



*The audience shuddered with delight at the realism of the weird dance—  
without realizing that it was real!*

**T**HE faded velvet curtain swished down on Rinaldi and his Trained Dogs, and was parted again and again, while man and dogs grinned and bowed and the house roared its approval.

“Pretty good start,” commented Chief Inspector Steele, leaning comfortably back in his seat. “If the rest is anything like it, I think we’ll see a pretty good show.”

Frank Mellot, private investigator, nodded in agreement.

“Maybe it’s just as well we couldn’t make that lecture,” he grinned. “I think you’re enjoying this better.”

“I am!”

It wasn’t often that Chief Inspector Steele could take a night off. His work at

Police Headquarters as head of the Homicide Bureau usually kept him at his desk anytime up to midnight. Occasionally, however, he would feel the need of a little relaxation, and when he did nothing pleased him better than an evening in the company of his old friend and rival in criminology, Frank Mellot.

He looked around the crowded theater now in great contentment. He liked music and lights and people. The Winter Garden was a complete change after weeks of undiluted criminal investigation.

“What’s next, Frank?” he asked, as the lights began to dim.

“Dorlo and Petite,” Frank Mellot read from the program. “In their Amazing Dance of Death. First Appearance in Chicago.” He

looked up and his eyes twinkled at his friend. "First appearance in Chicago. Somebody you haven't got on your records."

"Oh, shut up about records," the inspector growled in mock disgust. "Can't you let me forget 'em for an hour?"

The orchestra struck up a gay rustic dance. The rising curtain disclosed a lovely forest scene, warm with sunshine and gay with flowers. A nymph, slight and fragile, danced gracefully in the sunlight, her white limbs flashing among the trees.

It was Petite, seeming almost a child, slender as a young sapling. Yet her art had not been learned in a year and a day. Her every movement showed a rare perfection in technique. The house sat silent, approving.

Soon a sound of pipes was heard and a faun peered around a tree. The nymph glimpsed him and ran in sudden fear. But his legs were long and his muscles strong. Soon he held her, fluttering in his arms.

The music sank to a deeper, soberer measure. All the world knows the way of a faun with a nymph. The two danced together, and in the dance was expressed a wooing more passionate than any that could be conveyed by words.

"I'm surprised they haven't censored this," murmured the inspector, who went to church on Sundays.

His friend didn't hear him. Surprised to find such beauty and poetry of motion in that second-rate theater, he sat silent and entranced.

THE nymph blushed and protested, hesitated—and was lost. The imperious call of nature sounded in her ears and she yielded. Together the two lovers whirled in a wild bacchanale, sinking to rest on a grassy mound as the exotic music died away to complete silence.

Dusk now enfolded the sleeping pair. Strange eerie sounds from the orchestra became audible. There was an atmosphere of

tense expectancy. A curious stillness fell on the packed auditorium.

From beneath a tree, a thin, writhing shape detached itself. The serpent—primordial sin. In the dusk its two eyes were glittering balefully. An angry hissing was heard, and a scraping of scales as it glided toward the lovers.

Once, twice, it struck with a hideous rattling sound. Then squirmed its way back to its hiding place, while the blackness of night descended over the forest.

A deep note on the double-brass twanged twelve times—midnight. From the orchestra came floating the weird, diabolically gay strains of Saint-Saens' "Danse Macabre," that wildly imaginative tone-poem depicting the dance of mortal remains dragged by occult powers from the grave.

A strange, purplish light glowed on the stage. As it grew stronger, a shuddering whisper ran through the audience. The smiling woodland was gone. The background now represented a graveyard. And when the two shadows that had once been lovers rose and moved into the light, it could be seen that they were now no more than grisly, gesticulating skeletons.

"Darned clever, that!" the inspector murmured prosaically. "Nothing's been changed. How's it done?"

"A special kind of luminous paint," replied Mellot. "It's almost invisible in ordinary light, but shows up clearly in this purplish light, which is not bright enough to illuminate the original scene and costumes. I've seen it used several times before—but never as effectively as this."

Morbid the scene was, perhaps, but strangely tense and gripping. The art of the dancers held the spectators spellbound, assisted in no small measure by the magic of the music.

Bones rattled and chains clanked. Deep sighs and groans issued from the

yawning graves. The two skeletons reeled and tottered to a repulsive, ghoulish measure. The gruesome fidelity of the illusion was sickening.

"It's clever, but it's horrible," murmured Mellot. "I don't think they should allow it. A nervous child might—"

He broke off as something happened on the stage, something too fast for him to catch in all its details. But a moment later he and all the rest of the audience became aware that a third actor had appeared, vaguely outlined in the shadows.

The dim figure was not on the stage, but suspended a few feet above it. It was dancing wildly, grotesquely, in the obscurity.

The music faltered. The light grew stronger. Suddenly a scream rang through the tense, silent auditorium, a loud piercing scream that chilled the blood. For a few seconds everybody in the theater could see that the suspended figure was that of a man, hanging by the neck, his head curiously twisted. Even as they watched, his jerky, convulsive movements ceased, and he hung motionless except for a slight swaying. The two skeletons, close beside him, seemed frozen to immobility.

The curtain swished down. A burst of hysterical laughter came from the orchestra, and a woman fainted. A long shuddering sigh of relief swept through the rows of seats as the lights went up. Then thunderous applause burst out.

"Darned clever!" the inspector said again. "You'd almost think that hanging was real. I wonder how— Why, what the—"

THE seat next to him was vacant. Looking quickly around he caught sight of Frank Mellot making for the door that led from the orchestra to the stage. Without hesitation, he hurried after his friend.

"What bit you, Frank?" he grinned, catching up with him at the door. "Trying to

find out how the hanging was faked?"

"No, old pal," Mellot answered seriously. "The hanging wasn't faked. What I want to find out is what made that poor devil jump to his death at just that psychological moment."

Admission to the stage was at first denied to them, but when the inspector revealed his identity they were allowed to pass. Behind the faded velvet curtain they found an anxious group clustered around the body of a man who had already been cut down from the swaying rope.

"You're right, Frank," muttered the inspector. "Something's gone wrong." He moved toward the huddling group. "Now, what's been going on here?"

A big burly red-faced man, together with a couple of stage hands, was desperately trying artificial respiration on the limp body. He rose to his feet at the interruption.

"Who are you?" he snapped.

"Chief Inspector Steele from Headquarters."

"Sorry, Inspector. I'm a little upset. I'm Richardson, stage manager. It's an awful business. I'm afraid he's gone. But keep at it, boys. Give him every chance."

"How did it happen?" asked the inspector.

"Heaven knows. Nobody saw anything or heard anything. Then suddenly he was hanging at the end of that rope."

"Who is he?"

"One of the stage hands. Brown's his name. A quiet, reserved kind of fellow. Been with us about three months."

Frank Mellot knelt down to examine the body.

"No use trying to revive him," he said at once. "His neck's broken." He carefully examined the abrasion of the skin made by the rope, then rose to his feet. "Nobody saw how it happened, you say?"

"Apparently not. There's lots of men

around. If they had seen anything they'd be here. I doubt if anybody knows but ourselves."

"What about the performers?"

The two dancers were standing close by, looking on uncomfortably. Both were dressed in white tights on which, as on their faces, the luminous painted bones could be faintly discerned.

"I heard a sort of swishing noise," said the girl. She was young and pretty and undeniably frightened. "I thought some prop had come down. Then I caught sight of him, hanging there—kicking."

"Was it you who screamed?" asked Mellot.

"Yes. I—it was such a shock."

"I'll bet it was," sympathized the stage manager. "No wonder you were scared, Miss Petite. Especially when it happened during an act like yours. Nerves all on edge, you know. I don't know what struck that poor devil to kill himself that way."

"I don't know why he should have picked our act to do it in," grumbled Dorlo. He was a big muscular fellow, but as scared as the girl. The quivering of his eyelids and the twitching of his mouth showed that his nerves had been shaken. "It messed up the whole thing," he added.

"I don't think it hurt your act any," the stage manager said dryly. From behind the curtain came the thunder of applause, completely drowning the efforts of the orchestra. "They think it was just part of your act. Better take a bow."

HE PUSHED the two dancers toward the curtain. While they stood in front of it acknowledging the plaudits of the unsuspecting audience, the stagehand's body was carried into a dressing-room and the stage prepared for the next act.

"Funny business," Frank Mellot mused, standing with the inspector and the stage manager in the wings.

"Darned funny," agreed the inspector, chewing at his cigar. "The man must have been crazy."

"Might have been a lot worse for us," the stage manager said practically. "Lucky the audience took it as they did. We can go right on with the show as if nothing had happened. Will you gentlemen excuse me now?"

"Sure!" Mellot replied. "Do you mind if I have a look around while I'm here, Mr. Richardson?"

"Not at all—help yourself. Anywhere you want. I might see you a little later."

News of the tragedy had spread behind the scenes, and men were clustered around, staring at the empty stage. Richardson was bustling among them, sending them about their jobs, and the busy hive resumed its normal activities.

Dorlo and Petite came back to the wings as the orchestra struck up for their next turn. The girl still looked frightened. The man's nervousness had given way to annoyance.

"We'll be in a fine spot if the audience expects a hanging every night now," he grumbled. "Why the devil didn't he—"

"Maybe his mind was affected by your act," interrupted Mellot. "It's something of a nightmare, you know."

"Let me tell you, sir, that it's Art."

"Undoubtedly." Mellot wrinkled his nose. "But why do you use luminous paint that smells so awful?"

"I don't know that it's any of your business," the dancer retorted truculently.

"Oh, don't start fussing, Carlos," interrupted the girl, laying her hand on his arm. "We've had enough to upset us for one night. Let's go back to the dressing room."

Dorlo allowed himself to be led away. The inspector stared at his friend in surprise.

"You're not very pleasant tonight, Frank," he observed. "Why the rudeness?"

"A little safety-valve," Mellot grinned.

“I must be rude to somebody. I’m worried.”

“About—”

“About this Danse Macabre business. I want to find out why Brown performed it just while friend Dorlo’s act was on. Did you notice the rope he hung from?”

“Can’t say I did.”

“Let’s go and look for it. That is, if you’re sufficiently interested.”

The inspector was sufficiently interested. He knew Frank Mellot well enough to know there was something in the wind. He also knew that questions would be useless at present, so he followed his friend in silence.

IT WAS a bizarre experience, to be searching for a rope by which a man had just hung himself, while a comedian sang and joked within a few feet of them. Mellot, however, moved about in the confined space among the scenery without comment. The rope, of course, had been pulled up and tied somewhere. The simplest way of getting at it was to find the man who had tied it out of the way.

They found him eventually, a fussy, bespectacled little man, very full of his own importance because he had been a friend of Brown. His name was Smith.

“Yes, sir, I can show you the very rope,” he said at once. “If you’ll come this way I’ll take you right to it.”

He led them up a steep flight of wooden stairs to the flies. At the top of the stairs Mellot stood for a moment looking down on the comedian prancing in the limelight below.

“Tidy drop for a man with a rope tied around his neck,” he murmured. “It’s a wonder it didn’t yank his head off.”

“He was making sure of it, that’s what,” said Smith. “It must have been a terrible disappointment to him.”

“What must have been a disappointment?”

“Well, you see, he was expecting to

meet an old friend—some old pal of his he hadn’t seen in a long time, and who was supposed to have made a lot of money. This guy Brown wasn’t very strong, and this job was too hard on him. He told me about some business he had in mind, something that’d be just right for him, if he could only get a little capital. He was counting on his pal to help him for old times’ sake.”

“And didn’t he?”

“I don’t know. But it looks like he didn’t, don’t it?”

“You mean that Brown committed suicide because he was disappointed?”

“That’s it,” Smith agreed eagerly.

“That’s what I mean. I think what happened, his pal turned him down, and in desperation Brown killed himself.”

“He didn’t happen to tell you the name of this friend of his, by any chance?”

“No, he didn’t.”

“And you didn’t see anybody around the theater who might have filled the bill?”

“No; nobody.”

“H’m,” said Mellot, watching the little man sharply. “Thanks for your opinion. Now show us the rope, will you?”

While Mr. Smith stood by with eager, goggling eyes, the two friends examined the rope.

“Here is the end that was cut,” observed Mellot. “What interested me was this apparently useless piece tied just above the noose.” He indicated a three-foot length of rope, one end of which was hastily knotted to the long rope, while the other end, hanging loose, was blackened and charred. “That’s a queer thing, isn’t it?” he mused.

“It certainly is,” agreed the inspector, puzzled. “What does it mean?”

“It means we got to find another rope-end similarly charred. Then we’ll know—What was this long rope for, Smith?”

“Just a spare. It’s tied near the roof, as you can see.”

“And the lower end would be fastened—where?”

“I can’t say. It could have been slung over a hook anywhere.”

“We’ll have a look around. You don’t know anything about this short, added piece, I suppose?”

“No, I don’t.”

“All right, thank you. Don’t let us keep you from your work.”

MR. SMITH departed reluctantly. The comedian’s act was over and there was considerable activity on the stage below in preparation for the “star”—an illusionist. Mellot glanced thoughtfully around the theater, then grinned at the inspector.

“Let’s potter around downstairs,” he suggested. “Damn interesting, isn’t it?”

The inspector grunted.

“It might be if you weren’t so darn secretive,” he complained. “Looks to me like you got something up your sleeve.”

“I have,” admitted Mellot. “And that charred rope put it there. Come on.”

They wandered around the congested wings, trying to avoid getting in the way of the stage hands. The illusionist was occupying the whole of the available stage space, and there was very little room for moving around. Eventually the two friends found themselves in a quiet little backwater, a kind of niche in which scenery was stored.

There they were well out of the rush and bustle, hidden from the rest of the stage by the backdrop. During the few minutes they stood there, listening to the patter of the illusionist, nobody came near them.

“Nice peaceful little spot,” Mellot said. “I wouldn’t be surprised if—”

His attention was caught by some “pigeon-hole” steps in the wall, which led up to a platform built against the back wall of the theater, well above the flies. Laying his head against the woodwork, he gazed upward. A

flicker of excitement showed for a moment in his eyes.

“Looks like the scene-painter’s den,” he said. “Let’s go and see.”

Followed by the inspector, he climbed up the steps to the platform. As he had expected, it was the studio of the scenery painter. Stretched on the wall was a large half-finished drop-scene. A big table in front of it was littered with brushes and pots of paint.

But there was something else on the table. At the extreme edge stood a lighted candle; and lying among the paint-pots near it was a short length of rope, one end of which was fastened to a staple in the wall.

Mellot picked up the other end and showed it to the inspector. It was blackened and charred.

“This is where Brown started his last dance,” he remarked.

The inspector nodded. “Looks like it. Evidently the candle burned through the rope. I don’t see just how it worked, though.”

They moved to the edge of the platform and looked over. Far below they could see the illusionist performing some complicated trick. The edge of the platform was guarded by a rail, but there was plenty of room for anyone to slip through.

“I still can’t see what that burned rope has to do with it,” said the inspector.

“Can’t you?” Mellot murmured absently, looking eagerly around. “It seems to me that—”

His eyes lit up as he caught sight of a pad of drawing-paper on one end of the table. He blew out the candle and, holding it gingerly by the wick, dipped it into a fire bucket. Then he tore off a sheet of the drawing-paper and carefully rolled it around the wet candle.

“Let’s climb down again,” he said briskly, stowing the package in his pocket. “I want to see the end of the magician’s act.”

CONSIDERABLY puzzled and perturbed, the

inspector followed him down the pigeon-hole steps and over to the wings. There they found Dorlo and Petite, in dressing-gowns, talking to the stage manager.

"I've been looking all over for you two," said the burly stage manager. "The police doctor is here and a couple of policemen. They thought you wanted to see them, Inspector."

"I'll have a word with them," the inspector nodded. "Coming, Frank?"

"No, thanks. I want to see the end of this act. I'll wait here for you."

The inspector hurried away, rather surprised. The others turned their attention to the stage.

"I'm something of a magician myself," Mellot explained. "Ever seen this one, Mr. Richardson?"

He drew a battered cigarette-case and a handkerchief from his pocket.

"Not much of a case," he admitted, rubbing it on his sleeve. "But it'll do for the trick. Just examine it, please, to see there's no fake about it."

He handed the case to Dorlo, who turned it over casually without showing the faintest interest.

"It's the quickness of the hand that deceives the eye," Mellot went on in the best professional manner. "Kindly place the case in this handkerchief."

He held out the handkerchief to receive the case, wrapped it up and made a few rapid movements of his hands.

"Hey, presto!" he murmured. "It's gone!"

It was gone. Gone most obviously and clumsily into his pocket. A fumbling, foolish trick that wouldn't have deceived a child.

Dorlo winked at Petite.

"You'll have to ask Mr. Richardson for an engagement," he told the amateur magician.

"Oh, I can do lots of better things than

that," cried Mellot. "I'll show you one that—"

"No, thanks," said Dorlo hurriedly. "We got a little practicing to do. Sorry we can't stay."

He dragged the girl away toward the dressing-rooms. Mellot grinned at the stage manager.

"Ask them out to supper, will you?" he requested.

"Well—er—I don't—"

"It's all right, old man. I don't like asking them myself. I'm rather shy. But I was very much impressed by their act and I want both you and them to join me at supper after the last show. Inspector Steele'll be there too."

Inspector returned at that moment. He was always ready to back up any request of his friend, though he didn't understand the reason for it. And after a little urging, Richardson agreed to go along, too.

"That's settled then," said Mellot briskly. "Eleven o'clock sharp. And now I think some fresh air would do me good."

"What the deuce are you after now?" asked the inspector when they were out in the street.

"I'm after a taxi," Mellot replied, hailing one at the same time. "Police Headquarters—quick!" he instructed the driver, then sank back in the seat with a sigh of relief.

"Well, I'll be damned!" grumbled the inspector. "I thought we were having a night out. What do you want Headquarters for?"

"Records."

"Records? Why, do you think there's something fishy about that suicide?"

"It does smell a little. I'm interested in that rich friend of Brown."

"You're suggesting he was—"

"Murdered? I rather think I am, old pal."

"Good Lord! But why? How?"

"Don't you know?"

"I most certainly don't. This is one

time I think you're wrong, Frank. Why should anybody pick such a hard way of murdering a man? And in front of all those people! Why the dickens should anybody want to commit murder in public? There was no row, no signs of any struggle, and a man doesn't let himself be hanged without making some kind of fuss. I can't imagine two men fighting on that high platform without attracting some attention."

"Neither can I."

"Well, how—oh, hell! It's no use talking when you're like that. At least tell me why you asked those dancers and Richardson out to supper."

"To show 'em some magic tricks," grinned Mellot.

The inspector frowned; but a moment later he burst into a roar of laughter. It was no use being annoyed with his friend. He had known Frank Mellot long enough to know he wouldn't talk until he was ready. And that would be when he was sure of all his facts.

At Police Headquarters he found some work awaiting him. Interested and curious though he was, he handed Mellot over to the officer on duty in the record department, and was kept busy in his own office for an hour.

At the end of that time Mellot appeared very cheerful and pleased with himself.

"Just time to keep our appointment, old pal," he said. "Are you ready?"

"Yes. I guess I'll have to go along. Found what you wanted?"

"More than I hoped for," replied Mellot.

He was silent as they rode back to the Winter Garden. The inspector asked no more questions. He was puzzled, but he felt that something was due to happen very soon.

THE show was just over when they reached the theater. Richardson was waiting in his little office near the stage, and in a few minutes the two dancers joined them.

"It's very nice of you to invite us out to supper," said Dorlo, rubbing his hands. "We can both go for a good meal, eh, Petite?"

The girl nodded without speaking. Her face looked pale and tired. She was still rather upset by the tragedy of the evening.

"I'm afraid I've misled you all," said Mellot. "I asked the three of you to supper just to be sure I'd find you all here when I got back. Did you know I was a prophet, Mr. Dorlo?"

There was a grave, almost menacing tone in his voice. The dancer, obviously surprised, lost his friendliness.

"As well as a magician?" he sneered.

"A better prophet than a magician."

"That's not saying much. What are you predicting now?"

"I'm predicting that you won't dance again for several months. That you'll be ordered to appear before an unfriendly audience. And that your next and final performance will not last more than a few seconds."

Dorlo stared at him open-mouthed.

"What the hell are you talking about? Are you crazy?"

"No, I'm not crazy. I mean just this—that my friend Inspector Steele will now proceed to arrest you; that in due course you will be brought to trial for the murder of one Brown, stage hand; and that when the prescribed time has elapsed after your trial, you will give an imitation of his *Danse Macabre* on the scaffold."

For a while nobody spoke. There was a dead silence in the little office. The girl shrank back, her face white and terrified. The stage manager looked on, amazed. The inspector, equally surprised but ready for action, watched Dorlo closely. The man was still staring at Mellot as if hypnotized.

The stage door clanged to as the last of the performers left the theater. The noise startled the dancer and stirred him to protest.



"I—I knew you were crazy," he managed to say, licking his lips. "Brown committed suicide, and you know it."

"He was murdered," Mellot corrected.

"All right, even if he was murdered, how could I have had anything to do with it? I was on stage dancing at the time it happened. Everybody in the theater can swear to that."

"He was murdered *before* he was hanged."

"That's a good one!" Dorlo was recovering his self-possession. "Who do you think's going to believe a story like that?"

"The judge—and the jury. Listen—I'm going to tell you exactly what they'll hear, and you can correct me if I'm wrong."

MELLOT motioned to the Inspector to stand behind the dancer. He himself moved a step to one side, so as to block the way to the door.

"In the Fall of 1930," he continued, "a small branch bank on the outskirts of this city was held up to the tune of six thousand dollars by two young bandits in a stolen car." Apparently he didn't notice the sudden tenseness of Dorlo's face. "It was a very slick job, considering that both bandits were green at the game—and they would probably have got away with it if one of them—the bigger and tougher of the two—didn't decide to keep the whole swag for himself. And how he worked that was to chuck his pal out of the car after they had driven just a little way from the bank, so that the little guy, besides losing out on the dough, was caught by the police who were chasing them.

"It seems," Mellot went on, "that the little guy—whose name was Brown, by the way—turned State's evidence—and can you blame him? And so he got off with a light sentence—three years in Joliet. What happened to the other bandit? Well, they never caught him, and that in spite of the fact they knew his name—which was Jordan, by the way, Cliff Jordan—and had full descriptions

of him which they sent all over the country. But, of course, it would never occur to the average policeman to look for his man on the professional stage. Because, after all, it isn't every day that a bank-robber turns eccentric dancer—and a darn good dancer. It was a mighty good disguise, and a safe enough refuge as long as he didn't get into any more trouble—because the last thing he ever expected was to run into his old pal Brown, and certainly never as he found him when he did, working as a stage hand in the very theater he was to appear for the first time." Mellot turned abruptly to the girl. "I suppose you knew all about this? I'm afraid—"

"She didn't know!" snapped Dorlo. "You can leave her out of it."

"Thanks," said Mellot seriously. "I'm glad to know that."

"Then this man's a bank robber—a fugitive from justice?" asked Richardson.

"Well, you heard him admit it, didn't you?"

"I'm not afraid of admitting that," cried Dorlo. "How in hell you found it out so quick I don't know. I guess you can prove it all right, so it's no use denying it. But you can't prove I killed Brown."

"Oh, yes, I can. You killed him in that niche where they keep that scenery at the back of the stage."

"That's what you say."

"Yes, and I can prove it. Why you killed him, of course, is obvious—because even if he hadn't been trying to blackmail you, you'd still want him out of the way just to be on the safe side."

"What a wonderful imagination you got! And how *did* I kill him? He wasn't shot or stabbed or anything. With my bare hands, I guess."

"Exactly. You broke his neck by hitting him with the side of your hand, one of the more advanced ju-jitsu tricks. That particular blow leaves a very characteristic

bruise on the back of the neck. The noose around Brown's neck was so knotted that it chafed the skin of his neck at the front and sides, but left the back untouched. As soon as I saw the bruise I knew that he was dead before he was hanged."

DORLO'S thin lips were twitching, but he tried to keep calm.

"He may have been killed the way you say," he said, "but that doesn't mean I did it. Who saw it done? Why should you think I did it?"

"I don't think; I know. There was a faint but unmistakable odor about Brown's clothes. I didn't know what it was until I smelled that paint you use in your act, and then I guessed right away that you must have had a share in Brown's Danse Macabre. You see, after killing him you had to work fast—and that's probably why you left so many clues. Because your scheme was clever—I'll give you credit for that—and it might have worked too, if, as I said, you hadn't been so careless in carrying it out. You left traces of your paint on Brown's clothes when you hoisted him over your shoulder; you left more traces on the woodwork of the pigeon-hole steps as you carried him up to the scene-painter's cubby-hole, which you knew would be deserted at that hour. I could smell your progress without any trouble at all.

"When you got him on the platform you took a spare rope hanging from the roof and tied it around his neck. You tied a shorter

rope just above the noose, and fastened the other end of it to a staple on the wall. The result was that when you pushed Brown over the edge of the platform, he hung in midair a couple of feet below it, prevented from dropping down by the shorter rope.

"That passed over the table at a very convenient height. All you had to do now was to take one of the emergency candles from the shelf, stand it on the table under the rope and light it. You hurried back down to the stage ready to go on for your act—and the rope burned through in time to bring your victim down in the middle of your dance."

Despite all his efforts, Dorlo couldn't keep still. His mouth was writhing and twitching. His shifty eyes were flickering furtively from side to side.

"Lies! All lies!" he cried hoarsely. "Nothing but a lot of wild guesses! D'you think they can hang a man just because of a smell of paint?"

"No, I don't," Mellot agreed. "I was just telling you why I suspected you. For the judge and jury there's a little something else. The local police have fingerprints of Cliff Jordan, wanted for bank robbery—you see, even then you were careless. And I have right here on my cigarette-case fingerprints of Dorlo the dancer. On the candle that burned the rope is a third set of prints, carefully preserved. And all those prints are identical! So I'm afraid, Jordan, you'll dance just like Brown did."