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MYSTERY

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FEATURING

THE HOUSE OF FEAR

A Baffling Mystery Novel
By FRANK JOHNSON

THE CASE OF THE BACHELOR'S BONES

A Green Ghost Novelet
By G. T.
FLEMING-ROBERTS

BEST ACTION
DETECTIVE STORIES



INCHES FROM DEATH, THEY WORKED LIKE FIENDS!

A true story of the blitz in England as told to a War Correspondent by Arthur Letts and Frederick Rourke, gas repair men for the Thames Estuary District, Greater London.



① "The night sky was filled with enemy planes, and the earth shook with explosions. At the height of the raid we learned a bomb had smashed a gas main near the works. Rourke and I volunteered for the fixing job..."



② "We found it," continued Rourke. "A big delayed action bomb sitting on a severed pipe in the middle of a three-foot crater. We set to work. Letts held the flashlight, taking care to shield it so the Nazis couldn't see it, while I blocked the broken pipe with clay."



③ "In about 12 minutes the job was done. They were the longest minutes we've ever lived. We couldn't have done it without our flashlight—and the steady light from fresh batteries you can depend on."

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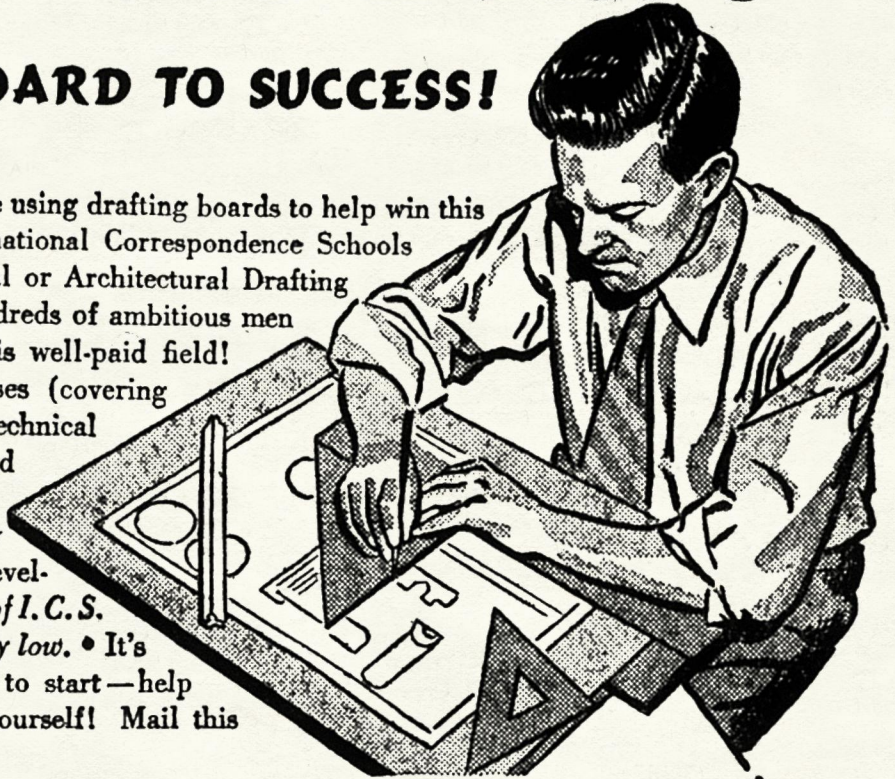
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These are our enemies.

They have only one idea—to kill, and kill,
and kill, until they conquer the world.

Then, by the whip, the sword and the gallows, they will rule.

No longer will you be free to speak or write your thoughts, to worship God in your own way.

Only our dead will be free. Only the host who will fall before the enemy will know peace.
Civilization will be set back a thousand years.

Make no mistake about it—you cannot think of this as other wars.

You cannot regard your foe this time simply as people with a wrong idea.

This time you win—or die. This time you get no second chance.

This time you free the world, or else you lose it.

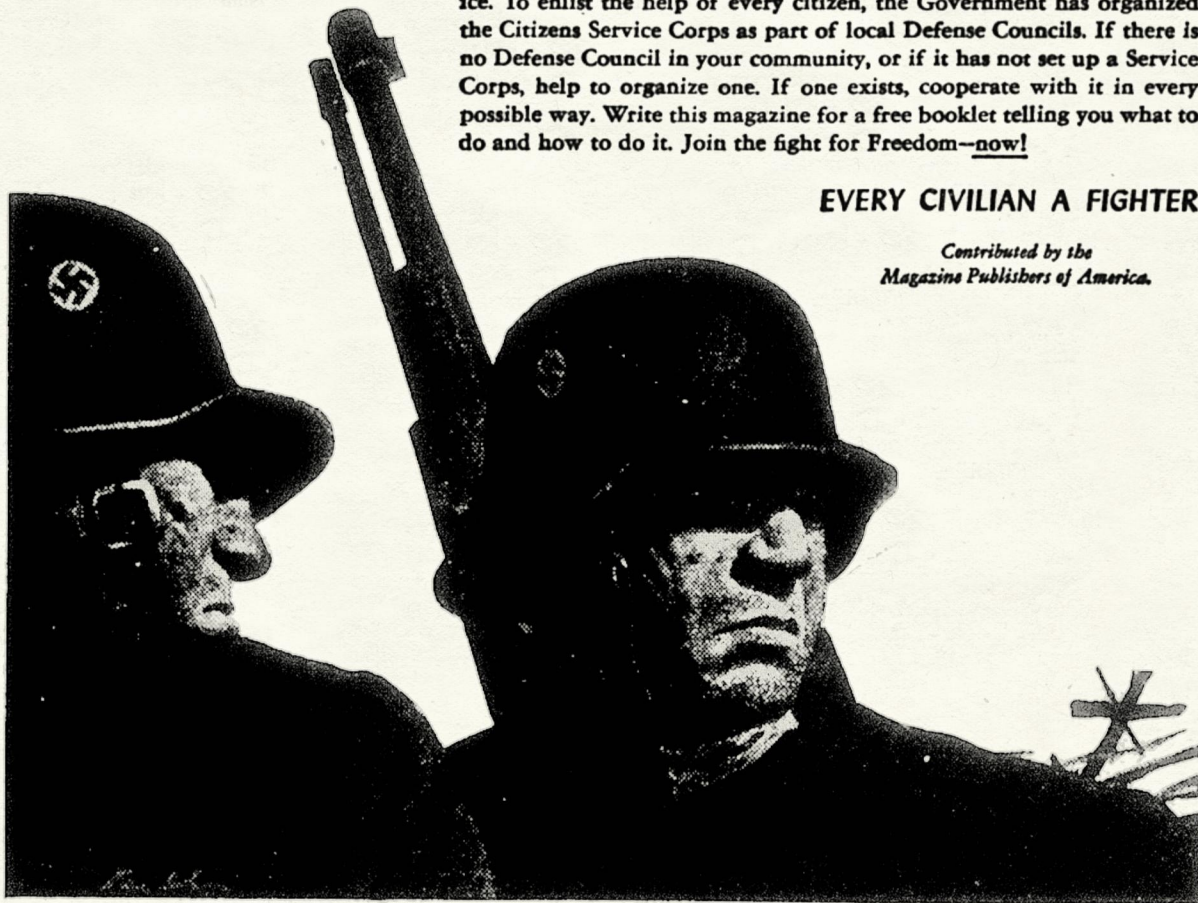
Surely that is worth the best fight of your life

—worth anything that you can give or do.

Throughout the country there is increasing need for civilian war service. To enlist the help of every citizen, the Government has organized the Citizens Service Corps as part of local Defense Councils. If there is no Defense Council in your community, or if it has not set up a Service Corps, help to organize one. If one exists, cooperate with it in every possible way. Write this magazine for a free booklet telling you what to do and how to do it. Join the fight for Freedom—now!

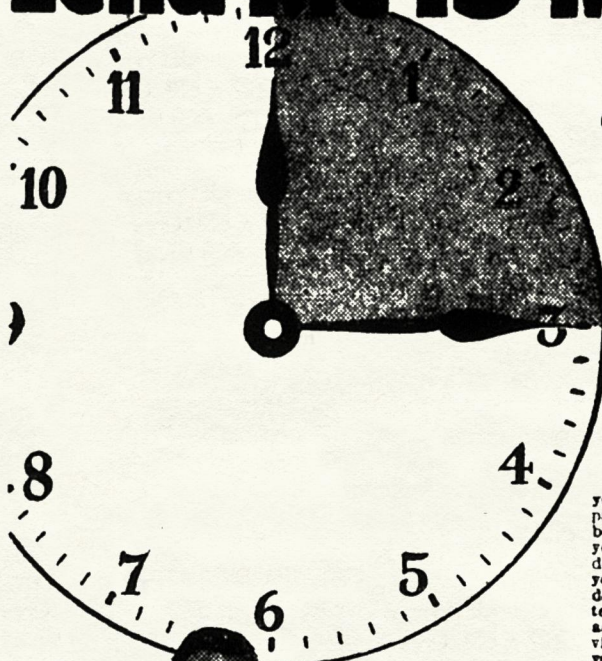
EVERY CIVILIAN A FIGHTER

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**..and I'll prove
I can make you
a NEW MAN**



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In every part of the country Charles Atlas is recognized as "America's Greatest Builder of Men." Almost two million men have written to him. Thousands upon thousands have put their physical development into his hands!

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"My doctor thinks your course is fine. Have put two inches on my chest and 1/2 inch on my neck."
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"My muscles are bulking out and I feel like a new man. My chest measures 38 in., an increase of 5 in., and my neck increased 2 in."
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I don't care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double quick time! 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 there's not 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!

I Was a 97-lb. Weakling

All the world knows I was ONCE a skinny, scrawny 97-pound weakling. And NOW it knows that I won the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." Against all odds! How did I do it? How do I work miracles in the bodies of

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MYSTERYSCOPES

By **CHAKRA**

Famous Mystic

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.

The purpose of this department is to furnish such entertainment. It presents true stories of strange happenings gathered from all corners of the earth and authenticated by reliable persons.

Your CRYSTAL-SCOPE Reading Free!

Send in Coupon on Page 96

THREE FATAL NUMBERS

A STRANGE story has been sent to this department by Thomas McEldowney of Honolulu, Hawaii.

It seems that during the summer of 1941 an American sailor, John Adams, had a peculiar dream. He told Mr. McEldowney about it. Adams dreamed that he was walking along the streets of Honolulu and on the forehead of every Japanese were the numbers—341. He thought maybe it was a hunch that 341 would win the next lottery.

But several days later he went into a Japanese store and was startled to see several signs reading "3-4-1," meaning three pieces of merchandise for one dollar. It made him curious and he visited several other Japanese shops. The same sign, "3-4-1," appeared on various counters.

It worried him, so to satisfy his curiosity he visited a Japanese friend of his, and asked: "Say, Kato—what does three, four, one stand for? I have seen it in so many places. Is it some secret code?"

The Jap seemed startled—then quickly smiled.

"Pay no attention," he said. "It is just a little joke among the Japanese based on a

statement made by a Japanese admiral that they always win three for one—three enemies killed for one Japanese."

So Adams told Mr. McEldowney about it, then dismissed it as just a curious coincidence that he should dream of those numbers.

Then came Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. And when Thomas McEldowney learned that John Adams had been killed, he experienced an uncanny sensation. December 7th was the 341st day of the year, according to a Japanese manner of recording.

Had John Adams in his dream tuned in psychically with the Japanese minds which had known that December 7th was to be the fatal day of the treacherous attack? Who knows?

BURIED IN ATLANTIS

JOHAN SNYDER of New York City tells a strange story concerning his uncle, George Snyder, who was a sailing ship captain back in the nineties.

When Uncle George was a young seaman, he visited a Hindu fortune teller at Port Said, Suez Canal. The old mystic looked at George strangely, then told him he was a descendant of kings—that he would have a prosperous life

(Continued on Page 10)



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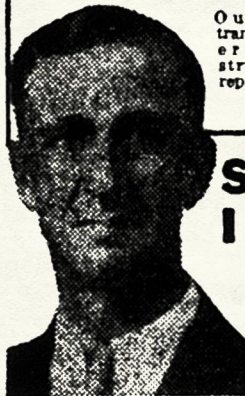
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Broadcasting Stations, Aviation and Police Radio, Ship Radio and other communications branches are scrambling for Operators and Technicians to replace men who are leaving. You may never see a time again when it will be so easy to get started in this fascinating field. The Government, too, needs hundreds of competent civilian and enlisted Radio men and women. Radio factories, with huge war orders to fill, have been advertising for trained personnel. And think of the NEW jobs Television, Frequency Modulation, and Electronics will open after the war! This is the sort of opportunity you shouldn't pass up.

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There's probably an opportunity right in your neighborhood to make money in spare time fixing Radios. I'll give you the training that has started hundreds of N.R.I. students making \$5, \$10 a week extra within a few months after enrolling. The N.R.I. Course isn't something just prepared to take advantage of the present market for technical books and courses. It has been tried, tested, developed, perfected during the 28 years we have been teaching Radio.

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MAIL COUPON NOW for FREE Sample Lesson and 64-page illustrated book. See the many fascinating jobs Radio offers and how YOU can train at home. If you want to jump your pay—mail Coupon in an envelope or paste on a penny postal—J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 3F09, National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

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"I repaired some Radio sets when I was on my tenth lesson. I really don't see how you can give so much for such a small amount of money. I made \$600 in a year and a half, and I have made an average of \$10 a week—just spare time." JOHN JERRY, 1837 Kalamath St., Denver, Colo.

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"I was working in a garage when I enrolled with N.R.I. I am now Radio Service Manager for M—Furniture Co. for their 4 stores." JAMES E. RYAN, 119 Pebble Court, Fall River, Mass.



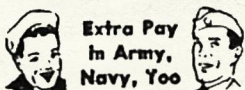
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APR-2

MYSTERY-SCOPES

(Continued from Page 8)

and his body would be buried, with honors, in Atlantis.

Later, George consulted a map of the world but could find no place called Atlantis; so he presumed the fortune teller had meant Atlanta, Georgia, where George had been born. At least, the young sailor was happy, believing that he would never be lost at sea.

Years passed. George was prosperous and finally he was made skipper of a modern sailing vessel carrying merchandise from South America to New York and Boston.

One night after his ship left New York, George had a peculiar dream; and the next morning he told the first mate that he dreamt he was in a strange city, not like any place he had ever seen in his world travels. The natives dressed like Aztecs and when they saw the captain they bowed to him in honor and escorted him to what might have been the royal palace, for they placed a crown on his head.

The first mate smiled and told the skipper he must have been reading too many fairy stories.

The dream was forgotten and the boat sailed on. But when it neared the shores of South America, it ran into a heavy storm. The skipper, always defiant of the elements, stood on deck giving orders to the crew. Suddenly a mast broke and fell to the deck, crushing the skipper. Before his men could reach him, his body was washed into the sea.

The first mate kept the ship moving in circles hoping to find the skipper if he was still afloat, because the old man was an excellent swimmer. Perhaps the water had brought him to consciousness. At least, the men were hopeful.

An hour later, the storm abated and the sea was calm. But there was no sign of the skipper anywhere on the water for miles around.

Suddenly one of the sailors looked in the mirror-like surface and shouted: "Look—straight down . . . the ruins of some ancient city . . . maybe that's lost Atlantis."

Then the wind caused ripples and the strange sight at the bottom of the sea no longer could be seen. Other sailors from time to time have reported seeing what resembled

(Continued on Page 93)

DRAFTSMEN NEEDED

Now



Industry is clamoring for more draftsmen for the job can't start until plans are drawn. Buildings, airplanes, machines, guns, tanks, bridges, all start on the drafting board, so it's no wonder that every good draftsman has a fine job. Yes, more draftsmen are needed NOW. The pay is good and the opportunities for advancement great.

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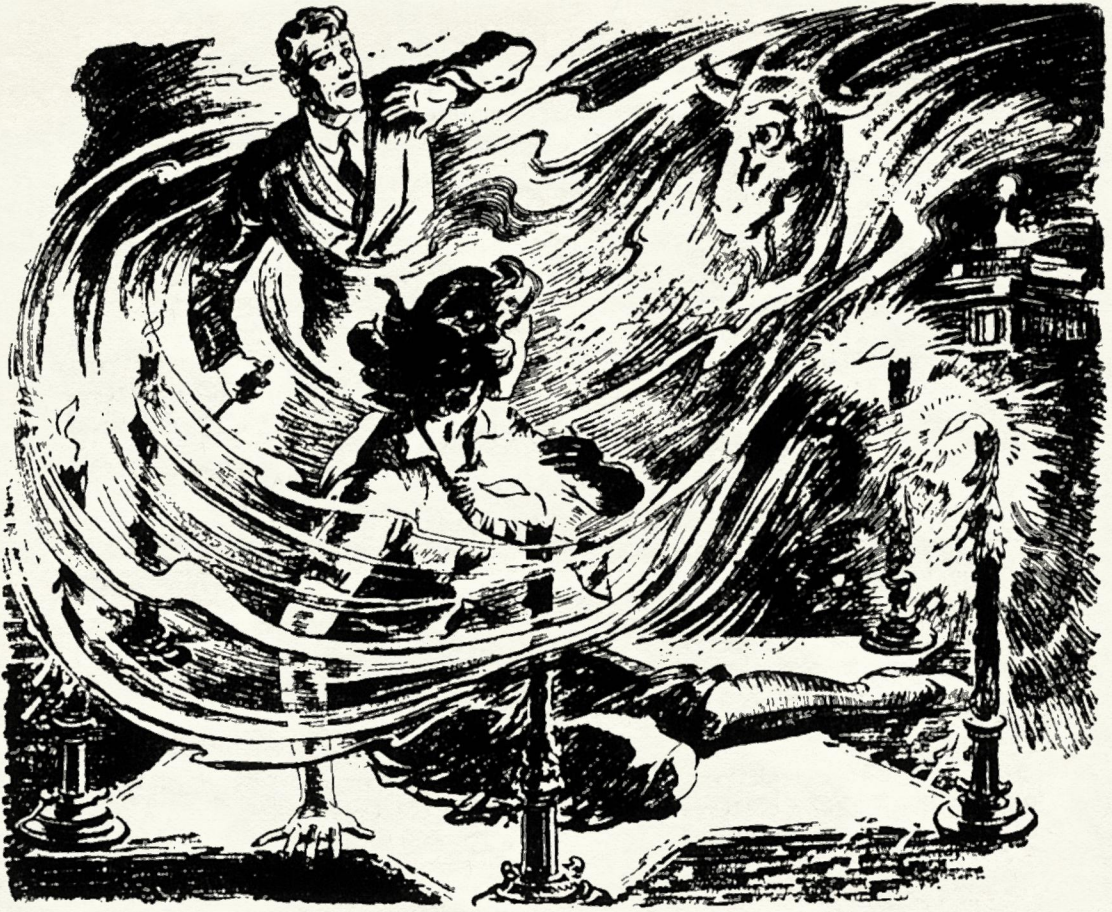
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Fighting desperately, the detective gripped the dagger as a drowning man clings to a straw

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CHAPTER I

The Eve of St. John

STIMPSON groped his way down the dark pathway to the garden gate and let himself out into the quiet street. Behind him, the silent house loomed still as death. No one knew of his visit, because there was no one to know.

Just as well, perhaps, he thought

grimly. He had little love for the man who lived in that gloomy old dwelling. A wasted journey—all these miles, just to have knocked in vain. Still—

He looked up sharply. A slight scream—then a scuffle—had sounded. Down the road, a covered car was standing. Beside it was a girl, struggling in the grip of three men.

"Help—" Her cry came feebly, stifled as one of them put a hand quickly to her mouth.

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Stimpson gritted his teeth and started running. The odds were three to one, but he did not hesitate. With a shout, he flung himself upon the attackers. He let drive at a man and tore the girl from him.

"Quick!" he snapped—and next instant stood literally dumbfounded.

She whirled her cloak suddenly over his head. Swift hands seized him, and caught in the folds, he was borne backwards, his yell muffled. He clutched out. Silken fabric tore away in his grip.

Pressed to the ground, he felt ropes or straps slipped about his legs and wrists. He heard the soft sound of a woman's laughter. Then he was lifted and deposited on something soft. A moment later, the car started, bearing him with it. Trussed up, helpless, he could only lie breathless and wonder—first, what the trick meant, secondly, where they were taking him. The car stopped at last. He could hear men's muttered voices, but no sound of the girl. The door opened, and he was carried for some distance.

Again a muttered discussion sounded—the ominous sound of a door shut behind him. The still more ominous rasp of a bolt shot home. He was thrown roughly to bare boards and the cloak whipped from off his head. To his surprise, he was in utter darkness.

Unable to move on account of his bonds, he lay waiting. The room seemed full of whispers—queer, vague whispers that chilled the blood. Around and about him, things seemed to move silently.

Stimpson steeled himself. It was strange. Why had he, a man of no importance, and without, so far as he knew, an enemy in the world, been seized in this way?

A brilliant light flashed suddenly in his face and he lay back, blinking. As his eyes grew accustomed to the brightness, he opened them and found himself looking into the features of a huge turbaned East Indian.

"Look at me, sahib—" The man leant forward, fixing his captive with his eyes.

Stimpson stared back, his full red lips twisted to speak. But they had gone suddenly dry. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. The Indian, the farther wall, were going misty. Everything was spinning around.

He heard a sound of running water. The boards beneath him seemed to meet. He was floating as on air. And mists, pink-grey, wreathed in strange shapes about him. He heaved a faint sigh and lay still.

He did not see the Indian rise and, coming forward, bend sardonically over him.

"Sleep—till I bid you wake—fool!"

The Indian made some passes with his hands, watched his victim for a while, then straightened. Smiling to himself, he withdrew, and again the room went dark and still, save for that murmuring sound as of running water, and the creak of the roof as the wind soughed softly through its ancient timbers.

But Stimpson knew nothing of this. No Pharaoh in his tomb slept more soundly than he. The rise and fall of his chest had ceased.

QUENTIN GREY stepped into the deep stone archway and halted before a large oak-ribbed door set far back in its shadowy recess. Raising the black iron knocker, he rapped.

As the echoes of the summons died away amongst the age-old masonry, the bloodhound squatting at his side emitted a low growl. Simultaneously, a face appeared at the small, barred grating in the door.

Two coal-black eyes looked into his—eyes piercing, yet limpid as the depths of some forest pool. Framing the face, he caught a glimpse of a woman's luxuriant hair, almost flame-colored. A flash—and the bright curls were mantled by a hood of grey.

Then the face was gone, and he was alone in the silence of the arch. The bloodhound growled again sullenly. Grey felt him give a tug on the leather lead.

"Down, Hannibal—down!" he ordered sternly. "See, you big chump, you've frightened her!"

Impatient at the delay, he fell to on the knocker again. Once more its booming echoed under the old arch. Then the sound of shuffling feet was heard. Wizen features peered suspiciously through the grating. There was a rasp of bolts withdrawn, and the door opened.

"Yes, sir?"

The new arrival fell forward with a stifled groan, skewered to the table top with a spear!



A white-haired old man stood on the threshold.

"My name's Grey. I've an appointment with Miss Smythe," the detective answered.

"Ah, Mr. Grey! Step in, sir, if you please. Miss Smythe is waiting for you. If I may—your bag, sir?"

The school porter relieved Blake of his suitcase and stepped back nervously at the sight of Hannibal.

Quentin Grey followed with his canine companion. But he had forgotten the porter. His gaze was on the big, creeper-clad building that lay across the smooth greensward. St. Monica's was a famous girl's finishing school, whence passes annually a bevy of brains and beauty to Vassar, Bryn Mawr or society.

St. Monica's was ringed in with its mile of towering brick walls, above which only tree-tops showed from the outside. He looked at the big pile curiously, then turned from it with a trace of disappointment. The world-famed old place was but a modern building, after all, and—

SOMETHING slipped by him swiftly, silently. It was the slight figure of a girl, with long bobbed hair of copper gold. She wore a tie of slanting colored stripes—orange, red, and indigo. As she passed, he saw her turn and look at him.

Deep black eyes—a glance piercing, appraisive, fathomless—whisk of knee-length skirts, and she was past. The porter reappeared from the lodge into which he had taken Grey's luggage and, edging wide round Hannibal, shut the still-open street door.

"Did that young lady come in with you, sir?" he asked apologetically, his eyes on the girl's retreating figure.

"Er—I really didn't notice," Grey answered cautiously.

He was thinking how like her eyes were to those he had first seen through the grating. But for the fact he knew full well that she had slipped in on his heels, and so could not have been behind the grille, he would have sworn they were the same.

"It's after hours, and the town's out of bounds," the old man grunted. "That was that new girl, Miss Tankerton, I'll swear. She'd be gated for the rest of the term, that she would, if the mistress

knew. They're young demons, they are, some of these minxes."

"I fancied I saw her through the grating as I knocked," Grey put in chivalrously. There was still something of the boy in him, and he couldn't help playing ball. Besides, the girl was pretty.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" The old man stared. "But I was at my window when you knocked the first time. The gate was in full view. There was no one there."

"H'm—well, I can't be sure!" Grey said good-humoredly. "I saw a face. Rather reddish hair, it had, peeping out below what looked like the headdress of a nun—a grey headdress."

He saw the butler stiffen.

"A nun—" he said hoarsely. "With red hair, sir?"

"More or less. Why, what's the matter?"

The old man was quivering. His parchment features had gone deathly pale.

"It ain't nothing, sir." He braced himself with a visible effort. "There—there's no one like that here. You—It couldn't have been real."

"Unless I imagined it, of course," Grey admitted.

All the same, he regarded the trembling old man curiously.

"Yes, sir—imagination, if I may make so bold, sir. The light is nearly gone, and—but you'll be wanting to see Miss Smythe. If you'll step this way, sir—"

He signed Grey ceremoniously toward a low building on the left. Half-seen through a cloistered passage that ran in from the street door, its sombre walls loomed ghostly through the dying twilight. Till now, Grey had hardly noticed it. Like the entrance arch, it was worn and mellow with time.

"The headmistress' house, sir! She lives apart from the new school building. Yes—the headmistress' house is very old, sir. Seventeenth century, they say. The old nunnery—"

There was a touch of pride in the old man's voice as he halted to explain. While he paused to chain Hannibal to a boot-scraper, Grey glimpsed a weather-beaten shield, carved in stone above a Norman archway. From it, the leering features of a goat looked down at him.

When he stepped inside, the porter's

thin, cracked tones, followed him.

"Yes, sir, the seventeenth century. They call it the House of the Goat."

ACROSS the threshold lay a big, square hall with bare stone walls, and doors sunk deep in Norman arches. Black oak beams spanned the dim grey ceiling, and the windows, diamond-paned and stone-mullioned, were set in deep embrasures.

In an open hearth, polished steel "dogs" reflected light from a simple chandelier. Back and beyond, a spacious oaken stairway mounted into gloom. It was a place of shadows—but for the gleaming well-waxed floor.

"Mr. Grey, ma'am—" The porter threw open a door, and stood aside for the detective to pass.

A woman rose as he entered, a smile of welcome on her thin-lipped mouth. He found it hard to credit what he knew to be a fact—that she was well past sixty.

"Thank you for coming, Mr. Grey," she said. "I hardly expected you here so soon."

It was a beautiful face, though the passing years had set their seal upon it. Eleanor Smythe might have reigned a famous beauty, had she not preferred instead to serve the cause of education.

"I got your letter," Grey began, as she released his hand. "I gathered you were having trouble of an extraordinary sort. So I motored down at once. Queer happenings for a—"

"For a one-time convent, eh?" Eleanor Smythe's gesture embraced the paneled apartment. "Still, it is many years now since the nuns were at St. Monica's."

"I saw one through the grille as I knocked," her visitor remarked slowly. "Two black eyes and flaming hair beneath a grey headdress."

"You—" Miss Smythe checked herself, stared blankly at the detective. Her cheeks had gone very white.

"Still, she couldn't have been there, could she, ma'am?" the porter interposed quickly. He had lingered by the door, unnoticed by his mistress.

"But—"

"How could she—when I was watching the path, and it was empty—right up to the door, ma'am?"

Miss Smythe's mouth flattened in a queer, straight line.

"You forget, Mullins," she said slowly, her voice suddenly gone frail, "it is the Eve of St. John."

The door closed softly behind Mullins, and a sense of relief came to the detective. The aged porter broadcast an atmosphere of panic.

As the headmistress sank into her seat, Grey brought himself back to normality. There was a queerness about this old building, like the dank mustiness of some mouldering tomb.

"You said you have had peculiar happenings here?" he heard his voice grate as he spoke. "Even sinister happenings, Miss Smythe. If you could amplify what you said in your letter, it might be helpful."

MISS Smythe took up a pen. For a moment she sat stabbing nervously at a blotter on the old oak table.

"Sinister—that's journalistic, isn't it? Still, it fits. Unaccountable happenings, too, Mr. Grey. Last week, a chair flew off the floor and hooked itself on to the chandelier. Oh, yes, in full sight of Mullins and myself. Only the two of us were in the room. Then, on Thursday, the coal scuttle emptied its contents all over the floor. I was seated here at the table when that happened. Yesterday, the library carpet rolled itself up neatly and bowled into a corner after spilling the furniture right and left."

"And in full view?"

"No, the room was empty. But I was crossing the hall at the time. I dashed to the door and flung it open. No one was in the room, no one could have left it unseen. The windows were all fastened. If anyone had come out by the door—the only available exit—I should most certainly have seen them."

"H'm!" Grey's brows contracted. "A secret passage, perhaps—"

"The walls are solid stone."

"You're sure?"

"Absolutely. Mr. Brown—our science master—sounded them at my request. He holds a Ph.D. from Yale and other eminent degrees. A confirmed materialist, I fear, Mr. Grey. Not the sort of man to be readily gulled. He is decisive on the point. There is no logical explanation."

"And, as I understand from your letter, there have been other and equally

mysterious events. Objects flying about—pots and pans, and so on. Vases jumping off their shelves. And invariably no sign of trickery, eh?"

"Exactly, Mr. Grey. It is beginning to grow serious. One cannot suppress rumors, unfortunately. The whole school knows, and the town also. The girls are beginning to develop nerves."

"If that's all—"

"It isn't. Half the servants have left without notice. Last week, a Cabinet member took his daughter away. The day before yesterday, three other prominent men withdrew their children. To-day, a well-known industrialist motored down to fetch his daughter. St. Monica's is—a national institution. For the sake of St. Monica's, Mr. Grey, this trouble must stop. That is why I sent for you. Perhaps a detective isn't—but—" She paused.

"I see." For a long moment Grey said nothing, his gaze on the wall opposite. "And yet, Miss Smythe, I am merely a cold-blooded criminologist. Surely this is the province of an occultist?"

"An occultist?"

"The phenomena you have described are characteristic of the poltergeist. Objects thrown about, without apparent natural cause."

"Poltergeist! That is German for a mischievous spirit, isn't it?" She shook her head dubiously. "I'm afraid I don't know much about such things. Do you believe in them?"

Grey shrugged.

"I don't know. There are records, of course, of such incidents—records fairly well established. We cannot ignore them."

"And yet, in the twentieth century, Mr. Grey—" She shook her head. "It sounds absurd."

"True. Yet a scientist friend of mine who has made investigations declares he has found a solution to the problem. He adduces such phenomena to the psycho-physical bar—a kind of aura which he declares attaches to every individual."

"Still, an unproven theory," Miss Smythe interposed, with swift incredulity.

"To be sure, a theory," Grey agreed. "Still poltergeist phenomena appear invariably to occur where some young

person of about fifteen years of age is involved. My friend asserts that, in some cases, such youngsters are clumsy with their psycho-physical bar.

"You know the sort of person who blunders round a room, knocking things over with his coat or body? Well, much the same thing is said to occur in the cases we are discussing. Only it is this aura that is responsible. At least, that is one theory."

He paused, then continued.

"By the way, what staff have you?"

"Just three, Mr. Grey. The others have left in terror. There is old Mullins, the school porter, who also acts as my manservant. He has been with me fifteen years. Then there is Darton, the cook. She has been here over thirty years. I am confident that neither are capable of producing such—er—phenomena, either deliberately or by accident."

"And the third—"

"The houseboy. A lad of sixteen. A dull, lethargic boy. I can hardly credit that he is possessed of a mischievous spirit."

"And he is here now?"

"Oh, no. He lives out and went home several hours ago."

Miss Smythe glanced at the grandfather's clock by the wall. It was nearly ten o'clock.

"Did these happenings occur during the day, or at night after he had gone?"

"In the day, so far. I hardly expect anything to happen till morning. I think—"

As she spoke the air was cut with a wild, unearthly screech. In the hearth the fire-irons leapt with a frightful crash several feet into the air.

As Grey jumped to his feet a dim, black shape flashed past and up the chimney.

The room filled with the fog of flying soot.

Simultaneously, the old clock boomed forth the opening stroke of ten.

CHAPTER II

Jeanne of the Flame

GREY dashed to the hearth and hurled the fire-irons violently

aside. He began groping vigorously up the chimney. There was a second shriek. Then he withdrew his arm suddenly.

Gripped in his hand was something which struggled wildly—a black cat! It clawed in his hold, its every hair on end, its green eyes blazing with terror.

"So much for the poltergeist!" he exclaimed triumphantly, as he held the cat aloft.

Miss Smythe came forward diffidently.

"Why, it's Saturn—the house cat!"

"Precisely—the cat!" Grey chuckled.

"Not so very mysterious, after all. Quite explainable, I think Miss Smythe."

He dropped the animal to the floor, where it arched its back ferociously. With a hiss, it retired to a corner, defensively, claws unsheathed. Eleanor Smythe regarded it queerly for an instant.

"All the same," she breathed hoarsely, "what caused its fearful terror?"

She gripped the detective's wrist.

"Mr. Grey, don't you realize? Saturn never acts like that! She is in deadly fear!"

Grey swept the room with his eyes. The curtains were drawn, the door was shut. Save for himself, his hostess and the cat, it was untenanted. Nowhere in its shadowed recesses did there lurk a sign of the extraordinary.

Yet there stood the cat, its back arched—its black fur on end.

"You're right—"

Grey strode to the window, whipped the curtain aside and glimpsed a sweep of greensward bathed in moonlight. Outside was nothing human or, in the ordinary acceptance of the word, inhuman, either. When he stepped to the door and flung it open, the hall lay bare and empty save for furniture.

"Remarkable!" he breathed, felt instinctively for his automatic. But he had not brought a gun with him. Miss Smythe's shoulders hunched vaguely.

"Precisely. You are beginning to experience the uncanniness of it all. Something frightened him, Mr. Grey. What?"

THE detective closed the door impatiently and turned to the head-mistress.

"What did you mean just now by 'It's the Eve of St. John?'" he asked bluntly.

Miss Smythe stiffened.

"Ah! That's another story. A hun-



A horrible
monstrous
face grim-
aced evilly

dred years ago, they would have lighted the Beltane fires to-night. And two hundred years ago today—" She stopped.

"Well?" Grey asked sharply. Miss Smythe frowned judicially.

"I was thinking of Jeanne of the Flame," she said simply.

"I beg your pardon?" the detective demanded.

"I'm sorry. I was forgetting—" She threw the door open and signed him into the hall. "I mean Jeanne de Nivelles. Sometimes called Jeanne of the Flame."

"I'm afraid the lady's name and fame have not reached me, Miss Smythe."

"Ah, but then you're not a St. Monica's girl, Mr. Grey! You'd know otherwise. She was our founder's daughter."

"Let me see—your founder was—"

"Marie de Nivelles—canonized as St. Monica. That was back in the seventeenth century, when René de Nivelles brought her to Paris, a bride only to perish later under Condé fighting the Spaniards. She took the veil, came to Maryland and founded this college. It was a nunnery then."

"And Jeanne?"

"Their daughter, Mr. Grey—a tall girl and fair, according to the old records, with flaming red hair and eyes black as forest pools. Plenty of young blood hacked each other to death for love of her. Yet she sat and smiled. Her heart was cold as her hair was flame. I quote the historian."

"Then no blade fought through and carried her off over the bodies of his rivals?"

"No. Lord Calvert bade her take the veil to save the male population from self extinction. Sworn to a life of poverty, she would then have no need of earthly riches. Poor Jeanne went perforce to what was for her a living death. And to the Crown went death duties in the shape of her portion. Unwillingly, she became a novice at the nunnery her mother had founded."

"And then?"

"Why, if the historian is to be believed, she consoled herself with black magic and witchcraft. It is even said that she rode on a broomstick to the Witches' Sabbath. She was tried, found guilty and condemned to death. I cannot repeat all of the story. But there were those who swore she had become

possessed of an evil spirit. Salem was not the only place where witches burned."

As she finished, Eleanor Smythe's gaze travelled to the farther wall, where, built into an alcove, stood a vertical shaft of stone.

"What's that?" Grey asked, his eyes following her own.

Miss Smythe shuddered.

"Her grave—or so tradition tells. They walled her up alive for her sorceries."

GREY did not answer. He stepped to the great stone casket and gazed upon its plain grey lid. A massive slab of granite, it bore only one device—a chiselled carving of a horned and bearded goat.

Again the goat—the satyric crest of the long-dead de Nivelles!

Grey bent there frowning, his thoughts back on the grille and the face he had seen through its bars—a head of flame and curving red lips, eyes bright as stars and black as inky pools, and a nun's hood.

What if the nuns were dead and gone? What he had seen he had seen. And so they had bricked up Jean de Nivelles here.

"I wonder you keep this thing," he muttered, scowling.

"It is cemented into the masonry," the headmistress said. "No workman would dare touch it. There is a curse upon whoever moves it. Besides—" She shrugged vaguely. "I dare say the whole story is an idle tale. Personally, I am not inclined to credit such stuff. But certainly no workman in the town would lay hands on that coffin, even for a hundred dollars. Apart from that, the coffin has a certain antiquarian interest."

"And the significance of St. John's Eve?" Grey asked abruptly.

"That was the day of her death, Mr. Grey—back in the year 1660. Her doom was meted out through trial by combat. Guy de Nivelles, her cousin—and, they say, her lover—battled Hubert Burley, the challenger, for her life and person. His rapier hangs there now on the wall. You can still see the cleft in the hilt where Hubert's blade drove through to his heart."

She pointed to a rusty rapier whose hilt was embossed with the grinning outlines of the sinister goat. Between the

horns a jagged hole gaped in the dingy metal, which hung there still on the grim grey wall, a trophy of the champion's prowess and a living monument to a bygone triumph of ignorance over innocence.

Jeanne of the Flame! The face at the grating—hers? Or was it, after all, the schoolgirl Tankerton, with her long bob of copper-gold?

Grey would have taken oath the girl had slipped in behind him from the street! And yet, if she had done so, why and what her errand? And those ink-black eyes of hers—foil to her hair, her lips, her skin—could they be matched twice—even in two hundred years?

Impatient with himself, the detective sought to put the thought from him. Ridiculous! This poltergeist nonsense—the atmosphere of the ancient house was getting hold of him. He spun round sharply. Outside, where he had chained Hannibal to the foot-scraper, came a low, angry growl.

Grey's eyes swept the window opposite. There was a chink in the partly drawn curtains—beyond, the silver-white of a full moon. Against it a shadow moved. Through the pane behind the chink two gleaming eyes looked back into his.

A fresh growl came from the bloodhound, a clink of chains as it strained madly on its leash. Springing to the door, Grey whipped it open. As the dog's fierce jaws met with the snap of a steel trap, a form came stumbling in across the threshold.

It was the girl of the grating.

FOR a moment she stood still, her breathing uneven. She had something crunched in her white hand. Her dark eyes, searching first himself and then the headmistress, were full of fear.

"Why, Eve! What are you doing here?" Miss Smythe broke the silence. "At this hour—" Her gaze sought a grandfather's clock by the wall.

"I'm so sorry!" The newcomer roused herself. "Mr. Brown gave me a note for you. I forgot it. I was afraid there might be something important." She held out the note tremulously.

"The science master." Miss Smythe took the note frowningly. "What can he want?" She made to tear open the envelope. Then, recollecting the detec-

tive's presence, refrained.

"If you please—" he invited courteously.

"If you don't mind—" She ripped the flap open and began to read. "There! It's nothing of moment. Eve Tankerton, you ought to be in bed! Why, it's just on ten-thirty, and—"

As she spoke the half-hour boomed forth—vibrant, sonorous. It sent echoes chattering down the beamed heights of the grim old hall. As if in sympathy, came a dim, faint rattle high above the timepiece.

Quentin Grey looked up quickly. On a long, narrow wooden ledge fashioned like a flat picture-rail stood two porcelain plates—antiques, crudely painted, yet rare—set some ten feet apart.

They were swaying.

Fascinated, he watched while the pair rocked, imperiled, yet unfallen. Slowly, imperceptibly they started rolling towards one another. At first gently, then with ever-gathering speed, they rolled onwards, scraping the wall. Like two opposing wheels, they raced at one another.

"Look!"

Grey's hand gripped Eve Tankerton's slim wrist. Still clutching her, he crouched, waiting while the two plates approached one another.

They met in a shivering impact, splintered, and flew in a cascade of broken china far out across the polished floor. A sprinkled mass of fragments, they lay there silent, motionless.

Grey let go the girl's arm, snatched up a chair, mounted it, felt along the picture-rail. There was nothing there save dust—no gadget, no cunningly contrived string or elastic to set the plates in motion. Even the wooden board that bore them was warped upwards in a tiny bow, so that both had run uphill.

Tight-lipped, he turned to face Miss Smythe. The headmistress' grey eyes flashed keenly.

"That, at any rate, is not the cat," she remarked, with a tremor in her voice.

CHAPTER III

Invisible Hands

YOU see! What's to be done?" Miss Smythe demanded, when, with an

abrupt, nervous little gesture, she had dismissed her pupil. Blake frowned judicially. He took a turn or two about the hall, then spun abruptly.

"You've just these two servants in the house—the maid and the butler?"

"Yes, just those two."

"You could accommodate them temporarily—yourself as well—elsewhere for tonight?"

"Yes. I could arrange for them in the main school building. Myself also. Only why—"

"Either these phenomena are natural—supernatural, if you prefer—or they're faked by some human agent. I wish to spend the night alone in the house. If I'm locked up in here by myself and the phenomena still continue, it should rule out any possibility of fraud."

It was the headmistress' turn to frown.

"But such an ordeal! Mr. Grey"—she laid an urgent hand on his arm—"you don't realize what you're up against—what these things mean!"

"I shall in the morning," he replied, smiling coolly. "For the rest, I have a great belief in human ingenuity, but very little in the—er—occult. My dog's outside. He'll be company."

Miss Smythe's answer was a slight shrug. She hesitated as if reluctant to expose him to his self-appointed task, then, at his insistence, went away to make arrangements.

Half an hour later, Miss Smythe and her two servants departed. Quentin Grey untied Hannibal from the shoe scraper where he had tethered him, and, bringing the dog indoors, locked the front door and bolted it.

His next move—a brief but methodical tour of the old building—satisfied him beyond doubt that every fastening was secure. Not only did he find all bolts, catches, and locks in order, but the place was well equipped with electric burglar-alarms, as Miss Smythe had shown him. No one could get in without his knowledge.

Relieved on this score, he next applied himself to a thorough test of the inner walls and partitions. But though he sounded them in many places and inspected the old hearths and chimneys closely, he found nothing suggestive of secret passages, or apparatus to produce the apparently miraculous events described by Miss Smythe.

These investigations completed, he returned to the hall, where Hannibal had settled down to doze beside the stair-foot. Except that the dog stirred restlessly, everything was very quiet. Not a sound came from the road beyond the high wall which shut St. Monica's in from the town. The house might have been in the dead of the country.

Grey went to the window and looked out. High above, the white disc of the moon showed silvery between black clouds. For a space, the grounds were bathed in ghostly brilliance, then the scene vanished in sepulchral gloom as a cloud passed over.

HE LEFT the window and began to pace the hall, smoking cigarette after cigarette to soothe his tensed nerves. The place was still—uncannily still, he thought. The air was hot and charged with electricity. A sense of oppression settled upon everything.

As if by some telepathic instinct, his feelings were communicated to Hannibal. Now and again the bloodhound growled in his sleep. Once—twice he raised his head to peer across the hall suspiciously. When he settled himself again, it was to resume a restless slumber.

"What did she mean by 'It's the Eve of St. John'?" the detective muttered, thinking of Miss Smythe's mysterious comment to Mullins.

St. John's Day was the 24th, its eve, June 23rd. This was the 16th, however. Miss Smythe seemed a wide-awake, well-informed woman. Why was she a week out in her reckoning?

"Ah! Got it!" He paused to fling a cigarette-stump into the fireplace. "The seventeenth century—when Jeanne of the Flame lived!"

He remembered now. It was the difference between new and old style calendars—a matter of seven days. The error in the old Julian calendar was rectified shortly thereafter when Gregory produced his revised calendar.

Two hundred years ago to a day, Jeanne of the Flame had walked to a slow, ghastly end across this very hall, if the old legend were credible.

Instinctively he turned to stare at the grim grey coffin vertical against the wall. As he did so the goat crest carved on the slablike lid seemed to leer at him.

For a moment he tried to throw off the thought. It was bizarre, absurd. Then, as though drawn against his will by some invisible magnet, he walked over to the stone slab and sounded it with his knuckles.

It rang hollow. However solid were the rest of the walls, the tomb rang hollow!

Jeanne of the Flame—dead these many centuries! The glory of her Titian hair was long departed. Her dark eyes had long since ceased to flash. And yet that face at the grating—where no one had stood! That someone who vanished without a sound!

Angry with himself, he lit another cigarette and went to the stairs. This hall was getting on his nerves. Perhaps a tour of the upper story would suffice to break the spell.

Slowly he walked up the broad oaken steps, pulling at his cigarette as he went. He had an uncomfortable feeling that unseen eyes were watching him, that behind his back something was creeping—creeping. His every instinct bade him face about and meet this lurking enemy. But he steeled himself to continue the ascent. It was nerves—just nerves.

At the stairhead, stood a big cheval glass. As he mounted he could see his own figure in it. There was nothing behind him—the mirror proved that. Yet still he felt it was there.

Forcing himself to fix his eyes on the glass, he gained the landing, where he confronted his full-length image. Behind him, the vision of an empty stairway framed his reflection. He gave a soft sigh of relief and raised a hand to take the cigarette from his smiling lips.

The smile died—frozen. As he stood there gazing into it, the mirror had gone suddenly blank!

FOR an instant, he stood gasping. Then, recovering his nerve, he seized the frame and whisked it round. The glass was backed by thin wood, secured in the usual fashion. The wall behind it was blank and solid. Annoyed with himself, Grey jerked the glass back into its former place, looked into it again.

It was gradually growing misty.

Fascinated, he watched a filmy veil develop on the still-dark surface.

A cold chill gripped his spine. In the heart of the mist, a shapeless thing of green loomed dimly. Even larger, even clearer, it rose toward him.

A horrible, monstrous face—half-ape, half-man, grimaced at him. Two wicked, fanglike tusks were thrust from between its slavered lips. Pig eyes gleamed like a devil's. An Elemental! The spirit of some ape-man ancestor!

The thick lips twisted, leering. With a supreme effort, Grey roused himself, seized the glass, sent it crashing to the floor.

As the mirror splintered, he caught a fragment up. It was backed with mercury. But the glass itself reflected his own pale features. The mist, the Elemental, had vanished.

"This place is getting me!" he muttered. "I don't know what Miss Smythe will have to say about her broken mirror. Seven years' bad luck!" He laughed mirthlessly. "Auto-suggestion—I'm seeing things!"

Angry with himself, he strode down the passage, found an open door to a bedroom, where, throwing the casement wide, he looked out into the night. The grounds lay still, deserted. On high, black clouds sailed serene and calm.

It seemed to him they took vague shape—sinister, ominous, as though an

[Turn page]



endless file of armed men moved across the sky—legions on the march, the swirl of dust up-thrown beneath their tramping feet.

He shut the casement with a slam. His nerves were all a-jump. He, Quentin Grey, who knew no nerves! What was there to this infernal place that made him—

He stiffened sharply. From down in the hall, came the deep low cadence of the bloodhound's growl.

Action—this much, anyhow, was a relief. Someone was trying to get in. He dashed from the room, went down the stairs two at a time, found Hannibal in the middle of the floor, sniffing angrily at the empty air. But the hall seemed empty. He looked, listened, found nothing.

"What is it, old man?" he queried. Then, as the bloodhound went on growling, he strode to the fading lamp and adjusted the wick. The reservoir was dry. Only a swift gleam of flame ensued. The wick died in a sullen rim of red.

He struck another match quickly. Candles stood on a farther table. Twelve in number, they were set in massive silver candlesticks of antique design. With fingers a trifle unsteady—he told himself it was because of his dash downstairs—he lit the whole dozen.

As the dim recesses of the hall brightened to the soft glow of steady flames, he heaved a sigh of relief. Suppose everything had gone dark? Suppose—

He spun swiftly as a whirring noise jarred from the farther wall. It was the old grandfather's clock about to strike. Its hands stood at twelve midnight!

He had lost all idea of how the time was passing.

Bong!

The first booming stroke rolled out. *Bong!*

He sensed the bloodhound stiffen.

There was a mighty hush, in which the deep-throated cadence of the striking dimmed. Then, with the crack of a gunshot, the stone coffin canted from the wall and crashed down flat.

Like a bullet, Hannibal leaped, fangs bared, eyes blood-red with fury.

In midair the spring ended.

The hound hung checked, four feet above the floor, as if gripped by invis-

ible hands. Blake stood stock still, fascinated.

With a throttled gasp, Hannibal fell, snaked round and, whining feebly, slunk towards the door. His jaws were frothing. By the threshold, he gave a frightened whimper, then rolled over and lay still and rigid.

Grey recovered from his astonishment and sprang to him. He dropped on one knee. At the bloodhound's throat were the blue marks of two monstrous hands.

He rose to his feet, an icy sweat on his brow, crossed unsteadily towards the coffin stone. As he did so, an Arctic wind swept past towards the stairway with the dim, despairing cry of some lost soul.

"*Aie Sarraye!*"

A wild, shrieking wail swung back from the dying whispers, and a peal of mocking laughter echoed down the ancient hall. Grey stumbled to the table, panting.

"*Aie Sarraye!*"

It was the dread cry of the foul sisterhood as they rode shrieking on their broomsticks and bats to the Witches' Sabbath.

Quentin Grey staggered forward. A last strident echo, and the hall was deathly still.

St. John's Eve—two hundred years—Jeanne of the Flame—walled up—his thoughts were a maelstrom.

He stumbled over to the coffin stone. Bones—it had thrown forth scattered bones—Bones, twined in a matting of Titian red hair!

Bewildered, almost panicky, Quentin Grey felt his throat contracting with the need for air—for need of the sight of something that was not unearthly.

He dragged himself madly to the window. As he flung it wide, the night went mad in a riot of sound. Overhead, a devil's tattoo beat furiously upon the roof.

CHAPTER IV

The Fiery Star

IUT through the casement, Grey forced himself. He fell on a flower-bed and stumbled into the open. About

him great stones were flying. As from the heaven itself, a storm of them smote the roof in a frantic hail.

He found himself running like a hunted hare. It was only when he blundered into a sundial that he halted, breathless, horrified. Fearfully he slewed about and peered back at the accursed house.

The stone-storm had stopped suddenly as it had begun.

For a little he hung there, supporting himself on the sundial and gasping. Then—it was one of the coldly bravest things he had ever done—he compelled himself to walk steadily back towards the building. He found the earth littered with blood-red pebbles.

So it was no illusion! For the instant, he had been half inclined to disbelieve the evidence of his own senses. But here was proof enough. Someone had been playing a trick. And yet—

He straightened, his heart thumping against his ribs. No human agency had conjured up so vast a shower of stones. The thing was incredible. The house lay at least a hundred feet from the roadway.

"Bah! Magic! The supernatural! I won't believe it!" He clenched his fists. "It's trickery! If they're not in the road, they're in the grounds. At any rate, I'll see."

Bent low, he groped through the bushes, hunting, probing. Yet he found and heard nothing. The grounds were empty and hushed as death.

Puzzled, he tiptoed towards the long, sprawling modern building that was the school itself. There every pane was black. Not a light showed. Seemingly no one had heard a battering rain of stones.

"Queer!" he muttered and leaned against a big tree-trunk, recovering himself. Had he dreamed everything, or had he— But, no! Hannibal, at least, knew nothing of black magic. What did a dog know of magic, of Jeanne and her ghastly fate? Yet the bloodhound lay strangled by unseen hands.

And it was the Eve of St. John. What if the night went red with Beltane fires? Expectant, the detective peered about him.

And again, there was nothing.

Then came a faint sound. Down the creeper-clad wall a fleck of white moved

stealthily. It was someone climbing from an upper window.

Holding his breath, Grey waited, screened in the shelter of his tree. Cautiously the figure descended, gained the ground, came creeping toward him, unaware of his presence. As it passed him, the moon came out, and the silent form went white in the slanting rays. It was a girl, clad in pyjamas. She was bound for the old stone house.

Grey let her go, waited till she had almost gained her objective. Then, cat-footed, he moved after her. She reached the open casement, paused to peer into the hall, swung herself dexterously over the sill.

THE detective slid through the window after her, sprang swiftly and swung her around by the wrist. With a faint shriek she faced him. It was the girl who had brought Miss Smythe the science master's note—the girl who had crept in on his heels when the butler admitted him.

"Got you!" he breathed triumphantly. Here was something tangible—human flesh and blood, at least. The thought brought him comfort. She scowled back at him defiantly.

"You're hurting me!" A fierce little twist of the wrist. "Let go!"

"Your name first, young lady."

Another useless jerk, a sullen stare, a moment's silence.

"Eve Tankerton—if you must know. I s'pose you'll find out, anyway," she muttered sulkily with a droop of her ink-black eyes. Grey scanned the copper-red of her hair thoughtfully.

"Yes, I'd have found out. And now—what are you up to?"

She shrugged disdainfully.

"I heard a noise and came to see what had happened. It sounded like hail."

"H'm!" He regarded her sardonically. "And do you usually emerge by the window, and the ivy?"

She bit her lip.

"The downstairs door's locked. Besides, there was no time."

"I see. But why the hurry?"

"Miss Smythe's popular. We've heard things in the School House. I was afraid for her. There were those plates, you know. Suppose—"

She gave a slight, barely suppressed shiver.

"Afraid?" Grey let her go and, with a stride, gained the window. He closed it, turned to her again. "You little idiot! You'll catch your death of cold, coming out of doors in that rig!"

She seemed not to hear. She was looking towards the fallen coffin and the bones strewn about it.

"You know this place pretty well, Miss Tankerton?"

"I don't. Except when the headmistress interviewed me the other week—I'm new here—to-night was the first time I've been in the house. But"—her eyes still gripped the coffin—"sometimes I feel as if I knew it well."

"What—after one visit?"

"I don't know. It's all so familiar. But"—she released herself abruptly, and stepped cautiously forward to the stone casket—"even that—"

Grey looked past her to the musty bones and the strands of reddish hair that, like dead seaweed, clung about them. His gaze shifted to her own copper-gold hair.

Jeanne of the Flame!—was it possible for one so long dust to look down upon what had, two centuries before, been her living tomb?

It was a madman's nightmare! How could the dead live again? Or was re-incarnation true?

CURIOSLY he watched her as, his nearness forgotten, she gazed down in silent fascination at the wreckage on the polished boards.

What was she? Seventeen—eighteen at the most? A finishing pupil? That would be about the age limit at St. Monica's, and yet—

"It would be very close in there," she muttered, looking down into the coffin. "Stone walls, closing on you—closing—"

"It's very close in here, anyway," he grunted, passing a hand across his head. "Hot—"

As he spoke, a slight breath gave the lifeless air a sudden chill caress. The candles guttered uneasily.

"Close—"

He saw her straighten. She was staring towards the staircase, and the stained-glass window beyond it, where the goat crest of the de Nivelles leered grotesquely from the painted glass.

The goat mask preened against its opaque background. The horns swayed,

shuddered. The draught bore past him, circling, groping—wind, where there was none. He reached mechanically to the table for a dagger, which was really a paper-knife with a silver cruciform hilt. Gripping the weapon, he posed to face some unseen enemy.

Vaguely, he glimpsed his companion snatch a stick of chalk from the table. Very white, trembling, she sidled to him and clung against him. He felt her tremble.

"It is here," she breathed.

"It?" he queried sharply, aware of something that, ever growing, filled the room unseen.

"Yes—it! You fool!" She laughed hysterically as, subconsciously, he raised the dagger. "A toy—against All Power!"

"What do you mean?" he muttered, as the room went misty.

"S-s-sh!" Her slight fingers gripped his elbow. "There's a chance, and but a minute to take it. Wait."

He felt her grip slacken. As he looked down he saw her drop on her knees, her hand moving. Eve Tankerton was chalking something on the floorboards.

Stifled, choking, the detective bent to watch her. The hall was deathly still, the air laden with the load of impending evil. As yet vague, it crushed him with a load of dread oppression.

Below, the girl's chalk scratched swiftly. On the floor, a big equilateral triangle formed. Her hand swept onwards, and a second triangle formed an intersection with the first.

"Quick—for your life!"

She sprang up, leapt to the tables, seized the candles. Like one possessed, she bore them to the chalked star, set them on its points and intersections. The flames were leaping madly, spluttering blue with saltpetre. Around, walls were closing in—closing—

"The pentacle! Inside it, for your life!" she panted.

SHE seized his arm and dragged him past the candles into the six-pointed star. Like a wooden dummy, he stumbled forwards, stifled, slack-limbed. It was unlike anything in Grey's experience; he had no command over his body at all.

The walls, floor, ceiling loomed nearer—nearer. They had grown suddenly alive, their grey stone merging in a whirl

of mad, fantastic colors.

"The candles—watch them! For the love of heaven, mind!"

He saw the girl bend forward, screen an all-but-guttered flame in the cup of her palm.

The spluttering blue tongues of fire were dragged sideways, at right-angles to the candles, down which melted wax streamed.

Throttled, choking, the detective saw the girl through a mist. At his feet, the floor went round him in a monstrous whirl, doubled on the beams aloft, where its twin spun in a mad vortex. He was in the jaws of a six-fold vise. And all the while the suck of the vortex dragged him nearer the confines of the six-pointed star.

Fighting desperately, he strove to check himself, gripping the dagger as a drowning man clings to a straw. Beyond, the goat crest spread out monstrously, its grin widening—widening—

The maelstrom seized him. He swayed forward, faint, sick, petrified. Numbed, he hardly felt the grab at his arm as the girl, down on her knees, her eyes tight shut, hauled madly at his elbow. His arm flailed wildly, its dagger a glinting silver circlet. With a last mad bid for life, he hurled the dagger full on at the gaping lips on the goat crest.

Crash! Something splintered and broke. The mouth closed, twisted, vanished into nothingness. The whorls spun out in a fading nightmare. The vise slackened. He felt the tide recede—

He came to, found himself still in the girl's frantic clasp as he leaned outwards drunkenly across the chalked lines and burning candles. The flames were steady now. The room was clearing. Past the stairs, the stained-glass window loomed up in a jagged hole. The goat was gone. The dagger had crashed clean through it.

"What happened?" he gasped, steadying himself. She let go of him, stumbled stiffly to her feet.

"The spell is broken!" She laughed hysterically. "They still burn!" She pointed to the candles. "We are saved! Do you realize? *Saved!*"

She stood trembling. On her white brow were great beads of sweat. Grey looked at her dumbly, then half turned as a sound came from behind him.

It was the bloodhound staggering to its feet.

Somehow, Quentin Grey knew that the ordeal was over, the peril past.

CHAPTER V

The Coffin on the Grid

THE detective stooped to pat his dog gently, then, assured the hound was all right, looked again at the girl. She was picking up something from the floor.

"What's that?" he asked.

"A cardcase." She bent again, snatched up a card. "I think—" She paused to inspect the superscription, then shot a queer glance at him.

"Yours, I suppose?" she added, handing him the case.

"Yes," he agreed, frowning at it.

The heavy gold sides were scored with deeply impressed dents—fang-marks.

Lips pursed, he stood twisting the case between his strong fingers. It must have fallen from his pocket to the floor outside the pentacle. When last he had seen it the sides had been undamaged. What had bitten so viciously into the metal?

"So you're Quentin Grey?" the girl murmured.

"You know me?"

"I've heard of you, of course. Who hasn't? I'm curious. Just why are you here?"

"To investigate the sort of thing we just witnessed, young lady."

"I see." She breathed slowly, and he thought a faint trace of relief crossed her pale features. "And what do you think of them?" Her tone was a shade malicious.

"Much—and nothing," Grey answered shortly, his eyes on the candles. "I'm just inquisitive."

"About what?" Her frown returned.

"What made you draw that thing?" He pointed to the pentacle. Her beautiful features darkened, and she shot a swift glance of apprehension down the hall.

"To save us both, of course, Mr. Grey. A pentacle is one defence against the unseen powers."

Grey nodded. He had, of course, heard of the device. Its uses were fully stated in medieval works on magic. Still—

"How do you happen to know of it?" he demanded suddenly. She bit her lip, looked puzzled an instant, drew a hand slowly across her white brow, as if groping for recollection.

"I don't know. I must have read about it somewhere. I—I can't remember."

"I see." He regarded her intently.

SUCH books were not fit reading for young people, nor was it likely such would understand them even if permitted to read them. Besides, books of that sort were rare, only to be found in museums and like places. The girl's explanation, plausible as it appeared on the surface, did not ring true.

"And if there had been no pentacle, Miss Tankerton?"

She shuddered.

"We should not be here."

"Yet the hound still lives—and he lay outside the pentacle."

"It was after bigger game."

"As for instance?"

"A most famous detective," she said quickly with another fearsome glance across her shoulder. "You have been lucky. Once it takes possession of you, it never lets go willingly."

"For a schoolgirl, you seem to know a surprising amount about the supernatural," Grey said slowly. Then, "There'll be trouble, won't there, if Miss Smythe gets to know about tonight's adventure and your share in it?"

"Er—exactly! And the famous Quentin Grey hasn't much to be proud of either!" she grinned. "Wouldn't it be—er—better if neither of us said anything about it? I haven't seen you tonight. You haven't seen me."

"Still, since you heard those stones on the roof and just came to see—"

She smiled meaningly.

"Those stones might take explaining, Mr. Grey. And it would be you who'd have to explain them. So—"

"It's a bargain, my dear Eve!" he declared, gripping her cold fingers. After all, there was no real harm in her escapade. Besides, he was not so sure he wished Miss Smythe's intervention. "You and I will keep our secret a secret!"

He went to the door and threw it open.

"If I were you," he added, "I'd be getting back before your absence is noted, and before you catch cold."

"You're right!" she said briskly and, with a parting smile, slipped away in the gloom of the garden.

Standing on the threshold, Grey watched her vanish amongst some shrubs in the direction of the school buildings. His thoughts on Jeanne of the Flame and her grim story, he stood there frowning till, on a sudden, the moon broke through the clouds.

In a flash the whole grounds were drenched in pure white light, in which the trees and shrubs showed ghostly. The myriad blood-red pebbles on the ground had gone!

Quentin Grey shut the door again softly and shot the bolts. A gang of men could not have cleared away that mass of stones so quickly, even in broad daylight. As Eve Tankerton had said, they needed some explaining. And now—

Intensely puzzled, he replaced the candles in their original positions, then, with his handkerchief, erased the chalk-marks from the floor. It might be as well that nothing of the pentacle should remain for evidence. Next he went round the premises and found all doors and windows fast with the burglar-alarms in order. There had been no intruder.

This done, he called Hannibal and ascended once more to the bed-room. Some intuitive sense told him that, for tonight at any rate, the danger was over. There would be no more occurrences, and there was no need to sit up.

Shedding his outer clothes, he threw himself down on the bed and, utterly exhausted, fell into a profound sleep.

WHEN he awoke, hot afternoon sunshine poured through the uncurtained windows. Dressing hurriedly, he went downstairs, where he found Miss Smythe awaiting him.

"We let ourselves in at the kitchen door," the headmistress told him. "You seemed so tired that I gave orders you were not to be disturbed. I was so worried something might have happened to you that I got Mullins to peep into your room. He reported you were asleep."

Grey pulled a wry face.

"I must have slept the clock round," he admitted. "Yes, things happened. I'm afraid some damage was done to your property."

"It doesn't matter, Mr. Grey. I rather expected it. I see things were flying about. That coffin, for instance. I've had the contents removed."

"That is as well," he agreed and told her as much as he deemed fit. He made no mention of Eve Tankerton, however.

"And you think—" Miss Smythe asked, when he had finished.

He shrugged.

"Frankly, I think nothing. This sort of case is not in my line. I am satisfied that the disturbances I experienced are not the work of human agencies, if that's what you mean. I suggest that you call in the Society for Psychical Research or, failing them, the minister."

Miss Smythe pursed her thin lips.

"Ah, I remember now! The sisters once summoned a holy man to exorcise some similar visitation—according to the old records, with success. Still, first I think I'll ask Mr. Brown to see what he can do."

"Brown?"

"Our science master. A clever man, Mr. Grey. He is rather anxious to investigate these phenomena himself. In fact, he begged for the privilege. Unfortunately, he has been busy of late on chemical research work for the government. As, naturally, this work must be done evenings, he has had no leisure so far for poltergeists. And of course, during the day, he is teaching my girls."

There were things experienced during the previous night, which, Grey knew, were not attributable to any poltergeist. Still, he said nothing, but, with a brief nod, fell to on the meal Miss Smythe had ordered for him. Then he rang up Sam Logan his young assistant, whom he had left in the hotel in Baltimore ordered him to run down with the car.

While awaiting Logan's arrival, he helped replace the coffin in the niche where, for so many centuries, it had reposed. So heavy was it, that it required the combined efforts of Mullins, the gardener, and himself to raise it into place. They had just finished the job and replaced the lid when Sam Logan drew up at the outer archway.

IT was not till they had traveled almost twenty miles and darkness had fallen, that the detective stopped the car before an hotel.

"I've had a thorough going over, kid. And the otherwise admirable Miss Smythe had nothing stronger than coffee in the house. I could do with a whisky. We'll stop here and have some food."

Grey had been silent during the ride, but as they ate he recounted in confidence his experiences at the old nunnery. Logan listened with interest. He had shared many strange adventures with his chief, but, of them all, this was the capper.

To his inward regret, Quentin Grey had no theories to advance. Logan was little the wiser when they resumed their way. They had gone perhaps five miles when a tire blew out with a loud report. Grey pulled Logan up, sprang down and hurried to the rear of the car.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed loudly, in evident surprise.

Grey alighted and went round to him, the luggage rack was down. On it lay a long stone box shaped like a coffin.

"What the deuce is this?" Logan demanded, looking at his chief.

"Wait!"

Grey got a flashlight from the front seat and flashed its white rays on the granite lid. From the stone, the leering features of the de Nivelles goat grinned up at him. It was the coffin he had replaced so arduously in its niche!

"Jeanne's last resting-place!" he exclaimed for Logan's benefit. "Someone must have stowed it on the carrier before we drove away from St. Monica's."

"But, chief, I went round to the back of the car just before we left to have a look at the tail lamp," Logan objected. "It wasn't there then. I remember distinctly, that the luggage rack was folded up and strapped tight. Besides, it would take two men and a boy to hump this heavy thing. They couldn't have done it without our knowing."

"I agree," Grey said shortly. "Still, be that as it may, the infernal thing's followed us. Perhaps it was wished on to us while we had dinner. I wonder why?"

He pocketed the flashlight and signed to Logan. Between them, they raised the heavy lid. Inside, still as death, lay a man—not a mediaeval man, but one in modern clothes.

"Great glory!" Logan gasped. "Is he dead?"

Grey touched the still form cautiously.

"Yes—no! The heart's stopped, but the flesh seems warm. I think it's suspended animation. Queer, but—Hallo!" He bent forward sharply, his torch focused.

In the man's right hand was gripped a tricolored tie, striped in orange, red and indigo—the school tie of St. Monica's.

Knotted as when worn, the narrow neckpiece had parted in the middle, just behind where the collar-stud would lie. The usual join in the fabric had been rent asunder as though the tie had been torn from its wearer's neck.

"What the deuce are we going to do?" Logan breathed. He glanced dubiously at Grey.

Quentin Grey looked back at him for a moment without speaking, then squared his broad shoulders.

"We're going straight back to St. Monica's," he said.

CHAPTER VI

Warning Unspoken

IT was getting late when at length the car pulled up before the school entrance and old Mullins admitted them. The light in Miss Smythe's study still burned. They found her seated in company with a sharp-featured, cadaverous young man. Wearing clothes of indifferent cut and carelessly groomed, he had rusty red specks upon his jacket and yellow acid stains upon his ill-kept hands.

It was Brown, the science master, Grey decided, as the newcomer sprang up on their entrance.

"So you're back again!" Miss Smythe exclaimed when she had introduced the three men. "So soon! What brought you?"

"This," Grey returned, and with Mullins and Logan carried in the stone coffin. "Your property, I think, Miss Smythe."

"Good gracious! But—" The headmistress glanced in surprise at the empty niche. "How did it leave? How did you get it?"

"It followed us," the detective said tersely. "Just how, I was hoping you could explain."

"But I thought it was still in its place. Mullins, what do you know about this?"

"Nothing, ma'am!" the butler answered promptly. "I haven't touched it. It's that dark in the corner there, where it stood, I didn't notice it was gone!"

Miss Smythe paled a trifle.

"Mr. Grey, I hope this isn't warning of fresh evil!" she breathed tensely. "Some fresh and weird happening—"

"If you can identify this person—perhaps not." They dragged the lid aside, exposing the motionless figure inside the coffin.

Miss Smythe gasped, bent quickly, then, straightening up, shook her head.

"I've never seen him before. Is—he dead?"

"I think not. Still"—Grey caught up an end of the knotted tie—"what of this?"

"The swimming team tie!" Miss Smythe exclaimed. "A new one, too! Good heavens! How does this man come to be holding it?" She looked at Grey in dismay.

"I was hoping you could throw some light on that, Miss Smythe," he murmured. "Are these ties easily come by?"

"Indeed, no, Mr. Grey. We're most particular. For one thing, our ties are all registered designs and cannot be bought outside the school. Then, too, we have a strict rule. All discarded ties must be handed over for destruction. Our object is to preclude any possibility of their falling into unauthorised hands, lest discredit be brought upon St. Monica's."

"Humph! Well, as you say, this tie's brand new—almost so, anyway. That should simplify the identification of its real owner. To whom have you recently issued swimming team ties, Miss Smythe?"

"That's simply answered, Mr. Grey. This term, we've only issued one—to a newcomer, Eve Tankerton. You've already seen her. You remember the girl who brought that note for me last evening?"

"Yes, I remember," Grey concurred. She had done more than bring a note, he thought to himself. "A newcomer, you say? Surely she's one of the seniors?"

I should have put her down for eighteen at least."

"She is eighteen. From California, Mr. Grey. Of course, she's been to school somewhere on the Coast—I forget just where. She was sent here to Maryland to finish her education."

"I see. Then, if you don't mind, I suggest you have her in here. If the tie's hers, she'll be short of one. Don't say anything—just send for her."

"I will," Miss Smythe agreed, and gave orders to the butler.

WHILE awaiting Eve Tankerton, Grey bent over the tie. Towards the end of its broad part, small pin-holes showed in the fabric, as if the owner were in the habit of securing it to her blouse with a safety-pin.

For an instant his eyes noted this. Then, whipping a large embroidered cloth off the table, he covered the coffin with it.

"We need not give Miss Tankerton a shock," he murmured.

"Indeed, no." Brown, a dour, taciturn young man, spoke for the first time since their introduction. "But I'm sure she can't have anything to do with this. Miss Tankerton is one of my best pupils. I cannot imagine her having clandestine communication with any man."

"I cannot imagine her having the opportunity to do so," Miss Smythe said crisply. "Our girls are not allowed out alone. However, we'll see—"

"S-sh!" Here she is!" Grey warned in an undertone as the door opened.

Eve Tankerton came into the room, her hands demurely folded. At the collar opening of the white blouse, peeping through her square-cut school frock of navy blue, gleamed a bright new tie—the duplicate of that hidden under the tablecloth.

"Yes, Miss Smythe?" she asked demurely, with a swift, curious glance at the group round the concealed coffin. The headmistress hesitated, her eyes on the tie. Evidently she was completely taken aback by its presence.

"Er—I wished to show this gentleman the swimming tie, Eve," she announced, collecting herself. "I—er—thought you might be wearing yours."

"Yes, Miss Smythe," was the docile answer, but the girl's dark eyes swept past her swiftly. For an instant they

met those of the science master in veiled inquiry.

"Perhaps you'll take your tie off, Miss Tankerton?" the detective requested politely. "Just so that I may examine it closely."

EVE bowed her head, and, fumbling obediently inside her frock, seemed to unloosen something. When she unknotted the tie and handed it silently to the detective, two pin holes showed near its lower extremities. Yet it was new enough—brighter even than the tie in the coffin.

"Thank you. That is all I want," Grey murmured, returning it to her. "I—"

He stopped abruptly. There was a furious clanging of the front door bell. Mullins strode to the door and opened it. A man stumbled in past him, and panting heavily, fetched up at the table, facing Brown.

"Sir, I've come to warn you. A terrible thing has hap—"

Crash!

A casement pane splintered. The new arrival fell forward with a stifled groan across the table, something long and tenuous quivering between his shoulder blades. He had been skewered to the table top by a short spear!

"The window—quick!"

Grey spun for the sill, but vainly. With a shriek, Eve Tankerton flung herself on him, and, clinging madly, broke into a storm of hysterical crying.

"Let go, you little fool!" he urged, thrusting her off. But she still hung on to him madly.

"Don't let them hurt me! Don't—don't—*don't*—"

He sent her staggering with a violent shove, sprang past her to the door. But when he gained the grounds, nothing was stirring. Though he looked left and right, he could see no human being.

"Quick—my flashlight from the car!" he ordered as Logan joined him. While Sam hurried off to get it, he continued his search.

But he found nothing. When a few moments later, Logan returned with the torch, the light picked up nothing save the shrubs of trees. The murderer, whoever he was, had vanished.

"Confound that girl!" Grey explained wrathfully. "Losing her silly head like that! I—"

He checked himself. After all, he had seen Eve Tankerton in a crisis less than twenty-four hours ago. She had been the cooler then. Yet now—

Frowning, he strode onwards, halted abruptly by a flower bed. In his brown study, he had almost stepped in it.

"No, she didn't panic last night," he muttered, sweeping his torch along the bed to find its end. "I wonder—*jingo!*"

He bent forward sharply, his torch extended. On the soft earth, still damp from the gardener's hose, a trail of tiny cloven footmarks showed up under the white rays.

"A sheep!" Logan cried, staring.

"Or else"—Grey paused dramatically—"a goat."

Sam Logan started.

"Holy cow, sir—" his voice was hushed with awe—"The goat of the de Nivelles!"

GREY went back to the hall, where he found Brown bending over the body.

"He's dead," the science master announced dully. "Died without another word. The spear's got him through the heart."

Grey felt the dead man's wrist and found the pulse.

"You're right—unfortunately," he said, releasing the wrist. "Another mystery!"

Brown shook his head.

"There's no mystery. He's my servant. I left him to watch a retort I had boiling over a bunsen burner. Something must have gone wrong with the reaction. Perhaps the retort burst."

"All the same, Mr. Brown, why should he dash here like this to warn you? After all, that's a trifle. My impression was that he had something vital to tell."

"I ordered him to be very careful. The retort contained—er—certain compounds I'd made up with great care. To replace them would mean much work. I wouldn't have left the reaction in his charge, but Miss Smythe was so concerned about this poltergeist. I'm quite sure it was the reaction that was worrying poor Robinson."

"Perhaps you're right. We'll find out later."

Grey looked over to where Eve Tankerton sat huddled in a high-backed chair, her cheeks blanched, her dark eyes

glassy with horror. She could hardly take her eyes from the ghastly thing on the table. Her face, he thought, had suddenly gone very old. Her schoolgirl look had left her.

"A Bikany spear," she muttered, her gaze on the slanting shaft. "I've seen them before."

"You don't see many here in America, though," Grey commented. "Now where can this one have come from?"

Miss Smythe approached the table reluctantly, and for an instant peered closely at the weapon.

"It looks like one of a pair I have hanging on the wall in the dining-room," she muttered.

"May I see them?" Grey queried. With an eager nod, she led him from the room.

Grey hurried into the dining-room. Over the fireplace, a single spear hung obliquely. Its fellow was missing. In the fastened casement, a small hole showed in the diamond-paned glazing.

"Great Scott! So it flew off the wall here!" Grey cried, staring at the window and its closed fastening.

"Round the grounds and in at that other window!" Miss Smythe regarded him incredulously. "Why, it's impossible!"

"All the same, it seems to have happened."

"But, but—" She shivered. "How can you account for it?"

"I can't. Though it's a characteristic poltergeist phenomenon, I believe, for hurtling objects to fly around corners, Miss Smythe. Missiles projected by a human hand cannot do that, unless, of course, they're capable of bouncing, as, say, a rubber ball. Obviously, a spear cannot do that."

THE headmistress bit her lip. Like Eve's, her cheek was chalk-white.

"Mr. Grey, it's all so dreadful—so mysterious!"

"It is. By the way, do you keep a goat here at the school?"

"A goat?" She looked surprised. "Of course not."

"There's no way a goat could get into the grounds from outside?"

"No, that would be impossible. The whole place is surrounded by a ten-foot brick wall, and every gate is locked. But, surely—your question is very strange?"

"Not as strange as that goat whose

prints I've seen in the ground, Miss Smythe. You see, its four hoofs are all right-handed, as it were."

Miss Smythe and Grey returned to the hall, where Logan waited in company with Brown and Eve Tankerton.

"What about that reaction of yours, Mr. Brown?" Grey asked on entering. "Shall we go and see what has happened to it?"

The science master scowled.

"There's no need. Probably nothing's happened to it. If it has—well, only I can see to things. I suggest, sir, that your proper place is here. I understand you're a sort of policeman." His tone was mildly contemptuous. "You ought to guard the body till the real police get here."

"As you prefer, Mr. Brown," Grey said carelessly.

Inwardly, he wondered why Brown was so disinclined for his company homewards. Most men, in the circumstances, would have preferred a companion. However, he said nothing of his inward thoughts. He turned to the principal.

"If you'll send Mullins for the police, please. As Mr. Brown says, they should be notified. The sooner the better. Meanwhile, I think Miss Tankerton would be better out of this. My assistant will see her to the school building."

"Don't worry, I'm going. I'll escort her to the door," Brown put in. "Probably you'll prefer that, Miss Smythe?"

"Yes, that would be preferable, I think," the headmistress concurred, with a glance at Logan's youthful face. "If you'll take her, Mr. Brown. I must remain here. Oh, and Eve—not a word of this, yet, to any of the girls, please!"

"Yes, Miss Smythe."

Eve bowed slightly, and a timorous figure followed the science master respectfully through the front door.

Grey closed it after them, then got through to the police station on the school phone. He was some time giving the sergeant details of the tragedy. When he rang off, he strolled into the open, intent on thoughtful pacing.

His feet silent on the soft grass, he took a turn or so about the garden. He was about to go in again, when the sound of a soft laugh caught his ear. Instantly, alert, he tiptoed to some bushes

and peered cautiously through them. Silhouetted against the rising moon, stood a man and a girl, locked in one another's arms. The girl had her arms about her companion's neck. Oblivious of the detective, she raised her lips to kiss her companion.

"Darling!"

Like a faint zephyr, the endearment reached the spot where Grey stood hidden. Then, releasing her, the man stepped away. Simultaneously the moonlight bathed their faces.

Grey's fingers contracted tensely on the shrub.

They were Eve Tankerton and the science master!

CHAPTER VII

The Clue of the Twin Rolls-Royce

A MOMENT later the pair parted—Brown making for the gate, Eve for the School House. Grey was trying to decide whether or not to follow the man when the sound of the main gate bell ringing warned him of the police and their arrival. Willy-nilly, he had to go back and receive them.

It was some time before he finished his interview with the local chief and was free to leave. He did this without telling Miss Smythe of what he had seen through the bushes. It was true she should know of Brown and his conduct. Yet Quentin Grey felt intuitively that the time was not ripe for disclosures.

He had much to do. There was the man in the coffin, for instance. True, the coroner, hastily called in, pronounced him dead. But Grey, who, in his younger days, had walked the hospitals and had the right to set the magic letters M. D. after his name, was not so sure. While professional etiquette forbade argument before third parties, he felt his responsibility towards this second victim of an unsolved mystery.

Still, for the present, it was the physician's job, and, leaving the police and their medical adviser to dispose of matters, he bade Miss Smythe good-night, and, with Logan, quit the school enclosure. His car still stood where he

had left it. But as they reached it, he halted.

"I think we'll make a detour of the walls first," he announced. "I'd like to satisfy myself that the place is as private as Miss Smythe believes. There may be some way in she hasn't discovered. Pupils have been known before now to arrange a loophole so they can sneak out of bounds undetected."

So the pair commenced a detour of St. Monica's. They had gone but a few yards when a slight sound on high caused Grey to grip his assistant's arm.

"Stop!" he whispered. "Don't move!"

He drew Logan back into the shadows. A short way ahead, something was straddling the wall—a slight figure, dimly seen against a background of leafy trees.

The figure scanned the roadway keenly. Then it dropped lightly on the pavement and moved forwards toward a gas-lamp. Grey's grip tightened on Logan's arm. It was Eve Tankerton again. This time she was clad in a silk blouse and knee breeches.

"Queer outfit for a schoolgirl!" Grey muttered. "What's she up to now, I wonder?"

The answer came quickly as she darted suddenly across the road and, entering the shadows of an alley, wheeled something from it. It was a motorcycle!

"Quick, the car!" Grey ordered. As the girl smashed down the kick-starter and whirled the engine into life, they raced to where their car stood, their footfalls drowned by the staccato bark of the single cylinder.

As luck would have it, the custom-built job jibbed slightly. It was a minute or so before, warming up, it got into its stride. Just as Eve Tankerton shot off down the street on her machine, Grey's car got away in pursuit.

Simultaneously a dark form stepped out from a corner, took one look after the two vehicles, and, jumping into a second car hidden unnoticed in a gateway, set out in their wake.

Eve Tankerton drove on swiftly through the town and out on its farther side. Not once did she look behind her. But from this circumstance Quentin Grey took little comfort. His car's headlights picked up a flash on her handlebars—a side mirror, in which she doubtless observed them in the following vehicle.

SO INTENT were both Grey and Logan on the fugitive that neither thought to throw a glance astern. They did not see the car that came on stealthily a hundred yards behind. As the girl increased her speed, so did they. In response, the second car opened out.

"Funny! I thought she was interested in that fellow Brown," Grey muttered. "But from the direction he took when he went off, his house lies the other way. Where's she going?"

As if in answer, the motorcycle swerved sharply and shot off down a side turning. Grey swung after it, and his car swept into a narrow opening, unlighted, and, from the bumpiness, unpaved.

Ahead, the dim disc of the motorcycle's lamp showed feebly, rocking and pitching as the two-wheeler also bumped over the uneven surface. The cycle had slowed considerably, had come almost to a standstill.

"Look out, sir!"

Logan gave a warning cry as the headlight beams caught the glint of water just ahead. The river—Quentin Grey braked quickly, and the great car skidded to a stand almost on the brink of a steep drop and right under the motorcycle's tail.

With a sudden roar, the machine shot off like a rocket full at the flowing stream. For a second the two detectives held their breath. Was the girl mad?

"Holy cow!" Logan gasped feebly.

The broad white beams from the car lights picked up a skeleton of steel-work spanning the water. It was a bridge under construction, and as yet but a single girder crossed the stream. Along this knife-edge viaduct the motorcycle drove, its rider bent low over the wide bars.

Their hearts in their mouths, the pair watched her. A single wobble—an inch to right or left—and the machine would plunge headlong into the dark, silent waters below.

But the little daredevil did not miscalculate. Cool as a cucumber, she rode on to the farther bank, bumped noisily ashore, and, with a contemptuous wave of her hand, shot off into the night.

"Confound her impudence!" Grey eyed a vague shape nearby, spanning the river—an older bridge. which the part-

ly finished structure was evidently to replace. "Look out! I'm backing. We'll get her yet!"

There was no room to turn, so he snicked the gears into reverse and began backing down the narrow lane, obviously an unpaved approach for trucks carrying materials to the new bridge. But the car had only gone halfway when once more Logan gave a warning shout.

"Hold hard, sir!"

Another car had turned in up the alley behind them and was blocking the way.

"Blast!" Grey breathed an imprecation. "Hi, there! Back out, will you? This is a cul-de-sac."

THE other car did not move. Instead, its driver shouted something in a foreign tongue, and, since the fellow did not seem to understand, Grey jumped down and ran back to him.

"Reverse, you fool! Back—back!"

But the stranger still held his ground. He continued to jabber excitedly, it sounded like unintelligible gibberish. In a frenzy of impatience—for the girl was all the while escaping—Grey sprang up to the car, gesturing furiously.

"For the love of Mike, back, you fool—!"

He stopped abruptly. The car was a big one, the same model as his own, and the same color, too. At the wheel sat a turbaned Indian.

For a full second, Grey stared at this unexpected combination in astonishment. Then, recovering, he let drive in Hindu, followed it with a succession of other Indian dialects. Yet the Indian only shook his head vaguely. Of the innumerable tongues spoken on the Deccan peninsula, Grey had apparently failed to strike on one intelligible to him.

Still, pantomime achieved its object at last. After a little, a light of dawning intelligence came into the Indian's face. Reversing, he made way for the other vehicle, and Grey's car backed out onto the main road.

Grey, however, made no effort to drive onto the old bridge. It was now obviously futile to follow the motorcycle. By this time the girl must have gained an enormous lead, and might have gone down any one of innumerable turnings.

Furious, yet impotent, Grey drove off back toward the town, leaving the other driver to his own devices. Then, as his anger commenced to wane, he frowned. Why had the Indian turned into that alley? It was a queer coincidence, one mighty convenient to Eve Tankerton!

His eyes fell thoughtfully on the instrument board, held it vaguely for a second, then flashed in sudden understanding. His own special type of speedometer that should have been there was missing! He bent forward quickly and scanned the polished mahogany. Not only was the instrument absent, but the screwholes were gone.

"But how, by all that's uncanny—" he muttered, and, quick as thought, cut into a private gateway and round a crescent drive that led to a second gate. Just before this gate he pulled up, listening. Ah, as he thought—the soft hum of another car was coming down the road. In a trice, he switched off the lights. A moment later the Indian's car swept past on the road outside.

Grey let it get a short lead. Then, switching on the lights again he set out in pursuit. Who was this Indian. And what was he doing with a supercar like his own? How, too, did he come to drive along Maryland roads when he spoke apparently not a word of the English language?

The detective's brain worked swiftly as, trailing the Indian into the town, he followed him to Main Street, where he drove into an entrance flanking the chief hotel. Above the entrance was a garage sign. After a moment's thought, Grey locked his own bus in beneath it.

He was in time to see the Indian dismount and stroll unconcernedly into the hotel itself.

Grey parked his car quietly. He was a little disconcerted by the fellow's nonchalance. Had he, after all, formed a too hasty conclusion? Perhaps. Still—

He raised the hood and peered in at the manufacturer's number stamped on the aluminum crankcase. The figures confronting him were not his own.

HE WENT quickly to the other car, spied the instrument board, spotted his familiar speedometer. Then, lifting the hood, he inspected the engine number. It was the one belonging

to his own car.

"So that's how they worked it—brought the coffin along after us and swapped cars after changing license plates outside the hotel where we stopped for dinner!"

His mouth wreathed in a triumphant smile.

"So you're in on this poltergeist stunt, my Asiatic friend! I've a notion the Society for Psychical Research might not be so interested in this case, after all. Well, we'll see—"

He slipped an arm through Logan's and drew him to a side entrance of the hotel. Behind one carefully shrouded window, a light still burned. Trying the door, Grey opened it and entered. In the bar beyond, a small group of men stood drinking.

Grey shut the door quietly, strode up boldly to the bar and beckoned to the round-faced man behind it.

"Two rickies, please," he ordered.

The rubicund publican drew the drinks and passed them across the counter.

"That'll be four bits," he said.

"Okay." Grey took a sip at his drink, tossed the silver on the bar.

"We're friends of Mr. Brown, up at the school," he said. "Does he come here often?"

"Oh, so you're friends of the science master, eh?" The barkeep's face cleared still further. "Yes, he comes in here now and again. A smart apple. At least, they say smart ones don't talk. He keeps pretty much to himself—no offense, of course."

Grey smiled.

"Well, he can talk at times. That's how we came to know about your extensive hospitality here."

The barkeep guffawed mirthfully.

"I'll bet he didn't tell the schoolmarm, though. A bit of a bluenose she is. He'd get kicked out if she knew the booze he knocked off here. And—he leaned forward suddenly in semi-confidence—"she'd most certainly 'out' him if she knew who he met in here sometimes."

"Meaning?"

"I'm mentioning no names. A nice piece of you know what—" He winked portentously. "Right out of the cradle."

Eve Tankerton! So she's been meeting Brown in here!

GREY'S pulse quickened as he stared reflectively into a mirror set in the high mahogany structure that held the saloon's many bottles.

The Indian was standing just at his elbow, a hand over the detective's glass. For a second the brown fingers paused, then passed on. Through the liquid, white powder was settling slowly.

"A cutie, old Brown, eh?" Grey chuckled, as the Indian walked casually away. "And I thought he spent all his time poring over those chemical experiments of his."

"A man's got to have some pleasure, mister. I'd be glad to get out of that house of his if ever I was in it."

"Why?" the detective asked, with interest.

"A gloomy place. It was shut up for a long time before he took it, a month or two back. It must be musty as blazes. Damp, too. I dunno what made him move in there. He'd a nice bungalow down by the river, too."

"Which reminds me—we need rooms. I s'pose this hotel can put us up? You can? Good! Well, here's all the best—" Grey raised his glass and, under cover of the counter, signed to Logan in code. Promptly the lad knocked his untasted beer with his elbow. The glass fell to the floor with a crash that drew the instant attention of the whole company.

Like lightning, Grey slung his own liquor into an adjacent palm-pot. When the company looked around again, he was in the act of settling down an apparently just-drained glass.

For awhile Grey went on talking to the landlord as the latter, very insistent, drew a second drink for Logan. Grey could sense the Indian's eyes on him. After a little, he began to yawn sleepily.

"I think—a bit of sleep—" he muttered thickly, stumbled slightly toward a doorway. "What about it?"

"All right, sir, this way—"

They passed on, guided by the barkeep, and Grey glimpsed in the mirror the Indian's smile of triumph.

As mine host left them, Grey shut the bedroom door and bolted it.

"The gutter-pipe, Sam." He raised the window-sash softly and threw one leg over the sill. "Back to the garage." A second later, he was sliding gingerly down the pipe.

Gaining the garage, the pair hid themselves. Hardly had they done so when the Indian entered, swapped the license plates of the two cars and, starting his own, drove out into the street.

"So you think I'm nicely doped and out of the way, eh?" Grey chuckled, as he sprang to the wheel of his own car. "Well, you're wrong, and—"

As he looked out into the street, his wrists were jarred at the wheel, his whole body shaken.

The ground beneath him rocked. There was the sound of a muffled explosion.

CHAPTER VIII

The Bank Smashers

DIAGONALLY across the way a building blazed into sudden light. A door was flung open, and a man rushed out onto the pavement.

"Police! Police!"

Grey braked his car sharply. Above the door, was a brass plate, which announced that the structure was a bank.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, driving into the curb.

The man at the door made a frantic gesture.

"Raiders! The vaults! You heard that explosion?" He set a whistle to his lips and blew. "There'll be a pack of 'em! I can't tackle a gang single-handed!"

"You won't have to!" Grey whipped a heavy wrench from the toolbox. "Come on!"

He plunged into the building with Logan at his heels, armed with a jack handle. Inside, they ran into a white-faced man, clad in a dressing-gown. It was the bank manager, roused from his bed in the apartment above. Together they hurried down to the cellar. A great steel vault door faced them. It was intact.

For a second the manager stared helplessly at the great metal door with its triple locks. Then he gave a stifled laugh.

"Phew! I thought we'd been raided. A false alarm. And yet"—his face grew puzzled—"I could have sworn I heard

an explosion."

"You heard one, all right, sir," the night watchman asserted. "The whole place shook!"

"Yes. We heard it out in the street," Grey affirmed.

"But if the door's intact—"

"Wait!" Grey put his nose to the joint of the door. A faint odor of fumes greeted him. "They've tunneled and blown in the floor of the vault I'm afraid."

"Good Lord!" The manager wrung his hands frantically. "What are we to do?"

"Unlock the door! We'll settle with them!"

"But I can't. Three of us hold the keys. No one man can open the vault alone. My assistant manager has one. The cashier's got the other."

"Then send for them," Grey ordered coolly, taking charge. "When the police come, we'll raid the adjacent premises and see if they've bored through from there."

The watchman and a second man raced away. Then, when the police showed up, entry was made to the houses on either side of the bank building. Roused by the noise, their occupants were quickly astir. But a rapid search yielded no trace of borings.

Grey, whose name had worked magic, next searched the rear yard. Again he drew a blank. Just how the raiders had reached the vault he could not tell. With the whole town as a possible starting place, it was vain to hunt farther. There was nothing for it but to wait for the cashier and his associate.

AN HOUR elapsed before, dragged from their beds, the two bank employees arrived with their respective keys. The police drew their pistols and, gripping his spanner, Quentin Grey poised at the ready while the manager hauled the heavy steel door open.

A rush of fumes poured out into the vestibule, but nothing more. Crouching tensely, the whole party waited in silence while the grey clouds cleared away.

"Now!" Grey switched on his torch and strode boldly forward into the vault.

It was empty! In the concrete floor gaped a huge, jagged hole.

"Just as I thought!" The detective

gave a shrug of resignation. "And they've got an hour's start. Still, we'll see where their borings start from. That should give us a clue."

"And, by God, we'll soon find out!"

A hefty sergeant dropped down into the hole, only to stagger back, coughing, his hands to his face.

Grey threw himself flat, seized the sergeant by the armpits and hauled him to the vault floor. His face had gone a sickly yellow. After a choking splutter or so, he collapsed limply—unconscious.

"Look out!" Grey dragged him aside quickly. "The tunnel's full of gas. The thieves were clever. They've left a trap behind them. It's certain death to follow them till the tunnel's cleared!"

The manager breathed a stifled oath.

"But, my heaven, what are we to do? They've got away with two hundred thousand dollars! The Zalumnite Company distribute their annual factory bonus tomorrow, and we had the money here ready. My God, the directors will break me for this!"

Grey eyed the unhappy man pityingly.

"I'm sorry, but it's madness to drop into that gas. The tortoise is going to win this race, not the hare. But till we know what the gas is we can do nothing. Get me some paper, someone."

A man came forward with a bunch of newspapers, and rolling them into a loose torch, Grey set a match to them. Waving his companions back, he advanced gingerly to the mouth of the tunnel, and tossing the blazing mass down into it, leaped back quickly.

There was a blinding flash, a roar, a rush of leaping flame. Then the fire faded, and the tunnel went dark again. From its mouth great clouds of black smoke came rolling. There was an interval while the smoke continued, then Grey advanced cautiously to the hole, and lowered himself into it.

"Okay!" he called up. Logan sprang down after him. The others followed.

Picking their way gingerly, they groped along a narrow cleft of newly hewn workings, the earthen sides of which were retained by planking. A hundred feet farther on, the boards ended. A brick-walled tunnel lay beyond.

"New stuff, this." Grey indicated the plank-sided tunnel. "But this other is old—look." He pointed to the damp

green on the masonry.

"And see where they've dumped their up-cast," Logan added, nodding at the floor of the brick tunnel. Along it a thin layer of earth showed where the gang had deposited their diggings.

FROM the comparative shallowness of the deposit, it looked as if the tunnel must proceed for some distance, And so, indeed, it proved. The party groped onward for several hundred yards before at length a flight of stone steps confronted them.

At the head of the stairs, lay a wooden panel, secured by a rusty catch, recently oiled. A finger to his lips, Grey raised the catch gently and shot the panel back.

Beyond lay an uncarpeted room and a table loaded with test-tubes, retorts, and flasks.

"By Jove! Brown's place! I'll bet!" Grey cried and stepped into the room. A single lamp still burned brightly in a corner. Over against the skirting lay a still figure. It was the science master, gagged and trussed up like a fowl. Grey dropped on one knee beside him. As he rolled the fellow over, two frightened eyes blinked at him shrinkingly.

"One moment!" The detective rose, fumbling for his knife. He glanced up at a window. Pressed to the pane, two eyes stared back into his own.

"Don't touch him!"

Grey dashed at the window as the eyes vanished. He flung up the sash and vaulted out into the garden in time to see a vague shape fling itself over the fence. As he gained the latter, there was a roar from the roadway. An unlighted car shot off up the road. Its make was uncertain.

"Too late!"

With a shrug of resignation, Grey went back to the house. Since they had no car of their own, it was useless to think of pursuit. Pausing to inspect the ropes which bound the science master, he cut them through. Groaning, Brown made an effort to sit up.

The attempt failed lamentably. But for the fact that Grey put out a hand to catch him, the unfortunate man would have fallen back to the floor. Steadying him, Grey lifted him to an adjacent table, and laid him prone.

"What's happened?" he asked, testing

Brown's pulse.

"I don't know. I was jumped from behind." Brown spoke with seeming difficulty. "I didn't see by whom. They kayoed me. Tied me up. Gosh, I feel rotten!" He ended with a dull groan.

Grey bent over him for a few moments, then nodded.

"That's all right, old chap. Don't worry. Take your time."

Brown's eyes answered gratefully. For a little he lay quietly, then he gave a sudden start and tried to sit up again.

"The reactant! Curse them! They've stolen it! My great discovery! And Zalumnite's promised me fifty thousand dollars!"

He fought Grey off frantically.

"Let me see! Out of the way! They've got my secret! *A-ah!*"

He fell back, gasping, too weak to swing his tortured body to the floor.

"Calm down, man!" Grey said kindly. "It wasn't your chemicals they were after, but the bank. They've cleared the vaults—got away with two hundred thousand dollars."

"Oh, is that all?" Brown heaved a sigh of relief and lay back contentedly. "Thank goodness!"

AFTER all, what did a mere sum of money matter when science was at stake? With an indifference wholly characteristic of his profession, the chemist closed his eyes tranquilly and composed himself. Two hundred thousand dollars—alongside a retort full of some evil-smelling compound of his own concoction, what was a trifle like that?

"You see, there's nothing to worry about, my dear fellow," Grey said sympathetically. "Just keep still for a bit. It's all right."

"Yes, I see now," Brown murmured. "Only I was wrong not to let you come back here with me when you wanted to. It's this silly professional jealousy. Forgive me. I knew you were a bit of a scientist yourself, and I was afraid about that reactant. I—well, I thought you might get a line on my discovery. And now it's you who've rescued me from a gang who mightn't have dared try anything if we'd been together."

"Don't apologize, old man."

"You're generous! I don't deserve it. Poor Robinson! I see now what he was trying to warn me of. He'd spotted the

gang breaking in. And all the time I thought it was something about the reactant."

"Never mind. We'll go into that later. Forget it."

Grey turned to Sam Logan.

"While he's recovering, we'll have a look at the grounds. There may be footprints."

Together the two detectives passed out into the garden, where Grey plied his torch methodically upon the paths, lawns, flower beds. But no clues remained on the sun-baked ground. Here and there the rank grass and weeds had been disturbed, but there was nothing to lead to identification of the raiders.

He was about to give it up when his torch ray caught a circular disk of black amidst the grass. A large, iron manhole cover—it lay fringed with battered nightshade, a frond of which was caught under its edge.

"Hallo!" Grey bent sharply. The lid had been raised recently.

He yanked it from its mooring, flashed his torch into a gaping orifice. Below, far down amongst the slimy-coated brickwork, flowed running water.

"What's this?" he asked a policeman at his side.

"That'll be the brook. It's trapped in a conduit, you know. It runs under the town."

"Where to?"

"The river. It runs out into it about two miles downstream."

"Hm!"

Grey swung himself down a rusty iron ladder affixed to the masonry and gained a narrow ledge just above the water level. Plying his flashlight, he inspected the conduit to right and left, but located nothing.

"Now what did they want to lift that lid for?" he muttered. "To dump tools into the water, perhaps. Nothing like getting rid of incriminating equipment. Ouch!"

He drew back sharply as he felt his feet grow wet. He looked downwards. The water was flowing over his boots. Cursing, he climbed up the ladder and gained the outer ground. His feet and trouser bottoms were soured.

The water level was rising fast.

"By the way, is there a grating at the far end of the conduit?" he asked the officer, as he mopped off his shoes.

"I believe so. I haven't been down there to see."

"Huh! And there's been no rain these last few days. Well"—he straightened—"you'd better get a doctor to see Mr. Brown, officer. I think we'll be going."

Close to the main entrance to St. Monica's, Grey's car drew up in the deserted street. The detective alighted and, leaving Sam Logan in the car, shot a keen glance up and down the roadway.

Assured that it was empty and that he was unobserved, he took a flying leap at the wall, gripped its crest with his fingers and drew himself up onto it. Dropping to its farther side, he stole softly across the grounds and gained the shadow of the great School House.

High above, a window lay open to the warm night air. It was one he had seen Eve Tankerton quitting when she climbed down the ivy. Very stealthily he scaled the creeper, following the path she had taken in her descent. Leaning in across the sill, he scanned the moonlit room.

Serene on her pillow, he saw the lovely face of Eve Tankerton. She was fast asleep.

Silently the detective climbed back to earth again and rejoined his assistant. If the supernatural elements of this case were mysterious, so, too, were those of its human agents.

CHAPTER IX

Zingaan the Merciless

NEXT morning, Quentin Grey in his car, pulled up beside the river bank, where, as a brick culvert suggested, the tunnelled brook flowed out into the main stream. Beside the road, a man was loading gasoline cans onto a truck. Grey alighted and went over to him.

"Excuse me. Do you know where the conduit runs out?" he asked politely.

The other, a rough red-bearded fellow, with a patch on one eye, regarded him unpleasantly.

"Me? I dunno nothin' about this neighborhood, mister, 'cept that the tomatoes round here ain't got no manners. They give me the needle!"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"You see that traction engine down the road?"

"Yes. We passed one."

"Druv me up on to the grass off'n the road, he did! My back wheels sunk in so far into the ground I've had to unload my cans an' load up again when I got her back on the road. She wouldn't have it nohow. An' not so much as one word of apology outer that punk with the engine, either."

Grey shot a glance at some damaged boards lying on the grass, where, presumably, the back wheels of the truck had been. Apparently they had been placed there to assist the vehicle regain the roadway.

"Well, I hope you'll be all right now," he said, smiling. "Some of those traction engines do take up a good bit of the thoroughfare. Sorry for troublin' you—"

He strolled down to the bank with Sam Logan and satisfied himself that a tunnel mouth did, in fact, let out into the stream. The river bank was steep, however, and at its foot lay a mass of uninviting black mud. To negotiate the bank was by no means easy, and since he did not know how deep the mud was, he hesitated to descend.

While the two detectives felt their way cautiously, the truck drove off. Failing to gain the tunnel mouth, Grey went back to his car and secured a tow-rope. This he lashed to the bridge rail so that its end trailed over the mud.

"We'll need a platform of some sort to stand on," he announced, glancing about him. "Something that will lie on the mud—"

Remembering the boards left by the truck driver, he looked 'round and found them still in their old position.

"They'll do," Grey said, picked them up. The ground under them was quite smooth and hard. There seemed no reason why the truck should have stuck. The discovery gave him a start. He cast a swift glance up the road, but the vehicle had disappeared.

He flung the planks out onto the mud in front of the conduit, then slid down by his rope from the bridge and got a stance on the planking. Steadying himself with the rope, he peered forward into the tunnel.

Bent remains of a grating remained. The rest lay half-sunk into the mud. The

twisted iron still adhering to the brickwork was badly blackened. It had been cut through by an oxy-acetylene burner.

"Fool! I might have guessed!"

He swung up the rope quickly and returned to Logan on the bridge.

"Back to the car, fellow! We must overtake that truck. I must have been asleep, letting him get past me like that!"

HE WENT racing for his car, and Logan, not a little mystified, followed. The big car went racing down the road in the direction taken by the commercial vehicle.

The latter had had a considerable start, and it was some time before the two detectives sighted it, traveling through some woods where the road ran between high banks. As the car bore up, the lumbering truck seemed to gather speed.

Grey pulled up, bade Logan take the wheel, then signed for him to proceed.

"Go get him, kid!"

Logan nodded, sent the car heading for the truck, which, swaying drunkenly, seemed all out on the narrow road, its piled-up cans dancing noisily.

"Empty—the lot of them!" Grey muttered, as Logan ran the car in alongside. "Hi, you! Stop!" He leaned outwards, signalling the truck driver.

With an oath, the latter stamped on the gas and tried to forge ahead—a vain effort against the greater speed of the long, grey car.

"Cut in on him—ditch him!" Grey breathed to Logan. The latter, swerving sharply, forced the other vehicle against the bank.

"What the heck are you playing at?" the driver yelled angrily. "Who d'you think you're dealing with?"

"You, Brown!"

Grey sprang on to the step and yanked the fellow's beard away.

It was the science master.

Brown's jaw fell. For a second he scowled. Then he laughed sourly.

"Well, I suppose I've a right to the road, haven't I?" he demanded. "What right have you, nearly wrecking us that way?" He paused ferociously. "I've a good mind to call a policeman and give you in charge!"

"I shouldn't if I were you," Grey rejoined easily. "He might like to look in-

side those gasoline tins of yours, Mr. Brown."

Brown paled slightly.

"What for?"

"To look for that loot you got out of the bank vaults last night, my friend. A slick trick, floating it down the conduit in bits and pieces in empty cans. Only you weren't away quick enough."

"You're mad!" Brown snarled. "I was never near the bank."

"Sorry. I should be more accurate. The loot you won off the actual bank-smashers, Brown, by gassing them in the tunnel. It's handy to have knowledge of chemistry, you know. Handy to have a confederate to tie you up afterwards."

"And to stand by when the time comes!" a fierce voice slashed from atop the tins.

Grey glanced up sharply. Eve Tankerton lay there, a pistol in her hand. Her dark eyes were on him ferociously.

"This gun's loaded," she warned, her voice ice-cold with hate. "A move, and you're as good as dead."

"Ah—the schoolgirl!" Grey smiled evenly. "Did they—er—teach you that trick at St. Monica's, Miss Tankerton? Surely not?"

"Shut your trap! And don't let that Zombie of yours stir, either. I'll plug you either way. Get off that step." She lowered the gun threateningly.

"Certainly. Anything to oblige."

AS HE spoke, he leapt, ducking. The gun roared and a bullet whirled past his head and struck the mudguard with a vicious *ping*. There was a cry of anguish from Eve as he wrenched the gun from her hands.

For a desperate second, the two wrestled for its possession while Logan, rising in his seat, flung himself on Brown. A shower of cans went in the road as the detective hauled Eve Tankerton from her perch.

"Better come quietly," he warned, swinging her by the wrist to her feet.

In reply, she buried her white teeth in his hand and, when he tried to free himself, flung a quick arm round his neck. Just in time, he wriggled out of a cunning ju-jitsu lock.

"Now!"

A fierce voice bawled from above, and a rush of men swept down the bank. Before the combatants could spring apart,

the charge had engulfed them. Quentin Grey went down on the road, a mass of humanity on top of him.

Something was thrust over his head, blinking him. Impotent in the vice-like hold of several captors, he was yanked to his feet. Cords tightened round his wrists and ankles. Pinioned, he was flung violently down into some vehicle. Vaguely he heard three other thuds close by, guessed his fellow captives had been thrown in beside him.

The vehicle started, jolted a short distance across uneven ground, then fetched up at its destination. He was hauled unceremoniously out, and born up a stairway, to be dumped roughly on hard boards. He heard the tramp of many feet, the sound of heavy objects deposited near him. There was a moment's silence.

"Well, Zingaan, aren't you coming?" a voice asked impatiently. Through the bag over his head Grey heard a low, fiendish chuckle.

"Not yet. I have to attend to these carrion, my friend."

"You fool—wasting time. Suppose the cops find that truck—and what's on it?"

"Then be gone with it—do you know where?" the second voice answered impatiently. "I shall follow when I have dope here."

The viperish evil in its tone brought a shiver to Grey's spine. The other man shuffled for an instant. Grey could hear his tense breathing as he faced the speaker.

"You brown devil, you can't work that stuff in this country. You'll get us all hanged if you—"

"By the Great Snake, you gutter-sweepings, would you give me orders?" With a bestial roar, the Indian turned on his white associate, a knob-kerrie swung on high. "Be gone, I say, or you will be in no danger of any rope. I am not to be balked now."

The white man hesitated; then, with a muttered oath, turned on his heel and went down the stairs. The Indian flung the door shut and bolted it. There was the dull roar of the departing truck, far below and faint through the intervening walls—then a laugh, low and evil.

"And now—"

Grey felt the fellow bend over him. As the bag was jerked from his head, he rolled over, blinking in subdued daylight

—light dazzling by comparison with the former gloom.

Logan, Brown, and the girl lay tied up beside him. Towering over them like a giant was a huge Hindu—the fellow he had seen in the other car—the man who had tried to dope him.

"So, you scum—" The Indian leered down at them sardonically. "You would think to trick me, descendant of Zingaan, son of a hundred servants of the Great Snake! To trick one to whom every act, every thought, is known, even before it happens. You fools—you puny fools—to pit your feeble wits against mine!"

HE BENT forward mockingly, the whites of his eyes showing, his huge frame muscled like twisted whipcord. If ever Asia had bred Hercules' prototype, here was the man.

"Yet you did not foresee the gas in the tunnel," Grey said, taking stock of the Indian from his place by the wall.

"Silence, pig! A cheap policeman—am I, the scion of a thousand priests, to bandy words with such as you? I shall attend to you and this cub of yours later. Meanwhile, there is this mixer of foul smells—" He kicked Brown contemptuously with his toe. "And more particularly this treacherous woman—his tool and ally."

He fixed his fierce eyes on Eve Tankerton.

"Sit up, daughter of plague rats. Sit up, I say, and face me if you dare!"

The girl shivered, tried to avert her gaze, then, with shuddering reluctance, poised herself to meet the Hindu's magnetic eyes. As a rabbit quivers under fascination of the snake so did Eve Tankerton turn to cower, rigid, before the baleful light of Zingaan's lightning orbs.

"So!" He fixed her glitteringly. "You would double-cross me, you spawn of nothing! When I sent you to that school, that you might work out purposes and lure this compounder of drugs from his habitation, you dared to fail me. Instead of luring, you were lured—by that idle folly men call love. So you plotted with your lover to sell us and snatch our hard won booty in the hour of victory.

"Well, I have said—from me nothing is long hidden. I have my magic—the secret of a thousand priests, each more

potent than yon bottle-washer on the floor. You have failed—and the price of your failure shall be—”

“Death?” The girl spoke woodenly, her voice ice-cold. She shrugged within her bonds. “Well, I shall not care if you let him go unhurt.” She looked towards Brown. “It was my fault! You hear? Mine—mine—*mine!*” Her voice rose in high-pitched emphasis.

“Death!” Zingaan laughed coldly. “You will be praying for that presently—and in vain. Only as a last mercy shall it be vouchsafed you, and that after you have learnt what it means to betray one such as I.”

He stepped back, smiling, and the room lay open to Grey’s view. In the middle of the floor were a pair of mighty mill-stones, with gearing overhead.

Zingaan strode to a flap and flung it open. As it swung wide, a sullen roar like the noise of many waters surged in through the opening. It was a mill-race boiling past the building.

“See!” Zingaan set his huge black hand on a rusty lever. “Old as this place is—long as it has been deserted—I have but to pull this lever and those stones will turn. When they do, daughter of water snakes, they will grind you to powder!”

He bent and swept her up in his mighty grip and flung her down amongst the mills.

“Ah, you shudder! But wait! First you shall taste of something better. Mine is a race of kings, and as such knows how to extract payment to the uttermost. But be of good heart. You shall feel the cunning touch of a craftsman. Exquisite tortures, worthy of a chief’s daughter. And that lover of yours shall lie there and watch while you do not die—listen while you scream, as that white beauty of yours crumples!”

“You devil!” Brown tried to stagger to his feet, but failed. Panting, the blue veins taut upon his sweating forehead, he fell back helpless to the floor, almost on top of Grey.

Zingaan viewed him sardonically for a moment, then laughed maliciously.

“So you commence to suffer already! Wait, *aasvogel*. This is only beginning!” And, snatching up his knobkerrie, he slashed with it at the girl’s white face.

As she flinched, he laughed anew. And, without hitting her, flung the stick

contemptuously to the floor. Grey noticed that its handle-end finished in a carved goat’s hoof.

“You will be regretting that it did not strike home soon enough, woman. I know far better tricks than that.”

He bent over her evilly. And as he turned his giant back, Brown crouched to rise again, his pinioned hands thrust back against Grey’s face.

“S-s-sh! Keep still!” Grey whispered and got his teeth into the knotted cord.

WHILE the black completed his evil preparations Grey chewed madly at the knots. Brown, sensing his purpose, forced himself to lie rigid. After a little, the last strand parted—his hands were free.

“So—we are ready,” Zingaan slewed abruptly, and in the nick of time, Grey whisked away his face. “You scum, I could will you into living death! But I shall not deprive you of the exquisite pleasure you are about to enjoy. Watch well now!”

Contemptuously he turned, and, a knife in his hand, made passes before the girl’s terror-stricken eyes.

“My penknife,” Grey breathed—“in my jacket pocket.”

Brown nodded mutely, groped backwards with his hand, and fumbled in the detective’s coat. He found the knife, opened it and, reaching forward, sawed at the rope about his ankles.

The cord parted. Dropping the blade, he crept forward stealthily towards the knobkerrie.

The latter lay on the floor mid-way to Zingaan’s turned back. Holding his breath, Brown crawled towards it—stealthily, silently.

He stretched out a hand—the stick was but an inch from his groping fingers. Tense, ice-cold, Grey waited, watching.

“The point—below the fingernails—to start with. My friend—”

Zingaan slewed abruptly as Brown’s hand gripped the stick. Brown sprang to his feet, and the Indian leapt at him with a bull-like roar. The club smashed down upon the turbaned pate, rose and smashed again. There was a flash of glinting steel, a scream from Brown as the knife-blade plunged home into his unguarded chest.

Once more the gnarled knobkerrie drove home on Zingaan’s skull, and, with

a choking gasp, the man went staggering backwards. He stumbled blindly against the lever, while, blood pouring from his shirt, Brown swayed drunkenly towards the millstones.

"Curse you—die, then!" the Indian blared, flinging his monstrous weight upon the lever. It creaked over in its rusty seating, and the giant stones began to move as the water in the tumbling stream communicated its force through the rods and gearing.

Gasping, Brown wrenched the girl from her place of peril, dropped her to the floor and, with a choking cough, fell feebly across her. For a second he lay still, while, gathering speed, the rasping millstone raced on with a roar. Then, stumbling to his knees, he jerked the knife from his breast, and severed her armcords with the bloodstained blade.

"Eve—you're free—a-a-ah!"

The knife fell limply from his hold and tinkled to the floor as he fell forward, dead, beside her.

"Curse you, I'll get you yet, traitress—"

By the lever, Zingaan staggered up and stumbled towards her, clutching at her. Lips afroth and his eyes ablaze with tigerish fury, he swayed across the floor.

Powerless, Grey strained at his bonds, while the girl, chalk-white, thrust Brown away and sat up, snatching for the knife.

"You rat!"

The Indian crashed over a yard from his victim, rolled in a spasm of agony and, with a stifled curse, lay doubled up. A groan, and his contorted limbs slackened, a victim of the knife. As Eve Tankerton cut her leg-bonds loose and stumbled stiffly to her feet he dropped flat, and the life-breath left him.

Simultaneously, a body on a slab in the local mortuary sighed and sat up blankly. It was Will Stimpson, the man from the coffin.

Zingaan's passing had released him from a living death.

fell from her hand, and, with a wail of anguish, she flung herself on Brown's body—pleading, weeping. But the still form made no answer. Wilfred Brown was dead.

Realization came to her at last. Her eyes dried hardly. Very slowly she bent and kissed the cold lips. Then, rising, she looked over at the two pinioned detectives.

"If only you had died instead of him!" she cried passionately, took a step towards them.

For an instant Grey thought she meant murder. But she checked herself halfway, stood in thought, then nodded mutely. A look of grim resolution passed slowly across her pallid face, and, with a slight shrug, she turned to the door. A moment later she was gone.

It was two hours afterward that a passing yokel, hearing the millstones grinding, entered the derelict building and released the detectives. Hurrying back to the town, Grey found the police station.

"The bank plunder—it's on a truck, packed in gasoline cans!" he cried, rushing up to the sergeant. "If you throw a cordon out you'll get 'em. The State Police—"

"Don't worry. We've got 'em already," the officer said, smiling. "We phoned the capital. They nabbed the whole bunch just outside of Baltimore."

"Then you knew!" Grey stared at the sergeant in astonishment. "But how?"

The bluff-faced officer chuckled.

"Information received."

"From whom?"

"A woman. She called in an hour ago and spilt the beans. No, I can't tell you who she was. She wouldn't give her name. Just told us where the gang were making for and by what route. They ran right into our hands. Revenge, I expect. It's the old story—a woman scorned—I shouldn't wonder. If crooks only had the sense to steer clear of females! But they haven't."

Quentin Grey nodded and walked slowly out of the police station. The sergeant had guessed shrewdly—yet not quite shrewdly enough.

Eve Tankerton's work — Wilfred Brown was avenged.

Still, he had not yet done with that young woman. She had things at the school house, and these might give some

CHAPTER X

Reasons Why

FOR a long moment the girl stood staring at the Indian. Then the knife

clue to her real identity—so also to her present whereabouts.

He re-entered the car and, with Logan, drove rapidly to St. Monica's, so wrapped in thought that he hardly noticed the red glow in the sky. It was not till he reached the entrance arch that the acrid smell of burning aroused him. He looked up sharply.

The House of the Goat was ablaze from end to end.

As he dashed through the open gate and pushed his way through an excited throng of people, he ran into Miss Smythe.

"What's happened?" he asked.

"It was the houseboy!" the headmistress exclaimed sadly. "He overturned a drum of kerosene. It ran all over the place and came in contact with fire—how, I don't know. The boy's had a fit and has not come to yet. So far we know nothing—except that this lovely old building is doomed. The flames have too strong a hold."

Grey looked past her at the towering mass of grey stones. From every window a torrent of smoke and flame poured furiously, the red tongues licking viciously at the ancient masonry. Above the roof hung a dense pall of black smoke, hovering like some evil bird.

"Thank Heaven, it's not the school house, anyway!" Miss Smythe breathed. "No lives in there to lose, whereas in—"

"Look!"

Grey sprang forward, pointing at the single turret flanking the roof.

On it a vague form stood in silhouette against the ruddy glare. Arms raised toward the sky, it rocked and swayed amidst the billowing smoke as might some heathen priestess chanting a wild hymn to the nether powers.

"Eve Tankerton!" he cried and, throwing off his jacket, ran forward to the foot of the wall.

"Come down! You up there, come down!" he yelled as some men raced up with an extended blanket.

But the girl ignored him. Like a wraith in the mists she held her station, flinging her arms wide, as if in supplication to the smoke pall gathering above her.

"She's mad!"

He started climbing, grasping at ledges, chinks, carvings, careless of the heat and flame that wrapped him. Chok-

ing, half-stifled, he fought his way up steadily through the rolling smoke and almost gained a sill some feet below the turret.

Grey steadied himself, then, setting his tortured muscles to their desperate task, renewed his climb. Scorched, coughing, dizzy, he got his bleeding fingers on the castellated top at last and dragged himself over to Eve Tankerton.

She was facing the roof now, a blackened figure bedecked with sparkling gems that mocked the whirling smoke. Round her slender neck a string of diamonds glittered. On her arms and fingers was a load of gems—rings, bracelets, bangles. They must have been worth a fortune.

"Come away!" He touched her elbow.

BUT she shrank from him and, when he would have caught her, swung madly toward the pitching tiles.

"I am his, I tell you—his! Let me go!"

"Little fool!" He swept her off her feet and bore her struggling to the parapet. An instant later the outstretched blanket below received her.

As they dragged her from it, he poised on the brink. Behind him the roof cracked ominously. Then, gritting his teeth, he jumped, and with a heart-catching breath plunged into the blanket.

"Run!" he shouted, rolling off and on to the ground. "She's going!"

He stumbled back from the building, the crowd on his heels, and gained a safe distance in the nick of time. As he stopped, panting, and turned, the roof fell in with a thunderous crash.

For a space, the grey-black pillar swirled and twisted, a huge grim ogre licked by crimson streamers from the hell beneath. As it cleared slowly, a deeper blackness spiraled toward the sky—tenuous as some Eastern genie. It seemed to soar and vanish as though melted in the azure blue.

Through the dull roar of the flames, a weird sound went down the thronged enclosure, like the sigh of a lost soul. Echoing faintly, it died away amidst the crackle of the blazing rafters. The air grew very still.

Something fell against the detective suddenly—Eve Tankerton, her cheeks, beneath a sooty layer, white as death. He caught her in his arms and held her, a

limp burden. She had fainted.

Yet the look of mad terror had left her. The crazed expression had left her fair face.

"She must have gone back for the jewelry I took from her, Mr. Grey." Eleanor Smythe said after the girl had been removed to the school house. "Such a wealth of gems you never saw in the possession of a schoolgirl. Of course, we don't permit that sort of thing at St. Monica's. It doesn't do, for one thing—and again, suppose it were stolen!"

"Er—exactly. A wise precaution!" Grey murmured. He was wondering just how such wealth had come into the girl's hand, but could hazard a guess. "How did she come here?"

"Her father's agent arranged for her schooling, Mr. Grey. He's living in Mexico somewhere—at Cuapulco, I fancy!"

"He may be," Grey said dryly. "A useful fact for the gang, and their—er—his agent."

"Gang!" Miss Smythe exclaimed in consternation.

"Certainly. The crowd that did that bank raid last night."

"But what have they to do with Eve Tankerton?"

"I happen to have discovered certain things at first hand and other things from the papers I found when Mr. Brown—but I'll explain. You see, an old tunnel happens to run from a certain house in this town—to what final point I don't know. The tunnel's clogged up in many places. It happens, however, to run right under the vaults of the modern bank building, as this gang in some way discovered.

"It's difficult—almost impossible—to break through these up-to-date safe doors that banks use. But you can blow a way through the concrete floor fairly easily. This the gang planned to do. Then, as they were in the middle of their work, clearing the tunnel, Wilfred Brown elected to take the hitherto empty house where the tunnel began.

"This upset the raiders' plans. They could no longer conveniently get at the tunnel, especially owing to Brown's nocturnal habits. He was frequently up half the night making chemical experiments. In some way, they had to devise a means of removing him. That's where Eve Tankerton came in.

"Rumors of this haunted house of

yours, Miss Smythe, had leaked out. I have no doubt that the falling furniture, et cetera, was caused by your house boy, whose final exploit was to upset that kerosene drum. Naturally Brown, as a scientist, was interested. The gang knew that, and hoped that the phenomena at your house would draw him there and get him out of the way.

"Unfortunately for the gang, the phenomena could not be relied upon to take place at any particular time. They therefore planned to supplement them with bogus phenomena scheduled to take place at convenient moments—especially at night. To procure this, the gang contrived to get Eve introduced to the school as a pupil."

"GOOD heavens, Mr. Grey!" the headmistress cried in horror. "Do you mean to say that she took part in that bank raid?"

"Not exactly. You see, she fell in love with Brown and let him into the secret. The pair of them let the gang go ahead, and as they were returning from the vaults, laden with loot, gassed them, in the tunnel with some chemical preparation of Brown's own devising. That done, it was easy to enter the tunnel with gas masks, seize the loot and haul out the unconscious crooks.

"There the gang chief found them. He arrived later with a car to drive his men away. I suppose they deemed it wiser not to park the vehicle in the street. Meanwhile, Brown and Miss Tankerton had got rid of the plunder—" Grey paused to explain how they had floated it down the conduit.

"News has just come in that that man in the coffin has come to, and been identified. He is Brown's step brother. He called on Brown the night I reached here. Failing to get an answer, he was going away when the gang, lurking outside, mistook him for Brown and kidnaped him. They wanted Brown out of the way, and the poltergeist had so far failed to draw him. Discovering their mistake, they got rid of him by putting him under hypnotic control. The Hindu was a master of that."

"Eve doubtless lent herself to this plan since it would make things safer and easier for her confederate if the gang believed him secure."

"So then all these weird phenomena

were faked!" Miss Smythe exclaimed.

"Certainly—except for the houseboy's clumsy errors. Eve Tankerton faked further stunts—a careful arrangement of thread and chewing gum could have made the plates crash together. A small explosive charge doubtless dislodged the coffin. The red pebbles that fell two nights ago were doubtless died rock salt which dissolved on the ground. As for the spear, that was undoubtedly thrown by one of the gang—the Indian—to prevent Brown's servant from reporting their raid. And Zingaan undoubtedly hypnotized me through the mirror to account for other phenomena."

"Murder—and one of my girls mixed up in it! My heavens, Mr. Grey, such a scandal would ruin the school! At all costs it must be hushed up. I must see this girl. I—"

She hurried to the school house, Grey

on her heels. But Eve Tankerton had vanished.

"Miss Smythe, I fear you have lost a pupil," the detective smiled. "I should let it end at that. She was an accessory to the murder, but I don't think anyone will come inquiring after her. After all, she's pretty, and a jury—"

"Poor child! Sometimes she reminded me of that unhappy Jeanne of the Flame. The red hair, the dark eyes, the pale—" Miss Smythe stopped at something in the detective's face. "Mr. Grey—all those ghostly phenomena—you don't think—she—Jeanne is—"

Quentin Grey shrugged enigmatically.

"My work, Miss Smythe, lies on the material plane. And for the rest—" He shrugged again. "As Shakespeare says, 'There are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy.'"

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Flint struck a match, and saw a diamond ring in the big man's hand

MANSION OF THE MISSING

By JOHN L. BENTON

Private Detective Dan Flint Enters a House of Grim Secrets and Learns That Death Can Be Greed's Twin!

THE rain beat steadily against the windows of the office as the storm swept over the town, and as Dan Flint moved restlessly, his desk chair creaked beneath his weight. There was an expression of defeat on his lean, dark face as he gazed bleakly around the one room that housed the Flint Investigating Service.

It had been nearly six months now since he had established his private detective agency in the little city of Bankford and during that time he had had only three cases. Yet his expenses had run on and on. He had to pay his office rent, and for the room in which he lived at Mrs. Carter's boarding house. His bank account was dwindling, and things were getting pretty tough.

Those unpleasant thoughts were in

Flint's mind when his office door opened, and he frowned as he saw who it was who entered. He did not like Jed Thorne, and he was sure that the reporter for the Bankford *Evening News* knew it and reveled in the knowledge.

"Any news, Sherlock?" Thorne drawled. Standing just inside the door he looked like a bedraggled horned owl with his glasses and dripping raincoat. "After I check with the police and the hospital I always like to see if Bankford's private investigator has something of interest that I can use."

"Nothing of interest," Flint said, with a yawn. "Guess I might as well admit that this town just isn't big enough for a private detective to find any business. You've mentioned that often enough in your frank and brutal way, Thorne."

"Sure." Thorne dropped into a chair with little regard as to what his wet coat would do to the furniture. "That's me—sees all and tells everything. I've just been working on a honey of a feature story for tomorrow evening's paper."

"What about?" asked Flint, though he wasn't particularly interested.

"That old place out in Oak Valley just south of town," said Thorne. "The Greyson estate that everybody calls 'Murder Mansion.' It's been just ten years since the Greyson brothers disappeared. Everybody claimed, at the time, that they had been murdered, but no trace of their bodies has ever been found."

"Maybe they just got tired of Bankford and left town," Flint said. "If anybody believes the bodies of those two men might still be somewhere in that old house why don't they just tear down the place? Maybe they'll find a stray corpse or two if they do."

"Because the Greyson house can't be touched until the attorney for the owners says so." Jed Thorne leaned back in his chair and removed his damp hat and dropped it on the floor. His hair stuck up above either temple like horns. "The owners got a court order that the house should not be opened for ten years—that was just before John and Martin Greyson disappeared."

"And the ten years is up?" Dan Flint was discovering a little interest in the missing Greysons and their old house. "That why you are doing a feature story on it, Thorne?"

"Right." Thorne nodded. "The ten years will be up this Thursday—day after tomorrow." He smiled sardonically. "Good chance then for a private detective to make a name for himself, Flint. Solve the mystery of the missing Greyson twins and you'll be a great guy."

"No, thanks," said Flint. "I've about made up my mind to quit this town—head somewhere else. If it wasn't for my bad arm I'd have been in the Service long before this."

"Let me know when you are leaving town and I'll run a story about it in the paper." Jed Thorne picked up his hat, clapped it on, and got to his feet. "See you later, Flint."

the door behind him so hard it nearly broke the glass panel. Thorne had little regard for other people's property.

Flint sat staring at the door. The rain was still beating against the windows. The wind had risen and howled dismally outside the building now. Flint made an often-tried experiment—attempting to raise his left hand until it was on a line with his shoulder—though he knew that could not be done. The badly set shoulder bone from an old football injury made lifting his left arm that high impossible.

He was frowning discontentedly about that when suddenly from the corridor outside the office came a muffled shout—and what sounded like the thud of a falling body! Flint leaped to his feet, made the door in a bound, and flung it open. The hall lights were out and the corridor was dark.

Flint blinked, finding it difficult to see after the lighted office. But he had a vague impression of something sprawled on the floor that might be a body. He moved toward it, but before he could take a good look something lunged at him out of the shadows.

"Hickory, dickory, doc," said a deep voice. "The mouse ran up the clock."

Something heavy crashed down on Flint's head with such force that, without a sound, he dropped to the floor of the hall, unconscious. . . .

When Dan Flint finally opened his eyes he was lying on the couch in his own office. His head felt as if someone had been using it for xylophone and playing on it with iron hammers. For a moment he just stared blankly up at the ceiling.

He grew conscious of voices somewhere close by then, and turned his head. Mark Hilton, the Bankford chief of police, was seated at Flint's desk carefully opening an envelope with the private detective's letter opener. Hilton looked like a rather small gorilla who had just learned a new trick. Jed Thorne was standing close to the chief, looking over Hilton's shoulder.

"The letter was lying here on the desk," said the chief. "Looks like Flint didn't bother to open it before he killed Marshall."

Flint choked and sat up, looking wildly at the two men.

"What in thunder are you talking

DAN FLINT merely nodded. The reporter left the office, slamming

about?" he demanded. "I didn't kill anybody!"

"So you finally came out of it, Flint." Thorne peered at him solemnly through his shell-rimmed glasses. "If you didn't kill Jim Marshall, then how come he's lying out in the hall with a bullet from your gun in his heart?"

"Was lying out there," remarked Chief Hilton, with a glance out through the half-open door. "The coroner said it was all right to have the body taken away."

"James Marshall," Flint said, bewildered. "He's a lawyer here in town, isn't he?"

"Was a lawyer," growled Thorne. "Always speak of the deceased in the past tense, Flint. Sure, Marshall was the attorney for the missing Greyson brothers—and just why you killed him fascinates me."

"Listen to this," exclaimed the chief, tapping the letter he had drawn out of the envelope.

The letter read:

Dear Mr. Flint:

I am anxious to engage your services on an important case. I offer you five thousand dollars for this job. I want you to find out why I was murdered.

"And it's signed 'John Greyson,'" said the chief.

"Lovely," drawled Thorne. "A man who has been dead for ten years sends a message from the grave hiring a private detective to investigate his murder. Unfortunately the detective can't take the case because he has just killed the dead man's attorney." The reporter frowned heavily. "I don't like it, Chief."

"What do you mean, Jed?" Hilton looked puzzled.

"It's all too pat," said Thorne. "I think Flint here has been framed. I was here talking to him half an hour ago, and he didn't seem to know anything at all about the Greysons then."

FLINT listened in silent amazement. That Jed Thorne would come to his defense was something that the private detective had not thought possible. Flint had always felt that there was mutual dislike between the reporter and himself, but it looked as though he was wrong.

"I've been wondering about that my-

self," said the chief. "Ever since we found Flint lying out there in the hall unconscious not far from Marshall's body."

"Correction, Chief," interrupted Thorne. "We didn't find either of them there. It was Lem Baker who discovered a couple of bodies and phoned the police. Then you and your men came rushing over here and I tagged along with you."

"All right," Chief Hilton said impatiently. "I'll grant all that, but what I'm driving at now, is that it hardly seems likely that Flint would shoot Marshall, then knock himself out."

"Maybe if you two would stop acting as if I'm not even present and let me tell my story we'd get a better idea of all this," Flint said acidly.

"Go ahead," said Chief Hilton. "Let's hear it, Flint."

Flint told of how he had remained seated at his desk after the reporter had left, of how he had heard the shout, then the thud that had sounded like a falling body, and had gone to investigate.

"The hall was dark," he said. "I saw what looked like a body on the floor, but before I could find out for sure somebody leaped at me and knocked me out."

"Did the guy who jumped you say anything?" Thorne asked.

"Yeah," Flint nodded. "He said, 'Hickory, dickory, dock, the mouse ran up the clock.'"

The reporter glanced at the chief, and both frowned.

"You feeling all right, Flint?" demanded Hilton. "Sure that blow on the head wasn't too much for you?"

"I know it sounds crazy," Flint said bitterly. "But that's exactly what the guy who knocked me out said. Looks to me like he did it deliberately, if he was the one who framed me. No one would believe it if I claim I was knocked out by an unknown killer who goes around babbling Mother Goose verses."

"They sure wouldn't," said Thorne. He glanced at the doorway of the office. "Ah! And so now we have a feminine angle!"

A slender girl stood there. Her brown hair was worn in a long bob, and her eyes were blue. The skirt of a long red evening gown was visible beneath the bottom of the raincoat she was wearing.

"I'm Gail Marshall," she said, glancing

from one to the other of the three men. "I—I just heard about my uncle. I was at a party but I came here at once. Is there anything I can do?"

"Nothing, Miss Marshall." Chief Hilton rose from the desk. "The police are investigating James Marshall's death, and the body has been removed to a local undertaking establishment."

"But who did it—how did it happen?" demanded Gail.

"I'm afraid I seem to be the main suspect up to now, Miss Marshall," Flint said wryly. "But I assure you I didn't do it, even though your uncle was supposedly killed with my gun."

"What do you mean supposedly?" demanded Thorne. "It must have been your gun—has your name engraved on the butt. Quite a fancy automatic it is, too."

"I know." Flint sighed heavily. "But I pawned it three days ago. I still have the pawn ticket in my pocket." He reached into a pocket of his vest. "Yes, here it is, right here."

GAIL MARSHALL had stepped into the office and dropped into a chair. It was hardly the time to think of such things, but it involuntarily came to Flint that she was one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen.

"Let's see the ticket, Flint." The chief walked over and held out his hand. Flint passed him the small green slip. "Hum, this calls for a gun all right. Bankford Loan Company, eh? That's the pawn-broker place that was robbed last Monday night. Maybe the robbers got your gun, Flint, and just happened to use it on Marshall."

"Tush, tush," Thorne objected. "Somebody deliberately tried to frame Flint, I tell you. But it looks to me as if he's in the clear now, Chief. How about it?"

"Guess he's right, Flint." Chief Hilton nodded. "May need you as a material witness, of course. But you are not under arrest now."

"Good thing, too." The reporter was grinning as he headed for the door. "Flint has to get busy and work on that Greyson case, now that a guy who's been dead for ten years has hired him."

"Coming with us, Miss Marshall?" asked the chief, as he started to leave.

"No," Gail said promptly. "I believe I'll stay here and talk to Mr. Flint, if you don't mind, Chief."

Hilton merely nodded as he and Jed Thorne departed. Flint closed the office door and looked at the girl questioningly. She did not speak at once, and then he saw that the chief had left the letter signed "John Greyson" lying on the desk.

"My uncle was coming here to see you tonight, Mr. Flint," Gail said abruptly, as Flint sat down. "He mentioned it to me at dinner before I left for the party."

"You lived with your uncle then?" Flint asked politely.

"Yes, my parents are dead." Gail's eyes clouded and her lip quivered. "Uncle Jim was so good to me! I'll miss him—terribly!"

"Why was he coming to see me?" Flint asked quickly.

"To try and hire you in your capacity as a private detective," said Gail. "He was the attorney for the Greysons, as you may know, and lately strange noises have been heard coming from that old house of theirs. Uncle Jim heard them when he went out to look over the place. But he did not want to say anything to the police about it."

"And he was going to hire me to see what I could find there?" asked Flint. He picked up the "John Greyson" letter and handed it to the girl. "Read that, please."

Gail swiftly read the letter, then looked at him, her eyes wide.

"What does this mean?" she demanded. "I don't understand."

"The Grayson twins were supposed to have died ten years ago," said Flint. "No one knows whether they did or not, since they just disappeared. It could be that they are still hanging around in that old house. Anyway I'm going to find out!"

"And doing that, you might learn who murdered my uncle." Gail rose to her feet. "Come on, my car is outside. I'll drive you out to the Greyson place right now."

"All right." Flint got his hat, gloves, and slipped into his raincoat. "Let's go."

The rain had finally ceased, the dark clouds were drifting away, and the wind was gradually dying down. Gail Marshall drove her coupé out through the south side of the town heading for the old house in Oak Valley that was now called Murder Mansion.

WHEN they reached the place, Gail swung the car into the weed-studded driveway that led to the big rambling house half-hidden back among the trees. Staring at the dark bulk Flint instinctively wished he had his gun.

"Uncle Jim told me a lot about the Greyson brothers," Gail told him as she stopped the car close to the porch steps. "Martin Greyson and his twin brother John were about fifty years old when they disappeared ten years ago. They didn't go out much, and had few friends in town. Neither of them ever married, and there were rumors that they didn't trust banks and had a fortune hidden in their house."

"Mmm—a fortune hidden in the house," repeated Flint. "Just asking for somebody to try to murder them."

He stared at the front door of the house, eyes suddenly narrowed. When the car had first stopped he had been sure that door was tightly closed, but now it was standing half open, revealing a yawning maw of blackness.

"Come on," Gail said, as she climbed out of the car. "Let's see what we find. I've got a gun. Uncle Jim told me he had kept the electric lights on here during all of the past ten years. That was at the Greysons' orders. I guess they left my uncle a certain sum to take care of the place. Anyway he paid the light bill each month, though the only times they were used, I suppose, were when he came to look the place over."

Flint followed her up the steps. This business of keeping the electricity turned on in a house that had apparently been vacant for ten years struck him as strange. Still the more he learned of the Greyson place the more weird the whole set-up appeared to be.

Flashlight in hand Flint stepped in first through the front door and Gail followed close behind him. He found a light switch in the lower hall and pressed the button. The lights came on.

Naturally the place was in a bad state of repair after ten years of standing idle, but it had been well furnished, and all the original furnishings were still there.

Gail removed her raincoat and threw it over a chair. In her low-cut evening gown she looked like a young hostess awaiting the arrival of guests. But that impression was gone as soon as she reached into the side pocket of her rain-

coat on the chair and drew out a businesslike small automatic.

Dan Flint threw off his own raincoat, but kept on his hat and gloves. From the moment he had entered the front door he had felt uneasy. He seemed to sense some evil presence waiting, watching—ready to strike at the first opportunity.

"Here we are," Gail said quickly. "But I can't say that I think very much of the place."

"Let's take a good look around," suggested Flint. "We might find something interesting."

Together they searched the first floor of the house. Only the lights in some of the rooms still worked. In others the bulbs had evidently burned out and never been replaced. Flint used his flashlight at such times.

When they reached the kitchen, however, they got a surprise. There was food on some of the shelves, and the coal stove showed evidence of having been used recently.

"Someone has been living here," Gail said firmly, as they looked around. "I'm sure of that now. I wonder if—"

She didn't finish as they moved to the stairway to climb to the second floor. They explored all the rooms, but without finding anyone. In a bedroom in which the electric light still worked was, oddly enough, a flight of wooden stairs leading up to a trap-door in the floor of the attic. Gail started up the stairs before Flint could stop her.

"I'll bet the mystery of this place is hidden up here," she called down to Flint as she pushed against the trap-door with her right hand, holding the gun in her left. "We'll see!"

THE trap-door rose with surprising ease as she shoved against it. She stepped up into the opening that was revealed, then abruptly she uttered a wild scream.

"What's the matter?" Flint demanded tensely, as he reached the bottom of the stairs. "What's wrong, Gail?"

"There's the skeleton up here!" she cried. "The skeleton of a man. It scared me. And—and I feel as if there's some great horrible monster up here watching me with huge red eyes—and clawlike hands."

"You sure have some imagination!"

Flint grinned up at her as she looked down at him. "All you really saw was a skeleton, wasn't it?"

"Yes. But I—"

Gail broke off, too frightened to scream as a pair of great hairy hands reached down, grabbed her beneath her arms and lifted her up bodily.

Flint shouted and dashed up the steps but before he reached the attic the trap-door was slammed in his face. Raging, he battered against the door, trying to shove it up, but it would not budge. Locked! Locked from the attic side.

He was still pounding, shouting, when the light in the room below went out. Flint stood motionless on the stairs, waiting, as he heard someone moving around on the second floor.

"Jack!" a man's voice whispered huskily. "Where are you?"

There was no answer. Flint could hear footsteps growing fainter and fainter as the man below headed for some other part of the house. Flint drew out his flashlight and crept down the stairs, trying to move as silently as possible.

Just as he reached the lower step a gun roared out of the darkness. The bullet struck the flashlight, knocking it out of his hand.

"Hi diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle," said a voice in the blackness.

Then there came a mocking laugh, and the pounding of running feet as someone dashed away.

Flint edged along the wall at the foot of the stairs, cursing fervently because he had no gun on him. The man who had shot the flashlight out of his hand was the same one that had murdered James Marshall—he knew it! And he was equally as certain that he and Gail faced death in this miserable old house. Not that he was thinking of himself, but the thought of Gail—

"I want more little blocks to play with," said a heavy voice. "Can't build a house with just one block."

A light came on in the hall—and standing there was a creature so weird Flint could scarcely believe it human. A big shaggy-haired man, dressed in trousers only. The upper part of his body was bare. He was looking at a dice cube that he coddled in one huge hand.

Flint came to a swift conclusion. This big man, of course, was simple-minded. So probably then there was a possibility

of the detective controlling him.

"Hello, Jack," Flint said cheerily stepping boldly into view. "Maybe I can find you some more blocks to play with."

"Don't know you." The big man glowered at Flint. "But I want more blocks. He held out the dice cube. "Like this."

"Let's see." Flint took the cube in his gloved left hand. "What will you give me if I find you more blocks, Jack?"

"Gave other man lots of green paper," said Jack. "But he never found out where me and Mart hid all of it. Just let him have a little at a time."

"Come in here," said Flint, motioning the apelike man to one of the dark rooms along the hall. "We can talk much better. Now tell me—what will you give me for more blocks?"

"Make light and I'll show you," said Jack.

FLINT struck a match. In the flickering light he saw that the big man was holding a woman's diamond ring in his hand.

"Took this off girl's finger up in the attic," said Jack. "She still up there. Went to sleep." He grinned confidentially. "No one but Mart and me know about secret ways in the walls of this house. But Mart—he's dead."

"So you are John Greyson," said Flint. "And your brother Martin is dead. That's his skeleton up there in the attic."

"John Greyson!" mumbled the big moron. "Sometimes I remember—but when I do he keeps me locked up. Then I forget again."

"You're too smart, Flint," growled a voice from the hall. "I guess I'll have to kill you after all."

Jed Thorne stood at the door covering Flint and the big man with an automatic. The reporter's eyes gleamed wickedly through the lenses of his glasses.

"Nice racket you've been working for ten years, Thorne," Flint shot out at him. "I'm betting you killed Martin Greyson ten years ago, just to get the money the twins had hidden in this house. The shock of finding his brother dead must have been too much for John Greyson—left him half crazy."

"Not all the time," John Greyson himself said, in a suddenly surprisingly sane tone. "I have found that I have been regaining my reason to a great extent

during the past year. But I did not want this man to know." He nodded toward Thorne. "Afraid it would mean I would be killed as was my brother. He kept me chained up here in the house all of those years—but I got free today when Thorne did not know. I heard him talking about a private Detective named Dan Flint here in town—so I decided to try and hire you."

"Then you actually wrote me that letter hiring me to investigate your murder?" Flint asked eagerly.

Greyson nodded. "I managed to sneak out of the house and mail it. I was afraid to leave the place for long for fear Thorne would get me. So I dropped the letter in the corner mail box and came back. I had made an arrangement with my attorney ten years ago to have the house taken care of for that length of time. My brother and I planned to make a trip around the world. We didn't know how long we would be gone."

"So that's why James Marshall didn't do much looking for you two at the house during the past ten years," said Flint. "He probably thought you and your brother had gone on your trip as you planned and had just disappeared until you felt like showing up again."

"True," said Greyson. "But unfortunately this man Thorne came here on the night we were to leave. He saw his chance to get the money he was sure we had hidden in the house, so he killed my brother and the shock drove me insane for a time."

"And since Marshall was going to start some real investigating now that the ten years are about up you killed him, Thorne!" Flint glared at the reporter. "You tried to frame me—and at the same time make me think you were my friend!"

"Sure," Thorne shrugged carelessly. "I had no idea that letter that was delivered to your office was from Greyson until the chief read it. Unfortunately Lem Baker, who found the body of Marshall and you unconscious happens to be one of the local mail-carriers—and he delivered the letter to your office." The reporter raised his gun. "Now I'm going to kill you both."

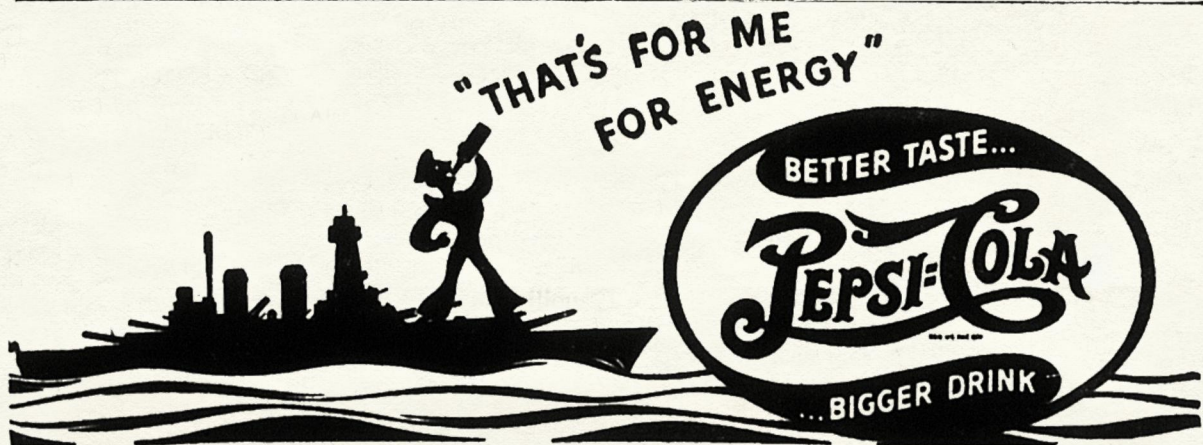
BUT before he could fire, from further along the hall an automatic roared. Thorne howled with pain, and dropped his gun as a bullet tore into his right arm. Flint leaped forward and grabbed up the automatic.

"I always knew this gun of mine would be useful some day," declared Gail Marshall as she stepped forward. "I'm sure Uncle Jim, wherever he is now, will be glad he taught me how to shoot—since it has helped to get his murderer."

"That feature story you were going to do about Murder Mansion will make the front page of the Bankford paper all right, Thorne," Flint said grimly. "But you won't write it!" He looked at Greyson. "Wish you had meant that about the five thousand dollars for getting your murderer, Mr. Greyson."

"I did mean it," said Greyson. "I've kept the secret of where Martin and I hid our money so well that Thorne only got a little of it from me at a time. I owe you five thousand—and you'll get it, Mr. Flint. It's worth it to me to be alive and in my right mind."

"You and your Mother Goose rhymes," exclaimed Flint with a look of disgust at Jud Thorne. "I suppose you thought that made it all more mysterious! Well, try and find one that will fit a guy going to the electric chair!"



Pop lay dead on the floor, a green feather clutched in his hand



THE SILENT PARROT

By W. H. PEARS

Pete Martin, Canny American Detective, Strives to Uncover a Vital Secret by Learning the Formula for Making a Bird Speak!

THE big-shouldered man hunched forward, frowning into the dusk. He turned to the slim blonde at his side.

"Something's wrong, Ann. Pop Solomon's place is dark as a tomb. Why should he close up when he knew we were dropping in to see his new Scotties?"

Long strides carried Pete Martin to the door of the pet shop. It was open. He called Pop Solomon's name loudly. A puppy's lonesome whine was the only response. Inside, Martin stopped short,

facing a large empty cage.

Samson, the silent parrot, was gone!

Pete Martin leaped into the back room. He had to pull up sharply to keep from stepping on the body. Pop Solomon lay on his face, his head crushed in like an overripe melon.

Hard glints were in Martin's blue eyes as he bent over the old man. Something was clutched in Pop's blue-veined hand. Gently Martin drew it free—a green feather. Pop had fought to the last for his mysterious pet.

Reluctantly Martin turned away from

the body of his old friend and made a rapid search of the room. No clues. He moved back to the front of the store. Ann stood by the doorway. In clipped, hard tones Martin told her what had happened.

Her gray eyes widened with pain. "Pete, who'd do such a terrible thing? Pop never kept much money around."

Examining the cash drawer, Martin said:

"Robbery wasn't the motive. All they took was the parrot."

"But why, Pete? Who'd murder Pop for a voiceless parrot?"

Martin had picked up a book that lay face down on Pop's desk. He flipped through the pages.

"This may help, Ann. You know, Pop swore he wouldn't sell Samson until he found out why the bird wouldn't talk. This book's about a guy named Pavlov, a Russian scientist who experimented with animals."

"I still don't get it," Ann said.

"You're going to," Martin retorted grimly, thrusting the book at her. "This guy Pavlov may give us the clue."

"What're you going to do?" Ann asked.

"Catch the rats that killed Pop," Martin said, rummaging through the old man's desk. "He kept a card file of people he bought pets from. He always got identification to protect himself against stolen property. I'm going to find out who sold him the parrot."

"You'd better call the police," Ann said.

"Nothing doing—not till I get a start on them." Martin held up a card. "Here it is! The name and address of Samson's former owner. Now I'm going to prove something to Rains."

HE SCOWLED, remembering the F.B.I. chief's friendly turndown: "You're okay, Pete. Before Pearl Harbor you were one of the best private detectives in the business. You gave it up to work in a defense plant. You're serving your country already."

"That's just swell!" Martin had snarled. "I make nice blue-prints while other guys fight the war! You're a big shot. You could push through my appointment if you wanted to."

"Not with that trick heel of yours, Pete," Rains had said patiently. "If the

Army or Navy won't use you, how can I risk it?"

Martin had sworn volubly. "I tell you the tendon only stiffens up on wet nights."

"So I've got to consult a weather chart before I send you on a case! No, sorry, Pete."

Ann broke in on Pete's angry reflections.

"This is a police case, Pete," she said. "Even if you crack it, what good can it do you with Rains?"

"This'll be just another homicide to the police," he explained. "They'll never look for a Nazi angle. I will. If I uncover it, Rains may give me a break."

Ann gasped. "What makes you think—"

"Look! We know Pop refused to sell the parrot. Suppose you are a crook, Ann. For some reason you want that bird. Pop won't budge. What would you do?"

"Tie Pop up and take the parrot," Ann replied.

"Right! You wouldn't risk a murder rap if there was an easier way. Now suppose you're a Nazi who's been taught to hate certain races and creeds. A guy named Solomon defies you. What do you do?"

"I—I don't know. I can't think like a Nazi."

"I'll tell you. You'd bash in his head to impress him with your superiority."

"But you're only guessing, Pete. You've no clues."

"I've got this card," Martin said. "You've got the book. Take it over to the Ronson Hotel and study it. Wait there until I come."

"Where're you going, Pete?"

"To see a woman." Pete Martin grinned.

The address on the card led him to a grimy brownstone house with a sign in the window, "ROOMS TO LET." A stringy-haired woman answered the bell.

"Mrs. Adams?"

She nodded. "You want a room?"

"I want to talk to you about a parrot."

"You're the second one's come asking about it," she complained, starting to slam the door. "I sold it to old Solomon."

Pete Martin thrust his foot into the opening, dangled a bill in front of the

woman. "Come in," she said sullenly, leading him into a parlor that reeked of stale cooking. "What do you want to know?"

"Where did you get the parrot?" Martin snapped.

"One of my lodgers died sudden. He didn't leave no relatives. I got rid of the bird along with the rest of his junk."

"What kind of junk?" Martin asked.

"Oh, some old chemicals and an electrical contraption. He rented the whole cellar—always paid prompt. But crazy as a loon. Made me leave his meals at the door. Never let no one in except on the day he died."

SHE stopped and Martin moved impatiently.

"Go on," he urged: "Who'd he let in?"

"A fellow delivering chemicals. I remember him because he was mean-looking, with a big scar across his cheek. That night when I took the old man's supper, his door was unlocked. He was lying dead across the table. City doctor come out and said it was a heart attack. He was all blue, the old man."

"What did the old man call himself?" Pete asked.

"Peroux. 'Pee-roo,' he pronounced it."

Pete Martin arose. "Did you ever hear the parrot talk?"

"Never a squawk until the old man played his mouth organ. Then the bird'd get off some gibberish in a furrin tongue. Didn't make no sense through the door. Guess the old man only knew one tune. I asked him what it was, but he got smart and said it was the national anthem. As if I didn't know the Star Spangled Banner!"

Back at the hotel, Pete Martin found Ann reading Pop Solomon's book.

"It's all about stuff like conditioned reflexes," she explained. "This Pavlov could make a rat so nervous it couldn't eat just by giving it a small electrical shock every time it started. Mean, I call it."

"Peroux had an electrical contraption," Martin mused. "Maybe he conditioned the parrot not to talk except—" He broke off. "That's what Pop was trying to get at, I'll bet."

"What are you trying to get at?" Ann demanded.

"I'm wondering what Polly could say

that would be important enough to cause the murders of two men." Martin scratched his head. "Ann, did you ever play a harmonica?"

"Why, Pete, how did you know? I stopped the freshman class show with my rendition of America."

"Good girl!" Her husband grinned. "Always in there pitching. Run along home now. I've got to see Ed Burns at the *Journal*. Dig up that juice organ for me. I'll call you later."

The story of Pop Solomon's murder ran on Page One of the *Journal* and was continued over to Page Nine. Thanks to the many tips Pete Martin had given Burns in the past, a curious advertisement followed the murder account on Page Nine:

Have you a bird or animal that won't perform? Consult an expert trainer. Write Box 34792. Results guaranteed.

Martin hadn't long to wait for a reply. It came next evening:

I will pay \$1,000 to hear my parrot talk. Come to the Silver Duck tavern at 8 tonight. Look for the jeweled American flag in the lapel of my coat.

"Goose chase," Ann scoffed, reading over his shoulder. "Who'd be silly enough to walk right into a trap?"

"He's not as dumb as he sounds," Martin explained. "He can look the place over. If he spots a lot of coppers, he needn't show his flag. Even if I do turn out to be the law, you can't arrest a guy for wearing a flag. Did you bring the harmonica?"

Ann produced it from her handbag. Martin blew some miserable sounds, then stuffed it into his pocket.

"How soon do we start for the Silver Duck?" Ann asked.

"I start in a few minutes. You go home."

"Oh, Pete! It's a lovely place."

"Yep. Lovely place for a Mickey Finn!"

THE Silver Duck was located along the shore, a low frame structure with a splashy neon sign. Pete Martin, wearing shabby clothes, waded through a haze of tobacco smoke past a dinning juke box to the bar. He ordered a beer, sipped it slowly.

He stood thus for about ten minutes.

Outside a fog was rolling in from the ocean. Martin knew it without looking. Pain darted through his heel. The tendon had begun to stiffen. He swore softly.

A big man with blocky shoulders appeared in the doorway. Martin's heart gave a jump. The man wore a jeweled American flag in his coat lapel. A pale scar angled across one cheek. He took a conspicuous place by the bar.

Martin sidled up to him. "Hiya, chum," he said thickly. "Guess you don't remember me?"

The scarred man narrowed his eyes, but said nothing.

"Won't talk, eh?" Martin growled. "Okay, guess I can make a *bird* like you talk."

"You'd better come with me," the scarred man said smoothly. "You're a little tight."

Protesting loudly Martin followed him to a booth in the back room. Two chairs were drawn up around a heavy oak table. The scarred man motioned him to one.

"Got the grand wit' you, chum?" Martin demanded.

"Not so fast, my friend." The man's speech was clipped, almost British, but he had the cold, hard face of a storm trooper. "Suppose you tell me what you're talking about?"

"Cagey, ain't you?" Martin leered. "Well, Muggy Garson ain't one to beat the bush. You gotta bird that won't spill. Me, I can make it—for one grand."

Suspicion showed in the man's pale eyes.

"How do you happen to know so much, Muggy?"

"Me? I get around. I roomed in the same joint with Peroux. I was the only one he'd get pally wit'. I was hard up. I figure the old guy's got foldin' dough hid somewheres in the cellar."

"Why?"

"Well, I got him pretty full one night. He told me the bird knew a secret worth a million bucks. Me, I thought it was a joke until old Solomon gets knocked off. I put two and two together and advertise."

"But you heard the parrot speak?"

"Sure, sure, the bird give out with some Frenchy talk. Didn't make no sense to me."

"Naturally. You're certain you could

make it talk again?"

"Easy as stickin' up a cripple," Martin bluffed. "Gimme the green stuff and let me at the bird."

"I'm afraid I can't do that, Muggy. Suppose you tell me how to make the parrot talk, then I'll pay you."

"Nuttin' doin'!" Martin growled. "I'm no sucker."

"Neither am I, Muggy." The scarred man's hand darted to his shoulder.

Pete Martin was faster on the draw. Gun metal flashed. As Martin lifted his gun to swing it in an arc, the scarred man slid to the right. The motion was fluid, automatic. The gun was knocked from Pete Martin's hand.

He saw the oak table coming at him. He ducked, but his bad heel made him slow. The table struck him on the chest. The scarred man leaped, his gun butt upraised. A star exploded in front of Martin's eyes. . . .

PETE MARTIN struggled back to consciousness. He was securely bound. His head throbbed. His heel throbbed. He didn't open his eyes, but lay quietly listening to the Teutonic rumble of a strange voice.

"Excuses mean nothing to the Fatherland, Schnabel," it was saying. "You radioed the U-boat to put me ashore tonight and you would deliver the formula. You do not have it!" The man lapsed into violent German.

Martin recognized the scarred man's British tones then.

"I'm sorry, *Herr* Mueller, but we must speak in English. Renault here understands no other tongue except his native French."

"Go on, go on!" Mueller commanded.

Schnabel spoke with a trace of malice.

"When Peroux slipped through your fingers in Paris and escaped to America—"

"Insolence!" Mueller roared. "Peroux did not slip through our fingers. When Renault here proved his loyalty to the new order by reporting Peroux's successful experiments with the explosive, we instantly seized Peroux."

"Being a loyal Frenchman," Schnabel added, "Peroux refused to give you the formula. Your methods of persuasion succeeded only in driving him mad."

"We released him, thinking he would lead us to the formula, but the swine

cluded us," Mueller snarled. "We picked up his trail here in America, yet you have failed."

"I have not failed," Schnabel said calmly. "Once I had suffocated Peroux, I easily found the formula—too easily. Naturally I hurried from the scene. The formula seemed complete, but turned out to be worthless. Peroux might have turned his discovery over to the Americans, but he was obsessed with the idea of revenge. Here is the message he wrote at the bottom of the formula."

Pete Martin gazed through slitted lids. He was in a large cellar dimly lighted by two candles. He saw Mueller, a loose-fleshed giant, grab the paper and read Peroux's message aloud:

Doubtless you will kill me to get this. It will be of no use. Two chemicals are missing from the formula. Only Francois knows the answer. It will do you no good to torture him as you did me.

Mueller cursed violently in German. "Experiment!" he ordered the renegade Frenchman. "Find these chemicals."

"I dare not, *Herr* Mueller," Renault said timidly. "It is one of the deadliest combinations conceived by man. To make a single mistake—*poof!*"

"Then seize this Francois!" Mueller shouted. "Torture him. He will tell."

"Francois," Schnabel explained, "is Peroux's parrot. I returned later and learned this from his landlady, who had sold the bird. I took the parrot from an old non-Aryan whose skull I had the pleasure of crushing. But the parrot utters no sound."

"Fantastic!" Mueller exploded. "You are a fool, Schnabel!"

"Perhaps, *Herr* Mueller," Schnabel smiled. "We shall see." He jerked his thumb at Pete Martin. "I have the man who can make Francois talk."

He yanked Martin roughly to his feet. The young American shook his head groggily. "Whadda ya want?"

SCHNABEL cuffed him hard across the face.

"Does that help you remember?"

"Gimme my grand," Martin mumbled.

Steel fingers bit into his arm. "Get this through your thick skull, my friend," Schnabel said. "You will receive no money from me. Unless you

make the parrot talk, you will not leave this room alive."

Martin stalled, trying to loosen the tendon and drive the mists from his aching head.

"No dough, no talk."

"You waste valuable time, Schnabel," Mueller broke in. "If I am caught on American soil—"

"First we shall try something simple but crude." Schnabel yanked the shoe off of Martin's sore foot. "The candle," he snapped to Renault.

Martin's eyes ranged desperately around the cellar. An opening overhead probably led into the Silver Duck. But one exit, he suspected, would never satisfy the methodical Schnabel. Turning to the floor, he saw a line of footprints in the dirt. They led behind an old boiler. The other way out!

Schnabel bent, candle in hand. The flame sent a new agony into Martin's foot. Setting his teeth, he let the candle flame lick around the injured tendon. If he could endure it a few moments the heat might—

Sweat poured from his face. His foot felt like a flaming torch. But he hung on, hung on until the odor of scorched flesh made his head reel.

"Let me up!" he gasped. "I'll do what you say."

Schnabel jerked him upright. Martin wriggled his heel. It was on fire with agony, but the pain was *outside!* Intense heat had loosened the injured tendon.

"Talk!" Schnabel growled.

"Untie my hands and feet," Martin ordered. "I can't tell you how to make the bird talk. I've got to do it myself."

A Luger appeared in *Herr* Mueller's fat hand.

"Let him loose, Schnabel. He cannot escape."

In a moment Pete Martin was free. He moved toward the silent parrot, limping only a little.

"I need more light," he said. "Bring both candles."

Schnabel hesitated. "I warn you, if this is a trick—"

Schnabel, don't be an old woman!" Mueller grunted.

With a shrug, Schnabel obeyed. Martin directed him to place a candle on each side of the parrot. Then he extended his arms.

Renault watched with beady eyes.

"Hypnosis," he murmured.

Fingertips leveled at the bird's eyes, Martin advanced between the candles. Mentally he charted his course to the boiler. He drew his arms slowly outward as if to clap his hands. Then, in one rapid sweep, he brought them together. The two candles were knocked to the floor as his hands converged on the parrot.

Darkness caught the Nazis flat-footed.

"I've got my fingers around the parrot's neck!" Martin yelled. "One move from you Jerries and you'll have an awful dead bird on your hands. And I don't mean me!"

He headed for the boiler. The room exploded with Nazi rage. Holding the parrot in one hand, he groped along the wall. His fingers touched a heavy wooden bar. He yanked it. Something gave, and the moist smell of fog was in his nostrils.

OUTSIDE he was enveloped in a swirling gray blanket. Soft sand underfoot told him that he was on the beach. He tried to run, stumbled. Again dampness had begun to stiffen the tendon!

A whistle shrilled. *Herr Mueller* barked an order in German. Footsteps shuffled across the sand from two directions. Pete Martin swore. Naturally there would be sailors from the U-boat waiting to take Mueller back. He was surrounded!

His one defense was the parrot. They wouldn't shoot for fear of hitting it. He stumbled forward. Too late he saw the solid figure of *Herr Mueller*. They crashed together. Martin's bad foot gave away. He fell to the sand, the parrot fluttering from his hands.

Ignoring Martin, *Herr Mueller* leaped after the bird. Pete Martin clambered over a dune, lay flat. His last protection was gone.

Beyond the dune, he saw someone move. The man's back was to him, so Martin had the advantage of surprise. He lunged, hammering home a terrific rabbit punch. A grunt, then Martin held the cool comfort of a gun butt in his hand.

Gunfire pricked through the fog, jumping sand at his feet. He caught the flash, threw back lead. Suddenly he

remembered the way Schnabel had faded to the right when Martin had gone for his gun in the Silver Duck. Maybe Nazis were all drilled alike.

At the next spurt of gunfire Martin fired to the left of the flash. He heard a moan. He tried it again. Another moan.

"Like mechanical ducks in a shooting gallery," Martin grunted.

He fired his last shot, missed. A figure charged him in a mad bull-like rush. The beam of a powerful flashlight jumped out of the murk. Behind Martin a gun spat. The lunging figure folded to the ground.

"Nice work, Pete," the welcome voice of Rains said. "Come on, boys, we'll close in."

Pete Martin limped along, giving Rains a rapid account of the set-up. Only *Herr Mueller* was missing. A thin trail of blood on the sand showed which way he had fled. It soon disappeared.

"The big boy himself," Martin groaned. "He's got the parrot and the formula. We've got to catch him."

"Pretty tough in this pea soup," Rains grunted.

Martin spun around. "Just a minute, Rains! How did you fellows happen to find me?"

"Ann got worried and called us," Rains explained. "We surrounded the Silver Duck and waited. We were just about ready to storm the place when we heard your gunshots."

"Did Ann come along?" Martin rapped.

"We left her in the car."

"Oh, no, you didn't!" Ann's voice came out of the fog.

Martin grabbed her. "Baby, am I glad to see you! Hey, you guys, get ready to move, and move fast. Mueller's hit, so he can't be far away."

"Say, what—" Rains spluttered.

"Mrs. Adams said Peroux played the national anthem, to his parrot!" Martin exclaimed. "I just now got it. Not our national anthem, but his—the French! Peroux conditioned the parrot to talk only when it hears the *Marseillaise*! I've got the harmonica, Ann. Can you play it?"

"I—I guess so."

"Okay, Rains," Martin said, "we'll march down the beach. Ann'll lead the band. When the parrot hears the Mar-

seillaise it'll sing out, and we've got our man."

IT was a strange procession. Ann played the French national anthem not accurately, but loudly. The F.B.I men fanned out around her.

They had gone nearly half a mile when Pete Martin heard the squawk—a squawk that was quickly choked off. The Federal men closed in, zigzagging against the spit of gunfire.

In a moment Rains reappeared. "Got him," he said crisply. "So fast he didn't have time to kill the parrot." Rains extended his hand to Martin. "You did a nice job, Pete, even with your trick heel. Maybe on special assignments . . . Well, you might drop over to the office tomorrow."

"You bet!" Pete Martin grinned.

"Nice going, Pete," Ann said softly.

"Nice going, yourself," Pete retorted. "You play a lot of harmonica!"

Next Issue's Calendar of Mystery



AN ODD, chilling paralysis seized Wendal Bishop's legs when he approached the lonely grave of Anna Bishop in the ghostly, deserted Wescott cemetery. Even from thirty yards away he could hear the haunting sound of a woman's heart-broken sobbing. It was a terrifying sound that cut sharply through the night's silence.

A feeling of oppression, of evil came over Wendal Bishop. The air became hard to breathe. A cold hand of fear seemed to fasten upon his heart.

Desperation drove him nearer, turned his dilated eyes upon the earth at his feet. All about him loomed the eerie, white shapes of headstones and monuments.

"Stop it!" he cried with a trembling wave of his hand.

But the sobbing continued—low and penetrating and somehow full of total despair. It tore at Bishop's nerves, reduced him to a quaking shell of bones and muscle. He turned abruptly and rushed out of the cemetery as if a thousand demons were at his heels.

All the way home he thought of that one strange passage in his aunt's will—the passage which read:

" . . . To my nephew, Wendal Bishop, I bequeath my house and all the furnishings within my house, including the broom by the fireplace and good stout cord to mend its broken handle. May he sweep evil deeds and evil doers before him. . . ."

Back in his own living room Wendal Bishop went to the fireplace, reached up into the flue to a soot-covered shelf in the masonry. His trembling fingers brought forth a gold link bracelet and a leather-bound notebook. He lit a match, started to burn the pages, then blew out the flame.

"No," he whispered tonelessly. "Don't do it. She doesn't know. How could she know—buried these two and a half years?"

That crying grave was a trick, he assured

himself—anything to create a stir, to suggest that there was rottenness in the timbers of his political platform. But was it?

And that was only one of the many perplexing questions George Chance, the famous magician-detective, had to answer in **THE CASE OF THE BROKEN BROOM**, by G. T. Fleming-Roberts, the featured novel in our next issue.

Hardly does he reach Wescott than Chance makes a strange discovery at the lonely grave. Later, a mysterious red-headed woman appears there. Chance follows her—and the trail leads to murder! From this breathless start, the story moves on through a series of dramatic and hair-raising incidents that call upon Chance to assume his other identity of the Green Ghost more than once and to battle for his life before the deadly murder plot is solved.

G-Man Dan Sheridan encounters a phony birth certificate racket involving nation-wide peril in next issue's gripping, fast-action novelet **MURDERER'S BIRTH CERTIFICATE** by Dale Clark. Careful investigation uncovers the fact that strange men of questionable patriotism are being placed in vital defense shipyards.

But not until murder makes its appearance and Sheridan finds his own life in deadly peril does he hit upon the full scope of the dangerous and clever plan to sabotage America's war effort. A hard-hitting, dramatic story that will keep you guessing and keep you reading all the way to the end.

In addition, our next issue will contain the usual assortment of absorbing short stories, and Chakra will be on hand with more weird and unusual tales to tell.

If you are enjoying the stories and features in **THRILLING MYSTERY** why don't you drop us a letter or postcard? And if you have any suggestions or criticisms, just pass them along. We promise to give them careful attention. Address all communications to: The Editor, **THRILLING MYSTERY**, 11 East 39th Street, New York, N. Y. Thank you! See you next issue.

—THE EDITOR.

CLOSE TO A CORPSE

By
C. K. M. SCANLON

*Detective Sergeant Dan
Kenny Moves Swiftly to
Spike a Killer's Alibi!*

DETECTIVE SERGEANT DAN KENNY seated himself on a bench with a sigh. Even after twenty years in the New York Police Department he still hated the city morgue. The bleak place with its rows of cadavers in compartments that could be pulled out of the wall reminded him of some sort of weird filing cabinet.

Kenny stared bleakly at the elderly morgue attendant. Old John Lake with his pasty white face and gray hair was getting to look more and more like the dead that were in his care. His manner was always like that of a well educated and overly unctuous undertaker.

"That is the last of the poor unfortunates who have been brought to this haven within the last forty-eight hours, Sergeant," Lake said. "I'm afraid the body you are seeking is not here."

"It wasn't important." There was something about Lake that always made Kenny inclined to feel tough and vitriolic. "Just a cheap gangster that's turned up missing so I'm checking the hospitals and the morgue. Routine stuff. The lug probably just skipped out of town."

John Lake nodded and then frowned as the phone rang in his office. Kenny glanced at his wrist-watch. It was a quarter past three, early morning. He rose up from the bench and followed Lake into the office as the morgue attendant went to answer the phone.

"City Morgue," Lake said as he picked up the receiver. He listened a moment and his eyes widened. "Just a moment, please repeat that."



The flashlight gleamed on a still figure

Lake quickly handed the phone to Kenny and the sergeant placed the receiver to his ear.

"Go ahead," he said. "Let's have it again."

"This is Harvey Wilson, of Wilson and Bart, attorneys," came a muffled masculine voice over the wire. "I'm at my office on the tenth floor of the Chapman building. I'm going to commit suicide, so you'd better send the morgue wagon here for my body."

"Hey, wait!" shouted Kenny excitedly. "Don't do anything foolish. You just wait there until I get to your office and we'll talk this thing over. Go slow, will you, old man?"

FROM the other end of the line there came the sound of a shot and then a thud and a clatter. The sergeant lowered the phone and looked at the morgue attendant.

"Did he do it?" asked Lake.

"Sounded like it." Kenny put down the phone and hung up the receiver. "Call the homicide squad, Lake," he snapped. "I'm going to the Chapman Building and see what happened to that poor devil."

Lake was busy on the phone as Detective Sergeant Kenny left the city morgue and climbed into the car he had left standing outside. The fresh night air felt good as Kenny started the motor and drove away.

Only twenty blocks separated the morgue from the Chapman Building. The sergeant made it in a few minutes without using his siren. He parked in front of the office building. The lobby door was locked but a night elevator operator appeared and opened it after Kenny had knocked several times.

"Police," snapped Kenny, flashing his badge. "We just received a suicide report from the tenth floor here."

"Gosh!" exclaimed the operator as he led the way to the night car. "Who was it?"

"He gave his name as Harvey Wilson and told us he was going to kill himself," said Kenny as the car ascended. "Then I heard a shot over the wire." He looked intently at the operator. "Have you taken any one up to the tenth in the last half hour?"

"Yeah." The operator nodded. "Mr. Jeff Bart. He's Mr. Wilson's partner.

He signed in about three-fifteen. He put the time down in the book in the lobby like all the guys do when they come here to work at night."

"Good," muttered Kenny.

The car stopped at the tenth floor and the door slid open. Kenny stepped out into the corridor with the elevator operator close behind him. Half-way down the hall a lean, sandy-haired young man about the same build as the sergeant was struggling desperately to get an office door open from the outside.

"That's Mr. Bart," said the operator. "Somethin' has happened all right."

Jefferson Bart turned as the two men came toward him. There was a wild expression in his eyes and he was still wearing his hat.

"My partner," he exclaimed. "He's locked himself in—and I can't get the door open. I left my keys at home. I heard a shot, and tried to find someone on this floor who might have a pass key. Then I came back here. I think he's killed himself."

"Yeah." Kenny shoved Bart to one side and looked at the door. It seemed rather flimsy. He moved back and flung himself against it, giving the door a hard blow with his shoulder. It flew open, revealing a yawning maw of darkness beyond it. "You didn't try hard enough, Bart."

The sergeant produced an automatic and a flashlight. He stepped into the office with Jeff Bart behind him. The buzzer in the elevator was sounding stridently. Kenny glanced back at the operator.

"That's probably the homicide squad," said Kenny. "Bring them up."

"Yes, sir." The operator ran to the car, and the floor door banged shut as the elevator descended.

Kenny went on into the office with Bart following. The ray of the flashlight gleamed on a still figure that was sprawled back in a chair. Behind the sergeant there was a click as Bart found a light switch and turned on the lights.

"He's dead all right," Kenny said as he thrust his gun and flashlight back into his pockets. "Shot in the right temple."

"This is awful," Bart muttered. "Why did he do it?"

Kenny did not answer. He was staring thoughtfully at the corpse. Harvey Wilson had been a middle-aged man.

He was slumped back in a comfortable leather desk chair, his arms dangling over the sides. There was a .32 automatic lying on the floor just below the fingers of his right hand.

THE telephone transceiver was off the hook and lying on the desk a little to one side of him. Kenny went close and sniffed. There seemed to be a faint hint of perfume in the air.

"I didn't believe he would do anything foolish even though he sounded excited when he phoned me," said Bart suddenly. "I told him not to worry, to wait until I got here and we would work things out some way."

"What do you mean?" asked Kenny.

He saw that the windows were closed and the door leading into the next office, apparently that of Bart, was locked from this side. There was the sound of the elevator door opening and voices in the hall. The homicide squad had arrived.

"Why, Wilson phoned to tell me—" began Bart and then stopped as the sergeant shook his head.

"Hold it," Kenny said. "No use in you having to tell your story twice. Waste of time."

The men from the homicide squad crowded into the office. Most of them were detectives, fingerprint men and photographers, none of them in uniform, save a few patrol car officers who had been sent to the scene. Kenny saw that Captain Tilford was in charge. The detective sergeant saluted the captain. Tilford returned the salute.

"Suicide, eh?" said Tilford, looking at the corpse.

"I don't think so, Captain." Kenny shook his head. "More likely murder."

"Murder!" gasped Jeff Bart. "But how could it be? The door was locked from the inside and Harvey told me on the phone what he was going to do."

"There's a snap lock on the door," said Kenny. "The killer could have shot Wilson and then stepped out into the hall, automatically locking the door behind him. He might have slipped away then. Tell us why you think your partner might have killed himself, Bart."

"He phoned me and told me that he had drawn out all of the funds of the firm and spent the money gambling," explained Bart. "He said he had cheated me and ruined the firm of Wilson and

Bart. I couldn't believe it was that bad, and asked him to wait here until I reached the office and we would talk things over."

"And what did Wilson say to that?" demanded Kenny.

"He—he just laughed at me," said Bart. "Told me he had drawn our last ten thousand dollars out of the bank today to pay off some of his debts. That by the time I arrived here he would be gone."

"So you came here, grew angry at what your partner had done and murdered him," snapped Captain Tilford abruptly. "Then you tried to make it look like suicide."

"The voice of the man who called the morgue and said he was Harvey Wilson, sounded muffled," said Kenny. "Might not have been Wilson at all."

Bart looked dazedly at the homicide man. He was pale and obviously frightened. Kenny frowned as he gazed at the young attorney. Jefferson Bart looked almost too guilty. Twenty years of police work had taught the sergeant it was usually an innocent person who looked that way when confronted in such a situation.

An assistant medical examiner appeared and looked over the body. He did it with the casualness of a butcher preparing a roast.

"Death by lethal penetration of the auricularis superior," said the medical examiner. "The missile taking a downward course."

"Yeah," said Kenny. "In other words the guy was killed by a shot in the head, the gun fired from such an angle that suicide isn't probable. Besides, the lights were out when Bart and I first entered the office and suicides don't usually kill themselves in the dark. They like to have light when they do it."

"But I didn't kill him!" protested Bart suddenly, as though he just realized he had actually been accused of murder. "I liked Harvey Wilson. He was my partner, and besides, I'm in love with his niece. Grace Wilson will stand by me. She'll never believe I killed her uncle."

"Then she has more faith in you than I have," said Captain Tilford. "You're under arrest, Bart. We're holding you on a charge of murder." He motioned to some of his men. "Take him away, boys."

DETECTIVE SERGEANT DAN KENNY yawned. It was late and he was sleepy. He left the homicide squad busy in the office going through all of the usual routine, checking for fingerprints, taking pictures of the body, and stepped out into the corridor.

Kenny had the elevator operator take him down to the lobby and show him the office register. He found that Jefferson Bart had signed in at 3:25 A. M. The name above Bart's interested Kenny. It was Nick Streeter, and he had signed in at 2:50 A. M. His office number was 1128.

"Who is Nick Streeter?" Kenny asked the operator.

"Oh, that guy." The night man did not sound as if he thought much of Streeter. "He has an office up on the eleventh floor. Claims he is a broker of some sort, but I've heard that he really runs a private gambling club somewhere over on the East Side."

"Then his office in this building is just a front?"

"That's the way I figure it." The operator nodded as the elevator indicator buzzed. "Tenth floor again. You guys certainly keep me busy."

"Take me up to the eleventh before you stop at ten," said Kenny. "I want to have a little talk with Streeter."

"Okay."

The detective sergeant got off on the eleventh floor and walked to the closed door of 1128. There was a light burning inside. Kenny put his right hand on the gun in his pocket and he opened the door with his left.

He stepped into a small office. A heavy-set dark haired man was counting a roll of bills. He glanced up with a scowl as he saw Kenny. Then he snatched up the money and shoved it out of sight in a drawer of his desk.

"I wondered what became of Wilson's ten thousand bucks," Kenny said mildly. He sniffed. "That pomade you use on your hair sure has plenty of smell, Streeter."

"Who are you?" demanded Streeter. "And what is this stuff about Wilson's ten grand?"

"The name is Kenny," said the sergeant. "Detective Sergeant Kenny from Headquarters. Investigating the murder of Harvey Wilson."

"Murder?" A flicker of surprise

showed in Streeter's dark eyes.

"That's right." Kenny nodded. "You thought you had arranged it so the police would believe it was suicide, didn't you?"

Behind Kenny the outer door of the office closed and there was a faint clicking sound. The sergeant glanced over his shoulder. There was no one at the door. He looked back at the desk to find Nick Streeter covering him with an automatic.

"Automatic lock on the door," Streeter said quietly. "It works from the desk. The door is steel and the office is sound-proof. A shot fired in here couldn't even be heard out in the hall. Are you the only one who suspects me?"

Dan Kenny knew what would happen if he gave the correct answer to that one. He had a vision of himself lying stiff and cold like one of those bodies he had been examining in the morgue. It was not a pretty picture and he did not like it.

"Just me and the whole homicide squad," he said quickly. "Now that we are just a couple of pals together would you mind telling me why you bumped off Wilson?"

"He was trying to doublecross me," said Streeter. "He was taken for fifty grand in my joint. He lost all of his firm's money except ten grand trying to win back his dough. So tonight Wilson plans to skip town, after drawing the ten grand out of the bank."

"So you kill him, get the ten thousand and decide to make it look like suicide," said Kenny, moving closer to the desk as he noticed that the wire of the lamp ran along the floor not far from his feet. "You disguise your voice, phone Jefferson Bart, and make him think it is his partner confessing all."

"Nice touch that," said Streeter, who was not lacking in self-esteem. "So was my calling the morgue."

"Except for muffling your voice," said Kenny. "I happened to be at the morgue and listened to that call. There was no reason for the muffled voice. No one knew you or Wilson at the morgue."

"You better put that gun of yours on the desk," ordered Streeter. "I don't like the way you keep holding onto it in your pocket."

"Sure." The sergeant drew the automatic out of his pocket and placed it on the edge of the desk. "There you are."

The gun was a little too close to the

edge and it slid out and hit the floor with a thud.

"Sorry," Kenny said.

He reached down to pick up the gun. As he did so he gave the electric cord a quick hard tug. It jerked the lamp off the desk and it landed against Streeter, knocking the gun out of his hand.

Kenny stood up, his automatic in his hand. He reached across the desk and tapped Streeter over the head with the barrel of his weapon while the gambling club owner was trying to pick up his own gun. Streeter went limp, knocked out from the blow.

"This guy makes a much better murderer than Jeff Bart," muttered Kenny as he drew out a pair of handcuffs and

placed them on the wrists of the unconscious man. "And if Streeter has a gal who believes and trusts him, then dames are more simple-minded than I think they are."

Detective Sergeant Kenny sighed and then yawned. He found the automatic button that unlocked the outer door of the office and opened the door. He had placed his gun on the desk. He frowned as he picked it up and smelled the barrel. The scent from the pomade on Nick Streeter's hair was on the gun.

"This night life is getting me," mused Kenny. "Much more of it and I'll be dead." He grinned. "In fact, I just came close to being a corpse a few minutes ago."



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Carol felt the jolt of pain that spun her around and knocked her into a world of empty blackness . . .

WITH THIS GUN

By C. WILLIAM HARRISON

Carol Learns That a Cop Is Just a Soldier in a Different Uniform Who Keeps the Home Front Safe!

SHE was like a white flame standing there against the backdrop of darkness. She had been crying softly, but now that he had come she held herself composed, locking fear out of her eyes.

He came through the yellow spill of the street light in a dark, shabby suit and she was shocked by the uncertainty of his walking. He was a man walking through prison walls that had been etched into his mind by time and habit. He was like a man who had forgotten freedom, and now that he had it again, was afraid of it.

"I did that to him," she thought.

He was afraid of the light, and what it might show to others. He moved out of

the reach of the street lamp, and she saw him pause to pick out the old landmarks. His glance traveled a slow circle across the neighborhood houses, and she saw his face, gaunt and sunless, reflect the return of lost memories.

There was Rob Banning's, where he used to go for his Friday night poker games; over there was the porch where little Tommy Fletcher had stood each evening at six to call out his greeting, "Hi, copper!" What would Tommy's greeting be now? Down there through the darkness was Monahan's cottage. . . .

"Hello, John," she said.

His glance had been sliding toward their home, and now he saw her for the first time standing there by the fence

gate. Expression dropped out of his face as he looked at her, and for the moment, he didn't move.

"I'm glad you're back, John." She tried to keep her tone casual, as though he were coming home from a day's work and not from a year in prison. She tried to be a man about it when she wanted so much to be a woman, to show her eagerness, to tell him that she had suffered too.

He moved toward her slowly, and suddenly there was an uncontrollable panic pounding through her. What should she say to him?

Should it be, "John, you're looking well." But he wasn't looking well, and he knew it.

Should it be, "John, I've counted every hour you were away. I did all this to you. You don't know how much it has hurt to know that. But I did what I did because I love you. Everything is still the same. You're still John Thacker. I'm the same Carol. I'm still your wife. I love you, John. You've got to give me the chance to make you understand why I did what I did. I love you."

HIS hands were clamped hard on the gate post, and the long muscles of his jaw were like ropes under his skin.

He spoke then, as though he had to fight to control each word.

"I ought to kill you, Carol."

He scared her with the bitter pull of his tone. He hated her, and he showed it. She tried to reach him with her voice, but she couldn't touch him.

"John, I'm your wife! You shouldn't say that. I love you." She couldn't find the words to say what she wanted to say. There was a wall between them, a wall that she herself had built, and she couldn't break it down.

"John, you've got to give me another chance."

"Another chance to frame me into prison again?"

"When a woman loves a man she'll do anything to protect him. Even what I did, John."

He laughed, a raw, bitter sound. "That's not the kind of love I want," he said. "I didn't come here to say this, Carol, but now that it's started I'll finish it."

"You knew I was a cop when you married me. It was my work, and you

started out at the first to make me change it. You always were headstrong. Framing me into prison was simply final means of having your own way."

She tried desperately to remember all the arguments she had planned, but they were gone. All she could say was, "I didn't want my husband killed."

"That's not the whole of it."

"No, that's not the full reason." Saying that was a key that unlocked other words, and they came out in a quick, almost frantic rush. "John, try to see my side of it. I love you. I sat home nights waiting for the sound of this gate closing. And when it came I was afraid to go to the door, afraid it would be an officer sent to tell me you wouldn't be home any more, ever."

"I didn't want you to be killed, but that wasn't all. I didn't want you to have to kill, and that is something you might have been forced to do when you went after a man. Oh, I know those men your job made you fight were crooks. But they have mothers and sisters some place, and I didn't want those women to have to go through what I did."

But she had failed; she could see that in the unrelenting bitterness in his face. She was losing, and she fought desperately against it.

"I know I was wrong, John, but I can't help loving you that much. Let's start over. Nothing has really changed."

His voice came low and ragged. "And you can say that to me! I've spent a year in prison, Carol. You put me there."

"Do you know what it means to be a cop in prison. You're hated by every convict there because you were a cop. You're hated by the warden and every guard because they think you sold your badge. I went through a hell that you made for me. And now you ask me to forget it and start over!"

"But, John, everything is the same."

He hit her hard with his voice. "You mean everything is the same because I've been reinstated in the Force? Because Mike Cancetti was shot and before he died confessed his part in framing me."

"You let him take one of my uniforms to wear. You stole my badge that night so it could be in the photograph that framed me with taking a bribe from that east side racketeer."

"Mike wanted me out of the way because I was crowding his gang too close."

Sure I was cleared and reinstated. But half of the Force think I took that bribe. The town thinks it, and they'll always think it. I'll be busted again the first chance the Commissioners get."

He looked at her steadily, piling all his bitterness up against her. He spoke again with a slow, inevitable force that drove wild winds of panic through her.

"There's a saying that once a man is a cop, he's always a cop. That is something you refused to believe. Sometimes a man has to fight force with force, and that's another thing you couldn't learn. You never could face reality."

For an instant he let a shadow of regret cross his face. But he killed that expression with one of grim finality.

"The gang Mike Cancetti left hasn't been cleaned up yet. That's what I came here to tell you. The Commissioners will never get another chance to bust me."

He swung away, and she chased him with her cry.

"John—John, don't go!"

But he didn't turn back.

CAROL caught a cab, and told the driver, "The Madierra Club, and please hurry." She tried to relax, to find something solid to put her mind on, but little pieces of the past kept sliding into her thoughts.

Her father had tried to warn her in his quiet, careful way.

"He's a cop, Carol," he had said. "That means nights of worry for his wife while he's out on a case."

"I know that, but I'll change him."

"He'll always be a cop."

"Not after we're married. He'll get a different job when I ask him to."

She remembered her sense of shock, of jolted confidence when John had refused the first time to turn in his badge.

The cab seemed to be crawling along the street, and the grumble of traffic was a sound that pressed a definite weight against her nerves.

She tapped the window, and said, "Driver, can't you go any faster?"

"You want me pinched for speeding, lady?"

"Please hurry."

There was a place in the park where he had often met her on his way home from work, a little moss-hung bridge overlooking a slender stream where

dragonflies swooped and droned like miniature bombers; and when the park was empty he would kiss her and she could feel the gun under his coat pressing hard and heavy against her side.

"You're lovely, Carol," he had said.

"John, someday that gun will get you killed, or make you kill somebody."

"A man has his job to do."

"But it's different now. I'm your wife; think of me."

"Yesterday, you mailed a check to the USO. That money was to help soldiers, and a soldier is just a cop in a different uniform, with a job of fighting the same kind of men as Mike Cancetti and Nick Cassiano. Would you ask a soldier to quit his job?"

"Go to work for Dad, John," she had begged.

The thud of John's heels on the sidewalk had been like a clock ticking away the last minutes of a man's life. They were no more than that, Carol thought.

She knew John Thacker now, better than she had ever known him before. He was a cop, and he had said, "They'll never break me." And because he was a cop she knew what he would do.

He would go in Nick Cassiano's, pick a fight and make Nick kill him. That wouldn't be hard, because Nick was always suspicious, always too quick with his gun. Nick's gang would be broken, but John Thacker would be dead.

"Hurry," Carol said to the cabby.

She paid him, and got out of the cab in front of the Madierra Club, her purse heavy under her arm. She ran toward the door, and the attendant moved across to block her way.

"Wait a minute, lady," he said. But she didn't let him stop her. She pushed him back with a sudden thrust of her arms, and went past him through the chromium latticed door.

There were palm trees lifting their leaf-crowned columns high along stucco walls, and festoons of Spanish moss here and there. The atmosphere was tropical and the music floating out of the dance floor was tropical.

A thin and immaculately dressed man was coming toward her, his face tight and inexpressive. "I saw that outside," he said.

He took her arm, started to turn her, but she shook him away.

"I want to see Nick Cassiano."

Anger was smoldering in his dark eyes, turning into bright flames.

"You want trouble, you can have it." He reached for her again. She tried to push him back, but he was surprisingly hard. She couldn't move him. He caught her wrist, and his thin fingers were like wires biting into her flesh. "You going to be nice?"

"I've got to see Nick."

"He don't need any canaries. He don't need any cigarette girls. If you're some old flame of his, see him in the morning. Let's go, now."

The squeeze of his fingers was turning her around, back toward the door, hot splinters of pain stabbing through her arm and into her shoulder.

"It's about John Thacker," she said.

His grip relaxed slightly, and she saw there was a frozen smile on his thin mouth.

"You trying to give me the run-around?"

"It's the truth. I've got to see Nick about John Thacker. There isn't much time. If you want trouble, you'll get more than you know by throwing me out now."

"You better not be stringing me, lady." His eyes were sultry and wicked.

HE HURRIED her around the outer edge of the main room. There were clouds drifting across the sky-ceiling, a thin moon was rising, and a silver-bright star was slanting a white spill of light down on the girl who was singing, "... My heart sailed east into the sun..." And somewhere near Carol, chipped ice in a cocktail glass tinkled a soft echo to the marimba.

There was a short hall not far from the orchestra box, and then Carol was entering Nick Cassiano's soft-lighted office. The door closed behind her and locked out all sound from the dance floor.

"She says she's got something about John Thacker, Nick," the thin man said.

Nick Cassiano looked up from his desk. He was a lean and compact man, and suspicion was always dormant in his black eyes. Recognition curved his smile.

"You're Mrs. Thacker."

She nodded. "There isn't much time to talk."

He was wary, on guard, grim beneath the mask of his smile.

"It's about your husband."

"Yes," she spoke hurriedly. "He's coming here. He's back on the Force, but he doesn't have his gun. He'll be here soon, and he'll pick a fight, try to make you kill him. I know that sounds crazy, but it's the truth. He wants to force you to do murder. He's willing to be killed if he can break you and your gang and at the same time clear himself."

Nick Cassiano's smile was thin and hard.

"You think I'm that big a fool?"

"He's a cop, don't forget that."

The thin man spoke up narrowly. "I've heard of crazier things, Nick."

Nick was prying at her with intent eyes. "What if we do kill him?" There was soft menace in his tone, and he was gouging her for an answer.

"A year ago that's what I wanted," she said.

Suspicion was a flame burning in his glance. She went on quickly.

"When I helped Mike Cancetti frame my husband for taking that bribe, I thought John would go after Mike with his gun. I counted on him being killed."

"Why?" It was a hard flat word.

She put her thoughts into her eyes.

"Remember who it was who gave me the idea of framing my husband. It was you, Nick. Only you thought I simply wanted John off the Force, when it was his insurance I was thinking of. Twenty thousand dollars is a lot of money."

"Why?" Nick said harshly.

"You ought to know women better than that, Nick," she laughed, softly mocking. "With John out of the way, with his insurance money to help, I might have had a chance to make another man forget I'd been married."

He looked at her, still tensely uncertain.

"You mean—"

"You, Nick. It was that way from the first. I didn't want it to be like this, but there's no time for anything else now."

His glance burned a swift path over her, and then he grinned broadly. "You got what it takes, lady." But he still clung to his suspicions. "What if we kill him when he comes?"

"Whatever you say, Nick."

"You're all right, kid," he laughed. "All right, Joe. Thacker knows too much, and this is our chance. When he gets here, we'll let him have it. He won't

have a warrant, and he'll start the fight. I'll switch on the orchestra amplifier so everybody can hear it. It'll be self defense."

"I don't like it," Joe said narrowly.

"We've got to finish him off sometime. What's wrong with now? We got everything our way, so how can we slip?"

"I just don't like it," Joe said.

"Maybe he's yellow," Carol sneered to Nick.

Joe whipped around, his eyes hot and ugly, and for a minute she thought he was going to strike her.

"He's your man," Joe said harshly. "Maybe you'd like to bump him."

Her voice was flat and steady. "If Nick says so. He's the boss."

"She's got guts," Nick said. "You know what to do, Joe. Grab him when he gets tough, and I'll slip her the gun." A buzzer sounded, and he clicked a switch, bent close to the communicator box. "Yeah, all right—all right," he said in answer to the message, and then he clicked off the speaker. "Thacker is coming," he said.

THE office door shoved open, and then closed quickly. "He's here," John Thacker snapped.

Thacker's face was gray and drawn by tension. When he saw his wife he flinched as though he had been struck a blow. He looked at Carol and then at Nick Cassiano, and then his eyes came back to her again, bleak and distant, and there was a shock and a hurt in them that only she could read.

"You warned them I was coming?" His tone was quiet, level.

Carol heard the faint click of the switch in the communication box, and knew all that was to follow would reach the crowd outside through the orchestra amplifier.

"Yes," she said.

It cut him, and he tried hard not to show it. He shrugged.

"You and Nick? Is that how it is?"

"Yes."

And she thought, "I've seen things like this happen in the movies, but they don't

happen in real life. And yet it's happening to me; it's happening to John!" A core of fear was growing inside her, stretching out tentacles of panic. "This can't happen to John! I've got to say something, I've got to do something to stop it."

But there was nothing she could do.

Nick Cassiano's voice crowded in. "You've no right to break in here like this. I hope you brought a warrant."

"No." And then there was something slow and cold in John Thacker's tone. "I'm going to kill you, Cassiano."

John started forward with his hands balled-up at his sides, but Nick yelled, "Grab him, Joe! He's going to shoot!"

And then Joe was pinning John's hands to his sides, and Nick was pulling Carol across the room, thrusting something cold and hard into her palm.

"Use it," he said softly. He raised his voice wildly, "Don't let him shoot!" And then his gun was pressing against her back, and he was whispering harshly, "Use it, lady. It's your idea. There's only one bullet in it, so don't miss."

Carol was standing close in front of her husband, with the gun in her hand pressing against his jacket, watching him and fixing each detail of him firmly in her mind.

"John—," she said, and shifted the gun muzzle two inches to the right, then pulled the trigger. She saw him flinch as the bullet scraped across his ribs under his arm, and she heard Joe scream.

Then, as she opened her purse so John could get the gun she had brought, she heard the roar of the shot behind her and felt the jolt of pain that spun her around and knocked her into a world of empty blackness. . . .

There were soft curtains and antiseptic smells and whispering silences in the room she wakened in. John was bending over her.

"Don't try to talk now," he was saying. "Just sleep, Carol. Go back to sleep."

"Don't go, John, don't ever go."

His touch was light on her hand. "I'll be here," he said. "I'll be waiting."

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CHAPTER I

Five-Alarm Funeral



AT THE edge of the clearing, George Chance came to an abrupt stop. He stared at the brown, barnlike structure that bridged a swiftly moving stream, and was lighted by two flood lamps beaming down from the roof.

The place was a mill, no doubt of that, for Chance could hear the rumbling of the mill-wheel as it churned in the water of the race. But no one could have named this ancient building the "Green Mill."

"Stand where you are, Simmons!"

The husky command came from behind Chance. He turned swiftly to confront a thick, broad-shouldered man wearing high boots with trouser legs tucked in their tops. The man had an unpleasant, coarse-featured face, with curling red hair hanging down to meet scowling brows. Over a black-and-red plaid shirt he wore, peculiarly enough, an artist's smock that was daubed and smeared with oil colors. He was cradling a repeating shotgun in one arm, but it was doubtful if he had been hunting rabbits by moonlight.

"You're not Simmons," he said gruffly.

"Fortunately, I'm not Simmons," Chance said.

A smile twisted his finely drawn mouth—the smile that had charmed thousands across the footlights when he had toured the world with his magic show. The man in the artist smock, however, was not charmed.

"Then you're one of the others. I promised I'd shoot the next prowler I found around here. You're it."

"I'm not prowling," Chance said. "If I were, you wouldn't have caught me. I'm rather good on the prowl. I just happened to be looking for a roadhouse known as the Green Mill. I heard this mill-wheel and saw the lights, so my mistake was natural."

"Huh! Any darned fool could see my place isn't green. Besides, didn't you see my sign at the foot of the path?"

"Sorry, I didn't."

"Well, suppose you go back and look at it. You'll find what you're looking for a quarter of a mile up the road. The Green Mill is painted green—and, it's a windmill. I hope you lose your shirt, sucker!"

"Thanks. That's decent of you!"

FROM the mill sounded the slam of a door. The man in the artist smock started slightly. Then Chance saw another man running across the clearing, a lanky figure with a shock of dead-black hair that emphasized the whiteness of his thin, peaked face.

"Roy!" the lanky man called. "Roy, Babe's gone!"

"Gone?"

The redhead's jaw dropped and his yellowish eyes glared at the black-haired

A COMPLETE GREEN GHOST NOVELET



The Ghost's hand shot out and closed upon the thin man's throat

newcomer who, evidently noticing Chance for the first time said, in a voice that approached the whine of a whipped puppy:

"I—I'm sorry, Roy. I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought!" The man in the smock poked at Chance with the barrel of his shotgun. "Get along, you."

"Getting," Chance said, and began to amble toward the road where his car was waiting.

"And move fast!"

This parting shot from "Roy" didn't quicken Chance's footsteps. He even paused after he had gone a little way to look back. The redhead had the thin man by the scruff of the neck and was hurrying him toward the mill.

"Nice, amiable person, that Roy," Chance muttered, then went on to where the footpath joined the road from Amboyd. Using his flashlight he discovered a sign on a fence post. It read:

ROY BARTLET STUDIO

Across the road, Merry White lowered the window of the Chance car. The magician playfully picked out her pert, pretty face with the beam of his light. She called to him, asked if this was the place.

"No," he told her as he got into the car. "That's Roy Bartlet's studio—visitors not welcome. Or welcomed with a shotgun. I wouldn't be surprised if we'd have more fun investigating Bartlet's brown mill than Lanky Leyton's Green Mill up ahead. But we've got a job to do."

The "job" was self assigned. George Chance had been spending much time in recent months breaking up crooked gambling resorts up and down the state of New York. Sometimes, with the help of Merry White and Joe Harper he would visit Army camps and instruct the soldiers how to detect various devices employed by crooked professional gamblers.

For several days the region around the little town of Amboyd had been his special concern, for a new Army camp was being located a few miles north of the town. Chance held no brief against gambling. Games of chance had been played since the beginning of time. But he could not endure the thought of the men of America's army losing to

gambling crooks. For that reason he and Merry were headed for the Green Mill while Joe Harper, claiming to have a private project of his own, had remained in Amboyd.

As the Chance car had topped a little hill Merry White leaned forward to stare through the windshield. Ahead a tower of crackling flame reached up into the dark sky.

"Look, darlin'!"

"Too bad we didn't bring some marshmallows," Chance said. "That's quite a fire."

"Some poor farmer's barn!" Merry suggested.

"I don't think so," Chance disagreed.

The structure that blazed seemed too tall for a barn, or had been too tall, for at that moment the roof caved in, sending a shower of sparks hundreds of feet into the air.

Chance braked his car beside a drive which led from the road to the blazing building. He pointed significantly to a large green sign that hung from a steel post at the side of the drive. The sign read:

Lanky Leyton's
GREEN MILL
Fine Foods & Liquors

They could see dark figures moving about near the flaming building. One, a man on horseback, gave his mount a sharp cut with a quirt and galloped to the mouth of the drive. Chance recognized Dr. Jefferson Hall, a retired physician who had become mayor of Amboyd. He was a tall, clean-shaven man with a high forehead and the type of features generally referred to as "distinguished."

Hall dismounted, strode over to the car.

"It's Mr. Chance, isn't it? And Miss White?" The excitement of the fire found Jefferson Hall completely unruffled. "Please don't park so near the drive," he said. "We're expecting the fire truck from Amboyd any moment."

Chance laughed. "They ought to get here in time to save the parking lot, anyway. How did it happen?"

The mayor of Amboyd shook his head. "No one has even offered a guess. I was taking my usual evening jaunt when I saw the fire. But by the time I reached here the entire building was a mass of flames."

"No one trapped inside, I hope."

"We don't know," Hall replied. A worried frown furrowed his high forehead. "When I got here, there was no one standing around except Mrs. Bartlet and William Simmons, the local real estate and insurance man. Simmons went to the nearest farm to telephone for the fire department, while Mrs. Bartlet and I stood around and shouted to Leyton just on the chance that he might have been somewhere inside, trapped and in need of help. No one answered our calls."

"What about Leyton's customers?" Chance asked.

"I understand a peculiar thing happened this evening early," Hall said. "Leyton's customers walked out in a body . . . But more about that later. Here comes the fire department!"

Chance hurriedly pulled out of the way of an antiquated fire truck that came up the road with clanging bell. Driving into the parking lot some distance from the burning roadhouse he got out of the car with Mary, and they joined Jefferson Hall who had tethered his horse to the sign post.

Exactly what the firemen intended to do was not clear. There was no available water for the pumper, and the fire was certainly beyond the control of chemicals.

"Look at that bed!" a man on the truck yelled wildly pointing at the blazing building.

Fire had eaten through the second floor and up there, supported by sagging beams already ablaze, could be seen a bedstead of iron, its mattress in flames. Only a moment later, the supporting beams gave way, and as the bed crashed through to the ground floor something rolled from the flaming mattress into the blazing inferno.

HORRIFIED cries arose.

"That was a man's body!"

Leyton, maybe! Or Burkey! Somebody, sure!"

And then the whole front wall of the building caved in. Flames *woofed* out of burning rubble, forcing the spectators to beat a hasty retreat. Chance hurried Merry to the parking lot.

"It's horrible, darlin'!" Merry moaned. "Up to now it was sort of fun, like a big bonfire. But if somebody

was lying on that bed—"

At a rustle in the bushes Chance glanced over his shoulder. A man stepped from the foliage, a small, weazened person, with the hair singed from his head. Great watery blisters stood up from the back of his hand as he clutched the magician's arm.

"Get the sheriff!" he said hoarsely. "Don't say anything to nobody. Just bring the sheriff over here to me. I'll be hid in these bushes."

Merry White gripped Chance's arm, staring wide-eyed at the little man.

"Sorry, but I don't know the sheriff," George Chance said. "Is he here?"

"Sure. The pot-belly over there talkin' to Simmons." The little man pointed with his blistered hand. "Bring him over here, will you? I'll be back in the woods."

He ducked back into the bushes and Chance looked at the girl beside him.

"There's something kind of f-i-s-h-y going on around here," Merry said.

Chance nodded. Gripping her arm, he walked with her over to where the sheriff stood talking to Simmons who, according to Jefferson Hall, was the local real estate agent and insurance underwriter. Insurance seemed to occupy his attention fully now.

"Wonder how the law reads on that, Sheriff," Simmons was saying. "Leyton was a bachelor. No family, no kin anyone knew about. And if that was him tumbled out of that bed, who will the insurance company pay off to?"

"The estate," the sheriff said. "To settle up debts and stuff, I guess. But we don't know it was Leyton fell with that bed."

CHAPTER II

Little Man In the Woods

GEORGE CHANCE looked William Simmons up and down. That ugly-tempered artist, Bartlet, had mistaken Chance for Simmons half an hour or so ago. Such a mistake was understandable. Simmons was nearly as tall and fully as wide as the magician. His complexion, however, was dark. He wore glasses astride a crooked nose and his

short upper lip was adorned by a wax mustache.

Chance tapped the sheriff on the shoulder.

"May I speak to you alone a minute?"

"Guess so." The sheriff lackadaisically pulled away from the real estate agent who followed Chance and Merry with a steady, black-eyed gaze.

"There's a man over here wants to speak with you, Sheriff," Chance said. "In the undergrowth."

The sheriff grunted, followed Chance to where the brush had swallowed the little man.

"Don't see no one," the sheriff muttered. "You weren't just tryin' to do me a good turn and bust me away from Bill Simmons, were you? I declare, that man can talk your arm off and sell you sixty acres of swamp land at the same time."

"He said he'd be back in the woods a little way," Merry ventured. "He seemed to be hiding from somebody or something."

More grunts from the sheriff as the trio stepped into the thickly grown woods. Chance took out his flashlight and beamed it around. He whistled softly; got no answer.

"Listen!" Merry whispered excitedly, and pointed. "Over there! Sounded like somebody groaning."

Chance's flashlight swung to the ghostly gray trunk of a beech tree. He led the way. Rounding the tree, he came to an abrupt stop. The little man was lying in the grass at the foot of the tree. His blistered hands were pressed tightly against his chest and blood seeped through wide-spread fingers.

"That's Leyton's man, Hugh Burkey!" the sheriff barked. "He's been stabbed! Get Doc Hall, quick."

Merry was already on her way through the bushes to find Amboyd's mayor.

Chance and the sheriff knelt beside the wounded Burkey. The little man's breath was coming in rattling gasps. His eyes were glazed and stared unseeing into the beam of Chance's flashlight.

"That—that you, Sheriff?" Burkey said hoarsely. "Don't seem able to see much."

"It's me," the sheriff said. "You better talk quick, Burkey."

It wasn't the most tactful thing the

sheriff could have said. A wistful smile twisted the lips of the little man.

"I'll talk," he said. "I didn't fire the mill. You—you get the killer. Leyton, Shag, and Shag's torpedo—he got 'em all. The wh—whiskey bottle inside my coat. I saw him. The—the pin artist. Get him! He— —"

The little man coughed. Blood flecked his lips. He summoned what strength he had left, seemed to be trying to sit up.

"Get—get Leyton's bones. They'll tell. Get—Leyton's bones!"

And then, as Jefferson Hall, Merry White, and Simmons came up Burkey died. Chance knelt there, studying the little man's face. A bright red welt crossed it from temple to mouth. . . .

AS GEORGE CHANCE drove away from the scene of the fire a little later, he told Merry:

"You'll take the car back to New York tonight. If you don't hear from me before noon tomorrow, send Glenn Saunders up to Amboyd. Have him arrive at dusk and go straight to the hotel."

Merry nodded. "This is Green Ghost business, darlin'?"

"It's murder," he said. "Remember Burkey's dying words—'Leyton, Shag, and Shag's torpedo'? The sheriff didn't seem to get the idea, but that name 'Shag' couldn't refer to anybody but Shag Hemphil who recently looted three upstate banks of four hundred thousand dollars."

"You think there were *three* bodies in the burning mill?" Merry asked, wide-eyed.

"I wouldn't be surprised. The last job Shag Hemphil pulled he was supposed to have collected a bullet from the gun of a bank guard. He'd have had to hole up somewhere and the Green Mill could have been the spot. And the Green Mill being practically empty tonight—that was a put-up job if there ever was one."

"I didn't hear anything about that," Merry said. "Don't hold out on me, darlin'."

He laughed. "I never have yet. It seems that early this evening quite a crowd came out from Amboyd to the Green Mill. Some gay young blade from town got to gambling, lost money, then claimed the Green mill games were crooked. He started a small riot which

ended with the crowd breaking up some of the gambling equipment and walking out in a body. About an hour later, the fire seems to have been well under way."

"And you think that riot was for the simple purpose of cleaning out the Green Mill so that Leyton would be easy prey for somebody?"

"That's about the size of it. And there's something else I picked up. It seemed to be open knowledge that Leyton ran a gambling house. Up until a month ago, though, he had the reputation of being an honest gambler. Then the games started to get crooked. It might be coincidence—but it was just about a month ago that this Shag Hemphill pulled his third bank job and vanished."

Chance stopped the car, got out, went around to Merry's side.

"Shove under the wheel, honey," he said. "I'm going to need both hands."

With Merry driving, Chance took a small leather-covered make-up kit from a pocket. Magician he was and breaker of crooked gamblers and other frauds, but he was also the Green Ghost, hunter of murderers. Few knew of this double identity for once the secret was out the life of George Chance wouldn't have been worth the proverbial plugged nickel. Where George Chance had hosts of friends, the Green Ghost had as many enemies.

Chance had spent the early years of his life in the circus. There he had learned the rudiments of his magic. Ventriloquism and impersonation were lessons he had learned, along with the art of throwing a knife with deadly accuracy. But from Ricki, the clown, he had learned make-up, and now his skill in that field far surpassed that of his teacher.

SWIFTLY now Chance applied make-up to his lean fair-skinned face. Brown eye shadow deepened the pits of his eyes and the hollows of his cheeks. Brown pencil applied delicate little lines that emphasized facial bones. Two little ovals of wire inserted in his nostrils tilted his nose. A set of yellowed shell teeth were fitted over his own natural teeth. Add to this a liberal application of white powder for pallor and the job was virtually done.

In his black suit, his black crusher hat,

the Green Ghost could have passed unnoticed in a crowd. But let his sunken eyes assume that unblinking, vacant expression, let his thin lips draw back from the yellow teeth and his face became a pale, terrifying death's head. To heighten the effect, a tiny electric globe was concealed in an ornate scarf pin. He could manipulate a rheostat in his pocket, throwing a baleful greenish glow across his face—the face of the Green Ghost that, once seen, was never forgotten.

Complete secrecy concerning Chance's double life was assured by Glenn Saunders who had served in the role of double for Chance in the magician's great stage performances. Since Chance's retirement from the stage and his adoption of crime detection as a hobby, Glenn Saunders was more important than ever. For by a curious wink of Nature, helped by plastic surgery, Saunders was the identical double of Chance.

"What did the whisky bottle have to do with it?" Merry asked abruptly when Chance had finished his make-up job.

"The one Burkey had concealed under his coat? It was just an empty quart bottle but it had contained gasoline. Burkey must have caught the murderer firing the building. He may have tried to save Leyton—if he wasn't too busy saving his own skin—but he knew the murderer, which made him dangerous to the killer."

The twinkling lights at the outskirts of Amboyd came into view and Merry sent a wistful glance at the lean figure beside her.

"What do I do—just drop you off here in town?"

"Yes. Then drive straight on through. And don't forget about Glenn."

"Sending me back home while you stay here and detect, darn it! It's not fair."

"You might even go so far as to say I'm mean," he suggested. "But somebody has to go back for Glenn. The Green Ghost can't operate unless Glenn is around to alibi Mr. Chance. Now how about a smile?"

Merry dimpled. "And a kiss, huh?"

Ten minutes later, George Chance, now the Green Ghost, was a shadowy figure in the yard back of Amboyd's only hotel. A rusty fire-escape ladder fastened to the rear wall was eight feet

above the ground. The Green Ghost leaped, caught the bottom rung of the ladder, drew his light well-sinewed body up hand-over-hand until he found foothold. Then he climbed to the third of the hotel's four stories, tapped on the pane of a lighted window.

JOE HARPER, Broadway's prince of chiselers and perpetual parasite attached to the George Chance bank-roll, appeared at the window, a cigarette dangling from his loose lips. If he was surprised to see the skull-like face of the Green Ghost looking into his hotel room his wooden face gave no indication.

He simply lifted the sash.

"Fly in, G. G." he invited dryly, closed the window, calmly sat down and picked up a movie magazine.

Joe had on his green snap-brim hat. That wasn't news, since he probably slept in that hat. His gaudy checked suit and shrieking tie was not news either. What was different about Joe Harper was that his right eye was pretty well blacked out. His left, sharp and shiny and black, examined the Green Ghost critically.

"You must've run into a murder to suddenly show up here in the graveyard costume," Joe said.

"Two murders, anyway," the Ghost replied. "Maybe a couple more. I know now where Death takes his holiday—here in Amboyd. You look as though you'd run into something yourself."

Joe slammed his magazine on the floor. "I ran into a hick gas grinder, that's all. It was my idea I should sort of circumnavigate the town and see if there were any crooked crap games going on which I would detect for you, see?"

The Ghost's grin was ghastly. "And you thought you could pick up a few dollars out-crooking the crooks."

"All right," Joe said peevishly. "The truth is, this town is deadlier than you look after ten p. m. No crap games. They take in the sidewalk. About eleven, I stopped in at a gas station which also sells magazines and candy and stuff, and I got to talking with the prop and chief gas pumper. No dice games, I said to him, and he said he'd roll me a game."

"And the hick from the sticks took your wad!"

"Yeah," Joe admitted. "With crooked dice. I told him so, and he said you can't

load transparent dice. You can, can't you?"

The Green Ghost nodded. "With tiny platinum disks under the spots."

"That's what I thought. Anyway, me and the gas grinder had an altercation. He was a big guy. He knocked me for a loop."

"You didn't pick up those crooked dice, did you?"

Joe shook his head. "I picked myself up and came back here to watch my mouse grow up."

He glanced in the mirror to see what his mouse was doing. The eyes were swelling and blackening to his dissatisfaction.

"Who was killed this time, G. G.?" he asked.

"They think Leyton, proprietor of the Green Mill, for one. They know a man named Hugh Burkey for another."

"Hugh Burkey?" Joe turned from the glass. "I knew a Hugh Burkey once. He was a pitchman, and darned good. He used to sell the Lord's Prayer engraved on the head of a nail. A little, shriveled-up guy, this Hugh Burkey I knew. I heard he'd been in stir once for engraving some plates for counterfeiters, and when he got out he atoned for his evil ways by doing these religious engravings on nail heads. His was a nice racket."

"COULD be the same man," the Green Ghost said.

He picked up Joe's cigarette case from a little table beside the bed, opened it to find it well stocked with George Chance's cigarettes, and chuckled.

"Mind if I mooch from myself, Joe?"

"Go right ahead," Joe said generously. "And then you might enlighten me as to who you're going to haunt."

The Ghost took a few thoughtful drags, then said:

"First, I want to see the guy who beat you at dice."

Joe looked at his watch—a watch which had once belonged to George Chance.

"He'll be closed up by now. He was in that filling station two blocks up the main drag."

"There was a light there when I passed it a moment or so ago. Meet me over there in five minutes. Remember, we don't know each other."

CHAPTER III

Broken Neck

THE Green Ghost returned to the window, swung over the sill and onto the fire-escape ladder. He dropped from the bottom rung into the yard, then headed up the deserted street toward the filling station. The place was still lighted.

Joe and the Ghost approached the station from opposite sides of the street. The Ghost's black gloved hand closed on the knob of the office door, twisted it, and he stepped inside. Joe Harper followed close on his heels. The office seemed deserted.

Across from the door was a cigar and candy counter. The glass front had been broken and pieces of peppermint stick candy were spilled on the floor. Also on the floor, tracked in grease, were the marks of big bare feet. Joe gave a low whistle.

"Couldn't be Li'l Abner, could it?" he whispered.

The door from the office into the wash and grease room was open and visible across the sill was the foot and ankle of a man. The foot wore a shoe that couldn't possibly fit the barefoot tracks on the floor.

The Ghost crossed to the door. The grease room was one step down from the office itself. Lying there on the floor sprawled the filling station attendant, head bent so that one cheek seemed to rest on one shoulder. He was a big man.

"But," the Ghost muttered, "not big enough."

"That's the guy with the gyp dice," Joe said. "Whoever knocked him out must have been the son of Superman."

The Ghost stepped into the room, knelt beside the man. He took hold of the head, moved it from side to side.

"Neck's broken," he whispered. "He didn't do that falling, either. Look at the bruises on the throat."

"Jeeps! You suppose the barefoot hill-william—"

Joe's sentence dangled. He had taken a taste of the strength of the filling station owner himself. Yet here that man

lay dead, neck snapped, the big body cast aside like a broken toy.

"Jeeps!" he said again. "And stick candy all over the place!"

The Green Ghost was searching through the pockets of the dead filling station operator. He stood up, shook his head.

"No dice," he said, "and I mean no dice." He stepped back into the office and began a methodical search.

"They were red, transparent dice," Joe said. "Could be the guy had a sudden notion to get rid of them in case I decided to report him to the cops."

"That's not logical," the Ghost said. He had opened the fire door of a coal stove that stood in the corner and was hauling out bits of paper and waste. "If you've been gypped by a gambler you don't go to the cops."

"Maybe he gypped the barefoot guy and got killed for it."

"That's not sense, either. There was money in the dead man's pocket. Apparently all the barefoot bone-breaker wanted was stick candy. It sounds silly, but—"

The Ghost spread out a crumpled piece of paper and uttered a low laugh. On the paper was written:

Enclosed two hundred dollars. Will mail twice that amount tomorrow if you manage to get all the customers out of the Green Mill tonight. Better burn this.

There was no signature.

THE following afternoon, George Chance received a phone call at the Amboyd hotel from the office of Sheriff Clasner, asking him to come to the courthouse at once. When he arrived he found the sheriff's office in a state of high excitement. Jefferson Hall, Amboyd's horseback-riding mayor was there, dressed in natty whipcord breeches and matching jacket. William Simmons, the real estate agent was also present, and appeared to have gnawed some of the wax out of his mustache.

Beside the sheriff's desk sat a rather pretty blond woman of about thirty-five, her eyes red and swollen as though she had been crying. A short, brown-haired man stood with one hand on the back of her chair.

Newspapers were spread out on a couch at one side of the room, and on top

of the papers were three heaps of charred bones.

"The ashes that remaineth," Sheriff Clasner said solemnly, and the woman in the chair sobbed. "I'm sorry, Edith," the sheriff apologized. "I know this is pretty hard on you, since you and Leyton were figuring on getting married. But we got to do our duty."

The sheriff turned to Chance. "This is Miss Edith Muns. Leyton didn't have any next-of-kin so we called in Miss Muns. And this man—he indicated the short person beside Miss Muns—"he's Dr. Hereford, our coroner. Believe you know the mayor and Councilman Simmons."

Chance nodded. "In a case like this, it's fortunate you have two medical men in your local government."

Jefferson Hall smiled. "I haven't practiced medicine in years, Mr. Chance, but I suppose I was some assistance in this matter." He waved his hand to indicate the heap of bones.

"I still don't think we ought to proceed until the insurance inspector from my company gets here," Simmons objected. "All this could easily be arson, Sheriff."

"Now you just keep your shirt on, Bill," the sheriff said. "All this is pretty informal. I don't think it's arson. It just looks as though the tail end of a crime wave hit this county and we got to stop it."

He turned to Chance, teetered up and down on his toes.

"Maybe you've heard Gabby Burns who runs the filling station was killed last night. Funny that it was Gabby who was out at the Green Mill and brought on that riot that ended with all the customers walking out. I figure his killing was tied up with Leyton's death, the murder of Burkey, and a couple of unidentified skeletons we raked out of the ashes."

"We have reason to believe, Mr. Chance," Simmons said, "that Leyton was harboring a couple of bank robbers—a Shag Hemphil and one of Shag's men."

"Mr. Chance heard what Burkey said before he cashed in last night," the sheriff said. "Yessir, Mr. Chance, we figure one of those heaps of bones over there belonged to Leyton. We got pretty positive identification of the skull, because of the teeth. We're waiting for a man

from New York to come up and identify the other two. Though from what Burkey said, we just know they were Shag Hemphil and one of his henchmen."

"That's not true!" the blond woman cut in. "Lanky Leyton wouldn't harbor criminals. I know he wouldn't!"

JEFFERSON HALL regarded her kindly.

"Perhaps not from choice, Miss Muns. But Leyton had a criminal record—"

"I know!" admitted Miss Muns. "But he's been going straight! I know he has!"

"Well," William Simmons offered, "it could easily be that Leyton was forced to sheltering Shag Hemphil. And if Shag had one or more of his henchmen with him, he probably just took the Green Mill over, even wounded as he was."

"Mr. Chance," the sheriff said, "in the ashes at the Green Mill and right with the skeleton we've decided belonged to Leyton, we found this here object and darned if we can identify it."

He handed Chance a scrap of metal from which four prongs stood up from the four corners of a square top. The square was a little more than three-quarters of an inch in dimension and the prongs were about an inch and a half long. There was a small ring in the center of the top and attached to this the blackened and fire-twisted remains of a safety pin.

Chance handed the object back to the sheriff.

"It's a dice holder," he said. "A crooked dice man will pin the holder in his sleeve or at the bottom of his coat. When he wants to introduce loaded dice into a game, thumb and forefinger catch the dice at the sides, pull, and the dice are snapped into the waiting hand."

The sheriff scratched his head. He looked disappointed.

"Thought for a moment I had a clue. Guess maybe I didn't. I heard Gabby Burns took crooked dice off Leyton in that fight at the Green Mill last night. Guess this thing is what held them."

"One thing before I go," Chance said. "Was Burkey an associate of Leyton's?"

The sheriff, Simmons, and Hall all nodded.

"He worked behind the bar at the Green Mill," the sheriff said.

"Thanks," Chance said, as he went to

the door. "I'm sorry I couldn't be of more help to you."

As a matter of fact, though, he might have been quite a bit more help to the sheriff, for he was fairly certain that he knew the identity of the murderer. But as to the motive behind the killings he was still in the dark. Strings had to be tied into the mystery web and one such string, he believed, could be found at Roy Bartlet's studio.

He particularly remembered the incident that had taken the disagreeable artist back toward the house the night before. The thin man had come out to tell Bartlet that "Babe" was gone. Who was "Babe?" And why should the announcement have affected Bartlet as it had? Could someone who might be called "Babe" be connected with the theft of stick candy in Gabby Burns' filling station? Perhaps the key to the entire mystery could be found at Roy Bartlet's studio.

Glenn Saunders, George Chance's double, came into Amboyd after dusk, driving the Chance car. He parked on a side street a block from the hotel, immediately went to the hotel and to the room Chance himself had arranged for. The appearance of the tall, slender man with red-gold hair attracted no special attention in the lobby, for there was no way of distinguishing the double from the original copy.

A FEW minutes later the Green Ghost entered the car which Glenn Saunders had just left. He drove three blocks to the north, paused at a quiet street intersection to pick up Joe Harper.

"You're a decoy tonight," the Ghost explained, as they cleared the city limits.

"I am?" Joe asked without enthusiasm. The Ghost nodded.

"You're to be bait for Roy Bartlet's shotgun while I get inside his studio and see what's what."

"I get it. Along with the buckshot I get it."

"Apparently he doesn't like prowlers on his property. We've got to chance it, Joe. He oughtn't to be too difficult for you to handle."

The Ghost parked his car some distance from the footpath that led to the artist's studio. Joe contemplated the wooded landscape distastefully.

"I ain't no boy scout, I'd like you to remember," he said. "No trail blazing, stalking, and making fires without matches for me. I'll take steam heat, for mine."

"I don't care how you manage this," the Ghost whispered. "You can use diplomacy or you can use a blackjack."

"To me they are practically the same thing."

The sound of voices came to their ears before they had traveled far up the path. They paused, the Ghost shoving Joe behind him into the bushes. Even in darkness like this, he couldn't be certain that Joe's necktie would not stand out like a traffic light.

"Hey," Joe whispered, "what about poison ivy?"

"Hush," the Ghost cautioned.

He could hear the voices clearly now; could recognize them.

"I wouldn't sell at any price!" Roy Bartlet was shouting. "I've told you that, Simmons. I bought the place for a studio and a home for my mother, and here I intend to stay!"

"I'm willing to pay a thousand dollars more than you paid for it," Simmons said. "That's a nice profit."

"Go on and get out of here!" ordered Bartlet. "Tell your New York client that he can go find himself another old mill if he feels he's got to live in one. Get!"

CHAPTER IV

Fire Bug

SIMMONS' footsteps sounded along the path. The Ghost and Joe Harper waited breathlessly until the real estate agent had passed within two yards of where they were hiding.

"Now," the Ghost whispered to Joe. "Right up the path. See if you can intercept Bartlet!"

As Joe stepped into the path, the Ghost melted back into the darkness, cut across through the woods toward the lights that flooded the clearing around the mill. He spotted Joe Harper standing in front of Roy Bartlet. The artist had his shotgun, but Joe had his sap and his gift of gab. Joe was talking, arguing himself into a spot where Bartlet's

guard would be down and Joe's black-jack up.

Bartlet's back was toward the Ghost. The magician-detective moved from the shadows and into the lighted clearing, behind Bartlet's broad back. Then he ran for the door of the barnlike brown building.

The door was unlocked. The creak of its hinges was effectively muffled by the rumble of the mill-wheel and the churning of the mill-race. He stepped into a poorly lighted room that served as a hall, closed the door, stopped to listen.

Upstairs somebody was snoring loudly in spite of the early hour. On the ground floor, to his right, he could hear a metallic *click-click*. He moved soundlessly to an open doorway, looked into a cavernous room that must have been cold in winter in spite of the huge stone fireplace.

A woman of sixty or more was seated in a cone of light cast by a table lamp. She was knitting and her steel needles had caused the clicking sound.

The magician-detective had seen her the night before at the scene of the fire. Jefferson Hall had said that Mrs. Bartlet and William Simmons had been the first to get to the conflagration.

Mrs. Bartlet had rather a hard, stern face. Her mouth as it mumbled over counted stitches suggested that Roy Bartlet's ugly disposition might have been inherited from his mother.

The Ghost waited to learn whether or not his movements had been detected. The click of the steel needles was uninterrupted.

Ahead of him a pine staircase mounted to the second floor. He climbed the steps quickly, was confronted by a closed door which he opened. Beyond stretched a long, narrow hall with rooms opening from either side. No sooner had he set foot in this hall than somebody at the other end came backing out of a door. The thin, pale-faced man he had seen the night before.

The Ghost stepped quickly through the open door of a darkened room. The pale-faced man came down the hall, carrying a tray of dirty dishes in both hands. At the door at the top of the stairway, he balanced himself on one foot, supporting the tray with one hand and an upraised knee, and the Ghost saw a large ring of keys dangling half out

of the man's pocket.

The ghost leaned from the doorway. His gloved fingers closed on the ring of keys to lift them nimbly. The man with the tray turned. Instantly, a baleful green light flooded across the Ghost's face. Lips peeled back from yellow teeth and the deep-set eyes stared vacantly.

"Who—who are you?" the thin man stammered. "What do you want?"

"Don't make a sound," the Ghost warned hollowly. "Come into this room quietly and you won't get hurt."

THE thin man carried out the order not to make a sound in a peculiar manner. He dropped the tray of dishes, opened his mouth, would have screamed had not the Ghost's hands shot out and closed upon his throat.

Downstairs, old Mrs. Bartlet heard the crash. The Ghost heard her footsteps on the stairs and her anxious question:

"What's wrong, Raymond?"

Raymond was in no position to answer, but from the thin lips of the Green Ghost came a perfect impersonation of Raymond's voice.

"It's all right, Mrs. Bartlet. I just dropped some dishes."

"Babe hasn't got out again?"

"He's all right," the Ghost replied.

Then he heard Mrs. Bartlet descend the steps. With one hand still tightly closed on Raymond's throat, the Ghost pulled the servant back into the unlighted room.

"You could have avoided some trouble, Raymond," he whispered. "I regret this, but probably not as much as you will."

His right hand dropped to his side, pressed the release of a clever gimmick pinned inside his coat. His small black automatic dropped into his hand. He lashed out with a gun-barrel blow to the side of Raymond's head, and the servant dropped limply into his arms.

He let Raymond down to the floor gently, then with the servant's keys in his pocket he proceeded down the hall to the door which he had seen Raymond leaving. There was a small iron grating in the panel and through this he could see into a lighted room. The floor was strewn with toys—a teddy bear, a wooden train, lead soldiers, marbles,

tops, and blocks. Here and there among the toys were chunks of red and white peppermint sticks, and among the other litter were two shining red plastic dice.

Just beyond the grating, the Green Ghost could see the foot of a bed. It was from this bed that the snoring came.

The Ghost examined the lock on the door, selected the proper key and quietly turned it in the keyhole. The snoring stopped momentarily. The Ghost waited for it to begin again, then he pushed the heavy door open, stepped into the room. He looked across the foot of the bed at Babe.

The bed was oversize and so was the occupant. The Ghost judged that Babe would top his own six-foot height by at least five inches and the breadth of shoulder exposed above the top of the covers looked like a prize winning ham. The face of the sleeper matched the name that had been given him. It was as pudgy as a baby's, had the same smooth skin, and yet a fine yellowish beard was growing on the rounded chin.

The Ghost tiptoed over the teddy bear, reached down among blocks and marbles, picked up one of the dice. He dropped it into his pocket. He was heading for the second die, which was near the foot of the bed, when his toe touched a marble. The marble started to roll, making a small rumble on the bare floor.

Babe suddenly sat up. He blinked puffy blue eyes at the Ghost.

"Hi," he said in a ridiculous, squeaking voice. "Man come to play with Babe?"

BABE wore only pajama bottoms. He scrambled from under the covers and to the foot of the bed where he squatted and blinked dully at the Green Ghost. He was in no way affected by the green glowing death's head of the Ghost's face.

The Ghost eyed the mate to the die in his pocket, inched toward it. Babe bounced up and down on the bed. Inasmuch as the imbecile must have weighed close to three hundred pounds, that was quite a bounce. An ugly gleam came into his blue eyes.

"Don't you touch Babe's playthings!" he warned. "All Babe's."

He jumped from the end of the bed and as his huge bare feet hit the floor, one heel came down on the edge of the

red die. The cube of plastic was flipped clear to the other end of the room and Babe was now firmly planted between it and the Green Ghost.

The Ghost dropped his right hand into his coat pocket and brought out the die which he had just picked off the floor.

"Look, Babe," he said in a gentle voice. "I've got a block and you've got a block. You get yours and we'll play a game."

Babe scowled. "No block. Um's a square marble. You got Babe's square marble. You gimme!"

The imbecile grabbed at the die in the Ghost's hand but the Ghost popped it into his pocket.

"You take Babe's toys!"

And this complaint was immediately followed by three hundred pounds of flesh and muscle that rammed the Ghost back against the wall in its onrush. Huge fingers went up to the Ghost's throat—fingers of tremendous, crushing strength.

The Ghost's nimble fingers produced a lighted match which he thrust toward Babe's face. The imbecile released him, backed away a little, regarded the match suspiciously.

"Watch, Babe," the Ghost said.

"Burn," Babe said.

"No, it won't burn you. Just watch."

The Ghost gave the match a flip and instantly, where the match had been, appeared a beautifully colored rainbow silk fully thirty inches square.

"Pretty," the Ghost said.

Babe was not impressed. "Babe wants um's square marble."

"Keep watching," the Ghost said.

Babe was watching with the dull stare of the mentally deficient, one that defied the deceptions of magic. Babe was perfectly aware that the Ghost's left hand was busy beneath the cover of that rainbow silk. The magician-detective was taking a hammer grip on the barrel of his gun because he knew nothing short of a skull-crushing blow would ever make Babe behave.

A crafty gleam came into the imbecile's eyes. He reached out suddenly, snatched the silk away, exposing the Ghost's gun. And then it seemed that Babe had always wanted a gun to play with.

His hands closed on the Ghost's gun and right wrist. Once more the Ghost's

slighter body was crashed back against the wall, with such force that for a moment he was practically out on his feet. When he staggered out of the red mist that seemed to envelop him, Babe had the gun!

Babe seemed to be trying to get the forefingers of both hands through the trigger guard at the same time. He pointed the gun at the Ghost.

"Bang!" he said loudly. Fortunately the safety was on.

"It's no good," the Ghost said.

A GAIN that crafty gleam in Babe's eyes. And by some streak of misfortune his finger found the safety.

"Is too good. Babe fix um so go bang."

"No," the Ghost argued. "You don't want to wake Mother, do you?"

"Mama don't care. Babe want to hear bang."

He had the gun's business end toward the Ghost now and as soon as his clumsy fingers found the trigger he was going to hear a bang; no doubt of that.

"Look," the Ghost said desperately, "let me show you a good bang. Watch."

He brought from his pocket a small wad of fuse material and a little bundle of tow. He lighted the fuse, hastily wrapped it in the tow, and put it into his mouth. No need for subtle moves when performing before such an audience.

He drew a long breath through his nostrils, exhaled forcefully through clenched teeth.

Great clouds of smoke and sparks issued from his mouth, and to his everlasting relief, Babe laughed.

"Babe want to eat fire, too?" the Ghost asked.

Babe apparently did. He extended his hand that held the gun, and the Ghost obediently dropped the burning fuse from the tow that enwrapped it into Babe's bare hand.

Babe howled. He dropped the gun, tried to cram his injured hand into his mouth. The Ghost snatched up the gun, brought a foot down flat on the glowing fuse to extinguish it. His gun arm slashed up, then down, the gun butt hammering the imbecile in the center of the forehead.

Babe fell like a log. The Ghost sprang across the room, picked up the second die, ran out into the hall. From some-

where outside the building sounded two sharp reports in rapid succession.

CHAPTER V

The Finger Points

BEFORE the Ghost had covered half the length of the hall, he was slowed by the appearance of Mrs. Bartlet at the top of the steps. The old woman took one look at the Green Ghost's glowing face, uttered a shrill scream and fled toward the door of the imbecile's room.

The Ghost took the stairs in three strides, bounded across the lower hall and out the door. He all but ran into Joe Harper who immediately rammed a gun into the Ghost's middle.

"What's the shooting?" the magician-detective demanded.

"Some fool fire bug!" Joe panted. "I caught him trying to set fire to a pile of firewood at the back of the building. We took a shot apiece, then he ran back into the woods."

"You didn't follow him, huh?"

"I told you I'm no boy scout."

"Where's Bartlet?"

Joe jerked a thumb. "Back in the bushes, er—taking a nap."

"Okay. Now back to town. I've got the dice."

"What dice?" Joe wanted to know.

"The loaded dice. Leyton's dice. Leyton's bones, as Burkey said. Any person who would use the term 'pin artist' would certainly refer to dice as 'bones.' You see?"

They regained Joe's room at the hotel by means of the fire-escape. There, the Ghost poured a glass of water, and took from his pocket a needle-pointed steel probe and a jeweler's eyeglass. He sat down before the writing desk.

"What gives?" Joe asked.

"The test for crooked dice," the Ghost informed him. "First, you've got to find out where the load is. Like this."

He held the dice evenly above the water, dropped them. Instead of falling straight to the bottom, the dice turned in the water, came up with a four and a three. The Ghost took the dice out carefully, turned them over, marked the loaded bottoms by scratch-

ing the plastic with his steel probe. He used his handkerchief to dry them.

"How did the big Bartlet nitwit get hold of them?" Joe asked.

"Babe was on the loose last night," the Ghost explained. "He went into town, into Gabby Burns' filling station, wrecked the candy case trying to get peppermint. Burns tried to stop him, and Babe is what you'd call a spoiled brat. He'll have his own way or bust something. What he busted was Burns' neck. Then he took all the candy he could carry, saw the pretty red dice—'square marbles' to Babe—took them, too. He was carrying his loot when the Bartlet household caught up with him and took him home."

The Ghost had fitted the jeweler's glass to his eye. His steel probe picked at the white spots on the loaded side of the dice, removed them one at a time to reveal tiny disks of platinum beneath. With each spot he removed, he uttered a prolonged "Ah!" For on the platinum disks was minute engraving. When all the spots on the loaded side were removed, he put the dice down on the desk top. The engraving on the platinum disks looked like this:

Hemphil	here	Loot	
			Under
Get	cops		Mill
			Race

He handed Joe the eyeglass.

THERE'S the whole story, Joe. Lanky Leyton and Burkey were virtual prisoners of Shag Hemphil and his henchman. As soon as Hemphil and company took over the Green Mill as their hide-out, Leyton's games got crooked. Leyton was angling for my attention. He knew that eventually George Chance's investigation of crooked gambling would land at the Green Mill.

"He knew I'd confiscate the dice, examine them, and get the message that Burkey had engraved. That way, Leyton could turn in Hemphil. Any less subtle method probably would have resulted in discovery, and then Hemphil and his henchman would have killed Leyton and Burkey."

"Burkey did the engraving, huh?" Joe put the glass and the dice down. "But what's this about the loot under

[Turn page]

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the mill race?"

"Hemphil and company hid the bank robbery loot under the bed of the stream that turns the wheel at Bartlet's mill. There's a dam across the race just above the wheel, with a gate that can be lowered, shutting off the flow of water. An hour or so after the gate is lowered, the bed below would be dry enough for you to get down there and dig a hole."

Hemphil's loot must have been pretty hot and he would have to wait before he could spend it. Besides, he was wounded, stood a fair chance of being caught, but he wanted the loot to be stashed until he got out.

"The joker came when the mill property was sold to Bartlet. Because the Bartlets were keeping Babe, who ought to be in a padded cell, Roy Bartlet turned out to be a watchdog who didn't like trespassers. Our murderer, wanting to get hold of the hidden loot, was willing to buy the Bartlet property. His motive for trying to set the place on fire was to force the Bartlets to sell."

"Yeah," Joe said. "But Burkey knew about the loot and so did Leyton."

"Well, Hemphil was wounded, and perhaps delirious at times. He probably babbled about the hidden money. Burkey knew, Leyton knew, and so did Hemphil and his henchman. But all those men are dead. The pin artist saw to that."

"Who or what is a pin artist?" Joe asked.

The Ghost chuckled. "You'll find out." He stood up. "I've got to get Glenn Saunders to arrange a meeting at the sheriff's office. I'll want all the suspects there. Glenn, acting as George Chance, can say he's going to give a demonstration of crooked dice games or something."

"And—let's see. I'll want that skeleton hand I used to tap out answers in the Living-or-Dead trick, and also a bar magnet. Some powdered lamp-black on the fake skeleton hand, and it will look like some of the charred bones. It ought to be effective!"

In less than an hour they were gathered in the sheriff's office—Roy Bartlet, Mayor Jefferson Hall, William Simmons, Sheriff Clasner, and George Chance's double, Glenn Saunders.

"I don't know what you've got me here for," Roy Bartlet fumed. "I'm not

interested in crooked gambling."

"Now, Mr. Bartlet," Hall said soothingly, "none of us are interested in making our living that way, but it's a good thing to have your eyes opened once in a while."

"Not interested in gambling?" Simmons asked, surprised. "Why, life itself is just one great gamble."

"Murder, gentlemen, is a gamble, too!"

A HOLLOW voice that might have come from the depths of a coffin sounded from the door of the sheriff's office. All eyes turned on the somber figure in black that entered the room. No one said anything. They simply stood and stared at the Green Ghost as he walked across the room to a steel locker in which Sheriff Clasner had put the charred bones recovered from the fire, pending the coroner's inquest.

Sheriff Clasner was the first to recover. He stepped to the coat tree where his holster hung.

"Why—why, my gun's gone!" he sputtered.

"Yes," the Green Ghost said. "I've been here before, Sheriff." He turned from the locker holding a blackened bony hand.

"You know what Burkey said," Simmons remembered. "'Find Leyton's bones!'"

Jefferson Hall slapped nervously at his polished boots with his riding whip.

"Stop that, Mayor," the Ghost commanded. "I want no unnecessary noise."

Jefferson Hall tucked his quirt under his arm.

"Of all the brass-lined nerve!" Glenn Saunders said.

"Not a word out of you, Mr. Chance," the Green Ghost said to his double. "You're not concerned in this. I suggest you go over in the corner and sit down before I make a ghost out of you."

Glenn Saunders, hiding a smile, went to a chair and sat down. The Ghost walked over to the sheriff's desk, took a position beside it. He put the blackened, bony hand down on the desk top.

"Now." His unblinking eyes looked from one to the other. "Shag Hemphil's loot is hidden under the mill stream at Bartlet's studio. I suggest you recover it as soon as this session is over, Sheriff. Also, there's a gigantic imbecile in the Bartlet house who ought to be turned

over to the state. Watch out for him, Sheriff. He's dangerous. He killed Gabby Burns, who was not exactly a weakling."

"You'll not touch my brother!" Bartlet said. "Why, if he was turned over to an asylum it would kill Mother."

"I think you'll find the law in favor of a padded cell for Babe, Bartlet," the Ghost said.

The real estate man tugged at his little waxed mustache.

"Why were you trying to buy Bartlet's mill, Simmons?" the Ghost asked.

"I—I was acting for a client," Simmons stammered. "A man in the city wanted to buy it."

"You've never met that client, have you?"

Simons shook his head. "I simply got a letter from him saying he wanted me to get the place for him. His name was Northrupt."

"Northrupt!" The Ghost chuckled. "Well, that's a better alias than Smith, anyway. Northrupt is the murderer of Leyton, Shag Hemphil, Hemphil's torpedo, and also Burkey.

"Northrupt is a pin artist. He knew about the hidden loot. He arranged to get the customers away from the Green Mill last night so that he could accomplish his murder business without interruption. His visit was expected by the

[Turn to page 89]

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*Director
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It is going to be hard, but not as hard for us as for our sons and brothers in the war zones. Ours is the less spectacular task of tightening our belts, salvaging everything on scrapheaps that can be used in this war, putting in long hours of volunteer work, sharing our tires and gasoline, giving our blood, mending and scrimping and buying war bonds. There will not be many heroes among us. Our adventure will come through teamwork.

Teamwork to make every blackout a cavern of guesswork for the enemy at the bombsight. Teamwork to gather and transport every piece of rusted scrap and every bit of decaying rubber. Teamwork to fill the membership of the car club and force out the Hitler who rides the empty seat. Teamwork to care for children while their mothers work. Your team is your local Civilian Defense Council. The workers are all of us.

If we adventure well in these fields that are open to us, and work for a just peace for all men, there will be a new and freer world of peace in which we and our children can adventure after the war.

James M. Landis
Director,
U. S. Office of Civilian Defense.

THE CASE OF THE BACHELOR'S BONES

(Continued from page 87)

four men he killed, but they didn't know he had come to kill. To kill and to burn.

"He brought gasoline for his arson in a whisky bottle. When he had accomplished his bloody work, he sprinkled the gasoline around, set the place on fire. Only one man escaped him—Hugh Burkey. Even Burkey did not live long, but long enough to point out the killer."

The Ghost turned his gaze on the skeleton hand before him.

"Leyton's bones," he said. "Step up, gentlemen, and take a look at Leyton's burned bones."

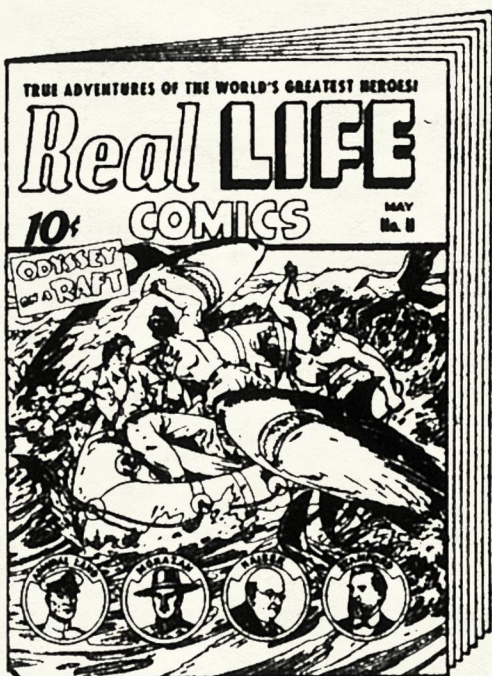
They gathered around the desk. And slowly the bony hand lifted from the desk. "Good lord!" Bartlet choked.

"Watch, gentlemen," the Ghost commanded. "The bones of Leyton will point to the murderer."

The skeleton hand rotated slowly, came to rest with the forefinger pointing at Jefferson Hall. The hollow, terrifying laughter of the Ghost echoed through the room.

"Well, Hall," the Ghost said, "are the dead fingers right? Aren't you the doctor who attended the wounded Shag Hemphil? And as his doctor, didn't you hear Hemphil babble in delirium about the hidden loot?" [Turn page]

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Hall returned the Ghost's accusing stare coldly.

"That's absurd. I haven't practiced medicine in years."

"Because you cannot legally do so," the Ghost cut in. "You don't know what a pin artist is, do you? You don't know that that is the underworld's name for a doctor who indulges in illegal medical practices. You lost your license. You're nothing but a pin artist!"

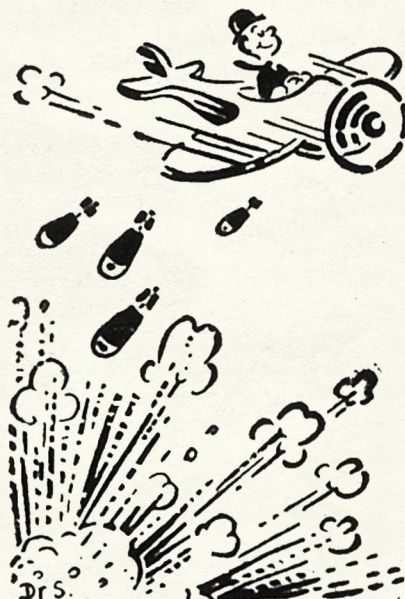
In cold fury, Jefferson Hall lashed out with his riding whip. The quirt struck the Ghost in the face. The Ghost seized the quirt. Hall jerked back and by that very movement bared a long gleaming knife that had been sheathed in the riding whip.

He lunged at the Ghost, but the magician-detective had been waiting for such a move. Faster than it seemed possible for any man to move, the Ghost was across the room, stooping over the back of the sheriff's couch. His hands struck down, came up again, and in one he held the sheriff's gun and in the other his own throwing knife.

He tossed the gun to Sheriff Clasner, was ready with the knife when Hall came at him. His right hand flashed up, and his knife was a silver bird that flew across the room, struck like a falcon for the flesh of Hall's right shoulder.

Hall stopped in his tracks. His handsome face was contorted with pain. The

[Turn page]



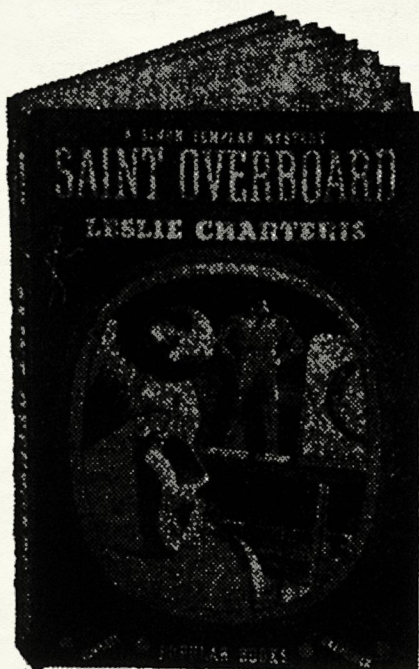
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sheriff, gun in hand, came up behind him.

"Drop that sticker, Jeff. Drop it!"

Hall dropped his knife, like a man in a dream.

"A handy little gadget—that whip knife of yours," the Ghost said. "I've heard of such things. And I distinctly remember the red welt across Burkey's face. Strike a man with a whip and your victim grasps at the whip. You jerk back, bare the blade, and you're all set to kill.

"As for Leyton's bony hand—Mr. Chance knows how that was accomplished, no doubt. The hand isn't bone and it isn't Leyton's. There's a bar magnet under the pointer finger which caused the hand to point to Hall because of Hall's concealed weapon—the steel knife in the whip. This necessitated my parking my own weapon some distance away.

"As for the levitation, Mr. Chance will tell you that a black silk thread is responsible for more magic than mirrors."

Glenn Saunders smiled.

The Green Ghost backed out the door.

"Good night, gentlemen. An unpleasant trial to you, Mr. Hall."



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MYSTERY-SCOPES

(Continued from Page 10)

ruins of some city with walls and pillars sticking out of the mud, some several hundred miles northeast of Colombia.

Had George Snyder's body been buried in the mud of lost Atlantis? His nephew believes the fortune-teller's prophecy was fulfilled.

THE GHOST THAT WORKS

THERE are few cases reported of ghosts demonstrating physical strength; but the case of Obadian Bickford still persists—and only recently a scientist investigating this case shook his head in bewilderment.

Obadian Bickford, a hard working farmer, died in North Bowdoin, Maine, thirty years ago. One day after a quarrel with his wife, he fixed up a room for himself in the woodshed. He promised his wife that each night before he went to bed, he would saw some wood, then bring it in a wheel-barrow to the kitchen door for his wife to use the following day. His son brought him his meals.

This went on for two years until he was found dead.

One morning, a week after he had been buried, his wife called to her son: "Did you cut some wood last night? There's a wheel-barrow full here at the door."

The son denied cutting it, so the wife thought some neighbor was playing a joke. But for several days the same thing happened. Then the widow and the son decided to stay up and watch.

At twelve o'clock they heard someone sawing wood in the shed. They investigated—but they couldn't believe their eyes. The saw was moving across a log but no one was touching it. Soon the pieces of wood seemed to jump into the wheel-barrow and then the wheel-barrow started its weird journey to the kitchen door. But no one was pushing it.

The next night, neighbors came to watch,

[Turn page]

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and they verified everything the widow had told them. This continued for several weeks, until it stopped its regular nightly occurrence—but at least once a month the loaded wheelbarrow was found at the door.

Finally, Mrs. Bickford sold the farm to John Martin, who still owns it. And to this day, John Martin swears that every night when the moon is full, the ghost of Obadian Bickford returns to saw a wheelbarrow load of kindling and wheel it to the kitchen door.

Hundreds of visitors claim to have observed the phenomenon. No one has ever seen the ghost, but everyone admits seeing the work of some invisible force.

SACRED BURIAL GROUND

ON A small island west of Scotland lived a proud family—the Coluhouns. One of their most cherished possessions was the family burial ground. Every male Coluhoun had been buried there for hundreds of years. If he had died in a distant place, his family had brought back the body for traditional burial. To leave a Coluhoun's body in foreign soil would be a curse upon the clan, so they believed.

They had been a family of soldiers, but although during the first World War six Coluhouns had been killed, every body had been brought back to rest in peace in the family ground.

Then came the second World War. Several Coluhouns enlisted, William being the oldest. But early in 1940, news came to the family that William Coluhoun had been lost at sea somewhere in the North Atlantic where he had escorted some German prisoners to Canada.

This was a blow to the Coluhouns, for they

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knew that William's body could never be found to be buried at home. It worried them. They believed that more tragedy was due them and that their clan had been cursed. They were very unhappy and neighbors sympathized with them.

But one morning a shout went up from the shore. A lad of the village had found a dead body lying on the sand where it had been washed up from the sea. It was an English soldier. And when the authorities examined it—it was the body of William Coluhoun which had floated 1500 miles to the sacred resting place of his ancestors. The family believed that the souls of the dead Coluhouns had guided the body across the ocean aided by the Gulf Stream.

This story has been verified by the British War Department. William Coluhoun was buried with honors: "A strong heart in life and in death."

RIVER REVELATION

THERE is an American story somewhat similar to that of the Sacred Burial Ground.

Back at the turn of the 20th Century, Joe Michero and his brother Tom of New Orleans were fishing in the Mississippi River. Their father, Captain Michero, was watching them. Joe was a good fisherman, but young Tom used to let his line drag in the mud and enjoy fishing out old shoes and boots or other rubbish at the bottom of the river.


Joe chastised Tom for this, but Tom laughed and said that someday he might find a treasure. The father smiled and told Joe to stop picking on his young brother.

Several years passed. Captain Michero sailed on a regular voyage up the Mississippi and his sons, now in the late teens, promised their father they would have a good catch of

[Turn page]

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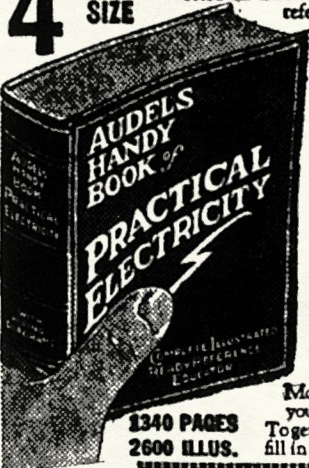
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fish waiting for him when he got back a week later. Their mother was dead.

A week passed but the father didn't return. But the boys felt sure the Captain would be back the next day—so early that morning they went fishing. Tom as usual let his line drag and Joe still condemned him for it. Tom promised he would do it only a few moments and then try and catch his share of fish for the evening meal.

Suddenly Tom's line went taut. It had caught something heavy in the mud. Even Joe was interested and helped the younger boy pull it up.

What they found will never be forgotten. It left its horrible memory for life. Tom's line had caught the dead body of his own father, Captain Michero. The corpse had floated fifty miles from the spot where it had been lost. It had come into the cove where the boys had always fished.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Chakra: Is it true that deaths in Hollywood always run in threes?

—John Nebel.

Dear Mr. Nebel: Hollywood people fear this jinx indeed. Death in threes within 90 days seems to be the regular thing. It happened recently with May Robson, Edna Mae Oliver and Laura Hope Crews dying within that period.

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Earlier in 1942 it was John Barrymore and two producers, J. Walter Ruben and Bernie Hyman.

Dear Chakra: Is it true that West Point graduates always carry lucky charms with them?

—Grace Cannon.

Dear Miss Cannon: There are many such cases. General Eisenhower recently admitted that he always carried a lucky coin. Also his aide Com. Harry C. Butcher, and Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham carry lucky coins. It is quite common among aviation officers.

Dear Chakra: Before my brother sailed for the Solomon Islands, I dreamed that my dead mother appeared to me and said: "Mac will take care of him." What does that mean?

—Helen Rhodes.

Dear Miss Rhodes: The message is based on fact—for MAC stands for the three medicines that protect men in the tropics, namely Mithio-late for protection against bush-sores and wounds. Atabrine for Malaria, and Chenophone for Dysentery.

Dear Chakra: I have been told that Tibetan mystics wear a double ring of two metals. Why is that?

—George Salvan.

Dear Mr. Salvan: Certain types of mystics wear two rings on the same finger—one of gold and one of silver, these two metals supposedly making better psychic contact when the palm is placed on the forehead in meditation.

CHAKRA.

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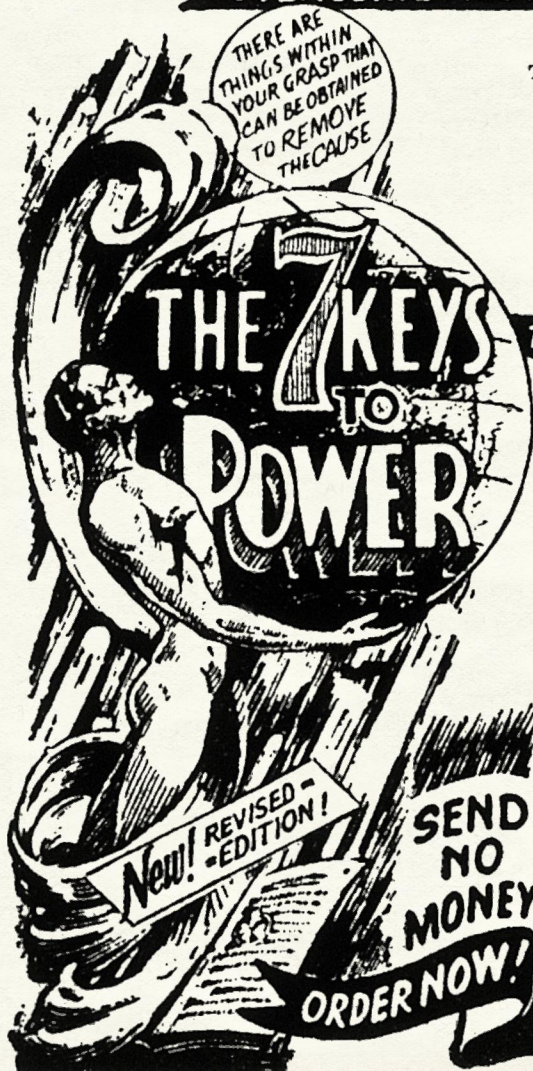
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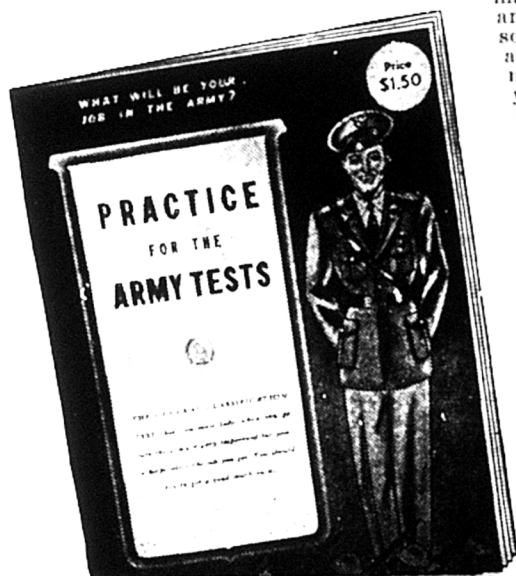
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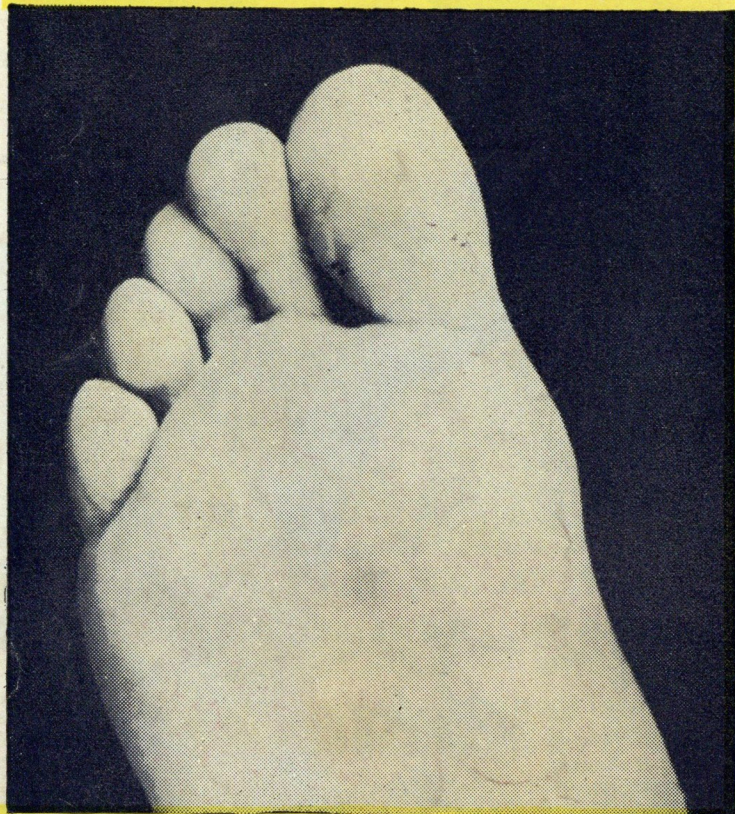
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DISEASE OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD

The cause of the disease is not a germ as so many people think, but a vegetable growth that becomes buried beneath the outer tissues of the skin.

To obtain relief the medicine to be used should first gently dissolve or remove the outer skin and then kill the vegetable growth.

This growth is so hard to kill that a test shows it takes 15 minutes of boiling to destroy it; however, laboratory tests also show that H. F. will kill it upon contact in 15 seconds.

DOUBLE ACTION NEEDED

Recently H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of relieving Athlete's Foot. It both gently dissolves the skin and then kills the vegetable growth upon contact. Both actions are necessary for prompt relief.

H. F. is a liquid that doesn't stain. You just paint the infected parts nightly before going to bed. Often the terrible itching is relieved at once.

H. F. SENT ON FREE TRIAL

PAY NOTHING TILL RELIEVED

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At least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

BEWARE OF IT SPREADING

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

Get relief from this disease as quickly as possible, because it is both contagious and infectious, and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

Sign and mail the coupon, and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money; don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you, we know you will be glad to send us \$1 for the bottle at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.



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Please send me immediately a bottle of H. F. for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better, I will send you \$1. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

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