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CONTENTS FOR
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Number
5

- Cover Design** **Virgil Finlay**
Illustrating a scene in "Towers of Death"
- The Man Who Died Twice** **Eli Colter** **9**
A strange tale of the murder of a man already dead
- Towers of Death** **Henry Kuttner** **18**
A weird story of one who dallied with evil magic, to his own destruction
- Bogey-Man** **Charles Sloan Reid** **31**
Verse
- Uncanonized** **Seabury Quinn** **32**
A tale of werewolfery and the horror that struck by night
- The Withered Heart** **G. G. Pendarves** **48**
Dire catastrophe followed the opening of Count Dul's half-forgotten grave
- The Web of Silence** **Mary Elizabeth Counselman** **63**
What mysterious pall of silence lay like a blight on Blankville?
- The Haunted Car** **David Bernard** **73**
A frightful obsession gripped the driver of that haunted automobile
- The Hunch** **Gene Lyle III** **83**
A brief little yarn about an uncanny premonition
- King of the World's Edge (Part 3)** **H. Warner Muna** **87**
The odyssey of a strange voyage to America in King Arthur's time
- Weird Story Reprint:**
The Phantom Drug **A. W. Kapfer** **116**
A popular story from an old issue of WEIRD TALES
- "Is that the wind dying?"** **Virgil Finlay** **121**
Pictorial interpretation of "The Old Crow of Cairo" by Thomas Lovell Beddoes
- The Eyrie** **122**
Our readers exchange opinions

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



All the time that voice kept shouting, "Faster, faster!"

The Haunted Car

By DAVID BERNARD

An unusual tale of psychic perception and a daring crime, and the frightful obsession that gripped the driver of a haunted Buick

"Hauntings . . . the psychic trace of some violent and emotional scene, persisting we do not know how in the spot where it occurred."
—Professor Julian Huxley.

"TELL you, there is nothing wrong with you."

As he spoke, taking the stethoscope from his ears, Doctor Harvey Potter's white-mustached face creased with a smile meant to reassure his patient. The patient, pallid, youngish Mark Sanders, pulled the shirt over his skinny chest and

squirmed on the stool facing the physician. His jaw sagged as Doctor Potter added:

"Nothing wrong—physically, that is."

"Then I'm—what I fear?" Sanders' thin voice cracked.

"No-o," the doctor drawled, smiling. "Not losing your mind. Nervousness, overwork—"

"But, Doctor—that voice, in the car—now, my terrible dreams. Before that, I wasn't nervous, like this." Hands—bluish, clammy, tremulous—were extended as evi-

dence. "Things, feelings, come on me now—that I thought I was rid of years ago, before my marriage, when I outgrew my susceptibility to impressions from"—Sanders hesitated, aware of Doctor Potter's scientific skepticism toward his belief, then added, in almost a whisper—"from the—other world."

Doctor Potter clapped one large hand over his patient's frail shoulder. "We'll straighten this all out. But you must work with me."

Silently finishing dressing, Sanders stiffened, throwing his chest out. A smile won its way to his lips. "What do you mean to do?" he asked timidly.

The doctor replied by leading him into the comfortably furnished anteroom. Not until they were resting deep in the plushy sofa, Sanders nervously drawing on a cigarette, did the physician begin to explain:

"You, Sanders, are an intelligent man. With another I'd probably trust to time and faith in a mysterious prescription. But I can, and therefore do, appeal to your intellect. Strange, even frightening, as your trouble may seem, it has, I'm convinced, a rational basis. I'm convinced it's no more than a—well, a psychological quirk that your fears and, I dare say, your beliefs have invested with an air of reality.

Sanders inhaled very deeply, obviously terribly anxious to believe the doctor, who went on:

"The start of it—if we, er, overlook your 'voices from the other world' when you were younger—was on High Bridge Road—"

"Yes. There, I first heard it—that voice—so clear—and that strange impulse at the wheel—"

"Exactly." Doctor Potter stood up, studying the excited, peaked face. "Therefore, we start now, tonight, to break that silly obsession. We will drive along High Bridge Road, in the very place. You, Sanders, will drive your car."

THE Buick sedan's headlights were vivid antennæ groping through blackness as Sanders steered up the steep street that formed one of the many approaches to broad High Bridge Road.

"Fine motor," Doctor Potter said, shaking his head pitifully at the rigid driver beside him. Easier to give a sensitive child nasty medicine, he thought, continuing in his effort to distract Sanders from his fear. "Used cars evidently can be worth while."

"My wife bought it while I was on the road," Sanders grumbled. "It is a bargain—mechanically. But—oh, well—" he paused helplessly.

Doctor Potter's eyes followed the sweep of the lights up the incline, taking in the sleek, impressively designed engine hood. A beautiful, new-looking car. Yet, from the outset, Sanders kept insisting, he had "felt" something foreboding, unclean, evil about it; a sensation—if, indeed, sensation it could be called—climaxing in Sanders' strange experience on High Bridge.

The brakes slammed the sedan to a jarring halt. Sanders gaped shamefacedly at the doctor. The car was nosed into the intersection that marked the summit of the approach. Brilliantly illuminated, High Bridge Road stretched out left and right.

"Come, man," the doctor coaxed, firmly. At length Sanders shifted. The purring motor roared; the car lurched into traffic, one in the widely spaced procession headed for distant High Bridge.

Sanders muttered, aside: "There, ahead, nearing the incline of the bridge, that night—I began to feel dizzy and faint. That terrible feeling of—death—smothering, frightful death—that I dream about now—came over me. Suddenly, as if from a great way off, the voice came to me. It was so clear—in a sudden rush—as if I had suddenly tuned in a station with terrific power; just as if somebody beside me was

screaming in my ear—hoarse, and cursing vilely. 'Faster! Faster!' That's what it shouted.

"A cloud seemed to sweep over and through me. Pain—terrible, burning, cutting pain—like being stabbed time and again in my neck and back. . . . And all the time that voice, shouting, 'Faster, faster!' I was dying, I felt. Somehow, just as I was losing consciousness, I managed to stop the car. It was a miracle the car didn't crash. I——"

"Easy, man!" Doctor Potter cried, noting the unexpected acceleration of the car. They were whizzing up the incline of High Bridge. Sanders' response was a crazy sweep of the speedometer needle past 55.

"Slow down, Sanders!" Doctor Potter commanded as the Buick reached well over mile-a-minute speed. And with that, the car swerved left, hurtling toward the bridge summit, between the "overtaking" lane of the approaching autos and the similar lane of the oncoming cars!

Sanders, muscles knotted in hands and face, held his face unswervingly forward, the steering-wheel in a grip of death. And the car picked up speed! Frenziedly Doctor Potter fought to get the wheel in his hands, noticing as he did, that Sanders was beginning to writhe like an epileptic in the throes.

A groan shot from Sanders' twitching mouth, to be repeated again and again—signals of deep-seated, violent pain. And, to add to the chaos, the piercing wail of a siren sounded above the motor's din.

The Buick barely missed an oncoming bus. Giving up his useless effort to win the wheel from the berserk driver, Doctor Potter clutched desperately for the emergency brake. With a death groan, Sanders slumped all at once, surrendering the wheel, slumping toward the open window at his left.

Doctor Potter held the limp body, grabbing the brake with his right and tugging

madly. The driverless sedan catapulted across the advancing line of cars—headlong for the walk paralleling the bridge road.

Rubber sent up its smell as tires screeched and the doctor prayed. The Buick swayed, skidded; the oncoming drivers braked and swerved wildly to avoid it. By God's grace alone the Buick got across the line of cars. Over the curb it bounced as it slowed, rocking on two wheels. Then, as if weary of its mad adventure, it stopped dead, bumper nestled harmlessly against the railing overlooking the river a hundred yards below.

The siren cut off sharply. A bluecoat stared into the car, shouting angrily. Doctor Potter, pulling the unconscious Sanders from the seat, answered the officer's cries about speeding and reckless driving with:

"This man must get hospital attention—at once!"

3

WITH an unavoidable deference, such as he had not experienced since his distant days in medical school, Doctor Harvey Potter hung intently on every syllable uttered by the elderly little man seated behind the glass-topped desk facing him. The little man, Professor Karl Rueder, eyed his listener sharply, fingers intertwining and opening quickly as he spoke.

"Of course," the world-renowned psycho-analyst went on, his words thickened by the accents of his native European tongue, "for you such things are difficult to accept—principally because such happenings are beyond your accustomed realm of experience."

"I admit I'm all at sea," Doctor Potter inserted politely, "which is why I have asked for your opinion. There he was—in the car—as if possessed."

"He *was*—possessed."

"Yet—now—two days later, he's normal."

"Normal? A man with his history of mediumistic sensitivity, a decided neurotic—normal?"

Doctor Potter bridled slightly. Reluctantly he admitted, "What you say, Professor, is true—yet—I am forced to, well, discount Sanders' talk about 'sounds from the invisible world' and whatnot that supposedly affected him in his youth. I can't—"

Professor Rueder interrupted the physician with an impatient wave of hands quite incongruous in one habitually so reserved and scholarly in manner. Acidly he said:

"For ages, centuries uncounted, such things have occurred. Rapport with the dead, baffling cures, so-called miracles, magic, a host of unexplained phenomena. Indisputable witnesses have authenticated these things; but all have been discounted, as you say, by so-called authorities. And why? Because to admit them would mean to upset the accepted canons and dogmas of science and formal religion.

"Look what I have encountered—since publishing my latest book. Scorn, ridicule—one critic writes, 'Rueder has grown soft cerebrally'—because I have concluded in a study of over ten years that the so-called superstitions and mystic beliefs of mankind have solid, factual basis. As for you, surely the other night you had proof positive of something demanding a, we shall say *superphysical*, explanation—else why have you come to me?"

Doctor Potter nodded humbly. "Yes—but, well—the idea of a car being *haunted*—"

Professor Rueder smiled wryly. "I said no such thing. I say that the facts you have brought to my attention prove that this automobile must influence, for reason or reasons to be disclosed, your patient in a strange and, I daresay, evil way."

"But—how?"

"Not 'how?'—but 'from what?'" Professor Rueder said reprovingly. "I need

not apologize for the teachings of modern physics that all matter is in essence electromagnetic, nor the teachings of many modern experimental psychologists that thought is wave-like in nature; capable of transcending the limits of the body and the body's senses. I go further, saying with the ancient teachers of India and Egypt that thought is the most potent force in the universe; that it impresses itself upon the electromagnetic substance, the essence of matter, surrounding the person who created the thought or thoughts. The vibrations of the brain are thus impressed upon nature's recording-tablet—upon the electromagnetic screen—just as light vibrations impress a picture upon a sensitive photographic plate. And the stronger the thought, the more vivid the picture.

"Call it haunting if you wish. It alone will explain the facts of such cases as I have put into my book; cases in which, as I have authenticated carefully, the acts of passionate men have been repeated, in the very places in which they first did their acts—years after they were dead and buried. Shakespeare was correct in a scientific sense when he said, 'The evil that men do lives after them.' For since evil acts invariably find men most single-minded and strong in their thinking and acting, the imprint left on the invisible screen of the universe lives on the more vividly and powerfully."

Abruptly the professor softened.

"Here," he extended a thick, smoothly bound volume to the doctor, "is a copy of my book."

Doctor Potter turned Professor Rueder's book in his hand, reading the jacket: *The Unseen Side of Life*.

"Read it," the professor said, "and read, too, some of the many works to which I have referred—but read, if you can, with a mind that is open."

Murmuring his thanks, Doctor Potter found his mind at grips with ideas he customarily would have rejected as the product

of an untutored or unbalanced mind. But the combined effects of Mark Sanders' experience and the firm words of the eminent psycho-analyst made disbelief come hard.

As he stood up, he asked:

"But why, then, hasn't Sanders been so affected before? After getting the car he drove it clear to the coast and back."

The professor raised his slight shoulders. "You have, to be sure, a problem. But did you not say that Sanders said he sensed something 'evil'—a weird feeling of decay, death—about the car? However, about the experience you witnessed, it would surely pay you to find out the history of the automobile. Given the appropriate circumstances and place, the influence I have spoken of will manifest through the sensitive person or medium. I would suggest, however, that Sanders be kept out of the car."

Doctor Potter forced a smile. "He'll never drive it again, he swears. He's at a hotel in town with his wife. Well——"

Doctor Potter was shortly on his way home, book under arm, grimly resolved to hew to the most difficult of courses: study unfamiliar, heterodox ideas with a mind free from prejudice and preconception.

4

WRONGLY or rightly, it was with a mind considerably altered and immeasurably more humble that Doctor Potter, later in the week, approached an address given him by Mark Sanders. He scanned the sign over the door:

BERGER'S BARGAINS IN
RECONDITIONED CARS

He entered the large showroom lined neatly with new-appearing, used automobiles. A flashily dressed youth slouched from a wicker chair to meet the doctor.

There was, Doctor Potter noted, the incapable suggestion of the rodent in the youth's uneven, unsteady small eyes and thin, sparsely mustached face.

In response to the side-of-mouth query of the salesman, Doctor Potter said he'd like to see the proprietor.

"Who—Berger? What for?"

Doctor Potter repeated the request. Smiling crookedly, the young man slouched to the showroom's rear, slid open a door and called out a name.

The young man then led the doctor to a wicker chair and soon a red-faced fat man came hurrying toward him. He squinted suspiciously at Doctor Potter while the latter introduced himself, then sank his short, heavy body into the chair close by.

"You keep a record of every car you sell, do you not?" Doctor Potter asked.

"Yeah, sure, got to—why?"

"I'm anxious to trace a car purchased from you."

Berger thought a moment, then asked cautiously, "And what might that be?"

"A Buick sedan, 1937 model——"

"What?" Berger leaned forward, as if incredulous.

"Why—a Buick sedan—sold to a Mrs. Mark Sanders last July——"

Berger jumped erect, unaccountably excited, mumbling as he backed away: "Just one minute. Just a minute——" He began to run to the rear.

The doctor, puzzled, stood up. Berger emerged from the back, shouting as he approached Doctor Potter.

"No you don't! Sit down there!"

Doctor Potter saw an automatic aimed at him in Berger's pudgy fist.

He obeyed the shouted order to sit. "What's the meaning of this?" he demanded, anxiously eyeing the waving automatic.

"You'll f-find out," Berger spluttered. The salesman came hurrying over with a loud "What's up, Boss?"

"This old guy here—says he's an M.D.—just asked for *the* Buick sedan."

The information set the rat-faced youth gaping at Doctor Potter. He turned to his employer: "Wh-whatcha gonna do?"

"I'll keep'm covered. You call up Harrison, that Government man. The number's by the phone. Hurry!"

The youth hesitated. Berger, face pouring sweat, shouted: "Hurry, damn it!"

"You're making a terrible mistake," Doctor Potter exploded. "I warn you to consider what you're doing!"

"Yeah, Boss," the young man added, craftiness creeping over his face. "Might mean a charge for false arrest."

Berger was impressed. "But—this federal guy—he give me strict orders. You know the cops was after the Buick——"

"But maybe he," the salesman nodded at Doctor Potter, "ain't in with Fenner——"

"Then why's he askin' about the Buick?"

"I told you," Doctor Potter stormed. "Say! Watch out with that gun! I told you I came in the interest of my patient."

"Who's that?" sharply queried the salesman. He added, as the doctor gave the information, "Where's this Sanders live?"

Patiently the physician gave the address. The salesman turned to the befuddled Berger. "I guess I'd better call the G-man," he said, striding toward the office in the back.

Had one followed him, he would have been seen to make two phone calls. The first was *not* to the federal agent.

5

"AND that," Doctor Potter concluded wearily, following a brief but very comprehensive inquisition at the hands of Federal Agent Harrison, "explains just why I came here to inquire about an auto I never saw before last week."

Gray felt hat shoved far back on his

jet-black hair, the G-man fixed his steady gaze on the doctor's face. Doctor Potter, who happily had found the man immeasurably less pugnacious than his square, wide jaw made him seem, asked anxiously, "You don't—doubt me?"

The federal man grinned almost boyishly. "Your veracity—no; but the basis of your story—well—I can't see how that sedan and your patient's fits can have any connection."

"Not the car itself." Doctor Potter spoke with the zeal of a converted religionist. "The invisible influence permeating the car—oh!" he groaned, noticing the skeptical grunts of Harrison and the attentive Berger, "I was skeptical too. But," he glowed with a sudden thought, "in your work you surely must know about certain places—prison cells, where inmates again and again give into a terrific urge to kill themselves, or go mad trying to resist the impulsion to suicide." Vaguely Doctor Potter realized he was quoting almost verbatim from Professor Rueder's book.

"I have known such places," agreed Harrison, shrugging. "Suggestion."

"Yes—but by what? In some way, yet to be explained, the violent acts of strong, passionate men impress the ether-like substance, in that way permanently affecting the surrounding environment——"

Interrupting with a grimace, the G-man asked, "What happened, you're saying, in that car—that is, the violence in it, would explain your patient's fits?"

"Yes, you could put it that way. Your information about what happened in the car would therefore help me to cure my patient—so I believe."

The G-man laughed, showing his even, white teeth. "I'm no man of theory, let alone what seems like spiritualistic theory. But plenty happened in that car. That sedan was driven by Nick Rago and Bugs Fenner this past summer when they got tangled up in the Isham kidnap case."

Mention of the Isham case stimulated Doctor Potter's memory. The two-year-old infant, ruthlessly stolen from his crib, missing one week before word came from the kidnapers. A note, asking for a small fortune in small bills, to be delivered at a designated spot. Many headlines, tapering off into little-noticed articles in the press, becoming in time another true story of agony, violence and lawlessness—an unsolved mystery.

"I was assigned," Harrison explained. "You see, the Government hangs on, even though the public forgets. We knew when the Isham family got the ransom note. We let the family follow the directions. But we were waiting for the car that stopped on the road to pick up the bundle of money thrown out to them. We chased the car—it was the Buick sedan—and caught it up on High Bridge——"

"Why—exactly where Sanders——"

"Coincidence," reproved the G-man. "Our bullets riddled the man at the wheel. We had to answer their fire. That was Nick Rago. The Buick went wild and wrecked on the bridge rail. Fenner lived. We put him in the hospital to mend."

"But Fenner——"

"Fenner always was a fox," Harrison went on. "He denied the kidnaping. He surrendered the money, and never changed his story that he and Rago were only out to extort money from the Isham family. Of course," he added bitterly, "we have never found the poor baby——"

"And Fenner was jailed for extortion?"

"He was never tried," Harrison snorted.

"The local police were a little lax, maybe a little jealous of the F. B. I. Fenner, his arm in a plaster cast, escaped under their noses from the hospital just last week. We'll get him—but we haven't done so yet."

Doctor Potter's brow furrowed. "Still—why your great interest in the sedan now?"

"Why—I'm convinced absolutely that

Fenner did that job, despite his nice story to beat a sentence of death. A clue turned up last month, late but welcome. A contractor told us a sedan, which he thought was a Buick sedan, drove past a house he was working on near the Isham home—on the evening the baby was kidnaped. The car left tracks in some concrete this man was having mixed.

"I came to see Berger, here, who had bought the Buick at police auction. I wanted to match the tires with those tracks."

"Did they match?" the doctor asked eagerly. Harrison smiled.

"You forget your patient's case history, Doctor. By that time Sanders and his wife, having bought the car from Berger, were on a tour somewhere west of the Rockies. Some papers printed the news of the clue. I figured that Fenner, after escaping, would be very anxious to get hold of the car—which is why you were held, Doctor."

He stood up. "Now—lead me to this patient of yours. I'm going to give those tires a close check."

6

SEATED beside the G-man in a sturdy Chrysler sedan, Doctor Potter bubbled over. As he spoke, Harrison listened politely, and yawned.

"Surely," Doctor Potter pressed, "it's more than mere coincidence, where the car wrecked each time. Then, your bullets riddled Rago, at the wheel. That would account for the stabbing pains Sanders felt——"

"And the voice?"

"That would be Fenner, shouting at Rago."

Harrison laughed. "Far-fetched as your theories are, they give me goose-flesh. A car—haunted."

"Haunted?" The doctor spoke dreamily, more to himself. "So unnaturally sensitive,

nervous, Sanders was like a radio set, vibrating in response to the impulses set up in the car and the immediate vicinity of High Bridge. 'The appropriate circumstances,' Professor Rueder told me. 'Marvelous. . . . But what, after all, is known about mind, matter, the soul?'

"This is the address," interrupted Harrison, braking smoothly.

Doctor Potter led the federal agent into the hotel, up to Sanders' rooms. Mrs. Sanders greeted them.

"The car again," she said somewhat annoyedly, after Doctor Potter had explained their mission. "Why, Mark just left with a man who was anxious to buy the car."

She peered curiously at Doctor Potter. "Why—he introduced himself as Joseph Green—he said you sent him up here——"

Doctor Potter shook his head in denial, but Harrison snapped: "Describe this fellow!"

"Why—stocky, high cheek-bones—and his right coat-sleeve hung limp, as if his arm was gone, or in a sling——"

"Fenner!" snapped Harrison. "Quick! Where'd they go?"

The bewildered Mrs. Sanders gave the address of the garage. "The car's been there since—that night. Mr. Green's friend drove——"

Doctor Potter whirled to follow the G-man, who was racing for the stairs. Seconds later, he was seated beside Harrison, whizzing through traffic.

"Fenner must be damn anxious to switch those tires," Harrison hissed as he steered, "but we'll be at that garage before he can monkey with that Buick."

In a few moments they were at the curb outside the runway of the Parker Garage. A man ducked from behind the telephone pole close by and ran down the broad runway into the garage, shouting and whistling.

Harrison raced into the garage, followed by Doctor Potter. Far down the

spacious garage was the Buick sedan they sought.

It was out of the line of parked cars, nosed toward the runway that led up into the street at the far side of the garage. Standing in front of the car was a man whose right sleeve flapped emptily at his side. Beside him was Mark Sanders.

Fenner looked toward the advancing G-man as the strange man ran down the runway, shouting. Into the car went Sanders, prodded by the gun in Fenner's left hand.

Uselessly the doctor cried, "He's making him drive away!"

Harrison stopped, swearing futilely as Fenner lunged to the seat beside Sanders, and the sedan, back-firing deafeningly, bolted for the runway to the far street.

Harrison spun, sprinting back to his Chrysler. He was shifting gears just as Doctor Potter got seated beside him. Harrison turned quickly and sent his car roaring for the avenue—a good thirty seconds after the Buick sedan went zooming past, headed uptown.

Traffic lights faded, glared red, but neither car slackened, the Buick holding its lead as they tore into wide Parkside Avenue.

The road turned several times; the iron hand of Harrison picked up precious yards each time, drawing to within six blocks. Then, with breath-taking suddenness, the Buick skidded and turned, right into one of the many tree-shaded park drives.

Harrison had to brake to avoid traffic sweeping out of the lane; then he swung to the chase.

The sedan, as they rounded the first bend in the park road, was a gray streak, nearly a half-mile up the winding tree-massed road. On the sparsely trafficked road, with no side exits, it became a contest of motors. The Chrysler, a newer model, commenced to close the gap. Harrison had the accelerator hard against the

floor, the springs humming a warning dirge as the road twisted and turned.

License plate numbers were visible now on the catapulting Buick. The staring Doctor Potter saw a white puff. Harrison's strong arm pulled the doctor's head forward and down. There came a sharp *crack!* And again grim evidence on the windshield of Fenner's marksmanship.

A red light loomed boldly ahead of the forward car. A stream of women and baby carriages began to cross the road. The sedan roared on. The women, many screaming, huddled helplessly with their priceless cargoes. Barely skirting the foremost of the human stream, the Buick, speed unchecked, whizzed past.

Harrison skidded the Chrysler far left, slowing unavoidably, then roared anew to the chase, up the hill, leaving the park behind. Once more about a half-mile to the front, the Buick swung out of view beyond the crest of the uphill road. Squeezing every atom out of the motor, the Chrysler sped up, and as they swept recklessly down the grade, Doctor Potter could see the Buick ahead on the wide road, zigzagging through the thick traffic headed for High Bridge.

Harrison swore in dismay as car after car in the onmoving line blocked their advance. Escape for the Buick would not be difficult once the bridge was reached, for beyond it lay numerous side roads.

A police car pulled alongside the Chrysler. Harrison flashed his badge at the angry bluecoat, and drove ahead, not waiting for recognition. Far ahead, the Buick presented a vivid if exasperating sight as it sped unobstructed up the white concrete incline of the bridge.

With a swift turn of his hands, Harrison sent his car far out of line, picking up speed, then shouted: "Look!"

The Buick had rocked off its straight course. It was swaying inexplicably from side to side, edging obliquely left. It fol-

lowed that mad path up the incline—flush across the oncoming line of cars!

It cut incredibly between two cars; the next instant it met the rear of another, side-swiping the fender and caroming off into the curb of the bridge roadway. It bounced back, rearing like a mustang, then spun onward, banging noisily into the bridge rail, stopped dead.

When, a minute later, the Chrysler got to the site of the accident, Sanders was prostrate on the sidewalk, bleeding from glass cuts. Doctor Potter hastened to administer first aid. Fenner was sprawled on the curb, a feeble though conscious hulk.

Harrison, identifying himself to the gathered police, began to give orders concerning disposition of the Buick.

7

FEDERAL AGENT HARRISON scowled in response to Doctor Potter's greeting as they met inside the police garage the following morning. Doctor Potter understood Harrison's ill temper.

The tires of the wrecked Buick had been checked, analyzed, traced. Little doubt could now exist. The Buick's tires were *not* the tires that had left imprints in the vicinity of the Isham home. More, it seemed certain that those imprints had been left by tires not adapted to the Buick sedan's wheels.

"Tell me what you want, Doctor," Harrison grumbled. "And please omit crowing about your psychic beliefs."

Doctor Potter led the way somberly toward where a mechanic was working on the Buick. "I'm hardly in a mood to crow," he said.

Harrison scratched his head in amazement, stopping right behind the wrecked Buick.

The mechanic was goggled, working with a blow-torch. The doors of the

car were open, the two big seats on the garage floor; the hood of the engine was off, its interior empty; its trunk was completely dismantled.

"Is this what you wanted a mechanic for—to destroy it?" Harrison cried. Doctor Potter shook his head.

"The way everything was so vividly, even terribly corroborated——"

"I know only one thing," Harrison snapped. "The tire clue was a false lead. Fenner can laugh at me. He'll maybe get out of the extortion charge with a sharp lawyer."

"Yes—but why, if the tire clue was false, why was Fenner so desperately anxious to get back the car?"

"He must have learned I was after it——"

"But for what reason did he fear that? That's left unaccounted for—just as the one single sensation of Sanders is left unaccounted for. I mean, his constant feeling in the car, a sense of terrible, overwhelming loneliness, of smothering death, decay——"

"That's out of my interest, I told you, Doctor."

Doctor Potter went on undisturbed: "But if every mediumistic impression of Sanders has been vindicated by what I've seen, this one must be. It *must!*" The doctor trembled with his conviction, and Harrison shrugged pityingly.

At that the mechanic interrupted.

"Stripped," he said wearily to Doctor Potter. "Nothing out of the ordinary under the hood nor in the trunk, nor anywhere."

Doctor Potter stared disbelievingly. Like

a drowning man snatching at a straw, the doctor pointed at the seats on the floor.

"Them too?" the mechanic laughed. He kicked at the heavy back seat. His laugh vanished. Mumbling, he lifted the seat, studying the underside, remarking at the unusual shortness of the springs. He seized the crowbar and began prying beneath the undercover. Doctor Potter and Harrison, intently watching the mechanic's silent but hurried operation, noticed that the man's tool met something unexpectedly firm, hard, right beneath the soft cover of the seat.

The mechanic grunted, manipulating, and with a creaking of wood and metal, his tool broke through the resisting substance. Sweating, he widened the quite unanticipated aperture within the seat. Harrison swore wildly. The mechanic, gasping faintly, fell back on his heels.

Out from the seat poured the indescribable dank stench that swirls from long unopened, airless pits of the dead. The gaping men tried to free their eyes from the interior of that crypt molded with fiendish ingenuity within the seat. Harrison was speaking suddenly:

"Fenner—he was desperate, clever as they come. He took no chances, never did; trusted nobody. He played this horrible game with as little risk of a death sentence as possible."

And as Doctor Potter heard himself saying, "I know it must be!" the mechanic threw a shaft of light flush upon the unspeakable spectacle: That which had been devilishly secreted within the seat—the moldering corpse of the kidnaped, murdered Isham infant.

