15¢

BLACK MASK

DETECTIVE STORIES

CORNELL WOOLRICH

•

a "Parson" story by

JAMES DUNCAN

•

H. H. STINSON

•

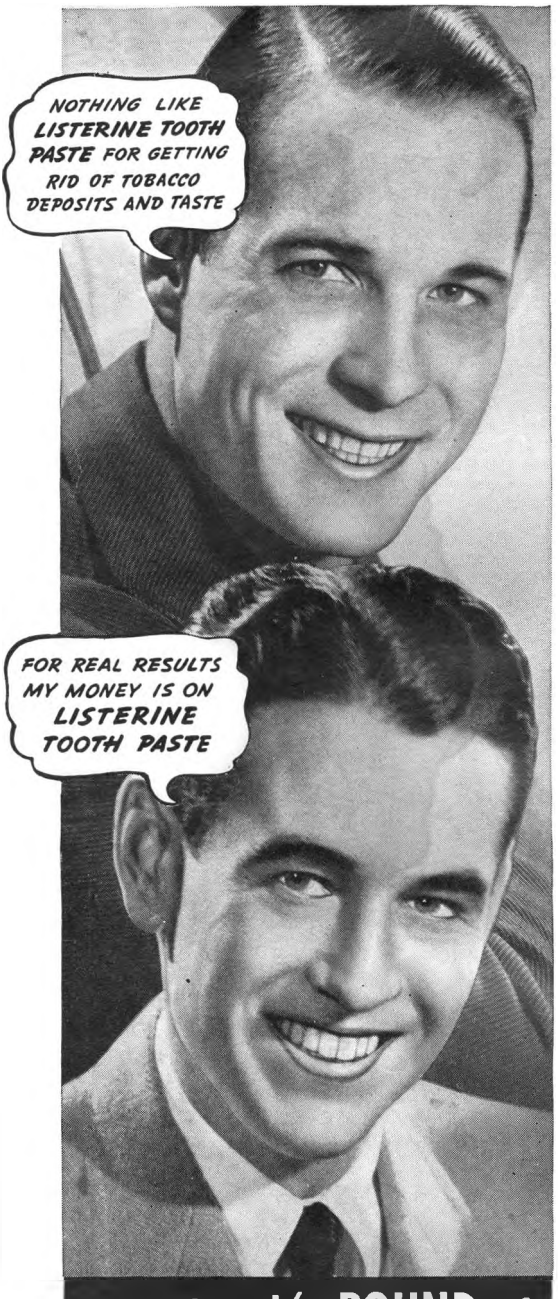
NORBERT DAVIS

•

a Black Burton story by

NELS LEROY JORGENSEN

OCTOBER 1937



TAKE THE TOBACCO FROM YOUR TEETH

Let your mouth wake up and live

A million men are chanting the praise of Listerine Tooth Paste

Why not start using Listerine Tooth Paste right now? We'll wager you will like it better than any you've ever used. A million men say here's a dentifrice with real action . . . real results. And real economy, too. Think of it! More than ¼ pound of first-rate dentifrice in the big 40¢ tube.

Fights smokers' teeth

Discover for yourself how easily it erases from your teeth those ugly deposits stained by tobacco smoke. Your teeth stand revealed sturdy, white, and shining. Feel it wake up your mouth and gums. You never knew anything so stimulating as that wonderful feeling of freshness it gives.

Your breath, sir

See how Listerine Tooth Paste combats breath odors that do you no good socially or in business. You'd expect such action, of course, from the name this tooth paste bears.

Ask your wife

Your wife probably knows about Listerine Tooth Paste, if she follows the news. It's a favorite of professional beauties of the New York studios who "live by their smiles"—girls who simply can't afford to risk the beauty of their teeth. Its results are so amazing that these glamour women actually call it their "beauty bath for teeth."

Get a tube from your druggist now. In two big economical sizes—double size 40¢, regular 25¢.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO., *St. Louis, Mo.*

More than ¼ POUND of tooth paste in the double size tube 40¢

Regular size tube · 25¢

BLACK MASK

A MAGAZINE OF GRIPPING, SMASHING DETECTIVE STORIES

F. ELLSWORTH, *Editor* J. B. MAGILL, *Managing Editor*

VOL. XX No. 8 OCTOBER, 1937

Contents

DELAYED SNATCH . . . . . James Duncan 8
A complete novelette
The Parson trips up a fast one.

FACE WORK . . . . . Cornell Woolrich . . . 31
A short novelette
A woman uses her beauty to trap a rat.

THE AMATEUR DETECTIVE 47
A readers' forum

MEDICINE FOR MURDER . . . . . Norbert Davis 48
A complete novelette
Greed plies a vicious trade on a lonely estate.

MONTE CARLO MERRY-GO-ROUND . Nels Leroy Jorgensen . . 71
A short novelette
Black Burton whips down on blackmailers.

MY DOUGH SAYS MURDER . . . . . H. H. Stinson 90
A complete novelette
O'Hara and Tony Ames uncover the "perfect suicide."

NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT . . . Herbert A. Woodbury . . 118
A short story
A tale of a man who had riches to spend—and couldn't.

SISTERS OF SATAN . . . . . "Undercover Dix" . . . 123
A fact article
About Cassie Chadwick who filched bankers for millions.

Cover painting by Raymond S. Pease Headings by Arthur Rodman Bowker

IN NOVEMBER

"BURIAL MOUND"

AGAIN STAN RICE CRACKS DOWN ON MURDER

By BAYNARD H. KENDRICK

P. C. CODY, President and Circulation Director F. ELLSWORTH, Vice-President

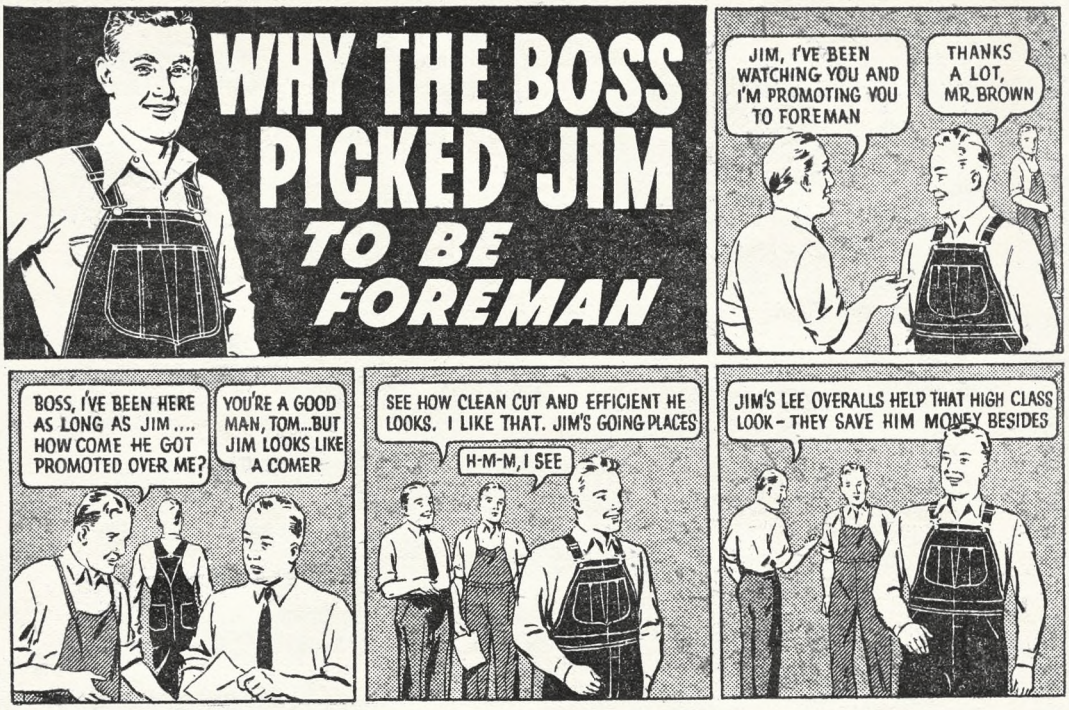
Issued Monthly by PRO-DISTRIBUTORS PUBLISHING COMPANY, Inc., 515 Madison Avenue, New York, New York

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION $1.50 SINGLE COPIES 15 CENTS

Entered as second class mail matter, March 1, 1920, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. under act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A.

Title registered as Trade Mark in U. S. Patent Office.

Member Newsstand Fiction Unit. For advertising rates address Newsstand Fiction Unit, 420 Lexington Avenue, New York, or 64 East Lake Street, Chicago, Ill.



YES, LEE OVERALLS MAKE YOU LOOK LIKE "A COMER"!

...And Tough Jelt Denim Gives You Extra Strength, EXTRA Wear... Or You Get Your Money Back!

You can't lose on this rigid guarantee! If Lee Overalls don't look better, fit better and wear longer than any other you've ever worn... you get your money back, or a new pair FREE!

Lee can make this startling offer because *only* Lee uses rugged, tough Jelt Denim! This super material *stands up* ...no matter how tough-on-overalls your job may be!

That's not all! Tailored sizes mean perfect fit for *every* build. Sanforized-shrunk, too... they'll always fit like the day you bought them! A total of 46 big Lee money-saving and comfort features.

See your Lee Dealer's line of Lee work clothes... the world's largest sellers. Send coupon today for name of your nearest Lee dealer.

THE H. D. LEE MERC. COMPANY

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

UNION-MADE **Lee** JELT DENIM OVERALLS SANFORIZED SHRUNK

FREE..MAIL THIS MONEY-SAVING COUPON NOW!

THE H. D. LEE MERC. COMPANY
Dept. N-10, Kansas City, Mo.

Please send me sample of Jelt Denim, as used only in Lee Overalls ... also name of my nearest Lee dealer.

Name _____

Street _____

Town _____

State _____

Train for ELECTRICITY IN 12 WEEKS AT COYNE

The great Coyne Shops in Chicago have a world-wide reputation for training ambitious fellows for their start in this big-pay field in only 12 weeks. Then you get **life-time graduate employment service.** By my new plan YOU can take advantage of their wonderful method of learning-by-doing NOW—no need to lose time and money while you strive and save to raise the necessary tuition.

I WILL FINANCE YOUR TRAINING

I have a plan where many **get training first.** Then they have **over a year** to pay for their training in **easy monthly payments, starting 60 days after the regular 3-months training period is over,** or 5 months from the day they start school. If you will write to me at once I will send you complete details of this sensational new plan, together with the **Big Free** illustrated **Book** telling all about COYNE and how **many earn while learning** and training you can get there **without book study** or useless theory.

H. C. Lewis

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. 77-66, Chicago, Illinois

MR. H. C. LEWIS, President
Dept. 77-66, 500 S. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.
Send me all details of your "pay-tuition-after-graduation" plan and your big FREE catalog.

NAME ..... AGE....
ADDRESS.....
CITY..... STATE.....

Home-Study Business Training

Your opportunity will never be bigger than your preparation. Prepare now and reap the rewards of early success. **Free 64-Page Books Tell How.** Write NOW for book you want, or mail coupon with your name, present position and address in margin today.

- ☐ Higher Accountancy
- ☐ Mod. Salesmanship
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Law: Degree of LL.B.
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Industrial Mgm't
- ☐ Business Mgm't
- ☐ Business Corres.
- ☐ Credit and Collection Correspondence
- ☐ Modern Foremanship
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
- ☐ C. P. A. Coaching
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Effective Speaking
- ☐ Stenotypy

LASALLE EXTENSION adult business training
Dept. 1075-R **Chicago**

MAKE MORE MONEY

Taking Orders For The NIMROD Line

Earn more every day in the year representing old established firm with a complete line of fast selling necessities: Shirts, Neckwear, Underwear, Dresses, Hosiery, Raincoats, Overcoats, Leather Jackets, Snow Suits, Pants, Breeches, Coveralls, Shop Coats, Uniforms, Campus Coats, etc. Every item guaranteed.

Experience Unnecessary.

Write quick for **FREE SALES EQUIPMENT.**

NIMROD CO., Dept. 75,
4922-28 Lincoln Ave., Chicago, Ill.

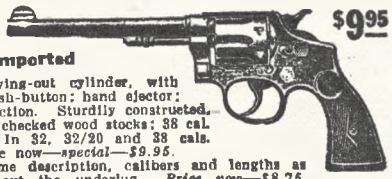
INVENTORS

Do you feel you have a valuable invention? A novel invention may produce something salable if patented. Are you groping in the dark—getting nowhere? Learn how other men with inventions attained success. Write for our FREE Book, "Patent Guide for the Inventor," which tells you of fields where inventions bring profits if they are good patented ones.

CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HYMAN BERMAN
Registered Patent Attorneys
187-T Adams Building **WASHINGTON, D. C.**

PRICES ADVANCING—BUY NOW!

POLICE SPECIAL **$9.95**



Brand New—Imported

Model 21: Swing-out cylinder, with underlug and push-button; hand ejector; 6 shot, double action. Sturdily constructed, fine blued steel; checked wood stocks; 38 cal. 5" wt. 32 oz. In 32, 32/20 and 38 cals. 4" and 5". Price now—*special—$9.95.*

Model 66: Same description, calibers and lengths as above, but without the underlug. *Price now—$8.75.*

Model 41: Same as Model 21; but better quality steel; finely finished, locked cylinder, and underlug. Equal to low-priced U. S. firearms. (reg. $15). Price now—*special $11.95.*

Automatics: 25 cal. 7 shot—$7.95; 9 shot—$8.95; 32 cal. 8 shot—$7.85; 10 shot Military Model—$8.95. *Holsters*: Automatic 75¢; Revolver 95¢; Shoulder—$1.75. *Cartridges*: 25 Auto.—65¢ 32 cal.—75¢ per 25. Revolver 32—$1.00; 32/20 and 38 cal.—$1.50 per 50. $2 Deposit required on COD's.

None sold to minors. New, Fall, bargain catalog: Rifles, Shotguns, Colts, S&W, Scopes, Binoculars, Knives, etc.—send 3¢ stamp.

LEE SALES CO. (Dept. FN) 35 West 32nd St., N. Y. City

Learn Photography at HOME

Splendid opportunities. Prepare quickly in spare time. Easy method. No previous experience necessary, common school education sufficient. Many earn while learning. Send for free booklet "Opportunities in Modern Photography", particulars and requirements.

AMERICAN SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHY
3601 Michigan Avenue **Dept. 1187** **Chicago, Illinois**

FOLLOW THIS MAN

Secret Service Operator No. 38 is on the job! Running down dangerous Counterfeit Gang. Tell-tale finger prints in murdered girl's room.

Free *The Confidential Report Operator No. 38 made to his chief. Write for it.*

Earn a Regular Monthly Salary

You can become a Finger Print Expert at home, in your spare time, at small cost. Write for confidential full report and details. Literature will be sent only to persons stating their age.

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
1920 Sunnyside Ave.
Dept. 1567 **Chicago, Ill.**

PILES DON'T BE CUT

Until You Try This Wonderful Treatment

for pile suffering. If you have piles in any form write for a FREE sample of Page's Pile Tablets and you will bless the day that you read this. Write today. E. R. Page Co., 488-C3 Page Bldg., Marshall, Mich.

SILK MUFFLER TIE ...AND HANDKERCHIEF SET TO MATCH.....

99¢ SAMPLE SET
$10.20 DOZEN
FREE SAMPLES

Buy direct from manufacturer. Complete line newest Fall men's ties, shirts, hosiery. Fast-selling holiday gift novelties. Patented Ready-Tied Ties, Genuine Leather Ties. Make over 100% profit. Start own business—instructions free. Send today for illustrated Wholesale Catalog of 42 Money Makers and Free Sample Materials.

BOULEVARD CRAVATS: 22 West 21st St., Dept. M-85, New York

WANTED ORIGINAL POEMS SONGS

For Immediate Consideration
Send Poems to
Columbian Music Publishers, Ltd.
Dept. 17. **Toronto, Can.**

BE A RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR WRITE TODAY

BUS AND RAILWAY LINES ARE ASKING US FOR MEN

Your position is waiting for you. Qualify as a *Passenger Traffic Inspector* by our short, home-study course, and upon completion we will place you at up to $135 per month, plus expenses, to start, or refund your tuition. Advancement is rapid. Interesting work; travel if you like.

STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INSTITUTE
Div. 1310 **Buffalo, N. Y.**

NOW YOU CAN HAVE A NEW SKIN IN 3 DAYS' TIME!

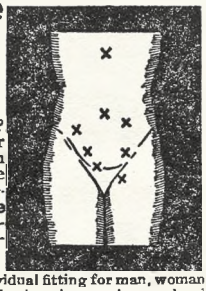
GET THIS FREE

—and learn that what was considered impossible before—the removal of pimples, blackheads, freckles, tan, oily skin, large pores, wrinkles and other defects in the outer skin—can now be done harmlessly and economically at home in three days' time in many instances, as stated by legions of men and women, young and old. It is all explained in a new treatise called

"BEAUTIFUL NEW SKIN IN 3 DAYS"

which is being mailed absolutely free to readers of this magazine. So worry no more over your humiliating skin and complexion or signs of aging if your outer skin looks soiled and worn. Simply send your name and address and name the skin blemishes which trouble you most to MARVO BEAUTY LABORATORIES, Dept. 68-H, No. 1700 Broadway, New York, N. Y., and you will receive this new treatise by return mail in plain wrapper, postpaid and absolutely free. If pleased, tell your friends about it.

Is Your Rupture HERE?



Why continue to suffer with rupture? Stop your worries and fears. Send for the facts about my perfected invention—the Brooks Appliance for reducible rupture—with the automatic AIR-CUSHION support that **gives Nature a chance to close the opening.** Thousands bought by doctors for themselves and patients.

Sent on Trial—Made-to-measure, individual fitting for man, woman or child. Low-priced, sanitary, durable. No obnoxious springs or hard pads; no metal girdle to rust. Safe and comfortable. Helps Nature get results. Not sold through stores—beware of imitations. Write today for full information sent free in plain sealed envelope.

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO. 174-G State St. Marshall, Mich.

ANY PHOTO ENLARGED

Size 8 x 10 inches or smaller if desired. Same price for full length or bust form, groups, landscapes, pet animals, etc., or enlargements of any **part** of group picture. Safe return of original photo guaranteed. **47¢** **3 for $1.00**

SEND NO MONEY Just mail photo or snapshot (any size) and within a week you will receive your beautiful enlargement, guaranteed fadeless. Pay postman 47c plus postage—or send 49c with order and we pay postage. **Big 16x20-inch enlargement** sent C.O.D. 78c plus postage or send 90c and we pay postage. Take advantage of this amazing offer now. Send your photos today. Specify size wanted.

STANDARD ART STUDIOS, 104 S. Jefferson St., Dept. 597-M, Chicago

LAW

STUDY AT HOME

Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training.

More Ability! More Money! More Prestige

We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL. B. conferred. Successful graduates in every section of the United States. We furnish all text material, including fourteen-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 64-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.

LaSalle Extension—adult business training, 1075-L, Chicago

Be Your Own MUSIC Teacher

LEARN AT HOME

by wonderful improved method. Simple as A. B. C.—a child can learn it. Your lessons consist of real selections instead of tiresome exercises. When you finish one of these delightfully easy lessons you've added a new "piece" to your list. You read real notes, too—no "numbers" or trick music. Method is so thorough that many of our 700,000 students are band and orchestra LEADERS.

PLAY BY NOTE

Piano	Guitar
Violin	Saxophone
Organ	Mandolin
Cornet	Ukulele
Trombone	Harp
Piccolo	Clarinet
Flute	'Cello
Hawaiian Steel Guitar,	Trumpet, Italian and German Accordion, Voice and Speech Culture, Harmony and Composition, Drums and Traps, Banjo (Plectrum, 5-String or Tenor)

Be Popular

Everything is in print and pictures. First you are *told* what to do. Then a picture *shows* you how to do it. Then you do it yourself and *hear* it. In a few short months you become an excellent musician—the life of every party!

Free Book and Demonstration Lesson

You may quickly become a fine player through the U. S. School home study method. Write today for Free Book and Free Demonstration Lesson which explain all. Please mention your favorite instrument. No obligation. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC
36910 Brunswick Building, New York City

FREE ENLARGEMENT

Just to get acquainted with new customers, we will beautifully enlarge one snapshot negative (film) to 8 x 10 inches—FREE—if you enclose this ad with 10c for return mailing. Information on hand tinting in natural colors sent immediately. Your negative will be returned with your free enlargement. Send it today.

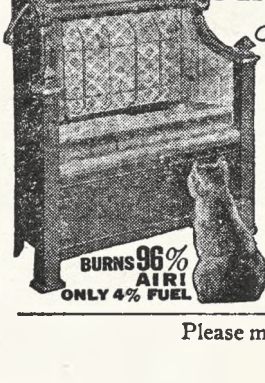
GEPPERT STUDIOS, Dept. 569 Des Moines, Iowa

SONG POEMS WANTED

TO BE SET TO MUSIC

Free Examination. Send Your Poems To
J. CHAS. McNEIL
BACHELOR OF MUSIC
4153-NF, South Van Ness Los Angeles, Calif.

AMAZING NEW KIND OF HEAT



AMAZING new discovery gives you instant heat from liquid fuel—glowing, sunlike, healthy radiant heat. A few pints of cheap liquid transform ordinary air into many hours of snug heat for only 1½c an hour. This invention built into a new-type modern portable radiant heater will heat a big room even in zero weather.

NO SOOT . . . NO ASHES . . . PORTABLE!

It is Absolutely Safe, needs No Installation, has Finger-tip Control. Hotter than City Gas or Electricity at tenth the cost. It means NO MORE wood or coal, NO MORE ashes or dust. Use it ANYWHERE. Ideal for home, cottage, camp, farm, roadstand.

30-DAY TRIAL . . . *IN YOUR HOME!*

PROVE TO YOURSELF why thousands are delighted with this amazing new heater. GET IT ON 30-DAY TRIAL, use it for a month at our risk before deciding! WRITE TODAY FOR DETAILS!

AKRON LAMP & MFG. CO., 830 High St., AKRON, OHIO

FOR ONLY 1½¢ Per Hour!

AGENTS!

This marvelous heater selling *Quickly* Everywhere. You can make big FULL- or SPARE-TIME PROFITS. **WRITE AT ONCE!**

DELAYED SNATCH

THE MONTECITA CLUB on upper Leeward Road is the one spot in Cariba where you can find half the male population on any given night. Its horseshoe cabaret floor is always crowded, always noisy with conversation in three or four tongues, alive with the clinking of bottles and glasses and

the scraping of chairs and feet; the blurred rhythms and dark, primitive gourd rattlings of the *cubañola* orchestra. It is a place meant for pleasure.

Once each week a ringside table was occupied by the beefy British resident-General and his stringy, horse-toothed British wife. Caste lines are lax in Cariba, "the little Paris of the Caribbean," and Lee Fong, the plump smiling Chinese proprietor of the Montecita, stood at the glass curtain which is the street entrance and warmly shook the hand of each patron—black, yellow, white and the in-between color variants.

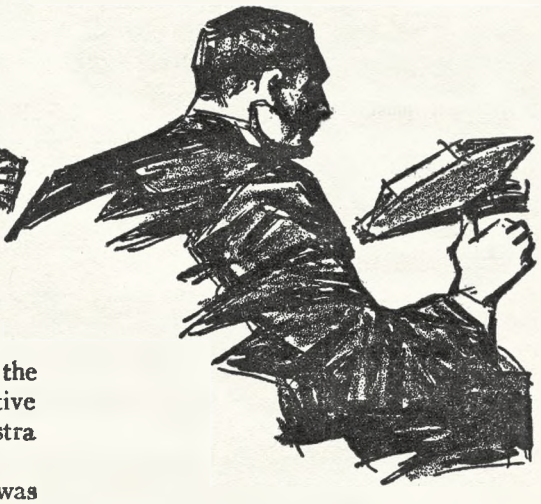
A warm landward breeze was setting the glass curtain into gentle motion that night in May when it was thrust aside and the Parson entered, dainty as a doll in his suit of midnight black.

The Parson cracks his Luger at double-crossers

Lee Fong was not the person to lose his composure but his smile was merely mechanical and polite when he said in his high-pitched, cackling voice, "Much welcome, my goo' fliend."

The Parson gave a harsh, dry laugh. "Hi yuh, Confusius."

He stood running his somber-lidded eyes the length and breadth of the circular room. He first saw Soo Gee, Fong's bodyguard. Soo Gee was looking upstairs. Lee Fong ran gambling rooms upstairs above the cabaret. The Parson had played once or twice. An adept at games of chance, he had caught Lee's croupier switching dice. The Chinaman had smilingly fired the croupier but glinting shafts of malignity shone in his eyes whenever he beheld the Parson. Lee Fong had never forgiven.

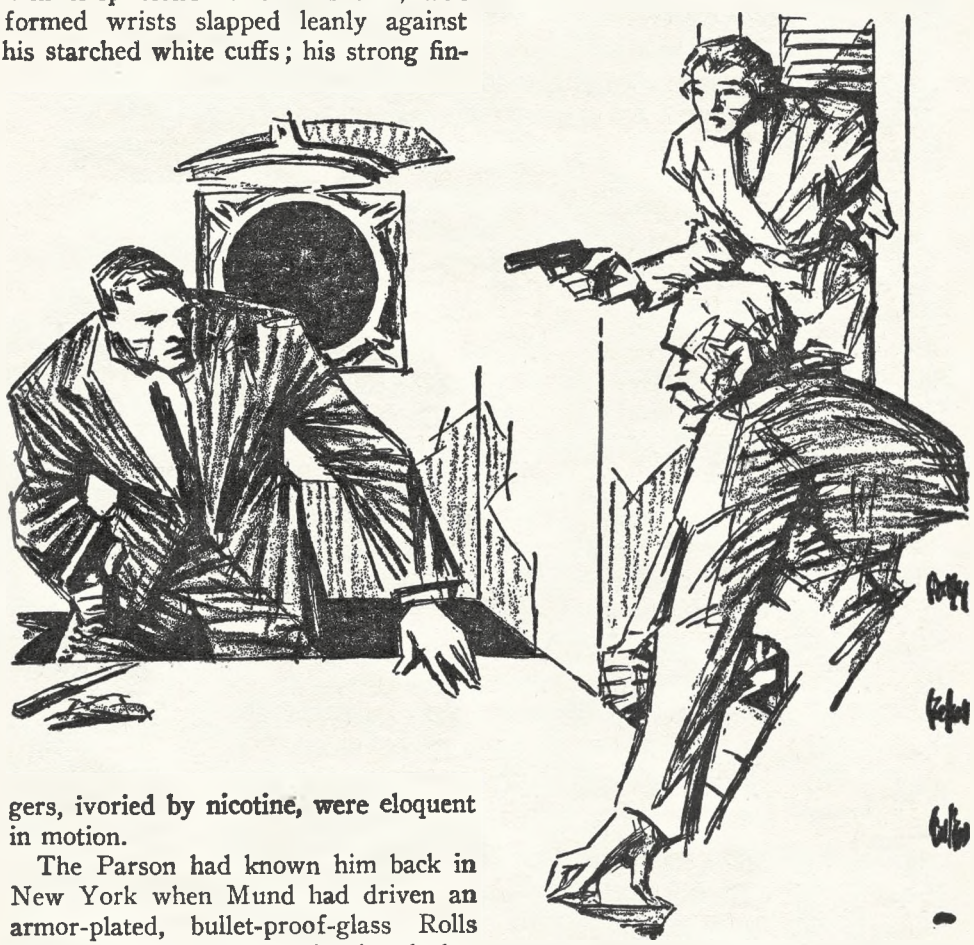


A man half rose from a booth far in the rear and beckoned. The Parson strolled toward him with that light, sidling gait of his. When he reached the

By JAMES DUNCAN

booth, he said, "'Lo, Jake," in an off-hand deep voice and hung his hat on a hook.

Jake Mund was nervous and inwardly excited. He lighted a cigarette, holding the match with trembling fingers. He was a compact, lithe, handsome man with crisp blond hair. His thin, well formed wrists slapped leanly against his starched white cuffs; his strong fingers, ivoried by nicotine, were eloquent in motion.



The Parson had known him back in New York when Mund had driven an armor-plated, bullet-proof-glass Rolls for Carl Dorn. It was a hard mob that Dorn ran but somehow they couldn't knock the innate honesty and decency out of young Jake Mund. He merely drove the car and the dirt around him did not even touch his trouser cuffs.

The Parson, in those days, had been running the gaming tables for the Vince Guard-Poggi syndicate. The Parson's nickname had come with him from New York. He had acquired it by his precise and almost gentle manner. It had nothing to do with the incredible speed of his draw.

There had always been something about Mund that had attracted the Parson. Once Mund had tried to break out of the rackets and the Parson had half-heartedly tried to help him with a stake but Carl Dorn had cracked down and forced Mund back into line. That

was the last the Parson had seen of him in many years until he had turned up in Cariba with a wife. The Parson was in Cariba because he had crossed his gang and both they and the police were interested in him.

Mund sat across from the Parson, his lips moving without opening, the corners twitching. Presently he said, "You'll have to lend me ten grand. I've got to get out of town with Nina in a hurry. Dorn's gang have found me here and they've put the finger on me."

"Hm," said the Parson. "Tell me about it. Does Nina know?"

There was a bottle of brandy on the table and two glasses. The Parson poured drinks. He downed his but Mund merely toyed with his glass, turning it round and round.

"You're the only person in this town I can turn to," he said. "I ain't scared for myself—it's Nina. She knows nothing yet." His voice hardened. "Lee Fong's on to something. He's had us shadowed for a week."

The Parson was surprised. "What's Fong got to do with it?"

"Hell, how should I know? They shouldn't have a connection with him but somehow they have. The whole thing's driving me nuts. How about it? Can you let me have the money?"

"The dough's O. K.," the Parson said crisply. "But why so much?"

"I got to get far so no one will ever find us again. That's why! I haven't a cent to my name!" His fists clenched. "Me, I'm a sweet man. I live off what Nina makes singing here. Isn't that funny? Me, livin' off a girl!"

"Nina don't mind," the Parson interrupted. "Forget it. Who of Dorn's crowd traced you?"

Jake Mund's voice cracked with bitterness. "Dorn himself and Alex Morton and a wren named Eva. She's plain poison."

"Don't know her. Morton's name is familiar, though."

"He's Carl's pulse man. Eva is Carl's woman."

"Oh. Well, look, liquor's no good in a glass."

Mund laughed. "I ain't scared, see, just rattled. Liquor won't help; I tried it. It just feels hot and hard inside. Gosh, it's ten o'clock. I come here every night and wait for ten o'clock."

"Why?"

"To throw curses at myself. Y'see, Nina goes on in five minutes. That's when I begin cursing. God, I'm a heel! Making her sing in a cabaret owned by a Chink, exposing her to danger. You don't know the kind of girl Nina is. She's different, see? She ain't used to a life in a cabaret. Why, she used to have twenty servants waiting hand and foot. . . ."

"Button your fool mouth!"

There was such savagery in the Parson's voice that Mund subsided, limp against the back of the bench He rubbed a hand over his forehead, smiled weakly. "For about a second I thought I was going to blow my top."

"I'll help all I can," the Parson said.

But inwardly he was revolving the whole thing in his head. A boy and girl get into trouble and there he is ready to step in and play godfather. And a lot of guys thought he was tough! He had thought so himself. His shoulder twitched with irritability.

Then another thought crowded out the first. Carl Dorn was no kill-crazy mobster but a business man. He wouldn't be down in Cariba merely for his health. Something more was involved, something big. What? The Parson mulled over possibilities. Well, anyway it would be something involving a lot of money; that was a safe bet. A lot of money. . . .

The Parson's eyes narrowed speculatively; he fingered a cigarette. A lot of money. . . . Why not cut in? Jake Mund, wittingly or unwittingly, was offering him the chance. His eyes glittered and a mocking half-smile touched his lips: perhaps he'd jockey himself into a position where he'd be able to outsmart Carl Dorn. The idea appealed

to him, a crook outmaneuvering a crook. Yeah, he told himself, why not help Jake Mund, especially when he could help himself at the same time!

"Parson," said Jake, cutting in on his thoughts, "you're swell!"

"Huh? I can get along without the soft soap." He leaned forward. "Listen, once. I ain't got the dough on me but I can get it, say midnight."

Jaake nodded eagerly. "Then bring it to the cottage."

"What about your getaway?"

"That's all arranged."

"How?"

"A motor launch will be waiting at the fruit pier. The guy who owns it said we'd make Port of Spain by morning. From there we get a liner."

The Parson sat silent a moment. Then he said, "Look, when you broke from Carl Dorn, you broke clean, didn't you?"

"Yeah. Yeah, sure I did." But Jake's voice lacked conviction.

"I mean there was no reason for a kickback, was there?"

"Of course not. Gosh, Parson, I know you got reason to be suspicious but you'll have to trust me, see? I can't—"

"Why did Dorn follow you down here?"

Jake's face was working. He leaned wearily across the table. "Parson, listen to me. I can't tell you. I—well, I can't, is all. If that means you won't help me," his lips came together in a firm line, "that's my hard luck. I'll see it through alone somehow." Sitting there, white-faced, a desperate shimmer came into his eyes, his fists clenched and his jaw muscles knotted.

The Parson's chin was sunk to his chest. "O.K., boy. I was only trying to make conversation. Forget it. I'm with you. But," his voice was low, hushed, "what are you going to tell Nina?"

Jake Mund groaned. "I'll tell her something; I haven't thought it out yet." He broke off speaking suddenly; his gaze whipped across the room. "She's coming out for her first number."

She was fragile and pale with luminous black eyes beneath a coronet of braided black hair. She drifted across the floor almost shyly, her hands limply clasped before her.

All at once the noisy cabaret became hushed as a cathedral. Her face was nun-like in its reserve; she looked about her with a combined wonder, exultancy and sadness. Then she began to sing.

Her voice was not strong; it was even meager; but it had a touching almost child-like inflection of purity that chained her listeners. No matter how tawdry her surroundings, she brought with her the armor of simplicity and innocence. Her fresh treble recreated the smoke-filled Montecita into a cottage or a flowery lakeside retreat. Her wide-spaced haunting eyes were open with the magic of her voice as if she could follow with them the waves of music, dissolving and recurring with the whisper of the orchestra.

Suddenly there was a commotion at one of the packed tables. A man stood up as though with his action he were breaking a spell. The Parson had a glimpse of him—a tall, white-haired man of about sixty-five, the rigid bar of his white mustache trembling with the tremble of his lips. Instantly, a shorter, much younger man, with sandy hair, who looked vaguely familiar to the Parson, stood up beside him and said something. The older mustached man shook his head violently and strode forward.

The girl stopped singing. Her face lost color; she took small retreating steps. Jake Mund leaped to his feet, dived toward the rear of the cabaret. The Parson saw his hand snake up toward the master switch.

The place was plunged into darkness. People became frightened. Feet pounded. As the Parson moved out from his table, he was caught in a milling throng. Minutes later, the lights went on. Lee Fong himself had clicked

the switch. His arms were upraised and he was bawling like a banshee, "Evlybolly him happy! No mo' tlubbul! Evlybolly him dance!"

He signaled the orchestra to play. People quieted down. The Parson looked about. Jake Mund and Nina were not to be seen. He remembered that there was a back door to the cabaret. The sandy-haired man was gone, too. Then with curiosity he watched the tall, white-haired man speak to Lee Fong. Lee Fong was smiling, he bowed profusely but he looked troubled. At length, he took the arm of the old man and piloted him to his tiny private office. The door closed.

The Parson squinted at the door, wondering who the tall man with the white military mustache might be. He shrugged and strode out.

TRIANGULAR shaft of moonlight broke through the leaves, slashing the Parson's body from shoulder to hip. It left his chiseled features in semi-darkness but showed up his black suit and black tie in striking relief against the brightness of his scrupulous white shirt. His shadow was firmly stenciled on the powdery white coral dust of the roadway as with black ink.

It was ten minutes past midnight. The town of Cariba was asleep. Here and there through the close-woven roof formed by interwining mango and guava trees, a sudden shaft of moonlight struck down. Under the leafy tunnel nothing moved. The branches themselves were never quite at rest. The warm breeze traversed them by slow vibrations, breaking into ripples through the leaves.

There was just the one house at the end of the straggly street. Two hundred yards beyond it were the phosphorescent waters of the Caribbean, endlessly slapping against the sunken piles of the tarred-wood docks. The house was a one-story bungalow built on stilts which were concealed by rotting lattice-work.

Thick, rope-like vines reached from the ground to the roof; flowers, fragile and white, crowned their highest point like very delicately wrought diadems.

The Parson knew the house well. On a number of occasions he had accepted the hospitality of Nina and Jake Mund. It had been for him a sort of oasis for his loneliness, a refuge in his exile. The two young kids had made him welcome, had granted him a niche in their lives.

Shades were drawn to the sills of the three front windows, cutting off the light from within, but themselves glowing orange. The Parson had a fleeting impression, not of catastrophe, but of ominous danger. He could not explain the feeling but he did not try to shrug it off. He felt the ten thousand dollars he was going to loan Jake Mund. Then he reached under his coat and transferred his Luger from the shoulder holster to his pocket. From another pocket he took a handkerchief and studiously wiped his fingers dry. It was a meaningless gesture but characteristic of him. He liked a dry finger on the trigger of his gun.

Then he walked down the brick walk toward the front steps. On either side of the walk was a patch of lawn. Directly below the porch grew a stunted banana plant. Its broad, shirred leaves, mottled with reflected traceries of leafage, were bright under the silver-white glare of the tropical full moon, which sometimes is almost as luminous as sun. All else surrounding the plant was in darkness. The effect was that of an intense spotlight.

The Parson stepped up on the tiny front porch and the harsh murmur of a voice reached him. Then another voice cut in. The Parson rapped sharply on the door.

The murmur of voices was louder now, but nobody came to the door. The Parson turned the knob, flung the door wide and went in.

He nearly collided with a red-haired handsome woman in a suit of white flannel who apparently was coming to answer his knock. The Parson had never seen her before. She had a .45 pocket automatic in her hand. Her hand was small and white and the gun looked enormous in it.

She stepped back, pointing the gun at him. Her eyes were wide but not frightened. Her eyes were bright green with strange gold flecks in the pupils. Indecision and a sort of puzzlement was written in the lines of her creased forehead. She was waiting for his move.

The Parson said sharply, "Put that gat away!"

The tawny flecks in her eyes glinted, but she lowered the gun to her side. The Parson moved quickly, grabbed her wrist. She offered no resistance; the gun clattered to the floor.

"That's better, sweetheart. If I should call the cops in, you wouldn't want them to catch you with a gun." He stopped picked it up. It had a comfortable, balanced feel.

Wrinkles appeared and disappeared on her smooth forehead. "Oh, then you're not the cops?"

"Did you think I was?"

"Nothing less. That's why I didn't shoot. Who are you, mister?"

"Are the Munds at home?"

"I think they're out for the evening," she said. Then she smiled, showing white, even teeth. "Yeah, they're *out* for the evening. I asked who you were, runt."

"I heard voices a little while ago—men's voices, not a woman. Where did the Munds go? And don't call me runt."

"You go to hell, runt."

His hand struck out like a rapier flash. It didn't look like a hard blow but all his fingers were traced in red on her cheek. She went back, brought up against the side wall. He went past her and looked in the open door on the right. She was gasping for breath, muttering behind him, but he paid no attention.

A man lay face down on the rug. He was a fat man, broad-beamed and short. A couple of chairs near him were overturned. The rug under him was twisted. The dark flooring was marred by scratches.

The top of his head was a mass of blood. Some blood had dripped on the rug, directly beneath his head. One arm was pillowed under his head and the other was outflung at right angles to his body. A carved mahogany stick, such as the natives sold in Cariba's waterfront markets, lay close to him. Short black hairs stuck to the end of it. The hair was plastered with blood.

The Parson walked into the room, knelt and turned the body over. It was Lee Fong, the owner of the Montecita. Lee Fong was dead.

Something creaked. It was a door opening. The Parson turned his head sidewise without moving his body. A thick-set, broad-shouldered man in a white linen suit came in. The suit was dark with sweat under the armpits, though the rest of it looked freshly laundered. The man was smiling, jovial.

"Parson," he chortled. "Parson, of all people! Remember me?"

"You're Carl Dorn. I remember you."

"A small world, eh? A small world."

Another man came through the door. It was the white-haired old man the Parson had seen at the Montecita. He was followed by a thin, eagle-nosed individual with a gun in his hand. The white-haired man's shoulders drooped wearily. He looked like a thoroughly cowed and beaten old man. His was the whitest face the Parson had ever seen. The thin, eagle-nosed man standing beside him wriggled his gun but he did not point it at anything or anyone in the room. He did not look at the Parson.

Eagle Nose growled, "Who's the clerical looking gent?"

Carl Dorn laughed coarsely. "Hah! You took the words right outa my mouth. He sure looks like a peaceable parson, don't he? Well, that's what

they call him—the Parson. Hey, Parson, meet one of my boys, Alex Morton."

The white-haired old man looked as if he were about to say something. Alex Morton took a step closer to him. The old man looked at him, did not speak.

The red-haired woman swaggered in, pointed a finger at the Parson, bawled, "That son-of-a——whammed me one!"

Carl Dorn scowled sharply. Beady eyes regarded the Parson. Then the smile of joviality returned to his face. He said, "Don't count that one, Eva. The Parson's really a gentleman. He was one of the boys in New York."

When she began to curse, Dorn put fingers in his ears. "Such language!" And when she stopped for breath, "That's about enough, you!"

She looked at him with her green, gold-flecked eyes but subsided.

The Parson said, "Excuse me for pointing but there's a dead guy on the floor."

Dorn laughed again. "Hah! So there is. So there is."

"How come?"

Dorn said, "Well, I guess it was self-defense. The fool Chink came at you and you gave him a couple of hard ones on the beano. With a little rehearsing Alex, Eva and me can tell the story that way."

The Parson's eyes merely widened a trifle. "Don't you think I'd need the old gent here as a witness, too?"

Dorn made a gesture with his hand. "Why, I imagine that could be arranged."

"Why not ask him?"

"He can't talk so good."

"Hm. Who is he?"

"Just a pal."

The Parson let the .45 he had taken from the woman slap against his trouser leg. "Correct me if I am wrong, but I am under the impression that this house is occupied by a guy named Jake Mund and his wife, Nina."

"You call the turn every time," said Dorn.

"You wouldn't happen to know why they're not here, would you?"

"That's where you got me, pal. Yessir! I'd sure like to know where Jake Mund and his wife are, myself."

The Parson shot him a quick look. "Why did you follow Jake Mund down here?" He added quickly, "I'm just asking for my own sake. If he ain't strictly on the up and up, to hell with him."

"Why, Jake's fine," Dorn said soothingly. "We just dropped in for a kinda social visit. Jake's fine."

The Parson shot him a sharp, biting glance and abruptly changed his line of attack. "Where does Lee Fong tie in?"

Dorn looked blank. "Who?"

The Parson pointed impatiently to the dead man.

"Oh, him. The Chink. Well, look my friend, I don't know." He looked genuinely puzzled. "I'm just damned if I know."

The white-haired old man took a deep breath, said quickly, "The poor Chinaman was simply slaughtered. When I came in and found him murdered—ugh! Only about an hour and a half ago, I was talking to him in his office in that cabaret. I promised him five hundred dollars if he would give me the address of this place. He wanted ten thousand to guarantee that no harm would come to Nina. I said I'd give him five thousand. But I didn't know that he'd be killed."

"Who killed him?" the Parson snapped.

The old man glanced at Dorn meaningfully. "When I came in, he was already dead.

"Go on."

"These two men were in the house. Upstairs."

"Alex," said Dorn quietly.

Alex said, "Yeah," and turned cold eyes on the old man. "How many times we gotta tell yuh we had nothin' to do with the Chink. Shoot off your mouth again and I'll plant my knucks on your kisser."

The eyes of the white-haired man flamed but he said no more, as though in fear. But not fear of physical punishment. The Parson sensed that somehow without knowing why.

The Parson said, quite dispassionately, "You lousy punks!"

"Now, now, Parson," Dorn said placatingly.

"Tough guys, aren't you? Yeah, with an old man. And you know what he's aimin' to say—that you murdered the Chink."

"Don't say that, pal!" Dorn protested. "We had nothing to do with it. We come in and there he was—cold meat. Just like I'm telling you."

"The British cops won't see that as an answer."

Dorn laughed nastily and Alex Morton said, "This guy needs a lot of slammin' around."

"As a matter of fact," Dorn told him, "he don't slam so good. He's tough like rubber. He bounces back at you."

"Oh yeah? One bounce'll be all he'll get!"

"Ah, forget it. We're friends! We're goin' to help the Parson, not pick a fight. Ain't that right, Parson?"

"I'll toss a coin to see if I can believe you or not."

"Kidding won't help." Dorn made a sucking sound with his lips as if in commiseration; a frozen-fish smile appeared on his face. His eyes, though, were hooded, glittering, and he said levelly, "You're in a jam, Parson."

"Nice of you to remind me. But I can't seem to remember—what kind of a jam?"

Dorn spread his hands in a gesture of acceptance. "Well, you killed the Chink. Just one of those things, I suppose. Too bad, too."

"What's too bad?"

"Too bad you whacked the poor departed Chink with that mahogany walking stick. The trouble with you, old pal, you don't know your own strength. Now most times you hit a guy, he goes down and that's all. He's down maybe ten minutes, maybe even half an hour. But he gets up. He may have a headache or something but that's all."

The Parson gave a harsh, dry laugh. "You must be soft in the head."

Dorn was purring, "Self-defense, though, will put you in the clear."

"Talk sense!"

The frozen-fish smile was full of cunning, of malice, of evil. Dorn nodded his head solemnly. "Self-defense. That's our story. Yeah. We'll stick by you. These limey cops can't be too bright."

"Listen, you damned ghoul! You can't hang such a crude frame on me."

Dorn spread his hands indulgently. "Self-defense. You wait and see."

"You mean I'll see *if* I wait," the Parson banged out in a grim, menacing voice. "To hell with you. You think I'll be standing still while you pin the kill on me? Not while I'm conscious."

"We," said Dorn, "will attend to that part of it."

The woman had been sidling close along the wall toward the Parson. She was only a foot or so behind him. All the time Dorn had been talking, she had been moving by inches. Whipping his head about, the Parson saw the leather thong twisted about her hand. With his sudden motion, the thong leaped like a live thing from her hand. At the end of it was a weighted leather sap. The woman handled it with the élan of a virtuoso.

Mid-air, it changed direction as the Parson dodged. He didn't dodge enough. A blow on the crown of his head seemed to split it wide open. The .45 in his hand boomed unexpectedly in response to the convulsive jerk of his whole body. But since by that time he was traveling in the general direction of the floor, the slug went wide.

He heard the woman's voice as from far off. "That's for the slap, runt."

Alex, the eagle-nosed, leaped on him from behind and tore the gun from his grasp. They didn't seem to think he had another gun on him. He lay on the

floor, nostrils wide, pumping breath, waiting to summon enough strength to get at his gun.

Dorn said complacently, "Nice going, Eva."

"Yeah. These big gun boys, they're always suckers for a sap."

Dorn came over, prodded the Parson with his foot. He was laughing as at a huge joke known only to himself. But it wasn't a pleasant laugh.

The Parson looked up at him as if the effort hurt. He said, "The laugh's on my side."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Look at the window behind you."

Eva yelled. Eagle-nose Alex looked white. Dorn jerked his head about. His yell was louder than Eva's.

The middle porch window had been raised and the drawn shade lifted aside. The Parson had been looking straight at it past the others. A slant-eyed Chinaman stood in the window with a gun in his fist. The Parson recognized Soo Gee; he had seen him at the Montecita before, Lee Fong's bodyguard.

The shade whirred up with a hoarse rattle. Soo Gee didn't say anything. He didn't have to; the gun in his fist, the implacable expression in his face were both eloquent.

Alex jerked up the .45 he had snatched from the Parson. A shot boomed. Glass tinkled musically, showered to the floor. The Parson dug his right hand into his coat pocket and fired through the cloth. Soo Gee's gun cut loose.

Alex shivered, dug his left hand into his groin. Two more shots burst forth as he started to crumple to the floor. The Parson jerked his gun out, free of the pocket. Something hit him a terrific blow in the shoulder, paralyzing the arm. It was Eva's efficient little sap. The gun spun out of his hand, hit the baseboard of the wall, skidded across the floor.

Dorn was behind a chair, a gun in his hand, snapping shots at the window. Soo Gee suddenly went down; there was not a sound out of him.

Powder smoke made the air thick, gaseous. In the sudden stunned silence, the Parson thought he could hear the insects outside in the still tropic night.

He lay perfectly still, feigning death. Carl Dorn was top dog now. Soon the Parson heard footsteps, then Eva's voice, "The damn Chink's dead. You got him clean in the forehead, Carl."

Dorn said, "The yellow punk was layin' for us. He thought we'd killed this Lee Fong. Bet he was workin' for this Fong guy."

"Yeah. Watch the major, Carl. He's got the fidgets."

"Oke," came Dorn's voice. "You scram, major. Forget what you saw. Forget everything. We'll get in touch with you."

There was a muffled sound of assent. Then Dorn's voice again, "And don't forget the price, two hundred grand. Cash on the line."

"You will get your money, sir."

"Oke. Now flit. A word to the cops and you know what'll happen."

"I will not breathe a syllable."

A door opened and shut close to the Parson. Footsteps hurried out in the hall. The street door opened and shut.

The Parson heard Eva say harshly, "Alex stopped a cupla fast ones. He's croaked." But her tone of voice was merely informational. "Hey, the Parson looks dead, too!" She poked him with her foot.

"Yeah," said Dorn carelessly. "He musta stopped one of my bullets."

The Parson lay quiet, breathing imperceptibly.

Dorn went on: "We got the major buffaloed anyway."

Eva said, "Say, I wonder who did croak this Lee Fong. Maybe it was Jake Mund. He was here sometime tonight, all right, he and that doll-face wife of his. The bedroom upstairs is topsy-turvy, clothes and things lyin' about, like he and the wife packed a bag in a hurry."

There was a shrill whistle somewhere. Then another, answering it.

"Cops!" said Dorn. "Let's blow, Eva. Jeeze, I wish we knew where Jake Mund and Nina are. Boy, I'd sure like to put my hands on them!"

Eva smirked archly. "The major thinks we got 'em."

"Yeah, that's almost as good as havin' 'em, if he'll kick through with the dough. Jeez, what a mess! First, we gotta find this Lee Fong dead, then Jake and Nina gone and on top of that, the Parson barges in!"

"You afraid of him?" Eva asked scornfully.

"Hell, not when he's dead I ain't. Too bad about Alex, though."

"Yeah? What's bad about a two-way split, 'stead of three?"

Dorn gasped, then laughed shortly. "I'm damned if you don't beat all for brains and guts, kiddo! Two-way split, huh?" His voice sounded troubled again. "But what about the tipster? You know. . . ."

"Him?" Eva spat. "What in hell's he done?"

"Yeah. We'll handle him. Well, let's get going."

The Parson heard footsteps running out of the hall. A door slammed. For about a second he lay as still as before. Then an eye slyly opened. He saw he was alone. His gun lay across the room from him. He stepped over the still form of Alex, retrieved it, then got his hat and clapped it on his head. The shrill whistle got louder. Footsteps were pounding in the street. He went through a back door and stumbled through a dark kitchen. He was surprised to find a back door there unlocked.

Voices were shouting at the front of the house as he plunged through a tiny square of garden. He stepped over a low picket fence and reeled dunkenly down an unpaved back alley. Silver-white moonbeams chased him. He slipped fast into the gloom of the shadows.

HE FRUIT pier was at the other end of town. But the Parson did not use a cab; he walked. Twice he had the feeling that he was being tailed but when he stopped short and turned about, there was no one to be seen. He moved warily. The pain was not yet out of his head.

Only one boat was tied to the pier. It bobbed gently against the swell, straining against the ropes. There was a pleasant odor of tar. Lights hung fore and aft. It wasn't a big boat but it looked as if it could sleep six or eight persons. Its bow lines were sharp, betokening speed. A man was pacing the foredeck, smoking a pipe.

The Parson leaped nimbly aboard, forged past empty boxes piled along the rail. The man looked at him placidly. He was a mulatto, more white than black. His face was large, ruddy in the cheeks, deeply tanned and wrinkled at the corner of either eye. His broad mouth uncurled slowly in a smile as he took the pipe from his mouth.

The Parson said, "Hello. I'm lookin' for the skipper who was to have taken a young couple to Port of Spain."

The man's expression did not change. "Brother, you're lookin' straight full and at him now." His voice was a rumbling, dreamy baritone.

"Swell. My name's Ormond. I'm a friend of the young couple."

The tanned face beamed. "Glad to know you. Maybe you can tell me when they is comin' 'board. They's overdue maybe an hour, maybe more.

"Oh, so they didn't show up."

"That's correct, mister. I been waitin' on 'em."

"Maybe they decided not to go," said the Parson.

"Mebbe you're right."

"Well, if they do come, will you tell 'em to get in touch with me at the Victoria? That's my hotel."

"Glad to, mister."

"Thanks, Cap'n—"

"Deerman is the name."

"Cap'n Deerman. How do you make a livin' out of your boat?"

"Little fishin'. Take out parties."

"And dope runnin, huh?"

"Fishin's nice out beyond the headlands. You come around some time, mister, and I'll show you where the tarpon run."

A cabin door opened and a flood of yellow light flitted across the deck surface. A handsome, full-bosomed young negress stood in the doorway, applying powder industriously to her cheeks from a flat silver compact. As she came toward them, the Parson was aware that her dress reeked of gardenia perfume.

Captain Deerman said, "Tha's my woman. Narcissa, go 'long in and fetch out the rum bottle. You like a drink, Mr. Ormond?"

"Sure."

The woman sauntered out, swinging shapely hips. She returned in a few minutes with a plaited straw demijohn and a couple of glasses. The man held the glasses while she poured the liquor. He handed one to the Parson. They drank. Deerman grinned dreamily, sucked at the rim of his glass.

"You in trouble, mister?"

"Hell, no!" the Parson snapped.

"Well, you look like you been banged around some." He looked out over the broad expanse of water. "That young couple now, *they* ain't in trouble, is they?"

The Parson lifted his chin, his mouth hardened, his brows drew together. "What makes you ask that?"

"Why, nothin' but idle curiosity." Deerman was undisturbed. "They seemed like nice kids, kinda devoted to each other, like me and Narcissa. I wouldn't see harm come to them for a thousand *pesos!* And I'm a poor man."

The Parson looked at him for a long moment, then drew forth a fat wad of bills and counted off five of them.

"There's a hundred bucks," he said grimly. "Not *pesos,* American money. If you run into them kids, look after 'em."

Deerman beamed, palmed the money. "Shu' will, mister."

"And tell 'em if you see 'em to get in touch with me at my hotel."

"The Victoria, you said. I'll do that."

The shadow left the Parson's face. His thin, chiseled features cracked into a tight, lopsided grin. He swung on his heel, caught hold of the pier and hoisted himself up.

"'Night, mister," came Deerman's voice.

"Good-night," said the Parson.

He turned briefly, saw the handsome young negress stick a shiny, nickel-plated gun back into the bosom of her dress. She had drawn it when she had gone in to fetch the demijohn, held it half-concealed under her armpit when she had poured the drinks. The heady odor of the perfume which saturated her clothing wafted to him briefly, was replaced by the fetid odor of rotted fruit as he paced down the pier toward the street.

Shadows moved away from the dark warehouse, moved with him. The Parson's hand dropped into his coat pocket, closed on the butt of his Luger. A man moved toward him with a bleak sort of smile, casually stopped about ten feet from him.

The Parson stopped, got set, muscles tense and waiting. The man said, "Take your hand off the gun, pal. I'm a friend."

He came into the light of the moon, a tall, thin man, dressed in tan gabardine. He held his hands in front of him, palms upward.

The Parson relaxed. It was the man he had seen in the company of the military looking white-haired old gent in the Montecita.

The man said, "I followed you all the way from Jake Mund's cottage. Carl Dorn and Eva think you're dead but I'm glad you're not. It's a swell night. Mind if I walk with you?"

They walked to the cobbled street,

turned in the direction of the flickering lights.

The Parson said, "I didn't catch your name."

"Joel Knight. Maybe you've heard of me."

The Parson turned his head sidewise but kept on walking. After a while he said, "Yeah, I've heard of you. You were a lawyer back in New York last I heard of you."

"Truth is, I still am. This is something of a vacation for me. I'm down here representing Major Hugh Amberly Rowe. He owns a couple of railroads, a lake steamship line and three or four continental bus companies. He pays income tax in six figures."

"That," said the Parson thoughtfully, "would be the old gent with the handlebar mustaches."

"Check. I've wanted to talk to you for some time, Parson."

"So you know my name, too."

Knight grinned indulgently. "Who hasn't heard of the Parson?" He made a sound with his lips. "Umm. Nothing doing on the little boat, huh?"

"What'd you mean?"

"They didn't go aboard the boat, did they?"

The Parson looked at him sidewise without checking stride. "If we're talk- of the same people, they didn't."

"We are. Did you like Carl Dorn and li'l' Eva? I thought it was nice that Alex Morton got clipped . . . the rat. I don't think Carl Dorn is so tough. But Eva, my! She's the guts of the outfit."

"So you were peeking, huh?"

Knight laughed. "Uh-huh. Right through a crack in the drawn shade. I was about to take a hand myself or call copper but that damned Chinese chopper cut loose."

"That," said the Parson grimly, "was Soo Gee, Lee Fong's bodyguard. But don't blame it all on the Yellow Peril. After all, they murdered Lee first."

"Who did?"

The Parson shrugged. "Search me. Maybe Carl Dorn, maybe Eva. And maybe Jake Mund. I'm not good at guessing games. Are you?"

"Lousy."

"Still, I distinctly heard Dorn say that he wondered who had knocked off the Chink, indicating that he hadn't. What about the major?"

"No. Oh, no. Not the major. I was stationed outside the window when he entered the house. Lee Fong was already dead on the floor."

"That leaves Jake Mund," said the Parson.

"And us out in the cold."

"Us?" said the Parson.

"Sure. I'm cutting you into the deal. We can't find Jake Mund and Nina, either of us. We might as well not find them together."

"I could tell more about that if I knew what this was all about."

Knight stopped short, looked keenly at the Parson. "You mean to say you don't know?"

"I'm a friend of Jake's, that's all. But he told me nothing."

"Whew!" Knight blew out his cheeks.

"Surprised?"

"You could bend me in two with a breath of air. And I was blithely cutting you into the deal."

"There's dough in it, huh?"

"Interested? Hell, of course, you are! You got a rep for keeping your eye on the main chance. Always a money player. I suppose I can bank on that. What say? Can you spare a dime's worth of time?"

The Parson said, "What can I get out of it?"

"Maybe about fifty, sixty grand. Maybe more. It'll be a two-way cut."

"I've heard *that* some place before. Shoot!"

"First, you got to promise you're in it with me."

"If I'm in, I'm in."

"Good. I know you don't go back on your word. And I need help. Who do you think Nina Mund is?" And when the Parson remained silent, "Ma-

jor Hugh Amberly Rowe's only daughter!"

The Parson looked at him.

"Yessir! Nina Rowe's her maiden name. You know who Jake Mund is, you know his connections."

"Yeah. He was with Dorn but the kid's a leveler."

"Maybe so. But that doesn't change the fact that he was planted at Major Rowe's home as a chauffeur by Carl Dorn to kidnap Nina."

Knight looked at the Parson with triumph, the sweat of excitement beading his forehead. The Parson looked at him wide-eyed, too dumbfounded to say anything. But his mind clicked into reverse, went swiftly over the ground. Yes, that explained a great deal. Things slipped into place, were firmly grooved. After a while Knight went on:

"But he didn't kidnap her. The plant went sour on him. He couldn't bring himself to follow out Dorn's orders. He fell in love with the girl. And the girl," he stopped, held the Parson's arm, "went nuts over him! Do you get it? Of all the crazy things to happen, that happened. They went into a love clinch. The day Jake was supposed to have brought her to the hide-out Dorn had prepared, he upped and eloped with her!"

"Where'd you promote all that?" the Parson asked gloomily.

"The whole set-up came out through Carl Dorn. He wasn't in touch with the hide-out, but he took it for granted his orders had been carried out. He demanded five hundred grand from the old major for the safe return of his daughter. That same night the major got a wire from Nina. She and Jake Mund had taken a plane for Mexico, they were married and would Papa forgive. Papa wouldn't. His daughter, heiress to millions, convent-bred, married to a common criminal! He damn near hit the ceiling. When Dorn found out what had happened, he exploded. Both he and the old man were left holding the bag. One lost his daughter and the other the biggest cash haul of his life."

The faintest shadow of a smile wreathed the Parson's lips. "Those kids really had guts," he said. He looked very pleased.

"Puppy love," said Knight scornfully.

"You," said the Parson with finality, "wouldn't know about that. Why didn't the major go to the cops?"

"Because of Dorn. Dorn made him promise to keep it all a dark secret. Otherwise he threatened to put a man on Nina's trail and have her killed. So the major kept his mouth shut."

"He was a fool."

"Maybe. But he thought a lot of his daughter. He wasn't going to take a chance. Just the same, he moved heaven and earth to find her."

"How'd he finally trace them down here?"

"That's my work," said Knight proudly. "Major Rowe used about six private detective agencies. They all picked up the trail—Vera Cruz, Havana, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, and lost it again. Then I came down here on a vacation cruise. I saw Nina singing at the Montecita. I cabled the major and he hired me, sight unseen."

The Parson frowned. "Then how did Dorn get here?"

Knight shrugged. "Don't know. Maybe he trailed the major."

"I still don't see where there's any dough in this for me."

Knight grinned very slowly, as if reluctantly. He stood still under a Spanish elm. The Parson stopped. Knight whispered:

"You heard Dorn and Eva talking when they thought you'd been killed. Dorn has talked the major into thinking that he's got Nina. You see, Nina and Jake were gone when the major arrived. He doesn't know where they are. And when Dorn said he had them both salted away, the major had to believe him. And two hundred grand—Dorn's price—is pin money to the major. He'd pay a million to get his daughter back safe and sound. So he'll pay Dorn. He won't

get his daughter back but he'll pay."

The Parson leaned his face closer. "And what do we do, produce the daughter, my friend, and shake the major down a second time?"

The sense of menace implicit in the Parson's voice got to Knight. His hand shook. "No," he said thickly. "You're too fast. We don't know where the girl is, do we? How could we produce her?"

"Yeah. That's so."

"Of course," said Knight heartily. "Hell, let's stop kidding each other, pal. You know what I mean."

"If there's any kidding, it's not from my side. Suppose you deal me another card."

"Hell, I thought you were quick on the uptake. Here's the layout. Dorn hasn't got the girl but I'm pretty sure he's going to be paid."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Well, I'm not the major's personal adviser for nothing."

"Oh."

"The instant the money changes hands you relieve Dorn of the burden of counting it. Do you get it now?"

"Check. It boils down to a simple hijack." The Parson was silent a moment, thinking. "But why cut me in?"

"Well, I couldn't handle it alone. I've got a clean reputation to uphold. Besides some fancy gun-work will be needed. You've got a rep for work with a gun. Without you I wouldn't get a nickel. With you I can split and still have mine. I'm no hog. What do you say? Are you in?"

The Parson drawled, "I'd be a dope to turn it down."

"Boy, that's talkin'. How about a cab?"

They had reached a main artery. Knight hailed a cab and they climbed in. Knight said, "Drive to Ching's bar." In the cab they talked plans.

But when they reached the bar, the Parson said, "I don't believe I'm drinking." Under his breath he added, "With you." Aloud he went on, "My face—I can't show such a damaged mugg in a public bar. I'll trot along to my hotel. I'll wait for your call."

Knight nodded. "Boy, we sure make some team—my brains and your gun. That's what I call a combination. We can't lose. Now remember, there'll be a key waiting for you at the desk. You go right up and slip into the closet. I'll leave it to you when to crack out."

"Yeah," said the Parson, "you just leave it to me."

THE PARSON had his breakfast sent up to his room at ten the next morning. The one English daily printed in Cariba informed him that two dead Chinamen, Lee Fong and Soo Gee, had been found, one by and one in the cottage occupied by a Jake Mund and his wife, Nina, who was a singer at Lee Fong's Montecita. A third corpse had been discovered, that of an unidentified white man believed to be an American. Soo Gee and the white man had been shot; Lee Fong had been clubbed to death. No motive for the triple killing had been unearthed as yet. But police had sent out an alarm for Mund and his wife who were mysteriously missing.

The Parson spent the day in his room, hovering close to the telephone. He killed a couple of hours cleaning and oiling his gun. He played about fifty games of solitaire. Then he sat at the window, staring out. It was getting dusk. Lights in the street came on. Lights festooned the piers and appeared on the mast-heads of ships riding at anchor in the curved sweep of the harbor.

At last his phone rang. Nervous before, he was instantly calm when he heard Joel Knight's voice.

Knight said, "All set, boy. The payoff is for seven-thirty. Carl Dorn is smart at that. The Pan-American plane leaves for Curacao at eight-ten. He'll be figuring to be aboard that and away before the major tumbles to the fact he's been taken in. You see, Dorn's promised

to produce Nina by nine. But of course he can't. The key will be waiting at the desk. I've arranged for the whole transaction to take place in my room. You use the clothes closet near the window."

The phone clicked. The Parson cradled the receiver, thoughtfully stuck a cigarette in his face, lighted it. Then he took a last look at his gun, clapped a hat on his head and went out.

The taxi took him to Knight's hotel, the Royal Palms. At the desk he stopped, said to the clerk:

"Mr. Knight left a key for me."

The clerk bowed. "He said you were to go right up to his suite.

"Thanks."

The suite consisted of a sitting room, bedroom and connecting bath. There was only one closet, though, near a window. There was no one there. The Parson took mental note of the whole layout, paced restlessly up and back. His watch said seven-fifteen.

At seven-eighteen he was electrified by carpet-muffled footfalls outside the corridor door. Frowning, he stood listening while they came closer. There was something vaguely disquieting about them. The door did not immediately open. No key was inserted in the lock. He sensed that whoever was outside was listening first with an ear pressed against the panel. Swiftly, he opened the closet door, slipped into the stuffy darkness and noiselessly drew the door shut. He estimated a thirty-second wait. Then he heard the corridor door open and close.

He pressed his ear against a crack. Hurried, yet stealthy footsteps sounded within the apartment. There were at least two men who had come in, perhaps three. No, two; he could tell by the way the footsteps sounded. But there was no conversation between the men. The sound of their movement ceased suddenly.

Minutes dragged by. The Parson wondered where the two men had gone. They had not gone out. Then he remembered the bedroom. They had gone in there. Yet strain as he would he could hear nothing. These newcomers could not be Knight and Major Rowe; they would have stayed in the living-room. Certainly, they would have talked. And they couldn't be Carl Dorn and Eva. There had been something heavy in the tread—they were the footfalls of two men. What could it mean?

In the wait ahead of him, the Parson speculated on the identity and purpose of the newcomers. Then his thoughts were interrupted by the corridor door opening a second time. This time the show was on. He recognized Knight's voice and afterward Major Rowe's.

Rowe said, "Take a chair, miss," with old-fashioned courtesy.

Eva's voice came to the Parson, saying, "Thanks, sport."

He pictured red-haired Eva with the green eyes and gold-flecked pupils. Instantly, a fourth voice, a man's, said, "Oke, major, let's get this over right away."

That was Carl Dorn's voice. He was across the room somewhere, farther from the closet than the girl was. The Parson had slipped his blunt-nosed Luger from the underarm holster, had soundlessly squatted on his haunches so as to bring his eyes level with the large old-fashioned keyhole. He saw the four of them. The lawyer, Knight, stood to one side but near the chair in which Eva sat, trim silken legs crossed, both hands closed over a handbag. Carl Dorn was near the hall door; a few feet from him stood the white-haired major. The major, however, moved out of the Parson's line of vision, as he said:

"Yes. You must give me some guarantee of my daughter's safety when I pay over the money you demand."

"Have you got the dough on you?" Dorn asked.

"Yes."

"Let's see the color of it."

The major moved back within range of the keyhole. The Parson saw him reach into the breast pocket of his coat and take out a flat manila envelope. He

laid it down on the table, stepped back.

Carl Dorn leaped at it like a dog after liver. The Parson was tense, muscles bunched, lines of worry creasing the space between his eyes. He saw Knight casting anxious glances at the closet door as though inviting him to crack out. But the Parson held back. There was still unexplained in his mind the two men who had come in just after him. If they were a couple of hijackers, perhaps he had best move fast. But if not. . . .

Dorn had torn off the flap of the envelope and had drawn out a packet of bills. But suddenly view of him was blocked by the intervening body of Major Rowe. The old man stood there with a gun in his fist!

The Parson couldn't see Dorn but he distinctly heard his gulp of sheer astonishment. He could just barely see the girl. She had not moved but a cruel and wolfish grin suddenly appeared on her sensuous face. The most surprised person in the room was Joel Knight. He stood with mouth agape, eyes fairly popping, Adam's apple working up and down like an agitated pulley-weight of his emotions.

The major straightened his shoulders. His jaw stood out like a chunk of granite. He said slowly and distinctly:

"Kidnapers, are you? You'll return my daughter safe and sound? Did you think you could really get away with a bluff like that?"

Carl Dorn purpled, started to speak, spread his thick tongue over his lips instead. The gun steadied on him.

"You're a couple of fools," Major Rowe went on with quiet dignity. "You didn't fool me any. I know where Nina is. You haven't got her. You never had her."

Dorn jerked out, "It's a d-double-cross."

Eva moved her legs. She was still smiling but she said nothing.

"You'll think about that when the police have you behind bars," the major said softly. His voice raised a bit. "All right, officers; you can come in now."

There was movement at the other side of the room and then two men came into the Parson's narrow gauge of vision. They were thick-fingered, burly men. Police detective written all over them. They held guns.

The foremost of them said, "The pair of you are under arrest. I advise you that anything you may say will be used against you. Put the handcuffs on them, Tom."

Carl Dorn got white. His knees quaked. He took a backward step, brought up against a table. They were watching him. The Parson wanted to yell a warning. But he kept his mouth shut. Eva had opened her bag. She stood up with a black automatic in her hand. It coughed, ejected flame and sound. She was laughing, white teeth showing. She fired again.

The second shot struck Major Rowe. He staggered like a tree about to topple. His gun boomed. Wood splintered. Something shot past in the darkness above the Parson's head and behind him plaster detached itself from the wall. The slug had gone through the closet door.

Major Rowe bumped to the floor on his knees with the shock of the bullet in his chest. Then he gently keeled over.

Carl Dorn snatched a gun from his pocket. It cleared the cloth and flamed simultaneously. One of the detectives spun about like a top. When he stopped spinning, he slammed down. The other detective fired. Joel Knight dragged forth a gun, too. But he ducked, went down and stayed down and didn't use his gun.

Dorn, Eva and the second detective were all firing at once. Powder smoke reeked. The detective snapped a swift shot from behind the shelter of a chair. Carl Dorn turned as if he were going to walk out of the door; he crashed resoundingly to the floor. The Parson could just barely see his head. The head did not move.

The detective's gun clicked as he leveled it at Eva. She streaked for the

door, got it open. Knight fired at her. The bullet split the glass knob, shattered it. She was through safely and running down the hall. The detective snatched the gun from his partner's hand and raced after her. Shots boomed distantly.

The Parson flung the closest door open and faced Joel Knight. His lips were blue, knees shaking. For a split second the two of them stood motionless. Then the Parson sidled over to the table where the money still lay.

His grin was sour, mocking. "Well, all I gotta do is take it."

Knight gulped like a stunned carp. "N-no. We can't dare touch it now. Listen! Get out! Before someone comes in. There's a back staircase . . . door . . . other room."

The Parson fingered the money lovingly, then let it fall back to the table. He looked down at Carl Dorn. He lay on his side, eyes open and sightless. Dead as a taxidermist's window display. Major Rowe was groaning, stirring. The detective was dead.

"Somebody crossed somebody," the Parson snarled softly. "Then somebody else crossed somebody else." He looked at Knight. "What do you make of it?"

Knight was still dazed. He rubbed a hand over his eyes, over his sweating forehead. "I'm still in the dark."

The Parson's sour grin came back fleetingly. He said, "The old major was smarter than we figured, is all. Two dicks planted in the next room. Not bad, not bad at all."

"God, what a shock!" Knight breathed like a spent runner, haggard lines lengthening his face.

The Parson said over his shoulder, "Don't let it get you down, guy. We gotta learn to expect our share of surprises." He knelt briefly by the major's side. "Hm. Slug went through the top of the chest. Not much blood, either. He'll be O.K."

Footsteps were pounding far down the corridor. Voices were shouting.

Knight said, "You'd better get out before you're seen."

The Parson rose leisurely. "Yeah. But I sure hate to leave all this dough behind."

There was silence and then Knight, his face convulsed, whispered violently, "No! I can't allow— That detective, he'll remember I was the last person left behind. If the money's gone, they'll blame me. To touch it now would be suicide."

"Not for me," said the Parson tranquilly. "Anyway, it wouldn't be suicide just to touch it."

"No, no! Don't—I'll—"

"Don't run a fever. Funny thing. I broke into this shebang for the dough was in it. Now I don't care so much about the money. All I'm thinkin' of is them two kids. Funny, huh? With the dough starin' me in the face."

"Listen! They're at the door. Get out!"

"Yeah. Well, s'long. Our combination was a bust, huh? Your brains didn't work and my gun didn't shoot. Maybe we'll get together again some time. Look me up."

He slipped through to the bedroom. There was a bolt on the back door. He eased it open, stepped out into the corridor. No one saw him. The stairs were dark and odors of food wafted up from the restaurant kitchen below. He passed the kitchen. It was deserted. He walked out into the night. He crossed a wide expanse of lawn, the garage driveway and went through a gate. He walked up the street to the corner and faced the hotel's front entrance.

The street was choked with humanity; white, black and yellow men jabbering away in three tongues. It was very lively; people spoke excitedly. There were a dozen versions of what had happened. All of them cockeyed.

After a while, the Parson saw the detective who had raced out of Knight's room after Eva, returning doggedly to the hotel. Uniformed policemen were with him. But not Eva. Bicycle cops pedaled up with stolid urbanity. Pretty soon they formed a knot of about a

dozen in front of the hotel. They talked to each other in calm British voices and shifted from foot to foot, not knowing what to do. Then it occurred to them that the crowd needed dispersing. The night boat for Curacao let forth a mournful, deep-toned blast. Her lights formed a twinkling pattern on the dark blue water.

The Parson moved away from the press of the crowd, circled the street and slouched into a broad avenue lined with restless, nodding palms.

For a long time he walked aimlessly, as if merely for the sake of walking. Then he looked up and found himself in front of Ching's, the biggest bar in Cariba. He went in, perched on a high stool and ordered rum. He sipped thoughtfully, face expressionless and rigid. His glass was refilled and he repeated the sipping process. The bright lights, the clink of glasses and bottles, the bustle and hum of conversation passed over, beyond and through him. He spent nearly three-quarters of an hour that way. Finally, he paid up and walked back into the street. A line of cabs was parked at the curb. He crooked a finger at one, climbed in. "Fruit pier," he said.

THERE were three small boats moored to the pier. The boat the Parson sought had been moved but not far. It bobbed gently against the oily swell. In the quiet, ropes creaked and sea water slapped against the pier, sucking out and slapping in with endless rhythm. Aboard the boat, nothing moved.

The Parson leaped nimbly aboard but made no effort to muffle the sound of his movements. He strode across the tiny deck. A cabin door opened and Captain Deerman's broad bulk was outlined against the streaming panel of light. The Parson stepped into the light.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Ormond," Captain Deerman said softly, recognizing him. "Come in. Come in."

He stood aside and the Parson went into the closet-size cabin. Deerman's colored woman was seated in a rocker. Her white teeth shone in a smile of welcome. She didn't get up. The air was heady with the gardenia perfume that came from her clothes. The Parson sat down on a bench. Deerman closed the door and sat down opposite him. On the table before him was a stock of wood, a big clasp-knife and a pile of shavings. Deerman was whittling a sailing ship model. He took up the knife and the stock of wood and trimmed the edge with deft, graceful movements of the blade.

His dreamy voice crooned. "I got about a dozen of 'em, all types. Makin' 'em keep your hands out of trouble. This one don't look like much now but it'll be the *Cutty Sark* when I'm finished. You like sailin' ships?"

The Parson leaned his elbows on the table. Deerman's woman rocked and the smile played about her handsome chocolate features. The Parson reached over with one hand and began playing with the neat pile of shavings.

"Heard what happened to Major Rowe about an hour or so ago?"

"Friend, I been aboard this here boat since evenin' fell." But both Deerman's eyes were wide open and fixed on the Parson's lips; he had stopped whittling. And he said nothing about not knowing the major.

"He stopped a piece of lead," the Parson said.

"Daid?"

"No, just hurt."

Deerman laid down the wood and then the knife. His eyes regarded the Parson for a long moment. "Who done it?"

"A feller named Carl Dorn and his woman, Eva. She's a snake; she wriggled clear. Dorn got himself killed." . . .

Deerman's face was blank. He removed his gaze from the Parson and glanced over at his wife. She was no longer smiling. Both shook their heads.

"Remember them?" questioned the Parson.

"Friend, I never heard of 'em. Besides there was no woman."

"But there was someone who came to see you, huh?" the Parson prodded.

Deerman shrugged. "Ain't they always someone?" Without turning his head, he added, "Narcissa, put up that fool gun. This gen'l'man's friendly."

The Parson turned and saw the gun in her hand. She was not in the least embarrassed. The same piquant smile returned to her lips. She laid the gun in her lap.

Deerman chuckled, said, "Narcissa can hit a flyin' fish mid-air at a hundred yards. And pick her spot. Crease his spine, nip his head or clip his tail. She is sure fond o' guns."

"And perfume."

Deerman looked quizzically at the Parson and shook his head, smiling.

"Gardenia perfume," said the Parson.

"Um. Call your play, friend. Narcissa can have some target practice or pour us a coupla swallows of rum. What you mean by that last remark?"

"Make it rum."

"So?"

The Parson leaned forward suddenly, said into Deerman's face, "Nina Mund used gardenia perfume. Also a silver compact with her initials. Narcissa was dolling up with the compact yesterday." He sniffed. "And gardenia—it's all over the room now."

Deerman's deep, soothing voice said, "That ain't why you gave me a hundred dollars last night."

"No. That hundred was a deposit on Nina and Jake's lives. As soon as I saw the compact and smelled that perfume, I was sure they'd been aboard. But since you acted like you were waitin' on 'em, I figured right off that Jake Mund had given you something to button your mouth. That hundred of mine was to button it tighter. Not knowin' what the game was all about at the time, I thought it was safer for 'em to be undercover I figured that when the time came for me to find out where they were I'd find out."

Deerman had listened impassively. "Not all of that's correct."

The Parson nodded solemnly. "As soon as the major got shot, I knew I'd figured somethin' out wrong. That's why I'm here."

"Narcissa," said Deerman, "get out the rum 'john."

Narcissa did not move. Light, delicate footsteps sounded outside on the deck above the sighing of the night wind through the rigging. The footsteps approached to the door. The knob rattled and the door flung back. Joel Knight came into the cabin; a small .32 was in his hand.

"Never mind the rum," said Deerman softly.

Knight stood in the door with his eyes only on the Parson. He had been drinking. He looked at the Parson and seemed uncertain whether to show welcome or embarrassment. It was evident, though, that the presence of the Parson had thrown him off stride.

The Parson said, "Go right ahead with what you intended doing. Don't mind me."

"No. There's nothing. I was just—That is, I meant—" He gulped, took a noisy breath. "There's evidently some misunderstanding.

"All on your part, pal," the Parson said. "Listen to me! You've been the key double-crosser in this mess since it began. What kind of a sap did you take me for? Your deal with me to hijack the ransom money was about the fourth double-cross you'd attempted. By that time you were tied up in knots."

"Please, please!" implored Knight. "What are you talking about?"

"This, fathead! You murdered Lee Fong. You'd made a deal with him to keep Nina Mund watched night and day so she couldn't slip away before her father or Carl Dorn arrived. Not that you told Lee what it was all about. Oh, no! You were too smart. But Lee smelled money. He got a promise of

five thousand from Major Rowe if he could keep Nina from harm. That's why he hot-footed it to the kid's cottage. But you were there first. You couldn't have him horn in on your game. So you socked him two, three times. When the kids came in, you slipped out the back door.

"They were scared witless to find a dead man in their house. They packed a bag quick, flung things into it and scooted. They lit out to the boat—this boat. You followed them. It wasn't hard to figure their plans—a quick getaway. You had a confidential talk with Cap'n Deerman, gave him some money. Obligingly, he tied them up for you."

Deerman chuckled. "He gave me five hundred."

"Yeah," said the Parson. "His game was to cash in but with no partners. Oh, he wanted partners for the dirty work but not for the pay-off. Y'see, Jake Mund used to be in Carl Dorn's gang. He was supposed to have kidnaped Nina so Dorn could collect a five hundred grand ransom. Instead he fell in love with the girl and she with him. They skipped, got married; her father spent a small fortune trying to find her and take her back home."

"So that's how it was."

"Yeah. Our pal, Knight, decided he'd collect two or three times. Instead of handing them over to Dorn, he was going to hold them for himself, then fleece the major when the right time rolled around. But before that he had to let Carl Dorn and Eva get theirs from the major. He'd overheard them speaking; he knew they hadn't much use for him and that they'd freeze him out if they could. So he took me on as a temporary partner to get the shake-down dough from them but principally to see that they got wiped out. After that, he figured it as clear sailing to squeeze some real money out of the major for the return of Nina.

"The major himself spoiled the party by planting a couple of dicks in the next room. The ground was cut from under Knight's feet. He put two and two together. That's why he's here, Deerman. To kill you so you can't spill what you know."

Deerman smiled. He looked over at Narcissa. She smiled.

"I don't think he will do that," said Deerman dreamily.

No one moved. It was very quiet in the cabin. Then Knight, his face gone gray, said:

"He's raving mad! I brought Jake and Nina Mund here myself to—to protect them from Dorn." His voice gained shrillness. "That's it—to protect them!" He caught at the phrase as though it automatically cleared him.

"Did you?" said the Parson gently. "Then why did you bring Dorn and his killers to Cariba in the first place? At the same time that you informed Major Rowe, you tipped off Dorn. Yeah. When I first ran into you on the dock, you asked me if I remembered you. I remembered. I remembered that about twelve years ago when Dorn was dealing in beer you were counsellor for his gang. Not many people knew that. You always had a cover of respectability. When he planned to snatch Nina, you were probably still his attorney, That's how come you knew all the ins and outs."

"You got it wrong!" Knight mopped his face and turned to Deerman, said, "If only you'd listen. Don't believe his insinuations. It. . . ."

His voice trailed to silence. He turned a tortured face toward the open door, haunted eyes groveling in his head. Footsteps clop-clopped over the deck in slow, measured tread. A head appeared suddenly in the oblong of yellow light.

Major Rowe stood in the doorway. He wore no hat. He carried his shoulder stiffly.

Knight backed up out of his way and brought up against the wall. The major stared hard at him, as if not quite understanding his presence. Deerman slipped past the major and out the door before anyone could stop him.

The Parson said, "Just in time. Knight and I've been talking. Sort of threshing things over. He's the baby responsible for the whole mess."

Major Rowe jerked a glance at the Parson without comprehending what he meant. He came into the room. The slight bullet wound had weakened him obviously. He put one hand on the table to support himself.

"I have come for my daughter," he said.

"Sure," said the Parson. "And the guy who planted her here—Joel Knight."

Again the major looked at the Parson. Then he looked at Knight.

Knight's lips were quivering. "D-don't believe a word he says. Let me explain. He's got it all wrong."

"He's got it right," said a voice from the doorway.

The Parson's head pivoted about.

The red-haired woman, Eva, stood there holding a gun in her hand and looking very menacing with drooping lids over her green-gold eyes.

The Parson laughed. He made it a hearty, diverting laugh to cover the slight movement of Narcissa's hand toward the gun in her lap.

"Li'l' Eva," he said warmly. "And just in time."

She looked at him not without surprise. "The runt, eh? I thought you'd been plugged. I'll get around to you in a moment. I'll kill the rat first, then you, then the old man. He got Carl killed. I'll kill him!"

The word seemed to intoxicate her. Her nostrils were dilated.

"Hoist the mitts," she said. "All of you. You too, chocolate. I said hoist!"

Nobody moved. Her wild face said plainly that she would shoot at the slightest movement, even to obey her commands. Knight swayed slightly as if he would faint. Her glittering orbs flicked to him.

"You were bright, huh? You tipped the major to the bluff; you told him we didn't have his damn daughter."

Knight tried to shake his head. He tried to smile reassuringly. But he couldn't move a muscle.

"I slipped back to the hotel," she went on, "to watch for you. I didn't care any more about being caught; I just wanted to burn a bullet through your heart. I saw you come out and I followed you. Then just as I was about to come aboard, the old gent showed. I slipped behind a barrel and let him go first. I wanted him, too. But I wanted you most."

Knight made a bleating sound with his lips but no words came forth. Suddenly there was a diversion. Eva stiffened, crouched. An inner door to the right of Narcissa opened. Jake Mund stood there with Nina beside him. Deerman was behind them.

Eva looked at them and her teeth showed. "Jake! This is swell, swell! Now we're all here. Come in, come in!"

"Dad!" It was Nina. She ran across the room, flung her arms about the quivering old man. "Dad, you're hurt! Is anything—"

"Let go of him!" Eva snapped. "Just step aside. Yeah. Now watch me cut him down. Just like—"

The Parson realized that there was no time to go for his gun. Something quicker was needed. He saw Eva's gun move until it was on a line with Major Rowe's heart, saw her finger whiten under pressure on the trigger. Nina screamed. The Parson was about to fling himself out of his chair.

Jake, from the doorway, moved faster. He hurtled across the room under Eva's gun. Her trigger finger twitched. The gun blasted and a slug burned Jake's ribs. Almost perceptibly it seemed to halt him. He shivered but came on doggedly. He hit her sidewise and she flung into a corner.

Narcissa got her gun up and shot her twice in the chest. Eva's shoulders hit hard into the V of the corner; she was grinning.

Knight was throwing himself toward the open doorway that led to the deck.

It was that which brought forth the grin.

Eva shot him in the back.

The gun action jolted her away from the corner. Her feet tangled but with her left hand she caught the table and stopped her fall. She bumped against the major, held herself erect. Knight was falling through the door. She shot him again.

The Parson had jerked his Luger out. His mouth was pulled down grimly. Before he could fire, Eva moved her head slowly toward him; the grin was still on her face. Then her knees buckled, struck the floor. She pitched forward on her face.

It was deafeningly still in the cabin. Gun smoke swirled to the overhead light. Water lapped gently against the boat's side. Jake Mund got to his feet slowly, his handsome young face grave and haggard.

Nina fluttered to him. "Jake, are you hurt?" She began to cry.

He sank into a chair, smiled wanly, put his hands on her cheeks. "Don't cry, sugar. I'm all right. Everything's all right. You've got your Dad now and we got the Parson. He'll make it all right. The Parson's our friend."

The Parson moved out to the deck. Deerman followed him. A crowd was gathering on the pier. Deerman looked out over the water. The Parson said, "You tipped off Major Rowe, didn't you?"

Deerman nodded. "I got to thinkin' after I tied up that boy and girl. I listened in at the cabin door while they was talkin'. It was mostly about her father Major Rowe and how she was scared he'd come to take her home. So I just went aroun' to all the hotels in Cariba until I found a man answerin' to the name, Major Rowe. That boy and girl was in trouble and I figured her father ought to know about it."

"But weren't you afraid he'd go to the cops?"

"Ah, he was a gentleman. He promised to tell the cops nothin' until the whole thing was cleared. He was to have come aboard and gotten them himself and the police'd never know I was mixed up in it. When he came aboard a little while ago, why I just went back and untied them an' brought them in here. Glad I did, too. That young feller handled that red-head woman good."

"Yeah," said the Parson thoughtfully. "I guess he's got guts at that." He looked pleased. "But why did you mix in the mess at all?"

"Well, the fishin' this time of year is poor and that feller Knight's five hundred looked big."

"Hm. But how come you went to the major at all after Knight had paid you five hundred to be on *his* side?"

Deerman cocked his head to one side as if that were something to puzzle over. "I'm damned if I know, 'cept I got to thinkin', I guess, an' I don't mind makin' a dollar by winkin' at the law but when you got a chance to make a little honest money and help out a couple of kids just married besides, well I guess that's all there's to it."

"Yeah," said the Parson, "I know just how you feel."

Jake Mund appeared beside him and said, "Parson, I don't know how I'm going to thank you."

"Phht! Listen, once. The cops will be here in a jiffy. Here's your story. You weren't tied, see? Deerman's a friend who gave you shelter because you were afraid of Carl Dorn and Eva and Joel Knight. That's the mugg Eva shot. Got it straight?"

Mund's face darkened. "You're wrong. Deerman crossed us."

"You listen to me," the Parson said savagely. "Deerman's your friend. You'll find out why soon enough. You'll do as I say. Is that clear?"

Mund looked at him. "All right," he said.

"How's your side?" asked the Parson with unexpected gentleness.

"All right, I guess."

"Hurt much?"

"No."

"Then why in hell ain't you in there with your wife?"

"No," said Mund. "I guess they caught up with us. She'll be going back with her father."

"Listen," said the Parson. "I blew fifty grand getting you clear of Carl Dorn. I could've had the dough. All I had to do was take it. I'll be damned if I don't have to get you out of this, too."

"What are you talking about?"

The Parson gripped his arm. "Come on." He pushed into the cabin, dragging Mund behind him. "Listen!" his voice crackled. Major Rowe and Nina looked up. "This kid's gone through hell with your daughter. If you think you're going to snatch her back home and leave him behind, you got another think coming. These two belong together. Why, he even saved your life a few minutes ago."

"Don't yell," said the major. "Nina's been telling me about him. Jake, I'm proud of you! Will you shake hands?" The Parson turned to go. "Wait a moment. Nina's explained about you, too. Jake told her. I don't know if I can repay you for all you've done but if money will help."

"Money? Money!" said the Parson. "Mister, I could fall over with surprise at that crack."

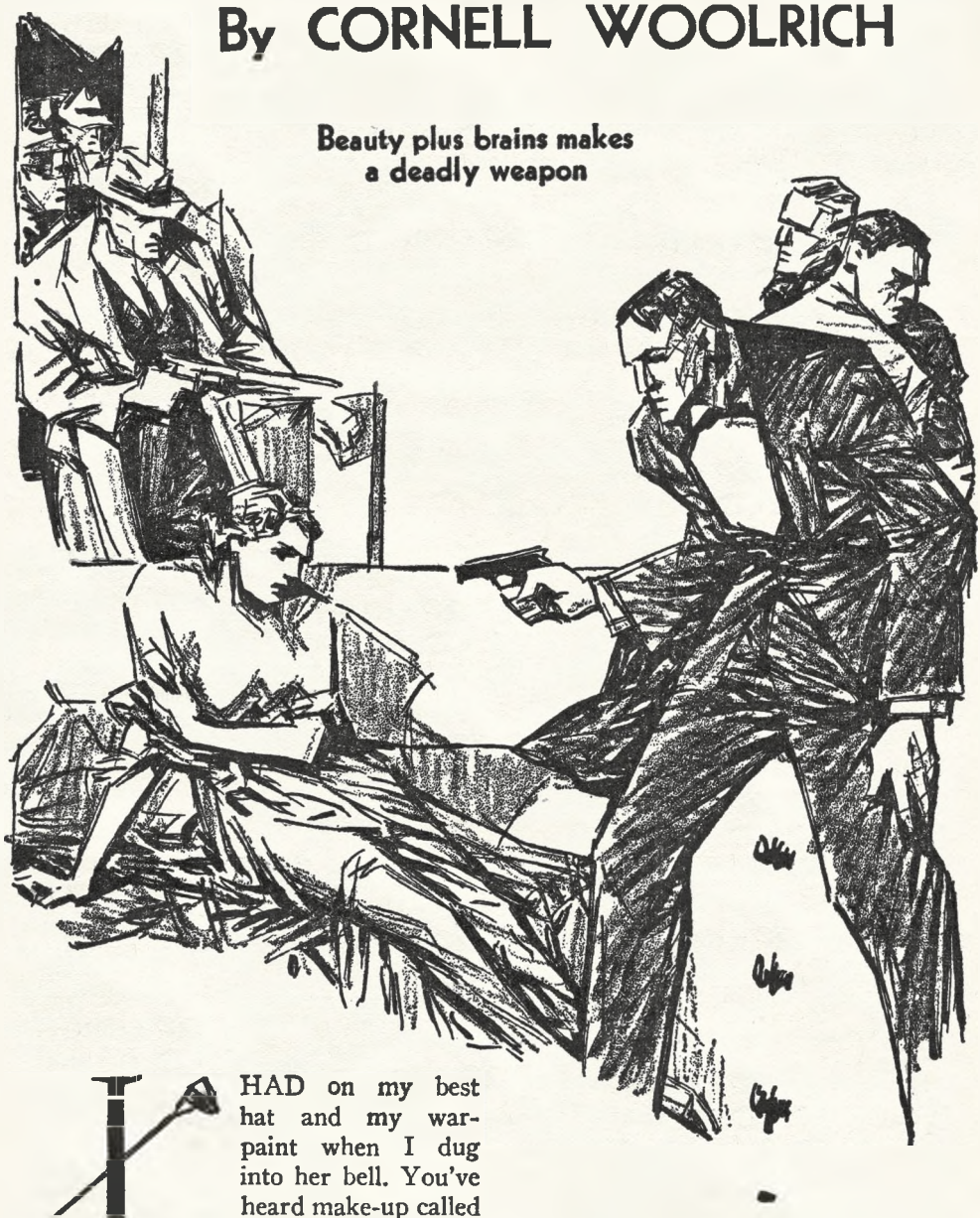
He stalked out on deck. The crowd had parted and two big policemen in white drill jackets and blue trousers were pounding toward the boat with beefy determination.

The Parson moved forward to meet them at the rail.

FACE WORK

By CORNELL WOOLRICH

Beauty plus brains makes a deadly weapon



I HAD on my best hat and my war-paint when I dug into her bell. You've heard make-up called that a thousand times, but this is one time it rated it; it was just that—war-paint.

I caught Ruby Rose Reading at breakfast time—hers, not mine. Quarter to three in the afternoon. Breakfast was a pink soda-fountain mess, a tomato-and-lettuce, both untouched, and an empty glass of Bromo Seltzer, which had evidently had first claim on her. There were a pair of swell ski slides

under her eyes; she was reading Gladys Glad's beauty column to try to figure out how to get rid of them before she went out that night and got a couple more. A smoke had opened the door, and given me a yellowed optic. "Yes ma'am, who you wish to see?"

"I see her already," I said, "so skip the Morse Code." I went in up to Ruby Rose's ten-yard line. "Wheeler's the name," I said, "Does it mean anything to you?"

"Should it?" She was dark and Salome-ish. She was mean. She was bad medicine. I could see his finish right there, in her eyes. And it hadn't been any fun to dance at Texas Guinan's or Larry Fay's when I was sixteen, to keep him out of the orphan asylum or the reformatory. I hadn't spent most of my young girlhood in a tinseled G-string to have her take apart what I'd built up, just to see what made him tick.

I said, "I don't mind coming right out with it in front of your dinge—if you don't."

But evidently she did. Maybe Mandy was on a few other payrolls beside her own. She hit her with the tomato-and-lettuce in the left eye as preamble to the request: "Whaddo I pay you for, anyway? Take Foo-Too around the block a couple of times!"

"I tuk him once already, and he was a good boy," was the weather report she got on this.

"Well, take him again. Maybe you can kid him it's tomorrow already."

Mandy fastened something that looked like the business-end of a floor mop to a leash, went out shaking her head. "You sho didn't enjoy yo'self last night. That Sto'k Club never do agree with you."

As soon as the gallery was out of the way I said. "You lay off my brother!"

She lit a cigarette, nosed the smoke at me. "Well, Gracie Allen, you've come to the wrong place looking for your brother. And, just for the record, what am I supposed to have done to him, cured him of wiping his nose on his sleeve or something?"

"He's been spending dough like wild, dough that doesn't come out of his salary."

"Then where does it come from?" she asked.

"I haven't found out. I hope his firm never does, either." I shifted gears, went into low—like when I used to sing "Poor Butterfly" for the customers—but money couldn't have dragged this performance out of me, it came from the heart, without pay. "There's a little girl on our street, oh not much to look at, thinks twelve o'clock's the middle of the night and storks leave babies, but she's ready to take up where I leave off, pinch pennies and squeeze nickels along with him, build him into something, get him somewhere, not spread him all over the landscape. He's just a man, doesn't know what's good for him, doesn't know his bass from his oboe. I can't stand by and watch her chew her heart up. Give her a break, and him, and me. Pick on someone your size, someone that can take it. Have your fun and more power to you—but not with all *I've* got!"

She banged her cigarette to death against a tray. "O.K., is the screen test about over? Now, will you get out of here, you ham-actress, and lemme get my massage?" She went over and got the door ready for me. Gave a traffic-cop signal over her shoulder with one thumb. "I've heard of wives pulling this act, and even mothers, and in a pitcher I saw only lately, Camilly it was called, it was the old man. Now it's a sister!" She gave the ceiling the once-over. "What'll they think of next? Send grandma around tomorrow—next week East Lynne. Come on, make it snappy!" she invited, and hitched her elbow at me. If she'd touched me, I think I'd have murdered her.

"If you feel I'm poison, why don't you put it up to your brother?" she signed off. And very low, just before she walloped the door after me: "And see how far you get!"

HE WAS right.

I said, "Chick, you're not going to chuck your job, you're not going to Chicago with that dame, are you?"

He looked at me funny and he said, "How did you know?"

"I saw your valise all packed, when I wanted to send one of your suits to the cleaners."

"You ought to be a detective," he said, and he wasn't pally. "O.K.," he said, "now that you mention it," and he went in and he got it to show me—the back of it going out the door. But I got over there to the door before he did, and pulled a Custer's Last Stand. I skipped the verse and went into the patter chorus. And boy did I sell it, without a spot and without a muted trumpet solo either! At the El-Fay in the old days they would have all been crying into their gin and wiring home to mother.

"I'm not asking anything for myself. I'm older than you, Chick, and when a girl says that you've got her down to bedrock. I've been around plenty, and 'around' wasn't pretty. Maybe you think it was fun wrestling my way home each morning at five, and no holds barred, just so—so. . . . Oh, I didn't know why myself sometimes; just so you wouldn't turn out to be another corner lizard, a sharp-shooter, a bum like the rest of them. Chick, you're just a punk of twenty-four, but as far as I'm concerned the sun rises and sets across your shoulders. Me and little Mary Allen, we've been rooting for you all along; what's the matter with her, Chick? Just because her face don't come out of boxes and she doesn't know the right grips, don't pass her by for something that ought to be shampooed out of your hair with gasoline."

But he didn't have an ear for music; the siren song had got to him like Ulysses. And once they hear that. . . . "Get away from the door," he said, way down low. "I never raised a hand to you in my life, I don't want to now."

The last I saw of him he was passing the back of his hand slowly up and down his side, like he was ashamed of it; the valise was in the other one. I picked myself up from the opposite side of the foyer where he'd sent me, the place all buckling around me like seen through a sheet of water. I called out after him through the open door: "Don't go, Chick! You're heading straight for the eight-ball! *Don't go to her,* Chick!" The acoustics were swell, every door in the hall opened to get an earful.

He just stood there a split-second without looking back at me, yellow light gushing out at him through the port-hole of the elevator. He straightened his hat, which my chin against his duke had dislodged—and no more Chick.

At about four that morning I was still snivelling into the gin he'd left behind him, and talking to him across the table from me—without getting any answer—when the doorbell rang. I thought it was him for a minute, but it was two other guys. They didn't ask if they could come in, they just went 'way around to the other side of me and then showed me a couple of tin-heeled palms. So I did the coming-in—after them; I lived there, after all.

They looked the place over like they were prospective tenants being shown an apartment. I didn't go for that; detectives belong in the books you read in bed, not in your apartment at four bells, big as life. "Three closets," I mentioned, "and you get a month's concession. I'm not keeping you gentlemen up, am I?"

One of them was kind of pash looking; I mean he'd washed his face lately, and if he'd been the last man in the world, well, all right, maybe I could have overlooked the fact he was a bloodhound on two legs. The other one had a face like one of those cobblestones they dug up off Eighth Avenue when they removed the trolley tracks.

"You're Jerry Wheeler, aren't you?" the first one told me.

"I've known that for twenty-seven years," I said. "What brought the subject up?"

Cobblestone-face said, "Chick Wheeler's sister, that right?"

"I've got a brother and I call him Chick," I consented. "Any ordinance against that?"

The younger one said, "Don't be so hard to handle. You're going to talk to us and like it." He sat down in a chair, cushioned his hands behind his dome. He said, "What time'd he leave here this evening?"

Something warned me, "Don't answer that." I said, "I really couldn't say. I'm not a train-despatcher."

"He was going to Chicago with a dame named Ruby Rose Reading; you knew that, didn't you?"

I thought, "I hit the nail on the head, he *did* help himself to his firm's money. Wonder how much he took? Well, I guess I'll have to go back to work again at one of the hot-spots; maybe I can square it for him, pay back a little each week." I kept my face steady. I said, "Now, why would he go *anywhere* with anyone with a name like that? It sounds like it came off a bottle of nail-polish. Come to the point, gentlemen—yes. I mean you two. What's he supposed to have done?"

"There's no supposition about what he's done. He went to the Alcazar Arms at eight fifteen tonight and throttled Ruby Rose Reading to death, Angel Face."

And that was the first time I heard myself called that. I also heard the good-looking one remonstrate: "Aw, don't give it to her that sudden, Coley, she's a girl after all," but it came from 'way far away. I was down around their feet somewhere sniffling into the carpet.

The good-looking one picked me up and straightened me out in a chair. Cobblestone said, "Don't let her fool you, Burnsie, they all pull that collapsible concertina act when they wanna get out of answering questions." He went into the bedroom and I could hear him pulling out bureau drawers and rummaging around.

I got up on one elbow. I said, "Burns, he didn't do it! *Please*, he didn't do it! All right, I did know about her. He was sold on her. That's why he couldn't have done it. Don't you see, you don't kill the thing you love?"

He just kind of looked at me. "You go to bat for the thing you love too," he murmured. He said, "I've been on the squad eight years now. We never in all that time caught a guy as dead to rights as your brother. He showed up with his valise in the foyer of the Alcazar at exactly twelve minutes past eight tonight. He said to the doorman, 'What time is it? Did Miss Reading send her baggage down yet? We've got to make a train.' Well, she had sent her baggage down, and then she'd changed her mind, she'd had it all taken back upstairs again. There's your motive, right there. The doorman rang her apartment and said through the announcer, 'Mr. Wheeler's here.' And she gave a dirty laugh and sang out, 'I can hardly wait.'

"So at thirteen past eight she was still alive. He went up, and he'd no sooner gotten there than her apartment began to signal the doorman frantically. No one answered his hail over the announcer, so he chased up, and he found your brother crouched over her, shaking her, and she was dead. At fifteen minutes past eight o'clock. Is that a case or is that a case?"

I said, "How do you know somebody else wasn't in that apartment and strangled her just before Chick showed up? It's got to be that!"

He said, "What d'you suppose they're paying that doorman seventy-five a month for? The only other caller she had that whole day was you yourself, at three that afternoon, five full hours before. And she'd only been dead fifteen to twenty minutes by the time the assistant medical examiner got to her."

I said, "Does Chick say he did it?"

"When you've been in this business

as long as I have, you'd have their heads examined if any of them ever admitted doing anything. Oh, no-o, of course he didn't do it. He says he was crouched over her shaking her trying to *restore* her!"

I took a deep breath. I said, "Gimme a swallow of that gin. Thanks." I put the tumbler down again. I looked him right in the eye. "All right, *I* did it! Now how d'ye like that? I begged him not to throw his life away on her. When he walked out anyway, I beat him up to her place in a taxi, got there first, gave her one last chance to lay off him. She wouldn't take it. She was all soft and squashy and I just took a grip and pushed hard."

"And the doorman?" he said with a smile.

"His back was turned. He was out at the curb seeing some people into a cab. When I left, I took the stairs down. When Chick signaled from her apartment and the doorman left his post, I just walked out. It was a pushover."

His smile was a grin. "Well, if you killed her, you killed her." He called in to the other room, "Hey, Coley, she says *she* killed her!" Coley came back, flapped his hand at me disguestedly, said, "Come on, let's get out of here, there's nothing doing around here."

He opened the door, went out into the hall. I said, "Well, aren't you going to take me with you? Aren't you going to let him go and hold me instead?"

"Who the hell wants you?" came back through the open door.

Burns, as he got up to follow him, said off-handedly, "And what was she wearing when you killed her?" But he kept walking toward the door, without waiting for the answer.

They'd had a train to make. I swallowed hard. "Well, I—I was too steamed-up to notice colors or anything, but she had on her coat and hat, ready to leave; that's about all I can tell you."

He turned around at the door and looked at me. His grin was sort of sympathetic, understanding. "Sure," he said softly. "I guess she took 'em off, though, after she found out she was dead and wasn't going anywhere after all. We found her in pajamas. Write us a nice long letter about it tomorrow, Angel Face. We'll see you at the trial, no doubt."

There was a glass cigarette-box at my elbow. I grabbed it and heaved, berserk. "You rotten, lowdown—*detective,* you! Going around snooping, framing innocent people to death! Get out of here! I hope I never see your face again!"

It missed his head, crashed and tinkled against the door-frame to one side of him. He didn't cringe, I liked that about him, sore as I was. He just gave a long drawn-out whistle. "Maybe you did do it at that," he said, "maybe I'm underestimating you," and he touched his hat-brim and closed the door after him.

THE COURT-ROOM was so unnaturally still that the ticking of my heart sounded like a cheap alarm-clock in the silence. I kept wondering how it was they didn't put me out for letting it make so much noise. A big blue fly was buzzing on the inside of the window-pane nearest me, trying to find its way out. The jurists came filing in like ghosts, and slowly filled the double row of chairs in the box. All you could hear was a slight rustle of clothing as they seated themselves. I kept thinking of the Inquisition, and wondered why they didn't have black hoods over their heads.

"Will the foreman of the jury please stand?"

I spaded both my hands down past my hips and grabbed the edges of my seat. My handkerchief fell on the floor and the man next to me picked it up and handed it back to me. I tried to say "Thanks" but my jaws wouldn't unlock.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a verdict?"

I told myself, "He won't be able to

hear it, if my heart doesn't shut up." It was going *bangetty-bangetty-bang!*

"We have, your honor."

"Gentlemen of the jury, what is your verdict?"

The banging stopped; my heart wasn't going at all now. Even the fly stopped buzzing. The whole works stood still.

"We find the defendant guilty of murder in the first degree."

Some woman screamed out "No!" at the top of her lungs. It must have been me, they were all turning their heads to look around at me. The next thing I knew, I was outside in the corridor and a whole lot of people were standing around me. Everything looked blurred. A voice said, "Give her air, stand back." Another voice said. "His sister. She was on the stand earlier in the week." Ammonia fumes kept tickling the membranes of my nostrils. The first voice said, "Take her home. Where does she live? Anybody know where she lives?"

"I know where she lives. I'll take care of her."

Somebody put an arm around my waist and walked me to the creaky courthouse elevator, led me out to the street, got in a taxi after me. I looked, and it was that lousy dick, Burns. I climbed up into the corner of the cab, put my feet on the seat, shuffled them at him. I said, "Get away from me, you devil! You railroaded him, you butcher!"

"Attagirl," he said gently, "Feeling better already, aren't you?" He gave the old address, where Chick and I had lived. The cab started and I couldn't get him out of it. I felt too low even to fight any more.

"Not there," I said sullenly, "I'm holed up in a cheap furnished room now, off Second Avenue. I've hocked everything I own, down to my vaccination mark! How d'you suppose I got that lawyer Schlesinger for him? And a lot of good it did him! What a wash-out he turned out to be!"

"Don't blame him," he said. "He couldn't buck that case we turned over to the State; Darrow himself couldn't have. What he *should* have done was let *him* plead guilty to second-degree, then he wouldn't be in line for short-circuiting. That was his big mistake."

"No!" I shrilled at him. "He wanted us to do that, but neither Chick nor I would hear of it! Why should he plead guilty to anything, even if it was only housebreaknig, when he's innocent? That's a guilty man's dodge, not an innocent man's. He hasn't got half-an-hour's detention rightfully coming to him! Why should he lie down and accept twenty years? He didn't lay a hand on Ruby Reading."

"Eleven million people, the mighty State of New York, say that he did."

I got out, went in the grubby entrance, between a delicatessen and a Chinese laundry. "Don't come in with me, I don't want to see any more of you!" I spat over my shoulder at him. "If I was a man I'd knock you down and beat the living hell out of you!"

He came on, though, and upstairs he closed the door behind him, pushing me out of the way to get in. He said, "You need help, Angel Face, and I'm crying to give it to you."

"Oh, biting the hand that feeds you, turning into a double-crosser, a turncoat!"

"No," he said, "no," and sort of held out his hands as if asking me for something. "Sell me, won't you?" he almost pleaded. "Sell me that's he's innocent, and I'll work my fingers raw to back you up! I didn't frame your brother. I only did my job. I was sent there by my superiors in answer to the patrolman's call that night, questioned Chick, put him under arrest. You heard me answering their questions on the stand. Did I distort the facts any? All I told them was what I saw with my own eyes, what I found when I got to Reading's apartment. Don't hold that against me, Angel Face. Sell me, convince me that he didn't do it, and I'm with you up to the hilt."

"Why?" I said cynically. "Why this

sudden yearning to undo the damage you've already done?"

He opened the door to go. "Look in the mirror sometime and find out," was all he said. "You can reach me at Center Street, Nick Burns." He held out his hand uncertainly, probably expecting me to slap it aside.

I took it instead. "O.K., flatfoot," I sighed wearily. "No use holding it against you that you're a detective, you probably don't know any better. Before you go, gimme the address of that jig maid of hers, Mandy Leroy. I've got an idea she didn't tell all she knew."

"She went home at five that day, how can she help you?"

"I bet she was greased plenty to soft-pedal the one right name that belongs in this case. She mayn't have been there, but she knew who to expect around. She may have even tipped him off that Ruby Rose was throwing him over. It takes a woman to see through a woman, even a permanently sunburnt one."

"Better watch yourself going up there alone," he warned me. He took out a notebook. "Here it is, 118th, just off Lenox." I jotted it down. "If she was paid off like you think, how you going to restore her memory? It'll take heavy sugar. . . ." He fumbled in his pocket, looked at me like he was a little scared of me, finally took out something and shoved it out of sight on the bureau. "Try your luck with that," he said. "Use it where it'll do the most good. Try a little intimidation with it, it may work."

I grabbed it up and he ducked out in a hurry, the big coward. A hundred-and-fifty bucks. I ran out to the stairs after him. "Hey!" I yelled, "aren't you married or anything?"

"Naw," he called back, "I can always get it back, anyway, if it does the trick." And then he added, "I always did want to have something on you, Angel Face."

I went back into my cubbyhole again. "Why, the big rummy!" I said hotly. I hadn't cried in court when Chick got the ax, just yelled out. But now my eyes got all wet.

MANDY doan live here no mo'e," the colored janitor of the 118th Street tenement told me. I went there during the daylight hours, don't worry. I wasn't taking any chances on Harlem after dark by my lonesome.

"Where'd she go? And don't tell me you don't know, because it won't work."

"She done move to a mighty presumptuous neighborhood, doan know how come all of a sudden. She gone to Edgecomb Avenue."

Edgecomb Avenue is the Park Avenue of New York's darktown. She'd mentioned on the stand, without being asked, that Reading had died owing her two months' wages. Yet she moves to the colored Gold Coast right on top of it. She hadn't been paid off—not much!

Edgecomb Avenue is nothing to be ashamed of in any man's town. Every one of the trim modern apartment buildings had a glossy private car or two parked in front of the door. I tackled the address he'd given me, and thought they were having a housewarming at first. They were singing inside and it sounded like a revival meeting.

A fat old lady came to the door, in a black silk dress, tears streaming down her cheeks. "I'se her mother, honey," she said softly in answer to what I told her, "and you done come at an evil hour. My lamb was run over on the street, right outside this building, only yesterday, first day we moved here! She's in there daid now, honey. The Lawd give and the Lawd has took away again."

I did a little thinking. Why just her, and nobody else, when she held the key to the Reading murder? "How did it happen to her, did they tell you?"

"Two white men in a car," she mourned. " 'Peared almost like they run her down purposely. She was walking along the sidewalk, folks tell me, wasn't even in the gutter at all. And it swung right up on the sidewalk aftah her, go ovah her, then loop out in the middle

again and light away, without nevah stopping!"

I went away saying to myself, "That girl was murdered as sure as I'm born, to shut her mouth. First she was bribed, then when the trial was safely over she was put out of the way for good!" Somebody big was behind all this. And what did I have to fight that somebody with? A borrowed hundred-and-fifty bucks, an offer of cooperation from a susceptible detective, and a face.

I went around to the building Ruby Rose had lived in, and struck the wrong shift. "Charlie Baker doesn't come on until six, eh?" I told the doorman. "Where does he live? I want to talk to him."

"He don't come on at all any more. He quit his job, as soon as that—" he tilted his head to the ceiling, "mess we had upstairs was over with, and he didn't have to appear in court no more."

"Well, where's he working now?"

"He ain't working at all, lady. He don't have to any more. I understand a relative of his died in the old country, left him quite a bit, and him and his wife and his three kids have gone back to England to live."

So he'd been paid off heavily too. It looked like I was up against Wall Street itself. No wonder everything had gone so smoothly. No wonder even a man like Schlesinger hadn't been able to make a dent in the case.

"But I'm not licked yet," I said to myself, back in my room. "I've still got this face. It ought to be good for something. If I only knew where to push it, who to flash it on!"

Burns showed up that night, to find out how I was making out. "Here's your hundred and fifty back," I told him bitterly. "I'm up against a stone wall every which way I turn. But is it a coincidence that the minute the case is in the bag, their two chief witnesses are permanently disposed of, one by exportation, the other by hit-and-run? They're not taking any chances on anything backfiring later."

He said, "You're beginning to sell me. It smells like rain."

I sat down on the floor (there was only one chair in the dump) and took a dejected half-Nelson around my own ankles. "Look, it goes like this. Some guy did it. Some guy that was sold on her. Plenty of names were spilled by Mandy and Baker, but not the right one. The ones that were brought out didn't lead anywhere, you saw that yourself. The mechanics of the thing don't trouble me a bit, the how and why could be cleared up easy enough—even by you."

"Thanks," he said.

"It's the *who* that has me buffaloed. There's a gap there I can't jump across to the other side. From there on, I could handle it beautifully. But I've got to close that gap, that *who,* or I might as well put in the order for Chick's headstone right now."

He took out a folded newspaper and whacked himself disgustedly across the shins with it. "Tough going, kid," he agreed.

"I'll make it," I said. "You can't keep a good girl down. The right guy is in this town. And so am I in this town. I'll connect with him yet, if I've got to use a ouija board!"

He said, "You haven't got all winter. He comes up for sentence Wednesday." He opened the door. "I'm on your side," he let me know in that quiet way of his.

He left the paper behind him on the chair. I sat down and opened it. I wasn't going to do any reading, but I wanted to think behind it. And then I saw her name. The papers had been full of her name for weeks, but this was different; this was just a little boxed ad off at the side.

AUCTION SALE
Jewelry, personal effects and furniture belonging to the late
Ruby Rose Reading
Monarch Galleries Saturday A.M.

I dove at the window, rammed it up, leaned half-way out. I caught him just coming out of the door.

"Burns!" I screeched at the top of my voice. "Hey, Burns! Bring that hundred and fifty back up here! I've changed my mind!"

THE PLACE was jammed to the gills with curiosity-mongers and bargain-hunters, and probably professional dealers too, although they were supposed to be excluded. There were about two dozen of those 100-watt blue-white bulbs in the ceiling that auction rooms go in for—to kid the bidders that they're seeing what they're getting, I suppose—and the bleach of light was intolerable, worse than on a sunny beach at high noon.

I was down front, in the second row on the aisle; I'd gotten there early. I wasn't interested in her diamonds or her furs or her thissas or her thattas. I was hoping something would come up that would give me some kind of a clue, but what I expected it to be, I didn't know myself. An inscription on a cigarette case maybe. I knew how little chance there was of anything like that. The D.A.'s office had sifted through her things pretty thoroughly before Chick's trial, and what they'd turned up hadn't amounted to a row of pins. She'd been pretty cagy that way, hadn't left much around. All bills had been addressed to her personally, just like she'd paid her rent with her own personal checks, and fed the account herself. Where the funds originated in the first place was another matter, never explained. I suppose she took in washing.

They started off with minor articles first, to warm the customers up. A cocktail shaker that played a tune, a make-up mirror with a light behind it, a ship's model, things like that. They got around to her clothes next, and the women customers started "ohing" and "ahing" and foaming at the mouth. By the looks of most of them that was probably the closest they'd ever get to real sin, bidding for its hand-me-downs. One of the items, incidentally, was a pair of cellophane pajamas, no kidding; she must have known somebody from Missouri. No one had the nerve to bid in for them.

The furniture came next, and they started to talk real money now. This out of the way, her ice came on. Brother, she'd made them say it with diamonds, and they'd all spoken above a whisper too! When the last of it went, that washed up the sale; there was nothing else left to dispose of but the little rosewood jewel-case she'd kept them in. About ten by twelve by ten inches deep, with a little gilt key and lock; not worth a damn but there it was. However, if you think an auctioneer passes up anything, you don't know your auctioneers at all.

"What am I offered for this?" he said almost apologetically. "Lovely little trinket box, give it to your best girl or your wife or your mother, to keep her ornaments in or old love letters." He knocked the veneer with his knuckles, held it outward to show us the satin lining. Nothing in it, like in a vaudeville magician's act. "Do I hear fifty cents, just to clear the stand?"

Most of them were getting up and going already. An overdressed guy in my same row, across the aisle, spoke up. "You hear a buck."

I took a look at him, and I took a look at the box. "If you want it, I want it, too," I decided suddenly. "A guy splurged up like you don't hand a plain wooden box like that to any woman that he knows." I opened my mouth for the first time since I'd come in the place. "You hear a dollar and a quarter."

"Dollar-fifty."

"Two dollars."

"Five." The way he snapped it out, he meant business.

I'd never had such a strong hunch in my life before—or since—but now I wanted that box, had to have it, I felt it would do me some good. Maybe this overdressed monkey had given it to her,

maybe Burns could trace where it had been bought. . . .

"Seven-fifty."

"Ten."

"Twelve."

The auctioneer was in seventh heaven. "You're giving yourself away, brother, you're giving yourself away!" I warned my competitor silently.

We leaned forward out of our seats and sized each other up. If he was giving himself away, I suppose I was too. I could see a sort of shrewd speculation in his snaky eyes, they screwed up into slits, seeming to say "What's your racket?" Something cold went down my back, hot as it was under all those mazdas.

"Twenty-five dollars," he said inexorably.

I thought: "I'm going to get that thing if I spend every cent of the money Burns loaned me!"

"Thirty," I said.

With that, to my surprise, he stood up, flopped his hand at it disgustedly, and walked out.

When I came out five minutes later with the box wrapped up under my arm. I saw him sitting in a young dreadnought with another man, a few yards down the street.

"So I'm going to be followed home," I said to myself, "to find out who I am." That didn't worry me any; I'd rented my room under my old stage name of Honey Sebastian (my idea of a classy tag at sixteen) to escape the notoriety attendant on Chick's trial. I turned up the other way and hopped down into the subway, which is about the best bet when the following is to be done from a car. As far as I could make out, no one came after me.

I watched the street from a corner of the window after I'd gotten home, and no one going by stopped or looked at the house or did anything but mind his own business. And if it had been that flashy guy on my tail, you could have heard him coming from a block away. I turned to the wrapped box and broke the string.

BURNS' knock at my door at five that afternoon was a tattoo of anxious impatience. "God, you took long to get here!" I blurted out, "I phoned you three times since noon."

"Lady," he protested, "I've been busy, I was out on something else, only just got back to Headquarters ten minutes ago. Boy, you threw a fright into me."

I didn't stoop to asking him why he should be so worried something had happened to me; he might have given me the right answer. "Well," I said, "I've got him." And I passed him the rosewood jewel case.

"Got who?"

"The guy that Chick's been made a patsy for."

He opened it, looked in, looked under it. "What's this?"

"Hers. I had a hunch, and I bought it. He must have had a hunch too—only his agent—and it must have been his agent, he wouldn't show up himself—didn't follow it through, wasn't sure enough. Stick your thumb under the little lock. Not over it, down below it, and press hard on the wood." Something clicked, and the satin bottom flapped up, like it had with me.

"Fake bottom, eh?" he said.

"Don't be an echo. Read that top letter out loud. That was the last one she got, very day it happened."

" 'You know, baby,' " Burns read. " 'I think too much of you to ever let you go. And if you ever tired of me and tried to leave me, I'd kill you first, and then you could go wherever you want. They tell me you've been seen going around a lot lately with some young punk. Now, baby, I hope for his sake, and yours too, that when I come back day after tomorrow I find it isn't so, just some more of my boys' lies. They like to rib me sometimes, see if I can take it or not.' "

"He gave her a bum steer there on purpose," I pointed out, "He came back 'tomorrow' and not 'day after,' and caught her with the goods."

"Milt," Burns read from the bottom

of the page. And then he looked at me, and didn't see me for once.

"Militis, of course," I said, "the Greek night-club king. Milton, as he calls himself. Everyone on Broadway knows him. And yet, d'you notice how that name stayed out of the trial? Not a whisper from beginning to end! That's the missing name all right!"

"It reads that way, I know," he said undecidedly, "but there's this: She knew her traffic signals. Why would she chuck away the banana and hang onto the skin? In other words, Milton spells real dough, your brother wasn't even carfare."

"But Militis had her branded—"

"Sure, but—"

"No, I'm not talking slang now. I mean actually, physically; it's mentioned in one of these letters. The autopsy report had it too, remember? Only they mistook it for an operation scar or scald. Well, when a guy does that, anyone would have looked good to her, and Chick was probably a godsend. The branding was probably not the half of it, either. It's fairly well known that Milton likes to play rough with his women."

"All right, kid," he said, "but I've got bad news for you. This evidence isn't strong enough to have the verdict set aside and a new trial called. A clever mouth-piece could blow this whole pack of letters out the window with one breath. Ardent Greek temperament, and that kind of thing, you know. You remember how Schlesinger dragged it out of Mandy that she'd overheard more than one guy make the same kind of jealous threats. Did it do any good?"

"This is the McCoy, though. He came through, this one, Militis."

"But baby, you're telling it to me and I convince easy, from you. You're not telling it to the Grand Jury."

I shoved the letters at him. "Just the same, you chase out and have 'em photostated, every last one of them, and put 'em in a cool, dry place. I'm going to dig up something a little more convincing to go with them, if that's what's needed. What clubs does he own?"

"What clubs doesn't he? There's Hell's Bells—" He stopped short, looked at me. "You stay out of there."

"One word from you . . . " I purred, and closed the door after him.

LITTLE higher," the manager said. "Don't be afraid, we've seen it all before."

I took another hitch in my hoisted skirt, gave him a look. "If it's my appendix you want to size up, say so. It's easier to uncover the other way around, from up to down. I just sing and dance, I don't bathe for the customers."

"I like 'em like that," he nodded approvingly to his yes-man. "Give her a chord, Mike," he said to his pianist.

"The Man I Love," I said. "I do dusties, not new ones."

"And he'll be big and strong,
The man I love—"

"Good tonsils," he said. "Give her a dance-chorus, Mike."

Mike said disgustedly, "Why d'ya wanna waste your time? Even if she was paralyzed from the waist down and had a voice like a frog, ain't you got eyes? Get a load of her face, will you?"

"You're in," the manager said. "Thirty-five, and buy yourself some up-to-date lyrics. Come around at eight and get fitted for some duds. What's your name?'

"Bill me as Angel Face," I said, "and have your electrician give me an amber spot. They take the padlocks off their wallets when I come out in an amber spot."

He shook his head, almost sorrowfully. "Hang onto that face, girlie. It ain't gonna happen again in a long time!"

Burns was holding up my locked room-door with one shoulder when I got back. "Here's your letters back; I've got the photostats tucked away in

a safe place. Where'd you disappear to?"

"I've landed a job at Hell's Bells. I'm going to get that guy and get him good! If that's the way I've got to get the evidence, that's the way. After all, if he was sold on her, *I'll* have him cutting out paper dolls before two weeks are out. What'd she have that I haven't got? Now, stay out of there. Somebody might know your face, and you'll only queer everything."

"Watch yourself, will you, Angel Face? Youre playing a dangerous game. That Milton is nobody's fool. If you need me in a hurry, you know where to reach me. I'm right at your shoulder, all the way through."

I went in and stuck the letters back in the fake bottom of the case. I had an idea I was going to have a visitor fairly soon, and wasn't going to tip my hand. I stood it on the dresser-top and threw in a few pins and glass beads for luck.

The timing was eery. The knock came inside of ten minutes. I'd known it was due, but not that quick. It was my competitor from the auction room, flashy as ever; he'd changed flowers, that was all.

"Miss Sebastian," he said, "isn't it? I'd like very much to buy that jewel case you got."

"I noticed that this morning."

He went over and squinted into it. "That all you wanted it for, just to keep junk like that in?'

"What'd you expect to find, the Hope diamond?"

"You seemed willing to pay a good deal."

"I lose my head easy in auction rooms. But, for that matter, you seemed to be willing to go pretty high yourself."

"I still am," he said. He turned it over, emptied my stuff out, tucked it under his arm, put something down on the dresser. "There's a hundred dollars. Buy yourself a real good one."

Through the window I watched the dreadnought drift away again. "Just a little bit too late in getting here," I smiled after it. "The cat's out of the bag now and a bulldog will probably chase it."

THE SILVER dress fitted me like a wet compress. It was one of those things that break up homes. The manager flagged me in the passageway leading back. "Did you notice that man all by himself at a ringside table? You know who he is, don't you?"

If I hadn't, why had I bothered turning on all my current his way? "No," I said, round-eyed, "who?"

"Milton. He owns the works. The reason I'm telling you is this: You've got a date with a bottle of champagne at his table, starting in right now. Get on in there."

We walked on back.

"Mr. Milton, this is Angel Face," the manager said. "She won't give us her right name, just walked in off 52nd Street last Tuesday."

"And I waited until tonight to drop around here!" he laughed. "What you paying her, Berger?" Then before the other guy could get a word out, "Triple it! And now get out of here."

The night ticked on. He'd look at me and then he'd suddenly throw up his hands as though to ward off a dazzling glare. "Turn it off, it hurts my eyes."

I smiled a little and took out my mirror. I saw my eyes in it, and in each iris there was a little electric chair with Chick sitting strapped in it. Three weeks from now, sometime during that week. Boy, how they were rushing him! It made it a lot easier to go ahead.

I went back to what we'd been talking about—and what are any two people talking about, more or less, in a night-club at four in the morning? "Maybe," I said, "who can tell? Some night I might just feel like changing the scenery around me, but I couldn't tell you about it, I'm not that kind."

"You wouldn't have to," he said. He

fooled with something below table-level, then passed his hand to me. I took it and knotted my handkerchief around the latch-key he'd left in it. Burns had been right, it was a dangerous game, and bridges were blazing and collapsing behind me.

THE DOORMAN covered a yawn with a white kid glove, said, "Who shall I announce?"

"That's all been taken care of," I said, "so you can go back to your beauty sleep."

He caught on, said insinuatingly, "It's Mr. Milton, isn't it? He's out of town tonight."

"You're telling me!" I thought. I'd sent him the wire that fixed that, signed the name of the manager of his Philly club. "You've been reading my mail," I said, and closed the elevator in his face.

The key worked, and the light-switch worked, and his Filipino had the night off, so the rest was up to me. The clock in his two-story living-room said four fifteen. I went to the second floor of his penthouse and started in on the bedroom. He was using the jewel-case, Ruby Rose Reading's, to hold his collar buttons in, hadn't thrown it out. I opened the fake bottom to see if he'd found what he was after, and the letters were gone, probably burned.

I located his wall safe but couldn't crack it. While I was still working at it, the phone downstairs started to ring. I jumped as though a pin had been stuck into me, and started shaking like I was still doing one of my routines at the club. He had two phones, one downstairs, one in the bedroom, which was an unlisted number. I snapped out the lights, ran downstairs, picked it up. I didn't answer, just held it.

Burns' voice said, "Angel Face?" in my ear.

"Gee, you sure frightened me!" I exhaled.

"Better get out of there. He just came back, must have tumbled to the wire. A spotter at Hell's Bells tipped me off he was just there asking for you."

"I can't, now," I wailed. "I woke his damn doorman up getting in just now, and I'm in that silver dress I do my numbers in! He'll tell him I was here. I'll have to play it dumb."

"D'ja get anything?"

"Nothing, only that jewel case! I couldn't get the safe open but he's probably burned everything connecting him to her long ago."

"Please get out of there, kid," he pleaded. "You don't know that guy. He's going to pin you down on the mat if he finds you there."

"I'm staying," I said. "I've got to break him down tonight, it's my last chance. Chick eats chicken and ice-cream tomorrow night at six. Oh, Burns, pray for me, will you?"

"I'm going to do more than that," he growled. "I'm going to give a wrong-number call there in half an hour. It's four-thirty now. Five that'll be. If you're doing all right, I'll lie low. If not, I'm not going to wait, I'll break in with some of the guys, and we'll use the little we have, the photostats of the letters, and the jewel case. I think Schlesinger can at least get Chick a reprieve on them, if not a new trial. If we can't get Milton, we can't get him, that's all."

"We've got to get him," I said, "and we're going to! He's even been close to breaking down and admitting it to me, at times, when we're alone together. Then at the last minute he gets leery. I'm convinced in my own mind he's guilty. So help me, if I lose Chick tomorrow night, I'm going to shoot Milton with my own hands!"

"You won't have to," he said grimly. "I'll have him beaten to death for you in some basement, *habeas corpus* or no *habeas corpus*."

"His private elevator-light's flashing on in the foyer, he must be on his way up!" I said frantically. "I'll have to sign off."

"Remember, half an hour. If every-

thing's under control, cough. If you can get anywhere near the phone, *cough!* If I don't hear you cough, I'm pulling the place."

I hung up, ran up the stairs tearing at the silver cloth. I jerked open a closet door, found the cobwebby negligee he'd always told me was waiting for me there whenever I felt like breaking it in. I chased downstairs again in it, more like Godiva than anyone else, grabbed up a cigarette, flopped back full length on the handiest divan, and did a Cleopatra—just as the outside door opened and he and two other guys came in.

MILTON had a face full of storm-clouds—until he saw me. Then it cleared, the sun came up in it. "Finally!" he crooned. "Finally you wanted a change of scenery! And just tonight somebody had to play a practical joke on me, start me on a fool's errand to Philly! Have you been here long?"

I couldn't answer right away, because I was still trying to get my breath back after the quick-change act I'd just pulled. I managed a vampish smile.

He turned to the two guys. "Get out, you two. Can't you see I have company?"

I'd recognized the one who'd contacted me for the jewel case, and knew what was coming. I figured I could handle it. "Why, that's the dame I told you about, Milt," he blurted out, "that walked off with that little box the other day!"

"Oh, hello," I sang out innocently. "I didn't know that you knew Mr. Milton."

Milton flared, "You, Rocco! Don't call my lady friends dames!" and slapped him backhand across the mouth. "Now scar-ram! You think we need four for bridge?"

"All right, boss, all right," he said soothingly. But he went over to a framed "still" of me, that Milton had brought home from Hell's Bells, and stood, thoughtfully in front of it for a minute. Then he and the other guy left. It was only after the elevator-light had flashed out that I looked over and saw the frame was empty.

"Hey!" I complained, "That Rocco swiped my picture, right under your nose!"

He thought he saw a bowl of cream in front of him; nothing could get his back up. "Who can blame him? You're so lovely to look at."

He spent some time working on the theory that I'd finally found him irresistible. After what seemed years of that, I sidestepped him neatly, got off the divan just in time.

He got good and peeved finally. "Are you giving me the run-around? What did you come here for, anyway?"

"Because she's double-crossing you!" a voice said from the foyer. "Because she came here to frame you, chief, and I know it!"

The other two had come back! Rocco pulled my picture out of his pocket. "I traced that dummy wire you got, sending you to Philly. The clerk at the telegraph office identified her as the sender, from this picture. Ask her why she wanted to get you out of town, and then come up here and case your lay-out! Ask her why she was willing to pay thirty bucks for a little wood box, when she was living in a seven-buck furnished room! Ask her *who she is!* You weren't at the Reading trial, were you? Well, I was! You're riding for a fall, chief, by having her around you. She's a stoolie!"

He turned on me. "Who are you? What does he mean?"

What was the good of answering? It was five to five on the clock. I needed Burns bad.

The other one snarled, "She's the patsy's sister. Chick Wheeler's sister. I saw her on the stand, with my own eyes."

Milton's face screwed up into a sort of despairing agony; I'd never seen

anything like it before. He whimpered, "And you're so beautiful to have to be killed!"

I hugged the negligée around me tight and looked down at the floor. "Then don't have me killed," I said softly. It was two to five, now.

He said with comic sadness. "I got to if you're that guy's sister."

"I say I'm nobody's sister, just Angel Face that dances at your club. I say I only came here cause—I like soft carpets."

"Why did you send that fake telegram to get me out of town?"

He had me there. I thought fast. "If I'm a stoolie I get killed, right? But what happens if I'm the other kind of a double-crosser, a two-timer, do I still get killed?"

"No," he said, "because you were still a free-lance; your option hadn't been taken up yet."

"That's the answer, then. I was going to use your place to meet my steady, that's why I sent the queer wire."

Rocco's voice was as cracked as a megaphone after a football rally. "She's Wheeler's sister, chief. Don't let her ki—"

"Shut up!" Milton said.

Rocco just smiled a wise smile, shrugged, lit a cigarette. "You'll find out."

The phone rang. "Get that," Milton ordered. "That's her guy now. Keep him on the wire." He turned and went running up the stairs to the floor above, where the other phone was.

Rocco took out a gun, fanned it vaguely in my direction, sauntered over. "Don't try nothing, now, while that line's open. You may be fooling Milton, you're not fooling us any. He was always a sucker for a twist."

Rocco's buddy said, "Hello?"

Rocco, still holding the gun on me, took a lopsided drag on his cigarette with his left hand and blew smoke vertically. Some of it caught in his throat, and he started to cough like a seal. You could hear it all over the place.

I could feel all the blood draining out of my face.

The third guy was purring, "No, you tell me what number you want first, then I'll tell you what number this is. That's the way it's done, pal." He turned a blank face. "Hung up on me!"

Rocco was still hacking away. I felt sick all over. Sold out by my own signal that everything was under control!

There was a sound like dry leaves on the stairs and Milton came whisking down again. "Some guy wanted an all-night delicatess—" the spokesman started to say.

Milton cut his hand at him viciously. "That was Center Street, police headquarters. I had it traced! Put some clothes on her, she's going to her funeral!"

THEY FORCED me back into the silver sheath between them. Milton came over with a flagon of brandy and dashed it all over me from head to foot. "If she lets out a peep, she's fighting drunk. Won't be the first stewed dame carried outa here!"

They had to hold me up between them, my heels just clear of the ground, to get me to move at all. Rocco had his gun buried in the silver folds of my dress. The other had a big handkerchief spread out in his hand held under my face, as though I were nauseated—in reality to squelch any scream.

Milton came behind us. "You shouldn't mix your drinks," he was saying, "and especially you shouldn't help yourself to people's private stock without permission."

But the doorman was asleep again on his bench, like when I'd come in the first time. This time he didn't wake up. His eyelids just flickered a little as the four of us went by.

They saw to it that I got in the car first, like a lady should. The ride was one of those things you take to your

grave with you. My whole past life came before me, in slow motion. I didn't mind dying so terribly much, but I hated to go without being able to do anything for Chick. But it was the way the cards had fallen, that was all.

"Maybe it's better this way," I said to myself, "than growing into an old lady and no one looks at your face any more." I took out my mirror and I powdered my nose, and then I threw the compact away. I'd show them a lady could die like a gentleman!

The house was on the Sound. Milton evidently lived in it quite a bit, by the looks of it. His Filipino let us in.

"Build a fire, Juan, it's chilly," he grinned. And to me, "Sit down, Angel Face, and let me look at you before you go." The other two threw me into a corner of a big sofa, and I just stayed that way, limp like a rag doll. He just stared and stared. "Gosh, you're swell!" he said.

"Gosh, you're lousy," I answered quietly.

Rocco said, "What're we waiting for? It's broad daylight already."

Milton was idly holding something into the fire, a long poker of some kind. "She's going," he said, "but she's going as my property. Show the other angels this, when you get up there, so they'll know who you belong to." He came over to me with the end of the thing glowing dull red. It was flattened into some kind of an ornamental design or cipher. "Knock her out," he said, "I'm not that much of a brute."

Something exploded off the side of my head, and I lost my senses. Then he was wiping my mouth with a handkerchief soaked in whiskey, and my side burned, just above the hip, where they'd found that mark on Ruby Rose Reading.

"All right, Rocco," Milton said.

Rocco took out his gun again, but he shoved it at the third guy heft-first. The third one held it level at me, took the safety off. His face was sort of green and wet with sweat. I looked him straight in the eyes. The gun went down like a drooping lily. "I can't, boss, she's too beautiful!" he groaned. "She's got the face of an angel. How can you shoot anything like that?"

Milton pulled it away from him. "She double-crossed me just like Reading did. Any dame that double-crosses me gets what I gave Reading."

A voice said softly. "That's all I wanted to know."

The gun went off, and I wondered why I didn't feel anything. Then I saw that the smoke was coming from the doorway and not from Milton's gun at all. He went down at my feet, like he wanted to apologize for what he'd done to me, but he didn't say anything and he didn't get up any more. There was blood running down the part of his hair in back.

Burns was in the room, with more guys than I'd ever seen outside of a police parade. One of them was the doorman from Milton's place, or at least the dick that Burns had substituted for him to keep an eye on me while I was up there. Burns told me about that later and about how they followed Milt's little party but hadn't been able to get in in time to keep me from getting branded. Rocco and the other guy went down into hamburger under a battery of heavy fists.

I sat there holding my side and sucking in my breath. "It was a swell trick-finish," I panted to Burns, "but what'd you drill him for? Now we'll never get the proof that'll save Chick."

He was at the phone asking to be put through to Schlesinger in the city. "We've got it already, Angel Face," he said ruefully. "It's right on you, where you're holding your side. Just where it was on Reading. We all heard what he said before he nose-dived anyway. I only wish I hadn't shot him," he glowered, "then I'd have the pleasure of doing it all over again, more slowly."

THE AMATEUR DETECTIVE

FIVE DOLLARS FOR EACH LETTER PUBLISHED!

EDITOR'S NOTE:—*This page is made up of contributions from readers. We shall pay five dollars for every letter we publish. Letters may be about unsolved mysteries, crime-busting, angles on detective work, legal processes, anything you think might be of interest to the readers of BLACK MASK. Was there an interesting crime solved in your home town? How did the detective ferret out the criminal? Maybe you know of some unsolved crime; how would you solve it? What is your opinion of capital punishment; of the third degree; of the parole system; of various current famous cases? We're running this open forum for readers with some unusually interesting letters which have recently come in to us.*

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily concur with those held by the editors of Black Mask. No entries can be returned and we cannot enter into correspondence about them. This is important:

ALL CONTRIBUTIONS MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY THIS COUPON:

THE AMATEUR DETECTIVE

Name: .....

Address: .....

Address to: The Amateur Detective, Black Mask, 515 Madison Ave., New York City

A Paying Hunch

Dear Editor:

I wonder if you haven't a few cynical readers who make a habit of laughing at hunches and intuitions as a part of detective technique?

As a reporter assigned to the week long manhunt for the slayer of three Inglewood children, I saw a striking example of a hunch which proved instrumental in breaking a tough, clue-bare case.

The night the bodies of the three pitiful little victims were found, a lynch-minded crowd seethed around the Inglewood city jail. One of those attracted to the scene was George Ray, twenty-five, father of four children. He had joined the mob because of a kidnap attempt made upon one of his sons six months previously. Also because he was interested in police work and had "always wanted to be a detective."

Ray noticed a feverish man selling extras announcing the discovery of the bodies. After talking to this man, who gave his name as Albert Dyer and who admitted having participated in the search, Ray became suspicious. He contacted police only to find that Dyer had already been arrested and released. Mrs. Dyer's alibi had placed her husband at home when the crimes were committed.

Ray was not convinced. He could not get the nervous, wild-eyed Dyer out of his mind. He obtained a leave of absence from his job in a Los Angeles medical laboratory, spent all of his time in Inglewood.

Ray reasoned that since the victims had been warned not to accept invitations from men they would not have gone off with a stranger. Following this line of logic he discovered a startling fact. Albert Dyer, the erstwhile paper boy, was a WPA crossing guard employed where the children had last been seen alive, and knew the children well.

Ray took this information to exhausted investigators who had questioned and released dozens of suspects.

Dyer was then subjected to intense grilling for five hours. Gradually the truth leaked out.

As the result of this cooperation between law enforcing agencies and this alert, observant, persistent citizen, Albert Dyer is now in jail, awaiting trial.

I recently asked George Ray what he was going to do with his share of the $3,500 reward, if and when he obtained it. George told me that he had just rented a swell, new home and his wife and the four kids loved it. George said if he got the reward or even part of it he would make a down payment on it.

I hope he gets the whole $3,500!

Ross Russell.

The Third Degree

Dear Editor:

In contrast to a letter in your August issue regarding laws that seem to safeguard criminals, I wish to offer the following evidence that these same laws sometimes do not protect the innocent from criminal practices, i.e., the third degree.

Consider the case of Frank C. Monaghan, sixty-four-year-old Uniontown, Pa. hotelkeeper who was arrested for driving while intoxicated and then charged with stabbing a detective. According to police he "collapsed suddenly while being questioned." Death was pronounced by the coroner as due to a heart attack, superinduced by acute alcoholism.

A second autopsy, however, disclosed a total of fifty-four fractures, including eleven broken ribs, a crushed skull, a broken nose, a broken jaw and a badly cut-up body in general. And it revealed that he had not been drunk. Fortunately, eye- and ear-witnesses to the brutal murder secured a conviction against one of the State troopers involved.

This sort of application of the third degree is a social disgrace. It ought not to be tolerated. Yet if laws were not so lax as to allow habitual criminals to outwit the police in many cases they might not have to resort to such drastic measures. Measures that imperil the safety of the few innocents who occasionally come afoul of the law.

George Dieterle.

MEDICINE FOR

GREGORY saw it floating up toward him slowly—limp and dead and wavering a little in the deep blue-greenness of the water. He leaned farther over the edge of the boat to see it, and its eyes were staring up at him through the water, brown and wide with mute animal agony.

It was a dog; a small wire-haired terrier with the blunt, square muzzle of a thoroughbred. Its throat had been cut, and the wound was a deep purple slash against the fur, not bleeding now, with the severed muscles showing in gristly white strings.

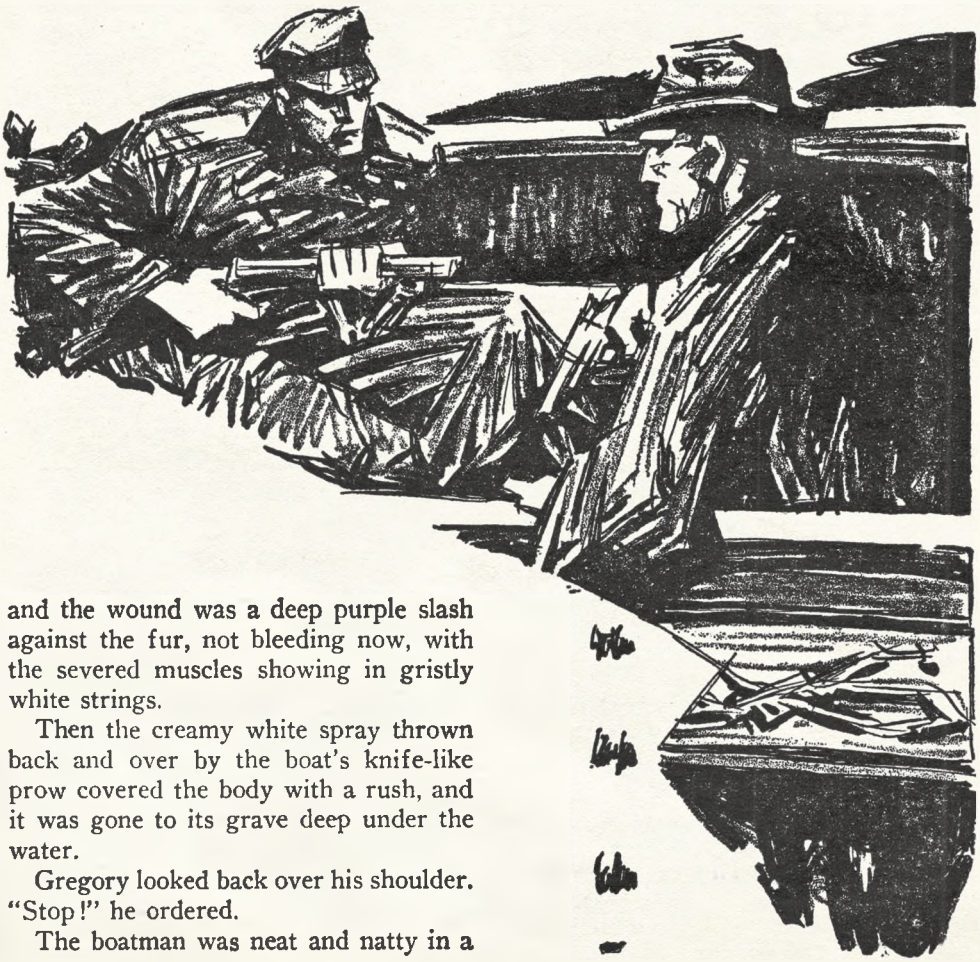
Then the creamy white spray thrown back and over by the boat's knife-like prow covered the body with a rush, and it was gone to its grave deep under the water.

Gregory looked back over his shoulder. "Stop!" he ordered.

The boatman was neat and natty in a white yacht-crew uniform. He was a young man, thick through the shoulders. His blond hair was bleached by sun and water. His face was deeply tanned. He moved a stubby fingered hand on the throttle of the engine, and the boat slowed.

"What?" he asked, over the rumble of the motor sound.

Gregory was looking back at the spot where he had seen the dog. He thought he saw it for a second in a vague white splotch near the surface, and then it was gone again.



MURDER

By NORBERT DAVIS

Death stalks the fog

"What're you looking for?" the boatman asked.

"I saw a dog," Gregory told him.

The boatman stared. "A dog? Here?"

"Yes," Gregory said. "Turn the boat around."

"Listen, mister. You mean you're tellin' me you think you saw a dog out here on the water? You ain't got the d.t.'s, have you? That'd be a hell of a thing for a doctor to have."

"Turn the boat," Gregory said. "I saw a dog. It was dead. I want another look at it."

"Why?" the boatman asked. "What do you want to go lookin' at dead dogs for? You ain't a dog doctor, are you?"

"Turn the boat," said Gregory.

Bruce Gregory was a slender man, neat and dark and unobtrusive in a tailored blue business suit. He had a high forehead with black hair receding sharply above his temples. He had thinly regular features, and his normal expression was that of a research scientist, detached and impersonal, yet observant. He kept his emotions carefully under control, and his facial expression never indicated what he was thinking. Only his eyes gave him away. They were a deep blue, wide set, warm and alive with human understanding, sympathy.

The boatman shrugged. "Why not? I get paid by the hour. I ain't a doctor. I've got no patients dyin' on me while I look for dead dogs."

The motorboat circled back toward the spot where Gregory had seen the dog, and he leaned again over the side, staring down into the shifting blueness of the water. He could see nothing but the moving flecks of light and shadow. After a moment, he straightened up.

"Well," said the boatman. "You got anything else you wanta look for? If you have, we can go back and get a diving helmet. Maybe we could find a dead cat."

"Take me to Van Tellen's," Gregory said.

"Well, sure," said the boatman. "And about time, too, I think."

The sound of the motor changed to deep thunder, and the prow tilted up a little from the water. Small stinging drops of spray felt cold and salty on Gregory's lips. He was frowning a little. The incident of the dead dog bothered him. He liked dogs, and this one had been killed brutally and thrown into the water, and there was a reason for that, Gregory knew. He wanted to find out the reason. The bright, clear beauty of the late afternoon seemed to dull slightly, and he was remembering the silent agony in the dog's eyes.

The prow of the boat swung a little, as the boatman changed his course. The Van Tellen estate was dead ahead now, looming enormous and dark with its spired towers and narrow, close-set windows, brooding over the blueness of the bay. Even the sun turned the brightness of its rays away from the cold granite walls, and the house was darkly sullen and sinister.

There was a man standing on the edge of the small dock as the motor boat nosed gently in against the pilings. He was tall and bent a little bit, and he had an air of flabby looseness about him that was emphasized by the petulant droop of his wide mouth. He looked worn and tired, nervously irritable. His voice had a deep, measured resonance that Gregory knew was acquired, not natural.

"Dr. Gregory?" he asked anxiously, and when Gregory nodded, climbing out of the boat, he offered a pallid, white hand. "I'm Richard Danborn—Mrs. Van Tellen's attorney. I called you."

Gregory shook his hand. There were firm, strong muscles under the flabby skin.

"I've been waiting very anxiously," Danborn said.

"Don't blame me," said the boatman. "It ain't my fault we're late. I—"

"That will be all, Floyd," Danborn said flatly.

"Well, don't blame me, though, if we're late. I just follow orders around here."

Danborn's grayish face flushed. "Then try following this one. I said that would be all."

The boatman muttered sullenly to himself, tying up the boat.

Danborn swallowed hard. "This way, Doctor." He led the way off the dock.

The slope of the lawn down to the water's edge was graduated in neatly even terraces. Danborn and Gregory went up a brick walk with flat steps at intervals.

"These servants around here," Danborn said. "That's an example. Mrs. Van Tellen doesn't know how to handle them at all. This damned estate has given me more trouble. . . ." He was silent for a second, then looked up sidewise at Gregory. "You'll pardon me, Doctor. I'm a little overwrought this afternoon. I suppose there are problems in all professions."

"There are," Gregory agreed.

"I called you to see Mrs. Van Tellen," Danborn said. "I'm very worried about her."

"Her regular physician?" Gregory questioned. "Why didn't you call him? I'm not familiar with her case."

Danborn shook his head irritably. "She has no regular physician. She's afraid of doctors. Never has one. You wouldn't be here now, if I hadn't insisted on calling you against her will."

Gregory stopped. "If Mrs. Van Tellen doesn't wish medical attention, there's nothing I can do about it."

"Wait," Danborn said anxiously. "Don't go. She really needs attention. Her fear of doctors is just an eccentricity. I can assure you, she has plenty of others. . . . Are you familiar at all with the history of the family?"

"No," said Gregory.

Danborn patted at his forehead nervously with a wadded handkerchief. "Let me tell you something about it. Mrs. Van Tellen had a brother by the name of Herman Borg. They came from a poor immigrant family, and they were left orphaned at an early age."

"I don't see what this—"

"Wait," said Danborn. "Herman Borg had a vicious and ungovernable temper. During his youth he quarreled with his sister, Mrs. Van Tellen. He never saw or communicated with her again during his life time. He made a great deal of money, and despite their quarrel, he left her all of his property. All this." Danborn waved an arm jerkily to indicate the house that towered darkly above them.

"He had no children?" Gregory asked, interested.

Danborn moved his shoulders. "One son. His wife died when the boy was born. Herman Borg quarreled with his son, too, and the boy ran away. I don't know as I blame Borg, at that. The boy was bad clear through. I wasn't acting as Borg's attorney at the time, but I know that Borg had a lot of trouble keeping him out of jail on several occasions. The boy died in a train accident in the West. He was bumming his way on freights."

"And Mrs. Van Tellen?" Gregory inquired. "Is she like her brother?"

Danborn shook his head. "Just exactly the opposite. She has no understanding of business at all. She's flighty and weak-willed. She gets one silly notion right after the other." His voice was suddenly emphatic, helplessly angry. "Now it's that damned dog!"

"Dog?" Gregory repeated.

"Yes. She's one of these sentimental women who get enormously attached to pets. She had a terrier. It was a cute little beast, I must admit, and I liked it. But she valued it more than she does her right hand. It disappeared today."

"You mean a wire-haired terrier?"

"Yes," Danborn answered. "Why?"

Gregory moved his shoulders. "Nothing. Just idle curiosity. It disappeared, you say?"

"Yes. Ran away, I suppose. I've arranged to put ads in all the papers and broadcast its loss over the radio. She'd give any reward to get it back. But, in the meantime, we've got to do something for her. She's been having one fit of hysterics after the other. I'm afraid she'll do herself some permanent injury."

"She could very easily," Gregory admitted. "Does she often get attacks of hysteria?"

"Yes," Danborn said frankly. "You see, she was not at all successful either financially or in her marriage. When I found her to inform her of her legacy, she was scrubbing floors at night in an office building. Her husband wasn't working at all. I think she's healthy enough, as far as that goes, but it seems to me that at her age, such fits of hysteria are something to be considered seriously. I'd be greatly relieved if you would look at her and try to calm her."

"I can try," Gregory said. "Now that you've told me about it, I am interested —and not altogether from a medical standpoint. I make a hobby of solving little problems in human conduct."

Danborn whirled on him suddenly. "I remember now. Someone told me you often worked with the county medical examiner on criminal cases! You can't —do you mean—"

Gregory smiled at him reassuringly. "That's just another branch of my hobby. I'm interested in people and why they do what they do."

"But, here now! There's no crime. Mrs. Van Tellen—"

"I know," said Gregory. "I wasn't thinking of that. From what you said about her, she interested me as a person,

that's all. I think you can trust me to keep professional confidences to myself."

"Certainly," Danborn said quickly. "I know I can. No question about it. I apologize, Doctor. I didn't mean to doubt you for a moment. But, you see, Mrs. Van Tellen has had so much unfavorable publicity through this sudden wealth, that the thought was a little startling. I've tried to keep her out of the papers as much as I could, but I haven't been entirely successful. You can understand the possibilities. She has great news value. And some of her actions seem so foolish. You can't blame her for that. To be poor all her life, and then, when she was so old, to have several million dollars thrust on her without the slightest warning—it's enough to upset anyone's balance."

"I know," Gregory said.

Danborn mopped at his brow with the handkerchief. "You really must excuse me. I'm overwrought. Well, there's nothing to be gained, standing here. If you'll come with me, I'll take you to her."

DR. GREGORY and the lawyer, Danborn, went on up the brick walk. The sun was low on the horizon now, a flattened red disc surrounded by hazy pinwheels of mist that distorted its dying rays. The shadows were like long black bars laid across the front of the house. They went up broad granite steps to the dimness of the porch.

The big front door opened before they reached it, and a man sidled out very carefully. He was a small man, narrow shouldered and stooping. His scanty brown hair was sweat-rumpled, straggling down loosely over his forehead. He wore big horn-rimmed glasses, and he stared through them at Danborn and Gregory with drunken owlishness.

"How do you do?" he said in thick, careful tones. "How do you do, all of you? I didn't expect such a large crowd, but come in. Come right in. I assure you that you are most welcome."

He took a step forward and then went teetering sidewise, jiggling his skinny arms to keep his balance. He bumped into the wall, slid slowly and gently down against it until he was sitting on the floor of the porch.

"Very comfortable chairs we have here," he said fuzzily. "Do come in." He closed his eyes and began to hum softly, beating time with an extended forefinger.

"That's Mr. Van Tellen," said Danborn contemptuously, making no effort to lower his voice. "The drunken old fool. He ends up in this state about the same time every day. He never before was in a position where he could afford all he wanted to drink. He's making up for lost time."

Gregory smiled a little, looking down at Van Tellen. "He's not the first to try it."

"He'll be trying it in a sanatorium pretty soon, if he doesn't let up," Danborn said in a disgusted tone. "He never was any good. He's been in jail for petty theft and drunkenness a dozen times in his career."

Van Tellen opened his eyes. "That, sir," he said, "comes dangerously close to being a slander. Eleven times is the correct number." He shut his eyes and began to hum again.

"Come on," Danborn said shortly.

The entrance hall was an immense, dim room with dark paneled walls and an arched ceiling two stories high. Danborn's footsteps made thudding, hollow echoes as he led the way back into its shadows to the long, winding staircase. Gregory followed him up the stairs, into another long, dark hall. Danborn stopped in front of a closed door.

"Please," he said. "Remember what I've told you about her. Remember her history. Make allowances for anything she might say to you."

Gregory nodded. "Of course."

Danborn tapped on the door. The echoes traveled along the hall like ghostly footfalls. There was no answer, and Danborn knocked again, and then

reached down and turned the knob. The door opened noiselessly.

"Mrs. Van Tellen," he said.

The bedroom was enormous, square and high-ceilinged. Wan, reddish light came through the narrow windows in the opposite wall, and the shadows were thick and heavy.

"Mrs. Van Tellen," said Danborn.

The bed was slantwise across one corner of the room. The carved oak head and foot gleamed dimly and richly lustrous. The thick covers humped a little in the center, and there was a head buried deep in the soft pillows with the white lace of a boudoir cap showing a little.

"Mrs. Van Tellen," said Danborn again.

There was no stir from the bed. The figure lying there didn't move. Gregory could see a hand now, reddened and rinkled from years of toil, grasping the bed covers, rumpling them slightly. He stared at the hand, and his eyes were narrowed suddenly.

Danborn took a step or two closer. "Mrs. Van Tellen. Wake up. I've brought the doctor to see you."

The figure on the bed didn't move, didn't answer.

Danborn turned back to Gregory. "She's asleep," he murmued. "Perhaps that's best. A little rest. . . . Come downstairs and wait for a while. You can see her later."

"I'm afraid she isn't asleep," said Gregory.

Danborn stared at him. "What?"

Gregory leaned over the bed and touched the wrinkled hand gently. It was cold and heavy in his grasp. He knew before he tried that he would find no pulse beat in the wrist.

"She's dead," he said, and the words seemed to fall dully in the silence of the room.

"Dead," Danborn mumbled. "Dead." He swallowed hard. "Good God! No! She can't be!"

Gregory had pulled the covers back and was looking down into the thin, old face. There were lines in it, deep graven lines that told their own story of sorrow and poverty and ugly disappointment. But it was a kindly face, smiling now in death, and the blue-veined lids were closed over the tired eyes that had seen too little happiness.

"Dead!" Danborn exclaimed. "But—but how? What—"

She was turned on her side and Gregory saw the clotted stain on her nightgown. It was a dark brown in color, and it had spread slowly and touched the sheets under her. There was a narrow slit in the cloth of the gown just over her heart.

"You'd better call the police," Gregory said slowly. "She was murdered."

Danborn made a choking noise in his throat. His grayish face was suddenly waxen, and his eyes stared wildly at Gregory.

"You—No! It can't be! You're mad!"

"I'm sorry," said Gregory, "but you'd better call the police. Mrs. Van Tellen has been stabbed."

"Oh, good God!" Danborn said, and wavered a little. "Stabbed! Somebody —" He turned and walked toward the door, his feet dragging leadenly.

Gregory listened to the clump of his feet going down the stairs, and then he heard a slight rustling noise close to him and the indrawn gasp of a breath. He whirled around. In two long steps he reached the painted screen that stood in the opposite corner of the room.

He struck it with his clenched fist, and the screen fell with a slashing rattle of sound. Then he was staring at a girl who was crouched back in the angle of the wall. Gregory could feel the blood pumping hard in his throat, and he released his breath in a little sigh.

"Well?" he said evenly.

She was small, only a little over five feet tall, and slender. She wore a white, sleeveless house dress. Her features were clean-cut, delicately even. They were distorted with terror now, and her white lips moved soundlessly.

"What are you doing here?" Gregory asked.

Her lips moved again, and the words came, half incoherent: "You said—she was dead?"

"Yes," said Gregory.

Her eyes were a wide, smooth brown, and now they glazed suddenly with tears. She put her hands up over them. She sobbed, quiet little choking sounds of agony.

"She was the only person who was ever kind to me."

"Who are you?" Gregory asked, more gently.

"Anne Bentley. I am—was Mrs. Van Tellen's companion."

"Why were you hiding here?"

She looked up at him slowly. "I was watching. I was afraid for her."

"Afraid?" Gregory repeated. "Why?"

She swallowed and then shook her head mutely.

"Who were you afraid of?" Gregory asked.

"You," said Anne Bentley.

The answer so astounded Gregory that for a second he was speechless. "Of me?" he said, recovering himself. "Me? Why?"

"I heard they were going to get a doctor for her. I was afraid—they've been torturing her. . . . I thought perhaps you were part of it, too. I wasn't going to let you hurt her! I won't stand for it any more! I won't! She'll not suffer—"

"No," said Gregory. "Never any more."

She stared at him. "No," she said numbly. "She's dead, isn't she? She can't suffer any more now. She's dead."

"Who was making her suffer?" Gregory inquired.

She clenched her fists. "They did everything they could to make her feel badly. Nasty, mean little things. They even stole her dog from her. And then, this!"

"Who?" Gregory said softly.

There was a shout downstairs and the rumbling pound of feet running along the hall. The sound seemed to bring the girl back to herself with a violent jerk.

"You said—stabbed?"

"Yes," Gregory said. "She was stabbed."

"I've got to get out! They can't find me here! They'll say that I—"

"Did you?" said Gregory.

She stared at him with dazed unbelief.

"Did you murder her?" said Gregory.

"No. No, no, no! You can't believe that!"

"How long were you here?"

"A half hour. I thought she was asleep. I came in very quietly, tiptoed behind this screen."

Gregory sighed. "She's been dead more than an hour. But I'm afraid you're going to have trouble making the police believe your story."

"Police," she said, and her voice thickened on the word. "They mustn't know. You can't tell them! You can't!"

"Why not?" said Gregory. "You haven't anything to fear if you are innocent."

"I can't face them! Don't you understand that? If they know I was here—they won't stop for questions."

Feet sounded on the stairs, climbing at a run.

Anne Bentley's face was a white twisted mask. "Let me go! Please! I'll explain, I'll tell you, but not now! I can't!"

Gregory stared at her for a dragging second. "All right," he said suddenly, stepping back. "I won't say anything if you meet me in a moment in that sunken rose garden at the side of the house and explain everything you've said. If you don't—"

"I'll be there! I *can* explain. But not now, not to the police."

She was gone, running lightly across the room. She went through a door at the side, and it closed softly after her.

Gregory picked up the screen and set it back in its place just as Danborn came back into the bedroom, followed by Mr. Van Tellen, weaving loosely.

"I called the police," Danborn said to Gregory. "You're sure there's nothing to do? Nothing to help her?"

"Nothing," Gregory said. "She's thoroughly dead."

Van Tellen sat down on the floor and leaned his back against the wall. "Aggie dead," he said thickly. "My, my. Hard to believe. Thought the old girl would outlive me seventy years. My, my." He closed his eyes and sighed. "I was very fond of her, too. Very sad. My, my." He began to hum slowly and softly to himself.

"There's the heir," Danborn said bitterly. "She didn't have any blood relations. He'll get all her money. Nice to think about, isn't it?"

Van Tellen opened his eyes. "Yes," he said. "Yes, it is. Now that you mention it." He began to hum again in a low, minor key.

GRAY of dusk was changing into black of night as Gregory came down the steep stone steps into the sunken garden. It was a maze of narrow walks, winding and criss-crossing around clumps of shrubbery and flowers that had lost all their color and beauty in the darkness and were only weird-shaped masses of shadow.

Gregory wondered absently if he had made a mistake about the girl, Anne Bentley. He had told no one of her presence in the bedroom. Still, there was time for that, when the police arrived. If she didn't explain. . . .

But he thought she would. Gregory had seen a great deal of human emotion, a great many people twisted and tortured by feelings that went down deeper than scalpel could probe. He was very rarely deceived. Anne Bentley's fear was not the fear of a criminal.

He strolled down one of the narrow paths, circled around its crooked length, back to the steps again. He stood there for a moment with the breeze blowing the rich, soft scent of the flowers across his face.

A foot made a quick, furtive scuffling noise on the walk behind him. Gregory had started to turn, and a man's voice said:

"Don't. Stand still."

Gregory's thin body stiffened. The round, cold ring of a gun muzzle touched the back of his neck. He could hear the light, shallow sound of the man's breathing just behind him. He could feel the light tremor in the steel of the gun muzzle, and he knew the man's hand was trembling.

"Walk ahead of me," the man said. The words were forced out in little spurts between the quick breaths. "Around that path to your right."

"Why?" said Gregory.

The man's voice went up a tone in jittery tenseness. "Walk! You hear me? Walk!" His nerves were screwed up tight, quivering. Gregory could hear the thin sound of hysteria creeping into the words, and he knew the man would shoot in another split second.

"All right," he said evenly.

He walked steadily ahead in the darkness. The gun muzzle went away from his neck and punched him hard in the small of his back, urging him forward. He reached the end of the garden and slowed, and the man stepped on his heel from behind and swore in a breathless mutter.

"Up the steps. Walk right along close to that hedge."

Gregory's shoes grated on the stone of the steps, and then he was walking along the gravel path, hidden in the deep shadow of the high hedge.

"Straight ahead."

They went across the slope of a lawn that was lined with trees that were like dark, tall sentinels. The grass was a smooth carpet under foot, soft and damp and springy. The trees stretched down to the white gravel of a roadway, and there was a car parked in the shadows—a big sedan, gleaming sleekly black. Gregory stopped when he saw it.

The gun muzzle prodded him. "Go on."

Gregory walked up beside the car. There was no one in it, and he stopped again.

"Well?" he said.

"Inside. In the front seat. You're gonna drive."

Gregory opened the door, slid carefully under the steering wheel. He heard the door latch click behind him, and he knew the other man was in the back seat. The man's tenseness had suddenly relaxed, and he was talking and laughing in a thin giggle that had a shaky little catch in it.

"Easy. Easy, huh, Doc? When you know how. Sure. Sure, it is. I knew it would be all the time. Sure. Start the motor."

Gregory touched the starter button, and the engine muttered lightly, smooth with multi-cylindered power.

"Drive right ahead." The man's voice was still shaky and he was trying to control the quickness of his breathing. He was afraid, and he had been afraid the whole time, and that had made him all the more dangerous. He wanted to talk now, smoothly and glibly, laughing, to prove he hadn't been afraid at all. "The lights, Doc. You forgot them. You wanta see where you're goin', don't you? You don't want to hide from people, do you?"

Gregory snapped the switch, and the brilliant white cones bit through the darkness. The road curved evenly and slowly around ahead of them.

"You see," said the man. "We got the whole road all to ourselves. It ain't used much, on account it's much shorter and easier to come by the bay. But we got a lot of time. There's a gate comin' up ahead of us, but it's open and there ain't nobody takin' care of it, so don't let it worry you."

Gregory looked up at the rear-sight mirror, trying to see the face of the man behind him, but he was crouched close against the back of the front seat, out of line with the mirror. Gregory twisted a little in the seat, trying to bring him into its focus, and then he saw another figure. It was plastered flat against the rear window.

For a second Gregory thought his eyes were tricking him. The figure was no more than six inches high. It had a fuzzy mop of hair that made its head disproportionately large and springy, jiggling arms and legs that moved and wiggled in a weird dance, as though the figure were trying to climb up the smooth glass of the window.

The gun muzzle tapped him gently. "Straighten it out, Doc. Don't get to day dreaming."

Gregory turned the steering wheel a little, brought the big sedan back into the center of the road. He glanced again at the mirror. The figure was still there, dancing and jiggling and waving its springy arms. He realized suddenly what it was. It was a doll—a little black gargoyle doll that was fastened on a string so that it hung down over the back window.

They were at the end of the Van Tellen estate now, and the grounds began to narrow. Gregory caught a glimpse of the iron fence on both sides of them, dully slick in the headlights, that was closing in on both sides of them. The big gate loomed ahead. It was open, and there was no light in the small gate house beside it.

"Right on through," said the man with the gun.

The car slid through onto the white road. The headlights showed nothing on either side of it now but blackness, and the sound of the water was a slapping gurgle audible over the sound of the sedan's engine.

"This is the causeway, Doc," the man with the gun told him. "See, the estate's on a little bit of a spit of land stickin' right out into the bay. Water'd be clear around it except for this little neck right here. The old boy—Herman Borg—he built this road when he built the place. Cost him plenty, too."

The road stretched straight and white

and empty ahead of them toward the black loom of the mainland.

"Stop the car, Doc."

Gregory took the sedan out of gear and let it coast slowly to a stop at one side of the road. There was no room to turn out.

"Get out. This is the end of the line."

Gregory opened the door beside him, slid out into the center of the roadway.

"All right, Doc," said the man with the gun. "Take a look."

Gregory turned around slowly. The man was small and wiry and stunted with a white, cruelly grinning face and eyes that were beady specks, glittering. He held a big automatic, and his fingers seemed white and childish and thin twisted around its butt. There was a tell-tale nerve that kept twitching spasmodically in his thin cheek, jerking the side of his mouth.

"Well?" he said mockingly. "Know me?"

"No," said Gregory. He had never seen the man before. "Who are you?"

"Well, the name is Carter right now, I think. I change it so often it's hard to keep track."

"What did you bring me here for?" Gregory asked.

The man called Carter giggled softly. "Well, what do you think, Doc? It's nice and quiet here and nobody around but you and me. And there's lots of water right off the edge, and pretty deep. If you was to fall off, Doc, you'd probably come up a long ways away from here."

"You mean to kill me," said Gregory. His voice was even and low.

"That's it, Doc." He was very sure of himself, now, very confident.

"Why?" said Gregory. His eyes were narrowed on the black automatic. The thick barrel was lined up directly with his chest. If it moved a fraction of an inch. . . . The muscles tensed along his back.

"Why?" said Carter. "Well, I don't see it's going to do you much good to know, Doc. In fact, that's your big trouble, Doc. You wanta know too much. You wanta go pokin' your nose in where it don't belong. So—good-by."

Gregory crouched a little. Carter's eyes were lidless and unblinking and bright watching him, and the barrel of the automatic was motionless, steady. The water made cold, chockling sounds slapping itself in soft little waves against the side of the causeway.

"Good-by, Doc," said Carter in a whisper.

It came at them out of the darkness like a sudden, blasting juggernaut without the slightest warning. It was a heavy gray coupé, running without lights. The driver had been coasting it silently down the road, and now suddenly the engine roared in a wild snarl of sound, and it hurtled at them.

Gregory jumped back instinctively. Carter ducked and whirled. He would have got out of the way, but the car followed him. It followed him uncannily, horribly, like a roaring animal. He dodged again, his face a pasty white smear, and tripped, and then it hit him.

The fender took him in the middle of the back with a sickening sound like the thud of a heavy stone falling to the ground. It knocked him up in the air, his thin body sailed in a jerking, kicking arc. The water of the bay made a sullen, cold splash receiving it.

The gray coupé slid half around, crosswise of the causeway, and the tires ground on the very edge, caught with a sudden jar. The car teetered a little sidewise and then stood there silent.

Gregory could feel the cold wetness of perspiration on his forehead, and he drew in his breath in a long, choking gasp. His legs were numb and stiff under him. He took an uncertain step forward and then another, watching the gray coupé. There was no movement inside it, and he reached out with groping fingers, found the door handle and turned it.

The driver was a small, limp bundle huddled down in the corner of the seat.

"Anne Bentley," Gregory said in a voice that sounded hoarsely strange to himself.

She looked up at him. Her brown eyes were widened abnormally, slick with a glassy, haunted horror.

"I killed him. I heard—when it hit. That sound. I saw him falling, kicking. . . ."

"You saved my life," said Gregory gently. "You were following us?"

She nodded stiffly. "Yes. I was coming into the garden, when I saw him hold you up. I followed, and when I saw the car, I ran back and got this one. I use it to shop for the estate. I drove —watching your lights. . . ."

"Thank you for that, Anne Bentley," Gregory said. "I won't forget it."

"I saw you and him standing here. I saw the gun. I couldn't do anything to stop him. I had to—"

"You had to do what you did," said Gregory. "It's something you'll never regret, I promise you that."

"Who was he?"

Gregory stared at her. "Don't you know?"

She shook her head. "No. I had never—seen him. I just saw his face when I hit—" She sobbed once in a sudden racking gasp.

"But listen to me," said Gregory. "You said something in Mrs. Van Tellen's room, something about someone who was torturing her. I thought this man Carter must be the one. Must be some way concerned with it. I never saw him before in my life either.

"Carter?" she repeated. "I never heard that name. There's been no one by that name around the house."

"Well, who was torturing Mrs. Van Tellen?" Gregory asked. "You did say something about that."

"I don't know. I tried to find out. I wanted to protect her, help her. It was mental torture. Little nasty things that kept happening to make her feel bad. The last was her dog. They stole that, I know. They knew how she loved it, how badly it would make her feel."

"But why?" Gregory said.

"I don't know. I tried to find out. But there was nothing, nothing definite. But everyone in the house was always watching her, making fun of her, remarking about the queer things she did and said. They were always hinting about insanity."

"Was Mrs. Van Tellen insane?" Gregory asked.

"No! No! She was not! They twisted the things she said and did and misinterpreted them to make them sound queer!"

"I know," said Gregory. "I know how easily that can be done."

"She was kind. She tried so hard to do what was right for everyone. She tried so hard to understand the way they acted." Anne Bentley's voice choked suddenly. "So hard. She was just an old woman, alone and bewildered. I wanted to help her, but—but now. . . ."

"Now?" Gregory said softly.

"They'll send me back." Her voice was dull and low and hopeless.

"Send you back?" Gregory repeated. "Send you back where?"

She watched him for a long moment. "I'll have to tell you. You'll know soon enough anyway. I'm out on parole."

Gregory stared incredulously. "You mean—"

She nodded mechanically. "Yes. I was paroled from the State Prison for Women just seven months ago. I was paroled to the custody of Mrs. Van Tellen. You see, her husband was arrested for hitting a man with a beer bottle in a drunken brawl. My trial came up just before his. I was accused of shoplifting. Mrs. Van Tellen saw me in the court-room and she heard the trial."

"Yes?" Gregory said. "And then?"

"That was before Mrs. Van Tellen had any money. But she remembered. And when she did get her brother's fortune, she arranged for me to be paroled to her custody. She—she thought that I wasn't guilty."

"Then I think so, too," said Gregory. "I'm sure you—"

Her hands twisted together tensely. "Thank you for saying that. But I was guilty. I told Mrs. Van Tellen. You see, I was raised in an orphanage. I was adopted by a couple who lived on a farm. They wanted a servant, not a child. I couldn't stand it with them. I ran away. I was all alone in the city. I had no money—only one shabby house dress. I stole a dress from a store. I thought if I could look well, I could get work. I meant to pay for it! I really did!"

"I know that," said Gregory. "And it's all past now, and gone."

"No!" she said tensely. "No, it isn't! Don't you see? That's why I was afraid of the police. They'll find out I'm a—a convict. They'll never look further for the murderer as soon as they know that."

"They will," said Gregory. "Because I'll see that they do."

"But even then I'll have to go back. Because I was paroled to Mrs. Van Tellen. And she's—she's gone."

"They'll never send you back," said Gregory. "Do you hear that? They'll never take you back again. I swear that."

She looked up. "You'll help—*me?*"

Gregory smiled, and the steely lights were gone from his eyes, and they were warm and understanding and sympathetic.

"You've lost one friend today," said Gregory. "But you've found another. Now listen to me. I think it best that you don't make an appearance at the house until I can go back and see just what has been happening. Here's my card. The address is on it. My office adjoins my house, and the waiting-room is never closed at any time. It will be open now. You go there and wait for me. Will you do that?"

Anne Bentley took the card unhesitatingly. "Yes." She stared at him for a long moment. "Thank you," she said in a whisper.

DOCTOR GREGORY drove the big black sedan around the smooth curve of the white graveled drive and stopped it near the side entrance of the Van Tellen house. He was fumbling for the door catch when there was a sudden incoherent shout, and a thick figure came running headlong across the dark sweep of the lawn.

"Hey, you! What in the hell do you think—"

It was the boatman who had brought Gregory across the bay. Floyd, Danborn had called him. He dug his heels into the gravel and stopped short, staring at Gregory.

"Well?" said Gregory.

Floyd drew in a long, deep breath. "Doc," he said, swallowing. "You kinda stop me. Are you really as screwy as you act?"

"Just what are you talking about?" Gregory asked.

"Well, look. I hear some screechin' up here, and I come up and find the old lady is dead. Murdered, they tell me. And everybody's goin' nuts lookin' for you. And now here I find you takin' a nice leisurely tour of the estate. Don't you ever tend to your business?"

"I'm better able to judge what my business is than you are," Gregory said evenly, getting out of the car.

"I dunno," said Floyd. "I really dunno about that, Doc. Did you ever think of havin' your mind examined?"

Gregory ignored him. He walked up the steps to the flat porch. He turned around to look back as he opened the door. Floyd was still standing beside the car, staring after Gregory and shaking his head slowly and incredulously.

The upper hall was bright with light when Gregory came up the stairs. There was no one in sight but a uniformed policeman lounging against the wall beside the door of Mrs. Van Tellen's bedroom. He straightened up when Gregory appeared.

"Oh, hello, Doc!" he greeted. "Where you been? Everybody's been lookin' all over hell for you."

"I was busy," Gregory said.

"Well, go on in, now that you're here. Old Goat Face and Keegan are still snoopin' around inside."

Gregory pushed the door open and went into the bedroom. Doctor Chicory was standing beside the big bed, carefully repacking his instrument case. He was a thin, dry little man with white hair and a white beard. He chewed gum constantly, and the waggle of his bearded jaw did make him look startlingly like a goat. He wore rimless nose glasses that glinted brightly when he moved his head. He had a soft, drawling voice that could be viciously sarcastic when he chose to make it so.

"Ah, Doctor," he said cordially. "Good evening."

"Good evening," Gregory said. "Sorry I'm late."

Chicory smiled at him. They were old friends.

"Quite all right. No hurry."

Detective Keegan was standing with his back to the room, looking out the window, and he turned around now. He was a soft, fat man with a pinkly dimpled face. His wide mouth dropped in a petulant pout. He drew his breath in deeply and expelled it with a little hiccough.

"Now, Doctor Gregory," he said importantly. He talked in a pompous whine. He hated Gregory. He hated his quiet efficiency, his air of grave courtesy. He hated him all the more because he knew Gregory was well aware of how Keegan felt and didn't care in the slightest. "I don't want to quarrel with you, not at all. But you know your duties as a doctor."

"Thanks," said Gregory.

The soft bulge of Keegan's neck above his collar reddened. "When you report a death like this, or when you are in attendance when it is reported, then you're supposed to stay here until the authorities arrive! You don't have any right to tamper in things like this! You have no official position!"

Gregory smiled at him in an amused way. Before he could answer, Chicory spoke in his dry, precise voice as calmly as if he were discussing the weather.

"Keegan, I've often told you that both your face and your voice grated on any person with decent sensibilities. You can't do much about your face, unfortunately, but you can keep your mouth shut, and I suggest you do it."

Keegan choked incoherently, staring at him with furious, bulging eyes.

Chicory smiled benignly. "My dear Keegan, I am the County Medical Examiner, and you are only a detective—and not a very good one at that. Just keep it carefully in mind. Doctor Gregory and I wish to discuss this case. Either keep still or get out."

Keegan found his voice. "I won't! I've got a right—"

"Not while I'm in charge, you haven't," Chicory said.

"I want to ask him about that girl!"

"Girl?" Gregory repeated. "What girl?"

"That damned ex-convict companion of Mrs. Van Tellen's! Did you see her around here?"

"Is she involved?" Gregory inquired.

Keegan's eyes were brightly malicious. "A little! Yeah, I'd say she was! Her fingerprints were on the knife!"

"What knife?" Gregory asked, puzzled. "Do you mean you've found the murder weapon?"

Keegan stared at him incredulously. "*Found* it! Hell, yes! It was stickin' right in the old lady! How could we help but find it?"

Gregory turned his head to look at Chicory.

The little medical examiner nodded once, precisely. "Yes, Doctor. Keegan very seldom gets things correctly, but this time he happens to be right. The knife was in the wound that killed Mrs. Van Tellen, and the girl's fingerprints were on the hilt."

"There was no knife in the wound when I saw it," Gregory said.

"What!" Keegan exclaimed. "Why, you're crazy—" He stopped and let out his breath slowly. He began to smile in a sly, knowing way. "Oh. So that's the way it is. I understand she's very pretty and—"

"Keegan!" said Chicory.

"Well, he's trying to protect her! You can see that! He's just lying."

"Keegan," said Chicory. "Get out of here."

"I won't! You and he will get together and cook up a bunch—"

"Ah," said Chicory in a quietly satisfied away. He began to take off his coat.

Keegan backed up two steps. His plump cheeks lost their color. His eyes were worried, and they shifted uneasily from Gregory, who was still smiling a little, to Chicory.

"Well, I didn't really mean. . . ."

Chicory removed his glasses and laid them carefully on his coat. Keegan walked very quickly to the door. He stopped there and turned around.

"Well, you're in charge here now, but you just wait."

Chicory took a step toward him, and Keegan went through the door and slammed it defiantly after him. Chicory picked up his coat and put it on again. He put on his glasses and winked at Gregory.

"Yellow," he said. "As yellow as a pound of butter, our friend Keegan. I like to watch him squirm. That's the trouble with holding a public office like this one of mine. You are forced to associate with scum."

"Could I see the kife you found in the wound?" Gregory asked.

Chicory shook his head. "I'm sorry. It isn't here. The fingerprint expert took it back to his office with him to check it more carefully. I'm afraid there's no doubt about it, though, Doctor. The fingerprints were the girl's. The expert located a number of her prints in her room and they checked."

Gregory frowned. "I can't understand the knife being in the wound. It actually was not there when I first saw the body. I examined the wound, not very extensively, but I would certainly have seen the knife if it had been there."

"Surely," said Chicory. "It means that someone put it in the wound after you saw the body. But the fingerprints?"

Gregory shrugged. "I don't know. What kind of a knife was it?"

"A long, slim dagger. A piognard. It was one of those medieval things. Keegan found where it had come from. It had been hanging up in the front hall on the wall, sort of an ornament."

"Speaking of ornaments," Gregory said, "have you ever seen anything like this before?"

He reached in his pocket and brought out the black gargoyle doll that had been hanging against the window of the black sedan. He held it up by the string attached to its neck, and the springy arms and legs jiggled in a fantastic shimmy. The thing had a painted face that was sketched in a set, cannabilistic leer with thick red lips and goggling eyes. The body was stuffed cloth. The legs and arms were tensed wires.

Chicory stared, wide-eyed. "Where on earth did you get that?"

"I found it," Gregory said. "Ever see anything like it before?"

"Yes. Wait, now." Chicory scratched his head. "Where did I see the thing? Oh, yes! My grandniece!"

"What?" Gregory asked.

"My little grandniece has one just exactly like it. She was playing with it the last time I was over at their house. I remember I remarked about it. I didn't think it was a very cheery looking object for a child to be playing with. But then, as is usually the case in my family, I was overruled."

"Do you know where your grandniece got it?" Gregory asked.

Chicory nodded. "Surely. My nephew and his wife went to the opening of the Harlem Club. These little beggars were

given away as favors on the opening night."

"The Harlem Club," Gregory repeated.

"Yes. I gave them a good talking to for going there. That place is a fire trap if I ever saw one. People think because a building sets near the water it won't burn, but that doesn't always follow."

"The place is closed now, isn't it?" Gregory asked.

"Yes!" said Chicory, "and a good thing, too! I don't approve of places like that. Brings in a bad element. Makes more trouble for the authorities."

"Who ran the place?"

"Fellow by the name of Steve Karl. Very unsavory character. I was against granting him a license when he applied for it, but that's all the good it did me."

"Is he still in town?"

"Yes. Lives out at the place there. He's looking for some new capital to reopen, I understand. I hope he doesn't find it. I'd like to see that rat's nest burn down with him in it. Why do you ask?"

"I think I'd like to have a talk with Steve Karl," Gregory said slowly.

HIS HOUSE was a tall colonial, white and graceful and distinguished looking on the wide, tree-lined curve of Elm Street. Gregory dismissed his taxi at the corner and walked up the hill toward his home. Through the mask of the tall shrubbery in front he could see the cheerfully glowing white light that marked the side door into his office.

As he told Anne Bentley, that light was always on and the office door was always open. It was not usual for a doctor of Gregory's standing to be on service twenty-four hours a day. But he liked it that way. He enjoyed his work. Each person that paused under the white light and opened that door was a problem for him to solve.

His footsteps sounded crisp and firm on the walk as he went around to the side of his house. He hesitated a second in front of the office door with his hand on the knob. And then, remembering that she would probably be afraid waiting there alone for this long time, he spoke her name cheerfully:

"Hello, Anne Bentley."

There was no answer from inside. Gregory's voice died in cold little echoes. He frowned in a worried way, pushed the door open. He stopped short, standing in the doorway, staring incredulously.

The neat white office was a shambles. The center table had been tossed over on its side, and the magazines that had been on top of it were scattered from one end of the room to the other. The glass case containing his extra instruments in steel shining rows had been smashed open. A chair lay in one corner, its metal arms and legs twisted grotesquely.

"Anne Bentley," Gregory called. His voice sounded hollow and empty in the wrecked room.

He stepped forward, and he saw something that had been hidden behind the tipped table. There was a man lying on the floor, face down, in a crumpled heap. The bright, shining steel handle of a surgeon's scalpel protruded from his back.

Gregory didn't need to look twice to know that the man was dead. He didn't need to look twice to know that the surgeon's scalpel was one of his own, taken from the smashed glass case.

Slowly he knelt down beside the stiffened figure. He lifted it a little, turned it on its back. Its arm flopped on the floor with an ugly thump.

Gregory was looking down into the grayish, lined face of the attorney, Richard Danborn. Danborn's tired eyes stared back at him, glassy and lifeless. There was a blue welt-like bruise on his forehead, running slant-wise above his left eye. Gregory touched it gently with his fingers.

After a moment Gregory stood up. His face looked older now, bleak and

harsh and determined. Taking his keys from his pocket, he went over to the door that led into his private office, unlocked it. He snapped on a light, crossed to the flat, polished desk. He took a stubby barreled police revolver from one of its drawers, slipped it into his coat pocket. He went out of the office, around to the garage where he kept his small black coupé. He climbed in and headed into the night. He drove for a long time, out of town and toward the bay, and when he stopped, he let the coupé nose into the shallow ditch beside the road. He had switched off his headlights several hundred yards before he had reached this point, and he got out of the car now. Its door made a muffled thump closing.

There was fog on the bay, and it was creeping slowly inland, pushing up on the land in rolling, puffing billows that changed shapes fantastically as they moved. Gregory stood beside the car, his coat buttoned close around his throat, watching around him. The darkness was a soft, oily black, and except for the creep of the fog, nothing else moved. There were no lights anywhere.

Gregory walked slowly down the road. It turned around the edge of a hill that sloped down sharply. The fog seemed to be waiting for him like a placid white lake, and he walked down into it, feeling for his footing. He moved ahead very slowly and quietly in the dim grayness.

A creaking sound to his right brought him up short. He stood tensely, watching the white object that stood beside the road, until he saw that it was inanimate. It was a white, square pillar with a metal sign attached to it by wires that creaked rustily when the night wind touched them.

Stepping closer, Gregory could make out the bright, slanted lettering on the sign:

WELCOME!
HARLEM CLUB
DINE—DANCE—DRINK

There was a wavering side road that turned off here, the thin gravel on its surface scoured into the mud underneath it in twin grooves from the pressure of auto tires. Gregory followed it through the fog until he saw the black loom of a building ahead of him.

It was long and low and rambling, shed-like, with a disproportionately high cupola over what had once been the entrance. There had been a Neon sign on top of the cupola, bright enough to be seen far out on the bay. It was gone now, probably seized by one of the Harlem Club's many creditors, and only the support remained, looking like a steel gallows, gauntly sinister in the fog.

There were no lights in the building. Gregory felt his way along a wall, still following the dim car tracks. They turned around a long L-shaped garage extension of the building and then stopped before warped, wooden doors.

Gregory hesitated there for a while, listening and watching, and then he slid his fingers in behind the bulge of a door and pulled gently. The door moved a little, sliding noiselessly on oiled runners. Gregory peered through the opening, but there was nothing to be seen inside except the oily heave of the blackness.

He pulled the door open farther, slipped cautiously in. The mud on his shoe soles slid on the cement flooring. He could smell gasoline and oil and the indefinable pungency of wet leather.

After a moment of blind, pointless groping, he breathed a soft curse to himself and reached inside his tightly buttoned coat. He took a small clip flashlight from his vest pocket. Holding his revolver ready in his right hand, he pressed the clip. The small circle of light cut brilliantly through the darkness, showed the mud-spattered side of a parked roadster.

"Hold it," said a voice flatly. "Hold the light right where it is, Doc. I'm covering you."

The flashlight beam wavered for a second and then was steady. Gregory stood rigid.

Shoes scuffed on the cement. Gregory listened to the sound of them, listened to them come cautiously closer, approaching from behind.

"The gun," the flat voice said. "Drop it, now."

Gregory dropped the light instead. Instantly, as soon as his thumb released the clip, the white beam shut itself off, and the flashlight tinkled on the floor in the darkness. Gregory stepped sidewise and swung the revolver back-handed in a flat, swishing arc.

There was a sodden thud as the barrel struck flesh. The voice gasped in a choking bubble of sound. Gregory struck again, heard the grate of the gun-butt as it struck on bone, felt the jar in his wrist.

Feet scraped on the cement. Someone fell with a lunging clatter, sprawling full length.

Gregory waited, breathing hard. He knew from the feel of that last blow that whoever it was he had struck was unconscious now, if not dead. He moved a little, feeling cautiously with his feet for the prone form. He touched its warm, inert limpness.

Then, suddenly, without the slightest warning sound, something hit the side of his head with tremendous, crushing force. He fell sidewise in the darkness, and it seemed that he was falling for long moments before he felt himself strike the coldness of the cement floor. He remembered feeling that, and then he felt nothing more.

LIGHT shone hot against the closed lids of Gregory's eyes. He didn't move. He made no attempt to open his eyes until he had conquered the first chaotic thoughts of returning consciousness. In a few seconds he knew that his brain would take control again, and he would remember just what had happened.

There was an ache spreading slowly from a spot over his right temple. He considered the ache, diagnosing it, and that brought memory back.

He remembered going into the garage of the Harlem Club, remembered the voice that had spoken out of the darkness. He remembered striking at that voice, and he remembered the crushing blow that had smashed him down.

It must not have been as hard a blow as it seemed. Or perhaps the brim of his hat had lessened its force. Gregory knew that he had only suffered a slight concussion. Now, recalling all that, and with his mind steady and clear, he moved a little and opened his eyes.

The light was an unshaded bulb, dangling down from a streaked, dirty ceiling on a length of tangled wire. Gregory was lying on his back on something soft and lumpy under him. He moved one hand slightly, felt a crumpled blanket. He was lying on a cot.

"Good evening," said a soft, slyly amused voice.

Gregory turned his head further and saw a man. He was sitting on a stool tilted back against the wall. He was a tall, ungainly man with stick-like arms and legs. The skin on his face was a pallid, pasty white, stretched paper-thin over the protruding jut of his nose. His hair was a dead black, glittering with oil, plastered flat against his bony head. His eyes were blue, a smooth, glossy blue that had no life behind them. He had a smooth and suavely sinister smile.

"Steve Karl," Gregory said.

"Why, yes," the man said. "I'm very pleased and flattered to be recognized so promptly."

Gregory moved again on the bed, starting to sit up.

"No," said Karl. "No, my dear doctor. Just lie there for a few moments, and you will feel much better. Of course, I wouldn't venture to give an expert like you medical advice—mine is just practical counsel." He raised his right hand casually. Gregory's police revolver rested lightly in his knobby, yellowish fingers. "A nice gun, Doctor. And I needed a spare."

Gregory relaxed and looked slowly around the room. The floor was littered with crumpled papers and snuffed-out cigarette butts. There was no furniture except the cot on which Gregory lay and the stool Karl was sitting on.

"This," said Karl, "is what serves me for an office at the moment. I apologize for it. You see, my creditors moved in on me recently and moved right out again, taking everything along with them that wasn't nailed down. In case you are interested, we are upstairs over the club."

"Thank you," said Gregory evenly.

"Yes," said Karl. "I'd heard that you were a pretty hard proposition, Doctor, but watching you come out from under the way you did just now makes me believe I underestimated you, at that. You're certainly hard to get excited, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Gregory.

"Does your head feel better now?"

"Yes," said Gregory. "May I sit up?"

Karl nodded. "But don't do anything else. I'm not quite such easy game as the men I hire. You've done pretty well with them, haven't you, Doctor? What happened to Carter, by the way?"

"He fell into the bay."

"Ah," said Karl. "I like the way you put it. Fell into the bay, eh? Well, that's one gone. And you just fixed another up very nicely down in the garage. I had to send him into town to get repaired—in the custody of the one that put you down. That leaves us all alone to have our little talk. Just how did you get on to me, Doctor?"

"Through Carter."

Karl's thin lips tightened. "That yellow little rat! Did he talk before he—fell into the bay?"

"No," said Gregory. "But he took me for a ride in a car. There was a little doll in the car, the kind you gave out on your opening night. I traced that. There was no registration or ownership certificate in the car and the license plates were forgeries. I thought the doll must have some relation to Carter, or else he would have removed it when he stole the car."

"That fool," said Karl. "That damned fool. He was drunk the night we got that doll, and he got the notion that the thing was good luck for him. Damn him and it, too. But it was clever, Doctor. Very clever of you."

Gregory watched him silently.

"You've been damned clever all the way through," Karl said. "Yes. I'll admit it. You had a better plan than I did, and you went about it in a slicker way."

"Plan?" said Gregory.

"Oh, yes. I figured it out very quickly; give me credit for that. You had a hold on that girl. You could make her do what you said. And she could manage old man Van Tellen. He was crazy about her. So you had the girl murder Mrs. Van Tellen. And there you had the whole business right in the palm of your hand. The old man controlled the money, the girl controlled him, and you controlled the girl. And how about Danborn? Isn't he in it somewhere?"

"Not now," said Gregory.

"What do you mean by that?" Karl asked.

"He's dead."

Karl moved tensely on his stool. "When did that happen?"

"Tonight," said Gregory evenly. "I found him lying on the floor of my office, where your men had left him."

"Yes," said Karl. "But Jerry only sapped him. Jerry's the guy that smeared you down in the garage. Jerry didn't crack him hard enough to kill him. Jerry don't make mistakes like that."

"I noticed the bump on his head," Gregory said. "But now he's got a scalpel in his heart."

Karl swallowed, and his smile grew a little strained as he watched Gregory. "You mean you stuck him in the back when you found him lying there?" He swallowed. "You know, Doc, I'm beginning to think I'm damn lucky to come out at the top of this pile. I don't like the way you do business."

"What was your plan?" Gregory asked.

Karl moved his thin shoulders. "Easy. I'm paying a few guys around the Van Tellen place. I spotted her for a softy, and I needed some capital. I knew she had the reputation for being a little on the screwy side, and I was just taking advantage of that. Pretty soon I was going to move in and protect her in a big way under the threat that the servants and the other boys around there would testify that she was insane. I would have put it over, all right. She's a soft touch for something like that. But I was playing for small change compared with you."

"Yes," said Gregory. "Very small change."

"Not any more," said Karl in an ugly tone. "Oh, no. You fixed up the setup for me now. I'll take it over."

"Will you?" said Gregory.

"Yes, but not the way you were going to work it. I don't want any part of that girl. I don't want her mixing in it. I'll work on the old man direct."

"Mr. Van Tellen?" Gregory questioned.

"Sure. Who else? He's getting all the old girl's money, but he won't have it very long. I'm having him brought over here for a little session as soon as I get rid of you. He'll listen to reason after the boys work him over for a while. Then, after this, he'll be my silent partner—or else."

"And the girl?" Gregory asked calmly. "Anne Bentley?"

"She goes with you," said Karl. "Deep down under. You and she and Carter are all going to be drinking a lot of water together."

"She's here?" said Gregory.

"Sure. In the other room—tied up. The boys had to rough her a little when they grabbed her in your office, but they didn't hurt her much."

"Ah," said Gregory quietly. "That's all I wanted to know."

"Is it now?" said Karl, getting up very slowly. "I'm glad of that, because you aren't going to get a chance to know very much more, Doc. We're going visiting. The girl's in the room through that door. Go on in. I want you to carry her. That'll just keep your hands busy."

Gregory stood up. The movement redoubled the throbbing ache in his head, but his eyes were steady and cool and watchful.

"Take it easy," said Karl. "Easy and slow, Doc. You won't catch me like you did those other guys."

He followed Gregory step by step with the cocked revolver level in his hand. Gregory walked to the door he had pointed out, opened it.

It was a dim, dark cubby-hole of a room, and Anne Bentley was lying in a crumpled heap under the boarded-up window. She was conscious. Gregory caught the shadowed movement of her head, turning toward them, heard the bubbling moan of her breath from under the gag that cut across her face whitely.

Gregory knelt down beside her. "This gag," he said. "It's too tight. It's choking her."

"Never mind that," Karl said thinly. "She won't feel it for very long. Pick her up."

Gregory raised the girl's slim body in his arms, stood up.

"Back through this way," Karl ordered, stepping aside and gesturing with the revolver. "Out that door."

Gregory carried Anne Bentley across the office. He fumbled clumsily for the knob on the door, opened it, went down a long, dim hall. A stairway made a dark well ahead of him.

"Down," said Karl.

He had a flashlight, and its beam made a moving pool in the darkness, showed the worn steps leading down steeply. There was another door at the bottom. Gregory pushed it open, and wet fog billowed into the hall bringing the salt smell of the bay in along with it.

"Outside," Karl said.

Loose boards clumped, moving a little under Gregory's feet. This was the bay side of the club building, built up on pilings above the flat, slick swell of the water.

"Straight ahead," Karl said. "There's a pier."

Gregory walked slowly into the smoky dimness. The boards of the little pier were wet and slippery under his feet, and he could feel the structure sway a little with their combined weight. The fog pressed in softly close around them.

"It's about time," said a voice ahead of them. "You think I wanta wait here all night?"

The slim, graceful lines of a speed boat took shape ahead of them, rising and falling a little with the movement of the water. Gregory recognized it as the same boat that had carried him out to the Van Tellen estate earlier. And Floyd, the boatman, was standing up in it now, holding it against the end of the dock. He was wearing a slicker with the collar strapped tight around his neck.

"I didn't know you were here already," Karl said.

"Why didn't you look?" Floyd demanded. "This is a hell of a place to leave a guy sittin' all night."

"Shut up," Karl said flatly. "I haven't got time to argue with you. Did you bring old Van Tellen?"

"Sure. Right here." Floyd moved his foot casually and touched a limp, bedraggled bundle that rolled loosely on the bottom of the boat.

"Carry him inside," Karl ordered.

"The hell with that," said Floyd. "I'm sick of carryin' the old coot around. Don't make any difference, anyway. He's out cold. He drank enough to sink a battleship today, and I tapped him on the head before I brought him along. Leave him in here. He ain't gonna bother anybody."

"All right," Karl agreed. "Get down in the boat, Doc. We're all goin' for a little ride. Take it easy."

CLIMBING stiffly down into the boat, Gregory held Anne Bentley close against him. He sat down on one of the seats, still holding her. His hands were freed now of the weight of carrying her, and instantly he began to work at the knots in the thin cord that bound her wrists. His hands were concealed under her body. He could feel the muscles in her arms strain as she tried to help him.

Karl jumped down into the boat. "All right, Floyd. You start up. Take it slow. I don't want anybody getting curious."

"Hell," Floyd said, "they couldn't see nothin' in this fog if they was."

The stubby revolver glistened in Karl's hand. "I said take it slow."

"All right," Floyd said sullenly. He bent over the engine. It coughed once, then again, and began to purr softly. The boat rocked a little, began to move away from the dock.

Gregory's strong fingers loosened the last knot in the thin cord. Then, under cover of the darkness and working with one long-fingered hand, he loosened the too-tight gag. He heard Anne Bentley give a long sigh of relief.

The pier disappeared behind them, and then there was nothing but the soft whiteness of the fog all around them. The only sound was the swish of the prow cutting through the water, the muffled mutter of the engine. Anne Bentley twisted slightly in Gregory's lap. He knew she was reaching for the cord that bound her ankles, and he touched her shoulder approvingly.

"This is your last ride, Doc," said Karl. "Enjoy it."

"I am," said Gregory evenly. "I'm enjoying it very much. This is just about the place you dropped the dog overboard, isn't it, Floyd?"

Floyd was a dark, thick figure sitting at the stern of the boat. The oilskin coat rustled softly as he moved a little,

turning to look toward Gregory. He didn't say anything.

"Dog?" said Karl blankly. "What dog?"

"Mrs. Van Tellen's dog," Gregory said. "He killed it before he killed Mrs. Van Tellen."

There was a long silence with the thump of the boat's motor sounding faint and far away.

"Killed Mrs. Van Tellen!" Karl repeated. "Are you nuts, Doc?"

Floyd's voice was thick and slow. "Sure. He's screwy. I told you he was."

"That babe you're holdin' killed Mrs. Van Tellen," Karl said. "Everybody knows that. I heard it over the news broadcast this afternoon. They found her fingerprints on the knife that was stuck in the old lady."

"The knife was put in the wound after Mrs. Van Tellen was dead," Gregory said. His voice was gentle and low, indifferent. "Floyd was saving it for that. You thought he was working for you all the time, didn't you, Karl? He wasn't. You were working for him."

"What—" said Karl. "What the hell, here?"

Floyd sat in the stern, unmoving. His face was a dark, smeared blur under the brim of his cap. He didn't speak.

"Floyd killed the dog," said Gregory. "He hated Mrs. Van Tellen. He wanted to do anything that would hurt her. She suspected him for some reason. He knew it. He couldn't waste any more time, then. He killed her. And he killed Danborn. And one other."

Karl's voice was faint with shock. "One other?"

"Mr. Van Tellen," said Gregory. "He's not drunk or unconscious. He's dead. If you don't believe it, touch him."

Automatically Karl leaned over the limp, soggy bundle on the bottom of the boat. He touched the glistening paleness that was its face. His breath rattled in his throat.

"Floyd!" he snarled. "Damn you! He's cold! He's dead! You——" He swung half around.

Anne Bentley slid off Gregory's lap, and Gregory leaned over her and reached under the next seat, groping for the object that glinted metallically there. His fingers closed over the smooth wet handle of a short wrench.

"That's all," said Floyd. "That's about all. Drop the gun, Karl, and you let that wrench stay where it is, Doc." He had picked up a shotgun from under his seat, and the short sawed-off barrels glinted coldly. "It's loaded with buckshot—both barrels. Ever see what a shotgun would do at this range? It would tear all three of you up like shredded wheat."

Gregory let go of the wrench and straightened up slowly in his seat. Karl's limp fingers loosened on the revolver, and it clattered on the bottom of the boat.

"Floyd," Karl said unbelievingly. "Floyd, what—"

"You're smart, Doc," said Floyd. "Oh, you're pretty smart, all right. You probably figured out why I killed 'em, didn't you?"

"I think so," said Gregory. "I think it was because you are Herman Borg's son."

"Yeah," said Floyd. "I am. The cops was after me out West, so I faked that train accident. That was some stumblebum hobo that got bumped. Not me. But the cops grabbed me anyway on another job and stuck me away for five years. But they never savvied who I really was. And then when I got out, I found my lousy old man had kicked the bucket and left all his dough to this Van Tellen outfit."

"And you set out to get it back," said Gregory.

"Sure. And I'm gonna. They're all dead. Floyd, the boatman, is gonna disappear. And then pretty soon Herman Borg's son is gonna turn up and claim the dough his old man left. Old lady Van Tellen didn't leave no will. I saw to that. And neither did this stew-bum husband of hers. I'm all that's left. I get it."

"And Danborn?" Gregory said. "Why did you kill him?"

"That dirty rat! He's the one who thought up the idea for my old man to give his money to the Van Tellens. I fixed him for that. I was trailin' him, lookin' for a chance. I seen Karl's boys jump him in your office. I finished the job after they scrammed with the girl. The knife in the old lady—that surprised you, didn't it, Doc? I seen the girl pick it up once. I was always watchin'. I glommed on to it and saved it. I didn't get a chance to stick it in the old lady before you showed. But I did afterwards. How'd you know, Doc?"

"You were in such a hurry to get back to the estate when you were taking me across," Gregory said. "And then the way you acted about the dog. You knew Mrs. Van Tellen's terrier was missing. All her servants had been hunting for it. But you didn't say anything about it when I saw the dead dog, and you tried to keep me from examining it closely, Then, later, when I drove up in the car Carter had tried to take me for a ride in, you recognized the car. You thought it was Carter driving, and you were all set to bawl him out for showing himself so openly. You covered up your surprise very well when you saw I was driving, but I knew you *were* covering up."

"I knew you did, damn you," said Floyd. "But it set me back on my heels so hard when I saw it was you that I couldn't think of anything sensible to say."

"Floyd," Karl said quickly. "Now listen, Floyd. This is fine, boy. You've certainly arranged things nicely. We've got everything fixed now. I'll help you—"

"The hell you will," said Floyd coldly. "I don't need any help from you. I'll help *you*—right over the side with these other two nosey punks!

"No!" Karl said frantically. "Floyd! You wouldn't!"

Floyd chuckled thinly, and then there was a thick, low muttering sound close to them in the fog. A round spot of light bloomed out suddenly like an incredibly bright mechanical eye and outlined them all in its ghastly white glow.

"All right!" a voice shouted from behind the light. "All right, you! Pull up! This is a police boat!"

"Police!" Karl screamed.

Floyd swung around, a jerkily moving black silhouette cut out of the gray blanket of fog. The light glittered coldly on the double barrel of the shotgun. Its report was a flat, blasting roar of sound. Glass tinkled, and the light was suddenly gone.

The speed boat jumped forward with a surge of power, heeling over as Floyd turned it in a sharp circle. His voice came hoarsely:

"Sit still! All of you! I've still got one barrel left!"

The engine of the invisible police boat drowned out his voice in a thundering crash of sound as it suddenly accelerated. The noise drummed in the fog, closing in invisibly, and then the gray knife-like prow loomed just over them.

Gregory threw himself down and sidewise, covering Anne Bentley with his body. The gray prow hit the speed boat in the side, knocked it up clear out of the water, rolled it over with a sharp, ripping crunch. Karl shrieked in sudden unbearable agony.

Gregory clutched Anne Bentley close against him, felt himself falling dizzily through the air. The coldness of the water closed over them like a great smooth hand. Gregory struggled and fought frantically, kicking up toward the surface. Anne Bentley was limp in his arms, unresisting.

Their heads broke surface suddenly, and a voice yelled just above them:

"Here! Here! Here they are! This side!"

Gregory stroked toward the gray wall that was the police boat's side. There was a man leaning far out toward him over the water. Gregory looked up and saw dimly the jutting white goatee and sparkling spectacle lenses of Doctor

Chicory. Then, over to his left, he saw a swirl of yellow slicker sinking under the surface.

Rope came rushing down toward Gregory. He gripped it with his free hand, pulled himself against the side of the boat and hoisted Anne Bentley up high enough for Doctor Chicory to grasp her. As soon as he felt her weight released from his arm, he let go of the rope, swam away from the boat toward the left.

"Gregory!" Chicory's voice shouted incoherently. "This way! Wait! Are you crazy?"

Gregory drew in a deep gulp of air, dove. He went plummeting down beneath the slick swell of the surface in a long, driving slant. The inky blackness of the water shut off all sensation except the laboring pound of blood in his temples. The pressure squeezed at his lungs, and little red streaks danced madly in front of his eyes.

Then one clawing hand touched smooth rubbery wetness below him. He grasped at it frantically, caught it. He had the collar of Floyd's slicker, but the weight of Floyd's body dragged it down with a leaden weight. He fought against it, kicking and threshing, while his lungs burned for the want of oxygen. He lost all sense of direction, all sense of progress. He didn't know whether he was going upward toward the surface or sinking. But he locked his fingers on the slicker collar and fought grimly.

Blackness began to wash out the red streaks that danced before his eyes. He knew he was losing consciousness. He concentrated all his will power on one last desperate struggle, and his head broke the surface of the water. He breathed through his open mouth in great, broken sobs, and the freshly moist air seemed to flow all through his body, restoring strength and feeling.

"There! There!" Chicory's voice shouted thinly, and a rope slapped the water beside him.

Gregory grasped the rope, felt himself hauled forward and then upward. Hands caught him and his limp burden. He sank down on wet boards, still breathing in sobbing gasps.

"You fool!" said Chicory, staring anxiously down at him. "Were you trying to commit suicide?"

"Girl?" Gregory whispered.

"Oh, she's all right," Chicory said shortly. "Just fainted. Scared, then the shock of the water. She's coming around."

"Floyd," Gregory said. "Take—care—him."

"Sure," said Chicory. He straightened up and shouted. "Here. Take care of this man. All he needs is a little artificial respiration."

Slicker-clad policemen knelt down beside Floyd's limp body, began to work on him expertly.

"Where'd you come from?" Gregory asked.

Chicory's glasses glittered as he turned around. "Well, you told me you were going to see Karl, and when one of his men was dumped on the lawn of the County Hospital with a cracked skull, and the policeman on the beat reported a dead man in your office, why I thought somebody ought to come around and see what was happening. So I commandeered this police boat so I could sneak up on Karl's place from the bay side. We were lost in the fog, here, and drifting along when we heard your voices and your motor. But what in the devil did you want to risk your life rescuing that fellow for? I saw him shoot at our searchlight."

"Evidence," said Gregory, breathing more strongly now. "Floyd, himself, is all the evidence I've got that he killed Mrs. Van Tellen and Mr. Van Tellen and Danborn. I hope he feels like confessing when he comes around."

"He will," said Chicory meaningly. "Oh, yes. He will, all right. I'll see to that."

MONTE CARLO MERRY-GO-ROUND

By NELS LEROY JORGENSEN

Black Burton's .38 blots out a gigolo's killer

MOST WOMEN would have fainted without apologies. Patricia Blaine did not. Afterward she wondered why she hadn't.

The echo of the backfire from the retreating taxicab that had brought her from the Monte Carlo Casino here to the small villa on the outskirts of town, was dying away. The big clock on the tall mantle shelf opposite the half-closed door ticked on remorselessly, curiously loud of a sudden in that ordinarily quiet room that had so suddenly become a place of violent death.

The door clicked shut unnoticed. Her purse fell. The girl's hand went to her throat and even then she could feel the wild, ungovernable hammer of her pulse. She thought she cried out but the cry died in her throat.

The figure was lying sprawled, half propped up on one shoulder against the small table in the foyer. The eyes were open, upturned and glazed. Light from

the small night lamp on the table shed a pallid yellow glow down over a lean face that was beardless except for a small, fastidiously pointed mustache, stained now with blood, and narrow shoulders encased in a well fitting coat with tails.

Blood smeared the once glistening shirt front, twinkled redly on the studs. Blood seeped sickeningly from one corner of the man's mouth, as though some hideously overgrown infant drooled crimson.

Patricia Blaine never knew afterward how long she stood there, her every muscle turned to marble, her voice frozen in her constricted throat, her hands clenched, and feeling the insane, overwhelming impulse to scream and scream and scream.

All the details were to be a blur for some time to come. But somehow she managed to get to the telephone beside her bed. She had to pass the thing on the floor in order to do it, but she managed. She heard her own voice and failed to recognize it.

Vivian Burton answered the call, a little sleepily. The low voice of the gambler's wife was throaty and reassuring. It held a steadying quality that eased the girl's nerves. She found herself talking, stammering, halting, choking over some of the words; and then, before she hung up she had taken a new draught of courage from Vivian Burton's quiet words of comfort:

"We'll be right out. Please be very quiet, do nothing. My husband arrived at the hotel, the *Negresco,* a half hour ago. I'll bring him."

Patricia Blaine sat back, staring straight ahead of her, fighting down that scream in her white throat. Even then, though she could not have told just why, she felt calmer.

"My husband." That meant that Stuart Burton had arrived in Monte Carlo! Black Burton! The famous, square-shooting gambler whose deep insight into human nature and whose swift draw and unerring aim had solved many a murder. With Black Burton there this nightmare might dissolve in the end, after all.

She knew the story of Black Burton, Black Burton and Vivian. Vivian, that lovely, glamorous young society girl the gambler had won so many years in the past—cool, competent, fascinating.

For a long time the gambler and his wife had chosen to live apart. Their ways of life, they had discovered early, had diverged too sharply. But that could never interfere with their devotion to one another.

They lived apart, yes, but they were somehow very close. Vivian had arrived in Monte Carlo the week before, and in that week she and the wealthy young debutante, Patricia Blaine, had been together constantly. They had been friends for many years.

Only the day before Vivian had received word that her husband, who had been in London, had left for Paris and would proceed south when his affairs were in order. And now he was in Nice, speeding toward Monte Carlo!

Patricia closed her eyes. She wanted to try not to think. But consciousness beat in on her and about her. She could not avoid what she had to face. This was the first time that tragedy had even remotely brushed the young heiress.

Tall and statuesque, blue-eyed, golden-haired and regal in spite of her youth, Patricia Blaine's life had been a glittering one from the cradle. A lilting, dancing, capricious existence that had never had in it room for thoughts of any future of responsibilities of any kind. The important thing, from babyhood, had been to escape ennui.

That was why she had come this season to Monte Carlo. That was why she had joined Vivian Burton at the Casino Tabarin—or the *Cercle Tabarin,* to give it its local name. To gamble. The small *Cercle* was one of the lesser casinos in the gambling city, and yet it had shown an appeal of its own; possibly that was because it was more exclusive than the great international gambling palace on

the waterfront. And even in gambling, Patricia was lucky; the wheels and the cards seemed ever eager to pay her youth and her loveliness additional homage.

Even this—this *thing* on the floor outside. He had paid homage, too. He had been her cavalier ever since she had first encountered him at the Tabarin. At first she had thought him merely another gigolo. But he had manners and grace, an air of quality—this Rene Descamps who had told her he loved her; and here he was lying dead in his own blood in her house!

The girl closed her eyes once more. Certainly it could not have been suicide. She had heard that these Latins . . . but, no, he hadn't killed himself, even for a thwarted love of her. Even though she had laughed gaily at him only three or four hours before and told him that she could never think of marrying him. Told him of her fiancé . . . somewhere, even now, in France, motoring here.

Suddenly her half-closed eyes started wide open.

But someone had killed him! Her fiancé. . . . Where was Rowland Kitterley right now? And where were those foolish, schoolgirl letters she had written to the dead man, the letters she had begged him to return to her only that night?

Monte Carlo seemed suddenly a long way from home!

She couldn't look for the letters now. Couldn't go to that huddled thing in the hall and search the gaping pockets. For it suddenly occurred to her that Rene Descamps had come here to return those letters as he had promised.

But who had killed him? And why? And what would the police have to say? What would they be forced to conclude about a young and wealthy debutante who had accepted the attention of a gigolo — however innocently—and who now had the gigolo's corpse in her parlor!

Her housemaid lived in the little cottage at the foot of the hill, a small place that went with the villa. She lived there with her husband, who was caretaker of the place Patricia Blaine had rented for the season. She would arouse Celestine now.

Just then a car ground to a stop on the road that ran thirty yards below the villa gates. She could hear steps coming up the winding way to the veranda. But no voices. Surely if it were Vivian and her husband—

The sound of the muted electric buzzer in the depths of the house was a stinging tonic, like a whip. She jerked. She started to her feet, then brought up. No, she could not pass that thing in the hall again.

She cried out: *"Entrez, s'll vous Plait!"* And thought of how ridiculous such amenities were in this sanguinary situation. Then she waited.

In a moment, after she had heard the door open, she realized it could not have been Black Burton and Vivian. A man's step had halted in the outer hall. She heard a whispered:

"Sacre nom de Dieu!" Then: *"Mademoiselle!"*

Staring out, she saw the man. What should the manager of the *Cercle Tabarin* be doing here? Now!

For Monsieur Jules Peret was standing there in the hall, standing and staring down at the dead man, a look of commingled amazement and horror on his fleshy features. In his hand he was holding a small brief-case which appeared forgotten in his astonishment.

The girl found herself exclaiming: "Monsieur Peret! Why have you come here—now?"

He raised his liquid eyes slowly from contemplation of the corpse. Peret was a man of medium height, inclined to fleshiness and pomposity, in his dapper manner an unfailingly calm, suave assurance. It was part of his profession in life to maintain that manner. He raised well manicured fingertips to his tiny mustache, managed:

"Mais! What can this mean, *mademoiselle?"*

Her voice was strained. "You can see what it means! Monsieur Descamps evidently came here during my absence and someone killed him. I didn't come directly home after I left the *Cercle.* But when I did I entered to find him just as you see. But why have you come here at this hour?"

For answer he held up the small briefcase he had been carrying. Stammering somewhat:

"But a thousand pardons, *madamoiselle!* You forgot your winnings of tonight. And you gave no instructions that they be held for you. I took it upon myself, after conferring with Monsieur Lavergne, to bring them to you."

Peret held out the case, flipped it open, then dumped onto the table just inside the library door a miscellaneous array of *Banque de France* notes. They were mostly all in large denominations. He was murmuring:

"If *madamoiselle* will recall she was rather *distraite* this evening. *N'est-ce pas?* We did not know. She left without the winnings. If now she will sign a receipt for me . . . for us . . ."

He jerked open a slip of paper, uncapped a fountain pen. The girl, almost grateful that she had some distraction, glanced at a pile of *mille* franc notes, riffled through them absently, then took the pen and scrawled her name on the receipt form.

This, at least, was customary, she knew. And just now she did not want to call attention to the fact that she had been unduly distraught, as Peret had mentioned, about the time she had left Lavergne's *Cercle Tabarin,* where this Jules Peret was manager.

She pushed the paper toward him, tried to swallow, and discovered her throat would not respond. Peret was still standing there, staring at her in a peculiarly penetrating way. Now he leaned forward and wispered:

"How did it happen, *madamoiselle?* Thieves? Or—"

The way he left the sentence trail off she had no difficulty in understanding. After all, the dead man had been her almost constant companion for weeks. Monaco, Monte Carlo and Nice and Juan-les-Pins—all knew them side by side.

She heard the gambling house manager say: "The police! Could you manage to tell me? Perhaps I could help. What was it that happen'?"

She stared at him; then finally her gaze focused. "I don't know," she said. "I came in and found him—that way. That's all I can tell you—tell anyone!"

"Then there was no quarrel?"

"I'm trying to tell you that I hadn't seen the man—not for hours!" she expostulated. "I came back here alone from—from Monsieur Lavergne's place, found him here. That's all I know."

He looked at her narrowly. Bit his lip. Then he turned and looked down intently at the man in the corner. There was little of even the dignity of death in the way Rene Descamps lay sprawled. He had been shot twice, and obviously at close range. So close that it might even have been suicide—except that there was no weapon in sight. Peret moistened his over-red lips.

Just then sounds came from outdoors. Into the strained and straining silence that the girl felt surely must overwhelm her, came the echo of a familiar voice; and a wave of relief spread over her numbed senses.

Almost hysterically, forgetting that she was afraid, she ran to the door, flung it wide. Peret remained standing there, watching her. She heard the throaty whisper of Vivian's hail:

"Patricia! We—"

Then she was in the older woman's arms and the pentup, hysterical sobs had broken free at last. Peret stood motionless.

Behind the beautiful woman who had entered came the dark, tall figure of Stuart Burton. Peret had scant need for asking his identity. Black Burton was known.

As he threw off the dark slouch hat he was wearing the yellow radiance of the foyer light glinted on the burnished jet black of the gambler's hair. Under that same dark jet cap the eyes of the man took in the entire scene. Yet not a muscle of his features moved. His eyes slid over Peret without lingering more than an instant.

Vivian Burton was almost as tall as her husband, very lovely in a youth that it seemed she might never relinquish. Her dark hair had a midnight softness under the wisp of scarf she had flung over it. Somehow it matched her eyes, deeply violet, understanding. She was comforting:

"Lucky Stuart happened to get in tonight ahead of his own itinerary. Tell us all about it."

Her glance questioned faintly the manager of the *Tabarin.* Hastily Particia Blaine introduced them.

Peret said: "Of course one has heard of *Monsieur* Burton! And one has had the honor before of being presented to *madame!*"

Vivian seemed uninterested in the formalities. She merely nodded, then turned the girl away from the scene. Burton nodded to Peret, stepped forward and stood bending over the corpse. He made no attempt to touch the murdered man. In a moment he straightened and looked at Peret.

"Who is he?"

Peret told him the name. Burton made an impatient gesture. "What is he?"

Peret shrugged. "We—that is, *Monsieur* Lavergne employed him. He had the—what you call?—the manner with the lady clientele. In a gambling establishment you will perceive that that is quite an essential. That is, to have on hand one or two gentlemen like him. . . ."

"Do you mean," the gambler interrupted, "that I'm to understand our corpse here was a gigolo?"

The word seemed to affright the manager of *Cercle Tabarin. "Non, non,* that is, not exactly, that, *monsieur.* Not quite that. But he was—shall we say?—at hand. And he has been very much attached to *madamoiselle.* There were even rumors this last week, that they might elope." Peret shrugged his shoulders, smiled. *"Tiens!* It is that we both understand what rumors are; *n'est-ce pas, Monsieur* Burton?"

Burton only nodded jerkily, followed with his eyes the shadow made by his young wife and the miserable girl in the next room, turned back again to Peret.

"It couldn't have been serious," he said quietly. "Miss Blaine is to marry an American. A man I know."

Peret nodded. "So I—so we understood." He stood gazing solemnly down at the corpse. At last he sighed. "It will be most embarrassing for *madamoiselle,* of course. But, what would you? I happened to arrive here only moments before you came. An errand." Peret, explaining, gestured to the pile of notes on the table beyond where they were standing. "So I wish if there is anything I can do to aid *madamoiselle,* you, her friend, will command me."

He waited, almost hopefully, it seemed.

"I hardly think there's anything," Burton said. "But *madamoiselle* will be grateful, I'm sure. And I'm grateful. But murder is murder. And as you suggest, it looks bad for Miss Blaine. However, I've just discovered since I arrived that my old friend, *Monsieur* Ouchy, formerly of the Paris Prefecture, has been appointed Commissioner here in Monte Carlo. He might give us some good advice, if we can manage to connect with him personally."

"Then you know *Monsieur* Ouchy, *Monsieur?*"

"Yes." Burton cut the syllable short. Then, with a murmured apology, he turned and went out of the room in search of the telephone. Peret glanced at the corpse, lifted one of his many-ringed hands to cover his eyes, and sank down in a chair to wait.

HALF AN HOUR later Patricia Blaine was quiet. Her eyes showed no traces of recent tears. Black Burton had telephoned the police and then had listened, without commenting, to the full story. During its recital Peret had sat smoking incessantly but without moving or putting in even a word. When it was over Burton said:

"And Kitterley. Rowland Kitterley, your fiancé. Do you have any idea where he might be just about now?"

Patricia looked afraid. "I know he is due here. At any moment. Perhaps even he's arrived. He was motoring south; the last I heard was a wire, this afternoon, from Lyons, en route. But he—"

She stopped abruptly. Burton and the others knew what it was that held her thoughts. He knew Rowland Kitterley himself, casually. Kitterley had acquired a nickname; and millionaire sportsman and playboy that he was, it fitted him. It was adapted to his Christian name: "Rowdy" Kitterley. It stuck with him, followed him into every capital of the world and just now it had taken on for the first time a menacing significance.

The girl seemed to sense the gambler's thoughts. She burst forth with:

"But Rowdy wouldn't possibly have known, at least I fail to see how he could have, that I was—accepting the escort of this man! How could he? He's been in London; he just left my father in Paris. You're thinking that he might have heard, might've become angry and—" She broke off on a choked sob and ended ineffectively: "No! It wouldn't be his way!"

Peret looked skeptical. But, "It will all depend," Burton said, "on his alibi for all this evening. If he's really motoring here, that gives him quite a range, I'd say."

Voices came. Two. Burton went to the door and they heard him speak. In a moment he returned to the room shepherding the two visitors. He introduced them.

Monsieur Ouchy, Commissioner of Police at the gambling capital, was a short, stubby man with pink cheeks and bland blue eyes that were somehow shrewd withal. He looked, and was, a gourmand. His paunch was prodigious and his grayish-white mustaches were magnificent. With him was a man from his department.

When Ouchy had heard the story, he turned on the gambler.

"Naturally we know of you, *Monsieur* Burton. I speak of the police in general; you and I are—how you say in English? —old comrades." He tried to laugh a little; then he became very grave. "*Mais,* we must understand that this is *tres serieux.*" He bent his mild but penetrating blue gaze upon the heiress and the gaze was steady when he said: "You are certain, *madamoiselle,* that you cannot be of help further?"

"I know nothing but what I have told you, *monsieur,*" the girl responded in a small, dead voice.

"Was the gentleman perhaps in love with you?"

Burton frowned, waited. But Patricia was a thoroughbred. "I think he was," she said at last. Calmly! "At least, in his own fashion he was. But I had to impress upon him tonight that I am affianced. My financé is on his way here right now."

"Your fiancé?" Ouchy leaned forward. This was an angle that a French police official found more comprehensible, of a sudden. "His name?"

She told him. Ouchy raised heavy eyebrows. "And where might he be at this moment, *madamoiselle?*"

She made a helpless gesture. "Somewhere between here and Lyons," she replied. "That is all I know."

"And he drives, it is suggested, a powerful car?"

Her eyes looked frightened. "A Mercedes," she said. And then she added quickly, "You'll doubtless discover this anyway, eventually—I've heard the

French police are thorough—so I might just as well tell you now. Rowdy had a specially built Mercedes engine installed by the manufacturers themselves. His car is possibly as speedy as any motor in France!"

There fell a pall of silence. Peret stirred. Ouchy sat back and placed his fingertips together.

"Doubtless we can investigate *Monsieur* Kitterley's movements without trouble," was his comment. But they all understood.

A sound came from the blackness outside. A hail. Burton looked up. Footsteps approached, sounding over the gravelly walk from the top of the steps, then clumped across the narrow veranda. The voice called:

"Hi, Pat! Welcome-home celebration at this hour?"

They all looked up to gaze at the newcomer. Patricia Blaine's pallor had swept back again. Her eyes were wide, staring.

"Rowdy!" she breathed.

At sight of them all there Rowland Kitterley stopped short in the doorway. He had, his attitude seemed to denote, expected a late party, perhaps. But never a grave gathering like this. Tragedy hung heavy in the air, inescapable.

Kitterley was tall and good-looking in a careless, debonair way. His smile was a delight. His brown hair was wavy and tossed back as though with impatience. His tweed suit was unpressed with almost a studious negligence, and yet it showed its fine tailoring; it was, like its owner, careless. His tie was twisted slightly askew. His gray eyes, young and reckless, were direct and arrogant. He stopped still in the doorway.

"Is this, by any chance, a funeral?" he murmured.

Patricia's breath caught in her throat. It was Ouchy who responded almost gaily:

"*Pas encore!* Not yet, *monsieur*. Perhaps tomorrow. And this would be *Monsieur* Kitterley?"

Kitterley looked bewildered. "Yes, but—"

Ouchy said abruptly, "*Monsieur* is perhaps failing to understand. And if he is totally in ignorance then his lack of comprehension is only natural. *If* he is! *Monsieur* Kitterley, there is a man in the next chamber—we have placed him there until the medical men arrive—who has tonight been murdered. Murdered—here! It might be most satisfactory to all of us if *monsieur* could explain where he was an hour or two previous."

"Why, I've been driving here. Left early enough to get in sooner, but I had a breakdown."

Kitterley parted his lips, closed them, then moistened them again to breathe: "Who was murdered?" And he stared helplessly at Patricia. She did not answer him, only sat there looking appealingly up at him out of her lovely, haunted eyes.

Burton interposed. The gambler said easily: "The body's in the next room, Kitterley. If you feel up to it you'd better have a look at it. Then we can talk to more purpose."

There might have been a protest but Burton was waiting for none. Taking Kitterley by the arm he steered him out of the crowded library. In the room where low lighting burned in one corner, away from the face of the dead man, he came to a halt as Kitterley stopped short. Burton's calm voice said:

"It's going to be a tough investigation, Kitterley. If you've got anything to tell me you'd better tell it now."

Kitterley was turning back from the corpse. His eyes were wide, almost frightened. "Do you suggest that they might think I had something to do with this? Or Pat? But why, Burton, why?"

"Haven't you yet gathered that Descamps was a gigolo, or something very close to it? And in love, without encouragement, no doubt, with Patricia?"

The youngster shook his head. "I had a faint idea Pat had someone steering

her around, if that's what you mean," he said. "Maybe even I wondered what kind of a guy he might be. I know that sort of thing is done here. If that fact interests you, the information didn't mean a damn thing. It wasn't even information, for that matter, just things I'd heard."

"I didn't mention it," Burton said shortly, "as a piece of gossip! I'm more interested in making you understand what the situation is. And trust these police to discover that you're known to have a violent temper. As it stands now, you and Patricia are both under suspicion."

"Sorry, Burton!" Kitterley broke in. "I should've known better. I know you! And if you'll only help—"

"I intend to help. But I can't do too much in the dark. Your having been driving south—that alibi, will it hold?"

For a second the boy hesitated. Then he shrugged.

"Its got to," he said bitterly. "There's nothing else. But Patsy had nothing to do with it, did she? You're sure? The fellow might possibly have annoyed her and she—"

When he broke off before the thought shaped ugly in his mind, Burton told him: "It wasn't Patricia. But it's up to us to find out who it was. The French police, fine as the are, dearly love a *crime passionel.*"

"Yes, I can see! They might railroad either of us on the strength of what to them is patent evidence; and even if they didn't succeed this thing would be hanging over us the rest of our lives! Hell, Burton," savagely, "if they must have a dummy to try for the case, let 'em pick on me! That driving alibi can be broken down, anyway, I suspect."

"Yes?" Burton thought it best not to pursue that. He looked narrowly at Kitterley. "And your motive? Jealousy?"

The younger man grinned unhappily. "That's as good as any, isn't it?" he said. "Why not? Though there's not much room for jealousy with that poor beggar now!"

They went back inside.

BLACK BURTON left his wife that night at Patricia's villa. He returned to his hotel alone, and he went in somber thought.

Vivian had been staying with her younger friend for some time; then had moved from Patricia's villa, *Les Charmettes,* into the hotel in town only upon word of her husband's approaching arrival.

In the morning *Monsieur* Ouchy appeared at the *Hotel Negresco.* Burton received him as an old friend, gravely. He knew Frenchmen; knew that underneath the official's manner there was warmth. Knew that though Ouchy loved the good things of life, its wines and finest viands, the man was more than competent for his job. In Paris Ouchy had left behind him something of a record.

But nevertheless Ouchy was not one to overlook any possibility. Burton realized this anew, when Ouchy announced with due gravity:

"It is all so regrettable, my good friend *Monsieur* Burton. But we have made the check on this *Monsieur* Kitterley." He paused.

"Do you mean that you've found his alibi was no good?"

Ouchy nodded in sober fashion. *"Pas bien!* We of the police have our own methods, *n'est-ce pas?* We have discovered that it was more than possible for *Monsieur* Kitterley to have been here last night, much earlier than he appeared to us! What he said about his breakdown was a correct story. I confess that that news surprised me. But it took only fifteen minutes to get the car repaired!"

Burton sat back. He lit a cigarette. At last, "I suppose that means you arrest *Monsieur* Kitterley," he said.

Ouchy moved his hands and got to

his feet. *"Pas encore.* Not quite yet," he said. "But *Monsieur* Kitterley will make no move that is not known to us. By tomorrow, perhaps, the arrest comes."

He waited. Burton knew what for. The gambler said:

"I'll see him. Maybe he does know something that will help. I assume you're thinking that he might have killed a gigolo through jealousy?"

Gravely Ouchy nodded; added, with something twinkling in his eyes nevertheless, "It has been done! But it would be better if we discovered it to have been that way, *apres tout, m'sieu,"* and stopped. "For if *Monsieur* Kitterley did not do the murder, then who did?"

"You're thinking of the girl?"

Ouchy shrugged. "What must one think? You know the police must take what the evidence offers. And there is so much evidence here. I understand that *madamoiselle's* father is in Paris?"

"I think so."

"He is very rich?"

"Quite. He'll be along soon; you can count on that."

Ouchy sighed. "I trust so. I think the lady may need much help," he said. Then he brightened. "She is very beautiful. And perhaps, after all, the help is already here—if she is innocent. And if this fiancé is innocent, too."

"The help?"

Ouchy smiled, at the door. *"Qui!* Black Burton is here; *n'est-ce pas?"* he said. *"Au revoir, monsieur."*

Burton stood looking fixedly at the closed portal for a moment. Then he glanced at his watch. He telephoned the villa, spoke reassuringly to Vivian, shrugged himself into his clothes and went out.

He walked up the *Promenade des Anglais* until he came to a small rendezvous he knew of old—the rather remote little *Casino Bleu,* overlooking the blue sea. Here he ordered a cocktail and food.

He was draining his cocktail when Rowland Kitterley came in. Kitterley looked back over his shoulder as he entered. There was worry in his young face, care in the depths of his eyes.

When he caught Burton's signal across the room he gave a distinct start. He began to turn away, then, rejecting a first impulse came back and threw himself into a vacant chair at Burton's small table. He lit a cigarette nervously, sat staring.

The waiter came with another cocktail and Burton observed, "You probably need one, too," and ordered a second.

Kitterley puffed silently until the second glass came. Then he drained three-quarters of its contents at one gulp, leaned across the table and said:

"We might as well come clean, eh, Burton?"

"As for instance?"

"I've just seen the noon-time copies of *L'Intransigent.* 'An arrest at any moment. A woman!' " He made a gesture with his strong hands. "We both know what that means, eh?"

Burton nodded gravely. "Fairly obvious. Can you help?"

Kitterley's clenched fist came down on the small table. "Yes, by the Lord, I can help!" he exclaimed. "I can tell 'em the truth!"

"And what would that be?"

"That I killed that gigolo!"

Through cigarette smoke Burton looked across the table. "For what they'll call a *crime passionel,* Kitterley?"

"I don't give a damn what they call it! If they check my record back far enough they'll see my breakdown last night didn't amount to much. I *could've* been here." The boy took a a deep breath. "I was here!"

"At Patrica's villa, *Les Charmettes?"*

"Yes. And I killed him! Jealous! It's well known that I've got a temper. Then I cooled off, went back and retraced my route, had that breakdown, and came on again. What will the police think of that?"

Burton squashed out his cigarette, his features a blank, and said, "I'm afraid

you won't be telling the police any news about that breakdown only taking a short while. But the rest." He lit a new cigarette, leaned forward. "Frankly, and it shouldn't surprise you, that story is likely to be believed. Even, I might add, it's true. Anyway, one part of it is true and so the rest might well be. I do believe you were there earlier. And if you'd tell me the story of that it might help a lot."

Kitterley was staring at him out of a white face. Burton helped him with, "The idea of you as a skulking killer isn't logical, of course. But the idea of you in a jealous rage at what you might have seen—well, that's believable."

"Does that mean you'd believe it?"

Burton did not answer. He wanted to steady the quivering nerves opposite him. He beckoned a passing waiter, ordered their glasses refilled, smoked quietly. Waited. When the drinks came and the waiter had gone, lowering his eyes, Kitterley said:

"You're half on to the right idea, Burton. As I said, I was here earlier."

Nodding, Burton prodded: "Surprise for Patricia?"

With a flash the youth looked up. "Not the way that sounds, no!" he exclaimed. "Surprise, yes. But I wasn't trying to spy on her. I arrived, went straight to *Les Charmettes*. There was a low-burning light in the living-room but the place looked empty. I started for the porch. Then—then it happened."

"What?"

"The murder! I—I saw it done!"

Burton's eyes were narrowed. "You saw the murder?"

Kitterley shook his head impatiently. "I saw two men. I saw this gigolo chap plainly as he came up there. He went to the door, knocked. I'd stopped by then, wondering what was up. No answer. He half turned away. Then out of the bushes a figure came and I saw moonlight on a gun barrel. Someone cursed, said something in French that I couldn't get, and this fellow turned around; he began to rush toward whoever it was, and crying out something. They spoke, but not like friends. Then there was a shot—two shots—and that was all."

After a space of silence, "You saw him killed, then," Burton murmured. "And what did you do?"

"Gave chase. I didn't stop to think of what it was all about but I knew I'd just seen murder done, in all probability. I knew Pat'd be in for it. I ran after the beggar but I lost him."

"Wouldn't recognize him again?"

"No. His description would fit any one of a dozen men I know. In the dark, that way, you understand. . . ." Kitterley toyed with the stem of his cocktail glass. "It's altogether screwy, Burton, believe it or not. But I saw that man killed at the bottom of the porch steps. And the body was found *inside Pat's house!*"

Burton waited a long time. At length he squashed out his cigarette and looked up to find the eyes of the younger man, haggard and haunted, fixed desperately on his face.

"You believe me, Burton?"

"I'm inclined to, just at this moment. But what good it's going to do, I can't tell. You don't surprise me," the gambler added, "with verification of the fact that the body had been moved. Ouchy didn't spot it last night, but Rene Descamps—if that was his name—had not been killed where he was found. I knew that and I was keeping it as an ace up my sleeve. There was no blood on the floor where we found him. And he'd bled a lot from those wounds. Therefore, since bleeding stops shortly after death, he must have been moved after he died!"

Kitterley was staring. "But for what reason?"

Burton was looking slightly more pleased. When he spoke at last it was to say: "The answer to that is going to solve our case. Can't you see what it means?"

"Not quite yet."

"It means," Burton propounded, "that your fiancée was being framed. And a

frame means either blackmail, or something even more sinister." He nodded. "This afternoon," he said, "I think we should stop in and see our friend the owner of the *Tabarin*. *Monsieur* Lavergne, did I understand was his name?"

"*Monsieur* Alexandre Lavergne," Kitterley agreed. "One of the small operators here. But—"

"Yes, Lavergne," Burton repeated. "We mustn't forget, Kitterley, that all this merry-go-round began at *Cercle Tabarin*."

ALEXANDRE LAVERGNE was an imposing individual. It was said that, in spite of his name he was an Anatolian Greek and it was believable. He looked well fed and well satisfied; his manner was that of a perennial, if somewhat suspicious, host to all the cosmopolitan world. The *Cercle Tabarin* was one of the smaller of the licensed houses for gambling in Monte Carlo; but Lavergne possessed all the pomposity and manner of a really big operator.

It was Peret who met Burton and his companion in the entrance foyer. Burton was angling toward the cage where the *cartes du jour* were to be bought when Lavergne intercepted him.

"But *non, monsieur,*" he expostulated. "Merely the matter of the stamp, if you insist. While the famous *Monsieur* Burton is our guest it is not permitted that he pay for a *carte*."

Burton thanked him. Kitterley was at his elbow when they entered the gambling rooms. A long, glistening bar ran alongside and down the length of the main room. The other rooms were small, fairly well furnished, but looking faintly drab and unromantic in the daylight.

There was little play going on at that hour. The voices of the croupiers sounded listless and even the clatter of the small balls at the roulette wheels sounded dispirited.

Burton bought a *chemin-de-fer* "shoe," dealt for almost an hour until a Greek who appeared to be well known in the place came in and bid for the bank. Burton sold it with relief and went out. He had not wanted so much to play as to look the place over. He found Rowdy Kitterley at his side as he struck the open air once more.

"Lavergne had nothing to say about the death of his gigolo," Kitterley summed up, outdoors.

Burton frowned. "I noticed that. I wonder why," he murmured.

Black Burton left Rowdy and returned to his suite at his hotel. A telegram was waiting for him; he tore it open, smiled with a pleased look, and tossed it aside. It was quite late in the afternoon when Vivian Burton and Patricia Blaine came upstairs.

The debutante had recovered a lot. In her eyes shone a defiant courage.

"You've seen Rowdy?" she demanded.

He nodded, went to the sideboard and busied himself with cocktails. Vivian smiled when she accepted her glass.

"You must miss Han Soy," she said.

A smile flitted across his dark face. His Chinese servant and he had been almost inseparable for many years. But he gestured to the telegram he had tossed on the table.

"I left Soy in London," he said. "I was surprised, even though I shouldn't have been, but he had relatives there. But just now he's wired me he's due this evening on the next Golden Arrow Express." Then he turned gravely to Patricia. "Yes, I've seen Kitterley. He told me what I might almost have guessed. He *could* have done that murder last night."

Patricia started. "You mean he—"

"I mean he was in Monte Carlo earlier. But that news was no particular surprise to me. I think you should know, though, that he advanced the information gratuitously. Advanced it with the idea that it might help your status with the authorities."

"My status?"

"Certainly." Burton set down his cocktail glass. "The French police have a passion for crimes in which there's a woman involved. This one last night was practically made to order. Tell me, Patricia, would it be possible for anyone to blackmail you?"

Her small clenched hand went to her red mouth. Her eyes were dilated. She half rose to her feet, sank back.

"Blackmail!" she repeated. "But I've done nothing to—oh, but I see what you mean! Yes, you've guessed right. There were letters. Letters I wrote to Rene Descamps, foolish things and all of them harmless—except one, perhaps. He promised to bring them back to me last night. I wanted them before Rowdy came—not that they were dangerous, but because I know Rowdy, and I'd suddenly begun to wonder about these Latins." When Burton nodded in his grave way she hurried on: "I'm trying to impress upon you that they weren't compromising letters, not in any way. No, no! They could all be published and they wouldn't reflect on me at all. But . . ."

She hesitated. Burton's eyes were on her flushed face, and he leaned forward to finish for her:

"But they might reflect on someone else?"

"Y-yes," she said in a small voice.

"Rowland Kitterley?"

"Yes. If the police got them, they would think Rowdy killed him because of jealousy." She moistened her lips. "It's silly, I suppose, the whole thing. That is, it would be if it weren't so tragic. You see, I know Rowdy's temper. Perhaps Rowdy wouldn't object to what you know is more or less of a custom on the Riviera, indeed, all through France, for unchaperoned girls to pay a young man to escort them. In most cases it's purely a business matter and ends there. But it didn't happen to in this case."

"I gather the boy fell in love with you; is that it?"

"I'm afraid so. I hadn't looked for anything of the sort, of course. But such being the case, as it was, I knew that if Rowdy ever discovered I'd been accepting this boy's attentions, after he became serious, he'd never understand. And perhaps I don't blame him. So I tried to persuade Rene that we mustn't be seen together again. He avoided me; but not because of my wishes. It was—a sulk."

Vivian stirred. Her eyes pleaded with her husband's when she protested: "Don't you see what that means now, Stuart? Patricia at last had to write Rene and warn him, knowing Rowdy Kitterley was due here. He and his temper. She asked him for her letters back. Only innocent notes, in themselves, as she says. Nothing you could pin blackmail on. The boy finally brought them, or promised to. However, they weren't on his body. And the last letter is warning Descamps of that Kitterley temper, of what will happen if the letters are ever discovered. That last one is the letter that was almost a warning of what Rowdy would do if he discovered, and that was among the ones that disappeared—if it was ever there—from the body!"

Burton smoked slowly. "So it's not a matter of blackmail," he said thoughtfully. "I'd been off the track. . . . No. They won't try to blackmail you. The letters are innocent. But they have meaning. And it boils down to this: Their meaning, in the hands of the right person or persons, points definitely to Rowland Kitterley as the killer, especially since his alibi has been broken!"

"That's it!" the girl cried. "But I repeat there was only that one letter that would involve Rowdy. However, that would be enough; I can see that. I put it to Rene very strongly that he must forget about me before Rowdy came. That Rowdy, if Rene loved his own life, mustn't ever be allowed to know that he and I were—what we were."

Vivian's careful voice came slowly: "If you need it put more bluntly, Stuart,

Pat's letter as much as said that Rowdy would not stop at killing if he became jealous."

The girl's eyes were moist. Burton sipped at his glass thoughtfully. "Did I understand this French boy wanted you to marry him?" he asked at last.

"Yes. Oh, he was very respectful, very sweet. Somehow all along I had the impression that he wasn't liking his rôle. Resented the whole background."

Burton raised his eyebrows at that; then he frowned and went to the window, stood looking down into the blue-gray shadows that were stealing down along the *Promenade des Anglais.* The early lights were soft, kindly blurs through them. "No one has been to you as yet, suggesting that he knows where the letters are?" he murmured over his shoulder.

"Not . . . yet."

"Someone will be," he said grimly. "You must let me know immediately who it is. Though the why of all this is beyond me! If it should turn out to be blackmail I'll be able to understand it. However, whatever it turns out to be, it wasn't blackmail in the beginning. I'll swear to that. I'm not sure why I'm so certain. But one thing is certain—you've given me ideas!"

BLACK BURTON was at the *Cercle Tabarin* that night with his wife, but Patricia Blaine was home at her villa, *Les Charmettes,* and in bed. Alexandre Lavergne was eagerly welcoming to Burton and Vivian. At eleven o'clock, when Vivian was finishing a run at the roulette table, Lavergne, coming up beside Burton as the gambler played *chemin-de-fer,* looked up with a low exclamation. Burton turned to see Ouchy making an entrance.

The policeman was not in uniform and created no interest among the other guests. But Ouchy stopped beside Burton's table, touched his arm and said:

"It is with regret, my good friend *Monsieur* Burton, that—"

When he stopped Burton picked up his counters and said: "It is with regret that you've come to tell me that you've arrested Kitterley. Is that it, *monsieur?"*

"Unfortunately, yes."

"You have more evidence, then, since we talked?"

"Not direct evidence. No. But that alibi of the motor car. His actions. Other things. We discovered a worn suit of rough serge in the back of the car, his car; it was torn and stained. Not with blood. No. But such tears as might be caused in breaking through the brush surrounding *madamoiselle's* villa. He claims he was in an accident recently, but . . . And we have tested the earth marks on it, too. They might have come from this part of France. We have checked his speedometer and his petrol tank. We believe he has lied to us. There were tracks of his footprints around the villa."

"Then you believe you have the man who murdered our friend Descamps?" The new voice was that of Jules Peret, manager of the *Cercle Tabarin.*

Ouchy spread his hands. "I regret to say that we have adopted the only course," he said, and turned away.

Burton looked after him. He frowned. He knew why Ouchy had gone out of his way to come here with that information. The French policeman was far from a fool. He had approached Burton because he believed that the gambler knew something, something not yet revealed. This new knowledge might get it out of him.

Shaking his head a little, a half smile on his lips, Burton turned to find himself staring at Lavergne. The operator of *Cercle Tabarin* was standing there shaking his head, making little muttering noises, half clucks, behind his teeth. Peret, the manager, beside him, looked grave, almost funereal. Lavergne said in a low voice:

"This is a bad thing. That it should

come home to one of us here! But men will do strange things for women; *hein, m'sieu?*" A shrug. "This *Monsieur* Kitterley—he possesses the temper of the most violent, I have heard. It was that then. . . ."

But Burton had turned away. He found Vivian; they cashed their counters and went out. Vivian had heard and she was quiet.

Burton summed up. "I'm very much afraid, with those foolish letters around loose—at least, that one letter—that Rowdy Kitterley is going to find himself in an uncomfortable spot. However, until they show up, he's comparatively safe. But the evidence of that last warning letter will practically condemn him!"

Vivian turned to him as they reached the curb. "But where are the letters?" she demanded. "If Rowdy is being framed, as you seem to think, why haven't the letters appeared? They're surely worth something to someone!"

Burton shook his head: "The answer to that, my dear, will solve the whole case." He went on, almost reluctantly. "And, too, there's another answer we mustn't let ourselves lose sight of entirely. Even if we do feel sympathetic toward Rowdy. Put everyone into the scene as it is at the present moment, and out of the whole cast of characters you'll find that Rowland Kitterley had more reason that anyone else to keep those letters concealed!"

Burton drove with Vivian to Patricia's villa. There he took leave of her. Han Soy was due at the hotel on the next train. But for a moment, at the summit of the flight of wooden steps that led up to the villa, he paused, alone in the darkness.

Below him wound the splendor of that broad highway known as *Grande Corniche*. The harbor of Villefranche showed clusters of fairy-like lights; the crafts moored out there in the silence were like ghostly, pasteled silhouettes on the dusky softness of a painted background.

He touched his left shoulder. Somehow he was glad that he had thought to adjust the shoulder holster with its reliable .38 under his coat tonight. There might be need for it. Things had stirred up, he thought. And Han Soy, his faithful valet, was due. . . .

He descended the steps slowly and entered the car. The Paris Express must have got in before this.

A block before the taxi came to the entrance of his hotel, he leaned forward and gave the order to pull up. He paid off his driver and walked on. The late hour had almost drained the *Promenade des Anglais* of even wakeful strollers.

Entering the hotel by the door opening on the *Promenade,* he called for the key to his suite, accepted it abstractedly. The clerk was in conference with two guests and paid him scant attention as he handed it over.

Still, with a feeling that called for caution, Burton left the elevator on the floor below his own. He mounted the well-carpeted stairs slowly, thoughtfully, wondering if Soy had come yet and reflecting that if he had he had been sent up to the suite. Burton had left word he was expecting him.

He fitted his key, stepped into the small foyer, then stepped back with a whispered oath.

Yes, Han Soy had arrived.

A scramble, a low oath that matched his own! Burton's gun flicked into his hand. Two men were dark shadows against the portieres in the rear. Soy's voice cried out something.

Livid flame bit the half-dark. Burton heard lead slam against the door panel to the left of him. He fired at the flash.

He knew two men to be there. Han Soy was an almost indistinguishable huddle in the middle of the sitting-room floor.

One dark figure went through the window, onto the fire-escape. The second paused only to snap another wild shot; then, at Burton's return flash, he was gone.

The gambler sped across the intervening space. A chair had been delib-

erately upended inside the doorway. His feet tangled in its rungs in the darkness and he had to clutch at the wall to save himself from a spill.

But the effect had been accomplished. By the time he reached the rear window, the fire-escape was empty. Curtains were billowing innocently outward from an apartment opening just below.

It was against Burton's nature to make any futile attempt at running out and trying to intercept his attackers on the floor beneath his. The two men, whoever they were, had known their business. In only one particular had they fallen short: Before a fear that must have been deep in them, fear for the known menace of Black Burton's .38 and his shooting wizardry, their nerve had failed.

Burton retraced his way and bent swiftly over the form of the little Chinaman who had served him so well and for so long. He snapped on the overhead lights and the luxurious apartment sprang into recognizibility.

But Han Soy was not dead. Nor was he too badly hurt. Small, even for a Chinaman, the yellow man struggled up on one elbow as Burton crouched over him. Blood ran down thickly from a clotted and jagged tear in the skin just over his left eye.

Burton said swiftly, "Your temple! Anything else, Soy?"

Han Soy held up a hand and shook his head. Burton poured him a large drink of brandy. The Oriental downed it swiftly, a look of gratitude and devotion in his slanting eyes.

Burton helped him to the lounge. Soy said at last: "Did you know them, sir?"

"I don't think so; didn't get enough of a look, but I'm pretty sure they're strangers to me. But tell me—"

"There is little to tell! But perhaps on the other hand there is much when it is seen by two pairs of eyes." Han Soy paused. His English was pure, unstilted, his diction excellent. Soy had been and was a scholar. He smiled a little. "Yes, perhaps there is much to tell. Perhaps it is because of what I had seen, there in the railway terminal before I came on here. They did not want me alive when you arrived to tell you that!"

"I suppose everyone who knows me knows who you are, of course—our long association," Burton nodded. "They could have spotted you easily enough if that was in their minds. And there never was any secret about your being due to arrive here. The thing is, why did they want to silence you before you could talk to me? What did you uncover?"

Han Soy sighed. "Maybe nothing. But it must be something, still. I saw two men in buying tickets for the Golden Arrow north. And I could not help but recognize them from the pictures I had seen—you know the story of this murder has been in all the papers since it happened, your connection with it, the principals; you understand? I had time to become acquainted with all the known facts long before I reached here. And so when these two saw me and saw that I had possibly recognized them, guessing who I was . . ." Han Soy spread his long, thin hands. "It would have been better for them had I not lived to tell you."

Burton lit a cigarette. Through the smoke of it, as he arose from beside the couch, he queried softly:

"I understand a little, Soy. Who were the men you recognized buying tickets north?"

Han Soy replied: "One I did not recognize. But the other, I have seen his photographs, with the news of the murder. The one I recognized resembled the man who works at the *Cercle Tabarin*. Jules Peret."

Burton turned away. He made no comment at once. Instead, as the little Chinaman's slant eyes followed him, he crossed the room, slumped into a deep chair and closed his eyes. Wreaths of smoke curled about his dark features. Soy made no move, said nothing.

At last: "It's got to be that way!" Black Burton exclaimed. He got to his

feet. "I'm leaving you here, Soy. If it'll be any comfort to you, you paid the price for cracking this case with that crack on your head!"

NOW THE gay lights on the *Promenade* were surrendering their hours of triumph to gray fingers of an early dawn mist creeping in from the Mediterranean. Burton's taxicab dropped him two blocks from the *Cercle Tabarin*. He told a somewhat querulous and suspicious chauffeur to wait there for him, then turned up his collar to hide his white shirt front and strode away.

From the road the *Cercle Tabarin* was mostly in darkness. It was situated on Monte Carlo's outskirts, almost on the border of the port town of Villefranche. Mist continued to billow in damply from the sea; the air already had in it a hint of sunrise.

Housebreaking or prowling had never been the gambler's metier. He would have much preferred to be in on the conversation behind that one lighted window in the rear of the gambling house, and he might have crept close enough to overhear what went on there, too; but he chose the other way.

With the facts in his hand, marshaled at length in his brain, he had his last resources: The gambler's way—bluff.

He rang the bell. Somewhere inside the darkened house an echo of its chime came to him. Only silence followed. Then at last footsteps and the door came open on a stout chain.

A servant stood there, a servant only partly undressed. Burton recognized him as one of the *Cercle* attendants. And he could not fail to recognize the automatic in the man's hand.

Burton said: "*Monsieur* Lavergne, at once! And it is greatly important! *Vite!* Hurry!"

The man knew him. There was a sullen and crafty look in his eye when he unbolted the heavy chain lock that guarded the portal. But he obeyed the command, nevertheless, and he stepped back as Burton entered the gloomy, semi-dark hallway and stepped into the groping shadows.

The door closed. The gambler repeated: "Take me to your master, *Monsieur* Lavergne. There is no time to lose!"

The man hesitated. Then at last he turned with a shrug and made a gesture. Burton was aware that his hand had dropped the gun into a side pocket and followed it there.

Burton knew he must use finesse. Without it he was lost. No one knew where he had gone, for certain; the taxicab driver would probably never relate the affair. The police? It was just possible, Burton knew, that Ouchy had had him trailed, on an off chance. But he had seen no sign of any shadow as yet.

Lavergne stood, coatless, across a table in a green-walled chamber. Yellow light shone down on the table. In the room's corners stealthy shadows lurked. Across from the gambling house proprietor stood the sleek, meticulously clad figure of Jules Peret.

They stared at the intruder. The house servant hugged the wall in the background. Lavergne's eyes were both questioning and hostile. Peret had no secret in his look; it was baleful, savage, and yet a little fearful.

Burton said easily, "You'll forgive the intrusion, I know, *Monsieur* Lavergne. Under ordinary circumstances I should never have thought of it. But I reasoned that you would want to know something I have discovered. It concerns you, I think."

Lavergne waited. He raised bushy eyebrows; his heavy jaw thrust forward a little. He said:

"The intrusion may perhaps be forgiven. It remains to be seen—its justification. What is it that *monsieur* wants?"

Burton nodded, almost as if to himself, then said lightly: "The letters,

Monsieur Lavergne. The letters that *madamoiselle* the American had stolen from her. The letters, in short, that Peret took away from your gigolo when he killed him at the lady's villa!"

Peret uttered an oath. Lavergne's eyes widened. Before the rising storm of expostulation could break, Burton was going on swiftly:

"Don't object yet, Lavergne! Perhaps you'll see things as I see them when I tell you that Peret was making off with them on the first fast train north in the morning. That he was giving you what you'd call the merry-go-round and getting to the girl's father first with them!"

Lavergne stared disbelievingly. "You are mad, perhaps, *monsieur*. You suggest that Peret here killed Descamps?"

"More than that! He killed Descamps at your orders! And then he took the letters. The letters he discovered can be used for blackmail. But I can see that that wasn't the idea behind it all. Descamps knew too much and he went to Miss Blaine that night intending to tell her the whole truth. And that? Why, you and your gang had planned to have Descamps marry her, then make her very wealthy father pay through the nose for an annulment. That was behind your whole plot. It tripped up when young Descamps found he couldn't go through with a dirty scheme like that. He was too decent, when it came right down to the last bit of dirty work. So he came to tell her the truth—the truth about you and your gang of Apaches, and the truth was that you had arranged for her to be *forced* to marry him if worse came to worst! And that's the time he returned with her letters."

Peret interposed, his calmness slightly restored: "In that case the lady must have the letters."

Burton swung on him. "In such a case the lady would have the letters if you hadn't got there first and killed Descamps!" Turning quickly on Lavergne the gambler continued hurriedly: "You, Lavergne! Can't you see now? It was a merry-go-round, all this you began, but Peret intended to finish it. In his pocket you'll find tickets for the next train north, leaving in about an hour from now. He had an accomplice of his own; and he and this other—whoever he is—were double-crossing the whole lot of you. I know now the plot wasn't blackmail to begin with and that Descamps was killed because you were afraid he'd talk too much, but afterward Peret saw his chance and now he's playing his own hand!"

Lavergne's eyes flickered to his hireling. In them was something of crafty understanding, the kind of grudging approval a jackal might cast upon another of his own kind. An unscrupulous man himself, the operator could recognize the Machiavellian scheme that his subordinate had planned so carefully under his nose. Now that it had been pointed out to him it was all patently clear.

Into his small eyes, suddenly smaller, a look of cunning and comprehension crept. The eyes flicked beyond Burton to where the henchman who had answered the door hovered in partial shadow. Lavergne moistened his thickish lips until they seemed pouting childishly under his heavy mustache.

Peret commenced to speak. But Lavergne cut in:

"*Oui,* a most charming plan. But believe me, Burton, my idea had no element of blackmail in it. It was only—well, Descamps was in the way, a too gallant adolescent who could seriously interfere with my ideas And the letters. . . ." He sighed. "Ah, yes. And then it is, I suppose you wish me to gather, that my friend Peret intended to go north on this morning's train? In Paris he would see the girl's father, eh? Perhaps even the boy's attorneys and then he would be negotiating for money for the letters on his own account. For I have heard they are all the police need for conviction. And no doubt her father would willingly have paid in full, for his daughter's sake and even for *Monsieur* Kitterley?"

"It's rather plain, isn't it?" Burton said. "But since I've explained and since I see you understand, if you'll hand over the letters to me, I. . . ."

Burton knew that this gesture was bluff. But he had to get the reaction. He could not be certain at the moment who had the letters, whether Peret had broken down and taken his employer in with his scheme, at the last, or not. He held out his hand.

Lavergne was laughing in a soft, chuckling way.

"Mais non!" he exclaimed. "As I swore to you, the whole thing was not conceived by me in this way. But now you have been so kind as to understand Peret's scheme, to outline its possibilities so generously to me, what is there to stop a poor operative to profit by it?"

Burton had not moved but he found he had only to turn the slightest bit in order to see the automatic of the servant who had brought him in; the weapon was pointed at his middle. Lavergne was saying in his deadly voice:

"You and I, my good friend Peret, we will have much to talk of—later. Much!" He turned, continued, "But in the meantime—*non*, do not move of the slightest, *M*. Burton!"

Peret was deathly pale under his olive skin. Burton knew better than to make a move for his gun in those seconds. Here they had heard of him, heard of that lightning-swift draw from under his left shoulder; they would never give him the opportunity to use it if they could help it. They were too wary of him.

Peret was babbling: "Lavergne, you cannot believe this dog's word against mine! He lies!"

Lavergne interrupted. He had reached out his big hand and was pawing in his desk drawer. For an instant Burton was aware of a small packet of letters there, then he understood. Peret had intended to take those letters with him, in one way or another, before he left here today. Lavergne's hand closed over the butt of a Luger and he said to his henchman:

"Gaston! *Attendez!* Peret has said that the gentleman lies. Look in Peret's pocket very carefully, for he has a weapon somewhere, I am sure. See if those letters are there! But see first if the tickets are there as *M*. Burton said."

Gaston went about his work with caution. Peret backed to the wall. His eyes were bulging with fear and his mouth was agape like a suffering fish's. All the suave veneer and polish of the man was wiped away by sheer terror. There was deadly meaning in Lavergne's eyes, a menace in the soft, low purr of his voice.

Burton said, in a low tone: "Not too much of the bluff, Lavergne! You fooled me and it's you who have the letters. Peret only hoped to steal them from you before he left. But you—"

Burton took his hazard as Peret saw his last slim chance evaporating. The eyes of them all were mostly for him. Then he moved, just as Gaston flipped back Peret's coat lapel.

A startled gasp came from Gaston. Peret's hand dove downward. A ridiculously small pistol emerged as if by magic from under the white of the cuff on his left wrist.

Burton moved. Lavergne, just in time, recalled that the gambler was probably the greatest menace in the room. The big Luger swiveled.

The small gun so suddenly in Peret's hand spat at Gaston and the crack of it was ridiculously inane in the tumult that ensued. Then Burton felt lead from Lavergne's Luger breathe past his head. Heard it as it smashed into the paneling beside him.

He heard Gaston's wild cry; then a torn sob that was half a curse and half a prayer as Gaston fired at Peret. Then Burton's own .38 was in action. Through the crimson blaze at its mouth, through the whirling smoke layers in that small room, through the hammering, deafen-

ing echoes of the tumultuous firing, he could see Lavergne go down.

Something burned Burton's shoulder. Crouching, he swung about as Lavergne crumpled forward across the green baize table top, the big gun still clamped tight in his fist. Blood spurted from him.

Peret's cry lingered. Burton whirled in time to see Gaston on the floor, bringing up his weapon.

Burton snapped a shot. Gaston's slight body gave a tremor and slammed back against the wall that had been half bracing him.

Peret wavered, started to speak, choked something incoherent; and then, as a rush of blood foamed to his lips, he crumpled and fell.

Burton took a deep breath. For a long moment he stood there, until the echoes of firing had almost died away and a tense, almost unreal stillness had come.

Then carefully he slipped the gun into its holster, methodically picked out the letters from the drawer He glanced at them to make sure of them, then he went to the fire still burning low in the small grate in the outer room. He placed each envelope with meticulous care in the tiny blaze. As he dropped the last one and watched it shrivel up he saw the thick stream of crimson that was running unchecked down over his own wrist.

At last he straightened and his dark face looked tired. He moved wearily toward the door.

IN THE hotel, much later that day, he told Vivian the story. Patricia Blaine had gone to the *Bureau de Police* to await her fiancé's release. Burton was still weary.

"Yes, my dear, that's all," he said. "One thing is certain: Without those letters the police could never make out a ghost of a case against Rowdy and they know it. I think it was Lavergne's idea all the time to erase Descamps from the picture because the lad was getting too troublesome; began getting that way, I gather, after it developed into a real case of love for Patricia. They were really frightened of what he could reveal about the whole crowd.

"And there, right in their hands, was a suspect made to order for them, a suspect they even had the goods on without trying overhard. Rowdy. Only they couldn't even be satisfied with that. Anyway Peret couldn't; and afterward, when Lavergne saw the same opportunity, it got him, too. They had to try another stunt, double-crossing one another to do it. And the odd part of it is that if they hadn't wanted to squeeze the last cent out of their merry-go-round murder they'd probably not have left a single workable clue. Somehow I think there must be a moral in that, but I'm too lazy just now to worry about it."

MY DOUGH SAYS

IN HIS entrance into the small and smartly furnished living-room two minutes before, Ken O'Hara had taken one glance at the body on the rug. After that he didn't look at it again but stood, spraddle-legged, warming himself in front of the gas log at one end of the room and letting his glum and overcast gaze coast around at the others in the place.

There was, for one, Inez Dana. She sat on an imitation-Spanish divan at one side of the imitation-Spanish room and held her body tightly in her arms, rocking and sobbing jerkily in the tail end of a fit of hysterics.

Tears had cut channels through the rouge on her cheeks but she was still beautiful in a damp tawny fashion with a slick black bob, wounded-fawn brown eyes and a smooth creamy skin.

Detective Lieutenant Otto Shuford sat

O'Hara twists a crime tornado

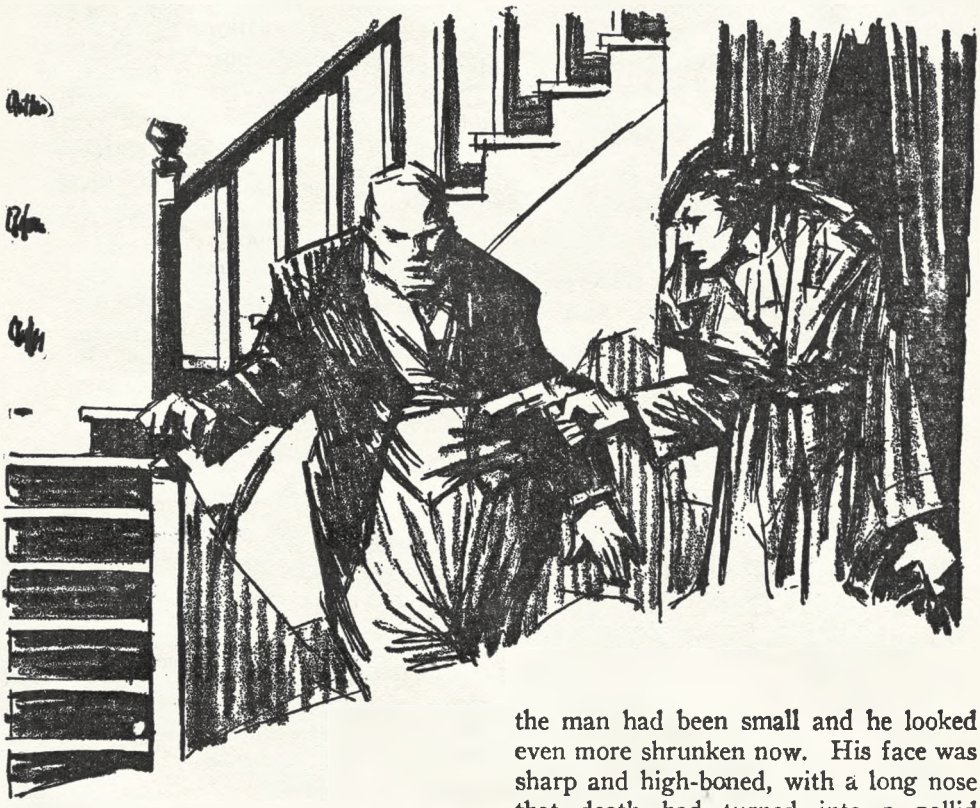
on the divan beside her. He had the round decent face of a small boy under sandy, graying hair, a body like that of a bear, big ruddy hands that kept patting at her while he clucked comfortingly:

"Now, Inez, it ain't your fault. Now, now!"

Through his words came the muted thump of melody from the Club Barcel-

MURDER

By H. H. STINSON



ona on the floor below where Joe Bullfinch's Swing Boys and an assorted hundred or so of patrons went to town to the scream of brasses and the mutter of drums, unaware that death had also gone to town just above their heads.

The body lay by the highboy radio and the leg of the cabinet propped the head up at an awkward angle. The eyes were half-lidded and the man looked as though he were staring with mild reproof at his feet which touched the fringe of red velvet window draperies. Blood had seeped in half a dozen thin streams from a wound in the right temple and not far from the man's hand a revolver, a .38 Police Positive, lay on the rug. In life the man had been small and he looked even more shrunken now. His face was sharp and high-boned, with a long nose that death had turned into a pallid wedge. Until a bullet had smashed through the thin bone of his temple he had been Johnny Lawton, café and amusement-beat reporter for the Pacific Tribune.

Well away from the body there stood two other men. One of them was a big jovial looking man with a long lock of gray hair combed back over a thin spot. That was City Councilman Homer E. Davenport, in whose district the Club Barcelona happened to be spotted.

The other was Johnny Kerr, owner of the Barcelona. A thin wiry man, with black spikes of mustache on a smooth dark face, he stared into space and whistled soundlessly and continuously.

Inspector Blane of the homicide squad

was on his knees beside Lawton's body. His oblong pockmarked face was professionally interested and, at the same time, a little shocked as he plodded methodically through the dead man's pockets. He found a watch, keys, billfold, old letters, a thick wad of copy paper, and laid them all on the cool marble top of a coffee table. He straightened, glanced at the wad of copy paper, riffled through the old letters.

He cocked an eye at O'Hara, said with heavy humor, "Don't you reporters ever pay bills? Lawton was carrying 'em for a year back."

O'Hara shrugged wide shoulders under the faded trenchcoat he wore, shoved his shabby fedora back on a thatch of black hair. The sourness of his craggy Irish face deepened but he said nothing.

Inez Dana went into a fresh set of wails and Detective Lieutenant Shuford said, "Could you wind up with her quick, Inspector? She's going nuts."

Blane looked at the sleek head on Shuford's shoulder without any particular concern. "Tell her to relax. As soon as we get pictures of this, I'll take her downtown and get her written statement. Now where the hell would that photographer be?"

Nobody answered him so he swung his eyes around to O'Hara, said, "I suppose, Irish, you want to know what happened?"

"I figured," O'Hara said, "you'd get around to telling me by the end of the week. As a matter of fact, some crackpot called the Tribune office and said Lawton had bumped himself. I thought it was hooey."

"That crackpot," Inspector Blane said, "happened to be me. The Trib once did me a favor and I thought they'd like to know one of their reporters had blown his brains out."

"And you really mean Lawton did the Dutch act?"

"Am I in the habit of kidding about things like this?"

O'Hara shook his head, blew his breath out between puffed lips. He said, "I've known Johnny Lawton a long time and I'd have said he was as likely to commit suicide as I am, which means not at all."

Blane lifted his shoulders, dropped them. "You never can tell who'll commit suicide or why."

"What was Johnny's why?"

Blane jerked a blunt thumb at Inez Dana and Inez unleashed a half-strangled sob. O'Hara batted his eyes in her direction, said: "Is this on the level?"

"Certainly it's on the level. And if you'll skip your cracks I'll tell you about it."

O'Hara nodded. His eyes took in Inez Dana somberly from head to toe, switched back to Blane.

Blane plodded on. "Like this, now, I get it. Seems like Lawton met Miss Dana a little while ago through Detective Shuford and right away blows his top about her. Lawton promotes her a spot in the floor show here through his connections as reporter for your sheet and he's out here every night to watch her do one of them ostrich-feather dances. She doesn't go for him in a big way, she says, and it got tougher and tougher shrugging him off because he got nuttier and nuttier about her."

O'Hara's eyes were beginning to get skeptical. "This story, if you ask me, gets nuttier and nuttier, also."

Shuford threw O'Hara a hard murky stare and Blane said, "You want to hear this or not?"

"Go ahead."

"Tonight after the first show the girl comes up to her apartment here and Lawton follows her. He goes on the heavy make for her but she bats his ears down. Then he goes completely wingding and pulls his rod with the old hooey about if he couldn't have her, nobody else could. So she makes a break for the door and he takes a wingshot and misses, the slug going through that picture over by the door, and she beats it downstairs for help. At the foot of the stairs she runs into the City Councilman,

Davenport, and a party just leaving." He broke off, looked at Davenport and said, "That right, Councilman?"

Davenport nodded. "Quite correct, Inspector." The long lock of hair slid over his right ear and he brushed it back. "I was just getting my hat and coat from the check girl. We'd heard the shot faintly and when Miss Dana told us what it was, I immediately went back to Mr. Kerr's office and asked him to summon police."

The manager of the club, Kerr, took his shoe-button gaze out of space and looked at O'Hara. He said in a husky impersonal drawl, " 'S right, O'Hara. I called the cops and I knew Shuford was in the house so I got him. The radio car got here about the time I found him, so we all came up here together."

Blane sighed. "It can only be suicide, O'Hara. The radio boys and Shuford and the Councilman and Kerr were within ten feet of the hall door when they heard another shot inside and when they busted through the locked door, the apartment was empty except for Lawton's body. Besides that, there's powder burns around the wound, the rod there is the one Lawton had a permit to carry and there's two shots been fired from it, accounting for the one at the girl and the one through his head. Of course, we'll check the gun for his prints and check the bullets against the gun and use the Lund test on his hand to see if he'd fired a gun but I'm satisfied it's suicide. You satisfied?"

"Yes," O'Hara said slowly, "and no."

"What's on your mind?"

Inez Dana had her head up from Shuford's shoulder. She dabbed at her nose with a wilted handkerchief, looked at O'Hara from drowning brown eyes.

He held her under a neutral, speculative stare for a little. He said finally. "This Casanova build-up for Johnny doesn't sound on the up and up to me, for one thing."

Shuford suddenly said in a loud voice, "Inez!"

Flying pink nails seared long gouges down O'Hara's check. Inez Dana swung the nails again, panted, "I won't sit here and be insulted!"

Both Blane and Shuford grabbed her. She collapsed against Shuford's chest. His small-boy face was red and angry. He said, "Louse!" in a quiet voice.

Patting a handkerchief against the red trail of Inez Dana's nails, O'Hara observed, "It occurs to me that for a guy who was supposed to have put on a real battle with the lady, Johnny Lawton doesn't show many scars."

"Come on, Inez," Detective Shuford said.

He led her into a bedroom and came out alone, shut the door. He said, "You've got a gut, O'Hara, to talk like that to a sweet little kid after what she's been through. For two cents I'd have a swing at your mug, myself."

O'Hara ignored him. "This may or may not be suicide," he said to Inspector Blane. "I grant you don't miss on many, Inspector, but here's a couple of angles you might stew over before you go back to your squadroom domino game. In the first place, contrary to popular superstition, newspaper men often stay decent. Johnny had a nice wife and a swell little kid and he was nuts about them. Why would he play around?"

"It happens in the best of families," Blane said.

"Yes, but Johnny had covered the amusement beat for five years and if he wanted to go on the make he had chances at plenty of hotter and apparently more willing numbers than this girl. There was never a whisper of anything like that. Now we're supposed to believe he not only turned into a Casanova but that he even blew his brains out over the girl."

Shuford grabbed O'Hara's arm, snarled, "You accusing Miss Dana of lying?"

O'Hara lifted the hand off his arm, said mildly, "Keep your pants on, Otto."

"I want you to know I've known her since she was a baby and I'll see she

doesn't get pushed around by more than one reporter at a time."

"And Lawton," O'Hara said, firmly but not nastily, "was a friend of mine and I'll see to it he doesn't go out to the tune of scallions."

Blane got his bulk between them, said, "All right, Boy Scouts, do your good deeds later." To O'Hara he said, "I know the motive sounds sort of weak but the only guy could have shot Lawton was Lawton, himself. I've got five witnesses that nobody left by the door after the last shot."

"What about a window?"

The Inspector went to a window, pulled the drapery aside and shook an ornamental grillwork set into the stucco outside the window. "Every window but the bathroom has these and you couldn't get a Singer's midget out the bathroom window."

"Any connecting doors to the other apartments?"

"None. There's three other apartments, all rented to members of the floor show. The radio boys went through the other places right away and found nobody." Blane was patient, had about him the attitude that he didn't mind humoring O'Hara. "Anything else, Irish?"

City Councilman Davenport came across the room with ponderous dignity and put his hand sympathetically on O'Hara's shoulder. "I know how you feel, my boy. I, too, had known Lawton a long time and liked him."

O'Hara's face had a crabbed, rebellious look but he shrugged, said nothing.

Tymes, the bureau photographer, came in. He was a small man in rumpled brown with a pod of stomach and he whistled "Little Old Lady," as he put his bag down and got out tripod and camera. He interrupted his whistling to say, "I'll get it from the doorway, Inspector."

He began his whistle again and the men in the room stood back from the body. O'Hara lounged by the coffee table, let his glance wander down to the litter of Lawton's possessions. He pawed through them with a finger. His back was to the others.

Detective Shuford, across the room, said sharply, "Hey, O'Hara!"

"You guys again?" Blane barked.

"Inspector, O'Hara just snitched something out of that junk of Lawton's," Shuford whined.

Blane came over heavily and O'Hara said, "As usual, Otto's all wet." His eyes were clear, candid.

Blane looked doubtful but he said, "Leave things alone or out you go on the curb with the rest of your newspaper tribe, O'Hara."

The photographer came out from under his black hood, began to get his flash gun ready. He was still whistling.

"For Pete's sake, Tymes," Blane snapped, "cut out that whistling."

Tymes said, "Aw, Inspector, I just do it to keep my spirits up."

"Well, let 'em drop."

'HARA waited until the photographer had his second shot, said, "Where's a phone around here, Kerr?"

"My office."

"How's about using it to make a call?"

"Go to it," the manager of the club said in his pleasantly husky drawl.

O'Hara picked his way around the tripod at the doorway, went down thickly carpeted steps to a foyer that connected with the entrance to the Club Barcelona Three more steps took him past a thin red-headed check girl and into the dining-room which was long and wide with a dais at the far end for the Swing Boys. The ink-spot of dance floor was jammed, and if there were any vacant tables, O'Hara couldn't spot them. He went along the wall, dodging waiters, and into a corridor that led to Johnny Kerr's office.

Inside the office a stocky man with a pink face and fluffy blond hair lolled in a big, leather-padded chair with his heels hooked on the edge of a desk. He had

a highball in one hand and a table-tennis bat in the other and he was making languid passes in the air at an imaginary ball. There was a half-eaten club sandwich on the desk. When the man saw O'Hara he threw the tennis-table bat on the desk with a clatter and stuck out his right hand.

"As I live and inhale and exhale," he chortled, "if it isn't my old pal, O'Hara. How are you, kid?"

O'Hara shook the outstretched hand. "Hello, Rock. How's the press agent racket?"

Joe Rockley beamed. "Swell, Ken, swell. I nearly make a living out of it, what with handling the Barcelona, Station KGP, a couple of other spots and a convention now and then." His pink face went serious. "Tough about Lawton. I was sitting right here with Kerr when the uproar started and this Dana wench busted in, saying Johnny had taken a shot at her. I thought at first she was nuts. Well, I suppose the Barcelona gets plastered on the front pages tomorrow."

"Not in the Tribune," O'Hara said. He pulled the phone over, dialed and got the Tribune. He talked briefly to Braddock on the city desk, not much more lengthily to a rewrite man and cradled the phone.

Rockley was making sleepy passes with the bat again. He grinned, said, "My doc told me to take up tennis for my figure so I'm making it table tennis because I can eat and practice at the same time. I'm getting a swell backhand."

O'Hara said, "Rock, as space chiseler for this joint you probably saw a bit of Lawton."

"Yeah," Rockley said, "he was here a lot, especially since Kerr put the Dana girl in the show."

"Would you say Johnny was carrying the torch for her?"

"I don't know if you'd call it that. He was seeing plenty of her, though."

"Ever hear him pull any suicide talk?"

"Not that I remember," Rockley said.

O'Hara nodded, scowling faintly. "Well, I've got a sweet assignment now. I've got to go out and see Mrs. Lawton and tell her Johnny doesn't live there any more. That's bad enough but when she learns it was over another woman—wow!"

"I'm glad it's your job and not mine."

"Incidentally," O'Hara said, picking up the phone again, "who is Dana? Where's she from? What do you know about her?"

"I might say not much," Rockley shrugged. "In fact, I will say not much. Kerr gave her a tryout at Lawton's request and she clicked. But I'll be glad to find out all I can for you about her."

O'Hara dialed a number, waited and then said, "I get you out of bed, Tony?"

Tony Ames yawned along miles of wire. "Yes, if you really want to know." Tony was very fond of O'Hara. She worked on the Tribune, too, and they saw a lot of each other.

"I don't but I thought it'd be polite to ask. Listen, duchess, I've got a nice lousy job for you."

"That's the sort you usually shove over onto me."

"I'm serious. Johnny Lawton killed himself tonight."

Her tone one of shocked unbelief, Tony Ames said, "Johnny Lawton did what?"

"Killed himself. And I've got to go out and break the news to his wife. Will you meet me there? I never did know what to do about weeping women."

"Of course I'll meet you."

"It's 1533 South Norton, block below Pico."

"In twenty minutes. Poor Johnny! Of all people, I never thought he—"

"Neither did I. Twenty minutes it is."

O'Hara stood up and Rockley said, "How about a little drinkie, Ken?"

"Thanks. I'm not in the mood tonight."

"Drop in whenever you're out this way. The Barcelona can always scrape up a filet mignon or at least a sardine for a practicing newspaper man."

He flipped an indolent salute at O'Hara as O'Hara went out the door and then went back to his highball, his club sandwich.

The Club Barcelona was on Palms Boulevard, far to the south of the city proper but still within the city limits. O'Hara looked up at it as he came out of the building. It was a long two-story affair of white stucco that had orignally been built as an automobile showroom with apartments above. Three years before, O'Hara knew, Johnny Kerr had come to the coast with the hint of a Chicago background about him and had taken over the building, turning it into a night club. It had done well; in fact, if this particular night's crowd was a normal sample, Kerr was doing better than well.

Along one side of the building was a graveled parking space and O'Hara trudged around there, gravel clicking from his toes. From above him, as he climbed into his shabby coupé, came the rumble of Inspector Blane's voice, asking questions, and a contralto that was Inez Dana's voice, answering them.

O'Hara grimaced, muttered, "And all for that little tramp! Johnny, it's hard to swallow."

Heading for town, O'Hara drove fast, expertly, along the broad boulevard that wound through rolling hills, past darkened exclusive-looking estates, on toward the greater compactness of the city proper.

After a time he saw headlights in his rear vision mirror, noticed they were creeping up on him but gave them no particular thought. He eased to a halt at the red blinker of a boulevard stop, slipped into a lower gear, began to pick up speed again. The car behind, a light-tan sedan, didn't make the boulevard stop.

Beyond the intersection it slid up alongside him and suddenly began to cut him skilfully into the curb. O'Hara braked and while the two cars were still rolling, the right-hand door of the sedan was whipped open and a man swung from it to the running-board of O'Hara's coupé.

The man was young, looked scarcely in his twenties, but he had a pinched white face, eyes that were dark smudges in his pallor. His jaws moved rhythmically while he clung to the car with one hand and with the other held a gun that poked O'Hara's left ear.

"Stick up, brother," he intoned around a wad of gum. "Set her down."

O'Hara stopped and the white-faced youth stood down in the road, said, "Light, brother."

O'Hara got out. He would have made two of the slim young gunman but the gun was held steadily on him, a blue glimmer in the faint light back of the headlamps, and the man's jaws worked at the gum as steadily and calmly as though all this were an old and boring routine with him.

So O'Hara didn't move but he said sourly, "Joke's on you. Payday's tomorrow and I've got six bits."

The gum-gnasher said nothing. He got behind O'Hara and began to go through his pockets. The man behind the wheel of the tan sedan leaned through the open door and watched the proceedings nonchalantly. He was big and thick-shouldered with a face that was flattened down almost to a single plane as though a horse had stepped on it.

He didn't speak until the lights of another car popped into sight over the crest of a long hill. The lights came rushing down toward them and the man in the car said in a confidential voice, "Better make it snappy, Vince."

Vince still said nothing but he straightened up. O'Hara sensed what was coming and tried to dodge but the gun barrel slammed him above the temple. He groaned, tried to pivot, but the gun barrel clipped him again, beating him down into blackness.

When he came out of it he was in a ditch beside the road. His hat was gone and his head felt like a free balloon except that there were quick knives of pain

slicing through it. After a little he climbed out of the ditch. His car, lights out, was parked a short distance away. He got to it, sat on the running-board for a while and began to feel better.

He went through his pockets and found them empty of everything, even the half-dozen pencils he always carried. But his keys were still in the ignition lock so he climbed under the wheel and got going toward the city again.

It was five minutes of two when he located an all-night drugstore. He bought gauze, tape and iodine from a curious clerk.

"What's the other guy look like?" the clerk grinned.

"Too good to suit me," O'Hara told him and shut himself into a phone booth where he looked up the number of Johnny Lawton's home and then dialed it.

When her voice answered, he said, "Tony?"

"And what happened to you, my good man?"

"I've been out getting an idea knocked into my head. How'd you make out with Mrs. Lawton?"

"When you didn't show up, I called the city desk and got the lowdown. Nancy—that's Johnny's wife—is taking it like a brick. I gave her a triple bromide and she's dozed off. Of course, at first she did a couple of ground loops because she simply couldn't understand Johnny committing suicide."

"My understander doesn't get it, either."

"And, incidentally, I'm pretty sore at you for not showing up. It was pretty tough for a while."

"Sorry, gadget. I was held up a bit, if that's an excuse." O'Hara grinned to himself, didn't enlarge on the subject. "I'll come out there now if there's any reason to."

"No. I'll stay with her the rest of the night."

"Then I'll go home," O'Hara said, "gargle three fast slugs of rye and hit the innersprings. I can use a lot of it."

Tony's voice sounded faintly worried. She said, "Ken, your voice sounds funny. Are you all right?"

"I'm O.K. Give you a buzz in the morning."

WOLFHEIM'S FISH GROTTO, across from the City Hall, was a cheerful place to dine provided you didn't mind seeing your prospective meal ogling you from the huge glass fish tank in the window. O'Hara made for the mellow lights of the place through a steady drumming downpour that now and then whipped itself into a miniature cloudburst.

He had had a good sleep, talked with Tony Ames briefly on the phone the following morning and now he expected to meet her here for dinner. She was in a booth at the rear and he had shed his hat, his sodden trenchcoat, spiking them on the rack beside her trim, translucent raincoat.

She was small and neat in a dark, tailored suit. She cocked her oval, pointed face and nice hazel eyes upward at him and paused in her spearing of a morsel from the seafood cocktail before her when she saw the X of adhesive tape above O'Hara's temple, the congested bruise that spread out from it.

She said as he sat down, "So, fighting with those big rough boys from across the tracks again."

"O.K., precious," O'Hara muttered. "Laugh."

A waiter came, took his order for a double old-fashioned, oyster cocktail, filet of sea bass, shrimp-salad, lemon chiffonade pie, coffee.

"At least," Tony said, "it doesn't sound as though you were dying."

"You're too, too sympathetic."

"And you're very, very mysterious. You haven't told me yet why you think Johnny didn't commit suicide or what happened to you last night."

"We've got plenty of time. Did you

find out anything on Inez Dana like I asked you to this morning?"

"Not much." She finished the cocktail morsel, rested her elbows on the table, her smoothly pointed chin on locked hands. "Joe Rockley, the press agent out at the Barcelona, helped me get most of it—we'll have to give him a break in a story some time. She's twenty-four, white, female. Raised in the same town in Nebraska that gave Detective Lieutenant Otto Shuford to a waiting world. Studied dancing in New York and did a copy of the Sally Rand thing at a South Wabash cafe in Chicago until recently. Came out here a couple of months ago, looked up Shuford and Shuford promoted her the job at the Barcelona through Johnny Lawton. Shuford has been giving her the rush act and Lawton had been seeing a lot of her, too."

"How about the Barcelona's manager, Kerr?"

"I understand Kerr has his own headache, a poisonous blonde, named Betty. Betty at the moment is supposed to be back in Chicago. And now about you. Who patted you on the head with the well-known blunt instrument?"

"A guy I'd like very much to see again." The waiter brought the double old-fashioned, went away again. O'Hara sketched out very briefly the hold-up. He said, "Hell, they even took an envelope I'd outlined an idea for a play on."

"That saves you the trouble of writing it."

"I got just that much sympathy from the cops. A reporter held up. Ha-ha-ha—joke. Inspector Blane cracked a rib laughing. As for it maybe tying in with Johnny Lawton—hooey. Blane came back at me with the news that only Johnny's prints were on the gun and both slugs came from that gun. Furthermore the paraffin test on Johnny's hand showed he had fired a gun. So it's suicide to Blane and, 'Will you quit bothering me,' says he, 'about trifles like reporters doing the Dutch act?' "

"But," Tony said, "it does look like suicide, doesn't it? You haven't let me in yet on the massive ideas in your massive brain; but your own story, the one you sent in last night, said there were witnesses that heard the shot when Johnny was in the apartment alone."

"Yeah," O'Hara agreed heavily, "it does look like suicide—pat. And when a thing looks so much like something, I begin wondering if maybe it isn't something else. Anyway, I'm poking around." The oyster cocktail had arrived and he went into it, talked through a mouthful. "Rurt ow see ris—"

"Manners, old thing, manners."

O'Hara swallowed, said, "I went out to see Mrs. Lawton today to find if she knew whether Johnny had been working on anything hot. Incidentally, she didn't. It seems she doesn't know much about the newspaper racket and Johnny didn't bother to talk shop at home. And say, that kid of theirs is swell. If I ever give in and marry you, I hope we have fourteen just like him."

"In that case, I'm calling our deal off."

"Sissy." O'Hara grinned. "Anyway, my visit out there confirmed my notions along one line. Johnny wasn't a chaser by nature and he was happy at home. His wife was twice as good-looking as Inez and they were in love. So he'd have had no sane reason to make a play for la Dana. Therefore her story, at least part of it, is a phony and when part of something is baloney you're apt to find it's all sausage. Then there's the fake stick-up."

"Where does that come in?"

"Somebody thought I had something I shouldn't have."

"As for instance?"

"I don't know but I can use my imagination. Last night while I was fiddling around in Dana's apartment, Shuford got the idea I'd snitched something out of Lawton's papers and made a big blab about it. I hadn't touched them and, as a matter of fact, when I went over them with Blane today there wasn't anything interesting in them. But

somebody might have thought there was and thought that I'd picked it up. He, or she, wasn't taking any chances so a couple of hooligans were sent after me."

"It must have been somebody who was there at that moment, then."

"You catch on quick." He ticked off names on his fingers. "There were Manager Kerr, Detective Shuford, Inspector Blane, a uniformed cop, Councilman Davenport, and a photographer. And I'm not forgetting Inez Dana. She was in a bedroom with the door closed but Shuford made enough uproar so she could have heard him. I think we can eliminate Blane and the uniformed man and the photo guy. Can you stand listening while I play with possibilities?"

"I can stand anything as long as I'm being fed. Go ahead."

"First, could it be murder? If anybody wants to bet, my dough says murder—in spite of the fact that Johnny's gun was the rod used, that his prints were on it and that the paraffin test showed he'd fired a gun. Suppose somebody first killed Johnny with Johnny's own gun. Then, to build up Inez Dana's story of Johnny going berserk, another shot is fired into the wall by the door. The sound of the shots would have been pretty well covered by the swing band downstairs. After that, the gun is wiped clean and Johnny's prints planted on it. Then Dana lams downstairs, raising cain, and comes back with a lot of witnesses to hear a final shot inside her place."

Tony squinted a hazel gaze into space thoughtfully. "That's just it, that shot."

"I've got a couple of supposes for that. Everything that sounds like a shot isn't necessarily a shot. Suppose there was some kind of gadget in the partment, all primed to go off at the right moment and make a noise like a shot? If that seems too gaga, how about supposing the shot hadn't been fired in the dame's apartment but in one next to it? The apartments are small, the walls are thin and, with everybody expecting to hear a shot inside Dana's apartment, they would have been easily fooled."

Maybe," Tony said, "but, as my civics prof used to say in discussing honesty in politics, there we get into the realm of pure speculation."

O'Hara grunted, "You sound like Blane. I told him all this and he said the same thing, except he didn't know the long words you use."

"I understood the police searched all the other apartments right away."

"That's what they said. My guess is that everybody crowded into Dana's place for the first few minutes. During that time somebody could have slipped down the stairs without being seen. Anyway, let's humor me and say it was murder. Then we get onto why. What's the most logical reason for bumping off a newspaper man? Because he knows something about somebody and he's going to print it. That would take care of the motive angle for everybody involved. Davenport's in politics, Kerr has a night-life background and there's always a flavor of underworld about that, Shuford's a copper and some cops turn the wrong corner. Or Dana might have managed it all alone although it doesn't seem likely because, granting it was a frame, it required plenty of brains and some split-second cooperation to make it come out right."

"But if somebody did fire an alibi shot, wouldn't that eliminate everybody you've named except Dana?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. Don't forget those punks that held me up could be in on it. I don't think they could be the brains behind it, though, because they acted like garden-variety punks to me."

"Go on from there."

"Personally," O'Hara said, "I lean toward Kerr. I've known Otto Shuford for years and I don't think he has either the brains or the inclination to be crooked. Councilman Davenport looks clean as a whistle, too, and I've checked him today from antipasto to nuts. Realtor, director in the Security

National, came into politics two years ago on the reform slate. His Council record is A-1 and he has a nice wife and a couple of grown sons that are going places themselves. No whispers about him any place. My guess is Kerr."

He stopped, his eyes glumly intent, and put the finishing touches to the sea bass.

After a little he said, "Anyway, Miss Ames, my nose thinks it detects a very sour smell about the whole thing. And I'm going to keep sticking the nose into it, hoping it—not the nose—won't blow up in my face."

Tony said nothing in a concerned reflective way and O'Hara finally grinned. "Besides, I don't like reporters being killed and nothing done about it. It might give people ideas."

"Like me," Tony said cheerfully. "When do we start?"

"We?"

"We. After all, Johnny was a friend of mine as well as yours and I think a lot of his wife and the youngster, too. So my nose gets stuck out right alongside yours."

"I'll think it over," O'Hara growled.

"Don't waste brain cells. It's Fate. Kismet. Or maybe just a feminine whimsy. But you may as well regard it as a fact, just the same."

O'Hara was on his pie when the front door of the Grotto opened violently, letting in the steady swish of rain on the sidewalk outside. Detective Otto Shuford stepped in, planked heavy feet down the aisle between booths. Rain drops glistened on his big black slicker, a left-over from the days of pounding a beat. He jerked his head, looking into one booth after another, and the jerks sent little sprays of water from the brim of his hat at the annoyed occupants of the booths.

His face was red and furious. He paid no attention to the discomfort he was causing.

Stopping beside O'Hara, he planted himself solidly, said in a half-choked voice, "So, you lousy ape——"

O'Hara was quiet, unwounded. "Unbend, Otto, unbend. You'll have a stroke."

Shuford's voice wasn't loud but it was bitter, came between his teeth. "Miss Dana just called me and said you, or somebody from your dirty sheet, was around trying to dig up dirt on her today. Now I'm telling you to lay off. You get it? Lay off! She's taken enough from you news-hawks already."

O'Hara said patiently, "Just because you think she's a swell number—"

Shuford's face flushed a deeper crimson. "I don't have to be nuts about the girl to see she gets a decent deal. She's one sweet kid and she's not going to be pushed around by the likes of you. This is suicide, as plain as the nose on your face."

O'Hara grinned. "I've been told my nose isn't so bad."

"Skip the comedy. You've had it in for Miss Dana ever since you hit the place last night." Shuford banged his fist on the table, got his outslung jaw within six inches of O'Hara's face. "If you're smart, O'Hara, you'll leave her alone, you'll forget the whole thing. That's a warning."

For a little they looked at each other, Shuford breathing hard and his face like that of a small boy about to break into tears, but the kind of a small boy who fights harder the harder he cries.

O'Hara smiled and said, "Otto, you're a sucker but you're a nice guy. And ain't love grand?"

For a moment it seemed that Shuford would either choke on his rage or swing at O'Hara. Then he spun, pounded down the aisle and slammed out the door.

Tony said, "Well!" And then, "Do you think he's in it?"

"Maybe," O'Hara said. "But my real hunch is that Otto's just a big dumb kid who doesn't know anything because nobody ever told him anything. Even his partners don't tell him what the score is until the ninth inning. I'd still say he's a good decent guy who's going to

town for this Dana wench because she's the first hot number that ever gave him a tumble."

"Nevertheless I'd watch out for him."

"Somebody should." O'Hara drained his coffee cup, reached for his coat. "How's your nose feel?"

"Long and sharp. Where do we start?"

"Dana's our best bet to start with. If it was murder, we know she had something to do with it. So we start with her and work onward and upward —I hope."

DESPITE the rain and a moderate amount of publicity on the violent death of Johnny Lawton, the Club Barcelona was doing its usual quota of business. The parking lot beside the long white building was jammed with cars and more were arriving.

O'Hara wedged his coupé into a meagre space at the curb across the street from the arched entrance to the club. The rain made a transparent shifting curtain between the car and the lights.

O'Hara's wrist-watch read seven-twenty. To Tony Ames beside him he said, "The first floor show starts at seven-thirty and lasts nearly an hour. Dana's in the opening number and closes the bill with her feather dance. That leaves plenty of time to prowl her place."

"I hope we know what we're doing," Tony said. "After all, there is such a thing as burglary."

"And I've heard murder's illegal, too."

"Inspector Blane's pretty white. Maybe we could get him to go along with us on this."

"And maybe," O'Hara said, "you think I didn't hint around for just that and got the cold fishy eye for my pains. Suicide and case closed, said he. So we'll just have to depend on the well known freedom of the press."

"And hope nobody abridges it for us," Tony murmured. "All right, let's go."

"I'm going and you're staying."

"As usual, you want to hog all the trouble."

O'Hara shook his head, grinned down at her. He said cheerfully. "Always misunderstood. Personally, I couldn't ask for a nicer cellmate than you. But if one of us gets jammed up the other had better be on the outside to do something about it. Catch on?"

He got out, pulled his coat collar up, his hat-brim down. There was a group of three women, four men, arriving and he walked through the archway with them, let them turn to the right toward the dining-room and obscure him from the view of the hat-check girl. He went up the stairs quietly.

In the hall upstairs the Club Barcelona orchestra was muted to a rhythmic thump, a vague suggestion of melody.

He knocked on the door of Inez Dana's apartment, waited for a little. There was no answer, no sound within the apartment. In a pawnshop on South Main Street a long time before O'Hara had picked up a keyring, fitted with a number of things that were handy if not entirely legal. He tried four keys on the lock before he found one that worked.

Inside the apartment he paused, closed the door softly behind him. The darkness was close, heavy with the scent of an expensive perfume and there was no noise save the quick faraway beat of the orchestra. After a little he went to a window that gave on the parking lot. The window was open and just underneath a man was talking as he helped a small, well curved blonde out of a car.

The man said, "If you wanta crash the fillums, baby, I can do plenty for you, provided you make me feel like it."

The blonde giggled a little. O'Hara chuckled softly and put his hand on the window to close it. Then he let the window stay open, said, "Idea!" in a low, thoughtful voice.

Nobody could have left the room via the window the night before. The ornamental grille outside made that certain. But if the window had been open, nothing would have prevented someone from sticking a gun through the bars and into the room and firing a blank just at the right moment. He parted the draperies a little more and looked out.

After a bit he said, "No idea," in a disgruntled fashion.

Nobody could put a hand through a window that couldn't be reached and obviously it would have been impossible for anyone to reach the window without a ladder. The roofs of the cars backed against the wall were a dozen feet below. Moreover, the parking lot was brightly flood-lighted, there were three attendants and nobody could have climbed to the window without being detected against the white wall, as readily as a black hat in a snowbank.

For a moment he toyed with the idea of a gun attached to a long pole, thrust up from the ground or down from the roof. Then he put that aside, too. It would have been nearly as conspicuous in the glare of the flood-lights as a ladder. Besides that, it was clumsy and uncertain. And clumsiness had no part in the picture he had been piecing together for the last twenty-four hours.

Finally he shut the window, drew the heavy draperies. Noises from the traffic on Palms Boulevard drifted through the wall of red velvet very faintly.

He turned on a floor lamp and went to work, quickly but methodically. He didn't know what he was looking for, in particular, so he scrutinized carefully everything he came across. He went through a desk in the living-room, through an antiqued cabinet, the radio highboy, looked behind pictures, under the rug, behind the cushions of the overstuffed set. He found nothing interesting; went on to the single bedroom.

In a cardboard suit-box on the top shelf in the dressing room just off the bedroom, O'Hara finally struck the litter of personal papers he had been sure would be around some place. There were newspaper clippings, theatrical and night-club programs from New York and Chicago, letters, half a dozen glossy press photographs of Inez Dana with and without her fan.

He poked through the mess, taking his time. Virtually all the clippings were night-club publicity in which Inez Dana had been mentioned. He read a letter here and there, some from a sister in Cottlesville, Nebraska, and others from males on the make. There was nothing promising until he dug out a large envelope that was crammed with glossy eight-by-ten prints.

He pulled out the top print and looked pleased. It was the photograph of an addressed envelope. The envelope bore in a corner the engraved name of a Chicago florist and writing on it said with a flourish, "Miss Inez Dana." The next picture was of a plain white card which said warm things about having enjoyed "your performance." Underneath the warm things was a large signature, a signature that said, "Homer A. Davenport," in dashing, ornate script.

O'Hara grinned, said under his breath, "The old goat."

But as he pulled out more prints, saw that they were all pictures of written pages and that the signatures progressed from "Homer A. Davenport," to "Homer," and finally, in the last few, to "Your adoring Daddy," his grin turned a bit pinched, faintly embarrassed. All the letters had been written from a Chicago hotel during the previous summer and the contents painted a masterpiece of a solid citizen on the loose. It was a little nauseating to see what a sap a decent guy like Davenport could become when he started carrying the torch for a tramp.

O'Hara slid the prints back into the envelope, stuck the envelope under his belt at the front of his hard, flat belly, pulled his vest down. The packet made no noticeable bulge.

His wrist-watch told him he still had

twenty minutes before the end of Inez Dana's last number, so he spent ten of them shaking down a tiny kitchenette, found nothing that seemed to mean anything.

At eighty-twenty he put out the lights, stood in the darkness a moment, patting the packet over his stomach and thinking. He knew he had something but how it might tie in with the death of Johnny Lawton he didn't know. At least the letters could be used as a lever to make Davenport do some talking; they had that much value.

He padded across to the door, opened it quietly and stepped without any attempt at concealment into the mellow light of the hallway.

A hand went around his arm. The hand belonged to Detective Shuford and Shuford jerked O'Hara around to face him. His round pink face had an expression half-way between glee and anger. He crowed, "Thanks for walking out into my mitts, O'Hara. I was just coming in for you."

Councilman Davenport, with a stray end of his long lock lopping out at the side of his fedora, stood beside Shuford and the manager, Kerr, stood just behind the Councilman. Kerr's face wore its usual mask of impersonal amusement but Davenport looked uneasily at O'Hara, at Shuford, and opened and closed his hands nervously. O'Hara said nothing.

"I had a hunch," Shuford gurgled, "you still had ideas about pushing Miss Dana around. So when I get here a few minutes ago, I ask the check girl if she's seen anybody looks like you. So she says a guy that looked like you sneaked up the stairs here a while back. So it's burglary and will I get a kick out of sticking you away!"

Davenport shook his head. "This is very serious, O'Hara. I could scarcely believe Lieutenant Shuford was in earnest when he came to my table, told me his suspicions and asked me to be a witness. I must confess I'm shocked."

O'Hara shrugged. He had his poise back after a very disquieting jolt. He said, "Don't let it get you down, Councilman. Of course, Otto's disappointed in me, too, but he'll get over it."

Shuford tightened his grip on O'Hara's arm, clipped, "I'll be disappointed if you don't get one to ten out of it."

Kerr drawled, "You've got yourself in a sweet mess, Irish. If you wanted to clown around why didn't you come to me? You could have had the keys for the joint. After all, I've got the whole place under lease and I'd have let you prowl around as much as you wanted."

"I'll bet," O'Hara said.

"I'm not kidding," Kerr said gravely. "You seem to have it in your nut that there was something sour about what happened to Lawton last night. That attitude isn't apt to do my business any good and if I can help you get over the idea, I'll do it."

Shuford growled, began to manhandle O'Hara toward the stairs and O'Hara flexed his arm, twisting Shuford's grip off slowly and without too much visible effort.

He said, "Grow up, Otto. If you insist, we'll go down and see Inspector Blane."

"Blane, your eye!" Shuford's neck bulged with anger but he didn't put his hand on O'Hara's arm again. "Your first stop is a cell over at the Westwood station. You newspaper guys get away with a lot but I'll prosecute this case clear to the grand jury if I have to. Get going!"

O'Hara said nothing, walked down the stairs between Shuford and Davenport. At the foot he leaned over, said under his breath into the Councilman's ear. "Maybe you'd use your influence to get me out of this, daddy. Or maybe I ought to say, adpring daddy."

The Councilman jumped as though O'Hara had rammed a pin into the seat of his pants. He fixed O'Hara with the shocked, wounded gaze of an animal in pain.

Shuford said, "What? Hey, what'd you say, O'Hara?"

He glared at Davenport, at O'Hara suspiciously, and O'Hara grinned and said, "You're too young to know, Otto. Let's go."

Davenport tried to keep the flutiness out of his voice but didn't quite succeed. "Yes, I—I'll see what can be done for you, O'Hara."

"Now, Councilman," Shuford said plaintively, "you know I got the goods on this guy and it ain't right to—"

Kerr's face was amused, impersonal but he said, "Let's talk this over in my office. After all, Lieutenant, there's no big rush to throw O'Hara into jail. I understand they keep the jails here open all night."

Davenport put his hand persuasively on Shuford's arm. He said, "Yes—yes, I'd suggest you—we all talk this thing over."

Shuford said doggedly, "It ain't going to do no good to talk it over. I caught this guy burglarizing Miss Dana's apartment and I know she'll sign a complaint. That's all there is to it."

"You'd better find out if she'll sign a complaint, hadn't you?" Kerr said smoothly. "Wait in my office and I'll call her."

Shuford grumbled, hesitated, but finally herded O'Hara after Kerr and the Councilman. They went through the dining-room, down the corridor that led to Kerr's office.

Inside the office, Joe Rockley, the press agent, was sitting with his heels hooked on Kerr's desk and a highball and a sandwich in his hands. This time the sandwich was ham and cheese but otherwise Rockley looked as though he hadn't moved since O'Hara had left him there the night before.

He raised fluffy eyebrows, said languidly, "Hey, hey, gentlemen. What ho?"

Nobody answered him for a moment and he said, "Anything wrong, O'Hara? You don't look happy and if you can't be happy at the Barcelona, you can't be happy anywhere. Our slogan."

O'Hara grinned. "Nothing the matter with me. It's our Detective Lieutenant—he's having delusions, among them the delusions that I'm a burglar and that he's going to slam me in jail."

"No!" Rockley said. "Lieutenant, didn't you ever hear that you can't arrest newspaper men?"

Shuford swung, poked a stiff forefinger at Rockley. He said between his teeth, "Get outa here, funny guy. Scram!"

Rockley's face lost its grin. He got up. Going toward the door, still clutching his sandwich and highball, he said to O'Hara, "I thought you were kidding. It seems you weren't. Anything I can do or anybody I can call for you?"

Shuford snarled, "I said scram!" and aimed a foot at the seat of Rockley's pants.

Rockley avoided the kick. Going out the door, he sighed, "Tsk, tsk, such a disposition."

Kerr got out a box of cigars, opened them on his desk. But nobody took any and Kerr said, "Maybe I'm going out of my way to mess in this but, after all, it's my spot and my success depends a lot on the kind of publicity I get. Pinching O'Hara out here, Lieutenant, won't help my relations with the newspapers."

"To hell with the newspapers," Shuford growled. "Get Miss Dana and when she says she'll sign a complaint, I'll take the responsibility off your shoulders."

Kerr lifted his eyebrows, went to the door. At the door he turned, said, "Maybe a drink might oil things up. What'll you have, Lieutenant?"

"Nothing."

"Don't be like that. What'll it be?"

"Well—hell, make it sherry and bitters."

"O'Hara?"

"You can make mine an old-fashioned."

"Nothing for me, please," Davenport said.

Kerr went out. O'Hara slumped in the big, leather chair by the desk. Shuford watched him sulkily. After a moment Davenport took the detective's arm, moved him off to a corner of the office. The Councilman talked in a low voice, with movements of his eyebrows, his hands. Shuford said only a little and that little very stubbornly.

He was still looking stubborn when Kerr came back, carrying a tall, curved glass of buttermilk. Inez Dana, wrapped in a huge shawl and nothing else, came in after him.

Kerr said, "I've explained things to Miss Dana, Lieutenant. She, like me, believes it would be foolish to sign a complaint."

Inez Dana looked frightened. She batted her brown eyes at Shuford who had become a photograph of indignation.

He growled, "She can talk, can't she? Where do you get off telling her what to say?"

Kerr shrugged, stood out of the way.

Shuford said, "Do your own talking, Inez. You're going to sign a burglary complaint against this guy, aren't you?"

Inez Dana paled, shook her head very slowly.

"Listen, baby," Shuford said, almost pleadingly, "I caught this guy prowling your place. You gotta sign a complaint against him—it's burglary."

The girl didn't look at O'Hara, at any of the others. She moved close to the bulky lieutenant, said, "Please, Otto. If I do what you ask, I'll have all the papers down on me. I—we don't want that, do we? Think of my career, please!"

A waiter came in with a tray that held sherry and bitters, an old-fashioned. He saw Shuford's red, raging countenance, put the tray down on the desk in a hurry and got out.

Shuford suddenly banged his fist on the desk. He said in a choked voice, "All right, Inez, I get it. You think you'll lose your job if you press charges against this guy. So run along, you're out of it. Go on, run along."

Still looking scared, Inez Dana turned, went out the door, trailing a corner of the voluminous shawl after her.

"Maybe I'm dumb," Shuford said viciously toward Kerr, with a sidewise flick of his eyes to include O'Hara. "I can't figure why you guys are so anxious to front for this punk of a news-hound and I'm not going to bother to guess. But dumb or not, I'm a copper and I don't scare. I've got plenty of evidence to back up a burglary charge against O'Hara and I'll sign the complaint myself. How do you like that, O'Hara?"

"Not much," O'Hara admitted. He reached over, got the old-fashioned from the tray. He put half of it down his throat, didn't like the taste of it a great deal and set the glass back on the tray.

"And you won't like it a lot more when you're standing in front of a judge," Shuford clipped.

He looked as though the prospect had put him in a better humor. He picked up the glass of sherry and bitters, drained it at a gulp, snapped to O'Hara, "Come on, then. I'm taking you in—complaint or no complaint."

A SHINY new sedan with a police sneak license on it was in the parking lot. Shuford wedged under the wheel, motioned to the seat beside him. He scowled at O'Hara.

"And no capers, Irish."

The detective and O'Hara rolled out of the parking lot, rolled past O'Hara's coupé. He caught a glimpse of Tony Ames in the dark interior and then they were on their way.

Shuford's driving was cautious even when it wasn't raining. He sirened his way, always, even on routine errands, and sometimes when he was in a particular hurry he got up to forty. But at forty he made more siren noise than most police drivers made at seventy. He pulled the siren cord as he turned into Palms Boulevard and kept its eery

scream going as he ambled along through the rain at thirty-five.

O'Hara hummed a tune that was no tune, wondered how long it would take him to pull wires that would change Shuford's mind on the pinch, wondered also what to do with the prints meanwhile. If Shuford insisted on booking him at the Westwood station, he'd be searched in the desk sergeant's office and he didn't want to let Shuford or even Blane know about them until he'd had a chance to use them as pressure on Davenport.

After a while, under cover of his floppy trenchcoat, he managed to slip them from beneath his vest. He rammed them down behind the seat cushion. He was still humming. The portion of the old-fashioned he had swallowed was throbbing along in his veins. He began to feel soothed and comfortable and unworried.

Shuford yawned, said, "Will you skip the music? What have you got to sing about?"

"I don't know," O'Hara said. He yawned, also. "I just feel like singing, that's all. Say, Otto, are you really nuts about this Dana girl?"

Shuford yawned tremendously. "What's it to you?"

"I'm a friend of yours, you poor mugg."

"You can't gab your way outa this."

"Let it go," O'Hara shrugged. He slid down in the seat, drowsily comfortable.

The police car veered to the left, cut across the white center line of the boulevard. Shuford's hand came off the siren cord. He swore dully, hauled the car back to the right. The car began to slide off toward the right. This time Shuford didn't pull it back. His foot slid off the accelerator.

The car kept going off to the right. One front wheel mounted the curb, seeming to take a very long time to do it. O'Hara groped for the steering wheel but his hand didn't seem part of him and, anyway, he couldn't find the wheel. The car went on across the sidewalk. There was a telephone pole directly in front of the radiator and the car finally plowed into the pole in what seemed to O'Hara a very leisurely fashion.

He saw Shuford pitch over the wheel, smack the shatterproof windshield with his forehead and then slide back into the seat. The shock tumbled O'Hara downward and forward, wedged him against the instrument board without apparently hurting him.

He yawned, said to himself, "Funny, very funny."

Then a part of his brain, but only a part of it, came alive and he knew it wasn't funny. He crawled up to the seat, managed to open the door and get out into the cold lash of the rain. The wetness on his face revived him a little and he weaved around, fighting drowsiness and trying to get a hand into his pocket. He got the hand in finally, pulled out cigarettes. He got one lit after a struggle against the rain, against the lethargy that was overpowering him.

When he had a hard, red coal glowing at the end of it, he stiffened himself, suddenly jammed the coal against the back of his left hand.

Fine wires of pain shot up his arm, kept on traveling to his brain, cleared mist out of it. The tide of drowsiness receded and he began to swear vividly and with feeling. The rubber went out of his knees and cold, damp air, flooding into his lungs, felt refreshing, delicious.

He started to walk away from the police car and then turned on his heel and went back. Poking his head in, he saw Shuford. The detectives head lolled back against the seat and rasping snores came from his gaping mouth. O'Hara grinned sleepily. He found the packet of prints back of the seat, put them under his belt again and went away.

He walked toward the city, toward a spot three blocks away where lights blazed against the rainy darkness. When he was a block from the wrecked car, he heard the squeal of brakes behind him.

Looking back, he saw a light-colored car had stopped by the police car. He still had his head turned over his shoulder when a man got out of the halted machine, walked in front of the lights. The man was big and thick-shouldered and even at that distance O'Hara could see that his profile against the car lights was almost flat, exactly like the gorilla who had held O'Hara up.

O'Hara whipped up the tempo of his stride, lengthened it. When he got to the cluster of lights, they proved to be a drive-in-market, a liquor store, a drugstore. He went into the drugstore, put both hands on the marble counter of the fountain to hold himself up.

He said hoarsely to the pimply-faced soda jerker, "Coffee."

"Coffee?"

"Black and hot."

He drank three cups of bitter, scalding fluid. Sweat popped out on his forehead. His head began to clear, the fuzzy feeling left his muscles. He bought a tube of salve to smear the cigarette burn on his hand, tossed change on the counter, went toward the front door.

When he got within five feet of the door he stopped. A light tan sedan that he had seen before was swinging into the space in front of the drive-in market. O'Hara spun, went back past the soda fountain fast.

Passing it, he said, "Back door?"

The pimply-faced soda jerker pointed dumbly toward a door marked: *Prescription Department.* O'Hara went through that door, past a startled man in a white coat and out a rear door. He skirted the long, dark wall of the building, crossed a vacant lot and came out on the boulevard a block west.

He walked for three blocks, keeping an eye over his shoulder. He didn't see the tan sedan. A cab came swishing through the wet toward town and O'Hara angled into the street, waved an arm, yelled. The cab slowed, made a U-turn and came back.

Climbing in, O'Hara said, "Club Barcelona."

RAIN was coming down in a fine drizzle that dewed O'Hara's face as he plodded, heavy-footed, down the block on the opposite side from the club. From under the brim of his hat, he checked parked cars the length of the block and didn't find his coupé and Tony Ames.

He checked again to make sure and then stood for five minutes in front of a darkened real estate office, his hands sunk deep in his coat pockets, his shoulders hunched. His face was sour, uneasy. He wasn't too much worried. She'd probably seen Shuford carting him away and, herself, had gone to see what could be done about unjamming him. But he wasn't entirely unworried. Peculiar things had been happening around the Barcelona and he'd have felt better if he'd known just where she was. Once he moved as though to cross the street to the Barcelona and then changed his mind. He looked perplexed, was perplexed.

He didn't want to barge in half cocked; wanted to go straight to the man who'd drugged him.

He thought he was shaping up a fairly clear picture of things. Those letters of Davenport's spelled blackmail and Johnny Lawton had stumbled onto the plot, been blasted out of its road for his pains. It hadn't been obvious at first who, besides Inez Dana, was involved but the loaded drinks looked like the tip off on that. Kerr had suggested the drinks, undoubtedly had needled them when he left his office to summon Inez Dana.

The one thing that messed up the picture was the shot that been been fired in Inez Dana's apartment while Johnny Lawton was in there alone. Even that might be cleared up if he could get somebody to talking. The letters ought to start Homer A. Davenport talking in a hurry. However, he'd have to corner Davenport alone, not in the Barcelona.

At ten minutes after nine Inez Dana came out of the Barcelona. She stood for a moment under the arched sign, looking up and down the street. Then she set off, away from the boulevard, nice legs setting silk folds of her raincoat swaying, a small bag in her right hand swinging with her stride. O'Hara chewed his upper lip a moment, watching her speculatively. Then he turned, began to follow her, keeping well back and across the street from her.

She walked steadily, swiftly, looked around only once. At the first corner she turned to her right, went east along a lonesome, gloomy side street. There was a car line three blocks away in that direction. O'Hara increased his pace, got well ahead of her in the darkness. When he was a block ahead, he crossed the street and turned back.

There was a lonely blob of street light on a tall pole at the car stop. It pointed vague fingers through the darkness, and one of them touched the figure of Inez Dana coming toward him.

O'Hara bore down on her, saw her slow and hesitate. He walked faster. She stopped and turned and O'Hara made the last ten feet fast.

He got a hand on her arm, said, "Wait a minute, Miss Dana."

She was frightened, trembling. She breathed, "You!"

"Me, your old pal."

Even in the dim light, her face was beautiful, appealing with its wide panic-stricken brown eyes, the round O of moist lips. He could see the sleek curve of her bosom palpitating under her raincoat. It left him cold, untouched; but a small corner of his mind wondered if perhaps he hadn't been all wrong from the start, if perhaps Johnny Lawton hadn't gone overboard about this ensemble of curves and eyes.

They stood there a moment. Her voice was stronger when she said, "What do you want?"

"Answers to some questions. The right answers."

She was silent but she seemed less frightened than she had been. O'Hara reached down with his free hand, took the grip from her. She clung to it for a moment, let it go under his stronger tug. He said, "Why not let me carry it? Always a gent, Miss Dana, no matter who it hurts."

He started her back toward the boulevard firmly, not roughly.

"Where are you taking me?"

"I haven't figured that out yet. Give me time." He smiled down at her without humor. "But it'll be some place where we can talk. And where you'll have to postpone your notion to lam, to get out from under. That's the idea you had, isn't it?"

Inez Dana snapped. "I don't know what you're talking about. And what makes you think I'll go with you?"

O'Hara made his voice velvety. "Just one thing—because I'll smack the daylights out of you if you don't. I've never tried that on a woman before but I've seen a lot of movies lately and the way the heroes smack the ladies around has given me ideas."

She tried to wrench her arm away and O'Hara bit down with his fingers.

Her voice shook a little when she said, "You're hurting me!"

"That, you female tornado," O'Hara said, "was for nothing at all. So be nice."

Privately, he wondered what he would do if she got difficult; but for half a block she trotted along beside him.

Then she said, "I can't walk so fast. Please!"

He slowed down a little and she said in a ghost of a voice, "If I were to tell you something, would you—"

"Would I what?"

"I'm frightened, terribly frightened. You d-don't know the terrible danger I'm in. There's something I've been wanting to tell ever since that horrible moment but if I do—" She shuddered walked closer to him, lifted her face piteously. "No, no, I can't. I don't want to die! I don't want to die."

O'Hara said earnestly, "Forget it,

Miss Dana. If you've got the sort of information I think you have, you can spill it and nobody will so much as make faces at you. Blane's a pig headed, hard-to-convince copper but a swell guy to have on your side. And the Tribune, too, will take plenty care of you. Now tell me, Johnny Lawton didn't commit suicide, did he?"

They stopped, facing each other. She looked up at him, breathed, "You're sure you'll protect me?"

"Absolutely."

"Then I'll show you something." She began to fumble at the buttons that held the silk raincoat snug across her breasts and O'Hara let go his hold on her arm. "I was running away from that h-horrible place with its—"

She got the coat open and one hand went into the bosom of her dress. The hand came out and it held a nickeled gun, a small gun. The barrel glittered, picking up gleams from the faraway street light. She backed away from O'Hara several steps.

O'Hara said sourly, "It was a swell act." He moved his feet a little.

Inez Dana said with sharpness in her voice, "Don't try it." She held the gun firmly, easily, in front of her stomach. "If you make me do it, I will."

"I believe you would."

"You know I would." All the helpless femininity of her voice was gone, leaving it hard, slightly husky and mocking. "You don't think I'd let some scummy reporter push me around, did you? After all, I've played with some really hot numbers in my day. Now put that bag down on the ground and beat it toward the boulevard."

O'Hara dropped the bag. It thudded on the sidewalk and Inez Dana cursed him expertly. She said, "If you've broken my perfume at fifty dollars an ounce—"

"I wish I'd broken your neck."

She jeered at him. "You should have thought of it sooner."

"Next time I will."

"It'll be a long time before you locate my neck again." The distant rumble of a street car came faintly, then grew louder second by second. She moved the gun a little. "Now, if you please, small change, I'm in a hurry. Get going and make it fast. If you don't I'm going to take a shot at you and, if I say it myself, I'm not a bad shot."

O'Hara turned, started. He went a hundred feet, looked over his shoulder. Inez Dana had the bag in her hand but she was still watching him and the gun, a glimmer of light in her hand, still covered him. He lagged another hundred feet, looked back again. The girl was running toward the car stop. She had a three hundred foot lead on him but he turned, got under way after her.

The car, a row of flying yellow oblongs in the darkness, slowed for the crossing. The motorman caught sight of her signaling arm, slammed air on. O'Hara saw her reach for the rail of the rear platform, saw a husky conductor grab her arm, haul her aboard while the brakes were still chattering. O'Hara was still a hundred feet away in the darkness when he heard the air cut off with a swoosh and the car churned into motion again.

'HARA took four minutes to run the four blocks back to the Club Barcelona. His heels hit the pavement solidly, his mouth had a chagrined thinness, his eyes were hard. He was sore, mainly at himself for falling for a gag as moss grown as the one the girl had pulled on him; and, being sore, he'd decided he was through with finesse, through with playing around on the fringes of this thing and making guesses.

When he got to the club entrance, he right-wheeled and went into the foyer, past the hat-check girl like a gust of ill wind on the way to do nobody any good.

As he passed through the dining-room, he didn't see Davenport nor did he see Kerr. He got to the door of Kerr's office and went in.

Kerr wasn't there but Joe Rockley was. He had a drink in his hand but this time no sandwich. He looked surprised at first; then his pink face creased into a grin.

He said, "Either it's that last drink I had or else I need another. I could swear it's O'Hara but I know O'Hara is in the can."

"Where's Kerr?"

"Around some place. What's the idea, Irish? Shuford change his mind about tossing you in the clink?"

"Somebody changed it for him," O'Hara said. "Listen, Rock, you've been making a big play about helping me if I needed it."

"Sure. And, oddly enough, I meant it. What can I do?"

"Get Kerr in here quietly for me without letting him know I'm here. And if Councilman Davenport is still around, get him to come in also."

"Davenport went home just after you and Shuford left." Rockley put his drink down on the desk, stood up from the leather-padded chair. "You sound like bad news for somebody." Rockley hesitated. "After all, Ken, I work for the guy, among my other odd jobs. He's bread and butter to me."

"If you know which side of the slice to spread the butter on," O'Hara said, "you'll play ball with me and the Tribune. Do you get him?"

"If you put it that way."

Rockley went toward the door, running one hand through the fluffy blond hair. When he was almost to the door, O'Hara said, "Wait, Rock. You got a gun?"

"Woh-oh," Rockley said. "Now it's guns."

"Have you got a gun? If you have, lend it to me."

"I haven't," Rockley said. But after studying O'Hara's hard-angled face for a moment he came back to Kerr's desk, opened a drawer and pulled out a snub-barreled .32, handed it over. He said, "Kerr's rod. I hope you know what you're doing, Ken."

"If I don't," O'Hara said, "I'm on the way to learning. Now make it snappy."

O'Hara slipped the gun into his trenchcoat pocket, moved so that he was out of sight from the doorway. Three minutes went by and Kerr came into the office. Rockley followed him only as far as the threshold.

When he saw O'Hara, Kerr looked as surprised as had Rockley. He said after a little pause, "Shuford got some sense, eh? Glad to know that."

"Sit down, Kerr," O'Hara said.

Rockley was looking pained and uneasy. He murmured, "Be seeing you guys," and moved back out of the doorway, vanished.

Kerr sat down slowly, his eyes on O'Hara and his smooth dark face wary but not particularly alarmed. He said, "What's on your mind, Irish?

"Murder," O'Hara said.

"Still got notions Lawton was murdered, eh?"

"And about ready," O'Hara said, "to have a showdown on my notions."

"Go ahead. It should be interesting. How can it be murder and who did it?"

"I'm not so sure about the how. But about the who — well, I probably wouldn't have to move over six feet to smack that guy in the puss."

Kerr's lips parted under the spiky mustache. He looked blandly amused. "And what makes you think I murdered him, if he was murdered?"

O'Hara said, "I should spend a lot of time horsing around with you. When I get you and Davenport and Blane together, I'll toss my cards on the table."

He put his hand out for the phone and Kerr said, "Wait a minute, O'Hara. You've pointed a nasty finger at me, but I still think you're regular enough to tell me why, to give me a chance to defend myself before you go messing me up with the law."

He smiled faintly and O'Hara said, "O. K., I will. Lawton was murdered because he'd stumbled onto a plot to blackmail Councilman Davenport over some hotcha letters Davenport had written your strip dancer, Inez Dana. Somebody was working with Dana on the thing and that somebody has to be you."

Kerr's eyes were shining, curious. He said, "Why does it have to be me?"

"If it hadn't been you, you wouldn't have slipped bedtime drops in the drinks you set up for Shuford and me just before we left here a while ago."

Kerr sat up with a jerk. He clipped "Drinks? You mean those drinks were loaded?"

"Don't trot out the dramatics for me," O'Hara said. "You knew I'd found evidence in Dana's apartment of the plot against Davenport. You didn't want that evidence to get into Shuford's hands and you knew it would if I was booked. So you drugged our liquor, put out a hurry call for your hoodlums and sent them after us, figuring we'd pass out before we got to the Westwood station. Luckily I didn't like the taste of my drink so I got only half as much as Shuford and I snapped out of it when Shuford went to sleep and let the car bounce into a pole."

"I swear," Kerr said slowly, "you're wrong, O'Hara. I've got no hoodlums on my payroll and if those drinks were drugged, I don't know anything about it. Let me call in the bartender that mixed them and see what we can find out."

He stretched his hand toward the phone and then didn't complete the gesture. He said dully, "Hell, Fred took my order and he's gone off shift."

"Conveniently," O'Hara sneered. "So we'll get hold of Inspector Blane and then we'll go out to see Davenport."

Picking up the phone, keeping a sharp eye on Kerr as he dialed, O'Hara got the police department, asked for the homicide squad. Somebody at the homicide squad told him Blane was out eating and they didn't know where but he'd be back before long.

O'Hara said, "Thanks, I'll call him later," and broke the connection but didn't put the phone down. He said, "I've stuck to this Lawton thing, Kerr, because Johnny was a fellow newshound and I felt sorry for him and his family to have him go out tabbed as a woman-crazy suicide. If I can fix it so you'll hang for that, swell and we'll call it quits. But there's something else. A young lady pal that came out here with me earlier is very peculiarly missing. If there's something sour about that and you're tangled up with it, that's personal and they'll have to nurse you back to health in order to hang you."

Kerr said blankly, "I tell you, O'Hara, you're on the wrong foot all the way through."

"We'll see."

O'Hara dialed the Tribune, got the operator. He said, "This is O'Hara, Miss Cuddebach. Any calls for me?"

"Just a minute, Mr. O'Hara." When she came back on the line, she said, "A Mr. Daffelbaum called. He wants to know if you'll fix a traffic tag for him."

"The next time he calls, say that I won't. Anything else?"

"Miss Ames has called twice, wanting to know if you'd called."

O'Hara's face lost some of its grimness. He said, "Tell her I have."

"If she calls again, where shall I tell her you are?"

"Tell her I'm going to call on a guy named Davenport. And thanks, Miss Cuddebach."

He hung up, said to Kerr, "The girl friend's O.K. and that makes you lucky. Climb under your bonnet and let's go."

Kerr, shrugging, stood up and got his hat from a rack in the corner. O'Hara slipped the snub-barreled .32 out of his pocket, showed it briefly.

He said, "You'll drive us in your car. And don't try any fast ones. I won't hesitate to shoot your knees out from under you."

Kerr looked at the gun, got a little of

his impersonal amusement back. He said, "My gun? Oke, O'Hara, I'll try no fast ones."

KERR turned the streamlined nose of his big car down a winding, tree-bordered drive in the Brentwood Hills district. He said, "I'm not sure. I think it's somewhere down here our councilman lives."

"It is," O'Hara said. "Fourth house on the right."

The house, of Georgian architecture, wasn't large as houses in that neighborhood went but it was elegant and spic and span in back of a white picket fence. There were lights on behind drawn shades, a porch light that shone amber in a decorative hanging lantern. When Kerr eased the car to the curb, O'Hara stepped out, stood beside the door with his hand against the butt of the gun in his pocket until Kerr climbed out. Kerr hadn't argued, had hardly spoken since they'd left the Barcelona.

They went through a white gate, up a brick walk to the porch. O'Hara dug his left thumb into the bell-push. He rang three times and after the third ring footsteps inside came toward the door.

O'Hara had expected to see the face of a maid, perhaps of a butler. The house was staffed with servants, he knew; instead, when the door eased back, he found himself looking at the ruddy countenance of Councilman Davenport. Only now it was not quite so ruddy, not so jovial or friendly.

Davenport looked surprised and shaken but he managed to say, "Well, well, O'Hara."

"You only think it's well, Councilman," O'Hara said. "I've just finished talking with Kerr and now I'd like to come in and go on from there with you."

Davenport still blocked the doorway. He began to stammer, "No, O'Hara, n-not now. Later, if you d-don't mind."

While Davenport was choking on words, O'Hara motioned Kerr in ahead, stepped in on his heels. The hallway was square, big, furnished in softly polished maple.

There was a phone in a niche and O'Hara said, "I'll use your phone first, thanks."

He got the .32 out, backed to the phone and kept an eye on both Kerr and Davenport while he lifted the phone from its cradle with his left hand, used the index finger of his left hand to pick out the letters and numerals of the police department number on the dial.

Kerr leaned, dark and unsmiling, against the wall and Davenport shambled down the hall, didn't bother to close the door.

He quavered, "What is this, O'Hara? What are you doing? How dare you break into my home in this manner?"

"I'm calling Inspector Blane at the moment," O'Hara said. "If, when he gets out here, you still think you've got a case of trespass against me, he'll know what to do about it."

He dialed the last number and Inez Dana's voice said from behind curtains at an archway, "Put that phone down, O'Hara! And your gun!"

O'Hara couldn't see her. He could see the shiny muzzle of a revolver poking rigidly from a gap in the curtains but he couldn't tell whether she'd be to the right or the left of the muzzle.

His left hand slowly dropped the phone back into its cradle and his right hand lowered, let the gun fall out of his fingers. It bounced off a throw rug onto wide, waxed boards and made an ugly scratch on the polished surface.

Inez Dana stepped out from behind the curtains. Her eyes were wicked, almost jet black. Her gun swung so that she could cover the three men in a general way.

"You just wouldn't stay out of it, O'Hara," she said nastily. "Now get in here, all three of you."

She backed out into the hall so that she could command the doorway and the three men and motioned at them with the gun.

O'Hara said jeeringly to Kerr, "Does it or doesn't it look as though little Inez meant to double-cross you and go south with the Davenport dough?"

"You're wrong, O'Hara, but I'd still like to get my hands on her," Kerr said softly.

"Get in that room," Inez Dana said through her teeth.

Davenport and Kerr moved, went past the curtains. O'Hara went in after them with Inez Dana's gun in the middle of his back.

The room, a long living-room, was mellowly lit by floor lamps. In a chair under one floor lamp Joe Rockley sat, his pink face smiling and his fluffy hair golden in the radiance of the lamp. A table beside his chair held a whiskey bottle, a siphon. Rockley was building himself a highball and he interrupted his task to nod genially at O'Hara.

"I didn't get here much ahead of you, at that," he said. "Just soon enough to have my wildcat friend here all primed to greet you. Ain't she a honey with a gun? I wish I could handle one like she does but they give me the jitters. I do better with my brain."

O'Hara swore back of his teeth, said, "Rock, you're a louse. I wouldn't have guessed you in this."

Rockley stayed cheerful. "You guessed plenty, Ken. So much that we've got to get our dough and shake the dust of this City of the Angels off our hoofs in a hurry. Councilman, we've mentioned fifty grand and it was supposed to be ready tonight. Suppose you turn it over and we'll be on our way."

Davenport rocked uncertainly from one foot to another, said, "I—it's in the safe in my study upstairs. I'll have to get it."

"Then get it," Inez Dana said with ice in her voice.

With the look of a beaten dog about him, Davenport turned and went out of the room. For two minutes O'Hara stood, looking at nobody, his eyes turned inward, his face abstracted and sour. Finally he said, "Rock, I repeat that you're a louse but you're a clever louse. How did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Murder Johnny Lawton and make it look like suicide?"

Rockley chuckled, sipped his highball. "If I told you, it'd spoil all the fun you'll have guessing. I'm admitting nothing. You know I was in Kerr's office when it all happened."

O'Hara said, "Maybe I can guess, at that."

Inez Dana spat out, "Will you shut your big yaps, you two? What the hell is keeping Davenport? If he tries a runout—"

She was nervous, getting more nervous by the moment. But her gun didn't waver.

"Don't worry about him, baby," Rockley said. "He knows better than to run out. And there's nobody in the house to touch off an alarm. He's sent the servants and the family out for the night. As for O'Hara, let him talk. He's a friend of mine and I've got a lot of things to thank him for. As for you, baby, slipping over here ahead of me.... You didn't have a double-cross in mind, did you, my sweet?"

The girl looked sullen but she didn't say anything.

O'Hara said slowly, almost absent-mindedly, "It was all there for me if I'd used my head, wasn't it, Rock? The fact that as publicity man for Station KGP, you might know something about radio. And that leather-padded chair in Kerr's office and the table-tennis bat you were fooling with when I dropped in there."

Rockley lost his grin a bit. Kerr looked puzzled, said, "This is all over my head, O'Hara."

"Do you happen to know, Kerr," O'Hara asked, "how they produce the effect of a gunshot on the radio?"

"No."

"I do. They can't use a gun, it'd blow out the tubes, so they smack a leather cushion with a flat stick. I think when we get around to checking up, Rock,

we'll find you borrowed a mike hook-up from KGP on some pretext."

Rockley, sweetening his highball, interrupted to say, "If I were admitting anything, Ken, I might admit you were getting warm."

"You had the mike hidden in Kerr's office. Where, Rock?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Rockley said, languidly amused. "However, if there had been anything like that around, a good spot for it would have been under the leather chair where a nimble guy could reach for it in a hurry if he needed something like that."

"Yeah," O'Hara said, "that would have been as good a place as any. With that point cleared up, Rock, the rest of it isn't hard to figure. Johnny Lawton had tumbled to your extortion plot against Davenport, perhaps not enough to print but enough to make it dangerous for you if he kept on digging. So you had to shut him up. By last night you had the mike hook-up wired to the radio in Dana's apartment. That wouldn't have been hard to arrange. You had the run of the club, the place is practically deserted until late afternoon, and these days nobody gets curious about wires tacked up here and there. So it was all set. Dana got Johnny up to the apartment, used some gag to get his gun from him and shot him through the head, the sound of the shot being covered by the swing band downstairs."

Rockley grinned over the rim of his highball glass. "What kind of cigars do you like, Ken?"

"Why?"

"I'll send you a box—from some far-distant place—if you can guess the rest of it. I understand the cops found by the paraffin test that Lawton had fired a gun and his prints were found on his rod. How d'you get around that?"

Inez Dana's bright brown eyes had been shifting venomously from O'Hara to Rockley, back to O'Hara again. She snapped, "Rock, you're a fool to keep blabbing like this."

Rockley chuckled. "Baby, with what O'Hara has already figured out, we're as good as hung if they ever catch us. And I like to watch O'Hara's mind work. He's one of the few really bright guys I've found in this town, outside of myself. Go ahead, Ken."

"Either Dana here knew," O'Hara said, "or else you'd told her that the cops might try the paraffin test on Lawton's hand to see if he'd shot a gun. So to cover that angle, she wiped her prints from the gun, got his dead hand around the butt and managed to pull the trigger while the gun was in that position. That shot went into the picture by the door. It would account for the positive reaction of Johnny's hand to the paraffin test, for his prints on the gun and for the bullet the cops found in the wall, the one that Johnny was supposed to have fired at Dana. Meanwhile you had everything set downstairs. When Dana ran down, you got ready for action. You timed it and when you were certain the witnesses were just outside the door of the apartment, you smacked the leather chair with the table-tennis bat. The mike picked up the sound. Dana's radio was probably turned on full and it came through the loud speaker with all the effect of a shot. Then you disconnected things at your end and sat back with everybody resting pretty except poor Johnny Lawton."

"I ought to be sore at you, Ken," Rockley said, still cheerfully. "If you didn't have such a nice set of brains, I wouldn't have to be powdering out of this fair burg. Ah, well, as some philosopher observed, life is very often like that."

"There's one thing I don't get," O'Hara said. "What made you send those two punks after me last night?"

"Not guilty. That was our girl friend here. She heard the fuss Shuford made about you taking some of Lawton's papers. She made an excuse to go down to her dressing-room when you went downstairs and put them on your tail.

However, I'd like to have credit for tonight's fast thinking. Luckily I'm somewhat of an insomniac and I'd just had a prescription filled and with me and I got a double dose into your drinks after the bartender put them out to be picked up by the waiter."

"Who were these punks?"

"That'd be telling," Rockley grinned. "They'll feel bad enough without being pinched when they find out I've gone places without them."

Dana said impatiently, "For God's sake, you love to talk, Rock. Go see what's holding up Davenport. I can watch these guys. We've got to get away from here."

Rockley took a big swallow of the highball and got out of his chair. He was less than half-way across to the door when the floor in the hall creaked to the tread of heavy feet in a hurry. Inez Dana swung her head a little and Rockley halted.

The curtains were swept aside by a big paw and Detective Shuford stepped between them. His face was red and his eyes were bloodshot and staring. If he saw anyone in the room except O'Hara he gave no sign of it. He had a long, blue-barreled revolver in his big hand and he bawled at O'Hara, "So I got you now, by Gawd. I'll learn you to slug me!"

O'Hara said, "Watch yourself!"

"You slugged me and knocked me out in the car. By Gawd, I'll learn you to pull that on me."

O'Hara saw Inez Dana's set, white face, the glitter of her dark eyes, the tightening of her trigger finger as she swung the gun around toward Shuford. He yelled at Shuford but the booming crash of her gun rode over his words.

Shuford staggered, caught at the curtain with his left hand. He seemed to see the girl for the first time and his voice didn't believe what he saw. He said, "Inez—you—"

He swayed toward her and she shot again, deliberately and with a vicious jerk of her mouth. Shuford pulled the curtain down on top of him, began to fall forward. He groaned thickly and his hands pawed blindly at the air, at the girl.

He still hung onto his gun and, pawing with it, he brought it down heavily on Inez Dana's chest. It sent her weaving back against the wall, stumbling and off balance.

Rockley cursed in a high, panic-stricken voice and started for the door. As he passed, O'Hara swung, connected with the pink jaw and Rockley did a cartwheel across Shuford's body out into the hall. O'Hara spun, threw himself toward Inez Dana who was pushing herself away from the wall, straightening up.

He got her by an arm, hauled at her and she went sliding across the room. Kerr had taken three steps toward Rockley who was scrambling to his feet in the doorway. The girl whirled into Kerr and both of them went down in a heap. Her gun jolted out of her hand, landed on Shuford's writhing figure and bounced out into the hall.

O'Hara went for it and Rockley went for it at the same moment. Their bodies tangled and O'Hara's foot struck the gun, kicked it a dozen feet way. Rockley wheeled out of O'Hara's arms, went to one knee, slid after the gun.

O'Hara let him. He'd seen the .32 he had dropped a few minutes before. It was almost at his feet and he bent, scooped it up.

He said, "Hold it, Rock."

Rockley had the other gun by that time and he began getting to his feet, grinning. He panted, "No good, Ken. Has a broken firing pin. Knew it when I gave it to you. Now get back in that room and we'll wind this up in a more friendly way. Go on."

O'Hara pulled the trigger, got only a click, and Rockley lifted his gun, said sadly, "If you insist, Ken."

From no more than a block away a siren bit into the night, wrapped its scream around them, went higher and higher. It jolted Rockley, confused

him for a bare second and O'Hara swung his arm, let the useless gun slide from his hand. It spun end over end at Rockley, caught him between the eyes, put him out on his feet. Plunging at him with the same motion, O'Hara got a hand on Rockley's gun. Rockley hung onto the gun and O'Hara put his arm, his shoulder and his back into a punch that lifted the pink-faced man off his feet, jolted him into the corner of a long divan, put him out completely.

Behind O'Hara, Inez Dana cursed and choked and he swung around, saw her writhing and spitting and clawing in Kerr's arms.

Kerr said, "You're asking for it, babe," and back-handed her across the face hard.

She stopped struggling. Kerr half-carried her, half-shoved her across the floor and flung her down beside Rockley. She crouched there, sobbing wildly and suddenly wilted and cowed. O'Hara found handcuffs at Shuford's belt and tossed them at Kerr and Kerr cuffed Rockley and Inez Dana together.

Then he stood back, said in his impersonally amused fashion, "Some fun, O'Hara, some fun. Satisfied now that I'm pure?"

"As the driven snow," O'Hara said. "Sorry."

"Think nothing of it."

Davenport came down the stairs, step by step and slowly, a pale and very frightened man. His long lock lopped over his eyes but he was too terrified to think of patting it back in place. He tried to find words, managed to say, "I—I heard everything. O'Hara, I swear to you I didn't know Lawton's death was murder. I was—was—"

"The fall guy," O'Hara supplied. "Never mind that now, Councilman. Get on the phone, get cops, get an ambulance."

Davenport wavered toward the phone and over all of it the siren kept on screaming, not getting any closer, not letting up.

O'Hara pulled back Shuford's coat, his shirt. There was a blood-oozing crease across the man's belly muscles, a round bluish hole through the flesh just above the right hip. Shuford groaned and moved and O'Hara said, "Take it easy, Otto. You're not so bad off. Just take it easy."

He was still on his knees beside shuford when Tony Ames ran into the hallway from the porch. She said, "Ken, are you all right? What happened? What about that shooting?"

"You?" O'Hara said.

"Me."

O'Hara grinned. "I might have known it'd be you when I heard all that siren noise. You can turn it off now."

"First I want to have some hysterics. I've been staving them off ever since I heard that first shot."

"Where were you?"

"Just outside. When Shuford rode you off from the Barcelona I tried to follow in your car but the plugs must have been wet—I couldn't get it started for a while. I supposed he'd take you to the Westwood station so I took a short cut over there and you hadn't arrived. Finally an ambulance brought Shuford in unconscious and I went half frantic phoning around to see if I could locate you. They were working over Shuford and he'd just come to when I called the paper and the operator told me you'd said you were coming here. Shuford heard my end of the conversation and piled me into a police car and raced over here, all steamed up because you'd slugged him."

"I didn't, but let it go."

"Anyway, when we got here he told me to stay put in the police car. Naturally I didn't and I was almost up to the porch when that shot sounded. I didn't know just what to do, I didn't have a gun, so I ran back to the car, started the motor and tied the siren cord to the handbrake and let it rip."

"Good head," O'Hara said. "It saved the O'Hara epidermis, if you're interested."

"Don't mention it. I've always wanted to play with a siren anyway." Her eyes took in Rockley and Inez Dana, cuffed together. She said, aghast, "Ken, you don't mean that Joe Rockley—"

"Yeah," O'Hara said. "He and Dana thought up the whole caper. I'll tell you all about it later."

Shuford stirred, opened his eyes briefly. He said incredulously, "Inez! She shot me!"

"Take it easy, Otto."

Shuford said, "But Inez! Why did she—" He stopped, shook his head as though he couldn't figure things out. His fat, florid face was almost comical with its expresison of bewilderment and hurt. He said, "Why, I'd have given my life to help her."

Tony Ames sniffled suddenly. She said softly, "The poor guy, Ken, the poor guy. Ain't love hell?"

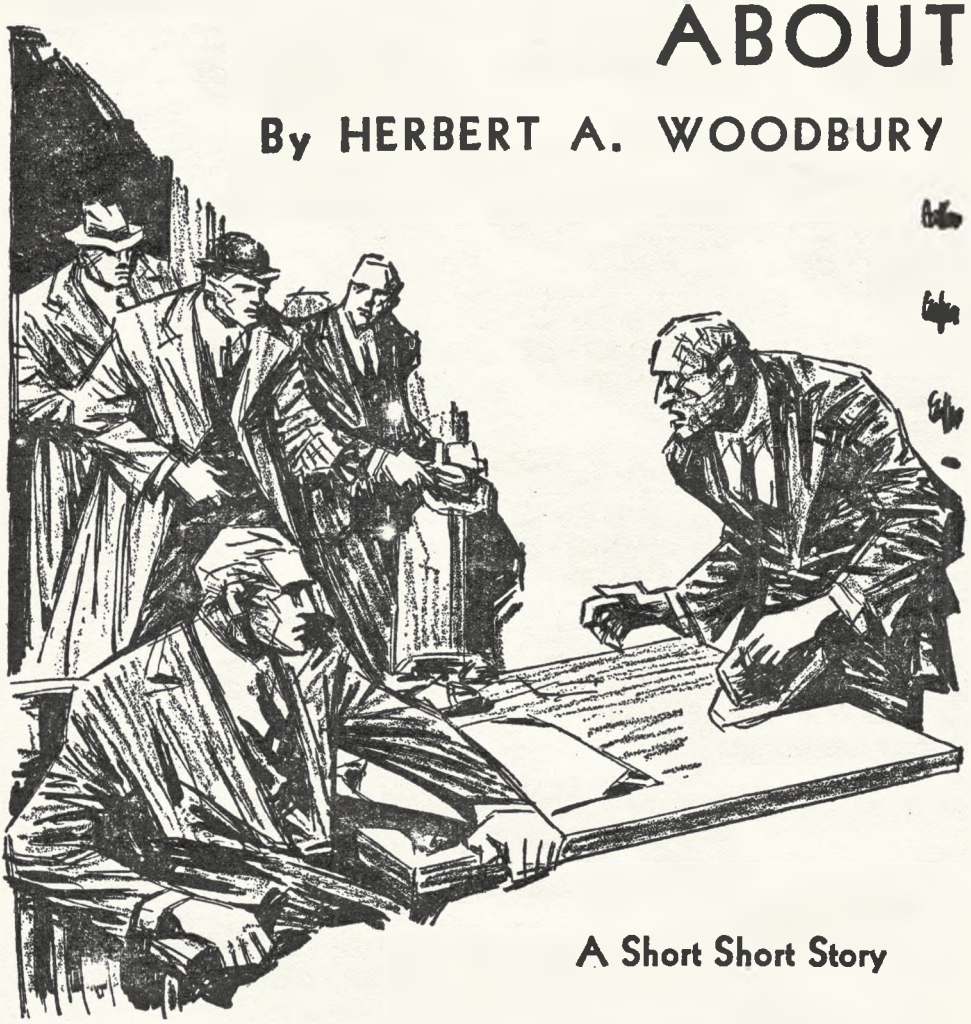
O'Hara looked up at her, smiling. The hard planes of his angular brown face weren't quite so hard.

"Sometime when I'm in the mood, my siren," he said, "I'll give you an argument on that."

"My country 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty—!"

NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT

By HERBERT A. WOODBURY



A Short Short Story

STANDING there, the last in line at the teller's grilled window, drably inconspicuous in his steel-rimmed spectacles and his baggy brown suit, Horatio Boggs kept telling himself over and over again that there was nothing to worry about.

If the crinkly, crisp, brand-new, twenty-dollar Federal Reserve note, the amount of which he had entered upon his deposit slip, didn't pass the muster of the teller's, Dan Meyers', eagle eye, why then Dan would confiscate the note, of course. But Dan, who'd been taking Mr. Boggs' deposits every Friday afternoon for twenty-four years, wouldn't guess for an instant that *he*, drab, dowdy little Mr. Boggs, possessed, hidden away in a safety deposit box, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two more such counterfeit twenties. No, there was nothing to worry about. Nothing at all.

Often, during the long years that he

had worked as a runner for Cameron and Calahan, Bonds, Mr. Boggs had been tempted. Again and again when he had been sent out to deliver fifty or a hundred or a thousand unregistered coupon Liberties, he had thought wistfully how easy it would be, simply to walk off with them; disappear. But it was a mood which had always passed. For Horatio Boggs had the prudence and the good sense to realize that it wouldn't really be easy at all. They'd broadcast his name; his picture. And eventually, in Tahiti, or in Honolulu, or in Bali—which the travel circulars called the last paradise—wherever he'd fled the detectives employed by the company which had insured the bonds against theft would find him.

No, he might dream. He might scheme and plot. He might occasionally pilfer postage stamps from the office till. But that was all.

And that might have continued to be all; that might have been a portrait of Horatio Boggs to the very end of his colorless and uneventful existence, had he not, on that fourth of July, driven to the Jersey shore.

He'd long since left Philadelphia and Camden behind him. The scrub pines had thinned out; the tang of salt had come into the air. He'd been approaching Fisher's Landing, when, abruptly, up ahead where a white cross arm said *Cross Crossings Carefully,* he had come upon sheer chaos and annihilation. A light sedan had been hit by a shore-bound express; reduced to a twisted mass. The train still blocked the crossing. The concrete was jammed with parked cars.

Applying the brakes of his coupé, turning off the ignition and carefully—very carefully and prudently—putting the key in his pocket, Mr. Boggs had joined the throngs of the curious. Worming his way into the front ranks of the crowd, he had reached the spot where two Jersey troopers in sky-blue uniforms were kneeling beside something half naked. Something quite terrible. Someone had said, "It's Terry Colt."

Mr. Boggs read the newspapers, of course. He knew who Terry Colt was. Terry Colt had commenced in the headlines in Prohibition days; he was out on bail, now, awaiting trial on the charge of smuggling aliens. But if there was any thrill to be found in gazing down upon a dead and mangled big shot, Mr. Boggs had left it abruptly to those with constitutions stronger than his own.

Nauseated, quite sick at his stomach, Mr. Boggs had turned away. Seeing for the instant in the death of Terry Colt, who had failed to cross a crossing carefully, simply a vindication of his own lifelong philosophy of prudence and caution, Mr. Boggs had wandered back along the tracks toward the road.

Here was a tire. Here a single spoke. There a tiny patch of blood-stained gray broadcloth. Here was Terry Colt's shoe, torn from his foot. And there—Abruptly, Horatio Boggs had come to a halt. There, trampled deep into the marshy grass, was something which looked very much like a bond house runner's leather wallet!

Then, upstairs in his room in West Philadelphia, after breakfast, the morning of the fifth, Mr. Boggs had sadly, and not deliriously as upon the day before, taken stock a second time of the contents of Terry Colt's wallet. He'd spread out upon his bed one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three twenty dollar bills.

Counterfeits! The story of Terry Colt's death had been in the morning *Inquirer.* Very early the morning of the fourth, it seemed, U. S. Treasury agents had raided an apartment in North Philadelphia. They'd arrested two men and a woman; confiscated copper plates for turning out counterfeit twenties and tens. Terry Colt, alone of those who had been in the apartment, had escaped. Flyers had gone out over the teletypes of four States. Later in the morning, a Jersey trooper had recognized Terry Colt at the wheel of his car; had given pursuit, and in his escape, Terry Colt had tried to push a train out of his way.

There wasn't any mention, of course, of a lost wallet. Because nobody knew that a wallet had been lost. Nobody, there in that excited and morbid crowd had seen drab, inconspicuous little Mr. Boggs swiftly tuck the leather case beneath his coat. He'd got away with it, all right. But what good had it done him?

He could see that Terry Colt's bills weren't genuine. The paper was thinner. Or was it, really? The ink seemed lighter. Or did it? What was it that the paper said about the confiscated plates? Why, it said that they were the work of a former U. S. Treasury engraver, and that had it been possible to use them with adequate ink upon at all adequate paper, they would have seemed perfect. Well, the paper and the ink would certainly have fooled Mr. Boggs. Ordinarily. Not now, of course. Not after he'd read that Terry Colt's latest illegal racket was counterfeit currency. But once. Yes, and—

Mr. Boggs wondered abruptly whether these bills wouldn't *still* fool a lot of people who didn't know where they'd come from. Look at them! Numbered consecutively like real bills. Nothing very miraculous about it, maybe. Any job printer who printed consecutively numbered tickets or sales slips could have superimposed those numbers upon the engravings of the bills. But it went to show, thought Mr. Boggs, the infinite care and patience and finesse which had been taken with the whole job. Suppose these bills would fool even an expert, like Dan Meyers at the bank? Why, then a man could spend all of them. With impunity. Couldn't he?

THE LINE there at Dan Meyers' grilled window moved on up. Telling himself not to worry—what was there to worry about?—if this sample bill taken at random from the lot didn't pass muster, he could convince Dan that he'd got it quite innocently, couldn't he? Mr. Boggs handed Dan Meyers his pass book and deposit slip.

An eternity passed. A million years.

Dan Meyers handed Mr. Boggs back his pass book, the deposit duly entered. Dan tossed the twenty into a pile of other twenties in a drawer. And Horatio Boggs stood there for a second, giddy, reeling!

Then his life-long prudence and caution asserted themselves. A uniformed armored car messenger who'd taken the place back of Mr. Boggs in line was stepping up to Dan's window. Horatio Boggs elbowed in ahead of the messenger again. But Dan hadn't even looked at that twenty! The possibility of Mr. Boggs handing him a note which was queer, hadn't even remotely occurred to Dan. Dan, carelessly, had accepted the bill without the slightest examination.

"Dan," said Mr. Boggs tremulously, "I wonder if you'd take a good look at that twenty I just— You see—" And now he was offering it gratuitously to Dan: the story he'd been going to tell Dan, if Dan challenged him. How he'd been having a beer in a taproom on South Broad. How the man next to him had offered the bartender a twenty which the bartender couldn't change. And then how he, Mr. Boggs, the Good Samaritan, had taken three fives and five ones from his own wallet, and . . . . "But I got to worrying about it afterwards, see? I read about this raid on a gang of counterfeiters out in North Philadelphia, and I —"

Was he talking too much, he wondered suddenly? Should he have hinted to Dan that he suspected the precise source of the bill? But no. No, he evidently hadn't been talking too much. Dan had good-humoredly picked up the bill again; and felt it, this time; scrutinized it; turned it over and scrutinized its other side. And Dan's expression hadn't changed. It was smiling good humor, still. As if Dan understood perfectly what must have gone on in the mind of timid fussy little old Mr. Boggs—the inevitable childish fears following the changing of the twenty for an utter stranger.

"As good as gold," Dan grinned.

Heart pumping wildly, head swimming in delirium, he left poor old Dan Meyers. Yes, poor old Dan Meyers—stuck there in his teller's cage, accepting deposits, cashing checks, making up factory payrolls and handing them out to uniformed messengers, to the end of his unexciting days. He, Horatio Boggs, was free!

And he *was* free. But, prudent, cautious, sensible always, he wasn't a damned fool about it. Some men would have dashed off to the South Seas carrying their fortunes, in cash, on their persons, and been robbed of it, or murdered for it in some native brothel. Not Mr. Boggs! Mr. Boggs realized that it would be far wiser to let the bank guard his fortune. And, prudent and cautious about that, too, he bided his time against the day when he could logically explain so large a cash deposit.

He let a week slip past. That following Friday, he cashed his weekly pay check from Cameron & Calahan, instead of, as he'd done for twenty-four years, depositing it.

"Going down to Bowie, Saturday afternoon," he said to Dan.

"And play the ponies?" Dan had his little joke.

"And maybe play the ponies," Mr. Boggs confessed. Because that was where he was going to be clever. He intended actually to commence frequenting the tracks. Actually to get a reputation as a gambler.

IX WEEKS drifted by. Mr. Boggs learned, for various considerations to various touts, that a sleeper was coming to life, today, in the third, or in the seventh. He learned that a maiden could be a gelding; was a horse which had never won a race; and not, as he'd always thought, a young filly. He learned what it meant to play 'em across the board. He lost and he continued to lose, but it didn't matter. He might be digging deeper and deeper into his savings of twenty-four years to finance these gambling expeditions. Wind of his bets and losses might have reached the ears of Mr. Calahan; and Cameron & Calahan might, regretfully, have discharged him. What of it? There was nothing to worry about. Sooner or later in the season, some horse was bound to win a race at odds great enough to make logical his story of an afternoon's winnings having been pyramided into thirty-seven thousand, two hundred and forty dollars. It'd be easy enough to pick a winner, when you didn't have to pick him until after the race was over.

Six weeks. Then, one afternoon, the favorites all trailed in a sea of mud. And a nag, fittingly enough named Liberty, galloped in, paying forty to one.

That next morning, Mr Boggs stood again at Dan Meyers' grilled teller's window, handing Dan one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two crisp, brand-new twenties. Heart in his mouth, he said, "Hit a nag named Liberty right on the nose. Had a hunch and I—"

Saying nothing, calmly accepting his story, Dan Meyers entered the deposit, thirty-seven thousand, two hundred and forty dollars, very neatly and without comment in Mr. Boggs' pass book. Mr. Boggs said good-by to Dan—to poor old Dan, plodding old wheel horse that *he'd* used to be, stuck there in his teller's cage for life.

He didn't see the bank guard trail him to Cameron & Calahan's. He was sitting in Mr. Calahan's private office, lording it over the boss who'd discharged him, condescendingly asking Calahan's advice on the safe investment of his winnings when Dan Meyers and a city detective and a Pinkham operative working for the Midland Insurance Co. came in.

Panic swept over Mr. Boggs. He made a leap for the far door. A shadow hurtled throught the air behind him. Strong arms locked 'round his knees, bore him to the floor with a crash . . . .

When he opened his eyes, he was lying on Mr. Calahan's couch. Dan Meyers was looking down at him. He glared back at Dan Meyers.

"And you knew all the time?" he asked Dan bitterly. "You accepted that first twenty just to give me confidence enough to bring the rest of them in to you?"

Dan colored sheepishly. "It'd make a good story, that way," Dan said, "me the amateur sleuth who encouraged you to— But I'm afraid I wasn't as clever as that. Nope, you fooled me on that first bill, Horatio. Took me in completely. I said, 'Good as gold' and entered it in your pass book, and it wasn't until today when you brought me in the other eighteen hundred and sixty-two of them that I realized what you were up to, six weeks ago. When you asked me to look that sample twenty over carefully, you were trying to find out whether it was hot. You wondered if I had a record of its serial number. And when I didn't pounce on it, you guessed there wasn't any such record. Only, there was, it happened. Been keeping such a record, every week for the insurance company, ever since the Philadelphia Distilling Co. hold-up two years ago.

"Well, as I say, that one bill got by me. You were so clever pretending you were afraid it was counterfeit, that that's all I examined it for; its genuineness. Didn't glance at its number. But today when you handed me eighteen hundred and sixty-two brand-new twenties—just one twenty less than the eighteen hundred and sixty-three twenties that were stolen when our armored car was knocked off on its way to the Philadelphia Distilling Company last June, I knew, then. It wasn't a hunch. It was a ton of bricks falling on me. I signaled a bank guard to follow you. I dived into my drawer for my list of the serial numbers of that week; I checked your deposit against my list, and—"

Only Dan Meyers' voice had blurred. Horatio Boggs sat there in a daze. Then the bills had been genuine all the time? Genuine, but so hot that Terry Colt had been afraid to try to pass them? He saw all of a sudden, what Terry Colt had been doing at the counterfeiters' apartment. He'd been trying to sell his roll at a discount. Men who shoved the queer would probably be equally able to shove the hot. Horatio Boggs sat there, sickness and nausea rolling up in him. He, he guessed, if he hadn't been quite so prudent and so cautious, could have taken those bills to some far city, and passed them, one at a time. Nobody'd ever have suspected drab, inconspicuous little Mr. Boggs any more than Dan Meyers had suspected him that first time. But now—

He guessed that he wouldn't hang for the murder of the uniformed messenger who'd died in the armored car hold-up, although a jury might *not* believe he'd *found* the money. He guessed that —for what he had left in his old savings account at the bank—he could hire a lawyer clever enough to persuade the jury of his innocence of everything except having been an utter damned fool. But he guessed that he'd never see Tahiti or Bali, the last paradise. Nope . . . Poor old Dan Meyers might. Poor old Dan Meyers who'd spent all his life making up factory payrolls, jotting down serial numbers, week after week, was probably due for a pretty nice reward. And he'd once condescendingly pitied old Dan, thought Horatio Boggs. Dan, who hadn't anything to worry about. . . .

SISTERS OF SATAN

By "UNDERCOVER DIX"

Cold facts from the archives of the International Association Chiefs of Police

IN THE lower and higher branches of criminal endeavor the "molls," or the ladies of the sub-strata, have given their male competitors some high marks at which to shoot. Regardless of gender, crime, like any other profession, is nearly one hundred per cent commercial, and in all commercial lines the ladies have been holding their own now for some little time.

The Gerald Chapman $5,000,000 mail truck robbery still is tops in swag for a single crime. No woman was even remotely concerned in this coup, yet, this record is clouded in shadows cast by feminine forms. As crooks the women can be counted on not only to play for high stakes but also to supply deeper interest by injecting a little emotion and sometimes wild hysteria into the game. To crime they add dashes of paprica in the nature of jealousy, envy, malice, greed, scorn, hate, vengeance and sometimes bloody murder. Capable no doubt, of deeper feeling, a woman is able to sink much lower than a man. However, there are feminine artists in crime who have held their heads and chins up to the last and a few who have succeeded in escaping arrest and amassing great fortunes. Picturesque creatures these women crooks. They use sex appeal and everything else they happen to possess in playing their game. It is a real tribute to the police to note that the majority of them get their just desserts sooner or later. When the eye-filling beauty of some of these molls is considered it is well that justice is a woman—and blind.

A quick survey of some outstanding women characters in the world of crime is surprising. Just offhand, there have been such dainty creatures as:

The woman blackmailer who could fell strong men with one blow of her fist. The woman "high mobsman" who carried to her husband, as a dowry, a bushel-basket of stolen diamonds and escaped arrest throughout her life. The woman keeper of a highly successful murder farm. And there have been innumerable peter women, panel women, badger women, and insurance swindlers, grifters, grafters, love pirates, tub workers and panderers.

There was even a famous and rich man's daughter who became a drug slave, went through several fortunes and died while serving as a lookout for a cheap mob of fur-loft prowlers.

Queer fish, these women crooks, and devilishly talented.

Cassie Chadwick, for instance, was an astounding character and the most successful woman crook of modern times. During her hectic life she garnered and spent a total of about $4,000,000 as nearly as can be computed. The total may have been more than Gerald Chapman's record of $5,000,000. There may have been victims who were able to cover or recover their losses without the police ever knowing that they had encountered Cassie Chadwick, bilker of bankers.

Besides being the author of the surest plan to swindle banks ever conceived, Cassie was a wanton, a pervert, a panderer, and a pest. She packed her life full of more unusual adventures than Catherine of Russia. She had her fun in freakish ways. In criminal annals Cassie stands out like a hair on a mole. Out of deference to a lot of decent families throughout New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and some other States, the names of Cassie's victims are omitted from this story. All of them were bankers, all were absolutely innocent and practically helpless victims and three of them are dead.

Cassie was born in Lorain, Ohio in a back-of-the-tracks neighborhood. Her father was a B. & O. railroad laborer and later a small-time gambler and card shark. Cassie's childhood was prankish and her maidenhood adventurous. She was in trouble in her early teens. Despite the fact that she was a heavy masculine type and was more forceful than attractive, even as a girl, she managed to sell what wares she had. Her parents were trying to square her case with the juvenile court when she joined up with a carnival show to fill a vacancy in the mitt joint. A mitt joint is a palmistry pitch or tent where fortunes are told by the alleged reading of the lines in the hand. Cassie told all comers that they would "live to amass riches" and have a "peaceful death in bed."

Somewhere during her carnival travels Cassie met John Chadwick and married him. He was a mild-mannered, meek, inoffensive little guy who made his living honestly enough as a lecturer for small amusement enterprises. These gentlemen are called spielers by tent-show folk and never barkers as is generally supposed.

Chadwick was a good spieler and did much for his wife's mitt joint. She had to pay a percentage of her gate to the carnival management and to save this percentage she soon left the carnival and started out on her own. Under the name "Madame Lorain" she worked her fortune-telling racket from small hotels and rooming houses. Her husband was her reception-room worker and general factotum. He swore in court that he knew his wife to be a seer and believed in her as such. He swore he never knew of her criminal activities and everyone who followed the case believed him. He attributed Cassie's growing and finally inordinate wealth to the gratitude of pleased patrons "among whom were many bankers."

As a matter of fact the bankers did not consult Cassie. It was Cassie who consulted the bankers.

BACK in Cassie's head was a big scheme—one of the biggest criminal schemes in all history. All her movements, all her operations, were building up to the fulfillment of a gilded dream which probably has no parallel in fact or fiction. The trail led her to Pittsburgh. She had a little money and was fond of giving parties to young girls. She introduced these girls to some male patrons and once or twice to bankers but her husband was counted out whenever there were girls around. He swore he sat in his own room at such times and listened to shrill, joyous, feminine screams, music and laughter.

Through one of her girls Cassie was able to meet a young man who worked as a clerk in a bank where Andrew

Carnegie, the multi-millionaire steel magnate, had an account. Cassie told the young man's fortune and promised him "great riches." "But," she added, "in order to get the spirits working in your behalf I should have some intimate token of some very rich man."

The dupe insisted that he knew no rich men except by seeing them enter the bank. "That's it," said Cassie. "You are where you will be able to get me a signature of Andrew Carnegie's and with this in my possession for only a few hours I can invoke the spirits to make you as rich as Andrew Carnegie."

This sounded good to the dumb young clerk and he pondered the matter. "Sure you can get the signature back to me in a few hours?" he questioned.

"Positively," agreed Cassie and she kept her word. The cancelled check bearing Andrew Carnegie's signature was in her hands only during a luncheon period protracted to about two and one-half hours.

How Cassie was able to get a blank letter-head from the president's office of Carnegie's steel corporation did not develop at the trial but she got it. On this letter-head she typed a letter—and what a letter—and by a shadowgraph process it bore the signature of Andrew Carnegie. The forgery was practically perfect. The letter was accepted in offices where copies of the steel magnate's signature and letters were on file. In fact Cassie sought just such places to work her wiles. All this lent credibility to her plot.

When it is remembered that Cassie had no feminine charms to aid her nefarious schemes, it must be realized that she was a very convincing talker. Her forged letter was even more convincing. The letter over Andrew Carnegie's signature made it practically impossible for a banker to refuse her a heavy loan. It placed the banker on his honor not to mention the incident and provided penalties.

Before presenting the letter Cassie would enter the office of a bank president and insist on confidence and privacy. Once alone with the bank president she would say bluntly: "I am the illegitimate daughter of Andrew Carnegie and I can prove it." Then she would flash the forged letter. It read in purport, as follows:

"This will introduce and acknowledge my unfortunate child, Cassie Carnegie-Chadwick, bearer of this letter. It must be realized by any bank official in whom she may confide that it is difficult at times for her to see me either to receive my consolation and advice or to obtain needed funds. It can be realized that I find it impossible to maintain a checking account for her. I will be responsible for any sums she might borrow or any business she might contract. Furthermore, I will do all in my power to aid the business aspirations of all who hold sacred her confidences. Anyone who should violate such confidence can expect me to immediately withdraw all business support."

That was all and it was plenty. The letter made it awkward for a banker to refuse Cassie a loan and it also made it seem business suicide for him to mention the matter to anyone at any time before or after the loan had been made.

Cassie, with a long face and a longer reach, visited banker after banker with that letter and borrowed all the traffic would stand. Sometimes the loans were from $100,000 to $250,000 and to some banks the amounts meant ruin in case Cassie's "beloved father" failed to make good the loan.

Cassie quit the fortune-telling racket and moved to Cleveland with her meek husband. Here she opened a large house —some thirty-six rooms—on the most fashionable thoroughfare. She surrounded herself with young girls with whom she staged queer and fantastic orgies. Twenty who fell into her easy ways were taken on a wild and extravagant tour of Europe. Chadwick went along and sat in his lone hotel rooms and "listened to the music, the feminine shrieks and the laughter."

The house in Cleveland was maintained for some years while bankers sweated, swore and prayed. One banker who threatened Cassie was coaxed to attend one of her parties. He was plied with wine and awoke beside a girl much too young. He did not remember ever having seen the girl before. Later he committed suicide as the doors of his bank were about to close.

The luxurious and ornate house in Cleveland was positively garish. Hundreds of thousands of dollars had been spilled into this place. The draperies and art pieces were expensive and rare and the furnishings lavish and extravagant. Twenty expensive pianos and as many beds were in that house. Cassie bought everything in the way of furniture and toggery that her girls admired. The house was cluttered with extravagant clap-trap for, it seems, Cassie really loved her girls and could refuse them nothing. Chadwick, the supine spouse, lived through all this on the fat of the land and without asking a single question!

Then, after a few harried years, the victimized banks began to fold up. Whole banking families faced disgrace as well as failure. Bank examiners looked more closely into the "Carnegie" loans. The cat came out of the bag with a wild yowl and all claws distended.

The police found Cassie and the criminal courts gathered her into their hungry arms. After a sensational trial she was sentenced to more than a hundred years on some two-score counts. Her girls scattered. She died in prison after serving only a few years.

This is the first of a series of articles about notorious women criminals. Others will appear in future issues.

"I wonder if we haven't carried this escape business too far?"

NOVEMBER HIGH LIGHTS

WHAT takes place in November besides Thanksgiving? . . . Election Day! And **BLACK MASK,** up to the minute as always, in its November issue gives you a timely story of city politics, of graft and greed on one hand, of courage and decency on the other. The yarn is called **"Leave the Door Open."** The author is **EDWARD S. WILLIAMS** who wrote the popular "Body of a Well Dressed Man" in a recent issue.

The lively imagination of **CORNELL WOOLRICH** gives us **"Cab, Mister?"** A man hops a taxi to be taken to a boat pier. When the cab gets there the driver finds him dead—murdered. It's an intriguing tale, deftly told.

Stan Rice, the Hungry, will be on deck in **"Burial Mound"** by **BAYNARD H. KENDRICK.** In the semi-tropical Gulf Hammock of the Florida coast, murder holds the whip hand until Stan Rice strikes it down.

Shean Connell, that hard-boiled dick of **ROGER TORREY'S,** takes plenty of crooks in **"One Good Turn."** It all starts because a perfectly strange girl slips Shean a package of jewelry.

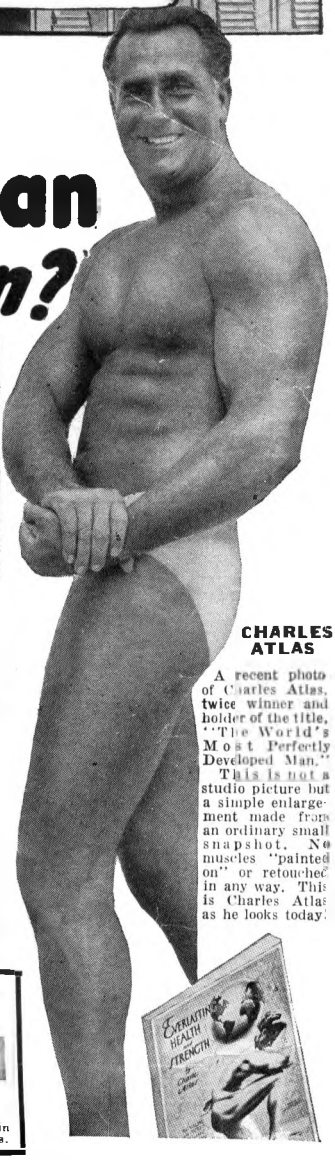
Do you remember **W. T. BALLARD'S** soldier of fortune, Don Tomaso Sherman? He will be back in **"Friends Sometimes Kill,"** a story of mad schemes that go awry in Old Mexico.

"Late Harvest," by **H. W. GUERNSEY,** whose short short story you read in the August issue, is a tale of a personable young man whose passion for a certain delectable food makes him a detective for a night. This is no run-of-the-mill story. It's fresh and it's entertaining.

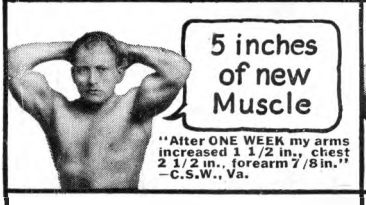
Every story a wow—there will be no duds in the

NOVEMBER BLACK MASK

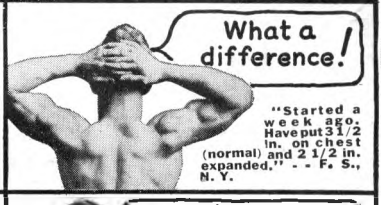
Will You Give Me 7 Days to PROVE I Can Make YOU a *New Man?*



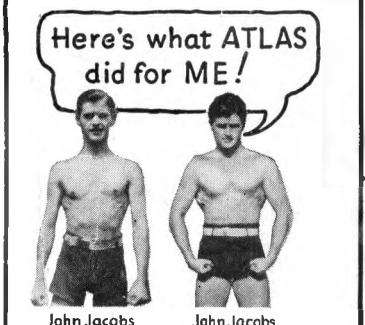
LET ME START SHOWING YOU RESULTS LIKE THESE



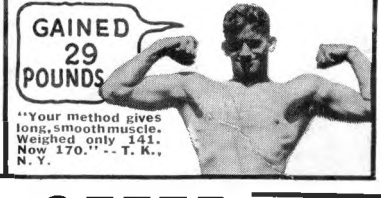
"After ONE WEEK my arms increased 1 1/2 in., chest 2 1/2 in., forearm 7/8 in." —C.S.W., Va.



"Started a week ago. Have put 3 1/2 in. on chest (normal) and 2 1/2 in. expanded." - - F. S., N. Y.



"Am sending snapshot of wonderful progress. Certainly recommend you for quick results!"--W. G., N. J.



"Your method gives long, smooth muscle. Weighed only 141. Now 170." -- T. K., N. Y.

CHARLES ATLAS

A recent photo of Charles Atlas, twice winner and holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." This is not a studio picture but a simple enlargement made from an ordinary small snapshot. No muscles "painted on" or retouched in any way. This is Charles Atlas as he looks today.

7-Day TRIAL OFFER

I could fill this whole magazine with enthusiastic reports from OTHERS. But **what you** want to know is—"What can Charles Atlas do for ME?"

Find out—**at my risk!** Right in first 7 days I'll start to PROVE I can turn YOU into a man of might and muscle. And it will be the kind of PROOF you (and anyone else) can SEE, FEEL, MEASURE with a tape!

My FREE BOOK tells about my amazing 7-DAY TRIAL OFFER an offer no other physical instructor has ever DARED make! If YOU want smashing strength, big muscles, glowing health, I'll show you results QUICK!

STERLING SILVER CUP BEING GIVEN AWAY

This valuable cup of solid sterling silver, stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base.

I will award it, engraved, to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months.

FREE BOOK I myself was once a 97-pound weakling—sickly, half-alive. Then I discovered "Dynamic Tension." And I twice won—against all comers—the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"!

I have no use for apparatus. "Dynamic Tension" ALONE **(right in your own home)** will start new inches of massive power pushing out your chest—build up your shoulders to champion huskiness—put regular mountains of muscle on your biceps—free you of constipation, pimples—make those stomach muscles of yours hard ridges!

Make me PROVE it! Gamble a postage stamp. Send coupon for my **FREE BOOK AT ONCE!** Address me personally: **Charles Atlas, Dept. 9Z, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.**

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 9Z,
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want proof that DYNAMIC TENSION will make a new man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, **"Everlasting Health and Strength."**

Name.....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address.....

City..... State.....

England—40-42 Chandos Street, London, W. C. 2

SPRINGBOARD ACE. Jane Fauntz Manske says: "When I smoke Camels at mealtimes and after, I find that my digestion runs more smoothly." The best meal digests easier when you smoke Camels.

THREE-TIME OLYMPIC WINNER in the high dive. Dorothy Poynton Hill says: "I prefer Camels because they don't get on my nerves. And, like so many other women, I like Camel's flavor."

WHAT SOME OF AMERICA'S AQUATIC STARS SAY ABOUT SMOKING...

(*Left*) **LENORE KIGHT WINGARD.** She has broken 7 World's Records—16 Nat'l Records—in speed swimming. Lenore comments on smoking: "Camels are certainly mild. They never jangle my nerves."

MISS GLORIA WHEEDEN says: "I always think of smoking Camels and eating as going together."

(*Right*) **HAROLD "DUTCH" SMITH,** who holds Olympic diving championships, says: "I've found great pleasure in Camels. I long ago found Camels restore my energy after a strenuous meet."

(*Left*) **PETE DESJARDINS** — internationally famous diver—speaking: "Divers like a *mild* cigarette that doesn't upset nerves. That's why I prefer Camels."

MILLIONS MORE FOR COSTLIER TOBACCOS!

Camels are made from finer, MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS — Turkish and Domestic — than any other popular brand

FOR DIGESTION'S SAKE — SMOKE CAMELS