

THE THRILLER

THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS

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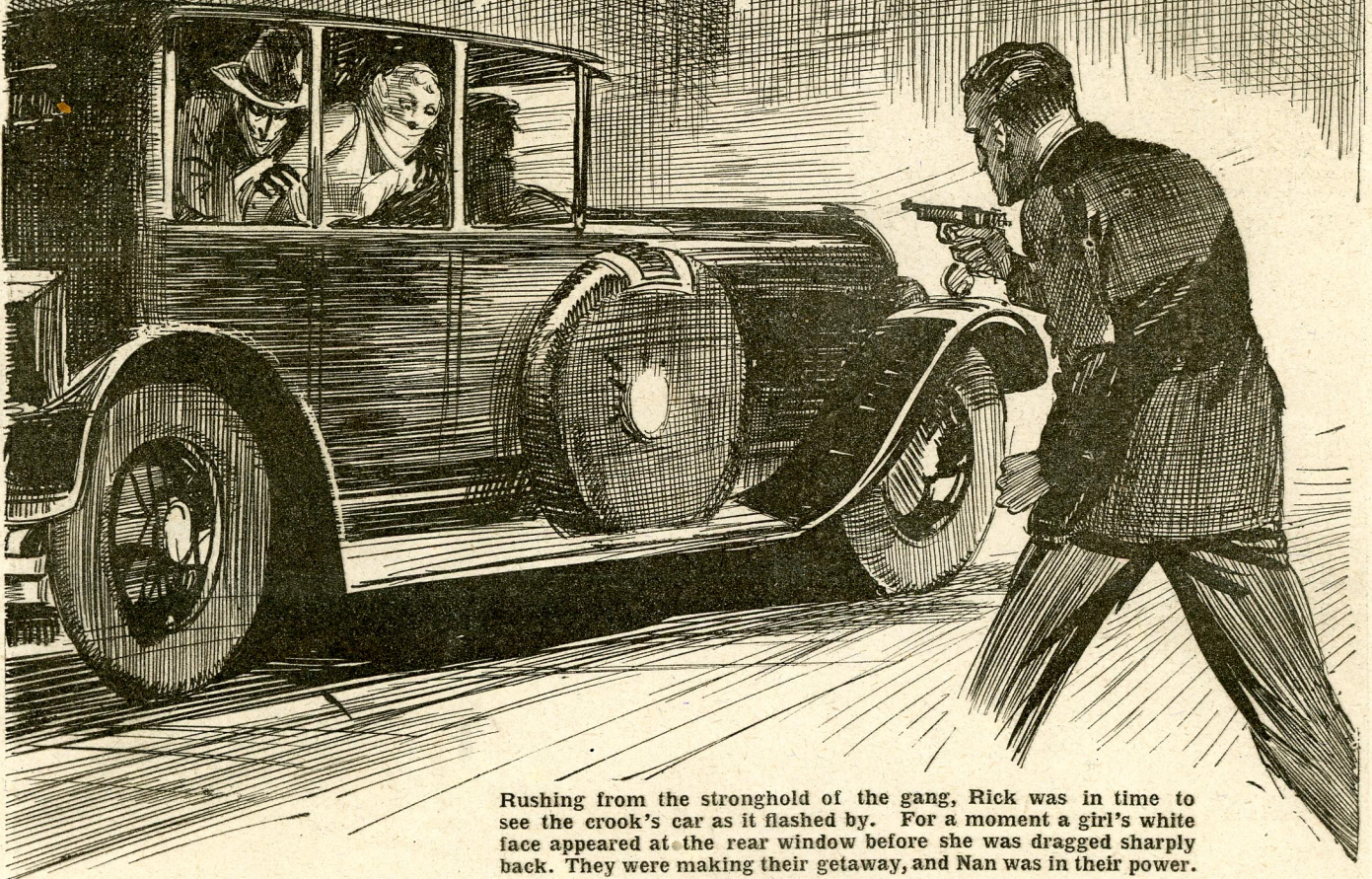


DREAD!

*A Brilliant NEW
Mystery Novel*

BY BARRY PEROWNE

DREAD!



Rushing from the stronghold of the gang, Rick was in time to see the crook's car as it flashed by. For a moment a girl's white face appeared at the rear window before she was dragged sharply back. They were making their getaway, and Nan was in their power.

Chapter 1. GANG WORK.

"SOMETHING tells me," Rick said softly, "that I'm just a natural-born low-brow!"

He glanced sidewise at Nan in the gloom of the box. She smiled, nodding towards the stage, where a plentiful lady, called La Tosca, was making the Opéra Comique ring with her lamentations for her messily-murdered lover, Mario.

"Fed up with it, Rick? Or is your French breaking down under the strain?"

Rick grinned.

"That'll be all right about my French. It's the music that gets under my ribs. I blush to say my mind's not trained up to this opera stuff; I have to concentrate so hard I'm in imminent danger of getting lockjaw. A cigarette would be kind of bracing. How about you?"

"I've been hoping for the past ten minutes you'd suggest that," Nan smiled.

She stood up, very slim, straight, and lovely in her simple black evening frock, her hair gleaming pale gold in the dim-lit box, her eyes blue and smiling. Rick helped her on with her fur coat, opened the door of the box unobtrusively. Down on the

stage, that brightly-lighted square in the dim vastness of the opera house, the considerable La Tosca threw herself into a paroxysm of grief for her hard-done-by lover; her full-throated keening followed Rick and Nan down the stairs and across the vestibule, so that it was a relief to get outside.

"Speaking as a student of criminology," Rick grinned, pulling on his coat, "I consider the way these opera folk bump off their pet aversions highly unsatisfactory. They lack style. There's nothing neat about their murders. And when it comes to singing about 'em on top G, I should say they were ill-advised; never sing about your murders, or the dicks'll get you." He smiled down at Nan with grey, whimsical eyes, his teeth very white in his lean, tanned face. "Cigarette?"

Nan took one from his proffered case, lighted it at the match he held for her, inhaled luxuriously.

"Gorgeous!" She looked out between the entrance pillars of the opera house. "Hallo! It's raining!"

"And no taxi," said Rick. "That's what happens to folk who lack the stamina to sit through more than two hours of people

singing at each other. The taxis aren't here yet. Still, we shall spot one in a minute."

He set his gibus at a jaunty angle, slipping his arm through Nan's. The thin drizzle of rain struck chill against their faces as they moved down the steps into the small, dimly-lighted square on which the Opéra Comique fronts.

"We'll cut through to the Rue des Italiens," said Rick; "that's our best bet. There're more taxis there than there are moustaches in Montmartre." He gave a little squeeze to her arm. "You looked sweet to-night."

"You looked kind of nice yourself," said Nan, and her arm returned his squeeze.

During the two years which had elapsed since the Hon. Roderick Leroy (private detective, author of "Criminal Secrets," anonymous crime correspondent of the London "Daily Cry," and disowned son of Lord Culvershaw) had befriended Nan Fergus when she was an out-of-work actress, and had made her his secretary and assistant, they had learned to know each other very well—so well, in fact, that they were to be married at the end of the month.

Now, companionably arm-in-arm, they



DRAMATIC COMPLETE
NOVEL OF THRILLS AND
SINISTER MYSTERY.

by Barry Perowne

turned into the narrow, dark, deserted street which flanks the Opéra Comique on the left. Nan pointed suddenly with her free hand.

"There's a taxi, Rick!"

It was drawn up stationary in the darkness, not twenty yards ahead of them, its sidelights only burning.

"We're in luck," Rick said.

They hurried forward over the wet, gleaming pavement; but, as they reached the taxi, it became apparent to Rick that they were not quite so gratifyingly in luck as at first he had thought. The taxi was empty; it lacked a driver.

"Darn!" said Rick. He looked about him in the darkness and the rain. "Out guzzling *bière blonde* somewhere, I suppose. I'll give him a hoot."

He put his foot on the running-board, leaning forward into the taxi to reach the bulb of the horn. But he did not press it. Nan heard him give a low exclamation, saw him lower his head to peer at something under the dashboard

"What is it?" she said quickly.

Rick withdrew his head from the taxi.

There was sudden excitement in his eyes.

"Take a look under the dashboard," he said. "Tell me if you see what I see!"

Wondering, Nan leaned forward into the taxi. In the small light from the dashboard lamp, she could see, to the right of the clutch, accelerator and foot-brake pedals, a metal cylinder, not unlike a Pyrene fire-extinguisher. It was strapped to the floor under the dashboard. A warm smell of petrol and of oil was wafted into her face as she leaned forward; and, mingled with it, some other smell, so faint as scarcely to be noticeable—a vague smell of gas.

She stepped back from the taxi, looking wide-eyed at Rick in the gloom.

"That cylinder, Rick—what is it?"

His voice was grim.

"A little device for the dissemination of poison gas! Keep your eyes open, Nan! I've got a kind of a feeling this taxi's not drawn up here so discreetly in the dark by mere chance! I'm going to have a look in the back here."

He wrenched open the door, stepping into the back of the taxi. Nan waited, glancing up and down the street. The wall of the Opéra Comique loomed up blackly in the darkness. From within the building there came a faint thunder of clapping. It sounded far off and muffled. Excitement quivered through Nan. In this dark street here, under cover of the night and the silence, anything might happen and the fashionable crowd in the opera house be unaware of it!

Rick emerged from the taxi. He was smiling slightly, without mirth, his grey eyes narrowed; and she knew that when Rick smiled like that what was going to happen was plenty—and in a hurry! He spoke swiftly, quietly:

"Nan, I've an idea we've butted into a pretty little story to start our 'Crime on the Continent' series for the 'Cry.' This looks excessively like gang work to me! They've got a machine-gun tucked away handily under the seat in the back there, and a cylinder of poison gas in front. This taxi was never meant for hire. It is just a blind!"

"What shall we do?" Nan said breathlessly.

"First of all, you nip and find a taxi in the Rue des Italiens. Run for all you're worth, and have the taxi stop fifty yards or so up the street. I'm going to watch for the gentry who own this charming little death-trap and tail 'em. How long'll you be?"

"Two minutes," said Nan crisply.

"Good! I'll keep watch!"

Nan moved away quickly into the rain and the dark. Rick glanced about him, crossed the street, took shelter in the doorway of a shop. He waited, his eyes on the taxi.

To all outward appearance, it was like any other Paris taxi—a yellow Renault, smart and up-to-date. Since its side and rear lights were in order, no gendarme would dream of giving it a more than cursory glance. Smart yellow taxis are as common to the gendarmes of Paris as rejected pictures are to a Montparnasse art student.

The thin, drizzling rain dropped down steadily through the dark. The water mouthed and mumbled along the gutter. The street lamps, set very wide apart, cast dim yellow blurs upon the night. Under the street lamps, the pavements gleamed wetly. Away to his left, Rick could hear the mutter of traffic in the Rue des Italiens, the ceaseless, phantom note of motor-horns.

He stiffened suddenly, pressing back into the darkness of the doorway. Two men had appeared round the edge of the opera house. They came on quickly—two dim figures in the darkness and the rain—heading for the taxi. They reached it, climbed in—one into the back, one into the driver's seat.

In the small light from the dash-lamp, Rick had a glimpse of the driver's white shirt-front. Then the man buttoned his overcoat, put aside his black felt hat, drew on a peaked cap. The engine shrilled into life. The driver leaned forward slightly to engage his gears. For a second the light from the dash-lamp fell full on his face. A quick thrill of excitement stabbed through Rick. That face—heavy-jawed, seamed and battered—he had seen that face before somewhere. He knew that face very well indeed—but, for the moment, he could not put a name to it.

The taxi slid forward smoothly towards the little square facing the opera house. Rick moved out from his doorway, peering up the street in the opposite direction. A car turned out of the Rue des Italiens, came sliding forward down the narrow chasm of the street. He waved his arm. The car came on, purred to a halt before him. It was a taxi. Nan stepped out from the back.

"O.K., Rick?"

"Fine. Listen, Nan. Go back into the opera house—you've got your ticket still—and find out if anything's happened. If so, get all the details you can. See you at the hotel later. All right?"

Nan nodded, bright-eyed with excitement. "You bet!"

She moved away into the darkness. Rick climbed into the taxi beside the driver, pointing after the red tail-light of the lethally-equipped taxi, sliding away down the street.

"Follow that light," he said urgently in French. "If you keep it in sight, the money market's set fair for you, Alphonse!"

"Pierre, monsieur," the driver corrected, grinning. He nodded, slipping in his gear. "C'est bien!"

The taxi jerked forward. Even as it did so, Rick snapped his fingers, recognition flaring of a sudden across his mind. That face—he had it, now!

"Mike Rooney," he said softly. "Roon the Jay!"

His hand gripped tight about the pistol in his pocket.

"FIRST BLOOD——"

It was the peculiar diversion of the Hon. Rick Leroy, when in London, to spend a generous proportion of his time prowling around that unsavoury district which lies about the Shadwell Basin. He had met many strange people there, and learned many strange things; and he had put them all, with an air of promiscuity, into his book, "Criminal Secrets." That book had made for him something of a reputation; it had made him, also, a large number of dangerous enemies. It was with a pained astonishment that he had learned how many inhabitants there were of that shadowy territory known as the "underworld" who nurtured the uncharitable ambition to bump him off in his prime.

Conspicuous among those who lusted after his blood had been the charming couple known as Stiletto Annie Gurney and Roon the Jay, who, under cover of the Congo Moon night club, in Soho, had directed the activities of a flourishing little gang specialising in drugs. Soon after the publication of Rick's book, Roon the Jay's gang had left their visiting-card (in the form of a Mills bomb heaved through the window) at Rick's chambers in Half Moon Street; and doubtless they had indulged themselves in a little tooth-gnashing *séance* when they learned later that the unobliging bomb had failed to explode.

It is probable that they would have paid a second call at Rick's chambers, had it not been for the fact that the information contained in Rick's book had led Scotland Yard to make such pointed inquiries concerning Roon and his lady that an abrupt change of air was the only manoeuvre compatible with their continued good health. That had been eight months ago, and they had promptly effaced themselves. To-night Rick had learned where they had effaced themselves to; and he thought it was hard luck on Paris.

He peered ahead through the rain-blurred wind-shield at the red tail-light of the taxi ahead. It turned to the right, down a narrow side street, swung left into the more populous Rue de Vivienne. Here, for Rick, it became inextricably confused in a constellation of other red tail-lights, sliding southward through the rain. He glanced at the driver.

"Got it marked, Alphonse?"

"Pierre, monsieur," said the driver. He was a small man with an olive-hued face, very white teeth under a sweeping black moustache, and a peaked cap at a rakish angle. He leaned forward, grinning, to work the wind-shield wiper. "I have my eye on it, monsieur. Figure yourself I am well used to this work. It is a lady you follow, no?"

"You've got the Parisian mind, Al," Rick said sadly.

"Pierre, monsieur," grinned the driver.

He swung to the left under the arches of the Louvre, following the light ahead with unerring precision. By way of the Pont du Carrousel, it led them across the Seine, tremulous in the rain with the many-coloured reflections from the sky-signs, turned to the left again along the Quai Voltaire, swung into a dark, narrow street running parallel with the river. Rick began to lose his bearings.

"Where on earth are we getting to, Al?"

"Pierre, monsieur," said the driver perseveringly. "Maybe she lives in Saint Michel."

The light ahead disappeared abruptly, turning a corner to the left, towards the river. Pierre trod down a little harder on the accelerator, bringing the light into view again. For the first time, he began to exhibit signs of uneasiness.

"Monsieur, this is not a nice district. No nice lady lives here."

"Carry on," said Rick encouragingly. "There's a wad of francs coming to you. And get rid of that lady complex. I'm no lady-hunter, Al."

"Non, monsieur?" said Pierre sceptically. He put out a hand to switch on his headlights. Rick gripped his wrist, checking him.

"Not yet, Al!"

He peered ahead through the streaming wind-shield. The street was narrow and very dark, hemmed in by tall, blank-windowed, ancient houses. The dark mouths of other streets, narrower yet, opened off to either side; the place was a labyrinth of unlighted alleys, flights of stone steps, yawning arches. This was old Paris, very different to the wide boulevards about the Place de la Concorde, on the other side of the river. Excitement was growing more acute in Rick. Whatever Roon the Jay was up to in Paris, it was clear that he had gravitated naturally to that part of it which was the equivalent of his old haunts in Limehouse and Shadwell.

The taxi ahead was slowing down. Rick laid a hand warningly on his driver's arm.

"Stop here, Al!"

He leaned forward in his seat, switching off the lights, as the taxi slid to a standstill.

"Monsieur——" Pierre protested.

"It's all right, Al. I'll see the gendarmes don't get you," Rick said softly. "Know where we are?"

"Passage des Touaregs, monsieur. It has a bad reputation." The driver lowered his voice, peering close at Rick in the darkness of the taxi. "It is no lady, then, monsieur? Sûreté, maybe?"

"Maybe," said Rick.

Through the darkness and the rain he could see, fifty yards or so away down the street, the lights of Roon the Jay's taxi. It was drawn up before a building which, looming darker than the darkness, appeared to bisect the street at right angles, making it into a cul-de-sac. The other side of the building, he guessed, backed upon the river. He drew out his wallet, thrust a thick wad of notes into the driver's hand.

"Wait for me here, Al! I'll double this for you when I come back."

He stepped out of the taxi on to the wet cobbles of the street. He buttoned his overcoat across his white shirt-front, tipped his gibus a little further over his eyes, and, keeping close under cover of the buildings, strolled forward slowly.

Twenty yards from the taxi, he paused for a moment, peering at it. The taxi was empty, its side and rear lights burning. Rick moved forward again, looking up at the building before which the taxi stood. The building was ancient and ramshackle; the two windows on the second floor were boarded up; torn and weather-beaten bills were pasted on the wall. Dimly, Rick made out a sign over the doorway: "Café des Touaregs. Bière Brune et Blonde. Billards." The doorway was in a shallow area, reached by a short flight of steps. Chinks of light escaped through the shuttered windows to either side of the door; a few metal chairs and tables were in the area; somewhere inside the building, a fimsy piano was rattling out "Marche d'Amour."

Rick hesitated for a moment, considering, then he descended the steps. He tried the door. It opened easily to his touch. A flood of light and of noise, mingled with the strong smell of chicory and of caporal tobacco, *deuxième qualité*, came at him like a fetid wind. He stood in the doorway, glancing round the room.

The small tables which encircled the

dancing space were crowded with patrons—lean-faced, quick-eyed men in ultra-smart suits, vivacious women with carmined lips and the fuzzed hair of negresses. The piano stood at the edge of the dancing-space, just in front of Rick; there was an empty table to the right of the piano. Rick closed the door behind him, slid unobtrusively into that empty seat. He did not remove his gibus.

The couple at the table on his right glanced at him suspiciously. Rick tried to look an innocent tourist who had wandered into the café out of curiosity. Evidently, he told himself, he did it rather well, for the couple resumed their conversation. A stout waiter with dank black curls, a laden tray in one hand, a greasy napkin in the other, came gliding up, looking askance at Rick with small, dark eyes.

"Monsieur?"

"Cognac," said Rick.

"Oui, monsieur."

The waiter flicked the table with his napkin, and glided away.

Rick took out his cigarette-case, his eyes flickering from face to face in search of Roon the Jay. He saw the gangster, sitting at a table on the opposite side of the dancing space, at exactly the same moment as the gangster saw him. The effect on Roon the Jay was startling. He went rigid, staring, his heavy jaw hanging slack. Rick raised his hat politely.

The gangster's teeth snapped tight. He said something out of the side of his mouth to the narrow-eyed man in evening-dress who sat beside him, and rose abruptly to his feet. He was a squat, heavily-built man with abnormally long arms; his oiled, dark hair was plastered down in a fringe over his brow; his overcoat hung open, showing his white shirt-front and black tie. He thrust his way between the dancers, crossing to Rick's table. Rick smiled up at him lazily.

"Well, of all people! Take a seat, Roon!"

With his foot, he pushed out the chair on the opposite side of the table. The gangster sat down. He leaned across the table, his small, pale blue eyes glittering into Rick's.

"What the Hades are you doing here, Leroy?"

Rick lighted his cigarette, inhaled luxuriously, leaning back in his chair.

"Broadening my mind. Nothing like travel to broaden the mind, Roon—museums, picture galleries, operas—"

"Operas!" There was a snarl in the gangster's voice. His great fists clenched tight on the table. "What do you know about—the opera?"

"You'd be surprised," Rick said easily. He was sure, now, that something sinister had taken place in the Opéra Comique. He continued to smile lazily, proffering his cigarette-case. "Smoke, Roon?"

"Smoke nothing!" the gangster snarled. He glanced quickly round the café, leaned further forward across the table, speaking through tight teeth: "Listen, Leroy! Keep your aristocratic nose out of my business—see?—or you'll get a packet where it won't do your physique no good! Get me?"

Rick emitted a cloud of cigarette smoke, grinning up at it.

"Better watch your step, Roon! These French dicks are bright lads!"

The gangster laughed harshly.

"They won't get the Dummy!"

Rick, smiling lazily, gave no sign of the hot excitement that was pounding in him. The gangster had made a slip. Who and what, Rick wondered, was "the Dummy"? He said tranquilly.

"Dartmoor, they tell me, is the original Sunshine Hall, compared with Cayenne!"

The waiter glided up, deposited a liqueur

glass of cognac on the table, glided away again. The gangster's eyes were mere pin-points of icy blue, glittering at Rick.

"You're askin' for it, Leroy—like Hades, you're askin' for it! You're dangerous"—his hand whipped out suddenly, dashing over the liqueur glass as Rick reached for it—"too darn dangerous to live!"

He was on his feet, his hand snapping back to his hip pocket. He was too late. Rick kicked aside the table, plunging forward. His fist took the gangster full in his twisted mouth. He reeled backward, brought up against the piano, slumped down.

The piano ceased.

In the sudden silence, a woman screamed hysterically. A pistol barked. The bullet bit viciously into the lintel of the door, just over Rick's head, as he wrenched the door open. Roon the Jay's narrow-eyed friend was firing across the room.

Rick leaped through the doorway, racing up the wet steps of the area. Behind him the pistol barked again. Rick wheeled round on the top step, whipping out his own automatic. The narrow-eyed man was in the lighted doorway, gun in hand. Rick fired first. The narrow-eyed man toppled forward.

Rick swung round again, his grey eyes glittering. The gangster's taxi was before him. He leaped into the driver's seat, pressing the self-starter. The engine shrilled into life. He thrust home the gear-lever, swinging the taxi round, bumping up on to the narrow pavement. He swerved back into the street, trod down hard on the accelerator. The taxi plunged forward, drew level with Pierre, stopped with a rasp of brakes. Pierre, evidently a man of prudence, had turned round already, in preparation for a speedy getaway. Rick leaned out from the Renault, shouting:

"Take the lead, Al!"

Away in the rear, an automatic was pumping lead up the dark street. A bullet shattered the rear window of the Renault. Rick ducked, chuckling.

"Bad luck, Roon! First blood to us, I suspect—heavy loss of transport and ammunition!"

He sent the Renault booming forward on Pierre's tail.

The Frenchman was in a hurry. Evidently he did not believe in loitering about in a neighbourhood where the night was populous with bullets. Not until they were back again on the Quai Voltaire, with the river and the sky-signs on their right, did he slacken his pace. Rick drove alongside him, pointing at the lighted windows of a café ahead.

"Stop there, Al!"

The Frenchman nodded. Rick dropped back again, following Pierre's taxi into the

kerb outside the café. He climbed out, glancing back along the Quai Voltaire. There was no sign of pursuit. Pierre came trotting up to him. He waved his arms in the air, profoundly moved.

"Voyons, monsieur! What is this? Do you figure yourself that I am a gendarme, that I face bullets—I, who have six children? Mais, monsieur—"

Rick thrust a wad of notes into the Frenchman's hand.

"Forget it, Al!"

"You have finished with me? Thank Heaven!" said the Frenchman piously.

He returned to his taxi. Rick went into



From the door, Rick watched the sinister figure slip over the window-sill and cross to the bed. An arm rose and fell as a knife was plunged into the heaped bed-clothes.

the café. A highly-coloured lady with a decoratively-architected coiffure was behind the pay-counter. Rick approached her, raising his hat.

"Pardon, madame. May I use the telephone?"

"Deux francs, monsieur. Merci!" said the highly-coloured lady. "Voilà!"

She pointed with a be-ringed finger to the telephone-box across the room. Rick threaded his way between the tables, shut himself in the telephone-box, gave a number. He was put through almost at once.

"Is that the Grand Hôtel de Londres? I want Mademoiselle Fergus, please—Room 14. Yes—Mademoiselle Fergus." He waited. What had happened at the Opéra Comique? He stiffened abruptly. "Is that you, Nan? Yes, I'm all right. Yes—lots. I'll tell you when I get back. Did anything happen at the opera? What! My Heaven, that's worse than I thought! Who? Waiting for me, now? Tell him I'll be there right away. Yes. Right. Cheer-oh!"

He returned the receiver to its hook, stood thinking for a moment. His face was

very grim, his grey eyes hard and glittering. He said softly:

"First blood to you, eh? You flatter yourself. First blood to—the Dummy!"

With abrupt decision, he pushed open the door of the telephone-box, and returned to the captured taxi.

THE PROWLER.

MONSIEUR LOUIS AUGUSTE SENAC, of the Paris Sûreté, was a small man of benign appearance. His face was round and pink and dimpled; his eyes were blue and guileless; he had a small, fair moustache, and an inconsiderable remnant of fair hair, brushed back. His brown lounge suit, white spats and white-spotted brown socks were exquisite; the contour of his waist was so admirably concave that Nan was sure he wore corsets. His hands were small and white and beautifully manicured, like a woman's.

Watching him now, as he strode up and down Rick's private sitting-room at the Grand Hôtel de Londres, carrying himself very erect, smoking a prodigious cigar, she might have put him down, Nan reflected, for a nice, harmless, but rather comic little man concerned above all else with his personal appearance. But, because she had the privilege of seeing him at work, back there in the Opéra Comique, she knew that his appearance was misleading, and that he was, in fact, an able and a clever man.

As the door opened, and Rick came in, there appeared in the Frenchman's eyes the same keen, steely glint that Nan had seen once before that night. He did not wait for a formal introduction. He moved forward quickly, holding out his hand.

"Monsieur Leroy? I am Senac. What luck?"

Rick told him briefly of that which had happened before and during the visit to the Café des Touaregs. The little detective's eyes glittered triumphantly.

"That will help us. It was great good fortune, your getting on the trail so quickly, Monsieur Leroy; I congratulate you on your presence of mind and your speed. The Sûreté will take charge of the captured taxi. This café, now—the Café des Touaregs I have heard of it. It is run by a big Moor, I believe. You think it is the headquarters of these men?"

"Frankly," said Rick, "I don't. If it had been, I think they'd have had some surer way of dealing with intruders than merely banging away at 'em with an automatic. I think that café must be either a meeting-place or a channel through which they send or receive messages."

"Ah! That is probable. And this man—the Roon the Jay—he is dangerous, you think?"

"He's dangerous, all right," Rick said grimly; "but not so dangerous, I suspect, as the man behind him!"

"The man behind him! Who is the man behind him?"

Rick smiled slightly, tapping a cigarette on the arm of his chair.

"Have you ever heard of—the Dummy?" The little detective stiffened, taking his cigar from his mouth.

"The Dummy?"

"Something tells me," Rick said mildly, "that you haven't. Neither had I—till tonight. But I've a sort of premonition, Monsieur Senac, that we're going to hear a good deal more about the Dummy before the bloom of our youth begins to fade." He lighted his cigarette. "Now, suppose you tell me exactly what happened at the Opéra Comique?"

The little Frenchman gestured violently with his cigar.

"Tonnerre! It is terrible enough! You

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have heard of Sir Felix Kane—a countryman of yours?"

Rick nodded.

"The tobacco millionaire, head of the Anglo-Orient Tobacco Company, the mail-order specialists. I've heard his name, and I know his big office building in Kingsway. He was—"

"Exactly! He was murdered to-night in his box at the Opéra Comique!" Senac pulled heavily at his cigar. "His wife, Lady Helen Kane, who was with him in the box, was unaware that anything was amiss until the curtain came down. He was sitting quite still in his chair; she thought he was asleep. But, when she touched him, he rolled out of his chair. He was quite dead. She gave the alarm at once, and I was telephoned for. When I arrived, Mademoiselle Fergus here, who had heard Lady Helen give the alarm, introduced herself to me, and told me that you were on the trail of two suspicious characters. I made a quick examination of the box and the body, and the Sûreté technicians are working there now."

"How did he die?" Rick asked.

"We don't know exactly. The doctor is of the opinion that he was poisoned. There was a tiny wound, comprising five small points on the side of his neck, just under the right ear. The five points were concentrated into a space of not more than half a square inch. The skin about them was burnt slightly, as though by acid. But all the symptoms point to death by some powerful poison acting instantaneously. The doctor declares that Sir Felix died at least a quarter of an hour before the curtain came down, so that for fifteen minutes Lady Helen was sitting in ignorance beside her dead husband."

Nan shuddered.

"That's—terrible!"

Monsieur Senac pulled distractedly at his cigar.

"That would—those five points—I do not understand how it was inflicted. I have seen nothing like it before. Lady Helen, naturally, is prostrated. I could not question her thoroughly, but she told me that no one entered their box, neither did she nor her husband leave it throughout the performance. She was certain of that. The Sûreté experts will disturb nothing, Monsieur Leroy, if you would like to examine the scene."

"That's very kind—" Rick began.

The Frenchman waved his cigar.

"I have had a letter about you, Monsieur Leroy, from my English colleague, your friend, Chief Inspector Hansard, of Scotland Yard. He says you are by no means the ordinary newspaper correspondent specialising in crime. He speaks—um—very highly of you. As the murdered man is a countryman of yours, and as the criminals seem also to be countrymen of yours, I should be delighted if you would co-

operate with me. In any case, you were first on the trail."

"That's very kind," Rick said again, smiling. "But I don't think I'll bother to examine the scene. You gentlemen from the Sûreté understand these things far better than I do. If you don't mind my pottering around in my own way, though, I should feel honoured."

"Tonnerre!" said Monsieur Senac, astonished. "As you will. In any case, we shall endeavour to reconstruct the entire scene to-morrow, after our method. Meantime"—he reached for his bowler hat, his astrakhan-collared overcoat—"I go to the Café des Touaregs—though I fear the birds will have flown."

"Good luck, anyway," Rick said, escorting the detective to the door.

A small, round-faced yellow man with black hair, black eyes, and a broad, many-toothed grin came gliding in as the Frenchman went out. It was Rick's personal valet and private assassin, Kasimo, the Jap.

"Master—"

"Hallo?"

"Gentleman asking for you at desk in lobby just now," the Jap grinned. "Concierge say you engaged. Gentleman say call later."

"Now, who would that be?" Rick wondered, looking at Nan.

"Maybe a bill-collector," said Nan brightly.

"That," said Rick, "is no remark for a nicely-brought-up fiancée to make." He turned to Kasimo. "All right, Buddha—bring him up, if he calls again."

"Yes, master."

The Jap glided out, grinning.

"And now what?" said Nan.

Rick lighted a fresh cigarette, his grey eyes thoughtful.

"And now," he said, "you'd better square up to that typewriter and earn your living. We'll knock off this Kane story cable. It'll help straighten things out in our minds."

The clock on the mantelpiece pointed to five minutes past two when the long cable-gram was finished and telephoned through to the post office. Nan covered a yawn with two slim fingers, smiled up at Rick.

"Can I, please?"

"You can," said Rick; "and don't hurry up in the morning." He took her hands, drawing her close. "I love you an awful lot, my dear. Won't it be great when—the end of the month comes?"

"I shall bully you horribly," Nan promised. "You'll be mine, then—all mine. I shall lead you a dog's life."

"The truth, hussy, is not in you," Rick said tenderly. He kissed her. "Good-night, sweetheart."

When she had gone, he went into the bed-room, which opened off from his sitting-room, switched on the light, removed his wet patent leather shoes, his tail-coat, collar, and white tie, donned slippers and a dressing-gown. He crossed to the window, looking out. The Grand Hôtel de Londres stands on the corner of the Rue de la Paix, and that large, quiet square, the Place de Vendôme. Rick's bed-room was at the side of the building, on the first floor; the window overlooked one of those narrow, ancient streets which connect the Rue de la Paix with the Rue des Capucines.

In the rain, with the lights gleaming yellow and forlorn, the prospect of that narrow street was chill and depressing. Rick closed the window hastily, switched out the lights, returned to the sitting-room. Switching out the lights there also, he drew up an armchair to the cosy glow of the electric fire, and settled down to think.

The Dummy! On the lips of Roon the

Jay there was something bizarre and sardonic in that name. Who exactly was the Dummy—and what?

He must have slept, for of a sudden he found himself piercingly awake, listening. Save for the steady glow from the electric fire, the room was in darkness. For a moment he could hear nothing; then a slight sound came to him from the next room—his bed-room. Small though the sound was, he recognised it at once. Somebody had slid back the catch of the window.

Very cautiously, Rick leaned forward in his chair, removing his slippers, cursing himself for leaving his automatic in the pocket of his coat. Silent on stockinged feet, he moved across to the door of his bed-room. The door was an inch or two ajar. Holding his breath, he applied his eye to that small crack. The window of the bed-room came within his line of vision. He had left the curtains undrawn. Against the faint luminance from the street, a dark shape was silhouetted, crouching on the sill. The sash slid up silently. With a soft thud, the dark shape dropped down into the room.

There was a faint creaking sound, as its hands, questing along the mattress, pressed a little harder than was intended. One arm rose and fell. There was a sudden thud—a sharp exclamation, low and bitter. The crouching shape appeared again in silhouette against the window.

Very gently, Rick opened the door wider. He padded forward soundlessly, crouching a little, his hands crooked for action. He leaped. His hands closed about a thick, powerful neck. With all his strength, he wrenched backward, kicking away the night prowler's legs from under him.

The prowler crashed down on his back. Rick dropped on top of him, his hands questing for the raider's throat, his knee pressing into the man's chest.

Something hot and stinging seared down the length of his right forearm, from elbow to wrist. A knife! He found the prowler's knife hand, gripped it, forced his thumb into the veins of the wrist. The hand slackened, opened, dropped the knife.

The raider choked, half-strangled by Rick's grip on his throat. He jerked sideways, jabbing upward with his free hand. The blow took Rick in the chest, knocking him backward, winding him.

The raider was up at once, leaping for the window. Rick plunged after him, to drag him back. His hand closed on the collar of the man's coat. He wrenched backward. The coat came away in his hand, sending him staggering against the bed. The raider had twisted free of his coat. He leaped for the window-sill, gained it, disappeared. Rick dropped the coat, moving quickly to the window, looking out. The rain struck chill against his face. A dark shape was clinging to a water-pipe, just to the left of the window. The prowler lowered himself swiftly, dropped to the ground, darted away up the street.

Rick cursed, helpless without a pistol. Just up the street, a car's engine roared, diminished, faded swiftly into silence.

Rick drew a deep breath, touching his right forearm tenderly. His sleeve was wet with blood.

Rick closed the window, switched on the light, stood listening for a moment. The hotel was very still and quiet. They had fought in a grim, deadly silence. The prowler's knife lay on the floor. Rick picked it up. It was a long, curved weapon, with an ivory hilt, and Arabic characters on the blade. Rick's eyes glinted.

"The Moor. Senac said that a Moor owned the Café des Touaregs!" He smiled grimly. "Obviously, an ally of Comrade Roon's; they suspect I know more about the Dummy

than I actually do. But how the deuce did they know where I parked my carcass o' nights?" He snapped his fingers suddenly, remembering Kasimo's announcement of the unknown man who had been inquiring for him. "Of course! They've been making a canvass of the likely hotels, looking for me—even got the location of my rooms, too!"

He crossed to the bed, looking down at it. In the eiderdown, approximately at that point where it would have covered the chest of a sleeper in the bed, was an oblique cut. Rick pulled back the clothes. The cut penetrated right through to the mattress, and a considerable way through the mattress itself. Rick puffed out his cheeks.

"Phew! Wants me to sleep in a draught, evidently! My Heaven, there's something to be said for staying up late! Rick, my man, I congratulate you warmly. You deserve a drink—and you shall have one, too, if it's the last you ever get!"

But, in that moment, he noticed the raider's coat, where it lay on the floor. He picked it up gingerly. It was one of rough serge, well-worn—a sailor's pea-jacket, wet with rain. He went swiftly through the pockets. Save for a soiled screw of paper in a corner of the breast-pocket, they were empty. Rick smoothed out the paper; but, before he had time to examine it, the telephone in the sitting-room rang suddenly—an urgent, startling sound in the silence.

Rick moved quickly into the sitting-room, switched on the lights, took up the receiver. A thin voice came to him over the wire:

"Monsieur Leroy? Is that Monsieur Leroy?"

"Speaking."

"This is Senac. Listen! There has been another murder! Ildar Achmet Bey, the Egyptian hotel magnate—and he bears the scar of the five points! Come to the Sûreté at once! *Tonnerre!* This is terrible!"

"I'll be there in half an hour," Rick promised.

He hung up, his face grim. He glanced at the paper in his hand—held it close to the light, examining it. In the centre of the paper was a small star, roughly drawn in pencil. At each point of the star was a name. The names read thus: "Felix Kane, Courtney Phillips Willard, Honoré de Carigny, Ildar Achmet Bey, Leon Ricardo."

Rick's hand crushed tight on the paper. He looked up, his eyes glittering, the muscles ridged and corded along his lean jaw. Five points—five men! And two of those men had been killed within a few hours of each other!

"Great heavens!" he breathed. "The others—the other three!" He moved quickly to the telephone, snatched up the receiver. "Put me through to the Paris Sûreté, Quai des Orfèvres! Quickly—quickly! This is a matter of life and death!"

MARKED MEN.

By Rick's wrist-watch it was exactly half-past three when he was shown into Monsieur Louis Senac's bleak office at the Paris Sûreté. The little detective, speaking urgently into a telephone, waved Rick to a chair and went on talking:

"Three men—yes—at once. Monsieur Honoré de Carigny's house, Boulevard Saint Germain. *Mais certainement!* I shall be there shortly. Yes, yes." He hooked up the receiver, mopped his forehead with an immaculate silk handkerchief, and looked at Rick. "*Tonnerre!* This is a bad business!"

"How bad?" Rick said softly.

The little Frenchman shook his head. "I know what you are thinking. *Not* that bad, monsieur. They live—and I have them guarded." He lighted one of his vast cigars. "Your warning, Monsieur Leroy, has probably saved the lives of those three men. May I see the paper you discovered?"



As the detectives rounded the corner, a red jet of flame stabbed the darkness.

Rick gave it to him. Senac held the paper close under his desk-lamp. For a full minute he examined the paper minutely, then he leaned back in his chair, looking at Rick.

"Well, monsieur?"

"The work, I should say," Rick suggested, "of a man scribbling absent-mindedly. I don't think he'd have done it consciously; certainly he wouldn't have put it consciously into his pocket. It's too incriminating."

"I agree with you," the little Frenchman nodded. He slipped the scrap of paper into a drawer of his desk. "There is something very strange here, Monsieur Leroy. Those three men—already I have learned something of them through the channels to which I have access. I have spoken to them on the telephone. Courtney Phillips Willard is an American—a night club magnate, Leon Ricardo is an Argentinian, chief of a number of casinos in Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, and other big South American towns. Honoré de Carigny is a financier, well known on the Paris Bourse. Add to these the other two ill-fated names on this paper—Sir Felix Kane, the English mail order tobacco millionaire, and Ildar Achmet Bey, the Egyptian hotel magnate—and one perceives a distinct, yet curiously varied association to big business."

"And a curiously cosmopolitan collection, also," Rick said thoughtfully. "A Frenchman, an Egyptian, an Argentinian, an American, and an Englishman. One wonders," Rick said mildly, "what brings all these notable gentlemen to Paris at the same time."

"Exactly!" Senac gestured excitedly with his cigar. "Find out what brings these men to Paris—with the exception, naturally, of Carigny, who is a resident—and we may be on our way to finding a motive."

"Which'll be interesting," Rick smiled, "but may not help us much in bringing in Roon the Jay and finding out who's the man behind him—the Dummy!"

"Ah! The Dummy!" The little detective's eyes glittered. "We must not forget the Dummy, Monsieur Leroy!"

"I've got a hunch," Rick said, "that we aren't likely to!" He lighted a cigarette. "What now?"

"We go at once to interview these three men—Willard, Carigny, and Ricardo. We can afford to lose no time. I have apprised them by telephone of our coming. I had, of course, no trouble in finding their addresses. The Sûreté is not blind to the presence in the capital of men in any way distinguished or notable—particularly foreigners. We have our channels," Monsieur Senac hinted darkly.

"Who'd be a crook?" Rick grinned.

In the police car, sliding through the wet, deserted streets towards the Rue Scribe, where Courtney Phillips Willard was staying at that exclusively American caravanserai, the Commodore Hotel, Monsieur Senac told Rick what he knew of the circumstances of Ildar Achmet Bey's death. He knew, as yet, little enough.

A telephone call had been put through to the Sûreté a few minutes after two a.m. by the manager of the Hotel Côte d'Azur, in the Place de la Concorde, where the Egyptian was a guest. Monsieur Ildar Achmet Bey, the manager had explained, suffered from insomnia. It was his misfortune invariably to awake at two o'clock and to find no further sleep for several hours. Accordingly, he had arranged to have a cup of hot chocolate brought nightly to his room at two o'clock. On this night of evil, the porter responsible for taking up Monsieur Bey's chocolate had found the Egyptian crumpled on the floor under the open window of his bed-room; the window

was banging in the wind; the shoulders of the Egyptian's pyjama coat were wet with rain. At once the porter had given the alarm to the manager, who in turn, seeing that the Egyptian was dead, had notified the Sûreté.

"I went immediately to the Place de la Concorde," Monsieur Senac told Rick, in his precise, studied English. "The manager of the hotel was under the impression that Monsieur Bey had died of heart failure, but a brief examination of the body was sufficient to make it clear to me that he died in the same way as Sir Felix Kane. There, on his throat, were those five small points—the hint of acid, the symptoms of poisoning. How was he killed—and why? Monsieur Leroy, there is murder abroad to-night in Paris!"

Rick said nothing. The gendarme at the wheel of the police car braked to a standstill outside the Commodore Hotel, in that handsome, but—at this hour—wet, dark and deserted thoroughfare, the Rue Scribe. A night porter on duty in the hall admitted Rick and Monsieur Senac, told them that Mr. Willard was expecting them, and took them up in the lift to the American's suite on the second floor.

If Rick had formed in his mind for Mr. Courtney Phillips Willard the conventional picture of the night club magnate (a fat, bald, and be-jewelled has-been), he was agreeably surprised. The American was no more than thirty-four or -five; he was tall, spare, and very bronzed; his face was clean-shaven, with a humorous mouth, and the good lines of laughter about blue, tolerant eyes. Obviously dressed in a hurry, he was wearing flannels and an open-necked shirt. He greeted them cordially, but with amusement.

"Pleased to meet you, gentlemen. What it's all about, I've not been able to figure out yet. But we'll take a highball to clear our heads, eh?"

He poured three drinks, and listened gravely while Monsieur Senac related as much as he thought fit of the events succeeding Rick's visit to the Opéra Comique.

"Why, that's—pretty terrible," he said quietly, when the Frenchman was finished.

Senac leaned forward in his chair.

"You will pardon me, monsieur, I trust, but—we are wondering what brings you to Paris?"

"I catch your drift," Willard nodded. He lighted a short, black cigar. "Well, gentlemen, I'm in Paris to discuss some very tempting offers I've received to merge the companies under my control with certain other interests, both European and American. If it went through, the merger would be a bigish thing."

"Ah! A merger!" Senac's eyes flickered to Rick, returned again to the American. "You will pardon me again, monsieur—understanding, naturally, that I speak in your own interests—but have you any rival, perhaps, who would suffer if this merger became fact?"

He watched the American eagerly. Willard shook his head.

"I see what you're aiming at, and it's just too bad I've got to disappoint you. But I know nobody to whom this merger can make the smallest difference."

"I think," Rick put in mildly, "that we might get a little forrader, Monsieur Senac, if we asked Mr. Willard, who exactly invited him to Paris to discuss this matter of a merger?"

The American nodded.

"That's O.K. You gentlemen may have heard of the Baron von Steinlach, the German financier?"

"Yes, yes," Senac said quickly. "He



Gun in hand, Leroy raced forward, as the gangster sprang for the wall and scrambled frantically over.

makes Paris his headquarters; his offices are in the Avenue de l'Opera."

"That's the man," Willard nodded. "Well, it's Steinlach who's back of this merger suggestion. He's trying to engineer it. It's his invitation that brought me to Paris. We held our first conference yesterday, at his residence in the Bois de Boulogne. That's where I got acquainted with Sir Felix Kane, Monsieur Carigny, Leon Ricardo, and Ildar Achmet Bey."

Senac's beautifully-manicured hand beat an eager tattoo on the arm of his chair.

"Ah! This is most interesting. Yourself—these other gentlemen—all here on the invitation of the Baron von Steinlach, no?"

"We are," Willard said, "for what it's worth. So far we've come to no agreement, and I've a hunch we're going to leave Paris as empty as we came."

"Two of you," Senac said grimly, "will not leave Paris at all." He rose. "You see that it is a most serious matter, Monsieur Willard. It is my duty to have you watched and guarded constantly; and I beg you most gravely to—to be on your guard."

The American smiled, patting his hip-pocket.

"It's a little habit of mine, gentlemen, to go heeled with a .45; I'm a Texan born, and it's in the blood, I guess." He added gravely, escorting them to the door: "No doubt you'll want to question me further later on; I shall be glad to do all I can, gentlemen, and if there's any way I can help—why, I'm right here with a gun in each hand!"

Back again in the car, Senac said eagerly:

"Well? Steinlach, *hein*?"

"We'll see what Carigny has to say first," Rick suggested.

From the Rue Scribe to the residence of Monsieur Honoré de Carigny, in the Boulevard Saint Germain, was a journey that, in the wet, deserted streets, took no more than ten minutes or so. The French financier's house was typical of the old, aristocratic quarter of Paris—a tall, grey building, fronted by a cobbled courtyard with handsome wrought-iron entrance gates under a massive stone arch. The windows were shuttered and dark, but, in response to Rick's ring, the door was opened almost at once. A shadowy figure peered at them from the dim-lit hall.

"Monsieur Senac?"

"Yes."

"I am Paul Gerrard, Monsieur de Carigny's secretary. He is waiting for you. Will you come in, please?"

Though his French was fluent, the secretary's accent, Rick noted, was English.

"This way, messieurs," said the secretary.

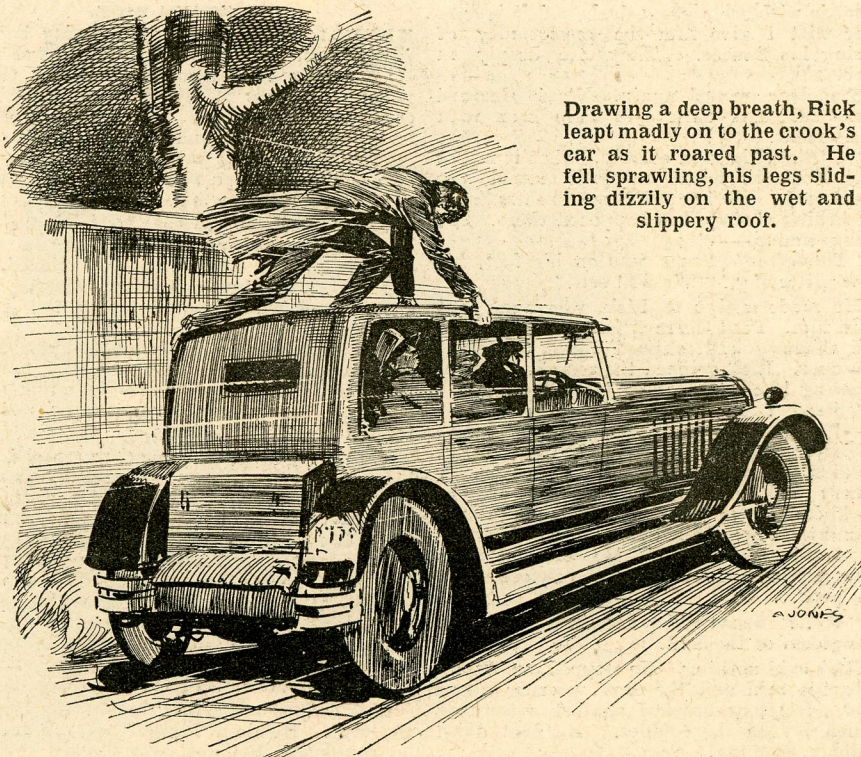
He led them along the hall, opened a door, stood aside for them to enter.

His first sight of Monsieur Honoré de Carigny affected Rick with an unpleasant shock. In a big oak-panelled room, furnished with dark, massive furniture, and lighted by an enormous chandelier, the financier sat in an invalid chair, facing the door. He was quite bald, with a high, narrow brow and a long, emaciated face of almost deathly pallor. Dark spectacles covered his eyes. He wore a black dressing-gown, yellow-braided and with a yellow cord. His hands—long, white, and abnormally thin—rested motionless on the arms of his wheeled invalid chair.

The secretary moved forward quickly.

"*Maitre*, the gentleman from the *Sûreté*."

"Ah, yes!" The dark spectacles glinted blindly in the light from the chandelier. The financier's voice was high-pitched, yet strangely void of expression. "Gentlemen, you are very welcome. Paul, you will be so



Drawing a deep breath, Rick leapt madly on to the crook's car as it roared past. He fell sprawling, his legs sliding dizzily on the wet and slippery roof.

good as to bring refreshments. Be seated, gentlemen. You are wet, I perceive. It is an unpleasant night."

So he was not blind, Rick reflected; in that first moment he had wondered whether the eyes behind those dark spectacles were sightless.

"A thousand pardons, monsieur," Senac was saying, "for this disturbance. You will understand that it was enforced. As I said on the telephone—"

"It was my secretary who spoke to you on the telephone," the strange death's head of a man interrupted. "I have had an illness, gentlemen. I lean now very much upon my secretary. Paul is like a son to me. He is English, you know—like your friend here, Monsieur Senac."

Rick was startled. He had, as yet, said no word. Certainly, for all his dark spectacles, the financier was an acute observer. Rick bowed as Senac introduced him. Monsieur de Carigny did not offer his hand. The secretary came in, bearing a tray with port and cognac decanters on it. While Senac was explaining the situation to Monsieur de Carigny, Rick watched the secretary.

Paul Gerrard was a young man—twenty-eight or thereabouts, Rick judged. His face was thin and pale; he had the brow of a thinker and thick, disorderly dark hair. His dark eyes were those of a visionary—of a musician or a poet. His attitude towards the financier, Rick observed, was one of profound respect. "*Maitre*"—"master"—a curious thing, Rick thought, for a secretary to call his employer.

The statement of Monsieur de Carigny made no substantial advance upon that of the American, Courtney Phillips Willard. He had been invited by the Baron von Steinlach, Monsieur de Carigny explained, to discuss the question of a merger; at the German's house in the Bois de Boulogne, he had met yesterday for the first time Sir Felix Kane, Courtney Phillips Willard, Ildar Achmet Bey, and the Argentinian, Leon Ricardo.

"I know nobody who might suffer if this merger became an accomplished fact," he said. "If I have enemies, they have made no previous attempt to, as it were, show

their hands." For the first time, he smiled slightly—a thin, mirthless smile. "I appreciate your concern on my behalf; it is comforting to know that you have the place guarded. As you see, gentlemen, I am helpless. My legs are—paralysed. If anybody desires my death, the task should not be difficult."

"You are mistaken, *maitre*," Paul Gerrard said quietly.

He stood behind his employer's invalid chair. His dark, dreamer's eyes were of a sudden keen and hard in his pale, set face. Monsieur de Carigny glanced up at him, smiling thinly.

"Ah, yes, I forget. There is one obstacle—a loyal secretary and an honoured friend."

The door opened suddenly. The four men glanced round, startled. A girl stood on the threshold. Obviously she had but just awakened from sleep. She wore a pink kimono—and pink mules on her bare feet. Her eyes, deep blue under soft, shadow-dark hair, looked wonderingly from one man to the other. She seemed very small, fragile and lovely, standing there in the great oaken doorway.

"Oh, I didn't know there was anyone here," she said softly, in English. "I—I was looking for you, Paul. I heard something—under my window."

"Why, Esther—what's the matter?" Paul Gerrard moved forward quickly, taking her hand. "You're frightened, dear." He glanced round, bowing slightly. "You will excuse us, gentlemen."

They went out. The door closed behind them. Monsieur de Carigny turned his blank, dark spectacles on Rick and Senac.

"My secretary's fiancée, gentlemen. She is a singer, and devoted to her art."

"She is very charming," Rick said.

"You may see her any night," the gaunt financier told them, "at the *Giroflée*, in the Rue de Parnasse. It is strange, gentlemen, is it not, that so sweet a child should sing in a night club? Paul does not like that, but it is hard to obtain opera engagements these days. She sings because music is in her blood, so Paul does not interfere."

"She lives with you?" Rick asked.

"But no. She has her own flat. Only she comes to stay sometimes. Since my illness,

Paul is with me a great deal, and it is only fair that I give him the opportunity of seeing his fiancée. They are deeply in love."

The door opened again. Paul Gerrard came in. His dark eyes were keen with excitement.

"I think," he said quietly, "that it might pay Monsieur Senac to look round the courtyard. Esther tells me she is sure something strange has happened there. She heard sounds—"

"*Tonnerre!*" Senac was on his feet, his eyes glittering. "We will see!"

He made a sign to Rick, who went out with him. Paul Gerrard followed them into the shadowy hall, slipped ahead to unbolt the door. Rick gripped the secretary's arm, drawing him aside.

"Steady! If there's someone out there

Very cautiously, he pulled the door open, holding the secretary back under cover. A scurry of rain surged in out of the darkness of the courtyard. Rick peered round the edge of the door. In the darkness he could see nothing. He waited for a moment, his hand tight on the automatic in his pocket.

"Well?" Senac whispered, behind Rick in the gloom of the hall.

Rick said nothing. He stepped out warily into the rain and the dark, peering about him. His foot brushed against something which lay on the cobbles. He bent down quickly, groping.

Even as he bent, a red jet of flame stabbed the darkness ahead of him. There was a low, muffled report. Senac shouted wildly from the doorway:

"Down! Down!"

Rick flung himself flat behind the thing which lay before him on the wet cobbles of the courtyard.

THE DEATH RIDE.

WHAT that thing was which lay before him he knew instantly. It was the body of a man. He sensed that, rather than saw it. The darkness of the courtyard was intense. The rain was chill on his bare head and his face. He lay motionless, peering into the dark over the still, huddled shape before him. His automatic was ready in his hand.

There was no sound from Senac or Gerrard, somewhere behind Rick in the darkness; they were still, he believed, in the hall. He lay unmoving, waiting for some sound which should betray the gunman's whereabouts.

The sound came—the faintest shuffle of a foot on the cobbles. Rick's pistol flamed into life, firing three times in quick succession. The sharp, abrupt reports shattered the deadly stillness.

There was a gasp somewhere ahead of him—a sudden thump. Someone, leaping upward, had caught the top of a wall, his boot-toes striking it sharply as he sought for a foothold.

Rick lunged to his feet, racing forward. In the darkness, the darker bulk of a wall loomed up before him. He had a glimpse of a shadowy figure crouched on the wall. There was a shout, and the figure dropped. Somewhere close on the opposite side of the wall a self-starter screamed into life.

Rick leaped upward, gripping the top of the wall. He drew himself up. So far as he could see, the wall was flanked by an alleyway, leading probably to the garage. From his left along the alley, the dark bulk of a car came sliding, all lights out. The running-board creaked under the weight of a man leaping aboard it. There was a sharp word, gasped out urgently, then the car's engine quickened. The car drew level with him. Dimly he made out its roof, gleaming

wetly. It was no more than a foot below him and a foot out from the wall. He drew a deep breath, and dropped down on to the roof of the car.

He fell sprawling, his legs sliding round dizzily over one side of the roof. He clutched at the opposite edge, gripped it, hauled himself round till he was lying lengthwise along the roof, gripping either edge. His pistol was gone.

With a snarl of gears, the car swung out from the dark alley into the broad, empty length of the Boulevard Saint Germain. He had a glimpse of the police car waiting, with sidelights burning, outside the great wrought-iron gates of the house. The gendarme driver was fumbling with the handle of the gates, shouting.

The car under him swerved suddenly to the left, almost throwing him off. He tightened his grip on the edges of the roof. Did they know he was aboard? He had dropped lightly, but they must have heard the thump, nevertheless.

The car was gathering speed every second, its lights on now. The rain lashed across his face. His body swung and slithered on the smooth, wet roof; his arms were taut as steel rods, holding him in place. He tried to turn his head, to see if Senac's men were following. But the car, skidding round to the right into the Rue de Rennes, almost flung him clear. The sudden jerk on his right arm sent a hot stab of pain through him. That was the arm wounded in the fight with the knife-expert. He hung on doggedly, sure now that the men in the car were aware of his presence on the roof. They were trying to dislodge him. That they did not stop was proof enough that Senac must be following and that the gunmen knew it.

The car boomed forward up the wide, deserted Rue de Rennes. A hand, gripping a pistol, appeared suddenly over the edge of the roof. One of the gunmen, leaning out backward from the window, was trying to get in a shot at him. Tightening the grip of his right hand, Rick let go with his left, making a grab at the gunman's wrist. He got it, hung on desperately. The hand slacked open, dropping the pistol—began to tug violently, trying to free itself.

The car boomed on through the rain and the dark, swept round in a wide, skidding curve into the Boulevard Montparnasse. A gendarme raced out from under a street-lamp, shouting, waving his arms. The car roared down on him. He leaped sideways just in time to avoid the shearing edge of its off front wing.

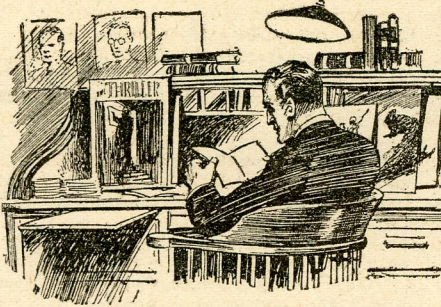
Rick kept his grip on the arm of the man in the car. Another arm came up, clawing at Rick's wrist. The crook's face appeared, contorted with fear, over the edge of the roof. He was shouting wildly, but the wind and the roar of the car's engine throttled the words between his teeth. He gripped Rick's wrist with his free hand, tugging madly. He dug his nails into the back of Rick's hand. Rick let go, catching at the edge of the roof.

The gunman, hanging backward half out of the window of the car, lost his balance as the grip of his wrist was removed. He clutched frenziedly at the roof edge—missed it. He was flung clear of the car, hurtled across the road.

The car swerved crazily to the right, bumped up on to the pavement, roared forward with one wheel on the pavement, one in the gutter. The awning of a café came leaping at Rick. He saw the iron bar, parallel with the ground, which supported the awning. The bar was a foot or so above the roof of the car. Rick's heart thudded in his throat. The driver of the car was trying deliberately to smash him against that bar!

With dizzying speed, the bar hurtled

THE LIGHTHOUSE CROOKS.



Cipher Detective Agency, came forward and persuaded Rod to join him and his charming partner, Faquita, in their war on Mathias Bel and his gang. Seeing in this the one chance of saving himself, Rod Helm went all out, but little did he know what he was letting himself in for, or of the amazing adventures that awaited him on Shudder Island. Don't miss this powerful and enthralling long yarn. Read it next week in The THRILLER.

In answer to several queries some while back, I have verified the fact that Hymie Weiss, the American gangster, who was reported as being one of the operators on Al Capone's crime council which he recently formed, was definitely killed in the booze racket by rival gunmen in October, 1926.

By the way, you will be interested to know that I am very busy planning a real bumper programme for you in the very near future. There will be wonderful opportunities for readers in the way of big prizes to be won. I can't tell you more now, but keep your eyes on The THRILLER for further announcements. There are big things coming.

Yours sincerely,

The Editor

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

THE popular thriller author, Douglas Newton, has added another triumph to his long list with his latest story, "Shudder Island," which I have selected for next week's issue.

Mr. Newton has always been renowned for his powerful writing, and now he has excelled himself in this newest effort of his. Shudder Island, a rocky, sinister mound rising abruptly out of the sea a short distance from the mainland, was by no means as barren and deserted as it appeared. Perched precariously in its centre was an old lighthouse, strange and forbidding, a veritable fortress and as unassailable, and here, defiant and immune, old Mathias Bel ruled his gang of thieves and gunmen.

When Rod Helm joined up with the Cipher Detective Agency, it was with the intention of recovering certain valuable jewellery which Mathias Bel had stolen from him. The jewels did not belong to him, and dishonour stared him in the face. It was then that Marcus Hahn, head of the

closer. It was almost upon him. He slithered sideways from the roof, clutching at the bar. His hands closed about it. A tearing, shattering jerk went through his body.

He was hanging to the bar. The car was past and gone, swerving out into the road again, booming away into the night. He had a fleeting glimpse of its rear number-plate—PD7060. Then his arms gave way, and he dropped. His legs crumpled under him. His brain was reeling dizzily. His arms and shoulders throbbed.

He lay still for a moment on the wet pavement, staring up blankly at the sodden awning of the café. The rain was cold on his face, chilling and steadying him. His head began to clear. He sat up with an effort, laughing weakly, peering foolishly at his right hand. Channels of blood trickled out from under his sleeve, where the bandage about his knife wound had given way.

He got unsteadily to his feet, muttering: "PD7060—got to remember that! PD7060!"

He heard a car come booming out of the Rue de Rennes, stop, come booming on again. It neared him rapidly. A gendarme was riding on the running-board. He saw Rick—shouted something to the man at the wheel. The car veered into the kerb, jerked to a standstill. The gendarme came running towards him; the doors of the car opened, disgorging other figures.

"*Tonnerre!*" Monsieur Senac was at Rick's side, peering anxiously at his face. "You are all right? Such a mad, wild-headed thing to do—"

Rick forced a grin, passing a hand over his rain-wet forehead.

"That'll be all right about wild-headed. What happened to the man who was thrown out?"

"The gendarme who tried to stop them saw it all. He is here, now. We have the fellow who was killed—"

"Killed?" Rick said sharply.

"But yes. He was thrown against a lamp standard—killed instantly. He is known to us—a notorious criminal, a Frenchman—Antoine Sachs, called 'Tony of the Blade.' The other—"

"Got away," Rick said grimly. "It's no good trying to tail him now, but I've got a line on him—the number of the car. Hadn't we better get back to the *Sûreté*, where we can straighten things out a bit?"

Paris, that city of early risers, was already stirring under the first signs of dawn as the police car drove back to the *Quai des Orfèvres*. The street-cleaners were at work in the wet streets; early buses began to appear. The workmen's cafés made cosy oases of light in the cheerless dawn; the smell of clean sawdust, fresh-baked *croissants*, fragrant coffee was in the air.

Rick, stiff, cold, soaked to the skin, forced himself to concentrate on what Monsieur Senac was saying:

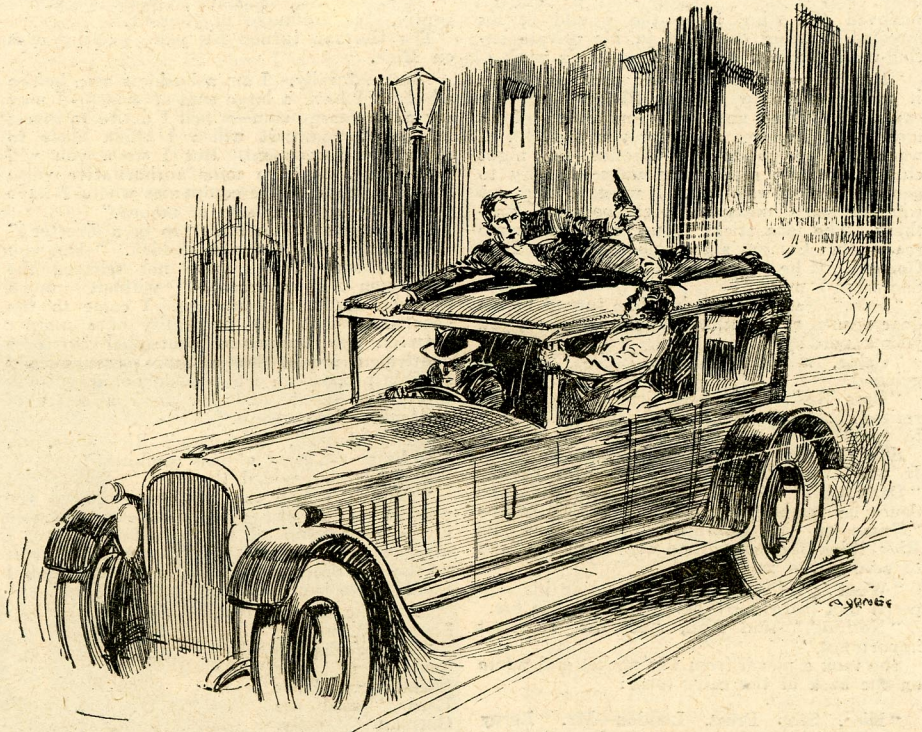
"We were not yet out of the door when the shot came. The Englishman, Gerrard, was all for leaping out to your assistance, but I held him still. I knew the slightest sound would draw the gunman's fire."

"What happened to the men you had on guard at Carigny's?" Rick asked.

The little detective swore bitterly.

"Two we found stunned at the back of the house—blackjacked, you call it, no? The other—dead in the courtyard. That was what the girl Esther heard under her window—the shot, half-muffled by a silencer, which killed that man."

"I see," Rick said. "And it was the gendarme driver of the car we came in who saw my undignified position on the roof of the gunmen's car, I suppose?"



Leaning out backward from the window, the gunman tried to get a shot at him. Rick let go his hold with his left hand and grabbed wildly. He got the crook's wrist and hung on to it desperately.

"Exactly."

They were silent for a moment, then Rick laughed harshly.

"Well, we've got plenty to think over! Put it like this: (1) What, if anything, will a police search of the taxi captured at the *Café des Touaregs* reveal to us? (2) Where exactly does the Baron von Steinlach stand in regard to these alarms and excursions? (3) Will PD7060 prove a useful line of investigation? (4) Who is the Dummy? Why so-called? And why does he desire the death of the five men on that scrap of paper? (5) Where does the money come from that makes it worth Roon the Jay's while to work with the Dummy? (6) Has Monsieur Honoré de Carigny any power over Paul Gerrard and that sweet kid, Esther Fane, that they stand by the old ghoul so loyally? (7) Am I allowing my imagination to get fevered, or does Monsieur Honoré de Carigny hide his eyes with dark spectacles because he drugs and knows that a drug-addict's eyes betray him instantly?"

Senac stiffened.

"You think that?"

"I rather nibble around that notion," Rick admitted. "His eyes are so sharp he could spot me for an Englishman before I opened my mouth. Why, then, does he wear dark spectacles like a purblind person?" He stirred uncomfortably in his wet clothes. "There's one more question: (8) What are the chances of a hot bath, a hotter breakfast, and a brief, reviving nap?"

"*Tonnerre!* That is to the point," Senac confessed. "I shall keep you but one moment more."

"My stamina," Rick said, with a brave smile, "is the wonder of my friends."

Of the vociferous family of telephones on Monsieur Senac's desk, one was ringing urgently as they entered his room. The little detective took up the receiver wearily.

"Comment?" He stiffened suddenly, listening, the blood flooding to his drawn and haggard face. "When? At what hour? *Tonnerre!* You did nothing? Fool! Fool!"

He was shouting into the 'phone, his nerves in rags from the strain of that night's work. "Remain there. I will send Inspector Dupont at once. I will come later myself. Yes, yes!"

He slammed down the receiver on its hooks, sinking wearily into his desk chair.

"They are all over Paris—all over the city—*everywhere!*"

"What's happened?" Rick said quickly.

The little detective pressed his hands for a moment to his face. He looked up then, his eyes bloodshot with fatigue.

"The men I posted at Leon Ricardo's chambers near the Luxembourg were attacked an hour ago by a squad of gunmen. Leon Ricardo was killed in the doorway of his bedroom! The five points again!" His voice took on the shrill note of desperation. "They are all over the city, I tell you! They are everywhere! *Mon Dieu! What are we to do?*"

A TRAIL OF DEATH.

IT was a belief of Rick Leroy's that work performed by a tired mind was that much work wasted. Therefore he chose to return to his hotel, and, as it were, to gird himself up with a hot bath, a hotter breakfast, and a few hours' sleep rather than to tackle at once, without adequate preparation, the work which lay ahead.

Nan, looking very sweet and fresh in a tweed skirt, white blouse, and leather golf jacket, was coming down the wide staircase as he entered the lobby of the Grand Hotel de Londres. She looked at him in astonishment.

"What! Out already? Couldn't you sleep?"

"Not very well," Rick said, grinning with lips that seemed strangely cold and stiff. "There were one or two little interruptions."

Nan looked him over critically, noting his sodden mackintosh, his drawn and haggard face, the drying blood on his hand.

"Something," she said, "has been happening. You've been out all night. I'm not going to ask any questions now. I'm just going up to tell Kasimo to fill you a bath so hot you'll yell, and then I'm going to get you the best breakfast in this hotel, or pull the place down!"

"What a wife you'll make!" Rick grinned. The hot bath dissolved the ache from his

body, and a little vaseline and a bandage removed the sting from the wound in his forearm. During breakfast in his private sitting-room, he told Nan of the night's work.

"I've arranged with Senac that he leaves it to me to follow up this PD7060 line," he explained. "I've got the glimmerings of an idea. And I've got a job for you to-night. I want you to go to the Girofée—the night club where this girl Esther sings—and try to get acquainted with her. I want to find out whether she's unhappy—frightened of anything. The idea sticks in my mind for some reason that Carigny's got some hold over Paul Gerrard. If he has, the girl might know of it. See what I mean?"

"I do," Nan said crisply. She turned as the door opened and Kasimo came in. "Well, you yellow peril?"

"Cable, missie, for Boss Rick," the Jap grinned.

"Boss Rick," said Nan firmly, "is on the retired list for the next few hours. Give it to me!"

She slit the envelope and read the cable. It was from Rice, managing editor of the "Daily Cry," who desired to know when the deuce he might expect the first article of the "Crime on the Continent" series, and did Rick think the paper had sent him to Paris to admire the midinettes?

"What is it?" Rick asked, toasting his slippered feet luxuriously before the electric fire.

"Nothing," said Nan, "of the remotest importance."

She took a pencil from her pocket and wrote on the back of the cable form:

"Rice. Stop Press. London—Mr. Leroy gone Tasmania on twelve-month vacation.—FERGUS."

"There!" she said. "That settles that! Here you are, Hari Kari. Send this cable."

The Jap went out, beaming all over his round, yellow face.

"And you," said Nan, turning to Rick, "go to bed—at once!"

"Yes, 'm," Rick grinned.

He went.

Nan crossed to the desk and removed the telephone receiver from its hook. It was bad enough, she reflected, to see one's husband-to-be all battered about; but if folk thought they were going to prevent his having an occasional snooze, they had a goodly number of second and even third thoughts coming to them. She settled down to deal with Rick's morning mail.

He awoke about three, refreshed and reinvigorated, and drove round to the Sûreté. Monsieur Senac, he was told, was engaged, but upon Rick's name being phoned through he was conducted at once to the detective's office. Monsieur Senac, bathed, rested, and impeccable, was in conference with a thick-set, well-dressed man, strange to Rick.

"Ah, Monsieur Leroy, I have been trying to get you on the telephone," the detective beamed. "But it was out of order, they told me. I want you to meet Monsieur the Baron von Steinlach."

"I've heard of Monsieur the Baron," Rick smiled. "How do you do?"

"I have heard of you!" the Baron said.

He was a typical German. His square head was shaven close to the scalp. His face was pale and hard, with thin, colourless lips and pronounced jaw muscles. Behind gold-rimmed spectacles, his eyes were pale green and small. There was in them a curious, set, peering expression, so that he smiled with his lips only. He was in morning dress.

"I have been wondering," Senac told Rick, "if perhaps Monsieur the Baron could throw any light on—the matter which is causing us so much concern."

"I am grieved to hear of it," the German said, in guttural French. "I will not disguise from you, gentlemen, that Sir Felix Kane and the others are more or less strangers to me. I have met them, as you know, only once. Even Monsieur de Carigny, until the day before yesterday, was known to me only by reputation. Whilst I am grieved at the terrible news, you will understand that I feel a still greater grief at the collapse of my own plans. I was anxious to contrive this merger."

"You saw it, of course," Rick suggested gently, "as profitable to yourself."

The German turned his pale, peering eyes on Rick.

"But naturally. I am a business man before all else. I have a large sum of money—I may say a very large sum—which I desire to invest in various countries which I think likely to repay the investment. But I wish, you will understand, to have some authoritative voice in the running of the companies where I have placed my so large sum of money."

"You mean," Rick said, "to be a director?"

"Exactly," the German nodded. "And you may be sure that I have not selected the gentlemen I approached without much thought, study, and analysis. I came to the conclusion that the possibility of a merger between the companies controlled by these gentlemen would be a more economically feasible proposition from—I do not disguise it—my own point of view than a series of scattered directorships."

"You planned, of course," Rick observed, "to be at the head of this combine?"

The German smiled thinly.

"Though I had not yet put forward the proposition, I had planned to—er—purchase my chairmanship of the combine. When I mentioned the sum I was prepared to invest in the associated companies, I do not think I should have been refused."

"And the sum?"

Senac said quickly.

"In the English money of our friend here, Herr Leroy," said the German softly, "ten million pounds!"

There was something in his face as he said that—a cruel, arrogant awareness of power—which gave Rick a startling glimpse of the ruthless brain behind those peering, myopic eyes. He gave no sign of the impression made upon him by the German.

"That's a lot of money," he said tranquilly. "In view of what's happened, do you intend to persevere with your attempt to engineer this merger?"

The German made a small, non-committal gesture with his squat, blunt-fingered hands.

"I do not know. It all depends now—"

"On what?" Rick asked.

"On the turn events take," said the German.

"I see," said Rick. Under cover of his lazy

smile, he was watching Steinlach closely.

"You aren't, by any chance, afraid?"

The German's jaw tightened; his pale eyes narrowed.

"Of what?"

"Three men associated with this merger," Rick pointed out, "have been killed. Assuming that some person or persons unknown desire to prevent this merger becoming an accomplished fact, doesn't it occur to you that their surest method of doing that would be your removal? You are the prime mover."

"It occurred to me," the German said grimly, "the moment Herr Senac asked me to

call upon him here, and told me why he wanted me."

"And you aren't," Rick said, "at all nervous?"

The German laughed harshly.

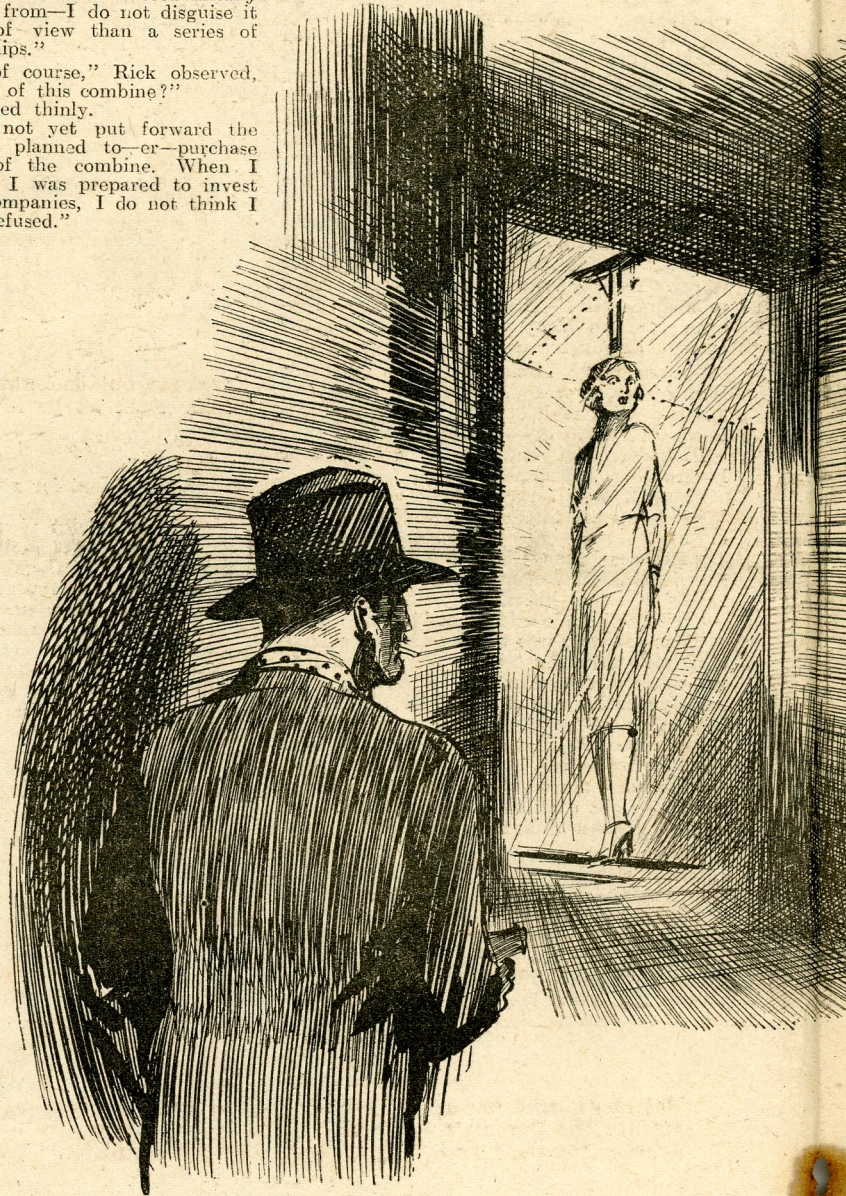
"Herr Leroy, you do not know me. I am afraid of nothing. If the need arise, I have adequate means of protection." He stood up, looking with his pale, peering eyes at Senac.

"You have further questions, no?"

The little detective glanced at Rick, who shook his head. Senac rose, escorting the German to the door. Steinlach bowed to Rick.

"It may be we shall meet again, Herr Leroy."

"I hope so, Herr Baron," Rick said



amiably. He looked at Senac as the detective returned to his seat. "Well?"

Senac's eyes gleamed.

"Why, of all those associated with this merger, is his name the only one missing from that paper bearing the sign on the five-pointed star? Is he telling the truth about his reason for inviting Sir Felix Kane and the others to Paris? Tonnerre, Monsieur the Baron shall be followed when he leaves here!" He selected a cigar from the box on his desk. "Meantime, Monsieur Leroy, we have searched that captured taxi. It revealed nothing, though its number-plates and licence

led us to a garage-proprietor in Saint Cloud. He sold the taxi a month ago, and knows nothing about the man who bought it. Thus another trail leads us nowhere."

"I wonder," Rick said meditatively, "if PD7060'll prove any more successful?"

He was wondering the same thing when, at half-past eight that evening, the taxi which had brought him thither slid to a standstill at the corner of that dark, narrow street, the Passage des Touaregs.

"*Ici, mon vieux,*" said the driver, opening the door.

Rick grinned as he climbed out. The driver's familiarity was a compliment to his—Rick's disguise. He had darkened his face

here—somewhere near the Passage des Touaregs. I don't know his exact address, but I know the number of the car he drives. Once I rode in it, when I came to Paris. You may know the car, perhaps—PD7060?"

"There are many cars in Paris," the driver shrugged. "You will find a cheap lodging-house, the Hotel des Sports, in the Rue de l'Orient, first turn on the left there. Good fortune, *mon vieux.*"

He slipped into reverse, swung his taxi round, and drove away. Rick, left alone in the darkness of the narrow street, grinned to himself. He had expected no more helpful an answer to his question than he had got; he had put the question merely for the sake

The solitary waiter, in shirt sleeves divided his time between tending two great, bubbling urns on the bar, and muttering furtive advice to one after another of four card players at a corner table. Rick bought the waiter a *bière brune*, talked with him for a few minutes, then edged in skilfully his question concerning PD7060. The waiter reflected.

"Your brother, you say?"

Rick nodded. "PD7060? Eh—there are so many cars—"

He appealed to the card players. "Auto PD7060—you know it, hein? Who owns it? This one, he comes all the way from Montaban, seeking his brother, who is chauffeur to the owner of this car."

"He'll have to seek a long time," one of the customers said maliciously. "Does he think there is but one car in Paris?"

The others laughed, Rick with them.

"No matter. I'll find him. He owes me money."

He paid for his drink and went out again into the rain and the dark. N.G., that time. Nevertheless, he'd carry on. Somewhere in this quarter the Dummy had his lair, and it was from that lair PD7060 worked; he was sure of that.

Visits to three more cafés failed appreciably to advance his quest. In this ancient district of alleys, passages, narrow flights of steps, and ramshackle, dark buildings, he had no idea of his direction. But he paid no attention to that. He knew vaguely that the river was somewhere about; he had only to get to the river to find his way back along the quays.

Emerging from a dim little basement café, ambitiously titled the Grand Café d'Arabic, he stood hesitant for a moment, considering. To his right was the narrow, unlighted street down which he had come; to his left a café, making the street a cul-de-sac; before him, a narrow opening between two dark, tall buildings, was a flight of worn stone steps, leading downward into darkness—probably, Rick thought, to a street on a lower level.

He began to descend the steps, going cautiously, groping his way for the steps were narrow and crooked, enclosed between stone walls. A sudden report, somewhere below him in the darkness, brought him up sharply. He stood rigid, listening. A gun? The report sounded again, shattering the dead quiet; an engine roared into life, throttled down at once. There was a low swishing sound—the screw of a motor-boat. Those reports had been backfires. The river was below him.

Going as swiftly and as silently as his heavy boots would allow, he went on down the steps—came out on to a quay. It was very dark. No light showed. He stood listening at the foot of the steps, peering into the darkness.

Somewhere ahead of him, he could hear the engine of the motor-boat ticking over quietly. There sounded the low mutter of men's voices.

Very cautiously, groping with one hand along the wall which backed upon the quay, he moved closer. Dimly now, ten yards ahead of him in the darkness, he made out the black shapes of men—three of them, in a group near the edge of the quay, talking in low voices. One of them dropped down into the motor-boat; the others followed. The boat slid out into the river, faded away into silence and the dark.

Rick released his pent-up breath; his heart was bumping with excitement. He moved quietly forward, looking up at the building opposite which the boat had been moored. The building was in darkness. He made out dimly the shape of a brass plate on the big double doors. He peered close at the plate, with difficulty spelling out the legend on it:

MEISSER ET CIE.,
BATEAUX.

A boat-builder's and hirer's! An excellent blind. The certainty gripped him that this was a base—perhaps, even, the headquarters—of the murder gang.

Very gently he tried the door. It stood firm. He moved along under the wall of the building. There were no windows on the ground



Hot fury surged through Rick as he saw Nan bound and helpless in that room of death. The Dummy's voice came softly from behind him. "You came for your fiancée, Monsieur Leroy. You shall join her forthwith. Both of you are too dangerous to live."

a little with grease-paint; beneath his unbuttoned black oilskin there were visible the blue smock and leather belt of a French peasant; he wore a stiff-peaked cap, corduroys and heavy Army boots. He had chosen thus to disguise himself that any slight discrepancy in his accent might be accounted for by his obvious provincialism; also, the disguise was in keeping with the district into which he intended to penetrate. He counted on the driver's fare carefully from a leather purse, and inquired for a cheap lodging-house.

"I'm looking for my brother—a chauffeur," he explained. "He lives somewhere about

of testing his method of approach. It was not, he feared, notably convincing; but, for lack of a better, it would have to do.

The Rue de l'Orient was a narrow street running parallel with the Passage des Touaregs. In the rain and the dark the shabby houses loomed up dimly to either side. There was a café half-way down the street. Rick went in, took a seat at one of small, metal tables, ordered himself a *bière brune*. There were one or two customers, but the place lacked the feverish gaiety of the Café des Touaregs. It smelt of damp clothes, sawdust and chicory, and was badly lighted.

floor. Flanking the building on the right, was a long, wooden boathouse. A wheeled derrick stood near the door of the boathouse; Rick looked up at the steel arm of the derrick, towering into the dark. A light sprang suddenly into being in a window on the first floor of the main building. Rick stiffened, looking up. The great hook at the end of the wire cable of the derrick was silhouetted blackly against the lighted window, no more than six feet or so from it.

Who was in that room beyond the lighted window? What was going on there? Here was his chance to find out.

He drew a deep breath, peeling off his oil-skin. He swung himself on to the derrick and began cautiously to climb the towering steel arm. Six feet from the top, he stopped climbing. From there, reaching out, he could grip the cable. He swung himself on to it, let himself down cautiously till his foot was in the curve of the hook. He peered in through the lighted window.

The room beyond was big and sparsely furnished. Three carpentry benches, a roll-top desk and a chair comprised all the furniture. There were shavings on the floor. The light came from a green-shaded electric bulb, low down over the desk. Under the light a man was sitting sideways to the window. He wore a green eye-shade and leaned forward over the desk in an attitude of intense concentration, one hand resting lightly on the sending arm of a Morse code buzzer.

A hot thrill of exultation burned through Rick. The man in the green eye-shade was Roon the Jay.

A sudden sound behind Rick in the darkness, made him turn his head sharply, straining his eyes into the night. The cable swayed with his movement. He could see nothing—but distinctly there came to him, drawing swiftly nearer, the low booming of a powerful motor-boat engine.

He swore softly. If that was the gangsters' boat, he was due for trouble. He must, he knew, be in clear silhouette against the lighted window. Swiftly, he changed his grip on the cable, preparatory to hauling himself above

the level of the window. But even as he made the move the vicious spat of a machine-gun studded the night. Bullets ripped past him through the dark. With a splintering crash the glass of the window was shattered. The gangsters were firing from the river, curving their boat in to the quay.

In the room, Roon the Jay was on his feet, pistol in hand. He leaped, crouching, for the window. Rick had a glimpse of the gunner's battered and distorted face; he saw Roon the Jay hunch down beneath the level of the sill, swinging up his gun.

With all his strength, Rick jerked at the cable, increasing its sway. The gangster's shot went wide. The cable swung upward, carrying Rick into the dark to the left of the window, above sill level. The machine-gun chattered again. Bullets splintered into the wall under his feet. There was a rattle of footsteps on the quay—shouts. The cable lost way, swung backward again past the window, veered up to the right.

Rick's brain was racing. There was one chance for him! As the cable came swinging down again past the window, he released his grip, jerking his body sideways. Like something flung from a gigantic catapult, he was hurled in through the window. The framework splintered away before the hurtling weight of his body. He crashed down upon Roon the Jay. Fighting desperately, they rolled over and over on the floor of the lighted room.

The gangster was on top, his pale eyes glaring into Rick's. His thick lips drawn back in a snarl from his blackened teeth.

"Leroy! By—"

Rick's fist jabbed upward, smashing into the twisted, snarling mouth. The gangster's head snapped back. Rick wrenched free, lunging to his feet. The gangster heaved up, still gripping his automatic. Rick bored in close, getting the gangster's gun-wrist. He pulled the gangster's arm over his shoulder, putting all his strength into a prodigious forward jerk. Roon the Jay whirled in a complete somersault over Rick's shoulder, crashed down on his back. His head struck the floor violently. He lay still.

Rick snatched up the fallen automatic. He stood rigid for a moment, trying to still his hasting breath to listen. From somewhere below him, there came a low, urgent buzzing, closely followed by the rush of feet on stairs. Rick's eyes flickered swiftly about the room. The pounding feet on the stairs gained the landing outside the door. The door gaped open. Rick flung himself flat behind the nearest of the carpentry benches. A volley of shots ripped across the room. The light over the desk shattered out.

In the sudden dark, Rick edged his automatic round the side of the bench, low down, firing in the general direction of the door. There was a shout, pain-choked—a second volley of shots. He heard the bullets splinter into the massive bench before him. He grinned slightly, waiting for further shots. None came. There was no sound from the gangsters. They were waiting, he guessed, for some sound which would advertise his movements.

Save for that small buzzing sound, to his right and under the floor, the dark room was very still—very silent. That buzzing sound—Rick sensed that it was a warning of some kind; an alarm signal, perhaps. Somewhere under the building, he guessed, there must be a secret chamber, where the gangsters had their hide-out. He must get out of here quick, before he found himself taken in the rear through some hidden door in the walls of this room. He must lure the killers from the motor-boat away from the door.

Carefully, making no sound, he drew his own automatic from the pocket of his corduroys. Peering about him in the dark, he measured his distance from the window, a vague, greenish square against the dark. Poising the gun he had taken from Roon the Jay, he tossed it low down toward the window. It struck the wall just under the sill, fell with a clatter to the floor.

Instantly, a volley of shots jettied out from the door. There was a low shout, in French: "Tiens! The window! We have him, now!"

"The error," Rick breathed, "is on your side, gentlemen!"

A rush of feet carried the gangsters across the room, past Rick to the shattered window. The bright beam of an electric torch lanced out into the rain-filled dark.

Rick heaved to his feet, edging his way cautiously in the direction of the door. A dim-lit cavity appeared suddenly before him, bringing him up sharply. One of the massive carpentry benches had slid aside. A figure loomed up out of the cavity, saw Rick, shouted wildly, grabbing at his feet. Rick kicked out, caught the man on the shoulder, toppling him backward whence he had come.

The men at the window came whirling round; the bright beam of the torch glared in his eyes. He ducked, leaping across the cavity; he gained the door of the room. A fusillade of shots spat after him; a bullet seared through the shoulder of his smock, ripping it open. Then he was through the door, on a dark landing, groping for the stairs. He found them, pounded down recklessly.

Behind him, in the dark, he could hear the rush of feet as the gangsters plunged in pursuit, firing at random as they came.

A door yawned open at the foot of the stairs. Rick raced through it—found himself out on the quay again. For a moment, he hesitated, uncertain in the darkness which way he should turn. An idea leaped across his mind. The motor-boat! The gangsters had come in a motor-boat!

He moved forward swiftly to the edge of the quay. The dark bulk of the motor-boat floated alongside. A figure loomed up behind the engine cover.

"Who—"

He got no further. Rick dropped down into the boat, slamming his fist at the dim grey blur which was the man's face in the darkness. Rick's fist jolted home. The man reeled backward over the gunwale into the dark water. Rick dropped, panting, into the seat behind the wheel—fumbled for the self-starter. The engine roared into life. Rick thrust open the throttle. The boat jerked forward, curving out from the quay into the dark river. Red jets of flame stabbed the night behind him.

THE DUMMY STRIKES!

THE Girofée night club stands in one of those discreet side streets which open off from the Rue de Montmartre. It is, to all appearance, a modest enough little establishment, specialising in theatre suppers, and only in the skysign, high up near the roof, is there any promise of gaiety and diversion for the tired business men of Paris. The skysign is an ingenious contrivance, depicting a leg of fair dimensions, outlined in electric-light bulbs, which kicks lustily upward at a top-hat, likewise outlined in electric-light bulbs. After every kick, leg and hat disappear, and there comes to gladden the eye of the jaded pleasure-seeker this intriguing legend:

"Oh, la, la! Cabaret Girofée!
Yvonne et Suzanne
dans
'Attendez-moi!'
avec

Esther Fane et Les Trois Wilburs.
Tous les soirs! Oh, la, la!"

With this merry promise, the legend is dimmed, and the leg repeats its persevering but consistently unsuccessful attempt to demolish the hat.

Save for this one bright spot, Nan reflected as she paid off her taxi, the Rue de Parnasse was a depressing thoroughfare. It was dark and narrow and ancient, like the majority of Montmartre streets, and the rain did nothing to gladden the prospect. Stepping carefully in her high-heeled slippers, she crossed the wet pavement to the entrance of the night club.

The big revolving door opened upon a long foyer, heavily carpeted and lighted by three great chandeliers. A commissionaire of vast dimensions, wearing so many medals he rattled at every step, approached her with ambassadorial deliberation, twirling his moustache.

"Pardon, mademoiselle. Your escort?"
"Escort?" Nan said blankly.
It had not occurred to her that she would need an escort. She was here, at Rick's

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request, to make the acquaintance of, and to study, Esther Fane.

"You have no escort?" the commissionaire said, frowning. "A thousand regrets, mademoiselle, but—no ladies can be admitted alone."

"But I *must* go in," Nan protested.

"A million pardons, mademoiselle," the commissionaire shrugged. "It is the rule."

Nan saw that he was adamant. She hesitated, considering. A voice behind her said cheerily:

"Maybe I can help?"

Nan turned quickly. A man in evening dress was smiling down at her. He was tall and tanned, with a humorous mouth and blue, tolerant eyes. By his accent, Nan knew him for an American.

"You must excuse my horning in," he said. "It's a liberty, but I was just entering, and I overheard this little difficulty of yours. I think you're English, aren't you? We foreigners must stand together. If my company wouldn't pall on you, I should feel honoured."

He took a card from his case, handed the card to Nan. She glanced quickly at the name on it: "Mr. Courtney Phillips Willard, New York." She looked up, smiling.

"Mr. Willard, this is very curious. I know more about you than perhaps you think."

"That," the man from Texas smiled, "is my good fortune."

He offered his arm. When they were settled comfortably at a table in the supper-room, Nan explained who she was.

"Rick has told me all about you," she said. "But—you oughtn't to be alone, you know." Willard chuckled.

"I know what you mean. Well, I've been tailed around all day by a brace of these French bulls, and it began to get me down. I can look after myself, I guess. I gave them the slip to-night, and came around here to have a look at the only honest-to-goodness American act in town—the three Wilburs, old buddies of mine."

"And the police don't know where you are?" Nan said.

She glanced anxiously around the big room. The negro orchestra was playing with vim and fire Maurice Chevalier's latest; the dancing floor was thronged with couples.

"That's O.K.," the American said, smiling. "If there's anybody wanting trouble, I'm right here to oblige. I may be in the entertainment game, but I'm Texas-bred, and I'm quick on the draw!"

But Nan was not listening. Her eyes were on three people who were in the act of entering the room—a woman and two men. The men, quick-eyed, silent individuals in evening dress, she did not know; but the woman, a dark, exotic creature in a magnificent gown which matched the amber of her eyes, Nan recognised instantly. A chill hand seemed to close about her heart. The woman in the amber gown was Roon the Jay's confederate and decoy, Stiletto Annie Gurney!

Nan's eyes flickered to the Texan. He had noticed nothing. He was proffering his cigarette-case, smiling. Nan took a cigarette, leaned forward to light it at the match he held for her. She said softly, looking into his eyes:

"Were you followed?"

Willard's eyes narrowed slightly, but he gave no other sign of surprise.

"I'd've sworn not. I was careful to cover my trail."

His hand, holding the match to the end of Nan's cigarette, showed no sign of tremor. That pleased her. The Texan was to be relied on.

"Whatever you do," she said quietly, between puffs at the cigarette, "don't look round in a hurry. There are three people here, just taking a table to the left of the orchestra dais—a woman and two men—the Dummy's creatures! Be ready for trouble!"

She leaned back in her chair, puffing a little, leisurely cloud of cigarette smoke toward the ceiling. The Texan tapped the ash gently from his cigarette, watching Nan.

"You're cute. What do we do? Flit?"

"Fatal," Nan smiled. "I'd draw attention to us at once. Don't look round. They haven't seen us yet. They're taking stock of the room."



Cautiously descending the steps, a sudden sound from beneath him drew Rick up sharply. The next moment he saw the gang's motor-boat slip out into the river.

She leaned forward suddenly, to smell the flowers in the vase on the table before her. The little manoeuvre hid her face at the exact moment when the amber eyes of the gangster's lady roved toward her. She leaned back again, after a moment.

"All clear. They haven't placed us. You've got your back right to them, and they missed me."

Over Willard's shoulder she watched the gangsters unobtrusively. The two men had their heads close together, evidently in conference. The woman, leaning back in her chair, the cigarette smoking between her small, very red lips, was watching the couples on the dance floor. Suddenly she caught sight of two men sitting at a table in a corner of the room, to the right of the door. She raised her eyebrows slightly—nodded her head. She returned to her survey of the dancers.

"Miss Fergus," Willard said, "if you don't tell me what's going on behind my back, I shall explode, which would be an embarrassing *contretemps!*"

Nan smiled. The little byplay she had just witnessed had made clear to her one thing, at least.

"You didn't tell anyone you were coming here?" she asked.

"Nary a soul," the Texan assured her.

"Then it's not you they're after," Nan said.

"No one, except the Gurney woman and her cavaliers, has entered since we came. That means they had two men posted here before we arrived. They're after someone or something else, and"—her eyes held his for a moment—"it's a big job. There're five of them here. That means—"

She broke off as the orchestra fell silent. The buzz of conversation swelled louder in the great room. The lights were dimmed suddenly. Two bright-coloured beams shot out from either wall to play on the cleared dance floor. A section of the floor slid aside; a huge oyster-shell rose up through the cavity. The orchestra was playing again now—very softly. The shell opened. A troupe of dancing-girls emerged from the shell on to the polished floor. They formed themselves swiftly into line—began to dance.

The drums rumbled portentously. Another girl emerged from the shell. In the glare from

the spotlights, her costume, close-fitting to her slim, lithe body as its leaf is to a lily, shimmered like mother-of-pearl. The great snell slid from view; the floor glided back into place. The girl in the pearl-coloured frock was singing as she led the dance. From Rick's description, Nan recognised her at once as Esther Fane.

She was, Nan thought, the sweetest youngster she had ever seen. Her dark, soft hair, parted in the middle, curved away gently to either side of a white brow. Her eyes were wide and deeply blue. She danced, as she sang, with a sweet, spontaneous gaiety, rapt in the music.

"She's a nice kid," Willard said, close to Nan in the gloom outside the radius of the spotlights; "too good for this stuff."

"Yes," Nan said absently.

Through the gloom, she tried to make out the table at which Roon the Jay's lady was sitting with her

confederates. The dancing girls hid the table from her view, but the other table—the one in the corner, to the right of the door—she was able to see. She caught her breath with a little gasp, gripping Willard's arm. The two men who had been sitting at that table were there no longer!

"What is it?" Willard said softly. "Watch out!" Nan breathed. "It's coming—soon!"

It came even as she spoke.

The dark figure of a man padded forward suddenly into the glare of the spotlights, making straight for Esther Fane. The little singer hesitated, her voice wavering; she shrank back. With an abrupt, bizarre discord from the violin, the orchestra fell silent. The line of dancing girls scattered back. Esther Fane stood rigid, wide-eyed and frightened. The man leaped, gripped her arm, thrust something into her face—a handkerchief. She struggled for a moment—went limp in his arms.

A woman screamed wildly, in sudden terror. Lights leaped up, all over the room. The Texan muttered savagely at Nan's side:

"The dirty hound!"

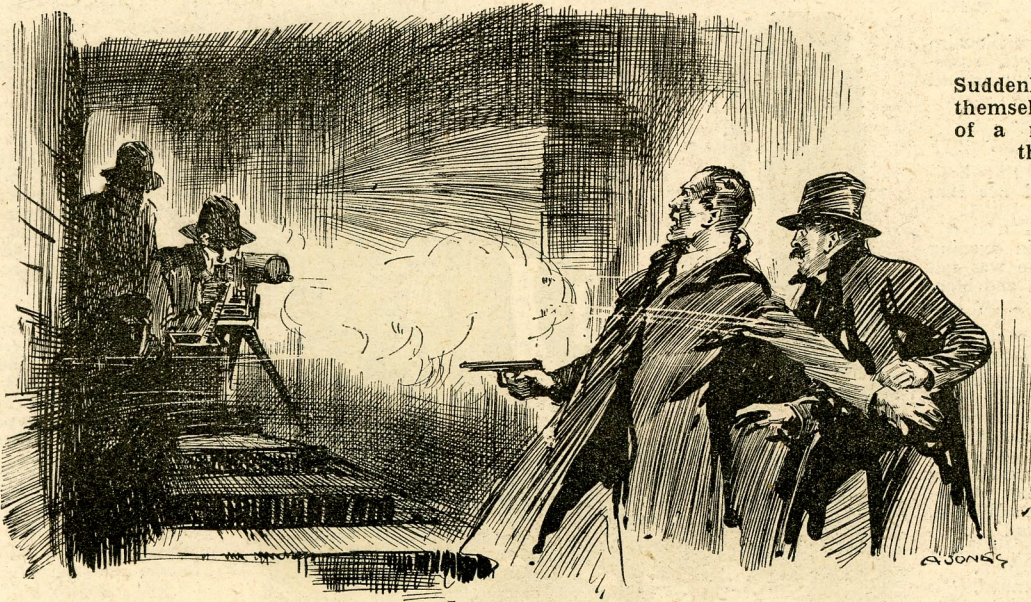
He was on his feet, lunging forward on to the dance floor. Supporting the limp figure of Esther Fane, the gangster whipped up an automatic in his free hand, covering the Texan. The gangster's gun jerked, jetting flame. The Texan pitched forward on his face.

Nan rose quickly, snatching her little pearl-handled automatic from its niche under her garter. She was too late. Her arms were gripped from behind. A voice rasped in her ear:

"Drop that, lady!" Powerful fingers bit viciously into her arm, just above the elbow. The pain forced her to open her hand. The automatic dropped. The man who held Esther Fane was speaking harshly, in French:

"Keep your seats! Everybody in this room is covered!"

The patrons sat quite still at their tables. Waiters and orchestra watched helplessly, like frozen men. The two men who were with Stiletto Annie stood erect to either side of their table, their pistols circling round slowly, menacing the people at the tables. One of the remaining two gangsters was holding Nan;



Suddenly the detectives found themselves staring into the muzzle of a machine-gun, planted at the top of the steps.

the other, she guessed, was in the foyer, dealing with the officials there.

Nan's heart was pumping heavily, but her brain was cool and alert. She kept her eyes on Stiletto Annie. Would the woman see her—recognise her? As coolly as though nothing unusual were happening, Roon the Jay's lady lighted a cigarette and rose to her feet, drawing on her evening wrap. She glanced at the man who held Esther Fane—nodded slightly. The gangster slipped his gun into his pocket, lifted the unconscious girl in his arms, moved quickly towards the door.

Stiletto Annie's narrow, amber eyes glanced across at Nan. The gangster woman stiffened slightly, a thin smile of recognition parting her red lips. She moved across to Nan, smiling sardonically, the cigarette smoking between her red lips.

"Well, well! Little Nancy Fergus! This is our lucky day, sure enough!" Her silky, taunting tone changed abruptly: "Give me her wrists, Joe!"

She snatched up a napkin from the table, twisted it about Nan's wrists, knotted it tight. She took up another napkin, smiling maliciously.

"Anything to say?"

Nan laughed.

"I like your frock, Annie, but I think your taste in lipstick's awful!"

"Yeh? Well, here's something for *your* lips," the gangster woman said, between her teeth.

She drew the napkin about Nan's mouth, knotted it viciously tight at the back of her head.

"All right, Joe! Get her outside!"

Gripping her arm, the gangster led Nan towards the door. She made no attempt to struggle or to hang back, knowing it to be useless. She allowed herself to be hurried through the foyer, where the bemaddened commissioner and three other employees of the Girofée stood helpless under the gun of one of the gangsters.

Two cars were drawn up against the kerb in the dark, rain-swept street. The gangster wrenched open the rear door of the nearest car, thrust Nan inside, climbed in after her. In the gloom of the car Esther Fane was lying back limply on the seat. She was still unconscious—chloroformed. Nan guessed. Her hands clenched tightly behind her. The brutes! Rick'd get them for this!

The revolving door of the night club spun again. Stiletto Annie and her killers emerged quickly. The men made for the second car. Stiletto Annie climbed in beside the driver of the car which held Nan and Esther.

"Step on it!"

The engine shrilled into life. The car boomed forward down the narrow street. Through the darkness the skysign flashed out

its message perseveringly. The colossal leg kicked vainly at the prodigious hat; the huge legend promised gay times within: "Oh, la, la!"

IN THE CATACOMBS.

WELL clear of the quay on which was the highly questionable establishment of Meisser et Cie., Bateaux, Rick cut off his engine to listen. No sound came to him, save for the ripple of water along the boat's side, as it slid forward under its own impetus through the rain and the dark. There was no pursuit. Rick smiled grimly, re-starting his engine. He sent the motor-boat plunging forward in a sheath of spray towards the faint luminance in the night sky which marked the heart of Paris.

In the tremulous light of the street lamps on the more frequented quays, he had no difficulty in recognising the Quai des Orfèvres and the unimpressive facade of the Sûreté building. He swung the boat into the quay, moored it, and, a bedraggled, spray-soaked figure, gave his name to the gendarme on duty at the door of the Sûreté. He was told that Monsieur Senac was still in the building, and was conducted at once into the little detective's presence. Senac stared at him in astonishment.

"*Tonnerre!* What is this? You are wet!"

"That," Rick told him, "is a minor detail. We've got to get a move on! How many men can you get together, and how quickly can you get 'em?"

"I can have the specials out at two minutes' notice," Senac said crisply—"a dozen strong."

"In motor-boats?"

"That will mean a few extra minutes, to get in touch with the river police headquarters."

"Go ahead," said Rick.

The little detective's eyes were keen with excitement.

"You've found something, *hein?* Monsieur, behold me move!"

He snatched up one of the regiment of telephones on his desk, spoke into it crisply, slammed down the receiver, looking at Rick.

"What happened?"

"If you can find me some dry clothes and a towel," Rick said, "I'll tell you while I'm changing."

He did so. Senac snapped his fingers.

"Meisser et Cie! I know the place. It is on the Quai de l'Orient. Monsieur, let us hurry!"

They hurried to such good purpose that it was little more than twenty minutes thereafter when three motor-boats, their engines silenced, slid out of the darkness and drew alongside the Quai de l'Orient, under the looming, dark building of Meisser et Cie., Bateaux. Less than an hour had elapsed since Rick had made his getaway from that same building. Nevertheless, by reason of the darkness of the boat-

builder's, and its silence. Rick suspected that the counter attack had come too late.

The men of the special squad attached to the Sûreté scattered silently along the quay, forming a cordon between the dark building and the river. Three men Rick sent up that flight of stone steps, from which he had heard first the backfiring of the gangsters' motor-boat, to the street above quay level. It was in his mind that the gangsters might have some bolthole opening upon that street.

After the disposal of their forces, Senac and Rick, with two other men, moved forward

cautiously to the big door bearing the brass plate with the legend "Meisser et Cie, Bateaux." The door stood wide open, as it had been when Rick had made his getaway through it.

"The birds have flown," Senac said softly. "We shall see!" Rick breathed.

Gun in hand, he groped his way up the staircase to that room on the first floor. The other three moved silently at his heels. The room was in darkness; that cavity which had appeared before him in the floor was there no longer. Rick took a torch from his pocket, running the bright, small beam around the room. He noted the position of the desk, the shattered window, the massive carpentry bench behind which he had sheltered. From the relative position of these things he tried to judge which of the great benches was above that cavity in the floor.

He selected a bench which stood against the wall opposite the window. This, unless his sense of direction was all wrong, should be the bench which had slid aside. He set his weight to it, pushing toward the left. The bench stood firm. He peered round at the Sûreté men, bulking darkly behind him.

"Lend a hand!"

They came forward silently, putting their combined weight into a concerted push at the massive bench. There was a click, somewhere under the bench. It slid to one side on well-oiled runners.

"Got it!" Rick breathed.

He flashed his torch into the black cavity. Steps were revealed, spiralling downward. The steps were of stone, uneven with age, so narrow as barely to give passage to one man. Rick guessed that they were built into the wall itself.

Senac exclaimed softly, just behind him: "The catacombs! *Tonnerre!* For a fortune, this building is over a section of the old catacombs of Paris!"

Rick nodded, laying a warning hand on the little detective's arm. They listened. No sound came to them from below. Motioning the others to follow him, Rick lowered himself through the cavity on to the topmost step. Very cautiously he began to descend, playing the torch on the steps before him. Every nerve in his body was taut and alert.

The steep, narrow steps spiralled downward between the great, unsmoothed blocks of grey stone which formed the wall. He checked suddenly, with a small, sharp intake of breath. Something in the contour of the two steps immediately below that on which he stood had caught his attention in the circle of light from the torch in his hand.

"What is it?" Senac breathed.

Rick said nothing. That which had attracted him was the fact that, whereas the edges of the other steps were rounded and worn with age, those two ahead were square-cut and evidently new. Why? He leaned

forward, peering closer in the torchlight. Those two steps were of steel. He smiled grimly, an idea striking him. From his pocket he drew a rather long nail-file and, poising it over the step, dropped it so that one end touched the wall at the side and the other the surface of the step. Immediately there was a vivid flash, and so strong was the current which had passed through it, that the file leapt in the air.

"Mon Dieu!" Senac snarled. "Electrified!" "Evidently the Dummy's own special substitute," Rick said, "for a 'Welcome' mat. We shall have to jump!"

Judging his distance carefully, he leaped across the two deadly steps to the stone one beneath them. He landed safely, went down two more steps, and turned, holding the torch for the others. They negotiated the trap in safety, and went on down, tense and watchful.

The steps led them into a long, narrow tunnel, dark and silent. From the dank moisture which glistened on the stone walls in the light of Rick's torch, it was clear that the tunnel was well underground—clearly, as Senac had said, a section of the ancient catacombs, that strange labyrinth of subterranean passages and chambers which warrens under ancient Paris.

Silently, torch in hand, Rick led the way along the tunnel, peering ahead into the darkness beyond the beam of the torch. A faint glow showed there suddenly. Rick stopped short. He had seen that very distinctive glow once before in his life—when he was in the Army. He flung himself flat on the floor of the tunnel, burying his face in his crooked arms.

"Down!"

A jet of lambent, unearthly flame leaped forward, man-high, out of the darkness—liquid fire! Behind Rick in the dark tunnel, one of the Sûreté men shrieked wildly. Without raising his head, Rick emptied his pistol blindly along the tunnel. There was a choked sob—a thud. Through the reek of gun-powder there came to Rick the terrible smell of burning flesh.

He raised his head slightly, peering forward. In the darkness before him there was a faint, luminous glow on the floor of the tunnel. He got slowly to his feet.

"All clear!"

His voice was hoarse and unsteady. Sweat rolled down his forehead into his eyes. Liquid fire, the vilest, most satanic invention of mankind!

He moved forward recklessly along the tunnel, playing the torch ahead of him. A figure lay huddled on the floor. From the pipe which had dropped across the killer's throat as he fell, a minute trickle of the deadly stuff even yet found egress. The man's face in the torchlight sent a cold thrill of horror crawling up Rick's spine. It was a face blasted out of all human semblance. He rolled the body over with his foot, looking down at the cylinder which was strapped to the man's back. He peered round at Senac.

"How'd our man get on—the man who yelled?"

"It just touched his shoulder," Senac said thickly, "but he's all right."

Rick nodded—stood listening for a moment. The tunnel was deadly silent. He turned the beam of the torch ahead of him into the darkness. A door sprang up in the circle of light, a massive, ancient door, iron-studded. He moved towards it, tried it gently. The door swung silently back on well-oiled hinges. Stabbing forward into the dark, the bright beam of Rick's torch revealed a large, low-roofed chamber of stone—a cellar. Rick stepped warily through the doorway, playing his torch around the cellar.

There were in it one or two leather chairs, a desk, a massive safe, and, on the stone floor, a couple of Persian rugs. Save for those things, the cellar was empty; but there was that on the floor which told Rick that it had not been empty long—the still-smouldering end of a cigarette, glowing red in the dark.

There was a door in the wall opposite that by which they had entered. The door opened at Rick's pull, revealing, in the beam of the torch, an upward flight of steps.

He turned the torch up the steps. The bright beam flashed full upon the muzzle of a machine-gun, planted at the top of the steps

—upon the haggard, grim faces of three men who crouched behind the gun.

Rick leaped back with a shout of warning. Simultaneously the gun ripped into action. The torch was shattered in Rick's hand. He flung himself sideways, under cover of the cellar wall.

Senac's pistol cut loose. The detective was firing round the edge of the door-frame. There was a sobbing gasp. A shadowy figure pitched forward down the stairs, rolling over and over into the cellar.

The rattle of the machine-gun ceased abruptly. A rush of feet pounded across a board floor at the top of the steps. Rick leaped up.

"They're bolting! The Dummy! They were covering his retreat! Quick—quick! He can't be far away!"

He lunged up the steps, dodged round the gun-nest, came out into a narrow hallway, unfurnished, lighted dimly by a street-lamp whose feeble glow penetrated through an open door. Rick raced for the door—out into the street.

As though it had awaited his coming, a big, closed car came hurtling at him from his right, roaring with its throttle wide open, bumping up on to the pavement. The shearing edge of its left front wing ripped his mackintosh as he leaped clear. In the light of the street-lamp he had a momentary glimpse of a face, peering out at him from the rear window—the face of a girl with a bandage across her mouth.

Nan!

Even as the car roared past, a black-gloved hand slid across the girl's shoulders, pulling her back from the window.

ULTIMATUM.

Rick whipped up his gun desperately, aiming at the rear tyres of the speeding car.

A sharp click was the only answer from his pistol. Breech and magazine were empty. Before he could make another move the car had swung to the right, up a narrow turning, and only the fading hum of its engine was left.

Senac was at his side.

"Gone!"

Rick said nothing. He stood rigid. In the light of the street-lamp his face seemed suddenly to have grown haggard and old. Three men came running through the rain down the narrow street—the men Rick had posted there at the beginning of the raid.

"They got past us—we had no chance."

Senac looked at Rick.

"We have no car. They are clear by now."

Rick turned slowly. His eyes were expressionless. His voice had in it a strange, dull note.

"The Dummy was in that car. He had Nan with him. He's got Nan!"

"Mon Dieu!" Senac breathed. "And you were to be married—"

Rick gripped his arm. A sudden, taut, cold fury rasped in his voice.

"Listen, Senac! I shall get him! D'you hear? I shall get him! And if he's hurt her—my Heaven, he shall pay for it as no man's ever paid before!"

He released the detective's arm then, and outwardly was calm again. But the grim, deadly fury of the hunter burned within him like a flame.

The preliminary search of the four-storied, ramshackle, empty house into whose

cellar the tunnel opened cut revealed nothing of value. The safe in the cellar, together with the drawers of the desk, had been stripped clear; and therein, Rick guessed, lay the reason for the Dummy's last-minute getaway, and for his posting of men to cover his retreat. Knowing, after Rick's escape, that the coming of the police was inevitable, he had been at pains to strip his lair of anything incriminating. That had taken time, but he had got away with it.

"By seconds," Rick told himself bitterly.

Leaving the place in the hands of the special squad, he returned with Senac to the Sûreté. There they found Courtney Phillips Willard awaiting them. The Texan was very white under his tan; his left arm was in a sling.

"I'm here to offer my services, gentlemen," he said grimly. "I feel now like I've got a personal interest in this matter. When a guy cuts loose at me with a gun, he's apt to get me riled?"

"What happened?" Rick asked.

Swiftly the Texan related that which had taken place at the Girofée—Esther Fane's capture and Nan's.

"When I started to sit up and take notice again," he explained, "the little singer was gone, along with the gunners and M'ss Fergus. The Girofée was staging what the papers call a 'sensation.' The telephone connections had been hauled out by the roots, and half the Girofée's staff was running around the streets, looking for gendarmes. They were just beginning to arrive when I left, pointing out for a doc., and then for here. I'm pretty sure, when they shot me down, that the tugs didn't recognise me. If I'm one of the bunch they crave to put their brand on, they'd've slipped me another bullet for luck if they'd known who I was."

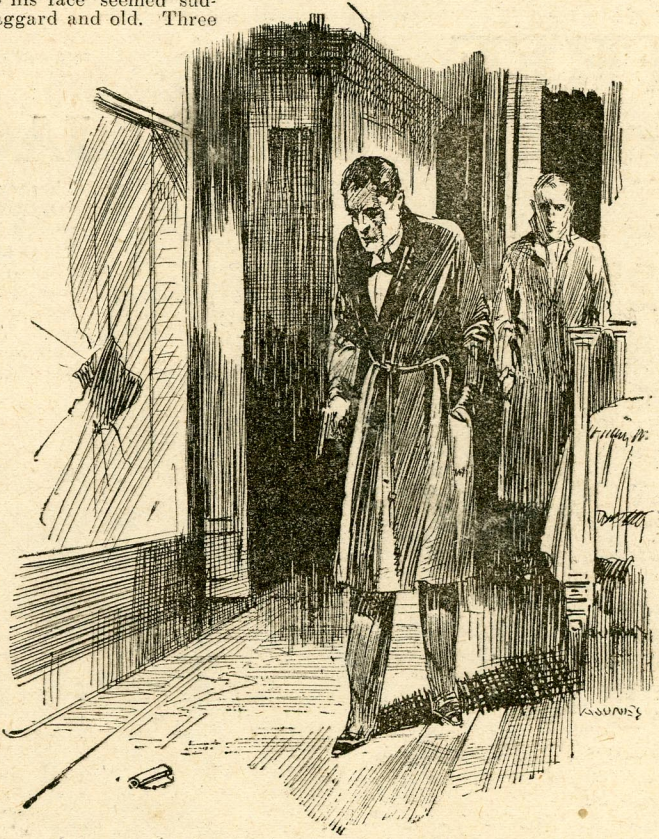
"They didn't follow you there?" Rick said sharply. "It wasn't you they were after?"

The Texan shook his head.

"They were after that little singer. There's no doubt of that."

"And Nan," Rick said slowly, "was an afterthought."

It was simple enough to reconstruct that which had happened. The gangsters had taken



Lying on the floor by the broken window, was a small cylinder of paper wrapped round a heavy object. It was a message from the Dummy.

the two girls to the Dummy, at the hide-out by the river. They must have arrived there shortly after his escape in the motor-boat. When the Dummy had made his getaway, he had the girls with him in the car. All that was clear enough, and for Nan's capture there was an obvious motive; in Nan they saw a weapon against himself. But what motive could there be, Rick wondered, for the capture, obviously premeditated and planned, of Esther Fane? Where exactly did the little singer fit into the Dummy's scheme?

He rose abruptly, took his leave almost with brusqueness of Senac and the Texan, and returned to the Grand Hotel de Londres. He wanted to be alone—to think. He must forget the urgent, pressing anxiety in him—keep his mind clear, cold, alert. At the moment he did not see what was to be done, but somewhere in the spate of events which had succeeded his discovery of the armed taxi outside the Opéra Comique there must be, he felt sure, some vital hint, some loose end, which would lead him to the evil heart of this business.

He sat for a long time at the desk in his private sitting-room, thinking, going step by step over that which had happened during the past forty-eight hours. He began to write:

"Sir Felix Kane, Courtney Phillips Willard, Honoré de Carigny, Ildar Achmet Bey, Leon Ricardo. Mail order. Night clubs. Finance. Hotels. Casinos."

He pored for a long time over that, then he crossed out the names of Sir Felix Kane, Ildar Achmet Bey, and Leon Ricardo, leaving those of Courtney Phillips Willard and Honoré de Carigny. To those two names he added that of the Baron von Steinlach, and beside the name of Honoré de Carigny he wrote: "Dark spectacles. Why? Dopes?" To this he added:

"Esther Fane. Paul Gerrard. Their relationship to Carigny? Is Carigny crippled? Has he been ill? Who is his doctor?"

He lighted a cigarette, and sat in grim concentration upon the paper. Presently he re-dipped his pen and wrote.

"Significance of Esther Fane's capture?"

The telephone at his side on the desk shrilled suddenly. He started slightly, hesitated, took up the receiver. The night porter of the hotel was at the other end of the wire. There was, he said, a gentleman in the lobby asking for Mr. Leroy.

"Who is he?" Rick asked quickly. "Monsieur Paul Gerrard. He says the matter is urgent, monsieur."

"Bring him up," Rick said. He hung up, rose to his feet, and, crossing to the fireplace, stood frowning thoughtfully. There was a knock at the door.

"Entrez," Rick called. The porter appeared. "Monsieur Gerrard."

He went out, closing the door behind the secretary. Paul Gerrard came forward quickly. "I'm sorry to bother you, Mr. Leroy, at this hour. I ought to have gone to the Sûreté, I suppose, but you're a fellow-countryman, and I know something of your reputation. I'm in trouble."

"I know about it," Rick said gently. He drew up a chair, fetched decanter and glasses from a tallboy in a corner of the room. "Sit down and have a drink."

"Drink!" Gerrard laughed unsteadily. "Curse the drink! Esther's gone—disappeared—captured! They've got her—the men who killed Sir Felix Kane and the others! My Heaven, they'll kill her! Those murderers—"

His voice caught in his throat. He was trembling uncontrollably. "Steady," said Rick. "We must keep our heads."

Gerrard dropped into a chair, running a white, nervous hand through his thick, dark hair.

"I'm sorry. But—but it's hard to be calm when—somebody you love is—in danger!" "I know how you feel," Rick said, and that was more true than Gerrard realised. He handed the secretary a glass. "Here—drink this. It'll steady you."

The secretary drank the neat brandy at a gulp, but its calming effect became almost instantly apparent. He said more steadily:

"I've just come from the Girofée. When Esther wasn't back, and it was after two, I

rang up her flat, and her maid told me she wasn't there. So I went to the Girofée, and the gendarme on duty there told me what had happened." He pressed his hands to his face. "Oh, Heaven, suppose they've—"

"Don't suppose any such thing!" Rick said sharply. "We'll get her back all right—and you can help."

"How?" Rick was watching him closely. "By telling me, Gerrard, exactly how you stand with Monsieur Honoré de Carigny."

The secretary hesitated. "I owe him—a great deal."

"Of what?" Rick asked. "Money?" "No—of gratitude. He took me on years ago," Gerrard explained, "when I was starving here in Paris, penniless and jobless. He's always treated me well."

"I see," Rick nodded. "And how long has he been crippled, Gerrard?"

"Since his illness—a year ago. His legs were paralysed."

"I see," Rick said again. He looked reflectively at the soda bubbles in his glass. "And what doctor attended him during his illness?"

The secretary hesitated briefly before answering. "Doctor André Bassecheur." A faint flush crept into his cheeks. "Why are you asking me all this?"

A sudden interruption prevented Rick from answering. At that hour of the night, in the quiet of Rick's sitting-room, the interruption was startling—the sudden crash of breaking glass in the bed-room which opened off from the sitting-room.

For a moment the two men were rigid, looking at each other. The room was deathly silent. Save for the faint, rapid ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece, there was no sound.

Gerrard licked his lips nervously. "What was that?"

Rick set down his glass carefully on the mantelpiece. He drew his automatic, moving across soundlessly, without haste, to the big double doors of the bed-room. He stood listening for a second, gun in hand, outside the doors. No sound came to him from the bed-room. Very cautiously, he turned the handle of the door, opening it inch by inch.

In the widening fan of light which pierced through the opening door into the darkness of the bed-room, something which lay upon the floor caught and held his attention—a small cylinder of paper, three inches or so in length. He switched on the bed-room lights, looking about him. The room was empty. Through the broken window-pane the wind breathed, fluttering the curtain. With the toe of his shoes, Rick rolled over the tube of paper on the floor. It slacked open, revealing the heavy rifle bullet of "service" pattern, about which it had been wrapped—evidently for the purpose of throwing it through the window.

Rick picked up the paper. Pencilled words, in capitals roughly scrawled, caught his eye. His heart thumping, he smoothed out the paper, reading that which, in French, was written thereon:

"You thought you held the trump cards to-night. You know now that you were mistaken. I have in my hands two hostages, by this time you will know who they are, and I have set a price upon their safety. The price is yourself. Go to-morrow evening at ten to the Café des Trois Spahis, Rue du Bac. You will be met there. Bring police, attempt treachery, or fail to keep this appointment, and the hostages will be dead within one hour. Do as you are told, and I guarantee you their freedom. This is an ultimatum and a challenge."

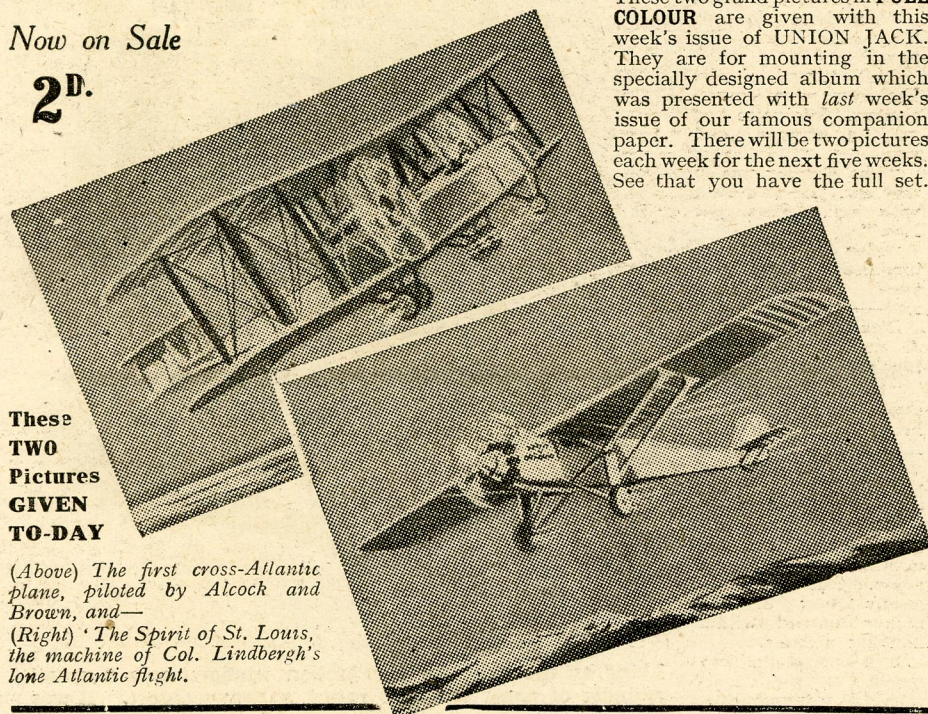
The note was unsigned, but it did not need a signature to tell Rick from whom it came. For a full minute he stood motionless, looking down at the note in his hands. His brain was racing. To keep this appointment was to go to his death. Not to keep it, or to get in touch with Senac, was to seal the fates of Nan and of Esther. The Dummy, Rick knew, would keep his word in that respect. But would he keep it, Rick wondered, in the other? Would he set free his hostages if the conditions of his ultimatum were fulfilled?

Paul Gerrard was watching Lim anxiously from the doorway.

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"What is it?"

Rick drew a deep breath, thrusting the note into his pocket. He had made up his mind. He said slowly, looking at Gerrard:

"There's one chance for the Dummy's prisoners—just one chance!" His hand gripped tight on his automatic. "I'm taking it!"

MAN BAIT.

WHEN Gerrard had left him, Rick did not go immediately to bed. He returned, instead, to his desk, and for a long time was busy there with pen, paper, and a small, compact finger-print outfit. Towards five o'clock he 'phoned two cablegrams through to the post-office, and not until this was done did he change into dressing-gown and slippers, and turn in for a nap on the chesterfield in his sitting-room.

At eight o'clock he was awakened by Kasimo, bringing coffee, croissants, the morning mail, and the papers. Rick paid no attention to his mail, but over his petit déjeuner he skimmed swiftly through the papers. Without exception, the latest columns were given up to a brief report of the Giroflée affair; and what the papers said about the Sûreté, Rick reflected sardonically, was a shame.

Just after nine the telephone rang. Rick, bathed, shaved, and dressed, took up the receiver. Senac was at the other end, excited and desperate. The Baron von Steinlach had disappeared!

"When did you discover this?" Rick demanded.

"Only this morning—half an hour ago. He entered his house in the Bois de Boulogne at six last evening. My men watched the house all night, and then this morning I was telephoned by the Baron's valet. The Baron retired early—about ten. But he was not in his room when his valet took coffee in at eight-thirty this morning—and his bed had not been slept in!"

"What are you going to do?"

"*Tonnerre!*" I shall obtain a warrant from the Chef d'Instruction for Steinlach's arrest! He must have slipped out somehow last night—got through my men! He is in this, I tell you—"

"He's in it all right," Rick said grimly.

"What about Carigny?"

"Safe. I have his house well guarded. You will come to the Sûreté soon?"

"I shall not," Rick said deliberately, "be round to-day."

Senac was startled.

"How is this? You have a line of your own?"

Rick smiled slightly.

"A line of my own—yes."

He hung up. A line of his own! His fingers closed about that sheet of paper in his pocket. Yes, he had a line of his own—a line that would take him at ten this evening to the Café des Trois Spahis, in the Rue du Bac. He must follow that line alone. The Dummy had laid down that stipulation, and so long as he held the girls the Dummy called the tune. Perhaps also, Rick told himself grimly, the Dummy would pay the paper.

Meantime, there was plenty to think about. A new factor had arisen in the shape of Steinlach's disappearance. That would bear thought.

During the day Rick put through a 'phone call to Doctor André Basseheur, at his surgery, in the Boulevard Saint Michel. Also, he received three cables. The first read thus:

"Have grave doubts. Known to have lost large fortune in Wall Street crash of 1929."

It was signed "Barker," and the second cable, arriving an hour or so after the first, bore the same signature:

"S. Mendes. Alexander Cassothenes. Karl W. Brandtheeth. J. K. Sale. Heaven knows. —BARKER."

The third cable, which came about five, was in cipher. Rick construed it with the aid of a key, and wrote out its message in long hand:

"Lew Gilan, born in London of Hungarian parents. Well-known gangster. Served sentence N.D.T. Disappeared soon after release. No information. HANSARD."



With the bandage about his eyes, Leroy was led by his captors into the gang's headquarters.

A pulse was racing in Rick's throat when he had finished reading that message. His grey eyes were glittering with excitement. He drew a sheet of paper toward him and began to write rapidly. It was after eight o'clock before at last he had finished. He read with minute care through that which he had written, then he folded the sheaf of papers, placed them in an envelope, and rang for Kasimo.

"Deliver this right away."

"Yes, master," the Jap grinned. He went out.

Rick rose, glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece, went into his bed-room. For no particular reason, save, perhaps, a vague desire to meet with something of a flourish that which lay ahead of him, he changed into a dinner jacket. Twenty minutes later, wearing a black felt hat and a dark coat over his evening dress, he left the hotel.

From the Place de Vendôme to the Rue du Bac is no great distance. Rick elected to walk. By the time he reached the Gardens of the Tuileries, he suspected that he was tailed; glancing back casually as he crossed the Pont Royal, he knew it for a fact. Moving along unobtrusively, twenty yards in his rear, was a dark figure, muffled in a greatcoat.

Rick smiled grimly, moving on.

"Watching to see if I've got the dicks following. Well, that's their mistake. I haven't."

He moved on across the bridge into the Rue du Bac, that picturesque thoroughfare which flanks the Quai d'Orsay station on the left. The Café des Trois Spahis was a small, unpretentious establishment on the corner of the Rue du Bac and the Rue Jacob. Through its uncurtained window the lights of the café cast a yellow parallelogram upon the pavement.

Rick slowed his pace a little as he drew level with the café. So far as he could see through the window, there were half a dozen men in the café—a couple standing at the bar, the others sitting at different tables. Rick drew a deep breath, pushed open the glass-topped door, and stepped on to the sanded floor of the café. Nobody glanced his way save the greasy-locked waiter, polishing glasses behind the bar. Rick, strolling casually across to the counter, ordered himself a cognac.

"Make it strong," he added loudly—"very strong!"

Every nerve in his body was strung taut, on the alert, but he gave no sign of that as he leaned easily against the bar, looking into the big pier-glass on the wall behind it. In the glass he could see the faces of every man in the café. The two who leaned against the bar, a few yards to his left, talking in low voices, were Roon the Jay and the narrow-eyed man who had been with Roon at the Café des Touaregs two nights ago. Roon had his back to Rick.

"Bad weather, monsieur," the waiter said, pushing a liqueur glass of cognac across the counter.

"Terrible," Rick agreed. "Nothing would've brought me out to-night, garçon, except a tryst with old friends."

"Ah, monsieur, old friends are best," said the waiter, touched.

Rick grinned. In the pier-glass he met the close-set, pale eyes of Roon the Jay, watching him venomously. The gangster looked away at once. A man entered the café. He wore a greatcoat, with the collar tucked high about his chin. He glanced swiftly round the room, nodded, moved across to the counter. Evidently it was the "all clear" signal for which the gangsters had been waiting.

Roon the Jay turned, smiling wryly, to Rick.

"I hear you talking of your old friends, monsieur, yet it seems you've forgotten us."

"By no means," Rick said heartily. "You had your back to me—that was all. As though I could ever forget old Lebrun—dear old Lebrun! How are you, my old friend—and the eleven little Lebruns?"

He seized the gangster's hand, shaking it warmly. Roon the Jay's lips curled back, snarling, from his teeth. Clearly this was not the greeting he had expected. But he said only:

"We have a car waiting. Come."

He laid a hand on Rick's arm, moving doorway. The narrow-eyed man ranged up on Rick's other side. Rick was escorted from the café, round into the Rue Jacob, where a closed car was waiting. The five other

gangsters came ranging up, forming a ring about Rick in the dark street.

"Frisk him," Roon the Jay said harshly.

Expert hands quested down Rick's body, found his automatic and removed it, took even his pen-knife.

"O.K.?" Roon asked.

"Yep."

"Right. Truss him."

Rick's wrists were wrenched behind him; he felt the bite of strong cord. A black silk handkerchief was drawn across his eyes, knotted tightly behind his head. Hands thrust him into the car, guiding him roughly to a seat. The engine shrilled, dropped to a hum. The car glided forward.

Roon the Jay chuckled softly beside Rick in the back of the car.

"Thought the girl'd fetch you, Leroy. This lets you out!"

"Maybe," Rick said amiably.

He was trying to judge in which direction they were going. Through the black handkerchief across his eyes he could see nothing; but from the note of the car's engine he judged that they were travelling fast, doing between fifty and sixty. That suggested that they were on one of the broad roads leading out northward from the city. Once or twice cars boomed past them, coming from ahead and dropping rapidly behind. The gangsters rode in silence; the steady booming of the engine was the only sound.

It might have been, Rick judged, half an hour after the start when the car slowed down, hooting three times on its electric horn—one long hoot, one short, one long again. The car swung round to the right. The wheels were biting on gravel—traversing, he guessed, the drive of a house. The car purred to a standstill. Hands gripped his arms, guiding him out from the car into what he guessed was a hallway, up a flight of stairs, along a landing with a thick carpet underfoot. A door breathed open before him. Hands fumbled at the knot of the handkerchief over his eyes. The handkerchief was whipped away; a heavy thrust sent him staggering forward into darkness. The door slammed shut behind him. There sounded the click of a lock.

Recovering his balance, Rick stood motionless, peering about him. After the long pressure upon his eyes he could see at first red circles and flashes before his face; but these faded swiftly, leaving only the dark. Well, he was in for it now, he told himself; he had walked open-eyed into the trap. Would the Dummy keep his guarantee?

He exerted pressure upon the bonds about his wrists, testing them. They stood firm. Cautiously, for fear of tripping over something, he made a circuit of the room, rubbing his left shoulder along the four walls. The walls were smooth and bare; so far as he could judge, the room, no more than twelve feet square, was empty of furniture. The floor underfoot was hard—parquet, he guessed. The darkness was intense.

He began restlessly upon another patrol of his prison—checked suddenly, staring at the wall opposite him.

A vague, diffused light had appeared there. Even as he watched the light strengthened and grew, swelling red into the darkness. He stood rigid, watching.

The wall at that end of the room whence the light came seemed to have disappeared. Through the square opening where the wall had been another room was visible. It was from that room that the light came, swelling up crimson out of the floor. As the light grew stronger he made out the shape of the room beyond. Three feet above the floor the walls turned inward at an angle, sloping up attic-like.

In the centre of the room a vague figure was discernible, motionless in the phantom red light. The figure seemed to be suspended a foot or so above the floor of the room. Rick watched, his breath held, his heart bumping in his chest. With a sinister, steady deliberation, the crimson light grew stronger—and suddenly he saw whose was that motionless, rigid figure in the next room.

"Nan!"

She was bound by wrists and ankles to a steel arm, shaped like a huge T-square inverted, which protruded downward from the

centre of the ceiling. The walls of the room, Rick saw then, were of steel.

For a moment he made no move, then, with a low exclamation, half-stifled, he plunged forward. Something hard, yet in that vague, crimson light invisible, brought him up sharply. Glass! The wall between his prison and that chamber of steel was of thick plate glass! He kicked at it desperately, unable to use his hands. The glass was strong as steel. A voice behind him said smoothly in French:

"You see, Monsieur Leroy? It is quite useless!"

He whirled round, panting. In the doorway of his prison a figure stood facing him, covering him with an automatic held steadily in a black-gloved hand. The figure was all in black—black patent shoes, black dress trousers, a black cloak buttoned high about the throat, a gibus. But it was at the face that Rick looked. It was an extraordinary and terrible face. The eerie crimson light which fell upon it served only to accentuate its complete lack of intrinsic colour. The nose was straight and faultless; the pale, closed lips were well-chiselled, the cheeks hollow but without lines, abnormally smooth. The shadow from the hat-brim fell across the eyes, hiding them completely, though Rick had the impression that the eye cavities were strangely sunken.

A cold thrill of horror stabbed through him. He felt the flesh creep at the base of his skull. There was about that face something eerie and menacing. It was the face of a statue or of a dead man—colourless, expressionless, lifeless. It was the face of—a dummy!

THE DUMMY'S LAST CARD.

THE man in black said smoothly, yet in a voice strangely muffled:

"Monsieur Leroy, I was expecting you. I have made all arrangements for your reception."

He laughed softly, sardonically—but his lips did not move. Only then did the truth dawn upon Rick. The man before him was wearing an exquisitely carved mask!

Without turning his head the Dummy spoke sharply to someone on the landing behind him. Roon the Jay moved forward into the red-lit room, his great shoulders hunched, his powerful hands hanging hooked at his sides, his battered prize-fighter's face grinning in triumph. A giant coloured man padded at his heels—the Moor, Rick guessed, of the Café des Touaregs. They ranged up to either side of Rick, gripping his arms. A section of the plate glass wall slid outward. Rick was hustled through into the crimson chamber of steel.

Hot fury burned in him, but he made no attempt to struggle, knowing it to be useless. He must keep cool, he told himself—watch his chance. He looked at Nan. Her feet rested on the cross-piece which was parallel to the sloping walls, and her ankles and wrists were bound to the rod itself. She was facing Rick, where he stood helpless in the grip of Roon the Jay and the giant Moor. The eerie red light, thrown upward from crimson-painted bulbs let into indentations at the angle of walls and floor, was upon her face, composed and without tremor; her eyes were steady and fearless, meeting his. For a long moment they looked into each other's eyes. Neither of them spoke. In that look was said between them all that there was to say.

The voice of the Dummy spoke smoothly from the opening in the glass wall:

"You came for your fiancée, Monsieur Leroy. You shall join her forthwith." His voice sharpened. "Roon—Kanifra—string him up!"

Swiftly Rick was secured by ankles and wrists to the steel rod. His back was to Nan's, the steel rod between them. The Dummy moved round, facing Rick. The mask of the killer was still and placid; but his voice betrayed something of the cold, deadly triumph which possessed the man behind that emotionless false face.

"Monsieur Leroy, it has pleased you to meddle in my affairs. Now I shall end your meddling."

"You guaranteed to release the girls," Rick said.

His voice was thick with the fury that burned in him.

The Dummy laughed softly.

"That was—strategy, Monsieur Leroy! I wonder you did not foresee this."

"I did foresee it," Rick said.

His voice was steadier now. He had control of himself.

"Ah! Yet you came nevertheless? I salute your courage, Monsieur Leroy," the Dummy sneered.

"It wasn't courage," Rick said quietly. "It was merely that I knew you would kill the girls if I failed to keep the appointment. I kept it because I wanted to be with Miss Fergus."

He felt Nan's hand, bound to the steel rod an inch or two below his, touch his fingers.

The death mask, looking up at him, was immobile, void of expression.

"Love is a potent man-bait, Monsieur Leroy. I understand that Miss Fane, whom I hold prisoner in another room, has a lover also. It may be that I shall release Miss Fane when she has fulfilled the purpose for which I needed her. But for you and for your lady, Monsieur Leroy, you, signed the death warrant when you raided my base of the Quai de l'Orient." The flat, deadly voice rose a little. "Both of you are too dangerous, Monsieur Leroy, to continue alive. We have fought a pretty duel and you have lost—*Englishman!*"

He spat that word as a man might a vile insult. His black-gloved hand rested now, writhing, on an ebonite dial in the steel wall of the room. His voice was edged with murder:

"I wonder, Monsieur Leroy, if you appreciate your present position to the full? The bar to which you and your lady are secured is a pendulum. I assure you that the steel is of the finest—very strong. The walls of this room are of steel also; you will note their slope, the angle of which coincides mathematically with the angle of the pendulum at the top of its arc. There is a certain point at which the pendulum will break—but that will not interest you." Behind the calm, emotionless mask the voice of the killer shook with triumph. "The inference, Monsieur Leroy, should be obvious."

His black-gloved hand writhed about the dial in the wall; but he continued to talk, savouring his triumph, rolling the words round his tongue. Rick, bound and helpless, said nothing. But, behind his back, his fingers were questing urgently for the knots which held Nan's wrists. If only he could reach them there might be—just a chance.

"You will understand, Monsieur Leroy, that sometimes it is necessary that I obtain information from persons reluctant to give it. Threats prove useless. It is then that I bring into play this little device. You would be surprised, Monsieur Leroy, how hastily my would-be-reluctant informants unbosom themselves when the pendulum first crushes the body against the wall. Let me demonstrate."

His black-gloved hand tightened on the dial, turning it.

There was a low hum of machinery directly over Rick's head. Simultaneously the bar began to move. The slope of the steel wall drew nearer, receded; the pendulum swung upward or Nan's side.

The Dummy's immobile mask, eerily satanic in the crimson light, followed the movement of the pendulum.

"You appreciate the beauty of the device, Monsieur Leroy. Were I a wagering man I should say that the girl will die first. You are a powerful man, Monsieur Leroy; your stamina may slightly prolong your—discomfort. Meantime—"

The sudden shrilling of a bell cut startlingly across the smooth, flat, deadly voice. The Dummy turned his death mask quickly towards the door. Above the lintel three electric light bulbs were winking rapidly—two green, one white.

The Dummy spoke sharply to Kanifra the Moor, and Roon the Jay. The gangsters went out quickly. The Dummy turned his placid, terrible mask toward Rick.

"It is necessary that I leave you, Monsieur Leroy. I shall return shortly to—observe your progress."

He laughed softly, moving across the room. The door clicked shut behind him.

For a moment, in that crimson chamber of death, there was no sound save for the hum of the machinery overhead. With the un-hurried, measured stroke of a thing driven by clockwork the great pendulum, with its bound and helpless figures back to back, gradually enlarged its arc.

Rick's wrists were torn and bleeding from his desperate efforts to get his fingers to the bonds which held Nan. He set his teeth grimly against the pain, picking doggedly at the knots in the cord.

Before him on the sloping steel wall there was a dark stain—blood, long dried. Some other poor devil had handed in his cheeks in this chamber of crimson Nemesis. With every stroke of the pendulum that carried him upward toward the steel wall Rick kept his eyes on that stain, judging by it the deliberate, steady lessening of distance between the pendulum and the wall. Nan said softly at his back:

"Is there—any chance, Rick?"

Her voice was low, but quite steady.

"The cord's loosening," Rick said hoarsely. "Stick it, old girl!"

The pendulum swung upward again. The distance between the wall and his body was no more now than a few inches. He picked desperately at Nan's bonds—gasped suddenly:

"Grab the bar!"

He had felt the knots give.

The pendulum swung dizzily upward on Nan's side. Gripping the bar, she twisted her body half round; but the cords about her ankles held firm.

"Hang on, with your left hand," Rick panted; "try to reach your ankle cords with your right!"

"Forget it!" Nan said tensely.

He felt her hands struggling with the knots which held his wrists. The pendulum swung him up again. The red stain on the sloping wall came to within an inch of his face; the wall touched his chest lightly. Sweat trickled down his forehead. He gasped urgently:

"For Heaven's sake, Nan, get yourself free first! There must be some way out of this Hades! I shall be O.K."

She did not answer; her hands wrestled desperately with the bonds which held Rick's wrists. The low hum of the engine overhead continued inexorably. Through the crimson light the pendulum swung steadily to and fro. He felt the growing pressure of the steel wall against his body.

"Nan—for Heaven's sake——"

The pendulum swung down—up on her side. He heard her gasp as her body struck the wall.

"Nan—for Heaven's sake——"

But even as he spoke the bonds about his wrists slackened and gave way. Gripping the bar behind him he tried to flatten his body away from the wall, but the breath was struck from his lungs.

Gasping, he lowered his body, twisting round as the pendulum began its down stroke. Holding the bar with his left hand, he wrenched with his right at the bonds about Nan's ankles. The pendulum swung up, crushing her against the wall. The thought was throbbing in his mind that the next stroke would be—the last.

The bonds gave.

"Jump—jump, Nan!"

She jumped, stumbled across the floor, recovered her balance. She swung round.

Rick was upright again on the pendulum, his whole body tensed against the imminent blow of the wall. The blow came. Something inside him seemed to crack and give way. A sharp, burning pain seared through his body. The crimson light whirled crazily about him like a delirium. The pendulum was swinging down again. Somehow he managed to crouch, tugging at the cords about his ankles.

The door gaped open suddenly. Roon the Jay stood for a moment on the threshold, staring. He plunged forward, his hand snapping back to his hip. But he did not fire. With a little choked sob Nan leaped at him, gripping his gun-wrist.

He swore savagely, trying to shake her off. She fought with all her strength, holding on. His battered, broken face was twisted with rage. He whipped up his left hand to strike

her—and in that moment Rick's last bonds gave.

Even as the pendulum struck the wall with a metallic clangour he leaped, stumbled, was up at once. He lunged forward, smashing his fist into the gangster's face. Roon the Jay's head snapped back. He pitched sideways, lay still where he fell. Rick bent quickly, frisking the gangster's pockets for his automatic. He found it—straightened up. His face was white and twisted with the burning pain at his side. A rib was broken there.

He gripped Nan's arm—stood listening for a moment at the open door. From somewhere below there came the swift, vicious rattle of a machine-gun—a violent, splintering crash.

Swiftly gripping Nan's arm he moved out on to the landing. To their left along the landing was the head of the stairs. They made for it quickly, tense and ready.

A figure appeared suddenly at the top of the stairs—a black-clad figure, gun in hand. The white, dead mask of the Dummy faced them along the landing. He was shouting wildly, like a madman:

"You hound! You hound! You've brought the police here! You had me followed! You know who I am! You know what I'm after! But you shan't beat me—not yet—not yet——"

The gun jerked up in his black-gloved hand. Rick wrenched Nan behind him, his finger snapping back on the trigger of the gun he had taken from Roon the Jay. There was no report—only a faint hissing sound.

The Dummy flung up his hands, clawing at his throat. For one second he stood swaying, then, with a low, dreadful choking sound, he pitched backward down the stairs behind him.

Rick looked blankly at the gun in his hand. "The five points! My stars, now I know!"

He released Nan, racing forward to the head of the stairs. There came a second shattering crash below him. As Rick gained the head of the stairs the door of the lighted hall

below splintered inward, smashing away from its hinges. With Louis Senac and Courtney Phillips Willard at their head, a dozen uniformed gendarmes, gripping a heavy wooden gatepost, staggered in over the shattered door. Behind the dismantled machine-gun at the window a knot of gangsters stood with their hands up.

A black figure lay motionless and rigid at the foot of the stairs, its hands still clutching its throat. The white carved mask had fallen away. The dead face of Lew Gilan, alias "the Dummy," alias Paul Gerrard, grinned up at the light!

With a hand that shook a little, Rick lighted a cigarette, his grey eyes flickering from Senac to Willard, sitting opposite him in the wrecked hall.

"The deadliest drug ring in Europe," he said gently, "and Gilan was its leader! They wanted to spread their activities all over the world. To do that they needed a means of distribution—a method of getting in touch secretly with a vast public. To that end they purchased through crooked operatives a great number of shares in certain companies.

"We know what those companies are: Willard's night clubs, Kane's mail order concern, Achmet Bey's hotels, Ricardo's casinos. They sought a controlling interest in those concerns, so that under cover of the ordinary business they could run a separate staff to deal with the drugs. It'd have meant—*millions* to them. But the heads of the companies wouldn't sell out. Therefore Gilan planned to kill them, and to buy up their shares after their deaths. There's the hub of the matter. What gave it away to me was the business of the companies concerned: mail order, night clubs, hotels, casinos—in two words, *distributing power!* For what? There was only one answer—*drugs!*"

He glanced toward the door of the room

(Continued on page 528.)

DOOM and DISHONOUR

seemed to be all that lay ahead of Rod Helm. The jewels, priceless as they were, had been left in his trust, but the following morning he found that they had vanished. Marcus Hahn for some time had been trying to persuade Rod to join the Cipher Detective Agency of which he was the head, but Rod had refused. Now, however, he saw in an alliance his one chance of recovering the jewels and redeeming his honour. The scent led to the sinister lighthouse stronghold of that master crook Mathias Bel and his gang, and when the Cipher Agency set up their headquarters in a small bungalow on the mainland, Rod Helm found himself hustled into adventures so breath-taking and amazing that he could see no escape. Drama and swift action make this yarn one that is bound to grip you. Be sure to read

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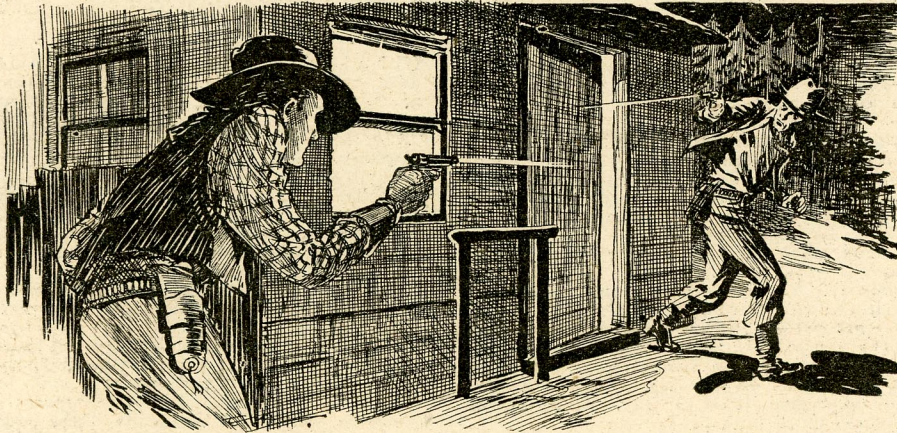
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THE STORY OPENS.

MURDER and mystery descend suddenly on the town of Black Buttes, Turbulento County. In Sheriff Dan Denver's own office, a Mexican, named Garvanza, is murdered by a mysterious shot fired from outside. The bullet is found to be of steel, a most unusual thing for those parts, and on the base is carved a skull and crossbones. Prior to the murder, the local ranchers, principal among whom are Bart Quinn, of the Barbeque range, Steve Stevens, and Frank Bozeman, of the Flying Flag spread, send for a detective to investigate the rustling, which has been increasing steadily. As a result, Walt Cole arrives in Black Buttes, and succeeds in learning quite a lot without giving his name away, even to the sheriff.

Soon after, Bob Dewing, deputy-sheriff, is found shot on the road to the Barbeque, and he has been killed by another of the marked steel bullets. The day following Dewing's death Cole meets an old pal, Strawberry Miller, cowpuncher, as he is riding into town. Neither of their names is known in the town, and Miller agrees to pose as the detective, while Cole carries on his investigations in secret.

Fenner, a friend of Stevens' eccentric nephew, Vic, is mysteriously killed by one of the marked bullets, and the sheriff suspects Cole.

A short while after Bart Quinn is arrested for rustling and is suspected of being the killer. Cole and Miller, however, follow a trail of their own and discover, in a small wood on Quinn's ranch, a hill of gold. It has been worked recently, and Cole thinks of Vic Stevens, who has been trying a scientific method to locate gold. They are returning to Black Buttes, when they surprise a strange rider who turns out to be the brother of Garvanza, the murdered Mexican, and he has come for revenge. The three men strike up an alliance and Cole tells Garvanza to follow the trail of another Mexican named Vasquez, whom he suspects and who has just ridden out of Black Buttes. Cole returns towards the town.

(Now read on.)

ANOTHER MURDER.

WHEN Cole slowed, the posts of another gate stuck out of the darkness—the gate of the Block S.

"Keep goin', Straw'ry! Stick with him, Garvanza! Burn the wind!"

"Walt, I'm hankerin' to stand beside y' when you corner Vic Stevens! You ain't intendin' to do it alone?"

"Alone—yeah. Listen, Straw'ry—ride! And listen again! No matter what happens, Straw'ry, keep on pertendin' you're me. You're Walt Cole—not Straw'ry Miller—and don't forget it! One slip of the tongue now, and we're apt to get shot in the back at any turn."

"Podner,—by heck—I'm rememberin'!"
"Everything depends on it now, Straw'ry. Then ride!"

Miller applied the spurs to his pony, and dashed off through the darkness. Leon Garvanza rode at his flank, his peaked hat silhouetted against the sky. Walt Cole watched them go; then he turned and slowly passed through the gate of the Block S.

As he went up the rising road, his eyes sought out the laboratory of Vic Stevens. It was visible from the road, squatting behind and at one side of the ranch-house. Slits of light gleamed from the windows, through the pulled blinds. Now and then a shadow crossed the covered panes.

"Vic's in there."

Cole kept to the road. He raised in the stirrups, listening all around, thinking for the moment that he had heard the drumming of a single pony on the wind. He rode on quietly. His right hand rested on his gun-butt.

Beside the porch of the ranch-house he swung down. The house was also alight. No one was visible behind the first curtains; but Cole did not waste time looking into the house. He cornered the porch, and started striding straight for the laboratory shack.

Inside the laboratory, several lamps were burning high. Shadows shifted across the blinds. Someone moved behind the cracks of light.

Suddenly, like a bolt from a clear sky, the roar of a six-gun burst out.

The thunderclap was so unexpected in the still night, and so near, that Walt Cole stopped short in his tracks, hand gripping his six-gun. There had been no flash of fire that Cole had seen. There had been no scream of a slug through the air. Only the dull roar of a six-gun.

Then, softly, the tinkle of glass. Again, more loudly and more suddenly, the crash of glass things shattering. Then, at last,

a dull thump—a sound of something falling—that came from inside the laboratory!

Walt Cole's gun flashed out and steadied. Again the night was still, serene. Across the blinds of the shack now there was nothing moving. Then—then—

The dark shape of a man moved away from the shack, a shadow form, drifting from the gloom of the moon-dark. The figure was black against the silver rises behind. In one hand the man was gripping a six-gun!

Crack!

Walt Cole let the slug go. It screamed through the air toward the dark figure. Instantly, before the flash of red fire had dashed out of the gun and into the smoke, the shadow figure swung round. Like lightning the black man's gun answered: crack, crack-ack!

Walt Cole flung himself to the ground. Something bit into and stung the side of his head. The shadow figure darted aside, swift as a fleeing phantom, and dodged again into the gloom.

Walt Cole lay still, eyes shifting right and left, hammer of his Colt back, ready for another shot. The silhouetted had vanished. Suddenly, Cole let go three slugs into the deepest shadow of the small orchard behind the laboratory—and waited. No answering shots came.

Cole jumped up, darted to the shack, pressed himself against the wall, and peered around the corner, gun ready to talk. He listened with ears keen for the slightest sound, but he heard nothing. Like a ghost the shadow man had vanished into the darkness.

Cole knew that to move into the open would be to invite another bullet. Cole knew that inside the shack something had happened. Whirling, he grasped the door-knob and pushed the door wide open.

On the floor a man was lying, face up—a face blanched, white—staring at the ceiling lamps with eyes which no longer saw.

"Vic Stevens!"

AN AWKWARD POSITION.

COLE pressed in. Vic Stevens had been shot in the chest. Falling, he had swept several beakers to the floor, and he lay in the liquid that had spilled from them. On the far side of the room a window-pane had been broken out.

Cole moved to that window. The glass had fallen inward. The killer had shot through it, then broken it entirely out with his gun. Within reach, on the table, was a leather notebook which lay open. A fragment of a page was clinging to one of the binding rings of the notebook. The rest of the page was missing—obviously torn out.

Cole leaned over to read the few words on the fragment:

Tests at the b
on the Barbeque show
the highest

Cole knelt beside Vic Stevens. The bullet had bored neatly between two ribs. Cole turned him, and saw on Stevens' back another area of red, another hole through the shirt.

With an exclamation of astonishment,

Cole jerked up to his feet. At the table, in front of the notebook, was a white stool.

"He was sittin' there—shot come through the window—bullet passed clear through."

Cole dropped to his knees, peered under the table on the other side of the room. He saw nothing except a litter of dirt. Rising again, he peered at the table-top. The fragments of several flasks lay there in a heap. With an unconscious cry, Cole's fingers darted out.

He picked up a slug from the table. It was a steel-jacketed slug! And on its nose was scratched—a death's head!

"Stick up y'r hands, Jack Straw!"

Cole whirled.

In the doorway stood Sheriff Dan Denver, levelling a massive six-gun. Behind him, staring over his shoulder, was Steve Stevens.

"Good heavens!" Stevens blurted. "It's Vic! He's been killed!"

"Stick up y'r hands!"

This time Cole broke away from his dumbfoundment sufficiently to obey—and to answer:

"Drop that gun, Denver! What're you throwin' down on me for?"

"You're got this time! Keep them hands up!" Denver advanced into the shack one step, eyes shining with a triumphant fire. "I reckon the killer is got!"

Cole started.

"Denver, you dam' fool, you don't think I did this?"

"I heard the shots as I was comin' up the road. Stevens bust out of the ranch-house just as I got there—told me the shots 'd come from the lab'ratory. We come out here and find you bendin' over Vic—and Vic's been killed—and you're the killer!"

Words piled up furiously behind Walt Cole's lips—but he fought them back. Sheriff Denver kept the six-gun levelled. Steve Stevens pressed past, and knelt beside Vic.

"Y're the only man around here what can't prove he didn't do all the killin's and the rustlin'!" Denver raged on. "This time y'r caught red-handed! Jack Straw—if that's y'r name—y'r comin' to the lock-up with me right now!"

Cole stared. Through his mind, then, passed a recollection of the words he had spoken to Strawberry Miller a few moments ago:

"No matter what happens, Straw'b'ry," he had said, "keep on pertendin' you're me. Everything depends on it now!"

During that moment Cole's mind worked swiftly. He might declare his true identity, and prove himself innocent immediately. To do so would necessitate explanations—would place Strawberry Miller in a critical position.

"Everything depends on it now," Cole had said to Miller. "One slip of the tongue, and we're apt to get shot in the back at any turn."

To declare himself, Cole knew, would be to warn the killer—to perhaps give the killer a chance to escape—to escape once and for all. Until now he had chosen to work secretly. Now he must choose again.

"Take his gun, Stevens!"

The owner of the Block S lifted Cole's six-gun and passed it to Denver.

"Y're comin' with me now—to the lock-up. Move careful—or I'll shoot y' down like the skunk y' are!"

"All right, sheriff," Walt Cole answered quietly. "You've got me!"

SUBTERFUGE.

TWILIGHT. Twilight again on the range-land. In the distance the buttes loomed blackly, like sentinels of the coming night.

Strawberry Miller rode from the west,

towards the town. He rode rapidly, rolling the spurs under his pony's belly with a surge of anger. In front of the sheriff's weather-scorched shack he slipped down from the saddle. He strode around the building. The wall was broken only by a row of small, square, iron-barred windows.

"Walt!"

Miller snapped the name as he stopped in front of one of the barred squares. In a moment Walt Cole's face appeared there. Cole looked out through the spaces, with a tight little smile playing around his lips.

"Evenin' Straw'b'ry. Anything happen?"

Miller edged closer.

"Nothin'! I've been settin' out there in the woods all day long; waitin' for somebody to come along, and nothin' come my way but a skunk! I did just what you told me, Walt, but not anything's come of it!"

"What you should do," Cole said quietly, "is go back and set some more."

"Yeah! Listen, Walt! I ain't trustin' myself to play this game alone. I'm for your tellin' Denver who you are, so you can get loose, and get on the job again y'rself!"

"I wouldn't do, Straw'b'ry. Tellin' Denver would get me out, but it would spoil all the work we've been gettin' done together. We've got to keep on playin' the game, Straw'b'ry." Cole peered through the bars, all around. "Come closer, Straw'b'ry. Anybody around?"

Miller put his head close to the window, and Cole told him of the last evening's happenings.

"And it was a marked slug got Vic?"

"Yeah. I reckon we built up a good case against Vic last night, Straw'b'ry—but it's all wrong. All I can figger out, Vic never found that hill of gold over on the Barbeque—he never found it! Listen, Vic 'd been makin' tests for years, and he was gettin' close to the vein. He'd found out that there was a rich pocket somewhere around there. But he never found the hill and the real gold."

"The killer—the killer must 've known Vic was gettin' warm!"

"Yeah. The killer knew Vic 'd find the gold pit right quick. He perverted that, all right, Straw'b'ry. Havin' killed Vic, he tore that page out o' Vic's notebook, so's nobody else 'd know it. You remember, Vic said to us, last time we saw him alive, he was on the verge of a great discovery. So he was—but he never thought it'd cost him his life. Listen, Straw'b'ry."

Miller leaned closer.

"I let Denver put me in here for a reason," Cole explained. "The killer is around here somewhere—he's watching everything—he knows I'm here—but I ain't hankerin' to stay. I've got to get out—without anybody's knowin' it—and I want the killer to think I'm stayin' in here all the time."

Miller's eyes lighted.

"By heck! Them's sweet words—about y'r gettin' out! But how can that come about, Walt?"

"Easy. Denver 'll let me out."

"Denver? Why, the old wart-hog thinks you did the killin' y'rself!"

"Yeah! That's why he'll let me out—and I won't tell him who I am, either. Go to him, Straw'b'ry, and show him there ain't no real proof against me. Tell him he ought to get the proof, or else a jury'll never return a verdict to hang me. Tell him mebbe if I was let loose, and trailed, I'd do somethin' incriminatin' that could be used against me. Understand?"

"By heck! Walt, I bow t y'! But—what good 'll it do to get out, if that pussy-cat of a Denver is trailin' y' all over the range?"

"I'll take care of that, Straw'b'ry. First I'll get out o' here. I'm leavin' the figgerin'

of the details to you, but I'm askin' you, when I get loose, to foller me up past that clump of birches—see?"

Miller found the landmark on the rise, visible from that position, and looked back.

"I'm with y', Walt, old-timer."

"Better mosey now, Straw'b'ry. How about Garvanza—is he headin' south?"

"Garvanza's a trailin' fool. He'll find Vasquez—mebbe he's found him by now."

"Yeah. So-long, Straw'b'ry. Don't let anybody get behind you!"

Miller edged away, back to the road. The peculiar light of the afterglow was spreading over the land now. There was that sense of suspension in the air, that hush. Miller pushed open the door of the sheriff's office.

(Continued on next page.)

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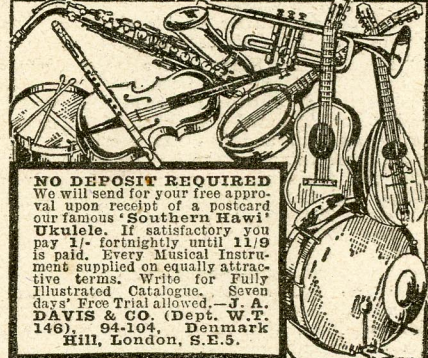
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"MARKED BULLETS"

(Continued from previous page.)

The office was gloomy and still—and empty. Miller had expected to find Denver there; now he did not know where Denver might be. He said things under his breath. Half-thinking he might wait for Denver's return, he stepped inside, and eased the door shut behind him.

The road outside was still. Miller slipped behind Denver's desk. Prompted by a deep curiosity, he pulled open one drawer and another. The first few were crammed with old documents, yellow with age and dusty. In the centre drawer was a folded Paisley bandanna.

"Evidence against Bart Quinn." There was also a steel-jacketed slug—the bullet that had pierced the body of Vic Stevens—marked with the death's head.

In the near corner was a six-gun in a holster, with its belt wound around it.

"That'll be Walt's. And he'll be needin' it, once he's out o' here again."

Miller slipped the gun from its holster and into his hip pocket.

Then the door opened. With one movement Miller pushed the drawer shut and sat in the chair. When he looked up it was with assumed indifference, but with eyes keen and flashing.

A man came in. It was Frank Bozeman. Bozeman stood just inside, eyeing Miller puzzledly, and for a moment he said nothing.

"Evenin'," Miller said casually. "Lookin' for the sheriff?"

"Can't say I am. I just saw the sheriff ridin' out to'ard the Barbeque."

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"Yeah? Anything I can do for you?" "I come here to get a look at the marked slug that killed Vic Stevens." Bozeman pointed. "The sheriff said I'd find it in that drawer there."

"Help y'rself!" Miller left his position. Bozeman, with a suspicious glance at Miller, opened the drawer. He lifted out the slug, and studied it intently. At length he put it back and pushed the drawer shut. Without speaking again, he turned to the door and opened it. Miller's voice stopped him.

"Did y' learn anythin' from it, Bozeman?"

Bozeman glared back. "Cole, I'm wonderin'—was Bart Quinn in this gaol last night? Does anybody know for sure he was here?"

Miller jerked. Then he chuckled. "I reckon the sheriff ain't furnished Quinn with a pass-key to the cell, Bozeman."

Bozeman's lips curled. "A man slick enough to commit those murders is slick enough to get out of a lock-up when he wants to. Quinn got out. He must 've got out. He had to—to kill Vic Stevens the way he did."

Bozeman stepped outside and closed the door with a slam. Miller stood staring at it. Then he followed Bozeman outside easily. Bozeman had mounted his pony and was riding away, towards the west. Miller studied him curiously.

(Has Walt Cole got a definite line on the killer of Black Buttes? Things hum with a vengeance when he mysteriously escapes from prison. Don't miss next week's gripping instalment of "Marked Bullets." There are big thrills coming.)

"DREAD!"

(Continued from page 525.)

where Nan was breaking the news to little Esther Fane. He went on:

Steinlach was the bait that brought the Dummy's intended victims to Paris. The Dummy wanted them here because it was his headquarters, and in Paris he had the means of removing them. Suspecting Steinlach, I found out from a financier in London how Steinlach stood financially. He lost a fortune on Wall Street in 1929; he had no ten millions to invest. Because of that lost fortune Gilan was able to bribe Steinlach to do what he wanted. After his interview with us, Monsieur Senac, Steinlach lost his nerve; that's why he bolted.

"He won't get far," the detective said grimly. "I have every airport, seaport and frontier station watched."

Rick pulled heavily on his cigarette. He was in pain from his broken rib.

"We come to Carigny. I suspected him of drugging. I found out from the doctor who was supposed to have attended him that he had never attended him at all. Carigny's never been ill, and he's not a cripple. He posed those things at the order of Lew Gilan, who, by threatening to stop his supply of drugs, had Carigny completely in his power. He made Carigny pose as a cripple and more or less helpless, so that he—Gilan, alias Gerrard—could, in the rôle of the financier's secretary and right-hand man, be present at those meetings in Steinlach's house with a logical excuse. He wanted to study his victims. Now, what made me suspect Gerrard was the capture of Esther Fane. She didn't realise it, but his alleged love for her was a pose; he played up to her because she's a sweet kid and probably he hoped to use her in his plans sooner or later. When she was

captured I asked myself why. Obviously the person least likely to be responsible for her capture was the man who was supposed to love her. I could see no reason for Esther Fane's capture, except that Gerrard wanted to divert all suspicion from himself. He thought we had a line on him. But he rather overdid his concern for Esther; I saw that he was acting. Even yet I didn't know he was the Dummy; but, when that ultimatum came through the window, I found on it, after Gerrard had gone, a thumbprint. It was a curious thumbprint with a little cross-shaped scar on it. The same thumbprint was on the glass used in my room!"

"Tonnerre!" Senac breathed. Rick smiled grimly.

"I knew now that he wrote that note and gave it to one of his men to throw through my window while he was with me—another little alibi, you see. I was certain by this time that Gerrard was the Dummy! But what could I do? If I'd had you arrest him, Senac, his men would have killed the girls. I had to keep the appointment at the Café des Trois Spahis. But what I did do was to tell you what I knew, and have you follow Gerrard, Senac. I knew he'd lead you to where the girls were—and myself."

"He did," Senac said softly. "The rest," Rick said, "is simple. A cable to Scotland Yard describing the print told me who Gerrard really was. He used that mask, I suppose, for fear of stool-pigeons among his own men. This house here is doubtless the real headquarters from which he worked. Carigny's name on that paper means that Gilan intended to kill him when he'd finished using him. And this"—he took from his pocket the gun he had commandeered from Roon the Jay—"is the jolly little weapon that helped Gilan's task. It's built on the same principle as a water pistol, but the barrel is divided into five small compartments, and it shoots poison instead of water. The touch of acid is what pierces the skin and admits the poison into the system. Anything else?"

"The police wagons," Senac said, "will be here shortly to remove your friend Roon the Jay and the other gangsters."

Willard rose, pacing the room. "It's tough on the little girl Esther. She's a sweet kid. Ever since I saw her, and what those dogs did to her, I've been wanting to help corral 'em."

He turned quickly as a door opened across the hall and Nan came out.

"How is she, Miss Fergus?"

"She's upset, of course," Nan said. "But she's young. She'll get over it."

"D'you reckon—maybe—I could cheer her up?" Willard said eagerly.

Nan looked at Rick, who nodded, smiling. "Perhaps you could, Mr. Willard, then," Nan said.

"Ge! That's great!" The American crossed the hall to the room where was the little singer. The door closed behind him.

"It looks," Rick said reflectively, "as though there might be a double wedding before long."

Nan laughed softly, slipping her hand into his.

"If you ask me, there's no 'might' about it."

Rick drew her close. In that moment the pain at his side was all but forgotten. There are some moments that can cure any known pain.

With that innate courtesy which distinguishes the police the world over, Monsieur Louis Senac rose silently to his feet and tipped from the hall. Something told him it was no place for him.

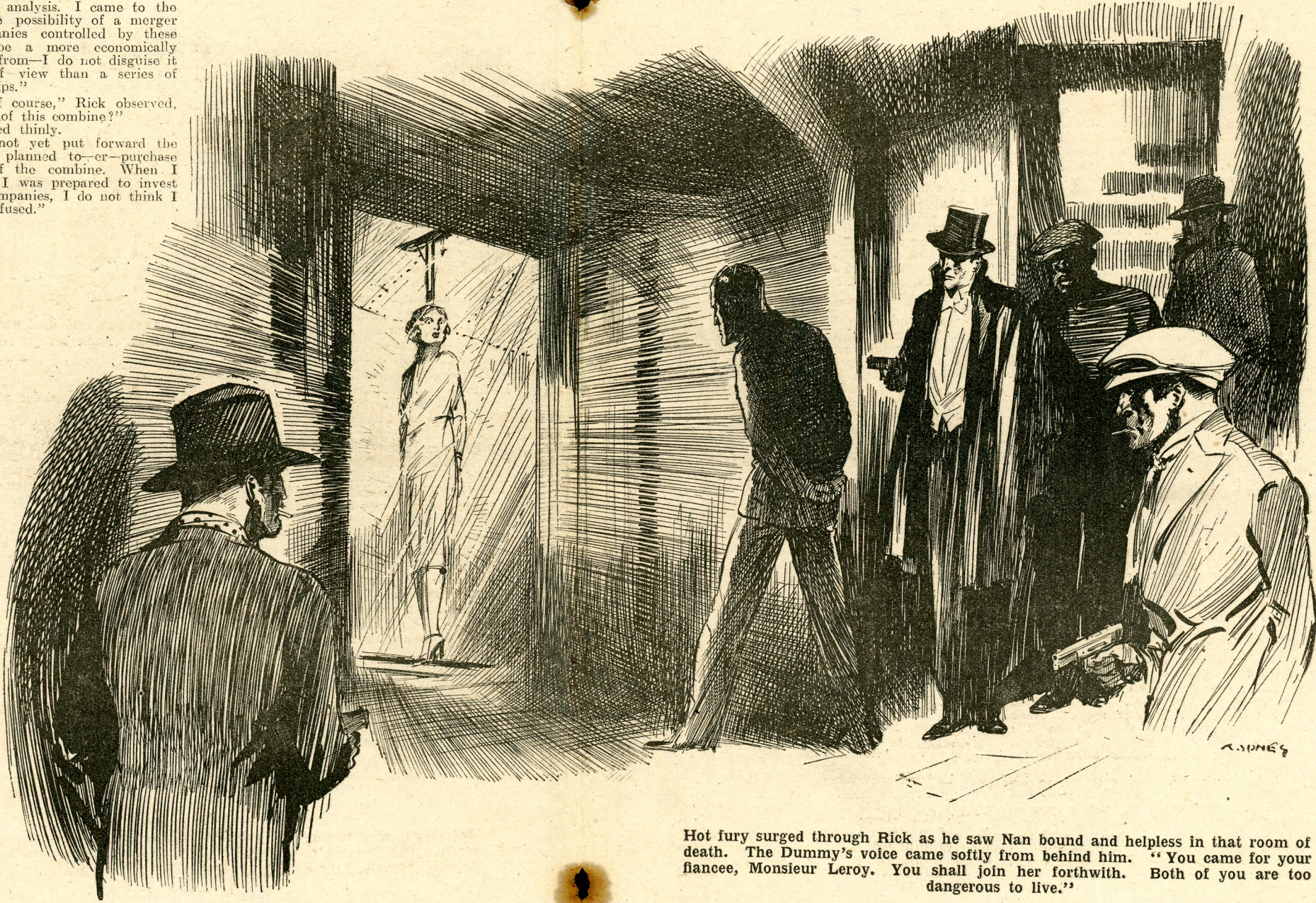
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analysis. I came to the possibility of a merger companies controlled by these be a more economically from—I do not disguise it of view than a series of ps.”

course,” Rick observed, of this combine?”

ed thinly. not yet put forward the planned to—er—purchase of the combine. When I I was prepared to invest mpanies, I do not think I fused.”



Hot fury surged through Rick as he saw Nan bound and helpless in that room of death. The Dummy's voice came softly from behind him. "You came for your fiancee, Monsieur Leroy. You shall join her forthwith. Both of you are too dangerous to live."