Machine squinted at him curiously, then dropped back into his big chair.

For several minutes Varick said nothing; he seemed to be struggling to control himself. Suddenly he burst out: "I'm going to die some day next week. Is there anyway to prevent it?"

The Thinking Machine turned his great yellow head and looked at him in a manner which nearly indicated surprise. "Of course, if you've made up your mind to do it," he said irritably, "I don't see what can be done." There was a trace of irony in his voice, a coldness which brought Varick around a little. "Just how is it going to happen?"

"I shall be murdered—stabbed in the back—by a man whom I don't know," Varick rushed on desperately.

"Dear me, dear me! How unfortunate!" commented the scientist. "Tell me something about it. But here—" He rose and went into his laboratory. After a moment he returned and handed a glass of some effervescent liquid to Varick, who gulped it down. "Take a minute to pull yourself together," instructed the scientist.

He resumed his seat and sat silent, with his long, slender fingers pressed tip to tip. Gradually Varick recovered. It was a fierce fight for the mastery of his emotions.

"Now," directed The Thinking Machine at last, "tell me about it."

Varick told just what happened, lucidly enough, and The Thinking Machine listened with polite interest. Once or twice he turned and looked at his visitor.

"Do you believe in any psychic force?" Varick asked once.

"I don't disbelieve in anything until I have proven that it cannot be," was the answer. "The God who hung a sun up there has done other things which we will never understand." There was a little pause, then: "How did you meet this man Adhem Singh?"

"I have been interested for years in the psychic, the occult, the things we don't understand," Varick replied. "I have a comfortable fortune, no occupation, no dependents, and made this a sort of hobby. I have studied it superficially all over the world. I met Adhem Singh in India ten years ago, afterward in England, where he went through Oxford with a little financial assistance from me, and later here. Two years ago he convinced me that there was something in crystal gazing—call it telepathy, self-hypnotism, subconscious mental action, what you will. Since then the science—I can call it nothing else—has guided me in every important act of my life."

"Through Adhem Singh?"

"Yes."

"And under a pledge of secrecy, I imagine—that is, secrecy as to the nature of his revelations?"

"Yes. In this case I have violated that pledge."

"Any taint of insanity in your family?"

Varick wondered if the question was insolent reproof, or merely a request for information. He construed it as the latter. "No," he answered. "Never a touch of it."

"How often have you consulted Singh?"

"Many times. There have been occasions when he would tell me nothing, because, he explained, the crystal told him nothing. There have been other times when he advised me correctly. He has never given me bad advice, even in intricate stock operations, therefore I have been compelled to believe him in all things."

"You were never able to see anything yourself in the crystal until this vision of death, last Tuesday night you say?"

"That was the first."

"How do you know the murder is to take place at any given time—that is next week?"

"That is the information Adhem Singh gave me," was the reply. "He can read the visions—they mean more to him than—"

"In other words, he makes it a profession?" interrupted the scientist.

"Yes."

"Go on."

"The horror of the thing impressed him so—both of us—that he has at my request twice invoked the vision since that night. I wanted to know when it would happen. There is a calendar by weeks in my study; that is, only one week is shown on it at a time. The last time the vision appeared he noted this calendar. The week was that beginning next Sunday, the twenty-first of this month. The only conclusion we could reach was that it would happen in that week."

The Thinking Machine rose and paced back and forth across the room, deeply thoughtful. At last he stopped before his visitor. "It's perfectly amazing," he commented emphatically. "It approaches nearer to the unbelievable than anything I have ever heard of."

Varick's response was a look that was almost grateful. "You don't think it impossible then?" he asked eagerly.

"Nothing is impossible," declared the other aggressively. "Now, Mr. Varick, you are firmly convinced that what you saw was prophetic? that you will die in that manner and that place?"

"I can't believe anything else—I can't!" was the response.

"And you have no idea of the identity of the murderer-to-be, if I may use that phrase?"

"Not the slightest. The figure was wholly unfamiliar to me."

"And you know—you know—that the room you saw in the crystal was yours?"

"I know that absolutely. Rugs, furniture, mantel, books, everything was mine."

The Thinking Machine was again silent for a time. "In that event," he said at last, "the affair is perfectly simple. Will you place yourself in my hands and obey my directions implicitly?"

"Yes." There was an eager, hopeful note in Varick's voice now.

"I am going to try to disarrange the affairs of fate a little bit," explained the scientist, gravely. "I don't know what will happen; but it will be interesting to try to throw the inevitable—the preordained, I might say—out of gear, won't it?"

With a quizzically grim expression about his thin lips, The Thinking Machine went to the telephone in an adjoining room and called some one. Varick heard neither the name nor what was said, merely the mumble of the irritated voice. He glanced up as the scientist returned.

"Have you any servants—a valet for instance?" asked the scientist.

"Yes, I have an aged valet, but he is now in France. I gave him a little vacation. I really don't need him, as I live in an apartment-house—almost a hotel."

"I don't suppose you happen to have three or four thousand dollars in your pocket?"

"No, not so much as that," was the puzzled reply. "If it's your fee—"

THOMAS FOGARTY

Creeping Stealthily, With Weapon Raised.

"I never accept fees," interrupted the scientist. "I interest myself in trivial problems like these because I like them. They are good mental exercise, a sort of recreation. Please draw a check for, say, four thousand dollars, to Hutchinson Hatch."

"Who is he?" asked Varick. There was no reply. The check was drawn and handed over without further comment.

It was fifteen or twenty minutes later that a cab pulled up in front of the house. Hutchinson Hatch, reporter, and another man whom he introduced as Philip Byrne were ushered in. As Hatch shook hands with Varick, The Thinking Machine compared them mentally. They were relatively of the same size, and, noting this, he bobbed his head as if satisfied.

"Now, Mr. Hatch," he instructed, "take this check and get it cashed immediately, then return here. Not a word to anybody."

Hatch went out, and Byrne discussed politics with Varick until he returned with the money.

The Thinking Machine thrust the bills into Byrne's hand, and he counted it, afterward stowing it away in a pocket.

"Now, Mr. Varick, the keys to your apartments, please," asked the scientist.

They were handed over, and he placed them on a table near him. Then he turned back to Varick.

"From this time on," he said, "your name is John Smith. You are going on a trip, beginning immediately, with Mr. Byrne here. You are not to send a letter, a postal, a telegram, or a package to anyone; you are to buy nothing; you are to write no checks; you are not to speak to or recognize anyone; you are not to telephone or attempt in any manner to communicate with anyone, not even me. You are to obey Mr. Byrne in everything he says."

Varick's eyes had grown wider and wider as he listened. "But my affairs—my business," he protested.

"It is a matter of your life or death," said The Thinking Machine shortly.

For a moment Varick wavered. He felt that he was being treated like a child. "As you say," he finally agreed.

"Now, Mr. Byrne," continued the scientist, "you heard those instructions. It is your duty to enforce them. You must lose this man and yourself. Take him away somewhere to another place. There is enough money there for ordinary purposes. When you learn that there has been an arrest in connection with a certain threat against Mr. Varick, come back to Boston—to me—and bring him. That's all."

Byrne arose with a business-like air. "Come on, Mr. Smith," he commanded.

Varick followed him out of the room.

. . . Here was a table littered with books and papers, there a chair, yonder a shadowy mantel . . . A door opened and a man entered the room, . . . moved about the study aimlessly for a time as if deeply troubled, then dropped into a chair at the desk . . . made some hopeless gesture with his hands and leaned forward on the desk with his head on his arms . . . another figure in the room . . . knife in his hand . . . creeping stealthily toward the unconscious figure in the chair with the knife raised . . . the unknown crept on, on, on . . .

There was a blinding flash, a gush of flame, a sharp click, and through the fog of smoke came the unexcited voice of Hutchinson Hatch, reporter.

"Stay right where you are, please."

"That ought to be a good picture," said The Thinking Machine.

The smoke cleared, and he saw Adhem Singh standing watching with deep concern a revolver in the hand of Hatch, who had suddenly risen from the desk in Varick's room. The Thinking Machine rubbed his hands briskly.

"Ah, I thought it was you," he said to the crystal gazer. "Put down the knife please. That's right. It seems a little bold to have interfered with what was to be like this; but you wanted too much detail, Mr. Singh. You might have murdered your friend if you hadn't gone into trivial theatrics."

"I suppose I am a prisoner?" asked the crystal gazer.

"You are," The Thinking Machine assured him cheerfully. "You are charged with conspiring and actually attempting the murder of Mr. Varick. Your wife will be a prisoner in another half-hour with all those others who were with you in the plot."

He turned to Hatch, who was smiling broadly. The reporter was thinking of that wonderful flash-light photograph in the camera that The Thinking Machine held—the only photograph in the world, as far as he knew, of a man in the act of attempting an assassination.

"Now, Mr. Hatch," the scientist went on, "I will 'phone to Detective Mallory to come here and get this gentleman, and also to send men and arrest every person to be found in Mr. Singh's home. If this man tries to run, shoot."

The scientist went out, and Hatch devoted his attention to his sullen prisoner. He asked half a dozen questions, and receiving no answers he gave it up as hopeless. After awhile Detective Mallory appeared in his usual state of [illegible] astonishment, and the crystal gazer was [illegible] to Adhem Singh's house. The police [illegible] them and gone away with four [illegible] among them the girl, Jadeh. They obtained [illegible] through the courtesy of a policeman [illegible] and sought out the crystal gazer. Together they bowed over the glittering globe. [illegible] an electric flash-light.

"But I still don't see how it was done," said the

Continued on page 15