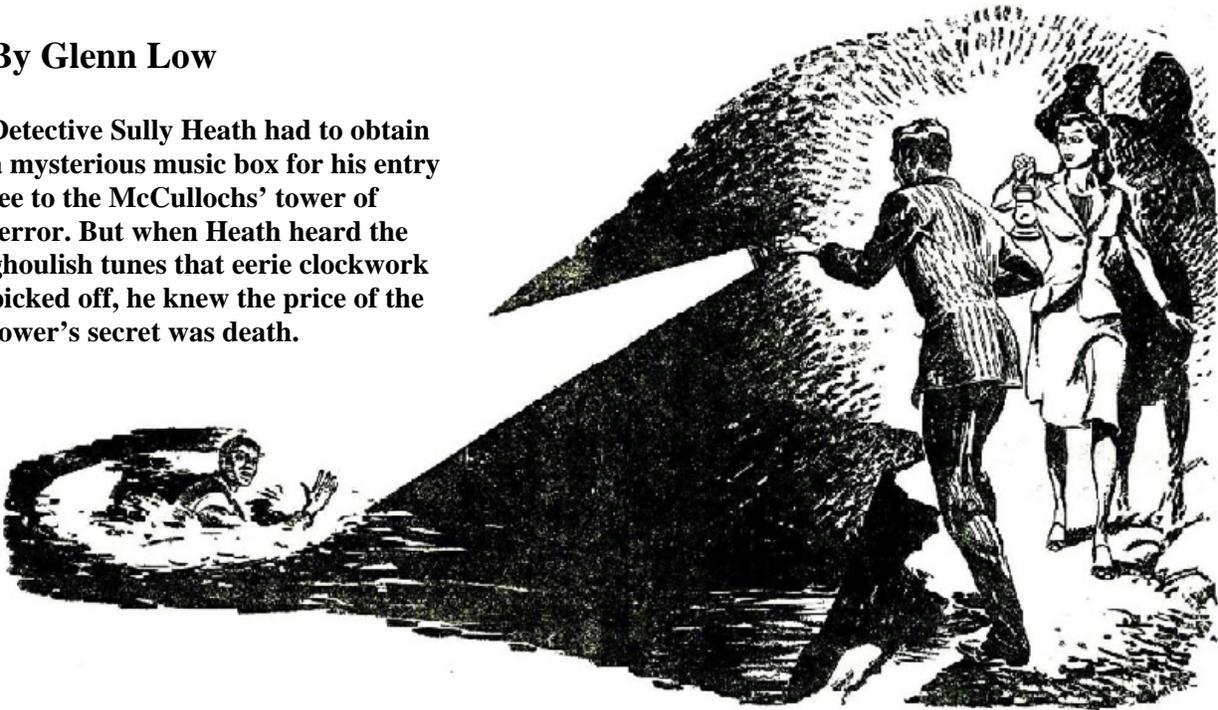


# The Music Box Murders

By Glenn Low

Detective Sully Heath had to obtain a mysterious music box for his entry fee to the McCullochs' tower of terror. But when Heath heard the ghoulish tunes that eerie clockwork picked off, he knew the price of the tower's secret was death.



## CHAPTER I

**I**T WAS nice there in the big yellow convertible. Any way you looked at it, it was nice. Around you the tiny hillocks and the snug little valleys seemed alive, to waft swiftly away—a monster drab-backed bird, feathered with dying grass and stiff, spiky fir trees.

Out there it looked cool, too; but not too cool. Looking at it, the gentle lift of the shadowy land, slanting upwards to the grey and rust of an hour old sunset, Detective Sully Heath had an impulse to get out and walk-walk long and hard to a mile away to the summit of the fir-clad ridge, there to listen to the wind, to taste of the lonely darkening world.

On lonely nights when he'd walked a beat, bored with dogging it over deserted streets, making routine call-ins, he'd attempted to think out poetry—stuff about such as he now saw in the swift, silent passing of the stones, the trees, the old farm fences. He'd been

trying to imagine in rhyme something of which he knew nothing, and how pitiful his efforts had been. . . . He looked across at Mary McCulloch and laughed.

As if in complete understanding Mary laughed, too. But the worried expression that had clouded her greyish green eyes since they'd left Baltimore was still there. In the two months Heath had known her he'd never seen her eyes like that, and he didn't like it. A bit of sadness, a touch of alarm, a pinch of fear mixed in. They all added up to the intent look she sent out along the hard ribbon of highway.

Until she spoke he studied with admiring care the delicate, yielding firmness of her face; the fading sunset playing in her wide eyes, striking them a pure jade; the slow curve of her dark lashes reaching out; the just-rightness of her nose, its slight tilt setting off the smooth, melting curves of her chin.

"There it is!" she suddenly said.

He stiffened, startled, looked around.

She laughed. "The sign, silly."

He glanced to the right of the road and saw

it. *Coverlee*. Pop. 7,003. He said, “Antique dealers usually ask murderous prices for their junk. But I do hope your little heirloom is still waiting for a buyer.”

“Only forty miles to McCulloch’s Rest now, Sully,” she said, letting the coupe slow to thirty miles an hour.

“McCulloch’s Rest.” He turned the words on his tongue as if tasting them. Then, “How about the antique shop—think you can find it?”

“I was a kid in this town,” Mary said lightly. “I remember most of the streets. My mysterious correspondent wrote that the shop is on Tydings, five blocks off Main. It’ll be a cinch to find it.”

“Probably closed now,” he said.

Mary shook her heart “Not if Mr. Anonymous is right. According to his letter the dealer lives in back and keeps open until bedtime.” She paused, glanced at Sully Heath’s strong, rough-featured, half-handsome face. “The old fellow’s eccentric. The letter says so, says it will be best to humor him.”

“Got to coddle the old codger, eh?”

“Please, Sully, don’t forget this does mean a great deal to me.” A sudden seriousness in her manner sobered him.

He thought the fear-trace in her eyes grew. “Grandfather McCulloch meant that I should have this heirloom. It was a specific request in his will. Then he disappeared and it with him. If it’s really turned up in this antique shop—well. . .”

“I’ll behave,” he promised. “I won’t kid the old boy, not even a little bit.”

“Thanks,” said Mary solemnly.

“Tell me more about your home, about McCulloch’s Rest,” said Heath, nestling deeper into the cushions, a bit lazy with the coupe’s easy motion, the comfy warmth.

“It’s just an old house in the hills with a stone tower beside it. When you see it, know the people who live in it, you’ll probably decide my family was and is kind of—goofy.”

“Nothing goofy about a family building a

tower. It’s been done before, and by kings and their children.”

“Father and grandfather built the tower. They built it right after my father came home from spending ten years in Baltimore. My mother was dead then. I was five years old.”

“You don’t know why they built it—for what purpose?”

Mary shook her head. “No. They never gave a reason.”

“Well,” said the big-town detective, frowning, “maybe they just wanted a tower, just wanted one. Like I want an atom bomb, just for the heck of it. A tower makes more sense though.”

“It was built because of their fear,” said Mary, not responding to his banter. “Grandfather spent most of his time locked inside it. Of nights my father stayed there with him, behind bolted doors in the little room at the top.”

“Then at seventy Grandfather McCulloch disappeared?” said Heath.

“A storm was coming up,” said Mary. “The last he was seen he was standing in front of the tower, watching some excited crows that were flying above a clump of distant cedars. The storm came as a cloudburst. I remember it took only a few minutes for the creek to overflow its banks.”

**A**S SHE lapsed into silence he didn’t ask any questions. He knew the story of David McCulloch’s strange disappearance. His knowledge of the circumstances surrounding that event had prompted him to ask his boss, the county prosecutor, for time off so he could accompany Mary on her visit home.

An anonymous letter recently received by Heath—Mary had received one the same day—had suggested a new angle on a nineteen-year-old unsolved kidnapping and murder. Heath had been doing research along lines suggested in the letter. But when the county prosecutor understood the

circumstances that Heath thought made the trip with Mary important, he'd been anxious for the detective to go.

"Probably just another crank letter," the prosecutor had said. "Never knew of a thing of its kind leading anywhere. But Roland Marcot and his wife have never been satisfied the dead baby was theirs. Besides the crooks got away with thirty thousand dollars or more. The business has been one big black eye to the county department for nineteen years. So if you think this lead is worthwhile, why, follow it. Take all the time you want."

Bothered by the anxiety in Mary's eyes, Heath said, "Maybe it's only because I'm a detective that you've asked me along. Maybe you think—"

He was teasing her, and she knew it; but she didn't take what he said lightly enough. "Sully," she interrupted jerkily, "if anything should harm you because of—"

He leaned, quickly kissed her to silence. A minute later she parked the coupe in front of the little antique shop on Tydings Street.

The old antique dealer glared up at Heath, eyes swimming in red behind rheumy, vein-bulged lids. "Look, Mister," he said, his voice a sharp lisp. "I'm not a man to quibble about a deal. Anything I got I'd just as soon keep as sell. I say two hundred, and two hundred it is."

Mary squeezed Heath's arm. "He's angry, Sully. I told you—"

Heath grinned good-naturedly; "Okay, old-timer. You win. But it's a holdup. The thing isn't worth more than six-bits."

The dealer grinned, satisfied, yellow fangs gleaming as his pale lips whipped back. "It ain't worth more than two-bits, looking at it one way," he said. "But looking at it another way it's worth any price a man might ask. Any price. The man that made it was a strange man, Mister. A strange man, indeed. David McCulloch made it, whittled and tapped and tinkered it into shape while he sat high in his rock roost out there at McCulloch's Rest watching for bloody murder to come traipsing

up the turnpike. You ever hear of David McCulloch?"

Mary's face paled. Heath said, "Wrap it and we'll take it along." As the dealer's whistling voice continued, Heath counted two hundred dollars from his wallet.

"Forty miles north as the crow flies from here is the spot where David McCulloch made this here thing. McCulloch's Rest 'tis called, and an accursed place it is—where dogs won't stay, where bats and owls abide."

The old man suddenly bent forward and gave a short, harsh cackle. "Murder makes a hard bargain, Mister." He nodded swiftly, his eyes lost behind red film. "Yes, so it does. And what I say is true, a man might ask any price for a thing like this, two hundred or two thousand or more. . . ."

**H** Heath passed him the money. He shuffled the bills, folded them and slipped them into a pants pocket, then turned and picked up a huge piece of wrapping paper. Smoothing it on the counter with gnarled hands, he looked up at them, his fiery eyes unwinking.

"John McCulloch lives at the Rest now," he said. "Keeps on out there, he does, with his three hired men, trying to get a living off that accursed land. But I didn't get this antique from him. Ah, no! He threw it away, he did. Trash to him, it was. Trash, mind you!"

He gave with another cackle as he turned his back and began wrapping the package.

Heath said, glancing at Mary, "Well, how about getting along? Ready, darling?"

She nodded. The old man followed them to the door. "Maybe you're buying it for that stranger—that yellow-faced stranger that was here awhile ago trying to buy it for one hundred dollars? Maybe you're buying it for him?"

"We're buying it for ourselves," said Heath stiffly, irritated by the dealer's prying manner, his uncouthness.

"Well, you got a fine antique piece there,"

the dealer said, his voice a lisping throb as they stepped out on the sidewalk. "There ain't another music box like it in the whole world. David McCulloch made it without pattern or design. But don't try to figure out the conundrum under the lid. It won't do you any good. Carved by a fool it was; by a fraidy-headed old fool."

He let go with a short, shrill cackle, then after a moment of complete silence, his voice a slow, hoarse croak, said, "*When the water runs low look at the feet of the weeping one.*" His laugh rose and fell like the quick screech of a rusty hinge. "Under the weeping one, mind you! If such as that ain't a fool's folderol then I'm a catbird's uncle."

Mary slumped onto the seat, shuddered, whispered, "You drive, Sully." Heath took the wheel, cursing the old man for an idiot. "Don't let it get you, baby," he said. "That old buzzard would make the sea hag a good husband."

She shuddered again. "The letter said he was eccentric, but—ugh!" She slipped a hand under Heath's arm, gripped it hard.

It was dark now, starless dark. There would be a moon later, but now it was so dark the line dividing the headlights' swath from the darkness seemed scalloped. Heath had just brought the convertible onto the highway beyond Coverlee when the car turned in behind them. They both noticed the car because it didn't try to pass, though they were doing less than thirty-five.

For five miles it hung behind them, maybe three hundred feet back. Other cars came up, passed on, but still it stayed there. Ten miles out its presence began making Mary nervous and Heath curious. Once when she was speculating as to probable reasons why anyone might want to follow them, he said:

"After all, Mary, there's no law against anybody driving along at the same speed as somebody else. Forget it, there just isn't any reason why we'd be tailed."

"Of course," she said, her voice brittle with mounting anxiety, "you remember that the dealer mentioned a stranger who tried to buy grandfather's music box today?"

He'd been remembering it since the car had persisted in tagging them. "I'll speed up a little," he said. "Make the play interesting for him, whoever he is."

The car behind speeded up, too, moving up to keep a little closer pace.

## CHAPTER II

"**I** POSITIVELY refuse to ride any faster," Mary said when the convertible's speed indicator touched seventy-five. "You're driving a strange road. Seventy-five is too fast for any kind of road."

He laughed lightly, cut the gas. He certainly didn't wish to add to the strain that was tightening her nerves. In a few seconds they were doing sixty. The car was still back there. It had been there all the time. A few miles farther on Heath began getting angry.

"How far to your home now, Mary?"

"About fifteen miles. A road leaves the highway beyond the village of Imps Cove. I'll know when to tell you to turn off."

"I think I'll stop just to see what our bloodhoundish friend will do about it."

"No, Sully;" Mary said quickly" touching his arm. "It may cause trouble. He'll not follow us off the highway, surely."

"Open the package and take a look at the music box, look it over good," he told her.

She obeyed. The music box was about a foot square, made of something that looked like cherrywood. She took a flashlight from the glove compartment, placed the music box on the seat between them. She lifted its wooden lid and it began tinkling a tune. A moment later she gave a short, tight gasp.

"Find Nero's emeralds?" Heath asked.

"The—it's carved inside the lid like the old man said! See?"

He was busy watching in the rear vision mirror, also along the road ahead, and didn't look. The car behind suddenly spurred up closer. "Read it," he said.

She did, slowly. "*When the water runs low look at the feet of the weeping one.*"

"River or lake near your home?" he asked.

"A creek. I used to wade in it. It runs near the house. Narrow and very swift."

"Water ever get low in it?"

"Not often. I remember twice."

The car behind suddenly drew so close its head beams passed on to mix with those of the convertible. Heath slipped his automatic pistol from under his arm, dropped it into his lap.

"How many are in the car?" Mary said, her voice loose and shaky.

"I don't know," he said. "Examine the music box, maybe it has double paneling."

She rapped on it with her knuckles. It was still tinkling a tune. When she jarred it the tinkling stopped, but a clicking sound began in the place of the music. It was like the ticking of a clock, only louder and unevenly timed. "The walls are of thin wood, so is the lid and the bottom. There doesn't seem to be anything hidden inside it."

She put the music box back on the seat. In a moment the ticking ceased and another tune began.

"I'm going to slow down and make them pass us—or else," Heath said. He pulled his foot off the accelerator.

The car behind slowed down, keeping some fifty feet back. Heath was driving fifteen miles an hour when he said, "This can't go on. They mean business," He turned the coupe off the highway, braking it to a slow stop.

The car pulled off and stopped a few feet behind them. Heath started to get out. Mary clutched his arm. "Let them make the first move, Sully."

He was angry. A hard pulse slammed at his temples, his neck throbbed. Behind them a door opened and a man's voice called out, "That you, Jack?"

Heath got out. "You're not looking for us, fellow," he said.

"My mistake," said the voice. It was too dark for Heath to see the speaker. The fellow had doused his headlights, putting Heath and the convertible in the dark. "Thought I knew you," continued the voice. "A friend of mine drives a car like yours." The speaker was moving toward them, his feet slapping softly on the roadside sod. Heath waited, holding the automatic loosely.

The fellow, much closer now, said, "I been wanting a smoke for a long time. Lighter in my car's on the blink somehow. You got a match!"

"I got a match," said the county detective.

He didn't see the man until the glow of the convertible's taillights struck him. He was tall, thick-bodied, slightly stooped. Heath put his age at around twenty-nine. An unlighted cigarette dangled from his thin, gashlike mouth. His hands swung free at his sides, empty. Heath put away his pistol.

**T**HE fellow was standing close when the detective reached for a match. The move was beautifully, expertly timed, and as swift as lightning. The blackjack must have been concealed in his sleeve, because it didn't appear until his arm was up and coming down.

Heath ducked, dived in, slashing out hard with his right. The blackjack whispered a mean song past his ear. His fist whacked against flesh and bone. The fellow straightened up, took two backward steps. Heath followed in, crashing a left to the head. The man dropped quickly, without so much as a sigh.

"Sully!" Mary came around the car, breathing fast and hard.

"Everything's okay," Heath said. He scratched a match on his shoe, held it near the fellow's motionless face. "Know him, Mary?"

"No. Sully, you haven't—"

"Grab onto yourself," he said, chuckling

softly. “The louse isn’t dead. He tried to brain me with a blackjack. I managed a lucky punch and kayoed him. He’ll snap out of it in a few minutes.” He pushed her toward the car.

“Probably an ordinary hoodlum,” he said. “Some of them work it like that—use some innocent-seeming pretext to get close to a guy, then slug him and lift his wallet. He should be turned over to the local constabulary, but if we do that I’ll have to identify myself. You said you don’t want your father to know I’m a detective.”

Mary did not reply. He started the car. Then, several miles farther on, after a too-long silence, he said, “Sure be a surprise for your dad; maybe you should have let him know we were coming.”

Mary drew a long breath. Her voice was still distraught when she said, “I’m worried about that man, Sully.”

“Afraid I killed him?” he laughed softly, trying to get a glimpse of her face. The glow from the panel lights didn’t reach it; but he saw her hands. They made tight little fists in her lap.

“He seemed—so finished like—so lifeless.”

“You ever see a guy after he was clipped on the button?” he asked.

Her reply was worried, anxious. “Sully, we’ve got to go back, help him, get him to a doctor. There was blood on his lips, and—”

“If we do that I’ll have to tell who I am, why I smacked him. You said policemen being around make your dad nervous. He’ll hear about this, and also know about me.”

“Just the same we’ll have to go back,” she said. “Even if he’s a hoodlum, as you say, it’s wrong driving away and leaving him unconscious and injured.”

“Okay,” he said, exasperation in his voice. “It’s your car, it’s your visit.” He whipped the coupe around and started back, but he didn’t drive fast. He wanted the fellow to have time to recover and get in the clear.

After the speedometer had marked off two

miles, Mary said, leveling, her voice, “I’ve only told you about the unsigned letter I received day before yesterday. Now I want to read it to you. I’ve been doing some hard thinking since we left Baltimore. If you don’t want to—”

He stopped her. “What’s eating you, anyhow? Ever since we bought the music box you’ve been on edge, all different somehow.”

“I’ll read you the letter,” she said coolly. She turned the flashlight on a paper in her hand and in a stiff voice read:

Dear Miss McCulloch:

The music box your grandfather willed to you has turned up at an antique shop at Coverlee. The shop is located on Tydings Avenue, five blocks off Main. The old man who owns it is eccentric and will stand humoring; but he’ll sell the music box for a price. I am advising you to buy it. It has the power to change your entire life, make you a different, happier person—if you’ll let it.

I know that you have a dear friend who is a detective. If possible have him accompany you when you go to purchase the music box. He will receive a letter from me the day you receive this one.

**F**OR a time after she finished reading quiet waited, then Heath said, “Is that all?”

“Why haven’t you told me about your letter?” Mary asked, her words catching on a tremble. “I’ve been waiting.”

“I didn’t think it wise,” he said slowly. “And I’m still of that opinion. I’m not telling you about it now. Later on maybe.”

“There’s something else,” she said. “Dad and I never got along. That’s why I haven’t been home on a visit for over three years. He never seemed to want me around. After Grandfather disappeared he became – well – unbearably mean. I went to work at Coverlee, saved my money, and went away to normal school. He’s never done anything for me, really. Sometimes I have a strange feeling about him, feel that he isn’t my father. That something happened and—”

She quit, gave a nervous sigh. “You know why I’m visiting him now.”

“You think your grandfather is still alive? But after fifteen years . . .”

“I can’t help my feelings, can I? Grandfather was my only friend. One of Father’s hired men, a man named Weblick, was good to me when I was little. It’s this feeling about Father that worries me, the feeling that he will harm me if I go near him now. You won’t blame me for feeling so when you meet him.

“Once when I was walking alone by the creek, near a big weeping willow tree, I thought I saw Grandfather. It was five years after his disappearance.

He was running as if frightened. I called to him, but he didn’t stop or look back.

It was at twilight and the valley was heavy with shadows. It may have been a wandering tramp on his way to the house to steal or beg. Still—”

Heath interrupted, “You’ve told all this before, Mary. Why tell it again?”

“Because Father may resent our visit, your presence. He might say bitter things. And you’re so impulsive. I want you to understand about him so you won’t lose your temper, and—like a few minutes ago when—”

“Great grief, Mary!” Heath exploded. “That louse tried to crack my skull! Do you realize what might have happened if he’d landed with that blackjack?”

“I didn’t see any of it,” she said. “I only heard him ask you for a match, then—then you hit him.”

“Okay,” he said hotly. “Okay, if you don’t believe me it’s—”

He was still lying there, sprawled on the bank beside the road. They stopped so the headlights would play over him. Mary got out first. When they reached him they saw instantly that he was dead.

Blood was smeared on his face, thick and glistening in his hair. Heath knelt and thumbed back one of his eyelids.

When he looked up, Mary was staring at him, her face chalky, the knuckles of her right hand pressed hard against her mouth.

“I didn’t hit him with anything, only my fist,” he said, his tone begging belief. “He was slugged later, after we left. Probably by someone who was in the car with him. He glanced down along the highway. The dead man’s car was still there just as it had been.

“Well,” he said, a bit lamely, “somebody else killed him just the same.” “Where--where’s his blackjack?” Mary asked, staring down.

“It’s gone, of course,” he told her. “Whoever slugged him took it.”

She turned and walked slowly back to the convertible. Heath started for the other car to take a look around, heard her open a door. Then a moment later he heard the thud as her body struck the ground.

He found her in a dead faint. The music box was tinkling a tune—a vaguely familiar tune. He saw that she’d taken up the flashlight, snicked it on, then dropped it. He caught the sure, placid throb of her pulse, his fingers on her wrist, after he’d lifted her and set her down inside the car. As he stood back he saw what had caused her faint—a bloody blackjack sticking from one of his gloves on the floor just beneath the open door of the coupe’s glove compartment.

Suddenly the music box stopped playing and began giving with the clicking sound again. He put gloves and bloody blackjack into the glove compartment and slammed the door, glanced over at Mary. Satisfied she’d be all right in a few minutes, he turned away, hurried back to the dead man’s car.

As he’d expected, it was empty. Nothing of importance there. He returned to the corpse, was on a knee searching its clothes when headlights of an approaching car sent a cloud of light above the highway. He went back and snapped off the convertible’s lights, then pulled the corpse over the bank out of sight. He’d finished searching the dead man’s

pockets when the car passed.

He'd found nothing that would serve as identification, and was starting back to Mary when light from another car, approaching from the way they had come, loomed up. He stayed on his knees, waiting for it to pass on. The strong beam of light played over the hillside beyond the road, outlining great and small shadows as it whipped across trees and low-growing brush.

A moment before it swung back toward the highway he saw the face, lank, wide-eyed, staring at him from a clump of brush on the slope. His hand flicked out his gun. At the same moment the light jumped roadward and darkness covered the brush clump. After the car passed he thought he heard someone running up the hillside, but he couldn't be sure.

Returning to Mary, ready to tell her they'd have to take the corpse to Coverlee, explain things to the police, wondering how to convince her that he hadn't killed anybody, he heard the music box tinkle into another tune as the rhythmic clicking stopped. Before he reached the car its starter raked and the motor roared to life. He started to run for it, then stopped, a hurt grin moving his broad face as he watched its taillights wink out of sight down the highway.

"Well," he said, a bit scared, a lot disgusted, "that's a dame for you." He realized, a dead coldness gripping his spine, that Mary really thought he was a murderer.

The corpse had the keys to the other car in its pocket. He got them, loaded the dead man into the turtle-back, then drove down the highway, hoping to catch sight of the convertible before it reached the side road that led to McCulloch's Rest.

### CHAPTER III

**H**EATH never caught up with Mary, but he didn't miss the sign to the right of the highway, a pointed board bearing the words,

*McCulloch's Rest One Mile.* It indicated a narrow, winding road with a napped rock surface.

He turned, onto it, driving carelessly, deep in thought as he worked to evolve a means of convincing Mary of his innocence. She'd called him impulsive, evinced fear of his losing his temper when he met her father. It angered him to think she believed he was the sort of person who went around smashing heads just for the hell of it.

It was easy to guess what had happened back on the highway. The goon had been sent out to crack him, maybe to get the music box. He'd failed, and somebody waiting in the car had got sore. There'd been an argument and a slugging.

He couldn't guess why the killer hadn't driven away, unless another car had picked him up. The man in the brush clump might have been the killer, might have been anybody—a farmer out hunting, a tramp who'd left the highway to avoid detection. Mary had probably found the bloody blackjack on the ground, then dropped it inside the car when she fainted. She'd had to reach inside the car for the flashlight.

Peculiar, though, the blackjack falling squarely into one of his gloves.

Two miles north of the highway he drove around a sharp turn and saw a lone lighted window ahead. The road narrowed suddenly. A few seconds later he was worming the car along a one-way drive, into the tight yawn of a steep-walled hollow.

The spread of level ground was not over forty feet from slope to slope. All at once the tower loomed up. A means of looking out of this place, he told himself.

The drive up to the house was on a slight slope. The house set in the middle of the little hollow. The reaching sweep of his headlights showed him a short ridge or fill spanning the hollow behind it.

He saw a picket fence, dilapidated, weed-grown, a rickety gate standing ajar. He drove

on and stopped when he saw Mary's car parked in the level-way.

He cut his headlights and killed the motor.

He was still sitting in the car a few seconds later when a door opened and a man came from the house. He was short, churn-legged, and carried a lantern. A moment he paused after closing the door, then stubbed off the porch. Halfway to the car he stopped, held up the lantern and peered around it. Heath saw his face, slack-mouthed, beady-eyed, chinless. The man spoke one word, his voice a rough squeak:

"Okay."

Heath kept still. The fellow seemed undecided as to his next move. He took a backward step, swung the lantern around quickly as if to look behind him, cleared his throat loudly and came on. Heath guessed Mary had sent this fellow out to order him away. Well, he wasn't going, not even if John McCulloch did the ordering. He didn't think this stubby-legged individual was McCulloch. He opened a door. As the man came up, Heath said, "If you're here to tell me to get out, save your breath. Miss McCulloch's got everything wrong. No matter what she told you—"

The man grunted, snatched a gun from his coat. Heath grabbed his wrist just in time, wrung it until the gun dropped from his fist, then jerked him up close. "What you mean pulling a gun on me?" Heath said angrily.

The man cleared his throat, his flabby face sheeted with fear. "Put the lantern down," Heath commanded. The man obeyed, flinching at sight of the automatic in the county detective's hand. "You—you was in the tower awhile ago!" the man gasped. "You tried to kill Trappett!"

"You're crazy," Heath said, shaking him. "I just now drove up. Who are you? Where's Miss McCulloch?"

"I'm Lee Bascome. I work here." Sullenness began supplanting the fear in Bascome's face. "Miss McCulloch's inside."

"Did she send you out?"

Bascome shook his head. "I ain't seen her since she came. She went right to her room.

"Where's Miss McCulloch's father?"

"You ought to know," said Bascome, ogling Heath with resentment. "He left here right after sundown, with Lorney and Weblick in the car."

"When do you expect him back?"

"Why ask me?" Bascome shrugged. "Don't you know?"

"You're not being smart," said the county detective. "You're playing it dumb as hell. Tell me, who's inside except Miss McCulloch?"

"Ira Trappett. He's hurt, as you know. You—a guy almost killed him in the tower, after he lost his little book."

"We're going inside," Heath said. "Take it slow. You try anything tricky and—"

Bascome crashed the lantern with his foot, then whirled and swung a haymaker at Heath's head. For the second, time that night Heath was lucky with a punch. His right caught Bascome squarely on the point of the jaw. A moment later when Heath leaned over him, Bascome was out cold. He found Bascome's gun, pocketed it, then turned toward the house.

His sole intention just then was to find Mary, make her believe him, tell her of seeing the face in the brush clump above the highway. The door wasn't locked. He pushed it open and found himself looking into the twin yawn of a double-barreled shotgun.

**T**HE man holding the gun was sunken-faced, badly jaundiced. Heath guessed he was Trappett. There was the couch with mussed pillow and blanket where the fellow had been resting. The county detective recalled what the antique dealer had said about a man with a yellow face.

Trappett's face was certainly yellow. His skin was golden, splotched with bright saffron. His large dark eyes glowed dully from beneath heavy black brows, fixing an intent

stare on Heath's face. He seemed an animal at bay that, through lucky circumstance, had gained an advantage it couldn't hope to hold.

"I saw you pummelling Bascome," he said in a gentle baritone. "Did you kill him?"

"Of course not," said Heath hotly.

Trappett clucked his tongue. "A pity." He stood hunched forward as if to ease a strain on his right side. Had it not been for the jaundice and a look of ill health he would have been handsome. He was perhaps in his early fifties.

"I'll say—" he began, stopped as the earth shuddered, the house rattled, sighed, the flame in the oil burner lamp danced weirdly.

"The blast," he said. "I've been waiting for it." Something akin to defeat wavered in his eyes. "They must have got back, even without a car—or they may have left Weblick behind."

"You seem a reasonable man," said Heath. "Why don't you use some sense and put up your gun. I'm here for no harm. You should realize that."

"Reasonable?" said Trappett, seeming surprised. "I?" He laughed, a rustling sound. "Who are you?"

Heath almost decided to forego the tale he and Mary had made up to tell her father. He wasn't forgetting the corpse in the car, the way Bascome had pulled a gun on him. Still . . . He'd wait until he met McCulloch before telling anyone he was from the county prosecutor's office "Name's Heath," he said. "I—"

At that moment Mary McCulloch stepped into the room, the music box tucked beneath her arm. She'd been crying, seemed in a daze, near hysteria.

"Tell this fellow about me, Mary," Heath said.

Trappett said, "This man just drove up out front. Bascome went out, thinking it was your father. He knocked Bascome down, beat him up."

Mary's face grew sicker. "Another one, Sully?" she said.

"The fellow pulled a gun on me," said Heath, anger hardening his tone. "But I didn't beat him up. I punched him once, knocked him out."

"The last time it was a blackjack that was drawn on you, now it's a gun," said Mary, fighting to keep back a sob. "Furthermore, Mr. Heath, I took the liberty to look inside some of your luggage. Tell me, why are you carrying a map of this farm? Why do you have a genealogy of my father's family written in your little book?"

The sob got loose, jerked at her words, but she kept on. "You worked your way into my confidence, made me care for you, to get a chance to accompany me here. It was you, I remember, who suggested the surprise visit after hearing about my letter. And why—why?"

He hadn't expected her to look inside his luggage. It was bad enough she believed he'd killed the hoodlum back on the pike, but now. . . If things didn't break right for him he saw that he'd lost her forever.

Trappett said, "What'll we do with him, Miss?"

"He—he's dangerous," said Mary. "We should lock him inside the tower until father comes home."

Trappett frowned, said, "I don't wish to frighten you, Miss. But he drove up in your father's car—alone. That's why Bascome went out. He thought it was Lorney, Weblick, and, Mr. McCulloch coming back."

Heath was watching Mary's eyes and saw when the light of true reason flickered in them. He drew a sigh of relief.

Mary said, "Are you sure, Mr. Trappett?"

Trappett nodded. "I got a good look when Bascome went out with the lantern. It's Mr. McCulloch's car all right. Maybe this man has done your father some harm. We'd better lock him up and get word to the State Police, don't you think?"

MARY'S face told Sully what she was beginning to think. The way her mind was changing didn't make him mad. "Sully," she said, her eyes going soft, "was it—the car—that—"

"Yes," he said simply.

"Then, perhaps I—"

Sully said to Trappett, "Did you try to buy that music box at Coverlee today?" He pointed at the music box in Mary's arms.

Beneath the brilliant ochre, Trappett's face paled. "Yes," he said, "I did."

"Why?" asked Heath.

Mary drew it loose quivering breath, took a few steps toward the county prosecutor's ace detective.

"Because I have one like it, made by David McCulloch," Trappett told them. "I bought it in Baltimore. David McCulloch had mailed it to a friend there. I happened to hear it play."

"You have one, and wanted another one?" said Mary.

"I don't have to tell you anything about it," Trappett said, patting the breech of the gun in his hands. "But I'll tell you this much. This evening I was in the tower, high on the stairs. It was dark there, and someone tried to push me over the railing. I fell down the stairs instead.

"During the struggle a little book was stolen from my pocket. In it was written the message of my music box; also a notation I'd made concerning the fact that another music box of David McCulloch's had turned up in an antique shop at Coverlee."

There, was a scraping sound outside the door. Mary went to open it. In passing Heath she whispered, "Forgive me, Sully. Please." His smile told her it would be an easy thing for him to do.

When Mary opened the door Lee Bascome fell into the room. His face was a slipping mass of blood. A huge gash laid open his forehead, covered his eyes with a red streaming mask of flesh.

Mary clutched onto the door jamb, staring down, her face deathly. Bascome struggled to his knees, lifted a shaking hand, pointed at Heath. "He—he did it! He's killed me." He fell back, moaning.

Trappett's words struck Heath's ear in a slitting whisper a moment after the yellow man had cocked the shotgun. "You dirty murderer! You—" The music box slipped from Mary's arms, banged onto the floor.

Bascome was struggling to lift his head. His words came with a moan, "It's—it's not running! There's no sound! No sound!"

As Bascome slipped back onto the floor, Trappett glanced through the doorway, cocked his head as if listening. In that instant his attention was divided. Heath took advantage of it. He leapt and snatched away the shotgun, leveled it at Trappett's face.

"Oh, Sully!" Mary cried. "How could you hurt him like that?" She whirled and ran out into the darkness.

Heath supposed she'd get in the convertible, drive back to Coverlee. He waited for the coupe's motor to throb, but it never happened. Only the slow ticking of the clock on the mantel and Trappett's hard breathing disturbed the stillness.

#### CHAPTER IV

ONE glance at Bascome told Heath he was dead. Trappett said, "Miss McCulloch may fall into evil hands. Don't you think you'd better go after her?"

Heath smiled. "And let you go? She'll be back in a moment, when she's had time to think things over." He stepped to the music box, used his toe to lift its lid.

As it started tinkling its dowdy tune Trappett sucked in a hard breath. Heath tried to place the melody. It was familiar, but kept slipping his memory. After a minute or so the music quit and the clicking sound began.

Trappett stirred nervously. His dark eyes poured out hatred upon the county detective.

When the clicking ceased the music took up again, tinkling a different tune. But Heath wasn't trying to recognize tunes now. He was looking into Trappett's eyes, fighting the yellow man's mind.

"It happened nineteen years ago in Baltimore," Trappett suddenly said, his voice wavering, sounding of defeat. "My wife deserted me, taking our year-old baby. I haven't seen them since. It's almost driven me crazy, all these years, never a word from them. Then a few weeks ago I passed a house in Baltimore, heard a music box playing. It was a box just like this one. I listened, believing I had at last truly gone mad.

"I rapped on the door, offered to buy the music box. The family sold it to me, told me the man David McCulloch had sent it to was dead months before it arrived. Had he lived to receive it, then—"

Trappett drew a slashing breath, his big eyes fixed in his head like frozen balls of blackest ink. "Now you know why I came here a week ago. I'll tell you this, I've only been waiting to make sure. A man can't undo murder.

"Then today I saw this music box at Coverlee, thought it might complete the message that is only partially given by my instrument. The old devil in the antique shop wouldn't let me play it. I came nearly killing him for the privilege. He'll never be closer death until he dies. I offered him all the money I have. He wanted more. I came back to borrow the money from McCulloch. He was gone when I got here—I think he was. Someone tried to kill me in the tower, stole my book. Now it has told them all about the music box."

He drew another hard breath, grinned cheerlessly. "If I'd got the loan from McCulloch it would have been a little like Napoleon borrowing money from his enemies to finance a war against them. A joke for death to laugh at."

Heath picked up the music box as it stopped playing, holding the shotgun as he would a pistol to cover Trappett. "We'll hear the story over again," he said, making to put the box on a stand. The shot came from outside, through the open door. The bullet ripped through the music box, tore through the fleshy part of Heath's right hand, between thumb and palm. It did more harm, though, as it passed on and struck Ira Trappett in the chest. The jaundiced man turned halfway around, fell.

Heath leaned quickly and blew out the lamp, then leapt to the open door. He heard someone beyond Mary's car, running away. He was feeling for a match to light the lamp, intending to give Trappett all aid possible, when he heard Mary's cry. Thin at first, it lifted piercingly:

"Sully! Sully, help!"

**S**HE called him again as he reached the parked cars. He dropped the shotgun, pushed the cracked music box beneath some dead grass, and grabbed the flashlight from Mary's coupe.

She'd called from the direction of the creek, he knew. As he ran through a field he silently thanked the county prosecutor for advising him to make a map of this farm. The agriculture agent had aided him with airplane pictures, taken of the countryside during a soil erosion survey. At the time he'd thought the map-making a bit silly.

He almost fell over the creek bank. He caught himself, knelt, reached down and touched creek mud, wet and slimy. This was the creek bed, but it was waterless. He recalled the jarring blast, the sunk look in Trappett's eyes.

A murky moon lazied from a rack of clouds and found him kneeling beside the waterless creek bed, poised like a runner for the take-off. He was trying to make sense of the inscription under the music box's lid,

hoping that Mary would cry out again, give him a lead.

“When the water runs low look at the feet of the weeping one,” he muttered, trying to force his brain to grasp at lost ends of things it couldn’t know, laboring to spur it on to the business of evolving something from nothing, fighting to make it tie in the missing parts neglected by the message of the music box. Pressing muddy knuckles to his forehead he groaned, cursed the circumstances, damned the blank wall of mystery that rose before him.

He lifted his face moonward, saw the drooping branches of the old tree above him. A bit of misty something like dew touched his face. It couldn’t be starting to rain! The sod in the field had been dry! “A tear!” he said softly. *The weeping one.* . . . He was beneath a weeping willow tree.

He leapt forward, swung around the big bole of the tree, slid down the bank beside it, and found himself in mud up to his knees. He snicked on the flashlight. Tracks! Tracks, fresh and still oozing mud bubbles, showed him a way to a large open rift in the face of an otherwise smooth outcropping of stone. Minutes ago water had covered the rock ledge. Its wet mark was still there, some five feet above the top of the crevice. A man and a girl had recently gone that way, walked right into the earth.

Sully Heath let caution go hang as he sped into the crevice. Fifteen paces on and he found himself in a high-ceilinged natural cavern, a wide hallway nature had fashioned in the deep belt of limestone stratum. He had penetrated the cavern about two hundred yards when he heard Mary scream. Catching the flicker of a light on ahead, he speeded up.

The moment before he saw the yawn of a deep chasm breaking across the cavern floor, he saw Mary McCulloch.

“Watch out!” Mary cried.

He stopped, tottered over the chasm’s lip, caught his balance, and leapt back. A glance and he saw what had happened.

John McCulloch and Mary had been crossing a narrow ledge to reach an opening in an opposite wall. Part of the edge had crumbled, and McCulloch had fallen into the chasm. Mary had got safely back to firm footing. Now she stood on the lip of the deep rift holding a lantern.

Heath heard splashes coming from below and sent down the flash’s beam. He caught a glimpse of McCulloch’s face staring up from a pool of black water. In the instant Mary slipped into his arms he knew that McCulloch had been in the brush clump above the highway after the hoodlum had been killed. Mary’s voice was a hoarse whisper.

“Oh, Sully, I’ve been wrong! Father shot Mr. Trappett. I saw him and tried to run, but he caught me, brought me here. He had a rope. He was going to leave me here—kill me. Then the rocks gave way, and—”

Heath kissed her cold face. “It’ll keep,” he said. “Save it.” He leaned over the rift, said, “Keep your head, McCulloch. I’ll pull you up in a jiffy.”

“Hurry then,” came the reply. “This is a blind hole. Water feeds in through a sump at the bottom. We’re all lost when the creek water comes back.” Mary handed Heath the rope McCulloch had brought into the cavern.

**H**EATH handed her the flashlight, quickly fashioned a loop in one end of the rope. “Keep him in the light,” he said as he began playing down the rope. He waited until McCulloch had slipped the loop over his head and under his arms, then said, “You set off the blast awhile ago. You did it to turn the course of the creek. Why?”

McCulloch was panicky. “Pull me up!” he shouted. “I tell you the creek is coming back! We’ll be sealed in like flies in a jug.”

“There’s a deep blind hollow dividing the flat above the house, isn’t there?” Heath asked Mary.

“Yes. He blasted away a narrow place in the creek bank, let the water into the hollow.

When the hollow fills the water will back into its regular course, then this cavern will fill up." She was cool now. The knowledge that Heath was in the right had removed her fear and anxiety.

Heath said, "Old David McCulloch pulled a fast one when he made that music box. Remembering the clicking that came between the tunes?"

"Yes," she said.

"It was a message in Morse code, worked out on the music roll. If we'd paid a little closer attention." He drew a tight breath. "Old David was honest. He knew his son couldn't receive Morse code. He told a great story—told how he was kept a prisoner in the tower, on his own farm for years. But wait, we'll let McCulloch tell us about it." He pulled the rope taut.

"Hurry! Hurry!" cried McCulloch. "Please, hurry!"

"After you do a little talking and not until," said Heath.

"What do you want me to say?" screamed the frightened man.

"Tell us why you wanted in here, why you turned the course of the creek with the blast?" said Heath.

"I—I won't!" shouted McCulloch.

"Then here you stay," said Heath, slacking on the rope.

McCulloch began sobbing, jerking on the rope wildly. Heath gave him more slack. "Don't!" he screamed. "I'm exhausted! I can't swim any longer!"

"Tell us!" demanded the county detective.

"I wanted the money my father stole from me and hid in here," sobbed McCulloch. "Now pull me up. Please."

"Was the money the ransom money you got from Roland Marcot?" said Heath, giving the rope more slack.

"No! No! I don't know what you're talking about. Pull me up! When the water comes back it's your life as well as mine. Can't you understand?"

"You'll have to tell me," Heath replied firmly.

"Yes. Yes, it was the Marcot money. Father found it where I'd hidden it in the tower. He compared some of the serial numbers with those published in the papers. He knew then how I'd got it, so I told him the rest. When he threatened to go to the police I locked him in the tower.

"He got hold of the money later and slipped off with it, brought it in here to hide it. He meant the Marcots should have it back, meant to hide it here for awhile, then return it to them. The water was low. He had no trouble getting in, but a cloudburst came while he was here. He never got out."

Heath said, "After you tried to kill Trappett in the tower this evening and stole his book, you found out about this cavern, knew what had become of your father, knew where the money was. You, Lorney, and Weblick went to Coverlee after the music box. You found out we'd bought it and followed us. You were in the car when I kayoed Lorney. After we left you killed him with the blackjack. It was a sweet chance to frame me, also to save for yourself Lorney's share in the ransom money when it was found. What did you do with Weblick?"

"You know it all," yapped McCulloch. "That accursed music box—that long-tongued, lying Trappett—pull me up now!"

"What did you do with Weblick?"

"He ran away when I slugged Lorney. I chased him through the brush above the highway, but didn't catch him. But he'll not tell the police. He's in this too deep himself." "One more thing, why did you murder the Marcot child nineteen years ago?" asked the county detective.

"I didn't!" shouted McCulloch. "You're wrong there! No matter what my father worked into the music box, I didn't. Trappett double-crossed me, was going to collect the ransom on his own. He and his wife were taking care of the stolen baby, but I had the

clothes it wore when it was kidnapped. I stole Trappett's baby and passed it off as the Marcot child. I'd dressed the brat in the Marcot child's clothing. It was dark and the contact didn't know the child—he had a description of the clothing. I collected the ransom and got away—away with Trappett's wife."

"Trappett's baby died in an orphanage a few months later," said Heath.

"It serves him right, the dirty double-crosser," replied McCulloch. "His foolish wife thought I'd light out with her, thought she'd get to help spend the ransom money. I showed her a thing or two. I knocked her out, stood her in a tub of cement. After it hardened I dropped her in the bay. Now you know it all, so pull me out."

Mary shuddered, whispered, her voice ragged, "I'm—I'm not his daughter. Thank heaven for that!"

Heath said, "It was in the anonymous letter I received that you weren't. That's why I didn't let you read it. I had to be sure."

She squeezed his arm. "Sully, you're wonderful. Everything's wonderful! Now I understand why I always loathed him."

Heath began lifting McCulloch from the chasm. He told Mary, "We'll have to watch him. He's got a trick worked out, otherwise he'd never have confessed."

"Mr. Trappett didn't know father. Mr. McCulloch murdered his wife, stole his baby?" Mary said.

"He came here to find it out," said Heath. "A music box David McCulloch sent to Baltimore to a friend he didn't know had died, gave Trappett a lead. He heard the rest of it tonight, just before he died."

## CHAPTER V

**J**OHN McCULLOCH was gripping the edge of the chasm when Mary lost her footing. Heath let go the rope, grabbed for her, missed. She and McCulloch plopped into the

water at the same moment.

"Mary! Mary, are you all right!" Heath found her a second later with the flash's beam. She was holding onto a roughness in the chasm's wall. McCulloch was swimming around, trailing the rope.

"I can't swim," she said, her voice a half-strangled gasp. "But maybe I can hold on for awhile."

"Listen, McCulloch!" Heath shouted. "I'm ripping up my clothing to make a string. I'll drop it down. You fasten it onto the rope." He pulled his coat and sweater, ripped his pants leg off at the thighs, tore the garments into strips, knotted them together. In a few minutes he let the knotted string into the chasm.

"Here it comes," he sang out.

McCulloch caught it, fastened it to the rope. In a few minutes Heath had the rope again. "The girl first," he shouted.

"Never," replied McCulloch. "I'm too tired to swim."

The county detective ground his teeth in anger as he lifted McCulloch from the chasm. He watched the killer closely as he dropped the rope to Mary. McCulloch had stripped to his trousers to make the swimming easier. He stood glaring at Heath, panting hard.

Mary was on the rope when McCulloch made his play. He snatched up a rock, was aiming it at Heath's head when the detective smashed a right to his face. He heard Mary plop back into the water, saw the rope, with string attached, slip over the chasm's edge. He'd had to let go in order to stop McCulloch. He followed it up and slugged the kidnaper into unconsciousness.

He realized his and McCulloch's remaining clothes would not make a string long enough to reach down to Mary. Sick to his soul, black fear gripping his spirit, he flicked the light down the chasm's walls. "How long can you hold on?" he said, a deadness rapping in his voice.

"I—I don't know," Mary replied tiredly. "The wall is so—so slippery!"

"I got nothing left but a sweater, and a guy can't rip up a sweater," he said. "You'll have to hold on until I go outside for a rope, a wire, something."

"I'll—I'll try. I'll be okay, Sully."

Heath turned to the dazed McCulloch, knowing if he left him behind he'd revive, probably lay for him with a rock, brain him from the darkness when he returned. He had nothing with which to tie the man. In all Heath's life he'd never shot a helpless man, but he meant to cripple McCulloch with a few bullets.

He'd put aside his gun while ripping up his clothes, now he picked it up, centered the killer's face in the flash's beam, snicked off the pistol's safety.

Mary's voice stopped him. "Sully, did you say you had a sweater?"

"Yes," he told her. "But it won't rip—"

"Unravel it, Sully. The yarn string will lift the knotted string. Hurry!"

He snatched up the sweater, started the yarn to ravel. He'd done this when a kid to get yarn to make socker balls. He laughed loosely, gladness moisty in his eyes, a chunk of it in his throat. "That's a dame for you," he said.

**W**HEN they left the cavern the water was rushing back into the creek bed, was almost waist deep at the washed roots of the weeping willow tree. McCulloch had regained full consciousness before Heath had lifted Mary from the chasm. They'd found the Marcot ransom money in a metal lockbox beside the skeleton of David McCulloch.

When they reached the house, Mary told Heath, "He can't get out of the tower, Sully. The windows are barred, and there's only one door to the outside. It has a bolt lock. It will be a safe place to keep him until we can get word to the Coverlee police."

McCulloch made no objection as Heath pushed him inside the tower and locked the door. But a moment later he called to them from the little window at the tower's top:

"Get ready to die, fools! I set a charge of dynamite under the fill above the house after I mined the creek bank. I meant to drown Bascome and the others like rats. The hollow is brimming with tons of water. I hold an electric switch in my hand. There's a battery, wires running from here to the fill." He laughed hoarsely, wildly. "I'll get the ransom money yet. I'll find it after the flood—after you're dead."

"He's bluffing," said Heath.

"No," Mary said, her voice anxious. "The water that ran into the hollow after he blew up the creek bank is held back by the fill. If he can blow up the fill from where he is the water will be over us before we can get away. The tower is our only chance. If we can get inside and up to the top we'll be safe."

Heath took her hand as they dashed toward the tower. McCulloch saw them and shouted from above. "The door's locked on the inside. Just try to get in! Just try!" He laughed again, gloatingly.

The hard, jarring *boom* killed all other sounds. The earth groaned, shuddered. Heath and Mary were almost thrown on their faces. A second later the mad roar of stampeding water struck their ears.

"It's coming!" Heath said, "We'll run for it!"

Mary clutched his arm, shouting to be heard above the deafening surge of the approaching flood, "No! It's no use!"

He knew she was right. There was no safe place except the tower. The first rush of the flood would smash the house, the other buildings. A creek thirty feet wide and from ten to forty feet deep had been filling the hollow behind the fill for at least three hours.

He stepped into the tower doorway, pulled Mary in beside him. At least he'd have a chance to swim for it if he could avoid the stunning blow that would come when the flood first struck. He drew Mary into his arms, turned his broad back toward the roar of the rushing water, started to kiss her—

Behind them the door suddenly opened. A voice shouted. "Inside! Quick! Up the stairs!"

Heath grabbed Mary up in his arms, raced upward. The flood hit. The tower trembled. Water screamed as it choked the windows. The din was maddening, ear-killing.

**I**N A MINUTE or so it was all over. Quiet came and seemed a living spirit. "You're Weblick?" said Heath to the man on the stairs behind them.

"That's right," came the reply. "After John McCulloch murdered Lorney—murdered him while he was unconscious from your punch—I ran away, came back here to warn the others of what was in store for them. I saw your light coming up from the creek and hid in the tower."

"You wrote us those unsigned letters, didn't you?" said Mary.

Weblick nodded. "I heard Trappett's music box, knew what Trappett and McCulloch did nineteen years ago. Later I heard the music box at the antique shop at Coverlee. I'm pretty good at receiving Morse code. Trappett wasn't sure McCulloch was the man that had coaxed his wife away and murdered her after passing off her baby as the Marcot child. I knew Lorney and Bascome were not in on the kidnapping and murder. McCulloch's acquaintance with them began when he hired them a year ago to work here. If Trappett had known McCulloch had murdered his wife he—"

"He knew it before he died," Heath interrupted. "He heard the message of the

music box we bought at Coverlee. What have you done with John McCulloch?"

"He's locked in the little room at the top," said Weblick. "I was in the dark outside the door when he went in. It was a cinch to slam the door and bolt it. He'll be there when you want him. About those letters, though, I only did what my old boss, David McCulloch, died trying to do. Mr. David was an honest man and wanted his no-good son turned over to the police.

"There's something else, McCulloch was planning on getting more money from the Marcots by selling them the secret of"—he glanced at Mary—"your identity. I heard him planning it with Bascome. That was before he knew where the ransom money was hidden. After he knew about the ransom money he planned to kill everyone else who knew about it. That's why he put dynamite under the fill. He murdered Bascome after you knocked him out, hit him with an axe."

Mary shuddered, drew a long free breath, said, fighting to clear her mind of all the terrible, bloody business that was past, "Marcot is a right nice name, Mary Marcot. I wonder what my parents are like? I wonder if they'll like me?"

She squeezed Heath's hand. "It'll be strange having a new name, getting accustomed to it."

"Which one?" asked the county detective.

"Why—Heath," Mary said archly. "Mrs. Sully Heath. How does it sound?"

They went down to see what the flood had left.