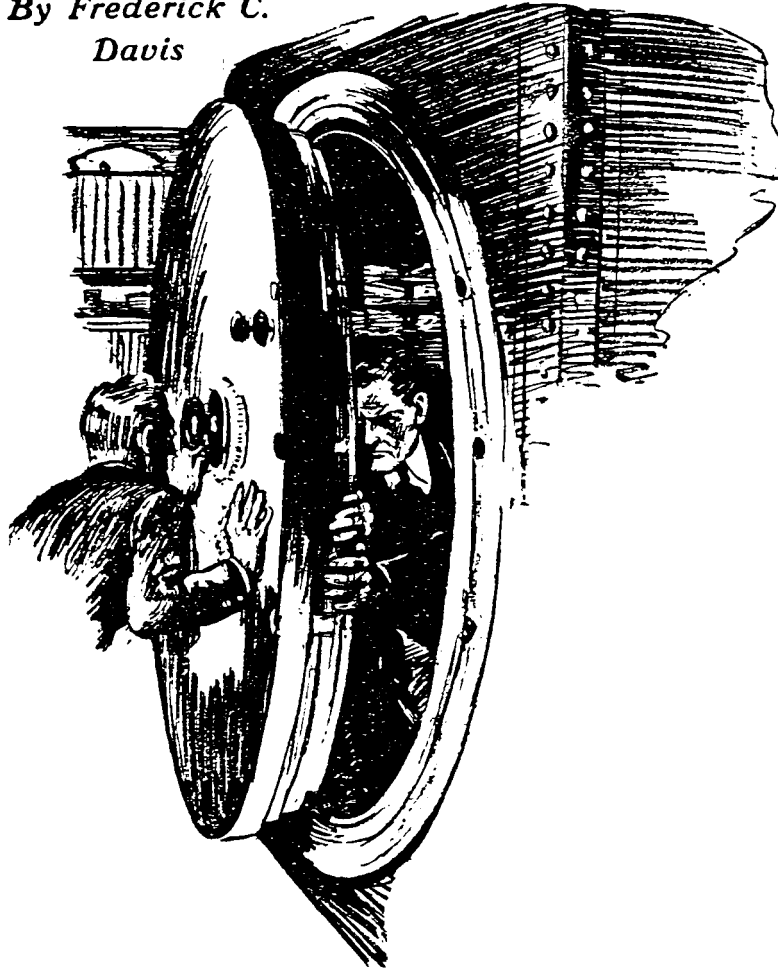


Juggernaut Justice

A "Mark Hazzard" Thriller

*By Frederick C.
Davis*



Mark Hazzard, fighting D. A., knew he'd sent an innocent man to the death house. And now to save that man from the last mile, he was ready to become the corpus delicti that would point death's finger at the real murderer.

CHAPTER I COURT OF DOOM

DISTRICT ATTORNEY Mark Hazzard climbed the black fire-stairs with the firm intention of breaking the law.

He paused on the platform at the twelfth floor and levered a sharp tool into the crack of the one-way door. He was the youngest prosecutor

ever to battle the state's cases in King's County. His red hair was a warning of a hot temper that made fearful defendants squirm while he fought for legal justice in the court room. He was a two-fisted terror to those who faced him from the witness stand with guilt in their hearts. Yet tonight Hazard was making himself as liable under the criminal code as they, by forcing his way through this sealed door.

He strode along the silent corridor to an entrance lettered *Lockridge, Culver and Hinton, Attorneys*, and slipped a skeleton key into the lock. That painted line might have read *Lockridge, Culver and Hazzard*, if the hotheaded young lawyer who was once slated for a junior partnership had not chosen to fight at the polls for the office of prosecuting attorney—and won.

When Mark Hazard alertly entered the black law office, he stood in the rooms, where his career as a lone wolf of justice had begun. The silent office recalled vividly the bitter mischance that first led him to study law.

He snapped a switch, swung a chair under a light fixture, and climbed up. He quickly unfastened the milk-glass bowl and unscrewed the bulb. The globe which he removed from his pocket and twisted into the socket looked quite ordinary; but it was not. Once it was gleaming, Hazzard spoke to it in a whisper:

“Are you there, Ann? Can you hear me? Keep listening.”

Hazzard replaced the reflector bowl, slid the chair back and stepped quickly to the wall switch. He unfastened the plate with a screw driver and hooked the leads of a small condenser across the terminals. Sure of the connection, he replaced the plate, and hurried into one of the partitioned offices. Again he spoke into empty air:

“Can you hear me now, Ann? I’m standing near Culver’s desk. Adjust the knob so you can hear me plainly. I’m coming down to check and—somebody’s coming!”

He had heard brisk footfalls in the corridor. He sped to the switch and clicked darkness into the office: he looked around swiftly for a place to hide. Shadows were moving on the pebbled pane of the entrance when he hurried to a door in the side wall. A key was turning in the lock when he closed himself in thick darkness. He stood in the supply closet, heart speeding, listening, while the entrance opened and two men strode in.

“There’s nobody here,” one of them exclaimed.

“That’s strange. I’m sure I saw a light,” the other insisted.

“Better look around, Larry,” the first suggested warily. “There’s been a petty thief working in the building.”

Hazzard recognized the voices as those of

Vinton Culver and Lawrence Hinton, partners in the law firm. Standing anxiously at the door, he heard the footfalls move into the adjoining offices. When both men were beyond other doors, he inched the closet open and tensed to speed across to the entrance and out. Instantly he drew back, dismayed and breathless. One of the men was returning.

“I don’t like this. Larry,” Culver said. “You saw a light. There’s somebody in here.”

“Hiding,” Hinton’s voice answered. “How about the supply closet? Watch it while I—”

Hazzard’s tight lips suppressed a moan. He heard two quick steps and the sliding noise of a desk drawer. Knowing that discovery was a certainty, he twisted the inner knob. When he stepped out in bright light, Vinton Culver gasped and Lawrence Hinton whirled from a desk. Culver blurted “Hazzard!” as Hinton lifted the automatic he had taken from the drawer. It glinted dangerously at Hazzard as he smiled and said:

“Good evening, gentlemen. Weren’t you expecting me?”

Culver snapped: “I expect any sort of trickery from you, Hazzard. What the devil are you doing here? What do you mean by sneaking into this office in the middle of the night?”

“I’ll keep my purpose to myself, if you don’t mind,” Hazzard answered wryly. “I assure you it’s quite unnecessary to point that gun at me.”

Hinton’s lips curled. “You deserve to be treated like a common burglar, Hazzard. That’s what you’ve made of yourself by sneaking in here.”

Culver added biting: “Exactly, Hazzard! The estimable district attorney is guilty of the crime of breaking and entering. Keep him covered, Larry—and call the police.”

“ONE moment, Hinton.” Mark Hazzard stepped forward tensely, studying Culver’s cold eyes, Hinton’s scornful smile. “You are quite right. I have no search warrant. I am guilty of burglary. You have only to call the police, and I’ll be forced out of office and made to face the charge in court. Before you do that—”

“You deserve that!” Culver straightened stiffly. “Duncan Lockridge took you into this office when you were down and out. He trained you as a trial lawyer because he had faith in you. He backed you at the polls, helped more than any

other man living to elect you to office. You've repaid his generosity and trust by bringing him to trial and convicting him of murder!"

"True," Hazzard admitted, "but—"

Lawrence Hinton spoke through curling lips. He was the young attorney who had succeeded to the junior partnership which Mark Hazzard might have had. Hazzard's withdrawal had raised him to that position prematurely. Yet now his eyes were a denunciation and his words a lash:

"You know damned well his appeal will be denied, Hazzard. You tried to break Duncan Lockridge on the witness stand. You pounded at him with every piece of evidence you could find. That man was your friend—he made you—but all you thought of was making yourself a glorious hero in the eyes of the public. Lockridge is the squarest man who ever lived, but he's going to the electric chair—and you've sent him there!"

"Gentlemen." Mark Hazzard's face pictured keen pain. "I did convict Duncan Lockridge for murder in the first degree. If he goes to the chair, it will be because of the case I built up against him. It was my duty to do that. I was forced to present those facts to the jury. You may believe Lockridge is innocent of murder—but you're not half as convinced of it as I am."

"What!" Culver snapped in a rage. "How can you have the effrontery to say that after you and you alone, sent him to the death house?"

Hazzard's eyes blazed. "Would Lockridge have come off better at the trial if I'd turned the case over to one of my over-ambitious assistants? Certainly not! He couldn't escape the facts the police built up against him. I wasn't trying to break him on the stand. No! I was doing my best to get at some clue, some little contradiction of circumstances that would bring the whole case crashing down. Whether you believe it or not, I'm still doing my damndest to clear Lockridge."

Hazzard's knuckles clicked to the desk. "You don't need to remind me that he's my friend. I haven't forgotten that he gave me my chance. I know I have to thank him more than any other man, for being state's attorney. God, I'm not persecuting him! I'm trying to use the power he gave me to save him. In spite of all the evidence, in spite of the jury's verdict, I know that Duncan Lockridge didn't kill Walter Platt."

"Very pretty, Hazzard," Hinton sneered.

"Very noble. But the fact remains you convicted him."

Hazzard moaned in despair. "A dozen times during the trial I moved that the charge be dismissed for lack of evidence, but each time the court overruled me. Twice since the conviction. I've gone to the governor and pled that the verdict be set aside, and he's refused. You've overlooked that, haven't you? I'm still trying. I'm going to stop at nothing until I've found evidence to clear Lockridge—and even your bringing me up for burglary, gentlemen, won't keep me from it!"

"Do you expect to find your evidence here?" Culver demanded coldly. "Do you think that Hinton or I are guilty? Do you dare hint that either of us would allow Lockridge to take the blame for something we did—the man who's closer to us than anyone else in the world? By God, Hazzard—!"

"I don't know who's guilty," Hazzard broke in, "but I know Lockridge isn't. I'd keep on trying to prove it if I suspected my own brother. Listen to me, both of you. What if Lockridge's appeal is denied tonight? What if Governor Bryant repeats his refusal to intervene? What chance will Lockridge have of escaping the chair then? One and only one—a district attorney who's doing his damndest to serve justice above the written law."

Hazzard strode to the desk where Hinton stood, his temper raging hot.

"If you choose to charge me with breaking and entering, gentlemen, you have your case. You can force me out of office, and by doing so you'll destroy the last chance of proving Duncan Lockridge's innocence. If you two men—closer to him than anyone else in the world—are willing to shoulder the blame for his death, here's the telephone."

He lifted the instrument from the desk and held it toward Vinton Culver. Culver's eyes were still blazing with contempt, but a flicker of uncertainty had crept into them. Hinton's gun wavered. Hazzard's firm lips curved, coolly as he replaced the telephone and strode briskly to the entrance.

"In that case, gentlemen, I trust you wish me the best of luck. Goodnight!"

HAZZARD'S jaw muscles were lumped with Hanger, his pulse was still hammering, when the elevator cab dropped him from the twelfth

floor of the Lambert Building to the eleventh. He needed no skeleton key to open the office directly below the suite of Lockridge, Culver and Hinton. Through dim light, he strode toward the girl who was sitting with phones pressed to her ears at a recording microphone.

She searched Hazzard's eyes anxiously, and kept listening, while he listened through a second hand-set. The bulb he had screwed into the light fixture on the floor above was one which concealed a sensitive pick-up. The condenser he had mounted in the switch box was a device which passed the sound impulses even though the lights were off. Hazzard listened to voices traveling over the wire of the light circuit while his secretary watched a diamond stylus recording the words on a composition disc.

Culver's voice came: "I don't trust Hazzard. He's not trying to clear Lockridge. He came here hunting for evidence, all right, but not for Duncan's sake. I think he suspects us of jury tampering—he's trying to disbar us both and make himself Public Hero Number One."

Hinton's reply came through: "Certainly! If he makes the slightest move in that direction, I'll prefer charges against him for burglary. I'll break him out of office. God, it's awful—waiting to hear from the Court of Appeals!"

Culver spoke: "The decision is due sometime tonight. It will mean the chair for Duncan if they deny the appeal—in spite of what Hazzard says about trying to save him. I don't trust him!"

Hinton's voice lowered. "Listen. I think I know why Hazzard came here. He couldn't hope to find any documentary evidence. He's planted a microphone somewhere. He's got someone listening in on everything said here. Look around! We've got to find it!"

Hazzard tensed with alarm while he heard the sounds of movements in the office above, brought to his ears by the sensitive device. He lowered the phones while Ann Nash looked up with hurt eyes.

"They don't understand, Mark!" she exclaimed anxiously. "You told them the truth—I heard every word—and you are trying your best to save Lockridge. Will—will they find the microphone?"

"It'll take a good job of hunting—" Hazzard's eyes narrowed. "I'm convinced either

Culver or Hinton is guilty of that murder. The facts show it—there's no other answer. But finding; proof—" His voice faded hopelessly. "Stick at that machine, Ann. I want a record of every word spoken in that room."

Ann Nash answered alertly: "On the job, Mark."

The silence in the phones meant that now both men were searching for the hidden microphone. Hazzard lifted the telephone, spun the number of his office. Frank Mayton, his assistant, answered.

"Any message, Frank?" Hazzard asked anxiously.

"Yes, from Inspector Trencher. He wants you over in his office as quick as you can make it."

"Trencher?" A chill tingled along Hazzard's nerves. "Ring him that I'll be right over."

His fingers warmly pressed Ann Nash's arm; he left the office with quick strides.

"Duncan Lockridge is innocent—innocent—innocent," had drummed through Mark Hazzard's mind since the moment of Lockridge's sensational arrest. "Innocent—innocent" all the while he had presented damning evidence against Lockridge in court because his duty demanded it. It had become an obsession that drove him day and night. "You've got to prove Duncan Lockridge did not commit murder. You and you alone must prove it—"

When Hazzard swung his car from the curb, newsboys on the corner were howling headlines that mocked him:

"Appeal Decision Due Tonight on Lockridge Murder!"

"Court Deliberating Lockridge's Case!"

"Noted Lawyer Awaiting Final Verdict!"

"Death or New Trial for Lockridge—Decision Tonight!"

In a squalid upstate town, Duncan Lockridge was caged in the grim death house. The bleak corridor which passed his cell ended at the door of the chamber where prisoners met their doom in the electric chair. There Lockridge was waiting for word of the decision to penetrate the gray stone walls of the prison while, in a stately building in this city, the Court of Appeals was sitting in extraordinary session. Tonight their judgment would be announced. Tonight the zero

hour in a condemned man's life must come.

Mark Hazzard gripped the wheel hard and sent his car speeding across the city with grim, unconquerable purpose.

CHAPTER II THE VOICE IN THE DARK

RECOLLECTIONS of that trying case—the most grueling he had ever handled—kaleidoscoped through Hazzard's mind with the speed of the spinning-car wheels.

“The murdered man, Walter Platt, was last seen alive entering the Lambert Building.” Hazzard's own words, uttered during his summation to the jury, came back to mock him. “He asked directions to the office of Lockridge, Culver and Hinton. The elevator operator noticed the man seemed very shaken. He entered those offices—and vanished from the world of living men. Those, gentlemen of the jury, are incontestable facts.

“When Walter Platt entered those offices, the junior partner of the firm, Lawrence Hinton, was there. You heard corroborative testimony that Hinton immediately left the office when Duncan Lockridge came in a moment later. Hinton testified that when he left, Platt was still there. Though Lockridge denies it, the testimony shows that he and Platt were left alone in that office. And when Platt was next seen, he was a water-sodden corpse which had been dragged from the river.”

Each remembered word stung Mark Hazzard as he kept his car speeding across the metropolis.

“Dr. Autumn, the Medical Examiner, has testified his expert opinion that Platt was dead of suffocation before he was thrown into the river. Proof of this fact is that no water was found in Platt's stomach or lungs. Lockridge has denied killing Platt in the office, denied carrying him unseen from the building, denied throwing the dead man into the river. But, gentlemen of the jury, there is damning mute testimony to prove he did exactly that.”

Inspector Charles Trencher, the deliberately methodical sleuth whose power extended all through the police department, had placed that evidence in Hazzard's hands. Three distinctive parallel, curving scratches had been found in the enamel of Lockridge's costly car,

near the rear door. Three nails in the heel of Platt's right shoe matched those scratches exactly. Hazzard had been forced to build his most damaging argument in the case on those three etched lines.

“Platt's heel made those scratches on Lockridge's car, gentlemen of the jury—that is an established fact. They were made when Platt, already dead, was tumbled into the rear seat of Lockridge's car—that is a certainty. That the car was driven from the alley behind the Lambert Building, to the bank of the river, carrying Platt's dead body cannot be doubted. The man who drove the car then threw Platt into the river in an attempt to conceal the murder—no one can question that conclusion. That Platt had reason to fear going in that office was indicated by his manner on the elevator.

“Duncan Lockridge denies he is the man who killed Platt. You must decide which you believe, gentlemen of the jury—the silent testimony of those three scratches on Lockridge's car, or Lockridge's statement.”

Hazzard remembered his earnest effort to present the case with scrupulous fairness. He recalled how he had avoided every accusing statement which the evidence did not inexorably force him to make. He had ended his summation with a plea that the evidence be weighed with the utmost care, had even called the attention of the jury to the law that Lockridge must be acquitted if there remained a “reasonable doubt” of his guilt. Now, as he drove, Hazzard again heard the verdict that meant he had won a sensational case, but condemned a friend to the electric chair:

“We, the jury, find the defendant, Duncan Lockridge, guilty of murder in the first degree.”

Hazzard had clicked on the radio, and it had been playing softly while intersections flashed past. He listened alertly as a gong sounded and the music yielded to a news announcement:

“The latest word from the court house, ladies and gentlemen, informs us that the decision of the Court of Appeals will be announced within an hour. The judges are about to complete their study of the record, and their verdict in this startling case is being awaited anxiously. Governor Bryant has issued a statement that he will take no action in the case if the appeal is denied, and therefore the decision of the court may be considered as final, since Lockridge's counsel

has declared that they will not carry the case to the Supreme Court of the United States. As soon as the decision is announced, it will be broadcast.”

Hazzard swung into the street which separated the massive court house from police headquarters. He looked up at lighted windows. In the room behind them, the august tribunal of last resort was deliberating the fate of a man while the entire city awaited their word. His nerves burning with impatience, Mark Hazzard climbed to the office of Inspector Charles Trencher.

He stopped short just beyond the sill. The full-waisted, heavy-jowled man who rose from the inspector’s desk was not Trencher. His eyes glimmered a threat while Hazzard stood stock still; his lips pursed into a mocking smile. He said in a heavy, throaty tone:

“How are you—Dennis Grant?”

THAT full-cheeked face, and the sound of that name, brought bitter memories flooding into the mind of the man who had been Dennis Grant.

A bitter cold night. A bleak railroad yard with sooty snow packed between gleaming rails. A man more than ten years younger than Mark Hazzard, crawling in agony from the rods beneath a freight car. It was the end of an exhausting journey for one then known as Dennis Grant—the stolen ride of a tramp, undertaken so that he might join his mother at Christmas. In that painful flash of memory, Mark Hazzard recalled that the freezing trip had not carried him to his home, but to the prisoner’s dock.

He heard it again as he stared at the square, brutal face of the man standing at Trencher’s desk—the crack of the shot. He saw again the gun thrown at his feet, the gun he had picked up before he knew what he was doing. He remembered blinding lights turned into his eyes and hard hands gripping him as a grimy yard crew trapped him. It was like a nightmare suddenly come to life again—the court room, the accusing finger of the prosecuting attorney damning him for the murder of a man he had never seen, with a gun a murderer had planted on him—and that word of doom uttered by the foreman of the jury:

“Guilty.”

During the trial, a huge man, handcuffed to Dennis Grant, had led him back and forth between cell and dock. That same massive sheriff who had moved to Dennis Grant’s side, and

clamped a horny hand on his arm, while the judge had pronounced the sentence of life imprisonment upon him, was the man now facing Mark Hazzard.

Panic struck through Mark Hazzard’s mind. He had made a desperate and successful attempt to escape from the court room in Philadelphia—from the clutch of the man now facing him. He had lived for months in terror of capture. At last, finding a job, he had studied endless nights so that he might understand the law that had condemned him for a crime he had not committed.

He had fought hard to place himself in a position to administer a justice that stood higher than the statutes. He had created a new identity for himself as Mark Hazzard, district attorney. His whole world was now shaken by the quiet words spoken by the man at Trencher’s desk:

“How are you, Dennis Grant?”

They meant: “Mark Hazzard, you’re wanted for murder. There’s a sentence of life imprisonment waiting for you.”

He forced a smile. Moving quietly toward the man at the desk, he said, “I don’t understand you. My name’s Mark Hazzard. I’m the district attorney.”

“I know you’re the district attorney,” the big man said. “But your name is Dennis Grant, isn’t it?”

“I said my name is Hazzard.”

He turned as a connecting door opened. Inspector Trencher came in slowly, a twisted smile on his lips. His black eyes showed an ominous smolder that sent a piercing chill to Hazzard’s heart. The huge man at the desk extended his heavy hand to Hazzard and said drawlingly:

“It’s been a long time since I’ve seen you, Grant.”

Hazzard’s surging temper brought scarlet to his face as Trencher settled into the swivel chair behind the desk. His voice was a crackle:

“Who is this man, Trencher? Why does he insist on calling me by a name that’s not mine? Is this your idea of a practical joke?”

“Not at all, Hazzard, not at all.” Trencher seemed to gloat. “Shake hands with Horace Halsey, an old friend of mine. He used to be sheriff of Delphia County, Pennsylvania, about ten years ago. You know, Hazzard, I’ve always been interested in you, but I never could get you to talk much about yourself. So when Halsey showed up,

I pointed out your picture in the papers, and asked him if he knew you. Do you remember him, Halsey?"

"Sure," the ex-sheriff rumbled. "I'd know him anywhere. But his name wasn't Hazzard then. It was Grant—Dennis Grant."

Trencher frowned. "Sure of that?"

"Sure?" Halsey showed a toothy, confident grin. "I couldn't forget that. I took him into the criminal court in Philadelphia, and back to his cell again, twenty times. I watched him all during the trial—that was my job. I was right at his side when the judge sentenced him. I tried to stop him when he threw a chair through the window and got away. Forget him—when I turned hell upside down for months, trying to find him? Not much!

"He's Dennis Grant—wanted for murder, with a life sentence waiting to be served."

MARK HAZZARD turned squarely to Trencher. The blaze in his eyes was so fierce that the inspector's smile faded. His voice was edged with cold fury.

"All right, Trencher. We understand each other. You're out to get me. You don't like the way I administer the law. You stick by the statutes in your routine way no matter if innocent men are jailed and guilty men go free. You're content, for instance, to let the Court of Appeals be the final judge of Duncan Lockridge while they think only of legal errors without considering the merits of the case. I'm not a slave to established procedure and I never will be. You don't like the way I work—so you're out for my skin. That's the truth, isn't it, Trencher?"

Trencher wagged a hand. "Take it easy, Hazzard. Sure, our methods differ. You stick your neck out and run your chances, and I hold to the regulations—but it's your neck. You set yourself up as a special police department and a special supreme court both in one—but if you overstep yourself, nobody's going to suffer but you. That's beside the point, isn't it? There's no use exploding if Halsey's mistaken. The thing is—are you Dennis Grant?"

Hazzard spoke through a dry throat. "You're clever, Trencher. Last month you checked up on my fingerprints, hoping to get something on me and this time you're making a direct accusation through Halsey. You pretend to be as slow-witted

and plodding as a pack mule while you're sly as a fox. As for your question—suppose you answer it!"

Again Trencher's hand wagged disarmingly. "Take it easy, take it easy, Hazzard. Don't go off like a firecracker. When you're in this game as long as I've been, you learn it doesn't pay to get excited. Halsey may be absolutely mistaken, sure. There's no use arguing about it, is there? We can check up on it in a few minutes, and then there won't be any question."

"I'm not making any mistake," Halsey asserted.

"Is that all right with you, Hazzard, if I check up?" Trencher asked.

"Go as far as you like, Trencher," Hazzard flared.

"Thanks," the inspector answered dryly. He reached for the telephone and lifted it slowly. He spoke into the transmitter casually. "Get me Brennan at Philadelphia police headquarters."

He broke the connection and his twisted smile came again. "Halsey wouldn't want me to take his unsupported word for it—not in a thing like this. Not the district attorney's being a murderer and a fugitive from the law. Would you, Halsey?"

"The records will show I'm stating facts," the ex-sheriff rumbled.

"It'll be tough, won't it, Hazzard, if it's true?" Trencher queried.

Hazzard smiled bitterly. The sensational disclosure would strip him of his honor and integrity. It would transform him from a respected public official into a convict. It would change the plaudits of the newspapers into scathing denunciations. It would bring tragedy to Ann Nash, the girl he loved, and utterly destroy his world. But he answered Trencher grimly:

"I don't happen to be afraid of anything you might find out about me, inspector. I'm still Mark Hazzard, the district attorney. As long as that's my job, I'm going at it with all I've got. I'm going to prove that Duncan Lockridge is not a murderer."

Trencher repeated quietly: "It's your neck."

"Do you mind, Inspector," Hazzard asked huskily "if I use your phone?"

"Go as far as you like."

Hazzard's eyes narrowed at Halsey as he

spoke into the transmitter. "Connect me with the district attorney's office." He saw suspicion untinged by doubt in the ex-sheriff's stare when Frank Mayton answered. "Any call for me yet, Frank?"

"Another, just now, Mark," his assistant answered. "Damned if I know who left it or what it means. It's just 'he's come in'."

"I've been waiting for that—thanks!"

Hazzard lowered the phone with a thump. His tight lips curved with a smile of defiance. "Trencher. I have no intention of waiting here, while you try to prove I'm a murderer. Let me remind you that you can't arrest me without a warrant, and you can't issue a warrant for me without a specific charge. From now on, if you want me, you'll have to find me. Good night, Inspector!"

Hazzard strode straight to the door. Trencher leaped up, snapped, "Come back here!" but Hazzard did not stop. The door slapped shut; the heels of the district attorney tapped down the corridor. Trencher's fist crashed angrily to the desk; his black eyes gleamed with triumph.

"I've got him!"

He grabbed at the telephone the instant it rang. "Philadelphia headquarters?" he rasped. "Brennan! That you Brennan?" Then, peering at the door through which Mark Hazzard had gone, he said levelly:

"Brennan, look up the records of Dennis Grant, convicted of murder about ten years ago. Read me his fingerprint classifications. I'll hold the line."

INSPECTOR TRENCHER sat tensely, his stubby fingers drumming. He opened a drawer of his desk, took up an envelope, and slid photographs from it. They were reproductions of Mark Hazzard's fingerprints. A month ago Trencher had taken them off a paper-weight which Hazzard habitually fingered, and he had been rewarded by finding distinct impressions. He eyed them grimly, and the cryptic classification noted above them, while he waited for Brennan to report.

When the answer came. Trencher's hand crushed the phone: "Good Lord, Inspector! We've got Grant's rogue gallery pictures, but his fingerprint record is missing!"

"What!"

"Missing! It should be in the file, but it

isn't. Damned if I know what happened to it. It's gone—that's all."

"Gone!" Trencher echoed the word while Halsey stared with widening eyes. The inspector's mind sped while he answered: "Listen, Brennan. I want those pictures. Send a man up here with 'em as fast as he can make connections. And Brennan. Send along a blank fingerprint card. Got that? A blank."

"They'll be on their way at once, Inspector."

Halsey blurted as Trencher broke the connection: "His prints are missing? I know the reason for that. He stole 'em out of the files."

Trencher straightened tensely. "What the devil makes you say that?"

"Listen. I remember, about a year ago, Mark Hazzard came to Philadelphia headquarters. He said he was making a personal visit to check up on some crook's record. Naturally, because he was D.A. here, they gave him a free hand. I didn't hear about it until afterward—I didn't see him at the time—but they told me they'd had the famous Hazzard in there. That's when he stole the fingerprint record out of the files!"

Trencher's eyes were black flame. "That won't stop me from getting him. I'll get proof he's Grant—legal proof. Nothing's going to stop me now."

He touched buttons on his desk as he spoke. Halsey blinked in bewilderment while the connecting door opened and a blue-shirted man appeared. Tensely Trencher handed him the photographs of Mark Hazzard's fingerprints.

"Get this straight," he commanded. "Arrange these prints in exactly the same positions as those on a record card. Have a photolithographic plate made of them and hold it. I want to have them reproduced on a special card in a hurry, soon as I say the word. And keep strictly quiet about it—it's important."

"Yes, sir."

When the connecting door closed Halsey blurted: "That's proof, isn't it? Hazzard's being there in Philadelphia headquarters—the card disappearing?"

"No. Not legal proof," Trencher drawled. "It's no good. We're getting Grant's pictures—but I'm going to do better than that. I'm going to break Hazzard. I'm going to force him to admit he's Dennis Grant—murderer!"

“How?” Halsey asked huskily.

“Philadelphia’s sending a blank fingerprint record card. I’ve got Hazzard’s prints. I’m going to transfer those prints to the card. When I show that to Hazzard—with the name of Dennis Grant on it, the right dates, everything—he’s going to think it came out of the Philadelphia files and he’ll know his game’s up. He’s going to break!”

Halsey declared: “That’s it! He won’t know the difference! He’ll break!”

“His confession will be legal proof, Halsey,” Trencher ground on. “I can’t offer that fingerprint card as evidence, because it’ll be a fake. The rogue’s gallery prints might not be much good, because a man changes in ten years. But a confession will prove it!” Trencher’s eyes smoldered as he said again: “The D.A.’s little game is up.”

MARK HAZZARD swung his car to the curb in a neighborhood of old-fashioned rooming houses. His heart was hammering with dread, his mind still picturing the ominous black eyes of Inspector Trencher, when he stepped into a dark doorway. The man who moved quietly at his side was wearing the uniform of a patrolman. “He’s in there now, skipper.”

“I got your report, Danny.”

The blue uniform was a disguise which shielded Dan Carey, ex-cop and fugitive from the law, from the scrutiny of men who had once been his comrades on the force. As district attorney, Mark Hazzard had sent him up the river for murder. Carey’s desperate attempt to escape had succeeded. Hazzard had found him starving in a dark alleyway while the law hunted him.

Because he was convinced of Carey’s innocence in spite of the evidence—exactly as he was convinced of the innocence of Duncan Lockridge—Hazzard had sheltered him from the inexorable man-hunt. Dan Carey had become Hazzard’s undercover assistant in the face of a danger that threatened disaster every hour of the day and night, not only for himself but for Hazzard as well. If it ever became known that the district attorney of King’s County was harboring a fugitive, Mark Hazzard’s career would be brought to a swift and tragic end.

“Keep your eye on that door, Danny. I’m going in,” Hazard said quietly.

He crossed the street quickly, pushed through a paint-blistered door, climbed two worn flights. He turned to the door at the rear and listened to the sound of a newspaper crackling above soft radio music. He knocked, twisted the knob, and stepped in briskly as a thin-faced man sprang from a chair with startled eyes.

Hazzard spoke crisply. “Your name’s Thomas Mackler. You’re a cabinet maker. You served on the jury of the Leeds versus Carren case, with the man who was later killed, supposedly, by Duncan Lockridge. That’s true, isn’t it, Mackler? You and Walter Platt were two of the twelve who decided that case.”

Mackler blurted: “Well? What if I did?”

“At the first vote, the jury stood two to ten in favor of the defendant Carren—that’s true, isn’t it? You and Platt argued for Leeds. The two of you kept that jury locked up until you argued them into a verdict in favor of the plaintiff, Leeds. Counsel for Leeds was the firm of Lockridge, Culver and Hinton.”

Defiantly Mackler answered: “What if we did?”

“Did you force the jury to render that verdict because you were convinced of the merits of Leeds’ case—or because somebody handed you a certain sum of money?”

“What’s that?” Mackler gasped. “You accusin’ me of takin’ a bribe?”

Hot temper edged Hazzard’s voice as he continued. “Listen. You attended every session of the Lockridge murder case. You know that I wasn’t able to bring out any motive for the killing. The papers printed rumors of the reason Lockridge murdered Platt. Lockridge had bribed certain jurors on the Leeds versus Carren case. One of the jurors—Platt—was attempting blackmail on Lockridge, knowing that if the truth came out, Lockridge would be disbarred. In order to save himself and to keep the truth hidden, Lockridge killed Platt. That’s the story. What do you think of it, Mackler?”

“I don’t know nothin’ about what Platt did, but I never took any money for—”

“Listen! I’ve teen having you watched. You don’t make much money in your shop, but you’ve been spending plenty. You buy whole cases of liquor. You get yourself a lot of new clothes. That radio there, Mackler, cost you three hundred and fifty dollars. How did you happen to

have so much ready cash, all of a sudden—right after the close of the Leeds case?”

“That’s none of your business!” Mackler blurted.

“Jury bribing is the state’s business, Mackler. I’ve got enough evidence on you to charge you with it. I can indict you tomorrow morning if I choose, and send you up the river for the rest of your life.” Hazzard’s eyes were blazing, his words driving like steam under pressure. “You’ve got just one chance of beating that rap. Do you want to know what it is?”

Mackler stared in terror.

“You’ll tell me, here and now, how much bribe money you accepted, and who paid it!”

Mackler swallowed hard, blinked dismayed eyes, tongued his dry lips. Hazzard stood tense while the radio played softly into the quiet. He watched Mackler’s fear becoming a consuming corrosive burning away all reason. The thin wood-worker said in a sudden cackle:

“If I tell you, you won’t have me arrested?”

“I promise you you won’t have to answer for it—if you tell me the truth!”

Mackler’s breath-whizzed. “I—I’ll tell you the truth. I took the money—so did Platt. We got it from—”

“Lockridge?” Hazzard urged desperately.

“No. No, from—”

Two quick shots barked from outside.

The reports drove splinters from the rear window. The bullets slapped past Hazzard, past Mackler, into the wall. Hazzard whirled, his hand darted to his arm-pit holster, while Mackler staggered back in terror. The cabinet maker’s outflung arm struck the table lamp. It crashed to the floor and its bulb exploded. Hazzard backed with his 9mm Webley leveled, while the darkness fluttered with swift movement.

A shadow vanished from the fire-escape platform outside the window. The hallway door flashed open and shut as the terrorized Mackler fled. Hazzard took swift steps toward the window, but paused. The radio had ceased playing; and out of the silence an announcer’s voice rushed:

“The Court of Appeals has handed down its decision in the Lockridge murder case, ladies and gentlemen! The appeal has been denied. The verdict of guilty must stand. Since the case will not be carried to the United States Supreme Court,

and since Governor Bryant has declared he will not intervene, Duncan Lockridge must die in the electric chair!”

CHAPTER III THE VANISHED JUROR

HOT wrath drove Mark Hazzard to the window where two white-rimmed holes shone in the pane. He thrust the sash up and crawled out. His Webley peered down the rusty flights as he alertly descended. Eyes flashing, he searched the black court, wary for any rustle that might betray the flight of the would-be murderer.

He dropped from the lowest platform and stood in black silence. Quiet steps took him past the rear door of a building fronting on the next street. Standing ajar, it hinted that the prowler had escaped to the street. Hazzard shouldered through it, ran along a hall, out a front door. He heard the hum of a car beyond the corner and knew that his man was fleeing.

Fury beat at his temples as he sped back. He slipped into the building where Mackler lived and bounded up the steps. Mackler’s room was black and empty; the radio was playing dance music. The line of fire across the room strengthened Hazzard’s conviction that the man at the window had intended to kill the cabinet maker. He sped down the stairs and out the entrance; crossed through quiet gloom to the doorway where Dan Carey was waiting.

“Did you see him come out, Danny?”

“Nobody’s used that door except you, skipper. God, what’s happened? I heard shots.”

“There *were* shots.” Hazzard answered wryly. “They’ve proved to me that Lockridge is innocent, but they can’t make a case in court. Keep watching, Danny. If you see Mackler come out, shadow him. Phone any message to Ann.”

“Right, skipper! Listen—I don’t get it. You’ve been playing this jury bribing angle from the start. Couldn’t you’ve used it to save Lockridge at the trial?”

Hazzard watched the door of the rooming house while he answered. “It would have made Lockridge’s conviction all the more certain because it would have supplied the missing motive. Somebody bribed Platt and Mackler when they were jurors on the Leeds case. Platt turned it into a means of blackmail. The murderer was

desperate to escape paying blood money—especially because it would mean disbarment if either Platt or Mackler talked. Got it, Danny?”

“Sure, skipper. But—”

“Platt was killed because he threatened to spill the works. The man who did it was watching Mackler tonight, and tried to kill him to keep him from telling the truth. It wasn’t Lockridge, because Lockridge is in the death house. I’m morally convinced it’s either Culver or Hinton—but a moral certainty isn’t admissible in court as evidence. I’ve got to find proof, Danny—proof, before they strap Lockridge in the chair and throw the switch.”

“How’re you going to do it, skipper?”

“That’s what I’m after, Danny. How.”

Hazzard hurried to his car while Carey stayed to watch the rooming house door. He circled the block, though he realized that there was now no hope of sporting the man who had attempted to silence Mackler. He turned toward the Lambert Building. Again and again, while he drove, he was chilled by a haunting recollection of Inspector Trencher’s accusing eyes.

The elevator carried him to the eleventh floor. He quietly entered the office he had rented, to find Ann Nash sitting alertly at the recording machine. Searching his face anxiously, she rose and seized his hand.

“Mark, what’s the matter? You’re worried. I can see it in your eyes.”

“Nothing, darling.” He kissed her lingeringly and the word echoed mockingly in his mind. “Nothing” he had said, when the ghosts of the past were rising to rob him of all his world and the girl he loved.

“There is something, Mark,” Ann Nash said quietly. “I’ve seen it in your eyes again and again. Don’t you know you can tell me anything, Mark, and I’ll understand. Whatever is preying on your mind is keeping us apart—making us both unhappy. You’ve refused to marry me because of it. Won’t you tell me what it is, darling?”

Grimly Mark Hazzard told her again: “It’s nothing, Ann—nothing.”

A CLICK came from the automatic trip of the recording device. The black record began to revolve under the diamond stylus, registering words spoken in the offices above. The girl turned at once, eyes and ears alert. Hazzard was reaching for the second pair of phones when the telephone

purred. He heard the breathy voice of Dan Carey over the wire.

“Skipper, Mackler came out right after you left. He must’ve been hiding somewhere in the place. I followed him to your building, skipper—the Lambert. He’s in there now.”

“Good work. Danny. Keep on the job. When he comes out, follow him again. We’re on a hot trail, old timer—we’ve got to play it for all it’s worth.”

The instant he lowered the instrument, Ann Nash whispered: “Mark! Listen!”

He adjusted the phones swiftly. A voice was carrying clearly over the circuit. Mackler was saying huskily:

“He’s on to it. I tell you—but that ain’t what’s worryin’ me. That’s your funeral if it gets found out. Somebody shot at me in my place and I ain’t goin’ to—”

The answer was a whisper. “You fool, don’t you know Hazzard’s tried to scare you into talking? You have nothing to be afraid of.”

Mackler: “Those bullets missed me by less than an inch! I’m not takin’ any more chances. Platt got killed because of what he knew. How’d you like it if I go to the cops with the whole story? I know who it was that called Platt to this office. If you want me to shut up, you’ve got to pay me plenty!”

The whisper: “Keep quiet now! There’s a microphone hidden somewhere in this place. Somebody might be listening in. Listen to me, Mackler. You’re not going to talk, and you’re not going to get any money. Clear out!”

“I guess you’ve got plenty in the safe. I’ll take a good big wad of it right now if you don’t want me to go straight to headquarters and spill—”

The words ceased with a sharp, cracking sound. Hazzard half rose, clamping the ear-phones tight, scarcely breathing. He heard a dull thud, then a gasp. The only sound during a long, quiet period, was a vague, scraping noise. Hazzard slipped the phones off and Ann Nash’s eyes followed him anxiously as he strode to the door.

“I’m going up. Mackler’s on the point of coming clean. Be sure you get it on the record, Ann—every word!”

“Mark—be careful!”

He smiled a wry answer. He hammered the elevator button while his temper flared. When the cab left him at the twelfth floor, he strode

straight to the door of the firm of Lockridge. Culver and Hinton. He found the door bolted, and knocked. Impatience burned through him while slow steps answered. Lawrence Hinton looked out.

“What the devil do you want, Hazzard?”

“A statement from Mackler.”

Hazzard thrust in. Hinton stood back, lips curling, while the alert eyes of the district attorney scanned the room. Hazzard stepped back to the gleaming front of the inset safe; he looked into each of the partitioned sections; he opened the supply closet. He was certain that Mackler had entered this office, certain that the cab could not have carried him down. Now he found not the slightest inkling of Madder’s presence.

“Looking for someone, Hazzard?”

“Mackler was here!”

“Here?” Hinton smiled thinly. “Besides burglarizing the place, are you spying on us? Very commendable, Hazzard—very. It happens you’re wrong. No one by the name of Mackler has been here.”

Hazzard asked quietly: “Quite sure?”

“No one named Mackler, or anyone else,”

Hinton stated flatly. “I’ve been here absolutely alone since Culver left, an hour ago. Just what makes you think, Hazzard, that someone was here?”

Hazzard did not answer. Instead, he asked again: “So you’re quite sure?”

Hinton scowled. “Hazzard, I don’t like your actions. I still think you’re a lying, contemptible sneak—railroading Lockridge to the electric chair. You’ve no damned business here. Get out!”

Red filmed before Hazzard’s eyes; his fists went hard; but he did not strike. He controlled his flaming temper with a desperate effort. He forced the tension from his muscles, the rasp from his voice, as he answered:

“Not yet, Hinton. Not quite yet. Before I go I want to ask you some questions about the very strange way in which Walter Platt met his death.”

HAZZARD walked slowly into the partitioned section which he knew to be Hinton’s office. He saw no indication that Mackler had been here. Hinton followed him, frowning. Hazzard confronted him, eyes narrowed, and asked:

“You told all you knew about it at the

trial, didn’t you, Hinton?”

“I knew nothing about it, and said so!”

“Shall we say only the murderer could know that secret?”

“What the devil are you driving at, Hazzard! Say what you have to say, and get out!”

The very softness of Hazzard’s voice was ominous. “Walter Platt died of suffocation. His body showed all symptoms of it when he was dragged from the river. His whole face blue, his blood dark and fluid—but the only mark of violence was a bruise on his jaw, which certainly was not fatal. That’s puzzling, isn’t it, Hinton?”

“Stop, Hazzard!” Hinton snapped. “I heard you ask it over and over again at Lockridge’s trial—‘What did you use to smother Platt? What did you use to smother Platt?’ Railroading him, every word! Showing the worshipping people that you’re a man of justice to whom friendship can make no difference! Now you’ve got the contemptible effrontery to ask me—”

Hazzard interrupted gently. “What do you think Lockridge used to smother Platt?”

Hinton stared in mute indignation,

Hazzard smiled coldly, bent forward, and spoke rushingly:

“That was a puzzle all through the trial, wasn’t it, Hinton? A strong man smothered to death, without a mark of violence to show how it was done. That murder occurred here, in this office—but how? What is here, in these rooms, that might have been used to suffocate a man without leaving a single mark? Do you know the answer to that?”

“I’ll stand for no more of this. Hazzard! I’m not on trial. You can’t force me to answer your damned insinuations. If you don’t get out of here, I’ll throw you out!”

“You’ll find that,” Hazzard answered, while his temper flared, “a fatal experiment.” He leaned forward tensely, eyes blazing. “I know why Platt was killed. I don’t know how, but I’m going to find out. I’m certain Lockridge is not guilty. You’ve heard my promise to clear him, Hinton—and I’m going to make my word good. Clearing Lockridge means getting the man who actually committed the killing. Does that interest you?”

“Listen—Hazzard—”

“Just to make sure you know absolutely nothing about it, Hinton.” Hazzard said tightly,

“suppose you—”

A knock sounded. A black shadow was blotted over the pebbled pane of the entrance. The knob twisted as Hazzard straightened. Inspector Charles Trencher took slow, heavy steps toward the partition.

“Hello, Hazzard!” Trencher said.

Hazzard’s mercurial temper raged. “Surprised to find me here, aren’t you, Trencher? Quite surprised.”

“No,” Trencher drawled. “One of the boys happened to mention he saw you coming in here a minute ago.”

“Happened to mention it,” Hazzard asked acidly, “because you ordered him to watch me?”

Trencher smiled crookedly. “Well, the fact is, Hazzard, the commissioner wants to see you. Seems pretty anxious—guess it must be something important. Suppose we go over to his office together right now.”

Hazzard answered stiffly. “Listen, Trencher. I’m here for a damned good reason. I want to see Hinton alone. Go back to the commissioner’s office and wait for me there, will you?”

“We’d better go along together, Hazzard,” Trencher answered ominously. “Right now.”

Fury crashed Hazzard’s flat to the desk. He strode out the entrance with face crimsoned and jaw clenched. Trencher followed him into the waiting elevator cab, smiling crookedly. At the lobby level. Hazzard shouldered out first. He walked swiftly to the sidewalk and glimpsed Dan Carey in the shadow.

“Out of sight!” his gesture warned. “Keep an eye on Hinton.”

Trencher was stooping into the car when Hazzard’s hand clamped on his arm. The inspector straightened warily. The tight lips of the district attorney clipped his words:

“The commissioner will have to wait.”

Trencher warned: “Take it easy, Hazzard. You and I are going down there now and—”

“Not—quite—yet!”

Hazzard’s thrust sent Trencher backward. The inspector lurched, grabbing for Hazzard’s arm. Hazzard tensed on toe-tips and his knuckles hissed. His blow clicked to the point of Trencher’s chin. The inspector dove to the pavement with a grunt. Hazzard spun, slipped behind the wheel, and kicked at the starter.

When Trencher pulled up, black eyes smoldering, hand groping automatically for his gun, the tail light of Hazzard’s car streaked red past the corner.

PONDEROUS iron gates swung open, before Hazzard’s car and shut behind him. Guards escorted him to the office of the veteran warden of the State Prison. He strode to the desk of the man who had headed the institution for thirty years.

“Wharton, I want to see Lockridge.”

The warden’s milky eyes blinked. “Sure, you can see him if you want to—but you’re wasting your time.”

They walked silently along bleak cement corridors, up cold steps. Wharton led the way and his voice rumbled.

“Wasting your time. Innocent men don’t get executed. You can search all the court records for three hundred years back, and you won’t find a single authentic case of an innocent man’s paying his life for a crime he didn’t commit. When Lockridge gets the jolt, it’ll be a guilty man frying.”

Hazzard said wryly: “I’m doing my best to see that the precedent holds this time, warden.”

The hall in the remote wing where the chair room was located rang rhythmically with their footfalls. Men condemned to die occupied these heavily fortified cells. Gaunt, haggard faces looked out at Hazzard as he passed—some of them the faces of men whom Hazzard had convicted with a grim certainty of their guilt. But when he paused, he gazed at the pallid features of a man he believed with all his heart to be innocent.

“Hello, old man,” he said. To Wharton he added: “Put through a call to Governor Bryant for me, will you, warden? Thanks!”

Duncan Lockridge smiled wanly as Wharton tramped away, and extended a thin hand through the bars. Hazzard gripped it hotly. The man who had been one of the most highly esteemed attorneys in the city, who now was awaiting the opening of the green door of death, said quietly:

“I’m glad you’ve come, Mark. I want to tell you that I don’t hold it against you. You were fair at the trial—fair to your job and to me, too. You’re not to blame because I’m here.”

“Duncan—” Hazzard’s earnestness tightened his voice. “You’ve told me your story

twenty times, but I want to hear it again. There might be something—some little thing we've overlooked—that can help clear you."

Lockridge smiled. "Certainly, Mark." He told it again, automatically, while Hazzard listened intently, how he had gone into his office just as Lawrence Hinton was leaving; how he had worked most of the night on an important case; how he had simply left, stopped in a nearby bar for a glass of beer and then driven home. He had seen nothing of Platt, had known nothing of Platt's murder, until the body was found in the river.

Testimony corroborating Lockridge's story had been disastrously weak. The elevator operator in the Lambert Building had not remembered the time of Lockridge's departure. The bartender who had served him the beer had not recalled him at all. This, and the fact that he had been alone in the office all the night, had provided him with only a feeble alibi.

Hazzard asked tensed questions: "Did you see any indication that someone else had used your car during the night? Did you notice the scratches on the side? Isn't there any way you can prove you were in that office all night without having once gone out? Can't you think of something I can work on, Duncan?"

To every query, Lockridge answered: "No."

"And you didn't see Platt at all that night—not at any time?"

"No."

Hazzard smiled. "Chin up, Duncan. I'm not giving up. I'm going to get you out of here, old man. That's a promise."

Again he gripped Lockridge's thin hand. Filled with a torturing bafflement, he walked slowly back along the cold corridor. When he entered the warden's office, Wharton, holding the telephone, grumbled:

"Governor Bryant's on the wire. I got him out of bed. You're wasting your time and everybody else's."

Hazzard gripped the instrument hard. "Governor Bryant? Hazard speaking. I'm getting new evidence in the Lockridge case. I'm absolutely convinced Lockridge is innocent. Governor, in the name of justice, will you grant him a reprieve so that I can have more time to build up a case and—"

Bryant's angry voice interrupted: "What

kind of evidence? Is it admissible in court? Is it strong enough for a new trial?"

Hazzard admitted grimly: "No. But if you'll give me a chance—"

"See here, Hazzard! You've badgered me on this case for weeks. I'll have no more of it! You've got to have damned strong evidence before I'll lift a finger to save Lockridge from the chair. That's final, Hazzard! Good-night!"

Hazzard lowered the phone slowly. His pulse pounded hotly as he left the warden's office. He peered back, in the direction of the death house, and pictured Lockridge in his bleak cell—Lockridge, waiting within sight of the green door, which was destined to open soon and beckon him to his doom.

HUSHED darkness lay over the city when Hazzard stopped his car at the side of the Lambert Building. Eleven floors above the street, he knew, the tireless Ann Nash was still posted at the recording machine. Somewhere Dan Carey was keeping an eye on Hinton. He felt that the relentless Trencher had men looking for him, with orders to bring him to headquarters when seen—a prisoner.

He was warily moving toward the entrance when furtive footfalls sounded behind him and a tense whisper came: "Skipper!"

Hazzard spun to Carey. The ex-cop's eyes shone startled as he peered back toward the alley entrance and said rushingly:

"I've been following Hinton. He left the office right after you did, and went home. A little while ago he came back. His car's around in the alley. Just now I spotted somebody sneaking out the back way. It's too dark to tell if it's Hinton, but he's carrying something heavy and—"

The sound of a starting motor whirred out of the alley blackness. Hazzard strode swiftly. Peering cautiously past the corner, he saw a car without lights spurting toward the far street. It swung out of sight as Carey blurted:

"That's it, shipper! It might be Hinton! He put something in the car—brought it down the fire-stairs and—"

"Come on, Danny!"

Hazzard whirled back. Carey clambered into his machine while he kicked it into action and they turned to speed after the car that scurried from the alley. He glimpsed it on the next street

when he was three intersections beyond the Lambert Building, and twisted to follow. The zigzagging chase led him out of the business district, through a section of warehouses, into river dampness. The bewildering turns of the mysterious car took it from sight until Hazzard chanced a swift run onto the ramp of the bridge.

Then he glimpsed it—a black, motionless shadow at the apex of the span. A dark figure with hunched shoulders was moving beside it, Hazzard pressed at the accelerator when he saw the man furtively lift something heavy and cumbersome to the rail of the bridge. It spilled over and dropped from sight. The black figure spun about as Hazzard's headlights flickered on him; and a gun glittered in his lifted hand.

"Look out, skipper!" Carey gasped as the gun spat fire.

The cracked windshield blinded Hazzard when the bullet struck. His one hand twined hard on the wheel and his other swung to his Webley. He swerved to run alongside the other car while the black figure sprang into it. Three swift flashes sent slugs clanging against Hazzard's machine. The lightless car sputtered away, swung swiftly. A howl of alarm broke from Carey's lips when it came driving straight toward Hazzard's machine.

Hazzard twisted wildly to avoid the imminent head-on collision. Tires whined past him. He spilled down, with his car still rushing, at the warning glint of a gun. Twice more bullets ripped the night air. The slugs whizzed past Hazzard and Carey while they huddled. The other car was roaring away when they straightened to glimpse an iron girder directly ahead.

Hazzard flung his car aside, but the girder tore into his right fender. They spilled forward with the violence of the stop. Hazzard ducked out, Webley leveled; but the other car was speeding off the ramp, lights still out. Carey gripped the rail and peered over, at a foamy white spot on the black surface of the river.

"Skipper! It looked like a man's body he threw over! Did you see it, skipper?"

Hazzard snapped: "I saw it, Danny! Listen. The shots might bring a prowler car at any second. If they spot you, you're done for. Get off this bridge, Danny—make it fast! I'm going after that car!"

His ringing tone urged Carey into a run down the slope of the span as he backed and

twisted to follow the lightless car. Wind whipped past him as he went down the ramp—and his temper flared with the conviction that he stood small chance of spotting the other car again. He swung past corners, searching vainly, lips pressed together and face hotly flushed, as he hopelessly searched.

SITTING at his desk in police headquarters, Inspector Trencher ceased rubbing his jaw to listen. He recognized the quick footfalls sounding in the corridor. His lips twisted with a grim smile as he rose. He said to ex-Sheriff Halsey, who was slouched in a chair, and to Commissioner Brook, who was moving angrily back and forth:

"That's Hazzard coming."

Hazzard paused on the sill, eyes glinting from Trencher's crooked smile, to Brook's accusing glare, to Halsey's stubborn defiance. He came quickly to the desk, took up Trencher's pencil, scribbled on a pad. He said imperatively:

"Here's an automobile license number. I want to know who owns that car—and I want a warrant for his arrest."

Trencher drawled "Sure," and touched a button. "Warrant? What's the charge?" He handed the slip to a blue-shirted man who came in and immediately withdrew. "Why don't I make it two while I'm at it? Another for Mark Hazzard, charging assault and battery on an officer of the law."

"If you like, inspector," Hazzard said bitterly. "I want a warrant charging Lawrence Hinton with first degree murder."

"Hinton?" Trencher sat up. "Who's he killed?"

"Thomas Mackler."

"Where's the body?"

"You'll have to drag the river for it."

Trencher swiveled back. "Tell me, Hazzard, how can I charge Hinton with murder when we haven't got the *corpus delicti*?"

Hazzard snapped: "I saw Hinton sneaking out of the Lambert Building with a man's body. I saw him throw it off the bridge. My testimony will establish the *corpus delicti*. I want that warrant!"

Trencher countered: "Are you absolutely sure it was Hinton? Are you positive it was Mackler's body? If you're not, you don't get the warrant. A mistake would get the whole department into hot water. Eye-witnesses are

sometimes wrong, you know.”

“Stick to the procedure, be absolutely certain before you make a move, Trencher,” Hazzard challenged, “—and give Hinton a chance to slip out of the state!”

“There’s plenty of time, Hazzard,” Trencher drawled. “If we find Mackler’s body in the river, that’ll be plenty of time. How’d Hinton kill him? Get any idea? If you didn’t actually see the murder committed, if your proof isn’t conclusive—why, I can’t do anything, Hazzard, until we’ve got the body.”

The door opened again, while Hazzard strove to control his racing fury, and a blue-shirted man brought a slip to Trencher’s desk. The inspector said “Humph!” and handed it to Hazzard. He peered at a scrawled address, and a name: Vinton Culver. Speechless, he watched Trencher lift the telephone and ask: “Get me Vinton Culver’s home right away.

“Better cool off, Hazzard,” he suggested. “Culver’s car, but you’re accusing his partner, Hinton. You can’t have any warrant.”

“It means only that Hinton used Culver’s car tonight—just as he used Lockridge’s to dispose of Platt’s body.”

Trencher said “Humph!” again and “Where’s your proof of that?” He asked into the transmitter: “Mr. Culver? Inspector Trencher talking. Have you been using your car tonight? Has anyone else been using it? Just take a look at it, will you, to make sure?” To Hazzard he explained: “He’s going out to the garage now. We’ll know in a minute.”

Commissioner Brook was facing Hazzard grimly. “Look here,” he said, “Are you trying to pull the wool over our eyes by pretending to be on fire about the Lockridge case? You’d better let that go, Hazzard. You’re through being the D.A. Explain this, will you?”

He handed Hazzard two photographs. Hazzard started. They depicted the drawn face of a young man ten years younger than Hazzard. A number identified the prisoner of the law known then as Dennis Grant. Hazzard remembered, with a pang of pain, that photograph being taken. It brought the agony of the past into the present as he gazed defiantly into Commissioner Brook’s eyes and asked:

“Who is this?”

“Don’t you recognize yourself, Hazzard?”

Brook asked. “Can’t you see it’s Dennis Grant?”

“A resemblance, yes,” Hazzard countered. “It’s why Halsey made his mistake. Since the law demands positive evidence, you’ve got to admit that picture is not conclusive.”

Trencher, smiling crookedly, put down the telephone and remarked: “Culver says his car is in the garage. You’re having another of your brainstorm, Hazzard.”

“If it’s there, it’s just been put back!” Hazzard retorted. His knuckles pressed the desk. “You’re taking Halsey’s word that I’m the man in that picture—taking it after a lapse of ten years. You said a moment ago, Trencher, ‘eye-witnesses can be wrong, you know.’ Halsey’s statement is worth nothing.”

Halsey grumbled: “I know you’re Dennis Grant—don’t try to bluff out of it.”

Hazzard whirled on him. “Have you studied the science of criminology, Halsey? Are you familiar with the experiments of Munsterberg, Dauber, Gross, Dupre, Heindl, Hellweg—all proving how unreliable eye-witnesses are? Do you know it’s been proved that witnesses on the average make an error of about five inches in the height of a person, and mistake the age by eight years?”

“Do you know it’s an established fact that eye-witnesses are wrong about the color of the hair in exactly eighty -three per cent of careful tests? Those errors were made in only a matter of minutes, and you claim to identify me positively as Dennis Grant after more than ten years’.”

Halsey reiterated stubbornly: “You’re Grant.”

Hazzard faced Trencher. “You’ll have to have better proof than that, inspector. Until you get it, I’m still the D.A. Gentlemen, good-night!”

Trencher leaped up and snarled: “Come back here, Hazzard!” as the district attorney snapped through the door. He sprang after Hazzard and followed swift footfalls down the stairs. When he reached the street, Hazzard’s car was speeding away. Trencher tramped back grimly. Once in his office, he punched push-buttons as he snarled commands.

His orders brought eight hard-faced plain-clothes men to his desk. His voice droned at them ominously:

“Keep this strictly under your hat. Any man who lets it leak out will get broken. I want

Mark Hazzard. Find him. Watch his office, and grab him. Bring him back here. Start looking for him right now!"

Eight grim detectives went out the door while Trencher peered at the rogue's gallery photographs of Dennis Grant, convicted murderer, and smiled twistedly.

CHAPTER IV STILL MAN-HUNT

ANN NASH looked through the window of the district attorney's office, across the sunlighted street at a window in police headquarters, and saw Inspector Trencher at his desk. She knew that the plain-clothes man posted in the corridor was there at Trencher's orders. Dread certainty that Hazzard was in grave trouble filled her, but she could not guess the reason. Since Dan Carey had relieved her at the recorder in the Lambert Building, she had neither seen or heard from Hazzard.

Each empty hour was agony to the girl. The day was an eternity of consternation and anxiety. She remained at her desk with torture showing in her eyes—until, long past sunset and after a period of trying silence, the telephone rang.

"This is Vinton Culver speaking," a voice said. "Will you come to my home right away? It's very important."

Ann Nash caught a faint hint of Mark Hazzard's inflection through the disguised tone. She went from the office breathlessly, pulling on her coat while she ran down the stairs, tugging an impertinent hat on her head while she slipped into her car. She sensed that she was being watched by Trencher's men as she turned in the direction of the attorney's home.

She crisscrossed the city until she was sure she had shaken off anyone who might be trailing her car. She followed the bends of a boulevard and braked in tree-shadows near Culver's residence. As she hurried to the entrance, a shadow stepped from the hedge and said:

"Good girl, Ann. I'm going to need you."

"Mark!" She whirled to him breathlessly. "Where have you been, Mark? What's happened?"

"No time to explain now, Ann." His hand closed on hers snugly while they went to the door. "I'm in a spot, that's all. Don't worry about me—it's Lockridge I'm thinking of. I've got to get the

evidence to clear him tonight, no matter what it means, or he'll go to the chair. If Culver—"

He broke off as the entrance opened. A maid escorted them into a library, and they waited tensely. The girl saw that Hazzard was carrying a small suitcase which was very heavy, that he had something bulky in his pockets. He grimly resisted the mute question of her anxious eyes until Vinton Culver strode toward them stiffly.

Hazzard said quickly: "Mr. Culver, I'm pressed for time. Please trust me as much as you can. I'm more convinced than ever that Lockridge is innocent. You want to help me clear him, don't you? You want to see the man who is actually guilty get the chair instead?"

"Certainly," Culver answered coldly. "Certainly. But how—"

"When Trencher called last night, about your car, you didn't feel the radiator to see if it was hot? You merely made sure it was in the garage and "Naturally. Trencher merely asked—"

"Have you seen any indications that your car was used late last night, without your knowledge—taken out of your garage, and then put back?"

"No."

"Mr. Culver, I want the combination of your office safe."

"What? Why? What the devil, Hazzard, are you—"

"Give me the combination of that safe! It's vital. Then call Lawrence Hinton and ask him to meet you at your office in half an hour. You're not going there to see him, but I am. Anyway, give him that message."

Culver hesitated; but the sting of Hazzard's words and the blaze of Hazzard's eyes decided him. He wrote cryptic symbols on an envelope and handed it over. He spun the dial of the telephone. Hazzard, taking up the heavy suitcase, heard him say:

"Larry? I'd like you to meet me at the office in half an hour. Yes, it's important." Culver's eyes widened. "You are? You think it best? I'll talk it over with you. Half an hour, yes." The lawyer rose and explained: "Hinton insists on preferring charges against you, Hazzard—for burglary."

"That," Hazzard declared as he strode to the door, "is literally the least of my worries. Good-night, Mr. Culver."

Ann's hand kept warmly on his arm as they hurried to her car. He put the heavy suitcase in the rumble compartment and clicked on the radio while he turned toward the center of the city. The girl asked anxiously:

"Won't you tell me, Mark? You know I'll understand—anything."

Hazzard smiled. "I know, Ann—but I can't. Listen. I want you to relieve Danny at the recorder. Whatever comes over the wire tonight is going to be of the utmost importance. I'm positive Hinton is guilty of the Platt killing, but there's only one way of pinning it on him."

Hazzard listened intently to the voice of a news commentator issuing from the radio:

"Thomas Mackler, who was a juror in the Leeds case, is still missing from the rooming house where he lives. Police have been unable to locate him. Though no information is forthcoming, it is believe that the men now dragging the river are searching for Mackler's body. Whatever they are searching for, they have not found it so far. The swift current of the river, and its unusual depth has in many cases made the task of dragging it unsuccessful."

Hazzard said wryly: "I can't count on that." He turned to the girl: "Ann, Hinton killed Platt in an unusual way. I think I know how, but there's no evidence to back me up. The only way of getting that evidence is to allow Hinton to try to kill me in the same strange way."

"Mark!"

"A chance." Hazzard answered. "It may not work. But if it does, it's going to nail Hinton—even if I become the *corpus delicti* that proves him guilty."

The girl studied his face in wide-eyed alarm as he swung into the alley behind the Lambert Building. He sent her ahead and searched the sidewalks before he followed her. Certain he was not seen, he lugged the heavy suitcase into the elevator cab. Ann Nash was tensely silent while they rode up and opened the office where Dan Carey was attending the recording machine.

"Nothing worth a damn came through today, skipper," Carey announced as he rose. "The office is empty now."

"Okay, copper," Hazzard said with a tight smile. "Ann's on the job. Get some sleep, then come back and relieve her at five in the morning. Watch yourself. Trencher's got men watching for

me all over town, and one of them may spot you."

"Why, Mark?" Ann Nash insisted. "What has Trencher got on you?"

"Please, Ann—let it go. I've kept clear of him so far, haven't I? I've been busy all day, ducking his dicks and getting certain important jobs done. Now, stick at that machine and catch every word. On your way, Danny—and if you know any prayers, say 'em for me."

The girl's gaze followed him anxiously as he left the office. When, the elevator cab left him at the twelfth floor, he carried his heavy case to the door of Lockridge, Culver and Hinton. His skeleton key admitted him. He clicked on the lights and stood alertly listening. The rooms were empty. The way was clear.

Hazzard carefully turned the combination dial of the inset vault, following the cryptic notations made by Vinton Culver. He tugged the heavy slab of a door open and stepped into the musty air within the steel walls, carrying the heavy case. He sought a place to hide it, and slipped it behind thick ledgers in a low compartment.

He reached to the single electric bulb in the vault and unscrewed it. The globe he twisted into the socket was a duplicate of that he had placed in the light fixture in the outer office—a sensitive microphone. He looked at it as he said quietly:

"Hear me, Ann? Are you getting it? Stay at the machine—I'll call you in a minute."

He stepped out and thrust the heavy door into its frame. He spun the dial to scatter the combination, and brought a bottle from his coat pocket. With a brush he dusted its powdery content over the dial and the handle; it left an almost invisible film of white. He pocketed both bottle and brush, stepped to the office switchboard and dialed the number of the phone in the room below.

"Did you get it, Ann?"

"Yes, clearly."

"Good! Listen. Hinton's almost due. Get every word that's said up here—it's absolutely vital. The whole case may depend on those records. There isn't time to explain now—you'll get it later, over the wire. On the job!"

She echoed: "On the job," and her voice was strained with anxiety.

Hazzard shrugged off his coat, tossed his

hat aside. His watch told him that almost half an hour had passed since Culver had telephoned Hinton. He walked back and forth tensely while the minutes crawled. He turned abruptly, facing the door, when the elevator grille clacked open in the corridor. Steps sounded; a shadow blurred over the pebbled pane of the entrance.

Lawrence Hinton paused, eyes narrowed at Hazzard. He came in slowly, without speaking, his lips tightening maliciously. Hazzard saw desperation in the deeply graven lines of Hinton's face. He said quietly:

"I've got a theory I want to talk to you about, Hinton."

Hinton retorted: "You've gone too far with your highhanded methods. You're going to face a charge of breaking and entering. I'm calling the police right now."

Hazzard smiled: "Go ahead."

Hinton strode quickly to the switchboard. "Culver and I will both testify that you're guilty of committing a burglary."

The dial spun under his nicking finger, "You're through as the district attorney."

Hazzard suggested: "Ask for Inspector Trencher. He'll be quite interested."

The receiver clicked. "Headquarters?" Hinton asked with a rasp. "Give me Inspector Trencher." He glared defiance at Hazzard. "Trencher? Lawrence Hinton calling. I want to prefer a criminal charge against Mark Hazzard. He's here, in my office now. Good!" He jerked the plug from its socket and rose. "Trencher's coming right over."

Hazzard said: "While we're waiting for him. I'll tell you why I came. I've got a theory—I mentioned that. I think I know how Platt was killed. It's the answer to the whole nasty business, Hinton."

Hinton's eyes narrowed.

"Platt came to this office. The bruise on his jaw, found in the necropsy, showed he'd been hit hard—knocked unconscious. The man he was trying to blackmail did that—the man who bribed him as a juror on the Leeds case. You did it, didn't you, Hinton?"

Hinton challenged; "Can you prove it, Hazzard?"

Hazzard admitted: "No. Platt's dead—and so is Mackler, in the same way. You were in this office with Platt. You knocked him down. You

thought you'd killed him on the spot, didn't you. Hinton—that wizened little man with heart trouble. You were terrified, and you tried to think how you could cover yourself. You were here, with Platt on the floor, supposedly dead, when you heard the elevator stop—Lockridge coming up."

Hinton's eyes were glaring. "Go on, Hazzard," he bade huskily.

"Your only thought, when you heard Lockridge coming, was to hide him. The safe was standing open. You dragged Platt into it and locked him in. You pretended to Lockridge that nothing had happened, and went out. That's what killed Platt, Hinton—all the post-mortem symptoms show it—suffocation while he was locked in that safe."

Hinton snarled: "You're talking damned nonsense!"

"Am I? You had to wait until Lockridge left the office before you could get Platt out of the safe. You used Lockridge's car that night—and Culver's to get rid of Mackler. You've sneered at me for convicting Lockridge, but you're letting him go to the chair for a murder you—"

Hinton struck with savage desperation. Hazzard had seen that fist grow hard. He had seen it begin driving toward his jaw. He was a trained boxer who could have parried that crushing blow with ease but he deliberately let Hinton's hard knuckles jolt him to his heels. He collapsed like a dropped length of chain.

Hinton stood stiff, knuckles bleeding. He bent over Hazzard; He made sure that Hazzard was unconscious. With feverish haste he strode to the safe and turned the combination dial. He tugged the heavy door open. He dragged Hazzard into it. His moves became frantically swift as he shoved the slab into its frame and scattered the combination—for footfalls were sounding in the hall.

CHAPTER V FINGERPRINT TRAP

THE safe locked. Hazzard was imprisoned in it. Hinton made sure of that while he steadied himself and answered the rap of knuckles on the entrance. He stepped back as Inspector Trencher came in with eyes blackly ominous.

Hinton blurted: "Hazzard knocked me down when I was turning from the telephone,

inspector. He ran out—maybe he used the fire-stairs. I'll charge him with burglary when you find him."

Trencher drawled: "Beat it, did he? Don't worry, Hinton. I'll grab that hot-head."

Hinton followed Trencher into the corridor. He stood rigid, watching the inspector charge down the fire-stairs.

When the footfalls were no longer audible, he peered into the office, eyes narrowed in wonder. The microphone haunted his mind. It must be hidden somewhere. He touched the elevator button, tensing with a growing determination, his eyes gleaming with the same savage light that had filled them when he had trapped Hazzard in the vault.

He stepped tensely through the opened grille and asked of the night elevator operator: "Did he come from the street, that man you brought up first? Do you remember where he came from?"

"No, he came from the eleventh floor," the operator answered. "He's got an office there. Eleven-twenty."

"Take me down."

Hinton's slitted eyes turned to 1120 when he left the cab. He took slow, steps toward it and silently twisted the knob. It held. He listened through, to a faint rustle of movement. His face became a mask of murderous intent—and he knocked.

Ann Nash heard the sharp rap through a voice that was speaking over the wire. She had clearly heard Mark Hazzard's accusation of Hinton. She had caught the thud of the driving blow and the thump of Hazzard's falling body. Trencher's voice, and Hinton's again, had followed a strained interval. Again there had been a period of baffling silence, but now a voice was speaking in the phones; and it was the voice of Mark Hazzard.

"Can you hear me, Ann? It's all right. Hinton knocked me cold for a few minutes. Did you get it all, Ann?"

Again the imperative knock sounded. The girl turned anxiously, slipping off the phones. She rushed to the door, drew the bolt, whispered, "Come in, Danny," and hurried back. The voice was sounding again when she replaced the phones. She heard quiet steps behind her while it said:

"I'm inside the vault, Ann. Hinton has

locked me in. He plans to leave me here until I've died of suffocation. It won't be long before—"

An unseen hand snatched the phones from Ann Nash's head. Another clamped across her eyes as she turned frantically. She tried to spring-up as an arm crushed her and dragged her back. The shattering-crash she heard was the fall of the desk lamp. Blackness filled the office and blinded the girl while the pressing hand lifted from her eyes to her mouth. She strove to escape the mad strength of the man who held her—until a paralyzing blow struck the side of her head.

The girl became a limp burden in Lawrence Hinton's arms. He lowered her, and sent the recording machine crashing to the floor with a savage kick. Its turn-table jammed to a stop. He clawed at the girl's dress, ripped it open, tore off the sleeves. He used one to bind Ann Nash's slender ankles, the other to pinion her wrists. He stuffed a silken gag into her mouth and tied it tight; and he left her unconscious while he turned to the automatic recorder.

It was broken. He took the composition disc from the turn-table and broke it in his hands. In a compartment in the lid he found other records; and he cracked each one apart. He made certain that he had destroyed every one before he stole for the door. He carried the fragments out with him. Ann Nash, peering through the haze of returning consciousness, vaguely saw him go, though she couldn't distinguish who it was.

A dim voice echoed in her mind—Mark Hazzard's. "I'm in the vault. Hinton has locked me in. He plans to leave me here until I've died of suffocation."

The girl strove desperately to break from the silken bonds. She tried to cry out, but her muffled voice was inarticulate. With all the strength she could summon, she tried to tug her wrists free, to kick her ankles loose—but the knots were hard, the bands painfully tight.

"I'm in the vault Hinton locked me in to die of suffocation."

The corridor beyond the door was silent. When the elevator hummed, the cage passed the level of the eleventh floor without stopping. The nearest offices were empty; and beyond the window was heavy darkness. Ann Nash could not know how many endless minutes passed while she tugged at her bonds. She could think only of the voice of Mark Hazzard as it had come over the

wire:

“Locked in the vault die of suffocation.”

Tears streamed from Ann Nash’s eyes while she lay exhausted. The faint shine from the street vanished on the pane, and told her that dawn was near, that hours had passed. Again and again she renewed her attempts to break free, but each sapped her strength. She lay faint, heart pounding, aware of nothing but that voice, conscious of no feeling save the dread of the death it had promised Mark Hazzard.

“Locked in the vault to die die

ANN NASH scarcely heard the sound that came at last to disturb the crushing silence. Her eyes turned dimly toward the shadow that appeared on the pane. She heard a key click, saw the blur of a square face, heard a blurted expletive.

It was Dan Carey. She summoned her strength as she felt the knife in his hand sawing at the silk. She ignored his questions as she struggled to her feet. She tottered to the door and gasped:

“Danny—call Culver—Culver. He’s got to open the safe—Mark’s in it. Get Trencher. They’ve got to—open the—safe.”

An amazed elevator operator carried the exhausted girl in her torn dress up one floor. She tugged at the knob of the entrance of the suite of law offices and implored the attendant to open it. She waited in agony until the pass key drew the bolt; and she stumbled to a stop, gazing in terror at the shining door of the vault.

“Mark—Mark!”

She was trying with unreasoning hopelessness to find the combination on the dial when Dan Carey shouldered in. Carey exclaimed: “I got ’em both—Culver and Trencher. I told ’em to come fast as they can make it.” he shuddered. “Is he in there, Ann—the skipper?”

“He’s been there for hours—hours,” she wailed. “He may be dead, Danny—it’s been so long.” A noise in the corridor brought alarm to her eyes. “You’ve got to keep away from Trencher, Danny. Please go. There’s nothing we can do—but wait.”

Dan Carey grimly remained until the hum of the elevator warned him. He sped to the fire-stairs door and peered back through a crack to see Trencher and Culver hurrying into the office. He heard Ann’s desperate: “Open it—open it!” and

grimly crept down.

In the office. Culver raised his hand to the dial and hesitated. “Hazzard’s in there?”

Trencher gripped the girl’s arms and demanded: “How the devil did he get in there? What’s happened? Speak up!”

She tried to turn from him and implored again: “Please open it—please! It’s been so long—”

Culver tensely began turning the disc.

“Hinton put him in there!” the girl exclaimed wildly. “Hinton hit him, and dragged him in, and left him there to die. If—if Mark’s dead—if it’s cost him his life—he’s proved Lockridge is innocent just the same.”

Culver exclaimed: “That’s right.” Ann peered as the lawyer thrust at the huge steel handle. A moan of despair broke from her trembling lips when she saw that it would not turn. Trencher blurted blasphemy—for Culver, in his nervous anxiety, had missed one of the points of the combination by a hair.

THE inspector snapped: “Try it again—quick! No—wait!”

He listened alertly. A faint hum was issuing from the elevator shaft. A cab was coming up. Trencher pushed Culver away from the vault. He seized the girl’s arm firmly. With a sharp gesture toward one of the partitioned offices he snapped:

“Get out of sight! That might be Hinton coming. If he’s guilty—if it’s cost Hazzard’s life to prove it—I’m going to get him cold! *Get in there!*”

He thrust Culver into the office. He forced the girl with him, and quickly closed the door. Ann Nash scarcely breathed when the click of the opening lock sounded. Trencher brought his service gat into his crusty hand while slow footfalls moved across the office. Silently he opened the door a crack; and his black eyes narrowed on Lawrence Hinton.

Hinton’s eyes shifted warily right and left as he stood at the vault, listening. His lips curved with malevolent triumph as he reached to the dial. He paused to glance at his wristwatch; and he mumbled: “Seven hours—seven hours.” There was no sound in the office while Trencher watched Hinton through the crack as the man selected the combination of the vault on the dial.

The last number stopped under the mark.

Hinton seized the handle, thrust it down. He tugged the great door slowly open, retreating with it. Light gleamed on the floor in a spreading fan, and Hinton stepped into it. He expected to see Mark Hazzard lying twisted on the floor, face swollen, eyes protruding, dead of suffocation. He did not expect the sight he beheld—Hazzard standing erect, smiling calmly, Webley firmly leveled.

“Raise your hands, Hinton,” Hazzard said. “I think this case is closed.”

Hinton stood stock still, shocked icy cold, staring at the apparition who came at him out of the vault. He scarcely heard the swift movement behind him. He retreated slowly, almost unaware that Trencher’s hard hand was closed on his arm. He heard a girl’s: “Mark—Mark!” and saw the frantic girl fling her arms around the ghost who continued to level an automatic at him.

“Hold him, Trencher!” Hazzard’s arm tightened snugly around Ann. “It’s all right, darling. Didn’t you get it on the wire? I told you I’d brought in two small oxygen tanks in the suitcase—didn’t you get it? I’ve been waiting for Hinton to come back. Ann, it’s all right!”

“He broke the machine!” the girl sobbed. “I didn’t know, Mark—I didn’t know!”

Trencher growled while Hinton still stared: “You’ll testify that Hinton locked you in there, will you, Hazzard? Was that the way he finished Platt—and Mackler?”

“Exactly,” Hazzard said. “I’ll testify to it, and so will the stuff on his hands. I powdered the dial and the handle with naphthionate of sodium when I first came in here. It’s still on his skin even if he’s washed his hands in the meantime. It’ll shine under ultra-violet light. You’re familiar with that thief-trap, aren’t you, Trencher?”

Trencher snarled: “If that’s so, Hinton, you’re nailed beyond all doubt!”

Suddenly Hinton wrenched away. He spun to drive a wild blow into Trencher’s face. He tore his arm loose and whirled to the door as Hazzard went from Ann Nash’s arms with automatic twinkling. He bounded after Hinton into the corridor. He stopped short, straddled, when Hinton crouched at the entrance of the fire-stairs with a revolver glinting up from his pocket. Hazzard leaped aside at the first thunderous report.

Screaming lead caromed off the corridor walls. Gunsmoke gusted in the dim light. Stinging

flecks hit Mark Hazzard’s face while his automatic crashed. He took slow steps forward, peering narrowly at Hinton, sprawled on the floor, whimpering with the pain of a broken arm. When Hazzard paused it was because Trencher’s big-hand closed on his arm.

“There’s your man, inspector,” Hazzard said. “Pick him up.”

Trencher answered: “All right, Hazzard. From now on this case is entirely mine. I’m taking Hinton to headquarters, and I think you’d better come along. How about it, Hazzard—considering this?”

“This” was a card Trencher had slipped from his Docket. Hazzard saw fingerprint smudges on it. He saw blank spaces filled in with haunting dates, under a black line indicating the card belonged to the records of the Philadelphia Police Department. A sigh of utter despair drained his lungs as he gazed haggardly at the lettered name: *Dennis Grant*: and, following *Convicted of*, that dread word: *Murder*.

The card went back into Trencher’s pocket.

BLUIISH light filled the room in police headquarters where Hinton’s tired voice droned. Ultra-violet light, shafting from a reflector, bathed Hinton’s hands while officers held them during the confessional. The brilliant phosphorescence on the fingers was a shine that proved a killer’s guilt.

“Lockridge gave me the Leeds case to organize. If we lost it, it would be my fault. That’s why I bribed Platt and Mackler. Lockridge and Culver didn’t know anything about it.” Hinton recited as the police stenographer’s pencil sped. “I couldn’t pay blood money to Platt. If he talked, it would mean the end of me as a lawyer—maybe send me to jail. I didn’t mean to kill Platt. But Mackler—”

Mark Hazzard turned at a touch on his shoulder. “Governor Bryant on the wire,” a whisper said. He went quietly out the door, into the office where Trencher, Commissioner Brook and ex-Sheriff Halsey were waiting. He smiled tightly and took up the phone.

“Hazzard, you were right from the beginning,” Governor Bryant said. “I’m issuing a pardon to Duncan Lockridge at once. Thank God you found out the truth before it was too late.”

Hazzard said “Thank you, governor,” and turned to face Trencher. The inspector’s ominous black eyes were upon him: that crooked smile meant victory. Trencher slowly handed the fingerprint card to Hazzard and asked: “What have you got to say to that—Dennis Grant?”

Hazzard’s eyes went over that card like a microscope. His smile had grown when he tossed it to the desk. “That’s not worthy of you, Trencher,” he said, “not a palpable fake like that.”

“Fake?” Trencher snapped. “What do you mean—fake? Those are your prints, aren’t they?”

“My prints,” Hazzard admitted. “The date of arrest on that card is December 4, 1924. Down here in the corner is a little code imprint made by the printer. See it?”

He pointed to the tiny type: 45-100M-3-4-35.

“It means that this fingerprint record card is Form 45 in that shop. The order called for a hundred thousand of them. They were run through the press on March 4, this year. That card didn’t come into existence until eleven years later than the date of arrest written on it. You overlooked that, didn’t you, Trencher?”

Trencher jerked to his feet. “All right—but you can’t get away from these photographs! That’s you—Dennis Grant, murderer! Can you deny that, Hazzard?”

Hazzard leaned forward tensely. “That fingerprint card is a fake. These photographs are questionable. You’ve heard of the case of Will West and William West, both convicts at Leavenworth Penitentiary in 1903, both negroes, one a murderer and one guilty of manslaughter—two men absolutely identical in appearance, impossible to tell apart, though they were absolutely no relation to each other. Amazing, Trencher—but such similarities happen. Realizing that, can you pin this thing on me?”

Trencher retorted: “There’s a man who identifies you absolutely as Dennis Grant,” and he gestured to ex-Sheriff Halsey.

Hazzard gazed at Halsey levelly. He said quietly: “Listen. The charge you’ve made is enough to wreck my whole life. It’s come down to this—your word against mine. All right. Halsey. Are you willing to answer a few questions?”

Halsey challenged: “Ask me anything you please. I know you’re Grant.”

“You were sheriff in Delphia County

when Grant was convicted of murder in Philadelphia, more than ten years ago, weren’t you?”

“I was.”

“How long were you sheriff there?”

“Four terms.”

“You remember me—remember me, distinctly as Dennis Grant—among all the men who become your prisoners during that time?”

“I do. You’re Grant.”

“Then you’d remember all the others as well, wouldn’t you, Halsey?”

“I’d know ’em anywhere. I never forget a face. I haven’t forgotten your?”

Hazzard smiled as he removed a photograph from his pocket. He offered it to Halsey and asked: “Then you remember this man?”

Halsey peered at the photograph and answered gruffly: “No, I don’t remember him.”

“What!” Hazzard’s voice rang with surprise. “You never forget a face, yet you don’t remember the man in that picture?”

The ex-sheriff shifted uneasily in his chair. “Wait a minute now. I’m gettin’ it.”

“What’s the matter with your perfect memory, Halsey?” Hazzard demanded. “Don’t you remember his name—the crime he committed—anything about him? Do you confess your recollection is faulty—that it can’t be relied on?”

“No, I don’t!” Halsey snapped. “It’s comin’ back to me. His name—”

Hazzard asked swiftly: “Was it Frank Harker or Ernest Berger or Henry Flint—which of the three was it, Halsey?”

“Flint!” Halsey exclaimed. “That’s his name, Henry Flint!”

“Flint,” Hazzard echoed. “What was his crime? Murder, burglary, kidnaping, or—”

“Murder! That’s him. He killed an old guy named Moses Abrams. He was sentenced to the chair. You can’t fool me, Hazzard! I remember him, just as sure as I remember you!”

Hazzard straightened, smiling. “Henry Flint, once a prisoner of yours, sentenced to electrocution for murdering: one Moses Abrams. You remember him just as sure—as you remember me.” And Hazzard laughed.

Trencher snapped: “Cut that out. Hazzard! You can’t get away from it! You’re Grant—”

“One moment, inspector!” Now Hazzard was not laughing. His eyes were blazing, his face reddening as his temper flared. He took the photograph from Halsey’s fingers and turned to the desk. “You heard Halsey identify this picture definitely. It’s his word, and his word alone, you’re trying to use to ruin me. Look at this picture, Inspector Trencher. Study it well.

“I spent hours this morning finding it. I spent more hours waiting while a photographer copied it to make it look like a rogue’s gallery picture. Perhaps you’ll recognize it more easily than Halsey did!”

He turned on Halsey and his words rang sharply. “That photograph was made ten years ago—of the very man you’re looking at now. Henry Flint, murderer? That’s not his picture. You—the man whose word might send me to prison for life—you identified that man as a killer—and it’s an old picture of Inspector Charles Trencher!”

Trencher sat stunned. Commissioner Brook stared in baffled amazement. Halsey shrank

sheepishly, the mumble on his lips an inaudible protest. Mark Hazzard, his eyes shining sharply, turned to the door and opened it.

“Good-night, Inspector Trencher.” he said. “Or, shall I say, ‘good-night, Henry Flint’?”

When he closed the door, he saw Ann Nash hurrying up the stairs. She came to him anxiously. In his arms she asked quickly: “What is it, Mark? Please—what’s the matter?”

Hazzard was listening—through the door. He heard Commissioner Brook growl: “You damned fool, Halsey!” And Trencher’s voice was a roar. “Get out of here, you halfwit! Get out of this office before I break your neck!” Hazzard stepped aside as Halsey charged out and went stumbling down the steps. His quiet laughter came from his heart; but the girl asked worriedly again:

“What is it, Mark?”

“Nothing, Ann—nothing!”

This time the word meant—*nothing*. The spectre of Dennis Grant, convicted murderer, had fled into the darkness of the past.