



MURDER WHEEL

CHAPTER I MEN WITHOUT EYES

WHEN Lieutenant Hagan negligently picked up the receiver of the desk phone, he certainly had no suspicion as to what he was going to hear. If he had, his motions would have been much faster.

"This is Dolsen at Courtland House." The voice was hoarse, strained. "I—I'm going to be mur—murdered. He wants—wheel—of—"

The rest was just a low cry, but it held terror in its note. Hagan pressed the receiver closer

and with his free hand jabbed a button. He heard a strange flapping noise at the other end of the wire and that was all. The wire was still open, but no living thing answered his hellos.

To the six-foot, gray-eyed man who answered the buzzer in the detective bureau, he gave terse orders.

"Something's mighty wrong at the Courtland House—that's one of the apartment hotels on the Drive. Guy named Dolsen called, said he was going to be murdered. And if he wasn't a dying man, he sure gave a damned good imitation of one. Beat it out there. Better take along a couple of men."

Sergeant Edward Conley of the Detective Bureau didn't wait to hear more. Two uniformed patrolmen followed when he beckoned to them. At the door there was a heavy sedan waiting. Lieutenant Hagan was efficiency personified. The car whisked them, siren moaning, to the Drive. Before an awninged entrance it stopped and Sergeant Conley leaped out. He pushed aside the doorman, went through the lobby in six long jumps and to the elevator.

"The floor where a man named Dolsen lives," he ordered. "And make it snappy!"

The two patrolmen had just time enough to get into the elevator before the door slammed. At the fifteenth floor the lift stopped.

"It's the apartment at the end of the hall," the elevator boy told him. Conley banged on the door and then listened intently. No sound came in answer to his knock.

"Well," he granted. "I hope this isn't a fake."

The two patrolmen knew what was wanted of them. Together the three men hit the door. It sagged and they drew back again. This time it flew open, hinges ripping away. Conley went in, gun drawn. He found himself in a large reception room, but it was barren of life. Then he went through the door at the end of the room, paused and shoved his hat way back on his head.

The study was barren of life too. On the floor, telephone still clutched in his hand, lay the body of a man. There wasn't need for an examination of the corpse. Nothing could live with the ugly, gruesome gashes that covered the face and the neck. There was something odd about the face, too, in spite of the deep cuts. For a moment Conley was stumped. Then he let his chin go out and gulped.

The dead man's eyes had been plucked out as neatly as if with a surgeon's forceps!

"This guy must have met the devil himself," Conley grunted. He turned to one of the

patrolmen. "Get another phone—I don't want to use the one the dead man's holding. Call the office. Send along the usual gang—fingerprinters, medical examiners, and photographers. And hey—have 'em send the dead wagon, too."

Conley went to the door he had broken. He examined it for a brief moment. It had been locked from the inside and bolted twice, at top and bottom. No manner of ingenuity could have locked that door from the outside. The bolts had been freshly put on, too, showing that the dead man had been afraid of something. Afraid of what?

He went into the other rooms, peered out into nothingness from the windows. There wasn't a fire escape within twenty feet of this apartment. City lights twinkled back at him from the street below. Nothing less than a fly could have obtained entrance to the apartment from any of the windows. No one could have locked that single door at the entrance to the suite of rooms. And yet—in the study lay a dead man. There wasn't the slightest possibility that it had been suicide. No man could inflict wounds upon himself like those. And how could he have plucked out his own eyes? The squad arrived from headquarters and went to work with an efficient bustle. The medical examiner made a brief examination and then came to Conley's side. He wagged his bald pate from side to side and curled up his underlip.

"I know why he died," he said slowly, "but I'll be damned if I know what killed him. Whatever it was, ripped and tore the flesh. The eyes were dug out and the wounds in their sockets are enough to kill. They penetrated the brain. Then there's a slash on the throat, almost instant death there. The clothing is torn and I'll bet I'll find other wounds underneath. I want him at the morgue. Your men finished?"

Conley found that they were. Morgue attendants came out of their lounging positions to drop the body into their basket. Conley

brushed away some of the fingerprint powder from the chair where they had seated the dead man. He dropped into it and studied the desk a moment. One of the men from the identification bureau sighed.

"Not a print that's of any use," he said. "No marks, no nothing. Take two aspirins every hour, sarge. It'll help."

"Huh?" Conley roused himself. "Oh, yes—go to hell."

He replaced the receiver which he had been examining on the hook, sat back. The instrument seemed to have been waiting for him to do this, for it began to jingle instantly. He lifted the receiver and barked a greeting. Then his body tensed, his eyes became alert. A voice, obviously disguised, hissed a strange message over the wire.

"If Sergeant Conley will go to the home of Samuel Tuttle at sixty-four North Shore Avenue, he may be able to prevent a murder similar to the one he is now working on. Great speed is necessary!"

The receiver at the other end clicked. Conley flicked the hook of his own instrument down a moment and then asked the operator to trace the call. Only two patrolmen were left in the apartment. He gave them terse orders, raced down the hallway and jabbed the elevator button impatiently.

HE sent the squad car flying toward North Shore Avenue. It was on the farther end of the city, but he made it at a mile a minute. The address proved to be a huge apartment hotel. The lobby reeked of wealth and sophistication, but to this Conley paid little heed. He went directly to the elevator and gave the boy orders to take him to Tuttle's apartment.

It was on the twelfth floor. Conley pounded on the door, then pressed the bell. A moment, and a well-built gray-haired man opened the door. He glared at Conley, but at the flash of his badge, he opened the door wider and motioned

for him to enter.

"The police?" he queried with uplifted eyebrows. "What do you want with me?"

"Do you know Arthur Dolsen?" Conley asked.

"Dolsen?" Tuttle nodded. "Yes—I know him well. What's up?"

"He's been murdered," Conley told him grimly. "Killed in a horrible fashion. I've had a tip from some unknown source that you are next on the list. I wanted to—"

"Ah, yes," Tuttle smiled a little, "you wanted to question me before I was—er—killed. That's it, isn't it?"

"Hell, no," Conley grunted. "I want to keep you from getting killed. If you can give me some idea as to why anyone would want to murder Dolsen and yourself, it will help."

"Sit down," Tuttle motioned toward a chair. "Of course the news of Dolsen's death staggers me greatly, but I'm not altogether surprised. He's always been a fool. Women have been his weakness and he showed a partiality to married ones. That always leads to trouble, sergeant. I can't think of any reason why I should be murdered—not a single one. I've enemies, of course—everyone has—but none of them would murder me. I'm pretty sure that when you get at the bottom of this, you'll find it's only a very usual murder with a feminine angle. Some jealous husband. The tip you received over the phone about me is very likely just a stall—to throw you off the trail."

It sounded logical, and Conley reflected on it a moment. "Maybe you're right," he said, "but somehow I don't think so. Jealous husbands use a gun or a knife."

"And wasn't one of those methods used on Dolsen?" Tuttle asked. "What did kill him?"

"I wish I knew," Conley said slowly. "Whatever it was, it ripped his face to ribbons and—and plucked out his eyes!"

"Good Lord!" Tuttle half rose from his chair. His cigar fell from nerveless fingers and

his face became the color of chalk. "Plucked out his eyes, you say."

"Right," Conley said, "I see it's a shock to you. Why?"

"I—I—" Tuttle hesitated, passed a trembling hand over his face and shook his head a little. "I'd rather not say yet. It's—it's too absurd even to think of such a thing. Come back tomorrow. I'll know then. If I'm right, I'll put you on the trail. But leave me alone tonight. I—I have to think."

"I'll wait," Conley rose and headed for the door, "but I won't leave you alone. There will be half a dozen men all through this building, Mr. Tuttle. I'll have at least one right outside your door. If you need any help, sing out. There'll be plenty of it on the spot. I wouldn't go out if I were you. It's too risky."

"I won't," Tuttle promised. "Come back in the morning. It's—it's—that hideous business of plucking out Dolsen's eyes. Oh, hell, man, get out! Let me think!"

Conley nodded, went to the door and examined the lock a moment. "Better lock up tight," he told Tuttle. "You may feel safe, but remember that whoever killed Dolsen went through locked doors as easily as a ghost. I'll have men planted here in half an hour."

He went downstairs, found a telephone booth, and gave orders for the guard. Then he went back up, stairs and parked himself near Tuttle's door. When the half-dozen plain-clothes men came from headquarters, he placed them at strategic points.

"Get this straight, Callahan," he told the man who led the squad. "We're up against something damned dangerous. I've a hunch that Tuttle is going to be attacked in the next day or two. He mustn't get out of your sight. Nobody goes into his apartment unless he says so and you look 'em over before they go in. I'm going to see if I can follow that anonymous tip I got over the wire. I'll be back in a couple of hours. If you need me, give the radio announcer a

buzz. He'll get me on the short wave."

CALLAHAN nodded grimly and took up a position where he could watch Tuttle's door. Conley went down in the elevator, into the street, and climbed into a squad car. He drove back to Dolsen's apartment.

The uniformed patrolman at the door let him in. He picked up the phone and learned that the anonymous call had come from a pay station in a down-town drug store. It was practically futile to get anyone to recall the person who used the phone in the large store, but Conley drove there. Chances sometimes materialized into great things. He slowed up for a red light; there was no great hurry. Then the radio under the dash broke into life with the long wailing signal for attention.

"Sergeant Conley," the announcer droned, "Callahan reports he needs you at once. Something's gone haywire."

The message was repeated two more times, but Conley barely heard the words above the scream of his siren and the roar of the motor. He left the car double-parked in front of Tuttle's apartment house, raced inside, and was quickly taken to the twelfth floor. Callahan was pacing the hallway, his face grim. He breathed a sigh of relief when Conley showed up.

"Maybe I'm nuts," he said, "but I haven't heard a peep out of that bird in there. It's too damned quiet. And then, ten or fifteen minutes ago, I'm pretty sure I heard a groan. I thought he was just snoring and didn't pay any attention. I didn't want to bust in the door unless you said so. I may be wrong."

"Anybody go in?" Conley asked as they hurried to the door.

"Nothing more than a germ got in that door," Callahan grunted, "I never took my lamps off it for a second. No, sir, if that guy's dead, he bumped himself."

Conley jabbed the bell, heard it buzz inside, and waited. No steps answered the bell, no

sound came from within. He stepped back, nodded to Callahan, and almost four hundred pounds of muscle and bone struck the door. It took half a dozen blows to break it down. Conley went in, gun drawn.

There was nothing in the living room. He headed for the closed bedroom door. It wasn't locked. He opened it cautiously. Wind struck him full in the face and with it came the odor of blood. He pressed the light switch and then gulped.

Tuttle was on the bed. He was wearing pajamas and, from the looks of the pillow, had fallen asleep. Then a horrible death had come to him. His face was ribboned, the bed was saturated with blood. Hollow sockets where eyes should have been stared ceilingward. Callahan cursed and went to the window. He looked down.

"Now how the devil could anybody get in this room to do that?" he asked.

"Guard the door we busted, Callahan." Conley ordered. "I'm going through this apartment. Whoever did this must be in here. There isn't any way he could have gone out."

He searched for half an hour, delved into closets, prowled the whole place, and found—nothing. He went to the window and with the aid of his flashlight examined it a moment. Outside, along the top frame of the lower window he saw a faint scratch. It had been recently made. Whatever manner of death had entered the room, had come by way of that window. He looked out and shook his head slowly. The whole thing reeked of the supernatural.

"Leave a man on guard here," he told Callahan. "Then dust back to headquarters. I'll get word to you if I need you, and if I do, it'll be damned fast. I—"

The telephone jangled. Conley reached for it, hesitated. He whirled to Callahan. "This may be another tip," he said hastily. "Get on another phone and have this call traced. Get there as fast

as you can."

He waited a moment, giving Callahan a chance to get out. Then he picked up the receiver. The same whispering, disguised voice reached him.

"I am sorry, sergeant, that you were unable to prevent the death of Mr. Tuttle. May I now inform you that the policeman you left on guard at Dolsen's home has been knocked unconscious and Dolsen's safe has been robbed."

The phone clicked, Conley leaped to his feet. "Mike," he told the guard at the door, "keep your eyes open here. Nobody gets in—understand? Tell Callahan I'm at Dolsen's on a hot tip."

HE raced the squad car back to Dolsen's apartment. The management of the place had full knowledge of the murder, but it had been kept from the other residents of the building. Dolsen's door was still hanging from its hinges when he hurried into the apartment. He spotted the patrolman on guard duty sprawled on the floor. He was unconscious and a livid welt stood out on his forehead. A small wall safe yawned at Conley.

He went to it and yanked out some of the contents. There was at least a thousand dollars in cash and some jewels of evident value. What had been taken? The motive certainly wasn't simple robbery.

On a hunch he called Tuttle's apartment. Callahan's strident voice answered him.

"Hell, Conley," Callahan groaned. "Somebody rapped Mike on the head, busted Tuttle's safe open, but they didn't take a damned thing. Now what do you think of that?"

"They did the same thing here," Conley said. "Did you trace that call?"

"Yeah, and a lot of good it did. That call came from an apartment three stories above Tuttle's. Somebody picked the lock, walked in and used the phone. What'll I do now?"

"Stay there," Conley told him. "Give headquarters a buzz. Tell 'em I'm on my way back, but if anything breaks to broadcast it."

He called the house doctor and had the unconscious patrolman cared for. As he climbed into his car, the radio burst into life again with a message for him.

"Ambulance call at 205 Boulevard," the announcer told him. "Doctor called here and said a man had been badly slashed, his eyes plucked out. They took him to Emergency Hospital, but they don't think he'll live long."

"Damn!" Conley grunted. He closed the siren circuit, whirled his little car about and headed for the Boulevard. The murderer would try to open the safe at his latest victim's home. If he could get there first, be ready for the fiend, he might close the case on the spot.

He did. The address given him was a one-family house, but a huge ornate place. The house was filled with light and the front door stood glaringly open. He went in, looked around. There was no one there.

"Funny," he told himself, "they didn't leave somebody to guard the joint."

He went into the study and stopped quickly. Spread in the center of the floor was the form of a patrolman. He hurried to his side, knelt beside him and felt the pulse. The patrolman was alive. Conley began to straighten up and then he heard a brief whiz. Something connected with a smack. He saw myriad stars and then went sprawling across the body of the man he had tried to aid.

CHAPTER II WHEEL OF MYSTERY

HE woke up in the hospital out of a dream filled with sightless men. A doctor sat by his side.

"You'll be okay in a day or two," he told Conley cheerfully. "Nasty crack on the head, five stitches. Lucky you didn't get a concussion.

Your man, Callahan, found you and a patrolman in the house on Boulevard."

Conley squinted about and sudden recognition came to him. "This is Emergency Hospital, isn't it?" he asked. "Got a man here whose eyes have been plucked out?"

"Right," the interne replied. "His name is Powers and he's on the floor above you. Two of your men are sitting just outside the door and there is a nurse on duty almost all of the time. She only leaves him to eat. Powers will live, sergeant. Of course he's going to be a wreck of a man. He'll never be able to appear in public, and while it's a tough thing to say, it's fortunate he is blind. If he ever saw his own face in a mirror, he'd go crazy. We took thirty or forty stitches on his cheeks and throat. He'll be here for weeks while we make certain no infection results from the loss of his eyes. By tomorrow morning he'll be out of it very nicely and you can talk to him then."

"He's unconscious now?" Conley asked.

"Dead to the world. We gave him ether so he wouldn't wake while we sewed him up, and he's sleeping it off. Tomorrow, sergeant, I'll see to it that you talk to him first thing—if you feel well enough."

"Feel well enough, the devil," Conley grunted. "If he was awake now, I'd talk to him if I had to crawl up to see him. He holds a mighty important secret, doc. Where's Callahan?"

"He's outside waiting to see you. You'd better get a little sleep first."

"Okay." Conley was vastly relieved. "Callahan will take care of things. Tell those two guards outside Powers' room to keep their eyes open. You never can tell."

"In a hospital like this?" The doctor snorted. "No one will get near him. But I'll tell them. You get some sleep, sergeant."

But there was no sleep for Conley. Two minutes after the interne had gone, a nurse escorted two men into the room. Callahan was

one. He dropped into a chair and grinned at Conley.

“Getting soft, huh?” he laughed. “Hell of a cop—letting a guy slug you on the nut and send you to the hospital. I brought along a man who knows the low-down on these murders. Mr. Bidwell, Richard Bidwell—this is Sergeant Conley, in charge of the case, but what he can do from a bed, I dunno.”

Conley peered at the stranger. He saw a well-built, bronzed man. He was in his early fifties, but didn’t look it. There was silent character in Richard Bidwell’s face. He smiled and shook Conley’s hand warmly.

“I found Detective Callahan at Powers’ home when I arrived there last night,” he said, “I—”

“Last night?” Conley cried, half- arising. “How long have I been here?”

“Six hours,” Callahan grinned. “What a sock you must have gotten. The guy who slugged you called me on the phone and told me to come and get you. He busted the safe in the house first though.”

“As I was saying,” Bidwell broke in, “I called at Powers’ home after I discovered Dolsen and Tuttle were dead, and of course I learned Powers was badly hurt. While I’m not certain, of course, I’m pretty sure as to why those two men were killed. You see, I traveled in Nepal and the outlying territory of Tibet. I know the country well. Seven years ago a party of white men sneaked into Tibet. No white men are allowed to enter the country, but these four got through. You can probably guess who those men were.”

Conley nodded. “Dolsen, Tuttle and Powers. Okay, go on.”

“There was one more—Hugh McKay. They were searching for tokens of the country to bring home. It so happened, unfortunately enough, that they met a little band of high monastery officials. These priests were carrying prayer wheels. They are funny little things, look

something like one of those pin-wheel noisemakers. A pin wheel on a stick. They rotate the wheels, and every time the wheel turns it means just that much nearer heaven the priest has arrived.

“To make my story short, the four whites attacked the priests and took from them three prayer wheels. Two of these were practically worthless. The third was the property of a Lama—high priest—who had died. It was considered very holy and it was worth a small fortune. The white men escaped, of course. From what I understand, agents have been sent here from India to negotiate with the white men for the return of this holy prayer wheel. Just how far these agents have gone, I don’t know.”

“Would they murder a man by slashing him horribly and then pluck out his eyes?” Conley asked grimly.

“What? Pluck out his eyes?” Bidwell was aghast. “Good Lord, man, I don’t know. It isn’t a custom of the country, if that is what you mean. We’ll have to ask Raj Eliya about that. He’s a native of the country and he is here to buy the prayer wheel. He’ll know about that.”

“I wonder,” Conley remarked thoughtfully, “just how much he does know—how far he’d go in his —er—negotiations. Do you think he’d murder to get that prayer wheel? Is he that kind of a guy?”

“If there were no other way to get it—yes,” Bidwell was frank. “That wheel means much in Tibet, and while Raj isn’t a Tibetan, he does have something to say in the government of the land and he’s popular there.”

“I talked to that guy already,” Callahan said. “When I heard you had been put out of commission, I got Johnson to watch the hotel where he is staying. I don’t mind telling you I don’t like his looks.”

“This Raj and I are going to have a little chat soon as I—”

A scream of terror cut through the quietness of the hospital and froze the words in Conley’s

mouth. He slipped out of bed, cursed when he found that he was clad only in the hospital nightgown. He yanked a sheet from the bed and followed Callahan who was racing madly up the stairs. Conley was weak, but in his excitement he didn't notice that.

HIS lips were tight together and his eyes were steely. For Sergeant Conley knew very well what he was going to find. A cluster of nurses on the floor moved aside in mingled consternation and fear as they saw the sheet-wrapped form approach. Conley went into the open door of the room that had been directly above his own.

Stuart Powers was there. He lay in the bed, throat slashed horribly. A silent group looked down at the body. In the silence, the flapping of the window curtain sounded like the report of a small gun. Conley went to the window, stuck out his head and looked up.

"Who is in that room above?" he asked.

"Have to find out," an interne replied. He went into the hallway, talked to the floor nurse a moment and came back. "A man named Black. Came in a couple of hours ago complaining of pains in the stomach. He had money and we put him in that room."

"See if he's still there, Callahan," Conley ordered. He pulled the sheet closer about his body, glared at the nurses who were peering into the room and then he began to search. For what, he didn't know, but sometimes little clues dropped. Under the bed he found a small piece of fresh meat. He picked it up, regarded it with wide eyes a moment, and then he held it under a doctor's face.

"Is this human flesh?" he queried.

"Human flesh?" The doctor stepped back a pace, recovered himself and regarded the piece of meat. "No—that's beef unless I'm sadly mistaken. How in the world did that get in here?"

Callahan came flying down the stairs. "Hey,

sarge," he cried, "that guy in the room above beat it already. I'll bet my shirt he had something to do with this killing."

"Keep your shirt," Conley replied. "It's not a fair bet. Of course he had something to do with the killing—and the other two murders, too. Get a description of the guy. I'm getting dressed. Where in hell are my clothes?"

IT was early dawn when Conley and Callahan left the hospital. There was a car at the curb and Callahan drove. They went first to a restaurant where Conley devoured a husky breakfast, washed it down with two cups of strong coffee, and then sighed contentedly for a man just out of a hospital.

"Where to?" Callahan asked when they climbed into the car again.

"Let's go see if this Raj Eliya is sleeping the sleep of the just or out gallivanting around."

"Sure," Callahan agreed, "but he can't be the guy who faked sickness to get into that hospital to kill Powers. No matter how good he was, he couldn't make himself two feet taller and eighty pounds heavier."

The Elite was one of the most exclusive of hotels. Raj would have to be a wealthy man to stay there. Conley and Callahan ambled into the lobby, went directly to the elevator, and told the boy to take them to the floor where Raj lived. They dissolved any trepidation the elevator boy might have by flashing their badges. In the hallway, as they left the elevator, they spotted Johnson, the man who had relieved Callahan. He was closely watching the door of Raj's apartment-suite.

"He's still in there," Johnson said. "Must be sleeping. Haven't heard a peep out of him since I came here."

"Hmm," Conley mused. "I wonder." He went to the door, knelt, down and peered into the room through the keyhole. There was no key in the door. Silently he pulled a bunch of keys from his pocket, judiciously selected one and

grinned at Callahan.

"Know what a burglar feels like, Irish?" he smiled.

"You'll know," Callahan retorted, "if that guy's in there."

"If he is," Conley told him, "we'll sneak out as quietly as we go in. If he isn't there—well then, we'll have found something."

Raj Eliya wasn't there. His bed hadn't been slept in, but a knotted sheet hung from an open window. Conley stuck his head out and looked down. The sheet-rope ended one floor below. Raj had evidently gone down his makeshift ladder, swung into the window of the apartment below, and escaped. Johnson began to curse bitterly.

They turned to leave the apartment. Conley was in the lead. He stopped suddenly as if he had struck a brick wall. Raj Eliya, short and swarthy-faced, his head neatly turbaned, stood in the doorway. His face wasn't pleasant to look at.

"And to what," he queried coldly, "do I owe this early morning visit?"

"Where have you been?" Conley demanded. "You went into your apartment last night and then you went out the window. Why did you do that and where did you go?"

"Am I to assume that I am under arrest?" Raj asked. He doffed the light topcoat he wore and then sat down. "If so, I wish an attorney before I answer your questions."

"Hell, man," Conley tried to plead with him. "We're trying to clear up three murders. Three—did you hear that?"

"Yes—I am quite normal of hearing. I expected that Stuart Powers would be murdered. But you can't accuse me of killing him. And I don't have to tell you where I have been. Very true—I did go out the window. I did not wish anyone to be following me. My business was quite personal, you see."

"Okay," Conley sighed. "We haven't got enough on you to make a pinch, but you might

as well know right now that you're under surveillance. After all, you were interested in those murdered men. You didn't, I suppose, get your prayer wheel?"

"Not yet," Raj shook his head. "I see my friend Bidwell has talked. I shall have the sacred wheel soon and then I must be free to leave at once. I do not wish to go the way of these other three men. You may have some one accompany me wherever I go, sergeant. In fact, I would rather have it that way, but please let me have him at my side. Perhaps Mr. Callahan here might wish the job? I promise not to run away or cause him any trouble. In fact, I shall treat him as my guest."

"Your job, Irish," Conley smiled. Then he turned to Raj again. "Who is McKay and where does he live?"

"I do not know him well," Raj replied and Conley knew he was lying. "He lives at twenty Atlantic Drive."

"We'll see how well you know him," Conley grunted. He took Johnson with him and they went directly to McKay's home. Conley rang the bell and held his finger on it until a huge gorilla-like man opened the door. He was dressed in the quiet livery of a servant.

"Wake up McKay," Conley ordered. "We're cops. Who the devil are you?"

"I'm Elkins, sir, Mr. McKay's man. Mr. McKay is sleeping, sir. You are sure this is important?"

"Wake him up—you'll soon see."

McKay came downstairs, rumpling his white hair and rubbing sleep from his eyes. He was about fifty, but the worried expression on his face added ten years to his appearance. He nodded to Conley and sat down.

"You came about Dolsen and Tuttle?" he asked. "And Powers?"

"Powers is dead," Conley told him bluntly.

McKay sat bolt upright and paled. "Then—then there is only myself left," he said almost to himself. "Damn that wheel. Damn Tibet and all

Indo-China too. Why I ever went there—"

"Where's that prayer wheel?" Conley said.

"Prayer wheel?" McKay jumped at the words. "Then you know?"

"I know," Conley repeated. "I want to see that wheel! Maybe I'd better take it to headquarters. It will be safer there. So long as you haven't got it, you'll be safe enough."

"Good idea," McKay seemed relieved. "I'll get the damned thing right away."

HE went to the fireplace at the east side of the big room. His fingers went under the mantelpiece, pressed a hidden button and a slot, cleverly concealed in the wall, opened. It revealed the face of a small, modern safe.

McKay reached out to twirl the combination. His hand froze halfway toward the knob and he gasped: "Good Lord—the safe is open!"

Conley reached his side in a moment. He watched as McKay swung open the door. Inside was a green plush box. McKay took it out with shaking hands, opened it, and then his shoulders drooped.

"It's gone!" he said slowly. "The prayer wheel has been stolen!"

Conley opened his mouth to answer. Ping! Something thudded into the wall by Conley's head. He dove floorward. Another popping noise from a silenced gun. McKay staggered back, clutching at his shoulder. He groaned and collapsed on the floor. Conley rose, called Johnson's name and got no answer.

With a presentiment of horror, he began to search outside the house for the detective. He found him in a few minutes. Johnson was dead, his head cracked open like an eggshell. His hand was still grasping the gun he hadn't been able to get out of the holster. He had died game!

Conley returned to the house with slow steps. His face was set in a look of hard determination. A detective had died. That made it a personal matter. He saw the big servant in

the doorway, asked for the telephone and called the hospital.

"Send the ambulance," he ordered, "and hurry!"

He went into the living room and sat down. McKay was still on the floor, fear rankling in his eyes. Blood streamed from the wound in his shoulder.

"What do you know about Raj Eliya?" Conley asked.

"Raj?" McKay raised his head. "Why—he's a wealthy, powerful potentate in his native land. Not a man to be trifled with. He probably has a score of servants with him. He rarely travels alone. Raj is here for that prayer wheel. He'd do anything to get possession of it. Raj is a dangerous man if he's aroused. It must have been he who tried to murder us. Oh God, my shoulder!"

"There's a doctor on the way," Conley snapped. "Now—how about Richard Bidwell—know him?"

"Bidwell?" McKay gasped and half rose from his chair. "Bidwell—is he here?"

"Where did you think he was?" Conley demanded.

"Why—a—I guess it's all right. Bidwell's a high-type man. I supposed he was in Indo-China. I wonder if he came here after that prayer wheel? He had many friends in Nepal. Perhaps he was persuaded to get that wheel. Perhaps it is he who robbed me—stole the prayer wheel."

McKay raised his shoulders expressively. "You know," he went on, "I'm not the least sorry that damned thing is gone. I've been afraid of something like this happening for a long time. The others feared it, too, but they wouldn't give the thing up. It's valuable, of course. I imagine Raj would pay half a million dollars for the thing—that is, unless he already has it."

A siren screamed outside. Conley went to the window, saw the white-uniformed interne

hurrying toward the house. Conley went to the door himself, but the interne wasn't there. He went into the yard, saw the white figure returning from the side of house and panting heavily. It was the same interne who had attended him at Emergency Hospital.

"I saw that man who faked admittance to the hospital last night," the doctor cried. "He was running away from the house. Had a big bag in his hand. Looked to me like he was taking it on the run, sergeant. He's the man, I'm sure. Ugly-looking guy."

"Tall, wide-shouldered?" Conley demanded. "Did he have on a dark blue suit?"

"That's him!"

"Hell! That guy was talking to me half an hour ago. Mr. McKay," Conley turned to the older man who had appeared in the door. "I think I know where your prayer wheel has gone. Your butler—you knew him well?"

"He's been with me six months," McKay answered. "Why? Do you connect him—"

"Last night he gained admittance to a hospital where Powers was taken. Powers was murdered in his room in the same manner that Dolsen and Tuttle were killed. He is the man we want and I'm going after him. Doc, you'll find the body of Johnson on the north side of the house. I know he's dead, but just make sure, will you? And take care of McKay's shoulder."

Conley began to run toward the back of the house. Elkins, the butler, had vanished in that direction. There weren't many homes about and the land was level. Conley spotted his quarry hurrying up the street that lay behind McKay's home. He dove for the rear of the houses, skirted the yards and gradually drew up on the escaping butler.

Elkins seemed certain that he wasn't being followed. Conley noted the huge, almost square bag the man carried. It was heavy, too, even for a man of Elkin's huge size. Conley loosened the gun in his holster, raced madly to get ahead of the man and succeeded. He crouched behind a

hedge waiting, gun ready. He was taking no chances with such a man as he knew Elkins to be.

He raised his head cautiously above the hedge and started visibly. Elkins had suddenly vanished. He heard a rustle behind him, turned and stared into the muzzle of a gun. His own service revolver he let drop. Elkins was behind that gun and his face was a mask of vicious hate.

"Stand up," Elkins commanded in a surly voice. "Make a phony move and I'll drop you in a second. Turn around!"

There was no denying that tone. Conley cursed and turned his back to the man. Suddenly he was pinioned in a cruel grasp. He struggled vainly, felt the prick of a needle, and in a moment his vision became blurred. As he lapsed into unconsciousness, he wondered if the needle had been loaded with poison or only a drug.

CHAPTER III SHAN!

CONLEY awoke to stare into darkness. He cached all over. His bones and muscles seemed stiffened unbearably. He was in some foul-smelling place. When he tried to rise, he found that he was strapped firmly to an old bed. There wasn't a ghost of a chance to wriggle out of the straps that held him. They were so tight that circulation was beginning to leave his extremities.

His mouth wasn't gagged and he gave vent to a loud yell. In answer a door opened and a yellow streak of light blinded him. Elkins stood framed in the doorway. There was a malicious smile on his face.

"Keep your damned mouth shut," he snarled, "or I'll shut it for you. I hate cops, and I hate you worse than most of 'em. I didn't gag you because in a few minutes I'm going to enjoy hearing you holler your fool head off. What a cop you are! Follow a guy and then let

him get the drop on you. Huh! Just like the rest of them. Your pal was a pipe. I didn't like to bash in his head though. I'd rather have taken him alive and listened to him yell just like you're going to do pretty damned soon."

"So you killed Johnson?" Conley said slowly. "I'm going to take a personal interest in arresting you later on, Elkins. When I do, I hope you try to get away."

"Listen, mug," Elkins laughed harshly, "when Shan gets through with you, there won't be enough left to carry home. You know what happened to the others, don't you? Remember how they looked? Remember they didn't have any eyes? That's how you're going to look, copper. And I'll laugh louder, the more you yell. The other guys didn't yell much. I had to fix it so that they couldn't, but you're way out in the country now. There ain't a soul within a mile. You can holler your head off and maybe you won't do it! Wait until you see Shan!"

Conley suppressed a shudder. As far as he could see, he would meet Shan—whoever or whatever Shan could be. That he possessed murderous inclinations, Conley didn't doubt. He wondered if he'd soon look like those others who had been murdered. When the door closed, he began to work vainly on his bonds. Elkins was no fool; he knew how to strap a man down and keep him there. Things looked almost hopeless.

He lay still, summoning his strength. Suddenly the door opened again. This time a masked man stood in the doorway. The light was full in Conley's eyes and he could barely distinguish the form. This was the arch fiend, he sensed, rather than knew.

Could this be—Shan?

"Meet the boss," Elkins laughed harshly. "He's sorry as hell, but he can't talk right now. You might recognize his voice and he don't want that to happen. Not that you'd ever be able to tell anybody, but he says it would give you satisfaction before you died. You'd know who

the main guy is. You're gonna croak wondering who he is, see?"

"Go to hell!" Conley snapped. "I'll find out who you are—you devil! I know Elkins isn't the brains of this outfit, he hasn't sense enough. You want that prayer wheel—maybe you've got it. But listen to this, mister. When I get out of here, I'm going to rip that mask off your face and then I'm going to bash it in. I'm remembering Johnson, mister. He was a pal of mine, a good guy. Elkins bumped him without giving him a break. That was your order and that's just what you're going to get."

"You are a fool," the masked man spat out. This was what Conley had been angling for. He wanted that man to talk. If he could recognize the voice, perhaps he might leave a clue before he was killed. But the masked man was too clever for that. He spoke only those four words and they carried no tone quality, no characteristic that Conley could recognize. The door closed suddenly and he was covered with darkness again.

AN hour passed by slowly. Conley's hands and feet had long since ceased to have feeling. He lay there, like so much clay, to await the hideous death planned for him. He wondered what it could be.

To his astute ears came a faint crackling. He heard metal snap and then a window opened slowly, quietly. Some one was coming into the room. Could it be the hideous death represented by the unknown Shan? A cold sweat broke out over Conley's forehead. Involuntarily, he closed his eyes and held them tightly shut.

A hand felt for his face, found it and then went outward, following his arm.

"Be quiet," a voice whispered. It was the same voice that had called him on the telephone when Dolsen and Tuttle had been murdered.

He felt the cold blade of a knife and suddenly one hand was free. Then the other. He lay still, scarcely breathing. Who could this be?

His hands began to throb in pain as circulation rushed back into them. He heard a faint scraping sound, something brushed his face lightly. Suddenly he knew who his friend was.

It had been a turbaned head that had touched his face. Then, too, Raj Eliya was dark, it would be next to impossible to see him in the darkness of that room. Whereas a white face—

A snap and his ankles were freed. He sat up slowly, in time to see the dim figure climb out of the window. He wet his lips, chafed his wrists and then his ankles to restore the circulation. He stood up, tested his strength.

There came a noise at the door and he went back on the bed, stretching out his limbs to make it seem he was still bound. Elkins came in. He was alone.

“Wake up, you rat,” he snarled. “Shan will be ready any minute now. He’s anxious to meet you—he wants your eyes, copper. Think of that! He’ll pick ‘em out of your head just as neat—”

But Elkins made the mistake of bending over his intended victim. Conley’s arms shot upward, came down and encircled the big man. The attack was so sudden, so unexpected, that Conley got in the first blow. His fist crashed into flesh and bone. He knew he had flattened that protruding nose of Elkins and he breathed a sigh of satisfaction.

Elkins roared aloud in wrath, shook his head like some mighty animal and sailed into the fight. But Conley’s fist had broken the nose. Blood smeared the ugly face and Elkins’ vision was obscured. Conley got in two more blows, straight to the face. Elkins resorted to brute strength then. He closed in, wrapped two steel-like arms about the detective and began to squeeze.

Conley’s breath came faster. The pressure on his ribs was terrific. He raised a knee, prodded it hard into Elkins’ stomach and heard the big man grunt in pain. He tried it again and loosened the grasp about his body. His fists began to tattoo on Elkins’ already bleeding face.

The bigger man went backward and Conley was quick to take advantage of the opportunity. He sailed in, both fists swinging. Elkins suddenly whirled and dashed blindly from the room. More by a sense of direction than by sight, he made the door of the cabin and ran into the open.

Conley raced after him. He wanted this man, wanted him badly. Elkins, under proper pressure, would talk. He was only the tool, but an invaluable man to capture. He knew the identity of the murderer, knew the grisly method used in the killings. Conley had to capture him.

Suddenly Elkins stopped dead. He turned a little, sagged downward, and Conley had time to see the little well of blood that emerged from between his eyes. Somebody had shot at him. The detective threw himself flat on the ground, crawled for cover.

The arch murderer was hidden somewhere in the darkness that surrounded this cabin. Elkins had died at the hands of his former master to insure his silence. Conley longed for a gun. With a weapon in his fist, he could scour the little growth of thick trees from where the shot had undoubtedly come. But he was weaponless. All he could do was to lie quietly and hope for the best.

Minutes passed. He reached out, found a stone and flung it toward his right. No answering plop came from the darkness. He stood up, felt suddenly weary, and then began to trudge away from the cabin. He had no idea where he was, but he was certain the murderer had made good his escape. To his ears came the sound of a starter churning, then a motor caught. A car slid into first gear, grated into second, and reared off. The murderer had escaped again!

CHAPTER IV A DARING MOVE

CONLEY hailed a milk collection truck and learned that he was miles out of the city.

With the aid of his badge which he still had, he managed to get a lift and got into town quickly. He hailed the first night-hawk cab he found, for which he abandoned the slow-moving milk truck.

He was driven directly to the Elite Hotel. Conley wondered if Raj Eliya actually had been the man who had saved him, and if he was, why he had performed this act. It struck him suddenly that Raj might have freed him so as to avert all suspicion from himself and, incidentally, grasp the opportunity that had been offered to put Elkins where he wouldn't talk.

Certainly Raj wanted that prayer wheel badly enough. But so did Bidwell and this adventurer was one to reckon with, one to respect. Whoever brought that precious relic of a dead Tibetan high priest back to its native land would profit both in money and in esteem. The latter meant much to both Raj and Bidwell. It had to be one of them.

Callahan was camped in a chair outside the Indian prince's door. He was fast asleep, his snores grating on Conley's already shattered nerves. He woke the detective with a shake. Callahan opened his eyes, blinked, and then grinned sheepishly at Conley.

"Holy Gosh," he ejaculated as he looked at his wrist watch. "I've been asleep four hours. That's never happened to me before."

"And plenty has happened in the meantime, Irish," Conley told him flatly. "Damned lucky thing I didn't need you fast. I did, at that, but I couldn't have reached you."

"Honest, sarge, I wasn't sleepy when I squatted in this chair. Our pal, Raj, brought it into the hall for me, even placed it near the door. Then—hell—I remember now. I smelled something sweet, like perfume. That's all I remember. He must have doped me!"

"Swell time to realize that," Conley grunted. "Let's see if he's awake yet I'll—"

The door to Raj's apartment opened wide and the Indian smiled genially at them. He was

fully dressed despite the hour, his head turbaned as usual.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said lightly. "You're not arguing, I hope. May I say, in defense of the worthy Detective Callahan, that I found it necessary to insure him a few hours' rest. I allowed the fumes of an Indian drug to reach him. I hope, Mr. Callahan, that your dreams were pleasant. It is said that the fumes of that drug inspire luscious thoughts, enticing dreams."

"You black—" Callahan started to lunge for the man. Conley stopped him with his extended arm.

"So," Conley said quietly, "you did go out. Where did you go?"

"I am most sorry," Raj answered smoothly. "Perhaps at a later date I may inform you. But now—"

"Well, anyway," Conley said slowly and distinctly, "accept my thanks for saving my life. I'd have been stone dead—dead without eyes in my head if it hadn't been for you."

If he thought he would get a rise out of Raj, Conley was mistaken. The prince never flickered an eyelash. "I am sorry," he said apologetically, "that I haven't the slightest comprehension of what you refer to. Now, may I be of help to you, gentlemen?"

Callahan stood aside, his eyes bulging. He didn't know what it was all about, but he sensed the idea that Conley had been near death and had been rescued by this man who had drugged him so subtly.

"Raj," Conley said, "what does Shan mean in Tibetan?"

"Shan?" Raj frowned. "That is a Dost common name like your English name, John, let us say. Tibetans name their cattle, their dogs, even, their children by that name. I'm sorry, I can't help you there."

"All right," Conley said. "But you can help. Raj, you know who the murderer is. Why don't you tell?"

Raj shrugged. "Perhaps you are right. Perhaps not! At any rate, please assume that I should be only too happy to inform you, provided that I was in possession of the prayer wheel of the Golden Patola. I came thousands of miles to seek it. Other men desire it also. I must fight to regain it for my people. It is worth—perhaps thousands of dollars—but in Tibet its worth cannot be counted in terms of money."

"You know that the prayer wheel was stolen from McKay's safe?" Conley asked.

He startled the Indian. Raj gasped a little, lost his suavity for an instant, and then regained his composure again. "I shall find it," he said, "if it takes my last worldly possession. Nothing can stop me, sergeant. Nothing, you understand?"

"Hell, sarge," Callahan horned in. "Let's lock this bird up. He admits he drugged me and beat it tonight. I dunno what the devil happened, but he must have had a hand in it. Let's take him down town and work on him."

"It's because of what happened tonight that we'll do nothing of the kind, Irish," Conley said grimly. "Raj saved my life. Saved me from that awful death those other three men suffered. I don't know his spot in this affair too well, but whatever it is, I'm backing him."

"For that," Raj bowed low, "accept my sincere thanks, sergeant."

"I'll accept your company if you'll come," the detective said. "We'll pick up Bidwell on the way. He knows a lot about this. I want to get all of us to McKay's house as soon as possible. I've got a hunch we can knock off the murderer before dawn."

"That's in four hours, sarge," Callahan reminded him doubtfully.

"It won't take that long. What do you say, Raj?"

"My car I shall summon at once, sergeant. My secretary will call Mr. Bidwell so that he will be ready. In the meantime, step inside. Liqueurs are in that cabinet."

Conley poured himself a healthy slug of mellow bourbon, handed the bottle to Callahan. They refilled their glasses after the first drink. Conley motioned toward the door through which Raj had vanished.

"Let's drink to a damn good guy," he said. Callahan drank, but there was doubt in his eyes.

RAJ was gone a moment or two. He was dressed for the street when he appeared and he led the way to the elevator. A sleek sedan awaited them at the curb. Without instructions, the chauffeur drove rapidly to Bidwell's apartment, picked up the husky adventurer and went directly to McKay's home.

The house was ablaze with light. McKay, too, had been notified by Raj's most efficient secretary. McKay came to the porch as the car pulled to the curb. He was plainly worried and his shoulder was bandaged.

"Things are happening a little too fast for me, gentlemen," he said when they entered the house. "Elkins has simply vanished from the face of the earth. I think I trusted him far too much. I've about made up my mind that wherever the prayer wheel is, he is with it. Damn him!"

"You would, of course, sell the prayer wheel to me if you had it?" Raj asked softly.

McKay whirled on him. "I'd give you the damned thing," he cried "I wish I'd never seen it. It's brought death to my friends and I've a hunch it isn't finished with us yet. I've been sitting in the living room of my home, gentlemen, behind locked doors and windows. I've had a gun in my hand every moment. I don't mind confessing that I'm scared stiff. I—I don't want that terrible death my friends suffered. I—I—oh, hell—let's get this over with. What can I do to help you, sergeant?"

"Let us go into your living room where the doors and windows are locked," Conley suggested. "I've an offer and a suggestion to make. It's a strange thing for a policeman to do,

but it's the only way out."

They seated themselves. McKay busied himself a moment, served stiff high balls. Conley sipped his, the others swallowed theirs quickly. A nervous tension caught them in its tentacles. Even the suave Raj Eliya trembled a little.

"The murderer," Conley said in clipped tones, "captured me tonight. Your man, Elkins, Mr. McKay, was one of the murderous spies. He knocked me out, took me somehow to a cabin miles from the city. The murderer, listen carefully now, came to see me. From his physical build, from his voice that he obviously used to disguise his true tones, I could not recognize him. However, among us in this room, is the murderer!"

Callahan gasped out loud. The others paled perceptibly. Conley continued to talk.

"How do I know? The murderer forgot one thing. He neglected to remove from his person one certain object that betrayed his identity to me. I know who the murderer is. I could arrest him here and now, but I'm not going to. The prayer wheel was stolen from Mr. McKay's safe; the murderer is in possession of it. That prayer wheel means so much to millions of natives in a distant land that I am going to make an offer for its return.

"I shall remain in this room for the remainder of the night. All of you will, go to rooms Mr. McKay will assign to you. You will remain in your rooms until I summon you. In the meantime, the murderer will come to me in this room as soon as he is certain the others are safe within their own rooms. He will hand to me, or tell me where I can find the prayer wheel. I shall then allow him twenty-four hours to make good his escape. With airplanes, fast cars and boats, he should have no difficulty in getting away. Further, I shall permit each one of you gentlemen to search me. I have no weapon—I want none. I promise the murderer perfect immunity if he only surrenders that

prayer wheel to me. That is all, gentlemen. You may search. Callahan, you search me last and do a good job of it. Turn out every pocket. You know how to go over a man; the others may not know as well."

There were gasps of astonishment. Callahan protested feebly and Conley shut him up with a gesture. Raj passed his hands over Conley's body, stepped back. McKay searched him next. Bidwell was the most careful of the three. When he stepped away, he was very sure Conley possessed no weapon.

Callahan was last. He spent fully ten minutes, turning out pockets, demonstrating his skill at frisking. Finally the four men left. McKay escorted them to their rooms. All retired.

In the big library Conley sat down weakly. He was dead tired. His hands and feet, even his head, ached from the fights and attacks he had been a partner to. There was a decanter filled with tempting whisky on the table and glasses at hand. He poured himself a drink, held it to the light and then brought it to his lips. But he didn't drink. Instead he carefully poured the contents of the glass into an already sopping wet drawer in the table. His first drink had gone there.

HE lay back in the chair, yawned and sighed audibly. Soon his eyes closed wearily and snores began to emerge from his throat. His right hand hung limply over the edge of the chair. Detective Sergeant Conley was out cold to all appearances.

There came a slight scraping near the windows. Very softly one of the windows began to work upward. The curtain flapped a little. On the chair, Conley opened one eye warily. Any moment the unknown Shan would appear. He had a vague idea of what he was up against, but he wasn't sure. Suddenly both his eyes opened wide.

The window was open, raised by unseen

hands. Perched on the window frame was a huge bird. It was a dull gray in color. Two malignant eyes were fastened on the quiet figure of the detective. A beak, inches long and sharp as any whetted blade, protruded from the ugly head. The beak was daubed with blood.

The bird hopped to the floor, started silently toward the detective. Conley kept his eyes slitted; his left hand was ready. The giant bird came closer, cocked its vicious head to one side and surveyed its prey. Suddenly it leaped to the table, drew a step nearer.

Conley's hand came up from beside the chair very slowly. No other part of his body moved, although his breath came in gasps of horror. In the hand an automatic gleamed dully. The bird suddenly sensed that its prey was not helpless. It emitted a screech of wrath, drew back its great head and the beak opened wide. Conley fired straight into the open mouth. The bird shuddered convulsively, toppled over and for a moment or two struggled on the floor, its great wings flapping in its death agony.

Conley heaved a great sigh, wiped the perspiration from his forehead and went to the door. He listened carefully, raised his gun and fired point-blank through the thin wooden panels. A shriek greeted the explosion. Strangely enough, none of the others in the house stirred.

Conley opened the door, stepped into the hallway, gun drawn. On the floor a man writhed in pain. The detective shoved his gun against the man's side and with the other hand jerked him upward. Then he dropped him into a chair.

"Tell me, McKay, you murdering rat, how long my friends will be out from the dope you put in those drinks?"

Only moans of terror and pain answered him. Calmly he drew the man's hands behind him, cuffed them. He took off McKay's belt, wrapped it around his legs and pulled it tight. He felt a great satisfaction as he tugged at it. He hoped McKay's legs would be paralyzed for the

short life that by before him just as his own had been not many hours before.

It took him an hour to bring the others out of their drugged sleep. Assembled in the living room, they stared at McKay who was trussed in a chair. His side was covered with dried blood. Sergeant Conley grinned at their consternation.

"Meet our pal—the murderer," he said.

"But—" the men protested.

"But nothing. McKay killed his three partners to gain possession of that prayer wheel for himself. Why he wanted it so badly, I don't know, but I've a hunch our friend Raj knows. Anyway, McKay killed those men, tried to kill me. He murdered his own right-hand man, Elkins, when he knew Elkins was of no more value to him. He even permitted Elkins to shoot him in the shoulder to divert suspicion."

Callahan suddenly spotted the body of the bird. It was hidden behind a huge chair. "For the lovamike!" he gasped. "What's that?"

"That's a vulture," Conley replied. "It's McKay's tool of murder. He opened the windows of the men he murdered, from above. He probably used some kind of a hook to do it with, making sure the window wasn't locked before he left the house. He drugged each man he killed, too, so that the vulture would have an easy time of it. Vultures only eat the flesh of dead people, but I imagine he starved this one so it would eat anything. He fed it raw meat, too, to keep it quiet. I found a piece of it dropped under Powers' bed at the hospital. Elkins worked the job that time. He got into the hospital as a patient, the bird was probably passed up to him by McKay. He let it into the room where Powers lay and—well, it did its dirty work. There was a light chain on one leg of the bird so it couldn't get away."

"But the eyes?" Callahan cried. "What made it take those?"

"I think, gentlemen," Raj broke in, "that I can answer that. This bird was undoubtedly taken by McKay from Tibet on his expedition

there. It is a native of Tibet, anyway. Those birds are used in Tibet to destroy the bodies of the dead. On tall towers the dead persons are placed for these great birds to feast upon. Invariably they first pluck out the eyes as being the choicest tidbit."

"Thanks," Conley nodded. "I was wondering about that angle of it myself. McKay prepared well for this, even had his right-hand man, Elkins, takes a pot shot at him while I was there."

"The prayer wheel," Bidwell broke in. "Where is it? Did McKay rob his own safe?"

"Of course he did," Conley replied, "and by doing that he queered himself. He has one of the latest safes built. Nobody but an expert could have opened the door of that safe without using soup on it. The only man I know who could do it is our friend Raj, but he didn't open this one. He opened three other wall safes damned neatly when he was trying to find that wheel. Perhaps McKay knows where it is."

"You go to hell!" McKay groaned. "I'm dying and you talk about prayer wheels. Get me a doctor!"

"You'll get no doctor," Conley said grimly, "until you come through with that information. You can stay there and suffer, or you can tell us. Talk fast, McKay—that wound will hurt like the devil in a few minutes."

"Damn you!" McKay groaned. "The wheel is in the safe. I never even took it out. Oh, go on and open it. I didn't lock it."

RAJ leaped for the safe. With anxious fingers, he pulled the contents out dropped cash and other jewels to the floor. A moment and he had the weird-looking prayer device in his hand. He grinned delightedly at Bidwell.

"It returns to my people, Mr. Bidwell," he said. "You sought to keep it from us. You wanted your world to see it to know its beauty.

Now it is mine—ours! It will again rest in the palms of the Lama's mummified hands."

Bidwell nodded slowly. "That's where it belongs, Raj. If I had got my hands on the thing, I would have returned it to you. It isn't meant for a white man's world, not even his museums. It is worth thousands, I know, but I could never take it now."

"My thanks," Raj bowed. "For your earnest good wishes, I shall reveal to you the secret of the Prayer Wheel of the Golden Patola. Look!"

He twisted the object deftly. Part of it came away. On the table he poured out a dozen glittering green objects. Bidwell cried aloud in eagerness.

"These are jade gods," Raj said. "They are perfect miniature carvings of the Lamas who went before the now living one. They are worth, as jewels, a million dollars. That is why McKay murdered his partners. Evidently he discovered the secret of the prayer wheel."

He turned to Conley and nodded apologetically. "I am most sorry that I had to render you unconscious that time at Powers' house, sergeant, but had I not done that, you would have arrested me. I had to be free. I did rob all those other safes, hoping I would find the Holy Wheel."

"Hey!" Callahan suddenly leaped to his feet. "Sarge, where in the devil did you get that gun—and those cuffs? I searched you before I went upstairs. You didn't have those on you."

"For once you're right, Irish," Conley grinned. "While you were searching me, I picked your pockets. The gat and cuffs are yours—many thanks. Well, come on—lift McKay to his feet. We got to get him behind bars and then—oh boy, I'm going to sleep a week!"

"And I," Raj declared solemnly, "will spin this prayer wheel—spin it backwards, for the damnation of McKay's soul!"