

# Time for Death

by Maitland Scott

*For ten years of hell. Fritz Hyler had waited for this moment. Now, in one violent second, Hyler's chance for grim revenge was in his grasp—if he could double-cross the unfailing, relentless hands of time.*

F RITZ HYLER'S FINGER trembled as he pushed the button of Judge Wilson's front door. His finger did not tremble from nervousness or fear, but from hatred and a deep, consuming desire for revenge, fostered during ten years in the state penitentiary. Damn Judge Wilson! If it hadn't been for his damned charge to the jury, things would have been different. Yes, the verdict would have been different. Sure—hadn't the mouthpiece said so?

The door was opened by the retired judge's elderly manservant.

"Yes, sir?"

"I want to see the judge. He may not remember me. Tell him some one's here to see him who wants to make an apology before going away from town."

"Yes, sir."

The manservant let Hyler in, motioned him toward a bench in the foyer and then went upstairs.

Fritz Hyler sat there on the bench, forcing a bland expression to his face, reviewing in detail his carefully laid plan. Since the judge had recently attacked a radical political party in a lecture over the air, two attempts had been made to bomb his home. That was what had given Hyler the idea for his clever scheme. Patiently he had waited for the affair to blow over, for the guards to be removed. And now, in his suitcase, was a large clock, the exact duplicate of the eight day clock in the judge's living room....

One day when Hyler had been waiting his turn in a barber shop, he had

idly picked up a smart magazine catering to fastidious men. In this periodical he had seen a picture portraying the judge's home as the epitome of smartness for a bachelor's residence. A section of the two-page picture showed a close-up of the living-room mantelpiece, which bore the eight-day clock—and showing the clock so distinctly that even the make was legible on the dial. The magazine article also told that Judge Wilson was a man of well-regulated, methodical habits, even to the extent of regulating his life with precise daily reminders kept on a memo pad.

In the large base of the clock in the suitcase beside Hyler on the floor, was fitted enough explosive to blow the house into eternity. This explosive was wired to the chronometer mechanism so that it would explode the following night, when Hyler would be many miles away. And it was set for the time when the judge would surely be in bed. Yes, the article, portraying the judge's health habits, such as his regular time for retiring, had been a great help.

The manservant came downstairs.

"Judge Wilson will be down presently. He would like you to wait in the living room."

Hyler walked into the living room, noticing that the servant went somewhere below stairs. This was too good to be true. Now he must act swiftly. Only one detail had been worrying him: a way, on some pretext or other, to be rid of the judge just long enough to substitute the clock in his

suitcase for the clock in the living room.

Swiftly, Hyler sped to the foyer for his bag, returned to the living room, made the substitution, placed his bag in the foyer again and went back to the living room. Now everything was set. The clock, wound up tight, would do its job; and, a perfect twin of the judge's clock, the old fool would never know the difference. The radicals would be blamed for the explosion. And Fritz Hyler, a hundred miles away at the time the bomb went off. ...

**J**UDGE WILSON walked slowly into the living room, and Hyler was surprised at the change in the appearance of the retired jurist. Where was the firebrand, tongue-lashing judge who had urged a jury so successfully to send a man for ten years into the hell of a living grave? For now placid lines etched the formerly harsh contours of his face.

"Gone soft," Hyler thought, sneering inwardly. "Well, that isn't going to help him any."

The judge shook hands with Fritz Hyler, saying: "Good evening, I'm sorry, but I don't seem to know you."

"I'm Fritz Hyler," the ex-convict explained, making his face look as contrite as he could. "You sentenced me to ten years in—"

A look of sudden recognition came to Judge Wilson's face, and he interrupted with: "Oh, yes, I remember now. My dear boy, sit down, sit down."

Hyler sat.

"But I don't see what you can possibly have to apologize to me for," the older man said.

Hyler forced sadness into his tone as he said: "Those threats I made, judge—I want to tell you that I'm sorry, that you'll never have anything to be afraid of from me. I've learned a lot of things, judge, and I'm sorry for everything I've done."

Judge Wilson took a seat near the mantelpiece on which stood the clock, and nodded slowly, gravely.

"I, too, have learned many things, my boy, since last we met. One of the greatest things I've learned is to be happy to see a man, such as yourself, see the light."

Fritz Hyler was sneering inwardly more than ever. That's what had happened to the old codger—he'd got religion.

Hyler now made several attempts to leave, but the judge insisted on his staying, and asked him many bothersome questions about prison life and its effects upon a man's spirit and soul. The judge became animated with interest, rose and walked to a table to fill a pipe.

Then a bell in a nearby church tower commenced to toll off the hour, and the judge paused and listened. As the ninth bong was echoing away, he turned and said with a self-deprecating smile:

"Hmm, that's my cue. You see, I always check my memoranda notations every night at nine to see that I haven't forgotten anything."

He went to a writing desk, consulted a pad, said, "Hmm" again, and walked to the mantelpiece.

"The old foggy does everything so routine he even has to check on himself," thought Hyler.

The judge moved the hands of the clock slightly, correcting its tardiness of two minutes. For a minute he stood there, a hand at the time instrument's back, near the keys, and said:

"Splendid instruments, these eight-day clocks. Save a lot of trouble."

A vague feeling of apprehension had come over Fritz Hyler as the old man touched the clock, but it fled at his casual words.

The ex-convict stood up and said: "You've been very good, judge, but I've

got to catch a train. Afraid I can't stay any longer."

"Very well, my boy," returned the jurist in a kindly voice, "I shan't keep you any longer. But before you go, I have a little gift for you."

The judge walked over to the table and pulled open a drawer. Suddenly the old man whirled, and Hyler gasped.

**H**ELD STEADILY in Judge Wilson's hand was a revolver, and that hand was steady, and the muzzle of the weapon was pointed straight at Fritz Hyler's heart. The elderly jurist's face was still soft and calm, but now there was fire in his eyes and his chin jutted with determination.

Fritz Hyler's mind was whirling. Something, something had gone wrong, and his thoughts kept shrieking: "What? What? What?"

The old man said nothing, but Hyler knew that the judge knew. He was caught, trapped. Wildly he charged straight at Judge Wilson, straight at the muzzle of the gun. Hell, the old gent would probably miss, his hand would tremble.

Judge Wilson's forefinger whitened on the trigger with the pressure of a slow, steady squeeze. The pistol barked spitefully.

Hyler was spun halfway around. He

fought back to balance, grabbing at his shoulder.

"That," said the judge, "was so you wouldn't be killed—so you would have another taste of the penitentiary, which, sadly enough, does not seem to have taught you your lesson. ..."

The police, called in by the manservant, arrived soon. Hyler, manacled and held between two plain-clothes men, stood glowering at Judge Wilson.

The judge picked up the memo pad from the desk, walked close to Hyler with it.

"Look," said the retired jurist, extending the pad of paper, on which was written under the date of that day:

*Wind clock at nine P. M.*

"My servant," said the judge, "used often to forget to wind that eight-day clock, so in the last few years I have taken that duty upon myself. When I tried the winding key—well, that clock was fully wound. Also, when I came into the living room, I passed by your suitcase in the hall, and from the suitcase I heard the sound of ticking. That was a bad oversight on your part, Hyler. You see, I linked the two together. I dare say an inspection of your suitcase and the clock on the mantel will reveal something—ah, rather interesting."