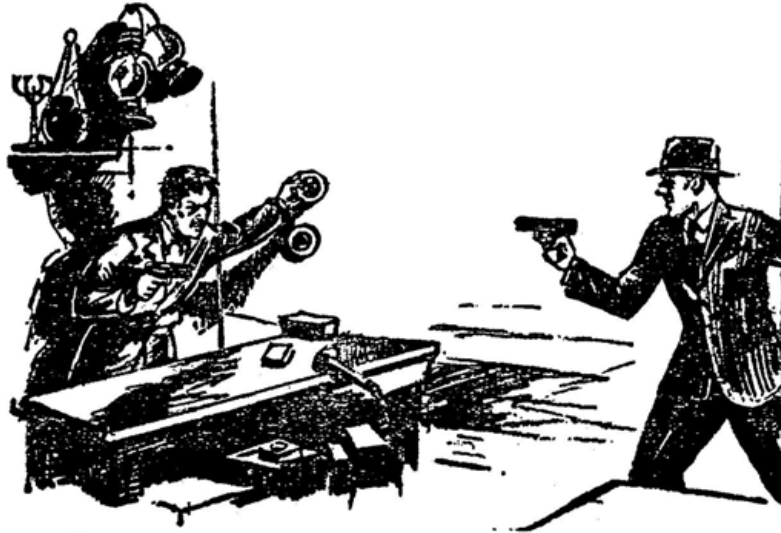


Hidden Evidence

by H. Ralph Goller



“Not a sound out of you,” he hissed, pistol covering the man half out of his chair.

Five times Peter Starr’s attempts to escape from San Quentin had been thwarted. His sixth attempt could not fail. For the next prisoner to die would bring his freedom.

“LUKE PARKINSEN, you’ve framed me. Some day I’ll come back and make you pay.” Five years ago Peter Starr had stood up in the court room and said those words to the district attorney who prosecuted him. Five long years that were like centuries behind gray prison walls, but the words burned as clearly in Peter Starr’s mind today as they had the day he uttered them.

Five years and Peter had tried unsuccessfully to escape five times. Once every year he attempted to hurtle those gray walls of San Quentin and return and make Luke Parkinsen pay. Five times he had been thwarted. Five times he had been shot by an alert guard and sent to the prison hospital in a critical condition. Four times he had recovered, determined that the next time he would escape. But he never had. Would he the sixth?

“Six was always my lucky number, Mike.

If you’ll help me—I’ll make it this time. It’s an air-tight scheme. I can’t lose. And you—”

“An’ me,” whispered the emaciated skeleton of a man in the adjoining bed. “I’m dyin’. Got two—three days to live yet, the Doc told me. Mebbe I’ll kick off tonight. Just another victim of T. B.”

“That’s what makes the scheme air-tight. They always believe a dying man. You were in Los Angeles when I was sent up. You were even arrested as a suspect. By the time my busted hip gets well, I’ll be a free man. Of course, it’s a lot to ask of a man.”

“A lot, hell!” wheezed the dying convict. He tried to laugh and started coughing. When he had stifled his wracking coughs, he lay panting for a minute, then continued. “It ain’t much. I’d do most anything to help a friend. I’m a bad man, Pete. I’ve murdered people—I’ve robbed ’em—done everything. Now I’m dyin’. I don’t care what happens after I’m dead.”

“Then you’ll do it?”

“Yeah, I’d do more if I could, just to get a last crack at th’ damned law that made me what I am—an’ Luke Parkinsen. Don’t worry. Pete. I’ll tell ’em a story that’ll make their souls cringe, damn ’em. You’ve been my friend fear years now. Th’ only friend I ever had.”

“Shhhh! Here comes the screw,” warned Peter Starr.

The attendant paused between the two beds. He glanced down at Peter. “Five times you’ve been shot trying to escape. Takes a long time for some convicts to learn they can’t escape. Anyway, you’ll remember this time. You’ll be lame the rest of your life.”

When Peter continued to stare at the ceiling, he turned to Mike Shabin. The dying convict was breathing with difficulty. Each breath threatened to be his last.

“The chaplain,” gasped Mike. “I’d like to see th’ chaplain. Wanta make a confession. Don’t wanta die till I do.”

“Want to make peace with God before you kick off, eh?” grunted the wooden-faced attendant. “It won’t keep the devil from getting you, but I’ll send the chaplain around. Time to take you to the death row, anyway.”

“Good-by, Pete,” Mike whispered, as the attendant moved away. “I’ll do my best.”

“Good-by, Mike. I’ll never forget you. God bless you!”

Two prison nurses came then and Mike Shabin was wheeled away. Peter Starr lay staring at the ceiling. All the hatred, the bitter gall of injustice, welled to the surface. Five years of living hell. Five years for a crime he had not committed. It was no wonder that Peter Starr had gone a little mad when the steel gates closed behind him. No wonder he had tried to escape—to return and make the man who framed him pay.

“Luke Parkinsen!” he breathed the words in a silent whisper, a grim smile twitching at his lips. “You murdered my uncle and made me the goat. It took me two years to realize

that, but you’re gonna pay.”

HOW poignant was the memory of his murdered uncle. He had quarreled with Sam Starr one day. The next day he had returned to ask forgiveness, only to find his uncle dying in a welter of his own blood. Sam had tried to talk, to tell Peter who shot him, but only two words passed his lips before the grim hand of death claimed him. Then Luke Parkinsen had entered with the chief of police. That entrance was not a coincidence, but Peter had not realized it at the time.

Luke Parkinsen. The very name nauseated him, filled his soul with burning hatred. Parkinsen had demanded his arrest. He had proved to the court that Peter was the murderer of his uncle. How well he had proved it. He had proved that the bullet which killed Sam Starr had been fired from Peter’s gun. He used Peter’s quarrel for the motive. And Peter, he had been unable to prove his innocence. Far from it. Shocked at the fate that had crashed down upon him, he had completely forgotten the two words his uncle had gasped out. It wouldn’t have done him any good had he remembered then. Parkinsen would have seen to that. But after two years in prison, Peter had recalled the two words. He had guessed at their meaning—the prompt appearance of Parkinsen. He realized Parkinsen had committed the crime. Why, he did not know, but he was going to return and then—

Peter let his mind drift back to Mike Shabin and his scheme to escape. Hour after hour he lay staring at the ceiling, thinking, scheming with a mind sharpened to a razor edge by five years of prison life. The hours lengthened into days. His bullet-shattered hip was mending nicely. Another week and he would be up and hobbling around on crutches. Two months and he would be as well as he ever would be.

Those three months passed swiftly for

Peter. He was back in his cell again. Still there was no word of Mike Shabin. But Peter only smiled to himself. Mike, of course, was dead and buried—forgotten by this time. Yet Peter knew that Mike had not failed him. Only the law could fail him.

But the law did not fail him. A week after he returned to his cell, he was called before the warden.

“Peter Starr, I have good news for you,” said Warden Ackley, smiling. “The governor has granted you an unconditional pardon.”

Peter’s eyebrows lifted in surprise, but that was the only sign that he had heard.

“Possibly you would like to know how this came about,” the warden went on. “One of the men arrested as a suspect at the time you were arrested died in this prison about ten weeks ago. Mike Shabin was his name. Possibly you remember him. Just before he died he confessed to robbing and murdering Sam Starr. I sent his confession to the governor. This pardon is his answer.”

He held out the pardon to Peter. Peter grasped it with fingers which trembled a little. There was a wry smile trying mightily to form on his lips, but couldn’t.

Pardoned! The fruit of his scheming. It was his day to laugh, but he didn’t laugh. Not Peter Starr. No one must ever know that Mike Shabin had died with a lie on his lips—no one must ever know that he, Peter Starr, had coached Mike Shabin into making that confession. It was Peter’s secret, his escape from behind gray walls.

“I can appreciate your many attempts to escape. Five years in prison for a crime you never committed.” The warden shook his head sadly. “A terrible miscarriage of justice. I cannot blame you if you are bitter with the law. You have a right to be. You must try to forget, though. You are an American citizen again—a free man. You have had a terrible setback, but you must not judge the law too harshly. You still have many years before you.”

Peter nodded slowly. “I have no complaint against you, the prison, or the law,” he said, meeting the warden’s sympathetic eyes. “It was just a miscarriage of justice, as you say.”

“That’s the spirit,” the warden said. “You’ll get much out of life.”

AN hour later Peter Starr left the penitentiary. His head was up and his lean shoulders were squared and there was a light of triumph in his eyes. The taxi at the penitentiary gate took him to San Rafael. He stepped out of the cab and disappeared—vanished completely from the world.

But though he had vanished to the world at large, Peter Starr did not for a moment forget the man who had framed him. Five years ago he was no match for the witty Luke Parkinsen, but now— His mind was as keen as a razor. He was capable of matching wits with the cleverest of the clever.

No one who had known Peter Starr before he was sent to prison could have recognized him as the shabbily dressed tramp shuffling along the highway in a limping walk. His once black hair was now a dirty gray. The once broad shoulders were shrunken and bent as if they had carried a great burden for many years. The once handsome, laughing, reckless face was lined, shrunken. The dark eyes that once danced with the joy of living were now puckered and squinting. His skin was brown and dried out.

Peter had not made the mistake of returning to Los Angeles too soon. He had deposited some money in a San Rafael bank before he entered the penitentiary. He drew it out and from San Rafael he had journeyed south and disappeared into the wastelands of the Mohave Desert until such time as the prison pallor had left his skin—until his muscles were like steel. Luke Parkinsen was a treacherous snake and he was taking no chances of being recognized.

Luke Parkinsen was no longer district attorney. Several questionable cases had lost

him his prestige and he had been defeated for reelection at the polls. But he was still to be feared. He would know that Mike Shabin's confession was a lie. Fear for his own safety would cause him to plot against the freedom of Peter Starr.

Peter realized that his precautions were justified the moment he reached Los Angeles. He had hardly reached the city before a car rolled up to him and two sharp-eyed police officers looked him over. Peter smiled to himself as the police car rolled away. The cops were looking for a young man with black hair and dark brown eyes.

"Luke ain't taking any chances," he mused, as he plodded on. "He's got the bulls watching for me. I'll bet he's got all my old haunts watched. I'll have to be careful."

But Peter had no fear of being recognized. Parkinsen was the only man he feared. Neither did he worry about the cops that he was certain were watching his old home, or rather his uncle's old house on West Third Street. There were things about the old house that neither Parkinsen nor the police knew.

He boarded a street car and rode through the business district and alighted two blocks from his old home. He entered a small secondhand clothing store, bought a shabby handbag and a change of clothes. Then he walked cautiously down the street until he was opposite Sam Starr's old house. He didn't glance across the street at the old house, but instead stepped into a tiny café. From the café he could watch the house and spot the dicks watching it.

He ordered his supper and sat down at the table nearest the window. His steak arrived after a few minutes and he began to eat, but with one eye on the house across the street. The house appeared to be about the same as when he had last seen it. And it was vacant. Peter was glad it was. Until he had settled accounts with Parkinsen, he would live at the old house. After that he would fix it up a little and sell it, together with the rest of the

property he had inherited from his uncle. After that he would go to some other state and begin life over.

Just as he finished his dessert, a Packard coupe rolled to a stop before the house. Peter caught his breath. Luke Parkinsen got out of the car and glanced at two men standing in a doorway. When the men shook their head in answer to Parkinsen's inquiring glance, the ex-district attorney nodded his head, walked up the steps, produced a key, and entered the house.

Peter frowned, then chuckled to himself. He suddenly knew why the house was vacant. Parkinsen had seen to it that it remained vacant. There was something hidden in the house that he wanted—something Sam Starr had hidden. The fact that Parkinsen was entering the house was proof that he had not found what he was looking for.

"And he won't find it," Peter soliloquized. "I'll just give him a scare."

Peter didn't know what it was Parkinsen was looking for, but he did know that if Parkinsen had business at the house that business concerned the murder of Sam Starr. It also concerned Peter Starr.

PETER picked up his bag, paid his check and sauntered out on the street picking his teeth. Walking to the corner, he crossed the street and turned down toward the house of Sam Starr. There was a cheap rooming house alongside the house, and he entered it.

"Like tuh have room 210 if'n it's vacant," he said, when the heavy-set landlady appeared. "Had it once a'fore, 'bout five-six years ago."

The landlady grunted and handed him a pen. He signed a name, planked down a dollar, picked up the key the landlady tossed at him, and went up to room 210.

Peter chuckled as he locked the door and slid the bolt as an added precaution. Sam Starr had rented this same room on several

occasions. Peter wasn't supposed to know this, but he had caught his uncle doing the same thing he was now about to do. Sam Starr was a queer man. He had built his house to fit his own needs and fancies. While his life was mostly a closed book to Peter, Peter, boylike, had learned most of the secrets of the house where he grew to manhood. In prison he often thought of those secrets and had as often wondered at his uncle's past. Now those secrets were to be of service to him.

Opening the one window, he glanced across the three-foot opening between the two buildings. The window directly across from his was closed and the shade was drawn. But that fact didn't worry him. Making certain no one was watching him, he reached across the gap, opened a tiny door concealed in the siding, caught hold of a steel ring and pulled. The window across the gap slowly opened.

With another glance around, Peter stepped across the space and into the house of the late Sam Starr. He chuckled grimly as he thought of meeting Luke Parkinsen in the dark house. To meet him now and put a scare into him—to make him suffer fear of the damned would be a good beginning of the payment he would exact for the years in prison.

Peter closed the window behind him and started down the hall. Doors were open on either side of the hall and he glanced through them to see ransackage everywhere. The entire floor had been gone over by a relentless searcher. Furniture was torn apart, scattered about; the floors were torn up; the walls and ceilings were a wreck.

On the ground floor a door slammed. Peter catfooted down the stairs, glanced cautiously about. A shade was up in the library and a tall, raw-boned man, with snake eyes and cold features, passed before the window. He was cursing like an infuriated mule-skinner.

Then he turned and saw Peter standing in the doorway. His glittering, beady eyes swept over the man he had five years before condemned as if he was looking at a stray

mongrel.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded harshly, coming toward the door, right hand gripping an automatic pistol in his coat pocket. "This isn't a bum's hotel."

"Possibly I have a better right here than you have, Parkinsen," Peter returned softly, smiling coldly. "I own the place."

Parkinsen stopped as if shot. He sucked in his breath in one huge gasp. He stepped to one side so the light would strike Peter's features. His face was white with sudden fear; his snaky eyes were boring through Peter with disbelief.

"By God, I recognize you now," he gasped at last. "You're Peter Starr. You've come here to—"

Peter Starr laughed harshly, the first laugh in five years. "No, nothing so crude as killing you, Parkinsen. I promised you I'd come back and make you pay. You're going to begin to pay now—tonight. You're going to answer for those five years in prison. Just look what it did to me."

"Answer to you," Parkinsen fairly screamed, face chalk white, eyes dilated with the fear of death, his huge frame crouched. "Yes, I'll answer to you—you murderer."

His hand jerked from his coat pocket with gripped automatic. Up flashed the gun, leveling with Peter's breast. Crack! Flame and smoke belched from the blue muzzle.

PETER STARR'S harsh laugh followed the explosion. He had been expecting Parkinsen to draw his gun and was ready. His steel-hard muscles were ready. He ducked and leaped an instant before the gun roared and the bullet intended for his heart fanned his cheek. Before Parkinsen could pull the trigger again, Peter caught his wrist in a grip of steel.

Parkinsen screamed in mortal terror as his wrist was cruelly twisted. The pistol fell to the floor. The terror of death gripped him. He leaped back, tore his wrist from that vice-like

grip with superhuman strength.

Before Peter could get another hold, Parkinsen was bounding for a side door like a madman. Peter leaped after him, but his crippled hip slowed him. The door had been flung open and Parkinsen was racing madly down the hall for the street door, yelling for the police, before Peter reached the door.

“The yellow cur!” Peter muttered, as the front door opened and Parkinsen leaped outside. “Not man enough to stand up and take it He’ll have the dicks in here in about thirty seconds. But damn him, he won’t get a chance to frame me again.”

He picked up the pistol that had fallen to the floor, glanced at it to see that it was loaded, set the safety and dropped it into his pocket. Then he bounded for the living room. As he paused in the great room for a momentary glance at the ravaged furniture, he heard the two detectives cautiously enter the front door.

He chuckled. Let the police hunt for him. They would never find him, not unless he wanted them to. And Parkinsen— There was a surprise awaiting the ex-district attorney; that is, if Peter was not mistaken. And this very night.

Still chuckling, he bounded across the room to the huge fireplace, making certain that he did not leave his footprints in the thick dust. Bending down into the huge opening of the fireplace, he raised up and reached up into the sooty chimney. His groping hand found another of Sam Starr’s secrets—an iron ladder rung. He pulled himself up, found another rung. Hand over hand he went up. His feet found the bottom rung and he crawled slowly up the chimney.

It was a tight squeeze, but he made it. Why Sam Starr had made the chimney big enough for a man to ascend and fitted it with iron rungs, Peter hadn’t guessed until he was in prison. But there were a lot of things people hadn’t guessed about Sam Starr. No one ever found out why he had come to Los Angeles

twenty-five years ago with his infant nephew, then built a house and settled down to the life of a real estate broker.

Peter reached a square crevice in the chimney somewhere in the vicinity of the second floor. He was sure it was built into the clothes closet of his uncle’s bedroom. He stood on the lower edge of the indented crevice and listened.

Voices reached him. One was loud and angry; two were low and consoling.

“But I tell you he must be here somewhere,” the high-pitched voice said as the detectives paused in the living room. “And he’s got a gun. He—he shot at me.”

“Probably went out the back door as we came in,” said one of the detectives. “But we’ll look around. Come on, Ed. He ain’t in here.”

“That’s one more lie against you, Parkinsen,” Peter muttered to himself as the voices trailed away.

THEN he took the small flash light from his pocket and flashed it on the crevice. The two words Sam Starr had uttered before he died were: “Safe—chimney.” Now if Peter’s deductions were correct, there was a safe hidden in the chimney. Ah, there it was.

Before Peter was a square steel door about a foot square with a thumb latch, covered with a thick coat of soot. He opened the door and—there was the safe.

Sam Starr had given Peter two safe combinations some months before his untimely death. One had been for the safe in the library, the other combination was for an imaginary safe. At least Peter had thought so at the time. It had taken Sam’s two dying words and two years of cogitation in prison for Peter to grasp the location of that second safe. Now his heart pounded as he recalled the combination, a combination kept fresh in his memory by constant repeating.

He twirled the knob with throbbing nerves, taut with grim expectation. In a minute he had

the safe open. He breathed a sigh of relief, laughed silently.

He turned his flash light in the safe and with fingers that trembled as with ague examined the contents. There was an old newspaper dated 1904. There were two large envelopes. One of the envelopes contained five one-thousand-dollar federal reserve notes; the other contained an affidavit written and signed by Sam Starr, with a notary's seal affixed, and a note of instruction.

Peter stuffed the contents into his breast pocket and closed the safe and snapped off his light. The detectives were still searching the house and he didn't care to take any unnecessary chances. He could pursue the contents of the safe at leisure in his room.

Climbing on up the chimney, he cautiously raised his head above the chimney and glanced around. The way was clear. Already darkness was settling down and he made an indistinguishable shadow as he climbed out onto the roof and glided to the edge of the building. A glance over the side told him there was no one in the narrow alley. He leaped across to the roof of the rooming house, trotted to a trapdoor in the roof, opened it and climbed down the ladder, closing the door after him.

Once in his room, Peter brushed the soot from his clothes and washed it from his hands and face, then he sat down to scan the contents of the safe. He chuckled satisfactorily as he thought of Parkinsen and the detectives searching the house for him. Let them keep on hunting. They would never find him.

He was still chuckling as he drew the affidavit from the envelope and started reading it, but the chuckle soon changed to a laugh of sheer satisfaction.

"My hunch was right," he thought when he had finished the document. "Uncle Sam was too smart for Parkinsen."

He laughed silently and long. Then he read a certain item in the old newspaper. Lastly he read the note of instructions. He nodded his

head with satisfaction. He was all ready now to make Luke Parkinsen pay for those years in prison.

Changing his clothes, he pocketed the documents and left the rooming' house. The tramp had disappeared; he was now a well dressed middle-aged man with a limp and a walking stick. Parkinsen and the detectives were not in sight as he stepped out on to the sidewalk. Neither was the former's car. So far so good.

"A cigar, a telephone call, the theater, then I'll make a call on Mr. Parkinsen. He ought to be home by then," he decided, as he made his way to the street car line.

LUKE PARKINSEN'S home was located in the city's most prosperous residential district. Peter had been to the house but once, but he had no difficulty in reaching the rear of the house unobserved. Here he met an obstacle. The same two detectives he had seen at his uncle's old house were on guard. But he only grinned to himself. He had learned many things in prison. Luke Parkinsen might lock himself in his palatial home and place detectives on guard outside, but Peter would find a means of entering.

He waited patiently until the detective on guard at the rear had strolled around to the front, then he leaped over the fence and darted for a basement window. It took him but a half minute to unfasten the screen and pry open the window. Another half minute and he was in the basement and had closed the screen and window behind him.

Silently and cautiously he felt his way about the basement until he located the stairway. He went up the stairs as silently as a cat. As silently he opened the door and stepped into the kitchen. The kitchen was dark, but opening a door he gazed down a dimly lighted hall.

As he approached the house, Peter had seen a light in one of the front rooms. Luke Parkinsen, if he was in the house, and Peter

was sure he was or there would have been no detectives on guard outside, would be in that room.

With Parkinsen's automatic in his hand, the stalking man catfooted down the hall. A board squeaked underfoot and he froze against the wall with stilled breath. A chair scraped in a room down the hall, but no one came to investigate.

He crept ahead, testing every board before he bore down on it. He came to a door. Light shone under it. He bent down and peeped through the keyhole. He smiled with satisfaction as a long row of books met his eyes.

The room was Parkinsen's study.

He took hold of the doorknob and turned it slowly and silently, then pushed gently on the door. It opened. A chair scraped again and a man cursed.

Peter shoved the door wide and leaped inside with the ease and grace of a panther.

"Not a sound out of you," he hissed, pistol covering the man half out of his chair. "An' keep your hands in sight. I'd like nothing better than to shoot you, Luke Parkinsen. Don't touch that phone."

"Starr!" Parkinsen gasped, his heavy, bleak face chalk white. Suddenly his knees gave way and he sank back in his upholstered chair. "You come to kill me?"

"Maybe I'll kill you, you yellow-bellied snake," Peter hissed, all the hate of injustice boiling in his blood. "You should've been killed in 1904."

"You—you—God—you found—"

"Yeah, I found what you hunted five years for and didn't find. Too bad I didn't know your past five years ago. My ignorance cost me five years of hell. But you're going to pay now. I made you a promise when you sent me up for a crime you committed. Now you're going to pay."

Luke Parkinsen knew he was staring death in the face. He knew his minutes were numbered, unless he could trick Peter—kill

him. If he was to live Peter Starr must die. His snake eyes darted about the room. He thought of the unsuspecting detectives on guard outside; he thought of the gun lying under a paper on his desk a foot from his hand; he thought of the telephone. He was at his wits' end. But Peter Starr must die. His hand moved slowly toward the gun under the paper. Peter couldn't have seen the gun.

"Don't move," Peter warned, facing the man he hated across the desk. "Just to make sure you won't hurt yourself, I'll take that gun under the paper." He reached across the desk, brushed the paper aside and picked up the gun. Then, "I'll give it back to you when I leave. You might want to use it."

HE stepped back, a grim smile on his lips, his eyes boring like hot irons into the cowering man across the desk. It was the moment for which he had waited five years.

"I've asked an old friend of yours to meet me here at midnight," he went on, his voice now like chilled steel. "Judge Keller who sentenced me to San Quentin. He should be here any minute now."

Parkinsen's eyes jerked to a wall clock. It was five minutes of midnight. He licked his bloodless lips, cleared his throat, then turned his scared eyes back to Peter.

"I'll give you anything you want if you'll turn that affidavit over to me," he said, with desperation. "Say a hundred thousand."

"Here comes the judge now," Peter drawled, as his keen ears caught the sound of squealing brakes. "I told him your servants were out and to walk right in."

"I'll make it half a million!" Parkinsen cried, breathing hard. "God, you can't do this to me, Starr!"

Peter laughed at him. Footsteps sounded in the hall. He got up, slipped the automatic into his pocket, and opened the door.

"Come right in, judge."

"This is rather unusual, Mr. Parkinsen,"

the judge began as he stepped into the room. "A man who didn't give his name telephoned me to meet him here on important business." Then he saw Peter and stopped.

"Take a seat, judge." Peter motioned to an upholstered chair. "Yes, it's unusual, judge. But I have a strange story to tell you. I'm going to prove to you that I didn't murder my uncle, Sam Starr."

"What's that?" Judge Keller stared at Peter, his gray, sympathetic eyes wide with astonishment. "Who—who are you?"

"Peter Starr."

"I—I remember you now. Yes, I remember. You were pardoned several weeks ago. Now you wish to prove you were innocent. I don't understand."

The short, dried-up, gray-haired judge sat down, his eyes darting from Peter to Parkinsen sitting behind his desk as if stricken with palsy. He frowned.

"I'll explain, judge," Peter said, handing the old newspaper and the affidavit to the judge. "Those papers will prove my story."

"Well, it's late, and I'm waiting," said the judge, his mind going back to the trial of Peter Starr. He remembered it vividly. Also he was remembering the confession of Mike Shabin, and Peter's consequent pardon.

"At Keokuk, Iowa, in 1904 two men held up and robbed a Judge Hess of one hundred thousand dollars," Peter began, keeping a wary eye on Parkinsen. "The judge was killed and the bandits escaped. There wasn't a clew and the robbery was never cleared up. But a little later Sam Starr and Luke Parkinsen left Iowa. Sam Starr came to Los Angeles and went into the real estate business. Parkinsen wandered about the country for several years, then came to Los Angeles and started practicing law. Here he met Starr again. He wanted money and began to fleece Starr."

"Just a minute, Starr," the judge interrupted, leaning forward with keen interest. "Make it a little plainer. Are you trying to say that—"

"That Sam Starr and Luke Parkinsen robbed and killed Judge Hess," Peter finished for him. "They did, judge. Sam Starr bought real estate with his share, but Parkinsen squandered his. When he found Sam Starr had invested his and was prospering, he demanded another cut, threatening to expose Sam unless he got it. Sam kept giving him money until bankruptcy threatened him, then he refused to give Parkinsen another penny."

"They were at a deadlock until Parkinsen threatened to prove that Sam had committed the crime single-handed. Sam wrote an affidavit, giving the details of the robbery and murder, stating that Parkinsen was the actual slayer of Judge Hess and giving the one bit of evidence that would fasten the murder on Parkinsen—his fingerprints. This he showed to Parkinsen along with the account in the newspaper which stated that the police had found the pistol used to murder the judge and had discovered the murderer's fingerprints. Parkinsen compared his fingerprints with the classification published in the paper and found they compared."

"Parkinsen then tried to get the evidence that would convict him, but Sam hid it and demanded return of all the money he had given Parkinsen. Parkinsen murdered him to silence him, but he never found those papers. You know the rest. I didn't know about those papers when he made me the goat and sent me up. And I couldn't trust any one else to get them—not with Parkinsen looking for them."

"Are these the papers you mentioned?" the judge demanded, glancing at the papers Peter had handed him.

Peter nodded. "They are. Read them carefully."

The judge did. When he finished with them, Peter took them from him and pocketed them.

THE judge frowned, "You have presented a very convincing case. I have no doubt that Parkinsen can be

convicted of the crime.” He glared frostily at the silent, cowering Parkinsen. “In fact I’m sure of it. Not only the murder of Judge Hess, but of Sam Starr. However, I don’t quite understand why Mike Shabin confessed on his deathbed to murdering your uncle.”

Peter chuckled. “I coached Mike into making that confession so I could get out and settle with Parkinsen.”

“Clever, I must admit,” the judge replied, and chuckled. “As far as the law is concerned, you’re a free man. However, what are your plans. I stand ready to help you.”

“Thank you, judge!” Peter said, and smiled. “I would appreciate it if you’d drive

me to the offices of the Los Angeles Examiner. I want the newspapers to get a chance at those papers before I do anything more. The more publicity, the more Parkinsen will suffer. After that, well, I’ll turn this old newspaper and the affidavit over to you so you can have me pardoned again—and can send Parkinsen to San Quentin to take my place. Then—I’ll turn Sam Starr’s property over to the heirs of Judge Hess. Uncle Sam came by it dishonestly and I want none of it. He left me five thousand dollars that he came by honestly. That will give me a start somewhere. We’ll leave Parkinsen here. He can’t get far.”