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THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU  AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!

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YOU'LL NEVER KNOW WHO KILLED YOU

Fantastic Crime Novelette

By FRANCIS K. ALLAN

Doomed to a living death, Steve Wall heard the hooded killer say: "You may pass me on the street, you may even drink with me, never recognizing that I am the man who will give you orders—for the rest of your very uncertain life, Mr. Wall!"

CHAPTER ONE

Black is the Hood of Murder

IT WAS just after five in the afternoon when Steve Wall left the elevator at the sixth floor of the Fitzhugh Building and moved down the corridor. He stopped at a door and surveyed the neat letters: Wall and Gregg, Attorneys-at-Law. He entered.

His partner, Martin Gregg, was putting on his hat. Helen, the secretary, was closing her typewriter. Steve dropped his brief-case.

"Your mail," Helen said, handing him a pack of letters.

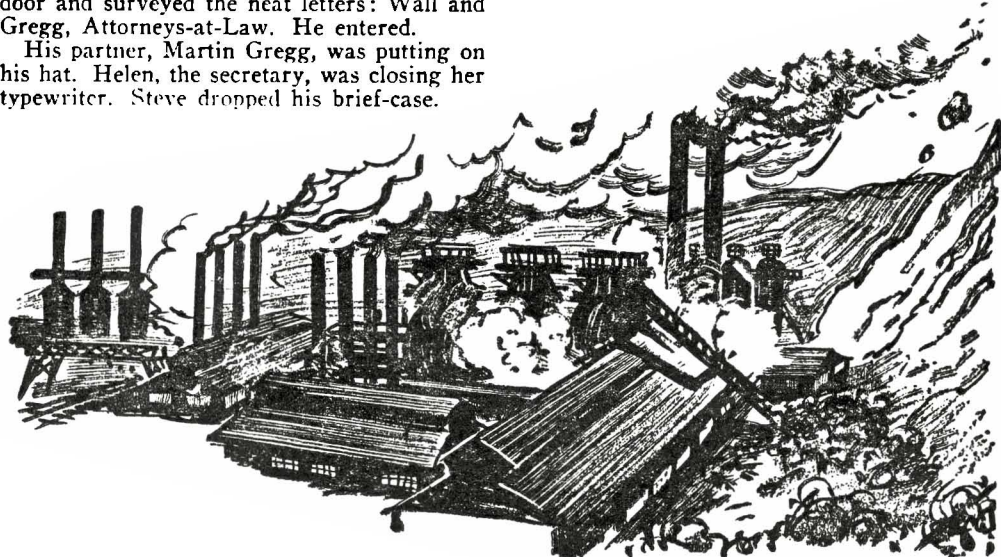
He rifled them and stopped at a brown envelope without a return address or name. He slit the flap and opened the one sheet.

Mr. Stephen Wall,

As a dear friend . . . as a curious dear friend, may I ask: Why has your wife not been informed of the whereabouts of her father? Can it be that you have some motive for this secrecy? And may I ask: Why has she not been told of the two hundred thousand dollars that he left with you? Have you some motive?

May I apologize for not signing my name? Very soon we shall meet, you and I. We will talk. . . .

"What's the matter—somebody die, Steve?" Martin's voice wondered from the distance.





With a sickening swiftness, Steve felt his legs drop into emptiness over the cliff.

Steve waked and folded the letter away. "It's just . . . nothing. Let's . . . have a drink."

IN A booth at the corner bar, Steve's fingers kept returning to his pocket. He could scarcely believe his memory.

"What's the matter with you?" Martin asked. "I've been telling you for ten minutes about the Village Dramatic Club, and you haven't heard a word! Do you, or don't you, want to see your partner in an amateur theatrical?"

Steve slowly moved his head. "The hell of it was, not a soul was supposed to know."

"Know what? What are you talking about? That Brooklyn witness?"

"Huh? . . . Oh, no. I meant my father-in-law, Max Count."

"What brought him up? I haven't heard of him in six months. Didn't he disappear after some gossip about a killing?"

"He—I'll pass this next drink, Martin. I feel terrible." Steve rose, nodded absently, and walked out.

It was after six when he entered his apartment in New York's West End. He heard Ann's swift steps hurry toward him.

"HELLO, mister!" she greeted. She stood on tip-toe and offered her lips. He did not move. He looked at her, yet his eyes seemed far away. Slowly she frowned. "Huh? You don't love me any more?"

He waked and kissed her, rumpling the short waves of her golden hair. "Sure I do. What's cooking?"

"Oh, beans and—" She stopped. "Steve, the strangest letter came to me this morning. I don't understand what—"

He took the brown envelope from her hand and pulled out the single sheet. Before he read a word, he knew. . . .

Mrs. Stephen Wall,

As an old friend . . . as a curious old friend who merely wishes to help, may I ask a question: Where has your father been for the past six months? Why has he been away? Are you certain your husband does not know where he is? Perhaps you will ask your husband one question: Where is a certain large sum of cash of which you have not been told?

Someday we shall have a long talk. . . .

"What does it mean?" Ann asked. "It's not even signed and—"

"I—" He stopped. He did not remember lying to Ann before; this was going to be hard. "I don't know, honey. Forget this thing."

"But where is father? Nobody knows! He didn't even tell me good-bye when he left! And those letters of his from Mexico—they have no return address! They never tell me anything about him!"

"Ann," he said slowly, "your father is a smart man. Whatever he's doing is best. You've got to believe that. Just . . . believe it."

"But why can't he write and tell me?"

"I don't know. I— Oh, let's eat," he said almost angrily.

Ann was frowning uneasily as she went away. Steve moved to the window and stood there, looking down. His fingers opened and closed against his palms. "Who in hell could have found out everything? . . ."

It was after midnight when the ring of the telephone woke him. He pulled the sheet higher and hoped. It didn't stop. He felt his way across the darkness to the hall. "Hello?" he grunted.

"Stephen Wall?" asked a man's voice. "This is Dr. Werner Grantham."

"Oh, Grantham. What do you—"

"Listen: I'm at Max Count's Lost Lodge.

He called me an hour ago. When I got here he . . . Steve, I think he's dying!" the doctor threw out harshly.

"Dying!" Steve closed the door to the bedroom. "What's the matter? When did he come back from—"

"I know nothing about that. He has a high fever. Sometimes he is delirious. When consciousness returns, he asks for you. He knows he's dying! This fever has been with him a long time, I think—"

"All right! I'll be out!" He hung up.

"Steve! What is it, Steve?" Ann called sleepily.

He turned on the light and opened the door. "It's just . . . an old client. He wants me to draw a will tonight."

"But I thought I heard you say doctor."

"The doctor called me. I've got to go." He began to pull on his clothes. He paused before the mirror. His eyes looked back at him, black and troubled. His lean face was lined and uneasy, his short black hair rumpled. He shook himself. "Back in an hour."

The clock in the filling-station at upstate Vardenville showed one-ten as Steve drove through the little hamlet. A mile beyond the last house, he turned into a narrow rocky road that soon became a trail. In the shifting arcs of the headlamps, whitish and angular trees crept out of the night. A rain had begun, and the drops slanted listlessly through the lights. The motor labored up the tortuous trail. He shifted into second and the car crept on. As he reached the crest of the hill, the lights spilled down to reveal the the shore of a small lake.

A long rambling building of stone and logs appeared. One dim light shone through an upper window. He turned off the motor and lights and hurried toward the porch. The door of Lost Lodge swung inward, and the odor of stale dust came to his nostrils. The light shone down the rude log stairs. He hurried upward.

"Dr. Grantham," he called as he opened the door to Max Count's bedroom. "Where are—" He stopped, looking down, stunned, at Max Count.

The huge body was relaxed upon the bed; the flesh was white; the fingers were limp and open upon the sheet. Only in the man's face were there traces of his strength and power. The eyes were deep-set beneath craggy brows. Heavy lines webbed the cheeks, and his head was utterly bald.

All that Steve saw. Yet he seemed to stare in a trance—at the round dark hole in the center of the forehead. It hadn't bled much—only two drops of blood that now were dry. Like two small tears they lay, dark on his temple.

Steve reached down; the body was still

warm. He straightened; his hard black eyes roamed the room. He found the brown envelope propped on the dresser: To Stephen Wall. . . . He opened it slowly.

Mr. Stephen Wall,

As an old friend who is sincerely interested in your safety, may I offer the following facts before the police arrive; and they are on their way, I should tell you.

First, I am afraid that Max Count was murdered with your thirty-two revolver; and you know that the gun is registered with the police.

Second, I am afraid that the murderer is in possession of a receipt, signed by you, proving that Max Count gave you two hundred thousand dollars, six months ago. It is remotely possible that the police will think you killed him to keep the money.

Third, the killer has evidence to prove that you called Max Count back from Mexico. Also it can be proved that you were here at the time of the murder. And last, if you will look at Count's legs, you will see they are chained to the bed. That chain is locked; you cannot remove it now. But the key to that lock is among certain of your possessions, and will be found by the police.

Unless, Stephen Wall, you return at once to your apartment and await a message from the murderer. I sincerely advise you to do so, for your safety, as well as the safety of your wife.

It will do you no good to search for Dr. Werner Grantham. He is no longer able to prove that he called you. Within twenty-four hours, the good doctor will be dead. Do not join him. . . .

A friend.

"Friend!" Steve exploded furiously.

He stared at Count's thick ankles; there was a chain, locking them to the heavy bed. There was a massive lock with an intricate keyhole. "Who in hell—"

He stopped. Through the window he saw the flash of a distant light. Again he saw it—headlamps weaving their way through the woods, slowly approaching the Lodge! The police!

ONE uncertain moment he waited, trying to think. Then he snapped out the light, crumpled the note into his pocket, and hurried from the room. Down the stairs he

plunged, across the porch, to his waiting car.

"Good evening, Mr. Wall," spoke a soft whisper. Steve twisted. Into the car slipped a shadowy figure. The blunt point of a gun settled against Steve's ribs. "We shall wait very quietly," the figure whispered musically. "Everything is progressing perfectly." He laughed—an acid and humorless sound.

"Who are you! What in hell's the idea! What—"

"Do not be impatient. We have a long time to talk, later. You will know me very well. For the rest of your life you are going to know me, Mr. Wall. But you will never know who I am. . . . Perhaps you will pass me on the street. Perhaps I will be the man next door, but I will be unknown. My face is no face you have ever known before, yet I know you well." And the laugh came again.

"You . . . you're insane!" Steve whispered thickly. He stared, trying to penetrate the darkness of the man's face. The features refused to take form. There was nothing but a black mass. Then the lights of the police car swung over the trees to the left; they were extinguished and doors slammed. Flash-lights played and steps crossed the porch of the Lodge. A heavy knock sounded.

"Me—I think it's a dead-alley chase," a voice growled.

"But why the hell would that doctor have called us?"

Steve did not move. The gun dug deeper into his ribs. The Lodge door opened and the steps began to echo through the silent building.

"Now," whispered the dark figure. "Start the motor. Cut down that trail and drive!"

"But, you . . . you fool! They'll see us and—"

"I said drive!" The voice was edged with throbbing fury.

Numbly Steve turned the key. The motor roared. He released the clutch and the car leaped forward. From the Lodge came a shout and the thunder of running feet. The dark figure reached down and snapped on the lights. The brilliant beams caught the porch and flooded over two uniformed figures in the doorway.

"Stop! Stop that car!" one man shouted.

Frantically Steve twisted the wheel. He saw the second man drawing a gun. Then a ham-

mering blast roared against his ears. The windshield shattered, spraying glass around. He waited for the pain. None came. And then he saw. . . .

The man with the gun staggered backward. His mouth sagged open. His fingers parted and the gun fell. His knees buckled and he fell forward on his face. He did not move.

"You killed that man!" Steve choked.

"Drive! Fast! I can kill two, you know!" the figure snapped.

The coupe rocked into the narrow trail. Fenders scraped trees. Rocks sang beneath tires. The headlamps sprayed their weaving beams through the night. Steve remembered to breathe. He listened for a sound behind him, for the car to follow. Nothing. . . .

"Stop here," the figure ordered after another minute.

Steve obeyed. The door opened. The gun left his ribs and the man stepped out. "This . . . is it," Steve whispered silently. "This is the way people die—" Then it came; not a shot, but a whisper:

"I believe that you have read the letter. Furthermore, when this car is found, that other policeman will identify it. You will have two murders to explain. So . . ."

"So?" Steve asked tightly.

I KNOW that you have two hundred thousand dollars of Max Count's money. Get it. Have it ready at ten o'clock in the morning. You will hear from me. When our bargain is made, we shall discuss our plans for the future."

"What future?" Steve asked bitterly. "You'll get the money and throw me to the cops."

"Oh, no. Hardly." The man laughed. "I have plans for you. You are going to live a long time. A long time, Mr. Wall."

"And if I don't get the money?"

"You love your wife, I presume."

"Oh," Steve said very softly.

"I thought so. I will see you at ten." The man stepped back. In that moment, in the reflection of the lights, Steve saw. . . .

There was no face! There was only a long black hood of cloth, flowing down over the shoulders!

"You'd better be going. I hear a car at the Lodge," the man said.

Steve choked a curse. The car leaped forward. Down the trail it sped, into the highway toward New York.

It was two-thirty when Steve turned into a dark narrow street in the upper West End. He stopped before a dark squat building in the middle of the block, unlocked the big steel doors. In the yellow glow of a match, two dismantled trucks took shape.

He drove his car into the building. As he

climbed out, something rolled from the seat and dropped to the concrete floor. He struck another match. There lay a small black tube, like a fountain pen. He lifted it and unscrewed the cap. Into his palm slipped a thermometer.

The match went out, and he stood there in the darkness. He remembered the words of the policeman at the Lodge: "Why the hell would the doctor have called us. . . ." And Steve remembered the midnight call from Dr. Werner Grantham.

He returned to the steel door, lowered it and turned the lock. "Now, if nobody remembers I'm the lawyer for the bankrupt Hoolihan warehouse," he murmured.

Two blocks away he entered the telephone booth of a smoke-filled bar and dialed. His breath tightened as he heard Ann's sleepy, "Hello?"

"Ann—it's Steve. Ann, listen. I can't explain now. Dress. Get out of that apartment. Walk to the subway and go to Greenwich Village. Change trains a couple of times. Don't get followed. Be damned sure that—"

"But Steve! What is the—"

"Go to the Albatross Hotel on 14th Street. Get a room. Sign in as Ann Smith. Stay in that room until you hear from me. Is that perfectly clear?"

"But I— No! I don't understand! You sound—"

"Something's happened. I'll tell you later. Do what I say—the Albatross at once." He hung up, mopped the sweat from his brow, and left the bar. He caught a cab and gave the address of Dr. Werner Grantham's apartment.

"How the hell he ever found out," Steve wondered rawly. "How he ever got Max back from Monterey! That damned man's insane! He's been setting this up for God knows how long! That key! My gun! Future plans!"

At 72nd Street, just below Broadway, he left the cab. He turned into a drab brownstone house. The lobby was dark.

Swiftly he climbed the stairs to the fourth floor. Silently he moved to Grantham's door. He heard no sound. He tried the knob. It turned freely. The front room was dark. A margin of light shone beneath the closed door of the study. Still there was no sound.

Steve tried to recall the room in which he stood. On the radio in the corner, he remembered. . . . He moved toward that corner and his fingers closed on a heavy bronze vase. He tip-toed toward the door. He gathered his muscles, gripped the vase, and opened the door.

The room was empty! In silent mockery the lamp shed its golden light across the desk and rug. Steve turned and looked behind him. Uneasily he entered the study. A sensation, uncertain yet deep and persistent, crept into his mind. A sensation of being watched with

unseen eyes, of moving within a planned and waiting trap.

The silence grew to thunder in his tense ears. Relentlessly the lamp burned on. A salty bead of perspiration burned in Steve's eye. Abruptly he bent over. From the waste-basket he lifted a huge scrap of black cloth. From the center had been cut a pattern.

"Black! And that hood was black!" he whispered.

"Yes. Yes, Stephen Wall. That hood was black," spoke a voice.

Steve turned. In the doorway stood the figure—large-bodied, stoop-shouldered, and gaunt. The gun sprayed bright reflections in Steve's eyes. The door closed. "You are early," the voice spoke softly. "Our appointment was for ten."

"Dr. Grantham! I knew damned well!"

"Your intuition is good—too good."

"What're you going to do? Take off that hood and—"

"No, thank you," came the dry answer. "You will never see my face. Not as *mine*. A thousand times you may see it, but never as mine."

"What are you talking about?"

"Think: how long since you last saw me? A month? Many changes have been made since then." He touched the features beneath the black cloth. "Only two people in this world ever knew what my new face resembled. And one of them, a facial-surgeon, met a sad death a week ago. Now only I know what Werner Grantham looks like."

"You killed the man who changed your face!" Steve's cheeks narrowed. "Murder comes cheap to you these days."

"Not cheap. It is well worth the effort."

"You mean the two hundred grand? How did you find out?"

CHAPTER TWO

Money or Your Wife

THE man laughed gently. "It was six months ago. One morning Max Count asked me to prepare an unusually large quantity of his heart-medicine; enough to last him for over a year. I had heard of some trouble at his Madison Club—the shooting of Phillip Avelli, to be precise. It occurred to me that Count was leaving town because of that trouble. And then I thought: Would it not be of value to know where he was going?"

"Just a natural gift for blackmail," Steve supplied.

"I take care of myself. . . . It was a simple matter for me, his doctor, to administer a sleeping-powder under the guise of heart-medicine. While he slept, I searched his papers. I learned the address to which he was going

in Monterrey, Mexico. Much more interesting, I found the receipt that you signed the day before; a receipt for two hundred thousand dollars in cash. I have it now. And so, six months ago, I began to make my perfect plan."

"You think it's perfect?" Steve wondered ironically.

"Quite perfect. And I have evidence that can burn you for double-murder. Unless you follow my orders."

"I see." Steve's hard eyes watched the gun relentlessly. "And if I pay you the two hundred grand? How do I know I won't go the way of Max?"

"Because you are more valuable to me alive. I know, of course, that you are the executor of Max Count's estate. He was rich—"

"But you know damned well what that money is for!" Steve exploded. "It goes to set up that paralysis fund. I can't touch a dime of it! You know that! You were named with me and Dr. Feller and Dr. Smallens to form the fund. They'd yell if I tried to—"

"We shall dispose of them before they talk."

"You'd kill them!" Steve stared.

"Yes, I will kill them." He gestured. "Listen: At ten this morning I will meet you. Then and there you will give me the two hundred thousand dollars. At ten-thirty tonight, we will meet again. At that time I will furnish a murderer for your crimes. I will furnish evidence to convict this murderer. But I will keep the evidence against you. In the years to come, after Smallens and Feller are dead, you will loot Max Count's estate. We will divide that money. I will direct you; I will watch you constantly. Never shall I be far away: perhaps I'll be the man next door; the man with whom you have a drink. You will never know the face I wear."

"You fool, you can't get away with—"

"Look out that window—down to the street. What do you see?"

Mechanically Steve obeyed. There at the curb was a car. "That— My car!" he gasped.

"Yes. I brought it here. I was in the rear trunk all the time. I have your second-keys. The car will be found in the morning at my door. It is known that I reported you. Perhaps you will have *three* murders charged against you, Stephen Wall."

Dazedly Steve turned to face the black hood.

"Now, I'll trouble you for the set of car keys which you have in your pocket, Steven Wall."

The gun threatened. Helplessly, Steve turned over the keys.

"I said the plan was perfect," the voice reminded. "The car is merely a detail. And I will know where your wife is within an hour. Do not force me to injure her."

"But I— For God's sake, Grantham, what— Who can you get to be the killer? The whole thing is fantastic! You can't—"

"It is very simple. I shall be the murderer."

"You what?" Steve exclaimed blankly.

"Precisely. At ten-thirty tonight, I will be dead." He laughed—a raw sound, yet lingering in the after silence. "Now, we have talked enough. I will call for the money at ten."

"Damn you, I won't do it! You'll lie and trick me! It'll mean murder on top of murder if I bargain with you! I won't—"

"Then I shall see your wife within an hour." He bowed himself out the door.

Steve followed quickly. Outside he saw no sign of Grantham. The man was unreal—diabolical and unreal. In the subway Steve peered fearfully at his fellow riders. Almost anyone of them could have been the masked murderer.

At 14th Street Steve left the Subway. The words came back to him: "I will know where your wife is within an hour. . . ." He walked to 12th Street. Half-way down the block he drew back into a dark doorway. He looked back; along the street not a soul was moving. He went on. At the corner of Fifth Avenue, he repeated the process; still no one was following. He circled back to the Albatross; once he passed the lobby without entering. Still he was alone. Quickly he crossed the drab lobby.

Ann Smith was in room 38, the thin hunched clerk said.

HE CLIMBED the stairs, hurried down the narrow corridor, and knocked. "Ann. . . . It's me, Ann," he called softly. Her steps hurried to answer. The door opened.

"Oh, Steve, I. . . . Steve! What's the matter?" she interrupted herself starkly. "Your face! You look so—"

He closed the door behind him and breathed deeply, with a sense of almost frantic relief. "Sit down, honey. I've got to tell you something. Something hard."

The bleak stillness of his face hushed her. Slowly she sank down, her eyes watching him.

"Honey. It's your dad. He was murdered tonight."

Her hand started toward her throat. Her eyes grew wide. "No. No!" she choked.

"I'm sorry," he said slowly. "There's plenty more. You better let me finish. I'll start at the beginning and give it quick. Six months ago a gambler named Phillip Avelli was killed in your dad's Madison Club. There was plenty that looked funny; Avelli owed your dad heavy money; people knew your dad was sore. It was dog-luck that your dad and I found the body first. It was a frame on your dad; a heavy initialed letter-opener was missing from

his desk. We had a hunch that the blade inside Avelli was the blade of that opener. We hustled the body out quick. We left it in an alley blocks from the club. The cops never tied the murder to your dad or the Madison Club."

"But what—I don't understand why he left—"

"He started getting black-mail letters demanding two hundred thousand dollars. If he paid, he'd get the handle of the letter-opener back, complete with incriminating initials and prints. If he didn't, the police would get the handle, plus a nice little explanation.

"You know your dad. He got stubborn. He'd be damned if he'd pay. He was ready to fight back when the black-mailer turned the fire on you. Pay up, he said, or something would happen to you. I talked Max into going to Mexico and staying quiet while I tried to trace the killer. I told him he'd never buy off; he'd pay installments until he was broke, and never get the blade back. I told him I'd watch you; for four months after he left I kept a private-dick behind you—that fat little man you used to wonder about."

"He—was trailing me!" Ann echoed blankly.

Steve nodded. "Your dad agreed, with one condition. He made me take the two hundred grand in cash. I was to hold it. If anything happened to you, if they got too close to you, I was to pay off. So that's where I got two hundred grand of your dad's money. That's why he left town. And he didn't want you to know the story."

"But what does this—tonight—" she stammered.

"Tonight it all turned clear and simple," Steve said bluntly. "The blackmailer, probably also the killer of Avelli, is your dad's heart-specialist. Dr. Werner Grantham killed your father."

"No! No, Steve! I know Dr. Grant—"

"Knowing him doesn't change it," Steve interrupted drily. "What happened on that murder six months ago has all the earmarks of what's happened this time. Last time your father was framed for a black-mail pay-off; this time it's me. Last time you were the pawn, and you're the pawn again. I'll tell you and let you draw your own conclusions." He took a deep breath and started with the midnight call from Grantham. When he was through, he waited. He watched her eyes, dark with the incredulity of horror.

"Steve, he's mad! No normal man could plan—"

"Certainly he's crazy—but crazy-smart, see? I'm nailed for murder. If I pay once, I'll pay forever. When there's nothing left to pay with, he slaps on the murder proof. I don't know what he looks like—understand

that? You can't hunt a face you've never seen." He pushed his fingers nervously through his black hair. "And he was so certain . . . so certain he'd be able to find you—"

"Steve, listen: The money—it doesn't mean as much as life—you see that, don't you? Let's pay it. Then if he won't let you alone, we can run—get out! He can't find us if we—"

"I shall always find you, my child," a musical voice said. Steve and Ann turned. In the doorway stood the figure, gaunt and black-hooded. Slowly the door closed. The gun seemed a living part of his body, poised and waiting. "You can never get away, my child."

"How—how did you—" Steve choked.

"Didn't I say that my plan was perfect?"

Steve swallowed drily. His palms itched. His fingers opened and closed in futile anger. "What are you going to do?" he whispered.

The man's gun settled on Ann. But he talked to Steve.

He said coldly, "it is nearly six o'clock. You will leave this hotel at once. Ten minutes from now I will telephone the Nightowl Cafe. You will be there to take the call; I must know you are that far away. After that, you will get the money. You will meet me at ten o'clock in Max Count's old house on Riverside Drive. I will hold your wife until our plans are complete. Remember: she will be with me constantly; I will have my gun. I do not advise you to bring the police. She would be the first to die. . . ."

"You—you know you're going to kill her! You—"

"Only if you fail or try to trick me. Now, get out."

Steve looked at Ann. Her eyes tried to speak. Her lips formed a silent whisper: "Please. . . . I'll be all right. Go on, Steve. . . ."

He choked. Furiously he wrenched open the door. Down the stairs he plunged. He passed a smouldering cigarette-stub. He kicked it in futile rage, knowing it must be Grantham's. Then he cursed.

"Like a child! All I can do is kick . . . run . . . leave her!"

THERE was only the waiter and cook in the small Nightowl Cafe when he entered and ordered a cup of coffee. He looked at the clock; it was time for the call. He lit a cigarette and waited. He felt his muscles grow stiff. Half an hour passed. Suddenly he could wait no longer. He entered the telephone booth and dialed the Albatross.

"Call room 38," he ordered the clerk. He heard the buzzing.

"I'm sorry, sir. That room doesn't answer."

"Go look in that room!" Steve rasped. He waited the long tense minutes until the clerk returned.

"I'm sorry, sir. There's no one in that room now."

Numbly, he replaced the receiver. He left the cafe. In the greyness of dawn he caught a cab and gave the number of his partner, Martin Gregg.

An ill-tempered, pajama-clad Martin Gregg answered his knock.

"It's an hour before I get up!"

"Give me your office keys, Martin. Mine were stolen last night."

"What do you mean, stolen? What's the hurry? You look—"

"Forget my looks and get dressed," Steve snapped. "You're coming with me. I'll tell you why." He talked fast while Martin dressed. His law partner stopped to stare at him.

Martin kept frowning. "I never heard Count was tied up with murder," he said suspiciously. "You never told me anything about any two hundred grand. It sounds just a little phony."

"Nobody got told—not even my wife. Max wanted it that way."

The elevators were not running when they climbed the stairs of the Fitzhugh Building. Steve went directly to his office. Slowly he pulled the heavy filing cabinet from its place in the corner. He reached behind and came up with a small flat key.

"That fits safety-deposit box 99 at the Eastern Trust," he explained. "It opens at nine. I want you to get over there Martin, and get the contents of that box. By nine o'clock I'm not going to want to meet any cops. You can do my signature. Get the money in that box and bring it to your apartment. I'll be waiting."

"And just where are you going?" Martin wondered.

"To stall a couple of murders. . . . Max Count had a pet-scheme. When he was a kid he had infantile-paralysis. He wanted his estate used to set up a trust fund for paralysis patients who—"

"I know all that. Where does it come in here?"

"Grantham's got plans to kill Smallens and Feller, and raid the estate. I'm going to Smallens and Feller and tell the story. Maybe they'll believe me, maybe not."

Martin stared at him. "You sound—I never heard such a fantastic tale, but— Damned if I don't almost believe you."

Steve laughed bitterly. "Thanks. You get that money."

Steve leaned forward as the cab neared Dr. Smallens' address. Suddenly his eyes narrowed. At the entrance was parked a squad-car. A cop was leaning against the doorway.

"Drive another block," Steve ordered. At the next corner he entered a cigar-store. He

diald Smallens' number. A man answered.

"Dr. Smallens, please," Steve asked.

"Who is calling?" the voice asked bluntly.

"Is Smallens there? Is he all right?"

"This is Inspector Carwile. Who is calling?"

Slowly Steve replaced the receiver. "Something's happened . . . already happened to Smallens!" He fed another coin into the slot and dialed Feller's number. A woman's voice answered.

"May I speak to Dr. Feller?"

"I—I'm sorry. This is Mrs. Feller. I don't know just where the Doctor is this morning," she said uncertainly.

"When did you last see him? Who was he with?"

"I believe he received a call last night about eight o'clock. I think it was from someone named Grantham. I don't—"

Steve didn't wait for the rest. Warily he left the cigar-store and moved toward the waiting cab. He wasn't thinking. He scarcely heard the shout:

"Wall! Stop there, Wall! Don't move!"

With a shock he waked. He turned. Not a dozen feet from him, a cop was approaching. The man was raising a gun.

One instant Steve stood frozen. Then he leaped! He tore at the cab door. The gun roared behind him. The slug smacked the fender! The cop shouted furiously! Steve stumbled into the cab and slammed the door behind him.

"Drive! Get out of here or—or I'll kill you!"

The white-faced cabby pawed at the gear. The motor coughed and roared. The cop hit the running board. His arm came in, levelling the gun. Steve ducked and grasped the thick wrist. Again the gun roared, shattering the rear window. Desperately Steve sank his teeth into the wrist. The cop screamed. The gun clattered to the floor. The cop reeled backward from the speeding car. Steve held the arm.

"Slow it, driver," he panted. When the speed slackened, he released the wrist. The cop stumbled down in the curb, sprawled, and came up fighting for his whistle. Its shrill blast tore down the street. A siren gurgled and wailed.

"Times Square! Lose that squad car!" Steve rasped. He pocketed the cop's gun. The siren was wailing in an endless blast now.

CHAPTER THREE

At Last—The Perfect Crime

AT TIMES SQUARE he caught the first shuttle to Grand Central Station. He got another cab. A block from Martin Gregg's

apartment he left the cab and walked. He entered the side-door of the building and used the emergency stairs. It was eight o'clock when he sagged down in a chair at the apartment and mopped his damp face. He snapped on the radio.

It came; first the war-reports from Russia, from the Far-East. News from Washington and London. There was a pause, then the announcer spoke crisply. "We bring you a special bulletin from Police Headquarters. . . . Shortly after midnight this morning, Maxamillian Count, wealthy speculator and club-owner, was shot to death at his upstate cottage three miles beyond Vardenville, at isolated Lake Boone. Police of Vardenville had received a tip from Dr. Werner Grantham, long-time physician to Count. They drove to the cottage. As they approached, a car was heard leaving the densely wooded section near the building. In attempting to halt the car, Deputy Chester was shot to death. The killer escaped in the car. An hour ago this same car, positively identified, was found abandoned at the apartment building of Werner Grantham. Known to be the death vehicle, this car has been identified as that of Stephen Wall, attorney and son-in-law of Count. Thus far Metropolitan police have been unable to locate Wall. Both Wall and his wife have vanished. Certain letters, the exact contents of which are not yet disclosed, were discovered in Wall's rooms. Attempts, as yet unsuccessful, have also been made to locate Dr. Werner Grantham. Since Wall's car was found at Grantham's address, some fear is expressed for the doctor's safety, in as much as—"

Abruptly the voice stopped—then continued. "Ladies and gentlemen, a late report on Stephen Wall has just been handed me. Thirty minutes ago a policeman, summoned to investigate the mysterious disappearance of a Dr. Joseph Smallens, saw Wall emerging from a cigar-store near Smallen's house. Wall disregarded a command to halt, and leaped into a waiting cab, escaping in the vicinity of Times Square. Further complications have come to light: The missing Dr. Smallens is reported to have left his home last evening around eight o'clock in answer to a telephone summons from Dr. Werner Grantham. Neither Grantham nor Smallens now can be located. In addition, Police have just received a missing-persons report upon a Dr. Paul Feller. Dr. Feller was last seen when he left his house at eight o'clock last evening. Feller, like Smallens, was answering a summons, reputedly from Werner Grantham. At the present time neither police nor families of the missing men can offer any connection between the calls. However, the families do state that Stephen Wall was known to the three missing doctors. Police now fear that these

later disappearances may have some place in Wall's pattern of violence. At the request of police, we broadcast a description of Stephen Wall. Anyone seen resembling—"

Numbly Steve twisted the dial. The voice vanished. He closed his eyes and tried to think. In the silence the ticking of the clock wore against his tortured nerves. Blindly he plunged up and hurled the clock to the floor. He stared at the shattered pieces. He closed his eyes and sank down.

"I— I'm going mad! I can't think. I can't—"

"Shut up, you fool!" a voice said. Into the room came Martin Gregg. He locked the door behind him. "You'll have the neighbors calling the cops," he warned.

"You got the money?" Steve questioned his partner anxiously.

"Yeah. Here." Martin pulled three thick packs of bills from his pockets. "It was touchy. I heard two radio reports on you. Every cop in town is looking. You—you're sure you're not—"

"I'm not sure of anything." Steve took the money.

"What's the next act in this little comedy?"

"I meet Grantham in Count's old house on Riverside Drive and pay him. Maybe Ann gets loose; maybe not. After that I . . . I don't know." He took the gun from his pocket and turned it slowly in his hand. "At least I'll have this much of a chance."

"Before you take any more walks, you better change clothes. The cops know what you're wearing. You— Take this old suit of mine. And I've got some brown glasses." He opened the closet and took out the clothes. He watched Steve undress. "Go take a look in the mirror. Try one of these old hats. Pull it low. Maybe if you do that and wear— Oh, hell," he exploded wearily.

"What's the matter with you?"

"What's that Riverside address? Is there a back door?"

"Yeah, but I don't see what difference that—"

"I'm just a natural fall-guy," Martin snapped bluntly. "But I've got a gun, too. What time is the pay-off?"

"You mean—you're taking a chance on me and—"

"I said I was a fool. What's the address and time?"

"At ten." Steve gave the address. "But I'm not asking—"

"OKAY, listen," Martin interrupted. "You go on. You'll go in at ten. Just a little after that, I'll tackle the back way. You stall along with Grantham while I prowl the house and find you. We'll have two guns on him, or at least mine. Now, go on." He gestured.

"Don't start the old thanks. I'd rather save you than pay the whole office-rent myself."

Steve smiled appreciatively. "Just be careful, Martin. Don't let Grantham know."

At five minutes of ten Steve touched the massive grill-door of the old mansion. It was a fat squat house, ill-kept and dirty. Five years before, Count had closed it and put it up for sale.

A voice called from within: "Come in, Steve Wall. Slowly. Close the door behind you."

The door whined inward, revealing a high empty hall and massive stairs. "You have the money?" spoke the voice. Steve's eyes adjusted. He saw the hood, the eyes shining from the slits.

"It's in my pocket," he said wearily. "Where is my wife?"

"Throw the money at my feet."

Steve obeyed. The man pocketed the bills. "I am glad you are reasonable. And your wife will be returned. But first we must discuss my death. Tonight at ten-thirty I shall die, you remember."

"The last of the perfect plan," Steve recalled acidly.

"Why shouldn't I want to be dead? How often do the police search for dead men? . . . Not often. So tonight I'll place evidence in your hands, proving me the killer. Then I shall commit suicide. You were about to reveal me. Suicide was my last resort—"

"Where is this fake 'you' coming from?"

"This body of 'mine' will be mangled beyond recognition. It will be quite simple—my tweed suit, my watch, my identification papers, my ring—those things will identify me. And as for the body—New York is full of potential bodies, you know." He laughed. It was a soft sound, yet edged with a cutting intensity. He leaned forward and spoke with quick whispers:

"Remember the nights you've spent at Lost Lodge? Remember that sound that seems to be thunder? It comes from the North each night at exactly ten-thirty. I know what that is." He gestured violently. "It's scrap-iron. A train-car of scrap-iron thundering down the waste-slide at the Hummerton Furnace a mile away. The car moves along an embankment until it reaches the slide at the end. Then the tons of scrap are dumped! That is the thunder—the tons of twisted torn steel, hurtling down the slide into the larger pile. That avalanche of steel will slice a man to ribbons! I know! Three nights ago I stood on the cliff high above the slide. I waited until that exact moment, then I hurled my dog over . . . down . . . into that avalanche of steel! Nothing but tiny scraps of flesh and hair remained. You see—"

"You mean— You'll throw a man—"

"Why not? Night after night I have gone to that cliff. The nightwatchman has seen me; he knows my tweed suit, my watch. We have talked. In my words, I laid the plan. I said to him: That twisted steel would cut a man to pieces, wouldn't it?" I said: 'You know, if I was a criminal and the police were about to catch me, I believe I would rather die down there—' You understand now, Stephen Wall?"

"That man already thinks I am partially crazy. He will tell his story to the police. The body will be there, mangled beyond recognition. You will have proof against me. And remember: when I called Feller and Smallens from their homes last night, I used my name." He stopped and there was a long dread moment of silence. "So there is my perfect plan. Tonight I shall be dead. No longer will the police search for me. No one will know the face I wear in the future. In the years to come, I shall direct you in the looting of Count's estate. So long as you obey, the evidence against you will be safe."

"You . . . You're insane!" Steve breathed thinly. "Nobody could dream up a death like—"

"No. Not crazy. Merely very wise," the whisper corrected. "Now it is fifteen after ten. By nine tonight I shall complete the last details."

"You mean you'll kill Smallens and Feller?"

"In my laboratory downtown. It will prove that Smallens and Feller and I were engaged in research. Max Count was financing that research. We discovered a serum for paralysis. And I, rather than share the profit and honor with the others, sought to eliminate them by murder. You will reveal me. I have prepared a great deal of data regarding the research. It will all be quite convincing."

"And then we'll have our last meeting?" Steve wondered slowly. He tried to listen for some sound of Martin Gregg. He heard nothing.

YES. Here is the schedule. Tonight I shall dispose of Smallens and Feller. At ten minutes after ten tonight, I shall meet you at the boat-house a mile from Max Count's Lost Lodge. There I will give you the evidence to prove me the killer. I shall go from there to the Hummerton Furnace in my car. It will take twelve minutes—I've timed it. You will walk to the Hummerton Furnace—that will take twenty-five minutes; I have timed that, too. By the time you arrive, this 'T' will have committed suicide. The night watchman will probably have called the police. You will present proof, and say that you had been following me. You had tracked me to that cliff. You will have a gun. . . . Thus I

jumped rather than let you take me or shoot me."

Steve felt the sweat turn salty on his lips. His ears ached for the sound that would be Martin Gregg. "And what about my wife? You've got the money. Our deal was for you—"

"Oh, yes. And so I will keep my promise. Your wife is in the basement room downstairs. We shall go down now and release her—" Abruptly he stopped and his body stiffened. His head tilted. "I heard a noise, Stephen Wall," he whispered softly. His eyes glinted through the slits of the hood. "You didn't disobey me, did you?" he breathed.

Steve did not move. Only the fingers of his right hand tightened, then the hand started toward his pocket. He tried to keep his voice cool, tried to cover the slow movement: "No. I didn't tell anybody! I didn't hear any—"

"You did!" The figure half-turned. "A step! Steps coming from the back! You told where I—"

Steve's fingers pawed at the gun. It came up. The figure turned back quickly. Steve side-stepped fast and leveled the gun. The hooded figure closed in. Steve aimed squarely at the other's gun and squeezed. One sharp empty click was all that broke the tense silence.

In a sweat of panic, he squeezed again. Again came the empty click. In closed the hooded man.

"I told you!" the voice snarled. "Never try to trick me! My plan is perfect!" His gaunt long arm swept up.

Steve threw himself to the side. Twice more the futile click of the gun sounded. Then the long arm came crashing down upon him. Desperately he hurled himself into the man. Too late—

The gun-butt smashed against his forehead! A shower of dazzling blindness burst into his skull. He felt his fingers tremble and loosen on the gaunt figure. An abrupt darkness closed in. . . .

He waked to the smell of dust in his nostrils. He tried to move, and a sharp ache pierced his head. Dazedly he pushed himself up. He was in that same shadowy hall. Alone now. A small sheet of white paper lay beside him, weighted down with the gun. He read the scrawled words

I warned you. Now I must hold your wife until after tonight. One more disobedience will kill her; I promise you, Stephen Wall, and as for your friend . . . you may find him in the basement. . . . The time is ten-ten at the boat-house tonight.

"But— That gun—" Steve choked. He lifted it. "No slugs! But that cop was shooting! He had slugs in—" He wiped his blood-

stained face with his sleeve and staggered up. He stared dazedly at the dim empty rooms. He remembered the face of Grantham—the old face, the face lost to plastic surgery. He could see again in memory the reddish cheeks and small grey eyes; the bony forehead and the thick glasses, deepening the eye-sockets.

"But I'll never know the next time," he whispered. "I'll never know which man I meet is the man who murdered— It is a perfect plan!" he whispered bitterly.

He stopped. For one endless moment his body was frozen. Then it trembled violently. An expression of horror, mixed with incredulity and dawning certainty, cloaked his stark features.

He stumbled to the back stairs that led to the basement. He descended into the dark and struck a match. He found Martin, crumpled on his side. A red livid welt crossed his temple. His breath was coming in jerking spasms. Consciousness was returning. The man's eyes opened. He stared wildly at the match-flame. He started to scream.

"It's only me—Steve. I got it too," came the dreary explanation. "How bad are you?"

"I don't know." Martin choked. He pulled himself into a sitting position. "I was—was trying not to make any noise. But the steps are old— When I opened the door, somebody was waiting for me. I got slugged before I could—"

"I know. Listen, Martin—I've been thinking. I want you to get out. Leave me alone. We can't whip this damned madman. I can't fight anymore. He's still holding Ann. If I try to trick him again—"

"You're going to play ball with him?"

"I've got to. I haven't any choice. I—you get out of it Martin. Keep out of it. Maybe someday I'll find a way. Tonight I've got to obey any damned thing he says. You'll only get in the trap with me if you try to help."

"Will I hear from you? You'll contact me if anything—"

"If I can. Later. Tomorrow maybe. Today I'm doing what he says."

CHAPTER FOUR

Scrap Iron for Hell's Furnace

THE dusty silence hung heavily in the empty huge rooms. The sun, sinking now into sunset, drove an oppressive heat through the shuttered windows. Steve paced relentlessly, slowly—as he had paced for the long hours of the day. Sweat, salty and grimy, streaked his haggard face. His cigarettes had run out hours before.

On he walked, in a tired relentless fury—trying to think.

"Ann—she's my wife. She means everything to me. But Smallens and Feller— They have families, too. Their lives are important, too. I—I haven't got the right to let them die. I can't sacrifice them for myself and Ann. I— Oh, God! I've got to take a chance! I've got to risk her life! It's got to be now!"

He moved to the window. The street was dark outside, now. He moved to the door. One long final moment he waited. He closed his eyes and whispered, silently and wordlessly to himself. He opened the door.

Two blocks away on Broadway, he entered a crowded bar. He pulled down his hat to cover the blood-stain. He entered the telephone booth and dialed Police Headquarters.

"Let me speak to Inspector Carwile," he said. There was a long wait, then the inspector's dry voice answered: "Yes?"

"Are you the man the radio's talking about?" Steve said thickly. "The man what's looking for that Wall guy?"

"I— Yes, I am. Why? Have you any information?"

"I don't want to get myself in no trouble—"

"If you have information, it won't cause you any trouble."

"If I tell you where I am, you'll just talk to me and leave me alone and don't bring no cops, huh?"

"Yes," came the blunt agreement. "Where are you?"

Steve gave the name and address of the bar. "I think maybe I seen him going in a hotel, but I don't want to get in no trouble. If you bring a lot of cops, you won't find me, see?"

"I heard you the first time. What is your name? How will—"

"You just come on. If you are alone, I'll spot you." Steve hung up. Quickly he left the bar, crossed the street, and drew back in the darkness of a vacant store-entrance.

He saw the police-coupe pull to the curb and park. He saw the heavy man leave the car and enter the bar. No other car was following; no one was with the inspector. Quickly Steve crossed the street, slipped into the coupe, and crouched down out of sight. His fingers gripped the empty gun. Long minutes passed. At last he heard the heavy steps returning. The opposite door opened. Inspector Carwile climbed in, closed the door, cursed wearily, and pushed on the starter. Steve moved slightly. The gun buried its muzzle in the inspector's ribs.

"Drive. Slowly. Don't touch that radio. Turn toward Riverside."

"Who in— Wall!" the man exploded harshly. "You can't—"

"Drive toward Riverside, damn you!" Steve whispered.

At last the man shifted the gears. The car moved. Slowly Steve raised himself into the

seat. "Pull against the curb, there," he ordered when they reached the dark drive. Carwile obeyed silently. The motor died. Deliberately the inspector faced Steve.

"Now what?" His voice was cold, waiting. "You're going to listen. Maybe you're not going to believe me, but you're going to listen. I . . . did . . . not . . . kill . . . Count! I haven't killed anybody; but Smallens and Feller are due to be murdered tonight—within the next hour. Listen. And get this straight: On Munsie Street, at 245 East, there's an old loft building turned into a half apartment house. On the fourth floor Dr. Werner Grantham has a research laboratory. Dead or alive, Feller and Smallens are in that laboratory. Grantham intends to kill them tonight, soon. Also, Grantham is holding my wife somewhere. If I wreck his plans on Smallens and Feller, he kills my wife. So—" Steve spoke more slowly. "When you leave me here in a few minutes, call the first-aid squad to that laboratory

"Meeting Grantham. But here's the rest: If you find Smallens and Feller alive, you'll know I'm not lying to you. If I was the killer, I wouldn't have tipped you off. So if you find them, do me one more favor. Call the Hummerton Furnace and Smelting Company. Get somebody in authority. Tell who you are. And then—tell them to delay the switching of that car of scrap-metal that gets dumped in the yard at ten-thirty. Tell—"

"Who gives a damn about any scrap—"

"I do! And so will you! Have them hold that car just fifteen minutes. Make it fifteen minutes late—understand. Not thirteen or fourteen, but fifteen minutes."

"I'm damned if I—"

"Okay. You know all I can tell you. You'll know the rest by eleven o'clock tonight." Steve reached into the man's coat and took out his gun. "I'm sorry. Later you'll believe me, I hope. Be waiting at your office for a call at eleven. And Carwile—for God's sake,



The hooded death threatened them both.



and get Smallens and Feller. If they're alive, explain fast that my wife is a captive. Then—and get this—put them on stretchers. Carry them into the lobby downstairs. Make them play dead. Make the frame-up look good! Get a pulmotor and an ambulance. Spread the word that gas was smelled; a complaint was turned in. The police came, found the gas coming from the laboratory, and broke in. There Smallens and Feller were discovered—dead! Do you understand now? Grantham will be coming to that address to kill them. He'll see the frame-up! You'll have to make it look good; make it look damned like they are actually dead! Maybe he'll swallow it; he can't investigate too closely, or he'll show himself. If he'll take the story that they're dead, maybe he'll feel safe in carrying out the rest of his plan. He must do that. He must meet me later."

"And where are you going to be?" came the blunt question.

make the gas-death story at Muncie Street look good. Grantham's got to think they're dead. Now—I'm getting out. Drive straight ahead. Get to Muncie Street fast."

He stepped out, slammed the door, and nodded. Carwile stared at the gun, then savagely shifted gears. The car roared away. Steve turned and plunged into the darkness of Riverside Park.

FIVE minutes after ten. . . . On the timbers beneath the boathouse, the waves of the lake lap-lapped in the silvery moonlight. The trees stood still and dark. A frog croaked in the distance. Steve breathed thinly. He stiffened.

"Stephen Wall?" a voice asked from the darkness.

Steve turned. "Here. I'm waiting."

"Do not move." Then a flashlight blazed upon him. Beyond the light, the gaunt hooded figure moved to stand before him. "Here is

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the evidence that will show why I killed Count. A timely accident made it unnecessary for me to kill Feller and Smallens, but the evidence will show why I was holding them captive. It tells of the research and discovery that I wished to keep for my own profit. With these facts, the rest of your story will stand. You will tell of my telephone call that brought you to Lost Lodge last night; tell the police I intended to frame you for the killing. You may tell them how I held your wife; she will agree with your story. And when the police search my apartment, they will find my diary in my desk. It will carry a day-by-day plan of my crime-schedule. It will begin with that day long ago when I first began to scheme. It will clear you completely. By the time you arrive at the Hummerton Furnace, 'I' will be dead. You may call the police. I will leave a gun for you; it will be on the edge of the cliff, just above the scrap-slide. You will say you had me cornered. Do you understand, now?"

"I understand everything, Grantham," Steve said quietly. "And my wife?"

"She will be waiting for you at your apartment when you get back to New York. And now—my last warning again— So long as you obey my orders in the future, you will never have to worry about the murder of Count. But remember, each day I shall watch you; my face shall be unknown. But you will obey me, unseen. You will loot Count's fortune and pass it on to me. Neither you or your wife will attempt to flee; else the proof of your murders will immediately go to the police. Remember. Now I must go. Back away from me, Wall. Back slowly. One minute from now, start for the Hummerton Furnace. Good-luck." Then he laughed. "It has been pleasant, our little friendship."

Steve did not speak. Steadily, slowly he backed away. When he was fifty feet from the light, it went out abruptly. Long moments later he heard the sound of a car disappearing, its tires whispering on the road. Steve plunged through the trees and underbrush. Branches raked his face and tore at his flesh. He ducked his head and plunged out, not following the road, but running cross-country in the direction of the Hummerton Furnace. He plunged on and on. At last he saw the faint reddish cloud in the night sky—the furnace!

He moved more slowly toward the edge of the cliff. He looked down. Fifty feet below, in the table-like bottom of the huge excavation, sprawled the Hummerton mills. Dimmed-out lights cast a bluish haze against the night. There stretched the rails of the switch-track over which the scrap-metal would move. Steve

moved on. His fingers were tight on his gun now. The safety was off. He retreated slightly from the brink of the cliff to shield his profile from the lights beneath. He tried to penetrate the night where the cliff hung above the slide. He risked a match to read his watch; it was ten-forty.

"Carwile did! He held the train! Grantham will be—" He hushed. Beyond, now no more than fifty feet ahead, waited two dark figures. Both stood on the brink of the cliff, directly above that slide. In the thin bluish light from below, Steve could see the brown tweed suit of Grantham; the thick glasses reflecting the light; he could see the sweat that stained the heavy face; he could see the lips working wordlessly. He moved in.

Behind him he heard the first panting chugg of the switch-engine. He looked back. Out of the darkness loomed the freight-car, loaded with twisted dark steel. Slowly it approached down the track, the engine panting behind it. It scarcely crept.

Steve moved on. Now the two figures were only ten feet before him. He could hear the words from Grantham's lips:

"You— Oh, God! You maniac! Don't kill— please don't push me—" he was sobbing thickly.

"He won't push you!" Steve announced. He came in with a rush. "Don't move!" he shouted. "If you move, I'll kill you!"

The figure beside Werner Grantham turned sharply. His body froze in an animal-like crouch. The head beneath the black hood seemed to tremble. The gun shone in the bluish light from the furnace. "And I—I can kill you, too!" came the thick whisper.

"But it won't do you any good now. The perfect plan fell apart. I know who you are. I know your face like I know my own! You'll never live to raid the estate!"

"How do you know—" the words were blotted out by the shrill scream of the switch-engine on the track below. The belching smoke traced its movement as it approached the end of the track.

"Just a couple of little mistakes," Steve snapped.

"But I've still got your wife! You can—"

"But Grantham knows where she is!"

You'll Never Know Who Killed You

You're holding her in the same place you've been holding him! Isn't he, Grantham? Where—"

"Don't answer!" the voice raged. "I'll kill you both!"

"You won't kill anybody. Ask Inspector Carwile."

"What do you mean?"

"That switch-engine is a little late, isn't it? Carwile delayed it. It's all a plan to trap you. Isn't it, Carwile?" he called loudly.

"Who— Where is—" The figure twisted instinctively, automatically. It was the instant. . . .

STEVE ducked his head and leaped headlong, swinging downward with his gun as plunged through the night. With a spine-shattering jolt, his head drove deep into the man's stomach. A violent breath exploded past the man's hood. In the split-instant later, Steve's gun smashed into the head. A broken sob trailed from the hidden lips. Then a paralyzing smash caught his own face, blinding him with a flash of pain. He held on doggedly and twisted. They crashed to the ground together. In a chaotic moment of vision, Steve saw the edge of the cliff roll nearer. Far below he saw the rails gleaming like black diamonds in the blue light. The smoke from the engine poured up. Frantically he kicked, trying to break his roll toward the precipice. His fingers fought to control the arm with the smashing gun.

"I'll take—take you with—with me if—" the hooded figure panted wildly.

The whistle screamed below. Suddenly, with a sickening swiftmess, Steve felt his legs lose their grip and drop into emptiness over the cliff. He felt his body sliding. Wildly he clawed at the figure above him. He screamed once in thick horror. He knew he was going over! He saw the slide directly beneath him. He saw, in slow-motion nightmare, the dump car lifting. Then the twisted scrap steel began to hurtle down. Its thunder roared upward. It became a tearing grinding avalanche toward which Steve was hopelessly sliding. . . . He knew he was taking the killer with him. But he knew he was leaving life behind!

Abruptly hard fingers gripped his shoulder and twisted him violently. Pain shot through his ribs and neck.

"Hold to me!" a voice shouted thickly. The voice of Werner Grantham!

Steve tried to clutch. He released the hooded man's waist. He felt himself being dragged away from the cliff. Abruptly another scream split the chaos. Beside him the hooded body was sliding over, the fingers gnawing wildly at the earth.

Steve grabbed with one hand. He got the hood. It wasn't enough. Beneath the cloth the man's hair slid away. His scream was a long and wordless sob now. Abruptly the hood slipped off. In that instant Steve looked into the face.

The features of his law partner, Martin Gregg, were grotesque and primitive in their horror. The throat was convulsed and corded the eyes wild and glazed. And then the face faded fast. Down—down through the bluish light hurtled the body. The limbs fought at the empty air. Then it ended. . . .

Into the roaring churn of steel the body fell. Once it seemed to rise, to leap—as if by superhuman effort, Martin Gregg was dragging himself from the death-slide. Then the human form was swallowed in the avalanche. Down it hurtled, beneath, over, between the tons of metal. Suddenly the last of the scrap left the slide. A silence, hushed and raw, filled the void where the thunder had been. And still Steve stared fixedly down. He could see nothing now. And then he could see a little

There was a scrap of black. Perhaps an arm. He didn't know or care. With a sick choking breath he turned away, crawling on hands and knees from the brink of the cliff.

"She—she's all right, Grantham? You don't know where she is?" he panted.

"She's all right. She is locked where he had me . . . in that boat-house. She's there now."

* * *

"Let me get this straight if I can," Inspector Carwile said incredulously. "Martin Gregg has held you captive at that boat-house for a month?" he asked Werner Grantham.

"A month—while I listened to him plan," the doctor said slowly. "He would torture me that way; when he'd come out to bring me food, he'd explain what he intended to do. He even explained how he intended to kill me."

The doctor gestured and leaned forward. "Six months ago he pulled the murder of Avelli, intending to blackmail Count. When Count vanished instead of paying, Gregg felt certain that Steve had advised him. Gregg told me how he broke into Steve's files, night after night, until he finally found the copy of Steve's receipt to Count for the two hundred thousand dollars. Likewise he found the copy of Count's will that outlined the set-up of the paralysis fund and named Smallens and Feller and me as trustees with Steve. He made his plan: he would telegraph Count to return to New York immediately, that his daughter was ill—he would sign Steve's name. When Count arrived, Gregg had all his other details waiting. He had stolen Steve's gun. He had held me at the boat-house. He planned to use me

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as the final killer-corpse. Night before last he forced me to call Steve from the Lodge. There Gregg had Count locked to the bed. When the call was made, he took me back to the boat-house, returned to the Lodge to kill Count and wait for Steve. The rest you know."

"I see." Carwile frowned curiously. "And he intended to throw you into that metal-dump. Naturally your body would be identified as you. Steve would be completely bewildered then. Likewise, the murder evidence would be held by Martin. Steve would have to go through life, raiding the Count estate, paying to the unknown killer who was actually his partner—the man who would always be able to check on his actions."

"HE SAID it was a perfect plan," Steve supplied ironically. "And it came damned near it. If he hadn't smoked cigarettes— If I hadn't remembered that Grantham smokes cigars— And most important, if I hadn't remembered, there in that house on Riverside, that Martin Gregg was the only man who had seen my gun; the only man who could have unloaded it. You see, I realized that the hooded man must have known the gun was unloaded, or he wouldn't have risked slugging me—he'd have shot me. But Martin saw the gun when I was at his apartment. He had a chance to empty the clip while I was changing to the clothes he gave me. The more I thought, the more I was sure it had to be Martin. Only my partner could have known enough about me. Only Martin could have raided my files and learned what he had to know. It must have taken weeks to search everything."

"But he didn't find the key to that safety-deposit box," Carwile mused. "And when you actually gave it to him, he had to play it honest and bring you the money."

"Or the long term raid on Count's estate would have blown up," Steve finished.

Carwile nodded, then frowned. "Why didn't you ever recognize Martin's voice?" he wondered.

"Because it was a perfect mimic of Grantham's," Steve said wearily. "Martin was good at that. He belonged to an amateur theatrical club in Greenwich Village; he worked his way through college as a radio-actor."

Carwile nodded.

Steve didn't see him. He was sleeping soundly in his chair.

Ann smiled softly. "You know, inspector, that is a very satisfied smirk my husband has on his face right now."

THE END