

# **FUEL FOR MURDER**

Clifford Goodrich

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Adam Streen flinched as an automobile backfired on the darkening street outside the laboratory.

Adam knew that death had been near him these—last few weeks. He knew it was probably even closer now. Adam had discovered the secret of other death—horrible, blackened death that had come with exploding liquid flame.

It had killed fifty persons when it came, that death. Then, later, four more had died who had tried to find out what had caused it.

Harl Veblam had told Adam Streen to stay away from it. Either Harl was afraid, Adam thought—or the death belonged to Harl. Adam hadn't known. That was why he had gone to The Whisperer.

The gaunt industrial chemist glanced from the suspended test tube before him to the flickering shadows at one window. Then, involuntarily, his eyes rested on the telephone.

Every night he got a phone call. It was a check-up call, to be sure no one had interfered with the chemist that day. Twice, Streen had been shot at on his way to work at the Veblam Refineries. Once, he had been attacked by four burly thugs in the dark.

That time he had been rescued by the queer, wispy gray man who now kept in constant touch with him. A casual friend named D. Smith had put the gray man in touch with Adam Streen.

D. Smith had said he thought it queer that six huge storage tanks of gasoline and kerosene had blown up at the Veblam Refineries.

Suddenly the phone bell shrilled, jerked Adam Streen erect. He shielded the mouthpiece, barely husked his voice into it.

"I . . . I've found it," Streen began. "I . . . I wrote you a note. Did you get it?"

. The voice that came back over the wires was a weird, eerie challenge. It was a whispering threat to criminals, that many crooks had heard and died defying. The underworld knew The Whisperer, and feared him. The little Nemesis of crime was using Adam Streen to find out what caused the burning death that had taken over the Veblam Refineries.

"I have not yet received my mail," the voice whispered across the wires. "I shall go for it now. What did you find?"

Adam Streen lowered his voice to the point of bare audibility. He did not give a direct answer to The Whisperer.

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"You may have difficulty in deciphering," he began. "I had to use care. Sylva—"

Adam Strenn paused. He heard a furtive sound behind. Then he clipped into the telephone:

"I'd better go now. I—"

Then Strenn dropped the receiver from nerveless fingers as a bludgeon struck his skull from behind. With his free hand, the masked attacker behind him cradled the receiver and broke the connection.

A rasping chuckle came from the masked one.

"I think we will play this thing my way," he rumbled. "There are many things I do not wish to be known."

The Whisperer, on the other end of the wire, didn't hear that mocking voice. He had hung up. Now his attention had been caught by a strange movement outside the phone booth in which he stood.

A large man, whose face was averted, had stepped to an old-fashioned cigar lighter on the showcase of the store.

Softly, The Whisperer chuckled to himself. He knew that that ancient lighter had not functioned in years. The big man's purpose in being there was certainly not to light the cigar in his mouth.

The Whisperer was a queer little figure. Wispy, whitish hair straggled from beneath a quaint, round-brimmed hat. The eyes were gray, seemed almost colorless. The chin was queerly pointed, jutting.

He was clothed entirely in a non-descript gray. He did not cut a very inviting figure. That had fooled a lot of people.

Hated by crooks and police alike, The Whisperer was a figure of considerable mystery. He was the one major figure outside the law who constantly eluded the vigilance of Police Commissioner James Wildcat Gordon.

Much did The Whisperer know about Harl Veblam, the tall, rangy owner of the refineries.

It was rumored that Veblam had developed a super fuel of such mighty potency that he couldn't even safely confine it to insulated tanks. That, some of the wise boys said, was the reason for the mystery explosions that had taken—nearly fifty lives.

The Whisperer was not sure. Either Veblam was taking mighty pains to cover up some super fuel he didn't want the public to know about, or Veblam didn't know what caused those explosions himself.

Slowly, the gray man edged out of the booth. His eerie voice husked a request for a package of cigarettes. That brought the big man at the useless cigar lighter around. The Whisperer had thought it would.

The stranger had a face that looked like loosely molded putty. The Whisperer knew it was some plastic make-up to hide the big man's identity.

Apparently oblivious of the big stranger, the gray man leaned across the counter. Big putty-face thought he had a cinch. He swung the blackjack with an expert hand. But The Whisperer was not there when the sap swung down.

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It smashed into the glass showcase. The showcase shattered with an angry crash. The salesman behind it began to yell. A police whistle shrilled outside. The big man decided he preferred to be somewhere else—and soon. He ran.

No one saw The Whisperer slide out of the confusion. The night was dark now. The little man ran softly along the sidewalk.

He did not believe murder had been the purpose of the big man. If it had, he would have used a gun or a knife. The gray man was sure that delay was the only motive. Therefore, he ran as swiftly as he could.

The Whisperer's private quarters were two rooms in the slums of the city. His mail was in the outer room. It was addressed simply to D. Smith, at that address. As D. Smith, he was

known as a man of uncertain occupation.

One envelope bore the handwriting of Adam Strenn. The Whisperer looked quickly at the back flap. Obviously, it had been steamed open after the original sealing.

The gray man ripped it open. It was not the message sent by Adam Strenn.

"Keep out of this, wise guy," typewritten words advised. "It's too big for you."

The gray man was moving even as he read that note. Whoever was behind this thing knew Adam Strenn's part in it now, knew more than did The Whisperer.

Down the stairs tore the wispy figure, leaped into a nondescript gray coupe parked at the curb. The motor roared to life and the machine shot down the street in the direction of the refineries.

Parking his car, The Whisperer slipped through a hole he had previously cut in the steel wire fence surrounding the refineries. He padded swiftly to the laboratory.

No lights showed. It was not like Adam Strenn to leave his work so early in the evening. Strenn was more scientist than man. He was devoted to his work.

With a skeleton key. The Whisperer slipped inside the lab. Strenn's body was in the center of the room.

He had not died instantly. His long, sensitive fingers, convulsing in the pain of death, had tried to scratch some message on the dusty wooden floor. The gray man could scarcely make it out, as he mumbled it aloud.

"Syl— Sy—v—a— Sylva!" Sylva Strenn was the blond daughter of the industrial chemist. The gray man wondered how much she might know. Perhaps she could have helped him unravel the message that Strenn had sent him—the message he never got.

Turning to go, the gray man didn't quite reach the door. The blast that lifted skyward in the quiet night was the most terrific the city had ever known. Windows shattered for miles around. The Whisperer was hurled to the floor.

His head struck the corner of a workbench. Vaguely he heard someone shout:

"The superoctane gas let loose! The whole place will go!"

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Then the gray man heard sirens, tried to struggle to his feet. He sighed inaudibly, sank back unconscious. Flames flickered on the floor near his silent form.

The world seemed to have gone mad when The Whisperer regained consciousness. Fire sirens screamed. Water meeting flames hissed and steamed. Voices drifted to the gray man.

"It's the biggest tank of them all," one voice said. "I never heard of such an explosion! Even superoctane ought not to go with a bang like that."

Another voice grunted angrily:

"If Veblam's got a superfuel like that, he better break down and tell about it. If he doesn't, he's liable to go to jail for killing people."

The other man agreed. "Yeah. No wonder Fenwick Joran wants to buy into the company!"

Slowly, The Whisperer struggled to his feet. The laboratory itself was blazing now. Only one door offered a safe exit. The gray man pondered the conversation he had just overheard.

Fenwick Joran was a name to conjure in this thing. An investor, Joran had made Veblam what he insisted was a fair and honest offer for an interest in the refinery enterprise.

Veblam had seemed about to take it. Then came the series of explosions and the hint of a superfuel that caused them. Veblam had denied he had any such grim invention. But no one seemed to believe him.

The gray man's thoughts were suddenly interrupted. A whining nasal voice cut through the air:

"That Whisperer's some place in that laboratory! I gotta tip he was lyin' there on the floor!"

Deputy Henry Bolton, second in command to Wildcat Gordon in the police force, charged down the narrow driveway with a squad of cops. The Whisperer, particularly if he were lying helpless on the floor, was just the one thing in life that would suit long-nosed Henry Bolton.

There were two careers he had set for himself. One was capturing The Whisperer, and the other was to take Wildcat's job away from him.

Bolton ordered firemen to play hose lines on the front of the laboratory. The other three walls were a solid mass of flame.

Then the gray figure in the building began to move, darted straight into a solid wall of fire. As he did, an eerie, hissing challenge drifted from his lips.

There was an added puff of flame as the gray clothing caught fire. Even hardened cops who had seen death before caught their breath. Then they gulped for another reason.

A moving, living ball of fire was in their midst. The ball of fire seemed to shoot out fists, as they converged upon it.

Peculiarly, the flames seemed to lessen. But the smoke increased. It became so thick that the cops found they were fighting among themselves. They were surprised to hear the sharp, staccato tones of Wildcat Gordon telling them to stop making fools of themselves. "I don't pay these men to fight with each other," Wildcat

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snapped. "What's the matter with you, Henry? Can't you enforce any kind of discipline at all?"

The cops mumbled their apologies, and Henry Bolton simply got red. They all knew Wildcat for a sharp-eyed, square-jawed ex-army sergeant who kept a discipline of his own peculiar kind.

Any of them would have been amazed to know that the flaming gray clothes of The Whisperer had recently surrounded the now loudly checked suit of Wildcat Gordon.

For The Whisperer was merely a grim disguise for Wildcat; a disguise that permitted him to investigate and act where pussyfooting politics might tie the hands of a commissioner of police.

It had not been a difficult matter to impregnate his clothing with a fireproofing that would give off the effect of flame and smoke. The dense smoke, particularly.

"Get back to the main blaze!" Wildcat snapped to Bolton.

His tones did not resemble those of The Whisperer. But Wildcat had just removed the queer set of dental plates that gave the wispy gray man his eerie tones and the oddly pointed chin.

"Find me Harl Veblam, Henry," Wildcat ordered. "And I also want to talk to a guy named Fenwick Joran. I've got a hunch they may be together."

Wildcat's hunch was not unfounded. Tall, broad-shouldered Harl Veblam was facing Fenwick Joran in a roadway not far from the now-simmering No. 1 storage tank.

Joran was a big man, almost as tall as Veblam, but somewhat bulkier. He shook his fist under Veblam's nose.

"I made you a final offer today, Veblam," he grated. "But now I withdraw it. You hear me? I publicly withdraw it! I want no part of anything you use to murder people! Tomorrow you won't be offered anything for this plant!"

Harl Veblam's eyes were like black agate chips. His thin lips drew into a snarl.

"I'm removing every bit of fuel in this place," he bit out. "There's only one tank left. No. 3 is full of kerosene. That'll be pumped aboard the Vebarl tonight. And, Fenwick, I want nothing from you at all!"

Hurl Veblam turned on his heel, began to walk away. Wildcat Gordon stopped him.

"What was in that tank?" he snapped, "I hear it was filled with superoctane gasoline."

Veblam's black eyes flickered slightly.

"You heard incorrectly," he said in a flat voice, "The tank was intended to house high-test. But tonight, it held nothing more than kerosene."

"Kerosene could never cause a blast like that," Wildcat rapped out.

Veblam drew thin lips over his even white teeth. He glowered strangely.

"I know it!" he rasped, and turned away.

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Wildcat moved toward Henry Bolton. He had things to do, and he had an idea he'd better do them fast.

"Stay here, Henry," he clipped. "Keep an eye on this plant. And particularly on the Vebarl. They're loading her tonight."

The S.S. Vebarl was a ten-thousand-ton oil tanker, one of the prized possessions of Harl Veblam, Wildcat Gordon noted her riding ill anchor lights in the oil-plant harbor. Then Wildcat eased himself out the main gate. No one saw Wildcat reach the drab gray coupe he had parked near his convenient hole in the fence. Swiftly, he began to change his identity. Spare gray clothing came from a compartment in the dashboard. The dental plates slid into his mouth, gave the jaw it's queer appearance.

Then Wildcat gunned the coupe into life. Much time had been wasted, he feared now for Sylva Strenn, daughter of the slain chemist. He feared that she might know too much, might be marked for death as had her father.

There was something murderous and deadly here, something that made ordinary kerosene into a substance akin to liquid TNT. It was that, or Harl Veblam was lying. That could well be, the gray man knew. But there was something that did not make sense.

Adam Strenn had lived in a rambling frame building near the outskirts of the city. The house showed not a light when The Whisperer got there. An eerie, hissing cry of rage came from his lips.

It might be, of course, that Sylva Strenn had merely gone to the refinery, might have been notified that her father had been slain..

The Whisperer leaped from the coupe, pounded up the steps. When he got into the living room he knew that his fears had been realized. The room was a shambles.

Books were scattered over the floor. Chairs were knocked about. Tables were turned upside down. Every drawer and box, every possible place of concealment, had been searched. And there was blood on the floor.

From the evidence at hand, The Whisperer knew Sylva had been kidnaped. For information. Someone wanted information they believed she possessed, enough to get it by torture.

The Whisperer was deep in thought. He was wondering how he could trace her. Thus, he failed to smell the gas at first. When he did notice the almost odorless inhalation, he couldn't help himself. The gas enfeebled The Whisperer.

Slowly, he sank to the floor, unconscious.

The gray man awoke on a bench in a laboratory. It was a crude, chemist's workroom. The benches and tables were of unfinished oak. Retorts and beakers were held in make-shift holders.

At first, The Whisperer thought he was alone. Then he heard voices not far from him. They were low, almost whispered, tones.

A man's voice kept suggesting, insinuating questions to some other person. A girl's voice answered him. Her words were dreamy, languid, as if she cared little what her answers might be.

The Whisperer turned quietly on his side. His wrists and ankles were tightly bound. He suppressed an involuntary outcry.



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Sylva Strenn lay on a padded table! A pressure tank loomed beside her. The Whisperer caught a faint, sweetish odor, Scopolamine, the truth-serum gas!

Two men were in the room. One was big, burly. His loose clothing hid what his figure really looked like. He wore a plastic mask of some sort. His voice sounded as if he had a mouthful of pebbles. It was obviously disguised,

"Tell us, Sylva," he commanded. "What does it mean?"

Then the big man quoted a strange jumble of figures. The Whisperer repeated them to himself: "5G6L10X13GL8THAYSEN."

"What do they mean?" the big man rapped.

"I don't know," the girl replied dreamily.

"Who is Thaysen?" the man bore down.

"A British chemist," the girl answered.

"What did he do?"

"Many things," Sylva replied. She began to list a long line of achievements, which meant nothing to her inquisitors.

Suddenly, The Whisperer stiffened. He remembered the name of A. C. Thaysen. And it did mean something to him. He began to realize that Sylva had not been asked these things before she had been put under the influence of the truth serum. If she had, her mind would have oriented them, catalogued them in her mind.

Had she done that, she would be giving answers now that would be valuable to the killers. As it was, she could not think out the problem under the anaesthetic influence. She could only repeat answers that she, had known and formulated before the drug had robbed her of consciousness.

But The Whisperer knew those answers now. If he fell before the truth drug, he would not be able to resist those same questions. He would have to give the answers! The one thing that tied Thaysen's discoveries to this was in his mind at the moment!

The big man spoke then, as if his mouth were filled with gravel.

"Hell! She don't know anything. We'll try the gray man and see how much he knows. After all, the letter was mailed to him."

The Whisperer tugged frantically at his bonds. He had to keep his wits about him now; had, somehow, to find a way to beat this grilling. He was still weak from the other gas he had inhaled in the Strenn living room.

His hands were small and his wrists thick and powerful. Perspiration made those wrists sufficiently slippery to fold over double-jointed hands and slide them through. The ankles were but another moment. Then he made a break for the door.

A thug with a submachine gun stopped that. The Whisperer still did not have his full strength back. The end would have been very different if he had.

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Finally he was cornered. He smashed into a shelf of chemical, knocked it over. A blackjack smashed against his skull. Vaguely, as he fell to the floor, he noticed the shower of chemical vials and containers around him. Labels seemed to dance in his mind.

Then he chuckled. One forefinger dug into a blue bottle labeled "Chloral Hydrate." He stuck the finger into his mouth. Another chuckle followed.

"Let the S.S. Vebarl go up," the gray man chuckled happily. "She'll take her secret with her!"

Then The Whisperer relaxed. All strength fled from his body. For the time, at least, he had defied scopolamine. He had given himself knock-out drops, the chemical used to keep people unconscious for hours.

And The Whisperer thought he had left enough bait to give the crook those hours in which to work!

The Whisperer was not out as long as his captors had expected him to be. He was made of stuff far too tough for chloral hydrate to put him out for very long. His head ached mightily when he awoke.

But his strength had returned. The Whisperer had counted on that. He turned quietly. He was in the same laboratory. Sylva Strenn was there also. Both of them were tied. The only other figure was the thug with the Tommy pin. He sat on a chair tilted against the wall. He dozed. No normal man would have been out from under that chloral hydrate The Whisperer had taken for many hours to come.

Doubling up, like a contortionist, one of The Whisperer's fingers touched the heel of a gray-covered shoe. A tiny blade shout out. Freedom was just a matter of minutes then.

The thug with the Tommy gun came out of his slumber like a punch-drunk fighter. His finger touched the trigger release just once. The gun stuttered jerkily. Slugs tore into the laboratory ceiling.

Then the thug did the remainder of the stuttering. The Whisperer tied him to an iron stanchion that held up the middle of the ceiling.

Then he freed Sylva Strenn.

"You may as well come along," he husked. "We'll have a showdown, and you have a right to be in on it."

The girl nodded silently, prepared to follow him. The gray man paused beside the table on which the truth serum had been given to Sylva Strenn. In their hurried departure, the killers had left the note with the queer formula: "5G6L10X13GL8THAYSEN."

Under that odd jumble of figures was another sentence:

This is worth a fortune!

The killers had not repeated that one to their victims. The Whisperer knew that sentence had caused the criminals to change their tactics. It had been careless of Adam Strenn. Up to that time, the killers had been merely trying to conceal their tracks.

Now they were trying to find out how valuable their footprints on a trail of death had really been!

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A block away, The Whisperer found a cruising taxicab. He hailed it and gave the address of the Veblam docks and refineries. The next chapter, he knew, would be aboard the S.S. Vebarl, loaded by now with kerosene—kerosene that had somehow become more deadly than its weight in dynamite!

It was still dark when the cab drew up to the main gate of the oil refinery. The Whisperer waved the taxi on, climbed out in the middle of the block. Sylva stepped down beside him. Both went through the secret hole The Whisperer had cut in the fencing.

Two oversize pistols lay in a cleverly concealed trap that the gray man had had Adam Strenn build for him beside the laboratory foundations. They were not like The Whisperer's usual supersilenced automatics. These had queer chambers at the snout, and looked like no gun that ever appeared in an arms catalogue.

Cautiously, Sylva and The Whisperer crept toward the dark piers. The Vebarl was the only ship tied up at the docks. The sound of marine pumps thumped against their eardrums.

An eerie whisper of satisfaction issued from The Whisperer's lips. He had felt sure that his threat in the criminals' laboratory would not go unheeded.

"Let the Vebarl go up," he had warned. "And her secret will go up with her!"

The killers were pumping the Vebarl's kerosene from her hull into the salty water of the bay. The gray man chuckled hoarsely. One man he hoped would be there was Harl Veblam himself.

Harl was there. The Whisperer heard the tall, rangy oil promoter's voice before he heard any other. Harl's voice was a scream of rage and fright.

"I don't know, I tell you!" Veblam yelled. "I don't know what is in the stuff! I know it's got me ruined!"

Fenwick Joran's voice rumbled in reply. Even without the mouthful of pebbles. The Whisperer knew that it was the voice of the burly killer with the plastic face!

"I'll find out from someone!" Joran roared. "It was your chemist found out the stuff was valuable. You must know what it is."

Both men were in the officers' quarters of the Vebarl. Cautiously, The Whisperer and Sylva Strenn crept to the bridge deck. The air was heavy with a sweetish odor. It was nothing like the smell of kerosene.

It had a slightly soporific effect, a numbing quality almost like an anaesthetic. It was that, perhaps, that dulled the gray man's senses so that he did not hear the thug who crept up behind him.

The thug swung a hoseline spanner that he found at the rail, smashed it against The Whisperer's skull. The thug held a gun. But, for some reason, he did not fire it. The Whisperer knew the reason. He stumbled forward on his knees. The thug struck again.

Dazed, The Whisperer fell against the cabin door. The door swung open. The Whisperer staggered in between Harl Veblam and Fenwick Joran. The thug who had struck The Whisperer shoved the girl in behind him.

Joran glared at The Whisperer. Joran's eyes were pale and hard now. He snarled an oath, raised the automatic he was carrying.

"Go ahead," The Whisperer husked. "You can blow us all to hell if you want to."

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Joran faltered. But his lips tightened grimly.

"O. K," he muttered. "You know the answers. But one false move from any of you and I'll do just that little thing."

Harl Veblam appealed to the gray man. His dark eyes showed complete bafflement.

"What's it all about?" he demanded. "I'm all at sea."

The Whisperer nodded.

"Joran wanted to buy your oil fields and business goodwill cheap," the gray man explained. "He stumbled onto something he figured could ruin you. It was a principle that had been known once before; was discovered by accident by A. C. Thaysen, investigating sabotage in British refineries less than a year ago.

"Working for Scotland Yard, trying to find out why several gasoline and kerosene storage tanks had blown up, Thaysen discovered a new kind of bacteria which can live in kerosene and ferment it into ten percent ethane and ninety percent methane gas.

"Artificial creation of the bacteria and a systematic operation of these two hydrocarbon gases as the starting point for innumerable chemical compounds has had chemists on both continents in a maze of speculation.

"It was the use of Thaysen's formula, in a simple substitution cipher, that made Strenn tumble. That was what he sent to me. 5G6L10X13GL8 became 1C2H6X0CH4, which meant simply one part C2H6—ethane—to nine parts CH4—methane.

"Just move back four places in alphabet and in numerals. The crooks never thought of applying a simple cipher to a chemical formula, because they didn't know how to read a formula anyway." \*

The gray man paused, slid one hand slowly toward the butt of a concealed pistol. Joran rasped an oath. brought his gun up again.

"Drop your hand, wise guy," he growled. "And tell us the rest of it. You're not leaving here alive, anyway!"

The gray man smiled.

"Joran didn't know that he had anything more than a destructive force," he finished. "But Strenn was ready for his discovery of how to create the bacteria and control its proportions.

"Before the final findings, he wrote a complete report and gave it to his daughter. She has it in her home. Without the link, it means nothing at all."

Joran snarled, and leaped to his feet. But he was interrupted. The voices had reached some passing watchman. Now the police were on the way.

"Shoot any of them on sight!" Deputy Henry Bolton screamed. "Particularly The Whisperer. If he's there, get him!"

The gray man whirled.

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"They will shoot," he snapped. "And if they do here, the fire of the bullet powder into this gas-filled air will set the whole place off like a bomb!"

Joran paled. This was more than he could stomach. He hesitated, faltered toward the door.

"Quick!" the gray man hissed. "Out this side. The slip is narrow. We can get to the other dock."

They fled in single file down an extended plank to the farthest dock. Then the gray man hissed a challenge to the cops. But in that challenge he put a warning, told them of the explosive gas.

Bolton was not exactly a fool. At least, not enough to wish a sudden ending of his existence. He ordered his men off the ship onto the broad field that fronted the piers and docks.

That was what The Whisperer had been waiting for. He whipped around, jerked out the two queer-looking guns.

"All right, Joran," he clipped. "You're through now. These pistols operate on a compressed-air principle. They won't ignite the gas."

Joran screamed in rage.

"You won't get me," he shouted. "I've got my own men on that ship now. We'll sail her clear!"

Joran raced back toward the Vebarl. The gray man knelt, took careful aim. He didn't want to kill. The law could do that to Joran.

His air-propelled pellet caught the killer in the leg. Joran stumbled, whirled around. In his pain, he forgot himself. He squeezed the trigger of his automatic.

The gray man twisted at the sight. He shouted to the others. "Down! Down!" his voice blared. "Down flat on your faces! Then roll in the dirt!"

The blast that followed Joran's shot was different than the rest. It was more of a whoosh and whoom. It didn't seem to have the concussion of the others. The Whisperer had figured on that occurring.

When the crooks pumped the Vebarl free of her oil, the gases were released into the air, not confined as they had been in the storage tanks. And the gas was lighter than the air.

The Whisperer alone caught the full brunt of it. He was still erect, had not had time to hurl himself to the ground. He saw the blast hurl Joran and his fellow thug into the blazing water. Oil, floating on the surface, flamed like a furnace.

Then The Whisperer yelled. His own clothing was ablaze. His wispy figure raced along the dock like a running ball of fire. Then the ball described an arc, dived into the flaming water.

At that instant, a series of sharp revolver shots ripped out.

"Damn!" Wildcat Gordon's voice barked into the night. "I near got him that time. But I guess he's done for anyway."

Sylvia Strenn sobbed. She gave Wildcat a tearful glance as he came up.

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"Say," Wildcat said sharply, "that fellow told me what Strenn discovered here. Strenn was working for Veblam at the time. So I guess you two ought to split it now. Then nobody'll lose much."

Veblam hastened to say he'd gladly split the profits of the Strenn discovery. And he knew something of Sylva's ability as a chemist. He needed her,

Sylva Strenn smiled for a moment. Then she walked over to Wildcat.

"Th—that little gray man," she said slowly. "He told you all about me while you were shooting at him?"

For once, Wildcat had the grace to be embarrassed.

"Well," he alibied, "he talked awful fast!"

\*Editors note: Investigators were baffled for generations by a similar device used by Samuel Pepys in his diary. He concealed dangerous passages by first enciphering them, and then rewriting the enciphered passages in shorthand.