

The Free Press' Short Story

THE PHANTOM EYE

JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

THE girl clasped and unclasped her hands nervously. Except for the secretary, she was the only person in the reception room. Very smartly dressed, her appearance belied the anxiety of her lovely face. She was poised on the very edge of her chair, and every few moments her dark eyes darted to the name on the nearest door—James Drake, Attorney at Law. The girl glanced at her wrist watch and then resumed clasping and unclasping her hands. A man emerged from the nearest door, closing it after him. The secretary frowned at a card as she arose. "Miss Lorraine Lassfolk," she said. "What did you say your business was, Miss Lassfolk?" "I didn't say."

The fourth month I found a hundred-dollar bill wrapped up in a local paper on my desk. The fifth month the envelope was pinned to a hanger in my coat closet. It had a hundred and fifty in it. Jimmy frowned. "Didn't it occur to you, Lorraine, that you were receiving an awful lot of money for the sort of work you were doing?" "Yes, it worried me terribly. I left notes in the letter box, asking what purpose was being made of my work. There was no answer. Once I waited in the office and tried to see my employer. But no one came." "Have you any reason to suppose he has been using your clippings for a vicious purpose?" "None at all. In the first place, he wanted clippings only on down-and-outers. He couldn't exploit them, could he?" "Not in any way I can think of at the moment," Jimmy said. "Did you ever go into the inner office?" "Well, I started to. Once when I was worried about receiving so much money for such simple work, I decided I'd look at the filing cabinet. I felt I had a right to know if my work was being used for some wrong purpose. Just as I started to cross the threshold, a voice cried, 'Stay out of this room!' Frightened, I jumped back. The next morning, there was a curt note on my desk saying that since I had given such excellent service, my disobedience would be forgiven, provided it was not repeated."

Jimmy rose and picked up his hat. "The place to start solving this mystery, then," he smiled "must be in your office." "You have the time?" the girl inquired eagerly. "I'll take the time. You have me very much interested—and puzzled! I've never heard of anything quite like this." Jimmy Drake pushed open the door of 1008, and Lorraine walked in. He surveyed the mahogany desks and the rich carpet and whistled softly. "It cost a pretty penny to furnish this office!" The girl nodded soberly. Jimmy walked over to a well-filled correspondence box. He scanned five of the clippings, his brow warshipping. "What anyone would want of these I can't make out!" His eyes travelled to the door of the inner office. "I'm going in there," he decided suddenly. Lorraine gripped his arm. "Please don't! I'll lose my job!" "It looks," he observed, "as if you've already lost it. And it's the only way I see of getting to the bottom of this." She trembled as he approached the open doorway. Scarcely had he crossed the threshold when a loud voice cried, "Stay out of this office!" Jimmy jumped back, a startled light in his widened eyes as he turned to face the girl. "Who?" he gasped. He peered into the inner office. "No one there; that's certain." "Don't go in there, Jimmy. I'm afraid!" "Of a voice?" He laughed and leaned over to examine the panel at either side of the entrance. "I'm beginning to see." He passed his hat over the threshold, about three and one-half feet above the floor. Again the voice cried, "Stay out of this office!" Smiling, Jimmy passed the hat back and forth. Each time the command was repeated through the office. The girl walked to the door. "What is it?" she asked in a thick voice. "A photograph?" "No," answered Jimmy. "See those circular jiggers in each panel?" "Yes, I've often wondered about them." "They're what is called an electric eye. One transmits the beam of light, and the other receives it. There's a garage over on Main Street which has an electric eye that rings a gong when a car enters or leaves the place." "But I don't see any beam of light, Jimmy!" "Doublets the beam in this case is an infra-red ray—invisible to the human eye. But the electric eye is still sensitive to it." "But what about the voice?" Lorraine asked. Jimmy smiled. "I imagine we'll find an automatic secretary in the closet. They're used in a few one-man offices to answer phones. They lift the receiver, say 'Not in, until three,' or something of the sort, and hang up. When a person passing through the door intercepts the beam of light sent out by the electric eye, an electric impulse is transmitted to the automatic secretary just as a phone call is. In this case, however, it tells the intruder to stay out. Let's see!" As they started across the threshold, once more the voice cautioned them to stay out, but now, understanding its source, it did not hold any terror for Lorraine. Jimmy swung open the closet door. Inside was a cabinet and a small amplifier. Jimmy grinned as he closed the door. "That's settled," he said. "Let's see if we can find the address of your employer." They rummaged through the desk, but found nothing except blank paper and envelopes of fine quality. Jimmy walked over to the steel filing cabinet. As he reached to pull open a drawer, a voice cried, "Leave that cabinet alone!" Jimmy jumped, and Lorraine felt as if her hair were standing on end. He grinned and glanced at the wall. Another electric eye! "That would certainly make a burglar run," he commented. "Despite the warning voice," Jimmy swung open a drawer of the cabinet. Lorraine joined him. Within were cards with clippings fastened to them. Jimmy thumbed through the cards. Most of them had the number 100 typed on them. Several had other figures—500, 750, 1,000, 2,500. Aside from these numbers, each bore a date. "Recognize any of these clippings?" Jimmy asked. Lorraine nodded. "Every one I clipped them myself. But he must have clasped them to those cards, and added the date and numbers." "Numbers?" Jimmy speculated. "I wonder. Could they be amounts?" "Oh, the old dear!" she cried in relief. "Do you suppose that's why he wanted the clippings? To help out people in dire need?" "We can't tell. No dollar signs. But it's possible. Here's one under a Middle-town date line. It's about a ten-year-old who crawled over thin ice to take a rope to a man who had broken through while skating. It says here the little fellow's clothing was ragged, but he wouldn't take a cent. And the figure 150 beside the clipping. I'll tell you, Lorraine, the boy's address is here. We might drive out and see if he received a hundred and fifty dollars. If he did,

he might be able to tell us what his benefactor looked like." The drive helped Jimmy and Lorraine to bridge the two-year gap in their friendship, but it helped little toward solving the mystery. They learned that a fifty and a hundred dollar bill had arrived in a plain envelope with an unassigned note asking the boy not to mention the incident to anyone save his parents. He was loath to discuss it. "All we've learned," Jimmy said, as he drove back, "is that your employer is a very secretive philanthropist. The amounts on those file cards are the amounts he has given needy people he admires." "Yes," Lorraine agreed. "He is so secretive he doesn't even want me to know the good work he is doing." "His disappearance is as mysterious as the things he has done," Jimmy said. "I'm afraid I don't know any way to locate him except to go to the police and tell them the whole story." The girl's eyes shadowed. "Oh, I'd hate to do that! It would spoil everything, Jimmy. Isn't there any other way?" The young lawyer deliberated for some minutes and then said, "Let's go back to your office. One of those clippings I read has given me an idea." Upon their return to the office, Jimmy delved into the clippings and finally found the one he sought. He handed it to Lorraine. It read: FLEES AFTER GIVING LAST HUNDRED TO NEWSBOY HERO INJURED An elderly lady, the account went on to say, confused by traffic lights at Sixth and Main Streets, had backed into the path of a speeding truck and was saved only by the swift action of a newsboy, Tommy Bartosh, twelve years old, who barely escaped the truck's wheels in his attempt to push her out of danger. A quietly-dressed elderly man, witness of the near-accident, had walked up to the newsboy and presented him with a hundred-dollar bill. He had turned, before the astonished boy could thank him, and had dashed into traffic, only to be struck by a taxi. Unconscious, he had been taken to the County Hospital, where an examination revealed a leg injury. "He carried no papers of identification, and only a few cents change," the article concluded, "and steadfastly maintains that he cannot remember his name. Police believe that in an impulsive moment he gave his last money to the courageous newsboy." "Jimmy!" Lorraine cried, her eyes glowing. "Do you suppose that could be her?" "That hundred-dollar bill sounds like him," he replied. "And then there's his unwillingness to receive any credit for his good deed. Let's go out to the County Hospital and see." It was not a long drive, and after some explanation, a nurse led them to a garden at the rear where several old men sat in wheel chairs. Apart from the others, reading, was one of the finest looking men Lorraine had ever seen. He glanced up at their approach, and shook his head. "Please," he said, "won't you reporters leave me alone? I haven't done anything to cause all this excitement." Lorraine handed him the clipping. "This is you?" "Yes," the old man said impatiently. "I," said Lorraine, taking a shot in the dark, "am your secretary." He gave her a startled glance and then slowly smiled. "So you've run me down at last? Just as well! I was about to reveal my identity to you, anyway. I felt you could be trusted. Who is this young man?" "James Drake, a lawyer—and a very good friend." "Perhaps," the philanthropist suggested, "he will be kind enough to push this chair out to some secluded spot in the garden so that we can talk in private." When this had been done Lorraine sketched the steps they had made leading to his discovery. "So," she finished, "your clippings contained the essential clue." The old man smiled. "I could have been found some days ago if I'd only been willing to reveal my identity. But that would have ruined my plans, and I preferred to stay here to doing that. I suppose you know that I'm Dudley Ingram." "I thought I recognized the millionaire in the convalescent," Jimmy smiled. "But I'd seen only one picture, so I couldn't be sure." "All my life," Ingram said, "I've tried to avoid publicity. Just my nature, I suppose. Some six months ago my last relative died. I had no one to whom to leave my fortune and thought up this plan of disposing of it. Miss Lassfolk has been good enough to help me find deserving people, and I've tried to do my bit. His kindly old face lighted. "Whatever a man's worth, that shall be also read. I believe that's true. The last six months have been the happiest ones of my life. I can hardly wait to get out of here to go on with it." He caught Jimmy's eyes on Lorraine. His smile faded and he sighed. "I suppose," he said, "I'll have to find myself a new secretary before long." Grimson crept into Lorraine's cheeks. Jimmy laughed softly. "I hope you're right."

Will Find Out Who Owns Skies

U.S. and State of Utah Will Test Question in the Courts

Washington, December 6th (CP)—Government is getting ready to determine legally who owns the air over continental United States, or at least that part of it covered by airways. Since the passage of the Civil Aeronautics Act in 1938, the government has been troubled by challenges by airplane pilots. Now the State of Utah has adopted a law establishing its own sovereignty over the air above its borders, and that complication brought the State Attorney-General's office into the conferences over the suit.

DEFENSIVE SWEDEN

Stockholm (CP)—Sweden has no desire to do that! It would spoil everything, Jimmy. Isn't there any other way? The young lawyer deliberated for some minutes and then said, "Let's go back to your office. One of those clippings I read has given me an idea."

WHERE FISH SCARCE

Sydney, N.S.W. (CP)—Because the Australian government has taken over many trawlers for defence purposes, fish are scarce here and some fish shops have closed up.



That recruit from out West is awful stubborn.

CARROLL'S CHRISTMAS BAKING SALE advertisement featuring various products and prices: CUT PEEL lb. 25c, PURE LARD 1-lb. pkg. 8c, SWANSDOWN Cake Flour pkg. 22c, CHATEAU CHEESE with Cocktail Glass All for 29c, CRISCO 1-lb. tin 19c 3-lb. tin 49c, Australian Seedless RAISINS 2 lbs. 19c, MINCEMEAT 2 lbs. 25c, EXTRACT 2-oz. bd. 10c, CINNAMON 2-oz. 5c, CURRANTS 2 lbs. 25c, COCOA Cowan's 1-lb. tin 25c, Apple Juice 46-oz. tin 18c, OXYDOL Pkts. 8c; 21c; 59c, BAKING POWDER 16-oz. tin 17c, PEAS Green Valley 2 16-oz. tins 15c, OGILVIE BLENDED FLAKES 2 pkgs. 19c, SOUP Heinz Assorted 2 16-oz. tins 25c, Bright's Choice Ontario PEACHES 15-oz. tin 10c, CLEANSER 2 tins 19c, TOILET SOAP 3 cakes 16c, FLOOR WAX tin 23c, 43c, Lipton's Tea 1/2-lb. 36c; 41c; 46c, RED CHERRIES lb. 41c, ALMONDS 1/2-lb. 15c, Silver Star Pastry FLOUR 24-lb. bag 61c, AMMONIA Handy 2 pkgs. 9c, SURPRISE Soap 2 bars 9c, RASPBERRY or STRAWBERRY JAM Glassco's with pectin 32-oz. jar 24c, PARSING KNIFE, IVORY SNOW 24c, Crisp White CELERY HEARTS, each 10c, Red Emperor GRAPES 2 lb. for 19c, Juicy Navel ORANGES, per dozen 23c, Firm Ripe CRANBERRIES, per lb. 29c. Fruit and Vegetable Prices Until Saturday Night Only.

DISMAL DINGO London (CP)—London air-raid sirens have been nicknamed by Australians here "Dismal Dingo," the dingo being an Australian dog that doesn't bark but howls mournfully in the night.