

15¢

# BLACK MASK★



for 18 years  
AMERICA'S  
GREATEST  
DETECTIVE  
STORY  
MAGAZINE



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**RUSSELL  
BENDER**

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KOBLER**

**OCTOBER  
1938**



*Man!*  
 HOW THAT  
**LUSTER-FOAM**  
(C<sub>14</sub> H<sub>27</sub> O<sub>5</sub> S No.)  
 °GETS AFTER  
**TOBACCO**  
**STAINED TEETH!**

*Energizing agent in the new formula  
 Listerine Tooth Paste an amazing cleanser...  
 sweeps away surface stains and accumulations  
 unbelievably fast... freshens entire mouth*

If you are troubled with dull, dingy, or tobacco stained teeth, don't fool around another minute. Start with the new Listerine Tooth Paste with amazing Luster-Foam, the dental discovery of the century.

Listerine-Foam detergent has remarkable penetrating power, hence cleans teeth so much better. The first touch of saliva and brush energizes it into a fragrant, lively foam which surges into tiny cracks and pits on tooth en-

amel that ordinary dentifrices may never reach. It actually performs four benefits:

1. Sweeps away food deposits.
2. Obliterates dull, stained film.
3. Combats dangerous acid ferments.
4. Reduces the number of decay germs.

And while it is performing a miracle of cleansing, Luster-Foam detergent gives the mouth a feeling of freshness that will simply delight you. Try the new formula Listerine Tooth Paste with Luster-Foam. In two sizes: Regular 25¢ size, and big, double-size, extra-economy tube at 40¢. At all drug counters—now!

LAMBERT PHARMACAL Co., St. Louis, Mo.

THE *New* FORMULA





**I jumped from \$18 a week to \$50**  
 -- a Free Book started me toward this --  
**GOOD PAY IN RADIO**

**HERE'S**  
*How it*  
*Happened*  
 by **S. J. E.**  
 (NAME AND ADDRESS  
 SENT UPON REQUEST)



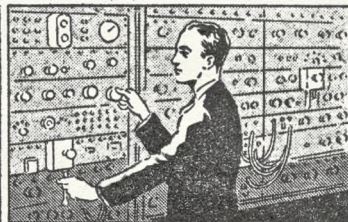
"I had an \$18 a week job in a shoe factory. I'd probably be at it today if I had not read about the opportunities in Radio and started training at home for them."



"The training National Radio Institute gave me was so practical I was soon ready to make \$5, \$10, \$15 a week in spare time servicing Radio sets."



"When I finished training I accepted a job as serviceman with a Radio store. In three weeks I was made service manager at more than twice what I earned in the shoe factory."



"Eight months later N.R.I. Employment Department sent me to Station KWCR as a Radio operator. Now I am Radio Engineer at Station WSUL. I am also connected with Television Station W9XK."



"N.R.I. Training took me out of a low-pay shoe factory job and put me into Radio at good pay. Radio is growing fast. The field is wide open to properly trained men."



**J. E. SMITH,**  
 President  
 National Radio  
 Institute  
 Established 1914

*Find out today* how I Train You at Home  
**to BE A RADIO EXPERT**

**Many Make \$30,  
 \$50, \$75 a Week**

Do you too want a better job? Do you too want to make more money? Radio offers many spare time and full time opportunities for good pay.

**Get Ready Now for Jobs Like These**

Broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays many \$200 to \$500 a year—full time repair jobs pay many \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full or part time Radio businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to \$8,000 a year. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loud speaker systems, offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio.

**Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning**

The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets showing how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and ideas that made good spare time

money—\$200 to \$500 a year — for hundreds. I send Special Radio Equipment to conduct experiments, build circuits, get practical experience. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT TO HELP FIX SETS QUICKER—SAVE TIME, MAKE MORE MONEY.

**Find Out What Radio Offers You**

Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities, also those com-

ing in Television; tells about my Training in Radio and Television; shows 131 letters from men I trained, shows what they are doing, earning; shows my Money Back Agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on penny post card—NOW!

**J. E. SMITH,**  
 President,  
 Dept. 8KM  
 National Radio  
 Institute,  
 Washington,  
 D. C.



**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8KM  
 National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out spare time and full time opportunities in Radio, and explains your practical method of training at home in spare time to become a Radio Expert. (Please write plainly.)

Name..... Age.....  
 Address .....  
 City..... State.....

Please mention NEWSSTAND FICTION UNIT when answering advertisements

# BLACK MASK

A MAGAZINE OF GRIPPING, SMASHING DETECTIVE STORIES

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F. ELLSWORTH, *Editor*

J. B. MAGILL, *Managing Editor*

VOL. XXI No. 7

October, 1938

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Cover painting by J. George Janes

Headings by Arthur Rodman Bowker

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IN NOVEMBER

**"MOBSTER GUNS"**  
A GREAT "BILL LENNOX" YARN

By **W. T. BALLARD**

---

P. C. CODY, President and Circulation Director

F. ELLSWORTH, Vice-President

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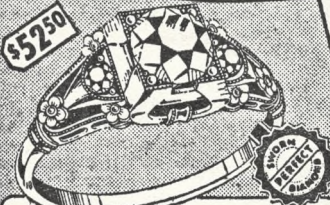
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**10 DAYS FREE TRIAL**

**MONEY BACK GUARANTEE**

Here's how simple it is to own one of these Jewelry Gift Bargains. Put a \$1.00 bill in an envelope with your name, address, and the number of the article wanted. Tell us your age (must be over 20), occupation, employer, and a few simple facts about yourself. Information will be held strictly confidential - no direct inquiries will be made.

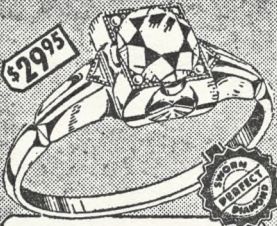
Upon arrival of your order, we will open a 10 month Charge Account for you, and send your selection for approval and free trial. If not satisfied, send it back and your \$1.00 will be refunded immediately. If satisfied, pay the balance in 10 small monthly amounts you will never miss. Send order today.



**A351-Sworn Perfect diamond with 2 other diamonds in 14K yellow gold mounting. Affidavit of Perfection with purchase. Regular \$75.00 value.**  
\$5.15 a month



**A80-Bridal pair—engagement and wedding ring designed to match in 14K yellow gold. Each set with 3 brilliant diamonds.**  
\$5.25 a month



**A147-Sworn Perfect diamond feature. Brilliant perfect diamond in 14K yellow gold mounting. Regularly \$50.00.**  
\$2.90 a month



**K162-21 JEWEL watch for men. Attractive case in charm and color of natural gold. Regular price \$25.00.**  
\$1.70 a month



**I455-Massive 14K yellow gold initial ring for men. Diamond and initials on black onyx.**  
\$1.70 a month



**D8-2 diamonds and blue sapphire in massive 14K yellow gold mounting for men. A real bargain.**  
\$2.25 a month.



**P230-2 DIAMONDS in ladies' tiny watch. Charm and color of natural gold. Guaranteed 7 Jewel movement. Regular price \$28.00.**  
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**W2-10K yellow gold cross with chain to match. Cross beautifully engraved. Splendid value.**  
\$1.00 a month

**L. W. SWEET**  
MAIL ORDER DIVISION  
OF FINLAY STRAUS  
1670 BROADWAY  
DEPT. 768K NEW YORK

Please mention NEWSSTAND FICTION UNIT when answering advertisements

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## What Will You Be Earning?

This may be the most important year in your life! Your whole future is apt to depend on how you take advantage of present business changes.

Returning prosperity is opening up new jobs, and creating unusual opportunities. But that does not insure prosperity for you. Only you can insure that.

For months—maybe years—employers will be able to pick and choose out of the millions now unemployed or dissatisfied with their work and pay. Naturally they will pick the men with most preparation and ability.

You should—you must—make yourself quickly more valuable—to protect what you have and to insure getting your share of the promotions and pay raises. It is being done by OTHERS—it can be done by YOU!

Ask us to send you full details about our new spare time training, and to explain how it prepares you to better meet today's demands and opportunities. If you really are in earnest, you should investigate at once. Check your field below, write your name and address, and mail.

### LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A Correspondence Institution

Dept. 1075-R Chicago

Send me, free, the facts about the demands and opportunities in the business field I have checked—about your training for that field.

- |  |  |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Accountancy  | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Expert Bookkeeping  | <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Foremanship    |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. A. Coaching   | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Law        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Salesmanship | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenotypy             |

Name.....

Present Position.....

Address.....

# ASTHMA

## WRITE FREE TRIAL OFFER!

If you suffer from Asthma Paroxysms, from coughs, gasping, wheezing—write quick for daring FREE TRIAL OFFER of real relief. Inquiries from so-called "hopeless" cases especially invited. Write NACOR, 396-F State Life Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind.

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Write quick for FREE SALES EQUIPMENT.  
NIMROD COMPANY Chicago, Ill.  
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For several years, Diesel engines have been replacing steam and gasoline engines in power plants, motor trucks and buses, locomotives, ships, tractors, dredges, pumps, etc. And now the first Diesel-powered passenger car is on the market. Our home-study course offers you a real opportunity to prepare for a worth-while position in this new field. Write TODAY for full information. No obligation. American School, Dept. D-739, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

Enjoy BEAUTIFUL  
NATURAL-LOOKING  
**FALSE TEETH**  
LOW PRICES  
**60 DAYS' TRIAL**



SEND NO MONEY



Made to order by FIT-RITE Improved method BY MAIL, all over world. Finest Quality. MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE YOU WILL BE SATISFIED. We take your word. Catalog and impression material FREE. Write NOW!

**UNITED STATES DENTAL COMPANY**  
Dept. 1013 1555 Milwaukee Avenue Chicago, Ill.

## Back Pain and Kidney Strain

Wrong foods and drinks, worry, overwork and colds often put a strain on the Kidneys and functional kidney disorders may be the true cause of Excess Acidity, Getting Up Nights, Burning Passages, Leg Pains, Nervousness, Dizziness, Swollen Ankles, Rheumatic Pains, Puffy Eyelids, and feeling old before your time. Help your kidneys purify your blood with Cystex. The very first dose starts helping your kidneys clean out excess acids and soon may easily make you feel years younger. Under the money-back guarantee Cystex must satisfy completely or cost nothing. Get Cystex (siss-tex) today. It costs only 3c a dose at druggists and the guarantee protects you.

## NEED RELIEF From AGONY of STOMACH ULCERS

Caused by Gastric Hyperacidity



If you are one of those men or women who have "tried everything" and given up hope of relief we urge you to try this effective, yet simple inexpensive way at home. Pain and distress relieved from the start. Numbers report they were saved from expensive operations. If after meals and at night you have pain and distress from Gas, Acid, Sour Stomach, or Ulcers due to gastric hyperacidity

**FREE** write for valuable booklet with information as to guaranteed trial offer.  
TWIN CITY VON COMPANY, Dept. 203, St. Paul, Minn.



A single application on plates—even lowers—brings all-day comfort. One application lasts up to 48 hours. A new adhesive in cream paste form. *Nothing else like it!* More economical than powders. Recommended by dentists. Made by the makers of Stera-Kleen. Money back if not delighted.

FOR FREE SAMPLE write The Phillips & Benjamin Co., Dept. 96, Waterbury, Conn.

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Our Training Means Good Jobs, Good Pay! Quality as Railway and Bus Passenger Traffic Inspector by our easy, home-study course. Earn good pay to start and advance quickly with experience. Mon—19 to 50—upon completion of training are placed at up to \$135 per month, plus expenses to start, or we refund tuition. Free Booklet outlines our 18-yr. record. Write Standard Business Training Institute, Div. 1310, Buffalo, N. Y.

## STOP THAT SLAM!



**AMAZING INVENTION STOPS SLAMMING DOORS**

KANT-SLAM closes heaviest doors silently, positively, automatically. Prevents slamming or doors open. Hydraulic leaving doors open. Easily installed. Lasts many years. Demonstrator furnished. We supply actual KANT-SLAM on easily-carried, miniature door. You make big money on quick sales to stores, offices, factories, every building can use 1 to 20! Free Demonstrator to workers. Write! Get details. **KANT-SLAM CO., Dept. D-87, Bloomfield, Ind.**

**PAYS BIG PROFITS DAILY!**

## SELL SUITS ON OUR EASY CREDIT PLAN

FREE SUITS and Pants given as Bonus Besides Large Cash Profits, Premiums and Gifts

Sell only (5) suits to get a FREE SUIT. No limit to number of FREE garments you may earn. Wholesale prices, \$17.95 and up. Sample line FREE. No experience needed to make easy sales. All garments individually cut and tailored to measure. Satisfaction or money back guarantee.

★★★ THREE STAR CLOTHES, INC. ★★★  
330 SOUTH FRANKLIN ST., Dept. CM-2, CHICAGO, ILL.

## WANTED ORIGINAL POEMS SONGS

FOR IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION SEND POEMS TO  
Columbian Music Publishers, Ltd.  
Dept. 17, Toronto, Can.

## TRAIN FOR ELECTRICITY 12 WEEKS HERE IN THE COYNE SHOPS MANY OPPORTUNITIES IN THIS GIGANTIC FIELD



Mail coupon today for details of famous Coyne "Learn by Doing" method of practical shop training for your start for success in this big-pay field. Age or lack of money need not hold you back.

**12 WEEKS' TRAINING**  
Coyne Training is practical, thorough, easy to grasp... you learn quickly by doing actual jobs on real electrical machinery right here in my Chicago Training Shops—NOT from books or printed lessons. You don't need previous experience or a lot of book learning. Expert instructors guide you every step of the way.

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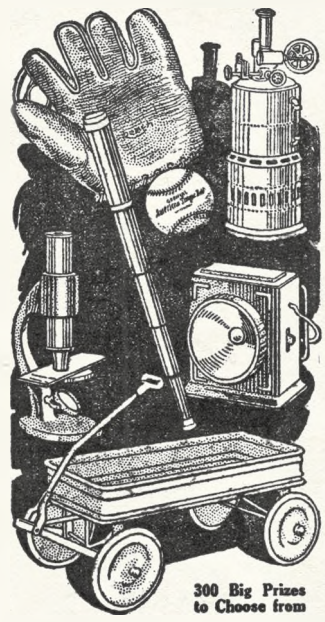
Learn by Doing

**COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL**  
H. C. LEWIS, President  
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 78-66, Chicago, Ill.

H. C. LEWIS, President, Coyne Electrical School  
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 78-66, Chicago, Ill.  
Send me, without cost or obligation, your Big Free Book and details of your "Plans" to help me.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_

# Boys! EARN MONEY AND Big PRIZES



**BOYS, 12 to 16:** Here's a speedy, fully equipped bicycle for you. Trimmed in chromium, baked-on enamel. Balloon tires and up-to-date accessories. Three hundred other prizes to choose from!

Earn the bike, or any other prize that you want, and make CASH PROFITS, besides. It's easy. It's fun. Just obtain customers in your neighborhood and deliver our magazines to them. Need not interfere with school or other activities; do it in spare time. Many boys earn a prize the very first day. Perhaps you can, too. Mail the coupon.

**Mail This Coupon at Once**



**EARN THIS BIKE**

Mr. Jim Thayer, Dept. 825  
The Crowell Publishing Co.  
Springfield, Ohio

Dear Jim: I want to earn MONEY and PRIZES. Start me at once and send me a Prize Book showing 300 items boys can earn.

Name..... Age.....  
Address.....  
City..... State.....

300 Big Prizes to Choose from

Please mention NEWSSTAND FICTION UNIT when answering advertisements

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 32 Cal. Colonial Military Model 10 shot, 6 1/2" overall; wt. 30 oz. Price new ..... \$8.95  
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 Halsters  
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**NEW RIFLE & SHOTGUN SPECIALS**  
 MARLIN Repra. 30/30 & 22 spl. Carbine & Rifles (Reg. \$32.50) \$27.95  
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 MARLIN Mod. 80, bolt action 22 cal. 7 shot repeater rifle... \$8.95  
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 None sold to minors. Bargain Catalog, S. & W., Colts, Rifles, Police Goods, Badges, Air Guns, Telescopes, etc. Send 5c stamp.  
**LEE SALES CO. (Dept. FN) 35 West 52nd St., New York City**

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Brand NEW!  
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 30-Day Trial—Easy Terms



Brand New, latest model Remington-Cadet only \$19.95 during this sensational sale. Also, Royal, Corona and world-famous Feather-weight Portables at real money-saving prices.  
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SAVE 90 DAYS' TRIAL

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TO BE SET TO MUSIC  
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 BACHELOR OF MUSIC  
 4133-NF, South Van Ness Los Angeles, Calif.

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 Learn Taxidermy at home. Write today for Free Book. State see N. W. School of Taxidermy 703 2nd Wood Bldg., Omaha, Neb.

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**BOOKKEEPER**  
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 A Correspondence Institution

**EXPOSE OF GAMBLERS SECRETS**  
 New ways they read cards. Stop losing. Know dice exposes, missers and passers, also slot machine and punch board. New book "BEAT THE CHEAT," \$1.00 copy. Add 25c for new 1938 catalog. Send \$1.25 to **SPECIALTY EXPOSES, Box 2488, Kansas City, Mo.**

## Bow Legs

Improve bow-legs or knock-knees as do hundreds of young people each year with  
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 Comfortable to wear night or day. Construction guaranteed to individual measurements. Send 10c for information and photos in plain wrapper. **MORRIS ORTHOPEDIC CO., 612 Loew's State Bldg., Dept. 150, Los Angeles, Calif.**

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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. **47c** 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 48c with order and we pay postage. Big 8x20-inch enlargement sent C.O.D. 75c plus postage or send 80c and we pay postage. Take advantage of this amazing offer or now. Send your photos today. Specify size wanted. **Standard Art Studios, 113 S. Jefferson St., Dept. 598-M, Chicago**





# ALUMINUM STREAMLINED BICYCLE

Boys Earn It



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Earn this bike, or any of our other prizes, and make **MONEY**, besides. It's easy. Just obtain customers in your neighborhood and deliver our nationally known magazines to them. Need not interfere with school or play. Many boys earn a **MAIL THIS PRIZE THE FIRST DAY.** Perhaps you can, too. Mail the coupon and we'll start you right away.

Mr. Jim Thayer, Dept. 824  
The Crowell Publishing Co., Springfield, Ohio

Dear Jim: I want to earn **MONEY** and **PRIZES**. Start me at once and send me a Prize Book.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_



The Monark SILVER KING

EARN A BICYCLE • TYPEWRITER • MOVIE MACHINE • PRINTING PRESS • MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

## REVISED GAME - LAWS 1938-9

for the UNITED STATES and CANADA in the October issue of

## Field & Stream

On Sale September 14th

Don't go hunting this fall and winter for any kind of game without knowing the game-laws. It's the only way to avoid trouble. The laws of every State, and every Province of Canada, are published for your protection in the October issue of Field & Stream. Only 15c, at any newsdealer.

### GUARANTEED TIRES! GOODYEAR-GOODRICH FIRESTONE-U.S. and Other Standard Makes



**World's Lowest TIRE PRICES**  
Tire users by the thousands all over the U.S.A. vouch for the Long Hard Service of our Standard Brand tires reconditioned with high grade materials and latest methods by our tire experts. Our 21 years experience makes it possible to offer tires at lowest prices, with legal agreement to replace at 1/2 price any tire that fails to give 12 Mos. Service.

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# FORCED LANDING



ONE MOMENT the twin motors of the cabin plane were droning smoothly; the next there was a jerk and the motors were going, brr-bak, brr-bak!

"Gawd!" said the pilot.

The co-pilot's face was taut and white.

"What's it sound like, Gene?" he asked.

The pilot's eyes were agony-stricken. "Bad!" he replied. "I guess—I guess you better tell them. There's a clearing. It's covered with snow and looks awfully small, but I've got to try it."

Swiftly the co-pilot rose. He opened the door and went back into the passenger compartment.

He spoke, his voice smooth and almost matter of fact. "We're



going to make a forced landing. Please fasten your safety belts. There's really no danger. . . ."

But all of them could hear the motors. All could see the tree-studded whiteness hundreds of feet below. A woman shrieked.

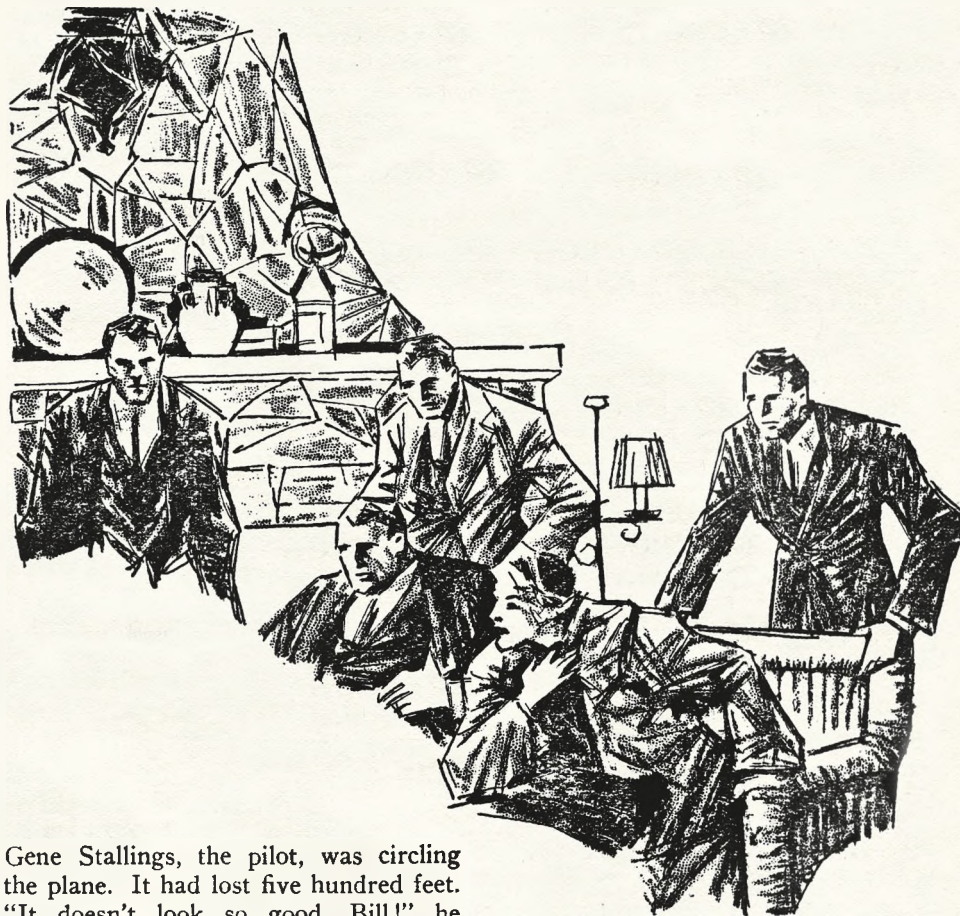
Instantly the hostess's voice spoke: "Everything's all right, really! Just keep your seats." Swiftly she went among the passengers, helped them adjust their safety belts, spoke cheerfully.

Morgan, the co-pilot, smiled wanly and wished he'd spoken his mind to Mona, the hostess, before they'd started on this flight.

He went back to the control room.

# By FRANK GRUBER

Which of this snowbound group is the killer? Can you guess before the Human Encyclopedia tells you?



Gene Stallings, the pilot, was circling the plane. It had lost five hundred feet. "It doesn't look so good, Bill!" he said.

Bill Morgan had been a co-pilot of the line for three years. On an average of three times a year he had seen the headlines in the papers: "Air Liner Crashes!" Sometime it'll be me, he had thought. This was the time.

However, he said, "You'll make it, Gene!"

They were skimming the tree tops. "Hang on!" said Gene Stallings.

The snow rushed up to meet them. The ship struck, bounced up in the air, seemed to hover there for a full second

then settled again. Gene Stallings cut the ignition switch.

And then he died.

The nose of the plane went through the snow, sheared off a short poplar stump and buried itself in the frozen earth underneath. It quivered there for an instant, straight on end, then went over on to its back.

It was level ground here, the snow was fairly deep, and the fact that the plane had landed on its nose and taken

the brunt of the collision saved most of the passengers.

A woman moaned, a man blubbered hysterically. Another swore softly. Everyone was trying to move about, most of them unable to do so because of the safety belts which had really saved them from being seriously injured.

Mona, the air hostess, had a cut on her cheek, a huge bruise on her shoulder and one side of her felt as if a couple of ribs had been caved in. But she crawled among the passengers, helping them. Through the broken windows the passengers crawled out to the whiteness of the snow.

Four of them. Mona came out, dabbing at her cut cheek with the back of her hand. She counted the passengers. "Two more," she said.

"My ankle!" screamed one of the women. "My ankle, it's broken!" It couldn't really be broken for she was hopping about on it. It was probably only bruised. She was a flaxen-haired blonde. Her hair looked as if it had been dipped in molten paraffin. Her face was broad and very Swedish. A short, roly-poly man wobbled to her side.

"Olga!" he babbled. "Oh, no! Not your ankle!"

Mona got down on her knees, started to crawl back into the cabin of the plane, through one of the broken windows. A lean man in a gray topcoat put his hand on her shoulder, said, "Let me!"

Mona turned her head and looked at the man. "All right, Mr. McGregor."

McGregor scuttled into the hole. After a moment, the bloody face of Bill Morgan showed in the opening. Mona exclaimed softly and dropped down. She gave him a hand out. "Gene, what about Gene?"

Bill Morgan shook his head. He crawled out, but did not get up from the snow. Then McGregor appeared in the opening. He came out, reached back into the hole, tugged at someone. Morgan crawled over and helped him.

It was a man, an unconscious man.

McGregor got to his feet. "One more!" cried Mona.

McGregor shook his head. "No, the glass got the one left in there."

Mona shuddered. Glass from the window had horribly mutilated the last passenger.

There had been eight in the plane. Gene Stallings, the pilot, was dead. So was one passenger. All of the others seemed to have injuries of some sort. How bad they were could not at the moment be determined. On the whole they had been fortunate.

"We've got to get doctors, a hospital!" someone cried.

They were all willing to admit that. But they were all hysterical now. Because they had survived an airplane crash.

It was several minutes before Morgan, the co-pilot could tell them: "As near's I can determine we're a hundred and fifty miles from Duluth. There ought to be a town near-by somewhere. The map shows—I'll get it from the cabin."

He crawled back into the plane. He was gone a full three minutes. When he came out his face was gray.

Mona looked at him and knew that he had seen something inside. "What is it, Bill?" she asked.

He shook his head and walked to one side a few feet. She followed. "Gene," he said. "He was killed—with a bullet!"

Mona gasped softly. "Bill! You?"

He shook his head miserably.



HERE were three inches of snow on the road, packed smooth and hard and very slick. It was cold and evening was coming on. Charlie Boston cursed dispassionately as he fought the wheel of the little car. He gunned the motor until the wheels went into a skid, then yelled and wrestled with the wheel. Regaining control, he put a heavy foot on the gas.

"Next town we come to," he said savagely to Oliver Quade beside him, "we'll trade the damn thing for a sled and some dogs."

"Or a ham sandwich," said Oliver Quade sardonically. He sprawled in the seat beside Charlie Boston. He did not seem concerned about the skidding. He did not seem concerned about anything. He knew there wasn't more than a gallon of gas in the car; he knew they were thirty miles or more from the next town, and he knew that even if they reached the town, they didn't have money enough to buy gas.

They were broke, stony; Oliver Quade, the Human Encyclopedia, and Charlie Boston, his burly friend and assistant. Things had been good in summer, but they weren't squirrels and had not stored any nuts for a long cold winter. Charlie Boston had pitted his wits against the race-track bookies and had lost. Oliver Quade had squandered his money on expensive hotels and fine living. And now it was mid-December and they were somewhere in northern Wisconsin, broke and cold and hungry and in a battered jalopy that threatened to expire at any skid.

"I'm a human being," said Charlie Boston. "I eat, drink and I'm fond of the good things in life. I don't know why I let you talk me into going up to the North Pole in winter."

Oliver Quade grinned. "I think the hotel manager in Chicago had something to do with that, Charlie. He didn't like the idea of you hibernating in his steam-heated room, not without something to help pay for the steam."

"Oh, we've been broke before," retorted Charlie Boston. "But look, there are people *south* of Chicago, too. Why did we have to come north?"

"Because they don't have ice carnivals in Florida. And because they have one in Duluth. Even if you cut their publicity agents' bunk in half there'll still be fifty thousand people there. And a

lot of those fifty thousand people are going back to their farms with some mighty fine reading matter that we're going to sell 'em. And you and me, Charlie, we'll run the bus into a snow bank and grab us some Pullmans and fine living and keep going until we get to Florida or somewhere warm."

The rear wheels of the car skidded to the left side of the road. Charlie Boston yelped and fought the wheel. It was only by a superhuman effort that he kept the car from going into the high banks of snow alongside the road.

"That was a close one!" he gasped. "Once we hit that deep snow, we're stuck. You know we ain't got no chains. Say! That's the first time I ever saw a black rabbit. Look!"

Quade had already seen it—a small black animal crouched on the ridge of snow, some fifty yards ahead. "Rabbits don't have long tails," he said. "Look out, Charlie!"

Boston twisted the wheel and the car went into a terrific skid. There was a sharp yell of an animal in pain and then Boston got control of the car again.

"Stop the car, Charlie!" exclaimed Oliver Quade. His lethargy was suddenly gone.

The car skidded again as Boston put on the brakes. He managed to stop it beyond where the animal lay. Oliver Quade leaped out to the road. He shuddered as the cold wind bit through his thin overcoat. He jammed his hat far down on his head and ran, a lean, tall man, back toward the animal.

It was dead, of course. He picked it up by the tail and started back toward the car. Charlie Boston had rolled down the window at his side and stuck out his head. "What is it?" he asked. "A cat?"

Oliver Quade was grinning hugely. "Nope. This is a fox, a silver fox. Charlie, we've turned the corner, and run smack into Old Man Prosperity."

"Silver fox!" yelped Charlie Boston. "Why, holy smokes! Ain't silver fox

skins worth about a thousand bucks each?"

Oliver Quade climbed into the coupé and placed the dead animal at his feet. "Not a thousand dollars but it's the most valuable fur to be found in all North America. Step on the gas, Charlie. I want to get to the town ahead as quickly as possible so we can pelt this beautiful, poor creature and kiss Mr. Recession so-long!"

Charlie stepped on the starter. It made a grinding, spitting, choking sound. That was all. He ground down on the button again.

Oliver Quade, who almost never lost his composure, said: "Damn it!"

Charlie Boston's face was a study of mingled rage and despair. "The gas!" he groaned. "Gone. And we're twenty miles from town in a howling wilderness."

Oliver Quade, his nostrils flaring, hauled out a road map. He consulted it, then looked at the mileage gauge. "The map says sixty-six miles from Homburg and we've come thirty-five which leaves us thirty-one to go."

"And it'll be dark in an hour! It's starting to snow now."

It was. The sky had been overcast all day. Only a few flakes were coming down now but they were big.

"It's a God-forsaken country," said Quade. "We haven't seen anyone for two hours, but there must be farm-houses around somewhere. It's a cinch we can't stay in the car all night. It's getting colder. We'd freeze stiff."

"Ollie," said Charlie Boston, "I feel like a man on a desert island who finds a pot full of gold. I'll trade my share of that silver fox for one bowl of hot chili. And for a warm bed I'd toss in my chances of heaven."

"Well," said Oliver Quade, "in a pinch we can move into the woods and build a fire. We've got matches."

"Let's try walking first." Charlie put up the big collar of his overcoat, climbed out of the car. Oliver Quade's tweed coat was lighter than Boston's. He wore

a light suit underneath. The prospect of a long walk was not cheering. He climbed out of the car on his side, then reached back and picked up the dead fox by the tail.

"I'm willing to desert the car, but not this," he said. "And look, Charlie, the going may be rough, but, just in case, would you take the valise with the books. We might get an opportunity to make a few bucks. You can't tell."

Charlie Boston went around to the trunk, unlocked it and took out a small, heavy valise. He locked the trunk again. "I hate to leave the two hundred, but these twenty'll get us on our feet. Let's go."

They started up the road. The snow was coming down thicker now. The flakes were cold and powdery, not wet which would have indicated warmer weather.

Stunted, snow-laden tamaracks grew to the edge of the road on each side. Interspersed, like sentinels, were white birch. On the higher spots a few lean, tall poplars, stood like green sticks stuck into the snow.

"I still think we ought to have had dogs instead of the jalopy," grouched Charlie Boston.

"Nah," said Quade. "The dogs would have scared away the fox. What's a bit of snow when we've got meat for the pot?"

"Hey! You're not figurin' on *eating* that fox, are you?" There was genuine alarm in Boston's tone.

Quade chuckled. "Only figuratively. This is a prime pelt and ought to bring us fifty or sixty dollars. We can buy a lot of beefsteaks for that amount. Charlie, do you see smoke over there to the right?"

Boston's eager eyes followed Quade's finger. "Umm, I'd almost swear I can smell it, too. Let's cut over."

"Looks like a small tote road up here, Charlie."

It was. And it had been traveled recently. Quade and Boston started up it briskly. Before they had gone a hun-

dred yards along the narrow road that wound in through the trees their steps quickened. They not only saw smoke now, but they saw a house, a large one. In a moment they saw several buildings, clustered around a five-acre clearing.

"Oh, boy!" exclaimed Charlie Boston.

Swiftly they approached the main house. It was built of logs, but it wasn't just a big cabin. It was a lodge, reinforced with stone and lumber. Paths were shoveled in the snow all around, and a thick column of smoke was coming out of a stone chimney.

They pounded up to a veranda and stamped their feet. Quade rapped sharply on the door with his gloved knuckles. The door was opened almost instantly and a heavy-set man with a close-cropped beard was framed in the doorway.

"Hello," Quade said, cheerfully. "Our car broke down up the road a piece. We wondered—"

"Sure, sure, come in!" said the man. His face broke into a smile. And then suddenly the smile gave way to a fierce scowl. "What have you got there?" he snapped.

Quade turned around and looked at Charlie Boston. He saw nothing out of the way. He turned back to the bearded man and saw his eyes fixed on the fox he was dangling in his own hands.

He held up the dead animal. "This? Why, it's a fox we ran down. I thought we'd pelt it."

"You ran down that fox! And you t'ought you'd pelt it?"

Charlie Boston cut in. "Sure, buddy, why not? We're trappers, see? I'm Dan'l Boone and this is my pal, Kit Carson."

"You!" choked the bearded man. "You t'ief's! You kill my fox, and you have the nerve to bring him here!"

"Your fox?"

"Of course it's my fox. All foxes around here are mine."

"How about the wolves?" Charlie Boston shot in. "And the squirrels and the hummin' birds—they yours too?"

"Wait, Charlie, I think I understand. You *raise* silver foxes, is that it?"

"Of course!" snapped the bearded man. "I'm Karl Becker."

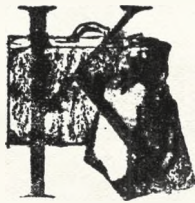
"Ah," said Quade. "Of course, Becker, the silver fox breeder. I've read about you. Well, I'm afraid we owe you an apology, Mr. Becker, but, of course, we didn't know. And couldn't have helped it, if we had. The fox ran right in front of the car."

Karl Becker seemed mollified by Quade's confession. "Come in," he invited.

Quade and Boston were quite willing. They almost leaped into the lodge, and the hot air was like California slapping them in their faces. They moved toward the roaring log fire in a huge fireplace.

"I'm awfully sorry about the fox," Quade apologized again.

"Oh, that's all right," Karl Becker said. "I was a leedle sore at first, but I know they get through the wire now and then. Usually they come back when they're hungry, but this time—well, let's say, it couldn't be helped, yah?"



ARL BECKER took the dead animal from Quade and carried it back to the door. He opened the door and tossed it outside on the veranda. Charlie

Boston scowled.

"And you said the Recession has receded, Ollie!"

Quade nodded significantly to the valise Boston had set down near the fireplace. Boston brightened.

"How far is it to the next town, Mr. Becker?" Quade asked.

"Spooner? About thirty-one miles. I don't think you make it the way the the snow's coming down."

"We've got to make it, Mr. Becker. But unfortunately we ran out of gas. I was wondering if you had a couple of gallons around here?"

"Yeah, sure, I got lots of gas. I be glad to sell you a few gallons."

Charlie blinked at Quade. Quade cleared his throat. "Ah, yes, we'd be glad to pay you for the gasoline. On the other hand, you really think we'd have trouble getting to Spooner?"

"Yes, the road isn't so good. Maybe you better stay here, overnight. I got lots of room, and I'll be glad to put you up. Reasonable, too."

Charlie gasped. Quade's eyes narrowed. He looked at Karl Becker through the slits, then let out a slow sigh. "That would be kind of you, Mr. Becker. By the way, I'm interested in your foxes. You raise quite a few here, don't you?"

"Yeah, sure. I pelt three-four t'ousand every season. But the business, it's lousy; not like it used to was."

"So I've heard. Too many breeders raising silver foxes these days. Well, that's true of all business, these days. Over-production. You take the hosiery business now. . . ."

"You in that business?"

"No, but I know a little about it. Just like I do everything else." Oliver Quade pursed up his lips and looked at Charlie Boston.

Boston was looking at Karl Becker and a little grin played around his mouth. Becker had risen to the bait. He was staring at Oliver Quade with his head cocked to one side.

"Ha, you know about everything, Mr.—?"

"Quade, Oliver Quade. And this is Charlie Boston."

"Please to meetcha. But, Mr. Quade, did you said you was a smart man, you know everything?"

"Yes, I know everything. I'm probably the smartest man in the entire state of Wisconsin."

Becker cleared his throat noisily. "Is that so? You're smart maybe about foxes, too?"

"Oh, sure." Quade attempted to look modest.

Charlie Boston began to rub his hands together, slowly. His grin was widening. He knew Oliver Quade. He knew

how he worked. Quade had been annoyed by that bit about *selling* them a little gasoline and putting them up for the night *reasonably*. He was out to get the fox raiser now. And no man had ever matched wits with Oliver Quade, successfully. For Oliver Quade was the Human Encyclopedia.

Becker put both hands behind his rumble seat and walked up and down the living-room. Then he stopped before Quade.

"Mr. Quade," he said. "You have made a statement to me, two statements. You have said you know everything. Furthermore, you have said you know smart things about foxes. You will excuse me, but I do not believe you. I am not a book man. I do not know things about this—well, maybe this Einstein t'eory. But I know foxes. I will bet you, Mr. Quade, dot you cannot answer one question I ask you about foxes. I will bet you five dollars."

"That, Mr. Becker," said Quade, "is a bet."

Karl Becker pulled a roll of bills from his pocket. He peeled off one and held it out before him. "Here is my money."

Quade plunged his hand into his own pocket, fished around. He knew very well what it contained—a lone dime and two pennies. "Ask your question."

"Very well. What three major diseases are foxes afflicted wit'?"

"Mr. Becker, those are really three questions. But it's bargain day. I'll give you the three for one. Foxes are greatly susceptible to worms—hook, lung and roundworms. They also get distemper and encephalitis. Encephalitis is sleeping sickness, or paralysis of the brain."

Karl Becker's face was comical to see. Bewilderment was intermingled with chagrin and greed. Karl Becker thought no more of losing five dollars than he did his right arm. He clung to the five dollar bill until Quade, grinning, stepped forward and plucked it out of his hand.

Then he added insult to injury. "Mr. Becker, I'm a sporting man, myself. I'll give you a chance to get even. I'll bet



you this five dollars against a night's lodging and three gallons of gasoline in the morning that I can correctly answer any question you can ask me *on any subject!*"

Becker's eyes glinted. "You fooled me once, Mr. Quade. With that act about the fox. You carried it like a dunderhead when you came in here. All right, you know foxes, but you don't know everything. I take that second bet. And I ask you a question, a good one. In one minute."

He turned abruptly and went to a book-case. Charlie Boston yelped. "Hey, he's lookin' in an encyclopedia!"

Karl Becker took a large volume from the shelf. "So?" he said. "Mr. Quade is smart. He said so. He didn't said not'ing about not looking in no book. So I look for a good question. Ah!"

He looked triumphantly at Oliver Quade. "So! What is . . . . epicene?"

"Epicene is a term in Greek and Latin grammar denoting nouns possessing one gender only, used to describe animals of either sex. In English there are no true epicene nouns but the word is used when referring to the characteristics of men who are effeminate and women who are masculine."

The book almost fell from Becker's hands. "You!" he gasped. He slammed the book shut, sawed the warm air of the lodge with it.

Someone battered the door on the outside. Karl Becker recovered from his agitation. "What? More visitors? The help don't knock!"

He strode to the door, opened it.

A snow-covered man almost fell into the hot room. Quade and Boston sprang forward. There was a bandage about the newcomer's face.

"Airplane!" he gasped. "Crashed! Need help. Women—men hurt!"

Quade whistled.

"Pilot killed!" exclaimed the bandaged man.

"I t'ought I heard something a while ago!" exclaimed Becker. "The plane,

it passed over here and then I t'ought I heard the bang. But I wasn't sure. And the men was busy. . . ."

"You've got employees here, Mr. Becker?" asked Oliver Quade, tersely.

"Yah, sure, three men. They help mit the foxes. Wait!"

He went to the door, took hold of a cord dangling there and pulled on it twice. "They come. They go help!"

The snow was beginning to melt on the man who had just come in from the outside. Quade stepped up to him. "Better take off your coat. You don't look so good!"

"I'm all right," replied the hurt man. "I'm worried about the others, though. There's six of us left alive. If there's a sled or something around here—"

"I'm a stranger here myself," said Quade. "But Mr. Becker. . . ."

"Yah, we got sled. Soon's Hugo comes. Here he is."

The door opened and a cupid-faced, stocky German of about thirty came in. He wore high boots, overalls and a gaudy, red mackinaw.

"Hugo!" said Becker. "This man come from airplane what fell down near. You get the sled and Oscar and you go help, *ja?* Maybe Julius better go along, too."

"Charlie and I'll go," said Quade.

Hugo ran out of the lodge. In a surprisingly short time Quade heard the tinkling of harness outside the door and caught up his thin topcoat. Boston grabbed up his own.

Morgan, the co-pilot of the wrecked airplane, staggered to his feet. Quade pushed him back again. "You won't be necessary. Just tell us which direction to go."

"Straight north, I think. I don't really know. I better come along."

"Your tracks be enough," said Hugo.

"Let's go!" Quade said.

They charged out of the warm lodge. In the yard stood a bob-sled with a box on it. Harnessed to it were two snappings, black geldings. A man in a

shabby bearskin coat stood up in the sled.

Quade, Charlie and Hugo piled into the sled. Quade nodded with satisfaction when he saw the blankets in it. And the jug in one corner.

"In fact," said Charlie Boston, who saw the jug, "I'm a victim of the snow myself."

"Nix," said Oliver Quade. "That's a stimulant for medical purposes."

"I feel sick," said Boston. He picked up the jug, pulled out the cork and with practised movement tilted the jug. He swallowed lustily.

"Ah!" he said. "Rum. I'm a well man already."

"Mr. Becker see you take that drink," said Hugo, "he charge you for it."

"Nice lad, that boss of yours," said Charlie Boston, "but he's not really a German, is he?"

"Yah, sure, he is, a *plattdeutcher!* He likes money. He is probably the stingiest man in the whole country."

"I'll give him more territory than that," said Quade. He fingered the five-dollar bill in his pocket.

Oscar, the driver of the bob-sled, had turned the horses into a lane leading through a patch of poplars. The snow didn't seem to be falling so heavily, here. But it was cold. Quade looked longingly at the jug. But he knew if he touched it Boston would hit it again, and there were sick people out there in the snow.

A mile through the woods and they burst suddenly into a clearing. "There they are!" cried Hugo.

Quade saw the wrecked plane, the passengers. They had built a small fire in the snow and were huddled around it.

Mona, the air hostess, was the first to reach the sled. She ran alongside it back to the wreck. "Did Bill Morgan send you?"

Quade nodded. "Yes. He's all right, too. There's a lodge about two miles from here."

He leaped out of the sleigh to the

snow. Quickly he, Boston and the two Becker men loaded the survivors of the air crash into the sled. They wrapped them up in blankets, passed the jug of rum around to them. Then they laid the dead passenger on the sled, leaving, however, the pilot's body in the plane.

"Hurry!" cried a flaxen-haired woman. "Or we'll be late."

"For supper?" asked Quade sharply.

She looked at him haughtily. A roly-poly man who was waiting on the flaxen-haired woman, bristled at Quade. "See here, my man, do you know who this is?"

"Florence Nightingale?" guessed Quade.

The little man sputtered. "This is Olga Larsen, *the* Olga Larsen, Queen of the Ice."

Quade thought he'd seen her face. She was one of the most publicized women in America; but he would have expected to see her in the Madison Square Garden in New York, the Coliseum in Chicago, rather than up in the Wisconsin wilds. Yet, he was himself going to the ice carnival in Duluth. Olga Larsen was the star attraction there, the magnet that would bring thousands to the city.

There was a tall, pasty-faced man standing to one side of Olga Larsen. His face was familiar, too. He was Gustave Lund, Olga's skating partner.

The lean passenger, McGregor, signaled to Oliver Quade. "Better take a look inside the plane," the lean man murmured.

Quade looked sharply at the man, then walked to the plane. He dropped to his knees and scuttled through one of the broken windows. It was dark inside. He crawled a few feet in the litter of wreckage, put his hand on a sliver of glass, and grunted. He fumbled in his pocket for matches. He struck one and saw the open door leading to the cockpit. He went forward and then he saw the thing the lean survivor of the crash had hinted about. The murdered pilot. . . .

The match scorched his glove, and he dropped it. He crawled back to the snow outside and found that the sleigh was moving away. He ran after it.



THE SURVIVORS of the plane wreck hurried into the warm air of the lodge. Becker's workman, Julius, had prepared hot coffee and for a few moments there was a bustle of excitement.

Quade drank his coffee and, while he did, sized up the others in the room. McGregor, the lean man, kept to one side, but Quade noticed that he did not miss anything that was going on. Olga Larsen had ensconced herself in the center of a sofa and was permitting her little manager, the roly-poly Slade, to fuss over her. Mona, the hostess, and the wounded co-pilot, Morgan, were off to one side sipping coffee and talking together in low tones.

Charlie Boston came over to Quade. "This Larsen dame," he said, "she don't look so good like she did in 'Queen of the Ice'."

Quade grinned. "None of them do, Charlie." His eyes went to Becker. The fox raiser wasn't at all disconcerted by the arrival of all the guests.

"Our friend Becker has counted the gate and seems quite pleased."

"Yeah," said Boston, "he's figuring on charging everyone for room and board. Except us."

"Oh, he won't lose by that," said Quade. "He'll just charge the others a little more."

McGregor, the saturnine passenger, moved over to Quade. "Did you see in the plane?" he asked.

Quade nodded. "Who did it?"

McGregor shrugged. "We were going along smooth, see. Then all of a sudden the motor began missing. Everybody got excited and then, *boom*, we hit. First thing I knew, we were all out on the snow."

"But didn't you hear the shot?" Quade persisted.

"Me, all I could hear was Gabriel's horn."

Gustave Lund, the skater's partner said: "What do you mean, shot?"

Quade looked at him. "Don't you know?"

"I don't know anything!" Lund said bitterly. "I'm not supposed to know anything. I'm just a stooge. Olga, she's the smart one, and Slade."

Slade bounced up from the sofa. "Now lookit, Lund, don't start in on Olga again! I've warned you about that! You're just paid to skate with her."

"Slade," Lund said coldly, "I don't like you!"

"Boys! Boys!" Olga said, placatingly, "Don't start fighting! I won't have it! I've had enough for one day."

"Folks," Quade announced, "it seems that some of you don't know all that's happened. The pilot of your plane wasn't killed by the crash. He died because some one of you put a bullet in his head!"

Quade's statement stunned the entire room. Only for a moment however. Then Olga Larsen screamed. Bill Morgan strode angrily across the room.

"Why did you have to spill that?" he demanded.

"Oh," said Quade, "you knew?"

"Of course I knew, but I wasn't telling them."

"Why not?" asked Quade bluntly. "Because you were in the cockpit with him?"

Morgan's eyes gleamed. "I was with him when we crashed but I didn't shoot him."

"But who did?" cried Slade. "You were the only one up front. All of us were fastened in our seats with the belts."

"That isn't so, Mr. Slade," said Mona, the hostess. "If you'll think back calmly, you'll know that everyone started jumping around. As far as I

am concerned, I helped only Miss Larsen."

Morgan smiled gratefully at Mona. "Thanks, Mona. Then someone could have opened the door and stuck in a gun!"

"But why would anyone do that?" exclaimed Gustave Lund. "It seems that someone wanted to make sure the pilot was killed!"

"Julius!" That was Karl Becker.

Quade looked at the German fox breeder. His face was white. Julius came hurrying out of the kitchen.

"Julius!" the German said. "Someone's been murdered around here. I don't like it. I want you should go tell Oscar and Hugo. Make sure the t'ief alarms are set, and," he jabbed a stubby finger at Julius, "you know, the guns, too."

Julius bowed his head and started for the door. He didn't reach it however. The door was opened from the outside, and two men stepped into the heated room.

"Hello, folks," one of them said.

There was a huge gun in his fist. It was a .45 automatic, and it was pointed carelessly in the general direction of the occupants of the lodge.

"*Eeck!*" screamed Olga Larsen.

"Oh, oh!" said Quade.

Beside him Charlie Boston's teeth clicked. Karl Becker almost fainted when he saw the gun in the newcomer's hand.

"Who," he faltered, "who are you? Vot you vant?"

"Guess," grinned the gun wielder. He was a square-built man, standing about five feet ten, but so heavily built that he weighed over two hundred pounds. He wore a heavy camel's hair coat which made him seem more burly even than he actually was. The man with him was short and slight. Swarthy. There was a gun in his hand, too.

"You. you're a hold-up man!" cried Karl Becker. "You want our money. I don't keep none here. I only got six-seven dollars in the whole house."

He looked sidewise at the others in the room, but his anxiety did not seem to lessen.

"I'll bet you're Karl Becker!" said the big gunman. "I heard about you. You'd sell the gold in your mother's false teeth. Well, Becker, I'll take your six-seven dollars for cigarette money, but that ain't why I came up here to the North Pole. I guess you know that, don't you, Becker?"

Karl Becker's teeth chattered. "Uh—uh, I don't know."

"You got some foxes out there," said the gunman. "Maybe you got some skins, too. I like fox skins. Louie, here, does too. We read about you in the newspaper a while ago; so we thought we would come and see you and maybe take along a few pelts."

"*Och Gott!*" cried Becker.

Quade whistled. "This is going to be sad," he said to Charlie Boston.

The gunman had sharp ears. He heard.

"Ain't it though?" he said.

Olga Larsen contributed her silver fox vocabulary. "Silver foxes, Mr. Becker? You raise them? I have always meant to buy a beautiful silver fox coat."

"If you've got the money to lay on the line," said the gunman, "I'll sell you a few pelts, Miss."

The swarthy gunman nudged his bigger partner. "Hey, Willie, dat dame, I know her. I seen her somewhere."

Willie looked hard at Olga Larsen. "Yeah, Louie. I have too. Sister, what's your name?"

Ben Slade couldn't contain his managerial pride. "This is Olga Larsen," he announced.

"Olga Larsen!" gasped Louis. "The ice skater!"

"Movie star," murmured Willie. He looked in awe at Olga Larsen. "Lady, I seen you in 'Queen of the Ice.' You wasn't bad, not bad at all."

"Thank you," said Olga frigidly.

"Oh, that's all right," said Willie. "I don't mind telling you you're good. Me,

I'm good in my own line too. I always like to meet people who are tops in what they're doing."

"You're Willie Scharnhorst, aren't you?" Quade asked.

Willie inhaled. "Yeah, sure, but look, pal, I don't like the Willie stuff from strangers. Call me Bill, and we'll get along."

"Willie Scharnhorst," cut in Boston, "he's the guy who snatched that butter and egg man down in St. Louis, ain't he?"

"Now, now," chided Scharnhorst, "you mustn't believe all the papers say. They said I did it, and I ain't saying I didn't. I ain't saying I did, either. Anyway, he didn't shell out."

"Aw, cut it!" groused Louie. "We didn't come here to tell everyone our business. We came to do something; let's do it and get out of here."

"Yeah," said Scharnhorst, "the fox pelts. Break them out, Becker."

"Vot do you mean, break them out?" cried Becker. "They *are* out, out there on the foxes. It'll take two weeks to get them off."

"You wouldn't fool me, Becker," jeered Scharnhorst. "You finished pelting your animals two days ago, and somewhere around here you got three or four thousand skins all ready for me to load up into my truck outside."

Becker groaned. "Thirty-two hundred pelts! A year's income! *Och*, why did I ever go into this foolishness business!"

"To make money, you tight-fisted Dutchman!" said Scharnhorst.

Quade grinned. Scharnhorst was as much of a Dutchman as Becker. The newspapers' pet term for him was "The Mad Dutchman."

Becker threw up his hands. "The skins are out in the drying sheds."

"You mean I got to go around and bale them up?" Scharnhorst frowned.

"Not if you don't want to," cut in Quade. "If you'll leave your name and address, we'll be glad to pack them up and ship them to you."

"Wise guy!" said Scharnhorst. He turned to his pal, Louie. "Well, Louie, it's going to be a little harder than we figured, but for a hundred and fifty grand, we don't mind doing a little work, do we?"

"How much work?" asked Louie.

Scharnhorst grinned. "You heard him say the pelts are in the drying sheds. You take these boys and have them gather them up and load them into the truck. Me, I'll stick here and see that none of these folks run to call a cop."

"The police are miles away," said Becker, "and I ain't even got no telephone."

"I know that," said Scharnhorst. "You're too stingy to have one put in. I know lots of things about you, Becker. I cased this joint for quite a while."

"Look, Willie," said Louie, "it's snowing like hell outside; it's cold. Why do I have to be the one to go outside?"

"Cause I'm the boss," replied Scharnhorst, "and the boss always takes it easy. Go on now. The sooner you get the pelts in the truck, the sooner we get out of here."

Louie stabbed his gun at Oscar, then Julius. "All right, you fellows, come on. Let's get busy! I'm warning you, I'm sore already. You fellows make any bad moves, and I'll skin you too!"

The three of them left the room. Scharnhorst pulled up a chair near the door and dropped into it. He dangled his gun carelessly between his knees.

"Relax, folks. It'll take Louie a while to get the skins baled together, and there's no reason we can't make ourselves comfortable. . . . Say, Miss Larsen, how about you giving us a song, that song maybe that you sang in 'Queen of the Ice?'"

"I don't want to sing," said Olga Larsen, coldly. "I don't like you, and I am not used to having guns waved in my face. Please go away."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Willie Scharnhorst. "So you don't like me. Well I don't mind. I like you just the same."

"Mr. Scharnhorst," said Ben Slade suddenly, "we've been in an airplane accident. We're nervous and excited. Please let us alone."

"Who are you?" asked Scharnhorst.

"Slade's my name. I'm Miss Larsen's manager.

Quade nudged Charlie Boston. "All right, Charlie, here we go."



**H**OLKS!" Quade announced in a sudden, dramatic voice. "I'm Oliver Quade, the Human Encyclopedia. I'm probably the smartest man in the entire State of Wisconsin! I know the answers to all questions!"

His voice rose until it filled the entire room. It was an amazing voice, vibrant and clear. It would have done credit to the best political orator of a national convention. The entire group jerked to attention.

"I see doubt in your faces," he cried. "You think I'm crazy! I'm not. I'm the Human Encyclopedia, and I know the answers to everything! I can answer any question any of you can ask me on any subject—history, mathematics, geography, business or sports! Try me out with a question, someone!"

Those in the room were staring at Quade in open-mouthed astonishment, all except Karl Becker. He had sampled Quade before.

"What's this," demanded Scharnhorst, "a new game?"

"Call it that," Quade shot back at him, "and ask me something."

Scharnhorst screwed up his mouth. You could almost hear him think. After a moment his face twisted into what Quade guessed was brilliance. "I got something!" exclaimed Scharnhorst. "Who was called the father of this country?"

Quade looked hard at Scharnhorst. "Is that your idea of a difficult question?"

"Why not?" demanded Scharnhorst.

"When I applied for my citizenship papers four years ago, they asked me that. I got mixed up, too. I told 'em Congress."

Charlie Boston guffawed.

"Oh, you're another smart guy, huh?" snapped Willie Scharnhorst. "You know all the answers, huh? Well, I did too. The saloon-keeper on the corner told me they always ask first who makes the laws for this country and second, who's called the father of this country. Well, the judge made a mistake and asked me the second question first and I give him the answer to the first. Was it my fault the judge didn't know his stuff?"

Quade kept a straight face. "Well, we'll just skip your question, Willie. Someone else, please, ask me something. Anything."

"I'll play," said Bill Morgan. "I used to fly down in South America. Look, Quade, what's the chief product exported from Chile?"

"Nitrate," Quade replied laconically. "It constitutes more than half of all Chile's exports. The total value of the Chilean nitrate exported every year is \$100,000,000 of which the government through taxation gets approximately \$20,000,000."

Murmurs went around the room at that. "You're dead right!" exclaimed Bill Morgan. "But I've got another question—"

"One to a customer," said Quade. "Miss Lane, what about you?"

"I was just thinking," smiled the air hostess. "I lived in England a while. So I'll ask an English question. What is a galee?"

"A coal miner. A man who operates a coal mine under a government lease, which is called a galee."

The saturnine, lean Alan McGregor threw in a question, then. "How far is it from St. Louis to Chicago?"

"Two hundred and eighty-five miles," Quade replied quickly.

And now the game took on. Olga Larsen asked a question, then Ben

Slade. Gustave Lund, too. He answered every question thrown at him, quickly and accurately. But suddenly he called a halt.

"And now I'm going to show you how you yourselves can learn the answers to all questions anyone can ask you! I'm going to give each one of you an opportunity to be a Human Encyclopedia!"

Charlie Boston was fumbling with the bag he had lugged with him earlier in the evening. He opened it and produced a thick volume. He handed it to Quade.

"Here it is folks, 'The Compendium of Human Knowledge,' the knowledge of the ages in one volume! Twelve hundred pages of facts and knowledge! The answers to any questions anyone can ever ask you! A complete education crammed into one volume! And folks," Quade leaned forward and lowered his voice, "what do you think I am asking for this marvelous book, this complete college education? Twenty-five dollars? Twenty? No, not even fifteen, or ten, or five! Just a measly two dollars and ninety-five cents. Think of it, folks! Twelve hundred pages of education for only two dollars and ninety-five cents! Charlie, the gentleman over there." He pointed at Willie Scharnhorst.

Charlie Boston had his hands full, his arms full of books. He strode briskly across the room.

"Here you are, Willie," he said, "and worth its weight in silver fox skins!"

Willie Scharnhorst looked stupidly at the grinning Boston, and then he reached into his pocket with his free hand and pulled out a fist full of bills. Charlie whisked away three of the bills expertly and dropped the copy of "The Compendium of Human Knowledge" on Scharnhorst's lap. He turned away abruptly and attacked the others in the room.

In the meantime Quade was continuing his exhortation. Boston sold more copies of the book, one to Bill Morgan, one to Alan McGregor. He

passed up Mona Lane—because he liked her—and forced one upon Olga Larsen, who protested. Boston ignored her and collected from Ben Slade for two volumes. Charlie paused before Gustave Lund, but Lund wasn't having any. Charlie grinned wickedly at Karl Becker and said:

"It wouldn't do you any good. You couldn't read English!"

"Phooie!" said Becker. "What's this business anyway? What did I do, that all this should happen to me in one day? I don't like it, I tell you."

"Neither do I," groaned Gustave Lund. "First the airplane, then a man murdered, and now this craziness!"

Willie Scharnhorst was fumbling around with his newly purchased copy of "The Compendium of Human Knowledge." His ears heard the word "murder."

"Someone get killed when the airplane fell?"

"Somebody got killed all right," said Alan McGregor. "But it wasn't by the crash. It was a bullet right smack in the back of his head!"

Quade, looking at Scharnhorst, saw the startled expression that leaped into his eyes.

"Why should anyone want to shoot someone in an airplane?" Willie asked.

"That's a question we were talking about when you broke in with your pal," replied Quade. "It's the screwiest situation I ever heard of; the airplane crashes, and then we find that the pilot is dead with a bullet in his head."

"Were you on the plane?" asked Scharnhorst.

"No, that's one thing I can't be blamed for. The person who murdered the pilot is one of these others." He waved a hand about the room.

Willie Scharnhorst's eyes went around the room. He passed over Morgan, the co-pilot, still with Mona, the hostess, looked long at Alan McGregor and passed on to the two ice skaters and their manager. His eyes went back to McGregor. After a moment he said:

"You, haven't I seen you somewhere before?"

McGregor looked steadily at Scharnhorst. "I don't know. Have you?"

"I'm asking you"

"Were we ever in the same police line-up?" asked McGregor, a slight sneer in his tone.

"Yeah," said Scharnhorst thoughtfully, "I think I remember now. Only it wasn't in a police line-up that I saw you. It was in Duke Kennard's place in Kansas City. Remember?"

"My memory's very bad," replied McGregor.

Willie Scharnhorst got up from his chair, laid the book on it and walked slowly toward McGregor. When he was three or four feet away, he made a swift movement which brought him behind McGregor. He stabbed his gun into the lean man's spine and frisked him quickly. The result was a pearl-handled .32 automatic. He backed away.

"That was very careless of me," he said. "I should have had Louie frisk everyone here."

He looked around the room again. "Well, I guess that's about all the artillery, except—" he nodded at Quade. "How about you?"

"Not me," said Quade. "I never carried a gun in my life. I don't have to."

Willie examined the gun he had taken from McGregor. He dropped the clip into his hand and smelled the muzzle.

"Cleaned it, huh?" he said.

"Not for two weeks," replied McGregor.

"Personally," said Quade, "I think the pilot was killed with a .38. And I also think that the person who really killed the pilot had all sorts of chances to throw away the gun and probably did."

"Eh?" said Scharnhorst. "You don't think it was this fellow?"

"It could have been. He might have had another gun."

"Well, who's your candidate then? You're a wise guy, you know everything."

Quade grinned wryly and shook his head.

The door banged open and in came Oscar and Julius with Louie behind them. Louie was shivering from the cold.

"It's forty below zero outside, maybe sixty or seventy even. I'll be damned if I'm going to stay out there all night."

Scharnhorst sighed. "Always complaining. How much more work have you got to do?"

"I just told you," snarled Louie. "The pelts are strung up on lines. We got to take 'em all down, tie 'em in bundles and load 'em in the truck. It'll take us until morning to load up all those skins."

Scharnhorst scowled. "We should have waited until tomorrow night. Maybe all these guests wouldn't have been here, and Becker might have had them baled for us. Well, you know how things are, Louie, the snow'll keep people from coming here tonight, and we'll have to make the most of it. Get yourself warmed up, and then give it another whack. Me, I've got my hands full right here."



LOUIE and the two German workers went out again in a few minutes. Quade sat himself on the floor near the fireplace. It was going to be a long night, he knew. Charlie Boston sat down on the other side of the fireplace. In the middle of the room, Gustave Lund, Olga Larsen and Slade began a mild argument. Olga was bemoaning her fate, and Lund was berating Slade for their predicament. He insisted that Slade had no business booking them for a small city like Duluth in the first place.

After a while Bill Morgan and Mona Lane came across the room and stood before the fireplace.

"What do you think of it, Mr.



Quade?" asked Morgan respectfully.

Quade shrugged. "We'll stay here until morning, and then they'll go off. We'll get to a town without any trouble."

Morgan nodded. "They'll be looking for the plane, of course, by morning. It should have been in Duluth by now, and when it's late, they'll start looking for it. I know we weren't off our course much, and they ought to be able to locate it in a few hours. We'll probably have a plane here before noon."

"And until then, we might as well make ourselves comfortable," said Mona.

Quade chuckled, and then the floor lamp flared brightly and went out, plunging the room into total darkness. Quade gasped and began raising himself from the floor. Before he regained his feet, someone in the room yelled sharply. There was a rushing movement and the sharp, terrific explosion of a gun.

Willie Scharnhorst's voice cut the darkness: "Stand where you are, everyone! I'm at the door, and the first one comes close gets plugged!"

A woman screamed, hysterically. Quade knew it wasn't Mona Lane. He was on his feet now, crouched and moving forward in the darkness, hands outstretched. He knew the location of the door, and if the darkness held for another thirty seconds, he knew also that he would be in complete command of the situation. A floor board creaked, and someone near the door, Scharnhorst no doubt, fired his gun into the ceiling.

"Stand still, I said!" Willie's voice grated harshly.

Quade's outstretched hand collided with a body. His fingers clawed it, and he was rewarded with a snarl and a sudden swish of air. He ducked instinctively. Something heavy and hard grazed the side of his face and thudded on his left shoulder. He almost went to his knees, but gritted his teeth and plunged forward. His hands encountered only darkness. There was a crash-

ing of glass, and then a match sputtered into flame. It threw a ghostly half-light upon the scene.

"You, Quade," snarled Scharnhorst. "Stand where you are, or I'll plug you!"

Quade stood. At the other side of the room another match lit up a little spot, and then Hugo, Becker's helper, came out of the kitchen with a kerosene lamp. It flooded the room with light.

Scharnhorst was standing just inside the door, his feet wide apart, his own gun and McGregor's held before him, menacingly. McGregor himself was poised on his toes at the window facing Scharnhorst. He looked like a tiger about to spring upon his prey. Becker was lying flat on the floor near the kitchen. Near the fireplace Bill Morgan stood with his arm around Mona Lane. Charlie Boston was behind Quade.

The two skaters and their manager were sitting on the couch. Olga Larsen was blubbering hysterically. Ben Slade's face was almost as white as the snow outside. Lund sat between him and Olga, his head hanging forward on his chest. Quade looked at him and inhaled softly.

"Lund," he said.

Lund did not move. Ben Slade looked at the man beside him and bounded to his feet.

"He's shot!" he cried. "He's been shot!"

Cold air blew into the room from outside. One entire window pane was broken. Quade looked at it and shook his head. Scharnhorst came away from the door in a rush. He grasped his guns securely, and Quade knew that this was not the moment to attack him. The gunman looked into the face of Gustave Lund and Quade heard his teeth click together.

"Who did this?" he snapped. "You, Quade?"

"No, not me," replied Quade. "I was sitting down beside the fireplace. I couldn't have put out the light."

Scharnhorst's eyes rolled toward the

fireplace, then dropped to the floor.

"The hell you couldn't. The wire from the lamp runs along there."

"That's so," Quade conceded, "but it isn't broken there. The circuit could have been shorted almost anywhere—outside the house, in the kitchen, or you, Willie, you could have pulled the cord from the socket there just two feet from your chair."

"Why the devil would I want to do that?" demanded Scharnhorst. "If I had wanted to bump him off, I'd have just done it without dousing the lights."

There was truth in what Willie said. Quade felt sure that Scharnhorst hadn't killed Lund. Besides there was the matter of the broken window. Throughout the turmoil in the dark, Scharnhorst had advertised his exact position. He could not have thrown the gun out of the window without coming forward at least eight feet and then retreating back to the door. Quade knew he hadn't done that. He knew too that Boston had been behind him and Charlie was not the sort of man who shot people in the dark. Besides, he was Quade's friend.

Bill Morgan and Mona? They'd been at the fireplace, but had had a chance to move around. Conceivably, they could have reached the wire, but Quade didn't think so. Alan McGregor? Yes, he was the logical suspect. He was near the window. But Scharnhorst had frisked him, had taken away his gun. Had the man had another gun concealed on his person or somewhere in the room? He was a member of the party who had been on the airplane. He could have been the one who had killed the pilot.

On the other hand, the skaters and their manager had ignored McGregor completely. If any of them had known McGregor, and they must have for him to want to kill one of them, they had concealed it well. Ben Slade? He was Lund's manager, received a share of his earnings. Managers don't kill the geese that lay the golden eggs.

Quade looked hard at Olga Larsen. She was a national figure, the world's greatest skating star. He recalled something Lund had said earlier. The dead skater had been bitter toward Olga and Slade for some reason.

The door slammed open, and Louie came running in, gun held ready.

"Jeez!" he cried. "What's all the shooting about?"

"Just a little rub-out, Louie," Scharnhorst said. "That's all."

Louie did not seem greatly disconcerted. "Why did you knock him off?"

"I didn't. Somebody else here did it."

"Who?"

Scharnhorst shook his head. "Search me. You can see the electric light ain't working. All of a sudden the light goes out, the window busts, and someone shoots this bozo."

"No," cut in Quade. "He was shot before the window was broken which means that someone in this room killed him. I'm willing to bet eight copies of 'The Compendium of Human Knowledge' against a nickel that you'll find a gun outside there in the snow."

Scharnhorst's eyes slid toward his pal. "O. K., Louie, get it."

Louie shot an angry look at Oliver Quade and left the room. Quade stepped easily across the room to the window and peered out into the rectangle of light that shone through the window on the snow. He saw Louie come into the rectangle, move around, and then pick up something from the snow. A moment later he came into the room, wiping snow from an automatic.

"This is it!" he said. "Two shots fired!"

"Oh," said Quade, "a .38. One shot for the pilot and one for Lund."

"And someone had the gun all the time!" exclaimed Scharnhorst, looking blackly around the room.

When he had first entered with Louie and taken command of the lodge, he had been a good-natured gunman. The events of the past half-hour had changed

his disposition. He looked sullen and mean. Quade didn't like the change. He had read about The Mad Dutchman in the newspapers, knew that when Scharnhorst was enraged, he was a mad dog who would stop at nothing.

"How you coming along with the pelts, Louie" asked Scharnhorst.

"All right," growled Louie. "Take me three or four hours more, I guess if—say! I left those two Dutchmen out there. Do you suppose they would beat it?"

"You sap! Get out there! If they've ducked for help, we've got to scam, too."

Louie slammed out the door. He returned two minutes later.

"They've beat it!"

Scharnhorst cursed roundly. Quade saw Mona Lane flinch. The big man strode across to Becker.

"Where did those men of yours go to?"

"I don't know," groaned Becker. "There ain't no neighbor in ten miles from here, and you can see for yourself that it's snowing like the devil. Spooner is thirty-one miles from here."

"Lucky I had the key from the truck ignition," said Louie. "They couldn't take the truck. They got the horses, though."

Scharnhorst pursed his lips thoughtfully. "The way it's snowing, they'll be lucky if they can make it to this neighbor in three hours and three hours back here."

"Not exactly," said Quade. "This neighbor may have a phone and call Spooner. They have cars and trucks there that can get through here."

Scharnhorst stared at Becker. "How about it, Dutch? Has this neighbor of yours got a telephone?"

Becker nodded. "Yeah."

Scharnhorst swore again. "That means if those two lugs get to this neighbor's, they'll telephone to Spooner, and they'll come out here in autos in about an hour—four hours altogether—better make it three in case those bozos push

their horses faster than I figure they will. Well, we'll just have to finish up in three hours."

His eyes darted around the room. "All right, you fellows! Becker, Quade, and that fat lug beside you! Morgan, you, McGregor and Slade, come on, we got work to do."

"'Fat lug' huh?" Charlie Boston grunted, under his breath. "Maybe I'll get a chance to talk to him about that."

"What do you want us to do?" demanded Ben Slade.

"Come on outside and help with the pelts, that's what. We haven't got much time. The women'll stay in here. They ain't foolish enough to try to get away in this weather."

"It's cold outside," protested Ben Slade, "and I, honest, I wouldn't be much good out there."

Scharnhorst looked contemptuously at the little manager. He snorted.

"Yeah, you wouldn't be much good out there anyway. Stay in here with the women."

"I don't feel so good either," said Quade. "And look, I only have this thin overcoat. You wouldn't make me go out there in the cold, would you?"

"The hell I wouldn't," snarled Scharnhorst. "You can work hard and keep warm. C'mon."



LONG, low, snow-covered shed held the fox skins. Quade saw long wires stretched from end to end of the shed on which hung, on wire frames, hundreds upon hundreds of inverted silver fox skins.

"All right, fellows," said Scharnhorst, hefting his gun, "get busy! Take them skins down from the frames, put them in bundles, and tie them up."

"There's another shed," said Louie. "I better take half of these punks with me. You can stand here at the end and watch these fellows. There's only one door."

Quade managed to pair off with Charlie Boston and Karl Becker and follow Louie. That left Scharnhorst with Morgan, McGregor and Hugo.

Outside Louie herded Quade and the others to a shed about fifty feet away. Inside the shed were row upon row of silver fox pelts.

"Boy! what a lot of fur coats!" exclaimed Charlie Boston. He smacked his gloved hands together, stretched wide his arms, and swooped up an armful of pelts.

"Och!" exclaimed Becker. "Such a business! The skins are still green!" He dropped down upon the pelts and almost reverently began taking out the individual wire frames upon which they were stretched.

Passing Charlie Boston, Quade nudged him. Boston followed him a few feet into the shed. They stood side by side gathering up armfuls of pelts.

"This is it, Charlie," whispered Quade. "Watch me!"

"Hey, break it up, you two!" called Louie from the door.

Quade moved away with a tremendous armful of pelts. Approaching Becker, kneeling on the floor, he seemed to trip. He cried out and as he plunged forward he heaved the bundle of pelts into Louie's face. The explosion of Louie's gun filled the room, but no bullet struck Quade. And then his shoulders hit the gunman's knees and Louie was falling backwards. Charlie Boston, swarmed over Quade, and he heard the solid thump of Boston's fist landing on Louie. That was all there was to it. Usually, when Boston hit them squarely they did not get up again, not for a while. Quade scooped up Louie's lantern in his left hand, his gun with his right.

"All right, Ollie. Let's go!" cried Boston.

Becker was babbling incoherently over his skins. Quade leaped out through the door of the skin-drying shed. At the same instant big Willie Scharnhorst sprang out of the other

shed. The big .45 in his hand blasted fire and thunder. The bullet fanned Quade's cheek. Scharnhorst was no mean shot. Quade fired, more with the intention of scaring Scharnhorst than trying to hit him. Scharnhorst jumped aside, but at that moment a gun somewhere else thundered and hot fire seared Quade's left shoulder.

"Someone else is shooting at you!" cried Boston.

"I know it," retorted Quade and made a huge leap around the corner of the shed. He dropped the lantern from his hand. It fell into some loose snow and sunk almost out of sight, but Quade didn't pause for light. He kept going straight into the darkness. Someone behind him kept shooting and that only made Quade go faster.

It was a minute or more before he was really aware that Boston wasn't behind him. The big fellow couldn't travel as fast as Quade, but Quade wasn't worried about him. Boston was quite capable of taking care of himself.

When Quade stopped, there were trees around him. He stepped behind one and looked back in the direction he had come. He saw two or three winking lights moving about and he heard faint talk. But the lights were not approaching him, and he guessed that Scharnhorst realized the futility of trying to capture someone in a snowstorm in an unfamiliar forest.

Scharnhorst would proceed with the work of getting the fox skins together. It was cold out here, and Quade shivered. The prospect of staying out here three or four hours was not a cheerful one.

Furthermore there were possibilities to this that he did not like. There was Olga Larsen, for example. Scharnhorst was a known kidnapper. Olga Larsen had money, a great deal of it. Furthermore, Scharnhorst was in a precarious situation himself. A truckload of silver fox skins was not easy to conceal even up here in the sparsely settled section of northern Wisconsin. Scharnhorst

would have to go one hundred and fifty miles to reach the Canadian border. If he were smart he would seize Olga Larsen or someone else to use as a hostage until he reached safety.

Quade was quite honest in admitting that he did not care a great deal for Olga Larsen, but on the other hand Scharnhorst might just possibly realize that Quade would be the most formidable pursuer and take along Charlie Boston. For Charlie Boston, Quade would go to very great lengths. He shook his head in the darkness.

"Got to do something before they get away."

His eyes growing accustomed to the darkness, he made out rectangular spots of blackness to the right. Those, no doubt, were the live fox houses. He moved in the direction and hit meshed wire. He kept his hands on the wire and moved along it. It was a long pen, almost two hundred feet long. When he reached the end of it, he found himself before a long, low shed.

He listened but heard no sign of movement inside the shed. He did, however, hear little noises further away and guessed that the shed was split up into sections, foxes in sections beyond this first one could smell or hear his presence and were restless. Softly he unlatched the door. He opened it a crack and attempted to peer inside. His eyes could not penetrate the inky blackness.

He stood there for a moment and then closed the door. As he did an electric light bulb directly over the door sprang into light. Quade gasped, but his quick brain deduced instantly that the lights in the fox pens were operated by remote control and someone back at the house or wherever the switches were had turned them on. That meant also that the short circuit in the house had been repaired. But he couldn't stand here under this light. Neither did he want to risk running to the woods again. He would make too good a target now with lights in several spots.

There wasn't anything he could do but tear open the door of the fox shed and spring inside. To his consternation, there was an electric light bulb inside. He saw in his first glance around the room that this wasn't really a fox pen, but rather a room for supplies. He saw several sacks of commercial, cereal, fox food, many cans of disinfectants and remedies, even a blow torch. There was a wooden latch on the inside of the door. Quade dropped it. No sooner had he done so that he heard the crunch of feet on snow outside the door.

Quade tensed. He expected any moment that a bullet would tear through the planking of the door, that the harsh voice of Willie Scharnhorst would blast at him. A voice did speak. But it was muffled, disguised.

"All right, Quade. Come on out!"

"I like it better in here," Quade replied. The advantage was his. The man outside was the person who had killed the airplane pilot and Gustave Lund. Why would he disguise his voice? It was not Scharnhorst. This person, apparently, did not want to make noise and bring Scharnhorst down upon him. That was in Quade's favor. Quade didn't want Scharnhorst in on this either.

He moved away from the door to a corner of the room. He heard the crunching of snow outside. The murderer was moving alongside of the fox pens. Suddenly Quade heard the quick flurry of rubbery pads; the nervous squeaks of animals. And then he saw something. The door leading into the adjoining pen was open. The killer was letting the foxes in on Quade. Quade knew that foxes, although shy, could be exceedingly vicious when frightened. And the foxes next door were certainly frightened at the moment.

He started across the room to close the door. He had taken only a step when there was a soft thump on the other side of the door and it flew wide open. A small black animal sprang into the room, saw Quade, and made a frightened leap for the small wire-cov-

ered window. Quade stepped quickly back into the corner. He had a gun and could shoot the animal if necessary, but the shot would instantly bring upon him Willie Scharnhorst and Louie.

There was more squealing and rushing about in the pen next door. Two foxes hurtled into Quade's room, made a simultaneous leap at the window and bounced back to the floor.

He made a quick movement with his hand. "Beat it, fellows!" he said.

The foxes rushed, but not toward the door. They sprang instead upon a bench on which were several tin dishes. They knocked them over. The clatter frightened them even more. Now they were absolutely terrified, so much so they were utterly blind. They squealed and dashed helter-skelter in all directions, bumping themselves against the walls.

Quade crouched in a corner. An animal hurtled against him. He struck at it and sharp teeth ripped the leg of his trousers and tore into his ankle. Giddy pain swept over him. For an instant, he thought he was seeing double. There were more than three foxes in the room. He blinked and tried to count them. Five. And if they had been excited before, they were doubly so now. Perhaps the smell of the blood was affecting them.

Another animal leaped at Quade. He struck down at it with the gun. The animal squealed and fell away. Quade knew that he was in one of the tightest spots he had ever been in in his life. You could fight a human being but you couldn't fight a room full of maddened foxes. The animals moved so fast you couldn't even strike them solid blows.

His desperate plight stimulated his nimble brain. It was then he saw the can of ether on the shelf beside of him. Alongside of it lay a three foot length of broomstick. Attached to one end of the stick was a bundle of cotton. Quade exclaimed softly. He whipped down the can of ether, tore off the cover and with a quick movement splashed a half cupful of the contents on the cotton ball

attached to the stick. The sickish sweet odor of ether assailed his nostrils.

He jammed his revolver into an overcoat pocket, caught up the stick with the ether-soaked cotton in one hand. The foxes were still rushing around. An animal snapped at his ankles. Quade smashed down with the stick and rapped the animal on the snout. The result was astonishing. The fox yelped, leaped and thudded to the floor, gave a spasmodic kick and lay still.

Quade's eyes glinted. Now he took the offensive. He advanced from his corner, lunged out at another animal and tapped it lightly on the nose with the ether-soaked cotton. That fox fell. Now there were only three animals left. One hurtled through the air toward Quade's throat. He smashed it down with his left fist and with his right hand flicked it with the stick.

Two left. Quade sprang forward, lunged for one and missed. The animal rushed away blindly, hit the wall and bounced through the open door into the pen. The fifth animal made a lightning circuit of the room, sprang for the wire-covered window and fell to the floor.

Quade caught it there, and then it was all over. He fastened the pen door so the fox that had escaped could not return. He was dripping with perspiration, weak from his battle and narrow escape, and mad clear through. He dropped the ether-soaked stick, whipped out his gun, and unlatched the door leading to the outside.

He stepped through and almost collided with Louie, the gunman. Louie yelled hoarsely and a bullet from his gun tugged at Quade's overcoat. Quade shot him. Louie screamed and plunged forward to the snow. Grimly, Quade stepped over him. He marched through the snow that crunched loudly under his feet with every step, straight toward the drying sheds.

There was grim determination in his step and there was fury in his eye.



HE FOUND an excited circle of figures there. Charlie Boston was the dominating one of the group. On the snow lay Willie Scharnhorst.

"Ollie!" cried Boston. "Where've you been?"

"With the foxes," retorted Quade. "I see you got Willie."

"Yeah, he took his eyes off me and I belted him. But Louie got away."

"Those shots just now was me and Louie shooting it out." Quade's eyes darted around the group. "The snow's over, folks," he said. "Let's all go to the house."

Electric lights were on in the big living-room of Karl Becker's lodge. Gathered around were Mona Lane and Olga, Ben Slade and Alan McGregor, Bill Morgan and Karl Becker. Louie, the gunman, was still stretched out in the snow. There was no use bringing him in. In the kitchen, Hugo was tying up Willie Scharnhorst.

"Mr. Quade," chortled Karl Becker, "I like you. You're a fine fellow. If it hadn't been for you—"

Quade waved a hand. "Scharnhorst and Louie are out of it, but there's still a murderer. He's in this room. He's the man who killed the pilot, and Gustave Lund. I might say he's also the man responsible for the airplane coming down."

"I thought there was something wrong with the motor," cut in Ben Slade.

Quade looked at Bill Morgan. "How about it?"

"One of them went dead altogether. The other was missing. There was something wrong with them all right, but I don't know what."

"Maybe the pilot knew. Maybe he was responsible for it. What did you know about him, Morgan?"

The co-pilot shrugged. "He was one of the best pilots on the line. Outside of that I didn't know a great deal about

him. He did have one weakness, women—expensive ones."

"That would tie in, although we'll probably never know. My conjecture is that he was paid to bring the plane down near this place."

"But why would he want to do that?" asked Alan McGregor.

"Isn't it obvious to you that Willie Scharnhorst didn't have the brains to figure out a set-up like this one? Scharnhorst is just an ignorant hoodlum. He kidnapped that man in St. Louis and didn't even have brains enough to collect the ransom. He had to let him go."

Quade shifted suddenly to the flax-haired ice skater. "Miss Larsen, why were Gustave Lund and Slade always quarreling?"

"That's none of your business," cut in Slade.

"It is," retorted Quade. "You tried to kill me out there a little while ago, and anything pertaining to you is my business."

"What?" cried Slade. "I tried to kill you?"

"Yes. You're the man I've been talking about. You shot at me and turned the foxes on me. How many rods do you pack?"

"You're crazy!"

"I'll draw a picture." Quade turned to Mona. "Miss Lane, all of us left this room except you and Miss Larsen and Slade. What happened here after we left?"

"Why, I don't know exactly. We sat around here in the dark and then Mr. Slade said he was going to try to fix the lights. He went out and a couple of minutes later the lights went on. And after a little while, he came back and said he had fixed them. That's all I knew until all of you came back in here."

Quade nodded. "How did you fix the lights, Slade?"

"I didn't," replied the little manager. "I just went outside and I heard a lot of shooting and running around and I didn't go anywhere. I just stayed in

back of the house a while doing nothing. Then after the lights went on I came back in here."

"You never left the vicinity of the house?"

"No."

"Is that so? Then how did you get those silver fox hairs on your overcoat?"

Quade stepped forward as if to touch Slade's coat. The little man yelled hoarsely and sprang back, tugging at his pocket.

*Smack!* Charlie Boston's fist lifted Slade clear off his feet and hurled him back upon the sofa. He tumbled from it to the floor and lay still.

"That's that," said Quade. "Maybe he didn't turn off or fix the lights—I think one of Becker's workmen did that, thinking he was helping. But Slade is your killer."

"I think you're right," Olga Larsen said suddenly. "Lund claimed Slade had stolen my money. He was stalling for a couple of weeks now. Lund was trying to get me to ask Ben for an accounting. But I thought Slade was honest. I suppose he just took advantage of the darkness to kill Lund."

"I'll bet you'll find that Mr. Ben Slade is short twenty-five or fifty thousand dollars, or whatever *you* call big money," Quade said. "Slade may never admit it, but I maintain he booked you for the Ice Carnival just to get you landed up here. Becker, it was that newspaper story about your foxes that was responsible. I read it myself only a week ago. One hundred and fifty thousand dollars worth of fox skins was quite an inducement to them."

"You mean dem two was working together?"

"Sure. Scharnhorst came along here with a truck. Slade brought down the airplane and the famous Olga Larsen. He'd paid the pilot to make a forced landing then, and just to play safe, and keep him from talking, he killed the pilot. Scharnhorst's job was to take the furs, but a big truckful of furs is a hard thing

to hide. That's why they needed Olga Larsen. She's a national figure. Slade brought her here so Scharnhorst could kidnap her. Hold her as a hostage, rather. With her life in danger, the police and G-men wouldn't go after Scharnhorst. Then in a week or two, when the furs were safely cached or sold, Willie would have turned Olga loose to make more money for Slade. He killed Lund to keep his account shortage quiet.

"Mr. Becker, in the morning there are four animals in one of your sheds to pelt. I killed them," Quade finished.

Karl Becker frowned. "You shot them? You put holes in their skins? That cuts down their value!"

Charlie Boston looked down at his huge fist. "Just once, Ollie," he pleaded.

Quade grinned. "No—Mr. Becker, I didn't put holes in your precious pelts. If I wasn't so tired it would cost you money to know how I killed them, but I'll just tell you. I killed them the same way you do, by tapping them on the nose with ether-soaked cotton."

"Is dat so? You really do know about foxes then?"

"Only what I read in books. Mr. Becker, I like you. I'm going to *give* you a copy of 'The Compendium of Human Knowledge'."

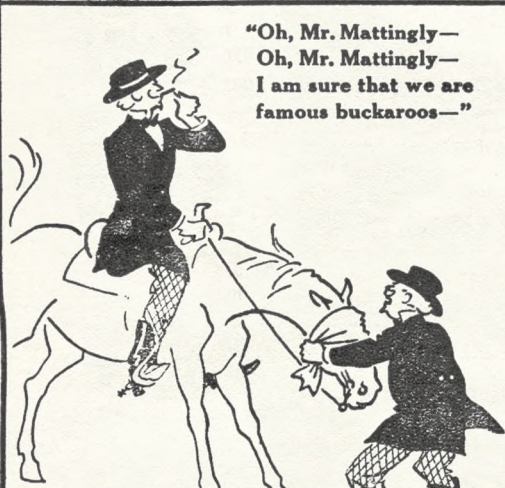
Karl Becker was genuinely touched by Quade's generosity. "Dot's fine, Mr. Quade. You know I like you, too, and I tell you what I do. You have safed me from these low-life t'ieves. You have safed my thirty-two hundred beautiful skins. I reward you. One minute!"

He stepped outside the door and returned with a limp, black animal. "Dis fox, Mr. Quade, the one you run over in your automobile. I am going to make you present of him—because you are such a fine fellow." He extended the dead fox to Quade and said, as an afterthought: "De fox got out of the wire and maybe I never see him again, anyway."

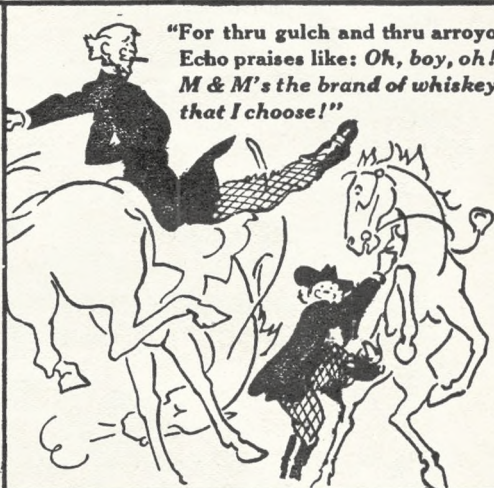
Charlie Boston gnashed his teeth. He stepped toward Karl Becker. Oliver Quade looked away.



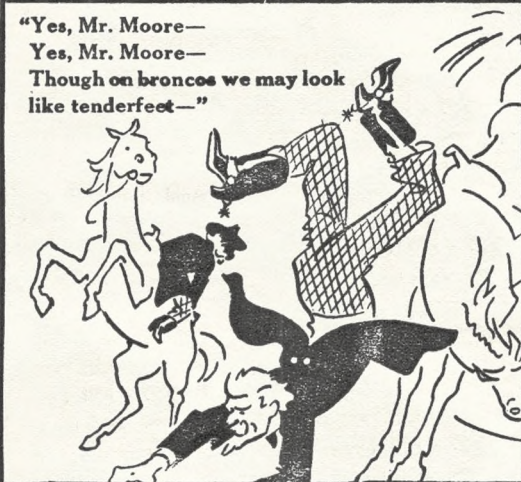
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Oh, Mr. Mattingly—  
I am sure that we are  
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Yes, Mr. Moore—  
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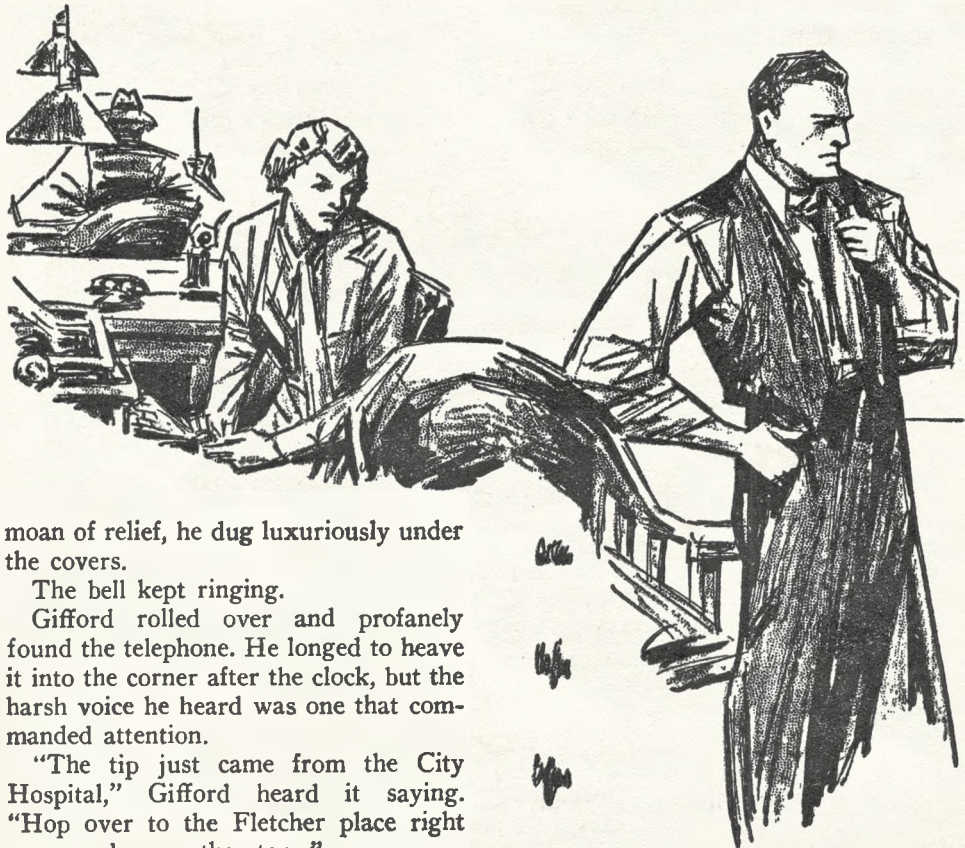
# THIS WAY TO THE MORGUE

**M**URRAY GIFFORD found himself sitting up in bed, muttering blasphemy and groping for the electric alarm clock in the darkness.

Its strident bell shrieked at him while he fumbled with the shut-off lever. The infernal clamor wouldn't stop. Resorting to drastic measures, he yanked the cord out by the roots and flung the damned contraption into the corner. The resulting crash pleased him. With a

It was Hackett talking, Gifford's city editor on the *Queen City Chronicle*. The noise that came over the wire next sounded like the collapse of a brick wall. In reality it was Hackett breaking the connection. That was Hackett's way.

Gifford was in whole-hearted agreement with the general opinion that Hackett was the meanest city editor east of Hell. He wasn't merely tough; he was irascible, vituperative, vindictive, a bilious Tartar—*mean*. Moreover, Hack-



moan of relief, he dug luxuriously under the covers.

The bell kept ringing.

Gifford rolled over and profanely found the telephone. He longed to heave it into the corner after the clock, but the harsh voice he heard was one that commanded attention.

"The tip just came from the City Hospital," Gifford heard it saying. "Hop over to the Fletcher place right away and cover the story."

# FREDERICK C. DAVIS

The presses spin a tale of death and disaster that will hold you tense to the very end

ett had hung up an all-time record for firing reporters. He had fired scores of the best news-hawks in the business. There wasn't a reporter living, no matter how able, whom Hackett wouldn't fire at a moment's notice and upon the slightest pretext. Gifford was certainly no exception.

Gifford dragged himself out of bed. . . .

Chill, damp air puffed into his face while he drove across town, still three-quarters asleep. When he curbed his roadster in front of the Fletcher place, he blinked at his strap watch and discovered, to his horror, that it was just five o'clock in the morning.

Six or eight cars were already there, most of them police machines. The



Fletcher house sat amid expansive gardened grounds, but it was not the center of activity. Tramping through a drizzle, Gifford saw that something was going on at the rear of the estate. Several cops were prowling around the guest house, which was a bungalow lo-

cated in a corner of the grounds. A member of the Homicide Squad was carefully pouring a plaster mixture into several footprints.

In the living-room the rest of the squad was busy with a camera, a flash-gun and envelopes for the collection of evidence. An assistant medical examiner was scribbling his report. Wagging salutes at everybody, Gifford looked down at the corpse.

Immediately he was wide awake.

The body of Harvey Fletcher was sprawled in front of the fireplace. His garb was pajamas, bathrobe and leather slippers. Yesterday he had been a figure of political importance, but this morning he was impressive in a far different manner.

He had met death violently. A revolver was clenched in his right hand, held there by cadaveric spasm. A poker was lying beside him, and this evidently was the weapon of murder. His head didn't look like a head any more, and his face was almost entirely gone.

"A pretty messy way of killing a guy," a voice said beside Gifford, "but it worked."

This was the opinion of Detective Mike Hubbard. Hubbard had a hairless pate, weighed two-fifty in his red flannels and was a good egg. He liked Gifford, probably because he envied Gifford the ability to sleep anywhere and at any time, and Gifford liked him because he was generous about passing out hot tips for the *Chronicle*.

"It happened less than two hours ago," Hubbard offered. "The ambulance men found Fletcher like that, dead, and Mrs. Fletcher over there on the sofa. She was wearing just a nightgown and a silk robe, and she had four bullets in her. The two other bullets missed. There are the holes, over there in the wall. Fletcher's gun is empty."

The sofa still retained the impression of the woman's body. She had bled.

"Funny thing about this, Giff," Mike Hubbard said, "the murderer phoned for the ambulance."

"For *him*?" Gifford asked.

"No, for Mrs. Fletcher."

"Then Mrs. Fletcher wasn't killed?"

"Not quite enough," Hubbard said, shaking his shiny head. "You can't say her husband didn't try, though. The ambulance rushed her right to the hospital, but she may not pull through."

"Why did the murderer phone for the ambulance?"

"Because Mrs. Fletcher was in such bad shape."

"At this time of the morning I'm not in such good shape myself," Gifford remarked, "but I'm beginning to get the drift."

"Sure," Hubbard said again, nodding. "But of course the murderer didn't wait around until the ambulance arrived. After he called the hospital, he scrambled. You know, that first ambulance didn't ever get here."

"The first?" Gifford yawned. "How many ambulances were there, anyway?"

"Two. You see, as soon as the hospital got this hurry-up call," Hubbard explained, "they sent one of their wagons right over. It was four blocks away, just turning into the avenue that leads to this place, when a coupe swung around the corner from the opposite direction. The ambulance wasn't using its siren on account of there wasn't any traffic and they didn't want to wake up the whole neighborhood. Neither driver had any warning. The two cars side-swiped each other."

"Has this any bearing on the murder?" Gifford asked.

"Might have. The ambulance ran onto the sidewalk and smashed into a fire-plug. The other car kept right on going, hell for leather. But the driver of the ambulance got its number."

"Then you'll soon have the bird who was driving the coupe," Gifford said.

"Sure. Some of the boys are picking him up right now. The ambulance was knocked out of commission, so the driver phoned back to the hospital. The hospital sent out a second ambulance.

That one got here all right. When they found Fletcher dead and Mrs. Fletcher all shot up, they phoned Headquarters."

"Mike," Gifford said, "when you grab the driver of that coupe, will you tip me off right away?"

"Sure," Detective Hubbard said.

Gifford was asking questions and making notes when Timmy Russell came in from outside. She had eyes the color of cornflowers and hair like spun taffy. She was as luscious a package as any girl reporter could possibly be, in Gifford's opinion; but, in common with all of Hackett's hirelings, she worked in constant dread of being booted out of her job. As she came up to Gifford she seemed full of an uneasy urgency.

"Hello, sweet," Gifford said.

"Hello, Giff. I got here a little ahead of you, as usual. I've been working on the servants and the neighbors. If you've got everything you need, let's go."

While Gifford drove, Timmy sat snugly beside him, huddling out of the damp wind. He closed one hand over hers, but she didn't pay any attention. She seemed preoccupied.

"Look," said Gifford. "This is the biggest story that's ever broken my way. I'm going to town on it. Maybe Hackett will give me a raise. Miracles do happen. Then we can be married, can't we?"

"That would be nice," Timmy murmured. "Marriage built on murder. Giff, please don't ask me again to marry you."

"Timmy," Gifford said, "I love you like hell. I know I'm not getting to first base with you, but if there's some other guy, I want to know about it."

Timmy was silent.

"Listen," Gifford said. "What the hell's the matter with you?"

"I was just thinking," Timmy said quietly, "that there ought to be a sign post on the primrose path. A special sign, reading 'This Way to the Morgue'."

Troubled, Gifford mulled that over. Timmy was in no mood to explain the

cryptic remark, and he couldn't divine its meaning. She was still silent when they went into the city room together.

It was busy. The rest of Hackett's slaves were laboring at their desks. Typewriters and teletypes were clattering. In the air was a feeling of strict regimentation that sprang directly from Hackett's presence.

Hackett was behind his desk in the corner, pouring water from a tumbler into a window-box in which four rose bushes were putting out buds. It was a curious thing about Hackett, the affection he lavished upon those roses. He was a city editor, hated reporters and everything else connected with newspapers, but those bushes were his pets.

When he turned from them, to face Gifford and Timmy Russell, his lean face hardened and his eyes took on a steely glint. "Let's have it," he said in his nerve-wearing rasp.

At a glance from Gifford, Timmy began. "Louise Fletcher had a lover," she said.

"Sure of that? I want facts, not rumors."

Timmy nodded, her blue eyes cast down at her notes. "It's perfectly understandable. Harvey Fletcher drank too much and was ugly to her. He thought of her as something to show off, like his diamond studs. Louise was fifteen years younger, lovely and sweet and fine. When she married him five years ago she was hypnotized by his money and his power, but that wore off. She'd turned to another man. She'd taken to meeting this man in the guest house, very late at night."

"Who is he?"

"Nobody knows that," Timmy answered, still looking down, "because they kept their affair almost a perfect secret. But the neighbors noticed lights in the cottage sometimes, and the blinds pulled. Once the cook saw Louise running into the house at dawn, and then, a little later, she saw a man hurrying out of the guest cottage."

"Did you get a description of that man?"

Timmy shook her taffy head.

"Why not? Get it!"

"The cook couldn't give me any description. Somehow, Harvey Fletcher must have come to suspect what was going on. He must have been looking for a chance to catch Louise and her lover together. Last night he must have heard her leaving the house to keep a rendezvous at the cottage. He took his gun with him and—"

Timmy looked at Gifford, with a strange flicker in her eyes; and Gifford went on from there.

"This is the way it must figure out," Gifford said. "Fletcher caught Louise waiting in the cottage. He'd been drinking heavily. He shot at her six times, emptying his gun, and four of the bullets hit her. He obviously meant to kill her on the spot, but she's still alive. At that point, Louise's lover showed up."

Hackett was listening in his cold-faced, challenging way that demanded Gifford be sure of every fact.

"This man gave Fletcher the works," Gifford continued. "He used the first weapon within reach, a poker from the fireplace. After he'd laid Fletcher out, he saw that Louise was in desperate need of medical care, so he phoned for an ambulance. Then he beat it."

"Any clues pointing to that man's identity?"

"Only a couple of footprints," Gifford said. "As for suspects, the field is wide open. Fletcher was a public figure who was always going around to balls and banquets, and Louise might have met this man at any one of a hundred different places. The guilty man might be almost anybody."

"Miss Russell," Hackett ordered brusquely, "go straight over to the hospital. If Louise Fletcher is able to talk, get her story. If not, get everything else you can, all about the call for the ambulance, and especially her condition. Make the most of the woman angle. Get back here as soon as you can."

Gifford watched Timmy, still silent and troubled, hurry out of the city room.

"As for you, Gifford," Hackett said, his voice even sharper, "make a supreme effort and exert yourself and stay awake. You'd be a fairly good reporter if you weren't so infernally lazy."

Gifford colored. "It isn't really laziness, it's a craving for sleep," he said. "You see, when I was a kid I worked night and day. About the time you became city editor, I was selling the *Chronicle* on the streets all night long, trying to hold down another part-time job and struggling through school at the same time. I guess that's why I don't ever seem to be able to get enough sleep now. But—"

"I don't want excuses," Hackett broke in sharply. "Give me your copy as fast and as good as you can turn it out. If you fall down on this job, you're finished. That's all."

Gritting himself to do his best, Gifford turned to his desk. His telephone was ringing. As he shuffled through his notes he scooped up the receiver. The call was from Mike Hubbard.

"Get set for the fireworks, Giff," Hubbard said.

Gifford tightened. "What's the break?"

"I told you I'd tip you off when we grabbed the guy who smashed up the ambulance. Well, we've grabbed him, and he turns out to be a hell of a lot more than just a hit-and-run driver."

"Give it to me, Mike!"

"You're getting it. We picked this guy up at his home, through his license number, see? Well, while we were questioning him down here at Headquarters, one of the boys brought in the casts of the footprints from the Fletcher place. I played a strong hunch and compared the casts with this guy's shoes. They fit—they fit perfectly."

"You mean you've already nailed the bird who killed Fletcher?" Gifford demanded.

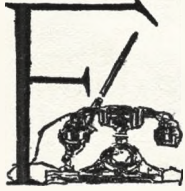
"We have, Giff, we certainly have."

"Good Lord! Who is it?"

"Carl Hackett," Hubbard said.

Gifford sat motionless a moment, trying to believe he had heard the name. "My boss's son?" he asked quietly.

"Sure," Hubbard said. "Your boss's son."



FOR A full minute after he broke the connection, Gifford sat looking at Hackett. Hackett was slashing his blue pencil through a mess of copy, scowling and cursing the poor devil who had turned it in. Gifford knew he couldn't evade this thing. He had to tell Hackett. He rose quietly and went over to Hackett's desk.

"They've got him already," Gifford said.

"Who?"

"The man who killed Fletcher."

"Who?" Hackett spat.

"Your son."

Across Hackett's lean face came the hardest expression that Gifford had ever seen on a human being. It was shock, and dismay, and incredulity, all held back by a fierce and chill self-control. Hackett's thin hands gripped the arms of his chair and he half rose. Gifford thought Hackett was going to hit him. But Hackett didn't.

"Carl?" he said, in a harsh, hollow tone.

Gifford nodded.

Hackett sank back into his chair, his eyes blinded by restrained rage. Sweat broke out on his forehead. After a moment he was able to see Gifford again.

"Has the *Bulletin* got this?"

"They must have it. They're questioning your son down at Headquarters now."

"They'll try to beat me with it. Damned if I'll let them. We'll put out an extra, the fastest extra that ever came off our presses. Write the lead, Gifford. Never mind the full story until the regular mail edition. Damn you, get to work!"

The whiplash of Hackett's savage tone drove Gifford to his desk. He got to work.

While he poked at his ancient typewriter, he glanced frequently at Hackett. Hackett was phoning the composing room, the press room, the distribution crew and demanding action. And action was what he was going to get, even before he hurried down to Headquarters to see his son.

It wasn't the printer's ink in his blood that was making Hackett do this. It was sheer vindictiveness. He hated the owner of the *Bulletin*. The owner of the *Bulletin* had once been a reporter under Hackett. Hackett had fired him for incompetence, just as he had fired scores of other first-class news men who had subsequently risen to positions of distinction in the Fourth Estate. But years later that reporter, Owen Watson, had inherited a fortune, had bought the *Bulletin* and had begun to cut into the *Chronicle's* prestige with a vastly improved paper.

Finding himself seriously challenged by a former underling whom he still held in contempt, Hackett had conceived an uncompromising hatred for Owen Watson. "Beat the *Bulletin*" was the precept that fired Hackett during his every waking hour. But it wasn't merely professional competition. On Hackett's part it was determination to vanquish the man behind the *Bulletin*.

Mean as his boss was, Gifford knew that Hackett was suffering agony now. He had to get out that extra and beat the *Bulletin* before he could hurry down to his only son's aid. Page by page, the copy boy flicked Gifford's story from his typewriter to Hackett's desk. Hackett knifed it in blue and shot it down to the composing room. Between pages, he grimly made phone calls.

Gifford caught the name of Booth. Andrew Booth was the biggest lawyer in the State. Hackett was retaining him for Carl.

"I haven't any money," Gifford heard Hackett snarl. "I haven't been able to

save one damned cent. But I'll get it for you. Somehow I'll get it."

Hackett had his coat on by the time the last page of Gifford's copy went down the tube.

"Now write the rest of it," he snarled. "Edit it yourself, for the mail edition. Remember I'm putting out a decent newspaper. If you put through a lot of sloppy stuff, I'll ram it down your throat. After that, start covering Headquarters."

Then he left the city room with a violent slam.

While the big presses rolled, down in the basement, spinning out the extra, Gifford banged out the full story. To his surprise, he found himself feeling sorry for Hackett. He wondered why. There wasn't a single reason why anyone on the *Chronicle* staff should like the man. Perhaps Gifford felt sympathetic because Hackett was so friendless. Perhaps, too, it was because Gifford knew, somehow, that Hackett was really human inside. Whatever the reason was, he didn't have time to think about it much. He had the job of his life to do, and a doubly acrimonious boss to do it for.

Just as Gifford dropped the last of his copy into the tube, the extras came up from the press room. The headline was a full-page shout: Fletcher Killed After Shooting Wife; Carl Hackett Held—written by the accused man's father.

On the faces of those in the city room appeared strange expressions, half stunned, half grimly glad.

Hurrying into police headquarters, Gifford found Hackett and the lawyer, Booth, in the office adjoining Detective Hubbard's. Booth was a big man, of impressive poise and presence, but he was obviously troubled. Hackett was sitting still, holding himself in. There were voices in the next room. Gifford stood aside quietly, realizing that Hackett hadn't yet been permitted to see his son.

Hackett rose stiffly when a door

opened. Detective Hubbard beckoned. Hackett brushed Booth aside and strode into the next office. Gifford followed him. He paused, facing the young man who was sitting wearily beside the desk in the center of the room.

"Hello, Dad," Carl Hackett said quietly.

Hackett drew a chair to face his son. The hardness, the meanness went out of his bearing. Before Gifford's eyes, he changed amazingly; and it was Carl Hackett that caused the change. It was like the transformation that came over Norman Hackett when he tended his roses, but it was far deeper.

Carl Hackett, Gifford thought, was a right guy by anybody's standards. He didn't fit into this picture at all. There was something definitely wrong about his getting pulled up for a murder.

"You don't have to tell me you didn't do it, Carl," Hackett said gently. "I know you didn't."

Carl looked straight into his father's eyes. "I don't know anything about it," he said.

"Those footprints they've got, are they yours?"

"No."

"Was it your car that smashed into the ambulance?"

"No."

"Where had you been last night? What did you do?"

"A bunch of us went to the Hide-away." This was a roadhouse, several miles outside of town, in a direction opposite that of the Fletcher place. "We had a few drinks, and danced a while, and then left."

"Who was there with you?" Hackett asked.

"Well, Barry Watson."

Gifford saw Hackett wince. Barry Watson was Owen Watson's son—the son of the publisher of the *Bulletin*. To Gifford it seemed natural that Carl and Barry Watson should be friends, but the fact that they were, he saw, was gall to Hackett. Perhaps Hackett expected, as a matter of loyalty, that his



son should share his hostility toward the Watsons. But, being the sort he was, Carl didn't.

Hackett asked quickly, his voice taking on an edge, "How does Barry Watson enter into this?"

"Why, not in any way. It was simply that we were all there together, the usual gang, having a good time. The others stayed, but Barry and I left together."

"In the same car, your car?" Hackett demanded, his voice sharpening.

"No; he had his, and I had mine. I drove straight home and went to bed."

Gifford touched Hackett's shoulder. "Let me ask a question," he said. He asked it of Carl. "About a week ago I dropped in at the Hideaway. Barry Watson was there that night, with some of his usual crowd. I know he's separated from his wife, so, when I heard them kidding him about a girl, I listened in. They were saying they knew he'd found himself a new girl—asking who she was, and why he never brought her around, and why all the secrecy. Do you know anything about it?"

"Just that much," Carl said. "Not any more than that. It couldn't have anything to do with—this."

Hackett peered at Gifford during a moment of silence, then turned again to his son.

"Then you deny having had anything to do with the murder, Carl?"

"Certainly. I deny the whole thing."

Detective Hubbard and Andrew Booth had been talking quietly in the outer office. At that moment they came in. Booth looked more troubled than before.

"Mr. Hackett," Hubbard asked casually, "did you hear Carl come home last night?"

"Yes," Hackett said. "I did."

"What time was it?"

"About—two o'clock."

A sick expression came over Carl's face; and the detective wagged his polished head.

"A good try, but I'm afraid it's no

go, trying to cover him," Hubbard said. "Carl himself said it was about three. But what time did he actually get there? It was about four, wasn't it?"

Hackett jerked to his feet. "You can't make me do that!" he rasped. "You can't trick me into saying things that you can use against my own son!" He turned to face Booth. "Listen to Carl's story! The boy's innocent, and he's got to be cleared."

"I'm going to talk with him now," the lawyer said dubiously.

Hubbard remained in the inner office with Carl, while Gifford followed Hackett and Booth into the next room. The lawyer rubbed his chin.

"I'm afraid you're asking me to do an impossible thing, Mr. Hackett," he said. "At the moment, I can't see any grounds for preparing a presentable defense."

Again Hackett was inside his horny shell. His face was set and his eyes were ice. "If you aren't able to clear that boy," he said harshly, "I'll hire another lawyer who can do it."

"Just as you wish. I confess I'm not eager to go ahead with this case, but I'll reserve my decision until after I've talked with Carl," Booth answered. "Consider the evidence—solid, material evidence that will stand up in any court. It's very foolish of Carl to deny everything, because he *was* at the Fletcher place, and when he was rushing away, following the murder, he did smash into the ambulance."

Hackett's fists closed.

"When the police arrested Carl," the lawyer went on, "they found him fully dressed and extremely upset. There was mud on his shoes. The footprints left at the edge of the garden, near the Fletcher guest house, match his shoes exactly. In the face of that fact, his denial only makes his guilt all the more certain. And you see, Mr. Hackett, I can't plead self-defense for him, because the gun Fletcher had was empty—useless."

And Gifford was thinking that Louise

Fletcher was lovely and young, a little younger than Carl.

"When Carl collided with the ambulance, his car was damaged," Booth continued gravely. "One of his headlights was smashed. The police found fragments of a headlight lens at the scene of the accident, and the pieces fit perfectly into the pieces left in the headlight of Carl's coupé. He was so desperate to get away, you see, that he didn't dare stop and—"

"Listen to me!" Hackett cut in. "I tell you, that boy didn't kill Fletcher. The evidence lies. Somewhere there must be grounds for a reasonable doubt, and you've got to find it!"

"I'll do my best," Booth said gravely.

After the lawyer went into the room where Detective Hubbard was again questioning Carl, Hackett stood a moment staring at the door. Turning, he gestured sharply to Gifford. He didn't speak until they paused outside the revolving doors of Headquarters.

"Carl's a damned decent sort," Gifford said. "Perhaps a bit too decent for his own good. He'd never do or say anything that might get a pal into trouble. I don't believe he could bring himself to the point of accusing a friend of murder."

Hackett looked hard at Gifford. "Carl's like that," he agreed tersely. "It just isn't in him."

"Even if Carl was suspected of a murder himself, as he is," Gifford went on, "he'd keep quiet and rely on his friend to come forward and straighten things out. I think he's doing that very thing right now. The trouble is, it's putting him into one hell of a jam. Booth's right, that evidence is enough to send him to the chair, no matter how he may change his story later."

Hackett's voice bore into Gifford's ears. "You mean that even if Carl knows who's guilty, even if he comes to the point of accusing that man, the evidence against him is so strong that nobody will believe him?"

Gifford nodded soberly. "It's possi-

ble, too damned possible. It's even worse than that. Suppose the guilty man confesses. Will that save Carl, as matters stand? It's doubtful. It's a fact of law that an uncorroborated confession has absolutely no weight in court. An uncorroborated confession, mind you. Every word of it may be the truth, but it's worthless unless there are facts, or evidence, or testimony to back it up. Those are hard lines, but—"

"I know all that," Hackett snapped. "If Carl changes his story, it won't help him now. If he accuses the guilty man, it'll mean nothing. Even if the murderer admits the crime, there must be substantial proof of what he says before Carl can be cleared. Yes, I know all that!"

"The news is all over town by now," Gifford said quietly, "and nobody's coming forward to take the blame off Carl's shoulders."

"Listen to me, Gifford. We're newspaper men, not detectives, but we've got to dig into this. We may be able to prove that Carl is innocent, some way, without actually finding the guilty man. It may be that the only possible way is to collar the real murderer. I don't give a damn what's necessary, we've got to clear Carl."

"We have only one lead—"

Gifford broke off because Hackett was turning away. Stiffly, Hackett went to his car. There were newsboys running along the street, peddling the *Chronicle* extra, shouting the headlines that damned Carl Hackett as a murderer—headlines that Carl Hackett's father had written because he had had to write them in order to beat the *Bulletin*.



N EED of sleep weighed heavily upon Gifford, but he was striving valiantly to keep awake. He'd been on the job constantly; he'd been up all night. It was again a horribly early hour of the morning. The break in the

Fletcher murder case had come twenty-four hours ago.

The little hospital room was quiet. There was a bed in it, but the bed was occupied by Timmy Russell. She was fully clothed and—how Gifford envied her!—sleeping soundly.

Norman Hackett was standing at the window, rigid and grim, staring out into the deep darkness that presages dawn. Detective Hubbard, at ease as always, was patiently twiddling his thumbs. But it was a long and trying vigil they were keeping.

In the next room of the hospital, two doctors were attending Louise Fletcher. She was sinking, they had said; but moments of lucidity came to her, and it was possible that she might summon enough strength to talk.

Gifford was studying the *Chronicle's* final. The headlines shouted that Andrew Booth had declined to enter the case. In bitterness and in desperation, Hackett had written that headline, too. Another scare-head announced that the district attorney had promptly presented the evidence to the grand jury, and that the grand jury was expected to return its decision in the morning. All this Gifford had read and reread; but, in the hope of discovering some flaw in the case, he was reading it again.

Timmy's story had been combined with his. Her coverage of the hospital angle was complete and, because she was working for Hackett, accurate. She had competently included several paragraphs concerning the murderer's telephone call to the hospital and the dispatching of the ambulances:

The hospital records show that the first ambulance left for the Fletcher home at 3:22 a. m. Upon receiving the report of the collision, the hospital sent out the second ambulance twenty-three minutes later. This ambulance is reported as having arrived at the Fletcher place at 4:15. This time is also recorded at police headquarters as the moment at which the first news of the murder was received.

Footfalls in the hallway caused Gifford's eyes to lift. Looking out, he saw

Barry Watson moving with quiet nervousness past the room in which Louise Fletcher lay dying. Dropping the paper, Gifford followed him. They paused together at the window at the end of the corridor.

"Anything breaking, Gifford?" Watson asked.

Gifford yawned. "Not yet. You're covering this for the *Bulletin*, of course."

Gifford looked at Barry Watson curiously. He was handsomer, in a virile, masculine way, than any other reporter Gifford had even seen. He had the strength and the lithe grace of an athlete. Gifford's eyes held to his during a moment of uneasy silence.

"Certainly," Watson said, then. "Why else would I be here? You may remember my father owns the *Bulletin*."

"Thought you might be a friend of Louise Fletcher."

"I know her slightly."

Gifford was trying to seem casual. "You don't believe Carl did it, do you?"

"No, I don't. But it's hard to get around that evidence."

Gifford nodded. "Assuming Carl is innocent, there's only one thing to think. He's covering somebody. And whoever he's covering, that man is willing to let him take the rap."

Watson said nothing.

"That's hellish lousy," Gifford said quietly. "It's betraying a real loyalty. Carl's left holding the bag. Whoever he's covering, isn't worth it. Any man would have come forward right away, if he wasn't an out-and-out rat. But then, I don't suppose any man wants to go to the chair if he can possibly avoid it."

Still Watson was silent.

"As I said to Hackett," Gifford went on, trying to sense Watson's reaction, "the field's wide open, so far as suspects are concerned. If Carl wasn't in the picture, you could point to almost any man in town and challenge him to produce an alibi. Not one man in a thousand could do it. For instance, I was at home, in bed, at the time of the

murder, but I can't prove it. How about you, Watson?"

Watson said flatly, "The same with me."

"Carl said that you and he left the Hideaway at the same time that morning. It must have been about two o'clock, wasn't it?"

"That's right."

"If circumstances demanded it," Gifford insisted, "could you prove you drove straight home and went right to bed?"

Watson offered Gifford a cigarette and, when Gifford refused, put one in his mouth and left it unlighted. "I couldn't produce any witnesses," he answered.

"There you are," Gifford said. "Eliminate Carl, and anybody is suspect. You know, Watson, I've a theory about this case. Off the record, of course—not for the *Bulletin* to print. But you probably wouldn't print it anyway."

Watson looked at him again, with sharper curiosity. "What do you mean by that?"

"Suppose," Gifford went on, watching Watson keenly, "that among the party at the Hideaway was a certain man. Suppose this man is married but separated from his wife. While the divorce is hanging fire, this man falls in love with another woman. Not wanting to invite trouble, he meets his new girl secretly."

Watson said nothing while Gifford unmistakably described him. "Being smart, this man doesn't take her out among his friends, doesn't even mention her to them. But his friends, for some reason, suspect that there is a new girl in his life, and they kid him about her, tease him, trying to find out who she is. Of course he keeps mum and takes it. That situation isn't very hard to imagine, so far, is it, Watson?"

Watson's eyes merely narrowed at Gifford.

"As I say," Gifford continued, his nerves tightening, "Carl and this man are among the party at the Hideaway. This man, let's call him Jones, leaves

early. Carl gets the idea that Jones is going off to meet the girl. He thinks it would be good fun to follow Jones and find out who the girl is, or at least where she lives. So he does; he trails Jones to a rendezvous where Jones usually meets his sweetheart. But on this particular night, he runs smack into a murder."

Watson's lips pinched hard on the cigarette.

"Carl isn't the kind who would peep; he wouldn't spy on Jones and the girl. But suppose he's right there, near-by, when he hears a series of gunshots. The next minute he sees Jones rushing away. Knowing Carl as well as you do, Watson, you can easily imagine what his reaction would be when he learned that a good friend of his had committed a murder. He'd do just what he's doing now, sit tight and say nothing. What do you think of that theory?"

Watson turned to face Gifford squarely.

"If you won't answer that question," Gifford said, his lips drawn against his teeth, "perhaps you'll answer another. What size shoe do you wear?"

Suddenly Watson's left hand gripped Gifford's shoulder; his right, closed hard, poised to drive squarely into Gifford's face. There was fierceness in his eyes, and his jaw was clenched. Gifford stiffened, backing away, and his own fists lifted. But neither of them struck. At that moment a quiet voice called down the corridor.

"Giff!"

Both men looked around quickly. Timmy Russell was standing outside an open door. Sleep had disarrayed her taffy hair delightfully, but her eyes were anxious. Watson released Gifford as she gestured to them. With an electrical charge of hostility between them, they strode toward her.

The vigil had ended. Hackett and Hubbard were no longer waiting. They had gone into the room where Louise Fletcher lay. Timmy followed them

first; Gifford and Hubbard went in after her. The hush was deeper here.

Hackett and the detective were at the side of the bed. Two doctors, their faces grave, were watching their patient from the opposite side. Louise Fletcher was an inert figure beneath the immaculate sheet. Her finely molded face looked waxen in contrast to the bronze hair splashed on the pillow. Her lips were colorless and trembling; her eyes were open, but veiled, as if they were looking into a far-away dream.

Hackett's hands opened and closed tensely as Hubbard bent gently over the woman.

"Mrs. Fletcher," the detective said in a kindly tone, "can you hear me?"

Louise Fletcher's eyes moved mistily until they found Hubbard's face; but her lips did not open.

"It's very important that you tell us everything you can, Mrs. Fletcher," Hubbard said. "We must know who the man was."

The woman's eyes slowly closed.

Abruptly Hackett brushed the detective aside and stepped closer to the head of the bed. One of his lean hands reached down to grip Louise Fletcher's shoulder. The rasp of his voice came as a shocking sound.

"Tell them the truth! It wasn't Carl. You know it wasn't Carl. Tell them the truth! Do you hear me? Tell them!"

Hubbard pulled Hackett back. Hackett resisted; but he grew quiet as one of the doctors stepped quickly to the woman's side. The grating of Hackett's voice must have penetrated the dark fog of Louise Fletcher's mind; for her lips opened.

But they made no sound, no sound save a long, slow breath.

It was the last breath that Louise Fletcher would ever draw. . . .

This was what they had been waiting for, through all the long, tiring hours of the night—these few seconds that had yielded not the dimmest spark of light.

Gifford's throat was dry as he watched Hackett turn from the bed.

Hackett moved leadenly, his eyes full of despair. He walked from the room as if he were turning his back upon his last hope.

Gifford lingered. He didn't move even when Timmy went out, twisting her handkerchief and biting her lips. His eyes were fixed upon Barry Watson. Keen and speculating, they followed young Watson's quick stride down the corridor, until he passed from sight. Then, quiet and purposeful, Gifford left.



HE MOMENT he entered the city room, Gifford heard his name rasp from Hackett's lips.

Hackett was at his desk, slashing at a page of copy. The haggardness of his face made it look even harder, even more inhuman. Gifford was beginning to learn that the tougher Hackett's shell became, the more Hackett was suffering inside. He strode directly to the desk.

"You're two hours late!" Hackett snarled. "You know I expect punctuality, especially now. You've been asleep on the job, you damned loafer. You've been wasting time while—"

"Hold it," Gifford said wearily. "I haven't had a wink of sleep since you phoned me night before last. I expect to fall on my face at any moment, but I've been working. I've got something. If it isn't enough to establish a reasonable doubt in Carl's case, I'm crazy—with lack of sleep."

Hackett jerked erect. "Do you mean that?"

"Damned well I mean it."

"Let's have it!"

Drawing a chair close, Gifford glanced around. Timmy was at the nearest desk. She was looking at him, seeming so worn and so unhappy that Gifford wanted to take her in his arms. She didn't answer his smile. She just kept looking at him as he sagged into the chair.

"Let's have it, Gifford!"

Gifford rubbed his blue-whiskered chin. "Down at Headquarters you heard me ask Carl about Barry Watson. Last night I grabbed a chance to get at Watson directly. I tried to find out if he could account for himself at the time of the murder. He was evasive and suspicious, so much so that I've been checking up on him."

Hackett demanded with a rasp, "What did you find out?"

"That Barry Watson didn't go directly home from the Hideaway. That Barry Watson didn't actually get home until some time after Fletcher had been murdered. That Barry Watson wears a shoe sized—"

Hackett gripped Gifford's arm. "Are you sure of that? Absolutely sure?"

"Absolutely," Gifford sighed. "He left the Hideaway at the same time as Carl. It was a few minutes after two o'clock. From that time until almost four-thirty, when he reached home, his whereabouts and actions are entirely unaccounted for."

Hackett's question lashed at Gifford. "How do you know Barry Watson didn't get home until four-thirty?"

"I found it out from the man who lives in the house next door—Philip Wetherman, of the First National Bank. Wetherman's bedroom window is directly above the Watson driveway. He was awakened by the noise of the car when Barry Watson drove into the garage. He looked at the clock and saw the time. Watson's on the day trick, over at the *Bulletin*, except when something unusual breaks, but Wetherman says he has frequently heard young Watson pulling in just before dawn."

"How does Wetherman know it was Barry Watson, and not Owen Watson?"

"He says he's been disturbed so much, because the driveway is so close to his house, that he's learned the difference in the sounds of the two Watson cars."

"What do you mean, Barry Watson's

actions and whereabouts are entirely unaccounted for?"

"I cornered him with this," Gifford said, his eyes narrowing. "I went straight over to the *Bulletin* plant and nailed him with it. He had only one answer to all my questions. He told me to go to hell."

Hackett's eyes were a savage gleam. "That has no connection—"

"But *this* has," Gifford broke in. "Last night I asked Barry Watson what size shoe he wears, and he damned near socked me. This morning I found out for myself. I tramped around from one store to another until I found the one where Barry Watson buys his shoes. Hackett, it's the same store that your son patronizes. What's more, Barry Watson and Carl wear exactly the same size shoes, the same length, the same width. That's enough to cast doubt on the footprint evidence, isn't it?"

"Write it!" Hackett's tone whipped at Gifford. "Write it, but be careful. We can't flatly accuse Barry Watson of murder. His father's paper would sue us to death. We'll have to disguise his identity in at least this first story. But we can set the police to investigating him. We can prove to the whole damned world that the footprint evidence is questionable. It'll undermine the State's case. Write that, Gifford!"

Gifford hesitated. "I can't help pointing out that this really isn't adequate proof of Barry Watson's guilt."

Hackett's fists smashed to the desk. "That's of no importance. I don't give one good damn whether we can pin the murder on Barry Watson or not. What we're going to do is wreck the case against Carl, no matter who the hell it hurts. Get to work!"

Gifford found new energy in the desperate urgency of Hackett. He hurried to his desk, flung off his coat, tilted his hat, loosened his tie. He was full of fire—the realization that this was the biggest exclusive story he could ever hope for.

He spun a sheet of paper under the

roller of his typewriter; and on that square of newsprint he was going to plaster words that were going to give him stature in this man's tough game, even in Hackett's contemptuous eyes. He never felt like this before, never so swept on, so charged with steam. He slammed into it under bursting pressure—until a quiet voice spoke at his shoulder.

"Here goes my job, Giff," it said.

Gifford looked up at Timmy Russell. She was nipping at her lower lip, and she was deathly pale.

"What?" Gifford mumbled. "Job? Your job? What about it?"

"I'm about to lose it."

"What? Why?"

"I'm going over and tell Hackett something, and Hackett's going to kick me out."

"What the hell, Timmy?" Gifford protested.

Timmy sat quietly in the chair next Gifford's. Her fingers entwined in her lap. She looked half her age, like a terribly disappointed little child, and yet she looked older and worn with weariness.

"I overheard what you told Hackett," she said. "I can't let you print it. It wouldn't be fair."

Gifford laughed, then suddenly stopped laughing. "Have you gone nuts?" he howled at her. "You can't let me? Why, you can't stop me! Timmy, what the hell is this, anyway?"

Timmy said, very quietly, "Barry wouldn't tell you where he was that night, and he'll never tell anybody, because he was with me."

It took Gifford a moment to realize what she had said. He sat staring at her, his fingers poised over the keyboard, the color fading under the stubble on his cheeks; and suddenly he felt sick.

"Timmy," he said in an empty tone.

"Barry came to my apartment after he left the Hideaway," Timmy said. "He stayed until just before dawn. I'm sorry if this hurts you, but I've got to

tell you, because Barry never would."

Gifford peered blankly at the few words he had peppered onto the sheet of paper in his typewriter.

"It—it's been like that for some time now," Timmy went on. "You see, Barry's wife is so apt to make trouble—she's that kind—we've had to meet secretly. We're hoping the divorce will go through soon. Then, Barry and I will be married."

Numbly, Gifford nodded.

"I know how much this means to you, really I do, but I can't let you print that stuff about Barry. It would get him into a jam unjustly; it would be terrible for both of us. And it wouldn't accomplish anything. It wouldn't help Carl Hackett, because I can prove that Barry had absolutely no connection with the murder and proving it would hurt us both. Don't you see?"

"I see," Gifford said leadenly.

"I'm sorry, Giff."

Smiling wryly, Gifford tore the sheet from his typewriter, crushed it into a wad and flung it into the wastebasket.

"That's what you meant when you made that crack about the primrose path," he said.

"Yes. People are capable of doing such horrible things sometimes, I was scared." Timmy rose wearily. "I—I'll explain it to Hackett."

Gifford reached out and closed his hand hard on her arm. "No you don't!" he said quickly. "I'm not that much of a heel—to make you do that. Take it easy, Timmy. Even if you did tell him, he'd only make me write the truth."

He forced her to remain in her chair. Her eyes, lifted to his, were profoundly grateful. He smiled crookedly, and glanced at Hackett. Hackett, at that moment, looked up at him.

"Get to work, Gifford!" Hackett snarled.

Gifford went to the desk with slow, heavy steps. Suddenly he felt very tired and very old; and he thought he would like to crawl into bed and sleep forever.

"It's no go," he said quietly.

"What?"

"No go," Gifford repeated. "The theory about Barry Watson. It won't help Carl a particle. It'll only harm innocent people. There's no use—"

"I told you to write that story!"

"Not me," Gifford said soberly. "I've just found out where Barry Watson was at the time of the murder."

"Where was he?"

Gifford shook his head.

"Where was he?"

"I'm damned if I'll tell you that," Gifford said.

Hackett jerked to his feet. "If Barry Watson has an alibi, let him use it! Let him clear himself! But we're going to print that stuff just the same. Do you think I care who the hell I hurt? Do you think anybody matters to me when Carl's life is at stake? I told you we're going to clear him, no matter how, and I mean to do exactly that. Get back to your desk. Write that story!"

Again Gifford wagged his head. "Not me," he repeated.

"I'll write it myself!"

Gifford's eyes leveled. "If you do," he said, "you won't help Carl. What's more, I'll break your damned neck."

For a moment Hackett stood with his hands pressed hard on the desk, his mouth drawn to a tight line. Then his voice lashed.

"Gifford, you're fired!"

With a crooked smile, Gifford said, "I guessed it. O.K. So long. It hasn't been so nice, knowing you."

Hackett sat staring at Gifford as he went back to his desk. Timmy was still there, her eyes blue and limpid. She didn't speak while Gifford went through the motions of cleaning out his desk. The process consisted merely of dumping the contents of all the drawers into the wastebasket. When he finished, Timmy's eyes were still upon him.

"What are you going to do, Giff?"

"I'm a crazy kind of a guy, Timmy," Gifford said. "This was more than just a job to me. I wanted to make good

under Hackett. He's mean as hell, and you can't help hating him, but he's the toughest city editor in the game and making the grade under him proves that you've got the stuff. I don't blame him for firing me. In his place, I'd have done the same thing. I guess I haven't got what it takes."

"Giff, what are you going to do?"

"Catch up on my sleep, first," Gifford said. "Then maybe I can find a ditch somewhere that needs digging."

Timmy put her hands on his arms and made him look into her eyes. "You're so swell," she said softly. "You're too human to ever become the kind of reporter that Hackett expects you to be. I hate myself for having hurt you—in both ways."

Gifford managed a smile. "Thanks," he said. "So long. And good luck."

He walked out of the city room quietly, feeling a crazy desire to laugh. Job gone, girl gone—it was funny. It was so funny that Gifford kept making queer noises in his throat as he drove home. It was going to be good to get some sleep now. He wished to God he'd never wake up.



HE WALKED heavily into his little apartment and began tearing off his clothes. He was almost stripped when he picked the alarm clock out of the corner where he had flung it. He chuckled at it sourly, because it wasn't going to be pulling him out of bed any more, for a while. Its crystal was smashed, and the hands were pointing to 4:02. Gifford was staring at it numbly when, suddenly, the telephone bell began clamoring. Wearily, Gifford took up the instrument. He heard a crisp, genial voice.

"Gifford? Owen Watson calling."

"Good morning, or afternoon, or whatever it is."

"I understand you're open for a new



job, Gifford," Owen Watson said briskly.

Gifford knew what had happened. Timmy had called Barry Watson. Barry Watson had told his father, the publisher of the *Bulletin*. Gifford didn't know whether to be resentful or grateful; he was too busy trying to think.

"That's right," he said.

"There's a desk waiting for you over here, if you'd like it," Owen Watson said. "We need a good man."

Gifford drew a breath. "Thanks, Mr. Watson. May I have a little time to think it over?"

"Certainly. Call me back when you've come to a decision. But I'd like to have you working for me."

"Thanks," Gifford said again, dizzily. "You'll be hearing from me soon."

He put the telephone down, then began to get back into his clothes. The bed looked soft and inviting; turning away from it called for a real effort. But Gifford pulled into his coat, his face set and his eyes determined; and he put the alarm clock in his pocket. Then he went out and got into his roadster.

He knew he looked odd when he stepped into the city room of the *Chronicle*. His face was black with beard and his clothes needed pressing; his eyes were veined with red and surrounded by dark lines, and the clock in his pocket made a big lump.

Knowing he had been fired out, everyone paused in their work to stare at him—especially Timmy. He smiled at her, then walked to the corner where Hackett was slashing at a mess of copy.

Hackett glowered at him. "I thought I fired you."

"I've got a story, Hackett," Gifford said. "I could give it to the *Bulletin*, but I'm crazy enough to think it belongs in the *Chronicle*."

Hackett didn't move; his eyes kept glinting.

"You said you want Carl cleared," Gifford went on. "You want him cleared, no matter how—and you mean it?"

"Certainly I mean it."

Gifford nodded, his mouth drawn tight. He found a copy of yesterday's final on the desk, spread it out, and pointed to a column that Timmy had written. Then he took the clock out of his pocket and put it on the desk.

"There's the evidence that will corroborate the murderer's confession," Gifford forced himself to say. "You see, the second ambulance arrived at the Fletcher house at 4:15. Until 4:15, only three people in the world knew that Fletcher had been killed—his wife, your son, and the murderer himself. You see, when you phoned me, I pulled this clock out of the wall and threw it into the corner and broke it—and the clock reads 4:02."

Gifford saw some of the wearing tension go out of Hackett's manner. Hackett looked at the copy he had been editing. Gifford saw the headline that was scrawled on it in blue: Grand Jury Indicts Carl Hackett For Fletcher Murder.

"Carl arrived home just as you were driving out, isn't that it?" Gifford inquired quietly. "He thought something must be wrong, and he followed you. He must have stayed there at the guest house, after you left, and found out what had happened. Of course, you didn't know about his part in it until he was arrested. He'd have gone to the chair before accusing you."

"I'd never have let him!"

"Of course not. I think I know why you phoned me just when you did. You thought there had been time for the ambulance to arrive—you didn't know about the collision—and you were anxious to have news of Louise Fletcher's condition. That, and getting the story first."

"Write your angle on it, Gifford," Hackett said in an amazingly gentle tone. "I'll handle the rest."

Amid a strange quiet, Gifford went to his desk. Timmy and all the others were watching him. Sitting at his typewriter, he saw Hackett sweep aside the

edited copy and begin to write in long hand, swiftly.

Gifford put paper in the roller and began hitting the keys. He felt, strangely, as he wrote, that he was doing the best job of his life, a job that even Hackett would consider a good piece of news work. When he finished, he sat exhausted, watching as Hackett sent the roll of copy down the tube to the composing room.

Hackett was watering his roses when the proofs came up. He corrected them carefully, sent them back, then got into his hat and coat. There was no hardness in his face now. With almost a comradely gesture, he came to Gifford.

"I've put through a recommendation for you," he said. "I think you can expect to be the new city editor. Let's go."

As they drove toward Headquarters wordlessly, Gifford remembered things: Timmy telling Hackett that Louise Fletcher had had a lover, and Hackett rasping, "Who is he? Did you get a description? Any clues pointing to that man's identity?" Hackett facing Carl and declaring, "You don't have to tell me you didn't do it, I know you didn't."

Then, "I don't give a damn what's necessary, we've got to clear Carl."

Knowing that his own confession would mean nothing, Hackett had bent over the dying woman he had loved and begged her to tell the truth. Gifford recalled, too, something he had said himself, something that now seemed full of grim truth: "But then I don't suppose any man wants to go to the chair if he can possibly avoid it."

As Hackett got out of the roadster, he asked a thing that put a lasting lump in Gifford's throat.

"Take good care of my roses for me, will you, old man?"

Gifford was at Hackett's side, and Hackett was at the desk in Headquarters, standing square-shouldered and straight, being formally booked for the crime, when the extra hit the streets. The headlines screamed: Chronicle Editor Confesses Fletcher Murder; Clears Son.

It was the first time that Hackett had ever given Gifford a by-line. It was the last story that Hackett would ever handle. And together they had beaten the *Bulletin*.

Gifford shook the murderer's hand.



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# BODY-GUARD TO DEATH

By **RUSSELL BENDER**



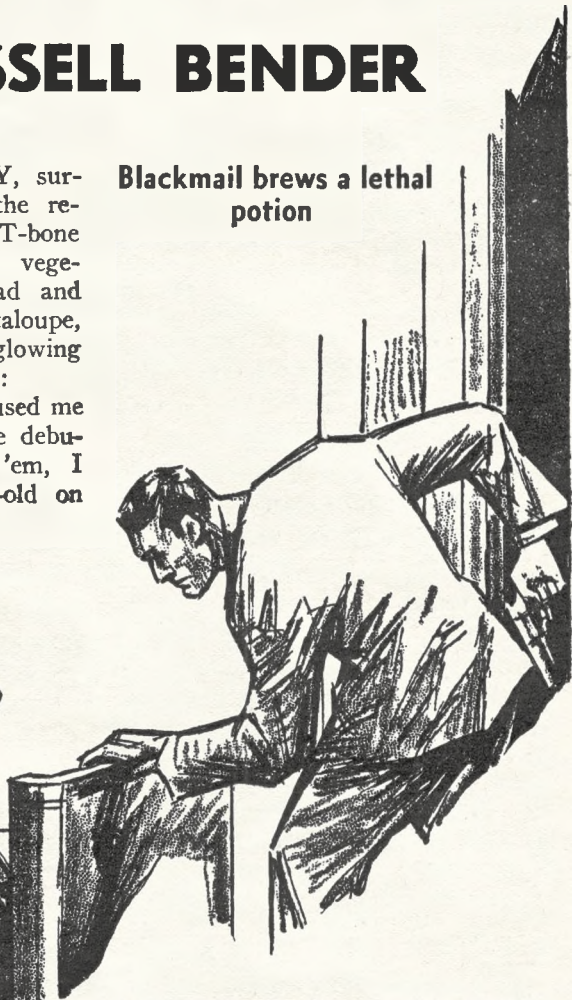
**C**ONNOLLY, surrounded by the remains of a T-bone steak, four vegetables, a salad and half a cantaloupe, pointed the glowing

end of his cigar at Gert and said:

"Shoo. Shoo, gal. You've caused me enough trouble. Besides, I hate debutantes, and even if I liked 'em, I wouldn't want a nineteen-year-old on my conscience. Shoo."



**Blackmail brews a lethal  
potion**



Gertrude said, "Can I help it if my dad's got money, Jake Connolly?"

"Shoo."

But she didn't shoo. She pulled up a chair and sat down, a tall lean girl with thick blond hair and eyes that changed color according to the color of the clothes she wore. Sometimes they were hazel, sometimes green. Right now they were blue. She wore a powder-blue linen

skirt and jacket, white shoes, and a white bandanna with dark blue polka dots. But Connolly noticed something unusual about her eyes. They were frank and bold—they were always that—but somehow they weren't mocking him, teasing him, tonight. Connolly pulled slowly at his cigar. Then his jaw tightened a little and he said:

"I told you to shoo. We're still news. When blue-bloods like you mix with guys like me, it's always news anyway. Not that I give a hoot. It's swell publicity for me, been swell publicity, and I got offers—"

Gertrude said, "Timmy's in a jam."

"What's that got to do with me?"

She said stubbornly, "When Timmy's in a jam, Jake Connolly, it's always got something to do with you. My old man hired you to take care of him—to take care of both of us."

"Yeah, but he fired me."

"He didn't fire you! He called you in to ask you to be more careful, and you quit! You know you did, Jake Connolly!"

Connolly snapped, "Well, what'd you expect me to do? Who wouldn't've—with fifty million reporters yapping at his heels night and day?" He shook a long forefinger at her. "You know what one of those tabloids called one of my pictures? Body-guard Turns Lover!"

"Well, didn't you?"

Connolly reddened. He knew he had, but hell and all high water would never make him admit it. Besides, he never knew how it had happened. It might have been the moon—it was pretty here over Chesapeake Bay—but anyway, suddenly he had been kissing Gertrude and suddenly a gossip column was emblazoning it: "Who is the man who was wooing Gertrude Loring (she's the heir to the steel millions, you dopes) on the boardwalk at the River Club last Tuesday?" And on the following day: "Is it true that Gert Loring and her body-guard are on fire?"

Connolly remembered and his flush deepened. Being called a lover was bad

enough, but the hints that went with it were what turned his stomach. Connolly hated fortune-hunters. Despised gigolos. But he knew Gert was simply teasing him. She was reminding him of something he'd always scorned—that a woman at last had gotten under his skin.

And a young debutante, at that.

Connolly made an angry, rasping noise.

Gert said, "I didn't *ask* you to kiss me, you know. But let's forget it. Timmy's in a jam."

She didn't exactly know what kind of a jam. Tim had phoned her two hours ago—it had taken her that long to find Connolly—and Tim, despite his general cheerfulness toward all troubles, had sounded worried.

"He was in his apartment at the Royal," his sister now said. "He said, 'For God's sake, find Jake quick and get him over here. And you stay away, Sis. This is too deep for you.' Then he hung up."

Connolly was dumping ash into his coffee cup. "Yeah?"

"Yes. So I started combing all the bars in Bay City for you."

"Listen, gal. When you came in here I told you how I stood, and now I'm telling you again. You've caused me enough trouble. Shoo."

She looked at him. He sat corkscrewed on the wire-legged chair, his long legs crossed, his wiry shoulders slumped forward, his cigar clamped at an angle in his strong white teeth. His eyes were inexpressive. She couldn't tell anything by studying him.

He puffed at the cigar and let her try for a while.

Suddenly she flared, "Jake Connolly, if I thought for one instant that you really meant that. . . ." She took a deep breath. "You know, we've had great fun together. We've kidded and joked—" Then her eyes grew serious. "Jake! Timmy's really in trouble!"

"So you've been trying to tell me."

Her eyes had grown wide. "And

you're not going to do anything about it?"

He said flatly, "I'm through. I told you how I stood and I meant it. Now, shoo!"

"But, Jake—"

"Shoo!"

Suddenly her eyes blazed at him. But in a moment the blaze went out of her eyes and she only looked hurt. She turned and went out very slowly.

Connolly grunted and paid his check.

He went outside. It was a pleasantly cool night, and he wandered around on the boardwalk, the breeze from the Bay ballooning his white linen trousers. He wandered around for almost fifteen minutes. Then he bought a pint from a package store, drank half of it, smacked the cork back in with the heel of his hand. So he'd hurt her, had he? And where did he get the right to hurt her?

Connolly scowled. He drifted down near the end of the pavilion, put his elbows on the railing, stared down at the water. Somehow he didn't like the looks of things. Tim wasn't a youngster who was scared easily. In fact, one of Tim's principal troubles was that he wasn't scared easily enough. A dozen widely publicized mad-cap adventures testified to that. And Gert—what would she do now? Connolly jerked erect. He knew what she'd do. She'd march to the Royal, and to hell with Tim's warning.

If he wouldn't help Tim, she wouldn't she? Connolly knew damned well she would.

He took another drink from the bottle. His jaw hardened and he frowned thoughtfully for a few moments, began to pace up and down. Light from a popcorn concession flattened his shadow crookedly on the smooth boards. Connolly hated to change his mind. He shuddered at what the papers would say if they found he'd quit and then gone back. "Heiress in Distress Brings Body-guard Back." He could see the headlines. "Heiress in Distress. . ." His entire face tightened. What kind of a guy

was he? She *was* in distress, wasn't she? He jammed the bottle deep in a hip pocket, muttered to himself angrily. Then he strode back to Bay Street and took a cab.

The Royal House was an apartment hotel, one with a canopy in front and a private beach club across from it, and when Connolly came in the desk was crowded with a party just back from twilight swimming, clamoring for keys. Connolly strode past the desk.

The elevator starter said, "There'll be a car in a second, Mr. Connolly," but Connolly shook his head, clicked across the checkerboard tile to the foot of the broad stairs. He started up. A man appeared above him, a man of medium height, dressed in white flannels and a plaid sports jacket, and the jacket was faultlessly tailored, looked brand new. The man paused for a moment and stared at Connolly. Connolly stared back.

The man muttered, "Pardon me. I thought you were somebody else," and came on down the stairs, dawdled leisurely across the lobby. Connolly knew he was lying. He watched him disappear through the entrance, a rather heavily built man with a doughy looking face and thin brown hair.

Connolly scratched his chin. His feet cushioned noiselessly on the heavy carpeting as he climbed to the second floor, frowning, puzzling over the man. But he couldn't place him. The harder he tried, the more he became convinced that he'd never seen him before. And by the time he reached the third floor he was sure of it. He shrugged, set off long-leggedly down the corridor, checking off door numbers.



NUMBER 308, in polished brass, gleamed in the bright overhead light, and Connolly knocked twice, pushed open the door without waiting. He wasn't prepared for what he

saw. He had expected Tim Loring and probably Gert, but not Maslin, Bay City Homicide Chief, and his two assistants, Hurley and Klein. Connolly froze on the threshold. Tim Loring, his sun-browned back welted and bruised, was lying face down on the bed, his wrists cuffed to a bed-post. Tim was stark naked. Klein stood near-by with a short length of rubber hose in his hand.

Gert was nowhere to be seen.

At the sound of the door opening, Tim raised his head, looked over his shoulder. The boy's lips were cracked and bleeding; his right eye was swollen and beginning to darken. Hurley reached over, smacked his head back into the covers. Tim cursed him. Hurley lifted a fist and Connolly snapped:

"Hold it, lug!"

Hurley's head swivelled. "You want some?"

Connolly ignored him. He never played with small fry; it never got him any place. Klein said, "Hi, Jake," rather sheepishly, and let the hose drop behind his leg where it was almost out of sight. Connolly glared at him. Klein dropped his eyes, toed a corner of the Chinese rug nervously.

He was a friend of Connolly's. The longer he toed the rug, the redder his neck got; and finally he lifted his head, said:

"Jake, you see—"

Maslin said, "Button your lip, Klein!"

Hurley said, "Haw! They're friends! Look at him blush!"

Connolly moved his shoulders. His eyes bored hard at Klein and he growled: "No friend of mine, not now anyway. Not when he acts like the rest of you rats."

Maslin said, "Rats?" He was quite cool. He was sitting on the carved arm of a high-backed mahogany chair, swinging his foot casually. He looked little older than a boy. His face was long, sallow, habitually expressionless. He swung off the chair arm, crossed the room. He was coming miraculously

close to registering scorn. He swung open the bedroom door, said, "You call us rats, huh, Connolly? When we work on a woman killer?" He almost smiled.

Connolly snapped, "I call you rats no matter who you work on. And I'll call you a rat until I'm six feet under, Maslin. It's guys like you who ruin the cops."

It was, too. Connolly knew it, and Klein, flushing to the roots of his thick black hair, also knew it. Maslin wasn't an ordinary cop. Seven years in Bay City, seven years on the force, and now he'd been chief for over a year, was already a czar in politics. And nobody knew how he'd risen so quickly. There were rumors of his efficiency—and rumors of his wealth.

Maslin had built a magnificent home out on Iona Terrace. Even his effrontery was magnificent; he dared to put the hose on Tim Loring, despite the Loring wealth and position. But not from an honorable allegiance to his duty. Connolly knew that. Maslin was merely flaunting his local power with a thinly veiled sneer, challenging Tim's millions to do anything about it. The chief's eyes moved over Connolly slowly.

Hurley was bristling. "Say the word, chief, say the word. I'll make more mince-meat out of this wise Connolly—"

Maslin said evenly, "Not now, Shanty. We'll let him have a look at the stiff. Maybe he can tell us a few things."

He stepped aside and Connolly looked through the doorway.

The girl lay mostly on her right side, face down, and as Jake stared at her, Maslin gave him the facts coldly. It seemed that an anonymous phone call had come to Headquarters. Just a brief, "There's been a murder in Apartment 308 at the Royal House. Better look into it." And they had found Tim in bathrobe and slippers with his own gun in his bathrobe pocket. His own gun, which had been fired twice; and there were two slugs in the dead girl.

Tim, speaking slowly through his

swollen lips said, "Her name's Jean, Jean Milner, Jake. She was a dancer at the Chesapeake Club and she was giving me lessons in tapping. Honestly, Jake. She used to come at six o'clock and we'd dance till seven. We'd just finished, and I was taking a shower, when I heard the shots, and then a man's voice said, 'Stay where you are, Loring. Stay there or you'll get it, too!' That was all. I didn't hear him leave, didn't hear anything else, and it seemed like I waited a life-time. Then I yelled. Nobody told me to keep quiet, so I took a chance and opened the bathroom door. Jean was like that and my gun was beside her."

Maslin said, "Look at her, Connolly. A white dress, neat and clean, high-heeled shoes—does she look like she's been dancing? Where are her dancing shoes? Would she dance in that dress?"

Tim said angrily, "I told you she didn't dance tonight. I told you her ankle was sore, and she was just coaching me."

"Nuts," said Hurley. "Keep your big mouth out of it."

Connolly was looking around the apartment. "Are these walls sound-proof?"

Maslin nodded. "They are in all these new buildings."

Connolly said, "Then if they're sound-proof, how could anybody have heard the shots and if nobody out of the apartment heard these shots, how could they know it was a murder?"

Maslin said, "We figured you made the phone call."

Connolly blinked. "Me?"

"Sure. You. This dead dame's been blackmailing somebody, we figure. This looks like just the kind of trick way you'd get rid of her."

"You know you're full of tricks, wise guy," Hurley said, and smirked.

Maslin went on. He said, "We found a bank book in her purse, and for the last month she'd deposited two thousand bucks a week. Pretty good for a chorus girl with a two-minute tapping specialty,

huh? And a pretty good alibi for Loring too, huh? Oh, I know your argument, Connolly. Why would he kill her in his own apartment? With a million bucks of the Loring dough to hire psychoanalysts, he'll prove he was too level-headed to kill in a burst of passion. And you'll probably even have a witness ready who'll swear he saw a man leave the apartment."

"Or a girl," said Hurley, keeping in his oar.

Maslin said, "As a matter of fact, a girl *was* seen leaving the apartment. She left just a few minutes before we got here, and the bellhop couldn't describe her very well. He happened to be in the corridor when she came out, and she went the other way. Pretty fast, too. You wouldn't know her, would you, Connolly?"

Connolly snapped. "Suppose I did? Would I tell you?"

Maslin looked at Klein and the hose. "You might. Loring didn't, but even he might yet. Lay on, Izzy."

Klein swallowed. "Huh?"

"Lay on," Maslin said. "Put a few more stripes on that smart—back, and we'll let his good friend Connolly watch."

Hurley said, "Yeah. We'll let him watch, Izzy. But when we start on him, it's my turn."

Klein's face paled.

Then Tim lifted his head. He looked over his shoulder and said quietly, "Go ahead, Klein. It's not your fault." And to Maslin: "I only hope to hell I get a crack at you some time."

Connolly couldn't watch. The first blow on Tim's body brought sweat to Connolly's forehead, and at the second he shuddered, his entire body writhed. At the third, anger surged wildly through him. He leaped across the room, snatched the hose from Klein's hand, straight-armed the big cop to the wall.

Hurley yelled, "Hey! What the hell, guy?" and lumbered toward him.

Connolly dropped the hose and punched his nose. But it was a bad punch, poorly timed, and Hurley stopped,

felt his nose and a few drops of blood got on his fingertips. Then he roared. He started wildly for Connolly and Maslin said:

"Never mind, Shanty. Never mind."

The Homicide chief had a gun in his hand. Connolly glared fiercely at him. He looked at the gun, held coolly, levelly, then switched his gaze to the three fresh stripes that diagonaled whitely across Tim's back. Tim was looking at him over his shoulder. The boy smiled feebly, gasped, "Thanks, Jake," then all the breath went out of him, and he relaxed wearily. Watching him, Connolly got a lump in his throat.

Then his jaw hardened and he did some fast thinking. Why make the kid take all this? What would Maslin do to Gert if he were told she had been there? Connolly presumed she had. Who else could that girl who'd been seen have been?

But the very idea of giving in to Maslin almost made him gag. He hated the sallow, expressionless face, the cold, reddish-brown eyes, the supercilious manner. If it was he himself who was taking the beating, he'd have been willing to die first. But Tim. . . . Connolly stabbed a glance at the striped, pain-racked body. Tim was shuddering a little. The reaction of relaxation was making his muscles quiver. And Gert would be safely home by now. Home in Bayside Park, across the county line where Maslin couldn't touch her. And she'd have the Loring millions and good lawyers to protect her.

Connolly clenched his long bony hands. He was almost a head taller than Maslin and, as he looked down, trying to probe behind those merciless eyes, he felt once more the violent distaste toward giving in to the guy. He saw through Maslin clearly enough. The chief could get away with beating Tim now, flaunt his local power. After all, he controlled the D. A.'s office; and a rubber hose didn't break bones or bruise. Even the stripes would be gone in three or four hours. Try to prove the third degree when the evidence

was only a shiner and a couple of cracked lips! Why, things like that were merely police routine. The D. A. could make the entire charge ludicrous.

Connolly folded his lips tight, shifted weight. Once Tim was behind bars, with the Loring lawyers looking after him like mothers, there'd never be a chance to get more evidence out of him. And the present evidence wasn't enough for conviction. Connolly doubted seriously if it was enough for an indictment.

From behind the gun, Maslin watched him coldly. This was the chance of a lifetime for him. He was already a ruler—but wasn't he far more ambitious? Didn't he have a personal eye toward the State Attorney's chair? And what better publicity than the conviction of Tim Loring? Especially when he himself had dug up all the evidence.

Maslin said over his gun, "Resisting arrest is a serious thing, Connolly. Sometimes we shoot fellows for that. And we get away with it too. Lay on again, Izzy."

Hurley growled, "And if you're gettin' soft, Izzy, lemme have that hose."

Klein swallowed unhappily again.

Connolly snapped, "Just a minute!" He squared his shoulders. He faced Maslin and said, "Suppose I tell you who the girl was? Will you lay off Tim?"

Maslin nodded.

Connolly's face was white. He said, "It was—" But that was as far as he got. Tim lifted his head and his face was twisted in agony. He cried out:

"For God's sake, Jake! Don't!"

Connolly said through his teeth, "It was Gertrude Loring."

Maslin's eyes flickered. He shifted position a little, and the room was quiet, deathly quiet. Suddenly Connolly felt a stab of fear. He didn't know why, couldn't guess then. Tim groaned. Maslin stood up and said:

"Thanks, Connolly. We ran into Miss Loring coming up the steps, but we couldn't prove she'd been in here. But we can now. Lay on, Izzy."



Connolly moved. He was tall and he was fast, but his gasp of horror slowed him up. He moved too late. His swing missed Maslin, and the chief side-stepped, his face still expressionless, crashed the revolver barrel on Connolly's forehead. It raked cruelly. Blood bubbled from five abrasions, trickled down in Connolly's eyes. He staggered. He tried to knuckle away the blood, and Hurley stepped in, pumped rights to his head. Maslin lashed out again with the barrel.

Connolly saw four men, then six, then the room seemed to contract and expand and a hazy darkness enveloped him. He wasn't out. He was conscious of his shoulder hitting the floor, of Hurley's voice saying, "I've waited a long time for that, chief."

Then Maslin said, "We'll fire questions at the girl and shine lights in her eyes. Maybe we'll beat the kid in front of her."

Hurley said, "Yeah." He chuckled. "Boy, what we can do with a confession! Eh, Izzy?"

Klein didn't say anything.

Hurley said, "Haw, chief! Klein's gettin' soft! Like the gigolo here!" He nudged Connolly with his foot.

Maslin said, "Go down to 202 and tell Canavan to bring the girl up. Tell him to bring her up in ten minutes. Then come back and get rid of Connolly. We don't need him any more."

"But he ain't out yet, is he?" Hurley asked.

"No."

"I'll fix that," Hurley said.

A great blackness exploded in Connolly's brain.



CONNOLLY awoke with no sense of time, no sense of anything, save that something drastic had happened to him a very long time ago. He lay very still. It was only when he moved that he felt nauseated, that he felt there were

a million little claws raking back and forth horribly in his brain. He sat up. He blinked in an effort to clear his head and two of the dried abrasions cracked open, spilled blood warmly down over his eyes. His memory began functioning slowly then. Twenty minutes later he remembered everything. He sat and stared about him stupidly, realized he was in his own apartment.

It took him twenty minutes more to get to his feet. His knees wobbled weakly as he touched up the abrasions with iodine, stumbled across the room to a mahogany cellarette. He took three drinks of brandy; fell once on his way to the bathroom, barely slithered over the edge of the tub into the hot water.

Afterwards, he took a cold bath. He was toweling vigorously when he heard a knock on the outer door.

He stiffened and listened.

A voice said, "It's me—Izzy. Open up."

For the first time since he'd awakened Connolly felt shame at the way he'd been tricked. He scowled. He wrapped the towel around his flat middle, pattered barefooted to the door and let Klein in.

The big cop was still in plain clothes. His dark eyes looked tired, sleepy, and he flushed at sight of Connolly, lumbered into the apartment awkwardly. He had a paper folded under his arm.

Connolly snapped, "Lovely morning, isn't it?"

Klein didn't answer him. He closed the door and stood in front of Connolly without once meeting his cold stare. After a moment, he mumbled:

"Gotta drink?"

"Not for you."

"Aw right, aw right, if you want to feel that way about it."

Connolly snapped, "How do you expect me to feel? Like I should kiss you?" And demanded suddenly, "What do you want?"

Klein didn't answer him. The big cop handed him the paper.

Connolly took it to the divan, sat down, and spread the paper out. His

head felt better when he wasn't on his feet. Then he looked at the headlines and forgot about his head. Glaring up at him in big black letters he read: "TIM LORING CONFESSES MURDER." And in smaller type: "Millionaire Playboy Signs Confession; Sister's Former Sweetheart Snitches." Connolly stared at the headlines and Klein said lamely: "It ain't very nice, is it, Jake?"

Connolly didn't answer.

Klein said, "It was awful, Jake, honest, it was awful. They brought the girl in, fired questions at her, and when she wouldn't answer they turned the light out, held a flash-light in her eyes and fired more questions. That didn't get 'em any place—she was as cool and pretty a lady as ever I've seen—so they made me beat the boy a little in front of her.

"But that didn't get 'em any place neither. Miss Loring said, 'Our brood can take it, can't we, Tim?' And the boy said yes, they could, and then looked at us all and *laughed*. Actually laughed. And him with a hundred stripes on his back. But then Maslin bluffed him into thinking he was going to have Miss Loring beaten, and— Well, the boy cracked when—" Klein gulped hesitated.

"When what?"

"When Hurley made out he was going to bare her back."

"Good God, Izzy!"

"It's a fact, Jake. An honest-to-God fact."

Connolly's face was twitching and his fingers ripped and crumpled the paper absently. The telephone rang. Connolly got up and answered, and a voice said:

"This is Jordan of the *Evening Record*." There was a slight sneer in his voice. "Would you give an interview in about ten minutes?"

"About what?"

"About your snitching on Tim Loring."

Connolly flushed. He bellowed, "Come up here and I'll bash your head in!" and banged up the phone.

He spun on Klein savagely and said,

"So I'm a snitcher, am I? I wonder how long that'll keep up?"

Klein sat down and looked at the floor. Connolly began muttering under his breath. He dressed, tying his shoes and tie angrily, had another brandy. He still wouldn't give Klein any.

Klein said, "But I ain't like you, Jake. I know it was kind of yellow of me to let 'em force me to beat him, but I got a wife and kids. I gotta buy bread. Maybe I'll get suspended anyhow."

"For what?"

"For not liking what I was doing, that's what."

Connolly snapped, "Then take a drink, take a drink, for Lord's sake!" He was more annoyed at himself than at Klein.

Klein took two drinks. He said that he and Hurley had carried Connolly out the back way at the Royal House, took him to the station in a police prowler car. Then they'd pick up Gertrude. Connolly listened absently. His head still ached but not enough to interfere with his thinking. Somewhere, wedged in a corner of his memory, were two leads to the solution of this damned problem. One was a rather heavily built man with a doughy face and thin brown hair that he wore pushed up. That was to make his hair look thicker. A carefully groomed man. Spotless white flannels, new tailored sports jacket. . . . Suddenly Connolly's eyes glinted. He scooped up the phone, dialed a number.

The phone at the other end rang for some time. Then a voice drawled sleepily, "Yeah?"

Connolly said, "This is Jake Connolly, Shawn. Listen, Mark. Have a few of your operatives check every tailor in town, and find the address of a guy who just had a Shetland sports jacket made up." Connolly described him. "Yeah. A Shetland sports jacket—tan, with an overplaid. And after you get his address, try to pick up something about him. Mail the bill to me. . . . No! Not old man Loring, me! I'll keep in touch with you."

He hung up and frowned.

Klein said, "Something to do with the jam we're in?"

"We?" Connolly snorted. "Well, that's the general idea, Izzy."

He led Klein down to the street and took a cab. It was a bright morning, and the buildings shadowed the eastern sidewalks. The clock on the Trust Tower boomed seven, and a bread man's horse reared as the cab cut away from the water front, taking the corner on the inside.

Connolly scarcely noticed. He was deep in thought, his eyes somber, and in addition to his headache, his legs felt cramped. It was like that in these new cabs. In the old ones he could stretch out his legs.

The cab drew up, and Connolly stooped carefully as he got out, to avoid knocking off his panama. He wore a spotless linen suit and white buckskin shoes with a heavy crepe sole.

There were several cars parked in front of the Chesapeake Club. Connolly scowled at them fiercely and his abrasions smarted. Making a mental note not to scowl any more, he heeled his way into the club entrance, found the doors unlocked. Klein tagged along behind him.

They found reporters and photographers in the owner's office. The owner sat behind his flat-top desk, a chubby little man with a shock of black hair that hadn't been combed. He was in pajamas and dressing gown. He looked sleepy, harried, and was brushing his hair out of his eyes.

"How long did she work here, Crosetti? What kind of a girl was she? Got any pix?" A stocky little reporter wearing steel-rimmed spectacles was asking all the questions. He broke off as Connolly came in, stared at him.

Connolly ignored the stare, said, "Hi, Al," to Crosetti, and crossed the room swiftly, whispered in his ear. It was a low whisper: "Can I see you a moment alone, Al?"

The stocky reporter said, "Whisper-

ing in company isn't exactly polite, Mr. Connolly."

"Connolly!"

All of the reporters yapped it together. The lanky body-guard straightened. He liked reporters as a general rule. They were good guys who never had any money, but somehow you never felt sorry for them. But Connolly was not in a friendly mood. He snapped, "Yeah, Connolly. Connolly, the snitcher. So what?"

There didn't seem to be any answer to that.

Crosetti stood up and said, "Sure, Jake. Sure thing. Follow me."

Connolly was glaring at the reporters. He slipped out a panelled door after Crosetti, held it open for Klein to come through. One of the news photographers focused his camera. Connolly said, "Nuts to you, fella," and slammed the door hard. Then he turned and Crosetti said, "Those reporters," and sighed. "Well, Jake. What can I do for you?"

Connolly's jaw was set. He said, "Tell me the history of the girl who was killed—the Milner girl. Everything."

The chubby little Italian brushed back his hair. "There isn't much, Jake. She came to me a month and a half ago with some nice letters from two Hollywood dance directors. She was in the chorus out there in a few of those super-musicals." He shrugged. "I put her on. The letters weren't addressed to anyone in particular—you know: To Whom It May Concern—but she was good. In this last show I gave her a two-minute solo."

"When'd this last show start?"

Crosetti raised his black eyes. "Last night."

"Oke. Go on."

"Well," Crosetti frowned for a moment, "if she was a hit, I was planning to star her in my next show."

Connolly said, "Just a minute. I want facts, Al. Your plans won't do me any good. How'd she happen to come to Bay City?"

Crosetti shook his head. "I wouldn't know that."

"Well, how'd she happen to leave Hollywood?"

"I wouldn't know that, either."

Connolly growled, "What the hell do you know? Did any guys ever call here for her?"

The little Italian nodded. "One."

"What'd he look like?"

"Well, he was a sort of heavy built fellow, sort of pale—he dressed smart as a son of a gun." Crosetti pushed his hair back again. "He was about forty, I'd say. Never talked much. Used to sit and watch her and drink scotch and sodas. She never introduced him to anybody."

Connolly grunted. Somehow he had expected a tie-up between the girl and the smartly tailored guy; he wasn't surprised. "You wouldn't know where this fellow lived by any chance?"

"Nope."

"And the girl?"

Crosetti said, "Well, I did at first. For the first two weeks she was living at the Frederick Hotel, over on Bretherton Street. But after the fellow showed here, she moved. I phoned a few days afterward about an extra rehearsal, but they said she'd checked out. Then she began phoning me every morning and I never got around to asking her where she'd moved to." Crosetti lowered his eyes. "You know, Jake. Seeing as how she moved after the fellow showed. . . . Well, I didn't want to embarrass her. You know, Jake."

"Sure, I know."

Crosetti was flushing a little. He said, "Anything else, Jake?"

Connolly nodded. He wanted to know where the back door was, so he and Klein could slip out, avoid the reporters. He wanted to phone Mark Shawn. But he didn't mention that. He asked Crosetti where the back door was, and the little Italian, still brushing back his hair, led them to it, let them out.

He said awkwardly, "I wasn't much

help, Jake. But any time I can do anything for you. . . ."

Connolly said, "Thanks, Al. You were a damned sight more help than you think you were."

The Italian's eyes brightened. "Yes?"

"Yeah," snapped Connolly, and turned on his heel. He led Klein past garbage cans and trash baskets, pounded down the alley to Mullen Street.



HEY had difficulty finding a phone. The drug stores weren't open yet, and there were no all-night restaurants close by. Connolly hailed a cab after wasting fifteen minutes and he and Klein got in. Connolly sat staring out the cab window at the deserted boardwalk, at the ripples on the Bay that gleamed like silver in the sun. His head still ached. The Bay looked cool and restful, and he would have liked to stretch out a blanket somewhere on the beach, lie in the sun and doze. But there was work to be done. A false confession had been forced out of Tim Loring, and it was up to him, Jake Connolly, to prove it was false. He spun on Klein and said:

"Did you know any of those things that Crosetti told us? That he was planning to star the girl in his next show? Did you know she was doing a solo in this show? Did you know she had a boy friend?"

Klein shook his head. "Didn't know any of 'em, Jake,"

"You sure?"

Klein nodded vigorously. "Positive."

Connolly said, "Think hard now. What did you know?"

The big cop wrinkled his brow thoughtfully for a moment, said, "We were all in the room there when Tim Loring told us who she was. He said she was a dancer at the Chesapeake Club, said she was giving him tapping lessons. That's all I knew."

Connolly said, "You're positive about

that, Izzy? This is important now. You really positive?"

Again Klein nodded vigorously. "I'd stake my shield on it."

Connolly peered at him out of the corners of his eyes. The cab bumped going around a corner into Bay City's main drag, slowed in front of an all-night restaurant. Connolly climbed out. He held the cab door open for a moment, snapped, "So you'd stake your shield on it, eh, Izzy?"

Klein nodded.

Connolly growled, "Well, I might give you a chance to do just that," then turned suddenly, and strode into the restaurant.

But Mark Shawn couldn't give him any dope. The head of the detective agency said he had three operatives out on the case, and that none of them had called in. Connolly hung up angrily. He bought a fifth of domestic cognac, went back to the cab. Klein looked at him questioningly, but Connolly didn't say anything except, "Let's go back to my joint."

Back in his apartment, Connolly paced the floor impatiently. His coat was off, his collar open, and the V at the neck was browned, healthy. He paced with a loping stride. His lanky body had muscles like ropes, long sinewy ropes that could strike swiftly, surely. His thick wiry hair was tousled. Now he rumbled it again for the eleventh time. The clock on the Trust Tower tolled nine. Klein was stretched out in a chair, asleep.

It was after eleven when the telephone rang. Half of the cognac was gone and Connolly was chewing on a cigar, staring at the floor. It was beginning to get hot. Beads of sweat were gathering around his throat, and when he got up his shorts stuck to his legs. Klein woke up when the phone rang, blinked, and Connolly said:

"If it isn't Shawn I'll tear the damned thing apart."

But it was Shawn. He said, "Hi, Jake," very cheerfully. Then he said, "We got your address, but no dope on

the guy. He's living at the Calvert Hotel, Room 637, and he's registered under the name of Harrison, Charles Harrison and wife. Been there a month. His wife's description fits that of this murdered Milner girl and I was wondering—"

Connolly snapped, "Well, stop wondering. You aren't getting paid to wonder." He knew Shawn was angling for more business. He added, "This guy there now?"

Shawn said, "Yeah. But, Jake, you oughtn't to go this alone. I know you're smart and I know you're tough, but, man, think! You're bucking something big! You've got to have everything pat, with plenty of backing, or Maslin'll have a rope around your neck. Yeah, I mean it. Have you heard of accessories before the fact? How do you think Maslin'll like the idea of the public knowing he beat the confession out of the kid? He didn't beat it out? Then how in hell did he get it? . . . Oh! The lousy rat! That's worse. But listen, Jake: He'll fight you. You've got to have somebody to prove your proof! You're bucking a small-time dictator. Listen, I've hated that Maslin for so damned long, I'd be almost willing to work for nothing. No kidding!"

Connolly snapped, "Are you going to stop yapping or do you want me to hang up?"

"But, Jake—"

"I don't want any help, Shawn. There's only one way to crack this case, and I've got all the help I'll need. Send the bill to me."

"Jake, you're a damned fool!"

"Maybe I am."

"Jake—"

Connolly hung up.

Klein looked at him questioningly. The big cop was on his feet now. He said, "What was he yelling about?"

"You."

"Me?"

"He didn't think you were help enough."

"Oh! Ain't I?"

Connolly didn't say anything for a moment. He got his tie, knotted it slowly, and shrugged into his linen coat. Then he said, "That's what we've got to find out. But I might not even need you. And I won't be able to tell for a little while—not until after I've seen this Harrison guy."

Connolly left Klein in the apartment, telling him to stick there, went down and hailed another cab. The streets were crowded now. The cab sped west along the boardwalk, and the cries of the barkers, the shrill whistle of the peanut machines, mingled with the rattle of the roller coaster, the hub-bub from the bathing beaches. Connolly watched the girls. Young, tanned, cool looking, in bathing suits, slacks, crisply fresh dresses, they appeared from doorways and roadsters, usually wearing bandannas and large dark glasses. But none of them compared favorably with Gert. Connolly grunted. He tried to fight away the thought of her, of how she must feel about Tim.

But he couldn't fight away the thought entirely. When the cab left him at the Calvert Hotel, he stood on the sidewalk a moment, baking in the sun, looking upward with his arms stiff at his sides. Then he cursed, spun away toward the entrance, hiked across the small lobby, and took an elevator.

He said to the elevator boy, "Ike Denning still manager?"

The boy bobbed his head. "Yes, sir. Yes, sir."

Connolly nodded thoughtfully. He got off at the seventh floor, walked down one flight, scarcely conscious of the coolness of the air-conditioned corridors. His face looked haggard but his eyes were hard. He rapped on 637, waited a moment, then made his voice smooth and purred:

"Mr. Harrison?"

In the room a voice said, "Who is it?"

"Mr. Denning, the manager." Connolly watched the door. The knob turned, it opened a crack, and he slammed it hard with the heels of his hands.



CONNOLLY waded in. Harrison was about ten feet from the doorway where the door had slammed him, and Connolly sped across the intervening space, pinioned his arms. It took the tall body-guard only a moment to frisk him. He found a .38 in a shoulder clip, then shoved the man, knocked him back on the bed. Connolly was taking no chances. He himself wasn't armed.

He moved backward to the door, closed it.

Harrison said, "You've got a terrific nerve. What the hell's the idea?"

"I've got a terrific problem, and you're the key."

Harrison sat up slowly. He was fully dressed in a neat white flannel suit, and he was freshly shaven, smelled of bay rum, powder. He looked at Connolly's grim face, didn't like what he saw. A frown creased his forehead and Connolly snapped:

"You came here a month ago and took up with the Milner girl. Go on from there."

Harrison shrugged. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Connolly forgot his abrasions and scowled. He stood, looming against the door behind him, a hard-faced man, now thoroughly angry. No smoothy was going to outmaneuver him! Not with Gert's happiness at stake. He crossed the room to the bed in three long strides. One hand shoved the .38 deep into a hip-pocket. The other shot out quickly, got hold of the flannel coat. He dragged Harrison up close.

"Spill the angle, baby, or we'll see why not."

Harrison's Adam's apple bobbed. He looked fearfully into Connolly's eyes, saw he meant business. The man said weakly, "All right, all right. Let me down."

Connolly shoved him down. He stood towering above him, fists clenched. He said, "That's better."

Harrison cleared his throat. He low-

ered his eyes, said jerkily, "There isn't much to it, you know. Jean was in pictures and I was her agent."

Connolly snapped, "You can skip the life history. Who'd you come here to blackmail?"

"Blackmail?"

"Want me to print it for you?"

Harrison raised his eyes. "Now honestly, Mr. Connolly—"

"Oh-ho!" Connolly said. His eyes gleamed. "So you studied the lay of the land, huh? You know me! And you know old man Loring had me on the payroll, huh? And don't tell me the Milner girl was just giving Tim tapping lessons." His voice became scornful. "Two thousand a week rolling into her kick so she adds some nice tapping lessons for about five bucks a day. Hooley!"

Harrison said. "No, not hooley, Mr. Connolly." His voice trembled. "It wasn't five bucks anyway—it was really ten. And about knowing your name, the papers were full—"

"Skip that!" Connolly roared. He wasn't going to be reminded of those snitching lover captions. He swung back savagely to the original question. "You came here to blackmail somebody. Who?"

Harrison swallowed.

Connolly snapped, "Not Tim. The girl was still giving him tapping lessons; they would have stopped. The lessons were only your build-up, your in. Who?"

Harrison said hoarsely, "I'll tell you why."

"You'd better—while you can still talk."

The man was squirming, sweating, but somehow he retained his well groomed look. He pressed the palms of his hands together, said, "Somebody crossed Jean out in Hollywood. She only tried to get in pictures to fleece a biggie. She's got talent, but she's too lazy to use it."

"Well?"

"Well, she and this man who crossed her were old hands at the badger game. And variations. Jean got in pictures and they worked it on a romantic star." Har-

ison hesitated. "His name doesn't matter. What does matter is that Jean's partner skipped out on her."

"With the money?"

"Exactly. Fifty thousand cash was what he skipped out with. And left her high and dry. I was her agent."

"Go on."

"Well, she refused to work. She only used her talent as bait for suckers. And pretty soon she talked me into the racket."

"That sounds reasonable."

"It ought to; it's true." Harrison moistened his lips. "Anyway, we did fairly well. Then she located the man who crossed her—here, in Bay City. And she was a vengeful sort. She came here to ruin him."

Connolly growled, "But you didn't come with her. There wasn't any money in it, and besides it was dangerous. You stayed where you were. Then the bird who crossed her offered her money, and about the same time, she discovered Tim. She changed her mind. Why not? A chance for a lot of jack. She began accepting hush money from this double-crossing bird, began digging into Tim with the tapping lessons. You came then."

Harrison nodded. "I came then." He looked up and despite himself, there was some admiration in his eyes. "I don't know how you guessed it, but I came then."

"Why were you in the Royal House the day of the murder? I know you didn't kill her—she was worth too much to you. So why—"

Harrison shrugged. "I was checking up on Loring's neighbors. Checking the apartments on each side of his. Learning their habits. If there's nobody close by when you spring the trap, the victim's liable to squawk and fight."

"I see you know your racket."

Harrison said slowly, "Ye-es."

"And if you were checking up then, you must know a lot more. You must have heard the shot. It's twenty to one you saw the killer get in Tim's apart-

ment ; forty to one you stuck around and saw him come out."

"I saw the killer both times, yes."

"Then cut the stalling," Connolly snapped. "Who was it?"

Harrison's lips moved. No sound came, and he frowned at his polished fingernails, shifted position, fidgeted. Sweat stood out in beads on his forehead. Then he got the name out: "Crosetti." "Crosetti!"

Harrison said, "He was the man who crossed Jean in Hollywood."

Connolly's jaw was sagging. He stared at Harrison, too incredulous to move. And slowly the facts began to slip into place.

Crosetti had been in Bay City about six years. He may have come from Hollywood—Connolly didn't know about that—but the little Italian was in show business ; it was quite logical. And Crosetti had arrived with a lot of money. With no backers, no partners, he had immediately built the Chesapeake Club. And the Chesapeake Club was no cheap place. It would have cost a third of the fifty thousand that the man who had crossed Jean had skipped with.

But still Connolly doubted Harrison. The man was too smooth, too crooked ; and in Connolly's mind, he had talked too readily. And why had he stayed after he'd heard the shots, after the girl was killed? Harrison wasn't a brave man. He had only come here in the first place after everything looked safe, come here because the money looked about to roll in. And if Crosetti was the original cause of the girl coming to Bay City, would Harrison have shown himself to the Italian, sat around at the club? Connolly thought not. Harrison was the kind who would have stayed under cover, the smooth crook who always played safe.

Connolly frowned at the man. Harrison sat on the bed now, chewing anxiously at his lips, and the light behind him at the window showed through his pushed-up hair. Connolly said, "Get your hat. We're going places," and unlocked the door. Harrison paused at a

mirror, angled a straw sailor smartly, straightened his tie, then marched out ahead of him.

In the corridor he waited nervously while Connolly closed the door. "Where to?"

Connolly snapped, "To the Chesapeake Club to see Al Crosetti."

Then he stiffened.

Flame starred the dimness of the corridor behind him.

Connolly was moving, spinning toward the sound, when the second shot thundered, and then the third. He saw an arm. It was sticking around the corner at the end of the corridor, dancing from recoil, then tensing, steadying. Connolly threw himself flat. Twice more flame spat, and twice he heard dull thuds. He glanced upward. Harrison was unnaturally stiff, his back concave, his arms flung out above him, bent, arched. Then the last shudder of his tendons drove him up on his toes. He fell in a swan dive across Connolly's legs.

Connolly kicked him off. A slug tore at the body-guard's white linen coat ; another splintered the door jamb four inches from his head. He thought, oddly : "How many slugs does that guy's gun hold?" Then he realized the man had shifted guns. The new one roared again. The report was louder, heavier, and Connolly felt a sear across his shoulder muscles.

His hand streaked for his hip pocket. The butt of Harrison's gun felt smooth, warm, and he yanked it out, fired at the arm. He missed. Paint chipped from the wall of the corridor a foot too high. Then the arm disappeared and feet began clattering away in a run.

Connolly swore. He got his long legs under him, pushed himself to his feet. He sprinted after the clatter. But when he reached the bend he found the corridor empty. Found it empty, that is, save for doors opening cautiously by inches, eyes peeking out. Some of the doors slammed at sight of him. He was wild-eyed, panting, and still holding Harrison's gun ; there were two bullet holes



in his white linen coat, and blood stained his left shoulder.

But one man stuck his head out, said, "He took the automatic elevator at the end of the corridor."

"What'd he look like?" Connolly bel-lowed.

"I don't know," the man said. "I opened the door for a look, and saw his back, that's all."

Connolly grunted. Here was another murder perfectly planned, even the get-away. Why did the hotel have to have an automatic elevator? All the guy had to do was leave the door open; the thing would sit there and wait for him, wouldn't move when the door was open. And the man could have got out at any floor, taken a regular elevator. Or got out on the second floor and walked down unobserved.

That was safer; that was probably what he did. Connolly spun on his heel. Back at Harrison's body, he knelt and felt the pulse. The man was dead. Other eyes peeked from doorways secretively, but no one came out.

Connolly wasted no time. He heard one of the main elevator doors clang, and realized that someone had phoned the desk and that house dicks were on the way. He ran noiselessly to the bend in the corridor. He found stairs not far from the bend and went down three steps at a time.



IN THE mezzanine Connolly paused. It was empty, luckily, but the lobby below buzzed with excitement; people were gathered in groups, talking swiftly, gesticulating. He could hear snatches: "A gun fight upstairs . . . murder. . . ." He kept well away from the veined marble railing. There was a phone booth near the stairs with a few potted palms around it. He slipped in and folded the glass door behind him.

He didn't hesitate. He got the number of Crosetti's club by calling information,

then dialed the number. Crosetti himself answered. Connolly would have known his voice any where.

Crosetti said, "Yes?"

"This is Jake, Al. Jake Connolly. How's things?"

"O. K."

The reporters gone?"

Crosetti sounded tired. "Not yet."

Connolly said, "Let me speak to the stocky one, the guy that recognized me."

There was a short silence. Crosetti said, "Just a minute, Jake," and then another voice said, "What's this? A tip, Mr. Connolly?"

"Maybe. You been there ever since I left?"

"Sure. Why?"

"Pumping Al for dirt on the girl all this time?"

"Sure."

"With not even a half hour's rest for him?"

The reporter said, "Mr. Connolly, when we go after a yarn we go after it. We haven't let Crosetti out of our sight since you took a powder on us. You got anything hot?"

Connolly said, "Not much. Nothing except that the Milner girl's boy friend was just murdered in the Calvert Hotel."

"No!"

"I said so, didn't I?"

The reporter said, "Sure. Sure, you said so. But who did it? Who're you snitching on now?"

Connolly swore and hung up.

It took him a few moments to get rid of his anger. Then he sat thinking. That let Crosetti out. A guy couldn't be two places at once—but Connolly frowned again; the Italian could have hired a killer. And that thought disturbed him. He puzzled over it for a little while.

But only for a little while. He was convinced both murders were coolly planned, coldly executed. He was convinced they were a one-man job. With two men the killer wouldn't need to take such risks. He chalked off Crosetti as a Harrison lie.

Satisfied, he stepped out of the booth.

his brain whirring in other directions. How to get out of the hotel? A few minutes more and it would be too late. The cops would have it surrounded, have thirty descriptions of him.

Then a girl's voice said, "Why, Jake!"

The voice came from the stairs. Connolly spun, saw Gert on the top step, goggling at him. He relaxed, snapped, "What the hell are you doing here?"

She retorted, "What are you doing here?"

Connolly said, "Sh, sh." He was listening to the buzz of excitement in the lobby. He didn't have time to waste arguing or fencing. "Your car outside?"

Gert bobbed her blond head.

"Go get it, bring it up to the entrance, and sit there with the motor going. Blow your horn long and loud. I'll be seeing you."

"But—"

"I know you can't park there. If anybody comes up to chase you, ask 'em questions, stall. I'll be along."

"But, Jake," he eyes were worried, "your shoulder—"

"Never mind about the shoulder. I'm O. K."

She turned and went down three steps. She came back and said, "Jake Connolly, I've been awfully sore at you. Hurley told me you squealed on me. He said he was going to give you the hose and you turned plain yellow. He gave the papers that ghastly snitching story." She hesitated. "It wasn't until a little while ago that Tim set me straight. Tim said you were saving him another beating, and probably thought I was home safe. Is that true?"

Connolly growled, "What do you think?"

She said, "I think it is," and turned and went down the stairs.

Connolly waited tensely. So she'd thought he'd snitched on her too, had she? And why had she come here? He made up answers to that until he heard her horn blare.

He was ready. He swung down the stairs and burst into the lobby, his feet

going at full speed, his coat tail flying behind him. Nobody tried to stop him. He was through too quickly for that, out the arched entrance before the crowd hardly had time to gape, before they even stopped talking. Then there was a moment of amazed silence, then hub-bub. Connolly shoved the uniformed doorman two yards, hopped into the sleek yellow roadster.

Gert could drive. She swung the car away from the curb, spun sharply at the next corner, then turned again two blocks away, and lined out Maryland Boulevard. In the distance a police siren wailed. They were away just in time.

Connolly relaxed wearily and blew out breath.



**K**LEIN let them in the apartment. The big cop didn't ask questions, simply sat on the edge of the tub and watched Gert bathe Connolly's shoulder. When she was bandaging it, Connolly told him what had happened. "In another half-hour every cop in Bay City'll be looking for me."

Gert said, "So because every cop in Bay City'll be looking for him in a half-hour, he wants to phone Maslin now and tell him where he is."

Klein opened his mouth slowly. "Maslin?"

Connolly said, "Listen, Izzy. This Harrison guy was sticking around because he knew who killed the Milner girl. Gert just told me a little kid delivered a note to her this morning. The note said that if she wanted evidence that would clear her brother to come to Room 637, Calvert Hotel, at eleven o'clock. Gert went down and talked to Harrison, and he said he'd testify in court for fifty grand. But he wouldn't say how. He said the money would have to be turned over to him first."

"He further said," Gert added, "that the money would have to be in cash. . . . Keep still, Jake Connolly. . . . I didn't

tell Dad because I didn't trust this Harrison fellow. I went back this afternoon to try to find out something about him."

"But she didn't find out anything," Connolly put in. "The point is that somebody was tailing her . . . the first time. And the fellow who tailed her is the guy who killed Harrison. Also the guy who killed the Milner girl." He looked up at Gert. "Almost finished the bandage?"

She plastered on some adhesive tape. "There."

Connolly flexed his shoulder. He winced a little, got up and strode to the phone. When he got the Calvert Hotel, he said, "Room 637, please."

It took him some time to be connected. He could picture the excitement of the switchboard operator, imagine the sudden craftiness of the cops. Then Hurley's voice said, "Hello, hello. Mr. Harrison speaking."

Connolly growled, "Cut out the comedy, lug. Put Maslin on."

Hurley was trying to be smooth. "I beg your pardon?"

Connolly snapped, "Put the chief on. This is Jake Connolly."

There was silence for a moment. Klein was watching Connolly with wide eyes, and Connolly nodded reassuringly at him, waited. Finally Maslin's voice said, "Connolly?"

"Sure."

"Where are you?"

Connolly snapped, "In my apartment. You won't have to trace the call. Hustle over here, I've got something for you."

Then he hung up. He frowned thoughtfully, his hand still on the phone, then whirled away and began pacing the room. Finally he stopped, spun on Gert.

She said, "Now what?"

Connolly was grave. "You go outside until all this is over."

She peered at him. Her eyes were a brilliant green now—she wore a green knitted jacket—and she crossed slowly to the door, kept on peering at him. Her cheeks were paling rapidly. She bit her

lip, said, "Please, Jake Connolly, don't take too many chances."

"I won't."

"You will, too. When you're like this, you're liable to do anything. Listen, Jake, I know this is your last effort. If you flunk this one, Tim gets the chair, I go to jail—you and I'd both be accessories; we might get the chair, too. But please don't take too many chances."

He snapped, "You wait outside."

She said, "By now I should know better than try to reason with you."

"Then why do you try?"

She looked at him sadly and shook her head.

The door closed behind her. Connolly stood for a moment, his gaze boring into it, and he knew she was right, knew this was his last try. If this one failed, everything was sunk. His face darkened. He spun on Klein.

"Stay with me, Izzy."

The big cop paled slightly. "I'll stay with you."

"It'll mean more than your badge. If we flunk, they'll railroad you, too."

"I'll stay with you."

"Atta boy."

Connolly took out Harrison's gun, made sure it wouldn't jam. On second thought, he got out his own gun, strapped it to his shoulder. He waved Harrison's gun, said, "They might come in shooting, so I'll keep this one out. Or they might come in to parley. If they do I'll put this one down. You get in the closet."

"Huh?"

"You get in the closet. I'll yell for you when I need you."

Connolly began to pace the room. His face was drawn, set, and his long legs scissored nervously. Klein lumbered into the closet. In a few minutes feet shuffled in the corridor outside.

Hurley opened the door. He came in with his moon-face tight over his gun, with Maslin's sallow complexion showing over his shoulder. Hurley stopped, stiffened. He was looking off to one side, watching Connolly's hands. Es-

pecially the one that had a gun trained levelly on his chest.

Connolly growled, "Peaceful or not peaceful? Make up your mind."

Maslin said, "Put the gun away, Shanty," and came inside coolly.

He closed the door. His eyes, as usual, were flat, expressionless, and he crossed the room without hurrying, edged a but-tock up on the library table. His foot swung casually. He eyed Connolly for a moment, said:

"You asked us over. For what?"

"As if you didn't know!"

Maslin rubbed his chin, shrugged.

Connolly snapped, "I'll make myself clearer. For instance, why did you and Hurley come alone?"

"Why?"

"Yeah, why? Afraid I might spill something, and didn't want any other cops to hear it?"

Maslin said, "Spill what?"

Connolly was watching him keenly. "Weren't you afraid I might spill enough evidence so they'd know *you* killed the Milner girl? Weren't you afraid I'd spill even more evidence that *you* also killed Harrison? Look here, Maslin, back in Tim's apartment, the very first thing, you said the Milner girl had a two-minute tapping specialty. How did you know that? Tim didn't tell you. Now don't interrupt me. I know all about that business out in Hollywood, know you knew the girl before she came here. Klein told me exactly what Tim told you. It wasn't much, so you couldn't have known the girl had the specialty unless she told you. Or did you see the show?"

Maslin's eyes looked muddy. "Of course I saw the show."

"When?"

"Now listen, Connolly, I didn't—"

"You didn't come here to be questioned. I know. But answer that one. When?"

Hurley snarled. "Tell him to go to hell, chief."

"Wait a minute." Maslin's brows puckered slightly. "I saw the show Friday."

"You're a liar." Connolly snapped. "It didn't start until last night, and this is Tuesday. And the girl didn't even dance in it. She was lying dead on Tim's floor at six o'clock that evening."

Maslin whipped back at him: "How did you know the girl was dead at six o'clock?"

Connolly blinked. Maslin's coolness, the swiftness of his come-back, caught him unawares. And suddenly Connolly realized he had made a mistake. He hadn't arrived at Tim's apartment until seven. In his eagerness to trap Maslin, he had exaggerated the time.

Connolly cursed himself. In his chagrin, he hesitated, and in his hesitation he forgot himself. The gun in his hand drooped. He rallied quickly, but he rallied too late. He hadn't noticed how close Hurley was. Hurley's big fist chopped at him.

Connolly weaved downward, and as he weaved, he yelled, "Izzy!" But the fist smashed his ear. Then he was looking into the barrel of Maslin's gun, and he heard Klein's voice say:

"Drop it, chief."

Klein didn't look very sure of himself. He was reared back too stiffly, his whole body too rigid, and the gun in his hand wasn't quite steady. Hurley scooped up a book from the library table, slammed it at him.

Connolly noticed Klein didn't shoot. He saw the big cop duck instead, saw Hurley catapult across the room, crash into Klein with his head and shoulders. One shoulder caught Klein's belly. The big cop's collapsed like a balloon. He was hurtled back into the closet, where he fell backward, leaving only his feet visible. His gun fell not far from this big black shoes.

Maslin said quietly, "Better pick it up, Shanty." The chief was still unruffled, and he held his own gun steadily. He added to Connolly, "And you better drop yours."

Connolly dropped it. Hurley got up from his hands and knees, picked up Klein's gun, jammed it in his belt. He

put Connolly's in his coat pocket. Then he grabbed Klein's feet and dragged him back into the room.

He snarled, "How much is Connolly paying you?" and slapped the big cop's face.

Maslin said, "Let him alone, Shanty. Try Connolly."

Hurley grunted. He walked stiff-legged across the room, back-handed Connolly's mouth heavily. He did it again. The second blow brought blood, and Connolly wiped it away with his fingers, didn't say anything. His eyes got dark, brooding.

Maslin said, "That's more like it, Shanty," and for the first time since Connolly had known him, smiled.

Connolly snapped, "Yeah. That's more like it, Shanty. Stick your own neck in a noose."

Hurley poised his hand. "Shut your mouth, wise guy."

"The hell I will. I'm trying to set you straight, Shanty. Do you think I'd have called Maslin on that specialty business if I didn't have evidence on him?"

Maslin's eyes were getting muddy again. "Don't pay any attention to him, Shanty. He's trying to talk his way out."

"Yeah," snarled Hurley. "The wind-bag!" He back-handed Connolly again. "That'll teach you, you——!"

The blood dripped down over Connolly's chin. He tried not to pay any attention to it, tried to keep his mind on what he must do. He'd failed once. He couldn't fail again. He thought of a prison uniform over Gert's slimness, and the thought helped him forget his mouth. He didn't even wipe the blood away. He said hurriedly:

"Listen, Shanty. Listen to me. Over at the Calvert Hotel, a guy emptied one gun. He emptied one, and killed Harrison; but I was there and he had to use another one. He hadn't figured on that. He didn't know I'd be there. He planned to kill Harrison with a light gun, then claim it was Gert Loring's. Women usually use light guns, you know.

"And how was he going to put the

blame on Gert? Well, she'd been there earlier. This guy was going to claim that she shot Harrison because Harrison would testify that Tim killed the Milner girl."

Hurley looked interested. Connolly plunged on:

"But the guy didn't expect me. Oh, no! He had to think fast. He figured that my presence there wouldn't hurt his idea—I'm her body-guard; he could tie me up as an accessory. But he got a bit nervous. His first shots missed and he lost his head. After he finally got Harrison he hurled slugs at me.

"That was his mistake. He began to use his own gun, and that one was a lot heavier. You see, Tim's gun killed the Milner girl. A light gun killed Harrison. But the guy used his own gun when he had to shoot at me. And here's the cincher, Shanty. There's a lot of slugs spread around up there in that hotel corridor. A lot of slugs with rifling marks on 'em. And from whose gun? Why, Maslin's. Take a gander at it if you don't believe me. See if it's been fired. He couldn't've found time to clean it yet."

Maslin didn't move. He looked over his gun coolly, said, "I wouldn't look at it if I were you, Shanty."

Hurley's eyes were uncertain. Then he growled, "Who's payin' any attention to that wind-bag?"

"You are," Connolly snapped. "You are, and it's written all over you. Don't be a chump, Shanty! Don't be a dumb, blind cop! Don't just follow orders all your life! Where do you think Maslin got his dough? He fleeced the Milner girl in Hollywood, that's where! Then he came here—about seven years ago—bought his way into the Department, bought his way up. His fifty grand cash was big money here. He built a big house out on Iona Terrace. He bought control in the ruling political party. Did you ever hear of any other cop being a chief in seven years?"

"But——"

"But, hell! Man, it's all right in front

of you! Why do you think he doesn't want you to take a look at that gun?"

Maslin said, "Work on him again, Shanty. Scatter some teeth."

But Hurley remained motionless. His mouth was sagging open, and his gaze dug fiercely into Maslin. He said, "Why, you lousy bum! Lemme look at that gun!"

Connolly said, "Go ahead and look at it, Shanty. Klein's got him covered."

That was pure bluff, of course. Maslin's eye stabbed downward, and Connolly went for his shoulder clip.

Maslin didn't know Connolly was armed. His head snapped up, after seeing Klein's apparent helplessness, and flame spewed from his gun barrel, but not at Connolly. It smashed into Hurley and his eyes bulged. He looked like a fighter who had been hit hard, low, and he put his hands to his belly, squirmed uncomfortably. Then he sat down. Maslin's second bullet tore his left eye away.

Connolly was fast but not fast enough. He had his gun half out when Maslin spun, knew a moment of hopelessness when he realized his position.

The gun flamed in front of him. But Klein was yanking at Maslin's leg. The slug crashed the ceiling, scattered plaster.

It took three swift strides to get Connolly across the room. He came up behind Maslin, got hold of his gun wrist. Then he twisted the wrist backward, jammed his own gun in the chief's back. "Take it easy, brother. Take it plenty easy."

From the floor Klein's voice said, distantly, "Yeah! Yeah, take it easy!" And a moment later added with tremendous contempt: "Chief!"



Loring was posing for the news photographers, and the mayor stood by look-

ing jealous. Connolly was taking a bath. On a cork tray floating in front of him was a slice of fried ham, four scrambled eggs, a plate piled high with buttered toast and a porcelain pot of steaming coffee. He ate this in eleven minutes. He was lighting a fat cigar when Gert knocked on the bathroom door.

"May I come in?"

"No."

Ten minutes later she knocked again. "Now?"

"No."

Half an hour later she tried once more. "I'm the only one here except the police guard in the hall. Now?"

Connolly wiggled his toes and watched them through the water. "Just a minute."

He got out of the tub, dried himself, and wrapped a flannel bathrobe around his body. He opened the door and stared at her fixedly.

"Well?"

She edged by him and he could smell her hair. "I want to ask you some questions."

"Shoot."

She sat down on the edge of the tub. "Well, I've got all the dope on how smart you were. The reporters told me Harrison was sticking around until he could get some money out of Dad—or me—and that you said he was stalling for time when he accused Crosetti. They also told me that Tim's story was true; he was in the bathroom when the girl was killed, just like he said he was. And they said Maslin planned the whole thing.

"Maslin paid the girl her two thousand every Monday morning, and she always deposited the money the same day, so he knew she'd have her bank book with her and the amounts would look like Tim had been the fall guy. And Maslin himself phoned in the tip to Headquarters that there'd been a murder in Tim's apartment. He killed the girl because he was afraid her blackmail might go on forever; and he killed her in Tim's apartment because it gave him a good alibi, and because the publicity of convicting Tim

might lead him anywhere politically. And, incidentally, Maslin broke into Tim's apartment a few nights before the murder and found out where Tim kept his gun. It seems Maslin has confessed."

"Already?"

"Your friend Klein applied the hose."

Connolly grinned. "Oh."

"Anyway," Gert said, "Dad wants you to come back to work. Will you?"

"Not on your life."

"Not for double your old salary?"

"Not for triple it."

Gert said, "Oh, all right, Jake Connolly, if you want to take that attitude." She turned and went out with her nose in the air.

Connolly frowned at the tiled floor. He picked up a towel, flung it angrily in a corner, then unscrewed the top of some shaving cream, began putting his razor together. He was lathering his face when Gert came back in. She leaned in the doorway and said:

"If you're not going to protect me, I thought maybe you'd kiss me."

Connolly growled, "What good would that do?"

She thought a moment. "You might try it and find out."

Connolly put down his shaving brush. He strode across the bathroom, took her by the shoulders, spun her around and started her for the door. He didn't push her very hard. She went about four feet and stopped.

"You'll have to carry me. I won't walk out."

Connolly compressed his lips. One step brought him up to her, and he bent quickly, scooped her up in his arms. He was half-way across the room before he saw the photographers. There was a whole battery of them, all grinning at him from behind their cameras.

"Hold it, Mr. Connolly!"

Just before the bulbs flashed, Gert lifted her head and kissed him.

"Now," she said, "will you take your job back?"

Connolly looked bewildered.

Gert said, "Make up your mind. I've got everything fixed. If you go back to work, they'll tear up the pictures."

Connolly scowled. He forgot his abrasions again, and one smarted like the devil. He winced. He bellowed, "Yeah! Yeah! I'll go back to work!"

Then he spilled Gert bodily to the floor and stomped to the cellarette for a drink.



"This one will take us all, gang!"

# THE DEATH POOL

**K**ATHERINE ANDREWS was unquestionably dead. Her slim, white, rounded body lay in sharp relief against the red floor tiles of the Roberts' swimming pool.

Only a stain, darker than the redness of the tile, indicated that she was not

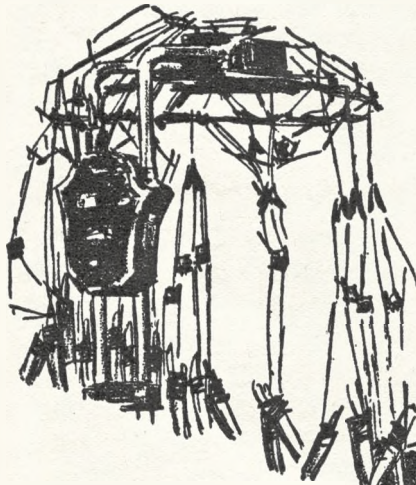
## A murdered girl sends Stan Rice on a killer quest

Now she lay dead at the drained bottom of it.

The setting of the estate on Crescent Island was so peaceful, so picturesque and so secure that momentarily Stan was lulled into utter disbelief.

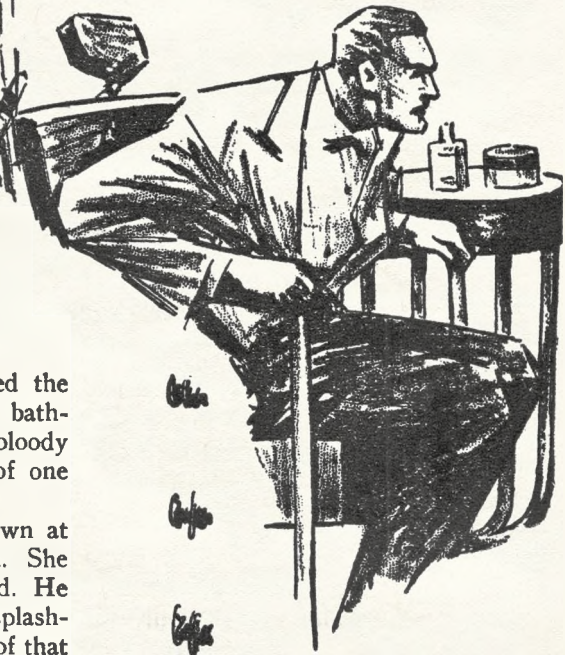
The Roberts family, who had leased the big house for the season, had everything—wealth, social position, and prestige. The skinny finger of murder thrust into their Miami winter was so out of place that Stan could not quite take it in.

His usually sharp faculties were momentarily blunted, though the girl's slim body indicated he would surely need them all at their sharpest before he was through. And other help, too—the help of Captain Vincent LeRoy and his



peacefully in a natural repose. The stain was unmistakable. It marred the yellowness of her hair, and vividly dyed the white scantiness of her one-piece bathing suit as though some rude, bloody hand had violated the sanctity of one of her firm young breasts.

Miles Standish Rice looked down at the girl for a moment, and sighed. She was young to meet so tragic an end. He had seen her laughing gayly and splashing about in the clear green water of that same pool less than ten hours before.





# By BAYNARD H. KENDRICK

entire Miami Police Department; the help of the one woman who had ever made Stan forget his hunger even for a short time—Millie LaFrance.

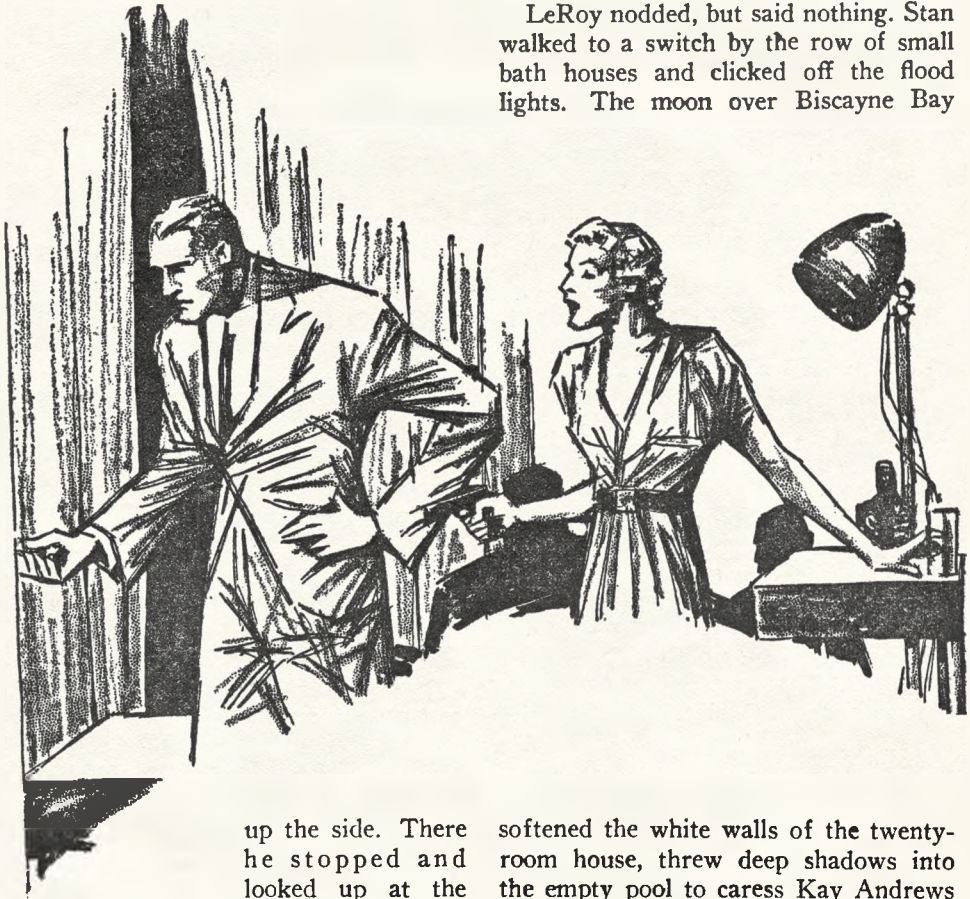
Stepping carefully along the slippery tiled bottom of the empty swimming pool, he made his way to the ladder which led

tain LeRoy who had moodily watched the proceedings from a deck chair at the farther end of the pool.

"I felt this was going to happen." The head of the Miami Homicide Squad chewed nervously on his cigar, and desecrated the tile edge of the pool with ashes.

"That's why you asked me to come here yesterday afternoon?" Stan asked.

LeRoy nodded, but said nothing. Stan walked to a switch by the row of small bath houses and clicked off the flood lights. The moon over Biscayne Bay



up the side. There he stopped and looked up at the spring-board showing black as a domino against the floodlights overhead.

He climbed the ladder, wiped the slipperiness from the soles of his black and white sport shoes with a slightly damp towel and joined the grizzly-haired Cap-

softened the white walls of the twenty-room house, threw deep shadows into the empty pool to caress Kay Andrews lifeless form.

Stan sat down on a small round table beside the Captain and asked: "Do you always have hunches about murder?"

"I've been a policeman for thirty-five years," said LeRoy. "You feel things. They're right or they're not right."

"And what wasn't right here?"

"I don't exactly know. Three women alone in a twenty-room house—all the men away on a fishing trip. Two nights ago their burglar alarm went off. A prowler car answered and found nothing. Last night somebody drained the pool. That's why I asked you to come over yesterday afternoon and talk to Mrs. Roberts. Now tonight someone sneaks in and drains the pool again and—"

"Merely breaking and entering, Vince."

"Breaking my heart, Stan. I've run up against some tough muggs around Miami. This is the first one who included pool-draining among his crimes."

Stan gave a slight smile. "I'm playing dumb—to find out what you really think."

"All right. Now you talk."

Stan looked up toward the house where a group of men stood in the light of the open front door. The Miami Homicide Squad was out in force. The reporters would soon follow.

"I talked with Mrs. Roberts between four and five yesterday afternoon," he told LeRoy. "She's quite a number!"

"And probably has yours," the Captain grumbled. "You're supposed to be a man-hunter, not a dame chaser."

"It's a neat mixture," said Stan. "This dead girl was Pamela Roberts' guest. There's another girl in the house. Name of Dorothy Larrabee. I don't think either the hostess or Dot Larrabee fit in the picture. They had a couple of men over from Miami for cocktails yesterday afternoon—"

"We have their names already: Wilbur Clinton and Richard Sykes."

"You know what they do?"

"Clinton owns race horses, and Sykes borrows money from him. We'll know more about them tomorrow."

"And tonight we have a murder involving a family worth millions. I'm glad you have the job of breaking it to Mr. Roberts when he returns from his fishing trip!"

Stan stood up. The lights of a car

had turned off from the Venetian Way onto the private bridge which led to Crescent Island. As it passed under an overhead light, Stan recognized the black bulk of an ambulance coming for the girl's body.

LeRoy drew a deep breath. "If only Dr. Gaines wasn't so sure she'd been battered to death with a black-jack, I'd like to think she accidentally dove into that empty pool and mashed in her head. She had a habit of taking late moonlight swims, you know."

"She wasn't killed with a black-jack, Vince," Stan told him. "She was shot."

The Captain ground out his cigar on an ashtray on the table. "We've questioned everybody on the island and nobody heard a thing. The women and the two housemaids were in the house right there." He pointed to the lighted windows hardly fifty feet away.

Stan reached in his side coat pocket and took out a small steel cone tufted with stiff green hairs. Gingerly he placed it on the table and threw light on it from his pocket flash-light.

The Captain prodded the small piece of metal with his stubby forefinger, and watched it roll in small crazy circles. "Where did you get that?"

"It was in a corner of the pool. Do you see now why nobody heard any sound?"

"No," LeRoy admitted. "I can't say that I do. What is it?"

"It's what killed Katherine Andrews—or one like it, Vince. It's a dart from a Haenel air pistol. It was fired from close quarters, too! There's a nasty hole in the corner of her left eye. Her head was undoubtedly bashed in to hide it."



IT WAS half an hour before the ambulance left, followed by the squad car and LeRoy's sedan. Stan stood by his Buick sports coupé and watched the lights of the three cars as they passed over San Marco Island on

their way into the city. Farther down Biscayne Bay, an incoming steamer whistled gloomily.

Stan left the Buick and walked over to the empty pool, nodding to a detective LeRoy had left on guard. He switched on the flood lights again, and walked to the far end of the pool where the water controls were housed in a small stucco building. Fred Fawcett, the finger-print man, had already checked the controls.

Stan looked curiously at the small metal wheel which raised and lowered the sluice-gate for draining. He tried it, and found that it took more than a casual touch to turn it. Any accidental draining of the Roberts pool was out of the question. It had been drained the night before and Mrs. Roberts had it refilled. Now it was empty again with a dead girl at its bottom.

He left the small house and climbed down onto the slippery tiles at the bottom of the pool for a second survey. If someone had wanted to kill Katherine Andrews and knew her predilection for lonesome night swimming, the someone might have taken a chance that she would dive off the spring-board and break her neck.

Stan dismissed the idea almost immediately. It was too fantastic entirely, and besides that, the girl had been shot. Some motive, far deeper, lay behind the draining of the pool.

He stood in the center looking slowly about him. The tiled bottom sloped from a three-foot depth at the shallow end, to fourteen feet at the deep end where a diving tower spiraled up into the night. Slowly he paced off the length and estimated it at fifty feet.

The walls were tiled also, but of a different composition from the bottom. Whistling tunelessly, Stan tapped them all the way around, only to decide that they were backed by solid concrete.

The sluice-gate was up. He bent down, shone his flash-light inside for a moment, then clicked it off again.

When he climbed up the ladder, he found Pamela Roberts waiting for him

at the top. She was visibly upset, but holding herself in hand—the type determined not to lose her poise even under the devastating prod of murder.

She had laughed and chattered with Stan over cocktails at four o'clock in the afternoon; now, at two in the morning with Kay Andrews' body en route to Maimi, Pamela Roberts took his arm and said calmly, "I'm afraid sleep is out of the question. Are you too tired to come up to the house? Dot and I are quite upset."

"I'll be glad to." Stan started for the switch controlling the flood lights, and paused by the row of bath cubicles asking, "Who used these?"

"Mostly outside guests." Pam gave him a quick glance, veiling curiosity in her violet eyes, and added: "Kay dressed at the house—the rest of us, too."

"I see." Idly Stan opened the doors on three of the five cubicles and shone his light inside. They were much like ordinary bath houses which serve bathers on Miami Beach—a trifle larger, perhaps, and a trifle more ornate.

He was about to pass the last two and shut off the flood lights, when a slight mark on the floor close by the fifth door caught his attention. It was no more than a smudge which might have been made with the heel of a shoe insufficiently dried of slime from the bottom of the pool.

Stan took Pamela Roberts' arm, and led her quietly past the door. Twenty feet farther on, he said, "Go on up to the house, and I'll join you in a few minutes."

He watched her tall pajama-clad form until she turned in at the house door, then he beckoned to LeRoy's man who was watching him from the other side of the pool.

As the detective drew nearer, Stan asked softly, "Did you search these bath-houses?"

"Damned if I know!" the officer replied. "I was up at the house."

"Well, keep quiet as we get close to

them," Stan ordered, "and keep your gun handy."

"What's the matter?" the man demanded, excitement threading his voice.

"I'm not sure," Stan admitted, "but I do know this: Someone went into that fifth bath house. There's a dried heel-print right close to the door—so close to it that the rest of the foot-print can't be seen."

"You don't think some guy's hiding in there? It's not like the Captain to overlook a thing like that."

"We'll find out." Stan and the man stationed themselves at each side of the door.

At Stan's signal, the detective leaned forward swiftly and attempted to throw it wide. The door refused to move.

There was no way of locking the doors from the outside. A simple steel bolt on the inside secured any occupant from intrusion. When the bather was in the pool, the door was held shut by a spring catch opened by an old-fashioned ring of wrought iron which served in lieu of an ordinary door knob.

Silently, Stan pointed to this ring. The detective tried to open the door again and said, "I'm going to count to three, then shoot through the door if you don't come out!"

Far down Biscayne Bay, the big passenger boat whistled again, deep and thrilling.

The officer counted, "One!"

Stan strained every faculty to listen against the noise of a late car speeding along the Venetian Way. There was no sound of breathing or of human motion behind the closed bath-house door.

"Two!" said the detective in louder tones and cocked his police revolver.

Water dripped slowly from the inlet at the end of the pool, splashing with a monotonous rhythm which seemed to grow steadily louder.

From the far end of Crescent Island, an outboard motor popped into life, missed fire a few times, and settled down quickly into a staccato roar which carried the boat which it was driving swiftly

away. The blackness hummed busily.

Over the noise, the officer said, "I'm going to shoot."

"Don't!" Stan ordered. "We'll break it in."

Gun in hand, the officer stepped back and jammed his brawny shoulder against the door. The inside bolt gave way with a rasp of torn-out screws.

Hurriedly the detective stepped back, following the course of Stan's flash-light. "I guess we're going nuts," he remarked ponderously after a moment. "The damn thing's empty. But how the hell could that door get locked on the inside?"



AMELA ROBERTS and Dorothy Larrabee were standing just outside the door of the house waiting for Stan. He gave them a comforting smile, but his

eyes were grave as he accompanied them into the cool living-room. He neglected to mention the empty, but locked, bath house. Instead, he turned off Pamela's pending question by heading for a table which held decanter and glasses.

Dot Larrabee kept close to his side. She was smaller than Pam Roberts, and obviously nervous. Stan noticed her heightened color—two bright patches of red, high on her creamy cheeks, setting off deep alert eyes. Under the trailing sleeve of her negligée her slender arm trembled as she reached for the highball which Stan skilfully concocted.

"There's no need to be frightened," he said, and immediately thought how fatuous it sounded.

Dot looked at him over the rim of her glass. "I suppose it's a regular thing to be murdered when you go out for a late swim!"

"It was a silly remark," Stan admitted. "What I meant to say was Captain LeRoy has two men posted outside guarding the island."

"That won't help us much when we're inside the house."

Stan turned toward Pamela Roberts,

caught by some undercurrent in her voice. She was guilelessly studying her polished nails. He swished the ice around in his glass, and asked her pointedly: "Just what did you mean by that?"

"Honestly, I don't really know." She looked up, frankly meeting his gaze. "Somehow I haven't felt secure in this house since Karl rented it for the winter. Now with Kay—" She hesitated, then waved her hand vaguely toward the direction of the pool. "There's only two of us here now that Kay's been killed. I'm afraid. . . ."

"Pam has said the same thing to me," said Dot Larribee. "She didn't want Karl and Mr. Andrews—that's Kay's father—to go on this fishing cruise and leave us here."

"But you must have some reason for being apprehensive," Stan insisted.

"The trouble is, I haven't. Or hadn't until tonight. I hate to speak of intuition and that sort of thing. It's this house, I guess. It's so large, and being here with just two maids and a negro butler. . . ." She looked over toward Dot, and Stan sensed, more than saw, the anxiety in her glance. Abruptly he changed the conversation.

"This Wilbur Clinton and his friend who had cocktails here with us yesterday afternoon—who are they?"

"Wilbur's been trying to marry Kay for the past two years," Pam explained.

"Trying to?" Stan stared out a window toward the Miami lights.

"Her father objected, and I don't blame him," said Dot. "Wilbur's all right. If you like a rich young man who does nothing but spend money."

"What about the other fellow?"

"Dick Sykes?" Pamela scornfully supplied the answer. "He's a hanger-on, a first aid in spending Wilbur's money."

Stan beat a thoughtful tattoo in one palm with his long fingers, and asked abruptly: "Has either of you any idea why that girl was killed?"

"I don't think it's hard to figure out." Dot spoke with an effort. "She went out for a late swim and burglars were hid-

ing down in the bath house waiting for a chance to break in here. They got scared and killed her."

"And drained the pool?" asked Stan.

"I don't think anybody drained it," Pam remarked soberly. "I think Dot's right about the burglars. This is the only house on Crescent Island. Obviously we have money. Somehow thieves learned that the men had gone away."

"And just how did the water get out of the pool?" Stan inquired.

"It leaked out," said Pam.

"It didn't leak out," Stan told her. "The sluice gate was open, Mrs. Roberts. It's quite a job to raise that sluice gate."

"A man drains and cleans that pool once a week, Mr. Rice. Isn't it possible that the sluice gate stuck open the last time the pool was drained? Maybe when the water is turned on full the pool will fill up even with the sluice gate open—like a bathtub, you know. They'll overflow, sometimes, even with the stopper out. The water comes in faster than it runs out."

"It's an idea, anyhow," Stan finished his drink. "I'll ask the police to make a test tomorrow, and check with the man who cleans the pool. I really must go."

"And leave us here alone?" Pamela rose to her willow height and glanced at him appealingly. "You'll do us both a great favor if you'll stay. I haven't much faith in the men posted outside. You can use the sleeping porch." She ran appraising eyes over his six-foot-two and added: "My husband's pajamas will probably fit you."

Stan poured himself another drink and said, "I assure you, Mrs. Roberts, after such an invitation police cars couldn't drag me away."

They talked for half an hour more before Dot excused herself and went upstairs. When she had gone, Stan told his hostess: "I'm interested in this burglar alarm system. Do you mind showing me how it works?"

"Not at all." She led the way to a switch concealed in a panel by the dining-

room and explained, "I merely push in this switch before I go to bed. The windows are all screened. If any of them or these doors are touched or opened, it sets off the alarm. It rings here and at police headquarters at the same time."

"What window was broken open," asked Stan, "when the alarm went off two nights ago?"

Pamela's eyes widened. "That's funny. I never thought of that. I don't think any of the windows were broken into. The police went over the entire house. Someone must have come in by the door."

"Don't close the switch yet," said Stan. He walked to the front door, swung it open, and examined lock and door jamb closely with the light of his flash. "How many more doors are there?"

"Three. The back door in the kitchen, and two doors which open onto the terrace on the west side of the house."

"Let's look at them."

She accompanied Stan as he made a fruitless examination. Not a mark was to be seen on terrace doors or back door.

When he had finished and securely locked the doors again, Pamela nervously plucked at his sleeve. "Do you think the servants opened a door to let the burglars in?"

"Do you?" he asked.

"No, I don't. The two maids and Peter, the butler, have been with me for years. Besides that, they know about the alarm. Peter shuts it off every morning before he opens the house."

"That's what I wanted to find out," Stan declared. "That alarm was set off, yet there's not a sign that anybody's broken in or attempted to break in here. Now if somebody on the inside had unlocked a door to admit a burglar, that somebody would certainly have shut off the alarm at the switch."

"And what's the answer to that?" Pam asked steadily.

"There's only one answer in my mind," Stan told her. "Nobody broke into the

house, and nobody was admitted to the house, but somebody who didn't know about the alarm was already in the house when it was locked up for the night. He—or she—set off the alarm when he went out."



LAD in a pair of Karl Roberts' heavy silk pajamas, Stan stood on the sleeping porch and watched the dark bulk of one of LeRoy's detectives move slightly under a fronded palm.

A soft breeze came up, bringing in a tinge of salt from the ocean. Restlessly he turned away and lay down on the comfortable bed.

Try as he might, he was unable to catalogue the house on Crescent Island. It worried him as anything worried Miles Standish Rice when it refused to fit into its proper niche.

He put aside as foolish his strong urge to call Pamela Roberts from her room and search the house again. Le Roy and his men had been over it less than a hour before, and Vincent LeRoy was the most thorough searcher Stan Rice knew.

There was some cryptic message behind the empty locked bath house and the alarm which had rung for no apparent cause. This message must point to the death of the girl whose body had lain in the mysteriously drained pool. Stan grappled with the problem until he fell asleep.

The luminous hands of his wrist watch showed it was past four when he sat bolt upright in bed conscious that someone had stepped out onto his sleeping porch. Before he could speak, the calm voice of his hostess said close beside him, "I don't want to alarm you, Mr. Rice, but I think someone's moving about downstairs."

Wordlessly, Stan reached for Karl Roberts' dressing-gown which he had hung across the foot of the bed. Under it, the smoothness of his worn leather

armpit holster concealed the bulk of his .38 Colt set in a .45 frame.

His blue eyes were on Pamela Roberts' firmly clad form as he slipped the gun into place and buckled it about his chest. Softened by the copper screen of the porch, light from the setting moon touched her gently, melting her silk pajamas into liquid lines. Inwardly Stan grinned. It was a bad murder which entirely lacked any moment of compensation.

He draped the dressing-gown about him, swung his long legs from the bed and shoved his feet into a pair of straw sandals. They flapped gently as he started to follow Pam. Conscious of their noise, he slipped them off and went barefooted after her.

At the top of the hall stairs, she paused, stopping him with a touch of her hand. A long gallery stretching across the living-room was before them. From where they stood, the furnishings of the room below were visible, but deep in shadow.

Pamela placed her soft lips close to his ear and whispered, "There's another staircase at the back of the house."

Her fingers tightened about his arm. Both of them had heard a faint sound from below followed by the stealthy patter of feet. Rigidly they stood close together while a large clock in some distant part of the house loudly ticked slow seconds away.

Tensely, Stan weighed the chances of returning to the sleeping porch and calling to LeRoy's men on the grounds below. He decided against it. Above all things, he wanted to find who was moving so cautiously about the Roberts' home at four o'clock in the morning.

"Wait here," he breathed to Pamela and, silently as a stalking panther, began to descend the stairs. He felt that Pam was following him when he was half-way down, but it was too late to stop her then.

He was at the bottom when, through an archway which separated living-room from dining-room, he heard the swing door to the kitchen rasp gently.

Enough moonlight showed on the first floor so that the dining-room table was easily avoided. Swiftly Stan circled it, his bare feet falling Indian fashion on the mat to make a minimum of sound.

At the swinging door, he flattened himself against the dining-room wall, pushed the door gently with one hand, and on the return swing caught it, pulled it into the dining-room and slipped adroitly behind it.

Looking into the kitchen, through the crack by the hinges, he saw moonlight bright on white tiles, enameled stove, and glistening copper pots hung in a row. The far corner remained impenetrably dark.

Stan was about to release the door when out of the darkened corner shot a narrow streak of flame, followed by the short sharp pop of a small-calibered gun.

On the heels of the shot Dorothy Larrabee, clad only in a wispy crepe nightgown, moved from the darkened corner into the moonlight. She saved her life by her sudden appearance, for the barrel of Stan's .38 was already shoved through the crack in the door.

"Don't shoot again, Miss Larrabee!" he ordered, his eyes fixed on the glittering automatic in her hand.

Slowly as a somnambulist, the girl lowered the gun and stood waiting in the kitchen as Stan came around from in back of the door.

Pamela Roberts, either heedless or unconscious of the danger, had run to his side. Together, they went into the kitchen, and Pam clicked a switch turning on a bank of lights which brightened the entire room.

Dot's lips showed scarlet red against the whiteness of her face. Over and over she kept repeating. "You frightened me to death; you frightened me to death!"

Stan took the gun from her limp fingers and slid it into his dressing-gown pocket. One of LeRoy's men was already pounding at the front door. "You were foolish to come down here alone, Miss Larrabee. What made you do it?"

Dot gazed at him uncomprehendingly

for a few seconds until Stan repeated his question more sharply. "I heard footsteps in the kitchen," she said. "I came down the back way. I thought you were a burglar."

"I see." Stan gave her a reassuring grin and added, "Well, at any rate you have plenty of nerve for a woman! Both of you had better get back to bed. I'm going to let in the detective. You calm the servants."

Dot Larrabee opened a door beside her and Stan saw that it shut off the servants' stairs from the kitchen. He waited until the two women were out of sight before he returned to the living-room and threw on the lights.

The face of the detective who had helped him break into the empty bath-house showed whitely against a glass panel in the front door as the man vainly tried to get inside. Stan crossed the room, disconnected the alarm system and unbolted the front door to admit the officer.

From outside, running feet sounded on the gravel path. Panting from exertion, the second detective burst into the room. His quick ferrety eyes swept about the place and sought his partner for an explanation as though he was surprised not to see the floor littered with corpses.

"I was down at the far end of the island," he said choppily. "What the hell's going on? I heard a shot."

"Mrs. Roberts woke me up," Stan explained. "She had heard someone moving about down here. We came downstairs and found Miss Larrabee in the kitchen. She was frightened when I opened the door and potted at me with this."

He took the .25 automatic from his pocket and held it out in the palm of his hand.

The first officer looked at it and grinned. "All it needs is a couple of diamonds," he remarked, "and you could wear it for a tie pin."

Stan returned the gun to his pocket and said, "Let's get busy and look over this house." He shut and relocked the

front door, shoved in the alarm switch, and snapped to the man with the ferret eyes. "You stay here by this switch! If there was anyone in here, he can't get out without setting off the alarm."

"Then how did they get in?" the detective wanted to know.

"If they got out and we can find out how," said Stan, "we'll know how they got in. You stick close to that switch."

For forty-five minutes, Stan and the officer prodded into every possible place of concealment in the twenty-room house. They questioned the two frightened maids and Peter, the butler, then looked upstairs first, later separating on the top floor for a second search working down.

They were back in the dining-room for the second time when Stan noticed the fine spider web of lines on one of the windows opposite the kitchen door. He bent over and picked up a small distorted piece of metal from the floor and beckoned the detective closer.

"Here's the slug from the .25 automatic," he said a curious note in his voice. "The Larrabee girl shot at me from the kitchen. I was holding the dining-room door open. The bullet came through the open door and finished up here. Now what do you make of that?"

The officer tapped the window pane with his forefinger, then slowly scratched his head. He turned and walked to the kitchen door, pushed it open and gazed for a moment at the opposite side of the kitchen, measuring the distance.

"A .25 automatic isn't a peashooter," he told Stan. "From where the girl fired that shot, the bullet should have gone right through that pane instead of only cracking it."

"Check!" said Stan. "When you make your report to LeRoy, you can give him this to put in his book: Tell him I'm coming over to Miami tomorrow to find out why all the windows in the Roberts' house are made of bullet-proof glass! Wait until I get on my clothes and the three of us will take a look around this island."





TAN RICE'S search of the island was most perfunctory. He hardly believed that he would find a marauder, who had succeeded in getting out of the house without springing the alarm, loitering about on the island; but not a single event in the murder of Kay Andrews had run true to form.

As he searched the landscaped isle, he became more and more puzzled. The old saw about murderers returning to the scene of their crimes might be true. It was doubtful, though, if they came back within a few hours and stuck their necks into a house guarded by watchful detectives. Yet he was forced to believe that Pamela Roberts had heard someone moving around downstairs. She might have heard Dorothy Larribee, of course.

If that was true, it was hard to account for Dot. There seemed to be no answer to the frightened girl exploring the downstairs of a darkened house with an automatic in her hand—except her story that she, too, had heard those noises.

Stan walked to the end of a short concrete pier and shone his torch into a structure which housed the Roberts' absent cruiser. A short flight of stairs led upward inside. He ascended them and looked briefly around a severely furnished room with a small adjoining bath. A few personal effects identified the room as the chauffeur's quarters.

Disappointed, Stan came down onto the pier, signaling the detectives to him by turning on and off his flash-light. "I'm going to go back up to the house," he told them. "You'd better return to your posts."

The dock lay in the center of the curve of the crescent-shaped island, almost due east from the entrance of the house. Walking back up, the path bordered a rock garden some twenty feet wide, a curved hummock of ground reaching in

the center almost as high as Stan's shoulders.

It was planted thickly with poinsettias and semi-tropical foliage. For a moment, Stan considered it as a possible hiding place, but the first rays from his flash disclosed that as a foolish idea. The bushes were far too thick to admit a human being.

"Hideous thing!" he muttered to himself. Struck by the import of his own words, he stopped and examined the rock garden more closely.

It *was* a hideous thing—enough to drive any landscape gardener into a suicidal frame of mind. It bisected the island from the front of the house down to the concrete pier.

From where he stood, Stan was unable to see the private bridge leading from the island to the Venetian Way. Exultantly he snapped his fingers. He had the answer to that rock garden if to nothing else! It was built there for an artificial screen. Anyone, who so wished, could go from the house to the pier without being seen from the bridge which led onto the island.

Stan turned back toward the house. The first grayness of dawn was in the sky when he entered it again. Pamela Roberts called down to him from the gallery above to know if he wanted coffee. Her voice held distinct relief at his return.

"Nothing, thanks," he told her as he locked the front door. "You go to bed and get some sleep. Don't be alarmed at me—I'm going up the back way."

He shoved in the alarm switch again, and went out to the kitchen. The service stairway was inky black as the door closed behind him and he started to ascend. He had been up and down those stairs, twice before, and knew that the stairwell was closed off with a second door which opened into a hall at the top.

He was about to switch on his flash when he heard a squeak no louder than the cry of a frightened baby mouse. It sounded straight ahead of him on the stairs at a level with his face.

Shifting the flash-light to his left hand, he tensed himself against an attack and with his right hand inched his .38 from the holster. A fight in the dark was always fifty-fifty, and Stan was certain someone was on the stairs.

He knew he was at a disadvantage at the bottom. If anyone jumped him unexpectedly, his gun would be of little use. He thought of turning on the flash-light and trying a snap shot, then decided against it, and changed his tactics.

Noiselessly, with every muscle taut, he turned sideways to offer a minimum target and, with his back pressed against the smooth wall, began to climb the stairs. He was on the second, when he heard a quick sharp cough just ahead. Something clunked sharply into the wood of the door behind him.

"If you move," said Stan, "I'm going to shoot." He squeezed his fingers tight about the flash-light and threw the beam upward.

Incredulously, with the air of a man clutched in some frightful nightmare, he turned the beam from the stairs down onto the kitchen door. "God help me!" he said half aloud. "I'm losing my mind."

The door at the top of the stairs was tightly closed. The stairs were deserted. In back of him, imbedded firmly in the door through which he had just come was a green-haired dart from a Haenel air pistol.



WENDELL REALTY COMPANY, which had negotiated the rental of the Crescent Island estate, was located on N E First Avenue. At ten o'clock

the following morning, Stan parked his Buick outside and wangled his way past a guarding secretary into Mr. Wendell's office.

He had cleaned up some of the ravages of his sleepless night. Bathed, shaved, and clad in clean flannels, he received an alert business greeting from the youngish

high-powered man back of the massive oak desk.

Stan closed the door behind him to insure privacy, glanced about the office which resembled a room from ancient Pompeii more than a place of sales and rentals, and stated abruptly: "A girl was murdered at the Roberts' house on Crescent Island last night, Mr. Wendell."

The realtor sank back in his chair, his look of eager expectation giving way to one of concern. "What—" he began, and trailed off into "Why?"

"I'm trying to find out why," said Stan.

Mr. Wendell wiped sudden beads of perspiration from his brow and muttered sadly, "Now that's plain hell. I get the first winter lease on that house since it was built, and a girl has to get herself murdered! I might as well cross it off the list. What do you want from me?"

"Information," Stan told him. "You say this is the first time that house has been rented since it was built?"

"That's right. It's been vacant for six years."

"Why?"

"Too big and too much money." Wendell's speech was succinct, straight to the point. "What's that to do with the murder?"

"I don't know." Stan was patient. "I'm still trying to find out. Tell me a little more. Who built this place?"

"Now you're asking me something," said Wendell. "All I know is that it was built for a winter home by a man who went broke during the depression. It was taken over by a local firm, not ours. They went broke. Now it's been foreclosed by a New York bank."

"Where can I find out who built it?" Stan persisted.

Wendell searched through a drawer. "A local contractor built it." He tossed a card across the desk to Stan. "Herman Little; he has an office on Miami Avenue at that address."

Stan pocketed the card and said, "Thanks. I'll let you know what happens."

Wendell accompanied him to the door and added gravely, "Nothing much more can happen. A murder on a piece of property that's already naturally hard to rent is about tops."

Stan drove to the Miami Avenue address and found Herman Little's name decorating a small sign on the front of an old dwelling converted into offices. At the top of a flight of rickety stairs, he was confronted by four glass doors. The one bearing Little's name was closed.

Stan rapped, received no answer, but noticed the edge of a couple of letters protruding from under the door. He pulled one out, glanced at the date and found it was post-marked two days before.

He was whistling tunelessly when he left the building. He got into his car and drove to police headquarters on West Flagler Street to talk to LeRoy.

The captain was dictating when Stan came in. He dismissed the police stenographer, leaned back in his chair, studied Stan's face and said, "What?"

Stan walked to the window and gazed up at the towering bulk of the city hall close by. Finally he asked without turning around: "Did you ever hear of a contractor in town named Herman Little?"

He heard the creak of LeRoy's swivel chair accompanied by the soft thud of the captain's feet on the floor. Mutely, he waited for an explosion.

The head of the Miami Homicide Squad seldom moved quickly unless he was about to explode. When the captain asked calmly, "Where did you get that man's name?" Stan swung around in surprise.

LeRoy was leaning across the desk, supporting himself on his elbows. His keen eyes were half closed, but under their heavy lids, Stan read something which amounted to utter disbelief.

He crossed the office and draped one leg over a corner of the captain's desk, pushing some papers to one side. Idly swinging his foot, Stan asked, "What's

the matter Vince, is Little dead?"

"Where did you get his name?" LeRoy repeated firmly, leaning back in his chair.

"From Wendell, the real estate man. Go on, Vince, come clean. I want to talk to Herman Little."

"You and how many others!" said LeRoy. "You find him, and I'll let you talk to him. He left his home in Coral Gables night before last to go to a lodge meeting and hasn't been seen since."

Stan got slowly to his feet, thrust his hands in his pockets, and looked down at LeRoy. "Where's his car?"

"We located it in a parking lot, the one he regularly uses when he goes to the lodge."

"Hmm." Stan pursed his lips. "Do you know why he disappeared?"

"No," said the captain shortly. "You tell me."

"All right," Stan agreed calmly, "I will. Little disappeared because he was the contractor who built that house on Crescent Island."

Briefly he sketched out for LeRoy the happenings of the night before. The office was quiet a moment, except for the drumming of LeRoy's fingers on the top of the desk.

"You mean there's something queer about that place," he asked finally, "and Little knows what it is?"

"Queer!" Stan burst out. "Holy mackerel, Vince, compared to that house, an insane asylum would be as quiet as the Breakers Hotel. The place is dolled up with burglar alarms, and bullet-proof glass. It's got a bath house that locks itself on the inside, and somebody potted at me from a service staircase when there wasn't a damn soul in sight. It has a rock garden built up six feet high to conceal anyone going from the house to the pier and you're asking me if it's queer!"

"You think Little knows the answer to all those things?"

"I think he knows some of the answers if he built the place." Stan started to pace the office in long quick strides. "There are others think so, too, Vince. We have to do something, have to act

fast. If we don't find Little quickly—"

"Go on!" LeRoy insisted through dry lips.

"We probably won't find him at all," Stan continued. "I bet he's been snatched, Vince, and I hate like hell to think what's happening to him now. Whoever has him intends to get everything Herman Little knows about Crescent Island and get it quick. There are methods, Vince, which, to put it mildly, are far from pleasant."

"Well, suppose he tells them what they want to know?"

"But, Vince, he probably doesn't know enough. Look here!" Stan stopped his parade of the office and came over to lean both hands palm down on the captain's desk. "Did you ever hear of Al Capone?"

"The opera singer?" asked LeRoy. "Don't be funny, Stan. Capone's in Alcatraz."

"Yes," Stan agreed slowly, "and so's the man who retained Herman Little to build this house—unless I'm crazy. That's the reason for all the secrecy and all the doodads. Some mugg with plenty of big money put that place up six years ago when the bigger rackets were about at an end. He intended to make it safe if he wanted to retire. You think he'd tip his hand to a local contractor such as Herman Little?"

LeRoy whistled slowly. "You mean his own men probably did the final work?"

"Exactly," said Stan, "but whoever has Little now thinks that Little knows the entire set-up and they'll try to torture it out of him unless we find him quick."

"I have every man available working on it now."

"That's not enough," said Stan. "There's a girl in Miami who knows more ex-mobsters' histories than all your police force put together. I'm going to ask her help."

The captain's gray eyes opened wide. "I presume you're referring to Millie LaFrance?"

He placed his fingertips together to form a tent and looked over the top of

it at Stan. "If you can stay sober enough and keep out of bed long enough to find out what you want to know from Millie, that will be swell. What's she doing for a living?"

"She's opened a beauty shop."

"That beats me," said LeRoy. "Why should a dame with everything Millie's got open a beauty shop?"

"To beautify the female portion of Miami, Vince. It brings more men to town so Millie can take them away."

"Go ahead," the captain told him, "but I'm warning you now. If you don't show up here with some information tomorrow, I'm going to send the wagon up to Millie's apartment and run you both in!"

"You'll probably have to drag us both out," Stan grinned from the doorway. "You just don't know Millie LaFrance!"

**I**N THE rather expert opinion of Stan Rice, Millie LaFrance was the prettiest woman in the States. As he crossed the Venetian Way en route to Millie's beauty parlor located near to the Roney Plaza, he thought of the many dangerous and thrilling adventures they had experienced together.

Millie's knowledge of organized crime on a big scale was deep and profound, learned by the bitterest experience. Due to her own astuteness, she had managed to get out of it in time and she had been willing to help Stan more than once. She had wit and fearlessness and Stan hoped she'd be willing to try her skill on the Crescent Island mysteries.

Millie had just returned from a three-months' trip to New York, and Stan's heart beat a trifle harder than usual as he parked the Buick before the decorative façade identified by a chaste "La France."

Rather hastily he walked by a row of semi-curtained booths housing tortured customers and sought Millie's office in the rear. From behind a black onyx desk, Millie dismissed an assistant and motioned Stan to close the door.

"My, my!" she exclaimed softly. "Dear Mr. Rice, so kind of you to come."

Stan stood speechless for a moment as she stood up, drinking in her slim blond perfection set off by a white dress touched with a splash of red.

"Remember me?" he asked.

Millie came slowly forward and extended a languishing hand. As Stan reached for it, she suddenly threw both arms around his neck and kissed him full on the lips, holding one slender leg up in back of her in the manner of a pleased school girl.

"Good Lord," Stan breathed as Millie relinquished her hold, "this place is a dive! It isn't safe for a man to come in here without his father."

"Bring him along next time," Millie suggested, "or did you ever find out who he is?"

She crossed the office to a buffet, swung the door wide and produced a squat bottle of Scotch and a couple of glasses.

"I came here on business, Miss La-France," Stan protested. "I need your help."

"You're a wonder!" Millie poured two drinks filling the small glasses up to the brim. "You spend the night over on Crescent Island with a pair of naked women running all over the house and now you need my help! Did you ever figure on moving to Turkey?"

She extended one of the glasses to Stan and said hopefully, "Let's get fried."

"I can't do it, Millie. A girl's been killed."

"Uh-huh." Millie touched the edge of her glass to Stan's and watched to make sure that he did justice to his own portion.

He coughed slightly, set down his glass, and asked, "Where the hell do you hear everything before I tell you?"

"I shot her," said Millie. "You spend one more night over there and I'll knock off the other two!"

"Talk sense, please," Stan pleaded. "Who told you all the dirt?"

"Out there." Millie perched herself on the edge of the black desk and in-

dicated the rows of booths beyond the office door. "Even those dicks you crawled around the grounds with last night have girls. One of them came in this morning to get washed and polished. Take a look at the noon edition. Stan. The press has moved out to Crescent Island on a barge."

She slid off the desk and Stan backed away precipitately toward the door. "You keep away from me," he ordered, "or I'll scream my damn head off! I came over here to find out who built that house on Crescent Island."

"And why should I know, Stan?"

"I don't know that you do, but you're the only one who can help me find out. It's a stronghold, Millie, with an alarm system and bullet-proof glass in every window."

Millie's full red lips set in a straighter line. "Is this very important to you?"

"Frightfully so," he said earnestly. "The contractor who worked on that place has disappeared within the last two days. I'm not the only one who's trying to get information about that house, Millie."

"Snatched?" Millie raised her head quickly, her blue eyes growing darker.

"I'm afraid so, and so is LeRoy. Herman Little's his name, and he has a wife and a couple of kids out in Coral Gables. We've got to find him quickly, Millie. A girl's already been killed, and somebody tried to get me last night. What do you think's happening to Little?"

"I don't want to think." Millie's voice was suddenly hard. "I've been able to put those things out of my mind for the past two years."

She went to the buffet and filled the glasses again. "I'm running a beauty shop, Stan. I took an oath I'd never stick my neck out again."

She tossed down her drink, waiting for Stan to speak. When he said nothing, she let her blue eyes meet his fully for an instant then turned away. "Damn you, Stan Rice, you know how I love excitement. You come here and hang it in front of my eyes like a string of pearls!"

"You don't need to help, Millie, if you don't want to. I can't make you."

"The trouble is, you know I want to." Her voice changed, became quick and eager. "What else, Stan? Tell me quickly before I change my mind."

He repeated exactly what had happened, while Millie bit at her underlip with strong white teeth. When he was finished, she sat down on the desk again, held one shapely ankle out before her, and regarded it serenely.

"An air gun," she said softly. "It's been five years since I heard of an air gun, Stan. It's a slim thing to go on, but there's a gambler here in Miami who may have the information we want."

"What makes you think so?"

"It's a hunch," said Millie. "His partner was killed with an air gun at the race track five years ago."

"What's his name?"

Millie leaned back on the desk, supporting herself with her palms, and gazed at Stan from under her long-lashed lids. "Will you feed me if I help?"

"Yes," said Stan, "I'll feed you."

"Will you buy me Chateau Yquem?"

"Yes, I'll buy you Chateau Yquem. What's his name?"

"Will you get fried with me?"

"To the gills," Stan promised.

"Oke," said Millie. She left the desk, and knelt before a small black safe while Stan tried vainly to keep his eyes on the buffet in the corner—a far less heady view.

When the safe door swung open, Millie reached inside and took out a flat, pearl-handled automatic. Expertly she slid it open to see that it was empty, then laid it on the desk.

"I hoped I'd never see that again," she said with a quick laugh. "I must be incurable. The feel of the thing sends tingles up and down my spine."

Stan nodded. "I have the same general feeling about you."

"Let's drop the whole thing," Millie suggested, "and just stay in here and neck."

"I you don't tell me that man's name

and why you got that gun you're not going to have anything to neck with—for I'm going to break it."

"Oh, yes," said Millie, "the man's name and the gun . . . Well, the man's name is Richard Sykes, and I got the gun because I think he's a stinking cold-blooded killer and nobody's ever been able to prove it. Sykes has draped himself on a Wilbur Clinton's neck. Clinton has plenty of money, a society boy, and Sykes is draining him dry."

"That's nice," said Stan. "I had cocktails with Mr. Sykes and Mr. Clinton on Crescent Island yesterday afternoon!"



HALEAH'S RACE track grounds were crowded when Stan and Millie LaFrance left the Buick and made their way to grandstand seats. They

had lunched expensively at a downtown restaurant where Millie had claimed advance payment of a bottle of Chateau Yquem.

A telephone call to LeRoy sent them to the track, for somewhere in the vast crowd were Wilbur Clinton and Richard Sykes with one of LeRoy's detectives sticking close to their trail.

On the drive out from Miami, Millie sketched out for Stan what she knew of Dick Sykes' history. It was meager enough. Sykes and his partner had operated an ornate gambling house in North Miami near the village of Miami Shores. The partnership had terminated abruptly when Sykes' partner was found dead in a Hialeah canal with an air-gun dart in the back of his neck. Sykes had an air-tight alibi, but patronage deserted his place and it was taken over by another man.

"Is it still running?" Stan asked her.

Millie nodded. "It's being operated by a mugg named Tippett, but I've heard things. Sykes spends a lot of time around the place and I still think he has an interest, although he cries poor-mouth most of the time. If we don't find him up

at the races this afternoon, the betting's even he'll be at the Shore Club tonight."

"Can we get in?"

Millie smoothed down the front of her dress and gave the effect an admiring look. "I can get into any place in Miami."

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Stan. "The question is, what condition are you in when you get out?"

"It may be bad," Millie told him, "but it's never delicate!"

She went off with five dollars of Stan's money to bet on a horse which came in sixth. They saw not a sign of Clinton or Sykes, but they did hit on the last race.

They left the track with Millie's handbag so jammed up with bills that it would scarcely close over the bulk of the automatic . . . . By ten-thirty they had consumed some twenty-five dollars worth of dinner, and left four bottles of Chateau Yquem ready for the ash can.

Stan was floating along more than driving, when Millie lifted her head from his shoulder on the outskirts of Miami Shores and said, "Stop here. The Shore Club's right ahead."

Stan pulled himself together with an effort. They were on an almost deserted street. Half a block ahead, two square posts surmounted by round electric lights marked a gateway gleaming fairy-like through a row of palms. Stan was certain they were real palms, although they had, for the moment, a squashy appearance which disappeared when he rapidly blinked his eyes.

"Why don't we drive in?"

"In the first place," said Millie with a slight hiccup, "we'd better leave the car here where we can get it if we need it. In the second place I don't believe you can get between those two posts, and I'm not going to try it!"

Stan shut off the motor, turned out the lights and locked the car. Not until they walked through the gateway and up a wide drive could he see the long, squat stucco house that lay so close at hand.

It looked dead and deserted without a crack of light showing at any window,

but Millie unerringly found a doorway and fumbled around for a bell.

The response was instantaneous. A concealed floodlight over the door snapped on blindingly, stayed for a few seconds and was gone, leaving everything blacker than before.

"Some night they're going to do that," said Millie, "and I'm going to think I'm on a stage and start singing."

The door in front of them opened silently and a voice slightly Spanish in accent said, "Please come in."

Millie took Stan's arm and they stepped into a vestibule dimly lighted by fern-shielded bulbs on each side. A short, olive-skinned man in a mess jacket showed white teeth as he closed the door behind them.

Glittering black eyes swept hotly over Millie, then turned on Stan. "You've been here before?"

"What do you think, Philip?" said Millie shortly. "I'm Millie LaFrance."

The Spaniard gave a brief shrug and snapped his fingers sharply. "But certainly," he said. "As if one could ever forget the *señorita*. And the gentleman is all right, of course, since he comes with you."

The inside door had already opened in answer to Philip's snapped signal. They stepped through it into a rectangular court centered by a tinkling fountain. Ahead and to their right and left light showed brightly behind the screen of a long veranda.

The place was quiet and subdued with a silence broken only by soft laughter from one side, and the muted strings of a small orchestra from the other.

Stan looked around and said under his breath, "I'm glad we have some of that race money left. From the looks of this place we'll need it."

"Everything's free, Stan." Millie patted his arm. "They take it away from you here on the wheel. It has two zeros and a set of electric signals. If anybody wins more than ten bucks, the whole things blows up and the place closes for the night!"

"Maybe we better shoot crap while we're waiting."

"Ah!" breathed Millie. "There's a delightful game in the Shore Club. This is the only gambling joint in the United States where they use octagonal cubes. If your point shows any sign of coming up, the houseman breathes on the dice and they fall over to the right numbers."

"It sounds lovely," said Stan. "Just what do you figure on doing?"

"What I always do in a place like this." Millie started across the court. "I'm going in and have two champagne cocktails on the house, and then talk to Tippett."

"If you can talk after two champagne cocktails," Stan declared thickly, "you're suffering from two hollow legs."

Millie laughed. "I'm drinking them to sober up, Stan. They're made out of dry ginger ale served under blue lights. The only time Tippett ever broke out a bottle of wine was when some sucker had dropped twenty-five grand! Look! Look, there, Stan!"

She nodded toward a tall, heavy young man who sat at the small bar, staring morbidly into a glass of sherry. Stan knew him at once. It was Wilbur Clinton, the society lad who had brought Sykes out to the Roberts' house of death.

Since the murder Stan felt a new interest in him. He noted the weak chin, the flabby lips. Then suddenly Clinton looked up and saw them. He turned a greenish white, jerked his eyes away.

"If he doesn't want to recognize us, to hell with him," Millie said, seating herself on a stool and giving her order to the white-coated negro who was serving.

Stan sampled his drink and decided she was right. Wilbur Clinton strolled casually out a side door, carefully avoiding Stan and Millie. Stan was half through the drink when she stood up and said tensely, "Come on, Stan. We've had a break! The man you want to talk to just went into Tip's office over there—Dick Sykes, you know."

Something in her voice sobered Stan. Millie had a trick of appearing very

drunk and snapping out of it without warning. Stan had seen it many times before.

Stan was beside her when she opened the door to Tippett's office without a preliminary knock and stepped inside.

Tippett, a hawk-nosed, cadaverous man in his fifties, was striding up and down the office talking to Dick Sykes who occupied a modernistic chair.

As Millie closed the door behind her, Tippett stopped in his stride, bit off words in the middle and swung around to face her, his face clouded with annoyance. Stan noticed that his jet-black hair showed signs of being dyed.

Dick Sykes, clad in a mess jacket, rose slowly. He had pale, colorless eyes slightly puffy. "Ah, good evening," he said and waited on a note of inquiry.

Stan changed an opinion formed the day before that Dick Sykes was dull. Instead, he decided that Sykes' bland, blank expression was the carefully cultivated mask of the professional gambler.

Millie looked from one man to the other and began to laugh, fatuously and with a drunken gurgle.

"We seem to have blundered into the wrong room," said Stan, catching Millie's hint. He took a step forward and added, "Hello, didn't I meet you at the Roberts' yesterday afternoon? Mr. Sykes, isn't it? I just saw your friend, Clinton. He just left in a hurry."

"Sykes, are these friends of yours?" Tippett snapped.

"Not exactly." Sykes' voice was cold. "I had cocktails with Mr. Rice yesterday afternoon as he says. I'm sorry, I don't seem to know the lady at all."

"Now that's too bad." Millie trailed off into another gurgle. "Old Tippy knows me well enough, don't you, Tippy? Why don't you tell him who I am? He's sweet."

She threw one white arm heavily around Dick Sykes' neck. With her free hand she reached up and ruthlessly mussed Sykes' carefully plastered-down hair. "You like Millie, don't you?"

Watching her performance, Stan



worked hard to hide a grin. Sykes' face colored slowly with a mixture of embarrassment and rage. He tried to free himself from Millie's entwining arm, but she knew all the holds.

"I'm sorry—" Sykes began.

Millie quit working on his hair and used both arms for closer clinging. She placed her lips close to Sykes' ear and whispered loudly enough to be heard ten feet away, "Millie wants a drink. He won't get me one. What about you?"

From behind the desk, Tippet gave a sour smile and asked, "Can't you do anything with your friend, Mr. Rice? This is a private office."

"Not a thing." Stan leaned back against the wall by the door and passed a hand serenely over his forehead. "She's worn me down. I've been trying for fifteen minutes to get her in my car which is parked outside down the road."

"Won't go!" Millie pouted. "He's tight, he's cheap. Won't go with him." Her voice became saccharine. "I won't go with anyone but Sykes."

Tippet lowered one eyelid in a wink toward Stan. "Go ahead, Dick," he said. "Be a sport and buy the lady a drink. Her friend won't mind, I'm sure."

"Thash it!" Millie became eager. She loosened her arms, got a determined grip on Sykes' hand and started to tow him toward the door.

Stan opened it wide to let them through and closed it behind them with a slight bow. As Millie passed him he heard her say, "I'll go to the car now. Go any place with good old Sykesie."

Tippet sat down on his chair behind the desk keeping his gaze on Stan's face. "You better get that dame out of here," he said after a moment. "We don't like to have that sort of thing in the Shore Club."

"I didn't know she was that tight," Stan said ruefully.

"Well, she is!" Tippet declared. "If you can't handle her, get Philip to help you. He's the doorman."

"All right," said Stan. "I'll see what

I can do, but she's a tough one to handle."

"We always have tougher ones to handle that kind," said Tippet looking away. "Get her out of here!"

Stan opened the door and stepped out into the bar. There was no sign of Millie or Dick Sykes. With a flash of apprehension, he went swiftly across the room, out through the screen porch and into the courtyard.

Philip, wearing his eternal grin, was just coming in through the second door to the vestibule. He saw Stan's hasty approach and stepped to one side.

"Where's the girl who came in with me a few minutes ago?" Stan demanded of the doorman.

Philip hesitated, took a look at Stan's face and said quickly, "She just went out, *señor*."

"Alone?"

"No," Philip replied. "A gentleman was with her."

Stan grabbed the Spaniard by one arm, digging his strong fingers cruelly into the flesh. "If you're not telling the truth, I'm coming back in here and turn this place into splinters and you along with it!"

Philip's face grew black, but he made no response, merely said, "It is the truth, *señor*."

"Let me out and make it snappy!" Stan brushed by the attendant as the doors were opened and ran down the graveled driveway to the two lighted posts.

The street was deserted except for the darkened shape of the Buick. He was about to turn back when the lights of the car flashed on and off. He drew a sharp breath of relief. They hadn't found out much, but at least Millie was safe.

At the door of the car he stopped, peering in through the open window. Dick Sykes and Millie were inside the coupé.

At the sight of Stan, Sykes exclaimed heatedly, "It's time you came. This—this—" He searched around for words

and classified Millie with a few choice names. "The dame's lost her mind. She marched me out of the Shore Club with a gun stuck in my back! She's got it on me now!"

"Get in, Stan," Millie ordered calmly, "and let's go! I don't like the way this mugg talks about me."

"Where are you headed, Millie?"

"Over to Miami Beach." In the gloom he saw her toss her curls. "I'm going to take this foul-mouthed louse over to the beauty shop and give him a permanent wave!"

They were nearly down the street when lights came up on another car a block behind them. Stan saw them in the rear-view mirror, but said nothing. LeRoy's men were still on Sykes' trail; and Stan decided that before the evening was over, he might need them.

Sykes made several attempts to speak as Stan guided the car south and across the Venetian Way to Miami Beach. Each time, Millie choked him off with a few terse remarks. "You've said too much already, and you'll get plenty of chance to talk when we get where we're going."



involuntary guest.

He knew from past experience that Millie LaFrance was wild, but back of her wildness was an uncommon amount of plain hard sense. It never did any harm to let Millie play out her hand.

The police car had trailed them tenaciously to their destination and stopped a couple of blocks away.

"Close the door and lock it!" Millie commanded.

Stan complied, twisting the knob of the Yale safety lock to send the tumblers home. Ahead to his left, a curtained

booth lighted up as Millie pulled the string of an overhead droplight.

Stan caught the flash of her pearl-handled gun as she stepped out from the booth and ordered Sykes inside. The man hesitated a moment then obeyed with a slight shrug.

"Sit down!" Millie ordered, waving her gun toward the customer's chair.

She turned to Stan and said, "Watch him. I'll be back in a minute," and was gone into the darkness at the back of the shop.

"That woman's mad, insane," said Sykes.

"Sure," Stan agreed. "Crazy as a loon. I'm scared to death of her."

"You'll pay for this, both of you, and plenty, too. What the hell does she think she's going to do?"

Stan took a chair and glanced up at the conglomeration of knobs and wires over Sykes' rumpled hair. "I'm afraid, unless you tell her what she wants to know," he said drily, "that she's going to give you a beauty treatment."

Millie's light footfalls sounded outside and she came into the booth carrying a bottle of Scotch in one hand and her gun in the other.

The room was eloquently silent as she picked a tumbler from the table, poured out a liberal three-fingers and offered it to Stan.

Rather dazedly, he took it and tossed it down. It was hard to keep from drinking when Millie kept poking glasses of Scotch into his hand.

She gave him a sweet smile of approval, replenished the glass and said, "Do you want this, Sykes, old dear, before you start talking about Haenel air guns and that bullet-proof fort you visited yesterday over on Crescent Island?"

The puffy lids which drooped quickly did not entirely hide Sykes' look of fear. "You go to hell!" he said sullenly. "I haven't any idea what you're talking about, and the police are going to hear of this little stunt first thing in the morning, don't forget that."

"Why wait until morning?" Millie fin-

ished the Scotch herself, placed the glass on the table and sat down nursing her gun on one shapely knee.

Sykes stared straight ahead, fighting the twitching of his lips.

"Why wait until morning?" Millie persisted. "There's a squad car right outside a block and a half away. They followed us in from the Shore Club."

She reached for a white enameled phone on the table beside her and lifted the receiver. "I'll call headquarters now. They can send out a radio call for that car to come to the front door. We don't even need to go out of the place. As a matter of fact, I think I'd like to see a couple of LeRoy's strong-arm men work on you as much as I'd like to do it myself."

"Wait a minute," Sykes said pleadingly. "You've got me all wrong. I don't want any trouble with the police."

"Why not?" asked Stan.

"Because I've had plenty of trouble with them already. They've been on my neck ever since my partner was killed." He turned his head slowly to look at Millie. "You know it, too, just as I know plenty about you. You were Zorrio's girl before he went to Alcatraz. I'm not spilling that all over Miami."

Millie's face whitened and her fingers closed caressingly over the automatic. "That's ancient history, Sykes. Zorrio was knifed three years ago on the Rock. He's deader than hell. I didn't bring you here tonight to drag up your past, and you'd better let mine alone."

"Then if it isn't the past you want to hear about," said Sykes turning away, "just what am I supposed to say?"

"I've told you what you're expected to say." Millie crossed her legs and studied the point of her toe. "A girl named Katherine Andrews was knocked off with an air pistol at the Roberts' place last night. You and a fellow named Clinton were over there yesterday afternoon. What were you doing there? Those people are out of your class."

"I went there for cocktails with Clinton."

"And just who is Clinton?" Stan put in.

Sykes twisted his fingers nervously. "He owns a string of race horses."

"We don't want to know how he throws his money away," said Millie. "Who is he?"

"He's the son of a wealthy New York family."

"Running around with *you*?" Millie stood up and walked around to face her victim. "What have you got on him, Sykes?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. What's your hold on this Van Stuyvesant Fish-tail that has him eating out of your hand, taking you over to cocktail parties at the Roberts' place?"

"We're friends. I place an occasional bet for him. Is there anything wrong in that?"

"This is wrong with it, Sykes." Stan got up and took his post beside Millie. "You don't intend to tell the truth and we haven't time to force it out of you."

He reached in the side pocket of his coat. When he removed his hand, he spread it out palm up in front of Sykes' eyes. On it lay the green-tufted dart picked from the wood of the kitchen door the night before.

Sykes' face grew mottled and a fish-like film seemed to slowly close over his opaque eyes. Through loose lips he asked, "What's that?"

"It's the same kind of a dart," said Stan, "that was found in Kay Andrews' head which was battered up with a black-jack to hide the hole. It's the same kind of a dart that was found in the empty pool at the Roberts' place last night where the first shot fired at Kay Andrews missed. It's the same kind of a dart as was found in your partner's neck when his body was fished out of a Hialeah canal. You ought to know what they look like by now!"

"That's a damned lie!" Sykes was drooling. "I didn't kill my partner; I didn't kill that girl."

"What difference does it make?" Stan

moved his hand and watched the tiny cone roll. "Somebody killed your partner, and somebody killed the girl. Millie and I both think it was you, so we might as well tie you into it good and tight."

"You can't hang those murders on me."

"We'll make a good try," said Stan. "I'm going to tie you up neatly in this chair and slip this into the vest pocket of those slick evening clothes. You can spend your time until the police get here figuring how to talk yourself out of that."

Sykes half rose from the chair and collapsed back under a vigorous push from Stan. With the impact of Stan's hand, he visibly became smaller until he appeared to be shrinking down into his clothes.

"You're not going to frame me. I'm going to talk, going to tell everything. Clinton," he plucked at the cloth of his mess jacket, "Clinton's the guy you want, not me. He shot Aiken, my partner, five years ago. That's the hold I've had over him; that's the hold I've got now."

"Why did he kill him?" Stan was grim.

"He owed Aiken money, nearly a hundred grand. Aiken was trying to make him pay. He's been paying me instead ever since."

"Aiken," Millie repeated softly, her eyes bright with excitement. "I've got it, Stan, I've got it! Aiken's the mugg who had that house on Crescent Island built to his order. He was more than a cheap gambler, he was a big-shot rum-runner who came down here to hole in and spend his dough when he saw Repeal on the cards."

"You'd better come clean, Sykes," Stan ordered threateningly. "Is that the truth?"

"I'll be killed for shooting off my mouth! Clinton's killed once. He'll kill again." Two tears trickled down Sykes' cheeks and Stan turned away in disgust.

"You'll be legally killed if you don't clear this up."

"Aiken built the house, all right."

Sykes collapsed completely. "But I don't know anything about it. All I know is he hid some money there, a lot of dough, over two hundred thousand in cash."

"So that's what they're after."

"That's what they're after, all right. Clinton learned of it a couple of weeks ago. A couple of guys who helped Aiken complete the place were sprung from Leavenworth where Aiken is and came down here. They know the money's somewhere around that house, but they don't know where it is. They let Clinton in on the information, because he has an entrée to the house."

"Talk quick!" said Stan. "How do they get in that house at night?"

"I don't know, I don't know," Sykes blubbered. He looked glassily ahead.

Stan picked him up bodily from the chair and shook him back into coherence. "Where's Little, Sykes? Herman Little, where is he?"

"Little?" Sykes repeated dully. "Never heard of him."

"He's the contractor who helped build that house for Aiken. Where are those men who told Clinton about the money?"

"They're staying in a fishing camp Aiken built down the bay."

"Where?" Stan gave the man another shake and dropped him down in the chair.

"It's called Buttonhole Key."

Stan grabbed up the phone and dialed Headquarters, asking for LeRoy. "Pick up Clinton," he said when the captain was on the phone. "He's the guy you want for killing Kay Andrews."

"That's great!" said the captain muf-  
fling a curse. "He slipped the man I had on him two hours ago. I'll have to put him on the air."

"Well, put him on quick," said Stan, "and meet me at the Municipal Docks with a police boat in fifteen minutes. We're going to Buttonhole Key."

"Where's that?"

"If I told you, you wouldn't know. I'm going along. It's a forty-minute run down the bay in a fast boat. I've fished around it for years, and know every foot

of it. If we don't hurry, there's a couple of thugs down there will probably have Little boiling in his own sweat!"

"I'm glad that's happening to somebody else," said LeRoy, "as well as me!"

"What are you going to do with this?" Millie pointed to the sniveling Dick Sykes as Stan hung up.

"Turn him over to the cops in the radio car down the street." Stan walked to the front of the beauty shop and opened the door. "I'll send them in. Can you keep him under control for a minute."

"I never had a man walk out on me yet unless I wanted him to."



TAN found the dark bulk of the police boat rumbling quietly at the end of the Municipal Pier in Miami. Captain LeRoy quit pacing up and down and chewing his cigar into a pulp when Stan appeared.

They had hardly touched the deck when the boat was shoved free and the idling throb of the powerful engines jumped into a humming roar. Water frothed up, climbing higher on each side of the bow.

"Which way?" asked LeRoy.

"Southeast across the bay," Stan told him. "Head for Ragged Keys." He pointed to where the lighthouse on Fowey Rocks alternately faded and glowed to mark the passage out to sea.

An incoming fishing cruiser changed its course as the electric siren of the police boat shrieked out mournfully, demanding right of way.

LeRoy took Stan's arm and led him below to escape the rush of wind which flattened out their words. The long slim craft could make thirty knots in a pinch, and LeRoy had given orders to push her to the limit.

Down in the snug cabin, Stan told of the information extracted from Sykes, and watched appreciation grow on LeRoy's face.

When he had finished, the captain pushed back his cap, bit the end from a fresh cigar and asked, "What's your plan?"

"So far as I know," said Stan, "there are two men holding Little. I'm assuming they have him on Buttonhole Key because it's an isolated place free from interruption."

"What's on the key?"

"Nothing much, Vince, except a four-room camp built there by Aiken. There's a dock on the north side."

"That should be easy," said LeRoy.

"I wonder." Stan took an envelope from his pocket and sketched an outline of the Key on the back of it with a pencil. "Aiken was a cagy duck. Have you figured, Vince, that this fishing camp may be as strongly fortified as the house he built on Crescent Island?"

"No," said LeRoy, "I haven't."

"It's a possibility we have to consider. Another thing is—there may be more than two men guarding Little."

"And another thing," said LeRoy, "there may be no one on the damn Key at all!"

"We'll find that out," Stan told him grimly. "How many men have you on board here?"

"Six," said LeRoy, "but we can't get help from more than four of them. Two have to stay with the boat whatever happens."

"All right," said Stan, "here's what we'll do: There's deep water all along the west side of the Key. Run down the bay and leave the Key about a mile off our port side. I'll tell you when to duck the lights and muffle down the engines. We'll turn due east just after we pass the key and start for it slowly. Have you tear gas on board?"

"Enough to make the angels weep." LeRoy swung open a cabinet beside him, disclosing neatly arrayed tear gas bombs and six Sedgley pistols for firing them. Underneath were four Thompson sub-machine guns and an assortment of other high-powered weapons.

Stan picked out one of the Sedgley

pistols and put it, together with six tear gas bombs, into a canvas sack. He selected a gas mask from a hook and added it to the bombs and pistol. A Tommy gun followed. He looked over the drum of cartridges and laid it on the table.

"What are you figuring on?" LeRoy asked watching. "A war of your own?"

"Exactly," said Stan. "If that fishing camp turns out to be a fort, we're going to be in for a stiff fight. I'm going to take one of the tenders and let you drop me off when you get in close to the Key. If your search-light picks up a boat at the dock, you'll know someone's there. Signal me by blinking a flash-light from the stern three times. I'll row around to the south side of the Key while you attack from the north. You don't dare shell them on account of Little."

"How many men are you going to take with you?"

"None," said Stan. "There's a mangrove swamp on the south side, and I'm going to have enough trouble getting through it myself. If I can make it and attack from the rear, it may save a lot of trouble."

"Go ahead," said LeRoy disapprovingly. "It's your life. Chuck it away any way you want to."

"At least when I die," Stan said grinning, "I'll be having a lot of fun."

"I'm an old man," LeRoy told him, "and I'd rather have a glass of beer!"

Stan added a small razor-edged hatchet to his equipment before he entered the light police tender and pushed away from the idling boat into the darkness.

The police boat churned water at the stern and left him rocking gently with waves from its wake. The west shore of Buttonhole Key lay on Biscayne Bay between him and the ocean.

Gingerly he arranged the Tommy gun on the small seat ahead of him, and began to row forward, guiding the light craft more by instinct than by any actual knowledge of the best place to land.

The hatchet was stuck in the left side

of his belt guarded by a metal sheathe which covered its sharp blade. From the right of his belt his powerful flash-light hung from a ring. Over one shoulder hung the canvas sack containing the gas mask, bombs, and Sedgley pistol.

It was not going to be easy negotiating a mangrove swamp in the dark cluttered up with so many accessories, yet Stan knew they were almost vital to his plan.

He had fished around Buttonhole Key many times. Twice he had landed to explore the small island and look over the unoccupied camp. It was idle curiosity, but the same curiosity had given him his knowledge of Florida's remote spots.

As he rowed, he drew on his unflinching memory to get a clear picture of the camp. He had never been inside it, but he remembered from looking through the windows that the living-room and kitchen were in the front facing the dock where the police boat would head in. The two bedrooms were at the rear. If Little was in the house, he would undoubtedly be in one of them.

Stan let the oars trail, watching the police boat intently. He was afraid it was going to disappear around the point of the Key, when the signal light flashed three times from the stern.

Exultantly, he laid on the oars again, shoving the tender swiftly into shore.

Trailing vines were close about him when he stopped and made the tender fast. Good fortune was lending a hand, for he had found a small spit of sand extending out beyond the encroaching swamp. It offered an almost solid footing.

Thanking the kindly gods, Stan stepped ashore nursing the Tommy gun under his left arm and entered the morass. It closed about him, steamy and dripping, fighting to keep him back with every ingenious device of tropical nature.

Twice he temporarily abandoned the Tommy gun, placing it on a table of matted vines, to chop himself a passage by the light of his flash. He knew from

previous visits that the mangrove swamp was not more than a hundred yards through, but progressing a foot at a time, it grew into a long hundred miles.

Still the ridge of sand held. Washed up by capricious tides, it apparently ran clear through the boggy ground. To follow it meant more cutting and chopping. Several times, the swinging arc of his flash-light had shown him easier and clearer ways. Always, the treachery of water and rotted vegetation under foot decided Stan against them.

For a time he forgot about LeRoy and the police boat entirely, pitting himself against soft tendrils which dragged and delayed him like a thousand living hands.

He was within sight of the slightly grayer color denoting the edge of the swamp when he started to raise his left foot and found it would not budge.

Frantically he switched on the torch and shot it toward the ground. The light gleamed back from a million minute grains brighter than diamonds—mica!

Stan tossed the machine gun ahead, flung himself face down, grabbing and clawing at the surrounding vines and bushes. Heedless of scratching, tearing thorns, he rolled over sideways three times and shone the torch again.

The sand spit which had led him in through the swamp had nearly proved fatal. All around him the deadly, slippery pin-points shimmered under the light.

He knew there was nothing in the world more treacherous than mica sand—the death-trap of the seas. Even in his brief pause to shine the light, it was clutching at him with its insidious hold.

Eight feet away, it quivered as he moved, spitting up a tiny fountain of water not over an inch high. He had been in quicksand before, but never as bad as that on Buttonhole Key.

An instant's pause might be too long. Blindly he rolled again and again, sliding over the surface and pushing himself with hands and feet as a swimmer might on dry land.

He was in the squasy boggy embrace

of mud before he realized he was actually free and that the clutching mangroves and quicksand lay behind him.

Slowly he dragged himself erect and took count of the damage. The Tommy gun was gone, never to be found again—buried forever in the quaking sands. The canvas bag was twisted up to the back of his muddy neck. The ax was still in his belt, and the flash-light in his hand.

Stan unwound the bag, loosened the flap and found the gas mask, bombs, and Sedgley pistol still safe. He loaded the heavy, awkward gun, then fitted the gas mask over his head.

It was scarcely in place when a staccato burst of machine-gun fire sounded not far ahead. Bent double, Stan stared on the run for the black square which marked the house.

He had taken less than ten strides, when darkness left the island. Quick as the flick of a switch, the square shadow of the house grew blacker, silhouetted against blinding white. The mile-ray drum search-light on the police boat was at work.

The gun-fire grew sharper. Abandoning his crouch altogether, Stan ran full speed for the back of the house. Unless the men in the camp gave things up and attempted escape from the rear, there was little risk.

When he came to a halt by one of the bedroom windows, he peered through the glass striving to adjust his eyes to the darkness inside. A burst of machine-gun fire sounded again. Inside the house, the rapid tongues of flame were visible through one of the open bedroom doors which led into the front room.

It was useless to try to locate Herman Little. Stan's sharp hatchet rose and fell, ripping out pane and sash with a smashing of glass.

From inside the answer came fast. A sawed-off shotgun banged twice, but Stan had already dropped below the sill.

His Sedgley pistol coughed dully, sending a gas bomb over the sill into the front room. Hurriedly, Stan reloaded and fired another.

He was taken utterly off guard by the next move. A choking, cursing, figure jumped feet first through the sashless window landing squarely between Stan's shoulders. Hatchet and Sedgley pistol were flung wide under the impact, and for a split second Stan found his face not more than a few inches from a pair of heavy leather boots.

He dodged automatically just as the man kicked and escaped a toe which swung by with crushing force. There was not time to grapple or tackle. Reacting with the speed and skill which had brought him out of more than one fight, Stan pushed himself upward on both hands and swung himself around.

His long legs struck the back of the other man's boots, and the newcomer went flat with a grunt. Stan was on top before the other could move—but the gunman had no intention of selling out cheaply.

He went promptly to work calling into play every tactic of the underworld, the mat, and the prize-ring, and mixing it up with a seasoning of plain old-time barroom mauling. Stan smashed out with a series of short powerful lefts, but had to abandon them due to the pressure of a thumb in his eye.

He gripped the gangster's thick hairy wrist, tore loose the punishing thumb, and cracked out with a straight right which connected. The answering grunt was reassuring, but it had small effect. Stan got a belly-blow in reply which would have ended everything had it struck squarely, and not been broken by a quick roll.

Already tired from the drain of his trip through the swamp, he felt himself weakening fast. When something gouged into his back, he groped for it recklessly, anxious to find anything which might prove a good weapon. He took a kick on the shin for his pains, and by sheer will refused to give way to an agony which goaded him into blind fury. It was worth the effort, for the smooth handle of the hatchet met his hand.

Both Stan's knees came up with a

snap, lifting his victim high enough from the ground to be nicely in line. Expertly he wielded the back of the light hatchet with a quick sharp blow, felt his antagonist wilt, and knew his aim was good.

By the time he was able to breathe again without jabbing pains wracking his lungs, the machine-gun fire in the house had quit completely. It took him a few moments longer to find his flashlight, and locate the gas mask on the ground near the house. He had just slipped it on, and was about to climb through the window when, from the front of the house, LeRoy's stern voice ordered: "Come out slowly with your hands up, or we'll drill you!"

Stan slipped off the impeding gas mask long enough to yell, "I've got one back here, Vince! Watch out for me, I'm going inside to get Little before he chokes on the gas."

From the other side of the house, a uniformed officer called, "Don't shoot, Mr. Rice, I'm coming around."

"All right," said Stan, "one of our men is here by the window. I don't think he'll do any more snatching."

Stan readjusted the mask and climbed over the sill. The seeping tear gas swirled around the torch thick as white mist. In the room he entered, he placed the torch close to the bed and found it empty.

The door to the adjoining bedroom was locked, but the key was in the lock. Stan opened the door and went in. There, the atmosphere was clear, as little gas had had time to seep inside.

On a cot in the corner lay a barefoot man, helpless under a tightly adhesived mouth, and cruelly wired wrists and ankles. One quick glance at the blistered feet brought a curse to Stan's lips.

He flung open the bedroom window and yelled, "Bring a stretcher from the boat! Little's here—or what's left of him."

He carefully unbound the contractor's wrists and removed the clinging adhe-



sive. Little was too far gone to do more than moan feebly.

Two men appeared outside the window. Gently Stan lifted Little's inert form from the bed and passed him through to eager hands outside. When he saw the stretcher safely on its way to the boat, he went into the front room and flung doors and windows wide to dissipate the gas.

LeRoy was waiting for him when he came out.

"One of our bullets got the other bird in the chest. Seems there were only two of them. I'll have the boys toss 'em in the boat. They'll live to talk."

The captain watched as Stan removed his mask, and his gray eyes crinkled as they traveled over the ravages made by mud and swamp.

"I wonder what Mother Millie would do if she could see you now?" said LeRoy with a chuckle.

Stan ran a hand across his forehead to wipe away caked black mud which had become streaked with perspiration under the confines of the mask.

"If I didn't put up a terrible fight," he told the captain, "she'd probably give me a bath!"



HE POLICE BOAT was ploughing its way up Biscayne Bay towing astern a rakish black speed-boat taken from the dock at But-tonhole Key.

Washed up a bit and looking more presentable, Stan was sitting in the lee of the afterdeck house enjoying a smoke when LeRoy took a chair beside him.

The captain's voice showed strain when he said, "I just heard another alarm go out for Clinton over the short wave. Too bad he wasn't with his two gangster pals we wiped up."

Stan watched the arc of his cigarette as he flicked it over the side. "No sign of him, huh?"

"Not a sign."

Stan banged a hand down on one

knee and jumped to his feet. "Listen, Vince, I'll make a bet where Clinton is right now!"

"I don't like to gamble," said the captain wearily. "Tell me! If they had a two-way radio on this tub, I could find out whether or not you're right."

"I've been deaf, dumb and blind for twenty-four hours."

"Liquor and women will get anybody," said LeRoy.

"No, Vince. Figure this out for yourself. Why did Clinton and these two muggs we have down below drain that pool?"

"A couple of good men are trying to get something out of one of them now. You conked the other one with an ax, and he still isn't in any condition to talk."

"Then let me talk," said Stan. "There's two hundred thousand dollars in cash salted some place around that house. Clinton and the two men we just picked up know something about it or think they do. Don't you see, Vince, they've already told us what they think they know?"

"You ought to run for the Senate," said LeRoy. "You can talk more and explain less than any ten men I know."

"The pool, Vince, the swimming pool. It was drained twice."

"Oh!" LeRoy exclaimed. "They don't like water."

"Good Lord, Vince, don't you see? They think that money's somewhere in or around that pool, and I'm beginning to think so, too. But they were on the wrong track. I don't believe Aiken hid that money any place under water."

"Why?" The captain's voice was more eager.

"Look at it this way," Stan went on. "That house was built as a sort of fort where Aiken could retire in safety. He planted that money there as an emergency fund in case things got too hot—from former associates or anybody else."

"I'm beginning to get it," said LeRoy. "You mean if he had to skip, he might want that dough in a hurry?"

"You've got it!" said Stan. "No one as careful and methodical as Aiken would hide his run-away money where he had to drain a swimming pool to get it."

"I think you're right, Stan."

"I know I'm right. Look how it fits. Clinton and these two fellows learn the men have all gone away on a fishing trip and decide it's a good time to make a search for the money. They get into the house, but they don't know about the burglar alarm. They set it off, getting out of the house to go to the pool."

"Wait a minute," said LeRoy. "I suppose they were born and brought up in the house. Or just how did they get in?"

"Skip how they got in for a minute," Stan said. "They got in the way Aiken figured on getting out in case of trouble. In their first attempt, they drained the pool, made a search, and had no luck. They tried it a second time and it cost Kay Andrews her life."

"But why kill the girl, Stan?"

"For two hundred thousand dollars that crowd would wipe out half of Miami—you saw Little's feet. The girl went out for a late swim and ran into them while they were searching the pool. She must have tried to put up a fight, or threatened to scream. Clinton, or one of the men we have below, shot her with a Haenel pistol, then battered up her head, maybe with the bright idea that you would think she died diving into the empty pool."

"It's a pretty picture," LeRoy declared after a moment, "if you can explain to me how they got into the house."

In answer, Stan took three steps toward the stern of the police boat and began to haul in on the towline of the black speed-boat astern.

"Tell the man in charge to stop," he told Le Roy. "We're changing boats in midstream, you and I."

"Why?" the captain demanded. "We can use this boat for anything we have to do."

"This boat has to get Little to the

hospital," said Stan, "and do it quick! I'm not going to tell you how those men got into the house, I'm going to show you!"

Stan and LeRoy climbed into the black speedster which proved to be nearly all engine, housing sixteen cylinders under the cowl. They caught with a roar as Stan pressed his foot on the starter. A moment later the lights of the police boat, with its two prisoners, poor Little, and the cops, were far astern.

LeRoy yelled something to Stan, but his words were whipped away by the wind. After that, both of them were silent, watching the growing lights of the County Causeway connecting Miami with the Beach which seemed sliding down the bay to meet them.

Terminal Island eased past to their right just as a large late-coming moon showed over the hotels on Miami Beach. They went skilfully through a cluster of chartered boats, and minutes later passed under a cut in the Venetian Way to see Crescent Island dead ahead.

With the concrete pier in sight, Stan braked the speed of the powerful run-about by reversing the screw. An instant later, he cut the power and they slid in toward the dock without a ripple. LeRoy reached over the side to check their landing.

From above them, a torch shone down, and back of it a voice said, "What do you want?"

"It's LeRoy!" the captain declared tersely. "Get on back up and guard the bridge leading to the Venetian Way."

"And don't make any more noise than you can help," Stan added.

The torch went out and the detective holding it vanished noiselessly.

Stan leaned close to the captain and said softly, "Work the boat on in along the pier."

Silently LeRoy obeyed. Twenty feet in toward shore, the smooth side of the concrete was broken by a culvert which ran under the pier. The moon had crept high enough to touch the semi-circular top of the opening. It was hardly notice-

able from either the island, or the pier under which it formed a water-filled tunnel.

Stan's torch clicked on and light glittered back from a shiny mahogany sea-sled. It was concealed well under the dock, and was held in place by a painter tied to an iron ring. Clamped to its stern was a multi-cylinder high-powered out-board motor.

Stan stood up and by working his hands along the concrete top of the opening, eased the speed-boat in beside the sea-sled. Both of them could see then that the smaller craft was tied up close beside a waterproof iron door.

"What the hell!" muttered LeRoy.

"It's Mr. Aiken's getaway. Too bad he's in prison and can't use it," Stan whispered. "That door opens into a passage which leads under the rock garden up into the house."

"And the sea-sled?"

"Is the property of your much-wanted Mr. Clinton, unless I'm wrong!"

With an added word of caution, Stan led the way across the sea-sled and tried the iron door. It opened inward on well oiled hinges disclosing an entrance four feet high.

He stopped and stepped through, groping around gingerly above him in the darkness. A few feet inside, the roof was high enough for him to stand erect.

Mentally, he calculated the distance and decided the rock garden was directly overhead.

He placed his mouth close to LeRoy's ear and said, "We can't take any chances in here. If anyone shows a light, or you hear anyone move ahead, shoot, and shoot fast. I have my .38 and I'm going to do the same. You better hang onto my coat. I'm going to feel my way along in the dark."

Stan tested the concrete walls on each side of him and found them smooth and damp to the touch. He put down an almost irresistible desire to shine his flash-light and started forward in the blackness.

It was slow progress, for he groped

around with his foot at each step to guard against the possibility of a fall. A dozen times he wished he had thought to count the steps along the side of the rock garden the night before. It would have helped, he was sure, and made the trip through the stifling passage less immeasurably long.

Twice he stopped with every nerve strung to breaking and went on, certain there was no other sound close by except the heavy breathing of LeRoy.

Twenty paces after the second stop, the walls on each side terminated abruptly. Another step and his outstretched hand found the damp concrete again straight in front of his face.

He reached back and seized the captain's arm and once more placed his lips close to LeRoy's ear. "It's a T-shaped passage, Vince. It turns off to left and right here."

"Leading where?" the captain whispered.

"The one to the left comes out in the fifth bath house beside the pool. The passage at our right comes out in the house in the servant's staircase."

"Shall we separate?"

"No," Stan replied after a moment. "We'd better stick together. If Clinton's here, he may get one of us and get away, but he won't get both."

They turned to the right and proceeded even more cautiously than before. Stan was certain they could not go far without encountering stairs, yet when his probing foot actually touched one, he drew it back with a short gasp of surprise.

"What is it?" whispered LeRoy.

"We're going up," said Stan. "I'm going to show a light to see where we are. It's safer than the risk of making a noise."

He pointed the electric torch upward and pressed the switch. The beam of light came on so abruptly that it seemed alive and real, almost as tangible as a long white rope.

Endlessly, Stan and LeRoy stood pressed close together following the

pointing finger of light. At the other end of the beam was Dot Larrabee's high-colored face.

She was seated on the stairs a third of the way up, gazing at them with a look almost comical and clownish. The red on one cheek was darker than the other because of the thin trickle of blood which seeped slowly down from eye to chin.

Stan hardly saw the blood, was hardly aware of the deep contrast of red and white or the ugly fracture at the top of her forehead which had brought death at a single blow. It was the girl's expression which sent sharp pangs of nausea stabbing into his middle.

One of her dark eyes was wide, gazing at him with a comical owliness, but the other eye failed to match. Somehow it stood out from her face, leering evilly.

It took him a full minute to comprehend that he was not looking at Dorothy Larrabee's other eye at all, but at the green-tufted dart of a Haenel air pistol shot in over her long-lashed eyelid.

He was so intent on the lifeless girl, that he sensed rather than heard the soft spat of a black-jack which dropped LeRoy senseless in the passage behind him.

Without conscious thought, Stan jerked his flash off, flung up his arm, and caught the blow intended for his head. He felt the numbing surge of pain as a bone gave way, crushed to splinters, and heard the clatter of his .38 as it fell to the floor.

Desperately, he swung around, battering out into the darkness with the heavy flash-light. The effort unbalanced him. One heel caught on the bottom step at his back, and sent him tumbling down at the feet of the murdered girl. Vivid pain flamed through his arm again, tearing at him inside, running moltenly through every vein.

Six feet in front of his face, another flash-light shone, shutting out everything except the round hard slab of brightness hung in the darkness.

Too sick to move, Stan lay and

watched it as the long smooth barrel of the Haenel poked its snout out beyond the light and got itself into line. He saw Clinton's weak, heavy face behind it.

From farther down the passage, three reports from a .32 automatic tore sound into shreds in the narrow confines. Stan heard them uncomprehendingly, but almost felt the shock of the steel-jacketed slugs as they tore into the back of the man holding the flash-light and air-gun.

Slowly, as if surprised, the round tube of brightness lowered itself toward the floor. Before it quite touched the ground, it was snatched up again and turned back toward Stan and the unconscious LeRoy. By then Stan had pulled himself together with a mighty effort. His left hand fumbled around until it picked up the .38. It seemed to take him eons of time, but he steadied the gun and squeezed the trigger. A roar filled the stairwell, and this time the little round tube reached the floor.

A minute later his head was in somebody's lap, and above his eyes was a dress, white and trimmed with blood. He shook his head with an effort. No, it wasn't blood, it was real red trimming, and it must belong to Millie La France.

Only Millie could work a slide gun that fast and find her mark. Only Millie could feel so soft and comfortable. Only Millie could kiss him that way and at the same time breathe, "Damn it to hell! Every time you promise to come back and take me out on a drunk, somebody tries to kill you!"



N HOUR later, the living-room of the Roberts' winter home was swarming with police.

Seated on a divan, Millie was tenderly pillowing Stan's blond head in her lap. Above his feeble protest, she had just succeeded in pouring a third Scotch highball into him, while a police surgeon splinted his arm.

Captain LeRoy, seated close by,

touched his own bandaged head and said, "We need a dozen like you on the force, Millie LaFrance."

"Sure," Millie agreed blithely. "I've been man-hunting all my life!"

An eager young man with a notebook pulled a chair up close beside her and said, "Now, Miss LaFrance—"

"Listen, darling," Millie turned her eyes away from Stan long enough to throw the young reporter into a daze, "will you do something for me?"

"Anything," the reporter agreed.

"Well, take this down in your little book," said Millie. "I'm telling you for the last time. I drove over here to the island to see if they had any news of Stan."

"Oh," said the reporter, "I see."

"Well, quit looking, and listen. I found a detective knocked out with a black-jack near the swimming pool. Then I saw a flash-light shine down by the spring-board. In my own brainy fashion, I started to investigate, and what do you think I found?"

"I don't know," said the young man making notes. "What?"

"A man!" breathed Millie. "He had the diving-board turned half-way around and he was taking out money and putting it into a bag—lots of money. It was hidden underneath the board—where it slants up. There's a box there. I was fairly close on to him before he finished. He closed the bag and by the moonlight I saw him duck into a bath house by the pool."

The young man looked up from his notes. "A bath house? What was he going to do in there?"

"I figured it out just like that!" Millie snapped her fingers. "He wasn't going to take a bath, because there was no water in the pool. I followed him in."

"Into the bath house?"

"You said it! I squelched all my natural modesty and followed him in, only he wasn't there. But he'd made a mistake. There was a crack about four inches wide between the lower edge of the back wall and the floor.

"I grabbed hold of the seat and pushed up, and the whole back wall slid up disclosing a door. I went down a flight of stairs and arrived just in time to keep the unfaithful Mr. Rice from breaking a date with me forever."

Stan looked up. "She means she shot Clinton just as he was going to kill me. Clinton was being used only as a means of entrée to this house because of his social connections. But Sykes had been blackmailing him for killing his old partner and so Clinton decided to cut himself into this sweet piece of change. He wanted to marry Kay Andrews—for her money, no doubt. And when she found one of Clinton's pals snooping, she got killed. Clinton didn't even seem to mind that. He was money mad."

"And what about Miss Larrabee who was killed?" asked the boy.

"You find out," Stan groaned. "She probably ran into Clinton in the house or grounds. He killed her and hid her body on the stairs going down from the house here into the passage below."

"How do you get in there?"

"You go down those rear stairs which hide stairs under them. On the seventh step up, you'll find that the back of the step swings out like a flap. It was through that flap that Mr. Clinton took a shot at me with his air gun last night."

Stan turned his head on Millie's lap and asked, "Isn't that what your men found, Vince?"

"That's right, sonny," said LeRoy.

The boy got up.

"Wait a minute," Millie called. "While you're in the kitchen, will you do something for me?"

"Anything!" said the boy softly.

"Well, get a half a dozen eggs out of the ice-box," Millie told him, "and fry them up with a pound of bacon."

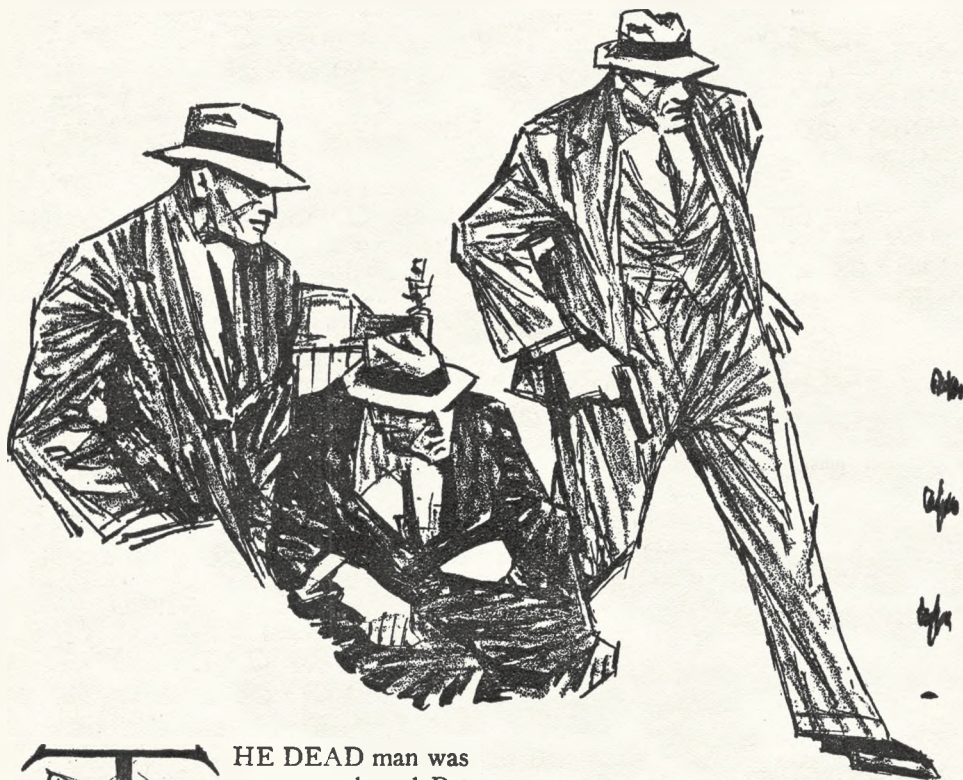
"My gosh!" The reporter stopped and came back to gape at Stan's pillow.

"Say," Millie demanded, "are you looking at me or my knees?"

"At him!" the boy said quickly. "I didn't know he was Miles Standish Rice, the Hungry."

# GARDENIA KILL

McCarthy twists a tornado's tail



**T**HE DEAD man was on a couch and Pat McCarthy stood beside him. The dead man looked calm and peaceful and as though he were asleep, McCarthy looked the opposite; hot and worried and puzzled. He kept wrinkling his nose as though he didn't like the odor in the room. He turned his head finally, waved at the flowers in the box by the couch, and asked: "What kind of posies are those, anyway?"

Rose Beck said, "Gardenias, Pat."

"Where'd they come from? Fred didn't buy them, did he?" He waved his hand toward the man on the couch.

Rose Beck shook her head. "I don't

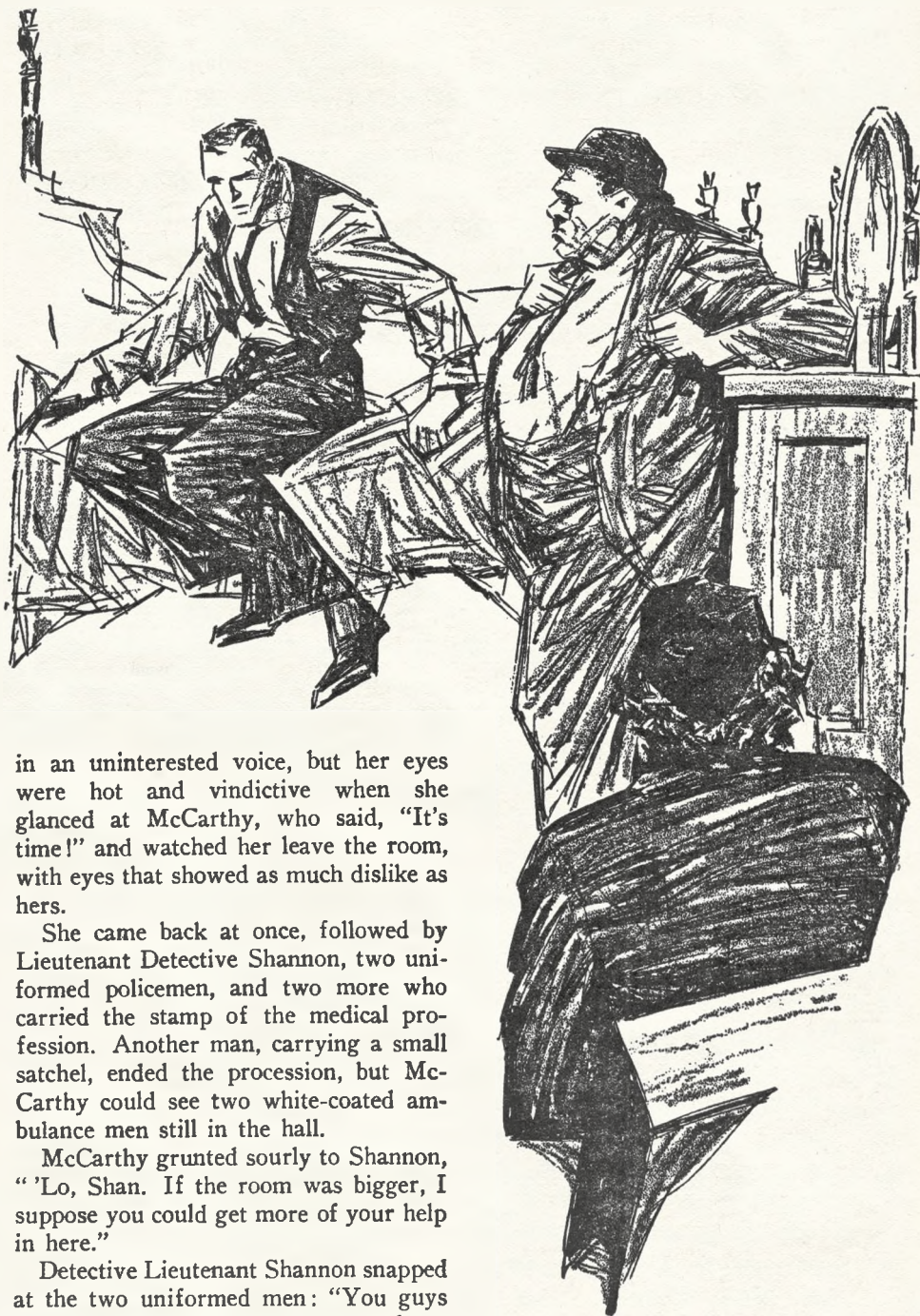
know. I was down town and they were here when I got back. Just like this. I called the doctor when I saw Fred."

McCarthy snorted and turned back to the body. "And I called the cops. They should have been here ten minutes ago."

The door bell rang and Rose Beck went toward the door. She was tall, dark, and beautiful in a sullen moody way. Too long eyelashes shadowed black eyes. She'd been a show girl before she'd married Fred Beck and she had a show girl's effortless ease in movement.

She said, "I guess this is them now,"

## By ROGER TORREY



in an uninterested voice, but her eyes were hot and vindictive when she glanced at McCarthy, who said, "It's time!" and watched her leave the room, with eyes that showed as much dislike as hers.

She came back at once, followed by Lieutenant Detective Shannon, two uniformed policemen, and two more who carried the stamp of the medical profession. Another man, carrying a small satchel, ended the procession, but McCarthy could see two white-coated ambulance men still in the hall.

McCarthy grunted sourly to Shannon, "'Lo, Shan. If the room was bigger, I suppose you could get more of your help in here."

Detective Lieutenant Shannon snapped at the two uniformed men: "You guys wait outside. One of you at the front

and the other at the back. Keep the news-hawks out. How come you got here first, Irish?" He and McCarthy had enjoyed feuding for years.

McCarthy jerked his thumb at Rose Beck, said: "I didn't get here first. His wife did. I brought Fred home from the race track and he told me to run along. Rose wasn't here, then. Fred had made a winning and I didn't want to leave him alone with it. He hired me a few weeks ago to protect him. He owed some money and had enemies. Well, I went to my hotel and just got there when Fred called and asked me to come back. Rose let me in and said that Fred was dead. She was right, for the first time in her life."

Shannon turned to the woman. She said, before being asked: "I'm Fred's wife. We've been married about six months. I was shopping and came back and found him like this."

Shannon asked: "How come all this running back and forth, Irish? Why didn't he keep you here with him?"

McCarthy shrugged. "He'd made a winning, like I said. He told me, over the phone, that he was going to pay same back debts and that he wanted me here when he did. That's all. He's been taking a beating this last year and hasn't paid a lot of bets he'd lost. Of course you know his business; he made books on the ponies. That's why he wanted me to protect him. He needed a body-guard; a couple of losers were getting tough."

One of the doctors turned from the couch and said, "This man died from heart failure. Technically, it will be myocarditis. Dr. Morrison, here, tells me that the man has had a bad heart for years. Dr. Morrison was Mr. Beck's physician. Dr. Morrison, this is Lieutenant Stone. You'll remember, Lieutenant, that Dr. Morrison got here to this house just as we did."

Dr. Morrison turned from the couch and said it was a pleasure to meet Lieutenant Shannon. The doctor was a tall

thin man and almost colorless; sandy-haired and with light blue eyes. He had little expression on his face and a generally innocuous manner and appearance. McCarthy decided he'd have trouble remembering him for over ten minutes and, for that reason, studied him.

Dr. Morrison said to Shannon: "It's certainly that. Myocarditis. His heart wasn't in too bad shape, if you understand. I mean the man wasn't an invalid in any sense of the word. But he was liable to go like this at any minute and knew it. Being his personal physician—"

Shannon said to the man with the satchel: "Let it go then, Barney. Looks open and shut. Death from natural causes." He swung on McCarthy then: "What's the idea in asking for a print man and for me to come and look it over?"

"Because I'm not satisfied. That's why! There's something funny here, Shan. I don't know what it is, but there's something screwy." He looked around the room, saw everybody staring at him, said defensively:

"O. K., I'm wrong, then. It's heart failure if you insist. But if I belonged to the family I'd ask for an autopsy. That's all."

By this time his glance had centered on Rose Beck. She stared back at him with her hot black eyes but kept her voice colorless:

"I'm sure I'll do nothing of the kind. I have every confidence in Dr. Morrison. And I'm sure this doctor here," she nodded at the police surgeon, "can see that poor Fred died from a bad heart."

The police surgeon nodded. Pat McCarthy said, "O. K.! I just happen to be working for him is all. I'm just a friend and you're married to him. I'm just a friend and you were his hard luck. But I still say it's screwy some place. What in hell would Fred Beck be doing with a bunch of gardenias like that?"

He pointed at the uncovered box of gardenias and Shannon asked incuriously: "Is that what they are? They sure



smell to high heaven." Then he jerked his head toward the door and the other plain-clothesman and the man with the satchel followed him out, leaving McCarthy, the two doctors, and Rose Beck. McCarthy followed Shannon, caught him in front of the house and took him to the side. He said quickly, persuasively:

"Listen, Shan! I got a hunch on this, see? Get an autopsy on Fred for me. That's all I ask. There's something funny about this, I tell you. Give me credit for smelling out things, once in a while."

Shannon narrowed his eyes. "All you can smell is those damn flowers in there, those gardenias. You ought to know, Irish, that I can't have an autopsy done unless there's something suspicious about the case. Or unless the family wants it and asks for it. This gal in there don't want it at all. She said so. And she's his wife. You tell me anything wrong on the set-up and I'll get an autopsy for you."

"Fred had a bunch of enemies. You know that?"

Shannon shrugged, grinned, said: "Hell, so have I. You have, too."

"O. K., pal! If you won't help, you won't help. I still say you're wrong."

"Well, one of us is, that's a cinch. But I'll play along with the doctors."



**M**cCARTHY went back to Rose Beck then. He waited until both the police surgeon and Dr. Morrison had left, asked her again if she'd ask for an autopsy, and listened to her refusal as though he'd expected just this. And then, when they were done, he said:

"All right, Rose! But Fred was a friend of mine, a good friend. If you want, I'll help you make the arrangements. You know," he coughed delicately, "the calling the undertaker and all that. It's tough for a woman to do all

that. If Marge was in town I'd send her up to look after you."

Rose hesitated and he added: "Of course I know how you feel. All broken up over Fred. It would look darn funny if I didn't offer to help and all. Me being Fred's friend."

She gave him a sharp glance and agreed. "Maybe you'd better. As Fred's wife, of course, I really should do it. But, as long as you will. . . ."

Her voice trailed and McCarthy took her up on it with: "I'll telephone now. I think the Sunset Mortuary would be as good as any." He went to the phone on the wall, called a number, and while he waited, said:

"You'll have to get somebody to open Fred's safe, Rose. That is, unless you know the combination."

She said she didn't know this, and McCarthy reached over, still holding the phone, and moved a picture on the wall. It disclosed a small safe, and the door of this was open and hanging drunkenly. The hinge had been broken so completely that the tiny door flopped flat against the wall, not pushing the picture forward.

McCarthy dropped the phone receiver, rapped out: "What the hell!"

Rose looked up, stared at the broken safe, and crossed to it. They both stared into the empty interior, and she swung on him and said:

"So you got in it, did you? Let me have that phone."

She jerked her hand to the receiver, snapped into the mouthpiece:

"No, I don't want the Sunset Mortuary. No! Hang up!"

McCarthy asked, "What you going to do?"

"Do! I'm going to call the police! I know who broke into that safe."

"Who?"

"You, of course! You knew about the money that Fred had in it. I know he owed you some, too. I know he hasn't paid you yet for playing body-guard to him."

McCarthy took the phone away from

her. He had to wrestle her a little bit but he did it. Then he held her by both her wrists, stared down into her angry face, and said soberly:

"Now wait, Rose! Use your head! Don't fly off the handle. I knew about the money and Fred did owe me some of it. And he owed plenty more people and owed them plenty. But I didn't—"

"I know you broke into that safe," she shouted stubbornly.

"Now, wait." McCarthy kept his voice low and even. "You call the police and, so help me God, I'll tell them what you've been telling Fred you were going to do—that you were going to divorce him. You'll be in the soup. Let's figure this out."

She closed her mouth, stared back at him with hate in her eyes. He led her over to a chair, backed her into it and said:

"Now, look! Fred was a professional gambler. Everybody knows it. He made books on the races. He played cards. He backed fighters. He promoted fights. But he was honest, on the level. He's taken a beating the last year and he hasn't paid a lot of bets he's lost, but he intended to. Lately, he hasn't given you as much dough as you thought he should have. You raised hell with him about it. You told him you were going to divorce him, and try to hurt him with his clients."

She said sullenly: "He wasn't right with me. He was older than I am. I'm entitled to more than he gave me."

"He gave you all he could. And you know it. He was that kind of a guy. He owed me money and I wasn't pressing him. I knew he'd pull out of this hole and I was carrying him," McCarthy said.

"You knew he had this money in the safe, too!"

"Sure! He made a killing and had eight thousand in there. He put it in there before I left. But I didn't take it and I told him to let my debt go and pay off people that were pressing him. Fred

and I were like *that*." He held his hand out, two fingers together.

"Yes, like that," Rose sneered. "A professional gambler and a crooked private detective. A good pair."

McCarthy looked as though he were going to slap her for a moment. He then said, "You damn tramp! I'm not crooked and I'm not forgetting the way you treated him. You're a bum and you always were a bum."

"To hell with you," she yelled.

McCarthy heard a noise at the door and swung it open. He stared at the stocky, red-faced man who filled the doorway, said: "Hello, Sellen! What brings you here?"

Sellen was a race-track gambler and looked the part. His clothes were too loud and his manner too brassy. He lounged against the door casing, said:

"Nothing much. Eight grand is all. I know Fred took that off the Belmont race today and I want it. He called me and told me to come over."

McCarthy waved at the safe, now in plain sight. "Try and get it. Somebody got it first."

Sellen looked at the safe and his red face went angry. He bellowed: "What's this stall? Who's got that dough?"

McCarthy said, "Probably whoever killed Fred Beck. That'd be my guess."

"Killed him?" Sellen looked shocked.

Rose said, "The doctors said he died from heart failure."

McCarthy turned on her and snarled, "I wanted an autopsy. Did you? No! But you knew something was phony all the time. You ain't fooling anybody."

Sellen moved over to them. He said, "Was Fred murdered? I just saw the copper, Shannon, and he said it was heart failure."

Without answering Sellen, McCarthy went to the phone and called a number. He said: "Central Station? Give me Homicide, Lieutenant Shannon." And then: "You, Shan? Listen to this." He told about the broken safe, finished with: "And now what about that autopsy?"

This is the funny circumstance you wanted, ain't it?"

He listened, swung around from the phone, asked Sellen: "How much did Fred owe you?"

"Nine thousand, even."

A strange voice said: "Tough, Sellen. But I bet I get mine before you do."

All three, McCarthy, Sellen, and Rose Beck, turned to the door. The man there waved airily at them with his left hand, kept his right in his pocket. "Nice of you all to leave the door open. I came for my nine grand."

Sullen said, "Yeah? Well, that same nine grand says you're wrong. It's mine."

McCarthy said, "Hi, Georgie Zee!"

Zee brought his right hand from his pocket and it held a stubby-nosed gun. He said, in the same cheerful way: "This says I'm right. I got it coming and I want it. Poor Fred will only pay one bet and I say it'll be mine."

He waved his left hand again. Georgie Zee was little and slim and very dark. He had a beak of a nose, far too big for the rest of his face, and this twitched as he said:

"Hi, McCarthy! You know I got it coming to me. You was there when I made the play. Fred telephoned me and told me to come over. He was going to pay off."

McCarthy said slowly: "Yeah, I was there."

Zee waved again. "I won twelve grand. You know I did. Beck would've paid me all he could on it."

McCarthy looked over and away, saw the box with the gardenias. The cover was lettered: *Soren—Florist*. He said, "Either of you guys send Fred flowers?"

Both Zee and Sellen looked puzzled. Zee said, "Flowers?" and wrinkled his big nose. Sellen asked, "What's the gag?"

McCarthy said, "I don't know. It's a cinch that Fred didn't buy them; he never bought a flower in his life."

Zee said, "What in hell's the differ-

ence? I want my money. Now!"

McCarthy said, "Somebody beat you to it." He waved at the looted safe and Zee flashed it a look. He saw it open, stared, and in that instant McCarthy was on him.

Zee didn't weigh more than a hundred and ten pounds. McCarthy weighed plenty and it was all packed solid. Zee was out of condition and McCarthy was as hard as nails. The struggle was too brief to be dignified by that name and ended with McCarthy holding Zee's stubby gun.

McCarthy said, "It don't make a damn bit of difference, but it makes me nervous to see this. I'll keep it, Georgie."

Zee had white lines around his nostrils. He panted: "Damn you, McCarthy, there's no man in the world can rough me up."

"And there's no man in the world can hold a gun on me and look away. What d'ya think of that?"

Sellen said, "Cut the horse play. What I want to know is who's got that dough."

McCarthy said, "Figure this. Fred Beck owed two of you money. You, Sellen, and Zee. He owed others, but not important money to any of them. He didn't owe any of them enough money to make them murder him. But he had eight thousand bucks here and all of us knew it. Now who got it?"

Sellen asked, "If I got it, would I be up here after it? Use your head, shamus."

McCarthy laughed and the laugh carried no humor. "Sure you would. It makes a good stall."

Zee said, "I've got an alibi. I can show where I've been every minute, from the time Fred collected that dough up to now."

"Sure you have. The boys that work for you will swear you out of anything."

Zee shrugged and twitched his big nose. Rose Beck said, "I want that eight thousand dollars and I intend to get it."

No matter who's hurt. After all, I was married to him."

McCarthy shrugged. "Maybe Shannon can pick the eight grand out of his hat."

Sellen said, "What's all this murder talk?"

McCarthy said slowly: "Well, I'd say one of us four did it. Or had it done. He was murdered, I'm willing to bet. We all knew he had that dough here; that wasn't common knowledge. You figure it out. And I happen to know he was afraid of all three of you. Fred was my pal and he talked to me."

Zee said, "If he was your pal, why do you say it was one of us four that killed him? If he was your pal, that would leave you out."

McCarthy started toward the door. He said, over his shoulder: "I'm just telling you what Rose Beck would like to get the cops thinking, you dope. I brought him home and he had the money. I come back and it's gone. I'm in this as deep as you are."



YOU SELL many gardenias?" McCarthy asked the florist whose name had been on the box.

Soren said very few.

"Sold any today?"

Soren spread his hands and beamed affably. "But yes! I sell a dozen gardenias at one time. Most usually people buy but one or two, for corsages. Gardenias cost money; much money."

"You got anything here that smells stronger?"

Soren shook his head and looked puzzled.

"Who bought these dozen gardenias?"

Soren asked cautiously: "But why is it you come to my store and ask me about gardenias?"

McCarthy showed him his private badge. "It's police business, Mr. Soren. Did Fred Beck buy 'em?"

"I do not know Mr. Beck. I get a note that a boy brings me. With money. Look, I show you the note."

He hustled across the store, to a desk in the back, handed McCarthy a type-written note that read: "Give the bearer of this note one dozen gardenias. Please give him the change from the enclosed money." There was no signature.

McCarthy asked what the messenger looked like and Soren shrugged and said he looked like any other Western Union boy.

McCarthy asked, "Sure he was Western Union?"

"Maybe he was Postal Telegram. I do not notice. I am busy here."

McCarthy said, "Thanks!" and left.

Western Union had no record of a boy being sent to Soren's but McCarthy did better at Postal. He finally cornered a long lean youth and inquired:

"You the kid that got flowers at Soren's today?"

The boy said that was right.

"Where'd you take 'em?"

"To a man named Beck. He didn't seem to know anything about them."

"Who sent you after them?"

The boy said that he wasn't very certain just who the man was. Or what he looked like.

"Was it a big man?"

"Well, sort of big."

"Heavy?"

"Well, sort of heavy, I guess."

"About this tall?" McCarthy held his hand at the level of his chin.

The boy said, "Yeah, I guess he was about that tall."

"Was he about as tall as that guy going by there?" He pointed out a passerby who wasn't over five feet six and didn't weigh more than a hundred and thirty. The boy said the flower sender was about the same size. McCarthy said, in a disgusted voice:

"In other words, the guy is tall and short and heavy and light. You're a help to me. Where was this guy when he started you out after the flowers?"

"Corner of Sixth and Midtown. I was walking by and he stopped me. There was four and a half change from the dough he give me, but he told me to keep that. I'd know him again if I saw him."

"Sure of that?"

"I'm positive I would."

McCarthy dragged out a five-dollar bill and said impressively: "Now listen, bud! You're going to make money out of this. You keep thinking about that guy. Every now and then I'll come and get you and point out somebody and you see if it's the one. Don't forget what this bird looked like."

The boy gazed at the bill with fond eyes. He said he'd remember. McCarthy snorted and started for his small hotel.

He missed his cabbie-stooge, Benny, who usually was on hand to ply him about town. But Benny was cooling off in a hospital after a minor street brawl. McCarthy smiled to himself as he thought of the shape Benny's already battered face had been in when he'd visited him in the hospital.

"I think I'll send *him* some gardenias," he thought gleefully.

Most of all, though, McCarthy missed Marge, his girl friend Friday. They'd had one of their many bickerings and she'd bounced away on a short trip, shouting: "All right, Pat, all right. See if you can take care of yourself alone. You'll probably land in the hospital or jail."

"Or the morgue," Pat had said, but even that didn't stop her this time.

He reached his hotel and the tiny lobby was empty except for two men standing by the door. McCarthy swung in past them, started for the desk, and one of the men slid in his way. The other came up behind him and said:

"Now be good, fella. We're just going to walk around the block."

McCarthy stood still, felt something jabbed in his back. He said, "What kind of a walk is it? Am I coming back?"

"Be good and you will. Get tough and you won't. It's your dice."

McCarthy looked for the desk clerk, but he wasn't there. He turned back toward the door and both men turned with him. McCarthy held his body stiff and straight, trying to ease away from the gun in his back. His face had gone a little white and lines appeared along his nose, tightening his mouth.

He said breezily: "You guys working for Zee or Sellen?"

The man behind him laughed and said, "You guess, wise guy."

The other said, "What difference does it make?"

McCarthy thought of how he'd taken Zee's gun from him and the threat Zee had made. He knew Zee had the habit of keeping his promises and that the little man had half-promised trouble.

The man behind him said good-naturedly: "Don't blow your cork, guy! If we'd wanted to knock you off, we could have done it from the alley as you came by. Be good and we'll be good."

McCarthy breathed easier. He turned to the right, the two men still with him, easing him out of the door. They had their hands in their side coat pockets. Both men seemed friendly, which meant nothing to McCarthy, who knew a hired killer had nothing against his victim. The talkative one of his captors said chidingly:

"I'm surprised at you, guy! Trying to hold out important dough. You ought to know that a bookie like Fred Beck has got to pay his bills whether he's alive or six feet under. You ought to know better than to make the switch."

"I didn't make any switch. I'm not holding out dough."

The man laughed, said: "We know what we know, fella. It's a good yarn and stick to it."

No one on the street noticed them and they came to a dark sedan and waved McCarthy into it. They were in sight of the hotel entrance and they

watched this; watched until three men came out and hurried toward them. McCarthy could see this in the rear-view mirror; could also see he knew none of the three approaching men.

Then the talkative one opened the door of the car, said to him: "Now get out and walk straight down the sidewalk. Get it? Don't look back. When we pass you in the car, you can go back to your place."

McCarthy did, thinking it was all a screwy business. He heard the motor of the car start in a moment, waited until it got almost up to him, and then dived into the shelter of an area-way. He heard a laugh from the car, then heard somebody shout: "Atta boy!"

He'd expected a burst of gun fire instead. He watched the car with the five men in it now, turn at the corner and he came out of the area-way. His face was flaming red and he was cursing and making little attempt at keeping this quiet. He'd made no effort to catch the license plates of the car, reasoning this was stolen, but he said aloud:

"I'll know those two hoods if I ever see them again, and boy, if I only do!"

The "atta boy" had really gotten under his skin. It made such a fool of him, like a little scared boy—diving into an area-way when no guns were fired.

The five unknown men were doing a piece of work for someone, that McCarthy knew. Three to search his room, undoubtedly; two others to stop him if he returned unexpectedly. It was a straight business proposition as far as the five were concerned; their manner had proved that, but McCarthy was good and sore.



**H**IS ROOM had been most thoroughly searched, as he'd known it would be. Everything was twisted and strung around, and McCarthy spent the next few minutes putting

things where they belonged. He ended up, sitting on the bed with what the searchers had left him of a bottle of rye. He took a good husky drink, dragged the telephone to him and got the Central Station and Shannon. Then he said:

"It's McCarthy, Shan. You know anything yet about that autopsy?"

Shannon said, "They won't make that until the next morning, dope. These doctors work union hours at the police station. At least the M. E. does."

"Somebody just went through my room."

Shannon laughed. "Did they get the dough? Rose Beck swore up and down that you had it. She claims you killed Fred, took the money and went home with it. And then went back to Fred's house for a stall."

"How does she explain Fred calling Zee and Sellen? Could he do that if he was dead?"

"We didn't go into that. You got any ideas about this?"

McCarthy said sourly: "Sure. Either Rose or Zee or Sellen knocked him off. The only thing is, I don't know which one. In the first place, Rose hated him from the moment his luck went bad. That gal would kill her old mother for fifty cents and Zee would do the trick for less. Sellen will do anything he's big enough to do."

"That's what Rose says about you." Shannon lifted his big shoulders.

McCarthy was facing the door and he saw the knob turning. He said, very softly: "Listen, Shan. I'm having uninvited company. Get over here in a hurry and come in quiet. Get it?"

He pronged the phone, then looked away from the door and started whistling. In a moment he got up and started bustling around his dresser, was busy there when the door opened and Zee said: "Hi, boy!"

McCarthy turned and tried to look startled. He didn't know whether he'd succeeded or not, because Zee said: "You was looking for me, wasn't you?"

"Should I have been?"

Zee said, "You should have been. I want that dough and I think you've got it." He said over his shoulder: "Come on in."

Two men followed Zee into the room. One was short, heavy, with a twisted nose that had been broken. He also sported a cauliflower ear. McCarthy knew him as one Tuffy Dolan, who'd been a fair middleweight at one time. The other man was Zee's size and type, with the same nervous habit of wrinkling his nose. This was Dominick Manelli and he had another of Zee's habits, namely, that of sniffing heroin.

McCarthy said, "You needn't have brought the boys along. I'm peaceful." He went back to the bed and his rye, looked at the level in the bottle regretfully and added:

"I suppose I got to buy you bozos a drink? And me damn near out of liquor."

Zee said, "You're talking different than you did at Beck's house. You was throwing your weight around plenty there."

"I got thinking, Georgie. I haven't got the dough and I don't think you have."

Zee's eyes got narrower. He grinned, waved at the room and said, "I still think what I think. Go through it, boys. And I mean go through it; don't miss."

McCarthy passed the bottle of rye to Zee, who waved it back. The broken-nosed Dolan looked sorrowful when Zee told him to lay off the liquor and get to work. McCarthy took the bottle down a full inch, said:

"I don't mind your boys looking around, but you're slow on it, Georgie. I got back to the hotel while the first shake was going on."

"What's that mean?"

McCarthy told Zee about the two men who'd stopped him in the lobby, about the three that had joined them at the car. He told how his room had been searched, and Zee said:

"You might have planted it some place else, shamus. That's about what you'd do."

Zee was steady, with no tremble to his hands or voice. His eyes looked a bit unfocused. McCarthy knew that this meant Zee was riding high on heroin, and silently prayed that Shannon would hurry. Zee studied over his last thought, said in a decided tone:

"That's the size of it. I guess we'll take you with us and see what you can remember. I got that dough coming to me and I want it. Tuffy!"

Dolan came from McCarthy's clothes closet. Zee said, "We're going to take this shamus with us and see if he can't remember what he did with the eight grand. Come on, Dominick."

McCarthy hadn't been searched, but Tuffy Dolan did this now. He took a gun from under McCarthy's arm, said: "This guy could have raised plenty of hell with this cannon, chief."

McCarthy said, "See, Georgie? I'm trying to play along. I had a gun; I could have gone to town with it."

Zee said simply: "Come on."

McCarthy tilted the rye and took another drink, and while he did, prayed that they might meet Shannon in the lobby. There were two times when Georgie Zee wasn't open to argument. When he had no heroin or when he'd had too much. This, apparently, came under that latter classification.

McCarthy said, "Oke, Georgie, I'll go."

Dominick Manelli said, "That's what Georgie is telling you; that you'll go."

Dolan opened the door and peered out in the hall. He said, "All clear."

Manelli, hand in pocket, nudged McCarthy with what the pocket held, and said: "Out you go."

McCarthy went out, Manelli and Zee following him and with Dolan leading the way. They rode the elevator down and went out in the still deserted lobby, and McCarthy saw no trace of Shannon.

They went through the swinging doors that led to the street and Shannon

climbed from a police car and said:

"Hi, Irish! Just coming up to see you. Didn't know you were going out."

McCarthy said, "I didn't either."

"What's that mean?" The lieutenant looked from Zee to Dolan, and then to Manelli, and his eyes got hard. He said, in a different tone: "Hey! Maybe I'm walking into something."

McCarthy looked at Zee and his eyelid flickered. He said smoothly: "I didn't think you were coming, Shan, so I told Georgie here I'd go out and have a bite to eat with him. But Georgie won't mind if I don't; will you, Georgie?"

Georgie's lips were tight and his oddly unfocused eyes were murderous. He said, "No, sure not."

McCarthy said, "Swell! Be seeing you, then," and to Shannon: "Come on in, Shan! For once I'm glad to see you."

Georgie and his boys sauntered down the street. McCarthy and Shannon turned and went upstairs and Shannon looked at the depleted rye bottle and seemed disappointed. McCarthy grinned, said:

"Thanks, pal. . . . Well, Sellen sent somebody up and searched the place. It must've been Sellen. Then Georgie Zee took his turn. They were taking me out right then when you came on the scene. They've the notion I got that money and they're holding to it."

"Give me that phone. I'll have that little dope-head in the can inside of half an hour."

"On what charge? You ever put one against him that took hold?"

"No, but, damn it, I will."

"This one won't. Dolan and Manelli and Zee will tell the same yarn. Three against one; will my story stand up? You know it won't."

"He's gone too far."

McCarthy said patiently: "I'll put in with you on that. But this ain't the way to get him."

"Who got that money?"

"Well, I still say either Sellen or Zee

or Rose Beck. I said that at first and I haven't changed."

"So Sellen and Zee search you, so one of them has the dough. Nuts!"

Shannon started walking up and down the hotel room.

"Quit the lion and tiger act and sit down," McCarthy said. "What in hell was the idea of those damn gardenias being in that room? How d'ya figure that?"

"What gardenias?" Shannon asked.

"You dope! Those flowers that were in the room where Fred died."

Shannon said, "What the hell! They ain't got anything to do with Fred dying, but the broken safe could have."

"Maybe an autopsy will show a connection."

"You'll have one by eleven in the morning, Irish. I'm sort of curious, myself. I'm going out and talk to Rose Beck. D'ya want to come along?"

"I wouldn't walk across the street to talk to that gal. Fred was a good guy, but Rose is poison to me. Get her over here if we must talk to her."

Shannon said, "O. K. I'll stay. I'll give her a ring and tell her what has happened!"

"That ought to bring her. Besides everyone else has been here. It's her turn to pick on me now," McCarthy said.



OSE BECK came up but not until ten o'clock that evening. McCarthy heard a knock on the door, hid Shannon in the clothes closet, and

picked up his heavy gun from the dresser. He went to the door, stood well to the side, reached for the knob and jerked the door open. He said:

"Oh, you!" when Rose Beck came in, put the gun back on the dresser and motioned to a chair. She crossed the room, throwing her hips around, and swayed into a chair. McCarthy sat across from her.



She said, "Lieutenant Shannon telephoned me. He said both Sellen and Zee had been up here."

"That's right!"

"They wanted that money, huh?"

"That's it."

"Why didn't you give it to them?"

"I've been saving it for you, Rose."

"That isn't funny. That money belongs to me. I was Fred's wife, wasn't I?"

McCarthy stood, leaned against the foot of the bed and stared down at the woman. His coat was off, with his shirt sleeves rolled up on his heavy arms. His collar was unbuttoned and his muscles bunched on his shoulders when he bent close to her. He snapped out:

"Let's get this straight, Rose. I figure you took that eight grand. I don't doubt you had help in getting into that safe, but you're the one that got that dough. Well, that's oke with me. I suppose you'd have got it anyway, you being his wife. But I'm going to find out if you're the one that knocked Fred off. Or if you're the one that had it done. They burn women in this State for murder. If you did it, you're going to sit in that chair and burn."

She stared back at him, without fear. "You're crazy! I wouldn't kill Fred. Anyway, he died from a bad heart; he wasn't killed. You heard what those doctors said."

"I haven't heard what the autopsy is going to show yet."

"It won't show anything . . . I want you to help me get that money," Rose said slowly.

"You want to hire me? Is that it?"

"That's it. I'll give you twenty-five per cent and not ask you any questions about where you found it."

"I wouldn't work for you if you were the last person in the world."

"I'll go to the Star Agency, then."

"Go where you please."

"I'm telling you this to give you a chance to get clean on it. Come through with it."

"You're screwy, Rose. Out of your head."

She said, "You're getting *over* your head, McCarthy!" and stood.

He held the door open, said: "And don't come back."

He closed the door after her and the closet door opened and Shannon came out. He grinned at McCarthy, said, "What a lousy idea that was. What did you find out?"

"Either that she hasn't got the money, or she wants me to think she hasn't." In other words I found out nothing except that she's too cagy to even let down her hair in front of me."

Shannon left at eleven and McCarthy followed him out a few minutes later. He wore his own heavy gun in a holster under his arm and a knife in his right sock. The knife looked like an ordinary pocket affair but it had a four-inch blade, razor sharp, that snapped into position when a spring on the back of the knife was released. Flat, it made no bulge in the sock.

McCarthy went to the Postal Telegraph office, collected the lean and gangling boy that had delivered the flowers to Fred Beck, then headed for the Top-Notch Club, which Sellen frequented.

Sellen was there. McCarthy passed the doorman, having a little difficulty because of the messenger boy with him, got inside and saw Sellen at the crap table. Sellen had dice in one hand, wadded bills in the other, and was bawling out:

"Get on it, you gamboleers! Two hundred down and I go for all or any part of it."

McCarthy asked the boy: "That the man that sent you after the posies?"

The boy said, "Naw! Say, chief! Will they let me in that game?"

"It's a limit game, kid! You couldn't get in with less than ten bucks."

The boy brought out five tattered ones and a new five. McCarthy thought the five was probably the one he'd given the boy in the afternoon. The boy said, "I got a chance to get over here for

heavy dough, chief. I can't lose over ten bucks and I might get over here for plenty."

McCarthy grinned and said it was a tough game. The boy said that this was all right with him and that he was used to tough games. That the messenger boys and hackers from the cab stand by the Postal made it a tough game for anybody and that he liked competition. McCarthy said:

"Boy, you'll get it!" and followed the boy to the table.

Sellen had most of his two hundred dollars covered but the messenger boy managed to get his ten placed before too late. Sellen rolled two sixes, the boy picked up twenty dollars, and yipped: "I'm right!"

McCarthy asked: "How old are you?"

"Sixteen. Well, over fifteen."

Sellen looked up then and saw McCarthy. He said: "Hi, Pat!"

McCarthy nodded. "Saw your friends, Sellen."

"Huh?"

"The guys you sent up to my room."

There were at least thirty people around the table and a good percentage of these had money and wanted to bet it. Somebody growled: "Get your dough down, Sellen."

Sellen said to McCarthy: "I didn't get that, Pat! Wait until I lose the dice."

Sellen made an eight and then sevens out. He surrendered the dice to the man on his left, jerked his head at McCarthy, and they moved to the side of the room. Sellen said:

"Listen, Pat. You threw your weight around plenty this afternoon. Now you come up and make cracks at me that I don't get. Get smart; keep off my toes."

"You didn't get that crack?"

"No."

"You didn't send up anybody to go through my room? You didn't leave a couple of these heels waiting for me in the lobby?"

Sellen's face got red. He snapped out: "If I'd sent anybody up to your room,

I'd have gone along with them. What in hell's it all about?"

McCarthy told him and, somehow, got the idea that Sellen wasn't lying when he said he knew nothing about it. Then Sellen said:

"I'm in this damn game about four C's. I want to get even. I'll see you again about this."

McCarthy said this was fine and went back to the crap table.

The messenger boy had the dice and a pile of money in front of him that startled McCarthy. He looked up, grinned, said:

"Gee, chief, this game's a cinch. I can't miss. I'm right. I made four passes and let it ride. Then I dragged down and missed. If I make this eight, it'll make three more passes."

"Then what?"

"Then I'm walking out. I'm quitting winner."

McCarthy said to Sellen: "The kid knows more about this game than an old-timer."

The boy made the eight, followed McCarthy out with his hands and pockets crammed with money, and McCarthy said: "I want you to go one other place with me."

The boy said, "Any place, chief! They got a game in this place we're going?"

"No!"

"Too bad!" The boy sounded resigned to this unfortunate circumstance. McCarthy grinned and said that he had to protect his friends; that they'd suspect him of bringing in a professional gambler into a friendly game.



GEORGIE ZEE was in the bar he owned and the telegram boy said he'd never seen Zee before either. McCarthy sighed, dug out another five-dollar

bill, and the boy waved it away and said, "I made plenty tonight, chief. Keep it. D'ya think they'll let me in that gambling place again?"

"I doubt it."

The boy said sorrowfully: "Oh, well. Maybe they're scared to," and left for the Postal office. McCarthy stayed in the bar. He shook his head dolefully. This youngster was worse than Benny.

The place was fairly well filled and McCarthy was depending on this. He saw Dolan and Dominick Manelli sitting in a booth, then Zee looked up from where he was and came over. Zee gave him a sour smile, said:

"Trying to catch me short, eh? That what you figured? Well, my boys are here, just in case."

"Hell, no, Georgie! I know if you want to keep up on me with your snatch act, that you would go through with it whether there was any of your men here or not. But you aren't going to make another such dumb play, are you?"

"I don't know whether it's a dumb play or not."

McCarthy said, "Let's sit down!" and led the way to a booth. And then: "Now look, Georgie! Why should we play on different teams? I'm trying to get along; why don't you?"

"You're a copper and I don't like cops."

"Just private."

"Still cop, ain't it?"

"Either Sellen or Rose Beck has got that dough. You and I together could get it."

"How?"

McCarthy didn't know the answer to this but he didn't admit it. He said mysteriously: "I got an idea but I don't want to talk it over here. Why don't you come up to my place again?"

"When?"

"Say tomorrow. About five."

"Dolan and Manelli will be with me."

"Why not? I don't care."

Zee sat there, fidgety, and McCarthy decided the heroin he'd had was wearing thin. Finally Zee said, "I can't see the harm in it. I can always walk out."

"Sure you can, Georgie."

Zee laughed and it sounded like a cackle. "You know I can, McCarthy.

If that damn Shannon hadn't popped up when he did, I'd have walked out with you."

"I wasn't kicking, Georgie. I'm trying to play with you."

"I never worked with a cop in my life."

"There's eight grand in it, Georgie."

Zee thought this over, said: "Five o'clock, then."

**T**HE autopsy report the next morning showed Fred Beck had died from an acutely dilated heart. McCarthy listened to the Medical Examiner on this, said slowly:

"I guess that settles it, then. Fred wasn't killed."

"It's going to be turned over to the Robbery Squad," Shannon said. "I'm Homicide; this is something for the Robbery Squad."

The Medical Examiner said slowly: "Now wait, Lieutenant. I found traces of gelatin in Beck's stomach. He had myocarditis, which means an already dilated heart. His own doctor knew this. Now a very small amount of cyanide may cause death when myocarditis exists. So small an amount as to almost defy detection. The characteristic odor would be there but this goes away. Do you see what I mean?"

Shannon said he didn't.

"Just enough cyanide could be put in a capsule and disguised as some other drug. Quinine, for example. Beck would die when the gelatin of the capsule melted from stomach heat. If the cyanide was just the right amount, there'd be practically no trace of it. It would still be murder."

"You think it's murder, Doc?"

The M. E. put on his glasses and looked severe. "I'm sorry to say it's almost impossible to answer that question. I suspect murder. The heart was dilated *too* much, if you know what I mean."

"I should think the damn autopsy would show poison."

"It's hard to tell after a lapse of time with cyanide," the Medical Examiner

said patiently. "Like I've told you. The reaction fades and the autopsy is a matter of guess work. This is true, of course, only if just enough cyanide to give fatal result is taken. An overdose is easily detected."

Shannon laughed. "Cyanide has an odor. I know that. It turns them sort of blue, too. I know that. I've seen guys that did the Dutch with cyanide."

McCarthy broke in with: "That's what those damn gardenias were doing there! Their scent was strong enough to kill the cyanide smell."

"But Beck's own doctor and the ambulance surgeon called it a natural death. Why didn't they catch it?" Shannon argued.

The Medical Examiner said, "You can't expect a police surgeon to notice everything. They make mistakes; their examination is necessarily hurried. The man's own doctor should have caught it, if it was cyanic poison, but I gather he slipped on this as well as the police surgeon. Of course, I have no definite proof the man was poisoned. I have my suspicions, however."

McCarthy said to Shannon: "I guess maybe you won't turn it over to the Robbery Squad after all, huh?"

Shannon looked sour and said he guessed he wouldn't. The doctor said he was sending Mrs. Beck a report of his findings.



WHEN McCarthy went around later Rose Beck wasn't in. He kept his finger on the bell for a moment, got no result, and went to work with assorted pass-keys. He got inside with no disturbance, searched a bedroom, kitchen, and was started on a front room when he heard a noise on the front porch.

He went to cover behind a couch, stretched out on the floor out of sight, and heard high heels tap down the hall and into the room. From his station he

could look under the couch and he recognized Rose's trim ankles and spike heels. He heard her bustle around the room for a moment, heard her leave the room and go out the front door. He got to his feet with a sigh of relief.

And then saw the lower drawer of a writing desk standing open. The drawer held little, no letters, a few unimportant papers and a snapshot of Rose Beck standing with a man who looked vaguely familiar to McCarthy. He stared at this with puzzled eyes, then snapped out: "That damn doctor!"

The pictured man with Rose was Morrison, Fred Beck's personal doctor, and their pose was decidedly intimate.

McCarthy kept this. He left the drawer open, as he'd found it, left the house, and started down the street toward where he'd parked his car. And saw Rose Beck hurrying toward him with packaged groceries in her hands. She looked startled and said:

"You, Pat!"

He said, "Yeah, me! I came over to see you."

"What about?"

McCarthy stalled the question with: "I thought maybe you'd know whether Fred had a safe deposit box."

"How would I know? Why wouldn't you know? You were supposed to be his body-guard, weren't you? You were his pal, weren't you? I was just married to him."

"O. K., Rose, let it go. I got a lead on his killer but I can't break it because I don't know where the dough is."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure, Rose. And listen! If I was you, I wouldn't be trying to leave town. The cops would stop you at the station."

"I'm not trying, but why should I leave town?"

McCarthy laughed, jeered: "You heard me say I had a lead on the killer, didn't you? Figure it out."

THE door was lettered: William A. Morrison, M. D. Below, in smaller letters: Walk In. McCarthy did this

and found a rather shabby waiting-room and another door lettered: Private. He sat down, waited in his chair for fifteen minutes without hearing signs of life from the inner room, and then knocked at the door.

He heard nothing, knocked louder, and then tried the door. It opened under his hand and he shoved it wide, peered in and saw an operating room. And saw Dr. Morrison.

Morrison was sitting on the floor by the operating table, leaning back against the side of this. His eyes and mouth were open. The mouth had a trickle of blood dribbling from it and down over the collar of the white jacket Morrison wore. The lower part of the jacket was soggy with blood.

McCarthy went all the way in, saw that Morrison was quite dead and almost cold. He went to the phone, got Shannon at the station and told him this.

Shannon said, "Hold it until I get there. Is he shot?"

McCarthy said he didn't know; that he'd called the moment he'd found the body. He heard Shannon's grunt, then heard the phone clang up.

McCarthy was careful not to smudge any prints that might be around. It was only a few minutes before Shannon was coming through the outer office, flanked by the Medical Examiner and the ever-present photographer, and said sourly:

"Well, looks like this is going to be sort of a wholesale proposition. They're knocking 'em off in bunches. Like radishes."

The Medical Examiner frowned at this and Shannon said: "Don't get on your ear, Doc, because it's a colleague. He's no deader than Fred Beck was yesterday, is he?"

The M. E. knelt and Shannon puttered around Morrison's desk while the preliminary examination was made. The Examiner stood finally, said:

"He was killed with some kind of knife. Stabbed three times. It's very possible this knife was a scalpel; that's about the size of the wound."

Shannon waved the print man to go ahead and asked McCarthy: "What were you up here for, Irish?"

"Wanted to see what he had to say about Fred's bad heart," McCarthy said glibly. "You remember what that autopsy showed."

He went on, told about waiting and then finding the dead Morrison. He said nothing about going through Rose's desk or about the picture he'd found.

Shannon said: "I been doing a bit of checking on this guy since the M. E. told me that, myself. He didn't have much of a reputation, this Morrison didn't. Fred Beck's neighbors seem to think he was chasing after Beck's wife."

"You should speak kindly about the dead, Shan."

Shannon said, "I'm going to do more than speak kindly to the guy that's doing all this killing. That is, when I find him."

McCarthy said, "If you don't want me I'll run along. Phone me at the hotel and leave word if you find anything."



McCarthy got stopped this time before he got to his hotel. The same two men who'd taken him from the lobby the night before, stepped from the alley that ran by the hotel, and the one who'd made the most conversation previously said:

"Hey, guy, where you going?"

McCarthy said, "To the hotel. Come on along."

"You're going to get in that car."

McCarthy saw the same sedan he'd been in the night before. He said, "Yeah? Where am I going?"

"You'll know when you get there."

The second man laughed as though this was funny. McCarthy shrugged his shoulders and the first man poked out his side pocket with the gun he held there, said: "Get moving."

McCarthy got in the back seat of the car. One of them sat with him, took the

gun from under his arm, patted him for other weapons, and the second man climbed behind the wheel and started the car.

They got almost to the edge of the city before McCarthy said, "She isn't going to have the dough to pay you for this. Did she tell you that?"

"What's that?"

"I said Rose Beck isn't going to have the dough to pay you. Fred Beck had eight grand but Rose didn't get it. You guys are working for nothing."

The talkative man said, "Who's Rose Beck?" but his voice sounded anxious instead of questioning.

"She's the one that's hiring you. I know that. I also know she won't pay you. She hasn't any dough."

The man in front said, "You know too damn much."

"I know you guys are doing a job for charity."

"We never even heard of this twist." This from the talkative one again.

The man in front said, "Hey, Megs. Let's take him to the spot and figure this out."

Megs said, "Oke! We ain't got nothing but time."

McCarthy said, "And that's all you'll get. Time."

The talkative man took the gun from his pocket and swiped McCarthy across the nose with it. McCarthy jerked in his seat, put up his hand to his nose, and found it bleeding. As he reached for his pocket, the man stuck the gun in his ribs, and McCarthy growled: "Can't I get my handkerchief, mugg?"

"Go ahead! I'm watching."

McCarthy brought his right leg up behind him, fumbled in his back pocket. Then he stopped, stared ahead as though their car was meeting something, and the talkative man took one glance ahead in the same direction. In that same instant McCarthy got the knife from his sock, palmed it, and had his handkerchief in his hand when the man looked back at him.

Blood was dribbling from McCarthy's nose. He mopped at this with the handkerchief, twisted the knife until he could find the spring release with his thumb. The man grinned and said:

"Don't get out of line, that's all. Mickey and me ain't Boy Scouts."

He was holding the gun in front of him, yet well away from McCarthy. McCarthy pressed the spring release, reached out with a continuation of the same movement, and drove the razor sharp blade through the wrist that held the gun.

Gun-fire crashed out even as Megs tried to let go of the gun. The car slewed, headed for the curb. McCarthy brought Megs' wrist to him by yanking on the knife, got the gun with his free hand, and then jerked the knife free. Megs screamed, loudly and shrilly. The car went into the curb, tipped crazily, then settled back with an odd tilt.

McCarthy, looking at the man behind the wheel, saw blood pulsing from the man's neck and said aloud:

"The slug didn't go to waste. Nice of you to shoot your pal for me." He thought of his undignified dive into the entry the night before and decided he was more than even.



HE POSTAL boy looked down at Morrison's body on the morgue slab, with great interest. He said to McCarthy: "Gee! That's the first stiff I ever see. And with me getting around like I do."

McCarthy said, "Is this the guy that sent you after those flowers?"

"Sure. Looks like he's the one that needs 'em, don't it?"

McCarthy shook his head, said: "This younger generation!"

Shannon, standing by, said: "And just what in hell is this supposed to prove?"

"Just who killed Fred Beck is all."

"And does this guy sending flowers to Beck prove he killed him?"

McCarthy didn't answer this, just said to the boy: "Come on, kid!" and led the way from the morgue. He sent the boy back to his office, turned on the angry Shannon and said:

"This is sort of a personal thing, Shan. You can see that. I was hired by Fred; we were pally."

"I don't see it," Shannon grumbled. "If Fred was killed, and there's no proof he was, it's police business."

"O. K.! Will you come up to my place about four? The back way?"

"More closet stuff, Irish?"

"Yeah! You come up then, Shan, and it'll maybe break. I got to see Rose and Sellen now. Are you going to be there?"

"I suppose I got to be."

ZEE sat on a chair with his back to a blank wall and with Dolan and Dominick Manelli flanking him. Rose Beck sat by the door and Sellen leaned back against the hotel dresser with both elbows resting on it. McCarthy, on the bed, said:

"Everybody comfortable? I got a bunch of answers to some things and I want everybody feeling happy before I spring 'em."

Zee said, "You never said anything about anybody else being here."

"They're interested too, Georgie."

Zee twitched his big nose and shrugged his thin, narrow shoulders. His eyes again had that oddly unfocused look and he was very calm. McCarthy knew that with Zee as full of heroin as he was at the time that he was as dangerous as a rattlesnake, and he watched him as he would a snake; knowing there might be no warning when Zee might strike.

Sellen said easily: "Well, get going. I'd like to hear some answers, myself, McCarthy."

Sellen's big red face was calm and

placid. He had his weight resting on his elbows and looked half asleep.

Rose Beck said, "I think this is a bunch of foolishness. I'll tell you now, Pat McCarthy, I want that money. I know you have it."

Pat said, slowly and easily: "You're wrong, Rose. Sellen's got it."

Sellen didn't move. He opened his eyes wide, grinned at Rose and said, "Pat's stalling, Rose. I ain't got that dough."

Rose looked suspiciously from McCarthy to Sellen while Zee said, "One of you has got it. That's a cinch. I ain't."

"Sellen's got it," McCarthy said again.

"How do you make that out."

"Well, look, Georgie. Rose sent up a gang of thugs to search my joint. I thought Sellen did but it was Rose. She thought I had it, so that sort of proves she didn't have it. Get that?"

"I get it."

"And then you come up and do the same thing, Zee. That sort of lets you out, too."

"I ain't got it. But I'll get it."

"Talk to Sellen then."

Zee rolled his odd-looking eyes to Sellen. Dominick Manelli took his hand from his pocket and the hand held a gun.

Dolan said to Zee: "Let's take him out, boss, and work on him. He'll cry like a baby. I promise you."

Sellen, still with his elbows on the dresser, said, "Now wait, Georgie! All this is talk and don't mean anything. McCarthy said he was going to answer questions and he's just stalling. In the first place, nobody even knows how much money was in that safe. Fred might not even have put any money in there. All we've got to go on is what McCarthy says. He might have killed Fred before Fred put the money in. Don't get excited, Georgie."

Rose Beck said: "All this talk about Fred being murdered! He died a natural death; two doctors have said that."

McCarthy said, "He died of cyanic poisoning. The autopsy proved that."

Zee snapped: "Leave Fred Beck out of this. He's dead, ain't he? What we're talking about is the dough. Who's got it?"

"I haven't, Georgie," Sellen said.

Zee was crouching forward in his chair, glaring at Sellen. Sellen had gone a little pale, but he was still keeping his eyes steady. Manelli had his gun poised and ready, and Dolan was grinning and licking his lips. Rose was watching all this with an air of detached interest.

McCarthy said, "Before you boys go into your act let me finish my answering. Rose Beck poisoned Fred. She thought he had the eight grand. She was working with Morrison, the doctor she killed this morning. I as much as told her that I figured she killed Fred and she sent two hoods to kill me. That didn't work."

McCarthy was still sitting on the bed but he had one hand under a pillow. Rose, still looking disinterested, stood up and walked to him and hit him in the face with her closed fist. She landed on his nose which was decorated with court plaster. It started bleeding but he made no attempt to stop this. He smiled up at Rose through the blood, said:

"That don't change things, babe. You still were working with the doctor and you still knocked him off this morning with one of his little knives. You'd taken care of that job by the time I met you. And the baby you sent to get me—the one that's alive—has sung a song about Roses."

Zee said, "Where's the dough? Nuts on this! Where's the dough? I want that dough."

His eyes looked a little crazy from heroin and rage. Sellen said, "Now Georgie, I tell you—"

Zee said, "You ain't telling me nothing! You chiseled me out of that dough, you—," and jerked for the gun under his arm as he said it. It came clear and he brought the muzzle to bear on Sellen, but Sellen jerked his elbows from the

dresser and went sliding down to the floor, feet first, with Dolan after him.

Zee's first shot broke the mirror in the dresser. The recoil threw his gun barrel up, and McCarthy brought his hand from under the pillow with the hand holding his gun. Zee, not seeing McCarthy, started to level his gun again and McCarthy shot him in the middle.

Zee doubled up, as though he was bowing, and Manelli quit kicking Sellen in the face and swung toward McCarthy. His gun came around with him. McCarthy shouted, through the din the heavy guns had made: "Drop that!"

Manelli didn't drop the gun and McCarthy shot and missed. Rose Beck had grabbed his wrist just as he pulled trigger. He tried to jerk free from her and Manelli tried to get a clear shot at him and couldn't because of the woman. Then Shannon slammed open the door of the closet and rasped:

"Manelli! Drop that!"

Manelli would probably have dropped the gun had he time to think, but the shock of this strange voice twisted him. Shannon took no chances and shot, and Manelli bounced back against the wall and then to the floor.

Rose was now holding McCarthy's gun wrist with both hands and she bent and set her teeth in his forearm. He howled with pain, and brought his free hand over in a short jolting hook to her temple. She let go with her teeth, straightened, and he brought the fist up to her jaw. Her eyes rolled and showed white and she took two steps back, until the back of her knees hit a chair. She slouched back in this, mouth open and eyes closed, hands hanging limply at her side.

Dolan and Sellen were fighting on the floor and Sellen's face was a mask of blood from Manelli's kicks. Dolan, slightly smaller than Sellen and painfully out of condition, was taking the loser's end.

McCarthy got from the bed and joined



Shannon, who was standing over the struggling men.

McCarthy said, "You grab Sellen; I'll take the other heel."

Shannon nodded, got Sellen by an ankle, and McCarthy reached and got Dolan by the hair. He pulled Dolan up, threw him over on the bed, and said:

"And stay there, mugg! The battle's over and we all won."

Dolan was glaring at Sellen. He said: "That——!"

McCarthy waved the gun he held and said, "Shut up."

Dolan shut up.

Shannon snapped a handcuff on Sellen's wrist, dragged him to the bed and put the other side of the cuffs on Dolan. He warned them: "The first move one of you guys makes towards the other one, I'm coming in. With a sap. Get it?" Then he went to the phone, got the Station and asked for help.

He hung up and said, "What was all that, Irish? Did you set 'em on each other on purpose?"

McCarthy grinned. "Not exactly, Shan. I had an idea if I could get 'em quarreling back and forth I might find out something. Of course I knew Sellen had the dough and that Rose and the doctor had killed her husband and that Rose then killed the doctor."

"How d'ya know she and the doctor killed Fred?"

"You dope! Who but Fred's own doctor would know just how little cyanide it would take to kill him? Who but his own doctor could give Fred capsules with cyanide in them; stuff that would get clear down in his stomach before it went to work? You heard the messenger boy say the doctor was the one that sent the gardenias that covered up the cyanide smell. When you break Rose on this, you'll find she propositioned the doctor with a split on Fred's money. She was just waiting for Fred to make a winning and she was ready. She was playing with the doctor and he

was crazy about her; he'd do anything she asked him to do.

"I'm guessing on this last, but you'll find I guessed right. That's why she killed this doctor; he was with her on the poison deal and she knew he'd break under questioning. He was that sort of a weak sister and she knew it. The autopsy business probably gave them both the jitters. She figured I had her pegged on the poison deal or she wouldn't have tried to have me killed. It all works out."

Shannon admitted: "You sometimes do guess right, Irish. Jeeze! The place looks like a slaughter house."

McCarthy said, "Well, what is it if it aint?"



AT McCARTHY, Detective Lieutenant Shannon, and the medical examiner sat in the latter's office. Pat looked battered, with his taped nose, but he looked happy. He grinned at Shannon and the doctor, said:

"I guess when Mrs. McCarthy's little boy gets hunches they work out. You got the dough from Sellen and that was a hunch."

Shannon grumbled: "And that's all it was."

"Not quite. I didn't have the money and Zee didn't have the money and Rose didn't have the money. So Sellen must have it. I call it reasoning."

"I call it a hunch," Shannon said.

The medical examiner said, "Was it a hunch or was it reasoning at the start? You were so sure Fred Beck was murdered."

"It was the damn flowers. They didn't belong. There was a reason for them being there and I couldn't figure what it was."

"I see," the medical examiner nodded. "Of course there's no actual proof that Rose Beck poisoned her husband. She claims she didn't; claims it was Dr. Morrison."

McCarthy shook his head. "What dif-

ference does it make? She can only burn once, and she'll burn for killing Morrison. The picture I found of her and Morrison showed they knew each other and more than slightly. Shannon, here, has got her placed at Morrison's office at about the time he was killed. Her prints were all over the place and on the scalpel that killed him. She's a human tornado, and she forgot to wipe them off. Shan has found they were more than pally with each other and it's reasonable to suppose she got him to work with her. If she burns for killing Morrison, what difference does it make if she goes free for killing Fred? Get the point? She got scared that Morrison would crack so she killed him. I wonder if she could've been panicked into making such a clumsy job of it, if she actually hadn't given Fred that pill!"

Shannon grumbled: "Maybe. Hunch stuff anyway! We do all that leg work and prove a case on her. All you did was scare her into action. We've proved this case, Irish. You didn't."

"Sure! You got cops to do the leg work. I'm more the foreman type, if you know what I mean. I get paid for what I know; not for what I do."

"What did *you* get out of it?"

"Well, first, I got eight hundred bucks that was coming to me for wages." Pat ticked this point off on his thumb. "That's one thing. I got Rose Beck stuck for killing my pal. That's two. I

got Sellen thrown in the can for breaking into that safe of Fred's and I never liked Sellen. That's three. And I got Zee and Manelli out of the way and I wouldn't have been safe with those two snow-birds running loose on the streets. That's four. That's why I greased him; to keep him out of my hair. And I got two heels out of the way for the police department; I mean the two thugs Rose hired to kidnap me. That's five and that ought to give me a stand in with the Department."

"You did swell," Shannon said sourly.

"And I put a cop named Shannon's nose out of joint. That's six. And I found me a boy that can beat a crap game and that's just the same as money in the bank."

"You mean that messenger kid?" Shannon asked.

"I mean that messenger kid."

"I think you're nuts," Shannon said.

"Sure I am. I'm going to send flowers to Zee's funeral and flowers to Rose, while she's waiting for trial."

"I know you're nuts, now! Flowers to Rose!"

McCarthy grinned. "Sure I am. I'm going to send gardenias."

"Don't let Marge catch you at it, even if Rose is going to burn," Shannon warned.

"Oh, I'll send Marge some, too," McCarthy said. "And Benny gets a potted plant, no less."



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# SCIENCE CHALLENGES CRIME

By JOHN KOBLER

*EDITOR'S NOTE:—Today few scientific developments, from radio to the mysterious "black light," have not been turned to crime-busting uses. At the same time the criminal is never far behind—and sometimes, for a short while, he is ahead of—the police in taking advantage of scientific aids. Below is the last of a series of articles illustrating this crime-science race.*

## Part Five—Rough on Rats



**B**EFORE the middle of the 18th century prisoners literally got away with murder.

Example: The Earl of Somerset and his erotic, neurotic Countess, a pair of higher-ups in the court of King James II, decided to liquidate Sir Thomas Overbury because that distinguished magistrate knew too much about their criminal goings-on.

They contrived to frame him on a charge of treason and he was juggled in

the Tower of London. What followed caused history's most hideous miscarriage of justice.

Sir Thomas died after a long and mysterious illness. Four persons were charged with poisoning him. Richard Weston, an apothecary's assistant, was accused of administering realgar, a red arsenic compound. He refused to talk until threatened with the 17th century equivalent of the third degree—thumb-screws and hot irons.

Anne Turner, a reputed witch, also accused, pleaded not guilty.

James Franklyn turned King's evidence and admitted supplying Mistress Turner with seven drugs given him by Weston—aqua fortis, white arsenic, mercury, powder of diamonds, lapis causticus, great spiders and cantharides. He also put the finger on the Lieutenant of the Tower, saying he knew all about the plot to bump Sir Thomas and introduced the stuff into his food.

Obviously the seven poisons could not have been administered because, if they had, Sir Thomas would have dropped dead like a poled ox, instead of lingering for weeks. Franklyn simply spun a yarn to save his own skin, while Weston and Turner were too scared to know what they were talking about. Nevertheless, the last two were both found guilty and axed.

The Earl and Countess were named by their four stooges in connection with Sir Thomas's death, but all they got was a short sentence after pleading guilty.

Now, the truth about the Overbury mystery will never be known. How he was poisoned, by whom and with what poison remain an historical enigma. Undoubtedly the Somersets engineered his death and Franklyn probably executed it. Just what, if any, part Weston, Turner and the Lieutenant of the Tower played nobody knows. On the evidence submitted against them no modern jury could possibly have convicted them.

The point is that one of a score of toxicological tests on the remains of Sir Thomas would have swiftly determined whether he had been poisoned, and by what. Franklyn's statement would have been confirmed or denied. This was never done.

It was never done for a very simple reason. In the 17th century there was no such thing as toxicology. You could lace an enemy's soup with enough poison to kill an army and still have odds-on chances of going free. Up to that time administering poison was a widely practiced art and the number of persons conclusively proved to have been poison-

ers wouldn't have filled New York's House of Detention.

In the year 1752, however, an enterprising little man by the name of Sir Anthony Addington changed all that. He founded the science of toxicology, and the art of poisoning received a set-back from which it has never recovered. If you don't get jittery every time you dine with somebody who doesn't like you, thank Sir Anthony.

It was in August of 1750 that Mary Blandy was arrested for the murder of her father, Francis Blandy, an attorney of Henley-on-Thames. Mary, it seems, had fallen madly in love with young Captain William Cranstoun, son of a Scottish peer. He was a disreputable, crooked lad, but the Blandys, snobbishly attracted by his title, at first encouraged his advances.

Mr. Blandy then learned that Cranstoun already had a wife, a French woman whom he had swindled and abandoned. He told the Scotchman what he thought of him and showed him the door.

Mary, however, was too far gone to object to a little thing like bigamy and fraud. She still loved her William and, by hook or crook, she was going to have him. Her father thought differently. And there it was, a deadlock. Cranstoun broke the deadlock by mailing Mary a packet of white powder with instructions for use on her papa.

Mary obligingly gave her father some of this white powder in a glass of wine. He promptly sickened and died. To the end Mary swore she believed the white powder to have been a "love philtre" which would change her father's feelings toward Cranstoun.

Mr. Blandy himself had no such illusions. On his death bed he accused Mary of poisoning him, but forgave her. The accusation was overheard and Mary was arrested. By this time Cranstoun had escaped to the Continent and nothing much could be done about him.

Ordinarily Mary might have got away with it. There was no way then of

showing whether Mr. Blandy's insides contained the white powder and, if so, what that powder was. But Mary had reckoned without Sir Anthony Addington.

For some years this scholar and early medico-legal expert had been studying poisons, with particular emphasis on arsenic. He felt confident he could identify the deadly stuff when he saw it. And so he offered the prosecution his services. The legal lights were understandably skeptical. Arsenic had never before been scientifically analyzed. Nor had such evidence ever been accepted in a court of law. But they decided to give Addington a chance.

Sir Anthony then exhibited the remainder of the "love philtre" found in Mary's room and a few grains which he had removed from Mr. Blandy's remains. Both, he announced, were white arsenic and he showed why.

His tests were crude, but none the less scientific and systematic. The color was the same. Both were tasteless. When thrown on a red-hot iron they emitted white vapors with an odor of garlic.

On this evidence Mary was convicted and hanged. On the scaffold she begged the hangman, in a unique display of maidenly modesty, "Please, sir, do not hang me too high."

Sir Anthony's tests were pretty crude, probably too crude to be accepted today. Far cruder, for example, than the Marsh-Berzelius test which never fails and can distinguish with absolute certainty between a fatal and non-fatal dose of arsenic. But it was a beginning. Since Sir Anthony's day toxicology has been developed to a point where the murderer who chooses poison for his instrument of death is practically placing his head in a noose. In fact, it isn't done much any more. Poison is definitely out of fashion. You can count on both hands the number of poison cases in this country the last few years.

Such modern toxicologists as brilliant Alexander Gettler, of Bellevue Hospital,

are equipped to analyze any poison in the pharmacopia, from arsenic to poisons as volatile as ether. That achievement represents two centuries of constant experimentation and research. Every time a new poison made its appearance in a murder case the toxicologist had to devise a new technique to analyze it.



CONSIDER the first criminal use of aconitine, one of the most virulent of all poisons, variously known as "wolf's-bane" and "monk's-

hood." It's deadly by any name.

In 1881 eighteen-year-old Percy John was a student at Blenheim House School in Wimbledon, England. He was an orphan, the youngest of five children. Between them they shared a sizeable inheritance. Percy was a sickly lad, being so badly crippled that he had to get around in a wheel chair.

One of his sisters had married an impoverished doctor, George Henry Lamson. By marriage laws then in effect, Lamson controlled his wife's share of the John estate.

They were an unlucky family, the Johns. One of the girls died at an early age. In 1879 Percy's younger brother died in circumstances of considerable mystery. That left Percy and two sisters to divide all the money.

On the third of December, 1881, Dr. Lamson visited his brother-in-law at Blenheim House School. Mr. Bedbrook, headmaster, joined them for tea and the trio passed the afternoon chatting amiably. Lamson, a tall, painfully thin man, of slightly sinister appearance, had a forceful personality.

Bedbrook offered his guest a glass of wine. Lamson accepted, asking for a little sugar which, he said, he always used to counteract the effects of alcohol. Some white, powdered sugar was brought in a basin and placed on the table. Lamson put some in his wine.

He had brought with him a small, black handbag and from this he now took a Dundee cake, already cut, and some candy. Everybody ate a piece of cake. He next produced a box of empty capsules and said to Mr. Bedbrook: "While in America I didn't forget you. I've brought these for you. You'll find them very useful to give the boys medicine in."

He then filled one with what appeared to be sugar and told Percy: "Here, you're a champion pill-taker. Take this. Show Mr. Bedbrook how easy it is."

Percy immediately swallowed it.

All this had occurred within full view of the headmaster.

Soon after Lamson left to catch a train back to London.

Fifteen minutes later Percy complained of heartburn, then severe cramps, and finally collapsed in agonizing pain. By pure happenstance—and it was the one thing the poisoner could not have counted on—a Dr. Little was staying at Blenheim House as a guest of Mr. Bedbrook. He was able to question the boy before he died and learn the nature of his symptoms. He also got a sniff of what was unquestionably a vegetable poison of some sort before the odor evaporated from Percy's lips.

But for Dr. Little's timely presence, the poisoner had played his cards cleverly. His sleight-of-hand with the sugar had deceived Mr. Bedbrook. By dosing Percy in the headmaster's presence he would ordinarily have drawn suspicion away from himself. Dr. Little spoiled all that. He collected some froth from the boy's mouth and sealed it in a test tube.

He then communicated with Scotland Yard and Lamson was picked up. He was not, however, licked by a long shot. He had carefully selected a poison about which so little was medically known that the chances of accurate analysis were remote. In which case the evidence against him would be incomplete. That poison was aconitine.

The real heroes of the Lamson case

were Drs. Stevenson and Berry, toxicologists. They knew they were dealing with an unknown quantity. They had to develop a technique to analyze it. Their first step was to isolate the poison from the froth and vomit of the dead boy. This produced a minute quantity of it in a fairly pure form. They applied it to their tongues and it immediately produced a "biting and numbing effect." A number of alkaloids were known to give the same sensation.

The doctors, at considerable risk to their health, proceeded to test orally five or six poisons. They finally decided that aconitine and only aconitine had exactly the same feel and taste.

They then made subcutaneous injections of the contents of Percy's remains in laboratory mice. These died with symptoms closely paralleling Percy's.

After that it was simply a question of tracing purchases of aconitine to Lamson. Scotland Yard men found a London chemist with the evidence written on his poison register. And Lamson was hanged.

His motive was patent. He planned to murder the entire John family one by one until their fortune passed into his hands. Extra-trial evidence showed that he had succeeded in murdering Percy's younger brother by drowning him.

Lamson was the first murderer to use aconitine. He was also, as far as the records show, the last. Only doctors and chemists have easy access to the stuff and no doubt those who have contemplated using it criminally remember how successfully Stevenson and Berry traced it.

The methods of these two toxicologists were still fairly crude. Observe how thorough is the more modern Marsh-Berzelius test for arsenic. The toxicologist first weighs a portion of the suspected food. He places it in a glass flask and treats it with strong acids. Heavy fumes are evolved, destroying extraneous matter. The acid mixture is at first dark, then yellow. Finally it clears. A tiny colorless quan-

tity remains, but this conceals the poison. The toxicologist now has to make it show up.

For this he uses an apparatus which generates hydrogen, using zinc and sulphuric acid to manufacture this gas. The arsenic forms a gaseous compound with the hydrogen, but the apparatus is so made that while the hydrogen escapes, the arsenic is trapped in a tube near the gas exit. It appears in the form of a black stain. And that black stain tells the story.

The Marsh-Berzelius method can detect as little as one part in five million parts of suspected material. Prison cemeteries are loaded with "master minds" who tried to buck the Messrs. Marsh and Berzelius.



AMERICA'S greatest living toxicologist is New York's Alexander Gettler. In his laboratory at Bellevue Hospital he is surrounded by every gadget developed in the evolution of toxicology, plus some inventions of his own. When somebody dies mysteriously, with no visible marks of violence, the viscera are sent in a sealed jar to Gettler. Using minute portions, he submits them to a variety of intricate and difficult tests. And if there is poison lurking there, he digs it out.

Gettler has solved scores of murder mysteries with his test tubes and retorts, among them the murder of Mrs. Applegate by her husband, Everett, and his sweetheart, Mrs. Dorothy Creighton. They were foolish enough to think they could give Mrs. Applegate arsenic in a glass of milk and escape detection. Shooting her in the presence of a thousand witnesses would have been safer. What Gettler found was enough to send the Long Island Borgia and her par amour to Sing Sing's hot seat.

Gettler has been New York City Toxicologist since 1918. He has examined approximately 35,000 "stiffs,"

of which some 3000 died of poisoning. This figure includes death from excessive drinking and drinking bad alcohol.

In the Bellevue laboratory was established his famous formula for determining intoxication after death. If twenty-five hundredths of alcohol per volume is found in the brain or spinal fluid, the subject was drunk.

Another process perfected by Gettler is the isolation of volatile liquids, that is, liquids which evaporate quickly like ether, benzine, chloroform and others. Gettler devised an apparatus which would produce the liquid in pure form by steam distillation.

This apparatus was used for the first time in one of Gettler's master strokes of detection. Two men, dressed in ragged, tramp-like clothes, were found dead in the basement of a Brooklyn apartment house. Despite their ragged clothes, one hundred dollars in crisp new bills were taken from their pockets.

The basement contained a number of metal casks. In one corner was a heap of old newspapers and kindling wood. The place was pervaded by an odor of some cleaning fluid. No marks of violence appeared on the men's bodies. They appeared to have died suddenly and gently.

The bodies were turned over to Gettler. His first question was: Where is the owner of the building? Detectives learned he had left rather suddenly the night before and had withdrawn his entire bank balance.

Armed with this rather slim information, Gettler produced his apparatus. He has since described the process to the author:

"The tissues removed at autopsy were sealed in glass jars and placed in a refrigerator. When ice-cold, a portion was ground up, the grinder having been previously cooled. It was then mixed with 200 c. c. of ice-cold water and introduced into a two-liter distilling flask. An additional 300 c. c. of water and one c. c. of petrolatum were added. The

mixture was then steam-distilled. This continued until about 200 c. c. of distillate had been collected in the ice-cooled bulb of the rectification flask.

"Experiments had shown that this amount was sufficient for recovery of practically all the volatile organic liquid that may be present in the tissues. After removing, icing and adding a number of chemicals to prevent warming up, it was heated.

"The liquid was eventually boiled, the flame gradually increasing so that the steam was made to rise slowly. By this process a volume of isolated liquid was collected in a calibrated receiver. And this, in its pure form, was easily read."

The answer was benzine. There had unquestionably been benzine in the metal casks. The tramps had failed to open a window and the fumes had overpowered them. But what were they doing in the basement? Gettler stole the detectives' thunder a bit there. He deduced, correctly as it turned out, that the owner of the building had bribed the tramps to set fire to the building so he could collect.

The owner was later caught and convicted of attempted arson.

Decidedly, the way of the poisoner has grown precarious since Sir Anthony Addington threw white powder on a hot iron.

*End of Series*

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## NOVEMBER ARRIVALS

The next arrival of the good ship BLACK MASK brings in to port a number of interesting persons.

First of all, **Jerry Tracy** will greet you in a new yarn by **THEODORE TINSLEY**. Weekly, Tracy goes on the air with a popular broadcast about personalities and events. There comes a day when a beautiful girl begs him to withhold from the public certain information which he believes should be given out. Tracy refuses her plea, and directly after the broadcast a friend of his is murdered. Tracy takes on the tough job of bringing in the killer. A fast-moving, readable, up-to-the-minute story!

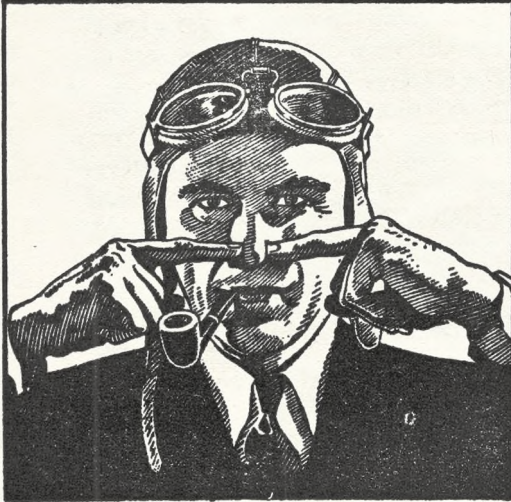
Long time no see **Bill Lennox**, General Consolidated's trouble-shooter. Now he is given the job of keeping an important actor from walking out on a half-finished picture. That doesn't sound so tough to Lennox until his man is jailed for murder. This vivid, absorbing novelette is by **W. T. BALLARD**.

Also coming in to port on the November BLACK MASK is miserable and bitter Jed Kerrun about whom **DONALD WANDREI** has written the story, "**Tick, Tock.**" Jed Kerrun plans to blast his way to success with a time bomb, but the instrument of death has other work to do. "Tick, Tock" is an arresting and powerful story.

Space prevents us from telling you about the rest, but you can take our word for it that you'll enjoy every story in the November BLACK MASK.



# MAKE THIS TEST and increase your pipe pleasure!



**1** If you think you enjoy tobacco flavor chiefly through your sense of *taste*...make this simple test. While you're smoking, pinch your nostrils shut. Note that your tobacco smoke tastes flat...*flavorless*.



**2** Now let go. The flavor returns immediately, proving that you enjoy tobacco flavor chiefly through your sense of *smell*. That's why HALF & HALF's distinctive *aroma*, added to its finer *taste*, gives you richer, fuller tobacco flavor. This exclusive quality is called FLAVOROMA.

## Why you get FLAVOROMA only from Half & Half

As the test shows, you enjoy flavor partly through your sense of taste, largely through your sense of smell.

Knowing this, we set out to blend a tobacco appealing partly to your tongue, but especially to the keen nerves at the back of your nose.

In HALF & HALF, we got a blend that does just that. A blend with a special quality which we call FLAVOROMA...a perfect combination of AROMA and TASTE that produces finer tobacco flavor.

It is this exclusive quality of FLAVOROMA in HALF & HALF that gives you more pipe-smoking pleasure.

Try HALF & HALF yourself. Learn why FLAVOROMA is switching so many pipe-smokers to this tobacco every day.

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THE TIN TELESCOPES!

JUST PUSH IT TOGETHER...

AS YOU USE UP THE TOBACCO...

THE TELESCOPE TIN gets smaller and smaller as you use it, makes tobacco easy to get at all the way down. No scraped fingers as you reach down for the last load. (Patent No. 1,770,920.)

Enjoy the FLAVOROMA of

# HALF AND HALF

FOR PIPE OR CIGARETTE



## BEHIND THE BLACK MASK

WE FIGURE that you readers share our curiosity about how stories get to be written. Of course there's the yarn born because its author one day walked into an editorial office, and the editor took his feet off the desk and asked, "When will you have a yarn for me, Jim?" Jim said, "Next week, I figure," and rushed home to write it.

Not all stories start from such an impetus, however, and even if they do the process of getting the idea and writing the story is still unexplained. The only person who can set us clear on this is the guy who wrote the story.

We asked FRANK GRUBER, the author of "Forced Landing" in this issue, to tell us and tell you what makes his Human Encyclopedia yarns go round. Here's his inside story:

"Oliver Quade, the Human Encyclopedia, is a real person to me. Yet he is an amazing creature. He changes as do my own moods. Sometimes he is myself; again he is someone I once knew, or perhaps even a composite of a dozen men.

"As a fiction character, Oliver Quade came into being about three years ago. Actually, he goes back much farther than that. From 1927 to 1931, I edited poultry journals. (Don't scoff—your own way of making a living may be just as dopey.) The work necessitated attending, every season, four or five State fairs and poultry exhibitions.

"At the Dairy Cattle Congress, in Waterloo, Iowa, was a man who sold health books. I've seen him hold 500 people spellbound for a half-hour and then watched him sell a hundred books on a single pass-out.

"At the Minnesota State Fair was a chap who sold rubber cement, the best low-pitch man I've ever known. I think I spent a hundred hours listening to him.

"We had, working for our own journals, dozens of 'sheetwriters' (subscription salesmen). One of them could put up a little stand at a poultry show, stop passers-by and sell from 200 to 400 subscriptions a day. His earnings ran as high as \$400.00 for a single day's work. I tried it a day myself and made \$32.00.

"In writing detective stories the usual rule is to work out an interesting plot, then create a 'hero' to fit the plot. In the case of Oliver Quade, I reversed the procedure. I wanted a character I could use in a series of stories. The process of creation was to list every type of character other writers were using, or had used, then start a brand-new list.

"From this list of characters I selected, 'pitchman, or high-pressure salesman.' That brought up the question—what should the

salesman sell? I made another list and finally decided upon books of knowledge. That choice rolled back the pages of time to my grammar school days when the valedictorian of the graduating class referred to me as 'The Human Encyclopedia.' I hasten to add that the name was *not* bestowed upon me because I was the honor student. Far from it.

"I was somewhat of a bookworm and my reading ranged from a harness catalog to a copy of 'French at a Glance' that I picked up one time. And many other things. So, while I was usually desultory in my lessons, I had a fragmentary knowledge of many things not pertaining to the classroom.

"While it doesn't matter perhaps, I wrote the first Human Encyclopedia story *before* there was a question-and-answer program on the radio. Also: the various questions and answers, the stunts and the encyclopedic information in these stories, is obtained the hard way. I have *never* read a quiz or question-and-answer book. The Encyclopedia Britannica is the source of Oliver Quade's knowledge. I spend hours and hours digging up the things Quade tosses off so blithely. I purposely try to make the questions hard. Figuring that I'm an average person myself, I discard all questions to which I already know the answers.

"The research department of the Encyclopedia Britannica Company supplies me now and then with unusual bits of information they've been called upon to supply. They tell me the stiffest question they were ever asked to answer, was one I used in a recent story: 'Why and how does a cat purr?'

"Once in a while a bit of knowledge obtained from the encyclopedia suggests an entire story. In a recent yarn someone asked Quade: 'How does a fox rid itself of fleas?'

"That got me to thinking about foxes. My knowledge of them was limited, so I obtained a book from the library on the raising and breeding of silver foxes.

"Oliver Quade is my favorite detective character. I hope he becomes the favorite of *Black Mask* readers."

—Frank Gruber.

These authors never miss a bet. Writing above about State fairs seemed to suggest the setting of a brand new story. Result—"State Fair Murder" has just arrived. It will appear in an early issue. The setting is the Minnesota State Fair. In it you'll meet some of the characters Mr. Gruber knows so well, chief among them, of course, Oliver Quade.

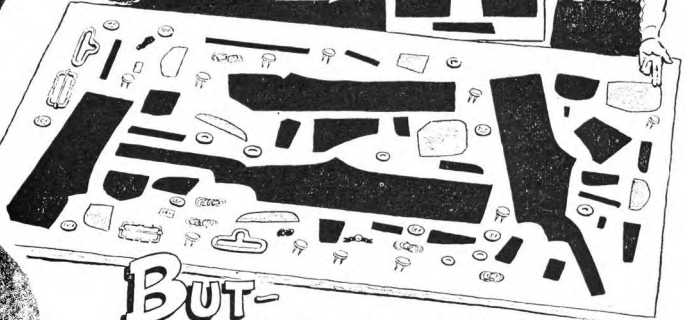
# Believe It or Not! by Ripley



NO OTHER OVERALL WEARS LIKE

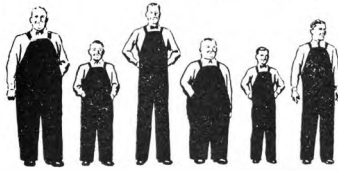
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CAN BE MADE WITH  
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OF CLOTH 5 BUTTONS  
2 BUCKLES & THREAD



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IT TAKES 76 PARTS AND 484 OPERATIONS  
TO MAKE SUPER-COMFORT TAILORED-SIZE



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**SEND FOR PROOF!**  
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NO TWO OF THESE 6 MEN  
ARE BUILT ALIKE

YET YOUR Lee DEALER CAN GIVE THEM ALL "TAILORED" FIT IN WAIST, LEG-LENGTH, CROTCH AND BIB-HEIGHT, BECAUSE Lee CUTS EACH PART ESPECIALLY TO FIT EACH BODY MEASUREMENT.

JUST LIKE DADS—  
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# THRILLS *from the* CIRCUS

FEATURING  
**ANTOINETTE CONCELLO**  
 TRAPEZE SENSATION  
 AND  
**TERRELL JACOBS**  
 LION KING

MISS CONCELLO, HOW ARE CHANCES FOR A STORY ON YOUR BIGGEST THRILL AS AN AERIALIST?

TONY, TELL HIM ABOUT YOUR FIRST TRIPLE SOMERSAULT IN THE AIR

NO WOMAN, TO MY KNOWLEDGE, HAD EVER EXECUTED A TRIPLE MID-AIR SOMERSAULT. I HAD TO DEPEND ALMOST ENTIRELY ON AUTOMATIC TIMING."

"... BUT AS I WHIRLED OFF INTO SPACE... ONCE... TWICE... FOR A SPLIT-SECOND I PRACTICALLY LOST CONSCIOUSNESS."

"... THREE TIMES... AND... I MADE IT! THRILLED AND SAFE!"

TERRELL, TELL HIM ABOUT THE TIME SPARKY, OVER THERE, ALMOST FINISHED YOU

"I HAD ALMOST COMPLETED MY ACT WITH 25 LIONS, WHEN SPARKY AND ANOTHER MALE WENT FOR EACH OTHER..."

"TRYING TO BREAK IT UP, I WAS KNOCKED DOWN AND SPARKY TURNED ON ME. THINGS LOOKED PRETTY BAD..."

"BUT I GOT THE UPPER HAND. BEFORE I LEFT THE CAGE, EVERY LION WAS BACK IN PLACE."

AFTER A TURN IN THE BIG CAGE, I NEED A 'LIFT' IN ENERGY, AND I GET IT FROM A CAMEL. I'VE SMOKED CAMELS FOR 16 YEARS. HAVE ONE, TONY?

YOU BET, TERRELL, THERE'S A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CAMELS AND OTHER KINDS - IN MILDNESS - IN SO MANY WAYS!

One Smoker tells another...  
**"CAMELS AGREE WITH ME"**

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CAMELS ARE A MATCHLESS BLEND OF FINER, MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS - TURKISH & DOMESTIC

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