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There was growing the sound of a violin. "Great Scott!" cried Williams. "What is that?"

Diamond Death

In the Room of the Crucible a Terrible Fate Awaits Professor Wheatland, Maker of Gems

By Madeleine Sharps Buchanan

CHAPTER I
Room of the Crucible

LEUTENANT WILLIAMS, head of the city's murder squad, followed the sedate butler down a softly carpeted hallway, under a fall of magnificent tapestry, and through a steel door into a room he had long wished to see.

A man in a linen smock rose from an easy chair before a table and came forward with outstretched hand. He was a rather heavy man of medium
height, but his keen eyes under bushy brows gave the lie to his dull large featured face.

"Professor Wheatland?" smiled the lieutenant. "I am very much interested to see your workshop, but I'm rather curious to know what you can want with me."

For a moment Wheatland, scientist and society man, looked gravely and appraisingly at the tall lithe figure of the young lieutenant. He was satisfied with what he saw, since it amply lived up to the reputation the officer had built for himself in the past five years, and with a smile he motioned to a chair.

"I sent for you, lieutenant, because I am about to be murdered," he said flatly.

"What?" Williams, gazing with interest about the curious room, brought his gaze back to the professor's face with a start.

Wheatland nodded.

"Yes. It is quite a serious matter. But first of all, I must show you this room. Then you may understand better. Of course you have heard of my ability to manufacture diamonds?"

"Yes," said the lieutenant, looking frankly incredulous. "And I must confess that with the rest of the city, I don't believe you can."

The professor smiled fleetingly.

"Look at this room," he requested. "That door you came in by is positively the only opening it has. No other doors and no windows. Here I work in absolute secrecy. I have to, as my invention would be worth millions to many industries. You realize what it will mean if I make diamonds in this crucible."

He motioned toward a stand near a huge electric furnace. Williams nodded.

"Yeah, if you can make them," he said. "But no man can make a real diamond, professor. Don't try to hand me that."

"I expect that attitude, naturally," said the professor patiently. "But I have already demonstrated to the heads of various jewel industries that I can make diamonds in that furnace. They have seen me do it. The diamond powers are growing frightened. And well they may. But it is not to show you how I make diamonds that I asked you to come here. First of all I wish you to examine to your own satisfaction this room. Convince yourself that there is no way out of it save through the door by which you just entered."

With growing interest, despite his incredulity, Williams rose and walked about the oval room, tapping the white painted walls and pausing to carefully examine the electric furnace.

"The door is locked by a combination only my wife and myself know," went on the professor. "And I have been most careful to let my wife know this combination. Examine the lock if you please."

Williams did so, wondering if what the papers said about the scientist was not true, and if he were not just a bit gone in the head.

"This," said the professor scribbling on a paper and handing it to the astounded officer of the law, "is the combination. Memorize it if you please."

The lieutenant having read the paper, the professor immediately burned it in a small dish on the table.

"In this room to-night, lieutenant," he resumed, "I demonstrate to a few friends, a reporter, and the head of a famous diamond mining company, an expert, that I can mix my ingredients
in this crucible and put the crucible in that furnace and in a short time take from the crucible a handful of genuine diamonds. I am giving a little dinner party first, but it is not with that I am interested. In this room, before this select little group leaves it, after my demonstration, I shall be killed.”

The lieutenant’s disgusted face flushed a little.

“How can you possibly know that?” he demanded.

“I have been told over the telephone and by notes left at my door and discovered in the morning by Jock, the butler. The notes will be of no help to the police, and I have not saved them. They have all been alike, worded the same, and composed of printed words cut from newspapers and stuck on a bit of wrapping paper. There has never been any envelope.”

“I should have liked to see them, however,” said the lieutenant impatiently. “They might have told us more than they told you. We have some rather good men at headquarters.”

“The notes all told me to stop this diamond faking, as they called it, or I would die,” went on the professor, not heeding the lieutenant’s remark. “This morning, after the papers had announced the demonstration that is to take place here to-night, I received the final note, in which I was told that if I tried to interest this diamond expert to-night in my trickery I would not leave this room alive. You have examined the room.”

“Yes,” said the lieutenant briefly.

The professor leaned forward tensely.

“There will be few guests here,” he said very low, his keen eyes on the young officer’s. “I will give you a list of them. The man who has been writ-

ing me these notes is in love with my wife, as well as desirous of possessing himself of my priceless formula for making these gems.”

“But then,” said the lieutenant a bit disgustedly, “you know the man.”

“I do not,” said the professor, leaning back again. “That is just it. I do not. Caresse, my wife, is most tactful. She is a very clever woman. Yet I know that she loves some man and that they are both plotting to get rid of me and to get their hands on the formula.”

“But if you are killed here in a sealed room, and some time afterward one of the men who were present starts to manufacture diamonds, how will he escape discovery?” asked Williams.

“That is exactly what will happen,” said the professor. “You do not properly estimate the brains of my enemy. My wife would never care for a stupid man. I have lost her because I dabbled too much in this room. But who would not, with such a fortune as this at stake? Do you realize what it means to make diamonds?”

“Yeah,” grinned the lieutenant, “but I don’t believe you can do it. No, you’d never get by with that, professor.”

“I sent for you to ask if you or one of the best men you have in your department will come to my dinner to-night,” said the professor coolly. “I am accustomed to laughter, sneers, incredulity. I ask only to prove what I can do. People must believe their eyes. Also, I want the protection of the police. I am to die to-night, lieutenant. And my work is not finished. All that I ask is that the man who kills me never dares use what my brain has discovered. This will not be like a crime out in the crowded world. You have convinced yourself that the only exit from this room is by that door, and
that only myself, my wife and you possess the combination."

"But if your wife has it and loves this man, she can give it to him," said the lieutenant.

"Yes, that is why I told her," chuckled Wheatland. "If she lets him use it to come in or out, he is identified. Jock looks like a meek person, but he is an ex-pugilist and he shoots from the hip. When I am not in here all night Jock is. Until I finance my vast venture we take no chances. I told my wife that combination to trap her, and the man she loves. But she is far too clever to use it. You have not met Caresse."

Surely, thought the lieutenant, the man was a little mad. But for a moment the wild idea occurred to him that possibly the fellow could make a diamond! For weeks the papers had been giving him a lot of publicity and his several demonstrations before all sorts of men had been most successful. But no hard-boiled police lieutenant could swallow that stuff! The chap was a crook, despite his reputation and his social position.

CHAPTER II

The Ghost Violin

"What is it you wish me to do if I attend your dinner tonight, professor?" asked the lieutenant after a moment during which he sat studying the room.

"Nothing," said Wheatland grimly. "Just come and watch and wait. There will be plenty for you to do. After dinner we come in here, all of us, for the demonstration, I lock the door with the combination only you, my wife and I myself know. If Caresse has told this man she loves he will not dare to use it lest he brand himself."

"Give me the list of your guests," said the lieutenant, interested in spite of his incredulity; conscious of a thrill that was not entirely pleasant. Something seemed to warn him that he was standing on the threshold of danger.

Drawing a bit of paper toward him the professor wrote rapidly a list of names and addresses.

"Linda Price, my wife's oldest friend," he told Williams, touching the first name with his pencil tip. "A charming girl. Runs a fashionable tea shop. Not because she has to, but because she must be busy. She and Caresse will be the only women present. It is the men who interest me. You see, without the diamond expert, whom we may except since I have only met him once and Caresse not at all, there are four. I am not eliminating from this list young Frisby, the reporter on the News. Caresse went to school with him, although we do not see much of him. Then there is Philip Farren, my lawyer, Will Clinton, the chemist, and Eddie Harmer, who lives on his money. One of these men, lieutenant, is coming here to-night to put a finish to me, to make it possible for himself to win my wife, and to take the formula. Of this formula there is only one copy. Any one would think that I would naturally have another in a safe deposit box or some place as secure. But, no. If I die, my wife is not to have this formula. No one is. My secret of manufacturing diamonds dies with me. Caresse and her lover will not benefit by the fruits of my brain after they have rendered me powerless."

The lieutenant put the list of guests slowly into his pocket. He seemed undecided about something.

"Do you mean to tell me," he asked, "that your wife is in the plot to murder you?"
The professor's face twisted grimly. "I think that if I am killed, Caresse will know by whom and why," he said deliberately. "I wanted you to know that. Her beauty and charm are quite unusual. There is something magnetic and potent about her personality. You will not believe that she can be capable of deception. But if I am murdered to-night, I have given you the motive. Remember that. That is more than you often get, lieutenant, before a crime has been committed!"

"But what makes you think that your wife is in love or that she is aware of these warning notes?" asked Williams.

"I know my wife," said the professor grimly, "and you do not. And you never will. Don't flatter yourself that you ever will, no matter what comes out of all this. But she cannot fool me."

Lieutenant Williams, who had solved many strange cases, and was accustomed to many weird stories, simply stared at the professor. He could not imagine a man who knew that his end was near, acting as he was acting.

"The formula," went on the professor calmly, "is typed upon a small square of paper. It is secreted in this room. Not even Jock knows where it is. If I am killed, not even Caresse, frantically searching, will find it."

The lieutenant's face showed varying emotions. He did not believe the professor quite sane. And yet, if the man could not make the diamonds in that absurd crucible, he must have a pretty store of the gems somewhere about! And what was his game? Nothing could make young Williams believe that any man could manufacture genuine diamonds.

And this murder stuff—

In any ordinary case he would have given any one who told him such a yarn the laugh long since, but Professor Wheatland was different. If he called on the police for help, he must be given help. He could not afford to forget the coming dinner party and laugh it off, and then have a hurry call come in to headquarters during the evening from the Wheatland mansion. But it was something new to the head of the murder squad to be summoned to the scene of crime before the crime had taken place, and that by the victim himself! No, he would not dare pass this up.

"You have no idea in what manner this criminal will approach you, professor?" he asked as he rose.

"Not the slightest."

"Very well," said the lieutenant with sudden decision. "I will attend your dinner to-night, professor, and study your guests with interest, you may be sure. If anything happens to you, you can be certain too, that we will get the man, no matter how clever he has been. Are you armed?"

"It would be of no use," said Wheatland, with a strange smile. "A gun would do me no good against this danger, I somehow know. But if you advise it, I will carry one."

"I certainly do advise it," said the lieutenant with sharp suspicion. "There is nothing quite so comforting as an automatic in one's pocket."

As he spoke he swung upon the professor with a start, a very unpleasant sensation creeping up his spine. For in the air about them, inside that close cell-like apartment, there was growing the sound of a violin, a magnificent violin, and the thing it played was Chopin's "Funeral March!"

"Great Scott!" cried Williams.

"What is that?"

The professor had grown rather
ghastly. He wiped his damp forehead and tried to smile.

"I didn't want to tell you about that," he said in a shaking voice. "I hear it all the time. It—more than the notes—has me rather rattled. Every now and then that cursed violin plays that depressing thing. You've no idea how it affects one."

"But your wife—she plays?" asked Williams, rather bewildered.

"Not at all. Caressé is not musical. We have no radio and no musical instrument of any sort in the house. This is the ninth or tenth time I have heard the thing. At night it is hideous, when I am down here alone."

The sound of the violin was dying out. Exquisitely played, it was growing fainter, and even as the lieutenant, using the combination he remembered, wrenched open the door, it ceased.

The softly carpeted corridor stretched away in both directions, entirely empty. There were no doors near the professor's workroom.

"You have looked for this violin?" he asked the professor, as he returned to the room.

"Certainly," said Wheatland still mopping his brow. "I have done all that mortal man can to solve its mystery. Of course it is a human agency, and it is not the thought of ghosts which upsets me, lieutenant. It is the thought of my own death with my work unaccomplished, and my wife and her lover triumphing."

CHAPTER III

A Murderer Defied

DINNER at the Wheatlands'. The long table, set in a room which was a triumph of paneling and tapestries, was weighed down with silver, exquisite china and glass. A delicate garden of orchids and ferns ran straight down the middle of it. Candlelight shed a soft glow over the women's gowns, the men's white shirt fronts, the silently moving figures of the two men serving, the pugilistic Jock and another man whom Lieutenant Williams did not know. A breath of flowers drifted in from the gardens through the open French windows.

At the head of the table sat Caressé Wheatland, a girl whom the lieutenant instantly found it difficult to describe. She was a flame, a flash, a vivid dash of exotic color, a lovely flare of something unbelievably exquisite—but definitely dangerous. Auburn-haired and brown-eyed, slim as a rapier, with a delicious curving mouth and a naturally perfect skin, she would dominate any gathering. For behind her arresting beauty was plenty of brains. Williams could see why the professor might fancy her in love with some other man, even plotting with the other man to free herself. She was nothing that could ever be held long by one person—as uncertain as quicksilver.

Had it not been for the music of that weird violin down in the strange room where the professor worked, the blasé young police lieutenant would not have believed any of the professor's story. The man might be a genius, but he seemed a trifle cracked. But he could not forget that violin. If it could be explained by something logical, as of course it could, it at any rate spelled danger for the professor.

Again and again the lieutenant's puzzled eyes came back from a study of the guests, to that exotic young hostess, an emerald-studded cigarette holder between her rouged lips. What material she would make for the press if she ever got herself into a mixup!
And then, naturally, his eyes went to the reporter, Fred Frisby, who sat on Mrs. Wheatland’s right and absorbed a good deal of her attention. Frisby was a sandy-haired young man with a likeable face and a store of good dinner yarns.

Next to Frisby sat Saleworth, the diamond expert, a gray-haired youngish man with a slow voice and a droll wit. The lieutenant did not pay much attention to him. Then came Linda Price, a fair-haired, dimpled young woman, who wore many diamonds and laughed at everything any one said.

Phil Farren, the lawyer, sat beside Linda. He was a type one passes on the street every day, medium height, medium color, medium brains, Williams decided, though he could not be too sure. He must not make a mistake about these people, for if that crazy professor was right, a clever crime was hatching about that magnificent dinner table. Boy, what news it would make! And what a case for his office!

Next to Farren sat the host, and next to him the chemist, Will Clinton. Stout and rather red-faced, and possessed of a jovial laugh, Clinton did not seem the type to make the brilliant successes he had made in his line, which went to show, thought Williams grimly, that one must not be too swift to judge, and certainly not in his work.

He himself sat beside Clinton, and next to him came Eddie Harmer, the idle millionaire. Harmer was young, as young as the lovely hostess, and his wavy dark hair, dark eyes and swarthy skin, coupled with a good figure and perfect grooming, made him very attractive. Caresse seemed to think so, for when she could tear herself from Frisby she turned instantly to Harmer, to the exclusion of the rest of the table which she left to Linda Price and her husband.

If any of those well bred people felt uncomfortable to have a police lieutenant seated at that exclusive board with them, they gave no evidence of it. Perhaps they were accustomed to the eccentricities of the host, although his presence, thought Williams, must cause the man who was contemplating a crime, some uneasiness.

The dinner moved along smoothly enough until the frozen dessert was passed and then, with no warning whatever, the host rose, cleared his throat and stood at the end of the table facing his radiant young wife until silence gradually fell and every one looked at him.

"Before we go down to my workroom," said the professor in a pleasantly clear voice, "I wish to say a few words to the man who has come here to-night to murder me."

Caresse gave a gasp and her face flushed with lovely warm color.

"Archie!" she said sharply. "Don’t be such an utter fool!"

"My dear," Wheatland bowed courteously, "I don’t care to be interrupted if you please. There is a man at this table who has come here this evening to murder me, I repeat. He has sent me notes telling me so for the past weeks. He does not wish me to demonstrate this evening my marvelous ability to make genuine diamonds. He wishes to be able to do that himself, my dear Caresse, after he has stolen my precious formula and married you."

"My dear fellow!" gasped Farren, horrified, while protests arose from about the table.

The lieutenant sat in grim silence, watching the shocked face upon which
the candlelight danced strangely. It was not his job to interfere—yet. His feelings were anything but enviable. He realized that he was in a position no police lieutenant had probably ever been placed in, and he studied the men about that table with keen, anxious eyes. They were on the verge of a great crime, a mysterious crime. He was being told so. To-morrow it might sprawl across the pages of the press. To-night he broke bread with the murderer and knew not who he was! His hands were tied until the crime was committed. It was hideous.

The professor’s face was quite quiet as he looked about the table. His eyes did not linger longer on one face than on another.

And then before he could go on with his ghastly remarks, the faint sound of a violin playing the funeral march drifted in from the hall or the garden—it was hard to say which.

Linda Price screamed thinly and laid her jeweled hand over her mouth.

“What on earth is that?” she gasped. “Archie Wheatland, I don’t think this is funny! Make him stop, Caressa!”

Lieutenant Williams was frowning. His keen eyes never ceased their trip about the table, studying one face after another, but he could not pick up one guilty expression.

The playing of the violin came closer, came apparently to the very door of the handsome dining room and stopped there, its mournful strains filling the silent room.

Then Caressa Wheatland sprang to her feet.

“Archie, if this is more of your trickery, stop it at once!” she cried. “It is horrible! None of us are amused! Stop it, I say!”

Down the length of the flower-decked table the eyes of husband and wife locked.

“My dear,” said the professor slowly, “you know I speak the truth. As for the violin playing—I have not its secret. Somebody explain it, please. The man who has murder in his heart can do so, I know.”

But for a moment, while still the strains of the funeral march magnificently played, possessed the air, no one said a word, and then Frisby gave a strained laugh.

“Professor, this is great stuff for the front page!” he said. “I’ll work this up in my account of the demonstration to-night! Very clever and amusing.”

“I have nothing to do with it,” said Wheatland sternly. “The lieutenant knows I have not. He heard that violin to-day while down in my workroom with me. I can assure you there is no radio in the house or any other contraption which would explain it.”

“I heard it, yes,” said Williams then, quietly. “But I can’t say that the professor had nothing to do with it. I simply could not understand how he could have.”

The music abruptly ceased.

The professor and his young wife were still standing staring antagonistically at each other.

“Archie, you will take back what you said about me,” said the girl then through tight scarlet lips. “As for the idea of some one here wishing to murder you, that is like some of your other crazy notions. I don’t care about that. But the part about me, about some man loving me—that you must deny. And at once.”

“I am sorry,” said the professor bowing ironically, “but it is the truth. I know it and you know it. In an hour or so, all the world will know it.
And I wish to add now that the man who leaves the workroom below stairs after the crime will brand himself as the criminal and my wife’s lover. If he takes the formula, or tries later on to manufacture diamonds, he will brand himself. I have told Lieutenant Williams the entire case, what I know of it. But I do not believe this frightens the man who has determined to end my life. He has a splendid defiance which appeals to Caresse. He is clever and fearless. I believe that is all. Let us go now and have the demonstration."

But the diamond expert was on his feet, protesting with a white face.

"No, professor, if you have any such mad idea in your head, I must refuse to permit you to take the chance," he said. "We will have no demonstration to-night."

"To-night as well as any other time, my dear Saleworth," replied the professor, smiling. "I do not intend to give up trying to prove to the world that I can make diamonds. This is the result of years of labor on my part. I insist upon going on with the matter and at once."

"But you make us all so frightfully uncomfortable," said the lawyer, Farron. "Great Scott, I feel as though I am a criminal myself!"

"And perhaps you are, my dear Farron," smiled the professor grimly. "I do not know. But the lieutenant will find out."

"I'd go home after that, Phil," said Linda Price indignantly. "I wouldn't stay for the silly old demonstration. Let us all go home."

"The man who makes that move will be rather unfortunate," said the professor mildly.

"You are right," spoke Clinton then. "We must stay. I, for one, would not think of leaving. If anything so horrible as an attempt upon the professor's life actually does take place, I want to be present after this speech of his. And that violin stuff rather has me going."

"Quite so," joined in Harmer, who had grown rather white. "Of course we cannot any of us leave now. Buck up, Linda. We’ve all got to see it through."

"This man, one of you, feels quite safe," said the professor looking about the table. "He has carefully thought out this thing. He feels he can defy the police. He is not afraid even though the famous Lieutenant Williams, who has many successes behind him, is seated at the table with him. Come, let us go and get the thing over with."
The professor motioned them to chairs and removed his coat and turned up the sleeves of his dinner shirt, rolling them to his shoulder.

"Saleworth, you are at liberty to watch me mix my ingredients," he nodded to the diamond expert, who was watching him uneasily.

"I again ask you not to try this tonight, professor," said Saleworth earnestly. "You have made me most uncomfortable."

"To-night as well as any other time," said Wheatland, with a twisted smile. "But one more word. The door by which you all came in is the only exit from this room. There are no windows. The door is locked by a combination only myself, my wife and Lieutenant Williams know. Caresse may have told the man who is going to murder me. I do not know. But he will not make use of the knowledge—now."

As he said this the professor turned a devilish grin upon the horrified faces about him. Picking up the crucible he passed it to the lieutenant.

"Every one kindly examine this most carefully," he instructed.

In silence the container was passed from hand to hand.

The professor, in silence, too, carefully watched by Saleworth, mixed the ingredients which he told them would form, in the terrifically hot furnace, a small collection of genuine diamonds. And gathered about the table the little group examined the mixture before it was placed in the crucible.

"I have only one formula," said the professor as he placed the crucible in the furnace. "That is in this room. I do not need any, for the trick is engraved upon my mind, so long I have labored at the thing. This formula is carefully hidden, but I think the mur-

ing to and how would he and his office be able to cope with it? Was the professor right or insane with jealousy? Could he actually make a genuine diamond, or was he a fake? A crook? Williams could not decide.

But as he had several times before this brought out a handful of genuine diamonds from his crucible, and as he would probably bring out some more that night, no matter how he did it, there must be, to the lieutenant's way of thinking, a store of diamonds in the house, in all likelihood, in that queer workroom. Suppose the criminal knew that? Knew the hiding place of the gems? But his plans must have been horribly upset by that dinner table speech of the professor's, by the presence of Lieutenant Williams.

The professor, stepping ahead of the others, unlocked the door with its secret combination. Then, standing to one side, with a courteous gesture he invited them into the room.

Switching on the light by the door, the professor snapped the door shut with a meaning look at the lieutenant. And Williams knew that only the professor, Caresse and himself knew how to get out of that room. And one other, the murderer—if the woman he loved had told him.

In the lieutenant's opinion, the professor well deserved to die, for anything more diabolical than the trap he had set for his lovely wife and her lover he could not imagine. It must have fanned into wild hatred the feeling already smoldering in the killer's heart. And no woman could ever live happily with Wheatland. The lieutenant was inclined to sympathize with Caresse, although he was on the alert to pick up anything that might help him if the prophesied crime really took place.
derer can find it. He thinks he can. It is for this secret he will kill me as much as to win my wife. But now he will have to take great care and skill in using it, else he will be sent to the chair."

"Let us out of this hideous room!" gasped Linda Price. "I cannot stand this any longer. Caresse, poor darling, how do you endure it? The man is mad."

"Perhaps that is why I endure it," said Caresse with a strange smile. "He is mad, Linda. He can no more make a diamond than I can."

The lieutenant believed her. And in watching closely the movements of the professor he had forgotten for the time the impending tragedy. For the life of him he could not discover how he worked the trick. But of course no diamonds were in that crucible at the moment. How the diamonds would get into it was what interested Williams.

CHAPTER V

Eight Diamonds!

"We will have a wait of about a half hour, or a trifle more," announced the professor, turning from the furnace. "Lieutenant, I will be grateful if you will stand beside the light switch. I do not intend to have my demonstration stopped before I show to Mr. Saleworth the diamonds which I shall take from the crucible."

With folded arms Williams took up his stand beside the door where a button controlled the powerful lamp which was set in the snowy ceiling and which lighted the small apartment with a trying white glare. His eyes wandered from face to face. Every one was grave and a bit shocked, easy and just a little disgusted, as was to be expected. But even with all his experience he could not decide what man had murder in his heart or the weapon upon him which would cause the death of the professor. And at that last thought he had an inspiration.

"Professor, since you are so set upon the idea that some one here is going to kill you," he said pleasantly, "suppose I search the gentlemen for a weapon? If you are right and we find one, it may help us vastly later on."

"A good idea," said the professor, looking grimly about the circle. "Does every one agree to this?"

A chorus of vehement voices replied. Apparently every one insisted upon the search. And the lieutenant’s face grew rueful. He was getting the idea that Caresse was right and they dealt with a madman.

"I did not follow your advice, lieutenant," smiled Wheatland. "I have no gun upon me. I thought it unwise to bring one here."

"I will search Caresse and she must search me," said Miss Price in a high indignant voice. "Women can kill as well as men."

The search, however, brought to light no weapon of any sort.

"My dear professor," said the lieutenant, "there is nothing here which can end your life. Not even any poison, nor a hypodermic syringe. I see nothing on your tables that can be used for such a purpose. In what fashion do you expect to be killed by one of your guests?"

"I have no idea," said the professor, looking about the silent circle. "But a man about to die cannot be fooled. The way will be found. I only ask this person to wait until I empty this crucible."
"I shall faint if I do not get out of this dreadful room!" cried Linda Price hysterically.

"Put up with it," advised Clinton gravely. "Archie is just a bit off his head."

"I'll say he is!" flared Eddie Harmer. "I never heard of anything so utterly ridiculous! We all know each other, but what Mr. Saleworth and the lieutenant think of us must be plenty!"

"We have as yet no reason to think anything wrong," said Saleworth gently.

Silence then fell rather sullenly upon the strange little room. The furnace grew hotter and hotter. The professor leaned, with his bare arms folded, against the table edge and stared moodily at the fire.

"Can a fellow smoke, I should like to know?" asked Clinton then with a nervous laugh, producing a cigarette case.

"If you like," nodded the professor.

Silence again. The professor looked frequently at his wrist watch. The tension grew and the group shifted feet uneasily. The thought of the locked door was not so good, if the professor really was mad, as most of them must have believed him to be. But the recollection that Caressé and the police lieutenant knew the combination was comforting. They could at least get out, no matter what happened.

At last, without a word, the professor stepped forward and, with Saleworth watching him closely, took the crucible from the furnace.

"This must cool," he said with a glance about at the excited faces.

It seemed like a nightmare to the lieutenant. A man making genuine diamonds before his eyes! He would never believe that. If the professor took diamonds from that crucible, then he put them there with some sleight of hand no one saw. He was just a clever crook. But what did this murder talk mean, and the sound of that invisible violin?

Saleworth himself opened the crucible when the time came. Eight exquisite diamonds rolled out into his palm.

"I insist that you take these gems and have them examined," said the professor quietly. "To your own satisfaction."

CHAPTER VI

When the Light Went Out

"By Jove, they look like the real thing!" said Saleworth, bending over the stones, puzzled and anxious.

"You can easily prove that," said the professor. "I am most grateful to the murderer for permitting me to convince Mr. Saleworth of the genuineness of my discovery."

As he spoke the great glaring light in the ceiling went out and the small rather horrible room was plunged into darkness. There was a choking gasp from some one and a scream from Linda Price.

Even as Lieutenant Williams put out his hand to the switch the sound of that weird violin playing the funeral march seemed to fill the room. It was dreadful beyond words, that instant of darkness, with the wailing violin notes close to them all, exactly as though one of them was playing!

When the light came again the violin ceased, and the lieutenant stood looking down grimly at the body of the professor, on the floor at their feet, a red stain widening on his white shirt front!
The criminal had chosen the only moment when such a thing could possibly happen, that brief space of time when every one was held entranced by the glittering stones Saleworth had taken from the crucible. Even the lieutenant, scoff as he did, convinced as he was of the professor's expert trickery, had for an instant been intent upon the gems. And in that instant the murderer had struck.

But that hideous violin!

"He is dead," said Clinton, who was kneeling by the professor. "Great Heaven! He told the truth! One of us has killed him."

"What with?" asked the lieutenant, stooping to the body. "I carefully went over this room and every one of you. What is this?"

From the breast of the professor he drew a short gleaming dagger, its handle set with precious stones.

Linda Price screamed again and put her hand to her wealth of blond hair.

"Oh—oh, it is mine!" she cried. "I wore it in my hair. I have two of them. I always wear one in the evening. They were my mother's. Oh—oh, do you think I killed him?"

"For crying out loud!" said the lieutenant, staring in disgust at the pretty blonde. "How the heck did I miss that thing in your hair when I searched everybody? I should have seen that if I had had any eyes!"

"You would not," said Caresse then quietly. "Not the way Linda wears it. She puts it deep in her hair with just the handle showing."

Williams turned to look at her then. She knew who had stabbed her husband. There was no doubt of that. But she also knew that the man, if she loved him, was lost to her forever.

"Did you hear that cursed violin?" demanded Harmer nervously. "My gosh, we are in for it now! Is that door locked?"

"Yes, it has not been unlocked," said the lieutenant steadily. "No one could unlock it save Mrs. Wheatland and myself. Could they, Mrs. Wheatland?"

"I did not tell the murderer the combination, if that is what you mean," said Caresse Wheatland then, meeting Williams's eyes boldly.

The professor's words came back to him: "Don't flatter yourself that you ever will know Caresse, no matter what comes out of all this."

The cleverness of the criminal and the daring of him, of one of those men shut in that little room with him, amazed Lieutenant Williams. To use the jeweled dagger in Linda Price's hair! And Linda always wore one. That was something to go upon. The man who had done that knew that Linda wore a weapon in her hair, hair that had never been bobbed or thinned out. During the search he must have laughed! But Caresse Wheatland, in searching her friend, knew of the dagger. Knew it would cause death if need be. And she had not mentioned it. Yet would she not have saved her lover from this position if she could? She would never dare marry him now. Nor would they dare to use the formula if there was one, which Williams doubted. The professor had, of course, never manufactured those diamonds.

But what had been his game? At any rate, he had been sane enough about getting himself murdered.

"Can you imagine whatever caused that violin playing?" asked Frisby, touching the lieutenant's arm, his face rather haggard, but pencil and paper in his hand, for Frisby was a natural reporter.
"I cannot," snapped Williams.

"This is damn serious," said Farren, the lawyer. "One of us stabbed the professor, you know. No need to look outside in the hall. Locked in here, one of us put out that light and killed him, just as the poor old boy said we would."

"Undoubtedly," said the lieutenant, who was still examining the body. "It narrows the circle."

"It stamps me forever," said Caresse, then in a still cold voice: "All my life all of you will believe that what my husband said at the dinner table was true. That one of you men present is my lover. That together we connived to kill Archie."

"Oh, how could they think that?" cried Linda Price, putting her arm about her friend and still mopping her eyes. "Caresse, no one who knew you, darling—"

"Nonsense!" said Caresse clearly. "Look at Fred Frisby. He is already writing it up for his hideous old paper."

"Miss Price," said Williams, rising with the dagger in his hand and carefully wrapping it in his handkerchief before placing it in his pocket, "did you not feel some one jerk this from your head?"

"Yes," said the girl, with big frightened eyes on the lieutenant, "I did. It pulled my hair. That was when I screamed."

"I guess we were all pretty well keyed up," said Clinton, walking up and down the small room.

"This certainly lets us in for a bad time," growled Harmer again.

Without speaking, the lieutenant walked to the desk which stood in a corner. From it he took a sheet of clean white paper, a blotter, and a bottle of printers' ink.

"I should like to take your fingerprints, if you please," he said, looking about the silent circle. "I don't for a moment think our clever criminal was fool enough to leave his prints on Miss Price's jeweled pin, but just the same I must take them. One at a time, please. Mrs. Wheatland, you first."

There was not a single protestation as the professor's wife and his guests filed past the desk and submitted to having their finger tips inked.

"Now we'll do all we can to clear up this matter while we are locked in here together," said the lieutenant, taking charge of the paper after setting a name under each print. "I feel sure you all wish me to do that. Only one of you stabbed the professor. The others must be keen to establish their innocence. It is the devil of a position for you all."

"You do not say only one of us is guilty," breathed Caresse, looking steadily into the lieutenant's eyes.

"You, like the rest of the group here present, think I am an accomplice. You believe Archie. And to-morrow the rest of the world will believe it."

"Yes," said Williams, meeting those glorious eyes calmly, "I am afraid you will have to be prepared for that, Mrs. Wheatland."

"What rot!" cried Harmer, starting up angrily. "The professor was bughouse. You saw him do his diamond stunt. Ridiculous! Clinton, who is an expert chemist, says he was a fake. To-morrow night he was going to bring an alienist to examine Archie. Weren't you, Will?"

Clinton flushed slightly.

"Yes, I was," he admitted. "Frankly, I thought him not all there. He had changed in the past two years."

Harmer's bold championing of Mrs. Wheatland aroused the lieutenant's in-
terest. Would the guilty man step forth like that? Or was it a play, the play of a person relying upon the lieutenant's common sense to tell him that no guilty man would do that?

"This thing is a bit beyond me, I'm afraid!" worried young Williams.

Saleworth, who had been pale and agitated since the crime, stepped to the side of Williams and held out his left hand.

"I say, what shall I do with these cursed diamonds?" he asked wretchedly. "I should like to have them thoroughly examined. But if Mrs. Wheatland—"

"Oh, by all means!" shrugged Caresse. "Do what you wish with them. You will find them genuine. My husband had a cache of diamonds about here, I feel sure. Perhaps I shall be lucky enough to find it."

The lieutenant took half the stones into his fingers.

"I'll give Mrs. Wheatland a receipt for these and you can do the same, Saleworth," he said. "I, too, should like to give these to experts."

"I am an expert," said Saleworth a trifle stiffly. "And I pronounce them fine stones of the first water. However, the thing was too much of a menace to be lightly treated. Five experts wait to examine the stones I was to bring them after to-night's demonstration."

Mrs. Wheatland watched the men write their receipts with sullen, brilliant eyes. She shrugged them aside when they handed them to her and Williams laid them upon the desk top. He could so easily understand the terrible position in which the girl stood, whether she was guilty or not. With the death of the man at her feet, the door to her happiness was slammed in her face. Even if she had had nothing to do with the crime and loved one of the men present, marriage with that man would not be possible.

CHAPTER VII

"I Play a Violin"

HAVING laid the receipts for the diamonds upon the desk, the lieutenant walked again to the body of the professor and stood before it for a silent moment. He was trying to see Wheatland and the entire room the moment before that light went out.

Saleworth had been bending over the diamonds which he had just taken from the cooled crucible. The professor had been beside him, and as far as Williams could recall, every one else grouped curiously about.

"I say, don't you think we should take into consideration the playing of that unearthly violin?" asked Frisby. "That will make great headlines! And there are servants in the house, you know. Jock, in particular, was devoted to Archie."

"But the man who stabbed him was locked here in this room with us and he took the jeweled pin from Miss Price's hair to commit the crime," snapped the lieutenant. "Don't forget that. The violin player, no matter how involved, or how he worked the trick, was not in this room."

"Yes," said Farren. "One of us is guilty."

"What good would it do one of us to kill the professor?" asked Clinton. "Even if his wild speech at the dinner table were true, none of us would dare marry Caresse now."

"Perhaps the guilty man has the formula," said Saleworth looking about.

"The formula, my aunt!" sneered Harmer. "There ain't no such animal. Old Arch was stringing us and the
public about these gems, Mother Nature made them all right."

"You can easily have the stones traced," said the lieutenant to the diamond expert. "They are large and pure enough."

"Oh, quite," bowed Saleworth.

"But suppose he did make them and nobody ever finds the formula for poor dear Carese!" sobbed Linda Price. "How dreadful! If Arch was on the square, the result of years of labor will just be wiped out by the murderer—by one of you men. Nobody ever does believe in anything that has never been done before."

"Be quiet, Linda," said Carese sharply. "The whole thing was a trap set for me, cannot you see? Archie's wild jealousy is at the back of it all."

For a moment the lieutenant was inclined to believe her. Forgetting the body at his feet he was almost swayed by the girl's compelling charm. And then again he heard the professor's grim voice: "If I am killed Carese will know by whom and why." And the professor had certainly been killed. That alone was the lieutenant's job. He now had a murder on his hands and he could swing into his stride.

"All of you try to take up the positions now that you held when that light went out," he said briskly. "Remember as best you can. Snap into it. We've got to get somewhere in this case to-night before I open that door."

As every one moved rather uncertainly to obey, Will Clinton, the chemist, spoke hesitatingly.

"I fancy I had better tell you now, lieutenant, before you find out for yourself," he said. "I had a grievance against the professor. Some months ago he promised to let me into this secret of the diamond making. I was frankly incredulous and he promised to take me in as a partner. He has never done so and each time he put me off. He owed me money, several thousand, and that is why he promised to do this. I said that if he convinced me that he could actually manufacture diamonds we would cancel the debt."

"I see," said the lieutenant slowly. "All right. Thank you for your frankness, Mr. Clinton. If any one can think of anything else. That sort of thing saves me probably a good bit of work."

Harmer gave a sudden, short laugh, not a pleasant laugh. His eyes met those of Carese fleetingly.

"I suppose I may as well confess that I own a violin, and that I can also play it," he said. "But I've never played the funeral march. Jazz is more in my line."

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CHAPTER VIII

Too Many Combinations

FOR a moment the lieutenant looked about the small circle with a frown. He knew just what he was up against. As soon as that door was unlocked and these people released all sorts of things might happen. Never again would he have them completely in his power as he had them now, with the body of the murdered man at their feet. The murderer was there where he could handcuff him with no effort whatever and yet he had no idea which of the professor's guests he was. Or she. Could Carese, that flame of a girl with the smoldering eyes, have taken the dagger-like pin from her chum's hair and stabbed her husband? It was possible. A woman's youth and loveliness did not bar her from being a criminal, Lieutenant Williams knew well.

Yet somehow he was inclined to think this a man's job. It had taken-
strength to plunge that dagger into the professor’s heart, strength and accuracy in the dark.

"Is this the best you can do?” he asked, looking about at the little group.

"Are you all perfectly sure you were in these positions when that light went out?"

They assured him eagerly that they were, to the best of their recollection.

"Then Mr. Farren was closest to the light switch,” said the lieutenant thoughtfully.

"It seems that I was,” said the lawyer grimly.

"You saw no one brush past you?” asked Williams. “They would have to, you know, to reach that switch.”

"I was not conscious of anything like that,” said Farren firmly. "I was anxious to see what Saleworth would get from that crucible.”

"So were we all,” said Clinton with a short, uncomfortable laugh. “But you see, lieutenant, this room is so small, almost any of us, grouped as we were, could have reached out for that switch. Miss Price could have, or myself, or Farren, or Frisby. Speaking for myself, I can swear I would never have noticed. I was so dead anxious to see what Saleworth found when he opened the crucible.”

"Yes,” said the lieutenant grimly, “the moment was chosen well. Yet one of you put out that light and stabbed Professor Wheatland. I say to that person now that it is only a matter of time before I expose him, before I arrest him. I shall never stop until I solve this mystery. It is going to be a big case, as you all must realize. I cannot afford to be called in as the professor called me, and asked for aid, and then be present during the actual murder and fall down on the case. One man here in this little room is doomed.

He need not think for one moment that he can get away with this.”

Eddie Harmer was rolling himself a cigarette. He had done so frequently during the evening, Williams had noted. His long, slim fingers were entirely steady, and his eyes met the lieutenant’s gravely.

"This is as serious for us as it is for you, lieutenant,” he said. "If you do fall down on it, we shall all be under a cloud the rest of our lives.”

"And even though the professor’s dinner speech would seem to let me out,” put in Saleworth, “I cannot be considered innocent. I was in here with all of you, locked into this small space. I must accept the same position the rest of you are in.”

"Will you let us out now?” gasped Linda Price, looking appealing at the lieutenant. “I cannot stand it in here another moment.”

She looked on the edge of fainting and Williams fancied he saw raw panic in her eyes. But why? The girl was nothing but a guest. The best friend of Caresse Wheatland. Even so, why should she be so frightened? The lieutenant watched her shaking fingers rearranging her hair.

"I’d like to say one thing,” said Frisby then briskly, putting away his notebook in which he had been busily writing. “That is, that in my opinion, there is no formula and no process to this diamond making. The professor is simply—was, I should say—a slick magician. He put it over on everybody for some reason of his own. He smuggled those gems into that crucible each time, somehow. He must have. And so all that stuff about the criminal wanting to kill him for the formula and the chance to make diamonds himself, is nonsense. The criminal probably killed him for some private griev-
ance and possibly, for a chance to win Caresse. The professor had plenty of enemies. But there is nothing but a trick to this diamond stuff. However, it is going to be written up by me as 'The Diamond Death' and it'll go big you can bet, in the morning editions."

"Has the professor ever been abroad, Mrs. Wheatland?" asked the lieutenant, coming out of deep thought and paying no attention to the reporter.

"No."

"I see what you are getting at," nodded Saleworth brightly. "The diamonds. If it was trickery, he must have had a lot of them here close by, probably in this room."

Williams did not reply. He continued to study the faces in the group and his manner made them all exceedingly uncomfortable. Linda Price shrunk into a corner with her hands over her eyes and Caresse put an arm about her.

"I think there is too much smoking in this room, gentlemen," said the lieutenant suddenly, picking up a small dish from the desk top. "Just place your cigars and cigarettes in this, if you please."

Without demur the surprised gentlemen dropped their cigars and cigarettes in the receptacle, handed them by the lieutenant. And before them all Williams picked up in his slender wiry fingers the cigarette Eddie Harmer had just rolled and lighted. Unrolling it he shook the tobacco from it and held it close to his eyes for a tense moment.

Lifting his head he shot Harmer a glance which would have made any other man cringe under the circumstances, but which slid off young Harmer like water from a duck's back, leaving him indifferently amused and rather brazen.

"Hamer, there is upon the inside of this cigarette paper the combination to the lock of this door," he said sharply. "Explain that, if you please."

"Easy," shrugged Harmer. "The moment the professor died, while you were examining him Caresse whispered it to me. She said she felt sure she would not have another chance. I wrote it down on one of my cigarette papers because I saw the fix we were in and I figured on a search and all sorts of stunts before we got out of here. My memory is about an inch long and I felt sure during all the stuff we were in for, I'd get that darn combination mixed up."

An ominous silence settled upon the room. In the lieutenant's ears the professor's voice seemed to be speaking. Had Caresse, after all, branded the man she loved, the guilty man?

"And why did Mrs. Wheatland give you the combination of the door?" asked Williams quietly.

"She thinks there is a cache of diamonds in this room and she wanted me to try to find it," said Harmer frankly. "She was afraid she would not get a chance to tell me again nor a chance to look herself after this. I know she has stolen in here whenever she could to examine the place."

"You apparently miss the fact that in giving you this combination, it might look as though Mrs. Wheatland thought you the guilty man and was trying to assist you to get out of the room," said Williams dryly.

"Nonsense!" snapped Clinton, his face very red. "Caresse whispered that door combination to me the moment we entered this room, before Arch started his demonstration!"

"I was a bit ahead of you both," put in Farren grimly. "As we came along the hall Caresse told it to me and said she felt sure there were diamonds
hidden here. She wanted me to look for them, not only to give them to her but to stop her husband from getting himself caught up by the law and openly disgracing them both.

"Just as the professor put that crucible in the fire Caresse told me the combination of the lock," said Frisby then, with a little chuckle. "She said she'd explain later. Since I have a mind like a card index, got to have in my game, I didn't have to do anything as elaborate as Harmer and write it on a cigarette paper."

Across the smoke-filled little apartment Lieutenant Williams met the brilliant eyes of Caresse. Leaning against the wall with folded arms and the jeweled cigarette holder dangling in one hand, she looked back at him with mockery that was like a glove flung in his face. If she knew the man, she had done a clever thing to protect him and yet give him information. It had been just possible that Williams would not have found that out. And one of them might have had the luck or the brains to discover that hiding place of the gems, if there was one!

"By Jove!" said Saleworth rather blankly. "No one told me about the lock."

"And why, Mrs. Wheatland, did you tell Clinton, Farren and Frisby the combination, before the crime took place?" asked Williams crisply.

"Archie was so sure he was going to be killed, that I thought he probably would be," replied that amazing girl coolly.

"But these men, one of them, might have taken the diamonds," reminded the lieutenant.

"No," said Caresse, her head flung high. "They are honest. I could trust them all."

"Yet one of them stabbed your husband," said Williams dryly.

Caresse merely shrugged and made no reply.

"Very well," said the lieutenant then, looking about. "I shall alter the combination of that lock. No one but myself will be able to enter this room after the professor's body is removed. If there is a cache of unset diamonds here used by Professor Wheatland in his manufacturing stunt, we shall find it. I am laying my cards frankly on the table now. We cannot stay in here all night. It is getting on our nerves now. Every one of you will be under police surveillance from this time onward. You will remain here until my men arrive and then you will be at liberty to return to your homes. I understand that you have nothing more to tell me? None of you can recall any little thing that will assist me?"

Utter silence answered him, and after a moment or so the lieutenant turned quietly to the telephone upon the desk, lifted the receiver and called into the transmitter: "Police headquarters!"

And across the two sharp words there shivered an ear-piercing scream as Linda Price fell in a dead faint to the floor before Farren who stood beside her, could catch her.

TO BE CONCLUDED
ON your toes, Don. Five-four in games, remember. If I take this one it 'll give me the set."

Inspector Frayne walked to the service line.

"Better give me all you've got, chief," came back Haggerty. "I've just been kidding you along."

The famous manhunter's answer was a nod and a smile and a ball that Haggerty was barely able to lob over the net. Frayne killed it, and Haggerty grinned.

"Still kidding you, sir," he said.

Frayne laughed, this time. He rarely laughed. He enjoyed these games with Don, though. Although Don was younger and had been a tennis crack in college, the two were fairly evenly matched. It was the only outdoor sport in which the police official indulged, and he drove to this upper West Side club whenever he could find the leisure. There was no better physical exercise on the market, in his opinion, and he had to keep himself in trim.

Frayne, after a beautiful volley, took the next point. And took the following one after a still harder tussle. He didn't get a chance, however, to put over his next serve.

A club attendant came rushing up excitedly. All club attendants had strict orders to interrupt any game at
any presumably crucial moment, if necessary, if an official call came over the wire.

"Mr. Haggerty, sir," the man was literally bellowing, apparently enjoying the importance of the layman at being mixed up in police business. "From headquarters. Lieutenant Geogan. Very important. He's on the wire, sir."

Frayne dropped his arm, nodded just once, and Haggerty took a hurdle over the net and raced for the clubhouse.

Haggerty was Frayne’s right hand man; his protégé; his buffer. It was Don’s task, before anything else, to see that his superior was not troubled with any murder problems that might have been dissected by any average detective. No one was allowed to communicate with the famous manhunter directly; they had first to give their stuff to his assistant.

Frayne had been forced to lay down this law. Otherwise he would have been swamped with all the unimportant and easily untangled cases that are bound to occur in the five boroughs that comprise the miracle city of the world, New York.

Frayne was twirling his racket, impatiently. Lieutenant Geogan wouldn’t have called unless the affair had been a vital and baffling one. Geogan was one of the shrewdest men on the New York force.

But Haggerty was back, now. He was running his fingers through his reddish hair, as he invariably did when he thought a mystery was on deck.

"Baa-Baa Jackson, chief," he said, his keen face alive with enthusiasm. "Paid the so-called wages of sin at last. Found in her bed this morning. Cold murder. Beaten up first, then stabbed. A kitchen knife from her own apartment. She—"

"Why not?" Frayne cut in with a frown. "She must be—yes, she must be thirty-eight. She had a long run. Couldn’t Geogan put his Broadway crew on the job?"

"Wait, chief, wait a minute, please," replied Haggerty. "The maid let herself into the apartment with her key at nine o’clock this morning, as she always did. Baa-Baa sort of half woke up and said she didn’t want to be disturbed until eleven. The maid got busy on the job of cleaning up the place. In something less than half an hour, as near as she can figure, the doorbell rang. It was Vince Lamont. He insisted on waking Baa-Baa. They found her dead—beaten up and stabbed. Geogan swears that the colored maid is O. K. Good rep, and she also stood up under questioning. She says she can’t be wrong; that Baa-Baa spoke to her when she came in at nine. The bedroom window was latched. Besides, the maid didn’t hear a sound.

"Chief," Haggerty finished, "it looks nice!"

Frayne, fingering his well trimmed mustache with the thumb and index finger of his right hand, was smiling a trifle skeptically. His voice also had the same tone.

"Another of these miracle murders, eh?"

Haggerty didn’t answer this one. Haggerty wasn’t supposed to answer it. Haggerty knew just when, and when not, to speak, which was one more reason why he was a valuable asset to the great manhunter.

Frayne’s eyes, of that cold blue of a particularly cold winter sky, had gone to triangular slits. They always did, when he was musing on murder.

Murder, it so happened, was his hobby. It was more than his hobby. It was food and drink to him.
It was what made his blood keep on pumping and his brain keep on throbbing. It was his life.

"Lamont?" he suddenly asked.

"Alibi looks on the square, Geogan says. Vince says he left Baa-Baa's apartment at about four in the morning, after one of their merry rows. He stopped in an apartment on the ground floor, where a party was going on, and had a few drinks. Seven or eight witnesses to that. Coming back to make it up with Baa-Baa when the maid answered his ring, he says."

Frayne nodded and tucked his racket under his arm, starting briskly for the clubhouse.

"Let's go, Don."

Four minutes and fifty seconds later, after having shed tennis flannels and taken a shower and changed into street garb, they were roaring through traffic in Frayne's private roadster, that had the fastest engine made in America under its hood.

II

BAA-BAA JACKSON?

You should ask, as the phrase has it.

Back in the days when Italian table d'hôte dinners, including wine, were fifty-five cents; back when drinks were two for a quarter and name your brand; back before the self-starters could always be counted on to do their stuff; back before the affair at Sarajevo that is said to have precipitated the War To End Wars—back in nineteen hundred and twelve, to be explicit—a little girl had come out of the South.

The newspapers had said she came out of the south anyway—and so did she—although two or three catty souls averred that she had been born and reared and raised up in Herkimer County. They said, furthermore, that Ike Schubel, the New York musical comedy man, had found her in the station of this same up-State town. She had, they added, been serving coffee, and pie, and sandwiches from under circular glass cases, in the station restaurant.

Maybe yes; maybe no. Mr. Schubel, at least, had seen her innate possibilities. She had had a more than fair figure; she had had a voice with exactly the correct touch of throatiness; she had had, also, very large black eyes and very natural light golden hair. And that, in itself, as Mr. Schubel stated, is always something to telegraph home about.

Briefly, he hadn't done any telegraphing. He had signed her on the spot for his next production, and he had taken his two bags from the waiting train. He had caught the next train for Tammany Town, with Baa-Baa in tow.

So the story goes, when it is told by those two or three catty people.

Her first appearance, which nobody noticed, it must be admitted, was when she went through the motions with the rest of the chorus in "Little Fleecy Lamb."

Just how long she would have kept on kicking up her legs, in company with twenty-three others, can never be definitely ascertained.

Appendicitis was quite fashionable that season, and the second female lead came down with it. She could afford to, having recently annexed what is now known as a big butter and egg man to attend to the tedious task of seeing the landlord on the first of the month.

This little lady had been singing a song that Ike Schubel had thought would be a wow. So had the lyric man and every one else. Only it hadn’t been.
That was why they hadn't been so grieved at the outbreak of appendicitis. They could chuck the number, now, and let it go at that. One salary saved.

But the girl with the golden locks and dark orbs had pleaded to be given a tryout. Just once.

"It costs nothing," was how Mr. Schubel had argued down the opposition. "Let her she should try it once."

That is the true history of how "I Want to Be Somebody's Baa-Baa Lamb" came to be the greatest song hit of the period.

No one can dope it out, for many have tried and all have failed, yet it happens to be a fact that certain personalities have been able to put over certain things that other equally colorful personalities have flopped on completely.

Baa-Baa Jackson, from that night, was made.

She didn't have to have appendicitis to break her contract with Ike Schubel; she merely told him to go to hell.

She had quit "Little Fleecy Lamb" for the protection of a great big wolf—one of the Wall Street variety. He had given her very pleasant pastures in which to gambol, including an imported car with a liveried driver and some rather lavish articles of jewelry. She seemed to have had a proper eye for precious stones from the start, too.

Baa-Baa, in short, had gone from one gilded cage to another, for the lady tired easily and seemed to find no difficulty whatsoever in discovering playmates who were not precisely poverty stricken. That is to say, during those first five or six years while the so-called bloom of youth still lasted.

But she didn't seem to mind her descent in the social grade, so to speak. There were still plenty of suckers, even if they didn't spend quite so lavishly. She wanted, as the years rolled on, a good time more than anything else. So, at least, she said. Apparently she was having one, according to her standards.

She was still known, at the present period, in every night club in town, and when her escort happened to be a particularly generous one the host always asked Baa-Baa to get up and do her stuff. Sing her once famous "I Want to Be Somebody's Baa-Baa Lamb," in other words. She could always get a kick out of that. She had been getting a kick, recently, out of Vince Lamont.

He had not in any form or fashion, by any remote possibility, been another of her "protectors." Not Vince. In fact, he rather wasn't averse to having ladies take him under their wing. The minute you gave a dame even a lousy nickel, was his ironclad axiom, right from then you lost all her respect.

Vince was another lily of the field who neither toiled nor did he spin. Not in legitimate pursuits, anyway. He was a race track tout; a fixer for a few big gamblers; a go-between in an occasional important bootleg deal.

His interest in Baa-Baa, rumor had it, was because business had been a bit slack, and because Miss Jackson had been in funds. A wealthy South American coffee planter, Broadway gossip ran, had presented her with a perfectly good check for ten grand, not a month previously, when he had sadly taken the boat back to his tropical shores after having enjoyed a hectic few weeks of her hospitality.

III

INSPECTOR FRAYNE was reminding himself of this gossip, anyway, as his car zoomed along down town. Inspector Frayne, incidentally, knew more about New York and the
various characters in it than any man living. He had been born there. He loved the place as if it were his own flesh and blood. He found it highly profitable, also, to know as much as he could of what was going on in the miracle city of the world.

Don brought the car to a halt before an old apartment on West Fifty-Seventh Street. It had been a grand apartment in its day, perhaps, but its day had been in the ’80’s and ’90’s. A five story affair, with only two flats on a floor. Big rooms but dark rooms, running the length of the building and known as the railroad type, with only the front and rear getting any light to speak of. There was no elevator, no hallway attendant. A seedy place for seedy people.

There was a little knot of loiterers before the steps, as well as an officer in uniform. The latter cleared the steps with a sweep of his night stick, as Frayne descended, and stood rigidly at salute:

“Morning, sir.”

“Morning, Harrigan,” said Frayne pleasantly, leaving the cop flushing with pleasure at having his name remembered.

Upstairs, in the apartment, the man-hunter found Lieutenant Geogan and one of his plain-clothes squad, Davis.

“Anything new since the phone call, Geogan?” he asked.

“No, sir.”

“Uh huh.”

Frayne, nodding, glanced about. The hallway was a wide one, with the entrance door about in the center. A kitchen and dining room were toward the rear, with a bath next, almost opposite the door. Then came two bedrooms, with the living room up in front of them, facing the street.

“Where is she?” asked Frayne.

Geogan pointed to the first bedroom. Frayne went in. A pathetic death chamber, seeing that Baa-Baa had previously had some exceedingly nice boudoirs in other and more genteel parts of the city. There was too much gilt in this one. Too many laces; too many beribboned pillows; too many startling colors.

She lay on the bed, in scant negligee, with a big red bruise on her left jaw and a big dark red patch on her left side with a kitchen knife sticking in the center of it.

“Denham been here yet?”

Denham was the finger-print expert. “No, sir. We waited for you,” said Geogan. “You’ve asked us to always—”

“Thanks,” said Frayne, and added: “Get Denham, Don.”

Don was at the telephone before Frayne could speak again.

“Maid and Lamont up ahead?”

“Yes, sir. In the living room.”

The manhunter walked up forward, to a room quite as garish as the one in which Baa-Baa had met her death.

Vince Lamont and the colored maid, with an officer in charge, were there. The tout was sitting in a rocker by the window, comfortably stretched out, smoking a cigarette. He didn’t rise, but raised inquiring eyebrows. The maid—a “high yaller” type—was walking the floor and moaning.

“Come out of it,” snapped Frayne. “Y-yesuh,” she said, and changed her moaning to a sob.

“What’s your name?”

“B-Bethenia, suh. Bethenia Gibbons.”

“All right, Bethenia. The sooner you get hold of yourself the sooner you can go—back home, or behind bars, one of the two. Let’s get to work and get your story.”
"Behin' bars, suh. Oh, Lawdy, suh, you ain't meanin' that for me, is you?" Frayne didn't look at her as he spoke. He looked at Vince Lamont, as if silently asking his opinion.

Lamont shrugged. It was an expressive shrug. It said that the maid had, after all, been found in the apartment with her dead mistress.

Frayne nodded, as if in understanding, and then spoke with gentle patience.

"Come now, tell me what happened, Bethenia."

Bethenia Gibbons did try to pull herself together. She somewhat succeeded. Her lower lip quivered and she shook her head.

"I done tol' it so many times to them other police gen'lemen, suh."

"Just try once more," said Frayne.

"Well, suh, I opened the door with my key at nine o'clock. I always tip-toes to Miss Baa-Baa's bedroom to see if she's awake or not, to see if she wants her breakfast or what order has she got. I ain't only come in the door this mornin', though, when she asks out in a sleepy an' yawnin' kin' o' voice—you know, suh—if it's me. I says yes, an' then she says go ahead an' clean up the front room an' not wake her till about eleven o'clock."

Frayne frowned. He had seen, when he had looked at the dead body of Baa-Baa Jackson, that rigor mortis had already set in. How could this have occurred had Baa-Baa not been killed until after nine o'clock?

Was the maid lying?

"Did you kill her?" Frayne suddenly snapped. "What was your motive?"

"I didn't kill her," the girl said sullenly. "I usta keep a-tellin' her she would be killed, though, if she didn't start leadin' a more clean an' decent life."

"Mmmm," said Frayne. "So you used to tell your mistress that you didn't apprové of her mode of living, eh? How did she take that?"

Bethenia flushed, hung her head, stubbornly remained silent.

"Speak up—speak up," snapped Frayne.

The girl did.

"She—well, she give me notice to leave the end o' the week, if you wanta know. I—it's the fu'st place I ever been fired from, too. I'm a respectable workin' girl, I am, an' I's worked for real quality folk down in—"

"And you killed her because she fired you, eh?"

"I—"

But Frayne had raised a hand. Frayne could always get instant action by merely raising a hand. He got it now. The girl sullenly hung her head.

"Well," he asked, "what happened when you say she told you this morning to clean up the front room?"

Bethenia Gibbons looked frightened, panicky, for a moment.

"I went right to the front room—right to this here room—and begun a-tidyin' an' a-sweepin' an' all. I wasn't here so long, suh—maybe ten minutes, maybe fifteen—an' then I went to fix the dinin' room an' kitchen an' put a pot o' coffee on the stove for myself, like I does. I—I dunno. The coffee wasn't b'iled, quite, when the bell rings, an' it's Mistuh Lamont."

Bethenia hesitated again. She looked at Vince Lamont, a trifle pleadingly. But he shrugged again, and a faint smile came to the lips under his thin, black mustache.

Frayne didn't nod at him this time. Frayne winked.

"I tol' Mistuh Lamont that Miss Baa-Baa wanted to sleep till eleven, but he says that's all right, she wouldn'
min' him a-wakenin' her. An'—an'—
Well, suh, that's all they is. He went to
wake her an' he foun' her dead! So
help me God I'm tellin' you the truth!"
Frayne began pacing up and down
the room, then, his eyes narrowing,
a slight furrow on his forehead.
The bell rang presently, and some
one entered.
"That D e n h a m, Don?" called
Frayne.
"Yes, chief," replied Haggerty,
coming to the door.
Frayne sat down suddenly, as if he
were a trifle nervous. He took out a
pencil and began tapping the arm of
his chair, as nervous people fre-
quently do.
But it wasn't that Frayne was
nervous.
The manhunter was tapping out a
message to his assistant, in a private
code that he and Don had invented.
The message said that Haggerty was
to send for Grady, the coroner, and
that the latter was to get there without
delay.
Frayne rose, stretched, again began
to walk leisurely up and down the
length of the room. Finally, with a
frown, he paused before Vince Lamont.
"What do you think about the whole
mess, Lamont?" he abruptly asked, his
voice and face frankly puzzled.

IV

THE tout smiled. It was a cynical
smile, tinged with a touch of
candid relief.
"There's one thing I'm thinking of
right now, inspector," he said, "and
that is that here's one thing they can't
hang on me!"
Frayne regarded him gravely. The
thin mouth with the thin black mu-
stache; the darkbrowneyes that Baa-Baa
had probably liked; the coal black hair
showing a contrasting white line where
it was parted with meticulous care
straight down the middle.
Although his clothes verged slightly
on the Broadway cut, Frayne never-
theless noticed that Lamont could be
called a well-turned-out man. Frayne
was qualified to judge clothes, too. He
himself was the best garbed police
official that New York or any other city
had ever had. He wondered, idly, why
it was that on this hot August day
Lamont wore silk gloves in the house.
"It doesn't seem so," agreed Frayne
thoughtfully. "No, it doesn't."
"Don't think I'm such a hard-boiled
guy for speaking of that right off the
bat, inspector," Lamont said, suddenly
losing his cynicism and l o o k i n g
troubled. "I guess if I didn't have this
cold turkey alibi it could be made to
look damn bad for me. I—" he
shrugged. "I don't know what to
think, inspector, since you ask me!"
"I believe the boys got your story,
Lamont, but give it to me again just
for form's sake," said Frayne.
"I— oh, you know about Baa-Baa
and myself, I guess. I've known her on
and off for three or four years, but we
just didn't click all that time. You
know, we didn't get this yen for each
other till about a month ago. Since
then we've been together pretty near
all the time. We—"
"Live here with her?" interrupted
Frayne, although he knew that Vince
didn't.
"Nothing doing, inspector," Lamont
laughed with a wave of his hand. "No
dame gets me like that. I've been hang-
ing out at my own little room-and-bath
at the Piccadilly Circle ever since it's
been built, about four years ago."
"Wise man," nodded F r a y n e.
"Well? Last night?"
"We blew in early from the 'Spanish
Slipper." A little after two, I'd say. We had a few shots more of rye and—aw, hell, you know how this hooch hits some dames, lately. They get naggy and start to hang things on you that you never done. We—well, Baa-Baa was jealous, and she starts saying I was trying to make a cabaret kid at the Spanish Slipper. One word led to another—and that word led to about six more—and—"

Vince Lamont shrugged again, made a helpless gesture with outstretched hands, and blew out smoke.

"Maybe I am wise in some ways, inspector, like you said. I am in one way, I know. I never let a dame get me into a deep argument that's maybe gonna lead to a fight. I blow, instead. I blew last night. It was about four."

"That's when you stopped down below and had a few more shots, is it?"

"Yeah. Flo and Toots Mason—you know, from the Scandals—have got a flat there. They were throwing a party, and I—"

"You stayed there how long?"

"Oh, maybe an hour; maybe a little longer."

"And then?"

"I blew over to Jerry Spino's place and had a few more shots. Not many, two or three, I think—yeah, three. I got to mopin' about Baa-Baa after that. I—aw, hell, inspector, maybe I'm a little hard-boiled, see, but I'd lately got to thinkin' a lot of Baa-Baa. I felt sorry we'd had that spat; I got to thinkin' I was too quick in takin' her up; I got to thinkin' perhaps I had give that Wop cabaret kid the eye; I... Aw, I figgered it was up to me to come back and make up!"

He paused, looked somber for a moment, and took out another cigarette. He lit it, and blew the smoke out with a sigh:

"Well, you know what I come back to!"

"Uh huh," said Frayne.

Frayne was telling himself that he knew one thing for certain. He knew that the alibi at Jerry Spino's speak-easy would be copper riveted and otherwise unimpeachable. The Spino crowd stuck together, as the manhunter was well aware.

"So you rang the bell, eh? You didn't have a key?"

"Baa-Baa was shifty about handing out keys, inspector. Nope, she didn't even give one to me. Hell, I only know one guy that ever had—but ain't that right, Bethenia? I never had a key, did I?"

"No, suh," said Bethenia. "He didn' have no key, Mistuh Lamont didn't!"

Frayne was fingering his close cropped and well trimmed mustache with the thumb and index finger of his right hand:

"So another lad did have a key?" he was musing.

"Nix, inspector," laughed Vince with a positive wave of his hand. "Wrong there. This was just a bird that Baa-Baa fell for a couple months ago, for about a week. She probably hasn't seen him since, and I know he gave her back the key. He—"

"Why so positive?"

"He's a dub. Gawd knows how she ever did fall for him, even for a day. He's the night clerk at the Piccadilly Circle—a sap that's always tryin' to beat the ponies from the outside. I take most of his bets for him."

"Losing lately?"

"Ever see a sucker that won, inspector?" countered Vince.

"No," said Frayne, "and I never saw a wise guy that did, either."

"You're tellin'," chuckled Lamont.
"What’s he called?"

"Baker—Blondy Baker, inspector. But say, you’re all wet, an’ I mean that right. He had no more to do with this than—"

"What time does he finish his shift?"

"Seven in the morning."

"Live at the hotel?"

"Yeah!"

"Don,” said Frayne.

"Yes, sir."

"You’ll make better speed in the roadster. Chase over to the Piccadilly Circle and round up Blondy Baker, the night clerk. Step on the gas, Don.”

"I will, sir."

Frayne took out a cigar, presumably searched his waistcoat pocket for his lighter and didn’t find it.

"Let me have a light, Lamont."

Lamont fumbled in his own pocket, clumsily, took out a match, lit it and held the flame for Frayne.

"Thanks,” said the inspector. He noticed that the tout had not removed his gloves.

Frayne started to walk up and down, his eyes narrowing. Denham appeared in the doorway, then. Denham’s face told Frayne, furthermore, that no finger-prints had been found on the knife or on the body of Baa-Baa.

Frayne continued his pacing. He stopped, presently. He stretched, yawned, looking like a man who is immeasurably bored; who was slightly annoyed, too.

"Too bad you had that row with Baa-Baa last night, Lamont. Might have averted the murder, if you hadn’t. It came at a devilish awkward time for me. I was having some tennis with Haggerty when we were called, and I needed only another point to beat him. It isn’t often I beat my young assistant, either,” he ended ruefully.

"I’m not a tennis shark, inspector, but I sure do like my sleep,” grinned the tout. "Make believe I couldn’t use some now.”

"Oh, you’ll get enough sleep in, Lamont,” he smiled. "It’s infinitely harder for me to get in enough tennis.”

He stretched again, as he finished, and strolled out into the hallway a bit impatiently.

DON must have stepped on the gas, for Frayne’s wrist watch told him that his protégé had been gone a few seconds less than twelve minutes.

Blondy Baker was with him.

Not so vicious when it came to looks, Blondy. A foppish little fellow with pretty curls, wearing a gorgeously striped silk shirt that tried to vie with an amazingly hued cravat.

Frayne wasted no time. He did not speak harshly; he spoke in a coldly matter-of-fact tone.

"Baker, did you kill Baa-Baa Jackson this morning?"

"Did I kill—did I kill Baa—"

It looked like legitimate surprise, beyond question, as the night clerk gasped out his words. His face went white.

"Precisely,” said Frayne. "Did you stick a kitchen knife into Baa-Baa Jackson’s heart this morning?"

Whatever Broadway veneer Baker had attained now left him, and he showed up for the frightened young lad that he was.

"Oh, my God, inspector,” he cried, "what do you—what do you think I am?"

"I told you so, inspector. Not him.”

It was Vince Lamont speaking, and every officer there looked to see the tout raked by Frayne for the interruption.
Frayne didn’t rake him, however. He merely turned on him, with a grave nod.

"That’s right, Lamont, you did," he said.

The manhunter faced Blondy, then, and spoke in an exceedingly kindly voice.

"Yes, you seem to have a champion in Lamont, Baker."

Blondy was blinking. Blondy was looking as if he didn’t quite get what it was all about. Blondy looked, all at once, as if it had just come to him what the trouble was.

"You—you mean Baa-Baa’s been murdered, Inspector Frayne?" he asked hoarsely.

"With a kitchen knife," said Frayne.

"That—that’s awful, isn’t it?" breathed the night clerk, after a moment or two.

"Better than the chair, perhaps," said Frayne. "Some one’s going to get the chair for this, remember. That’s why you’re here. You’ve got to clear yourself. You—"

"Clear myself?"

"You had a key to her apartment, didn’t you?"

"No, sir. I have not, sir. I did not have... Well, I mean I haven’t had one in—oh, in two months, Inspector Frayne. I swear to God I haven’t, sir," he ended with a sobbing gulp.

"You might have had an impression made, when you did have one," Frayne reminded him.

A whistle came, at that. It came from Vince.

"I’m—I’m not a murderer, sir," Blondy Baker was saying, his voice quavering.

"Take it easy; take it easy," suggested Frayne. Then he asked, briskly:

"When did you last see Baa-Baa?"

"See her?"

"See her. Speak to her," said Frayne.

"I—oh, I haven’t spoken to her for a month or more, except when I’d see her at some club on my night off. I—you see, we didn’t play around for very long together, me and Baa-Baa. She just took a fancy to me for a few days—a pretty strong one, if I do say it myself—and I guess she wasn’t hard for me to fall for. She—well, she dropped me as quick as she took up with me," he ended, flushing and hanging his head as if ashamed to admit his inability to hold the affections of the little girl who had wanted to be somebody’s Baa-Baa lamb.

Very suddenly, however, Blondy Baker jerked up his head. His eyes were very wide, and understanding had come to his entire face. He spoke in a rush.

"Oh—o-o-oh, now I see why you suspect me," he cried. "Somebody saw me come here this morning. Somebody—"

"You were here this morning?" asked Frayne quietly.

"Well, I was here at the door, I mean. I rang the bell but Baa-Baa didn’t open. I rattled the knob, too, and knocked on the door. I wanted to see her badly."

"What time was that, Baker?"

"I leave the job at seven, sir. I brushed up and walked right over, so I guess”—he thought for a moment—"oh, I guess it was before half past seven, anyway."

"Why did you want to see her?" pressed the manhunter.

The night clerk of the Piccadilly Circle did some more flushing. Then he spoke out.

"Well, she was always a damn good fellow, inspector, and I was in a hole—"
I mean I still am in a hole, God knows;" he laughed bitterly. "I been playing the ponies, and they’ve been taking me for all I’ve got. I owe everybody, and I don’t know where to turn. I got to get some jack by to-night, and I thought of Baa-Baa. I heard she’d grabbed ten grand, and I thought she might maybe let me have just three hundred. Just three hundred would—"

He paused and licked at his lips, and his eyes, naturally pale, became strangely darker:

"There’s one in the fifth to-day at Saratoga, that if I had three centuries on his nose... God, it would put me all in the clear, inspector," he ended feverishly.

A knock came on the door, then.

"Come in," called Frayne.

It was Grady, the coroner.

"Where’s the body, Frayne?" he asked his friend.

"Second bedroom down the hall. Bring me a report right away, will you, old man?"

Frayne followed Grady out of the room. He did not stop in the death chamber. Grady would get everything that he wanted there, he knew. Instead, the manhunter examined the other rooms.

He went to the unoccupied bedroom. To the dining room. To the bathroom. To the kitchen. He didn’t spend much time in any of these rooms, for it was said that Frayne, in a single glance, could take in more details than the average man would absorb in minutes of close scrutiny.

The kitchen seemed to interest him. At least, he stood there in the center of the room, frowning, his cold blue eyes going to triangular slits.

Suddenly he walked over to the dumb-waiter. He peered down the shaft, his body stiffening. He began to pull on the ropes, presently. All at once he stopped.

Then he leaped back and called out sharply.

"Don!"

"Sir?" replied Haggerty, coming like a flash.

"Cut out those dumb-waiter ropes. There’s our evidence!"

Frayne, instantly, was back in the living room. He was standing over Lamont.

"Take off those gloves, you rat," he snarled.

"I like to keep my gloves on, Frayne," said Lamont, his voice and his eyes defiant.

"And I want ’em off, damn you," snapped the manhunter. "Peel them off, Lamont."

Slowly, his eyes on Frayne’s, the race track tout obeyed. He had to. He knew they would have been torn off, otherwise.

"I thought so," Frayne exulted, as he saw the bruises and blood blisters on the palms of Lamont’s hands. "Whaddaya mean, you thought so?" said Lamont, his voice ugly. "Hell, can’t a guy go rowin’ an’ get blisters on his hands?"

"Sure he can," agreed Frayne, "but they’re not rowing blisters."

He turned, then, and beckoned to the finger-print expert.

"Got your magnifying glass with you, Denham?"

"Yes, inspector."

"Examine Lamont’s hands. Examine those bruises and blisters. Examine them for particles of hemp."

"You can’t hang nothin’ on me, Frayne," Vince Lamont was now snarling. "I got my alibi. I got—"

"Take him, Don," said Frayne, as Haggerty came to the doormat and stood ready for orders.
Lamont started to bound from his chair, but Haggerty was across the room like a leaping panther, the race track tout’s wrists gripped between his fingers.

Denham was a painstaking workman, and he was an exceedingly efficient workman. It took him three or four minutes—maybe five—to study those blistered hands.

When he straightened up and faced his superior his face had a contented look.

"Seven particles, sir," he said. "Five on the right hand, two on the left. There may be more, on closer examination. I’m certain about the seven, though."

"Good," said Frayne.

"Say, I heard a lot about somethin’ bein’ Greek to a guy," smiled Lamont, trying to bluster, "and now I know what it means. Put it in plain American, will you?"

"Glad to oblige," said Frayne. "You’re arrested for the murder of Baa-Baa Jackson!"

Vince Lamont looked at his hands. Looked about the room. Suddenly hope blazed up in his face and he cried out loudly:

"How in hell can you hang that on me when Baa-Baa was alive when Bethenia come in at nine-somethin’ o’clock? She spoke to her, didn’t she? And wasn’t I drinkin’ over at Jerry Spino’s all mornin’?"

Frayne didn’t answer. Frayne, instead, called out:

"Finished, Grady?"

"Right, Frayne, coming."

"What’s the report?" asked the manhunter, when the coroner showed up in the doorway.

"She was killed somewhere in the vicinity of four o’clock this morning, Frayne."

"I knew the maid was wrong when she said Baa-Baa called through the door at nine o’clock," Frayne said. "The body had already stiffened when I got here. The answer to that is—somebody was imitating her voice."

Frayne, then, faced Vince Lamont. His voice, now, came in a drawl.

"Still Greek to you, Lamont?"

"Worse than ever, inspector," laughed Lamont, his own eyes not doing such a bad job of bluffing.

"When Mr. Haggerty slips the handcuffs on you, as the murderer of Baa-Baa Jackson, I’ll explain."

The handcuffs clicked.

"I’ll try to reconstruct the crime for you as nearly as I can," said the manhunter. "You and Baa-Baa did have a fight, of course, but I don’t think it was about any little cabaret girl. I think it was because she wouldn’t come across with as much money as you asked for. Right on that, Lamont?"

"Aw—"

But Frayne had started to walk forward. Frayne was flexing the fingers of his right hand. A good many crooks—a good many other people—knew about those fingers. It was said that Frayne, with a mere pressure of them here and there, could cause a man torture. He did not have any sympathy for a killer, either. He did not believe they were sick creatures who should be coddled; he believed they were extremely dangerous people who should be eliminated from the scheme of things.

"Aw—aw, maybe we did have a run-in about jack," grumbled Lamont, as Frayne’s hand went for a handcuffed wrist.

"I thought so," said Frayne suavely. "Thanks. Well, I don’t know with what you hit her on the jaw—it’s unimportant, now, and we’ll get it later—but you hit her so hard that
you thought you'd nearly killed her. You got frightened, then, and
you'd been drinking, and you were sore because you couldn't get the money. Anyway, you went and grabbed that
knife and stuck it in her. Did you say
I was right?"

"You leave me alone, Frayne! You . . . All right, all right! Jeez, I'll say
yes. I got to say yes, ain't I?"

"Sensible lad. Too bad you weren't
as sensible before you killed her. Then
you wouldn't have done the job. Too
bad you weren't as sensible after you
killed her. Then you wouldn't have
pinned all those clews onto yourself!"

"What—what clews?"

"Wait. Let me tell you what you
did. You went out the door, after
you'd murdered her, and you went to
that party downstairs. When you left
there, though, you went into the cellar
from that door in the back of the main
floor hallway. When you got in the
cellar you went to the dumb-waiter,
and you hoisted yourself up here. Then
you waited until Bethenia let herself
in!"

Frayne, paused, started to stretch
out a hand. But Vince Lamont, with
a cry, had covered his face.

"You imitated a female voice—
Baa-Baa's voice—and told the maid to
clean up the front room and not to dis-
turb you until eleven. It isn't so diffi-
cult, imitating a female voice, espe-
cially when that voice is supposed to
come from a person just waking from
a sound sleep. Anyway, as the maid
came into this front room, and you
heard her start to clean, you sneaked
out of the bedroom and again made
for that dumb-waiter in the kitchen.
Then you let yourself down. You hid
in either the cellar or the hallway
downstairs. After a few minutes you
came and rang the bell!"

Frayne paused. He pointed to
Blondy Baker.

"This lad? Where does he come
in? That was just one of those things
that happen. You heard him ring the
bell and knock at the door, when you
were waiting here with the corpse. You
probably peeked out of the window to
see who it was. You brought his name
up to me because you thought you
might pin something on him. You
thought you had a break there, didn't
you?"

Lamont was swaying.

"I asked you a question, Lamont,"
came Frayne's voice. "Answer that
one and answer the rest. Have I or
have I not doped it as it all happened?"

Lamont uncovered his face. It was
a very weak face, now. A very
stunned face. Dazedly, he nodded his
head.

"Your clews?" Frayne was saying,
his own voice quickening. "That
dumb-waiter rope was hard on soft
hands. You left blood on it. The rope
left little particles of hemp in your
bruises and blisters, too, as Denham
saw with the magnifying glass. Your
shoulder blades, as you went down the
shaft brushed against the kalsomined
wall. My dear fellow, you should see
how the back of your coat looks. For
one as particular about his clothes as
you are, you'd be damned ashamed of
yourself. But another thing, too. How
could a woman speak at around nine
o'clock when as reputable a physician
as Dr. Grady will testify she was killed
in the vicinity of four?"

Vince Lamont didn't answer this
one. He sagged forward, a great gulp-
ing sob coming from his throat.

Frayne didn't expect him to answer.
Didn't want him to answer. He was
speaking to Geogan.

"Take him away, lieutenant."
A Fair Reward

A Novelette

By Erle Stanley Gardner

Clint’s Lie Detector Was a Strange Contraption, and He Put It to Strange Uses in the Thurmond Murder Case

CHAPTER I

A Backwater of Life

GOVERNOR KENDALL blotted the signature, laid down the pen and whirled the big executive chair through a complete half circle to regard his visitor.

“Clint, do you know why I sent for you?”

The dapper individual on the other side of the desk shrugged his shoulders.

“I might guess—wrong.”

The Governor nodded. “And again you might guess right. Try.”

Clint Kale smiled, and there was a trace of mockery in that smile.

“Something to do with my work in psychology?”

“You’re asking questions. I told you to guess.”

“Some mission you want to have me undertake, and are having difficulty getting the ice broken?”

The Governor frowned.

“Hang it, Clint, it’s your cold-blooded efficiency, your ever-present air of supercilious superiority that gets you into trouble!”

Clint smiled affably.

“Really?” he drawled.

“Yes, really! You remember that talk you made at the club the other night, about the fallacies of circumstantial evidence? You claimed that
circumstances could lie just as well as human witnesses.”

Clint Kale reached for a cigarette.

“All right. This is confidential,” snapped the harassed executive. “Jane Thurmond, fifty-two, convicted of first degree murder, sentenced to death, and the papers are urging me to sit tight and let the sentence be carried out.”

Clint nodded.

“You can’t come bustin’ into my territory,” the officer bellowed.

“Ah!” he said. Then, after an interval during which he lit the tobacco and exhaled smokily: “So you’re wondering if she’s really guilty?”

The Governor started, flushed.

“I haven’t said so.”

“You were about to.”

The executive pulled a black cigar from a desk humidor, bit the end off with a snap of his decisive jaw, regarded his visitor over the flare of a match.

“Suppose we eliminate the mind reading.”

“You asked me to, you know.”

“Yes. You’re right. Hang it, you’re always right. That’s the irritating thing about you, Clint.”

He paused for a moment, and Clint bowed.
and made short work of it. They weren’t out two hours!”

Clint nodded.

The Governor reached in a drawer, slammed out two bound volumes of typewritten transcript.

“There’s the record in the case.”

Clint stared at it for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders.

“If you doubt her guilt, why don’t you commute the sentence?”

The Governor puffed reflectively on his cigar.

“Hang it, Clint, I don’t know how I feel. I don’t doubt her guilt, and yet—well, I’d dismissed the matter from my mind until the other night when you broke loose with that psychological patter about circumstantial evidence. You made me think, and now I don’t know just how I do feel about the case.”

Clint shook his head after the manner of a teacher chiding a disobedient child.

“I must learn to keep my mouth shut,” he said. “It’s hard to realize one is talking to the highest executive in the State when one is at a card game—”

“Oh, forget it, Clint. Be serious. Cut the comedy. I have half an idea you deliberately started all that talk about criminal justice in order to raise a doubt in my mind!”

Clint raised one eyebrow.

“Really?” he drawled.

“Yes, really. Anyhow, that’s neither here nor there. But here’s what I’m up against. Unless I sign a pardon or a commutation of sentence that woman is going to die within two weeks. She’s a mother, two grown children. She has one grandchild.”

Clint nodded, that amused nod of superiority which the executive found so irritating.

The Governor waved his cigar toward the typewritten transcript.

“This case came up from a backwater of the State, a regular cowcounty. The people in that county all know each other. The district attorney could have called every one on the jury by his first name. Jane Thurmond’s son engaged a city lawyer to go down and defend her.

“He was a good lawyer in the city. But he went up against a local combine. The district attorney had been in partnership with the trial judge. The people all figured it was a chance to show everybody how good their district attorney was. He licked the ‘slick city feller.’ That jury really didn’t vote on the woman’s guilt. They voted that a home town lawyer was just as good as the slick city lawyers.”

Clint Kale yawned, patted his lips in a deprecatory gesture.

“The evidence?” he asked.

The Governor flushed.

“All right, if I’m wearying you, I’ll be brief. The evidence is this. The woman had a place. It was mortgaged. She was desperately in need of funds. Old Sam Pixley was the town miser. He was murdered. Whoever committed that murder knew where he kept his money. It was in a strong box under his bed, in a little cubby-hole cunningly built into the floor.

“The woman had acted as Pixley’s housekeeper. She went to his house once every week and straightened up. The rest of the time Pixley did his own cooking and cleaning.

“He was found dead in his bed. He had been hit over the head with a club, several times.

“Then the murderer had moved the bed, opened the trap door in the floor, pried the lid off the box, and taken what money there was. Just how much
there was no one knows. There were some bonds, a few diamonds set in old-fashioned jewelry and some money. The bonds were Hanover Irrigation District bonds, perhaps some others.

"The murderer cleaned up on the bonds and jewelry. The only things that weren’t taken were some stocks that were valueless, some promissory notes, and a packet of letters."

Clint leaned forward, flipped his cigarette into the cuspidor, took a pencil from his pocket, opened a leather bound notebook.

"The valueless stocks?" he asked.

The Governor thumbed through the pages of the transcript.

"American Carbonator, Incorporated," he said. "They were old stocks. A clever promoter had organized the company fifteen years before and victimized several of the town’s prominent men. Sam Pixley knew the stocks weren’t any good, but he’d paid money for them, so he kept them in with his valued possessions.

"The body was found the next morning. That afternoon Jane Thurmond paid off her mortgage in cash. The cashier at the bank identified one fifty-dollar note that had been torn and pasted with adhesive tissue. He had paid that note to Pixley in cashing a check for him less than a week before the murder.

"Remember, Clint, this is a small community we’re talking about. Everybody knows everybody else. Everybody’s business is everybody’s business."

"Perhaps," suggested Clint, "Sam Pixley put the torn bank note into circulation."

The Governor shook his head.

"Pixley never put money into circulation. He took it out of circulation, and kept it out. He’d lost money in a bank failure once. After that he cashed his checks and hid the cash."

Clint nodded.

"That all the evidence?" he asked.

"Good Lord, no! Jane Thurmond was interrogated. She admitted she’d not earned the money. Finally she said she found it, all wrapped up in a bundle and dropped on her doorstep. The mortgage was eleven hundred and fifty dollars. She said there was exactly eleven hundred and fifty dollars in the package that was dropped on her doorstep. Not a very likely story."

Clint regarded the executive through half closed eyes.

"Go on," he said.

"That started an investigation. Jane Thurmond was taken to the scene of the crime, accused of murder. She denied her guilt, but was somewhat rambling as to her statements of where she’d been the night of the crime. One thing she was certain of, she hadn’t been near Pixley’s place.

"That was proved to be false. Two witnesses had seen her, one going, one coming. But she had left before the crime was committed. That’s one point in her favor. Pixley must have been killed shortly after midnight. Jane Thurmond was seen leaving the place about ten thirty. It’s the theory of the prosecution that she returned and committed the crime.

"There’s a witness by the name of Ezra Hickory who says he saw Jane Thurmond leave her house shortly before midnight. He doesn’t know where she went or what she did, but he swears she was carrying a club, something that looked like an ax handle.

"Subsequently they found the blood-stained ax handle. It was hidden in the barn on Sam Pixley’s property. It fitted an ax head that was found in Jane Thurmond’s woodshed."
Clint held his pencil poised over his notebook.

"Didn't Mrs. Thurmond finally admit she'd been to Sam Pixley's house?"

"Yes. She eventually admitted it. She said some one had telephoned her that Sam Pixley had said he'd be willing to take over the mortgage. She went over to see. Sam said nothing doing. The woman left. That's her story."

"Any finger-prints?" asked Clint.

"Not a finger-print, not on the ax handle, not on the box, nowhere in the place. There were some old finger-prints on the ax handle. They belonged to Mrs. Thurmond. That's settled. It's her ax handle. She finally admitted that, but claims she doesn't know how it got there."

"That all?"

"That's all."

"And what do you want me to do?"

"Clint, I want you to go down there, Middlevale, Middlevale County, and get the real inside facts on that crime. You can do it. If that woman dies I want to feel certain she's guilty."

Clint's half closed eyes held something of a mocking glitter.

"There's enough evidence there to convict a dozen defendants. You shouldn't feel any doubt in your mind."

The Governor groaned.

"I didn't, not until you gave that little dissertation on circumstantial evidence, and how facts lied. Then I began to feel uneasy. You were so cocksure, so coldly final, and you're nearly always right."

Clint smiled enigmatically.

"If I do this, I shall want two things," he said.

"Name them."

"I shall want to go to the State's prison and pick out a good burglar. I shall pick one who is eligible for parole. I'll want him to be paroled in my charge. In addition to that I shall want a tube of radium from the State hospital. With those two things I'll undertake the job."

The Governor regarded him with closely knitted brows.

"You seem to want peculiar things, and you don't seem to hesitate any in thinking what they are."

"Those are my terms," Clint said.

"Oh, take 'em!" exclaimed the Governor, irritably. "My secretary will fix you up with the necessary papers. I'll sign 'em. Hang it, I'm almost beginning to believe you started that talk about circumstantial evidence just to make me feel uneasy about this case."

Clint Kale reached for his gloves, drew them on with an air of quiet finality.

"I did," he smiled.

"You did! I wondered. What was the big idea?"

"I doubt if the woman's guilty. There are too many facts, and they're too conclusive. Circumstantial evidence is really mighty poor evidence. The facts don't lie, but our interpretation of those facts may be wrong. Ever since the beginning of time man has misinterpreted facts. He thought the thunder was the voice of a god. He thought the sun rose in the morning and set at night. The facts were there. Man simply didn't have enough knowledge to interpret them correctly."

"Now in this present case there are two facts that the jury considered as pointing to the guilt of Jane Thurmond which I consider point to her innocence."

"Those facts?" rasped the Governor.

"Will be explained later. They're as evident to you as they are to me.
There's one thing I want understood, though. I've got to use my own methods here. You can't control those."

"How do you mean, Clint?"

"Well, I'm going into a backwater of life and civilization. I've got to use weapons that those people aren't familiar with. They'll all team against me right at the jump. I'll be like that city lawyer that went in there and got massacred in front of a local jury.

"Therefore I've got to hit 'em with something they're not accustomed to. I've got to use weapons they don't understand."

"Such as?" asked the Governor.

"Such as humor, for one thing, and applied physics and psychology for another. You see, this Jane Thurmond had only lived in the town for eight years. They all regarded her as being a rank outsider."

The Governor shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't do anything that'll connect you with me in any way. Keep this entirely confidential."

Clint nodded.

"That," he observed as he edged toward the door, "was one of the wisest remarks you've made in a long time. If those chaps put me in the insane asylum, pardon me out."

And he was gone.

CHAPTER II

The Scientific Detective

The bewildered secretary fixed Clint Kale up with the necessary documents which entitled him to one quarter-inch tube of radium, valued at some five thousand dollars. Also with a letter to the prison board which enabled Clint to check over the records of some half dozen eligible burglars of unquestioned skill.

"I want," he told the warden, at length, "a man who never smiles. I want a man who looks like an undertaker on duty with indigestion and a toothache. I want a man who can open anything except his mouth."

The warden nodded.

"You want Boston Blackie," he said, and pressed a button.

Boston Blackie arrived. He was short, solidly built. His head was covered with a shock of black hair. His ebony eyes glared out from beneath shaggy black brows. His face was covered with black stubble. His mouth was twisted to one side until it seemed to grow entirely out of one cheek.

In his bearing was the surly defiance of one who has found all the resources of existence pitted against him in the battle of life. Permanent pessimism was stamped upon his features.

"Blackie," said the warden, not unkindly, "this is Mr. Clint Kale, at one time a professor of psychology, a friend of the Governor. He wants a man to do certain things and I have recommended you."

Boston Blackie favored Clint Kale with a dour appraisal.

"My experiments," said Kale, "will require that the subject come with me as a servant. The duties will be light. There will be fresh air, sunshine, good food, pleasant work."

"Ugh huh," moaned Blackie, "you ain't lookin' for me."

"Why not?"

"No luck ever came my way. It's all a mistake."

"On the contrary, I think you'll do. You will be paroled to my charge, and will, of course, be under my supervision."

"You mean you're takin' me?"

"Yes."

"It won't do no good. You'll get
run over by an automobile, or get shot or somethin', I'll be back here inside of a week."

The warden turned to a clerk.

"Arrange to have this prisoner paroled to the custody of Mr. Clint Kale."

Boston Blackie studied Kale gloomily. His face did not change expression as he heard the words which secured him his liberty.

"We're drivin' away from here?" he asked.

"In my car," Kale assured him.

"Drive careful," husked Boston Blackie.

The town of Middlevale seethed with hissing whispers of gossip.

A detective had arrived, was staying at the Palace Hotel. The detective was investigating something, some said one thing, some another. Some said he was an income tax detective, come to check over Ezra Hickory's return for the preceding year. Some said he was working on a new angle of the Sam Pixley murder.

Clint Kale registered at ten thirty in the morning.

By noon he was known by sight to every man, woman and child who was able to walk past the lobby of the hotel.

At twelve thirty a motor truck drew up to the hotel and Kale went out to greet the driver. After a hurried conference the porter was summoned, two loafers were pressed into willing service, and great packages began to slide to the sidewalk, where Clint Kale himself supervised unpacking them.

It took three and one half minutes for the news to reach from one end of Main Street to the other, another two minutes for the crowd to gather.

They goggled open-mouthed at the assortment of machinery.

Clint Kale had secured this machinery by the simple expedient of calling upon certain manufacturers of laboratory and dental equipment, picking up the obsolete models they had traded in on newer equipment. Then he had done the same thing with the manufacturers of dictating machines, had also called at the salvage department of the railroad companies, picking up shipments of various paraphernalia which had been damaged in shipping, refused by the consignee and salvaged by the railroad.

There were obsolete dictating machines in which the motive power was furnished by a tread. There were dental drills which had long ago given up their last vestige of nickel plate. There were X-ray machines whose weak bulbs gave forth weird lighting effects and sputtered hissing sounds of static throughout the surrounding atmosphere. There were obsolete radio sets incapable of tuning in any single station, now that the air was crowded with programs. There were cameras on tripods, old studio cameras, obsolete equipment of all kind.

And, last to be unloaded, was a casket.

Under the direction of Clint Kale, Boston Blackie opened this casket upon the sidewalk. Within was another casket, slightly smaller. That casket was locked.

Clint Kale unlocked that casket, opened it. Boston Blackie disclosed another casket, opened that. Within was a box. There were three padlocks on the box, each requiring a different key.

Clint unlocked them with something of a flourish.

A small lead box came to view.

Clint opened the lead box. Within, carefully resting in an asbestos nest
was a very small tube, something like a quarter of an inch in length.

Kale took some forceps from his pocket and lifted the capsule with tender reverence. Then he nodded and smiled at Boston Blackie.

"The radium's there," he said.

Boston Blackie frowned at the circle of eager faces which kept narrowing as outer pressure thrust the craning necks into a smaller area.

"Well, it won't be long," he prophesied.

Clint Kale turned to his audience, a compact ring of pushing, struggling, seething townspeople.

"That, gentlemen, is a tube of genuine radium, worth exactly ninety-three thousand, two hundred and thirty-seven dollars and sixteen cents—gold!"

And then he proceeded to cover the lead box, to snap the padlocks one at a time, to restore box to casket, casket to casket. When he had finished the task, he turned to the porters.

"Take it all up to my room. Blackie and I will handle the radium."

There followed a shuffling of steps, the eager hum of voices, and the packing case wreckage was slid to the gutter, eager hands furnished motive power, and the variegated assortment of machinery was carried across the hotel lobby, up one flight of steps, and installed in Kale's suite.

In the process the two assistants were swelled in number until some thirty volunteers were carrying equipment, all for the reward of one glance at the interior of the mysterious rooms where all this paraphernalia was to be used.

When it had all been finally adjusted to his liking, when X-ray machine was hooked up to obsolete radio. When the loud speaker thundered forth static which was duly recorded upon the wax cylinder of an old time dictating machine, Clint Kale announced himself as satisfied, thanked those who had assisted him, and announced a desire to be left alone that he might "get to work."

The men shuffled down the stairs, out through the lobby. But they did not leave the vicinity. They milled into little groups, knots of men who talked in low voices. Not since the murder of Sam Pixley had there been quite so much excitement in the little town, and the loafers proposed to see that nothing escaped their observation.

Precisely fifteen minutes after the equipment had been adjusted, there came an imperative knock at the door.

At a word from Kale, Boston Blackie threw it open.

On the threshold stood a pasty-faced chap, an ancient collar around his neck, eager eyes peering from behind thick-rimmed spectacles. In his hand was a notebook.

"I'm Carl Rosamond from the Courier," he said.

Clint Kale met him with grave courtesy.

"It is a pleasure, Mr. Rosamond. I am not like those detectives who shrink from the press and seek to carry on their work in mystery and seclusion. I am fully aware of the power of the press. I know that they can ferret out any secret, that nothing is obscure to them. Therefore, I have adopted the policy of confiding to the press in the fullest detail. I give them my most confidential plans, my secret findings, my every thought.

"And I only ask of them to treat my confidences with respect. Such as I wish to have published, I release for publication. Such as I wish to remain a secret, I intrust to the honor of the
high class gentlemen who comprise the fourth estate.

"Do come in and sit down, my dear chap."

Carl Rosamond blinked,

"You have questions?" asked Kale.

The reporter pulled out pencil and notebook.

"This stuff?" he asked, waving a soiled hand at the pile of equipment.

"Ah yes," purred Clint Kale. "I am a detective. There's no use concealing the fact from your keen eyes, my dear Mr. Rosamond. But I am no mere blundering detective. I am a scientific detective who supplements the fallibility of human judgment by the unerring accuracy of mechanical investigations."

Boston Blackie coughed.

Carl Rosamond gulped.

"This thing?" he asked, and waved toward the X-ray machine.

"Ah!" exclaimed Clint Kale, and began to talk with the rapidity of a machine gun. "As you are doubtless aware the metaphysicians have long claimed that the human body is encased in a subtle emanation of the life force which has been referred to as the 'aura'.

"For many years their claims were ridiculed by science. But, of more recent years, it has been determined that science was in error. By the use of a certain coal tar product the aura can be seen, even photographed.

"Now, to diverge, for the moment. We originally considered the atom to be the smallest unit of mass. In recent years the atom has been resolved into electrons. We have, therefore, all matter reduced to a series of disembodied negative electrical impulses grouped about a positive, central electrical nucleus of vibratory composition.

"It has even been said that all matter is electrical, vibrational, intangible. It is, in short, but a light whorl, a vortex of vibration in a sea of vibrations.

"And you may well ask how all this is connected with my work. Simply thus. I place a witness before this machine which amplifies the aura. I send that amplification through two stages of radio audition. I record the resulting sound vibration upon a wax cylinder which, in turn, is synchronized with certain questions. At the same time the amplified aura of the witness is subject to the photographic recordation of the ultra violet emanations. The result, my dear Rosamond, is infallible.

"You have my permission to publish that."

The reporter gulped, asked more questions.

Those questions were answered in a patter of scientific jargon which contained the nucleus of thought, clothed in an almost impenetrable covering of scientific terminology.

When he had finished, the reporter had the flattering feeling of having been taken into the confidence of a great man. His brain reeled with the stuff he was permitted to publish. His notebook was crammed with misspelled words which he could never afterward decipher, and which wouldn't have made sense if he could have done so.

He sprinted from the room in time to make the afternoon paper with a brief note of his interview. That interview found headlines across the entire front of the Middlevale Courier.

"Scientific detective reduces crime detection to certainty," read the headlines. There followed much about guilt detectors, lie arrestors, aura, static, vibration, electrons, radium, photography, aura amplification, light vortexes and kindred matters.
Clint Kale read the account and nodded his head with pleasure.

In the meantime the occupants of the hotel had heard the roar of the stuttering sparks, resounding through a loud speaker, the whir of electric motors. The scientific detective was at work. The question was, what was he detecting?

The Courier had been on the streets less than half an hour when important steps thudded their way down the corridor, paused before the door of Kale’s room. There sounded an imperative hammering on the door panels.

Clint Kale signed to Boston Blackie. That individual, through the pessimistic habit of long years in the underworld, stood well to one side as he flung open the door.

The man who blocked the opening was built somewhat the shape of a huge barrel. His great torso, resting on huge hips, was as broad as it was thick. The shoulders were slightly rounded. The neck was a great pillar of fat-incased muscle. A long, walrus mustache swept down from either side of the upper lip. The forehead was low. The eyes were a glimmer of malevolent concentration.

“What’s comin’ off here?” he demanded.

Clint Kale regarded him with casual indifference. He remained seated in one of the hotel’s uncomfortable chairs, his slippered feet resting on the bed.

“Who the hell wants to know?” he asked, his voice the patronizing drawl with which one addresses a child.

“I do!” shouted the man, and barged across the threshold.

“You would,” agreed Clint Kale, still keeping his posture of relaxed inattention. “And who, may I ask, are you?”

It was Boston Blackie who blurted an answer.

“For God’s sake, boss,” he warned, “can’t you spot ’em?”

The heavy set man turned a glowering glance in the direction of Boston Blackie, then swept his glittering eyes back to Clint Kale.

“I’m Ellery Hatcher, the chief of police in this here town.”

Clint Kale reached for a cigarette.

“Ah, yes, you would be. Pardon me, Mr. Hatcher. But I never work with the local police. I am only called into a community to solve that which has hitherto been unsolved. That means that I am seeking to cover the inefficiency of the local authorities.

“Under the circumstances, I prefer to have no business dealings with them whatever.”

The chief of police took a threatening step forward. Boston Blackie’s hand strayed toward the handle of a hammer which had been used in uncrating the machinery.

“Well, by heck, I got something to say about that!” bellowed the officer. “You can’t come bustin’ into my territory with all these fool contraptions and then try to ignore me. I won’t stand for it.”

Clint Kale slowly removed his slippered feet from the bed, dropped the four legs of the chair to the floor with a thump, and regarded his visitor quizzically.

“Chief,” he said, “are there any speakeasies in town, any places where illegal beverages are dispensed?”

The officer snorted.

“So, you’re a revenue agent, eh?”

“Not at all. I had a purpose in asking the question.”

“The answer is no!” growled Hatcher.

“Ah, yes,” said Kale. “Not being any speakeasies, of course, it follows as a necessary corollary, that you are not
receiving any hush money, graft, percentage, rake-off or knock down from such nefarious enterprises."

The chief sneered.
"So that's it?"

"Not at all, chief. Not at all. I merely asked the question, because I am now about to demonstrate to you the facility with which my lie detector operates."

And Clint Kale pressed a button.
The electric lights dimmed. There was a whir of a motor, the sputter of an arc. The ancient X-ray machine sent out a flickering light from the old bulb which had long since ceased to function properly. The radio took up the song and thundereous din from its loud speaker.

Clint Kale took a seat before the dictating machine, worked the treads with his feet, and spoke loudly into the mouthpiece.

"Operator, this is a test of the veracity of Ellery Hatcher, the chief of police of Middlevale. He has just testified that there are no speakeasies in town and that he collects no graft from them."

Kale gestured with his hand.
"If you'll just sit in that chair, facing the radio machine, and with your profile to the camera, chief, I shall demonstrate the unfailing accuracy of my equipment."

But Chief Hatcher refused the proffered chair.

"What the hell's the idea? I ain't on no witness stand. I came up here to see what your doin', an' I want a report. You an' me ain't goin' to have no fight unless you want to start one. But you gotta cut me in on this, particularly on the publicity."

"Oh, yes," observed Clint Kale, "the publicity. I'd forgotten that. Boston Blackie, please see if you can get that reporter chap on the telephone. Young Rosamond, Carl Rosamond. Call the Courier, and if you can't get him there . . ."

Chief Hatcher interrupted.
"Don't call that number. It's six fifteen. He gets off work about five thirty and eats at the Green Star lunch counter. After that he drops in at the drug store. He's a little sweet on Betty Gilrvay. Tell you what, call Gilrvay's drug store. You don't need the number, just tell central you want Gilrvay's drug store."

Boston Blackie put through the call, asked for Carl Rosamond.
"Here he is."

"Ah, yes, exactly," remarked Clint Kale as he sauntered to the telephone, took the receiver and drawled a lazy "hello."

"Good evening, Mr. Rosamond. That was a very nice write-up, ably handled. I have some more publicity for you. Yes, this is Mr. Kale, the detective. Yes. Got your pencil? Good. Get this."

"Chief Hatcher—er, what were the initials again, Mr. Hatcher?—Oh, yes, Chief Ellery Hatcher, of the local police force, denied emphatically that there were any speakeasies in the city, or that he received any graft from the operators of the same. When asked to take the chair in front of the lie detector and repeat that statement he refused. . . ."

There was the sound of swift motion, the pad of heavy feet behind Kale, and that individual hastily slipped the receiver back on the hook, turned to face the irate, rage-distorted features of the chief of police.

"What the devil's the idea? You poor sap! What do you think you're trying to do? You try that stuff on me and I'll break your damned neck.
You're trying to ruin me in my home town. All right, wait and see what happens to you."

"You wanted publicity," murmured Clint Kale. "This would make dandy publicity. The metropolitan newspapers would probably copy it..."

With an inarticulate roar, the chief flung past him out of the door.

"I'll have to kill that copy," he snorted, "and then I'll be back! I'll be back!"

The door banged.

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CHAPTER III

Insult Intentional

"H

E'LL be back," croaked Boston Blackie lugubriously.

"Think so, really?" asked Clint Kale.

"Think so. I know it. Ever know anything about a rubber hose, boss?"

"They use it to sprinkle gardens with, don't they?"

"Yeah. And guys like him can work wonders with about a three-foot length of it. He'll be back. You'll learn somethin' about police officers."

"That'll be fine. I wonder who our next visitor will be."

"Maybe the local undertaker. He might get an inside tip, an'—"

He broke off as steps sounded in the hall once more.

These steps contained something of a swaggering strut to their rhythm. They paused before the door. A well-timed knock rat-a-tatted on the panels.

Boston Blackie, in response to a gesture from Kale, eased himself to one side and opened the door.

The man who stood on the threshold had carefully dressed for the part he was to play. There was about him an appreciation of the dramatic, a pose of haughty learning, of contained dignity. He was a man who had carefully planned each step as he went through life, devoting his attention to impressing his fellow men.

He was tall, thin, hatchet-faced. His gray hair had been swept back from the high forehead. The frock coat was an impressive black, emphasizing the high whiteness of the collar, the flowing black tie.

As he stood there at rigid attention he thrust one hand within his vest and spoke in a voice which reverberated through the room in studied eloquence.

"Mr. Clint Kale, the detective?"

Clint bowed.

"And I have the honor of addressing?"

"Thomas Jefferson Train, sir, the district attorney of this county."

Clint sank back in his chair as though disappointed.

"Oh, shucks!" he exclaimed audibly.

"Well, come on in."

The lawyer stalked with stately dignity into the room, his pale eyes sweeping over the miscellaneous assortment of equipment.

"I read of your advent in the paper, Mr. Kale, and you will appreciate my natural curiosity as to the particular matter which you may have under investigation. It is only natural that I should enjoy your confidence, your complete confidence, your utter confidence, your implicit confidence."

And the district attorney stalked to a chair, executed a right turn, paused, flipped the tails of his frock coat to either side, and jackknifed himself into a sitting position.

Clint Kale leaned forward.

"You take the Middlevale Courier, may I ask?"

"Certainly, sir. As one in a public position, I deem it my duty to subscribe to each and every paper printed
within the confines of my county. The Middlevale Courier is one of the most reliable of the sheets. It has always supported my candidacy for public office."

"I see. Well, Mr. Thomas Jefferson Train, if you'll read the columns of the Courier from time to time you'll enjoy as much of my confidence as I care to make public."

The lawyer flushed, then thrust a hand within the breast of his coat, assuming an oratorical posture.

"Your attitude, sir, is scarcely that of one who desires to enforce the existing laws and statutes upon our books. I may assure you that nothing more than such an arbitrary, rude and unusual statement is needed to arouse my suspicions. I am to believe, then, that you are in league with the criminal element, anxious to obstruct rather than to expedite, anxious to avoid rather than to enforce law and justice.

"I had even heard a rumor, sir, that you were employed at the behest of that foul murderer, that blood-thirsty Jezebel, Jane Thurmond. I understand that you were trying to upset a just conviction in a court of justice, a conviction that has been affirmed by the highest appellate tribunal in this State."

Clint Kale put his head in his hands.

"Don't make me appreciate the depths of my own infamy," he begged.

"Your accusation makes my activities seem illegal."

Thomas Jefferson Train nodded gravely.

"They are."

"But suppose the conviction was unjust?"

"She was tried by a jury of her peers."

"But the two witnesses who swore they saw her at Sam Pixley's house.

Suppose they were lying? Couldn't I place them upon that chair, in front of my lie detector? Couldn't I subject them to a scientific test to determine their credibility?"

The district attorney's long neck pivoted inside his high collar as he gravely shook his head in dignified negation.

"No, That would be reopening a case which I have pronounced closed. I came to advise you of that."

"And this man, this Ezra Hickory. How of him?"

"A most valuable witness. A client of mine, by the way."

"A client! I thought you were the peoples' attorney?"

"I am, But the emoluments of this office in a small county are not sufficient to furnish a satisfactory remuneration for the highest legal talent. It has, therefore, been the policy of the Legislature to allow a district attorney in counties such as these to accept certain outside employment."

"I see. But suppose one of your clients should commit a crime. Would you feel free to prosecute them?"

"My clients would not commit crimes, sir."

"Then it would only be necessary for a man to pay you a retainer to secure virtual immunity from prosecution during your term of office?"

"Very emphatically not! I merely remarked that I am careful in choosing my clients. They are not of the criminal class."

"I see. How about Ezra Hickory?"

"How about him, indeed?"

"That's all I wanted to know. Do you suppose the fact that you were his private counsel may have influenced his testimony in the murder case? Do you suppose, knowing you were desperately in need of a witness who had
seen the defendant near the home of the deceased at around midnight he stretched his imagination a point—"

Thomas Jefferson Train unjack-knifed his tall figure, stood with telescopic rigidity while he frowned portentously.

"Sir! You are insulting me!"
Clint Kale turned to Boston Blackie with a gleeful smile.

"He's got it, Blackie. He's got the idea, at last!"
The lawyer covered the distance from chair to door in three long strides.

"You shall suffer for this," he declared, and then he, too, banged the door.

"Oh, Gawd," moaned Boston Blackie, "they'll frame a murder rap on us now. Why did I ever get into this mess? I was so happy in my cell compared with what I'm goin' to get into! Le'me go back. Tell the warden I violated parole."

Clint Kale shook his head,

"No, Blackie, I need you. I need your cheerful optimism of character. But I was going to give you a telegram to send. I wouldn't send it from Middlevale. The town gets gossip around a little too speedily. You'd better hire a car and drive across the county line. Send it from Center City."

Boston Blackie took the telegram, mournfully put on his hat and coat.

"I'll probably find you in jail. Maybe they'll frame something on you that'll get you lynched. I ain't got no relatives. But you'd better make a list of your relatives, an' the address of where you want the body sent. Mail it to your friends and send a copy to the hospital an' the undertaker."

And he closed the door with the firm determination of a martyr marching grimly to his doom.

He would, perhaps, have been even more mournful had he known the contents of the message he carried. It was addressed to the warden of the State prison and was as follows:

Communicate at once criminal record of Boston Blackie to chief of police here. Ask to report if this party in his vicinity. Send photos and finger-prints.

But Boston Blackie handed the sealed envelope to the telegraph operator in the neighboring city, handed over the bill Kale had given him, received his change, contemplated the advisability of breaking his parole, finally decided against it, and returned to Middlevale.

He found his employer peacefully snoring.

Boston Blackie locked all doors, barricaded the windows, and then sought his own bed. Long into the night he could be heard restlessly tossing and turning.

Morning dawned and found Carl Rosamond, pencil and notebook in hand, waiting in the corridor. As soon as Clint Kale left the room for breakfast the reporter attached himself like a bur.

"You're in bad," he cautioned.
Clint Kale nodded.
"Awful bad," he agreed.
"And then some," added Rosamond.

"Yes," groaned Kale, "I've lost my radium."
"What's that?"
"Yes, My radium. It's gone. It was worth exactly ninety-three thousand, two hundred and thirty-seven dollars and sixteen cents—gold."
The reporter stared goggle-eyed.

"I want to put a want ad in your lost and found department, offering one thousand dollars for the return of
that tube of radium and no questions asked."

The reporter’s pencil was busy.

"Good Lord! That won’t be necessary. You’ll get all the space you want. A want ad wouldn’t amount to anything. I’ll smear the story all over the front page. Robbed, you think?"

The gloom upon Clint Kale’s countenance deepened.

"Robbed, I’m afraid," he said. "It was done so cleverly I didn’t have any idea of it, not until this morning."

"Gee!" breathed the reporter, his news sense causing him to forget his audience, "what a story! Scientific detective, coming to this city to investigate obscure crime, is robbed first rattle out of the box of a hundred thousand dollars’ worth of radium used in connection with his lie detector! Gee, that’s a wow! I’ll telephone that in to the city newspapers. Gosh, what a story!"

Clint Kale scowled.

"That wouldn’t be very good advertisement for me, would it?"

The reporter shrugged his shoulders.

"It’s news, an’ we gotta print the news.

"Of course."

"Have you any theories?"

"No. Only I shall recover the radium. The reward will do it. It’s of no commercial value. Only hospitals and lie detectors, scientific laboratories and certain limited manufacturers are in the market for radium. It will be returned. I’ll be out the reward. That’s all."

The reporter nodded.

"I think I’ll get off an extra," he said."

"Yes, yes, do so. My scientific apparatus is greatly curtailed in efficiency as long as the radium is missing. Be sure to state that I think it is merely lost, or that, if it was stolen, it will be thrown away by the thief in order to escape detection. Discount the theory of theft."

The reporter hesitated a moment.

"I shall report the facts," he said, and walked away.

Clint Kale sidled up to the lunch counter in the gloomy restaurant. The odor of stale grease was a rancid insult to the nostrils. The place was blue with the by-products of cooking.

The tired-eyed girl smeared a bare arm over a perspiring forehead.

"We got ham an’ eggs or steak. Which’ll you have?"

Clint Kale picked ham and eggs.

A shadow fell over the counter. He looked back and up. Ellery Hatcher, the chief of police, was grinning down at him, and the grin was triumphant.

"Hear you lost somethin’?"

"Yes."

"Maybe you won’t be so highhat now."

"I fail to follow your reasoning."

"Haw, haw, haw, the big detective! Comes to town to show us guys up, an’ what happens? Gets held up and a million dollars of radium stolen. Haw, haw, haw."

Clint looked around apprehensively.

"Not so loud."

Chief Hatcher raised his voice.

"And it takes the local police to come to the rescue. You got a crook workin’ for you, an’ we have to tell you that. He’s Boston Blackie, a parole, and the big house wants the dope on him. I wired in a report this mornin’. They’ll likely wire me back to pick him up."

Clint straightened, dropped knife and fork clattering to the lunch counter.

"You’re sure?"

"Of course I’m sure. I knew ‘m the
minute I clapped eyes on him. But I sent in a wire to find out if they still wanted him. They sent me his picture and finger-print classifications, and told me to report in detail. Haw, haw, haw!"

"But," protested Clint, "how could you know?"

"Oh, we know," boasted Chief Hatcher, swinging his triumphant glance to include the circle of gawking faces which had assembled as by magic. "Us country police ain't boobs. We know our way about—even if we don't donate no million dollars' worth of radium to crooks. Haw, haw, haw!"

Clint Kale seemed to have lost his appetite. He paid for his check, clapped his hat on his head and sprinted for the hotel. Nor did he emerge from his room the entire day.

CHAPTER IV

"What About the Reward?"

At night Boston Blackie, carefully coached in the part he was to play, moaning dire calamity to come, slipped from the back entrance and made his way to the home of Ezra Hickory. He was the unwilling custodian of the radium.

"I want your help," he husked.

Ezra Hickory, a wrinkled specimen of hardened manhood, fastened cold eyes upon the man.

"You're a convict," he rasped.

Boston Blackie started.

"You know that?"

"Sure."

Boston Blackie groaned.

"That's the tough part of it. I am. And the boss lost a tube of radium. It spilled out. I happened to find it. There's a reward offered for it. But, if I should say I found it they'd bring up my criminal record and I not only wouldn't get no reward, I'd get put back in the big house with another sentence hung on me.

"Now I was figuring that you're an old-established citizen here, and you're a client of the district attorney. Maybe if you was to find this here radium there wouldn't be nothing said. You'd collect the reward and then we could go fifty-fifty."

Ezra Hickory glanced up and down the dark lane which led to his secluded dwelling. Frogs were booming in various cadences. A whippoorwill whistled his mournful note. An owl hooted from the telephone post at the corner of the driveway. Everywhere were evidences of isolation.

"Come in here where there's light," he invited.

Boston Blackie entered the hallway, produced a golden capsule from his pocket.

"How much is she worth?" asked Ezra.

"Pretty near a hundred thousand dollars, even money."

"How much is the reward?"

"The boss offered a thousand. He'd pay ten if he had to."

Ezra wrinkled his brow shrewdly.

"Any way of identifying this here bit of radium as belonging to Clint Kale?"

"None whatever."

"Humph," murmured Ezra.

"You an' me, fifty-fifty on the reward," said Boston Blackie.

Ezra extended his hand.

"Give it to me," he said.

Boston Blackie passed it over.

"You gotta put it some place. You can't carry it for no length of time. It'll burn the skin. That's what they use it for, burnin' out cancer and such stuff."

Ezra Hickory regarded the small
capsule, then his face stiffened in decision.

"You wait right here," he said.
"Don't move."

And he glided out of the hallway, into the house, as furtively as a shadow.

Ten minutes later he was back.
"The chief o' police is lookin' for you. He's got authorization from the penitentiary to pick you up as a parole violator. And the district attorney is aiming to frame a crime on you because your boss was highhat to him. You better do somethin'."

Boston Blackie collapsed on the stoop.
"Oh, my God!" he moaned. "As bad as that!"
"Worse," croaked Ezra Hickory.
"Gee, what'll I do?"

"I'm goin' to help you. I'll put you in my machine an' you can get to the State line. We'll get there in a couple of hours. I'll give you money to get away with. You better keep movin'."

"How about my half of the reward?" asked Boston Blackie.

"What reward?"

"For the radium I gave you, of course."

"You didn't give me no radium," said Ezra Hickory.

"The hell I didn't!"

"The hell you didn't. Do you want a lift to the State line and money to get away on, or do you want me to call the chief an' tell him I found you prowlin' around the house?"

And Ezra Hickory produced a big revolver, levelled it at the whimpering figure of Boston Blackie.

"I want a lift to the State line," said Boston Blackie. "How much get-away money do I get?"

"Enough. I don't want to have 'em catch you."

"You won't get into no trouble?" asked Boston Blackie.

"Heh, heh, heh," chuckled Ezra Hickory, "the district attorney's my private, personal lawyer. Heh, heh, heh!"

They went to the garage. The light flivver roared into activity and jolted away into the darkness.

Minutes passed. The frogs failed to resume their chorus. The owl had ceased to hoot. The whippoorwill had faded into the night.

A furtive shadow glided along the driveway, inserted a skeleton key in the front door, and entered the house. The shadow became a figure of a man carrying a heavy bag. The bag was opened, a flash light taken out, also a glass jar.

The light of the flash disclosed the features of Clint Kale.

He took the glass jar, a curious contrivance which contained an insulated rod. On the top of the rod was a button. At the lower end of the rod, safely incased in the glass, were bits of gold leaf, hanging limply.

Clint Kale took an ebonite rod, rubbed it briskly, waved it over the metal button. After an interval he touched the button with his finger, withdrew the rod.

The bits of gold leaf, attached to the end of the insulated rod flew apart, remained rigidly erect, each repelling the other.

Clint Kale had created an electroscope. The bits of gold leaf, each being charged with a similar kind of static electricity, repelled each other. Yet let them come in contact with a field of electrical energy, the charges would be dispelled and the leaf would collapse.

Holding the electroscope in his left hand, nestled in a specially constructed holder, Clint Kale moved about the
house, holding the electroscope near the walls, sliding it over the floor, pushing it up to within a short distance of the ceiling.

Room by room he went through the place.

In the cellar he slid the electroscope past a section of what appeared to be solid concrete. Of a sudden the leaves of the instrument collapsed.

Clint marked the place. Then he again separated the gold leaf and began a series of experiments. When he had finished, he had a certain section of wall carefully marked.

He gave that section careful attention.

Its secret was disclosed only after microscopic examination. The section of wall had been so cunningly fitted that it was almost impossible to notice the lines which marked the junction of the removable section and the rest of the wall.

Clint Kale removed the section.

There was disclosed a hidden recess. In that recess was the tube of radium, also certain other papers and documents, a great pile of currency.

Clint went back upstairs, got out a camera and tripod from the bag he had brought to the house with him and got to work.

He made a double exposure on the plate. One exposure was of the opened recess with its papers, its currency, its radium. The other exposure was from the same place, but with the section of wall back in place.

The plate, when developed, would give the X-ray effect of a solid wall behind which would be visible the documents, the money, the radium capsule.

Clint exposed another plate in the same manner.

Then he carefully packed up all his belongings and left the house as furtively as he had entered.

CHAPTER V

Trick Photography

It was well toward noon when the thump of many steps sounded in the corridor of the Palace Hotel. Heavy knuckles sounded imperatively upon the wooden panel.

Clint Kale opened the door.

The solemn-faced delegation greeted him with elaborate formality. There was Chief Ellery Hatcher. There was Carl Rosamond, the reporter of the Courier. There was Thomas Jefferson Train, and there was the wizened form of the astute Ezra Hickory.

“Mr. Kale,” said the chief, “this here is Ezra Hickory.”

Clint Kale bowed.

“A client of mine,” hastily interposed the district attorney, “and I’ll do the talking—all of it, for my client, of course.”

“You are now speaking in your private capacity?” asked Clint Kale.

“Certainly,” snapped the district attorney.

“Where’s Boston Blackie?” smirked the chief.

Clint Kale spread his hands, palms out, in a deprecatory gesture.

“Gone.”

“Skipped,” said the chief.

Clint shrugged.

Thomas Jefferson Train cleared his throat.

“You lost a capsule of radium?”

“Yes.”

“That is very valuable?”

“Very.”

“You advertised, offering a reward and no questions asked?”

“Not exactly. I wanted to, but Rosamond advised against it. There-
fore no formal offer of reward was ever made.”

The district attorney’s face twitched.
“"You can’t get around it by no such technicality,” he said. “My client found that radium, or some radium.”

He gestured to Ezra Hickory. That individual took from his pocket a package. The package was undone. A gold capsule fell to the table.

“That’s it!” yelled Clint, and swooped toward the capsule.

Chief Hatcher’s hairy paw snapped down upon his wrist.

“No, ye don’t,” said the chief.

“You’ll have to identify it as yours first,” said the district attorney.

“But of course it’s mine. How else would any radium get to this community? Why not have your client tell how he got it?”

“That,” said Train, with dignity, “will come later. For the present we are inquiring into your title. The thing that makes me more suspicious than anything else is the small amount of the reward offered. According to your own declaration this radium is worth approximately one hundred thousand dollars. Yet the reward you offer is but a paltry thousand. That, in itself, is enough to indicate that it is not the same radium.

“As district attorney I could not allow this radium to be turned over to you until the circumstances convinced me it was the same radium.”

“Speaking officially?” asked Clint.

“Speaking officially!” rasped the district attorney.

“If the reward were increased it would convince you?”

“Yes.”

“Speaking officially?”

“Speaking officially!”

“Your client would get that reward?”

“Naturally.”

“And you would collect a percentage?”

“Of course.”

“Officially?”

“No, sir, speaking privately now, in my capacity of private attorney.”

Clint Kale rubbed a hand over the angle of his jaw.

“You seem to have me sort of sewed up!”

The lawyer said nothing.

Ezra Hickory’s features softened into a half smile.

The chief of police snickered audibly.

“What reward would you suggest?”

“As district attorney I should say a reward of ten thousand dollars would prove that you really felt the radium was yours.”

“Speaking officially?”

“Yes!”

“That’s a lot of money.”

“My client would be willing to accept it in full as a reward.”

“Speaking privately now, Mr. Train, I take it.”

“Speaking privately, sir.”

Clint sighed.

“Guess I’m hooked,” he admitted.

“But first I’ll have to make certain scientific tests to determine that this is really the radium.”

“You have my permission.”

“Officially?”

“Both official and private. The chief will keep an eye on you and see there’s no funny business.”

Clint picked the capsule up with a pair of forceps, weighed it carefully, noted the weight.

“I shall require a bit of blued steel to rub it over,” he said.

“Blued steel?”

“Yes.”
The chief of police tugged at his holster, produced a six-shooter.

"Ah! Thank you, chief. Set it down there, right by Mr. Hickory, if you will. That’s fine. Now watch the barrel."

He took the forceps, ran the capsule over the steel.

"Leave it there for a moment or two and see if the oxidation brings out any apparent change in the barrel. Now, one more thing. I have to tell where this radium was stored while it was absent from me. If radium is stored for any length of time in an electrical field it tends to lose its energy.

"However, fortunately, radium is sufficiently active to impress a photographic plate with its environment. Let me place the capsule between two plate holders. Fine. Now we’ll put them in this developing box, put on the top, pour developer in the opening. Now there’s nothing else to do while we wait for the plates to develop.

"Tell me, since we’re all here, gentlemen, how about that Sam Pixley case?"

"That what you came down here to investigate?" asked Chief Hatcher.

"Yes. I might as well admit it. It is."

"The case is closed," said the district attorney.

Ezra Hickory said nothing.

"I always felt," said Clint Kale, speaking in a reflective monotone, "that the woman wasn’t guilty. Her testimony is too utterly incredible to have been fabricated, the telephone call to go see Pixley, the finding of the package of currency in the exact amount required to pay off the mortgage. Only a fool would have told such a story if it were the truth. Not even a fool would have made up such a yarn as a lie.

"But there were no finger-prints on the job. That indicates mental shrewdness. But, most convincing of all, the shares of stock in a worthless company were left untouched. But only a few of the older inhabitants knew that this stock was worthless. Mrs. Thurmond had only lived here eight years. The history of that stock goes back farther than that."

Clint ceased speaking, smiled around him.

"I think the plates have developed. We will now pour off the developer and put in the hypo to fix them."

He walked to the wash bowl, poured off liquid, washed the plates, poured off the washing water, poured hypo through the light-proof opening that was placed in the top of the developing box.

Then he returned to his chair.

"I have carefully examined the transcript," he said. "It seems to me that the testimony of Ezra Hickory was the determining factor in the conviction."

Ezra Hickory squirmed in his chair.

"I have long wanted to talk with Mr. Hickory, to get him to face my lie detector."

Thomas Jefferson Train cleared his throat with a metallic rattle.

"You’ll settle this matter of the reward first," he rasped.

"Betcha life," growled Chief Hatcher.

"I’ll tell my story anywhere!" snapped Ezra Hickory, glancing around him with some visible apprehension as he took in the various equipment of the place.

"Fine," agreed Clint, and took the top off the developing box. "We can now inspect the plates."

They were perfect exposures.

"Look here," said Clint, draining
one and holding it to the light. "You can see where this radium was stored the last few hours. There's a wall. But the radio rays go right through the wall and give a perfect photograph of the interior. There are some stocks, and some currency. Look! You can even see the names on the stocks, the numbers of the shares—Let's see. There's a name. There's a number. There's a date. Stock in the—no, it's bonds—bonds in the Hanover Irrigation District. And here are some diamonds—most interesting. One has only to seek such a wall—"

There was a flourish of motion.

Ezra Hickory had snatched the blued steel six-shooter from the desk.

"Hands up!" he yelled.

His hearers stared at him with wide eyes.

The little man, brandishing the weapon, scuttled for the bathroom, went through it to the communicating room, opened the hall doorway.

A State officer was posted at the end of the corridor.

Ezra Hickory didn't hesitate. He raised the weapon to his temple.

There was the roar of an explosion, the sound of a limp body thudding to the floor.

He was dying as they reached him.

He rattled out a confession as they took him to the ambulance. He died as he reached the hospital.

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CHAPTER VI

He Got His Reward

GOVERNOR KENDALL frowned over the desk at the dapper figure that lounged in the chair across from him. On the desk was the signed pardon which liberated Jane Thurmond. Also on the desk were copies of the Middlevale Courier.

The Governor indicated those copies with a wave of his hand.

"I don't like your methods," he said.

"What's wrong with them? I told you I'd have to be more or less unconventional. That paraphernalia was just a stage setting."

"Oh, it isn't that. It's the casual manner in which you made it possible for Ezra Hickory to shoot himself. In fact, you fixed it so he couldn't do much else."

"Oh, that," remarked Clint Kale, with a shrug. "It was, after all, only a matter of reward. Ezra wanted his just reward. He came with his attorney to collect it. He got it."

"Humph," shrugged the executive. "How long had you known he was guilty?"

"Some time. The newspaper reports showed he must be. The woman didn't have enough mentality to guard against finger-prints, not if she was as foolish about the rest of the facts as she seemed. And, in any event, she wouldn't have known the worthless nature of the American Carbonator stock."

The Governor sighed.

"And you staged that elaborate third degree with the idea Ezra Hickory would save the State the expense of his trial."

Clint shrugged.

"It would have embarrassed the district attorney to have had to prosecute Ezra. He might have been half-hearted about it. And Ezra would have been shrewd enough to get a local lawyer."

"No. He was there to collect his reward. He got it."

The Governor slammed the blotter down upon the signed pardon.

"Get out of here," he said, "and let me think just what I'm going to tell the newspaper reporters."
"I'll take that rod!" Coats said suddenly.

For a sultry minute, hiding with lowered lids eyes that were murderously aflame, Coats would let Byrne do all the talking. Let him strut his stuff.

Then: "I'll take that rod!" A whip-crack.

Foolishly, Byrne had taken his hand from his pocket. Saying it with words wasn't quite enough. He wanted to add the gesture of snapping his fingers at Coats.

He didn't snap his fingers. Coats, flying at the chance, had made one of those split-second, miracle draws of his. His gun, squeezed free in its holster under his left arm, flashed into his hand as uncannily as a sleeved ace into a magician's.

Byrne stopped short, staring with round, dazed eyes at that dark hole in the pistol muzzle aimed uphill at his
heart. His palms jerked to a level with 
his reddening ears and remained 
elevated after Coats had deftly rid his 
pocket of the blue-steel weight that had 
sagged it.  

"Now, go on an' tell me, Lefty,"  
Coats invited. "Tell me where I get 
off at."

A car rolled into the garage, and one 
of the four hard-mouthed passengers 
it had brought walked to the door of 
the office in back. What he saw 
wrenched a startled oath from him. 

"You birds rehearsing' something?"

Coats turned a razor-thin smile on 
the questioner.

"Lo, Jimmy Walsh," he said. 
"No—it ain't a rehearsal. It's a play."

"Yeah?" The newcomer's stolid 
gaze reappraised the tableau and 
fastened on Coats—blank. "I don't 
get it."

"The play itself, that's what it is,"  
Coats repeated. His rhetorical figure 
pleased him, and he extended it. 
"Wrote and produced by Mr. Lefty 
Byrne, I was supposed to be the dog 
audience for th' try-out—see? What 
I'm doing right now, I'm callin' the 
author!"

He exploded with a brief laugh of 
self-appreciation, and then his voice 
went harsh.

"Still too fast for yuh, Walsh? 
Well, I'll tell you another way. Lefty 
made a collection to-day—got the 
dough for that load of fancy stuff that 
went out on the North Shore Satur-
day. Five grand he should 'a' turned in. 
And would you ask me what he tried 
to turn in instead? His resignation!"

Lefty Byrne, who had turned 
several colors directly before Walsh's 
intrusion, was all scarlet.

"Listen, Jimmy," he appealed 
hoarsely, "is a fella tied to any racket 
with a ball an' chain? Can't he do a 
fade-away when he wants to—if he 
can walk out clean? Sam owes me that 
five grand, every dime of it. Breakin' 
with him, why shouldn't I hold it?"

Walsh blinked and shrugged, de-
ferring to Coats.

"Don't ask me," he said. "I'm not 
the big shot in this racket. Sam runs 
the mob."

"Tootin' right I do," Coats grimly 
affirmed. "And anything you got 
comin' from me, Byrne, is paid when 
I'm ready to pay. You don't snatch it, 
see? Fork over!"

Lefty Byrne swallowed hard and 
forked. Five crackling notes went on 
the desk and were swept casually into 
a drawer.

"I'll put 'em in a better place," Coats 
said, "after I'm done with yuh. I want 
to hear some more. My mind was 
somewheres else, so maybe I didn't get 
you straight the first time. I'm sittin' 
back here safe, am I, grabbin' the kale 
while the boys take all th' risk? I ain't 
gave you a fair break, ain't I?"

He had put down the pistol; and 
Byrne, taking that to mean the passing 
of his crisis, drew a deep breath. The 
film that had dulled his eyes passed 
away; blue and steady, they met 
Coats's glare.

"Be reasonable, Sam," he urged. 
"If I got on my ear, it was your fault. 
I brought th' dough in, didn't I? And 
wasn't I on the up-an'-up with you, 
sayin' I wanted to junk the booze 
runnin' game an' buy that gas station 
up in Yonkers, an' settle down?"

"Sure," grinned Coats. "You as 
much as told me, 'Here's your five 
grand, Sam, only you don't get it!' 
Then you went up in the air because I 
couldn't see it that way."

Lefty Byrne shook his head.

"Now, wait!" he protested softly.

"What happened, you made a rotten
crack about—a certain party. A lady friend a' mine."

"Which," murmured Coats, with a wink for Walsh, "was Dorcas O'Donnell. Right? Be a good guy, Byrne, an' tell Jimmy what you're goin' to do to me if I ever look cock-eyed at that dizzy dame a' yours again!"

"Oh," Walsh said, and smirked. "Hear?"

"We're goin' to get married," Byrne told him quickly. "Married—regular. Get that."

"I got a picture a' Dorcas O'Donnell sittin' home and dartin' socks!" crowed Coats. "Say, unless she married a bank roll big enough to buy her all the excitement on Broadway she'd be back to the hostess racket in th' Gold Slipper before the weddin' flowers faded!"

Walsh saw something ominous in the tautening of Lefty Byrne's jaw and the swift hunching of his shoulders.

"Well, I dunno," he interjected hurriedly, attempting a diplomatic diversion. "She's got a domestic streak at that, Dorcas has. I mean, you got to hand it to her. She does her own laundry. I know!"

"Whose business is it," Byrne demanded truculently, "if she does? Let's just drop her out of th' conversation, Walsh." He transferred his frown to Coats. "Now that you've got the money, Sam, and a portion of my sentiments along with it, I guess I might as well take the air."

Coats put out a big hand and dropped it significantly over the two pistols lying side by side on the desk.

"Guess," he snapped, "again! You're not walking off, Lefty, as free an' easy as all that. You know too much to be let stroll out a' here sore

head. Beat it upstairs an' take a nice peaceful nap for yourself."

He threw a nod to Walsh.

"Take him up, Jim. Put him in his own room, and turn th' key on him. His case is goin' to take some heavy thinkin'!"

II

FOR one instant Byrne hesitated, weighing his chance for a break against the dubious aftermath of acquiescence. Once he was upstairs Coats had him in the bag. If big Sam made up his mind that way, they could put him on the spot right here—use that rod of Sam's that had the silencer on it, and bump him without a sound getting to the street. Or if they wanted to make a fancy job of it, they could pile him into a machine and take him for one of those quiet little one-way rides into the country.

As he stared past Walsh, poised for a dash, the square of the outer twilight up in front was already narrowing, the steel garage door rumbling on its rollers. It closed with a clank—and that was that. His only choice then was to give in, to play to Coats.

"Okay, Sam," he said. "I'll chase on up—but, say, get that funny idea out a' your bean, won't yuh? Whether we split or whether we don't, I'm no squawker. You ought to know me better'n that by this time."

For a little Coats studied him, and again the red lids dropped over his eyes. When he spoke there was a note of concession in his voice—a straw that Lefty Byrne snatched at gratefully.

"Oh, hell," he said. "Forget that. The reason I'm holdin' yuh, Lefty, I don't want yuh goin' out mad. We'll talk about the money end later, when we're both feelin' better. Go on along,
now. Hit th’ hay. Maybe you’ll wake up with different notions about givin’ the mob the go-by.”

The three riders who had arrived in the big touring car with Walsh looked curiously after Byrne as he started up the stairs back to the office. Evidently they had overheard enough to know he’d had a falling out with Coats, and their chill silence told him plainly enough whose side they’d be on at a show-down. The fact that they’d all been pals, that they’d fought side by side in a dozen skirmishes with hijackers—all that would be overboard if Sam ever turned his thumb down.

Walsh himself said nothing until they were on the second story, threading through the dusty and idle machinery that camouflaged the Big Shot’s diversions of government-doped alcohol by way of his withdrawal permit for Beautiful Doll Boudoir Preparations, Inc.

Up there, remote from Coats’s ears, Walsh deplored:

“Somethin’ must ‘a’ rattled loose in your head, Lefty, you tyin’ into Sam that way. A wonder he didn’t turn the smoke on you, instead a’ just the gas.”

“I guess it is,” Byrne agreed moodily. “But there’s a limit to what a guy can take, Jim. He shouldn’t ‘a’ brought in the Kid—that’s all. I think he’s beginning to see it that way himself.”

“Yeah; he’ll be all right now,” Walsh opined. “All you got to do is tell him you changed your mind about jumpin’ the racket, and everything’ll be hotsy-totsy again. That was his main grouch—don’t you see it? He’s short-handed now, the way things are openin’ up.”

Another stairway took them out of the powdery precincts of the Beautiful Doll Preparations to the third and up-

permost floor of the garage building. The “cell-block,” the mob called that particular department of the Coats ménage. It had been partitioned by bleak walls of hollow tile into half a dozen sleeping rooms, and each was furnished with a good bed and a dresser.

Lefty Byrne walked directly into a cubicle at the rear. That had been “home” to him for the last couple of years—all the home he’d thought he would ever want, until he’d discovered Dorcas.

Shifting the key from the inside of the door to the outside, Walsh deprecated: “This is applesauce, Lefty, but you know how Sam is. We don’t either of us want to rub him the wrong way.”

Byrne grinned wanly.

“It’s all right by me,” he said. “Do your duty, sheriff!”

He was at the window, staring out over cluttered back yards at a rectangle of light in a tall, seedy building below, when the key turned. Evening had come, and Dorcas was up, preening herself for the night’s grind at the Gold Slipper.

Lefty had seen her first from where he stood now. It came back to him, as vivid as if it had been yesterday. That broiling afternoon; street cars and trucks roaring so you couldn’t hear; he at his window and the girl, covered by some filmy silk thing, gazing at hers; their exchange of smiles. He had made a street corner rendezvous by signs, though at first she had laughed, shaking her head. All that—the beginning.

The beginning. And how was it going to end?

She was expecting him to drop in at the Gold Slipper to-night, but he wasn’t going to be there. To-morrow,
she’d be certain then, he’d come around to the flat. Would he, though? A chill came on him again. Who could say what to-morrow had in store?

Hungry he watched her shadow on that shade down the line, passing, re-passing, slim and quick. He prayed that she’d come to the window and look out; then he’d switch his own light on and try to show her, in pantomime, that circumstances prevented the keeping of dates just now.

But she didn’t come. Her light went out presently, and even that tantalizing shadow of her was gone.

He smoked a cigarette in darkness before he reached for the switch and threw himself on his bed with a much-thumbed book.

“Money in Gas,” was the book’s title, and it was further described on its cover as “A Practical Guide for the Independent Filling Station Owner.”

III

In the dressing room at the Gold Slipper, toward midnight, a large, glittering blond lady—the famous Tennessee Martin, in person and extremely so—cast eyes of concern upon the prettiest of all her dancing sub-hostesses, Miss Dorcas O’Donnell.

“Why,” she asked, “so pensive? It’s early for a headache.”

The slender, dark girl made a grimace of repugnance.

“Honey,” she said, “I’m not here for headaches. Not since I collected a real one, once, and missed a date. They could sail the Leviathan right up to the bandstand on all the loaded apple-juice I’ve spilled to-night.”

“What’s wrong, then?”

The girl sighed.

“Everything. This time—a date’s missed me. A very special one.”

“Love, deary,” said Miss Martin, “is a disease. And you’re a hospital case, if I ever saw one. But cheer up. The boy friend will be here when he gets here. You ought to know there’s lots of night work in a profession like his. Hearts may ache, and women may weep, but somebody’s got to go down to the sea in speed boats!”

Dorcas O’Donnell shuddered.

“I can’t laugh it off,” she protested. “I’ve got a feeling that—something’s happened. It wasn’t just the every day risk that Lefty was going to face when I saw him this afternoon. He was bound to have a showdown with the man he’s been working for—and that man’s a killer, Tennessee! It’s no secret. If I mentioned who he was, and Lefty was yours, you’d be in a panic, too. I tell you, I’m scared to death of what I’m going to see in the papers when I leave here.”

The Gold Slipper’s buxom hostess-in-chief threw an arm around the girl’s trembling white shoulder.

“Then the best thing, chickie,” she comforted, “is to leave before the papers are out. Get on your things this minute, and taxi along home. And don’t sit up when you get there, thinking horrible things that’ll be funny in the morning. Go to sleep. Rest is what your nerves need.”

Good advice—but how could she follow it? Across the dingy yards the starlight showed her Lefty Byrne’s window, standing open. Did it mean, as it always had before, that he was there? If he was, why hadn’t he come uptown? Why, when he knew she’d be anxiously waiting, holding her breath, anguished with fear for him?

It was dawn before she dozed; but at nine she was up, heavy-eyed, and at the window again.

A glad cry escaped her. Lefty Byrne
was at his own window. There, and in just the pose of that first day of theirs, a leg thrown up on the sill, a cigarette in his fingers.

He saw her at the moment of her appearance, and she divined he had been watching for her. He waved; she beckoned; he shook his head—and she couldn’t understand that.

Lefty was trying to make her understand; working in what seemed a frenzy of gesticulation to get some message to her across that void filled with the racket of the “L” trains and the flat-wheeled surface cars, the straining trucks and the ceaselessly honking smaller fry of East Side traffic.

He pointed down, and shook his head. He pointed behind him and shook his head. He took out a billfold, held it upside down, open, empty, and shook his head again.

“Come over!” she called desperately. “Come over and tell me!”

Her voice was a whisper in a thunderstorm. He couldn’t hear her. She knew he couldn’t. But he could guess. He spread his hands helplessly. That meant he couldn’t come maybe. Why?

While she was trying to puzzle that out, he vanished from the window. Just before he vanished he had turned quickly, as if some one had come into the room behind him. What did that mean? Why hadn’t he stopped for a good-by wave?

Impulse took her to the telephone when, after long minutes, Lefty hadn’t reappeared.

It was Coats who answered her ring at the garage. He’d been drinking; his voice was thick and surly, but it smoothed when she spoke her name.

“Why, no, kiddo,” he said. “Lefty ain’t around just now.” He laughed. “Anybody else do?”

She stiffened at the lie. “Where,” she asked, “is he, then?”

Coats hesitated. “He’s out on a little errand. Ought to be back any minute. Why don’t you come over an’ wait for him?”

She could think of several good reasons why she shouldn’t, but swiftly she was aware of a still bigger and better reason for not presenting them. Around at the garage she might find the answer to the mystery.

“Maybe,” she said, with a thin echo of that widely-imitated, engagingly amiable gurgle introduced in night club circles by Miss Tennessee Martin, “maybe I will!”

She bathed and dressed quickly, and she had a trained smile for big Sam Coats when she walked into his office half an hour later.

“Lefty ain’t here yet,” he told her, grinning back. “But sit down. Make yourself at home. He ain’t the only one that likes to look at you.”

She had girded on her armor of the cabaret for him and took it wide-eyed.

“I thought you were different, Sam,” she murmured. “All business. But you’re like all of ’em. I guess the man doesn’t live who won’t try to hand you a line.”

Coats’s widening smile showed a glint of gold in his upper jaw.

“The big question before the American girl to-day,” he said, “isn’t the men’s line, but what they’re willing to hand with it. I’ll spend money, any day, on mine. Sweet boys are all right, but it takes a fur coat to keep a lady warm when the mercury’s down.”

Dorcas O’Donnell sighed.

“Some get furs, and some don’t,” she said. “You’d be surprised how the big-hearted customers up at the club shower them on me between two and five any morning—in promises. But whenever the delivery cars stop in front
of my door, it's something C. O. D. they've got for little Dorcas.”

Coats chuckled.

“I was going to say something. I guess I won’t.”

“Why not?”

“Lefty Byrne mightn’t like it.”

Her gaze was a baby stare, steady and gently thoughtful, and provoca-
tive.

“But,” she suggested demurely, “Lefty isn’t here.”

Sam Coats guffawed and slapped his knee.

“That’s good! Well, if men are the same—ain’t women?” He swung around and sidled his chair along be-
hind the desk. “I like ’em smart, kiddo. Up on their toes. Out to grab what they can. But—on the square—I always thought you was too good-
lookin’ to be anything but dumb.”

The girl evaded his reaching hand, but her smiled stayed put.

“Don’t!” she whispered. “Not here. Lefty—”

Coats’s eyes narrowed.

“Yeah?” he questioned. “Lefty?”

“He—he might be coming back.”

She drew further from him in the pause, while the Big Shot’s blunt fi-
gers began softly to drum the desk.

“Listen,” he said, “listen here, kiddo. Tell me th’ truth. Would you care a lot if he didn’t? Would you mind it, that is, if somebody with a real roll was ready to be good to you?”

She lost the smile at that—gasped.

“Wh-what do you mean?”

The gold tooth flashed again.

“You heard me. You’ve got ears—and brains. A skirt like you could dazzle this town if she had things. If she was hooked up right. What th’ hell are you alive for? Just to sit around and help the butter-an’-egg men get ready for an ice bag in the morn-
in’? Or to waste time on a cheap gun that ain’t got nerve enough to stick with his racket?”

The girl straightened.

“That’s—Lefty? Where is he, Sam? Why are you talking that way about him? About him not—coming back?”

Coats had caught himself, and his eyes were veiled to her.

“That’s somethin’,” he said, and coughed, “somethin’ that could be taken care of. I got connections in Florida—and believe me, he’ll go where the best dough is.” He got up and crossed to a filing cabinet; pulled open one of the steel drawers, and from the drawer produced a bottle and glasses. “How about a ‘first to-day?’” he asked. “This is the McCoy, kiddo. Stuff you never get uptown. My own private stock, with th’ music of th’ bagpipes in every drop.”

She had started to refuse, but some-
things was buzzing suddenly in the back of her mind. She had to stay, and that meant she must play the game as nightly she played it at the Gold Slip-
er. Play it the Spartan Tennessee’s way, with a glass in one hand and the reins firmly in the other, until she knew what was coming up for Lefty.

Out by the garage door, Walsh and two or three others still were loiter-
ing. Coming in, she’d wondered why they were sticking so close to-day with the big car; wondered why they had been so set on avoiding her eye. Now, after that sodden miscue of Coats’s, terror was throbbing in her throat.

Yes; she must stand by. If she could only make a party of it, run it in her maddest madcap manner, get them whooping it as she knew they often did, get upstairs to Lefty—

Staring at her with the bottle un-
corked, big Sam Coats said: “Well, what do you say?”
She gave him the Tennessee look and the Tennessee gurgle.

"If it’s as good as you say it is, pour me one as big as I ought to want it." Then, as if it had been a swift inspiration, she wanted to know:
"How about having the boys in?"
"Why?" grunted Coats.

Both coolness and promise were in her slow glance.

"I’m a hard woman in a hard world, Sammy,” she drawled. “Starting now, when anybody talks fur coat to me—I want witnesses!"

Coats’s eyes went wide.

“What a gold digger my baby’s turnin’ out to be!” He gave her an ecstatic squeeze in passing, and roared happily through the office door: “Gang! Front and center!”

IV

It called for a flawless technique, the handling of that day’s wild whooppee party in Sam Coats’s garage, for it was a party epic in its potentialities. The Scotch, as plentiful as powerful, early proved a distillation not only of bagpipe music, but of stout Highland combativeness. Twice the thick-shouldered Mr. Walsh had to separate two of his partners of the touring car crew, and once Walsh himself was at the verge of a clash with Coats.

Ardently wishing they’d slaughter one another, but uncertain whether they would, Dorcas O’Donnell vindicated herself as an accomplished mistress of ceremonies by directing the removal of the radio from the office to the garage floor.

“I love to dance,” she shrilled, “when I don’t have to. And what a stag line!”

Coats, maudlin by then, claimed her first.

“When th’ rest a’ you dance,” he hiccuped, “is when I’m too tired. Whose liquor is it, anyhow? And whose joint—an’ whose dame?”

“You ought to ask Lefty,” some one suggested.

“Shut up!” Coats roared then. “Lefty ain’t here, see?”

But Dorcas O’Donnell had marked the source of the jeering invitation, and that was the man she danced with next.

“What’s the joke about Lefty?” she asked him when they were at the far end of the floor.

Her partner’s tongue was almost, but not quite as loose, as she had hoped it would be.

“Joke?” he said. “Well, if you call it that. Him an’ Sam had an argument about some coin—and Sam’s got the coin. Playin’ close to his vest with it; I’ll say he is. Under his vest. It’s in his money belt now, next to his skin.”

“Yes?” the girl breathed. “And what about Lefty?”

The well had run dry.

“That’s somethin’,” the rum runner told her, belatedly cautious, “that you’ll have to ask Coats.”

When she danced next with Coats, she did try again. But, “He’s gone on erran’—a long erran’!” was all he told her.

A while after that, Coats went into the office and called one of his men—the straightest one, except for Walsh, of the crowd. The girl, close to the door, overheard an interchange that froze her heart.

“Now, lissen here, Buck,” Coats was saying in a hoarse whisper. “This goes. My mind’s made up. I’m tired a’ hearin’ that broad with her Lefty this and Lefty that, an’ ‘Where the hell is Lefty?’”

“Yeah?” said Buck. “It goes—but, what?”
“The works!” snarled Coats.
“You’re goin’ to take him out in the car to-night, and you ain’t goin’ to bring him back. Give him a water ride, see? Take him ‘way out an’ sink him. I told the skirt I might be sendin’ him to Florida. Well, I will—inside a shark!”

He came from the office, weaving, to find the life of the party faint and white.

“What’s the matter, kiddo? Gettin’ sick? An’ me just after openin’ another case!”

She rallied bravely.

“No; I’m just beginning to have a good time. But we need more girls. I was just thinking—there’s a couple over in my house. Hostesses. They’d love to come over.”

“Fine!” endorsed Coats. “Phone ‘em.”

“I can’t. They haven’t a phone. I’ll have to go after them.”

The host glowered and grunted.

“You wouldn’t come back!”

“I will. I promise. Won’t you believe me—Sammy?”

“All right,” Coats said. “I believe you. But I’ll send Walsh with you, just for luck.”

Walsh went, but the girl left him waiting on the sidewalk when they had turned her corner. Breathless, she flew up the stairs to her own small flat and to the rear window.

She wasn’t disappointed. Lefty was over there, looking out—looking for her, patient after the hours.

“Honey boy!” she screamed at him.
“You’ve got to get out of there!
He didn’t get it. Didn’t get a word of it. Didn’t get the frantic signs she made. With only a couple of hundred feet between them, they were a world apart. Precariously close, she realized with a dry sob, to two worlds apart!

And then at the height of her desperation, she thought of her stratagem of another day, and saw a way, thought of that trick of hers to explain to Lefty why she wasn’t meeting him one afternoon after a big night uptown, and went flying to—her laundry bag!

SHE kept her promise. Within a half hour after she had left big Sam Coats, she had returned to him, Walsh at her side.

“Too bad,” she told him, as she had told Walsh. “One of the girls didn’t get home last night, and her sister isn’t feeling well. I stopped to freshen up for a lone woman’s struggle.”

“Your funeral,” grinned Coats.

“You missed a lot of drinks. Want to catch up?”

“And how!” cried Dorcas O’Donnell. She stooped to bring up the amplification on the radio until the music was a boiler shop roar, and caught big Sam’s arm. “Come on,” she urged. “Take one with me. My first in a long while.”

“Tootin’ I will,” Coats said, and stumbled after her into the office.

She closed the door, and shook her head at the bottle.

“No, wait,” she breathed. “What about that fur coat, Sam? What about—being in back of me? Did you mean it?”

“I said it,” he told her. “You treat me right, I’ll treat you right. I always do business that way.”

She nodded.

“Then I’ll tell you something. I know where Lefty is!”

“Huh?” Coats stared.

“He’s upstairs, in his room. I just saw him from—from the girl’s flat. He was at his window.”
Big Sam blinked.

"Was he? Well, it's too bad. He wanted to keep out a' sight. If you want it straight, he was hell for duckin' you. You see, a fine chance come up for him to go to Florida—alone. He got wise to himself all of a sudden. Saw he'd be a sucker not to take it."

The girl laughed.

"I should have a weeping spell!" she said in a voice as hard as Coats's own. "It's fifty-fifty. If Lefty's got his way to make, I've got mine to make. Far as I'm concerned, he's out of my life. Out like a light. There's plenty of others. Plenty—and real men. Men with dollars to his nickels. He's cheap. I'd like to tell him so. Tell him to his face!"

It was a great act and the befuddled Coats was getting a good kick out of it.

"Atta baby!" he encouraged. "You tell him, kiddo!"

The girl caught up his hands.

"No, no! I take that back!" she cried. "I never want to see him again. Wants to go to Florida, does he? For all of me, he can go 'way south of there. Go and stay. But I want him to know, Sam, just who's quitting who. Listen! I'd write him his walking papers here and now, if—"

Coats had decided he liked her in the hysterical part. He wasn't too far gone to congratulate himself she was that kind—the peppy kind that just blew off steam and tried to beat the man to it when he was ready to give her the gate. So much the better!

He picked her up at the pause.

"If—what?" he said.

"If you'd take his discharge up to him, Sammy," she finished. "Serve it on him yourself. Right away, while I know just what I want to say to him."

Big Sam's arms circled her.

"Momma," he exulted, "you sure rung the right messenger! Say, I won't only hand Lefty the walkin' papers. I'll fix up his transportation for him—to-night!" He waved at the desk. "There's paper an' pen an' ink. Go ahead. Poison him!"

She wrote just a couple of lines. They were ladylike but final in implication:

I'm playing the mob from now on.
You know where you can go. And how.

D. O'D.

Coats gloated over the note.

"Thass the idea, kiddo!" he applauded. "Don't ever waste words. Tell it to 'em snappy."

He lumbered out of the office, turned his back on the scattered and flattening party and started unsteadily up the stairs.

VI

THE key was in the outside of Lefty Byrne's door, and Lefty was waiting just inside when the Big Shot fumbled at the lock. A heavy wash basin was in his hands, and it came crashing down on Coats's head as he entered.

For a second Coats stood waving, then he slumped. He was out cold. Byrne, bending over him, ripped open his vest and his shirt, swiftly unbuckled the money belt under them, and took from it the same five thousand dollar bills that he had been forced to give up.

When he had stuffed them into his pocket, he glanced at the note which Coats had dropped. It brought the ghost of a smile to his lips.

"Thanks, lots!" he said aloud.

"You're the smartest girl in America, honey! You bet I know where to go—and how!"
He patted the Big Shot’s pockets, transferred a pistol to his own, and whisked the sheets from his bed. When he had knotted their ends together, he collected sheets from other beds along the “cell block” and tied them in, too, the squawk of the overturned radio and a bedlam of drunken shouting coming up to him as he worked.

It was in Walsh’s room that he made his rope of sheets fast to the bed. That room looked out on the alley, and there were no fences to climb below. Out the window he went and down.

Three minutes after Coats’s arrival with the note, Lefty was in front of Dorcas O’Donnell’s house with a waiting taxi. Dorcas came scurrying around the corner presently.

“It was kind a’ tough one to read,” Lefty grinned as she climbed hurriedly into the cab. “But it percolated. I crowned Sam, an’ I got my money. Let’s go places.”

Her face again was ashy as she snuggled to him.

“Far places,” said she.

Nearly a half hour had passed before Walsh, always more careful with his drinks than the others, missed the Big Shot.

“Hey!” he shouted, coming out of a doze. “What’s become a’ Sam?”

An answer came hazily through the shriek of the radio.

“Him an’ the skirt went out.”

But the gunman called Buck recollected otherwise.

“No,” he corrected, staggering to Walsh. “They didn’t no such thing. That’s a lie, an’ whoever said it can get as tough as he wants to. Sam went upstairs, thass where Sam went. An’ the dame said she was goin’ to the corner to bring in some san’wiches. But, hell! That’s a long time ago!”

Walsh sprang up.

“Say!” he exclaimed, sobered. “We better see what’s happened. If Sam tangled with Lefty in the shape he’s in, then plenty may of. Shut off that damn music box!”

There was no sound from above. Walsh, gun in hand, leaped for the stairs.

On the third story he found Coats. The Big Shot was sitting on the floor of Lefty’s room, with the door wide open behind him. He was rubbing his head. His eyes were open, but there was only a profound stupefaction in them.

“I—I was ganged,” he stuttered. “An’ s-somebody copped my dough.”

“Where’s Lefty?” Walsh demanded.

Coats couldn’t tell him, but he found out for himself—saw that hawser of sheets moored to his own bed and leading out the window.

“I’ll tell you,” he said, “about Lefty. He’s blew!”

That materially assisted the Big Shot’s recovery. Rage convulsed him.

“What d’you mean, blew?” he thundered. “You guys let him walk, did you?”

“He didn’t walk,” said Walsh. “He slid. He went out my winda into the alley.”

Coats struggled to his feet.

“Then he was tipped!” he accused. “Somebody told him he was in for the works.” His jaw dropped. “Say—that dame! Did she come up here with me and give me th’ double cross?”

“Nope. She went out.”

Walsh was at Lefty Byrne’s window, looking across the yards. He knew Dorcas O’Donnell’s window, for Lefty once had pointed it out to him. On that window his eyes were fixed. A clothes line leading from it to a pole in
the center of the noisy court was strung with what struck him, after a moment, as a preposterous assortment of clothing.

His gaze widened as he stared, and suddenly he snorted.

"My Gawd!" he wheezed. "She's went and pulled that gag with the wash again. An' maybe she didn't hand Byrne a lineful this time!"

Coats came up behind him.

"What th' hell are you talkin' about?" he snapped.

Walsh pointed at the clothes line.

"There! That's where Lefty got his dope!"

The Big Shot looked hard at him.

"Somebody's cuckoo."

Walsh laughed wildly.

"Somebody's slick," he amended between gasps. "It'll all come out in the wash, they say, and this is once when it did! Listen, Sam. I mind one time when Dorcas O'Donnell fell down on a date with Lefty Byrne. Usually she ducks the heavy wine parties, see?—but she'd got into one where she had to drink plenty. And d'you know the way she tipped off Lefty what was the matter with her? She hung out some sheets on her wash line, to signal him she was woozy. Three of 'em, get it? So much as to tell him she was ' three sheets in th' wind!' Ho, ho!"

"What a dame!" commended Coats. He stared at the O'Donnell clothes line again. "But what's that got to do with—now?"

"It's the tip off," said Walsh, dabbing at his eyes with a handkerchief. "Look at that line a' hers, Sam. What do you see on it?"

"A lot a' junk," grunted Coats.

"Name some a' the things, Sam."

"You're nuts. But—well, there's one a' them gadgets a broad wears inside her dress sometimes."

Walsh nodded.

"Sure. That's right. They call it a 'slip.' And what else do you see?"

Coats cursed him.

"Is this an eye test? But it's a crazy wash at that, when you come to look it over. The upstairs part of a couple pyjama suits without no pants. An' the half of a pair a' socks without the soul mate."

"Fine," approved Walsh. "Two pyjama coats and a sock. Also, a white belt and an item a' underclothes. And two sheets and a wash tie, and a lace collar. But you don't start readin' in the middle of a line, do you? Read this one from left to right, now!"

"I'll call a doctor," Coats offered.

"Stop your laughin'. You're drunk!"

"Who wouldn't laugh?" clucked Walsh. "I'll read it to you myself—left to right, the way the line faces Lefty's winda here. No, I'll do better. I'll write it out for yuh."

He scribbled rapidly on the back of an envelope and handed the envelope to Coats. Reading it, the Big Shot collapsed heavily on the edge of the bed.

"Yeah," he murmured mournfully "I could sure a' used that dame! She beats me. She played me right into it."

Once more, gone speechless, he stared at Walsh's transcription of the O'Donnell "wash."

It was there, an out-and-out wigwag as the quick-eyed Walsh had written and spaced it:

**SOCK COATS. COLLAR BELT UNDER CLOTHES. TIE SHEETS. SLIP.**

A sickly grin spread over the Big Shot's face.

"Well, I dunno," he said. "Maybe I'm lucky at that. Cop a dame that works as fast as that, an' she owns you. Me, I'll pick 'em dumb an' be general!"
Exploits of the Wolf

A True Story

By Alan Hynd

Without turning he shouted, "Mitchell, put that cannon away!"

Linky Mitchell Was the Terror of the Underworld Until a Little Man With a Keen Eye Threw a Hat in His Face

"THE WOLF is dead!"

A few weeks ago, when those words slipped from twisted mouths with lightning-like rapidity in certain quarters of that weird labyrinth known as New York's underworld, there was great rejoicing.

"He's dead, huh? Well, that's a relief!"

But Federal officials, from the President down, knew that with the passing of the Wolf—otherwise known as James R. Kerrigan—the Government of the United States had suffered an irreparable loss. For Kerrigan was the ace of Uncle Sam's narcotic agents. A man of unadulterated courage and stamina, despite the fact that the scales said only one hundred and twenty pounds, and the possessor of a brain that was sharper than that of the sharpest criminal, Kerrigan thrust terror into the hearts of narcotic law violators, big and small, in this country and in Europe, for more than a decade. Hence his sobriquet.

This month he would be in San Francisco's dimly lit Chinatown, bat-
tering down the doors of an "importing and exporting house," and seizing a few hundred thousand dollars' worth of dope, single-handed. Next month he would be aboard a transatlantic liner, peering through the keyhole of a stateroom in the dead of the night, unearthing a gigantic smuggling plot. On another occasion he might be found sitting in a joint deep in the notorious halfway world of Amsterdam, his keen ears tuned in on conversations not intended for him.

Born in New York's famous East Side, the Wolf grew up with many of those individuals who were later to carve niches for themselves in the realm of dishonest enterprise. Accordingly, when the Wolf passed on he took to his grave with him inside information about criminals which will never be retrieved. Literally, he was a walking encyclopedia of information on the underworld and its habitués. He hadn't the time to impart all he knew. He revealed a good deal to his fellow agents, understand, but not half enough.

Often times he would be walking along murky streets with his two sidekicks—Agents Ray Connolley and Louis Kelley—when some one whom he knew would blink by.

"See that guy?" the Wolf would say. "Well, listen; take a good look at him and I'll slip you the low-down on him in case I get bumped off." And thereupon the Wolf would narrate the history of the individual in question, giving, among other things, his racket, his various hangouts, his real name and his aliases, the date of his birth, the names and addresses of those with whom he contacted, and so on ad infinitum.

The police, when they were at sea regarding the whereabouts of a certain person they wanted, usually called on the Wolf. They figured that he would have, in the back of his unusual and retentive brain, the information they desired. And they were rarely disappointed.

A few years ago, when the river pirates in and around Gotham were extremely active, the authorities decided to call a halt to their nefarious practices. Things had gone a trifle beyond the pale of tolerance. In fact, it got so that a self-respecting boat was afraid to go out at night. If it did, it was looted.

Whereupon some one suggested: "Maybe the Wolf can help us out."

So the Wolf was asked what he knew about the activities of the river pirates.

"Well," he answered, "that's a little out of my line. Dope, you know, is my meat. But I think I can help you boys."

So the Wolf unreeled certain information from the film of his memory with the result that the river pirates passed into history ere a month went by.

Quite an unusual man, this Kerrigan, you're thinking. Well, let's take a look at him: Five feet ten and the aforementioned one hundred and twenty pounds. Skinny as a rail.

"No flesh, but lots of nerve," is the way he put it.

Lines all over his face. Dark, burning eyes that looked right through you. (You wouldn't lie to Kerrigan.) A big forehead. Forty-two.

Tobacco and booze were taboo. His wife and two children rarely saw him. He slept wherever his work took him—when he did sleep.

Arnold Rothstein, notorious gambler, racketeer and dope lord, who was recently slain, was one of the many
who would have given anything for the Wolf’s good will. Rothstein tried hard enough, Heaven knows, but got nowhere.

Rothstein used to sip coffee by the hour in a well-known restaurant on upper Broadway. Kerrigan often passed the place. But he seldom passed without being approached by Rothstein.

"Hello there, Wolf," Rothstein would say as he rushed into the street, bareheaded. "Come on in and have something to eat."

"I'm not hungry; go on and sell your papers, Arnold," the Wolf would answer. "I don't want to be seen in your company."

But despite the fact that he detested racketeers and dope runners, the Wolf was often seen in their company. On such occasions, however, he was usually busy turning down bribes, notwithstanding the truth that his pay was small and his family more or less in want. It is estimated that he turned a deaf ear to a cool million in bribes during his service with the Government.

Only a few weeks before his untimely demise the Wolf was passing the restaurant frequented by Rothstein and his gang when a pale-faced fellow ran out of the eating place and accosted the narcotic agent with this remark:

"Say, Wolf, I understand you're after me."

"That's right, egg," answered Kerrigan, who was truthful to the point of painfulness.

"Well, lookit! I got twenty-five grand for you if you lay off, see?"

"Listen, bozo," he snapped. "Who ever told you I went in for petty larceny?"

Kerrigan's icy stare was famous.

His eyes would start at your shoes and wander upward, in a despising, withering manner, to your face. Then he would stare hard, looking right through you. That stare was most irritating and disconcerting. Therefore, it produced results.

At noons the Wolf, when in New York, frequented a cheap eating house patronized by characters of the underworld. When entering the place he was in the habit of giving every one in the joint the once over. One day he let his glance fall on a man and a woman. He didn't know them; he hadn't, in fact, ever laid eyes on them before. But they apparently knew him, for when his gaze roved from their shoes to their heads they nudged one another, left their meals unfinished, paid their bill and hurried into the street.

"Oh, boy," said Kerrigan to Agent Kelley, "they've done something. Notice how fast they blew when I looked 'em over?"

So the Wolf bounded through the door and shadowed the couple—for two weeks.

They wound up in jail, having been underlings connected with a big dope ring. Before taking the rap they spilled information to Kerrigan which resulted in the demolition of the ring in question.

For more than a year preceding his death the Wolf concentrated on an international narcotic network which had for years mystified the best minds of the Government. Kerrigan loved big jobs—and he knew that to get to the core of that ring was a big job. He had an idea that Arnold Rothstein was in back of the organization, but he couldn't get the goods on him.

The Wolf's labors, however, began to bear fruit just after Rothstein's
death. It seems that the police had gone to the offices of the Rothmere Realty Company, one of the slain gambler’s many “smoke screens,” in an effort to unearth a clew which would lead them to Rothstein’s murderer. But the police came to the conclusion that there was nothing of value in the offices.

The Wolf, however, had a hunch that a search of the “realty” company’s premises might reveal something of moment. So the place was gone over with a fine tooth comb, and certain data—the Government won’t reveal the details—was obtained. The upshot of the whole thing was this:

One fine day, a few weeks after Rothstein’s murder, Joseph Ungar, a suave and dapper crony of the slain man, strolled into the Grand Central Terminal in New York. He was leaving for Chicago on the crack Twentieth Century Limited, the first section of which pulls out every day at two forty-five. It was then two thirty, and Ungar occupied himself with the task of seeing that his two expensive-looking trunks were properly placed in one of the baggage cars.

Meanwhile, the Wolf sat in the office of Assistant United States Attorney John M. Blake, in the Federal Building, his long, nervous fingers beating a tattoo on the desk. He was waiting for the word from Grand Central Terminal.

Shortly after three o’clock Ungar’s two trunks, which had been removed from the train without the knowledge of their owner, were brought in to Kerrigan.

“How we’ll see if I’ve worked a year for nothing,” said the Wolf to Blake. With that Kerrigan took an oversized hatchet and began to smash one of the trunks open. When his task had been completed he was confronted with a sight he had long anticipated—narcotics valued in excess of a million dollars.

The wires began to buzz, with the result that the Twentieth Century was flagged outside of Buffalo that night. Ungar was unceremoniously hustled from his berth, forced to complete his toilet in the railroad yards, brought back to New York and sent up for a long stretch.

But I’m a trifle ahead of my story. When Kerrigan was smashing open the second trunk, which also contained more than a million dollars’ worth of “hop,” his hatchet slipped and he struck himself in the stomach.

“Dammit,” he said, a sly smile playing about his lips, “I’ve killed myself.”

And the Wolf had killed himself. He was taken to Misericordia Hospital, where he succumbed to an operation for a twisted intestine, brought on by the blow from the hatchet. He didn’t have a chance. His constitution had been undermined by seventy-two consecutive hours of work preceding Ungar’s arrest and the Wolf died a martyr to his country, the same as a soldier on the battlefield.

And so the arrest of Ungar marked the beginning of what promises to be the end of the Rothstein dope ring—the crowning achievement in the fiction-like and hair-raising career of the peer of all narcotic agents. Little was published about the Wolf’s exploits when he was alive. The Government was rather touchy about that. It didn’t want people to know how clever he was. But his death changed all that, so I sought out the man with whom he had worked on so many cases and who knew Kerrigan as well as anybody—Assistant United States Attorney Blake. And from Mr. Blake I obtained the inside stories on three of the Wolf’s most
thrilling exploits, many of the facts being set down here for the first time.

II

BEYOND a shadow of doubt, the intrepid Kerrigan had his closest call during his encounter with "Linky" Mitchell, generally recognized as one of the most fearless and desperate of the bad men, and the scourge of New York's halfway world. Linky and the scrappy agent met head on one night in a glorified speakeasy just off the street called gay, and only a miracle—in the form of Wolf's dominating personality—prevented the loss of several lives. In order that the reader will thoroughly appreciate the pure grit displayed by Kerrigan on the night in question, it will be best, perhaps, to unfold some of the more important details of Linky Mitchell's life and habits.

Mitchell, a stocky lowbrow in his early twenties—with a career of petty crimes behind him—earned the sobriquet of "The Link" with the advent of prohibition, at which time his leap to notoriety was swift and lasting. He was, perhaps, the first of the bootleggers to successfully execute on a large scale the racket of toting booze from ship to shore. He operated several small boats which, in the murky hours between midnight and daybreak, chugged their way out into the ocean, got their cargo from waiting rum ships and brought it to shore for distribution. Thus, Mitchell became known as 'The Link' because he was the go-between who brought about a connection between ships at sea and the thirsty ashore. As time went on, the nickname The Link was abbreviated to Linky.

In a short while, Mitchell became something of a whisky czar in certain circles. He supplied many of the more disreputable of the night clubs and cabarets and a long string of speakeasies with booze. One fine day another bootlegger made the sad mistake of encroaching on Linky's territory, and the next night the bootlegger in question was found lying in an alley, literally perforated with forty-five caliber bullets. Linky boasted of the killing, displaying an empty but recently-fired forty-five caliber revolver.

When a few months wore on, the leader of a notorious gang decided to give Linky a little opposition in the booze racket and dispatched one of his henchmen to Mitchell to tell him so.

"You go on back," retorted Mitchell, "and tell your boss that as soon as he starts takin' the play off of me he's a dead one. I love to bump people like that off, I do—and I ain't kiddin'. Linky Mitchell never goes back on his word, he don't."

When the gang leader was apprised of Linky's threat he laughed long and loudly. He had a whole army behind him, he reasoned, while Mitchell was known to be a lone wolf. So the gang leader promptly took an order for some booze in Linky's self-designated domain, and within a week he was in his grave. Again Linky boasted of a killing as he strutted lordly through the underworld.

"'N let that be a warnin'," added Linky to his awe-stricken listeners, "that nobody is goin' to step on Linky Mitchell's toes and get away with it—they ain't."

In a short while, Linky no longer enjoyed the thrill of encounters with those who trespassed on his territory—for the simple reason that other bootleggers were afraid to trespass. Linky had them all scared stiff. So, flushed with victory, he went out with the ex-
press purpose of digging up trouble, deciding to cut into the rackets of others. His first move in this daring campaign was a visit to a cabaret which was the hang-out of thieves, thugs and racketeers of all types. Linky approached the proprietor of the place and asked:

"Who are you buyin' your booze off of?"

The proprietor supplied the name of his bootlegger, whereupon Linky retorted:

"Well, beginnin' to-morrow you're buyin' it off of me, see?"

"No, I ain't!" snapped the proprietor, who happened to be a tough egg. "Listen, guy," warned Mitchell, "I'll be around to-morrow, and if you ain't changed that weak mind o' yours then I'll bump you off. I'm Linky Mitchell, see?"

The proprietor laughed a slightly sickly laugh as the vicious-looking Linky strutted from the place, his cap pulled down over his eyes and a cigarette drooping from his tight lips. He told some of his thug-patrons of Mitchell's threat. They advised him to pay no attention to Linky—which turned out to be bad advice.

"We'll take care of dat bimbo if he starts gittin' tough," was the reassuring comment of one gangster.

So, when Mitchell called the next night, the proprietor told him he had decided to string along with his old bootlegger and that he (Linky) could go to hell if he didn't like it. Twenty-four hours later, the man who had defied Linky was leaving his cabaret for his home when he ran into a fusillade of steel-jackets and dropped to the sidewalk, a corpse.

A couple of nights later, Linky went into another night club and sought out the proprietor.

"My name's Linky Mitchell, see? Did you read about what happened to the guy what run the Blue Owl, did you?"

"Yes; why?"

"Nothin'," answered Linky, "only I'm the fella what bumped him off. He wouldn't buy his booze off of me. Who are you takin' your stuff off of?"

"I'm gettin' it from Marty the Wop."

"Well, beginnin' to-morrow you're takin' it off of me, see?"

"All right."

So that sort of thing went on for many moons. Whenever Linky decided that he wanted to supply another night club or cabaret with booze, he simply made his wish known to the proprietor of the establishment in question, the latter gentleman being only too pleased to acquiesce to the bad man's desire. And whenever any one was foolhardy enough to demur, he was promptly riddled with bullets and Linky would go home and reload his gun.

But the peculiar thing about Linky was that he did things in such a manner that the police were never able to pin anything on him; they didn't have any evidence. They laid a score or more murders at his door, but their hands were tied. Linky's reign of terror was so completely dominating that the toughest of the tough simply wouldn't entertain the fantastic notion of turning informer against him. Such a thing was entirely too dangerous. And there the matter stood.

So Linky continued on his defiant, boastful way, fearing neither man nor God.

His sole precautionary measure was the donning of a bullet-proof vest which he wore even while sleeping. He had, by this time, many enemies, but
he often remarked that those people were, to him, the spice of life. In fact, he didn’t know what he would do without them; they supplied his only thrills.

One of Linky’s favorite stunts was to walk into a joint where he was surrounded by gangsters who were just eating their hearts out for a chance to murder him. On such an occasion, Linky would take a seat in a corner and order the most sumptuous repast which the establishment had to offer. When he had eaten, he would call the waiter over, hand him a good-sized tip, and then remark:

“I’m Linky Mitchell. I guess they ain’t no bill for this food, is they?”

“Oh, no, sir; that’s quite all right, sir.”

Whereupon Linky would turn his back on his hawk-eyed enemies and brazenly depart. But did any of those gangsters have the nerve to fire at Mitchell? Guess again! They were thanking their stars that he had gone without firing at them!

Time passed and one night, in January of 1926, Linky swaggered into a smoky, disreputable speakeasy and pulled his usual line on the proprietor, asking him who he was buying his booze from, informing him that he would have to change bootleggers, and so on. The proprietor, exhibiting more than his share of nerve, told Linky that he was perfectly satisfied with his present bootlegger.

“I’ll be around at ten to-morrow night, I will,” said Linky, “’n’ if you still talk back like that I’ll bump you off right in here!”

Shortly after Linky left, Jim Kerrigan walked into the speakeasy. It might be explained at this point that this particular place was a favorite haunt of the Wolf’s because it was frequented by many stool pigeons who, from time to time, turned over certain information to the agent which resulted in the seizure of hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of narcotics.

In view of the fact that the place was a source of great aid to Uncle Sam, Kerrigan arranged things so that those in authority closed their eyes to its violations of the prohibition law. In other words, here was one speakeasy that was under the protective wing of the United States Government.

When Kerrigan entered that night, the proprietor rushed up to him excitedly and told him of Linky’s threat. Kerrigan, of course, knew all about Linky. He had never come in contact with him, but he knew him by sight—and he hated him. Likewise with Linky. He hated Kerrigan for the very plausible reason that the agent was a symbol of law and order—the thing most removed from Linky’s heart.

Kerrigan listened intently to the proprietor’s story, and upon its conclusion he asked:

“What time did that egg say he was comin’ to-morrow night?”

“At ten o’clock.”

“All right. Don’t worry; I’ll be here, too.”

The prospect of an encounter with the desperate Mitchell meant little to Kerrigan. It was just another nasty job in the line of duty—and duty was sacred. Kerrigan had started and finished many nasty jobs in his time; he had bucked up against what was thought to be certain death on countless occasions, only to exit unscathed. Fear was a total stranger to him.

So, at precisely ten o’clock the next night, Linky entered the speakeasy. As usual, he was alone. (He was never seen in any one’s company.) Taking
a hundred pounds less than the bad man, grasped Mitchell by the coat collar and the seat of the pants, marched him over to the door and threw him out on the sidewalk—face downward!

Kerrigan then returned to the table which Linky had "left" so unceremoniously, scooped up the bad man's hat, went back to the door and threw it in its owner's face.

"If you ever set foot in this place again, you weasel," roared Kerrigan, "I'll blow your rotten brains through your thick skull! I'm one guy that you can't scare!"

Kerrigan later explained that he had not drawn his gun on Linky for fear that several of the cabaret patrons would be killed by stray bullets. As for Mitchell, he was a broken man after his encounter with the Wolf. He hadn't the heart to go after the little agent and he was never seen in the vicinity of the unlucky speakeasy again.

Linky died as violently as he had lived. A little later, a girl lured him to a speakeasy. Four men, who didn't want to go to the trouble of removing Linky's bullet-proof vest, grabbed him while a fifth stood on a chair and pumped six bullets through the crown of his head. When Kerrigan heard of the murder, he smiled and said:

"What a pity! Poor Linky gave me the biggest thrill of my life and I had hoped to meet up with him just once more before one or the other of us got bumped off. . . ."

III

ABOUT two years ago members of the narcotic squad, working out of New York, were beginning to get gray around the temples because they couldn't lay their hands on a mysterious leak, through which hundreds
of thousands of dollars worth of dope was finding its way into this country. Various of the agents had a hunch that the stuff was filtering in from big transatlantic liners or ships calling from South America, but sharp eyes focused on the baggage of incoming travelers at the New York piers failed to confirm any such suspicions.

Assistant United States Attorney Blake, under whom many of the Government's best agents operate, called in Kerrigan.

"Jim," said Blake, "this leak is beginning to get on my nerves. I want you to concentrate on it and plug it up."

"Enough said," replied the intrepid Kerrigan, who picked up his battered slouch hat, pulled it well down over his eyes and sauntered out of Blake's office.

For several days the Wolf met all the big steamers which docked at New York and trained his eagle eyes on each and every passenger who came down the gangplanks. On the seventh day of his vigil, he noticed a dapper young man, with a pinpoint mustache, leaving a steamer which had just arrived from South America. Kerrigan began to search his uncanny memory. He had seen that face somewhere before. Oh, yes! That was the fellow he had pinched in December, 1918, for running dope! So, when the gentleman in question set foot on the pier, Kerrigan called him aside.

"Remember me?" asked the agent.

"I sure do," was the tart reply.

"Come over here in the corner; I want to search you."

"You'll be wastin' your time, Wolf; I haven't got a thing on me."

"Are you sure there's no hop sewed up in your clothes?" asked Kerrigan, eying up the man before him in a suspicious manner.

"I'll give you my word that there ain't," was the reply. "I've laid off the stuff since the time you got me seven or eight years ago."

Now, here was an unusual thing about the unusual Kerrigan: In nine instances out of ten, he could tell when a man was lying—and he could tell when a man was speaking the truth. If the latter happened to be the case, the Wolf never exposed any one to the embarrassment of a search. Thus, he made many friends, for there is nothing more flattering than to have your word accepted at its face value, if you're telling the truth.

So Kerrigan beamed on the returned traveler and said:

"O. K., kid. I know you wouldn't lie to me—and I'm glad to know that you're walking the straight and narrow.... By the way, how's the family?"

"Just great, Wolf. Got two new members—a boy and a girl—since I saw you last."

"Now isn't that just dandy, kid," responded the inspector. "By the way, look me up any time—especially if you know of anything that'll interest me. Remember, now, that if you tip me off to anything, I won't question you. I know you're on the level, but I thought maybe you had overheard something hot in your travels...."

The Wolf looked after the dapper young man as he walked away. The kid, personally, was on the square, mused the shrewd agent, but he knew more than he was telling....

The next morning, when Kerrigan took up his vigil at one of the largest piers, the dapper young man who had figured in the previous day's proceedings approached him and said:

"Well, here I am again, Wolf; thought I'd find you here."
"Hello there," said Kerrigan, jovially. "What's up?"

"Just this, Wolf: I've been thinkin' things over and I've decided that you're a pretty white egg. Now, I'm going to give you a tip. The B—— is due in at noon and on board is Signor A, a diplomat from C——" (a small foreign country). "Several diplomats from that country have been comin' over here lately and I understand they're all cartin' dope. They sell it in New York and Washington and make a lot of dough for themselves."

"Thanks a lot, kid!" said the Wolf, as the informer made his way from the pier.

So that was it! Emissaries were bringing in the stuff, taking advantage of diplomatic immunity, which enabled them to get their trunks through the customs, unsearched! A rotten, low-down trick, mused Kerrigan.

The big liner drew into her pier shortly after twelve thirty and one of the first to march down the gangplank was Signor A, accompanied by his secretary and a valet. Signor A, puffing away on a cigarette, kept almost a foot from his mouth by an ebony holder, appeared very nonchalant as ship workers toted his three trunks after him. When the baggage was deposited on the wharf, a ship officer told one of the customs men that a search of the effects would not be necessary as they were the property of Signor A, a distinguished visitor en route to Washington on official business. Kerrigan stood a safe distance away, but close enough to the scene of activities to take in everything.

Signor A cast a furtive glance or two about him and then stepped into a taxi, instructing the driver to fasten one of his trunks to the side of the cab. The other two trunks were strapped to a second taxi, this machine being occupied by the diplomat's secretary and valet.

"Follow those cabs!" said Kerrigan to the driver of a third taxi, which he boarded.

The three machines, traveling in line, weaved their way in and out of the clutter and din of the dock vicinity and twenty minutes later drew up in front of one of New York's largest hotels.

Kerrigan followed the diplomat into the hostelry and stalled around in the lobby until the visitor and his retinue were enconced in an expensive suite. Then the agent went up to the suite and knocked on the door. The diplomat's secretary answered.

"I'd like to speak to Signor A," said Kerrigan.

Signor A, who spoke excellent English, having been in this country on several previous occasions, was not long in putting in an appearance.

"I'm an officer of the United States Government," said Kerrigan, revealing a bronze badge, "and I'd like to search your trunks."

"But, my dear sir," mildly protested the suave diplomat, "I am protected by the flag of my country and am therefore immune to a search of my effects."

But these words fell on deaf ears. The Wolf was no respecter of personages or titles.

"I don't care what sort of protection you have," he said, "there's something in one of your trunks that I want."

But Signor A held his ground.

"Do you realize, my dear man," he said, menacingly, "that I could have you discharged for this unwarranted intrusion?"

Kerrigan thought fast. Signor A was no blockhead. He would have to be cornered by a subtle scheme.
"I can't understand your attitude," said Kerrigan pleasantly. "You threaten to have me discharged just because I have come here to help you."

"To help me?" asked the diplomat, with some surprise.

"Yes, signor, I am here to help you."

"In what way?"

The Wolf stepped closer to his quarry.

"Please don't get excited now," he said calmly, "but there's a time bomb in one of your trunks."

"What?" shouted the diplomat.

"I say there is a time bomb in one of your trunks. I just got word of it after the ship docked. It was placed there by some of your political enemies who crossed on the boat with you."

"Oh, this is terrible—terrible!" wailed Signor A. "Which trunk is it in?"

"I don't know," said Kerrigan. "Let's open them all—in a hurry! The bomb is set for two o'clock and it's one thirty now!"

So the diplomat called his secretary and valet and the three of them hurriedly removed the contents of the three trunks, while the Wolf stood by, watching their every move.

Among the effects which were excitedly placed on the floor was a wooden box, about a foot square, with a sliding lid. Kerrigan never took his eyes from that box. When everything had been removed from the trunks, Signor A said to Kerrigan:

"You seem to be mistaken, my dear man. There is no time bomb in these trunks."

"Well, well, well," laughed the Wolf, "I guess I was misinformed."

Kerrigan then picked up the wooden box, slid back the lid and a fortune in opium greeted his expectant eyes.

"Here, here!" shouted Signor A, realizing that he had been out-smarted. "Give me that box!"

"No, I'll just take this along with me," smiled Kerrigan.

"I shall complain to the President of the United States!" thundered the emissary. "You shall pay for this!"

"That's where you're wrong," joked the Wolf, whose sense of humor was quite pronounced. "I am one man who shall not pay for this—opium. I shall have it free."

"An outrage! An outrage! That's what it is!"

With that Kerrigan took the diplomat by the arm and escorted him to a chair.

"Now sit down and listen to me!" snapped the agent, focusing his renowned icy stare on his prey. "I want you and the rest of that crowd from your damned country to stop bringing dope into the United States. And, diplomatic immunity or no diplomatic immunity, I am personally going to search the baggage of every one of you rascals who come over here in the future—and you can tell them so when you go back!"

The minutes wore on and Kerrigan continued to talk.

Before long he had completely won over Signor A.

"Very well, sir," said the diplomat when Kerrigan had stopped talking, "I assure you that this shall be the last offense. Now then, shall we have a little something to eat?"

So, the Wolf was extended all the hospitalities of the government he had so recently condemned until late in the afternoon, and when he left the hotel suite—with the opium under his arm—he left a friend, Signor A. For, from that day to this, diplomats coming to these shores from the country in
question have never violated the law as laid down by Kerrigan to Signor A.

IV

The Wolf was strolling up New York's famous Broadway one night early in 1927, looking for trouble. He had heard that many traffickers in narcotics were openly plying their nefarious calling along the main stem, and he was out to demoralize the practice. Little did he realize what was in store for him.

On this particular night Kerrigan had hit upon a clever scheme. He was imitating a "hophead"—one who uses dope. His arms twitched at his sides, his eyes bulged out blankly. His every movement was quick, nervous, jerky. The masquerade, in short, was perfect, and it was not long in producing results.

The Wolf had been sauntering along for perhaps ten minutes when he noticed a heavy-set man, attired in a natty brown suit and overcoat, following him.

Kerrigan crossed to the other side of the thoroughfare, and the man in brown did likewise. Finally the little agent made a sharp turn to the left and eased up Fiftieth Street. He slackened his pace and when he reached a point half a block from Broadway's mad, milling throng, the man in brown overtook him.

"Leatin' against the stem?" asked the stranger, his expression meaning, to dope users: "Do you smoke opium?"

"Yeah," drawled the inspector.

"In the market?" was the next query.

"Yeah," came the enthusiastic answer. "Got any?"

"About fifty dollars' worth."

"Gimme it quick!" said the Wolf, his hands reaching out nervously and eagerly.

"Let's have the cash first," retorted the stranger.

Kerrigan produced fifty dollars in bills of ten-dollar denomination. The other man took the money, counted and pocketed it and then reached into another pocket and extracted a good-sized chunk of opium. Kerrigan grasped it as a hungry baby grasps a bottle of milk.

"Gee, this is great," he said, training his eagle eyes on his purchase, which he knew to be genuine stuff. Then, lifting his glance to the peddler, he asked:

"Say, can you get any more of this stuff? I sell it, too, but the fellow I been gettin' it off got pinched by the agents."

"Yes, I can get you more. How much would you want?"

"Oh, a hell of a lot of it; say, fifteen thousand dollars' worth."

The man in brown was taken aback at the mention of such large figures. Kerrigan was eying him up, not missing a trick.

"Well," answered the stranger, "that's a pretty big order, but I guess I can fix you up all right. Could you come for the stuff yourself?"

"Yeah," answered the Wolf. A pause. Then: "Where?"

"Well, I could deliver it to you at an old farmhouse outside of Rutland, Vermont, if that wouldn't be too far for you to come. You see, I don't like to take a chance on bringing so much down here to New York. I been doin' quite a business lately with my two partners, and the agents might be on to me."

Kerrigan feigned indecision. At length he said:

"Well, the agents won't bother me.
I'll come up to Vermont. Just where is the place?"

The stranger gave Kerrigan detailed directions as to how to reach a deserted farmhouse situated along a lonely road ten miles out from Rutland.

"You can't miss it," he concluded. "It's a big place and sets far back from the road. It ain't been occupied in years."

"What time will I see you there?" asked Kerrigan.

"Eleven o'clock sharp to-morrow night—will that be satisfactory to you?"

"Yeah, that'll be O K. I'll be there."

"You'll have the cash with you?"

"I'll have fifteen thousand in my pocket. What's your name?"

"Phelps—Ned Phelps."

The following night, at eight o'clock, Kerrigan and Agent Ray Connolley alighted from a train in Rutland. The night was pitch black. A storm was brewing.

The two agents hired a decrepit automobile and drove over ten miles of lonely country roads and finally arrived at a spot where a deserted old house sat far back from the road. A stretch of woods began in the rear of the place.

"This must be it, Ray," opined the Wolf. "Now, here's what we'd better do: I'll take you back down the road and leave you at that gas station we just passed and then I'll come back here. If I don't return to the gas station by eleven thirty, you come after me. I want to handle this baby alone because if he sees you anywhere around he's sure to blow."

"But he might turn out to be a tough egg when he finds out who you are," ventured Connolley.

"He won't turn out to be half as tough as I am," replied the Wolf.

So Kerrigan drove Connolley to the gas station, about a quarter of a mile back toward Rutland, left him there, and returned in the machine to the old farmhouse. He parked his car in from the road, alighted and walked into the dark, deserted structure. With the aid of his flashlight he saw that the floors were bare and that there was not a piece of furniture in the place. The wind whistled ominously through innumerable cracks in the sides of the house and any one but Kerrigan, there alone, would have been frozen by fright.

After completing his explorations, the Wolf took a seat on the floor of what had once been a parlor, drew his overcoat collar up around his neck, and proceeded to wait for eleven o'clock.

A couple of minutes before eleven o'clock the dozing Kerrigan was awakened by the noise of an old flivver, which pulled up in front of the house. He went to the front door and there saw the man who had sold him the dope in New York coming up the porch steps.

"Well," said Phelps, "I see you got here all right."

"Yeah," said the Wolf, smiling, "I've had a pretty cold wait; been here since ten."

The peddler, still sporting his natty brown outfit, led Kerrigan back into the house, lit a couple of candles which he had brought with him and then drew a gun on the little agent.

"Are you a narcotic man?" snapped Phelps.

"Lord, no," replied Kerrigan: "What made you think that?"

"Well, I wasn't sure—and I ain't sure yet!"

With that, Phelps, holding his gun in his right hand, ran his other hand through the Wolf's hip, jacket and
overcoat pockets, but found no trace of what he was looking for—a gun. Kerrigan, however, had his trusty automatic with him, but it was reposing in the left-hand arm pit of his jacket. That’s where the Wolf always carried his gun. It was placed in such a manner that the barrel pointed downward and the handle stuck out from the arm pit, making a quick draw quite simple. And, let it be recorded, one of the late Jim Kerrigan’s many specialties was a quick draw.

“‘Well,’” said Phelps, after his examination of the agent’s person had been completed, “I guess you’re all right. But if I’d found out you was an agent, I’d knock you off in a minute. . . . Got the money for the stuff?”

Kerrigan produced a roll of greenbacks and handed them over to the man in brown. The latter counted them, by the aid of candlelight, pronounced the sum “fifteen thousand iron men; just right” and then told Kerrigan to come outside with him.

“We got the stuff in two suitcases in the machine here,” said Phelps, indicating the flivver.

When Kerrigan approached the machine, he noticed two men sitting in silence in the rear of the car. He had not anticipated dealing with three dope runners!

“Hand out the suitcases,” said Phelps to one of the occupants of the flivver. Two bags were promptly tossed from the car.

“Mind if I look over the stuff?” asked the Wolf of Phelps, who was standing alongside of him, still toying with his revolver.

“Not at all; go right ahead.”

Kerrigan opened up one of the suitcases and extracted a big chunk of what was represented to be opium. He then walked in front of the automobile headlights, explaining that he wanted to get a better look at the stuff. The agent at once recognized the contents of the suitcases as imitation opium and knew instantly that he was dealing with a gang of racketeers who specialize in the old game of “cheating cheaters.”

The Wolf began to burn up. He had gone to time and trouble of making the jaunt from New York to Vermont in the hope of running into something big, only to be disappointed in the worst way. He concealed his anger, however, for Phelps was standing right in front of him. Kerrigan was in a ticklish position—and he knew it. Why, any one of these fellows could bump him off out here in the wilderness and make a clean get-away.

Suddenly, Kerrigan raised the chunk of fake opium over his head, holding it with both hands, as if to further examine it. Then, in a fraction of a second, he let it fly—right in the face of the man in front of him! Phelps fell to the ground in a heap, knocked completely unconscious by the terrific blow. In less time than it takes to tell it, the Wolf whipped out his gun and covered the two men in the machine.

“You babies can step right out of there,” he snapped, “before I blow your dull brains out!”

Two stocky frames made clumsy exits from the car. The Wolf searched them and confiscated two revolvers and a hundred or more loose bullets. Still covering them, he leaned down and picked up Phelps’s gun. Then he marched the two conscious captives to the rear of the house and told them to stand with their chests flat against two trees, which were close together. Kerrigan next ordered the men to stretch out their arms and when these instructions were complied with he extracted
some fine but strong copper wire from his overcoat pocket and bound the men's hands. Thus, only one tree separated each prisoner from his liberty!

"I guess that'll hold you fellows for a while," said the Wolf.

Going back to the flivver, Kerrigan noticed that Phelps was beginning to display signs of life. So the little agent grabbed the latter by the collar and dragged him into the deserted house.

Shortly after eleven thirty, Connolley, fearing that something had happened to his side-kick, put in an appearance. Seeing the candlelights in the front room of the farmhouse, he walked in, to find Kerrigan holding an animated conversation with his desperate-looking captive.

"Would you mind going out to the back of the house, Ray, and bringing in those two eggs who are tied to the trees? They'll probably find it a little warmer in here."

Ten minutes later the three prisoners were lined up before the two agents.

"What's the idea of selling me fake dope?" asked Kerrigan of the trio.

"I'm a narcotic agent and came up here to catch you with the real stuff."

"I was just thinkin'," was the answer, "that you ain't got a thing on us. We didn't sell you real dope."

"Is that so," shot back Kerrigan.

"Well, listen to this: I didn't give you real dough, either. It's all counterfeit stuff, seized by other Federal men in raids. We use it on guys like you."

"Well, we're even then," said the man in brown.

"The hell we are," said the Wolf.

"I'm taking the three of you in for the sample of real stuff that you sold to me in New York last night!"

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Please Send Correct Addresses

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Hugo Oakes was leaning back in his chair comfortably. He was trying to roll a cigarette, but not succeeding very well. Most of the tobacco had already trickled down on his wrinkled and bespotted vest. Yet he seemed vastly pleased.

The papers on the desk in front of him may have had something to do with his mood; he had been retained as the legal representative of a wealthy gentleman named Markum, whose carelessness had involved him with the law. Money! Big money!

His short, fat body heaved and he sighed a satisfied sigh. Then he turned to his stenographer, who had a desk in a corner of the same dingy office room.

"Mamie," said Oakes, "we got to work hard today on this Markum case. Can't lose no time."

Oakes was capable of magnificent eloquence in a court room speech, but elsewhere he talked as if he had studied English in the back room of a district police station.

"And, Mamie, I ain't going to let no penniless bum interrupt me, either."
"Yes, sir," said Mamie, very seriously.

"What's more, Mamie, I ain't never going to let no poverty stricken fool that gets himself into trouble waste my time. I'm off this charity stuff forever."

"Yes, sir."

Oakes pounded the desk.

"No. From now on I got to see the cash before I lift a little finger. Cash in advance, Mamie. No exceptions. Now we'll get busy on this Markum case. And if any one comes butting in—"

The door was opened. Rather, it flew open. A young man was standing in the doorway.

He was quite a young man, not much over twenty. A rather undersized young man, whose bow tie was twisted to an almost vertical position, whose hand trembled on the doorknob, and whose eyes were wide with agitation.

Oakes glared at him indignantly. The young man closed the door, and hurried in.

"Mr. Oakes?" he inquired.

"Yeah. But I'm busy."

"It's awful important, Mr. Oakes."

The young man's voice was rising, until it was almost shrill.

"Important! Huh! It may be important to you, young feller, but to me—"

"The cops are after me," blurted out the young man.

Oakes began to roll another cigarette. He shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Cops or no cops," he objected vigorously, "I'm busy, and I can't be bothered—"

"They're after me!" the young man repeated.

"Well, why come to me?"

"I read about you in the papers—"

"Have you got any money?"

"Why, no, sir, but—"

"Then get out," said Hugo Oakes. The young man looked at him, despairingly, his mouth open.

"But they're after me," he insisted.

"I called up home not long ago, and found out—they're after me."

"What for?"

"Murder."

"Well, you shouldn't commit murder—not unless you got money."

"I didn't," the young man protested.

"Another innocent victim of circumstances," Oakes sneered. "What's your name?"

"Larry—Larry Deronda."

"Who got killed?"

"Mr. Lanyon. Sydney Lanyon."

In spite of himself, Oakes looked interested.

"Lanyon, eh? Big theatrical guy, ain't he?"

"A big bum," exploded Larry Deronda. "Well, I guess he is by this time," Oakes grinned. "Where did he get killed?"

"Out on the county highway, near the Broken Lantern."

"Broken Lantern? Who busted it?"

"That's a road house, Mr. Oakes. Called the Broken Lantern. There's another road house right across the highway from it called the Blue Plume. They found Lanyon on the road outside the Broken Lantern."

"When was this?"

"Oh, about three o'clock this morning, sir. Maybe a little before."

"What was Lanyon doing out there at three o'clock this morning?"

"He was with my sister, Myrtle."

"Ah! And what was your sister doing out there at three o'clock this morning?"

"Why, she—Sis was a waitress in
the Broken Lantern. She works until two in the morning. Lanyon called for her when she got off work, and took her across the road to the Blue Plume.”

“Lanyon was sweet on your sister, was he?”

Larry Deronda screwed up his face as if he was about to weep.

“He—he was a dirty liar, Mr. Oakes. He claimed he was going to put Sis on the stage, and all that hooey. But he—he—”

“You mean his intentions weren’t honorable?”

“Sure. I mean he was a dirty skunk.”

Apparently Oakes had completely forgotten that he was very busy on the Markum case. He leaned across the desk, and let his half-rolled cigarette drop on the floor.

“Now, Larry, what were you doing out on the county highway at three o’clock in the morning?”

Larry Deronda flushed.

“I—I was watching them, Mr. Oakes. I was afraid something might happen to Sis. I warned her, but she wouldn’t listen to me. So I went out there to watch them.”

“Tut, tut! Spying on your own sister! Did you see anything?”

“Not much, sir. There’s a field on one side of the Blue Plume. I was in the field, looking through a side window. Sis and Lanyon were sitting at a table. Then a waiter came up and gave a message to Sis. Pretty soon she got up and walked out. She walked across the highway toward the Broken Lantern. Then, in a few minutes, the waiter went to the table again and gave Lanyon a message, and he got up and went out, too.”

“That was the last you saw of them?”

“No, sir. That is, it was the last I saw of Sis. I stayed there in the field. But after a while I got to thinking maybe they were not coming back to the Blue Plume. I figured I’d better cross the road where I could look into the Broken Lantern. So I got through the fence and sneaked across the highway—”

Larry Deronda’s legs seemed to get weak suddenly. He dropped into a chair.

“Well?” Oakes prompted.

“I—I was across the road, Mr. Oakes, almost directly in front of the Broken Lantern, and I ran right into the body of a man lying by the side of the road. There was a little light, and I leaned over and saw that it was Lanyon. Well, I felt like yelling at the top of my voice, I was so glad to see that rat dead. But, at that, I was pretty scared.”

“And so you went into the Broken Lantern and called up the police?” Oakes suggested.

“No, sir. Not me. I was kneeling there, staring down at Lanyon, when I heard something. I looked up, and saw somebody had come out of the Broken Lantern. First thing I knew, the fellow was almost up to me, looking at me. Well, I just beat it. My old rattletrap was a couple of hundred feet up the highway, and I hopped in and rambled on.”

“And now the cops are after you.”

“Yes, sir. I kept under cover the rest of the night. Just scared. And just before I came up here I phoned home to see if Sis got home all right. And mother told me the cops were after me.”

Oakes’s little eyes were gleaming with interest. Then he suddenly glared at the young man.

“You ought to go to jail,” he reproved him, gruffly. “In fact, you got
to go to jail. We can’t have this—a suspected murderer running around loose.”

“What do you want me to do?” asked Larry Deronda, disappointedly.

“Get right down to headquarters and give yourself up,” said Oakes sternly. “Ask for Inspector Mallory; tell him I said to give you the best cell in the place.”

The young man got up. His legs were still shaky. He fumbled with his cap.

“Then you’ll do something for me?”

“I ain’t saying what I’ll do. I’m pretty busy. You just beat it, right now.”

And Oakes began to shuffle a pile of papers on his desk. Larry Deronda looked at him in embarrassed silence. Then he turned and stumbled out of the office.

Oakes continued to fuss with his papers for a few moments. Presently he leaned back, with a heavy sigh, and reached for his hat.

“Mamie,” he barked.

“Yes, sir.”

“When that fellow Markum calls up, tell him I’m too busy to attend to him to-day.”

“Yes, sir.”

Oakes pushed his hat over his shiny pate, and heaved himself wearily out of his chair.

“And, Mamie,” he added, ferociously. “If Markum don’t like it, tell him he can go get some one else to do his dirty work.”

II

WHEN Hugo Oakes got off the bus in front of the Broken Lantern, two men were standing in the road, near a telephone pole, talking. Oakes approached them.

“Headquarters men?”

Their reception was not very warm. Oakes’s appearance was scarcely impressive, and the interruption obviously irritated them. One of them, however, spoke to him.

“No. The bulls are gone now.”

“H’m. Too bad. I’d like to get a line on this killing business. I’m Oakes—Hugo Oakes.”

The other man at once became friendly. His teeth, which were wedged to a cigar, showed in a smile; a golden smile. It was evident that he had heard of Hugo Oakes.

“Well, well, Mr. Oakes. Maybe we can help you. I’m Collman, proprietor of the Blue Plume. And this is Mr. Bouchet—Jim Bouchet. Jim runs the Broken Lantern here.”

Mr. Jim Bouchet, of the Broken Lantern, was a large man whose none too agreeable face had been rendered still further ineligible as a thing of beauty by a flattened nose and a couple of ears that had been whacked out of shape in some physical encounter.

Oakes shook hands with them.

“Glad you two gents are on good terms,” he remarked. “Hardly expected to find you two chatting like this. Competitors, ain’t you?”

“Sure,” growled Bouchet, of the Broken Lantern. “But we don’t mind that.”

“Open for business, are you?” Oakes asked.

“No,” said Collman. “Neither of us opens until six in the evening. And keep open until four in the morning. But this murder has kept us around here. Ain’t it, Jim?”

Bouchet nodded.

“Where did they find Lanyon?” Oakes inquired.

Bouchet stuck his foot forward, and indicated a spot in the road with the end of his shoe.
“Right there.”

The spot indicated was just on the edge of the road. It was about forty feet from the front of the Broken Lantern. There was a vacant space between the road house and the road, used, doubtless, for the parking of cars.

“This Lanyon come out here often?”

“Quite a bit, lately,” said Bouchet. “Came out to see the girl, Myrtle Deronda. She worked in my place. He’d come out about the time she got off, around two in the morning, and take her over to the Blue Plume, across the highway.”

“Sure,” agreed Collman, of the Blue Plume. “They’d come over to my place and eat and talk. I guess,” he added, with a grin, “they liked my stuff better than Jim’s.”

“Looks like somebody figured out in advance how to bump Lanyon off,” Oakes suggested.

“Maybe,” said Bouchet, dubiously. “But my guess is that Myrtle’s brother, young Deronda, did it. Anyhow, I came out last night and found him standing over the body. He ran away. I understand the bulls are on his trail. He’s a crazy kid, anyway, and he was pretty sore at Lanyon.”

“How long were you out in front of your place, Mr. Bouchet, before you saw the kid with the body?”

Bouchet looked at Oakes rather belligerently.

“I dunno. About fifteen or twenty minutes, I guess.”

“Lanyon was shot, was he?”

“Yep. Shot just once. A clean shot through the heart. No one heard the shot, so I guess the killer used a silencer. The bulls ain’t found the gun—Deronda could easy have ditched it before now.”

Oakes thought a moment.

“I thought I’d like to talk to the waiter that delivered the messages to the girl and to Lanyon. Figured maybe somebody arranged to have them messages delivered so that Lanyon would come out where the killer could get him.”

Collman turned to Bouchet with a wide smile.

“Mr. Oakes is way off there, ain’t he, Jim?”

Bouchet scowled.

“He sure is. Nothing to that, Mr. Oakes. Why, I phoned over to the Blue Plume myself, a message for Myrtle. You see, the other waitress I had working for me was supposed to work until four o’clock, but she got sick. So I wanted Myrtle to finish the night out in her place.”

“The other girl? Ain’t you got more than two girls working for you?”

“No. Only two. All the rest are men waiters.”

“Well,” Oakes commented, “that would account for the message to Myrtle, but how about the message the waiter gave to Lanyon a few minutes later—the message that made Lanyon get up and follow Myrtle across this way to the Broken Lantern?”

“Nothing to that, either,” said Bouchet. “Myrtle just agreed to work until four o’clock, then she phoned over to the Blue Plume to ask Lanyon to come back over here to the Broken Lantern.”

Oakes pushed his slouch hat back over his head, and scratched his pate.

“You gents are sure good to me,” he thanked them genially. “Giving me all this information. By the way, Mr. Bouchet, you say you discovered young Deronda standing over the body. Now, how come you were out of your place of business just then?”

Bouchet’s eyes flickered angrily.
"Me! What you mean? Why, I—it was a fine night last night, and I just came out for a little airing. I often do that when it's a fine night, don't I, Collman?"

"You sure do," Collman confirmed him.

"No offense meant," Oakes placated them. "Just wanted to show how easy it is to throw suspicion on any one. You see, Mr. Bouchet, how difficult it might be for even you to produce an alibi?"

"I guess that's right, too," agreed Collman.

"And where were you, Mr. Collman, when Lanyon was shot?"

Collman stared at Oakes, his lips parted.

"Why, I—I guess I was down in my cellar about that time, looking over my stock."

"Can you prove that? Did any one see you?"

"I don't know, Mr. Oakes. I don't remember. But I always go down to the cellar about that time of night. Don't I, Jim?"

"You sure do," Bouchet supported him.

Oakes grinned amiably.

"There you go!" he chaffed them. "Neither one of you could prove an alibi, But we won't worry about that. Say, Mr. Bouchet, how about your waiters—the men? Any suspicious characters among 'em?"

Bouchet pondered a little.

"Not that I know of. Of course, you understand, they ain't saints, none of them. But I don't know nothing against them."

"You got a list of your employees, ain't you? Could I look at it?"

"Why, sure, I got a list—names, addresses and telephone numbers. I guess you could see it. Wait a minute."

Bouchet hurried into the Broken Lantern and returned soon with a small notebook, which he handed to Oakes.

Oakes looked it through carefully, made a note or two on the back of an envelope, and handed the book back.

"I'm sure obliged to you gents," he said heartily. "Say, I think I'd like to see the waiter—the one that delivered those messages to Miss Deronda and Lanyon. Where could I find him?"

"You're lucky," said Collman. "Usually, this time of day he's in town, at home. But on account of the murder he's had to stick around here this morning. You can get him right over in my place there, in the Blue Plume. His name is Hayden, Billy Hayden."

"I'll go right over," said Oakes. "By the way, this bird that was killed was quite a lady's man, wasn't he?"

"Sure," Collman grinned. "Lanyon was stuck on that other dame, wasn't he, Jim?"

"Yep," said Bouchet. "He used to come out and chin with the other waitress, the one that left early last night. That was before I hired Myrtle, though. Myrtle took his eye right away, and he ditched Clara."

"Well, this other girl, Clara, she left the Broken Lantern last night just before the killing, did she?"

"I guess so," Bouchet said. "Just a few minutes before."

"Say," said Oakes abruptly, "what's the time?"

Collman glanced at his watch.

"Just about ten o'clock."

"Thanks," said Oakes.

III

In the center of the Blue Plume was an open space, a dancing floor. Around that were tables. And along the walls were curtained booths. The kitchen was in the rear.
There was no activity in the place when Oakes entered, except for a porter who was scrubbing floors at the back. The only other occupant was a man who was seated at one of the tables.

The solitary man looked up as Oakes came in. He appeared to be about fifty, pale faced, white haired, dark eyed; a typical waiter of the old school. Oakes sat down in a chair opposite him.

"Your name Hayden?"

The man nodded. Oakes introduced himself.

"You're the man that delivered the messages to Myrtle Deronda and Sydney Lanyon last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose you realize that the message you delivered to Lanyon resulted in his death?"

The question seemed to startle the man.

"Well, it would seem so, sir."

The waiter was obviously tired. Under ordinary circumstances, doubtless, he would have been in bed at this time of day. Oakes softened his tone.

"Mr. Bouchet, of the Broken Lantern, tells me that he telephoned the first message, the one to Miss Deronda. And she herself telephoned the message to Lanyon?"

"I believe that's correct, sir."

"And you conveyed both messages?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were the messages written?"

"Yes, sir. The cashier at the desk took the messages over the phone, wrote them down on a slip of paper and gave them to me to deliver to the table?"

"Did either Miss Deronda or Lanyon make any comment when they received the messages?"

"Not that I recall, sir. That is, except that they were both put out at Miss Deronda's having to go back to work."

"Now, Hayden, when you gave Lanyon the message from the girl, did he go right out—that is, out the front door?"

"Certainly."

"There's a back door to the place, isn't there?"

"Yes, sir. A kitchen door. But nobody uses it except the help."

"And can you go along the outside of the building from the kitchen door to the highway?"

"Yes, sir. There's a road comes in from the highway. Trucks with supplies drive right up to the kitchen door, on the south side."

"Very good, Hayden. I like your straightforward answers. Now, show me the kitchen door, will you?"

Hayden lifted his eyebrows in surprise. But he got up promptly, and led the way back to the kitchen.

Oakes walked out of the kitchen door. He strolled thoughtfully down the narrow road along the building to the highway, then back again. His eyes were searching the ground. Hayden watched him curiously from the kitchen door.

Oakes returned, and reentered the kitchen. Hayden followed him. Just inside Oakes stopped. He was looking at a large sink that was close to the door.

"Dishwasher work there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now, the dishwasher that was working last night from two o'clock on—I suppose he's home now."

"No," said Hayden. "It happens that he's here. That's him just inside the dining room, Mr. Oakes. Tom comes to work at one in the morning.
He relieves the first dishwasher. Tom washes dishes until the place closes up, then he does the porter work. That's why he's here now."

"Guess I'll talk to Tom, then," Oakes said. "By the way, Hayden, what's the time?"

Hayden took his watch out, opened it.

"Close to ten thirty."

"Thanks. Say, that picture you got in your watch—she's some good looker. Daughter, is she?"

"No, sir," said Hayden, closing the watch. "Just a friend."

"Well," said Oakes, "got to hurry. Guess I'll talk to Tom first though. You can go now, Hayden."

Hayden went back to the dining room, Oakes called to the man who was busy at the scrubbing.

Tom was a young man, slight of stature, eager of eye, and distinctly greasy of aspect. He clearly belonged to that unfortunate group of humans who, in spite of a ready grasp of details, never succeed in mastering any but the most menial positions.

"Now, Tom," Oakes confided. "I'm working on this murder case. I want you to help me."

Tom's eyes shone like twin stars.

"Me! Gosh!"

"Yeah! Now, where were you between two and three o'clock last night?"

"Me! Why, I was hanging over that tub there, massaging dishes."

"Think, now, Tom, are you sure you—"

"Hey! Wait a minute!" Tom began to get excited. "I did quit the sink for a while."

"When was that?"

"I dunno just what time it was. No occasion to look. But I was gone about half an hour, I guess."

"Now you're getting hot," Oakes commended him warmly. "What were you doing while you were away from the sink?"

"I was shaving spuds."

"Shaving spuds! Think of that now!"

"Yes, sir. I remember because I was just going to leave the sink when up comes Billy Hayden. That's the waiter you was talking to. And Billy says, why, he says, you can't leave the sink now, Tom, to fix them spuds, because you'll be swamped with dishes before you get back."

"And what did you tell him?"

"Oh, I tells him that I got to go and shave them spuds because Mr. Collman himself ordered me to."

"So Mr. Collman ordered you to peel the potatoes right away, did he?"

"Sure. He was down in the cellar, and he comes up—the cellar door is right over in that corner—and tells me to barber the spuds right away."

"And after Mr. Collman told you to fix the potatoes, where did he go?"

"He went back down in the cellar."

"And where did you work on the potatoes, Tom?"

"Why, back in the vegetable room. There's a little room way back there, back of the kitchen, where they keep the vegetables. That's where I always shave the spuds."

Oakes was beaming on Tom delightedly.

"Say, Tom, you're a smart guy. Now, there must have been some reason why Mr. Collman wanted you to fix the spuds right away. And I bet you he didn't fool a clever lad like you. What do you suppose was the reason?"

Tom suddenly lost some of his enthusiasm. For a moment he seemed to be tongue tied.

"Don't be afraid," Oakes en-
couraged him. "If you lose one job, a brainy guy like you can always get another."

"Well," said Tom, reassured, although he lowered his voice, "when I'm in the stock room I can't see the cellar door nor the kitchen door."

"Ah!" said Oakes. "You mean maybe they were taking something out or in that they didn't want you to see?"

"Sure. I know there was a truck drove up to the kitchen door not long before Mr. Collman told me to go and fix the spuds."

"Fine, Tom! Now, what do you figure it was they didn't want you to see?"

Tom lowered his voice another notch. "Hooch!" he whispered.

"Oh!" said Oakes.

"Yes, sir," Tom went on, gathering courage. "Mr. Collman's got a couple of other places, but he keeps most of his hooch here. They can't fool me. And that truck that was outside the kitchen door when I went to shave the spuds, it was gone when I got back to the sink, Mr. Oakes."

"You don't say!" Oakes surveyed Tom admiringly. "It's a good thing there's a wide awake chap like you around here, Tom."

"Yes, sir," Tom admitted.

"Now, don't tell any one about this, Tom. I've got to go now, but you've been a great help to me."

"All right, Mr. Oakes. I'm sure glad you spoke to me about it."

Oakes shook hands with the dishwasher, and left. Instead of going out through the dining room, however, he went through the kitchen door to the side road.

A few feet from the door he stopped, stooped quickly and scooped up a small and crumpled piece of paper.

He straightened it out, glanced at it. It was a scrawled note, reading:

Meet me at the kitchen door of the Blue Plume, outside. I'll be waiting for you. Leave by the front door, and don't tell any one.

Myrtle.

Oakes folded the note up and inserted it in his vest pocket. He walked slowly down the road toward the highway.

As he reached the highway, Collman of the Blue Plume was coming across from the opposite side, having apparently just parted from his friendly competitor of the Broken Lantern, Mr. Jim Bouchet.

"Did you see Hayden?" inquired Collman.


Collman gazed at him, rather doubtfully.

"Learn anything?" he asked.

"Sure," said Oakes.

"What?"

"That dishwashers are smart people," Oakes told him.

The answer did not seem to satisfy Collman. His lips appeared to be framing another question, but a bus swung around the bend in the highway, and Oakes trudged out to hail it.

IV

Back in town, Hugo Oakes was presently standing in front of a small, shabby house on a shabby street. He rang the bell. A middle-aged woman, small of stature, somewhat old-fashioned in dress, and plainly worried, opened the door.

"I want to see Miss Myrtle Deronda," said Oakes.

"She isn't here just now," said the woman. "Can I do anything for you? I'm her mother."
"No," said Oakes. "I want to see her. Where is she?"

Mrs. Deronda hesitated.
"Is it about this dreadful murder?"
"Oh, it ain’t such a dreadful murder," Oakes comforted her. "Nothing messy about it; just a shot through the heart."

The woman seemed on the verge of tears.
"I never wanted Myrtle to work in that road house," she lamented. "And I never did thrust that Mr. Lanyon."
"Well, Mrs. Deronda," said Oakes, "these young women are hard to handle. But I got to talk to the girl. It’s in the interest of your son. So you better tell me where she is."
"She’s with Clara."
"Clara?"
"Yes. Clara Fanning. That’s the other girl that worked at the Broken Lantern. She lives in a rooming house a couple of blocks away, down this street—number 2349."

Oakes thanked the woman, and left with as much speed as he could manage.

Clara had a room on the second floor of the rooming house to which Mrs. Deronda had sent him. At the door, the landlady directed him, and he wheezed up a flight of stairs. In a few moments he discovered that he was unusually ill at ease; he was in a room with two young women, both of them quite dangerously good looking.
"Which of you is Miss Deronda?"

he asked.
"That’s me," said one of them. Myrtle Deronda was dark, with challenging black eyes, stubborn little chin and daringly fashioned lips. She was sitting on the arm of a large chair.

Oakes turned to the other one, who was sunk deep in the same chair. Her eyes and hair were brown, a gentler type than the Deronda girl, and probably some years older, but still quite handsome. She was clearly distressed, and the younger one seemed to have assumed the rôle of comforter.
"Then you must be Clara Fanning?"
"Yes, sir."
"Sorry to disturb you two ladies," Oakes apologized, "but I’m representing Miss Deronda’s brother. He’s in the can—er—that is, he’s under arrest, you know."

Myrtle’s eyes flashed.
"He’s a crazy kid. He ought to stay home nights, where he belongs."
"Maybe," Oakes suggested bravely, "that might be a good plan for you, too."
"Say! I don’t need no bodyguard," the girl flared at him.
"Well, maybe you don’t," Oakes hastily retracted. "But we got to get the boy out, or they’ll send him up for murder."
"Poor kid!" Myrtle changed her tone at once.
"Now, Miss Deronda, you was over at the Blue Plume with this fellow Lanyon not long before he was shot?"
"Sure."
"Then Mr. Bouchet of the Broken Lantern called you up to ask you to work the rest of the night in Clara’s place?"
"Yes. Clara felt ill and had to go home. So, of course, I worked for her."
"Then you called up and sent a message to Lanyon suggesting that he come back over to the Broken Lantern?"
"Where do you get that ‘suggesting’ stuff? I just said for him to come right over."
"Those messages were written, weren’t they?"
"Sure."

Oakes leaned forward, a stubby forefinger raised.

"Now, think hard, Miss Deronda. What happened to the written message that was delivered to you?"

"Why, I think—well, I guess I put in my pocketbook. Then I—oh, now I remember! Just before I got up to go, I was rummaging in my pocketbook for a handkerchief, and I took the message out again, and handed it to Syd Lanyon."

"And do you know what he did with it?"

"No."

"Well, it don't matter, I know."

"You know?"

"Yeah," said Oakes. "He put it in his pocket."

"How do you know—"

"Never mind," Oakes grinned. "But I want to be sure about this: who would write those messages out before the waiter took them?"

"The cashier of the Blue Plume, said Myrtle Deronda, impatiently.

Oakes sat grinning into space for a few moments. Then he turned again to Clara Fanning.

"And what did you do when you left the Broken Lantern?"

"I caught the bus, sir."

"Did you catch it right outside the Broken Lantern?"

The young woman hesitated.

"Well, no, sir. The bus has another stop farther down the highway, about a quarter of a mile. So I walked down there to meet it."

"And why, young lady, didn't you catch it right outside? Why walk a quarter of a mile?"

Clara Fanning's fingers were twitching nervously. Myrtle was fidgeting on the arm of the chair.

"Well, sometimes, standing in front of the road house there, some of the men might be annoying."

"Some of the men! Now, tell the truth. Don't you mean one man in particular?"

"Perhaps."

"What's his name?"

"I—I can't tell you that."

"What man has a small picture of you?"

"I can't tell you that, either."

"Oh, you can't!" Oakes was getting brusque. "Isn't it a fact that this Sydney Lanyon was an—er—admirer of yours, before this other young lady cut you out?"

"Aw, shut up!" put in Myrtle.

But Clara, flushing, admitted that it was true.

"Now," said Oakes, "according to your story, you were up the road, waiting for the bus when Lanyon was shot?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! But can you prove it? Have you any proof that you weren't right there in front of the Broken Lantern when Lanyon—"

"Cut that out!" the other girl snapped at him.

Myrtle Deronda had jumped off the chair, and was standing in front of Oakes, shaking her little fist in his face.

"But, my dear girl," said Oakes, soothingly, "I'm only working up a case for your brother. I've got to—"

"Say! If you have to drag Clara into this mess so you can get Larry out, why, you can just let the dear boy stay in the can."

Oakes stared at her blankly. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, all right." He put his hat on.

"You two ladies will be going out to work again to-night, will you?"

"Sure," said Myrtle, "if you'll get out so we can get some sleep."
Oakes muttered apologetically. Then he stumbled to the door, murmured some apologies, and went out.

Downstairs, he stopped at the landlady's office, and asked permission to use the telephone. He called headquarters, asked for Inspector Mallory.

"Sent you a customer this morning," he reminded Mallory.

"Uh huh. We were looking for him. We'd have got him anyway."

"You guys never do give anybody else any credit," Oakes complained.

"Well," conceded Mallory, "if you think you've got something coming, name your price."

"I want you to drive me out to the Broken Lantern to-night, about eight o'clock," said Oakes promptly.

Mallory grumbled, but agreed.

"To show you that I'm looking out for your interest," Oakes added cheerfully. "I'll give you another live tip."

"All right. Spill it."

"About the time that Lanyon was getting shot, there was a truck—a booze truck—belonging to Collman, standing out in the road, near the kitchen door of the Blue Plume."

"Well, I ain't friendly with the liquor squad," Mallory objected.

"Maybe you ain't. But get a couple of your men to trace that truck. Right away. Find the truck, and look it over carefully."

"That all?" said Mallory, sarcastically.

"That's all—until eight o'clock tonight."

"We got young Deronda—"

"Yeah. You got him. And you'll let him loose before the night's over."

"Oh, well," Mallory hedged, "we was only holding him on suspicion. I been keeping an eye on a couple of others."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. Them two road house babies, Bouchet and Collman, are kind of interesting. They're tough lads. And did you notice they ain't neither one got an alibi?"

"Sure. But that's in their favor," Oakes commented.

"In their favor! How do you get that way?"

"Listen, inspector. Bouchet and Collman maybe ain't had the benefit of a good education, like you, for instance. But they're pretty wise birds, at that. And if either one of them was going to stage a killing, that's the first thing he'd arrange—a good alibi!"

Mallory looked disappointed.

"Well, anyway, I got a couple of pair of bracelets—"

"You won't need 'em, inspector," Oakes assured him.

Mallory, puzzled, turned to look at him.

"Why, say, you don't mean that one of them two girls perforated Lanyon—"

"First," Oakes interrupted, "did you find that truck?"

"Sure. I'll give you credit for that, Oakes. That was a hot one. We found the truck."

"And there was blood on the rear end?"

"Right you are. But how—"

"Just a matter of working on the most likely angles, inspector. You will remember that Jim Bouchet, proprietor of the Broken Lantern, was walking around outside his place of busi-
ness at the time of the murder. But, so far as I could see, he was not a likely suspect. He would have gone to more trouble to cover his tracks.

“Yet, if some one else had shot Lanyon right where his body was found, Bouchet was almost sure to have seen or heard something. Well, he saw nothing and heard nothing. Therefore, the body must have been dropped there. And it must have been dropped from a moving vehicle, else there would have been blood leading up to the spot.

“All right. How? I knew the answer when Tom, the dishwasher, told me about the truck.”

“You ain’t accusing the dishwasher, are you?” Mallory waxed sarcastic. “If not, who are we after?”

“I found the answer to that one just outside the kitchen door of the Blue Plume,” said Oakes.

“What was that?”

“The second message. The message that the waiter delivered to Lanyon.”

“And who does that take us to?”

“We’ll see when we get there,” Oakes countered.

“Well, now, about this message—”

“Here we are at the Blue Plume,” Oakes put in. “Let’s hop to it.”

Inside the Blue Plume, business was slack; it was too early in the evening for the crowd. Collman, the proprietor, was sitting near his cashier, close to the door. He looked at Oakes with disagreeable surprise.

Oakes, however, paid no attention to Collman; he approached the cashier, a middle-aged woman with watchful eyes.

“Say, write ‘meet me at the kitchen door’ on a piece of paper for me,” Oakes instructed her bluntly.

The woman, startled, looked at Collman. And Collman looked at Mallory.

“That’s the law with him,” Collman told his cashier. “Better do as he says.”

She hesitated, then scrawled on a scrap of paper. Oakes took it, scrutinized it.

“Now, you, Collman.”

“Me!” said Collman. “Don’t kid me. Why, I can’t hardly write at all.”

“Thought not,” Oakes said, and turned to the cashier again.

“Say, lady, do your waiters write out their checks? Do they put down what a customer orders on the checks?”

“Sure,” said the woman. “There’s a stack of ‘em on that spindle. And each waiter initialled his own checks, too.”

Oakes ran through the stack rapidly, and presently lifted one. It was initialed in the corner, “B. H.”

“Let’s go see Billy Hayden,” said Oakes to Mallory.

The waiter was standing near the kitchen door at the back of the dining room. Oakes and Mallory crossed toward him. Oakes drew him aside, into a corner. He spoke to him, not unkindly.

“It’s all over, Hayden.”

The waiter looked at him steadily, his pale face set rigid.

“What is it, sir?”

“No good to bluff,” said Oakes. “You tricked Sydney Lanyon into going around to the kitchen door, by way of the road along the side of the building. There you shot him, loaded the body on to the back of a truck, rode with it out to the highway, and dumped it in front of the Broken Lantern. You returned the same way.”

Billy Hayden was silent.

“It was the message—that second message—that gave you away, Hayden.”
Oakes brought the crumpled piece of paper from his vest pocket, and unfolded it. Mallory leaned over his shoulder and read:

Meet me at the kitchen door of the Blue Plume, outside. I'll be waiting for you. Leave by the front door, and don't tell any one.

Myrtle.

"Your handwriting, ain't it, Hayden?" Oakes insisted.

The waiter was still silent.

"You figured on taking this slip of paper away from him when you shot him," Oakes went on. "But there was a slip up. Myrtle gave Lanyon the first message before she left, and it was that message that you took out of Lanyon's pocket. This one—it was all crumpled up—must have been clasped in his hand, and he dropped it on the ground just as you were shooting him."

Still Hayden said nothing.

"Snap out of it," Mallory barked. "You had better come across."

But the waiter paid no attention at all to Mallory.

"You can see that the case is complete against you," Oakes proceeded, almost coaxingly. "But I might add that if you don't confess to the killing you will place some one else, a lady, in a dangerous position."

For the first time the lines on the waiter's face changed. Presently he spoke, reluctantly:

"A lady? Who?"

"Clara Fanning. Miss Fanning left the Broken Lantern just before Lanyon was shot. She has no alibi—"

"Clara had nothing to do with it," Hayden broke in hastily.

"I might as well tell you the facts, sir," he went on, after a pause. "There's not much to it. I've been fond—too fond—of Clara for some time."

"Yeah," Oakes put in. "I noticed that picture of Clara in your watch this morning."

"But she did not encourage me. I was too old, although no older than that snake, Lanyon. For a few weeks Clara was deceived by Lanyon. She was living in a fool's paradise. Then he deserted her for the other girl. It hurt her terribly. I hated him for it. I often wished I could kill him, planned to do it.

"Then, last night, the chance came, when Clara had to leave work because of illness. And Clara's illness itself enraged me all the more, sir, because I was sure he was the cause of it.

"Everything seemed to fit in so beautifully. The truck was out by the kitchen door. The driver was down in the cellar. Nobody in the kitchen would notice me going out and in, except Tom, and he was back in the store-room.

"When that second message came from Myrtle to Lanyon, I destroyed it and wrote another one; it was so easy. You seem to have learned it all, sir. I went out by way of the kitchen, shot him, loaded his body on the truck, which I knew would leave soon. It took a bare five minutes, and nobody noticed my absence.

"And," he added, "I'm not the least bit sorry."

Oakes put his hand on Hayden's shoulder.

"Say, this Lanyon killing gave me a client this morning—young Larry Deronda. Now I've lost my client, and I need another one. How about it?"

Hayden looked at him hopelessly.

"But I have no money, sir."

Oakes laughed.

"Money! My dear man! The very last thing I ever expect of a client is money!"
The Blind Fury

By Sinclair Gluck

He saw Morgan, and started towards the bars.

In the Cellar of the Mystery House Hal Fights a Madman and His Murderous Slave

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

Benjamin Hearn, Charles Murray, his partner in a company constructing a dam, and their attorney, Howard Evans, have each received a mysterious card bearing a double cross. They know that it is a threat from an old enemy.

That night Howard Evans's house is burned to the ground; Evans is murdered. Hal Evans, his son, Mrs. Evans, and Dan Bottis, a loyal chauffeur of the dead man, go to the Hotel Belmore, where Captain of Detectives McCoy interviews Hal.

Hal tells the captain about the strange card, but when he wants to show it to him, discovers that it has disappeared.

McCoy enlists the aid of his friend, Christopher Morgan.

While Hal is away from the hotel, his mother vanishes. Morgan learns that Mrs. Evans went away with a man, and took the jewels that she had deposited at the hotel safe. Apparently she had been lured by a forged note purporting to have come from Hal.

On the heels of this comes news of

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two fresh disasters. The dam has been blown up. And Hearn is found murdered.

Hearn is throttled by the unknown. Dorothy Hearn, his daughter, is robbed of her jewelry by a man with huge hands and a luminous death's head face.

McHenry, foreman at the dam, comes to New York with his wife and takes a room across from Hal Evans’s.

Morgan learns from the police record that a former partner of Hearn and Murray, named Wallace, had been swindled by the pair shortly after the latter’s marriage to a chorus girl. The girl had later divorced Wallace, married a Levantine named Papaniotis, and subsequently had left him.

Murray is shot in Hal’s hotel room by the man with the luminous face, and Hal is attacked.

Hal is kidnapped by the avenger, who turns out to be the man Wallace, now “McHenry.” Chained to a stone wall, Hal is forced to listen to a terrible tale of misfortune which Wallace, half mad, pours into his ears. Wallace thinks that Hal’s father had been instrumental in his downfall, and is going to exact vengeance from Hal.

Dorothy Hearn also falls into Wallace’s hands.

CHAPTER XXIII

All But One

Some time later, Hal came to his senses, stimulated by a vague feeling of urgency that he could not define. The muscles of his shoulders and back had stiffened and felt horribly sore when he tried to move.

Suddenly, in the darkness, he became aware of a hand on his arm and a voice in his ear.

“Hal!” came the whisper again.

The fog that lay over his senses lifted and cleared.

“Dan! How did you get here? Have you brought the police?”

“Police nothing. There wasn’t time.”

“Can you get out again? If you can, go for help! McHenry is the murderer. He’s Wallace. He’s mad as a hatter. Find Morgan and McCoy and bring them—bring plenty of men—”

“Think I’ll leave you here?” whispered Dan savagely. “I saw what you got! Gawd knows how long that monster had been at it—”

“You’re wasting time! Go for help!”

“I can’t, Hal! I came in your car. It’s out of gas. Dunno where I am. By the time I get back you might be—I got it! I came in the window. I can climb out and haul you after me! Can you stand on your feet?”

“Maybe I can, but I won’t. The man’s mad, Dan! He’s got some scheme to revenge himself on Dorothy Hearn. If he plans to abduct her, he will. He’s infernally clever. He’ll bring her here. I can’t leave her to be tortured without a friend in the place! Go for help and you can save us.”

“I’ve told you I can’t go and get back in time. No gas. The car’s way off on a side road, Lord knows where.”

Hal felt ready to burst with exasperation.

“Have you got a gun?” he hissed furiously.

“I just had time to follow you! Thought it was fishy the way McHenry hung around without doing anything. Saw him look at you once, when you weren’t looking—”

“Why the hell didn’t you tell me?”

“No use. You wouldn’t have taken no stock in it! But I knew you wouldn’t shoot a man and then run. So I left
the lobby and hung around outside. Didn’t know what to think.”

“Nor how to think, either!” said Hal.

“Yeah? Well, when that wheel chair came out right after the murder I did some thinking! I looked at the trunk and saw the air holes along the top of it. I did some thinking then, when I guessed you were in that trunk! You would of thought it was a rabbit—and not been so far out, either—”

“How did we get here, and where the hell are we?”

“I got your car started. When the taxi pulled away, I followed. Going up through the park it was stopped all of a sudden; I guess by the party inside. There was a big car near and I saw that thing in the taxi get out. The taxi went on and they took the trunk away from the road.

“After a while the driver of the big car and whoever it was in the taxi came back with you between them. They left the trunk, I guess. But they lifted you in the big car and got in themselves, and drove away—”

“You never thought of picking up a policeman and having him stop the car?” whispered Hal with sarcasm.

“I was too far away to be sure the figure they carried was you! And if I tried anything like that they might of got away. That car was faster than yours. Wonder you wouldn’t keep yours with gas in!”

“Go on,” whispered Hal.

“I followed that car way uptown and around for a while, and then clear back down again. It was a big, blue car. Guess it was the one that Brooks got your mother in. It stopped on a corner and McHenry got in. I was way behind, luckily. Then the car beat it out toward Yonkers.

“Once past Harlem it stuck to side roads for miles. I had to dim the lights and I sure bumped around, trailing their tail light. It crossed the main Hudson road. Then I ran out of gas and had to stop.”

“That’s funny—that you had to stop!”

“Is it? Well, I left the car pointing the way I had come, hoping the police would find it. I ran ahead a while and there was the river in front and no side road and no car! I galloped around in bigger circles, over fences and through bushes until I saw a light. It was this window. I crawled up to it in time to see that guy pasting you with that rope—”

“All right,” whispered Hal. “Now, for the last time, will you get out of here and go for help?”

“Not without you,” retorted Dan obstinately. “Think I’ll leave you here alone to get beaten up again?”

“Oh, Lord!” groaned Hal, “give me strength to deal with this dumb egg! All right, then, stay here and get shot for your pains! If any one comes, roll under the bed. If it’s the black man you lie still. He’d break you in two. If it’s McHenry alone, I’ll jump him and you grab his feet when I whistle. Maybe he carries a gun. We’ll have to get that away from him—”

“I’ll handle him if I can get my hands—”

At that moment, from a distant part of the cellar, came despairing cries that rose steadily until they became broken screams. Both Hal and Dan felt a coldness along their spines. The voice was that of a man beside himself with pain and terror.

They listened until the shrieks died away, listened still, in awed silence, until, faint at first, but growing louder, they heard the shuffle and check of footsteps upon stone. Almost without
a sound, Dan rolled under the cot. Some one fumbled at the door. Then the light flashed on.

Hal turned his head slowly. Wallace and Nimbo were in the room and approaching him. Wallace was empty handed. The Nubian carried a tray with two dishes of gold and a thin-stemmed wine glass. He set them on the table within easy reach of Hal. One plate bore a piece of dirty bacon rind, the other some moldy crusts of bread. The glass was full of muddy water.

Wallace seated himself on the end of the table. Nimbo stood at his side.

"I've brought you the sort of banquet my daughter enjoyed for eighteen years," explained Wallace evenly. "You were whipped to-night as she was whipped. She is dying, so Nimbo took toll of revenge for her. The debt is a heavy one and will take some time to pay, Evans."

"It won't take long on this sort of food," said Hal. "Who else have you been torturing just now?"

"I told you that my daughter Gloria is dying. It is only a matter of hours. I think Papaniotis has satisfied himself of her approaching dissolution and therefore of his own, because when she dies I will kill him. Though Nimbo has beaten him almost every day, he seems to cling to life. But Gloria does not. He has not made life attractive to her."

Again Hal sensed an abyss of suffering beneath the pitiless voice. Despite his own wrongs, he felt a certain respect for this broken-hearted madman with his iron self-control.

"That's—pretty tough," he admitted. "Even if my visit here hasn't been particularly entertaining, I'm glad my father had no hand in your troubles."

Wallace lifted one eyebrow in iron-ical disbelief as he glanced about the room.

Suddenly his regard grew fixed, then flashed back upon his prisoner. Hal guessed that he had seen the cellar window hanging open a little from the top. Hal returned his stare blankly, but Wallace was not deceived.

He drew a revolver and laid it across his knees, at the same time motioning toward the window.

"That should have been nailed up," he rasped. "Our guest is not as weak as he looks. See to it!"

Grinning anxiously, the Nubian rolled his eyes at the revolver and hurried out of the cell. Soon he was back again with a hammer and a dozen long nails which he drove in the sash.

Lacking leverage from the inside, it would be impossible now to open the window, even if the glass was broken. The panes were too narrow for the passage of a man's body through the space they occupied.

And Wallace had two prisoners instead of one, though he did not know it.

Nimbo returned to his master's side. To attack Wallace during the black's absence had been out of the question because of that ready revolver.

"You complain of your entertainment," observed Hal's captor. "Would you like to hear how my revenge was accomplished? It was difficult and intricate, but successful."

Hal nodded shortly. He hoped that both Nimbo and the revolver might disappear during the narrative, giving him a chance at Wallace.

"I planned the work long in advance," began his captor. "My position at the dam was important for its contact with Hearn, but more important to avert suspicion."

"In order to use it as an alibi it was
necessary to be in two places at once, so far as the usual methods of transportation are concerned.

"I bought a seaplane and learned to fly. In the wild country above the site of the dam there is a little lake. I hid the plane there before I became McHenry."

"In this way I was able to carry Nimbo from above the dam to the inlet near your home last Saturday night and arrive early in the evening. There was the symbol to leave and we had to make other preparations.

"After the house had been fired we went back to the plane and reached our little lake before daylight. So far as the workmen knew, I had never left the dam."

Hal's grief and rage returned full flood. It cost him a violent effort to hold his tongue.

"Sunday night we blew up the dam. Monday evening we removed Hearn. After his death, the police permitted me to leave for Buffalo to visit my 'sick wife.' I made for the plane instead. Nimbo had reached it ahead of me—"

"How did he get away from the dogs?"

"He walked in the stream for a few yards and then took to the trees. His arms are strong, as you may remember."

"Sort of missing link," said Hal with a savage glance at the Nubian.

Nimbo stared back at him blankly.

"We came down on the Hudson that night, not far from here. The next day I drove into town for your mother. That was Tuesday—"

"How did you know where to find her?"

"One of my agents met me at your home Saturday night and followed you into town Sunday morning."

"Don't see why the police let you leave the dam Monday night—right after you murdered Hearn."

"I had another agent in Buffalo, Evans. He wired me to hurry to the bedside of my mythical invalid wife. I had only to show that wire to the police."

"And the same man wired from Buffalo asking for quiet rooms for you in New York!" Hal exclaimed.

"Almost obvious—now that you know," replied Wallace with a faint sneer. "To continue. We drove your mother to a place of safety. Later we returned to New York to get Dorothy Hearn's jewels. I found them myself, just before she woke. But I slipped out of the window while she was staring at Nimbo's luminous skull."

"It was touch and go that night. We had to work fast. But I got back to the plane in time to reach the lake, the dam and the inquest in Barton the following morning. I left Nimbo behind to prepare for his part on Wednesday afternoon. It was all play to him. He does not know what fear means."

"He will," muttered Hal.

"I doubt it. By the way, I trained him to stand on a chair if any one except his victim could see him. I wanted the police to think they had a definite clew and look for a man of great height as well as strength."

"We gathered that," Hal retorted.

"Did you? How interesting. As regards Hearn, I knew that he had skimped on cement and would wish to examine the damage alone. It was simple to post Nimbo at the top of the dam, where the concrete was faulty. When Hearn got up there, Nimbo throttled him, pinned the symbol on his chest, and flung him to the bed of the stream. I wished the crash of his body to distract attention and give
The Blind Fury

Nimbo more time to get clear. As I led the pursuit and did the firing, I was pretty sure he would not be hit. Of course he escaped."

"For the moment," retorted Hal.

Wallace chose to ignore the prophecy.

"My agent in Buffalo," he continued, "wired McCoy that I would leave Barton after the inquest and take the train to New York. I did so.

"In the meantime, my New York agent drove Nimbo to a station where my train would stop. We came to New York together and accepted the suite opposite yours—"

"You mean that your nervous wife was—Nimbo?" cried Hal. "You smuggled him into the hotel—"

"Of course. My 'wife' was supposed to have a terrible skin disease. So Nimbo could keep out of sight and I could bandage his face and hands when the waiters came in. Huddled in a wheel chair, his bulk was hardly noticeable."

"You must have enjoyed my sympathy," said Hal.

"Or your stupidity. That empty suite seemed a gift from the gods. The god of vengeance, perhaps—"

"Next comes Murray. He was shrewd enough to guess his danger and guard his person. I did not dare risk Nimbo in a direct attack on him. Then came that matter of the contract. Another gift from the god of vengeance! What I overheard you say to Murray over the phone, and what you afterward told me, showed me how to get Murray away from his men.

"When I left the hotel that afternoon, I phoned you, as Burke, telling you to stay there all evening. Then I phoned Murray that you wanted to see him. Later, I sent Morgan and McCoy on a wild-goose chase to Long Island—to find a double cross waiting for them.

"It was probable that you would take Murray upstairs to discuss your misunderstanding and that he would leave his guards in the lobby. Nimbo was waiting behind our door. He had the automatic which we had taken from your room the night before, when we got the contract.

"Nimbo shot Murray, throttled you, dragged you into our suite and locked you up in the big empty trunk we brought with us for that purpose—"

"You got me out of the hotel in a trunk?" demanded Hal quickly. Dan had already told him so. But Dan was not supposed to be hiding under his cot at that moment.

"Of course. Nimbo left the automatic to incriminate you. Your disappearance would look like flight. The police would believe you guilty, at least until after we escaped."

"But how did you escape?"

Wallace nodded toward the big Nubian.

"My 'wife' was supposed to be highly neurotic. I explained that the shots and subsequent excitement had almost brought on a stroke and it was vital to get her away. The police let me send her and her trunk to a nursing home. An hour later, Morgan himself let me get away to see that she was comfortable. He will be annoyed with himself to-morrow, when I fail to appear at his office."

Wallace paused for a moment.

"So here we are," he concluded—"all but one."

"What do you mean?" cried Hal, although he guessed.

"Your little friend, Dorothy Hearn, owes a debt," replied his captor.

"Why? What has she done? If you dare touch her—"
“Well?” inquired Wallace tonelessly.
“I’ll kill you if it’s the last thing I do!”
“You mentioned that before, I think. Her payment begins to-morrow—here.”

CHAPTER XXIV
The Shuffle of Feet

Hal’s thoughts raced. Too much confidence might lead Wallace to suspect Dan’s presence. He tried pleading.
“But there’s no sense in it! She’s never done you any harm. Why punish her?”
“So far as I know, my tiny children had never done any one any harm. Yet they suffered horribly—for eighteen years—all through their childhood and youth.”
“What’s that got to do with Dorothy Hearn?”
“They are my children. Hearn made them suffer. Dorothy Hearn is his daughter. There still remains a debt from his family to mine—what is left of it.”
“That’s not sense. It’s madness! What about mother?”
“I shall release your mother,” replied Wallace evenly. “She profited by your father’s treachery to me. But she has lost her money and she’s going to lose her son. You and Hearn’s daughter will pay most of your debt elsewhere. Your mother has suffered and will suffer enough.”

Between rage and dread, Hal had to fight for control of himself. He almost lost the struggle.
“It’s all lies!” he shouted. “You’re not Wallace! You’re Irish! You’re McHenry—a sore employee—”
His captor studied him keenly.
“You want all the facts? You’d like to denounce me later, eh? But you believe my story. Have it so.
“In twenty years of wandering I made by bread in many ways. I was on the stage for a while. The part of an Irishman is easy to play. The part of that ignorant, suspicious sailorman who befuddled Papaniotis was much more difficult. Is there anything else you’d like to know?”
Hal shook his head slowly.
“You’re insane, of course,” he declared, “or you’d know that you can’t heal old scars by making new ones. There’s something in the Bible about vengeance. Maybe you know it.”
Wallace stood up and pocketed his revolver.
“The Lord had His chance for eighteen years, Evans. But He let my children suffer. Now ‘Vengeance is mine’! I think that’s all between us for to-night.”

He walked out of the cell. Nimbo followed, snapped off the light and bolted the door behind him.
Hal lay still. His back hurt him terribly. But it was forgotten in the torment of his thoughts.

His mother was a prisoner of this madman, who might or might not keep his word to free her. Hal had little doubt that Wallace would capture Dorothy, despite Morgan and McCoy, judging by the devilish ingenuity he had already shown. He and Dan were unarmed—helpless as yet—
If Dan had only gone for help—
A bump and a muffled curse focused his attention elsewhere.
He lifted himself painfully on one elbow. Dan was crawling from under the bed.
“Maybe we can’t get out,” muttered Dan. “But you wanna stay, don’t you?”
Hal dropped on his face with a stifled groan.

"You win the cut glass bath mat, you long eared, wall-eyed, pig headed ass!" he whispered.

"Is that so!"

"And there's your bray! Well, climb up on this bed and see if you can lay your ears back and kick out these bars overhead. If you step on my back, I'll pull you apart!"

Dan climbed obediently, fumbled about and shook the bars until the bed creaked under him.

"Not a chance," he whispered.

Dan stepped off the bed. He felt his way to the door, explored its surface, tested the bolt and returned.

"Nothing doing there," he said. "But it's got a bolt on the inside. We could keep 'em out—"

"Sure! While they smoke us out—or starve us to death. You're mother's little helper, you are!"

With a sore back, a raging thirst and a sense of utter helplessness, Hal was letting go a little.

"Anybody that didn't know you," muttered Dan resentfully, "'ud think you was kinda irritated!"

Hal gasped and lay still.

"Well," he muttered at last, "here's half the bed. Might as well get some sleep. Maybe Wallace will give us a chance at him alone to-morrow. If we can get his gun and bolt the door, you can keep the others away from the bars and the window..."

"I'll sleep under the bed," Dan broke in.

He arranged Hal's coat over his sore back, took off his own and crawled into hiding.

Luckily, the summer night was so warm that the cellar was not uncomfortably cool.

Shock and exhaustion spared Hal an awakening to his plight until midday. Dan woke earlier, ravenous with hunger. But he kept as quiet as possible, anxious to let his companion sleep and regain his strength.

At noon, Nimbo unbolted the door and flung it open, rousing Hal. The big Nubian shuffled into the room. After him entered a grizzled, hard-eyed individual with a wealth of tattooing on his bare arms. He carried a tray of dishes and a coffee pot. Nimbo removed the dishes with their mocking contents. The sailor set his tray on the table with a crash.

Nimbo grinned vacantly at Hal and the two tramped out again. The door closed. The bolt shot home.

Hal sat up quickly, stared at the tray and sniffed. Unless both sight and smell deceived him, here was a real breakfast: coffee, scrambled eggs, bacon frizzled by an expert, a covered dish that might mean toast—

Dan's head and long lean neck were thrust, turtle-fashion, from under the cot.

"Food!" he croaked.

Hal reached for the tray, then drew back.

"Food it is. But why—after that other muck? Drugs? Disease germs? Damn Wallace!"

"If you're gonna let a little thing like that spoil your appetite," muttered Dan, "lemme taste it—"

"Nothing doing. You're my ace-in-the-hole if Wallace comes in alone. I'll taste it myself—"

He did so, since Dan could not scramble out in time to prevent him. There seemed nothing wrong with the food. Hunger conquered caution. Hal began to divide the meal into two equal shares.

Dan stood by with itching fingers. But a dim light filtered into their cell
through the window and Hal ordered him out of sight again under the bed. In a moment he was wolfing his share and passing the other half down to Dan.

Both felt better after the meal. But Hal’s sense of well-being was purely physical. To think of Dorothy in the hands of this madman stung him to apprehension.

About two thirty Nimbo appeared again. This time he was alone. With another grim at Hal, he picked up the tray and departed, bolting the door as usual. But he failed to switch off the light.

When Dan stuck his head out, Hal ordered him, in a vicious whisper, to pull it in again.

A little after three they were startled by hoarse screams from the same distant point. The muffled sounds rose to a crescendo of horror, and ceased abruptly.

Still listening, the two prisoners heard the shuffle of feet along the passage, approaching their door.

“Now for it,” whispered Hal. “Keep out of sight!”

But the shuffle passed on and stopped. Then they heard it again, from somewhere close at hand.

Hal looked up suddenly. The square of barred darkness above his head now showed a light beyond.

He rose cautiously to his knees to look through the bars. Just before his head reached the level of the opening the light beyond went out.

Hal rose no higher, but lay down again. No good showing the silhouette of his head against the light in his cell. He wanted his captors to think him weaker than he actually was. It might add a fraction to his chances.

He was hardly prone again before the cell door opened and Wallace strode in. Hal turned his head wearily. The man’s face was drawn and pale. But his eyes blazed.

Nimbo shuffled in at his heels.

“You heard that bellowing?” Wallace demanded.

“Another victim?” queried Hal in a weak voice.

Wallace advanced to the table. There his figure began to lose its erect tensity. His shoulders drooped a little. The light of fury faded from his eyes, leaving only shadows of hopeless tragedy. The glance that met Hal’s seemed turned inward and blind with pain.

“Gloria died this morning,” he muttered. “She died while I was gone. You heard Papaniotis before he followed her. If I could kill him a thousand times—”

The harsh voice trailed off into silence.

Hal felt his judgment reeling. This was plain murder! Yet Wallace had suffered—was suffering—almost past endurance because of Papaniotis’s old cruelty.

It needed Hal’s dread for Dorothy to steel his determination. Tragedy or no, this madman must be downed.

Wallace looked slowly in his direction, as though seeking him with blind eyes.

“I have done you and your mother an injustice,” he droned monotonously. “You will suffer no more harm from me. As soon as possible you will be liberated. Your mother is here and quite unharmed. In other ways I have done what I can to make amends. It is too late to bring back your father and my friend. I made a mistake there—”

“You’ve made more than one,” said Hal grimly.

“Yes. I trusted to letters—for eighteen years.”

There was a little silence.
“How did you learn that dad never betrayed you?” Hal demanded.

“An old letter. Some one sent it to the papers. Morgan, no doubt. Your father wrote it soon after my crash. He offered to help me. I never got it. You were right.”

Hal studied his captor blankly. Here were sanity and madness, cheek by jowl. Hands still shaking from one murder, Wallace sincerely regretted another. Having wreaked his triple revenge with almost incredible skill and foresight, he had shown a simple-minded carelessness in confessing his crimes. He had bedeviled Hal and his mother. Now he would make amends. Then Dorothy might escape harm if Hal pleaded her cause—

But Hal hesitated. While admitting his human mistake, the man still usurped the prerogative of a deity. He had inflicted a sort of rough justice, demanding an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Hal’s heart sank. If Hearn had been guilty, how could Dorothy hope to escape such mad, distorted revenge?

Wallace straightened his shoulders and spoke.

“In the meantime,” he sighed, “you are again to witness the justice of punishment inflicted in kind. Nimbo!”

Before Hal could stir, the black had lifted him like a child and stood him up on the bed. The Nubian leaped to his side, gripped him by one wrist and arm and spun him about to face the dark, barred opening.

Hal turned his head quickly. Wallace was eying him. To risk an uppercut at the black’s jaw would be madness.

With the skill of long practice, Nimbo bound first one of his wrists and then the other to the bars. He stepped down, leaving Hal securely lashed, his enemies behind him in the lighted room and mysterious darkness before him.

The bed creaked as Wallace took the Nubian’s place, his head close to Hal’s at the bars.

A wall switch clicked. Hal found himself looking into a cell like his own, now flooded with light. But it lacked a window. Presumably the barred opening was intended for ventilation.

On the far side of the cell, with its head against the wall, stood a cot like his own. Dorothy lay there, dressed, and fast asleep.

Hal caught his breath at the sight of her.

She lay with her head away from him. Her slim, arched feet projected limply beyond the foot of the bed. Her ankles were bound to the bar there. The rope ran under the bed, where it was fastened out of her reach.

Hal turned his head to face Wallace.

“Untie her and let her go!” he ordered with desperate calmness. “I love her, Wallace. You have no quarrel with me. You owe me something for that beating.”

“No!” said Wallace.

“If you must torment somebody, take it out on me! Not on a girl!”

“No! That it happens to be she who must suffer is your misfortune, not my fault. Her father was guilty!”

Hal jerked at his fettered wrists. His eyes narrowed to slits, glimmering with a chill, desperate purpose.

“I’ll kill you for murdering my father!” he promised huskily. “But if you touch that girl in there, you madman, I’ll torture you to death! I’ll follow you until I get you, as you followed them!”

For an instant Wallace hesitated; then he shrugged.
"The two cases are not the same, Evans. Wait and watch."

CHAPTER XXV
The Last Stand

WHEN Dorothy reached the offices of her father’s lawyer that afternoon her detective escort left her. She was admitted at once. Elder was conferring with a man past middle age. He greeted her warmly, then asked leave to present Judge Moreland.

Dorothy saw a rather stern-looking man of great natural dignity. The sternness was modified by his smile.

"So this is Dorothy!" he echoed the introduction. "Pardon my familiarity. You had been eating mud pies when I last saw you."

Dorothy laughed. "My passion for mud pies has faded."

"Has Mr. Elder told you that we are closely related?" asked the judge.

"I don’t—quite understand."

"Your father asked me to be your godfather and I accepted the honor, promising to come to your aid in time of need. Not every one takes such a promise seriously. But I have always managed to keep my word, Miss Hearn."

Dorothy smiled uncertainly. Judge Moreland nodded.

"When I heard of your father’s death I came up from Baltimore, where I have been living in retirement. I am without other ties. You must not hesitate to let me keep my word to poor Ben. Mr. Elder tells me that your affairs are in a muddle. That won’t do. I hope you will let me take your future into my hands. I am a just man, Miss Hearn. It will be a pleasure to me."

Dorothy was touched, so touched that her eyes filled with quick tears.

"You’re awfully kind," she said. "But—we’re quite strangers. I have no claim on your kindness, Judge Moreland. Playing godfather to a child is no more than a pretty custom."

"It is more to me. Only some fifteen years have passed since you were kind to a bachelor who was rather at a loss in your presence. You put me at ease by presenting me with a large piece of sticky candy. What’s more, I ate it!"

"I’ve asked Mr. Elder to prepare for me a statement of your financial position," he continued. "While his clerk is at it, will you join me at lunch, so that I can apologize for taking such a liberty?"

"So that you can use your legal skill to override my objections!" she corrected, smiling. "Well, I accept the invitation to lunch. For the other, I don’t see why—"

"The lunch is all I ask," replied the judge gravely, "until we are better acquainted, Miss Hearn."

He rose and held out his arm in a courtly way.

Dorothy accepted it with a small brown hand, warming to the obscure sadness she read in his face.

Down in the street, Judge Moreland called a taxi and helped her into it. They drove to another large building farther uptown. Here, the judge explained, he had told his chauffeur to meet him.

He dismissed the taxi and looked about for his car.

"The rascal isn’t here," he smiled. "Probably he is waiting at the other entrance."

He led her through the long foyer toward the next street. As they trod the tiled floor side by side, Dorothy felt a surge of gratitude to her escort. In his position, not one man in a million would have considered himself
obligated to help her. An upright judge, she mused. He had called himself a just man, not a generous one. What a quaint point of view!

Almost as soon as they appeared in the street beyond, a big, dark-blue limousine drew up at the curb. The chauffeur jumped down to open the door. About to slip lithely into the tonneau, Dorothy’s finer instinct made her wait to allow the judge to hand her in.

He took his place at her side. The door slammed. The driver hopped back to his place. As the car drew swiftly away from the curb, Dorothy turned to smile at her companion.

At that instant she felt a sharp pain in her arm and uttered a little cry of surprise.

Judge Moreland looked his concern.

“What is it, my dear?” he inquired anxiously.

“I pricked my arm on something!” she exclaimed. “Why—I feel quite ill—”

 Darkness swooped down upon her senses. She did not even feel the judge slip his arm about her waist and draw her nodding head to rest against his shoulder.

Later, she was dimly aware of a shout and a grinding crash. She tried to stir. Something stung her arm. Again she lost consciousness.

Her next impression was very shadowy. She thought some one was carrying her—an interminable distance—

She felt herself laid on a resilient surface and drowsily opened her eyes.

Close above her floated a black and dreadful face. She tried to scream, but could manage no more than a pitiful murmur of fright. A third time came the pain in her arm and again she fell asleep.

She was still unconscious, though on the edge of waking, when Hal first saw her on the cot in the next cell. His pleading and threats came to her as a blur of sound.

She lay still, too listless to raise her eyelids.

Then she saw Hal’s face against the bars, his bound wrists, Wallace’s hand at his throat and Wallace’s face at his shoulder.

“What’s the matter?” she gasped. “What are you doing there, Hal? Is that you, Judge Moreland? What’s happened—”

Suddenly she remembered Morgan’s warning. Her hand flew to her mouth and she stared at them with scared eyes.

Wallace’s voice rasped in Hal’s ear. “Nimbo! Get in there. The lash!”

Hal turned a desperate face in time to see the black grin vacantly and shuffle out of the room. Yet this might be their chance, if only he could free himself. He jerked and strained at his bonds. They would not give way. But he hoped the creaking bed would cover the noise Dan might make as he crawled from beneath it.

Far from guessing his object, Wallace dropped the knife he had snatched up from the table and gripped Hal’s shoulders with both hands, swaying with his struggles as he looked past him into the next cell.

Hal saw Nimbo roll into sight, lash in hand, and approach Dorothy. Her sharp scream of alarm set him beside himself. But the ropes held.

Suddenly there was a double weight on his shoulders and a shout in his ear. Wallace let go of him, stumbled back and toppled to the stone floor.

From the next room came a frightened scream of pain.

“Dorothy!” Hal yelled insanely.

Behind him as he fought his bonds
he could hear a thrashing struggle in progress. A second cry reached his ears and he grew desperately sane. There was one loose loop in the rope. He caught it with his teeth and ground at it like a savage animal.

A knife glittered past his eyes and sliced the taut rope near one wrist. Dan hacked at the other. He was free.

He turned swiftly. Wallace was just lifting his head from the floor, struggling to draw his revolver, his face dark with the choking Dan had given him.

Spurred by a shriek from the next room, Hal sprang off the bed and landed on Wallace with both feet, knocking him flat again.

"Get his gun, Dan!" he yelled. "Hold him here—"

Regaining his balance, he flung himself into the hall. Wallace found his voice at the same instant.

"Nimbo!" he shouted. "Here to me!"

The cry saved Dorothy from further harm.

As Hal tore into the next room, Nimbo was turning toward the door. Wild with rage though he was, Hal realized that he was no match for the black if they came to grips. Nimbo crouched and sprang at him. Hal put everything he had into one hasty swing. It missed Nimbo's jaw but landed in his great, thick neck.

Having made no attempt to guard himself, the black took the full weight of the blow and went over backward with a jar and a grunt. He lay still for a second in sheer surprise.

Desperately cool, Hal remembered the sailor who had brought his food. He turned like a flash, bolted the door on the inside and whirled again. Nimbo had scrambled to his feet. Hal met his savage charge with a straight-arm blow on the nose and leaped aside to escape his clutching hands.

Ignorant of such fighting, the black did nothing but try to rush him. Again and again Hal struck and escaped, swinging and jumping clear with a savage and primitive lust.

Dorothy watched the fight without a sound. Instinct warned her not to cry out lest she distract Hal's attention for one fatal instant.

Still Nimbo came on, his great, battered face snarling and smeared with blood, his huge hands reaching, reaching.

Once he maneuvered Hal against the bed, forcing him to leap clear over it behind Dorothy's shrinking back.

Hal heard a shot in the next room and a yell of pain from Dan. His heart sank. He struck and struck again in savage anxiety.

Suddenly Nimbo turned from him, ran clumsily to the door and switched off the light. Swerving in the sudden darkness, Hal brought up against the bed. Nimbo sprang for the sound. Just in time Hal distinguished the luminous face as it bobbed close. He struck with all his force. The black grunted with pain, but one of his clutching hands touched Hal's arm, turned, and gripped it.

With a furious, twisting wrench Hal managed to free himself. It was a close call. He dared not risk such another. Darting sideways he felt for the bed and scrambled across Dorothy, knocking her flat. Luckily for Hal, though unhappily for the breathless girl, Nimbo clambered after him instead of turning aside to cut him off.

It gave Hal time to blunder to the door, find the switch and snap it on again before the Nubian bore too close. Nimbo followed all his movements by ear, with an uncanny accuracy.
Again Hal escaped the black’s rush. Suddenly the latch of the door rattled. A great voice boomed at Nimbo to open the door. A furious pounding began on its panels.

Dan must be out of the fight. Every instant Hal expected the inside bolt to give, or a shot from the barred opening to bring him down.

But he dared not even glance aside. He had landed half a dozen blows on Nimbo’s throat and chin that would have knocked any other man unconscious. The black only growled in response, mouthing at him like an animal, the ferocity of his rushing attack increasing as Hal’s hard, bare fists crashed against his face and body.

The most nimble of footwork was vital against such a giant. Hal was tiring fast. But the Nubian seemed made of steel springs.

Hal fought on without hope, getting what satisfaction he could out of his punishing blows.

At last, as he slipped between his opponent and the foot of the bed, his foot struck a caster, spinning him half about. In a flash the Nubian gripped his shoulders and yanked him over backward. His head struck the stone floor with a crash.

Before he could stir the man was on top of him, snarling with hate, those terrible hands clutching his throat despite his sudden, thrashing efforts to avoid them.

Dorothy screamed at the top of her voice, flung herself over the foot of the bed and buried both her small hands in the murderer’s hair.

Fighting in vain to draw one breath of air, Hal heard her screams more faintly as the roaring in his ears increased. The room grew dim. Nimbo’s bleeding, snarling face seemed to recede to a vast distance.

With a last shudder he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XXVI
A Crumpled Fender

The news that Dorothy had been abducted and that McCoy’s men had failed to trace her, left a vibrant silence in Morgan’s office. The columnist was angry—and anxious.

He stared at his companion with eyes that glinted under bushy brows. The police had accomplished nothing in the case. Now they had blundered badly.

But not all the responsibility was theirs.

McCoy and he had blundered at every turn.

Morgan surged to his feet to stride back and forth. A glimmer of white caught his eye. Some one had slipped an envelope under the door. He swooped for it.

The captain needed only the slight stiffening of Morgan’s big body to jump up and look over his shoulder.

Morgan held a card bearing the familiar symbol. Dollar signs and skulls occupied the first seven spaces as before. In the bottom row, where two had been vacant up to now, the middle space contained a cat-o-nine-tails sketched in ink but unmistakable. The final space was still empty.

“Good night!” Morgan rumbled. “This is foul! We’ve got to get those men and get ‘em quick!”

“What’s it mean?”

“It means they’ve turned from murder to torture! There’s no time to lose. How long will it take that raid car to get here?”

“Half an hour. Twenty minutes more, maybe.”

“What time is it now?”
McCoy looked at his watch.

"Just on two."

"Eh? What?—By Gad, Ross—"

Morgan's face flamed darkly. Dropping the card, he pounced on the classified telephone directory and slapped through its pages. He sat down with the big book open before his eyes and diligently applied himself to the telephone.

His calls completed, he turned to McCoy.

"Ross! Locate the cops who went to the Belmore last night! Let me talk to 'em!"

McCoy called the nearest police station.

"Here," he growled. "Here's the sergeant."

Morgan put a rapid fire of questions that brought the captain upright in his chair, thanked the sergeant, and replaced the receiver.

"Right under their noses!" he snapped.

"What d'ye mean?"

"McHenry! He's Brooks. And we let him go. Not a woman was admitted last night to any nursing home in the Bronx. But half an hour after the murder, McHenry wheeled his suffering wife out of the hotel while your cops stood by. The sergeant says her face and hands were bandaged. She's a he, Ross. The murderer was in that chair."

"But McHenry came down here to help us! He was up at the dam when Evans was murdered—"

"Not he! Why did he wire for a quiet suite? He knew the one across from the Evans's was empty. He took it to get Evans. He's played with us like a pair of kids!"

"You think he got Evans out—"

"In that big trunk the sergeant speaks of!"

"If young Evans has been knocked about—"

"He can stand it!" Morgan snapped. "But they've got Dorothy Hearn. She's a girl, Ross! God knows what we'll see in that last space—"

"Why?" growled McCoy. "Where's their motive?"

"Damn the motive. We've got to save that girl."

"There's nothing to do but go out there—"

"Where? Got any program?"

"See that cop at Mount Vernon. Get a description of the car. Look up our patrols out there. What else can we do?"

McCoy was almost humble.

Morgan dropped his head in his hands. Suddenly he sat up with a shout, grabbed the telephone and called his paper.

Five minutes later he hung up in triumph.

"Ross! Can you get hold of a police boat—to meet us at Yonkers? There's just a chance—"

"Sure I can. What for?"

"McHenry's our man. He had to be at the dam every day. How could he strike down here and get back there by morning? And what an alibi!—Only a plane, Ross. But no plane could land in that rough country. He had to have water—and a seaplane. My people looked it up on a big map. There's a little lake not far above the dam but less accessible. That's where your murderer went when they lost track of him up there—"

"Still I don't get the police boat idea—"

"That dark-blue car is up the Hudson somewhere! McHenry's through at the dam. He'd bring his plane away so it wouldn't be found there. He has
to come down on water. If we go up by water, there's a chance we may see his plane!"

"Right! But I'm sending that carload of police by road as well. I'm counting on those patrols. If we both have luck, we can take him from both sides—"

Morgan nodded impatiently. McCoy called headquarters, ordered a police boat, told Burke to send out a general order to pick up McHenry, and asked for news.

"Nothing new on the big case, sir," Burke reported.

"Well, send out an order to watch for a big trunk. McHenry had one with him."

"A park patrolman found a big trunk in Central Park this morning. No shelves or drawers. Pierced with air-holes—"

"That's the trunk! Why didn't they report it to police headquarters at once?"

"They did, captain. You hadn't mentioned a trunk—"

"That's right. My fault. Get that police boat started for Yonkers as quickly as possible, will you?"

The Force loved McCoy because he played fair.

Morgan was calling Mount Vernon when they heard the siren of their raid car in the street far below. The motor cycle cop was conscious again and they could see him.

Their progress northward to the Boston Road was a thing of sound and fury. McCoy led in his own car which Hardy drove. The raid car followed. Both sirens blared as they tore through the streets. Morgan was glad to have it so. Any one who saw them would think they were going all the way by road.

At the hospital, McCoy was led at once to the ward where his patrolman lay.

The man looked up with sullen apology in his eyes.

The captain grinned and touched his shoulder.

"Tough luck, Smith. Let's hear the story."

Smith lay back and looked his gratitude.

"That girl came out with an elderly man. They took a taxi. I trailed 'em. They stopped uptown a ways and let the taxi go. I watched 'em through a long lobby and took a couple a' corners in time to see 'em pulling away in a big blue car. That looked fishy—the change and the blue car—but you said just trail 'em. Of course, I got the number."

He repeated it. McCoy wrote it down.

"Right. Then what?"

"I followed 'em uptown, keeping back. They crossed the Harlem toward Mount Vernon. I closed in a bit. I noticed they was on good terms. The girl had her head on his shoulder."

Morgan suppressed a groan at this point.

"Well, sir, they turned into a side road that leads over to Yonkers. It winds a lot and I had to close in for fear of losing 'em. I figured they'd take me for a civilian now, anyway. But they must have seen me earlier. I took a curve fast and there was the car pulled up across the road. I hit the front fender. That's all I remember until I woke up here a while ago."

"All right," nodded McCoy,rising.

"Anything you need?"

"Not a thing, sir, thanks! I'm sorry—"

"Forget it and get well. Come on, Morgan."

In a few minutes they were speed-
ing toward Yonkers. There Hardy stopped long enough for Morgan and McCoy to get out, then tore northward again, leading the raid car.

The police boat was waiting. McCoy took command and they shot away up river, putting on speed until a bow wave of clear water hissed high to port and starboard.

Soon after they passed Irvington, Morgan got his companion to pull in and hug the east shore.

The grim walls of Sing Sing swung into sight, rose high above them, slipped past. Suddenly Morgan shouted.

“See that old dock? Pull in closer—”

The wheel was put over. The boat careened as she veered to starboard, nearer the shore. Drawing close, they saw that the wharf was old, belonging to a disused factory.

“Here we are!” cried Morgan. “Look!”

A road dipped down a ravine toward the wharf. At one time it had crossed the railroad lines. Old planking led across the tracks. More recently, the fence that guarded the right of way had been built across the road.

Now something had torn through that fence, flinging its woven wires to left and right. And just clear of the tracks lay a crumpled, dark-blue fender.

As the boat pulled cautiously alongside the wharf, they noticed that a post at the end of it had been broken off short very recently, for the splinters were bright yellow.

They landed and hurried across the tracks. Chips of dark-blue paint clung to the broken wires of the fence.

One of the men in the boat called to them and pointed. In the eddy downstream floated a black leather cushion.

“Out of control!” rasped McCoy. “They’re drowned!”

“Drowned nothing!” Morgan snapped at him. “Here went McHenry’s incriminating dark-blue car, with nobody in her. The house is somewhere above!”

“They went past the next town with Mrs. Evans.”

“And doubled back. McHenry’s clever. But he’s not far away, nor Evans and his mother and Dorothy Hearn!”

“Would he leave such a clew so close to home?”

“He figured we’d come by road and never see it.”

Morgan did not trouble to add that, even by water, McCoy had missed the clew until it was pointed out to him.

“Worth having a look, anyhow,” McCoy agreed.

He called an order. The boat was made fast. All except two of the men on her came ashore to join him.

McCoy led them up the road to the top. Seeing no house, he sent his men into the woods on either side, in a widening circle. He and Morgan stayed on the road.

Presently a man came trotting back to them.

“Empty car farther along, sir,” he reported.

Another policeman burst out of the bushes to their right, ran up and saluted.

“Big house off there near the cliff, sir. Looks old and deserted. But I saw a light—”

“Got him!” cried McCoy. “Wait here for us, you two. Tell the others to wait when they come back.”

He strode along the road with Morgan until a bend showed them the car. Morgan stared at it and whistled softly.
"Bottis! That's young Evans's car, Bottis smelled a rat and trailed 'em! They've got him, too, or he would have phoned us for help long before this. The house, Ross?"

The men from the boat had collected again on the road. The man who had found it led the way to the house. Presently it showed through the trees, an old-fashioned wooden structure with cupolas and wooden lacework.

The men spread out to surround it. Morgan spotted the light, low down in a cellar window.

Suddenly they heard the muffled report of a revolver.

"Blow the charge and be damned!" roared Morgan. "I'm for the front door—"

McCoy drew his whistle and blew it. His men closed in about the house. He raced after Morgan, arriving in time to see the big column writer burst through the aged front door with a crash. They both heard the alarm bell that rang somewhere below. Three men crowded in after them.

Somewhere beneath them came an agonized screaming in a girl's voice. It turned Morgan cold.

He thundered down the hall. Luckily, the cellar stairs were exactly where he hoped to find them. He plunged down, McCoy and the others at his heels.

Dorothy's cell was near these stairs, Hal's beyond. When the warning bell rang, Wallace and the sailor had been pounding on her door, which Hal had bolted on the inside.

At the first alarm, Wallace thrust the sailor along the passage toward the front of the house and followed him.

The two were at the far end of the corridor when Morgan came clattering down the stairs. McCoy saw them and yelled an order to halt. Wallace opened a door at the far end, thrust the sailor through, and started to follow him just as McCoy drew his revolver and opened fire.

But it was a long shot. McCoy's bullets went wide. Wallace vanished and slammed the door. McCoy and his three men raced in pursuit.

Intent on the frantic screams from close at hand, Morgan had no attention for anything else. He located their source and hurled himself at the door of Dorothy's cell.

For all his reckless weight it would not yield. The screams continued. Cursing McCoy, he ran into the next cell in search of another door.

Dan lay writhing on the floor there, struggling to drag himself toward the bed, his face a mask of agony.

When Morgan entered he turned with a snarl, then waved toward the barred opening and held out the revolver he had taken from Wallace.

"That sailor shot me from the door!" he groaned. "Get the black! Take this and get him through the bars! Quick, before he—"

Morgan jumped on the bed and glared through into the cell where Dorothy lay screaming and tugging at Nimbo's hair. Hal was just losing consciousness. The girl's writhing little person was directly in line with Nimbo's figure as he crouched over Hal. Morgan roared at her to roll to one side, but she was too frantic to hear him.

Taking a chance, he fired at the Nubian's bent leg, at a point below and in line with his body. Though no great marksman, he had the luck to send his bullet home.

Nimbo howled with pain and stumbled to his feet, sweeping Dorothy aside. Still, in his animal fury, he saw Morgan and started toward the bars.
Morgan took careful aim and fired. The heavy bullet struck the black between the eyes and crashed through his brain. He reeled backward and down across Hal’s body, dead before he struck the floor. But the tremendous vitality in his squat frame kept him jerking and twitching for many seconds after.

Dorothy lay in a limp heap where she had fallen, dangling by her bound ankles. A glimpse of Hal’s face sent Morgan into the corridor again.

McCoy and his men were still trying to break down the door through which Wallace had escaped.

“Ross!” bellowed Morgan. “Come back here and break down this door! It’s touch and go with Evans—”

Against all his instincts, McCoy abandoned the chase and came pounding back with his men.

Without orders these three hurled themselves as one against the door. The bolt snapped and they tumbled into the cell in a heap. Morgan scrambled over them.

“First aid! Quick!” he ordered. “The boy’s been strangled. The black’s dead. I’ll see to the girl—”

He waited until the men had begun to work over Hal. Then he turned to Dorothy. He cut away the ropes from her chafed ankles, picked her up in his arms, and laid her on the bed.

She would be all right, despite the pink welts on the soles of her feet. Black with anger, he turned to see what hope there was for Hal. And at that moment Hal opened his eyes, drew a long painful breath, felt of his throat and sat up weakly, stung thereto by a deep, subconscious memory of danger.

Morgan turned suddenly. A long, lean figure had crept to the door, dragging a broken leg, its tortured face seeking Hal. Dan saw his friend sit up, knew that all was well, and dropped senseless in his tracks.

In the meantime, McCoy’s whistle and his yell for an ax had brought more men pounding down the stairs. One of them had found an ax somewhere back of the house.

McCoy led them racing along the corridor. Two or three blows knocked out a panel in the door at the end. He reached through to the bolt and the door swung open.

They found themselves in a long tunnel roofed with heavy planks. It led downward and straight for the cliff.

When they had covered about forty yards, stumbling through darkness, the tunnel swerved sharply to reveal an enclosure lighted by electricity about fifty feet farther on.

Suddenly this was flooded with daylight. Now they could make out the side of a plane.

They heard a tremendous, swelling roar. The plane stirred and shot out of sight.

With an oath, McCoy ran on and burst into a great cave in the cliff looking over the Hudson. He was just in time to see an amphibian plane swoop across the water toward the police boat. The men on the boat scrambled to unlimber the gun in the bow.

Before they could train the gun the plane rose in a wide, graceful arc, and headed south toward New York.

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CHAPTER XXVII

An Act of God

One hasty glance showed McCoy why they had not seen the hangar from the boat. A huge canvas curtain, painted to resemble the face of the cliff, had hidden the mouth of the cave. It was counter-weighted, so that
a touch had sent it up and let the plane escape.

He led his men back on the run, telling one of them to cut through to the main road, meet Hardy and the raid car, and lead them to the house.

The other men from the boat had scattered through the building. Morgan had found Mrs. Evans unharmed in one of the upper rooms and set her free. The police had found her jewels and Dorothy’s. A room on the ground floor held the corpse of an emaciated young girl in a gorgeous bed.

The cellar had yielded another gruesome find. This was the body of an elderly foreigner, swarthy and fat, his face still convulsed with agony. His color and the puncture in his wrist indicated that he had been poisoned.

Dorothy had regained her senses and now lay weeping and shuddering in the arms of Mrs. Evans. The sailor’s bullet had shattered the bone of Dan’s leg above the knee. The wound had been roughly bandaged. Dan was still unconscious.

But McCoy had time for none of this. He was in search of a telephone. In the upper hall he found one.

He got Burke at headquarters and told him to send out a general alarm for McHenry’s amphibian plane, locally and as far as possible throughout Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. It was a large order. McCoy had no great hopes of immediate success, but in the end the plane would be found and McHenry traced and captured.

As he concluded, Morgan’s voice boomed in his ear.

“Don’t hang up yet!”

“Wait a minute, Burke,” McCoy complied.

He turned to find Hal as well as Morgan at his side, the younger man wheezing through a bruised and swollen throat.

“Why not catch McHenry yourself?” inquired Morgan.

McCoy glared.

“He got away in a plane! How the hell do I know where he’ll come down?”

“I think we do know!”

“Well? Well?”

“Well! Well!” Morgan echoed.

“McHenry told Evans his story. He’s Wallace. He’s got Pap-who’s-is in his power. Collared his money and his yacht and came here to get revenge. His job’s done. Pap’s dead. But the yacht’s somewhere! He’s got a seaplane—”

“Burke!” yelled McCoy. “Gimme the chief!”

The captain sweated over that appeal to his superior. And the police commissioner backed his men. Given a sketchy knowledge of the situation, he promised to ask for a naval seaplane and the fastest Federal rum chaser available. McCoy was to come down river in the police boat. The chaser would be waiting at the Battery.

“I’m going along!” croaked Hal as McCoy hung up. “I told McHenry I’d get him for killing dad!”

“Right!” nodded McCoy, and, turning, plunged down the stairs again.

In a storm of fierce orders he arranged for a guard on the house, transportation to New York for Dan, Dorothy and Mrs. Evans when Hardy arrived, and a search for the chauffeur. Then he was away and racing down the road, with Morgan, Hal and six of the men from the boat lumbering after him.

He yelled an order before he reached the police boat. She was cast off as they tumbled aboard. In a mo-
ment she backed clear of the wharf and headed south.

As the fast little vessel tore downstream like a vibrant living thing, Hal croaked and wheezed out the story Wallace had told him.

Then McCoy explained the chief’s plan of campaign. To locate McHenry’s plane was out of the question. But the naval plane was to quarter the harbor mouth and the sea beyond in search of the yacht. The chaser would follow to sea and stand by. If the plane located the yacht, it was to come back and lead the chaser in pursuit.

All this, if the yacht Circe were not actually in port. But it seemed more likely that she would be standing off the harbor mouth, or out at sea.

It was sheer deductive gambling. But the chief knew Morgan’s guesses and thought this one worth testing.

As they neared the Battery, a steel gray chaser shot to meet them, seemed about to ram the police boat and curved alongside with a flurry of spray, its high bows wet and glistening in the sun.

McCoy, Morgan and Hal scrambled aboard her, to find a crew of youngsters who feared neither man, beast, nor devil.

The hard-eyed young commander put himself at McCoy’s orders, adding that he and his crew had seen McHenry’s plane come down the Hudson and head straight out to sea.

“Pity we couldn’t follow it then,” he observed.

“Follow it now,” said McCoy evenly.

Hal had thought the police boat fast. But the chaser tore through the water like a bullet, the bow rising higher and higher as their speed increased.

He clung to the quivering rail of the bridge while the wind whipped his clothing and rainbows danced in the flashing spray. Staten Island wheeled past. At length the shores began to open and recede. Now they were crashing into the long Atlantic swells.

The lightship was to be their rendezvous with the plane. When they neared it and drew alongside, the commander hailed the blunt-bowed craft.

“Ain’t—seen—no—plane!” came faintly across the water to them. “Fog—just—cleared—hour—ago.”

The only man-made thing in sight except the lightship was a tramp steamer to southward.

Morgan touched the commander’s arm and pointed, his face pale green.

“Since your craft has wings,” he groaned, “suppose we hail the tramp.”

The commander looked at McCoy. McCoy nodded. They wheeled and tore south.

The little steamer grew larger and more distinct. Suddenly the commander whistled.

“Look at her stem!”

They drew nearer the rusty craft. Now even the landsmen could see that her stem sloped back from her forefoot. Nearer still and they saw that her bows were buckled in clear from the waterline. The chaser ranged alongside.

“Seen a plane?” bawled the commander.

A man on the tramp’s bridge took up a megaphone.

“Plane—came—over—us—half—hour—ago.”

“Seaplane?”

“Su-ure!”

“What course?”

“Dead—astern—our—course.”

“What happened to your bows?”

The man on the bridge leaned forward and the megaphone waggled in his hand.
"Rammed — yacht — Circe — last
—night — fog — no — lights — no —
horn—cut—her—in—two!"

"My God!" muttered Morgan.
"Anybody saved?" McCoy prompted
the commander.

He yelled the question.
"Three — seamen — she — sank—
quick!"

"Where away?"

"West — south — west — thirty—
knots!"

"Can you make port?"

"Yes—got—her—plugged!" floated
down to them.

The commander waved his hand.
There was a hasty consultation on the
bridge. Wallace had been heading for
his rendezvous with the yacht. He had
seen the wreckage and returned to
land. There was nothing to do but go
back to the lightship and wait for the
naval flyer to find them.

"There's a plane now!" shouted Hal
suddenly.

It was low down to the north, mak-
ing for the lightship. The commander
signaled for full speed and they leaped
away to intercept it.

Presently the flyer saw them,
wheeled in a wide arc and came drift-
ing overhead, his engine throttled
down. Something dropped, breaking
out a tiny parachute an instant later.
The commander maneuvered his craft
so that the message floated down just
back of the bridge.

A waterproof box contained a fold-
ed slip of paper.

"Plane down at sea forty miles out.
Follow me," ran the message scribbled
on it.

The naval plane was drifting off
toward the southwest. The chaser tore
away in pursuit.

Half an hour later they found what
they sought.

Wallace's plane had crashed, snap-
ing off a float and both wings, and
turning turtle.

The wings and the float were drift-
ing near by.

The other float was upside down and
awash.

The chaser pulled alongside. One of
her crew dived overboard into a cream-
ing swell and made a line fast to the
submerged fusilage. With the block
and tackle on one of the boatfalls, they
hoisted it clear.

Wallace's drowned body was
strapped into one of the seats. They
found no trace of the sailor.

The tanks were empty, which ac-
counted for the crash. In his hasty
flight, Wallace had taken with him
little more than enough gasoline to
reach his rendezvous with the yacht.

His body was taken aboard the
chaser. The commander cruised about
for a while, but the sailor had evidently
drowned and washed away.

At length the chaser headed west-
south-west at full speed. Where the
Circe had gone down they found traces
of oil and a few bits of flotsam from
the yacht, but no survivors.

They headed reluctantly back to
New York.

"What a death!" muttered Hal to
Morgan. "Searching, searching until
his gas gave out—for a yacht that
went to the bottom last night!"

"Better than electrocution. His
death comes pretty close to what they
call an act of God!"

CHAPTER XXVIII
Restitution

NEXT morning Mr. Wilder called
on Hal and his mother. The lit-
tle lawyer was jubilant. He had
just dropped in, he said, to tell them
that an unknown benefactor had deposited to their credit half a million dollars each.

Mrs. Evans demurred. She said that Wallace must have stolen the money from Papanioitis and they had no right to it. Wilder insisted that Wallace had made more than a million in breaking Mr. Evans on the stock exchange. The money was his to restore, if he chose, and ethically theirs.

Hal went to the hospital that afternoon. Dan’s leg had been set as soon as he arrived. Now his temperature was down and he was doing nicely.

Before Hal went in, the nurse warned him that Bottis would be lame for the rest of his life.

Dan lay contemplating the huge cast in which his leg had been slung, above the level of his eyes. At sight of Hal he scowled.

“Whatcha want?” he demanded sullenly.

“Just dropped in to see which was uglier, you or Nimbo,” explained Hal.

“I guess Nimbo was better-looking.”

Dan merely grunted.

“Going to look for that job when you get up?”

“At’s my business!”

“Well, McHenry left me a fortune. So if you want a job chauffing for me, I suppose you can have it.”

“Might be willing to work for your wife!” exclaimed Dan, meaningly. “If you wasn’t around too much!”

“Haven’t got one yet!” snorted Hal. But he flushed.

“Huh! Well, you will, Handsome!”

Hal leaned over and stuck his fist under Dan’s nose.

“Now, listen, you mule,” he said. “Whether I marry or not, you and I are going to stick together, do you hear? If you marry, your wife has got to reckon on that. If you ever try to

leave, I’ll push your ugly chin up through the top of your head!”

Dan turned his face away.

“Is that so?” he snarled huskily.

Hal turned in haste and stalked out, his heart warm with gratitude toward Dan.

Mrs. Evans had taken rooms in another quiet hotel. Hal had found her there, no worse for her adventure. He had his hands full, however, standing guard over her. The reporters were wild to get at them both.

Twenty-four hours after his rescue, Hal himself had nothing worse than a very sore throat to remind him of his narrow escape from death.

Dorothy had been sent to a nursing home to recover. By cashing a check and using his smile to advantage, Hal surrounded her with fruit, flowers, and anything else the doctor would permit. He was not allowed to see her.

Three days later she was well enough to leave. Hal went to get her. Mrs. Evans had rented a little flat and arranged it attractively with some of Dorothy’s furniture.

She let them in, noticed that they did not seem to have much to say to each other, pleaded some shopping and departed. Left alone, they faced each other squarely. Dorothy rushed into speech, her eyes shining with gratitude.

“Hal! I’ll just never forget! You almost gave your life to save me a little pain!”

“Here’s what I want to know,” said Hal. “When can we get married? Think we ought to wait a whole year?”

“Pooh!” said Dorothy explosively.

She turned away, touched this and that, then swung to face him, flushed but calm.

“Just because we’ve shared an adventure together I suppose! Don’t be so old-fashioned!”
"You know better than that!" said Hal advancing.

Dorothy retreated a little way.

Hal found that his breathing troubled him.

"Not because we've shared a bad scare," he stumbled. "Oh, here, Dorothy, let me show you—"

He advanced another swift pace. Since she failed to retreat in time, they collided.

The shock of it to them both was out of all proportion to the impact. It lifted Dorothy off her feet.

After a moment she pushed him away, shook her bright hair back from her face and looked up at him with a self-possession that concealed anxiety.

"It's not just romance?" she gasped.

"It's the very tip-top of romance!"

"Why, so it is," she admitted slowly. Standing on tiptoe, she kissed him.

"We'll have your mother to live with us! Of course, I haven't a cent. Heavens, I never thought of that!"

"She's much too wise, sweetheart! But I guess we'll have to keep Dan. One of his legs will be shorter than the other."

"As if we wouldn't!"

The doorbell rang. Dorothy slipped out of his arms and went to answer it.

Morgan walked in, looked at their flushed faces and the light in their eyes and shrugged his shoulders.

"Guess there's not a thing I can do for you," he grumbled.

"There's—there's one thing that puzzles me," Dorothy stammered.

"How could Wallace know that Judge Moreland was my godfather and that I used to eat mud pies?"

"The first is pure invention, my dear. A Judge Moreland does live in Baltimore. Elder wired him. He never met your father."

"The other was a guess, because Wallace left this country before you were born. Most children eat dirt at some early stage in their careers, especially girls, they say.

"I suppose they want to see what it tastes like and make the men eat it when they are older. Of course, your father had friends who gave you pennies."

"You're sure it's all right for mother and me to keep that money?" Hal demanded.

"Right as rain. Pap-something-or-other was an orphan and probably illegitimate. His government collars the huge bank account he had in Nice and the one Wallace had here. They're more than satisfied.

"Before Pap sold his wife into slavery, it seems he made a will in her favor and that of her children. With all four of them dead, Wallace would inherit from the children as next of kin. There was plenty for Wallace to leave you what he did.

"Oh, yes, I just called to say that after legal representations, Pap's government have agreed to leave a hundred thousand dollars to you, Miss Hearn, by way of slight restitution."

"Oh, my goodness!" cried Dorothy.

"Anything else?" inquired Morgan restlessly.

"Just our thanks to you. We want to forget—"

"I like that! When I planned all that fracas out there to bring you two together!"

Hal burst out laughing.

"Your method was a bit painful! We would have found each other anyway! It's written in the stars!"

"There's gratitude for you!" Morgan grumbled.

He had taken a licking over the case. His failure to save them suffering made him want to demonstrate a very real
humbleness. But he did not know how to go about it.

"Well, I'll leave you together," he growled. "I'll leave your door on the latch for myself, too.

"In the meantime, I have a little work of my own to do, though I can never make McCoy realize it!

"So—God bless you, my children!"
He lumbered out again.

THE END

Old Dungeon Discovered

A MYSTERIOUS underground chamber, believed to have been a punishment dungeon in territorial prison days, was recently discovered at the Colorado State penitentiary, under the old dining hall. It was that hall where first blood was spilled in the now famous Cañon City mutiny of October, 1929. Workmen, in excavating for one of the main piers of the new central building foundation, discovered the abandoned chamber.

The chamber is twenty feet long, eight feet wide and ten feet high, with an arched roof. The floor is of sand and the walls of stone. The only opening into the room, apparently, is a ventilator in one corner. This ventilator opens into a shaft which runs horizontally up the hill, but the shaft had fallen in and it was impossible to find to what point it led.

It is believed that at one time there was a manhole in the ceiling of the underground dungeon. Through this incorrigible convicts probably were dumped bodily into the chamber, and left there in total darkness until their punishment in "the hole" was terminated.

An employee of the penitentiary who has been around the prison for fifty-three years said he had no knowledge of the mysterious chamber. The central building, under which the chamber was discovered, was built in 1883. But prior to that time there had been a government penitentiary of territorial days on the site.

Discovery of the underground room was fortunate. Otherwise, one of the main piers of the new building would have rested upon the arched ceiling of the abandoned dungeon, and probably would have crashed.
"I've got you covered, Tony. My boss wants to see you."

Matty Had an Idea Why Men Went for the Gangster's "Ride," but He Was Dead Wrong About It

"YEA, Spike, you know all about it, don'tcha!" retorted Matty Wilkins with obvious irony. "Go ahead and tell me!"

"Havin' nerve ain't got nuthin' to do wid it," insisted the other man. "It's hopin' until the last minute, I guess. And maybe most of them would rather take it where they have some soft grass to fall on." The speaker's laugh was not pleasant.

"Bunk! All I can say is that they must be a bunch of saps to go on a ride, with a mighty broad streak of yellow, or they'd take it right then and there—or else shoot it out."

The stocky man called Spike laughed again. "There ain't no use tryin' to convince you. How many of these rides have you seen pulled?"

"None." Wilkins seemed ashamed to admit the fact. "But I've heard about dozens of them. And I'm damned curious."

"I guess you have to be shown, that's all. Too bad you can't get a chance to sit in on one."

"Ain't it."

"I know one what's gonna be pulled to-morrow and I was asked to handle it, but I've been layin' low lately and I didn't make no promises. If they raise their ante and are willin' to get another man, I might change my mind."

"What's it pay?" Wilkins asked casually, striking a match.
“Only a half grand,” Spike growled. “It ain’t enough.”

“I wouldn’t mind pickin’ it up. Get them up to six hundred and see if you can horn me in. I’ll let you have the extra-jack.”

“No kiddin’, I didn’t know that was part of your racket, Matty. What’s the trouble?”

“I’ll explain it in a letter,” laughed Wilkins. “I’m on the level about this. Can you work it for me?”

“I doubt it. You ain’t so well known. There ain’t no harm tryin’, though. You kin be the third man ... I tell you, meet me in the Acme pool room about this time to-morrow afternoon an’ maybe I can fix it up.”

II

“HELLO, Spike!” smiled Wilkins, laying down his cue. “How’d you make out?”

“Better than I expected. It’s okay. When you finish the game, we’ll go.”

“It’s finished now.” Wilkins flung a dollar on the green felt. “Let’s go.”

“The other guy is right outside waitin’,” Spike told him when they were on the stairs. “Don’t say a word. I’ll do all the talkin’ till we get on the road. You’ve got a rod, ain’tcha?”

Wilkins nodded.

“This is Matty,” was all Spike said to the man at the wheel. The driver did not even glance at him.

“Uhuh,” he grunted. He let in the clutch and the big sedan glided away.

“It ain’t far,” remarked Spike. “You’ll see I ain’t been kiddin’ you about it bein’ easy.” He fished in his pocket and brought forth a sizable roll of bills. “Hold your hand.”

Some twenty minutes later they pulled up before what was ostensibly an express office, but which had none of the marks of a thriving business.

“Come on!” said Spike. “Better pull down to the corner, Jake. We won’t be long if he’s in. An’ I got reason to know we ain’t gonna be disappointed.”

Spike found a button set in an inconspicuous place near the door, but almost beyond arm’s reach. It was evident he knew the place well, for the door opened almost immediately and they stepped into a long, narrow room, illuminated only by the light filtering through the buff paint and dirt which covered the windows.

“How’s tricks, Tony?” began Spike, addressing a dark man whose smile revealed a perfect set of gleaming teeth.

“Can’t kick. Eighteen cases this week. Pickings are good.”

“But they won’t be for long,” smirked Spike. Wilkins saw his right hand go into a coat pocket. “I’ve got you covered, Tony! My boss wants to see you.”

“The hell you say!” Tony leaped for a dust covered shelf, but Spike was quicker.

“No, you don’t,” the gunman snapped. “Frisk him, Matty. Maybe he’s got another stuck in his belt.”

Matty followed the order while Tony glared and cursed.

“What’s it all about?”

“Can’t you guess? Never mind that. Would you like to write a note to the ball and chain? I’ll give you time. Five minutes. How about it?”

“She don’t mean much to me, but I better drop her a note at that. If—”

“Don’t forget I’ll give it the once over. Better not say too much,” Spike advised.

They both stood guard over him with drawn revolvers while the palpably distraught man scribbled a few lines to his wife. Then, with the gun concealed in his coat pocket, Spike
prodded him through the doorway.
"Don't try to pull nothin' in the
street," he warned. "We won't leave
you until you're pumped full of lead
so you can't be tellin' no tales. An'
don't forget to lock the door."

III

THE four were speeding up Second
Avenue before Wilkins had
time to consume the cigarette he
had lighted in the speakeasy. Tony
sat quietly in the tonneau beside Spike.
None of them had spoken until the car
swung onto the Grand Concourse.
Tony asked where he was being taken.
"What does it matter? You'll soon
find out."

Up the Bronx River Parkway they
sped. It was sunset and October had
been lavish with its colors on the
trees. The air was sparkling and
Wilkins felt at peace with the world
and his companions.
"Have a smoke!" he invited Tony.
"Thanks. I left mine in the store.
Too much excitement."
"Uuhh. But it's not bothering you
none," Wilkins remarked.
"Why let it?"

The conversation proceeded easily
and Wilkins became filled with admira-
tion for the man. He exhibited
genuine courage.
"Here we are!" said Spike suddenly,
as the car came to a stop atop the
Kensico reservoir. "Pretty view, ain't
it? Let's make it snappy! We just
timed it right. It's gettin' dark . . .
You stand here, Matty . . . Tony, you
come wid me . . . About three feet.
Right?"
"What's the idea!" exclaimed
Wilkins, as the powerful spot light
was focused directly into his eyes.
Something hard was prodding into his
back.
"Drop the rod!" commanded Jake.
"What the—" snapped Wilkins, a
terrible suspicion dawning.
"Yea," laughed Spike. "Ain't it
a surprise? It was a big surprise to
poor Red, too, I guess when you put
him on the spot. But his pals ain't
the kind to forget. That light makes
you a swell target. You fell for it
easy. Now you know why they go,
Matty. But you're not gonna tell no-
body."

Tony joined in the laugh.

What Is a Gimmick?

A GIMMICK is what you don't see when the man in the derby and the
striped shirt says, "Come on, folks—get your money down—play any
color, any number . . ." The gimmick is what makes the game you
think is a game of chance, a game where there's no chance at all for you!

Mark Mellen understands gimmicks. And in the stories he has written
for DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, which begin next week, he tells you all
the secrets. He has many a tip that will save you money at the carnival
games this summer.
Sheriff Rutherford sprawled in his chair with his feet on his desk, mopping his beaded brow every few minutes with a large bandanna. The first sultry day of early summer was sending shimmering heat waves upward from the row of tin roofs across the street just beyond which the purpling Cumberlands towered majestically. Staring at them speculatively, Rutherford shivered. Somewhere in the depths of those wooded shadows lurked the deadly, stalking figure of Hook-Dave Hall, that ghostly, enigmatic killer of the Devil’s Apron country whom all men feared.

Bart Cantrell, youngest deputy of the sheriff’s staff, was leaning across the table, tense and eager, watching Rutherford’s face expectantly. A lithe, tawny youth, his steel-gray eyes narrowed, his muscles corded with the excitement under which he labored, courage and determination were delineated in his every feature, confidence seemed to ooze from every pore.

"Reckon I’m goin’ to have to refuse ye, Bart," declared Rutherford after a long silence, during which he had been tugging fiercely at his drooping melancholy mustaches. "Sendin’ ye out alone after Hook-Dave’d be nothin’, short o’ murder. I wouldn’t tackle him ‘less’n I had a dependable posse with me."

Young Bart relaxed, disappointment creeping into his eyes.
“Then let me spot his still an’ get the lay of the land so’s we can take a posse in there an’ get him,” pleaded the deputy. “He’s runnin’ a thumper-keg outfit up there on Bear Pen Creek—I got that straight. I’ll just locate him an’ won’t try to arrest him.”

For a long minute the sheriff pondered that request, his fingers drumming softly upon the desk. Then he let his feet fall heavily to the floor as he reached into a box for a long stogie.

“All right!” he agreed with a shrug. “Onderstand, I’m not orderin’ ye to go, an’ ’tis ag’inst my advice. Still if ye’re bound to go, I figger ’twould be best to do yore spottin’ from the top of a high mountain som’ers through a pair of field glasses.”

Bart chuckled and came to his feet. “I promise to try to steer clear of Hook-Dave,” he declared with a grin, “but in case I do happen upon him sorta accidental-like, it might be best if I had some papers to serve on him.”

“Got none,” cut in Rutherford shortly. “We both know he killed that State prohibition enforcement officer, but we ain’t got no proof that’ll hold five seconds in court. If we can catch him moonshinin’, he’ll get a stiff term in the Federal penitentiary.”

“Thought he was wanted over in Kentucky,” suggested Bart.

“Yeah,” drawled the sheriff. He killed three-four men over thar, but Kaintucky is like us—they ain’t got enough evidence to convict him or even to arrest him. Hook-Dave don’t leave evidence scattered about.”

Bart hitched his belt into a more comfortable position and reached for his hat.

“Afore ye go,” said Rutherford, “mind tellin’ me what plans ye’ve made about goin’ in that Bear Pen country?”

“Sorta figgered on slippin’ in there durin’ the night an’ locatin’ a likely spot from which I can watch the headwaters of the creek. I reckon I ought to locate the smoke of his still without much trouble.”

“Ye know that section?”

“Squirrel hunted over ever’ foot of it.”

“Even so, ye’ve got to be darned careful,” cautioned Rutherford solicitously. “Sometimes I think that Hook-Dave ain’t human. He’s a born killer, but he’s slick enough to cover his tracks. He can get through the woods faster an’ without makin’ any noise than any man in the hills, an’ I reckon he’s the best shot in the county. So ye can’t be too careful.”

“I’ll keep my eyes skinned,” declared Bart, and took his departure.

II

FOR a full minute Rutherford sat motionless at his desk, and then, aroused by the clatter of hoof-beats upon the street outside, he moved lumberingly but silently to the window where he stood watching the retreating form of the deputy until he vanished in the direction of the looming Cumberlands.

A premonition of lurking danger for Bart stirred Rutherford and for an instant he debated saddling his horse and setting out after the youth. Then with a shrug he dismissed that thought. Bart was well able to take care of himself.

Shortly after noon on the following day Ranse Moore, a shambling, apologetic figure, appeared in the door of the sheriff’s office and stood fumbling his battered old hat. Rutherford recognized him and realized with a start that he was from the Bear Pen Creek country.
"Well?" demanded the sheriff sharply.
"I jes' draped in to tell ye," replied the hillman uncertainly, "that yore deepity, Bart Cantrell, was killed."
"Killed?" Rutherford came quickly to his feet. "How?"
"Looks as though he fell off'n a cliff."
"Fell off?"
"Looks as though."
"Who found his body?"
"Hook-Dave Hall, "Lige Honeycutt an' me."
Rutherford's drooping mustaches fairly bristled at the mention of Hook-Dave.
"When?"
"'Bout ten o'clock or a little after," guessed the visitor with an apologetic shrug.
"Any bullet holes?"
"Not that I seen. I didn't look clost—jes' come straight on in to tell ye about it."
"Think he fell off'n that cliff durin' the night?"
"Done told ye all I know, sheriff," said the hillman, twisting his old hat out of shape.
"Where'd this happen?" demanded Rutherford, buckling his belt and guns about his waist.
"Up thar on the head of Bear Pen, 'bout three mile from hyeh."
"All right, Ranse! Much obliged for comin'. Wait till I saddle my hoss an' get one of the boys an' we'll ride back with ye."

Ten minutes later Rutherford with Crit Randall, a lanky deputy of indeterminate age and a startlingly long neck, rode out of town. A few paces in the rear jogged the hillman who had brought the news. Little was said during that forty-five minutes ride until they reached the mouth of Bear Pen Creek, where Rutherford and his deputy reined to a halt and permitted their guide to pass them.

The trail up the creek was nothing more than a sheep path, and the three horsemen were continually swaying and bending, stooping and dodging the thick undergrowth that at times made progress difficult. Here and there the sheriff caught sight of the tracks of a horse in the soft mold, but they had palpably been made by Ranse's horse as he had ridden out with his news, and not a trace could he find of young Bart Cantrell's horse. Undoubtedly the latter had left his mount near the mouth of the creek and followed that trail afoot.

Coming out of a dense bed of rhododendron they found themselves in a little clearing in the center of which sat a log cabin.
"Who lives here?" demanded Rutherford of their guide.
"I do." He dismounted and laid down a panel of the rail fence. "Reckon we'd best leave our hosses hyeh. Can't go further on hossback."

Despite his huge proportions Rutherford set a pace into the headwaters of the creek which taxed the strength and energy of his two companions, and brought a twinkle of admiration into the eyes of the deputy. It was quite apparent that the sheriff was a woodsmen of no mean order. Nor did he pause for rest until a rim of precipices towered high above them.

At a gesture from Ranse he turned off at right angles and swung up a sharp incline for a matter of something like a hundred yards before reaching the bench behind which reared that line of cliffs. Seated upon mossy bowlders at the base of the nearest precipice were two motionless men, and
Rutherford with a start recognized one of them as Hook-Dave, that enigma of the Cumberlands. The other was 'Lige Honeycutt, an uncle to the deputy whom the sheriff had brought with him.

As they drew near the sheriff saw that the two men were talking in a low tone as if awed by the presence of death, and just beyond them he caught sight of a motionless, shapeless form wedged between two great bowlders. In single file the three newcomers drew near.

"Howdy, men!" drawled Rutherford, removing his hat and fanning his perspiring face. Slowly he let his eyes sweep over the scene, missing no detail. Then he turned his gaze to 'Lige Honeycutt.

"Bad business, eh?" he ejaculated.

Honeycutt grunted an affirmative.

Rutherford knew and trusted 'Lige Honeycutt. A pillar in the Primitive Baptist Church and a law-abiding citizen, he could have had no part in the crime, neither would he aid in the capture or prosecution of the perpetrator. It had been a "hands-off" policy which had enabled him to live in peaceful and successful proximity to the lawless elements along the State line, and he was unlikely to change that attitude.

After shaking hands with Honeycutt the sheriff turned to Hook-Dave and met the latter's expressionless gaze. He was a heavy, squat man in direct contrast to the average gangling hillman, and there was that about his mouth and eyes that set him apart from his people as a dangerous and menacing figure. His gray eyes were flinty, and his lips thin and straight, giving him a grim appearance at all times, which the heavy stubble of beard failed to efface.

In a fight with a rival faction across the State line some several years earlier he had lost his right arm near the elbow—had it literally shot away—and in its place he wore a sharp steel hook which dangled from his sleeve in such a manner that it gave the casual observer the creeps. And manifestly that steel arm could be a dangerous weapon in close quarters. Indeed, if rumor could be believed, it had done deadly havoc more than once.

Rutherford knew that there was open hostility in the glance he gave Hook-Dave, but he found it utterly impossible to mask his malice. He had warmly liked his young deputy and the sight of that shapeless figure at the base of the precipice had sent a surge of uncontrollable anger rippling through his veins. Not for a single instant did he believe that Bart's fall had been accidental, but to connect that crime with Hook-Dave would be another thing. But of one thing he was positive—he would bring Hook-Dave Hall to justice for that act if he never did anything else.

III

With a common impulse the five men gathered in a semi-circle about the body while the sheriff made a superficial examination. It was apparent that Bart had met death instantly and that he had fallen from the top of the precipice at least two hundred feet above. As far as he was able to ascertain there were no other marks of violence except those which could have been made by the fall. Hook-Dave had covered his crime well.

Rutherford straightened and tugged thoughtfully at his mustaches, staring through half-closed eyes at the wild morning glory vines which covered the two bowlders between which the vic-
tim was wedged. Then he turned to 'Lige Honeycutt.

"Who first located the body, 'Lige?" he demanded softly.

"'I did," replied the hillman. "Me an' Ranse an' Hook-Dave hyeh was passin' an' I seen it—lyin' thar."

"What time was that?"

"Ten o'clock—mebbe a little atter."

"How ye happen to be up hyeh, 'Lige?" demanded Rutherford.

"We was goin' up thar on that upper bench after them curly-walnut stumps," explained Honeycutt, "Feller offered me a good price fo' stumps like that an' I'd made arrangements for Hook-Dave hyeh to go along with us an' blow 'em up. He knows how to handle dynamite. We was comin' along that sheep path past this cliff when I jes' happened to see the—body."

"What time did ye first see Dave this mo'nin'?"

"'Bout seven o'clock, I reckon. After he come we waited a leettle while on Ranse hyeh, an' then we had to wait till my boy got in with the dynamite. Must 'a' been nigh onto ten o'clock when we got started."

"On a guess, 'Lige," continued Rutherford thoughtfully, "what time would ye say that this—happened?"

"Couldn't say, sheriff. Might 'a' been a hour—might 'a' been half a day. To tell the truth I didn't get clost. Thought I'd leave ever'thing jes' as it is fo' ye to examine."

Rutherford nodded his approbation, and then stooped over and raised slightly the deputy's body, extracting a silver, hunting-case watch. The rear of that watch was dented and battered, but the crystal, strangely enough, was intact. But the force of the fall had shattered the jewels and ruined the works.

The four spectators crowded about Rutherford and watched him as he tried to wind the timepiece. Then he shook his head.

"Looks like it happened at four minutes to nine o'clock," declared 'Lige softly. "She stopped then. Is she bad broke, sheriff?"

"Plumb ruined."

Rutherford shot a quick glance at Hook-Dave, but the latter's expression was masked in indifference. His alibi was perfect. He had been with 'Lige and Ranse at that hour and could not have had a part in the murder.

"What do ye reckon he was doin' up thar on top, sheriff?" queried 'Lige curiously.

"He was tryin' to spot Hook-Dave's still," replied Rutherford bluntly.

With one accord the little knot wheeled and watched Dave, but the latter's enigmatical smile could have meant anything. He offered no denial of the charge of moonshining, but shrugged and resumed his seat upon the moss-covered bowlder.

"Let's go up on top an' see what we can see," suggested Rutherford. "He must 'a' been on that ledge up thar near the top."

Up a precipitous path on the right of the cliff they toiled, the sheriff and Deputy Randall leading the way with the other three men following a few paces in the rear. Watching his chance Rutherford leaned close to the deputy and whispered:

"Keep yore eye on Hook-Dave, an' if he makes a break for it, stop him—with a bullet."

"Huh!" The deputy grunted his surprise. "His alibi—"

Rutherford's gesture was one of warning and the deputy grew silent. A few minutes later they were on top of the precipice and gingerly advancing along a narrow ledge from which it
was palpable that Bart Cantrell had fallen. At a point directly over the scene of the tragedy Rutherford halted and motioned to the others to remain where they were. Then inch by inch he went over the ground, seeking signs of a struggle, footprints—anything that might throw light on the mystery.

The surface of the ledge was bare stone, relieved here and there by tiny patches of moss and crevices. At its broadest point the ledge was not more than six feet wide and at the rear arose a wall of granite some twenty to thirty feet high. Just a few paces ahead of Rutherford the shelf narrowed and became sheer wall.

On hands and knees Rutherford examined the entire surroundings, keeping his back to the watchers as much as possible. Three times he found scratches upon the stone surface—four parallel marks about an eighth of an inch apart, and once he located a fresh cut along the jagged surface of the rear wall. Manifestly there had been a struggle, but the evidences of it were meager and vague.

At last he arose to his feet and stood tugging at his mustaches. Then with a deep sigh he drew near his companions.

"We'll finish up this work down—there," he announced.

"Find anything, sheriff?" demanded 'Lige, whose curiosity had overcome his natural reticence.

"Nothin' I didn't already know," replied Rutherford enigmatically, leading the way down the sharp incline to the base of the precipice.

IV

UPON reaching the boulders Rutherford motioned his deputy forward.

"Let's move the body over in the shade, Crit," he suggested, and gently they placed it upon a bed of leaves and Rutherford removed his coat and spread it over Bart's face. Then he came back and stared long and thoughtfully at the bed of wild morning glory vines, crushed and flattened by the deputy's crumpled weight.

"Strange thing about that watch, 'Lige," observed Rutherford at last. "Ye know, when a man puts his watch in his pocket he allus puts it in with the crystal next to his body so's it won't get broke. But Bart had stuck his'n in with the crystal out."

Hook-Dave's eyes narrowed and one of his hands crept toward his inside coat pocket. Out of the corner of his eye the sheriff saw his deputy's hand close upon the butt of his forty-five, and at the same time Hook-Dave's left hand dropped to his side.

"Another thing about that watch," continued the sheriff, never taking his eyes off Hook-Dave, "is that not only was the crystal outside, but it wasn't even cracked—while the back side of that watch was mashed up."

"What do ye make o' that, sheriff?" asked old 'Lige softly, but it was apparent that he had caught the drift of Rutherford's monologue.

"I figger that somebody took that watch outta Bart's pocket—after he was dead."

Complete silence greeted the statement.

"Another thing, 'Lige!" resumed Rutherford in even tones which seemed to carry a hint of steel. "Bart wa'n't killed at nine o'clock. I'd say that whoever, took his watch outta his pocket set it at four minutes to nine o'clock to prove him an alibi. Bart was threwed off'n that cliff afore sun-up."

"Eh?" 'Lige's glance shot toward Hook-Dave, but the latter's expres-
sionless face gave no indication of the thoughts that were seething behind it. "Yeah," dr a w l e d Rutherford. "What time was sunrise this mo' nin'?" "'Bout six, I reckon."

"Then Bart was murdered afore six thirty. Look thar!" Rutherford pointed dramatically toward the bed of wild morning glory vines upon which the body had been lying.

"The sun," resumed the sheriff, his eyes on Hook-Dave, "would strike this place a few minutes after it come up. By six thirty these mo' nin' glory flowers would all be closed up like they are now. But them flowers which was under the body ain't closed up yet. See."

'Lige peered intently in the direction in which Rutherford's accusing finger was pointed and saw the scattered full-blown petals which were beginning to wilt. Rutherford's reasoning was irrefutable. The morning glory vines established the time of the tragedy to be not later than six thirty that morning.

"Mebbe he lost his footin' in the oncertain light of early mornin'," suggested 'Lige.

"Bart was murdered," declared the sheriff in a tone of finality, and in the same instant he whipped out a heavy calibered revolver and covered Hook-Dave.

"Stick up yore left foot, Dave," he ordered sharply, "so's we can see yore heel."

Not a hint of changed expression showed on Hook-Dave's face as he coolly sat down upon a bowlder and thrust out his left foot.

"Lost yore heel-tap, Dave," murmured Rutherford. "Mighty careless of ye. Ye left the marks of them four tacks which are stickin' outta yore heel up thar on that shelf when ye was strugglin' with Bart afore ye hit him in the head with that steel hook. Give me that shoe, Dave, 'cause it'll be the evidence which is goin' to send ye to the chair. Also ye left the mark of that steel hook in a crack in the rock up thar when ye anchored yoreself to keep from bein' threwed oveh yoreself. Ye've allus covered yore tracks mighty well, Dave, but this is one time ye slipped up. Take his shoe an' put the handcuffs on him, Crit," he ordered turning to his deputy.

The latter stepped forward with alacrity and as he reached for the shoe which the accused held out in his left hand, Dave swung that steel hook upward viciously with such power that it would have crushed Crit's skull. Rutherford's gun barked once, and with a look of utter surprise Hook-Dave recoiled and that terrible steel hand dropped uselessly at his side. A split second later the deputy had disarmed him and had linked the left arm of his prisoner to his own right arm.

"Good shootin', sheriff!" complimented 'Lige. "Ye caught him in that arm neat."

"Accident," grunted Rutherford. "I was aimin' at his durned head."

Who was the greatest counterfeiter of all time? Federal agents chased him for years. His greenbacks were so perfect that they fooled bank presidents. Read Alan Hynd's true story of his life and amazing experiences while "shoving the queer," in "The Astonisher," one of the features of next week's issue of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.
The Madame Aubertin

A True Story
By David Redstone

"I am dying! You have poisoned me!"

The Butcher, the Baker She Finished With Poison—and the Candlestick Maker Had a Rôle in the Plot

AUBERTIN, the baker, was plying his trade in the usual even tenor of his way, when, one day, at the time of the year when the grass almost bursts with greenness, he fell ill with a violent pain that tore at his stomach as if with invisible knives.

He groaned so loudly that certain of the citizens of the village in the Vosges mountains heard him.

His wife, wringing her hands in terror, remained helpless to do anything but bring him the water which he craved. In the midst of his intolerable thirst he gasped, retched, and breathed his last.

Neighbors were rushing in.
"The good God!"
"What has happened, Madame Aubertin?"
"Dead! But it is impossible!"
"Get water! Chafe the hands! A little brandy—"
"Ah, he is past all hope, I fear."

Indeed, it was so. The baker of the Vosges village lay in death, his form convulsed, his contorted face horrible to see.

"He has had a fit, the poor man!"

The neighbors uttered their sorrow and comforted the widow as well as they could, but they were not long able
to bear the sight of the deceased. Soon they departed in little groups, and the woman was left alone to take care of her dead.

The bereaved wife sent word to her daughter, who had been spending a fortnight with her friends in a near-by town.

When Yvette arrived a day later, she gazed not upon her father’s face, but on his grave, for, swiftly as the death had come, the burial was equally surprisingly sudden. Such hurried management drew more than censure upon Madame Aubertin; it drew suspicion, for whisper followed whisper about the circle of scattered cottages.

“Alas, the good man dies like a candle snuffed out, and she does not even wait for the body to lose its warmth. She is in a remarkable hurry, that woman!”

“Yet why not?” a somewhat kindlier villager said. “Even in life Aubertin’s face was a large replica of a meat ball. And since you say that he was a sight a pig would turn its eyes away from when the fit possessed him, do you blame the poor woman, all alone as she was, for burying him with such dispatch?”

“Not only are you stupid, Alphonse, but you are also gullible,” the wife of this charitable citizen said. “It is fortunate for her that the gendarmerie are also men. As if every one who is not blind cannot see how greatly the Monsieur Hennezal is concerned. And how much she is concerned with him—la! There is neither grief nor shame in the hussy.”

Thus were opinions voiced and thus were they somewhat allayed—until a day during the harvest. The death and the burial together created less consternation than what then occurred.

“Did I not tell you, Alphonse—a hundred times, no?”

The widow Aubertin had married Hennezal, maker of goblets, candlesticks and ornaments of glass. Whereupon the whispers grew to murmurs, and what was voiced as mere suspicion and gossip, became established in the minds of the villagers as a fact. Aubertin had been dealt with foully.

Whether these suspicions reached the ears of the law, the history of this case does not show.

At any rate, they were not acted upon at the time.

It is only apparent that the police authorities would not take up the stray, possibly malicious, gossip of a community, nor would it order a disinterment on the strength of such gossip unless expressly desired by the near kin of the deceased.

Thus the matter rested for a time until further circumstances, coupled with the suspicions already known, took form in a chain of evidence that made Madame Aubertin’s case exceedingly more fascinating.

Some little time passed. The Madame, seeing that her daughter was fair to look upon (indeed Yvette was being “looked upon” to some small notoriety), began to cast her eyes about her upon the eligibles of her vicinity. With characteristic suddenness, Mme. Aubertin—now Mme. Hennezal—made a choice, namely, Bourlette, a prospering butcher in a village not far away.

A meeting was arranged, and when Bourlette beheld the vivacious beauty of Madame’s daughter, he decided that his prosperity would adorn her admirably. The news of the forthcoming marriage of these two was an occasion for much cynicism in the village.

“She is young, and she has a charm-
ing face," Bourlette heard himself con-
gratulated. And truer, sterner friends
he would not heed.

"She is cunning, like her mother. You have heard the rumor, I suppose, of the late M. Aubertin?"

Bourlette grunted, annoyed. "I look upon the litter, and you show me the sow! What have the mother's affairs to do with the character of my Yvette? Answer me that!"

"But, my dear Bourlette, isn't it a fact that the woman poisoned her hus-
band?"

"My friend, your venerable beard ought to restrain such witless gossip. It is not a fact, and if it were, you could not prove it. You are positively out of your senses to repeat such gossip even to a friend."

"Bourlette," said the other, irrita-
ibly, "I open my mouth wide to tell you you are a fool. She is young and you are old, and there you have my opinion!"

"And you," came the answer, "are altogether a confirmed cynic. You are well aware that I love the wench, and she is also, if I may say it, fond enough of me."

"Of you," scoffed the friend with a grimace. "Bourlette, I would save you from this misstep even at the cost of our friendship. You are certainly not what you might call a cavalier. You are certainly not young. As a matter of fact you are old. Besides that you are fat, you have three teeth missing and the others will soon drop out.

"You may be rich after a fashion, but by all the saints you haven't a hair on your smooth, flat, empty pate. And there you have my opinion, and the opinion of every one else, if that mat-
ters to you!"

That year, 1884, Yvette came into possession of the butcher as his law-
fully wedded wife.

II

BOURLETTE chose a spacious house, in which the couple went to live. Perhaps he looked for-
ward some day to making a hostelry of it, for the rooms were numerous. In the meantime, he did not let them go to waste. Within a short time after his marriage the butcher let it become known that he would let some of his rooms to a few "select, genteel" boarders.

Soon the house was filled with a convivial spirit. Merchants from the cities, gentlemen from the south, and foreigners from over the German border came and found rest there, and Yvette smiled on them all.

One whispered: "How does it happen so pretty a girl should be the wife of this eye-sore of a butcher? His naked skull is the color of a skinned ox, and there is more lard in him than in a full tub of his hog-fat."

A gentleman from Paris shrugged with such expressiveness that his eyes shut.

"She has a lover," he stated posi-
tively, though he had arrived only the day before. Bourlette, himself, became aware that this was the actual state of affairs.

But he did not fly into a rage. Dis-
creetly he took one of his younger "genteel" boarders aside and ad-
monished him in a respectable manner.

"Sir," he said, "I beg of you to
leave this house. And if you prove swine enough to linger three blinks of an eye, by the sacred name of a rabid dog—"

Bourlette had come out of his shop, and a cleaver was in his hand. The young boarder left.
Later, when the couple were alone, the butcher had no other cudgel than his large right hand, which, without a single word of explanation, he used vigorously across the mouth of his wife.

Bourlette had distinct cause to remember the day that followed. When evening came he relished his onion soup with customary keenness, and after supper sat down to read.

It was not long before he forsook his chair for the floor. Ten thousand demons began to torment his mid-regions. His face was screwed up in pain; he gasped, he retched, and called for water.

"Name of a name! I am dying!" he choked. "Curse you and your mother, together with the mother that begot her. Yvette, you have poisoned me, I swear!"

Pale faced, Yvette protested that he lied. She brought the water he craved. Bourlette gulped great draughts which only for the moment quenched the terrible fires that burned within him.

"By all the saints!" the butcher went on when he was at last able to gasp the words. "I have married into a family of poisoners. What my friend warned me against has come true, and may you be struck by a thousand thunders!"

"You lie! It is not true!"

Spasm after spasm seized the unfortunate Bourlette, while his wife merely looked on with staring malevolent eyes.

Strange as it may seem, the fit passed, and Bourlette did not die. Yvette it was who suffered then, for in the next few days her husband watched her like a hawk. He would not let her prepare his food; he spied upon her wherever she went; peeped suspiciously into every pot and pan, until, furious, she packed her things and left him without so much as a good-by. Where she went he did not know.

Bourlette, now at peace, relaxed his vigilance. But only to his cost. A week later a similar malady, though not as violent as the first, brought him low. During the days that followed he became well and ill by turns. One day he lay gasping, and the next he was up and fuming at the base treachery that pursued him in his own household.

He discharged his servants one after another. He got rid of a cook, a gardener, a stable boy, and finally every last boarder. But even these expedients did not seem to help. The fearful attacks came nevertheless. Despairing at last, he wrote to his wife's mother, the Madame Aubertin:

If you know where Yvette is, tell her to come to her Bourlette. I am suffering from some malady of the stomach, terrible. And there is no one in the house to help me. I accused her, but now I know it could not be her fault, because she has been gone for the past two weeks now. Tell her to forgive me for my unjust treatment of her, and to come to me, for God's sake.

Yvette came, and her mother with her. Tears, protestations, and forgiveness poured like rainfall, after which mother and daughter settled down to nurse their invalid back to health.

"For a week you must eat nothing but gruel," Madame laid down the law. "Too much meat and strong seasoning have caused your sickness. At the end of a week's time—behold, what a difference!"

The butcher submitted meekly to their ministrations, while the inexperienced hand of the daughter was aided by the proven skill of the mother. Not the end of the week, but four days
was the limit of Bourlette’s endurance. The knowledge which the younger woman did not have the other supplied. During the fourth day Bourlette passed into the Beyond, too weak in his final hour to voice further suspicion or to invoke a single curse.

III

This time the villagers did not stand idly by. Some one demanded that a doctor from the city be taken to view the remains of Bourlette. No sooner had the physician arrived at the village than a hundred tales were poured into his startled ears. Stories flocked upon him from all neighborhoods. Of these, one more than all the rest was later to count heavily against the pair.

It was to the effect that during the time the young Madame Bourlette was away, her mother, the Madame Aubertin, was seen to prowl at night at the back door of Bourlette’s house. She had kept her presence secret, and then had departed.

Did she have possession of her daughter’s key, and did she enter the house by this means? If this were probable, then indeed she could have had opportunity to scatter poison like dust to the four winds, over every article within her reach.

The villagers waited breathlessly to hear what the physician would report. A prompt examination was made. Arsenic—tons of it—was found in the stomach contents of the corpse.

Confronted with a direct accusation by the police, Yvette wailed: “We have had no luck here at all! No sooner do we settle down to live in a neighborhood, but people begin to die about us like flies. One day they are here, and the next day—piff paff—they are gone.”

Heaven only knows what further accusations were laid against Madame Aubertin, and what other deaths could be accounted to her!

The butcher, the baker—the indictment pointed to these two only. Meanwhile, where was—to complete the verse—the candlestick maker? That is to say, did Hennezal, the second husband of Madame Aubertin, have a hand in this reign of agony, convulsion and death? Hennezal, maker of goblets and ornaments, and candlesticks of glass?

It was to him, as a matter of fact, that the arsenic was actually traced. Was not arsenic used in the making of glassware?

Where else, indeed, could Madame Aubertin have obtained her instrument of destruction?

Upon all this evidence both mother and daughter were tried, despite their protests; convicted, and sentenced to death.

But M. Grevy, a kind and overcompassionate man, who was also death on capital punishment, afterward pardoned Madame Aubertin and the young widow, Yvette. And they never paid.

Do you play the carnival games? If you do, you had better read Mark Mellen’s stories that begin in next week’s issue of Detective Fiction Weekly. Mark Mellen says you can’t win, and he tells you why!
CHARACTER REVEALED IN YOUR HANDWRITING

EDITOR’S NOTE — After making character analysis, through handwriting, his hobby for more than a score of years, John Fraser has recently won wide renown in New York City as a popular lecturer on this subject. He conducts a thriving business of analysing character from handwriting; and many notables in this country and abroad have complimented him on the accuracy of his findings.

By special arrangement his personal analysis is given to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY readers for ten cents in U. S. POSTAGE, or free with a $1.00 subscription for thirteen issues (in Canada $1.75 for subscription). Please fill out the special coupon.

Am interested in a delineat—traits of character, etc.

(H. C. K., Muskogee, Okla.) I observe that your thinking is not at all times as clear as it ought to be. You have a habit of spreading your thoughts in all directions. Your power of concentration is a minus quantity. I believe that the reason for this is to be found in the fact that while you have many splendid qualities you do not enjoy mental exercise, and, consequently, thought, except when absolutely necessary, is not pleasant and easy for you.

I would say that you have strong intuitive powers which help you tremendously in determining a course of action. From very slight indications you are able to jump at conclusions, which, I believe, are frequently accurate. Buoyancy appears to be one of your strongest characteristics. You are a very ambitious young fellow who has a great desire to get to the top of your profession.

Optimism reigns supreme in your nature. It would be hard to discourage you once your mind was made up to do something.

To come to your weak traits, I have to confess you haven’t so many as some of us have. Still your temper is worth the watching, and your opinionated ways are apt to neutralize many of your good traits. You have a pretty good opinion of yourself, and carry your chin a little too high at times. Keep your eye out for these “little
foxes that spoil the vines," and you will be all right.

We if my hand
it characteristics I

(Mrs. J. F., Atlantic City, N. J.)
You impress me as a woman who is quite content to gather around her a few well chosen friends; one who cares little for bridge parties or anything pertaining to society. You are a home loving person, and once inside your four walls you feel as happy as the Queen of England, and as pleased as Punch. As a result, of course, your interest in life is rather narrow. The big world of commerce with its manifold problems does not occupy your attention at all. You feel you can get along without bothering your head about them. You live in a little world all by yourself, and to you, that is life.

It is an enviable condition to be in, to a busy man like myself, but it is all so narrowing and poverty stricken, human nature would soon run to seed if we were all built as you are. It reminds me of a plum pudding without the fruit and the brandy sauce; there's nothing to it. In the chance of being accused of sermonizing, I would like to tell you, as I have told so many more through the pages of this magazine, that "no man liveth unto himself."

While many of us boast of our independence, as a matter of fact, we are more dependent than ever on each other. That is because we have grown and developed and are getting larger as we go on. To-day each individual is dependent on his neighbor for comforts and necessities. In a word, dependence marks the arrival of organized society, and a higher plane of living. Open the doors of your home, as well as the windows of your own soul, and let the hum of the world's machinery fill your ears, and the music of children's voices flood your being. Then, and only then, will you know what life really is.

Do you want Mr. Fraser's analysis of your character and a personal letter from him? Then send us the coupon and six lines of your handwriting, in ink, with ten cents in U. S. POSTAGE. Mr. Fraser will send you an analysis. Or, send us one dollar for a thirteen-weeks' subscription to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY (in Canada, one dollar and seventy-five cents), and Mr. Fraser will send you a FREE analysis!

To John Fraser, Detective Fiction Weekly, 280 Broadway, N. Y. City

Signature ........................................................................................................................................

Street ..................................................... City ..........................................................
FLASHES FROM READERS

Where Readers and Editor Get Together to Gossip
and Argue, and Everyone Speaks Up His Mind

Did you ever hear of the Gimmick?

Probably not. It's not advertised. It's the little device that takes away the element of chance. The Gimmick fixes things so you can't win!

You've all had experiences with the innocent-looking games in the carnival parks. "Put y'r money on a number, folks—win a five-pound box of chocolates!" They are called games of chance. But there isn't any chance. The Gimmick takes care of that.

The Gimmick is the gadget on the games that the operator can work—unseen by you—and control chance and your pocketbook, too. The Gimmick is the thing that makes it so you can't win.

Here's a chance to learn about these ingenious devices—before carnival season costs you too much money. Beginning next week, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY will run a series of articles on carnival games, and how they can be, and often are, "fixed" to "take" the public. The author of the series is a man who has traveled across country for years—with carnivals, fairs, and circuses. He knows what he is talking about. His name is Mark Mellen.

Look for the first of his series, next week—"The Spindle Racket."

IRISHMAN DOESN'T LIKE "GROUSERS"

Dear Editor:

I am inclosing ten votes for artist's drawing. I get my copies of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY through Messrs. Hachette's in London and have had hard luck, as five copies, those for October 5, 12, 19, and 26, and November 9 issue, were lost in transit. I have had to get my copies registered at a cost of three cents extra per week, but it is worth it.

Don't take any notice of the grouser who write complaining, as your magazine is readable from cover to cover.

Wishing you all kinds of luck, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

A. Gargan,

Dublin, Irish Free State.

DOGGONE—GONE TO THE DOGS

Dear Editor:

I have been a reader of your magazine, though irregular, since I read your very first copy, Flynn's.

Well, here's my story. First of all I like a good true murder story. The first few years of your magazine's existence I got them and in plenty, and I took your magazine regularly,
even though I couldn’t go the fiction in it at all. But then the true stories fell off and went to the dogs entirely and I stopped taking your magazine.

Once in a while I’d take a copy and I kept noticing that the fiction was improving until it got so good within the last year that I started taking your magazine more regularly, and lately now, I find the fiction very, very much improved, in fact, it can’t be beat in any magazine at any price, so I’m a regular one again.

Keep up the good work. Of course, as I said before, I like first of all a good fact story—preferably murder. But these seem to have died a natural death. By the way, I see that the new picture type of true detective story magazines are hashing up stories that have already been covered by DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY gives as much and more and much better reading than magazines almost triple its price.

My favorite author is Charles Somerville. He sure knows how to write up a story. Fred MacIsaac is a corker, with “Gems of Jeopardy.”

Yours,

W. W. J.,
Dorchester, Mass.

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TRIED OTHERS FIRST

DEAR SIR:

Just a few words of thanks for many a pleasant evening reading your wonderful book, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

I like Lester Leith and Jimmy Dugan stories best, but the other stories are not far behind. I have been reading your book about a year now and I have given up reading the other books I had been getting. I want to say I have never come across a more interesting magazine.

Yours truly,

MRS. T. L. YOUNG,
Hamilton, Ind.

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DON THOMPSON KEPT HIM UP LATE

DEAR EDITOR:

My hat is off to Don H. Thompson. Boy, what “machine gun action” in his story “Collier Cleans Up!”

Don actually made me hold my breath from start to finish.

I’m sure it’s needless for me to say that your other writers are on the “firing line” also, and right in the front rank at that.

Darn it, Don Thompson made me get up at 1:30 A.M. and write this letter, but the story was well worth it.

Wishing you, Mr. Editor, Mr. Thompson and all the rest of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY all the sunshine of life,

I remain sincerely,

M. W. DU BOYS,
Utica, N. Y.

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FACT STORIES FIRST

DEAR EDITOR:

Your fact stories always come first and then I look for Lester Leith or Riordan.

Has the Kaw Valley Detective Agency gone out of business?

Your stories are short and snappy and it is not necessary to take an evening off to read them.

That is what makes DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY my favorite magazine.

May you have lots of luck and all of it good.

Sincerely,

J. E. CHURCH,
Louisville, Ky.

Get an artist’s illustration of a story in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

Please fill out and send us coupon from ten different issues of the magazine.

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"HERE’S MY VOTE"

Editor,

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. 

Name ____________________
Street ____________________
City ____________________ State ____________________
ONE of the best methods for the instruction of beginners in cipher solving is that of identifying short words, prefixes, and suffixes which have letters in common. In last week's Cipher No. 119, for example, the two-letter word DY is used as a prefix to word 13, with the symbols also occurring in the endings -DYE and -VDAY. And thereby hangs a tale.

CANES, LANES, PANES, VANES: 
-o-g- o-g- o-g- t-o-g-

BANJ OAIPY ODVS VST XGRT 
-o- o- i-t t--

XQTHHDYE TZLTQV BAJ DYDV-
----- i-n g ----- t-o-i-n i-t

DGH HTVVTJX, CNV PDBBTJDYE 
i-- t-t-- t-i- ing

DY PTBDYDVAU YGP OJAYNYLD-
in- i-n i-t i-o-n n-- o-n-n-i

GVDAY. 
-t-i-o-n

By far the commonest two-letter word used in this way is in; and the chances are strongly in favor of the above affixes being in-, -ing and -tion. The correctness of these guesses in this instance can be checked at once by substituting these letters throughout the message, as shown. In fact, this done, the cipher is practically solved.

Thus, word 13, with only the two last letters unknown, is evidently initial. Substituting l for H, word 14 becomes l-tt--, suggesting letters.

Other words and at length the whole message follows in a similar manner. This crypt can also be solved by trying with and the for ODVS and VST. Word 14 is then guessed as letters; and so on. Full answer on page 287.

Try the method above outlined on this week's ciphers. The lot of five is arranged according to difficulty, with the easiest coming first. Clues may therefore not be so easy to interpret and apply in the last two or three. But if the solver will put on his thinking cap, he should come through with flying colors.

In M. L. T.'s No. 124, for example, the repetition of QOS suggests that it may signify a common word. Guessing this word correctly will give the middle and last letters of BZQOBS, and the missing letters should be easy to fill in. This crypt also affords the one-letter word, R, and several other short words, RMX, ZM, ZQ and EMS, to help you along.

Try to identify the three-letter words BKO and VBK in M. I. Spangler's cipher, through the digraph BK which they have in common. KRKI, with the repeated K, should come next; then BWI, of which you will now have all but one letter. The above words will supply all but three letters in word 11, and you should quickly get these by comparing with HFIJ.

In Mabel Verona McKeown's contribution you will observe that every letter in the three-letter group BYO occurs in the four-letter group BOYS. Also note that the initial digraph of
UGLY is used as prefix to word 12 and in the endings -UGH and -UGHT. Check your guesses for the above with the group OUGHT; the rest will follow.

Word 18 is a weak spot in the cipher of Hilary G. Neighbors. Compare the prefix and suffix of this word, SE- and -CSVEA, which also contain all but one letter of word 4. Hunt your own clues, solvers, in No. 128, this week’s hardest, or “Inner Circle,” cryptogram! Solutions of all of this week’s cryptograms with the clues given will be discussed next week.

No. 124—Know your berries! By M. L. T.
QOS BZQQBS KNEPM A E T T S S
KSRM ZC R MRQZYS ET RNRKZR
RMX ZC DNEFM SVQSMCZYSBL ZM
CEGQQ RMX ASMQNRB RHSNZAR.
ZQ HRUSC QOS EMS XNZMU TR-
HEGC QOS FENBX EYSN.

ABCD EFGHIJBK, LCMHDN KBJIO
“PGQ RS LBTT,” BKO FGM IUVID-
DIKH RWWFIMHWB BWI MCWA-
BMMIO XN KRKI; YIWN SIE VBK
IZCBD HFJJ.

No. 126—Lines and circles. By Mabel Verona McKeown.
TROUGH FUGHT OUGHT BOYS
QYMDOT TUHNUGH QUID BZOG-
XDT BYO SEUJDGT ANY UGTRUOD
RYDLUX BQUNLT UGLY BEGXU-
BZQ MDOTD.

No. 127—Wormwood. By Hilary G. Neighbors.
ACJVET JHBSWHX WJZB JSVCA
CFJVOTF SCHXSHE W H U S C V X.
DXHW M AFJSJC, DJSAMXL UHW-
SQQW, YHK FVAUSCHX. WHACVJ
VSX APOHB QSESASF SEACJOWC-
SVEA. AOMUXL TJVOU VWKUXJHE.

No. 128—Out of the dusk. By J. G. Blandy.
PRYMU, KSAV-MQSHPM, YMOMT-
MAM, LRYMA, ERAXJEGMA NYSE-
SNPH, FJYVUGHPGE, ORHBSOGE
DYGPGAWH ERAPMGA XJAVMOS-
APMB HMEYSV BRY S ERAHPGJ-
PGAW MAEGSAP YSBGWGRAH.

LAST WEEK’S ANSWERS

119—Bough, cough, dough, tough: four words with the same spelling except for initial letters, but differing in definition and pronunciation.

120—“Many lads make mistakes in language construction,” says famous grammarian, “but that that that that lad used was grammatically proper.”

121—How many sniffs of sifted snuff would a sniffed snuff sniffer sniff if a sniffed snuff sniffer sniffed sifted snuff?

122—Elizabethan clock introduced into “Julius Caesar,” classic Roman tragedy, strikingly exemplifies Shakespearean anachronism.

123—Xanthochroid xylographer drinks xylene to slay ingested trypanosoma. Over-taxed constitution rebels; gleeful xyloto-
mists examine petrified specimens under microscope.

Answers to this week’s ciphers will be published next week. Fans submitting answers to one or more cryptograms in any issue will be duly credited on our monthly lists of solvers.
COMING NEXT WEEK!

JERRY LASSITER looked down at the orchestra that was blaring Broadway’s latest hits, and the close-packed, colorful crowd dancing in the flickering spotlights. The “Peking Palace” seemed to be just another commercialized Chinese place made to order for the public. The only Chinese he could see were the waiters and attendants.

He turned to the girl who sat opposite him in the booth.

“It’s the new Chinatown,” observed the Secret Service ace. Then he fell silent. “I wonder,” he finally resumed, “if that really could have been San Lee we saw on Broadway. Joan, if it was—you realize what that means!”

“I know,” said the girl. “It means—Li Wan may be alive, too.”

A silence fell between them, tense.

In a small office, on the floor below, a smooth-faced yellow man sat at a teakwood desk with a head-set clamped over his ears. His eyes were slits. Beside him sat a lovely Chinese girl. The yellow man, listening intently, smiled.

“Yes, my friends,” he muttered softly. “I hear you. Li Wan is alive. But you will not know it until the blow falls, and then it will be too late.”

There was a light tap on the door to the office. “Open it, San Lee,” said the Chinaman, and the girl glided like a tigress across the room.

An Oriental dressed in a waiter’s uniform stood there.

“It has been done, Yueng Joy,” he said. “The tea has been drugged.”

“Good,” said Yueng Joy. “Long Island is large, and it will not be the first time it has known a mystery of doom! They won’t live to spoil my plans!”

His face became blank again, as he listened. Suddenly he said: “The white girl asks: ‘Shall I pour your tea?’”

Who is the sinister Yueng Joy? What is the plot devised by his diabolic cunning? Here is a new adventure of that ace of Secret Service agents, Jerry Lassiter—hero of “Lure of the Poppy,” back again and pitted against a yellow master of crime. Don’t miss the first installment of

Yellow Freight

By Steuart M. Emery

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