

# AMAZING STORIES

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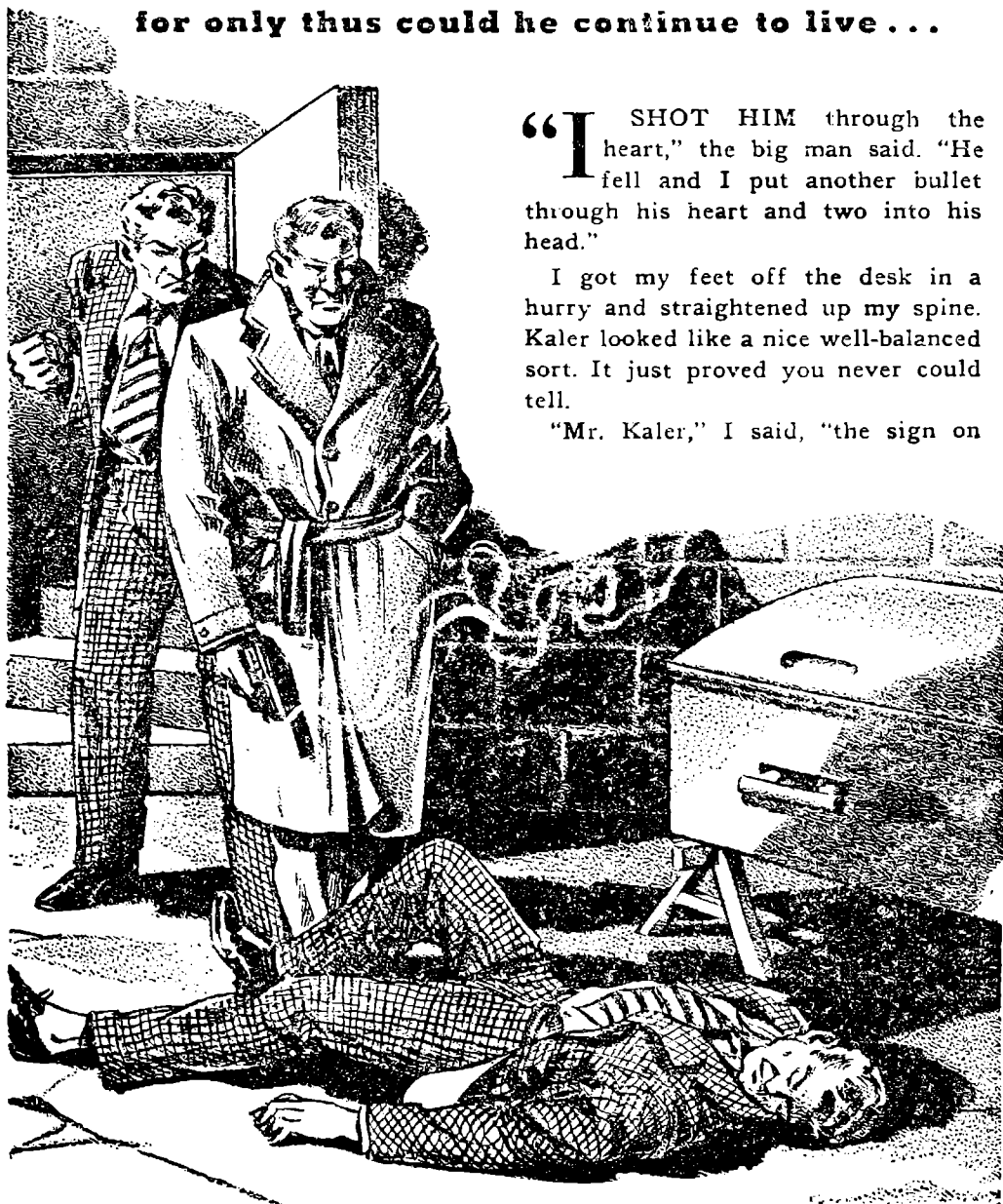
Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating  
a scene from "The Ultimate Peril."

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# YOU LIVE ONLY

While death is a normal fear for most men, Dick Enson faced it with a grim hope — for only thus could he continue to live . . .



“I SHOT HIM through the heart,” the big man said. “He fell and I put another bullet through his heart and two into his head.”

I got my feet off the desk in a hurry and straightened up my spine. Kaler looked like a nice well-balanced sort. It just proved you never could tell.

“Mr. Kaler,” I said, “the sign on

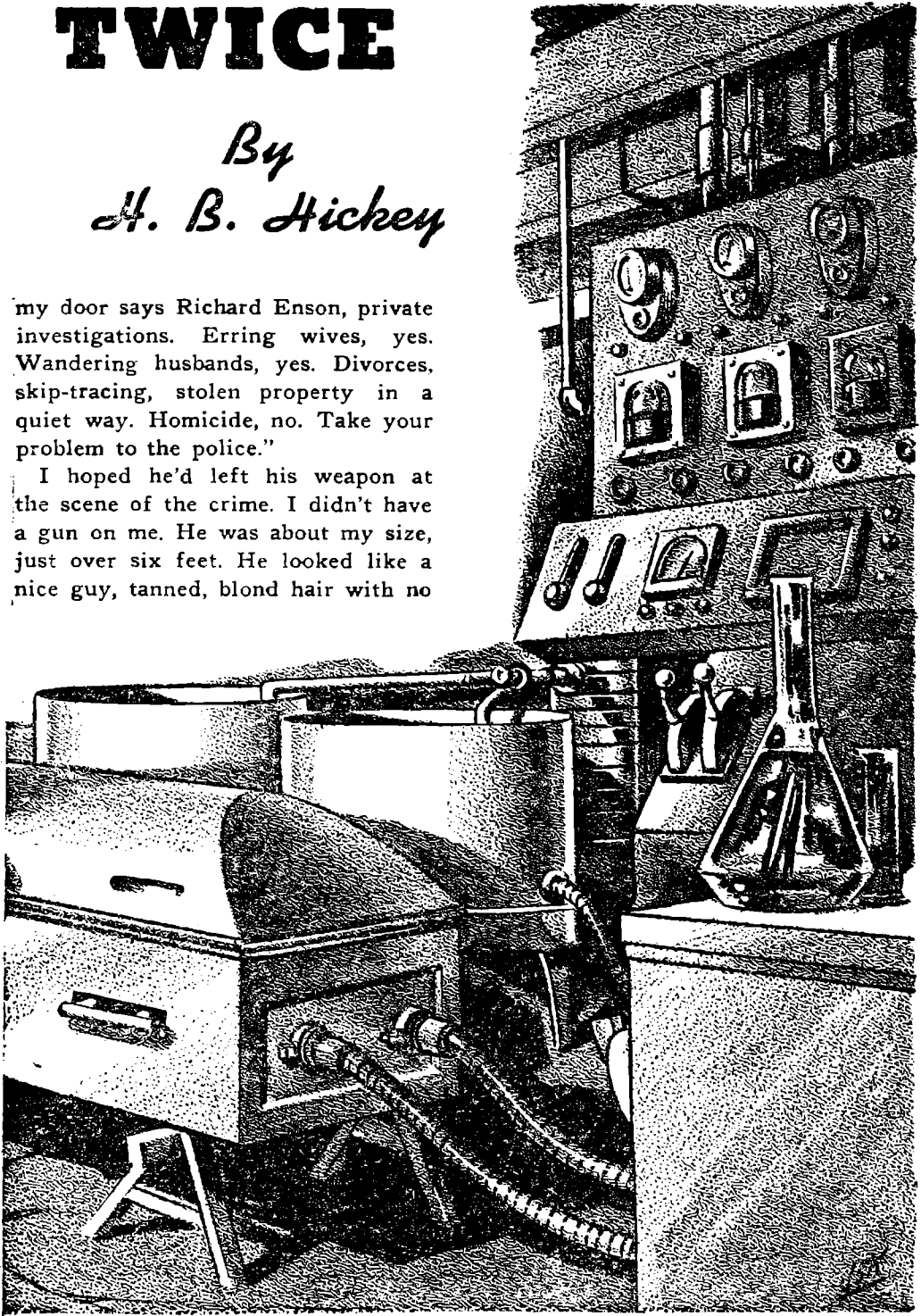
He never really knew what hit him. Death claimed his body even before it struck the floor.

# TWICE

*By*  
*H. B. Hickey*

my door says Richard Enson, private investigations. Erring wives, yes. Wandering husbands, yes. Divorces, skip-tracing, stolen property in a quiet way. Homicide, no. Take your problem to the police."

I hoped he'd left his weapon at the scene of the crime. I didn't have a gun on me. He was about my size, just over six feet. He looked like a nice guy, tanned, blond hair with no



dandruff showing on the collar of his expensive blue suit. I was sorry Sherry had let him in.

"Please, Mr. Enson, hear me out," he said, spreading his hands.

"My listening time comes high." I hoped it would discourage him.

It didn't. "I can afford it."

"Shoot," I said, and could have bitten my tongue.

"As I said, I put four bullets into Aleko's most vital organs. When I was certain he was dead I pocketed my gun and let myself out of his study.

"I then went down the stairway and opened the outer door to leave. And met him coming in."

"Him?" I said. "Who?"

"Aleko."

Nuts. But absolutely, indubitably nuts. I swallowed drily and choked on it. I coughed and coughed. It looked like Kaler was coming around the desk to hit me on the back and I waved him away. It was a good excuse to ring for Sherry.

She came in about two years later. She stood in the doorway with the light behind her, her golden hair like a halo.

I'd told her a thousand times to either wear a slip or come through the door sideways. It always took a male client's mind off business, and made the women so jealous they took their work elsewhere.

"Water," I told her, and gave her a high sign.

Kaler caught the sign. "Please," he said. "I know you think I'm crazy. I am not. If you called the police they'd find nothing amiss."

Then he reached into a pocket and hauled out a neat .38 automatic and tossed it on the desk in front of me. It was a nice gesture. I felt lots better.

"Skip it, honey," I told Sherry. "A misunderstanding."

**T**HE DOOR closed behind her and I gave him my full attention. Maybe his mind was in good shape. I doubted his glandular system. He hadn't blinked an eye at Sherry.

"Let's start over," I said. "You killed Aleko. Then you met him coming in. How many of him are there?"

"Seven or eight, I should think."

Oh, no, I said to myself. It wasn't fair. Here I was, thirty-five years old and decent looking in a rugged way. Women liked me and clients paid me good fees. And he comes in and makes me feel I've got ping pong balls bouncing around in my head.

"It started during the war," Kaler said. I nodded numbly and he went on. "George Aleko was a physicist, brilliant but too immersed in metaphysics. He and Armand Ferris and I worked together on a project."

"Where is Ferris now?"

"Aleko killed him."

Just like that. At least one I wouldn't have to worry about. I wondered what Kaler did for a living. I asked...and he told me.

"I invent machines of duplication. For instance, such as those which produce a given card from millions when another card is placed in them. Also a machine which can read blueprints and set machinery to work producing what the blueprints specify.

"Aleko, Ferris and I worked together on a device to reproduce exactly, and many times over, the fortuitous and random gamma radiations from a bit of radioactive material."

"Succeed?" I asked.

"No. I found out later why we didn't. But that is getting ahead of my story."

**A**T ANY RATE, Kaler went on, the three had parted. They all lived in Chicago. But they hadn't liked each other too well. What with Ferris being a biochemist, their fields were different. Their paths didn't cross again.

Until two years later. "Then, one day, Aleko called on me at my office. He asked me to build for him a machine which could receive a welter of radiation and electrical impulses and discharge them in a certain order, and always the same order, into any mass or substance.

"He knew what he wanted, and was able to convey it to me. I told him the machine would have to be enormous. It would cost a fortune.

"Apparently he had the fortune. He gave me a check for one hundred thousand dollars."

"At last," I said. "Back on dry land. One hundred thousand dollars is something I can understand."

He grinned wryly. "I tried to simplify. Guess I didn't do so well."

"At any rate—"

"I built the machine. It took a year. It was large, combining an electronic calculator and other components. It cost a fortune; much more than Aleko's first check.

"In the meantime, I ran into Ferris one day. It turned out he was doing some work for Aleko. Something about a breakdown of chemical constituents of a complex organism, down to infinitely small traces."

"You mentioned that you too were working for Aleko?"

"No. I saw no reason to do so. Well, he went his way, I went mine. I didn't see him for about six months. The next time was at a dinner honoring a mutual acquaintance. I asked about his work for Aleko. Ferris had that very day turned over the com-

pleted job to him.

"The next morning Ferris was dead. Murdered. By Aleko."

"How do you know?"

"Never mind. I know. And now, to the job I want you to do for me."

He was just taking it for granted I was going to do his job. But at the moment I didn't want to argue with him. I let him ramble.

"I want you to find George Aleko."

"All seven or eight of him?"

"Naturally. More, if there are more. I want the exact address of each one."

He dug a folder out of his pocket and tossed it to me. I opened it. There were three pictures of a man, three different poses. He wasn't handsome in any of them.

He had thinning hair, pop eyes, a broad brow that bulged. His chin was almost non-existent, fading into a long neck. One of Aleko was bad enough; the thought of seven or eight of him was repugnant.

"One question," I said. "Why did you try to kill him?"

"Because he tried to kill me. He's tried several times."

"Any idea where he lives? Or lived?"

"Just one address. But that one I killed today."

Kaler got up and dug out a folded banknote and tossed it on my desk. I unfolded it. There was a picture of Salmon P. Chase on it. Ten thousand bucks, in one chunk.

"To spur you on," Kaler said. "Keep in touch with me."

**F**OR QUITE a while after he'd gone I just sat and studied that greenback. This was one piece of artwork I knew was valuable. It hurt me to tuck it in an envelope and write Kaler's name across the front.

I took it out to Sherry.

"Get it to him by special messenger," I said. "If he calls, I'm not in. If he comes in, the same. And give me a double buzz to warn me."

"Uh huh." She shifted her gum from one cheek to the other. "And where you going now?"

"Through for the day. It's spoiled for me." I made a grab for her and she ducked. "And just for that you work till six."

Then I went out and took the elevator down. My favorite bar was a block away, down Michigan Boulevard, and I needed a couple of fast drinks.

There are two entrances to the building. Coming out of the elevator, I headed for the one on Michigan. There was a man standing near the revolving doors, pretending to read a paper.

He had pop eyes and a bulging forehead. A receding chir.

I didn't stop too short, but just like I had maybe forgot something. I looked up at the ceiling. I turned around and headed for the other entrance.

The building lobby curves sharply. Once around the curve I ran fast.

There was a man standing at that door too. He was pretending to read a paper. He had pop eyes and a bulging brow.

My mouth was full of cotton. I needed that fast drink twice as fast. But that building had only two exits and I'd run out of them.

Only one thing to do. I walked right past him and went on out. He followed me but I wasn't too worried. It was still light and there were hundreds of people around. I got enough of them between us so he couldn't get a good shot if he wanted one.

WITH A few drinks under my belt it still didn't mean much. Maybe I'd been wrong; there are plenty of people who look alike. Maybe I'd been right but twins are not so uncommon.

I'd already turned the case down, but just for kicks I called a friend at Homicide. "Ever hear of an Armand Ferris?" I asked.

"Are you kidding? All day I've been working on that one."

"What happened to him?"

"He passed away. Of a hole in the head. What do you know about Armand Ferris, Dick?"

"Not a thing. When did this happen?"

"Yesterday. Now, listen—"

I wasn't listening. I'd put the phone back on the hook. I looked out of the window. Aleko wasn't in sight.

Which didn't mean a great deal. I looked down the bar at the bartender. He knew me from prohibition days when the place had been a speakeasy. I caught his eye and he came on down to where I sat.

"You keep a heater handy?" I said. He thought a second and finally nodded.

"I left mine at the office," I told him. "Would you get too lonely without yours tonight?"

"Not too lonely. Come down to the end."

I went down to the end of the bar and he came along with his bar towel over his arm. He leaned over to whisper in my ear and something fell into my coat pocket.

It was a comfort to me, a great comfort. I went out and glanced around and there was no Aleko. Foolishness, I thought, and hailed a cruising cab. I gave the cabbie the address of the small hotel where I lived

and then settled back in the seat.

"Nice evening," the cabbie said.

Ordinarily I don't mind taxi chatter, but tonight I wasn't talkative. I let him know it by answering with a grunt. He took the hint and kept his peace while we rolled along the dark streets behind Chicago's Gold Coast. About three blocks from my hotel he opened up again.

"Got trouble with your wife, pal?"

"Got no wife," I said. "Why?"

"There's a tail on one of us. Don't think it's me."

"You sure?"

"See for yourself."

I straightened up so I could look out the rear view mirror. There was a car behind us, all right. It wasn't too close, not too far.

"Should I lose him?"

"No," I said. "I don't think this bell is tolling for me."

Even so, I slipped the bartender's gun out of my pocket, made sure it was loaded and the safety off, and laid it on my lap. The car behind didn't come any closer, even falling back.

False alarm, I thought. I dug out my fare and started to hand it to the driver as we slid to a stop in front of the hotel.

Then it happened. There was a car parked just ahead of us. The door opened suddenly and a man popped out. At the same time there was a squeal of brakes and another car was behind us. It was beautiful timing. We were pinned.

I didn't have time for more than one glimpse. I didn't need more than that. You couldn't miss those pop eyes. But I was more interested in the gun each man held.

I crossed them up. I came out of the cab. And I came out with my finger on the trigger. I snapped one fast shot. It was too fast for good

results as far as hitting anyone.

But it scared them. As fast as they'd come out they were back in again. They'd left their motors running. One pulled forward. The other backed and then swung around us.

I started back into the cab. No use. The driver had ducked down, killing his motor. I tapped him on the shoulder.

"School's out. You can go home."

WHEN I walked into that lobby I was boiling. If there's one thing I hate, it's assassination, especially when the attempted assassinee is myself.

"I thought I heard a shot," the desk clerk said.

"Backfire," I told him.

Then I started running. There's a long hall past the desk, and it ends in a fireglass door with a light above it. There was a face pressed against the door, a face I was getting dammed sick of seeing.

When I got to the door the face was gone. It was senseless to chase out into the dark. I turned around and came back.

I took the phone book off the clerk's desk and looked up Kaler's number. Within thirty seconds I had him on the line.

"Get that envelope?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Well, I've changed my mind. Put it in your pocket and bring it down to my office. Right now."

"You've seen Aleko!"

"Several of him," I admitted. "Tell you more about it later."

And hung up. Then I began to think about it. I thought about it while I waited for another cab, while I was riding back to the office.

And the more I thought about it the clammy got the feeling that had



been growing inside me. I was angry, but I was also beginning to get scared. There was something here that wasn't in the natural order of things, something I couldn't understand.

**WHEN KALER** came into the office I had all the lights on. He walked in and I pointed to a chair and said, "Sit." He sat.

"What happened?" he asked.

"We'll start with *my* questions," I said. "First, why didn't you go to the police when Ferris was killed?"

"What good would it do? Suppose they arrested Aleko. Which one would they arrest? And what if they tried, convicted, and executed him? There will always be more."

"And *that*," I told him, "is something we are going to discuss right now. With no double talk. Either that or I quit the case; and throw you to the cops for concealing information about a murder."

"No!" He jumped out of his chair. "You don't realize what's involved!"

I didn't move an eyelash. "Sit down," I said. "Start talking. And talk straight."

"Maybe you'll believe me now," Kaler said, settling back. "This afternoon you wouldn't have. I didn't believe it myself at first."

"As I told you, our work during the war failed. It was Aleko's fault. I thought he was cracked, too interested in immortality and the transmigration of souls to have his mind on his work. But I didn't realize how much Aleko's fault meant until three days ago, the day he came to get the finished machine."

"It was after hours at my plant. I was alone. The machine was on a dolly, ready to roll. Aleko came to the office and said he had a truck in

back. I unlocked the doors.

"Before I could see the truck or any of the men, Aleko had steered me back to my office to write out a final payment. I offered him a drink and he accepted. Later I realized he had accepted only to keep me occupied."

"But he's not a drinking man. Three drinks and he was off on a metaphysical gambit. I stood it as long as I could and then told him I thought that kind of stuff was hogwash."

Kaler paused and smiled faintly. "Mr Enson, do you believe in immortality?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's possible, but nothing's ever achieved it."

Kaler nodded. "Just about what I answered to the question. It *has* been achieved!"

"By whom?" I demanded.

"By a lowly thing called protozoa, a simple one-celled creature. It multiplies by dividing itself into two *identical* creatures. So you see, as Aleko pointed out, that the original primordial protozoa has died and is yet still alive, repeated in infinite number!

"And now Aleko believed he could do the same with himself! I said he was crazy; he called me a fool. He had stalled our work with Ferris because we were getting close to the answer. And now, unknowingly, I had made for him the machine which would help render him immortal."

"And more than that, Mr. Enson, I had built the machine which would make him master of the world! It was insane."

"Not so insane," I said. "Not if the idea works. The guy will sheerly outnumber the rest of us!"

SO, THE idea had worked. A brilliant mind, multiplied many times. And each replica in complete rapport with the others, each knowing what the others knew and gathering more knowledge every day.

Brilliant minds, and twisted ones. Not stopping at murder, not fearing death, Aleko was bound to succeed. Give him time and he'd even manage to duplicate Kaler's machine.

Then, more and more Alekos, each one twisted, each one brilliant and growing more twisted and more brilliant every day. And against them only one man—myself.

Sure, I could go to the police. But I wouldn't, for exactly the same reason Kaler hadn't. There are plenty of nuts around, and we would just be two prize specimens to them. Kaler knew Aleko had killed Ferris, but he couldn't prove it.

Kaler wasn't going to be much help in this, either. He was bright enough, but not in the way that counted here. Besides, one of these days Kaler was going to turn up dead.

And so was I. I began to sweat under my collar. Suppose I managed to run down Aleko, one of him anyway. No good. I had to get all of him, and pretty darned quick.

In my mind he was like the protozoa Kaler had mentioned, constantly dividing, endlessly multiplying. It didn't matter if one died, there were always plenty more.

There was only one answer: stop them from multiplying! I had to get to the source, and that was the machine.

Kaler must have realized the same thing. But he didn't know how to find the machine. Neither did I, of course, but at least I had some idea of where to start looking.

Kaler hadn't seen the truck that took the machine away. So he was finished. But I wasn't. It takes special trucks to move large machinery, and there aren't too many firms in that business.

Also, there was the matter of electricity. It took a lot to run that machine. Aleko would be limited to areas where large users of juice were common. He'd be a new user, probably, in which case there'd be a record at the electric company. There were ways of getting to those records.

Give me a day, give me two days, and I'd find that machine. But that was only half the problem. I had to get Aleko, and every one of his duplicates.

But how? I couldn't possibly run every one down. There had to be some way of getting them to come to me. I had to find a lever, a threat, to force them out into the open. A threat to one wasn't enough. I had to have a sword to hang over their heads, so that each and every one would be in mortal danger.

And the answer to that was—the machine. Destroy the machine and I'd destroy Aleko. His immortality was gone.

I picked up the phone book and looked up the heading, Machinery, Moving. I'd been right. There weren't too many firms, not more than I could cover in a day.

But what if I *didn't* find the machine? I could still get Aleko. All that was necessary was that he *think* I knew where it was. He'd come out after me, and plenty fast.

I grabbed up the phone, dialed a newspaper, got the want ad department. I ordered a personal notice inserted on the morning after next, to appear in the earliest edition only. It was a simple notice, brief and to

the point: *Kaler—have found machine. Meet me behind Grant Park bandshell eight-thirty this morning. Enson.*

After I'd called the other morning papers I called Kaler and told him about the notice. I didn't think Aleko would miss it. From what Kaler had told me he figured to read everything, learn everything.

Then I said good night to Kaler, tore out the page of machinery movers from the phone book and stuck it in my pocket. I went downstairs, made sure I wasn't being tailed, and hid myself to the nearest hotel to hole up for a day.

**S**EVEN-THIRTY of an autumn morning is often unpleasant along Chicago's lake front. The wind was raw and I felt chilled without a topcoat as I parked the car and walked toward the bandshell.

It was the perfect spot. There is shrubbery and some trees close by, but around the back of the big shell you're in a clearing, out in the open. It's a lonely spot, nice for a murder.

And I was the bait. I smoked one cigarette after another as I waited. Time passed slowly. More time, more cigarettes. And then at last it was almost eight-thirty.

I looked up. A car had pulled to the curb along the drive. A moment later there was another car. Then more. I looked ahead, toward Buckingham Fountain to the north. Three men were walking toward me.

At my back, the big shell protected me. But from the other three sides I was being hemmed in. It was a frightening thing to watch them come on, each one dressed differently but each one with the same face. There were eight of them in all.

I had a gun, but I wasn't ready to use it. I wouldn't unless I had to.

They were running now. This time Aleko wouldn't miss. He'd kill, but he was no gunman. He had to get close to make certain.

They were almost on me when Kaler stepped out of the clump of bushes he'd been hiding in since before I got there. He had a gun in each hand.

"Aleko!" he called. They turned, startled.

Kaler was a good shot, and they were sitting ducks. Seven shots and there were seven figures down on the yellowish grass. The eighth one ran and I started after him.

"Let him go," Kaler called.

And he himself darted off at a slight tangent. I followed him. Within seconds Aleko was in a car, pulling away fast, and we were fifty yards behind him.

"That was murder, plain and cold-blooded," I told Kaler as we swung onto the Outer Drive with tires screeching.

"I'll take the responsibility," he grated.

I shut up and gritted my teeth and prayed as we roared down the Drive at eighty miles an hour. It had been a nice trick until Kaler had opened fire.

Suddenly the car ahead slowed and swung off toward the industrial area to the west. Kaler let out a triumphant, "Ah!"

"You let him go on purpose," I said.

**"THE MACHINE!"** Kaler snapped. "He's got to get to it. Only one of him now and he's got to get to it!"

He was right. Aleko drove like a madman, took corners on two wheels, but Kaler stuck like a leech.

Aleko should have figured Kaler's game. But he didn't. He should have ditched the car and taken off on

foot. But he didn't do that either.

Suddenly there was a screech of brakes and Aleko was at the curb in front of an old building. We got there almost on his heels, but still not fast enough.

A big door opened and Aleko was through it. It slammed in our faces as we raced up. A lock clicked.

"Around the side!" I said. "There are windows."

Kaler went through the window first, shattering the glass with his elbow. I went in right behind him. We were in a semigloom, on the main floor. Toward the front a stairway led up to a second floor. There had been a tool shop here once and I could smell the grease and the metal as I ran behind Kaler toward the stairs.

Aleko was almost to the top. Kaler had his gun out and snapped a shot. I saw Aleko falter, then go on. He was out of sight. Then we were taking the stairs two at a time. Kaler hit the top first.

Splinters flew as a bullet chewed wood over Kaler's head. The gun in his hand roared and roared again until my ears ached. Then it stopped firing and he was standing there, motionless.

"Got him," he said softly.

He had indeed. Twenty feet away Aleko lay, down at the base of a dingy wall. No more immortality for him; he was dead as any man had ever been.

"And there's the machine," I said. Kaler was already staring at it.

He had only built part of it, but the part he had built took up half the big room. Next to it was a smaller machine, a maze of tubes and wires. And there were the chemicals Ferris had worked out, vat upon vat of them.

And each machine, and every vat, and every wire and tube was connected with a cabinet the size and shape of a coffin that occupied the center of the room in the midst of the weird maze.

"There it is," Kaler whispered. He looked at me and smiled strangely and said, "Thank you, Enson."

"Wait," I said. The gun was pointed right at my heart.

"No. It was a clever trick to get Aleko out into the open. But it was the machine I wanted, you see. Aleko had a wonderful idea, but I can use it to so much better advantage."

"It was you who killed Ferris," I said.

"Of course. And now I'm going to kill you. There's only room for one immortal, you know."

I MADE a grab for him, but it was no use. The gun went off in my face and there was a shattering blackness as my forehead caved in. Kaler was laughing as the thing that had been Dick Enson toppled to the floor.

He was still laughing as I came out from behind the machine and swiped him across the back of the head and knocked him forward. The gun fell from his hand and I kicked it out of reach.

"It wasn't all a trick," I said as Kaler got to his knees. "I found the machine last night. I was hiding here while Aleko produced a duplicate of himself. I had a hunch that this might happen, so after Aleko left I used the machine myself."

Kaler was still dazed, but he had enough yet to make a grab at the gun on the floor. He actually got his hand on it and was coming around. I had no choice but to kill him.

For a moment afterward I just stood and looked at the machine. It

was a wonderful thing, the kind of thing bound to give any man ideas. It was even giving me ideas.

Then I looked down at Aleko and Kaler. They'd had the same ideas. And look what had happened to them.

I turned and pumped a shot into several vats. Then I tore loose a metal pipe and went to work. When I walked out the machine was a total wreck.

Sure, the papers were full of the story. It was a three-week wonder. But nobody knew anything, and I

wasn't offering information nobody knew I had. I let it go at that.

Sherry had a notion, of course, because she'd met Kaler. But just a notion. She's never said a word.

And I've found other things to discuss with Sherry. In a more quiet manner than formerly. In fact I've changed quite a bit. Once in a while Sherry will give me a strange glance.

"You've changed, Dick," she'll say. "You're not the same man I used to know."

Dead men seldom are....

THE- END