

5 Detective NOVELS

Magazine

25c WINTER

THE TATTOOED LOVELY

By TOM ROAN

ONCE UPON A TRAIN

By CRAIG RICE and STUART PALMER

STOP THE PRESSES

By FREDERICK C. DAVIS

WHAT HAPPENED TO LISA?

By TALMAGE POWELL

MURDER IN THE MIRROR

By W. T. BALLARD

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5 Detective NOVELS

Magazine

WINTER, 1953

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

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MORRIS
OCDEN
JONES
Editor

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the LOWDOWN

*The Crime That Is
Never Committed*



THE RECENT spectacular case in Miami of an extortionist who put the bite on doting parents to ransom a kidnaped boy who'd never actually been abducted, led your investigator into a curious inquiry. It had little to do with the case in question, which turned into a legal hassle as to whether a man who sent a taxi to a child's school with instructions to pick up the boy and take him home could be prosecuted for kidnaping as well as extortion. What it did have to do with was the position of the more or less innocent bystander.

Some odd quirks of law and precedent turned up. For example, you may easily commit a crime merely by keeping your mouth shut. Or by doing nothing at all, when ordinary good citizenship would have called on you to do something. One of the most common instances of that sort of thing is when a person sees a home or a building on fire and fails to send in an alarm, or at least notify the police.

Say a murderer runs amok in a crowded store, shoots down a couple of clerks at the jewelry counter, makes a getaway. If you happen to be the only person on the street to see him emerge with his still smoking pistol, and fail to raise a hue and cry and point out the direction in which the killer made his escape, you would be guilty, in many states, of aiding and abetting a felony. You could be arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced for a crime which was never actually committed—but which carries as serious a penalty as if you *had* done something.

There are plenty of other ways in which you may be guilty of criminal action without doing a thing. If you see a person drowning and make no attempt to save him, or to get assistance for him, you may be charged with man-

slaughter. If you read Dreiser's *American Tragedy* or saw the movie made from it, you will remember the fate of the young fellow who took his pregnant sweetheart out in a canoe when she couldn't swim—and then failed to save her when the canoe overturned.

It's a crime not to do something when you are the only uninjured person at the scene of an accident. It's a felony to fail to give or get medicine for a person mortally ill, should you happen to be the only individual within call.

Only a short time ago there was a brutal whipping in one of the Carolinas. The victim, a Negro woman, was savagely lashed and frightfully crippled. She was sure her assailants were Klansmen because they told her she was being punished for "running around with white men." (One of them later turned out to be a member of the valorous whipping party!) But she couldn't identify any of them through the sheet-and-shroud outfits.

But the county prosecutor went to work on the assumption the mutilators were Klansmen. Quietly but persistently, he had the word spread around: any Klansman who knew who the guilty men were would be prosecuted for aiding and abetting unless he furnished what information he had immediately to the prosecutor's office.

It worked. One member of the Klan thought that over and got cold feet under his sheet. He phoned the prosecutor, told what he'd heard. Arrests followed.

The ringleader of the band in the atrocious assault pleaded guilty, was sentenced to a term that will keep him out of circulation for a good many years. The threat of punishment for *not* doing something was effective!

—Stewart Sterling

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CRIME AND FUN-ISHMENT



IN MUNCIE, IND., a man showed up at the jail to bail out his brother who'd been arrested for intoxication—and was promptly lodged in a cell for the same reason.

WHEN A CITIZEN of Union, S. C., discovered that somebody had stolen a tire and wheel from his old car, he ran an ad in the paper asking the thief to come back and take the rest of the car.

FRANCOIS LAKE, CANADA, Police have been searching for a moonshiner—after spotting 50 drunken ducks. The inebriated mallards were lying on their backs in the middle of a field kicking their legs in the air.

AT WESLACO, TEX., nimble-fingered thieves entered a cotton field and picked three bales during the night before escaping.

A CALIFORNIA POLICE OFFICER, suspended in one town as being "unfit physically and mentally," was promptly hired by a neighboring town as chief of police.

IN SPOKANE, WASH., a man complained to police that a business institution had refused to cash his check although he'd offered letters of references. Police looked over the letter and agreed with the business firm—so thoroughly in fact that they locked him up on a vagrancy charge. The letters

were addressed to the man in care of a jail in a nearby town.

IN ATLANTA, GA., it is against the law to display affection in public.

THERE WASN'T MUCH doubt about the court being right when it found a Baltimore woman guilty of being a number bets taker. She paid her fine with 6,000 pennies, 1,100 nickels, 200 dimes, 680 quarters and 482 half dollars.

BY A 133 TO 27 VOTE, Omaha policemen decided to change the color of their official necktie from black to—of all things—"powder puff blue."

IN DALTON, MASS., thieves stole one of the new call boxes put up by the police department.

A DAYTON, O., JAIL OFFICIAL answered the phone and a voice said, "Have you got Jim Janx in jail?" The official replied, "Yes." The caller snorted, "You're a liar." The deputy checked Janx's cell—sure enough, he was missing!

IN SPOKANE, WASH., somebody stole an eight ball from a pool hall!

A Novel by **FREDERICK C. DAVIS**

STOP THE

*The dead beauty, clad only in her nightgown, lay on the
cellar floor — beside the grave a killer had dug for her!*

Chapter I

THE patrolman came out of the dark door, crossed the porch, and paused on the top step. In his right hand he was holding his service revolver. He lifted the gun and aimed with cool deliberation at the dark figure that was fleeing down Sycamore Drive.

The man who had bolted from the house a moment ago was running through the shadows of a wet and blustering night. The rain shaking through the trees helped to make him an indistinct target. The patrolman waited with grim patience, his gun still lifted, while the fugitive moved toward the shine of the street light at the corner.

The light was a hazard that the escaping man could not avoid. Suddenly he became clearly visible. Running with his shoulders hunched, his hat pulled

low, a coat bundled under his left arm, he crossed the sidewalk with the obvious purpose of dodging into the darker side street. At that instant the patrolman fired.

The shot was a flash of coppery flame, a thunderbolt that caused the fugitive to stumble. He seemed about to fall; but he caught himself and dove into the shelter of a hedge.

The patrolman sprang from the steps. Watchful for any flicker of movement, his gun poised, he hastened to the intersection. His wet rubber coat glistened as he paused, peering in every direction through the downpour. His quarry was nowhere in sight.

Quickly he turned about and hurried back to the house. The only light in the house was shafting up through the

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PRESSES



The Headlines Screamed Murder—but There Was

open door of the cellar. The patrolman gazed down the stairs, and his ruddy face grew hard. His lips were thin, his chin blunt, and his eyes calculating. In a confidently decisive manner he took up the telephone. The line was open. A voice was rasping over it when he tugged the receiver inside the flap of his rubber cap.

"Hello, hello, Orr?" the voice was saying.

"Patrolman Orr speaking again, Inspector. He made a break for it, sir—turned off the lights and ran out and got away. Better signal the Radio Bureau, sir."

"Give me his description."

"Age about thirty, sir. Good looking chap. Six feet, brown hair, blue eyes, wearing a gray suit. He grabbed up a hat and some kind of a topcoat on the way out, and I didn't get a look at them. I fired at him, sir, and I'm sure I hit him."

Patrolman Orr could hear Inspector Early talking to the Radio Bureau over the office dictograph.

"It's on the air now," the inspector informed him briskly. "Go back to what you were telling me when he made the break."

"Yes, sir. I was working my tour about ten minutes ago when I heard a couple of gunshots—muffled reports, like they'd come from inside one of the houses. I tried to locate the house and the next thing I heard was a chopping sound in the Wayne place, Number 5750 Sycamore Drive. I entered by the front door without knocking and I walked right in on a murder."

"You say Mrs. Wayne's body is in the cellar?"

"Yes, sir. She's not wearing anything but a nightgown, so he must have shot her upstairs in the bedroom, then carried her down. I found Wayne, her husband, down there with her. There's a hole dug in the floor underneath the stairs. Looks like he was going to bury her—hide the body."

"Stay right there until the homicide squad arrives," Inspector Early directed, "then come to my office and make a full report."

"Yes, sir."

Patrolman Orr disconnected, turned to the cellar door, and descended into the cold cement room where the murdered woman lay. . . .

RAIN swept by in angry gusts. It pelted the streaming windows, poured off swinging signs, and filled the gutters. Only a few cars and fewer pedestrians were braving the storm, but in the downtown section of the city scores of rubber-coated cops were on the prowl.

Orders direct from the chief's office had organized every available patrolman into a concerted manhunt. They tried the doors of stores that were closed for the night; they tramped through back alleys and dark yards; they peered into every doorway, their eyes alert for a fugitive wanted for murder.

As one of them appeared at the corner directly ahead of him, Stephen Wayne lowered his head. Through the water dripping from the brim of his sodden hat, he gazed warily at the ominous black figure. His steps slowed. The cop was tramping toward him.

He turned to the only possible shelter nearby—the door of a cheap restaurant. He went in quietly, concealing the anxious tension of his nerves, trying to appear to be a casual customer. The air in here was warm and heavy with the greasy odor of cooking. Two men were perched on stools at the white tile counter. Behind it another man, who had a soiled apron wrapped around his paunch, was frying two hamburgers on the grill.

Stephen Wayne opened his streaming coat and shook the water from his hat, using only his right hand while his left hung stiffly at his side. He slid onto another of the stools.

"Coffee," he said.

He saw the cop step into the doorway.

More to the Story Than the Newspapers Revealed

The cop stood there, looking up and down the street. Watching him through the tails of his eyes, Wayne drank coffee. He drank slowly, while the patrolman remained in the doorway.

There was a midget radio on a shelf. It had been playing, but now its music was fading. Wayne sat motionless, listening to an announcement.

"From the editorial room of the Queen City Chronicle comes another dispatch concerning the murder of Mrs. Stephen Wayne. The police are still searching for the husband of the dead woman. The railroad terminal, the airport, the bus stations are being watched.



All cars leaving the city are being stopped.

"Chief of Police Beckett has just issued a statement, saying he believes Stephen Wayne, wanted for the killing of his wife, has not succeeded in escaping the city. Chief Beckett is confident that Wayne's apprehension is only a matter of hours, perhaps minutes.

"The weapon of murder has not been found. It is believed that Wayne is still carrying the gun with which he allegedly murdered his wife. All officers detailed to the case have been warned that Wayne is evidently desperate to escape justice and that an attempt to capture him may mean a gunfight. Chief Beckett, who is known for his direct and drastic methods, has ordered his men, 'If it is necessary to shoot in order to capture Wayne, shoot first.' The Queen City Chronicle will bring you more news concerning the Wayne murder as developments arise."

Stephen Wayne's mouth tightened. His cup was empty now. He saw that

the patrolman was still blocking the doorway. He slowly moved his left arm and suppressed a grimace of pain. His high forehead was covered with cold dew. His nerves were jerking, and his stomach seemed about to capsize. Rising, he left a nickel on the counter and turned to the door in the rear that was labeled MEN.

After a few moments he felt steadier. He sank the bolt into its socket, then worked himself out of his coat. The left sleeve of his shirt was crusty with dried blood. Rolling it up, he found that the bullet had hit him at a point three inches above the elbow.

Evidently it had been almost spent, for it was lodged in the tough muscle. It hadn't gone in very far. Wayne could feel the hard lump in his flesh. At first the wound hadn't hurt much, but now the numbness was gone. It felt hot and raw. It was swelling and throbbing. He folded his handkerchief and wrapped it around his arm, knotting it as tightly as he could with one hand and his teeth. He got back into his coat and topcoat, then released the bolt and looked toward the front door of the restaurant.

The patrolman was no longer there. Drawing an easier breath, Wayne walked through the restaurant and went out. Raindrops drove into his face. He leaned against the whipping wind, keeping close to the buildings. He turned the corner in an effort to escape the lash of the storm. Abruptly he stopped short.

Another patrolman was moving toward him. The patrolman's head was lifted, and his eyes, shadowed by the visor of his cap, were directed straight at Wayne. Wayne set his jaw. Knowing that the cop's suspicions would be aroused if he turned and hurried away, he went on.

Just ahead of him there was another doorway. A legend was lettered in gold on the glass panes: QUEEN CITY CHRONICLE. Reasoning that a newspaper office would be the last place in the city that a fugitive would be expected to enter, he reached for the knob.

The glass showed him a startling reflection. The cop was also turning toward the door.

Chapter II

WAYNE entered a foyer. On his right, it opened into a large room. A sign hung overhead: Advertising Department. There was a counter bearing another sign, Classified Section, and behind it were many desks. None of the desks was occupied, and most of the overhead lights were out, but two young women were working behind the counter. Neither of them looked up at Wayne.

He felt the surge of the wind as the entrance opened behind him. The patrolman was coming in.

Still moving, Wayne turned to a door on the left. It was lettered: Press Room, No Admittance. He stepped into a deafening din.

Two gigantic presses were roaring. A score of pressmen, wearing inky overalls, were busy around them. The air was hot. The heat, with an odor of scorched paper, was coming from the stereotype machines, with their tanks of molten type metal, at the farther end of the room.

Nearby two men were bending over a metal-topped table on which several page-forms were lying. One of the men had shaggy white hair. In one blue-veined hand he was holding a magnifying glass through which he was reading the type in a number of galley trays. He looked up curiously and said something which Stephen Wayne could not distinguish through the thunder of the presses.

Wayne glanced around him quickly, searching for another way out; but the door behind him was opening. The patrolman was following him.

His nerves straining, Wayne checked a wild impulse to spin about, to thrust his way past the cop, to run. He forced himself to pretend that he was paying no attention to the patrolman and that he was here for a legitimate purpose. Then he saw the headlines on the front pages of the newspapers that were pouring out of the presses: Cop Surprises Husband Burying Murdered Wife.

Wayne stood transfixed, staring at the damning black print. His throat dry, he watched several pressmen pick up armloads of the papers, deftly bind them with twine, and send the bundles tumbling down a chute—news to be rushed to every point of the city and to scores of nearby towns.

Suddenly he was aware that the white-headed man was tapping his wounded arm.

"Looking for the city room?" the old man shouted at him.

Wayne eased his arm away. Over his shoulder he saw that the cop was still standing in the doorway. He had to swallow some of the fire in his throat before he could answer.

"Yes. Yes," he shouted back. "Where is the city room?"

"Upstairs," the hoary-headed man yelled. "Are you Lester?" He took Wayne's arm, and Wayne stiffened with pain. He brought his colorless lips close to Wayne's ear. "Are you Chick Lester?"

Wayne chanced answering this question with a nod. The old man pulled him toward the door at which the cop was posted. He might have wrenched himself away if the cop had not, at that moment, wagged a comradely hand. The three of them stepped into the foyer.

"My name's Lamb," the old man said, taking Wayne's hand and pumping it. "Make-up editor. Gifford's waiting for you, Lester. Expected you hours ago. We've got plenty to keep us busy tonight." He turned to the patrolman. "Officer Harrigan, Mr. Lester," he introduced. "Bad night to be out hunting for a killer, isn't it, Harrigan?"

"It is that," the patrolman said, mopping his face with his handkerchief. "Wet job, but we're hoping it'll soon be over. Not much chance of his getting away. Just thought I'd come in and wring a little of this damned rain out of me."

Wayne drew a breath and ventured, "A murder? Tonight? Where?"

"Lester's just come from Kansas City," Lamb explained to the patrolman. "Remember those pictures of the riot at the Amalgamated plant there? He took 'em—some of the best action shots I ever used. You're just in time,

Lester. Gifford's been howling his head off about having only one lens man on the job tonight. Come along with me, and he'll tell you about it."

BECAUSE the patrolman was remaining in the lobby, Wayne was forced to accompany Lamb. They climbed three flights of iron stairs, then pushed through a pair of swinging doors into the city room. Wayne paused, wondering coldly if there were anyone here who might know him by sight.

Five young men and a girl were seated at desks, all pounding typewriters. They gave Wayne no more than a glance. At another desk in the far corner a man wearing a green eye-shade was rapidly reading a sheaf of copy and holding a blue pencil poised. Lamb touched his shoulder.

"Here's your new photog, Gifford."

Gifford reared up from his chair and grabbed Wayne's hand. He was a lanky young man whose clean-cut face looked feverish. His intelligent eyes were full of excitement.

"Lester! Am I glad to see you!" he exclaimed. "We've got the sweetest murder case in years. I've only had one cameraman since Samuels left—you're taking Samuel's place—and he's been running around in circles ever since the case broke tonight, trying to cover it singlehanded. I want all the pix I can get, the more the better.

"Since I got to be city editor we're using more pix in a week than we used to run in a month. You'll have to hop right out on this thing. Jenkins will steer you around until you get the lay of the land. Say, those riot shots of yours were swell. When Samuels quit, I knew you were the man I wanted. What kept you? Is this storm tying up the roads?"

Wayne groped for an answer. "That's it. They're flooded in places. Nothing serious, but I had to take a detour. Sorry I couldn't get here sooner, but—"

A precipitous interruption came then. A door at the side of the room had opened, and a dynamic little chap was inserting himself between Wayne and Gifford. He was red-headed and vociferously elated. He slapped several photographic prints, still damp, on Gif-

ford's desk with a flourish.

"There's the murder victim, lying right where Orr found her," he said in a rush. "She was a beauty, wasn't she? Spoiled as hell, though, you can see it in her face. Look how little she's got on. Boy, I wish we could run it. We can't, because it would shock the natives, but I had to get it. The other one shows the hole her husband was digging in the cellar with a big poker. He hadn't got very far with it before Orr found him. Boy, how this is building up!"

The photograph of Nadine was lying directly in front of Wayne: Nadine dead, clad only in a film of silk, lying on her back on the cement floor, with those two ghastly wounds in her chest. Beside her was the cavity in the cement, ragged and dark. A chill started prickling at the back of Wayne's neck and spread to his arms and down his spine. He closed his eyes.

The red-headed chap was saying, "There's a long shot of the cellar, showing the corpse under a sheet. We can use that one. There's a close-up of the cellar, windows with burlap bags tucked over 'em so no light would shine out and attract attention. He'd been planning this thing, Giff, planning it a long while. According to the neighbors—"

Gifford was rattling the hook of his telephone. "Press room!" he demanded over the wire. "Stop the presses!" he ordered. "Hold 'em and break up page one for a new layout. Jenk just brought me some pix. Leave room for a four-column spread. We'll have to wait for the cuts. Damn it, Ape, quit yelling and stop those presses!"

WAYNE saw Gifford hand the photographs to Lamb. Peering through his magnifying glass, Lamb immediately began to work with brush and ink, preparing them for the engraver. Jenkins was still talking.

"Listen, Giff. What the neighbors are saying makes it all the tougher for this Wayne guy. The homicide boys have been asking 'em questions and learning plenty about—"

"What about a picture of Wayne?" Gifford asked quickly. "I want to plaster that guy's mug all over the front page. It'll help catch him if he's still

on the loose tomorrow—help crack the case."

"I went all through that house, trying to snatch one, but Inspector Early said they couldn't find any," Jenkins answered. "The Waynes didn't move into town until a couple of months ago, and the cops haven't even uncovered any of their connections yet. Listen Giff, about the neighbors. The Waynes were married less than a year ago, but their home life seems to have been one continual scrap. The people next door say they heard the wife once, yelling that she was going to divorce him and sock him for plenty of alimony."

"I get it. It got to be too much for Wayne to take," Gifford said. "Jenk," he added with a gesture, "this is Chick Lester."

Jenkins gripped Wayne's hand eagerly. "Lester! Mighty glad to know you. I'm glad Samuels decided to go to New York and free lance, so now we've got a real lens hawk on the job. I'm pretty new at this game and I'm hoping you can help me along with a few pointers. What say? I'll get you acquainted with the burg, and you—"

"Got your camera along, Lester?" Gifford asked.

"No—no, I haven't," Wayne managed. "Not tonight. You see, my baggage—"

"Get him Samuels' old box, Jenk," Gifford directed. "Both of you boys are going to be hopping the rest of the night. You can't give me too many pix. Lester, I want you to give me a good shot of the cop who caught Wayne red-handed."

Wayne could only nod.

"Jenk couldn't get at him because he'd been called in to report," Gifford hurried on. "His name is Orr. He's your most important assignment, but I want you to shoot everything else that looks good. You'll probably pick up something new at police headquarters. Jenk, take him over right away and introduce him to Inspector Early and Chief Beckett."

"Sure thing!" Jenkins promised.

Wayne said quietly, "How about a— a press card?"

Gifford reached into a drawer of his desk. He took out a card, wrote the name of Charles Lester on it, then scrawled

his signature. Wayne's fingers tingled as Gifford passed it to him. He saw it as a means of getting himself outside the police dragnet. Until the real Lester appeared—how soon, Wayne could not guess—it would enable him to conceal his own identity and escape to another city.

Chapter III

DETERMINED to make the most of an opportunity that might vanish at any moment, Wayne was tucking the press card into his wallet when a sudden opening of the swinging doors startled him.

The man who marched in was heavily muscular. His sleeves were rolled far up his hairy arms, and he was wearing an ink-spotted apron of canvas. His head lowered and his eyes flashing with anger, he slammed his fist upon Gifford's desk.

"Don't start yelling at me, Ape," Gifford said quickly. "You've got to hold the presses for—"

"Great Gawd!" growled the big man. "Every time I start an edition rolling, you howl at me to stop the presses, stop the presses. Damn it, Giff, I can't change the train schedules. Whenever the mail edition misses, I hear complaints from hundreds of farmers who get the paper two days late. The big boss jumps down *my* throat for that, not yours. I'm not stopping my presses for you every time you get a new picture. I'm getting out my editions on time. And don't call me Ape. My name's Apperman."

The presses were, in fact, still running in the basement. Wayne found a chance to take hold of himself while Gifford and Apperman argued. He allowed the eager Jenkins to lead him into a cubbyhole that was equipped as a darkroom. It was full of an acrid smell that rose from the solutions in the white trays on the bench. The shelves were crowded with bottles and supplies—boxes of film and printing paper, cans of chemicals, and piles of flash bulbs. As Wayne tried to clarify his thoughts, Jenkins placed a camera in his hands.

"It's in good shape, and the speed gun

has just been checked," Jenkins said. "Here's a dozen holders in your case, all loaded, and plenty of bulbs. You're all set. Say, I've been looking forward to meeting you, Lester. I'm anxious to see how you work."

Wayne's mind was far beyond the camera he was seemingly inspecting. "You've got plenty to do tonight without having me on your hands, Jenk," he said quietly. "Just tell me where headquarters is and I'll find my way."

"Wouldn't think of it," Jenkins demurred happily. "It'll be a pleasure to show you around. The inspector and the chief are good guys, but you've got to know how to handle 'em. I'll be glad to give you the dope."

Wayne's lips twitched. "All together you seem to be giving this Wayne guy the works," he said. "Apparently the police are sure he's guilty."

"Say, we're going to town on this, all right," Jenkins agreed. "It's open and shut."

Wayne swallowed. "No possibility that the police are wrong?"

"Not any," Jenkins assured him blithely. "Wayne is guilty as hell. Once the cops grab him, he's as good as hung. You might read about it in the galley proofs while I load up."

Wayne eased from the darkroom and stood outside the door a moment. There was a peculiar gathering chill about his heart. He looked from one to another of the busy staff, numbly marveling that none of them realized a fugitive wanted for murder was in their midst. None of them? His eyes stopped on the face of the girl sitting at one of the desks. She had ceased belaboring her typewriter and was studying him with a puzzled expression.

FOR a moment they gazed at each other, the girl curiously, Wayne with sharp misgivings. Her questioning eyes were a deep brown. Her lips were parted slightly, as if she were about to speak to him. With her long-bobbed hair and jumper dress she looked almost like a school kid, except that she seemed so knowing. After a moment her eyes dropped to her work, but the puzzled expression remained on her face.

Troubled, Wayne went to Lamb's desk.

A pug-nosed copy-boy was standing beside it, impatiently waiting to whisk the pictures away the moment Lamb finished retouching them. Wayne leaned over Lamb's shoulder. The white-headed man was about to hand the prints to the boy when Wayne reached for them. He turned to Gifford's desk.

"See here," Wayne said.

Gifford looked up.

"Notice this," Wayne went on. "The bottom of this hole in the floor is flat. It couldn't have been left like that if Wayne was digging with a poker. In fact, no matter what tool was used, it wouldn't leave a surface as perfectly even as this."

Gifford inspected the picture. "Must be the lighting that makes it look that way," he said. He gazed at Wayne again with keener interest.

Wayne hesitated but risked another comment. "Supposedly Wayne was about to bury his wife's body—conceal it. To do that he'd have to restore the floor afterward. But look at this other picture. It shows almost the whole cellar. I don't see anything that he might have used for the purpose. Jenk said Wayne had been planning all this, but—well, for instance, there isn't any bag of cement."

Wayne withstood the glint in Gifford's shrewd eyes. "Doesn't mean anything," Gifford said. "If he'd already provided himself with some cement for patching up the floor, it might be out of range of the camera, or in the garage, or somewhere else. Maybe he intended to buy some tomorrow. Don't worry, the cops will check on that. What're you driving at, Lester? Picking up a hunch that Wayne isn't guilty? Why?"

Wayne forced a smile. "It strikes me as a good angle, playing up both sides of the case. It would make a better story if we let the police work on their theory that Wayne is guilty while we try to find evidence to prove his innocence."

Gifford wagged his head emphatically. "We don't try to show up the police department. That boy's guilty as hell. He hasn't got a chance. Hustle up that picture of Patrolman Orr as fast as you can, will you, Lester?" Gifford returned to slashing at a mess of copy with his

blue pencil.

The copy-boy snatched the pictures from Wayne's hand and went out the swinging doors at a run. His shoulders sagging, Wayne turned from the city editor's desk. He picked up a fresh copy of the *Chronicle* that had just been brought up from the pressroom. The condemning headlines shouted at him. He scanned the body of the story. It read:

Although the record of Patrolman George Orr, who surprised Wayne beside the dead body of Mrs. Wayne in the cellar of the house on Sycamore Drive, shows that he has been disciplined for using his gun too freely and also for insubordination and absence from his post without leave, he has, on the other hand, distinguished himself several times by capturing wanted criminals in the face of great danger.

Orr's most important capture was made about four years ago near the place where Mrs. Wayne was murdered. The Sycamore Drive development was then being constructed. Orr discovered Leonard Nolan hiding in one of the unfinished houses. Nolan had committed a payroll robbery earlier that day at the Eureka Manufacturing plant. He had been recognized but he had escaped with his loot. Following his capture by Patrolman Orr, Nolan was convicted and sentenced to the state prison.

His mind stirred, Wayne rapidly read a short news item under a separate heading that followed these paragraphs.

Leonard Nolan, convicted of stealing a \$20,000 payroll of the Eureka Manufacturing Company four years ago, completed his sentence at the state prison yesterday and was released. Nolan has returned to this city.

SEeking information concerning his own status in the case, Wayne lifted his eyes to an earlier passage in the column.

Mrs. Wayne had lived most of her life in this city, but Stephen Wayne is a comparative stranger, having come to the city about a year ago as an adjuster for a nationally known automobile insurance company. The police immediately set about obtaining a detailed description and a photograph of Wayne from the insurance company's files. At headquarters the theory was first held that Wayne might be concealing himself by—

"Okay," a voice said at Wayne's el-

bow. "Come along."

His nerves snapped. He looked up tensely, expecting to find himself confronted by a detective who had already penetrated his masquerade—but it was Jenkins. The red-headed cameraman had emerged from the darkroom, his case slung over one shoulder. Hot breath drained from Wayne's lungs. He tried to answer Jenkins' eagerness with a smile.

"Yes," he said quietly, "let's get going."

Turning, he saw that the girl was standing near him, her eyes still puzzled. Again she seemed about to speak, to question him. Wayne found himself dreading her unspoken words.

"This is Chick Lester, Sue," he heard the cameraman saying at his side. "Chick, this is Sue Carey. She's not only our society editor but she's such a wise little package that she writes the beauty hints column, too."

Wayne forced himself to say cordially, "Hello, Sue. With—with such ability, you should be on the news end."

Sue Carey put her small hand into his. "I'd like to be, but Giff won't give me the chance. He doesn't like sob sisters, but one of these days I'm going to prove that I'm equal to the job." Her eyes were searching Wayne's face. Quietly she added, watching his reaction, "I've got a hunch that maybe soon I'll find my chance."

"Well, good luck," Wayne said quickly.

Jenkins was at the swinging doors, signaling him to hurry. Full of mounting uneasiness, Wayne was conscious that Sue Carey's gaze was following him. Jenkins' eager manner indicated that he had every intention of sticking close to Wayne.

"You've an assignment of your own, haven't you, Jenk?" Wayne said. "There's no need for you to waste time steering me around when I can just as easily—"

"I've got to stop in at headquarters first myself," Jenkins answered. "It's just around the corner. Anyway, I want to see how you handle it when you get your shot of Orr."

Wayne's lips drew thin. Though his

false identity was affording him a short respite from the manhunt of the police, a feeling of hopelessness weighed upon him. The odds were heavily against his avoiding arrest much longer. To face Orr, he knew, would mean his immediate unmasking. And soon, perhaps at any moment, the real Lester would show up and report to Gifford.

Even if Wayne made a break for it now and succeeded in escaping from the city with the aid of his press card, his movements would be traced, and he would be dragged back. Inevitably, before the night was done, he would stand revealed as the fugitive wanted for murder. But until that moment came, he would have an opportunity to learn at first hand, as he could in no other way, how the case was building up against him. His decision, grimly made, was to continue to play his part as long as possible.

He examined his camera as he followed Jenkins down the iron stairway. He had never handled one like it. Compared with the little Leica he owned, the Speed Graphic seemed a complicated machine. The flash-gun affixed to it made it even more formidable—he had never used one. Though he was familiar with the principles of photography, he lacked experience with this particular type of equipment. He had scarcely time for a good look at the shutter and the range-finder before Jenkins was pushing out into the street.

Chapter IV

THE rain had slackened. Wayne slipped the camera into its case. Striding along with Jenkins, he became acutely conscious of his arm. The pain was sharpening. There was grave danger, he realized, that an infection might set in. He saw blue-coated patrolmen still moving about the streets. Abruptly he found himself at the door of police headquarters.

Jenkins escorted him down the corridor. They passed neat offices in which men were efficiently busy. His nerves tightening each moment, Wayne followed Jenkins through a door lettered: Inspector Early.

"Back on the job," Jenkins accounted to the crisp-looking man at the desk. "Inspector, meet one of the best lens-luggers in the business, Chick Lester. Lester wants to get a shot of Patrolman Orr."

Early's big hand closed over Wayne's. "Hello, Lester. Orr's busy right now. The chief's talking to him. You'll have to wait until he comes out. You know how camera-shy Eckett is, Jenk."

The inspector jerked a thumb toward the adjoining office. The tight muscles across Wayne's chest eased a little.

"On your way to the morgue, Jenk? They've finished the autopsy on her. We've got the two bullets that killed her, one of 'em out of her heart. They're being photographed in the lab now. I expect they'll help to pin this thing on Wayne all the tighter."

Jenkins was getting ready with his camera. Watching him make the adjustments, Wayne duplicated them on his own box.

"Have you any idea where Wayne is, Inspector?" Wayne inquired quietly.

"Pretty close to the end of his rope," Early answered bluntly. "He's crazy to try to make a getaway. He doesn't stand a chance. . . . Okay, Jenk?"

Jenkins' shutter clicked, and the flash-bulb glared. He stepped back, glancing expectantly at Wayne. Without being sure that his camera was set correctly, Wayne drew out the slide of the film-holder, climbed on a chair, aimed the lens downward at Early, and pressed the shutter release. To his immense relief the shutter clicked, and the bulb flashed.

"Nice angle," Jenkins said. "How about those bullets, Inspector? You're going to give me a couple of pictures of them, aren't you?"

Early nodded, eying Wayne. "We'll work right along with you. You'll find we've got a first-class department here, Lester. Our lab is the best in the country, outside of New York and Newark. We welcome every new scientific development that'll help us catch crooks. The whole department's on special duty in this case. Organization and advanced methods—that's the way we work. All the lawyers in the state won't be able

to get Wayne off a first-degree rap."

"Not even if he's innocent?" Wayne asked softly.

Early guffawed. "Very funny," he remarked, as if Wayne had intended it for a wisecrack. "The case is all sewed up right now, but just for good measure we want to get our hands on one more piece of evidence. We'll probably find it on Wayne when we grab him—the gun he used. Anything else I can do for you boys?"

Wayne said, "I'd like to look around."

Jenkins turned to follow, but Wayne winked. With a knowing nod, Jenkins drew back, perched himself on a corner of the inspector's desk, and invited further conversation. Wayne walked down the corridor and out the entrance.

The fact that Gifford was counting on him to deliver a picture of Orr sent him around to the side of the building. He was still determined to prolong his masquerade in order to pick up all the information possible. He walked through a parking lot until he reached the rear corner. The windows of Chief Beckett's office were above his head.

WAYNE pulled the discharged flash-bulb out of the synchronizer, sank a fresh one into the socket, reversed the plate-holder, and repeated the settings he had seen Jenkins make. With his camera cocked, he stood onto a sedan that was standing beneath the windows. He stood on the top, gazing into the office.

Orr was facing the chief's desk. Wayne vividly remembered his hard features and ominously confident manner. He could not hear the report Orr was making, but the man seated at the desk was listening intently.

Chief Beckett's bearing was severely military. His face was florid, his nose bulbous and red. Wayne aimed his camera, focused carefully through the range-finder, then thumbed the plunger. The glare of the flash filled the office. Orr and Beckett spun about. Wayne jumped off the car, hoping grimly that the picture would satisfy Gifford and that in this way he could avoid coming face to face with Orr.

When he reached the entrance of

headquarters, he met Jenkins coming out. Jenkins looked jubilant. He grasped Wayne's arm and pulled him away from the door.

"Nice work!" he exclaimed. "You're the first photog who ever caught Beckett unawares. He's so sensitive about that schnozzle, he won't let any of us turn a lens in his direction! He came out of his office roaring, so we'd better wait until he cools off. I hope your shot's good. Lester—it's just the sort of stuff Giff likes. Better hop back and put it through the soup. I'm going over to the morgue. See you later."

Jenkins hurried across the street. Wayne walked slowly toward the *Chronicle* office. His mind reverted to the paragraphs he had read in the early edition. There was something about them that bothered him, like a splinter caught in his mind. He was self-absorbed until he reached the entrance of the building. There he paused, gazing alertly at a taxi that was just stopping at the curb.

A thin young man was clambering out of it. He had a bulging suitcase and a smaller case like the one Wayne was carrying. Galvanized, Wayne opened the door, swung his own case inside, then turned back. The thin young man was paying off the driver.

"Hello," Wayne said. "You're Lester, aren't you?"

"That's right." Lester looked hurried and tired. "You on the paper?"

"I'm Gifford," Wayne said.

Lester gripped Wayne's hand. "Har-ya, Gifford? Sorry as hell to be so late. The damned bus I was on got bogged down. I had to help pull it out of the mud. I've have been here on time if—"

"That's okay," Wayne said. "We're busy tonight, but we've got everything covered. You look pretty wet. You'd better find yourself a room in a hotel. No need for you to work tonight."

Lester sighed with relief. "That's damned decent of you, Gifford. Fact is, if I don't get a hot bath, I'll come down with a lousy cold. I'll be around tomorrow, about five."

"Fine," Wayne said.

He helped Lester heave the cases back into the taxi. Lester gave him a fare-

well salute, and the cab turned about. Wayne drew a deep breath as it swerved from sight at the corner. He turned back to the door—and stopped short.

Sue Carey was standing just outside the entrance. She had put on an oilskin coat, and a jaunty little hat was perched on her head. Again she was gazing at him in that strangely wise way of hers. He went to her slowly.

"Think you're going to like it here, Mr. Lester?" she inquired quietly.

"Much better than the spot I was in before I came," he answered.

She walked out into the rain. Wayne's

pressed for time, used rapid developers.

After two minutes he turned on the dim green light. In two more minutes the images on the films looked strong. He rinsed them, then slid them into the tray of hypo. The rapidity with which they cleared surprised him. While they hung in the circulating wash-water, he found a tray that smelled strongly of alcohol. That would be a rapid-drying solution.

He printed the negatives and, after using the rapid-drier again, turned on the white light. The shot of Early was crisp and clear. That of Orr and Beck-

DID YOU KNOW

THAT, until repealed only recently, Guatemala had a law which held guards solely and directly responsible for the safekeeping of prisoners left in their charge? If the prisoner broke out of jail and escaped, the guard was promptly arrested and sentenced to serve out the remainder of the prisoner's term! And if the prisoner had been awaiting the death penalty, the unfortunate guard was taken—and actually executed in the missing prisoner's place!

THAT the penalty for armed robbery in Ethiopia is death by hanging?

THAT in Persia, during the early 1920's, condemned murderers were tied to the mouth of a cannon—and blown to bits?

THAT baseball players were looked upon as being on the same level as petty criminals in the early days of Marietta, Ohio? An ordinance—passed in 1874—stated that a person convicted of being a baseball player was subject to a fine of \$50 and/or a 30 days jail sentence!

THAT death was the punishment for bigamy in ancient Sweden?

?

anxious eyes followed her a moment. He stepped in, took up his case, ran up the stairs to the city room, and immediately turned to the darkroom. Gifford was busy and did not glance up.

Closing and bolting the door, Wayne peeled off his trench coat. He felt of his wounded arm. It was swelling, and the blood was pounding through it hotly. His mouth set, he turned to the trays. He acquainted himself with the layout on the bench, and switched off the lights.

IN TOTAL darkness, because he surmised his film was superpan, he opened his holders. He remembered reading in a photographic magazine that newspaper cameramen, usually

ett in the chief's office was not quite as good. Strangely pleased, Wayne took the prints out to the city desk. Gifford scanned them quickly.

"Orr reporting to the chief," Wayne explained. "Instead of waiting, I tried a candid shot through the window."

"Good," Gifford said. "We'll use it. That's the type of stuff I want. But I still need a close-up portrait of Orr."

"He'll be busy a while," Wayne said quickly. "Won't this one fill the bill?"

"Get Orr again as soon as you can," Gifford insisted. "A straight shot. Also, try having him aim his gun straight at the camera and see how it turns out. Any new leads?"

"I'm just getting acquainted with the setup," Wayne said, "but I may have

something soon."

Gifford nodded, passed the prints to Lamb, and turned back to his blue-slashed copy. Wayne asked quietly of the white-haired man, "Where are the files—the back issues?" Lamb indicated a door at the far corner of the room.

Beyond it, Wayne found racks loaded with bound copies of the *Chronicle*. Selecting one dated just four years ago, he split it open on a large tilted table and began flipping from front page to front page.

Presently he found the story of the payroll robbery at the Eureka plant and the capture of the criminal. Leonard Nolan's photograph, taken at headquarters following his arrest, showed him to be a sunken-cheeked, sly-eyed young man with an expression of dazed defeat.

Another halftone showed Orr, characteristically hard-faced and confident but thinner. There was a view of the Sycamore Drive development, showing half a dozen houses in various stages of construction, with an arrow indicating the one, not far from 5750, where Nolan had been captured.

Chapter V

WAYNE followed the story of the crime to the stage at which the headlines shouted Nolan's conviction.

The deciding evidence at the trial was the identification of Nolan as the lone stick-up man by several eyewitnesses to the robbery. The defense pleaded that the lack of material evidence raised a reasonable doubt of Nolan's guilt, since the loot, not having been found, could not be directly connected with him. The police, in fact, are still searching for the stolen money, the loss of which was covered by bond.

The testimony of the eyewitnesses, however, added to the fact that Nolan's alibi was proved false by the prosecutor, was deemed sufficient by the jury to . . .

Wayne winced as something touched his throbbing arm. His breath stopped. He lifted his head quickly. Sue Carey was standing beside him, gazing at him with open-eyed apprehension, her lips parted, her breath coming rapidly.

"Why are you pretending to be Chick

Lester?" she asked.

His shoulders sagged. A feeling of nausea suffused him. He began in a husky tone. "What makes you think I'm not—" but his voice faded. It was no good, trying to put something over on this girl. Her eyes were too wise.

"I know you're not Chick Lester," she said. "I met him once, about a year ago, when I was visiting out of town. You're not anything like him."

Wayne made a gesture of despair. "That stops me," he admitted. He saw that Sue Carey was pale, that she was trying to keep herself from trembling. After a moment he asked, "Why haven't you told Gifford?"

"I want to learn the rest of it first—why you're impersonating Chick Lester and who you really are. It's my story, and I want to spring it on Giff all at once so he'll realize I can handle real news."

"I think you'll get your wish, Sue," Wayne said evenly. "You—you don't know who I am?"

She shook her head. "No."

He leaned toward her intensely. "Look here. You want your chance, and I want one for myself. You'll have a bigger story than you expect if you'll play along with me a little while. Can't we make a bargain between us?"

She hesitated. "I—I don't quite know what you mean."

"I'll tell you the whole story if you'll listen, if you'll try to believe me. All I want in return is a little time, a few hours. Is there any place where we can talk alone?"

She thought a moment uneasily. "My apartment is only a block from here." "Giff won't miss us if we talk fast," Wayne said quickly. "You're not afraid to go there with me, are you?"

"Yes," she admitted. "Yes, I am. But if I let it make any difference, I'll never be any good as a reporter. I think the— the chance is worth taking."

"Good girl," Wayne said. "You'll be all right."

HE LEFT the file room quickly. He was glad that Gifford didn't glance up. Sue followed him out of the swinging doors. They walked through the rain

rapidly. The girl glanced at Wayne repeatedly, anxious yet determined. Her apartment was cozy and quiet. He eased his arm and sank into a chair. She remained standing near the door, warily estimating him.

He smiled. "I won't hurt you."

"No—no, I don't think you will," she answered, but her voice was not quite steady. "You don't seem the type. You—you're not a crook, though, are you?"

"I'm Stephen Wayne."

She stood there staring at him.

"Don't let that frighten you," he said earnestly.

She was motionless.

"Judging from all I've heard," Wayne went on, "I haven't a prayer of clearing myself, but I've got to try anyway. I didn't deliberately set out to impersonate Chick Lester. I was sort of jockeyed into it. Then I realized it was a chance to work under cover and unearth some evidence in my favor—if there is any. That's why I want a little time, just a few hours so I can at least make a stab at it."

"Stephen Wayne working in our own city room!" the girl said in a hushed tone. "You expect me to keep quiet about that?"

His drawn smile faded. "I suppose it is too much to ask. It's the sort of story you've been dreaming about, isn't it? And all your own. Well then, perhaps you'd better listen. You'll have to have the facts, won't you?"

She said anxiously, "Yes."

"I wish you wouldn't be so nervous."

She moved to a chair and sat in it stiffly. "You—you don't look like the sort who'd—" She could get no further than that.

"Thanks," he said wryly. "That's the first kind word I've heard about myself since it happened. I wonder if you'll believe me."

"I don't know."

"I can't blame you for being doubtful. Look here. Perhaps this would be easier for both of us if you were doing something while I talk. Would you mind taking a look at my arm?"

He shook off his coats. He felt Sue stiffen when she saw his bloody sleeve, but she helped him roll it up. As she

gazed at the wound, her face turned white. She stepped quickly into the bathroom and opened the medicine cabinet.

"Have you a pair of tweezers?" he asked. "The bullet isn't in very far."

She came back slowly. "Did—did you kill your wife?" she asked almost inaudibly.

"No," Wayne said.

She hesitated another moment, gazing at his wound. "That's a job for a doctor."

"I can't go to a doctor. He'd notify the police immediately. You'd lose your story, too. Do you think you can get the bullet out?"

"I can try—if you can stand it."

"Try," he urged.

He watched her gratefully while she sterilized the tweezers, boiling them in a pan on the gas stove in her tiny kitchen. She brought bandages and adhesive tape and a bottle of antiseptic. Taking up the tweezers, she steadied herself.

"You won't hurt me," he said. "Get it out, that's the important thing."

His right hand clenched the arm of the chair. The sharp points of the tweezers felt white hot. Sweat broke out on his forehead. He could hear Sue breathing rapidly. Presently something hard fell into the pan of water. Lifting his head, he saw the bullet.

"Good work," he said hoarsely.

"Didn't hurt a bit."

"This is iodine," she warned him.

THE room began to spin. He clamped his eyes shut. Minutes passed before the burning lessened and became bearable. When he looked up again, the girl was taping a bandage neatly over the wound. Next she put a tall glass into his hand. It was half full of Scotch. He drank some of it.

"Thanks," he said. "It feels better already."

She sat opposite him, looking like a frightened child.

"I didn't do much talking, did I?" he observed. "I'm afraid I'm not the Gable type. For instance, I realized now that I was a damned fool to break away from that cop."

"Why did you?"

"I'm not sure," Wayne said. "I told him that whoever had killed my wife must be somewhere near the house. I tried to get him to go outside and look around. He wouldn't, naturally. All I could think of was that if somebody didn't go outside and try to find the murderer, he'd get away and never be seen again. That's why I ran out—hoping to find some trace of him. Of course, I didn't. I hadn't a chance. After that I realized how black it looked for me and there was nothing I could do but try to stay out of reach of the police."

She asked quickly, "What made you think that somebody was outside—and close?"

"While I was unlocking the front door, I heard somebody going out the back way."

"You mean you came home when somebody was down in the cellar, digging that hole in the floor?"

Wayne leaned toward the girl. "I'd just come from the office. I'd been working there alone, writing up some late reports. I realize this is no good as an alibi. I haven't any. I thought I'd better tell you everything from the beginning. My car is being overhauled, so I took the bus out to Sycamore Drive and walked the three blocks from the bus stop to my house. The house was dark. I thought Nadine had gone to bed. Evidently she had, but—"

"When you went in," Sue interrupted quickly, "are you sure you heard somebody going out the back?"

"I can't prove it, of course," Wayne said. "Whoever was down in the cellar had heard me crossing the front porch. He had time to get out before I unlocked the door. I went into the kitchen to get a bottle of beer and noticed that the cellar door was standing ajar and a light was shining down there. I found my wife lying at the foot of the stairs. The big poker from the furnace was lying across her. I picked it up, and just then the cop came down."

"Didn't the cop—didn't Patrolman Orr see anybody sneaking away from there?"

"He said he'd heard a pounding sound and he'd been standing in the garden at

the side of the house, listening and watching. He hadn't seen me come in. That's reasonable as there's a high hedge. And if the man who'd gone out the back way had ducked behind the garage, the cop wouldn't have seen him. All the circumstances put together—" Wayne clenched his fists. "Nadine and I were never happy. In fact, we were miserable together. We seemed to bring out the worst in each other, but it was never so bad that I'd be driven to kill her."

"You can't prove any of this," Sue said.

"Not one detail," Wayne admitted. He searched her eyes. "But—do you believe me?"

"Somehow I can't help it."

"Thanks," Wayne said quietly. "Will you let me have the few hours I want?"

"But what can you do?"

"You're taking a chance, you know," he reminded her. "I may make another break for it as soon as I get outside your door. The cops may pick me up, and then you'll be left out in the cold on the story. Had you thought of that?"

"Yes, but what can you do in so little time?"

"There's something my mind keeps grasping at," Wayne said quickly. "I know Nadine didn't have any enemies. Nobody hated her enough to kill her. She hadn't any lover, so that angle is out. Something came in from outside, something that meant her death because she was in the way. It's very vague, but things connect up. Do you know where I can find a man named Leonard Nolan?"

She shook her head.

"Four years ago Nolan was captured not far from the house I leased on Sycamore Drive. Yesterday he was let out of prison. Tonight somebody came into that house, for some reason, and killed Nadine. Put it all together—that and a lot more I haven't found out yet—and it means something. That's why I want a little more time, so I can try to learn the rest."

"Then—then you'd better get busy. You won't have long."

"No," Wayne agreed. "I won't have long." He rose and closed his hand on

her arm. "You're swell."

"Maybe I'm crazy," she said, "but I don't think so."

Chapter VI

SUE and Wayne stepped out of the apartment together. Sue paused. "Just a minute," she said quietly. She went back in, closing the door. Wayne waited in the hall until she reappeared a moment later. She was still wary of him, but thoughtful. Walking quickly through the rain, they turned back to the *Chronicle* plant.

"I wish there was some way I could keep the story for you when the big news breaks, one way or the other," Wayne said. "You rate it."

"Maybe not," the girl answered. "Maybe Giff's right. Maybe I'm not built to be a real reporter. I could turn you in and get a by-line under a big screamer head, but somehow that doesn't seem to be the most important point. If I didn't give you the chance you want, if you were hauled up and tried and convicted and—and—" She pushed her hands deep into the pockets of her coat. "I'd always have to think that if it weren't for me it wouldn't have happened that way. I guess my conscience means more to me than a few headlines."

As they reached the *Chronicle* building, they saw Jenkins piling out of a taxi. They caught up with him at the door. Wayne stopped him and signaled Sue with a glance. She hurried in. Jenkins gave Wayne a puzzled frown.

"Have you any pix you'll have to put through right away? Wayne asked quickly.

"I've got one of the woman in the morgue, but we probably won't be able to run it," Jenkins said. "What's up?"

"I've picked up a new lead," Wayne said. "It may build up into something big. I'll need you along. Listen. Leonard Nolan came back to town yesterday from the state prison. Where can we find him?"

Jenkins shrugged. "He might've crawled into any one of a thousand different holes. What about him?"

"But isn't there any way we can con-

nect with him?"

"Bill would probably know," Jenkins said.

"Who's Bill?"

"Bill Mahoney runs a saloon on the other side of the railroad tracks. He knows everybody."

"Get in," Wayne said.

He had signaled the taxi to wait, and now he pushed Jenkins into it. Jenkins gave the driver an address, and the cab ground away. Rain eddied in the windows, and the street lights flashed past. The red-headed photographer gazed at Wayne curiously.

"What does this add up to?" he asked.

"I don't know yet," Wayne confessed. "It may come to nothing at all. On the other hand, it may crack the case."

"Pin it on Wayne? So far as that goes, the case is already cracked."

"Pin it on somebody else," Wayne said.

Jenkins snorted. "That's out! We're wasting our time. Say, you're a stranger here in town. How come you're going off on a crazy hunch like this. Where'd you get this cockeyed idea that Wayne didn't do it?"

Wayne smiled slowly. "That's my own peculiar angle," he said.

Jenkins studied him with a strange light in his eyes. When the cab pulled to the curb, he asked the driver to wait. Bill's place was a sooty brick building. The air inside was heady with the fumes of many years' sloppings of beer and liquor. An automatic phonograph was playing so loudly that the bass notes jarred the glasses behind the bar. Jenkins ordered two beers from the barrel-bellied man who was officiating at the spigots.

"This is Chick Lester, Bill," Jenkins said. "Just started working for the paper tonight. We're after a little friendly information."

Bill said nothing.

"Happen to know where Leonard Nolan is, Bill?" Wayne inquired.

BILL wiped his beefy hands on his dirty apron, scowling at Wayne. "Lennie's a good guy," he growled. "Lennie's all right. He took his rap and he's going straight. You guys leave

Lennie alone."

"Sure, he's all right," Jenkins said. "We just want to talk to him, that's all."

"A guy just come outa stir oughta be let alone," Bill said. "There was a guy in here already asking about him, wantin' to check up. He ain't got nothin' to hide. He took a room in the place down at the end of the block. Second floor back. Ain't seen him since mornin', but he oughta be there. I don't want you mugs to make any trouble for a right guy like Lennie. You oughta lay off a guy what's just come outa stir."

"Thanks, Bill," Wayne said.

They closed the door on the reek and the deafening music. Wayne signaled to the cab driver, and he followed them to the end of the block. The rooming house was a dirty frame structure on the edge of the railroad yards. The lights in the hall were dim, and the stairs creaked. Wayne knocked on Nolan's door. He turned the knob when he heard a groan. With Jenkins beside him, he went in quickly.

When they found the light and snapped it on, they saw that Nolan was stretched out on his back on the floor. He was wearing a pair of cheap pajamas. In semiconscious agony he was rolling his head from side to side and clutching the ragged carpet in his fists. His face was blotched with dried blood, and his hair was matted. He groaned and mumbled.

Kneeling over him, Wayne and Jen-

kins saw that he had been beaten over the head. His scalp was gashed, and the bare bone looked cracked.

"Judas!" Jenkins blurted.

Wayne shook him gently.

Nolan muttered. "Get that light outa my eyes." The words were almost indistinguishable. Nolan's lips were split and swollen from other brutal blows. "Get it outa my eyes. I dunno where it is. I dunno. Who the hell are you? That light. Who—" He swallowed his voice.

"We've got to get an ambulance," Jenkins said in a hushed tone.

Suddenly Nolan shouted hoarsely, "I'll tell ya! Quit hittin' me. I'll tell ya where I hid it!"

Again Wayne shook him. "Lennie! Lennie!"

Nolan groaned and gripped the carpet.

Wayne came to his feet. As he turned to the door, Jenkins stepped back with his camera lifted. An instant glare filled the room. Jenkins shifted for another shot while Wayne hurried out. In the lower hall Wayne found a pay telephone on the wall. He was disconnecting when Jenkins ran down the stairs.

"Who the hell did that to him?" Jenkins said quickly.

"I don't know," Wayne said, "but I've a damned good idea why. I've just phoned for an ambulance. There's nothing we can do for him. Listen, Jenk. We've got to play our cards close to the

THE ADVENTURES OF

IT SMELLS GRAND



SMIFF A WHIFF—
IT SMELLS RIGHT JOLLY!

IT PACKS RIGHT



CUT TO PACK JUST RIGHT, BY GOLLY!

chest. We can tell the cops about it afterward—if we find anything.”

“If we find out what?” Jenkins asked.

Without answering him, Wayne hurried out to the taxi. Jenkins clambered in after him. He told the driver, “Fifty-seven hundred block on Sycamore Drive. Stop at the near corner.” The taxi swerved off through the rain. Automatically busy with his camera, Jenkins peered at Wayne.

“For a guy who’s been in town just a couple hours, you’re certainly going places,” he observed. “How come you had this lead to Nolan? What the hell’s eating you? You look white as a ghost.”

“Listen to this,” Wayne said earnestly. “All the facts are printed in the *Chronicle*. Four years ago Lennie Nolan stole a payroll amounting to twenty thousand dollars. Within a few hours he was pinched, but nobody ever found that money. How far is it from the Eureka plant to Sycamore Drive?”

“Couple miles.”

“How did Nolan happen to be hiding out there that night?”

JENKINS gestured. “A lot of half-built houses,” he said. “A good place. No lights, plenty of holes to crawl into. Why not?”

Wayne was silent a moment. “Bill said a man came into the saloon today and asked about Nolan. Earlier tonight somebody walked in on him unexpectedly. That man kept a light in Nolan’s eyes so he couldn’t see. You heard him

say, ‘Quit hittin’ me and I’ll tell ya where I hid it.’”

“What did he hide?” Jenkins asked. Suddenly he realized. “The money! That twenty grand.”

“God knows where it is now,” Wayne said. “Maybe there’s been plenty of chances to ditch it somewhere else. Maybe not. It would be damned hot money if he’d been caught. Perhaps he didn’t dare take it.”

“Who?” Jenkins asked. “If *who’d* been caught?”

The taxi was turning to the curb. Wayne told the driver to wait. Jenkins swung into step with him as they walked toward the house at 5750. The windows of Wayne’s home were lighted. Two cars were sitting in front of it.

“Cops,” Jenkins said. “What the hell are you up to, Lester?”

“We’ve got to be quiet about it,” Wayne warned. “We’re going to take a look around, but we don’t want them to know.”

Wayne was conscious of Jenkins’ suspicious stare as they passed the house. When they were near the next corner, where the street light was burning—where the bullet had struck his arm—Wayne turned back. Jenkins followed him into the driveway. At the rear of the house Wayne paused again, scanning the ground.

“He must have come this way,” he murmured.

“Who?” Jenkins asked in a whisper.

[Turn page]

UNCLE WALTER

IT SMOKES SWEET



A MERRY SMOKE—Sir Walter Raleigh!

IT CAN'T BITE!



SIR WALTER RALEIGH'S BLEND OF CHOICE KENTUCKY BURLEYS IS EXTRA-AGED TO GUARD AGAINST TONGUE BITE. THE LARGE SIZE CANISTER OF SIR WALTER RALEIGH—IN A BEAUTIFUL YULETIDE PACKAGE—MAKES THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS GIFT!

"He didn't dare risk getting caught with it," Wayne said half to himself. "He had to get rid of it somewhere and gamble that it would still be there when he came back. He didn't have time to bury it. There aren't any refuse cans back here, nothing that would suggest itself as a hiding place. He had to move fast and—"

"Who?" Jenkins insisted.

Wayne turned to the garage. One of the doors was standing ajar. He tugged Jenkins in after him, then closed the door noiselessly. He snapped a switch, and light glared down from a bulb overhead. There was no car in the garage. Wayne looked around.

"He hasn't had a chance to come back yet," Wayne said. "There have been cops in the house ever since she was found dead. He's had to stay clear and wait. It must still be somewhere around here." He gazed at the perturbed Jenkins. "We're looking for a bundle. Not a large one. Try to find it."

"Listen," Jenkins said. "Where the hell are you getting all these cockeyed ideas, Lester?"

Wayne opened a tool cabinet above a bench. No bundle was hidden there. He scanned the floor. It was cement, unbroken at any spot. In one corner an oil drum stood. He leaned over it, but the space behind it was empty. He was conscious that Jenkins, without knowing why, was also searching. He heard a sound and turned to see Jenkins probing into a large bag of cotton waste.

"Something hard in here," Jenkins said.

"Wait!" Wayne cautioned.

He pulled his camera out of his case and adjusted it. The click of the shutter caught Jenkins reaching into the bag. As Wayne reversed the plate-holder, Jenkins dug deeper. Wayne fired the second bulb when Jenkins had the bag spilled over, with some of the waste raked out. The soiled bundle embedded in the cotton was clearly visible.

Chapter VII

NOW Jenkins was moving almost too quickly, but Wayne flashed him as he lifting the bundle. It was wrapped in old brown paper. Bits of earth,

gravel, and cement were clinging to it. Jenkins ripped off a corner of the rotten paper.

Wayne stepped closer and focused on the pack of banknotes protruding from the open corner and flashed a close-up.

"The money Nolan stole!" Jenkins exclaimed.

Wayne's pulse was swift. He switched off the light, looked out cautiously, made sure the detectives inside the house had not noticed their operations, then hustled Jenkins along the driveway. Their strides stretched as they returned to the taxi.

"Chronicle building," Wayne directed the driver. The cab started up. Jenkins glanced at his strap-watch and revised Wayne's instructions. "Drop me off at police headquarters." Turning eagerly, he gripped Wayne's injured arm. Wayne winced.

"What's the matter? You hurt?" Wayne, busy inspecting the bundle, did not answer. The suspicion in Jenkins' eyes sharpened. "How the hell did you get onto this setup so fast? How could you know—"

Wayne broke in. "This money is the reason Nolan was hiding out among those unfinished houses that night four years ago. He went there to hide his loot. The cement in the cellar of 5750 must have just been laid. It was still soft. He buried the money in it and smoothed it over. It's been there ever since. Nolan planned to come back for it—"

"Wait a minute," Jenkins said. "Nolan didn't get the chance. Somebody got to him and forced him to tell where he'd hidden the dough."

"That's it," Wayne said quickly. "Then that man went to the Wayne place tonight. There wasn't any car in the garage, so he thought nobody was at home. He got into the house some way, not knowing that Nad—Mrs. Wayne was asleep in the bedroom upstairs. She heard him digging and came down to investigate, probably thinking it was her husband, and she saw a stranger take the bundle out of that hole in the floor. In order to keep it, he had to silence her. Just then Wayne came home and—"

"Wait a minute," Jenkins protested

again. "How do you know that? How do you know Wayne—"

Urgently Wayne interrupted again. "Here's headquarters. Give me your shots of Nolan. I'll try to have them ready to print and in Gifford's hands by the time you get back."

"But listen—"

Wayne all but spilled Jenkins out of the cab. His orders sent the taxi forward at once. Jenkins stared after Wayne before he hurried into police headquarters.

Entering the city room, Wayne dropped his case beside the door. Then his eyes stopped on Sue Carey.

She was perched tensely in front of her typewriter, hard at work. Wayne knew at once it was no cut-and-dried society item she was writing. She looked up, and her cheeks reddened at sight of him.

She went on typing but more slowly this time.

Wayne smiled and said, "Okay, but make it your best." Then he went to Gifford's desk.

"My Gawd, Lester, where've you been?" Gifford asked in a harassed tone. "Apperman is beginning to roll the final right now, and you haven't got that new shot of George Orr. What the hell kind of a—"

"We've got some better pix than that one would be," Wayne interrupted, putting the bundle down in front of Gifford. "That's the payroll stolen by Lennie Nolan four years ago. Nolan was damned near killed tonight by somebody who forced him to tell where he'd cached it. Jenk and I found it. It had been taken out of that hole in the floor of the Wayne place and transferred to the garage. Nolan's on his way to the hospital now."

INSTINCTIVELY, his eyes rounded, Gifford had reached for the telephone. "Press room!" he urged. "Stop those presses, Ape! I said stop 'em! My Gawd, don't yell at me. Tear up page one. We've got a new lead and some more pix. I don't give a damn what you say, we're holding the final!"

Rapidly Wayne repeated the story he had outlined to Jenkins. Gifford kept nodding and looking amazed, but there

was a skeptical glint in his eyes, nevertheless.

"Wayne's out of this case now, Giff, Wayne argued. "Certainly he didn't beat that information out of Nolan. He didn't dig up that money. He didn't—"

"Why not?" Gifford interrupted. "He could have done all that as well as any other man. But suppose he didn't know anything about it. That doesn't clear him. If that spot under the cellar stairs was picked out by Nolan as the best place to hide the money, then Wayne picked it out as the best place to bury the wife he's murdered. He turned up the money by accident, that's all. This is a swell break, Lester, but never mind the angles. Leave the question of Wayne's guilt to the courts. I'll get this written. You— Oh, Gawd!"

The doors had swung open again and Apperman was charging in. Gifford threw up his hands in harried resignation, and Apperman slammed his big fist on the desk.

"You hear those presses rolling?" the foreman bellowed. "They're going to keep on rolling. We've missed the deadline on the final already because you held me up on the mail. Distribution's cursing me from hell to breakfast because the whole system's shot. Nothing's going to stop those presses now, y' understand? And let me tell you something else. My name's Apperman, not Ape."

Gifford had no immediate opportunity to contest the point. Another swing of the doors produced Jenkins. The red-headed cameraman shouldered Apperman aside and slapped two photographs on Gifford's desk.

"There's the lab's pix of the bullets that killed the woman, magnified ten times. Did Lester tell you what we turned up?" He faced Wayne breathlessly. "We can't hold out on the police. They play ball with us, so we play with them. I had to tell 'em about it. Inspector Early wants to see you. He can't figure out, and neither can I, how you can know so damned much about this case."

It was coming now, Wayne felt. His brief respite was coming to an end, hopelessly.

"Never mind, Jenk," Gifford said,

swinging the ballistics photographs to Lamb's desk. "For Gawd's sake, put those new pix of yours through the soup." He swung upon Wayne. "I still want that shot of George Orr. I phoned him and got him to come over. He's waiting in that room over there. You'll find a camera all set up. Go in there and shoot him and hurry up about it."

Wayne stood back while Gifford and Apperman resumed their altercation. Jenkins gave Wayne a queer look as he dug into Wayne's case for the exposed films. He hurried into the darkroom and closed the door.

Wayne was full of a numb chill. He turned away slowly. Sue had paused in her typing. Her fingers strayed over the keys as he bent over her.

"Looks like it's all over but the formalities," he said soberly. "I hope your story's all set to hand in, because it's going to break right now. You've left yourself out of it, haven't you? Helping me, I mean. No use getting yourself in a jam, you know. I want to say again—thanks. It isn't your fault that it didn't work out."

She said softly, "I'm sorry."

Gifford turned from snarling at Apperman. "Lester! Get busy! Get that shot of Orr!"

"Right away, Giff," Wayne said.

HE WENT toward the adjoining room that Gifford had pointed out. Glancing back, he saw that Sue was hurrying from her desk to Lamb's. Pausing outside the connecting door, he noticed first the view camera set on a tripod, with a light craning up beside it. Patrolman Orr was sitting on the opposite side of the room.

Wayne fished out a cigarette and lit it as he went in. Partially covering his face with his hands, he felt a certain grim satisfaction in delaying Orr's identification of him as long as possible. Immediately, as Orr rose, he switched on the photo-flood. The blinding glare caused Orr to blink and lower his head.

"Stand right between the windows," Wayne suggested. "It won't take a minute. Giff wants one of you with your gun in your hand. Okay?" He added wryly, "Sorry I kept you waiting."

Orr squared his shoulders, hardened his face, and lifted his service revolver from its holster. "That isn't you, is it, Jenk?" he asked. "Doesn't sound like you. I can't see through that light."

"I'm new here," Wayne answered, remaining in the shadow behind the camera. After focusing Orr's image on the ground glass, he drew the slide of the film-holder and set the shutter. "My first night." And his last. "I suppose you'd like to get your hands on that chap who got away from you?"

"Damned, sorry I didn't drop him," Orr said grimly. "Wish I'd saved the state the trouble of stringing him up. Let's get this over with. Is this oke?"

"It would be better if you'd step back a little and aim the gun straight at the lens," Wayne suggested.

"Say," Orr said, complying, "your voice seems sort of familiar."

Wayne's thumb rested on the plunger of the shutter release. The glitter of Orr's gun was hard and bright and deadly. Orr's expression was confidently calm, yet merciless. He must have looked like that, Wayne thought, when he had fired at the fugitive dodging through the shadows on Sycamore Drive. A suitable caption for this picture would be, he reflected: Patrolman Who Discovered the Murder, Taken by the Accused While Masquerading as a News Cameraman.

He was about to release the shutter when Sue Carey and Lamb appeared in the doorway.

"Lester!" Lamb exclaimed.

Sue had the two photographs which had been brought from headquarters by Jenkins. In one hand Lamb was holding his magnifying glass and on the palm of his other hand a bullet was resting. Wayne sensed at once that it was the slug which Sue had extracted from his wound. She had gone back into her apartment as they were leaving to fish it out of the pan of water.

"Lester!" Lamb squeaked again. "They're the same. All three of these bullets came out of the same gun!"

Unconsciously Wayne leaned into the shine of the brilliant light, his gaze turning slowly to Patrolman Orr.

"Then this is the man who murdered my wife," he said.

He jerked back at the instant Orr fired. The click of the shutter was lost in the roar of the report. Like lightning the thought went through Wayne's mind that he had a picture of Orr attempting to kill him. He tripped over the tripod as a patch of plaster broke out of the wall behind him. The camera fell toward Orr. Suddenly Orr heaved it aside and ran out of the room. Wayne flung himself along at the patrolman's heels.

Orr was pushing out the swinging doors when Wayne caught up his camera case by the strap. He swung it overhead and brought it crashing down on the back of Orr's neck. Orr plunged forward, parting the doors, and dropped inertly across the sill.

WAYNE turned about, suddenly aware that the city room was full of commotion. Reporters were springing up from their desks and running toward the fallen Orr. The door of the darkroom was open, and Jenkins was staring out, a dripping print in his hand. At the city desk, Gifford and Apperman had forgotten their quarrel and were staring at Wayne. Lamb

trotted toward them, gesturing with both hands, chattering something that Wayne could not hear. Before he followed, he saw that Sue was rapidly gathering up the pages she had typed.

"Orr is the man who killed my wife," Wayne said through a dry throat. "The bullets prove it. He was careless with his gun once too often. When he arrested Nolan four years ago, he knew Nolan must have hidden the stolen money somewhere close at hand. Evidently he couldn't find it, but tonight he forced Nolan to tell him where the money was. He hurried out the back door of the house when I went in the front. He hid the money in the garage, then came around after me and— He's the one who—" Wayne paused with a tired gesture. "Sue has the rest of it."

"Stop the presses!" The words were howled over the telephone, but the voice was not Gifford's. Gifford was standing stock-still, staring in speechless admiration at Wayne. It was big Apperman who was shouting so loudly that there was no need of a wire to convey his orders into the basement. "Stop 'em, stop 'em!" he bawled. "Stop those presses!"



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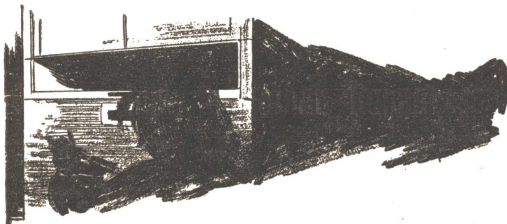
Miss Withers suddenly
cast aside her modesty



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A TRAIN

A Novel by CRAIG RICE and STUART PALMER



Chapter 1

IT WAS nothing, really," said John J. Malone with weary modesty. "After all, I never lost a client yet."

The party in Chicago's famed Pump Room was being held to celebrate the miraculous acquittal of Stephen Larsen, a machine politician accused of dipping some thirty thousand dollars out of the municipal till. Malone had proved to the jury and to himself that his client was innocent—at least, innocent of that particular charge.

It was going to be a nice party, the little lawyer kept telling himself. By the way Larsen's so-called friends were bending their elbows, the tab would be colossal. Malone hoped fervently that his fee for services rendered would be taken care of today before Larsen's guests bankrupted him. Because there was the

matter of two months' back rent—

"Thank you, I will," Malone said, as the waiter picked up his empty glass.

He wondered how he could meet the redhead at the next table, who looked sultry and bored in the midst of a dull family party. As soon as he got his money from Larsen he would start a rescue operation. The quickest way to make friends, he always said, was to break a hundred-dollar bill in a bar, and that applied even to curvaceous redheads in Fath models.

But where was Steve Larsen? Lolly was here, wearing her most angelic expression and a slinky gown which she overflowed considerably at the top. She was hinting that the party also celebrated a reconciliation between herself and Stevie, that the divorce was off. She

When Miss Hildgarde Withers and John J. Malone put their heads together, some murderer's bound to have a headache!

had hocked her bracelet again, and Malone remembered hearing that her last show had closed after six performances. If she got her hand back into Steve's pocket, Malone reflected, good-bye to his fee of three grand.

He'd made elaborate plans for that money. They not only included the trip to Bermuda, which he'd been promising himself for twenty years, but also the redhead he'd been promising himself for twenty minutes.

Others at the table were worrying, too. "Steve is late, even for him!" spoke up Allen Roth suddenly.

Malone glanced at the porcine paving contractor who was rumored to be Larsen's secret partner, and murmured, "Maybe he got his dates mixed."

"He'd better show," Roth said in a voice as cold as a grave-digger's shovel.

The little lawyer shivered and realized he wasn't the only guest who had come here to make a collection. But he simply had to have that money. \$3,000—\$30,000. He wondered, half-musing, if he shouldn't have made his contingent fee, say, \$2,995. This way it almost looked like—

"What did you say about ten per cent, counselor?" Bert Glick spoke up wisely.

Malone recovered himself. "You misunderstood me. I merely said, 'When on pleasure bent, never muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.' I mean rye."

He turned to look for the waiter, not solely from thirst. The little lawyer would often have been very glad to buy back his introduction to Bert Glick.

True, the city hall hanger-on had been helpful during the trial. In fact, it had been his testimony as a prosecution witness that had cinched the acquittal, for he had made a surprise switch on several moot points of the indictment. Glick was a private detective turned bail-bondsman, clever at tapping wires and dipping his spoon into any gravy that was being passed.

GLICK slapped Malone on the back and said, "If you knew what I know, you wouldn't be looking at your watch all the time. Because this ain't a coming-out party, it's a surprise party. And the surprise is that the host ain't gonna be here!"

Malone went cold—as cold as Allen Roth's gray eyes across the table. "Keep talking," he said, adding in a whisper a few facts which Glick might not care to have brought to the attention of the district attorney.

"You don't need to be so nasty," Glick said. He rose suddenly to his feet, lifting his glass. "A toast! A toast to good ol' Stevie, our pal, who's taking the Super-Century for New York tonight, next stop Paris or Rio. And with him, my fine feathered friends, he's taking the dough he owes most of us and a lot more, too. *Bon voyage!*" The man absorbed the contents of his glass and slowly collapsed in his chair.

There was a sudden hullabaloo around the table. Malone closed his eyes for just five seconds, resigning himself to the certainty that his worst suspicions were true. When he opened his eyes again, the redhead was gone. He looked at his watch. There was still a chance of catching that New York train, with a quick stop at Joe the Angel's bar to borrow the price of a ticket.

Malone rushed out of the place, wasting no time in farewells. Everybody else was leaving, too. Bert Glick was alone, alone with the waiter and with the check.

As Malone had expected, Joe the Angel took a very dim view of the project, pointing out that it was probably only throwing good money after bad. But he handed over enough for a round trip, plus Pullman. By the time his cab had dumped him at the I.C. station, Malone had decided to settle for one way. He needed spending money for the trip. There were poker games on trains.

Suddenly he saw the redhead! She was jammed in a crowd at the gate, crushed between old ladies, noisy sailors, and a bearded patriarch in the robes of the Greek Orthodox Church. She struggled with a mink coat, a yowling cat in a traveling case, and a caged parrot.

Malone leaped gallantly to her rescue and for a brief moment was allowed to hold the menagerie before a Redcap took over. The moment was just long enough for the lawyer to have his hand clawed by the irate cat and for him and the parrot to develop a lifelong dislike.

But he did hear the girl say, "Compartment B in Car 10, please." And

her warm grateful smile sent him racing off in search of the Pullman conductor.

Considerable eloquence, some trifling liberties with the truth, and a ten-dollar bill got him possession of the drawing room next to a certain compartment. That settled, he paused to make a quick deal with a roving Western Union boy, and more money changed hands. When he finally swung aboard the already-moving train, he felt fairly confident that the trip would be pleasant and eventful. And lucrative, of course. The minute he got his hands on Steve Larsen—

Once established in the drawing room, Malone studied himself in the mirror, whistling a few bars of *On the Wabash Cannonball*. For the moment the primary target could wait. He was glad he was wearing his favorite Finchley suit and his new green and lavender Sulka tie.

"A man of distinction," he thought.

TRUE, his hair was slightly mussed, a few cigar ashes peppered his vest, and the Sulka tie was beginning to creep toward one ear, but the total effect was good. Inspired, he sat down to compose a note to Operation Redhead, in the next compartment. He knew it was the right compartment, for the parrot was already giving out with imitations of a boiler factory, assisted by the cat.

He wrote: *Lovely lady, let's not fight Fate. We were destined to have dinner together. I am holding my breath for your yes. Your unknown admirer, JJM.* He poked the note under the connecting door, rapped lightly, and waited.

After a long moment, the note came back, with an addition in a surprisingly precise hand. *Sir, you have picked the wrong girl. Besides, I had dinner in the Pump Room over an hour ago, and so, I believe, did you.*

Undaunted, Malone whistled another bar of the song. Just getting any answer at all was half the battle. So she'd noticed him in the Pump Room! He sat down and wrote swiftly, *Please, an after-dinner liqueur with me, then?*

This time the answer was: *My dear sir: MY DEAR SIR!* But the little lawyer thought he heard sounds of

feminine laughter, though of course, it might have been the parrot. He sat back, lighted a fresh cigar, and waited. They were almost to Gary now, and if the telegram had got through—

It had, and a messenger finally came aboard with an armful of luscious *Grüss von Tepflitz* roses. Malone intercepted him long enough to add a note which really should be the clincher. *To the Rose of Tralee, who makes all other women look like withered dandelions. I'll be waiting in the club car. Faithfully, John J. Malone.* That was the way, he told himself happily. Don't give her a chance to say *No* again.

Chapter II

AFTER a long and somewhat bruising trip through lurching Pullman cars, made longer still because he first headed fore instead of aft, Malone finally sank into a chair in the club-car lounge, facing the door. Of course, she would take time to arrange the roses, make a corsage out of a couple of buds, and probably shift into an even more startling gown. It might be quite a wait.

He waved at the bar steward and said, "Rye please, with a rye chaser."

"You mean rye with a beer chaser, Mista Malone?"

"If you know my name, you know enough not to confuse me. I mean beer with a rye chaser!"

When the drink arrived, Malone put it where it would do the most good, and then for lack of anything better to do, fell to staring in awed fascination at the lady who had just settled down across the aisle.

She was a tall, angular person who somehow suggested a fairly well-dressed scarecrow. Her face seemed faintly familiar, and Malone wondered if they'd met before. Then he decided that she reminded him of a three-year-old who had winked at him in the paddock at Washington Park one Saturday and then run out of the money.

Topping the face—as if anything could—was an incredible headpiece consisting of a grass-green crown, surrounded by a brim of nodding flowers, wreaths, and ivy. All it seemed to need

was a nice marble tombstone.

She looked up suddenly from her magazine. "Pardon me, but did you say something about a well-kept grave?"

Her voice reminded Malone of a certain Miss Hackett who had talked him out of quitting second-year high school. Somehow he found himself strangely unable to lie to her.

"Madame, do you read minds?"

"Not minds, Mr. Malone. Lips, sometimes." She smiled. "Are you really *the* John J. Malone?"

He blinked. "How in the—oh, of course! The magazine! Those fact-detective sheets *will* keep writing up my old cases. Are you a crime-story fan, Mrs—"

"Miss Hildegard Withers, school-teacher by profession and meddlesome old snoop by avocation, at least according to the police. Yes, I've read about you. You solve crimes and right wrongs, but usually by pure accident while chasing through saloons after some young woman. Are you on a case now?"

"Working my way through the second bottle," he muttered, suddenly desperate. It would never do for the redhead to come in and find him tied up with this character.

"I didn't mean that kind of case," Miss Withers explained. "I gather that even though you've never lost a client, you have mislaid one at the moment."

Malone shivered. The woman had second sight, at least. He decided that it would be better if he went back through the train and met the Rose of Tralee, who must certainly be on her way here by this time. He could also keep an eye open for Steve Larsen.

With a hasty apology he got out of the club car, pausing only to purchase a handy pint of rye from the bar steward, and started on a long slow prowl of mile after mile of wobbling, jerking cars. The rye, blending not unpleasantly with the champagne he had taken on earlier, made everything a little hazy and unreal. He kept getting turned around and blundering into the long-deserted diner. Two or three times he bumped into the Greek Orthodox priest with the whiskers and similarly kept interrupting four sailors shooting craps in a men's lounge.

BUT—no redhead. And no Larsen. Finally the train stopped—could it be Toledo already? Malone dashed to the vestibule and hung over the steps to make sure that Steve didn't disembark. When they were moving again, he resumed his pilgrimage, though by this time he had resigned himself to the fact that he was being stood up by the Rose of Tralee.

At last he turned mournfully backward where his own lonesome cubicle ought to be—and then suddenly found himself back in the club car!

No redheaded Rose. Even The Hat had departed, taking her copy of *Official Fact Detective Stories* with her. The car was deserted, except for a bridge game going on in one corner and a sailor—obviously half-seas over—who was drowning in a big chair with a newspaper over his face.

The pint was empty. Malone told the steward to have it buried with full military honors and to fetch him a cheese on rye.

"On second thought steward, skip the cheese and make it just straight rye, please."

The drink arrived and with it a whispered message. There was a lady waiting down the corridor.

Malone emptied his glass and followed the steward, trying to slip him five dollars.

It slipped right back.

"Thanks, Mister Malone, but I can't take money from an old classmate. Remember, we went through the last two years of Kent College of Law together?"

Malone gasped. "Class of '25. And you're Homer—no, *Horace* Lee Randolph. But—"

"What am I doing here? The old story. Didn't know my place and got into Chicago southside politics. Bumped up against the machine and got disbarred on a phony charge of subornation of perjury. It could have been squared by handing a grand to a certain sharper at City Hall, but I didn't have the money." Horace shrugged. "This pays better than the law, anyway. For instance, that lady handed me five dollars just to unlock the private lounge and tell you she's waiting to see you there."

The little lawyer winced. "She—was she a queer old maid in a hat that looked like she'd made it herself?"

"Oh, no. No hat."

Malone breathed easier. "Was she young and lovely?"

"My weakness is the numbers game, but I should say the description is accurate."

Humming *But 'twas not her beauty alone that won me, oh, no, 'twas the truth*, Malone straightened his tie and opened the door.

Lolly Larsen exploded in his face with all the power of a firecracker under a tin can. She grabbed his lapels and yelled, "Well where is the dirty bastard?"

"Be more specific. Which dirty bastard?" Malone said, pulling himself loose.

"Steve, of course!"

"I don't know, but I still hope he's somewhere on this train. You joining me in the search? Nice to have your pretty face among us."

Lolly had the face of a homesick angel. Her hair was exactly the color of a twist of lemon peel in a glass of champagne brut, her mouth was an overripe strawberry, and her figure might have inspired the French bathing-suit, but her eyes were cold and strange as a mermaid's.

"Are you in this with Steve?" she demanded.

Malone said, "In simple, one-syllable words that even you can understand—no!"

Lolly suddenly relaxed, swaying against him so that he got a good whiff of brandy, nail polish, and Chanel Number 5. "I'm sorry. I guess I'm just upset. I feel so terribly helpless—"

For Malone's money she was as helpless as an eight-button rattlesnake.

"You see," Lolly murmured, "I'm partly to blame for Steve's running away. I should have stood by him at the trial, but I hadn't the courage. Even afterward—I didn't actually promise to come back to him. I just said I'd come to his party. I meant to tell him—in the Pump Room. So, please, please, help me find him—so I can make him see how much we really need each other."

Malone said, "Try it again, and flick

the eyelashes a little bit more when you come to 'need each other.'"

Lolly jerked away and called him a number of things, of which "dirty little hysther" was the nicest.

"All right," she finally said in a matter-of-fact tone. "Steve's carrying a hundred grand, and you can guess how he got it. I happen to know—Glick isn't the only one who's been spying on him since he got out of jail yesterday. I don't want Steve back, but I do want a fat slice for keeping my mouth shut. One word from me to the D.A. or the papers, and not even you can get him off."

"Go on," Malone said wearily. "But you interest me in less ways than one."

"Find Steve!" she told him. "Make a deal, and I'll give you ten per cent of the take. But work fast, because we're not the only ones looking for him. Steve doublecrossed everybody who was at that party this afternoon. He's somewhere on this train, but he's probably shaved off his mustache, or put on a fright-wig or—"

Malone yawned and said, "Where can I get in touch with you?"

"I couldn't get a reservation of any kind." Her strange eyes warmed hopefully. "But I hear you have a drawing room."

"Don't look at me in that tone of voice," Malone said hastily. "Besides, I snore. Maybe there'll be something available for you at the next stop."

He was out of there and back in the club car before Lolly could turn on any more of the charm. He decided to have one for the road—the New York Central Road, and one for the Pennsy, too. The sensible thing was to find Steve Larsen, collect his own hard-earned fee, and let Lolly alone. Her offer of ten per cent of the blackmail take touched on a sore spot.

Chapter III

MALONE began to work his way through the train again, this time desperately questioning porters. The worst of it was that there was nothing remarkable about Larsen's appearance, except curly hair, which he'd probably

had straightened and dyed, a mustache that could have been shaved off, and a briefcase full of money, which he'd probably hidden. In fact, the man was undoubtedly laughing at everybody behind a set of false whiskers.

Such were Malone's thoughts when he suddenly came face to face again with the Greek Orthodox priest, who stared past him through thick, tinted spectacles. The little lawyer hesitated and was lost. Throwing caution to the winds, he yanked vigorously at the beard. But it was an orthodox beard, attached in the orthodox manner. Its owner let loose a blast which just possibly might have been an orthodox Greek blessing. Malone didn't wait to find out.

His ears were still burning when he stepped into a vestibule and ran head on into Miss Hildegard Withers. He nodded coldly and started past her.

"Ah, go soak your fat head!"

Malone gasped.

"It's the parrot," Miss Withers explained, holding up the caged monstrosity. "It's been making such a racket that I'm taking it to the baggage car for the night."

"Where—where did you get that—bird?" Malone asked weakly.

"Why, Sinbad is a legacy from the aunt whose funeral I just went back to attend. I'm taking him back to New York with me."

"New York!" Malone moaned. "We'll be there before I find that—"

"You mean that Mr. Larsen?" As he stood speechless, she went briskly on: "You see, I happened to be at a family farewell party at the table next to yours in the Pump Room, and my hearing is very acute. So, for that matter, is my eyesight. Has it occurred to you that Larsen may be wearing a disguise of some sort?"

"That it has," admitted Malone sadly; thinking of the Greek priest.

The schoolteacher lowered her voice. "You remember that when we had our little chat in the club car some time ago, there was an obviously inebriated sailor dozing behind a newspaper?"

"There's one on every train," Malone said. "One or more."

"Exactly. Like Chesterton's post-

man, you never notice them. But somehow that particular sailor managed to stay intoxicated without ordering a single drink or nipping at a private bottle. More than that, when you suddenly left, he poked his head out from behind the paper and stared after you with a very odd expression, rather as if he suspected you had leprosy. I couldn't help noticing—"

"Madame, I love you," the lawyer said fervently. "I love you because you remind me of Miss Hackett back in Dorchester High and because of your hat and because you are sharper than a tack."

Miss Withers sniffed, but it was a mollified sniff. "Sorry to interrupt, but that same sailor entered our car just as I left it with the parrot. I just happened to look back and I rather think he was trying the door of your drawing room."

Malone clasped her hand fondly. Unfortunately it was the hand that held the cage, and the parrot took advantage of the long-awaited opportunity to nip viciously at his thumb.

"Thank you so very much—some day I'll wring your silly neck," was Malone's sincere but somewhat garbled exit-line.

"Go boil your head in lard!" the bird screamed after him.

The maiden schoolteacher sighed. "Come on, Sinbad, you're going into durance vile. And I'm going to retire to my lonely couch, drat it all." She looked wistfully over her shoulder. "Some people have all the fun."

BUT twelve cars, ten minutes, and four drinks later, Malone was lost again. A worried porter was saying, "If you could only remember your car number, sah." A much-harassed Pullman conductor added, "If you'd just show us your ticket stub, we'd locate you."

"You don't need to locate me," Malone insisted. "I'm right here."

"Maybe you haven't got a stub."

"I have so a stub. It's in my hatband." Crafty as an Indian guide, Malone backtracked them unerringly to his drawing room. "Here's the stub—now where am I?"

The porter looked out the window and said, "Just coming into Altoona, sah."

"They lay in the wreck when they found them, they had died when the engine had fell . . ." sang Malone happily. But the conductor winced and said they'd be going.

"You might as well," Malone told him. "If neither of you can sing baritone."

The door closed behind them, and a moment later a soft voice called, "Mr. Malone?"

He stared at the connecting door. The Rose of Tralee, Malone told himself happily. He adjusted his tie and tried the door. Miraculously, it opened. Then he saw that it was Miss Hildegarde

rassing because he's not only dead, he's undressed!"

"Holy St. Vitus!" gulped Malone. "Quiet! Keep calm! Lock your door and don't talk!"

"My door is locked, and who's talking?" The schoolteacher stepped aside, and Malone peered gingerly past her. The speed with which he was sobering up would probably establish a new record. It was Larsen, all right. He was face down on the floor, dressed only in black shoes, blue socks, and a suit of long underwear. There was also a moderate amount of blood.

FAST WORK

By

JACK BENTON



Withers, looking very worried, who stared back at him.

Malone said, "What have you done with my redhead?"

"If you refer to my niece Joannie," the schoolteacher said sharply, "she only helped me get my stuff aboard and rode as far as Englewood. But never mind that now. I'm in trouble."

"I knew there couldn't be two parrots like that on one train," Malone groaned. "Or even in one world."

"There's worse than parrots on this train," snapped Miss Withers. "This man Larsen you were looking for—"

The little lawyer's eyes narrowed. "Just what is your interest in Larsen?"

"None whatever, except that he's here in my compartment. It's very embar-

SGT. BERT POND, answering the phone at St. Paul's police headquarters, heard a voice say: "I'm going to kill myself." The quick-thinking sergeant answered: "We don't talk to anonymous callers. What's your name and address? Of course, I realize you're only kidding. . . ."

"I'm not anonymous and I'm not kidding," retorted the man on the other end of the line, giving the officer a name and address out in the country. "All right, all right," said Pond, very businesslike, "but I got to ask you some questions. You know how those things see. . . ."

The desk sergeant asked a lot of questions. Enough so that when two deputy sheriffs burst into the gas-filled home the man was still answering. He was almost unconscious but the hospital soon had him in good shape.

At last Malone said hoarsely, "I suspect foul play!"

"Knife job," said Miss Withers through the professional coolness. "From the back, through the *latissimus dorsi*. Within the last twenty minutes, I'd say. If I hadn't had some difficulty in convincing the baggage men that Sinbad should be theirs for the night, I might have walked in on the murderer at work." She gave Malone a searching glance. "It wasn't you, by any chance?"

"Do you think I'd murder a man who owed me \$3000?" Malone demanded indignantly. He scowled. "But a lot of people are going to think that. Nice of you not to raise an alarm."

She sniffed. "You didn't think I'd care to have a man—even a dead man—

found in my room in this state of undress? Obviously, he hasn't your money on his person. So—what is to be done about it?"

"I'll defend you for nothing," John J. Malone promised. "Justifiable homicide. Besides, you were framed. He burst in upon you, and you stabbed him in defense of your honor—"

"Just a minute! The corpse was *your* client. You've been publicly asking for him all through the train. I'm only an innocent bystander." She paused. "In my opinion, Larsen was lured to your room purposely by someone who had penetrated his disguise. He was stabbed and dumped here. Very clever, because if the body had been left in your room, you could have got rid of it or claimed that you were framed. But this way, to the police mind, at least, it would be obvious that you did the job and then tried to palm it off on the nearest neighbor."

Malone sagged weakly against the berth. His hand brushed against the leather case, and something slashed viciously at his fingers.

"I thought you got rid of that parrot!" he cried.

I DID," Miss Withers assured him. "That's Precious in his case. A twenty-pound Siamese, also part of my recent legacy. Don't get too close. The creature dislikes train travel and is in a foul temper."

Malone stared through the wire window and said, "Its father must have been either a bobcat or a buzz saw."

"My aunt left me her mink coat, on condition that I take both her pets," Miss Withers explained wearily. "But I'm beginning to think it would be better to shiver through these cold winters. And speaking of cold—I'm a patient woman, but not very. You have one minute, Mr. Malone, to get your dead friend out of here!"

"He's no friend of mine, dead or alive," Malone began. "And I suggest—"

There was a heavy knocking on the corridor door. "Open up in there!"

"Say something!" whispered Malone. "Say you're undressed!"

"You're undressed—I mean, I'm un-

dressed," she cried obediently.

"Sorry, ma'am," a masculine voice said on the other side of the door, "but we're searching the train for a fugitive from justice. Hurry, please."

"Just a minute," sang out the schoolteacher, making frantic gestures at Malone.

The little lawyer shuddered, then grabbed the late Steve Larsen and tugged him through the connecting door into his drawing room. Meanwhile, Miss Withers cast aside maidenly modesty and tore pins from her hair, the dress from her shoulders. Clutching a robe around her, she opened the door a crack and announced, "This is an outrage!"

The train conductor, a Pullman conductor, and two Altoona police detectives crowded in, ignoring her protest. They pawed through the wardrobe, peered into every nook and cranny

Miss Withers stood rooted to the spot—in more ways than one. There was a damp brownish-red spot on the carpet, and she had one foot firmly holding it down. At last the delegation backed out, with apologies. Then she heard a feeble, imploring tapping on the connecting door, and John J. Malone's voice, whispering, "Help!"

The maiden schoolteacher stuck her head out into the corridor again, where the search party was already waiting for Malone to open up.

"Oh, officer," she cried tremulously, "is there any danger?"

"No, ma'am."

"Was the man you're looking for a burly, dark-complexioned cutthroat with dark glasses and a pronounced limp in the left leg?"

"No, lady. Get lost, please, lady."

"Because on my way back from the diner I saw a man like that. He leered and then followed me through three cars."

"The man we're looking for is an embezzler, not a mental case." They hammered on Malone's door again. "Open up in there!"

Chapter IV

OVER her shoulder, Miss Withers could see the pale, perspiring face of John J. Malone as he dragged Steve

Larsen back into her apartment.

"But, officer," she improvised desperately, "I'm sure that the awful dark man who followed me was a distinct criminal type—" There was a reassuring whisper of "Okay" behind her and the sound of a softly closing door.

Miss Withers backed into her compartment, closed and locked the connecting door, and then sank down on the edge of her berth, trying to avoid the blankly staring eyes of the dead man.

Next door there was a rumble of voices, and then suddenly Malone's high tenor doing rough justice to *Did Your Mother Come From Ireland?* The schoolteacher heard no more than the first line of the chorus before the jello in her knees melted completely. When she opened her eyes again, she saw Malone holding a dagger before her, and she very nearly fainted again.

"You were so right," the little lawyer told her admiringly. "It was a frame-up, all right—but meant for me. This was tacked into the upholstery of my room. I sat on it while they were searching and had to burst into song to cover my howl of anguish."

"Oh, dear!" said Miss Withers.

He sat down beside her, patted her comfortingly on the shoulder, and said, "Maybe I can shove the body out the window!"

"We're still in the station," she reminded him crisply. "And from what experience I've had with train windows, it would be easier to solve the murder than open one. Why don't we start searching for clues?"

Malone stood up so quickly that he rapped his head on the bottom of the upper berth. "Never mind clues. Let's just find the murderer!"

"Just as easy as that?"

"Look," he said, "this train was searched at the request of the Chicago police because somebody—probably Bert Glick—tipped them off that Larsen and a lot of stolen money are on board. The word has got around. Obviously somebody else knew—somebody who caught the train and did the dirty work. It's reasonable to assume that whoever has the money is the killer."

There was a new glint in Miss Withers' blue-gray eyes. "Go on."

"Also, Larsen's ex-wife—or do I say ex-widow?—is aboard. I saw her. She is a lovely girl whose many friends agree that she would eat her young or sell her old mother down the river into slavery for a fast buck." He took out a cigar. "I'll go next door and have a smoke while you change, and then we'll go look for Lolly Larsen."

"I'm practically ready now," the schoolteacher agreed. "But take *that* with you!"

Malone hesitated, and then with a deep sigh, reached down and took a firm grip of all that was mortal of his late client. "Here we go again."

A few minutes later, Miss Hildegarde Withers was following Malone through the now-darkened train. The fact that this was somebody else's problem never occurred to her. Murder, according to her tenets, was everybody's business.

Malone touched her arm as they came at last to the door of the club car. "Here is where I saw Lolly last," he whispered. "She only got aboard at the last minute and didn't have a reservation." He pointed down the corridor. "See that door, just this side of the pantry? It's a private lounge, used only for railroad officials or big shots like governors or senators. Lolly bribed the steward to let her use it when she wanted to have a private talk with me. It just occurred to me that she might have talked him into letting her use it for the rest of the night. If she's still there—"

"Say no more," Miss Withers cut in. "I am a fellow-passenger, also without a berth, seeking only a place to rest my weary head. After all, I have as much right in there as she has. But you will be within call, won't you?"

"If you need help, just holler," he promised.

Malone watched as the schoolteacher marched down the corridor, tried the lounge door gently, and then knocked. The door opened, and she vanished inside.

THE little lawyer had an argument with his conscience. It wasn't just that she reminded him of Miss Hackett; it was that she had become a sort of partner. Besides, he was getting almost fond of that equine face.

Oh, well, he'd be within earshot. And if there was anything in the inspiration which had just come to him, she wasn't in any real danger anyway. He went on into the bar. It was half dark and empty now, except for a little group of men in Navy uniforms at the far end, who were sleeping, sprawled and entangled like a litter of puppies.

"Sorry, Mister Malone, but the bar is closed," a voice spoke up behind him. It was Horace Lee Randolph, looking drawn and exhausted. He caught Malone's glance toward the sleeping sailors and added, "Against the rules, but the conductor said don't bother 'em."

Malone nodded, and then said, "Horace, we're old friends and classmates. You know me of old, and you know you can trust me. *Where did you hide it?*"

"Where did I hide what?"

"You know what!" Malone fixed the man with the cold and baleful eye he used on prosecution witnesses. "Let me have it before it's too late, and I'll do my best for you."

The eyes rolled. "Oh, Lawdy! I knew I shouldn't a done it, Mista Malone! I'll show you!"

Horace hurried on down through the car and unlocked a small closet filled with mops and brooms. From a box labeled *Soap Flakes* he came up with a paper sack. It was a very small sack to hold a hundred thousand dollars, Malone thought, even if the money were in big bills. Horace fumbled inside the sack.

"What's that?" Malone demanded.

"What would it be but the bottle of gin I sneaked from the bar? Join me?"

The breath went out of John J. Malone like air out of a busted balloon. He caught the doorknob for support, swaying like an aspen in the wind. It was just at that moment that they both heard the screams.

The rush of self-confidence with which Miss Hildegarde Withers had pushed her way into the lounge ebbed somewhat as she came face to face with Lolly Larsen. Appeals to sympathy, as from one supposedly-stranded fellow passenger to another, failed utterly. It was not until the schoolteacher played her last card, reminding Lolly sharply that if there was any commotion, the

Pullman conductor would undoubtedly have them both evicted, that she succeeded in getting a toehold.

"Oh, all right!" snarled Lolly ungraciously. "Only shut up and go to sleep."

During the few minutes before the room went dark again, Miss Withers made a mental snapshot of everything in it. No toilet, no wardrobe, no closet. A small suitcase, a coat, and a handbag were on the only chair. The money must be somewhere in this room, the schoolteacher thought. There was a way to find out.

As the train flashed through the moonlit night, Miss Withers busily wriggled out of her petticoat and ripped it to shreds. Using a bit of paper from her handbag for tinder—and inwardly praying it wasn't a ten-dollar bill—she did what had to be done. A few minutes later she burst out into the corridor, holding her handkerchief to her mouth.

She almost bumped into one of the sailors who came lurching toward her along the narrow passage, and gasped, "What do you want?"

He stared at her with heavy eyes. "If it's any of your business, I'm looking for the latrine," he said dryly.

WHEN he was out of sight, Miss Withers turned and peeked back into the lounge. A burst of acrid smoke struck her in the face. Now was the time.

"*Fire!*" she shrieked.

Thick billows of greasy smoke flooded out through the half-open door. Inside little tongues of red flame ran greedily along the edge of the seat where Miss Withers had tucked the burning rags and paper.

Down the corridor came Malone and Horace Lee Randolph, and a couple of startled bluejackets appeared from other directions. Somebody tore an extinguisher from the wall.

Miss Withers grabbed Malone's arm. "Watch her! She'll go for the money—"

The fire extinguisher sent a stream of foaming chemicals into the doorway just as Lolly Larsen burst out. Her mascara streaked down her face, already blackened by smoke, and her yel-

low hair was plastered unflatteringly to her skull. But she clutched a small leather case.

Somehow she tripped over Miss Withers' outstretched foot. The leather case flew across the corridor to smash against the wall, where it flew open, disclosing a multitude of creams, oils, and tiny bottles—a portable beauty parlor.

"She must have gone to sleep smoking a cigarette!" put in Miss Withers in loud, clear tones. "A lucky thing I was there to smell the smoke and give the alarm—"

But John J. Malone seized her firmly by the arm and propelled her back through the train.

"It was a good try, but you can stop acting now. She doesn't have the money." Back in her own compartment, he confessed about Horace. "I had a wonderful idea, but it didn't pay off. The poor guy's career as a lawyer was busted by a City Hall chiseler. If Larsen was the one, Horace might have spotted him on the train and decided to get even."

"You were holding out on me," said Miss Withers, slightly miffed.

Malone unwrapped a cigar and said, "If anybody finds that money, I want it to be me. Because I've got to get my fee out of it or I can't even get back to Chicago."

"Perhaps you'll learn to like Manhattan," she told him brightly.

Malone said grimly, "If something isn't done soon, I'm going to see Manhattan through cold iron bars."

"We're in the same spot. Except," she added honestly, "that I don't think the inspector would go so far as to lock me up. But he does take a dim view of anybody who finds a body and doesn't report it." She sighed. "Do you think we could get a window open?"

Malone smothered a yawn and said, "Not in my present condition of exhaustion."

"Let's begin at the beginning," the schoolteacher said. "Larsen invited a number of people to a party he didn't plan to attend. He sneaked on this train, presumably disguised in a Navy enlisted man's uniform. How he got hold of it—"

"He was in the service for a while," said the little lawyer.

"The murderer made a date to meet his victim in your drawing room, hoping to set you up as the goat. He stuck a knife in him and then stripped him, looking for a money belt or something."

"You don't have to undress a man to find a money belt," Malone murmured.

"Really? I wouldn't know." Miss Withers sniffed. "The knife was then hidden in your room, but the body was moved in here. The money—" she paused and studied him searchingly. "Mr. Malone, are you sure you didn't—"

"We plead not guilty and not guilty by reason of insanity," Malone muttered. He closed his eyes for just five seconds' much-needed rest, and when he opened them, a dirty-looking dawn was glaring in at him through the window.

Chapter V

GOOD morning," Miss Withers greeted him, entirely too cheerfully. "Did you get any ideas while you were in dreamland?" She put away her toothbrush and added, "You know, I've found sometimes that if a problem seems insoluble, you can sleep on it, and sometimes your subconscious comes up with the answer. Sometimes it's even happened to me in a dream."

"It does? It has?" Malone sat up suddenly. "Okay. Burglars can't be choosers. Sleep and the world sleeps—I mean, I'll just stand watch for a while, and you try taking a nap. Maybe you can dream up an answer out of your subconscious. But dream fast, lady, because we get in about two hours from now."

But when Miss Withers had finally been comfortably settled against the pillows, she found that her eyelids stubbornly refused to stay shut.

"Try once more," John J. Malone said soothingly.

She closed her eyes obediently, and his high, whispering tenor filled the little compartment, singing a fine old song. It was probably the first time in history, Miss Withers thought, that anyone had tried to use *Throw Him Down, McCluskey* as a lullaby, but she found

herself drifting off.

Malone passed the time by trying to imagine what he would do with a hundred grand if he were the murderer. The money would have to be put somewhere handy—some obvious place where nobody would ever think of looking, and where it could be quickly and easily retrieved when all was clear.

"There was an angry growl from Precious in his cage. "If you could only say something besides 'Meeerow' and 'Fssst!' Malone murmured wistfully. "Because you're the only witness. Now if it had been the parrot—"

At last he touched Miss Withers apologetically on the shoulder. "Wake up, ma'am. We're coming into New York. Quick, what did you dream?"

She blinked, sniffed, and came wide-awake. "My dream? Why—I was buying a hat, a darling little sailor hat, only it had to be exchanged because the ribbon was yellow. But first I wore it out to dinner with Inspector Piper who took me to a Greek restaurant, and the proprietor was so glad to see us that he said dinner was on the house. But naturally we didn't eat anything because you have to beware of the Greeks when they come bearing gifts. His name was Mr. Roberts. That's all I remember."

"Oh, brother!" said John J. Malone. "And there wasn't anyone named Roberts mixed up in this case or anyone of Greek extraction, was there?"

The train was crawling laboriously up an elevated platform. "A drowning man will grasp at a strawberry," Malone said suddenly. "I've got a sort of an idea. Greeks bearing gifts—that means look out for somebody who wants to give you something for nothing. And that something could include gratuitous information."

She nodded. "Perhaps someone planned to murder Larsen aboard this train and wanted you aboard to be an obvious suspect."

The train shuddered to a stop. Malone leaped up, startled, but the school-teacher told him it was only 125th Street.

"Perhaps we should check and see who gets off." She glanced out the window and said, "On second thought, let's

not. The platform is swarming with police."

They were interrupted by the porter, who brushed off Miss Withers, accepted a dollar from the gallant Malone, and then lugged her suitcases and the pet container down to the vestibule.

"He'll be in your room next," she whispered. "What do we do now?"

"We think fast," Malone said. "The rest of your dream!"

THE door burst open and suddenly they were surrounded by detectives, led by a grizzled sergeant in plain-clothes. Lolly Larsen was with them, breathlessly accusing Miss Withers of assaulting her and trying to burn her alive, and Malone of engineering Steve Larsen's successful disappearance.

"So," said Malone, "you wired ahead from Albany, crying copper?"

"Maybe she did," said the sergeant, "but we'd already been contacted by the Chicago police. Somebody out there swore out a warrant for Steve Larsen's arrest—"

"Glick, maybe?"

"A Mr. Allen Roth, according to the teletype. Now folks—"

But Malone was trying to pretend that Lolly, the sergeant, and the whole police department didn't exist.

He faced Miss Withers and said, "About that dream! It must mean a sailor under false colors. We already know Larsen was in Navy uniform—"

"Shaddap!" said the sergeant. "Maybe you don't know, mister, that helping an embezzler to escape makes you an assessor after the fact."

"Accessory," corrected Miss Withers. "If you want Larsen," Malone said easily, "he's next door in my drawing room, wrapped up in the blankets."

"Sure, sure," said the sergeant, mopping his face. "Wise guy, eh?"

"Somebody helped Larsen escape—escape out of this world with a shiv through the—through the—?" Malone looked hopefully at Miss Withers.

"The *latissimus dorsi*," she prompted.

The sergeant barked, "Never mind the double-talk. Where is this Larsen?"

Then Lolly, who had pushed open the connecting door, let out a thin scream like tearing silk. "It is Steve!" she

cried. "It's Steve, and he's dead!"

Momentarily the attention of the Law was drawn elsewhere.

"Now or never," said Miss Withers coolly. "About the Mr. Roberts thing—I just remembered that there was a play by that name a while back. I ran into a sailor just after I started that fire, and he said he was looking for the *latrine*. Sailors don't use Army talk—in Mr. Roberts, they called it *the head*!"

Suddenly the Law was back, very direct and grim about everything. Miss Withers gasped with indignation as she found herself suddenly handcuffed to John J. Malone. But stone walls do not a prison make, as she pointed out to her companion-in-crime. "And don't you see? It means—"

"Madam, I am ahead of you. There was a *wrong* sailor aboard this train, even after Larsen got his. The murderer must have taken a plane from Chicago and caught this train at Toledo. I was watching to see who got off, not who got on. The man penetrated Larsen's disguise—"

"In more ways than one," the school-teacher put in grimly.

"And then, after he'd murdered his victim, he took Larsen's sailor suit and got rid of his own clothes, realizing that nobody notices a sailor on a train!"

NOW the train was crawling into one of the tunnels beneath Grand Central Station, and the harried sergeant was beside himself.

"You listen to Mr. Malone," Miss Withers told their captor firmly, "or I'll hint to my old friend, Inspector Oscar Piper—"

"Oh, no!" the unhappy officer moaned. "Not that Miss Withers!"

"That Miss Withers," she snapped. "My good man, all we ask is that you find the real murderer, who must still be on this train. He's wearing a Navy uniform—"

"Lady," the sergeant said sincerely, "you ask the impossible. The train is full of sailors. Grand Central is full of sailors."

"But this particular sailor," Malone put in, "is wearing the uniform of the man he killed. There will be a slit in the back of the jumper—just under the

shoulder blade."

"Where the knife went in," Miss Withers added. "Hurry, man! The train is stopping."

The sergeant leaped out on the platform. He seized a railroad dick, who listened and then grabbed a telephone attached to a near-by pillar.

In less than two minutes the vast labyrinth of Grand Central was alerted, and men in Navy uniforms were suddenly intercepted by polite but firm railroad detectives who sprang up out of nowhere. Only one of the sailors, a somewhat older man who was lugging a pet container that wasn't his, had any real difficulty. He alone had a narrow slit in the back of his jumper.

Bert Glick flung the leather case down on the track and tried vainly to run, but there was no place to go. The container flew open, and Precious scooted. Only a dumb Siamese cat, as Malone commented later, would have abandoned a lair that had a hundred grand tucked under its carpet of old newspapers.

"And to think that I spent the night within reach of that dough and didn't grab my fee!" said Malone.

But it developed that there was a comfortable reward for the apprehension of Steve Larsen, alive or dead. Before John J. Malone took off for Chicago, he accepted an invitation for dinner at Miss Withers' modest little apartment on West 74th Street, arriving with four dozen roses.

It was a good dinner, and Malone cheerfully put up with the screamed insults of Sinbad and the well-meant attentions of Talley, the apricot poodle.

"Just as long as the cat stays lost," he said.

"Yes, isn't it odd that nobody has seen hide or hair of Precious? Would you care for another piece of pie, Mr. Malone?"

"All I really want," said the little lawyer, "is an introduction to your redheaded niece."

"Oh, yes, Joannie. Her husband played guard for Southern California and he even made all-American." Miss Withers explained tactfully.

"On second thought, I'll settle for coffee," said John J. Malone.

Miss Withers sniffed, not unsympathetically. ● ● ●

THE KILLER TAKES A BRIDE

A True Story

By HAROLD HELFER



YOU probably never heard of Reynolds Forsbrey, and it is true that he doesn't deserve to be mentioned in the same breath with such spectacular criminals as Jesse James, Gerald Chapman, and John Dillinger. Yet this drab, colorless, nondescript little guy carved out a niche all his own in the annals of crime.

Reynolds Forsbrey was one of New York City's teeming millions. But even in Paducah or Springfield it is doubtful that anyone ever would have given him a second look. He was just naturally a kind of faded-looking, unprepossessing guy.

Somehow or other he got off on the wrong foot. When he was still in his teens, he forged some checks. Later, he took to burglary and dope.

When he met Margaret Ryan he'd already served six years in prison. Margaret was a secretary and, like Reynolds Forsbrey, was a flat-looking, unmagnetic person. She was an orphan, neglected and unwanted, and the mediocre, narcotics-taking burglar showed her the first real attention she'd ever received. They fell in love.

He told her he was a plumber and she

believed him, and they both seemed very happy. One day—July 29, 1912—he said to her, "Get your bags packed, honey. We're getting married this afternoon. As soon as I go out and collect some money due me for a job. We'll do it up brown—go to Niagara."

Having had a shot of heroin that morning, Reynolds Forsbrey was feeling high and happy. He lost no time in entering the jewelry store of Morris Schwartzkopf—and pulling out a gun. The terrified jeweler screamed. The startled holdupman's pistol jerked. There was a belch of fire. Fatally wounded, the jeweler crumpled to the floor.

But Reynolds Forsbrey was still determined to get the money to marry his girl, and an hour later, while hundreds of New York policemen were scouring the vicinity for him, the drab little guy walked into the cigar store of Morris Katz.

When Katz saw the gun he started to run. Forsbrey shot him in both legs. Then, though still empty-handed, the hapless bandit turned and fled.

This time he didn't get away. Several policemen gave chase and cornered him.

So Margaret Ryan didn't go on a hon-

He Broke Prison Three Times — All for a Woman!

ymoon that day. Instead she learned that her sweetheart was a cheap, petty criminal. But she said, "Whatever he's done, he was good to me. I still love him."

As he was being led away, handcuffed, Reynolds Forsbrey said to her, "I'm coming back to you, Margaret."

Nobody paid any attention to that remark, though. There was nothing about such a colorless, docile prisoner to indicate there was any need for the Tombs prison officials to worry about him. Besides, he'd served six years in prison before without causing any trouble whatever.

One day, however, they discovered that he'd somehow managed to get smuggled into him some hydrochloric acid and steel saws, and that was a different story. They put him in a special solitary confinement cell.

The cell was considered escape proof, but the prison officials reckoned without Forsbrey's determination to see his Margaret again. Centered in the ceiling of the cell there was a grilled ventilator. By standing on his cot, the inmate could reach it. Using the buckle of his belt as a screwdriver, he managed to undo the grill fastening. Soon he was working his body through the opening. Then he found himself plunging down a chute. He wound up, after a two-story fall, in the darkened carpentry shop. He picked himself up and a few minutes later was scaling a wall.

Prison officials spent minutes taking turns in gawking at the empty cell. They hadn't thought it was possible.

Finding a nondescript individual like Forsbrey among New York's bulging humanity was a well-nigh hopeless task. Officers, remembering the case, didn't even try. Instead, they sought out Margaret Ryan, the quiet, plain secretary. Sure enough, in her genteel, shabby little flat, there he was.

Shortly after his recapture, Forsbrey pleaded guilty to second degree murder in connection with the jeweler's death, was given a twenty-year sentence, and was taken to Dannemora Prison.

Naturally, because of his sensational escape from the Tombs, he was guarded closely. Nevertheless, while working in the machine shop, he managed secretly

to construct a small iron box. Every day, he was able to put a few drops of gasoline and oil in it. His plan was to set off a big explosion and escape in the confusion. Guards discovered his "infernal contraption" just in the nick of time.

They transferred him to the Auburn Penitentiary, and an even closer watch was kept on him. But the determination to return to his Margaret never faded, and in some never determined manner, he managed to smuggle a hammer out of one of the workshops.

Auburn has not one but several fences to enclose the inmates. One evening, Forsbrey approached an inner gate with a bundle, supposedly laundry. He made as if to give the guard the bundle but clumsily dropped it. The guard stooped to pick it up, and Forsbrey brought the hammer down on his head. In a split second, he had the guard's keys and in rapid-fire order was opening the remaining gates that stood between him and freedom.

It was another "incredible" escape, but this time he didn't make it to New York City. Bloodhounds sniffed him out where he was cowering under some hay in a barn two miles from the prison.

Now, because of his escapes, he had a life sentence against him, and it seemed hopeless indeed that Reynolds Forsbrey would ever be with his Margaret again because, to make sure that he did spend his remaining existence behind bars, he was placed in a cell usually reserved only for men awaiting execution. His "yard," a six-by-nine-foot extension of space beyond his cell, was really a cage. The daylight that came in down its wall had to filter through an iron grilled covering.

Moreover, a guard patrolled the adjoining corridor constantly, night and day. Also, just so none of the prisoners got too familiar with any one cell along this "bad man's corridor," the inmates were changed about in the cells once a week.

Escape seemed entirely out of the question. Nevertheless, Reynolds Forsbrey, with characteristic persistency, managed to get hold of the blade of a small steel saw. At once he began filing away at the bars of cell No. 5. Consider the enormity of the task. He could work

for only seconds at a time—when the guard was at the far end of the corridor, and after spending a week there, he'd have to wait two full months before he'd be back there again to resume operations. But, resolutely, he'd take out the blade he kept under the sash of the window of cell No. 5 and resume where he'd left off, filling up the sawed-away places on the bars with dust and dirt before he left for his next two-month sojourn so they would remain undetected until he came back.

A good many months went by before he finally felt that he'd weakened the bars sufficiently. Even so his job had just begun. Now he had to extend his hand out through the bars and, holding an excruciating position, work during the brief seconds allotted him during guard movements, and file quietly away at the iron grill canopy that hung over his "yard."

At long last—on a March day in 1918—he felt the time had come. He removed two bars from his cell. Then he stepped

out and removed two more bars that were over his head. He scrambled through the opening, scampered down into the yard, and was soon over a wall.

This escape of Reynolds Forsbrey from "bad man's corridor" is still regarded as one of the most remarkable prison breaks of all time. But all his tedious Herculean work and his monumental patience was to no avail. He was picked up in a near-by railroad yard only forty-eight hours later, shivering and half-starved.

That's about the end of the story of Reynolds Forsbrey, the drab, colorless, mediocre little guy whose love for "his Margaret" inspired him to turn into one of the most fabulous prison escape artists in the annals of crime.

After his last recapture, his Margaret took poison and turned on the gas, leaving behind a note that simply said: "I am Margaret Ryan, the sweetheart of Reynolds Forsbrey."

Reynolds Forsbrey didn't seem to care about getting out after that.



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MODEL FOR MURDER

A Marshal Pedley Novel of Murder and Arson

By STEWART STERLING

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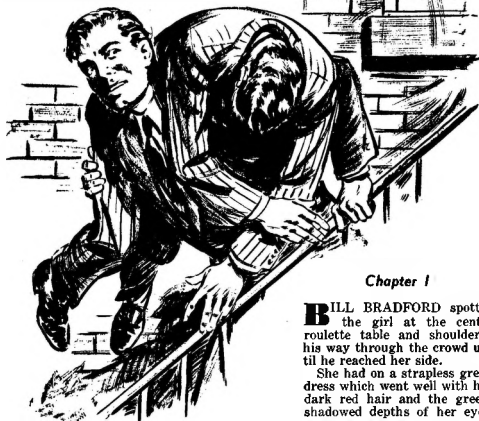
4

OTHER NOVELS OF CRIME AND MYSTERY!

Murder in the mirror

A Novel by W. T. BALLARD

*There was a corpse on his back
—and a redhead on his mind*



Chapter I

BILL BRADFORD spotted the girl at the center roulette table and shouldered his way through the crowd until he reached her side.

She had on a strapless green dress which went well with her dark red hair and the green-shadowed depths of her eyes.

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The Girl Had a Body Hanging in Her Closet, and

He watched the wheel turn a couple of times.

"Lucky tonight?" he murmured under his breath.

She looked around, her eyes taking in his sun-tanned face, his angular jaw, and level eyes. Then she turned back to the wheel and placed five chips carefully on 36.

The dealer spun the white ball. There were half a dozen players at the layout. The green cloth was well covered with chips.

The little ball spiraled inward, struck one of the metal tabs, landed in one number, went out, landed in another, bounced again, and came to rest in 36.

"That is that." Bradford whistled softly.

He turned away from the table and headed for the long bar on the far side of the gambling room. He'd covered half the distance when the girl in green touched his arm.

He turned his head to look at her inquiringly. Under the glare of the overhead lights her red hair seemed to shimmer, climaxing the clean sweep of her white shoulders and graceful neck.

"I want to talk to you," she said.

Bradford smiled faintly, but there was no mirth behind the twist of his lips. "You're Slater's girl, and this is his place. Will he like it?"

She moved her shoulders. "He's in his office. Come over here." She led Bradford toward a vacant table near the far end of the bar.

He held a chair for her, then took one himself and looked around.

"The new club seems to be doing well," he said. He raised his hand to a waiter, when the girl did not answer, and ordered. They didn't speak again until the drinks had come and Bradford had tasted his.

"What's on your mind, beautiful?" he asked.

She leaned forward. "You got my vote?"

"I'm here." He could be as brief as she.

Her eyes weren't meeting his now.

They were on the frosted glass in her slim fingers.

"Slater's in trouble."

"Trouble?" Bradford was leaning forward. "Cops?"

"Not cops, but trouble, plenty of it. I tried to get him to send for you this morning, but he wouldn't. So I took matters into my own hands and wrote you that note."

Bradford was still watching her. "Why pick on me?"

"Because you're the only person in the world that Rod Slater trusts," she said irritably. "I've never met you, but Rod talks of no one else. You two have been friends for a long time."

Bradford nodded at that. He and Rod Slater had been raised together. The first fight he'd ever had had been with Slater. They'd belonged to the same gang, gone with the same girls, worn each other's clothes.

HE LOOKED again at the girl. She was new to the town. She'd been a dancer in the East. Slater had brought her out here as an entertainer for his new club, and it was pretty well understood around town that she was Slater's girl, that the gambler intended to marry her.

Slater hadn't told Bradford personally. They weren't as close as they had been. They'd talked over the phone once since Slater's return from the East. That had been two months before.

"All right," Bradford said. "What kind of trouble is Rod in?"

She hesitated as if trying to decide how much to tell him.

"If you want to help, go to my apartment. Here's the key." She drew it from a little chain around her neck. "You'll find a man's body hanging in the closet. Take the body out into the hills some place and leave it where it will be found."

Bradford almost snapped the stem of his cocktail glass as his blunt fingers tightened with surprise.

"What the hell?" he choked out.

Her lips twisted tightly.

"I don't blame you for being surprised. Listen, this man was found dead in Rod's

Bill Bradford Agreed to Help Her Get Rid of It!

office last night. Rod didn't kill him. Neither did I. We took him out ourselves, since Rod doesn't trust his guards. We had to get him out. Rod couldn't have the cops around now. He's got two hundred and fifty thousand tied up in this spot and he can't afford to have it closed."

Bradford understood that.

"But why in hell did you take the body to your apartment?" he asked.

"We meant to take it out into the hills ourselves, but a cop car trailed us away from the club. Rod stepped on it, and we lost them, but we were afraid to go traveling around town with the body in the car, and my apartment was the nearest place we could think of. I suggested it. Rod didn't want to, but what the hell.



The cops don't know me, don't know my address. If they had had a tip, as we feared, and were laying for Rod, the last place they would think he'd hide a body was my place."

There was something in what she said, but Bradford stirred restlessly. It was a damn fool thing to have done, but in a lot of ways Rod Slater had always been a damned fool.

"Why didn't Rod send for me himself?"

"Because he said that you were doing okay with your detective agency and that he wasn't going to drag you into a mess like this. You will help, won't you? Rod didn't kill the guy, so why should he take the rap and have his business ruined and everything? It won't mean anything to the murdered man whether his body is found at my place or in the hills. You'll do it, won't you?"

Bradford nodded. He hadn't meant to, but there was something about this girl.

She stirred him, and it made him angry. After all, she was Slater's girl. He was going to have to remember that, and it wasn't going to be easy. It made him sore that Rod would do a thing like this to a girl, not to any girl, but to this one.

She rose. "Then you will? I've got to go now. I'm part of the show. Bring the key back when you've finished so that I'll know everything is okay."

She was gone, leaving Bradford staring after her.

He watched her walk across the dance floor and disappear through the door which led back to the dressing rooms, then he turned at the sound of a rasping voice behind him.

"Have a nice talk?"

He twisted, looked up into the black, beady eyes of a short, stocky man with the battered face of a prize fighter. The man's eyes were set deep under a bulging brow. His lips were thick, pressed together in a half sneer.

Bradford looked at him carefully as he sat down. His voice was cold, without emotion.

"What's it to you?" he asked coldly.

"That was Little Alice you were talking to," the man said. "She's Slater's girl, and I'd advise you to keep away from her. Why don't you go and take a nice long walk in the night air? It will do you a lot of good."

THERE was no change on Bradford's face, only his eyes narrowed a little, and his jaw seemed to square as he tensed, but he did not speak.

The short man was still staring at him.

"I'm just giving you a bit of good advice. Keep away from Little Alice. The dame is dynamite. You'll live longer if you keep away from her."

His hand slid into the front of his coat. Bradford did not move. Both his hands stayed in sight as he got up slowly, turned, and walked away from the table.

The short man rose also and after hesitating for an instant, disappeared into the crowd.

Bradford turned his attention to the dance floor. Beyond it the band, a five-

piece affair, huddled in a shell at the back of the room extension.

The leader tapped his baton on the back of the music stand, then turned to the microphone. The band swung into a moody theme song over which the leader's voice came clearly.

"Now, folks, we present the feature of the evening—Little Alice in Wonderland, the girl in the looking glass."

To his right, a panel slid back, exposing a square-foot pane of silvery glass which glowed as the lights came on behind it.

The room lights dimmed and as Bradford watched, the figure of the girl slowly materialized in the magic mirror.

He had already guessed that it would be the girl in green, but he was startled when he saw her. She made a beautiful picture, her long straight limbs, her delicately modeled body, her arms raised as they came up into the pose, appealing to the audience.

Already the lights behind the mirror were beginning to fade. After a moment the pane was a square of shimmering silvery glass.

The floor show followed in a moment, and Bradford stood beside the bar, watching it for several moments. Then he turned and moved toward the door of Slater's private office.

He turned the knob and pushed it open without bothering to knock. He'd expected to find his friend behind the big mahogany desk, but the expensively furnished room was empty.

Across the room, on the right, a half-open door showed a dark passage beyond. Bradford started toward it, stopped as the sharp whiplike crack of a shot cut at him above the muffled sound of the band.

He jumped for the door, went through into a short hall, ran along it to a half dozen steps which led upward to a boxlike landing.

He went up the steps three at a time, reached the landing, and stopped as his toe struck something soft and yielding.

He bent down, trying to see in the uncertain light, sensing that it was the body of a man. Then suddenly, the lights around him came on, and he saw that the twisted figure was that of Rod Slater.

He swore explosively as he dropped to his knees to feel for a pulse, for heart

action. There was none; the man was dead. He knew it before he saw the hole in Slater's side.

He was so engrossed that he failed to hear the startled gasp, failed to sense that the band had stopped playing. He turned his head. He was directly behind the magic mirror.

Someone had cut the outer room lights, and he could see the gambling room only vaguely. For an instant he stood, not knowing what had happened. Then he understood.

He was framed in the magic mirror, standing with his back to the stairs. His gun, which he had drawn unconsciously at the sound of the shot, was in his hand. His best friend lay dead on the floor at his feet!

Chapter II

AS SUDDENLY as they had come on the lights around him went off, and he could see the gambling room plainly. Men were leaping to their feet in the outer room. Although they could no longer see Bradford, he could see them, could hear their shouts. Someone was yelling for the police.

He turned, jumped back down the stairs, and gained the office, wondering as he did so what had happened to the girl in green. She'd been posing behind that same mirror only a few minutes ago.

The lights still burned in the empty office. The room was in perfect order, save for the picture of a racehorse hanging back of Slater's desk. The picture was tilted at a crazy angle. He reached up on impulse to straighten it, thought of something else, and pushed it to one side, exposing a wall safe.

He tried the steel door, found it locked, let the picture swing into place, and turned back to the desk. There was a pad beside the blotter. The top sheet had been torn off.

Whoever had written on the top sheet had pressed so hard that the impression of what he had written was clear on the second sheet.

Bradford picked up the pad and stared at it. There were three names listed. One was Scanlon, the second Perry, and the third looked like Silverline. He stiffened

when someone pounded on the door and dropped the pad into his pocket.

"Who is it?" he called.

"The law. Open up."

For an instant Bradford hesitated, then he crossed the room and opened the door. There were two radio cops outside.

"That's the guy in the mirror," a man behind them yelled.

One of the cops was young and excited. He wasn't used to murder. He rammed his gun into Bradford's stomach. Bill grunted from the force of the blow.

"Take it easy, lug," he said quietly.

"Get your hands in the air, killer," the cop barked.

Bradford did not argue. The second cop took the gun from his pocket.

"Where's the body?"

A dozen people told him. He went up the steps, leaving his partner to watch Bradford. He came back looking a little sick.

"All right," he rasped. "Why'd you kill him?"

"I didn't," Bradford said, and the cop hit him in the mouth.

Bradford's eyes got narrow as he wiped the blood from his crushed lips.

"You'd better leave the strong-arm stuff to Timkin. You're digging a mine of trouble."

"He's right, Charley," the second cop said nervously. "Maybe he knows someone."

His partner grunted but let Bradford alone until Detective Captain Timkin came in.

The homicide man had short, stubby legs, a red face, and beefy shoulders with arms that were too long for his height.

Surprise quirked his mouth when he saw Bradford's lips.

"What happened to you?" Timkin gasped.

The cop moved uneasily, but Bradford just shrugged.

"Rod's dead." His tone was low, containing his emotion carefully. "I found him. I came into his office looking for him, then I heard a shot and raced up those stairs. He was behind the mirror. You know how those things work. The audience can see only when the platform lights are on. Well, someone turned them on while I was standing there."

A well-dressed man pushed forward

out of the crowd.

"He's trying to cover up, Captain. He had a gun in his hand, and it was still smoking."

BRADFORD knew that the man thought he was telling the truth, that the usual eye-witness is very unreliable, that people go half on what they see and half what they imagine.

"My gun hasn't been fired, Al," Bradford pointed out. "The slug in Slater wouldn't match it, and anyway you know that Rod and I were pals."

Timkin's face did not change. He took the gun from the radio officer and passed it to one of his own men.

"Check it." Then he ordered the crowd out and turned back to Bradford. "What were you doing up here anyway?"

Bradford hesitated. He knew that Timkin was honest, but he didn't want to tell him about the girl in green for two reasons. First, it would confuse the issue. Second, he didn't want to drag the girl in—unless she'd had something to do with Rod's death. He didn't want to believe that.

He knew that he was not in the clear himself. It was going to take all his connections to keep him out of jail.

"I dropped in to see Rod," he said at last. "Haven't seen him since he opened. But I didn't expect to walk into anything like this."

Timkin's eyes were doubtful. "Look, pal, you wouldn't hold out on me?"

"Why should I?" Bradford asked evenly.

Timkin looked at him for another minute, then turned away and told one of his men to bring in the help. They came in one at a time. The girl in green was near the last. Timkin seemed to know who she was. He asked her a lot of things about Slater.

She answered without once looking at Bradford, denied that she and Slater were engaged, and said that the gambler had been a good friend and nothing more.

"Were you in the gambling room when the lights were off, when the audience saw this man in the mirror?" Timkin demanded.

She hesitated, then nodded.

"I was, and that man who said he saw smoke from the gun was wrong. There

wasn't any and if there had been, you could have seen it. Besides, this man didn't kill Slater."

Timkin looked at her sharply. "How do you know that?" he rapped out.

"By his expression," she said. "If a man was ever surprised and shocked, he was when he stood there over Slater."

Timkin just grunted and a moment later he let her go as Heywood, the club manager, came in.

Heywood was big and fat with a good-natured face and little blue eyes that were almost lost in rolls of flesh. He'd been hurrying and he was puffing as if the exertion had been too much for him.

"What's happened? Where's Rod?"

"Weren't you here?" Timkin asked.

Heywood was mopping his face. "I've been out of town. I just got in. What the hell is this, a raid?"

"It isn't a raid." Timkin told the fat man what had happened. For a long moment Bradford thought the club manager was going to cry. He gulped a few times, then was quiet, his short-fingered hands twisting and untwisting.

"Who would kill Slater?" Timkin asked him.

Heywood shook his head. "Rod always said that trouble didn't pay. He was friends with everyone." He looked toward Bradford as if for confirmation.

Timkin snorted, started to speak. Changing his mind, he jerked his head toward the door.

"Go on outside, Bill, but don't try to leave."

Bradford went out. A few minutes later the fat man followed him. Most of the guests had gone. The employees were grouped around the bar, watched over by two uniformed men.

"What shall I do about the club, Bill?" Heywood asked in a low voice.

"Why ask me?" Bradford demanded, staring.

THE fat man's face showed his surprise. "Didn't you know about Slater's will? He left the club, everything, to you."

Bradford gasped. "What?" He had to think rapidly. "And there were over a hundred people in this room tonight ready to swear I shot Rod! Keep it under your hat for a while, will you, Mike? If

Timkin knew that I benefited by Rod's death, he'd drop me in the clink. I can't afford that. If I'm going to run down the rat that killed Rod, I've got to be loose."

The manager nodded. "Yeah, I understand. I'll keep it quiet."

"Thanks. Was Rod having trouble with Perry?"

"You mean the gambler?"

Bradford's face tightened. "Yeah—and with Scanlon and Silverline, the jeweler."

Heywood wet his thick lips. "Why, they're all customers. But trouble? No."

Bradford had no chance to argue, for Timkin came out of the office at that moment and motioned toward him.

"Bill, I'm going to have to take you downtown," he said apologetically.

Bradford nodded. He wasn't surprised. He followed the detective captain out to the squad car after a sharp glance at Heywood.

They didn't hold him, but when he came out of headquarters and climbed into his car, Bradford knew that he was far from a free man. If they could have shown a motive, if they had known about the will, it would have been different.

He drove around town to make certain that he wasn't being followed, then turned toward the girl's apartment house.

There was a clerk behind the desk in the lobby. Bradford didn't want to see the clerk. He went around to the back, using the rear door and climbing the stairs.

It was a long walk up to the fourth floor. How was he going to get the body out? He didn't like the job. He guessed he was screwy; he should have told Timkin. But then he thought of the girl in green and was glad he hadn't.

He used the girl's key on the door marked 410 and slid inside. The room was small, not more than ten by twelve. It smelled decidedly of perfume. He struck a match, found the light switch, and punched it. Returning the matches to his pocket, he felt the pad he had taken from Slater's desk.

He pulled it out and studied it under the light. Yes, the third name was Silverline, and there was a little check mark after it. He knew Silverline, one of the town's biggest jewelers.

The man's business had grown rapidly in the last few years. Each day's paper carried a quarter-page ad, featuring jewelry at very low prices. The wonder was that Silverline could make a profit selling as cheaply as he did in his Eighth Street store.

The second name on the list was Perry. Bradford knew him, too, a gambler who had once been Slater's partner. They'd split up over two years before. Bradford had never known why. There was no check after Perry's name, nor after Scanlon's.

He put the pad back into his pocket, wondering why those names had been written on it. It looked like Slater's writing, although he couldn't be sure.

Scanlon was president of the Retail Jewelers Association, a man important in the city and certainly not one who would frequent Rod Slater's gambling house.

There were two doors in the right wall. The first, he found, led to the bathroom, the second opened into a closet. The closet was filled with dresses. For a moment he failed to see the body, and the cold fear that someone else had found it first flooded through him. Then he parted the dresses and stared directly into the distorted face of Silverline.

The dead jeweler hung stiffly, suspended by the back of his coat from a wall hook. The front of his vest had a dark stain. Bradford's nostrils caught the sickening odor of dried blood. He knew now why the scent had been so heavy in the room outside. The girl had used the perfume to kill the odor.

Chapter III

MOPPING his forehead with a handkerchief, Bradford closed the door. He lit a cigarette. His hands shook a little, which was why he crossed the room and examined the drawers of the dressing table.

He found what he wanted, pulled the cork, and took a long drink. He was just returning the bottle when someone paused before the outer door and shoved a key into the lock.

He clicked off the light with one sweeping gesture and crouched down beside

the dressing table, pulling his gun as he did so. The door opened. He saw a girl's figure framed in the lighted rectangle.

She fumbled, found the switch, and turned on the lights. She gave a little gasp as Bradford rose but relaxed when she saw who it was.

"Oh, it's you." She came in, closing the door, and sank wearily onto the bed. "Bill, who killed Slater?"

"I don't know," he admitted. "Where were you when that shot was fired?"

She looked startled. "Why I—I was standing around out in the gambling room."

"You're lying," he said tonelessly. "You'd just finished your act. You had to dress. Where were you?"

Her face got defiant. "Well, I was still in the dressing room when the shot was fired, but I went out into the gambling room as soon as I could."

He watched her, still not certain that she was telling the truth.

"Where's the switch that controls the mirror lights?" he asked, his mouth cold and drawn.

"At the end of the bar, beside the dressing room door."

"So you could have killed Rod, ducked across the dressing room, and pulled the switch."

She came off the bed, half a step toward him.

"You don't believe that, Bill! You don't!"

"I don't know what to believe." His voice was hoarse with emotion. "You haven't come clean. I know that."

"But you've got to believe me!"

He shook his head. "I can't. The dead man in the closet is Silverline. You said you didn't know who he was, and yet he's been a regular at the club—" He broke off at a knock on the door.

They stared at each other, the girl's eyes deep with unvoiced fear.

Bradford moved toward the closet.

"Find out," he whispered and disappeared, closing the door.

Through the panel, he heard the girl cross the room. The closet was stifling. He opened the door a crack, in time to see two men force their way into the room.

One of them was the short, squat man who had warned him to keep away from Little Alice. The second was Perry, Rod

Slater's former gambling partner.

"Glad to see me, Toots?" Perry smiled thinly.

Her answer was so low that Bradford couldn't hear it. She stepped back, and they followed her. Perry's voice was soft.

"We don't want trouble with you, kid, but Grayco and I are going to get that gold."

"Gold!" The girl had backed to the bed. "I don't know what you're talking about."

There was a snarl in Perry's voice. "Listen, we know that Slater trusted you, told you about it. Don't stall or you'll get hurt. Where is it?"

"I wouldn't know, unless it's in the safe at the club," she said faintly.

"Did you check that, Grayco?"

The short man shook his head. "Didn't have a chance. Bradford was in the office."

PERRY cursed him softly, then looked at the girl. "We should take you with us, but you'd be too much trouble. Keep your lip buttoned and if you're giving us a bum steer, we'll be back. Come on, Grayco."

They went out, slamming the door. The girl crossed the room and flipped on the catch.

Bradford came out of the closet. Alice turned to face him, her eyes full of appeal, but it did not soften his expression.

"So Slater had some gold and you forgot to tell me about it."

She nodded. "You don't think I was trying to cross you, do you, Bill? I—I forgot."

He knew she was lying, but he let it pass.

"What kind of gold was it? Where did he get it?"

"It's in bars," she told him. "Quite large ones. I don't know where he got them. I didn't think much about it."

"There's a federal law against hoarding gold."

"That's what Slater told me. I saw the bars in the safe one night when I was in there. He told me there was over half a million dollars worth. He didn't know exactly what to do with it."

Bradford was watching her. "Someone must have been after that gold. The picture over the safe was hanging crooked

when I went into the office."

She didn't answer directly. Instead she inclined her head toward the closet.

"What are we going to do with that body? I think Perry will leave Grayco outside to watch. Otherwise, he'd be afraid I'd run out."

Bradford whistled softly, his attention for the moment off the thought of the gold.

"That makes it tough," he said.

She was pale beneath her make-up. He realized suddenly that she was a lot more scared than he had thought. She'd been holding herself under perfect control.

His tone sharpened a little. "Is there a fire escape?"

"Yes. But, Bill—"

"Listen." His tone was low and commanding. "Go down the hall and push the bell for the automatic elevator. When the car comes up, hold the door open so no one else can use it. When the hall is clear, whistle."

"You're a good guy," she said after looking at him for a long moment.

She was gone, leaving Bradford staring after her. He stood there for an instant, then went into the closet and lifted down the body. He waited just inside the apartment door, the body balanced stiffly across his shoulders. His heart beat a hollow sound against his ribs.

When her whistle came, he stepped quickly into the hall, praying that no other tenant would appear until he had gained the fire escape.

None did. The iron stairs were narrow, and the body was unwieldy. He gained the second-floor level and paused. The ladder to the ground was a pull-up affair. He swung it down, holding his breath as the rusty joints screeched. Gingerly he clambered down to the ground and cut diagonally across the vacant lot to where he had left his car.

His hands felt shaky as he slid the body into the back seat and fumbled for his ignition key. Suddenly he realized that he was not out of the woods yet.

There was a man across the street from the apartment house entrance. In the uncertain light it looked like Grayco.

Bradford got his motor started, watching the man while he slipped it in gear. He must have been too far

down the street for Grayco to be interested.

A STREAK of gray ran along the eastern horizon when he turned the sedan toward the hills behind Hollywoodland. His one thought was to get rid of the body. He did that as quickly as possible, leaving it in a little brush-covered canyon, and turned back toward town.

The city with its red and blue neon signs looked like an enormous Chinese checker board stretched below him. The streak of gray in the east was wider. He

body. Timkin got most of the play. Police and newspaper men seemed at a loss to account for Slater's death.

"Jeweler Missing," a subhead in the right-hand corner reported over an account of Silverline's disappearance. The man had last been seen when he left his store two nights before. No one would admit having seen him after that.

Mrs. Silverline had not been particularly worried when she failed to hear from her husband the first night. He often stayed at one of the downtown hotels. But when he did not show up at

THE WET FINGERPRINT



NO MATTER how clever some crooks might be, the laboratory technician always queers his game.

Take, for instance, one burglar at Santa Monica, California. In the early morning hours about a week before Christmas, he went to work on the back door of a restaurant there with an ordinary brace and bit. With this singular burglar tool he drilled a series of closely-placed holes in a 4½ x 4-inch square in the door. It was an easy matter then to loosen that square of wood with a light punch, lift it out and toss it aside. Reaching through the opening, he unlocked the door and entered. Once inside, he ransacked the place and made off with a quantity of bottled cheer and cash to the tune of \$520.

It was another eight hours before the burglary was finally discovered and police arrived on the scene. The piece of wood which had been hand-drilled from the door was recovered and immediately turned over to a police technician for analysis. Since it had rained quite steadily during the night, this latter officer proceeded to dry the water-soaked wood thoroughly before attempting an examination. After considerable effort, he was able to bring out a partial latent fingerprint.

But the burglary detail wasn't idle by any means. They had immediately gone into action and picked up a number of characters of whom they had a perfect right to be suspicious. Each one was fingerprinted and his prints compared to the one on that piece of wood. One of the suspects, thus identified as the culprit, broke down and confessed.

It had been the print of his right index finger which had pointed accusingly at him. And a wet one, at that!

—Norman Renard

was very tired, but he hated to go to bed.

He was eating a belated breakfast in a diner when the man on the next stool went out, leaving his paper behind him. Bradford grabbed it and stared at the screaming headlines.

**GAMBLING CLUB OWNER MURDERED
SLATER FOUND BEHIND MAGIC MIRROR
SQUARE GAMBLER SHOT**

He glanced swiftly through the story. He was mentioned as having found the

the store the following morning, she had notified the police.

The body had not as yet been found. Bradford played with the idea of giving the police an anonymous tip but decided against it. The clearer he stayed on this thing the better.

Two people were waiting for him in his own office when he got there. One of them was Timkin.

"It's that man from headquarters," his office girl said in an apologetic voice. "I couldn't keep him out."

Bradford nodded and went into the private office.

Timkin was pacing up and down. He turned around, scowling at Bradford, and indicated the man beside the desk.

"This is Mr. Iris, Slater's lawyer. Know him?"

Bradford shook hands. "How are you?"

"I want to congratulate you, Mr. Bradford," the small, dark lawyer said.

Bill pretended surprise. His mind was working rapidly.

"For what?" he asked, his eyes wide and innocent.

"Didn't you know? Mr. Slater left everything to you."

There was silence in the office. Bradford could feel Timkin's eyes boring into his back. They felt accusing.

He walked around the desk and sat down in his chair slowly.

"Slater left everything to me?" he said in a stunned tone.

The lawyer nodded. "Everything."

"You didn't know, Bill?" Timkin was still watching. His voice was deceptively mild.

Bradford shook his head. "Was it much?" he asked the lawyer.

"I don't really know. There were a couple of safety deposit boxes. I thought that perhaps you'd go over with us. I have a court order to open the safe at the club, but I'd rather you'd be there."

Bradford rose. "Sure, I'll go. Have you got the combination?"

"No, but I've got a man from the safe company. Come on, Timkin."

The detective captain smiled without mirth. "I was coming, anyway," he said. "Are you sure you didn't know anything about this will?"

Bradford stopped. "Meaning just what?" he demanded.

The city detective shrugged expressively. Bradford's eyes hardened.

"Listen, you knew Rod Slater. You knew that anything he had was mine for the asking. Are you dumb enough to suggest that I'd kill him just because he had dough and would leave it to me?"

Timkin was unmoved. "It's been done before."

"Not by me. Come on."

Bradford turned and led the way.

At the club, a policeman guarded the

door. Heywood, the manager, was not in evidence. They went upstairs, crossed the gambling room to the office. It took the man from the safe company twenty minutes to open the wall box.

Bradford wasn't surprised when he saw that it was empty. If the gold had ever been there, someone already had it. He stood watching Timkin and the lawyer.

Chapter IV

IRIS seemed surprised. Just how surprised he was, Bradford couldn't judge. Timkin let out his breath slowly.

"Well, Bill, you won't get rich from what's in there."

"There's still the safety deposit boxes," Iris cut in.

Bradford shrugged. "Come on, we might as well get it off our minds."

There was a man from the tax office at the downtown bank where Slater had done business, but he wasn't needed. Both boxes were empty.

"Damn funny that Slater would rent two boxes when he had nothing to put in them," Timkin swore.

"Rod poured a lot of money into that new club," Bradford pointed out. "It probably strapped him."

Timkin looked at him. "If that's true, you're out of luck. The orders are out for the vice squad to close the place and keep it closed."

"I wouldn't have tried to run it, anyhow," Bradford told him.

They left the bank. He watched Timkin climb into the squad car, then got a cab and rode back to the club.

Heywood was standing in the middle of the deserted gambling room, looking around when Bradford walked in. The fat man's face was twisted with grief, as if he might burst into tears at any moment.

"The orders just came through from downtown that we've got to close and stay closed," he said. "They've given us twelve hours to get the wheels and stuff out."

Bradford shook his head. "Don't bother; let them seize it," he said quietly.

The fat man looked as if he couldn't believe his ears. "Why not?" Bradford asked. "They're about as useful to me as

a jar of face cream. How long were you here after I left last night?"

"Why?" The fat man was puzzled.

"Because I want to know if Perry came in," Bradford told him.

Heywood hesitated. "Yes. He came in, but I don't know what he wanted."

"Did he get into the office?" Bradford asked, his face expressionless.

The fat man shook his head. "Not while I was here. The whole place was filled with cops, anyway. Why?"

"What kind of trouble did Rod have with Silverline?" Bradford asked instead of answering.

"Trouble?" The fat man looked startled.

Bradford's mouth tightened. "Look, Heywood, don't try to give me the business. I know that Silverline was killed in Rod's office night before last and I want to know why."

The color had drained out of Heywood's flabby cheeks, leaving them gray and sagging.

"How'd you learn that?"

"Did Rod kill him?"

The fat man shook his head. "He didn't. He found the body and was going to call the coppers. I wouldn't let him. I knew they'd close the place. If they did, it would've broken Rod. He was in pretty deep. He'd borrowed money from Perry and— I got a couple of boys to take the body and dump it in the hills."

"What?" Bradford was staring. "The body wasn't taken to the hills. It was taken to the girl's apartment. And it wasn't taken by any boys. It was taken by the girl and Rod! At least, that's what Alice told me."

Heywood nodded, undismayed. "That's right. I helped them carry the box out the back way."

"You told the cops last night that you'd been out of town," Bradford said.

"That's what I told them."

"Who were the guys who took the box?" Bradford cut in.

"I didn't know them," Heywood said. "Just two mugs that Little Alice sent for. She's a swell kid. She helped put that body in the box, helped nail it up, then they carried it out. They didn't even know what was in it."

Bradford paused. "Okay," he said at last. "I'll see you later. Let the D.A.'s

men clear out the stuff and you might see if you can sublease the place."

HE WALKED down to the drug store on the corner and from the booth called the girl's number. She answered almost at once.

"This is Bill. Is Grayco still watching your place?"

"I'm not sure," she told him nervously. "But I stole down a while back and thought I saw him."

"It won't hurt to be careful. I don't want him to see me talking to you. How about meeting me at Carlisle's? I'll be in the last booth on the right in twenty minutes. Go out the back way."

He hung up. Leaving the drug store, he walked the three blocks to the cocktail lounge. He was on his second highball before the girl lifted the curtain and slipped into the booth.

She looked younger in street clothes. There was very little make-up on her cheeks and lips. She didn't need any.

The red hair was caught back under a wide-brimmed sport hat of chartreuse, and she carried a bag and gloves to match.

"What about Silverline?" she asked anxiously. "Did you—"

Bradford reached across the little table and put the blunt tips of his fingers against her lips. There was no ceiling in the booth. Anyone in the place might be listening.

"It's all taken care of." The words were little more than a whisper. "I had a visit from Slater's lawyer this morning. It seems that I'm Rod's heir. We opened the safe and the safety deposit boxes. There wasn't any gold."

"Was it Perry?"

He shook his head. "I don't think so. I talked to Heywood." He was watching her closely. "He told me about finding Silverline's body, about two friends of yours taking it away in a box."

"Yes." Her voice was faint.

He leaned toward her. "Why didn't you tell me that? Why didn't you tell me about your friends, about the box? Silverline was taken out in a box, yet his body turns up in your apartment."

She refused to meet his eyes. "I don't know what you're talking about."

His hand reached out and caught at

her wrist, drawing her forward until she was pressed tightly against the edge of the table.

"Don't stall, baby. You aren't telling it straight at all. Did the body leave the club in that box or was it some of that gold?"

She stared. "Who told you that?" Her words were breathless.

"Where'd that gold go?" he demanded ruthlessly.

She had no chance to answer, for the booth curtain was suddenly pushed aside. Bradford had a confused glimpse of Grayco's snarling face, of the automatic swinging at his head. He tried to duck. The gun swished down along the side of his head.

He groaned and rolled under the table, stunned, only half conscious. He heard the girl scream, saw her feet disappear as she was jerked from her seat. He struggled to get up.

By the time he made the rear door, Grayco was bolting down the alley, dragging the girl toward a parked car. They made it as Bradford lurched out into the sunshine. The car started with a jerk and swerved savagely into the side street.

All Bradford could do was stand gaping after it stupidly, wondering if he should call the police. . . .

Silverline's store on Eighth Street was closed when he reached it. There was a big sign in the double window, reading:

WE PAY CASH FOR OLD GOLD

The place was deserted. Bradford even walked around through the alley to the rear, but there was no sign of life. He walked the five blocks to the offices of the Retail Jewelers Association.

At the reception desk he asked the blonde if Scanlon was in. She started to stall him, but he gave her no chance. He pushed past her and slammed open the door of the inner office.

SCANLON sat at a big desk in the corner. He looked up, surprised. The girl was trying to crowd past Bradford's shoulder, trying to explain, but Bill gently pushed her back and closed the door.

Scanlon glared at him sharply, anger

darkening his angular face. "What's the meaning of this?"

"Relax," Bradford told him. "I wanted to talk to you, and your office girl had other ideas."

Scanlon studied him. "I've seen you somewhere before."

"I did some work for your association a couple of years ago. I'm Bill Bradford."

The man behind the desk relaxed a little. "I remember. Well, what's the matter now?"

"Plenty. Rod Slater was killed last night at his gambling club. Maybe you saw the news in the paper."

The man's face seemed to change. It was like a mask coming down, killing all expression.

"Well, what has that to do with me?" he asked smoothly.

From his pocket, Bradford drew the pad he had taken from Slater's desk and laid it before Scanlon. The man picked it up, stared at it, studied the names.

"Well?"

"I found that on Rod's desk," Bradford said.

"I still don't see."

"Listen, Scanlon. Rod Slater had a lot of gold. It's gone, and you're mixed up with it somewhere. Shall I let the cops know? Maybe they can straighten it out."

Scanlon half rose, then slowly settled himself again in his chair. "You seem to know quite a bit," he snapped.

"Yeah," Bradford said easily. "I thought perhaps you would rather talk to me than to the police."

Chapter V

FOR a moment Scanlon hesitated, then he nodded. "I'll talk if you'll promise to keep the association out of it."

"No deals," Bradford shook his head. "You talk first, and then we'll see."

Scanlon stared into his eyes. It was the association man's eyes that dropped first.

"Okay, I'll talk. Silverline was buying stolen gold, gold hijacked from various mines. Under the law, only the registered owner of a mine can sell new gold, and the mint can tell from the assay what mine, or at least, what locality, the gold came from.

"Well, there's been a lot of gold hijacked all over the country that couldn't be sold. Silverline bought it for a very low figure and resold it to other jewelers to be made into jewelry. He had a permit to buy old gold, you know."

Bradford stabbed an accusing finger at him. "Why didn't you tell the government men?"

"Publicity," Scanlon said hastily. "A lot of honest men had bought that stolen gold from Silverline. I thought it better to bring pressure on him to make him stop. Which is what I did. I scared him so that he would have stopped. But he had two partners, Slater and another gambler named Perry. I called Slater. By threatening to bring in the federal authorities I made him listen. But he said that he had just opened a new club and had borrowed money from Perry, giving him his share of the gold as security."

"I gave him twenty-four hours to get it back and turn it over to me. I was going to divide it among all the mine owners I knew had been hurt."

"And how did you find out about this gold first?" Bradford asked.

"A girl told me, a dancer at Slater's club."

Bradford started. "Little Alice?"

"I think that's what they call her. She and her brother own a small mine up in the motherlode country. She was a dancer in New York. Her brother, who was operating the mine, caught two of his men stealing gold. They implicated Silverline. So the brother came down here and tried to get the goods on him. He tracked the gold to Slater, who was then in New York, and telegraphed his sister. She made Slater's acquaintance and came back with him as entertainer for his new club."

IT WOULDN'T have been her brother she sent for," Bradford said, "to carry out the box of gold from the club the other night, would it, Scanlon?"

"Oh, so you know about that, eh? Yes, it was her brother and a friend, but there wasn't any gold in that box. I asked him. When they got the box away from the club, it was filled with old account books."

Bradford stared. "You're kidding."

"Not unless they are lying, and I don't

see why they should lie to me," the association man said. "Someone evidently thought faster than the girl did, that's all. It looks as if whoever killed Slater and Silverline beat us."

Bradford leaned forward, his face hard.

"Not yet," he said confidently. He picked up the telephone and called Perry's number. "This is Bill Bradford. You've got the girl, Perry. I'm giving you half an hour to turn her loose or I'll call in the boys from the FBI and hang a kidnap rap on you."

Perry laughed harshly. "Nuts. If you really care anything about the girl, there's some gold knocking around that belongs to me. Turn it over, and I'll let you have her."

"I don't know where that gold is, Perry. There's only one thing I do know. It never was taken out of the club."

"You're sure?" The gambler's voice was eager. "If you're crossing me, the girl gets it in the neck."

"I'm sure and I'm not crossing you."

Bradford hung up without giving the man a chance to say anything else. He got up.

"Where are you going?" Scanlon asked.

"To clean this up—I hope."

Without a word the jeweler followed him from the office. A cab took them across town to the club. Bradford paid the fare, led the way inside.

The place seemed deserted; the cops were gone. Scanlon looked around the empty gambling room in which nothing remained but the long bar. Evidently the D.A.'s men had been here and had made a clean sweep.

"Where do we search?" Scanlon queried.

Bradford did not answer. Instead, he marched into Slater's office, through the passage, and up the steps to the platform behind the mirror.

It was dark around them, and the room below showed clearly.

"Stay up here and warn me if anyone comes," Bradford said in a low voice.

Back in the office he made two calls. As he finished the second, a warning sounded from the passage. He rushed to rejoin Scanlon.

Grayco was in the room below. He

looked around, turned, gestured cautiously with his hands. Perry appeared, shoving Little Alice before him.

Bradford could see their lips move, but they were not speaking loudly enough for him to hear through the glass. They crossed the gambling room and disappeared into the office. From the sound, Bradford judged that they were tearing the place apart.

He listened for perhaps five minutes. Suddenly, his attention was caught by a movement at the outer door. Heywood came into the room.

In the office, they must have heard the fat man, for the sound of the search ceased abruptly. Everything was still.

Heywood moved quickly to the bar. The end of the high counter was within a couple of feet of the office door. But either he did not look in or the door was partly closed.

WITHOUT suspicion, he disappeared beneath the bar as he bent over the cooling system. He straightened up slowly, lifting something to the top of the bar.

Bradford could tell from the way the fat man strained that whatever he was lifting was heavy. A thrill ran through him.

Again Heywood disappeared from sight. He dragged up something else. Bradford could not see distinctly enough to be sure but he was almost certain that they were the bars of gold.

There was quite a pile now. The fat man, tucking one under each arm, started for the door. He never got there. Grayco appeared suddenly from the office, a heavy gun in his hand, aiming steady at the fat man's bulging vest.

To Bradford, behind the dark mirror, it was all in pantomime. He could see the fat man's lips move, but the sound was too faint to reach him.

Grayco moved forward slowly, sinisterly, his murderous eyes on Heywood. He stopped to the right of the fat man. Before either of the watchers behind the mirror could move, he brought up the heavy gun. It crashed down on Heywood's unprotected head.

The club manager collapsed all at once. His fat limbs just went loose. He hit the floor before the blood could even begin to

pour from his crushed head.

Viciously Grayco bent over him. He smashed down again. A cry escaped Scanlon's tightly pressed lips. He leaped to his feet but settled back again unwillingly when Perry and the girl appeared in the office doorway.

The gambler said something to Grayco. To the silent watchers his intent was obvious. The girl understood, too. She shrank back.

Scanlon was on his feet, running toward the stairs. But Bradford knew that if he went through the office, it would be too late.

He swung his foot hard. Sent it crashing against the thick pane of glass. The mirror bulged outward for an instant with surprising resistance. With a snapping, crackling sound, it fell outward into the gambling room below.

Grayco, startled, jumped around. He saw Bradford's flying body, tried to jump back out of the way. When Bradford struck him, he tripped and grabbed at air.

The shock of Bradford's fall was broken by Grayco. Just in time he twisted erect to meet Perry's rush.

The man came in, with gun swinging, his face livid. Bradford ducked the sweep of the gun, made a flying tackle that brought the gambler to the floor. Scanlon charged out of the office. He seemed to think his help was needed.

But the cops, led by Timkin, were streaming in through the outer door. He jerked Bradford to his feet and examined him anxiously.

"Hurt, Bill?"

Bradford shook his head. "I'm okay. How's Grayco?"

The cop who was inspecting the squat man turned to grunt. "He'll be okay. Got a couple of crushed ribs. That's all."

"Is he the killer?" Timkin demanded.

Bradford shook his head and pointed at Heywood. "Is he dead?" he asked.

"Nope," Timkin said. "Why he isn't, I don't know. His head is pounded to hell."

"Boy!" Bradford said. "I hope he can talk. If he doesn't, you'll have to take my word for what has happened."

He turned and found the girl at his side.

"This young lady and her brother own a mine." From that introduction he went

on, telling Timkin all he had learned about the stolen gold.

"So Slater got the gold back from Perry," he concluded. "Isn't that right?"

He looked at the sullen gambler who nodded.

"That's right," Perry grumbled. "I'd loaned him over a hundred grand on it. He gave me a bum check. After he had the gold, he told me the feds were after it and he'd have to turn it over. I squawked like hell, but what could I do."

BRADFORD nodded and turned back to Timkin. "Slater got the gold, put it in his office safe, and sent for Silverline to turn it over," Bradford said. "But Heywood wanted the stuff. When Silverline came, he took him into the office and killed him. Then he pretended to discover the body and suggested taking it away in a box. The girl saw a chance to get the gold. So she got her brother and took Silverline out of the box. Right?"

Her lovely gleaming head bobbed swift agreement. "My brother helped me," she blurted. "We put the body in my car. I knew the combination of the safe, and we got the gold and packed it into the box. We didn't know that Slater was really going to turn it over to the jewelers' association. Still, when my brother got it away, he found only old account books in the box."

Timkin looked quizzically at Bradford. "Okay, that left us Heywood," the pri-

vate detective said. "He was the only one who could have taken the gold out, put it in the bar cooling system, and filled the box with the account books. He proved it by coming after the gold. The only thing I can't understand is why he killed Rod Slater."

"I saw Slater fooling around the bar cooling system last night," the girl said. "Heywood saw him, too, because we were standing together. Maybe Rod found the gold and Heywood knew it and had to silence him."

Bradford stared down at the bloody fat man. "That must have been it," he agreed. "Now all I can't understand is why you dragged me in."

She avoided his searching, hopeful eyes.

"My brother was supposed to move that body from my wardrobe. He didn't, though. Rod was coming up to the apartment after the show. I couldn't reach my brother. I'd heard Rod speak of you so often, I felt I really knew you—could trust you. So I sent you a note by messenger."

"Do you still trust me?" he asked softly.

"Well—" she began hesitantly. Her light make-up could not hide her lovely blush.

"Break it up," said Timkin with false harshness. "We've got things to do."

Neither Bradford nor the girl heard him.

FISHY EVIDENCE

AT THE United States Service Institution in London there is displayed the head of a shark which helped to bring a law-breaker to justice.

It seems that in the early days of the Republic, British authorities captured the American brig *Nancy* and brought the vessel into Port Royal. There her skipper was charged with carrying contraband of war. He produced his ship's papers, but was held for trial.

Meanwhile, the crew of *H. M. S. Ferret* caught a big shark. Inside the creature they found a bundle of ship's papers. An examination by their commander, Lieut. Michael Fitton, revealed that they belonged to the *Nancy*!

Presently the skipper of the *Nancy* was brought to trial in the court-house at Kingston, where his attorney presented the papers seized with the ship, and which purportedly cleared the prisoner of all criminal activity.

At this critical juncture, Lieut. Michael Fitton entered the court-room with the papers retrieved from the shark. They were the *Nancy's* true papers, and proved the ship had been engaged in carrying contraband of war. When the *Nancy's* capture was threatened her skipper had thrown them overboard, and they had been swallowed by the shark. Then he had produced false papers which had been prepared for just such an eventuality.

The *Nancy* was forthwith condemned as a lawful prize, and her skipper was fined and sent to jail.

—Andrew Meredith



She went to the phone,
her gun still leveled

The Lady

AND THE ICEMAN

By RUFUS BAKALOR

WHEN the well-turned and fully-equipped blonde bounced into Filligree's Furniture Store, Willy was roaming the appliance department at the rear, pondering the advantages of being a crack furniture salesman instead of an inept jewel thief.

The gears in Willy's head reversed themselves almost audibly as he began to ponder the blonde. She was not a woman to be described in words but, rather, with a series of significant sounds, such as whistles, moans, squeals, and gurgles, all of which Willy quietly gave vent to while leaning on an automatic dishwasher.

The blonde surveyed the store and dodging several breathless salesmen who were converging on her, walked rapidly toward Willy. She smiled at him as if she were running for governor and asked throatily, "Could you show me something in a Hollywood bed?"

Willy smiled idiotically, being, for the moment, incapable of speech, and pointed the way to the bedroom suites. The blonde asked a lot of pointless questions about the furniture, and Willy answered absently. She told him that her name was Mrs. Bushey, but that she would take it as an affront if he called her anything but "Bubbles."

THE lady had a special taste in furniture . . . and ex-convicts!

At last, when she tried herself on a mattress and asked him how it became her, Willy was, as they say in the trade, a gone goose.

"You know, you're a very bright young man and you have such exquisite taste, that I'd love you to come out to my home sometime soon and advise me on refurbishing it."

"Glad to, Mrs. Bushey. Ticked to death to do it."

"It's Bubbles to you," she said with a peevish wiggle. "How about tomorrow afternoon?"

"Tomorrow? Afternoon?"

"Uh-huh. I'm anxious to get going."

"Well," Willy said, "there's a little detail about us going out to customers' homes. Mr. Filligree's got a rule that he's got to talk to the customer first about certain things."

"I see. And where's Mr. Filligree?"

Willy took her to Mr. Filligree's office and waited outside, musing idly.

By way of a preliminary gambit, Mr. Filligree put his little finger in his ear, twirled it, took it out, and dented his cheek with it. "This may seem a bit unusual to you, Mrs. Bushey, but, then, we have here an unusual situation. You see, I've got a bug for rehabilitating ex-convicts. Maybe you've heard."

"Yes, I believe I have."

"All the salesman on the floor out there have served time for one reason or another. It's pretty tough for them to find jobs once they've been in prison. I look them over and if I think they're sincere about going straight, I fit them into my business. I pride myself on being a pretty good judge of character, and not one of my boys has been a backslider yet."

"Good for you, Mr. Filligree."

"It's only fair to tell a customer about it in case they've got any prejudices. Now, take Willy, for instance. He was known as Willy the Iceman, a burglar who specialized in gems and precious stones, nothing but the best. Never very good at it, though. Tried it three times and got nabbed twice. Served three years before he joined us. Good boy, Willy. I'd trust him with my life."

"Yes, he's such a very, very nice young man. And such excellent taste in furniture. Who'd ever think—"

"I just thought I'd mention it, Mrs. Bushey. We know all about the Busheys and what a lovely home you have and all about the jewels, the Bushey jewels. This is just by way of a warning in case you have any objections. No hard feelings, mind you. Perhaps you'd like to think it over?"

"I've already thought it over, Mr. Filligree. I think that the work you're doing is simply marvelous, and if he's good enough for you, he's certainly good enough to advise me on furnishing a home."

On her way out, she purred, "See you tomorrow afternoon at three, Willy boy. The address is 17326 Oconto Drive."

Willy took a final, surreptitious whiff of her perfume and nodded eagerly in assent.

BEFORE he left for the Busheys, Willy had to listen to a long, fatherly talk from Mr. Filligree, of course. To Willy's relief, the only commandment Mr. Filligree dealt with was the eighth. Nothing was further from Willy's mind than theft.

The Bushey home was one of those complacent piles that sit off by themselves commanding a lot of smug lawn. Unconsciously, Willy considered it from the jewel thief's point of view as he made his way up to the door.

A maid opened the door to him and indicating that he was avidly expected, showed him to the library. After a few moments, Bubbles entered. Her manner was as excessively cordial as before and— Well, we will not dwell on the nature of her attire, except to say that she had chosen a rather quaint costume in which to receive a furniture salesman on a business call.

She showed him through the house, asking his advice on furniture and decorating and seeming to mind not at all the muddled answers he gave. Indeed, her behavior puzzled Willy somewhat, but he readily accepted the simplest and most delightful solution.

When they had completed their tour of all the rooms, she said, "Of course, you've seen it only during the day. I'd like to have you come out sometime at night so that you can see it by unnatural light."

"Sure. Any time. You name the night."

"Well, how about tomorrow night? The maid's off tomorrow night and Henry—Mr. Bushey, that is—will be out of town. We can discuss furniture without being disturbed. Does that suit you, Willy boy?"

"Tomorrow night's fine," Willy said weakly. "When?"

"I'll phone you at your place when to come."

"It's a date."

"You'd better not mention it to old Fillagree, or to anyone else. They might not understand," she warned.

Willy laughed off the suggestion that he was capable of doing such a preposterous thing.

"Now, promise you'll come when I call you."

Willy put his hand to his heart and sighed, although with the feeling that this gesture was an inadequate expression of his absolute availability.

She came close to him and said, "Seal it with a kiss!" and in a moment Willy knew that he'd come when she phoned and drag the wild horses, if any, with him.

The phone call came shortly after midnight. Willy tried to sound casual on the phone, as casual as she was, but there was a certain tightness in his throat muscles.

"Okay, I'll be right over," he gurgled.

"One thing, Willy dear," she said. "Do me a special favor and come in through the window. I'll leave a candle in the right one. I know it sounds silly, but I've a reason for it and I'll explain when you get here. Call it a quirk of mine if you want to."

"Anything you say, Bubbles." Willy agreed manfully. "I'm used to that, you know. I guess Mr. Fillagree must have told you—"

A trickle of oily laughter came over the phone and Bubbles said, "Hurry, you silly boy!"

WHEN Willy arrived, the Bushey residence was dark, except for the candle in the window. He straightened his necktie and made for it. "Mmmm. Just like old times," he thought as he raised the sash and deftly boosted himself inside.

As soon as he was in the room, a dim lamp went on, and a totally unexpected situation was revealed. He was in the library, he knew, and everything was arranged pretty much as it had been during his daytime visit. Except, of course, for the corpse in pajamas and robe leaning over the desk. That was an extra.

"That must be Henry," Willy observed somewhat foolishly.

"It has to be," said Bubbles. She was standing by the lamp, pointing a .38 Terrier in Willy's direction.

"Well," Willy said, striving for a light effect, "this makes quite a picture."

"Just wait till you see the frame, Willy boy," she said. "Now, as you may have figured out, I've already killed the rich slob over there, and it's Henry, all right. One more murder more or less wouldn't matter much to me, so just do as Bubbles tells you, Willy boy, and you'll live to a ripe old age. Life imprisonment is the most you can get in this state. I checked on it for you."

"Me?"

"You—Willy the Iceman. But we'll talk about all that later. First, there are a few things I want you to do. Do as I say and do it fast and don't try anything cute. I've found out that I enjoy shooting people."

"Why me? Why pick on me?"

"Because you fit the role perfectly, that's why. See that pistol on the floor, Willy? Go over and pick it up. Willy reached for it. "No, Willy, with your left hand. I know you're left-handed, Willy. I told you not to try anything cute. Go on, Willy, don't be afraid. The gun isn't loaded any more."

Willy picked it up. "It's still warm—the barrel."

"Uh-huh. Now pull the trigger. That's a good boy. Now lay it on the floor for the time being. So far, so good. Now go to that painting on the wall behind the desk. Tip it up."

"A wall safe," Willy said. "I thought so when I was here yesterday. What an obvious place for a wall safe."

"You're such a clever critic that I'm surprised you came tonight. Open the safe, Willy, and take out all the Bushey jewels and put them in your pockets."

Willy did so.

"Good boy, Willy. Now muss up the old man's hair, what little there is of it, and tear his robe. The idea is to make it look like there was a struggle."

Willy hesitated, nodding toward the corpse with a pained expression. She gestured menacingly with her gun, and Willy fell to.

"Careful not to scratch him, though, Willy, because he's dead already. That'd be smart on your part, but it would be the last thing you ever did. You see, I've got this pretty well planned out."

"I'll say," Willy said spiritlessly.

"Now muss up your own hair. Pull your tie to one side. Tear your shirt. Good. You look like you'd put up quite a fight before you got his gun away from him."

"This isn't right; it's criminal, that's what it is. You can't get away with it, Mrs. Bushey."

"I'll get away with it, all right, Willy boy. Don't you worry about me. I didn't miss a trick. Here's what happened, in case you're interested. You're an ex-con, a burglar. You saw the setup out here yesterday. Cased the joint, I believe you say. You came out here tonight, climbed through the window to pull the job, and my husband caught you red-handed. You didn't have a gun—you never used to carry one, I'm told—but you managed to get his away from him. Then you killed him. Then I came downstairs with my gun and captured you, you naughty, naughty man. I wonder if I'll get a reward. Pick up the gun again, Willy, and we'll finish setting the scene."

SHE backed up toward the door. "Now! Hands up! Drop that gun! Why, it's

the furniture salesman! You've killed poor Henry!"

Willy, half-convinced, dropped the gun and stared dumbly at her.

She went to the telephone, her gun still leveled at Willy, and said into it, "Operator, get me the police! Quickly! There's been a murder!"

"This is the police," said a clear voice.

"Come right over to 17326 Oconto Drive. My husband's been shot, and I'm holding the murderer at bay!"

"Be right in, lady. Only drop your gun first."

Willy realized with a kind of hopeful bewilderment that the voice had been coming from the slightly open window by which he'd entered.

Greatly confused, Mrs. Bushey dropped her gun, the window was raised, and Mr. Filligree entered with a plain-clothes cop right behind him.

"Did you hear? Did you see?" Willy asked.

"Heard it and saw it," said the cop. "Come along, lady."

"I really feel quite badly for having doubted you, Willy," Mr. Filligree said. "But when you came back to the store yesterday and acted so preoccupied, I figured that you were going to pull a job out here. So I kept watch tonight and tailed you out here with the copper. If you'd crossed me about going straight, I personally was going to see that you got caught at it."

"You're lucky he suspected you, Willy," the cop said.

"I'll wager things have turned out a bit differently than you thought they would tonight, eh, Willy?"

"You can say that again, Mr. Filligree."

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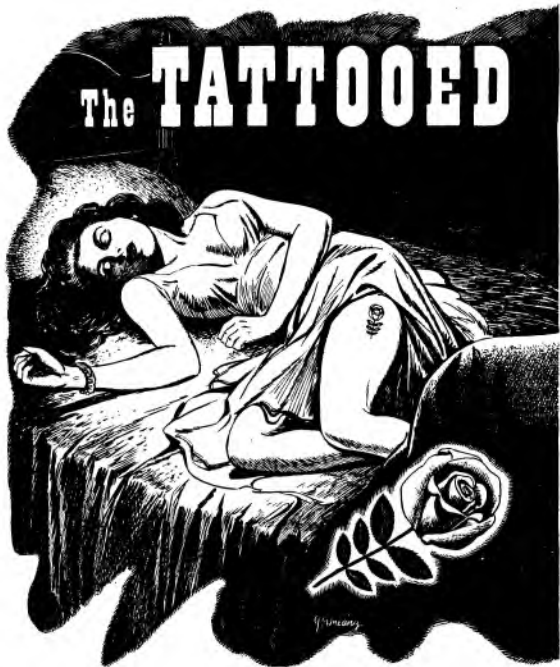
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LOVELY

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Chapter I

IT WAS two in the morning, a thick fog off the Hudson hugging the world in gray dampness. Fire trucks were coming down the street, motors roaring, sirens wailing, the noise rattling windows in the barnlike old studio hugging the West Side waterfront where the smells of all the world filled the heavy night air.

The noise must have given courage to the hesitating figure on the dark old stairs above the black, musty hallway. Yusolov would be like that, like all the rest of his slimy killer breed, brazen and bullying in the light—with a gat in his hand—and scared of his own evil shadow in the dark. All of a sudden his footsteps were faster, the stairs groaning under

the two hundred and eighty pounds of him.

The figure below crowded back, waiting, a dark fedora flopped low over his left eye. An unlighted cigarette dangled from the corner of a thin-lipped mouth cracked into something akin to a wolfish little grin. In his right hand the black automatic was ready; in his left a flashlight was waiting for a thumb on the switch. Here was cool and smiling death waiting in the dark hallway, but the fire trucks roaring by would cover any noise.

The light came, a silent white javelin cutting through the darkness. Yusolov stopped, with the grunt of a startled porker. A gun was in his fist, but his arm was rigid from the sudden shock.

There he stood, Ivan Yusolov, many times a killer but never convicted, a beast of the alleys and rooftops with queer friends in the political know of New York's waterfront big-time mobsters. Yusolov, no merciless triggerman now! There was only terror in the dark, greasy face, and the unkempt mop of curly, oily hair seemed suddenly to stand on end. Yusolov, like all big rats when put on the spot.

"Uh-nuh!"

It was the last grunt Yusolov ever made between earth and hell. The big gun in his hand wiggled. It never came up. There was no time for that. This was death. In the noise made by the fire trucks the little automatic was suddenly jabbering, pouring one fast streak of fire and lead after another into the big man's guts.

YUSOLOV never had a chance. He had never given one to anybody else. Others cowering before him had made him laugh and spit in their faces just before letting them have it. Here there was no time to make him moan and quiver like weeping jelly.

Big feet going out from under him, he fell like a dead hog when six hot little dum-dum bullets cut him to sloppy belly-wash inside.

The killer with the wolf smile stepped forward, something triggerlike about his quick, certain moves. A brush up and down of one hand over the dead man's body told him the big lug had not disappointed him.

Under each of Yusolov's armpits was a heavy flat case of black leather, held there by straps over the shoulders. As the swiftly working killer pulled up the cases he felt something else, and suddenly realized that unexpected things had been added to Yusolov's precious cargo tonight.

Four hard metal objects were in each of the outer pockets of Yusolov's big, baggy overcoat. In fours they were wrapped together with insulation tape to make them stand or lie as a flat package. The killer took them, still smiling as he stepped back.

The rest of it was rapid; this man always worked fast. In seconds he had transferred the dead man's burdens to himself. The big cases were under his armpits. The smaller, flat ones were in the outer pockets of his suit coat. He leaned forward to bid farewell to the corpse.

"I saw her, Yusolov. The burns you made with the fat cigar. If she lives her hands will always be crippled. Remember me to the folks in hell! Tell them I'm only starting to send your mob down!"

As he turned, a light stopped him, snatching his smile away. A sudden glow had instantly taken shape from somewhere beyond the top of the stairs, blinding for a moment in its intensity, then a figure moving forward to shadow it. The killer stared upward, eyes widening, mouth open, held spellbound, dazzled in the sudden glare of the flashlight, almost as Yusolov had been.

Where she had come from was not the question. Who she was or what she was doing up there made no difference. She was there, tall and statuesque, with something blue flung loosely about her, something so wispy as to leave nothing to the imagination, and with the bright light behind her making a golden halo of her hair—ravishing beauty at the top of an old stairway with plaster-cracked walls.

She was peering down, trying to see into the dark hall, but for only a few moments. Quickly turning on high-heeled red mules, she was gone, the faint slick of a switch wiping away the light and bringing back the darkness, in which now was a faintly whispering

sound of Yusolov's blood sipping through a broken plank in the floor.

The killer moved to the door, cautiously opening it. It was his intention to step boldly outside and turn eastward, a blue-eyed, fair-haired and rather jaunty-looking young fellow in well-cut gray whom no one would suspect was carrying the loot of one of New York's largest hauls from one of the city's most brutal robberies in its history.

But just as he was looking out the door a long sedan came whipping down the street. In a rapid swing-in it was coming to a fast stop at the curb, its doors flying open. Eight men popped onto the sidewalk, four of them short and dark, the others big and bullish. Somebody rasped a few words in broken English.

Something had gone wrong: maybe a tip-off. And yet that couldn't be right. Only three men on earth were supposed to know that the big Yusolov was going to meet up with hard luck tonight. The man who had just killed him was one of the three. It would be worth a cool hundred thousand dollars if the other two kept their mouths shut. If the job failed it would not be worth a thin dime to anyone connected with it. It would have been worth plenty to Ivan Yusolov and his gang of killers and big-time mobsters who had long defied both State and Federal authorities to bell them down.

CLOSING the door, the killer leaped back into the hall. Yusolov's dead hunk was in the way. Seizing it by the shoulders, he swiftly propped it against the door. Wheeling then, he headed for the stairs, taking them two at a time. Better to be anywhere now than standing down there and shooting it out with the mob—and bringing all the cops in New York helling to the scene, motors roaring, and the sirens of the damnable little "snow whites" wailing in the night.

Gunsmoke had swirled upward. It was like a thick fog, blotting out everything up at the head of the stairs, but mingled with the acrid odor, some heavy, sensuous perfume tinged the air. He looked right and left along a dim hallway. Through the smoke he saw the outlines of a dingy window in either direction.

One was in the front of the house, overlooking the street. The other was at the rear. Maybe a fire-escape was back there. He headed toward it. Before he had taken four paces he knew that somebody ahead of him was crowding back against the wall.

This was no time to get a knife in the ribs, a blackjack across the head, or even a bullet in the belly. He ducked, weaved in, slamming a left to where he thought a stomach would be in the shadowy outline. At the same time he was whipping over a fast right for a jaw, always a believer in throwing plenty of them in hopes of connecting with something.

Both blows landed as if he had been attacking a dummy. He heard a gasp as his left drove into a smooth, soft belly. His right landed before he could stop it, a solid straight to a smooth, firm jaw. As the figure in front of him went backward something snapped, a crack of light appeared, and a heavy door flew open.

"Damn!" he whispered, glancing back at the stairs. Already heavy feet had hit the creaky bottom steps.

She lay on the floor in front of him, red-muled feet, and legs in the hall. The rest of her was lying flat on her back in a brightly lighted studio.

He grabbed her up and, with one arm around her, he closed the door and shot the stout bolt. A bed with rumpled sheets showed ahead of him. He carried her limp figure to it and flung her onto it, wide-legged and sprawling. She lay there completely naked except for her thin garment which was sawed up to her armpits, and the high-heeled mules.

He swore, hearing the floor boards creaking in the hallway. This girl, of course, was the beauty who had appeared at the head of the stairs with the light behind her. The right play of lights and shadows could sometimes make any woman a startling beauty from the proper distance, but the light and shadows on the stairs could not have fooled anyone about this velvet-skinned girl on the bed. She was actually as flawless as a perfect piece of ivory, about twenty-five, he guessed, ideal in all her lines, her hair a pale-honey cloud. Old Mother Nature had been in her finest mood when this baby was cast into the mold!

Chapter II

Her long, shapely legs held him, smooth like the rest of her, not a flaw on them. But Mother Nature had had no part in one startling thing he was seeing there. In the fair skin of each smooth thigh had been tattooed a bright red rose, each so perfect in execution and all the shades of colors it might have been a real living rose on a green-leaved twig.

He bent closer to have a better look, then turned and stared intently at her face, fixing it firmly in his memory. Not knowing why he did it, he pulled a sheet over her, the other hand reached to turn off the light as a heavy fist fell on the door behind him.

NEVER the wolf to walk into a trap without looking for a way out, he had seen the big window the instant he had stepped into the room. Now he moved swiftly and silently toward it as the fist banged harder on the door. The old flooring in the hall was creaking louder. They were out there in front of the door in the darkness and gunsmoke. They were becoming excited now, too, their mumbling voices sounding like angry bees rumbling in a barrel.

Beyond the window, the rooftops were fog-shrouded. The fugitive turned a latch, shoving a long section of the window outward like a door, its old hinges protesting. Angrier banging sounded behind him. Hastily looking out and down he saw a dark shaft about six feet wide. If he could get over that he would be on the roof of a broad one-story building gouged like a wedge back between the taller old houses.

Stepping through the window to a narrow ledge, he pushed the window closed behind him and made a desperate leap across the shaft. He landed on the roof just as the studio door was smashed open, with broken bolts flying from the old wood and falling to the floor. At the same time something spat at him from the concrete floor of the shaftway below, and he recognized the muffled report of a gun.

Another jump and he was ducking to his left, getting behind a fat chimney top and racing straight on to a thicker blob of darkness and fog at the other side of the roof.

LADY LUCK had been riding the killer's coat-tails like a tail wind tonight, but it seemed to have changed and gone back on him when he reached the other side of the roof. A thicker pocket of fog swirled around him, but the roof was smoothly joined against a brick wall.

A one-story building, even a tall one like this, would not have a fire-escape, no way down but to jump, and maybe break a leg on concrete below. But again Lady Luck smiled. He saw an open window five feet above him, a break in the brick wall that seemed suddenly to have been put there.

He had leaped up, caught the sill, and was scrambling through the window when another one of those muffled little splats sounded behind him. A slap that was a bullet hit the side of the window as he fell inside. By the dim light coming from a transom ahead he saw that he was on the landing of an inside fire-escape.

Ordinarily a man would have gone down it, seeking a way out below. This man was not ordinary, not with the fortune he was carrying—and his life with it. He went up one stairway after another until five floors were below him. Panting, he turned down a long hallway to a window hazily outlined at the rear.

He found an outside fire-escape here, by which he reached the roof. Here he stopped, unable to go on forever, and stood there gasping for breath, lungs pumping, the cold fog a wet cloud around his face.

He swore, hearing police cars wailing in the distance. None of *that* mob had called the police, and yet they were coming, sirens shrieking and moaning as they converged on the old studio building where he had left a dead man. Others were coming from up and down the waterfront, sirens clearing the way.

Breath back, the killer raced on, leaping from roof to roof to the end of the block. On the last roof he saw a skylight open and a light below it. A quick look showed him a carpeted hallway below. He swung down, hanging for a second on his hands, then dropping as noiselessly as possible on the floor.



The butler held a sturdy fire-poker about a yard long

Numbers on little white enameled plates on the doors told him that he was in a small third- or fourth-rate hotel. As he slipped cautiously forward he could still hear the police sirens—hell still dumping itself on this particular section of the city where little things like murder were about as common as sight of the *Queen Mary* steaming majestically up and down the Hudson.

What he needed right now was a washroom. Climbing fire-escapes and running over tarry roofs could be grimy. His face must be smudged, for his hands looked as if they had been clawing in a coal pile.

Tiptoeing down a rear stairway to the third floor, he spotted a door marked,

"Gents Room." Inside he hastily cleaned up and combed his hair, the wail of police cars outside louder now. Danger was growing every minute. Cops soon would be swarming all over. At this time of night, for the next hour or two every man on the streets would be stopped and questioned. If some nosey cop happened to pat this night bird's flanks he would be certain to feel things which could rate him a picture in the papers and a fast promotion.

So far tonight it had been easy—easy for this fast and deadly business. Death too often struck more than once in these bloody jobs. The only casualty so far was Ivan Yusolov—if that was really the big, fat bastard's true name!

Ivan Yusolov's sudden departure for hell would please every decent cop in New York. Some hot-shot lawyers would groan, men as slimy as Yusolov—like the women who slept with them. Merciless human blood-suckers like Yusolov and his mob kept the fat fees rolling, and in too many cases had brazenly transformed certain types of greedy coppers into million-dollar men in blue pushing fat bellies about.

HE KEPT thinking of the blonde he had left on the bed in the studio—red, red roses on those perfectly rounded white thighs! Hell, he had seen tattooed women, but never any tattoos on such a knock-'em-dead dream as that baby!

Now he'd be going around for the next forty years wondering if every tall, beautiful blonde he saw sported red roses in spots which ordinary small-fry in the run of men were never supposed to see. Somehow he felt they were going to meet again, though a girl like that could only be dynamite to a man.

He grinned at himself in the mirror above the wash-stand, and set his hat on the side of his head, giving its brim an upward brush. Time was rolling. He had to get out of here. Somebody else might come along and find that open skylight, and this little hotel would suddenly find itself in a mad uproar, with a lot of blood being spilled in its carpeted halls, women guests screaming murder, startled men yelling their heads off.

Out in the hall, shoulders squared, right hand instinctively close to the pocket where the lightning was kept, he followed the rear stairway down. On the second floor it came to an end. That probably meant having to head for the lobby and past the desk. Delinquent guests sure couldn't slip out the back with their baggage here!

Luck was with him again as he walked down the front steps into a small lobby. A little old bald-headed man was asleep in a padded chair behind the desk. Double doors straight ahead led to the sidewalk. To his right, through a panel of glass, he saw a quiet barroom, still open. It was not yet four o'clock.

This would be the place for right now.

A big, dark Irishman stood behind the

bar, slowly polishing a glass. A little blonde sat on a stool in front of him, a pretty little trick with a near-empty glass of beer in front of her. Further along the bar, a pair of far-gone drinkers leaned wearily against the rail. Another, at the lower bend of the bar, was asleep on his forearms. The new customer took a stool beside the girl.

"Hi." She looked up and tried to smile. Drinks were making her sleepy, head a little wobbly. "Welcome—to our city."

"An' that will do, Daisy." The bartender spoke with mock impatience. "'Tis the rule of the house, an' well you know the rule—"

"But I know Daisy." The man beside her took a quick flier as he laid a twenty dollar bill on the bar.

The Irishman's eyes fastened on it. "Oh! Well, excuse me, an' you, too, Daisy."

"Sure!" She grinned up at him—damnably pretty if she hadn't had so much to drink "Heesh an old friend."

"Danny Riddle," he said, and nodded. "Haven't forgotten the name, have you? Let's all have a drink. Make mine your best Irish whisky."

"A man after me own heart!" The Irishman grinned. "I'm Paddy McGibney. Seems I've seen you before. What now, Miss Petersen?" He looked at the girl, respect suddenly picking up for her.

"I drink what Danny does." She pushed her glass aside, instantly taking her cue. "I—I alwaysh drink with—with my—my Danny Boy!"

"Sure." Mr. Danny Riddle was relaxed, suddenly feeling right at home. "And just for the hell of it, Paddy, give the fellows at the other end a snort to raise their spirits."

"An' that I will, Danny Boy!" The Irishman grinned again. "'Tis a pleasure that gladdens me whole heart when gentlemen like you drop in."

IT WAS a nice party in a few minutes. Daisy Petersen came out of her slump, her eyes no longer leaden but sparkling green emeralds in a lovely face.

"The Swede in you will come out now," the man beside her whispered as Paddy McGibney poured a fourth round at the other end of the bar.

"Ja?" She looked up, eyes flashing,

wide-awake now that good old Irish whiskey had taken the place of gone-dead beer. "Of course the name would tell you that."

"It's really Daisy Petersen?" he half-whispered.

"The Petersen part, yes." She was serious for a moment. "I dropped the Olga part for Daisy."

"Why?"

"I'm really damned Swede." In her low laugh was a delightfully musical accent. "Ja, I bane yall de vay from Manney-soota an' a gude gurl until I wisit New York an' drink some visky."

He laughed softly.

"I think you're a nice fellow, Mr. Riddle," she said. "Is that Riddle part straight, too?"

"Yes." He nodded. "Let's have a couple more rounds and get out of here."

"I don't need any more, Danny."

"You break off fast."

"Because," she whispered, "it doesn't do the thing it's supposed to do. I'm not a tramp, Danny. Honest!"

"Who said you were?"

It was a question not yet to be answered. The front doors were opening. Four men in blue were suddenly entering. In the lead was a big, red-jowled inspector. When he opened his mouth it looked like it was lined with red flannel.

"How long has this bunch of night owls been in here?" he growled to McGibney.

"Night owls, you say, aye!" Paddy McGibney was suddenly belligerent. "Tis a hell of a fine way to walk into a man's place of business insulting his friends!"

"Tis no insulting of your friends!" The inspector bared his horsey-looking dentures. "I'm asking a simple question, and there's no need of getting your Irish tail in the air about it. There's been one hell of a murder done nearby tonight."

"A murder, now!" For just a second it looked as if McGibney's eyes were on Riddle and the girl. The same eyes could have seen the nice little pile of money on the bar. "Well, now, an' what, I'm askin' you, are we supposed to have to do with that?"

"How long have all these people been in here?" the inspector snapped.

"O-ho, now!" McGibney bared his own

big teeth in a leer. "Well, now, Danny Boy"—he pointed to Riddle—"a couple or three hours, I'd say. Daisy has been here since about ten. Pete, Charley and Andy"—he waved at the others—"since eight or nine. Have a drink an' be on your way, Inspector. You know how I run this joint, an' you know I keep good company when it comes to me friends."

The inspector nodded. "Tis a bottle you might slip me, Paddy. It's not best to be seen drinking at a bar in times like these."

"A bottle, aye!" McGibney snorted. "At this time of night! You know the law better than I."

"And 'tis you who knows your friends," the inspector rasped back at him. "Make it *Three Star*."

"*Three Star*!" snorted McGibney, about to blow his top.

FOR a second his eyes were again on Riddle, and Riddle nodded, tapping the money in front of him with a forefinger. The big Irishman took a bottle off the back-bar, and slipped it forward.

"*Three Star* it is," he growled, "an' may it choke your greedy County Cork gullet when you let it down!"

"Tis a nice lad you are, Paddy!" The inspector leered, slipping the bottle under his coat. "Drop around to the station house and see us now and then—without going to the bother of kicking your belly off and hauling you in. Good night, all, and sweet dreams!"

"The chiselin' hog!" McGibney snorted angrily as the door *slap-slapped* behind the bluecoat. "Seven dollars and eighty cents for that bottle!"

"Forget it, Paddy." Riddle brushed his money forward. "When this is gone there'll be some more. Let's all have another drink."

"An' little more than time for one more." McGibney glanced up at the clock. "I always close a bit before four to catch me Jersey train. I don't own the joint, you see, and that big lug"—he closed his fists and looked murder at the closed swing doors—"he knows it!"

Riddle pushed the money closer. McGibney grinned. "Well, now, me boy, you'll be a welcome sight whenever you enter my door."

"Broke, Olga?" Riddle whispered, as

McGibney turned back to the other end of the bar. "Want a twenty?"

"No!" Her eyes flashed. "I'm no tramp, I told you!"

"But you are a little mule. A damned pretty little mule, Olga."

"And you're dangerous!"

"Why?"

"You can so easily be a wolf."

"Only when pretty little lambs bleat and wiggle their pretty little tails."

"I'm no lamb." She tried to put a growl in her tone. "And I have no tail to wiggle."

He rubbed his jaw, grinning at his image in the back-bar mirror. "Then my eyes are deceiving me."

"Please, Danny!" She reached over and put a firm, smooth little hand on his wrist. "Be a nice guy. I'd like to remember you like that."

He frowned. "You're not to see me any more?"

"You're dangerous, Danny. Like I said." He thought she was going to burst out crying. "Let's—please—leave it like that."

"All right, Olga." He caught her hand and squeezed it. "Where do you live?"

"What's the difference?"

"I'll drop you off in a cab."

"Only that, Danny?"

"Only that, Olga."

"You don't come here often?"

"This was the first time"—his voice was low—"and probably the last, Olga."

"And I won't see you any more?"

"Chances not."

"All right, Danny." The answer was slow. "I'm a fool, but—but all right." She whipped her shoulder straight. "Drop me off from your cab."

"Little mule!" He squeezed the firm small hand again. "Beautiful little mule."

And then, abruptly he caught himself wondering. Was it possible—just possible now!—that even pretty little Olga might have beautiful red roses on her legs?

Chapter III

ALTHOUGH Danny Riddle was running a little behind time now he pushed Paddy into the cab ahead of Olga and himself, and took the bartender down to the Liberty Street ferry. Paddy

would be better than any mouthpiece in New York if the cops came snooping again.

Leaving Paddy waving in the fog, they headed for the East Side. Olga had given her address as the nurses' home of a big hospital. He moved over closer to her.

"So you're a nurse?"

"Yes, Danny."

"And a good one, I'll bet." It was hard for him to keep from putting his arm around her, but he had to think of what was under his armpit. "Funny how quickly you sobered up after I came in. You don't look like a steady lush, Olga."

"I'm not, Danny." She put her hand on his arm. "But any girl who lets herself get picked up like I did would be reason for you to say that, I suppose. Let's not talk about it. Maybe you'll know all about it some time."

He looked down at her. "Then there's going to be another time?"

She was looking out the window. "Wait until you have a chance to think things over, and then you may see things in a different light. Picking up gals in a barroom is a pretty cheap way of finding respectable friends."

"Now listen!" He put his arm around her in spite of the damned things under his coat. "Let's get things straight. I make up my mind fast when I make it!"

"You would! You'd do most anything fast!"

"Can I phone you today at this nurses' home?"

"No, not today." She was still keeping her face away from him. "I'm on the long shift today. I mean the day ahead. I'm in surgery from nine until seven."

"And after seven, Olga?"

"You can call me then, but—but please don't!" She turned to him all of a sudden. Her eyes were swimming, her lips quivering as she looked up at him. "I—I'm afraid of you, Danny. Honest, I am."

"But why?"

"Oh, I don't know!" She shook her head. "It—it's because—oh, I'm afraid because I smell danger all around you, Danny!"

"You're goofy, Olga."

"Maybe I am, but I'm only glad the cops didn't come right up close to you in Paddy's. You didn't see me do it, I don't think you even smelled it, but I took a

little vial of perfume from my purse and spilled it on the floor between us."

"And why in hell would you do a thing like that?"

She lifted her face, putting her lips up close to his ear, her voice a whisper. "To hide the smell of gunsmoke in your clothing!"

His hand came up, swiftly cupping her chin as he pressed his lips to hers. For a long breath she was rigid, resisting but helpless. Suddenly she relaxed, an arm going around his neck.

"Women," she half-whimpered, "are so foolish. There is danger around you, Danny. You didn't fool me tonight."

His arm tightened. "And you're keeping what you think to yourself?"

"How could I do otherwise?" She was trying to smile again. "As you would say it, I lost my shirt in that saloon tonight."

"Maybe two shirts were lost," he said tightly. "You were just another chippy when I walked in, just another thick-skulled trollop hustling for a big Irish bartender. Then all at once I didn't seem to give a damn what you were! I even told you my right name. Here, let me prove I'm not lying about that."

HE WAS fingering for something in his vest pocket. He put a small white card in her hand. By the street lights she read it aloud.

"'Captain Daniel Riddle, United States Army Air Corps.'" She looked up. "All right, Danny, you *would* be a bird to fly high and far! What I suspect only you or I will ever know. I'll be off the floor, waiting for your call at eight tonight."

"And at eight tonight"—he swept her back in his arms—"I'll be calling you, Olga. We'll go out somewhere."

"Not out on a drinking spree!"

"Not on a drinking spree," he promised solemnly. "Do you know something, Olga? For two pennies for a blind man's cup I'd go crazy as hell about you."

She was still looking up. "I'm already crazy as hell about you!"

When they stopped in front of the nurses' home and he escorted her up long stone steps to a door, leaving the cab waiting, she slipped him a crumpled yellow envelope containing a telegram.

"Some other time I'll tell you about

it," she whispered, and added quickly, "No, not here, please!" She pushed him back as he was about to take her in his arms. "I'll be waiting for your call."

"I'll be waiting for tonight to come," he promised. "Just one more thing, Olga. And think about it all day while you work. I may not turn out to be the worst guy you ever met. Let's both, please, just keep on being as crazy as hell!"

She smiled gently. "The way I feel, I wouldn't know a remedy to make it otherwise—if I wanted to!"

Back in the cab he gave another address. As they moved on he took out the telegram. It was from a little place out in Minnesota. Short and to the point, it read:

ANNIE PETERSEN WAS BURIED
TODAY SORRY YOU NOT HERE
ERIC OLSEN

He frowned, carefully placing it in an inside pocket. A sister or some other close relative, he guessed. Maybe even the kid's mother.

Leaning back on the cushions, he sat there frowning again, wondering what had come over him tonight. Hell, women were few and far between who made him even think of acting up like this. A good sleep and his head would clear—after he got these infernal cases off his hands. No man could feel exactly calm and collected chasing around at this time of night with a fortune in his possession, and about eight out of ten men in the ordinary walk of life willing to kill for it—if only they could get away with it.

Always wary, he changed cabs three times, getting out in front of big East Side apartment houses, walking inside, and after a few minutes swinging back to pick up another cab around a corner. A block and a half away from his real destination, he got out of the last one, waiting in a hallway until it was gone. Then, hand in his pocket on the butt of the little automatic, he wound through a couple of dark and narrow little alleys before mounting an old stairway to what was like a small penthouse in the middle of a jumbled mass of uneven roofs that all but overhung the East River.

Home sweet home at last! It was neat and cozy, and like the cabin aboard an old-time galley inside, with the good doors locked. Whoever had first fixed up this hide-away certainly loved the sea.

Switching on a few low lights he inspected it like a suspicious wolf that had long been away from his den. In this business one never knew when a closet door might pop open and some joker behind a gun take a quick step forward.

With everything all right, he dialed a number on the telephone on a small desk at the end of what looked like a captain's berth. At the second ring a voice on the other end was answering, tense, eager with long waiting. The words spoken would not have been enlightening to anyone without a prearranged understanding.

"Eight?"

"Eight!"

"Skillabooch!"

"Skillabooch!"

RIDDLE put the instrument back in the cradle, and removed his coats, hanging them in a closet, and switching on an electric stove. At a heavy old mahogany table he sat down to wait, the big cases in front of him, the little automatic beside him. There would be no complete relaxing until those leather cases and the two smaller tape-wrapped things were in other hands which would take care of them from now on.

The tape-wrapped objects were the most interesting, now that he had them where he could look at them. They were little stainless steel capsules with a smooth but strong short length of little chain hanging from the end of each one of them. Four were about four inches long and about an inch and three-quarters thick. The others were about six inches long and two inches thick. They would be smooth, neat damned little things when once that black tape was removed. He gave them a shake, but nothing rattled.

Here was something new to Captain Daniel Riddle, released four months ago as battle weary from too many flights over Korea in the thick of the fighting. He had never seen anything like those things, and they were certainly no part of the stolen loot he had gone after tonight. They were here now simply because Yusolov had had them in his big pockets, and anything found on Yusolov would be stolen property, and wanted by the police, the State, or Federals.

He was not going to worry about them. Now one Andrew Casper Lane and his son Jeffery of the far-famed firm of Lane & Lane, insurance adjusters extraordinary, could worry.

Riddle went to his small refrigerator to pour himself a Scotch and soda. Turning out all the lights except a dim bulb over the desk, he slumped comfortably in a big leather chair, his drink and the little automatic on an end table beside him.

Had it not been for that loot on the table he might have dropped off to sleep before the drink was half-finished. It had been a rousing night, like all of them, but he had seen things tonight he had never run into before.

That beautiful pair of legs and the red roses kept coming back to him. Of course the dame had some tie-in with Yusolov, and any girl connected with Yusolov would not be worth the powder and bullet to blow her to hell. Yusolov had been up there in the room with her, a new one in his smelly life, perhaps. He kept few of them long, his abuse and beastliness more than the strongest could stand.

Then Olga Petersen—and how she kept coming back to him! Until he'd met her his mind had been on a pair of beautiful legs and red roses, and wondering if every beautiful, stately blonde he'd see from then on would give him a sneaky feeling she might be tattooed.

After Korea, and after five do-or-die jobs like this tonight, it was amazing that anything could stir any human warmth in him again. Maybe he was sick of blood, a lot of it belonging to upward-looking, praying women and children he'd bombed from the sky, innocent humanity caught in a zone with no way out, waiting only for the skyman with his roaring plane and his bombs making a hell's pattern of destruction on the ground—a war made by thieves and rats and pimps for the money and power they could get out of it, and to the last one a yellow-livered coward who would never dare go within a thousand miles of a firing line.

And Olga, drunk as a bitch, and sobering up so quickly! Maybe she had been playing some game, too. Maybe she had taken some vitamin pills or something for a quick sobering up. Maybe it was all

hokum about her pouring that perfume on the floor.

Out of the chair as if startled, he went to the closet and took out his overcoat. A few drops had spattered on it. He could smell it plainly.

Well, all right! So she had smelled gunsmoke. He thought he could detect a trace of it in the woolen coat, but his trying to smell gunsmoke was like a polecat smelling its own tail. Gunsmoke had so long been a part of him his whole body was saturated with it.

He had poured a third highball when he heard a gravel grind on the roof outside. Like a shot he was up, backing into the deeper shadows, automatic ready—and a fortune on the table.

A soft, single rap sounded on the door. He slowly counted three before the next one came, this time two of them. Moving forward, he unlocked the door, to hear a single word.

"Eight."

Chapter IV

TWO men appeared in the doorway, both tall, one old, one young. In somber black and a hard black hat, Andrew Lane reminded one of a certain British Prime Minister—without the umbrella. Jeffery Lane was about Riddle's age, twenty-seven or -eight, not too long in the firm with his noted father, and rather weak of face. He stopped just outside the doorway.

The older man cleared his throat.

"Jeffery'd better stay out on the roof, Captain. I have too often had it proved to me that walls have eyes and ears."

"As you wish." Riddle closed and locked the door, switching on another light. "I think it is all here on the table. The sooner you take it away, the better. I might—he grinned—"be tempted to fly by night with it."

Lane chuckled, attacking the big flat packages. Before he could open the first one he dropped it, picking up one of the four tightly wrapped capsules. "Where the devil did these things come from?"

"Yusolov. He had them in his outer pockets. Thought they might be important. Maybe you can tell me what they are."

"You don't know?" Lane stared at

him. "Good Lord, Captain Riddle, you mean you haven't opened them?"

"They're just as I took them off of Yusolov."

Lane was ripping off the windings of tape. "Confound it, my boy, this is the way women smuggle narcotics or gems into the country!"

"The hell you say!" Riddle's eyes were big. "You mean—"

The old man nodded. "Captain Riddle, every Federal agent in the country would know what they are from a block away! Strip a woman naked—stark naked, mind you—and you wouldn't see a thing. Yet she'd have two of these things."

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"Same thing I said years ago. God, look at this! Diamonds!" He had unscrewed the top of one capsule, carefully holding it forward for Riddle to look. "Don't touch it. We'd never get them back without long tweezers to fit them in place. This is dynamite in our hands."

"Dynamite?"

"Worse! Pure nitroglycerine!"

He saw Riddle's bewilderment, and went on more mildly, "If we wanted to save ourselves a world of trouble, we'd throw these infernal things in the middle of the East River and forget them." He shrugged. "But we'd be criminals—in the eyes of Federal law. For this is Federal, and when you mix with anything Federal, confound it, you've got all the devilish little whippersnappers in the business on your neck wanting to know this and that, asking questions. A gang of wise-acres running off at the mouth!"

"But with your reputation—"

"Reputation be damned!" It was the first time Riddle had ever heard the old man swear. "Nobody gets anything but a lot of braying and stomping when he faces a jackass! How the devil can we tell them how we came by these things? And they'd want to know, want to know, want to know! I wish Ivan Yusolov was in hell!"

Riddle grinned. "He's on his way."

"You shot him?"

"No, he got tired of living and shot himself!"

"And these things." Lane was rapidly opening the big cases now. "Nearly two million dollars here, if it's intact."

"It's up to you to find out. Yusolov

was in no mood to check it over with me."

It was there, all of it, jewels and bonds that could be sold for their real value in any part of the world. Lane was like a gloating miser going over each case, smacking his lips, rubbing his long, lean hands.

RIDDLE, no longer interested, was sipping a drink while he watched, glad that the whole thing was about finished. But as he sat there he was remembering the little old woman who had lost all those things—an old lady with snow-white hair now lying in a hospital bed with holes burned in her palms, and her frail body dotted with blisters. He had lied when he'd told the dead Yusolov he had actually seen the burns. He had seen only the official pictures, but they had been pictures to curdle the bile of a real man.

Lydia Martingail had believed in the absolute safety of her old-fashioned wall vault in her big old-fashioned house in the heart of the once fashionable quarter on the rim of Harlem. Leaving the old girl alive after forcing her to open the safe and deliver up her fortune furnished the only mystery in the case. Yusolov and his mink-eyed little gunman, Jitters, might have put her out of her misery with one small bullet through her brain. Instead, they had left her writhing in agony with her mouth taped, her hands and ankles bound.

Her nephew and his wife, returning from downtown, had found her at three in the morning. It had been doubtful she would live until dawn when she had been rushed to a hospital.

"It is all here," Lane had finished a double check in his inspection. "For this job, Captain Riddle, my son and I have decided to cut you in on a third of the insurance company's reward. Fifty thousand dollars. You're making us hog-rich, and it's time we showed our appreciation. Besides, we will have more cases coming. And you're the man to handle them.

"But this"—he waved to the big capsules—"God alone knows what we're to do about them. In recovering the Lydia Martingail loot you have hit into a smuggling ring, and it's big—international."

"But look!" Riddle nodded toward the table. "How far and how long can those things be carried?"

"Hidden?" Lane grinned. "Just across the Line, through the Customs—thirty or forty minutes. Simple if they're not suspected—or put through an X-ray test. In this case, four women were involved, possibly entering the country through Canada or Mexico. Generally they're darned good-looking, dressed like a million, able to sweep an unwary inspector off his feet with a few sweet smiles.

"Sometimes, however"—he shrugged—"they're just the tired, worn kind wearing cheap clothes, their hands showing the signs of honest toil. Women you just couldn't suspect! Sometimes the school-teacher type—even schoolteachers, at that, occasionally. Women who want to make a fast dollar after a tour."

"I saw one of them tonight," Riddle was smiling. "That is, I think I did. What particular advantage would there be in roses tattooed on their thighs—pretty red roses?"

"Roses?" Lane's jaw sagged. "Never heard of such a thing. Go on with it."

"There's little to tell," Riddle shrugged, and briefly told him of the gorgeous blonde in the old studio. "And if she was even in the same house with Yusolov—"

"She'd be in with Yusolov, yes! That infernal beast! We'll talk of that later. Dawn isn't far away, and we've got to get away from here." He pulled pen and checkbook from a pocket and wrote a check which he laid on the table.

Riddle came to his feet. "But you haven't got yours yet!"

"I will have in another few hours." The old man thrust his hand across the table. "Give me a little chance to think what to do with these devilish capsules. I'll call you later, and arrange for an appointment."

Riddle said, "Whatever you decide will be all right by me. But don't call me tonight—this coming night, I mean. I've got a date that must be kept."

CAPTAIN DANIEL RIDDLE sighed with relief as he saw old Lane and his son Jeffery fade away in the pre-dawn darkness, carrying away a fortune.

Riddle, who had been without sleep

now for nearly forty-eight hours, fell asleep in his berth almost immediately, his last waking thoughts that a game like this was a royal road to riches, but it was also a blood-dripping fast road to hell. One slip and a man was done. And too often police, State, and Federals combined to run him down, shoot him like a mad-dog.

Andrew Lane was a wizard. He alone knew where he obtained his information to get his jobs done and no questions asked. Certain underworld characters trusted him where others, believed to be honorable men, wouldn't have dared to give him the time of day.

Old Andy had had his clashes with the law, with the tigers and jackals of grasping politicians shouting for his blood, or his liberty. He had wiggled out. The more power to him if he knew too much about the shady transactions of the greedy-bellied boys.

Chapter V

NONE of it bothered Captain Riddle as he slept, face buried in a fat feather pillow. Gone was Yusolov and the knocked-out beautiful baby with the roses on her gorgeous legs. But another figure was fitting through his dreams, a girl in a rather shabby dark coat, a little turban drunkenly askew on her head.

Damned odd that a girl like that could get under a man's skin so quickly. Hell, he knew them all—the fat ones, the lean, the short, the tall, flat-tailed and flat-chested, the nubs, the nubs and the nobs, the boopers, droopers and super-droopers—sisters all under their skin, good-looking, beautiful, and plain jane. It had usually been best when he graded them all in one pile—just damned bitches and vampires, one little better than the other when it came to the old stock in trade.

That was as ancient as the universe, had been fought over and for by the molecules and microbes of the earliest ditchwater. The great saurians of the stagnant swamplands of Beginning had taken it up, and they in turn had passed it along to the scrawny and hairless thing called mankind.

Maybe a man, after all, was moved quicker by something closer to the simple and plain than by the false sparkling

of would-be great brains housed in peanut-shell skulls adorned with upswings, pony tails, and poodles.

Police cars wailed not far away when the brightening shafts of dawn light were stealing through the cracks in the blinded windows. He never heard a sound. And last night the noise of police cars had quickened his pulses. He slept on, not disturbed at noon when a head-on collision shook the neighborhood, and police cars and fire trucks roared to the scene, the heavy motors pounding for twenty minutes afterward.

It was dark in the little apartment when he awoke, and he had to switch on the light to see that it was three-thirty by his watch. Even a sleepy-head knew that wasn't right. His watch had stopped. And the silver-rimmed little clock on a shelf had stopped at nine-thirty. Reaching over the head of the berth he snapped on the small radio on the desk. A smooth, sickly sweet male voice said, "It is seven-thirty, and time for the Little Star Rovers to drink their wonderful warm Moola-Doola and go to the land of sweet dreams."

"Is that so?"

He clicked off the switch, sat up and set and wound his watch. Still sleepy, he headed into the little bathroom. Stepping quickly into the shower stall to keep from standing and dreading it, he turned a valve, a flood of cold water suddenly changing him into a dancing and shivering chatterbox.

Once sleep was knocked out of him, he took the warmer water and soap. Out of the shower at last he put a small pot of coffee on the stove, and went back in the bathroom to shave. Not another thing on his mind but the thought of eight o'clock. He had his coffee at eight, forcing himself to take ten minutes with it. Then he dialed the phone, and as if she had been sitting waiting she answered on the first ring.

"Olga?"

"Yes."

"Are you ready?"

"As near as I can be, Danny."

"How do you know you're talking to Danny?"

"No one else would be calling me."

"They'd better not! I'd break both your necks!"

"You work fast, Danny."

"We have to down in Texas. We rope them fast or they get away. I'll be there in a taxi in"—he glanced at his watch—"twenty minutes at the most. Powder your nose. I'm getting there as fast as I can!"

HOW was she going to look tonight? He thought about it as he went down the stairs to the street, hand flying up as he saw a cab. In the cab he was still wondering. Last night everything was so fast and foggy. Tonight he was sane and sober. Maybe he should not have called her, after all.

All that was out the window when the cab pulled up in front of the nurses' home. She was a little thing in black up there on the white steps, and a soldier all ablaze with his ribbons—because she had wanted to see him in uniform—was hurrying to meet her with his cap in his hand. A step or two below her he stopped and stared, and she stopped also, looking down at him, eyes wide and sparkling in the pale face under the little black hat over her wavy blonde hair. He lifted his hand.

"Olga!"

She smiled, a little sweet and timid tonight, that little something a man liked. "Careful, please. I think they're watching us through the windows—some of the nurses, I mean."

"All right, Olga." A possessive hand closed on her arm. As they walked down the steps he leaned closer, his voice a low croon. "Have I told you lately that I love you?"

They did the town until three o'clock in the morning. There was little to drink but much to eat, and a whole world of dancing. Never had he seen a girl so radiant, so vivacious. She was bowling him over and twirling him around her finger.

Two of the nurses had dolled her up in sheer black net, loaning her a fur jacket and hat.

He learned more about her. She had been a graduate less than thirty days, after having worked for four years as a student in a little Southern hospital for five huge dollars a month. Unable to make the trip to Minnesota for her mother's funeral, three of the girls at the nurses' home here had tried to pick her

up by taking her out for a few drinks and, going wild as a goat, she had wound up in Paddy's.

It was a good story, and because Danny was no sucker when it came to women, he knew it was true. She was not looking for anything from anybody, and twice during the evening she set him back on his heels by letting him know there was not one thing he could do for her.

The smell of gunsmoke the night before was never mentioned. It seemed to have been completely forgotten. And when they headed back to the hospital he felt that he had known her forever. Forty nurses might have been watching them for all they cared when he took five minutes to kiss her good night, and held her hand until he had to let the door close.

He still wanted to talk to somebody when he was back in the cab. "You've got a girl, of course?" he asked the cabbie.

"Naw." The driver leered back over his shoulder. "Just a wife, five kids and a mother-in-law in the middle of us in a four-room flat. I shoulda swallowed a lighted bomb an' jumped from the bridge!"

It shut Riddle up. He settled back on the seat.

Tonight, with no fortune to carry, he was not the cab-changing and cautious wolf stealing back to his den, yet when he entered his roost a stubby little automatic was in his hand and he made the usual inspection, peeping out on the roofs before turning on the light.

He was unbuttoning his collar when the sudden jangling of the telephone startled him. Stepping forward quickly, he picked up the instrument.

"Yes?"

"Captain?" It was a woman's tired voice, like a sob.

"Yes!"

"I've been trying to get you since"—the voice choked—"since midnight. This is Stella Lane, Andrew's wife and Jeffery's mother. Andrew is conscious now, and he wants you to come and see him at nine this morning. Not any later. Make certain of that. Before others arrive. I'm calling from a public booth at the hospital. Watch yourself going and com-

ing. They'll stop at nothing, as you might know after this terrible thing."

HE THOUGHT she was about to hang up when her voice choked again. "Wait a minute! What are you talking about?"

"Haven't you seen—the papers? Or heard the radio?"

"I haven't seen a paper all day!"

"Jeffery was killed this morning right after leaving you. His father was left for dead. Everything they had was—was taken from them."

"God, no!" He thumbed the light switch, quickly changing position in the darkness. "Go on! This is the first I've heard of anything."

"The killers struck them down from the park. If you only had looked at the papers!"

She wouldn't say any more then, though he urged her, except to add, anxiously:

"Get the papers—somehow! Read them!"

Jeffery Lane dead, and his father left for dead and now in the hospital!

Riddle stood back in the darkness after cradling the phone. Could his face have been seen it would have been the face of a man who had been struck a tremendous blow to the mid-section, grim, white and tight, his lips compressed to a crooked line. A feeling of nausea was like a lump in his stomach.

A man could feel like this in Korea, flak and smoke and roar bursting around him, great hands appearing to push and pull at his guts—a fighting hawk going through hell, maybe with the enemy wing-tipping for the screaming rush at his back.

Andrew Lane had slipped somewhere. He had made one little bobble. One was enough. The racketeers of well-organized gangland here in New York had their own detectives, with decent citizens paying for most of the protection they needed from men tops in the political swim.

Here on the Eastern Seaboard where a few men might fight back, the cards were stacked against them from the beginning. This judge and that had bought his seat on the bench in hard cash planked down to the right politicians.

Gunmen, gamblers and master pimps whose reputations reeked from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans were brazenly entrenched behind certain political thrones. If a man killed one of the bastards, he had killed God!

And if Jeffery Lane had been killed near this place, that meant that this little two-by-four apartment was now on the spot or certainly close to it. A man had to watch his own shadow from here on. Even his shadow could suddenly turn to gashing gunfire, a knife or a black-jack striking from the dark.

He changed clothes in the darkness. In each outside pocket of his light overcoat now rode a stubby automatic, their bullets dum-dummed. A man never wanted merely to wound a bird in this game. The play was for keeps. Once a man pulled the trigger he wanted it to be quick death, the battle won or lost in the first couple of flashes of fire.

Living like this was like prowling through enemy territory with mines and booby traps at every hand. When he opened the door he was to the side of it, gun in hand. Going down the steps it was the same. In the little hallway below he stole a quick look along the sidewalk; making sure before he stepped into the open.

At this hour there were of course no cabs in the district. He walked three blocks before he boarded a downtown bus on the corner, quick eyes raking the four sleepy-looking passengers. At Forty-second Street and Third Avenue he unloaded under the elevated and plodded to Grand Central Station and the all-night newsstands.

IN a rear corner of a coffee shop he settled down with a pile of papers in front of him. He got more than he was looking for in the first headline:

DEAD MAN WHO WALKED WILL LIVE

Of all the startling and unbelievable things! Ivan Yusolov, the louse, was still alive!

Hauled away as dead, he had actually been sent to the morgue to await a post-mortem, had not as yet been undressed for it, only a sheet being tossed over the

body. A couple of hours later the attendants had almost had heart failure, seeing a rocking Frankenstein rising from a cold slab with a sheet around him. The white-swooshing ghost of a thing had reeled uncertainly among the slabs, rocking against the dead not yet pushed into their cubby-holes, a specter muttering broken English.

Rushed into the hospital, they had discovered that the big killer was wearing a vest of steel mesh. The vest had not completely stopped the bullets, but it had slowed them to a stop in the wall of fat covering his ponderous paunch.

Chapter VI

IVAN YUSOLOV alive and going to live! Out of the hospital in a week or ten days, and the great barrel of lard would be back with his gorgeous blonde with the beautiful red roses on her thighs! The paper didn't say that, but Riddle knew.

All of the big man's known record that it had been possible to print was in the story, and between the lines it could be read that he was a killer, a waterfront hoodlum, thief, liar, sneak, and rated high as a foreign spy. He had been in jail and out of jail, arrested twenty-odd times, but somehow had never been put out of the way for more than thirty days at a time.

Nice work—for big, fat, greasy Ivan!

As if gangsters, thugs and spies rated all the space, the story carried little about the Lanes. A cop making his rounds had found the bloody and battered pair in the mouth of a narrow alley. Both had been slugged and stabbed in the back.

Jeffery Lane had been dead when they picked him up, skull crushed, heart slashed. Little hope had been held out for the father, and the cops had not as yet had a chance to question him. Just mystery! One of New York's oldest tales of dead and dying men picked up on the streets, out of dark halls and alleyways by coppers making their nightly rounds.

But in all the papers Yusolov had his day in the sun, a near great character the law could not pin down—a shining model for the city's tough kids.

Taking a round-about way, Riddle

reached the hospital just before nine. In a wing on the lower floor Mrs. Lane, a quiet, gray-haired little lady, was waiting for him. She got up out of a big overstuffed chair wearily when she saw him heading toward her.

"We'll go right up," she told him, putting a frail hand on his arm. "He has a private room, and it will be all right."

They went up on a rear elevator to the room where he lay—a gaunt, gray figure whose face looked bloodless in the dim light. But weakness from his wound which had proved to be not too serious, after all, and his close brush with death had not dampened the old man's courage. He forced a dry smile.

"Yes," he murmured, "they were waiting for us in the dark. Captain, only one other person on earth besides you and me could have known that the jewels and bonds had been recovered. And no matter how much it hurts, I'm afraid Jeffery was to blame—unconsciously. He made a phone call after you called me. I didn't know it until after it was made. He was a close friend to Godfrey Nilo."

"Would Nilo be the old lady Martingail's nephew?"

"Yes, the nephew who found her the night of the robbery. Godfrey and Jeffery went to school together. Jeffery saw a lot of Godfrey and his wife, Emily."

"And Eve," put in the old lady in a whisper. "Don't forget Eve."

"Well, yes, I suppose so." Lane frowned, then winced as though pain had stabbed him. "Eve is Emily's sister. But—but—well, she was just another beautiful woman as far as Jeffery was concerned. Like Emily, very, very beautiful."

"And Eve and evil are close together!"

"My dear"—Lane held up a limp hand—"you never liked any woman Jeffery—"

"Mr. Lane!" A voice at the door cut him short. "We were here last night and they wouldn't let us up. This morning we came as soon as we possibly could."

"Nice of you and Emily, Godfrey." A hint of vexation was in Lane's voice. "Won't you come in?"

Riddle stepped back from the bed, keeping in the shadows, and with his own head averted as much as possible, as with one swift glance he took in Godfrey

Nilo. Tall and thin, skin dark, hair black and flattened on his head like a skull cap. Black-eyed, spindle-shanked, flat-chested, nose big, mouth wide, teeth inclined to protrude—a weak sister who had probably had too damned much money all his life.

EMILY NILO would have held the devil to the spot, the wiggle and the bend taken out of his tail. Here was knock-out beauty in mink, a tiny black hat on a delicately golden blonde head, eyes of a heavenly blue. Between twenty-four and twenty-six, tall, but with a well-rounded body and a bosom high and full.

And even as Daniel Riddle gazed at her, in his mind's eye the mink coat and dinky hat disappeared—and he was seeing a beautiful woman on a messy bed, red mules on her feet, long white legs sprawled out, on each thigh a bright red rose.

As the vision faded, he heard himself murmuring, "I'm glad to know you," and he was bowing stiffly.

She reminded him of a big, siky kitten as she purred, "So sorry if we came too early. I just couldn't hold poor Godfrey any longer."

"Mighty sorry we failed you at the last moment, Godfrey," said Lane.

"You have never failed anyone." Nilo put a quick, gentle hand on the old man's shoulder. "If poor Aunt Lydia hadn't been such a strong-head about her old cracker barrel vault none of it would have had to happen."

"But you still have the insurance on the stuff, Godfrey."

Nilo's shoulders sagged. "What is money, with you hurt like this—and Jeffery gone?"

"Some men"—Lane smiled wanly—"go far for money, Godfrey. As soon as I'm able I'll be back trying again. Jeffery would want that."

"There'll be no next time!" Godfrey Nilo set his jaw. "Good God, I've lost my best friend—"

"Godfrey, darling!" Emily touched him as he turned away, long and thin dark hands quickly covering his face. "Stop it!"

"Sorry, sweetheart." Nilo straightened, forcing a smile. "Guess I'm a little wrought up, Emily."

"We all understand. You loved Jeffery so."

"Yes, I loved him like a brother."

"Go home, Godfrey." Lanes' limp hand was up again. "And rest. There is nothing you can do here."

"By all means," Lane's wife urged, "get him home, Emily. Put him to bed with a good hot toddy and let him rest. I'll go see your aunt as soon as—" Her voice trembled. "There's Jeffery's funeral—"

"Poor Jeffery! Poor Aunt Lydia!" Godfrey Nilo looked about ready to break apart. "If there's anything we can do, for God's sake please call us!"

"We will," agreed Andrew Lane with an inescapable hint of relief in his tone. "Thank you so much for coming."

As the door closed behind the visitors, Captain Riddle began, "So that was Godfrey Nilo and—"

"Wait!" Lane cut him off, lifting his hand and turning to his wife. "Stella, please go out, close the door, and keep everybody out for the next few minutes. We won't be long. The police will soon be back. I don't want this man here when they arrive." When she had closed the door he said, "And now, what did you think of Godfrey Nilo?"

"Weak, dissipated. I got his number at first glance. His Emily could be hot getting what she wants, playing on her gifts of nature. And the damned weak saps give her their shirts. —I noticed you garbled my name when you introduced us."

"Young man, you have sharp ears." Lane's smile was thin. "But let your opinions hang fire while I have my say. It's like this—the insurance is in Godfrey's name. His aunt doesn't believe in insurance. Godfrey and his wife are the old girl's protecting angels! She pays all the bills without knowing where her money's going. Sun rises and sets in Godfrey! Eccentric is a small word for her. Period."

"Godfrey and Emily are night owls. At ten o'clock almost every night you'll see them whizzing downtown in one of those underslung green convertibles—special job, snow-white top, and silver trim. After that until dawn, usually, you'll find them in the Jungle Joy, an ultra arty night club in Greenwich Village. Very

hoity-toity. Only the best and fattest purse, you know. A handsome young Army officer with a good-looking girl who smells like a rich man's daughter wouldn't have much trouble getting in, but maybe you'd better climb into soup-and-fish if—"

RIDDLE grinned. "I've been there. In fact, I have a club card for the joint." "You surprise me!"

"An old colonel sponsored me there. He wanted to see the naked ladies. You just tell me the rest of it. You don't trust Godfrey Nilo. I don't. You want to get a tie-in on whom he meets. And while I think of it, I still have your check in my pocket."

"And you'll cash it!" cut in the old man. "You did your job, and well, I bungled mine, and that's no skin off your neck. They didn't get those confounded capsules. I hid the infernal things behind three old water barrels on your roof. There'd have been no explaining them if I'd been caught with them. I never carry all my eggs in one basket anyway."

"Suppose somebody finds the capsules?"

Lane smiled. "Not one chance in ten thousand. If they do, let them explain. Get them yourself and put them in another good hiding place. We might do a little horse trading with the Government, but the original job comes first."

Riddle knew that Lane was not telling all he knew or suspected. A wise old gambler cautiously playing his cards. Learning fast, Riddle kept a lot of his own thoughts to himself.

Ten minutes later he was at the rear entrance of the hospital, entering his waiting cab.

Chapter VII

IN THE hospital driveway, the cab headed around the building. As it swung around the corner of the wing Riddle sat back stiff and straight with his hat slanted down. He had spotted a green convertible with a snow-white top parked on the other side of the street. In it—both smoking cigarettes—sat Godfrey Nilo and his gorgeous wife, waiting, maybe, to get a look at him in a good light.

But he knew they didn't see him—not then—and was satisfied that he had not been followed when he was back in his little apartment within an hour. Looking out across the roofs, he saw the place Lane had mentioned. There was no reason to wait. He stepped out through his door to the roof, and a couple of minutes later had the infernal capsules hidden in the old-fashioned water-box high up on the wall above the john in the bathroom.

Between changing cabs he had stopped long enough to send a telegram, after he had gone to his bank, deposited Lane's check and drawn a fat roll of cash for himself. Like a man with ants in his pants he sat back in the big leather chair to wait for an answer to his wire, the doors locked and the blinds drawn, the automatic beside him. But, still tired, he was sound asleep when the ringing of the phone brought him out of his chair.

It was Olga Petersen, voice tense with anxiety.

"Danny, I just got your telegram. Is there anything wrong?"

"Yes, Olga." He was diving on his target, making it fast. "Pay any price to get another nurse to take your place. I want you to get off as quickly as possible for the rest of the day."

"But I can't!" she said desperately. "I'm new here on the job as you know. I was lucky to get into surgery the first thing so—"

"Olga!" He cut her short. "You can't let me down!"

"But—but I'll be off tomorrow. It's my day—"

"Pay any price. I need you. Trust me Olga. Move fast. Call me as soon as you fix it."

"It won't need any fixing tomorrow." "The devil with tomorrow!" he cried.

"I want you, I need you now! *Fast!*" "You're scaring me to death!"

"Maybe I'm dying." He put a groan into it. "I called you. I—need you. I—" "Danny!" she half-shrieked. "I'm coming without asking!"

"No!" he cried. "Ask them and call me right back."

"All right, Danny, all right! I'll jump the job if I must!"

When he cradled the instrument he

muttered, "Louse! What a lamb-killing sheep-dog you turned out to be!"

He looked at his watch. Two o'clock already. How long had he slept in that chair? But he'd certainly needed rest.

A portable set in the corner caught his eye. He switched it on with a stack of records to play. The room was reeling with "I'm Walking the Floor Over You" when the telephone jingled. He left the song playing as he picked up the receiver.

"Danny, I made it!" Her voice was sharp. "Now tell me what is wrong with you!"

"Listen!" He held the transmitter toward the portable for a moment. "That's maybe the part that's killing me. How long must I wait before I can roll up to your door?"

"Well"—she was trying to be firm—"now that I've gone this far I can be ready in fifteen minutes. But—but what's it all about?"

"Murder!"

"Oh, my God!"

In fifteen minutes when he met her and pushed her into the cab, she was breathless and panting with excitement. "Now you behave!" she told him. "You can't do these things right here in front of the hospital!"

"I can kiss you with all Manhattan looking!"

"But you won't." She thrust him back. "I'm just a country girl, a rube Swede from Minnesota, and I'm not used to all this. You're killing me!" She looked at him with a wild light in her blue eyes. "And that reminds me! Where is that murder—and who is it?"

"Only a couple of women. Not important."

"Women?"

"Yeah." He nodded. "I got tired of them."

SHE turned away, then stiffened.

"Don't!"

"The hospital's out of sight now." He pulled her to him. "Stay right there where you belong."

"Until you get tired of me, too?"

"Yes." He grinned. "Maybe I'll just dump you in the river."

"And I can't swim! Awful!"

"I'm an awful man. A Bluebeard."

"All right." She slumped closer. "When you're ready, give me time to say my prayers. Just tell me now what bridge we're going to."

"The driver knows."

It was all he was ready to tell her, and when they pulled up at one of the smartest stores on Fifth Avenue she was startled. She was too poorly dressed, though spotlessly clean, for this place.

"I'm not going in there, Danny!" she declared, when he paid the driver. "Please!"

"You'll do what, I say." He pulled her out of the cab. "And like it as long as you can. I never know when a spell is coming on."

Two hours later, in a little coffee shop, she was still trying to argue with him. He was afraid she was about to go on a crying jag.

"You're beautiful," he growled. "You're going to stay that way. We have a few things more to get."

"But I never owned a fur coat before in my life!"

"You do now. One not nearly good enough for you, but how pretty you are in it!"

She looked at herself in the mirror on the wall. "I'm in fur—Persian lamb! Maybe skunk would be more suitable. You're buying me, Danny. That's all there is to it. Maybe I should feel some satisfaction in knowing I come high."

He grinned at her. "Average black slaves just out of the jungle used to bring from four hundred to four thousand. Skinned to the hide and on a good block with the proper lighting you'd probably hit the jackpot."

"And you don't even know what you've got!"

"I have a damned good idea."

"You're crazy!"

"The Army found that out." His face became serious. "Too many runs over Korea. Now New York, and maybe the last high fly."

"I don't know what to make of you."

"Don't try. And another thing." He caught her wrist, his jaw setting. "If and when you're close enough to hear me crying in my sleep, don't get up and run away."

"Korea?"

"Korea."

"Then you do need a nurse!"

"Maybe." He was grinning again, all seriousness gone. "That's why I went all out for you, angel."

"I'll bet you've got a string of girls a mile long! I can almost hear them walking from here to only God knows where. You snatch them, then kill 'em!"

"I haven't killed you yet."

She nodded. "But something tells me one country gal from Minnesota is walking the last mile. . . ."

At nine o'clock, when she met him on the corner of Christopher and Sheridan Square, she was radiant in a little black dinner dress and her pretty new fur coat. Her eyes widened as she stared at him.

"In uniform again, and—of all things!—big horn-rims! I had to look three times to make sure. What is this—a disguise?"

"Like it?"

"No!" She turned up her nose. "You look like Professor Dinklepuss. And you've parted your hair in the middle. I never saw anyone changed so much, or so quickly."

He hooked his hand under her arm. "While we mosey along, tell me what they said at the nurses' home about the captain's lady."

SHE grinned up at him as they headed down Christopher. "Lord, they rode me! One of 'em said I'd nailed Mr. Moneybags and wanted to know if you had any old loose friends lying around. Another one said I'd been holding out on them, and must be a madam with a joint somewhere. I did some tall lying to take the heat off. I told 'em I'd married you when I was fifteen out in Minnesota, and my mother had had it annulled."

"So I'm your husband!"

"Was." She laughed at him. "Where are we going, if I'm supposed to know."

"You're not supposed to know. Just be nice and don't start a fight."

In the jumbled maze of crooked streets and old houses that is Greenwich Village, after they had turned a few more corners she couldn't have told where they were. At last they went through a green doorway, down a narrow lane dimly aglow with small bulbs, and were in a wide, oblong courtyard with ancient houses on each side, and

small trees dotting the ground.

She was big-eyed when they stopped in front of a tall door. He touched the buzzer. A whale of a Negro in a marine cadet's monkey jacket and baggy pantaloons opened the door. Riddle showed him a card and they were ushered inside.

Entering the great main room was like walking into a jungle of low palms, creepers, and small trees shading white-topped tables flanking a dance floor. Riddle slipped the man in the monkey jacket a bill after they had checked their coats and his cap in a hole that looked like the mouth of a cave. A pretty Negro girl with a gold ring in her nose, and naked from the waist up, gave him his check—a number on a small brass lizard.

They were seated at a table in a shadowy pocket against the wall. On a shelf just a little above their heads was a long glass aquarium. Perched on rocks in the water sat four fat green bullfrogs.

As their eyes became accustomed to the dimmed lighting they could see people, some half-hidden and some completely hidden at tables in the artificial foliage.

A jungle all right.

A shining Negro girl as pretty as a picture appeared with a tray of cigarettes. She was stark naked, except for a necklace of what looked like tiger fangs around her throat, and a ring in her nose. Riddle took a couple of packs of cigarettes and parted with three dollars.

Olga Petersen was indignant when the girl had moved on.

"She didn't even say 'Thank you!'"

"Thinks I'm a cheap guy, I guess." He laughed. "She's probably used to five spots. Or her boss is."

Chapter VIII

MENUS and wine lists were brought by one of the waiters who were all in black except for something like a white diaper around their middles. By the time the drinks arrived an orchestra hidden somewhere in the jungle was beginning to pour out soft strains of music. Dance couples began appearing on the floor. Olga Petersen stared at them, fascinated.

"I'm lucky," she leaned forward to

confide. "Such beautiful women, and the men just whopping big bellies with fat cannon balls for heads."

He reached over and squeezed her wrist. "Sssh! Sugar daddies usually come like that."

"All right, but it's true. They're just bellies with legs and heads on them! How'd you ever find a place like this?"

"Here comes the waiter with dinner."

Patience and whispers kept her from asking too many questions all through their dinner. At a quarter after ten things were beginning to move.

Godfrey Nilo appeared, just as Lane had said he would. It was soup-and-fish for himself. For Emily it was flimsy blue and sparkling jewels. Sudden applause rippled, the orchestra immediately blaring away with something that had to do with "waltzing my baby on the air."

"Somebody important?" whispered Olga. "Gosh, she's beautiful!"

"Sure." He nodded.

"And he hasn't got a belly."

Being in the shadows was not enough to keep Riddle from lowering his head when Nilo and his wife passed with the big Negro in the monkey jacket. They were seated at a big round table just behind Riddle and Olga, with a screen of foliage hiding them.

This was better than a doctor could have ordered it. A couple came across the floor, joining the Nilos, then another, and a third. Big bellies and fair ladies.

The last pair was the most interesting. The girl was a little, well-rounded Irish redhead. The man reminded Riddle of Ivan Yusolov, except that he was short, no more than five-feet-three—a barrel-like figure on fat stumps of legs in the voluminous trousers of a double-breasted business suit. Bald to a line above his big ears, the rest of his hair was a rusty brush. He had a bulldog jaw, a pudgy, uptilted nose.

Emily Nilo greeted them with a twitery laugh. "Dr. Buzzby and little Minnie! Do join us!"

"But won't we be crowding?"

"Not at all." Emily's laugh seemed a trifle forced. "We take this big table every night just to have room for our friends. Tomorrow night the party's at our house, and you're coming, of course?"

"That means"—Buzzby's laugh was low and heavy—"the old lady's still in the hospital."

"For another month—we hope!" Godfrey Nilo answered him. "And damned good riddance."

"Godfrey!" Emily's reproach was sharp. "How mean!"

"Let him alone!" Dr. Buzzby's Minnie cracked at Emily. "I have a sick mother at home on my hands, and it gets darned boring. We will be at the party, Emily."

Riddle was tired of it before the first hour was up, and was slumped in his chair by midnight. Olga looked weary, too, and both were easing up their glasses and quickly emptying the drinks which were a necessary evil if they were to stay, into the frog bowl.

It was senseless chatter at the big table. Now and then they danced. Right after midnight, when Olga had slipped away to the powder room, the whole party were dancing except Godfrey Nilo who sat alone. An acquaintance had come up to claim Emily.

A BIG, square-jawed, blue-eyed blond man who seemed to have been waiting for this moment quickly appeared from the shadows beyond. Without waiting for an invitation he slumped down on a chair beside Nilo.

"We want action, Nilo!" Riddle heard him say, his voice flat, final. "There's been enough of this stalling."

"But, damn it, you can't push the horses!" Nilo was scared. "There must first be a settlement."

"They offered half before."

"But, Rod, half's not enough! Think of me. I won't have anything out of it."

"You'll have your neck out of the penitentiary—and maybe skip the hot seat." The blond man seemed to be laughing at him. "Old lady could yet die. I'll be at that party, Godfrey. We're building a heat under you."

"But, Rod, if I can't—"

"Shut up!" growled the blond man, rising from the chair. "I didn't come to this table to hear you cry. Here come a couple of your chiseling friends. Just remember what I said. And another thing, Nilo." The big man's voice was like the hiss of a snake. "Yusolov's taken a sudden turn for the worse. Some

of the fragments of the bullets got through to that mountain of guts he's been pushing around. That's bad."

"But—but," Nilo gasped, "I had nothing to do with his getting shot!"

"How do we know that?" There was a short mocking laugh. "You hired him for the first job, the big bastard!"

It was all over in a few moments, and the blond was weaving back through the crowd. Nilo's gang returned, crowding noisily around the table, chairs scraping as they seated themselves.

Olga was back only an instant before everything turned into a screaming uproar at the big table. Riddle got a glimpse of a flash by the side of his face, a splatter of something striking his cheek. Emily Nilo screamed before he could lift his hand to his face.

"On my back! On my back!"

"Damn it, look out!"

"They're all over!" Olga Petersen's voice came out a thin little shriek. "On the table!"

"Frogs!" somebody bawled. "They're flying out of that glass thing!"

"Eee-eee-ek! They're so slimy!"

"Waiter!" yelled Riddle. "Bring the check!"

"Eee-eee-ek!" Olga's next screech was high and eerie as a cold-bellied flying thing spat her on the cheek. It fell in a wiggling, kicking lump on the table, to bounce away in the shadows. "What's the matter with the things?"

Riddle grabbed her wrist. "They're drunk!"

She was still tingling with excitement when they got outside, leaving the club in an uproar of laughter, shrieking and yelling.

"What in the world did happen?" she demanded. "They were everywhere!"

"The trough was larger than it looked." He was still grinning. "Bet there were forty frogs in it, and they were either drunk or just couldn't stand the taste or smell of those drinks we were ditching in the water with them. Some acted like they were hell-bent on fighting everybody in the house."

He hooked his arm under her arm, pulled her closer as they walked on.

"And you started it," he chided mockingly. "You poured in the first drink.

Another Eve misleading another helpless Adam. Hungry?"

"Hungry?" She stared up at him. "After that dinner? And what a bill you paid!"

"I still could go a steak four inches thick."

"You fly too high for me, Danny.— Why do you keep glancing behind us like that?"

"I'm afraid of the dark. I'm at home in the air, and nervous on the ground."

"Were you scared in that place?"

"Scared?" He stopped and stared down at her.

SHE gave him a short jab in the ribs. "Don't lie!" If ever I saw mule ears stretching on a man they were on you tonight, and those ears were cocked on the big round table behind you. I'm not asking any more questions than I can help, but I can tell you right now—she set her jaw—"you thrill and make me bubble with happiness one minute, and leave me chilling to death the next. Danny, I'm trying awfully hard to understand you."

"And you won't for a time, Olga." He was urging her on. "Just let things ride. By the way"—he was looking down at her again—"how'd you like to have some beautiful red roses tattooed on your pretty white legs?"

"Good heavens, what next!" She tried to pull loose from him. "Besides, you don't know whether my legs are white or green!"

"If they are green," he said, walking her on, "we'll dab some white roses on them."

"Danny"—there was a small catch in her voice—"I think you'd better take your pretty coat and go home."

"Listen, you!" He stopped and swept her off her feet into his arms. He kissed her savagely, on chin, cheeks, eyes, then a minute-long blue bender to her lips, hushing her. Just as suddenly as he had picked her up he let her down. "I've got no other gal to wear that coat. It's on the gal I bought it for. My gal!"

"All right, Danny. Remember what I said about the last mile."

"Then you're going right on with me tonight?"

"If—if you can get anybody to open

City Hall and give us a license tonight."

"I'm damned if I don't think you mean that," he said.

"You've got it straight." She was trembling all over. "I'm just a dumb creak from Minnesota, but—but I've got what you call guts. I'm wallowing by the head, as Uncle Eric would say, but I haven't lost all my bearings."

"Then I'm taking you right home."

"I think," she sighed, "that would be best for us both."

She was stumbly when he helped her into the cab. Pulling her close, he felt her trembling. He cursed himself when he smashed another one of those long kisses to her lips, feeling her wilt. . . .

At dawn he had her back at the nurses' home. In a place uptown he had all but danced her heels off, the Nilos and Andrew Lane forgotten, nothing remembered but the little figure in his arms. She was tired now and looked ready to drop at the door, but her eyes still held the old sparkle.

"Sleep," he told her. "Thank heaven for the day off. I'll call you in the middle of the day or early afternoon."

"Then—you're not going away for good? Like you said?"

"Before long, yes. When I can take you with me."

In the cab again he fell back against the cushions, knocked out himself. The wariness of the old wolf had gone out of him. Only one thought held him. Tonight somehow he was going to Godfrey Nilo's party. Somebody at that party was going to give him the answer to the missing gems and bonds, and he couldn't help feeling that they were back in the big old house, with the four-flushing Godfrey and his beautiful Emily having failed to pay the fiddlers who had helped recover them.

Godfrey was just the kind of fool to believe he could have gems and bonds and the insurance money as well; just enough ass to trust killers to do a job for him and let him alone afterward.

For the first time in ten days Riddle went up the dark little hallways without a gun in his hand. Everything looked all right when he opened the door and stepped inside. He felt for the light switch. There was only a click—no light. Instantly he started to step back.

The door closing on him violently told him he was in for it—one careless minute, and the roof ready to fall on him.

A blackjack smashed downward, a shadow moving furiously but soundlessly. His cap broke some of the blow, but the next one wilted him. Before he could swing his head clear the third blow caught him at the base of the skull. Vaguely he heard a voice in the darkness:

"Don't kill him—yet!"

Forty blows could have been struck after that without his feeling them. Blackness took charge, overwhelming him in a rounding dark ring that was like the shutter of a fast camera noiselessly closing.

Chapter IX

FROM somewhere came light, sheeting for a moment like the flashing of rapid gunfire against a distant black mountain wall in an intensely black night. It was just that sheeting for a moment, then darkness again closing in.

When the light came once more it was millions of many-colored bubbles dancing, jiggling, suddenly breaking into long streaks and bursting stars—a gigantic display of fireworks against a black background of sky.

"You hit too hard," growled a voice. "Damn it, Hutch, you killed the last one."

"That was with the new one. I used my old one tonight. Six ounces of bird shot in leather—satisfying dynamite that never killed anybody."

"How about Speckles?"

"You're a dirty liar! I didn't kill Speckles!"

"His moll thinks you did. If she ever gets a chance she'll put a knife or a bullet in your kidney."

"Yusolov made her think that, the bastard! And you know why without asking. He'd make 'em think whatever he wanted them to after he got to 'em. —Wet the towel on that duck's head again. I don't like it up here."

"Nobody comes here."

"Lane and Jeffery did."

"And Jeffery's dead and the old man in the hospital. Just too bad his damn shoulder-blades turned the knife. A kid

could have done a damned better job."

"Goofy and Puggy always bungle 'em. What's that got to do with some more ice water on that Army bird in the chair?"

Through cracked eyelids Riddle was taking a good look at the man who had been called Hutch. The other was out of his line of vision. Hutch was straight ahead, sitting with his back against the door to the narrow hall. He was a beefy fellow with rusty-red hair, florid-faced, around forty and weighing about two hundred and twenty pounds. His nose was like a mashed yam against his face, the mouth wide, the lips thick. His ears were lumpy, eyes little reddish jewels—a former prizefighter and a damned tough lug who had seen a lot of battering and mauling.

No man could have feigned unconsciousness for long when the other man—a short, bushy-haired, dark fellow of about thirty, in baggy gray—returned, and doused water that was like ice over Riddle's head and shoulders. Unable to help it, his eyes popped open, a chill shaking him violently. With a quick, apelike lurch, thick lips warping into a grin, gold-capped teeth glinting, the ex-prizefighter was on his feet.

"This is more like it!" he grunted. "Smart boys, some of you Army birds. None of you too smart for us. Where's the diamonds you took off Yusolov?"

A hand shot forward, slapping Riddle's face and rocking him far over to the side of the chair in which he sat. It was then that he realized his wrists were taped behind him and his ankles bound together. As he rocked straight a wide-open left hand caught him on the other side of the face, and the big man stepped back, long arms and hands swinging.

"We play fast, sweetheart!" he chortled. "Just tell us."

"Tell you what?" Riddle glared up at him helplessly. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"You will before we're done with you." The shorter man gave Dan's nose a painful twist. "Ever have an electric iron tied to the bottom of your naked foot? My big pal's good at that."

"Give him a heavy shot of the Scotch he's got in the kitchen." The big one

seemed to be boss. "Let's get the boy awake. Cigarette, chum?" He reached for one of the black hardwood cigarette boxes on the table. Turning, he pushed it between Riddle's lips, and stepped back to strike fire from Riddle's little Buddha lighter beside the boxes. "Smoke up! We could use a fast bird like you in the little games of marbles we play, but you're shooting with the wrong crowd. Old Andy Lane will only get you killed."

THE only thing that could be done was to sit and take it. If these apes had searched the apartment they had not found the steel capsules hidden in the water-box above the john. Once back in their hands the quick stroke of a knife could end everything. The East River was close. One more body would mean only a ripple in the water, and if properly weighted just a few more bones to rot in the mud and sand.

Big Hutch was grinning again. "If you haven't caught the point, we don't like Andy Lane, even though he has been known to make deals and pay fair sums with no questions asked—when things were returned. Some of these insurance fixers are like that. Lane's son started good, and wound up a stink. A good-looking woman can make a preacher lay his Bible down, they tell me."

"I see." Riddle nodded, trying a quick shot in the dark. "You'd mean Eve or Emily."

"So you know them?"

"I've just heard of them."

"Did Lane tell you about them when you went to see him yesterday morning?"

"How would you know I went to see him?"

"We know everything." The big man chuckled. "Our business to know. Like about your little blonde nurse at the hospital. Cute trick. Yusolov should have had her for one week. After that you could have packed her up and sent her home in a sardine can. Her name's Olga, ain't it?"

The telephone cut him off. He looked at it, then at the other man.

It was a blind number. No one could get it from Information. Such a phone

was simply not listed. That meant that these two had used it after coming here, and had passed the number on to somebody else. They were counting the rings. At the eleventh, the big man picked up the instrument.

"Well?" His eyes lighted as he listened. "Yeah, sure! The plumber's here. The job is goin' fine, but we could still use the female for that union. Think it would wind up the job a lot faster."

He turned back to Riddle with a grin when he had cradled the phone. "How'd you like to see your girl friend, Captain Riddle? Something tells me it won't be long now. We work fast—like you work. In handling romantic young guys it's always a good idea to bring in the lady in the case."

Despairingly Captain Riddle realized that to argue with these killers or try to make a deal with them would be only a waste of time. Sympathy for anything that stood in their way was unknown. The women who associated with them were even tougher than they were, and they knew no other kind. They reasoned coldly, logically where their interests were concerned. Once in a while the law caught up with them. Even then they had the last laugh, seeing anywhere from a quarter to a million dollars of the tax-bled suckers' money spent, but failing to convict them.

This pair showed no signs of being in a hurry. Since they evidently were convinced that the steel capsules were not in the apartment, Riddle decided to try to inject the suspicion of one double-cross after another in the game. He played a hunch.

"How far," he ventured, "do you go with Puggy and Goofy?"

Big Hutch turned on him with a leer. "What'n hell would you know about them?"

"Nilo would know more."

"Then you're a smart guy who maybe knows a lot of angles. Maybe you was tryin' to two-time Lane!"

"I didn't say that."

"Maybe you will!" Hutch stepped closer—"after me and Zunk are through knockin' that handsome face around to the back of your neck. How much do you know about Godfrey Nilo?"

"How about Emily and Eve?" Riddle

sparred. "If you birds had heads on your shoulders instead of lumpa to put hats on you'd have had all the answers before now."

"Smart, ain't you?" The shorter man stepped forward. "How much would you know about Eve?"

"Maybe I've seen the roses." It was a long shot in the dark, but the jaws of both men dropped. "I've wondered if Nilo's wife wears them, too."

BIG HUTCH flapped his shovel-like hands. "They make guys wonder! And not about roses. One question more about Eve. If you muff it, I'll knock that face around. How many leaves are on the stems?"

"Six. They get smaller from rose to the butt of the stem."

"Then you've seen 'em!" Big Hutch stepped back, rubbing his jaw briskly.

"How in hell," the shorter man snarled, "would you know?"

"How?" Big Hutch grinned at him. "Maybe a lot don't know they ain't the only damned frogs in the pond. You—"

The telephone stopped him again, and once more the two stood counting the rings. At the eleventh Hutch picked up the instrument.

"Yeah? Good! Buzz her along." He cradled the phone. "Big May is on the fly. Won't be long from here on."

"And if you ever get another chance, chum," put in the shorter man to Riddle, "maybe you'll learn to keep your trap shut when ridin' cabs. Didn't it once occur to you that there was one right at hand each time you needed one?"

"You fellows are smart."

"Sure." Big Hutch chuckled. "That's why we still go on livin' when so many others wash up in the river. Bait any two-legged wolf with plenty of money and beautiful floozies and he's got to be smart if he wants to keep 'em."

"Stop playing with him!" The man who had just been called Zunk still held the pallor around the mouth that had come when they were talking about roses. "He's sounding you out, and like a damn fool you're spilling your guts. We came here for diamonds."

Hutch clenched his fists. "We'll get 'em before we're done. Hell, we always do! And more'n half of 'em won't be

paste, either."

"Paste?" asked Riddle sharply.

"Sure." Hutch laughed. "Godfrey and Emily pulled a fast one on the old gal. Half the old lady's stuff is paste. The McCoy's been replaced with a lot of junk."

"Then why in hell," demanded Riddle, "did they bring in Yusolov and Jitters to manhandle the old lady so badly?"

"Any jackass would know there had to be a cover-up," sneered Zunk. "Now ask that big bastard"—he jabbed a finger at Hutch—"and he'll tell you Jitters went on a little trip to the bottom of the Hudson the night after the take."

Hutch shrugged. "Yusolov caught him too close to the roses." He stabbed his finger at Zunk. "That fool is still crying at the belly. He once had little enough sense to believe the great and beautiful Eve was his one and only. I never did."

"She would go for you, Hutch." Riddle was never cooler, playing them one against the other, since Zunk had shown his jealousy. "You're big and virile, but I can't see her falling too hard for a waddy-looking bird like Zunk. He's only a belly with a head on it."

"You—you dirty bastard!" Zunk was coming for him with his fists closed. "I'll smash your face to dog meat!"

"Keep off!" Big Hutch shoved him back. "Don't get mad at the guy for just telling you the truth."

Having stumbled upon one pinch of truth about them Riddle had them going after that, two men who had been violently jealous of each other over the same woman. Once quarreling and snapping sharp digs at each other, they kept it up.

Big Hutch was the best man of the two, and it was soon evident that Zunk was afraid of his hamlike fists and powerful arms. If Hutch ever stepped out of the apartment Riddle could expect to catch it from Zunk, for the Army man was constantly taking sides with the big fellow, playing on his vanity, egging him on.

Chapter X

SOME noise on the stairs finally brought the verbal battle of the thugs to an end. Riddle was ignored. Big

Hutch and Zunk were noiseless shadows moving forward. A big black automatic in his hand, Hutch stepped to a position that would put him behind the door, while Zunk set himself to open it. There was a low knock, and a low voice suddenly let both men relax.

"It's May. Let me in!"

The door opened, and there she was, an exceptionally big woman of about thirty, in a blue suit, with a small hat atop her flame-red hair. Backed against her as if balking was Olga Petersen—big-eyed and scared.

"Danny!" Olga darted forward, face bloodless as she stared down at him. "This woman said you'd been hurt in an auto accident!"

"Easy, kid." Zunk put a big hand on her shoulder. "Just take off your drawers and stay a while."

"Take your paw off me!"

Her right hand swung upward, caught Zunk on the nose. Surprised, he staggered back with an oath, a dribble of blood coming from his nose.

"Damn you!" He set himself for a blow. "I'll—"

"You won't, spoiled boy." Big May's right hand caught the collar of his coat and hauled him back. "When I'm around and women are to be beat up I'll do it, not you. Let her alone!"

"He's mad at me." Big Hutch was grinning. "Just found out that a certain broad was my baby on the side while he was buying her fur coats and diamonds."

"Don't brag!" Big May wheeled on him, hands on her lips, jaw outthrust, a good-looking woman—and dangerous. "For three months you've belonged to me whether I'm wild about God's great gift to women or not! If I catch you stepping out of line I'll cut those cauliflower ears off your ugly head and make you swallow them! And now maybe you can take time to tell me"—she wiggled a thumb at the girl—"what you want with this little twist?"

"Take it easy, baby." Hutch patted her shoulder with an awkward paw. "Maybe she's an ace in the hole—if Zunk don't start trying to buy her a coat."

"You dirty bastard!"

Zunk was no longer able to stand it. He started for Hutch. Big May moved like a barge between them, hands

against their chests to hold them apart.

"Shut it down!" she yelled.

"I'll beat his brains out!" Big Hutch wanted to fight. "He can't get over Yusolov takin' his woman."

"Jealous dogs!" Big May again thrust them back. "Yusolov's out of it. He died this morning. And the radio said he never did dare to tell who shot him, either."

Riddle's hands had been free behind him now for minutes. Big Hutch had taken his guns, but had overlooked a small pen-knife Riddle always carried under a couple of handkerchiefs in his right hip pocket—a little thing less than three inches long, and never intended to be an ace in a matter of life and death like this.

With the broad bands of adhesive tape cut between his wrists, Riddle had been getting the cramped numbness out of his hands while Zunk and Big Hutch threw pet names at each other.

Now, with Big May between them, Riddle had suddenly reached forward and down. With two fast rakes of the sharp blade he freed his ankles. When he leaped to his feet in his hands was the heavy brass smoking stand swung up from the right side of his chair.

"Danny! Lord, no!"

ZUNK turned, startled by Olga's voice. With a jerk he was half around, a big hand pawing for a weapon. The lead-filled bottom of the smoking stand caught him on the side of the head. With one surprised gasp he lunged back, hitting Big May with all his weight and knocking her into the amazed Hutch who suddenly seemed muscle-bound for an instant by the unexpected.

It was surprise all around. Big May slumped to the floor as if she had been in these things before and knew how to put herself down. Big Hutch croaked something like a gaspy oath and bobbed backward out of the way. More of a prizefighter than a triggerman, his big fists came up, feet setting themselves, and shoulders lumping to weather the rush.

A flying smoking stand didn't know a thing about the manly art of self-defense. It shot through the air. A born fighter, Big Hutch rolled his head as if

to let a fast glove slide over his thick-skulled poll. But there was no give when the brass bottom struck, bounced, turned end for end, and struck the door. Hutch went backward and down.

But, waiting for no count, Big Hutch was coming up when a flying figure shot over the big woman on the floor and landed like a dancer in front of him. A swift kick shot forward. Big Hutch caught it squarely on the point of his chin, and the next minute he was sprawling backward and going to stay there for at least a while longer.

"No, you don't!"

Riddle wheeled, just in time to see Big May sitting up, clawing in her overfilled bosom. Right behind her, terror in eyes now a violent green, was Olga Petersen. In her hand was a heavy metal candlestick she'd snatched from a shelf. There was a brassy flash, a bounce on top of May's head. The woman rolled over, flattening herself out on her stomach like an enormous frog, and the girl leaped back to take a fierce whack at the rising head of Zunk, and down again was Mr. Zunk, his scalp spilling blood.

"This is an awful place!" screamed Olga. "I want to get out of here!"

"Hold it, honey." Riddle threw up his hands, not knowing where the swinging candlestick might take a notion to land next. "We'll soon be leaving here together."

"I don't like your friends!" she squaled. "Look out! Kick him again! He's getting up!"

He whirled just in time. Big Hutch was struggling upward, still in a daze, but the old fighter brain was instinctively forcing him to try to beat the count. A fast kick to the side of the jaw put him back and down, this time to stay.

"I want to get out of here!" Olga's candlestick was swinging wildly. "You only run around with bums!"

"They're killers, Olga."

Klunk! The candlestick struck again. Big May had started up, and though her hat and heavy hair were some protection, she laid down again.

Zunk was a hard man to keep down. When he started up again there was something like a whirling flash of brass in the air. Even Riddle grunted when he saw the candlestick land squarely on top

of Zunk's head with all the fury of a girl's fear and anger behind it.

"What a cat with a candlestick!" he said fervently.

Rolling Big Hutch over he took the man's .45 automatic.

"Watch that pair until we can get them tied up," he told Olga. "There's no time to explain things now."

"I didn't want to hurt them, Danny."

"The devil you say!" He was able to grin again. "They'd be in one hell of a fix if you *had* wanted to hurt them."

He found his own automatics in the pockets of the two big overcoats in which also were fat rolls of three-inch adhesive tape. These fellows traveled well-prepared for their jobs. Zunk had a black six-shooter, a .45 with a two-inch barrel. Down between Big May's large breasts rode a .25 automatic with carved ivory grips, and plated with silver—a pretty jigger.

PRISONERS had suddenly changed sides. Zunk, Hutch and Big May had their wrists taped and double-taped behind them, and were stretched out on the floor as if waiting for the meat wagon.

Zunk still bled freely from the scalp, blood pooling on the old rug under him. Riddle walked to the pot-bellied little cast-iron stove in the corner and returned with the sooty lid. Using a handkerchief, he raked and packed the black soot down into Zunk's wounds. Sitting in the big leather chair, Olga lifted her hand just once to protest.

"Soot will leave his scars black, Danny."

"Who cares? When he comes to the sight of his own blood may scare him to death."

"I want to go home." Olga suddenly was sobbing. "I—I'm cold in this old place!"

"You should be, honey." He grinned as he straightened from bending over Zunk. "If you were not so excited you'd know you have your little tail in water in that chair. Take a drier seat."

"I wish I'd never seen you, Danny Riddle!"

"Maybe I wish the same about you." He pulled her up and took her in his arms. "Now that I've got you I'm like a

man with a wooden leg, but wouldn't part with it for the world."

She pillowed her face wearily against his chest, a dry sob shaking her. "You—you're wild as hell, Danny, devil take you!"

"Hell wild, sugar."

"They'll fire me at the hospital if they ever hear of this."

"You've already resigned and just haven't realized it. Now sit over there on the berth where it's dry. We have some things to do before we can get going."

Replacing the weapons on Zunk, Big May, and Hutch, he found his wallet on Hutch, still loaded with money. The unhandsome pair had not had time to divide the bills.

Zunk was the first to open his eyes, muttering as he tried to rock himself up on his stern. Riddle dashed a glass of cold water in his face. Zunk shivered, swore thickly, and glared up with clearing eyes.

"What the hell?" he growled. "Whash-amatter? What happened?"

"You got a good smell of yourself and it knocked you out."

"Yeah—yeah." Zunk wagged his head. "I remember now. The little bitch hit me, damn 'er!"

"Dry your talk about her or I'll kick your teeth out." Riddle helped him up and backed him into the wet chair. "Sit there." He glanced at the girl. "If he makes a move, just yell. I won't be long."

Chapter XI

RIDDLE took a quick turn into the bathroom, looked at the water-box. A board up there that looked like part of the wall had hidden the steel capsules, and the blundering lugs had simply failed to lift the board to find them. Riddle left them there for the time being. Right now he wanted something else—a small coil of telephone wire hanging on the wall. It had been left here when his private phone had been installed.

When he returned to the living room with the wire and an old pair of pliers, Big May was coming to, whimpering. Big Hutch's eyes were open, but not a muscle moved.

"Get up!" Riddle ordered the sullen

Zunk. "I'm not taking any more chances with you."

"Try makin' me, damn you!" snarled

Zunk. "I don't dance for just anybody's tune."

"Tough guy, eh?"

"So tough"—Zunk spat at him—"I got muscles in my eyebrows."

Riddle turned and lighted a cigarette at the table. He got it burning to a full half-inch of ash, then stepped back to Zunk. Catching the man under the chin he rocked his head back, let hot ashes spill on the bridge of the upturned nose.

"Damn!" Zunk was like some startled reptile wiggling himself out of the chair and to his knees on the floor. "You—you'd blind a man's eyes!"

"You pull them out with finger and thumb. Get up! I don't want to have to tell you again."

"Zunk, don't make him mad, you fool!" Hutch was scared. "He's liable to kill all of us, damn you!"

"Mr. Zunk won't get himself killed." Riddle's grin was ugly. "His kind never get hurt if they can help it. They work in mobs, terrorizing a few people at a time. One good man with a shotgun can whip five thousand of the dirty buzzards herded together. Zunk! On your feet! You, too, fat stuff." He emphasized his order to Big May by a short kick to her stern. "And you, Hutch."

He added wire wrappings to the taped wrists. Olga watched in mute amazement. With a knife in each hand now they would never be able to saw those wrapping apart, and yet they would not stop the circulation of blood in their hands.

"Now I want the boss," he told them, lighting another cigarette. "I'll dial and hold the phone. Hutch will do the talking. Get your hoss here, Hutch!"

"But—but—"

"Don't argue!" He waved the cigarette in front of the big man's eyes. "Unless you want this fire right on the eyeball. He either comes—and—fast—or you and Zunk will never be able to see daylight again."

"God!" groaned Big Hutch. "What a mess we got in! Look—look, now." He turned little red eyes on the trembling Zunk. "What will we tell him to get him here?"

"Tell him we got the damned diamonds," snarled Zunk. "He said call him if we got 'em."

Hutch told Riddle the number. Riddle dialed it and stood there holding the receiver to the man's ear. Hutch steeled himself, and his voice actually sounded honest to Riddle.

"We've got the stuff." With the muzzle of an automatic grinding in his back Hutch seemed to be trying to make the transmitter believe him. "All we've got to do is go on with this bird and pick up the rest of it. Yeah, the rest of it. We don't want to pack this junk from one job to another. You know the danger.—Good! Good enough."

"You yellow-bellied coward!" Zunk jeered when he cradled the phone and staggered back. "I'd hate to take what you'll get for that."

"Sit on the floor and shut up." Riddle wheeled on him. "All of you!" He looked at Olga. "Sugar, let's start packing to get the hell out of here fast. We're going places."

WITH their prisoners staring at them, they got as busy as two chipmunks before a storm. Three big suitcases were hurriedly packed. Riddle knew he might never be back, and he had been all set to go at any time. By the time they were finished, slow and hesitant footsteps were sounding on the old stairs.

Gun in one hand, Riddle opened the door quickly, suddenly shoving the muzzle of the weapon in the fat, soft belly of Dr. Buzzby, the man he had seen with the Nilos at the Jungle Joy in Greenwich Village.

The duck-legged and barrel-like doctor's mouth bagged open and his eyes bulged. In his right hand was a doctor's black bag. He flapped his mouth, trying to get words out.

"I—I—"

"—had a call at this address," finished Riddle. "Step in and look the joint over, see whether to charge twenty-five or fifty for the call."

"It ain't no use, Doc," Big Hutch said, looking like a hound dog about to howl, as the door closed. "He's got us dead to rights, and now he's got you."

"I—I don't know what you're talking about," gabbled Buzzby, all the blood

gone from his fat and now sickly face. "Why, my friend, I never saw you before in my life!"

"You've sure got one hell of a fast-fading memory," Big May's knife-sharp voice cut in, her eyes blazing. "Don't stand there looking like a dying cow! Start trying to buy this bird off—if he'll sell."

"He won't." Big Hutch shook his head. "He's hell on wheels." He glowered up at Buzzby. "You damned fat hog, when you got us into this you said he'd be easy!"

Buzzby didn't answer him. He couldn't. He could only choke. He didn't find his voice again until after his hands had been fastened behind him.

"Now look," he said then. "Let's be sensible. I'll give you five hundred dollars, cash in hand—"

"You cheap son of a bitch!" Big May's vitriolic flare stopped him short. One heel banging on the floor punctuated her words. "You hungry, thieving swine! Chisel—chisel—chisel! Beat it down! If I was the handsome bastard there I'd spit in your fat face!"

"Stop her, can't you?" Buzzby was frantic as he looked at Big Hutch. "She's your woman."

"And I told you both I didn't want in on this mess!" blazed Big May. "Why don't you stop me? Why—"

"Shut up!" Riddle shouted. "Want me to plaster up your mouth?"

"I'll make it seven-fifty." Buzzby looked at him hopelessly. Before Big May could get into it again he had raised his bid. "A thousand—and nothing said."

"Listen to the birdie sing!" Big May's retort was a sing-song wail. "Listen to—"

"Now, dry it, May!" Big Hutch barked. "All we want is to get out of this mess."

"Then keep quiet." Riddle picked up the telephone book. "The Federals will soon take you out where the air will temporarily be better."

"No, please!" Buzzby's face was livid—green and yellow. "I was interested only in the diamonds. I swear it, on my word of honor!"

"His word of honor!" Big May squealed in sudden delight. "And look at

the fat hog!"

"Dry it, May," snarled Big Hutch, murder in his eyes.

"And I've been so good to her." Buzzby was ready to cry.

"And if Hutch knew how"—she laughed wildly—"he'd cut your fat throat." Her eyes swung to Riddle. "Good God, he's going to dial!"

"Wait—wait!" Buzzby pushed along the side of the table. "I'll give you ten thousand dollars to forget it!"

RIDDLE looked him squarely in the eyes. "I want only one thing out of you, Buzzby. Where's the stuff that was taken off of old man Lane when his son was killed? And just remember this." He hooked his thumb under Buzzby's nose, giving it a sharp thrust upward. "I already know enough to recognize a lie when you start telling it. Start talking! If you shoot straight you'll walk out of here—free."

"But—but—" Some people would argue in hell, and Buzzby was that kind. "I'm only a professional man, on a call."

"With a gun in your pocket." Riddle leered in his face. "If nothing more, you big louse, that would be two years up the river for every damned one of you!"

Buzzby suddenly let everything fall out of him.

"Godfrey Nilo and his wife have it! Tonight at his party he's getting rid of the bonds for enough cash to pay off the two men who recovered the stuff from the Lanes. Ivan Yusolov and a man called Jitters handled the old—"

"Never mind ancient history. Doc Jitters is at the bottom of the Hudson. Got too close to the roses. Ivan's dead. How about Goofy, Puggy and Rod?"

"Rod is Goofy!" burst out of the scared Buzzby. "Big time once. Had Emily before Godfrey got her. Now he takes to marijuana on a job, and makes most everybody afraid to use him."

Hutch, Big May and Zunk could only stare in amazement as Riddle kept the doctor talking, dragging it all out of him. Buzzby must have felt that he was saving a pay-off in cash, and money meant everything to a man like him. Riddle also was making him think he was saving himself a trip to the penitentiary. Buzzby hit the floor on his knees when

Riddle started dialing.

Riddle poked him in the belly with his toe.

"I made a deal. I keep my word. All you have to worry about is whether you've told the truth. If you have, you'll walk out of here—all of you—around midnight."

He made three calls to reach two men. After that the air was breathless, for long intervals, then charged with snarls as the three bound men and Big May quarreled and cursed until Olga fled into the kitchen and closed the door.

Overcoat on over the gray suit into which he had changed, as if he were cold in the chilly apartment, Riddle made a trip to the bathroom. If only the wrong side wanted the diamonds right now he would just hang onto them. They were in his pockets when footsteps again sounded on the old stairs.

Two characters in the garb of automobile mechanics entered the apartment—characters who were small and wiry, both limping, both with faces scarred, men who were old before their time. One had a steel hook where his left hand should have been.

Riddle led them to the kitchen, and sent Olga to watch the prisoners. When Riddle returned with the two odd-looking characters, he said to Buzzby:

"These are your guards. They've killed a hundred more men than you ever have on an operating table—if you are a doctor. Don't try to get funny with them. And now that I'm not turning you over to the police, they'll relieve you of the guns I left on you.—Ready, baby?"

Olga nodded vigorously, ready long ago to fly.

Chapter XII

WHEN they were in a cab, Olga began gabbling, "Danny—those funny-looking men! Who on earth are they?"

Riddle answered her grimly. "The man with the hook was one of the best bombardiers who ever yelled, 'Bombs away.' The other was just as good as a tail-gunner until they batted our brains out five miles high in the sky over the target run in Northern Korea and we came in on a wing and a prayer. Let's not

talk about it."

"But you came through all right."

"I won't have pretty legs." He smiled. "They rarely are after tracer and flak have been through them."

"That's all right, Danny." She slid closer. "If they're made of wood I'll grease and oil them for you every day.—Where do we go from here?"

"Then you're resigned to fate?"

"Still scared to death"—she nodded, lips trembling—"but I'm beginning to like it. Honestly, though, I like the 'roses 'round the door' stuff, a quiet old mountainside with lots of timber where you hear the dogs bay at the moon at night."

"Honey"—he squeezed her huddled little figure—"you should hear them just once in Texas!"

"But what about now? Where are we going?"

"Back to the hospital." He thrust a flat fold of bills into her hand. "Shut up! Pay any bills you owe. Resign. Get out. I'll have a room for you when I phone you."

"But—"

"Not now." He caught her under the chin and pushed her mouth closed. "All you do is listen."

When he let her out of the cab this time he let her go scurrying away toward the white steps alone. Then the cab was moving on with him and the big suitcases.

An hour later, everything set for himself and Olga in a big mid-town hotel, he had thrown all caution aside and was walking in on Andrew Lane at the hospital. He knew the old man would appreciate it if he made his call on a purely business basis, and made no attempt at further words of consolation about Jeffery's death and approaching funeral.

So he came straight to the point. "Are you prepared to do business with the insurance company right here from this bunk?"

"My God, man!" Lane's eyes bugged. "Don't tell me you've got the stuff back!"

"I haven't, but I think I soon will have," Riddle dropped into a chair. "You have a telephone beside you. When I call you, you can call the insurance company.—Just one thing more. The diamonds."

Lane was frowning. "You hijacked a smuggler. That smuggler —er—according to the radio, won't be smuggling any more. How in the hell are you going to explain to the Government without their wanting to turn you over to the police? And what will the Government do but sell them? One hijacker hijacking another!"

"Then don't worry about them any more." Riddle came to his feet. "Maybe I'll send you a couple of nice ear-bobs for Christmas. After I finish this job I'm going away for a few months."

"I want to go up to Maine for a little rest myself," agreed Lane. "There's a place—Jeffery and I used to go there—though—Where are you going now?"

"That's my business." Riddle waved a hand and left.

He had intended to wait for nightfall, but it was like him to change his mind all of a sudden. He was like a flier briefed and on the wing, moving fast and no time to lose. Downstairs he piled into a cab and gave the address of the old Martingail house on the rim of Harlem.

WHEN he reached it and got out he asked the cabbie to wait. Night owls like Godfrey and Emily would probably sleep until four or five in the afternoon, then get up, have a few drinks and a couple of cat-and-dog fights before they began thinking about the evening ahead. So naturally the house was quiet this early.

He punched the bell button but there was no answer to three rings. He bore down on the fourth, holding it until the tall glazed door was jerked open by a big, beefy man of sixty in the half-but-toned coat of a butler.

"I say now, I say," he snarled, "you might take your hand off the buzzer, you know."

"And how in hell"—Riddle was shoving right on in—"did a squirt like you pick up such fine airs on Pig Pen Hill?"

"Wait, now!" The big butler thrust out his hand. "You can't do this, you know."

"Don't call the cops." Riddle leered in his face. "Godfrey and Emily won't like it. Where are they?"

"They haven't come down yet."

"Then I'll go up." Riddle shoved the

man aside. "The Nilos would rather see anybody else than cops this morning. Which is their room?"

"The master front, but I say now—"

Riddle walked right on, heading for the beautiful old stairway. That butler probably had never been in such a predicament. He followed to the foot of the steps, muttering, wiggling his hand.

Upstairs, Riddle turned to the front of the house, footsteps noiseless on the deep carpet. The door of the master bedroom was unlocked. As he turned the knob and entered the room it was like stepping into the splendor of some ancient castle, the furnishings museum pieces of somewhere about the Eighties. The immense bed was on a mahogany platform, the two figures sprawled flat on their backs all but lost in it.

Nilo and his wife were still sound asleep when Riddle came up to Emily's side of the bed. One impulsive move he couldn't help making. He gave Emily's blue chiffon nightgown an upward yank, and took a look.

"Hell," he growled, "no roses!"

"What the hell is this?" It sounded like a squalling wildcat was suddenly flipping over and coming off the bed. "Godfrey! Godfrey!"

"Shut up your yelling." Riddle shoved her back on the bed, heels kicking wildly in the air. "Unless you want the police."

"Police?" That one word got through to Godfrey Nilo's whisky-heavy brain as he rolled off the other side of the bed. "What—what the hell is this?"

"Kill 'im!" Emily was screaming, getting back to her feet again.

Riddle had heard the door opening, and wheeled, to face the flabbergasted butler, and the butler was holding a sturdy fire-poker about a yard long. Emily's shrieks were firing him into action.

Possibly he was a good butler, one who had never before had to strike a caller in this house with a poker. He swung like a ball player trying to knock a high fly. Riddle went down and under the swing, and up like a twisting corkscrew. An uppercut landed as if delivered from hell to the breakfast table, downed both butler and poker, one flat on his back, the other a suddenly animated thing bouncing on the floor.

"You—rat!" Emily was flying at Riddle. "You can't—Oh!"

He had shot up his hand, catching her on his palm and wheeling her back to sprawl on the floor, pretty heels again high in the air. A yell came from Nilo.

"Damn it, that's my wife!"

"She first belonged to Rod. "Riddle wheeled on him. "Better known lately as Goofy. Too much marijuana! Do you want the police to come up here?"

"Police!" Again the word was like electricity. "My God, no!"

"Damn the police!" growled another voice from the doorway, the voice of the big, blond Rod.

EVIDENTLY, even though he had quarreled with Nilo, he had come home with Godfrey and his wife. Now he stood there in a shabby dark bathrobe, square-jawed, head down, a bull ready for his charge.

"Who's that mug?" he demanded.

Riddle gave no one a chance to answer. The big butler was stirring. Nilo was rocked with indecision, whether to charge or go flying out the window.

Grabbing up the heavy poker from the floor, Riddle spun toward big Rod. As the blond man bobbed his head to dodge, the poker left Riddle's hand. *Blow!* Rod went down on his nose, scalp bleeding.

Emily had quit squalling. She was sitting on the floor, bare legs stretched out, hair awry; dazed.

"Get 'em, Nilo!" growled Riddle.

"Get—get what?" Nilo looked drunk.

"Those two big cases of jewels and bonds!" rasped Riddle, watching the butler, still half-out on the floor. "Paste and all. Just as you took them back."

"There's no paste." Nilo grinned like a fool. "I only told that to make Rod cut his price."

"Get 'em!" Taking a chance, seeing the windows closed, a gun that had whipped into Riddle's hand shot a streak of fire across the room. A bullet grooved the floor to Nilo's left. "If I have to ask again—"

"They're behind the big picture above the fireplace!" wailed Emily. "Don't shoot Godfrey! Behind the picture behind you!"

"Get 'em, you, or I'll kill all of you!" Riddle fired again, smacking splinters

from the floor to Emily's left.

Emily got them. Nilo sat down on the floor, too scared to move. With the big cases thrown at his feet, Riddle took a couple of quick looks. Gun held ready, he left them—scared and snarling cats. He stepped over the big blond Rod and moved swiftly down the stairs.

Outside, the cabbie looked curious.

"You movin' furniture in the joint, buddy?"

"Just the piano." Riddle fell back on the cushions. "How'd the horses come out yesterday?"

"Had my money on Peck of Oats." The cab was moving. "Guess they forgot to plant 'em."

Riddle leaned over and handed him a ten-dollar bill. "Stick with me."

"You've bought the hack." He grinned. Back at the hospital—in the elevator—Riddle remembered that he had forgotten to telephone Lane. It was just as well. Three men were already in the room with him. Lane began to apologize.

"From the insurance company. They misunderstood me. They thought I wanted them to come—"

"No matter." Riddle flapped the big cases on the bed. "The rest is up to you. Don't lose the second delivery."

"Here?" cried Lane. "Captain, you're a wonder!"

"Never mind the compliments," Riddle said, and was gone in two minutes.

Back at the hotel he was like the colonel with bumblebees in his breeches to keep him pepped up. On the fifteenth floor he tried to tap gently on a door. When it cracked open he had his foot inside, pushing it right on in.

"Danny!" she gasped, white-faced. "I—I'm scared to death!"

"This is your last mile, honey. You know it, don't you?"

"I—I guess it is," she sobbed, falling against him.

"All right. Dry your eyes and get on some war-paint. We're going out of here—with the two battle-scarred jerks I called to take charge of the monks in my apartment. They're going to take us to the airport."

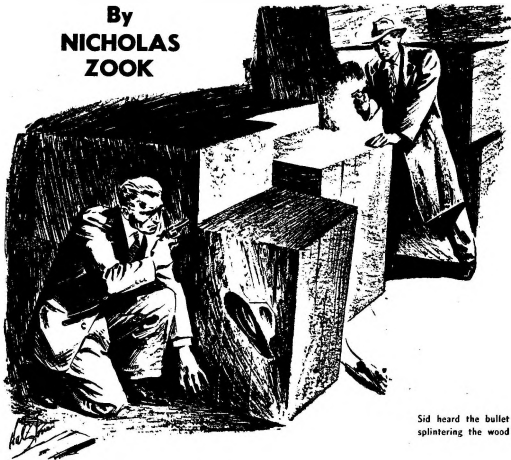
"But, Danny, where are we going?"

"Texas!" he cried, with laughing eyes. "Hell, there ain't no other place, is there?"

"You won't take me alive, copper," the 19-year-old punk spat contemptuously. "If I die, I'll take you with me!"

BLAZE OF GLORY

By
**NICHOLAS
ZOOK**



Sid heard the bullet splintering the wood

DETEKTIVE SID LOCHLIN faced retirement with distaste. He didn't like it, even if it meant plenty of time for fishing. His wife, Minnie, would like it, sure. It meant safety for a cop who wasn't as fast as he used to be and leisurely days in the garden. But Lochlin didn't feel like an old horse that should be led to an idle pasture. He had plenty of good years left.

Things were quiet on the robbery detail that Saturday, and he almost regretted it. It would be fitting if he ended his final day in a blaze of gunfire and glory. A fireworks finish for a career that stretched over thirty years.

With a grimace he put his gear into a suitcase he had brought to the station. It seemed sacrilegious to empty the locker that had been filled with his things

for so many years.

He stuffed his extra shirt into the bag and snapped it shut. The click of the lock had a finality that was disconcerting. Damn it, you couldn't end thirty years of work with the department just like that.

Yet, in three hours, he would be turning in his gun and badge. The chief would give him the usual spiel, Lieutenant Jacques would make a wisecrack, and he'd be out the door. Outside of it all.

He reached for his pipe, as he did in thoughtful moments, and tamped tobacco into it. He had it going like an angry chimney when Lieutenant Jacques came in.

"Lucky horse," Jacques said softly. "Couple more hours, and you'll be free to fish all you want."

Lochlin grinned sourly. "Yep. I'll send you photos of all the big fish I get, including the one that got away. -It's gonna be one swell life of loafing and fishing."

Jacques sighed and rubbed the back of his hand against the side of his chin. "And me with ten more years to go." He took a photograph from a pocket. "Sid, we got a pick-up order on a kid named Don Kapek. Know him?"

Lochlin nodded. "Wild one. About nineteen, but gun crazy. In and out of reformatory and prison a dozen times. Lives over in the warehouse district."

Jacques returned the photo to his pocket. "Guess you won't need this mug shot, then. The chief thinks he might be mixed up in the fur loft job. He's got no reason for thinking so, just a hunch. But he wants him brought in."

Lochlin asked, "How about the cruisers? All tied up?"

Jacques shrugged. "He's not at home. Maybe he's bumming around the neighborhood. You can scout around and see if you spot him. If you do, give a box call, and I'll send the wagon down."

Lochlin placed his suitcase carefully near the locker.

"Sounds like a nice, simple job."

"It should be. Just one of those routine jobs the taxpayer pays us for. But if you don't find this guy by quitting time, let it go, Sid. Like I say, we've got nothing on him."

Lochlin scowled. "Why couldn't my last trick include a real humdinger of a case, instead of picking up some punk kid. That's a fine finish."

"Don't forget," grinned Jacques, "you're not as young as you used to be. Maybe it's just as well you've pulled such a lulu of an assignment."

Lochlin winced. He knew Jacques meant it as a wisecrack, but all the same, he didn't like it.

Squatting just on the edge of the city, the warehouse district had a few sooty, tumbledown dwellings and a few bars with sawdust on the floors and nickel beer. It had, besides, a half dozen blocks of large storage sheds and warehouses.

Lochlin had no luck at the beer joints. He nosed around, sipping warm beer with distaste and keeping his eyes open. But Don Kapek didn't show.

HE WANDERED over to the two-story building that Kapek lived in. On a hunch, he didn't go inside. He knew he would meet Kapek's mother, who would protest wildly that she hadn't seen her no-good son in months—and she would be lying in her teeth.

Instead, he perched on a rickety stool in a bar directly across the street and moodily studied the house. A fine way to spend his last day of duty, drinking beer in a second-rate dive.

He forced down more of the warm stuff and was spilling tobacco into his pipe when the kid showed.

He was a tough-looking kid, with unruly hair showing under the rim of his hat. The hat was pulled over his eyes in the best gangster style, and the kid's right hand was in his topcoat pocket.

Lochlin frowned. He watched Kapek study both sides of the street before he sauntered out of the doorway. He knew intuitively that Kapek had a gun on him and was afraid.

His first impulse was to call the station. Then, he put his pipe away and scratched his graying hair in thought. Since when was Sid Lochlin, thirty years on the force, in need of reinforcements to pick up a nineteen-year-old tough.

He raked his change off the bar and got up. He'd bring the kid in alone.

His long legs scissored a path across the street in the direction Kapek was

taking. He didn't want to go too fast. That would scare the kid into flight.

He set a healthy pace, twice as rapid as the saunter that Kapek affected. His best bet was to overtake the kid without showing himself too much and then to move in fast.

The street was deserted and he knew the beat cop was over in the other direction about this time. His rubber heels slapped the pavement with a slight squeak, but he didn't think it could carry to the kid.

Kapek held his right hand in his pocket. He reached a corner and turned his head for no apparent reason. He did a double-take and crouched slightly. His narrowed eyes were on Lochlin, and his body bent forward, prepared for flight.

This was it. Lochlin's long legs pounded like pistons, trying to close in before the kid had time to recover. Kapek drew his lips into a snarl, and then he was away. He was as fast as greased lightning.

Before he had taken a dozen steps, Lochlin knew he had set himself a hard task. His breath was coming in short wheezes, and his heart pounded like an overworked boiler. The kid ran as effortlessly as a deer.

Lochlin turned the corner, and a pedestrian almost upset him. He thundered an oath and pushed his way past. Kapek's thin figure darted into the doorway of a barnlike warehouse that stretched for half the block.

The detective puffed up to the door and paused to catch his breath. He flirted again with the idea of calling for a cruiser. Again he tossed the idea aside. Kapek was in there and, if anyone could get him, he would—and without outside help.

His gun was out now, and his free hand was on the door. He took a deep breath, crouched, and slammed the door open. He was on the floor when the shot came. It was to his right and wide. Lochlin kicked the door shut and scrambled to cover behind a barricade of piled-up crates. Kapek was in front of him, he was sure, hidden somewhere, his gun ready.

Taking his hat off, he placed it carefully over the edge of a crate. A shot sounded and echoed hollowly. He heard

the splintering of wood to his right as the bullet struck some four feet from him.

He was hot, sweating. He grasped his gun with his left hand and rubbed his hand on his trousers. The Kapek boy was going to cause him trouble. Yet, he wanted to bring him in alive.

He risked exposing himself long enough to throw a shot. The gun kicked in his hand and, for an instant, he saw Kapek's pasty face. His shot was deliberately high, but it made Kapek duck.

LOCHLIN shouted, "Better give up, Kapek. The cops will have this place surrounded soon."

"You won't take me alive, copper." Lochlin heard Kapek speak contemptuously. "And if I'm gonna die, I'll take you with me."

Routine assignment! Lochlin swore. Kapek was guffy as could be, and scared, fighting scared. He peeped over his barricade and met Kapek's glittering eyes. Gun faced gun, as Lochlin pulled the trigger. Again his shot went deliberately wide.

But Kapek's gun was pointed straight at him. Lochlin jerked his head down as the thunder sounded. He turned his head to inspect the wall. Kapek's bullet had burrowed into the wall, about five feet from him and to his right.

He frowned thoughtfully and licked his dry lips. With any luck, the cop on the beat had heard the shots and was coming on the run. But Lochlin had a stubborn streak in him a mile wide. He still wanted a lone hand.

Daringly, he exposed himself and waited. Kapek threw two shots. Lochlin was scared, and sweat was heavy on his face. But the shots were still wild, off to the right. Suddenly Lochlin had the answer.

"All right, Kapek," he said tightly. "I'm coming out after you. If you're smart, you'll throw your gun down."

He darted into the aisle and walked erect. For one tense second, Kapek's wide eyes were on him. Then, he took aim. There were forty feet of distance separating the two, but to Lochlin it looked like forty inches.

The gun blazed and spat. When Kapek jerked his trigger and heard a

hollow click, he stared incredulously at the oncoming detective, who was unharmed, untouched, by the bullets that he had sent at almost point-blank range.

Lochlin's arm was limp, but his extended gun was steady. "Don't move, Kapek, or I'll shoot," he said huskily. "And these bullets won't miss like yours did."

A sob was his answer. Kapek's gun hit the floor like a discarded toy, and his shaking hands were lifted toward the ceiling. Outside, in the sunlight, the faint din of a siren sounded in a growing voice.

When the two cops broke through the door, Lochlin dropped his gun arm limply to his side. He waved a weary welcome and motioned to Kapek.

"Take him in, boys. He's harmless now. . . ."

LIEUTENANT JACQUES regarded the sparse detective with round eyes. "You're a foolish cop," he said, incredulously. "Taking your life in your hands like that."

Lochlin puffed serenely at his pipe. "Uh-uh," he shook his head. "Don't forget, I had thirty years of service behind me, and the chance I took wasn't as bad as it looked."

He glanced absently at his watch. One more hour to go to retirement. He lolled in his chair and explained, pointing to the gun on the desk between them.

"Kapek kept throwing shots at me, but they were wild. That was funny,

since I knew his marksmanship was good. I figured something else might be wrong and I risked my life on a hunch."

He poked a gnarled finger at the gun barrel. "All his shots went well to my right. Now, look at that revolver barrel closely. You'll see the barrel is a little out of line, kind of bent to the left.

"That means the bullet must also angle off to the left after the cartridge is fired. At close range, the bend would make little difference. But it made a difference of a couple of feet when we were firing at each other behind crates. At forty feet, when I got out in the open, it made the same difference."

Jacques lifted a sceptical eyebrow. "I'd hate to risk my life on such figuring, Sid. For my money, the kid was unnerved and just couldn't shoot straight."

Lochlin said nothing. He sent a ring of smoke into the air and consulted his watch once more.

Jacques grinned. "We've got another routine pick-up job, if you want it. You've still got an hour of duty left."

Lochlin turned his attention to his packed suitcase. His grin was broad and his face was the picture of contentment.

"No, thanks," he said. "It'll take me an hour to recover from that last routine assignment."

He hefted the suitcase for a second and set it down again.

"You know," he drawled, "gardening and fishing look good to me, better than they ever have."



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Murder's AUTOGRAPH

By WILLIAM L. JACKSON

MART BOND appeared to be reading a newspaper. His heavy body was slumped comfortably in a lounge chair, his balding head was wreathed in smoke from his black cigar, and he seemed lost in the sport section. But the gray eyes beneath his bushy brows missed nothing in the hotel lobby. If asked, he could have described every person there.

He watched Albert Roth cross the lobby and he caught the slim, wealthy man's hold and contemptuous glance. Roth walked proudly in his two-hundred dollar suit and forty-dollar shoes. The sight of his well dressed figure brought glowing pinpoints of hatred into Bond's eyes.

Roth's room had been robbed two days

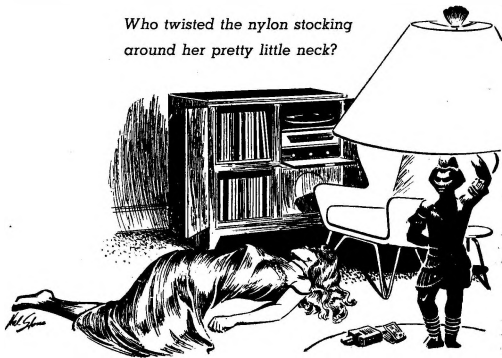
ago. The police were gone now, but the hotel had been crawling with them for two days. Simmons, the hotel manager, had not been pleased. On top of the poor publicity, Roth's howling had nearly cost Bond his job, although Roth had been robbed of only a few dollars and some personal jewelry.

"A new house detective is what we need," Roth had told Simmons. "Then criminals couldn't walk in here in broad daylight and take a man's belongings."

As if he should squawk, Bond thought. The things he lost weren't a drop in the bucket compared to the fortune he had inherited. Bond had a copy of the list of stolen articles in his pocket and he knew.

The publicity actually pleased Roth's van-

*Who twisted the nylon stocking
around her pretty little neck?*



ity, Bond thought. He had never known a man with such an ego. Roth had at least twenty two-hundred dollar suits in his wardrobe, each with its own monogrammed matching handkerchief for the breast pocket. He changed clothes as often as three times daily. His shirts were monogrammed, as were his belt buckles. Bond wouldn't have been surprised to see the man with a tie that flashed ROTH in neon.

How anybody could walk in, open Roth's door with a skeleton key, and make off with a fistful of valuables while he, Bond, had been watching the lobby all that afternoon made the detective wonder. Something about this didn't click, and he wondered when someone would stumble onto that something. The police certainly hadn't. They hadn't been able to find so much as a fingerprint that wasn't Roth's.

The burglary two days ago, a kid stealing candy from the cigar counter yesterday, a pickpocket in the lobby today. Bond asked himself why he had ever left homicide for a job like this. But he knew. He had taken the job for its hundred and a quarter a week. Still, a man got fed up with the small stuff handed to a house dick. He almost wished that someone would haul off and commit a real old-fashioned murder.

He didn't know how close to coming true that wish was.

Seeing that Simmons was motioning to him from behind the main desk, he put out his cigar and walked over. "Take your pass key and go up to room 511," Simmons said. "The switchboard operator says the phone has been off the hook up there since five o'clock. There might be something wrong."

Mart nodded briskly. He crossed the lobby and took the elevator up to five. He walked unhurriedly to 511. There was a light showing through the transom, and he knocked loudly. When he got no reply he opened the door with his passkey.

HE SAW the occupant of 511 on a shag rug in front of a radio which was playing soft music. She was a tall blond woman, clear-skinned and pretty, her lips full and red. She was wearing a silk negligee which did justice to a figure which lacked abso-

lutely nothing. But she was wearing one nylon stocking wrong.

The stocking was around her neck, and she was obviously very dead. Her face was uncontented, but her hands were clenched tightly against the agony she had suffered. Bond knew her. She was Miss Mary Norton. A month ago she had been Mrs. Albert Roth.

The divorce had been played up in the New York papers. She had proved that Roth had treated her worse than a servant and had won an alimony settlement which must have hurt even Roth. Then she had taken a room in the same hotel with her ex-husband, to rub in the fact that she was as well off financially without him as with him.

Bond walked past her and turned off the radio. He looked the suite over and saw the same disorder which he had seen in Roth's suite two days ago. Drawers were pulled out of tables, the contents of two suitcases in her bedroom closet were strewn on the floor, and the jewel box from her dresser was empty on the bed. It looked as if the same man who had robbed Roth had robbed Mary Norton, but she hadn't been lucky enough to be out of her suite as Roth had.

Bond shook his head and walked wearily to the phone which was off its hook. "Switchboard? Bond talking, up in 511."

"Then everything's all right up there?" the operator's sugary voice asked.

"Everything but Miss Norton," Bond answered. "Get me the police—homicide."

McGrath was the captain in charge from homicide. Bond had known him for ten years. He was a good cop. Bond wouldn't have asked for anyone else on the case.

It took him three hours to work the suite over, and it took Bond most of that time to keep Simmons from having apoplexy. At last he left Simmons to the mercy of the reporters and returned to 511.

"Anything at all?" he asked McGrath. "Clean as a whistle," McGrath said. "Not a print that's not hers. Not even a hair or any skin clutched in her doubled pinkies." He shoved a newspaper at Bond. "We've got about as much to go on as a movie cop."

Bond read the article McGrath pointed to, a short blurb by a society columnist:

The ex-Mrs. Albert Roth has attracted some attention on the White Way of late, though she is

obviously trying to avoid any more publicity after her recent divorce. The man seen escorting blond Miss Norton is none other than oil-man Nathan Whitcomb, certainly not the man to be courting a whopping alimony payment. Is this *the new man* in Mary Norton's life, or only an escort, as she says?

"We'll bring him in for interrogation," McGrath said, "but I can't see Nathan Whitcomb as a second-story man. If he wanted dough, all he'd have to do is reach. He's rolling in the stuff."

"It looks like a professional heist to me," Bond said. "Not a print in the place, nothing taken but real valuables. I don't figure it. Not twice in two days. There was a cop on the back door, and I've been living in the lobby."

McGrath grinned wryly. "I'll have Whitcomb picked up. You better find a way to get Simmon's blood pressure down, or you'll be applying to me for a job."

BOND couldn't lower Simmons's blood pressure, and he called McGrath three times the next day without catching him in his office. But at one o'clock he met McGrath in the lobby with another detective.

"Yeah, we picked Whitcomb up," McGrath said. "He was in Kansas City last night. I questioned him personally. If he had anything to do with it, I'll eat one of your black cigars. The man was in love with this Norton dame. And, incidentally, he isn't as rich as he once was. He's been losing his shirt on the stock market. He was tapping Mary Norton for all she had. She told him that she'd have some more money in a day or so; if it didn't come through, she'd hock her jewels. This heist hurt Whitcomb twice."

Bond swore. "How about Roth? Did you question him?"

"We just came away from him. A very nasty individual. He gave us a list of the stuff Mary Norton probably had, plus a lot of lip." Angry sarcasm took control of his voice. "He said we had a fine police department. Said we might be able to pick up a common burglar if he left his autograph on the wall for us. He's leaving town on business and if he has anything to say about it when he gets back, we'll both be out of a job. You first."

Something clicked in Bond's mind as he listened to McGrath, the something which he had been waiting for since the day Roth had been robbed.

"Oh, man," he said. "I think I've got it. Where's Roth now?"

"He's about through with lunch in the dining room," McGrath said. "What's eating you?"

"Don't let him leave," Bond said. "I'm going up to his room. Come up with him after he finishes. I'll meet you there. I'll take full responsibility." He ran across the lobby and jumped into the elevator just as its doors were closing.

He got off at the fifth floor and hurried to Roth's room, letting himself in with his passkey. The suite was now neat and in order, and Roth's suitcases were packed and standing by the desk in the front room. Bond hurried to the closet, quickly flipped through the long row of suits there, and found what he wanted. Then he went to Roth's desk and found what he was looking for there, too. He knew he didn't have time to go through the suitcases, so he left, locking the door.

He was halfway to the elevator when McGrath and Roth got off, followed by the other homicide detective. McGrath threw Bond a puzzled glance which said: "God help you if what you've got doesn't work."

Roth said. "Captain McGrath says you've got some questions to ask me. Can you hurry? I'm catching a plane in twenty minutes." He unlocked the door, and they followed him into his suite. He pulled open the top drawer of his desk to take out a pack of cigarettes. Bond, noticing that he left the drawer open, felt even more sure of himself.

Bond jammed his hands in his suit coat pockets. "You killed Mary Norton," he said flatly.

"You're crazy," Roth said. "What possible reason would I have had?" Bond thought his thin face took on a more pinched look.

"Two reasons," Bond said. "Conceit and jealousy. You're so conceited you couldn't stand having your wife make a fool of you during the divorce proceedings; and you were jealous of the fact that she might find Nathan Whitcomb attractive enough to fall

in love with. It was too much when she did things for him she would never do for you. Like giving him every cent she could scrape up—even promising the alimony payment due from you this week."

ROTH smiled, a thin and not so confident a smile. "A fine story, but without a shred of proof." Bond watched his hand drop casually to the edge of the desk drawer.

"Not quite without a shred." Bond drew one hand from his pocket and dropped a piece of neatly folded but badly crumpled cloth on Roth's desk. "This was clutched in Mary Norton's hand when we found her."

It was one of the monogrammed handkerchiefs which Roth always carried in his breast pocket.

Bond saw fear come into Roth's eyes. "And what could you say," he continued, "if I told you the police lab wants to check some of your shoes against some marks on the shag rug in Mary Norton's room? And if I told you that Captain McGrath had a search warrant to let us take a look in those suitcases you're ready to take off with?"

Roth's hand went in and out of the desk drawer, quickly and smoothly. A black, ugly .32 automatic leveled on Bond's chest. "I'd say you're too damned clever," he said. "You had it figured out, except that I'd have killed Nathan Whitcomb too if he hadn't been in Kansas City." Roth's eyes were not the archly contemptuous eyes of a rich man now; they were the cold eyes of a killer.

Bond stepped forward, taking his other hand from its pocket. "Finally," he said, "what would you say if I told you I've got the clip for that heater?" He showed Roth

the loaded .32 clip in his hand. "Take him, McGrath."

Roth was handcuffed to McGrath's man from homicide when McGrath turned and said, "Bond, you're a crazy man. I thought of that alimony angle, too, but it wasn't enough. How did you know he'd fall for the other stuff you dreamed up?"

"Like I told him—conceit," Bond said. "Mary Norton's hands were clenched, and there could have been, something in them. Roth changes clothes so many times he couldn't remember which suit he had on that night, but I remembered from seeing him in the lobby. I swiped the hankie from his closet and unloaded the .32 before you came up with him."

"I guessed that," McGrath said impatiently, "but what sent you nuts when I saw you in the lobby? What's in his suitcases?"

"I had been trying to figure out what was fishy about that first heist since it happened," Bond said. "Then you said Roth was leaving town and that he had said we might catch a crook if he left his autograph. That's when it hit me. I had a list of the stuff 'stolen' from him. Cuff links, tie clasps, belt buckles—all expensive stuff, but all stuff no professional thief would touch. No fence would take it off his hands. Every ornament Roth owns carries his monogram.

"That tied it all together. Roth robbed himself to give us a false motive for Mary Norton's murder. He couldn't get rid of the stuff himself, with every pawnshop and jewelry in town alerted. Look in those suitcases, and you'll find all of it, probably Mary Norton's stuff, too. I'd bet my shirt on it."

And Bond would have won that bet hands down.

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What happened to LISA?

a novel by TALMAGE POWELL

Chapter I

THE telegram arrived on Friday, posing a blunt question:

IS LISA THERE?

There was a Clearview number for me to call, and while I was waiting for the connection my mind went back to when I'd met Lisa. I'd been about ready for release from an army hospital, not caring much whether I lived or died. Then Lisa had given my life back to me.

She was tall, slender, dark-haired, with a strange kind of beauty. Her eyes never completely lost that haunted expression. It was as if a restlessness inside of her kept prodding her toward something she couldn't name or would ever find.

I'd never brought myself to speak of marriage to Lisa. As I came to know her, I sensed that she had joined the nurses' corps because the agony of war

had made a deep and indelible mark on her. From unguarded remarks I gathered that she came of a family that counted its coin in six figures or better, while I was a hack reporter in civilian life, a lug. Yet right then I'd needed the fire and warmth of her. She'd sensed that as if it were her duty to get me again interested in living. Yet the way she responded could not have been motivated by duty alone.

When we'd gone our separate ways, we'd written occasionally—a letter, a post card, greetings at Christmas and Easter, some trifling gift to her on her birthday.

A nasal voice answered from Clearview. "Ollie Gardiner speaking."

He was her fiancé. Her last card had informed me of her engagement. It had given me a case of the blues that had drifted me into a bar where I began to wonder, after the third or fourth



*She was haunted by the fear that somebody was trying to kill her—
and then one day she suddenly vanished. . . .*

Pickens pulled a gun
as Jones' hand slid
into the desk drawer



bourbon, if maybe I hadn't been a fool after all.

Gardiner kept right on talking in a voice like steam bubbling through mud. "You're Steve Holloway? You got my wire?"

"Yes. But what makes you think Lisa might be here?"

"Isn't she?" he said, a nasty suspicion in his voice. Something told me I was going to be very allergic to this Gardiner character. "She disappeared two weeks ago. She often rambled off for a day or two at a time. At first I figured this was just another of her moody streaks."

Moody. So Gardiner interpreted her that way. But the word didn't fit her. He'd interpreted as moodiness her reaction to life, her attempt to find a meaning somewhere for her existence.

I GOT the impression he was sweating during his pause. I was sweating a little myself. Two weeks.

"We couldn't turn up a trace of her," he said. "And then I thought of you. She was found of you once. I know you wrote occasionally—until I flatly told her the practice must stop."

"You can rest your mind easy on that," I said. "She hasn't written recently, and no kind of impulse brought her here. Any reason she might have walked out on you?"

My suggestion brought a splutter, a terseness to his voice. "I'm quite sure she'd never take a walk on me, Holloway—unless her thinking got fouled up." He hesitated, then added, "She hasn't been exactly well since her mother returned from a European trip ill, and died three weeks ago. Her mother traveled a lot and Lisa was never very close to her, but the death upset Lisa. She imagined someone was trying to kill her. I didn't know that until her father told me after her disappearance."

A jolt of sickening fear hit me. Paranoïa? Not Lisa, I told myself.

"I'm coming to Clearview," I said.

"I don't think that's quite necessary, Holloway. We are doing everything—"

I slammed the receiver down.

I stood there a minute, sorting my thoughts. There'd been nothing on the teletype about her disappearance. Her

old man and Gardiner were obviously keeping it quiet. There might be any murder of reasons for their doing that. And maybe some of the reasons weren't quite kosher.

I called my boss, the ulcerous individual who holds down the city desk on our afternoon daily. It took some talking to convince him our sheet should send a man all the way to Clearview, but I did.

I went back up to my room, threw a few things into a Gladstone, and scrounged in the rear of a bureau drawer for a few of Lisa's letters. I reread her last post card. Anything between the lines? Maybe. Maybe not. I tossed aside an old birthday greeting and opened an envelope that was postmarked Rogersville, instead of Clearview. The note sounded a little sentimental, as if she'd been spanking a bottle. I wouldn't recognize her, it had been so many years since I'd seen her, the note read. She was enclosing a snap taken by one of those sidewalk photographers that catch you in action.

I looked at the print. It was fuzzy, crowded with people on the sidewalk. A woman who must have been Lisa was walking under a neon sign that read:

THE DIVE

I jammed the letter in my pocket and went down to call the railway station. . . .

A tightness crawled into my chest as I rode a taxi out to Lisa's house, late that afternoon. The neighborhood was quiet, old, elegant, smug.

The taxi veered into a driveway bisecting a wrought-iron fence, and I got out to have my first glimpse of the solid mass of cream-colored brick where Lisa had spent most of the years of her life.

A Negro butler answered the door, showed me into a long living room. The grand piano with its loaded music rack reminded me of the times I'd danced with Lisa and listened to her soft, rich singing close to my ear.

Somebody cleared his throat, and I turned. Perry Admin Jones, Lisa's father, had entered the room.

He was a short, stocky man who

looked as if he carried great power in his thick shoulders. His head was as bald as a bird's egg, tanned to the hue of leather. His eyes were the coldest gray I had ever looked at, in perfect keeping with his thin, sharp nose and steel-trap mouth. Everything about him radiated a restless, merciless fountain of raw energy.

"Gardiner phoned me you might show up, Holloway." His eyes swept me up and down. So I was the guy who'd known Lisa better than casually during the closing days of the war. I wasn't surprised that he didn't like me worth a damn.

"Ollie made a mistake wiring you," he said. "We can take care of our own affairs without any meddling from you."

"Then I'll have to get some answers some place else. I want to know where she got the idea that someone was trying to kill her."

HE EYED me with cold hatred, but my own mug must have looked as determined as his.

"A delusion," he said reluctantly. "There's no reason for anyone to kill her."

"But she was sure someone had tried. She must have had a reason to think that."

"Her mother's death three weeks ago upset her. She confided to me that twice a car had tried to run her down. It was senseless, of course, but even the doctor I called in couldn't convince her of that." His voice sharpened as his control wore thin. "Now that you've pried the skeleton out of the closet, buy yourself a ticket to leave Clearview. We're doing all we can." He raised his voice to call to the butler, and I was shown out.

As I climbed back in the taxi an old thought came back to me, a thought I'd had in her presence once, the thought that she must have been an unwanted child. Jones was displaying none of the anxiety that might have been expected. Her mother had always traveled. That big brick house could have been pretty old and lonely for a girl who was rich, but starved for warm and generous feelings.

Talking with Jones, I had for the first time glimpsed behind that door that Lisa had always kept closed against me. The door behind which her strangeness, her quiet sadness lurked, even when a smile was on her lips.

At Police Headquarters I ran head-on into a wall of political pressure. Mum was the word, and they wanted no outside meddlers here either. A sloppy-dressed, lantern-jawed lieutenant in Missing Persons dismissed me with the curt statement that Lisa had walked from her father's house two weeks ago to the day, had carried no baggage, but had cashed a good-sized check the morning of her departure. She'd last been seen in a restaurant where she'd had lunch. She'd walked out of the restaurant, turned the corner and pouf—no Lisa.

The cop was reaching for the phone even as I closed his door behind me. I would have given odds he was calling Perry Jones. They had the single sheet in Clearview bamboozled into silence, but they must have known that the story was out now.

A young, short, fat man was waiting for me outside the lieutenant's office. He was wearing blue tropicals, but sweating anyway. The sweat gave his soft, round face a bluish-pink tinge.

"Steve Holloway?"

I nodded.

"I'm Ollie Gardiner."

My allergy. And in my present mood I always broke out in a rash. His appearance matched his telephone voice. Obese, pompous. Irritatingly certain of himself and the inherent rightness of his position in his own restricted world.

"Don't tell me," I said, "that I'm meddling."

"Well, I do think you might do Lisa more harm than good with a news story. We're doing what we think is best. We've got a good private detective on the case."

"Papa Jones didn't tell me that," I broke in.

He shifted from one foot to the other. "I just wanted to assure you that we'll turn her up. I've swallowed about enough of her contrariness. I told her father this morning he'd better bring her to heel."

- Chapter II

I looked at him a moment, and he colored and backed away a step. I was picturing Lisa with this little grub. His fat, soft hands. I was seeing him waddle to her father with a petulant complaint every time she failed to salaam in his presence.

"How the hell did she ever get engaged to you?"

He bristled, as much as he dared. "It's none of your business, of course, but she was fond of me. We grew up together, and her mother and father agreed a long time ago that our marriage was the natural and proper thing, for all concerned."

"I guess old man Jones had a thousand little methods of his own of beating her down to that."

"Damn you, Holloway! It'll be to her advantage as well as mine. When we join the two families, we'll be the real power in this town."

IN ADDITION to his other failings, he was also a fool. It would not be he who would have Clearview under his heel, but Lisa's old man—with Lisa like a weapon pointed at Gardiner's lecherous soul.

A little more of his talk and I was afraid I'd lay my knuckles against his nose. I brushed by him.

It was still gagging on his presence when I went out on the sidewalk.

From the day of her birth, Lisa had been a flower struggling for existence in barren soil. Now she was gone, and I was glad. But she'd been afraid, too, and I knew I would never rest until I knew what had happened to her, that she was all right.

I spent the remainder of daylight gouging out bits of information about her. It wasn't hard. Everyone in Clearview seemed to know her. A wonderful girl, they agreed. A certain strangeness about her that caused you to feel hushed in her presence. But you sensed compassion in her and she was often doing things for people. The poor knew her. As a kid she used to slip off to play with their urchins.

But I was unable to pry open a single crack in the blank wall surrounding Lisa's disappearance.

I PHONED in a story to my paper from the lobby of the Princess Anne hotel, where I'd registered. I didn't feel like eating, but gulped enough food to convince myself that I'd had dinner. Then I went up to my room.

I had company.

He was a string bean of a man with a face like wilted, yellow lettuce. He was sitting at the knee-hole desk. The ashtray on the desk was overflowing. He was lighting a fresh cigarette, and I noticed that his hands were as yellow as old tallow.

"You're Holloway?" he asked.

"Yeah. Everybody seems to want to know Holloway. But I don't know you."

To remedy that he handed me a calling card. It was inscribed:

Judd Pickens
Private Investigations

I handed the card back. He was standing now, a full two inches taller than I, which put him well up toward the clouds. His suit was freshly pressed, but still hung in loose gray folds.

"Jones retained me," he said. "I used a passkey on your door 'because we shouldn't be seen together. Jones don't like your horning in."

"But you do?"

"Hell, yes! I'll take help wherever I can get it while I'm earning a fee. There are only a few hotels in Clearview. When Jones told me you were in town I figured you'd be registered at one of them if you decided to stay. I hit it on the fourth phone call." He lighted a fresh cigarette from his old one. "I got a hunch you know Lisa better than Jones or Gardiner do."

"Maybe. But I can't tell you a thing."

He laughed softly. "Now what kind of way is that to talk? Say that I'm a bright young guy on a paper and a beautiful dame shows up in my town. She doesn't want anybody to know where she is, see, and I'm willing to string along with that. So what do I do? I run like crazy to her home town and act very much upset and make a show of finding out where she is—and all the time my fingers are on the pulse of the

entire investigation."

I looked at him, and his yellow eyes washed a coldness over me. Without being able to put my finger squarely on the reason, I was afraid, more afraid than I'd been in a long time.

"They sell cigarettes in the lobby," I said, when he asked me for one.

He smiled again, that mirthless twisting of his yellow lips. "Okay, son. I'm going. But don't rush me. I'm not afraid of you."

He meant that. And he didn't believe what I had told him. The door slammed behind him. But I knew I wasn't through with Pickens yet.

I hit the sack, but couldn't seem to get

MATRON

Here's to the lady with eagle eyes,

Who sits outside the women's cells,

Who feels so much she never shows,

And knows so much she never tells!

—Sam L. Mann

to sleep. I was plagued by the gnawing feeling that under my nose was the very thing I needed to get a line on where Lisa had gone. But I couldn't put my finger on it.

When I finally drifted off, she walked in my dreams, tall, slender, a smile on her face and that queesting look in her eyes. She held out her arms and I called out to her, "Don't pity me!"

Her black hair brushed her shoulders as she shook her head. "You don't need pity. You are a soldier—and a man."

I moved toward her, and a fog sprang up between us, colder than a shroud, impossible to fight. And she was gone.

Then I awoke and it was broad daylight outside.

I had a touch of a headache, and the sleep hadn't rested me. I felt better after I'd showered. I knotted my tie, slipped into my coat, and in a gesture so

automatic it surprised me, I took out her letters and slipped one of them to the top. The one from Rogersville. From out of the envelope I pulled the snapshot the street photographer had taken. I studied it a moment, the sign that said, "The Dive." And from the way her body was turned, the angle from which the camera had caught her, I guessed suddenly that she had been snapped as she had stepped from the place.

This was what had troubled my mind last night—this postmark, Rogersville, this restaurant, saloon, nightclub, or whatever it might be, called The Dive. Was she in the habit of going to Rogersville, frequenting The Dive? It was a thin, thin lead, I knew. But in the utter blank darkness that surrounded her disappearance, this was the only thread of light.

My headache went away and I rode the elevator downstairs, entered the coffee shop, and ate a hearty breakfast.

ROGERSVILLE was a good-sized industrial town in the eastern part of the state. Factories strung along a river. Blocks of grimy houses struggling for breath in the smog. Shops and bustling traffic downtown. A town swollen with workingman's money when the wheels turned and the engines roared. A town that would starve if the wheels ever swung to a stop.

I got off the train in early afternoon, jostled through a gate, handed my bag to a redcap. Voices, hurrying footsteps, the chuffing of an engine in the distance, the sepulchral intonation of an announcer on a loud-speaking system made a rolling babel of sound about me.

Then for just an instant the crowd broke, parted, and I saw them. Pickens, Jones, and Gardiner. Two fat pumpkins and a string bean.

The break was quickly closed by an eddy of people, and I knew that only a freak stroke of luck, a chance glance at the moment a trough appeared in the waves of people had permitted me to spot Pickens's tall form with Jones and Gardiner like shadows behind him.

I knew then that Pickens was good. He knew his business. I'd taken great

care in leaving Clearview, yet he had successfully shadowed me, doubtless phoning Gardiner and Jones while I was at the station getting ready to board my train.

The redcap guided me down a long, sloping corridor. We angled right toward the domed waiting room. Around the ell, I touched his arm. As he paused, I said, "Keep walking, but take this."

I handed him the letter with the Rogersville postmark. The shot of her coming out of The Dive was still inside the envelope.

"Mail this to Steve Holloway, care of General Delivery, City. Got it?"

He got it when I slid the five spot in his hand. For a moment I'd considered tearing the photograph in bits, dropping them as I walked, but I wanted the picture in case I hit a dead end and needed to go to the police. Too, the picture was numbered. The number would tie it to the photographer who worked for the action-shot outfit. If the area near The Dive was his regular beat, he might have seen her again. He might remember Lisa.

I took the bag from the porter's hand, slid it into a ten-cent locker, dropped a coin in the slot, turned the key, and put the key in my pocket.

There was a bank of glass doors leading out of the station. Beyond the doors people hurried up and down the gentle slope of broad concrete. There was a winding stairway to my right, leading up to the mezzanine.

I climbed the stairs, stood well back from the smoke-begrimed marble balustrade and saw the trio burst into the waiting room. They paused momentarily, eyes sweeping the waiting room. Jones stood like an unyielding pile of steel; Gardiner hovered beside him, as if seeking protection. Like a loose, gray shadow, Pickens lighted a fresh cigarette from his old one and gave a short, clipped order. Jones moved toward the broad exit, passing beyond my view beneath the mezzanine. Gardiner hesitated, then headed toward the men's lounge. Pickens faded into the crowd and began a circuit of the waiting room.

I was pretty much alone in the mezzanine passage. A young couple passed, coming from the mezzanine level coffee

shop. An old man strolled by reading a paper.

Below, I saw Gardiner emerge from the men's lounge. He stood in indecision until he spotted someone under the balustrade. I guessed that it was Jones. I was right. Gardiner and Jones made rendezvous at one end of the long benches below. They stood with their heads together, throwing glances about the waiting room. Jones's face was bleak; Gardiner was plainly nervous, his features as white and soft as dough.

Then I smelled the pungent sweetness of cigarette smoke behind me. I was turned just far enough to glimpse Pickens's chill smile when he slapped me on the temple with the palm of his hand. There was something hard and cold in his palm, a small gun. Stars pinwheeled and my knees went rubbery. I felt him helping me toward one of the benches against the far wall, away from the balustrade.

He chuckled, deep in his throat. It was a more fearful sound than any curse could have been.

I tried to get my eyes in focus, to force my lips to work. I was still conscious in a vague way, but paralyzed from the skull downward. Then Pickens patted my temple again with his palm and the lights went completely out. . .

WHEN I came out of it, I was sick, deep down, as if my guts were trying to crawl out of my throat and spill over the floor. I felt as if I would vomit all over my bib and tucker if I moved a muscle.

I heard Pickens tell Gardiner to keep his shirt on. I heard footsteps, sharp, hard, heavy, and guessed they belonged to Jones as he paced about the bed on which I lay.

I wanted to lay there for an indefinite time without their knowing that I was conscious. I wanted them to say nothing to me. I didn't want to move. But I couldn't help myself. Like a boil erupting, the sickness came to a head and I rolled over on my side, thrust my head over the edge of the bed and messed up the floor.

When my gagging and groaning heaves had subsided, Pickens reached across the bed, caught me by the hair,

and pulled me over on my back. He scratched his cheek with his yellow talons and smiled at me.

"That mezzanine play was bright, Holloway. But not quite bright enough. When I didn't find you in the waiting room, I guessed you'd spotted us and ducked upstairs. I came up through the coffee shop, and there you were. A couple of redcaps were most solicitous as they helped us ease our drunken friend down a back stairs and into a taxi."

I lay looking at him, too weak at the moment to move, spittle and stuff that tasted like bitter slime oozing from the side of my mouth down my chin.

I rolled my head a little and saw that I had been wrong about one thing. The footsteps had not belonged to Jones. He was not in the room. Only Gardiner and Pickens were there. It must have been Gardiner walking about the bed.

It was plain that Gardiner found as much distaste in the situation as Pickens found delight. Gardiner looked as if he felt ill himself. He walked around the bed, pushed the window up. A breath of hot air from the city stirred the even hotter, stifling, syruplike air in the room.

Pickens ground a cigarette beneath his heel, lighted a fresh one, and said, "Close it!"

Gardiner closed the window, walked across the room so that he didn't have to look at me. His fat shoulders were shaking.

Pickens smiled at me. "Let's not be unpleasant about this, Holloway. Where is she?"

"I don't know."

"I'll repeat myself," Pickens said with sadistic patience. "Let's-not make a Victorian melodrama out of this. Where is she? Where were you to meet her?"

I looked at him and shook my head. I had strength enough now to wipe my mouth and sit up. The room spun for a second, then settled on an even keel. I discovered in that moment that I was still young; I still had bounce. I had endured nothing violent since the war, but the years hadn't made a middle-aged man of me yet. Except for the throbbing pain in my temple, I was feeling better.

The room, I saw, was a cheap one, probably in a flophouse or grubby hotel in a slum section. A nice spot to question a man when you wanted absolute privacy.

Chapter III

PICKENS reached out and caught a handful of my hair. He twisted my head over hard. I grabbed his wrist, tried to bring my body around, break his grip and snap him down on the bed. But I still had not recovered to that degree. I lacked the strength, and he chuckled as he saw that I was for the moment powerless.

"We'll never permit you to meet her," he said. "And we'll find her. You should have leveled with me in your hotel room, Holloway. I don't like you for that. Not one damn bit!" He twisted his hand, driving pain through my head that set me gagging again. "Now where is she, Holloway?"

"Wait a minute, Pickens!" Gardiner seemed to have taken all that he could. His eyes bulged; sweat was pouring off of him. "There must be a better way than this."

He forced himself to waddle to the bed, stood looking down at me. I couldn't help but stare him in the face, the way Pickens had my head twisted back.

"You're a strange nut, Holloway," Gardiner said. "Don't you know when you're licked? You could make a good piece of change right now for yourself. How would two thousand dollars sound?"

When I didn't speak, Gardiner's face became suffused with angry color. The power of his checkbook had never been questioned before.

"After all, it isn't as if we were planning anything crooked, Holloway. We have a perfect right to know where she is. Her father and I wouldn't dream of doing anything mean to her."

"Except trade her the way you would a bitch dog," I said.

Gardiner clenched his hand. He said, "Damn you!" It sounded like the petulant shrilling of a spoiled, bratty child.

Pickens glanced at him. "Now maybe you'll agree with my method. Want me to hit him?"

"No," Gardiner said in a thin voice. "Hold him. I'll hit him."

He punched. My lips went numb from the blow. But I didn't lose a tooth and he barely drew blood. He had the strength of a pot of mush.

Contempt was in Pickens's face. "I think you'd better let me earn my own fee."

Gardiner stood back, rubbing his knuckles. He was gasping, and his face looked dull and loose.

A knock sounded on the door and Jones's voice identified him. Gardiner unlocked the door. Jones entered the room, his face set and white, and he brought an utter stillness.

"The Rogersville police have found her," he said. "In the river. What was left of her. She was still wearing her ring and watch. The fish and river scavengers left that much at least for me to identify her by."

I was unimportant now. Pickens released me, and I supported myself spread-armed on the bed, hearing the words of Jones over and over. Gardiner put his face in his hands and began crying like a child.

Jones moved slowly through the heat hush to the bed. "You're the cause of her coming here, Holloway."

His first punch knocked me flat. He bent over the bed and I saw his fists flying at me. This wasn't mush-armed Gardiner punching, either. How many times Jones struck I don't know. The second blow knocked me into a dead, dark world of unconsciousness. . . .

I awoke in heat-sticky blackness of night. I lay with my eyes open, smelling the sour stench of the room, hearing the hustle of traffic below.

A slow constriction began taking hold of my throat. I was seeing her in the dark waters of the river. Jones and Gardiner were reclaiming what was left of her from the morgue. I hated them, my guts in knots, for driving her to this end.

And the man who'd killed her—I didn't possess enough hatred for him. That tightness in my throat checked my breath off for a moment. I would eat only to have strength to hunt him down. I would sleep only when my flesh surrendered to exhaustion. I'd never quit,

never stop, no matter what the cost. He was a doomed man, and there was no way out for him.

A vile, unholy thing, that kind of thirst for vengeance. An uncivilized, primitive thing that belonged in the jungle. The raw power of it drove me to my feet.

I WENT out of the room, found a bathroom at the end of the hall, and washed the worst of my grime and pain away in cold water.

Then I went down to the street. It was nearly midnight.

I missed the trio at the morgue. Her body had already been released to her father. I rode a second cab to the station and there under a freight shed in the darkness I found Gardiner keeping a lone vigil.

Near him stood a baggage truck holding a black-draped casket. I walked up to him, and he took a hard breath.

"I'm sorry, Holloway. Our roughing you up didn't do any good, did it?" He looked at me, and blinked at tears in his eyes. "She would have married you, wouldn't she?"

"I don't know. I never asked her. Our difference in social position, my belief that she acted for me through a sense of duty, seemed important once."

"What was she to you, Holloway? I've got to know!"

"No," I said, "you don't."

He was trembling, staring into my eyes. "Yes! Why this attachment for her? Why this willingness to take a beating, to go to the most extreme lengths for her?" His words became a soft scream. "What did she do for you, Holloway?"

I looked at the casket. "Okay, Gardiner, maybe you suspect something of the truth. But you mustn't think evil of her. So here it is. She gave me back my belief in my manhood. In France I stepped on an anti-personnel mine. You know what those things can do to you? The doctors who operated and did the skin grafting tried to convince me that I'd be the same afterward. But I didn't believe them. I was convinced they were handing me pater to get me well enough to empty the bed for the next man. I imagined crazy things happening to me,

my hair growing long, my voice changing. She knew and understood what I was going through. And when I left the hospital she was there, ready with all her warmth to prove to me—in the one sure way it could be proved—that I was still a complete man."

Gardiner stared at me, his face going to pieces. I heard him sobbing as I walked off the freight shed platform.

There was a small office in Police Headquarters occupied by a lean lieutenant of detectives who looked like a sandy-haired college track star. Ed Ransom was his name.

cheek. "I deny that Lisa suffered delusions! She was as level-headed as—"

"Calm down, Holloway. I didn't call it delusions. But she was certainly emotionally upset, enough to imagine things for the moment."

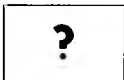
"And she came here and was killed by a tramp for the money she was carrying."

"It holds water. And remember your press card isn't worth a damn here."

His tone was a flat dismissal. I left to phone my paper. . . .

Brilliant sunlight was boiling through the window of my hotel room when I

NOODLE ANNOYER



By LEW YORK

CLEVELAND police are up against one of the most puzzling crimes in the history of the department, and there is no solution in sight—literally speaking. The crime: theft of 221 yards of invisible cloth, stolen from a theatrical costumer. The cloth gives the illusion of not existing and is used by magicians and other kinds of conjurers.

What has the cops giving the aspirin bottle a terrific workout is: If the cloth is invisible, how then does the owner know that it is missing? And if it has been stolen, then, say the gendarmes, how can we be expected to recover it if we can't see it? If we assume that the officers find the cloth by sense of touch and return it to the owner, how can the owner identify it or the cops prove it was the cloth stolen, if it is invisible?

Summed up, the owner reports something he can't see, and the police are looking for it. "Such cloth," as one cop put it, "should be scented for identification. For instance, like the new father who rubbed limburger cheese on the crib so he could find the baby in the dark."

He rocked back in his swivel chair and said he'd talked to Jones. "He admitted following you here, roughing you up. He said you might even file assault charges."

"That can wait. Have you got anything?"

He shrugged. "You're a newspaper man and know what we're facing. This kind of killing often slips into the unsolved file. She must have been killed for that sizable chunk of cash she was carrying. A tramp, or a mugger."

"How about the attacks on her the week before she disappeared?"

"She was upset by her mother's death. Her father explained that."

A dribble of sweat crawled down my

awoke. I was stiff and sore. After a few minutes I crawled out of bed, flexed my muscles, and padded into the shower. The cold sting of the water made me feel better.

While I was having breakfast at a restaurant near the hotel, I saw Pickens. He was lounging in a doorway across the street.

SO JONES had left him behind. I thought of the manhandling he'd given me last night and the food grew sour in my stomach. I went out on the street, turned west. Now and then I tried to spot him, but didn't see him. I walked to Headquarters, sidled over to the side of the swinging double doors

once I was inside.

Pickens walked along the front of an office building, took up a stance just beyond a sidewalk news stand. He smoked patiently, figuring that I would be checking with Ransom for some time.

Just then Ransom himself came down the corridor into the vestibule. He was red-eyed and haggard. He worked the twelve to eight trick, but today he had two hours' overtime under his belt and his temper showed on his face.

He stopped when he saw me.

I said, "I've thought it over. I want to swear out that warrant."

"For Jones?"

"No, for Pickens."

"So get your warrant and have the Clearview cops pick him up."

"He didn't go back. He's across the street now, waiting for me."

That brought a show of interest to Ransom's eyes.

"Convinced now that Jones is hiding something?" I asked.

"I'm convinced that he doesn't want a lot of notoriety stirred up. But go on and get your warrant. I doubt if we'll have Pickens in jail more than a few minutes before he makes bond." He turned away, turned back again. "We've been grilling bums all night. You've got a story. We picked up a tramp, a known mugger, who's been spending some sugar the past few days. We found a woman's zipper wallet in his room. I'm sure it was Lisa's."

His eyes challenged me to digest that as he took his departure.

I swore out the warrant for Pickens and got the rest of the story on the tramp from a dick named Blake Hannrihan. The tramp claimed he'd found the wallet on the bridge. It was possible. The wallet might have fallen from her purse when she'd been thrown over. But would the tramp have kept the wallet? Why hadn't he removed the money and got rid of the wallet if he'd killed her?

Hannrihan assured me that you never knew what such characters would do. I phoned a rewrite man from the press room at Headquarters. Then I walked back out into the sunlight.

I didn't know how long I would be free of Pickens. Today, tomorrow, or

the next day I'd turn around and he would be there, I knew.

I flagged a taxi, slid into the rear seat, and asked the driver, "You know a place called The Dive?"

"Yeah, but the place ain't open this time of day."

"I'll go anyway—for the ride."

The Dive was just around the corner from a block of smart dress shops, in a good section of town. I suspected then that the name was a misnomer, a deliberate effort to spice up a tony and high-priced joint. The exterior of the club was of pale blue crystal, but I guessed that inside the motif would lean, in a sophisticated way, toward the name. Checkered tablecloths, candles stuck in the necks of brandy and wine bottles, the hat check and cigarette girls dressed like French apaches.

On a small billboard near the opaque blue doors was a shot of the interior of the club, bearing out my supposition. Beside the interior shot and overshadowing it was a full length shot of a tall blonde dressed in a low cut black dress. Over her picture was the caption:

Appearing Nightly

And beneath it, the one word:

Jeanine!

It gave me a kind of lost feeling to look at the blonde's picture. For she reminded me of Lisa. Of course Lisa's hair had been black, the slant of the eyebrows was different, the shadows of the cheek-bones and the width of the lips were not the same, yet an intangible something brought Lisa to life in my mind as I looked at the picture.

I closed my eyes for a moment and wondered if it would always be like this. Seeing Lisa whenever I looked at a woman of the same size and build, with the same haunted expression in her face. This never again being quite free of Lisa.

Chapter IV

THE street photographer appeared five or ten minutes later, ambuling contentedly from the diner across the street. He was a chubby individual with

wild sandy hair and thick glasses. I walked toward him. His camera clicked, and he thrust a coupon in my hand.

"See yourself as others see you, pal!"

"Thanks." I took the coupon. He shot three or four more people in the morning shopping crowd streaming down the sidewalk, and glanced at me with some annoyance.

"You've been on this spot long?"

"A few months."

I held the shot of Lisa toward him. "Do you recall this woman?"

"I shoot 'em by the thousands. How could one face stand out?"

"I think she used to come to this neighborhood frequently. She was an attractive girl. She stood out in a crowd."

He studied the picture. "Nothing clicks. Hey, Benja!"

The man to whom he'd called was a gray-haired old newsy. He came forward in response to a motion of the photographer's hand. He was a small old man with a mild smile and blue eyes. He was threadbare, as if he bought his clothes at rummage sales, but he was clean.

"Benja has been a fixture around here for a long time," the photographer said to me. "He knows a lot of faces. If he doesn't remember her, you're out of luck. Your wife?" He added that with a little hesitation.

"Yes." It was natural for the word to come out, and it gave me a queer, chill feeling. I knew I had spoken truth. Marriage vows could never have made her any more my wife.

Benja studied the picture a moment, handed it back to me. "Sure, I think I've seen her before—or a girl a lot like her."

"When did you see her last?" I was aware of a thickness in my voice.

"Oh, couple weeks ago." Benja smiled. "I remember her because she would look at me as if I was here. Or maybe you don't know what I mean. Most people look, buy a paper, and I might as well be a shadow. But to her I was a person, a real human being. She always gave me a dollar for a paper."

"Did she come here with anyone, or seem to be coming for any particular reason?"

"I dunno. Last time I saw her, she was with the piano player from The Dive."

"You know his name?"

"Andy Bladen. Nice guy. Kind of washed out. In his latter years. A withdrawn, moody sort. I guess he just never had what it takes to hit the big time, but forever kept hoping."

I pumped Benja a while longer, but there was nothing he could add. I bought a paper for a dollar and left him staring after me. Maybe he thought I was her husband, and that she'd run out on me for the piano player.

I called the musician's local union and got Andy Bladen's address. He was supposed to be living in an apartment house on the west side. But he wasn't there. He'd moved two weeks ago and left no forwarding address.

The next couple of hours didn't turn him up, and I went back downtown to a late lunch. I ate in the diner across the street from The Dive and when I crossed over a part of The Dive—the bar—was open for business.

I ordered bourbon and water. There were three other patrons at the bar, two men and a woman in black, all interested in each other. I heard the tinkling of a piano from the rear somewhere, and while the bartender was stirring a martini for the woman in black I eased off the leather stool and ducked through the archway.

I emerged into a rather large, darkened foyer. To my left was the empty hat check booth. Ahead, a short stairs dropped to the cabaret floor from the foyer. The tables and dance floor were separated from the foyer by a velvet rope swung between gleaming black stanchions.

The cabaret was in darkness except for the single light glowing in the roof of the bandshell. A man sat at the piano, talking to a girl who leaned toward the music rack. She was tall and slender and had blonde hair that was like ripples of honey in the pale light.

THE man gestured as he talked. The girl nodded, and I moved to the rope, unhooked it, and slipped to the floor level. I stood there looking at the bandstand, and when the girl turned, she saw me and stiffened, with a gasp.

I moved toward the bandstand. The man on the piano bench swung toward

me. He was slim, clean-cut, but tired-looking, his features thin. He had lost enough of his black hair to give him a high forehead, and he was gray at the temples.

The girl—the blonde billed as Jeanine—recovered her composure. "You frightened me, standing in that half-light that way."

Her voice was low, husky. She reminded me so much of Lisa it hurt.

The man's voice was angry. "No one is allowed in here during rehearsals."

"You're Mr. Bladen?"

"Yes."

I showed him my press card. "I want to ask you a few questions."

"I'm busy."

"Then perhaps you'd rather talk to the police."

"I'm sure I have nothing to say to the police."

"Not even about Lisa Jones?"

He stiffened, glanced at Jeanine. He must have read an affirmative in her eyes. He got to his feet. He was tall when he stood, and his shoulders slouched.

Without a word he stepped off the bandstand and passed through a door beside it. I followed him to a dressing room in the rear of the club. He sat on the edge of a bulb-ringed dressing table, folded his arms, and said, "There is little really I can tell you about—Lisa."

I was interested in the way he spoke her name. The hesitation had not been deliberate, the hushed tone was spontaneous. I studied his face. His tiredness was even more noticeable close up, as if it had been years in the accumulation.

"You knew Lisa?"

"You seem to have gathered that much already."

"How well?"

"Not well enough. Not nearly well enough."

I stared at him. He was old enough to be her father, yet he had spoken as if she'd been infinitely dear to him.

"You'd better level with me, Bladen."

Anger came to his eyes. "I told you I have nothing to say. I met her. I enjoyed her presence briefly. Her death was as much a shock to me as it was—well, to her."

"Did you know she was running from something?"

"I guessed as much."

"You might have guessed a little further—that somebody was trying to kill her."

"I did. Though it seemed impossible that any such thing could happen until that body was found in the river."

"She said nothing to give you any idea who was after her?"

"No."

"Yet you changed your address about the time she came here the last time."

He shrugged. "I wanted a cheaper place and moved over to the Ardmore." He uncrossed his arms, let his hands fall to his sides. "Now, if you're convinced there is nothing sensational I can give your paper, I'll go back to my rehearsal."

I allowed him to motion me out of the dressing room. The blonde girl was still on the bandstand when we passed. I mounted the steps to the foyer, and looked back once. It seemed she had her hand halfway raised to me. But I supposed she was merely getting ready to start her song.

Out on the street, Benja was still peddling his papers. He smiled at me. "Find the piano?"

I nodded. "Where is the Ardmore?"

"A small hotel one block west, turn right a block and a half. The piano tell you anything about the girl?"

I COULD have told old Benja that the piano was lying in his teeth right down the line. But I didn't say anything. I started walking west.

The Ardmore was one of those hotels where the edges are just beginning to wear off the furniture, the elevator is beginning to creak, and dust is starting to gather in the corners. Small and select yesterday, tomorrow it would be cheap and indiscriminating. Today it was somewhere between the two stages.

The desk clerk told me that Andy Bladen was in Two-ten and said he would ring, but I told him I would walk up, knock lightly in case Bladen hadn't got up yet.

Upstairs on the second floor, I wondered just what in hell to do next. I couldn't reach Two-ten from the fire-escape at the end of the corridor, and the door, of course, was locked.

I went back to the desk. "I didn't rouse."

him," I said. "But don't ring. I'll be here a day or two and might as well register. I'll have my bags sent over later."

I signed in, paid two days in advance, and a bell-boy showed me to a third floor room. There was a book of matches bearing the Ardmore name on the bedside table. After the bellhop was gone, I waited perhaps fifteen minutes and walked down to the second floor with the matches in my pocket.

A woman was getting on the elevator. I knocked lightly on the door for her benefit and when she had stepped into the elevator and was gone, I took the matches out of my pocket. I struck one, knelt, and scorched the edge of the carpet at the base of Bladen's door.

The clerk looked annoyed on my third appearance.

"You'd better get a key and come upstairs," I said quietly. "I smelled smoke. Could Bladen have dropped off in a doze with a lighted cigarette in his hand?"

The clerk whitened, swarmed through the desk wicket. He decided the elevator was too slow. I followed him up the stairs.

At the door of Two-ten, he sniffed; his alarm grew greater. He knocked, waited a few seconds, and thrust the key in the lock.

I edged into the room behind him and as he called Bladen's name and then conducted a quick search of the two-room suite, I stood with my back to the door, reached behind me, and threw the tumbler of the lock.

The clerk came back to face me. He sniffed. "I don't smell it much now."

"Neither do I. It's possible the smoky odor blew in from outside."

He accepted that after looking around a bit more, and then he was annoyed all over again. "Anyway, you'll have to wait indefinitely to see Mr. Bladen. Or you might check the club where he works. He seems to have left the hotel without my seeing him. I have duties that call me from the desk now and then. Complaints to answer. That sort of thing."

I nodded, edged behind him so that he preceded me out of the room. I closed the door, took the key from the lock, handed it to him, and rattled the knob. We walked to the stairs together.

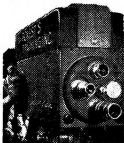
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I started up and he started down. When I reached the third, I figured he'd had time to get behind his desk again.

I walked back to the second floor. I went into Bladen's rooms, throwing the door tumblers again. I felt better working behind a locked door.

The rooms were barren, as only a neat bachelor can leave his living quarters. Most of the clothes in the closet were probably for professional use—dinner jackets, a set of tails, linen jackets with shawl collars. Everything was worn, but of good quality.

The sitting room was desolate, its carpet worn, the furniture beginning to grow lumpy.

I felt sure that Andy Bladen had a personal record of his life somewhere—clippings, a scrapbook, a diary. I'd never yet met a professional actor or musician who didn't allow mementoes of his past triumphs stick to him.

Chapter V

MY EYES came to rest on a small, scarred chest at the end of the faded studio couch. It was locked, and a quick search yielded nothing better than the rod on the shower curtain to break the lock. I unscrewed the rod, inserted it through the hasp. Metal squealed as the padlock ripped loose.

The chest was about half the size of a foot locker and it was my guess that Bladen had picked it up in a second-hand store somewhere for the express purpose to which it had been put. On top was a scrapbook of clippings and press notices, some of them yellow with age. Next came framed black and white gloss pictures of Bladen at a piano, of Bladen fronting a band. During the golden age of jazz, he had been quite a boy. He'd never seriously worried men like Duchin, I supposed, but such men must have known he was in the business.

Beneath the pictures were several tear sheets from newspapers, neatly folded. The first was out of the society section, so old it threatened to tear under its own weight. A three column heading read:

SOCIALITES' WEDDING
HIGHLIGHT OF SEASON.

I glanced across the other columns,

wondering what had put Bladen on the society page. But he was mentioned nowhere.

Then my gaze went back to the three-column spread, and another name leaped out at me. I read the lead of the story:

The current Clearview social season was today climaxed by the magnificent wedding of socialite Estelle Courtney to Perry Admin Jones, a junior vice president in the Courtney Tool and Die Works. Among the guests who packed St. James' Cathedral for the event

WIFE—

I lifted my eyes and stared into space. The account of the wedding of Lisa's mother and father. Why had Andy Bladen kept it all these years?

I studied the picture of the bride and groom coming from the church. Jones had been his short, robust self even then. The lovely and rich socialite he'd married was small and probably pretty. The picture had been none too good to begin with and was faded now.

I dug deeper into Bladen's chest, his buried past. Some of the news clips were of Estelle Jones's gadding about America and the continent. There was a gossip column which had been ripped out of a page, remarking on a certain young matron's frantic pursuit of pleasure.

The papers grew in a heap beside the chest. Three years after the wedding there had been a birth announcement—a daughter born to Mr. and Mrs. Perry Admin Jones.

Below the papers was another picture, but not of Bladen. A woman this time, elfin-faced, her sandy hair cut short in what must have been one of the first boyish bobs. It was inscribed, "To Andy, your Estelle."

And below the picture, a pitifully few letters tied into a packet. From Estelle Courtney to Andy Bladen. I read the top ones and the pieces began to fall into place. She'd met him when he'd been playing at a summer resort. A short, torrid romance. Then remorse. She must never see him again. There could never be anything between them.

But there had been something between them.

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[Turn page]

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birth they'd met again. She was a married woman now, married in a faith that would never permit her divorce and remarriage. Yet the new springing tide of emotion had been greater than ever, and after her return home, she'd written a plaintive letter:

Why did you have to come back into my life again? If I'd known you were booking into Lazy Bear Lodge, I should never have gone there for the summer. Oh, why, did you have to stir the embers of an old summer love? Please try to forget a despicable, wanton woman, dear Andy.

Your Estelle

I laid the letters aside. One last picture looked up at me. I picked it up. It showed a young Estelle and a young Andy Bladen seated together at a table on a hotel terrace.

My heart picked up speed until I felt sick with its pounding. My hands were damp and shaking as I stared at the Bladen of years ago.

Lisa looked nothing like her mother. Even less like Jones. But I was stunned, numbed at her resemblance to the young Bladen who'd squired Estelle Courtney.

THE suite was hot and still. I sat there with sweat running down my face trying to soak up the real truth about Lisa. Perhaps even trying with a heavy desperation to deny it. But deny it I couldn't. It was all there before me. Their lives. Their years, gone now down the mists of time. A wild passion. A mistake. A child coming into the world. But not the child of Perry Admin Jones.

The daughter of Andy Bladen! Forever denied him, forever beyond his reach. Until her mother had returned ill and dying from her last European trip.

So Lisa's coming to Rogersville might not have been accidental after all. I remembered the well-filled music rack on the piano in the Jones home. I recalled the soft way she'd sung to me a few times when we'd danced years ago. Without revealing his real status, Bladen would have found it easy to go to Clearview, contrive a meeting with her. He could have introduced himself as an old friend, or a classmate of Lisa's mother. Some of that old feeling for Estelle

might have led him to call on her during her last illness.

Carefully I placed Bladen's lost years back into their Pandora's box. The picture was pretty well complete in my mind now. I knew the why, and I knew the who. And I knew I was helpless. I couldn't prove a thing.

Darkness had fallen when I stepped out of the taxi that had carried me from Clearview train station out to the Jones house. I hammered with the knocker. Jones himself opened the door. His face reflected annoyance.

"You again, Holloway. You have little sense of propriety, calling at a time of bereavement."

"I know who killed the girl," I said.

His lips thinned; his eyes narrowed. He weighed a decision, swung the door a little wider.

Without speaking, he led the way past the living room where I'd first seen him just a short day and half ago. He paused before a doorway just beyond the living room, and said, "So you have that kind of news, Holloway? I'm extremely anxious to hear it."

He opened the door, fumbled for a light switch. Indirect lighting flooded a study sumptuous with leather furniture. A door across the room stood open, but Jones seemed careless of being overheard, or sure we wouldn't be.

"All right, let's have your statement. Who killed the girl?"
"You tried."

He looked at me with frost in his eyes. "I've never heard anything more insane. She was my daughter. I was planning on her marrying Gardiner, planning on many things for her future."

He turned toward the desk. He took two steps toward it before I caught his shoulder, spun him about, and hit him. His nose went flat and he fell back across the desk. I grabbed the front of his shirt, held him pinned, and flung words at him.

"I'll draw you a picture, Jones. Some of the places I'll have to fill in. Most of the proof I don't have. But a cop like Ed Ransom will take care of those details when he knows where to start looking.

"Estelle Jones hated you, spent her life traveling, detesting your presence.

[Turn page]

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Then she got sick and knew she was dying. She knew you loved that. You'd been a social climber who'd married the boss's daughter for her dough. Now you were finally going to have the top hand.

"She guessed the way you felt and told you the truth she'd kept hidden for years, the truth that Lisa didn't belong to you. And she must have planned to fix her money so you wouldn't get it. She must have done that very thing and you managed to keep it hidden until you could get Lisa out of the way. You hated Lisa now. She was the symbol of everything your ego had suffered—and who would suspect you, her own father?"

"The accidents in Clearview misfired. She ran—to a friend in Rogersville, a person she'd come to know recently whom she felt she could trust. Then you rung in Pickens, and he traced her, burgled her room, stole her ring and watch—and she thought that somebody was still after her. What could she do now? Change her identity. Disappear."

"But Pickens had a plan of his own. If he killed her, he got his pay for that and nothing more. But if Lisa was buried, yet continued to live, he had a grip on you. One word from him and Lisa, the living Lisa, will know the truth about her mother's money. Ransom will break Pickens into a million pieces to find out the real identity of the nameless little chirpie that Pickens picked up, battered beyond recognition, and planted in the river wearing Lisa's watch and ring. Pickens wanted only too make sure that you controlled the money long enough for him to take what he wanted as a price for a second, future killing—of the real Lisa."

JONES crawled from my grasp, oblivious to the blood seeping from his nose. His voice was hoarse. "You expect me to believe she's still alive?"

"I'll get Ed Ransom for company and take you to her, Jones. She's blonde now, bleached. She's changed the slant of her eyes, the shadows of her cheek-bones, the contour of her lips with makeup, and she calls herself by another name. But I knew her, Jones, and so will you before I'm through!"

Jones dragged himself around the desk, lifted his stark, white face and

said, "Is it true, Pickens?"

And Pickens was there, in the open door across the study. He came into the light, yellow-skinned and gaunt, taking slow drags on his cigarette.

"So you know a little before I was ready. We can still make a deal. Holloway's got no real proof. He was planning to beat or frighten you into admitting something. You've let him do just that. But nobody else knows. And I'll take care of Holloway for you, Jones."

There was a faint ripple of sound as a drawer slid open, the widening of Pickens's eyes as he saw Jones's hand dipping into the desk drawer.

I backed from the desk as if it were a chunk of hell itself. Pickens pulled a gun from a shoulder holster. It cracked, and Jones slumped over the desk.

Pickens sucked hard on his cigarette, brought his yellow eyes up to mine. "This whole thing was a sweet idea until you stepped in, Holloway!"

I had come armed myself. But I doubted that I would be able to use the small .25 automatic in my side pocket. Pickens swung his gun up. But it was Jones with his last ebb of strength who fired.

The slug knocked Pickens against the wall. His cigarette fell from his mouth. He clutched his chest. Jones slid down behind the desk and thumped on the floor. I walked to Pickens, kicked his gun out of the way.

I looked at the wound in his chest. "It won't cost you a bit more, Pickens. Will you make a statement to the police?"

He considered—or perhaps was listening to the shrill whistling of air in and out of his torn lung. "Okay, Holloway. Like you say. I got nothing more to lose. Got a cigarette? No, I forgot. You don't smoke . . . !"

In an apartment in Rogersville a girl sat before her dressing table with a towel wrapped about her head. She was dressed in a red silk bathrobe and her eyes still bore traces of tears. She, Ransom, and I had finished talking and now silence lay over the apartment as she worked with makeup.

Eyebrow pencil. Rouge. Lipstick. Cream. Powder. I watched the blonde singer, Jeanine, die and vanish. I

[Turn page]

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watched the slant of the eyes change, the shadows that seemed to shift the cheek-bones a little, the contour of the mouth.

She was finished. She stood up. She removed the towel and her jet black hair — dyed back to its natural color now — tumbled about her shoulders.

She was Lisa.

She slid into my arms. Her body was firm and warm beneath the robe. Over her shoulder I nodded toward the door and Ransom took the hint. The door closed behind him.

What happened to Lisa from this point on is nobody's business but hers — and mine. ● ● ●



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The Large Benefit This Low Cost Policy Provides!

The Service Life Family Hospital Plan covers you and your family for almost everything—no more accidents and for all illnesses and all diseases until the policy has been in force 30 days or more. Very serious diseases such as cancer, tuberculosis, heart disease, diabetes involving internal organs, diseases resulting in a surgical operation, kidney, liver, and various conditions involving the eyes. The policy is in force on accidents as well. All serious complications caused by abnormal conditions, use of instruments or anesthesia, insects and venereal disease is naturally included.

The money is all yours—the only person you want to see it. There are no hidden advantages or big words in this policy. We give you and your family and your investments to use for this policy on our 30 day low cost offer—and be assured that no other hospital plan offers you so much for just \$1.00 a month.

TWO SPECIAL FEATURES

MATERNITY
Benefit of \$1000.00 a Year

Benefit of \$1000.00 a year for the mother and child. This benefit will pay for the cost of hospitalization, doctor's fees, and other expenses. It also covers the cost of the child's hospitalization, doctor's fees, and other expenses. This benefit is in force from the first day of pregnancy until the child is born.

POLIO
Benefit of \$5,000.00 a Year

Benefit of \$5,000.00 a year for the insured. This benefit will pay for the cost of hospitalization, doctor's fees, and other expenses. It also covers the cost of the insured's hospitalization, doctor's fees, and other expenses. This benefit is in force from the first day of the insured's illness until the insured is discharged from the hospital.

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

Wonderful news! This new policy covers everyone from infancy to age 70! When sickness or accident sends you or a member 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 stay 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 4-1/2c a day. This policy even covers children up to 18 years of age with cash benefits of \$5000 a week when hospitalized—yet the cost is only 1 1/2c a day for each child! Benefits paid while hospitalized in any accredited hospital, government hospitals, rest homes and clinics, spas or sanatoriums. Pay your own doctor. Naturally this wonderful policy is issued only to individuals and families who are 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 bills and more... 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 **HEAVY CASH BENEFIT** WILL BE TO YOU! Here's cash to pay a long way, time and paying low hospital expenses—and the money left over can help pay you for time lost from your job or business. Remember—all cash benefits are 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 Hospital 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 with policyholders in every state. SEND NO MONEY—just your name and address! No obligation, of course!

REMEMBER—\$100.00 A WEEK CASH BENEFIT IS ACTUALLY \$14.25 PER DAY!

FREE INSPECTION... MAIL COUPON

The Actual Policy Will Guarantee You a Week Without Cost or Obligation.

The Service Life Insurance Company
 Hospital Department M-17 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.

SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
 Assets of \$12,700,000 as of January 1, 1952
 Hospital Department M-17, Omaha 2, Nebraska

Name.....
 Address.....
 City or Town..... State.....

Reducing Specialist Says:
LOSE WEIGHT

Where
It
Shows
Most

REDUCE

MOST ANY
PART OF
THE
BODY WITH

UNDERWESTERN
LABORATORY
APPROVED

Spot Reducer

Relaxing • Soothing
Penetrating Massage



**ELECTRIC
Spot
Reducer**

**PLUG IN—
GRASP
HANDLE
AND
APPLY**

Take pounds off—keep slim and trim with Spot Reducer! Remarkable new invention which uses one of the most effective reducing methods employed by masseurs and Turkish boys—**MASSAGE!**

LIKE a magic wand, the "Spot Reducer" always gets your wish. Meet any part of your body where it is loose and flabby, whisker your bare extra weight and inches, the "Spot Reducer" can aid you in acquiring a youthful, slender and graceful figure. The beauty of this scientifically designed Reducer is that the method is so simple and easy, the results quick, sure and harmless. No exercise or strict diets. No steambaths, drugs or laxatives.



FOR GREATEST BENEFIT IN REDUCING by massage use Spot REDUCER with or without electricity—also used as an aid in the relief of pains for which massage is indicated.

TAKE OFF EXCESS WEIGHT!

**Don't Stay FAT—You Can Lose
POUNDS and INCHES SAFELY**

Without Risking
HEALTH

With the SPOT REDUCER you can now enjoy the benefits of RELAXING, SOOTHING massage in the privacy of your own home! Simple to use—just plug in, grasp handle and apply over most any part of the body—stomach, hips, chest, neck, thighs, arms, buttocks, etc. The relaxing, soothing massage breaks down FATTY TISSUES, tones the muscles and flesh, and the increased awakened blood circulation carries away waste fat—helps you relax and keep a firmer and more GRACEFUL FIGURE!

Your Own Private Masseuse at Home

When you use the Spot Reducer, it's almost like feeling your own private masseuse at home. It's the softest, most relaxing thing you'll ever feel. It's also the most effective. It's the only one that works in the relief of these types of aches and pains—and there never was an instant of pleasure! The Spot Reducer is ingeniously made of high quality aluminum and rubber and truly a beautiful invention you will be thankful you own. NO 118 with Underwestern Laboratory approval.

TRY THE SPOT REDUCER 10 DAYS FREE IN YOUR OWN HOME!

Mail this coupon with only \$1 for your Spot Reducer on approval. Pay postman \$2.00 plus delivery—or send \$1.00 (full price) and we ship postage prepaid. Use it for ten days in your own home. Then if not completely satisfied return Spot Reducer for full purchase price refund. Don't delay! You lose nothing by non-committal reply, compressing, undesirable pounds of FAT. MAIL COUPON NOW!

ALSO USE IT FOR ACHES AND PAINS!



CAN'T SLEEP

Relief with electric Spot Reducer. See how soothing the gentle massage can be. Helps you sleep when massage can be of benefit.



MUSCULAR ACHES:

A hand's helper for transient relief of discomforts that can be eased by gentle, relaxing massage.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

USED BY EXPERTS
Thousands have lost weight this way—in hips, abdomen, legs, arms, necks, buttocks, etc. The same method used by stage, screen and radio personalities and leading reducing salons. The Spot Reducer can be used in your spare time, in the privacy of your own room.

ORDER IT TODAY!

SENT ON APPROVAL—MAIL COUPON NOW!

SPOT REDUCER CO., Dept. 9-118

575 Market St., Newark, New Jersey

Please send me the Spot Reducer for 10 days trial period. I enclose \$1.00. Upon arrival I will pay postman only \$2.00 plus postage and handling. If not satisfied I may return SPOT REDUCER within 10 days for prompt refund of full purchase price.

I enclose \$1.00 for Spot Reducer.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE

NO. OF SPOT REDUCERS

DATE

MAIL TO: SPOT REDUCER CO., DEPT. 9-118, 575 MARKET ST., NEWARK, N. J.

1181 11810 11810 11810

MAIL THIS 10 DAY FREE TRIAL COUPON NOW!