

The Sinister Sphere

Frederick C. Davis

MANY WRITERS for the pulps were extremely prolific, as they needed to be with pay rates that commonly were no more than one penny a word, but none more than Frederick C. Davis (1902-1977). He wrote about numerous characters, both under his own name, as Stephen Ransome, and, most famously, as Curtis Steele for the Operator 5 thrillers.

In addition to nearly fifty full-length novels, Davis wrote more than a thousand short stories, producing more than a million words a year, but none were more popular than his series about the Moon Man—Stephen Thatcher, the policeman by day and a notorious robber by night.

The son of the police chief, Sergeant Thatcher was utterly dedicated to helping those unable to handle the trials of America's Great Depression, even if it meant breaking the law. In the tradition of Robin Hood, he stole from the wealthy to give to the poor.

To keep his true identity a secret, Thatcher donned the most peculiar disguise in all of pulp fiction—not a mask, but a dome made of highly fragile oneway glass, fitted with a breathing apparatus that filtered air. The glass, known as Argus glass, was manufactured in France and was, at the time, unknown in the United States. As the perpetrator of innumerable crimes, he was the most-hunted criminal in the city, saving lives in equally impressive numbers along the way.

There were thirty-nine adventures about the Moon Man, all published in *Ten Detective Aces* between June 1933 to November 1939. "The Sinister Sphere" is the first adventure of the character seen by Depression-era readers as a common man who became a hero.

The Sinister Sphere

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With a strange, uncanny knowledge the Moon Man selected his victims. Those victims had climbed roughshod to power; some within the law, and others outside the pale. And the Moon Man called on them with a very definite and grim plan—for he walked in the eternal danger of a double menace.

CHAPTER I THE MOON MAN

IT WAS ROBBERY.

The French door inched open. A figure crept through, into the dark room. It paused.

It turned from side to side, as if looking around, a head that had no eyes, no nose, no mouth! From side to side it turned its head, a head that was a perfect sphere of silver! Mottled black markings covered the shining

surface of the ball, reproducing the shaded areas of the full moon whose light streamed in through the windows.

If the silent figure had any face at all, it was the face of the man in the moon!

The silver, spherical head sat low on a pair of broad shoulders from which a long, black cape hung. A pair of black-gloved hands stole through slits in the sides of the cape.

The dark room was not silent. From below came the soft strains of dance music, mingled with laughter and the rhythmic moving of feet on polished floor. It was midnight; the party was at its height. The man whose head was a globe of silver nodded as though pleased.

He glided through the darkness across the room. At an inner door he drifted to a stop. He opened it carefully. The music became louder in the ears of him who had no ears. The

hallway outside was empty. The cloaked figure closed the door and turned to the wall.

He removed from its nail a mirror which hung between two doors, and disclosed the circular front of a safe. His black hand twirled the combination dial. He turned his moon head, listening alertly. He heard faint clicks. When he drew up, he turned the handle of the safe door and opened it.

Locks meant little to him.

Into the safe he thrust a black-gloved hand, and brought out a sheaf of banknotes. He drew them inside his cape. He closed the safe and twirled the combination.

Suddenly a loud snap!... A flood of light drenched the room.

The figure whirled.

In the doorway stood a woman, her eyes widened with fright. She was forty and fat. She was wearing a spangled gown. Her one bejewelled hand dropped limply from the light-switch. She stood transfixed, staring at the figure with the silver head, and gasped:

“Martin!”

She had no need to call. Her husband was at her back. He stared over her shoulder, as startled as she.

“The Moon Man!” he exclaimed.

The man in the silver mask whirled toward the open French door.

Martin Richmond, clubman, broker, man of position, was wiry and athletic. He leaped past his wife with one bound. He sprang toward the French windows with the intention of blocking the way of the grotesque thief. The Moon Man reached it at the same instant.

Richmond flung up his arms to grapple with the intruder. He groped through empty air. An ebony hand, clenched into a fist, cracked against the point of Richmond’s chin.

Richmond staggered, making a desperate attempt to clasp the man with the spherical head. His hand clutched a black one. Another thrust tumbled him backward. Something soft remained in his fingers as he sprawled. The Moon Man darted through the door slamming it shut behind him.

The door opened on a balcony. Beneath it was twenty feet of empty space. The Moon Man leaped over the railing of the balcony, throwing himself into the void.

Martin Richmond scrambled up. From below came a quick, smooth purr. He rushed onto the balcony and looked down. He saw nothing. The Moon Man was gone.

“Call the police!” Richmond gasped as he sprang back into the room.

He jerked to a stop and looked at the thing he had in his hand. It was a black silk glove.

“We’ve been robbed!”

The words came ringing over the wire into the ear of Detective Lieutenant Gil McEwen. He was perched at his desk, in his tiny office in headquarters. He clamped the receiver tightly to his ear.

“Who’s talking?”

“Martin Richmond, Morning Drive. The Moon Man robbed me. He got away!”

“Coming right out!” snapped McEwen.

He slammed the receiver on its hook and whirled in his chair to face a young man who

was standing by the window. McEwen's face was hard and wrinkled as old leather; the young man's was smooth-skinned and clean-cut. McEwen's eyes were gray and glittering; the young man's were blue and warm. McEwen was fifty, hardened, by twenty years on the force; the young man was half his age, and had just been made a detective sergeant.

He was Stephen Thatcher, son of Peter Thatcher, the chief of police.

"Steve, it's the Moon Man again!" the veteran detective snapped. "Come on!"

"I'll be damned!" said Steve Thatcher. "Can't we do anything to stop his robberies?"

"I'll stop him!" McEwen vowed as he grabbed for the knob. "I'll stop him if it's the last thing I ever do!"

He went out the office on a run. Steve Thatcher ran after him with long legs flexing lithely. They thumped down the wooden steps. They rushed into the adjoining garage. A moment later they swerved a police-car into the street and dashed away with the speedometer flickering around sixty.

Martin Richmond's residence on Morning Drive was five miles away. Gill McEwen made it in less than five minutes. With Steve Thatcher at his side he hurried to the front door and knocked very urgently. Martin Richmond himself opened it.

The party was still going on. Couples were still dancing in the large room at the right. McEwen saw them through closed French doors, and followed Richmond into the library opposite. Richmond wasted no time.

"My wife found the Moon Man in our room. He'd just finished robbing our safe. It was almost an hour ago."

"An hour ago? Why didn't you call me sooner?" McEwen snapped. "By this time he's crawled into a hole somewhere."

"I found that our phone wires were cut. I stopped to see how much had been stolen. Then I had to find a phone. It took some time to get my neighbors to get up and let me in. I called you as soon as I could."

"Let me see the bedroom," McEwen ordered.

He trod up the stairs with Steve Thatcher at his heels. Thatcher could well understand the veteran detective's anger. The Moon Man had done this sort of thing repeatedly. He had committed robberies without number in his characteristic daring, grotesque way.

The papers had been filled with his exploits. The police department had been absolutely unable to find a single clue pointing to his identity. He appeared like magic, robbed, and vanished.

The papers and the police commissioners were howling for an arrest. The public was demanding protection against the mysterious thief. And the police were helpless. Steve Thatcher could well understand why Gill McEwen was in no amiable mood.

McEwen paced about the bedroom. He examined the safe. He looked out the balcony. He ran downstairs and inspected the ground below. He came back red-faced and puffing.

"He used a car. Driveway right below. Stopped the car under the balcony, climbed on the top of it, then swung himself up. Beat it the same way. Not a tire-mark or a footprint! Not one damn' thing to tell who—"

"Look at this!" said Martin Richmond quickly.

He thrust the black silk glove toward McEwen. McEwen took it slowly, narrowed his eyes at it, and passed it to Steve Thatcher.

"I pulled it off his hand as he was rushing out the door," Richmond explained. "He—"

"It's a right glove," McEwen interrupted. "The chances are he's right-handed. Then he had to use his bare hand to open the door and make a getaway. The means he's probably left a fingerprint on the knob!"

He examined the knob. He could see nothing. Raising, he turned sharply on Steve Thatcher.

"Beat it to a phone and get Kenton up. Tell him we've got to dust this knob right away— can't wait. Get him up here quick!"

Hours later Gil McEwen hunched over his desk in Headquarters peering at a photograph. It was a photograph of a door knob. On the knob was a clearly defined impression of a thumb. It was not the thumb-print of Martin Richmond, nor of Mrs. Richmond, nor of any one else in the burglarized house. McEwen had made sure of that.

It was the thumb-print of the Moon Man!

McEwen settled back in his chair exhaustedly, and peered into the face of Kenton, the fingerprint expert.

"You're absolutely sure that this print doesn't match any in the files?"

"Absolutely sure," Kenton answered. "The thumb that made that print has never been recorded by any police department in the United States."

"Hell!" grunted McEwen. "Then it can't tell us who the Moon Man is—yet. But when I

find a guy whose thumb-print matches up with this one, I'll collar him hard!"

Kenton went out. Steve Thatcher settled into a chair.

"We know, anyway, that the Moon Man is somebody who has no criminal record."

"Yeah, but he'll soon have! The time's coming when that guy's going to make a slip. When I grab him, he's going up the river on so many counts of robbery that he'll never live to come out of prison. And I'll grab him, all right—I'll do it!"

They looked toward an older man seated beside the desk. He was portly, with a kindly face and curly white hair. He was Chief Peter Thatcher. His were the keen eyes of a born law officer. His was the straight, stern mouth of a strict disciplinarian. He was a good chief, and at present he was a very worried one.

"We've *got* to get the Moon Man, Gil," he declared. "We've got to stop at nothing to get him."

"Listen!" McEwen said sharply. "I've been on the force twenty years. I've got a reputation. No crook has ever succeeded in getting away from me once I set out on his trail. I went to Brazil to get Doak, didn't I—and I got him. I went to India to get Stephano, and I got him. I'm not going to let any smart aleck Moon Man make a fool out of me. I've sworn to get him, and I will!"

Chief Thatcher nodded slowly. "The Police Board is clamoring for that bird's hide. So are all the papers. We've got to grab the Moon Man somehow, Gil—and quick."

"Chief, you've got my promise. I'm not going to stop trying till I've grabbed him. Nothing's going to keep me from it. And when I make a promise, I live up to my word."

"I know you do," the chief said soberly. "I'm depending on you, Gil. It's your case. It's entirely in your hands."

Steve Thatcher looked solemn.

"I haven't been a detective long enough to be of much help," he said quietly. "I wish to gosh I could do more. But you know you can count on me, Gil, for—"

The door opened. A girl came in. She was twenty-two, pretty, animated. Her face resembled Gil McEwen's strongly; she was his daughter. She greeted her father cheerfully, nodded to Chief Thatcher, and went quickly to Steve. She kissed him.

On Sue McEwen's third left finger glittered a solitaire. Steve had put it there. The wedding was not far off.

"Baffled!" she exclaimed, surveying the disgruntled expressions of the three. "Aren't the papers awful? You'd think the Moon Man was the greatest criminal of the age, the way—"

"He is, as far as I'm concerned!" her father snapped. "Sue, we're trying to get at the bottom of this thing. We'll see you later."

"Why chase me out?" Sue asked with a smile. "Maybe I can help. Perhaps the thing you need is a little womanly intuition."

"Huh!" said her father. "You're too eager to mix yourself up in police matters, Sue. I don't think you can be of any help."

"Don't be so sure," Sue insisted. "I would say, for instance, that the Moon Man must be someone far above the level of an ordinary crook. He has more intelligence. He plans his moves cleverly. So far, he has always succeeded in getting what he wants, and making a clean getaway. Going through the Rogue's Gallery would be only a waste of time. The man you want is well-bred, with a fine

mind, good manners, and a broad social background."

"Trying to make a hero of him—a thief?" her father asked skeptically.

"Not at all. After all, he is a thief, and stealing, besides being illegal, is revolting to anyone of sound character. The man deserves all the punishment you want to give him, Dad. I'm only suggesting the kind of a man he is—one whose character has been despoiled by the dishonorable business of robbery. There—have I helped?"

"Not much. Now—"

"How much did he steal this time?"

"Six hundred and fifty dollars."

"Only six hundred and fifty?" Sue McEwen repeated in surprise. "Why, that pushes him even lower in the scale of thieves. He's nothing but a petty pilferer!"

The parsonage of the Congregational Church of Great City was located not far from the business district. The Reverend Edward Parker lived there alone. At nine o'clock on the night following the Moon Man's latest exploit he heard a knock at his door. He opened it.

A short, squatty man stood on the step. He had a twisted nose that evidently had once been broken in a fist-fight. He had a cauliflower ear. He had scarcely any neck. He nodded, and handed through the door a sealed envelope.

"From a friend, for the needy of the parish," he said.

Immediately the Rev. Mr. Parker accepted the envelope, the pugilistic gentleman turned and walked away. The darkness swallowed him up. Dr. Parker opened the envelope. Inside it he found a bundle of

banknotes. They were bound by a single band of silver paper, and they amounted to \$250.

Maude Betts was a widow with no work and three children. She lived in a tenement in the warehouse district of Great City. The stove in the kitchen was cold. There was no food in or on it. Her cupboard was bare. She was about to be evicted by a landlord who declared that the four months' rent, past due, must be paid him at once. She was facing the county poor farm.

A knock sounded at her door. She dried her eyes, opened the door, and found a tough-looking young chap handing her an envelope. She took it as he said: "From a friend."

He went away. Mrs. Betts opened the envelope and gasped with joy. From it she removed a pack of banknotes held together by a band of silver paper. They totalled just \$200.

Ethel Knapp, twenty and not bad to look at, stood in her furnished room and peered at the gas jet. For ten minutes she had been peering at it, trying to summon the courage necessary to turn it on—without a lighted match above it. She had no money. She had come to Great City from her home in Ohio to work. She had no work. She had no way of returning to her mother and father. But she did have a way of saving herself from further hunger and humiliation. The gas jet.

She raised her hand toward it. Startled, she paused. A faint rustling sound came into the room. Looking down, she saw an envelope creeping under the door. She took it up, bewildered, and opened it. Inside lay money—currency held together by a band of silver paper—banknotes totalling \$200!

She jerked open the door. The hall was empty. She ran down the steps. She saw a few persons on the street, and paused bewildered. She had no way of knowing that the money had been left her by the squatty, combative-looking

young man who was just vanishing around the corner. But that money meant life and happiness to Ethel Knapp...

For the Rev. Edward Parker, \$250.

For Maude Betts, \$200.

For Ethel Knapp, \$200.

Just \$650 in all!...

CHAPTER II

THE MOON MAN SPEAKS

In their delight, neither Dr. Parker, nor Mrs. Betts, nor Miss Knapp noticed the oddity of the silver band which encircled the money that had so mysteriously come to them. None of them thought to associate it with the Moon Man.

Had they suspected, they might have thought the stocky chap to be the Moon Man. They would have been wrong.

Ned Dargan, ex-lightweight—he of the broken nose and cauliflower ear—walked along a dark street in a shabby section of the city. He glanced neither right nor left; he walked steadily; he knew where he was going. When he reached the black doorway of an abandoned tenement building—a structure condemned by the city but not yet demolished—he paused.

Making sure he was not observed, he entered the lightless hallway. He closed the door carefully and tightly behind him and trod up a flight of broken, uncarpeted stairs. Plaster littered them. Dust lay everywhere. The air was musty and close. Dargan walked along the upper hall to another door.

As he reached for the knob a voice called:

“Come in, Angel.”

Dargan went in, smiling. The room beyond was dark. A moment passed before his eyes became accustomed to the gloom. Gradually he was able to see a form standing behind a table, a figure that blended out of the blackness like a materializing ghost. The figure was swathed in a black cape. Its head was a smooth globe of silver.

“Evenin’, boss,” said Dargan.

A chuckle came from the silver-headed man. “You’ve distributed the money, Angel?”

“Yeah. Got it out right away. And it certainly was badly needed, boss.”

“I know... You realize why I selected Martin Richmond as a victim, Angel?”

“I’ve got an idea he ain’t all he seems to be.”

“Not quite that,” answered the voice that came from the silver head. “He’s quite respectable, you know. Social position, wealth, all that. But there’s one thing I don’t like about him, Angel. He’s made millions by playing the market short, forcing prices down.”

“Nothin’ wrong in that, is there?” Dargan asked.

“Not according to our standards, Angel; but the fact remains that short-selling had contributed to the suffering of those we are trying to help. I’ve taken little enough from Richmond’s kind, Angel. I must have more—later.”

Dargan peered. “I don’t quite get you, boss. You’re takin’ an awful chance—and you don’t keep any of the money for yourself.”

A chuckle came from the silver globe. “I don’t want the money for myself. I want it for

those who are perishing for want of the barest necessities of life. What would you do if you saw a child about to be crushed under a truck? You’d snatch her away, even at the risk of your own life.

“I can’t bear to see suffering, Angel. I can no more help trying to alleviate it than I can help breathing. If there were any other way of taking money from those who hoard it, and giving it to those who desperately need it—if there were any other way than stealing, I’d take that way. But there isn’t.”

“Don’t think I’m questioning you, boss.” Dargan hastened to explain. “I’m with you all the way, and you know it.”

“Yes, Angel,” said the Moon Man gently, “I know it. You’re the only man in the world I trust. You know what it is to suffer; that’s why you’re with me. Well, you’ve been scouting today. What’s the result?”

Dargan wagged his head. “Things are pretty bad, boss. The regular charities ain’t reaching all the folks they should, and they’re pretty slow. I don’t know what some of these folks would do without your help.

“There’s a steamfitter out of a job named Ernest Miller. He’s got a daughter, Agnes, who’s sick with consumption. The kid’s goin’ to die if she ain’t sent to Arizona. Miller can’t send her— he hasn’t got any money, boss.”

The Moon Man nodded his silver head. “Miller shall have money, Angel—all he needs.”

“Then there’s the guy named Frank Lauder, I told you about.”

“Lauder will be compensated, Angel.”

“Then there’re two kids—Bill and Betty Anderson—a couple of sweet kids they are. Their mother just died. They ain’t got nowhere

to go but to their aunt and uncle, named Anderson. The Andersons are barely gettin' along as it is, and can't take the kids in. So they'll have to go to an orphanage if somethin' ain't done for 'em."

"They won't go to the orphanage, Angel. You've done your work well. I'll have money for all of them tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" Dargan peered again at the small moon which was the head of the man in the black cape. "Boss, ain't you takin' an awful chance, followin' up so close? Last night—and now tonight! Ain't it gettin' dangerous?"

There was a pause. "Yes, Angel, it is getting dangerous. The police now have my thumbprint."

"Your thumb-print! Holy cripes! Now if they ever catch you they'll be able to prove you—"

"I don't think it will occur to Gil McEwen to look in the right place for me, Angel!" the Moon Man interrupted with a soft laugh. "Still, as you suggest, I've got to be very careful. At any time McEwen might accidentally find a print which matches the one he found on the Richmond bedroom door knob last night—and when he does—"

"Cripes, boss!" gasped Dargan.

The Moon Man straightened. "Don't worry, Angel. Keep an eye on yourself. Report back to me tomorrow night, half an hour after midnight, here. All clear?"

"Sure, boss."

Ned Dargan turned from the room. He closed the door tightly on the Moon Man. He peered at the panel, as though trying to penetrate it with his gaze and read the secret of the man in the room—a secret even he did not

know. He walked down the stairs slowly, and eased out the front door.

"I can't figure out *who* that guy is!" he told himself wonderingly. "But, cripes! I know he's the swellest guy that ever lived!"

Ned Dargan had a solid reason for feeling as he did about the man whose face he had never seen—the Moon Man. He'd gone bad in the ring. A weakened arm made further fighting impossible. He found it just as impossible to find work. He'd drifted downward and outward; he'd become a bum, sleeping in alleys, begging food. Until, mysteriously a message had come to him from the Moon Man.

Some day Ned Dargan was going to fight again. Some day he was going to get into the ring, knock some palooka for a row, and become champ. And if he ever did, he'd have the Moon Man to thank for it...

The Moon Man stood in the center of the dismal room. He watched Dargan close the door. He listened, and in a moment heard a creak, then another. He knew those sounds the stairs made. The first was pitched at A Flat and the second at B in the musical scale. When B sounded before A Flat, someone was coming up. The Moon Man heard B follow A Flat and knew that Dargan was gone.

He turned away, opened a connecting door, and stepped into an adjoining room. He turned a key in the lock. The air was pitch black. The Moon Man made motions which divested himself of his cape. He pulled off his black gloves—luckily he had provided himself with more than one pair. He removed from his head that silver sphere, and he put all his secret regalia in a closet. The closet door he also locked.

Turning again, he silently opened a window, and eased out onto a rusted fire-escape. Rung by-rung he let himself down into

the alleyway behind. He paused, listening and looking around. Then he stepped forth...

The street-light's glow fell into the face of Stephen Thatcher!

Steve Thatcher thought of things as he walked away from the house he had made the Moon Man's rendezvous. In his mind's ear he heard Gil McEwen saying: "I've sworn to get the Moon Man, and I will!" McEwen, the toughest detective on the force, who never failed to bag his man!

And he heard the voice of the girl he loved: "He's nothing but a petty pilferer!"

Steve Thatcher lowered his head as though stubbornly to butt an obstacle. A wild scheme—his! He knew it. But, also, he knew the world—cruel and relentless—and he could not stand by and do nothing to save those who were suffering. The mere thought of letting others perish, while nothing was done to save them, was unendurable.

He was a cop's son—revolt against injustice was in his blood—and not even the law could keep him from trying to right the wrongs he knew existed. Beyond the written law was a higher one to which Steve Thatcher had dedicated himself—the law of humanity.

And if he were caught? Would he find leniency at the hands of Gil McEwen and Chief Thatcher? No. He was certain of that. Even if McEwen and the chief might wish to deal kindly with him, they would be unable to. The Moon Man now was a public enemy—his fate was in the hands of the multitude. Steve Thatcher would be dealt with like any common crook—if he were caught.

He remembered Ernest Miller's daughter, who must go to Arizona or die; he remembered Frank Lauder, who must be cared for; he remembered Bill and Betty Anderson, who must have help.

"It's got to be done!" he said through closed teeth. "Damn, it's *got* to be done!"

He walked swiftly through the night.

CHAPTER III ANOTHER VICTIM!

Detective Lieutenant Gil McEwen's phone clattered. He took it up. He glared at a photograph he was holding—a photograph of the Moon Man's fingerprint—and grunted: "Hello!"

"Detective McEwen? Listen carefully. I'm calling—"

"Speak louder!" McEwen snapped. "I can't hear you."

"My name is Kent Atwell, Mr. McEwen," the voice came more plainly. "I'm phoning you from a pay-station downtown because I don't dare phone you from my home. I've been threatened—by the Moon Man."

"What!" barked McEwen. He knew the name of Kent Atwell. Atwell was one of Great City's most prominent citizens. His home was one of the finest. His influence went far. And here he was, huddling in a booth downtown like a rabbit in a hole, using a public phone because a threat of the Moon Man had filled him with fright! "The devil!" McEwen said.

"I've got to see you, Mr. McEwen—immediately. The Moon Man has threatened to rob me tonight. I don't dare let you come to my home, or my office. Can I meet you somewhere?"

"Where are you?"

“In a drug store at State and Main streets.”

“You’re close to the Palace Theatre,” McEwen said briskly. “Buy a ticket and go in. Go down into the men’s room—be there in ten minutes. I’m coming right along, and I’ll meet you there.”

“Certainly. Thank you!”

McEwen pushed the phone back and scowled. He tramped out of his office into Chief Thatcher’s. He found the chief absent, but Steve Thatcher was sitting in his father’s old padded chair. The young man looked up.

“You come with me, Steve!” McEwen snapped. “This thing is getting worse and worse! The Moon Man’s going to stage another robbery—and this time he’s saying so ahead of time!”

“I’ll be damned!” said Steve Thatcher. “Listen, Gil. I’ve just found out—”

“Never mind! Come with me!”

McEwen went out the door. Steve Thatcher frowned; but he followed. He loped down the steps, crowded into a police-car beside McEwen, and said nothing until the car was whizzing down the street.

“Of all the damned gall!” the veteran detective blurted. “Sending a warning ahead of time! He must think he’s living a charmed life—that we can never touch him. I’ll show him where he’s wrong—then, by damn, he’ll wish he was on the moon!”

Steve Thatcher sighed. “I was about to tell you, Gil, that I think I’ve found out about this mask the Moon Man wears. You’ve wondered how he could see his way about, with a silver globe on his head. Well, evidently he can, because the thing isn’t silver at all, but glass.”

“Glass?” McEwen repeated. “How do you know?”

“It must be. That mask of the Moon Man’s has made us all curious, and I began trying to figure out how he could manage to move about with his head completely enclosed in a metal ball. Well, he can’t, of course. I browsed around the library today, and found the answer—Argus glass.”

“What’s Argus glass?”

Steve Thatcher smiled. “If you were a frequenter of speakeasies in New York, you’d know. Argus glass is named for the son of the mythological god, Zeus. Argus had a countless number of eyes, and some of them were always open and watching, so the legend goes. Argus glass is a mirror when you look at it from one side, and a perfectly clear piece of glass when you see it from the other.”

“Didn’t know there was any such thing!” McEwen snapped, sending the car swerving around a corner.

“Nor I, until I read about it. A big French jeweller’s store has in it several pillars of the glass. They look like mirrors to the customers, but they’re not. They’re hollow, and inside them sit detectives on revolving chairs. They can see everything that goes on in the store, but no one can see them. It wasn’t so long ago that speakeasy proprietors found out about the glass. They use it in their doors now instead of peepholes. Nobody can see in, but they can see out.”

“Say! Maybe we can learn who the Moon Man is by tracing that glass globe!” McEwen exclaimed. “Who makes the glass?”

“The Saint Gobain Company of France. Argus glass is the answer, Gil. The Moon Man can see as clearly as though he wasn’t masked

at all, but nobody can see his face. His mask must be split down the middle so he can get his head into it, and he's evidently painted the mirror surface to look like a moon."

"By damn!" McEwen declared. "Just let me get within reach of that guy and I'll take a whack at that glass mask. It'll turn into splinters and then we'll see who the Moon Man is!"

Stephen Thatcher smiled. He had not thought of that likelihood. A sharp blow would shatter the globe that masked the face of the Moon Man!... His smile faded. He was almost sorry now that he had divulged the secret. He had told McEwen this only because he was supposed to be working on the case and, to safeguard himself from suspicion, had decided that he had better make some discovery about himself.

"No kidding, Gil," he said quietly. "Aren't you keeping something back? Haven't you some idea who the Moon Man is?"

"Not a damn' notion!" McEwen declared. "How about you, Steve? Who do you think he is?"

"I," said Steve Thatcher with a sigh, "couldn't say."

McEwen parked the police car a block from the Palace Theatre. He strode to the ticket-booth with Steve Thatcher; they bought tickets and went in. Immediately they turned toward the downstairs men's room. They entered it to find Kent Atwell waiting.

Atwell was thin, dapper; his eyes were dark and deep-set. And at the moment he was visibly agitated. When McEwen identified himself, he immediately launched into a frightened, indignant explanation of the Moon Man's threat.

"Here!" he exclaimed, pushing a sheet of crumpled paper toward McEwen. "Read that! The incredible presumption of it!"

The bit of paper was torn irregularly at the bottom. It was typewritten—done, McEwen could not dream, on a machine in police headquarters! Its message was terse:

Dear Mr. Atwell:

Withdraw from your bank today the sum of five thousand dollars. Place it in a safe in your home. I intend to call for it tonight. Let me warn you that if you notify the police of my intentions, you will suffer worse punishment than death. That is my promise to you.

McEwen looked blank. "How do you know this is from the Moon Man?" he asked sharply. "Where's the rest of it—the part that is torn off?"

Atwell turned pale. "It's of no importance— just the typewritten signature. I accidentally tore it off and lost the piece, so—"

McEwen gestured impatiently. "Mr. Atwell, I beg your pardon, but it is my business to know when men are telling the truth. You are not being frank with me. There was more of this message—and if I'm to help you, I've got to have it."

"Really, there—"

"Unless you produce it right now, Mr. Atwell, you can count on no help from me," McEwen snapped.

Atwell sighed. He fumbled in his pocket. McEwen quickly took the bit of paper he produced—the lower half of the sheet he had already read. And he scanned a second paragraph:

What do I mean by a "worse punishment than death?" I mean disgrace and humiliation, the loss of your friends and position, becoming a pariah. I know that, while you were handling the drive for money under the United Charities, you as the treasurer of the organization helped yourself to five thousand dollars of the funds. I can and will produce proof of my statement if circumstances demand it. It is that stolen five thousand I want. You will leave it for me in your safe, as I direct, and make no move to interfere with my taking it—or I will give the facts to the newspapers.

MM

McEwen peered at Kent Atwell. "Is this true?" he demanded sharply.

"Certainly not! There is not a particle of fact in what is written there. I preferred not to let you see that paragraph, because it is all so preposterous. I refuse to be mulcted out of money that is rightfully mine, and I'm asking you to do something to protect me from this maniac who calls himself the Moon Man."

"I can't do a damned thing until he shows up and tries to rob you," McEwen answered. "He says he'll come tonight. Is there some way of my getting into your house without being seen?"

"Yes. I can tell you how. But am I to deliberately wait for him to come and—"

"If I may suggest it, Mr. Atwell," Steve Thatcher spoke up quietly, "you had better follow the Moon Man's directions to the letter. Get the money from the bank and put it in your safe as he directs. If he suspects that you're laying a trap for him, he may not show up; but if you appear to be acting in good faith, we may stand a chance of grabbing him."

"Exactly. He seems to know everything and be everywhere," McEwen agreed. "If he learns, somehow, that you haven't been at your bank today to withdraw that sum, he may stay in hiding. Our only chance of getting him is to have that money in the house—as bait."

Steve Thatcher smiled.

"But what," said Kent Atwell, "but what if your precautions fail, and the money is stolen regardless and—"

"You'll have to take that chance. This is an opportunity to grab the Moon Man tonight. If we don't make the most of it, he'll get you in some other way, and you'll be helpless." Gil McEwen fixed the gentleman with a stern eye. "If you have no faith in what I'm suggesting, you shouldn't have come to the police, Mr. Atwell."

"Yes, yes—I agree!" Atwell answered. "I will go to the bank immediately. I'll take the money home and put it in the safe. And you—"

"We'll come to your house tonight, after dark. I'll have enough men with me so that there'll be no chance of the Moon Man's escaping if he comes after that money. I'll phone you beforehand, to make arrangements."

"I'll follow your instructions to the letter."

Kent Atwell fumbled with his gloves and left. McEwen and Steve Thatcher waited a few minutes, then hurried from the theatre. McEwen's face was twisted into a grimace of distaste.

"I half believe that what the Moon Man wrote about Atwell is the truth," he said. "Damn— who is that crook, anyway? How can he know so much?" He started along the street at a stiff pace. "Tonight, Steve—tonight, unless something goes very wrong—I'll grab him!"

“Where’re you heading, Gil?” Steve Thatcher asked quickly.

“I’m going to send a cable to the Saint Gobain factory in France. I’m going to find out who they made that glass mask for!”

Steve Thatcher’s eyes twinkled. Again—unseen by the veteran detective—he smiled.

Outside the windows of Police Chief Thatcher’s office hung veils of darkness. Inside, lights burned brilliantly. Detective Lieutenant Gil McEwen stood in the center of the room, facing a group of six men who had just entered in answer to his call. Each of the six was a plainclothes man.

“I’ve just made arrangements with Atwell,” McEwen was saying, crisply. “We’re going to slip into his house so we won’t be seen, in case someone is watching. We’re going to be damned careful about that. You’re to follow my orders strictly, and be ready to leave here as soon as I say the word.”

McEwen had chosen his men well. Each of the six was an old-timer on the force. Each had demonstrated, in the headquarters target gallery, that he was a dead shot. Each possessed a record of courage and daring.

As McEwen talked to them, the door of the chiefs office opened quietly. Sue McEwen sidled in, stood aside, and listened with intense interest. His eyes strayed to those of Steve Thatcher, who was standing beside his father’s desk; they exchanged a smile.

“This is our chance,” McEwen declared to his men. “We’ve got to make it good. If the Moon Man gets away from us tonight, God only knows if we’ll ever grab him. Wait downstairs.”

The six men turned and filed from the office. McEwen paced across the rug. Steve

Thatcher looked thoughtful. The chief of police sighed and wagged his head.

“You’re all set, Gil?” Chief Thatcher asked.

“Yeah. You wait right by that phone, chief, in case of an emergency. And I hope when I phone you it will be to say we’ve got our man.”

Sue McEwen stepped toward her father eagerly. “How soon are you leaving, dad? I wouldn’t miss this for anything.”

McEwen stared at her. “You’re not getting in on this, young lady!”

“Why not?” Sue asked. “If I go to the house with you it won’t do any harm, and I may be able to help. As long as I’m a detective’s daughter, I want to make the most of it.”

“How many times have I got to tell you, Sue,” her father sighed, “that this sort of thing is not for you? We’ve argued about it a thousand times. I won’t let you mix yourself up in police matters.”

“You forget,” Sue answered, smiling, “that I gave you the tip that helped send John Hirsch, the forger, to prison. And didn’t I figure out where Mike Oppler was hiding after he killed his woman? I don’t think I’m so bad at this. If you’ll give me a chance tonight—”

“Nothing doing!” Gil McEwen snapped. “You go home and go to bed!”

“Dad,” said Sue indignantly, “I’m not a child. I’m perfectly able to take care of myself. This Moon Man fascinates me, and I’m going to—”

“I think your dad’s right, Sue,” Steve Thatcher interrupted gently. “You’d better leave this to us. There’s no telling what will happen.”

Sue raised her chin defiantly. "It's going to take more than an argument to stop me this time. I—"

The telephone jangled. Gil McEwen snatched the instrument off the chief's desk. A voice twanged into his ear:

"This is Preston, downstairs, McEwen. You told me to let you know if a message came for you. There's one coming in now!"

"Be right down!" McEwen answered quickly. He dropped the telephone and hurried to the door. "Answer to my cable coming in over the teletype!" he exclaimed as he hurried out.

Steve Thatcher's eyes brightened. He hastened out the door after McEwen. They jumped down the stairs side by side, paced along the brick corridor, and squeezed into a little room. Inside it was a sergeant, a battery of telephones, a short-wave radio receiving set, and a teletype machine. The teletype was clicking and spinning out its yellow ribbon.

McEwen leaned over it and read the words as they formed:

**POLICE HEADQUARTERS GREAT CITY-
ARGUS GLASS SPHERE SHIPPED TO
GILBERT MCEWEN GENERAL DELIVERY
GREAT CITY-ST. GOBAIN.**

"By damn!" gasped McEwen.

He tore the strip out of the machine. He glared at it. He said unprintable things.

"By damn! He ordered that mask under *my name!*"

Steve Thatcher's eyes were twinkling. He had known what this cable would say. He had

planned for this exigency. And he was enjoying the veteran detective's discomfiture.

"Looks suspicious, Gil," he remarked. "*You're* not the Moon Man, are you?"

"Yah!" snarled McEwen. "He's smart, isn't he? He's clever! Pulling a stunt like that—getting his damn' glass mask made under my name! Wait'll I get my hands on that guy!"

Steve Thatcher chuckled in spite of himself.

McEwen squeezed out of the teletype room. He hurried down the corridor to a door which opened into a larger room. His six detectives were there, perched on and around a table usually devoted to pinochle.

"Come on!" he snapped. "We're going!"

The six men began trooping after McEwen. Steve Thatcher followed the veteran detective a few steps.

"You've got all your car will carry, Gil. I'd better follow you in mine. I'll be along in a minute."

McEwen nodded his agreement and pushed through a big door into the adjoining garage, with the six following him. Steve Thatcher looked up and saw Sue McEwen coming down the stairs. He turned to her.

"I want to come with you, Steve," she said.

"Darling, I'm sorry. I'll phone you as soon as there's news."

"But, Steve—"

He did not wait to listen. He did not like this insistence of Sue's. It emphasized in his mind the painful disaster that would surely follow if it were ever learned that he, Steve

Thatcher, son of the chief of police, was the Moon Man. He hurried out the entrance, turned sharply, and went into a drug store on the corner.

He slipped into a phone-booth and called a number which was unlisted in the directory, unobtainable by anyone, known to none save him and one other.

Two miles away, in the maze of the city, a phone rang. A stocky, broken-nosed young man picked it up. He heard a voice say over the wire:

“Hello, Angel.”

“Hello, boss.”

“Listen carefully. I want you to leave the car in front of the home of Kent Atwell at exactly five minutes before midnight tonight.”

“Sure, boss.”

“Don’t wait. Take a taxi back. Leave the car right in front of the house, and make sure nobody sees you do it. I’ll meet you at the usual place thirty-five minutes later.”

“Right, boss.”

“Wish me luck, Angel.”

Then the line went dead.

the garage; and out of it climbed Gil McEwen and his six detectives.

Standing silent in the darkness, they waited. A moment later another car turned from the street and crept into the driveway. It braked behind the sedan. Steve Thatcher climbed out of it and walked to Gil McEwen’s side.

No one spoke. Leading the way, McEwen strode past the garage and pushed his way through a high hedge. Steve Thatcher followed, and the six men. They walked silently across the rear of an adjoining estate, and paused at a gate in the hedge. They listened a moment, then eased through.

They drifted like shadows to the rear of the home of Kent Atwell. McEwen knocked softly at the door. It opened; no light came out. McEwen, Thatcher and the six men entered. Kent Atwell closed the door, turned, and led them into a spacious library.

“Okay,” said McEwen without formality. “You alone, Atwell?”

“Yes,” said the gentleman. “My wife is away, and I’ve given the servants the night off.”

“Place all locked up?”

“Every door except the front, and every window. All the blinds are drawn.”

“Money in the safe?”

“Yes.”

Atwell crossed the room to a stack of bookshelves. From one the height of his head he removed a unit of four thick volumes. In the wall behind shone the front of a circular safe.

“Locked?” McEwen asked.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAP IS SET

Nine o’clock. A sedan buzzed past the front of the home of Kent Atwell. It rolled on smoothly and turned at the next corner. Halfway down the block it turned again, swinging into the driveway of a dark house. It paused in front of

“No,” Kent answered as he replaced the books.

“Good. Now.” The detective turned. “We’re all going to keep out of sight and wait. First thing, I want to make sure there’s only one way for the Moon Man to get in—the front door. Steve, take a quick look around, will you—upstairs and down.”

Steve Thatcher circled the library, and made sure every window was locked. Stepping into the rear hallway, he determined that the bolt was in place. In the other rear rooms he repeated his examination; then he climbed the steps to the second floor and entered, in turn, each of the bedrooms. McEwen, listening, heard him moving about. In a moment Steve returned.

“All set,” he announced.

“Good. Where in this room can I keep out of sight, Atwell?”

Again Atwell crossed the room. He opened a door and disclosed a closet space behind it. It offered a large, comfortable hiding-place to McEwen. The detective nodded.

“Mr. Atwell, I want you to go upstairs and prepare for bed. Pretend that you are alone. I’m going to put a man in every room upstairs and down. Every window will be watched, and every door, in case the Moon Man tries something tricky. I’m going to stay here in the library and watch the safe. Understand?”

They understood.

McEwen signalled two of his men. He conducted them across the vestibule and into the two rooms on the opposite side of the house. Stationing one man in each, he closed the doors and went up the stairs with the others following. He waited until Kent Atwell went into the master bedroom, then assigned one man to each of the remaining rooms on the second floor.

Five doors opened. Five doors closed. Behind each of them a detective began to wait. Behind one of them Steve Thatcher listened.

He heard Gil McEwen go downstairs.

McEwen stepped into the library. He closed its doors. He strode to the safe, opened it, reached inside, and removed a thick pack of banknotes. He counted them—five thousand dollars. He put them back and closed the safe.

From his pocket he removed his service automatic. He examined it very intently. Crossing the room, he opened the closet door, moved a chair inside. Stepping in, he swung the door until it was within an inch of being closed. He sat, with his automatic in his hand, and waited.

The house was utterly silent.

The vigil had begun.

An hour passed.

Another.

Silently an automobile turned the corner of the street on which the Atwell mansion sat. Its lights were dimmed. It drew to the curb near the corner and its light went out. A hand reached for the ignition switch and clicked it off. The hand was that lovely one of Miss Sue McEwen.

The young lady settled down in the cushions and looked reprovingly at the Atwell residence. Its windows were dark, save for a few chinks of light shining through the draperies on one side of the lower floor. Inside, Sue McEwen knew were her father and her fiancé and six detectives and an intended victim of the Moon Man. Inside, she knew, interesting things were almost sure to happen. She said to herself in a whisper:

“I *won't* be left out!”

She opened her handbag. From it she removed a tiny automatic. It was a fancy little thing, with handle of mother-of-pearl; but it was deadly. In the hand of an expert shot it could spout death. Sue McEwen, by dint of long and arduous practice in her own back yard, under the guidance of her father, was by way of being an expert shot.

The minutes crept past.

A quarter of twelve.

The determined young lady looked and listened and waited.

Five minutes of twelve.

A soft whirr came from behind Sue McEwen's parked roadster. She did not stir, but through the corners of her eyes she saw a coupé swing into the street. Its lights were out. It rolled along without a sound. And that, thought Miss McEwen, was strange.

The lightless car eased to a stop directly in front of the Kent Atwell home. One of its doors opened. A black figure stepped out of it and began to walk toward the farther corner. When it was halfway there another sound came from behind Sue McEwen. A second car—this time with its headlamps on and making no attempt to be quiet—purred past her. It was a taxi. It spurted toward the far corner and stopped.

The squatty young man climbed into it. The cab started up again. It swung around the corner and disappeared.

“I,” said Sue McEwen to herself suddenly, “am going to see what that's all about!”

She started her engine. She spurted away from the curb—her tiny automatic lying in her lap—and eased past the dark car parked in front of the Atwell home. Should she get out and look it over? No; that would take time, and she wanted to follow that taxi; it might get away from her if she stopped now. She stepped on the gas.

At the next corner she swung left. And there, two blocks ahead, she saw the red tail-light of the taxi gleaming.

She followed it. It drove straight on. It was going toward the central business district of Great City. Just this side of the main thoroughfare it turned. When she reached that corner Sue McEwen also turned. For a moment the taxi was out of sight, but she picked it up again immediately. She was keeping well behind it. She was taking no chances.

“Something,” she thought, “is up.”

The taxi went on. Sue McEwen went on. The two cars, separated by two blocks, turned into a route that took them around the nocturnally popular section of the city. Presently the taxi was rolling into a region that gave Sue McEwen some uneasiness. It was dark, lonely, dangerous; and, after all, she was alone.

But she kept following that taxi. And suddenly she saw it stop.

It paused just past an intersection. The young chunky fare got out and paid the driver. Sue McEwen could not see his face. A moment later the taxi spurted off and, at the next corner, swung out of sight. The young man walked along the black street, turned and entered a “dog cart” in the middle of the block.

From the tower of the City Hall came the reverberations of a striking gong. The town clock was striking. It tolled twelve.

What, Sue McEwen wondered, was happening back in the Kent Atwell house? She could not guess. She wanted to keep an eye on that strange young man.

She drew to the curb, cut the ignition, and blinked off her dimmers. She waited. For twenty minutes she waited. And at the end of that time her quarry came out of the lunch cart and began walking away.

She started after him, cautiously. She saw him turn the corner. As she rounded the corner, she saw the young man make a quick move and disappear.

She saw that he had gone into the black doorway of an empty tenement.

She stopped. She got out of the car and, keeping in the deep darkness which flanked the buildings, slowly worked her way toward that doorway. It was empty now. The young man had gone inside. She listened and heard nothing. With the utmost care she eased the door open an inch and peered through. She saw nothing.

Then, taking a tight grip on her little automatic, she crept in.

The house was a black tomb—silent. She stood still until her eyes became accustomed to the darkness. Gradually she saw the details of a staircase leading to the second floor: She moved toward it. She went up the steps, one after another. And suddenly she stopped.

A board creaked under her foot.

Ned Dargan stood stock still in the darkness of the room which was the rendezvous of the Moon Man. He had heard that creak. A second later he heard another. His hand slipped into his coat pocket and came out grasping a gun. He turned slowly.

Stealing toward the closed door which communicated with the hallway, he listened. He heard no sound now. He wondered if the creaks had been caused by the loose boards warping back into place after being strained by his own weight. He decided he had better make sure. He opened the door stealthily, and stepped into the hallway.

Every nerve alert, he walked to the head of the stairs. He went down them slowly. The boards creaked again as he crossed them. He went on.

Again those sounds served as a signal. Sue McEwen heard them. She was hidden behind the door of a room directly across from that which Ned Dargan had just left. Realizing that the creaking of the board under her feet might have been heard, she had hastened along the hallway and slipped into the front room just as Dargan had opened the rear one. Now, seeing the way clear, she crept back into the hall.

She crossed it. She opened the door of the room which Dargan had left—the hidden headquarters of the Moon Man. She slipped inside and looked around. It was bare. It was musty. It looked unpromising; but Sue McEwen was tantalized by the mystery of what was happening.

She gasped. From the hallway again came creaks. The man she had seen enter the house was returning to the upper hallway. Even as she turned, Sue McEwen heard his step toward the door she had just entered.

She turned quickly away from that door. She hurried across to another, which apparently communicated with a room beyond; but it balked her. It was locked. She whirled again. In a corner she saw a closet. She jerked open its door. It was empty. She sidled inside and closed the door upon herself.

At that instant she heard a step in the room. The man had come back. He was standing within a few yards of her now—unaware of her presence. She stood straight, her tiny automatic leveled. She was determined to wait—and listen—and learn.

Now she was going to see what connection all this had with the Moon Man. Now, perhaps, she might even learn who the Moon Man was.

CHAPTER V IN DEAD OF NIGHT

Faintly the sound of a tolling gong came into the library of Kent Atwell. Twelve slow strikes—midnight.

Gil McEwen, hidden in the closet, heard the trembling beats. Steve Thatcher, in a room directly above, listened to them and smiled.

He silently opened the door of the bedroom which had been assigned to him. He stepped into the hallway and closed the door behind him. Along each wall of the hall was a row of such doors, all closed. Behind one of them was Kent Atwell himself. Behind the others were detectives.

Steve Thatcher crept to the nearest door. Beneath its knob the handle of a key protruded—outward. Very slowly he turned it—without a sound. And he smiled. While making the rounds of the house he had carefully removed the keys from the inside of the bedroom doors and placed them on the outside. He passed up and down the hallway silently as a ghost. At each door he turned a key.

Now one millionaire and four detectives were securely locked in their rooms—and did not know it!

Steve Thatcher crept down the front stairs into the vestibule. Again he locked a door and imprisoned another detective. He crept to the rear hallway and made a captive of another sleuth. So far he had contrived to imprison every man save Gil McEwen.

Steve Thatcher drew the bolt of the rear entrance, slipped outside, and hurried toward the street. At the car left by Gargan, he stopped. He unlocked the rumble compartment and from it removed a black bundle. Then, quickly, he returned to the rear door of the house.

Pausing, he drew on his long, black cloak and pulled on his black silk gloves. He placed on his head the glass mask modeled as a moon. It was padded inside so that it sat firmly on his head. A deflecting plate, which came into position over his nose and mouth, sent his breath downward and out, so that it would not fog the glass and blind him. He was ready.

He stealthily opened the rear door and let himself in. Through the glass he could see as clearly as though there was nothing on his head. He trod up the rear stairs, along the hallway, then down the front flight into the vestibule. Outside the unlocked door of the library he paused.

Gil McEwen, he knew, was inside—waiting.

The Moon Man laid his black hand on the knob of the library door. He twisted it. He eased the door open and peered through the narrow crack. Within six feet of him, though unseen, sat Gil McEwen.

McEwen's closet door was partly open, but he could see only the wall opposite, the wall in which the safe was set. He could not see the door opening slowly under pressure of the Moon Man's hand. He heard not the slightest sound. The Moon Man drifted into the room.

The black-cloaked figure flattened itself against the wall. It moved toward the closet door with one arm outstretched. The other arm also moved—toward a light chair. The Moon Man picked it up. His body tensed.

Suddenly he sprang. He struck the closet door and slammed it shut. Instantly he braced the chair under the knob. A startled cry came from behind the door. The knob rattled. From inside McEwen pushed—hard. The door would not open. The tilted chair wedged it firmly in place.

“By damn!” rang through the panels.

The Moon Man turned away quickly as the door shook. McEwen was throwing himself against it. From the black space within came another muffled cry:

“Get him! Carter! Landon! Winner! Carpen! Go after him!”

The sound of McEwen’s furious voice carried through the walls. Quick movements sounded upstairs. Knobs rattled. Across the lower hallway two more knobs rattled. Upstairs and down six imprisoned detectives and one imprisoned millionaire cursed.

And the Moon Man chuckled.

Suddenly the report of a gun blasted with a hollow sound. Splinters flew from a panel of McEwen’s closet. A bullet hissed across the room and shattered a window pane on the opposite side. The shattered glass fell very close to the position of the wall-safe.

“No use, McEwen!” the man in the silver mask exclaimed. “I’ve already got it!”

McEwen snarled; and he did not fire again.

He flung himself against the door. It literally bulged under the impact of his body. The Moon Man heard the wood of the chair crack. He hurried to the wall-safe.

He grasped the four books and flung them away. He snapped open the door of the safe. He snatched out the sheaf of banknotes. They disappeared through a slit in the side of his cape.

The closet door thumped again. This time it gave a little more. Upstairs men were pounding and cursing. Bedlam filled the house. And once more McEwen crashed against the inside of the closet door.

The Moon Man hurried into the vestibule. He jerked open the front door and sped along the walk to the street. He ducked behind the car and with quick movements divested himself of his costume. Cloak, gloves and glass mask went into the rumble compartment. The next instant Steve Thatcher’s hands went to the wheel.

A shot rang sharply near the house. A bullet whizzed through the air. Steve Thatcher jerked a glance backward to see one of the lower windows opening, and a plain-clothes man leaping through—after him. Steve’s motor roared. He slammed into gear and spurted away.

Another shot. Another. Then Steve Thatcher sent the coupé swerving around the corner—and he was out of range.

In the library a splintering crash sounded. A panel of the closet door cracked out under the terrible impact of Gil McEwen’s hard shoulder. He reached through the opening, snatched the chair away, slammed out.

He heard the shots outside the house. He went out the front door at almost a single leap. The plainclothes man with the smoking gun saw him and shouted:

“He’s getting away in that car!”

McEwen whirled like a top. He sped toward the edge of the Atwell grounds and crashed through the hedge with a flying leap. As fast as his legs could swing he ran toward the driveway in which the police cars had been left. There he stopped short and cursed.

The sedan was farthest back in the driveway.

Steve Thatcher’s roadster was behind it, blocking the way out! McEwen hurried to it—and saw that the ignition was locked! He spun back furiously, slipped behind the wheel of the sedan, and started the motor. With an utter disregard for law and garden, he spurted off around the opposite side of the house, jounced off the curb, twisted the wheel madly, and pressed the gas pedal against the floorboards.

The tires whined as he wrenched the car around the corner. Far away he saw a gleam of red—the tail-light of another car traveling at high speed. McEwen’s eyes narrowed shrewdly. At the next corner he turned again; at the next, again. Running then along a street parallel with the fleeing coupé, he let the motor out.

He did not slow for intersections. He slowed for nothing. With the car traveling at its fastest, he plunged along the street. McEwen knew the fleeing coupé could not long keep up its breakneck speed. It must surely slow down to pass through the streets near the business center, or suffer the shots of a traffic policeman. Moreover, the city narrowed like a bottle’s neck toward the river. If the fugitive coupe went on, it must soon reach the bridge.

McEwen had the advantage. No traffic officer would try to stop or shoot at his police car. Deliberately he sent the sedan catapulting through the very center of Great City, its horn blaring. Lights flashed past. Other cars scurried for the curb. Pedestrians fled to the sidewalks.

In a matter of seconds McEwen had put the congested district behind him and was racing toward the bridge.

Within a block of it, where two streets intersected in a V, he turned back. He knew that he was ahead of the coupé now. He shot to the next intersection and looked up and down the cross street. The same at the next, and the next. There was no place the coupé could escape him now if it stayed in the open. Sooner or later he was sure to see it.

Soon he did!

Glancing along a dark street lined by warehouses and shabby tenements, he saw a pair of headlights blink out. Instantly McEwen shut off his own, and stopped. He saw a coupé, two blocks ahead. He saw a dark figure climb out of it, turn, and hurry back along the street. He watched with eyes as keen as an eagle’s—and saw the dark figure slip into an alleyway.

McEwen got out of his car. He gripped his automatic tightly and began running through the shadows toward the alleyway. When he reached it he paused.

One second before Gil McEwen glanced down the dark alleyway, Steve Thatcher lowered the rear window on the second floor of the abandoned tenement. A quick climb up the rusty fire escape had brought him to it. In the darkness of the bare room he turned, lowering a dark bundle to the floor.

A moment later Steve Thatcher had vanished; the Moon Man had appeared.

He stepped to the closet and opened it. By the glow of a flashlight he worked quickly. He separated the sheaf of banknotes into three parcels. Each he fastened together with a band of silver paper. He snapped off the flash and turned to the connecting door.

He unlocked it. Slowly he went into the room. Ned Dargan turned at his approach. The Moon Man moved toward the table. From his one black-gloved hand dropped the four packets of currency.

“There you are, Angel.”

Dargan silently took up the money. He blinked; he thrust it into his pocket.

“Boss,” he said, “I’m worried.”

“Why?”

“Just after I came into this place a little while ago, somebody followed me.”

“Who?”

“I don’t know. I heard the stairs creak. I went down to look around, but I didn’t find anybody. Cripes, boss, I don’t like it!”

“Nor I, Angel. I’ve an idea that in future we must be more careful. You had better stop delivering the money personally—send it by messenger. And we’d better change our headquarters. I’ll phone you, Angel—about a new place.”

The muffled voice broke off. The silver-masked head came up. Ned Dargan’s breath went sibilantly into his lungs.

From the hallway came a creak!

Then another!

“Somebody’s comin’ up!” gasped Dargan.

The Moon Man moved. He rounded the table, crossed to the door. With a quick motion he shot a bolt in place.

“Out the rear window, Angel—quick!”

Ned Dargan hesitated. “Say, listen! I ain’t goin’ to skip and leave you to face the music alone! I’m in this as much as you are, boss!”

“Angel, yours is a true heart. But get out that window right now! I’ll take care of myself.”

The Moon Man’s voice rang commandingly. Dargan did not hesitate again. He hurried into the adjoining room. He slid up the window and ducked through.

“Make it snappy, Angel! Take the car. And if you don’t hear from me again—bless you.”

“Boss—”

“Snappy, I said!”

Dargan moved. He disappeared downward in the blackness.

The closet door opened silently. Sue McEwen slipped into the room without a sound. She hesitated, peering through the open communicating door. In there, beyond the threshold, was a vague black figure.

It was turning—turning to close the connecting door.

Sue McEwen raised her tiny automatic.

“Please,” she said sharply, “throw up your hands!”

The Moon Man stood frozen. Through the glass that masked his face he could see the girl, standing in the glow of the moonlight that was shafting through a window. He could see the glittering gun in her hand—aimed squarely at him.

If she learned—

“Take off your mask!” she commanded.

The Moon Man could not move.

Then a sound—the rattle of a door knob. The door connecting with the hallway opened. The girl glanced toward it, catching her breath. Then, in a sob—a sob of relief—she exclaimed:

“Dad!”

Gil McEwen came through the door. He stared at his daughter. He turned and stared into the adjoining room, at the black-cloaked figure standing there—the thing with the silver head.

“By damn!” he said.

He sprang toward the Moon Man.

Instantly Steve Thatcher leaped forward. With one movement he slammed the door shut and twisted the key. He leaped back as a gun roared, as a bullet crashed through the wood. He whirled toward the window. He ducked out—cloak and mask and all—and began dropping down the fire escape.

Gil McEwen raised his gun to fire again through the door. But he did not fire. He spun on his heel, sprang into the hallway, leaped down the stairs. He burst out the front door, and whirled into the alley.

He peered at the window above. It was open. He peered at the fire escape. It was empty. He peered down the black alley. The Moon Man was not in sight.

McEwen sped through the shadows behind the buildings, but soon he paused. Useless to hunt here! As he came back his eyes turned to a row of wooden boxes, each fitted with wooden lids, which sat at the base of the tenement rear wall. They were coal-bins; each of them was large enough to hold a man. With gun leveled he moved toward them.

McEwen paused, grumbling with disappointment. On each bin-cover was a rusty hasp, and on each hasp was a closed padlock, corroded and useless, untouched for perhaps years. He turned away.

McEwen hurried toward the police-car with his daughter following close. A moment later the quiet of that dismal district was broken by the snarling of a motor and the whining of tires as the car spurted away.

After that, for a long time, the alley behind the deserted tenement was silent.

Then, at last, a faint movement. The cover of one of the coal-bins shifted. One edge of it raised—not the front edge, which was fastened by the padlock, but the rear edge, from which the hinges had been removed. Like a Jack-in-the-box, a man came out of it.

“I’ll get him! Don’t worry—the day’s comin’ when I’m going to grab that crook!”

So said Gil McEwen as he paced back and forth across the office of Chief of Police Thatcher while bright sunlight streamed into the room—the sunlight of the morning after.

Chief Thatcher sighed and looked worried. His son looked at Gil McEwen solemnly.

“He’s got us all buffaloed, that’s all. A swell detective I am! The way I climbed out of Atwell’s bedroom window, then went chasing an innocent man for blocks, thinking he might be the Moon Man!” In this way Steve Thatcher had explained his absence from the Atwell home immediately following the Moon Man’s escape. “Gil, I guess if he’s ever caught, you’ll have to do it.”

“I will do it,” said McEwen. “That’s my promise. I’m never going to stop until I grab that guy!”

And McEwen, Steve Thatcher knew, meant exactly that.

The chief’s son looked at his watch. Inside its cover was a photograph. It was a portrait of Sue McEwen.

“If you only knew what you almost did!” he addressed the picture in silent thought. “If you only knew!”