

# **THER GOLDEN HAND**

Norman A. Daniels

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MATT EVANS, detective sergeant, headed into the foyer of the apartment where he lived. He glanced at the little curio shop about half a block up the street and across from the apartment. Lights had been burning late in Hugh Bostwick's little shop for many nights, and Evans hadn't liked the nervous way that Bostwick reacted when he strolled in for a little chat. There was something definitely wrong with the old codger. He seemed to be mortally afraid.

Evans stopped at his mail box and saw a white envelope gleaming inside. He opened the box and took out a cheap envelope. He ripped open the flap, shook out a small piece of paper and frowned.

Serg't Evans; 297 River Road Bostwick

That was all it said, but Evans grunted in surprise. He looked over toward Bostwick's shop, saw the lights on and hurried there. He slowed up as he neared the door. Bostwick had a new clerk. Evans didn't know if he was to be trusted.

He sauntered inside, waved to the clerk and headed for the back room where Bostwick did much of his work.

"Sorry, sarge," the clerk announced. "The boss went out a couple of hours ago. Didn't feel so hot and wanted a walk. I'll tell him you were here."

Evans nodded curtly. "Thanks. He hasn't looked very well lately. I thought I saw him last night, about nine o'clock, but I guess I was mistaken."

The clerk polished off the top of a counter and spoke without looking up, "He was right here at nine bells, sarge asleep in his bedroom. He hasn't been out of the place in days except tonight."

Evans walked out the door, forced himself to proceed slowly and without evidence of the excitement that raged within him. Bostwick was in trouble! The clerk lied when he said the old man hadn't been out in days. That letter had been postmarked ten o'clock from a branch post office about two miles west of where Bostwick lived.

To avoid any possibility of suspicion, Evans went into his apartment building, but there his tactics changed. He raced down the hallway, out the rear door and across courtyards until he came out on the street behind the building. There he hailed a taxi, showed his badge and gave the address in Bostwick's letter.

HE dismissed the cab a block away and prepared to spend a few moments investigating the place. He neared it, and with every step he tried to puzzle out just what difficulty led Bostwick into mailing that letter.

Then Evans heard a scream. A man came hurtling down the front steps of the house at 1297 River Road. He ran as if a leering specter was at his heels. Yet no one chased him. He kept screaming in mortal agony, and his running steps were none too firm. One arm was held stiffly at his side. He reeled crazily, landed out in the gutter

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twice and nearly took a header. Evans rushed toward him. Under a street lamp, he got a good look at the man, and such were the horror and pain lines in his face that Evans barely recognized him as Bostwick.

"Evans." Bostwick said the word in one long hissing gasp. Then he collapsed in Evans' arms. The big detective sergeant gently laid him down on the sidewalk and knelt beside him. He reached for his right wrist to feel the pulse. So far as he could see, the old man wasn't injured, yet something more than mental pain had caused his collapse and that horrified, agony-filled look in his eyes.

There was a shot and then another. They came from the house from which Bostwick had run a few moments before. Evans was up instantly and drawing his gun. Bostwick wasn't dead. He'd be perfectly all right where he was, and to Evans, it sounded as though murder were being committed. He sprinted down the sidewalk, turned into the entrance of the house and bounded up the steps. The front door was partly ajar. He gave it a tremendous kick and then dodged aside to avoid any possible hail of bullets. None came. He moved closer to the door. Then a gun barked, sounding more like a small cannon in the empty house.

Evans snapped two quick shots before he ducked away again. From within came no further sound. He tried jumping past the door and even that drew no bullets. Gun hand thrust out, weapon ready, Evans took a bold chance. He plunged through the door and into the darkened hallway. Nothing happened. He tried to penetrate the darkness, but that was impossible. He heard a door slam at the rear and made his way toward that direction cautiously. Outside, a motor roared into life. Tires scraped against a cement drive. Evans raced back to the front door. A car was just turning out of the drive and heading in the direction where Bostwick lay on the sidewalk.

Evans ran out on the sidewalk in time to see the sedan slow down and a man, bending over Bostwick, leaped up and jumped into the car. The car turned the next corner and was gone.

Evans broke into a run, reached Bostwick and turned the ray of his flashlight on him. The old curio-shop owner was dead this time! A knife had been driven hilt-deep in his chest, squarely through the heart. That knife hadn't been there when Evans left him, so the man picked up by that sedan was the murderer.

Evans automatically picked up Bostwick's left hand and almost started up in surprise! The hand was heavy and felt metallic. He shot his flashlight on it and gasped. His eyes bulged in disbelief of what they were actually seeing.

Bostwick's left hand was coated with a metal that looked like pure gold. Coated from just above the wrist right down to the fingertips. Evans dropped the hand in horror and heard it clang against the sidewalk.

Someone opened a window and began yelling for the cops. Evans realized then that only a matter of two or three minutes had elapsed since the shooting affray at the house. To him it seemed more like two or three hours. He shouted back ordered headquarters to be notified.

RADIO cars arrived first. Evans turned the body of Bostwick over to two radio patrolmen, summoned four more and invaded the house from which the killers had escaped. It was a deserted, unfurnished old place, but the dust had been disturbed, particularly in one of the rooms upstairs. Here Evans found the only article of furniture in the place a long oak table covered with tiny seared spots, as though something intensely hot had been dropped on it and then quickly removed. He tried the light switch, and to his surprise, the weak bulb became luminous. Evans ran into the cellar, found the electric-light meter and took its number and its reading. There were several vague ideas developing in his mind and one of them had to do with the use of a large amount of current.

A morgue wagon and homicide-squad detail were clustered around Bostwick's corpse when he got back. Evans gave a brief version of what had happened, climbed into a radio car, and was driven to the nearest public phone. There he called the electric-light company and convinced the clerk that the information he wanted was important.

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"We turned on the current at that address two weeks ago," the clerk reported. "At that time the meter read . . . let's see now "

Evans whistled softly when the figures were read to him. Enough current had been consumed in two weeks to light that house for three months. He hung up and had himself driven to Bostwick's curio shop. It was dark when he arrived, but Lumbard, the clerk, slept in one of the spare rooms behind the store. While he waited for the clerk to answer his banging on the door, Evans peered through the windows at the display of postage stamps and old coins. Bostwick had been an ardent numismatist and philatelist. He sold coins and stamps, collected them, and spent much of his spare time in working over his collections.

Lumbard came, drawing on his shirt as he approached the door. He stared sleepily at Evans and let him in.

"How long have you been here?" Evans demanded.

"How long? Why, I haven't gone out since you left. And say . . . the old gent didn't return yet. Has anything happened?"

Evans brushed Lumbard aside, strode through the store and into the living quarters behind it. He saw Lumbard's bed and slid a hand beneath the covers. The bed was warm, indicating that Lumbard had occupied it for some time. Evans turned a straight-backed chair around and straddled it. He eyed the younger man sharply.

"Bostwick is dead murdered! What's it all about?"

Lumbard retreated a step or two. His jaw dropped and his eyes bulged. "M—murdered ? B—but why ask me what it's about? I don't know. Anyway, who'd want to kill a nice old guy like him. He wasn't worth five hundred bucks beyond that collection of stamps and coins Holy smoke, sarge . . . you don't think "

"Where are they?" Evans demanded.

Lumbard hurried over to an ancient safe. He spun the combination, yanked open the door and hauled out several long tin boxes and four of the thick catalogues in which stamps are kept by collectors. He flipped the pages of the stamp book and then opened the tin boxes.

"Everything is here, sarge. You must be wrong. Nobody would want to bump him."

"Think!" Evans snapped. "Someone did and there must be a reason. It wasn't simple robbery. You were closest to him. Think hard!"

Lumbard began pacing the floor, nervously running his hands through his blond hair. He took six steps, wheeled sharply, retraced just six more and turned once more. Again and again he repeated that performance. Evans' eyes narrowed.

"You can stop now, Lumbard," he said coldly. "What prison were you holed up in, for how long and for what?"

Lumbard spun around, lips drawn back in a snarl of hatred. "H—how'd you know that?" he asked.

"The way you hike around. There's plenty of room here, but you take just enough steps in either direction to show you were used to pacing a cell. I've seen it happen before. Now out with it. Everything because, if you're a stir bug, it won't be so pleasant when they jump on you at headquarters, and there's probably a little matter of parole, too."

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LUMBARD took a long breath. His eyes had gone bleak with hatred. Suddenly he gave a growl of rage and leaped toward the detective. Evans tried to get to his feet before the impact, but that was impossible. He was bowled over, chair and all. Lumbard landed on top of him, lashing out hard blows with a fury inspired by fear and a savage anger. Evans raised his legs quickly, dislodged Lumbard by practically lifting him off, and then reached up to grab the younger man by both arms. He gave a tremendous yank. Lumbard flew up and over, landing with a thump that shook all the bric-a-brac in the store.

Before he could regain his breath and bearings, Evans was upon him. Handcuffs clicked. Lumbard was pulled to his feet and then pushed into a chair. Evans searched him, found a small automatic in a hip pocket and confiscated it.

"I know better than ask you to talk," he thundered. "Maybe you won't have to. But it's back to the pen, brother, and unless you open up wide, maybe you'll come out again after about six months in an undertaker's basket with your head shaved in a nice round spot and your trousers leg ripped up the side."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Lumbard said sullenly. "It was . . . was just that you spotted me. I . . . I lost my head."

Evans clucked his tongue in sarcastic sympathy. He walked over to where the books and tin boxes lay on a desk. He ran through the stamp book, saw nothing missing as far as he could notice. Then he turned to the tin boxes from which he took a number of cardboard mounts on which coins had been attached. Below each was a short description. In the second tin box he found one card with an inscription, but no coin. It had been torn off, taking part of the cardboard surface with it. The inscription indicated that the coin was a Spanish doubloon, many years old. Evans shoved this into his pocket. He motioned Lumbard to precede him and wait out to the street.

THERE was a cab parked half a block away. Evans whistled and the taxi rolled up to the curb. He opened the door and pushed Lumbard inside. He saw the door on the opposite side of the cab slam shut. Someone raced around the rear of the cab, and when Evans sensed his danger, it was too late. His hand froze halfway toward his gun. A smirking runt of a man had him well covered.

"Get in, copper," he said smoothly. "Maybe you'd like us to take your prisoner to headquarters, huh? Sure anything to oblige."

Evans sighed and climbed into the taxi. There was still another man who had been crouched in the shadows. He held a gun ready, too. Lumbard pushed Evans into the seat.

"Look out for that dick he's smart. Spotted me right away. Boys am I glad to see you. Listen maybe this copper knows too much! He's got to be knocked over, understand? We can't take no chances at this stage of the game."

He faced Evans and held out his manacled wrists. "Take 'em off, wise guy, and we'll put 'em on you for a change."

Evans shrugged and started to reach for his pocket. A gun muzzle slashed down across his face. One of the crooks grinned broadly, as blood spurted from the detective's lips. He was searched and his gun taken away. Then Lumbard repeated his demand for the handcuff key. Evans took the flat key from his pocket slowly. They were riding through traffic now not much of it, but enough. He suddenly made a dive for the door and managed to get it partly open. His hand came back and hurled something out into the middle of the street.

"There's your key," he said when eager hands pulled him back and slammed the car door. "See if you can find it."

Lumbard growled and slapped him across the face with the back of his hand. He motioned his companions and two guns were buried in Evans' stomach. Lumbard searched him carefully and took a key ring from one pocket.

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He examined the keys critically, sneered at Evans and inserted one small key into the handcuff lock. He removed the steel links, grabbed Evans' wrists and slapped the cuffs on.

"Wise guy, ain't you?" he snarled. "Well, see how you like wearing bracelets for a while. In fact, I think you'll wear them forever, if you get what I mean Hey, Mike head for the boathouse!"

The driver nodded without turning around and sent the cab heading west at the next corner. Lumbard straddled one of the folding seats in the cab and eyed Evans with a cruel grin.

"Now tell me what you know," he said softly. "That's the question I was asked. How come you dropped in to see me early tonight and asked about that old fool, Bostwick? Then you beat it to your apartment, but you didn't go upstairs. You came out the back door and made tracks for the hide-out where Bostwick was being held. How'd you get wise?"

Evans shrugged and didn't answer. The runty crook growled something and thrust a gun between the detective's eyes.

"Talk, damn you," he yelled. "Or shall I blow the back of your head off?"

Evans looked the sawed-off crook in the eye. "There's a lot of blood on your shirt sleeve, pal. Looks like you carved somebody up or maybe drove a knife into a man's heart."

The little crook paled and the gun trembled. He lowered the weapon and settled back in the seat.

"This copper," he announced coldly, "has got to be knocked off and right. How you gonna do it, boss?"

Lumbard chuckled. "In a way so they'll never find him. His wrists are cuffed, see? Well, we'll tie a few links of chain around his ankles, hook them onto a cement block and toss him overboard way out. He'll stand on the bottom of the ocean until the fish get fat. There's no comeback on a bump-off like that."

Evans didn't speak again. Lumbard slapped him several times when no reply was forthcoming to his questions.

Then they reached a pier off which a fast power launch was tied up. Evans was forced to board the launch. The taxi driver, burly, misshapen thug, started the motor, and they roared out to the middle of the river, turned south and headed across the harbor. An hour elapsed while Evans huddled in the stern of the craft with Lumbard and his two companions menacing him with guns. Once he glanced involuntarily toward a heavy chunk of cement that had been placed aboard. That was meant for his gravestone one that would never be seen by human eyes.

There was no escape from the handcuffs Evans knew that, and he didn't even try to worry them over his wrists. Even if this had been possible, there were still three alert gunmen watching him.

"O. K. idle her!" Lumbard ordered. "We'll dump him right here. Tie that cement block to his legs with the chunk of chain. Snap it up! We ain't got all night. Before daybreak that stuff has to be planted, and it's a long way back to the pier."

"Hurry it up," Lumbard snapped. "Regan ain't supposed to show on the pier until four o'clock, but he might come early and we don't want that junk he's lugging around to be spotted. Tie this copper good and tight. I wish I had a diving suit so I could go down and watch him drown."

The cement block was encircled with heavy sections of chain. Then these were passed through ropes that tied Evans' ankles. Finally he was rolled over to the edge of the speedboat. The burly driver lifted the heavy cement

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block with a grunt, balanced it for a second on the rail and grinned gleefully before he let it go. Evans was hauled upside. Water closed on him, and he went down and down.

"That" Lumbard relaxed and lit a cigarette "is the best way in the world to get rid of guys who know too much, and believe me, that copper knew plenty."

EVANS began working furiously the moment his head disappeared below the surface. As he slid down through the water, he raised his cuffed hands toward his mouth, and his fingers eagerly removed the handcuff key that Lumbard and his mates believed he had thrown out of the taxi. By fast movements Evans had transferred the key to his mouth and kept it there.

He unlocked the cuffs, doubled himself up and attacked the ropes around his ankles. They came free after a full moment of frantic work. As the great weight was released from his feet, he shot toward the surface; his head broke the water and he drew in mouthfuls of air. His lungs ceased aching, but he was desperately fatigued. He saw Lumbard's boat racing back toward the river and grinned slightly. Then he turned over on his back, floated until his strength returned, and finally set out for shore, swimming with long, powerful strokes.

He crawled up on a pier and stretched himself at full length, panting from exhaustion. After several minutes he sat up, wrung out his clothing and arose. He located a watchman at a warehouse, phoned headquarters, and a radio car reached him two minutes afterward.

He was driven first to Bostwick's curio shop. He forced the door, hurried into the room occupied by Lumbard and selected several articles that would probably bear his fingerprints. He sent these to the fingerprint division at the police laboratories with instructions that they were to be developed, checked in local files, and if nothing was found, a description was to be phoned the F. B. I. in Washington until Lumbard's real identity was exposed.

Then Evans was driven to the morgue. He viewed the body of Bostwick sorrowfully. He had liked the old man for his honesty and calm good nature. He examined the gold-incrusted hand, and now, in the full, strong light of the morgue, he saw how that hand had been seared as if the gold had been molten when applied. Two of the fingertips were not covered, and beneath the nails Evans discovered tiny slivers of a silvery metal. He scraped these particles on a clean bit of paper, folded it carefully and bolted out of the place.

Dr. Norton, in charge of the police laboratories, listened to Evans and then went to work.

"I can tell you what those metallic slivers are in fifteen minutes," he said. "Stick around."

Evans used a phone, called the identification division and listened to a description of Lumbard. His right name was Salazar and he had served ten years for robbery of goods from an express car. Part of his loot had consisted of bars of solid gold, on their way to a jewelry manufacturer. None of the loot had ever been discovered, and according to the records, Salazar, or Lumbard, claimed that a companion, killed in a gun battle with police, was the only person who knew where it was hidden.

Lumbard had dropped completely out of sight after his release, and he was wanted for violation of parole.

"You can change the records," Evans said grimly, "to wanted for murder. What's more, I'll bring him in before morning!"

He put aside the telephone book, waited a moment and then called another number. Evans knew people in all classes, and among his best friends was the commodore of a yacht club. Evans' request for a fast craft was granted immediately.



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"Tie her up at Pier 52, North River," he said. "Never mind a crew. I can handle her."

Dr. Norton had the analysis ready when Evans returned. "It's chromium steel," he said. "It's been filed off something with an ordinary cheap file."

Evans glanced at the clock. It was twenty minutes to four. He raced to the garage behind headquarters, commandeered a cruiser and, with the siren open wide, roared up the almost deserted avenues.

HE reached the vicinity of the pier and boathouse from which Lumbard had set forth. Evans hauled out a submachine gun and slipped through the darkness to Pier 52. There he found a sleek, crimson-colored speedboat. He dropped the gun into it, turned back toward Lumbard's boathouse and drew an automatic from his still-sodden hip pocket.

There were lights within the boathouse. He crept up to it, risked a quick glance through a window, and saw Lumbard's two thugs and his burly driver, playing cards. There was no sign of Lumbard, but Evans decided to act anyway. If he could put these three out of commission before the master thief arrived, things would be that much easier.

He flipped off the safety of his gun, walked up to the door and tried it. The latch moved under his thumb. He flung the door wide and stepped inside. The big driver saw him first. His eyes bulged, his jaw hung slackly down. The other two looked up and uttered squeals of terror. Then they reached for their guns. Evans fired. One of the men folded up as if he had a sudden, mighty cramp. The other snapped one shot, missed by half an inch, and then his gun dropped from a hand that had become useless because part of it had been blasted away by Evans' bullet.

The burly thug still gaped. Even the roar of the guns hadn't aroused him from his terror-induced stupor. All his sluggish mind could fathom was that a dead man had returned from the sea. A man who had been sent to the bottom with his wrists manacled and his ankles weighted down by a two-hundred-pound slab of cement.

The burly crook started a line for the door. Behind him, a window broke! A gun roared! The little crook went down with a choked cry. There was a hole through the back of his head.

Once more the gun barked. This time the burly thug, sprawled on the floor, jerked convulsively and then was still. Evans pumped two quick shots at the broken window, but he was too late. Lumbard's raucous yell reached him.

"Thanks for helping me take care of those mugs. It means there's no cut."

Evans darted out the door, raced along the pier and took a snap shot at Lumbard. The thief doubled up, but didn't stop running. He jumped off the end of the pier, and before Evans reached it, the speed launch was heading away.

Evans fired until his gun was empty, but he drew only contemptuous laughter from Lumbard. Evans wheeled, raced back along the pier, down the river front until he reached the speedboat tied up at Pier 52. He jumped in, started the smooth motor and cast off. There was a powerful searchlight mounted above the cabin. He turned it on, operated the hand control from below and caught Lumbard's racing craft in the full glare of the beam.

Lumbard gave his craft the gun, depending on the powerful cylinders below deck. But while they were fast and could probably outstrip any police launch, the boat under Evans' feet had won races. He smiled in satisfaction as the distance between the two boats lessened.

Lumbard noticed it, too. He left the wheel for a moment and began shooting. Evans picked up the submachine gun he had left in the boat. He rested its muzzle against the side of the cabin, drew a bead on the racing cruiser and let go. He was aiming low, just above the water line. He wanted Lumbard and his cargo.

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Lumbard yelled imprecations and tried to coax more speed out of his ship, between reloading and shooting back at Evans. The detective raised his rifle slightly, pressed the trigger, and Lumbard ducked as bullets splattered against the motor. There was a dull explosion. A tongue of flame licked skyward and then enveloped the whole prow of the craft. The motor sputtered and died.

Lumbard got to his feet, beat out sparks that threatened to start his clothing afire and, with a wild shriek, jumped overboard. Evans went back to his motor, tuned her down sharply and came alongside.

"I can't swim," Lumbard yelled. "Save me! I can't swim."

"Then learn," Evans called back. "You can go down twice I think."

He threw a line into a hold of the burning cruiser, jumped aboard her and fastened both vessels together just long enough for him to stagger back on board his own craft with a round chest of something heavy. He cast off just in time, for the gasoline tank caught. The whole prow of the cruiser blew up.

Lumbard was yelling frantically and going down as Evans spotted him.

"O. K., sweetheart," he yelled. "I'm coming, and you won't like it."

He dove overboard and swam quickly to where Lumbard floundered around helplessly. Evans encircled the crook with his left arm and grinned at him.

"It's a rule that when a drowning man struggles, he's to be socked and believe me, there's nothing I'd enjoy better."

Evans rammed home a haymaker to the chin. Grinning broadly, he swam back to the speedboat, hoisted himself and Lumbard over the side and left the crook staring unseeingly at the sky that had become gray with dawn.

AN hour later, Evans, in dry clothing, sat in Inspector Wallis' office. Lumbard, his jaw swollen, his eyes bloodshot, slumped sullenly in a chair. On a big table was set the heavy cask which Evans had taken from the crook's launch. The lid had been swung back and the contents consisted of hundreds of coins that sparkled brilliantly.

Evans lit a cigarette. "Lumbard, alias Salazar, held up an express car, and in his loot was almost half a million in gold bullion. That was ten years ago. He cached the stuff until he got out, slipped away from the detectives following him and unearthed his gold. He took it to a hide-out and set about planning to dispose of it. He couldn't sell the stuff because it would be identified so he thought up a clever scheme. He got himself a job with Bostwick, because he knew Bostwick was a coin expert. When things were ripe, he snatched Bostwick, took him to the hideout and made him melt the gold bars and mold them into these coins you see. They are the exact duplicates of Spanish doubloons the same kind that used to go down with the old Spanish galleons near Cuba or South America when the Spaniards were busy looting this continent. Bostwick had one of those original coins, and they forced him to create a mold and manufacture these fakes.

"Somehow, Bostwick managed to mail me the address of the hide-out—probably by tossing an envelope addressed to me out of the window. Someone picked it up and mailed it. Then I visited Lumbard and he got suspicious. He phoned his hide-out, and his men tortured Bostwick, trying to find out if he had slipped some information out. They did this by plunging his hand into a crucible of molten gold."

"You," Lumbard declared ominously, "are crazy! You can't prove a thing."

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Evans smiled. "I can prove you killed your own men so this loot would be yours alone. That's enough to send you to the chair, but there are other things. Bostwick, of course, fainted from that act of torture, but when he recovered, he managed to get out of the house. I found him, but he passed out before he could talk. Your men lured me away from him, killed him and then got away. I guessed what was going on when I saw Bostwick's golden hand. You used a lot of electricity to melt the gold, some of it splattered and burned holes in the bench on which you were working. Bostwick's model coin was missing, you gave yourself away as an ex-con yet all the while, you dumb heel, Bostwick had fixed things so you'd never have gotten away with it."

Evans crushed out his cigarette. "Bostwick had some chromium-plated apparatus on that workbench. He filed the chromium off it without the knowledge of the crooks and he kept dropping the filings into the molten metal. Some of the filings were shoved beneath his nails. Dr. Norton determined what they were, and he has also analyzed one of these fake doubloons. Lumbard planned to submerge them in salt water for several months for aging, take them South and have some pal of his 'find' them. As doubloons, they'd be worth a king's ransom far more than their actual gold content. But Bostwick spoiled all that. The chromium he put in the metal would show up on analysis and those coins would have to be analyzed before being accepted as the real thing."

"The guy is nuts," Lumbard insisted over and over again.

Evans got up. "You see, inspector, chromium wasn't discovered, much less put into use, for centuries after Spain's power and her gold doubloons vanished. Bostwick knew that. He also knew he was doomed, and he hoped to expose Lumbard even if he had to do it from the grave."

Evans yanked Lumbard to his feet. "Come on, mug. There's a magistrate who wants to hold you for general sessions."