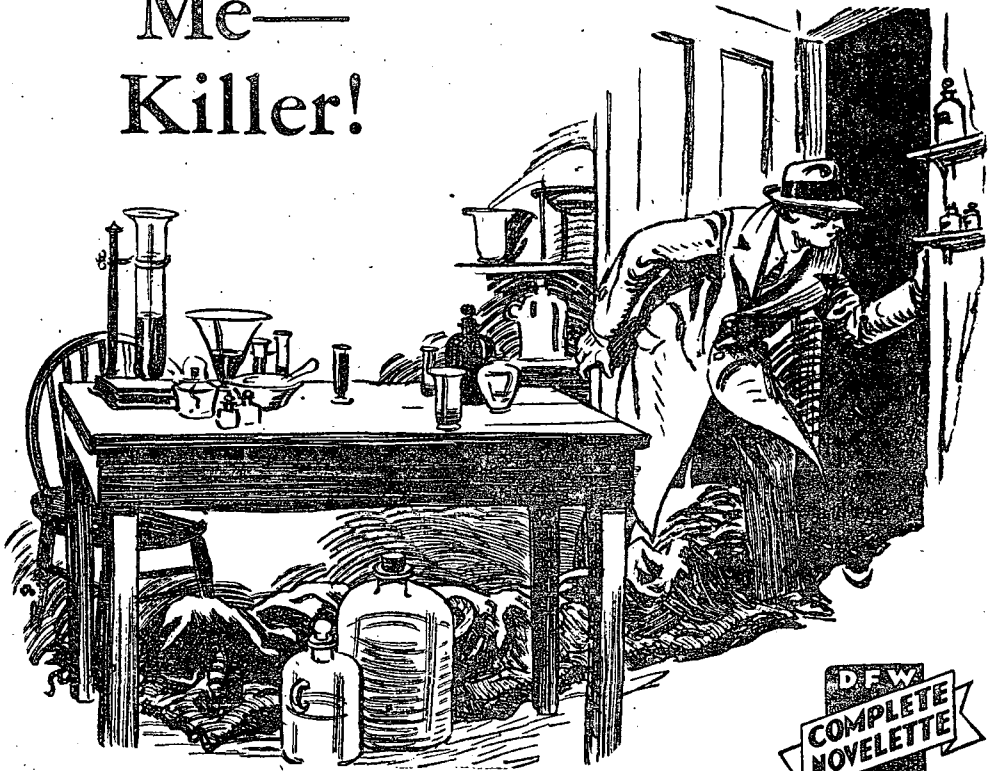


Me— Killer!



A terrific fear seized Arnold

DEFW
COMPLETE
NOVELETTE

By Frederick C. Painton

CHAPTER I

Staggering News

THE instant I entered the dining room I felt the tenseness that gripped my father and mother. I had a sense of suspense, a premonition of something tremendous about to happen.

Mother was seated at the table, looking very old and sad. Ever since I had been kicked out of college for killing a professor's three-prize collies in an unusual nerve experi-

ment, she had grown older, slowly dehydrating and shrinking up until she looked eighty instead of sixty-four. Father was standing in the center of the floor.

Why Did This Killer Plead for a Speedy Trial and Capital Punishment? And Why, Despite His Crime, Did the Law Turn a Deaf Ear to Him?

His bald skull was pink with suppressed fury. Beneath his shaggy white eyebrows his eyes flashed, and his thin mouth was compressed as if he had arrived at a decision and intended to hold

to it no matter what happened. I attempted to carry it off jauntily: "Splendid luck with the basal metabol-

ism test. My paper in the *Journal* will create a sensation."

My father came close to me. "You've been drinking," he said tensely.

"Don't get excited, Dad," I grinned, "that's part of the metabolism test. I had to find out if alcohol taken internally increases or lowers the rate."

"Another lie," he said bitterly. "Every time I catch you in some devil-try you plead a scientific experiment. Nonsense!" he exploded. "You—a scientist—with that warped brain of yours. Bah!"

Ah, the old fool knew how to sting me. I could stand his accusation of being drunk; I could endure the continual hounding he put me to, trying to get me to work in his damned office. I could even get along without the allowance of money from which he had cut me off. But when he laughed at my experiments, he aroused a cold fury that made me want to tear him to pieces. I was proud of my scientific genius. The professors at four universities had said I had the most precise scientific brain they had ever met. I knew that given the leisure and the money, I would rank as the greatest research scientist of the twentieth century.

I said coldly, "You, with your petty low cunning mind that only knows how to rob your fellow man by selling real estate for more than it's worth—what do you know of intelligence?"

Mother sighed and covered her face with her hands. "Please, Frank, don't."

"But I will," flashed my father. "Penelope, I've stood enough. I'm beginning to see that this thing is a monster and not human."

There he was, trying to hurt me again. I laughed. "I'm your son."

"But you're not," he yelled. "Thank

God, not a drop of Penelope's or my blood flows in your veins."

For a moment I stared at him in utter amazement. Then I smiled. "Is that a new way you've found of hurting me?"

"No," he replied more calmly, "it's simply that I've come to the decision to tell you that you're not my son. Nor Penelope's. We adopted you. If you had been a normal youth, you would never have known. We decided that years ago. But you aren't normal; I sometimes wonder if you are human."

Before I could interrupt he began a recitation of past events, coloring them falsely, of course. He told about my cruelty to other children when I was younger. I could have told him I was experimenting even then on the theory that part of the pain sense is located in the spinal column and not the brain. He expatiated on my aloofness and anti-social traits. What could he, extravert that he was, know of a great brain's desire to have solitude in which to think?

BUT I did not seek to explain this to him. In all truth I was stunned by his statement that I was not his true son. All my twenty-six years I had been led to believe that I was his son and upon his death would inherit two million dollars and that money would give me the leisure to carry on my great experiments.

I believe that at that instant the idea of killing him generated in my mind subconsciously. My conscious brain was recovering from this blow.

"If I'm not your son," I yelled at him, "then who am I?"

"I wish I knew," he said bitterly. "All I can tell you is that Penelope and I took you from the Municipal Foundling Home. We could have no children ourselves and Penelope wanted a child. We went there. I wanted to have a child

whose parents were known so we could investigate the background. But you were crawling on the floor. She fell in love with you, God help us both."

I listened, too stunned to comment.

"The Lord knows, Arnold, we have tried to do our duty by you. We gave you every advantage. We raised you as a son should be raised. We looked forward to the time when you could take my place and be an honor not only to us but to yourself. We overlooked your queerness as a child. We've tried in every way to make you normal. But that was impossible."

His thin mouth stiffened. "So I have decided to tell you that you are no child of ours. And to tell you that you may look for no great inheritance from me. I have a duty by you which I recognize. A small income shall be arranged in a trust fund. But you are not capable of handling the power that wealth entails. I intend to change my will Monday to this effect."

He paused as I stood staring at him.

"And," he went on, "I do not want you to remain in this house any longer."

His words were striking like hammer blows and I was bereft of speech. And now, at last, he revealed the reason for this decision. His hand came out of his pocket holding three slips of paper.

"I.O.U.'s for five thousand dollars to a man named Tucky Wiener," he cried angrily. "By what right do you gamble money which you do not possess? What made you think I would pay these I.O.U.'s?"

Inside me, I cursed Tucky Wiener. True, the man had been pressing me for weeks to pay the five thousand. The fool had let me play roulette on credit because he knew Franklyn Reese was worth a fortune. He had threatened to send them to Franklyn, but I had not believed he would.

Aloud I said, "I was not gambling with the desire to win or lose. I was merely experimenting on the recurring rhythm of numbers. I have a theory that all stellar and earthly phenomena can be explained mathematically and—"

"Lies! Tell me no more," he cried. "And tell this Tucky Wiener that I shall not pay a penny. Not a single penny of this debt."

I had to be alone to think. Saying no more, I turned on my heel and went upstairs to my laboratory. I knew then definitely that I intended to kill Franklyn Reese that night. Before he had time to change the will.

And I knew, too, that Mother Reese would have to die. Once Franklyn had spoken about the will. It set up a trust fund which Mother Reese had for her life. The income was eighty thousand dollars a year. After her death the trust reverted to me to remain a trust until I was forty at which time the estate became mine to do with as I pleased.

If he changed the will, Mother Reese would get lifetime use of the trust, but would have no power to change it. His new will would doubtless make other dispositions. That could not be. If my great scientific brain was to be of use to humanity, then it must be well-endowed. In killing them both I was doing science a great service.

But how was I to kill them? I was a well-informed toxicologist, but poisons take too long. Moreover, the police, stupid though they are in most things, usually have autopsies and poison can be readily traced by a chemist. So I must use some other method; one so clever that the stupid police would be without a clue to me.

The idea, almost complete, came to me around eight-thirty. I tested it backwards and forwards as I would an experiment, to make sure it had no flaw.

I grinned at its simple cleverness. If the police were ten times more brilliant than they were, the plan would completely befool them.

At a quarter to nine my father—I mean Franklyn Reese—came up to my laboratory.

"You will have to pack all this and leave," he said grimly.

"Naturally," I told him coldly. "I hope, however, that I may stay here tonight. It's rather late to be kicked out."

He handed me a hundred dollars in twenties. "You may stay tonight, but I do not wish to see you at breakfast. You will get a hundred dollars the first of every month so long as you live."

With no other word he turned and went down the stairs. I smiled after him. The fool! I hated him so that the muscles of me stiffened at sight of his bent back.

CHAPTER II

The Plan Works Perfectly

THE secret of my plan lay in perfect timing and the fact that our apartment was air-conditioned because of Mrs. Reese's asthma. I laid out my time-table, checking each minute, then burned the paper. I examined the air-conditioning unit to make sure my scheme would work. Then I asked Ballard, the single servant the Reeses kept, if my father and mother were going out.

"No, Mr. Arnold," he said. I studied him as he spoke and from his attitude I knew he had not been made aware of our quarrel or that I was only a legal, not a blood son. What he told me simplified the scheme even more. Mr. and Mrs. Reese went to bed each night at ten o'clock. Ballard retired at that time to the servants' quarters which our Park Avenue duplex apartment main-

tained on the top floor. He would not come down until quarter to seven in the morning.

"Well," I said, "I have a big experiment that will keep me late. I must be getting at it."

I went up to my laboratory. My regular hat and coat were in the closet downstairs. But I had a duplicate upstairs. The window of my laboratory gave out on a coping two feet wide along which I had frequently crawled to a corridor window when I wanted to go out secretly. I put a can of ethylchloride in my pocket and went out that way now.

I went directly to Tucky Wiener's gambling place on West Fifty-sixth Street. It was raining.

I hated the sight of Wiener's fat pale face and his narrow, tricky eyes, but I pretended otherwise. He came toward me, his eyes glancing anxiously to see how I was taking the news.

I said, "You did me a bad trick, Tucky."

He shrugged, holding out his hand placatingly.

"Don't get sore, kid," he said. "I am hard pressed and I simply have to have the money. You kept telling me—"

"I know, and you wouldn't wait," I said. "Well, I am telling you now that my father told me tonight he will never pay you a penny."

He cursed and scowled at me. "That's what I get for trusting a nitwit," he growled.

"Save your pet names," I told him, "and if you really want your money I know a way you can get it."

Instantly he was all friendliness. "How?" he asked eagerly.

"My father and mother are going out tonight and will not be home until late," I said.

He stared. "So what?"

"So this. My mother has a very valuable pearl necklace in the safe. My father keeps ten to eleven thousand dollars in there because of the necessity of taking up options with cash."

He was very stupid. He stared as if I were a new species of lepidoptera.

"Yeah," he said softly.

"If I took the pearls or the money," I said, "I would instantly be suspected. But if someone came in and knocked me down after I had given the safe combination to him, and took what was in the safe, you'd get your money and there would be some left over for me. We could split what was over your debt three ways."

He touched my arm and said under his breath, "And it moves and breathes."

"Never mind your jokes," I said. "It's the only way you'll ever get your money and it will have to be tonight or never."

"Oh, I want my dough," he said, pinching his lower lip. "I'm just wondering how far I should play ball with the likes of you. Wait here."

HE was gone about ten minutes and when he came back a short, stocky man of thirty or so, tagged at his heels. This short man had a bald head on top, around it a fringe of black curly hair. He had slit-eyes and a cunning twist to his mouth.

"This is Baldy Grogan, Arnold," Tucky said. "He's interested in your idea."

Grogan regarded me queerly, then his glance went to Tucky, and they both nodded slightly. "What kind of a box is it, kid?" Grogan asked.

"Hall and Peters," I told him, "but that doesn't matter; I know the combination."

"Yeah, but we'll have to make this look good," Grogan said, "and as it happens I could open that make of box with a can-opener."

"It's jake then?" Tucky asked.

"Okay by me," Baldy rejoined. "I'll talk it over with the kid and we'll all meet here for the divvy."

His eyes looked queer then and I knew they had no intention of splitting with me. Nor did I care. This was my game they were playing. Baldy asked questions about the location of the apartment, the construction outside, and was most pleased when I told him that it was a duplex that could be reached by sliding along the building coping and entering through my laboratory window and then going downstairs to where the safe was located in the living room.

"Two things are important," I said.

"What?"

"Well, in the first place, do you carry a gun?"

Baldy Grogan grinned. He turned his back on the room and slid a compact Colt .38 out of a shoulder holster. I could hardly restrain a grin of joy. Here was luck! I possessed a gun of

the same caliber so it would not be necessary for me to duplicate his gun as I should have had to do, had his been of another make.

"What else, kid?" he asked, putting away the gun.

"Secondly," I went on, "this has to be done on a time-table. Ballard, the butler, comes down at quarter-past eleven to put out hot milk and things. So this break-in must be done between five minutes to eleven and five minutes past."

"Ten minutes," said Grogan thoughtfully. After a pause he said, "Okay."

"Remember," I warned, "not a min-

ute before nor a minute after. Let's compare watches now."

We did so and set them exactly. "Don't forget not to hit me too hard," I said, moving toward the door.

He smiled and nodded.

"A crack with a jimmy, kid," he said. "A little headache tomorrow, that's all."

"Very well, then," I told him. "In my laboratory—the window will be unlatched—at precisely five minutes to eleven."

We did not shake hands on it, but he nodded, and I went out into the rain. This was half-past nine, and I had to kill an hour and twenty minutes. I dropped into a big movie house on Broadway where my presence would not be noted and saw part of a very mediocre picture that only confirmed my opinion of the stupidity of the human race as a whole.

At ten minutes to eleven on the tick I dropped into the drug store at the corner of Seventieth Street and bought a package of cigarettes.

"Miserable night," I said to the clerk. He knew me; I frequently bought chemicals there. "The dampness is interfering with my chlorophyll experiment. I'll be at it the rest of the night."

"Too bad, Mr. Reese."

"Lucky I just beat you to closing," I said. "It's nine minutes to eleven."

He glanced at the big clock over the rear end of the store. "So it is. Well, I'll be glad to get home."

I HAD established the time of my appearance in the store. Once outside I instantly broke into a run. The rain kept the street deserted. I entered the apartment through the janitor's door. I had to move fast, but I was right on time. Each apartment

had, of course, its own air-conditioning plant so that air from one apartment would not circulate in another and thus, perhaps, communicate sickness.

I had opened our box many a time. So it was simple now. I opened the blower case. My knife punctured the can of ethyl-chloride. I tipped it into the blower compartment. The anæsthetic gassed instantly and the whirling fan, sucking air from the cooling tubes, seized on the ethyl-chloride and sent it boiling up the intake-pipes.

I grinned, knowing what it was doing upstairs.

Ethyl-chloride is a practically instantaneous anæsthetic, but does not last as long as ether or chloroform. Mr. and Mrs. Reese, already asleep, were already in a stupor of insensibility that would last long enough for my purpose.

Furthermore, the ethyl-chloride would be sucked from the room by the cold air return pipes and in less than ten minutes not even a smell of it would remain. I emptied all the can and threw the empty into the incinerator. Its presence there would be natural, for I frequently used ethyl-chloride to anæsthetize guinea pigs and other subjects for experimentation.

I hurried outside, entered through the regular entrance, got into the elevator. I had a minute and twenty-seven seconds to reach the fourteenth floor and meet Grogan. The trip up consumed thirty-one seconds. I let myself into the reception hall and hurried to the bedroom. Ethyl-chloride was still present and I held my breath.

I stopped briefly to listen. The heavy breathing of the two in the twin beds told me they were drugged. I went up the staircase to my own quarters. I had to breathe and I could feel the shocking power of even what little ethyl-chloride was left in the air.

I actually staggered, and for a second I wondered if my whole scheme was to be frustrated because the ethyl-chloride had persisted a few seconds beyond my calculations. But the cold air return was dragging out the fumes, and fresh air was shooting through the intake. I knelt to it, breathed deeply until my head cleared. Then I went into my laboratory.

It was precisely five and one-half minutes to eleven.

Now, everything depended on Grogan appearing on time. I walked around impatiently. The air cleared quickly, as the cubic-foot change of the air-conditioner was enormously efficient. At four and a half minutes to eleven o'clock fingers tapped on the window.

I opened it for Baldy Grogan. He had on old clothes, a felt hat pulled down, and his pockets bulged.

I said, "You're a half-minute late."

"There's time," he jerked a little nervously. "Where's the can?"

I laughed at his nervousness. A burglar with nerves. No wonder he had served time in jail.

"Down that staircase," I pointed, and opened a drawer and slid a gun with a Maxim silencer on the snout into my pocket.

"You lead the way," he muttered. "What was that you took?"

"A package of gum. Want a stick?" I grinned.

CHAPTER III

Murder!

HE cursed under his breath. I think I actually enjoyed his nervous fear. But the time was moving. I led the way to the living room. There, behind a Chinese tapestry was the safe, a bull's-eye affair that

looked quite stout to me. Grogan laughed in relief. Here, apparently, was something he understood!

"Let me monkey with it a little while," he said; "then you can give me the combination and the job will look right."

"Go ahead," I agreed.

I did not know the combination.

He started to spin the dial, listening to the clicks. I checked the room, saw that every object I would require was in its place. I glanced at my watch. It was precisely twelve seconds to eleven o'clock. Good!

I walked over to Grogan, who was working by a flashlight resting on the telephone taboret—the beam aimed at the safe.

"How are you doing?" I asked.

"I could get it," he said. "I'm good on safes."

"Fine," I said, "but the combination is—what's that?" I exclaimed, fear in my voice.

He jerked, turned so that he stood exactly as I had pictured the scene in my mind. I leveled the gun and shot him through the heart. The explosion made no sound at all.

He flung up his hands, took one staggering step. "You insane—little—" his breath died in his throat and he hit the carpet all limp like a dead guinea pig. I stared at him as I would a white rat specimen, he was about as valuable. How easy he had died! He was a perfectly useless human being, living by predatory methods, and the world was better without him. However, this was no time for philosophizing.

I put on gloves—the new silver nitrate process brings out fingerprints even on cloth—and went to Mr. and Mrs. Reese's bedroom. They still breathed heavily, and the old man did not even stiffen as I dragged him from

the bed and into the living room and stretched him face downward just inside the door. Then I brought Mrs. Reese. I put her beside him.

From Grogan's pocket I got the jimmy he had intended to use on me. Only hatred was in my mind as I poised over them and raised the jimmy.

I struck Reese first with all my strength. His skull collapsed. He died instantly. Down came the jimmy and thudded on Mrs. Reese's head. She did not move or groan either. The only difference was the limpness of muscles beyond even subconscious control. I had no compunction over what I had done. I looked at them frozen-faced. They were old, they had lived their lives. They had intended to ruin me.

I glanced at my watch. I was right on time. Many things had to be done.

I took off the Maxim silencer and hid it in a little hole in the oak floor of my laboratory where none could ever find it. Along with it I placed the brass shell of the fired cartridge. I re-loaded my gun. Then I returned to the living room. Seconds were flying.

WITH a scalpel I gouged my scalp in a long deep cut that ran on the left side of the skull. I made sure the gouge went through the skin covering almost to cut the bone. The pain was terrific, and the blood poured down. For a second I was dizzy. Then necessity drove me on.

I went to the telephone which was not of the dial type and was hooked to the exchange downstairs. The girl said, "Operator two, good evening—" I cut her off with a deep yell.

"Help. Burglars—murder—"

As I yelled, I fired my own gun up the fireplace chimney, and dropped the receiver with a crash. Swiftly, I got out Grogan's gun, impressed his finger-

prints carefully on it, cocked it and held the muzzle as closely as I dared to the wound I had made with the scalpel in my scalp. For a second or so I hesitated. Suppose I—time pressed me. I pulled the trigger. My hair caught fire, and the explosion deafened me in the ear. The powder grains stung my face. For a half-minute I could not move. But the pain was not as great as I had expected. The scalpel wound had deadened the nerves, of which there are not many in the scalp anyway.

I had aimed the bullet so it hit the back of the fireplace. I looked for it now. It had chipped off a chunk of brick and fallen, flattened and hot, to the base. I picked it up and ran up to the small hole in my laboratory floor and stored it there.

I came down and closed Grogan's fingers over the gun butt. I lifted the arm so it and the gun would fall naturally. Then I took soot and filled over the chipped brick so it looked old. Steadying myself—I was panting for some strange reason—I glanced around the scene. It was just as I had imagined it. I checked again to make sure I had overlooked nothing. The girl downstairs was calling the police. They would be here at any moment.

The time for the final act had come. I measured off the distance to the sharp-pointed brass andirons. I got a good grip on my gun. Silently I let my body pitch downward. I had expected to skin the andiron and make another cut to show how I had fallen when Grogan's bullet grazed my scalp. But I must have miscalculated. I fell—and there was a rush of blackness and nothingness.

WHEN next I knew anything I sat up, my head throbbing, my brain confused. Bewildered and really hurt, I must have offered a most

convincing spectacle of a wounded groggy man. A young man in a white uniform gave me a drink of whiskey. "You're not badly hurt," he said kindly, "so we're leaving you here until the police question you. Later we'll look over that scalp wound and see if it needs stitches."

He had taped it up. I found myself lying on a couch across the room from where I had fallen. I could see the police who were there in force. Photographers were taking pictures from several angles. From the door came a clamor and a blue-coated policeman said, "No, boys, you can't come in. Not now, anyway."

They were reporters.

A medical examiner was peering at the bodies; two thick-bodied men walked around smoking cigarettes, apparently doing nothing. One tall, lean, rather young man with a clean-shaven, tanned face was standing near the fireplace rolling a cigarette. He spilled the crumbs of tobacco into the empty grate in an absent-minded way. When I was helped to sit up, he lit the cigarette and came toward me. He had a wide mouth and rather disconcerting blue eyes which he turned upon me. He smiled. His teeth were white, big and even.

"Mr. Reese," he said, "I'm Detective Larrabee. I'm in charge of this case."

I merely nodded; I was perfectly cool but I could not have spoken then. Here was the critical ordeal I must face: Questioning by the police. No slips now or I was lost. My brain raced. I gathered the threads of memory. I stilled myself for the crisis. Somebody handed me a cigarette and said, "Smoke?"

I took it and made my hand tremble as I lit the end. I smiled weakly. "I'm sort of hazy, Mr. Larrabee."

"You ought to be," he gripped con-

solingly. "Another quarter of an inch and that slug would have finished you. Do you feel strong enough to talk?"

"I think so. I'll do the best I can."

I waited, grinning inside me. The fool didn't know where to begin.

"Well," said Larrabee, "suppose you start and tell us what you did tonight and carry right through as long as you remember."

I put my hand to my head; it was aching. Suddenly, as if I had just remembered, I cried, "Mother! Father! He struck them. Are they—are they hurt?"

Larrabee nodded gently. "Yes, I'm afraid they were. As a matter of fact, they're dead."

I uttered a loud groan. I buried my face in my hands. I sat very silent. After a while I took my hands away. "I guess I knew they were—when I saw them lying there," I said brokenly. "But the shot—at me—I loved them, Mr. Larrabee."

He made a clucking noise with his lips. I straightened up; gripped the side of the couch. "What was it you wanted to know?" I said firmly.

HE repeated his question. I pretended to concentrate. "I was working all evening in my laboratory on a chlorophyll experiment," I told him. "Chlorophyll is what makes grass and leaves green. My father and mother always retire at nine-thirty—they were older people, Mr. Larrabee. That was why my laboratory was upstairs, so I would not disturb them."

"About ten minutes to eleven or thereabouts, I found I had run out of cigarettes. I went to the Seventieth Street corner and purchased a pack—these," I pulled them out that he might see.

"I came back at once," I resumed.

"I don't know the exact time, but it must have been eleven or thereabouts. I came up in the elevator and then decided I would get a glass of milk and a piece of cake. I was just about to start downstairs when I heard my father yell, 'What's this? Who are you?'"

I paused, aware of Larrabee's blue eyes fixed steadily upon me. He was making notes in a notebook, but scarcely looking at them.

"Then," I went on, beginning to tremble as if with memory, "I heard my mother cry, 'Frank, look out! Don't! Oh—' and she stopped. I heard the sound of blows. For a few seconds I was absolutely paralyzed. It was all so quick, so unusual that I guess I didn't function."

"Then I realized my parents were being hurt. I grabbed my gun from the drawer. I raced down the stairs. There was noise, groaning and cursing. The stairs—over there—hid me from what happened. And myself hidden from the assailant. So I came upon him unawares. As I rushed at him, I saw my father and mother on the floor."

I choked up and ceased speaking for a moment. No one spoke and I became aware of the other police officers and detectives around, listening.

"The man stood near the safe. There was a flashlight in whose glow he stood. I saw his face clearly. He was bald with big jowls and heavy-set. I'd know him again if I saw him."

"You will," said one of the detectives grimly.

I wondered at the moment why I was pretending Baldy was alive. But since it went over so well, I added nothing to that angle.

"As I saw him," I resumed, "I leveled the gun and said, 'Throw up your hands.' The man cursed. He had a deep bass voice. He put up his hands

slowly. I was not afraid but I wanted help. My mother and father seemed hurt. I moved toward the telephone—over there by the fireplace. I picked up the receiver to call the alarm."

I paused as if thinking.

"I guess I must have taken my eyes off him as I lifted the receiver. Suddenly he moved. I saw a gun. His terrible eyes behind it. There was flame, a roar—and nothing more. That's all I remember."

One of the detectives said, "But you shot him. He's dead. Square through the heart."

I gave a start. My eyes widened. "I—shot the burglar?" I got up and walked toward the fireplace. Now, I could see Baldy lying just about where he had fallen when I shot him. I came back, my face quivering.

"I shot him?" I repeated. "You are sure?"

"Yes," said Larrabee. "We found your gun in your hand and one bullet discharged. You must have done it."

"It seems impossible," I said. "I have no memory of it."

This created amazement, which I had intended. All eyes turned toward the medical examiner. He nodded to Larrabee. "Reflex action could have done it. He was tensed to shoot and stimulated to do so when Grogan pulled down on him. He could have gone through with the action of shooting and be unconscious."

"I guess that's the way it was," said Larrabee. He gestured with a thumb toward the safe. "Anything in there worth taking?"

"My mother's pearls—they're a matched set," I explained, "and my father kept anywhere from ten to twelve thousand dollars on-hand. He had the habit of paying options on real estate deals in cash."

"It all fits," said one of the detectives. "Grogan always went for big cash and quick dough. And he could have opened that safe with a hairpin."

"Yes," said Larrabee, "but how did he know there was a haul in it? Who tipped him to the job?"

CHAPTER IV

Unseen Development

I SAID nothing. Later, if necessary, I could answer that. But there was no use being too glib. Larrabee was persistent. With his disconcerting blue eyes on me, he took me over the story again. He asked questions, hundreds of them. About Mr. and Mrs. Reese, about me, about our life. I answered them truthfully, but always pointing to the fact that Grogan had killed them in the commission of a crime.

Finally Larrabee said, "You are the only heir?"

"Why," I rejoined frankly, "I suppose so. I haven't seen the will. Father never talked about it. But there is one at the law offices of Northrup and Connery."

"Oh, come on, Steve," one of the detectives said. "This is open and shut. Let's get to bed."

Larrabee nodded, smiled and presently they went out, taking Grogan with them. Exultation leaped within me. They had accepted my picture. I had beaten them, the stupid fools!

Joy and relief made me giddy and I almost fainted. The interne grabbed me and said, "You for the hospital, youngster."

At St. Vincent's the surgeon took three stitches in my scalp, and the morphine he administered made me sleep soundly until the next noon.

Then I returned to the apartment. It

was vacant except for Ballard who was trying to get bloodstains out of the rug.

He was weeping and sniffing as he worked.

"This is terrible, Mr. Arnold," he said. "I've been with them twelve years. I—I—"

"Yes, Ballard," I said kindly, "I know. And you shall stay with me as long as you like."

Why not? He knew nothing, and to dismiss him might cause talk. And I wanted everything forgotten as soon as possible. Harry Northrup, the lawyer, helped me with the funeral arrangements. People called to commiserate with me. The swine!

They had never liked me but now I was rich. So they said nice things. They came to the funeral and I could feel their eyes on me when the coffins were being lowered under their banks of flowers.

The newspaper accounts made quite a hero out of me. "SON SHOTS BURGLAR WHO KILLS PARENTS." I grinned. But the main thing was that all the newspaper accounts agreed. The police were fooled. After the publicity I heard no more and knew the case was closed. But nonetheless, I conducted myself most carefully. I was the model mourner.

A fortnight passed. Northrup opened the will and asked for letters of administration. The document had not been changed. And now I was rich, beholden to no one. A brilliant scientific future before me. But I did not play the fool. I lived quietly as before.

Three days later I got a shock.

The telephone rang and Ballard said, "Detective Larrabee wishes you to come to police headquarters on Centre Street, sir."

A momentary doubt seized me. Had I overlooked some simple thing? What

could the fool want? I knew I must go.

"Tell him I'll be down at once."

I changed my laboratory smock for a gray suit with a black left arm band. I forced myself to be calm.

Larrabee and another detective greeted me and shook hands. Larrabee motioned me to a chair. He was thinner, more tanned, and his blue eyes blazed like ice under the sun.

"We're getting ready to close the Grogan case, Mr. Reese," he said, "and there are a few points I'd like to clear up."

I shrugged. "Certainly, if I can help. But you understand the whole thing was so horrible that I'm trying to forget."

"I know, but these will only take a minute."

I WAITED. He drummed on the desk top with his fingers. "This sounds personal, Mr. Reese, but why didn't you tell us you were not the flesh and blood son of your father and mother, but adopted?"

I tried to flush. I hesitated just the proper interval. "I don't know," I confessed finally, "that night—the excitement and horror. It didn't occur to me. I've always looked upon them as my parents. I was less than a year old when they took me."

I didn't ask him how he had found out. I knew. Northrup had told him. Old Reese had left a document.

"Yes, I know," said Larrabee. Then: "Another thing, you gambled at Tucky Wiener's?"

I had expected this, too, and was prepared.

"Occasionally," I admitted, "but not heavily, and it was actually a scientific experiment on the recurring rhythm of numbers." I smiled. "I take a drink, too, and I smoke. But I

am not what you would call a wild young man, Mr. Larrabee."

"No," he said, "I guess not."

The other detective who had not spoken, gave Larrabee a look half of disgust as if he thought Larrabee was wasting his time. I *knew* Larrabee was.

Finally, after the lapse of a moment or so, Larrabee said, "Another point that puzzles me, Mr. Reese, is the amount of time that elapsed between the shot that grazed your scalp and the second shot with which you apparently killed Grogan. The telephone circuit was open, and the operator downstairs, while plugging in for the police, was also listening. She heard the second shot and timed it. There was a matter of twenty-odd seconds between it and the first."

I shrugged. "I told you I don't know anything about that. I don't know yet that I shot Grogan."

"No reflex takes that long to act," he said.

"I know little about reflexes," I said, "and nothing about shooting Grogan."

I fingered my hat suggestively. The fool was maundering around. I wanted to go.

"And finally," Larrabee said, rolling a cigarette, "I'm wondering how Grogan knew what that safe contained?"

For a space I watched his slender brown fingers make the cigarette. He twisted the end and lit it, inhaling deeply.

"I may be to blame for that," I offered.

"How?" he leaned forward.

I HAD an argument with Tucky Wiener one night. About a small debt. I said I would have cash at nine in the morning. He laughed and asked where I could get

cash before the banks opened. I told him my father kept thousands of dollars."

"You think Tucky told Grogan?"

"I have no idea. He may have or possibly what I said was heard."

He flung down the cigarette and ground his heel on it. I knew he was baffled and grinned inside.

"Another thing," he said in a harsh voice. "Why didn't Grogan shoot your father and mother instead of taking a jimmy? He shot at you."

Coldly I replied, "I have no acquaintance with the criminal mind."

"No, of course not," he said hastily. "Only criminals have habits. Grogan was a burglar, but he had never hurt a mouse to our knowledge."

I chose those words as my cue.

I scowled. "Mr. Larrabee, I don't like that statement. I am glad to be of help to the police if possible. But these questions and your actions seem to indicate that you believe I am lying. That offends me."

"Oh, for God's sake, Steve, cut it," growled the other detective. He turned to me. "It isn't a question of suspicion, Mr. Reese. We all know how it was. Steve is a stubborn bird and wanted more answers. He doesn't question your veracity, do you, Steve?"

Larrabee's frown vanished. He grinned. "I guess I'm too sure of human nature. I shouldn't be. People do act differently at different times."

I took this as an apology. "I'm afraid they do," I said coldly. "And now, if you are through, I would like to go."

Larrabee inclined his head, his blue eyes staring straight ahead. I bowed and went out. In the anteroom I paused at a water cooler. My throat had been dry in that interview. I suppose I had not closed the door, for I heard the one

detective say, "Steve, you're making a fool of yourself."

"Maybe," Larrabee's voice, angry and puzzled, came back, "but I tell you that killing was as perfect as a—as a picture. Everything fitted into place like a mathematical calculation. I've covered plenty of murders and I never saw one dovetail like that. It's too perfect."

"You're dreaming; forget it."

I went out quietly, suppressing a grin. What if Larrabee did suspect something? What did I care? He had no proof and he would be mad, indeed, to make charges in face of the evidence unless he could prove it. And there were no clues. I had seen to that. I forgot Mr. Larrabee for a week.

A week later Tucky Wiener appeared!

CHAPTER V

Blackmail

HE stood inside the threshold and waited until Ballard had withdrawn. His mouth grinned, but his eyes were hard.

"How are you, kid?" he asked softly.

I was uneasy. Here was a factor upon which I had not counted.

"I'm fine," I said easily. "I intended to drop around with a check presently. But you knew the money was good, didn't you?"

"Sure," he told me. "Good as gold."

I felt cheered. Maybe the fool didn't suspect anything after all.

"But so long as you're here, I'll pay you now." I was anxious to be rid of him.

He watched in silence while I made a check payable to him. I blotted it, stood up and handed it to him.

"Now we're square," I told him.

He took the check but his mouth was

grinning. "Not square, kid. Make another for five times this one."

A cold chill made me stiffen. With difficulty I made my voice steady. "Just what do you mean?"

"You know what I mean," he sneered. "You can kid the cops, but not Tucky." He leaned forward, pinned me with his eyes. "You killed poor Baldy and you killed your old man and your old woman."

It was out. But he only suspected, he could not know.

"That's a lie," I said hotly. "I didn't tell all the truth to the police. Why should I? But what happened was that Mother and Father came home unexpectedly and caught us here in the living room. Grogan thought it was a frame-up, and when Father went for the telephone, Grogan nailed him with the jimmy. He nailed Mother, too, when she went to help Dad. He was going to kill me to shut my mouth, but I fired just as he did. I didn't miss."

I watched his eyes but they didn't appear convinced. He shrugged. "Okay, if that's your story, stick with it. Only pay Tucky off plenty to keep from telling the cops that you asked me to get Grogan to rob your old man's safe. What will the cops say to that?"

"You wouldn't dare," I said. "You'd be a party to that crime."

"The hell I don't dare," he jeered. "All I'd say is you asked to see Grogan after I'd dunned you for dough. They'd do plenty, the cops. Steve Larrabee has been around to see me three times and he's the smartest dick in New York."

I looked at him but I half-lidded my eyes for fear that he should see that my decision to kill him had been made.

"You could cause me inconvenience," I admitted.

"I could get you the hot seat," he jeered.

"You're crazy, but rather than be annoyed, I'll pay you extra. How much?"

"Thirty thousand bucks."

"Too much," I protested.

"You're getting millions, ain't you?" he growled.

"And if I start this, you'll never quit."

"Yes, I will, kid. Thirty grand and I'm done."

He was lying and I knew it. But I had to pay this sum to gain time to perfect a way of killing him.

"No checks," I said. "They could be traced. Meet me tomorrow at the Mutual Savings Bank and I'll give you cash."

"Now you're sensible, kid," he grinned.

After he had gone I retired to the laboratory. I always think best there. I knew Wiener must die. He would hound me endlessly otherwise. But it must be a perfect job—like the other. Because the police knew of his connection with me. And I must not even be suspected. It would have to be an apparent accident, or there must be no *corpus delicti* for investigation. But how?

I got no answer that night. But there was time—lots of it—and I must take pains. The police were stupid but no use to give them the slightest clue.

I DREW the money next morning in hundred dollar bills. There was over sixty thousand dollars in the checking account, but nonetheless the teller went to the president and there was sufficient stir made about the withdrawal to tell me the event would be remembered if something—me in trouble, for instance—should recall it to their minds. All the more reason to be careful about Tucky.

He met me outside the bank, his eyes gleaming.

"Did you get it?"

"Of course," I told him calmly, "but remember, it's the last time."

"Man!" he exclaimed, taking the package. Then: "Sure, I ain't no fool, kid."

He looked at me queerly as he pocketed the money. "Okay, kid, thanks."

His thick-set body moved off rapidly down the street. I watched him go: accident or disappearance! Which? I kept thinking that his pudgy body sewed in a burlap sack and weighted down by iron would stay a long time on the bottom of the river. The idea caught my fancy, and I walked crosstown to Fourth Avenue to the Marks Company that sell anything from a skiff to a two hundred foot yacht. I bought a fast speed boat. I crossed to Sutton Place where a mooring pier rented anchorage space.

All this I did, suffused by a queer feeling that I was being watched by invisible eyes. I fought down the feeling. Wiener was the single flaw and him I would dispose of.

I walked part way crosstown in order to think but then, tiring, I moved to the curb to hail a cab. As one drew up to the curb I heard a gasp behind me. A girl came flying out of a building, clutching a package.

"Cab," she hailed.

Just as she reached it, her ankle turned. She cried out, lurched and fell heavily against me. If I had not caught her she would have fallen.

"Oh, my leg!" she cried.

"That's what you get for trying to take someone else's cab," I said.

I saw that she was slender, with red hair, and a beautiful white lovely skin. Somehow her beauty shocked me. She

smiled wryly. "Do you talk to all girls that way?"

I repented my rudeness. "Sorry—here, let me help you."

I almost carried her through the cab door "Look out!" she cried. "Don't knock that jar loose unless you want to start an epidemic."

"What's in the jar?" I grinned.

"*Mycobacterium leprae* — leprosy germs to you," she said. "That's why I'm in a hurry. I want to get them in their culture before they die. Puny things with no pep to live, you know."

I rode downtown with her. Her name, she told me, was Mara Daggart, and she was a research worker in the Stanton Foundation, working on a new condensation of chaulmoogra oil as a possible cure of leprosy. I found myself interested. Beauty and brains; a girl with a scientific mind and a soft feminine beauty that stirred me deeply. No woman had ever taken my eye before.

I AIDED her to her small apartment on MacDougal Street, and she invited me to stay while she got her germ colony into the jelly feed. I watched her movements, her sunny smile. I think I fell in love with her at that moment.

I, who claimed to have no emotion; I, who believed not in love but only in physical attraction; I, who held the human species but a grade above the animal—I fell in love. That night I cursed my own folly. I sought to put her out of my mind. She was interfering with my thinking. When I saw her image, my plans for Wiener faded. I determined to see her no more.

Two days later she came to my apartment. "Perhaps I'm not wanted," she said. "You certainly dropped me like a hot brick. But I did want to see your

chlorophyll experiments and hear your reasoning."

She stayed. For lunch. For dinner. I knew then that this queer feeling that left me breathless, soft and shaken when she was around could not be shaken off. We saw each other every day for two weeks. She came and went in my apartment as she pleased. She came sometimes when I was out, and Ballard let her in to amuse herself in my laboratory.

Sometimes things were moved around, but she always explained she had been careless with retorts or Bunsen burners.

"You should be more careful," I said. "I have my things arranged with precision. A good mind believes in everything in its place and a place for everything."

She touched my hand. "Sorry, Arnold," she said. "Let's look at your air-conditioner. I'm crazy to see how they work and what effect they have on bacteria that thrive in a less humid atmosphere."

I took her to the cellar. She was fascinated as I showed her the mechanism that washed, dried, cooled and humidified the air which was then blown under forced draft into the apartment.

She suddenly laughed. "I don't know whether I like it or not, Arnold. Suppose somebody didn't like me and put a dead rat or a stink bomb in it."

"It's locked by this key," I said.

"Still," she pointed out, "locks can be forced, and if a burglar wanted to rob you and put chloroform in this blower—it would be bad."

I jerked upright. I stared at her. Was this a blind stab or did she suspect something? Was she what she claimed? Or was she, perhaps, someone planted?

She ignored my stiffness. "Let's go back and watch the chlorophyll," she suggested.

I went up, with suspicion deep within me. We did not, however, go to my laboratory. In the living room she tapped my cheek and stood close to me.

"You're angry about something, Arnold," she murmured.

The perfume of her, the closeness of her slim body overpowered me. I took her in my arms and kissed her. The touch of her lips swept me like burning fire. She surrendered without resistance, yet she did not return my caress.

Carried away by my emotion, I cried, "You've got to marry me, Mara. Think of the future. We can tour the world, study in Vienna, investigate new phenomena. With my mind stimulated by yours, we can make tremendous discoveries."

She pushed me gently away. "I like you very much, Arnold," she said softly, "but give me time to think it over. Please, I'll tell you day after tomorrow."

She left and I found myself humming and singing around the laboratory. I am not a singing person. I found myself gazing into the mirror at the thin, stoop-shouldered youth which was I. I got rid of horn-rimmed glasses to get glasses of a more fashionable shape. So happy was I that night that I thought of nothing but Mara.

The next morning the doorbell rang and, thinking it was she, I hastened ahead of Ballard and flung it wide.

Tucky Wiener stared insolently at me. "How are you, kid?" he asked.

CHAPTER VI

Murder It Is

HE thrust his way into my living room. I sent Ballard out for some chemicals. Then I turned on Wiener in cold fury. "What are you doing back here?"

"What do you think?" he sneered. Then: "Kid, I lost that dough in a crap game. I'm broke and I got to have more."

I turned my gaze from his leering eyes, his fat, loose mouth, that he might not see the mad hatred of him that blazed there.

"How long is this going on, Wiener?" I asked with an effort.

"What do you think, kid?"

"Until I am broke and then you'll go to the police anyway."

"Oh, no, not that," he mocked. "I never kill a golden goose."

"Well," I said, "go to the police. You'll get no more money from me."

He scowled. "Won't I? Listen, kid, I know more than you think. I know how *you murdered* all three of them!"

I laughed in his face.

"You know nothing, you stupid fool."

"Easy on the names," he growled. "I'm only guessing, but the cops would like my guesses. You forget Baldy wasn't a killer, and with a rod on him he'd never have swung that jimmy. You faked the whole thing to get him there to take the rap."

Something snapped in my mind. Wiener should die that night. I became cold, calculating.

"How much do you want?" I asked. The money should bait him.

"Thirty grand."

I shrugged. "That is impossible. I haven't got it, no way to get it. You forget this was a trust fund which I cannot touch."

"What can you raise?" he asked.

"Twelve thousand in cash and you can have it tonight."

He grinned and licked his loose mouth.

"Then twelve grand is what I want," he said grimly.

"And it's the last time," I cried. "I'll give no more."

He laughed. "Sure, the last time, kid, I promise."

I pretended to believe him. "All right then, come here tonight at ten o'clock and I'll have the cash."

After he had gone with his leer, I spent minutes stilling the trembling fury within me. It would be a pleasure, I told myself, to hear him scream and beg.

I went to the bank to get the money that had baited him.

As I came out, the money packages in my pocket, a voice said, "Hello, Mr. Reese."

I suppressed a start and turned. Detective Larrabee stood near the curb, rolling a cigarette. I forced a smile. "Hello," I said.

"Have you got a match?" he asked.

I gave him a paper clip of them. He lit the cigarette, handed them back. "Thanks, you're looking well."

I said that I felt excellent.

"Glad I ran into you," he went on seriously. "I really owe you an apology for all that questioning at headquarters. I made a monkey of myself and I'm sorry."

"That's all right," I said. "In cases of death you can't be too careful."

"That's what I think. Glad you don't hold any hard feelings. The case is closed now, and I'm on another case."

I murmured some polite phrase. "Really?"

"Yeah, but this isn't as easy to close as your case." He glanced up the street. "There's the bird I'm tailing now. So long, Mr. Reese."

I watched his lean, broad-shouldered body stride up the street in long graceful swings. He must think I was a fool to believe all that cock-and-bull. He still suspected. He might even be working

on the case. But he'd get nowhere. Tucky Wiener was the weak link, and I was getting rid of him tonight.

LATE in the afternoon I let Ballard go for the evening. I called Mara and told her I was going to be intensely occupied in an experiment and could not see her until the next day.

"Can't I come?" she begged.

"Not this time," I told her.

I ate my dinner out, and returned about eight and read Milliken's explanation of his cosmic ray theory and completely disagreed with him. Wiener came at ten minutes to ten. He seemed a little nervous.

He brightened, however, as I showed him in.

"Hi, guy," he called jovially, "how about a little drink?" I smelled his breath; he had been drinking. So much the better.

"I never drink with men like you," I said.

"Tish-tish! Them's hard words. Well," he shrugged, looked around, "gimme my dough and I'll scam."

"It's up in my laboratory," I told him. "Follow me."

I pretended to a great nervousness. "Did any one see you come here?"

"Not a soul," he assured me. "I don't want to spoil this pot of gold."

"And nobody knows you came here?"

"No." He glanced at me swiftly.

"Say, don't you try to cross me. I'll let you have it, rat, quick as that." He patted his pocket suggestively.

"I wouldn't double-cross you, Wiener," I said.

I led the way upstairs to my laboratory. My heart was thudding. My breath was short. He followed me, stood looking at retorts, vapor baths and the like in curiosity. I reached into the

drawer with my left hand, drew out the package of bills and tossed it on the table.

"There's your money," I said, "now get out."

His eyes gleamed. He came to the table. "Sure, don't get sore, kid," he counselled.

He bent forward to reach for the money.

My hand streaked out of my pocket, holding the blackjack. I exploded with joy as I swung at his head with all my strength.

The weight smashed squarely on the crown of his gray felt hat. He hic-coughed like a man who has laughed too much.

He staggered, pitched forward, and his face smashed into the table. His body fell back, dragging his chin along the table surface. He crashed to the floor and rolled over on his back. I grinned at him. The swine!

Swiftly now I got out the burlap sack. I dumped the body in. The iron weights were already in it.

The gloves I wore made me awkward, but I managed to sew the sack lips quickly enough.

Now came the greatest ordeal of all—getting his carcass down to the alley where my car was parked. I opened the door. I stooped. Suddenly I straightened, rigid, by breath pendent in my throat.

The doorbell downstairs rang!

The rasp of the bell came like a peal of doom. My blood seemed frozen. A terrific fear seized me. Who had come? And why? I had been cold to acquaintances; no one visited me any more. Could this be Larrabee? No! No!

The clangor of the bell reverberated through the house. Like a fool I had left on the lights. Again and again the bell clattered. Impatiently.

I forced myself to be cool. After all, was I not clever? I'd beat them all. I put a gun in my pocket and went downstairs.

I unlocked the door and pulled it open.

"Arnold!" cried Mara. "Darling, how you must have been absorbed! I've been poking that darned button for hours, it seems."

The reaction made me angry. "What are you doing here?" I cried.

She stopped stock-still inside the door. "What am I doing here?" she repeated. "Why that tone of voice, Arnold? After all—"

I suddenly remembered myself. "I know, darling, I'm sorry," I interrupted hastily, "but as a matter of fact I'm deep in an experiment. My mind is still on it."

"Oh, let me watch," she cried.

I shook my head. With an effort I mustered a gay smile. "You shan't see anything until I am done," I told her. "But if it is a success—and I am sure it will be—what do you say we get married and catch the Europa sailing Tuesday?"

"What is the experiment?" she asked.

"The chemical reaction of kinetic rays in the transformation of polycells into chlorophyll," I said.

It was an experiment on which I had been working and I knew the solution was at hand.

"Oh, I'd love to see," she murmured.

"With you there," I reproached, "how could I keep my mind on the formula?"

I took her by the shoulders to thrust her out the door. An impulse overcame me. I kissed her roughly, thoroughly.

"Go home," I ordered. "You shall see the result tomorrow."

"Well, if you must deport me," she said, and went out the door. Hastily I

slammed and locked it. I took a deep breath of relief. Now for Wiener.

CHAPTER VII

The East River

THE burlap sack containing Wiener reposed as I had left it. As I moved toward the sack I saw my face in a mirror. My skin was pale as ashes. My eyes blazed deeply in my skull. I wet my lips. This wouldn't do. I forced a smile. As soon as Wiener was sunk, I was safe from further annoyances. I grasped the burlap!

What a task! I took him down the fire staircase. I met no one, fortunately. But I had to rest every few minutes. I tugged, pulled, lifted—even rolled. And at last I had the sack at the cellar door that led to the alley. I reconnoitered the alley. It was empty. Hastily I tugged the sack into the rear of the car. At last! The worst was over.

I climbed in, grinning. A tremendous joy suffused me. Years hence, when people honored me for my scientific exploits I could remember this moment and snicker inside.

I drove leisurely across town, assured of myself, humming a little tune. The East River was deep, its currents treacherous. If ever Wiener was found, the crabs would have picked his bones clean.

I had no compunction over what I was doing. Wiener was a rat, a gambler who preyed on others. He deserved death.

And anyway, death was a finality to all. Human life was not more precious than any other animal life, only stupid humans had made laws to preserve themselves because they feared death.

The fools! Death was a necessity at times. Human progress thrived on death—look at wars! And how easy to inflict by a clever person!

I was proving that any one with half-intelligence could kill and the stupid police could be fooled. Only by accident do they catch a killer. And then the murderer is usually one who strikes in mad, blind fury, with no thought of the consequences. But me, cool, with foresight, they would never catch me.

At length I reached Sutton Place—where at a mooring dock my boat lay. Here I waited a space to make sure no one saw me. Then I tumbled my burden out and dragged it across the ground to the twenty-four foot speed boat.

Wiener's body fitted into the stern sheets. I moved forward, over the engine cockpit, pushed the self-starter and the motor burred pleasantly. Casting off, I steered straight out and then turned north in the center of the channel. Ward's Island's light slid by. Over my head were the looping strands of lights on the Queensboro Bridge, glistening like illuminated pearls. A light mist hovered near the black water.

I went north, slowly, with muffled exhaust, almost to Hell Gate Bridge.

Here I slowed the boat up, set the wheel, and moved back toward the sack. I stopped suddenly midway.

I thought I heard another motor exhaust. I listened intently, stared into the gray opaqueness of the mist on the water. But I saw nothing.

Imagination, I told myself. The imagination that makes cowering fools of murderers who fear to take human life.

STILL listening, I moved back to the throttle and steering wheel and shut off the motor. For a moment or so I let the boat drift. I heard nothing at all. There was no sound except the muffled beat of city noise. I moved back to the sack. Now was as good a time as any.

As I climbed over the mid-section hatch that held the motor, I thought I heard a groan from the bag. Wiener was regaining consciousness. The fool must have had a head like concrete not to die under such a blow.

"But you won't groan after this splash," I grinned at the bag. "You knew nothing, but you guessed too much, Wiener. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and as the Arabs say, a fool and his life are soon parted."

I scaled the hatch. "Didn't you realize," I sneered, "that after I had killed Mr. and Mrs. Reese, killing you would be easy?" I laughed again. "The minute you asked for money you were doomed." There was no more sound from the bag.

I reached down to get the bag in my arms. "Good-by, Wiener," I grinned.

I started to lift the bag. Before my eyes the lips of the bag fell apart. A gun muzzle thumped into my chest.

"Reach 'em, Reese," growled a voice. "You're under arrest for murder!"

"Larrabee!" I gasped. His lean grim face reared out of the bag.

Larrabee! What did this mean? How did he get here? For a second I was stunned enough to be incapable of movement. In that time he shook down the bag from his shoulders and straightened up, the gun snout still pressed against my breast. "You've had all the rope you need," he said.

Before my mind's eyes flashed a picture of a courtroom, of a judge pronouncing sentence, of a white cell in the death house and the little walk that ended in a stout awkward chair where the straps held you tight as the electricity blew your cells asunder. Me—dead! Never!

Something snapped in my brain, I screamed shrilly. Blindly I sprang at him. At that instant a tide wave struck

the boat a terrific slap. Larrabee, his feet encumbered by the sack, swayed. The gun muzzle no longer covered me. Like a flash my arm went out, grabbed his wrist, my body lunged forward. I wanted to tear him to pieces.

We fell with a crash into the cockpit. Insensate rage made my one hand tear at his throat. I was unconquerable, I, Arnold Reese, would still laugh at these all. Before my onslaught he could do nothing. My fingers sank into his throat. I laughed at his efforts to wriggle loose.

"You fool!" I yelled. "I don't know how you did this, but you'll never tell any one else about it."

He spoke no word, but his legs were coming out of the sack and twining around mine in a scissors grip that I could not break. His back arched and suddenly he wrenched upward with his torso, threw my own body high, and his one leg came up in that brief space of time and the bony cap of his knee struck me in the groin.

A dizzy wave of pain swept me. But I did not relent. This was the last convulsion of a dying man. I clung to my grip. Suddenly he relaxed. I yelled with joy. I wrenched the gun from his hand and drew back to blow him to hell.

In that split-second he bounded upright. A terrific blow caught me alongside the head. I swayed. I fired the gun, but my arm was not level. The spitting flash merely showed him charging at me. Another blow. I fell to the cockpit. I could not think; I could not see.

Faintly I heard a shrill blast of a whistle. Out of the night voices yelled. There was the ripping roar of a motorboat under full way. I staggered to my knees, swinging wildly, trying to level the gun. My hand was seized. Another blow caught me flush on the chin. I went backward, tasting salt blood. The gun was jerked from my hand.

The jaw blow had practically paralyzed me. I lay there, incapable of movement even when another motorboat came alongside and I heard the metallic rasp of a boat-hook.

"Got him, Steve?" yelled a voice.

"Sure," Larrabee called.

"Any trouble?"

Larrabee laughed. "Trouble, with a hundred and twenty pound rat! Who are you kidding?"

I heard no more.

CHAPTER VIII

Retribution

I HAVE no clear recollection of what immediately followed. I was taken to the Tombs and a physician came and administered a hypodermic. It seems I was shouting and screaming then. After the prick of the needle I remembered no more until much later.

It was daytime, I know, for light streamed through the barred window, and I heard traffic rumble on Centre Street. Then a guard unlocked the cell door and Detective Larrabee came in. But I did not look at him. Behind him came Mara Daggart. I yelled, sprang up and threw myself at the girl. Larrabee tossed me back.

"You betrayed me, Mara Daggart," I yelled.

She merely stared. I quieted.

"Well, Reese," Larrabee said, "are you ready to tell us all about it in writing?"

I stared at Mara. Even now I loved her. "Why did you do it, Mara?" She still stared at me, loathing unspeakable written on her face.

Larrabee said, "She's what we call sucker bait, Reese. She's a clever little actress, though, I expect, she didn't have to be too clever to fool you. The minute I suspected you killed your adopted

father and mother, I sicked her on to you. Every time she went to your apartment she searched a portion of it."

He drew things from his pocket. "Recognize these?"

There was my silencer, the bullet fired into the fireplace. I came off the bunk with a scream, full of hatred, but Larrabee pushed me back.

"Easy, man," he said. "You're caught with the goods. If you weren't going to be indicted for the murder of Mr. and Mrs. Reese, you could be had for the attempt on Tucky Wiener."

I sat silent. Wiener! Of course, I had struck him down, yet Larrabee came out of the bag.

"Wiener!" I muttered. "He—"

"Wiener was working with me," but in Larrabee. "Just the old stool pigeon stuff that you fell for. You see, Reese, there wasn't enough evidence to convict you for the murder of your adopted father and mother. But you could be forced to try again; guys like you always do. So I put him up to it. Some more sucker bait."

He paused, watching me with those disconcerting blue eyes.

"You used to go in and out of your laboratory window as you did the night you killed two nice old people. Well, I could come and go, too. I was watching you when you struck down Wiener. Good thing his hat was padded. That was a wallop. Mara rang your bell, called you downstairs, so I could get into the bag. I knew a braggart of your type would say something that would be evidence."

THEN, bit by bit, he re-enacted my crime before my eyes, even to the use of ethyl-chloride in the beginning. It was amazing. I finally said, "How did you know about the ethyl-chloride?"

He grinned at me, but it was a grin without mirth.

"What I can't understand in you who call yourself a great scientist," he said, "is that you didn't stop to think that ethyl-chloride can be detected in the blood and the lung tissue."

He snorted. "I had a post-mortem made before we surrendered the bodies to you for burial, and found the ethyl-chloride. That's how I knew it was murder."

He sighed. "You dumb amateurs—you always miss out where you think you're smartest."

He stung me. I drew back, snarling. What right had he, who had had phenomenal luck, to criticize one whose brain was equal to anything? A rage shook me.

He said, "Do you want to get it all down in writing?"

In my fury I saw just what I should do. Write down the story from its inception, show them how a perfect murder had been tripped by the stupid luck of a nitwit detective.

"Yes, I'll write it down," I yelled, "and people will see that you were only lucky." I laughed at him. "You couldn't have proved how I killed Mr. and Mrs. Reese, if I were not willing to tell you."

He exchanged stares with Mara. "Can you tie it?" he asked. "Okay, Reese, go ahead. There's a dictaphone and a steno taking it all down."

I spoke for an hour or more, going into every detail of thought, motive, and how I met every emergency. I knew as I talked that I was condemning myself to death in the electric chair. But I did not fear death. It was a mere dissolution, a long sleep.

"There," I said at the conclusion, "there is a story that will make people gasp."

Larrabee really laughed. "Imagine!" he said to Mara. "He thinks this routine murder is remarkable. Well, I suppose all murderers think their crime is the best just like all fathers think their babies are the best."

I sprang at him, but he twisted my arm and threw me screaming onto the bunk.

All day after he had left I brooded over what he had said about my perfect crime being dumb and routine. Well, I had a way to show them. I would will my brain to the Stanton Foundation so that they could see what a genius's brain looked like. I would go to the chair laughing over a joke to prove to them that death had no terrors for the informed mind not shrouded in superstition. This would show Larrabee and the world that I was a great man. Indeed, now that I had to die I would make a spectacle of it. I wanted to die. This being cooped up in a cell was worse than death.

I drew my will. When the reporters came I told them the story of my brain. I amplified on it when other scientific-looking men with glasses came and asked me many questions and rapped me with a rubber hammer. When this man, Frederick C. Painton, came to write my story for a magazine I gladly agreed.

"Show the world the kind of genius I am," I told him.

"Sure," he said, "just keep on talking."

"My trial," I said, "will be on the front pages of all the newspapers of the world."

"Sure," he agreed, taking notes.

THE day of my trial arrived. I dressed and shaved and took care of myself better than usual. I would show the world. Here was my moment of spotlight, that the people

should know what sort of man can take life and laugh. Guards took me to the courtroom.

But there was no trial! The spectated physicians came into court and spoke with the judge. Other men came and conversed.

The district attorney merely looked at me and said, "I abide by the unanimous opinion of the psychoanalysts, Your Honor, though I am convinced that such an inhuman maniac should be destroyed rather than kept alive."

Inhuman! Maniac! What were they talking about? I found out two days later. The judge committed me to life confinement in the Hospital for the Criminal Insane at Matteawan. Me! Insane! They were all mad. I insisted on a trial. I demanded the capital punishment. To die the cynosure of all eyes, as having committed a great crime, that I could take and smile.

But to be confined in a white, bleak room, this is worse than death. Endless days, tortured nights. A prisoner. Never to be free!

I tried to take my own life. But they had denied me even a hairpin. My knives and forks were of paper. My clothes so ragged I could not even hang myself on their strength. I tried to butt my brains out. They put me in a padded cell.

Day after day I screamed and cursed and tore my hair and scratched my skin, hoping for infection. Physicians cauterized my self-made wounds. At this rate I would go mad. Images came into my brain. Mad images that made me cower, then laugh and shriek at my own idiocy.

I was a slaving nervous wreck when Frederick C. Painton came to take notes on what he called the end of my story.

"Get me out of here," I cried to him through the bars. "I cannot stand this.

The others are mad. They talk like insane fools. One thinks he is Napoleon. Another—my God, in pity's name get me out of here."

"I can't get you out of here," Pain-ton told me. "Nobody can. You have to pay the price."

"This price, I can't," I yelled. "Smuggle me in a pin—just a little pin that I can stab into my carotid artery."

"I'm carefully searched before I can get in," he explained.

I tried to snatch at his pencil through the bars. He stepped back.

"Let them shoot me, let them see how a genius can die," I cried.

He shook his head. Frantically I jerked at the steel bars. "Then let them give me my laboratory to work in. Let

them use my great brain. Don't you know that I am the great Charles Darwin, brought back to life? I am the man who invented evolution. I wrote the Origin of the Species. I am descended from Julius Cæsar himself. A brain like mine occurs once in a hundred years. I am Julius Cæsar."

But he was not listening. He had gone away. I sobbed and hurled myself at the door. Freedom without and even death denied to me within. But I am Julius Cæsar and I shall outwit them. I shall be free.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Arnold Reese is still alive, and confined to the State Hospital for the Criminal Insane in Matteawan.



Rackets in Business

THE Law says that, in collection cases, the innocent third party must be paid. That furnishes the base for a racket wherein the victim, usually a retail dealer, is induced to order merchandise under the belief that its sale is guaranteed and that extensive advertising is to be done in promotion work. The racketeers selling the merchandise secure notes from the merchant and sell these notes to a third party. The racketeers keep none of their promises, the merchant cannot dispose of the merchandise generally, but he must pay because the Law empowers the innocent third party to collect.

—John Berry.



"Lizzie's been trying
to talk to me—she's
dead!"

A Midsummer Night's Murder Dream

By Glenn Garrison

A SCUDDING cloud whisked sheets and suddenly she sat up with a away and a silvery stream of strangled scream. moonlight flooded the bedroom of the small, quiet farmhouse. It revealed Mrs. Sarah Elizabeth Burton, a widow, tossing violently on a large four-poster bed. She clutched at the

*As Mrs. Burton Dreamed
of Her Daughter's Murder
Many Miles Away, It Was
Actually Happening! And
She Also Recognized the
Fiendish, Brutal Murderer!*

"Don't!" she choked. "Don't! Please don't! Don't murder my daughter! Lizzie! Lizzie! The pine trees! Stay away from the pine trees!"

Her horror-glazed eyes cleared and she