AMAZING DETECTIVE-MYSTERIES

15 MYSTERY STORIES

OCT. 25¢

MIRANDA

A STORY OF HAUNTING, UNFORGETTABLE TERROR

by JOHN D. MACDONALD

THE EYES THAT DIDN'T DIE

by GRAHAM DOAR

Is your Hearing worth a 3¢ Stamp?

Discover a new way to HEAR AGAIN with startling clarity — by spending just 3c for a postage stamp! A way that may help you enjoy normal family and social life again...win new success and happiness. A way that's *easier* than you've dreamed possible.

ACCEPTED COUNCIL ON PHYSICAL MEDICINE and REHABILITATION AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

FREE BOOK Tells How to Overcome Hearing Loss

All you do is mail coupon for valuable FREE book. It reveals amazing secrets of how deafness can now be overcome, thanks to a tiny, new electronic miracle.

No Button Shows In Ear

Book tells how a transparent, almost invisible device *hides deafness.* Mail coupon today for your FREE book. No obligation.

Beltone

MONO-PAC *One-Unit Hearing Aid*

Beltone Hearing Aid Co., Dept. 320-D
1450 W. 19th St., Chicago 8, Ill.

Mail Coupon Today!

Beltone Hearing Aid Co., Dept. 320-D
1450 W. 19th St., Chicago 8, Ill.

Please send me FREE book that tells how to overcome hearing loss without a button showing in ear.

Name.....

Address.....

Town..... State.....

LUCK WAS WITH TOM WHEN . . .

ON VACATION, TOM MAHONEY IS SHOOTING THE LAST AND MOST DANGEROUS RAPIDS IN HIS LONG TRIP THROUGH MAD CANYON WHEN . . .

Lee

At State and County Fairs and EVERYWHERE

More men and boys wear Work Clothes bearing a Lee label than any other brand! *For longer wear . . . greater comfort . . . better fit and appearance . . . buy* **Lee** *Work Clothes at leading stores coast-to-coast.*

THERE'S A LEE FOR EVERY JOB

Overalls • Overall Jackets • Union-Alls
Matched Shirts and Pants • Dungarees
Riders (Cowboy Pants and Jackets)

Lee
Matched Quality
WORK CLOTHES

THE H. D. LEE COMPANY, Inc.

Kansas City, Mo. • San Francisco, Calif. • Trenton, N. J. • South Bend, Ind. • Minneapolis, Minn.

WORLD'S LARGEST MANUFACTURERS OF UNION-MADE WORK CLOTHES

AMAZING DETECTIVE-MYSTERIES

15 MYSTERY STORIES

25c

Volume 40 October, 1950 Number 3

THREE NOVELS OF HAUNTING TERROR

TWO GRIPPING MURDER NOVELETTES

THREE SPINE-TINGLING SHORT STORIES

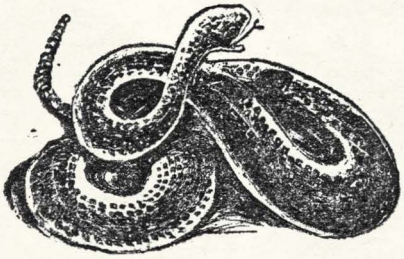
SEVEN SPECIAL MYSTERY FEATURES

NEXT ISSUE OUT NOVEMBER 3RD!

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

Published bi-monthly by Popular Publications, Inc., at 1125 E. Valle Ave., Kokomo, Indiana. Editorial and Executive Offices, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. Henry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice-President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Kokomo, Indiana. Single copy, 25c. Annual subscription for U.S.A., its possessions and Canada, $1.50; other countries 38c additional. All correspondence relating to this publication should be addressed to 1125 East Valle Avenue, Kokomo, Indiana, or 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts, enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return, if found unavailable. The publishers will exercise care in the handling of unsolicited manuscripts, but assume no responsibility for their return. Printed in the U.S.A.

Trial of the Animal Kingdom



By EARL L. WELLERSDICK

Even insects had their day in court, back in the era when chivalry reigned. . . .

A JUDGE in our times would undoubtedly be baffled if called upon to pass judgment on a member of the insect world. Yet there was a time in history when nearly every common insect —and many animals—were defendants in court cases.

As early as the year 886, ants, mosquitoes, locusts, pigs, rats and bulls, to mention a few, had their days in court.

These early cases involving insects were heard by ecclesiastical courts because the defendants, due to their size and number, could not be handled in the usual manner. But the primary reason for the use of Bishop Courts was the power held by the clergy of being able to place the curse of the church on the defendants. The common practice of the times was that after several insects had been tried, convicted and put to death, their associates were excommunicated. Ancient records reveal this penalty was considered effective.

The trials were carried on with the greatest seriousness, all the finer points of the law being strictly adhered to, even to the appointing of a lawyer to defend the insects. Some of the trials lasted for days, with the prosecution and defense attorney fighting out the slightest points of the law and presenting volumes of evidence. Many of the lawyers became famous for the way they defended their insect clients.

Towards the beginning of the eighteenth century. a group of monks in a province of Brazil brought action against the ants in their neighborhood. They charged the insects with being numerous, large and destructive, and with having undermined the cellars of the monastery. They also claimed the ants had burglarized stores and carried off flour kept for the service of the community. Because of this, the brethren claimed, they were in peril of famine. In their indictment the monks further added that the ants were not content with acts of larceny, but proceeded to open violence and endeavored to ruin the monastery.

The court ordered the ants to "show cause" for their actions, or in default to accept the court's sentence of death by some pestilence, or drowning by an inundation—at all events to be exterminated from the district.

The bishop of the area who was to judge the case appointed a counsel for the ants. The lawyer claimed his clients had right to the land because of their natural instincts, whereas the monks were the ones who should be expelled because they had taken the land by force.

Despite the eloquent defense. the ants were found guilty, and the court's decision was that the monks set aside a field in the neighborhood suitable for the ants, and that the latter change their abode imme-

(Continued on page 8)

$100.00 A WEEK in CASH
PAID DIRECT TO YOU

FAMILY HOSPITAL PLAN

SAVE MONEY!
There's a big advantage to buying this policy by mail. This method of selling is less costly for us—and that's another reason why we are able to offer so much protection for so little money.

Policy Pays for a Day, a Week, a Month, a Year—*just as long as necessary for you to be hospitalized!*

JUST LOOK
The Large Benefit This Low Cost Policy Provides!

This remarkable Family Hospital Policy covers you and your family for about everything—for *every* kind of accident—and for *all* the common and rare diseases, and the e are thousands of them. Serious diseases such as cancer, tuberculosis, heart diseases, diseases involving female organs, and abdominal operations are also fully covered after this policy is in force six months. Suicide, insanity, and venereal diseases are understandably excluded.

The money is all yours—for any purpose you want to use it. There are no hidden meanings or big words in the policy. It is the kind of protection that will stand by you when emergency comes. We urge you and every family and also individuals to send for this policy on our 10 day free trial offer—and be convinced that no other hospital plan offers you so much for your $1.00 a month!

TWO SPECIAL FEATURES

MATERNITY
Benefits At Small Extra Cost
Women who will some day have babies will want to take advantage of a special low cost maternity rider. Pays $50.00 for childbirth confinement either in the hospital or at home, after policy has been in force 10 months. Double the amount on twins.

POLIO
Benefits At No Extra Cost
In lieu of other regular benefits policy pays these benefits if polio strikes—
For Hospital Bills, up to $500.00
For Doctor's Bills while in the hospital, up to $500.00
For Orthopedic Appliances, up to . . . $500.00
TOTAL OF $1,500.00

3c A DAY IS ALL YOU PAY
for this outstanding new Family Protection

Wonderful news! This new policy covers eve yone from infancy to age 70! When sickness or accident sends you or a membe of your family to the hospital—this policy PAYS $100.00 PER WEEK for a day, a month, even a year . . . or just as long as you s ay in the hospital. What a wonderful feeling to know your savings are protected and you won't have to go into debt. The money is paid DIRECT TO YOU to spend as you wish. This remarkable new Family Hospital Protection costs only 3c a day for each adult 18 to 59 years of age, and for age 60 to 70 only 4½c a day. This policy even covers children up to 18 years of age with cash benefits of $50.00 a week while in the hospital—yet the cost is only 1½c a day for each child! Benefits paid while confined to any recognized hospital, except government hospitals, rest homes or sanitariums. Pick your own doctor. Naturally this wonderful policy is issued only to individuals and families now in good health; otherwise the cost would be sky high. But once protected, you are covered for about every sickness or accident. Persons covered may return as often as necessary to the hospital within the year.

This is What $100.00 a Week Can Mean to You When in the Hospital for Sickness or Accident

Money melts away fast when you or a member of your family has to go to the hospital. You have to pay costly hospital board and room . . . doctor's bills and maybe the surgeon's bill too . . . necessary medicines, operating room fees—a thousand and one things you don't count on. What a Godsend this READY CASH BENEFIT WILL BE TO YOU. Here's cash to go a long way toward paying heavy hospital expenses—and the money left over can help pay you for time lost from your job or business. Remembe —all cash benefits a e paid directly to you.

Examine This Policy Without Cost or Obligation—Read It—Talk It Over—Then Decide

10 DAYS FREE EXAMINATION

You are invited to inspect this new kind of Family Hospi al Plan. We will send the actual policy to you for ten days at no cost or obligation. Talk it over with your banker, doctor, lawyer or spiritual adviser. Then make up your mind. This policy backed by the full resources of the nationally known Service Life Insurance Company of Omaha, Nebraska—organized under the laws of Nebraska and licensed in other states. SEND NO MONEY—just you name and add ess! No obligation, of cou se!

PAYS CASH BENEFITS REGARDLESS OF ANY OTHER HOSPITAL INSURANCE YOU NOW HAVE!

FREE INSPECTION . . . MAIL COUPON
The Actual Policy Will Come to You at Once Without Cost or Obligation

The Service Life Insurance Company
Hospital Department K-11 Omaha 2, Nebraska

Please rush the new Family Hospital Protection Plan Policy to me on 10 days Free Inspection. I understand that I am under no obligation.

Name.....

Address.....

City or Town.....*State*.....

THE SERVICE LIFE FAMILY HOSPITAL PLAN

SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
Hospital Department K-11, Omaha 2, Nebraska

15 MYSTERY STORIES

(Continued from page 6)

diately under pain of major excommunication. A friar was oppointed to convey the sentence to the ants, which he did by reading it aloud at the openings of the burrows. It is said that the ants hastily left their hills and headed towards the oppointed residence.

This process of setting aside certain areas for use of insects was a common practice of the courts and was claimed to be effective.

DURING the thirteenth century, in a province of France, proceedings were instituted against the mosquitoes. They were so well defended by counsel that the court took pity and, in banishing them, transferred certain property in the neighborhood "to be for their use and behoof forever."

At one time the leeches in a Swiss lake, accused of killing fish, were said to have retreated to a part of the lake assigned them following trial. In another case against the leeches they were brought into court and forced to "hear" reading of a document which admonished them to leave the district within three days.

Caterpillars were often the defendants at trials and as early as the year 886 were indicted by a Roman court. In 1584 in Italy they were cited to appear before the Grand Vicar. This case dragged on for such a long time most of the caterpillars died of natural causes and the Vicar was credited with having miraculously exterminated them.

Other unique cases have been brought against a variety of insects, including fleas, and against such animals as bears, cows, horses and donkeys. In France all doves were excommunicated at one time; and the last known trial of a locust occured in 1829.

The belief that animals might either be

(Continued on page 126)

A TRUE I. C. S. STORY *taken from an actual letter*

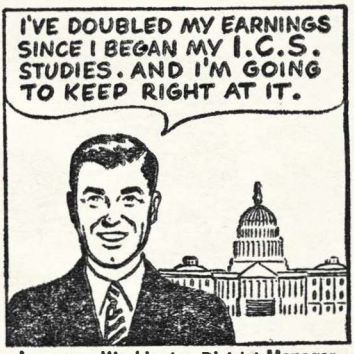
I was a World War II pilot . . .

A prisoner of war in Germany . . .

Back home, I was hired by National . . .

Studied with I. C. S. in my spare time . . .

I. C. S. sent reports to my employer . . .



I am now Washington District Manager.

PARKE WRIGHT

How have you done since the war? Start now to get the training that leads to advancement. Mail coupon *today!*

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

APPROVED under the G.I. BILL

BOX 3279-D, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course BEFORE which I have marked X:

Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Heating ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Refrigeration ☐ Steam Fitting

Chemical Courses
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry, Analytical
- ☐ Chemistry, Industrial
- ☐ Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel
- ☐ Petroleum Refining ☐ Plastics
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making

Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Courses
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
- ☐ Building Estimating
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Lumber Dealer
- ☐ Reading Structural Blueprints
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping

Communications Courses
- ☐ Electronics
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Radio, General ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing ☐ Television
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering

Electrical Courses
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Light and Power
- ☐ Lighting Technician
- ☐ Practical Electrician

Internal Combustion Engines Courses
- ☐ Auto Technician ☐ Aviation
- ☐ Diesel-Electric
- ☐ Diesel Engines ☐ Gas Engines

Mechanical Courses
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineer's, Jr.
- ☐ Aircraft Drafting ☐ Flight Engineer
- ☐ Forging ☐ Foundry Work
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Industrial Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Instrumentation
- ☐ Industrial Metallurgy
- ☐ Machine Shop ☐ Mech. Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mold-Loft Work
- ☐ Patternmaking—Wood, Metal
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Drafting
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Worker
- ☐ Ship Drafting ☐ Ship Fitting
- ☐ Tool Designing ☐ Toolmaking
- ☐ Welding Engineering
- ☐ Welding—Gas and Electric

Railroad Courses
- ☐ Air Brake ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Diesel Locomotive
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Locomotive Fireman
- ☐ Locomotive Machinist
- ☐ Railroad Section Foreman
- ☐ Steam-Diesel Loco. Eng.

Stationary Eng'r'g Courses
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Combustion Engineering
- ☐ Engine Running
- ☐ Marine Engineering
- ☐ Power Plant Eng'r'g ☐ Steam Engr.

Textile Courses
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Loom Fixing ☐ Rayon Weaving
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

Business and Academic Courses
- ☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
- ☐ App. Psychology ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Administration
- ☐ Bus. Correspondence ☐ Bus. Law
- ☐ Certified Public Accounting
- ☐ Commercial ☐ Commercial Art
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ Federal Tax ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship ☐ French
- ☐ Good English ☐ High School
- ☐ Higher Mathematics ☐ Illustration
- ☐ Industrial Supervision
- ☐ Motor Traffic ☐ Postal Civil Service
- ☐ Retailing ☐ Retail Bus. Management
- ☐ Salesmanship ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Sign Lettering
- ☐ Spanish ☐ Stenography
- ☐ Traffic Management

Name_____ Age_____ Home Address_____

City_____ State_____ Working Hours_____ A.M. to_____ P.M.

Present Position_____ Employed by_____

Length of Service in World War II_____

Enrollment under G.I. Bill approved for World War II Veterans. Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces.

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

Macabre Museum

Mayan & Jakobsson

As far as anybody knows to this day, Frederick Bailey Deeming, originally of Birkenhead, England, was just a guy who took the grisliest road anybody ever thought of to domestic bliss. He married, reared children—and left each wife with her particular brood neatly murdered and immured in the stone hearths which characterized the Deeming homesteads from England to Australia.

No financial motive was ever found—to the end, until in Australia they strung him up, Deeming remained just a guy who wanted, apparently, to settle down!

They say dead babies never cry. But Tokyo police heard them, all 169 of them, in an empty post-war boarding home, in one of the city's grimiest, saddest slums. Here, records showed, the proprietor, a midwife, had accepted for indefinite care the fatherless children of war widows or other little flotsam, charging the mothers about $100 apiece for the service. The midwife then had petitioned the government for special rations for her charges, killed the kids and sold the rations on the black market.

No trouble at all—till police heard the ghostly silence where 169 babies should have been.

One of the most successful con men in history was Phil Rooney, who sold a couple of too-rich Eastern tenderfeet on the unfounded idea that there was gold on Unimak Island, an uninhabited, barren piece of the Aleutians—and thereby uncorked one of the prize horror stories in crime annals. Led by Rooney's golden promises, six men landed on the island. But, unforeseen by Rooney, news of his "find" had leaked out to two sailors in the party—who proceeded to murder the rest of the expedition, including Rooney, for the nonexistent gold. Justice was administered on the Unalaska gallows.

At an early age, the three Halzlinger sisters decided they wouldn't be caught dead in last year's styles. Nor were they. After their wealthy father disinherited them, they merely murdered all the relatives who stood between them and his money, and so financed themselves to the fashions of 1851. His money spent, they went west, lived on crooked gambling and murder till even the Barbary Coast was too hot for them. Their next victims were an Arkansas uncle, his wife and five children. Before they could capitalize on the massacre, they were arrested and sentenced to hang.

Beautifully dressed, they mounted the gallows, and Amy Halzlinger gave an hour's talk on the styles of '55 before they died. Everyone said they looked stunning in their nooses, and had set the fashion for years to come.

BOOK BARGAINS BEYOND COMPARE!

BUILD YOUR LIBRARY THIS NEW, MONEY-SAVING WAY!

Order any book right from your own home. You'll get it promptly, direct from New York (book center of the world). Postage and insurance are free. Here's the smart money-saving way to build a library your friends will marvel at. And it's just as perfect for selecting gift books, too. Here are just a few of the latest selections worth owning. ***Use the convenient coupon below . . .***

CHILDBIRTH: YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

by Carl Henry Davis, M.D., and Donita Ferguson **$2.50**

What is the truth about the new method of having a baby painlessly? Are premature babies invariably handicapped? This and so many other vital questions are answered in this remarkable book. Every expectant mother should have a copy.

WHILE THEY LAST!

Special Gift Package—Original Editions

TALES FOR MALES . . . . . Selected by Ed Fitzgerald

". . . It is rowdy . . . cynical. . . . Notable stories by clever writers . . ."—The Salt Lake Tribune.

THE BEDSIDE BONANZA **Edited by Frank Owen**

"A lodestone of love and laughter . . ."—Frederick Fell.

Two volumes, 870 pages
Published at $4.99 **2 volumes complete $1.98**

SPECIAL— WHILE THEY LAST!

Reader's Treasury— Heritage Press Edition

750 pages of unforgettable stories, novels, essays, poems by Somerset Maugham . . . Ring Lardner . . . Alexander Woollcott . . . A. E. Housman . . . James Thurber . . . Jack London . . . Damon Runyon . . . Carl Sandburg . . . many others.

Published at $2.95
Special Price $1.49

SPECIAL THIS MONTH— THE BIG MYSTERY CRIME PACKAGE

We will send you sight unseen four popular crime novels by famous writers, the selection to be made by our own staff. The published price of these will be at least $10.00.

Special—this month only—$2.98

CHICAGO, CONFIDENTIAL

The Lowdown on the Big Town

by Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer

A cheeky, impudent, uncensored account of the fast, fabulous city. Chicago is the hurly-burly, rough-and-tumble, guns-and-girls front page hero town of the U.S. And so, while CHICAGO, CONFIDENTIAL is of vital importance to every Chicagoan, it will have enormous interest to every American.

$3.00

SPECIAL— JAMES T. FARRELL PACKAGE

2 Famous Novels— the Danny O'Neill Series

NO STAR IS LOST
MY DAYS OF ANGER

Pub. at $3.96 . . . . . 1040 pages
The 2 Volumes Complete, $1.98

BUILD YOUR OWN HOME—SAVE $75 A DAY

Can you saw a board? Hammer a nail? Then you and your wife can build a beautiful new home in 20 weekends plus your 2-weeks vacation. And think of it—you can save $75 a day while you're busy. What do you dream about—a ranch house, town house, modern? They're all here in Hugh Laidman's great book.

"HOW TO BUILD YOUR OWN HOUSE." Only $5. Order today . . .

WHILE THEY LAST—THREE GREAT NOVELS!

VERMILION by Idwol Jones
"A vintage novel . . . full-bodied and to the connoisseur's taste."—Prentice-Hall, Inc.

I WILL BE GOOD by Hester Chapman
"An original and deeply impressive book."—Houghton Mifflin

BARABBAS by Emery Bekessy
Second large printing. Recommended by the Religious Book Club.

Pub. at $8.25. 1296 pages.
The three volumes, $2.98

THE FORSYTE SAGA

by John Galsworthy **$2.98**

This is the motion picture edition of one of the most interesting novels of all time. Yes, the picture that stars Errol Flynn, Greer Garson and Walter Pidgeon, in book form—a big book, 921 pages complete, uncut. A rare opportunity while the limited supply lasts!

SAVE MONEY

Buy your books this new, easy by-mail way!

Yes, order any book you want right from your own home. You'll get it promptly direct from New York (book center of the world) at no extra cost—free insurance and postage. Build your library this fast, easy, money-saving way. USE THIS COUPON.

MAIL THIS COUPON WHILE SUPPLIES LAST!

Popular Publications, Dept. D,
205 E. 42nd St., N. Y. 17, N. Y.

Send me the books checked below. I enclose remittance of $.....

- ☐ James T. Farrell Package $1.98
- ☐ How to Build Your Own House, $5.00
- ☐ Childbirth, $2.50
- ☐ The Forsyte Saga, $2.98
- ☐ Tales for Males, The Bedside Bonanza, $1.98
- ☐ Reader's Treasury, $1.49
- ☐ Big Mystery Crime Package, $2.98
- ☐ Vermilion, I Will Be Good, Barabbas $2.98
- ☐ Chicago, Confidential $3.00

Name.....

Address.....

City..... Zone.... State.....

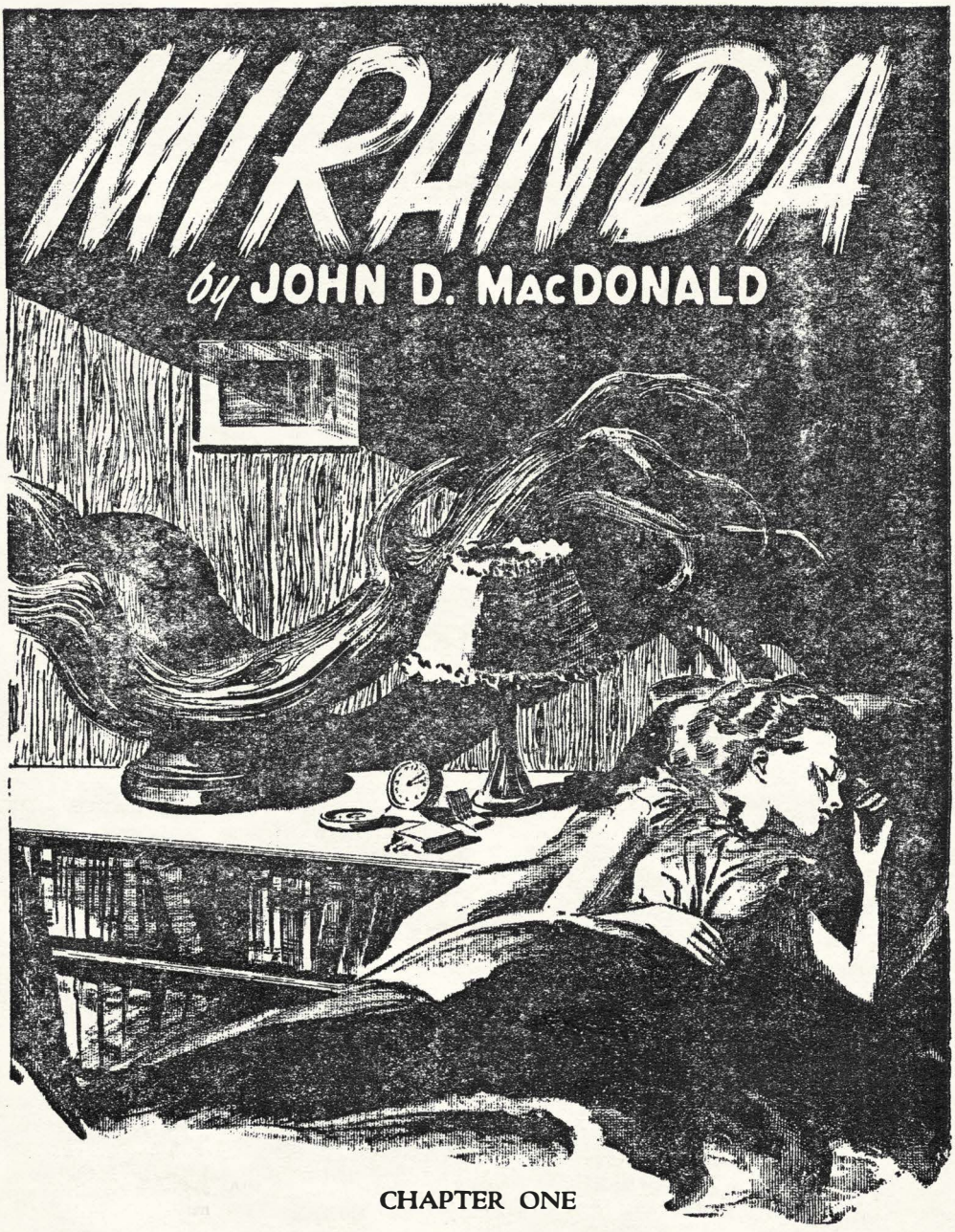
The old rocking chair creaked. Back and forth. Back and forth. We smiled at each other. . . .

Novel of Unforgettable Terror

It was a miracle to the doctors the way he kept on living, with his body smashed and a plate in his skull and an eye gone. But they couldn't know that it wasn't medical skill that kept life in George Corliss. It was hate . . . And murder . . . And Miranda.

MIRANDA

by JOHN D. MacDONALD



CHAPTER ONE

The Man With the Silver Plate

THEY put a plate in the back of my head and silver pins in the right thigh bone. The arms were in traction longer than the legs. The eye, of course, was something they couldn't fix.

It was a big, busy place they had there. The way I had come in, I guess, was a sort of challenge to the doctors. A post-graduate course. See, gentlemen, this thing is alive—indubitably alive. Watch now. We will paste it back together the way God made it. Or almost as good.

My friends came—for a while. For a few months. I wasn't too cordial. I didn't

need them. It was the same thing every time. How terrible to be all strung with wires and weights! Aren't you going mad from boredom, George?

I wasn't going mad from boredom. I learned how to keep my face from laughing, how to laugh on the inside. As if I was sitting back there in my mind, hugging myself, shrieking with laughter, rocking from side to side, laughing and laughing. But nothing but silence on the outside. The faraway dignity of the very sick.

They brought me in and I was dead. That is, for all practical purposes. The heart had no right to keep beating.

But you see, I knew. When you know a thing like that, you can't die. When you know a thing like that it is unfinished business.

Poor George. Poor old George.

And me all the time laughing away. It was a joke that I could understand, but nobody else would. The joke goes like this. I'll tell you and you can laugh with me too. We'll rock and giggle together. Once upon a time there was a good-natured, broad-shouldered slob named George A. Corliss who lived in an eleven-thousand-dollar frame house in an orderly little suburban community called Joanna Center. He lived at 88 April Lane. He made a hundred and thirty-two fifty each and every week in a New York publishing house, carried a little more insurance than he should have, loved his dainty, fragile-boned, grey-eyed, silver-blonde little wife named Connie very much indeed. In fact this slob had his happiest moments when Connie would give him a speculative look and tell him that he really did look a little like Van Johnson. This George Corliss, he made replicas of early American furniture in a basement workshop, bought a new Plymouth every time he had the old one about paid for, conscientiously read "good books" while commuting, and often brooded about the childlessness of the Corliss household, a thorn in his side.

HE DROVE too fast, smoked too much, knocked off too many cocktails. In all respects a very average guy. But what George didn't know was that Connie, the little silver-blonde wife, feeling the thirties coming on, had acquired an itch for a Latin-type, twenty-two-year-old kid, a gas pumper at the local lubritorium, a pinch-waisted kid with melting eyes, muscles and a fast line of chatter. Since the kid could obviously not support Connie in the style to which George had gradually accustomed her, nothing seemed simpler than to find some nice safe way of knocking George off and glomming onto the fifty-six thousand bucks his demise would bring in.

So one day when George had told Connie in advance that he had to take a run up to a mountain town called Crane, New York, to dicker with a recalcitrant author, Connie took the Plymouth to the garage and the kid, Louie Palmer by name, did a judicious job of diddling with the tie rod ends with the idea of their parting when a turn was taken at high speed.

So I took a turn at high speed. Rather, I *tried* to take it. The steering wheel went loose and gummy in my hands. They killed me all right. They killed George, the slob, all right.

Funny, how it was. Take the moment the car started rolling. I had maybe one second of consciousness left. And in that second a lot of little things added up. I'd had the steering checked in town that week. Connie always buying gas in one-dollar quantities. The funny way she'd said good-bye. At the last minute I wanted her to come along. She was emphatic about saying no. And there was the time I found the initialed cigarette case on the car floor. She took it and I forgot it until I saw that Louie Palmer using it. Then he got all red and bothered and said it had slipped out of his pocket while he was

checking the car, maybe when he reached in to yank the gimmick that releases the hood.

And before things went out for me, in a blinding whiteness that reached across the world, I said to myself, almost calmly, "George, you're not going to let this kill you."

But it did kill the George I was talking to. The man who came out of the coma eight days later wasn't the old furniture builder, huckster and loving husband.

No, he was the new George. The boy who could lie there and laugh inside at his joke. They tried to kill him and they did. And now he was going to kill them. Murder by a corpse. There's something you can get your teeth into and laugh at. But don't let it move the face muscles. It might pull out some of the deep stitches.

"You're the luckiest man in the world," the young doctor said. Young with a nose like a bird's beak and no more hair than a stone.

"Sure," I said.

"I would have bet ten thousand to one against you."

"Good thing you didn't." I wanted him to go away. I wanted to think about Connie and Louie and just how I would do it to them.

He fingered the wasted arm muscles. "Doing those exercises?"

"Every day, Doc." I liked to see him wince when I called him Doc.

He clucked and muttered and prodded. "I warned you that you might not ever be able to walk again the way those nerves were pinched. But the nurse told me you took a few steps today. I don't understand it."

I looked him in the eyes, with the one I had left. "You see, Doc," I said, "I've got everything to live for."

The way I said it made him uneasy.

"Mr. Corliss, you're not going to be exactly as good as now. We can improve that face for you by hooking a plastic eye in those muscles so that the eye will turn in its socket, but the two big scars will still show. You'll limp for a few years and you will have to be very careful for the rest of your life protecting that plate in your head from any sudden jars. No sports, you understand. Bridge is going to be your speed."

"You've said this before, Doc."

"I want to impress it on you. A man can't go through what you went through and expect—"

"Doc, I don't expect a thing. I was thrown through a shatterproof windshield and then the car rolled across me."

He didn't like me as a person. He loved me as a case. I made his mouth water. He had showed me to every doctor within a ten-mile radius. He was writing me up for some kind of medical journal. The before-and-after pictures were going to go in his scrapbook. But we always parted with him looking as though he wished I was healthy enough to hit in the mouth.

PAIN to the average person is just that. Pain. Nothing else. A mashed finger, or a bad headache. But when you have it a long time something else happens to it. It turns into something else. You live with it and get to know it. With me, it was a color. Green. Green is supposed to be restful. I would see it behind my eyes. Eye, I should say. I'd wake up in the night and look at the color. Dull dark green. That was good. That was above standard. That was more than you could expect. But there were the nights in the beginning when it was a hot, bright, harsh green, pulsating like a crazy living plant. That was when the night nurse was always there. During the first weeks she used the needle when it was bad, and later it was pills, which never worked as fast or as well.

One time it was that new green that they say you can see for two miles on a clear day. It stayed that way, they told

me later, for four days. Something about those pinched nerves.

And one day I searched and searched and could find no green at all, even the dark, almost pleasant kind. I missed it. Believe me. I missed it.

I didn't want them coming and they sensed it and they didn't come any more. But I liked to have Connie come. I liked it when there was traction on the two arms and the leg and both legs felt dead and the bandages on my head covered all but my mouth and my right eye.

She came every day. She wept a little every time she came.

"Don't cry, Connie."

"I—I can't help it, George."

"I'm getting better, they keep telling me. So why are you crying?"

"It's so awful to see you there like this."

"Just think, Connie. I might be dead. Wouldn't that be worse, Connie? Wouldn't it? Or maybe you'd like that better."

"What do you mean? What do you mean?"

"Then there wouldn't be all this pain and suffering."

"Oh."

"What did you think I meant, Connie? What on earth could I have meant except that, dearest? I know that you love me very much. You've told me so often."

"It's hard to understand you, George, not seeing your face and all. Just your . . . eye. What you say just comes out . . . and it's hard to know what you mean sometimes." She always worked hard on that explanation. It meant a lot to her to get it right. Her knuckles always had a bone-white look while she talked to her loving husband.

Every time it was a lovely game. And I had all the time in between to plan the next visit.

"Connie, I hope you're taking good care of the car."

"But, George! It was a total loss."

"Sorry, dearest. I keep forgetting. We'll have to get a new one. But when we do you'll help me see that it's well taken care of."

"Of course, George."

THERE was a continuity about it. If I kept after her too hard she'd get suspicious. Then the fear would show in her eyes. I'd let her carry the fear around for a few visits and then I would drive it away.

"I'm so lucky to have a wife like you, Connie."

"Thank you, George."

"I know I've been acting strangely. But I haven't the courage to do what I planned. I wanted to estrange you, to drive you away, so that you could find a new life with a whole man, not some smashed item like me."

"Is that what you were doing?"

"Of course!"

"Oh George! Darling, I thought . . ." A very abrupt stop.

"What did you think?"

"Well, that maybe the accident had. . . well, hurt your head in some way so that you were beginning to think I was to blame for the accident." Then she laughed to show how silly that idea was. She flushed too and I imagine she was considering her boldness to be the best defense, in addition to being rather fun because of the risk.

"You? Hey, I was alone in the car, remember."

"You've always driven too fast."

"Never again."

At the end of the visiting period she would kiss me and go. Before the bandages came off my face she would press her lips to mine very sweetly. Loving little silver-blonde Connie with those enormous grey eyes and that dainty figure.

After the bandages came off and there was just the patch on the eye she kissed hard, but not in passion. As though it was

something she had to do hard and quick in order to do it at all.

After her fears had gone away and after, I guessed, she had told Louie that she had been wrong about thinking that I might have guessed, I would slowly bring her suspicions back to a boil.

I was giving Connie and Louie some exciting dates. Giving them something to talk about.

A good thing about carrying too much life insurance is that you sometimes have too much accident insurance along with it. And I had a lot. Complete coverage of all medical expenses plus thirty-five hundred consolation prize for the loss of the eye plus six hundred a month for complete disability until I could get back to my job. They said a full year from the time of discharge from the hospital.

To go home would give me more time for the game I was playing with them. But it was good in the hospital, too. I could lie there at night and it was as if I had them fastened to a string, two puppets. When I yanked the string they jumped.

The books talk about having to live with guilt and how it can subtly change the relationship of lovers. But I was no body, firmly and safely planted away. I was between them. I wondered if she could taste my lips when she kissed Louie, and if he looked deep into her eyes and saw a hospital bed. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

Murder for Two

THE nurse was something else. A tall, gawky girl, almost grotesquely angular and yet full of a strange grace. Miranda. She charged at the bed looking capable of tripping and falling over it—yet always her hands were light as moths. Her eyes were deep-set, smallish, a brilliant and technicolor blue. She knew.

I saw it in the strange, wry amusement in her eyes.

Once she told me she knew. She cranked the bed up a little to rest tired muscles. She stood and folded her arms. I heard the starched rustle of the material. Her hair was a soft dusty black under the cap. Her mouth was wide and quite heavy.

"Delirium," she said in her abrupt voice, "is usually dull." She had a trick of starting a sentence boldly, and then letting it fall away.

"I was delirious, I expect."

"But not dull, George." That was the tip. Up until that point it had been a most discreet and proper Mr. Corliss.

"Like living out a soap opera, Miranda?"

She shrugged. It was typical of her to shrug too hard, hiking her wide, thin shoulders almost up to her ears. "But no part in it for me, I would think."

I watched her. There was nothing awkward in our silence.

"Delirium isn't much to go on, Miranda. Not when there's been a brain injury."

"I'll just add it to her. All tinkle and ice and teensy little gestures. Oh, she's a one, that one. What mothers want their daughters to grow up to be—on the outside."

"And the inside. Will you hazard a guess on the inside, Dr. Miranda?"

No more banter. She looked hard at me and up through the little blue eyes welled the fanatic light. "Rotten," she whispered. "Dead, soft rotten." She turned and walked out with her lunging stride, a whisper of starch.

It made the game better. A new piece on the board, allowing of more permutations and combinations.

Later that day I had my arm around her as I walked. She looked as though her back and shoulders would feel hard, slatted. She was a softness and a warmth. I took five steps away from the bed and four back to the wheel chair. Her lip was

caught under her teeth and her breath came hard as though it were she who was making the effort.

The next day, dozing on the sun porch, I felt someone staring at me. I looked over and saw Miranda in the doorway. We looked at each other for an impossible time, the white antiseptic walls and the neat floral arrangements tilting and spinning away until we looked across a bottomless void at each other and there was nothing alive in creation except the wild blue of her eyes. When she turned and left, without speaking, the time-weave was ripped across with a sound I could almost hear.

The young doctor and the absent-minded old one came in one morning and told me that this was the day I would go home, that an ambulance was being provided, that Connie had been informed, that arrangements had been made for Nurse Wysner to live in for a time until Connie became accustomed to the necessary work.

"In a couple of months you'll be ready for the eye work," the young doctor said.

"Yes, of course," I said. "We mustn't forget that."

He turned away, looking as though his mouth hurt him.

They didn't use the siren and it awakened in me a childish disappointment. It would be fitting to arrive with siren, that sound which in our neat world has replaced the night cough of the unknown beast.

WHEN they rolled me out onto the asphalt of the drive I lifted my head and looked at the house. This was where the big amiable clown who sometimes looked a little like V. Johnson had lived. All the details of it were sharp and it looked unreal, a house seen in a movie. I knew that all things would now look that way. Two eyes give depth perception. One eye gives everything a two-dimensional flatness.

Miranda Wysner, blinding white in the sun, stood tall and straight, with a tiny smile at the corners of her mouth. A smile no one else could see.

Connie trotted delicately back and forth between the wheeled cart and the side door, telling everybody to be careful, please, don't bump him on anything, and her voice was like the mirrored windchimes in a lost lake house of long ago.

Connie had moved into the guest room across the hall from the bedroom we had shared—or rather the bedroom she had shared with George A. Corliss who died in such an unfortunate accident. They put me in the big double bed and the Hollywood frame creaked in a well-remembered way and I was very tired and went to sleep almost immediately.

I dreamed I was laid out in that room with candles at head and feet and the smell of flowers and soft chanting. I awoke in the purple-grey dusk and there were flowers and a distant chanting but no candles. The chanting was a muted newscaster, his airdale voice tamed by a half twist of the dial. There were the sharp yelps of neighborhood children at play and for a moment I was a guy who had taken a nap. Just a nap. Get up, go down, kiss Connie, mix the drinks, check the stove to see what dinner might be.

But Miranda came in with her starchy rustle and bent over me and put her hand on my forehead. "Cool," she said. "Probably a little subnormal."

"We're living in a subnormal household. Where are you?"

"The next room. Beyond the bath. With both doors open I'll hear you if you cry out in the night."

Connie smells sweet and dainty and feminine. Miranda had her special scent. Long illness makes the senses acute. Miranda smelled of medicinal alcohol, antiseptic and, underneath, a deep perfume that throbbed. It was probably against regulations. It had a musky jungle beat.

"Maybe I'll just whimper."

"I'll hear that, too." There was just enough light so that I could see her teeth flash white. "I told her not to try to talk to you until tomorrow. Excitement, you know."

"Just like a county fair."

"I'll bring your tray."

WHEN I awoke in the morning a fat rain, oyster colored, viscid, was coming down in straight lines. I could see it bouncing off the roof peak across the street. The bedside clock said three minutes of six. Hospital habits. In three minutes Miranda came striding in with a basin of warm water, glass of cold, toothbrush, comb.

"I've put the coffee on," she said. I had finished breakfast and I was shaving with an electric razor when Connie came in, her pink housecoat belted tightly around her child's waist, her face all cute and vacant with sleep.

"Goodness, you people get up early!"

Miranda turned from the window. "Good-morning, Mrs. Corliss."

"Good-morning, Nurse. Welcome home, darling! Oh, welcome home!" She came over to the bed. Miranda watched stonily. Connie bent and gave me that quick, hard kiss. I got my hand around the back of her frail neck and prolonged it. When I released her she took a step backwards, her eyes wide, bringing her hand up as though to scrub her lips, not quite daring.

"Well!" she said unevenly.

* * *

At the end of the week I made four full circuits of the room. At the end of two weeks I went downstairs, dressed for the first time. The clothes hung on me. The more independent I grew, the more coldness appeared in Connie's manner toward Miranda.

At the end of the second week she brought it to a head, in Miranda's presence.

"George, I think we can get along beautifully now without Nurse Wysner."

"I'll leave in the morning," Miranda said. "I'll pack tonight. That is, if you really feel you don't need me, Mr. Corliss."

I gave the words the proper emphasis. "I can handle everything myself," I said.

"You mustn't get too confident," Miranda said.

"I know my own limitations," I replied.

"You two talk as if I weren't here to help," Connie said with small-girl plaintiveness.

"I'm certain you'll be a great help, Mrs. Corliss," Miranda said, starting bluntly, sliding into her odd breathlessness at the end of the sentence.

"Then it's settled," Connie said brightly, clapping her hands once, a habit I had at one time found almost unbearably sweet.

IN THE middle of the night Miranda's hand against my cheek awakened me. The bed stirred as she sat on it. The night was as black as a sealed coffin.

Her whisper had the same quality as her speaking voice. "You can't do it alone, you know."

"Do what?"

"Whatever it is that you've been planning, my darling."

"May I take this as a declaration of your great and undying passion?"

"See? You can't hurt me that way. You can't hurt me by trying to hurt me. That's a sort of secret we have. We've said more things with a look than we can ever say with words."

"I'm touched, deeply."

Her nearness was more vital than any caress. "You've got to let me help. You've got to let me share."

"Why?"

"Doing something and never having a sharing of it is bad. Then it's all on the

inside. We can talk, you know. Afterward."

Nurse and patient, probing together a deep and desperate wound.

"But I have a way and you aren't in it."

"Then there must be a new way. Two can think better. You might forget something important."

"You're accepting the correctness of the decision, then?"

"Only because it's yours. I don't matter. I've never had any strong feelings about right and wrong."

"That's a lie, Miranda."

Hoarsely, "So it's a lie! When you've seen the evil I've seen—"

"I'll let you help on one condition, Miranda."

"Anything."

"We haven't used the words yet. I want you to say the words we've been skirting so carefully. I want you to say them slowly. All the words. Now what are you going to do?"

Her hand found my wrist and the moth touch was gone. Her nails dug in with a surprising force. "I am going to help you kill your wife and her lover."

"Why?"

"Because they hurt you so badly and it's something you want to do."

"But more than that. The other reason."

"Because after it is done it will be something so strong between us that we'll never be apart again."

"Love, then?"

"No. Something stronger than that. Something more exciting."

"You want half a man?"

"I'm strong enough for two. I knew it would be this way. Ever since the night I kept you from dying. You gave up that night. I sat and whispered in your ear why you had to live. Over and over. And you did."

"It's settled then. Go in the morning. Be patient. I'll come to you when I can."

She left quickly, plunging toward the doorway, miraculously finding it in the blackness.

CHAPTER THREE

Rendezvous

STRENGTH slowly came back. My clothes began to fit again. Tone came back to the mended muscles. Connie stayed in the guest room. For a long time she seemed to be waiting, and when she saw that there would be no demands on her uxorial capacities, there seemed to be a relief in her. Once, when she was out, I went over her personal checks against the small income from her father. I checked back far enough to find out when it had started. They had been a little careless several months before my accident. Instead of cashing two of the checks, she had turned them over to her friend. The endorsements were a scrawled L. Palmer, with a self-conscious flowery squiggle under the name. I took those two checks. They were both for twenty-five.

I didn't hate either of them. I was cold—cold as any self-respecting corpse should be.

With the proceeds of the collision insurance I bought a good used car. I wasn't cold about that. It frightened me. That was unexpected. I sat behind the wheel and when I shut my eyes I could feel the car rolling, first sideways and then end over end. I opened my eyes quickly and the world returned to sanity. The first time I drove to the city, the sweat ran down from my armpits, soaking my shirt. I had the checks photostated on that first trip, front and back. I returned them to her file.

That night, at dinner, I put the next brick in the foundation. I looked across the booth at Connie. "You're mine, you know," I said.

Little puzzled wrinkles appeared above the bridge of her nose. "Of course, dear. What brought that on?"

"I just was thinking. You know how you imagine things. I was imagining how I would react if you ever wanted to leave me. The answer is very simple. I'd never, never let you go."

She smothered the quick alarm. "Why think of such a thing, George? Such an impossible thing!"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Say, the new car holds sixteen gallons of gas."

The fork trembled in her hand. "What's that got to do with—"

"Nothing, Connie. Don't be so silly. I saw that the conversation disturbed you, so, in my own feeble way, I was changing the subject."

"Oh!"

"The steering seems pretty sound. I had it checked at the station. That Palmer boy seems to know his business."

Vacant stare. "Palmer? Oh, Louie, the dark one."

She was getting better at it. That was really a good effort. I thought it was too bad that I couldn't tell her just how good an effort it was. Then she spoiled it by being unable to finish the dinner that she was eating with such appetite. That's one thing about her that always amazed me. A tiny girl, yet almost rapacious about her food. Red lips eager and white teeth tearing and champing. Once upon a time it had been cute. Funny how little you can learn about a woman in seven years of marriage.

I had to make her see Louie. I had to give her a reason.

Over coffee I said, "I've been asking around."

"About what, darling?" A shade too much casualness and disinterest.

"We could make a good deal on this house right now."

The petulance showed immediately. "But, George! I love this house and this neighborhood. I don't want to move."

"I stopped in at the office. I told Mallory how the docs recommend I keep out in the air as much as possible. He hinted that they might be able to give me a traveling job, based in California. I'd cover eleven Western states, part promotion work, part digging up new talent for the list. I'd also do some coordination work with the movie agents. I'm to let him know."

SHE looked as if somebody had hit her in the stomach. "But isn't the job you had a better one? I mean we could see that you got plenty of fresh air."

"I don't know if I'm too anxious to pick up this commuting treadmill again. I'm going to give it a lot of thought. We'd make a profit on the house. In the new job my trips would be so long that you would travel with me, naturally."

"I do get a little carsick," she said, the dread showing.

I laughed. "Say, remember in the hospital when I told you I was going to drive slow from then on?"

"Yes, I do."

"Found out today I've got my nerve back. I kicked it up to seventy-five on Route 28. The old reflexes seem pretty good."

I watched and saw the speculative look dawn. She covered it by getting up to bring more coffee. But when she poured it into my cup she spilled some in the saucer and didn't seem to notice.

At a quarter to nine she said she was going for a walk. I know that the station closed at nine. I yawned and said I might go to bed. She left. I waited five minutes and backed the car out. The station was six blocks away. I was curious to see how it was done. I took the parallel road, then turned left after six blocks and parked in the tree shadows. I could see the station. Connie walked by it, very slowly, silhouetted against the station floodlights. She

continued on down the street. I turned around in a driveway, went back to the parallel road, sped down three blocks and parked as before. Soon Connie went by, walking quickly now, high heels twinkling. I eased out after her.

Thirteen block from our house on April Lane she turned left. It was a cheap neighborhood. Midway in the second block was a green neon sign against a pale brick front "Unicorn—Bar and Grill." Beyond it was another sign. "Ladies Entrance." She darted in there, reluctant to linger under the harsh green light. I could remember the exact stage of pain that green light represented. Not the worst, but bad.

I went down the street, turned around, parked on the same side as the Unicorn, facing toward it. I was barely in time. A '40 Ford convertible parked across the street and Louie Palmer in jacket, open sports collar, hatless, walked across the street. He stopped in the full glare of green and lit a cigarette. He handled it in a thoroughly Bogart fashion, hand cupped completely around it, lowering it with calculated slowness after each drag. He looked up and down the street. He flipped it away, squared his shoulders and went inside. After all, he was a desperate character. A real killer. The murder didn't quite pan out, but what the hell. The intent was there. Louie was a real sharp apple, all wound up in a capital A affair, just like out of James M. Cain.

It would be nice to tell him that he was a sniveling little grease monkey preening himself over a tramp wife, a hired banty rooster with grease on his hair. But that was a pleasure I would have to forego.

I was in bed when she got home an hour later. I heard her in the bathroom. I wondered how radiant she looked.

MIRANDA lived alone in an efficiency apartment crowded into what had apparently been one of the bedrooms of a vast old Victorian house. To the left of the house was the parking lot for a supermarket. The street had been widened until the bottom step of the porch was a yard from the sidewalk.

She came down the street from the bus stop, lean legs in the white cotton stockings scissoring below the hem of the cheap coat.

She watched the sidewalk ahead of her, and suddenly looked across the street directly into my eyes and stopped. It did not seem strange that she should have that utter awareness.

She waited and I walked across to her. The small blue eyes narrowed just a bit. Her heavy lips were laid evenly together. She wore no lipstick and the strange thinness of the skin on her lips made them look peeled, raw.

We did not speak to each other until she had shut the apartment door behind us. "You should take stairs more slowly," she said.

"Showing off, I guess."

"You look better, George. Give me your coat."

The apartment was absolutely characterless at first glance. Then the signs of her presence intruded. An ashtray squared precisely to the edge of a table. Three birch logs, so perfect as to look artificial, stacked in the shallow, ashless fireplace. Shades all pulled to exactly the same level. She plunged back and forth through the room, physically threatening to derange all its neatness, but her touch on each object was light and precise. She pulled a glass-topped table closer to the armchair where I sat. From the kitchenette alcove she brought bottle, glass, small bowl of ice cubes, new bottle of soda. She set them down with evenly spaced clicks against the glass top. She made the drink deftly and said, "With you in a moment," and shut herself into the tiny bath.

She came out with her hair fluffed out of its rigid nurse's style and she wore a

turtle-necked grey sweater and a harsh tweed skirt in a discomfiting orange shade. No stockings. Ancient loafers. She fell toward a chair, sat lightly in it. The bones of her wrists and hips were sharp. She looked harsh, brittle, angular. I thought irrelevantly that she was a woman made for a blind man. To his touch she would have the remembered softness and warmth.

I put the drink down. "How do we start?"

"Tell me how we're going to do it." The sentence faded away. Each of her sentences brought silence after it, so that forever we spoke across silence more clearly than with words. Her eyes were dedicated blue flame.

"Not that fast. I want to know if you still insist on sharing this thing. Without knowing when or how we're to do it."

"I insist."

I studied her. "Have you ever wondered about your own sanity, Miranda."

"Of course. Everyone does. They say that to wonder means that you are really quite all right."

"Odd that you're a nurse."

"Is it? People fighting, dying. I'm there. I can watch and decide about them. Oh, you don't have to do anything crude, like the wrong medicines. I like them caught between living and dying. Like you were. Then you can do it with words. You can decide and it always comes out the way you say. It makes you strong to think about it."

I smiled and my lips felt stiff. "Have you decided against anyone lately?"

"Oh, yes. This past week. An old man. They wanted him alive because, you see, he was a great grandfather and in another month he'd be a great great grandfather and it was all a matter of pride with him and with them. To have all those generations living at once. He fought, that one, to keep living just for the sake of living, which is never any good. I whispered in his ear. 'Give up,' I said. 'Let it go. Stop fighting. Give up.' They say they can't hear you, but they can. They always can. He finally gave a great sigh and died. They couldn't understand why he died. But, of course, I couldn't tell them."

"You like doing that?"

"You kill the rotten ones and keep the good ones. Like sorting things. Like being neat about yourself."

"I'm one of the good ones?"

She shook her head, as though puzzled. "No, and yet I kept you. I keep wondering why."

MY GLASS was empty. She sprang toward me and had I not learned about her I would have flinched away. But she stopped in time and the new drink was made.

I caught her wrist and pulled her onto my lap. Oddly, she seemed lighter than Connie, though she was much heavier I knew. The calm lips folded against mine. But there was nothing there. It was holding a senseless pose, like a charade that no one can guess. She went back to her chair.

"I expected anything but that," I said.

"Wait," she said. "Wait until afterward. There isn't enough togetherness yet. Afterward the thing shared will make it right."

"Maybe I died," I said. "Maybe this is a fancy-type hell, like the mythological one where the sinner is chained for eternity just out of reach of food and drink."

"Am I food and drink?" She showed, for the first time, a trace of coyness. Like a child's rattle placed atop a small white coffin.

"Maybe not that. But necessary. In an odd way. Essential."

"That's because I know more about these things. I'm like a guide. You're just learning."

"Is it a taste you can acquire?"

"That you can't help acquiring."

"But when there's no one left to kill?"

"Then we'll help each other find someone else. And do it in a better way than words."

I stood up. "I'll let you know."

"I'll be waiting."

On the way home I could feel the clear imprint of the plate inlaid in my skull, the perfect outline of it, as though gentle fingers were pressing it against the jelly of my brain.

I went into the cellar and fitted a length of soft white pine into the lathe. I let my hands work the way they wanted to work, without direction. The cutting tool ate away the wood, turning angles into curves. I took it off the lathe and turned on the sander. I held it one way, then another way, rounding it the way my hands said. It turned into the crude enlongated torso of a woman, a woman as thin as Miranda. Then I put it back into the lathe and cut it down to a round rod, shaving away the woman-form.

The pressure against the plate had turned into an ache, the beginning of green behind my eyes. I broke the rod over my knee.

I went up to Connie and I said, "Rub the back of my neck."

I stretched out on the couch. She was awkward about it, lacking the skill of Miranda. I turned and held her close, telling myself she was precious. I kissed her. I saw surprise in her eyes and then a most patient resignation. I sat beside her on the couch and took the patch off the empty socket. She shut her eyes hard. Her small fists were clenched. I tiptoed away from her and up the stairs and shut myself in my room. I heard her go out. I lay in the livid green and the world was green neon and the outline of the plate changed slowly, forming letters, pressing the word "Unicorn" deep into the grey-green brain, deep into the softnesses in which forever a car rolled and leaped and bounded like a child's toy thrown aside in petty rage.

CHAPTER FOUR

Angel of Death

"YOU won't be needing the car, will you?" I asked Connie.

She gave me her prettiest frown. "Gosh, I don't think so. How long will you have it?"

"Overnight."

"Where on earth are you going?"

"I went in and talked to Mallory yesterday. We decided I'd start to take on a few odd jobs, just to get my hand in. That splendid creative artist up in Crane is yammering at his agent to arrange a switch of publishers again."

"But that is where you were going when—"

"Correct. Sort of like a movie. This is when I came in."

"When are you leaving?"

"He keeps crazy hours. Starts writing after a midnight breakfast. It's a two-and-a-half-hour drive. I'll leave tonight after dark and after I see him I'll hole up somewhere and come back down tomorrow. No point in getting too tired at this stage of the game."

The upper surfaces of her rounded arms had the faint tan that she never seems to lose, even in the dead of winter. I held her by the shoulders and looked into her eyes. She was facing the light. I saw then, and for the first time, the slight yellowness of the whites of her eyes. Once they had been that bluey white that only children seem to have. The pores of her snub nose and on her rounded cheeks were faintly enlarged, and everywhere, eye corners, around her mouth, across her forehead, I could see the spreading inevitable network of wrinkles, cobwebby against the skin. Enlarge those wrinkles to the maximum and she would have the face of a withered monkey, out of which the grey eyes would still stare, acquiring through that contrast the knowledge of evil which

had always been there but which I had never been able to see or understand.

She moved uncomfortably in my grasp. "What are you staring at?"

"My fine true wife, my loyal little Connie. Darling, what did I do to deserve you?"

She had the grace to blush. "Oh, come now."

"It's the truth, isn't it? Why, any other woman would be scheming and planning on how to get rid of me. But not you, Connie. Not you. Love is bigger than expediency, isn't it?"

"If you say so, George."

"Read any good books lately?"

"George, right now you seem . . . more like yourself. You've been so odd, you know."

"I'll be my very own true self very soon now."

"Are we going to move away from here?"

"I think so."

Her voice became wheedling. "Darling, before you make up your mind for sure, let's go up to the cabin for a long week. Just the two of us. There won't be anybody around at this time of year. We can walk in the woods. Oh, we'll have a wonderful time."

"Just the two of us?"

Her eyes grew as opaque as grey glass. "Call it a second honeymoon," she breathed.

That would be ideal for them. Not difficult to arrange at all. So many ways to do it up there. I could almost see Louie Palmer pushing me off the high front porch onto the lake-front rocks and then lighting a cigarette in his Bogart way, saying, "I'll run along. You drive out and make the phone call. Remember, he complained about feeling dizzy and you told him not to go near the steps."

There would be a deep satisfaction in that for them. An end of tension. It had failed the first time. Their frozen world would begin to revolve again.

"A second honeymoon," I said.

In the late afternoon I took the car down to the station. Conner, the owner, was there as well as Louie Palmer. Louie was in his coveralls, his sleeves rolled up over muscular forearms, a smear of grease on his chin near the corner of his mouth, a lank end of black hair curling down across his forehead to the black eyebrow. He avoided meeting my eye.

"Taking a little trip," I said heartily to Conner. "First one since my accident. Have Louie check the tires, steering arms, king pin, front wheel bushings, please."

"Put it on the rack, kid," Conner said in his husky, domineering voice. I wondered how much Conner's constant scorn was a factor in Louie's bold play for big money. I watched the coveralls tighten across Louie's broad shoulders as he ducked under the car. How had it started?

A few sidelong glances? The realization that the Corliss woman was coming around oftener than strictly necessary? Then, probably, "I guess we better road test it, Mrs. Corliss. Just move over and I'll take the wheel."

How does it start?

"Change the oil, sir?" Louie asked.

"No thanks, kid," I said. I rasped that "kid" across him, saw the color creep up the back of his neck.

I waited and when he was through I tipped him a quarter. He looked as if he might throw it in my face. "Buy yourself a beer," I said. "Try the Unicorn. I hear that's a good bar."

His mouth sagged a little and the color left him. I grinned into his face and turned away. Louie was jumpy.

"Take it easy, Mr. Corliss," Conner advised.

"I'll do that," I said. "Made myself a promise that I'll never drive over forty-five again and I'm sticking to it."

Beyond Conner I saw a puzzled look on Louie's lean white face.

I WENT over right after dinner. Miranda was waiting for me. Her eyes seemed deeper in her head, their glow strong and steady. The wide lips were parted a faint fraction of an inch. It added to the breathlessness of her words. The spring within her was wound as tightly as the key could be turned. A deb waiting for the grand march. A horse player waiting for the sixth race. An animal watching, from a limb, the trail beneath.

She shut the door and leaned against it. "Tonight?"

"Yes, tonight."

She shut her eyes for a moment. With her eyes shut she had a corpse face.

"How? Tell me how. Quickly!"

"They think I'll be gone. They think I'll be gone overnight. We'll come back."

"They'll be together?"

"Why not? They have planning to do."

"But how?"

"Electricity."

She looked disappointed. "Is—is that a good way?"

"The best. Clean and quick and final."

She nodded slowly. "Yes, I can see a lot of ways how it could be. But I won't just watch, will I? I'll be part of it." You there, little girl! Get into that game of musical chairs with the other children.

"You'll be part of it. I promised."

"Do they have a good chance of catching us, blaming us?"

"Not a chance in the world."

"Oh good! And later . . . we'll go away."

"Far away."

"How much time is there?"

"Three hours. Four."

"Long hours to wait, George."

"We'll take a ride. That'll kill time. Come along."

She had not sat beside me in a car before. She was unexpectedly feline, a part of her that I had not noticed. She sat with her legs curled up under her, partly facing me, and I knew that she watched, not the road, but my face, the glow of the dash lights against it, the pendulum swing of the street lamps.

"Scared?" I asked.

"No. Something else. Like when you're a child. You wake up in the morning. Another day. Then you see the snow on the windowsill and it all comes with a great rush. The day after tomorrow is Christmas, you say. One more day gone. Yesterday it was the day after the day after tomorrow. Now it's getting so close it closes your throat. That's how I feel. Getting one at last that isn't a sick one."

She inched closer so that the hard ball of her knee dug against my thigh. The musky perfume was thick in the car.

Without turning to see, I knew how her eyes would look. "We've never had to say much, have we?" she asked.

"Not very much. We knew without

saying. A look can say everything."

"Later we can talk. We can say all the words that ever were. Good words and bad words. I've said bad words when I'm alone. I've never said them out loud to anybody. And we can say the other words too, and it won't be like after reading a story."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, murder. Death. Kill. Blood. Bodies. I kill, you kill, we kill. The way you had to learn the Latin words in school."

"Conjugations, you mean."

"That's what I was trying to think of. Miranda Wysner, conjugate the verb to kill. I kill, I shall kill, I killed, I had killed, I should have killed."

She laughed. Her fingers shut on my arm above the elbow. "Think about it, George. Like swinging a big shining white sword. You swing it at evil and you tell yourself that's why you do it, but all the time way down inside your heart you know that it isn't the reason for it, it's the act itself."

I WAS on the road north out of town. She looked out the windows.

"Where are we going?"

"We'll just go north out of town up into the hills and then swing around and come back."

She was silent. I drove ever more rapidly. The road climbed and then began to gather unto itself a series of gentle curves that later would grow hard, the shoulders popping and crackling as the car threw itself at them.

I knew the landmarks. At the crest I slowed down, my arms tired from the strain. I started down the other side. The rising whine of the wind grew louder. The needle climbed. Sixty-five, seventy, seventy-five.

"We're killing the two of them, you see," I yelled above the wind. "We can't make the curve coming up. You wanted a part in it. You've got it, baby. You've got it. I left a letter with Mallory to open if I should die. It's all in there. They'll never worm out of this one. Electricity will kill them all right. Courtesy of the State of New York, baby."

I saw the white posts of the curve in the furthest reach of the headlights.

Her scream filled the car, filled my ears, drilled into my soul. "Faster, Georgie! Oh, faster!" Wild ecstasy, beyond the peak of human endurance.

I gave her one quick look. The dash lights hit the white-ridged bone structure of her face so that the shape of the skull was apparent. The mouth was wide-screaming, lip-spread. Her voice told me that she had known.

I came down hard on the brake. The car went into a long skid toward those posts. I let up on the brake, accelerated it straight, came down on the brake again. This time the skid was the other way so that the car headed toward the brink, still skidding sideways. I could hear only the scream of tortured rubber, then the jolting metallic scraping as tires were rolled right off the rims. I couldn't bring it out of the second skid. The front right wheel smacked the posts and the car spun so that I lost all sense of direction. For a moment it looked as though the car were spinning in one spot, like a top, completely ringed about with the white posts. Then it hit again and I was thrown toward Miranda. I tried to find her with my arms but I couldn't.

The crescendo of sound was fading. The car jolted, lurched, stood absolutely still in a world where there was no sound.

I got out. Other cars stopped. I looked for Miranda. I couldn't find her. The tow truck had a spotlight on it and so did the trooper car. I made them shine the lights down and search down the slope. They looked and looked. After I told them a little more about her they stopped looking and they were most polite

and they took me to a doctor who gave me white powders.

I WAS in bed for ten days. I told Connie everything. She was very grave about it all, and kept her eyes on my face as I answered every one of her questions.

By the time I was on my feet the car had been repaired. I didn't care what happened any more. I didn't protest when she took me to the gas station. Conner acted odd and the questions seemed to embarrass him. He said, "Why, sure a few times Mrs. Corliss cashed checks with me and I guess I turned some of them over to Louie as part of his pay." Louie came over and shuffled his feet. He looked younger than I'd remembered. He was smoking a cigarette and he didn't hold it in his Bogart way.

"Louie," she said, "have you and I ever had a date?"

He stared at her. "What the hell! What the hell, Miz Corliss!"

"Have we?"

He manufactured a pretty good leer. "Well, now you bring the subject up, if you want a date, I'd—"

"Shut up!" Conner rasped.

"Get behind the wheel, George," Connie said, "and take me to the Unicorn."

I found the street. It wasn't there. I tried two other streets and then went back to the first one. I parked and went in a cigar store and asked what had happened to it. The man told me he'd been there twelve years and there'd never been a place of that name in the neighborhood.

We went home. I sat on the living-room couch. She pulled a small footstool over and sat directly in front of me.

"George, listen to me. I've been checking everything. That address you gave me. It's a parking lot. There aren't any old Victorian houses on that street made over into apartments. There's no local record of a nurse named Miranda Wysner. I brought you home from the hospital and took care of you myself. They told me I should put you in a psychiatric nursing home. They thought I was in danger from you. You said some pretty wild things about me in the hospital. I took the risk. For the first two weeks you were home you called me Miranda as often as you called me Connie. It was, I thought, the name of some girl you knew before we were married. Then you stopped doing that and you seemed better. That's why I thought it was safe to let you drive again. You were almost rational. No, you were rational. If it had been just almost rational, if I had thought that you were in danger, I wouldn't have permitted it. The steering did break when you had your accident. That's because the garage you took the car to installed a defective part."

I said haltingly, "But . . . you. The way you acted toward me. I know that I'm repulsive to you now. This eye and all. . . ."

She left the room, came back quickly with a mirror. "Take off the patch, George." I did so. My two eyes, whole again, looked back at me. I touched the one that had been under the patch.

"I don't understand!" I cried out.

"You were convinced you had lost an eye. They gave up and decided to humor you when you demanded the patch. And as far as my turning away from you in disgust is concerned, that is precisely what *you* did, George. Not me."

I sat numbly. Her grave eyes watched me.

"I followed you that night," I said.

"I went for a walk. I didn't want you to see me cry again. I'd cried enough in front of you—until I thought that no more tears could come. But there are always more tears. Funny, isn't it? No matter how many already shed."

"Why have I done this to you?" I demanded.

"George, darling. *You* didn't do it. It

wasn't you. It was the depressed fracture, the bone chips they pulled out of your brain, the plate they put in."

"Miranda," I whispered. "Who is Miranda? Who was Miranda?"

Connie tried to smile. Tears glistened in the grey eyes. "Miranda? Why, darling, she might have been an angel of death."

"When I nearly died, she was there. . . ."

"*I* was there," Connie said with an upward lift of her chin. "*I* was there. And I held you and whispered to you how much you had to live for, how much I needed you."

"She said she whispered to all of them on that borderline."

"Maybe she does."

"Take me in your arms, George," Connie said.

I couldn't. I could only look at her. She waited a long time and then she went alone up the stairs. I heard her footsteps on the guest room floor overhead.

WE WENT to the cabin on the lake. I was sunk into the blackest depths of apathy. Once you have learned that no impression can be trusted, no obvious truth forever real, you know an isolation from the world too deep to be shattered.

I remembered the thin pink skin of her wide lips, the lurch of her walk, the unexpected competence of her hands.

I do not know how many days went by. I ate and slept and watched the lake.

And one day I looked up and there was Connie. She stood with the sun behind her and she looked down at me.

The smile came then. I felt it on my lips. I felt it dissolving all the old restraints. I reached for her and pulled her into my arms. The great shuddering sighs of thanksgiving came from her. She was my wife again and she was in my arms and everything between us was mended, as shining and new as in the earliest days of our marriage.

She wept and talked and laughed, all at once.

That night a wind was blowing off the lake.

When she slept I left her side and went to the windows. They look out onto the porch.

The old rocking chair creaked. Back and forth. Back and forth.

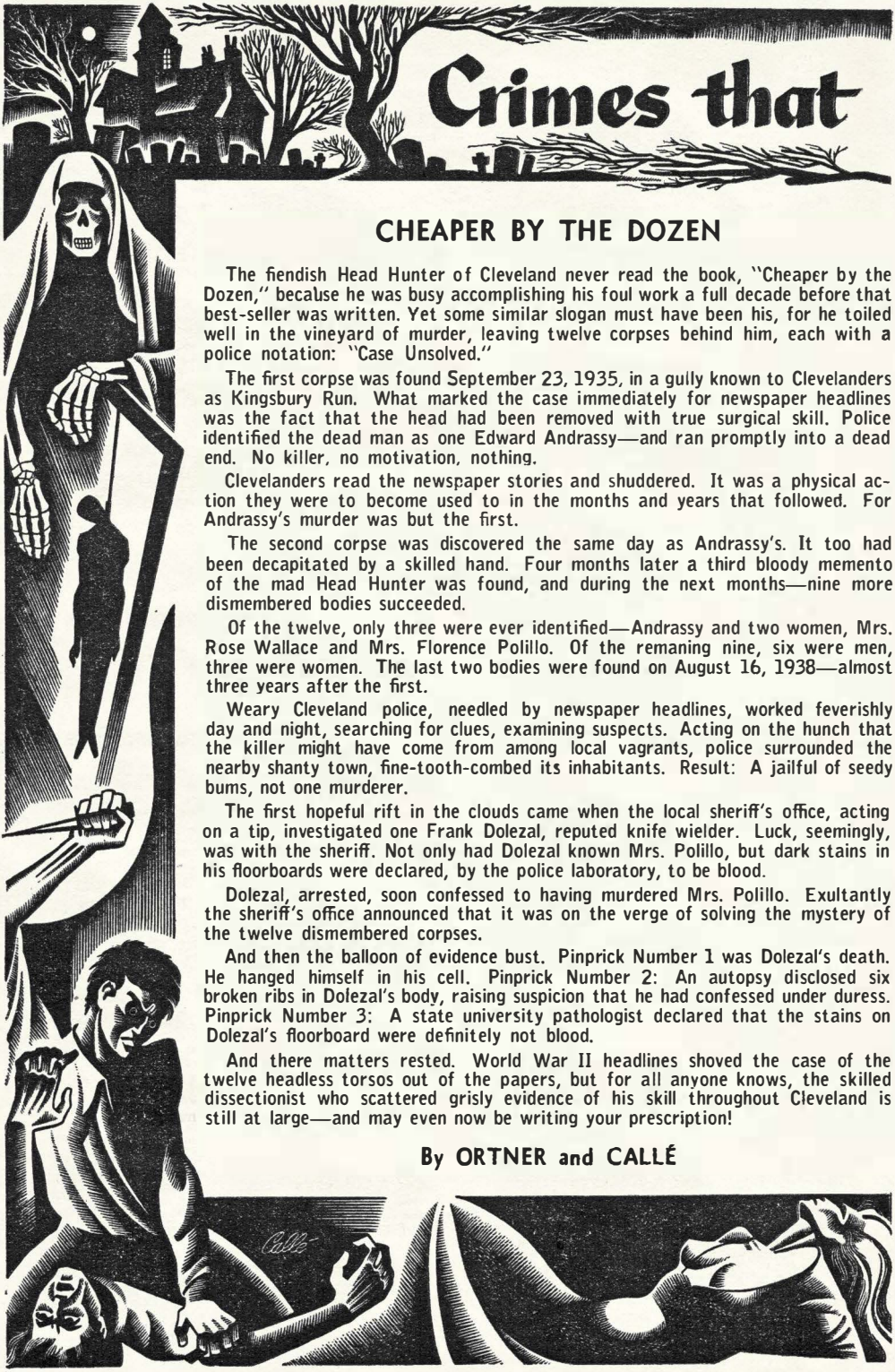
It was no surprise to me to see her sitting there. In the rocker. There was a moon-glade across the lake and her wide underlip was moist enough to pick up the smallest of highlights from the lake.

We smiled at each other the way old friends smile who have at last learned to understand each other.

You see, Miranda knows about the drop from the top steps to the lake-shore rocks.

I turned back to gather up my small and dainty wife in my arms.

THE END



CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN

The fiendish Head Hunter of Cleveland never read the book, "Cheaper by the Dozen," because he was busy accomplishing his foul work a full decade before that best-seller was written. Yet some similar slogan must have been his, for he toiled well in the vineyard of murder, leaving twelve corpses behind him, each with a police notation: "Case Unsolved."

The first corpse was found September 23, 1935, in a gully known to Clevelanders as Kingsbury Run. What marked the case immediately for newspaper headlines was the fact that the head had been removed with true surgical skill. Police identified the dead man as one Edward Andrassy—and ran promptly into a dead end. No killer, no motivation, nothing.

Clevelanders read the newspaper stories and shuddered. It was a physical action they were to become used to in the months and years that followed. For Andrassy's murder was but the first.

The second corpse was discovered the same day as Andrassy's. It too had been decapitated by a skilled hand. Four months later a third bloody memento of the mad Head Hunter was found, and during the next months—nine more dismembered bodies succeeded.

Of the twelve, only three were ever identified—Andrassy and two women, Mrs. Rose Wallace and Mrs. Florence Polillo. Of the remaning nine, six were men, three were women. The last two bodies were found on August 16, 1938—almost three years after the first.

Weary Cleveland police, needled by newspaper headlines, worked feverishly day and night, searching for clues, examining suspects. Acting on the hunch that the killer might have come from among local vagrants, police surrounded the nearby shanty town, fine-tooth-combed its inhabitants. Result: A jailful of seedy bums, not one murderer.

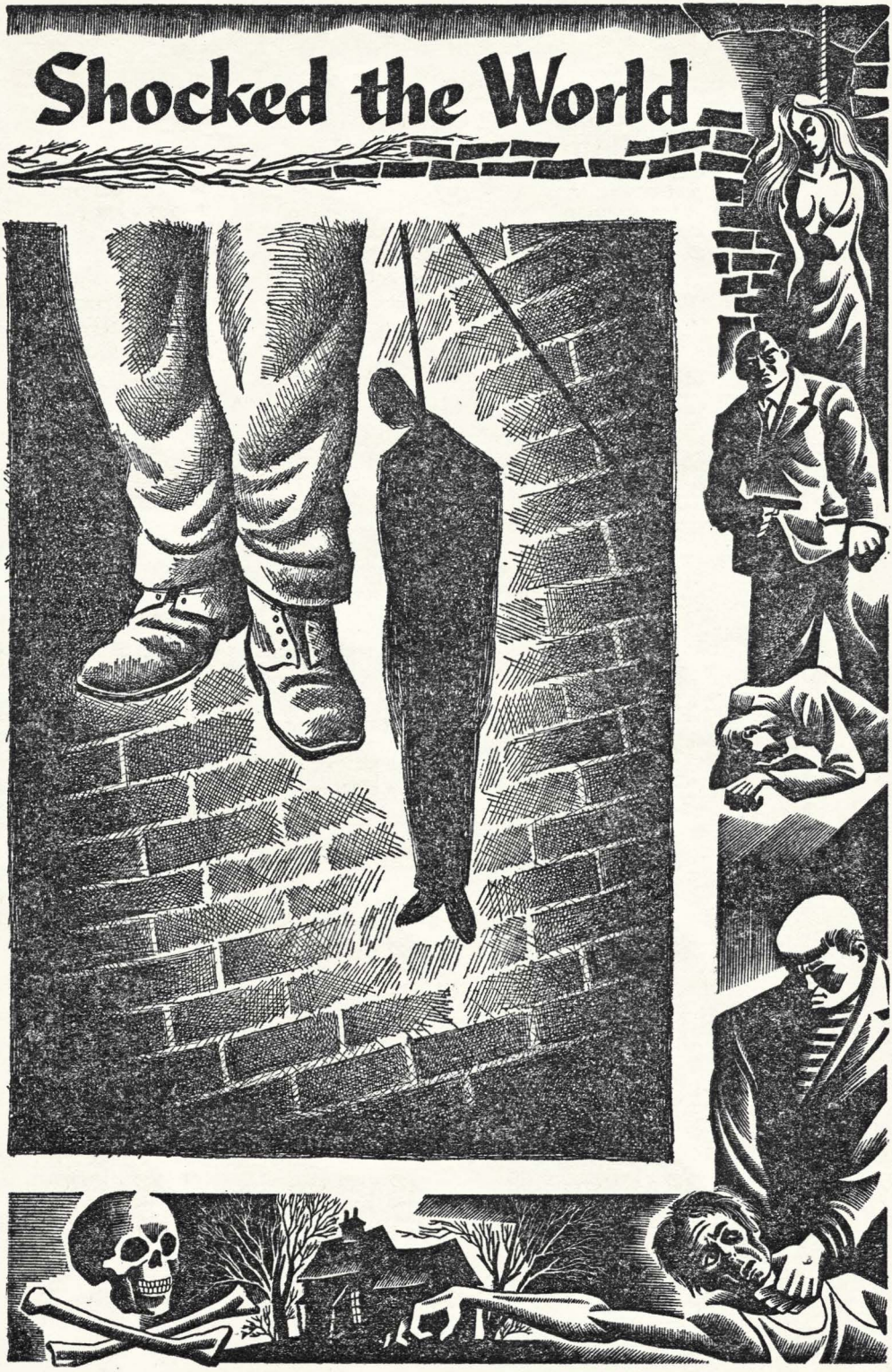
The first hopeful rift in the clouds came when the local sheriff's office, acting on a tip, investigated one Frank Dolezal, reputed knife wielder. Luck, seemingly, was with the sheriff. Not only had Dolezal known Mrs. Polillo, but dark stains in his floorboards were declared, by the police laboratory, to be blood.

Dolezal, arrested, soon confessed to having murdered Mrs. Polillo. Exultantly the sheriff's office announced that it was on the verge of solving the mystery of the twelve dismembered corpses.

And then the balloon of evidence bust. Pinprick Number 1 was Dolezal's death. He hanged himself in his cell. Pinprick Number 2: An autopsy disclosed six broken ribs in Dolezal's body, raising suspicion that he had confessed under duress. Pinprick Number 3: A state university pathologist declared that the stains on Dolezal's floorboard were definitely not blood.

And there matters rested. World War II headlines shoved the case of the twelve headless torsos out of the papers, but for all anyone knows, the skilled dissectionist who scattered grisly evidence of his skill throughout Cleveland is still at large—and may even now be writing your prescription!

By ORTNER and CALLÉ


Shocked the World

The Ghost That Loved Answell

By CHARLES LARSON

Even dead she pursued him, crooning to him, mothering him, watching over him. Good Lord, Answell thought, didn't she realize he had killed her?

HE could not have said when the fear began in him. It came slowly, without concious cause, like a malignant growth in his mind. There was no base to it, no coherence, no reason, and that, it seemed to him, was the most terrifying part of all.

They noticed it at the office. His receptionist, a rather silly young woman named Patsy something, left a travel fold-

er on his desk one morning, and popped in at least six times during the day to see whether he'd read it.

He threw it into the wastebasket.

The doctor who shared his suite spoke to him at lunch. "Walter, it's not up to me to tell you your business, but don't you think you've been hitting the ball a little too hard lately? I mean, under the circumstances—"

"There's nothing wrong with me," Answell said.

"Of course there isn't. I simply meant that it's been a strain. Bound to be. Loss of a loved one. All of that. But you must realize, Walter, that Ethel would have been the first—"

"I don't want to talk about Ethel."

"No. Certainly not."

Even his patients became solicitous.

"Why is it, Dr. Answell," said a freckled woman with a recurrent angina condition, "that doctors always take the very worst care of themselves? You look perfectly worn out. Surely a month at the mountains, a few weeks of sun and fresh air and rest. . . ."

He hoped that she could not see the effort it took for him to remain calm. He was so tired of hearing about his altered appearance. He kept his eyes on a slim vase near the edge of his desk and on the single red rose it contained. "I'm afraid that's out of the question, Mrs. Moore. There are so many things to do. My wife—"

"Doctor, I'm going to speak quite brutally. And I want you to listen. Ethel's gone. You had fifteen wonderful years with her. But you've got to consider yourself now. What do you think Ethel would say if she could see you carrying on like this? I know how she used to fret and worry. She'd say, 'Walter. . . .' "

It had become difficult to hear. The room throbbed delicately, as though he were watching it through opera glasses held by a nervous hand. He got to his feet. "There are other patients waiting. Will you leave, please." The words were plainly rude, and he had never been a rude man. He wondered if he were going to be ill. "Please," he repeated.

THE woman chose to be compassionate rather than insulted. After a moment she sighed. "All right, Doctor." Her dress rustled intimately as she leaned over to pat his arm. "I understand. Believe me, I do."

She gave him a tender smile and moved with the somnolent slowness of the heart patient toward the door. Answell remained motionless long after she had gone, held and hypnotized by her final words.

It seemed to him suddenly that he had found—in those last idle syllables—the crux not only of his present unhappiness, but of his entire graceless life. The sentences sang shrilly in his mind. "I understand, Doctor. Believe me, I do. I understand. I understand. I understand . . ."

Very slowly he brought his head up. No! He could have shouted. No, you do *not* understand.

That was the simple, unholy truth of it. He had never taken a step, never drawn a breath, never uttered a remark that had not been—to some extent—misunderstood.

Quickly he walked to the mirror opposite his desk, stopped in front of it. He saw a tall, loose-limbed figure with prematurely grey hair and large, sensitive hands. He saw a face of kindly absentmindedness. He saw, in effect, a doctor in whom one would have the deepest confidence.

Walter Answell, M. D., specialist in cardiology. A good man, a plain, awkward, shy person, bereaved and made pitiable by the loss of his dearly beloved wife.

He wanted to smash the mirror as he would have smashed the face of an obnoxious liar.

He wanted to fling open his office door and cry, "Look here! Every one of you! Stop treating me like a child! Stop pitying me! I don't want it. I fought it for fifteen endless years, and now that it's over I don't intend to go through it again!"

He could imagine the fluttering such cries would cause, the startled glances, the awed conjectures.

Almost imperceptibly, Answell drew his shoulders back. Out of the corner of his eye he could see the reflection in the mirror straighten, take on a subtle grandeur. There, he thought, stood the true Answell. An Answell strong and unafraid and faintly disdainful.

And that Answell would have a voice like the flick of a whip. "Bereaved?" it would say. "For what earthly reason? Is the prisoner bereaved to see the sun again? I'm glad Ethel's dead! I loathed every fat ounce of her. I hated her from the day we were married. I hated her for loving me so much, for smothering me, for her constant concern. And listen to this, my fatheads. I did something braver and stronger than any of you could ever have done. Because I murdered her!"

THE words were so loud in his brain that he thought for a moment that he had actually shouted them. He cocked his head in abrupt panic, half expecting someone to run into his office. But everything continued on its usual way. Steadily his receptionist typed in the outer room, somewhere a woman laughed, the usual traffic noises rose from the street.

Answell realized that he was very, very tired.

He rubbed his forehead and then returned to his desk. Wearily he touched the intercommunication box. "Patsy?"

"Yes, Doctor?"

"Cancel all my appointments. I . . . don't feel well. I'm going home."

The metallic voice was relieved. "Yes, Doctor."

She was glad he was going home. He tried to fight down the tiny surge of anger that spread through him at the thought. But, childishly, it grew until he was white with baffled rage. If he had chosen to stay, if he'd wished to work until three o'clock in the morning, it should have been no one's business but his own. Instead, the girl was as vastly interested in his welfare as Ethel had been. Everyone was interested. He had escaped from Ethel only to meet, apparently, an infinity of Ethels all over again. *Why* couldn't they see that he was sick to death of their anxiety, that he wanted, at last in his life, to do as he pleased, without interest or hindrance or help on anyone's part?

Trembling, he shut his eyes. Now that wouldn't do at all. There was something unseemly about such perturbation over the tone of a voice. In all likelihood the poor girl had meant nothing whatever by it.

Here, Answell thought, was the legacy Ethel had left him. This unmanly petulance. This eternal vigilance and introspection.

He breathed deeply, rose and put on his hat and coat. He paused once before the mirror to compose himself, and left the room.

The outer office, he saw, was empty except for the receptionist. Without a word he crossed to the door. And then it happened.

"Walter," a voice said. "It's raining, and you've forgotten your umbrella."

His first reaction was one of distinct shock that Patsy should take it upon herself to call him by his first name.

He turned, his eyebrows raised. "I'm quite aware of that," he said. "And I didn't forget anything. I deliberately left it at home."

Patsy paused, her hands poised over the typewriter keyboard. "I beg your pardon, Doctor?"

"I said," Answell repeated, "that I had left it at home. In my opinion, a man looks like a fool when he carries an umbrella. And I would prefer, youg lady, that you called me something other than 'Walter.' It cheapens the office."

Patsy's mouth had fallen open.

"Please see that it doesn't happen again," Answell said. He nodded stiffly, and continued into the hall.

Once outside, he shook his head angrily. What colossal cheek! That was the trouble with the very young. They failed to realize . . .

"Then," the voice said, "you must take a taxi. I'm not going to have you standing about on wet corners. You know how easily you catch cold, Walter."

Answell stopped dead.

The corridor, both before and behind him, was vacant. It reminded him of a tomb; a dankness had entered the air.

The voice had been Ethel's.

For a moment he assumed, quite clearly and coldly, that he had lost his mind. He had been under an unusually severe strain for several weeks, and a momentary mental breakdown would not have been in the least far-fetched. One could not hate as fervently as he had hated—nor experience such blessed relief when the source of his hatred was removed—and not undergo certain extensive mental upheavals. Still, wasn't his very acceptance of insanity tacit proof that he was normal? The madmen never believed in his madness....

Deep within him the unreasonable fear had returned to coil like a small chill snake around his heart. A small, slippery snake, constricting. . . .

"Going down?" someone said, and Answell jerked his head about. An elevator stood open beside him.

"What?" Answell said.

"Going *down?*"

"Oh. Oh, yes. Down." He stepped into the elevator.

And the dankness entered behind him.

OVER the city a leaden sky hung like a malevolent blanket. Streams of water gushed in the gutters and splattered against the bent bodies of hurrying pedestrians. Answell raised his coat collar and began to move blindly toward the bus stop. He had never learned to drive his own car; Ethel had been terrified that he might one day have an accident. As a matter of fact, so had Answell been terrified of the same thing.

In rare moments of spiritual clarity, Answell had realized that Ethel was partically his own fault. He had created her as surely as Frankenstein had created *his* monster. Long before marrying her, he'd known that Ethel thrived on weakness in others. Ethel loved to protect, to advise and guide and strengthen. And Answell had been quite content at first to submit. Originally she'd been a patient

of his, but soon their roles had become subtly reversed. Despite her chronically bad heart, Ethel had given the impression that Answell was the one who needed to be looked after. And in his weakness Answell had allowed the situation to get out of hand. He had conceived a hatred for her that had grown in direct ratio to the love she bore for him. When he had seen his chance—during one of Ethel's frequent heart attacks—to kill her without suspicion or danger, he had literally jumped at it. It had been so easy to withhold the medicine Ethel had needed. He had murdered her by proxy, so to speak. There had been no violence, no blood, no incriminating instrument. He had simply not saved her life when it had lain in his power to do so. Even Ethel had not suspected. He'd known by the trustful, fatalistic look in her eyes . . .

But he *had* killed her. She *was* dead. Therefore, the voice he'd heard had been a figment of his own sick imagination.

Answell lowered his head against the pounding rain and stepped off a curb. Perhaps a drink . . .

He felt the blow against his chest at the very moment he heard the car honk. Wildly he tried to regain his balance, but his heel caught on the curb and he fell backwards to sprawl awkwardly on the wet sidewalk. Above him he could see the car, a taxi, swing crazily out and away from him, brakes shrieking. The driver's white face glared back at him. "Watch it, you crazy son of a . . ." The words were lost in the rain and the wind.

Open-mouthed, Answell stared at the traffic light over the center of the street. It had been red against him, green for the car. One more step . . .

But why hadn't he taken that step? What on earth had saved him? He remembered the blow against his chest, as though someone, seeing the danger, had deliberately pushed him away from it.

Answell got to his feet.

"Walter," the voice said, "*when* are you going to learn to look both ways at an intersection? Honestly . . ."

Answell leaned against a lamp post, his head down.

"Now you call a taxi," the voice said, "and get home and out of those wet clothes just as fast as you can. Why . . ."

Another car passed slowly by the lamp post. "Taxi?" the driver called.

Answell glanced up dully, and finally nodded. Again the dankness accompanied him as he got in. He gave his address and rested his head against the back of the seat, staring blankly at the meter. . . .

THE nights, Answell came to believe, were the hardest. Then the horror became immediate and unbearable. In the night there was no escape. Often he would wake with the sound of humming in his ears, tuneless and frightful, and he would sit up and scream "Stop it! My God, are you trying—"

And the humming would cease. The voice would take on a surprised, hurt tone. "Did I wake you, Walter? I'm sorry, dear. You must get your rest, of course. I'll be very, very quiet. Now, go to sleep. Perhaps if I sang very softly, the way you used to like . . ."

Sometimes, too, in the night he was able to see her.

She loved to stand beside his bed, a faint outline that wavered and dissolved like a dream. And there would be a bow in her hair, and utter adulation in her eyes.

He called the manifestation "her" rather than "it" almost from the beginning. Like a man with an incurable disease, Answell found himself adapting to his new condition with desperate hopelessness, and even making some attempt to study it.

He slipped without protest from a position of indifferent skepticism into one of necessary belief. Ethel was there. Whether or not ghosts could exist, Ethel existed,

and that was enough. That settled the question.

For a time he labored under the delusion that Ethel had returned in order to harm him—to avenge, somehow, her own death. The truth, when he saw it, was infinitely more horrible.

Because Ethel had not known he'd killed her. She had no intention of harming, or even of frightening, him. A love greater than the grave had brought her back, and nothing else.

She watched over him like a guardian angel, as she'd always done. The hundred and one little traits that had once driven him to murder were back in frightful abundance, and he was utterly helpless to cope with them.

"Walter," the voice would say, "you're not eating well at all. Why should you be so childish about vegetables? Order the broccoli . . ."

And, hating broccoli, he would order it solely because it would stop the whining in his ear.

"Walter, you're in a draft, dear. If you closed that window . . ."

"Walter, *why* must you smoke so much?"

"Walter, chew your food."

"Walter . . ."

Tiny drops of water, each in itself comical and insignificant, but building together toward total madness.

He could no longer work. He called Patsy and told her that he was taking a short vacation—for his nerves. The sympathy in her voice revealed her agreement with his plan. He grew thinner, a tremor lodged in his hands and in his head. And always and forever there was Ethel.

It was almost by accident that he discovered the one way out.

He had found that sleeping pills provided momentary but absolute release from the thing at his side. He began to look forward to those few hours of precious blankness with the longing of an alcoholic toward his bottle.

If only, he thought, the effect were eternal. If only he needn't eventually awaken . . .

He was standing at the wash basin, with the box of pills in his hand, when the idea of suicide entered and fled his mind like a pleasure too remote to be contemplated.

He wet his lips and stared at his face in the mirror. An eternal rest. Wasn't that going a bit too far?

A breath of air came to him from the bedroom door. A dankness. He heard the empty humming that Ethel began whenever she was happy.

He turned the box over in his hand, cupped the pills in his palm and opened his mouth.

"Walter!"

Something brushed violently against his arm, sent the white pills spinning and clattering over the floor. Answell was after them in an instant, crying like a baby, shrieking with rage each time they eluded him.

At last he fell against the bathtub, exhausted, and the voice said, with grave sadness, "Walter, Walter. My poor darling. I know how hard it is for you. I know, dear. You're lonely. You want to join me. But that isn't the way, Walter. If you were to die, we could never find

each other again. Don't you see? We're together now, the way we've always been, and we don't want to lose that, do we? Now get into bed, my sweet, and I shall sing you to sleep . . ."

FROM that time on, Answell became obsessed. Self-annihilation danced and spun in his brain like the sight of a

special paradise. He went to the most crafty lengths to get around Ethel's vigilance. He spent the better part of a week in transferring, drop by drop, the contents of a bottle marked "Poison" into a used bottle of mouthwash, only to find the mouthwash bottle shattered on the bathroom floor at the end of the fifth day. He recalled that a friend whom he hadn't seen for years now occupied an office at the top of a fifteen-story building, and he tried to fall from the open office window during a visit. Ethel held him until the friend could come to the rescue. He attempted to cut his wrists, to drown himself in the tub, to step into the path of a speeding automobile. And, each time, Ethel saved him.

He couldn't die.

He was in a trap of his own making, held tightly and safely for the rest of his horror-ridden life. By murdering Ethel he had condemned himself to a hell more hideous than any imagined by Dante. No judge could ever have devised so inhuman a punishment. The law at least was gracious and simple. An eye for an eye, said the law. A death for a death. . . .

Death.

Answell thought of it first lying in bed, with the hum soft in his ears, and the monstrous form close and adoring. And the plan was so true, and yet so simple, that he could have cried.

Ethel was not infallible after all. There were acts, once set in motion, that even she could neither touch nor change.

He did need help, of course. Oddly enough, it was Patsy who provided it.

On the next afternoon, Patsy came to call on him. She sat in the living room, furiously ignoring his wasted face, and spoke brightly of events at the office. All his patients were anxious for him to return, though his colleague, Dr. Smith, was taking over his practice as well as possible. They had begun to paint the hall, which was in a terrible mess. That freckle-faced Mrs. Moore had had another attack

"Oh, and yes," Patsy added, "the darndest thing happened to me. I'm on my way to see about it now." She flushed angrily at the memory. "I got a ticket for speeding. Can you imagine that? Me! The slowest, safest driver . . ."

"A ticket?" Answell said.

"Yes, and I have to appear at the police station, and I suppose they'll fine me."

Answell's heart had commenced to pound. He could smell the dankness in the room. Idly he said, "I wouldn't worry too much about it. Perhaps I can go along with you. Character witness or something."

"Oh, *would* you? I really need the moral support."

The dankness stirred suspiciously.

"Be glad to," Answell said. He rose. "I haven't been out for so long. . . ."

THERE was nothing Ethel could do, even though she was, Answell knew, puzzled. She walked beside him when he followed Patsy into the grim, squat station. He felt the foreboding within her at the sight of the police officers, and he could barely manage to keep the triumph out of his eyes.

While Patsy stopped at a grilled window, Answell got a cigarette out of his pocket, made a pretence of not being able to find a match, and strolled casually toward two sergeants leaning against the wall.

"Pardon me," he murmured.

"Yeah?"

"Listen very carefully, and don't raise your voices. I've come to give myself up."

The taller of the two policemen straightened.

"I murdered my wife," Answell said. "I did it deliberately. I was in full possession of my senses. I hated her. . . ." His own voice had risen, and was trembling on the ragged edge of hysteria. "If you knew how I hated her! She was ill.

She needed a drug. I substituted water for it. Listen . . ."

He was aware of startled movements around him. Voices. The second policeman had grabbed his arm.

"I confess," Answell screamed. "I . . ."

He was being hustled away, out of the hall, into a tiny private office nearby.

". . . violent . . ." someone said.

And then Patsy's voice. "What *is* this?"

Answell could see her talking to one of the sergeants. Soothingly the policeman holding his arm said, "Now take it easy, Pop. One thing at a time. What's your name?"

But Answell was paying no attention. He was listening, instead, to Patsy.

"A murderer!" he heard Patsy say. "Dr. Answell? Oh, the poor . . . No, you don't understand. His wife died recently. Heart. Ill for fifteen years. And it broke him up completely. He loved her so much, and tried so hard to save her that he blames himself for what happened. Nervous breakdown . . ."

"We get 'em like that sometimes," the policeman answered. "But maybe an exhumation of the body—"

"Exhumation!" Answell screamed. "Can't you see? It was a perfect crime! An exhumation wouldn't show anything! You've got to believe me! It's my last chance! *I can't die!* But you can kill me! She won't let me kill myself, but you—"

"Can you handle him?" the sergeant asked Patsy.

"I'll try. I have my car. He isn't danderous."

"Then he's all yours, lady. And see that he doesn't come back."

Answell put his face in his hands and sobbed.

TWO men helped Patsy get him into the rear seat of her sedan. They remarked about the tomb-like smell, and one of them swore that something had touched him just before he'd closed the door.

When the car was finally under way, Ethel said, "That hurt me very much, Walter. To think . . . But you weren't yourself. I liked what that young woman said. She understands. You've been brooding too much. I don't know what might have happened to you if I hadn't come back. You need me, Walter. And you must trust in me, dear. Even when you're distraught, I'll be at your side. Think of the years we'll have together. Rest, Walter. And tonight I'll sing to you. You always liked that. I'll sing every night. Oh, they can't destroy a love like ours. Never, Walter. I'll be here always. Every day. Every evening. For years and years and years . . . Shall I sing now?"

Answell closed his eyes as the humming began. . . .

Adventures into

A GHOST GETS ITS REVENGE

THE YOUNG SON OF THE DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND, ROBERT DUDLEY, WAS SENT TO THE TOWER OF LONDON AND HELD, A POLITICAL PRISONER IN MILD CONFINEMENT. WHILE THERE HE MET A GIRL HIS OWN AGE, ANOTHER PRISONER, NAMED ELIZABETH. EVENTUALLY BOTH WERE RELEASED, ROBERT TO MARRY AMY ROBSART IN 1550, ELIZABETH TO BECOME THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND IN 1558.

AS SOON AS ELIZABETH ASCENDED THE THRONE, ROBERT LEFT HIS WIFE AND OFFERED HIS SERVICES TO THE QUEEN. THEY WERE ACCEPTED AND HE BECAME HER FAVORITE.

WHAT AMY FELT CAN BE IMAGINED. SHE WAS NEGLECTED AND LIVED A SECLUDED LIFE AT CUMNOR HALL NEAR OXFORD. AS TIME WENT ON, LORD DUDLEY IS SAID TO HAVE SPREAD THE RUMOUR THAT SHE WAS A VICTIM OF CANCER. THIS WAS TO PREPARE PUBLIC OPINION FOR HER DEATH — AND IT WAS SUDDEN!

ON SEPT. 8TH, 1560, SHE GAVE HER SERVANTS PERMISSION TO ATTEND A COUNTRY FAIR. WHEN THEY RETURNED THEY FOUND HER LIFELESS AT THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS. HER NECK WAS BROKEN!

DUDLEY WAS IMMEDIATELY SUSPECTED OF HAVING SENT ASSASSINS TO KILL HER. IT WAS COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT HE WANTED HER OUT OF THE WAY SO THAT HE COULD MARRY QUEEN ELIZABETH. WHETHER SHE FELL OR WAS THROWN WILL NEVER BE KNOWN. THE VERDICT OF THE INQUEST WAS — ACCIDENTAL DEATH.

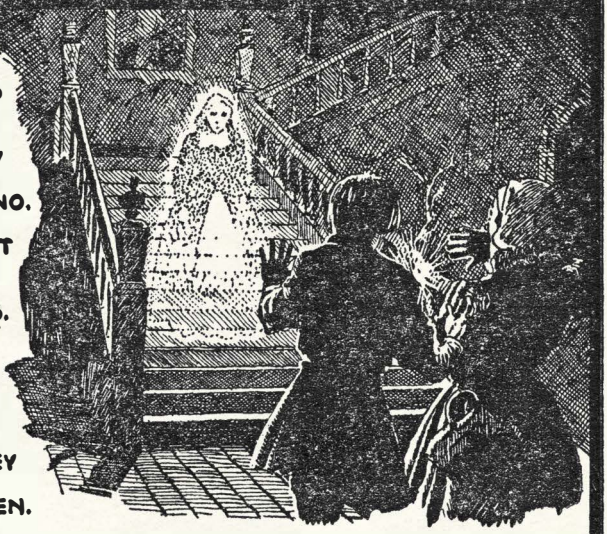
the UNKNOWN

BY— Frederick Blakeslee

AFTER THE STORM OF PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST DUDLEY HAD BLOWN OVER HE WAS MORE ARDENT THAN EVER. HE URGED THE QUEEN TO MARRY HIM BUT SHE WOULDN'T SAY YES AND SHE WOULDN'T SAY NO.

THEN CAME THE REPORT THAT CUMNOR HALL WAS HAUNTED BY THE SPECTRE OF AMY WHO WAS SEEN ON THE FATAL STAIRS. DUDLEY MERELY LAUGHED. BUT AMY'S GHOST WAS TO CAUSE DUDLEY'S DEATH IN THE END.

BESIDES CUMNOR HALL, AMY HAUNTED CORNBURY PARK IN OXFORDSHIRE WHERE DUDLEY USED TO STOP ON HIS WAY TO KENILWORTH — AND THE QUEEN.



IN THE SUMMER OF 1588, DUDLEY, NOW THE EARL OF LEICESTER, STOPPED TO HUNT AT CORNBURY FOR A FEW DAYS. HE WAS ALONE WHEN SUDDENLY HE CAME FACE TO FACE WITH THE APPARITION OF AMY. HE STOPPED, FROZEN TO THE SPOT, WHILE A SPECTRAL VOICE WARNED HIM THAT HE WOULD BE DEAD WITHIN TEN DAYS.

HE RETURNED TO THE HOUSE AND TOLD FRIENDS OF THE WARNING. HE NEVER CONTINUED HIS JOURNEY TO KENILWORTH, FOR HE SUDDENLY WAS TAKEN ILL AND DIED.

THE GHOST OF AMY HAUNTED CUMNOR HALL UNTIL IT WAS DEMOLISHED IN 1810, BUT IT STILL HAUNTS CORNBURY PARK. IT IS NOT A GENTLE GHOST BUT A TERRIFYING ONE. NOT SATISFIED BY WREAKING VENGEANCE ON DUDLEY, IT IS STILL VINDICTIVE, FOR WHOEVER MEETS IT IS DOOMED TO DIE WITHIN TEN DAYS.

14-184

They were both stabbed a half-dozen times — the doctor in the back, the nurse in the throat and belly. . . .

How could Homicide Lieutenant Greene miss finding that double killer? After all, he had fifty witnesses who had seen his man, and fifty descriptions—and fifty blind alleys to explore!

CHAPTER ONE

Too Many Witnesses

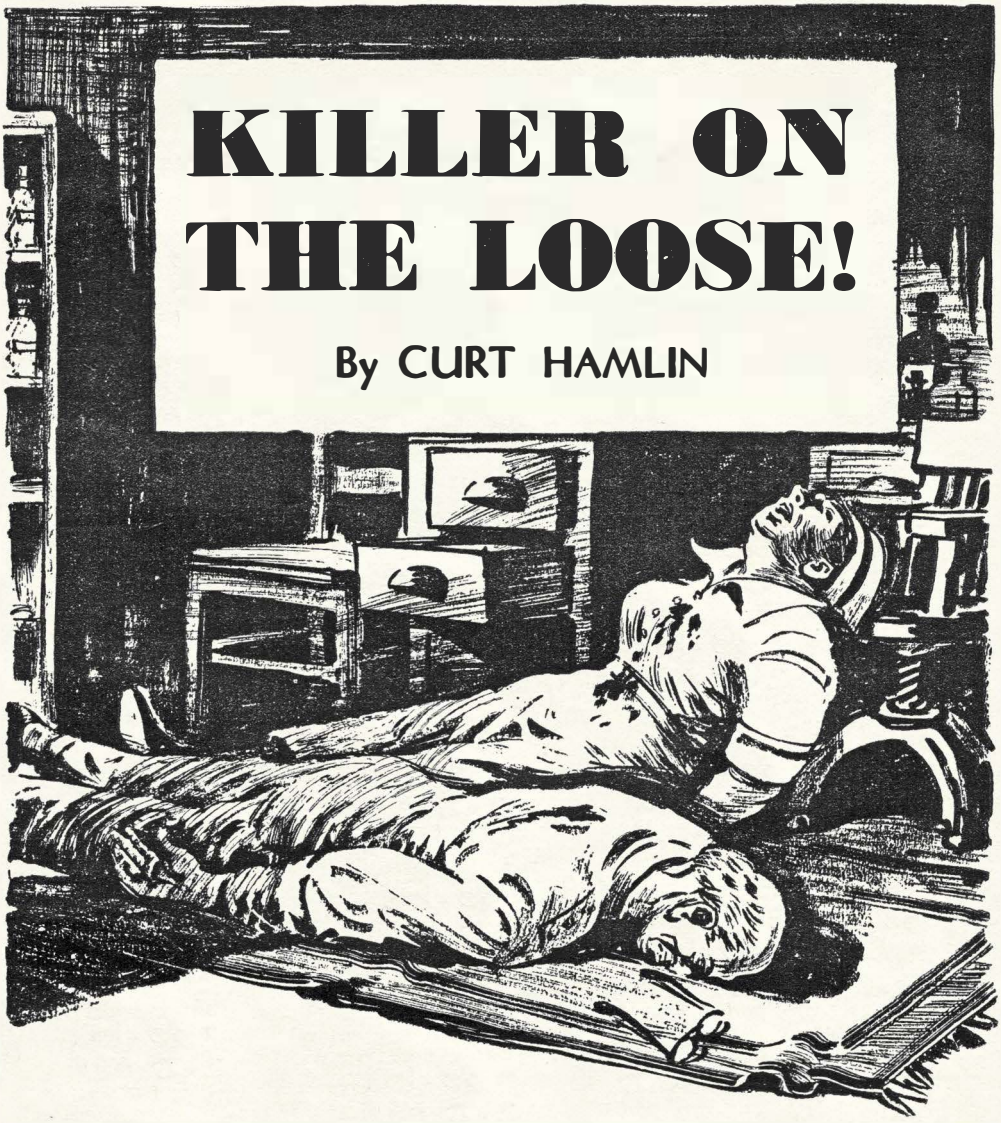
"KUSOCINSKI," Greene said. "She found them."

The commissioner asked if Kusocinski was the cleaning woman.

"Yeah."

"Any witnesses?"

"Too many," Greene said. "A couple hundred people must've noticed him. Maybe more. It's a busy street. The boys talked to about fifty. Only nobody's sure



KILLER ON THE LOOSE!

By CURT HAMLIN

Hard-Boiled Homicide Novelette

what he looked like. Because of the way he was acting."

"Drunk?"

"Or sick," Greene said. "All doubled over, with his face twisted. Two-three times he even stopped to throw up. Probably took something beforehand. Mustard and warm water, maybe." He frowned, squeezing his eyes shut hard, and then blinking them. The lids were sticky. "Anyway, we figure he got the doctor first. Then the nurse. Probably she came in to see what was the matter. Say the doctor yelled and she heard it. Anyway the guy was nervous or he didn't know what to hit. They were both stabbed half a dozen times. The doctor in the back. The nurse in the throat and belly. With an ice pick."

"He left it?" the commissioner asked.

Greene nodded. "On the floor. For all

the good it does us. No prints and not a chance in a million of tracing it." He yawned wearily. His back muscles were acid with ache. He said, "His name was Gooding. The doctor, I mean. Walter Gooding. About five last night. Or a little later. Nobody saw him leave. It came in this morning, just after we cleaned up that Park Terrace thing."

The commissioner sharpened a pencil on the bottom of a desk drawer, began drawing small, precise squares on his blotter pad. He drew twenty before he said, "Fill it in, Sam."

"Burnside," Greene said. It was a waste of time to go all through it, but he was going to have to. He settled himself again. "You know Burnside?"

The commissioner said he did.

"Rooming houses," Greene said. "Cold-water flats. Papa-mama groceries. Beer taverns. The doctor's place is in the middle of the block, between Seventeenth and Eighteenth. The first anybody remembers noticing this guy was down on Twelfth. He walked up from there. It took him quite a time, the way he went at it. When he got out in front he stopped for maybe a minute, looking at the shingle. Like he was trying to make up his mind. Then he went inside."

"At five?"

"As close as we can put it," Greene said. "We got this." He fumbled through his pockets, brought out a white card, propped it on his knees to read from it. "'John Moore. Age: thirty-five. 1717 South Fourth Avenue. No phone.' That part's typed. By the nurse, most likely. We checked the address. It's second-hand clothing store. They never heard of him."

THE commissioner pursed his lips impatiently. "Damn it, Sam, you could have figured that."

"I did," Greene said. "That's why he didn't take it with him. To throw us off. Anyway, here's the rest of it. In ink. The lab boys think it's the doctor's writing. They're making blowups." He read again. "'Severe pain in the epigastric region. Two to three hours after eating. Occasional vomiting. Marked aneuria.' Whatever that means."

"You said this Kusocinski found them?"

"Uh-huh." Greene returned the card to his pocket. "Here's the setup. It's an old house like the rest of them, but better kept up. Gooding moved in there six years ago. Had his office downstairs and lived up. Alone. He was a bachelor."

"No relatives?"

"A nephew," Greene said. "He showed this afternoon. Heard about it over the radio. We had him make the identification. I haven't talked to him yet. Anyway. The nurse took care of the first floor. It isn't much. Waiting room, office and an examination room behind that. And a closet used for a dispensary. The cleaning woman just did the living quarters. Three days a week. She has her own key and when she got there this morning she didn't notice anything wrong. She did her work and then she went looking. Today's Friday and she gets paid on Friday. They were on the floor in the examination room."

The commissioner made more squares, filling them in with heavy, deliberate strokes. "What about the nurse?"

"Cara Horn," Greene said. "A widow. Lived in a boarding house on the east side. Fat and fiftyish. No known kin. Worked hard and had few friends, from all we've been able to find out. We're running a tracer through the registry."

He yawned, took his hat from under the chair, got to his feet. Brushing at the crown idly, he said, "There's a little morphine missing. Between five and ten grains. From Gooding's bag. Nothing else we can tell. No syringes or anything. The boys found an inventory to check against. There was another twenty grains in the dispensary. It's got a lock you

could open with a paper match but it wasn't touched. I've got a drag out. It may turn up something."

"You don't think it was an addict?"

"I don't think anything. Except it was nobody Gooding knew. I guess that's about all."

"Keep me posted."

"Sure."

"And Sam." Greene paused, one hand on the door knob. "Remember what Bertillon used to say. " 'Look for the woman.' "

"This Gooding was past seventy," Greene said. "Besides, Bertillon was a Frenchman."

BACK in his own office Greene hung his hat on the clothes tree behind the door and dropped into his swivel chair, arching his back and stretching his legs out. Wanting sleep. His feet burned and his teeth were furry.

Down along the river the five o'clock whistles set up a shrill, insistent whining.

He spent ten minutes going through the accumulation of papers in his basket. Transcripts of interviews. A reminder he was to appear before the Medical Board the first week of February. The preliminary autopsy report on Gooding. Attached to it was a note in the autopsy surgeon's awkward scrawl. "Sam: This man used to be one of the finest surgeons west of Rochester. Freethy." Which might be important, Greene thought, but probably wasn't.

He ran down the form rapidly. "Walter Donald Gooding. Age: About 70. Male. White American." Further along an item caught his eye. "Needle marks on upper arms indicate drug addiction." He stared at it, tapping a thumb nail absently against his front teeth. Bothered. He'd been inclined to rule out the dope angle and now it was back again.

Knuckles rattled on the door and Joe Norton came in, not waiting for an answer, swinging his hat and stomping his feet to get the last of the snow off. He said the nephew was outside, whenever Greene wanted to see him, and there was something else. Unbuttoning his coat as he talked. He was a fat, untidy little man with a suety face and the sick reek of cheap cigars about him. Honest, but not too bright.

A lot of them weren't, Greene thought. The honest ones. He waited.

"About this Gooding," said Norton. "I been checking. It's screwy. Up to six years ago he was a big shot. Had a set of offices in the Medical Arts Building; half a floor, damn near. Owned a piece of a private hospital. Specialized in operating. Brain surgery and that kind of stuff. Then all of a sudden he quits cold and sets himself up like some cheap lock expert. And no more operating. Just aches and sprains and most of it charity the way his books read. What you think?"

Greene said there was no telling. He said it was something for Norton to follow up. "Who's handling the drag?"

"Narcotics. And the Treasury boys are helping out. We're doing the weeding. Mostly blanks but there's a few you could see. And the nephew."

Greene told him to send along the nephew. While he was waiting he untied his shoes and loosened the laces. To let the air in.

The nephew carried an umbrella. He was thirtyish, but he looked older because he was thin, with a stoop, and he wore a dark suit with a black silk armband. His voice was a raspy monotone. He said he was Charles Hunt, and the deceased's nephew, and he lived in the Danmoore Hotel. He insisted that the police leave no stone unturned and he, personally, thought it was the work of some vicious dope fiend. And he was terribly wrought up about the whole thing.

But not enough, Greene thought, for

it to show very much. He was irritated.

"You know he used it?"

Hunt's eyebrows curled. "I beg your pardon?"

"Dope," Greene said. "He was an addict. They found needle scars all over his arms. Where were you at five o'clock yesterday?"

HUNT fumbled with the knob of the umbrella. He couldn't be sure. He said, after frowning over it for a few moments, "I went to a theater. That newsreel place. The usual things. Sporting events and that. I didn't pay much attention. And a travelogue about Italy." He told about the travelogue, in detail. "Afterwards I had dinner and went for a walk. I'm a great walker." He looked up suddenly, his eyes wide and distressed. "I can't see, really—"

"Routine," Greene said. His sense of irritation was growing. He picked a paper from the desk, staring at it without knowing what it was, dropped it again. "Born here?"

"Oh, no. In Cleveland. I only came west a year ago. This month, in fact. After Mother died. To be near Uncle. We're the last of the line, you know."

Greene said he hadn't.

"Or were," Hunt said. "Now there's only me." He simpered.

"You and he get along all right?"

"Oh, yes. We were very close. We used to play chess together. Sunday nights. Sometimes during the week but almost always on Sundays. Uncle had a beautiful set. An antique. Carved ivory pieces. Chinese, I think, or Indian. He was enormously proud of it."

"You inherit."

Hunt's face went stiff with disapproval. "I couldn't say. We never discussed it. You can consult his attorney. McCann, or some such name. In the Pacific building."

Greene wrote it down. Feeling he was getting nowhere. Trapped in Hunt's treacly unction. He waved a hand in dismissal. "That's all for now. I'll want you back later."

Hunt gathered his hat and umbrella, and moved toward the door. He hesitated. "If you could arrange for me to get into the house, there are some things—"

"Not today," Greene said. "Tomorrow, maybe. We're not through in there yet. It all takes time." He watched the nephew's stooped shoulders disappear, waited for the door to close, flipped a button on the intercom box. "Send two men out to the Gooding place and keep them there. Nobody's to get in without my say-so."

Going upstairs to the lineup room, he wondered what he was trying to accomplish.

CHAPTER TWO

Lineup

THE amplifier said, "Louie Williams, also known as Leo Webster. Known user. Federal conviction, San Francisco, 1935. Trafficking. Two years. Oregon State Hospital, 1940. Discharged as cured after seven months. Arrested for possession."

He was a small, twitchy man wearing an Army surplus overcoat three sizes too large. The light bothered him. His pupils were dilated and he tried to shield them with his hands.

"Put your arms down."

He obeyed, jerkily.

"Where were you at five o'clock yesterday?"

"Sleeping it off."

Greene said, "Too short." He was sitting at the back of the auditorium with Pete Crosby. "The one we want was bent over. This one would look like a midget. Besides, he's a snow bird."

The amplifier droned in the background. "Who's Walter Gooding?"

"How the hell do I know?"

Greene said, raising his voice, "All right. Next man." He settled back, pulling his neck down into his coat collar. "What time is it?"

"Seven-thirty."

"How many more?"

Crosby wasn't sure. Three. Or maybe four. The amplifier broke in before he had finished.

"Jackson Clay. One previous arrest. Suspected break-and-enter. No indictment. Arrested for possession."

A six-foot Negro, grinning and anxious. The whites of his eyes glistening. "Lord in Heaven," Greene said. He rattled coins impatiently. "Next man."

"Bernie Jacobs. No known record. Arrested for possession."

Jacobs shuffled out slowly. Thin. Medium height. Sallow cheeks drawn taut over angular face bones; shadowed hollows sunk in both cheeks. His eyes were lusterless.

Greene leaned forward to listen.

"Where were you at five o'clock yesterday?"

"I don't remember."

"Ever been arrested before?"

"I don't remember."

"Who's Walter Gooding?"

Jacobs hesitated, tongue working at dry, peeled lips. "I don't remember."

"All right," Greene called. "Keep him. Next man."

It was an elderly Chinese, moving with meticulous, vacant dignity.

The lights went up and Greene sat for a moment, blinking till his eyes adjusted themselves, before he followed Crosby out into the hall. Crosby's face was ashen and he walked doggedly, dragging lead-weary feet. Shoulders lax. Greene told him to take five. "Get some coffee. I'll handle it."

"I'm all right."

"You're dead on your feet. There'll be plenty to do later. It looks like a long night."

He strode off, not waiting for an argument, remembering that Crosby had spent three days on the Park Terrace thing, with six hours sleep at most, and wasn't young. Had stomach trouble and was getting along toward retirement.

His own belly rumbled protestingly, to remind him that he hadn't eaten since breakfast. Maybe, he thought, after he was finished with Jacobs.

He found the door and went in.

IT WAS a ten-by-ten windowless room, uncomfortably warm. Weighted air, breathed too often. There was a pair of wooden chairs, a flimsy-legged table. Jacobs was sitting slumped, chin on chest, arms dangling, staring with dull disinterest at nothing. The guard was leaning against the wall, puffing a cigarette. Greene recognized him as someone he

knew slightly and searched his mind for the name. Kress. On assignment from Narcotics. Massive, with slabby shoulders and thick, undivided eyebrows. A thrusting, box-shaped jaw.

The Narcotics man grinned, nodding toward Jacobs. "Still riding the dream wagon."

"He can sleep afterwards," Greene said. He sat down opposite the addict, resting his elbows on the table. "Wake up."

Faded eyes rolled toward him. The pupils were almost invisible.

"Where you from?"

"I don't remember."

"Where'd you get the stuff?"

"I don't remember."

"What'd you do yesterday?"

"I don't remember."

Greene reached across the table and slapped twice. Full-handed, putting his arm behind it. Jacob's head rolled loosely under the impact. He whimpered a little.

"Where are you now?"

"I don't know. Don't remember."

From where he was leaning Kress said, "We could try him in the sweat room. That helps."

Greene didn't think it would. Not with this one. "Dead enough to wear pins in his scalp," he said. "What was he carrying?"

Kress brought out a manila envelope and Greene ripped it open, dumping the contents on the table. Small change. A quarter, a dime, three pennies. A worn leather wallet holding a folded envelope and a crumpled dollar bill. No cards or identification. He unfolded the envelope. It was postmarked San Francisco a week back, and addressed to Bernie Jacobs, General Delivery, Portland. A woman's handwriting. The letter was missing.

"Your name Bernie Jacobs?"

"I don't remember."

"Who do you know in San Francisco?"

"Nobody. I can't—I don't remember."

"Who wrote you the letter?"

"I don't remember."

Greene sighed, pushing himself heavily to his feet. To Kress he said, "Twelve hours away from it and he'll remember what Moses looked like. Put him up for the night and contact the San Francisco department. See if you can raise the family." He'd turned his back and even with Kress' yell to warn him he didn't have time to move before the chair smashed down on his shoulders, driving him almost to his knees and forward till he met the wall with stunning force, bruising his forehead. In a half crouch, still dazed, he looked back. Kress was straining to hold Jacobs, locked in a silent, twisting dance until suddenly the Narcotics man screamed with outraged pain and his fist rose and fell, pounding savagely, hammering the little addict's face in merciless fury. Jacobs reeled, still clinging, and stumbled, bringing Kress down with him. They rolled over twice, upsetting the table, before Kress hooked his fingers in Jacobs' thin hair and began to jolt the smaller man's head repeatedly against the concrete.

Greene shouted an order, struggling to his feet, telling Kress to stop it. He managed to get one arm under the big man's jaw, pulling up and back until Kress gave way with a grunt and rolled free.

"You damned fool, you might have killed him."

"He bit me." Kress' mouth twisted in a snarl of sullen fury. "The dirty little son bit me." His left wrist was torn and dripping. He held it stiffly, away from his body, holding the thumb of his other hand against the vein to slow the bleeding. "I ought to kick his lousy teeth out."

"Shut up." Greene knelt. Jacobs' face was puffy and discolored and blood ran thinly from his mouth. His breathing was noisy and irregular. Greene turned him with gentle care, examined the back of

his head. The scalp oozed. The bone beneath it was pulpy to the touch. Mashed. Greene probed gingerly, worry cramping into his chest, and stood up. He used a handkerchief to dry his fingers. "Get him to Emergency. On a stretcher. Don't try to handle it by yourself. I want a doctor to see him right away."

"The dirty punk."

Greene's glance went to Kress' mangled wrist. "Get that taken care of and then report yourself off duty. You can spend the time deciding what you're going to tell the Inquiry Board."

Before going downstairs he stopped at the lavatory to wash his hands. Soaping them again and again. Wondering what it was that had set Jacobs off. That business about the family, he thought, probably.

His head ached, and his shoulders.

HE WAS no longer hungry but he went out anyway, to a Chinese restaurant across the street, and ordered a roast pork sandwich. With black coffee. Eating was an effort. He was depressed about Jacobs. About the way the case was going. There was only one certainty. Gooding hadn't known the man who killed him. A disguise was out. It might fool the nurse but it wouldn't fool a doctor. And no motive unless you liked the drug angle. He didn't. It looked contrived. His mind tugged and hauled wearily. Not a professional. A professional would have known about the syringes.

He was so occupied he left without paying. The fat cashier ran into the street to stop him, calling excitedly in Cantonese.

When he got back to the office he found Norton, jiggling impatiently, pleased because he was onto something and eager to tell it. "The operation," Norton said. "Why he quit."

Greene said to hold it and lowered himself into the swivel chair. A new stack of papers was piled in his basket. He riffled them rapidly. A man answering John Moore's description had boarded a train for San Francisco. Another had held up an east side tavern. There was a supplement to the autopsy report. Gooding was full of cancer. Hopelessly advanced. Which probably explained the needle marks, Greene thought. To deaden the pain. He finished and leaned back. Only momentarily. The racking throb of his bruised muscles forced him upright, lips tight set to keep from wincing. He nodded shortly. "Go ahead."

"What happened to your forehead?"

"Nothing."

"You got a lump coming."

"In God's name, get to it!"

Norton reddened unhappily and sat down, dragging a notebook from his coat pocket. He wet a thumb and flipped pages. "A job he did went sour. Gooding. Some kind of brain operation. On a woman named Celia Barker. Just over six years ago. She didn't die but something else happened."

"What?"

Norton said he hadn't been able to find out, exactly. The two other doctors who'd been on the case were both dead. Anyway, the woman's husband had been wild. Blaming Gooding and threatening to kill him. Once he'd even caught the doctor on the street and knocked him down. There'd been an arrest but Gooding had refused to prosecute. "Ed Barker," Norton said. "That's the husband. Lives way out on the east side." He read laboriously from the notebook, tracing with a forefinger. "Eight-nine-ought-five Northeast Jessup."

Greene wrote it down. He fiddled with the pencil. "After that Gooding moved to Burnside?"

"Yeah. Not right away, though. First he left town for a few months. When he came back he told it around he was through with surgery. Sold out his interest in the hospital. Closed his office and bought the old house. I talked to

some of the medics who worked with him. They say his nerve was busted."

"Because of what happened to the woman?"

"That's the way they tell me. It's the only thing they can figure." Norton shut the notebook. "What you think?"

Greene said it was worth checking and that he'd run out. "On the off chance. Six years is a long time." He swung the chair half around to where he could see the window. Snowflakes fluttered against the dark pane like pale moths. "Have somebody check the nephew's alibi. He claims he was in that newsreel theater when it happened, watching a travelogue. And get in touch with Gooding's lawyer. McCann, in the Pacific Building. Tell him I'll be at his office the first thing in the morning."

"Will do."

"There's more," Greene said. He was up, slipping into his overcoat. "Wire Cleveland for the story on Hunt. Follow up that tracer on the nurse. Find out who her husband was and what killed him. I put a couple of men in Gooding's house. Have one of them go through the files and make up a list of all the male patients." He reached for his hat. Norton was scribbling busily.

"Anything else?"

"Sure," Greene said. "Anything. Any damned thing at all."

CHAPTER THREE

The Locked Room

IN THE business district the streets were gutter high with slush, but across the river the snow was packed and slick, creaking dryly under the wheels of the coupé. Green drove out Fremont slowly, a window lowered to let the chill wind slap away his almost overpowering desire for sleep.

It occurred to him that he might be going at the case the wrong way around. That the nurse might have been the primary victim and Gooding's murder only incidental. A cover-up. Like the sick act and the morphine and the phony name on the clinic card. Even so, the basic problem wasn't changed. The Horn woman hadn't known the murderer either. Or hadn't recognized him.

He turned at Eighty-second.

Jessup wasn't cut through and he had to go on to Columbia, then swing back. Past truck farms and small dairy ranches, because this was bottom land, beyond the city limits and too rich to subdivide. The house, when he found it, was small and white, a frame bungalow crouching in a broad yard that was enclosed by a six-foot woven-wire fence. The shades were drawn but smoke filtered thinly from the chimney and yellow light poked out at the corners of the windows.

He parked and got out, letting himself through the tall gate, and followed a crooked path tramped through the snow. The porch was low and narrow. He rang the bell, kicking his shoes dry as he waited.

He heard movements, creeping and uncertain, and the door opened. Only a few inches, caught by a night chain. A voice asked what he wanted. A man's voice. Querulous, with harsh overtones. Greene extended one hand, badge cupped in the palm. "Lieutenant Greene, Homicide. I want to see Ed Barker."

"Go to hell."

"I can do it the hard way," Greene said. "I can get a warrant. I can have the sheriff pick you up and bring you in. It'd take time but I've got plenty." He put the badge away. "Or you can talk now."

"About what?"

"If you're Ed Barker, you know," Greene said. "If you're not, I'll wait. Or send somebody."

The chain rattled. The man swung the door open, standing back so that Greene

could pass. A tall man with white hair and a ravaged face. Thin and stooped. He was wearing a stained undershirt and work pants, bony feet thrust into worn slippers. "About what?" His eyes were bitter and suspicious.

"Gooding."

"I didn't do it."

"You wouldn't admit it anyway." Greene walked further into the room. It was grubby and the furniture was cheap. A sagging davenport. A floor lamp with a torn shade. A rocker. Everything smelled of dust. He took off his hat, ran fingers through thinning hair. "Where were you yesterday?"

"Here."

"All day?"

"I said so, didn't I?"

"I don't have to believe that," Greene said. "Not unless I want to. Or you can prove it. Was anybody with you?"

BARKER hesitated, tugging nervously at his slack, corded throat. After a moment he said, "Celia."

"Your wife?"

"What difference does it make? I told you I didn't do it."

Greene said, "They all do. You'd be surprised." His gaze wandered absently, missing nothing. An arch, leading to a kitchen. A hall. "Where is she?"

"You go to hell."

"Later," Greene said. "After I talk to her."

"No."

"You could try to stop me," Greene said. "You wouldn't, but you could try. If you're fool enough." He put his hat back on. Expecting something. Because of Barker's eyes. Frightened and malignant. Hating me, Greene thought. He moved toward the hall. "Where is she?"

The clatter of slippers warned him and he spun, catching a fist in the kidneys and another in the chest, and swung his left in a wide hook. The knuckles bit into bone. Barker reeled, losing a slipper, and came again. In a crouch. Spittle was white at the corners of his mouth. "Get out."

"You're big enough," Greene said, "but not smart enough." He feinted with his left, twice, jabbed suddenly, rocking Barker's head back, drove his right from the hip. Low, putting his shoulder behind it. The tall man doubled with a grunt, stumbled to the davenport, clutching his belly. He sat moaning, eyes wet with agony.

"You want more."

"No."

"Any time. Just tell me."

"Go to hell!"

"Probably," Greene said. "But later. Like I told you." He sucked a bruised knuckle. Disliking himself. Remembering Kress. He moved into the hall.

There were four doors. He opened them as he went. A closet. A bathroom. A bedroom. All empty. The fourth door was locked, the key on the outside. He unlocked it and looked in. The light was on. A nursery littered with toys. Dolls and woolly animals and picture books. A child dressed in a bathrobe was playing in the far corner. Squatted on its haunches, back toward him. It turned suddenly, smiling, an idiot's vacant, drooling smile, and he realized that it wasn't a child but a woman. A small, delicately formed woman with cropped golden hair and beautiful features. Beautiful but vacuous. Before he could move she scuttled across to him; chuckling delightedly, scrambling on hands and knees, and grabbed him about the legs. Pressing her body against them. He tried to push her away but she clung, laughing up into his face and jerking her head in obscene rhythm. Loathing swept over him and he kicked out with frantic effort, his foot driving into her ribs. She tipped over backwards and lay sprawled there, while sobs forced wetly from her flaccid lips.

He slammed the door and relocked it.

His mouth was dry. He was trembling.

When he returned to the living room, Barker was still on the davenport. Greene said, "I saw her." Flatly. Knowing it was useless. "Sorry."

"Get out."

"It's your own fault," Greene said. "You should have told me."

"It wouldn't have made any difference."

"Probably not."

"You wanted to see her. Everybody wants to see her." Barker's eyes stared at nothing with hypnotic fixity. "It's their dirty rotten minds."

Greene waited.

"It was only a headache," Barker said. "It wouldn't go away. We'd been married a year. He said it was a tumor. He said if he didn't operate, she'd die." His face hardened. "I wish she had."

"Where were you yesterday?"

"Get out."

"For now," Greene said. "I'll probably be back. Not that I want to." He settled his hat, began buttoning his coat. "Because you can't prove anything."

"Get out."

"Sure." He opened the door. He said, "I might want you to come down for a while. Better find someone to look after her." He saw the stricken fear in Barker's eyes and went out quickly, shutting the door and hurrying to the car. He drove back with the siren open, going too fast.

It was just short of midnight when he reached his office. There were notes on his desk. One from Norton, confirming his appointment with McCann. The other was a copy of a death certificate. George Howard Horn. The nurse's husband. It was dated February, 1941. He read with drugged eyes. "Cause of death: Hypostatic pneumonia and complications following gastro-enterostomy." The certifying physician was Walter B. Gooding.

For what it mattered, Greene thought. He loosened his laces, undid his collar, raised his feet to the desk. Shifting about, favoring his bruised shoulders, until he was comfortable. The best bet was Barker. No alibi. But there was still the question of recognition. Gooding would have known Barker. Unless he'd changed. There was always a chance. . . .

He had just drifted off when the phone rang. The Emergency Hospital. Jacobs' skull was badly fractured. He had one chance in five of pulling through.

McCANN'S office was on the ninth floor and when Greene got there, shortly after eight, the lawyer was waiting. An elderly man with a bowed, arthritic back and careful eyes. Greene said that it was about Gooding, and McCann said of course, leading the way through the reception room to his private office.

"Please sit down, Lieutenant."

Greene sat, balancing his hat on his knees. "You know him well?"

"I used to. I haven't seen him for six years."

"Why not?"

McCann smiled dryly. "I rather imagine you know the answer to that. Or think you do."

"The Barker business?"

McCann nodded, studying his hands. After a moment he said, "Walter Gooding was a remarkable surgeon. Almost too good. And his belief in his own ability was enormous. To the point where it affected his thinking. He recommended surgery for everything."

"When in doubt, cut it out?"

"Something like that," McCann said. He leaned back in his chair, thinking. "At any rate they brought this young woman to him. She had a brain tumor. A large one. Unless it was removed she would die within a few months. Walter removed it. The results were . . . unfortunate."

Another pause. Greene waited, remembering the woman in the littered nursery. Uneasiness crawled up his spine.

"It could have happened to anyone,"

McCann went on. "A brain operation is an uncertain thing. If the woman had died Walter would have been unaffected. Momentarily upset, perhaps, but basically undisturbed. As it was, she didn't die. And he blamed himself. For creating a monster. An idiot mind in a healthy, beautiful body." The lawyer cleared his throat, leaned over his waste basket, sat back again. "It broke his nerve."

"He gave up operating?"

"Yes. He took a trip. South. When he came back he sold his interests in various enterprises, closed his office, bought that house on Burnside. I handled the details for him. I haven't seen or heard from him since. He avoided every one he knew, even the members of his own profession."

"He had cancer," Greene said. "Kept himself going with drugs. I don't suppose he much minded dying." He fiddled with the brim of his hat. "Any will?"

McCANN said there was, and left the room. A safe door clanged open. He returned, carrying a bundle of papers held together by a broad rubber band. Sitting down, he drew a pair of pince nez from his breast pocket, balanced them on the thin bridge of his nose. "The one I have is dated 1930."

"There's a later one?"

"I doubt it. I have no way of knowing, of course." McCann had removed the rubber band and was leafing through the papers. He chose one and spread it open before him. "Short and to the point. Everything is left to his sister, Janet Gooding Hunt. In the event she predeceased him, the sole heir is her son."

"Charles."

"Yes. He called me yesterday."

"About the will?"

"No." The dry smile returned to McCann's lips. "As a matter of fact, he wanted two things. The first was that I exert whatever pressure possible to insure that the police discover his uncle's murderer. The second was that I arrange matters so that he can secure access to the house."

"He mentioned that," Greene said. "I'll fix it up. Soon." He put on his hat and pushed himself erect. "You know him?"

"No. I've heard Walter speak of him, of course."

"Uh-huh." Greene drifted toward the door. "How much did Gooding leave?"

"Offhand, three hundred thousand. It could be a little more or a lot less."

"Less, probably. He did a lot of charity work these last few years."

"You may be right. If there's anything else—"

"There may be," Greene said. "Later. I'll let you know." He paused, kicking at the carpet with the tip of one shoe. "One thing. About the house. You can tell Hunt he can get in tonight. Around nine. We ought to be through by that time."

Downstairs in the lobby, he entered a phone booth and called headquarters. He

left word with the central board to contact Norton.

CHAPTER FOUR

Alibi

NORTON said it was ten till and Greene said Hunt would probably be a little early. "Early and anxious," he said. They were sitting together on the bench in Gooding's reception room. Resting. Legs stretched long.

"What you think he wants?"

"To move in, maybe. Why pay hotel rent when you own a house? He isn't the kind to spend two bucks if he can save one."

"You going to let him?"

Greene said it all depended. "How things turn out. I might."

"I checked the theater. That travelogue started at four fifty-three. They change the bills every Monday and Thursday."

Greene didn't think it was important. He asked what had come in on the Horn woman.

"She had a son," Norton said. "In the Navy. Went down on a destroyer in the South Pacific. Listed as missing and presumed dead. She went to work for Gooding in '40. Stayed with him when he closed his office and moved here." He rubbed fretfully at the left side of his chest. "Damn."

"Now what?"

"Got a pain."

"Save it."

Norton asked how the hell he was supposed to save it. Getting worked up and feeling sorry for himself. Or pretending to. He said it was his heart and a doctor had told him a guy that was fat shouldn't do heavy work because of the strain on his heart. He was still going on when the front bell jangled suddenly, startling both of them. He heaved up and waddled off obediently to answer it.

Hunt was still carrying the umbrella. Holding it just above the middle, the knob level with his chin. When he saw Greene he stopped, abruptly and with surprise, and gave a jerky bow. "Mr. McCann gave me to understand that you would be through by this time."

Greene said they were, almost. Shortly. His irritation was returning. He got to his feet. "Enough so you can come in," he said. "I guess you know your way around."

"Only the second floor."

Greene cocked an eyebrow.

"I've never been in this part. I often asked Uncle to show me where he worked, but he wouldn't. He simply wouldn't. He was very sensitive about it."

Greene said there was probably a reason. He looked up. Norton grinned at him from the doorway. The fat detective held up one arm, wrist loose, and flopped his hand limply. "Very probably," Greene said. He brought his eyes back to Hunt's sallow, prissy face. "I guess you'd like to look around. I'll show you."

He led the way. From the reception room to the office, then into the examination room. Saying, as he opened the door, "This is where they were. Where you see those chalk outlines."

"Horrible."

"It wasn't very good."

"I demand that you discover the fiend who did it. I absolutely demand."

"That's a help," Greene said. "It'll make us work harder." He closed the door, moved slowly back through the rooms to the front hall, paused at the foot of the stairs, one hand on the banister. "You know the part where he lived pretty well?"

"Certainly. I've been there many times."

"If anything is missing you could probably tell us?"

Hunt frowned, nibbling thoughtfully at his thin lower lip. After a moment he

shook his head. "Anything large, perhaps. Of course, there are many small things . . ." His voice died away. He ended the sentence with a shrug.

"We can always try," Greene said. They climbed the narrow, dark stairway. Norton brought up the rear, panting audibly. "On the off chance," Greene said. At the top he reached a long arm around the corner, switched on the light.

THE hall was rectangular. Carpetless and bare of furnishings except for a small wicker table holding a fern in a brass pot. Five doors led from it. One at each end, three opposite. All were closed. Greene and Hunt moved forward together. A moan stopped them. A low, gasping moan of concentrated agony. They looked back to see Norton teetering on the top step. Bent over, hands clutching at his chest. His tongue showed thick between locked teeth and his face was purple. He swayed and collapsed before they could reach him, lying contorted and groaning as Greene bent and yanked open his collar. Hunt watched with jittery interest. "What—"

"Heart," Greene snapped. "There's a bottle of whiskey in your uncle's bedroom. Get it."

"I don't think you should—"

"For God's sake, don't just stand there! Get it. The bedroom. Top shelf of the closet."

The hesitation left Hunt and he darted across the hall and flung open the second door from the left, fumbled wildly for the switch. Light blazed up with blinding brilliance, showing chairs, a table, lamps, a cabinet radio. It was clearly a living room. He spun with a snarl, saw Greene grinning at him, saw Norton lumbering clumsily to his feet. A scream ripped from his lips and he charged forward, swinging his umbrella.

He fought like a maniac. Norton finally had to shoot him in the left leg. Carefully. Through the fleshy part above the knee....

"I looked up that word," Greene said. "Aneuria. The old doc had it right. It means failure of nervous energy. That's what happened to him. His nerve failed." He sat down in the chair in the commissioner's office, put his hat on the floor. "We worked on him all night. He split like a melon."

The commissioner had stripped the cel-

lophane from a cigar. He lit it, leaned back to listen.

"He was only telling one lie," Greene said, "but it was a whopper. He was born in Cleveland and he lived there all his life."

"Gooding never saw him?"

"Once. When Hunt was a kid. Twenty-five or six years ago. Anyway, after his mother died he moved out here. Last January. But he didn't go near the old man. Probably he was already figuring on the murder. He won't admit it but my guess is he was. So last Thursday morning he went and saw that newsreel show. And just before five, he went again. Only this time he didn't stay. He ducked out a side exit and took a bus up to Twelfth and Burnside. That's where he began his sick act. It was a pretty good trick. Gave us too many witnesses."

"Not much of an alibi," said the commissioner.

"HE DIDN'T need much. He was depending on us believing that he and the old guy were pally-pally. That way we couldn't suspect him."

"What's the rest of it?"

"About the way we figured. He gave

Gooding a lot of phony symptoms. The old man took him into the examination room to look him over and Hunt fed him the ice pick. Then he killed the woman. He was going to, anyway, because she might recognize him. Besides, if Gooding's nephew had been visiting him the doc would have mentioned it to her. She made it easy by coming in to see what was the matter."

"And then he stole the morphine to make it look like an addict?"

"Yeah. Only he made a mistake. He didn't take enough and he didn't bother the syringes. An addict who wants it badly enough to kill for it wants it right now. He doesn't wait till he gets home."

The commissioner nodded wisely, sucking his cigar. "Then what?"

"Then he locked the door and looked the place over. So he'd know the lay of the land. That was important. He spent a couple of hours upstairs, memorizing the rooms and everything in them. That's how he knew about the chess set. And he went through the office files to find out what he could. Like the name of Gooding's lawyer. He didn't leave until he figured he had things taped. After ten o'clock. Nobody noticed him. It was close to a perfect setup." Greene reached for his hat, gathered himself to rise. "He'd have got away with it if he hadn't lost his nerve. The way Norton threw that phony heart attack got him jittery and when he turned on the light and saw he wasn't in the bedroom he blew his top."

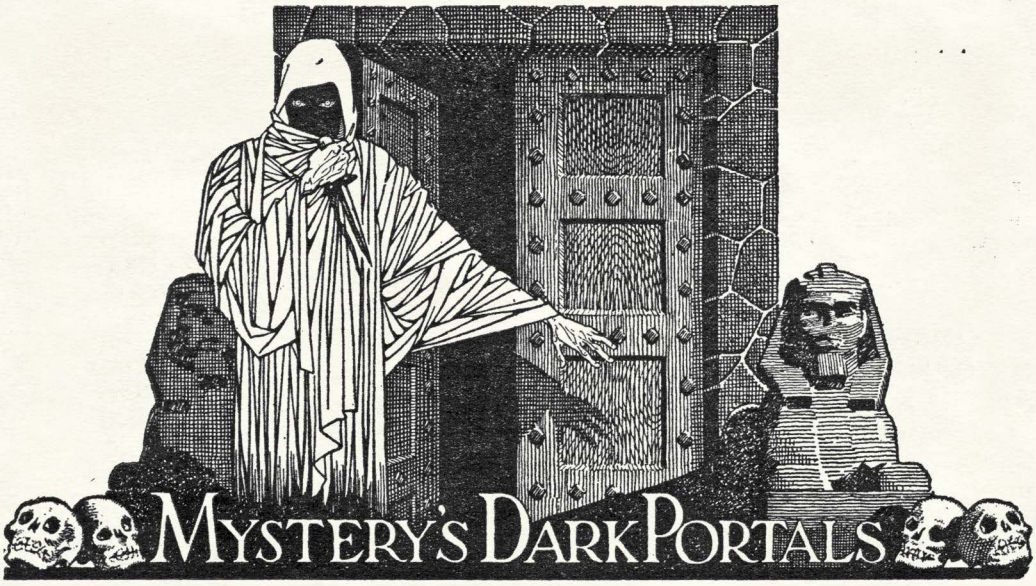
The commissioner frowned and laid the cigar on the edge of the table. He said he supposed it was money. "The motive," he said.

"Yeah. Hunt figured a cinch to inherit. Even if he didn't know about the will. Probably he did. Probably his mother had told him."

Greene was sidling toward the door. The commissioner said, "There's one other thing, Sam. If Hunt was so careful to memorize where the rooms were, how'd he happen to open the wrong door?"

"He didn't," Greene said. He kicked sharply to get the cramp from his right leg. "That's why I'm so tired. Norton and I spent most of the day shifting around all that damned furniture."

THE END



"SUSPENSE," says the dictionary, "is a state of mental uncertainty, as in awaiting a decision or outcome, usually with more or less apprehension or anxiety."

That's a pretty good definition, as far as it goes. The more you consider the subject, however, the more instances you can call to mind where it's not exactly true. What we have in mind is this: Is it necessary to be uncertain of the outcome of some particular situation to be in a state of suspense? Is it possible to be already aware of the solution, and still be kept on the edge of your seat?

For us it is. Probably for you, too. As a kid, how many times did you reread your favorite book, sometimes almost knowing it word for word, and yet each time feeling the same excitement, the same fear, the same exultation as the hero came through?

No, there's more to suspense than just a "state of mental uncertainty." What it requires is this—*a vital interest in the people whose destinies you are following.*

And that's what makes a story. People. Real people, in situations you or we might conceivably find ourselves in. People in love. People in trouble. People faced with troublous decisions. Men at war, faced with the choice between death or cowardice. Men and women who have killed, have tasted blood, and are now being hunted down by the grim agents of the law.

This then is what makes suspense—the presence in a story of people so real that for the moment we have changed places with them, are ourselves faced with *their* decision, and are experiencing every emotion they feel. . . .

It is the alchemy of good writing, this suspense, the creation out of thin air of people so real that we can believe in them and make their troubles our own.

That alchemy, we like to feel, is exhibited everywhere in 15 MYSTERY STORIES. For as you read the opening paragraph of each story, you are immediately transported to a new world, where the sounds of shots are sounds you hear in your very own home; where the fear of the pursued is a fear that clutches at your own heart; where eerie night creatures stalk in *your* back yard; and where the slim, beautiful blondes who throng the pages of 15 MYSTERY STORIES are your very own, to love . . . and, perhaps, to kill. . . .

—*The Editor*

Gripping Crime-Mystery Novel

CHAPTER ONE

Moynahan to the Rescue

PATRICK TIMOTHY MOYNAHAN, five feet ten of red-headed, bulldog Irish, sat outside Mr. Langmuir's chaste sanctum and unsuccessfully tried to rearrange his scrappy features into lines of melancholy contrition. Patrick Timothy Moynahan was fresh from three days in the city's calaboose, a fact that Mr. Langmuir was going to deplore in accents grave, for the law firm of Langmuir & Associates was a law firm with a Harvard accent, and Patrick Timothy Moynahan was an associate in agate type at the very bottom of the list.

From the office came the sound of Mr. Langmuir's voice in its practiced tone of well-bred regret. Moynahan looked at the plain, but eager, receptionist and jerked his thumb disrespectfully at the door of Mr. Langmuir's office.

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN...

Only a mad Irishman like Patrick Timothy Moynahan would throw himself into the frying pan of the grim Dr. Ironwood's high-walled sanatorium—to pull a blonde out of the fire!

"Who's the old goat giving the brushoff to now?" he asked.

The receptionist jumped. She smiled uncertainly. "A girl," she whispered back. "Very lovely . . . in a tailored sort of way," implying that virile men like Moynahan would prefer something more feminine. "Something about a will she wants to break, or . . . something . . ."

She finished in a fluster, for Moynahan was gazing at her with those blazing blue eyes of his, as if about to make an un-

"You won't be needing your doctor, after all," the voice said, and the gun flamed from the doorway. . . .

By LARRY HOLDEN

marital proposal. He leaned slightly toward her, still staring.

"When she comes out"—his whisper was like a reveille bugle—"tell her to wait. Langmuir & Associates are about to lose an associate, unless I miss a hunch."

The office door opened and Langmuir, as dignified as a candidate for senator, bowed out the girl with a finality that the crack of doom itself could not have equalled. She was twice as lovely as the receptionist had implied, despite the droop of her shoulders and the look of dry-eyed

desperation in her lovely cameo face.

Langmuir glanced at Moynahan and said crisply, "Come in, Patrick." He turned his back and walked briskly back into the office.

Moynahan rolled his eyes at the receptionist. "The tumbrils are rolling," he said, and ambled after Langmuir into the office, closing the door behind him for decency's sake. It would not remain closed long. This was going to be short and sweet. Brushoff.

It *was* short and sweet.

Langmuir read coldly from a newspaper clipping.

"Patrick Timothy Moynahan's belligerent tactics in the courtroom earned him a stern scolding from Judge J. J. Quinn and a sentence of three days in all for contempt of court. The jury, however, awarded Moynahan's client the decision, which may or may not prove that Moynahan is crazy like a fox."

Langmuir crumpled the clipping and dropped it into the waste basket as if it were contaminated. "Mr. Moynahan," he said, "it is unnecessary to tell you that your association with this firm is terminated."

Moynahan was already edging toward the door. "Thanks, pal," he said. Then hastily, "I mean, gosh that's a shame. Mind if I take my diploma outa my office?"

"Please do!" said Mr. Langmuir frigidly.

MOYNAHAN raced into the cubicle that passed as an office among the Langmuir galley slaves, grabbed his black-framed lawyer's diploma from the wall over his darts target (the map of Hoboken), and raced out into the reception room. The girl was standing there, listening disconsolately to the receptionist's index of platitudes.

Moynahan grabbed her by the hand, said, "Sweetheart, you've got yourself a qualified attorney-at-law," and pulled her out of the suite after him.

He pulled her over to the bank of elevators, jabbed at the button and said chattily, buttering her with the famous Moynahan grin, "First we'll go out and grab ourselves a cup of java and a doughnut, then you can spill it in my lap. I just got out of pokey, and I ain't seen a jelly doughnut for three days. What's your name, honeybun?"

She stammered, "E-Enid."

"Oklahoma. Great! Wonderful state. You got nothing to worry about. Do you like jelly doughnuts? Sure you do. Nothing like 'em. Damn jails around here give you oatmeal. Ugh! Here's the elevator. In you go!"

Enid Palmer never did quite recover. An Automat cup of coffee and jelly doughnut were thrust upon her, she was herded to a street-side table, and she was treated to a full fifteen minutes of the famous Moynahan diatribes on the dismal state of the courts in general.

"And now, light of my life," he beamed on her, when she was finally and completely bewildered, "what was the corpse you brought into Langmuir to embalm? What's your problem?"

She said, as if hypnotized, "My mother worked for a millionaire named Buell, and while she was working for him she was stricken with polio. He was sending her to specialists, and promised her fifty thousand dollars in his will. He meant it, too. He was leaving half his money for polio research. He had a heart condition and died suddenly. And now," she started to cry, "the will can't be found!"

"Whattaya mean it can't be found?" Moynahan shouted as if he were sounding a charge. "He had a lawyer, didn't he?"

"Y-y-y-yes, but the l-l-lawyer went crazy, and now they can't find Mr. Buell's will. That means he died intestate. . . ."

"I know what it means," snarled Moynahan. "If he died intestate, the natural

heirs get the works and mama and the polio fund get nothing. The dirty crooks. Did this shyster really go nuts, or is that just a figure of speech. like Langmuir?"

"Oh, he really went crazy," said Enid earnestly. "He's in an asylum. And there's just one heir, his son—Vince. I tried talking to Vince, to tell him about Mother, but—"

"I know, I know," Moynahan interrupted savagely. "A stinker, a callous son of the rich, a—"

"He is not a callous son of the . . ." the girl stopped and flushed. "He was drunk, that's all. They were plying him with liquor, and he was gambling, and—"

Moynahan gave her a shrewd, clinical glance. "You're in love with the punk?" he suggested slily.

The girl sat up very straight. "That's nonsense!" she said icily. "When he's gambling, he's not himself and—"

"Where was he gambling?"

"At Lace Malone's Casino."

"Ah, Lace Malone," nodded Moynahan. "A thief if there ever was one. And the gambling fever is a vicious one. But let's forget the philosophy for the while. What's the name of this lawyer that popped his buttons, where's he from, where is he now, and so forth?"

The girl looked at him and sagged helplessly. "His name is Hapgood, and he's from the firm of Brush and Hapgood, but nobody seems to know *where* he is, except that he's in an asylum, and all his papers and files have disappeared with him."

"What was that first name again?" asked Moynahan, bending toward her over a half-gnawed jelly doughnut.

"Brush."

"Brush . . . Brush . . . Ah, yes, another Harvard accent like Langmuir. No wonder the poor fella blew his whistle. I'll tell you what, my pet. I'll take the case on the ten percent contingent, and bust it wide open, or somebody, inside a week, ten days at the outside. Okay?"

"It's a deal!" She looked surprised, then grinned and held out her hand across the table. "It's a deal, Moynahan," she repeated.

MR. BRUSH, of Brush & Hapgood, had the wiry, resilient look of a banker about to refuse a loan. He sat behind a Chippendale desk that came up to his chin and peered at Moynahan over his skinny, folded hands.

"As long as you're an attorney," he said unhappily, "I'll tell you. Hapgood is stark, staring mad, but, thank Heavens, he's been committed."

"To an asylum?"

"Where else?"

"What asylum?"

Brush bit his lip. "I would give my right arm," he muttered, "to know that. The mess—"

"Who committed him?"

"As far as I can discover, he committed himself. They do, you know, the smart ones, and Hapgood was smart. He must have felt himself slipping. The strain . . ." Brush waved a bony hand, indicating the strain of a prosperous law practice.

"I know," sighed Moynahan. "Terrible. Terrible. What was the name of that asylum again?"

Brush gave him a hard glance. "I don't *know* the name of the asylum," he said angrily. "But I said I would give my right arm *to* know it!"

Moynahan looked at Brush's lean right arm. "No dice," he said, and left.

* * *

His next stop was Lace Malone's Casino. Downstairs was a glass-brick bar and a plastic dining room, but if you knew your way around, the back stairs led to the roulette wheels, the dice tables and the chuck-a-luck. The back stairs were curtained in black velvet and were guarded by a gentleman with the jaw of a bulldog

and the shoulders of a wrestler. He barred Moynahan's progress with a thick, timbered arm.

"Are you a member of the club, sir?" he asked politely.

"A life member," said Moynahan airily. "A member emeritus."

"Your card, sir?"

"Me card? Oh, sure, sure, and here it is. . . ." He brought up his knuckly right fist hard on the hinge of that bulldog jaw and followed through with his chunky shoulders and, as the guardian slowly collapsed, he murmured, "And the blessings of the Lord be with you," and trotted quickly up the stairs.

The second floor was exactly what he had expected, though he had never been in a place like it before. It was a white-tie-top-hat layout, everybody speaking in low, cultured tones, even the bouncers, the roulette wheels agleam with polish. But it was still the same old sucker trap as the crummy crap table in the back of Jimmy's Bar on Grove Street, in Lower Jersey City.

Moynahan strolled over to the bar, ordered a drink and threw a bill on the bar. The barman pushed it back with a smile.

"There is no charge for drinks in this room, sir," he said.

MOYNAHAN downed his drink and immediately ordered another. "Just a little drop to pass the time while I wait for a young friend of mine," he said to the barkeep with a grin. "Vince Buell's his name. You might know him."

"Indeed I do, sir, and unless I'm mistaken, there he is at the faro table."

Moynahan turned in time to see a tall blond man with the build of a fullback lurch from the faro layout and lift two cocktails from a huge tray a waiter was passing among the players. Vince was scowling and had the truculent air of a consistent loser as he staggered back to the card table.

Moynahan poked his drink with his forefinger, said to the barkeep, "Mind this for me, me boy," and ambled across the room.

Vince Buell was the only one at the faro table. Moynahan touched him on the arm.

"Now, if I could have a word with you, Mr. Buell," he started.

Buell shook him off and said thickly, "Go away!" He dribbled a handful of blue chips on the table and glowered at the dealer. "Start the play."

Moynahan's eyes blazed dangerously, but he held his temper down. "It's just a word I want with you," he said persuasively. "It concerns the word your poor departed father gave to an unfortunate woman who lays crippled and tormented with the agonies of polio, and all that stands between her and health and happiness is the fifty thousand dollars promised her by—"

Young Buell swung around and glared blearily into Moynahan's scrappy face. "If you don't stop mumbling at m' elbow, damn it," he said thickly, "I'll throw you outa here m'self. Y' bad luck, see? Y're a jinx, see? Now run along b'fore I smack y' one!" He was swaying so badly that he had to hold the table for support, but none the less he reached out and snatched still another drink from the tray of a passing waiter.

The blue of Moynahan's eyes fairly crackled, but again he spoke softly. "I'm appealing," he said lyrically, "to the seed of charity I know lies nurtured in your heart. . . ."

Young Buell's big fist seemed to come out of nowhere and it exploded on the point of Moynahan's bulldog chin. Moynahan had never been hit as hard as that in his life. His heels flew up and he crashed down on his chunky shoulders, skidding along a full ten feet before he fetched up against a huge tub that held a living cocoanut palm tree. He scrambled

furiously to his feet, but before he could take a step there were a half-dozen men between him and young Buell, and with a minimum of noise the boy was pushed and butted across the room and through a waiting doorway.

At Moynahan's elbow, a quiet voice said bitterly, "And if I could afford it, I'd kick him out for good, but he's coming into a million bucks, and I figure to take a chunk of it before he finishes. I hope he didn't hurt you badly, Moynahan."

CHAPTER TWO

Fear House

MOYNAHAN stared at the tall, swarthy man in surprise. "You're Malone, aren't you?" he said. "But how'd you know I was Moynahan and all?"

Malone smiled and patted Moynahan on the shoulder. "You're famous, Moynahan," he said. "You've had your picture in all the papers, and all us Irish think you're the wonder of the Western world. I'd have given my shirt," he grinned delightedly, "to have heard you give that judge the back of your tongue in court there."

"And maybe," Moynahan said drily, "you also heard that *he* gave *me* three days in the caboose."

"Ah, what's three days in the pokey to an Irishman? But tell me, what was your fracas with the Buell lad? He's a vicious sort, to be sure, never happy unless he's got his great lumpy fist in somebody's snoot, but why'd he tee off on you and all?"

"I was trying to put the bee on him for fifty thousand," said Moynahan, watching Malone closely.

Malone laughed heartily and slapped his knee. "Whisht on you!" he gasped. "The great Moynahan begging a touch from a hulking wet-nose the like of that! Get along wid ye." Malone's brogue was getting thicker and thicker.

Moynahan shrugged. "My woes are me own, I suppose," he said. "And if you'll excuse me now—"

"You're me guest from now on, Moynahan me lad. And a joy it is to me to be havin' you."

Moynahan muttered, "Hurray for Erin," and walked out. He couldn't stand professional Irishmen like Malone—though, if the truth were told, Moynahan himself often let his own brogue run away with his tongue if there was a chance of making profit with a jury.

FIFTEEN minutes later, he stepped out of a cab in the suburb of Nutley and for a few minutes stood on the sidewalk, proudly admiring the neat brass sign beside the door of the white house. The sign said, Michael Terrance Moynahan, M.D. That was Moynahan's younger brother by exactly eleven months. None of the Moynahan clan were separated in time by more than a year, and Michael had been just a bit more impatient than the rest.

When they greeted each other, grinning in the doorway, there was no doubt that they were brothers. Michael did not have Moynahan's furious blue eyes, but they were both equally chunky and equally homely. After the initial and noisy shouts of greeting, Moynahan took his brother's arm and led him back to the privacy of the doctor's office.

"Micky," he said seriously, "how could I go about finding which booby hatch a nut might have incarcerated himself in?"

Micky shook his head. "That won't be easy, Paddy," he said. "Asylums keep such things as confidential as possible."

"Hmm . . ." Moynahan rubbed his square jaw, then reached out and tapped his brother's knee. "Tell me this then—if this nut committed himself personally and private, where would he go?"

"We-ll, there are four or five of those."

"But suppose now there was a bit of underhand business about it. Mind you, I'm not saying there is, but just suppose. Where then?"

"The Ironwood Sanatorium," said Micky promptly. "Reputable physicians won't send patients there. There've been rumors of shady deals. But you'd never get in there, Paddy. They've an electrified wire fence ten feet high and armed guards."

"Ah, but yes I am," said Moynahan softly. "And it's you, as a qualified physician, who'll be committing me."

Micky's jaw dropped. "You're nuts!" he shouted.

"Exactly," beamed Moynahan.

* * *

Dr. Ironwood had a Van Dyke beard and wore a pince-nez. His manner was dignified and soothing, compared to the wild and truculent manner of Dr. Michael Terrance Moynahan, who was explaining, in a growl, that he was committing his brother for the good of the family.

"He's not violent and we love him very much," he snarled. "But he's an embarrassment."

Moynahan leaped upon the desk of the sharp-faced, fifty-year-old nurse and gave her a languishing glance. "Say, kid," he whispered, "let's get rid of those two kibitzers over there and have a little fun, just you and me, what say?"

Her thin lips tightened in a grim smile. "Okay," she said ominously. "Later." She gave Dr. Ironwood a significant glance.

Ironwood stroked his beard. "We'll take good care of your brother, Doctor," he murmured. "He'll be happy here, I'm sure." A bulky orderly in a white coat entered the office. "Morrison, here, will conduct you to your room. I'm certain you'll find it satisfactory."

Moynahan kissed the nurse soundly on both cheeks, then meekly permitted himself to be led out of the office.

"I love her very much," he said happily. "She has a lout of a husband with a beard, but we'll get rid of him."

Moynahan's room was light and airy and overlooked a pleasant stretch of lawn that was marred only by the ugly wire fence at its terminus.

"Now listen, Paddy," Micky warned him seriously when the orderly had left them, "Don't go prowling around before you know what you're doing. That orderly wasn't carrying a blackjack to hold down his pants. You don't even know if Hapgood's in this place and—"

"He is," grinned Moynahan. "I saw his name in the registry book when I was whispering sweet nothings into the ear of Juliet down there."

"Please be careful, Paddy. To tell you the truth, I've half a mind to take you out of here right now. I don't like the looks of this place."

Moynahan touched his brother's arm affectionately, and his face turned sober. "I'll be careful, Mick," he promised.

LATER, as he stood in the window and watched his brother's car roll slowly toward the guarded gate, he saw Mick turn and give a final, anxious wave of his arm. Moynahan waved back, then swung away from the window and surveyed his room. There were Maxfield Parrish prints on the walls (unglassed), intended to induce soothing thoughts, but they gave Moynahan the meemees and he went around the room, carefully turning each one to the wall. His taste in art did not lean toward the saccharine. He stood back and admired his handiwork. The effect, on the whole, was better. Then he took out his ballpoint pen and industriously printed something on the back of each.

On one was lettered, "This is a Rembrandt, 'The Watch.'" And on another,

"A Titian, 'Madonna and Child.' " When he finished, he was surrounded by priceless masterpieces—just another little touch, designed to establish him as a certified nut. Then he rang for the orderly, who entered almost immediately, unsmiling.

"I've gotten rid of all your pictures and replaced them with Old Masters of my own," said Moynahan. "I demand a fifty percent reduction in my room rent."

"Anything you say, Cap," yawned the orderly. "That all that's on your mind?"

"Indeed not, my man. I was told that I would be surrounded by beautiful girls. Where are they?"

"Right now they're having their beauty naps, Cap. You'll see 'em later."

"And may I visit them in their—ah"—Moynahan leered—"boudoirs?"

"Sure. Any time, Cap. But just relax for the time being. Okay?"

"Go away," said Moynahan haughtily. "You bore me."

The orderly reached back, fingered his blackjack for a moment, then gave Moynahan a wolfish grin and left. His, "See you later, Cap," had a forboding ring.

Moynahan swore softly. Had Micky let something slip? Did they know he wasn't really cracked? Or was the orderly one of those sadists, who liked nothing better than to beat up a helpless, luckless patient. Moynahan hoped it was the latter, but there was cold comfort in the thought.

As a test, he slipped out of his room and wandered down the corridor. Inside ten steps he knew he was being watched, but no move was made to interrupt his stroll. From some of the rooms came the whimperings of some poor, devil-ridden inmates, and from others came voices raised in ecstacy. At the far end of the east wing was the solarium, usually reserved for the highest-paying patients. Moynahan ambled toward it, happily playing with a yo-yo he had brought along for propaganda purposes.

The hatchet-faced nurse stepped out of a room and gave him a hard glance.

"And just where are you going, little boy?" she asked harshly.

"Down there," he pointed toward the direction from which he had just come.

She visibly relaxed. "That's fine," she said. "Run along now."

"Or maybe," he said slily, "I'll change my mind and go down there." He pointed at the solarium.

Her mouth tightened again. She took his arm with her left hand and dipped her right into a deep pocket. "And maybe," she said flatly, "you'll march straight back to your room."

Moynahan did not have to be told that she had a blackjack in her right hand. He submissively let her march him back to his room. Dr. Ironwood, his hair slightly frantic, came bursting out of the door as they walked up. At the sight of Moynahan, he let out a deep sigh of relief.

"Thank you, Nurse," he said, and took Moynahan's other arm. "I'll take charge of him now."

"He's no trouble, Doctor."

"I said, I'll take charge of him," Ironwood said sharply.

"Very well."

She turned her back and walked stiffly away. The doctor pulled Moynahan into the room and carefully closed the door. He gave Moynahan a wary, searching glance.

"I'm afraid I have some rather bad news for you, Mr. Moynahan," he said. "Your brother has been in an—ah—accident. An automobile accident."

Moynahan's heart leaped and he fought desperately to keep his face dead and blank.

"Brother?" he stammered. "What brother? Somebody had an accident?"

"Your brother had an automobile accident," said Ironwood, watching Moynahan closely. "He's dead, I'm sorry to say. Do you have any other interested rela-

tives? I mean," he added hastily, "someone who will assume the responsibility of keeping you here?"

MOYNAHAN didn't say anything. He didn't dare. His voice, he knew, would betray him. Mickey dead! Cold fury locked in his throat.

"Didn't you hear me?" Ironwood asked impatiently. "Who else knows you're in here?"

Moynahan stared down at his shoetips, gritting his teeth for control of his fury. When he looked up, his face was wooden.

"Please," he said shakily, "can I play with my yo-yo now?"

The doctor gave him a hard, clinical look, then shrugged. "Go right ahead," he snapped. "But you're not permitted outside this room. Do you understand?"

"I don't like you," said Moynahan ominously. "I think you'd better get out of here."

The doctor looked at him once again, then left, apparently still uncertain in his mind about the question of Moynahan's sanity. There was, however, a question.

The moment he was gone, Moynahan covered his face with his hands. He stood there, shaking with mingled grief and rage. Gradually he calmed, but it was the calm of icy anger.

Something had gone wrong, horribly wrong. He stared out the window at the coming dark of night. Moynahan heard the door open and he whirled. The heavy-shouldered orderly stepped into the room and closed the door. There was the hard snick of a snapping lock, and the orderly palmed the key. He dropped it into his pants pocket.

"The Doc don't know if you're nuts or not, Cap," he said. "So that's what we gotta find out." He brought out a short, woven-leather blackjack and slapped it against the palm of his left hand. "You can make it awful easy for yourself," he suggested. "Though I'd just as soon you didn't."

Then, grinning, he advanced slowly toward Moynahan, savouring his anticipation. "Well, how's about it, Cap?" he asked.

Moynahan leaped for the night table and snatched up the little bedside lamp. The orderly laughed. The lamp was made of papier mache and wasn't heavy enough to swat a fly.

"What a comedian!" the orderly grinned. "You must be a great joker, Moynahan, but you shouldn't have tried any of your jokes on the Doc. He's been in the business too long. He thinks maybe you're a snoop, and we don't like snoops. We think the Snake Pit is a bad word."

Laughing again, he prowled closer, watching for the fear to mount in Moynahan's face. Moynahan jerked the cord out of the lamp and flung the lamp into that grinning face as hard as he could. The orderly instinctively threw up his hand to ward it off, and Moynahan came in savagely, swung the doubled length of lamp cord like a whip. It wound itself around the orderly's neck and snapped with a crack like a pistol shot. Moynahan stepped back and jerked hard. The man lurched toward him clawing at his throat, and his face was congested as if a scream of pain had locked on his tongue.

Moynahan hit him on the side of the jaw with a short left and followed with a hard right. The orderly rocked back on his heels and Moynahan stepped in with a jolting right to the heart and brought over a chopping left to the face. The man's nose disappeared in a sudden flood of blood. He whimpered and dropped the blackjack as he covered his face with his arms and tried to scramble back to the door. He flung himself at the doorknob, but it was locked and the key was in his pocket.

Moynahan snatched up the blackjack

from the floor. The man fumbled frantically in his pocket for the key. Moynahan sprang in, swung the blackjack with a full-arm swing, and it thunked sickeningly on the point of the orderly's elbow. The man shrieked and grabbed his arm. He squirmed away from the door and lumbered across the room in blind terror. Moynahan jumped in and brought down the sap on his left shoulder.

"That," he panted, "was for Mick. And here's another one. Don't go away. I've got more."

Both arms useless, the orderly fell to his knees, screaming, pleading, blubbering. Moynahan stood over him and mercilessly lashed him with all the strength in his arm. As the orderly lay prone and helpless on the floor, faintly moaning, sanity seeped back into Moynahan's brain. With a grimace of disgust, both for himself and the blubbering object on the floor, he bent over and gave the orderly the coup de grace with a comparatively gentle rap across the back of the neck.

Breathing heavily, he flung the blackjack across the room. He went down on one knee and rapidly went through the man's pockets. He found the master key, and also a small, flat automatic, which he dropped into his own pocket. As he started for the door, he was surprised to see that night had fallen and the room was quite dark.

CHAPTER THREE

Bedlam

HE SLIPPED cautiously out of the room, his mind leaping ahead and planning The corridor was silent and dim, lighted only by the forty-watt bulb at the head of the stairway. As he tiptoed toward the stairs, Moynahan unlocked every door on his way. He crept silently down the stairs. In the main hall, another orderly was seated at a desk, reading a newspaper. To Moynahan's right was a door, over which burned a small red light. This, he assumed, was the doorway to the basement. Fortunately, it was in the shadows away from the desk.

Moynahan took two slinking steps, then muttered, "The hell with that!" and strode boldly down the hall, half hoping the orderly *would* spot him, but the man never even looked up from his newspaper.

It *was* the cellar door. As he clattered down the stairs, he could hear the rattle of dishes and the voices of the cook and his assistant raised in some dim, petulant quarrel in the kitchen.

To the left of the stairs was a huge furnace, and beyond that in the half light, a work bench. He caught the metallic gleam of the meter board on the far wall. From the work bench he selected a heavy hand axe and a small flashlight.

He stood in front of the meter board, his eyes closed, making sure he had the layout of the halls firmly in his mind. Then his hand tightened on the axe and he chopped savagely at the electric meter. Instantly, every light in the sanatorium and on the grounds went out. Moynahan chopped twice more, just to be sure no one would be able to patch it with a hairpin, then turned and ran for the cellar stairs, spraying the beam of the flashlight before him.

In the main-floor corridor, voices were shouting out of the dark to one another in mingled anger and alarm. Apparently, they could not find a flashlight. Moynahan sprinted lightly down the hall, running his hand along the wall, feeling for the open gap of the stairway to the second floor. The second floor he knew well from his earlier explorations. There was a window at the end of the corridor, and there he turned left into the el that led to the solarium. The door to the solarium was locked, but Moynahan had it open in

a trice with the master key he had taken from the orderly. He snapped on his flash.

A short, scrawny, grey-haired man, with terror in his pale eyes, was sitting on the edge of the bed, clad only in a short, hospital-style nightgown.

Moynahan said, "Hapgood?"

The man's eyes seemed to light with hope and he started up eagerly from the bed, but then the terror flooded back and he sank back and huddled away from Moynahan.

"You have the wrong name, sir," he stammered. "I am an attorney, it is true, but Mr. Hapgood's office is at 891 Broad Street. This is Market Street. I no longer practice law actively, though in my day I was quite famous and very successful. Today I accept only the cases that interest me personally and appeal to my sense of adventure. My name, sir, is Perry Mason."

Moynahan felt a little chill. "Sure," he said soothingly, "and it's a desperate problem I have, Mr. Mason. Later, I'm betting, you'll be calling it 'The Case of the Unwilling Will'. Come along now, or they'll be on us from all sides."

He grasped the old man's skinny arm and hoisted him to his feet. Hapgood hung back and said desperately, "No, no, please no. Anyway, I can't go like this. They've taken my clothes."

"Come now, Mr. Hapgood, you wouldn't be wanting to spend the rest of your life on this nut farm, would you now."

A voice behind them said coldly, "Going some place, Mr. Moynahan?"

MOYNAHAN whirled. Dr. Ironwood stood in the doorway, and the Luger in his hand was a pointing, accusing finger. He also held a flashlight, but he had not turned it on. Moynahan flipped off his own flash and dived for the floor. There was a brief moment of blackness, then Ironwood's beam shot out, jerkily probing the darkness.

Moynahan did not wait to see if the Luger were also probing for him, and with the gun he had taken from the orderly he shot Ironwood twice in the legs, snapping the shots by guesswork just below the round eye of the flash. Ironwood went down with a crash and a deep groan. The flash skittered crazily across the floor, briefly showing the Luger lying a few inches from Ironwood's hand. Moynahan turned on his own flash and snatched up the long-barreled gun. Ignoring Ironwood's groans, he rapidly went through the man's pockets, snatching out a ring of keys. He flipped the end of the doctor's nose with the front sight of the Luger.

"Where's your car, bucky?" he demanded.

Ironwood compressed his lips and turned his head away. Moynahan raked him across the cheekbone, drawing blood.

"The car," he repeated menacingly.

"Just . . . outside . . . my office." Then Ironwood's eyes flared and he spat. "But you'll never get by the gates, Moynahan!"

"Ah now," Moynahan muttered, "I'd not have you lying here worrying yourself about the likes of me," and rapped the doctor across the forehead with the flat of the gun.

The doctor sagged limply, and Moynahan looked at him without pity. He turned to Hapgood. The man was crouched on the floor, in the angle of the far corner, whimpering. Moynahan jerked him to his feet.

"And don't make me carry you, grandpa," he said harshly.

Hapgood scrambled across the room in tow, bleating with terror. The room must have been soundproof, for the moment Moynahan flung open the door a tumult of screaming, shouting, roaring voices rolled over him like massed thunder. There was fear in it, exultation, rage.

Moynahan permitted himself a small, grim smile, remembering all the doors he had unlocked.

To orient himself, he sent a brief beam of light down the hall. In that flickering moment, he saw two nightshirt-clad patients leap on a single orderly, drag him to the floor and dance on him. Another orderly was running madly, his arms wrapped around his bleeding head, pursued by a gleefully shrieking mob of lunatics. It was true, awesome bedlam, a scene out of Edgar Allan Poe.

Holding tightly to Hapgood's arm, Moynahan ran down the hall, keeping as close to the wall as possible. The cries and groans and the sound of blows all around them brought a web of perspiration across Moynahan's forehead. Someone brushed against him, then clutched with a burst of eerie laughter. Moynahan clubbed the arms away and dragged Hapgood straight across the hall toward the wide entrance doors. They were locked, of course, but it took only two shots from the Luger to remedy that.

Ironwood's car, a long-hooded Cadillac, was standing just outside. Moynahan felt the power in it as he let out the clutch. He roared down the driveway and glanced back over his shoulder. Flashlights were flickering in the windows all over the sanatorium now, and an orderly burst from the front door with a stream of madmen after him. Four guards, carrying clubs, came running up the driveway from the main gate. They scattered and yelled angrily as the Cadillac tore past them.

The tall wire gates loomed up in the headlights. Moynahan set his jaw and stamped the accelerator pedal to the floor. There was a rending crash, and the Cadillac lurched and bucked wildly as it went through. Moynahan desperately fought the wheel to keep it on the road. The tires screamed, then settled down to a high whine as the car straightened out. The windshield was a spider web of cracks, and Moynahan breathed a fervent prayer of thanksgiving for safety glass.

It was an hour and a half's drive back to the city, and Moynahan felt increasingly depressed and beat-up as the miles unwound beneath them. Hapgood huddled in the seat, squeezed against the door as far away as he could get. He didn't open his mouth once, but just sat there twisting his bony fingers, frustrating Moynahan's every attempt to extract information about the missing will.

"Okay, bucky," said Moynahan finally. "You may not remember now, but you'll be remembering before I finish with you, crazy or not crazy. You'll be spouting like a fountain. Even the worst of you loonies, I've heard, have spells of sanity."

Feeling utterly exhausted, he drove the car into the parking lot behind his apartment. Just for effect, he waved the Luger at Hapgood.

"Just stay put, grandpa, till I let you out," he told the lawyer.

He plodded around the car to Hapgood's side, but by this time Hapgood had scrambled to the opposite side and sat crouched behind the wheel. Moynahan growled impatiently, ducked his head into the car and reached for him.

The sky fell in, the earth rocked, and a great swirling darkness rolled down and Moynahan was engulfed. He fell backward and lay still as the big car roared off.

IT WAS a full half-hour before Moynahan stirred, rolled over and raised himself dizzily to his hands and knees. He fought back a rising tide of nausea. His head lolled. Slowly, painfully, he pushed himself to his feet and staggered toward the apartment house. The elevator did not run after ten o'clock, and Moynahan practically had to drag himself up the three fights of stairs hand over hand.

When he opened the door of his apart-

ment and switched on the light, he just stood there and stared, uncomprehending. A herd of wild bulls could not have wreaked more havoc in a china shop. The pictures were torn from the walls, ripped apart and smashed on the floor, the sofa and chairs had been slit open with a razor and the down and horsehair scattered. Even the rug had been taken up and now lay piled in a corner among the wreckage of his books and bookcase. His clothes, torn and slashed, lay everywhere, and the very mattress on his bed had been treated as savagely as the sofa.

Moynahan dully prodded a pile of ruined drapes with his toe, then turned and walked out of the apartment. He was too numb for anger. He got his own car from the parking lot and drove out to Mick's place in Nutley. The thought of the empty house, now that Mick was dead, sent a wave of deep sorrow over him, for he and Mick had been very close, yet he also felt a need to surround himself with the things that had surrounded Mick, and perhaps draw some peace and comfort from them.

He parked the car at the curb and was halfway up the walk before the significance of the lights in the living-room windows struck him. He stared, then with a wild yell he ran the remaining distance and pummeled on the door. When Mick opened the door, Moynahan threw his arms around him, hugging him tightly, dancing him around the small foyer, tears streaming down his face. He held Mick off at arm's length.

"Sure now and you're not dead," he babbled happily. "You're alive and not dead at all!"

Mick looked completely bewildered. "Did that place affect your mind?" he asked suspiciously. "Dead! Why should I be dead?"

"Ironwood told me you were."

"He . . . Why should he do a thing like that?"

"Ah, Mick, it's a low, suspicious mind the man has, and a streak of cruelty, too, unless I'm mistaken. But," he grinned, "I gave him something to think about. I turned his own loonies loose on him."

Moynahan told that story, and they were both whooping before he finished.

Then Mick said, "There's a friend of yours here."

"A friend of mine?"

"An Enid Palmer. A very pretty girl."

Moynahan's eyes narrowed and he turned into the living room. The girl jumped up and gave him a tremulous smile.

"Your—your brother was telling me where you were." Her eyes were grateful and more than admiring. "I . . . You're hurt!" Her hand flew to her forehead, trembled.

Moynahan raised his hand to his own forehead and gingerly fingered the lump over his right eye. It was smooth, there was no cut. He fumed as Mick made him sit down and went to get a cold compress for it. He also brought back a bottle of bonded rye.

"A prescription, mind you," he said to Moynahan, pouring half a water tumbler.

"Sure," grinned Moynahan. "Instead of an oxygen tent." He looked at the girl hovering at Mick's elbow. "How'd you know to come here?"

"I went to your apartment first," she said. "You weren't home, and your superintendent said you frequently came here, so I came."

"Ah. And you were at my apartment. You didn't go in, by any chance, did you now?"

"Why no. You didn't answer your bell and—"

"Are you sure you didn't go in?" His voice was sharp.

Her face flushed, and she stepped back, tilting her chin angrily. "Of course I didn't go in. Are you trying to accuse me—"

"Now, now, the pair of you," Mick interrupted mildly. "What's this all about, anyway? What's your grievance, Paddy?"

MOYNAHAN gave the girl a last suspicious glance, then broke into a sunny grin. "Ah, me wits must be scrambled," he said. "How could a bit of a girl like that lift a great, hulking mattress from a bed and rip it apart entirely, to say nothing of a sofa and a rug. I've got a low, skulking kind of mind, being a lawyer and all, and you'll have to forgive me, Enid my love."

"Ripped apart," she repeated. "But who'd do a thing like that?"

"Nobody except maybe crazy Hapgood, but then you can't tell what kind of fun appeals to a crazy's mind, can you?"

He stood up and patted the compress Nick had put on his head. "Well, thank you one and all for your kind hospitality," he said. "But I find I must be getting on my way."

"You're not going any place!" Mick grabbed his arm and tried to force him back into the chair. "Man alive, you look as if you're on the verge of a collapse!"

Moynahan laughed. "Whoever heard of a collapsing Moynahan?" he scoffed. His face turned sober. "I've got to go, Mick. There's a crazy man loose out there and God help the poor innocents in front of his car if he goes amok. It's a job for the police, I know," he said quickly, forestalling Mick's objection, "but if the police get hold of him, Mick, back he'll go in a nut house, and I want a chance to talk to him, which I'd never get if—"

The doorbell rang. It was an ordinary doorbell and it rang in the usual manner, but all three of them stiffened and, as one, their faces swiveled toward the front door. Mick took a step toward it, but Moynahan pushed him aside and strode ahead, saying with a wink, "Ah now, we've got to keep you safe, Doctor. We may be needing your services later."

He dipped his hand into his pocket and wrapped his fingers around the flat little gun he had taken from the orderly in the sanatorium. Then he opened the door and stepped quickly to one side.

It was blond young Vince Buell, disheveled, sick looking. He glanced wanly at Moynahan and mumbled, "I'm looking for Paddy Moynahan. Is he here?"

Moynahan started, "I . . ." then bit it off short. "I'll see," he said and walked into the living room.

He closed the door softly.

"Is there someone around, expecting yourself," he whispered to Mick, "who could stand and look dumb for about ten minutes maybe without having to open his big trap? About the size and age of meself, say."

"There's a young fellow next door, Paddy, but he's a good head and a half taller than you and as wide as the butt end of a boxcar."

"Fine, great," Moynahan beamed. "Even better. Fetch him over as quick as you can and we'll have a bit of fun, on the grim side. Just tell him before he comes in that his name's Moynahan and that he's just to stand and grunt, no matter what's said to him. On with you, now."

Mick trotted out through the back of the house, and Moynahan went back to the foyer.

"Mr. Moynahan'll be right back," he said to young Buell. "Step right in and seat yourself."

CHAPTER FOUR

Trail of Blood

ENID jumped to her feet as Buell walked into the living room. He stopped short in his tracks at the sight of her, and they stood there, not five feet apart, staring at one another with eyes

that seemed to grow larger and larger the longer they stared. There was something lost and hopeless in young Buell's eyes, and he was the first to shift his gaze and look down at his shoe tips. His scowl blackened.

"Who's she on the make for now?" he asked Moynahan with deliberate intent to insult. "It was me a while ago, but who's it this time—Moynahan? She's very choosy. She won't go out with a guy unless he's got a buck in his pocket."

Enid gasped, "Oh!" then turned and walked frigidly out of the room. Young Buell's eyes followed her and even lingered on the door long after she had slammed it behind her.

Moynahan said mildly, "You're a great conversationalist, boy, but some day somebody's going to punctuate it with a poke in the snoot."

Buell did not appear to hear and kept staring at the closed door. His eyes lighted as it opened again, then dulled when Mick walked in, followed by a young red-headed giant with the amiable but stupid face of a St. Bernard.

"This is the young fella that wants to see you, Mr. Moynahan," Mick said.

Young Buell's jaw dropped. He was big, but compared to the redhead, he looked puny. In complete bewilderment, he stammered, "M-Mr. Moynahan?"

The redhead grunted.

Young Buell licked his lips. "I—I'm sorry about what happened tonight, Mr. Moynahan. I was a little drunk and—well, I apologize."

Moynahan said quickly, "You remember what happened tonight? Mr. Moynahan told us all about it."

"Of course I remember, but you don't think I'm proud of it."

"You must have been drunk to pick on a fella the size of Mr. Moynahan here. He must have looked like a midget to you, or maybe you wouldn't have swung on him, now."

"He looked the same as he does now!" said Buell proudly. "And I don't pick fights with men smaller than myself."

"Ah, don't you, now," murmured Moynahan.

Young Buell's face was very pale and he went on in a forced, stilted voice, as if he had rehearsed this speech over and over. "And I'm ashamed of myself about something else, too, Mr. Moynahan. It's about Mrs. Palmer. I just learned that she's in St. Luke's Hospital in an iron lung. I didn't know she had been stricken with polio, and I knew nothing of the fifty thousand dollars my father had promised her. When a man comes into money, especially a man as young as myself, he gets a little cynical about appeals to his sympathy, especially when he finds most of them are fake. I—I . . ." His voice trailed off and, apparently for no reason, his face turned a fiery red.

HE DUG into his pocket, pulled out a slip of paper and thrust it at the redhead. "Here's my check for fifty thousand," he said woodenly. "My father died intestate, and his estate is not settled yet, but my attorney, Mr. Brush, will endorse the check in the morning. You can call him and verify this, if you wish. The check is made out to Mrs. Palmer."

The redhead took the check, read it and burst into a guffaw, as if, to him, such figures couldn't be anything but a joke. Moynahan threw him a furious glance, then said reflectively to young Buell, "Mr. Brush? Now, could that be the Mr. Brush who was partner to Hapgood, the attorney who came all unbuttoned a while ago?"

Buell said shortly, "Yes. But Mr. Brush is quite sane, I assure you."

"No doubt, no doubt. And just when does Mr. Brush expect to have the estate settled?"

"He said it would take time, but that won't affect the check."

"I have no doubt of that either," said Moynahan drily "But if you'll take my advice, young fella, you'll hurry Brush up a bit, or you'll find, maybe, that the legal fees might strip you right down to the nails in your shoes."

Buell said stiffly, "I can take care of myself, thank you Good-night."

He turned abruptly and walked out of the house Moynahan hesitated, then ran after him, catching him at the curb, just as the boy was about to climb into his car.

"Just one more word with you, Mr. Buell," he grinned "This is kind of a late hour of the night to come calling, especially with a check for fifty thousand, so would you mind satisfying my curiosity about just one point? What brought on this great rush of charity now?"

Buell glanced down at the gun that seemed to have sprouted in Moynahan's hand. "You go to hell," he said thickly and dived into the car, slamming and locking the door with one motion.

Moynahan raised the gun as the car leaped from the curb, then lowered it and let the car plummet crazily down the street.

"Well, I'll be damned," he muttered, then turned and walked slowly back into the house.

Mick was alone in the living room. "I sent him home before he started asking too many questions," he explained the absence of the redhead. He tilted his chin toward the front door. "What did you make of that, Paddy?"

Moynahan shook his head and walked to the window. He stood looking out into the dark of the empty street. He glanced back at Mick over his shoulder.

"There's one thing sure," he said in a puzzled voice, "he's in love with the Palmer girl so hard his eyeballs pop."

"He's got a fine way of showing it," Mick growled. "Making her cry like that. And he's a rummy. I could smell it on him clear across the room. And there were other signs, too. His hands were shaking like a leaf in the wind, and he had a tic in the corner of his eye, and his face looked swollen and sick. I'll bet he's heading straight for a drink right now."

"A binge, you mean. That's a bet you'd win, Mick. The boy's been on too many binges recently, and that's the real puzzler. He looks like a boy that's lived clean, not a bottle fighter."

MICK made a scornful noise in his throat and growled something about, ". . . too much money for his own good."

"Maybe," conceded Moynahan thoughtfully. "But you're forgetting one little point, Mick. He can't lay his hands on any real money until his father's estate is settled. The court gives him an allowance, sure, but the bulk of the money can't be touched until the debits and credits are balanced, which leads me to wonder how crazy Lawyer Hapgood was after all."

Mick said, "Huh? Come again?"

"I said," Moynahan winked, "that Lawyer Hapgood's dementia might be the kind that washes off with soap, if you follow my meaning. There's something rotten in the woodpile, Mick. For instance, Young Buell's crazy in love with the Palmer girl, yet he ups and says he just found out her mother was in an iron lung with polio. How can you be in love with a girl and not know if her ma's dead or alive? Ah no, Mick, the boy was lying to hide the real reason for giving us that check for Mrs. Palmer and her iron lung."

"And just what," Mick asked, "was the real reason, Paddy?"

"There you have me, bucky," Moynahan confessed ruefully. "But it's me hat against a wooden nickel it hinges on the real state of Mr Hapgood's sanity."

He paced the room excitedly. He shot out a finger at Mick and demanded,

"Suppose you were running around the countryside dressed only in a bit of a nightshirt that came only down to here. Where would you head for first?"

"Why—to get some clothes, I imagine."

"And just where would you be getting the clothes at this hour of night?"

"Right here. Home, of course."

Moynahan beamed. "Y'know," he said as he trotted toward the phone, "there's still another matter I may not have mentioned. According to the Palmer girl, old Buell was leaving half his fortune to the Polio Fund, but if there's no will . . . Do you follow me?"

He leafed rapidly through the phone book, found Hapgood's home address and jotted it down on the back of an envelope. Mick was standing with his back to the front door when he looked up.

"I've never interfered with you, Paddy," he said urgently, "but stay out of this. It's too big. Men have been killed for a lot less money than half of Buell's fortune. Stay out of it, Paddy!"

Moynahan slowly shook his head. "I can't, Mick. Mrs. Palmer's got her money, and she may be cured. But she's just one. There are thousands of others, and it burns me to think some lousy crook might get the money that could help to cure them. I hate crooks, Mick, and that's why I got to be a lawyer. But I'll be okay, boy. Stand aside, Mick."

Mick stood aside. "I'll come with you," he said quickly.

"Ah, no. I may need you later to patch up a bruise or two. And save me a slug of the bottle, too, while you're at it."

He trotted down the walk to his car at the curb. He checked his glove compartment to be sure he had a flashlight with him, then with an airy wave to Mick in the doorway, he drove off.

THE Hapgood house on Wyoming Avenue, the most conservative and respectable section of Millburn, was entirely dark when Moynahan slid his car to the curb and cut the motor. The shades were drawn and it had a look of desertion. Moynahan prowled around the side of the house, avoiding the ornate, pillared front entrance. He found a small door that entered from the porte cochere. He tried it and found, as he had expected, that it was locked. He glanced quickly around. The nearest house was two hundred feet away. The grounds, in this neighborhood, were extensive.

He put his shoulder to the door and heaved. The wood creaked. He heaved again, getting his shoulder under the knob. He grunted from the pain of it and stepped back from the door, eyeing it speculatively. He raised his leg and knocked out the glass with his heel. The falling glass sounded like the clash of cymbals in the quiet of the night. Moynahan reached quickly through the hole and unlatched the door. He stood inside and listened. There wasn't a sound inside the house—not the murmur of a voice, not a footfall.

He went quickly through the rooms. The furniture was dust-covered in linen, standing in the small light of his flash like shrouded specters. Upstairs it was the same.

But standing on the chest of drawers in what was obviously Hapgood's room, were two silver-framed photographs—one of a smiling, grey-haired woman, and the other of a solemn-faced cadet in the caped, full-dress uniform of West Point. Physically, the boy did not resemble Hapgood at all, but there was an air about him that brought Hapgood to mind. The dust was thick on the chest top in front of the photograph. The house was obviously unlived in.

Moynahan sprayed the room once more with his flash before leaving and caught a glimpse of wadded grey fabric in the far corner beside the dresser. He swooped down on it with an exclamation, know-

ing what it was even before he picked it up.

Hapgood's grey-flannel hospital-style nightshirt. Moynahan held it up, then sucked in his breath. The left side, from armpit to hem, was sodden with fresh blood!

Again Moynahan darted the beam of his flash around the room, picking up now splashes of fresh blood on the rug. They clustered heavily before the clothes closet, where Hapgood had obviously changed into a suit of clothes—though, from the amount of blood he had lost, it was hard to see how he had managed to stand upright. The trail of blood led to the bathroom, and the towels over the sink were bright with it. But sitting on the sink was Hapgood's comb and silver-mounted hair brushes. Wounded as he was, the man had stopped long enough to comb and brush his hair! Though he, himself, was far from neat, Moynahan could not but admire the tough fiber of a man who refused to look anything but his best under any circumstances.

Moynahan grimaced and gave his head a sharp shake as the contradiction hit him.

Hapgood was not insane. That much was obvious. He was a neat, orderly man—or had been—yet somewhere in his character was a place for deception, for hiding in an insane asylum, for suppressing an important will. It did not make sense. Hapgood was apparently a man who took pride in his family. . . .

Moynahan thinned his lips and trotted down the stairs to the main entrance hall, where he had seen the telephone on a small Sheraton commode. He riffled through the telephone book until he found Brush's name. Brush also lived on Wyoming Avenue in Millburn, three hundred numbers down the street. But Moynahan could almost have predicted that. Brush and Hapgood had been cut from the same pattern.

He slapped his pocket, as if to make sure he still had his gun, then went down the hall toward the door.

CHAPTER FIVE

Out of the Frying Pan . . .

BRUSH'S house was Tudor in style—all dark-stained beams and ivory-colored stucco—and there was a light burning over the front door. As Moynahan swung into the driveway, his headlights picked up the rear of Dr. Ironwood's sleek black Cadillac parked there. And there was a trail of blood spots that led from the car straight to Brush's front door.

Moynahan did not ring the bell, but tried the door. It swung open before him. He stepped into the house and silently closed the door behind him. He slipped his gun from his pocket and padded down the hall. There was a vast, gloomy living room—empty—and a dark dining room and kitchen. There was nothing else on the first floor.

He was halfway up the stairs to the second floor when he heard slow, dragging footsteps and as he watched, Brush's wiry form came into view at the head of the stairway. Moynahan lifted his gun.

"Good evening, Mr. Brush," he said, "and might I inquire after the health of Mr. Hapgood?"

Brush started and peered down at him. "Ah, Mr. Moynahan," he said dully. "Mr. Hapgood? Mr. Hapgood is dead, I fear." He looked back over his shoulder and shivered.

Moynahan advanced slowly, step by step.

"We'll take a look," he said. "You and me, bucky, we'll take a look." He took Brush's arm and turned him. "Where is he?"

"I tell you, he's dead," Brush said tonelessly. "I should have called a doctor immediately, but I was so stunned, so

shocked. He was bleeding. I am not accustomed to blood. . . ."

He made no resistance as Moynahan marched him along the hall.

"I blame myself," he mumbled. "There was all that blood, and I should have known. I should have called a doctor. But I was not really remiss. I was so stunned, so shocked." He peered anxiously into Moynahan's face. "Your name is Moynahan, is it not? Mr. Hapgood was very worried about you. He felt very guilty. He struck you with a wrench, he said, and left you lying helpless on the ground. He was deeply concerned about your safety. You see, it was when he was driving away from your apartment that they shot him. That was during the pursuit. They pursued him, but Mr. Hapgood was an excellent driver and he had a much more powerful car. He successfully eluded them."

"Them! They!" cried Moynahan. "Who are they?"

"The only name he mentioned, aside from yours, Mr. Moynahan, was that of a Mr. Ironwood. . . ."

"Dr. Ironwood."

"Yes. Mr. Hapgood spoke of him with deep feeling. With loathing, I might say. He called him a devil incarnate. But that was just before he died, and his mind seemed to be rambling. I could not ascertain Dr. Ironwood's role in this . . . tragedy and . . ."

He broke off, for they were at the open door of a lighted bedroom. Hapgood, looking curiously grey and flattened, was lying on Brush's bed. There was blood on the sheet, blood on the pillowcase, and even a finger smear of it on the wall behind the bed. Relaxed in death, his face was very peaceful. Brush stood at Moynahan's side and tears washed down his face.

MOYNAHAN let him go, and the man staggered over to the lounge chair beside the window.

"I don't understand it. I don't understand it at all," Brush moaned. "We're a respectable law firm." He looked up at Moynahan. "How could such a thing happen to us?"

"What did he say before he died?" Moynahan repeated quietly.

"Say? Say? It was so fantastic I . . ." Brush tossed his hands, then took a deep breath and appeared to compose himself. "He told me this," he said. "Immediately after Mr. Buell died, someone called him on the phone and threatened him with bodily violence if he filed the Buell will for probate. Hapgood laughed at him, of course. He was a man of integrity. Then he was told that if he filed the will, his wife and son—his son is a West Point cadet—would be killed. It sounded very melodramatic, yet . . . very real. Hapgood did not file the will, but he concealed it and sent his wife and son on a South American cruise, intending, once they were safely out of the country, to file the will. But he was kidnaped and put into an insane asylum. He was subjected to every conceivable form of torment, but, he told me, he did not reveal the hiding place of the will. He was told he would be left in the asylum to die, but . . ." Brush glanced at the bed and shuddered. "He did not have to wait very long, did he?" he said in a low voice.

"The hiding place," said Moynahan urgently. "Where did he hide the will?"

Brush gave him a wan, apologetic smile and moved his hands ruefully. No spoken answer was necessary.

Moynahan swore. Then his jaw dropped, and he looked quickly at the body of Hapgood, as if to confirm a half-formed conclusion. His face lighted grimly.

"I think," he said softly, "I know where Mr. Hapgood concealed the will. Being a lawyer myself. The legal mind works in certain grooves. But first I'd like to take care of another matter. I want you

to do something for me. Do you think you can handle yourself for a few minutes, bucky?"

Brush nodded. "I think so."

"And make a phone call?"

"Yes."

"Right. Call Lace Malone's Casino and ask for Vince Buell. Tell Vince you have something of imperative importance. Tell him to come out here immediately. If he's not there, leave the message. Now, d'y'-think you can do that?"

Brush took a breath and squared his skinny shoulder. "At least that much," he said.

EXCEPT for the porch light and a small light in the living room, Brush's house was dark. Brush and Moynahan stood side by side in the dark dining room, watching the quiet street.

For the third time, Moynahan asked nervously, "Are you sure young Buell wasn't there? Did they sound, maybe, as if they might be putting you off?"

"How can I tell that, Mr. Moynahan?" Brush asked unhappily. "They told me young Mr. Buell wasn't there. I could not contradict them, could I?"

"Not without television, no."

Moynahan laughed shortly, but it was without mirth. He put his hand on Brush's arm.

"Does your house creak ordinarily?" he asked.

"Why no. It's—"

"Then we've got friends, bucky. Suppose you greet them. Remember, now, Hapgood's upstairs and alive."

Brush nodded, shivering.

He stepped out into the hall and called, "Hello, hello, how did you get in?"

A figure loomed up, a darker shadow in the shadow of the back hall.

A muffled voice said, "Brush?"

"That's my name, sir."

The voice chuckled, "I want to see Hapgood," it said.

"He's upstairs, but you'll have to be quiet. He's very low. We're waiting for the doctor."

The voice chuckled again. "You *were* waiting for the doctor, sweetheart. . . ."

Moynahan kicked out and sent Brush flying across the hall as the shot flamed from the door. Moynahan crouched low to the floor and peered around the archway. Another shot licked out. Moynahan steadied his gun and held down the trigger of his automatic. The shots poured out like bees leaving a hive.

There was a cry and a heavy thump, then a floundering, dragging sound, an animal-like whimper of fear and pain.

Moynahan reached around the arch and slipped on the light. There was Lace Malone, trying to drag himself along the hall to the back door. His legs trailed uselessly behind, and there was a black glistening smear that stained the right side of his sport jacket. He squirmed up on his left hip as the light went on, and he held up his hands as if to shield his eyes from the glare of it. His face was slack and empty. His fingertips were bloody from his frantic scrabbling to escape. . . .

THERE were three hours of police questioning. There were affidavits to be signed in triplicate. But there were also the Buell millions and Patrick Timothy Moynahan's record as a scrappy, belligerent attorney-at-law. The police and Moynahan parted as one happy family, and when the flash bulbs of the news photographers exploded, it was the commissioner of police himself who was pictured in the middle, shaking hands with what the captions later labeled the "happy, scrappy, Patrick Timothy Moynahan."

He left headquarters with one very grateful young millionaire in tow: namely: Vince Buell. Their pictures were snapped again when they slid into Vince's Duesenberg, parked in the No-Parking zone in front of headquarters.

Vince said humbly, "I can't thank you enough, Mr. Moynahan, for keeping my part of it out of the newspapers. I—I'm damn well ashamed of myself!"

Moynahan just grunted.

After a pause, Vince said haltingly, "You said you had Mr. Brush call the Casino and ask for me. Did you suspect *me* at that time of killing Hapgood?"

"I didn't even expect you to be at the Casino, bucky," said Moynahan. "When you left Mick's house, you were headed straight for the nearest gin mill, and the Casino was an hour's drive away. You wouldn't wait that long for a bottle. No, I had a pretty fair idea it was Malone I was after. It was that little shenanigan of the fifty-thousand-dollar check. You see, Vince me boy, it was like this. You never recognized me at Mick's last night, so if you were too drunk to know what I looked like at the Casino when you poked me in the snoot, you were also too drunk to have known my name. Somebody told you my name. Brush didn't know about that poke in the snoot; Ironwood didn't know about it; but by some coincidence Lace Malone was right on the scene, and Lace Malone is a boy who knows one end of a gun from another, scoundrel that he is. You owed him quite a bit of money from losing at faro, didn't you, now?"

"Ninety thousand dollars," said Vince in a low voice.

Moynahan winced. Ninety thousand dollars! No wonder Malone had turned so reckless. Ninety thousand was just the starter. With Vince firmly hooked, Malone had the whole of the Buell fortune to work on, and Vince was not a lad to give half of that to the Polio Fund, or any fund except the Malone Fund.

He looked at young Vince with pity and asked curiously, "Tell me, boy, how'd you ever let yourself get mixed up in a scheme like that?"

"I didn't, Moynahan. That's the truth. I didn't. I didn't know what was going on!"

"Ah, and didn't you now?"

"First it was the gambling," said Vince miserably. "I'd never gambled much before I went into the Casino. Dad never let me have too much money, and I was more interested in boats and sailing and fishing. I'd never really been in a big-time gambling house. In the beginning it was just the excitement, then it was a fever. I won for a while, and then I started losing. I ran out of cash, and Malone gave me credit. I signed notes. I couldn't seem to stop playing, and the more I lost the more I drank."

"Sure," said Moynahan, remembering the waiters with their huge trays of free drinks in the Casino, "and Malone was shrewd enough to keep feeding you drinks, pushing them under your nose whether you wanted them or not."

"I'm finished with gambling," said Vince fervently. "Finished. And even if Dad's will has disappeared, I'm going to do as he wished. I'm going to give half the money to the Polio Fund . . ."

"Oh, the will's safe enough, I think," Moynahan murmured. "Being a lawyer myself, I have a fair idea of how the legal mind works. Hapgood was a conservative, conscientious man. And until his family was safely out of the country, I'm betting he put that will in a very, very safe place."

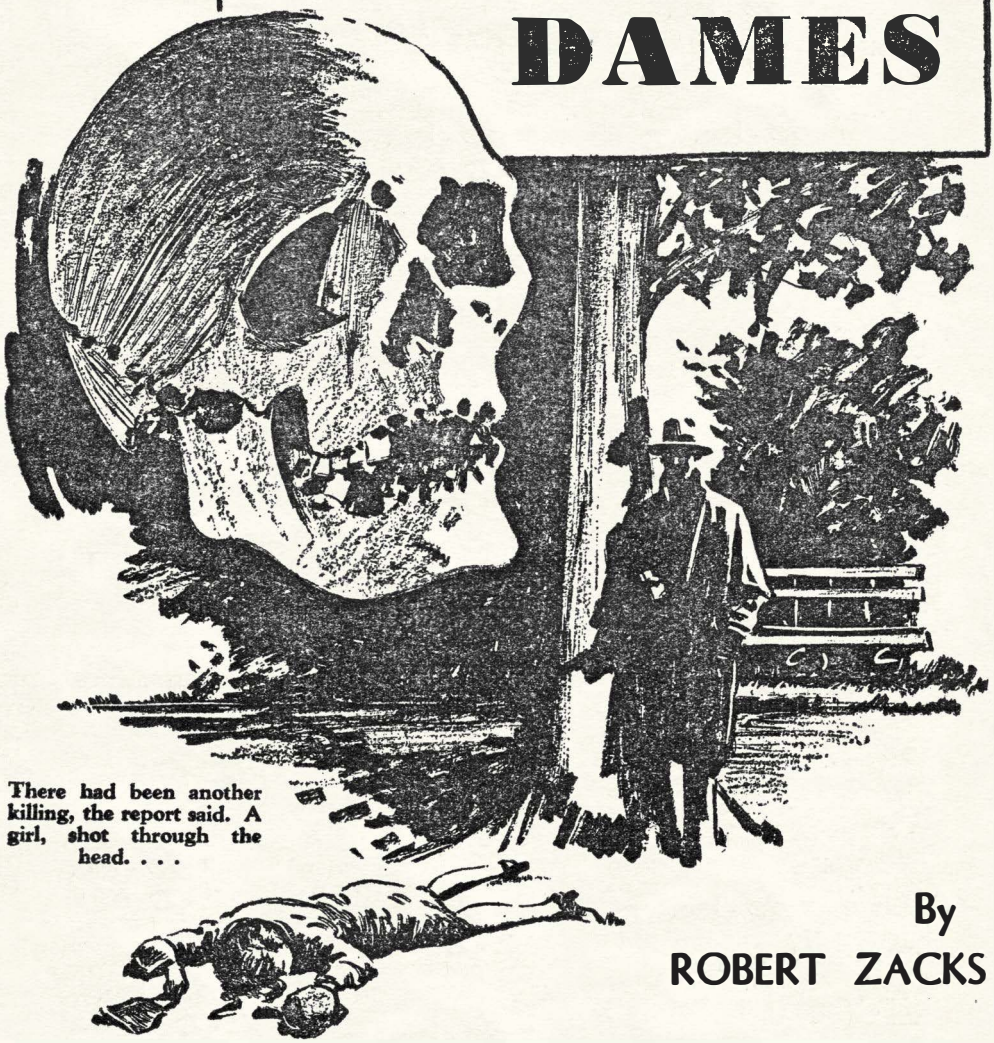
"And that would be . . . ?"

"The National City & County Trust in a safe-deposit box, with instructions that it be opened immediately in case of death. However," he grinned, "I'm thinking you have your mind on much more important matters and have no time for such trifles, and the name of that important matter would be Enid Palmer, I'm thinking."

"Sure," mimicked Vince, grinning, "and it's right you are entirely."

THE END

DEATH ON DAMES



There had been another killing, the report said. A girl, shot through the head. . . .

By
ROBERT ZACKS

He was their man, this shambling, deadly maniac. But between suspicion and proof, for the cops, there was a long, bloody distance. . . .

"USUALLY," said Detective Brody, in exasperation, "all we need is to lay our hands on the guy we think committed the murder. Once we got him for questioning, it's just a matter of time. But *this* guy . . ."

He lifted his hands in angry helplessness. Inspector Porter, sitting across the desk, nodded thoughtfully.

"You're pretty sure he's it, eh?" asked Porter. Porter was a cautious man. They had been pulling in suspects for the three "lover's lane" murders for weeks, and

the remorseless efficiency of the city police department had investigated and freed all suspects but one. This one was a Mr. Gabriel, a shambling, middle-aged janitor, half out of his mind.

"Pretty sure," said Brody flatly. "Only not sure in a way that would put this guy away."

"They'd never electrocute him, you know," said Inspector Porter. "He's obviously a nut. They'd just lock him up somewhere in an institution."

"Is that bad?" asked Brody, grimacing. "Listen, they'd better get him out of circulation fast, before he knocks off a few more. Look, Inspector, we know he was not in his apartment in the basement each night a murder was committed. Also, he's used to dark cellars, what with taking care of furnaces and things. He can get around in the dark like a cat. Every murder was the same type. A couple smooching in a dark place, on a bench in the park or in a parked car. Always somebody making love."

"What's the connection?"

"Well, you notice the way this Gabriel

guy glares at a nice young girl when he sees her. When we brought him in he stared at Miss Johnson, the typist outside, and he started shouting right away. Sort of Biblical stuff. Warnings about evil and virtue and stuff like that. He kept shouting 'vileness, vileness' at her. She really got good and scared."

"That's hardly evidence that—"

"Wait a minute, Inspector. And that name, Mr. Gabriel. I tried to check on him. He hasn't any papers of any kind that would prove that's his name. We searched his apartment. The only thing we found was an old address book with a name on the first page; and, believe it or not, that name was Betty Grable. No other names or addresses in the book. And another thing. There were piles of pictures of pinup girls and *all of them were torn up right across the center*. The way I see it, this guy has a screw loose about pretty women and he punishes them by tearing up their pictures."

Inspector Porter nodded. "It's a good guess, anyway. Did you have the psychiatrists examine him?"

"Yeah, but he clammed up right away. Wouldn't let out a peep. We really got nothing to hold him on. No sign of the gun in his apartment at all."

"Okay. Let him go," said Inspector Porter. "Plant a dictaphone in his apartment and take over the listening-in yourself. He might mumble something that will help us."

Detective Brody groaned. It was a good technique that often got results but it was dull and wearying beyond measure.

"Yes, sir," said Detective Brody, getting up.

THE days passed slowly and Mr. Gabriel said a number of odd and vague things as he puttered about his apartment that strengthened Detective Brody's belief that he was the murderer, but which had no definite value at all. It was maddening.

Once Mr. Gabriel said in a sudden shriek, "I am the arm of the Lord!" It came over the earphones clearly and awfully. Then another time he screamed, "Punishment for thy sins!"

"By golly," muttered Brody, his flesh crawling, when he heard this. "You're it, pal."

There was a step behind Brody. He turned and saw Inspector Porter. Porter's face was pale. "Pack it up, Brody," said Porter grimly. "There's been another killing. Same kind. You're on the wrong trail."

Brody's face was a study of bewilderment and stubbornness. He stood up slowly, putting the earphones down. "Where?" he growled.

"North end of Central Park. Three hours ago. Another couple. Girl got it through the head, fellow was just wounded. It couldn't have been Gabriel. You've been hearing him, haven't you?"

"No," said Brody. "Last I heard he was going to the furnace to shake out the ashes. That's a two-hour job. He just got back."

They stared at each other. Then they turned and went through the door fast, cursing aloud. "He must have gotten through Riley and Smith," snapped Brody. "I set them to watch the exits."

They tore around the corner and came panting up to Riley who stared at them in astonishment. "I thought you told me Gabriel didn't go out?" snarled Porter.

"He didn't," said Riley belligerently. "And I haven't left my post for a minute."

"Where's Smith?" growled Inspector Porter.

"Up on the roof," said Brody. "I stationed him up there. He can see if anybody comes out of the alley from up there. There's a street lamp right at the alley entrance. So he couldn't have gone over the roof to the next house."

Suddenly Inspector Porter looked ill. "It's dark up there," he said tightly, "isn't it?"

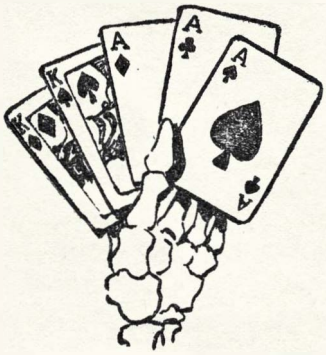
Without another word they turned and made for the roof, climbing the four flights with a speed that left their lungs laboring and their hearts pounding.

Patrolman Smith was sprawled in a dark heap in the corner of the roof, the back of his head bloody. He was still alive.

"Get him to the hospital fast," said Brody, his teeth gritted. "I'm going down to lay hands on that character. I'll—"

"No," said Inspector Porter. "It won't do you any good. And I don't want him pulled in, either. We'll be a laughing stock after this, if the papers find out he got away right from under our noses. We've got to have a confession that'll stick."

"He's a nut," protested Brody. "His



confession is no good, anyway. Not without evidence."

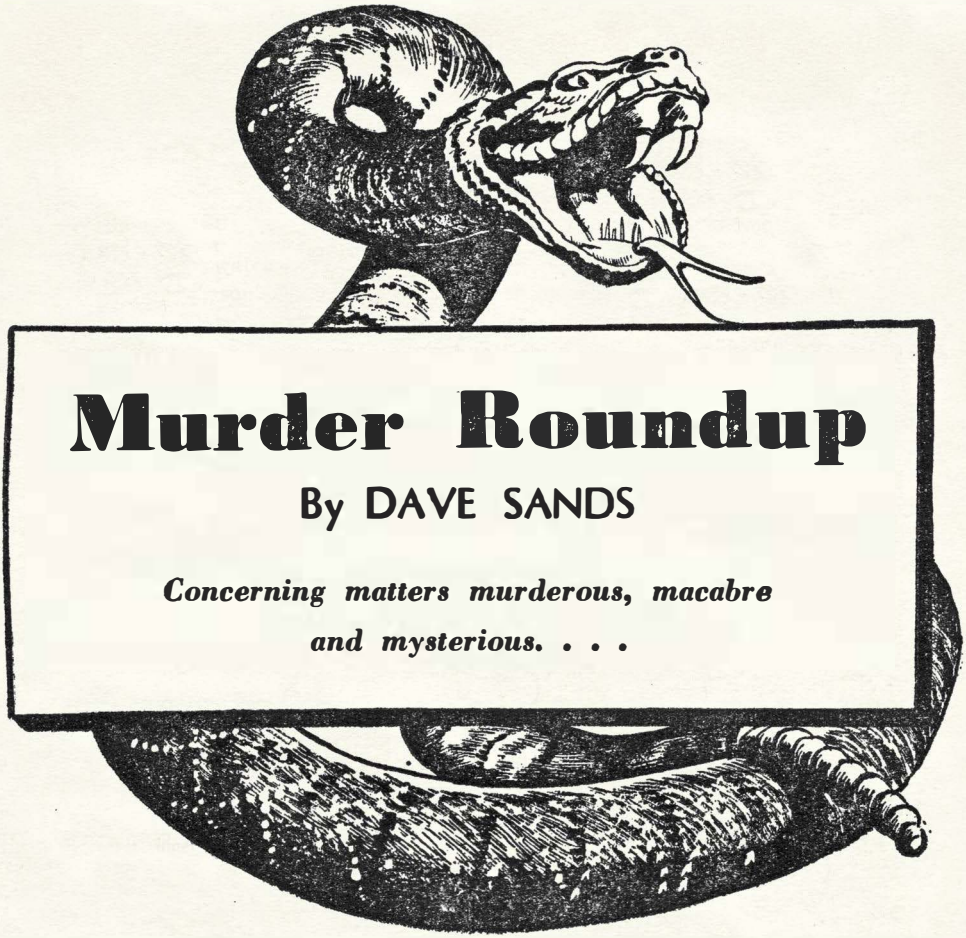
"That's right," said Porter. "We've got to have the gun. He's hidden it somewhere, probably where we'll never find it. We've got to get him to *give* it to us. Then we can prove the bullets came from that gun."

"And just how," said Detective Brody, unhappily, "are we going to do that?"

"I've kind of got an idea," said Inspector Porter. "I was discussing the case with the department psychiatrist. . . ."

DETECTIVE BRODY listened with his pulse pounding and interfering with what was coming over the earphones. Mr. Gabriel had gone to attend the furnace. Everything depended on his reac-

(Continued on page 127)



Murder Roundup

By DAVE SANDS

Concerning matters murderous, macabre and mysterious. . . .

Crime—1200 B. C.

WE MAY sometimes feel that crime is a product of the past few centuries, but a true detective story of three thousand years ago reveals a striking similarity between crooks and courts of 1200 B.C. and the present age.

The official chronicle of crime and punishment in the days of the pharoahs was brought to light several years ago with the finding of the long-lost half of the famous Amherst papyrus.

Translation of the ancient scroll showed that graft and bribery and the "fix" and "double-cross" were not unknown.

Recorded in detail is the story of three men who stole gold and precious stones from the tomb of an ancient king. When the local law got hot on their trail the gang leader gave his share of the take to the chief of the Theban police in an attempt at a fix. However, the chief wasn't having any and double-crossed the crooks by turning them in.

The trio was tried first by a civil court, which decided the crime was one for the religious tribunal. There was no record of the tribunal sentence but as the rulers of Egypt were considered descendents of the Egyptian gods, and any dese-

cration of the tomb was considered sacrilege, there is no fear that the crooks escaped punishment.

Unhappy Birthday To You

WHEN Lady Nikola Beresford and her cousin, the Earl of Tyrone, jestingly made a pact that the first to die would return to visit the other, neither realized the visitation would really take place and would be the death sentence for the living party. Yet, if the family legend of the supernatural can be believed, such was the case.

One morning, October 14, 1693, long after the pact had been forgotten by both parties, Lady Beresford, a widow, was awakened from a sound sleep to find young Tyrone at her bedside. The startled woman wanted to know why he was there, and received the answer that he had died early that morning and was fulfilling his part of the promise. In order to convince her that it was no dream, he inscribed his name in her pocket book and touched her wrist, leaving a mark indelible to her dying day. He also foretold that Lady Beresford would remarry, that the marriage would be an unhappy one, and that she would never reach the age of forty-two.

Later that day Lady Beresford was informed by messenger that her cousin had died at about the moment he appeared to her. In the following years the first part of the prophecy was filled: Lady Beresford married but it was an unhappy union.

Still not fully believing what her cousin had imparted to her, she planned a large party to commemorate her forty-second birthday. Among the guests who enjoyed the dinner was the family chaplain. While walking with him in the garden in the dusk, she confided that this birthday removed a great weight from her mind as she had never expected to reach her forty-second year.

The startled clergyman replied, "Nor have you; I remember your baptism and can prove you are only forty-one."

Lady Beresford was so affected she took to her bed and died a few hours later.

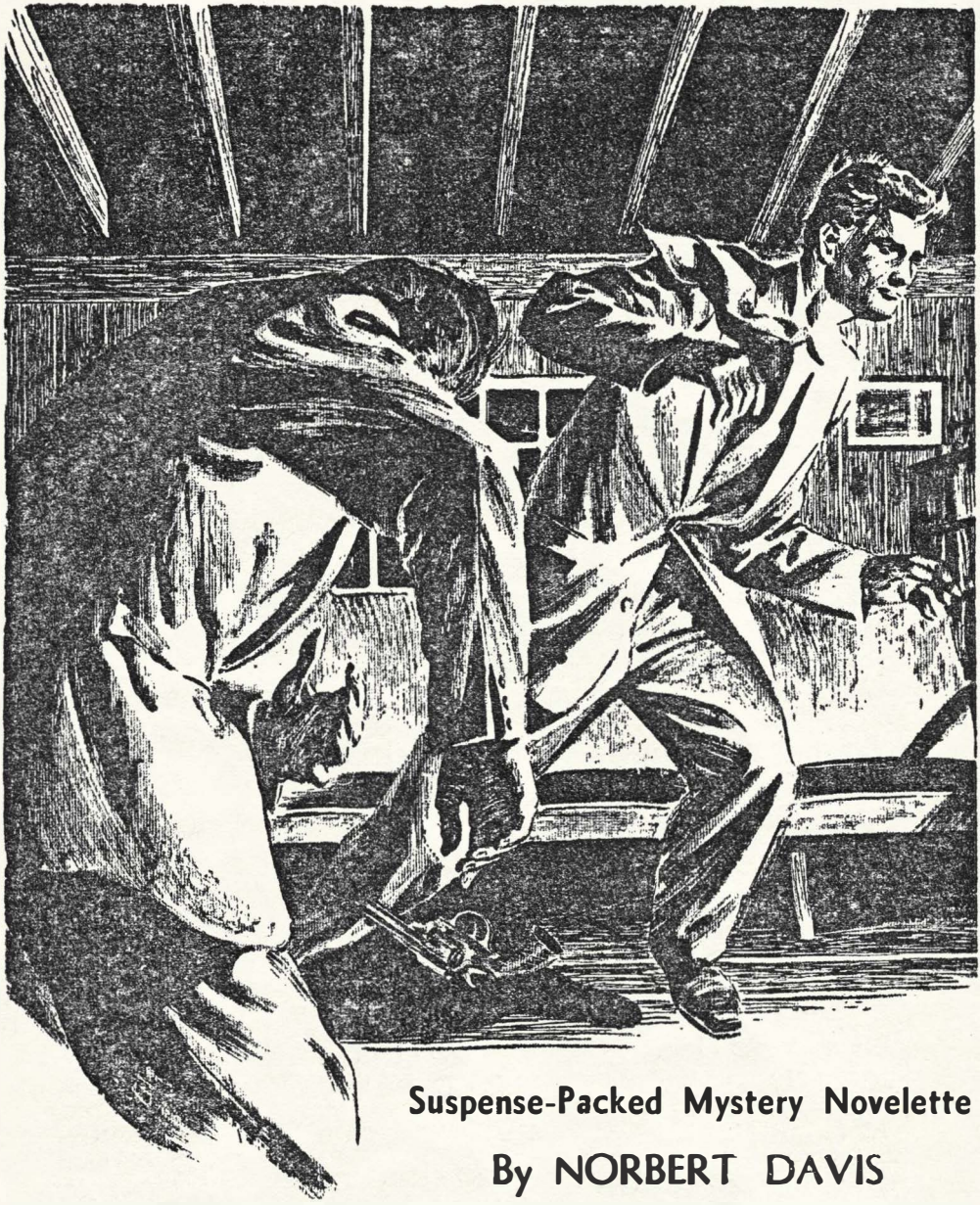
Long Time Dead

THERE is a great deal of truth to the saying that "murder will out," but it was over twenty thousand years before the corpus delicti was discovered in one American murder case believed to have been a crime of passion.

The strange discovery of the crime was made in 1931 in Ottertail County, Minn. While constructing a road across a dried-up glacial lake, workers turned up a skeleton of a girl of about seventeen years of age. Scientists, who rushed to the spot, estimated her age after a study of the formation of her bones. Her head features were Mongolian, with a special apish shape of the nose bones. The fact that she had been found under eleven feet of tightly packed clay accounted for the unusually fine preservation of the bones.

A small hole in the lower border of the right shoulder blade seemed to have been made by an arrow or spear passing through the lung and possibly piercing the heart. The skeleton lay about a half-mile out from shore and one of the things that bothered the scientists was whether she was killed while on a raft or canoe, or had been carried out from shore and dropped overboard. It was also suggested that she might have been killed while crossing on the ice during the winter.

The "evidence" of the case was well assembled by the scientists, but one thing is certain—the killer will never be brought to trial.



Suspense-Packed Mystery Novelette

By NORBERT DAVIS

What monstrous, shapeless terror cast its spell over the huge, foreboding Grant mansion, where admission could be gained only at the point of a .45—and exit was made feet first?

CHAPTER ONE

The Face of Fear

THE HOUSE was a great pile of grey-black stone, turreted like a medieval castle, with, across its front, a mat of green vines that threw long curling tendrils up toward the deep eaves. It had a dark gloominess all its own, despite the wide sweep of bright

Seaton fired from under the card table and the table seemed to jump with the report. . . .

FEAR HOUSE

green lawn and shrubbery surrounding it.

Duncan stopped his coupé and got out on the graveled drive. He was a tall man and he moved with a sort of lazy grace. He was dressed in a grey tweed suit and he wore no hat. He went up the wide steps and across the flagged terrace to the high-arched front door.

A huge iron knocker gleamed against the dull black of the wood, but there was an electric bell in the panel beside it. Duncan pressed his thumb against that. Somewhere deep inside the house chimes boomed on a low, descending note.

Duncan waited. Closer to the house now, he could feel the cold loneliness of it more plainly, and he made a wry face to himself, wondering how any one could live here and like it.

The door opened six inches and then

clinked against a chain that held it there. A face that was a white blur in the shadows peered out at him. Duncan waited, but there was no word of greeting or inquiry.

"Good-afternoon," Duncan finally said. "Is Charles Grant home?"

The face had a voice that was precise and toneless. "You wish to see Mr. Grant?"

"Yes," said Duncan.

"Your name, please?"

"William Duncan."

"May I ask your business with Mr. Grant?"

"No business," Duncan said shortly. "I'm a friend of his."

The chain rattled in its socket and the door swung wide.

"If you'll step inside, please."

The hall was cool and damply shadowed after the brightness of the sunlight. The walls were paneled in dark wood and the ceiling went up into a high arch to match the medieval Gothic style of the front door.

The man who had admitted him was small and thin and stooped, with dead-white hair and a pale face. He was dressed in a black, severe suit, and he bowed with stiff courtesy.

"If you will wait here, please, I will ascertain if Mr. Grant can see you." His feet made a slight whisper going away, and a door latch clicked dully behind him.

Duncan stood alone in the hall, frowning a little in a puzzled way. He had stood there perhaps a half minute before he knew someone was watching him. It was pure instinct that told him that, but he had learned long ago to trust his instinct. He stood casually still, turning his head a little at a time, trying to locate the eyes that he felt upon him.

The doors were closed along the hall. At the back a stairway went up in a long graceful sweep. Duncan raised his head, following the stairs up to the top and then sideways along the banister, and he found the face there, pressed tight against the rails.

It was no more than two feet from the floor—a small white oval with blue eyes enormously wide in it. The shadows were deep behind the banister, and Duncan could see nothing but the face, and it was as still as death now that it had been discovered It was the face of a child.

Duncan smiled up at it and said, "Hi, there."

There was no answer and no movement. It was as though the sound of Duncan's voice had frozen the child in pure terror, a terror so chilling and so plain that Duncan could feel its presence.

A DOOR opened somewhere in the upper hall, and a woman's voice called, "Charles! Charles, where are you?"

High heels made a quick, light tapping and then she evidently saw the child, because she said, "Charles, what are you doing?" She appeared above the banister, slim and young and quick moving, in a white sports dress.

In the shadows her hair was dull gleaming bronze around the smooth oval of her face. She saw the direction in which the child was staring and looked down over the banister at Duncan.

Her eyes were a deep green and they widened suddenly with shocked surprise. She caught the child's hand and pulled him to his feet with one quick sweep of her arm and hurried him along the banister, pausing for a second to look down at Duncan. Then she disappeared.

She was frightened, too, as frightened as the child had been, and Duncan wondered if his nerves were getting the better of him, or if his appearance was really so awesome as to give the effect that it apparently did.

A door latch clicked and a man came slowly out into the hall and stared at him. "You're a very clumsy liar, sir," he said.

He held his shoulders exaggeratedly straight in a sort of aged mockery of a military posture. He had a thick sweep of white hair flowing back from a broad forehead and a white crisp mustache, and he should have been dignified and imposing, but there was something wrong. There was weakness more than age in the pinched lines of his face, and his eyes were small and spiteful and slyly calculating.

"I beg your pardon?" Duncan said blankly.

"I think you heard me correctly, but I'll repeat my remark. You are a very clumsy liar. You announced yourself as a friend of mine. I've never had the misfortune of seeing you before this moment."

"That's quite true," said Duncan.

"Then may I ask what you hoped to gain by this stupid subterfuge?"

"I hoped to see Charles Grant," said Duncan evenly.

"I am Charles Grant."

"There is some mistake," Duncan said. "I'm referring to Charles Lehman Grant. You certainly aren't he, unless you've aged considerably in the last couple of years."

Malice and anger seemed to seethe behind the old man's eyes. "Get out! Get out of this house, sir!"

Duncan shrugged. "Certainly, if you wish. However, would you mind telling Charles Lehman Grant that William Duncan called on him? I am at the Carlyle Hotel if he wishes to get in touch with me."

"Get out! Get out, or I'll have you ejected!"

Duncan opened the front door and bowed. "Good-day. Thank you for your hospitality." He closed the door behind him.

From inside the house he could hear the trembling shrill of the old man's voice calling angrily, "Macon! Macon! Watch him! See that he leaves the grounds!"

The thin, stooped man who had admitted Duncan into the house came out of the front door, closing it carefully and precisely back of him. In the sunlight the waxen pallor of his face was more pronounced.

His voice was flat. "You are to leave at once. You are not to loiter on the grounds, and I warn you, sir, that I shall call the police if you attempt any violence."

"Right," said Duncan. He turned on his heel and went down the steps and across the gravel to his car.

He drove the coupé down the winding sweep of graveled drive and out between squat grey-stone pillars. The road was black asphalt here, lined with oaks that joined their branches over it in a thick-leafed arch. He turned to the right, back toward the city, and then he saw the car—a grey sedan—parked in the shade of the trees.

IT HAD not been there when Duncan had entered the grounds. There was a man standing beside the sedan, leaning lazily and casually against the front fender, and he flipped one arm in an unmistakable request for Duncan to halt.

Duncan slowed the coupé, braked it to a stop. "Trouble?" he asked.

The man pushed himself away from the fender, not hurrying at all, and walked heavily across the asphalt. He was a fat man and he wore a shapeless blue suit that looked as dusty as his car. He had a reddened sagging face that was streaked with sweat, and he was wearing a yellow Panama hat tipped back on his head.

"Maybe," he said. "Just maybe." He put his thick forearms on the sill of the door opposite Duncan and leaned forward through the window. He stared with eyes that were wide and blandly empty.

"Well, what do you want?" Duncan demanded.

"A little talk with you," said the fat man. "Just a couple of words or three. What's your name?"

"I'm keeping it a secret," Duncan said.

The fat man blinked. "So? What were you doin' in that joint? Or is that a secret too?"

"Yes."

The fat man shook his head regretfully. "That's bad, pal. That's sure bad. You're gonna be sorry for that, I think maybe."

Duncan had carried a gun for so long that it was as much of a habit with him as wearing his shoes. It was a .32 Colt automatic, the steel showing in bright worn streaks through the bluing on the slide, and he took it out of the tipped shoulder holster under his left arm now. He did it with the quick, casual deftness of a man who has handled guns a lot.

He aimed it at the fat man's face and the safety catch made a slight snap under his thumb.

The fat man didn't move. He very pointedly did not move, but his eyes were no longer bland.

"I hear your pal," said Duncan. "He's crawling along beside the car on this side. Tell him to back off and walk around where I can see him."

"Whitey," said the fat man, "you heard him. Do like he says. He's got a gun pushed in my puss."

A foot scraped cautiously on the asphalt and then a head poked up slowly above the front fender and two pink-rimmed eyes stared at Duncan.

Duncan didn't move the gun. It was still aimed at the middle of the fat man's face.

"Get away from the car so he can see you," the fat man said. "Hurry up, gravy-brain. You think I like lookin' down this gun barrel?"

WHITEY reluctantly left the cover of the fender. He was scrawny and bowlegged, a little man with a bristly shock of white hair. He was wearing a checked suit that was too small for him and he was carrying a leather blackjack in his right hand.

He didn't know what to do with the blackjack now. He shifted it from one hand to the other, started to put it in his hip pocket and desisted with a jerk when the fat man snarled incoherently at him. He finally dropped the blackjack on the pavement and kicked it away from him.

"You would muff it," said the fat man.

Whitey said in a whining mumble, "Now, Rock, I didn't—"

"You made a noise like a tank goin' over a bridge. Now what, mister?"

Duncan said, "I'll ask the questions. Step back a little bit. What's the idea of this?"

"A joke," said Rock. "A joke—on us. Very funny. Ha-ha."

Whitey giggled nervously. "Sure. Just a joke."

Duncan said, "The joke is that you talk to me while Whitey sneaks up and cracks me from behind. Is that it?"

"Sure," said Rock. "We're practical jokers. This is just the time we made a mistake."

"You bet," said Whitey, giggling again.

"Come here, Whitey," said Rock in a gentle voice.

Whitey sidled up beside him. When he was close enough, Rock swung one heavy arm in a back-handblow. His knuckles hit whitey in the mouth with a flat, cracking sound. It didn't look like a particularly hard blow, but it was.

Whitey's feet left the ground. His wizened body arched in the air and he came down on his shoulders on the edge of the road and somersaulted into a shallow ditch with a sudden bursting puff of yellow dust.

"I'll kill him some time," Rock said to Duncan. "You might as well move on, mister. You ain't lost nothin' here. We made a mistake, that's all. We won't make it again."

"Don't," Duncan advised.

He put the car in gear and let it roll forward. He watched in the rear-view mirror, ready to swerve instantly, but Rock

stood solid and heavy, motionless, watching the coupé go away from him. Whitey was crawling slowly out of the ditch.

Duncan went around a curve and left them. He put the Colt back in his shoulder holster and shook his head slowly. The things that had happened this morning simply made no sense at all. The people he had met had a queer air of fantasy about them, as though they weren't acting in a way from motives a normal person could understand.

But the thing that stayed in Duncan's mind and spoiled the warm pleasantness of the day was the pinched white face of the boy who had stared down through the stair railing. There was something ugly and chilling about the terror in that small face.

CHAPTER TWO

Suspicion

IT TOOK Duncan a half-hour to get back to the hotel and up to his room, and when he opened the door a gaunt, long-legged man in black was standing in front of the long casement window, looking morosely out and holding his big nose carefully between his left thumb and forefinger.

Duncan said sharply, "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

The gaunt man answered the question in reverse order. "Lookin' at the view. Nice one. Pay extra for it?" He took his unoccupied hand out of his coat pocket, opened it and showed Duncan a small gold-plated badge. "Belt is the name. Lieutenant of detectives. Want to talk to you. Registered here under the name of William Duncan. That your real name?"

"Yes," said Duncan.

Belt took a last thoughtful pull at his nose and produced a small notebook and a stub of pencil from another pocket. "You got any occupation?"

"Yes. I'm a construction engineer. I work for DeWitt and Hardy, New York City. They lease heavy mining machinery —dredges and things like that. I install and supervise their machinery."

Belt wrote it down. "Why did you want to see Charles Grant?"

"No particular reason. I'm on my vacation now—touring around getting acquainted with this country again. I thought since I was in his town I'd just like to see him."

"Why?"

"Because he's a friend of mine," Duncan said.

"Friend of yours?" Belt said with a rising inflection. "Friend?"

"Yes!" Duncan said emphatically.

"Oh. Know him long?"

"I met him three years ago."

"Where?"

"In Peru."

Belt closed his notebook, stowed it and the pencil carefully away in his pocket. "Come on. You and me got business down to the station."

"Oh, no!" Duncan said. "First I'm going to have a little explanation before I—"

The door in back of Duncan opened so violently that it thrust him forward into the room, and a pudgy little man with bright popping eyes pushed his way through.

"Hello, hello!" he said in a wheezy high-pitched voice. "Hello, Duncan!"

"Hello," Duncan said blankly. He had never seen the man before in his life.

The pop-eyed man took off his hat and fanned himself with it vigorously, panting. He had a round, merry red face and a grin that stretched from ear to ear and showed an impossible expanse of glistening white teeth. He went right on talking busily.

"Sorry, Duncan. Sorry, old man. Got here as quick as I could. Drove through traffic like a fire engine, I swear. Why!

Why, look who we have with us! It's my dear old friend, Belt. How are you, Belt, old boy? What are you doing—running around and making a fool of yourself as usual?"

Belt pulled his nose and glowered at him. "I'm arresting this guy."

The pudgy man popped his eyes wider. "Arresting him? Arresting Duncan, my client? My goodness, Belt, I can hardly believe you're serious. It's incredible, Belt, old boy. I assure you it is. Just as a gesture—a mere formality, Belt—I'd like to look at your warrant."

"You know damned well I haven't got one," Belt said sourly.

THE pudgy man threw his hands up in the air. "No warrant! Belt, my dear friend, you surpass yourself in your own stupidity! Can you imagine, Duncan? He thinks he's going to arrest you without a warrant! What a joke! I'll die laughing! I must remember this and tell it to my grandchildren."

"I'm arresting him on reasonable suspicion of attempted kidnaping," said Belt stubbornly.

"Fantastic! Utterly fantastic, Belt! You haven't the faintest comprehension of what the word reasonable means. But I'll be patient with you, Belt. I'll lead you by the hand like a little child. What suspicion?"

Belt said, "He went to the Grant house and asked to see Charles Grant, pretending he was an old friend of Charles Grant's."

The pudgy man shook his head slowly and despairingly. "My dear, dear Belt. My dear friend. Have you had a mental examination lately? Do you seriously expect to support a charge of attempted kidnaping on those grounds?"

"When I questioned him—"

"Illegally, of course," said the pudgy man. "Each and every question was illegal."

Belt plowed on stubbornly, "—he gave me a phony story about being a *friend* of Charles Grant's and said that he had met him three years ago in Peru. And you know damned well that kid's never been out of this state!"

The pudgy man held his head. "Belt, this is too much. I can't stand it, Belt. The thought of such uninformed stupidity positively appalls me. Belt, you oaf, my client was referring to the boy's father, not to the boy. The boy's father was in Peru three years ago and Mr. Duncan met him there."

With that the pudgy man turned and pushed Duncan gently away from in front of the door, opened it wider and bowed ceremoniously to Belt. "Belt, the pleasure of your company is a fleeting and transitory thing at best, and now you have most thoroughly worn out your welcome. Good-day, Belt."

Belt gave his long nose a particularly vicious jerk and walked to the door. He turned to look back at Duncan. "All right. But if I was you I'd stay right around here until I get a chance to check up."

The pudgy man closed the door gently in his face, turned around and plumped himself into a chair with a long sigh of relief and began to fan himself with his hat again, smiling engagingly at Duncan.

Duncan stood still, looking down at him. "Well?" he said.

Yes, indeed!" said the pudgy man. "My dear Mr. Duncan. This must have been a day of many surprises and much mystery to you, and I will endeavor to relieve your mind as quickly and efficiently as possible. First, as to me. I am G. Henry Measure, attorney-at-law, very much at your service. I am, like yourself, a friend of Charley Grant's. We were roommates in college. I think the roiled waters will become clearer if I tell you—I assume from your actions you do not know—that Charley Grant passed away from this vale of tears over two years ago."

The thing struck Duncan with the force of a blow. "Dead?" he repeated incredulously. "Charley Grant—dead?"

Measure nodded gravely. "Dead. I was right, then. You didn't know it. You weren't in close contact with him?"

Duncan shook his head slowly. "No. No, we never wrote. That is, I never did. I'm not much of a hand at correspondence. He wrote me twice, a long time ago. I never answered. Just too busy—or too lazy. I always meant to look him up when I got a chance. This is the first one I've had."

"Of course," said Measure. "Of course. Understandable."

DUNCAN went on, hesitating over the words: "It's hard for me to believe he's dead. I liked him as much as any man I've ever known. Three years ago I was in Peru installing some mining machinery in the back country—I've been in that neck of the woods most of the time since—when Charley came along with some little scientific expedition."

"Entomology," Measure said. "His hobby."

"Yes. He stayed at the camp with me for four or five months and we got to know each other well. There was several other engineers on the job, but they were Peruvians—didn't speak English. Charley and I had to amuse each other. You get to know a man quickly in those circumstances and you find out damned soon whether you like him or not. Charley was swell company. Always chipper and cheerful, no matter what."

Measure squirmed in his chair. "Yes. Yes, yes. Charley was a man you took to."

Duncan shrugged and drew a deep breath. "That's that. Now, what's all this funny business about?"

"Charley's son," said Measure. "He's a boy about five."

"I think I saw him today at the house," Duncan said.

Measure jerked forward. "You did? How did he look to you?"

"Damned puny and damned scared."

"Ah!" said Measure, nodding. "I know it. Look. I'll try to make sense out of this mess for you. There are three Charles Grants."

"Three!" Duncan exclaimed.

"Three. First there is Charley Dornley Grant. He was Charley's uncle. He's a pompous, tricky old fool who thinks he resembles an English nobleman."

"I saw his today, too," said Duncan.

"Yes. To go on—there is, or was, the late Charley Grant, your friend and mine. And there is Charley Grant's son, the boy you saw. His name is Charles Lehman Grant, same as his father's. This is what happened, as I see it.

"You came to the Grant house. You asked for Charles Grant. Macon, the butler, assumed you wanted the old man. He asked you why and you said you were an old friend. Then the old man took a look at you and discovered he'd never seen you before, which gave him the jitters. On top of that you asked for Charles Lehman Grant, and naturally the old man thought you wanted to see the boy, so he had you thrown out."

"Well, why?" Duncan demanded. "Even when I arrived at the Grant house they treated me as if I had the plague. Then they have me thrown out and send the police after me. Suppose, just for instance, I *had* wanted to see Charley's boy. What's wrong with that?"

"Money," said Measure, "is, as they say, the root of all evil."

"What money?" Duncan asked.

"CHARLEY was rich. He left a trust fund for his boy. The income from it amounts to about fifty thousand a year. Old Dornley Grant doesn't have a dime of his own, but as long as he is the boy's guardian he gets the fifty thousand. Charley divorced his wife and got the custody

of the boy, but now the wife wants the boy—and the income. Dornley Grant is scared green she'll get both. He probably thought she had sent you to pull some trick or other. Did she, by the way?"

"No," said Duncan. "I never saw her in my life. As far as that goes, I didn't know she even existed."

"She's a tramp," Measure said frankly. "Dornley Grant is no better, and the poor kid is in the middle. Neither one of them cares anything for him. They want that money from the trust."

"Not a very nice break for the kid," Duncan said slowly.

"It is not! I've been trying to get enough evidence to have Dornley Grant declared unfit as the boy's guardian, but he's a smooth old rascal and he can assume a very pious air when he wants to. So far I've done nothing but get him mad at me, but I'm still trying."

Duncan nodded. "I see. How did you happen to drop in here so opportunely?"

Measure squirmed in embarrassment. "Well, Mr. Duncan. At times I engage in the practice of criminal law, and as a matter of expediency I find it a good thing to have a—ah—friend at court, you might say. This particular gentleman is stationed at headquarters. He knows I'm interested in the Grant case and he telephoned me as soon as Dornley Grant called in and accused you of attempting to kidnap the boy. I realized that you had probably involved yourself inadvertently, so I came right over."

"Well, thanks," said Duncan. "If I can pay you—"

Measure bounced out of his chair. "No, no! Think nothing of it. Friend of Charley's—friend of mine. If I can be of any further service just give me a ring. I must dash along now. I have a client who is going to be very angry indeed if I don't get him out of jail pretty soon. Good-day, Mr. Duncan. Pleasure to have met you."

"Yes," said Duncan absently. He stood staring at the door for a long time after Measure had closed it. His grey eyes were narrowed thoughfully.

CHAPTER THREE

Warning

IT WAS an hour later, and Duncan had shaved and showered and dressed. He was adjusting his tie with a sort of absent-minded care when the telephone rang.

It was the desk clerk. "Ah—Mr. Duncan? There's a lady in the lobby to see you."

"Lady?" Duncan repeated, surprised. "Who is it?"

"A Miss Myra Case."

The name didn't mean a thing to Duncan. "Well," he said hesitantly, "tell her to wait just a moment and I'll be down."

He finished adjusting his tie, put on the shoulder holster with the .32 in it and slipped on his coat. He left the room and rode the elevator down to the lobby. He looked toward the desk inquiringly as he got out of the elevator, and the clerk nodded toward the opposite corner of the lobby.

The girl had already seen him coming and she stood up and took two hesitant steps toward him. She was wearing a coat and hat, but Duncan knew her at once. She was the one he had seen that morning at the Grant house—the one who had hurried the frightened child away so quickly.

"How do you do?" Duncan said.

Closer to her now, Duncan saw that her lips were full and soft and that her nose was short and straight with a sprinkling of freckles across its bridge. Her eyes were tilted just enough at the corners to give her face an oddly appealing piquancy.

"Mr. Duncan," she said, "I listened this morning at the Grant house. May I speak to you for a moment?"

Duncan said, "Certainly. Will you sit down?"

She sat down in the low chair again. She had a pair of gloves in her hand and she molded the smooth leather across the curve of her leg, obviously hunting for words.

"Mr. Duncan, I hardly know how to start. I realized this morning that you had come expecting to see the little boy's father, not the boy. His uncle should have realized that, too, but he's so queer. I'm the boy's governess. Were you a very good friend of his father's?"

"Yes," said Duncan.

She looked up at him. "Then you should do something to help that little boy."

"Well," Duncan said uncertainly, "why does he need help? I mean, what's the matter with him?"

"He's being horribly and callously mistreated."

Duncan watched her thoughtfully. "You're his governess, aren't you, Miss Case?"

Her soft lips straightened. "I do everything I possibly can to make things easier for him."

"I'm sure you do," Duncan said quickly. "But how is he being mistreated, and by whom?"

She hesitated again. "His uncle is a . . . very unpleasant person. Frankly, I wouldn't stay there for a second if I didn't think the boy needed me so badly. You saw how he looked this morning. His uncle won't let him out of the house at all. He frightens him continually with terrible stories about his mother and how she's going to kidnap him and mistreat him. The boy is in a perpetual state of terror. The whole atmosphere of the house builds that up. There's no one there except Mr. Grant and Macon, the butler. It even makes *me* afraid sometimes."

"I see," said Duncan, and he remembered the coldly hostile air he had felt when he had entered the house.

"I try to do what I can to counteract the way Charles feels, but that's not enough. He should be taken away from there. He's a sensitive and intelligent child and that's no atmosphere for him to be brought up in."

"It certainly isn't," Duncan agreed. "But it's really none of my business. I talked to a man named Measure. Perhaps he can arrange things. . . ."

SHE made a disgusted gesture. "Measure! He's just a pop-eyed, blustering little coward. Oh, he probably means well enough. He's been to the house several times. The last time Mr. Grant threatened to shoot him, and he ran—*ran* all the way to the gate. He was terrified!"

"Maybe I would be, too."

She stared at him soberly. "No, you wouldn't be. Will you help the boy and—me, Mr. Duncan?"

Duncan was silent for a long moment and then he said, "What can I do "

"Go out and see Mr. Grant and tell him that you are going to see to it that the boy has a better home and a healthier atmosphere to live in and other children to play with."

Duncan smiled wryly. "You think that would do any good?"

"Yes. Mr. Grant's afraid of you."

"Of me?" Duncan asked, startled.

"Yes. You have a—a look about you. As though you couldn't be bluffed or intimidated by threats. As though, if you really wanted something, you'd keep right after it until you got it. You're not the same sort as Measure or those two men the boy's mother has hired."

"Two men?" Duncan said quickly.

"Yes. They're private detectives, I guess. They hang around the grounds all the time, spying."

"Oh," said Duncan. "I want to help the boy and you, Miss Case, and I'll go out and talk to Dornley Grant if you think it would do any good. Tell me, though, do

you know how Charley—the boy's father—happened to die so suddenly?"

"He was killed in an automobile accident."

Duncan nodded slowly. "I see." He hesitated, considering, and in that second they heard the desk clerk saying:

"That is Mr. Duncan over there, madam."

Duncan started to turn around, and then Myra Case said, "Oh!" in a sharp, frightened gasp and got quickly to her feet.

Duncan rose, too. "What—"

"It's Mrs. Grant! I don't want her to see—" She stopped short and her eyes were wide and frightened and suddenly sick. "Are—are you—and she...?"

Duncan shook his head blankly. Before he could say anything Myra Case turned and ran. She ducked around the end of a settee and out through a side door of the lobby and disappeared, and then a softly possessive hand took hold of Duncan's arm just above the elbow and a throatily professional voice spoke in his ear.

"It's Mr. William Duncan, isn't? I'm so glad to meet you at last. May I call you Bill? Poor, dear Charley used to speak of you so cordially."

Her eyes were wide and blue and as empty as a cloudless summer sky. She had a round, soft face that would be pudgy before long and hair that was a brassy artificial yellow. She had small, soft lips painted very expertly a deep shade of red, and her teeth looked small and sharp. She tilted her head to one side and stared up at Duncan.

"You don't know me at all, do you, really? I'm poor, dead Charley's widow."

"Oh, yes," said Duncan vaguely. "Yes."

"You were talking to my little boy's governess, weren't you, Bill? I think she's rather nice looking, but so shy and queer, and so—so *serious*. I don't think men like serious women very well, do they, Bill?"

"Probably not," said Duncan.

"Bill, dear, I'll just have to talk to you for a moment. It's really quite important and I've been dying to meet you anyway. Charley always said you were the nicest person, but he never did say you were so handsome. Charley used to have such *grubby* friends! It was really a task for me But not *you*. Won't you stop in here and buy me a drink, Bill? I've got a friend waiting, and he's just dying to meet you, too. He really is."

DUNCAN let her lead him across the lobby and along the hall that slanted down to the cocktail lounge. It was just before the dinner hour now, and the place was crowded with couples sitting at the circular bar and at small chrome-legged tables. Mrs. Grant piloted Duncan across the room to a table backed in against the deep black-leather divans that filled a corner.

"Waldo, dear," she said. "Waldo, this is Mr. William Duncan, the one I was telling you about. Bill, this is my very dear friend, Waldo Seaton. You must like each other!"

Seaton was sunk back deep in the cushions and he made no attempt to rise. He was incredibly thin, and his skin was yellowish and tight and dry over the angular contours of his face. There were shadows under his eyes His voice was like a dry, rustling whisper.

"Hello, Duncan. Sit down. Have a drink."

The waiter was hovering at their elbows and Duncan ordered a Scotch and soda. Mrs. Grant hesitated prettily.

"Well, I really shouldn't have one. Really. But I would like just one small Manhattan. They're so refreshing."

Seaton sat motionless, as though he were too tired to move. His eyes were bright and hotly feverish and they studied Duncan unwinkingly. Mrs. Grant prattled on about something, but Seaton didn't say

a word until the waiter brought back the two drinks.

In front of Seaton on the table there was a quart bottle of bonded rye, a big highball glass and a bowl of ice cubes. He took one of the cubes out of the bowl now, put it carefully in the glass and then filled the glass with whiskey. He picked it up in one claw-like yellow hand and sipped at it, eyes on Duncan. After a while he turned his head toward Mrs. Grant.

"Shut up for a while," he said casually.

Mrs. Grant sighed and subsided.

Seaton nodded at Duncan. "You were a friend of her husband's?"

"Yes," said Duncan.

"Now, Waldo, you know I told you dear Bill was—"

"Shut up," said Seaton. "You know Charley and she had a kid—a boy?"

"Yes," Duncan said.

"That poor, poor dear little angel—"

"Quiet," said Seaton. "Duncan, you in on this with anyone? You got any personal irons in the fire?"

Duncan shook his head. "None."

Seaton jerked his head toward Mrs. Grant. "She signed the kid away when Charley divorced her."

Mrs. Grant sat up. "I was tricked—"

"Can it," Seaton advised. "Duncan's got a brain or two. She signed the kid away for dough, Duncan, That's all right. She's no lily. He'd have been a nuisance to her."

"Why, Waldo!"

SEATON went on as if she wasn't there. "As long as Charley was alive the kid was okay. A lot better off without her around. But the old man—the uncle—that's another proposition. Anybody would be better than him. That old boy is a rat."

"I see," said Duncan vaguely.

"Look," said Seaton in his monotonous whisper. "We're not trying to fool anybody. That kid has an income like the federal government and that has a lot to do with it, of course, but she wants him back. And if she gets him back, I'll see that he has decent care in a decent home."

"The little angel!" said Mrs. Grant. "I'll just love him and love him—"

"You'll lose a few teeth if you don't keep that trap shut. That's it, Duncan. She wants the kid back and I think we've got a good chance to get him back, and if we do he'll get a hell of a lot better treatment that he's getting now. So what do you say?"

"What do you want me to say?"

"Nothing. I want you to keep still and keep out of this. It's enough of a mess now."

Duncan shrugged. "It's none of my business after all." He got up. "Thanks for the drink."

"I know," said Mrs. Grant brightly. "Oh, I know. You're going to hurry back to meet my boy's cute little governess, that Miss Case."

"Say it again, dummy," Seaton requested.

"But he was talking to her, Waldo. Right in the lobby when I went to get him just now, and she ran away when she saw me, like the silly shy little thing she is."

Seaton sat still, looking at Duncan, and when he spoke it was like the soft slow rustle of silk. "Just remember what you said, Duncan. It's none of your business. Don't be smart, pal. Not with me."

Duncan nodded politely. "Good-bye," he said.

He went across the room and out through the door into the hall.

Belt was standing there, leaning against the wall, with one long leg twisted awkwardly around the other. He had his arms folded across his hollow chest and he was slowly stroking his nose with a long, bony forefinger.

"Hello," Duncan said.

Belt nodded once. "That company you work for—does it own any heavy trucks?"

"Why, yes," Duncan answered blankly. "Lots of them."

"Can you drive 'em?"

"Certainly."

"Can you prove you were in Peru two years ago April fifth?"

"I could," said Duncan, "but I'd probably have to go to a lot of trouble."

"Better start."

"Why?"

"Your dear old pal, Charley Grant, was killed two years ago on April fifth. He was run off of Canyon Road by a truck that didn't stop. A heavy truck that we haven't identified—yet."

Duncan stared at him. "You get lots of ideas, don't you?"

Belt nodded. "Oh, yeah. I'm about to get some more—after seein' you talkin' to your pals inside the bar. Watch your step, Duncan, or I'll be watchin' it for you."

"I'll try to remember," said Duncan.

CHAPTER FOUR

House of Death

THE shrill jangle of the telephone jolted Duncan abruptly out of a troubled sleep. He sat up in bed with a jerk, unaccountably startled for a second. The room was in darkness except for the faint flicker of a sign somewhere below his hotel window. The phone rang again, imperiously, and Duncan lifted it off the night stand.

"Yes?" he said.

"Duncan, this is Measure. G. Henry Measure. Now, Duncan, I did you a favor this afternoon when I got rid of that half-witted Belt for you, didn't I? In all fairness, you'll admit I did you that favor, won't you, Duncan?"

"Certainly," said Duncan.

"Good. Now I want you to do a favor for me, Duncan. It's an imposition, Duncan, I know it. But I haven't got anyone else I can ask. It's of vital importance. I'm excited."

"I gathered that. What's the favor you want?"

"Duncan, I was out here—near the Grant place—just looking over the lay of the land in a casual fashion. Not snooping or spying, you understand, Duncan. I wouldn't stoop to that. But I saw things I don't like at all, Duncan. Not at all."

"What?"

"There's some excitement at the house. There was shouting and a scream and something that sounded like a shot, and a car came out going at a terrific speed and nearly ran me down in the road. I'm afraid there's been some tragedy, Duncan."

"Why don't you call the police?"

"Duncan, now be reasonable. I can't do that. It would prejudice my interests if it was known I was snooping around here, and it might not be anything at all but old Dornley Grant having a fit of temper or something similar."

"Why don't you go find out?"

"Duncan, I'm ashamed to admit it, but I'm afraid. Old Dornley Grant has promised to shoot me on sight and I'm not a man of action, Duncan. You know that. I'm a man of words and not deeds, unfortunately."

"All right," Duncan said. "What do you want me to do?"

"As a friend of Charley's, Duncan, come out here and investigate. You're not involved in this, Duncan. You can safely put yourself forward without inviting repercussions or retaliations, Duncan. I'm asking this as a return of the favor I did you."

"I'll come," Duncan said.

"Good. Good, Duncan! You're a man after my own heart. I won't forget this. I'll be waiting for you at the highway at the edge of the estate. Come quickly, Duncan. I have a feeling that this is of the most vital import."

THE trees that lined the road were like squat dark sentinels and the asphalt was slick and black and shiny under the headlights. Duncan drove fast, following the white center line around a banked curve, and then he saw the startled image of Measure, squatting frightened and toad-like in the dusty grass of the roadside. his pop eyes staring glassily under the arm he was holding up to shield them.

Duncan put the brakes on hard and let the coupé skid sideways to a shuddering halt. Measure jerked the door open and scrambled in. He was puffing and wheezing prodigiously.

"Duncan, I can never thank you enough. I'm glad you're here. Indeed I am! It's dark and infernally lonely out here, Duncan. and I'm a man of imagination. There're dark and bloody things going on tonight, Duncan. I swear I can feel them like footsteps on a grave. I don't like this, Duncan."

Duncan had thrust the coupé into gear, rolling it forward. "Tell me again what you saw."

"I was at the gate. Investigating, Duncan. Nothing more, I can assure you. Wondering if there were any guards or if that old crook was wandering about with murder in his heart. I heard the shouts and screams and what I'm sure was a shot, Duncan. A shot, no less. And while I was standing and looking and wondering, this car came down the drive—without lights, Duncan—and missed me by no more than a hair's breadth. It was terrifying. I admit I was in a funk, Duncan. I don't attempt to deny it."

"We'll see what happened," Duncan said.

The outlines of the gate posts loomed up, and Duncan swung the car between them and up the slanting curve of the graveled drive.

The house was dark and shadowy with lights upstairs and down, like the empty grotesque eyes of a jack-o-lantern. Duncan slid the coupé to a stop in front and got out.

"Duncan!" Measure hissed. "Duncan, the front door is open! Do you see that. Duncan?"

Duncan didn't answer. He took the .32 out of his shoulder holster and it was comforting in his hand. He walked quietly and quickly across the flagstone terrace.

The big front door was ajar, with light behind it shining through the opening. Duncan thought for a moment that it was fastened on its latch chain and that Measure was nothing but a hysterical fool and that he was another for paying any attention to him. And then he reached out and touched the door with his fingers and the door swung back ponderously and silently, like a heavy curtain rolling slowly away.

The big hall was lighted and empty. There was no movement and no sound in it, but the dark thick rug that had covered its polished flooring was crumpled up into a ragged ball at the foot of the long sweeping stairs.

That was all—the rug crumpled there. But it was enough to send a little prickling chill along Duncan's back, and his thumb moved a little and slid the safety catch on the automatic down.

"Duncan," Measure said in a stage whisper. "Duncan, what is it?"

One of the doors that opened off the hall was swung wide on its hinges, and Duncan moved forward softly until he could see through it and down two polished steps into a den with a huge carved desk in the corner.

There was a green-shaded lamp on the desk and its light made jagged shadows on the floor and touched the gold lettering in the bindings of the books that were stacked in shelves along the walls.

CHARLES DORNLEY GRANT was lying flat on his face in front of the desk. His hands—the fingers gnarled and

knobby with age—were flung out ahead of him as though he had dived head first at the floor and stayed there without moving again. His white hair was pushed down over his face in a bushy tangle and blood was clotted dark in the back of his head.

"Oh!" said Measure.

"See if you can help him," Duncan said. Measure went inching into the study, his pop eyes bulging. Duncan walked back along the wall toward the stairs, listening. When he reached the crumpled rug he stopped and called, "Hello!" and then again, louder, *"Hello!"*

His voice traveled away and came back in an empty ring of echoes. There was no answer. There was no sound. "Myra Case!" Duncan called. "Charles!" There was only silence.

Duncan went up the stairs three at a time and around the length of the banister where he had seen the boy peering at him that afternoon. There was a broad hall on beyond and Duncan went the length of it, opening each door and looking into empty bedrooms.

The last door was the boy's bedroom, and when Duncan opened the door he found that the light was on in it. He stopped in the doorway, staring around. The small boy's bed in the corner had been heaved up bodily and then tipped over on its side. The bed clothing trailed out across the floor. The closet door was open and the clothes inside were a jumbled mess, as though someone had reached in and grabbed an armful of them and pulled them out helter-skelter.

Duncan didn't hesitate any longer. He turned and ran down the hall and down the stairs. Measure was at the foot of the stairs, shaking his hands in a sort of helpless panic.

"He's—he's dead," said Measure, shaking his hands as though he were trying to get something off them. "I touched him. I turned him over to—to see. He's dead. His eyes are open and he—he looks at you. I think his head is smashed in. Duncan, I don't like this. This is terrible, Duncan. I'm sure to be involved. My reputation will suffer, Duncan."

Duncan said shortly, "No, it won't. You came out here on business and this is the way you found things. The boy and Myra Case are gone."

"Gone?" Measure echoed. "Gone? They've been kidnaped! They've been murdered! It's that woman—Charley's ex-wife! I'll see she's punished for this! I'll have her prosecuted to the fullest extent—"

"Stay here," Duncan said shortly. "Macon is gone, too. I want to see if he's out in back."

He went through an open door opposite the study. This was the dining room, and a long narrow table gleamed dully in the dim light. The carpet was soft and luxurious under Duncan's feet, and when he had gone three steps into the room he stopped, staring down.

The nap of the carpet was bent down in two parallel dragging grooves that led waveringly from the hall door to the swinging door ahead of Duncan. He stared at the grooves for a second, puzzled, and then realized what had made them and went rapidly to the swinging door and pushed it open.

The kitchen was long and narrow and low ceilinged, and Macon was in a queerly flattened small hump in the middle of the bright linoleum. Duncan reached him in two steps, bent down, and then a voice spoke in a soft murmur:

"Drop that gun."

Duncan froze.

"I'm not foolin', pal. Drop it."

Duncan let his fingers relax slowly and his automatic thudded on the floor at his feet. He turned his head slowly.

Rock was standing in the doorway to the back porch. His yellow hat was tipped on his forehead, and sweat made bright

twin streaks down one fat cheek. His eyes were colorless and deadly. He was holding a stubby-barreled revolver casually in his right hand.

"You're quite the guy for gettin' around, ain't you, pal?" he asked. "Just come along quiet. You're goin' visitin'. Whitey's waiting' for us outside."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Man Behind the Gun

THE house was low and rambling and masked by the trees that grew close around it. It was like a cardboard silhouette against the dark background, with a steeply tilted roof and lighted squares that were windows.

The dusty grey sedan rumbled over a small wooden bridge, and a willow flicked its drooping branches across the windshield as Whitey made a sharp turn to the right and brought the car to a jerking stop.

"You'd think you could at least learn to stop a car, even if you can't drive one," Rock said. He was sitting with his stubby revolver poked hard into Duncan's ribs and he kept it there as he maneuvered the door catch and slid out of the car.

"Get out and come with me, Duncan. Take it slow and easy. Wait here, Whitey."

Duncan walked ahead of Rock up a narrow graveled path, past a bedraggled hedge and up on a small front porch.

"Open the door and go in," Rock said.

Duncan pushed the door back and stepped into a long low living room with heavy rafters making criss-crossed shadows under its ceiling. A natural-stone fireplace filled the whole far end of the room and the furniture was artistically rustic.

Waldo Seaton was sitting in front of a card table beside the fireplace. There was a bottle of rye, nearly empty, and a solitaire layout on the table. Mrs. Grant was leaning cozily over his shoulder when Duncan opened the door.

Rock came in and kicked the door shut behind him, still holding his gun against Duncan.

The cards made a sudden sharp flutter in Seaton's skeleton-like fingers and he put them carefully down on the table. The parched yellow skin of his face was a dry and tight as a mask.

"What's the idea, Rock?" he asked in his rustling whisper.

Rock said, "This guy gets around too fast. He was at Grant's when I got back. I thought I better bring him over for a conference."

"That was right," said Seaton. "Well, Duncan, I told you to mind your own business. I warned you."

"Rock and Whitey kidnaped the Grant boy," Duncan stated.

Seaton shook his head. "Not kidnaped. Oh, no. They merely took him to return him to his mother. Did you ever hear of a mother being convicted of kidnaping her own kid—especially when he was being mistreated? We'll put that over, all right, and when we get through the court will award her the boy's custody."

"How about the boy's governess—Myra Case?"

Seaton said, "No kidnaping there. She came of her own free will—didn't want to leave the boy. We didn't want her, but we didn't want a beef. She's in the other room with the boy now. Nobody has laid a finger on her."

"That's very neat," Duncan said. "You could put it over—if it wasn't for the murder."

"Murder? Seaton repeated softly.

"Yes. Either Rock or Whitey hit old Dornley Grant too hard. He's dead."

Rock's gun jerked against Duncan's side. "He's lyin'!"

"No," said Duncan easily. "The cops are probably there by this time. Call up and see."

"He's not lying, Rock," Seaton whispered. "He's not lying. I can tell."

"Get over there," Rock said. He pushed Duncan against the wall and opened the front door. "Whitey! Whitey, come here!"

WHITEY'S shoes crunched on the gravel of the walk. "Huh? What you want, Rock?" He came into the room, swaggering jauntily, and then he saw Rock's face and seemed to shrink inside his loud suit, and his pink-rimmed eyes grew suddenly round and terrified. "Rock! W-what—"

Rock's voice had a thin, steely edge. "Whitey, what'd I tell you to do at the Grant place?"

"You—you said go in and paste the old man one while you grabbed the kid, Rock. That's—what you said."

"What else, Whitey?" Rock urged gently.

"You—you said don't paste him hard on—on account he's an old boy and—and delicate."

"Damn you! You hit him too hard. You killed him."

"No!" Whitey shrieked. "I never! I just tapped—"

Rock hit him with the stubby revolver, raking it across Whitey's face. Whitey screamed and tried to hide his head in his arms, and Rock hit him again and then a third time, and Whitey's legs suddenly crumpled up under him and he slammed down on the floor and lay there limp and twisted.

Rock turned to look at Seaton. He was breathing hard and noisily through his open mouth, and there were bright little bubbles of sweat on his upper lip.

"You'll have to cover me for this, Seaton. You'll have to figure a way. I'm in this just as deep as that damned Whitey. I was there at the Grant place at the time."

"Cover you?" Seaton said silkily. "Oh, no. Paddle your own canoe, Rock. Start now. Get out of here."

"Oh," said Rock. "Oh, I see."

He took a step back, casually, as though he were going to turn and go through the door, and then his stubby revolver came around in a glinting arc.

Seaton fired from under the card table and the table seemed to jump with the report. The bullet hit Rock low in the abdomen and flipped his legs out from under him. He came down on top of Whitey and rolled over him and across the floor, doubled up.

That was when Duncan sprang.

Mrs. Grant screamed shrilly and senselessly. Seaton started to get up, jerking at the gun he had hidden under the table, and they both crashed against Mrs. Grant and knocked her headlong across the hearth.

Seaton was all bone and wiry, twisting muscle. He writhed under Duncan's weight and got the gun loose and fired once. The powder blast made a fiery streak across Duncan's cheek and the bullet howled weirdly as it ricocheted off the stone fireplace. Then Duncan caught Seaton's wrist and twisted just as Seaton pulled the trigger again.

The report was not a roar this time, but a hollow, deadened thump, and Seaton arched his body up and threw Duncan clear. Duncan rolled over and came up to a crouch, ready to duck in under the gun again, but Seaton hadn't moved, and his body was still in that impossible, contorted position.

As Duncan stared, uncomprehending, Seaton made a wet, bubbling sound with his lips and suddenly turned over and flattened out on his face. The bullet from his revolver had struck him at the base of his skinny neck and the whole side of his face was blackened with powder.

Mrs. Grant was on her hands and knees on the hearth. Her brassy hair had come loose and she was staring through it at

Duncan with glassy eyes. She screamed at him. She got up, stumbling, with her soot-smeared hands held out in front of her and ran crazily, staggering, to the door. She ran out through it, and it slammed hollowly behind her.

Duncan blew out his breath in a sudden gasping sigh. He got up unsteadily and looked down at Rock. Rock wasn't moving and his eyes were closed, but he moaned steadily with every breath. Duncan went across to the door at the side of the room and tapped on it.

"Myra Case," he called softly. "Are you in there?"

Her voice came, low and trembling a little. "Y-yes."

"It's all over now," Duncan said. "It's all over and everything's all right. Come out."

WHEN Duncan and Myra Case and the boy drove up to the Grant house in Rock's dusty grey sedan there were three police cars parked in front of the flagstone terrace. Duncan got out of the sedan and helped Myra Case out. He picked up the boy in his arms.

"Chin up now, soldier," he said.

"Sure," said the boy. "I—I wasn't scared—not so very."

His eyes were enormous and glistening in the pale thinness of his face and his small body was pitifully light in Duncan's arms as he carried him across the terrace and into the huge front hall.

The door to the study was closed now and there was a red-faced policeman leaning against the wall beside it, holding a riot gun in the crook of one arm.

"Hey!" he said, straightening up. "What goes on—"

Duncan put the boy down in front of him. "This is the missing child. Will you keep him here for a moment?"

"Well, sure," said the policeman in an amazed voice.

Duncan opened the door into the study and let Myra Case precede him into the room. Belt was there and three other plainclothesmen, and there was a fussy little man in horn-rimmed glasses packing a stethescope in a medical bag.

Dornley Grant's body was lying in front of the desk, covered with a sheet now. Measure was sitting in a chair in the corner with his hands folded across his paunch, grinning blandly at Lieutenant Belt.

"Well, well," said Belt. He didn't look or sound surprised.

"Duncan!" Measure said in a triumphant chortle. "Ha, Duncan, old boy! You found her, eh? Did you find the boy, Duncan? Did you?"

"Yes," said Duncan. "I left him out in the hall with a policeman. He's had enough excitement for one evening."

Belt felt thoughfully of his nose. "Mind tellin' me where you found 'em?"

Duncan said, "Seaton had his two hired hands take the boy. They were going to return the boy to his mother—at least that was going to be their story. Of course, all they wanted was his income."

"Ha!" said Measure. "See, Belt, you imbecile? I told you that if you had any brains you'd find the answer at once. You're a dope."

Duncan looked at him. "I'm afraid you're in for a disappointment, Measure. A pretty big one."

"Ah?" said Measure blankly.

"Yes. You're not going to profit by the murder of Charley Grant as you thought you would. You killed Charley, Measure."

Measure blinked his pop eyes. "I? Are you mad, Duncan? Is your mind unbalanced?"

"No. You were his lawyer. You knew he hadn't provided for a guardian for his boy. You probably saw that he didn't. You knew that the court would have to appoint a guardian if Charley died suddenly. So you arranged that, too. You

expected to be appointed guardian, but Dornley Grant got in ahead of you, and you couldn't protest too much for fear of someone connecting you with Charley's death."

"Why, Duncan," said Measure. "My dear Duncan. You really shouldn't make an accusation like that when you know that it can't possibly be proven."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Belt, staring at Measure.

Duncan made a weary gesture. "It doesn't matter. Measure also murdered Dornley Grant."

"What!" Measure shouted furiously. "That's absurd! That's fantastic, nothing less. Those miscreants that kidnaped the boy killed him!"

"No," said Duncan. "Whitey struck Dornley Grant and knocked him out, but he didn't kill him. You did that while I was upstairs looking for the boy and Myra. You saw he was only unconscious and you killed him."

"It's absurd," said Measure. "Oh, it's perfectly absurd. But just supposing it wasn't absolutely false. How would you prove it?"

Duncan looked at Belt. "How is Macon?"

"Just knocked out," said Belt.

DUNCAN nodded. "Macon saw Measure kill Dornley Grant. He'll tell you that as soon as he regains consciousness. Macon was in the kitchen when Rock and Whitey walked in on him. One of them hit him and knocked him out. He regained consciousness about the time Measure and I arrived.

"He was pretty weak and he crawled out of the kitchen and across the dining room. You can see the marks he made in the carpet. From across the hall he saw Measure murder Dornley Grant."

The color was gone from Measure's round face. He kept trying to smile defiantly, but the smile wouldn't stay in place, and then he began to giggle hysterically.

Duncan turned away, sickened, and walked out into the hall with Myra Case close beside him. The boy was sitting on the lowest step of the stairway.

"Listen, soldier," he said. "I'm on my vacation now. Do you suppose, if we could arrange it, you'd like to go along with me?"

The boy's eyes opened very widely. "Yes! Oh, yes! You mean—I wouldn't have to hide and I could play—just anywhere—out in the open?"

"Yes. Anywhere."

"But—but if I should be kidnaped or—or caught by bad people—"

"I don't think any one will bother you while I'm along with you," said Duncan soberly. "Do you think so?"

"Oh, no! No! Not with *you* along." Then his thin face lengthened. "But—but I can't. . . ."

"Why not?"

The boy swallowed painfully. "Please, couldn't Myra come with us? Please." He swallowed again and pleaded breathlessly. "I couldn't leave her. They—they might take her away again. And she's awfully nice, really she is. . . ."

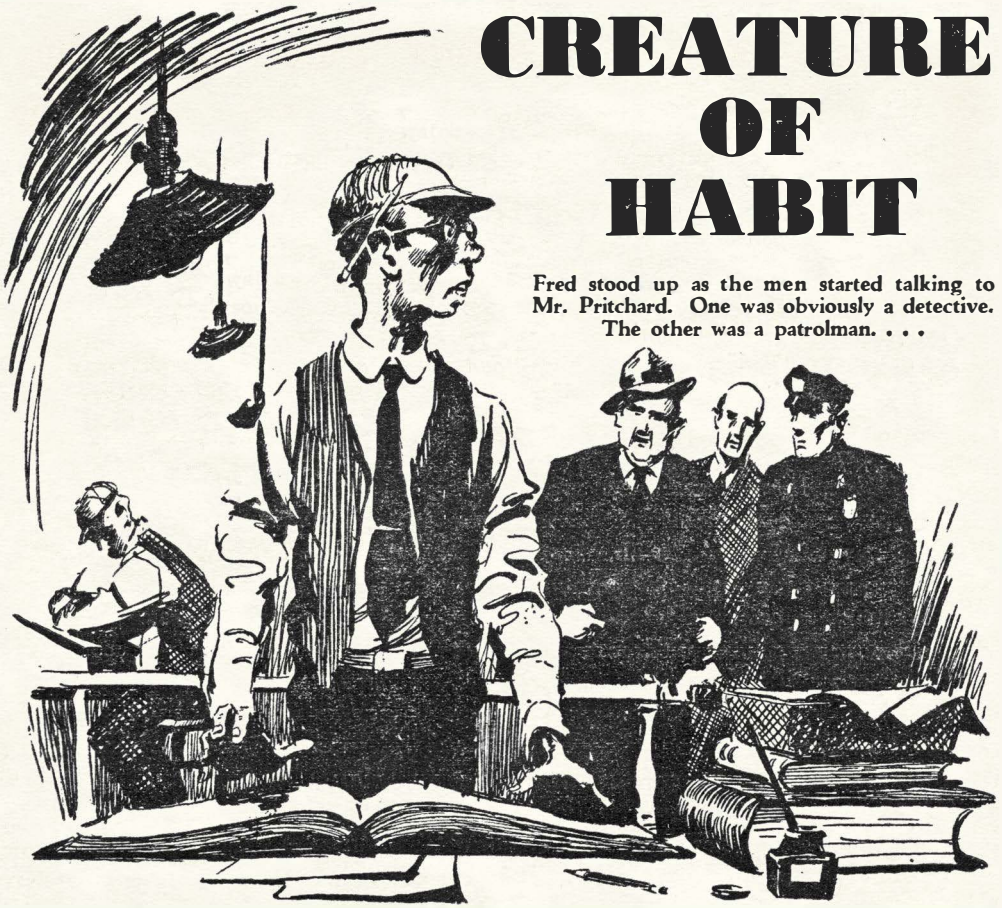
Duncan looked at Myra Case. Her face was painfully red with embarrassment. "Charles! No! I couldn't go. It—it wouldn't be . . . Well, it just isn't the thing."

The policeman had been watching and listening with a sort of delighted interest, and now he cleared his throat casually. "I got a cousin by the name of Hinkle. He's a clerk in the marriage licence bureau. He works real late at night sometimes—like tonight, I bet."

Duncan was still looking at Myra Case, and now he turned and nodded slowly at the eager boy. "Yes. I think we'll just take Myra along with us," he said.

THE END

CREATURE OF HABIT



Fred stood up as the men started talking to Mr. Pritchard. One was obviously a detective. The other was a patrolman. . . .

By WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

It takes more than murder to change the habits of a man like Fred. . . .

WITHOUT the Friday nights he might have gone on and on. He had his own world, after office hours, his printed world, and adversity troubled him very little.

But always on Friday nights Bertha would be waiting in front of Bloom's, her two hundred and seventeen pounds outlined by the white store behind her. She'd be smiling. She was always smiling.

What the hell was so funny?

Two hundred and seventeen pounds, an even hundred more than Fred weighed, and her hand would be out and he'd put the week's wages in that, and she'd shove it into her tiny purse.

When they were first married Bertha had been young, shapely and romantic. Now she was still romantic and the Friday evenings were a must. In the interests of peace. Not that she'd scream, but she'd pout. A two-hundred-and-seventeen-pound pout is a horrible sight, and Fred avoided it by meeting her in front of Bloom's at 5:08 each Friday evening.

At the long counter in Bloom's Bertha would have a Double Banana Royale. Fred would have a sandwich and coffee.

Then the movie. Very few movies in-

terested Fred; none failed to enchant Bertha. She held his hand all through the double feature. He loathed its damp capaciousness; he loathed Bertha.

One hundred and seventeen pounds and two hundred and seventeen pounds. People would turn as they walked by,

would smile at them. Fred was sensitive, being the lighter one. Bertha? Who knows?

The street is so busy in front of Bloom's. There are so many people. Some are men, tall and superior. Some are women, beautiful and young. Smiling at Fred and Bertha.

Funny?

One of Fred's favorite writers was the minor-league philosopher, Ramsay Elleson. In one of the thin books Ramsay published—infrequently and at his own expense—Ramsay got going on Hell.

Eternity, itself, Ramsay claimed, was Hell, though it would be a personal matter. For the author, Hell would be an eternal box seat at an eternal football game, Ramsay being an intellectual (self-proclaimed). For football fans Hell would be an eternity in the library of Ramsay Elleson. And so on.

Fred gave the matter some thought and his personal view of Hell would be an eternity with Bertha. Eternity is only a word; he'd actually gone through most of it already. Twenty-two years of Friday nights. Twenty-two years of the Hollywood product for a man who could enjoy the profundity of Ramsay Elleson.

Only a little less than twenty-two years of—avoirdupois.

Eternity can end. It can be brought violently to a stop. With determination and fortitude and something heavy to swing, a man can establish a better destiny than an eternity with Bertha.

Fred had this thought on a Wednesday night, while working out a cryptogram. He looked over at Bertha, monumental and placid under a reading lamp, and waited for the thought to go away.

The thought didn't go away.

He slept with it. He carried it, along with his lunch, to work the next day. The figures in his ledgers seemed to dance and form strange shapes, leering at him. He left early, his head aching.

At home, Bertha said, "Honey, you're sick. . . ."

"What makes you think I'm sick?"

"You're home early. And you look sick, Honey."

"I'm not sick. I'm just a little tired. I didn't sleep very well last night." He rubbed the back of his neck with a trembling hand. "I'm going down to look at the furnace."

It was July.

She stared at him.

He said irritably, "Well, I can look at it, can't I? Damn it!"

She said soothingly, "Of course you can. I'll make some tea. I'll have it ready for you."

The floor in the cellar was dirt. It was a cheap house. He paid more rent for it than it was worth. But the floor was dirt, which suited his present purpose.

After a little while, she called, "Honey, the tea is ready."

He didn't answer.

"Fred?"

He didn't answer.

"Fred—answer me!"

He didn't answer, and she started down the stairs. . . .

IT WAS a restless, fretful night. Well, it was done; nothing could change that. He'd grown weary, digging, and had covered her very skimpily. But he could finish that tonight. He could use the time they usually wasted in the movie.

He ate his breakfast at a coffee shop near the office. He spent the day rereading meaningless figures. Ahead of him stretched a Bertha-less Elysium; to hell with figures, today.

Then, around five, one figure jumped to the front of his consciousness and burned a hole in his brain. It was the figure on his desk calender.

Today was the 21st of July.

Today was the day the gas man read the meter in the cellar, using the duplicate key Bertha thoughtfully left for him under the rear-door mat.

Fred stood up, his stomach filled with flying birds. He stood up and saw the men talking to Mr. Pritchard at the front of the office. One was obviously a detective. The other was a blue-uniformed patrolman.

Mr. Pritchard was indicating Fred now, and both officers started his way. Their faces were grave, watchful and ominous.

Fred didn't wait for his hat. There was a door at the rear, and old wooden steps going down to the alley. Fred bolted.

He saw the startled faces of the other employees and heard the shouted, "Stop, in the name of the law! Stop that man!"

Now Fred was through the door and going down the steps. From the head of the steps, as he was halfway down, he heard the "Stop!" again. He heard the single, deafening shot.

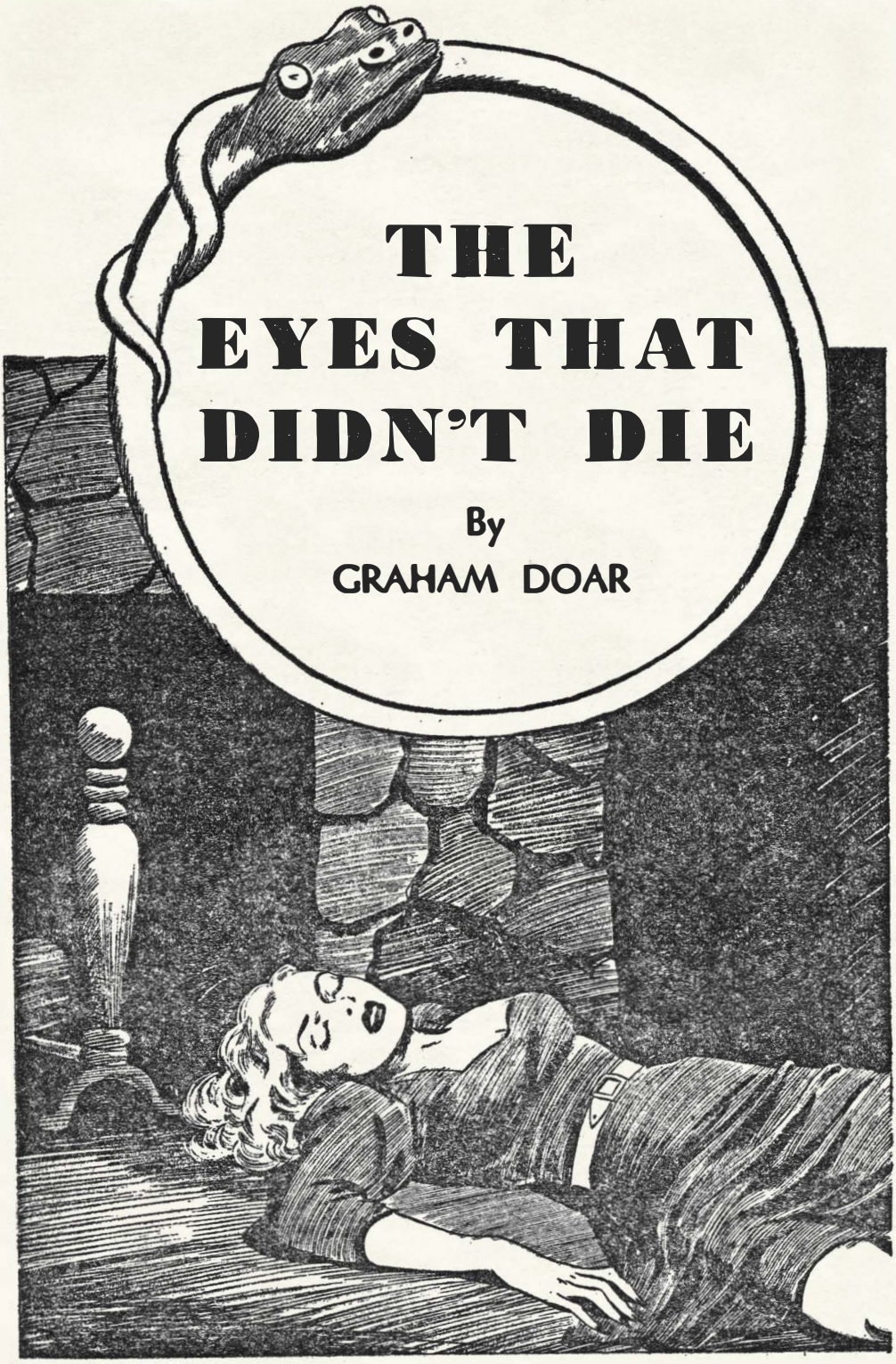
One shot—that missed. He was in the alley, and running. He came out of the alley on Eighth and turned north. He was still running, and no more commands reached his ears.

Eight to Grand and down Grand.

And then, suddenly, he stopped without the command. Stopped to stare, stopped to realize that single shot *hadn't* missed.

For there, outlined against the front of Bloom's, Bertha was waiting. Smiling, holding her purse, but her hand wasn't out for his wages.

What need was there for money—where they were?



THE EYES THAT DIDN'T DIE

By

GRAHAM DOAR

• •

"Don't worry about a thing, Joe," said the voice of the Whispering Man. "Nobody knows you killed her. Nobody but me. . . ."

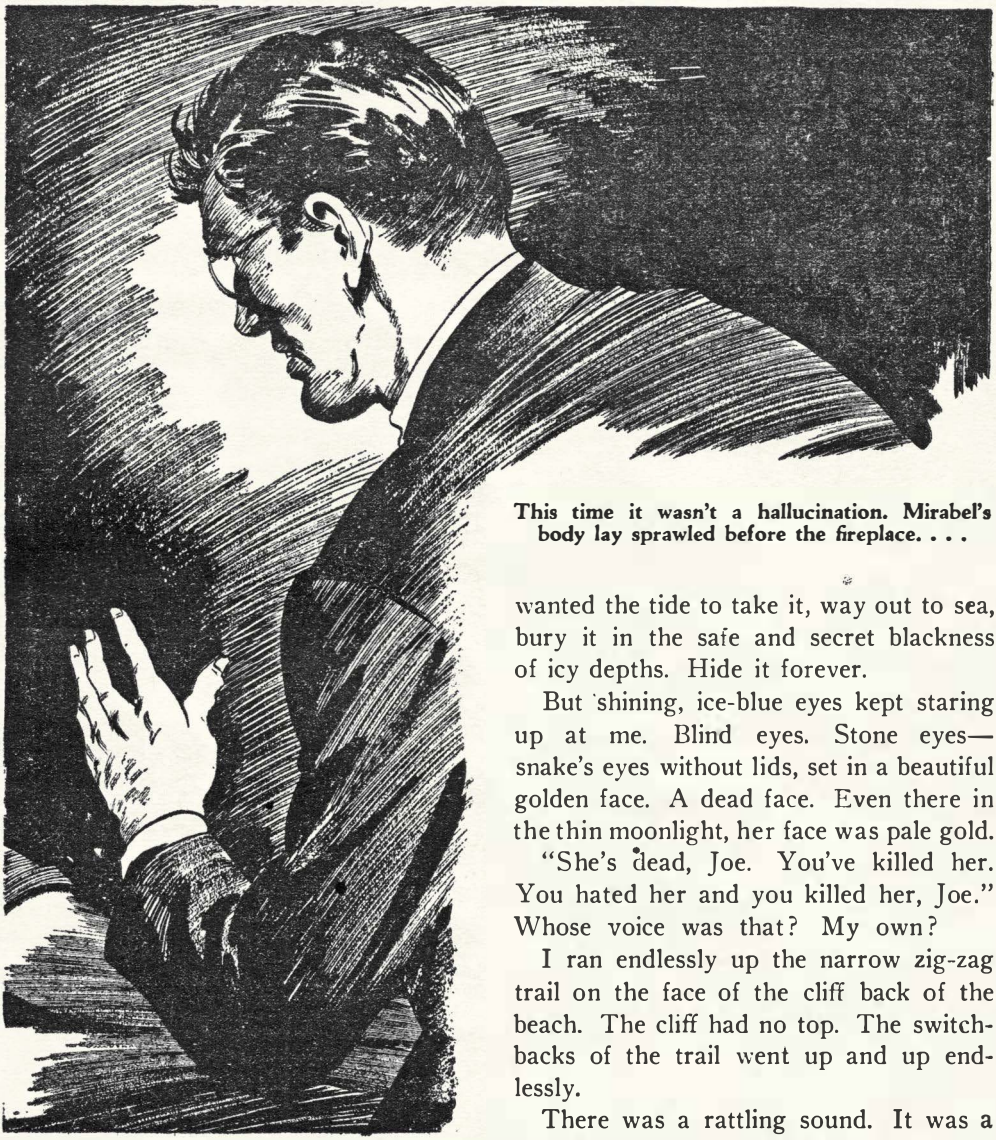
• •

CHAPTER ONE

The Blue-Eyed Snake

IT WAS a cold, cruel sound, the sound of a dark tide clawing at a pebbly beach, a withdrawing rattle, a cold, rushing thrust of dark water.

I wouldn't look at the black water, at the thing lying half in, half out of it. I wanted the tide to take it, way out to sea, bury it in the safe and secret blackness of icy depths. Hide it forever.



This time it wasn't a hallucination. Mirabel's body lay sprawled before the fireplace. . . .

But shining, ice-blue eyes kept staring up at me. Blind eyes. Stone eyes—snake's eyes without lids, set in a beautiful golden face. A dead face. Even there in the thin moonlight, her face was pale gold.

"She's dead, Joe. You've killed her. You hated her and you killed her, Joe." Whose voice was that? My own?

I ran endlessly up the narrow zig-zag trail on the face of the cliff back of the beach. The cliff had no top. The switchbacks of the trail went up and up endlessly.

There was a rattling sound. It was a

snake, coiled in the path ahead of me, a golden snake with blue stone eyes and yellow fangs that gleamed. An evil thing that hissed and moved with a rattling sound.

I turned and ran back down the zigzag path, down toward the black and cruel water. . . .

I SAT up in bed shaking, dripping with sweat. A tide was clawing at the inside of my skull and my stomach heaved with the bed's billowing motion. Sunlight was bright in the room, but my eyes would not focus. I lay back on the pillow with a groan.

When I shut my eyes, the nightmare swept back, the cold shine of dead blue eyes, the rush of water, the rattling sound. . . . There *was* a rattling sound.

Right there in the room.

I sat up unsteadily and squinted about. Without my glasses, the whole room swam and blurred. My hand automatically reached to the bedside table where I always left them. They were not there.

I swung my legs over the edge of the bed and perched unsteadily on its side.

Something swished past my bare ankle. I jerked away, shuddering, from the slight, furry contact even as I gave a shaky laugh. Damn that Faustine!

I didn't share my brother's enthusiasm for cats, but ordinarily I got along all right with Faustine, a pale yellow nondescript. After all, it was Bob's house—his and Helen's—and the cat was their pet.

She was playing with something in the middle of the bedroom now, batting it back and forth between her paws. Suddenly she sent it rattling across the floor toward the bed. It came to rest near my foot.

I brushed a trembling hand across my eyes and squinted. It was a snake. A tiny golden snake with glittering ice-blue eyes.

The trip-hammer in my skull stepped up its tempo.

I forced myself to lean closer, gripping the frame of the bed with nerveless hands. It was a snake ring. Only a ring—with blue stones for eyes—but I felt as unwilling to touch it as if it were a living serpent.

I wondered where such a bizarre bit of jewelry could have come from. It certainly was not my sister-in-law's sort of thing and neither Bob nor I would be caught dead wearing such a ring. I felt sick. I had seen that snake ring before. Where? I picked it up.

The cat rubbed against my legs, mewing.

She was hungry, I guessed, but why hadn't she been fed? It was late; I could tell that. Bob and Helen wouldn't be sleeping this late, even on Sunday. If they had both gone out, Helen would have fed the cat before they left.

Why was the cat in my room, for that matter? My door was standing open. Surely I had shut it when I went to bed. The house seemed curiously quiet.

I tried to remember shutting my door the night before. I couldn't. I couldn't even remember coming home. I was drunk. Blackout drunk. And after I had promised Bob.

Somebody must have helped me to bed. That was why my glasses were not in their usual place. That was why the balloon that was my head was tugging at its moorings. I stumbled across to the bureau and dropped the snake ring there. However it had come to be on by bedroom floor, it looked valuable. Beautiful workmanship in soft gold, and the eyes were jewels of some kind, not just glass. Somebody would be around asking about it.

My glasses were not on the bureau, either. I found them finally in my coat pocket, hung up neatly in the closet.

The cat followed me across the hall

toward the bathroom, mewing until I shut the door between us. Cold water cleared my head some. I changed the shower to hot, then cold again. This was building up to be the king of hangovers. I always had pretty good ones, but if I nursed this one along it looked as if I might set a record. The taste in my mouth was new, too. Peanut oil and bay rum would be my guess.

The headache was partially explained when I started to comb my hair. There was a considerable swelling high above the left ear, sore, the skin slightly broken. I supposed I had fallen and hit my head.

Faustine yowled again when I entertered the kitchen. She stood up and stuck her head into the refrigerator when I opened the door. There was not much on the shelves inside, a half-full milk bottle, no fruit juice. I was afraid to try to eat, but I knew my stomach was as empty as Bikini lagoon. Maybe some milk.

I hadn't eaten since noon yesterday, Saturday, not since I had those first couple of drinks with a customer at the garage. Bob was angry. Bob was a swell guy—all the time—but his temper had a hair trigger. And I *had* promised.

My mind shied away from the quarrel with Bob. It was my fault to begin with, starting again after I had promised, and then I had had to drag in Mirabel.

I glanced at the clock on the kitchen wall. It said seventy-thirty but—it must have stopped. Outside, the July sun was shining straight down into the back yard. I found my watch on the bedside table. It said a quarter to one.

THE door buzzer, not a loud one, blasted through my head like an artillery bombardment. I sat quietly at the kitchen table. It kept on buzzing.

The man on the doorstep was thirty-five, maybe forty, with a square face with a straight line across it that was his mouth. Grey suit with a brown hat. I had never seen him before.

"Robert Martin's residence?"

I told him yes, but Bob was not home.

"You're Joseph Martin, Robert's brother," he told me. "I'd like to come in." He pulled back the grey suit coat.

I'd seen police badges before but not like this, not having it flashed on me. I started to shake again, leaning against the door. He came toward me and I stepped back to let him in. He raised an eyebrow at my hand, jumping like a rodeo pony against the door jamb.

What was it? What had happened that the police were interesetd in? Where were Bob and Helen? Had I been driving my car yesterday? A crash, maybe—that lump on my head.

"Was Bob—is Bob hurt?"

Both eyebrows went up now. "What makes you think so?"

"Nothing, I . . . What did you want?"

"You and your brother own a garage at Seventeenth and Nichols."

I nodded.

"You're acquainted with a girl"—he glanced at a slip of paper in his square hand—"Mirabel Bourne?"

I hesitated. What to say? Sure, I knew her—too well. Bob knew her, too—also too well. That was part of the argument we'd had at the garage yesterday—Bob's wild infatuation with Mirabel Bourne, his silly yammering about splitting up with Helen so he'd be free to marry Mirabel. Bob hadn't liked it when I'd pointed out that he didn't need to marry her, that nobody needed to marry Mirabel. Maybe it was going too far when I told him that, told him how I knew. But . . .

I'd hesitated too long. It was too late to deny it now. "Sure, I know her. She's a regular customer at the garage. We both know her."

"You wouldn't know where Miss Bourne might be at the moment?"

"I wouldn't know." I was trying to read, upside down, the slip he held. It was headed "Missing Persons Report Form" and was pale blue. "I don't remember seeing her for quite a while. Weeks, anyway."

He made a notation on the slip and said nothing.

"What's it about Mirabel—Miss Bourne?"

He looked up at me sharply. "You call all your customers by their first names?"

It had slipped out. I wasn't proud of how well I had known Mirabel. Me and plenty of others. I hadn't found out till Saturday that my own brother was one of the others.

"Some," I said. "I know Miss Bourne pretty well."

He nodded. "I heard that. There's also talk you made some threats against her."

"Threats?" That really puzzled me. "Not me. At least, I don't remember. I haven't seen her for some time. As I said."

"You hear all kinds of talk." He shrugged it off.

"What's it all about? Has something happened?"

He tapped against his square chin with the end of his pencil. "You don't mind if I take a look around the house here?"

I did mind. I didn't know any reason why I should mind—but I did. I shoved my hands into the pockets of my robe so he couldn't watch them shake.

"Look," I said, "just tell me the score. I'm entitled to that much. Then you can look around—you can spend the day at it if you like. It isn't my house—it's my brother's. But he and my sister-in-law are both out—and, anyway, I don't know any reason they'd mind. But if it's something that's police business and concerns this house, I'm entitled to know the score—first."

He referred to the slip again. "Miss Bourne seems to have turned up missing. Around ten o'clock this morning her family called us and insisted on an investigation. They seemed to think—to have reason to think—that something might have happened to her."

I GRINNED, partly in relief, partly with genuine amusement. "I don't know what their reasons are, but I could make a good guess what's happened to Mirabel. It happens to lots of girls—every night in the year. She'll be home when she gets tired."

The thin line that was his mouth quirked upward on one side for a second, He probably thought he'd smiled. It could be that he knew a little more about Mirabel and Mirabel's little ways than her family. And, of course, there was her divorce. Most of the unsavory details had got around town, even though her family's money and position had kept them out of the local papers.

"Miss Bourne left home in her own car on Friday," he said. "She was expected back Sunday morning at the latest. She didn't show—and her family called the friends she was going to visit, some people name of Vaughn who have a summer home in Surfside. She hadn't been there. Well, her people waited all Sunday and Sunday night—then this morning they called us."

"This morning? Then this is . . . Monday?"

"What's wrong with Monday?" His little quirky smile said he knew the answer.

I held out one hand and let him watch it jump. "I guess I lost a day in there. I had a couple on Saturday afternoon. I thought this was Sunday."

He nodded judicially. "Quite a bender. You show the signs. You sure Miss Bourne wasn't on the party?"

I wasn't sure—and I didn't like his asking. I didn't remember *seeing* Mira-

bel. Bob and I had argued, almost fought about her, on Saturday. After I'd taken a couple of drinks and Bob started riding me. But if this was Monday, where was Bob?

I brushed my hand across my face, rubbing out the whispering voice of fear.

"I haven't seen Mirabel Bourne for weeks," I told the detective flatly. I hoped it was true.

I went with him as he looked through the house, even the attic and the cellar, where he opened and closed the doors of Helen's jelly cupboard.

"For a guy known to have a free-wheeling elbow, you don't have much of the stuff in the house," he said as we mounted the stairs.

"I don't keep it around," I said.

I used to take a drink like anybody else. It was after an enthusiastic Nazi mortar crew had bounced a shell fragment off my thick skull that I began to black out along about the third or fourth drink. The thing was that I didn't lie down quietly and pass out like a decent lush. I was strictly a zombie—the walking dead. It was that same crack on the head that had ruined my sight permanently so that I had to wear these nice thick spectacles.

The doctor had told me I'd do better to lay off the stuff completely. Mostly I did.

We were back in the living room finally. "You say you don't know where your brother and his wife were going?"

It was Monday. "Why, Bob would be at the garage, I guess."

"He isn't. I was there. The boy there says he hasn't seen or heard from either of you since he left at noon on Saturday. He opened up this morning and tried to call the house here. He got no answer."

I remembered about Saturday. Bob and I had locked up and left the garage together. In Bob's car? I was already half tight. We had closed early—about two. But Bob should have been back at the garage on Monday morning. Eddie couldn't handle it alone. He was all right on the pumps, but he was no mechanic.

I tried to think. Had Bob told me? Had he and Helen planned a trip of some kind? My head ached worse than ever. "I don't know. I can't think of any place. His wife's family lives in Dayville, and sometimes they drive down there on Sundays. But he'd have left me a note or some word. Anyway, Bob'd be back by now." It was only a hundred miles to Dayville.

He nodded and moved toward the front door. I stood and watched him go down the steps and walk toward the corner of the block. There was no police car in sight.

There were four bottles of milk on the porch and two newspapers. I picked them up and took them into the kitchen. The cat was at my heels again, crying for food. I poured a dish of luke-warm milk from Monday's bottle—one of the two that still smelled all right. She lapped it as if she hadn't been fed for a week.

Helen loved Faustine, as she did all small animals. She wouldn't neglect to feed the cat.

Helen would bring in the milk and wind the kitchen clock. Bob would have scattered the Sunday paper all over the living room.

Neither my brother nor his wife had been in the house since Saturday.

I went toward the telephone in the hall to call Eddie at the garage. He might, just might, know more than he'd spill to any nosy cop. Eddie was from the back part of town. He didn't have any liking for cops.

The phone was dead. As I lifted it, the cord came snaking toward me. It was loose from the connection on the wall, torn loose.

CHAPTER TWO

The Fat Man

I WAS still jittery and weak, but my head was a little better with the aspirin I'd taken. Food suddenly was a welcome thought.

I scrambled eggs, too dry, and scorched a piece of bread. The coffee was all right, though. I opened the Sunday paper in front of me and pushed the eggs around on my plate with the fork.

The picture on the page in front of me, the society page, jumped into focus and the toast stuck in my throat. I knew that face in the picture—the face of a delinquent Madonna, the classic, pure lines of the features spoiled by the overlush, pouting mouth. The "missing" Mirabel Bourne.

"Bethrothal Announed" the caption read.

In the sickeningly cute, hothouse phrasing of society writers the world over, the item stated that Miss Mirabel Bourne's uncle and former guardian, Judge Clayton Bourne, had announced her engagement to Mr. Walden Harte, of this city and San Francisco, to a "select gathering of intimate friends on Wednesday last." Mirabel had taken back her maiden name after her divorce and her first husband wasn't mentioned. Which would have suited him fine.

It wasn't really funny. You could laugh, but it wasn't funny.

On Saturday Bob and I had come near to blows because he had this fat-headed idea of divorcing Helen to Marry Mirabel. And for some time by then, days at least, his lady fair had been engaged to "Mr. Walden Harte, of this city and San Francisco." I wished the paper had included Mr. Harte in the picture; it would have been interesting to see what Mirabel had finally trapped. He sounded pretty impressive.

I got up to get the coffee maker from its burner on the back of the stove. The cat, relaxed now and full of food, was sleeping in the middle of the floor. My foot struck her soft, yielding side and I stumbled.

I hardly heard her anguished yowl or noticed the pale streak of fur flashing through the door. My hands were dancing again so that I nearly dropped the coffee maker. It was suddenly hard to breathe and I felt the cold sweat start again on my face.

It had been dark there. Where? I was moving across the room in the dark, the pitch dark. But where? I couldn't remember.

What I *did* remember was the blackness and my foot striking, in the blackness, against soft, yielding flesh, and I stumbled. And then—then I had turned on the lights and there was a woman there. On the floor. Dead. Cold and pale and dead with her blue eyes wide open. Mirabel's blue eyes.

I made it back to the kitchen chair before my legs folded under me.

THERE was too much I couldn't remember. A lot of it, maybe, that I didn't want to remember. Saturday noon to Monday noon. Forty-eight hours in which God knew what might have happened. God knew—and I had to find out.

I *had* to find out. Mirabel was dead. I had seen her dead. Where? Start from there. Where was Mirabel dead?

It was a blank wall. A tall, blank, grey wall, and shadowy images darted and rustled and flickered and changed across it. Nothing came into focus.

Wasn't there a little flower called heartsease, a little pink or purple flower like a pansy? But what would that have to do with Mirabel? Mirabel was strictly an orchid type.

I guess what was gripping me was fear. It felt exactly like the hangover

except that my head no longer hurt. And one thing certain—I was sober now. Oh, how sober I was.

Where?

* * *

Bob's was a small house, but the garage in back was double, to hold my car as well as his. I unlocked the door and swung it up. My grey Chevvy was in its usual place.

But there was another car occupying Bob's side of the garage. A cream-colored Buick convertible that bore no resemblance at all to Bob's four-year-old black Packard.

The detective had missed a bet. It was Mirabel Bourne's car.

I wanted to slam down the garage door, go back in the house and get back into bed. And pull the covers over my head.

I went through the convertible with a fine-tooth comb. There was nothing in the body of the car, nothing but a gold-colored bobby pin. But the luggage compartment held a white-horsehide overnight bag with the gold initials M.B. It was full of clothing and lingerie mostly, not folded but stuffed in any which way. The faint but heavy scent brought memories—memories I'd firmly tucked away months ago. Not the sort of memory I was on the trail of now.

Heartsease, hell! Mirabel's musky, heady perfume smelled more like a civet cat on the prowl.

I backed my Chevvy into the drive and got out to lock the garage door. That cop—he hadn't asked for a look at the garage. Had he already glimpsed the convertible through the window in the door? It seemed queer now.

I DROVE across town to Nichols, then straight down to Seventeenth. I had started out from there Saturday with Bob. If there was any beginning to the trail I was hunting it was there. At least I could talk to Eddie.

Twenty minutes later I piled back into the car and drove away. I had played in luck. I had only a direction, but it was a start.

Eddie had left at noon on Saturday, all right, but he'd come back about one-thirty to pick up a carton of cigarettes he'd forgotten. He'd heard Bob and me arguing in the back of the shop. He'd heard one of us speak of driving to the beach. He'd gone away.

I told him to close up at the usual hour and just to turn away any tire or repair jobs. He had his hands full with just gas and oil. He looked at me in puzzlement but it was against all his training to ask any questions.

There were two main highways from the city to the coast. Mirabel had been going to Surfside—maybe. Anyway, it was a pointer, and the best I had. I drove out Seventeenth, swung around the big traffic circle there and pointed the coupé's nose north and west—toward the Pacific.

I drove, and my mind was a squirrel on a treadmill. My hands danced on the wheel so that I was forced to drive slowly when all the time something in me cried for speed and more speed.

The engine coughed, caught, coughed again.

I had forgotten to get gas at the garage. Luckily I was on a downhill grade and there was a filling station dead ahead. I coasted up to the pump there.

I dug into my pocket for money as the attendant approached. Not a dime, not even a thin dime. I cursed myself for a fool.

That one wasn't hard to figure. I remembered drawing twenty at the garage on Saturday morning, but twenty wouldn't last me long. Not when I'd got started. But why the hell didn't I think to get some money from Eddie?

"What'll it be, mister? Fill her up?"

Fill her up. In my mind a strange, half-remembered chord echoed the words. *"What'll it be, Joe, what's yours? Here, Joe, fill her up."* A dim whisper with no voice behind it, a blurred figure with no face, a steel wire tightening around my mind. . . .

"Hey, mister! You want gas?"

I looked blankly at the attendant, then nodded. I had a couple of credit cards in my wallet. I hoped one of them was the right kind.

Neither of them was—but in the bill compartment was a neat, crisp twenty-dollar bill. Untouched.

AT THE highway junction, my hands pulled the car onto the left fork and I had driven a couple more miles before my mind woke up with a start. Surfside was the other way. I eased my foot from the accelerator and felt for the brake pedal. Then I goosed the Chevvy ahead again.

Maybe this was the way. My head wasn't getting me anywhere; maybe I should let my hands do the driving.

Maybe Surfside wasn't the place we'd gone to on Saturday. There were other beaches on the Pacific Coast, all the way from Canada to Mexico, and quite a few not much farther than was Surfside from the city.

Maybe my hands knew the way. As I always turned left when I pulled out of the garage at home because that was the way to the shop—even if I was heading for the other side of town.

Stop thinking. Let my hands do the driving.

* * *

There was a shiny red roof on the new eating joint at the next junction, where the highway from town ran into 101. I was staring at it while my hands pulled the car into 101 and headed it left again. South.

South was as good a direction as any—and it could be the right one. It *had* to be the right one.

Red. Not a good, earthy tile red but a flashy paint red. Christmas-tree red. Blood red.

What was red? I couldn't drag up any memory of blood red—or blood. But a picture flashed into my mind of Mirabel lying dead on the floor near a fireplace. But why had the color red brought that to mind? The fireplace wasn't red; it was grey fieldstone. The furniture? No, it was brown, the brown of old, rubbed wood and saddle leather. But red?

Something was red. Something significant was red. Mirabel, smiling over a bare shoulder into a camera, managing to look naked even when you knew she was fully clothed. Like the engagement picture in the paper. But in a red-leather frame!

A portrait of Mirabel in a red-leather frame. A hand that reached to take it from me, a hand that offered a glass instead. It was fuzzy, unfocused, but it was a memory.

"Forget her, Joe. Nobody knows you killed her. Nobody but me. And she's gone, Joe; they'll never prove anything without her body. You've fixed things. Now drink up—and forget her. She was no good."

A whisper that was not quite a voice. A voice that was not quite a face. A memory that was a ghost of a memory. A voice of conscience, a drunken, tearful ghost talking to itself in the graveyard of consciences. . . .

I SHIVERED and the wheel shook in my hands. I forced my mind back to the photograph, to the red-leather frame.

There was more red around, lots of it. Lampshades, bookbindings, lacquered

boxes. I had been in a room, a large room done in red and black and silver. I was drinking whiskey, lots of whiskey, and feeling sick. A bar? The lights were dim, like a bar. And I must have had my glasses off for some reason. Everything was blurred.

My thoughts jerked back to the present. I was driving south on Highway 101. By now the road looked unfamiliar. There'd been no towns of any size for miles.

I was shaking with weariness and the tag end of a king-size hangover and black, bitter fear. Some food, maybe, would help. I still hadn't eaten anything since when. I began watching for the inevitable blue and red neon, screaming "Good Eats" to trap the passing motorist. . . .

It turned out to be an old railroad car painted a blinding yellow. Inside were the red plastic counter, the red imitation-leather stools, the chrome trim that edged, seemingly, everything but the tired, yesterday's pies. But no red-leather frame holding a portrait of Mirabel; only the usual coy calendar girl leering steamily on the wall over the gurgling coffee urn.

The man wearing a cook's apron ambled toward me heavily. From a mountainous body topped by a full-moon face, his voice issued curiously light and high.

"What'll it be, friend?"

"Black coffee," I told him. "And have you got anything to eat besides the pie —and those?" I jerked my thumb toward the three greasy doughnuts under a smeared glass cover.

"Well, sure, friend." He spoke over his fat shoulder as he drew coffee from the urn. "We don't cook much this hot weather but I can fix you almost any kind of sandwich you want—cold."

"Fix me a cold ham sandwich," I said. "No mayonnaise."

I took off my glasses and wiped them on a paper napkin. As I slipped them on again, he was putting the coffee down in front of me and there was a funny expression on the fat face. The coffee was strong and hot, if not good.

He brought my sandwich and he carried the huge, gleaming bread knife in one fat hand as he put the plate down on the counter. He stood waiting.

I fumbled in my pocket. "How much?"

"That'll be ten."

"Ten?" I looked at him. "Ten cents for coffee and a sandwich? You're kidding."

He wouldn't meet my eyes. "No kidding, Joe. Ten bucks."

I stared at him and felt the coffee I'd drunk roil in my stomach. Here was something. Here was a piece of the trail. It had to be. I'd never seen this white grub before in my life—not when I was sober.

"Just what would the ten be buying, Fatso?"

Surprisingly, he was insulted. "Okay, Four-eyes, I'm fat. Anyway, *I* got good eyes—and a brain. I'm a guy notices things, Joe. Like what people look like, what they say. And them cheaters don't make that much difference."

"Okay. You notice things."

"Especially I notice customers who leave ten-buck tips in a greasy dump like this here."

"When you get it all built up, Fatso, maybe you'll break it down and tell me why you expect to tag *me* for ten."

HE LEANED forward over the counter. His weight was on the hand that held the knife. "A guy comes in stinko, see, early on Sunday morning—one, one-thirty maybe. He don't like the joint, don't like anything about it. His friend is practically carrying him. He has one cup of coffee, see, and his friend has to jolly him into drinking that. 'Drink it up, Joe. Come on, drink it up and let's get going, Joe'." His voice, dropped to a

falsetto whisper, brought the short hair up on my neck.

"This friend, Fatso—did 'Joe' mention his name?"

"Nah." He looked disgusted. "I didn't even get a good look at him. He kept his hat on, pulled down. But I got a good look at you, Joe. And at that cream-colored Buick you was driving. Ten's cheap, Joe."

I was beginning to get a chill. "Lots of people have Buicks."

"Yeah. But not with that license number, Joe. And not many of them get put on the radio on the Missing Persons broadcast." His grin indicated that he had finally made his point and, I suppose, his ponderous wink was to inspire my confidence in his purchasable discretion.

One thing I knew. Ten bucks wouldn't seal that fat, greedy mouth and I needed information from this guy a lot more than I needed his silence. I picked up my coffee cup, the usual heavy restaurant mug.

"So it's on the air already," I said. I whipped the edge of my left hand hard across the joint of his right elbow and, as the thick arm began to fold under his weight, I smashed the heavy cup down on the fat knuckles.

He screamed like a woman and tears came to his eyes. I picked up the abandoned knife from the counter.

"Take it easy. You're not hurt much—yet." I sorted the ten-dollar bill from the wad in my pocket. "You might still earn the ten, Fatso."

"You didn't have to do that. I wouldn't of—" His high voice was thick, muffled.

"Okay. But I don't like knives. Listen, Fatso, you must have got the license number wrong, because that cream-colored Buick belonged to my friend. Hell, you can see my Chevvy coupe right out the window there."

"Sure, if you say so."

"I do say so. Now look, I lost a—a suitcase out of the Buick the other night and I'm trying to find it. Like you say, I was pretty blind drunk. Did either of us say, or do you happen to know where we were coming from?"

He looked thoughtful, sucking at his bruised hand.

"An answer to that might be worth the ten, Fatso."

He shook his head and my heart nose-dived. Then he said, "You drove up from the south and you went away toward the city. Come to think of it, there was one thing. Your friend, he said you'd better be getting back to town, it must be late because it was nearly one when you'd left the cabin. So you must of come from not too far."

Bless his big ears! "What cabin would that be?"

He wasn't giving any more. Maybe he didn't have it. "Mister, there's a hundred cabins near here—and half a dozen ways to get to most of them."

I dropped the ten on the counter and laid the knife beside it. "Here, Fatso. They're both yours."

His moon face was framed in the window as I started my motor and drove off.

CHAPTER THREE

The Lady Is a Corpse

I SHUT off the engine and sat there. I felt sick, drained of the little wave of encouragement I'd had when I left the diner. This was the second road I'd tried, branching off to the right of 101, toward the beach and the Pacific Ocean. The first had led down over the hills into a little seaside community that I'd never seen before in my life.

This one, the second, was a dead end. Curving through towering walls of spruce and underbrush, it swept around the shoulder of the cliff and came into the

open. A graveled parking area looked out over the Pacific, reddened now in the setting sun that overhung, in either direction, miles and miles of coastline.

The sign I was staring at said "View Point" and, in slightly smaller letters, "No Overnight Camping."

Well, I hadn't planned to stay.

After a while I lifted my head from the steering wheel, switched on the ignition and tramped the motor to life. There were other roads to the beach. There had to be.

I swung the car into the graveled parking area to turn it around.

And I saw it.

Off to the north, less than a mile away, the tiny crescent of pebbly beach and the zig-zag switchback trail that led to the top of the cliff above it. It was my nightmare come to life, glowing red in the sunset, and I knew it like the palm of my hand.

There are maybe a hundred beaches exactly like it along this strip of coast and there wasn't any doubt in my mind. This was the one.

Now I really had it. Even now I don't know why I didn't drop it there, didn't tear back to the city as fast as the Chev would make it. Because I had it good. I was scared stiff and limp at one and the same time.

I didn't want it—but I'd found it!

I STARTED the Chev and drove back along the wooded road. I had missed it before, when I drove in, but now I was looking for it. It was a side road running north, a wooden gate barring the entrance, with a "Private Property" sign. It ran through the thick woods for a while, then out into the open along the spine of a small cape just north of the view point.

I opened the gate, drove through, got out and closed it again. The grey, rambling cottage out at the end of the cape came into view just before I drove out of the woods.

I had to stop the car. My hands wouldn't hold on to the wheel any longer. After a while I managed to work the Chev into the underbrush along the side of the road, more or less out of sight. I didn't know what I was going to find but it seemed important to me that I find it first.

THERE was no cover, walking to the house. It stood in the windy open, facing the wide Pacific to the north, a beautiful, solitary place. Screened from the highway and passing motorists by half a mile of thick woods, it had only the water and the wild sky for neighbors. Limned against the lowering sun, it stood taller than it actually was, a story and a half, and red reflections from the sky struck through the huge plate-glass windows on the ocean side.

Close to it, I stopped dead, almost holding my breath, feeling the prickly gooseflesh break out over my skin. For a fraction of a second, no more, I had thought I saw a figure move in silhouette against one of the windows. But why not? It was a house. People live in houses. Why shouldn't there be someone here?

The house suddenly was like a somnolent beast that crouched, waiting.

I moved slowly along the drive past the house. The setting sun, shining through the windows, lighted the interior brightly. Nothing moved there. Nothing that I could see. I went on along the drive to the top of the cliff and looked down at the crescent of pebbly beach. It was deserted. I shivered.

This was it.

My mind shied and struggled like a roped horse to escape the memories I was calling up. I forced it to stand.

Staggering down that zig-zag trail on the face of the cliff, deceptive moonglow making the footing doubly treacherous,

staggering under the weight of a soft, sweet-smelling burden in a blue wool dress. I could remember, now, dumping Mirabel's body into the water for the tide to take, the body turning, the golden face with the blue, sightless eyes staring up into the moonlight.

Now I could remember panting up the switchbacks of the trail as though all hell were on my heels. I remembered checking suddenly at something shining in the path. It was a snake ring, a gold snake ring with blue, blue eyes glinting in the moonlight. I knew it must have dropped from Mirabel's dead hand. I picked it up, thrust it in a pocket and fled on upward, away from the beach and the dark rush of cold and evil water.

Oh, I was clever then. I didn't miss a trick. I went back to the house and straightened things up. I threw out empty bottles, washed glasses, and wiped away fingerprints. I gathered up Mirabel's belongings and threw them in her bag. I shoved the bag into the luggage compartment of the Buick. With drunken, concentrated cunning, I cleaned up the works.

"You killed her, Joe, but they'll never pin it on you. You've done a good job, Joe. Have another drink."

That whispering voice again. My "friend" at the little diner. The man with the limitless supplies of hooch. Who?

I turned back toward the house my mind whirling. Then it hit me now with a rush—murder. *Murderer*!

My brother Bob.

I sat down on a rustic bench beside the door.

IT WAS hazy. Bob driving, talking. Me nursing a bottle, talking. Coming in over the private road, Bob was cold and angry. I was drunk and angry. Bob was coming to meet Mirabel. I had forced him to bring me along.

Mirabel was here when we arrived, her cream convertible parked in the drive. Bob had faced Mirabel with some of the facts of life I'd preached to him on the ride down. Mirabel, standing before the fireplace, all gold and blue in a snug, blue-wool dress, had laughed.

Things got rapidly foggier then. It must have been some time later and I'd got drunker—steadily.

There as Bob, still angry, still talking, and Mirabel laughing, always laughing. I laughed too. It was funny.

I think my laughing made him more angry than her laughing had done. Because he hit her then. Hard.

All right. There it was. There was the thing my mind had shied away from and now it was there, out in the open, and I could look at it. Bob had hit her with his fist and she had fallen and the wrought-iron tools by the fireplace had gone down with a clatter. There was Mirabel, out cold on the floor by the fireplace. Hardly waiting to see her fall, Bob had stamped from the house and there'd been the roar of his motor in the drive.

He couldn't have known she was dead. I hadn't known. Not then.

After a while I had stopped laughing. It wasn't funny any more. I had got up and gone toward the kitchen for some water and—blank. That was where the curtain closed down. That must have been when the liquor had hit me.

But there was another piece. A piece beyond the curtain. A time when I'd felt my way across the dark room, after awakening, and tripped over Mirabel's body. When I'd turned on the lights at the wall switch and stood and looked down at her soft, dead body. I'd known then she was dead.

I felt again now, remembering, the frenzied panic that had driven me then, and I leaned forward on the bench, holding my clenched hands tightly between my rigid knees. Bob, my brother—a murderer!

But who had turned out the lights?

With Mirabel lying unconscious, maybe dead—with me passed out in the kitchen—who had turned out the lights?

AFTER a while, moving like a sleepwalker, I got up from the bench and went slowly around the house toward the front.

The front door wasn't locked. I pushed it open and walked in. It was dim inside, now that the sun had set, shadows long across the floor, windows outlined starkly against the darkening sky of dusk.

Mirabel's body, sprawled stiffly in a snug, blue-wool dress, was lying in front of the grey fieldstone fireplace in the living room.

For seconds I was rigid, frozen with shock. Then tremors began to run over me and the steel wire tightened around my brain until I wanted to scream. I managed two shaking steps and got hold of the carved redwood slab over the fireplace, holding myself up. Gradually my teeth, clenched hard, stopped their chattering.

My mind slowly loosened itself from the web and began ticking again.

I went from room to room of the empty house, seeing the mussed and tumbled bedroom, the three smeared glasses on the cocktail table, two whiskey bottles in the kitchen, rugs rumpled, chairs overturned.

The house was a shambles, the obvious aftermath of a drunken brawl—*and I hadn't left it that way*!

I sat down suddenly in one of the brown-leather chairs in the living room and stared at the body by the fireplace. Had I dreamed that nightmare journey down the face of the cliff? Then where was reality?

My eyes fixed on the face that had glimmered golden in my dream. Mirabel's face wasn't beautiful. It wasn't golden, either. It was bloated, with a livid purplish hue, and the sultry mouth was twisted horribly. There was a blackened, bleared look to the staring eyes, no longer blue. And there were black and ugly bruises on her livid throat.

Bruises like finger marks.

Mirabel hadn't died from a blow of Bob's fist. Not from anybody's fist. She hadn't died from striking her head in a fall, either.

Mirabel had been strangled. Choked to death.

THERE was a noise, a creaking thump outside the house, toward the rear. I jerked my head around, swallowing hard against the sudden constriction in my throat. The corner of my eye caught flitting, shadowy movement, framed darkly against a window. It vanished.

Three swift strides brought me to the window. My eyes, adjusted to the greater darkness inside the house, saw clearly through the gathering dusk outside.

There was nothing.

I went through the kitchen to the rear door and out into the drive. There was a rush of air over my head, an angry scream. Relief flooded warmly over me.

Low over the house, sailing easily, turning in slow, lazy swoops, were three seagulls. Another perched like a stone bird at the edge of the cliff. I walked toward the cliff, slowly at first, then faster.

My faith in my carefully reconstructed memories of that Saturday night had been badly shaken. There might be something, some trace on the beach or on the trail down that would pin down some small bit of fact among the fantasy.

The trail, wider than it had looked, easier, walled with stones at the turns, was unmarked. The beach itself, washed to the foot of the cliff with each high tide, told nothing. There was no clue to be found here. I stared dumbly and with a return of that nightmare horror at the

empty, ebbing water, black now in the fast-fading light.

This was it then. The end of the trail. Murderer or not, I was sober now and more or less in my right mind. I knew that the longer I delayed, the more I fooled around with this thing, the deeper in I'd get. It was time to call the law.

I turned back and started up the first incline of the path. A pebble rattled above me, startlingly loud.

I saw, dimly, the black figure against the sky at the top, heard the rattling grow to a scrabbling rush as more stones followed the first. In the same glance I saw the boulder, basketball sized, that bounded and plunged down toward me.

I think I shouted as I twisted aside, plastered myself tight against the rock face. There was an answering shout from the top of the cliff, and a glancing blow, as though from a giant fist, struck my left shoulder. Dislodged shards rained on me. I staggered, went to one knee.

The agonizing pain paralyzed me for a moment—that and just plain fright. I didn't know who it was at the cliff top but, for my money, throwing rocks that size was an unfriendly act. I waited, silent.

I heard footsteps on the trail above me and a man came around the last bend into sight. He stopped when he saw me, his right hand bulging the pocket of a green tweed jacket. "I say, old man, are you hurt?" His voice was concerned. "I saw you down here and I called out when the rock began to fall but—"

He hadn't called out till pretty late and I didn't like the looks of that bulge. From the weight and shape it was a gun—or he wanted me to think so. "Just bruised, I think." I got to my feet and tested the left arm.

"I'm sorry, old man. I should have known better than to lean against that stone." His hand stayed in the pocket and his pale eyes were flat, without warmth. "Come on up to the cabin and let's have a look. Won't hurt to make sure."

"Are you a doctor?"

"Oh, no. No, but I do know a bit of first aid. My name, by the way, is Harte. Walden Harte. This is my place here."

Mr. Walden Harte of this city and San Francisco. He looked it. Dark, slight, with blank grey eyes, he smelled of money. I said, "Mine's Martin. Did you just arrive, Mr. Harte? Been inside the house yet?"

"Why, no. I saw a car—yours, I suppose?—parked off the road up there and I thought I'd take a look around first. This is—the property's posted, you know, Martin."

I rubbed my left shoulder. "Yes, I saw the signs. I'm a trespasser. Let's go up to the house, Mr. Harte. And you'd better brace yourself."

I told him. I had to. I couldn't let him walk into that living room cold.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Whispering Man

HE TOOK it pretty well. He would. It was a shock, but he'd known Mirabel was missing. He must have been half prepared for something like this. "I've been in San Francisco on business since Thursday," he told me. "Just got back at noon today. When Mirabel's family told me, I came right out here. She was fond of this place. We—we had planned—" His voice choked up.

I looked away and gave him a minute. Then I said, "Look, Mr. Harte, we're going to have to call the police. Is there a phone here?"

"No. I never had a phone at Harte's Ease. We'll have to drive out to the highway. That little diner, I think."

Harte's Ease. Heartsease. So there was my little flower. "Shouldn't one of us stay with the—with Mirabel?"

He shook his head. "I don't think so, Martin. We'll stay together." His hand was back in that pocket. He might as well have said that I was his bet for the murderer. "I'll lock up the cabin after us," he said.

Funny to hear an eight-room house with two baths called a cabin. Only a guy with money enough to keep such a place would think of it so. Though, come to think of it, the cook at the diner had . . .

Harte locked the doors and we walked rapidly down the drive, he at my right. He said, "You drive, Martin."

I didn't argue. If there wasn't a gun in that hand-tailored jacket, he was running a good bluff. His car, a grey sedan, was parked near mine just at the edge of the woods. We took mine.

The fat cook hadn't called it a cabin. He had said that "my friend" had spoken of "the cabin." I drove slowly, my mind ticking like a Geiger counter.

Harte sat beside me and adjusted the knife-sharp creases of his slacks with his left hand. He fished out and lit a cigarette—with his left hand. The right remained out of sight.

That didn't prove anything, of course, but I wondered if Mr. Walden Harte owned a photograph of Mirabel in a red-leather frame. Who would be more likely? And about his being in San Francisco since Thursday "on business." Why would he stay there over Sunday? You don't do business on Sunday. Or maybe you do, if you're Walden Harte. Just the same, I'd have liked to hear him whisper once, "You killed her, Joe."

"Stop here, Joe!"

In my preoccupation I'd almost passed up the little diner. I swung the Chev in a U-turn and braked to a stop at the door. Joe. So he knew my first name.

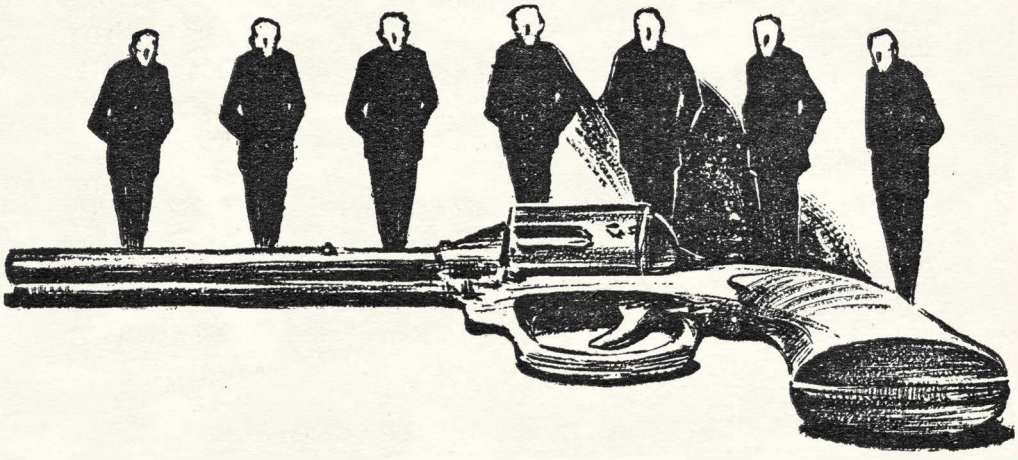
He read my mind. "Mirabel pointed you out to me once. At the garage. She always spoke of you as Joe."

All right. That could be.

But I wish I'd trusted my instinct instead of being so damned judicial about it. The diner's neon lights were not burning and inside there was only a dim glow coming from the rear. I should have known it wouldn't be closed so early in the evening. He gestured, and I went through the door ahead of him.

The tableau imprinted itself on my mind in the first split second: The coffee urn hissing, blowing off clouds of steam that swirled and eddied around the mountainous, still form that slumped across the low counter; the sluggish liquid, black and shiny in the dim light, that dropped in hideous threads from the slashed throat into the black and shiny pool on the floor.

There was motion behind me and a sudden hard pressure against my spine.



"Go on in, Joe. Don't let a little blood frighten you."

"YOU'RE nuts," I said. "If you'd left it alone, you might have got away with it. You've got it so complicated, they'll never stop digging. They'll turn you up."

He gave me a sardonic smile and switched the Luger to his left hand while he fumbled out a cigarette. "I don't think so, Joe. Not as long as they've got you. I wasn't even here, remember?"

I didn't think so, either. "There must be people who know you weren't in San Francisco on Saturday."

"One, Joe. Just one." He jerked a thumb at the fat cook's body. "Your fingerprints are on the knife."

They probably were, at that. But how did he know? "How did you know?"

"He told me, Joe. He was saving it. In case he wanted to try a little blackmail on you—too."

I said, and my voice was getting hard to control, "They'll know from Mirabel's clothes and hair that she's been in the water. Why did you pull her out?"

"She was my wife. We'd been married a month, a little over. Secretly. Even after I knew she was—what she was—I couldn't let her body go that way."

So they'd been married. Sentimental cuss, wasn't he? "Not wanting to wait seven years to get your hands on her money wouldn't have anything to do with it?"

I hurt his feelings. He got up from the stool at the far end of the counter from me and stood stiffly. "I don't like that, Joe. That's not true. A chap gets forced into these things and he has to go through with them. She laughed at me. I was in the kitchen and knocked you out when you came through the door. When I brought her to, naturally I demanded an explanation of what *my* wife was doing in *my* house drinking with two men. She laughed at me. The rest of it was your fault, Joe. I was going to call the police and let them find the two of you there—but you recovered consciousness.

"I thought I'd have to kill you, too, until I saw how drunk you were, how nearly blind when you dropped your glasses and couldn't find them."

It was hot in the little diner and the smell was nauseating. He didn't seem to notice. I said, "So then you started your magician's act. What was that supposed to get you?"

"You seemed a not-too-bright, suggestible type. I thought I might get you to believe you'd done it. The whole thing. And maybe confess or run away. In fact, I thought I'd been successful when I put you to bed—but you turned out to be stubborn, Joe."

"Thanks. I'll swallow anything when I'm drunk. I woke up sober." He had come pretty close, at that.

He hardly heard me. "This slob here that tried to blackmail me. That's your fault. If you hadn't been so stubborn, insisting on coming in here for coffee on Saturday night, I'd never have had to kill him. And now, because of your stubbornness, I'm going to have to kill you, Joe."

My hands were gripping the edge of the stool under me so tightly that they ached but I couldn't let go. I wasn't going to let this guy see their fluttering. You couldn't say he was crazy. It was a sort of madness, a megalomania, yes, but he had a good chance of getting away with it. I wasn't kidding myself that the cops were going to do any real deep digging into Walden Harte. Not when they had me, Joseph Martin, served up on a sizzling platter with my mouth permanently shut so that I could ask no questions. Not even Bob would . . . Bob!

"What have you done to Bob?" My tongue was thick in my throat.

"Your brother? Nothing." He chuckled.

"It will be some time before he does any more playing around, though. His wife heard about his little affair. Here." He dug a piece of paper from his pocket and skidded it along the counter toward me. It was a note from Bob, written hastily on the back of an old envelope.

Joe: Helen knows about M. She's gone to Dayville and I'm going after her. You were right all along, kid. Wish me luck—and take care of yourself. Call me if you need me. Bob.

BOB had written this note to me on Saturday night when he got back to the house and found Helen gone. And this so-and-so had taken it away with him when he took me home and dumped me in the hay. Somehow, this gratuitous bit of nastiness made me more angry than frightened—for a second. I stood up and shoved my hands in my pockets. "All right, wise guy. You've got it all your way. Maybe you'd like this as a keepsake. Something to remember her by." I rolled the snake ring along the counter toward him.

He glanced down at it but the Luger didn't waver. "My ring! My snake ring!" It was the nearest thing to excitement he'd exhibited.

"Yours? I thought it was Mirabel's."

"No. It's mine. My lucky ring. It's always been too large—it must have caught on her dress when—when—"

I said it for him. "When you strangled her."

"Yes. When I strangled her." He walked toward me. "Thanks, Joe. I wish I could do something for you."

The guy *was* crazy, after all. I didn't even try to hold my voice steady any longer. "Oh, for God's sake, get it over with! But remember, you're going to have to explain how I happened to shoot myself with *your* gun."

He smiled sadly, coming nearer. "I'm not that careless, Joe. This is *your* gun. I

took it from your dresser drawer. A gun is a handy thing to have."

It was my Luger, all right. As he came closer I could see the long scratch on the barrel that my trench knife had made that day when I got it. Warmth flooded my chilled, fear-cramped muscles like stepping into a hot shower. I took a step toward him, and another. He stopped and slowly brought the muzzle up, level with my head.

He said, and now, finally, I heard the whispering voice again, "All right, Joe. That's about the right range. Hold it!" And he pulled the trigger.

There was a dull click.

I had both hands on his wrist and the arm pinned between his shoulder blades before, I think, he realized that the gun hadn't fired. I drove him hard against the edge of the counter, folded him, face down, over it.

Deliberately, I wrenched the pistol from his helpless hand and swung it hard just behind his ear. He went limp and I let him slip to the floor.

All the time I was tying his hands behind him with his expensive pure-silk Ascot, all the time I was spinning the phone dial to raise the state police, I was eating my remarks to and about the overofficious officer who had checked my baggage at the British port of embarkation, who had raised an eyebrow at the beautiful German Luger I was bringing home for a souvenir. That particular shavetail was taking his job seriously, praise his name.

"Sorry, Sergeant," he had said as he handed me back my lovely pistol *with the point of the firing pin broken off clean.*

HARTE broke. A guy like that, a guy used to having things all his own way, is likely to go soft when his plans turn sour on him. He spilled the works.

Bob was there with the car on Wednes-

day night when they finally let me go. We didn't talk much on the way home. It had been a close thing and, of course, I felt pretty good about being on the right side of those bars again, but it wasn't an occasion that called for a celebration. It—well, I guess it was *too* close.

Once I said, "If he'd been tough, I'd have had a bad time. Poor devil." I meant it, too. That last.

"Yeah, I guess so." Bob pulled the Packard up into the drive and cut the motor. "But let's skip it, Joe. Forget it, huh? At least, for tonight."

He didn't want any talk about Mirabel, dead or alive, around Helen. I could see his point. "Okay, Bob."

Things were all right, though. Helen was bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked like a three-day's bride and Bob followed her from dining room to kitchen and back again, all elbows and thumbs, trying to be helpful. While the dishes were being wiped, I took a book up to my room, leaving the lovebirds alone. Later, Bob came up with a couple of beers. We talked for a while, then he got around to it.

"Look, Joe. Helen and I . . . Well, what would you think of looking around for an apartment for yourself? Or a room, maybe, here in the neighborhood?"

I studied my empty glass. You couldn't really blame them, could you? I said, "Why, sure, Bob. If you and Helen feel you'd rather . . . Why, sure."

He shoved a fist under my chin and nudged my head up. His face looked like a dentifrice ad, all teeth and twinkling eyes. "Now, don't get any wrong ideas, kid. It's just that—well, it won't be right away, but it looks like we'll be needing your room for a nursery."

My glasses were kind of misty and I took them off and wiped them. What do you know?

Uncle Joe! Me!

THE END

15 MYSTERY STORIES

(Continued from page 8)

possessed of the Devil or be the Devil himself in disguise has caused many a farmyard inhabitant to be dragged before a court for trial and sentence.

The defendant in a trial in Basel, Switzerland, in 1474 was a rooster accused of laying an egg. The prosecution showed that most sorcerers would rather possess a rooster's egg than a philosopher's stone, and that Satan employed witches to hatch such eggs, from which proceeded "winged serpents most dangerous to mankind." The rooster was convicted of sorcery and, with the egg, burned at the stake.

A trial of a pig, accused of murdering a child at Falaise, France, in 1386, ended with the accused animal sentenced by the court to be dressed in men's clothing and hung.

The solemnity of these grotesque trials can be seen in the wording of the sentence in a case where a piglet was found guilty of killing a baby. The sentence was as follows:

"We, in detestation and horror of the said case, and by way of exemplary justice, have said, judged, sentenced and appointed that the said piglet shall, by the public executioner, he hanged and strangled upon a wooden potence."

At another time in France a court ordered the death sentence for a bull that had gored a man, and it was hanged on the gallows of Noisy-le-Temple.

Here in the United States there are no known cases of insects ever being tried, but there have been instances of dogs being brought to court for trial and sentence.

Perhaps the oddest of American animal trials occurred some time ago in South Bend, Indiana, when smoking was prohibited in public. Arrested for this crime —and convicted and fined by the court was—a monkey.

(Continued from page 81)

tion when he came back. If the psychiatrists were right . . .

There was the sound of a door opening. Brody stiffened. Steps went across the room. The steps stopped suddenly.

Through the earphones came a thin, high wail.

"Yes," screamed Gabriel's querulous voice. "Yes, I will. I will."

Steps running wildly, the door slamming. Brody, tearing the earphones from his head, dashed out the door and waved wildly at Porter and Riley, who were waiting tensely. They dived into the doorway to the apartment house and down into the basement. Brody went after them.

He found them holding on to Mr. Gabriel, who was weeping piteously, and Inspector Porter was holding a gun carefully in a clean handkerchief.

"Punish me, punish me," babbled Mr. Gabriel, his eyes vacant.

"He had the gun hidden behind the furnace," said Inspector Porter, carefully wrapping it in the handkerchief. "Had a hole knocked right into the wall, out of sight. Hey, Brody, where you going?"

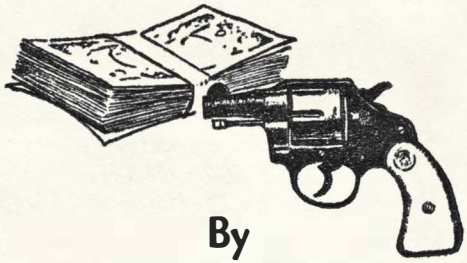
"I want a look at the job you did," said Brody respectfully.

He went through the dank cellar into the dark apartment in which the janitor lived. When he closed the door behind him and walked through the darkness toward the kitchen he saw it.

On the wall, glowing eerily in an unearthly light a supernatural hand had written:

THOU SHALT NOT KILL
REPENT AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED

"I wonder," said Brody, "how long that luminous paint lasts. I just got to show this to some of the boys."



By JOHN LANE

Memos on Mayhem

PRIOR to World War II, courts in Ethiopia resembled legalized gambling establishments and the man who had to make use of the law found a knowledge of poker a handy thing.

When a citizen brought his neighbor to court—say for cheating in a trade of animals—the two were allowed to argue until one finally reached a point where he called the other's bluff by betting that the judge would decide in his favor. Under the law he could "open the pot" by betting a farm animal or some other possession, and the other man either had to call the bet or lose the case—and the presiding judge would not have to make a decision.

If the bet was "called" the judge had to decide which of the two men held the better "hand." However, if the bet was raised the man who opened had an opportunity to keep the game going by betting something else of his possession. The contestants could put everything they owned into the pot, including their wives, and bluffing was as much a part of the game as in poker. Sooner or later one of the men would be "bluffed," and the judge took the pot—and "decided" the case.

MEMOS ON MAYHEM

POLICE near Oakland, Cal., were puzzled about a series of missing cattle until they met up with a twenty-three-year-old nurse who admitted rustling five calves and three cows.

THE only way to get things done is to work on them yourself, believes a convict serving a fifty-year sentence for armed robbery in the Mississippi State Prison.

In this case what was wanted was an indefinite suspension of sentence, and the convict's method of carrying on his fight to gain these ends can be considered quite unique in penal history—he sent necessary information to his wife, to help her in his plea for pardon, by radio transmitters he had hidden inside the prison walls.

One of the three transmitters he used was hidden in the guard house, where he was a trustee, and two others were located beneath his bunk. The man had been making secret broadcasts from 5 until 7:30 A.M. each day for four years.

A SIX-FOOT woman storekeeper got mad when a half-pint robber took twenty-nine dollars and threw a flying tackle at him, tore off a shoe, chased the getaway car and rode the running board until gunfire forced her to drop to the street.

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT

HAIR LOSS

ITCHY SCALP, DANDRUFF, HEAD SCALES, SEBORRHEA, EXCESSIVE FALLING HAIR

The following facts are brought to the attention of the public because of a widespread belief that nothing can be done about hair loss. This belief has no basis in medical fact. Worse, it has condemned many men and women to needless baldness by their neglect to treat certain accepted causes of hair loss.

There are six principal types of hair loss, or *alopecia*, as it is known in medical terms:

1. Alopecia from diseases of the scalp
2. Alopecia from other diseases or from an improper functioning of the body
3. Alopecia of the aged (senile baldness)
4. Alopecia areata (loss of hair in patches)
5. Alopecia of the young (premature baldness)
6. Alopecia at birth (congenital baldness)

Senile, premature and congenital alopecia cannot be helped by anything now known to modern science. Alopecia from improper functioning of the body requires the advice and treatment of your family physician.

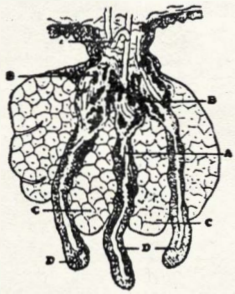
BUT MANY MEDICAL AUTHORITIES NOW BELIEVE A SPECIFIC SCALP DISEASE IS THE MOST COMMON CAUSE OF HAIR LOSS.

This disease is called Seborrhea and can be broadly classified into two clinical forms with the following symptoms:

1. ***DRY SEBORRHEA:*** The hair is dry, lifeless, and without gloss. A dry flaky dandruff is usually present with accompanying itchiness. Hair loss is considerable and increases with the progress of this disease.

2. ***OILY SEBORRHEA:*** The hair and scalp are oily and greasy. The hair is slightly sticky to the touch and has a tendency to mat together. Dandruff takes the form of head scales. Scalp is usually itchy. Hair loss is severe with baldness as the end result.

Many doctors agree that to NEGLECT these symptoms of DRY and OILY SEBORRHEA is to INVITE BALDNESS.



DESTRUCTION OF HAIR FOLLICLES
Caused By Seborrhea
A — Dead hairs; B — Hair-destroying bacteria; C — Hypertrophied sebaceous glands; D — Atrophic follicles.

Seborrhea is believed to be caused by three germ organisms — staphylococcus albus, pityrosporum ovale, and acnes bacillus.

These germs attack the sebaceous gland causing an abnormal working of this fat gland. The hair follicle, completely surrounded by the enlarged diseased sebaceous gland, then begins to atrophy. The hair produced becomes smaller and smaller until the hair follicle dies. Baldness is the inevitable result. (See illustration.)

But seborrhea can be controlled, particularly in its early stages. The three germ organisms believed to cause seborrhea, can and should be eliminated before they destroy your normal hair growth.

A post-war development, Comate Medicinal Formula kills these three germ organisms on contact. Proof of Comate's germ-killing properties has been demonstrated in laboratory tests recently conducted by one of the leading testing laboratories in America. (Complete report on file and copies are available on request.)

When used as directed, Comate Medicinal Formula controls seborrhea—stimulates the flow of blood to the scalp—helps stop scalp itch and burn—improves the appearance of your hair and scalp—helps STOP HAIR LOSS due to seborrhea. Your hair looks more attractive and alive.

You may safely follow the example of thousands who first were skeptical, then curious, and finally decided to avail themselves of Comate Medicinal Formula.

A Few of the Many Grateful Expressions By Users of Comate Medicinal Formula

"My hair was coming out for years and I tried everything. Nothing stopped it until I tried Comate. Now my hair has stopped coming out. It looks so much thicker. My friends have noticed my hair and they all say it looks so much better." —Mrs. R.E.J., Stevenson, Al.

"Your hair formula got rid of my dandruff; my head does not itch any more. I think it is the best of all of the formulas I have used."—E.E., Hamilton, Ohio.

"Your formula is everything you claim it to be and the first 10 days trial freed me of a very bad case of dry seborrhea." —J.E.M., Long Beach, Calif.

"I do want to say that just within five days I have obtained a great improvement in my hair. I do want to thank you and the Comate Laboratories for producing such a wonderful and amazing formula."—M.M., Johnstown, Pa.

"I have found almost instant relief. My itching has stopped with one application."—J.N., Stockton, Calif.

"My hair looks thicker, not falling out like it used to. Will not be without Comate in the house."—R.W., Lonsdale, R. I.

"I haven't had any trouble with dandruff since I started using Comate."—L.W.W., Galveston, Tex.

"This formula is everything if not more than you say it is. I am very happy with what it's doing for my hair." —T.J., Las Cruces, New Mexico

"I find it stops the itch and retards the hair fall. I am thankful for the help it has given me in regard to the terrible itchiness."—R.B.L., Philadelphia, Pa.

"The bottle of Comate I got from you has done my hair so much good. My hair has been coming out and breaking off for about 21 years. It has improved so much." —Mrs. J.E., Lisbon, Ga.

Today these benefits are available to you just as they were to these sincere men and women when they first read about Comate. If your hair is thinning, over-dry or over-oily—if you are troubled with dandruff with increasing hair loss—you may well be guided by the laboratory tests and the experience of thousands of grateful men and women.

Remember, if your hair loss is due to Seborrhea, Comate CAN and MUST help you. If it is due to causes beyond the reach of Comate Medicinal Formula, you have nothing to lose because our GUARANTY POLICY assures the return of your money unless delighted. So why delay when that delay may cause irreparable damage to your hair and scalp. Just mail the coupon below.

COMATE LABORATORIES INC., DEPT. 53-C
1432 Broadway, New York 18, N. Y.

Please rush my bottle (30-days supply) of Comate Hair and Scalp Formula in plain wrapper. I must be completely satisfied or you guarantee refund of my money upon return of bottle and unused portion.

☐ Enclosed find $5.00, Fed. tax incl. (Check, cash, money order.) Send postpaid.

☐ Send C.O.D. I will pay postman $5.00 plus postal charges.

Name.....

Address.....

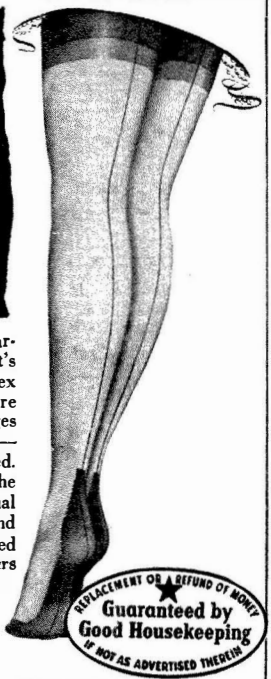
City..... Zone..... State .....

APO, FPO, Canada and Foreign—No C.O.D.'s

Earn Big Money WRITING ORDERS

AMAZING NYLONS

Guaranteed Against RUNS AND SNAGS Regardless of Cause!



The world's ONLY complete, nationally advertised nylon hosiery line actually guaranteed against runs, snags or excessive wear, REGARDLESS OF CAUSE! It's amazing, but true! No matter what the cause—hard use or deliberate abuse—Kendex nylons are replaced FREE if they run, snag or become unfit for wear within entire guarantee period! Every weight from sheerest 15 denier to heavy 70 denier—all gauges up to luxury 60 gauge—all sizes, lengths, popular shades, fancy heels, black seams—full fashioned and seamless. Nothing is missing to make sure every woman is pleased. In spite of the amazing guarantee, retail postage prepaid prices start at $1.08 the pair for sheerest 15 denier 51 gauge. Should free replacement be necessary, actual cost becomes 54¢ a pair! How could any woman possibly resist saving money and solving her hosiery problems? NOT SOLD IN STORES. Men and women wanted NOW, spare or full time, to write orders and earn big money. You can get orders even if you never sold a thing in your life!

MEN'S HOSE GUARANTEED 1 YEAR

Kendex gives you FOUR complete lines, including sensational men's hosiery line actually guaranteed for ONE YEAR! Any pair not giving satisfactory wear within 12 months is replaced FREE without question. All styles, patterns, colors, yarns (including nylon) at lowest prices that mean steady income for you 52 weeks a year.

LINGERIE HOUSECOATS — ROBES

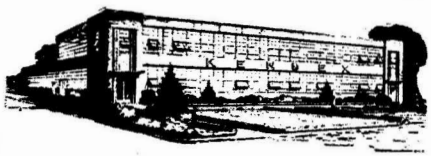
Full line of lingerie, housecoats and robes. Woven and knitted fabrics—rayon, cotton and NYLON. Nothing is lacking. Unbelievable prices that defy competition and make women eager to order. Imagine a beautiful all NYLON slip, with NYLON lace, at $2.95 or a lace trimmed rayon satin slip at $1.58! Kendex values sell themselves.

NATIONALLY ADVERTISED

Kendex has advertised in Life, Look, Collier's, McCall's, Saturday Evening Post, Ladies' Home Journal, Good Housekeeping, etc. Carries the Good Housekeeping Guarantee Seal. Thousands of orders shipped daily. Yearly volume in millions. A dependable responsible national organization.

FREE NYLON STOCKING AND MONEY-MAKING OUTFITS

Man or woman — young or old, YOU can easily earn steady income, spare or full time. No money or experience needed. We supply EVERYTHING free and set you up in business at OUR expense. Nothing to buy or deliver. Write orders, we deliver and collect. Big advance pay plus huge cash bonus that increases your earnings up to 40%! Your name and address on postcard will bring you sample nylon stocking; samples of lingerie, hose, robe materials; self-selling sales books with FULL COLOR illustrations; 36-page sales manual showing you easy steps to success; color cards, free "door openers" worth $1 each but which you give away free; special plan to have others sell for you, etc., etc. You can start making money the minute you receive the complete FREE outfits!



YOUR COST ONE CENT!

SEND NO MONEY. Pay nothing now or later No obligation. Not even a promise to return outfits. Simply write your name and address on a penny postcard and mail to us. We'll immediately rush you everything you need FREE and postage prepaid. WRITE TODAY!

KENDEX CORPORATION • BABYLON 69, N. Y.

WE SOLVED OUR HOUSING PROBLEM . .

QUICKLY, INEXPENSIVELY *with a* LIBERTY TRAILER!!

AIR-QUEEN MODEL

UP TO 5 YEARS TO PAY!

Every Model Features Modern Home Comforts

THIS IS HOW LIBERTY HELPED US SOLVE OUR HOUSING PROBLEM!

FREE! Send today for our free big six page booklet describing in detail how you may solve your housing problem with a Liberty trailer. This book also features the wide choice of floor plans which are yours when you buy a Liberty. Act now—mail coupon today!

It is easy to solve your housing problem with a completely furnished Liberty trailer. These comfort-packed mobile homes, which offer you the choice of many floor plans, are smartly designed throughout. A full-sized bathroom with tub and shower combination and flush toilet, a modern kitchen equipped with an electric refrigerator, are but a few of the many unusual features.

All Liberty trailers are Comfort-Conditioned which keeps them WARMER-in-WINTER—COOLER-in-SUMMER.

Go to your Liberty dealer today or fill in coupon below now for full information. Get all the facts concerning Liberty's smart Air-Queen, Caravan and Coach models.

Licensed Under Spencer Patents, U. S. Pat. No. 2,225,244. Other Patents Pending.

LIBERTY

America's Foremost Trailer

H. L. SPENCER, President, Dept. PF-G-10
LIBERTY COACH COMPANY, Inc.
BREMEN, INDIANA

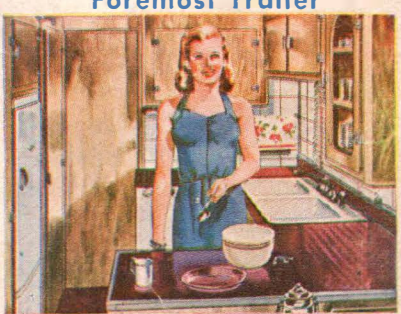
Please send me FREE without obligation full information on all LIBERTY TRAILERS and the 5 year easy payment LIBERTY HOME PLAN.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zone _____ State _____

LIBERTY COACH COMPANY, Inc.
BREMEN, INDIANA



Smartly designed, easy-to-work-in kitchens are one of Liberty's many features.