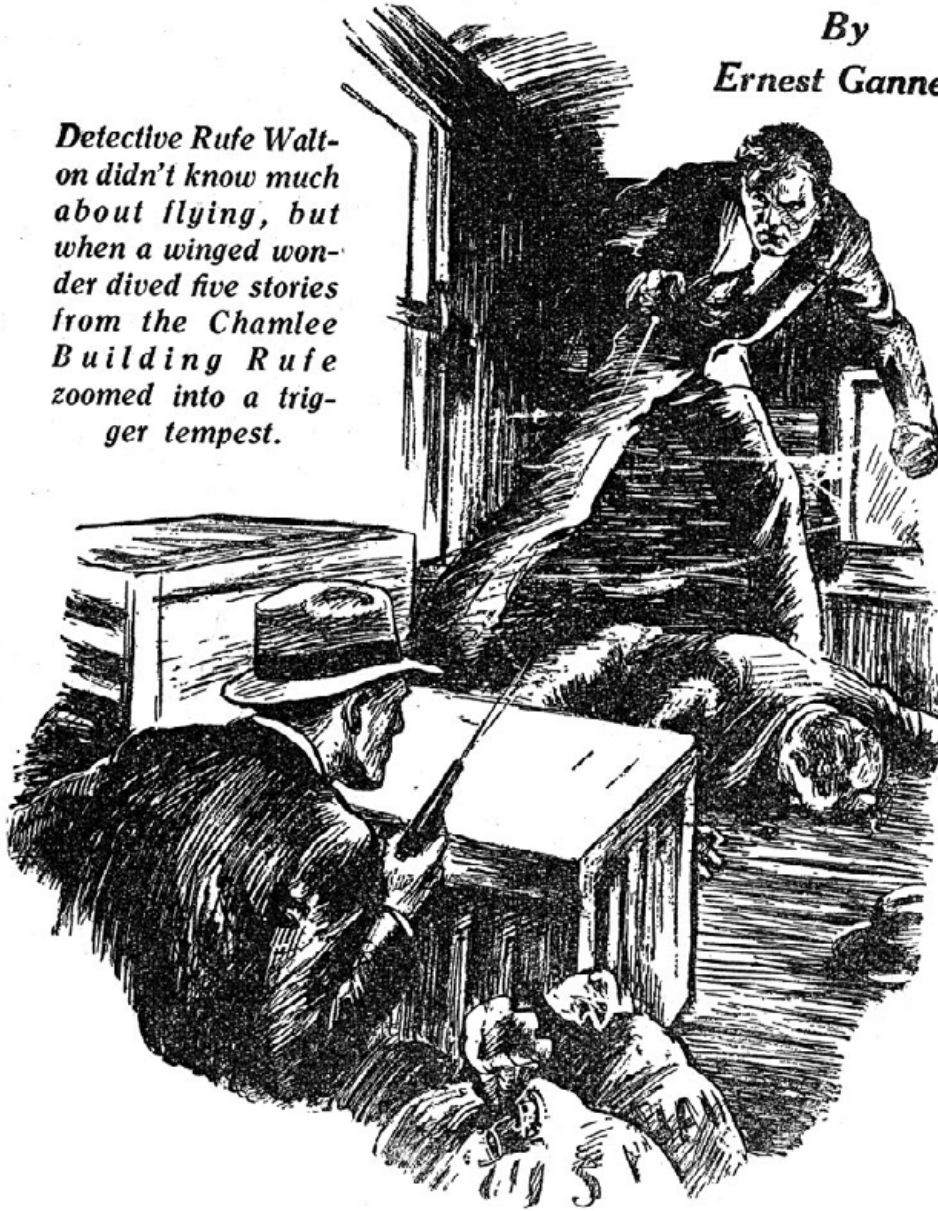


# Stooge for Swag

By  
Ernest Gannett

*Detective Rufe Walton didn't know much about flying, but when a winged wonder dived five stories from the Chamlee Building Rufe zoomed into a trigger tempest.*



**A**N HOUR after he'd made the leap which should have killed him outright, Nick Averamides was in the hospital, and the horrified thousands who had watched him leap to what seemed a certain death had forgotten him, almost to a man.

With any kind of a press Nick might have been famous from one end of the country to the other. But Nick had a poor

press that day, for he had picked a time to jump from the fifth floor of the Chamlee Building when the Citizens National Bank in Chamlee Square was being systematically looted. And that was good enough to crowd poor little Nick all the way back among the radio programs and household hints.

Rufus Walton, Detective Sergeant, was one of the few who remembered Nick

Averamides, but even he was beginning to wish he had never heard of him. Walton, a big slow-spoken man, fair and guileless in appearance, in spite of his size looked so harmless that sundry gentlemen of unsavory reputation had been deceived into thinking they need not fear him. This line of reasoning had eventually provided most of them with free lodging at the expense of the state.

At present Walton's mild eyes looked almost reproachfully at his superior, Captain of Detectives John Clancy O'Brien, who was engaged in administering a dressing down—with trimmings.

"With the Old Man riding my tail so hard I can't take time to think, you come in here again half asleep. You been at the hospital all night again, I suppose?"

"Uh huh," Rufe Walton nodded sleepily.

"Hundreds of thousands. Not simply thousands. Hundreds of thousands cleaned out of the Citizens National and the Old Man hopping because I don't do something about it. I want every man I can spare to put on the case. And what do I get? Six days out of six you come in here looking like a morning after because you're sitting holding a Greek's hand all night waiting for him to whisper sweet nothings in your ear. Forget the Greek. He's out of the case. Nothing to do with it. Understand?"

"Maybe I can't spend my time off duty the way I want to any more?" suggested Walton.

"Not by a damn sight you can't," O'Brien roared. "Not if it's going to leave you like this every morning. Say"—he leaned forward on the desk—"just what gives you the crack-potted idea that Nick Averamides has anything to do with this job?"

"Well," Walton hesitated. "I got a hunch," he concluded stubbornly.

"Get out!" gritted O'Brien with admirable restraint—for him. "Get out

before I tear you to pieces with my bare hands and throw the hunks to the City Council."

WALTON got out, but he got out still thinking about Averamides. If Nick had been just an ordinary window-jumper, he might have been willing to call it coincidence and let it go at that. But Nick had done it with fixings. To wit, one pair of wooden wings attached to his arms—wings about six feet long with crudely carved surfaces which seemed intended to resemble feathers.

And from behind a bolted door of half-inch, chilled steel plate. Walton knew all about that steel door, for he it was who had first tried to break in to prevent the man from jumping.

Chamlee Square was crowded the noon of the jump and it was a woman near Walton who first noticed the man poised in the fifth floor window. Walton looked up and saw him perched there, the clumsy wings catching now and then in the breeze, his gaze fixed out into space. Walton later looked for something at which Averamides might have been staring, but it could have been anything in the skyline of a big city.

The clock tower two blocks away seemed a good bet, though, for the Greek had seemed to be waiting for a fixed time. But this had come later. Walton, at that time, had wasted not a moment getting up to that fifth floor, only to find himself blocked by a bolted door. His gun roared again and again at the lock but it was no use. He had finally called for the emergency squad; had even begun to hope that they might be in time when a loud, swelling roar which had almost the quality of a sigh rose to him from the crowded square and told him that it was too late—for Nick Averamides. . . .

"Phone. For you, Rufe," Walton heard as he came out of O'Brien's office.

Walton cupped the receiver to his ear.

"Yeah," he announced mechanically.

The phone crackled in his ear and Walton lost his lethargy. "I'll be right over," he yelled joyfully.

"Don't tell me. Let me guess." Detective Turber looked up at him with a sour grin. "Averamides is coming to at last and you're going over there. Why don't you go in and throw your shield in O'Brien's eye before you go?"

Walton shrugged and slipped out the door.

Nick Averamides was a small man. Even swollen with bandages and splints as he was he did not take up much space in the hospital bed. The parts of him at all visible did not look good. You don't come down five floors the quick way and end up ready for a May dance. This man on the bed before him should have been dead when they reached him, Walton reasoned.

He sat down while a doctor hovered nearby. Averamides opened his eyes slowly.

"Hello, Nick," Walton began. "How do you feel now?"

Averamides couldn't move his head much but he could move his eyes. He brought them to bear on Walton.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Where are we?"

Walton felt relief. The Greek's accent wasn't bad. He'd been afraid he might have to wrestle with mangled English, or get an interpreter. Well, Nick had been in the country twenty years, according to his wife. He should be able to speak the language by now.

"You're in a hospital, Nick. And you're lucky to be there, too. As for me, just figure me for a pal and let it go at that. Now let's hear about it."

"About what?"

"About this," Walton made batlike motions with his arms. "Why did you do it?"

"Oh," Averamides caught the idea.

"Twenty years I been in this country," he began weakly. "I worked hard all the time when I could. Last five years no work, no money. When I'm broke and this man asks me if I want to fly, I tell him yes."

"Yeah. You wanted to fly. So what?"

"He gave me some money. Then he told me the operation would take a couple of weeks. So I told my wife I was going away for awhile. Then I let the doctor do the operation on me."

"What operation?" Walton looked sideways at the hospital doctor and frowned. The doctor shrugged and shook his head.

"The operation to hollow out all the bones. Like a bird. To make me light like a bird. He opened up my legs and arms and hollowed out the bones. When it was all over and I could walk again I felt light. Like I didn't weigh hardly anything."

Walton looked at the dark face on the pillow and wondered if the Greek was crazy, or if he was. It was the Greek, of course. No man could go through what he'd been through and still give a sensible story. He might have known it. O'Brien had been right after all and he was finished with the force. He had defied O'Brien in coming here on the run, and now O'Brien could have his rating for it. Well, he'd taken a chance, and lost.

"Wait a minute." The doctor stepped forward. "There's something funny about this."

"If I laugh myself sick, you'll only have to put me to bed here," Walton warned grimly.

"No. I mean it. You didn't see this man when he came in, and he's all covered up now so that you can't see for yourself. But he has a series of long scars, or what look like scars, running the length of his legs and arms. As though the bones had been 'reached.'"

"Huh?" Walton exploded. "You mean

some one actually hollowed out this guy's bones? Say—"

"I said they looked like scars. But they were made with acid and some indelible stain apparently, for they were fakes. Scars to the uninitiated, perhaps, but they wouldn't fool anyone who knew anything about it."

Rufe Walton sat down again. "Let's hear the rest of it, Nick."

AVERAMIDES looked as though he might have sunk back into his coma, but his eyelids stirred and opened and he began to speak again. "He told me he could make me the first man to fly, and all I'd have to do for him was one thing. I had to make my first flight for him from the Chamlee Building at half past twelve in the afternoon. That was all I had to do for him to pay him back."

"Icarus, twentieth century," murmured the young doctor.

"Who?" queried Walton.

"Icarus," the doctor repeated. "He was another Greek who tried the same thing. A long time ago."

"Never heard of him," Walton brushed it aside. He turned to Averamides. "Tell me some more, Nick."

"No more to tell. We went to the building and a little after twelve I got ready on the window sill. I was to watch the clock and start at just twelve thirty. The doctor left me there."

"What doctor?" Walton demanded sharply.

"Doctor Palsap."

Walton's head snapped around at the sharp whistle from the young doctor by his side. Know him?"

"By reputation only. Out of my class. Uptown."

Walton frowned. The thing looked screwier and screwier to him as it went along. "You sure you got that name right?"

he demanded of Averamides.

The small figure on the bed nodded, very slightly, then closed its eyes once more. The doctor stepped forward, then looked at Walton.

"No more now," he terminated the interview.

"Okay. Thanks, doc. I guess I got all I can handle for a while in this visit." Rufe Walton shook his head dismally as he went out.

On his way uptown to Palsap's office, Walton's hand fumbled within his pocket and brought forth a newspaper clipping which he reread for possibly the hundredth time. It was from the Globe, of the morning of Averamides' leap. It was an unaddressed advertisement and carried no signature.

**If the party who rode uptown with me on the subway yesterday afternoon will meet me in Chamlee Square at noon, it will be to his immense advantage.**

Walton snorted. No wonder a mob had collected in Chamlee Square. The advertisement was so vaguely worded that anyone who had used the subway on that day might assume the request applied to him, personally. At the Globe office Walton had discovered that the advertisement had come in by mail with a five-dollar bill attached to the letter.

Walton had the letter in his pocket and, although he was sure it tied in with the Citizens National holdup and the leap of Nick Averamides, he was unable to pin it down.

Well, maybe the Palsap angle had something to offer—although it seemed more likely the muddled ravings of sick Averamides.

Palsap's offices formed an impressive suite. Walton chewed on his misgivings while he waited for an interesting looking blonde secretary to arrange an interview for him.

"Doctor Palsap can give you ten minutes now," she announced at last, and led Walton into the doctor's office.

Palsap, a dark, suave-appearing man of medium build, was eyeing Walton's card with a puzzled frown when the detective entered. Walton explained his mission briefly without inferring that it had to do with Nick Averamides' little-publicized leap.

"So I was wondering," he concluded, "if you could tell me if you have a patient by the name of Nick Averamides."

Palsap pressed a button on his desk and the blonde secretary put in a prompt appearance.

"Miss Mather," instructed Palsap, "please see if the files contain any mention of a Nick Averamides."

"No, doctor," returned the girl shortly. "Nor even a similar name."

"Thank you." Palsap turned to Walton again. "Does that answer your question?"

Walton could have sworn there was the suggestion of a sneer beneath the doctor's urbane manner as he brushed a hand lightly against gray-flecked temples.

"Yes. I guess it does," Walton replied. "Sorry to have bothered you."

Palsap leaned back in his chair and buffed the well-manicured nails of one hand against the back of the other. "Would you mind telling me," he smiled, "just who this Nick Averamides is?" He continued hastily: "That is, of course, if it isn't confidential."

"Oh, no. Nothing secret about it. He's the man who jumped from the Chamlee Building the other day."

Palsap clucked sympathetically. His fingernails continued to caress the back of his hand. "Killed outright, I suppose? Tragic. Very tragic."

"No. That's the odd part of it." Walton watched the sweep of Palsap's fingers stop for a moment, then resume as regularly as clockwork. "He was badly broken up, but

he'll live. Or so they say." Walton rose to leave.

IN THE anteroom Rufe Walton addressed the blonde. He held a piece of paper in his hand. "Look, beautiful. How about letting me pound out a line or two on your typewriter? I've a letter here I want to mail, but I forgot to address an envelope. Can you let me have one?"

The blonde proved amenable to the suggestion, but as soon as Walton pecked out the first few letters of a fictitious address on the envelope he knew he was wrong. There was not even a superficial resemblance between the type he set down and that of the letter from the Globe office. Yet he was sure there was a connection between Palsap and Averamides. The doctor had been surprised to hear that Nick was still alive. Surprised and maybe a little scared.

Walton stalled in the outer office, hoping Palsap might make a move to telephone the rest of the crowd. The secretary would have to be in on the whole thing then, or out of the office completely. It was too risky for the doctor otherwise. Walton doubted if Palsap would try it.

He slipped out the door to the hall, but halfway to the elevator he stopped. Damned if he was going to give up Palsap! He stepped into a service door to wait.

His wait was short. The door across the hall opened and Palsap stepped out and walked briskly down the corridor. Walton followed, and by the time he reached the street, Palsap was just getting into a parked car. Walton sought a taxi and pointed out the doctor's car to the driver.

"Keep him in sight. But don't let him know you're doing it. Get me?"

The hack jockey rubbed thumb and forefinger together and said: "Gee, boss, I don't know that I understand what you mean."

Walton uncovered his shield and the significant gesture ceased as though the owner of the hand had grabbed a red-hot coin. The taxi leaped forward.

Keeping Palsap's car in sight, they entered a squalid section of the city where the buildings were old and grimy. Palsap pulled up to the curb while still on a busy street, and Walton's taxi obediently pulled up half a block behind the doctor. Palsap set off on foot and Walton, paying off the cab, followed.

Palsap struck off down a dingy street. By the time Walton reached the corner and turned it, Palsap was climbing to the porch of an ancient house which had obviously been a residence of some pretensions in the section's better days.

Walton stopped in front of a shabby little grocery store nearby and feigned interest in the fly-specked window display while he watched the house from under the brim of his hat.

There seemed to be some difficulty about Palsap's entrance, for the person who first opened the door shut it again and there was a short wait before it reopened. Then there was only a flash of a face as the door swung open and Palsap was hastily admitted.

That settled it for Walton. Palsap was in the thing up to his neck. The quick flash of the man's features was all the detective had needed to identify Roddy Mardigrew. No wonder he had been in a hurry to identify Palsap and get the door closed again. Mardigrew's features were too well known to the police of five or six states as well as to the Federals to let him risk exposure.

Walton returned to the corner, entered a drugstore he found there, and headed for a phone booth. While he waited for his connection with O'Brien he tried to tie up the ends he had on hand.

Palsap and Averamides tied in all right. Palsap was the man who had done to the

little Greek whatever was necessary to make him jump from the Chamlee Building of his own apparent volition. And Roddy Mardigrew's presence meant that he too was, in all probability, implicated.

"This is Walton," he barked into the transmitter as O'Brien's roar came over the wire. He lowered his voice. "I got a tie-up between the Greek and the Citizens National."

A sputter reached Walton's ear and he could imagine O'Brien's fat neck bulging redly over his collar at this. "I told you to lay off the Greek and get to work. Where you been all morning? I'll bust you for this, sure."

"Bust hell," Walton snapped. "Now listen to me." He outlined his progress, giving the address of the old house on the side street. "And I'm sure Roddy Mardigrew is there right now. We'll get him, if nothing else. And if the doc is still there we can hang a harboring charge on him until we can get him sifted down."

"Oh, yeah," he added hastily. "The Greek is out on a limb now. The way I figure it is that he's supposed to be dead. And if we don't look out," he concluded ominously, "he will be."

O'Brien paused a long while before replying. "All right," he admitted grudgingly at last. "We'll watch out for the Greek. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going in the back if I can—to see what I can line up before you get a squad there. Don't send it along too soon. If you tip them too early I may not get anything."

Walton could picture O'Brien on the edge of indecision. He wouldn't want to play it the slow-moving sergeant's way, but Walton held the cards, and O'Brien, threaten as he might, was in no position to issue contrary orders.

"Gum this up if you want this town to be too hot for you," blustered O'Brien in capitulation.

RUFÉ WALTON circled the old house warily on his return, then slipped through a dismal alley to the rear of the building. There was no sign of life as he stepped carefully on the rotted back porch and let his hand fall soundlessly to the knob of the sagging door. He pushed the door gently inward and slipped inside. With the door closed behind him he attempted to adjust his eyes to the gloom of the small hall.

Walton sucked in breath silently at the feeling of the gun prodding his ribs. So there had been a watcher, and he had blundered right into their hands. O'Brien would love this.

"Right on in through that door, pal," a silky voice advised Walton, and the prod of the gun backed up the demand.

Walton moved slowly forward. The door ahead was closed and he made a pretense of trying the knob.

"I can't open it," he said in a low voice. "It must be locked."

The man behind him stepped forward and Walton tensed as he felt the gun leave his ribs for a moment.

"Hell," the man said. "It can't be locked. I just came—" He had no opportunity to conclude his observations, for Walton's right fist came up in the dim light and connected with his chin.

He slumped soundlessly and Walton eased his fall to the floor, pocketing the gun a moment later. The detective spent a few precious moments applying handcuffs and a rough but effective gag.

Turning back to the door, Walton applied his eye to the keyhole and, seeing nothing in the next room, risked cracking the door slightly open. He could still see nothing except a large, nearly bare room, but from beyond a connecting door across the room came the buzz of voices. Walton slipped across the room and tried the keyhole of that one.

There were several men in the next room, among them Doctor Palsap and Roddy Mardigrew. Walton held his breath for long intervals trying to distinguish words.

"But I tell you," Mardigrew was saying in exasperation, "this is the time to strike again. Now—when they won't be expecting another attempt like that."

"I'm not so sure," Palsap answered worriedly. "That detective had a lead on me through Averamides. If he's suspicious, then there's probably more behind it. Averamides never should have lived through that jump. I can't understand how he did. Now he's likely to talk enough to finish me."

A slight sound across the room brought Walton's head up from the keyhole and he faced an unkempt figure coming toward him. The man lifted his feet very high as he walked and grinned with amiable vacancy.

"Hello, mister," the figure greeted Walton affably.

Walton approached the other cautiously. In the dim light from the dirt-crusted window he saw a man of middle age with a stolidly stupid face who pranced back and forth, lifting his feet high at every step. He looked into the man's eyes.

"I thought so," Walton muttered to himself. "Snowed up to a million." Aloud he said: "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"My name is John. The doctor brought me here. But I won't be here long." He lowered his voice to a confidential whisper. "He says I can do it any day now."

"Do what? What are you talking about?"

John looked mysteriously around for invisible eavesdroppers. "Fly," he whispered. "But don't tell anyone I told you. It would make the doctor mad."

Walton grasped the man by the arm. "Now take it easy, John, and tell me an about it."

"I'm going to fly," John persisted doggedly. "Just like a bird. That's why the doctor hollowed out the bones in my arms and legs. So I'd be light and could fly when he gives me my wings. Look."

JOHN leaned down and drew up a leg of his trousers to expose a bony shin. Walton whistled softly. Extending upward on the man's leg was a long, continuous scar, such a scar as might have been made if the limb had been laid open to the bone.

"See, my arms, too," John offered, drawing up his sleeves. His arms bore similar marks.

Walton remarked that he would be damned. John let out an exuberant whoop, and Walton, startled, heard the scrape of chairs in the next room. He dived for the cover of a small table behind which he crouched.

Two thugs came into the room and, paying no attention to John's babblings, led him between them to the next room, closing the door after them. Walton slipped to the doorway again.

"Well, John," Palsap was saying genially as Walton reached the door. "How do you feel now? Ready to try your wings?"

"You bet, doc," John replied. "Any time. We'll show them, won't we, doc? Tell us we can't fly, will they?"

"He'll do all right," Palsap reported to the group in the room. "Get everything timed for tomorrow noon and I'll keep him in condition for it."

"Can I take my friend with me?" John suddenly wanted to know.

"What do you mean?" Palsap whirled on him.

"The fellow in the next room," John waved his hand in the direction of Walton's refuge. "We were just talking about it. He's a nice guy. I'd like to see him get a chance, too."

"See what this nut is talking about," Mardigrew ordered.

Walton, retreating hastily, reached the entrance to the small back hall and stopped dead, for, just coming in the outer door was another pair of gangsters. Walton slammed a shot in their direction without pausing to aim and they tumbled backward in their attempt to escape.

But Walton was trapped now. They were on both sides of him, and guns within the room he had just left took up a chanting roar as they sought him in the hall.

Walton backed into a corner of the hall and filled both hands with guns. He breathed quick thanks for the gun he'd lifted from the man he'd handcuffed before. He alternated with a shot into the room and one in the direction of the back porch. In the room Walton caught a glimpse of Palsap's face, pale and worried.

"It's that detective," the doctor screamed in apprehension as Walton flung a shot in his direction. "They've got us."

"Shut up and get out of the way," Walton heard Mardigrew's rough voice. "Hey, you two outside. Don't let him get away. If you can't kill him, just hold him from that side. We'll hold him from this side and start loading the stuff from the cellar. Then we'll all make a break for it together."

The group in the room behind Walton thinned to a couple of men and the firing became sporadic. It was stalemate, as far as Walton could see, until O'Brien's squad showed up. Suppose O'Brien held off too long, though, and the whole gang got away? Walton felt a desperate need for action.

He reloaded his own gun, then, imitating the voice of one of the two men outside, he called to those within the room. "Okay, you guys, hold it. We just killed him and we're coming in." He shouldered his way into the doorway, guns thrust forward.

The two men left to hold him from that side were caught flatfooted. For only a moment, to be sure, but that moment was enough. Walton's twin guns blared and the two men went down in a screaming heap of crumpled bodies. Rufe Walton stalked past them to the doorway ahead.

The table in the center of the next room was now pushed aside and a shabby rug was pulled away to reveal an open trap door. Through the door packages were being passed and relayed toward the front of the house and on out to the street.

WALTON'S guns voiced thunder once more and he dropped in a running crouch until he reached the shelter of an old and ragged davenport slanted across a corner of the room. He slipped behind it and felt the overstuffed upholstery of the piece shudder as slugs probed for the man it sheltered.

No use to try to pin down the entire gang single-handed, Walton realized. Leave that kind of stuff for glory-grabbers. He'd be satisfied now to keep them busy until O'Brien got his men here. It seemed hours since he had called his chief.

But he had stopped the removal of the bank loot from the dank hole in the center of the room. For a few minutes they tried to move it out behind a screen of greedily tonguing guns. But Walton broke that up. Only an occasional hand dared show above the floor level to throw a desperate shot in the sergeant's general direction.

Walton recognized the staccato chant of new guns outside, and the throaty growl of sirens gurgling to silence as police cars drew to a stop. The men trapped below the floor recognized the same sounds.

They began to boil up through the hole in the floor, and Walton slammed his last clip into an empty gun as he stood up to deal leaden death. But he had forgotten the two men at the rear of the house. He swung

his weapon in that direction a moment too late as a meteor exploded beside his head. He slumped heavily behind the davenport.

"Walton! Walton!"

Rufe Walton heard his name being called. It was O'Brien's bellow, and he now directed it to the men with him. "Find him. Look in that hole there. Maybe they had him down there with them."

Walton passed a hand over his forehead and it came away sticky. He looked at the blood stupidly, then snapped out of it. He struggled to his feet.

"Get Palsap!" he called wildly. "He doped the Greek." He didn't, he realized, know what he was saying. He shook his aching head as he stumbled forward and felt nausea at the pungence of burned cordite in the room.

"Okay, okay," O'Brien said. "We got 'em all. Suppose you get lippy now and tell us about it."

Walton's eyes scanned the band of criminals lined up. His head felt clearer now and he began to get things straightened out in his mind. He stepped to the connecting door and found John huddled in a frightened heap in a corner of the next room. He dragged the man in.

"We can start with this guy," Walton began. "Look at his arms and legs."

"Cripes!" O'Brien grunted at the sight. "Somebody cut the poor devil all to pieces and sewed him back up again."

"No. They only faked it. Those marks are made with acid and stain. The acid would burn enough for a few days to make him think he'd been cut up. Especially if he wasn't too bright in the first place and hopped up all the time anyhow. The idea was to make this fellow believe that his bones had been hollowed out, so that he was light enough to fly with a pair of dummy wings tied to his arms."

O'Brien looked skeptical.

"It's the same thing they did to the

Greek—" Walton stopped short. "The Greek?" he queried excitedly. "Did you take care of him?"

"The Greek's all right. He's in the hospital, ain't he?"

Then it dropped into place in Walton's brain. "Come on," he bawled, dragging O'Brien from the house. "We'll use your car."

"No visitors until two o'clock," a nurse stopped them when they reached the fourth floor of the hospital. Walton's big bulk shouldered her silently aside and he led the way down the corridor to Nick's ward.

At the door the two men halted and Walton drew a breath of relief at the sight of the man on the bed halfway across the room. He had been in time after all. A white-coated doctor moved toward Nick Averamides from the other side of the ward and Walton edged into the room.

With a shout Walton leaped for the doctor. He tackled him at the foot of Nick's bed and they both crashed to the floor. A glint of polished metal showed as a hypodermic needle slithered across the floor from the doctor's opened hand.

One of Walton's fists landed on his jaw and the white-coated figure went limp. Walton ripped at a beard on the man's face with hurried fingers and the mass of hair came away in his hands.

"Palsap," he announced to O'Brien. "He thought he had to get the Greek out of the way before he talked too much. He didn't know Nick told me all he knew this morning."

Back at headquarters, Walton explained to O'Brien: "They got the Greek to believe he was able to fly by snowing him up all ready for the day they wanted to use him. When the time was right they took him to the Chamlee Building where they had a room prepared with a steel door that couldn't be broken open in a hurry.

"The Greek was to jump from the window at exactly half past twelve, after keeping the crowd in the square on edge for half an hour. Of course Nick thought he was going to soar gracefully down to the sidewalk."

"Yeah, but—"

Walton raised a hand. "Palsap or Mardigrew had an advertisement in the Globe which would be sure to draw a record crowd to the square at that time, and they used the Greek to keep the crowd hysterical and unmanageable so we couldn't get through. Then, when they had things in one sweet uproar, Mardigrew's boys turned the bank inside out and we couldn't get through the crowd to do a thing."

O'Brien cocked his head to one side. "How'd they get through themselves?"

Walton frowned, looked at Mardigrew. "Yeah, Roddy. Let's hear about that."

Mardigrew shrugged. "We had a mob of our own people in the right places in the square to open up lanes for the getaway cars when the time came."

"See? Just like that," Walton pointed out to O'Brien.

"Bah! Well, what are you guys waiting for? Get this bunch out of here and locked up!" O'Brien barked.

"How about me, mister?" Walton whirled at the sound of a timid voice. "You going to lock me up, too, so I can't go flying? He was going to let me fly tomorrow."

"No, John," Walton said confidentially. "You come along with me and we'll go to a nice quiet hospital. Where," he added under his breath, "they'll sure as hell keep you locked up until they get the hop out of your system that you've been living on lately."