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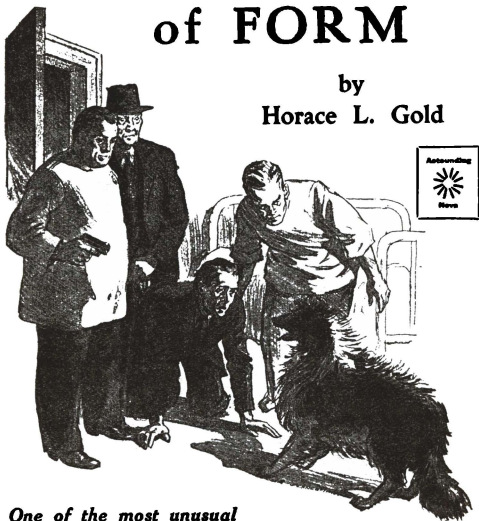


STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC.,

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A MATTER of FORM

by
Horace L. Gold



One of the most unusual stories in years introduces an old theme with a new and outstandingly logical viewpoint

GILROY'S telephone bell jangled into his slumber. With his eyes grimly shut, the reporter flopped over on his side, ground his ear into the pillow and pulled the cover over his head. But the bell jarred on.

When he blinked his eyes open and

saw rain streaking the windows, he gritted his teeth against the insistent clangor and yanked off the receiver. He swore into the transmitter—not a trite blasphemy, but a poetic opinion of the sort of man who woke tired reporters at four in the morning.

"Don't blame me," his editor replied after a bitter silence. "It was your idea. You wanted the case. They found another whatsit."

Gilroy instantly snapped awake. "They found another catatonic!"

"Over on York Avenue near Ninety-first Street, about an hour ago. He's down in the observation ward at Memorial." The voice suddenly became low and confiding. "Want to know what I think, Gilroy?"

"What?" Gilroy asked in an expectant whisper.

"I think you're nuts. These catatonics are nothing but tramps. They probably drank themselves into catatonia, whatever that is. After all, be reasonable, Gilroy; they're only worth a four-line clip."

Gilroy was out of bed and getting dressed with one hand. "Not this time, chief," he said confidently. "Sure, they're only tramps, but that's part of the story. Look . . . hey! You should have been off a couple of hours ago. What's holding you up?"

The editor sounded disgruntled. "Old Man Talbot. He's seventy-six tomorrow. Had to pad out a blurb on his life."

"What! Wasting time whitewashing that murderer, racketeer—"

"Take it easy, Gilroy," the editor cautioned. "He's got a half interest in the paper. He doesn't bother us often."

"O. K. But he's still the city's one-man crime wave. Well, he'll kick off soon. Can you meet me at Memorial when you quit work?"

"In this weather?" The editor considered. "I don't know. Your news instinct is tops, and if you think this is big— Oh, hell . . . yes!"

Gilroy's triumphant grin soured when he ripped his foot through a sock. He hung up and explored empty drawers for another pair.

The street was cold and miserably deserted. The black snow was melting to

grimy slush. Gilroy hunched into his coat and sloshed in the dirty sludge toward Greenwich Avenue. He was very tall and incredibly thin. With his head down into the driving swirl of rain, his coat flapping around his skinny shanks, his hands deep in his pockets, and his sharp elbows sticking away from his rangy body, he resembled an unhappy stork peering around for a fish.

But he was far from being unhappy. He was happy, in fact, as only a man with a pet theory can be when facts begin to fight on his side.

Splashing through the slush, he shivered when he thought of the catatonic who must have been lying in it for hours, unable to rise, until he was found and carried to the hospital. Poor devil! The first had been mistaken for a drunk, until the cop saw the bandage on his neck.

"Escaped post-brain-operatives," the hospital had reported. It sounded reasonable, except for one thing—catatonics don't walk, crawl, feed themselves or perform *any* voluntary muscular action. Thus Gilroy had not been particularly surprised when no hospital or private surgeon claimed the escaped post-operatives.

A taxi driver hopefully sighted his agitated figure through the rain. Gilroy restrained an urge to hug the hackie for rescuing him from the bitter wind. He clambered in hastily.

"Nice night for a murder," the driver observed conversationally.

"Are you hinting that business is bad?"

"I mean the weather's lousy."

"Well, damned if it isn't!" Gilroy exclaimed sarcastically. "Don't let it slow you down, though. I'm in a hurry. Memorial Hospital, quick!"

The driver looked concerned. He whipped the car out into the middle of the street, scooted through a light that was just an instant too slow.

THREE CATATONICS in a month! Gilroy shook his head. It was a real puzzler. They couldn't have escaped. In the first place, if they had, they would have been claimed; and in the second place, it was physically impossible. And how did they acquire those neat surgical wounds on the backs of their necks, closed with two professional stitches and covered with a professional bandage? New wounds, too!

Gilroy attached special significance to the fact that they were very poorly dressed and suffered from slight malnutrition. But what was the significance? He shrugged. It was an instinctive hunch.

The taxi suddenly swerved to the curb and screeched to a stop. He thrust a bill through the window and got out. The night burst abruptly. Rain smashed against him in a roaring tide. He battered upwind to the hospital entrance.

He was soaked, breathless, half-repentant for his whim in attaching importance to three impoverished catatonics. He gingerly put his hand in his clammy coat and brought out a sodden identification card.

The girl at the reception desk glanced at it. "Oh, a newspaperman! Did a big story come in tonight?"

"Nothing much," he said casually. "Some poor tramp found on York and Ninety-first. Is he up in the screwball ward?"

She scanned the register and nodded. "Is he a friend of yours?"

"My grandson." As he moved off, both flinched at the sound of water squishing in his shoes at each step. "I must have stepped in a puddle."

When he turned around in the elevator, she was shaking her head and pursing her lips maternally. Then the ground floor dropped away.

He went through the white corridor unhesitatingly. Low, horrible moans came from the main ward. He heard them

with academic detachment. Near the examination room, the sound of the rising elevator stopped him. He paused, turning to see who it was.

The editor stepped out, chilled, wet and disgusted. Gilroy reached down and caught the smaller man's arm, guiding him silently through the door and into the examination room. The editor sighed resignedly.

The resident physician glanced up briefly when they unobtrusively took places in the ring of internes about the bed. Without effort, Gilroy peered over the heads before him, inspecting the catatonic with clinical absorption.

The catatonic had been stripped of his wet clothing, toweled, and rubbed with alcohol. Passive, every muscle absolutely relaxed, his eyes were loosely closed, and his mouth hung open in idiotic slackness. The dark line of removed surgical plaster showed on his neck. Gilroy strained to one side. The hair had been clipped. He saw part of a stitch.

"Catatonia, doc?" he asked quietly.

"Who are you?" the physician snapped.

"Gilroy . . . *Morning Post*."

The doctor gazed back at the man on the bed. "It's catatonia, all right. No trace of alcohol or inhibiting drugs. Slight malnutrition."

Gilroy elbowed politely through the ring of internes. "Insulin shock doesn't work, eh? No reason why it should."

"Why shouldn't it?" the doctor demanded, startled. "It always works in catatonia . . . at least, temporarily."

"But it didn't in this case, did it?" Gilroy insisted brusquely.

The doctor lowered his voice defeatedly. "No."

"What's this all about?" the editor asked in irritation. "What's catatonia, anyhow? Paralysis, or what?"

"It's the last stage of schizophrenia, or what used to be called dementia præ-

cox," the physician said. "The mind revolts against responsibility and searches for a period in its existence when it was not troubled. It goes back to childhood and finds that there are childish cares; goes further and comes up against infantile worries; and finally ends up in a prenatal mental state."

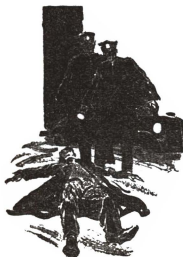
"But it's a gradual degeneration," Gilroy stated. "Long before the complete mental decay, the victim is detected and put in an asylum. He goes through imbecility, idiocy, and after years of slow degeneration, winds up refusing to use his muscles or brain."

THE EDITOR looked baffled. "Why should insulin shock pull him out?"

"It shouldn't!" Gilroy rapped out.

"It should!" the physician replied angrily. "Catatonia is negative revolt. Insulin drops the sugar content of the blood to the point of shock. The sudden hunger jolts the catatonic out of his passivity."

"That's right," Gilroy said incisively. "But this isn't catatonia! It's mighty close to it, but you never heard of a catatonic who didn't refuse to carry on voluntary muscular action. There's no salivary retention! My guess is that it's paralysis."



"Caused by what?" the doctor asked biting.

"That's for you to say. I'm not a physician. How about the wound at the base of the skull?"

"Nonsense! It doesn't come within a quarter inch of the motor nerve. It's *cerias flexibilitas . . . waxy flexibility*." He raised the victim's arm and let go. It sagged slowly. "If it were general paralysis, it would have affected the brain. He'd have been dead."

Gilroy lifted his bony shoulders and lowered them. "You're on the wrong track, doc," he said quietly. "The wound has a lot to do with his condition, and catatonia can't be duplicated by surgery. Lesions can cause it, but the degeneration would still be gradual. And catatonics can't walk or crawl away. He was deliberately abandoned, same as the others."

"Looks like you're right, Gilroy," the editor conceded. "There's something fishy here. All three of them had the same wounds?"

"In exactly the same place, at the base of the skull and to the left of the spinal column. Did you ever see anything so helpless? Imagine him escaping from a hospital, or even a private surgeon!"

The physician dismissed the internes and gathered up his instruments preparatory to hurried flight. "I don't see the motive. All three of them were undernourished, poorly clad; they must have been living in substandard conditions. Who would want to harm them?"

Gilroy bounded in front of the doctor, barring his way. "But it doesn't have to be revenge! It could be experimentation!"

"To prove what?"

Gilroy looked at him quizzically. "You don't know?"

"How should I?"

The reporter clapped his drenched hat on backward and darted to the door.

"Come on, chief. We'll ask Moss for a theory."

"You won't find Dr. Moss here," the physician said. "He's off at night, and tomorrow, I think, he's leaving the hospital."

Gilroy stopped abruptly. "Moss . . . leaving the hospital!" he repeated in astonishment. "Did you hear that, chief? He's a dictator, a slave driver and a louse. But he's probably the greatest surgeon in America. Look at that. Stories breaking all around you, and you're whitewashing Old Man Talbot's murderous life!" His coat bellied out in the wash of his swift, gaunt stride. "Three catatonics found lying on the street in a month. That never happened before. They can't walk or crawl, and they have mysterious wounds at the base of their skulls. Now the greatest surgeon in the country gets kicked out of the hospital he built up to first place. And what do you do? You sit in the office and write stories about what a swell guy Talbot is underneath his slimy exterior!"

The resident physician was relieved to hear the last of that relentlessly incisive, logical voice trail down the corridor. But he gazed down at the catatonic before leaving the room.

He felt less certain that it was catatonia. He found himself quoting the editor's remark—there definitely *was* something fishy there!

But what was the motive in operating on three obviously destitute men and abandoning them; and how had the operation caused a state resembling catatonia?

In a sense, he felt sorry that Dr. Moss was going to be discharged. The cold, slave-driving dictator might have given a good theory. That was the physician's scientific conscience speaking. Inside, he really felt that anything was worth getting away from that silkily mocking voice and the delicately sneering mouth.

II.

AT FIFTY-FIFTH STREET, Wood came to the last Sixth Avenue employment office. With very little hope, he read the crudely chalked signs. It was an industrial employment agency. Wood had never been inside a factory. The only job he could fill was that of apprentice upholsterer, ten dollars a week; but he was thirty-two years old, and the agency would require five dollars immediate payment.

He turned away dejectedly, fingering the three dimes in his pocket. Three dimes—the smallest, thinnest American coins—

"Anything up there, Mac?"

"Not for me," Wood replied wearily. He scarcely glanced at the man.

He took a last glance at his newspaper before dropping it to the sidewalk. That was the last paper he'd buy, he resolved; with his miserable appearance he couldn't answer advertisements. But his mind clung obstinately to Gilroy's article. Gilroy had described the horror of catatonia. A notion born of defeat made it strangely attractive to Wood. At least, the catatonics were fed and housed. He wondered if catatonia could be simulated—

But the other had been scrutinizing Wood. "College man, ain't you?" he asked as Wood trudged away from the employment office.

Wood paused and ran his hand over his stubbled face. Dirty cuffs stood away from his fringing sleeves. He knew that his hair curled long behind his ears. "Does it still show?" he asked bitterly.

"You bet. You can spot a college man a mile away."

Wood's mouth twisted. "Glad to hear that. It must be an inner light shining through the rags."

"You're a sucker, coming down here with an education. Down here they want poor slob who don't know any

better . . . guys like me, with big muscles and small brains."

Wood looked up at him sharply. He was too well dressed and alert to have prowled the agencies for any length of time. He might have just lost his job; perhaps he was looking for company. But Wood had met his kind before. He had the hard eyes of the wolf who preyed on the jobless.

"Listen," Wood said coldly, "I haven't a thing you'd want. I'm down to thirty cents. Excuse me while I sneak my books and toothbrush out of my room before the super snatches them."

The other did not recoil or protest virtuously. "I ain't blind," he said quietly. "I can see you're down and out."

"Then what do you want?" Wood snapped ill-temperedly. "Don't tell me you want a threadbare but filthy college man for company—"

His unwelcome friend made a gesture of annoyance. "Cut out the mad-dog act. I was turned down on a job today because I ain't a college man. Seventy-five a month, room and board, doctor's assistant. But I got the air because I ain't a grad."

"You've got my sympathy," Wood said, turning away.

The other caught up with him. "You're a college grad. Do you want the job? It'll cost you your first week's pay . . . my cut, see?"

"I don't know anything about medicine. I was a code expert in a stock-broker's office before people stopped having enough money for investments. Want any codes deciphered? That's the best I can do."

He grew irritated when the stranger stubbornly matched his dejected shuffle.

"You don't have to know anything about medicine. Long as you got a degree, a few muscles and a brain, that's all the doc wants."

Wood stopped short and wheeled.

"Is that on the level?"

"Sure. But I don't want to take a deadhead up there and get turned down. I got to ask you the questions they asked me."

In face of a prospective job, Wood's caution ebbed away. He felt the three dimes in his pocket. They were exceedingly slim and unprotective. They meant two hamburgers and two cups of coffee, or a bed in some filthy hotel dormitory. Two thin meals and sleeping in the wet March air; or shelter for a night and no food—

"Shoot!" he said deliberately.

"Any relatives?"

"Some fifth cousins in Maine."

"Friends?"

"None who would recognize me now."

He searched the stranger's face. "What's this all about? What have my friends or relatives got to do—"

"Nothing," the other said hastily. "Only you'll have to travel a little. The doc wouldn't want a wife dragging along, or have you break up your work by writing letters. See?"

WOOD DIDN'T see. It was a singularly lame explanation; but he was concentrating on the seventy-five a month, room and board—food.

"Who's the doctor?" he asked.

"I ain't dumb." The other smiled humorlessly. "You'll go there with me and get the doc to hand over my cut."

Wood crossed to Eighth Avenue with the stranger. Sitting in the subway, he kept his eyes from meeting casual, disinterested glances. He pulled his feet out of the aisle, against the base of the seat, to hide the loose, flapping right sole. His hands were cracked and scaly, with tenacious dirt deeply embedded. Bitter, defeated, with the appearance of a mature waif. What a chance there was of being hired! But at least the stranger had risked a nickel on his fare.

Wood followed him out at 103rd Street and Central Park West; they climbed the hill to Manhattan Avenue and headed several blocks downtown. The other ran briskly up the stoop of an old house. Wood climbed the steps more slowly. He checked an urge to run away, but he experienced in advance the sinking feeling of being turned away from a job. If he could only have his hair cut, his suit pressed, his shoes mended! But what was the use of thinking about that? It would cost a couple of dollars. And nothing could be done about his ragged hems.

"Come on!" the stranger called.

Wood tensed his back and stood looking at the house while the other brusquely rang the doorbell. There were three floors and no card above the bell, no doctor's white glass sign in the darkly curtained windows. From the outside it could have been a neglected boardinghouse.

The door opened. A man of his own age, about middle height, but considerably overweight, blocked the entrance. He wore a white laboratory apron. Incongruous in his pale, soft face, his nimble eyes were harsh.

"Back again?" he asked impatiently.

"It's not for me this time," Wood's persistent friend said. "I got a college grad."

Wood drew back in humiliation when the fat man's keen glance passed over his wrinkled, frayed suit and stopped distastefully at the long hair blowing wildly around his hungry, unshaven face. There—he could see it coming: "Can't use him."

But the fat man pushed back a beautiful collie with his leg and held the door wide. Astounded, Wood followed his acquaintance into the narrow hall. To give an impression of friendliness, he stooped and ruffled the dog's ears. The fat man led them into a bare front room.

"What's your name?" he asked indifferently.

Wood's answer stuck in his throat. He coughed to clear it. "Wood," he replied.

"Any relatives?" Wood shook his head.

"Friends?"

"Not any more."

"What kind of degree?"

"Science, Columbia, 1925."

The fat man's expression did not change. He reached into his left pocket and brought out a wallet. "What arrangement did you make with this man?"

"He's to get my first week's salary." Silently, Wood observed the transfer of several green bills; he looked at them hungrily, pathetically. "May I wash up and take a shave, doctor?" he asked.

"I'm not the doctor," the fat man answered. "My name is Clarence, without a mister in front of it." He turned swiftly to the sharp stranger. "What are you hanging around for?"

Wood's friend backed to the door. "Well, so long," he said. "Good break for both of us, eh, Wood?"

Wood smiled and nodded happily. The trace of irony in the stranger's hard voice escaped him entirely.

"I'll take you upstairs to your room," Clarence said when Wood's business partner had left. "I think there's a razor there."

THEY WENT out into the dark hall, the collie close behind them. An unshaded light bulb hung on a single wire above a gate-leg table. On the wall behind the table an oval, gilt mirror gave back Wood's hairy, unkempt image. A worn carpet covered the floor to a door cutting off the rear of the house, and narrow stairs climbed in a swift spiral to the next story. It was cheerless and neglected, but Wood's conception of luxury had become less exacting.

"Wait here while I make a telephone

call," Clarence said.

He closed the door behind him in a room opposite the stairs. Wood fondled the friendly collie. Through the panel he heard Clarence's voice, natural and unlowered.

"Hello, Moss? . . . Pinero brought back a man. All his answers are all right. . . . Columbia, 1925. . . . Not a cent, judging from his appearance. . . . Call Talbot? For when? . . . O. K. . . . You'll get back as soon as you get through with the board? . . . O. K. . . . Well, what's the difference? You got all you wanted from them, anyhow."

Wood heard the receiver's click as it was replaced and taken off again. Moss? That was the head of Memorial Hospital—the great surgeon. But the article about the catatonics hinted something about his removal from the hospital.

"Hello, Talbot?" Clarence was saying. "Come around at noon tomorrow. Moss says everything'll be ready then. . . . O. K., don't get excited. This is positively the last one! . . . Don't worry. Nothing can go wrong."

Talbot's name sounded familiar to Wood. It might have been the Talbot that the *Morning Post* had written about—the seventy-six-year-old philanthropist. He probably wanted Moss to operate on him. Well, it was none of his business.

When Clarence joined him in the dark hall, Wood thought only of his seventy-five a month, room and board; but more than that, he had a job! A few weeks of decent food and a chance to get some new clothes, and he would soon get rid of his defeatism.

He even forgot his wonder at the lack of shingles and waiting-room signs that a doctor's house usually had. He could only think of his neat room on the third floor, overlooking a bright back yard. And a shave—

III.

DR. MOSS replaced the telephone with calm deliberation. Striding through the white hospital corridor to the elevator, he was conscious of curious stares. His pink, scrupulously shaven, clean-scrubbed face gave no answer to their questioning eyes. In the elevator he stood with his hands thrust casually into his pockets. The operator did not dare to look at him or speak.

Moss gathered his hat and coat. The space around the reception desk seemed more crowded than usual, with men who had the penetrating look of reporters. He walked swiftly past.

A tall, astoundingly thin man, his stare fixed predatorily on Moss, headed the wedge of reporters that swarmed after Moss.

"You can't leave without a statement to the press, doc!" he said.

"I find it very easy to do," Moss taunted without stopping.

He stood on the curb with his back turned coldly on the reporters and unhurriedly flagged a taxi.

"Well, at least you can tell us whether you're still director of the hospital," the tall reporter said.

"Ask the board of trustees."

"Then how about a theory on the catatonics?"

"Ask the catatonics." The cab pulled up opposite Moss. Deliberately he opened the door and stepped in. As he rode away, he heard the thin man exclaim: "What a cold, clammy reptile!"

He did not look back to enjoy their discomfiture. In spite of his calm demeanor, he did not feel too easy himself. The man on the *Morning Post*, Gilroy or whatever his name was, had written a sensational article on the abandoned catatonics, and even went so far as to claim they were not catatonics. He had had all he could do to keep from being involved in the conflicting riot of theory. Talbot owned a large

interest in the paper. He must be told to strangle the articles, although by now all the papers were taking up the cry.

It was a clever piece of work, detecting the fact that the victims weren't suffering from catatonia at all. But the *Morning Post* reporter had cut himself a man-size job in trying to understand how three men with general paralysis could be abandoned without a trace of where they had come from, and what connection the incisions had on their condition. Only recently had Moss himself solved it.

The cab crossed to Seventh Avenue and headed uptown.

The trace of his parting smile of mockery vanished. His mobile mouth whitened, tight-lipped and grim. Where was he to get money from now? He had milked the hospital funds to a frightening debt, and it had not been enough. Like a bottomless maw, his researches could drain a dozen funds.

If he could convince Talbot, prove to him that his failures had not really been failures, that this time he would not slip up—

But Talbot was a tough nut to crack. Not a cent was coming out of his miserly pocket until Moss completely convinced him that he was past the experimental stage. This time there would be no failure!

At Moss' street, the cab stopped and the surgeon sprang out lightly. He ran up the steps confidently, looking neither to the left nor to the right, though it was a fine day with a warm yellow sun, and between the two lines of old houses Central Park could be seen budding greenly.

He opened the door and strode almost impatiently into the narrow, dark hall, ignoring the friendly collie that bounded out to greet him.

"Clarence!" he called out. "Get your new assistant down. I'm not even going to wait for a meal." He threw off his hat, coat and jacket, hanging them

up carelessly on a hook near the mirror.

"Hey, Wood!" Clarence shouted up the stairs. "Are you finished?"

They heard a light, eager step race down from the third floor.

"Clarence, my boy," Moss said in a low, impetuous voice, "I know what the trouble was. We didn't really fail at all. I'll show you . . . we'll follow exactly the same technique!"

"Then why didn't it seem to work before?"

Wood's feet came into view between the rails on the second floor. "You'll understand as soon as it's finished," Moss whispered hastily, and then Wood joined them.

Even the short time that Wood had been employed was enough to transform him. He had lost the defeatist feeling of being useless human flotsam. He was shaved and washed, but that did not account for his kindled eyes.

"Wood . . . Dr. Moss," Clarence said perfunctorily.

Wood choked out an incoherent speech that was meant to inform them that he was happy, though he didn't know anything about medicine.

"You don't have to," Moss replied silkily. "We'll teach you more about medicine than most surgeons learn in a lifetime."

It could have meant anything or nothing. Wood made no attempt to understand the meaning of the words. It was the hint of withdrawn savagery in the low voice that puzzled him. It seemed a very peculiar way of talking to a man who had been hired to move apparatus and do nothing but the most ordinary routine work.

He followed them silently into a shining, tiled operating room. He felt less comfortable than he had in his room; but when he dismissed Moss' tones as a characteristically sarcastic manner of speech, hinting more than it contained in reality, his eagerness returned. While Moss scrubbed his hands and arms in

a deep basin, Wood gazed around.

In the center of the room an operating table stood, with a clean sheet clamped unwrinkled over it. Above the table five shadowless light globes branched. It was a compact room. Even Wood saw how close everything lay to the doctor's hand—trays of tampons, swabs and clamps, and a sterilizing instrument chest that gave off puffs of steam.

"We do a lot of surgical experimenting," Moss said. "Most of your work'll be handling the anæsthetic. Show him how to do it, Clarence."

Wood observed intently. It appeared simple—cut-ins and shut-offs for cyclopropane, helium and oxygen; watch the dials for overrich mixture; keep your eye on the bellows and water filter—

Trained anæsthetists, he knew, tested their mixture by taking a few sniffs. At Clarence's suggestion he sniffed briefly at the whispering cone. He didn't know cyclopropane—so lightning-fast that experienced anæsthetists are sometimes caught by it—

IV.

WOOD LAY on the floor with his arms and legs sticking up into the air. When he tried to straighten them, he rolled over on his side. Still they projected stiffly. He was dizzy with the anæsthetic. Something that felt like surgical plaster pulled on a sensitive spot on the back of his neck.

The room was dark, its green shades pulled down against the outer day. Somewhere above him and toward the end of the room, he heard painful breathing. Before he could raise himself to investigate, he caught the multiple tread of steps ascending and approaching the door. He drew back defensively.

The door flung open. Light flared up in the room. Wood sprang to his feet—and found he could not stand erect. He dropped back to a crawling posi-

tion, facing the men who watched him with cold interest.

"He tried to stand up," the old one stated.

"What'd you think I'd do?" Wood snapped. His voice was a confused, snarling growl without words. Baffled and raging, he glared up at them.

"Cover him, Clarence," Moss said. "I'll look at the other one."

Wood turned his head from the threatening muzzle of the gun aimed at him, and saw the doctor lift the man on the bed. Clarence backed to the window and raised the shade. Strong noonlight roused the man. His profile was turned to Wood. His eyes fastened blankly on Moss' scrubbed pink face, never leaving it. Behind his ears curled long, wild hair.

"There you are, Talbot," Moss said to the old man. "He's sound."

"Take him out of bed and let's see him act like you said he would." The old man jittered anxiously on his cane.

Moss pulled the man's legs to the edge of the bed and raised him heavily to his feet. For a short time he stood without aid; then all at once he collapsed to his hands and knees. He stared full at Wood.

It took Wood a minute of startled bewilderment to recognize the face. He had seen it every day of his life, but never so detachedly. The eyes were blank and round, the facial muscles relaxed, idiotic.

But it was his own face—

Panic exploded in him. He gaped down at as much of himself as he could see. Two hairy legs stemmed from his shoulders, and a dog's forepaws rested firmly on the floor.

He stumbled uncertainly toward Moss. "What did you do to me?" he shouted. It came out in an animal howl. The doctor motioned the others to the door and backed away warily.

Wood felt his lips draw back tightly over his fangs. Clarence and Talbot

were in the hall. Moss stood alertly in the doorway, his hand on the knob. He watched Wood closely, his eyes glacial and unmoved. When Wood sprang, he slammed the door, and Wood's shoulder crashed against it.

"He knows what happened," Moss' voice came through the panel.

It was not entirely true. Wood knew something had happened. But he refused to believe that the face of the crawling man gazing stupidly at him was his own. It was, though. And Wood himself stood on the four legs of a dog, with a surgical plaster covering a burning wound in the back of his neck.

It was crushing, numbing, too fantastic to believe. He thought wildly of hypnosis. But just by turning his head, he could look directly at what had been his own body, braced on hands and knees as if it could not stand erect.

He was outside his own body. He could not deny that. Somehow he had been removed from it; by drugs or hypnosis, Moss had put him in the body of a dog. He had to get back into his own body again.

But how do you get back into your own body?

His mind struck blindly in all directions. He scarcely heard the three men move away from the door and enter the next room. But his mind suddenly froze with fear. His human body was complete and impenetrable, closed hermetically against his now-foreign identity.

THROUGH HIS congealed terror, his animal ears brought the creak of furniture. Talbot's cane stopped its nervous, insistent tapping.

"That should have convinced even you, Talbot," he heard Moss say. "Their identities are exchanged without the slightest loss of mentality."

Wood started. It meant— No, it was absurd! But it did account for the fact that his body crawled on hands and knees, unable to stand on its feet.

It meant that the collie's identity was in Wood's body!

"That's O. K.," he heard Talbot say. "How about the operation part? Isn't it painful, putting their brains into different skulls?"

"You can't put them into different skulls," Moss answered with a touch of annoyance. "They don't fit. Besides, there's no need to exchange the whole brain. How do you account for the fact that people have retained their identities with parts of their brains removed?"

There was a pause. "I don't know," Talbot said doubtfully.

"Sometimes the parts of the brain that were removed contained nerve centers, and paralysis set in. But the identity was still there. Then what part of the brain contained the identity?"

Wood ignored the old man's questioning murmur. He listened intently, all his fears submerged in the straining of his sharp ears, in the overwhelming need to know what Moss had done to him.

"Figure it out," the surgeon said. "The identity must have been in some part of the brain that wasn't removed, that couldn't be touched without death. That's where it was. At the absolute base of the brain, where a scalpel couldn't get at it without having to cut through the skull, the three medullæ, and the entire depth of the brain itself. There's a mysterious little body hidden away safely down there—less than a quarter of an inch in diameter—called the pineal gland. In some way it controls the identity. Once it was a third eye."

"A third eye, and now it controls the identity?" Talbot exclaimed.

"Why not? The gills of our fish ancestors became the Eustachian canal that controls the sense of balance.

"Until I developed a new technique in removing the gland—by excising from beneath the brain instead of through it—nothing at all was known about it.

In the first place, trying to get at it would kill the patient; and oral or intravenous injections have no effect. But when I exchanged the pineals of a rabbit and a rat, the rabbit acted like a rat, and the rat like a rabbit—within their limitations, of course. It's empiricism—it works, but I don't know why."

"Then why did the first three act like . . . what's the word?"

"Catatonics. Well, the exchanges were really successful, Talbot; but I repeated the same mistake three times, until I figured it out. And by the way, get that reporter on something a little less dangerous. He's getting pretty warm. Excepting the salivary retention, the victims acted almost like catatonics, and for nearly the same reason. I exchanged the pineals of rats for the men's. Well, you can imagine how a rat would act with the relatively huge body of a man to control. It's beyond him. He simply gives up, goes into a passive revolt. But the difference between a dog's body and a man's isn't so great. The dog is puzzled, but at any rate he makes an attempt to control his new body."

"Is the operation painful?" Talbot asked anxiously.

"There isn't a bit of pain. The incision is very small, and heals in a short time. And as for recovery—you can see for yourself how swift it is. I operated on Wood and the dog last night."

WOOD'S DOG'S brain stampeded, refusing to function intelligently. If he had been hypnotized or drugged, there might have been a chance of his eventual return. But his identity had been violently and permanently ripped from his body and forced into that of a dog. He was absolutely helpless, completely dependent on Moss to return him to his body.

"How much do you want?" Talbot was asking craftily.

"Five million!"

The old man cackled in a high,

cracked voice. "I'll give you fifty thousand, cash," he offered.

"To exchange your dying body for a young, strong, healthy one?" Moss asked, emphasizing each adjective with special significance. "The price is five million."

"I'll give you seventy-five thousand," Talbot said with finality. "Raising five million is out of the question. It can't be done. All my money is tied up in my . . . uh . . . syndicates. I have to turn most of the income back into merchandise, wages, overhead and equipment. How do you expect me to have five million in cash?"

"I don't," Moss replied with faint mockery.

Talbot lost his temper. "Then what are you getting at?"

"The interest on five million is exactly half your income. Briefly, to use your business terminology, I'm muscling into your rackets."

Wood heard the old man gasp indignantly. "Not a chance!" he rasped. "I'll give you eighty thousand. That's all the cash I can raise."

"Don't be a fool, Talbot," Moss said with deadly calm. "I don't want money for the sake of feeling it. I need an assured income, and plenty of it; enough to carry on my experiments without having to bleed hospitals dry and still not have enough. If this experiment didn't interest me, I wouldn't do it even for five million, much as I need it."

"Eighty thousand!" Talbot repeated.

"Hang onto your money until you rot! Let's see, with your advanced angina pectoris, that should be about six months from now, shouldn't it?"

Wood heard the old man's cane shudder nervelessly over the floor.

"You win, you cold-blooded black-mailer," the old man surrendered.

Moss laughed. Wood heard the furniture creak as they rose and set off toward the stairs.

"Do you want to see Wood and the

dog again, Talbot?"

"No. I'm convinced."

"Get rid of them, Clarence. No more abandoning them in the street for Talbot's clever reporters to theorize over. Put a silencer on your gun. You'll find it downstairs. Then leave them in the acid vat."

Wood's eyes flashed around the room in terror. He and his body had to escape. For him to escape alone, would mean the end of returning to his own body. Separation would make the task of forcing Moss to give him back his body impossible.

But they were on the second floor, at the rear of the house. Even if there had been a fire escape, he could not have opened the window. The only way out was through the door.

Somehow he had to turn the knob, chance meeting Clarence or Moss on the stairs or in the narrow hall, and open the heavy front door—guiding and defending himself and his body!

The collie in his body whimpered baffledly. Wood fought off the instinctive fear that froze his dog's brain. He had to be cool.

Below, he heard Clarence's ponderous steps as he went through the rooms looking for a silencer to muffle his gun.

V.

GILROY closed the door of the telephone booth and fished in his pocket for a coin. Of all of mankind's scientific gadgets, the telephone booth most clearly demonstrates that this is a world of five feet nine. When Gilroy pulled a coin out of his pocket, his elbow banged against the shut door; and as he dialed his number and stooped over the mouthpiece, he was forced to bend himself into the shape of a cane. But he had conditioned his lanky body to adjust itself to things scaled below its need. He did not mind the lack of room.

But he shoved his shapeless felt hat on the back of his head and whistled softly in a discouraged manner.

"Let me talk to the chief," he said. The receiver rasped in his ear. The editor greeted him abstractedly; Gilroy knew he had just come on and was scattering papers over his desk, looking at the latest. "Gilroy, chief," the reporter said.

"What've you got on the catatonics?"

Gilroy's sharply planed face wrinkled in earnest defeat. "Not a thing, chief," he replied hollowly.

"Where were you?"

"I was in Memorial all day, looking at the catatonics and waiting for an idea."

The editor became sympathetic. "How'd you make out?" he asked.

"Not a thing. They're absolutely dumb and motionless, and nobody around here has anything to say worth listening to. How'd you make out on the police and hospital reports?"

"I was looking at them just before you called." There was a pause. Gilroy heard the crackle of papers being shoved around. "Here they are— The fingerprint bureau has no records of them. No police department in any village, town or city recognizes their pictures."

"How about the hospitals outside New York?" Gilroy asked hopefully.

"No missing patients."

Gilroy sighed and shrugged his thin shoulders eloquently. "Well, all we have is a negative angle. They must have been picked damned carefully. All the papers around the country printed their pictures, and they don't seem to have any friends, relatives or police records."

"How about a human-interest story," the editor encouraged; "what they eat, how helpless they are, their torn, old clothes? Pad out a story about their probable lives, judging from their features and hands. How's that? Not bad, eh?"

"Aw, chief," Gilroy moaned, "I'm licked. That padding stuff isn't my line. I'm not a sob sister. We haven't a thing to work on. These tramps had absolutely no connection with life. We can't find out who they were, where they came from, or what happened to them."

The editor's voice went sharp and incisive. "Listen to me, Gilroy!" he rapped out. "You stop that whining, do you hear me? I'm running this paper, and as long as you don't see fit to quit, I'll send you out after birth lists if I want to."

"You thought this was a good story and you convinced me that it was. Well, I'm still convinced! I want these catatonics tracked down. I want to know all about them, and how they wound up behind the eight-ball. So does the public. I'm not stopping until I *do* know. Get me?"

"You get to work on this story and hang onto it. Don't let it throw you! And just to show you how I'm standing behind you . . . I'm giving you a blank expense account and your own discretion. Now track these catatonics down in any way you can figure out!"

Gilroy was stunned for an instant. "Well, gosh," he stammered, confused, "I'll do my best, chief. I didn't know you felt that way."

"The two of us'll crack this story wide open, Gilroy. But just come around to me with another whine about being licked, and you can start in as copy boy for some other sheet. Do you get me? That's final!"

Gilroy pulled his hat down firmly. "I get you, chief," he declared manfully. "You can count on me right up to the hilt."

He slammed the receiver on its hook, yanked the door open, and strode out with a new determination. He felt like the power of the press, and the feeling was not unjustified. The might and cunning of a whole vast metropolitan newspaper was ranged solidly behind

him. Few secrets could hide from its searching probe.

All he needed was patience and shrewd observation. Finding the first clue would be hardest; after that the story would unwind by itself. He marched toward the hospital exit.

He heard steps hastening behind him and felt a light, detaining touch on his arm. He wheeled and looked down at the resident physician, dressed in street clothes and coming on duty.

"You're Gilroy, aren't you?" the doctor asked. "Well, I was thinking about the incisions on the catatonics' necks—"

"What about them?" Gilroy demanded alertly, pulling out a pad.

"QUITTING again?" the editor asked ten minutes later.

"Not me, chief!" Gilroy propped his stenographic pad on top of the telephone. "I'm hot on the trail. Listen to this. The resident physician over here at Memorial tipped me off to a real clue. He figured out that the incisions on the catatonics' necks aimed at some part of their brains. The incisions penetrate at a tangent a quarter of an inch off the vertebræ, so it couldn't have been to tamper with the spinal cord. You can't reach the posterior part of the brain from that angle, he says, and working from the back of the neck wouldn't bring you to any important part of the neck that can't be reached better from the front or through the mouth.

"If you don't cut the spinal cord with that incision, you can't account for general paralysis; and the cords definitely weren't cut.

"So he thinks the incisions were aimed at some part of the base of the brain that can't be reached from above. He doesn't know what part or how the operation would cause general paralysis.

"Got that? O. K. Well, here's the payoff:

"To reach the exact spot of the brain you want, you ordinarily take off a

good chunk of skull, somewhere around that spot. But these incisions were pre-determined to the last centimeter. And he doesn't know how. The surgeon worked entirely by measurements—like blind flying. He says only three or four surgeons in the country could've done it."

"Who are they, you cluck? Did you get their names?"

Gilroy became offended. "Of course. Moss in New York; Faber in Chicago; Crowninshield in Portland; maybe Johnson in Detroit."

"Well, what're you waiting for?" the editor shouted. "Get Moss!"

"Can't locate him. He moved from his Riverside Drive apartment and left no forwarding address. He was peeved. The board asked for his resignation and he left with a pretty bad name for mismanagement."

The editor sprang into action. "That leaves us four men to track down. Find Moss. I'll call up the other boys you named. It looks like a good tip."

Gilroy hung up. With half a dozen vast strides, he had covered the distance to the hospital exit, moving with ungainly, predatory swiftness.

VI.

WOOD WAS IN a mind-freezing panic. He knew it hindered him, prevented him from plotting his escape, but he was powerless to control the fearful darting of his dog's brain.

It would take Clarence only a short time to find the silencer and climb the stairs to kill him and his body. Before Clarence could find the silencer, Wood and his body had to escape.

Wood lifted himself clumsily, unsteadily, to his hind legs and took the doorknob between his paws. They refused to grip. He heard Clarence stop, and the sound of scraping drawers came to his sharp ears.

He was terrified. He bit furiously at

the knob. It slipped between his teeth. He bit harder. Pain stabbed his sensitive gums, but the bitter brass dented. Hanging to the knob, he lowered himself to the floor, bending his neck sharply to turn it. The tongue clicked out of the lock. He threw himself to one side, flipping back the door as he fell. It opened a crack. He thrust his snout in the opening and forced it wide.

From below, he heard the ponderous footfalls moving again. Wood stalked noiselessly into the hall and peered down the well of the stairs. Clarence was out of sight.

He drew back into the room and pulled at his body's clothing, backing out into the hall again until the dog crawled voluntarily. It crept after him and down the stairs.

All at once Clarence came out of a room and made for the stairs. Wood crouched, trembling at the sound of metallic clicking that he knew was a silencer being fitted to a gun. He barred his body. It halted, its idiot face hanging down over the step, silent and without protest.

Clarence reached the stairs and climbed confidently. Wood tensed, waiting for Clarence to turn the spiral and come into view.

Clarence sighted them and froze rigid. His mouth opened blankly, startled. The gun trembled impotently at his side, and he stared up at them with his fat, white neck exposed and inviting. Then his chest heaved and his larynx tightened for a yell.

But Wood's long teeth cleared. He lunged high, directly at Clarence, and his fangs snapped together in midair.

Soft flesh ripped in his teeth. He knocked Clarence over; they fell down the stairs and crashed to the floor. Clarence thrashed around, gurgling. Wood smelled a sudden rush of blood that excited an alien lust in him. He flung himself clear and landed on his feet.

His body clumped after him, pausing to sniff at Clarence. He pulled it away and darted to the front door.

From the back of the house he heard Moss running to investigate. He bit savagely at the doorknob, jerking it back awkwardly, terrified that Moss might reach him before the door opened.

But the lock clicked, and he thrust the door wide with his body. His human body flopped after him on hands and knees to the stoop. He hauled it down the steps to the sidewalk and herded it anxiously toward Central Park West, out of Moss' range.

Wood glanced back over his shoulder, saw the doctor glaring at them through the curtain on the door, and, in terror, he dragged his body in a clumsy gallop to the corner where he would be protected by traffic.

He had escaped death, and he and his body were still together; but his panic grew stronger. How could he feed it, shelter it, defend it against Moss and Talbot's gangsters? And how could he force Moss to give him back his body?

But he saw that first he would have to shield his body from observation. It was hungry, and it prowled around on hands and knees, searching for food. The sight of a crawling, sniffing human body attracted disgusted attention; before long they were almost surrounded.

Wood was badly scared. With his teeth, he dragged his body into the street and guided its slow crawl to the other side, where Central Park could hide them with its trees and bushes.

MOSS HAD BEEN more alert. A black car sped through a red light and crowded down on them. From the other side a police car shot in and out of traffic, its siren screaming, and braked dead beside Wood and his body.

The black car checked its headlong rush.

Wood crouched defensively over his

body, glowering at the two cops who charged out at them. One shoved Wood away with his foot; the other raised his body by the armpits and tried to stand it erect.

"A nut—he thinks he's a dog," he said interestedly. "The screwball ward for him, eh?"

The other nodded. Wood lost his reason. He attacked, snapping viciously. His body took up the attack, snarling horribly and biting on all sides. It was insane, hopeless; but he had no way of communicating, and he had to do something to prevent being separated from his body. The police kicked him off.

Suddenly he realized that if they had not been burdened with his body, they would have shot him. He darted wildly into traffic before they sat his body in the car.

"Want to get out and plug him before he bites somebody?" he heard.

"This nut'll take a hunk out of you," the other replied. "We'll send out an alarm from the hospital."

It drove off downtown. Wood scrambled after it. His legs pumped furiously; but it pulled away from him, and other cars came between. He lost it after a few blocks.

Then he saw the black car make a reckless turn through traffic and roar after him. It was too intently bearing down on him to have been anything but Talbot's gangsters.

His eyes and muscles coordinated with animal precision. He ran in the swift traffic, avoiding being struck, and at the same time kept watch for a footpath leading into the park.

When he found one, he sprinted into the opposite lane of traffic. Brakes screeched; a man cursed him in a loud voice. But he scurried in front of the car, gained the sidewalk, and dashed along the cement path until he came to a miniature forest of bushes.

Without hesitation, he left the path

and ran through the woods. It was not a dense growth, but it covered him from sight. He scampered deep into the park.

His frightened eyes watched the carload of gangsters scour the trees on both sides of the path. Hugging the ground, he inched away from them. They beat the bushes a safe distance away from him.

While he circled behind them, creeping from cover to cover, there was small danger of being caught. But he was appalled by the loss of his body. Being near it had given him a sort of courage, even though he did not know how he was going to force Moss to give it back to him. Now, besides making the doctor operate, he had to find a way of getting near it again.

But his empty stomach was knotted with hunger. Before he could make plans he had to eat.

He crept furtively out of his shelter. The gangsters were far out of sight. Then, with infinite patience, he sneaked up on a squirrel. The alert little animal was observant and wary. It took an exhaustingly long time before he ambushed it and snapped its spine. The thought of eating an uncooked rodent revolted him.

He dug back into his cache of bushes with his prey. When he tried to plot a line of action, his dog's brain balked. It was terrified and maddened with helplessness.

There was good reason for its fear—Moss had Talbot's gangsters out gunning for him, and by this time the police were probably searching for him as a vicious dog.

In all his nightmares he had never imagined any so horrible. He was utterly impotent to help himself. The forces of law and crime were ranged against him; he had no way of communicating the fact that he was a man to those who could possibly help him; he was completely inarticulate; and besides, *who* could help him, except Moss?

Suppose he *did* manage to evade the police, the gangsters, and sneaked past a hospital's vigilant staff, and somehow succeeded in communicating—

Even so, only Moss could perform the operation!

He had to rule out doctors and hospitals; they were too routinized to have much imagination. But, more important than that, they could not influence Moss to operate.

HE SCRAMBLED to his feet and trotted cautiously through the clumps of brush in the direction of Columbus Circle. First, he had to be alert for police and gangsters. He had to find a method of communicating—but to somebody who could understand him and exert tremendous pressure on Moss.

The city's smells came to his sensitive nostrils. Like a vast blanket, covering most of them, was a sweet odor that he identified as gasoline vapor. Above it hovered the scent of vegetation, hot and moist; and below it, the musk of mankind.

To his dog's perspective, it was a different world, with a broad, distant, terrifying horizon. Smells and sounds formed scenes in his animal mind. Yet it was interesting. The pad of his paws against the soft, cushioned ground gave him an instinctive pleasure; all the clothes he needed, he carried on him; and food was not hard to find.

While he shielded himself from the police and Talbot's gangsters, he even enjoyed a sort of freedom—but it was a cowardly freedom that he did not want, that was not worth the price. As a man, he had suffered hunger, cold, lack of shelter and security, indifference. In spite of all that, his dog's body harbored a human intelligence; he belonged on his hind legs, standing erect, living the life, good or bad, of a man.

In some way he must get back to that world, out of the solitary anarchy of animaldom. Moss alone could return

him. He must be forced to do it! He must be compelled to return the body he had robbed!

But how could Wood communicate, and who could help him?

NEAR the end of Central Park, he exposed himself to overwhelming danger.

He was padding along a path that skirted the broad road. A cruising black car accelerated with deadly, predatory swiftness, sped abreast of him. He heard a muffled *pop*. A bullet hissed an inch over his head.

He ducked low and scurried back into the concealing bushes. He snaked nimbly from tree to tree, keeping obstacles between him and the line of fire.

The gangsters were out of the car. He heard them beating the brush for him. Their progress was slow, while his fleet legs pumped three hundred yards of safety away from them.

He burst out of the park and scampered across Columbus Circle, reckless of traffic. On Broadway he felt more secure, hugging the buildings with dense crowds between him and the street.

When he felt certain that he had lost the gangsters, he turned west through one-way streets, alert for signs of danger.

In coping with physical danger, he discovered that his animal mind reacted instinctively, and always more cunningly than a human brain.

Impulsively, he cowered behind stoops, in doorways, behind any sort of shelter, when the traffic moved. When it stopped, packed tightly, for the light, he ran at topnotch speed. Cars skidded across his path, and several times he was almost hit; but he did not slow to a trot until he had zigzagged downtown, going steadily away from the center of the city, and reached West Street, along North River.

He felt reasonably safe from Talbot's gangsters. But a police car approached slowly under the express highway. He crouched behind an overflowing garbage

can outside a filthy restaurant. Long after it was gone, he cowered there.

The shrill wind blowing over the river and across the covered docks picked a newspaper off the pile of garbage and flattened it against the restaurant window.

Through his animal mind, frozen into numbing fear, he remembered the afternoon before—standing in front of the employment agency, talking to one of Talbot's gangsters—

A thought had come to him then: that it would be pleasant to be a catatonic instead of having to starve. He knew better now. But—

He reared to his hind legs and overturned the garbage can. It fell with a loud crash, rolling down toward the gutter, spilling refuse all over the sidewalk. Before a restaurant worker came out, roaring abuse, he pawed through the mess and seized a twisted newspaper in his mouth. It smelled of sour, rotting food, but he caught it up and ran.

VII.

BLOCKS AWAY from the restaurant, he ran across a wide, torn lot, to cover behind a crumbling building. Sheltered from the river wind, he straightened out the paper and scanned the front page.

It was a day old, the same newspaper that he had thrown away before the employment agency. On the left column he found the catatonic story. It was signed by a reporter named Gilroy.

Then he took the edge of the sheet between his teeth and backed away with it until the newspaper opened clumsily, wrinkled, at the next page. He was disgusted by the fetid smell of putrifying food that clung to it; but he swallowed his gorge and kept turning the huge, stiff, unwieldy sheets with his inept teeth. He came to the editorial page and paused there, studying intently the copyright box.

He set off at a fast trot, wary against danger, staying close to walls of buildings, watching for cars that might contain either gangsters or policemen, darting across streets to shelter—trotting on—

The air was growing darker, and the express highway cast a long shadow. Before the sun went down, he covered almost three miles along West Street, and stopped not far from the Battery.

He gaped up at the towering *Morning Post* Building. It looked impregnable, its heavy doors shut against the wind.

He stood at the main entrance, waiting for somebody to hold a door open long enough for him to lunge through it. Hopefully, he kept his eyes on an old man. When he opened the door, Wood was at his heels. But the old man shoved him back with gentle firmness.

Wood bared his fangs. It was his only answer. The man hastily pulled the door shut.

Wood tried another approach. He attached himself to a tall, gangling man who appeared rather kindly in spite of his intent face. Wood gazed up, wagging his tail awkwardly in friendly greeting. The tall man stooped and scratched Wood's ears, but he refused to take him inside. Before the door closed, Wood launched himself savagely at the thin man and almost knocked him down.

In the lobby, Wood darted through the legs surrounding him. The tall man was close behind, roaring angrily. A frightened stampede of thick-soled shoes threatened to crush Wood; but he twisted in and out between the surging feet and gained the stairs.

He scrambled up them swiftly. The second-floor entrance had plate-glass doors. It contained the executive offices.

He turned the corner and climbed up speedily. The stairs narrowed, artificially illuminated. The third and fourth floors were printing-plant rooms; he ran

past; clambered by the business offices, classified advertising—

At the editorial department he panted before the heavy fire door, waiting until he regained his breath. Then he gripped the knob between his teeth and pulled it around. The door swung inward.

Thick, bitter smoke clawed his sensitive nostrils; his ears flinched at the clattering, shouting bedlam.

Between rows of littered desks, he inched and gazed around hopefully. He saw abstracted faces, intent on typewriters that rattled out stories; young men racing around to gather batches of papers; men and women swarming in and out of the elevators. Shrewd faces, intelligent and alert—

A few had turned for an instant to look at him as he passed; then turned back to their work, almost without having seen him.

He trembled with elation. These were the men who had the power to influence Moss, and the acuteness to understand him! He squatted and put his paw on the leg of a typing reporter, staring up expectantly. The reporter stared, looked down agitatedly, and shoved him away.

"Go on, beat it!" he said angrily. "Go home!"

Wood shrank back. He did not sense danger. Worse than that, he had failed. His mind worked rapidly: suppose he *had* attracted interest, how would he have communicated his story intelligibly? How could he explain in the equivalent of words?

All at once the idea exploded in his mind. He had been a code translator in a stockbroker's office—

HE SAT BACK on his haunches and barked, loud, broken, long and short yelps. A girl screamed. Reporters jumped up defensively, surged away in a tightening ring. Wood barked out his message in Morse, painful, slow,

straining a larynx that was foreign to him. He looked around optimistically for some one who might have understood.

Instead, he met hostile, annoyed stares—and no comprehension.

"That's the hound that attacked me!" the tall, thin man said.

"Not for food, I hope," a reporter answered.

Wood was not entirely defeated. He began to bark his message again; but a man hurried out of the glass-enclosed editor's office.

"What's all the commotion here?" he demanded. He sighted Wood among the ring of withdrawing reporters. "Get that damned dog out of here!"

"Come on—get him out of here!" the thin man shouted.

"He's a nice, friendly dog. Give him the hypnotic eye, Gilroy."

Wood stared pleadingly at Gilroy. He had not been understood, but he had found the reporter who had written the catatonic articles! Gilroy approached cautiously, repeating phrases calculated to soothe a savage dog.

Wood darted away through the rows of desks. He was so near to success—He only needed to find a way of communicating before they caught him and put him out!

He lunged to the top of a desk and crashed a bottle of ink to the floor. It splashed into a dark puddle. Swiftly, quiveringly, he seized a piece of white paper, dipped his paw into the splotch of ink, and made a hasty attempt to write.

His surge of hope died quickly. The wrist of his forepaw was not the universal joint of a human being; it had a single upward articulation! When he brought his paw down on the paper, it flattened uselessly, and his claws worked in a unit. He could not draw back three to write with one. Instead, he made a streaked pad print—

Dejectedly, rather than antagonize

Gilroy, Wood permitted himself to be driven back into an elevator. He waggled his tail clumsily. It was a difficult feat, calling into use alien muscles that he employed with intellectual deliberation. He sat down and assumed a grin that would have been friendly on a human face; but, even so, it reassured Gilroy. The tall reporter patted his head. Nevertheless, he put him out firmly.

But Wood had reason to feel encouraged. He had managed to get inside the building, and had attracted attention. He knew that a newspaper was the only force powerful enough to influence Moss, but there was still the problem of communication. How could he solve it? His paw was worthless for writing, with its single articulation; and nobody in the office could understand Morse code.

He crouched against the white cement wall, his harried mind darting wildly in all directions for a solution. Without a voice or prehensile fingers, his only method of communication seemed to be barking in code. In all that throng, he was certain there would be one to interpret it.

Glances *did* turn to him. At least, he had no difficulty in arousing interest. But they were uncomprehending looks.

For some moments he lost his reason. He ran in and out of the deep, hurrying crowd, barking his message furiously, jumping up at men who appeared more intelligent than the others, following them short distances until it was overwhelmingly apparent that they did not understand, then turning to other men, raising an ear-shattering din of appeal.

HE MET NOTHING but a timid pat or frightened rebuffs. He stopped his deafening yelps and covered back against the wall, defeated. No one would attempt to interpret the barking of a dog in terms of code. When he

was a man, he would probably have responded in the same way. The most intelligible message he could hope to convey by his barking was simply the fact that he was trying to attract interest. Nobody would search for any deeper meaning in a dog's barking.

He joined the traffic hastening toward the subway. He trotted along the curb, watchful for slowing cars, but more intent on the strewing of rubbish in the gutter. He was murderously envious of the human feet around him that walked swiftly and confidently to a known destination; smug, selfish feet, undeviating from their homeward path to help him. Their owners could convey the finest shadings and variations in emotion, commands, abstract thought, by speech, writing, print, through telephone, radio, books, newspapers—

But his voice was only a piercing, inarticulate yelp that infuriated human beings; his paws were good for nothing but running; his pointed face transmitted no emotions.

He trotted along the curbs of three blocks in the business district before he found a pencil stump. He picked it up in his teeth and ran to the docks on West Street, though he had only the vague outline of a last experiment in communication.

There was plenty of paper blowing around in the river wind, some of it even clean. To the stevedores, waiting at the dock for the payoff, he appeared to be frisking. A few of them whistled to him. In reality, he chased the flying paper with deadly earnestness.

When he captured a piece, he held it firmly between his forepaws. The stub of pencil was gripped in the even space separating his sharp canine fangs.

He moved the pencil in his mouth over the sheet of paper. It was clumsy and uncertain, but he produced long, wavering block letters. He wrote: "I AM A MAN." The short message

covered the whole page, leaving no space for further information.

He dropped the pencil, caught up the paper in his teeth, and ran back to the newspaper building. For the first time since he had escaped from Moss, he felt assured. His attempt at writing was crude and unformed, but the message was unmistakably clear.

He joined a group of tired young leg-men coming back from assignments. He stood passively until the door was opened, then lunged confidently through the little procession of cub reporters. They scattered back cautiously, permitting him to enter without a struggle.

Again he raced up the stairs to the editorial department, put the sheet of paper down on the floor, and clutched the doorknob between his powerful teeth.

He hesitated for only an instant, to find the cadaverous reporter. Gilroy was seated at a desk, typing out his article. Carrying his message in his mouth, Wood trotted directly to Gilroy. He put his paw on the reporter's sharp knee.

"What the hell!" Gilroy gasped. He pulled his leg away startledly and



shoved Wood away.

But Wood came back insistently, holding his paper stretched out to Gilroy as far as possible. He trembled hopefully until the reporter snatched the message out of his mouth. Then his muscles froze, and he stared up expectantly at the angular face, scanning it for signs of growing comprehension.

Gilroy kept his eyes on the straggling letters. His face darkened angrily.

"Who's being a wise guy here?" he shouted suddenly. Most of the staff ignored him. "Who let this mutt in and gave him a crank note to bring to me? Come on—who's the genius?"

Wood jumped around him, barking hysterically, trying to explain.

"Oh, shut up!" Gilroy rapped out. "Hey, copy! Take this dog down and see that he doesn't get back in! He won't bite you."

Again Wood had failed. But he did not feel defeated. When his hysterical dread of frustration ebbed, leaving his mind clear and analytical, he realized that his failure was only one of degree. Actually, he had communicated, but lack of space had prevented him from detailed clarity. The method was correct. He only needed to augment it.

Before the copy boy cornered him, Wood swooped up at a pencil on an empty desk.

"Should I let him keep the pencil, Mr. Gilroy?" the boy asked.

"I'll lend you mine, unless you want your arm snapped off," Gilroy snorted, turning back to his typewriter.

Wood sat back and waited beside the copy boy for the elevator to pick them up. He clenched the pencil possessively between his teeth. He was impatient to get out of the building and back to the lot on West Street, where he could plan a system of writing a more explicit message. His block letters were unmanageably huge and shaky; but, with the same logical detachment he used to employ when he was a code translator, he

attacked the problem fearlessly.

He knew that he could not use the printed or written alphabet. He would have to find a substitute that his clumsy teeth could manage, and that could be compressed into less space.

VIII.

GILROY WAS annoyed by the colleague's insistent returning. He crumpled the enigmatic, unintelligible note and tossed it in the wastebasket, but beyond considering it as a practical joke, he gave it no further thought.

His long, large-jointed fingers swiftly tapped out the last page of his story. He ended it with a short line of zeros and dashes, gathered the sheaf of papers, and brought it to the editor.

The editor studied the lead paragraph intently and skimmed hastily through the rest of the story. He appeared uncomfortable.

"Not bad, eh?" Gilroy exulted.

"Uh—what?" The editor jerked his head up blankly. "Oh. No, it's pretty good. Very good, in fact."

"I've got to hand it to you," Gilroy continued admiringly. "I'd have given up. You know—nothing to work on, just a bunch of fantastic events with no beginning and no end. Now, all of a sudden, the cops pick up a nut who acts like a dog and has an incision like the catatonics. Maybe it isn't any clearer, but at least we've got something actually happening. I don't know—I feel pretty good. We'll get to the bottom—"

The editor listened abstractedly, growing more uneasy from sentence to sentence. "Did you see the latest case?" he interrupted.

"Sure. I'm in soft with the resident physician. If I hadn't been following this story right from the start, I'd have said the one they just hauled in was a genuine screwball. He goes bounding around on the floor, sniffs at things, and makes a pathetic attempt to bark.

But he has an incision on the back of his neck. It's just like the others—even has two professional stitches, and it's the same number of millimeters away from the spine. He's a catatonic, or whatever we'll have to call it now—"

"Well, the story's shaping up faster than I thought it would," the editor said, evening the edges of Gilroy's article with ponderous care. "But—" His voice dropped huskily. "Well, I don't know how to tell you this, Gilroy."

The reporter drew his brows together and looked at him obliquely. "What's the hard word this time?" he asked, mystified.

"Oh, the usual thing. You know. I've got to take you off this story. It's too bad, because it was just getting hot. I hated to tell you, Gilroy; but, after all, what the hell. That's part of the game."

"It is, huh?" Gilroy flattened his hands on the desk and leaned over them resentfully. "Whose toes did we step on this time? Nobody's. The hospital has no kick coming. I couldn't mention names because I didn't know any to mention. Well, then, what's the angle?"

The editor shrugged. "I can't argue. It's a front-office order. But I've got a good lead for you to follow tomorrow—"

Savagely, Gilroy strode to the window and glared out at the darkening street. The business department wasn't behind the order, he reasoned angrily; they weren't getting ads from the hospital. And as for the big boss—Talbot never interfered with policy, except when he had to squash a revealing crime story. By eliminating the editors, who yielded an inch when public opinion demanded a mile, the business department, who fought only when advertising was at stake, Gilroy could blame no one but Talbot.

Gilroy rapped his bony knuckles impatiently against the window casement. What was the point of Talbot's order?

Perhaps he had a new way of paying off traitors. Gilroy dismissed the idea immediately; he knew Talbot wouldn't go to that expense and risk possible leakage when the old way of sealing a body in a cement block and dumping it in the river was still effective and cheap.

"I give up," Gilroy said without turning around. "I can't figure out Talbot's angle."

"Neither can I," the editor admitted.

At that confession, Gilroy wheeled. "Then you *know* it's Talbot!"

"Of course. Who else could it be? But don't let it throw you, pal." He glanced around cautiously as he spoke. "Let this catatonic yarn take a rest. Tomorrow you can find out what's behind this bulletin that Johnson phoned in from City Hall."

GILROY ABSENTLY scanned the scribbled note. His scowl wrinkled into puzzlement.

"What the hell is this? All I can make out of it is the A. S. P. C. A. and dog lovers are protesting to the mayor against organized murder of brown-and-white collies."

"That's just what it is."

"And you think Talbot's gang is behind it, naturally." When the editor nodded, Gilroy threw up his hands in despair. "This gang stuff is getting too deep for me, chief. I used to be able to call their shots. I knew why a torpedo was bumped off, or a crime was pulled; but I don't mind telling you that I can't see why a gang boss wants a catatonic yarn hushed up, or sends his mob around plugging innocent collies. I'm going home . . . get drunk—"

He stormed out of the office. Before the editor had time to shrug his shoulders, Gilroy was back again, his deep eyes blazing furiously.

"What a pair of prize dopes we are, chief!" he shouted. "Remember that collie—the one that came in with a hunk of paper in his mouth? We threw him

out, remember? Well, *that's the hound Talbot's gang is out gunning for! He's trying to carry messages to us!*"

"Hey, you're right!" The editor heaved out of the chair and stood uncertainly. "Where is he?"

Gilroy waved his long arms expressively.

"Then come on! To hell with hats and coats!"

They dashed into the staff room. The skeleton night crew loafed around, reading papers before moping out to follow up undeveloped leads.

"Put those papers down!" the editor shouted. "Come on with me—every one of you."

He herded them, baffled and annoyed, into the elevator. At the entrance to the building, he searched up and down the street.

"He's not around, Gilroy. All right, you deadbeats, divide up and chase around the streets, whistling. When you see a brown-and-white collie, whistle to him. He'll come to you. Now beat it and do as I say."

They moved off slowly. "Whistle?" one called back anxiously.

"Yes, whistle!" Gilroy declared. "Forget your dignity. Whistle!"

They scattered, whistling piercingly the signals that are supposed to attract dogs. The few people around the business district that late were highly interested and curious, but Gilroy left the editor whistling at the newspaper building, while he whistled toward West Street. He left the shrill calls blowing away from the river, and searched along the wide highway in the growing dark.

For an hour he pried into dark spaces between the docks, patiently covering his ground. He found nothing but occasional longshoremen unloading trucks and a light uptown traffic. There were only homeless, prowling mongrels and starving drifters; no brown-and-white collie.

He gave up when he began to feel

hungry. He returned to the building, hoping the others had more luck, and angry with himself for not having followed the dog when he had the chance.

The editor was still there, whistling more frantically than ever. He had gathered a little band of inquisitive on-lookers, who waited hopefully for something to happen. The reporters were also returning.

"Find anything?" the editor paused to ask.

"Nope. He didn't show up here?"

"Not yet. Oh, he'll be back, all right. I'm not afraid of that." And he went back to his persistent whistling, disregarding stares and rude remarks. He was a man with an iron will. He sneered openly at the defeated reporters when they slunk past him into the building.

In the comparative quiet of the city, above the editor's shrills, Gilroy heard swiftly pounding feet. He gazed over the heads of the pack that had gathered around the editor.

A reporter burst into view, running at top speed and doing his best to whistle attractively through dry lips at a dog streaking away from him.

"Here he comes!" Gilroy shouted. He broke through the crowd and his long legs flashed over the distance to the collie. In his excitement, empty, toneless wind blew between his teeth; but the dog shot straight for him just the same. Gilroy snatched a dirty piece of paper out of his mouth. Then the dog was gone, toward the docks; and a black car rode ominously down the street.

Gilroy half started in pursuit, paused, and stared at the slip of paper in his hand. For a moment he blamed the insufficient light, but when the editor came up to him, yelling blasphemy for letting the dog escape, Gilroy handed him the unbelievable note.

"That dog can take care of himself," Gilroy said. "Read this."

The editor drew his brows together

over the message. It read:

;;:;;: ;:;;:":::;;: ;:; ..";:;
 ;:;:;;:;;:":::;;: ;:;:"";:; ..;
 "":;:;;:;;:"" "":;: ..";:;:;;:
 ;:; "":;:;;: ..";:;:

"Well, I'll be damned!" the editor exclaimed. "Is it a gag?"

"Gag, my eye!"

"Well, I can't make head or tail of it!" the editor protested.

Gilroy looked around undeterminedly, as if for someone to help them. "You're not supposed to. It's a code message." He swung around, stabbing an enormously long, knobbed finger at the editor. "Know anyone who can translate code—cryptograms?"

"Uh—let's see. How about the police, or the G-men—"

Gilroy snorted. "Give it to the bulls before we know what's in it!" He carefully tucked the crudely penciled note into his breast pocket and buttoned his coat. "You stick around outside here, chief. I'll be back with the translation. Keep an eye out for the pooch."

He loped off before the editor could more than open his mouth.

IN THE index room of the Forty-second Street Library, Gilroy crowded into the telephone booth and dialed a number. His eyes ached and he had a dizzy headache. Close reasoning always scrambled his wits. His mind was intuitive rather than ploddingly analytical.

"Executive office, please," he told the night operator. "There must be somebody there. I don't care if it's the business manager himself. I want to speak to somebody in the executive office. I'll wait." He lolled, bent into a convenient shape, against the wall. "Hello. Who's this? . . . Oh, good. Listen, Rothbart, this is Gilroy. Do me a favor, huh? You're nearest the front entrance. You'll find the chief outside the door. Send him in to the telephone, and take his place until he gets through.

While you're out there, watch for a brown-and-white collie. Nab him if he shows up and bring him inside. . . . Will you? . . . Thanks!"

Gilroy held the receiver to his ear, defeatedly amusing himself by identifying the sounds coming over the wire. He was no longer in a hurry, and when he had to pay another nickel before the editor finally came to the telephone, he did not mind.

"What's up, Gilroy?" the editor asked hopefully.

"Nothing, chief. That's why I called up. I went through a military code book, some kids' stuff, and a history of cryptography through the ages. I found some good codes, but nobody seems to've thought of this punctuation code. Ever see the Confederate cipher? Boy, it's a real dazzler—wasn't cracked until after the Civil War was over! The old Greeks wound strips of paper around identical sticks. When they were unrolled, the strips were gibberish; around the sticks, the words fell right into order."

"Cut it out," the editor snapped. "Did you find anything useful?"

"Sure. Everybody says the big clue is the table of frequency—the letters used more often than others. But, on the other hand, they say that in short messages, like ours, important clues like the single words 'a' and 'I,' bigrams like 'am,' 'as,' and even trigrams like 'the' or 'but,' are often omitted entirely."

"Well, that's fine. What're you going to do now?"

"I don't know. Try the cops after all, I guess."

"Nothing doing," the editor said firmly. "Ask a librarian to help."

Gilroy seized the inspiration. He slammed down the receiver and strode to the reference desk.

"Where can I get hold of somebody who knows cryptograms?" he rasped.

The attendant politely consulted his colleagues. "The guard of the manu-

script room is pretty good," he said, returning. "Down the hall—"

Gilroy shouted his thanks and broke into an ungainly run, ignoring the attendant's order to walk. At the manuscript room he clattered the gate until the keeper appeared and let him in.

"Take a look at this," he commanded, flinging the message on a table.

The keeper glanced curiously at it. "Oh, cryptogram, eh?"

"Yeah. Can you make anything out of it?"

"Well, it looks like a good one," the guard replied cautiously, "but I've been cracking them all for the last twenty years." They sat down at the table in the empty room. For some time the guard stared fixedly at the scrawled note. "Five symbols," he said finally. "Semicolon, period, comma, colon, quotation marks. Thirteen word units, each with an even number of symbols. They must be used in combinations of two."

"I figured that out already," Gilroy rapped out. "What's it say?"

The guard lifted his head, offended. "Give me a chance. Bacon's code wasn't solved for three centuries."

Gilroy groaned. He did not have so much time on his hands.

"There're only thirteen word units here," the guard went on, undaunted by the Bacon example. "Can't use frequency, bigrams or trigrams."

"I know that already," Gilroy said hoarsely.

"Then why'd you come to me if you're so smart?"

Gilroy hitched his chair away. "O. K., I won't bother you."

"FIVE SYMBOLS to represent twenty-six letters. Can't be. Must be something like the Russian nihilist code. They can represent only twenty-five letters. The missing one is either 'q' or 'j,' most likely, because they're not used much. Well, I'll tell you what I think."

"What's that?" Gilroy demanded, all alert.

"You'll have to reason *a priori*, or whatever it is."

"Any way you want," Gilroy sighed. "Just get on with it."

"The square root of twenty-five is five. Whoever wrote this note must've made a square of letters, five wide and five deep. That sounds right." The guard smiled and nodded cheerfully.

"Possible combinations in a square of twenty-five letters is . . . uh . . .

625. The double symbols must identify the lines down and across. Possible combinations, twenty-five. Combinations all told . . . hm-m-m . . . 15,625. Not so good. If there's a key word, we'll have to search the dictionary until we find it. Possible combinations, 15,625 multiplied by the English vocabulary—that is, if the key word is English."

Gilroy raised himself to his feet. "I can't stand it," he moaned. "I'll be back in an hour."

"No, don't go," the guard said. "You've been helping me a lot. I don't think we'll have to go through more than 625 combinations at the most. That'll take no time at all."

He spoke, of course, in relative terms. Bacon code, three centuries; Confederate code, fifteen years; war-time Russian code, unsolved. Cryptographers must look forward to eternity.

Gilroy seated himself, while the guard plotted a square:

;	"	,	.	:	
a	b	c	d	e	;
f	g	h	i	j	"
k	l	m	n	o	,
p	r	s	t	u	.
v	w	x	y	z	:

The first symbol combination, two semicolons, translated to "a," by reading down the first line, from the top

semicolon, and across from the side semicolon. The next, a semicolon and a comma, read "k." He went on in this fashion until he screwed up his face and pushed the half-completed translation to Gilroy. It read:

"akdd kyoiztou kp tbo ezttkprepd"

"Does it make sense to you?" he asked anxiously.

Gilroy struggled, unable to reply.

"It could be Polish," the guard explained, "or Japanese."

The harassed reporter fled.

When he returned an hour later, after having eaten and tramped across town, nervously chewing cigarettes, he found the guard defended from him by a breastwork of heaped papers.

"Does it look any better?" Gilroy asked hoarsely.

The guard was too absorbed to look up or answer. By peering over his shoulder, Gilroy saw that he had plotted another square. The papers on the table were covered with discarded letter keys; at a rough guess, Gilroy estimated that the keeper had made over a hundred of them.

The one he was working with had been formed as the result of methodical elimination. His first square, the guard had kept, changing the positions of the punctuation marks. When that had failed, he altered his alphabet square, tried that, and reversed his punctuation marks once more. Patient and plodding the guard had formed this square:

,	.	;	"	:
z	u	o	j	e
y	t	n	i	d
x	s	m	h	c
w	r	l	g	b
v	p	k	f	a

Without haste, he counted down under the semicolon and across from the side semicolon, stopping at "m." Gilroy followed him, nodding at the result.

He was faster than the old guard at interpreting the semicolon and comma—"o." The period and semicolon, repeated twice, came to "ss". First word: "moss."

Gilroy straightened up and took a deep breath. He bent over again and counted down and across with the guard, through the whole message, which the old man had lined off between every two symbols. Completed, it read:

:::|:|:|:| |:|:|:|."|:|:|:|:|:|:|:|
m o s s o p e r a t e d o n

..|:|:|:| |:|:|:|:|:|:|:|:|:|:|:|:|:|:|
t h e c a t a t o n i c s

..|:|:|:|:|:|:|:|:| " |:|:| " |:|:|:|:|:|:|:|:|
t a l b o t i s f i n a n c

" |:|:|"" |:|:|:|:| |:|:|:|:|:|:|:|:|:|:|
i n g h i m p r o t e c t

:::|:| " |:|:|:|:|:|:| |:|:|:|:|:|:|:|:|
m e f r o m t h e m

"Hm-m-m," the guard mused. "That makes sense, if I knew what it meant."

But Gilroy had snatched the papers out of his hand. The gate clanged shut after him.

Returning to the office in a taxi, Gilroy was not too joyful. He rapped on the inside window. "Speed it up! I've seen the sights."

He thought, if the dog's been bumped off, good-by catatonic story! The dog was his only link with the code writer.

IX.

WOOD SLUNK along the black, narrow alleys behind the wholesale fruit markets on West Street. Battered cans and crates of rotting fruit made welcome obstacles and shelters if Talbot's gangsters were following him.

He knew that he had to get away from the river section. The gangsters must

have definitely recognized him; they would call Talbot's headquarters for greater forces. With their speedy cars they could patrol the borders of the district he was operating in, and close their lines until he was trapped.

More important was the fact that reporters had been sent out to search for him. Whether or not his simple code had been deciphered did not matter very much; the main thing was that Gilroy at last knew he was trying to communicate with him.

Wood's unerring animal sense of direction led him through the maze of densely shadowed alleys to a point nearest the newspaper office. He peered around the corner, up and down the street. The black gang car was out of sight. But he had to make an unprotected dash of a hundred yards, in the full glare of the street lights, to the building entrance.

His powerful leg muscles gathered. He sped over the hard cement sidewalk. The entrance drew nearer. His legs pumped more furiously, shortening the dangerous space more swiftly than a human being could; and for that he was grateful.

He glimpsed a man standing impatiently at the door. At the last possible moment, Wood checked his rush and flung himself toward the thick glass plate.

"There you are!" the editor cried. "Inside—quick!"

He thrust open the door. They scurried inside and commanded an elevator, ran through the newsroom to the editor's office.

"Boy, I hope you weren't seen! It'd be curtains for both of us."

The editor squirmed uneasily behind his desk, from time to time glancing disgruntledly at his watch and cursing Gilroy's long absence. Wood stretched out on the cold floor and panted. He had expected his note to be deciphered by then, and even hoped to be recog-

nized as a human being in a dog's body. But he realized that Gilroy probably was still engaged in decoding it.

At any rate he was secure for awhile. Before long, Gilroy would return; then his story would be known. Until then he had patience.

Wood raised his head and listened. He recognized Gilroy's characteristic pace that consumed at least four feet at a step. Then the door slammed open and shut behind the reporter.

"The dog's here, huh? Wait'll you take a look at what I got!"

He threw a square of paper before the editor. Wood scanned the editor's face as he eagerly read it. He ignored the vast hamburger that Gilroy unwrapped for him. He was bewildered by Gilroy's lack of more than ordinary interest in him; but perhaps the editor would understand.

"So that's it! Moss and Talbot, eh? It's getting a lot clearer."

"I get Moss' angle," Gilroy said. "He's the only guy around here who could do an operation like that. But Talbot—I don't get his game. And who sent the note—how'd he get the dope—where is he?"

Wood almost went mad with frustration. He could explain; he knew all there was to be known about Talbot's interest in Moss's experiment. The problem of communication had been solved. Moss and Talbot were exposed; but he was as far as ever from regaining his own body.

He had to write another cipher message—longer, this time, and more explicit, answering the questions Gilroy raised. But to do that—He shivered. To do that, he would have to run the gang patrol; and his enciphering square was in the corner of a lot. It would be too dark—

"We've got to get him to lead us to the one who wrote the message," Gilroy said determinedly. "That's the only way we can corner Moss and Talbot.

Like this, all we have is an accusation and no legal proof."

"He must be around here somewhere."

GILROY fastened his eyes on Wood. "That's what I think. The dog came here and barked, trying to get us to follow him. When we chased him out, he came back with a scrawled note about a half hour later. Then he brought the code message within another hour. The writer must be pretty near here. After the dog eats, we'll—" He gulped audibly and raised his bewildered gaze to the editor. Swiftly, he slipped off the edge of the desk and fumbled in the long hair on Wood's neck. "Look at that, chief—a piece of surgical plaster. When the dog bent his head to eat, the hair fell away from it."

"And you think he's a catatonic." The editor smiled pityingly and shook his head. "You're jumpy, Gilroy."

"Maybe I am. But I'd like to see what's under the plaster."

Wood's heart pumped furiously. He knew that his incision was the precise duplicate of the catatonics', and if Gilroy could see it, he would immediately understand. When Gilroy picked at the plaster, he tried to bear the stabbing pain; but he had to squirm away. The wound was raw and new, and the deeply rooted hair was firmly glued to the plaster. He permitted Gilroy to try again. The sensation was far too fierce; he was afraid the incision would rip wide open.

"Stop it," the editor said squeamishly. "He'll bite you."

Gilroy straightened up. "I could take it off with some ether."

"You don't really think he was operated on, do you? Moss doesn't operate on dogs. He probably got into a fight, or one of Talbot's torpedoes creased him with a bullet."

The telephone bell rang insistently. "I'd still like to see what's under it," Gilroy said as the editor removed the

receiver. Wood's hopes died suddenly. He felt that he was to blame for resisting Gilroy.

"What's up, Blaine?" the editor asked. He listened absorbedly, his face darkening. "O. K. Stay away if you don't want to take a chance. Phone your story in to the rewrite desk." He replaced the receiver and said to Gilroy: "Trouble, plenty of it. Talbot's gang cars are cruising around this district. Blaine was afraid to run them. I don't know how you're going to get the dog through."

Wood was alarmed. He left his meal unfinished and agitated toward the door, whimpering involuntarily.

Gilroy glanced curiously at him. "I'd swear he understood what you said. Did you see the change that came over him?"

"That's the way they react to voices," the editor said.

"Well, we've got to get him to his master." Gilroy mused, biting the inside of his cheek. "I can do it—if you're in with me."

"Of course I am. How?"

"Follow me." Wood and the editor went through the newsroom on the cadaverous reporter's swift heels. In silence they waited for an elevator, descended to the lobby. "Wait here beside the door," Gilroy said. "When I give the signal, come running."

"What signal?" the editor cried, but Gilroy had loped into the street and out of sight.

They waited tensely. In a few minutes a taxi drew up to the curb and Gilroy opened the door, sitting alertly inside. He watched the corner behind him. No one moved for a long while; then a black gang car rode slowly and vigilantly past the taxi. An automatic rifle barrel glinted in the yellow light. Gilroy waited until a moment after it turned into West Street. He waved his arms frantically.

The editor scooped Wood up in his

arms, burst open the door, and darted across the sidewalk into the cab.

"Step on it!" Gilroy ordered harshly. "Up West Street!"

THE TAXI accelerated suddenly. Wood crouched on the floor, trembling, in despair. He had exhausted his ingenuity and he was as far as ever from regaining his body. They expected him to lead them to his master; they still did not realize that he had written the message. Where should he lead them—how could he convince them that he was the writer?

"I think this is far enough," Gilroy broke the silence. He tapped on the window. The driver stopped. Gilroy and the editor got out, Wood following indecisively. Gilroy paid and waved the driver away. In the quiet isolation of the broad commercial highway, he bent his great height to Wood's level. "Come on, boy!" he urged. "Home!"

Wood was in a panic of dismay. He could think of only one place to lead them. He set off at a slow trot that did not tax them. Hugging the walls, sprinting across streets, he headed cautiously downtown.

They followed him behind the markets fronting the highway, over a hemmed-in lot. He picked his way around the deep, treacherous foundation of a building that had been torn down, up and across piles of rubbish, to a black-shadowed clearing at the lot's end. He halted passively.

Gilroy and the editor peered around into the blackness. "Come out!" Gilroy called hoarsely. "We're your friends. We want to help you."

When there was no response, they explored the lot, lighting matches to illuminate dark corners of the foundation. Wood watched them with confused emotions. By searching in the garbage heaps and the crumbling walls of the foundation, they were merely wasting time.

As closely as possible in the dark, he located the site of his enciphering square. He stood near it and barked clamorously. Gilroy and the editor hastily left their futile prodding.

"He must've seen something," the editor observed in a whisper.

Gilroy cupped a match in his hand and moved the light back and forth in the triangular corner of the cleared space. He shrugged.

"Not around there," the editor said. "He's pointing at the ground."

Gilroy lowered the match. Before its light struck the ground, he yelped and dropped it, waving his burned fingers in the cool air. The editor murmured sympathy and scratched another match.

"Is this what you're looking for—a lot of letters in a square?"

Wood and Gilroy crowded close. The reporter struck his own match. In its light he narrowly inspected the crudely scratched encoding square.

"Be back in a second," he said. It was too dark to see his face, but Wood heard his voice, harsh and strained. "Getting flashlight."

"What'll I do if the guy comes around?" the editor asked hastily.

"Nothing," Gilroy rasped. "He won't. Don't step on the square."

Gilroy vanished into the night. The editor struck another match and scrutinized the ground with Deerslayer thoroughness.

"What the hell did he see?" he pondered. "That guy—" He shook his head defeatedly and dropped the match.

Never in his life had Wood been so passionately excited. What *had* Gilroy discovered? Was it merely another circumstantial fact, like his realization that Talbot's gangsters were gunning for Wood; or was it a suspicion of Wood's identity? Gilroy had replied that the writer would not reappear, but that could have meant anything or nothing. Wood frantically searched for a way of finally demonstrating who he really was.

He found only a negative plan—he would follow Gilroy's lead.

With every minute that passed, the editor grew angrier, shifting his leaning position against the brick wall, pacing around. When Gilroy came back, flashing a bright cone of light before him, the editor lashed out.

"Get it over with, Gilroy. I can't waste the whole night. Even if we do find out what happened, we can't print it—"

GILROY IGNORED HIM. He splashed the brilliant ray of his huge five-celled flashlight over the enciphering square.

"Now look at it," he said. He glanced intently at Wood, who also obeyed his order and stood at the editor's knee, searching the ground. "The guy who made that square was very cautious—he put his back to the wall and faced the lot, so he wouldn't be taken by surprise. The square is upside-down to us. No, wait!" he said sharply as the editor moved to look at the square from its base. "I don't want your footprints on it. Look at the bottom, where the writer must've stood."

The editor stared closely. "What do you see?" he asked puzzledly.

"Well, the ground is moist and fairly soft. There should be footprints. There are. *Only they're not human!*"

Raucously, the editor cleared his throat. "You're kidding."

"*Gestalt*," Gilroy said, almost to himself, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. You get a bunch of unconnected facts, all apparently unrelated to each other. Then suddenly one fact pops up—it doesn't seem any more important than the others—but all at once the others click into place, and you get a complete picture."

"What are you mumbling about?" the editor whispered anxiously.

Gilroy stooped his great height and picked up a yellow stump of pencil. He

turned it over in his hand before passing it to the editor.

"That's the pencil this dog snatched before we threw him out. You can see his teethmarks on the sides, where he carried it. But there're teethmarks around the unsharpened end. Maybe I'm nuts—" He took the dirty code message out of his inside breast pocket and smoothed it out. "I saw these smudges the minute I looked at the note, but they didn't mean anything to me then. What do you make of them?"

The editor obediently examined the note in the glare of the flash. "They could be palmprints."

"Sure—a baby's," Gilroy said witheringly. "Only they're not. We both know they're pawprints, the same as are at the bottom of the square. You know what I'm thinking. Look't the way the dog is listening."

Without raising his voice, he half turned his head and said quite casually, "Here comes the guy who wrote the note, right behind the dog."

Involuntarily, Wood spun around to face the dark lot. Even his keen animal eyes could detect no one in the gloom. When he lifted his gaze to Gilroy, he stared full into grim, frightened eyes.

"Put that in your pipe," Gilroy said tremulously. "That's his reaction to the pitch of my voice, eh? You can't get out of it, chief. We've got a werewolf on our hands, thanks to Moss and Talbot."

Wood barked and frisked happily around Gilroy's towering legs. He had been understood!

But the editor laughed, a perfectly normal, humorous, unconvinced laugh. "You're wasting your time writing for a newspaper, Gilroy—"

"O. K., smart guy," Gilroy replied savagely. "Stop your cackling and tell me the answer to this—"

"The dog comes into the newsroom and starts barking. I thought he was just trying to get us to follow him; but

I never heard a dog bark in long and short yelps before. He ran up the stairs, right past all the other floors—business office, advertising department, and so on—to the newsroom, because that's where he wanted to go. We chased him out. He came back with a scrawled note, saying: 'I am a man.' Those

four words took up the whole page. Even a kid learning how to write wouldn't need so much space. But if you hold the pencil in your mouth and try to connect the bars of the letters, you'd have letters something like the ones on the note.

"He needed a smaller system of let-



Talbot stared at the dog, then shrank back, tearing at his chest, a look of horror growing on his face.

ters, so he made up a simple code. But he'd lost his pencil. He stole one of ours. Then he came back, watching out for Talbot's gang cars.

"There aren't any footprints at the bottom of this square—only a dog's paw-prints. And there're two smudges on the message, where he put his paws to hold down the paper while he wrote on it. All along he's been listening to every word we said. When I said in a conversational tone that the writer was standing behind him, he whirled around. Well?"

THE EDITOR was still far from convinced. "Good job of training—"

"For a guy I used to respect, you certainly have the brain of a flea. Here—I don't know your name," he said to Wood. "What would you do if you had Moss here?"

Wood snarled.

"You're going to tell us where to find him. I don't know how, but you were smart enough to figure out a code, so you can figure out another way of communicating. Then you'll tell us what happened."

It was Wood's moment of supreme triumph. True, he didn't have his body yet, but now it was only a matter of time. His joy at Gilroy's words was violent enough to shake even the editor's literal, unimaginative mind.

"You still don't believe it," Gilroy accused.

"How can I?" the editor cried plaintively. "I don't even know why I'm talking to you as if it could be possible."

Gilroy probed in a pile of rubbish until he uncovered a short piece of wood. He quickly drew a single line of small alphabetical symbols. He threw the stick away, stepped back and flashed the light directly at the alphabet. "Now spell out what happened."

Wood sprang back and forth before the alphabet, stopping at the letters he

required and indicating them by pointing his snout down.

"T-a-l-b-o-t w-a-n-t-e-d a y-o-u-n-g h-e-a-l-t-h-y b-o-d-y M-o-s-s s-a-i-d h-e c-o-u-l-d g-i-v-e i-t t-o h-i-m—"

"Well, I'll be damned!" the editor blurted.

After that exclamation there was silence. Only the almost inaudible padding of Wood's paws on the soft ground, his excited panting, and the hoarse breathing of the men could be heard. But Wood had won!

X.

GILROY SAT at the typewriter in his apartment; Wood stood beside his chair and watched the swiftly leaping keys; but the editor stamped nervously up and down the floor.

"I've wasted half the night," he complained, "and if I print this story I'll be canned. Why, damn it, Gilroy—How do you think the public'll take it if I can't believe it myself?"

"Hm-m-m," Gilroy explained.

"You're sacrificing your job. You know that, don't you?"

"It doesn't mean that much to me," Gilroy said without glancing up. "Wood has to get back his body. He can't do it unless we help him."

"Doesn't that sound ridiculous to you? 'He has to get back his body.' Imagine what the other papers'll do to that sentence!"

Gilroy shifted impatiently. "They won't see it," he stated.

"Then why in hell are you writing the story?" the editor asked, astounded. "Why don't you want me to go back to the office?"

"Quiet! I'll be through in a minute." He inserted another sheet of paper and his flying fingers covered it with black, accusing words. Wood's mouth opened in a canine grin when Gilroy smiled down at him and nodded his head con-

fidently. "You're practically walking around on your own feet, pal. Let's go."

He flapped on his coat and carelessly dropped a battered hat on his craggy head. Wood braced himself to dart off. The editor lingered.

"Where're we going?" he asked cautiously.

"To Moss, naturally, unless you can think of a better place."

Wood could not tolerate the thought of delay. He tugged at the leg of the editor's pants.

"You bet I can think of a better place. Hey, cut it out, Wood—I'm coming along. But, hell, Gilroy! It's after ten. I haven't done a thing. Have a heart and make it short."

With Gilroy hastening him by the arm and Wood dragging at his leg, the editor had to accompany them, though he continued his protests. At the door, however, he covered Wood while Gilroy hailed a taxi. When Gilroy signed that the street was clear, he ran across the sidewalk with Wood bundled in his arms.

Gilroy gave the address. At its sound, Wood's mouth opened in a silent snarl. He was only a short distance from Moss, with two eloquent spokesmen to articulate his demands, and, if necessary, to mobilize public opinion for him! What could Moss do against that power?

They rode up Seventh Avenue and along Central Park West. Only the editor felt that they were speeding. Gilroy and Wood fretted irritably at every stop signal.

At Moss' street, Gilroy cautioned the driver to proceed slowly. The surgeon's house was guarded by two loitering black cars.

"Let us out at the corner," Gilroy said.

They scurried into the entrance of a rooming house.

"Now what?" the editor demanded. "We can't fight past them."

"How about the back way, Wood?"

Wood shook his head negatively. There was no entrance through the rear.

"Then the only way is across the roofs," Gilroy determined. He put his head out and scanned the buildings between them and Moss. "This one is six stories, the next two five, the one right next to Moss' is six, and Moss' is three. We'll have to climb up and down fire escapes and get in through Moss' roof. Ready?"

"I suppose so," the editor said fatalistically.

Gilroy tried the door. It was locked. He chose a bell at random and rang it vigorously. There was a brief pause; then the tripper buzzed. He thrust open the door and burst up the stairs, four at a leap.

"Who's there?" a woman shouted down the stair well.

They galloped past her. "Sorry lady," Gilroy called back. "We rang your bell by mistake."

She looked disappointed and rather frightened; but Gilroy anticipated her emotion. He smiled and gayly waved his hand as he loped by.

THE ROOF DOOR was locked with a stout hook that had rusted into its eye. Gilroy smashed it open with the heel of his palm. They broke out onto a tarred roof, chill and black in the overcast, threatening night.

Wood and Gilroy discovered the fire escape leading to the next roof. They dashed for it. Gilroy tucked Wood under his left arm and swung himself over the anchored ladder.

"This is insane!" the editor said hoarsely. "I've never done such a crazy thing in my life. Why can't we be smart and call the cops?"

"Yeah?" Gilroy sneered without stopping. "What's your charge?"

"Against Moss? Why—"

"Think about it on the way."

Gilroy and Wood were on the next roof, waiting impatiently for the editor to descend. He came down quickly but his thoughts wandered.

"You can charge him with what he did. He made a man into a dog."

"That would sound swell in the indictment. Forget it. Just walk lightly. This damned roof creaks and lets out a noise like a drum."

They advanced over the tarred sheets of metal. Beneath them, they could hear their occasionally heavy tread resound through hollow rooms. Wood's claws tapped a rhythmic tattoo.

They straddled over a low wall dividing the two buildings. Wood sniffed the air for enemies lurking behind chimneys, vents and doors. At instants of suspicion, Gilroy briefly flashed his light ahead. They climbed up a steel ladder to the six-story building adjoining Moss'.

"How about a kidnap charge?" the editor asked as they stared down over the wall at the roof of Moss' building.

"Please don't annoy me. Wood's body is in the observation ward at the hospital. How're you going to prove that Moss kidnaped him?"

The editor nodded in the gloom and searched for another legal charge. Gilroy splashed his light over Moss' roof. It was unguarded.

"Come on, Wood," he said, inserting the flashlight in his belt. He picked up Wood under his left arm. In order to use his left hand in climbing, he had to squeeze Wood's middle in a strangle hold.

The only thing Wood was thankful for was that he could not look at the roof three stories below. Gilroy held him securely, tightly enough for his breath to struggle in whistling gasps. His throat knotted when Gilroy gashed his hand on a sharp sliver of dry paint scale.

"It's all right," Gilroy hissed reassuringly. "We're almost there."

Above them, he saw the editor clambering heavily down the insecurely bolted ladder. Between the anchoring plates it groaned and swayed away from the unclean brick wall. Rung by rung they descended warily, Gilroy clutching for each hold, Wood suspended in space and helpless—both feeling their hearts drop when the ladder jerked under their weight.

Then Gilroy lowered his foot and found the solid roof beneath it. He grinned impetuously in the dark. Wood writhed out of his hold. The editor cursed his way down to them.

He followed them to the rear fire escape. This time he offered to carry Wood down. Swinging out over the wall, Wood felt the editor's muscles quiver. Wood had nothing but a miserable animal life to lose, and yet even he was not entirely fearless in the face of the hidden dangers they were braving. He could sympathize with the editor, who had everything to lose and did not wholly believe that Wood was not a dog. Discovering a human identity in an apparently normal collie must have been a staggeringly hard fact for him to swallow.

He set Wood down on the iron bars. Gilroy quickly joined them, and yanked fiercely at the top window. It was locked.

"Need a jimmy to pry it open," Gilroy mused. He fingered the edges of the frame. "Got a knife on you?"

The editor fished absent-mindedly through his pockets. He brought out a handful of keys, pencil stubs, scraps of paper, matches, and a cheap sheathed nail file. Gilroy snatched the file.

He picked at the putty in the ancient casement with the point. It chipped away easily. He loosened the top and sides.

"Now," he breathed. "Stand back a

little and get ready to catch it."

He inserted the file at the top and levered the glass out of the frame. It stuck at the bottom and sides, refusing to fall. He caught the edges and lifted it out, laying it down noiselessly out of the way.

"Let's go." He backed in through the empty casement. "Hand Wood through."

They stood in the dark room, under the same roof with Moss. Wood exultantly sensed the proximity of the one man he hated—the one man who could return his body to him. "Now!" he thought. "Now!"

"Gilroy," the editor urged, "we can charge Moss with vivisection."

"That's right," Gilroy whispered. But they heard the doorknob rattle in his hand and turn cautiously.

"Then where're you going?" the editor rasped in a panic.

"We're here," Gilroy replied coolly. "So let's finish it."

The door swung back; pale weak light entered timidly. They stared down the long, narrow, dismal hall to the stairs at the center of the house. Down those stairs they would find Moss—

Wood's keen animal sense of smell detected Moss' personal odor. The surgeon had been there not long before.

XI.

HE CROUCHED around the stair-head and cautiously lowered himself from step to step. Gilroy and the editor clung to banister and wall, resting the bulk of their weight on their hands. They turned the narrow spiral where Clarence had fatally encountered the sharpness of Wood's fangs, down to the hall floor where his fat body had sprawled in blood.

Distantly, Wood heard a cane tap nervously, momentarily; then it stopped at a heated, hissed command that

scarcely carried even to his ears. He glanced up triumphantly at Gilroy, his deep eyes glittering, his mouth grinning savagely, baring the red tongue lolling in the white, deadly trap of fangs. He had located and identified the sounds. Both Moss and Talbot were in a room at the back of the house—

He hunched his powerful shoulders and advanced slowly, stiff-legged, with the ominous air of all meat hunters stalking prey from ambush. Outside the closed door he crouched, muscles gathered for the lunge, his ears flat back along his pointed head to protect them from injury. But they heard muffled voices inaudible to men's dulled senses.

"Sit down, doc," Talbot said. "The truck'll be here soon."

"I'm not concerned with my personal safety," Moss replied tartly. "It's merely that I dislike inefficiency, especially when you claim—"

"Well, it's not Jake's fault. He's coming back from a job."

Wood could envision the faint sneer on Moss' scrubbed pink face. "You'll collapse any minute within the next six months, but the acquisitive nature is as strong as ever in you, isn't it, Talbot? You couldn't resist the chance of making a profit, and at a time like this!"

"Oh, don't lose your head. The cat-whatever-you-call-it can't talk and the dog is probably robbing garbage cans. What's the lam for?"

"I'm changing my residence purely as a matter of precaution. You underestimate human ingenuity, even limited by a dog's inarticulateness."

Wood grinned up at his comrades. The editor was dough-faced, rigid with apprehension. Gilroy held a gun and his left hand snaked out at the doorknob. The editor began an involuntary motion to stop him. The door slammed inward before he completed it.

Wood and Gilroy stalked in, sinister in their grim silence. Talbot merely

glanced at the gun. He had stared into too many black muzzles to be frightened by it. When his gaze traveled to Wood his jaw fell and hung open, trembling senilely. His constantly fighting lungs strangled. He screamed, a high, tortured wail, and tore frantically at his shirt, trying to release his chest from crushing pressure.

"An object lesson for you, Talbot," Moss said without emotion. "Do not underestimate an enemy."

Gilroy lost his frigid attitude. "Don't let him strangle. Help him."

"What can I do?" Moss shrugged. "It's angina pectoris. Either he pulls out of the convulsions by himself—or he doesn't. I can't help. But what did you want?"

No one answered him. Horrified, they were watching Talbot go purple in his death agony, lose the power of shrieking, and tear at his chest. Gilroy's gun hand was limp; yet Moss made no attempt to escape. The air rattled through Talbot's predatory nose. He fell in a contorted heap.

Wood felt sickened. He knew that in self-preservation doctors had to harden themselves, but only a monster of brutal callousness could have disregarded Talbot's frightful death as if it had not been going on.

"Oh, come now, it isn't as bad as all that," Moss said acidly.

Wood raised his shocked stare from the rag-doll body to Moss' hard, unfeeling eyes. The surgeon had made no move to defend himself, to call for help from the squad of gangsters at the front of the house. He faced them with inhuman prepossession.

"It upsets your plans," Gilroy spat.

Moss lifted his shoulders, urbanely, delicately disdainful. "What difference should his death make to me? I never cared for his company."

"Maybe not, but his money seemed to smell O. K. to you. He's out of the

picture. He can't keep us from printing this story now." Gilroy pulled a thin folded typescript from his inside breast pocket and shoved it out at Moss.

THE SURGEON read it interestingly, leaning casually against a wall. He came to the end of the short article and read the lead paragraph over again. Politely, he gave it back to Gilroy.

"It's very clear," he said. "I'm accused of exchanging the identities of a man and a dog. You even describe my alleged technique."

"Alleged!" Gilroy roared savagely. "You mean you deny it?"

"Of course. Isn't it fantastic?" Moss smiled. "But that isn't the point. Even if I admitted it, how do you think I could be convicted on such evidence? The only witness seems to be the dog you call Wood. Are dogs allowed to testify in court? I don't remember, but I doubt it."

Wood was stunned. He had not expected Moss to brazen out the charge. An ordinary man would have broken down, confronted by their evidence.

Even the shrinking editor was stung into retorting: "We have proof of criminal vivisection!"

"But no proof that I was the surgeon."

"You're the only one in New York who could've done that operation."

"See how far that kind of evidence will get you."

Wood listened with growing anger. Somehow they had permitted Moss to dominate the situation, and he parried their charges with cool, sarcastic deftness. No wonder he had not tried to escape! He felt himself to be perfectly safe. Wood growled, glowering hatred at Moss. The surgeon looked down contemptuously.

"All right, we can't convict you in court," Gilroy said. He hefted his gun, tightening his finger on the trigger.

"That's not what we want, anyhow. This little scientific curiosity can make you operate on Wood and transfer his identity back to his own body."

Moss' expression of disdain did not alter. He watched Gilroy's tensing trigger finger with an astonishing lack of concern.

"Well, speak up," Gilroy rasped, waving the gun ominously.

"You can't force me to operate. All you can do is kill me, and I am as indifferent to my own death as I was to Talbot's." His smile broadened and twisted down at the corners, showing his teeth in a snarl that was the civilized, overrefined counterpart of Wood's. "Your alleged operation interests me, however. I'll operate for my customary fee."

The editor pushed Gilroy inside and hurriedly closed the door. "They're coming," he chattered. "Talbot's gangsters."

In two strides Gilroy put Moss between him and the door. His gun jabbed rudely into Moss' unflinching back. "Get over on the other side, you two, so the door'll hide you when it swings back," he ordered.

Wood and the editor retreated. Wood heard steps along the hall, then a pause, and a harsh voice shouted: "Hey, boss! Truck's here."

"Tell them to go away," Gilroy said in a low, suppressed tone.

Moss called, "I'm in the second room at the rear of the house."

Gilroy viciously stabbed him with the gun muzzle. "You're asking for it. I said tell them to go away!"

"You wouldn't dare to kill me until I've operated—"

"If you're not scared, why do you want them? What's the gag?"

The door flung open. A gangster started to enter. He stiffened, his keen, battle-trained eyes flashing from Talbot's twisted body to Moss, and to Gil-

roy, standing menacingly behind the surgeon. In a swift, smooth motion a gun leaped from his armpit holster.

"What happened to the boss?" he demanded hoarsely. "Who's he?"

"Put your gun away, Pinero. The boss died of a heart attack. That shouldn't surprise you—he was expecting it any day."

"Yeah, I know. But how'd that guy get in?"

Moss stirred impatiently. "He was here all along. Send the truck back. I'm not moving. I'll take care of Talbot."

The gangster looked uncertain, but, in lieu of another commander, he obeyed Moss' order. "Well, O. K. if you say so." He closed the door.

When Pinero had gone down the hall, Moss turned to face Gilroy.

"You're not scared—much!" Gilroy said.

MOSS IGNORED his sarcastic outburst. "Where were we?" he asked. "Oh, yes. While you were standing there shivering, I had time to think over my offer. I'll operate for nothing."

"You bet you will!" Gilroy wagged his gun forcefully.

Moss sniffed at it. "That has nothing to do with my decision. I have no fear of death, and I'm not afraid of your evidence. If I do operate, it will be because of my interest in the experiment." Wood intercepted Moss' speculative gaze. It mocked, hardened, glittered sinisterly. "But, of course," Moss added smoothly, "I will definitely operate. In fact, I insist on it!"

His hidden threat did not escape Wood. Once he lay under Moss' knife it would be the end. A slip of the knife—a bit of careful carelessness in the gas mixture—a deliberately caused infection—and Moss would clear himself of the accusation by claiming he could not perform the operation, and therefore

was not the vivisectionist. Wood recoiled, shaking his head violently from side to side.

"Wood's right," the editor said. "He knows Moss better. He wouldn't come out of the operation alive."

Gilroy's brow creased in an uneasy frown. The gun in his hand was a futile implement of force; even Moss knew he would not use it—could not, because the surgeon was only valuable to them alive. His purpose had been to make Moss operate. Well, he thought, he had accomplished that purpose. Moss offered to operate. But all four knew that under Moss' knife, Wood was doomed. Moss had cleverly turned the victory to utter rout.

"Then what the hell'll we do?" Gilroy exploded savagely. "What do you say, Wood? Want to take the chance, or keep on in a dog's body?"

Wood snarled, backing away.

"At least, he's still alive," the editor said fatalistically.

Moss smiled, protesting with silken mockery that he would do his best to return Wood's body.

"Barring accidents," Gilroy spat. "No soap, Moss. He'll get along the way he is, and you're going to get yours."

He looked grimly at Wood, jerking his head significantly in Moss' direction.

"Come on, chief," he said, guiding the editor through the door and closing it. "These old friends want to be alone—lot to talk over—"

Instantly, Wood leaped before the door and crouched there menacingly, glaring at Moss with blind, vicious hatred. For the first time, the surgeon dropped his pose of indifference. He inched cautiously around the wall toward the door. He realized suddenly that this was an animal—

Wood advanced, cutting off his line of retreat. Mane bristling, head lowered ominously between blocky shoulders, bright gums showing above white

curved fangs, Wood stalked over the floor, stiff-jointed, in a low, inexorably steady rhythm of approach.

Moss watched anxiously. He kept looking up at the door in an agony of longing. But Wood was there, closing the gap for the attack. He put up his hands to thrust away—

And his nerve broke. He could not talk down mad animal eyes as he could a man holding a gun. He darted to the side and ran for the door.

Wood flung himself at the swiftly pumping legs. They crashed against him, tripped. Moss sprawled face down on the floor. He crossed his arms under his head to protect his throat.

Wood slashed at an ear. It tore, streaming red. Moss screeched and clapped his hands over his face, trying to rise without dropping his guard. But Wood ripped at his fingers.

The surgeon's hands clawed out. He was kneeling, defenseless, trying to fight off the rapid, aimed lunges—and those knifelike teeth—

Wood gloated. A minute before, the scrubbed pink face had been aloof, sneering. Now it bobbed frantically at his eye level, contorted with overpowering fear, blood flowing brightly down the once scrupulously clean cheeks.

For an instant, the pale throat gleamed exposed at him. It was soft and helpless. He shot through the air. His teeth struck at an angle and snatched—The white flesh parted easily. But a bony structure snapped between his jaws as he swooped by.

Moss knelt there after Wood had struck. His pain-twisted face gaped imbecilically, hands limp at his sides. His throat poured a red flood. Then his face drained to a ghastly lack of color and he pitched over.

He had lost, but he had also won. Wood was doomed to live out his life in a dog's body. He could not even expect to live his own life span. The

average life of a dog is fifteen years. Wood could expect perhaps ten years more.

XII.

IN HIS HUMAN body, Wood had found it difficult to find a job. He had been a code expert; but code experts, salesmen and apprentice workmen have no place in a world of shrinking markets. The employment agencies are glutted with an oversupply of normal human intelligences housed in strong, willing, expert human bodies.

The same normal human intelligence in a handsome collic's body had a greater market value. It was a rarity, a phenomenon to be gaped at after a ticket had been purchased for the privilege.

"Men've always had a fondness for freaks," Gilroy philosophized on their way to the theater where Wood had an engagement. "Mildly amusing freaks are paid to entertain. The really funny ones are given seats of honor and power. Figure it out, Wood. I can't. Once we get rid of our love of freaks and put them where they belong, we'll have a swell world."

The taxi stopped in a side street, at the stage entrance. Lurid red-and-yellow posters, the size of cathedral murals, plastered the theater walls; and from them smirked prettified likenesses of Wood.

"Gosh!" their driver gasped. "Wait'll my kids hear about this. I drove the Talkin' Dog! Gee, is that an honor, or ain't it?"

On all sides, pedestrians halted in awe, taxis stopped with a respectful screech of brakes; then an admiring swarm bore down on him.

"Isn't he *cute*?" women shrieked. "So *intelligent-looking*!"

"Sure," Wood heard their driver boast proudly, "I drove him down here. What's he like?" His voice lowered confidentially. "Well, the guy with him—his manager, I guess—he was talkin'

to him just as intelligent as I'm talkin' to you. Like he could understand ev'ry word."

"Bet he could, too," a listener said definitely.

"G'on," another theorized. "He's just trained, like Rin-tin-tin, on'y better. But he's smart all right. Wisht I owned him."

The theater-district squad broke through the tangle of traffic and formed a lane to the stage door.

"Yawta be ashamed ayehselves," a cop said. "All this over a mutt!"

Wood bared his fangs at the speaker, who retreated defensively.

"Wise guy, huh?" the mob jeered. "Think he can't understand?"

It was a piece of showmanship that Wood and Gilroy had devised. It never failed to find a feeder in the form of an officious policeman and a response from the crowd.

Even in the theater, Wood was not safe from overly enthusiastic admiration. His fellow performers persisted in scratching his unitching back and ears, cooing and burbling in a singularly unintelligent manner.

THE THRILLER that Wood had made in Hollywood was over; and while the opening acts went through their paces, Wood and Gilroy stood as far away from the wings as the theater construction would permit.

"Seven thousand bucks a week, pal," Gilroy mused over and over. "Just for doing something that any mug out in the audience can do twice as easily. Isn't that the payoff?"

In the year that had passed, neither was still able to accustom himself to the mounting figures in their bank book. Pictures, personal appearances, indorsements, highly fictionalized articles in magazines—all at astronomical prices—

But he could never have enough money to buy back the human body he

had starved in.

"O. K., Wood," Gilroy whispered. "We're on."

They were drummed onto the stage with deafening applause. Wood went through his routine perfunctorily. He identified objects that had been named by the theater manager, picking them out of a heap of piled objects.

Ushers went through the aisles, collecting questions the audience had written on slips of paper. They passed them up to Gilroy.

Wood took a long pointer firmly in his mouth and stood before a huge lettered screen. Painfully, he pointed out, letter by letter, the answers to the audience's questions. Most of them asked about the future, market tips, racing information. A few seriously probed his mind.

White light stabbed down at him. Mechanically, he spelled out the simple answers. Most of his bitterness had evaporated; in its place was a dreary defeat, and dull acceptance of his dog's life. His bank book had six figures to the left of the decimal—more than he had ever conceived of, even as a distant Utopian possibility. But no surgeon could return his body to him, or increase his life expectancy of less than ten years.

Sharply, everything was washed out of sight: Gilroy, the vast alphabet screen, the heavy pointer in his mouth, the black

space smeared with pale, gaping blobs of faces, even the white light staring down—

He lay on a cot in a long ward. There was no dreamlike quality of illusion in the feel of smooth sheets beneath and above him, or in the weight of blankets resting on his *outstretched* body.

And independently of the rest of his hand, his *finger* moved in response to his will. Its nail scratched at the sheet, loudly, victoriously.

An interne, walking through the ward, looked around for the source of the gloating sound. He engaged Wood's eyes that were glittering avidly, deep with intelligence. Then they watched the scratching finger.

"You're coming back," the interne said at last.

"I'm coming back," Wood spoke quietly, before the scene vanished and he heard Gilroy repeat a question he had missed.

He knew then that the body-mind was a unit. Moss had been wrong; there was more to identity than that small gland, something beyond the body. The forced division Moss had created was unnatural; the transplanted tissue was being absorbed, remodeled. Somehow, he knew these returns to his natural identity would recur, more and more—till it became permanent—till he became human once more.