

Stan Tremaine, postal dick, had another one of his hunches about the mail truck shipment. He'd figured skulduggery of some kind, but he hadn't counted on his own. . .

Dispatch to Doom

By
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THE black passenger car slid to a halt at the curb in front of the post office. Arlen, the guard on duty, snapped:

"Hey! Beat it! You can't park there!" He started over toward the car. Suddenly his eyes went wide, and with swift fingers he clawed at the flap of the holster at his hip.

Before he got the .45 out of the leather holster, a soft bloop sounded in the car. Arlen coughed and pitched forward to the pavement.

The car door swung open, and a man wearing a uniform exactly like the dead Arlen's climbed out. Quickly, he scooped the dead guard up and pitched him into the back of the car.

In a moment the car was rolling across Pearl Street, leaving the uniformed man behind.

Hardly had the car slid into the shadows of the steel-elevated structure when a heavy

armored mail truck turned into Pine Street. The driver jumped the curb deftly and brought the truck to a halt close to the red brick side of the post-office building. He opened the door and jumped out of the cab, saying to a guard as he did go:

“Well, here we are, right on time! Say—”

Whatever the driver meant to say was cut off by a swiftly swinging gun butt. The driver went slack without so much as a groan. He collapsed into an unused doorway.

The gun swinger clambered into the truck where an armed guard was shifting registered mail sacks to the rear of the boxlike truck body. Again the gun traveled in a short arc. The armed guard groaned. The gun butt thumped once more.

Within a space of seconds the truck rumbled away from the post office and disappeared under the sprawling steel skeleton of the el.

INSIDE the post office Postmaster Regan wiped at his thinning brown hair, through which the pink scalp shone under the unshaded bulb. He glanced at the clock on the wall.

“Right on the button,” he said as he noted it was midnight. “Mike, Paul, get that hand truck out there,” he said to two waiting clerks. He looked skeptically at the lean hungry-looking man who was sitting on his desk swinging long legs to and fro. “Well, Tremaine, for once your hunch has been wrong.”

Stan Tremaine grinned. The postmaster didn't see the grin because it only showed in the crinkles around Tremaine's green eyes. Tremaine's face looked as though it had been hammered out of wrought iron. It was dark and angular. There were tiny white scars around his stiffened mouth. A vertical crease between his eyes looked as though it had been chiseled there.

He waved a long, bony-looking hand at Regan. “You can't always hit them right,” he

said.

At that instant the truck outside roared away!

Tremaine, face set, jumped down from the desk, ran across the table-littered room and out the door that led to Pine Street. He was just in time to see the mail truck disappear.

Regan and the two clerks were right behind the lean detective. “Where's Arlen?” Regan snapped. “I'll have his job for this!” he muttered.

Tremaine produced a pocket flash and sent the beam circling on the concrete sidewalk. “Here, look!” he snapped as he knelt down near some gleaming spots on the dark pavement. “Blood!”

He jumped up and sent his light beam along the building. The shoes of the fallen driver projected from the dark doorway. Tremaine ran over and examined the man.

“Well, he's just out!” he exclaimed. “Here, one of you men give me a hand with him. Regan, you call the police and get in touch with our people, and the F. B. I., too!”

They carried the unconscious truck driver into the post office where Regan was already putting through the calls to the police.

“What'll we do now?” Regan demanded when he finished his calls.

Tremaine said to the truck driver, “You'll be okay—just a whack on the skull!” Then he turned to Regan. “I've got a hunch they won't go far with the truck. We'll wait here!” he whistled a few notes. “A hundred and twenty grand. I had a hunch somebody would get ideas about it!”

From the police radio on Centre Street, staccato alarms pulsated to roving patrol cars. Keen-eyed cops edged forward on their seats and watched the night traffic move closely. Patrol Car 63 rolled swiftly along South Street.

“Look—what's that?” the driver asked his partner.

A massive truck shot out of a dark street three blocks ahead and streaked across the

wide avenue toward the river. The patrol car rocketed forward as the gas pedal was stamped upon.

THE truck thundered over the planking of the pier that jutted into the black lustrous river. With a tremendous crash and a geyser of splinters, it smashed through the massive stringer that guarded the edge of the pier. The truck somersaulted through the air and hit the water with a terrific splash.

The patrol car screamed to a stop on the pier. "Truck just went over the Wall Street pier. . . send Emergency Squad!" the policeman barked into his microphone. . . .

Stan Tremaine pulled his battered brown hat down with a jerk. "Let's go!" he snapped when he heard the call come over the short-wave radio. "This is it. I've got a hunch!"

The Emergency Squad truck arrived at the pier seconds after Tremaine and the federal men. "There's a man in that truck," Tremaine told the sergeant in charge of the emergency wagon. He flashed his credentials. "I'm Tremaine of the Post Office Department!" he said.

The sergeant gave swift orders. Then he turned to Tremaine. "Tremaine, huh?" he asked. "You the guy that gets the hunches?"

"That's right." Tremaine nodded.

"I've heard about you," the sergeant said. "We'll do what we can. Hey, Nick, get in touch with Sanitation. We're gonna need their derrick, I think," he called to one of his men.

In an agony of impatience, the men on the pier watched the diver sink into the searchlight-flooded water. Seconds crept into minutes before the copper helmet broke the water on its way up.

"Hoist away on that cable!" the Emergency Squad sergeant signaled.

The Sanitation Department derrick whined as the steel cable the driver had fastened to the sunken truck grew taut.

The river boiled and churned. The square green truck erupted from the river, shedding

tons of white water. It rose high in the air and settled to the pier under the deft fingers of the derrick operator.

"There's a man in there all right!" the sergeant snapped. "Get a torch over here! And get that oxygen tank ready. We may be able to save him yet!"

The blue pencil of the acetylene torch lit up the faces of the waiting men with a weird ghoulish glow. The flaming finger of the torch bit deeply into the steel of the door, cutting a semicircle around the lock. The section of steel dropped to the wet pier with a mad hiss.

"Watch it—that door's hot!" the sergeant warned.

Unmindful of burnt fingers, the lean detective pulled open the steel door. Water flushed out of the truck, wetting his long legs. He pulled the body out of the truck.

"This is Arlen!" he called. Handing the dead man over to the men behind him, Tremaine clambered into the truck. It was empty!

"There was a guard in this truck—a man named Finch. He's gone now, and so is the mail!" He jumped out of the truck. "Search the neighborhood!" he commanded. "They must have dumped Finch somewhere nearby. I don't think they'd take him with them!" He looked down at the body of Arlen, the guard. "We'll even the score for you, Arlen," he said softly. "You were a good guy."

"Say, who's that giving all the orders, Sarge?" one of the emergency men asked the sergeant.

"Feller named Tremaine—he's the top dick in the Post Office Department. I heard about him before. Funny thing, he claims he always gets hunches about things. He cracks plenty of cases, I understand, so maybe he does get hunches. I don't know, but I'd hate to have him after me. Or any of those Postal Joes, come to think of it. They don't let up till they've nailed their man. They're a smart crew. C'mon, pack up that stuff and let's get out of here!" he added impatiently.

A police whistle shrilled in the silent streets, shrilled again, and still a third time.

"Somebody's found something," Stan Tremaine said to the worried-looking Regan. "Let's go!"

A FEW men were gathered around a set of dirty stairs that led to the cellar of one of the ancient buildings on Front Street. Tremaine and Regan hurried over to them. "What is it?" Regan asked.

He pushed his way through the men. At the bottom of the steps, a man was bent over a crumpled body. A flashlight beam sprayed over them.

"He's knocked cold," the man at the bottom of the steps called, "but his pulse is strong. Let's get him up out of here."

Willing hands quickly lifted the unconscious man from the stairway and laid him on the street.

"That's Finch!" Regan exclaimed.

Running gentle fingers over the blood-clotted hair, Tremaine said, "Somebody was mighty free with his gun butt tonight!" Systematically, he searched the unconscious man. Tremaine's face was hard and masklike as he worked.

Finch groaned. His eyes fluttered open and screwed shut when the light hit them:

"Shine that light away from his eyes," Tremaine directed crisply. "You're all right, Finch," he said to the prostrate guard.

"I-I feel like my head is split," Finch said weakly.

"What happened, man, what happened?" Regan, the postmaster, asked feverishly.

"What did happen?" Finch looked, perplexed.

"You were slugged, and the truck was stolen," Tremaine said. His green eyes flashed like jewels in the light.

Finch touched his head and groaned, "We pulled up to the door of the post office same as usual. Then—wham! Next thing, you guys

are working over me. Whew!" He fingered the lump on his head and groaned again.

"Get him to the hospital," Tremaine said. "Get that head X-rayed. You can never tell about a whack from a gun butt." He rubbed a long finger over his scarred lips reflectively. "I'm going to run up and see the chief."

Ralph Kincaid, Chief Postal Inspector for the New York area, rumpled his white hair. "One man dead and two sapped, you say, Stan?" he asked.

Tremaine nodded. His scarred lips tightened. "And four registered mail sacks worth one hundred and twenty thousand gone!" he added.

Kincaid tugged at the tab of his collar. "Bad!" he said. "Any clues?"

"Not yet," Tremaine said. "I checked with the police on my way up here. There isn't even a fingerprint on the truck! Those lads worked it smooth. They had everything timed to the second. I've got a hunch somebody in the department tipped them off. That shipment was an unusual one. The truck driver says that the man who slugged him looked like Arlen. But we know Arlen was murdered before the truck got there. The tire rolled over one of the blood spots, leaving a print. Now that shows that they had this job well spotted in advance.

"This phony guard must have been waiting only a few moments, when the truck got there. Within five minutes the mail sacks were transferred from the truck, Arlen was pushed into the driver's seat, and the truck was hurtling over the pier into the river! Timing like that doesn't just happen. That was well planned. And somebody in the department flashed the go-ahead signal." Tremaine's masklike face was seamed with a deeply bitten frown.

KINCAID tugged at his collar again and sighed heavily. "I hope you're wrong," he said, "but I'm afraid you're right. I'll have everyone who knew about the shipment

checked.” He eyed the lean Tremaine. “Any hunches, Stan?” he asked.

He knew from long experience that Tremaine’s hunches were based on an almost phenomenal insight into the criminal mind. Tremaine had grown up in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge. He knew why men went bad, and the forces that drove men to crime. He also understood the weak spots at which criminals were likely to strike. His hunches were based on that deep-seated knowledge.

“Not yet,” he said to the chief inspector, “but I’m working on one.” He flexed his long fingers thoughtfully. “I’m working on one,” he said again.

The great clock bell boomed three times, sending great circles of sound washing over the silent city. Stan Tremaine thrust his hands deep into his pockets. The mild day had given way to a sharp chilly night. “Should have worn a topcoat,” Tremaine reflected as he turned his collar up about his muscle-corded neck.

Near the doorway in which he was standing a door opened, spilling a fan of orange light into the deserted street. Two girls came out through the open door.

“Say, are my arches killin’ me,” one said. “It ain’t no cinch peddling cigarettes, I’m tellin’ yuh!”

“Maybe yuh think I got it easy in that little closet,” the other retorted. “Nuthin’ but ‘Check your hat, sir?’ all night long. An’ then the Parson grabs all the tips!” The girl who was speaking broke off when she saw Stan Tremaine lounging in the doorway. Their eyes held for an instant. The girl said, ostensibly to her friend, “Say, I could go a hamburger right now!” She slackened her stride.

Tremaine didn’t move.

With a slight flounce, the girl walked on. “On secon’ thought, I think I’ll pass up the hamburger,” she said peevishly. They walked on, with high heels drumming on the sidewalk.

The door opened again. A tall man, taller even than Stan, ducked his head slightly as he stepped into the street. His shadow in the glow from the door was long and thin. He wore dark clothes and a black Homburg hat. In one hand, he carried an umbrella. He looked like the comic figure the cartoonists formerly used for prohibition. His face was pink and unlined.

“Hello, Parson,” Stan Tremaine said.

The gaunt man turned quickly. “Bless my soul, Stan Tremaine!” he said. His voice was deep and resonant. “Well met, well met,” he beamed at Tremaine. “I’m just locking up for the night,” he said. He produced a well-filled key ring and switched off the light in the hall behind the door. Three locks fastened the door to the Parson’s Night Club. Tremaine waited while the Parson deliberately chose the proper keys and threw the bolts.

“Now, Stan, my boy,” the Parson said, “we must enjoy a little chat together.” He sounded like a benevolent old clergyman. Tremaine knew that the name the “Parson” was singularly deceptive. Stan was not deceived by Kurt Raymond, better known as the “Parson.” He knew the man was a cold, deadly killer beneath his smooth mask.

The Parson took Stan’s arm. “Shall we wend our weary way homeward?” he asked.

“How’d you do tonight, Parson?” Steve asked. His eyes were as hard as jade.

THE Parson didn’t answer for a moment. Their footfalls rang in the silent street. “Why do you ask, Stanley, my lad?” the Parson asked. “Surely you haven’t decided to aid your confreres in the Treasury Department, have you?” He waggled a playful finger at Tremaine.

“Nothing like that,” Tremaine said crisply. “One of our trucks was knocked over. I thought some of the stuff might have found its way to you.”

The footfalls rang on for a long moment. Finally the Parson said, “Go on.”

“There isn’t anything more to tell,” Tremaine said. “The truck was knocked over at twelve tonight.”

“It’s three now,” the Parson said. “Really Stan, the hours you have to work. Why don’t you accept my standing offer to join my enterprises. I could use a man like you.”

Tremaine said, “What about the mail truck job?”

“Well, since you’ve put it so bluntly, what about it, lad, what about it?” the Parson asked innocently.

On the corner, under a light standard, a taxi cab wailed. “Can I drop you anywhere, Stan?” the Parson asked.

“No, I’m going to hop the subway,” Tremaine said. “I want to check with Homicide before I shoot home. Since you won’t talk, I’ll give it up as a bad job!”

“Stanley,” the Parson exclaimed, a happy smile on his benign face, “one of your hunches has misfired. Lo, did I ever think I’d see this day!” The tall, black-clad figure struck his umbrella against the pavement.

Tremaine said, “You can’t always be right, I guess. Good night, Parson.”

The taxi roared away into the night. Tremaine watched it go and shook his head. With his hands thrust deeply into his pockets, he walked toward the subway station three blocks south. His mind was churning with thoughts. One of his hunches had misfired, even as the Parson had said.

The platform was deserted, except for a sleeping drunk, when Tremaine descended the stairs from the street. Stan looked incuriously at the sleeper as he went by. The man’s hat was pulled down over his face. Blubbery snores came from the under the hat. The reek of cheap whisky hung like a visible fog around him. A bottle had slipped from one limp hand to the platform.

Nagging at the back of the postal man’s mind was the thought that his only clue had fizzled out. The case was still up in the air.

Endless minutes dragged by. Deep in the heart of the tunnels, a murmur started. It grew in volume, became a roar, then a thunder. Tremaine watched the swiftly growing headlights appear in the distance.

“Hey! Wake up!” He shook the drunk. “Here’s the train.”

Rousing, the drunk growled, “Awright, I’m comin’, I’m comin’—lemme ‘lone.”

SATISFIED that he had done all he could, the lean detective walked toward the edge of the platform. Rocketing out of the dark tunnel into the station, the train thundered into the lighted platform area.

Suddenly Tremaine received a violent blow in the back; He staggered, fought wildly for his balance with arms windmilling, and plunged to the tracks!

Frantically, the train motorman rammed home his brake lever. Fountains of yellow sparks gushed from the wheels where the brake shoes clamped on the steel. Metal screamed. Blue balls of fire exploded on the third rail where the train contacts slid. The air filled with the odors of hot, tortured metal, ozone, and grease. The train jolted to a halt.

White-faced, the motorman joined the conductor. “I got him,” he gasped. “The brakes wouldn’t catch in time—they wouldn’t catch!”

Together, they jumped down from the platform to the tracks and flashed a light under the train. The motorman’s breathing was harsh. His face had a greasy greenish sheen on it.

“This is the first time I ever had any trouble,” he said. “I hope he ain’t too bad!”

“It wasn’t your fault,” the conductor said. “I saw it all. This guy was pushed over the track!”

“I feel all churny inside,” the motorman said. He leaned against one of the steel girders that supported the roof of the subway and vomited.

The conductor moved along the tracks, flashing his light under the train. "Hey, here he is!" he called.

"Sure," Stan Tremaine said. "You didn't think I'd leave, did you?"

The conductor's eyes bulged. "You're alive!" he exclaimed.

"Well, I'm not a talking ghost, I can assure you," Tremaine said sardonically. "Hold your light so I can get out of here."

The conductor held the light steady. "Watch that third rail," he cautioned. "It's hot."

Carefully, Tremaine slithered his body out from under the train. "Lucky I wiggled into that trough between the rails," he said, "or you boys would be collecting with me with a strainer now!"

The conductor giggled hysterically.

The motorman hurried over. "Whew! Mister," he said, "you gave me a scare. That gent that pushed you over in front of me sure wasn't a friend of yours."

Making their way to the front of the train the three men climbed to the platform where a few late riders waited curiously.

Tremaine wiped some of the black grease and mud from his suit. He ignored the people on the platform. "Wait a minute, will you?" he asked the motorman.

The motorman glanced at his watch. "We're behind schedule now, but a few minutes more won't hurt."

Tremaine went over to the bench on which the drunk had been sitting. The empty bottle still lay where it had when he first passed the drunk. Tremaine used a handkerchief when he delicately picked the bottle up.

THE label was a standard one, Tremaine noticed. He turned the bottle around. A small sticker was pasted on the back. *Tryon Liquor Store, Washington Square*, it read. Tremaine's green eyes lit up.

He wrapped the handkerchief around the bottle and slid it into his coat pocket. Then he

turned to the change agent who had left his little booth to learn what was wrong.

"Did you see a man leave in a hurry a few minutes ago?" Tremaine asked.

"I sure did," the agent said. "Funny thing, he came down here just a few seconds before you did. Business is pretty slack at this time of night, so I noticed both of you. He left in a hurry just as I heard the squeal of the brakes."

"You say you saw him pretty well? Can you give me a description?"

"Sure—he came over to me for change. He was stocky, weighed maybe one-eighty or so, about medium height. He's got a nose that you can't miss. It's got a twist in it. Looked like he had been hit by a pile driver."

"Thanks," Tremaine said. "You remember what you've seen. We may need your testimony." He turned and entered the train. His face was set in hard lines, making it look more than ever like a wrought-iron mask. His lean jaw was clamped tightly. So they wanted to play rough. Well, they had chosen the right man!

Washington Square was silent and deserted at four in the morning. Even the pigeons were roosting in the great arch that dominates the north end of the park. Tremaine's cab rustled under the arch, wound its way through the park, and stopped at the other end.

"This is it," the driver said.

"Fine, wait here. I'll be back," Tremaine said. He had changed his clothes and washed the grease and mud of the subway off his face and hands.

He climbed out of the cab and walked over to the steel grill that protected the show windows of the Tryon Liquor Store. A set of stone steps led up to an ornate wooden door. Tremaine climbed up to the door and found it open. He entered a small vestibule and scanned the bank of push buttons. Finding one reading *Tryon*, he jabbed on it with a long, bony finger. Deep within the building, he could hear a faint insistent ring. He held his

finger in place.

The lock on the inner door buzzed. Tremaine passed through it into a long narrow corridor, broken by painted wooden doors. One of the doors was opened a few inches. A steel chain kept it from opening farther.

“What do you want?” a querulous voice asked. “The store is closed. You can’t get any whisky here.”

Tremaine flashed his wallet at the pajama-clad, sleepy-eyed man. “I’m a federal man,” he said.

Tryon hastily unhooked the chain. “Sorry, Mister,” he said. “So many drunks come by this time of night—you understand.”

Tremaine nodded. He produced the bottle and asked, “This may have been purchased in your store today. Do you remember who bought it?”

Tryon looked at the bottle. “Wait till I get my glasses,” he said. As he walked into the next room, he said over his shoulder, “I don’t know as how I can help you. We sell to so many different people.”

TRYON returned in a moment, wearing black horn-rimmed glasses. “Now, let’s see,” he said, reaching for the bottle. “Say, this is an easy one,” he said. He sniffed at the open end of the bottle and wrinkled his nose distastefully. “Cheap spirits!” he muttered. “Every day for months a man would come into the shop. Always it was ‘One Pint of Old Eagle’—never anything else.

“Then, suddenly, he didn’t come in any more until yesterday. Yesterday, in he comes. ‘One pint of Old Eagle,’ he says. I gave him the bottle. ‘You know,’ he says to me, ‘this is the only place in the city I can get this brand in pints. I want you to send me a pint a day.’ The queer thing is he’s out of this neighborhood entirely. Well, I’m not one to discourage trade—”

Impatiently, Tremaine broke in. “What is the address to which you delivered this stuff?”

“It’s written down. Wait a minute, and I’ll

get it for you,” Tryon said, hurrying away. He returned with a small slip of paper in his hand.

Taking the paper, Tremaine read the address. His eyes crinkled. The green depths sparkled. Tremaine was grinning to himself.

“This clears up everything!” he said. “Thanks!”

The cab roared uptown. As he passed the subway station on which he had almost met his death, Tremaine tipped his hat and smiled bleakly. A block from the station, the cab stopped.

“If I’m not out in five minutes,” Tremaine told the driver, “call this number, and tell the man who answers to get down here in a hurry and bring plenty of friends with him.” He kneaded his knuckles for a second.

“Got you,” the cabby said.

The building had once been yellow brick. But time and dirt had turned it into a muddy brown. A street light splashed against the front of the building, revealing an untidy, rusty fire escape crawling up its face.

Climbing upon a garbage can that stood in front of the building, the tall postal dick balanced himself for a moment. With a heave of powerful leg muscles, he propelled himself upward. His lean fingers fastened on the lower rung of the iron ladder leading down from the fire escape. Pulling himself up to the platform, he quietly began to ascend the iron steps.

Working with infinite caution, he inched a window up and slid into a room. In the darkness he spotted a streak of light, marking the location of a door. Silently, he drifted over to the light and applied his ear to the door.

Low voices mumbled in the room beyond. Tremaine got his .38 out of its holster. He pulled open the door and said, “Hello, boys!” in a flat, mocking voice.

The two men in the room leaped from the chairs on which they had been seated, dropping sheafs of green paper. One, a squat, solid man with a broken nose squealed:

“It’s him! I killed him, but he’s here!”

THE other man, a tall, powerfully built man who still wore a postal guard's uniform, went for the automatic that was strapped to his hip.

Tremaine's .38 spit orange flame. The tall man yelled hoarsely. His sleeve blossomed red over his forearm.

"Face the wall!" Tremaine commanded. He deftly frisked the two, taking their guns. Turning, he surveyed the room. On a circular table under an unshaded lamp, a heap of crisp money was stacked. Empty registered mail sacks were thrown in one corner.

"Nice haul," Tremaine said. "Too bad you won't get to enjoy it."

"And why not, pray tell?" a deep voice asked from the doorway.

Spinning on his heel, Tremaine saw the funereal figure of the Parson. A big automatic was pointed at the detective's middle. Tremaine let his guns drop to the bare floor and raised his hands.

"I suspected the worst, my dear lad," the Parson said, "when I made inquiries as to a man who had been killed in the subway and learned that you escaped without so much as a scratch."

Turning, the Parson said to the squat man, "Bind Larry's arm, Jake. We don't want the boy bleeding to death, do we?" His tone was grave and concerned.

The broken-nosed man, named Jake, asked, "We gonna rub this guy after I do?"

"Why not?" the Parson asked suavely. "Really Stanley, my boy," he said to Tremaine, "you've had a charmed life so far. You gave me quite a start tonight when you came to me. Your hunches are so often correct that I was worried. I had to have you removed." The black-clad Parson shook his thin head. "Unfortunately I chose this bungler to do the job. Naturally, in the limited time I had at my disposal, no other choice was feasible.

"As soon as I learned the job had been bungled, I knew that you'd be on my trail. I

give you credit for great natural sagacity, Stanley. I came here to tell these fools to go under cover, and lo, here you are, gun in hand, running things to suit yourself. You are even better than I thought."

Tremaine's green eyes narrowed. "Killing me won't do you much good, Parson. Finch talked!"

The Parson's narrow face hardened. "You're lying, Tremaine!" he snapped.

"Maybe," Tremaine agreed amiably, "but I guarantee you that you and the boys here will sizzle for this stunt." The detective's eyes crinkled.

The broken-nosed Jake snapped, "I tole ya we shoulda blasted that punk."

"Shut up!" the Parson snapped. His black eyes blazed.

Tremaine turned and took a step backward, placing himself between the Parson and his two henchmen.

The Parson cocked his gun. "One more step, boy, and you'll get a slug in your heart!" he said flatly.

Tremaine said, "Okay, Parson." Both feet were on the wire that connected the lamp to the socket in the baseboard of the wall. He began to flex his long fingers.

"Stop that!" the Parson said irritably.

SWIFTLY, Tremaine kicked his left foot. With a flare of blue sparks, the plug pulled out of its socket. The room went dark.

A drum roll of heavy gunfire churned in the room. A man screamed hoarsely and then went silent.

In the dark stillness, a liquid dripping could be heard.

"Nice try, Parson," Stan Tremaine said. "You've killed one of your own men!"

Once again, shots blasted in the room, pounding eardrums unmercifully.

"Larry?" the Parson whispered. "Jake?"

No one answered. "Jake—Larry! Answer me!" the Parson shouted.

"They're both dead, Parson," Tremaine

mocked, "and I'm coming to get you!" He chuckled as he heard a faint sound.

A gun clicked.

"No use, Parson. I counted, and you've used up all your slugs!" Tremaine said.

Scuffling sounds rose in the black room. "You can't get away, Parson!" Tremaine mocked. "You haven't a chance now!"

Laughing derisively, the Parson asked, "Can't I?" Opening the door, he bolted down the stairs.

Tremaine lit a match and casually examined the two dead men. He could hear the sound of the Parson's footsteps clattering down the linoleum-covered stairs. Deliberately, he inserted the light plug into its socket.

From below, two shots echoed. Tremaine cocked his head. His green eyes crinkled. His hunch was correct!

Kincaid, white-haired Chief of Postal Inspectors, burst into the room. "Stan? Boy, am I glad to see you alive! When we heard those shots, I thought sure they had gotten

you."

"He just killed a few cronies. I'm too tough for them!" Tremaine said lightly. He waved his hand at the mass of money and securities on the table.

"There's the loot!" he said. "You'd better have Finch picked up. He's the one who tipped the Parson off about the shipment."

"That a hunch of yours?" Kincaid asked.

"Well, it was, but the Parson backed it up when he blew his top. You see, when we found Finch alive, I couldn't understand why they hadn't killed him just as they killed Arlen. Leaving the driver alive, I could understand, but not Finch. I frisked him when we were working over him and found a match folder from the Parson's Club. It still wasn't anything concrete, but I decided to check it by contacting the Parson.

"That gent, thinking I was onto him, set his killers on me. This is the result!" He waved a muscular hand about the room and let a rare smile pull at the corners of his scarred mouth.