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HE TOOK A TAXI
TO SCOTLAND
YARD TO TALK
TO M^o X. BUT
HE NEVER
SPOKE A
WORD!

A G-MAN COMES ^{TO} TOWN

A POWERFUL LONG
COMPLETE STORY OF M^o X

By

WALTER
EDWARDS

A G-MAN COMES



Mr. X had a knack of always turning up when he was least expected, and often when he wasn't wanted. But, on this occasion, Sally Blossom certainly was glad to see him, even if she hadn't expected him!

Chapter 1. THE BLACK SHADOW.

OSCAR GAR claimed to be the scion of an ancient Swedish family, but the fact remains that he was part American, part Polish Jew, part Chinese, and he had inherited all the less desirable qualities of the three races. That Oscar was an astute man can be accepted without quibble, for he was supreme boss of the Hand Diamond Corporation, the all-powerful combine that controls the diamond markets of the world.

A millionaire at thirty, he had forged ruthlessly ahead, smothering down opposition, walking over the face of the underdog, amassing wealth and a multitude of enemies; for he was cold-blooded and brutal in all his dealings.

The Hand Corporation had held a conference in London, and all the most expensive sales in the most exclusive luxury hotels had been taken over by the diamond magnate and his associates. The magnates themselves seemed to show confidence from the pores of their swarthy skins; their womenfolk dangled the eye

with a day-and-night parade of precious stones.

On the evening of the last day of the conference Oscar Gar was seated in a shabby office in Hutton Gardens, the unpretentious street that is the hub of the diamond trade. The cheap American desk at which he sat was tea-stained and shabby, and that went for the carpet, the old-fashioned horsehair furniture, and the gilt-and-rod wallpaper; but there was nothing shabby about Oscar himself.

Short, stout, broad-shouldered, with smooth, lemon-tinted skin and oily, jet-black hair brushed straight back from a wide forehead, his taste in clothes reflected the sartorial fashions of Barrow Street; his perfectly cut suit was of a fine mouse cloth, his shirt a darker shade of moose, his shirt collar and undershirt of heavy silk. A diamond of fabulous size glittered in his tie; his short, fat, muscular fingers were adorned by many rings. The face was round and plump, but not puffy; the eyes, small and black, like restless spots of quailshot.

Oscar was feeling pleased with things as he helped himself to a Cuban cigar from a heavy gold case and lit up from the flame of a gold, diamond-studded lighter.

"The poor suckers!" he chuckled, shaking in his armchair. "Like sobbing a kid of six candy!"

For in the last session of the conference he had bluffed and bullied his co-directors into increasing his emolument by fifty thousand dollars a year.

A thinness knocked down at the door.

"Come!" he called, his voice surprisingly thin for a man of his solid build.

A nervous, pony-faced little man took an apologetic step into the office. There was awe in his faded eyes as he looked at the prosperous, well-fed man at the desk.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, sir!" he announced breathlessly.

"Who's his name?"

"Aw, for the love of Pete!" cried a voice from the corridor, and the next moment the little clerk was being violently aside and the caller strode into

TO TOWN

He wanted to talk about Nick Schenk to Mr. X, the smartest undercover man Scotland Yard has ever known.

"Dead men don't talk," said Schenk, and acted accordingly. But Mr. X got on his trail all the same, and stayed there.

A GRIPPING, LONG COMPLETE, STORY OF MR. X.

BY WALTER EDWARDS



the room. "I thought I'd look in old-timer!" he drawled, leaning down upon Oscar Gar with undisturbed hand. "See, I'm glad to see you again!"

"This is swell!" said Gar, wringing the other's hand. Then, as the clerk cast a scorned look over his shoulder and scuttled out of the office, closing the door softly behind him: "So it's you, Schenk!" he snarled, his thick lips curling back from discoloured teeth. "What'd you want with me, you slimy, blackbacking son of a Puritoid lout?"

"What do I want?" echoed the visitor. His voice quiet, his expression variant as usual. "Let me see, Oscar! I've got it! It 'ud be dough, I guess! Lots of dough, Oscar!"

"You ain't getting another dime out of me!" grated Gar, with an obscene flap of the hand.

"You'll be through if you don't listen to reason," said Nick Schenk meekly. "Clean through and out the other side!"

Oscar Gar shot a look of dark hatred at him.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"You know what I mean, brother," drawled Nick Schenk. "Don't act dumb!"

"I'm being 'blacked' again, am I?"

Nick Schenk looked shocked for a fleeting moment, then his raised face became vacant once more.

"That's what you like," he drawled, talking round a lit cigar, "but I prefer to call it business! You're going to pay me protection money, Oscar!"

"Protection money?" snarled Gar, his thin nose shaking with fury. "I don't want protection! I can take care of myself!"

He hunched to his feet, his bright eyes up, his face light green in colour.

"Use to tell out of love, Schenk, believe I—"

"Aw, nuts!"

Nick Schenk sat on the carpet and lowered himself into a grubby bowchair nearby. Deliberately he removed his Stetson and tossed it on to the desk. He sat back, crossed his legs, made himself at home.

"You are going to cough up protection money, Oscar," pursued the lion of the crime syndicate, "and you're going to like it! And it won't be thick-and-thin this time! The syndicate's out for real dough in a hot clean-up!"

Oscar Gar glowered hard at the round, vacant countenance.

"Say, how do you aim to turn the heat on me?" he demanded.

"That's going to be easy, Oscar," drawled Schenk, pulling hard at his cigar and talking through a thick haze of blue smoke. "I can still prove that you made your first pile of jack in the I.I.R. racket! And now," he went on, "I can prove something else—something that'll knock the props out from under you, and blow your social ambitions sky-high!"

"Go on," nodded Gar, showing his glittering teeth in a leer. "I'll call your bluff! What else can you prove?"

"What I can prove concerns a pretty Cape girl! She was called Miriam, and had the body of a golden-skinned young Venus! She was the Belle of Starbury, the same village a few miles outside Middlesbrough, where you were living at that time! Remember, Oscar? One day she disappeared, and the ransom went round that she'd been kidnaped! She was found some days later, and she was dead!"

Nick Schenk swung forward in his chair and gazed fixedly into the wet, pitiful face of the diamond magnate.

"I know how, why and when she died, Oscar," he said, his voice low, taut and sure. "I can bring proof! Penny and the penny, the two Cape boys who looked after your house, saw everything. You strangled Miriam because she wouldn't have anything to do with you, and then tossed her body into the river!"

"You can't prove a damned thing!" snarled Gar. "Who's going to believe the word of a couple of Cape boys?"

Nick Schenk regarded the other with a sardonic, half-pitying smile.

"Don't kid yourself about that, Oscar!"

he drawled. "Those two crooks'll be believed all right! Your name still rings around Kimberley and the mines districts! Argus!"

He went on impatiently, "a guy with your dough, a guy who aims to boss the night-bat Society, wouldn't stand for the scandal!"

He reached for his hat, half-rose from his chair. "Get down to brass tacks, pronto," he rapped out, "or I'm beating it!"

"Aw, hold your horses, fella!" cried Gar, his bold eyes bright with fright and strain. "You've got me where you want me, I guess! What's this phoney protection probe you're trying to sink me?"

The lion of the crime syndicate tossed his cigar butt into the fireplace, gnawed at the end of another weed, carefully lit up from an ornate silver lighter.

"I'll tell you," he said. "You're going to need a lot of protection when you throw that swell party next week! Like lots of other swells, you think gangsters only operate in New York, Oh, and the other big cities in the States, so let me tell you there's a swell just-bracketing mob in London right now! What's more, I've been tipped off that they aim to pull a clean-up at your swell party!"

Oscar Gar stared at his visitor astound.

"Say, is this on the level?" he breathed, body rattled for once in his life.

"Yeah!" nodded Nick Schenk soberly, "it's on the level, Oscar! I ain't kidding you the least! Hell, don't it stand to reason that something's liable to bust loose with all those racks lying around? Listen, say! Every damn set of the party will be loaded down with 'em, from head to tail; I'll bet a million quid wouldn't buy all the specks that'll be on parade at the party! That's where your protection idea comes in, Oscar!"

"Yeah! I get you!" nodded Gar. "I guess you're talking turkey! What's your proposition?" he urged eagerly.

"Oscar, old-timer," drawled the big shot, drawing hard on his cigar, "open

screen with the right kind of dough, and I'll see to it that your party goes off as smooth as molasses! My boys will take care of this Letcher mob if they try to pull a fast one, Oscar! Leave it all to me, brother! Is it a deal?"

"It's any time, Nick," nodded Oscar. "Let's go into a huddle!"

THE MAN WHO VANISHED.

THE manly man was sitting upon the Embankment when the party-grey car swept through the gates of Scotland Yard and drove up before the staid, grey stone building that is the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police Force. The smart vehicle had powerful headlights burning, but the interior light had not been switched on.

A Irish-faced young constable stepped forward and fished the driver with an interrogative eye.

"Yes?" he prompted.
 "The two girls inside," answered the driver, "wearing a coat over his shoulder, "want to see Mr. X!"

"Is that all?" asked the constable, a shade of sarcasm in his tone; for Mr. X, an undercover man of the Yard, was perhaps the most elusive and inaccessible man in London.

"That's all!" nodded the driver, smiling.

"That's all?" asked the driver, smiling.
 But the young constable was not listening. Hearing the scratch of a match, and a quiet cough, he had looked round to catch the twosome, and no sooner did he recognize the smooth-faced, mild-eyed gentleman who was lighting a cigarette than he came to attention and gave a respectful salute. Then, interpreting a glimmer from the mild blue eyes, he turned about and swung open the door of the car.

The next thing he did was to cast a suspicious glance at the driver.

"How many passengers do you say you're carrying?" he inquired, in a flat voice.

"Two!" frowned the driver. "Didn't little Clith-Sire say so last time?"

"I heard you first time," returned the constable, and thrust head and shoulders into the gloom of the car. "You've only got one passenger now," he called, a moment later, "and he's fast asleep!"

"As, right!" scoffed the driver, switching on the interior light; and then he gazed and stiffened in his seat, staring through the glass partition, staring wide-eyed at the huddled figure in a corner seat. The face, dressed in a blue suit and dark overcoat, had a full but filled over his eyes; and the hands, clasped lightly upon his lap, were long but shapely—sensitive hands with long, tapering fingers. The chin, smooth and round, sagged upon a black knitted tie.

Of a second passenger there was no sign.

"Dork-permitting-line!" breathed the driver, still staring like a man hypnotized. "Can you beat that for a vanishing trick! I'll swear no affidavit!"

"One moment, Ryland!"

It was the mild-eyed man in evening kit who raised the constable aside and ducked into the car, a quiet air of authority about him as he took charge of the situation. He did not attempt to rouse the slumped figure in the corner, but carefully lifted the rim of the hat and studied the grey face of the face; then, placing an arm about the latter's chest, he slowly raised the body forward until the bright light of the overhead lamp gleamed upon the white hair handle of a Mexican dagger.

A Merry Christmas Co You All

THE EDITOR

The blade of the knife was thrust well into the back of the neck, a shade of color.

The mild blue eyes of the man in evening kit were not so mild as he replaced the body in its original position, and when he spoke there was an edge to his melodic voice, a tightening of the thin-lipped mouth.

"Get help, Ryland," he croaked hoarsely, "and take this poor fellow up to Dr. Crowden's room!"

"Yes, sir!"

Ducking out of the car, the man in dress clothes lit another cigarette, a brooding expression in his clear eyes, his pale face a marble mask, cold and inscrutable.

"Put the light out!" he said, shooting a swift, penetrating glance at the driver and looking away.

The next moment the car was in darkness.

"One of 'em-dye-da, sir!" ventured the driver, beginning toidget. There's thousands of taxis and cars for hire in London, yet they must pick on my barrow to do their nasty murder in! Why pick on me, sir? Can you beat that!"

"Too bad!" sympathized his companion, regarding him with calm but penetrating gaze. Then, thoughtfully: "Perhaps," he suggested, "you don't like getting mixed up in murder jobs?"

The driver stiffened perceptibly, stared hard at the impressive face of the stranger, and gradually turned the colour of lead. The stranger who was taking a cigarette from a slim gold case did not appear to notice his companion's guilty reaction to his innocent question.

"You bet I don't want to get mixed up in murder jobs!" said the driver, looking moist and uneasy. "This barrow's a car, not a barrow's wares!"

"How long have you had her?" asked the stranger.

The driver, shifting uneasily in his seat, stared at the questioner with a puzzled, suspicious, half-diminished frown.

"The long 'ave I had 'er?" he asked, pushing his cap back and ruffling his curly fringe. "Must be three years last February, if I remember right!"

"It should be easy enough to remember," assured the other, lighting his cigarette.

When Morris Morris bumped off by the Frankie Richard mob in the following month. The killer used a paraffin Deluge for the job," he went on, gazing towards the south side of the river,

"driven by a small-time crook called Shifty Griffin!"

Grey to the lips, perspiration pouring down his flat features, the driver stared at the speaker as though hypnotized, stark terror in his narrow eyes.

"For gawd's sake, sir!" he barked, the shag cigarette slipping through his nervous fingers. "I swear I didn't know, I was a murder job that!"

"I know you didn't know," cut in the other, "also, I know that you've got a nice little wife and a fleet of kids to feed! The boys played you for a sucker! There's why you didn't find yourself at the Old Bailey with Frankie and the other rats! But get an ounce of this, Shifty! There's still time to pin an 'accident' badge on your chest, and that'll mean ten years on the Moor for you. I'll see to that!"

The man in dress clothes stepped up to the grey-faced driver and looked deep into his narrow eyes.

"Get a load of this, Shifty!" he ordered, tonelessly. "You are going to keep your big trap shut about what you've seen this evening! You didn't find a girl in your car! Your wife's a blank! Breathe a word, and you get yourself tossed into the can! We're keeping the murder dark—see!"

"Yes, sir," nodded the driver, fearful and trembling. He stared at the portebled stranger as though he were a lightning-stricken agricultural. "For gawd's sake, sir," he quavered, "who are you?"

"Just another copper, Shifty, just another cop!" came the grimly smiling reply. "Detective-Superior Knapp, C.I.D.!"

"Mister X!" The driver spoke in a husky, awed whisper, for the name of the ace undercover man was known and feared throughout the dives and cat-runs of London's underworld. "Mister X!"

"In person, my dear Shifty!"

THE BODY.

THE man, Shifty, observed Mr. X, in his smooth way, "is your story in a nutshell. At approximately half-past six this evening, two gentlemen called at your garage in Hammersmith to hire a car! The choice made, you were instructed to drive to Scotland Yard!"

Shifty, who was sitting upon the extreme edge of a leather armchair, nodded his rusty head. He looked shifty-eyed and uneasy; the atmosphere of New Scotland Yard did not appear to agree with him.

Mister X went on, his calm gaze never leaving the unattractive face of his visitor.

Traffic being heavy at that hour of the evening, there were a number of jams, and on three occasions at least you were held up for a minute or so! Ample time, that is, for one or both of your passengers to have slipped out of the car and made off. Indeed, according to your story, one did actually vanish between Hammersmith and Scotland Yard!"

"That's gawd's truth, Mister X," nodded Shifty, eager and earnest.

"Of course it is," smiled Xavier Knapp. "I have the greatest trust in your veracity! You arrive here at about five minutes to seven with only one passenger, and by your deal, it is in a bad state of health! Now, then, Shifty! About the passenger who vanished on route?"

"Yes, sir?" Shifty sat forward in his seat.

"Did you get a good look at him in the garage, when they were checking a car?"

"Yeasir!" Shifty gave a vigorous nod of his rusty head. "I'd know 'em again

anywhere, sir! "E was about five feet in height, a regular oval! Grey suit, green-tinted boots, and grey trolley hat! And 's small like a fly!"

"Scrappy dresser!" said Xavier Krapp's dry comment. "Go on!"

"His face was round, like a baby's, with a pink complexion, and 's big grey eyes. 's hair was thick and yellow, and 's spoke kind of parted! You couldn't mistake 'im, Mister X!"

"I'll say not," agreed the undercover man. "Thanks, Shifty! I think that will be all now, but we must keep in touch, of course! What's your address?"

The crook hesitated, as in the way of crooks when dealing with the police. "Oh, never mind," said Mister X, shrugging. "Then, as a shade of relief passed across Shifty's hat features: "You're not thinking of leaving 'is Canal Street, 's you?" he asked, shik-ki-ki innocence in his blue eyes.

Shifty shook to the roots of his unshorn hair.

"N-o-o, Mister X!" he mumbled, scratching his greasy cap off the carpet and grilling up. "No, sir!"

"Show 'is government out, sergeant!" ordered Xavier Krapp, a twinkle in his eye.

Secretly did the door close behind Shifty than Doctor Creodon sloshed into the room. Loose-limbed, limpy and stumpy-eyed, he lowered himself into the arm-chair recently vacated by Shifty Griffin.

"Death instantaneous," he announced, in his staccato manner of speech. He leaned forward, helped himself to a Turkish cigarette. "Didn't live long enough to make a cry!"

"Now work on the part of the killer," observed Mister X, a connoisseur of such things. "It takes nerve to pull a murder in daylight, and in the West End, at that! Even now I can't see how he got away with 'is! How about the trunk?"

Creodon shook his long, narrow head. "Nothing doing," he answered. "Cleared out! No papers, no anything!"

"Tutor's later?"

"Wash-out! It is all ready-made American state stuff!"

"I guessed as much!"

Doctor Creodon regarded the undercover man with a shrewd, sleepy eye.

"You know the corpse?"

His mouth tight, his blue eyes no longer wild, Mister X gave a slow nod of his smooth, shaggy head.

"Yes, I know him, doc," he answered, but without a trace of emotion. "I recognized him at once, although he was sandy-haired and wore a clipped ginger moustache when I last saw him in the States! Now, as you know, he's clean-shaven, black-haired, and dark-skinned! And the gold-rimmed glasses are part of a clever disguise!"

"But you saw through 'is, X!" There was admiration in the doctor's lazy drawl. "Who is the corpse?"

"Captain Jago, of the Chicago Police, attached to the G-men! He was no Hercules to look at, but liquid dynamite when he went into action! The Chicago cops have had him on the spot ever since he staged a party-drive to clean up the city! In the end he put the big shots out of business!"

"Has that got anything to do with this 'ill, X?"

"How should I know?" shrugged the undercover man, "but it certainly looks that way! However, I promise to find out for you, doc! Seeing that Jago was about to call on me, I feel that it's up to me to hunt down the unspeakable

rat who killed him in cold blood, and find out what it's all about! We are up against a big proposition, doc," he went on, reaching for another cigarette. "Jago wouldn't have come from the States, and departed at that, unless there was something really important about to break loose! It was to be a secret visit, but he was crooked on the very doorstep of Scotland Yard, which means a whole 'il!"

"You've got a description of the murderer?"

"I certainly have, doc," nodded Mister X. "That rat knows all the answers, and I'm going to find him within twenty-four hours!"

There was a quiet rattle in the motion voice which caused Creodon to rouse himself from the depths of the arm-chair and regard the undercover man with easy eyes.

"You seem very sure of yourself, X," he said, trying to read the impressive countenance of Xavier Krapp. "Is it going to be as easy as all that?"

"It's going to be simplicity itself," returned Mister X, with his original smile. "I'm going to stage a decoy act, doc!"

"Meaning?"

"First of all," explained Mister X, "I must trace Jago, find out where he's been staying, and the fact that I can supply a detailed description of him should make 'is an easy matter! His Chicago accent will help, too! Next, knowing the name of his hotel, I shall disguise myself as Jago—which will be easy, doc, both being of similar height and build—and take his place in the scheme of things, so is speak!"

"D'you mean that you're going to try to pass yourself off as the murdered man?" guessed Doc Creodon, sitting bolt upright in his arm-chair, shocked out of his lethargic state for once.

"Not only shall I try," came the quiet reply, "but I shall get away with 'is! You can be perfectly sure, my dear doc, that the murderer did not waste any time in making his escape from the car; it is doubtful whether he stayed long enough

to assure himself that life was extinct! Nevertheless," added Mister X, "that he will be surprised to see me—that is, my masterly impersonation of the late Captain Jago—I have no doubt!"

"Surprised!" Doc Creodon's hoarse face split into a wide grin. "Hard to believe the state of his life, X! You go to Jago's hotel and carry on as though you were Jago!"

"How quick you are, my dear doc!" Mister X smiled a little ironic smile. "Yes, that is the idea, and I'm certain that it will force the killer and his friends to show their hand!"

"His friends!" echoed Doc Creodon. "Do you think this is the work of a gang, X?"

"I'm sure about it, my dear doc! I've a strong hunch that Captain Jago made his secret trip to London to warn me against a bunch of crooks known as the Crime Syndicate!"

"The Crime Syndicate?" Creodon gave a hopeless shake of his heavy head. "That's a new one on me, X!"

"As I told you just now," explained Xavier Krapp, "Jago's chest-up put the big shots of Chicago out of business, with the result that the ace operators in all branches of crime got together and handed themselves into a combine! The syndicate numbers among its members the cream of Chi's fingers, petroleum, shoe-makers, rat men, stick-up artists, blacksmiths, jewel thieves, and so on! They operate independently, of course, but share the spoils. Everything goes into the common fund! They've worked most of the big cities in the States, and now, unless I miss my guess, they've descended upon London like a flock of vultures!"

"Lord bless my soul!" howled Doc Creodon, shaking his moist brow. "It sounds fantastic—incredible, X!"

"It is neither!" the undercover man assured him, shortly. "Jago got wind of the scheme, diagnosed himself, and came to London to warn me, fearing to trust either cable or wireless! He knew what he was up against! And he paid for the attempt with his life, stout fellow! But

Could anything be more disconcerting—to impersonate a man, enter his flat, and find there a murderer's victim?



the Crime Syndicate won't get away with it, doc." He ran on, his blue eyes glowing like chips of ice. "I'll smash the syndicate and hang Jago's killer or get croaked in the attempt!"

THE SILENT BLASTER.

The man who, at ten o'clock that night, emerged through the gloomy panels of Scotland Yard, bore not the slightest resemblance to Detective-Inspector Xavier Knapp, the undercover man more generally known throughout the underworld of London as Mister X.

But it was Mister X, and his facial resemblance to the cop in the doorway was startling, uncanny. The master of disguise, Scotland Yard's Prozac, had costumed himself.

Wearing a blue suit, dark overcoat, and soft hat, Mister X peered shrewdly through gold-rimmed glasses as he passed on the edge of the curb and gazed up and down the Embankment, as though in search of a lead.

It had taken the special inquiry squad less than an hour to locate Captain Jago who, posing as Charles J. Carson, Texas oil man, was occupying a luxurious suite of rooms at the Royal Hotel, Piccadilly. With "Charles J. Carson" was his secretary, Mr. Floyd Carron.

Placing a cruising taxi, the undercover man gave the driver instructions and took back against the rusty cushions, and the blink light behind the gold-rimmed glasses, actively belied the polite smile upon the thin lips.

It was a short journey to the Royal, and a lowering commissionaire in a crushed strawberry uniform gave Mister X a magnificent salute as he swung open the door of the cab.

"Good-evening, Mr. Carson!" he said, knowing that the demostic American prefers to be "addressed" rather than "steered." "I'll take care of the fare for you!"

"Thanks a lot," drawled Xavier Knapp, feeling an added lull in his disguise. "Guess I'll be getting along! Got an appointment with a eye specialist!"

Peering through the crowded vestibule, he made his way to the reception desk. The blonde behind the counter gave him a dazzling smile, all eyes and teeth.

"Key, please," drawled the undercover man, steering himself against the second wheel.

The blonde staved at the key-card.

"That's funny," she said, wrinkling her pretty nose.

"What's funny?"

"I've certain Mr. Carron took the key away about an hour ago, yet here it is, back on the book again! I didn't see him go out!"

"Maybe he was in a hurry," suggested Mister X, "and gave it to bell-boy to take care of! The kid bring it up while your back was turned!"

"I expect that's it," nodded the blonde. A luxurious lift carried Mister X smoothly to the second floor, where a diminutive page-boy led him along a carpeted corridor to a door bearing a neat numeral in copper: 308.

"O.K., sir!" drawled the undercover man (then Charles J. Carson, alias Captain Jago). He slipped a key into the youngster's absent-minded palm and waved him away. "Real E. kid!"

Unlocking the door, he passed into a sitting-room furnished with almost severe good taste, but it lacked warmth or friendliness. On a table near the Adams fireplace was a copy of "Excitee" and an out-of-date "Chicago Daily News." The

periodicals were the only personal touch about the apartment.

A rosewood door faced Mister X; behind the door, he reasoned, was a bed-room. He made no sound as he moved smoothly across the Indian carpet.

Continuously turning the handle, he nodded with quiet satisfaction as the door gave to his light touch; and his lean fingers were crossing the cold bar of his suitcase as he slid across the threshold and stood with his back to the wall.

For some seconds he remained stone-still.

Lying upon a silken bedspread of great tropical beauty and gorgeous coloring was a baby-faced, yellow-haired young man who gazed up at the ceiling with large grey eyes that did not see. He was immaculate, dressed in grey. There was a dark, spreading stain upon the front of his expensive silk shirt. He was dead.

DOWN-DOWN.

A shadow came at the outer door. Mister X did not hesitate, being a believer in the rash axiom that he who hesitates is lost. Switching off the light, he passed out of the master chamber, turned the key in the lock, and strode across the sitting-room to the main door of the suite.

Another rap came upon the panel; sharp, peremptory.

"Ar, keep your shirt on!" shouted Xavier Knapp, with a swift inspection of his automatic. His trigger finger was crooked for action as he swept open the door and took a sharp step into the passage. "Sorry, son!" he apologized, reading on the diminutive page-boy.

"Young lady to see you, sir! Here's her card!"

The ivory card was inscribed in fine copper plate:

"Miss Sally Blomson,
Police Headquarters,
Chicago."

Mister X was deep in thought for five seconds; he came to a decision in the margin of Mister X.

"I'll see Miss Blomson," he said.

The girl who was ushered into the room a minute or so later could have been none other than Sally Blomson. There was something fragrant about her fresh young beauty, fragrant and blooming; the soft

curves of her slender form, the glow of her dimpled cheeks, the wavy eyes that were pools of intelligence and latent tenderness.

She was across the carpet with outstretched hands, took Mister X's shoulder in affectionate embrace, and gave him a peck on either cheek.

"Oss, cap!" she breathed, a tiny sob in her drawing voice. "The saints be praised that I'm in time!" She took a backward step and inspected him from head to toe. "I'll say that's one dandy disguise, old-time!"

"I'll pass!" drawled Mister X, wondering what in Heavens this new complication was all about. "What brings you here?" he bluffed.

"You ask me what brings me here, you old peach!" The girl laughed into his eyes. "That's a swell way to greet a poor undercover dame who's come all this way to save your life! You were one jump ahead of me at New York, so I followed on the Corvathie, a fast tub making for Chebogue! At Chebogue I chartered a 'plane, and hit London an hour ago; and here I am, I guess! And I had you all in one piece, Cap! Ain't that grand?"

"I'll say it's swell," drawled Mister X, beginning to get a new sort of thing. Then, taking a chance: "Why shouldn't you find me in one place, anyway? Am I supposed to be in danger, or something?"

"Am you supposed to be in danger?" echoed Sally Blomson, opening wide her wavy eyes. "I'll say you are, cap! I've thought I laded you all the way from Chi to hand you a cream bun!"

Mister X heaved an inward sigh of relief; he began to see the light.

"Could you use a drink, kid?" he asked, playing for time in which to think.

"Don't ask me, cap," begged Sally. "I might weakin'! Oss, I've got a real copper's thirst right now!"

"Here's all the guss at headquarters!" asked Mister X.

"Swell, cap!" answered Sally Blomson, a slightly pained expression in her shrewd, winking eyes as she watched Mister X mixing drinks at the minibar. "They're tickled to death when they hear that Baby Carron didn't get away with the fat one he be planned to pull!"

Mister X looked thoughtful as he handed her a long cool drink.

"Tasty!"

Sally Blomson nodded, dropped into an armchair, and relaxed her beautifully moulded limbs.

"Where's Baby Carron?" she asked abruptly.

"He's on his way some place, I guess," drawled Mister X, a sardonic glint in his eyes as he thought of the corpse in the next room. "He ain't likely to stretch us, if that's what you're worrying about!"

"That's swell," smiled Sally, lighting a cigarette. "Listen, cap, you can see correctly. 'Baby Carron's been a dirty, double-crossing rat from the day he joined the undercover squad! He's been fighting us all the time! He was smart all right, and he brought home the loot, but it was all small stuff, as you know! He always gave the big shots a miss! You, cap, he was working with the big shots, keeping them wise about what was going on at headquarters! We've been running a squatter in our bosom all this time!"

"So what?" urged Mister X, as she began to ponder her cute little nose.

"Don't you guess, Master Mind?" challenged Sally, busy with her puff.

"I ain't good at guessing," frowned Mister X. "Feed me facts!"

"That don't sound like Captain Jago!"

NORMAN CONQUEST

will thrill you
NEXT WEEK

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complete story

THE HOUSE OF A THOUSAND LIGHTS

By Berkeley Gray

(See page 614 for full details.)

laughed Bally Blossom. "Gee, you always go into a song and dance about being a swell dancer! Anyway," she planged on, closing her handbag, "soon as Baby Garrison heard you were going to London to make-up Mister X about the Crime Syndicate, he went to Nick Schenk and gave him an aerial! The aesthetic daps, Cap? And what did Nick do? I'll tell you! Nick gave Baby orders to wait till you two reached London, when Baby was to give you the works and do a fade! His orders were to make the kill before you had time to connect with this one undercover gap at Scotland Yard!"

She fixed Mister X with her fine eyes, her expression cynical, slightly pained. "With you crooked, cap," she went on, "and Mister X knowing nothing about the Crime Syndicate, everything would be nice and dandy for Nick and his mob! London would be ripe for an epidemic of black-mail, stick-ups, con stuff, phony dough, and what have you." Impassively she jumped out of the armchair and gave Mister X an affectionate hug. "But you're not crooked, cap! You're all—"

Her voice trailed away, and there appeared in a small, capable hand a little pearl-handled automatic. Her face was set as she snatched off Knapp's gold-rimmed glasses and peered into the clear blue eyes.

"Say, smartie," she drawled coldly, jolting the gun into his stomach in business style, "what's the big idea? You're no more Captain Jags than I'm Joe Louis! Who are you, you rat? Spill it, before I go pay with this cannon and blow you apart!"

The undercover man smiled into her fiery eyes.

"At Scotland Yard," he said, "I am known as Detective-Inspector Xavier Knapp." He passed, still smiling into her eyes. "But you, my dear Sally," he added, "you may call me Mister X!"

MISS WENDON.

SALLY Blossom made a sour grimace as she looked him up and down. She told herself that she ought to surrender her police badge and peddle pounds for a living.

"I always figured you must be a smooth operator, Mister X," she drawled, "but I didn't think you'd be able to put a hat one over on me!" There was a glint of wistful admiration in her tawny eyes as she watched the undercover man adjust the gold-rimmed glasses. "It's certainly a swell disguise!" she declared. "It didn't take you long to see through it," Mister X reminded her.

"Those kinks of yours gave you away," returned Sally. Then, with a swift change of tone and manner: "Does this mean that I'm too late?" she asked in a low voice. "This impersonation stunt—"

Mister X gave a slow nod.

"They got cap?" pressed the girl, tight-lipped and dry-eyed.

"Yes, they killed Captain Jago," came the quiet reply. "Garrison stuck a knife into him and delivered the corpse to Scotland Yard! Jags was stabbed in the back, dog-fashion!"

"That's Baby Garrison, all right," said Sally tensely; and there was something ominous about the way she thumped the safety-catch of her little automatic.

"Captain Jags was a grand old, Mister X, and a particular friend of mine, so I want you to leave Baby Garrison to me! Let me take care of that double-crossing bastard!"

"I'm afraid you're too late, Sally!"

The staid statement was charged with

meaning, and the undercover girl gave Mister X a quick, penetrating glance.

"I get you," she said, in the same flat voice. "He's been bumped already?"

"Just that very thing!" nodded Mr. X, admiring her cool nerve. "Someone slugged him through the heart!"

The glance of a smile, cold and mordant, touched Sally's red lips.

"I get the set-up," she said. "Nick

Schenk ordered the kill, and Horace McKelretsky, his private pupil, pulled the job! You can take that from me, Mister X! Nick never could trust a squawker, so he had Garrison bumped as soon as he'd served his purpose! Nick Schenk is like that! Cautious!" She sat down again, studying Xavier Knapp with her shrewd, intelligent eyes.

"I like this decoy set you're putting on," observed the girl. "It's cute! It's so good I might have thought it up myself! You are going to have Nick Schenk worried and guessing right from the start! Mix your old another lightbulb and let's get down to business! I crave action!"

"Business!" echoed Mister X, drawing an eyebrow.

"Sure," drawled Sally. "We're running in double business from now on, Mister X! We are looking into what've cleaned up the Crime Syndicate and headed Nick Schenk and the other rats for the Big House! So mobsters are going to put a pal of mine on the spot and get away with it! No, sir! I'm going to square accounts for Captain Jago! We'll do it together, Mister X! We'll blow this crooked syndicate wide open! What do you know about that?"

"I think it's a swell idea, Sally," answered Mister X, from the sideboard. "I'm a lone wolf in the ordinary way, but it's going to take two first-class undercover cops to tackle this job!"

"That's us, I guess," smiled the girl. "The first one's up to me!"

"Explain, partner!" begged Mister X, sipping his drink.

Sally curled herself up in the armchair and regarded him with a tender, provocative smile in her beautiful, luscious eyes. Her slender form was graceful and streamer, and she wore expensive silk hose. She looked lovely, alluring.

"So what?" queried Mister X, a shade puzzled.

"Am I any strain on the eye?" asked Sally.

"You are a very beautiful young creature," answered Mister X, "and you know it! I hope," he added grimly, "you are not trying to tempt me, Miss Blossom!"

"I may need someone to practice on before I get to work on Nick Schenk!" nodded Sally, with a sweet smile. "And you needn't think you can talk me out of it, partner! Like you, Mister X, I'm an undercover gap, and undercover gaps have to take chances! I'm going to wear Nick Schenk in a new way, and soon I'll have the ape taling out of my hands! Then I'll give him apart from his secret and pass the dope on to you! There's



The welcome Mr. X handed out to his would-be murderer was as effective as it was hearty.

going to be a 'leak' in the Crime Syndicate! How's that for a swell idea, partner?"

"The idea is great," answered Mister X, frowning. "but the terrible risk—"

"Terrible risk!" Sally's sunny eyes flashed with scorn. "Did Cap Jags give two hoots about risks when he tried to warn you against the syndicate?"

"He did not," agreed Mister X, in his mild way. "And I, personally, have no objection to taking a risk now and again! But you—"

"Yes, I know!" cut in Sally with a light laugh. "I am the sweet, innocent, unprotected young female who wouldn't about Nick Schenk's eye out and enjoy doing it! Or am I? Leave Nick to me, partner! You're going to be sorry for the poor sap by the time I'm through with him!"

THE CLASSY GAME!

WITH the possible exception of the Athenian, the most exclusive club in London is the Skilly Club, apart from their exclusiveness, the two institutions have nothing more in common. The Skilly Club is of humble origin, having started life as a chow's kitchen in the more squand part of Seven Dials. Indeed, the club still has premises in a cold-war of Drury Lane, but the thieves' kitchen is a thing of the past.

Although the club is modest in its primary, there are times when it is bristling in hospitality. It is always a festive occasion when a big shot from the States drops in.

Dick Schenk was made a life member within half an hour of proving his identity to "Duke" Frisky, the president, an Australian con man who made enough out of the money money racket to retire at the age of forty-two.

On this particular evening he joined Duke Frisky at the bar and ordered a bottle of champagne, draining his words round a twelve-inch cigar.

From where he stood, with his broad back to the shiny mahogany counter, he could see through the lounge, and there

was an avid expression in his shiny eyes as he fixed his bold stare upon the girl seated in an armchair beside the fireplace.

She was young and shapely, the clinging material of her smart dress revealing the soft curves of her slender figure. She had good features, too, although a too levish use of rouge and lipstick had given her a flamboyant, slightly coarse appearance, a looseness of beauty; and it is supposed that it was this very type of striking looks which appealed irresistibly to Nick Schenk. Nick had no use for drooping lilies and shriveling violets; he liked his ladies full-blooded, healthily-scented, dancing to the eye.

He had been attracted by the girl in the lounge on the previous evening, and it was with the idea of making an impression that he had dozed himself out in the grey ensemble. Once or twice he managed to catch her eye, but her bored expression did not change in the least. He did not appear to arouse a spark of interest in her tender bosom. He might have been an Blue State hoodlum, not the boss of the Crime Syndicate!

"Say, what's taking you, big shot?" It was the mellow voice of Duke Friday that broke in upon Nick Schenk's bold appraisal of the girl's physical charms. "You're not listened to a word I've said!" The rosy man, a tall, lean-built individual with the face of an incubus, chuckled softly as he glanced into the lounge and saw the reason for Nick's preoccupation. "Her's easy on the eye, brother!" he observed.

"I'll say she is, Duke," drawled the gangster. "Who is the dame? She's got real class, and I fall hard for class! A classy treat for me every time!"

"You'll fall plenty hard if you get fresh with the kid in there," warned Duke. "Little Coral plays the con game a big way, Nick, and she don't let nothing interfere with business! Lay off her before you get a raw!"

"Aw, drunks!" snorted Schenk. "Been snooty James fall for a big shot! This classy kid don't know who I am, I guess! She don't know what she's missing!"

Tilting his Stetson over one eye, he hunched his padded shoulders and stroked into the lounge, entering the strained banish which greeted his appearance, conscious of the sly sidelong glances which followed his progress across the gaudy Italian carpet.

He flicked the brim of his Stetson at the dazed-eyed girl beside the fireplace.

"Lo, baby!" he drawled cooly. "I've fallen hard for you kid! You've got looks and you've got class, and I've all for a classy deal!"

Her features hard and expressionless beneath its coating of make-up, a sneer upon her bright red lips, Coral van Loane (alias Sally Blossom, underworld girls regarded the boss of the Crime Syndicate with icy contempt in her strange, feline eyes.

"If you're trying to sell me a romance, cleaver," she said, her tone clear and controlling. "I've got one! Good-morning!"

Nick's wide mouth stretched into an ugly grin as he turned round and looked down at Sally Blossom.

"That crack about the cleaner comes you are class, kid," he drawled, grabbing a chair and sitting down beside her.

"Get, you're swell!" he breathed, his eyes crawling over the girl's luscious form.

"Class! Maybe," he continued, leaning towards her, attracted by her fresh fragrance—"maybe you don't know who I am."

"Maybe I don't," conceded Sally, with a polite little yawn. "What's more, Mister Butinsky, I'm not interested in who you are! You don't look much to me, anyway. Just another small-time crook! Now do a fake, before I call a cripple to bounce you out on your ear!"

The boss gangster's thick neck went purple as he muttered an obscene oath and glowered at the girl through dilated lids.

"That's no way to talk to a Big Shot, baby," he drawled. "The member, just in case you don't know already, is Nick Schenk. You come from Kansas, so you've heard of me, I guess."

The girl looked him up and down, a cold, mocking smile upon her red lips, and Nick, flushing to the roots of his yellow hair, glowered savagely upon the cold host of his expensive cigar and waited for her to speak.



Judas Treu knew more about Chinese torture than the Chinese themselves.

"Sure, I've heard of you, Big Shot!" she drawled. "The last time was about six months ago, when you and the other Big Shots were on the fish from the Chicago cops! Big Shot!" The biting comment in her tone made Nick Schenk wince. "There was a time," she went on, a tender, reminiscent light in her feline eyes, "when I thought I might fall for the real thing in Big Shots, but the tough cops are extinct, I guess, leaving the rogues to smooch like you! Well," she exploded, but in a lower tone of voice, "wouldn't a real Big Shot do something about this little burg? London! What a pinking! Why, even the cops go around unshaved, and still nothing happens!"

"Listen, baby!" Nick Schenk sat forward in his chair and patted Sally's cool little hand. "Could you still fall for a Big Shot who put over a fall-out? Something big, kid!"

"How big?" came the cautious question. "Pretty big," he said, trembling slightly in the warmth of her florid beauty. "The boss of the Crime Syndicate," he continued, "and we aim to clean up a million during our short stay in this burg! Is this big enough for you, baby?"

Sally regarded the eager, hot-eyed gangster with a sceptical smile.

"You wouldn't hit a poor, simple girl, would you, Big Shot?" she drawled.

"Bertha! He I wouldn't hit you," said Nick in an exalted whisper. "Get an ear-

ful of this, baby! We're pulling our first job to-morrow night. A swell dump in Park Lane. I'll tell you all about it, just to prove I'm on the level."

"O.K., Big Shot!" murmured Sally, thinking of Mister K. "Maybe I could fall for a guy like you, after all, Nicky?"

"Oh, baby!" sighed the intoxicated gangster. "You've now got class!"

FAST WORK!

Two cock-brick tugs at the albino wedding had nothing on "Morgan" McKlosky. With an orange-colored hair, prominent nose, and hawk-like Morgan was conspicuous in any company. Certain it is that the fashionable night-club crowd at the Golden Club stared wide-eyed and aghast when Nick Schenk, Mosey Quade and Morgan strode tumultuously into the most exclusive dining-room in London, to be seated at a favored table by Langst in person, an honour seldom accorded to anyone below royal rank.

But, then, the social and stage celebrities who stared aghast were ignorant of the fact that Nick Schenk had something "on" the great Langst, whom he had known in the old days in New York, when the Little Italian had a ten cent speakeasy dive in Canal Street, Brooklyn.

In Langst, it will be understood, Nick Schenk had a hand-picked subject for unlimited blackmail.

The expensive supper had reached the liquor and coffee stage when Schenk fixed his bodyguard with a pale, feline eye. He kept looking at Morgan McKlosky for a full ten seconds, but the gorilla did not sense anything amiss.

"Listen, you big ape," said Nick at last, with scarcely a tremor of his fat red lips. "Haven't I told you a score of times that I'll not consider eligible to pick your teeth with a fork? That is, it's something that isn't done in public! You can please yourself when you're at home in the sty!"

"And now," he went on, lighting a huge cigar, "we'll get down to business. I take it, Morgan, that you wanted Baby Carran?"

"Ever mean, have I robbed him out?" drawled the gorilla, who always suffered under cross-examination by the Big Shot; and Nick spoke a different language. "Sure, I slugged him, like you ordered," he went on, at a nod from Schenk. "A couple slugs into the heart did the trick. We went into confidence before I fed him his hot lead."

"He made no mistake about Jago?"

His ape-like face splitting into a broad grin, Morgan McKlosky exposed a number of chipped ivory teeth.

"I'll say 'hot, hot!" he chuckled broadly, smacking his massive chest with hairy hands. "We stuck the knife into the back of the cow's neck up to the hilt! Skewered Jago's tassets, I guess. Mer worth!"

A thoughtful, half-suspicious expression in his moist, feline eyes, the boss of the Crime Syndicate exchanged a furtive glance with Mosey Quade, his second-in-command.

"You're sure he wasn't putting something over on you?" asked the latter, a slim, stream-lined dago with varnished hair and the slow, reflex smile of the born killer. Nothing pleased him in the underworld of Chicago, hence his misname. He knew it all. "I never did trust Baby Carran."

"So me," drawled Nick Schenk through a dense cloud of cigar-smoke. "That's why I had him bumped. A squeaker all the world over, no matter whether he's being paid by the cops or

the gang. How did he stage the kill, Morgan?"

"As that was dead-end, boss!" grinned the hoodlum, pulling himself a cheap cigarette. "Senna like Cap Jago wanted some cocaine, so baby lumbered him out to a place called Richmond. They walked around till it was getting dark, and Baby suggested hiring an auto. That was O.K. by Jago, who figured on calling at police headquarters on the way back to their hotel."

Nose nodded his sleek black head. "Going to wire-up this smooth undercover guy, Mister X?"

"Sure!" nodded Morgan McKintsky. "He told Baby that very thing, so Baby knew he'd got to work fast. What, seems like they got into a traffic jam some place in the West End, and Baby pulled the kill. Dropped his cigarette-case, and Jago—simple sucker—went down on to his knees to pick it up, and right then he got that neckful of lead!"

"Nice work!" nodded Nick Schenk.

"Smooth—"

His voice trailed away, and he sat quite still, gazing fixedly down the room.

"Morgan!" His fat, red lips did not move. His voice was flat, dead.

"Yeah, boss?"

"You're sure Baby Garson wasn't pulling a fast one?"

"Sure I'm sure, boss! Why—"

"Shut up!" rasped Nick. "Take a look at the guy over there!"

Following the direction of the Big Shot's fixed gaze, Morgan and Nussy Gande found their eyes focused upon a solitary figure standing by the orchestra desk. He was a man above medium height, well built, with poise. His hair, smooth and black, was brushed back from a wide forehead; his complexion dark. The eyes behind gold-rimmed glasses were blue and penetrating the type that can see round corners.

"Japs!" breathed Morgan and Nussy, staring like men transfixed. "Japs in disguise!"

QUICK EXIT!

I was getting on towards midnight when Charles J. Garson, alias Mister X—collected his hat and coat from the cloak-room and passed out of the Golden Grill into the mild night air of Regent Street. The cold wind had dropped, and a pale moon smiled mysteriously in a cloudless sky.

"I'll walk, I guess," drawled the undercover man, addressing the massive constabulary who, hat-to-hat in hand, hovered at his elbow. "Good-night, brother!"

"Good-night, sir."

Leaving a trail of fragrant cigar-smoke in his wake, Mister X covered the short distance to the Royal Hotel in leisurely fashion, passing every now and again to admire the handsome beauty of the moon.

Passing through the crowded vestibule, he retrieved his key from the reception-desk. The blonde flashed him a smiling smile as he headed for a lift.

Fifteen seconds later a shadow fell across the reception-desk, and the blonde, coming out of a day-dress, looked up with a start, her dewy eyes broader with hope and expectation.

"Lo, hill!" drawled Morgan McKintsky, flicking the white brim of his Stetson hat. "Is Mister Garson around? You know, the oil-man from Texas? I gotta see him at once—something mighty important!"

"If you will give me your name, sir, I'll send a page up to Mr. Garson's suite."

"There ain't no time for that, sister," drawled Morgan. "I got a message, and

it's mighty important! What's the number of the room? Snap into it!"

"One hundred, second floor."

"Thanks a lot, sugar!" grinned Morgan. Squaring through it was, the lift seemed to fit him like a glove, and the small boy in buttons stared in popple-eyed wonderment as he watched the human earthquake glide away down the rose-carpeted corridor.

Morgan passed outside No. 100. Carefully he tried the door-handle; it gave to his touch.

"Sweet!" he grinned, using a microphone receiver from his shoulder-belt. "Let's go!"

Moving with remarkable agility, he flung open the door and leapt into the room, to receive a smashing blow to the base of the skull which dropped him like a poisoned bomb.

He came to with a vague idea that the Singer Building had toppled over and landed on top of him. He was a flattened heap upon the carpet, occupying the exact spot where he had fallen, and a low moan



"Stay put, McKintsky," ordered the man in the chair. "We're going to have a chat, and you're going to talk about Nick Schenk, or else—"

escaped him as he struggled up into a sitting position with the idea of taking to his surroundings.

Supine in a brocade-covered armchair, a dark-haired, dark-complexioned individual was regarding him with quiet amusement through gold-rimmed glasses.

"Stay put, McKintsky!" ordered Charles J. Garson, alias Mister X. He was holding Morgan's snuff-box as in a smooth, sharply hand, and the gun was trained upon the person of the sweating gorilla.

"Say, what's all this about, mister?" blundered Morgan, trying to pull a handkerchief but he couldn't have talked his way out of a paper bag. "Looks like I walked into the wrong apartment—"

"Shut your trap!" rasped Mister X, talking language the other understood. "Owe me fifty more bags, and I'll kick your face in! I know you, Morgan, and you know me, an' quit kidding! Nick Schenk's pretty smart, but he ain't smart enough to put a snuff-box over on Captain Japs! Baby Garson tried to snook me, but I takes more than a kifle to go through a steel mesh vest!"

"What, can you beat that?" gasped McKintsky, his great mouth gaping like a cavern. "Now, ain't that one? You always was pretty smart, cap, and—"

"Shut up!" snarled Mister X, looking raspy. "What took you and the other pals to the Golden Grill to-night?"

"You can snook me, cap," Morgan drawled, looking ludicrously innocent. "The boss don't tell me nothing about his affairs. My job's to take orders."

"And you had orders to rub me out to-night." It was a statement rather than a question, and the undercover man impaled Morgan with a glacial stare. "Ain't that so, you see?"

"What, you, I guess so, cap," drawled Morgan, like a small boy making a shy admission. "Yeeh," he went on, "that's what I got paid for."

"Says, Morgan, I see," murmured Mister X. "That's what you got paid for."

Flushing Morgan's gun upon the mantelpiece, he took a cigarette out of his case, and lit it up. Then, meditatively, he hattered to throw the burnt match into the

grate, and in that instant Morgan McKintsky leapt to his feet and tore across the room like a maddened horse, teeth bared, a needle-pointed stiletto grasped in his upturned fist.

Mister X did not turn to face the killer. Instead, he snatched up the .45, measured Morgan in the mirror, and fired three shots over his shoulder; and when, a second or so later, he passed down at the corpse, he gave a shudder of repugnance and felt physically sick.

The swinish face of the killer was not nice to look at—what there was of it. Morgan, it seemed, had a fancy for explosive bullets.

THE STICK-UP

In addition to a heavy rifle in an exclusive West End hotel, Oscar Carr had secured a mansion in Park Lane for a period of six months. His wealthy party was to be in the nature of a house-warming; also, killing two birds with one stone, he wished to celebrate the conference that had brought together all the dominant diamond magnates of the world.

Bearing out Nick Schenk's prediction to Carr, early on in the evening, it became obvious that the party was going to be a brilliant function; brilliant in every shade of the term, for the ladies, most of

The Compliments of the Season

To My Readers

WELL, here we are again—Christmas on top of us! How time flies! But what does it matter if you can keep young? Anyway, here's wishing you all A Merry Christmas and a jolly good time—and that goes for authors, artists and everybody else connected with The THRILLER Library as well as my readers. May you get all the good things you wish for yourselves.

And, talking of good things, may I draw your attention to the two announced in the next column? The **SEXTON BLAKE ANNUAL**, at 3/6d., is packed tight with the first-class detective stories which have made the name of Sexton Blake deservedly famous over the whole English-speaking world. Isn't that a tip-top present for somebody?

The **POPULAR BOOK OF BOYS' STORIES** is its equal, but in a different sphere. It is one long thrill from cover to cover, with many sterling adventure yarns calculated to make any boy forget even the catkins on the roadside. It's a bargain at 2/9d., and no boy could wish for a better book this Christmas—or any other Christmas.

In next week's THRILLER Library your old friend **NORMAN CONQUEST** gets busy again on the trail of Humphrey Piggott, the man who worked the stolen radium mine in the Welsh Hills with kidnapped labour. You remember the admirable Mr. Piggott, of course. But you thought he was dead, didn't you? So did Norman Conquest.

One dark night a maneled man arrived at the nursing home

of Dr. Zinkola—a house of glass, guaranteed not to shut out the ultra-violet rays, and so on. It glowed in the night like a beacon, luring him to the spot. He collapsed when he got there. Dr. Zinkola didn't know him, but found in his pockets the visiting card of Norman Conquest and Conquest's keys. Had the famous 1944 visited him?

The doctor was a crook and a fake and eager for easy money. He thought he'd find wads of it in Conquest's flat, Underneath the Arches, where Norman dreamed his dreams away. Only when he got there he was due for a shock. And what actually happened, and how Mr. Piggott came alive again, you will find in next week's brilliant, long complete **NORMAN CONQUEST** story, "THE HOUSE OF A THOUSAND LIGHTS," by Berkeley Gray.

Make sure of your copy.

The Editor

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to: "The Thriller" Office, The Publishing House, Farringham Street, London, E.C.4.

Next week's THRILLER Library will be an extra Thursday, December 12th.

IF IN DOUBT—

what to give for Christmas, here are Two First-Class Suggestions that will SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS

THE
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A G-MAN COMES TO TOWN

(Continued from previous page.)

them startlingly beautiful in their dark, Southern way, were smothered with diamonds and other precious stones. The ostentatious display of such fabulous wealth was vulgar, flamboyant, but to one in the laughing, chattering company seemed to suffer from a jarring note.

There was a hushlike hush at the far end of the ball-room; at the opposite end, high up in the mezzanine gallery, a famous band played anything from waltz tunes to red-hot jazz.

The party was small and select, numbering no more than fifty persons, so the waltzes, perhaps a score in all, had ample leisure in which to stand about the room and watch everything that was going on. And they didn't miss much. A mild red, they all looked unusually bright for men of their obnoxious calling; and the ugly badge in the left shoulder of their dinner-jackets could be accounted for in only

one of two ways: either the tailoring was faulty, or the gun-holder was a poor fit. Occasionally, as the night progressed and nothing untoward disturbed the quiet fun, Oscar Gar would stroll across the ball-room and join the head waiter at the buffet.

"Nice work, Nick!" he drawled, towards midnight. "They wouldn't try pulling a fast one now, would they?"

Nick Schenk, his dress-suit rather shabby, a maphin over his arm, gave a quiet, confident laugh.

"I'll say not, Oscar," he drawled. "I told those Cockney rats what to expect if they tried anything to-night! Stand on me, brother! Didn't you feed me plenty dough for protection?"

"Plenty's right!" muttered Gar, thinking of the £20,000 that had changed hands that evening.

It was eight minutes off midnight, just as a waltz was about to strike up, when the sharp report of a shot rang out, and the leader of the band clutched at his chest, reeled drunkenly, and crashed back into the semicircle of musicians behind him.

"Stay put, everyone!" ordered Nick Schenk, mounted upon a chair by the buffet, a sub-machine gun tucked under

his arm. (The gun, packed in a suitcase, had been behind the counter all the evening.) "Look at the waltzers!" he roared on, his ringing voice echoing through the lofty apartment. "Get an evildoer of those babies—then get your hands warring, and back to the wall! That goes for the lot of you—men and women! Ain't those waltzers just cute? Look at 'em, folks!"

They looked, the women screaming when they saw that the waltzers, who had donned black masks, were covering their eyes with revolvers, each man having a gun in either hand.

"Go to it, boys!" ordered Nick Schenk. "Don't stand anything from those bossy wags! Shoot to kill! That goes for the damn, too!"

By this time two suspects had spread a large tablecloth in the middle of the dance floor.

"Listen, folks!" cried Nick from behind a bar chair. "You're going to strip down of jewellery and toss the stuff into that tubercle! If any guy or dame gets shy of parting, they're backed for a slab in the morgue! That's the only warning you'll get from me. Go ahead, boys! Keep the trigger-fingers twishing, and place your staps where they'll do most good! O.K.!"

It was then one minute to twelve, and as the stroke of the hour there drove into the small ornamental garden at the rear of the mansion a plain motor-car, which came to a standstill outside the scullery door. The vehicle, the size and shape of a small park-ambulance, had an official appearance about it. It could easily have been mistaken for a police ambulance. Seated at the wheel was a man in first blue uniform and peaked cap.

The scullery door opened, and a shadowy figure gave a low, cautious whistle and beckoned the driver inside. Slipping out from behind the wheel, the latter leapt to the grass fringe and darted through the doorway, running full on into a paraffin pump in the law which dragged him into a still, silent trap.

The next moment deft fingers were stripping him of his uniform; two minutes later he was bound with thin copper wire and gagged with a towel and a piece of carbolic soap. A little time after that he was curled up in a roomy, old-fashioned copper, with the lid clamped on him.

As eight minutes past twelve there came the sound of running feet, and through kitchen and scullery there streamed about a score of waiters all wearing black frocks.

"Everything O.K., Jimmy?" hissed one of them to the trim figure at the wheel of the van.

"Sure!" returned the latter as the party pushed into the interior of the van. "Give me the wire."

The passing of three seconds; then: "Best 5, Jimmy?" came the order; and the rear door closed, a key turned in the lock.

The driver reached Scotland Yard and the hands of the Ben pointed to the hour of two when the plain van pulled up before the side entrance.

At once a strong cordon of uniformed constables appeared out of the shadows and surrounded the vehicle. Armed with Service revolvers, they were silent and grim of count. A tall, black-nosed inspector with the face of a headman saluted the uniformed figure at the wheel.

"Everything correct, Mister X?" he whispered.

A sardonic glint in his blue eyes, Mister Knapp nodded quickly and rapped upon the front panel of the van.

"She, open up, you mag!" he called, with a marked Brooklyn accent. "Snap out of it!"

Mister X continued to smile as he waited for the door to be unlocked. This was the type of joke that appealed to his sardonic sense of humour; it was putting a hat one over on Nick Schenk and his mob, the Chicago wire guys who rated the London police as a bunch of saps. He wondered what would be their reaction when they found themselves delivered at Scotland Yard, forty-odd miles from Scarborough Dock, a lonely little village on the Essex marshes, where they had a temporary hide-out.

Nick Schenk, in his crazy passion for Sally Blossom, according to improve her with his status as a Big Shot, had told her about the close-up he planned to pull at Oscar Gar's mansion in Park Lane, explained how he was going to throw a snare into the party by shooting the band

leader, lift the jewels, and make a slick getaway in a fake ambulance; and Sally, the vamp, had led to him in getting the information to Mister X, who, on his part, had gone to work in his smooth way and brought off a wholesale capture, a real "pitch."

Again he rapped on the front panel of the van. "Make it snappy, you egg! We're at Scarborough!"

"O.K., Jimmy—O.K.!" Then the key turned in the lock, and the rear door swung open to its full span.

The moon, sailing out from a bank of dark cloud, shed her white radiance upon the scullery constable, a close molecule of burly, granite-faced police officers, each levitating holding a Service revolver in threatening businesslike fashion.

The harsh voice of the inspector broke the stunted silence which seemed to have the garages in thrall.

"You chaps are under arrest!" rapped the officer, training his gun upon the ungraciously punch of "Daddy" Lane, one of Schenk's lieutenants. "If you've got any sense, you'll come quietly; but if you want a rough-house you can have it!"

"You win, I guess," drawled Dutch, his heavy eyes, crawling like black beetles, mastering the armed police officers. "On your way, boys! Don't try anything with these punks! Listen, copper!" He spit the words at the inspector. "This is a swell frame, and I'm going to live long enough to wear the liver out of the dirt, everlasting crosser who pulled it! There's a 'look' in the mob, and—"

"Get a move on!" ordered the inspector. "Aw, right!" snarled Dutch.

Snooting dully, grating obscene under-world oaths, the others trailed out in his wake, to be frisked and handcuffed and hustled none too gently into police headquarters.

"That's the lot, sir!" announced the inspector at last.

Mister X, who had been watching things from behind a stone pillar, emerged from



The finger was on

Mr. X. Another second and he would be sensation and kidnapped.

his hiding-place and stroked across to the guard, black-nosed officer.

"You are quite sure of that?" he asked.

Getting the drift of the quiet question, the inspector flushed a touch into the grey shadows of the van.

"Quite sure, Mister X!" he said. "The van's empty!" Then, seeing the cold glint in his companion's blue eyes: "What's up, sir?"

"I'm only curious about something, my dear fellow," returned Mister X, in his mild, unostentatious way. "I'm wondering what has happened to Nick Schenk, the big shot who pulled the job? He seems to have smelt a rat and given up the sap!"

"Not only that, sir," the inspector said curtly, "he must have taken the jewels with him! Someone gave him the tip that you were on the job, Mister X! Didn't get a sale!"

"It does look that way, inspector," agreed the undercover man, with a thoughtful frown. "Yet I can't think of anyone who could have tipped him off, for even the Commissioner himself didn't know of my plan until Gar's party was in full swing! It was too obvious before I showed him and arranged to have you and your men meet me here when I arrived with the van! I couldn't afford to risk a leak, yet Nick Schenk seems to have got wind of the trap!"

"It's funny, sir, very funny!" Mister X turned sharply as a tall, swept round the corner of the building and came to a standstill beside the fake ambulance. The door opened, and three stepped out into the pale moonlight a vision of breathtaking loveliness that might have been a fairy princess.

"Lo, cap!" she drawled, showing perfect teeth in a flashing smile. "Here's tricks!"

"Sally!" Mister X took her cool little hands and smiled down into her strange, feline eyes. "Where have you come from at this hour of the morning?"

"Me!" She flicked long eyelashes at him, speared his fingers cordently. "I've been to a swell party, Mister X! And did I have fun?"

"Which party was that?" Oscar Gar's!

Just for once in a way, the undercover man displayed a sign of surprise; in the ordinary way, a Swiss Indian had got nothing on him when it came to making his enemies. He made no comment until he had paid off the taxi and sent it away. Then:

"We will go up to my room," he said, a peculiar inflection in his mild tone.

Sally Blossom looked a fascinating little creature as, curled up in a big leather armchair, she smiled at the undercover man through a haze of fragrant cigarette smoke. The clinging material of her evening dress seemed to caress the rounded contours of her slender form.

"What were you doing at Oscar Gar's party?" he asked. "Did you get a special invitation?"

"I got first very thing, Master Mind!" drawled the girl, a slightly pained look in her lovely orbs. "But not from Oscar Gar. It was Nick Schenk who insisted—"

"Like that, eh?" murmured Xavier Knapp. "I thought you did all the trailing—had him eating out of your hand!"

"He's telling!" exploded Sally Blossom. "Don't I have to humour the big ape every once in a while! Master! I keep him sweet! He's plain nuts about me, and he wanted to show me what a smooth

worker he is! Most of the dances at the party were strangers to each other, and he said a strange girl wouldn't be noticed in the crowd. And he was right!"

Billy looked her sharply legs aside and gazed fixedly at her companion, a hint of admiration in her sudden eyes; though whether the admiration was for himself or Nick Schenk, the undercover man was unable to tell.

"And is he a smooth worker?" she drawled. "I'll say he is! He handled that stick-up job like a master! Having been skinned of their money and robes, the guests were ordered to turn round and lace the walls, fire elevated; then Nick made a bundle of the swag and signed to his porties to do a fast fade to the van in the garden! He was the last to leave, but he didn't go until he'd whispered a few words of love into my ear! He's fallen for me like a bag of wet cement! Gee! The nerve of that one! You know, Mister X," she went on, a soft note in her drawling voice. "I don't think I've such a hard-boiled dame as I thought! I kind of fell—"

"Sure, I know what you fell," cut in Mister X, his tone flat, expressionless. "You fell it was tough for a cool guy like that to be walking into a trap!"

Billy coloured hotly, her mouth became hard.

"No! I didn't mean that at all!" she declared sharply. "Not quite—"

"Anyway," interrupted Mister X, "you may be interested to hear that Nick Schenk has got away, and the swag gone with him!"

Billy, her lovely face pale and set, snaped forward in her chair and stared with fixed, wide-open eyes.

"A gateway, Mr. X?" she gasped.

"Yes," nodded Xavier Knapp. "And everything points to the fact that he was tipped off at the last possible moment!" he added. "All the others are in the can!"

"I wonder who tipped him off," breathed Betsy.

"I wonder, too!" said Mister X, regarding her through a cloud of blue smoke.

JUDAS GOES OUT!

THE next morning after the stick-up in Park Lane found Nick Schenk patronizing the bar of the Billy Club, in Scotch Dick. But it is doubtful whether even the Chicago police would have recognized him, for he was dressed in somber black from head to foot, his honey-coloured hair was dyed dark brown, and he wore square-framed, horn-rimmed glasses that obscured the Billy quality of his close-set eyes.

There were two persons in London who might have seen through the simple disguise: one was Captain Jago, the other Oscar Carr. The latter, he told himself, would not dare speak to the cops, having in mind the murder of the pretty Cape girl; as to Captain Jago, who was masquerading as Charles J. Carson, Texas oil man, Nick had plans for dealing with him.

Nick, of course, was still under the impression that Betsy Garran had misled the killing of Jago; he was equally certain that Jago was masquerading as John J. Carson, Texas oil man. He had yet to learn that "John J. Carson" was Mister X, undercover man, and the revelation, when it came, was to jar him to the back teeth.

Nick, smiling the smooth work of Mister X in the previous night's "pinch," had a strong hunch that Mister X and Jago were working hand in hand against

the syndicate. He'd thought over the situation during the night, and towards dawn he hit upon the idea of kidnapping Jago, and through the medium of Jago, going to work upon Mister X. He'd make the undercover guy listen to reason, force him to lay off the syndicate till they'd cleared up half a million or so! Else X was going to be just too hot for Jago. It wasn't a new scheme, but it came off if the situation was accompanied by an ear, or a finger, or something. Just to show the kidnappers meant business.

He joined Betsy Blossom a little later in the morning, his eyes, shining through his square-framed glasses, devouring her bold, beautiful beauty. She seemed to have been more lavish with her make-up than usual, and her lips wore a red wash, just as Nick Schenk liked them.

"Listen, kid!" he drawled contently. "I got a swell idea for putting the finger on this undercover dude who calls himself Mister X! I figured it out in the night—"

"Av, pipe down, you big ape!" snapped Betsy, her voice dripping with sneering contempt. "Listen, hoodlum, give your ears a chance! The papers say the boys who pulled the Oscar Carr job are in the can—"

"Yeah, sure, honey!" roared Nick. "Looks like this smooth article from the Yard pulled a fast one! But he wasn't fast enough for me, baby! Not on your life!"

"How come?" whispered Betsy, giving a slight curve to the large, fleshy hand resting upon her knee. "Gee! You're a smart cat, Nicky!"

"I gave the smartie the max, all right!" grinned Nick, pressing himself. "You remember I stayed behind to have a chat with you? Well, when I got into the garden the man had gone without me! Can you beat that, gorgeous? I guess the boys, who'd been hitting the booze all evening, just paid into the man and covered! It's as dumb as hell's coal-water in that man, so I'll bet they didn't notice I wasn't there till they found themselves at police headquarters! And then, you can bet your life they acted dumb when they were grilled by the cops! My boys wouldn't squeak!"

"How did you get away with the stuff?"

"That was dead easy," answered Schenk. "I found a cap, overall, and a couple empty petrol cans in the garage, and me and the cans did a quiet fade! You'd never guess what I'd got in those cans, I guess! I loved, giving her a shy, affectionate nudge with his elbow.

"Wasn't that plenty cute, sweetest?"

"Yeah, plenty cute, honeybunch!" purred Betsy. "And if you dig me again I'll bounce that brass knocker of your dime, you handsome warthog!" she promised. Then, softening, smiling tenderly into his troubled countenance: "You're a smart egg, Nicky! What chance does this punt from Scotland Yard stand with you? You're used!"

"I aim to put the finger on Mister X through Captain Jago! Part of all I want Jago and hand him over to Judas True for treatment!"

"Judas True, Nicky?" Her voice held a caress as she asked the question.

"Yeah, Judas!" Nick Schenk gave a laugh of quiet amusement. "Nice guy, Judas! He's been on my pay-roll for years, yet I wouldn't trust him as far as I can throw Brooklyn Bridge! He wanted for a Prince Blackmail mob for a time, and now he knows more about torture than Chin Li Moon himself, and he

knows plenty! As I say, I hand Jago over to Judas True for treatment!"

Betsy nodded, her face pale under the heavy coating of make-up. Unlike Nick Schenk, she knew that it was Mister X, not the late Captain Jago, who was wanted for medication. Yes, she was certainly pale, but there was no outline of pity in her strange, feline eyes.

"When do you pull the switch?" She appeared to be only politely interested in his affairs.

"I can't say off-hand," returned Schenk, lurching tobacco into a new leather pipe. "But it'll be soon!"

"What's the big idea?" asked Betsy, staring at the briar. "The pipe, I mean! Trying to look a man, or something?"

Nick Schenk went brick-red at the insult, and a large hand pulled itself into a fist. Many a nail had had her pain pushed in far less than that, thought Betsy. Then, recovering himself, he bowed his teeth in a somewhat lustrous grin.

"You sure think up some swell cracks, honey," he drawled. "That's because you're class, I guess! Listen, kid! I ain't ever smoked a pipe in my life; it's always a twelve-inch cigar with me! I'm famous for my smokes! I'm being cute, see? Anyway, a dollar cigar wouldn't match these gorgeous duds! But about the switch job! I've got a date with a guy in the bar, and by the time I'm through



everything will be straightened out! I hate leaving you, baby, but that's how it is! I'll be seeing you later!"

"I'm going places, too!" drawled Betsy, dismissing him with a languid wave of her pretty hand. "On your way, punk!"

Nick Schenk heaved a lustrous sigh as he stood up, the vocabulary "punk" searing his nerve-ends.

"You've got me on the rack, baby!" he said. "But you're swell, real class, and I'm crazy about you! I'll be seeing you!"

Then, blowing a smacking kiss from his finger-tips, he waddled off towards the bar.

Perched upon a high stool at the mahogany counter, a glass of soda water in front of him, Judas True was immersed in the latest report issued by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. He felt drawn upon the subject, and subscribed handsomely to the funds of the society. A man of distinctive stature, he

had a long face, eyes like colorless marbles, and neither eyebrows nor lashes. An abnormally small head, completely bald, was covered with tightly stretched yellow skin, as were his skeleton features. His voice, soft yet deep-toned, was the only pleasing thing about him.

He glanced up from the R.S.P.C.A. report as Nick Schenk bore down upon him, nodded silently, but uttered no other greeting.

"Where your poison, Ju?" drawled the big shot, after he'd ordered himself a bottle of light ale, an innocuous beverage that would go well with his favored garb.

"Yes," answered Judas True, with a slow nod of his shiny head.

"We've got to have a straight-up cut," Schenk went on, "driven by a guy we can trust to the limit! Do you know anyone who runs a number-one, Ju?"

"Yes," returned Judas True at once. "His name's Shilly Griffin, and he lives down Stepler's way! I'll get in touch with him! When do you pull the job?"

"Tonight, if our backs in," answered Nick. "It all depends upon Jago! If he takes supper in the grill-room of the Royal we're on velvet! Let's drink to the smash, Ju!"

He was already late for a party, he said. In order, Mister Carson, that no delay should occur, I bring to you the letter myself!" He tossed once more and surrendered an expensive parchment envelope to the other. "I am delighted to be of service!" he boomed, writing thickly and.

The wild blue eyes of Mr. X became thoughtful as he studied the inscription upon the envelope: Charles J. Carson, Esq., Personal, New York.

Using a silver fruit-knife, the undercover man slit the flap and withdrew a square sheet of paper which he spread out on the table before him. Like the envelope, the paper was a first quality parchment. The message ran:

"My Dear Jago—The chief having had no word from either you or R.R. since you left Chi, I becoming worried as hell about you, I've been sent over to make contact. But I'm keeping under cover, just in case anything screwy's happening. Meet me at 12:30 (after midnight) round the corner from your hotel, in Clark Street. Near the telephone call-box on the seventh. Yours,

"HARVEY T. NELSON."

The name of Harvey T. Nelson meant nothing to Mister X, but he at once came to the conclusion that he was an officer from police headquarters in Chicago. Knapp had gone no thought to the American end of the affair, but the arrival of Harvey T. Nelson on the scene came as no surprise to him, now that it had happened. The Chicago police, it seemed, had been kept in after darkness over the happenings of the past week or so; Shilly Blossom had not called headquarters, and Captain Jago had been in no condition to do so.

Charles J. Carson, also Mister X, looked at his massive gold hunter.

"Just time for a cigar," he mused, his eyes thoughtful behind the gold-rimmed glasses. Dark-skinned, short-haired, immaculate in evening clothes of American cut, he appeared a person of quiet elegance as, with a genial smile, he accepted a light from the obsequious young waiter who was hovering at his elbow. There was nothing high-brow about the oil millionaire!

It was on the stroke of twelve-thirty when Mister X lurked into the shadow of Clark Street and stroled towards the public call-box that stood upon the corner of Plum Alley, a short cut-to-cut. Even in the main thoroughfare there was little traffic at that hour of the night; Clark Street was deserted. Cf Harvey T. Nelson, or any one else, there was no sign.

Reckless the telephone box, Mister X paced in its radius of light and proceeded to re-read the note—and in those moments, as he perused the bold writing, there slowly rose inside the call-box the figure of a man, for all the world like a Jack-in-the-Box.

Silently, noiselessly, the door swung open and a hand swept upwards, and Mister X was still oblivious of his danger when he received a smashing blow to the base of his skull which dropped him into a stiff, stiff heap.

From out of the cut-to-cut swept a dandified car, pearl-grey in color, and the clock outside the Royal indicated the hour of 12:40 as the saloon swung into the main thoroughfare and joined the meagre stream of traffic travelling eastward, towards the City.

Some folk swept themselves back to consciousness, others rose, and yet a third



It was Dick Schenk's idea of humor—and business—to hold up the swell party he had been paid to "protect." And he did it slickly. "All the jewelry, folks, please," he said, "and no tricks."

"You know that I'm a territorial," returned his companion. "Neither do I smoke! Also, I'm a vegetarian, and the enemy of intoxication! Cruelly to dumb animals appeals me! I take it," he ran on, "that you wish to see me upon business?"

"Yeah," said Nick, lowering his voice and running a casual glance round the bar. "It's a smash job, and the mug gets handed over to you for treatment! The guy's staying at the Royal. He's registered as Charles J. Carson, Texas oil man, but he's really Captain Jago in disguise!"

"The Chicago cop?"

"Yeah," nodded Schenk. "How's the set-up, Ju?" He spoke rapidly for about five minutes, and during the mental the parchment face of Judas True did not change in expression; it remained calm and intelligent, like the face of a Chinese philosopher. "Swell idea!" asked Schenk, reaching for his beer.

"By all means!"

"What's your poison?" asked Nick, bringing out a fat wad of notes. "Let's celebrate the occasion, old-timer!"

"Very well," agreed the professional targeteer, showing the slightest trace of enthusiasm. "I will have a bottle of soda water! A large one!"

THE SMASH.

Mrs. Christian J. Carson, also Mister X, undercover man, had reached the coffee stage of a light after-theatre meal when Louis Varner bore down upon his table.

"Good-evening, brother!" drawled Charles J. Carson, with his unmistakable Texas accent. "Anything on your mind?"

"Good-evening, m'sieur!" bowed the famous maître d'hôtel. "A gentleman left a letter with the commissaire, ordering that it should be delivered without delay.

school immediate during morning; but Mr. X indulged in none of these things. Instead, he flashed his eyes in Stern anger and let drive with a torrent of invective that would have put even a Tennessean to shame.

Strapped to a cheap pine-wood armchair, he was a helpless prisoner, unable to move a limb, or tight over his bonds. Not that the bonds troubled him much. It was his right foot that was driving him to a point of frenzy.

His shoes and socks having been stripped off, his naked foot had been lashed securely to a common iron mud-scraper with a length of thin steel wire, so that the foot stayed parallel with the red brick floor. Immediately beneath the foot a fire of twigs and shavings had been made, and the small amount of fuel that was fed to it from time to time sustained a steady blue flame which heated slowly at the sensitive sole of the foot.

Xavier Knapp had heard many ugly yarns about this favorite Chinese torture which had sent many a poor devil raging mad. It has been said that the stench of burning flesh—his own—tames a man's brain.

The strained face of Mister X was moist and shivered as he looked round at the campers, the blue area behind the gold-rimmed glasses which, as he-chips, the half-tipped mouth a grin against his face.

The color, a damp and frosty hole, was illuminated by a glancing of lamp. In the glaucous, yellowish glow, the prisoner took stock of the others, four persons in all; a fat little man in corduroy jacket, a selected convict, with shagreen features and a small black head, a stocky young chap in evening clothes, and a scruffy, somewhat individual wearing threadbare trousers and a greasy cap.

The fat man he knew to be Nick Schenk, despite his disguise, the skeleton and the drowsy eyes were strangers to him, although he felt certain that the latter was "Harvey T. Nelson," who left the match race at the hotel; the fourth member of the party he had known for some time.

He was Shifty Griffin, the crook motor driver Mister X had saved from a long term of imprisonment over the killing of Morris Melton; Shifty Griffin, whose pearl-gray suit had delivered the corpse of Charles J. Carson, alias Captain Jago, to the door of Scotland Yard. No sooner did Mister X recognize Shifty in the dim light of the cellar than he gazed hard into the other's narrow, deep-set eyes, and what he saw in the steady depths was anything but reassuring, a glint of mockery and warning.

A laugh of ironic amusement broke from Nick Schenk as he watched Judge True

drop in his knees and feed fuel to his little bonfire.

"I shall attend to your other feet later on, Captain Jago," said Judge, his tone and manner calm, matter-of-fact. "After that, unless you listen to reason, your hands will receive treatment! There is—don't you agree?—a beautiful simplicity about the small twig fire? There are, of course, less pleasant methods of Colonial punishment—". He uttered, fed more fuel to the tiny bonfire, and scowled towards the loss of the Crime Syndicate. "This gentleman," he went on, watching a brown tongue of flame leap upwards and curl round the captive's foot, "this gentleman wishes a slight service of you, Captain Jago!"

"Ah, get down to cases!" droned the big stork. "Listen, copper! I'm Nick Schenk, just in case you don't know, and cops are poison in my system! You'd do as I say, Jago, or take what's coming to you!"

"What do you want me to do?" asked Mister X, gazing at his undertip, stifling a groan of agony.

"You're going to write to your pal Mister X, the undercover guy at headquarters," said Schenk, a snarl in his voice. "He's got to lay off the Crime Syndicate during a clear-up of this city, Jago! Let him pull a fast one, like he did at Oscar Galt's dump, and it'll be curtains for you, copper! Curtains with Chinese trimmings, if you know what I mean! Tell him that! Got me?"

Mister X, his grey face running with moisture, gave a slow nod of his head. He looked limp, vacant-eyed, on the verge of passing out; it was with a superhuman effort that he sat back in the chair and took a grip upon his fading senses.

"I advise you to keep awake, my friend," said Judge True, in his drowsed, pleasant voice. "It will save me the trouble of roasting you—Chink fashion!"

"The idea doesn't smell good to me, Nick," said Mosey Quade, lighting a stik-tipped cigarette. "D'you think this British undercover guy will play ball, even if he does promise to lay off the syndicate? Not on your life!"

Nick Schenk thought that one out. "I guess it don't seem so hot to me," he confessed. "But don't forget that we've got a small hostage in Jago!"

"Sure we have," agreed Mosey Quade, smiling his slow, killer's smile, "and it was a simple match at that! What's the matter with smothering this undercover fella with it?"

"That ain't going to be so simple, Mosey," droned Nick Schenk. "This Mister X is a real hot number at disorganizing himself; he ain't the same guy twice in a row! One day a lawyer dines into the witness-stand—that's Mister X! Next time it's a monk or a nun, or a tough guy from the East End, maybe! Mister X again! Three of the cops have been banging Scotland Yard all the time, but they're drawn a blank! They don't know what they're looking for! He's a mystery man! So we've got one helluva chance of smothering him!"

"I guess you're right," agreed Mosey Quade. "I'll say we'd give real dough to get the hooks on that smother article!"

"Pretty dough!"

"O' much, g'v'ner?" It was a Cockney voice that put the question—the lanky voice of Shifty Griffin. He was flushed and bright-eyed, his expression a mixture of avarice and cunning. "O' much?" he repeated, coming out of the shadows.

The Americans exchanged stiff, cautious glances.

"What d'you want to know for, anyway?" demanded Nick Schenk.

"I might be able to deliver the goods, g'v'ner," answered Shifty, with a crafty leer. "I only said I might; it all depends, like! What's it worth to me if I deliver Mister X into your hands?"

"Do that very thing," answered Nick Schenk, and you're on a hundred pounds!"

"Make it five hundred, g'v'ner," grinned Shifty, "and we'll call it a deal!"

"O.K.," nodded Schenk, who was prepared to pay a thousand for the body of Xavier Knapp. "When can you deliver the goods?"

"Right now!" grinned Shifty, pointing a grimy finger at the limp figure in the chair. "That's Mister X, g'v'ner, and I'll prove it!"

ENIGMA!

Mister X passed out with the drone of Shifty Griffin's Cockney voice coming faintly to his hearing. The torture inflicted by Judge True's little fire must have scathed his brain. Beginning consciousness, he recalled how, in drowsy fashion, he heard Shifty telling his story about the night of the murder, when he found the corpse of Captain Jago in his car, buried in the back. Shifty told of his meeting with Mister X, explained how he had been sworn to secrecy by the undercover man. He, Shifty, was given orders to forget all about the dead body of Captain Jago. And what was the big idea? Since the night of the murder, declared Shifty Griffin, Mister X had been masquerading as Charles J. Carson, alias Captain Jago.

All this Mister X recalled as, in characteristically fashion, he recovered consciousness without any long-drawn-out preliminaries. His brain was clear as he proceeded to take a view about things. One thing struck out like a sore thumb; he was in one of the lightest corners of his life.

The cell was in complete darkness; the acid smell of paraffin oil suggested that the lamp had but recently burnt itself out. He was still lashed to the chair, but now the metal mud-scraper was cool to his scorch feet. Judge True's little bonfire was a patch of white ash.

Then, after what seemed an age, a key turned softly in a lock, and from the far end of the cellar a disc of white light lobbed its way across the filthy flooring and came to rest upon the helpless "ears of Xavier Knapp."

From the lanky blackness behind the torch the low, droning voice of Shifty Henson broke the stillness.

"It's Shifty, Mister X!"

"Come right in, Shifty!" invited the undercover man, a curious inflection in his tone. "Is Nicky with you?"

Shifty did not answer at once, but stopped abruptly in her stride, as though taken off her guard. There was a hard note in her voice when she spoke.

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"No, Nicky is not with me, Mister X," she said, walking toward him. "He's waiting at the Skilly Club, with Money Quade and the others! I've just come from there!"

"To make sure I haven't got away?" suggested Mister X, with a short, metallic laugh.

"Sure," drawled the girl, after a moment of silence. "Something like that! I didn't know about the smash until an hour ago! Say, she went on, her words coming in a terse whisper, "what makes you so sure that I'm a double-crossing tramp?"

"It struck me as funny," explained Xavier Kneak, "the way Schenk looked out of the picture on the night of the Oscar Gar stickup! It occurred to me that he might have been tipped off by someone in the know!"

"Sure, it was funny," agreed Sally, remembering what Schenk had told her about his lucky getaway. "I've had a hunch that you figured I was 'in' with Nick! Wait, Mister X," she pursued, going to work upon his wire bonds with a pair of strong clippers. "you may be a swell undercover guy, but you're just another sap where a girl's concerned! Sit still, damn you!" she ordered sternly, as he began to fidget.

Shaking to her knees, she snipped away with her clippers and freed his feet, but no word of sympathy came from her tightly compressed lips. Next, opening her cautious handbag, she produced ointment, lint, and a small medical case, and it was to a grim and forbidding silence that she attended to his tormented foot, working with the calm austerity of a trained, untroubled nurse.

"It's sweet of you—" began Mister X. "Like hell it is," snapped Sally Mossom. "Get your doctor to take care of that hoof as soon as you get back to headquarters!"

Ignoring his renewed thanks, she stood up, brushed dust from her skirt, and flashed the touch at her watch.

"The gentles won't be back for another hour," she said, cold and impersonal, "but don't waste any time getting clear of this dump! Here, take the torch! So-long!"

"Sally!" cried Kneak, wincing as he stood upon his raw foot. "Listen, kid! Sally!"

"Good-morning, Mister X!" she flung over her shoulder as she strode across the cellar.

The next moment the door closed with a decisive little slam.

GANGSTER'S LOVE.

As unscrupulous as the end of Nick Schenk was regarded with mistrust and suspicion, the big shot found it hard to believe that within the ranks of the Crime Syndicate there lurked a speaker a double-crossing cat, a "yak," who appealed to the cops. It went against the grain to admit, even to himself, that one of the mob had nerve enough to risk the consequences of betraying the great Nick Schenk, whose black hatred of speakers was known throughout the underworld of New York and France, where he had ruled the Blackbirds like a czar during the prosperous Prohibition period.

The police, of course, were his natural enemies, but informers he hated with a dark intensity which could only be satisfied with death in its more violent and lurid forms. A dead habit would have been a luxury for a speaker where Nick was concerned; even slow death by torazine did not wholly appease his

maniacal rage he harbored against those who sought to betray him.

Yet, in spite of his unconquerable attitude towards informants, everything pointed to the fact that a leak was busy within the Crime Syndicate.

First, there was the Oscar Gar job, when a dozen smart eggs had walked into a trap; next came the arrest of Prince McCall, just as Lord Luckley was about to part with \$400,000 for a cargo of stony mining shares. Then came Carlo Leach, who was plucked with waste of wide currency in his possession, and now Money Quade and two fast workers had been caught while pulling a slick-up job at Casiers, the famous jewelers in Bond Street.

In every case the gangsters walked into a trap, and always there was a quiet individual with cold blue eyes hovering in the vicinity of the "smash" and so smooth were the arrests that Nick Schenk could smell the technique of Mister X, which



Nick Schenk had a car waiting for Sally Mossom outside Scotland Yard. It looked bad for Sally.

meant that the undercover man was being tipped off about the inside plans of the syndicate.

"Smart egg, Mister X," drawled Nick, talking to himself, "but still I agree there's something sneaky about the way he got out of the cellar that time! Unless he can do miracles," he added, his mouth stretching into an ugly, threatening grin, "and hell! here to be plenty good at that, next time I got my hooks into him! And there's something else, honey," he pursued, his bold gaze upon Sally Mossom's revealing curves. "I'll get Judge Tray to think up something real hot in Chinese costume when I find the two-timing palooka who put that one over on me! Mister X didn't get away on his own!"

Nick's party, seven in number, were seated round a low Mahon table in the lounge of the Skilly Club. Like the big shot himself, each of his lieutenants were wearing a simple but effective disguise. He wanted Silver's admission to midnight, and the emergency meeting, called by Nick, was to conclude at twelve o'clock.

The club was stuffy and crowded, but,

even so, the members did not encroach upon the big shot's confidence.

"Listen, you guys," drawled Schenk, his blue eyes narrowed as he looked round through square-framed glasses, "I've got some big news for you! This Mister X is in the way, and I aim to have him destroyed! And plenty soon!"

His lieutenants made excited noises and flashed gold teeth at him, but Sally, curled up in a leather armchair, did not look up. Her eyes closed, her cutting lashes throwing a shadow upon her cheeks, she looked like a beautiful tired child.

"Spill it, boss," urged Bugs Slutz, ex-beer baron, who reclined on a car in a gaudy bottle of long ago. "You mean you've put de finger on dis undercover punk?"

"Just that very thing, Bugs," drawled the big shot, "and I'm going after Mister X in a big way! Got a load o' him!" He sat forward in his chair and lowered his voice to a cautious whisper, "even though the lounge was ringing with discordant voices and spasmodic outbursts of laughter. His two lieutenants looked towards him over the table, but Sally did not stir. "I've got a warner inside police headquarters," he announced, looking from one crook to another, enjoying the effect of his words. "Right inside headquarters!" he stressed.

"Oce, boss," breathed Bugs Slutz, his mean little eyes shining with admiration. "You gotta killer at Scotland Yard!"

"Yeah, on the premises, Bugs," nodded Nick Schenk. "He's a screamer on special duty! I can tell him this morning, and spotted him at once! He didn't know me at first, but I soon jugged his memory plenty! I knew him years ago in the States, and the cops have still got a warrant out against him! He's worried on a charge that states him for the chair, so he'll do anything to keep my trap shut!" The big shot grinned at the

others. "And he's going to do plenty, believe me!" he vowed.

"Yes, that's well, boys," beamed Duke Sims, a product of Sun Side, New York. "How do you figure to scrub out the Mister X?"

"I'm coming to that," said Nick Schenk, his fifty eyes pock of cunning as he looked round at the circle of easy, cool faces. "Dynamite Smith—that's the one I met this morning—is one of the few officers of headquarters who got an official of this notorious Mister X, and he tells me it's going to be dead easy for him to pull the job!"

"That means this copper!" said a white-faced, emaciated young man with feverish eyes. "Hell, some folks have all the luck! I've not bumped a copper in months!"

"No, there'll be no bumping," said Nick Schenk. "Dynamite says gals and kids can be traced, and he never takes a risk! He was a bomb and dynamite expert in the States, and he's going to plant something in Mister X's office that'll blow the roof of Scotland Yard! And Mister X will be around when it happens!" The big shot grinned. "With him out of the way, he finished. 'With him out of the way, he finished.' We'll be able to get down to business!"

"When does he get the works, Nick?" asked Francis the Blade, in his cool, unexcused way.

"That depends," drawled Nick. "Dynamite Smith says he sleeps in his office most nights, so it's more than likely that he'll be dead most by the morning! What there's left of him!" He looked at his watch, frowed with annoyance when he saw that it was five minutes after midnight. "You snap, screw," he ordered abruptly, "and keep under cover till you hear from me! That won't be all the small's died down, and the croaking of this undercover guy's going to smell plenty! On your way, and keep your traps shut!"

The gangsters, poker-faced and quietly dressed, nodded to the big shot and faded out of the lounge, nondescript yet alert, their eyes always on the moon, missing nothing that went on about them.

A peculiar smile upon his lips, Nick set forward in his chair and placed a large, hairy hand upon Sally's knee. In a flash she was spring upright, her twenty eyes blazing, her body tense.

"Say, keep your paws off a dame, can't you?" she demanded. "You've got the manners of an ape, or have you?"

"Aw, honey, don't be sore at little Nicky!" bopped the big shot, pale and unrepentant. "I didn't mean nothing, honey! I didn't—I only wanted to wake you up, honey!"

"Next time," fished Sally, "send a poker round my brain, and keep those fins to yourself!"

"Aw, lass a heart, baby!" whimpered Nick. "I just can't help myself when you're around! You know I'm crazy about you! You got class!"

"What's happened to the managrie?" demanded Sally.

"The managrie, lassie?" asked Nick, claud by her allures. "I don't get you!"

"I'm talking about the bunch of gorillas you've been talking to!" explained Sally.

"Oh, those egg?" remarked Nick, with a show of indifference, but again that peculiar smile played about his thick lips.

"We just went into conference, baby, that's all!"

"Something important, I guess," said Sally, her tone softening slightly.

"No, honey; nothing important," declared the big shot, regarding her with

adoring gaze. "Just business! You looked like a little baby when you were asleep just now," he continued, almost wistfully. "Hell, I've fallen hard for you, yet you, like me around like I'm an old sock, or something! When I look at you, Beautiful, the honey makes turn sour on my stomach! I wanna be like you, who wouldn't double-cross a guy, or lose a pal to the cops! That's class, that is! And am I miss about you, honey?" He looked at her with the eyes of a spaniel. "Can't you bring yourself to like me just a bit?" he asked. "I ain't such a bad egg, not according to the rules—our rules!" Emotional, trembling, nearly articulate, he ran on: "If you could only like me just a little. But if you'd let me hold you sitt now and again, it—"

"Oh, I must go home!" cried Sally, something out of the armchair and standing herself by clatching at his arm. "Oh, Nicky!" she sobbed. "I'm a fool—a fool! A silly, sinnering, weak fool!"

And almost before he had realized what was happening, she had passed out of the lounge.

It was then twenty minutes after midnight, and at twelve-thirty she was putting through a call from a telephone booth in a life station.

"This is Sally Blossom," announced the undercover girl briskly.

"Go ahead, Sally!"

"Listen, Mister X! You're in a swell spot, and I've got to see you at once!"

"Dear, dear!" murmured the undercover man. "Blackie, my dear!"

BUY HIM

The POPULAR BOOK OF BOYS' STORIES

The Best in Adventure Fiction 2/9

"You're slated for a kill," explained Sally breathlessly, "and you're getting the works from inside police headquarters! Inside, I said! Get out of your office right now!"

A laugh of quiet amusement came to her ears.

"It all sounds very tragic and mysterious and fraught with danger," laughed Mister X.

"It's all that, and more, you see?" blazed Sally Blossom. "I must see you!"

"Sorry," returned the undercover man. "I ain't to be free until one o'clock!"

"O.K.," drawled Sally. "I'll be waiting for you on the Embankment, opposite Scotland Yard! I want to talk going inside!"

"Right-ho! I'll pick you up in a car and give you a lift home! An' now!"

"Adios!"

It was a fresh night, with banks of cloud moving peacefully across a silver sky, and Sally decided to do the short journey on foot. She walked briskly in order to clear her throbbing head, and her time was good, the hands of Big Ben pointing to the hour of one as she reached her destination.

A car was waiting at the curb opposite the Yard; a dark blue car, with no interior illumination, the latter being a precautionary measure on the part of Mister X, recalled Sally Blossom.

She hurried across the pavement, using open the door, and dived into the car.

"I'm dead on time, Mister X!" she laughed, closing the door and dropping into a corner seat.

"Yeah, you're dead on time, I guess," agreed the voice of Nick Schenk, thin and silent, like the hiss of a snake. "You're dead on time, all right, you dirty, double-crossing snaf!" Sure, you're dead on time—and how dead, you two-timing rat! Step on a bit, Spide!" He shouted as the car gathered speed and tore off along the deserted Embankment. "Ain't life swell?"

"Nicky!" improved Sally, quietly teaching his arm.

"Keep your fifty paws off me, you scum!" started the big shot, slipping her across the mouth.

"Nicky!" cried Sally.

He hit her again.

"Gee," he started, with a sobbing kind of laugh. "I think I was crazy about a tramp like you! I know there was a speaker in the mob, but I figured it was Bugs, or Frenchy, or Judas, maybe! I set a trap, spicing that bit about 'Dynamite Smith,' a guy who never existed! And I thought you were fat; snaf! all the time, sleeping like a baby!"

He gave another sobbing, lusty laugh and went on, his fifty eyes glowing red in the darkness of the car:

"I figured that the leak would tip off Mister X right away, and waited outside police headquarters in the off-chance of spotting the squawking rat! And the rat wasn't Bugs, or Frenchy, or Judas, or any of them tough eggs! No, sir!"

Leaving heavily, Nick Schenk gripped Sally's knee with a large, hot hand.

"I was you, the dame with class, the dame I was crazy about, who walked into the trap! Hell! Don't that give you a laugh, you honey tongs?"

The next moment the stiff night air was lacerated by a screech of steel, hysterical laughter, the laughter of a madman; and Sally, for once in her life, knew what it meant to be dreadfully afraid.

Shrinking back in her corner, she closed her eyes and prayed for Mister X.

GANG LAW!

MISTER X was one minute late for his appointment with Sally Blossom, and during that fractional space of time the undercover girl seemed to have vanished into thin air.

Disguised as an American newsbank, with cards and documents to prove he was Curtis Krieger, roving correspondent of the "St. Louis Star," he combed the dives and chabes of London's underworld, ostentatiously in search of copy; but his true purpose, of course, was to hear a word, to pick up the slightest clue, that would put him on the trail of the kidnaped girl.

For he had ceased no comforting illusions as to what had happened to her: Nick Schenk had laid a trap to catch the leak, and Sally had walked into it.

Right o'clock in the morning found him back at the Yard, worn out and worried, for many were the gruesome stories he had heard of Nick Schenk's may with the speaker. For those who sought to betray him he had no mercy, his last fat vengeance knew no limit.

Krieger repressed a shudder as he speculated upon the fate Nick had in store for Sally, the fascinating police spy the big shot had worshipped in his own crude way.

"I've got to save her," muttered Mister X, pale and heavy-eyed. "She's due for something worse than death!"

He looked up as someone tapped at the door.

"Come!"

The door opened to admit a portly, red-faced sergeant with a solemn manner and

THE SUBTLETY OF THE SHADOW BEATS THE CUNNING OF LI HOANG

The GOLDEN PAGODA

YOU CAN
START NOW!



YING KO CAPTURED!

There was trouble brewing in Chinatown, but just what it was no one could discover. Lesser Chinatown heard about it, for he thought crime in the guise of the Shadow. By the Chinese he was known as Ying Ko. Cranston was an endless war on crime in the hopes of finding some trace of his son, who, years before, had vanished into the underworld. Cranston had sent one of his agents, Harry Vincent, into Chinatown, to investigate matters, but he had never returned.

In his black garb of the Shadow, Lesser Cranston went to Chinatown to seek Harry Vincent. He discovered that Li Hoang, a Chinese henchman, was behind all the unrest, and that he had captured Harry Vincent.

Meanwhile, a henchman in the City, Lesser Zalook, had obtained a private detective, named Kraven, to trace Li Hoang to his lair. The Chinese bandit was blackmailing Zalook heavily, and the henchman was determined to put an end to it, if he could.

Harry Vincent was later rescued by Miss Hazen, a Secret Service agent, masquerading as a Chinese girl under the name of Miss Dean. Lesser Cranston managed to enter Li Hoang's lair and reached Vincent's cell, only to find the prisoner gone. Then the guard came and Cranston—the Shadow—was trapped!

That Mongol did not see the moving form. Cranston was adroit in that gloom. The guard's first taking of trouble arrived when he heard a hiss from the cell floor, below and behind the lantern.

Into the lantern light shined the muzzle of an automatic. It pointed squarely between the guard's eyes. Wink came, in Chinese. The Mongol's teeth chattered

A POWERFUL
STORY OF YING
KO—THE SHADOW
—IN CHINATOWN

By
MAXWELL
GRANT—

terred as he palped the dried name of the Shadow:

"Ying Ko!"
Clowed hands came upwards, one holding the gun. Fearfully the guard obeyed instructions. He let the Western slide into Cranston's empty hand. With his own hands the Mongol gripped Cranston's wrists and drew the cowed prisoner against.

There wasn't a chance for a false move during that trip. Cranston's gun muzzle was placed along the Mongol's arm, pressed straight for the fellow's heart. Trickery by the Mongol would mean a mere drop for Cranston; but it would bring death to the man who tried it.

The situation changed when Cranston was almost through to the floor. There, he coiled the lantern in one side; used his hand to gain a grip. Whispering another warning to the guard, he lowered his gun.

In an instant the villainous guard whipped out a knife, started a downward thrust for the back of Cranston's neck.

That was the longest knife jab that the Mongol had ever tried. It traveled a down foot. As the blade started its downward sweep, Cranston gave a powerful arm-swing along the floor. With his automatic he fairly swept the Mongol's feet from under him.

Likewise, the yellow man was chopped into a heading dive that carried him clear over Cranston's shoulders, straight into the blackened coil. The guard had no chance to yell, before he hit the bottom. Shoulder first, he took a jar that stunned him, while his knife rattled a tangle across the floor.

Cranston arose, stamped the metal cover into place. He had given the guard a fair test, for he had warned him not to make trouble, and the guard had agreed. If the Mongol started that plunge, he would never again fall in a promise to Ying Ko.

Cranston reached the top of the same steps. He was hoping that the lone guard's feat had been a premature one; but that was not the case. The clang of other Mongols sounded from a corridor.

Little time was wasted. It would only spread the alarm, produce a trap for Harry and the person who had rescued him. Harriedly Cranston leaped for the upper level. He was in time to reach the last stairs unobserved. There, he saw Harry and Miss Dean approaching the rotary door.

The sand level in the hang-glass showed less than a minute race. Even that period was too long. From below, Cranston could hear excited shouts in English Chinese. The men went to bring Harry to Li Hoang had found the changed condition of the coil.

Cranston's laugh sounded along the corridor. Harry and Miss Dean turned; they saw the Shadow. The girl gave a grateful gasp as the Shadow joined them. Harry heard his chief speak a name:

"Steve Holston."

The girl nodded. The whole truth dawned on Harry. He had heard of Steve Holston; she was a Secret Service agent who investigated Chinese matters.

But Harry had never realized that Myra could be Ming Dwan!

He had only the recollection that Myra had once worked with the Shadow when their paths had crossed. But Harry had not seen Myra in her Chinese make-up. He understood at last why this girl, presumably a tool of Li Hoang, had come to his rescue.

There was bedlam from the lower corridor. A horde of women was coming, headed by Chun Laro. Cranston was putting quick questions to Myra; getting prompt answers that decided his policy. He took a quick look towards the hour-glass, then planted Harry against the steel door, with orders to go through.

Then, just as Chun Laro hovered in sight, the Shadow gripped Myra and flung her across the corridor!

Chun Laro saw what happened to the supposed Ming Dwan. He gained the very impression that Cranston wanted. He thought that the Shadow was Harry's rescuer; that Ming Dwan was trying to prevent the capture.

Chun Laro aimed his revolver, pressed the trigger. Like other Chinese, he had that habit of carrying a dead chamber under the hammer. Before he could press the trigger a second time, his shot was frustrated. It was Myra's turn to spring a timely move.

Coming to her feet, the pretended Ming Dwan spring for the Shadow. Grabbing fiercely at his cloak, she cut off Chun Laro's aim. Together they formed a shield for Harry's body.

Chun Laro and a dozen others hurried forward, hoping for a fight at this quarter, since they could not fire without dropping Ming Dwan.

A last gust of wind dripped from the hour-glass. The steel door snapped about, plunging Harry through. Cranston was relieved from the burden of protecting his groggy agent. Harry's rescue was completed; he had a clear path, to carry word to others who served the Shadow.

With Ming Dwan still as his shield, the Shadow looked capable of battle. Chun Laro and those others did not guess that their clocked foe, more than themselves, was anxious to preserve the girl's life. Chun Laro himself was rooted at sight of an automatic that Cranston had drawn. The smoky Chinese was glad when he heard Ming Dwan cry in Chinese:

"Offer him life! Promise Ying Ko a hearing before Li Hoang!"

Chun Laro put the proposition in English. Coldly, the Shadow clanked his automatic; he nudged Ming Dwan away. Standing with upraised arms, he faced the Chinese horde.

Chun Laro and his crew moved forward. Bringing ropes that they had intended for Harry, they gleefully bound the Shadow in those coils. Led by Ming Dwan, they started a march with their tight-bound prisoner.

They were carrying the Shadow, helplessly, to the throne-room of Li Hoang!

LI HOANG LEARNS.

SPRANG upon his dragon throne, Li Hoang surveyed the new prisoner that his henchmen had brought him. Like Harry, Cranston met the glare of eyes that gazed from strange, angled slits, sometimes showing their peculiar whiteness.

Though Li Hoang had controlled his expression when he studied Harry, he could do so only passively when he faced the Shadow. With all his solemnity, Li Hoang felt glad. His eyes did not show it, but the light beneath that long-hanging mustache revealed a smile of pleasure.

Mongols had thrust Cranston into a beakwood chair opposite the throne. Chun Laro was talking volubly in Chinese, giving the details of the Shadow's capture. Myra Holden, as Ming Dwan, was standing at one side, an ardent listener.

Li Hoang set his lips. His face became inscrutable. He leaned from his throne to study Cranston's countenance. He could see a face—probably disguised—beneath the upturned brim of the slouch hat. It had a hawkish tinge that seemed suitable to the Shadow. But in the Shadow's eyes, glittering in the wavering light of the dragon torches, Li Hoang saw a trace of serpents.

Li Hoang raised one yellowed hand. "Speak in English," he told Chun Laro. "So that he—Ying Ko—can understand."

Chun Laro repeated his account. The version credited the Shadow with Harry's rescue; Ming Dwan with a valiant effort to prevent Harry's escape. Li Hoang accepted the story.

"I understand your surrender, Ying Ko," he announced in precise English. "You have managed, at least, to free a man who can bring others to my side. Because of that, you suppose that I shall prefer to keep you alive, rather than dead."

"Your conjecture is correct. Knowing your methods as I do," Li Hoang's tone was dry—"I presume that your men will use subtle tactics to rescue you, rather than attempt an open attack. Therefore, I shall hold you as a hostage."

The decision was the sort that Cranston expected. Whatever Li Hoang's game, Cranston knew that it was not complete. The Chinese crime wizard would prefer to continue his schemes unobscured.

That might be possible if he could starve of the Shadow's agents with proof that their chief still lived. But that would not be for long. Cranston could foresee that Li Hoang would use little time gathering loose threads, so that he could establish himself elsewhere. After that the Shadow's life would no longer be useful to him.

How long Li Hoang would allow was a matter that did not perturb Cranston. With Myra Holden on hand as Ming Dwan, the Shadow's own escape would be as simple a matter as Harry's; and it would probably lack complications.

With it all, Cranston was prepared for emergency.

Definitely he had worked against the hurried bonds with which the Mongols had tied him. In using their long ropes, they had required many coils. The more such turns, the better the chance for slack. The Shadow's present predicament was much less than even Li Hoang supposed.

Perhaps—Li Hoang's eyes were dark and steady through their slits—"was should discuss our terms alone, Ying Ko."

With a wave, Li Hoang dismissed his servants. Chun Laro and Ming Dwan among them.

"Perhaps you may prove highly useful, Ying Ko," he announced. "We have ways, in China, of acquiring services that we need. We do not offer rewards. Instead"—Li Hoang's eyes were glaring hard—"we have tortures for those who do not obey."

Cranston's gaze was uncommoved. Settling back on the throne, Li Hoang reached for the gong; gave it a savage stroke. Chun Laro appeared promptly.

"Bring the guard," ordered Li Hoang in English. "The one who was in the cell when you found the prisoner gone."

Chun Laro bowed and left. Li Hoang stared expectantly towards the door. Again Cranston shifted; this time grimly. He could see trouble when that Mongol came. Until this moment he had supposed the man still to be unconscious.

If the guard insisted that he had found the Shadow alone in the cell, Li Hoang might begin to wonder about Harry's escape. Through wondering, he could suspect Ming Dwan. That would not only deprive Cranston of his side ally in this den; it would produce Myra's immediate death.

Ropes slackened, but not enough. Cranston turned his head towards the door. He relaxed when he saw Chun Laro and others bringing in the Mongol. The fellow was slouching, barely able to walk.

Chun Laro deposited the guard at the foot of the throne. He and the others left. Again Cranston was alone with Li Hoang, save for that pitiful guard. Foolsly the man had recognized Li Hoang, and was striving to arouse himself.

Li Hoang said nothing. His eyes lowered; his lip hardened. He watched the Mongol; thereby he unwittingly gave Cranston a chance for freer motion. With a shift, Cranston lightened one coil of rope. The man slackened another.

The crippled Mongol showed a sudden burst of strength. He clutched the dragon head of Li Hoang's throne; came to his knees. In stammered, slung-up tone, he began to gasp words that Cranston caught. Those first phrases, though incomplete in themselves, were almost telltale.

"It was Ying Ko!" the wretch panted in his native tongue. "I saw Ying Ko! He made me do his bidding! If I had known—that the prisoner—"

Fiercely Cranston was wrenching with the coils. His arms were almost free. He needed one of those automatics that the Mongols had left beneath his cloak, decking him helpless. A few words more—the girl's story would be told.

It was Li Hoang who supplied the interruption.

Thrusting his left hand forward, the purple-robed Chinaman clutched the Mongol's neck, pulling off further words. With his right hand, Li Hoang drew a knife from beneath his kingly mantle.

His hands worked together, the left thrust back the unconscious head, his right drove the knife deep in the Mongol's heart. With a steady shove, Li Hoang sent the body rolling beside the throne.

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Cranshaw's activity ended instantly. He slumped back in his chair, bracing horror, as Li Hoang passed in his direction.

"That is how I deal with those who plead for mercy," sneered Li Hoang.

He passed the gang; when Chan Laro appeared, Li Hoang ordered him to admit Ming Dwan and a picked group of Mooks.

Chan Laro looked quizzically at the body of the man whom Li Hoang had murdered. Li Hoang gave a nod.

When the Mooks arrived, it was Chan Laro who beheld the worth of Li Hoang's deed. He told them that they saw the fate of those who failed Li Hoang. All the while that Cranshaw listened to Chan Laro, he kept his keen eyes on Li Hoang.

The throaty Chinaman was paying no attention. His slanted eyes were riveted elsewhere. They fixed upon Ming Dwan.

In the manner of a second Cranshaw's own attitude changed, as a terrific realization seized him.

The men that Li Hoang had failed to obtain from the bathing stonop had suddenly been furnished from another source. Myra Kelson, despite her clever acting in the part of Ming Dwan, had unwittingly given the game away.

Death threatened Myra; with it the Shadow, too, was doomed. This emergency demanded a desperate move.

With a terrific wrench, Cranshaw writhed free from the loosed cords; he thrust the coils down to his feet. An instant later—ever before Li Hoang could shoot a command—Cranshaw was coming up from his chair, lunging for an automatic.

Straight in front of Cranshaw was a square trap, set at a slight angle. He could understand its purpose. It covered the trap above the boiling vat on the floor below.

Li Hoang had that same in readiness to plunge any wild attackers through the floor, into a web that would break if a harrying body struck it.

Li Hoang grabbed for a golden cord beside the dragon throne. He fumbled it momentarily. That was the only break Cranshaw needed. The slip that Li Hoang made gave him time to cross the trap and reach the throne.

A monster scowled downed when Cranshaw lunged. An instant later the scene was changed. The Shadow's choked figure took a merry, bounding leap.

A last coil of rope had caught his feet. As the black-clad fighter took a full-sprawl on the rug, Li Hoang found the golden cord and jerked it.

Cranshaw was on his feet as the floor slid open. He gave a tremendous lurch; it did not save him. The whole trap shot away into the floor; the slabs of the boiling vat hissed wildly. Cranshaw lost his automatic; it dropped into the misty web below. Only a titanic effort saved him, temporarily.

He managed to grip the far side of the trap with his finger-tips. His body dropped downward; gone from view, he swung in peculiar fashion, depending solely upon that precarious grip.

Myra's gasp was audible. She could see those gloved fingers retaining their iron clutch. She was seized by a wild hope that Cranshaw might haul himself from the snare. But Li Hoang was prepared to settle that. With a high-pitched shout, the Chinese cross-dresser gave the cord another tug.

The snare-door splattered into view, coming with the speed of a cleaver. Its impact was sufficient to numb Cranshaw's fingers had he wanted it; but the coming rubble gave him a split-second's notice. He

loosened his grip, just as the trap-door slammed into place.

Myra caught a last glimpse of his body, headed downward far thus slender web, with the doom of burning oil beneath it. An instant later the door was closed, its high-placed rug in place.

The floor itself seemed like a deadly monster that had refused to swallow the Shadow into certain doom!

STRIFE UNDERGROUND

WHERE Myra Kelson gazed in consternation at the spot where Cranshaw had dropped from sight, Li Hoang bounded from his throne. He sprang straight for the girl. To the astonishment of his followers, he propped the supposed Ming Dwan in a luxurious chair. Myra took vicious clings grip her wrist.

This was no mock battle, like the one that she had fought with the Shadow. That struggle had assumed real character in a grim effort. Cranshaw had given a sharp rip to Myra's sleeve. When she saw that very sleeve, Myra realized why Li Hoang's stroke had come.

The seam of the sleeve had left a gap beside the girl's arm. Through that space Li Hoang had spotted white skin. Cranshaw, too, had noticed the white skin; but not until he had noticed Li Hoang's hand gaze.

The search that Li Hoang gave to Myra's collar tore away the whole side of her dress. Her sleeve fell loose, that did not matter, for she had stained her arm and shoulders with a yellow dye. The flinging of her dress did the real damage. It exposed Myra's side, almost to her hip. Chan Laro and his crew saw instantly that she was white.

Li Hoang flung Myra towards the door. She sank here, clanking her torn dress too late.

Chan Laro, anxious to copy his master's deeds of murder, whipped round a snail. He was ready to launch Ming Dwan, as Li Hoang had yelled with the Mook guard.

Before Chan Laro could drive forward, a muffled thump stopped all motion in the three-room. The sound came from below, beneath the thick-rugged floor. There was the quiver of an unearthly laugh, mocking and triumphant. Guns delivered a muffled roar from the depths. Again the Shadow's laugh thrashed stainer (with).

Li Hoang made a leap far the wall behind the throne. He swung upon the spurt that was adumbrated with a glittering pagoda, to reveal a spiral staircase. Followed by a crowd of Mooks, Li Hoang dashed downward.

Chan Laro hesitated. That was a

bad mistake. Myra was drawing a 22 revolver. It was too late for the costly movement to make his knife-thrust. He dived beyond the dragon throne, shouting for aid. Descending his knife, he drew a gun of his own.

Myra found refuge behind one of the torch-topped stators. In the light from burning flames the sad Chan Laro exchanged quick shots, without effect. Both had pointed too good a refuge.

Meanwhile, Li Hoang had visited the room before. Coming from the far side of the boiling vat, he gazed at the scene before him.

Pointed in the metal-encased web, Cranshaw lay ready for all comers. In each fat he held an automatic; on the other side of the vat crippled guards lay helpless from bullets that he had delivered.

Li Hoang's snare had failed, because Cranshaw had previously inspected it. For the first time, Li Hoang realized the fault of that ingenious web.

Cranshaw, thanks to his brief clutch at the trap, had dropped—not plunged—into the mesh. His body, stretched downward almost to the level of the web, had given the snare no job. Instead of wildly straggling to leave the web Cranshaw was resting there serenely, avoiding the target that would result if he acted in frantic fashion.

Even as Li Hoang stood, Cranshaw made a leisurely turn in the counter-clockwise direction. Li Hoang sprang back to the spiral steps; but his followers were not so wise. They shuffled forward, snoring as they came. Cranshaw's automatic spoke.

Mooks growled. The web swayed in accommodation from the recoil of

(Continued on next page.)

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Cranton's guns. There was a scream as one stumbling passed slipped over the edge and splashed into the swimming oil. That was enough for the rest of them. They followed Li Hoang in confusion, spread tips.

Almost lastly Cranton let his body turn. His roll was slow, too delayed to tangle him in the mesh. He made no such effort until he was at the inner coil. There he jolted his body sideways. A corner of the mesh split loose.

With a heave, Cranton slid downward, cleared the edge of the vat. Catching his footing, he drove for the spiral stairs. He fired upward as he began his pursuit. Those above, and the laugh that accompanied them, spurred the frenzied crew that followed Li Hoang.

Once in the three-room, Cranton saw a mad rush for the outer door. Chen Laro had joined in; he was running side by side with Li Hoang, while Myra blasted shots from her spot of safety. Unfortunately, the girl clipped neither the Chinese leader nor his lieutenant. Intervening Mongols took the bullets that she meant for the fleeing pair.

When Cranton crossed the three-room, Myra followed. Women were on the run; the chase had become a rout. It was not until they reached the crossing of the passages that they met with opposition. There Cranton pulled Myra back, as bullets whizzed from doorways along the walls.

Shoving suddenly into the passage with the revolving steel door, Cranton blasted a quick shot at a Chinese. The man sagged against the right side of the barrier, his eyes fixed towards the hearthstone above.

Again the hands had almost twiddled through. Cranton's quick shot was a timely one. As he drew back into safety, others saw the steel door turn. The body of the Mongol rolled into the breach, jamming the door and holding it half-open.

Again Cranton fired a quick barrage of shots along the sloping corridor. These bullets brought back little answer, despite the angry cries of Li Hoang and the belated shouts of Chen Laro.

They knew the Shadow's purpose. With the outside route opened, gunfire could be heard. If Harry or others were about, they would know that the road to battle was clear.

Gathering horsemen of Li Hoang prepared for a bigger battle. It came with a suddenness and size that they did not expect. A group of men appeared beyond the opened portal; they were headed by a stocky leader, whose swarthy face meant business.

Harry had done better than bring a few of the Shadow's agents. He had heard the gunfire; had passed the word aloud to Joe Carton and the Chinatown squad!

Like human rats, the Mongols took to the depths, and with them went Li Hoang and Chen Laro. Cranton saw Cranton shoot forward, following that lead, Joe headed the squad through. This was a clear shot that gave no chance for cover, and Cranton knew the route through the passages below.

Myra let the rush pass her by. Cautiously the girl waited, hoping that the Shadow would return, but knowing that, in any case, she could declare her identity to Carton.

The squad was almost out of sight, when another man came through—an arrival scarcely noticed by Myra, who took him for a plain-clothes man. The fellow was Kevin, the private detective hired by Lucia Zalkoff. Though the best to enter,

Kevin was to play a part more important than Myra supposed.

Kevin's chance came when he saw Cranton working at a black door that was marked with a golden peacock. The Chinatown squad had taken other routes, reaching up the remains of Li Hoang's island. Only Cranton had noted the importance of the black door.

The door gave suddenly. As Kevin watched, he saw Cranton pile into a room where two men were crouched close a desk. With a wild yell, the pair heaved the desk straight for the cloaked invader, then drove for a little stove. They pressed past a curtain; then footstep pounded on a stairway.

One fleeing man was clad in purple, the other had a staidish face. Like Cranton, Kevin had seen Li Hoang and Chen Laro take off in his new flight.

Cranton pursued. He was gone when Kevin came into the room. There was the roar of guns, the clatter of a heavy foot. Li Hoang and his chief lieutenant had managed a lucky escape.

Kevin decided to clear out. He shoved the overturned desk from his path. He glared sourly when he saw that the drawers had been rapped from it; that all were empty. Savage, Kevin kicked a drawer away. His disappointed look turned to a pleased one.

On the floor lay a large square envelope. It was marked, proceeding from its interior was a sheet of thin paper. With a quick grab, Kevin pocketed the envelope and hurried from the battered office.

The lucky investigator was out of sight when Cranton returned. Having learned of one new set, Cranton was confident that three would be others. He passed long enough to scour the office; finding no clues there, he headed off through remote passages.

Kevin, meanwhile, reached the only exit that he cared to use—the revolving hearthstone door where the shot Mongol lay. Peering along a side passage, he saw a plain-clothes man talking with a girl whom Kevin took for a Chinese. Hurrying past, the private detective stepped over the body of the dead Mongol.

The rest of Kevin's route brought him eventually to the abandoned curio shop where Harry Vincent had met with capture. There Kevin met a headquarters man, who eyed him suspiciously. Kevin showed a badge and credentials.

"I was supposed to join up with Inspector Carton," he explained glibly. "I had some news about a case he's working on. Just when I got here, the rumpus started. So I was going down to see what it was all about. Tell the inspector I'll be seeing him later."

The headquarters man let Kevin through. Outside, Kevin shoved his hand deep into his pocket, crinkled the envelope that he had pilfered. That was a prize that Kevin had long wanted; proof for Lucia Zalkoff that he was on the job.

Maybe the papers meant nothing; perhaps they meant a lot. That was something Kevin could find out later. His guess, though, was that he had made an excellent find.

In a sense, Kevin was right. Later, though, he was in regret that he had not left that packet for the person who rightfully deserved it—Lauron Cranton.

THE WAY OF LI HOANG.

It was a far stretch from Chinatown's (land) to the quiet suburban district where Lucia Zalkoff lived.

Spacious grounds surrounded Zalkoff's mansion. Broad lawns were quiet, streaked with darkness. The house itself was severe; its lighted windows, widely

spared, spoke of calm. Despite those outward signs, the reaction was actually a clash.

Clumps of shabby hair watched men—Zallock's own treated servants. Other garb was piled in the recesses of the porch. No one could approach that house without observation, except by utilizing the utmost stealth. Lucius Zallock was talking in chance; he feared a thrust from Li Huang.

A caravan of cars came rolling into the big drive. These were three in all—a limousine between two light coupes. The cars were recognized. Men rose from the shrubbery to signal that all was well.

Lucius Zallock stopped from the limousine.

Inside the mansion other servants stood on watch while Zallock met a slender, well-faced man who served as his confidential secretary.

"What news, Shamp?" demanded the business manager. There, in an undertone: "Has Kevin called up?"

"He did a while ago, sir," replied Shamp. "He said he would come out here later."

Zallock started upstairs; Shamp followed. They entered a little study at the rear of a second-floor hall. Zallock was about to close the door, when he raised his hand in nervous fashion, spoke the one word:

"Listen!"

Shamp listened. Like Zallock, he heard the unmistakable rumble of a car coming into the front driveway. Shamp analyzed the sound.

"It's probably a taxi," he said. "Shall I go downstairs and meet the motor?"

Zallock nodded. Shamp went downstairs, arriving there just as the door-bell rang. A servant opened the door; a stooped man entered. With one hand, he was leaning on a cane; in the other he carried a large, oblong box with a leather handle.

Shamp received the visitor kindly. Through the open front door the secretary could see men race from the bushes, ready to spring to aid if Shamp signaled.

The visitor announced himself as Eric Hardley. Hearing the name, Shamp recognized the inventor from Zallock's descriptions. Politely he invited Hardley to wait downstairs.

Zallock was waiting at the door of the study. He gave a smile that was both relieved and pleased.

"Bring Hardley up," Zallock told Shamp. "Take him into the little parlor at the second-floor front. While I am talking with him, bring the papers that you will find in File B."

Soon afterwards Zallock and Hardley were seated in the small but elaborately furnished room that the magnate had termed the "parlor." Shamp brought in the required file. Zallock spread papers on a table.

Eagerly Hardley studied the documents. They were certified by accountants who had gone over Zallock's books; but the astute magnate did not explain that his letters were falsified.

"Our business has been large," murmured Zallock, "but you can see for yourself, Hardley, that my net profits for the last seasons year were less than ten thousand pounds."

"That is greater than your royalty of four thousand; but when you consider the tremendous amount of financial work that I must handle, your position is preferable to mine."

Hardley seemed satisfied by Zallock's smooth explanation. The inventor was nodding; his face displayed only the

faintest marks of doubt. Coolly, Zallock suggested:

"Show me your new invention, Eric. Perhaps it can produce new profits for both of us."

Hardley's face gleamed with a smile. He opened the oblong box; brought out a tube that stood on a pedestal. At each end was a small propeller. Hardley set the appliance on the table. He opened a shallow compartment in the deep bottom of the oblong box; from it he produced a length of insulated wire, with plugs on the ends.

A few minutes later the inventor had the wire running from a floorplug to the propeller tube. He pressed a switch; the blades began to spin.

"Observe all that happens!" he shrieked excitedly. Hardley's gleaming face had brightened; he was running his fingers through his shaggy hair. "Only one propeller is taking the current, but it produces the revolutions of the other!"

"Because it drives air through the tube," commented Zallock. "That is quite obvious, Eric."

"Watch this!"

Hardley threw a switch. The free propeller halted; its blades floored. Calling imperia, it began to speed in the reverse direction.

"Double action!" shrieked Hardley. "In one direction the second propeller supplies additional power, thus increasing the speed of a plane to which the device is attached."

"In the other direction"—the inventor had raised his hands excitedly—"the propeller nullify. That will enable the plane to remain almost stationary in midair!"

Zallock stopped close to Shamp, gave an undertone that Hardley could not hear.

"Say nothing."

Shamp, warned the magnate. "The man is crazy! Let

in this drive, he has forgotten that wings are required in a plane's flight. We mean humorists—"

Zallock cut short.

Hardley had stopped the tiny motor in the base of the propeller tube. Since the hum had ceased, he could hear anything that was said.

"An excellent idea!" approved Zallock. "It should be tested on a larger scale. The strains of higher speed—"

"Means nothing!" interrupted Hardley. "I can gear this device to double the number of revolutions. I shall prove it!"

He disconnected the cord; began to dismantle the propeller tube. While Zallock watched patiently, the sound of another

approaching car came from outside. Zallock nudged Shamp, telling him to go downstairs.

A few minutes later the secretary returned. He saw Hardley busy with the invention. Shamp spoke two words to Zallock:

"Kevin. Important!"

Quickly Zallock turned to Shamp.

"How long will this require, Eric?"

"Only fifteen minutes," promised the inventor.

"We shall leave you alone," paced Zallock. "Shamp, bring these records to my study."

Kevin was waiting on the stairs; Zallock beckoned him into the rear hall.

They reached the study. Kevin slipped into a chair; wiped a streak of sweat from his forehead. He began to pour the flow of words in Chinese.

Pausing, Kevin turned to stare towards the door. His eyes were thrown, rather than waver.

"Can anybody hear what we're saying here?" he demanded. "Maybe it might go to Li Huang—"

"The room is soundproof," insisted Zallock.

"But if I was followed here—"

"You are safe."

"Maybe not from Li Huang—"

"From Li Huang as well as from all others," assured Zallock. "The house is guarded. Kevin, though you probably did not observe it, I am positive that no one—not even Li Huang—could enter here undetected!"

Kevin leaned back in his chair. His walled position blocked Zallock's view of the door. Neither Zallock nor Shamp spotted the slow turn that the knob received from some outside source.

(About twice next week's long installment of this powerful story.)

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A G-MAN COMES TO TOWN

(Continued from page 423)

bluish eyes. His voice was deep when he announced that the bath was ready.

"Thank you, Morrow," nodded the undercover man, getting nearby to his feet. "I shall be fifteen minutes at the outside! Have some black coffee ready, please!"

"How about breakfast, sir?"

"No breakfast for me this morning!"

"A lightly boiled egg, sir?"

"Awaat, fellow!"

Tossing carelessly, Mister X varied his away.

A hot bath and a cold shower, followed by a shave and a change of linen, worked a marked transformation in Mister X, and he looked a picture of health and good spirits when he strode back to the office and sat down at the glass-topped desk.

Sergeant Morrow came in with a small cup of black coffee and a finger of dry toast.

"Where are the eggs?" asked Mister X, frowning.

"Eggs?" echoed Morrow in surprise.

"Eggs!" nodded Mister X. "Non-frail! I'll have three, sergeant, please! You might as bring on a smoked haddock while you're about it! I've a hunch there's a busy day before me!"

He ran through his post during the substantial meal, and the faint hope that he might hear from Nick Schenk died after he'd read the final letter, a blood-thirsty threat from an co-sponsor.

Breakfast over, he covered himself out another cup of coffee and helped himself to a Turkish cigarette, and he was in the act of lighting up when the telephone in

front of him purred into life, its summons still but insistent.

Mister X reached for the instrument and lifted the receiver.

"Yes?"

It was his usual formula, polite but noncommittal, and this despite the fact that the caller must have known his private number.

"Yeah!" roared a thin, droning voice.

"Oh, good-morning, Nick!" said Mister X, in his smooth manner of speech. "You are quite an early riser!"

"Eleven o'clock's my usual time," drawled the big shot, "but this is an occasion!"

"All the same," said Mister X, "I advise you to postpone the habit of early rising!"

"Yeah?"

"Yeah!" echoed the undercover man. "We hang murderers at eight a.m. in this country! Think it over, just in case you've got ideas in your head! I trust Miss van Loone is in an superb state of health!"

A smacking curse jerked Krapp's end-grams.

"Miss van Loone, my eye!" shrieked the big shot with a torrent of obscene invective. "She's Sally Benson, an undercover dame from headquarters in Chi! She played me for a sucker, and what's going to happen to that smart jack is plenty!"

Mister X remained silent for a moment or so, his features set and hard, his blue eyes bleak as ice. His voice was calm, flat, as he asked:

"Who gave you that information about the girl, Schenk?"

"The little tramp herself!" shrieked the big shot. "Boy, she couldn't spill the dope fast enough!"

"Not? Krapp's tone was sceptical.

"You surprise me!"

"You wouldn't have been surprised if you'd seen Julius True go to work on her!" laughed Schenk. "No frail gives me the run-around and gets away with it, copper!"

"Did you ring me up to tell me that?" Mister X caught the ballroom eye of Sergeant Morrow as that worthy came in to collect the breakfast things. "Why should I be interested?" he pressed, making a sign which sent Morrow away to trace the phone call.

"An' quit bluffin', smartie!" snarled Nick Schenk. "You and this dirty tramp have been working in harness! I was played for a sucker until last night, when I found out she was the best who'd been squandering to the cops! I sure gave me a hell, fella, 'cause I'd fallen hard for the tramp!" The drawing room was litter, ransacked with hate and fury.

"So what?" prompted Mister X.

"I'll tell you!" spat out the big shot.

"Squanders are poison to me, so I'm handing Sally Benson over to Julius True for treatment—think s'pe! Get an earful of this! Sally the Squanderer's going to come to a squanderer's end! She's a lousy sucker, and she's going to croak like a sucker! That's gang law! I'm having her branded—see?—branded with a red-hot branding-iron! The letter 'T' is going to be burnt into that lovely white body of hers! I'm doing the thing in style, all right!"

Such was his state of excitement that the drawing room rose in a scorch, and the scorch became a wild, almost momentary laugh.

"Quit kidding, Nick!" begged Mister X, soon in his tone, but he was white as the month, his forehead was moist. "You can't get away with torture and branding in this century! You mean to think years back in the Middle Ages?"

"I can get away with anything, now or any time!" sneered Schenk, with an oath; and Mister X, turning with impetuosity, held out his hand as Sergeant Morrow hurried across the office. Inscribed upon a card was the information:

"Call comes from public box, cross-roads two miles north of Carthorpe, Essex."

"That little tramp is going to be branded," Nick Schenk was shouting, "and it's going to be done in swell style, like I said! Drop in for an eye if you're around, peak!"

"Thanks, Nick," returned the undercover man amiably. "Maybe I will!"

After he had rung off Mister X visited the library where he grabbed every gazette and guide book available that could tell him anything at all about Carthorpe. And what he learned was plenty. It included out-of-the-way facts about an old ruined monastery there, complete with medieval torture chamber.

Mister X had a chat!

THE BIG BLUFF.

Mister X reached Carthorpe, a sleepy, old-fashioned town on the edge of the Essex marshes, soon after six that night. Seated at the wheel of a dilapidated car, he drove with circumspection down the narrow High Street and parked the car in Market Square.

Carefully dressed in blue serge suit,

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Seated in front of a stone slab, shaped like a sacrificial altar, were the remnants of the Crime Syndicate, crooks and killers whose coarse faces and glowering eyes were bestial, nerveless, without pity or human feeling.

Pale as death, but with a sign of life in his heavy eyes, Sally Blossom might have been a godsend-carved out of marble; the contours of her slim body were revealed through the flimsy robe which covered her. So still was she that she appeared not to breathe.

"You're certainly easy on the eye, you bragg," drawled Nick Schenk, his bold stare crawling from naked left to glossy head. "But you can't look so swell when Judas goes to work on you!" He leaped towards her and drew the prisoner's covering aside. "Yeah," he said, "he'll make a deep impression on that nice white skin—T for Justice!" "Say, didn't you ever hear about what Nick Schenk does to suspects? Always says you dumb-chuck!" he sneered, lifting a fist and threateningly, as though to strike her across the mouth.

Her face strangely calm, Sally just looked at him, yet without anger, and lowered her eyes.

"Right-ouch, eh?" drawled the big shot. "Believe you me, sugar, you're going to open that rosy-plumery in a minute!"

Again he looked at his watch, licked his lips, and grinned round at the half-dozen of gangsters.

"Time's up, boys!" he announced. "O.K., Judas!"

"O.K., boss!"

Slowly, ponderously, the massive oak door in the rear of the club swung open and there appeared the figure of a masked man in a long flowing robe that reached down to his heels. Moving across the smooth stone floor with steady tread, a white-hot branding-iron held before him, he came to a standstill before the scowling prisoner in the chair.

And Sally, passing through the side of the black mask, recognized the mild blue eyes of Mister X, but not by the thicket of an eyelid nor the movement of a muscle, and she swung her captional gaze to the glowing stare of Nick Schenk.

"Get on with it, Judas!" ordered Schenk, his eyes set trembling. "Close it in the two-minute tramp! Heard that T on her chest, just to start with!"

Staring on each because the other did not obey at once, he made a vicious snarl at the flimsy robe with clashing fingers, and in that moment Mister X swung sideways and jolted the glowing iron within six inches of Nick's face.

"Stay put, you rat!" ordered Knapp. "Make a move, Schenk, and you get yours!" "I'll burn your face off, and like Gang 2!"

The big shot opened his mouth to speak, but no sound came from him; he sat petrified, unable to move, his gawling eyes staring at the branding-iron that was scorching his skin.

"Don't say anything, you otheest!" cried Mister X. "Make one snide pass and Nick loses his face! Tell 'em I mean it, Nick!"

"Lay off, boss, lay off!" squealed Schenk, on the verge of collapse. "Lay off, I tell you!"

"Yeah, lay off, boss!" echoed Sally Blossom, slipping her wrist- straps and leaping forward from Mister X's hip- holster. Straight-aimed, her heavy eyes black and challenging, she was a figure of menace as she latched the gangster with the snarl-nosed automatic. "Put 'em up!" she ordered.

"Stick 'em up when she says so!" shouted Nick Schenk, covering back in his chair. "Move, you trash!"

"Aw, hell!" sneered Bugs Slutz, going for his shoulder-holster. But he did not live long enough to make the draw. The slug took him midway between the eyes, and he was dead before he hit the stone floor.

"Grab the air, you gravel!" ordered Sally, a wisp of blue smoke rising from the gun barrel. "That's the idea! And mind you stay that way! What next, Mister X?"

"Mister X!"

The gangsters spat out the hated name like a shameful oath, and some of them were reaching for their weapons when the main door crashed open and a squad of police officers streamed into the place, the glow of the torches glaring redly upon hem-knickered service patches.

"Keep your hands waving!" ordered Inspector Whiting, leaping on to the slab beside Sally Blossom.

Nick Schenk's lips curled back in a wolfish snarl as the bracelets were snapped on to his wrists; there was irascible hate in his heavy eyes as Mister X

stripped off his mask and regarded him with a placid smile.

"Thanks for the invitation, Nick!" said the undercover man. "It was nice of you to give me a ring this morning. Very thoughtful! Sally was expecting me, but I wasn't sure about her address until you gave me a clue to go on. Thanks a lot, Nick!"

"You're a smooth article all right, Mister X," granted the big shot. "But the Syndicate's still got you linked plenty!" Mister X lifted a polite, interrogative eyebrow.

"You are thinking of the Oscar Car job, perhaps?" he suggested.

"That very thing!" grinned Nick Schenk, his moist eyes bright with sneering. "The cops won't find those sparklers in a thousand years, and there are only two of us who know where the stuff's stashed away. Me and another guy."

"Exactly!" agreed Mister X, with the same placid smile. "You and Judas True!"

"Who put you wise to that, amateur?" Schenk prodded on.

"Judas!" answered the undercover man.

"Judas!"

"He can sneez all!"

"Aw, hell!" sneered Schenk, more and more. "Judas wouldn't spill the beans to a cop! And a lousy undercover guy as that! So you say?"

"But he did spill the beans, my dear Nick!" said Mister X, smiling sweetly; and he continued to smile as he watched Schenk's murderous gaze crawl toward the unshattered figure of Sally Blossom.

"I'll admit that I had to use a little persuasion——"

"Oh, yeah?" drawled Schenk. "He was shy, I guess?"

"That's what I guessed," roared Mister X. "It wasn't until I promised to poke a red-hot iron down his throat that he decided to talk. And he talked fast as soon as I stopped the hair on his chest. He told me what you'd done with the Oscar Car jewels. He said the idea was his."

"What?" exploded Nick Schenk, half-rising to his feet, then changing his mind.

"The dirty, lying poltroon said that, did he? His idea! It isn't as though that fat had a brain, is start with! Now if he had could he have hit on that swell idea?"

The undercover man made a deprecatory gesture with a chin, smooth head.

"What is there so swell about it?" he asked.

"Everything about it's swell!" glowered Schenk. "What's it a swell idea to buy a gross of hair rattles and ship 'em to my man in Paris?"

"Yes, that was swell all right," agreed Mister X, with a light-lipped smile.

"There's a sparkle inside each rattle, of course."

"You know damned well there is!" broke in Schenk. "Didn't that rat Judas spill the beans?"

"As a matter of fact," returned Mister X in his quiet way, "Judas didn't spill the beans. He changed his mind at the last moment. Nick didn't say a word! At the first touch of the branding-iron he squeaked like a rat and passed out."

THE END

Get the Author's very own opinion of this story. Address your letter to THE AUTHOR, The THRILLER MAN, The Flamingo House, Farringham Street, London, E.C.4. Enclosed in return is THE AUTHOR'S VERY OWN FREE STAMP.

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