STREET & SMITH'S

DETECTIVE STORY 10¢

SEPTEMBER · 1940

THE *Red Tide*
by
CORNELL WOOLRICH

The VENGEFUL DANE
A COMPLETE MYSTERY NOVEL
BY WALTER RIPPERGER

"AND TO THINK . . .

I might have lost you!"

"I DON'T KNOW *how I could ever have been such a fool, Betsy . . . such a careless, unthinking idiot . . .*"

"Don't say that, darling. It was partly my fault, too. I should have told you . . . said something. But it's such an embarrassing subject to talk about—a person's breath! I didn't know how to tell you."

"It'll never happen again, dearest. I've learned my lesson—plenty. Thank heaven Bill saw the way things were going with us. And did he give me the devil about it, too! . . . Told me point-blank what the trouble was, and asked me how I expected any girl to stay in love with a man who constantly offended that way."*

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What else can ruin romance so quickly as halitosis* (bad breath)? And the worst of it is that if you yourself have this insidious condition you may not even know it . . . or even realize that you are offending.

In some cases halitosis is due to systemic conditions which call for treatment by your doctor. But usually . . . and fortunately . . . bad breath is due, say some authorities, to the fermentation of tiny food particles on tooth, gum, and mouth surfaces.

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Listerine Antiseptic quickly halts such fermentation, and then overcomes the odors it causes. The breath becomes sweeter, fresher, more agreeable—less likely to offend.

If you are a heavy smoker you'll find Listerine Antiseptic almost invaluable. It does such a grand job of combating tobacco odors and ridding the mouth of that stale, musty taste caused by excessive smoking.

In any case, if you want people to like you . . . if you want to be at your best . . . make a habit of using Listerine Antiseptic before all important engagements. It may pay you real dividends in social and business success.

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

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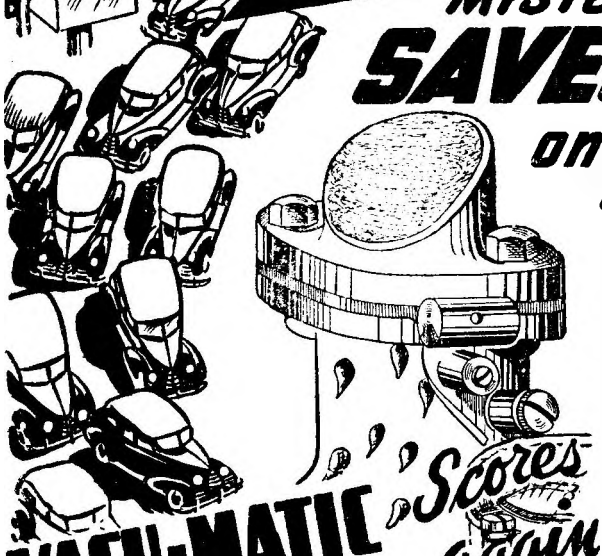
OR COSTS NOTHING TO TRY



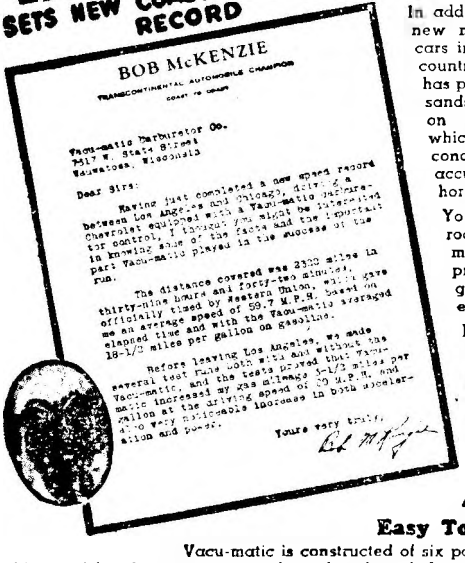
Answer this call! Investigate this remarkable discovery that trims dollars off gasoline bills —gives you worthwhile gas savings—more power — greater speed — quicker pickup — faster acceleration. Proven so efficient, it is guaranteed to save up to 30% and give better performance or the trial costs you nothing.

Automatic Supercharge Principle

Vacu-matic is *entirely different!* It operates on the supercharge principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air, into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely automatic and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing *automatically* as required to save dollars on gas costs.

VACU-MATIC "Scores" Again

SETS NEW COAST-TO-CHICAGO RECORD



BOB McKENZIE
TRANSCONTINENTAL AUTOMOBILE CHAMPION
COAST TO COAST

Vacu-matic Carburetor Co.
7617 W. State Street
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

Dear Sirs:

Having just completed a new speed record between Los Angeles and Chicago, doing it in a Chevrolet equipped with a Vacu-matic carburetor control, I thought you might be interested in knowing some of the facts and the important part Vacu-matic played in the success of the run.

The distance covered was 2300 miles in thirty-nine hours and forty-two minutes, which officially timed by Western Union, based on an average speed of 59.7 M.P.H. based on elapsed time and with the Vacu-matic averaged 18-1/2 miles per gallon on gasoline.

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In addition to establishing new mileage records on cars in all sections of the country, the Vacu-matic has proven itself on thousands of road tests and on dynamometer tests which duplicate road conditions and record accurate mileage and horse power increases.

You, too, can make a road test with Vacu-matic on your car and prove its worthwhile gas savings to your entire satisfaction.

Learn all about this remarkable discovery. Get the facts NOW!

Fits All Cars

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Vacu-matic is constructed of six parts assembled and fused into one unit, adjusted and *sealed at the factory.* Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can install in ten minutes. The free offer coupon will bring all the facts. Mail it today!

The Vacu-matic Co. **Wauwatosa, Wis.**

Sworn Proof of Gas Savings

This certifies that I have carefully read 300 original letters received from Vacu-matic users testifying to gas savings up to 30%, many reporting added power, smoother running, and quicker pick-up. These letters are just a small part of the larger file of enthusiastic user letters that I saw at the company offices.

Signed ..... Notary Public

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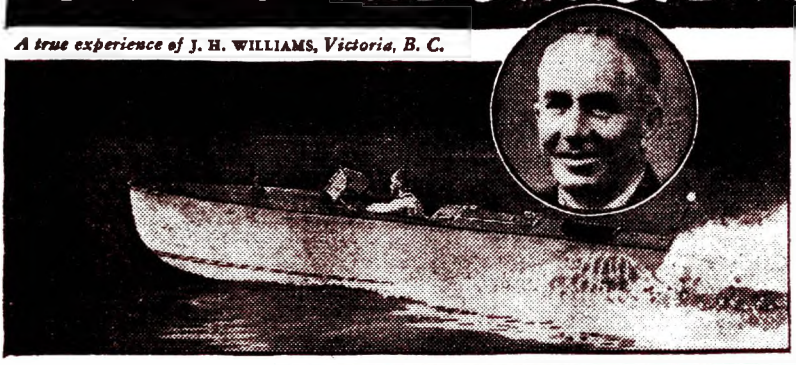
DS—1

TERROR STRICKEN, I LEAPT TOWARD THE SINISTER SHAPE!

A true experience of J. H. WILLIAMS, *Victoria, B. C.*



"ONE BLACK NIGHT I was returning to Vancouver, in my 15-foot inboard motorboat," writes Mr. Williams. "Suddenly, a dark and sinister shape loomed up directly ahead. There was no time to avoid it.

"I LEAPT as the boat crashed into the object—and found myself sitting on a crossbeam of a huge log boom that was being towed by a distant tug. My boat was gone. Shivering with cold, I shouted in vain—the tug was too far away for my voice to reach it.

"AFTER HOURS OF TORTURE, the night became stormy and the tug skipper shortened his line. Again I shouted—and this time a flashlight on the tug picked me out with its powerful beam. To the 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries in *that* flashlight I probably owe my life—and you can take it from me, *I* am an 'Eveready' convert now.

(Signed) J. H. Williams"

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STREET & SMITH'S

DETECTIVE STORY

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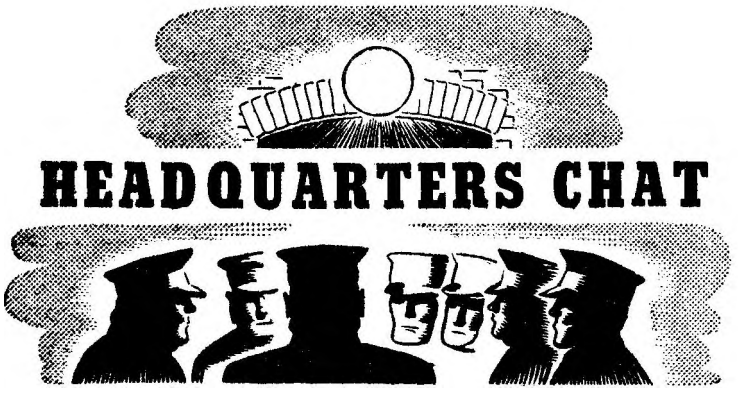

HEADQUARTERS CHAT

When two of the country's business leaders committed suicide and a half dozen others, equally prominent, suddenly appeared to have become mentally queer, Colonel Jerome Early, head of the president's unofficial domestic secret service, realized it could be no mere tragic coincidence. As he told Jigger Masters, the famous Long Island detective:

"There's enough smoke here to write the words 'dirty murder' across anybody's sky. But, though I'm convinced there's fire behind the smoke, I don't believe we have murder—yet. Just suicide. And a bunch of our biggest business men who've started cutting out paper dolls! But there's one constant in all these queer cases, Jigger. Get it?"

"Yes," said Masters. "Just before they started to go off the handle, every one of these sixteen-cylinder financiers took a vacation somewhere in the wide open spaces. Then, within a week or so of their return, every one of these tanned, revitalized guys began to go pale, to tremble, to shut himself away and act like—"

"Well, like what?" snapped Early. "What could have happened?"

"It sounds to me," said the detective, "like the way men would act who had been told by trustworthy diagnoticians that they had contracted incurable disease. Or the way men would act who had been put on the spot by some criminals they considered infallible!"

"O. K. I thought so, too. Now, I doubt it. However, start from there."

So Jigger Masters began to delve into the weirdest case the dynamic colonel had ever given him. This strange mystery of the frightened financiers is thrillingly told in next month's complete novel:

DISKS OF DOOM, by Anthony Rud

There will also be two dramatic feature-length novelettes—"Squeeze Gently to Kill," by J. J. des Ormeaux; and "Halfway from Hell," by Dale Clark. And in addition, a variety of shorter stories by other top-flight authors of detective fiction. This next issue of DS will be on sale August 30th.

Detective Story gives you not only the best, but the most for your money—sixteen pages more reading matter than you'll find elsewhere for ten cents.

KNOW RADIO *as*
Trained Technicians Know It

Many Make $30, $40, $50 a Week

Don't envy trained Radio Technicians because of their good pay, pleasant work; because everybody admires their technical knowledge and skill. Mail the Coupon. Learn how hundreds of men trained at home nights and became Radio Technicians without giving up their jobs or going to expensive schools. Get the facts about the "Radio Night School That Comes To You!"

HUNDREDS LEARNED RADIO AT HOME NIGHTS, GOT GOOD JOBS

Yes, hundreds of men from all walks of life are in pleasant, well-paying Radio jobs today because they trained at home nights to be Radio Technicians. These men hold jobs in practically every branch of Radio: installing, fixing, selling home and auto Radio sets; operating and maintaining Broadcast, Police, Aviation, Commercial, Experimental Radio Stations; selling, installing and servicing loudspeaker systems. Newer fields such as Television, Commercial Electronic Devices also offer opportunities now and for the future to Radio Technicians.

WHY MANY GET GOOD JOBS WITH GOOD PAY IN RADIO

Anyone can tune a Radio receiver, but very few can fix one when it doesn't work right; few can operate or maintain a Broadcast Station or handle the many other types of jobs which require a Technician's knowledge of Radio. That's why so many trained Radio Technicians get good pay, steady work, plenty of opportunities for advancement—why others hold jobs in other lines and operate a profitable spare time Radio business right from their own homes.

MANY MAKE FROM $5 TO $10 A WEEK IN SPARE TIME WHILE LEARNING

The N. R. I. "Night-School-at-Home" Course gives you a thorough training in Radio and Television principles; actual experience working with real Radio parts building circuits, test instruments and other Radio apparatus. In addition, a special section of the Course shows you how to do many Radio jobs which you can cash in on as you learn them. That's why many Radio Technicians earn good money—from $5 to $10 a week fixing Radio sets in spare time while learning. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL WAVE ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

When I completed 20 lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined Station WMPC where I am now Chief Operator.
HOLLIS F. HAYES
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$200 To $300 a Month in Own Business

For the last two years I have been in business for myself making between $200 to $300 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N. R. I. to thank for my start in this field.
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MAIL COUPON FOR FACTS NOW!

The thorough, easy-to-understand N. R. I. "Night School" Course in Practical Radio and Television has actually doubled, yes tripled, the earnings of some. It has put hundreds of men into good-pay technical Radio jobs—into pleasant work with good pay—the type of work other persons admire. Get "Rich Rewards in Radio" FREE today. See for yourself how easy it is to prepare at home nights for Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television. Read more than 100 letters from men who started in Radio this way. Get the facts about this great, growing field with a future. Mail the coupon now—in an envelope, or paste it on a penny postcard.

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National Radio Institute, Dept. OGD
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MAIL THIS TO GET 64-PAGE BOOK FREE

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Mail me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

Age.....

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....

Mary won..

So can you!

NANTICOKE, PA.—MARY HOWELLS, NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD BLUES SINGER, WINS TWO WEEKS' ENGAGEMENT AT MICHAEL TODD'S DANCING CAMPUS AT WORLD'S FAIR.

TODAY, Mary Howells is earning $50. a week in one of the world's greatest night clubs at the World's Fair. Yesterday she had never sung before an audience except in a high-school musical at Nanticoke.

Mary won this chance for fame over many other amateurs in the audition at Michael Todd's Hall of Music. She enjoyed an exciting free day at the World's Fair and today is a guest of that tower of hospitality—Hotel Times Square. "PIC" has paid her return fare from Nanticoke to New York.

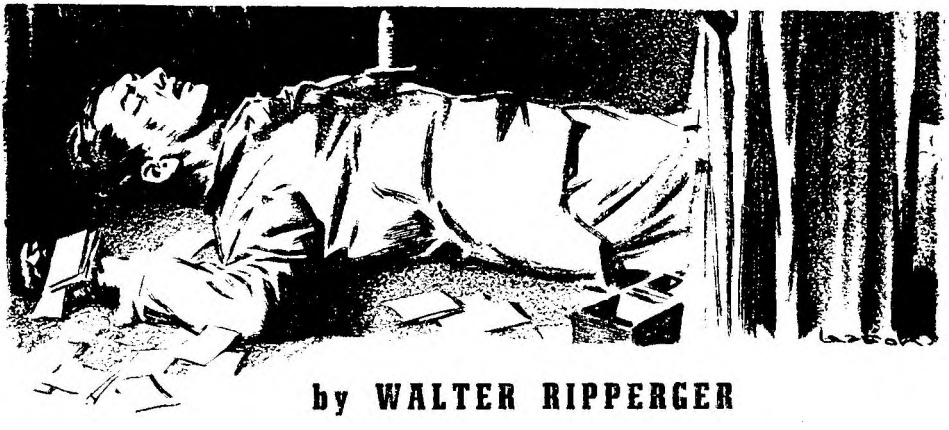
Over Station WNEW, which featured Mary Howells on their program for "PIC" amateurs, Mary told reporters, "I have never been so thrilled as when I stepped up to the microphone—and I'm delighted at this chance for fame and big money."

If Mary wins the finals of the "PIC" amateurs she will receive a free trip to Hollywood and a casting interview with a great producer at Paramount Studios.

BUY YOUR COPY OF "PIC" AND ENTER THE

"PIC" AMATEUR CONTEST *Now!*

The Vengeful Dane



by WALTER RIPPERGER

Mordecai Breen sat in his stuffy little office, contemplating the future gloomily. Being a private detective wasn't all he had expected it to be. Perhaps he had been foolish to give up his job as ace reporter down at the *Daily Leader*. So far he had had only two clients, and these not very remunerative. He was behind in his office rent. He owed the landlady of the boarding-house where he lived six weeks' lodging, and only that very morning she had made it clear in no uncertain terms that if he couldn't pay he'd have to vacate his room at the end of the week. She had another and more solvent applicant for Breen's room. Then there was that character in the outer office, an ex-prize fighter—Mordecai Breen's only assistant, who acted at one and the same time as stenographer, secretary, and Operative No. 13—a

character whom Breen had nicknamed Slap-happy. He owed Slap-happy a couple of weeks' salary, too.

Slap-happy didn't mind. He was a big roughneck with a flat, battered face, cauliflower ears, and serious but on occasion twinkling eyes. Slap-happy had been known in the ring as One-round Musky, because of the fact that he had a veritable gift of getting himself knocked out in the first round, invariably ending up in the laps of ringside spectators. Slap-happy had the greatest faith in Mordecai Breen, whom he always addressed as "chief." He never questioned the ultimate success of the Breen Detective Agency. Faithfully and industriously he practiced daily on the secondhand battered typewriter on his desk, never losing his optimism or the feeling that some big case was bound to come along, a case where it would be necessary for him to type voluminous reports.

Just as Breen was finishing his third rye and ginger ale and putting the bottle and glass disconsolately back into the bottom drawer of his desk, Slap-happy came in beaming.

"We're signed up for a bout, chief," Slap-happy whispered hoarsely. "Looks like the main event, too, or at least the semifinal. Two guys out there to see you. They look like folding money to me—like they was in the chips."

Mordecai Breen's yellow-brown eyes brightened.

"One of 'em's got—" Slap-happy went on.

"Never mind. Show them in."

Mordecai Breen hastily fished in his inside pocket and found a letter. It happened to be a letter from a finance company assuring Breen that they would be happy to make him a personal loan—anything up to two hundred dollars on his personal effects, at very reasonable rates. No delays, no embarrassment. Breen, intently studying the letter in a preoccupied fashion while Slap-happy showed in the visitors, got the impression that the finance company was a very philanthropic institution whose sole aim in the world was to help people in need.

"Sit down," Mordecai Breen said, without looking up. He folded the letter, put it back in his pocket, then glanced up at the two men who had come in.

One was rather short, an elegant, dapper figure, smartly attired in a dark suit and a dark overcoat belted at the back. His Homburg hat was mouse-gray. He carried gray suède gloves in one of his small rather delicate hands; he wore gray spats. His features were narrow, his eyes gray and thoughtful. But it was his companion who spoke.

"I am Dr. Cecil Park-Minton," he said in a soft cultured voice, "and this is my assistant, Dr. le Bar. Some time ago I received one of your circulars."

Mordecai Breen eyed Dr. Park-Minton. He was almost a head taller than his assistant. His attire was as perfect and as expensive as Dr. le Bar's. But he gave the impression of being the more prosperous and the more important. Perhaps it was only Dr. Park-Minton's overcoat that gave Breen that idea. Even to the most uninitiated, it was obviously a costly garment. The cloth was black and soft, and the fur collar was expensive. It was plainly the work of a master tailor. But after all, Dr. Park-Minton's attire wasn't the most striking thing about him. It was the domineering way in which he held himself, his sensitive mouth that had something of

cruelty in it, and it was his dark eyes—or, rather, eye. There was only one eye visible—a sinister, malevolent optic. Over the other—the left one—there was a black patch held in place by a silken cord that ran across Dr. Park-Minton's forehead.

Mordecai Breen said again, "Won't you sit down?"

Neither of the two made a move. Dr. Park-Minton let his one eye travel about the room, taking it in, then letting it come to rest on Mordecai Breen. It was as though he were trying to make up his mind whether or not he had come to the right place.

"I had expected," he said slowly, "a more elaborate establishment."

Mordecai Breen had a violent temper.

"What difference does it make?" he said irritably. "You didn't come here to live, did you?"

"No," said Dr. Park-Minton without emotion, "I'm just wondering." He kept that dark, almost black eye of his fastened on Mordecai Breen.

Breen wasn't much over average height. His shoulders were broad but not exceptionally so, nor did he appear of an unusually athletic build. Yet he gave the impression of having great strength. There was a sort of careless recklessness about him, a kind of arrogance—an arrogance that on occasion burned fiercely in his yellow-brown eyes.

Finally Dr. Park-Minton seemed satisfied. He sat down. Dr. le Bar sat down.

"Having but one assistant," Breen said without batting an eye, "you can imagine I am pretty busy. If you've got anything you want to talk to me about—"

Dr. le Bar's gray eyes swept the top of Breen's desk—a desk bare of any papers. His eyes flickered, but he said nothing.

"We came to you," Dr. Park-Minton said, speaking very slowly, "for two reasons. We want you to find a man for us. And we want you to act as a sort of bodyguard until this man is found. Considering the two together, you'll understand why I had hoped that yours would be a larger organization. And yet there is something about you that impresses me. I am a very good judge of character. One gets to be that way when one is in a profession such as mine."

"I suppose I ought to know who you are, but I don't," Breen said truculently.

"If you moved in different circles," Dr. Park-Minton said with a sort of careless complacency, "you'd know who I am. Cecil Park-Minton, the surgeon. Nor is my assistant, Dr. le Bar, without repute."

Breen looked into Park-Minton's one eye. It was an amazingly expressive eye. It suggested that the man was conscious of his superiority, that he was vain, evil, contemptuous of his fellowman, and yet it somehow also suggested something else—apprehension.

"All right, you want me to find a man," Breen said. "Who is he?"

"He's a convict—an ex-convict."

"There are thousands of those," Breen said sarcastically. Dr. Park-Minton's manner, his cold deliberation, irritated him almost beyond endurance. "Will any convict do, or do you want some special one?"

"I want one very special one," Dr. Park-Minton said patiently. "His name is Peter Dane. He was released several days ago."

Breen, his voice flat, said: "All right. You want me to find him and you want a bodyguard. Why?"

"Because," Dr. Park-Minton said,

"we have reason to believe, Dr. le Bar and I, that we're in danger. The man hates us. He wouldn't hesitate to kill us both if the chance arose." Dr. Park-Minton adjusted the patch over his left eye. It seemed an unconscious, instinctive gesture.

Breen stared. He didn't know why, but for some reason or other he disliked the two men, a dislike that amounted almost to antagonism, and yet a client was a client.

"Why don't you go to the police?" he asked bluntly. "That's what the police are for, to protect people. And they can probably find this Peter Dane easier than I can."

Dr. le Bar moistened his thin lips. He started to speak, changed his mind, and looked at Dr. Park-Minton.

"We don't wish to go to the police," Dr. Park-Minton said. "A man of my reputation can't afford to be mixed up with the police. As for your being able to find Dane, we think you won't have any trouble. He'll . . . he'll find us, and you'll be there. That is one of the reasons why we want you to act as a sort of bodyguard."

Breen shifted restlessly in his chair. He didn't get it.

"And if I find him, what? You still wouldn't be safe. You can't do anything to an ex-convict just by finding him. You can't have a guy locked up just for coming to see you, even though he's been in jail."

Dr. Park-Minton's one eye gleamed malevolently. His sensitive cruel mouth twisted itself into a line that was repulsive.

"That," he said, his voice thin, "is going to be your particular task. Peter Dane is going to try to kill one or both of us. You are to trap him, you are to catch him as he's trying to do it. That will suffice to send him back to where he belongs —to prison. I am placing a great deal of trust in you—an enormous amount of trust, putting my life, Le Bar's life, into your hands. If you fail—"

Mordecai Breen let his eyes wander from Park-Minton to Dr. le Bar. The smaller man's face had gone ashen. His gray eyes were filled with fear.

"You don't . . . you don't," he said, "have to put it so graphically, do you, Park-Minton?"

Breen turned back to Park-Minton. Breen's yellow-brown eyes were hard, his mouth wolfish, and his voice harsh.

"I think I get it now," he said. "You want me to find this Peter Dane, to actually make it look to him as though it were easy for him to kill you, and then I trap him in the act."

Dr. Park-Minton's eye glittered. "My estimate of you was correct," he said, his voice full of satisfaction. "You get the idea perfectly. It's a difficult task, but I think you can accomplish it."

"I'm sure you can," Dr. le Bar added, his voice unsteady.

Mordecai Breen leaned forward. His big strong hands closed over the edge of his desk.

"What . . . what did you two do to Dane that he'd want to kill you? Why are you afraid of him?"

Dr. Park-Minton drew back a little. Le Bar made a nervous noise deep down in his throat. A heavy stillness filled Mordecai Breen's musty little office—a stillness that seemed to blot out the *click-clack-clack-click* of Slap-happy's typewriter in the outer office. At long last, Dr. Park-Minton said:

"We did nothing . . . nothing to Peter Dane. He thinks we did. He's an unreasoning person, suffering under some delusion. Am I stating the

case correctly, Le Bar?"

The little doctor shook his head in eager agreement.

Breen glowered at them; then he leaned back in his chair.

"I don't think I want any part of this," he said with an air of finality.

The expression in Park-Minton's face didn't change, but Le Bar appeared crestfallen.

"Could you . . . could you recommend someone to us who might be interested?" he asked anxiously.

"Wait," Dr. Park-Minton said, before Breen could answer. "This is the man for us, Le Bar. I can feel it. I am sensitive to this sort of thing." He turned his head a little to one side so that his one eye could take in Mordecai Breen more fully. "You are dissatisfied," he said. "because we don't take you fully into our confidence. That is not because we distrust you; it's just because we can't. We feel that what has happened in the past is our business. You haven't heard my proposition yet. I think it will interest you. You are to devote your talents entirely to us until this matter is settled. You are to live with us. You will receive five hundred dollars a week, and at the conclusion of this affair, if you bring about the situation that I have outlined—or, rather, that you have outlined—you will receive five thousand dollars!"

Breen sucked in his breath. Five hundred dollars a week, with a possible five thousand! He disliked these two men, almost loathed them, and yet, what the hell was he in business for? His landlady was going to throw him out in the street at the end of the week, and here he was being offered a home and being paid for living there. It seemed almost providential. But something told Mordecai Breen that if he took this case, he would be on the wrong side; that the man he ought to be working for was the ex-convict, Peter Dane. And yet that was silly. After all, if these two men stood in danger of their lives—and they certainly seemed to think so—it was up to him to protect them if he could. And besides, what was the use of being squeamish? There was money in this, and as far as he knew, this Dane might be a heel, a racketeer, a fiend. What was the use of turning down a good fee because of vague hunches?

"When do I start?" he said.

"Tonight," Dr. Park-Minton said. "I imagine you'll want to go home and pack a bag." He reached into his pocket and on the back of an old envelope scribbled his address. He pushed it across the desk.

Mordecai Breen made no move to take it. In the far recesses of his mind he still had a feeling that he shouldn't take it, that he should turn down the proposition.

"What's the matter with your eye?" he demanded irrelevantly.

A slow flush crept over Dr. Park-Minton's face. Hot anger flamed in his good eye. When he spoke, he hardly moved his lips.

"I am retaining you," he said, "for a specific purpose. Beyond that you will please mind your own business."

Mordecai Breen, sitting rigid, his yellow-brown eyes bleak, said: "I'm not retained yet." A stubborn look came to his mouth. "What's the matter with your eye?"

He clasped his hands behind his head, leaned far back and stared up at the ceiling, not interested in Park-Minton or Le Bar, not interested in the case.

For a time neither of the other two said anything, then:

"You're going to be difficult to get along with," Dr. Park-Minton said. The rage had gone out of his

eye. There was a certain speculative quality in his tone, something of curiosity. "You're implying that unless I tell you about my eye, you're not going to take this case. You're an incredible sort of man, but that's what we need, Le Bar and I—an incredible sort of man. Look."

Mordecai Breen turned. Dr. Park-Minton raised the black patch. Breen had expected to see a sty, an infection of some sort, perhaps just an ordinary black eye. But he was wrong. There was no eye—only an empty socket.

Slowly, with unbelievable deliberation, Dr. Park-Minton let the patch fall back into place and leaned forward.

"Dane did that to me," he hissed. "Two years ago it was my eye, and next time it will be my life, unless—"

II.

On a street in the East Sixties stood the rooming house owned and managed by Tessie Bonville—pronounced "Boveel." In appearance it was no different from the rooming house that flanked it on either side—an old-fashioned brownstone affair with a high stoop leading up to the front door. Like the other houses it had a front yard with a plot of untidy, despairing brown-green grass. But there was a difference. Whereas all the other houses had vacancy signs in their windows and their various owners eagerly looked forward to the arrival of a new tenant, there was no vacancy sign in Tessie Bonville's house, and it was a matter of complete indifference to her whether or not a new tenant arrived.

Tessie was in her late fifties. She had once been rather lovely looking, but the life she had led, and years of unceasing dissipation, had taken their toll. She was now rather fat and flabby. There were lines in her face. Her eyes were rheumy except on certain occasions when they were sharp, predatory, greedy. Her hair was dyed, a none-too-successful job, that resulted in a sort of dirty straw color. Yet Tessie was still not without vanity. She struggled unceasingly against the ravage of time and a life that had robbed her of every vestige of good looks. She had her hair done weekly. She put on enough make-up to enamel a bathtub. She made her lips a vivid red, and not content with that, she squeezed her ample figure into a corset that was too small for her, and tortured herself by forcing her spreading feet into shoes meant for a dainty ballet dancer. Tessie was a vicious woman, and yet good-natured, her good nature enhancing her viciousness.

Right now she sat in the front parlor behind a small oak desk, going over her accounts. The sums involved in these accounts were startling. Almost any ordinary hotel would have envied the amounts apparently earned by Tessie Bonvill's shabby lodginghouse.

Somewhere in the far recesses of the house a bell tinkled faintly. Tessie didn't look up from her work, until presently there was a knock on the door. The door opened. Tessie's maid, a pock-marked Negress, stood there.

"There's a gen'man wants to see you, Miss Tessie," the maid said. "He done say his name is Mistah Dane. He done say Leverman sent him. Does you want to see him?" The pock-marked Negress' face was impassive. There was nothing in it to show that she had admitted so many men who had been sent by Leverman, during all the years she had been with Tessie.

"Dane did that to me," Dr. Park-Minton said. "Two years ago it was my eye, and next time it will be my life, unless—"

Tessie said, "All right. Let him come in."

She fluffed up her hair, peered into a tiny mirror that lay on her desk, then waited. To be sure, the characters that Leverman sent had never been particularly prepossessing individuals—that was natural enough—but there was still always a chance. And for once she was destined not to be disappointed.

The man who came in was handsome. Or at least he would have been handsome if it hadn't been for the things that life had done to him. He was young, tall, rather slender, yet well built. But there was a ghastly pallor about his face. His eyes were hollow, lifeless. He walked with a peculiar, almost slouching gait. There was a starved look about him—the look of a man who is not only physically starved, but spiritually as well.

"I'm Dane," he said in a mechanical sort of way, "Peter Dane. One of the guards, his name's Leverman —'screws,' they call them down there—thought it might be a good idea if I came to see you."

Tessie said: "Sit down. How long were you in for?"

Listlessly, Peter Dane sank into the chair she indicated. He gave the impression of having no interest in anything. It was as though he were not taking in what was happening now, as if his mind were dwelling only on the past and—the future.

"How long were you in for?" Tessie asked again. There was curiosity in her tired eyes. This man was different from any that Leverman had ever sent her before.

"Two years," Peter Dane said in that remote voice of his. "Felonious assault—first degree."

"They tell me," Tessie said, "that Graton is one of the toughest stirs in the country." She was trying to draw him out, somehow bring him to life.

Peter Dane looked at her as if he didn't quite comprehend, then:

"I wouldn't know."

Little lines formed above the bridge of Tessie's nose. She had a sudden conviction that for once Leverman had sent her a dud. This man was washed up. He could be of no use to her. He had nothing to sell, no secrets that would serve to enrich the safe-deposit boxes of Tessie Bonville. What in the world had gotten into Leverman? What had made Leverman think that in sending this Peter Dane to her he would be earning his customary commission?

"And what do you want from me?" Tessie said, her voice a little sharp.

Peter Dane appeared to consider the question. He rubbed his thin hands together, started to answer, then stopped. A door at the back opened.

A girl came in. Antoinette, Tessie Bonville's daughter. She was all that Tessie once had been—and more. Her features were regular, her hair was red, abundant. Her eyes were an off shade of blue that made them look green. They were wide apart and steady. Her lashes were long, curling, touched with kohl. She had a mouth that was full, generous, and carmine. She was slim, but not too slim. There was something sinuous about her figure, about the way she held herself, and the manner in which she walked, her hips swaying, provocative.

Peter Dane gave her one brief, disinterested glance, then looked back at Tessie.

Antoinette looked startled. She wasn't used to having men, young men—and this man *was* young—content with looking at her so sparingly. She glanced at her mother.

"A new boarder?" Her tone was indolent.

"Leverman sent him." Tessie said shortly. "His name is Peter Dane."

Tessie Bonville harbored few grudges and no resentments, but in some vague way that she couldn't even explain to herself, she resented Antoinette. Antoinette was young, unbelievably desirable, and had all the things that she, Tessie, once had had.

"What does he want?" Antoinette drawled. She said it carelessly, as though Peter Dane weren't even there, but out of the corner of her eye she took in Peter Dane, his pallor, his lean, gaunt face.

He still didn't look at her.

"I don't know," Tessie said. She turned to Peter Dane. "What do you want?"

"A place . . . a place to stay," Peter Dane said slowly, "until—" He stopped.

"Until what?" Tessie asked.

It was a long time before Peter Dane answered. His lifeless eyes were fixed, staring into space. Then something came into them—hate,

implacable hate. And more than that, unshakable determination.

The two women saw it and recognized it for what it was. There was something shattering about the look in Peter Dane's eyes, something devastating, almost overwhelming. Antoinette's carmine lips parted a little, but she said nothing. Tessie took as deep a breath as her tightly laced corset would permit.

Then Peter Dane spoke, his voice weary, low:

"Until I can kill a couple of men. After that . . . after that it doesn't matter."

Tessie started to say something and couldn't find the words. Antoinette said contemptuously:

"Stir crazy." She knew that wasn't true. She said that to rouse him, to make him look at her, to attract his attention.

Peter Dane kept his eyes on Tessie. The hate had gone out of them, leaving them dull, bleak as before.

"If Leverman sent you to me, he must have told you," Tessie said impatiently, "what sort of a place I run. I don't take in ex-convicts that have nothing to offer. This isn't a charity institution. This . . . this is a business." Tessie was angry. Leverman was a fool, and this Peter Dane was a bigger fool. The idea that he could come here, live here at her expense, just so that he could bump off a couple of guys!

For seconds Peter Dane looked at her without comprehension, the lines in his lean face deepening until they looked like gashes. Then he rose, twisting the cheap slouch hat that he held between his fingers.

"Sorry to have troubled you," he muttered. "Leverman—" Slowly he started for the door.

He had almost reached it when Antoinette's voice stopped him.

"Wait," she said. She went up to him and stood looking into his eyes, her own challenging. He stared at her dully, twisting his hat. "You're all tied in knots," she said. "You're frozen. You need somebody—somebody to thaw you out."

She waited for some response, but there wasn't any. Only after a long time he said:

"I've got to be getting along."

Antoinette spun around facing her mother.

"He can stay," she declared.

"You're crazy!" Tessie said. "What's the sense?"

Peter Dane's hand was on the doorknob. He was turning it. Antoinette placed her slim hand on his wrist.

"You can stay," she said.

"I've got to be getting—"

Antoinette, breathing fast, softly said: "You can stay. We'll help you . . . we'll help you kill your two men!"

Again life came into Peter Dane's eyes and again it was hate.

"You don't have to help me. I'll do it by myself. I just . . . I just want a place to stay. I haven't . . . I haven't any money."

His hand fell away from the doorknob.

Late that day Sergeant Hammerstein of the homicide squad ambled into Mordecai Breen's office.

"So you got a client again," Hammerstein said with jovial malice. "That makes three, as far as I know, since you've turned sleuth. Boy, are you making good!"

Breen scowled at him. He moved the bottle of rye a few inches and said truculently:

"Help yourself." At the same time he took out a glass from the drawer

of his desk and put it beside the bottle.

The sergeant poured himself a generous portion. He drank it neat. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, then:

"You haven't got any coffee beans, have you, or sompn? I might run into the inspector—"

"Did you get the dope I asked you for?" Breen said fretfully. He was preoccupied, disturbed by this case that had come his way. Everything about it seemed to him wrong, and he didn't know why.

Hammerstein shook his head wonderingly.

"A screwy reporter with a punch-drunk prize fighter playing detective. It just doesn't make sense. If it wasn't for me—"

"The hell with you," Breen said. "I phoned you about a guy named Dane—Peter Dane. Did you find out anything or didn't you? If you just came here to lap up my liquor—"

"A good idea," Hammerstein said, and helped himself to another drink. Then: "It happens I know all about this Dane, or at least all there is to know about him. I was in court when he was being tried a couple of years ago. I had a case of my own. This Dane didn't have any lawyer, didn't want one. He just wanted to plead guilty. It was the damnedest thing."

"What's so damned about it?" Breen snarled. He didn't have much time. He had to go home and pack a few things and get to Park-Minton's house.

"Dane was charged with felonious assault in the first degree. He was a nice-looking young fellow, only his face was kind of stony like he was one of those trees, you know—"

"Petrified," Breen said grumpily.

"Yeah," Hammerstein said, "only I thought that was the same as being ossified—you know, the way you get." Hammerstein grinned. "Dane beat up a doctor, one of those high-society doctors who won't prescribe an aspirin without charging you five hundred bucks—a fellow named Park-Minton. This Dane, when it came to beating a guy up, was sompn. He'd made a wreck out of Park-Minton. Not only that, but he knocked down Park-Minton a couple of times, and the second time Park-Minton hit an andiron in the fireplace. He hit it with his eye, and that was all there was to it. He lost his eye. It was the damnedest—"

"Hell's bells," Breen snapped. "Don't start that again. What happened?"

"The damnedest thing," Hammerstein went on unhurriedly, "was the way this Dane behaved during the trial. He wouldn't defend himself, he wouldn't say why he beat up Park-Minton. He just stood there taking it, as if it didn't matter, as if he were already thinking of sompn he was going to do at some time or other in the future. The judge gave him two years. Dane didn't say anything for a minute. He turned away from the judge and looked at Park-Minton and a little guy—I forgot his name, Baron or sompn; he was witness—"

"Le Bar," Breen interjected.

"All right, Le Bar. Dane looked at the two of them and said sompn. He didn't say it very loud. Nobody much could hear it but me, because I was right there. I guess Park-Minton and Le Bar heard it. Anyway, Le Bar, the little guy, turned a kind of sickly green."

"What did Dane say?"

"All he said was, 'I'll be back in two years.'"

III.

There was a knock on the door. Peter Dane said, "Come in."

The room that the pock-marked Negress had given him was small and cheaply furnished, but it was comfortable enough. Whether or not it was comfortable didn't matter anyhow to Peter Dane. He had been sitting there with his hands clasped, staring down at the floor for hours, ever since his interview with Tessie and Antoinette. He said again, listlessly, "Come in."

Antoinette entered. She had changed into a dinner dress of some shimmering sea-green material—a dress that emphasized every line of her magnificent figure. There was a sparkling star-shaped hair clip in her red hair. The clip was green, almost the color of her eyes. Walking with that swaying, easy grace of hers, she came up to Peter Dane and smiled at him.

Peter Dane stood up and stared at her with bleak, disinterested eyes. She gave a little toss to her head.

"You don't . . . you don't take much interest in . . . in things," she said. Her ordinarily husky voice was a little metallic.

"I take an interest in some things."

"Two men you want to kill?"

Peter Dane's shoulders moved, but he said nothing.

A half minute went by, then Antoinette said:

"Dinner will be in about an hour. I thought I'd come and take you downstairs to meet the others beforehand. It'll be easier that way."

"I don't want to meet anybody. I just want to stay here, be let alone until . . . until I've done what I want to do. Then I'll be on my way."

She shook her head. "That won't do," she said. "The others wouldn't like it if there was someone here who they didn't know, who hadn't been properly introduced to them by ma or me. The men here are a little different from the sort of men you'd meet at any other boarding-house. When Leverman sent you, he must have made that plain to you. Don't worry. They won't ask you any questions and they won't expect you to ask them any. Everyone's business here is his own. Only ma and I, we ask questions, and we direct things. Nobody does anything without being told what they're to do."

Peter Dane looked as though he didn't comprehend. His lean features stayed expressionless.

Her voice sharpened. "You get what I mean, don't you?"

Peter Dane's eyes flared up briefly, then grew vague. His mouth went into a thin, straight line.

"Snap out of it," she said. "You're all nerves. Your brain isn't working. You talk about killing people. We don't go much for that sort of thing. There's other better and safer game. But if you want to kill somebody, that's your affair, providing . . . providing it's done so it doesn't get us into trouble. When you come to life, we'll talk about it. You'll need help."

"Help? Who'd want to help me?"

Antoinette smiled again. "There are a half dozen men downstairs and any one of them will do just as I say. If I tell them . . . if I tell them to jump in the river, they'll jump."

For the first time Peter Dane's eyes seemed to focus on her, seemed to take in her person.

"I guess . . . I guess that's so," he said slowly.

She studied him with a perplexed expression, unable to understand why she wasn't making any im-

pression on him. Men coming out of prison after years—young men—were eager to see women, were satisfied with women far less prepossessing than she was. But not this one. She obviously meant nothing to him. Well, there was time.

"Come," she said. For a moment she rested her hand on his arm, felt his muscles, muscles that were taut, unresponsive, and not pliable.

She went out and he followed her downstairs to the basement, into a large room. There was a pool table at one end of the room. Three men were playing Kelly pool. Two others were watching in chairs tilted back against the wall. At a card table, two more were playing pinochle. Everyone seemed to stop as Antoinette, with Dane a little behind her, came into the room.

Peter Dane took them in without interest. They were of different heights, different builds, different ages, and of course their faces were different. And yet they all had something in common. It was their expression. Their faces were closed, secretive, and their mouths were tight-lipped.

Antoinette led Dane up to the pool table where a big man with sandy hair and dull opaque eyes had been mechanically chalking his cue. The big man was devouring Antoinette with his lackluster eyes. The nostrils of his flat nose quivered.

"Harry the Ox," Antoinette said, motioning with her head toward the big man.

"How's the girl?" Harry the Ox said. His voice was tight, constricted. He didn't look at Dane.

Antoinette smiled tantalizingly at Harry the Ox. The big man put the chalk down on the table and placed a huge hand on Antoinette's shoulder.

"Everything all right?"

Antoinette made no move to shake off the hand, but angry flames flared up in her eyes. Without lifting her voice, she said:

"Take your paws off me."

Harry the Ox flushed. He took his hand away.

"Touchy," he muttered.

"Touchy," Antoinette said, "but not touchable—not by you."

Nobody laughed. Nobody said anything.

Antoinette turned to the two others at the pool table.

"Gimpy Myer," she introduced, "and Dan Weaver."

Gimpy Myer was about thirty-five, five feet eight, with a ferretlike face and shoe-button eyes. His hair was black and sleek, his frame narrow, flat-chested. Weaver was shorter, a stocky individual, with a low, slop-

Limehouse Johnny held out his hand and said, "Hello, Pete!"

ing forehead, a sharp nose, and a thick mouth. Like the others, he nodded briefly in Peter Dane's direction, then he gazed at Antoinette. There was a hungry look in his eyes and his hands, which were extraordinarily large, opened and closed.

Antoinette ignored him. She waved to the two men who sat leaning against the wall. One, a blond man with strong, regular features and a cleft chin, she called Halverson. Halverson's eyes were cobalt-blue and he kept them away from Antoinette. The other she introduced as Baron Lush. The baron was the tallest of them all. He was broad-shouldered, had soft brown eyes and a wide, gentle mouth. He stood up and bowed from the waist when Antoinette introduced him.

Now she indicated the card table where one of the men—the one who was shuffling the cards—sat facing Dane.

"Louis Davis," Antoinette said, meaning the man who was shuffling the cards, "and the other, with his back to you, is Limehouse Johnny. And this, gentlemen, is Peter Dane."

Again the men nodded. There was no interest in their faces, no welcome, or the reverse, in their expressions. Their faces remained closed. Harry the Ox started chalking his cue again, but the little man, the last who had been introduced, Limehouse Johnny, rose slowly at the mention of Peter Dane's name. He came over, stood directly in front of Dane, and looked up at him. Then he held out his hand and said:

"Hello, Pete."

Peter Dane took the outstretched hand. Antoinette looked startled. For the first time since she had seen him, that frozen look for a brief instant left Peter Dane's face. There was a glimmer of warmth in his eyes, and Antoinette couldn't understand it.

Limehouse Johnny was just a little rat, hardly in a class with the rest of the clientele that patronized Tessie Bonville's rooming house. He was an insignificant-looking fellow, emaciated, with a pinched face, gray nondescript eyes, and gray scraggly hair. Why should he, of all people, arouse any interest, get any response from this man who was so grim, so remote? To Dane, Antoinette said:

"Do you know him?"

"Sure," Limehouse Johnny answered. "Me and Pete, we was roommates at one time." He stopped talking and gazed up at Peter Dane, an anxious, almost worried expression in his gray eyes.

From the card table, Louis Davis called: "Come on, let's finish the game."

Limehouse Johnny seemed reluctant to go, then he turned and walked back slowly.

The pock-marked Negress came in.

"Dinner am ready, Miss Antoinette", she said, and went out again.

The men at the pool table put down their cues and went over to the washbasin.

Antoinette didn't wait for any of them. To Peter Dane she said, "Come," and led the way to an adjoining room. It was almost as large as the game room. The table was set for ten.

Tessie was already sitting at the head of the table. Tessie's glance traveled swiftly back and forth between Dane and her daughter. There was a speculative look in Tessie's rheumy eyes. She was a woman of the world, had vast experience, and was nobody's fool. She didn't mind a flirtation, a passing affair, but anything beyond that was out. Antoinette seriously in love would not be so valuable as Antoinette carefree and unattached. Some sixth sense told Tessie that in some curious way this newcomer, Dane, had done something to Antoinette, that somehow he had captured her imagination. Perhaps it meant nothing, and then again—

"Sit here, Dane," Tessie said, indicating a place on her right, "and you, Antoinette, sit down there at the other end, next to the baron, when he comes in."

Antoinette smiled at her mother and sat down next to Peter Dane. Tessie sank her little sharp teeth into her lower lip, but made no comment. One by one, others came in until they were all there, seated.

Idly, now that they were together, Peter Dane took them in again. Subconsciously it struck him how well groomed they were, how well dressed, that he alone of them all was a shabby-looking character, that he alone looked like a down-and-out ex-convict, and he didn't care. It didn't matter. Nor did the conversation matter or interest him. It was idle chatter. Fragments occasionally registered with him—something about the Yankees always winning the pennant; something about the heavyweight wrestling championship; about a burlesque show; the World's Fair.

Antoinette watched him covertly out of the corner of her eye. Once, irritably, she said:

"For Heaven's sake, don't you ever say anything?"

A fleeting look of surprise came into Peter Dane's face, as though it were unreasonable for anyone to expect him to talk.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I guess . . . I guess I've sort of forgotten how to talk."

Tessie grinned maliciously at her daughter, then frowned. The Ne-

gress came and took the soup plates away. She brought an enormous roast beef and put it down in front of Tessie. Tessie carved large, generous portions. Peter Dane watched her, a sudden gleam coming into his eyes.

Antoinette studied Dane. Was he hungry? What had suddenly aroused him? Was it the jewels on Tessie's hand, jewels that glittered as her hand went deftly back and forth with the carving knife? Antoinette half turned in her chair so that she could see him better. He didn't notice her at all. His own eyes seemed riveted on Tessie's hand, carving the beef. At last they were all served. Peter Dane made no move to touch his plate. His eyes were on the platter now—on the carving set.

Antoinette experienced a queer sensation, something that she couldn't possibly explain to herself. At last she could stand it no longer. Her hand closed hard over his arm.

"What the hell is it?" she hissed inelegantly. "What are you staring at?"

Without turning to look at her, in a far-off voice as if he were not conscious of actually saying it, Peter Dane said:

"That knife. It's a sharp knife."

Hours later there was a timid knock on the door of Peter Dane's room. It opened and Limehouse Johnny came in. He closed the door softly behind him and stood looking at Peter Dane, his eyes troubled, uncertain. After a long time Limehouse Johnny said:

"It's none of my business, Pete, I know, but what are you doing 'ere?"

"Just staying here, Johnny, for a while."

"You oughtn't to stay 'ere," Limehouse Johnny said. "It's not the place for you."

"Why not?" Dane said. "If it's all right for you and the rest, why isn't it all right for me?" Harsh bitterness crept into Peter Dane's voice. "I'm an ex-convict like you and the others."

"We're different," Limehouse Johnny said with mild insistence. "We're professional crooks. We're thieves, rats. We're against everybody wot's against us. We don't know wot's right and wrong. I knew once, but I've forgotten now. We ain't even decent crooks. We don't take much chances. We just go in for blackmail and badger games and things like that. We ain't even decent blackmailers because we even blackmail our own kind—ex-cons, people wot 'ave been in stir, that made good after they got out. Most of us knows somebody like that. Leverman sees to it that the right people are sent 'ere to see Tessie and Antoinette. They're the brains and the front." Limehouse Johnny stopped. The anxiety in his eyes mounted. "You wouldn't go in for anything like that, Pete, would you?"

"No," Peter Dane said dully. "I'm just here because Leverman sent me."

"'Ave you got any money, I mean real money?"

"No," Dane said. "I had a little once, but I spent it all years ago."

Limehouse Johnny looked perplexed.

"I don't get it. Leverman's smart, 'e is. 'E knows what 'e's doing. If you 'ad any money, I could understand 'is sending you 'ere so you could be bled white. You 'aven't got a secret, Pete, 'ave you?"

"Yes, I've got a secret," Peter Dane said with dull unwillingness. "But there's no money in it."

"I don't mean to be pryin'—"

"I know, Johnny. Don't bother about me. Take my word for it, there's no money in this, just—"

The little man ran his fingers through his scraggly hair. His pale eyes clouded. He turned as if to go, then turned back again.

"I owe you something, Pete?"

"You owe me nothing."

"'Ave you still got that scar?"

"I guess so, yes," Dane said listlessly.

He wished the little man would go. He wanted to sit there and think. He was thinking now even while he spoke, but not about the things that Limehouse Johnny was saying. He was thinking about that carving knife with the long narrow blade.

Limehouse Johnny came closer. He put a shy hand on Peter Dane's arm.

"I'm not much, Pete," he said; "just a rat like the others, and only a little rat at that, but—I don't forget. Promise me somethin', Pete. Don't do anything . . . don't do anything crazy without telling me first. I'm not much, but I know my way about, and maybe I can . . . and maybe I can help."

Peter Dane nodded absently. Limehouse Johnny got as far as the door when Dane suddenly came to life. There was a weird light in his stark eyes.

"I haven't any money, Johnny," he said. "If you want to help—"

"I got plenty," Limehouse Johnny said, reaching into his pocket.

Dane shook his head. "I don't want any money, but if you want to help, there's something you could do for me. You know your way about in this place. You know where the kitchen is. If I tried to find it, I'd probably just stumble into somebody. There's a knife, Johnny; a long, thin carving knife. They used it tonight."

"I say you looking at it," Limehouse Johnny said, his tone soft, rasping. "It's like that, huh?" Limehouse Johnny's pale eyes seemed to recede far back into his head.

"Well?"

"A gun's better, Pete," Limehouse Johnny said. "I can get you a gun. A gun's quicker. You can get away. You don't 'ave to be on top of a man. With a knife you never know." Limehouse Johnny looked away from Dane. Irresolutely he shifted from one foot to the other, and waited.

"I don't want a gun," Peter Dane said. "I want a knife."

IV.

It was late the next afternoon that Leverman's note concerning Peter Dane reached Tessie Bonville. It was carefully, almost piously, worded, so that anyone who saw it and who was unfamiliar with the sort of ménage that Tessie ran would think that Leverman, the guard at Graton Prison, was a kindly, solicitous individual, who was interested in the future of convicts who had served their time. The note read:

Dear Mrs. Bonville:

I have recommended your place to a man named Peter Dane who was released a couple of days ago. Dane is an unusual man, much different from most of the people sent here to do time. You know I'm always interested in men like that. I treat them fair when they're down here, and I like to think that they're going to get on their feet after they leave here. I don't know much about Dane. Maybe I'm making a mistake in sending him to you. He never said anything much about himself while he was here, but what I hear from some friends of mine in New York, the judge gave him a two-year stretch for giving a guy named Park-Minton the works.

Park-Minton's a doctor, and big stuff, I understand. I thought maybe that he would be kind-hearted and that if you got in touch with him he might like to do something for Dane. Maybe he would feel sorry that he had lodged a complaint that resulted in such a severe sentence, which very likely is very liable to ruin the career of a young man.

I hope something will come of this as I should like to see Dane get on his feet.

Yours,

L.

Without comment, Tessie passed the note to her daughter, while she stared frowningly into space. She understood Leverman's note well enough. Leverman was shrewd; he suspected that a man of Dane's caliber wouldn't have assaulted a man so severely as to receive a two-year sentence unless there was more to this than lay on the surface. But Leverman wasn't sure. "Maybe I'm making a mistake," he had written. But then farther on in the note he'd written that if Tessie got in touch with Park-Minton, the doctor might want to do something for Dane. Leverman hadn't meant that Park-Minton would *want* to do something for Dane, but that he might be *made* to do something. Leverman hoped that something would come of this. Naturally he'd hope that, otherwise there'd be no commission for Leverman. Tessie looked at Antoinette.

"What do you think?"

"I think Leverman knows what he's talking about," Antoinette said. Her green eyes were unreadable and the frown on Tessie's face deepened.

"Can you get it out of him?" she asked.

"I think so," Antoinette said, a mocking smile on her full lips.

Tessie's rheumy eyes clouded. She didn't like the expression in Antoinette's face; she didn't like her tone; she didn't like the whole thing. She knew where she stood with the run-of-the-mine convict that Leverman sent her, but this Dane was different. And there was Antoinette—Antoinette for the first time in her life seemingly really interested in a man.

"I'll see what I can do," Antoinette said, and walked out.

She went straight to her room and rang for the Negress. When the maid came, Antoinette said:

"See if Johnny is around. If he is, send him to me."

"Yes'm," the pock-marked Negress said, and disappeared.

Antoinette sat down in front of her dressing table, fluffed up her glossy red hair, retouched her lips, and powdered a complexion that was already flawless.

Presently there was a knock, and then Limehouse Johnny came in. His manner was diffident, shy. He had never been in Antoinette's room. In fact, none of Tessie's Bonville's boarders had. The room seemed to overwhelm Limehouse Johnny. It was a luxurious, thoroughly feminine chamber. The four-poster bed was high, covered with rich silk. The draperies at the windows were soft and came down to the floor. The carpet was thick. But it was the dressing table with its three-sided mirror that particularly fascinated Limehouse Johnny. It was a thing of shiny glass and silk. On its glass top there were bottles, jars, and two lamps. In the soft glow of the lamps, the bottles sparkled. They held perfumes, astringent lotions, and beauty creams. Limehouse Johnny had to guess at the creams, but he was sure of the perfumes. Their odor filled the room, made him feel a little giddy. Limehouse Johnny, in the course of his turbulent life, had known some women,

but no one that even came close to Antoinette.

Antoinette turned from the dressing table and faced Johnny. She was smiling, perfectly aware of the impression the room and she herself were making on the little man.

"Sit down, Johnny," she said. "I want to talk to you." Her tone was vibrant, appealing.

"You . . . you wanted to see me," Limehouse Johnny said.

He was embarrassed, a little overwhelmed. He made no move to sit down, looking askance at the delicate silk-covered chairs.

"It's about Dane," Antoinette said. "You knew him before he came here. Tell me about him."

Limehouse Johnny stiffened. His embarrassment fell away from him. He forgot about the room, the perfumes, and Antoinette. He made his lips tight and his eyes opaque.

"He was in stir with me," he said. "That's all I know about 'im."

That was a lie and Antoinette knew it. Limehouse Johnny was hiding something from her. But Antoinette, womanwise, didn't say so. A hurt look came into her face.

"You don't like me, do you, Johnny?" she said.

Limehouse Johnny looked startled, bewildered. "Why, sure, Antoinette," he said. "What makes you say that?"

Antoinette shook her head as though she knew better. "You never come near me. You never—well, you never try to make any passes at me the way all the others do."

"I . . . I wouldn't do that. What would *you* see in me?" Limehouse Johnny said. It was plain that the whole conversation had taken a turn that was beyond his comprehension. He felt, too, that somehow he had been put in the wrong and that he had to defend himself. "'Alverson, the Swede," he said urgently, "doesn't make any passes at you."

Antoinette wanted to laugh, but she didn't. "Halverson makes passes at me," she said simply, "not with his hands, but with his eyes. He doesn't look at me often, because he knows I know."

Limehouse Johnny shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other. The whole thing was beyond him. This was a different Antoinette from the one he knew. The Antoinette he was accustomed to was careless, decisive, contemptuous of Tessie's boarders, made them keep their distance with no effort at all. It couldn't be—Limehouse Johnny's heart began to beat faster—it couldn't be that she liked him, *really* liked him. No, that couldn't be. Alongside of Harry the Ox, of the baron, or even Gimpy Myer, he, Limehouse Johnny, was nothing.

"You don't trust me, do you?" Antoinette said pathetically. "It's funny that the one person in this place that I trust—that's you, Johnny—shouldn't trust me."

"Why, sure I trust you," Limehouse Johnny said, more and more confused.

Antoinette shifted her ground.

"Don't you like Dane?"

"Sure I like Dane," Limehouse Johnny said. "I like 'im better than . . . than anyone. There's nothing wot I wouldn't do for Dane."

Antoinette rose and came over to where Johnny stood. She was taller than he. She bent down a little so that he could look into her eyes.

"Don't you understand, Johnny? That's the way I feel about it. I want to save him. He's going to get into trouble. He wants to kill somebody—two men. He's not like the rest of you here. He wouldn't know how to go about it without getting caught." A vehemence came into

Antoinette's voice that she hadn't intended. "Do you want to see him caught? Do you want to see him sent to the chair? What kind of a pal are you? You say you like him. I tell you he's going to try and kill somebody. He's crazy. He's all tied into knots. He doesn't care what happens to him. But I . . . I do."

Limehouse Johnny backed away. He couldn't think, not with her so close to him, not with her eyes—those flaming green eyes of hers—boring into his.

"Let me think," Limehouse Johnny said. "Give me time to think."

Antoinette considered. Generally it was a mistake to give a man time to think. But something told her that Limehouse Johnny was different, and unless he could think and work it out in his own way, she'd get nothing out of him. She walked to the dressing table, took a cigarette from a silver humidor, and lighted it. Then she sat down and waited.

Limehouse Johnny walked around the room in a distrait fashion. Once he stopped at the dressing table, stared at the array of bottles without seeing them, then at last he came and stood in front of Antoinette. It was Antoinette's turn to be surprised.

Limehouse Johnny's voice, when he spoke, was indescribably harsh, somehow savage. There was a light in his nondescript eyes.

"If you're lying to me, if you're going to double-cross Pete, I'll kill you. I'll kill you as sure as I'm standing 'ere."

Antoinette had never been afraid before. She wasn't afraid of Harry the Ox, or Dan Weaver, or Halverson, or the baron. And yet now, curiously enough, she was afraid of this little man, Limehouse Johnny, whom she had scarcely ever noticed, whom she wouldn't have noticed if it hadn't been for the fact that he had known Peter Dane.

"I've told you the truth, Johnny," Antoinette said. She gave an almost imperceptible toss of her head, a proud gesture of which she herself was unconscious. "I want to save Dane. What is he to you anyway?" she added curiously. "I didn't know there was anybody whose throat you —or anyone else in this place—wouldn't cut, if it paid you."

Limehouse Johnny smiled with his lips only. His face was still hard. "I'll tell you what 'e is to me. I'll tell you so that you'll know. And if you play 'im a dirty trick, if you use 'im to make money, or get 'im into trouble, I'll kill you if . . . if it's the last thing I do. Graton's a tough prison and I'm a rat and I know it. About a year ago a 'alf dozen cons planned to make a break. They took me in with them. I figured it wouldn't work and I figured something else. I figured if I went to the warden and told 'im about it, it would make things easier for me. I was getting to a point where I was going stir crazy. I figured that if I told the warden, I'd get some time off and I'd get out of that hell-hole before I went out of my mind. So I told 'im. They let the cons make the break. They caught them and they made it pretty tough for them after that. I was with the bunch when we made the break just so I wouldn't be suspected, but you can't get away with that sort of thing. I don't know 'ow things leak out in a prison. I guess some of them must 'ave noticed that the warden wasn't making it as tough for me as 'e did for the others."

"Was Dane one of them?"

Limehouse Johnny shook his head. "No. They wouldn't take a fellow like 'im in. Only regulars. They figured I was regular, but I wasn't. Nothing 'appened for six months. Dane and me and a con named Tovesky was working in the machine shop every day. Tovesky wasn't there for a while. 'E was the leader, the guy that 'ad planned the getaway, and 'e 'ad 'ad to do a stretch in the 'ole—solitary. And when 'e came out and they put 'im back in the machine shop alongside of me, I was scared. Tovesky was big and 'e always was sort of fierce. But after the solitary, 'e came out looking like an animal. I was scared because I thought 'e might suspect me for 'aving played stool pigeon. I asked the warden to 'ave me transferred to some other job—any kind of a job, even to making jute sacks, the place where your lungs finally get eaten away. I told the warden I was scared of Tovesky. The warden wouldn't pay any attention to me, told me not to worry, that Tovesky, after the time 'e'd done in the 'ole, wasn't going to bother anybody. And then it 'appened!

"Nobody knows 'ow those things start in a prison—who gives the signal—but all of a sudden it was like all 'ell broke loose in that machine shop. Everybody began pounding with 'ammers and wrenches, yelling at the top of their lungs, so that the guards wouldn't know which way to turn. One man knew—that was Tovesky. All the others 'ad started that racket just so 'e'd get 'is chance at me. There was a file in 'is 'and, a file 'e 'ad sharpened, so you could punch it through an oak tree. And 'e 'ad me down on my back, sitting on top of me, telling me what a rat I was." Limehouse Johnny stopped. His face was ashen. Tiny beads of perspiration were trickling from his forehead down to his chin.

Antoinette watched him breathlessly, her ordinarily soft, pliant body tense.

"That's where Dane came in," Limehouse Johnny said in a drained voice. "He jumped for Tovesky, and that file—instead of going into me—went into Dane. The guards came and it was all over. They took Dane to the prison 'ospital. It was weeks before 'e got out. So you see—" Limehouse Johnny made a gesture with his hands, then stopped.

Antoinette sat there, a curiously entranced expression on her face. It was as though she had been transferred into another world, not a world of prisons—she was familiar enough with that—but into a world where men did things without the thought of gain, without a thought of the consequences.

"What about Dane?" she whispered. "Why does he want to kill people—two people? Didn't he tell you?"

"After 'e got out of the 'ospital," Limehouse Johnny said, "they put 'im in a cell with me. 'E was sort of unpopular with the rest of the cons, the same as I was now. But it didn't bother 'im none. Just think of 'im risking his life for a rat like me wot wasn't anything to 'im. None of the cons was anything to 'im. 'E was always sort of . . . sort of apart. And then my time was up. Pete 'ad another six months to go. I sort of 'ated to leave 'im."

"But didn't he tell you . . . didn't he tell you why he wanted to kill the two men? You were in the same cell together. He must have talked."

"'E didn't talk much; 'e never talked much. Only when 'e first got out of the 'ospital, 'e said something. I said, 'I'm glad you didn't die,

Pete,' and 'Thanks,' and 'e looked at me in a kind of a funny way. 'I couldn't die,' he said. 'There's a couple of men where I come from that have got to die before I do.'" Somehow or other Limehouse Johnny managed to say that in the same way Antoinette had heard Dane talk, in that far-off, frozen way, as though he were looking at, addressing a distant mountain.

She shivered. Her eyes were alight, her lips parted. She was breathing softly.

"We can't let him do it, Johnny," she said, her tone insistent, yet calculating. "He'll be caught."

Johnny said: "'E *got* to do it. 'E can't live unless 'e does it."

Antoinette leaned forward.

"We have a half a dozen men here. Any of them could do it without being nabbed." She waited, then: "If the two men he wants to kill were dead, that would end it, wouldn't it?"

Limehouse Johnny looked startled.

"We don't know who they are."

"I think I know at least one of them," Antoinette said, "and it ought to be easy to find out who the other is."

Limehouse Johnny screwed up his thin face. Deep lines formed on his forehead.

"'Ow are you going to make 'em do it?" he asked. "Why would 'Arry the Ox, or the baron, or Gimpy, or any of them do it?"

Antoinette stood up. For a long time she looked intently at Limehouse Johnny. Then:

"Perhaps I could persuade them. I might tell them there was money in it. I don't know—"

"You'll 'ave to work fast," Limehouse Johnny said, his voice flat.

"Why?"

"'E's got a knife—one of the carving knives. I gave it to 'im."

Antoinette stiffened. A feeling of unreasoning anger swept over her. Johnny was a fool. Why had he done a thing like that? The next minute she got hold of herself. She could understand perfectly why Johnny would do a thing like that. She smiled at Johnny, the same warm, intimate smile.

"I guess it doesn't matter anyhow," she said. "Maybe I couldn't make the others do it. They're not like you and me, Johnny. Not like you. Dane doesn't mean a thing to them. What the hell would they care if he went to the chair? I'd care. You—" She broke off abruptly. There was an unnatural brilliance in her eyes as she stood looking steadily at Limehouse Johnny. "If the two men were dead—"

Limehouse Johnny wanted to move, he wanted to turn away and couldn't. It was becoming all too clear to him that she was right. He was a rat, a thief, a blackmailer. And yet— Little by little every vestige of color went out of Limehouse Johnny's face. His frail body quivered a little. He dropped his eyes.

"I guess," he said, "it's up to me. I . . . I should have thought of that right away. I . . . I should have done it without thinking. Pete didn't stop to think when Tovesky—"

"Johnny says you want to see me," Peter Dane said.

He looked about Antoinette's room, much as Limehouse Johnny had done. But for some reason she couldn't understand, he frowned, almost scowled.

"Yes," Antoinette said. "You've got to promise me something. You remember it was me who fixed it so

There was rage in Dane's eyes. He put a hand against Antoinette's shoulder and sent her reeling backward.

you could stay here. Mother didn't want you."

"I can go."

She paid no attention to that.

"It's about those two men you want to kill. I want you to promise me not to do anything for a while, for a couple of weeks."

Peter Dane stared at her, his eyes brooding, then he shook his head, but said nothing.

She looked at him with exasperation. Was there no way of getting to him, no way of penetrating the wall he had built around himself? She took swift strides until she was directly in front of him. She placed both her hands on his shoulders. She drew him toward her until her body was flat against his.

"Come to life," she whispered. "Everything will be all right. Come to life."

For seconds he stood unresisting without a move, then he jerked himself away. His face was gray, drawn; there was rage in his eyes. He put a hand against her shoulder and sent her reeling backward. She almost lost her balance.

Antoinette stared at him, speechless. Her face was a dead-white, making her lips even more red; her green eyes were furious and startled. No one had ever done a thing like that to her before.

Seconds went by, and more seconds. At last Peter Dane spoke:

"I'm sorry," he said. "I shouldn't have done that. I couldn't help it. I owe you an apology. It was . . . it was the perfume—ylang-ylang."

The fury went out of her eyes, but her face stayed white.

"What's the perfume got to do with it?" she asked.

Peter Dane had turned as if to go, but now he turned back. The lines in his face had deepened, his manner was unwilling, ungracious.

"I suppose I owe you more than an apology," he said in a monotone, "an explanation. My wife used that perfume. She was the only one I'd ever known—"

"Your wife? You're married?"

He shook his head.

"Divorced?"

Peter Dane's face twitched once, then he snarled at her:

"Damn you! What the hell business is it of yours? She's dead."

Antoinette said nothing. She stood where she was for a while, then with swaying hips walked over to the dressing table and looked at herself in the mirror. Outwardly she was calm, but deep inside every emotion of which she was capable was in a tumult. Suddenly she spun around.

"The knife . . . the knife that Johnny gave you! I want it back."

The lines went out of Peter Dane's face. The eyes went blank; his face went stony.

"What knife?"

Peter Dane walked out.

V.

A week had gone by since Mordecai Breen had taken up his quarters at Dr. Park-Minton's house on West End Avenue. So far nothing had happened and Breen was getting restive. Seeing the same faces day in and day out was getting on his nerves. His original dislike for Dr. Cecil Park-Minton had, if anything, increased, and that, for no particular reason at all. To Le Bar, Breen was more or less indifferent. Le Bar wasn't a very decisive personality. He seemed to have few opinions of his own, moved in the shadow, as it were, of Park-Minton. Breen classified him as Park-Minton's stooge, and let it go at that.

Breen's duties were simple

enough. If a strange patient came to call on either Park-Minton or Le Bar, Breen, clad in a white jacket, impersonating a male nurse, stood by. When Le Bar and Park-Minton went out to make their rounds, Breen accompanied them in the car. At night he made the rounds of the house, saw to it that all the doors were locked and that the ground-floor windows and shutters were properly closed. The whole thing was monotonous. Outside of Park-Minton and Le Bar, there were two other occupants of the house—a Japanese who combined the functions of cook, butler, and chauffeur, and a nurse who, considering that she was working for two surgeons, had the happy name of Miss Carver.

It was after dinner. Dr. Park-Minton, Breen, and Le Bar were sitting in Park-Minton's study. The conversation was sparse. Breen was bored, fretful. He had brought along a fair supply of liquor, but by now it was all gone. Le Bar took down a book from one of the shelves and began to read. Dr. Park-Minton adjusted the patch over his left eye, and with the other he looked at Breen.

"I imagine," he said in a soft voice, "that you seldom have had an easier, more congenial, or profitable job than this one."

"That's what you think," Breen said truculently. He got out of the chair in which he had been sprawling and paced the floor restlessly. He came to an abrupt halt. "Say, isn't there anything to drink in this house? Ring for the Jap. I want a drink."

Park-Minton's eye gleamed. He shook his head. "We never have any liquor in this house."

"What?" Breen was indignant. His face was nervous.

Le Bar looked up from his book, an odd expression on his narrow face.

"I want a drink," Breen insisted suddenly. "Send the Jap out. Tell him to get me a couple of bottles. I'll pay for it." He waited.

Neither of the others said anything, and then strangely enough it was Le Bar, who scarcely ever expressed an opinion of his own, who spoke:

"We—Dr. Park-Minton and I—would rather you didn't drink. We . . . we'd rather not have any spiritous liquors in this house."

Mordecai Breen glared at him in astonishment, then he looked at Park-Minton. The latter had a queer, brittle expression in his face. His sensitive mouth was set. Breen, who had one of the most violent tempers imaginable, let out something of a roar.

"Say, what the hell is it to you two whether or not I take a drink? I didn't come here to have my personal habits renovated. I'm here to look out for you two guys and that's what I'm doing. The whole idea is lousy. If you want to know what I think, I'll tell you. I think you're screwy. Nobody's going to do anything to you. This fellow Dane, if he was going to take a crack at you, would have done it before this."

He broke off abruptly, walked to one of the windows and stared out into the night, considering whether or not he ought to quit. He stood there for a long time seeing nothing. The avenue was dark and deserted. Suddenly he stiffened. Someone was across the street, moving to and fro in the shadows of the opposite buildings. It was a tall man who had a slender build. Breen couldn't be sure—the nearest lamp-post was some twenty feet away—but he got

the impression that the man across the way was studying Park-Minton's house. Breen let the curtains fall back into place and turned slowly back to the others.

"This Dane," he said, making his voice soft, "would he be a tall, thin fellow?"

Dr. Park-Minton nodded. "What made you ask that?" he said.

"Because there's somebody like that across the street, someone who I think is casing—looking over this house."

Dr. Park-Minton sprang to his feet and darted to the window. He pulled the curtains aside and looked out.

Breen let out an oath, went to the window, took hold of Park-Minton by the elbow and yanked him away.

"Are you nuts?" he growled. "Supposing that's Dane and he's got a gun, with you standing by the window making a target of yourself?" Breen's voice choked with exasperation.

Le Bar had risen. He was pressing his body against one of the bookcases. His face was white, frightened. The gray eyes looked with fear toward the window.

"He's right," he said to Park-Minton. "What . . . what are we going to do?"

Breen ignored him. To Park-Minton he said:

"Well, did you get a look at him?"

"Yes."

"Was it Dane?"

"I don't know," Park-Minton said. "It might be. It was too dark for me to be sure."

"Can't you tell from the way he walked, from the way he held himself, or something?"

Dr. Park-Minton shook his head. "I didn't know Peter Dane well enough to be able to identify him from things like that. I only saw him twice in my life."

Mordecai Breen dropped into a chair. He glowered at Park-Minton. When he spoke, his voice was tight and irritable, devoid of the patience he tried to put into it.

"I've been here a week," he said, "I've been trying to get some dope from you that would help, and you gave me nothing—nothing outside of what you told me in my office. And now you tell me that a guy who beat you up, maimed you, and is coming to kill you, only met you twice in his life. Is that reasonable?"

Park-Minton shrugged, unmoved by Breen's outburst. The latter, his face filled with disgust, rose, went back to the window, parted the curtains an inch or so and again peered out. The man across the street was still there, still facing Park-Minton's house. His head went up and down as though he were taking in the various floors one by one.

Suddenly there was the thin shriek of a police siren. A patrol car came up and stopped, with brakes screaming. Two policemen jumped out. They looked up and down the street, up at the buildings. One of them spoke to the thin man who had been watching Park-Minton's house. The thin man shook his head. The sound of another siren, clanging bells, and the next moment the street was filled with fire engines and auxiliary apparatus. The firemen sprang down, began running to and fro ringing doorbells, creating a scene of confusion.

Le Bar said nervously, "What is it? What's happening?"

Without turning, Breen said: "Fire somewhere. Here comes another police car."

Breen kept his yellow-brown eyes fixed on the street, not on the firemen or the police, but on the thin

man. There was no fire. Somebody had turned in a false alarm—deliberately? Had someone purposely created all this confusion? Why? Was it just a trick to create a diversion so that this Peter Dane—if the man across the street *was* Peter Dane—could slip into Park-Minton's house? Was he hoping that one of the firemen would ring Park-Minton's bell, get the door open, and that he could then slip in, perhaps in the guise of a reporter, or something like that? Or was he hoping that Park-Minton and Le Bar would run out into the street to see what was happening, or at least open the windows and look out? All that was possible—but wrong.

The thin man detached himself from the small crowd that had gathered and walked away. Ten minutes later the fire engines departed. The police cars stayed a little longer, then they, too, left, and the street was quiet.

Mordecai Breen came away from the window. He glanced at Park-Minton. There was a weird look in Park-Minton's one eye. It was focused into space. His nostrils were quivering, his lips were working without making a sound. Then he looked at Mordecai Breen.

"It's all over," Breen said. "There was no fire."

"You don't suppose," Park-Minton said slowly, "that all that was prearranged to enable Dane—"

Breen shook his head vigorously. "I thought of that myself at first," he said, "but the guy who was watching the house walked away. I saw him go down the street as fast as he could, the minute the police car got here. When you come to think of it, if you're out to kill somebody, you don't fix it to get all the cops you can around, not to mention a lot of firemen that might get in your way. There's nothing to it. Say, you sure you haven't got something to drink in this place, something you dish out for medicinal purposes?"

"Yes, I'm sure," Park-Minton said. "But are *you* sure that the man we think might be Dane, walked away?"

"Of course I'm sure," Breen said fretfully.

Nurse Carver came in. Nurse Carver interested Breen. She was about forty, with prematurely white hair, and had one of the most placid faces that Breen had ever seen. She had a strong, vigorous body, and for a woman, extraordinarily large hands. For some inexplicable reason, whenever Breen saw Nurse Carver and Park-Minton together, he got the impression that Park-Minton disliked her. And what was even more strange, Breen had a distinct feeling that Nurse Carver knew that Park-Minton disliked her and enjoyed it. If he didn't like her, why hadn't he dismissed her? She had been with him for years, Park-Minton had said to Breen when he first got there.

"Will you want me any more tonight, doctor?" Nurse Carver said. Her voice was husky, deferential.

"Not tonight, Miss Carver," Park-Minton said in an abstract fashion.

Nurse Carver turned to go. Her eyes met Breen's.

"They tell me," Breen said, "that there's nothing to drink in this house. Maybe you got some."

Nurse Carver's eyes widened. Then: "No. There's nothing to drink in this house." She laughed softly, without moving a muscle in her face.

"Miss Carver!" Park-Minton's voice was sharp.

"Sorry, doctor," Nurse Carver said.

She turned her back on Breen and made for the door. That broad, strong back of hers shook a little, as though she were still laughing silently.

VI.

Mordecai Breen, sound asleep, was dreaming. He was dreaming that he was playing with a huge great Dane. The big dog liked to play. It stood on its hind legs with its front paws on Breen's shoulders, letting Breen push it all around the room, pretending that it was trying to push Breen around. Breen had the dog up against the wall beside the door. The great Dane was wagging its tail, banging it against the door. It made a lot of noise, so much noise that Breen opened his eyes. The great Dane was still banging its tail against the door. Only there was no great Dane, and it dawned on Breen that there was really someone knocking from the outside. He sat bolt upright, fumbled for the switch, and even as he turned on the light, he heard a voice—Nurse Carver's voice.

"Mr. Breen! Mr. Breen!"

Breen, now wide awake, said, "Just a minute," snatched up an old dressing gown, put it on, and opened the door.

Nurse Carver said: "Dr. le Bar is dead. He's been murdered." Her face stayed placid; her voice was even unexcited.

Mordecai Breen let out an oath. He glanced at the clock; it was after two. He said, "Show me."

Nurse Carver started to lead the way when Dr. Park-Minton came hurrying down the hall. He was a weird sight. His hair was disheveled like one roused from a sudden slumber. He wore a purple velvet lounging robe, but the weirdness came from the fact that he hadn't stopped to put on the black patch that covered his missing eye. The empty socket somehow was repulsive.

"What is it?" he said sharply. "What is all this noise?"

"She says," Breen snarled, "that Le Bar is dead—murdered."

Park-Minton stopped in his tracks as though he had been struck from behind.

"Dane!" he muttered. "I knew it. I knew something would happen. All that business out in the street, the fire engines—"

"Don't be a fool!" Breen roared. The roar was to cover his own confusion.

Park-Minton of course was right. And he, Breen, had been right when that same idea had first occurred to him. But Dane had put it over on him. To be sure, he had seen Dane go down the street; but Dane might have come back. Or Dane might have had a confederate. But even so, how had the confederate gotten in? How? The hell with it.

"Where's Le Bar's body?"

"In his room," Nurse Carver explained.

Breen knew where it was. He brushed past Nurse Carver and Park-Minton and dashed into Le Bar's room. The lights were on. Le Bar lay on the floor. A knife was buried in his breast.

Breen stepped across Le Bar's body, went over to the extension telephone on Le Bar's desk, picked it up and called police headquarters. He asked for Sergeant Hammerstein and got him.

"There's been a murder," Breen said, and gave Park-Minton's address.

Hammerstein said: "Why not? You never have a client unless there's a murder."

Breen said, "Go climb a tree," and hung up.

That he should have said, "Go climb a tree," in view of what occurred to him next, was a little ironical. One of the windows was open. A breeze was blowing the curtains back. Breen looked at the window. A small square had been cut out of the pane just below the catch, sufficiently large for a man to reach through and release the catch. Breen went to the window and looked out into the back yard. There was a tree right there—a tree big enough and close enough so that anyone who could have climbed it, could have reached the window and forced it. The square of glass lay on the floor. It had adhesive tape against it—tape that was used to hold it while it was being cut so that it wouldn't fall and awaken Le Bar.

Breen saw it all clearly now. Somebody had turned in a false alarm in order to create all that tremendous excitement in the street. And while that was going on, the murderer—the thin man whom Breen had seen going down the street—had made his way around to Riverside Drive. Here he had entered one of the houses, or perhaps it had been simpler—had found an alley that brought him into the back yard of one of the Drive houses. Then he had climbed a few fences until he found himself in Park-Minton's back yard. Now all he had to do was to climb the tree. It was all so simple and he, Breen, was a dope.

Breen left the window the way it was. He turned back to Le Bar—Le Bar, lying on his back with the knife in his breast buried up to the handle. Blood stained Le Bar's green and yellow pajamas. That wasn't surprising. The surprising thing was that a lot of three-by-five filing cards and the wooden box that held them lay scattered all over the floor.

Some of the cards were in La Bar's outstretched hand!

Breen knelt down to look at the cards. They were typewritten, recording the case histories, apparently, of Le Bar's patients. Only about a dozen or so cards were in Le Bar's hand. That didn't make sense. Was Le Bar stabbed while he was going over the case histories of his patients at that hour of the night? Or did the murderer have some peculiar interest in those case histories? Had the killer scattered the cards about? No, that didn't make sense either. If it had been the murderer, there wouldn't be any cards in Le Bar's hand. Had Le Bar grabbed the cards after he had been stabbed? That wasn't likely. If he had had time enough to do that, he would have had time enough to cry out for help. That made Breen think of something.

His yellow-brown eyes sultry, he said to Nurse Carver: "How'd you come to find him? What made you look in his room?"

Nurse Carver's face stayed placid. She betrayed no embarrassment.

"I couldn't sleep," she said. "I suffer from insomnia. I wanted Dr. le Bar to give me some sleeping tablets. I've often done that—knocked on his door late at night, and asked him for them. He doesn't mind. I tried to sleep tonight. I tried not to wake him, especially as it was almost two o'clock, and finally I couldn't stand it any longer. I came and knocked on his door. Dr. le Bar is a light sleeper. I know. I've awakened him many a time. I knocked tonight and got no response. I knocked loudly again and again, and then— Well, I don't know, call it woman's intuition if

you want to, even though there is no such thing, I became frightened; perhaps it's because you're here, a private detective. It is a strange thing to have happen in a house. Anyway, I became frightened, opened the door and turned on the light, and there . . . and there he was."

Mordecai Breen looked at her moodily, then shifted his eyes to Park-Minton.

"Now I hope you're satisfied," Park-Minton said. "Until now you've been thinking that I was slightly out of my mind—a little cowardly perhaps—that Le Bar and I stood in no danger whatsoever. Tonight I tried to suggest to you that those fire engines and the police, when there was no fire—"

"All right, all right," Mordecai Breen said.

His face was nervous, his mouth wolfish, and his words fretful. Maybe it was his fault. His eyes faded away and came to rest on the dead man on the floor, on the blood on his green and yellow pajamas. Mordecai Breen knelt down and looked at the cards that were scattered over the floor and the few that were in Le Bar's hand. They told him nothing except that each card bore a number, besides the history of Le Bar's or Park-Minton's patients. To Nurse Carver he said:

"What do these mean?"

Nurse Carver's face stayed immobile. Her eyes, that were something between blue and gray, remained inscrutable.

"They're just records," she said. "He kept his records here in this room. It's obvious what they are, isn't it?"

"Yeah," Mordecai Breen said. "It's obvious what they are, but why they should be all over the floor and some of them in his hand after he's dead, isn't so obvious."

Nurse Carver shrugged her broad, capable shoulders, and said nothing.

Ten minutes later Hammerstein arrived. Hammerstein, short, stocky, with an aggressive expression, brought plain-clothes men with him, fingerprint men, camera experts, and a little man with a bag, who turned out to be an assistant medical examiner. The sergeant, surveying the scene, said:

"Don't you ever have any clients that live? What is all this? How do you come to be here? If I hadn't been working late, you wouldn't have gotten me."

"I never have any luck," Breen said.

"I suppose that's meant to be a dirty crack," Hammerstein said. "Open up. What's it all about?"

Mordecai Breen shrugged and with his chin indicated Dr. Park-Minton.

Park-Minton explained. He told Hammerstein about Peter Dane, about his employing Breen as his bodyguard, about the fire engines and the police cars. He explained it all about as vaguely as he had explained it originally to Mordecai Breen.

Sergeant Hammerstein listened skeptically, watching in the meanwhile his men examining fingerprints, looking at the window, watching the medical examiner, then:

"Why should this Dane want to kill you or your assistant, Le Bar?" he demanded brusquely.

Dr. Park-Minton's answer was a long time in coming. It was easy enough to parry the questions of a private detective whom you're hiring at a high rate, but not so easy when it came to evading an

ordinary policeman. At last Park-Minton said:

"This Dane is out of his mind. As a doctor, I understand the symptoms perfectly. Dane suffers under the delusion that Le Bar and I injured him; don't ask me how, I don't know." He pointed with his finger at the empty socket. "Dane assaulted me and this is what happened. They sent him to prison, of course, which only added to his—" Park-Minton broke off with a shrug.

"Yeah I know about that," Hammerstein said. Then to the medical examiner: "How long has he been dead?"

"Not more than an hour or so. Rigor mortis hasn't set in," the little doctor said. "Can't tell exactly."

Nurse Carver said, indicating the cards on the floor: "Can I gather these up? They're the records of our patients."

"Sure," Hammerstein said. "Why not?"

Nurse Carver started to pick up the cards, then stopped.

"I suppose the ones he's got in his hand, you'll want to keep."

Hammerstein eyed her dully. "I don't see why—" he started.

Breen said: "Yes. The ones in his hand we'll want to keep."

The sergeant glowered at him. "Say, who's running this?"

Breen paid no attention to him. To Nurse Carver and Park-Minton, he said:

"We won't need you any more. The sergeant and I have got some things we want to discuss."

For a moment it looked as though Park-Minton were going to argue the matter, but then he moved his shoulders and walked out. Nurse Carver stayed for a few seconds longer. She looked at the sergeant, then at Mordecai Breen, then she followed Dr. Park-Minton.

"You act as though you knew something," Hammerstein said, "but then you always act that way. That's to make your clients think you're a detective instead of a punk newspaper reporter."

Breen said: "Look at the bed."

"All right," Hammerstein said. "I'm looking at the bed. There's a little blood there. That means he was stabbed while he was in bed. He wasn't killed instantly. He got up, staggered around the room in the dark, knocked over the file box with the cards. Don't ask me why. How the hell do I know why? Don't ask me why he grabbed a fistful of the cards. I don't know that either, but I suppose you do."

Mordecai Breen shook his head. "He was stabbed in bed all right, and he was bleeding, and you say he got out of bed and staggered around. Now look at the blood on his pajamas. If he stood up, why didn't the blood run *down* toward his feet? Why did it run *up* toward his chin?"

The assistant medical examiner made a chuckling sound. "That's an interesting idea."

Two of the plain-clothes men stopped their work and looked at Breen.

Hammerstein glowered. "Anything to make it harder," he growled. "Keep on thinking of some more things."

Breen said: "Not me. I'm tired. I'm going to bed. Believe it or not, there isn't a drink in this lousy joint."

VII.

There was no regular time for breakfast at Tessie Bonville's boardinghouse. You had your breakfast whenever you felt like it. Antoinette generally had hers in her room along with the morning paper. Munching a piece of toast, she

scanned the front page. The toast slipped from her fingers, her eyes widened, her breath came faster. There it was right on the front page!

It naturally would be on the front page. The murder of as famous a surgeon as Dr. le Bar was news. It would have been news even if he'd only been just the assistant of an even more famous surgeon—Park-Minton.

Little Limehouse Johnny hadn't failed her!

Antoinette had acted with promptness and decision. Two days before, she had gotten in touch with Tessie's lawyer, had asked him to look up Peter Dane's case and how he had come to be sent to prison. Tessie's lawyer had had little difficulty in finding that out. In addition to Park-Minton, the other principal witness against Peter Dane had been Le Bar. Antoinette had reasoned rightly then, that the two men Dane wanted to kill were Park-Minton and Le Bar. Of course she might be wrong. It might be only Park-Minton and someone else. Or it might be neither Park-Minton nor Le Bar. There might be two other men. But then something had happened last night that had satisfied her that she was right.

Shortly after dinner Peter Dane had gone out. Limehouse Johnny had told Antoinette about that instantly, and just as instantly Antoinette had made up her mind. She had sent Limehouse Johnny to Park-Minton's house. Dane had a head start, but he had no money and would have to walk. At best it would take him twenty minutes, whereas Johnny, in a taxi, could be there in five. Johnny was the first to arrive and from a safe distance he saw Dane standing there looking up at Park-Minton's house, just as Mordecai Breen had seen him from the inside. And Johnny, from a drugstore on Broadway, phoned Antoinette. Antoinette already had decided what to do in case Dane made his appearance at Park-Minton's house. She, too, went to a drugstore to make a telephone call, to make sure that the call wouldn't be traced back to Tessie's rooming house. Then she went home and waited.

Peter Dane had no key. When he returned, he rang and as per instructions, the Negress reported his arrival to Antoinette. Antoinette had met Dane as he was going upstairs to his room.

"Where have you been?"

"Just for a walk," Dane had said shortly. Then he went past her on to his room.

Antoinette made no attempt to stop him. She was satisfied. She would have been even more satisfied had she realized last night how swiftly, how determinedly little Limehouse Johnny had acted. It was here in the paper. Le Bar was dead, stabbed. Johnny would take care of Park-Minton next, and then . . . then Dane would be himself again. Something could be done with him once that insane idea was out of his mind.

Antoinette left her breakfast unfinished. She gathered her soft pale-green negligee more tightly about herself and went downstairs to the dining room. Harry the Ox was there and so was Peter Dane. Peter Dane didn't look up as she came in, but Harry the Ox did.

"Good morning," Harry the Ox said. "Nice to think of you coming down and having breakfast with me. I don't remember that happening before." There was touch of sarcasm in Harry the Ox's voice. He took his opaque eyes from Antoinette and let them rest on Peter

Dane. His eyes were unfriendly, his big mouth was askew.

"If you've finished your breakfast," Antoinette said, "I'd like to talk to Dane—alone."

Harry the Ox put the napkin to his mouth, then flung it on the table. His face was dark, scowling; then he got up.

"I know when I'm not wanted," he said.

"That's funny," Antoinette said carelessly. "You never knew before."

Harry the Ox made a growling sound deep down in his chest and walked out.

Antoinette sat down next to Dane. She had brought the newspaper along and now put it down beside him. Dane looked up from his plate at Antoinette, without interest. She pointed to the account of the murder of Le Bar. Peter Dane didn't comprehend.

"Read it," she said, with a trace of impatience.

Dane read. His sparse frame grew taut. His gaunt face became stony. The account was brief enough. The police had given out no details. There was no mention of the filing cards containing the case histories of Le Bar's patients. There was no mention of the blood that had run up instead of down. It did state, of course, that Le Bar had been stabbed, but there was no description of the knife, and the account wound up with the usual statement that the police had several important clues. That was all.

Peter Dane glanced briefly at Antoinette, then turned to his coffee.

Antoinette said, "You don't seem pleased."

Dane put down his coffee. His words clipped, his voice terse, he said:

"Why should I be?"

"You're hard to please," Antoinette said. She made her voice gentle, almost pleading. "He was one of the two you wanted to kill, wasn't he?"

"Yes, but not the important one."

Antoinette smiled. "Don't worry. Park-Minton will be the next. I'll see to that just . . . just as I saw to this one."

Peter Dane's hand was still on his coffee cup. The cup rattled in the saucer. He stared at her. There was disbelief in his eyes, then something else came into them—a look that frightened her.

"*You* saw to it?" he said harshly. "You . . . you had him killed?"

"Yes," she said, without elation. Somehow she had pictured this thing differently. She had visualized this moment as a proud one, with Dane grateful. "I wanted to save you," she said. "You couldn't have killed him without being caught. You can't kill Park-Minton without getting caught."

After a long time Dane, his voice filled with bitterness, said: "Not now, I can't." He stood up and looked down at her. His face darkened by degrees, his eyes filled with uncontrollable rage. "Just because I'm staying here, living under your and your mother's roof, eating your food, that doesn't give you a right to interfere with my life. Who asked you to save me? Who told you that I wanted to be saved? And now it's going to be ten times as hard. Park-Minton will be on his guard. The police will be protecting him. I won't be able to get near him. Damn you!"

"Don't," she said. Her face was white. "I promise you he'll die just as Le Bar died. I promise," she repeated earnestly.

The anger went out of him. His

tall form sagged and again he looked uncomprehending.

"Why," he said, "should you want to do this for me?"

Antoinette looked away. "I told you," she said softly. "I wanted to save you from yourself, and"—she didn't blush; now she looked him straight in the eyes—"for me."

Peter Dane shook his head as though to clear a befogged mind.

"You and I could do great things together," Antoinette said with gentle insistence. "Once you were satisfied, peaceful, loved, what a man you could be! I don't know what it's all about. You won't tell me. I only know that it's something that is eating your insides away, that you want to see two men dead. Well—" She made a gesture with her slim hand.

Peter Dane licked his dry lips. He tried to sound reasonable, to keep his voice from being strident.

"I suppose I ought to thank you," he said, "but let me make something clear to you. I don't know how you found it out or guessed at it, but you're right. I want to see Park-Minton dead. But I don't want anybody else to kill him." His voice rose. *"I want to kill him!* I want to kill him with my own hands . . . *and with a knife!"*

Slowly Antoinette got to her feet. The brilliant green eyes were uncertain.

"You're crazy," she breathed. "You're crazy and you're driving me crazy. I don't know what I see in you, but—" Idly she picked up the napkin that Harry the Ox had thrown down. She twisted it and tore at it as if trying to rend it into shreds. Then she let it slip to the floor. "You mean . . . you mean you can't be happy unless you—"

"That's what I mean. I want to kill him myself. I want to talk to him before he dies, to remind him—All right, I'm crazy. A man can be crazy, can't he, if he wants to? Being in prison— No, that's not it. I went crazy before they put me in jail."

For a long time Antoinette stood very still without saying a word. Then a sudden change came over her. Every trace of indecision left her. She became her old self, strong, sure—the Antoinette who could hold at bay without an effort the half dozen or so ex-convicts who surrounded her, who stood ready to devour her at the slightest sign of weakness. She walked close to Peter Dane, her hips swaying, her hands making tiny gestures.

"If you could have your way," she said, "if you could kill Park-Minton, would you be happy then? Would you—"

Peter Dane looked at her dully. "What do you mean?"

A slow smile came to Antoinette's lips. "Give me two days," she said, "three, and I'll bring you Park-Minton—alive. I'll bring him to you on a platter!"

She patted Peter Dane on the shoulder in a comforting way, like a mother telling her son to go and play, that everything would be all right. Then she walked out.

Peter Dane watched her go. He had a strange sense of unreality. But then he had that for a long time —more than two years.

Antoinette went into the game room. Harry the Ox was playing pool with Halverson. Baron Lush sat at the card table playing solitaire. No one else was there.

Antoinette beckoned to the baron. Carefully he placed the queen of diamonds on the king of spades and added the jack of clubs. After that he rose and came over to the pool table. Harry the Ox put down his

cue. He looked at Antoinette. Halverson put down his cue and looked away.

"I want you boys to do something for me," Antoinette said.

Halverson turned his blond head and took in Antoinette with his cobalt-blue eyes. Harry the Ox, his mouth sullen, said:

"Why come to me? If you want anything done, why don't you ask this new guy, this Dane? You like him."

Antoinette slipped her arm through Harry the Ox's arm. Her fingers played on his wrist. She looked at him sideways through her long, curling lashes. Harry the Ox's huge frame quivered.

"I was only kidding, Antoinette," Harry the Ox said. "What do you want?"

To Baron Lush, Antoinette said: "I want you to rent a house—a furnished house—under some name, any name. But not a place like this. It's got to be a place with class. It's got to be in a swell neighborhood. Pay whatever you have to, a month's rent down, or two months. We won't need it more than a couple of days. You oughtn't to have any trouble. You look the part."

"What do you want me to do?" Harry the Ox broke in, frowning. It seemed to him that the baron was getting the preference and he didn't like it.

Antoinette gave his arm a little squeeze.

"Harry, you and Halverson will have plenty to do," she said softly. "As soon as the baron gets the house, we'll talk it over." She let go of Harry the Ox, looked at each one of them in turn with her green eyes brilliant, promising, and made for the door, walking in that peculiar swaying, provocative way of hers. At the door she paused, turned and smiled. "I like men," she said, "who do things—men that you can count on."

Harry the Ox, his mouth slack, watched her slip through the door. Halverson looked at Harry the Ox. Baron Lush was studying his perfectly manicured fingernails.

Outside, Antoinette ran into Limehouse Johnny. Her expression changed. She wasn't acting now. She said:

"Thanks, Johnny, for last night."

"I called you right away—" Johnny said.

"I know, and thanks for the rest. Don't tell me about it, I don't want to know. I didn't know you were going to do it or I would have waited up for you. I think you've got more guts than all the rest of them put together."

Limehouse Johnny blushed. "I don't . . . I don't—" he stammered.

"It's in the papers," Antoinette said, "but don't tell Dane about your having any part in it. He doesn't think it was a very good idea. And Johnny, don't do anything else. Dane says he's got to kill Park-Minton himself. You understand, Johnny? He's got to do it himself."

Limehouse Johnny looked puzzled. He didn't understand, at least not all of it. He was sure of one thing, though. She liked Dane and that made it all right with him, Limehouse Johnny. He liked Dane, too.

VIII.

Sergeant Hammerstein, looking gloomy, said: "Are you going to live here for the rest of your life? It'll be soft so long as nothing happens to this Park-Minton, but after that you'll have to go back to sleeping in the park. This case is making a big stir in the newspapers. Park-Min-

ton is a big shot and so was Le Bar, and the papers don't like it because we cops don't give 'em any dope. We don't give 'em any dope because we haven't got any."

Mordecai Breen, restive, said: "I'm getting out of here at the end of the week. Park-Minton says he won't need me any more. He doesn't think much of me anyhow because Le Bar got killed. It's all right with me. The guy won't let me have any liquor. I had to phone Slap-happy the day before yesterday to come and smuggle in a few bottles. Want a drink?"

Hammerstein shook his head. Three days had elapsed since the murder of Le Bar and he hadn't turned up a thing, had found no trace of Peter Dane; and such evidence as the police had, meant really nothing—the small square of glass cut out of the windows; the cards in Le Bar's hand; the knife.

"What about fingerprints?" Mordecai Breen asked.

"Oh, sure," Hammerstein growled. "Every amateur dick figures all you have to have is some fingerprints, and the case is in the bag. Sure there were fingerprints. There were fingerprints on them cards. They were Le Bar's and that Carver woman's. Why wouldn't they be on the cards? They both handled 'em enough. She made 'em out and he studied 'em."

"What about the knife?"

Again Hammerstein shook his head. "No fingerprints on the knife. The guy must have worn gloves. And there were no fingerprints on that little piece of glass. Say, what'd you do with that anyway? I've got to have that back. That's evidence."

Breen opened the top drawer of his bureau, took out the piece of glass—the tape was still on it—and gave it to Hammerstein without saying anything.

The sergeant looked into Breen's yellow-brown eyes and a startled expression came over his face.

"You know somethin'," he declared threateningly. "You're holding out on me. If you are, I'll take you down to the station house and have you resisting arrest until there won't be enough left of you to bury. See?"

Mordecai Breen gave a fretful shrug. "When I know something, I'll tell you. Right now I'm guessing. It's the cards that bother me. They don't fit into the picture."

"Forget about the cards," Hammerstein said impatiently. "You're always harping on them. They don't mean a thing. They just happened. Le Bar had 'em in his hand when he was stabbed maybe. Maybe he fell asleep while he was studying them, and the murderer knocked over the file box and dumped the rest of them by accident."

Mordecai Breen went back to the bureau, took out a bottle of whiskey and poured himself a liberal drink.

"I suppose," he said, "the blood on the pajamas was an accident, too—the blood that didn't run down while Le Bar was staggering around, that crawled up toward his chin. Does your conscience ever trouble you when you take your pay check?"

Hammerstein said, "Go to hell," and walked out.

A half hour later Nurse Carver knocked on Breen's door.

"Dr. Park-Minton wants you to come down to the office. There's a patient waiting to see him—somebody he never heard of. The doctor wants you to put on your white coat."

Nurse Carver started to go out, then changed her mind.

"I saw that policeman who is in

charge of this case just go out. Have they . . . have the police found out anything yet? We ought to have those cards back. They're part of our records. If they mean anything to the police, they could make copies of them." Nurse Carver's face was as placid as always.

Mordecai Breen's eyes went flat. "You wouldn't know, would you," he said casually, "if there was anything special about the cards, anything different about the ones in Le Bar's hand from the ones scattered all over the floor?"

Nurse Carver shook her head. "The cards are all the same, except of course that the names of the patients and their ailments differ. They're just cards and they're numbered. The numbers are for cross-reference. Say, for instance, we take an X ray. When I file away the picture, I put the number on the picture that corresponds with the number of the patient's case history as recorded on the card."

Breen took off his coat, slipped into a white linen jacket, and followed Nurse Carver downstairs. On his way to Park-Minton's office Breen went through the waiting room. He saw a very tall, broad-shouldered man sitting there, with soft brown eyes and a wide, gentle mouth—rather a distinguished-looking individual. It was Baron Lush, but he wasn't there under that name. To Nurse Carver he had given the name of Roland. Breen went on into Park-Minton's office.

"Please sit over there," Park-Minton said, "and pretend you are studying something through that microscope. I haven't the faintest idea who this Roland is. From Carver's description, he certainly isn't Dane, but then it might be a friend of Dane's. After what's happened to Le Bar—" With a movement of his shoulders, Dr. Park-Minton broke off. He didn't appear to be particularly worried. He pressed the buzzer.

Nurse Carver appeared and Park-Minton told her to show in the new patient.

Baron Lush was very good. Aside from the fact that he had the natural appearance of a very prosperous, substantial citizen, he was an excellent actor. He was particularly good in playing the part of a husband, though right now he was to be a different sort of husband from the one he generally impersonated whenever Tessie Bonville found some likely victim for the badger game. As Mr. Roland, Baron Lush wasn't the irate husband. He was sorrowful, worried, frightened as to what might happen to his dear wife who was so very ill.

"Our family physician," he told Park-Minton, "thinks she has to be operated on immediately. He suggested you as the best man I could get. I'm a well-to-do man, Dr. Park-Minton," Baron Lush said with becoming modesty. "Any fee—"

"Who is your family physician?" Dr. Park-Minton asked.

"Dr. Wohl. I don't think you'd know him," Baron Lush said. "You see, we come from Washington. The old gentleman has been taking care of my family—the Rolands—for many years. I had him come down here by plane the minute my wife, Mrs. Roland, had her first attack."

"Well, we'll see what we can do," Dr. Park-Minton said in his most reassuring, professional manner. "Perhaps the matter isn't so serious—" Park-Minton checked himself. There was no point in minimizing the case in advance. This Roland looked like a very affluent person, and would unquestionably be willing to pay almost any fee, if

it could be made to appear that it was a very serious matter indeed. And the chances were that this family doctor didn't know what it was all about.

"I'm afraid it's very serious," Baron Lush said gravely. "In fact, it is so serious, Dr. Wohl wouldn't discuss the case with me at all. He says he prefers to have your opinion first."

"Humph," said Park-Minton. "Perhaps I'd better telephone your physician."

"I wonder," said Baron Lush. "I know that this is making an unusual demand on you. But I'm out of my mind with worry. My car and chauffeur are downstairs. I wonder if you could come right over. Perhaps she ought to be moved to a hospital at once. Dr. Wohl is with her. She's in great pain. I know, of course, that money doesn't interest professional men of your standing. I just—you'll excuse me for bringing it up—I just want to say that any amount—"

Right here Baron Lush was at his best, the picture of a strong man about to break down.

Park-Minton's eye filled with sudden suspicion. He looked at Mordecai Breen. The latter for the moment had taken his eye away from the microscope.

"What do you think, Breen?" Park-Minton said. "This is my assistant, Dr. Breen—Mr. Roland."

"If it's not too far," Breen said. "Remember you have an appendectomy at three o'clock. That leaves us an hour, doctor." Breen was bored by what was going on. His mind was on something else. Besides, why should Park-Minton be scared of this guy Roland?

Park-Minton turned inquiringly to Baron Lush.

"It's just east of Fifth Avenue," Baron Lush said. "We can be there in ten minutes, and then of course after that my car and chauffeur are at your disposal." Again Baron Lush was very good. There was just the right amount of pleading in his voice.

"All right," Park-Minton said briskly. "Get ready, Dr. Breen. I'll want you to come along. In case Mrs. Roland will have to be moved to the hospital, you'll have to make the arrangements."

Breen left the room, went upstairs, and changed his coat. He picked up his hat and overcoat, then took a flat blue-black automatic out of the drawer of the little writing table and slipped it into his pocket. He felt silly doing that. This was nothing but an ordinary case. In fact, the whole business was screwy.

Breen went back downstairs. "Mr. Roland" was in the hall, pacing the floor with well-simulated nervousness. Breen went into the waiting room on his way to Park-Minton's office. He met Nurse Carver coming out.

The color in her ordinarily placid face was higher than usual. There was an odd light in her eyes. She had an oblong slip of paper folded in the middle in her hand. To Breen, it looked like a check, but he couldn't be sure. She passed him without a word.

Breen waited a few seconds for Park-Minton to come out. Then he knocked on the door and walked in. Park-Minton was sitting at his desk, staring into space. Park-Minton's face was deathly pale. It was distorted with rage, and that one dark eye of his was ablaze with hate. He seemed to be unaware of Mordecai Breen's presence. Pensively, Breen rubbed a palm across his mouth, then:

"Your patient's waiting."

Park-Minton started.

"Yes, of course," he said. He pushed the partly open middle drawer of his desk shut, rose, took his hat and coat, and followed Breen.

The limousine parked in front of Dr. Park-Minton's house was impressive, and so was the chauffeur—one of the inmates of Tessie Bonville's ménage—Gimpy Myer. Right now Gimpy Myer was attired in a smart whipcord uniform. He wore a smart cap and puttees and stood holding the door.

Baron Lush waited for Park-Minton and Breen to get in. Park-Minton got in. Breen, one foot on the running board, hesitated. His yellow-brown eyes gleamed like a jungle cat's.

"Just a second," he said, "I forgot something." He winked at Park-Minton and patted his pocket as if to indicate he had forgotten his gun.

Park-Minton's shoulders twitched slightly, but he said nothing.

Breen dashed back up the steps and rang the bell. The little Japanese servant opened the door. Breen brushed past him through the waiting room straight into Park-Minton's office. He yanked open the center drawer of Park-Minton's desk and found what he thought he would find—a check book. He opened it to the last entry—a check for three thousand dollars made out to Elsie Carver!

Mordecai Breen sucked in his breath softly. He glanced at the balance. After deducting the check made out to Nurse Carver, Dr. Cecil Park-Minton had just one hundred and sixty-seven dollars and forty cents in the bank. Breen, the lines in his face angular, his brow furrowed with thought, was about to put the check book back when he heard a voice.

"Pardon, please." It was the little Japanese standing in the doorway. His tone was guttural. His little black eyes were solemn, reproving. "So sorry, but will have to tell honorable doctor that Mr. Breen is detecting by examining honorable doctor's private papers. Very sorry."

Without taking his eyes off the Japanese, Breen replaced the check book in the drawer and closed it. His mind was working furiously, grappling with this and that. He stood up slowly.

"I think you ought to," he said. "I think we'll both tell him."

The Japanese's eyes widened for a second, then grew wary. By that time Breen was beside him. Breen's hard fist shot out. It caught the Japanese on the jaw. The little yellow-skinned man went down and lay there still, his eyes closed.

Breen, his mouth wolfish, said: "So sorry. Pardon, please," and walked out to the car.

IX.

The limousine went east through Central Park, headed south, then turned left, off Fifth Avenue. Breen, preoccupied, didn't notice the street. It didn't matter. The house in front of which the car came to a stop was large and imposing.

Baron Lush led the way up the broad steps. A heavy mahogany door swung open. A massive figure in a butler's livery stood there—Harry the Ox.

"This way, please," Baron Lush said.

He conducted them up heavily carpeted stairs to the next floor and into a dimly lighted room. The blinds were closed. A single lamp on a small table gave what illumina-

tion there was. Breen and Park-Minton found themselves in a large bedroom with two doors besides the one through which they had entered. The girl in bed lay there with her eyes shut, her red hair against the white pillow lustrous, despite the dim light. She wore a pale-green marabou bed jacket, with elbow-length sleeves.

"She is sleeping," Baron Lush said in a hushed tone. "Perhaps Dr. Wohl has given her a sedative."

"Where is Dr. Wohl?" Park-Minton asked.

"He may be in my study," Baron Lush said. "I'll go and see." He went out.

Mordecai Breen took in the room without much interest. His mind was back in Park-Minton's house, considering Park-Minton's check book. He took in the girl in bed and felt sorry that she was ill. Mordecai Breen had an eye for women and this one had a lovely face; that luxurious red hair of hers was magnificent. The arms resting on the silken quilt were well shaped, smooth and white.

Park-Minton went over to the bed. He took hold of the girl's wrist and felt her pulse. She let out a soft moan.

"Open the shutters," Park-Minton said, "and let some light into this place."

Breen, his eyes on Park-Minton's hand holding the girl's wrist, said: "That's a magnificent ring, doctor; one of the best I've seen."

Park-Minton jerked his head around to look at Breen stonily. Breen went to one of the windows, tried to open the blinds and couldn't. He went to the other and couldn't open the blinds there either.

"They're stuck," he said, "or something." He went to the switch, pressed it, and lighted the side brackets, flooding the room with light.

Just then Baron Lush came back. He wasn't alone. The big butler was with him. One of the other doors opened and the chauffeur came in. The chauffeur had a long-barreled revolver in his hand.

Mordecai Breen let out an oath. His hand darted toward his pocket where his own gun nestled. Somebody said:

"Don't do that, buddy."

Breen's eyes darted to the left where Mr. Roland—Baron Lush—stood, with the butler beside him. The butler, too, had a gun, much like Breen's own—a short, ugly-looking automatic. It was pointing straight at Breen. Breen's hand dropped away from his pocket. What the hell was going on here? This shouldn't be happening. Was he all wrong?

Park-Minton whirled.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. His voice was cracked. He kept jerking his head from side to side so as to be able to take them all in with his one eye.

Then from behind the chauffeur a short man appeared—a little man with scraggly hair and nondescript eyes. He had two coils of stout rope slung over his arm.

The butler, Harry the Ox, said: "Frisk 'em, Johnny."

Johnny walked behind Breen, patted his pockets, reached into the one that held the gun and took it out. For one wild moment Breen had the idea of spinning and grabbing the little man and holding him in front of himself as a shield, but that would be no good. They'd shoot him in the back before he could do anything. Besides, he didn't get it. The whole thing was unreal—the three men standing there grimly silent, and the little

man with the rope, and the girl in bed. The girl had opened her eyes now. Her eyes were green. The little man left Breen and stepped behind Park-Minton. He searched him for weapons and found none. For a moment there was a weird stillness.

Breen said, "What's the play?"

Harry the Ox said: "Shut your trap. Sit down over there."

Breen sat down in an armchair that was too small for him.

"And you," Harry the Ox said, motioning with his gun to Park-Minton, "sit there."

"I want to know what the meaning of this outrageous affair is?" Park-Minton said, addressing himself to Baron Lush. Park-Minton's voice was unsteady. He got no answer and sat down.

The girl in the bed still lay back with her red hair on the pillow. She was smiling now, looking up at the ceiling dreamily.

Without haste, Limehouse Johnny made his way to the back of Park-Minton's chair. He threw a piece of the rope across Park-Minton's chest, looped an end around each arm, then knotted the rope securely at the back of the chair. He did the same to Breen. Breen sat very still. There wasn't anything else to do. When they were both fettered, Harry the Ox turned toward the bed.

"What's next, Antoinette?"

Antoinette sat up. She stretched her arms—a luxurious, feline gesture. Then she threw back the covers and got out of bed.

Harry the Ox, eying her with slightly bloodshot eyes, taking in the feathery marabou jacket over the tight-fitting nightgown, said: "That's a nice rig you got on, Antoinette." He licked his lips.

Antoinette laughed softly without looking at him. Walking with that swaying, tantalizing gait of hers, she went up to Breen, studying him curiously.

"Who is this?" she asked over her shoulder. "What'd you bring him for?"

The baron said: "It's Park-Minton's assistant. Park-Minton wanted him along."

Mordecai Breen grinned up at Antoinette without mirth. His yellow-brown eyes were mocking but hot. "If you didn't have so many friends, kid, and I wasn't tied up, you and I could go places," he said.

Antoinette's eyes filled with disdain.

"You're going places—only you won't like it." She turned her back on him. "Where's Halverson?" she asked Harry the Ox.

"Downstairs keeping watch. We thought the owner might come to see if everything was all right; that he might have a key."

Antoinette nodded, then: "You can go back to the house, all of you, and take Halverson with you. Johnny can stay."

Harry the Ox looked sullen and obstinate. Again those hungry eyes of his took in Antoinette's costume from head to foot.

"Send Johnny home," he said. "I'll stay here and look out for you. One of those birds might get loose and you'll need a big guy."

From behind Antoinette came Breen's voice, taunting.

"If I get loose, you'll need *two* big guys."

Antoinette turned her head to look at him, then swung her body around and walked up to him. She slapped him hard across the mouth twice, without anger, almost with indifference, then went back to where Harry the Ox stood beside the baron.

"Out," she said, "all of you ex-

cept Limehouse Johnny. Take the car with you."

It looked as though Harry the Ox was again disposed to argue the matter, but then he changed his mind. Scowling, he motioned Gimpy Myer to follow him and the baron. They left, with the baron closing the door softly behind him.

For eternal seconds, in a stillness that threatened to become unbearable, Antoinette stood looking at Park-Minton. Then to Limehouse Johnny she said:

"Tell him to come in."

Limehouse Johnny went out.

"I really don't understand it," Park-Minton said. "There must be some mistake—"

Antoinette said nothing. She went and sat on the edge of the bed, swinging her slim legs underneath the nightdress.

Mordecai Breen watched her. His lips a little swollen from the blows she had struck him, made his mouth more wolfish.

Limehouse Johnny came back. Behind him there was a tall, rather thin man with a lean face, and eyes that were fixed—fixed on Park-Minton. With slow, measured steps he walked past Limehouse Johnny and stood in the center of the room. There was a long carving knife in his hand.

Antoinette, her voice high, excited, said: "I kept my promise. I've brought him to you—on a platter. Go to work on him."

"Peter Dane!" Park-Minton's voice was strangled. His one eye threatened to pop out of its socket as it took in the knife in Peter Dane's hand.

"I said I'd come back," Peter Dane said in a voice that seemed miles away. He seemed unaware of Mordecai Breen's presence, of Johnny's presence, even of Antoinette's. His rigid eyes stayed riveted on Park-Minton.

Park-Minton ran his tongue across his parched lips.

"You're mad," he said; "stark, raving mad. What do you intend to do with . . . with that knife?"

"I think I am mad," Peter Dane said. There was something devastating about the dull flatness of his voice. "I have been waiting a long time for this moment—over two years." He stopped as though reviewing the past.

Mordecai Breen strained with his arms and found the rope wouldn't give a fraction of an inch. His throat was dry. His face twitched nervously.

"What did he do to you?" he said hoarsely.

Peter Dane blinked his eyes once, only now aware of Mordecai Breen's presence.

"Who are you?" he asked dully. "How did you get here?"

"I'm a private detective," Breen said, "hired by Park-Minton to protect him from you. It doesn't look as though I'd done a good job."

"You wouldn't want to protect him," Dane said with weary listlessness, "if you knew—"

"What did he do to you?" Breen repeated.

Without raising his voice, Dane said: "He murdered my wife—he and that assistant of his, Le Bar. She had to have an operation. It wasn't a very serious one." For a moment his voice broke, then he went on in that same deadly monotone. "But I wanted the best I could get for her, even though it took every cent I had. I got Park-Minton and Le Bar. They operated on her . . . they operated on her, but they were drunk . . . so drunk they didn't know what they were doing, and they killed her . . .

murdered her . . . just as I am going to murder him right now . . . with a knife."

"You're crazy," Park-Minton croaked, "crazy."

Peter Dane, talking off into space, said: "I wasn't there, of course—not in the operating room. It was the nurse, his private nurse, who told me days afterward. Her name was Carver, I think. There were a couple of other nurses there, I believe, but either they didn't realize or else they were afraid to say anything. Nurses are always afraid of doctors, especially doctors with a reputation like those two had."

"Why did the Carver woman tell you?"

For a second Peter Dane looked confused. Then he shrugged. "I don't know. What difference does it make?"

Antoinette jumped off the bed. She came and stood beside Peter Dane. The flames in her green eyes flared high. Her lips were drawn back from her even, white teeth. Her cheeks were flushed.

"Go ahead," she said breathlessly, "kill him. Kill him with that knife just as he killed your wife."

Peter Dane looked at her with clouded eyes. "You better go. This isn't going to be nice to watch."

Little Limehouse Johnny started to say something, but only got as far as "Pete—" Then closed his lips.

"I'm going to stay," Antoinette told Dane. "I'm going to see you do it. It will always be a bond between us. You and I will have done it together." Her face was transformed. Blood lust and passion mingled in her eyes.

"It's a lie!" Park-Minton tried to shout, but his voice was hardly more than a whisper. "Le Bar and I, we weren't drunk. It was one of those unfortunate—"

"They reformed after it happened," Mordecai Breen interrupted, his voice hard. "They don't drink any more. They don't even have liquor in the house."

"They reformed too late," Dane said with dull relentlessness.

"Go ahead," Antoinette said with soft insistence. "Kill him."

Peter Dane glanced at Limehouse Johnny.

"Take her away, Johnny," he said. He slipped out of his coat and let it drop to the floor.

"Murder! Murder!" Park-Minton managed to scream, but not loudly. His throat was almost closed.

Moving like a cat, Antoinette snatched a doily from the dressing table, wadded it and stuffed it into Park-Minton's mouth when he again tried to cry out. Then she stood there, waiting, breathing fast.

Mordecai Breen, the sweat pouring down his face, the inside of his hands wet and clammy, said:

"Wait. Why kill him that way? Gets over too quick. I don't blame you for wanting to kill him, but there's a better way."

Peter Dane looked at Breen without comprehension. But his lean jaw was set, stubborn.

"He killed your wife," Breen said, "but he killed somebody else, too—his partner. He killed Le Bar." Mordecai Breen started talking fast. "I can prove it. He tried to make it look as though somebody from the outside . . . as though you had done it. I spied you in front of Park-Minton's house the night that Le Bar was killed and told him I'd seen you. I don't know how long before that he'd planned to kill Le Bar, or why. But your being there on the scene seemed to be an

auspicious moment. He had already convinced me that you were out to get him."

Antoinette, through her teeth, said: "You're lying! Limehouse Johnny killed Le Bar. I sent Limehouse Johnny to do it, to save Dane from doing it. I was afraid Dane would get into trouble. I saved him. I saved him that night by phoning the police and telling them there was a fire across the street from Park-Minton's house, so that the police and fire engines would come and Dane wouldn't dare try anything." She looked at Limehouse Johnny as if for confirmation.

Limehouse Johnny shook his head. "I didn't do it, Antoinette. I wasn't ready. I didn't 'ave a chance to get the layout of the place. I tried to tell you the other day—"

Antoinette stamped her foot.

"What difference does it make who killed Le Bar?"

"You change your mind quick, don't you?" Breen snarled. "First you want to stop Dane from killing Le Bar and Park-Minton. Now you want him to do it." He turned to Dane. "If you stick that knife in him, it will be all over in a second. That's no way to get even. Make him suffer, make him suffer for months." Mordecai Breen could feel a trickle of sweat working down his chin and inside his collar. The muscles in his face went lumpish with the effort he was making. "Let's hand him over to the cops, let him go to trial for killing Le Bar. Think of it! Months and months in prison waiting to be tried. Then the trial, the public disgrace. Then the conviction, and then the death house. Days and days, each one moving along like years, knowing you're going to die in the end, that nothing can ever save you."

"Don't listen to him!" Antoinette cried. "He's just talking. He told you what he was—a dick, hired to protect Park-Minton. He's talking to save the doc and himself." Her manner was urgent, pleading.

"He did it," Breen said hoarsely. "I can prove it. Nobody in that house except Park-Minton could have killed Le Bar, unless you want to count the Jap or the nurse. Why would the Jap want to kill him? There's no sense to that. Maybe the nurse had some reason for killing him, but she didn't do it. She knows Park-Minton did it. She knows because just before we got here she blackmailed him out of three thousand dollars."

Park-Minton made a strangling, gurgling sound through the gag.

"Nobody from the outside did it," Breen went on, "because nobody got in from the outside. There was a hole cut in the window, a little hunk of glass with a piece of tape stuck to it for a handle so that it wouldn't fall and break. But if you try to fit that piece of glass into the window with the tape on the outside, it doesn't fit. But if you put it with the tape on the inside, it fits perfectly. Park-Minton had the thing with which to cut that glass. He's got it on him now—that diamond ring. He's a doctor and he must have adhesive tape in the house. And he had rubber gloves—all surgeons have—so that there were no fingerprints on the glass and none on the handle of the knife. The knife was an old hunting knife, something he'd probably had around for years.

"Nurse Carver found Le Bar dead in bed. She dragged him out of bed—never mind how I know; I know. She must have recognized the knife, but that alone wasn't

enough. She was afraid that when it came to blackmailing Park-Minton, he'd say that the knife had been stolen from him, or something like that. She wanted to plant some evidence that no jury would disregard, so she stuck some cards into the dead man's hand—into Le Bar's hand. Somehow or other those cards prove that Park-Minton killed Le Bar. I don't know how they prove it, but Nurse Carver does and she's told Park-Minton. That's why she got three thousand out of him today—almost every cent he's got in the bank. Don't you see what a cinch it is? He's as good as in the chair right now. Why should you—"

Peter Dane's eyes looked tired.

"I don't understand it at all," he said. "I think you're trying to do something for me, trying to keep me from committing what you think is a murder, but it's no good. I've got to kill him with a knife, just the way he killed my wife. I've got to do it."

Antoinette was beside him. Her hand was on his shoulder. She was urging him toward Breen.

"Kill him first," she said. "He talks too much."

The import of her words didn't sink in.

"Won't you please go away," Dane said, "and take Johnny with you, so I can finish this?"

"You've got to kill the dick," she persisted coaxingly. "You might as well do it first. If you don't want to do it, give me the knife and I'll do it."

Dane shook himself free from her hand. At last the meaning of her words had penetrated his consciousness. He looked bewildered.

"Why should I kill him? I haven't anything against him."

Antoinette fell back a step. There was anger and amazement in her face.

"Haven't you any sense at all? Can't you see he's got to die? If we let him live, we wouldn't be safe. There wouldn't be any place we could go, you and I. He's got to die. It doesn't matter about the others, about Harry the Ox, about the baron, or Gimpy, or Johnny here. They can't squeal without tying themselves in. But this big louse, here, is different. He's a dick. If we let him live, he'll put you into jail. You'll burn. He'll put the cops on you."

"What difference does it make?" Peter Dane said stonily. "After this is done, I don't care what happens to me. I've got nothing to live for."

She flung herself at him. Her arms were around his neck. Standing on tiptoe, her lips were close to his.

"You've got me," she breathed, "me to love you always."

Breen turned his eyes away from them and looked at Limehouse Johnny. The little man had taken it all in like one in a trance, an odd look in his pale eyes. His body was trembling a little.

"You a friend of his?" Breen barked, motioning with his head toward Peter Dane.

Limehouse Johnny came to with a start.

"What?"

"You a friend of his?"

Limehouse Johnny nodded.

"Are you going to do anything to help save him? Are you going to let him commit a murder and get the chair?"

Limehouse Johnny shook his head. The look in his eyes became ecstatic.

"I can save 'im. 'E saved me once—"

And then it happened! It happened just as Peter Dane was gently disengaging himself from Antoinette.

A shot! Another and another.

Park-Minton's body quivered, then was still. His head dropped to his chest. Little Limehouse Johnny had shot him with the gun he'd taken away from Breen.

X.

Mordecai Breen said in a soft, surprised voice: "Well, I'll be damned."

Antoinette let out a scream. She sprang at Limehouse Johnny, seized him by the shoulders and shook him, her face unlovely with rage.

"What did you do that for?" she shrieked. "You've ruined everything. Dane can't be happy now. He'll never forget now. He wanted to kill him himself with a knife. You little fool!" Overcome with fury, she dropped her hands.

"I don't want Pete to go to prison again," Limehouse Johnny mumbled. "'E's a great guy, Pete is. I wouldn't want 'im to go to the chair." He shook his head again and again.

Peter Dane stood there stunned, his eyes hot, tense, and far back in his head.

"How about cutting me loose?" Breen said. His yellow-brown eyes were more yellow than brown now.

Peter Dane didn't seem to hear. He still stood staring at Park-Minton as though what had happened was beyond his understanding.

"How about cutting me loose?"

"Don't do it! Don't do it!" Antoinette cried. "You and I have got to get out of here, Dane. We can go away. I've got money—piles of money."

Peter Dane walked over to the chair where Breen sat. Mechanically he cut the rope that held Breen.

Breen flexed his arms and stood up.

"Keep him covered, Johnny," Antoinette shrilled. She dashed to a closet, brought out a long coat, slipped her bare feet into a pair of slippers, and donned the coat.

Peter Dane was at the door, about to open it. He had tossed the knife onto the carpet. With swift strides she was beside him, putting her arm through his, an arm that hung slack at his side.

"Come," she said: "let's go."

Peter Dane looked at her. "I don't want you," he said dully. "I don't ever want to see you again."

Antoinette fell back. In a still, small voice, she asked:

"You don't want me? I don't mean anything to you after all I did, tried to do? You—"

Peter Dane opened the door, stepped out and closed it behind him.

Antoinette, her face deathly white, stood still, only her lips moving soundlessly. Then she laughed, a laugh that was high, strident. It made an unpleasant sound, ear-splitting.

"The only guy I ever fell for," she shrieked, "and I'm poison to him." Again she laughed.

Mordecai Breen took a few steps toward Limehouse Johnny.

The little man, in a listless sort of way, raised his gun.

"I'm getting out of 'ere," he said.

"All right," Breen snarled, "but she's got hysterics. Can't you quiet her down?"

Limehouse Johnny took his eyes away from Breen and let them drift to where Antoinette stood. That was a mistake. Breen leaped. He knocked the gun out of Limehouse

Breen leaped upon Limehouse Johnny.

Johnny's hand, then hit him twice. Limehouse Johnny went down. He lay there inert.

Mordecai Breen turned back to Antoinette. She had stopped laughing, just stood there, every muscle in her sensuous body taut. Looking at Breen, her eyes filled with an insane glitter. Suddenly she made a few catlike strides, stooped, and her hand closed over the knife on the floor. She straightened up and slowly advanced on Breen. Breen backed away. She was out of her mind—temporarily at least—and the way she was holding that knife made her doubly dangerous. She wasn't holding it like a dagger with her thumb toward the back of the handle. She was holding it like a poker with her thumb toward the blade. It might have been easy to catch her wrist and disarm her if she struck a downward blow. But it wasn't so simple with the way she was holding that long knife. She would thrust from below, upward. Breen could almost feel that sharp blade in his belly, thrust there with a strength that ordinarily would be beyond her.

His eye swept the room in a fraction of a second, looking for something with which to protect himself. The gun on the floor was too far away. Beside him stood a chair with a cushioned seat. He reached down, snatched up the cushion.

Antoinette sprang. The cushion moved through the air, struck her in the chest, fell to the floor, and as she leaped, she tripped over it. Mordecai Breen started for her, then stood still. Antoinette didn't move. Was she tricking him? Breen took a cautious step, another, and a third. Still she didn't move. And then the rose-colored carpet where she lay was suddenly marred by a dark, ever-widening stain.

Breen moved fast now. He turned her over on her back. The knife was

buried in her breast. In trying instinctively to save herself as she went down, she had somehow fallen on the knife.

Breen rose. He stood staring down at her and shivered. He looked about the room. There had to be a telephone somewhere. A silk doll stood on the dressing table. Breen went over, picked it up, and underneath was the telephone. He called police headquarters and said:

"Give me Hammerstein."

Hammerstein was there.

"This is Breen," Mordecai Breen said. "I don't know where I am, somewhere off Fifth Avenue in the Seventies or Eighties." He gave the telephone number. "Trace the call back and find out where I am. Then get up here as fast as you can. I got a couple of dead people here with me, and one that's alive, or will be in a little while." He hung up, shutting off a torrent of profanity from Hammerstein.

Two days later Hammerstein ambled into Mordecai Breen's office. Breen was at his desk, drinking, his expression moody.

"How's the old sleuth?" Hammerstein said. He was in high spirits.

"I didn't get paid," Breen said gloomily, "for the last week that I worked for Park-Minton."

"That is rich," Hammerstein roared gleefully. "You fix it so a guy gets himself killed, then you're sore that he didn't pay you. Did you see the papers?"

"Yeah," Breen said with disgust. "You got yourself a nice write-up. 'Sergeant Hammerstein of the homicide squad, single-handed, unearths huge blackmail ring while solving murder.'"

Hammerstein had the grace to look a little uncomfortable.

"You know how newspapermen are," he said. "You were one yourself once. I just forgot to mention you. Besides, I thought it would be bad for your business if it got about how your clients—this Park-Minton and La Bar were your clients—got themselves bumped off."

"Oh, sure," Breen said, helping himself to another drink.

"Besides, *you* didn't tell me about Harry the Ox," Hammerstein went on virtuously, "or this Tessie Bonville that ran the joint, or Gimpy Myer and the rest of them. I got that from the little fellow you turned over to me, this Limehouse Johnny. He ratted on the others, figuring that he'd get himself a manslaughter rap instead of first-degree murder. Considering what you told me, I figure he ought to get off easy at that."

"Did you get the Carver woman?" Breen asked morosely.

"Oh, sure. No trouble at all. I found out from her why Park-Minton bumped off his partner, Le Bar. There's one sweet girl, that Carver woman. How I'd love to have somebody like that around my house! She tipped off this Peter Dane in the first place. Park-Minton and Le Bar were drunk when they operated on his wife. She had an idea that this Dane and herself could make a sweet thing out of it by blackmailing those two butchers. But it seems that this Dane didn't even stop to listen to that part of the scheme. He just made tracks for Park-Minton, and started knocking him all over the place. Le Bar came in just then. He hit Dane over the head with a poker and knocked him out, and called the police. And Dane went to prison. You know all about that. From then on, your friend Nurse Carver sort of took charge in a mild way. She fired

Park-Minton's secretary and got herself a nice big raise."

Mordecai Breen sighed and helped himself to another drink.

"You take a long time to tell a story," he complained.

"Don't you want me to tell it all?" Hammerstein said in a hurt tone. "This Carver woman made it plain to Park-Minton that she knew why Dane had attacked him, that they'd been drunk when they operated on Dane's wife, and so Park-Minton couldn't fire her because a scandal would ruin his practice. Now she had plenty of chances to snoop around and find out a few things. One of the things she found out was that Park-Minton and Le Bar ran their practice like sort of a business, with Park-Minton in charge of all the money. And he lost it all in the market, not only his, but Le Bar's. And that Le Bar was goings to quit at the end of the month and wanted an accounting. So when she found Le Bar dead that night—she was on the level about going to Le Bar's room for a sleeping powder—she knew who had done it. That little hunk of glass out of the window didn't fool her a bit. There was that knife in the first place. She remembered that knife, having seen it in one of the drawers of Park-Minton's desk. But she was going to make assurance doubly sure, so she planted them cards in Le Bar's fist after dragging him out of bed."

"I know that," Mordecai Breen said grumpily.

"You know everything, don't you?" Hammerstein said bitterly. "How did you know she dragged him out of bed?"

"Because the blood ran toward his chin and not down to his feet as it would have if he had gotten up by himself."

"Oh," said Hammerstein, a little crestfallen. "And I suppose you knew, too, that that window was a phony?"

Mordecai Breen nodded. "I knew that because I did something you should have done. I fitted the glass back into the pane and found that it would only fit with the adhesive tape on the inside."

A slow flush came to Hammerstein's face, but he rallied.

"I suppose you know all about the cards, too?"

"No," said Breen. "I haven't had a chance to talk to Nurse Carver the way you have."

"All right, then I'll tell you. The cards have numbers on them. There were ten cards with ten numbers. Here they are." Hammerstein took a slip of paper from his pocket and read off: "16—1—18—11—13—9—14—20—15—14. There's twenty-six letters in the alphabet, see?" Hammerstein went on.

"Don't tell me, let me guess," Breen said wearily. "And every one of those numbers represents a letter. You've got ten numbers and there are ten letters in Park-Minton's name. P is the sixteenth letter in the alphabet; a is the first; r, the eighteenth; k, the eleventh; and so on."

"That's right," Hammerstein said disappointedly. "I got that all out of her by threatening to slap her in the can as an accessory to the murder of Le Bar—an accessory after the fact. I'm going to do it anyway. She's some baby."

Breen said: "You should have seen the other one—I mean in action—the one that fell on the knife. This Carver is stupid. No cop, not even you, in his right mind, would believe that a man with a knife in

his breast dying, would stagger around a room to figure out this number gag and then spend time sorting out the cards."

"She wasn't so dumb as all that," Hammerstein protested. "She gathered up all the pencils and pens in the room so that if she'd have to use that card clue and the police came back and began to look around, they'd figure that Le Bar didn't have anything to write with—couldn't write down Park-Minton's name before he died—so he'd hit on that scheme of telling the cops with the cards who the murderer was."

"If he had all that time," Breen said fretfully, "he'd have had time to open the door and yell to me for help."

"I know, I know," Hammerstein said, "but it was the best she could do. And it wasn't so bad when you come to think that she had to have a clue that the police wouldn't catch onto, unless she sent them an anonymous postal card—a clue that would only frighten Park-Minton. And it must have frightened him. He probably figured that even if the police wouldn't believe in that card stunt, they would be put on his trail, whereas till now they hadn't even thought of him. They were looking for this Dane. What with you there and everything, he seemed like the guy."

Breen said: "Go away. I'm tired."

"Listen," Hammerstein said, his manner suddenly threatening. "What's become of this here Peter Dane? Attempted murder is a crime. You know that. I've got to find him and put him in the clink."

Mordecai Breen roused himself a little. His yellow-brown eyes took on a stormy look.

"You leave him alone, do you hear? He's been through enough. Besides, he didn't do anything, and furthermore he was crazy when he thought he was going to do something. No jury would convict him. I'll take the stand for him."

"Just the same," Hammerstein said belligerently, "I'm going to lock him up. I know my duty."

"You do, do you? Well, you'll look awfully funny when it gets into the papers that the great sergeant who single-handed rounded up a blackmail ring didn't have brains enough to fit a little hunk of glass into a windowpane to see if it was cut out from the inside or the outside."

Hammerstein's face purpled. "I've got a good mind to—" he bellowed.

"You got a mind," Breen said, "but it's not a good one. Have a drink."

Slowly the sergeant's color came back to normalcy. He tilted the bottle to his lips, put it down, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and grinned.

"No hard feelings," he said.

"No hard feelings," Mordecai Breen said, "if you leave Dane alone."

"You know who I feel sorry for?" Sergeant Hammerstein said. "It's that little Limehouse Johnny. He's a rat. He's always been a rat, but he's got something in him. You know what he said after he got through talking to me? He sort of stuck his flat chest out, and he said: 'Sarge, I'm no good, but I did one thing in my life that I'm proud of. I paid back Pete, wot did something for me once.' I feel sorry for the little feller."

"Sure," Mordecai Breen said. "And I'm sorry for myself. I should've got paid for that second week."

TO SAY NOTHING OF MURDER

by THOMAS McMORROW

Mr. John Gorman was indulging himself in a fit of rage; which was dead against his doctor's orders. Flushed and glaring, bellowing epithets, he trudged on massive legs after the smaller man, who retreated toward the apartment exit, making appeasing gestures. Mr. Gorman was not to be appeased; he had an inflammable temper, starting on a spark and mounting out of all sense and proportion. He caught up with the smaller man, swung right and left at him, hit him solidly on the nose.

But then, oddly, it was John Gorman who fell to the floor, collapsed, all joints loosening together; he struck on knees and side, rolled gently over on his back, and lay. The smaller man exclaimed, clapped a hand to his flooding nose, stared puzzledly, went slowly and sulkily and knelt beside the fallen man.

"Mr. Gorman!" he cried, though he suspected, when he met the set

stare, that the big man was dead.

He plucked at Gorman's collar, tight around the swelling neck; he felt for the heart, and held the lax wrist. He tried to lift Gorman's shoulders, make him sit up. He let Gorman's shoulders down again and hurried to the telephone in the foyer to call the desk below and ask for a physician.

"Send him to John Gorman's apartment, at once, quick!"

Passing a mirror, he saw his gory face, went into the bathroom and washed it; the flow had stopped.

He sat in a chair, smoked a cigarette and contemplated the dead man with perplexity, some natural regret, and much annoyance. Gorman had been like a man infected by a scratch; he had been merely sullen and resentful at first and had gone from talking and frowning to shouting and waving his fists; his death was embarrassing, very inconvenient, to the man watching from the chair

The doorbell rang. He answered it.

He looked out and saw three men, none of whom was the hotel physician. One was a house painter, with pot and brush, who had been working in the public hallway; he had heard Gorman's shouts, and the trampling feet and the heavy fall, and he was genially interested, as they sounded like murder; he stood at gaze, smiling.

The man in the apartment recognized the two other men.

One was Walter Stoate, the city's political boss, a heavy oldster twinkling of eye and hard of mouth, a tolerant-looking man, as patient with sinners as any saint could be, so long as Wally Stoate was getting his. The other was Counselor Jefferson Simms, Wally Stoate's lawyer—lank, cold-eyed, reserving his charm for business.

The man in the apartment silently cursed his luck: the boss and his lawyer were the last whom he would wish informed of their associate's death—though any possible delay would have been very brief. Nonetheless, clinging to the last shred of hope, he closed the door almost to, and spoke in a hushed voice through the crack.

"Sorry, but Mr. Gorman is lying down and can't be disturbed. Who shall I say called?"

"Lying down, nuts," said Wally Stoate bluffly, shoving the door. His professional manner was bluff and hearty; bluff and hearty men pass easily for stupid and amiable, which is popular, and they can get away with more. "The painter says he's playing the radio."

"What station, mister?" called the painter. "It was good. I could take my Bible oath you were murdering somebody in there, only I knew it was the radio, but I thought they wouldn't even let him say 'damn!'"

Wally Stoate drove the door open. "What are we, a couple of thieves, that you put the eye on us like that?" He shouldered into the foyer, swaggered forward with amiable bellow. "Hi, Jack!"

He halted on the verge of the living room as if both his feet were trapped in place, threw out his arms to balance.

"Jeff! Shut that door! Hold it!"

He saw his pal Jack Gorman, the city's leading contractor, on his back on the living-room floor. One ear was spattered with blood, and blood dappled his thick gray hair and soaked the rug beside his head.

Wally Stoate looked behind him, saw Counselor Simms pressing uncomprehendingly against the door in expectation of an attack from

without; the man who had refused entrance was standing in apparent composure, hands folded over his stomach. Stoate went swiftly to the side of the dead man, squatted, avoiding the crimson stain. "Call a doctor!"

"I did, sir," said the man who had held the door. "Not that it's any use. He's gone."

"Never mind, you! Here, you; come sit in that chair where I can watch you, and don't budge! Jeff, call that doctor; and take a look around for anybody else that's here. This looks like murder!"

"Nothing so gruesome, I assure you, gentlemen," said the little man, advancing. "If I may explain—"

"Shut up! Sit down there or I'll knock you down. How about the doctor, Jeff?"

Counselor Simms hung up the telephone in the foyer. "They'll send him when they locate him; he's around the hotel. Is he dead?"

"Looks it. Shot or hit in the head. Look around!"

Stoate waited, his lowering stare holding the little man who had come tractably from the foyer and sat in the indicated chair. He was slight of stature and young, but looked cunning and resolute and not to be easily overawed; his keen gray eyes met the politician's fully and frankly.

"Nobody else here, Wally!"

"And no fire escape, is there, Jeff? No other way out? O. K., fellow, you want to explain; here's the chance of your life. Now listen. Don't try and give me a ghost story about this. It's as plain as that big nose on your face. You . . . killed . . . him. What are you doing here? Who are you?"

Hearing himself accused of murder, the little man's manner suddenly degenerated; he quailed. His posture became servile and browbeaten; he slumped abjectly, fingers nervously twitching at the palm of the other hand.

Wally Stoate leaped from his squat, gripped him by the shoulder, shook a clenched fist. "You killed him! Out with it before I belt you on the jaw!"

The accused pulled back against the chair, tried to shield his face, spoke breathlessly. "Will you see I get fair treatment, Mr. Stoate? Will you do what you can for me?"

"Know me, do you? I'll see you get justice!"

"I can ask no more," said the man, relaxing as if promised full pardon. "If Wally Stoate—asking your pardon, sir—gets me justice, I know it'll be the right sort. I know you have all the power, sir."

"Come, don't barter with me; you killed him!"

The man glanced at the dead contractor, shuddered, averted his eyes. "Among ourselves, gentlemen, and hoping it will go no further—I killed him."

Wally Stoate released his grip, flashing a victorious glance at the attentive and impressed attorney.

Stoate lighted a cigarette, sat in a chair across from the confessed murderer.

"What's your name? Who are you?"

"Riley, sir. I'm Mr. Gorman's houseman, sir. I'm new with Mr. Gorman—a week tomorrow."

"What came off here, Riley?"

The accused did not answer at once, but looked about the room and then consultingly at the man on the floor.

"You want a good bust on the jaw?"

"Oh, no, sir! It is only that the details do not come at once; I'm so — Mr. Gorman was calling the

police, that's the most of it. I couldn't bear it. I've made a mistake or two in my day, sir, and been annoyed by the police before this."

"In trouble before, eh? Not the first poor fellow you knocked off, eh?"

"Referring to Mr. Gorman, sir? Oh, he was indeed! I couldn't go along knocking my gentlemen on the head, you know, sir; there'd be an end to that. I'd lose my character. No, it was little things—cuff links and shirt studs and such—though it's always a question if they did not go out with the laundry, and a gentleman thinks twice before taking away a man's character. My worst mistake was a stomacher of Russian green garnets that I took for emeralds."

"A professional thief. What crooking did you do on these premises?"

Riley's gaze wandered again, over the displayed silver and bronzes, sporting prints, imported rugs, and other fine furnishings, returning again and again to a safe in the opposite wall.

"You hear me?" growled Stoate, lurching forward.

"I was trying to think, sir. Mr. Gorman entered suddenly and formed the idea that I was trying to break into that safe; which I wasn't. I was only having a look at it, safes and locks being rather a hobby with me. But he sprang to a conclusion and went to call the police and give me in charge, and—I couldn't bear it. I took up one of those."

His hand jerked toward the tall and heavy silver candlesticks on a side table.

"And let poor Jack have it," said Stoate satisfiedly, and he rose, with another knowing look at Counselor Simms. Wally Stoate had always

RILEY

believed, and had loyally supported the local force in the view, that a good belt on the jaw is the best detective. "Lay off the candlesticks for a bit, Riley; I'm calling the police!"

He moved toward the foyer.

"Pardon, Mr. Stoate," said the accused man urgently, "but would you permit a suggestion on that? Look, sir, Mr. Gorman has passed away, and a terrible loss, but need there be unpleasant aftereffects? He was a big heavy man, sir; he could have fallen and knocked himself. In fact, that is what I was going to say happened, till you frightened the truth out of me. Could I not be of some service to you, sir? Look. The Washington gentleman mentioned you to Mr. Gorman! And not very highly, if you'll excuse me, sir; he spoke of Atlanta and Alcatraz. Was it about income tax?"

Wally Stoate halted in the place where his feet had been trapped be-

fore, on the edge of the living-room rug. He turned slowly and looked at Counselor Simms.

"What about income taxes, Riley?" said the lawyer in a melodious and enticing tone, turning on his charm, this being business. "And who, pray, is 'the Washington gentleman'?"

"The Washington gentleman, sir?" Riley put a hand over his eyes, pressing his temples. "His name was—I think of Harrington, sir, but that wasn't the name; Harrington was the partner in the rags and bottles business. I mean it was Harrington's partner who had the same name as the Washington gentlemen; no connection otherwise, really. Harrington and . . . Harrington and—"

"Reeve?"

"Harrington and Reeve!" exclaimed Riley brightly. "What sort was he? Well, sir, to give you an idea of his height, he could reach down and put both hands flat on the ground. And when he sat on his wagon, the line of bells, or tin cans, rather—"

"Are you talking about Reeve?"

"Harrington's partner, sir? Ah, the Washington gentleman. I was coming to him, sir. I was explaining how I came to connect his name with this Harrington. I'm not accustomed to all this excitement, and this disagreeable business of Mr. Gorman, and Mr. Stoate shouting at me—"

"Collect yourself, my boy. You were speaking of somebody named Reeve, whom you called 'the Washington gentleman,' and this man Reeve was talking to Mr. Gorman and mentioning Mr. Stoate in connection with income taxes. Tell me in your own words."

"Indeed and he was mentioning Mr. Stoate, sir, and not at all friendly. It was about a lot of money that Mr. Stoate gave Mr. Gorman—wasn't it, sir?—for building the municipal center. And about putting the money in a safe."

Riley's eyes lifted to the wall safe again.

"Spying on Jack Gorman, were you?" growled Wally Stoate.

"Wally! Take it easy. Go ahead, Riley."

"Not spying, sir," protested the accused. It's easy to see that you were never in service, Mr. Stoate. One is supposed to see nothing and hear nothing, but must also know everything without having to ask. A master or madam detests being questioned; and one gets in the way of bending an ear, sir, with the best intentions."

"Continue, Riley," Counselor Simms pressed softly. "Very natural that a servant should overhear things, and no discredit whatever. So there was talk about a lot of money that passed in connection with building the municipal center, was there? Tell us just what was said, in your own words, if you can't exactly recall."

"Said about Mr. Stoate, sir? It was to this effect, Mr. Reeve speaking: 'Somebody is going to jail for this, Gorman, and if it's not Wally Stoate, it will be you!' I tell you, I thought Mr. Gorman would rise and hit him. Mr. Gorman wasn't a man to be talked to like that."

"'Somebody is going to jail for this—' And what did Mr. Gorman do or say to that?"

"I did not catch it, sir. The kitchen door was closed, you understand, and with the best intentions I couldn't hear unless they shouted, or when they telephoned to Washington."

"How do you know it was Washington?"

"Mr. Reeve asked for Washington, sir."

"All right, he got Washington. And what did he say?"

"He said, 'I have John Gorman's affidavit and it is the works.'"

"He shouted that?"

"Quite gently, sir. But the telephone is beside the kitchen door."

"To whom did he talk in Washington?"

"That I cannot say, sir."

"But he asked for somebody. What did he say? Try to recall. He said, 'This is Reeve—'"

"Ah, yes, sir! He said, 'This is Reeve of the Intelligence Unit.' That I recall now, sir."

Riley's obvious pleasure in recollecting the name of the secret service of the Federal Income Tax Bureau was not shared by his company. Lawyer Simms rose, beckoning to his client. They went into the foyer, out of earshot of Riley.

"Scared, Wally?"

"Sweating ice water, Jeff. Did you get that stuff about Jack Gorman making an affidavit for them? They must have put the heat on him; it must have been him or me. Listen. Now that Jack's gone, is his affidavit any good?"

"Oh, yes. Washington can put it in evidence on your trial. And that can't be all they have: Jack Gorman wouldn't run out on you if he wasn't convinced you were licked anyway. You're right, though, about Washington being after you. Well, it's no surprise. When a man gets as big as you, Wally, with the city treasury in one pocket and the district attorney in another, there's only one crime he can commit and that is not kicking back to the government a piece of his pickings; and that's the crime he commits every time. They're after you, Wally."

"Didn't I tell you? They were all around me! Jack Gorman himself was telling me right in that room last night—easing it to me—that they were looking into his 1936 report, the year he built the municipal center for us. And checking up Spinelli's numbers game, and O'Leary's profits from his track; and a couple of fellows going through my bank. And that was the name I was given—Reeve! A big man named Reeve was here with a squad of snoopers from the intelligence unit. So what, Jeff? Not licked, are we?"

"Sh-h-h, the case is in the bag," scoffed the lawyer. "But lucky we came over here to talk to Jack. That dim-wit in there not only spilt Washington's case against you, but he also gave me the right idea for your defense. Wally, we'll have to figure that Washington is going to prove up to the handle that Jack Gorman slipped you money when he got the contract for building the municipal center. O. K., then we'll admit it!"

"We'll admit it, eh, Jeff?"

"That's it. We'll admit that Jack Gorman gave you a block of cash—to hold for him as a friend. Confidential between you and Jack, but his money all the time. And we'll prove you gave it back to him."

"Gave it back to him, eh? How'll we prove that?"

"By swearing to it, now Jack's dead," said Lawyer Simms cheerily. "You couldn't do it while Jack was alive, because then Washington would grab Jack for making thirty thousand more that year than he declared. You'll swear to it, with dim-wit Riley swearing with you, and nobody swearing against you. We'll save Riley's neck long enough to get out of him what we want, and then we'll put him across for murder."

"We'll stall off Riley's murder

trial till he has testified for me in this income trouble, eh, Jeff?"

"That's it, Wally. Ideal! It's always the ideal defense to admit the other side's case, and add a little something. What happened to the money after you gave it back to Jack? Well, you don't know, but it's not hard guessing, when Jack had a thief in the house. And Riley's one witness won't run out on you. Made to order!"

They returned to the mild-mannered little man who was sitting primly in the living-room chair.

"I've been talking to Wally to see what could be done for you, Riley," said Counselor Simms kindly. "Your idea of calling this thing an accident is out. It wouldn't wash."

"Ah, yes, sir?" Riley looked politely regretful. "It was the best I could think of on the spur of the moment, sir. A happy thought. And what is your idea, sir?"

"My boy, we'll see you don't go to trial till the excitement blows over—and maybe not then. Do as you're told, and don't fret."

Counselor Simms walked up and down, reflecting.

"We have to call in the police now, Riley, and you tell them it was an accident and reserve your defense till I can figure it out. Tell them Jack Gorman fell down and knocked his head. They won't believe you, and they'll take you along, but that's all right. However, I want you to get your story straight as to what happened before. What happened last night, understand?"

"Last night, sir? Nothing that I recall, sir."

"Last night, Riley," said Counselor Simms forcibly, "you were in the kitchen going about your usual employment, about—what time were you here last night, Wally?—about nine o'clock, when the doorbell rang, and in walked Mr. Stoate. Did Riley let you in last night, Wally? No? Where were you at nine last night, Riley?"

"I was in my room above, sir. There are rooms on the roof for the help, sir."

"Were you alone up there?"

"Yes, indeed, sir. I'm new in the town, sir, and know no one."

"Made to order. Then you were in the kitchen, and the bell rang and you let Mr. Stoate in. You went back to your work. A little later, you served Mr. Gorman and Mr. Stoate a drink. Mr. Gorman was sitting at that desk counting a bundle of currency, and you heard him say, 'Thirty thousand dollars, right. Wally!' And Mr. Gorman put the money in a drawer."

"I see, sir." Riley hesitated. "Would you permit a suggestion on that, sir? I should think he would put it in that wall safe."

"Right! Strike the other out: Mr. Gorman got up and put the cash into that wall safe. Not bad, Riley."

Counselor Simms walked again, halted.

"Now, as to what happened today. This will do to go on with: Mr. Gorman called you in this afternoon, and he was all smoked up. The money was gone from the safe! Mr. Gorman ranted and carried on, and collapsed on the floor. By the way, Wally, wasn't Jack Gorman told by the doctor to watch his step or he might go out?"

"Right! He was told."

Lawyer Simms smiled at Riley. "Don't be too discouraged, my boy. Got your story? Tell it to me in your own words."

The lawyer listened to the man's recital of the concocted yarn, and nodded approval. "Wally, call the

police now. Tell them Jack Gorman's dead."

Wally Stoate telephoned police headquarters. As he was coming back to the company, the doorbell rang; he turned and answered it.

"It's the doctor, Jeff! Want him in?"

"No, please, sir," called Riley, trembling. "He could spoil everything, sir. I couldn't have the courage to talk up to the police if the doctor was saying someone killed Mr. Gorman."

"Tell the doctor to come back in fifteen minutes, Wally! Take a drink for yourself, Riley. Chew on one of Jack's cigars. Here, were you looking for the liquor? There it is! You are jittery, aren't you? Take it easy! We're taking care of you."

Police Detective Rafferty arrived; with him, a police-news reporter for the *Times-Journal*, the chief local newspaper and unfriendly to the city administration and Wally Stoate.

Detective Rafferty looked down at the dead man, looked up.

"Ask him," suggested Lawyer Simms, pointing to Riley. "He's the valet and butler here. Mr. Stoate and I walked in a few minutes ago and saw this and called the hotel physician. We've been sitting waiting for him. I thought we'd better call you, too."

"Dead, Rafferty?" asked the reporter, bending. He looked about for the telephone, hurried to it. He called after a moment: "Make it snappy, Rafferty! They're stopping the presses!"

"Well, sir?" said the detective to Riley. "What's your name? Let me warn you, Mr. Riley: anything you say may be used against you. Go ahead if you want."

"To make it all quite clear to you, sir," began the accused tremulously, "I must begin with last night, when Mr. Stoate came here. What time was it precisely, may I ask, Mr. Stoate?"

"Nine o'clock."

"Nine o'clock, Mr. Stoate says, sir," continued Riley. "Mr. Stoate came here, I believe, to give Mr. Gorman a large sum of cash."

"How much, Mr. Stoate?" called the reporter. "And tell that little fellow to speak louder, will you, Rafferty? I'm shooting it right in! How much, Mr. Stoate?"

"It was thirty thousand dollars," explained Wally Stoate, "that Mr. Gorman gave me to hold for him, back in 1936. I obliged him, as a

friend, why not? I suppose he wanted to know, as any businessman might, where he could always lay hands on a block of cash with no strings on it. Nothing to that."

"Wally Stoate gave money to Jack Gorman?" called the reporter. "That's news." He spoke into his telephone. "Wally Stoate just said Jack Gorman gave him thirty thousand dollars in private in 1936, and he claims he gave it back to Jack Gorman last night! . . . Mr. Stoate, the office says have you got a receipt or any proof you gave the money back?"

"Here, now!" interposed Counselor Simms, annoyed. "Who's telling this story? Shut up, Wally. Go on, Riley."

"Wally Stoate's lawyer, Jeff Simms, just told him to maintain silence!" telephoned the reporter. "Told him to shut up. . . . Rafferty, the office wants to know is it a murder or what? Make it snappy, old man, will you?"

"You dry up, Billy," ordered the detective. "Go ahead. Mr. Riley. Just a minute. Billy, see who's that at the door. Tell him we're busy. It's who? A doctor?"

"Do let him come in, sir," requested Riley, to the surprise of two of the company. "I called him immediately when Mr. Gorman collapsed, and Mr. Simms called him later, but he couldn't be had."

The physician was admitted. He saw his subject and went to it, bag in hand.

"Well, Mr. Riley?" pursued the detective. "Forget that stuff about the money; we want to know what happened to Jack Gorman."

"I would rather confine my statement to that," said Riley gladly, "as it is all I know, really. Since I was not in the apartment last night, I cannot speak of any payment of money."

"What's that, Riley?" Counselor Simms' voice was biting. "Didn't you open that door for Mr. Stoate last night, and see a bundle of big bills in Mr. Gorman's hands at that very desk, and hear Mr. Gorman say, 'Thirty thousand dollars, right, Wally'? And see Mr. Gorman put the money in that very safe? Is that your story or isn't it? Yes or no, Riley! Get yourself together."

"Sorry, Mr. Simms," said Riley, shrugging, "but I was not in this city last night. I was never in this apartment and never saw Mr. Gorman in my life, until an hour ago."

"Oh, take him along, Rafferty," exclaimed Wally Stoate, pale and sour with anger. "He knocked out Jack Gorman's brains with one of those candlesticks when Jack caught him at the safe. He told us so himself, and ask Jeff Simms if he didn't!"

"He did, Rafferty," indorsed the lawyer. "And that he was the houseman and had been here for a week. Riley, were you lying then or are you lying now?"

"I misinformed you and Mr. Stoate," said Riley, bowing, "but you asked for it, you know. You insisted that I had killed Mr. Gorman, and I agreed with you for the time being, hoping something helpful might develop. Mr. Stoate, I am happy to inform you that Mr. Gorman was your friend to the last and did not sell you out to Washington. But perhaps the doctor can shed some light now. What killed him, doctor?"

"I can't say yet," announced the physician, who had been busy with scissors and a sponge. "Heart or brain condition, probably."

"He wasn't beaten to death with a candlestick, doctor?"

"Oh, no. No extravasation of blood whatever. All this blood? It isn't his."

Riley caressed his inflamed nose. "It's mine, doctor. Mr. Gorman flew into a temper and hit me. I didn't hit him back, but down he went. While I was trying to help him, my nose dripped."

"An autopsy must decide," said the physician, replacing his utensils in the bag. "He looks the type."

"But you did quarrel with him, Riley!" persisted the detective. "You admitted that, didn't you?"

"He quarreled with me," amended the witness. "I asked Mr. Gorman to assist us—I am with the intelligence unit of the income-tax bureau, sir—in preparing a case against Walter Stoate for making a false report of his 1936 income. Anonymous letters came to us in Washington charging that Walter Stoate received a large sum as graft in connection with building the municipal center here. We have been investigating locally, but couldn't get enough to indict on; we couldn't prove the payment of a large sum to Walter Stoate at that time, though it was common rumor. So, as a last desperate hope—"

"Another lie!" shouted Wally Stoate. "You had an affidavit from Jack Gorman that he paid me some money!"

"No, Mr. Stoate," said the witness mildly. "We had no proof, till you admitted it just now. I asked Mr. Gorman to testify for us, and he punched my nose. I misrepresented the matter to you, sir, hoping that you and your attorney would discuss it in an informative way."

"Louder, Riley!" called the reporter from his telephone. "Keep quiet, will you, please? Intelligence unit, income-tax bureau? Full name, Riley, please!"

"Riley Reeve is the name, sir. You wish to see my papers, Mr. Rafferty?"

"Reeve? Of the Unit?"

Counselor Simms caught the glance of the scowling Stoate, nodded his head toward the exit. He rose, drawing his client with him.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Reeve," he said cordially. "I've heard of you. You handled the case against Pender, didn't you? And did it very well, I'm told. Reeve, we're not going to do anything precipitate and hasty, are we?"

"Washington will proceed in order, sir," said Riley Reeve, eying him thoughtfully. "The matter belongs now with the Department of Justice."

"You people are over the big bump now," said Counselor Simms gratulatingly. "You don't have to prove that Wally Stoate got the money; he admits it, he publishes it in the newspapers. The rest is only negotiation for some fair and square settlement, no doubt. I'll go down to Washington tomorrow and have a chat. Good enough?"

"Excellent, Mr. Simms, and I trust everything will be adjusted," said Riley Reeve pleasantly. "But may I trouble you and Mr. Stoate to step across to the United States attorney's office now, at once, and get his blessing? You'll come without— That's fine. Mr. Rafferty, I'll be at police headquarters in an hour for any statement you want on this death; and the United States attorney will give you access to these gentlemen in case he can't let them go at once. Shall we go, gentlemen?"

LEAVES IN WINTER

by CARL CLAUSEN

An officer in uniform greeted Lieutenant Laird McLee of the New York City homicide squad as he walked up the steps of the old brownstone house in the East Forties. It had been built when there were still railroad tracks in Park Avenue.

"Sergeant Rice is waiting for you in the hall," the officer said, saluting.

The hall was as dark as a pocket. Sergeant Rice's moonface merely accentuated the darkness.

"Notify the medical examiner?" McLee asked.

"Yeah, I phoned Doc Shale right after I called you, lieutenant. He should be along."

"Name's Armitage, you said?"

"Yes. Professor Edward Armitage. One of those guys who go in court and testify if a mug is screwy or not."

"Alienist?" McLee grunted.

"Shouldn't wonder. Most of them are foreigners. He was shot through the head. A .45."

The room was at the rear. McLee stopped on the threshold. At first glance it looked as if someone had

gone through it for loot, but when he came to size it up, he saw that the disarray was orderly. Things were piled helter-skelter, but they were *piled*. Books, old magazines, newspapers—on tables and chairs and on the floor. A Japanese armor in one corner; in another, a cabinet piled high with stone axes and spears. Indian stone mortar bowls used as wastebaskets. A jade Buddha holding down a pile of correspondence on the littered desk over which the dead man was spread-eagled with his head on his arms, his back to the only window in the room.

McLee leaned forward. The old man had been shot from behind. There was a hole at the base of the skull where the bullet had entered, but none in front, so it hadn't come out. The desk blotter was soaked with blood.

The lieutenant glanced about. There was a couch against one wall made up as a bed. Over it hung an oil painting of the Hudson Palisades. It was the only modern touch in the room, incongruous in that gloomy chamber dedicated to antiquities. It was neither good nor bad —just the work of some uninspired painter. The signature in the right-hand corner was large and florid—Preston Lyle.

Directly opposite this was the window. McLee crossed to it, noted that it was unlocked, and ran it up. Below was a musty backyard with rusted cast-iron garden furniture cluttered about a fountain choked with dead leaves. A small addition had been built to the ground floor recently. There were still a few chips of wood, and some fragments of bricks and dabs of plaster lying about. The roof of the addition came within four feet of the window.

"The old man built it for his niece, lieutenant," Sergeant Rice said. "Her name's Van Buren—Jean van Buren. She's in the front room with the housekeeper and Armitage's son-in-law. His name's Preston Lyle. He's an artist."

McLee glanced up at the picture of the Palisades. "Says he!"

The lieutenant ran the window down and examined the catch. It was rusty and had been opened lately. The break in the rust was plainly visible.

"I was wondering about that catch," said Rice. "Looks like the window has been locked for a long time—the catch was turned recently. You could stand on that roof and shoot him without half trying."

"Much good that'll do us," McLee replied. A light snow had fallen during the night. It was only half an inch deep on the roof, but it was enough to have obliterated any footprints.

He stood for a moment looking about without touching anything. The other walls were hung with Japanese prints—good ones. He noted among them a Hiroshige and two Toyokunis and wondered what a man of Professor Armitage's evident discrimination in art was doing with a daub like the Palisade thing desecrating the wall. Everything else in the room was a collector's item, although the dead man seemed to have been more of a magpie than a specialist in any particular line.

McLee crossed to the picture and examined it from all angles. Raised it away from the wall and looked behind it, then let it swing back. The frame was a plain gilt one. He touched it with his finger, then looked at the finger to which a little of the gold paint adhered.

"O. K.," he said. "Let's talk to the family."

"The housekeeper's name is Mrs. Gorm. Some handle!" Rice said on their way through the hall.

The room they entered was the typical artist's studio—north exposure and messy with half-finished sketches and empty frames standing around. There was an easel with a fresh canvas—a landscape even more uninspired than the one of the Hudson Palisades in the dead man's room. The paint was still wet. On a stand beside it lay a palette smeared with colors.

Preston Lyle was as uninspiring-looking as his pictures—in his forties, short and stout, but not fat. Looked like a man used to easy living—the kind who thinks the world owes him one. The housekeeper wasn't the type, McLee decided. Thirty-odd, perhaps, but not too many odds. Good-looking in an aloof way. Blue eyes and light hair without a trace of gray. The niece was small and dark, and easy on the eyes. Red lips, but not from lipstick. More than a trace of Mediterranean blood in her, McLee mused.

He tackled the housekeeper first. Her replies seemed straight enough. She had called the dead man for breakfast and receiving no reply had gone upstairs to investigate, she said. When she saw Armitage slumped over the desk, she had called Lyle who was already at the breakfast table. He had gone up and had rushed out to telephone for the police, but had run into the patrolman on the beat ringing in at his box on the corner.

"You didn't disturb anything in the room?" McLee asked the housekeeper.

"Oh, no! I didn't even go inside. I . . . I just opened the door and saw what had happened. I've never been inside Mr. Armitage's room in the five years I've worked for him. He didn't permit *anyone* to go there."

"You mean he kept it locked?"

"When he wasn't in the room, he did. He took care of it himself."

"That's right," Preston Lyle concurred. "I've been in there myself but twice in ten years."

The niece spoke up. "I've never been in there at all."

"Your room is that new addition, Miss van Buren?"

"Yes. Uncle Ned built it on for me when I came East last year."

"Where from?"

"From California—Inyo County. I was born there. When my mother died, Uncle Ned asked me to come and live with him."

"Your mother was his sister?"

"Yes."

"So you're his heir?"

"I . . . I think so." She was looking at Lyle as she spoke.

"Don't you know? Are there others?"

"Preston will share, of course. He was married to Uncle Ned's daughter Emily. She died."

"I see. Which one of you saw Mr. Armitage alive last?"

"I saw him last at dinner last night. I went out shortly after. He had gone to bed when I got back about midnight. At least there was no light showing over his transom as I went downstairs to my room."

Mrs. Gorm concurred. "I returned from the movies shortly after Miss Jean, and Mr. Armitage's room was dark."

Lyle said: "I heard Jean and Mrs. Gorm come in. I was working. Trying to finish that painting," he added, nodding at the canvas on the easel. "It must have been all of two a. m. when I turned in."

"How come?" McLee asked. "This is an out-of-doors scene and you worked on it in the house at night?"

The artist smiled faintly. He pointed to some sketches standing against the wall beside a large ornate gilt frame of scrolled leaves.

"I worked from those and from memory. One doesn't depend on inspiration when one has to make a living painting."

"So neither of you saw Mr. Armitage after dinner?"

"*I* didn't," said Lyle.

The housekeeper shook her head and the girl said:

"He was in his room when I left shortly before nine o'clock. There was a light and I heard him move about."

"You painted the picture of the Palisades over his couch, Mr. Lyle?" McLee asked.

"Yes. I gave it to him on his seventieth birthday. He admired it."

"When was that?"

"His birthday was last week—the fourteenth—but I didn't hang it for him until yesterday. That was the only other time I had been in his room. The first time was the day I came to live here ten years ago."

McLee turned to the housekeeper. "How about the window? Did he always keep it locked?"

"Always," she replied. "I've never known him to open it, even in the hottest summer weather. He said it kept the heat out."

"Then how d'you explain that the catch was unhooked—had been unhooked lately?" McLee asked.

"Unhooked!" the woman ejaculated. "I . . . I can't explain it!"

Lyle ejaculated, "Why, that's incredible!"

The girl said nothing at all. She was staring at McLee, her dark eyes wide and her face the color of a sheet.

"The window opens directly on the roof of this addition—your room, Miss van Buren," McLee said. "Can you explain why it had been unlocked?"

"No . . . no, I tell you!"

McLee glanced out of the window and said to Rice. "Doc Shale, sergeant. Take him in back. I'll be with you in a few minutes."

"O. K., lieutenant."

When he had gone, McLee said, looking from one to another of the three: "I'm going to ask all of you to stay in this room until I get back. The medical examiner will tell us about what time Mr. Armitage was murdered. I'll be back after a while."

He found Dr. Shale going over the dead man.

"He's been dead at least ten or

twelve hours, lieutenant; killed around midnight, I'd say. Shot at close range. Powder burns on the back of his collar. Slug's still in him. Better ring the morgue so I can go to work on him. Or shall I notify them on the way out?"

"If you will, doc," McLee said. "The sergeant and I are going to have our hands full here. While you're at it, ring Weeks of the Bertillon department and tell him and Logan to hurry over, will you?"

"O. K. Inside job?" Shale asked.

"I shouldn't wonder," McLee replied as the front doorbell rang. "See who it is, sergeant."

Dr. Shale snapped his bag shut. In the dark hall they practically collided with a man whom Rice was trying to deny admittance, but wasn't making much of a show at it.

"What d'you want?" McLee demanded of the man.

"To see my wife. Try to stop me!" the fellow replied.

"Which one of them is your wife?" McLee asked. He stepped up close and saw that the man was young, hardly more than a boy. "So you're the niece's husband? What's your name?"

"McFarland. Where is she?"

"Come in," McLee told him, opening the door to Lyle's studio.

The girl left her chair and ran into his arms. "Oh, Jim . . . Jim!" she sobbed.

"These guys been riding you?" he asked.

Sergeant Rice snapped, "What would we be riding her for, fellow?"

"Because it's your business to ride people."

"Don't like cops, eh?"

"Check!" said the boy.

He was built on heroic lines. His eyes were turquoise with little flecks of green in them. He had a cleft chin, but McLee remembered that one of the hardest eggs he had ever cracked had had a cleft deep enough to park his cigarette between drinks. He pointed to a chair.

"Sit down," he said.

"I've been sitting all morning," the boy replied, pushing the girl behind him. "Did these apes get tough with you?" he asked.

"No, Jim; no, dear."

"O. K." He glared at Rice. "You found my gun, of course? Well, I gave it to her. So what? I've got eight thousand acres of mesa in Inyo County, California, with five thousand sheep grazing. Jean and I don't have to commit murder for a living. The old man was a pill, but so are others in this room. I haven't any *talent* that entitles *me* to wear out the seat of my pants on other people's chairs," he added, with a look at Lyle.

McLee said: "Where's the gun, Miss van—Mrs. McFarland?"

"In my dresser drawer—I mean it was last night," the girl stammered.

"But it isn't now, of course!" Sergeant Rice interpolated pleasantly.

"Go down and look, sergeant," McLee said.

Rice returned in a few minutes with a .45-caliber revolver of a pattern that had made history—and orphans in the West. The sergeant was carrying it gingerly in his handkerchief.

"One shell has been discharged recently, lieutenant," he said happily.

McLee took the gun from Rice, broke it and squinted through the barrel, then laid it on the table covered by Rice's handkerchief.

"Why did you give the gun to your wife, McFarland?"

"To keep that rat out of her

room," the young man said, glaring at the artist.

Lyle shrugged. "So you married her to get her uncle's money," he said. "I might have known."

"If you hadn't had a mind like a sewer, you *would* have known we were married when you saw me leaving her room by the window the other night," the boy snapped.

McLee was watching this pleasant passage at arms. "When were you two married?" he asked.

"A week ago. If you don't believe it, go up to the county court at Westchester and look for yourself."

Sergeant Rice said: "The old man was shot with a .45, fellow. How d'you like that?"

"Do I have to like it?"

"So he didn't fancy you for a nephew-in-law?" Rice said.

"And vice versa!" the young man snapped.

Rice started to say something, but McLee silenced him with a look.

"Have you ever been up to his room, McFarland?"

"Yeah, once—yesterday. He practically threw me out, but not before I'd told him plenty."

"We found the window unhooked, McFarland," McLee said.

"If I had wanted to throw him out of it, I wouldn't have bothered opening it," the young man replied.

McLee's dark eyes were expressionless. "Someone unhooked that window—recently. Both you and Lyle admit having been in the old man's room yesterday. Mr. Lyle's reason for having been admitted there by Mr. Armitage is plausible. What's yours?"

"To tell him that blessing or no blessing I was taking Jean back with me to California."

"What did he have against you?"

The young man jerked his finger at Lyle. "His daughter had married a tramp. I tried to tell him that I wasn't after his damned money—told him to leave it for a home for hairless Chihuahuas. He's seen his lawyer to have our marriage annulled on account we had lied a couple of months on Jean's age."

"Where are you staying?"

"At the Easton Hotel off Madison Square. I registered for Jean, too. The manager knows all about it. She was with me until midnight last night. I brought her home."

"Didn't come in with her?"

"Not last night. I didn't want any more run-ins with the old man. We had planned to leave for California today." He ran his hand into his coat pocket. "I got our tickets right here. Then Jean called me this morning and told me what had happened."

Sergeant Rice said: "The old man was killed somewhere around midnight, according to Dr. Shale. He don't make mistakes, fellow. All four of you may have been here, but—"

Mrs. Gorm, the housekeeper, spoke up for the first time. "Mr. Lyle invited me in to look at the new picture he was working on when I returned from the movies. That one on the easel. He had no reason in the world to kill Mr. Armitage. No matter what happened, he'd be taken care of. Mr. Armitage had established a trust fund for him—"

"Kitty!" Lyle interrupted.

"I'm going to tell them everything, Preston! Why shouldn't I? His giving you a measly sixty dollars a month for life when he's worth a million!"

"Stop it, Kitty," the artist said wearily.

"I won't! A few years of study in Europe and you'd have *been* somewhere. He could spend thousands of dollars on junk!"

"Will you cut it out, please! He had the right to leave his money to Jean, to anyone he chose. I'm getting along all right."

"I'm only trying to show these men that you had no reason to kill Mr. Armitage, Preston!" She turned on young Mrs. McFarland and her pale face grew livid. "Don't think because you've charmed a sheepherder that every man you meet is ready to fall for you."

McLee nodded at Sergeant Rice. A car had stopped in front of the house. Weeks and Logan of the Bertillon department were coming up the steps with their paraphernalia. Rice left the room, and McLee said:

"None of you four is to leave this house until I give the word, understand? I'll be back this afternoon."

Weeks was setting up his camera in the dead man's room as McLee entered.

"Take over here, sergeant," he told Rice. "I may be gone for an hour or two."

"O. K., lieutenant."

Outside McLee hailed a cruising cab. "Rousseau Art Galleries, Fifty-seventh Street," he told the driver.

The Rousseau Art Galleries was one of *those* places. "I'd like," said McLee to a man in gray cravat seated at an ornate mahogany desk, "to talk with someone who knows pictures from A to Z."

"So would I," the man replied with a wry smile. He squinted at McLee's card. "What's on your mind, lieutenant? I'm Mr. Rousseau."

McLee blinked. "Professor Edward Armitage dealt with you, didn't he?"

"Still does, I hope."

"I'm afraid not," McLee replied, and he told the art dealer what had happened. "I saw one of your bills on his desk."

"Murdered! Good heavens!" Rousseau ejaculated. "He was the best rare print customer I had."

"That's what I was coming to. Did he ever go in for oil paintings?"

"Never, so far as I know. He liked them, but as he never wanted anything but the best and couldn't afford *great* oils, he confined himself to prints."

"I was told he was worth around a million."

"So am I. Still I can't afford to *collect* the best." He pointed to a canvas in back of his desk. "I'm asking three hundred thousand for that one."

"No harm in asking." McLee grinned.

The art dealer seemed not to hear. "Incredible!" he intoned. "I talked with Professor Armitage only yesterday. He was here looking over some old Mexican prints."

"A slug from a .45 in the right place takes about five seconds to finish you," McLee replied. "What time was he here?"

"Some time before noon."

"How about Preston Lyle, the son-in-law? His paintings any good?"

"To scare children with, perhaps. Why?"

"The old man seemed to have liked them. He had one hanging over his bed."

"I'll believe that when I see it!"

"So he didn't think they were so hot?"

"Right. Some years ago he brought me a couple of Lyle's efforts. To vindicate his own judgment. We disagreed slightly about them. They were worse than he had thought." The art dealer paused. "You think Lyle did it?"

"Frankly, I didn't until now." McLee winked at Rousseau. "And even this motive would hardly stand

up in court—murdering a man so he could hang one of his bum pictures over his bed. You've met the niece, I suppose?"

"Yes. Nice girl. She's been here with him a good many times. You're not telling me that you think she did it? She's hardly the type to commit murder."

"I've seen all types commit murder. She is his heir. And she was married last week to a sheepherder from California."

"A what?"

McLee smiled. "He owns five thousand sheep, so I guess he herds them—now and then. I was just wondering if you'd heard of it."

"I hadn't. You think he married the girl for her expectations, then killed the old man?"

McLee shrugged. "Professor Armitage had taken steps to have the marriage annulled since the girl is slightly under age. That's enough for a man of this sheepherder's type to do something about it."

"Big, silent Westerner, eh?"

"Big and Western—not silent. He gave his gun to the girl; claimed this fellow Lyle made passes at her."

"I wouldn't put it past him. He was overfriendly with the housekeeper, Armitage told me."

"Nice family!" said McLee.

"The old man was all right. A little soured on the world. His sister ran off to California with a—desert rat, I believe they're called. Then his daughter married this so-called artist and made Armitage promise on her deathbed to give Lyle a crack at being Leonardo da Vinci; she was so sure he was a genius. Women are that way. The old man settled a small annuity on Lyle for life so he could go on smearing paint on canvas. Armitage played square all right, and all the time despising the fellow for a panhandler. He was a dour old man, but he lived up to his promise. Lyle pestered the life out of him to give him enough in a lump sum for four years' study on the Continent. Armitage asked my opinion. I told him that if Paris could make an artist out of Lyle I'd believe in miracles. I don't see, however, why he should kill the professor. He'd have got his sixty a month no matter what happened. And while Armitage lived, he was also sure of a home in addition to his income."

"So far as you know, then, Professor Armitage never owned an oil painting in his life?"

"With one exception," Rousseau replied. "Some ten years ago he returned from Europe with one. I was at the customs house appraising importations for the treasury department when he called for it. I had put the value of a hundred dollars on it. Armitage paid forty dollars duty on it. I spoofed him a bit about buying an old master since the picture was painted on an old canvas, a favorite trick of unscrupulous dealers. He said he had bought it with his eyes open—liked the subject, a pretty bit of Mediterranean coast done by some promising youngster."

"Do you remember what the frame looked like?" McLee asked.

"The frame? I'm ashamed of you, lieutenant! The usual mid-Victorian gilt type, as I remember. Why?"

"Scrolls and leaves?" McLee persisted.

Rousseau nodded. "The Victorians went in for that sort of thing."

"Ever see it since? I mean the picture, not the frame."

"Once, about a month later. He had hung it over his bed—where you tell me Lyle's Palisades is hanging now. Next time I called on him, it

wasn't there. I asked him what he had done with it. He said he put it in the attic, that he'd grown tired looking at it. I never saw it after that. Next time I referred to it, he passed it off, but when I offered to allow him something on it on his account thinking I'd take it off his hands since he was a good customer, he snapped back at me that he didn't care to sell it, so I dropped the subject."

"When were you at his house last?" McLee asked.

"I haven't been there in several years. He didn't want me to come up; said his room was so cluttered that he was ashamed of having anyone see it, so I kept away. He had been getting queer of late. Hermit stuff. I was surprised when he had the girl come and live with him."

McLee was looking at the three-hundred-thousand-dollar old master above Rousseau's bald head.

"You said a while ago that you'd believe it if you saw one of Lyle's pictures hanging over the old man's bed. I'm calling you on that, if you can spare the time."

"I can't but I'll come—peaceably. But why?"

"There's something phony going on there. I may need a little expert advice—at your usual rates, of course."

"When d'you want me to come?"

"I've a cab outside. I'll have to work fast."

"All right, lieutenant."

On the way to the house McLee told the cab driver to stop at an artist's material store on Lexington Avenue. He was gone but a few minutes. When he returned to the cab, he was carrying a small can.

"What's that?" Rousseau asked.

"I'm going to try a little experiment—in art," McLee replied.

"Go ahead, be mysterious!" Rousseau shrugged as the cab moved on.

"I may be all wet. If I am, you'll get your horse laugh."

When the cab pulled up before the house, McLee asked the art dealer to stay in the car. Sergeant Rice was on the stoop.

"The boys from the morgue just left with the body, lieutenant," he said.

"All right. Take the four of them into the old man's room and close the door. I'll be in Lyle's studio."

"O. K., lieutenant. Who is that in the taxi?" he asked.

"An art expert. Get going."

McLee then went into the studio. He was standing looking at the still wet picture on the easel and at the ornate gilt old-fashioned frame leaning against the wall nearby, as Sergeant Rice entered. Drawing from his coat pocket the can he had purchased at the art store, McLee unscrewed the top, poured a little of the liquid on a rag, and stepping up to the picture, he wiped a small spot at the lower right-hand corner. The wet paint came off. He bent forward and examined the spot.

"O. K., sergeant," he said. "Get all the wet paint off that canvas with this turpentine, then put it in that frame. Sing out when you're ready. Bring the picture, frame and all, into the old man's room."

"Holy mackerel, lieutenant, you're going to have one mad artist on your hands!"

"Yeah," said McLee. "Get busy."

He left the room and signaled Rousseau. As the two entered the dead man's cluttered room, the girl started from her chair.

"Oh, Mr. Rousseau!" she cried.

"I'm sorry, my dear!" the art dealer murmured. He adjusted his pince-nez and stared at young McFarland. "So this is your sheepherder!"

"Any objection?" the young man demanded.

"None," said Mr. Rousseau hastily. He nodded at the artist. "How d'you do, Lyle?"

"Quite well," the artist replied sullenly.

The art dealer's glance traveled to the picture of the Hudson Palisades over the day bed. He said nothing for all of a minute. Lyle spoke up.

"Lousy, isn't it?" he jeered.

"No need of maligning an innocent parasite," Rousseau replied. "If that's all, lieutenant, I'll be on my way."

"Not quite," McLee replied. He looked around the circle of faces. "Any four of you could have done it—"

"Would it help you if we drew lots?" young McFarland asked sententiously.

"I wouldn't get tough, fellow. In the first place, you were carrying a gun without a permit—"

"I have an Inyo County permit."

"Which doesn't entitle you to hunt on Manhattan Island. In the second place, you had your wife swear falsely to a marriage license—"

"And in the third place, I knocked the old man off because he was trying to have our marriage annulled?"

McLee nodded. "So you wouldn't come in for your wife's inheritance unless you worked fast."

The girl jumped at McLee. "You lie!" she cried. "Jim wouldn't do anything like that. You rotten cops!"

"I just phoned the medical examiner," McLee lied. "The bullet came from your husband's gun."

"I don't care. He didn't do it, I tell you. He knows nothing about it. I . . . I shot Uncle Ned! He . . . he ruined my mother's life, then tried to ruin mine. I went into his room after Jim had had the argument with him and tried to reason with him. It was I who unhooked the window. I climbed up on the roof of the addition and shot him through it after I had sent Jim back to his hotel last night."

"Oh, Jean . . . Jean!" Mrs. Gorm whispered.

"And left the gun in your dresser drawer for us to find?" McLee asked softly. "Nice work, girlie." He was looking at her husband. "You know how to pick 'em, sheepherder," he told the boy as Sergeant Rice called out from the hall:

"O. K., lieutenant!"

McLee opened the door. "Bring it in, sergeant," he said.

Rice entered with a picture in the ornate scrolled-leaf frame. Not the uninspired landscape Lyle had spent the night working on, but something quite different. At McLee's direction, he set it up on the day bed under the Hudson Palisades and stepped back.

Mr. Rousseau adjusted his pince-nez with trembling hands and leaned forward.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "The Arillo Madonna!"

Lyle jumped for the window—took the sash with him, but Sergeant Rice had him by the leg. The two of them fought briefly on the narrow roof four feet below and fetched up in the littered backyard—with Lyle in handcuffs. Mrs. Gorm screamed and tried to throw herself out of the window after them, but McLee caught her.

"He isn't worth it, Mrs. Gorm," he said softly. "Are you all right, sergeant?" he called out through the wrecked window.

"Sure, I'm O. K. I hit the pile of shavings. He's cut some on the glass."

"Oh . . . oh!" the housekeeper moaned.

"Bring him in the back way," McLee called out. He put his hand on the woman's shoulder. "Take him up to your room and help the sergeant dress his cuts before he takes him away."

Mrs. Gorm buried her anguished face in her hands. "Thank you, lieutenant," she whispered and stumbled from the room.

Rousseau tiptoed closer to the picture. Sergeant Rice's turpentined rag had left a few smears of paint—the remains of the landscape which Lyle had so hurriedly painted over it the night before.

"It is unquestionably the Arillo Madonna!" he said in awed tones. "It was stolen from the Carrenzia Galleries in Florence, Italy, ten years ago, lieutenant!"

"About the time Professor Armitage imported the picture you appraised at one hundred dollars," McLee said.

"Y-yes," Rousseau replied, turning a faint pink even to his bald dome.

"I wouldn't take it too hard," McLee said. "We all slip up now and then. Armitage had had that Mediterranean coast picture painted over it—knowing that it was stolen. When he thought it safe, he removed the overpainting. I guess that's why he never allowed anyone in this room during the past ten years, why he refused your offer to buy it. He took it from the wall every time you called here, of course, knowing you'd recognize it. Lyle must have seen it some time. Figured he could bootleg it to some millionaire collector for enough to have his fling in Paris."

"Fling!" Rousseau exclaimed. "Why, that picture is worth three quarters of a million dollars, lieutenant!"

"Collectors," said McLee, "are nuts."

Mr. Rousseau cleared his throat. "Would you mind telling me how you came to suspect this?" he asked.

"Certainly not." McLee stepped up to the couch and removed Lyle's picture of the Hudson Palisades from over the day bed.

"Look!" he said, pointing to the wall.

The art dealer stared at it and the two young people stepped closer. On the faded wallpaper where the Arillo Madonna had hung for ten years in its ornate scrolled-leaf frame, the sun falling through the window opposite for a few hours each day had traced in perfect outline to the minutest detail the convolution of every leaf and scroll of the frame.

"So I knew some other picture had been hanging here for a long time," McLee said. "When I saw in Lyle's studio the frame that had made this pattern, the case was in the bag. Just to make sure, I checked with you, Mr. Rousseau. Lyle knew the old man had had a quarrel with McFarland; that McFarland's gun was in the girl's dresser drawer. It was made to order for him. He got the gun, came in here and killed the old man with it, opened the window catch to make it look like Armitage was shot from the roof of that addition—then put the gun back in the girl's drawer for us to find."

The boy and the girl were looking at each other. The boy held out his hands.

"Put 'em on, copper," he said. "I got it coming. I should have known better than pack a gun in this man's town!"

"Next time you dip your sheep, go soak your head," McLee snapped. "Come on, Mr. Rousseau."

THE RED TIDE

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

Young Mrs. Jacqueline Blaine opened a pair of gas-flame-blue eyes and looked wistfully up at the ceiling. Then she closed them again and nearly went back to sleep. There wasn't very much to get up for; the party was over.

The party was over, and they hadn't raised the twenty-five hundred dollars.

She rolled her head sidewise on the pillow and nestled it against the curve of one ivory shoulder, the way a pouting little girl does. Maybe it was that last thought made her do it, instinctively. Water was sizzling downward against tiling somewhere close by; then it broke off as cleanly as at the cut of a switch, and a lot of laggard, left-over drops went *tick,*

tick, tick like a clock.

Jacqueline Blaine opened her eyes a second time, looked down her arm over the edge of the bed to the little diamond-splintered microcosm attached to the back of her wrist. It was about the size of one of her own elongated fingernails, and very hard to read numbers from. She raised her head slightly from the pillow, and still couldn't make out the time on the tiny watch.

It didn't matter; the party was over, they'd all gone—all but that old fossil, maybe. Gil had seemed to pin his hopes on him, had said he hoped he could get him alone. She could have told Gil right now the old bird was a hopeless case; Gil wouldn't be able to make a dent in him. She'd seen that when she tried to lay the groundwork for Gil the day before.

Well, if he'd stayed, let Leona look after him, get his breakfast. She sat up and yawned, and until you'd seen her yawn, you would have called a yawn an ungainly grimace. Not after, though. She propped her chin up with her knees and looked around. A silverish evening dress was lying where she last remembered squirming out of it, too tired to care. Gil's dress tie was coiled in a snake formation on the floor.

She could see a green tide rising and falling outside of the four windows, on two sides of the room. Not water, but trees swaying in the breeze. The upper halves of the panels were light-blue. The sun was somewhere straight overhead, she could tell that by the way it hardly came in past the sills. It wasn't a bad lookout, even after a party. "It would be fun living in it," she mourned to herself, "if the upkeep wasn't so tough; if I didn't have to be nice to eccentric old codgers, trying to get them to cough up. All to keep up appearances."

Gil came out of the shower alcove. He was partly dressed already—trousers and undershirt, but feet still bare—and mopping his hair with a towel. He threw it behind him onto the floor and came on in. Her eyes followed him halfway around the room with growing curiosity.

"Well, how'd you make out?" she asked finally.

He didn't answer. She glanced at the adjoining bed, but it was only rumpled on top, the covers hadn't been turned down. He must have just lain down on it without getting in.

She didn't speak again until she had come out of the shower in turn. He was all dressed now, standing looking out of the window, cigarette smoke working its way back around the bend of his neck. She snapped off her rubber bathing cap, remarked:

"I guess Leona thinks we died in our sleep."

She wriggled into a yellow jersey that shot ten years to pieces—and she'd looked about twenty to begin with.

"Is Burroughs still here," she asked wearily, "or did he decide to go back to town anyway, after I left you two last night?"

"He left," he said shortly. He didn't turn around. The smoke coming around the nape of his neck thickened almost to a fog, then thinned out again, as though he'd taken a whale of a drag just then.

"I was afraid of that," she said. But she didn't act particularly disturbed. "Took the eight-o'clock train, I suppose."

He turned around. "Eight o'clock, hell!" he said. "He took the milk train!"

She put down the comb and

stopped what she was doing. "What?" Then she said. "How do you know?"

"I drove him to the station, that's how I know!" he snapped. His face was turned to her, but he wasn't looking at her. His eyes focused a little too far to one side, then shifted over a little too far to the other, trying to dodge hers.

"What got into him, to go at that unearthly hour? The milk train—that hits here at 4:30 a. m., doesn't it?"

He was looking down. "At 4:20," he said. He was already lighting another cigarette, and it was a live one judging by the way it danced around before he could get it to stand still between his cupped hands.

"Well, what were you doing up at that hour yourself?"

"I hadn't come up to bed yet at all. He decided to go, so I ran him in."

"You had a row with him," she stated positively. "Why else should he leave—"

"I did not!" He took a couple of quick steps toward the door, as though her barrage of questions were getting on his nerves, as though he wanted to escape from the room. Then he changed his mind, stayed in the new place, looking at her. "I got it out of him," he said quietly. That special quietness of voice that made her an accomplice in his financial difficulties. No, every wife should be that. That special tone that seemed to make her his shill in a confidence game. That special tone that she was beginning to hate.

"You don't act very happy about it," she remonstrated.

He took a wallet out of his pocket, split it lengthwise, showing a pleating of currency edges. And it was so empty, most of the time!

"Not the whole twenty-five hundred?"

"The works."

"You mean he carries that much in ready cash around with him, when he just comes for a week end in the country! Why . . . why, I saw him go in to cash a twenty-five-dollar check Saturday afternoon in the village. So he could hold up his end when we went out to the inn that night. I was embarrassed, because he asked me if I thought you could oblige him; I not only knew you couldn't, but I knew it was up to us as hosts to pay his way, and I didn't know what to say. Luckily you weren't around, so he couldn't ask you; he finally went in to get it cashed himself."

"I know," he said impatiently. "I met him out front and drove him in myself!"

"You?"

"I told him I was strapped, couldn't help him out. Then after he'd cashed it himself and was putting it away, he explained that he had twenty-five hundred on him, but it was a deposit earmarked for the bank Monday morning. He hadn't had time to put it in Friday afternoon before he came out here; our invitation had swept him off his feet so. He wanted this smaller amount just for expense money."

"But then he handed the twenty-five hundred over to you anyway?"

"No, he didn't," he said, goaded. "At least, not at first. He had his check book on him, and when I finally broke down his resistance after you'd gone to bed last night, he wrote me out a check. Or started to. I suggested as long as he happened to have that exact amount in cash, he make the loan in cash; that I was overdrawn at my own bank, and if I tried to put his check

through there they'd put a nick in it and I needed every penny. He finally agreed; I gave him a receipt, and he gave me the cash."

"But then why did he leave at that ungodly hour?"

"Well, he did one of those slow burns, after it was all over and he'd come across. You know him when it comes to parting with money. It must have finally dawned on him that we'd only had him out here, among a lot of people so much younger than him, to put the bee on him. Anyway, he asked when the next train was, and I couldn't induce him to stay over; he insisted on leaving then and there. So I drove him in. In one way, I was afraid if he didn't go, he'd think it over and ask for his money back, so I didn't urge him *too* much."

"But you're sure you didn't have words over it?"

"He didn't say a thing. But I could tell by the sour look on his face what he was thinking."

"I suppose he's off me, too," she sighed.

"So what? You don't need an extra grandfather."

They had come out of the bedroom and started down the upper hall toward the stairs. She silenced him at sight of an open door ahead, with sunlight streaming out of it. "Don't say anything about it in front of Leona. She'll expect to get paid right away."

An angular Negress with a dust cloth in her hand looked out at them as they reached the open door. "Mawnin'. I about gib you two up. Coffee's been on and off 'bout three times. I can't drink no more of it myself; make me bilious. I done fix the old gentleman's room up while I was waitin'."

"Oh, you didn't have to bother," Jacqueline Blaine assured her happily, almost gayly; "we're not having any more guests for a while, thank—"

"He still here, ain't he?" asked Leona, peering surprisedly.

This time it was Gil who answered. "No. Why?"

"He done lef' his bag in there—one of 'em, anyway. He want it sent to the station after him?"

Jacqueline looked in surprise from the maid to her husband. The blinding sunlight flashing through the doorway made his face seem whiter than it actually was. It was hard on the eyes, too, made him shift about, as in their bedroom before.

"He must've overlooked it in his hurry, gone off without it," he murmured. "I didn't know how many he'd brought with him so I never noticed."

Jacqueline turned out the palms of her hands. "How could he do that, when he only brought two in the first place, and"—she glanced into the guest room—"this one's the larger of the two?"

"It was in the clothes closet; maybe he didn't see it himself," offered Leona, "and forgit he hab it with him. I slide it out just now." She hurried down the stairs to prepare their delayed breakfast.

Jacqueline lowered her voice, with a precautionary glance after her, and asked him: "You didn't get him drunk, did you? Is that how you got it out of him? He's liable to make trouble for us at soon as he—"

"He was cold sober," he growled. "Try to get him to drink!" So he had tried, she thought to herself, and hadn't succeeded.

"Well, then, I don't see how on earth anyone could go off and leave a bag that size, when they only brought one other one out with them in the first place."

He was obviously irritable, nerves

on edge; anyone would have been after being up the greater part of the night. He cut the discussion short by taking an angry step over, grasping the doorknob, and pulling the door shut. Since he seemed to take such a trifling thing that seriously, she refrained from dwelling on it any longer just then. He'd feel better after he'd had some coffee.

They sat down in a sun-drenched porch, open glass on three sides. Leona brought in two glasses of orange juice, with the pulp shreds all settled at the bottom from standing too long.

"Wabble 'em around a little," she suggested cheerily; "dat makes it clear up."

Jackie Blaine believed in letting servants express their individualities. When you're a good deal behind on their wages, you can't very well object, anyway.

Gil's face looked even more drawn down here than it had in the lesser sunlight upstairs. Haggard. But his mood had cleared a little. "Before long, we'll sit breakfasting in the South American way—and will I be glad of a change of scene!"

"There won't be much left to travel on, if you take care of our debts."

"If," he said half audibly.

The phone rang.

"That must be Burroughs, asking us to forward his bag." Jackie Blaine got up and went in to answer it.

It wasn't Burroughs, it was his wife.

"Oh, hello," Jackie said cordially. "We were awfully sorry to hear you were laid up like that and couldn't come out with Mr. Burroughs. Feeliny any better?"

Mrs. Burroughs' voice sounded cranky, put out. "I think it's awfully inconsiderate of Homer not to let me know he was staying over another day. He knew I wasn't well when he left! I think the least he might have done was phone me or send a wire; if he wasn't coming, and you can tell him I said so."

Jackie Blaine tightened her hold on the telephone. "But, hold on, Mrs. Burroughs. He isn't here any more; he did leave, early this morning."

There was a startled stillness at the other end. Then: "Early this morning! Well, why hasn't he gotten here? What train did he take?"

Jackie swiveled toward her husband, telephone and all. She could see him sitting out there from where she was. "Didn't you say Mr. Burroughs took the milk train, Gil?"

She could see the gnarled lump of his Adam's apple go all the way up, then ebb down again. Something made him swallow, though why he should swallow at that particular point—his cup wasn't anywhere near his lips. Unless maybe there was some coffee left in his mouth from before, that he'd forgotten to swallow till now. He didn't move at all. Not even his lips. It was like a statue speaking—a statue of gleaming white marble. "Yes, that's right."

Somehow there wasn't very much color left in her own face. "What time would that bring him in, Gil?" She always used the car herself.

"Before eight." She relayed it.

"Well, where is he then?" The voice was beginning to fray a little around the edges.

"He may have gone direct to his office from the train, Mrs. Burroughs; he may have had something important to attend to before he went home."

Still more of the self-control in the other woman's voice unraveled.

"But he didn't, I know he didn't! That's why I'm calling you; his office phoned a little while ago to ask me if I knew whether or not he'd be in today."

"Oh." The exclamation was soundless, a mental flash on Jackie's part.

The voice had degenerated to a pitiful plea for assistance, all social stiffness gone now. It was the frightened whimper of a pampered invalid wife who suddenly has the tables turned on her. "But what's become of him, Mrs. Blaine?"

Jackie said in a voice that sounded a little hollow in her own ears: "I'm sure there's nothing to worry about, Mrs. Burroughs; I'm sure he's just unavoidably detained somewhere in town." But somehow she caught herself swallowing in her turn now, as Gil had before. It was such a straight line from here—or rather from the station out here—to his home, how could anything possibly happen to anyone traveling it?

"He was feeling all right when you saw him off, wasn't he, Gil?"

He started up from his chair, moved over to one of the glass panels, stood staring out, boiling smoke.

"Leave me out of it for two minutes, will you?" His voice came back to her mufflediy.

That "Leave me out of it" blurred the rest of the conversation as far as she was concerned. The voice she was listening to disintegrated into sobs and incoherent remarks. She heard herself saying vaguely: 'Please don't worry. . . . I feel terrible. . . . Will you call me back and let me know?" But what was there she could do? And she knew, oh, she knew that she didn't want to hear from this woman again.

She hung up. She was strangely unable to turn around and look toward where Gil was standing. It was a physical incapacity. She felt almost rigid. She had remained standing during the entire conversation. She sat down now. She lighted a cigarette, but it went right out again because she didn't keep it going. She let her head fall slowly as of its own weight forward into her upcurved hand, so that it was planted between her eyes and partly shut them out.

She didn't want any more breakfast.

II.

She saw the man get out of the car and come up to the house. She knew him by sight. He'd been here before. This was about three that afternoon, that Monday afternoon, the day Burroughs had—gone. He had a cheap car. The sound of it driving up and stopping was what had made her get up off the bed and go over to the window to look. She'd stopped crying by then anyway. You can't cry *all* day long; there isn't that much crying in you.

Then when she saw who it was—oh, that wasn't anything. This was such a minor matter—now. And of course it could be taken care of easily enough—now. She stayed there by the window, waiting to see him walk out to his car and drive off again, within five minutes at the most—with the money he'd come for. Because Gil was down there; he could attend to it and get rid of him for good—now. Then there'd be one fewer to hound the two of them.

But the five minutes were up, and the man didn't come right out again the way she'd expected him to. He seemed to be staying as long as those other times, when all he got was a drink and a lot of build-up. Angry voices filtered up to her—one angry

voice, anyway, and one subdued, placative one.

She went outside to the head of the stairs and listened tautly. Not that this was new to her, but it had a new, a terrible significance now.

The angry voice, that of the man who had come in the car, was barking: "How long does this keep up, Blaine? You gimme that same runaround each time! You think all I gotta do is come out here? Look at this house you live in! Look at the front you put up! You mean you haven't got that much, a guy like you?"

And Gil's voice, whining plaintively: "I tell you I haven't got it this minute! What am I going to do, take it out of my blood? You're going to get it; just give me time."

The angry voice rose to a roar, but at least it shifted toward the front door. "I'm warning you for the last time, you better get it and no more of this funny business! My boss has been mighty patient with you! There are other ways of handling welshers, and don't forget it!"

The door slammed and the car outside racketed up and dwindled off in the distance.

Jackie Blaine crept down the stairs a step at a time toward where Gil was shakily pouring himself a drink. Her face was white, as white as his had been that noon when they first got up. But not because of what she had just heard. Still because of its implication.

"Who was it?" she said hoarsely.

"Verona's stooge. Still that same lousy personal loan he once made me."

"How much is it?"

"Six hundred odd."

She knew all these things; she wanted to hear it from him. She spoke in a frightened whisper: "Then why didn't you give it to him? You have twenty-five hundred on you."

He went ahead with his drink.

"Why? Gil, look at me. *Why?*"

He wouldn't answer.

She reeled over to him, like someone about to pass out; her head fell against his chest. "D'you love me?"

"That's the one thing in my life that's on the level."

"Then you've got to tell me. I've got to know. *Did you do anything to him last night?*"

She buried her face against him, waiting. Silence.

"I can take it. I'll stick with you. I'll string along. But I've got to know, one way or the other." She looked up. She began to shake him

despairingly by the shoulders. "Gil, why don't you answer me? Don't stand there— That's why you didn't pay Verona's debt, isn't it? Because you're afraid to have it known now that you have money on you—after *he* was here."

"Yes, I am afraid," he breathed almost inaudibly.

"Then you—" She sagged against him; he had to catch her under the arms or she would have gone down.

"No, wait. Pull yourself together a minute. Here, swallow this. Now . . . steady, hold onto the table. Yes, I did do something. I know what you're thinking. No, not that. It's bad enough, though. I'm worried. Stick with me, Jackie. I don't want to get in trouble. I met him coming out of the house Saturday, wanting to cash that pin-money check, and I drove him in, like I told you. The bank was closed for the half day, of course, and I suggested getting it cashed at the hotel. I told him they knew me and I could get it done easier than he could, so I took it in for him and he waited outside in the car.

"I didn't mean to put one over on him; it all came up sort of sudden. I knew I didn't have a chance at that hotel desk, not even if the check had been signed by a millionaire, and I didn't want him to come in with me and see them turn me down. Jack McGovern happened to come through the lobby just as I walked in, and on the spur of the moment I borrowed twenty-five from him as a personal loan without giving him the check. I didn't mean anything by it. It was just that I was embarrassed to let him know I couldn't even accommodate one of my own house guests for a measly twenty-five. You know how they talk around here. I went out and gave the twenty-five to Burroughs, and I kept the endorsed check in my pocket. I intended tearing it up, but I couldn't very well do it in front of him. Then later I forgot about it.

"I tackled him last night after you went to bed, and he didn't come through. He got crabby, caught on we'd just played him for a sucker, refused to finish out the visit, insisted on taking the next train back. I drove him in; I couldn't very well let him walk at that hour. He got out at the station and I came on back without waiting.

"I started to do a slow burn. There I was, not only no better off than before we asked him out, but even more in the red, on account of the expense of the big house party we threw to impress him. Naturally I was sore, after all the false hopes we'd raised, after the way you'd put yourself out to be nice to him. I couldn't sleep all night, stayed down here drinking and pacing back and forth, half nuts with worry. And then sometime after daylight I happened to stick my hand in my pocket for something and suddenly turned up his twenty-five-dollar endorsed check.

"It was a crazy thing to do, but I didn't stop to think. I lifted it, added two zips to the figures, got in the car then and there, and drove all the way in to town. I cashed it at his own bank the minute the doors opened at nine. I knew he had twenty times that much on tap at all times, so it wouldn't hurt him any."

"But, Gil, didn't you know what would happen, didn't you know what he could do to you?"

"Yeah, I did, but I guess I had a vague idea in the back of my mind that if it came to a showdown and he threatened to get nasty with me about it—well, there were a couple of times he got a little too affectionate with you; you told me so your-

self—I could threaten to get just as nasty with him about that. You know how scared he is of that wife of his."

"Gil," was all she said, "Gil."

"Yeah, I'm pretty low."

"As long as it's not the other. But then what's become of him? Where did he go?"

"I don't know."

"Did you *see* him get on the train?"

"No, I just left him there at the station and turned around and drove back without waiting."

She hesitated a moment before speaking. Then she said slowly: "What I've just heard hasn't exactly been pleasant, but I told you I could take it, and I can, and I have. And I think—I know—I can stand the other, the worse thing, too, if you tell it to me *now*, right away, and get it over with. But now's the time. This is your last chance, Gil. Don't let me find out later, because later—it may be different, I may not still be able to feel the same way about it. You didn't *kill* Burroughs last night, did you?"

He breathed deeply. His eyes looked into hers. "I never killed anyone in my life. And now, are you with me?"

She raised her head defiantly. "To the bitter end."

"Bitter." He smiled ruefully. "I don't like that word."

III.

His name was Ward, he said. She wondered if that was customary on their parts, to give their names like that instead of their official standing. She wasn't familiar with their technique, had never been interviewed before. And of course, she would be alone in the house when he happened to drop in. Still, on second thought, that might be better. Gil might have given a—well, a misleading impression, been keyed up, on account of that check business. This was Tuesday, the day after Burroughs had last been seen.

Her caller spared her any of that business of flaunting a badge in front of Leona; that was another consoling thing. He must have just given his name to Leona, because Leona went right back to the kitchen instead of stalling around outside the room so she could hear. Just people that came to try to collect money didn't interest her any more; the novelty had worn off long ago.

Jackie Blaine said: "Sit down, Mr. Ward. My husband's gone in to town—"

"I know that." It came out as flat as a sheet of onion-skin paper, but for a minute it made her a little uneasy; it sounded as though they were already watching Gil's movements.

"If there's anything I can do—"

"There always is, don't you think?"

He didn't look so coarse, so hard-bitten, as she'd always imagined those men did. He looked—well, no different from any number of other young fellows they'd entertained out here, whom she'd danced with, golfed with, and almost invariably found herself putting in their places, in some dimly lighted corner, before the week end was over. She knew how to handle the type well. But then she'd never parried life-and-death with them before. And maybe he just *looked* the type.

He said: "Mr. Homer Burroughs was here at your house from Friday until some time late Sunday night or early Monday morning." There wasn't the rising inflection of interrogation at the end of it.

"He was."

"When did you last see him?"

"My husband drove him to the station in time for—"

"That isn't what I asked you, Mrs. Blaine."

She didn't like that; he was trying to differentiate between Gil and herself. They were together in this, sink or swim. She answered it his way. "I said good night to Mr. Burroughs at ten to one Monday morning. My husband remained downstairs with him. My husband drove him—"

He didn't want that part of it. "Then 1 a. m. Monday was the last time you saw him. When you left him, who else was in the house with him besides your husband, anyone?"

"Just my husband."

"When you said good night, was it understood you weren't to see him in the morning? Did he say anything about leaving in the small hours of the night?"

That was a bad hurdle to get over. "It was left indefinite," she said. "We're . . . we're sort of casual out here about those things—formal good-byes and such."

"Even so, as his hostess, wouldn't it be up to him to at least drop some hint to let you know he was going, to thank you for your hospitality before taking his leave?"

She brought a gleam of her old prom-girl manner, of three or four years before, to the surface. Keep it light and off dangerous ground. It had worked to ward off boa-constrictor hugs; maybe it would work to keep your husband out of difficultits with the police. "You've read your Emily Post, I see. Won't you have a drink while you're doing this?"

He flattened her pitiful attempt like a locomotive running on a single track full steam ahead. "No, I won't! Did he drop the slightest remark to indicate that he wouldn't be here by the time you were up the following morning?"

He'd given her an opening there: her own and Gil's habitual late hour for rising any day in the week. "Well, we took that for granted. After all, he had to be back at the office by nine and—"

But it didn't work out so good. "But he didn't have to take the milk train to get back to the office at nine. Isn't it a little unusual that he should leave in the dead of night like that, a man of sixty-four, without getting his night's rest first?"

"Well, all right. Say it is!" she flared resentfully. "But we're not accountable for his eccentricities, why come to us about it? He left here, I assure you. Look under the carpet if you don't think so!" A second later she wished she hadn't said that; it seemed to put her ahead of him, so to speak. They got you all muddled, these professional detectives. Just think if it had been a case of out-and-out murder, instead of just trying to conceal that money business of Gil's!

Ward smiled wryly at her dig about the carpet. "Oh, I don't doubt he left the house, here."

She didn't like the slight emphasis he gave the word "house," as though implying something had happened to him right outside it, or not far away.

"Then what more have we got to do with it? Who's putting these ideas in your head, his wife?"

"I don't have ideas in my head, just instructions, Mrs. Blaine."

"Why don't you check at the other end, in the city? Why don't you find out what became of him there?"

He said very quietly, "Because he never got there, Mrs. Blaine."

Womanlike, she kept trying to retain the offensive, as the best defense. "How do you know for sure?

Just because he didn't appear either at his home or his office? He may have been run over by a taxi. He may have been overcome by amnesia."

"To get to the city, he would have had to take the train first of all, wouldn't he, Mrs. Blaine? A man of sixty-four isn't likely to thumb a ride in along the highway at four in the morning, with week-end baggage in the bargain, is he?"

"He did take the train. He must have. My husb—"

"We happen to know he didn't. We've questioned the conductor on that train whose business it is to punch the passengers' tickets as they get on at each successive stop. No one got on the 4:20 train at all at your particular station out here. And that milk train is empty enough to make it easy to keep track. The ticket agent didn't sell anyone a ticket between the hours of one and six thirty that morning, and since you drove him out in the car yourself on Friday afternoon, it isn't likely he had the second half of a round-trip ticket in his possession; he would have had to buy a one-way one."

A cold chill ran down her spine; she tried not to be aware of it. "All I can say is, my husband drove him to the station and then came on back without watching him board the train. He may have strolled a little too far to the end of the platform while waiting and been waylaid by a footpad in the dark."

"Yes," he said reasonably enough. "But why should the footpad carry him off bodily with him into thin air? We've searched the immediate vicinity of the station pretty thoroughly, and now we're combing over the woods and fields along the way. His baggage has disappeared, too. How many pieces did he bring with him, Mrs. Blaine?"

That one was a son of a gun. Would it be better to say one and try to cover up the presence of the one he'd left behind? Suppose it came out later that he'd brought two—as it was bound to—and they identified the second one, upstairs, as his? On the other hand, if she admitted that he'd left one behind, wouldn't that only add to the strange circumstances surrounding his departure? She couldn't afford to pile that additional strangeness on top of the already overwhelming strangeness of the hour at which he'd gone; it made it look too bad for them, too much as though his leave-taking had been impromptu, conditioned by anger or a quarrel. And then in the wake of that would unfailingly come revelation of Gil's misdeed in regard to the check.

She took the plunge, answered the detective's question with a deliberate but not unqualified falsehood, after all this had gone through her mind. "I believe . . . one."

"You can't say for sure? You brought him out in the car with you, Mrs. Blaine."

"I've brought so many people out in the car. Sometimes I dream I'm a station-wagon driver."

Then, just as she felt she couldn't stand another minute of this cat-and-mouse play, just as she could feel the makings of a three-alarm scream gathering in her system, she recognized the sound of their own car outside and Gil was back at last. He sounded the horn once, briefly, as in a sort of questioning signal.

"Here's my husband now," she said, and jumped up and ran to the door before he could stop her.

"Hello, Gil," she said loudly. She wound an arm around his neck, kissed him on the side of the face,

back toward the ear—or seemed to. "There's a detective in there," she breathed.

His own breath answered hers: "Wait a minute; stay like this, up against me." He said loudly down the back of her neck: "Hello, beautiful. Miss me?"

She could feel his hands fumbling between their bodies. He thrust something into her disengaged hand, the one that wasn't clasping the nape of his neck. Spongy paper, currency. "Better get rid of this. I don't think he'll search me, but bury it in your stocking or somewhere, till he goes." And then in a full-bodied voice: "Any calls for me?"

"No, but there's a gentleman inside waiting to see you now."

And under cover of that he'd gone on: "Go out and get in the car; take it away. Go down the village and . . . buy things. Anything. Keep buying, keep buying. Stay out. Phone here before you come back. Phone here first."

Then they had to break it up; they'd gotten away with m— Not that word! They'd gotten away with a lot, as it was.

She followed Gil's instructions now, but she did it her way. She couldn't fathom the motivation. But she couldn't just walk out the door, get in, and drive off; that would have been a dead give-away he'd cued her. She did it her way; it only took a minute longer. She went back into the living room after him, across it just to the opposite doorway, and called through to Leona in a war whoop: "Leona, need anything?" She didn't have to worry about getting the wrong answer; she knew how they'd be fixed.

"Sure do," said the uninhibited Leona· "all we got lef' after that bunch of cannibals is a lot of nothin'!"

"All right, I'll run down and bring you back a shot of everything." But as she passed the two men a second time, short as the delay had been—and necessary, she felt, for appearances' sake—Gil's face was almost agonized, as though he couldn't wait for her to do as he'd told her and get out. Maybe the other man couldn't notice it, but she could; she knew him so well. The detective, on the other hand, not only offered no objection to her going, but seemed to be deliberately holding his fire until she was out of the way, as though he preferred it that way, wanted to question Gil by himself.

She got in and drove off leisurely, and as she meshed gears, at the same time cached the wad of unlawful money under the elastic top of her stocking. Gil's motive for so badly wanting her to get in the car and get away from the house, and *stay* away until the fellow left, must be this money, of course. He wanted to avoid being caught in incriminating possession of it. That must be it; she couldn't figure out any other logical reason. Still, they couldn't keep on indefinitely running bases with it like this.

She'd stepped up speed now, was coursing the sleek turnpike to the village at her usual projectile clip. But not too fast to glimpse a group of men in the distance, widely separated and apparently wading around aimlessly in the fields. She had an idea what they were doing out there, though. And then a few minutes later, when that strip of woods, thick as the bristles of a hairbrush, closed in on both sides of the road, she could make out a few more of them under the trees. They were using pocket lights in there, although it wasn't quite dusk yet.

"What are they looking for him this far back for?" she thought impa-

tiently. "If Gil says he let him off at the station platform—" Stupid police. That malicious Mrs. Burroughs, paying them back now because she'd sensed that the old fool had had a soft spot for Jackie. And then in conclusion: "How do they know he's dead, anyway?"

She braked outside the village grocery. She subtracted a twenty from the money first of all, tucked that in the pocket of her jumper. She hadn't brought any bag; he'd rushed her out so. Then she went in and started buying out the store.

By the time she was through, she had a knee-high carton filled with stuff. "Take it out and put it in the rumble for me, I'll take it right along with me. Let me use your phone a minute; I want to make sure I've got everything."

Gil answered her himself. "I just got rid of him this minute," he said, in a voice hoarse from long strain. "Whew!"

She said for the benefit of the storekeeper, "Do you need anything else while I'm out?"

"No, come on back now; it's all right." And then sharply: "Listen! If you run into *him,* don't stop for him, hear me? Don't even slow down; just drive past fast. He's got no authority to stop you; he's a city dick. He's done his questioning and he's through. Don't stop for *anyone* and don't let anyone get in the car with you."

The store manager called into her just then from out front: "Mrs. Blaine, the rumble's locked. I can't get into it. Where'll I put this stuff?"

"The whole key rack's sticking in the dashboard; take it out yourself. You know the one, that broad flat one."

"That key ain't on it any more. I don't see it here with the rest."

"Wait a minute, I'll ask my husband. Gil, where's the key to the rumble? We can't find it."

"I lost it." She couldn't really hear him the first time; his voice choked up. Maybe he'd been taking a drink just then.

The storekeeper said: "Maybe it's just jammed. Should I try to pry it up for you?"

"No, you might spoil the paint job."

Gil was saying thickly in her ear: "Never mind about the rumble; let it alone. Get away from that store." Suddenly, incredibly, he was screaming at her over the wire! Literally screaming, like someone in pain. "Come on back, will ya! Come on back, I tell ya! *Come on back* with that car!"

"All right, for Heaven's sake; all right." Her eardrum tingled. That detective certainly had set his nerves on edge.

She drove back with the carton of stuff beside her on the seat. Gil was waiting for her all the way out in the middle of the roadway that passed their house.

"I'll put it to bed myself," he said gruffly, and drove the car into the garage, groceries and all, he was in such a hurry.

His face was all twinkling with perspiration when he turned to her after finishing locking the garage doors on it.

She woke up that night, sometime between two and three, and he wasn't in the room. She called, and he wasn't in the house at all. She got up and looked out the window, and the white garage doors showed a slight wedge of black between their two halves, so he'd taken the car out with him.

She wasn't really worried at first. Still, where could he have gone at

this unearthly hour? Where was there for him to go—around here? And why slip out like that, without saying a word to her? She sat there in the dark for about thirty, forty minutes, sometimes on the edge of the bed, sometimes over by the window, watching the road for him.

Suddenly a black shape came along, blurring the highway's tape-like whiteness. But in almost absolute silence, hardly recognizable as a car, lights out. It was gliding along, practically coasting, the downward tilt of the road past the house helping it.

It was he, though. He took the car around, berthed it in the garage, and then she heard him come in downstairs. A glass clinked once or twice, and then he came up. She'd put the light on, so as not to throw a scare into him. His face was like putty; she'd never seen him look like this before.

"Matter, couldn't you sleep, Gil?" she said quietly.

"I took the car out for a run, and every time I'd stop and think I'd found a place where I was alone, I'd hear some other damn car somewhere in the distance or see its lights, or think I did, anyway. Judas, the whole country seemed awake—twigs snapping, stars peering down—"

"But why stop? Why should it annoy you if there were other cars in the distance? What were you trying to do, get rid of something, throw something away?"

"Yeah," he said, low.

For a minute she got badly frightened again, like Monday morning, until he, seeming to take fright from her fright in turn, quickly stammered:

"Uh-huh that other bag of his, that second bag he left behind. He's coming back, that guy, I know he is; he isn't through yet. I was on pins and needles the whole time he was here, this afternoon, thinking he was going to go looking around and find it up there." He let some sulphur matches trickle out of his pocket. "I was going to try to burn it, but I was afraid somebody'd see me, somebody was following me." He threw himself face down across the bed. Not crying or anything, just exhausted with spent emotion. "The bitter end," he panted, "the bitter end."

A minute later she stepped back into the room, astonishment written all over her face.

"But, Gil, you didn't even have it with you, do you realize that? It's right there in the guest-room closet, where it's been all along!"

He didn't turn his head. His voice came muffledly: "I'm going crazy, I guess. I don't even know what I'm doing any more. Maybe I took one of our own by mistake."

"Why did all this have to happen to us?" she sobbed dryly as she reached out to snap off the light.

IV.

He was right, Ward came back. The next day, that was Wednesday, two days after It. He had a different air about him, a disarming, almost apologetic one, as though he were simply here to ask a favor.

"What, more questioning?" she greeted him caustically.

"I'm sorry you resent my interviewing you yesterday. It was just routine, but I tried to be as inoffensive as I could about it. No, so far as we're concerned, you people no longer figure in it—except of course as his last known jumping-off place into nothingness. We have a new theory we're working on."

"What is it?" she said, forgetting to be aloof.

"I'm sorry, I'm not at liberty to divulge it. However, a couple of interviews with Mrs. Burroughs were enough to give it an impetus. She's a hypochondriac if there ever was one."

"I think I know what you're driving at. You mean his disappearance was voluntary, to get away from the sickroom atmosphere in his home?"

His knowing expression told her she was right. And for a moment a great big sun came up and shone through the darkness she had been living in ever since Mrs. Burroughs' phone call Monday noon. How wonderful it would be if that should turn out to be the correct explanation, what a reprieve for herself and Gil! Why, it would automatically cover up the check matter as well. If the old man had been about to drop from sight, he certainly could have been expected to cash a check for that amount, to keep himself in funds; there wouldn't be any mystery about it, then.

Meanwhile, as to Ward: You could tell he wasn't here altogether on business. He was looking into her face a little too personally, she thought. Well, he was only a man after all. What could you do about it?

"The local chief out here, whom I'm co-operating with, can't put me up at his house; he's got three of our guys staying with him already. I was wondering if it would put you out if I . . . er . . . asked permission to make this my headquarters; you know, just sleep here while I'm detailed out here, so I

wouldn't have to keep running back and forth, to the city and out again, every night?"

She nearly fell over. "But this is a private home, after all."

"Well, I wouldn't be in your way much. You can bill the department for it if you like."

"That isn't the point. There's a perfectly good hotel in the village."

"I already tried to get quarters there. They're all filled up. You're entitled to refuse if you want to. It'd just be a way of showing your good will and willingness to cooperate. After all, it's just as much to the interest of you and your husband as anyone else to have this matter cleared up."

By the time she got in to Gil, she was already beginning to see the humorous side of it. "It's Ward again. He wants to be our house guest; can you tie that? He hinted that now they think Burroughs disappeared voluntarily, to get away from that invalid wife of his."

His face was a white pucker of frightened suspicion. "He's lying! He's trying different tactics, that's all. He's trying to plant himself here in the house with us as a spy."

"But don't you think it'll look worse, if we seem to have anything to hide by not letting him in? Then they'll simply hang around watching us from the outside. If we let him in, we may be able to get rid of him for good in a day or two."

"He'll watch every move I make, he'll listen to every word that's said. It's been tough enough up to now; it'll be hell that way."

"Well, you go out and shoo him away then; you're the boss."

He took a quick step toward the door. Then his courage seemed to ooze out of him. She saw him falter, come to a stop, rake his fingers through his hair.

"Maybe you're right," he said uncertainly, "maybe it'll look twice as bad if we turn him away, like we have something to hide. Tell him O. K." And he poured himself a drink the size of Lake Erie.

"He'll sleep on the davenport in the living room and like it," she said firmly. "I'm not running a lodging-house for homeless detectives."

It was the least she could do, she felt, meeting him along the road like that: ask him if he wanted a lift back to the house with her. After all, she had nothing against the man; he was just doing his job. And Gil's half-hysterical injunction, over the wire the day before, "Don't take anyone in the car with you!" was furthest from her thoughts, had no meaning at the moment. For that matter, it had had no meaning even at the time.

"Sure, don't mind if I do," he accepted. He slung himself up on the running board without obliging her to come to a complete stop, and dropped into the seat beside her without opening the door, displacing some parcels she'd had there.

"Why don't you put these in the rumble?" he asked, piling them on his lap for want of a better place.

She took one hand off the wheel, snapped her fingers. "That reminds me, I wanted to stop at a repair shop and have a new key made; we've lost the old one."

He was sitting sideways, face turned toward her, studying her profile. In one way it was annoying, in another way it was excessively flattering. She kept her eyes on the road ahead.

"Didn't the mister object to your coming out like this?"

She thought it was said kiddingly; it was one of those things should have been said kiddingly. But when

she looked at him, his face was dead serious.

She eyed him in frank surprise. "How did you know? We had a little set-to about the car, that was all. I wanted it and he didn't want me to have it; wanted it himself, I guess. So I took it anyway, while he was shaving, and here I am." Then, afraid she had given him a misleading impression of their domestic relations, she tried to minimize it. "Oh, but that's nothing new with us, that's been going on ever since we've had a car." It wasn't true; it had never happened before—until tonight.

"Oh," he said. And an alertness that had momentarily come into his expression slowly left it again.

They came to the belt of woods that crossed and infolded the roadway, and she slowed to a laggard crawl. She fumbled for a cigarette and he put a match to it. Without their noticing it, the car had come to a full halt. The light wind, no longer in their faces, veered, changed direction. Suddenly she flung the cigarette away from her with a disgusted grimace.

They both became aware of it at the same time. She crinkled her nose, threw in the clutch.

"There must be something dead in these woods," she remarked. "Do you notice that odor? Every once in a while you get a whiff of it."

"There's something dead—somewhere around," he agreed cryptically.

As soon as they picked up speed again and came out between the open fields, it disappeared, left behind—apparently—under the dank trees. He didn't say a word from that time on. That only occurred to her later. He forgot to thank her when they drew up at the house. He forgot even to say good night. He was evidently lost in thought, thinking of something else entirely.

Gil's grip, as she entered their bedroom in the dark, fell on her shoulder like the jaws of a steel trap—and was just as merciless. He must have been standing unseen a little inside the doorway. His voice was an unrecognizable strangled sound.

"*Didn't I tell you not to let anyone get in that car with you!*"

"I just met him now, on my way back."

"Where'd you go with it? I've died every minute since you left!"

"I told you I wanted to see the new war picture."

The idea seemed to send him floundering back against the bedroom wall in the dark.

"You went to the *movies?*" he gasped. "And where was the car? What'd you do with it while you were in there?"

"What does anyone do with a car while they're in seeing a show? I left it parked around the corner from the theater."

This time he just gave a wordless gasp—the sort of sound that is wrenched from a person when something goes hurtling by and narrowly misses hitting him.

V.

She was in a half sleep when some sense of impending danger aroused her. It was neither a sound nor a motion, it was just the impalpable *presence* of some menace in itself. She started up. There was a late moon tonight, and the room was dark-blue and white, not black. Gil was crouched to one side of the window, peering down, his back to her. Not a muscle rippled, he was so still.

"Gil, what is it?" she breathed softly.

His silencing hiss came back even softer, no louder than a thread of steam escaping from a radiator valve.

She put her foot to the floor, crept up behind him. The sibilance came again:

"Get back, you fool. I don't want him to see me up here."

The sound of a stealthy tinkering came up from below, somewhere. A very small sound it was in the night stillness. She peered over his shoulder. Ward was standing down there at the garage doors, fumbling with them.

"If he gets them open and goes in there—"

Suddenly she foreshortened her glance, brought it down perpendicularly over Gil's shoulder, saw the gun for the first time, blue-black as a bottle fly in the moonlight. Steady, for all Gil's nerves; held so sure and steady there wasn't a waver in it. Centered remorselessly on the man outside the garage down there.

"Gil!" Her inhalation of terror seemed to fill the room with a sound like rushing wind.

He stiff-armed her behind him, never even turned his head, never even took his eyes off his objective. "Get back, I tell you. If he gets them open, I'm going to shoot."

But this would be murder, the very thing she'd dreaded so Monday, and that had missed them the first time by a hairbreadth. He must have the money hidden in there in the garage. She had to do something to stop him, to keep it from happening. She floundered across the room on her bare feet, found the opposite wall, groped along it.

"Gil, get back. I'm going to put on the lights."

She just gave him time enough to swerve aside, snapped the switch, and the room flared into noonday briliance that cast a big warning yellow patch on the ground outside.

There was a single retreating footfall on the concrete runway down there, and the next time they looked, the space in front of the garage doors showed empty.

She crept out to the head of the stairs, listened, came back again.

"He's gone to bed," she said. "I heard the day bed creak."

The reaction had set in; the tension Gil had been under must have been terriffic. He was shaking all over like someone attached to an electric reducing belt. "He'll only make another stab at it again tomorrow night. I can't stand it any more, I can't stand it any more! I'm getting out of here—now."

It was no use reasoning with him, she could see that at a glance. He was in a state bordering on frenzy. For a moment she was half tempted to say: "Oh, let's go downstairs to him now, the two of us, admit you raised the check, give him back the money, and get it over with! Anything's better than this nightmare!"

But she checked herself. How much did they get for doing what he'd done? Ten years? Twenty? Her courage failed her; she had no right to ask him to give up that much of his life.

Meanwhile he was whipping a necktie around his collar, shrugging on his jacket. She whispered: "Gil, let's stop and think before we cut ourselves off completely— Where can we go, at this hour?"

"I rented a furnished room in the city today, under an assumed name." He whispered an address. "We'll be

safe there for a couple of days at least. As soon as I can get boat tickets—I have to get rid of that car, that's the main thing."

"But, Gil, don't you see we're convicting ourselves, by doing this?"

"Are you coming with me? Or are you doing to let me down just when I need you most, like women usually do? You're half in love with him already! I've seen the looks he's starting to give you. They all fall for you; why shouldn't he? All right, stay here with him then."

She silenced him by pressing her fingers to his mouth. "To the bitter end," she whispered, misty-eyed, "to the bitter end. If you want it this way, then this is the way it'll be."

He didn't even thank her: she didn't expect him to, anyway. "Go out there again and make sure he's sleeping."

She came back, said: "He's snoring; I can hear him all the way up here."

While she began to dress with frantic haste, Gil started down ahead.

"I'll take the brakes off, you take the wheel, and I'll push it out into the road so he won't hear us start."

Ward's snoring filled the house as she crept down the dark stairs after Gil moments later. "Why? Why?" she kept thinking distractedly. But she'd made her decision; she went ahead unfalteringly.

He had the garage doors open by the time she'd joined him. The place smelled terrible; a stray cat must have found its way in and died in there some place. She got in, guided the car out backward as he pushed at the hood. Then he shifted around to the rear. The incline of the concrete path helped carry them down to the road. You could still hear Ward snoring inside the house, from out where they were. Gil pushed it down the road a considerable distance from the house, before he jumped in and took over the wheel.

"Made it," he muttered hoarsely.

She wasn't a slow driver herself by any means, but she'd never forced the car to such a speed as he got out of it now. The gauge broke in new numbers on their dial. The wheels seemed to churn air most of the time and just come down for contact at intervals.

"Gil, take a little of the head off it." She shuddered. "You'll kill the two of us!"

"Look back and see if there's anything in sight behind us."

There was, but far away. It had nothing to do with them. It definitely wasn't Ward; he couldn't have gotten another car that quickly. But it spurred Gil on to keep up that death-inviting pace long after they'd lost sight of it. And then suddenly, ahead—

The other car peered unexpectedly at them over a rise. There was plenty of room for them both, at a normal rate of speed. They wouldn't even have had to swerve; neither was hogging the road. But Gil was going so fast, and in the attempt to shift over farther, their rear wheels swept out of line with their front, they started a long forward skid, and the other car nicked them in passing. It wasn't anything; at an ordinary rate of speed it would have just scraped the paint off their fender or something. But it swept them against a tree growing close to the roadway, and that in turn flung them back broadside on the asphalt again. Miraculously they stayed right side up, but with a bad dent toward their rear where they'd hit the tree. The rumble lid had sprung up and that

The two shots came with sickening suddenness.

whole side of the chassis was flattened in.

The other car had stopped farther down the road; it hadn't been going any too slow itself. She was on the floor, thrown there in a coiled-rope formation, but unhurt. She heard Gil swear icily under his breath, fling open the door, shoot out as though pursued by devils.

She looked up into the rear-sight mirror and there was a face in it! The sunken, hideously grinning face of Homer Burroughs, peering up above the level of the forcibly opened rumble. She could see it so plain, swimming on the moonlit mirror; even the dark bruises mottling it under the silvery hair, even the heavy auto wrench riding his shoulder like an epaulette, thrown up out of the bottom of the rumble as his body had been thrown up—like a macabre jack-in-the-box. And the odor of the woods that she and Ward had noticed earlier was all around her in the night, though she was far from those particular woods now.

She acted quickly, by instinct alone. Almost before Gil had gotten back there, to flatten the rumble top down again, smother what it had inadvertently revealed before the occupants of the other car came up and saw it, she had opened the door on her side and jumped down. She began to run silently along the edge of the road, in the shadows cast by the overhanging trees. She didn't know where she was going. She only wanted to get away from this man. This man who had killed. This man who was no longer her husband, who spelled Fear and Horror to her now. She saw now that she had lied to him—and to herself—Monday, when she told him she could stand it even if he'd done this, so long as he only admitted it. If she'd seen Burroughs' battered corpse at the time, as she had now, the same thing would have happened then: she would have fled away from Gil like one demented. She couldn't stand cowardly murder.

He'd gotten the rumble down, and was standing there pressed slightly backward upon it, at bay, arms out at either side to hold it down. He either didn't see her scurry by along the edge of the trees, or was too preoccupied in facing the two men who were coming solicitously back toward him, to pay any attention. The half-formed idea in her churning mind was to get into that other, momentarily vacated car and get away from him. Anywhere, but get away!

She was halfway to it now. She could hear their voices, back there where she'd run from:

"Are you all right, brother? How badly did we hit you?"

"Gee, we banged up his rumble, Art."

And then Gil's sharp, dangerous: "Get away from it!"

The two shots came with sickening suddenness. Just *bam!* and then *bam!* again, and there were two huddled, loglike forms on the roadway in the moonlight up there by Gil's car.

Murder again. Murder trebled now. How far, how far away they'd stopped that other car! She'd never make it. She saw that now. He'd already called her name warningly once, he was already running toward her like a winged messenger of death. She was up to it at last, had one foot on the running board now. But he had a smoking gun in his hand that could reach out from where he was to where she was quicker than any car could get under way. And this one, too, like theirs,

had brought up broadside to the road. Before she could back up for clearance, turn, and get away, he'd be upon her. In her frustrated panic, hand on the door catch, she was conscious of the caked dust spewed upon the sides of the car, thrown up by its wheel action. They'd driven it hard.

Instead of getting in, she ran around it to the opposite side, away from him, as though to take cover. Then she stood there staring at him over it. At last she rounded it once more at the rear and came back toward him, away from it. Met him a few paces before it.

He seized her relentlessly by the wrist. "So now you know," he heaved. "So you ran out on me."

"I lost my head for a minute; anyone would have."

"I watched you. You didn't go the other way. You started back toward *him*, the guy you love now."

He was dragging her toward their own car, swinging her from side to side like a primordial ape with a living victim.

"You're dangerous to me now, I can see that. I've just shot two men; I'm fighting for my life. And anything or anyone that might help to trap me, has got to be removed."

"Gil, you wouldn't do such a thing. I'm your wife!"

"Fugitives have no wives."

He half raised the gun toward her, lowered it again. He looked up the road, and down. The moonlight was crafty in his eyes.

"Get in, I'll give you one more chance."

She knew it was only a postponement. One thing at a time; he had to get to cover first. If he left her lying out here on the open road, they'd know instantly who had done it. She could read her death warrant in his eyes, as they started off once more toward the city.

VI.

It was inconceivable that he meant to go through with such a thing. Even the sight of the grimy tenement room, suggestive of crime and violence, failed to make it more plausible. "This isn't happening," she thought, "this isn't real; my husband hasn't brought me to this unspeakable room in the slums, intending to do away with me. I'm still asleep, at home, and I'm having a bad dream.

"Yet all these days he's known, and he hasn't told me. All these days I've been living with a murderer." She visualized again the way he'd shot those two men down in cold blood, without a qualm, without a moment's hesitation. Why wouldn't he be capable of doing the same to her? He was kill-crazy now, at bay. The red tide of murder had swept over him, effacing all love, trust, compassion, wiping away their very marriage itself. And he could kill this woman in the room with him, he could kill anyone on God's earth tonight.

She sat slumped on the edge of the creaky iron bedstead, fingers pressed to her temples. He'd locked the room door after they came in, pulled down the patched blue shade on the window. He stood listening for a moment by the door, to see if anyone had followed them up, then he turned to her. "I've got to get rid of that car first," he muttered to himself. Suddenly he'd come over, thrust her aside, was disheveling the bed, pulling out the sheets from under the threadbare cotton blankets. They squealed like pigs as he tore long strips down their lengths.

She guessed what they were for.

"No, Gil, don't!" she whimpered smotheredly. She ran for the door, pulled uselessly at the knob. He swung her around back behind him.

"Don't do this to me!"

"I can't just leave you locked in here. You'd scream or break a window. You sold out to him, and you're my enemy now."

He flung her face-down on the bed, caught her hands behind her back, deftly tied them together with strips of sheeting. Then her ankles in the same way. He sat her up, lashed her already once-secured hands to the iron bed frame. Then he wound a final length around her face, snuffing out her mouth. Her eyes were wide with horror. It wasn't so much what was being done to her, as whom it was being done by.

"Can you breathe?" He plucked it down a little from the tip of her nose. "Breathe while you can." His eyes, flicking over to the length of tubing connecting a wall jet with a one-burner gas ring, then back again to her, betrayed his intended method when the time came. He'd stun her first with a blow from his gun butt, probably, then remove her bonds to make it look like a suicide, disconnect the tube and let the gas take its course. That happened so often in these cheap rooming houses; that was the way out so many took.

He listened carefully at the door. Then he unlocked it, and as he turned to go, glanced back and said to her:

"Keep your eyes on this doorknob. And when you see it start to turn, begin saying your prayers."

She heard him lock the door again on the other side, and the faint creak of his step descending the warped stairs.

He would come back—in forty minutes, in an hour—and kill her. But therein didn't lie the full horror of it. It was that this man and she had danced by moonlight not so long ago, had exchanged kisses and vows under the stars. It was that he had brought her candy, and orchids to wear on her coat. It was that they had stood up together and sworn to cherish and cling to one another for the rest of their lives.

Yet she saw that it must have been in him from the beginning, this fatal flaw of character that had finally led him to murder. People didn't change that abruptly; they couldn't. There were some who could never be capable of murder, no matter what the circumstances. And others, like Gil, needed only a slight push in that direction to fall into it almost of their own accords. He'd been a potential murderer all along. He hadn't known it and she hadn't, so who was to blame?

She couldn't free her hands. She only succeeded in tightening the knots in the sheeting more inextricably when she strained against them; it was that kind of material. The bed had no casters, and one foot, caught in a crack in the floor, held it fast against her attempts to drag it after her.

He'd been gone a long time. Against her will she found herself eying the china knob on the inside of the door. When it started to turn, he'd said—

And suddenly the light, given back by its glossy surface, seemed to flash, to waver. It was moving, it was going slowly around! Without his having made a sound on the stairs outside. She could feel her temples begin to pound. But the key rattle didn't come. Instead the knob relapsed again to where it had been. With a slight rustling sound, so she knew she hadn't been mistaken, she had actually seen it move. She stared toward it till her eyes

threatened to start from their sockets, but it didn't move again. Why didn't he come in and get it over with? Why this exquisite additional torture? Maybe he'd heard someone coming on the stairs.

There was another agonizing wait, during which she screamed silently against the gag. There, he was coming back again. This time she could hear the furtive tread on the oil-cloth-covered stairs. He must have gone down to the street again for a minute to make doubly sure no one was about.

The key hardly scraped at all, so deftly did he fit it in. And once again the china knob wheeled and sent out wavers of light. And this time the door opened—and let Death in. Death was a face she'd kissed a thousand times. Death was a hand that had stroked her hair. Death was a man whose name she had taken in place of her own.

He locked the door behind him, Death did. He said, tight-lipped: "I sent it into the river. It was misty and there was no one around to see. At last I'm rid of him, that damned old man! And by the time they fish him out again, if they ever do, I'll be far away. There's a tanker leaves for Venezuela at midday."

The rubber extension tube went *whup!* as he pulled it off the nozzle of the jet. The key didn't make any sound as he turned it, and the gas didn't either, as it started coming in.

He dropped his eyes before hers. "Don't look at me like that; it's no use. I'm going through with it."

He drew out his gun and gripped it down near the bore, and then he shifted his cuff back out of the way, as a man does when he doesn't want anything to hamper the swing of his arm. The last thing he said was, "You won't feel anything, Jackie." That was Gil Blaine, dying inside the murderer.

Then he raised the gun butt high over his head, with a terrible intensity, so that his whole arm shook. Or maybe it was just the way she was looking at him, so that he had to use twice as much will power, to get it done.

It had gone up as high as it could; now it started to come down again. Her head seemed to be made of glass. It shattered, she could *hear* it shatter with the blow, and her skull seemed to rain all around her on the floor, and the blow itself exploded deafeningly in her own ears, like a shot. But without causing any pain.

Then as her eyes started spasmodically open again, it was *he* that was falling, his whole body, and not just his arm any more. She turned her head dazedly. The window shade was being held aside by an arm, and there was broken glass all over the floor, and Ward was out there looking into the room through a sort of saw-toothed halo where the window-pane had been, lazy smoke soft-focusing him. He reached up and did something to the catch, raised the frame, climbed through across the sill.

When he'd turned off the gas jet and freed her, she hid her face against him, still sitting there on the bedstead, and clung like that for a long time. It was a funny thing to, with a mere detective, but still—who else had she?

"You weren't in line with the keyhole when I squinted through it, or I would have shot the lock off then. I wasn't sure that this was the right room, so I went through to the back yard and climbed the fire escape from there. All I had to go by was what you'd traced in the dust on the side of that car left standing out

there on the road: just my name and this address. And, gee, Jackie, if you knew how close I came to never noticing it at all!"

"I didn't think it would be seen, but it was all I had time to do. Anything could have happened. Someone's sleeve could have brushed against it and erased it.

"He killed Burroughs early Monday morning. And he's had him in our locked rumble seat ever since! That explains so many things in his behavior the past few days I couldn't understand. But, oh, you're so blind when you trust anyone! He finally dumped him, car and all, into the river just now, before he came back."

"We'll get it up. I was sure of him from the first, but without a body or any trace of one, our hands were tied. And then you, you pulled so much weight in his favor just by being in the picture at all, so honest and so— We all knew you couldn't be a party to a murder."

She lifted her head, but without trying to see past him into the room. He seemed to understand what she was trying to ask, and told her:

"He's dead. I wasn't very careful, I guess."

She wondered if he'd meant to do it that way. It was better that way. Better even for Gil himself.

Ward stood her up and walked her out through the door, leaning her against him so she wouldn't have to look at Gil lying on the floor. Outside the night seemed clean and fresh again, all evil gone from it, and the stars looked as new as though they'd never been used before. She drew a deep breath, of infinite pity but no regret.

"So this is how it ends."

CONFIDENT KILLER

by BENTON BRADEN

Sheriff Jim Pomeroy had been a witness in a murder case at Holbrook that morning. Now, in the gathering dusk, he was pushing his little sedan to the limit on one of the few straight stretches of the lonely road. Far ahead of him, to the south, a low range of purplish mountains was already merging into the horizon. But for miles about him there were only low rolling hills, spotted with sagebrush and cactus and great rocks of weird design. It was a hardy, barren country where no friendly lights would beam after darkness had fallen.

The road itself was almost a pavement of natural gravel. For nearly seventy miles it twisted and wormed its way through the desolate hills until it emerged in the pleasant and fertile little valley that sheltered the town of Flintrock. That was home to the sheriff. He had forty miles to go yet, but he calculated that he would make it before darkness had much more than fully settled.

He knew he would have to revise that calculation when he saw the man who reeled into the road, some two hundred yards ahead of him. From the way the man held his hip, the sheriff knew that he was hurt, probably in pain. As he applied his brakes and slid to a stop beside the man, Pomeroy could see, in the semi-darkness, torn clothes and a white face on which blood had already clotted.

Pomeroy leaped from his sedan. He caught the stranger by both arms as he saw that his knees were buckling and he was about to collapse.

"Easy does it," he said gently, as he lowered the stranger to the rocky roadway. "What's the trouble? Did you fall—or did you get hit by a car?"

The man moaned, then raised his arm feebly and pointed. "Down there," he half croaked. "In the gully. Our car went over . . . smashed. My . . . my wife—" He choked and began to whimper.

Pomeroy frowned and stepped quickly over the edge of the road. There was a small precipice there. In the shadows thirty feet below he could barely make out the lines of a heavy car that lay on its side. The sheriff's solid boots loosened rocks and gravel as he half crawled, half slid down the steep incline.

The car was at least thirty feet from the base. He guessed that it had turned over two or three times before it had come to rest on its side. It was a sedan and it was now little better than a mass of twisted metal. Pomeroy struck a match as he came up by the wheel side. He peered into the front seat. His eyes widened. His lower jaw sagged a little and he made a hissing sound as he gasped.

There was a woman in the front seat. She was dead, beyond doubt. Her head was badly crushed and Pomeroy could guess, from the twisted position of her body, that there were many broken bones. The steering wheel had broken and her body was wedged in between the column and the edge of the seat. It was going to be no small trick to get her out.

There was no use in delaying it. He went to work, crawled up on the side of the car. The door on that side was half off its hinges. With a single heavy push he got it out of the way. But it was a full twenty minutes before he laid his rather slender burden on the ground.

Pomeroy looked up, made out the dark figure that lurched before him. "Oh, my God!" the man said. "I know . . . know she's dead!"

"Yes," Pomeroy admitted gravely. "She must have been killed instantly. But it would have been better if you'd stayed up on the road. You're in no condition to help me and—"

"I'm all right," the man interrupted hoarsely. "I'm just cut and bruised. Badly stunned. I didn't know where I was or what had happened . . . at first. I must have been thrown clear of the car. I don't remember crawling out of it. I found myself lying on the ground. I was so dazed I couldn't think . . . until I looked around and saw the car. I went over and looked into it,

saw . . . my wife . . . like that."

"Take it easy now," Pomeroy said as he saw the man's shoulders jerking. "It's bad, but you've got to face it as it is. How did it happen?"

"I hardly know," was the faltering reply. "My wife was driving. I had been driving all day and was a little tired. So she took the wheel. I was dozing with my head against the cushions at the right of the front seat. She must have gone to sleep, dozed off. I felt a heavy bump. As I opened my eyes, my wife screamed. It was a terrible scream. Uttered instinctively, I imagine, as she came awake and realized that the car was going off the road. It was still light then. I saw that it was too late to do anything. We were already over the edge, plunging down to the bottom of the gully. I must have lost consciousness as we struck. I can't remember a thing until I woke up, lying on the ground."

"You and your wife were on a pleasure trip?" Pomeroy asked.

"Partly pleasure. Partly business. My name is Maxwell Boyce. We're from Nashville, Tennessee. We stopped in Amarillo last night. We were on our way to Flintrock, Arizona. It's not far from here, I guess."

"About forty miles."

"I didn't know how far we had come since we left Highway 66. I dozed most of the time. My wife insisted on driving on into Flintrock. She said she knew every inch of this road."

"You've been in Flintrock before then?"

"I haven't. I've never been out in this country before. But my wife was reared in Flintrock. Her maiden name was Ruth Patterson."

"I knew her," Pomeroy said gravely. "I'm from Flintrock myself." He took a long breath, squinted in the darkness, then said: "I'll carry her up to my car. You go on up if you can make it alone. We'll go on into Flintrock and come back and look after your car in the morning."

The sheriff raised the still figure in his arms and began the difficult ascent of the embankment. At each step he had to grope for solid footing and it took him five minutes to reach the top. When he got there, Boyce was waiting for him.

Pomeroy reached into his little sedan, turned on the headlights and dome light. He lifted the body of Mrs. Boyce into the back seat. As he closed the door, he turned and got his first good look at Boyce's face. Boyce seemed to have heavy cuts on each side of his head. Blood had streamed down over his forehead and clotted on his cheeks. He was a pitiful sight—except for his eyes. There was something in his eyes that didn't quite match the mournful expression in his face. Those eyes seemed watchful and alert. Boyce was already climbing into the front seat as though he were a little anxious to leave this scene of tragedy. Tragedy it was, without doubt. Sheriff Pomeroy was already asking himself if it was also a crime.

"Make yourself comfortable there, Boyce," he said easily. "My name is Pomeroy. I'm the sheriff of this county." He watched Boyce closely as he spoke and wondered if he was right in thinking there was a momentary gleam of alarm in Boyce's eyes. "Maybe I can save myself a trip back out here. I'll go back down to your car and look around so I can make a complete report of it. You take it easy here."

He took a flashlight from the dash

compartment and again made his way down the embankment. He frowned heavily as he threw his light on the big sedan. He had never seen a car more thoroughly wrecked. It was a miracle that Boyce had lived.

Was it a miracle? Was it by design? There was a motive for murder here. Pomeroy had known Ruth Patterson all her life, until she had gone East to school three years before. Her father and mother had died nearly ten years ago. Then she had lived on a ranch twenty miles from Flintrock with her bachelor uncle, Mike Patterson. Her Uncle Mike had wanted her to have a good education. He had finally bundled her off to a girls' school at Nashville. In two years Ruth had married—married quite well, folks said—and was living in Nashville.

Her uncle Mike had died two months ago. And rather surprisingly had left fifty thousand dollars in cash in a safe-deposit box in the bank. It was willed to Ruth, his only surviving relative.

It was both a business and pleasure trip, Boyce had said. He and Ruth had come to make a visit at her old home—and to take back with them that fifty thousand that was waiting for Ruth. There couldn't be any doubt, now that Ruth was dead, that Boyce would take that fifty thousand with him when he returned to Nashville.

Pomeroy's jaws set grimly as swift thoughts filled his mind. Yes, there was a motive for murder and, if his quick appraisal of those alert and watchful eyes was correct, there was a man in his sedan up there who was capable of doing murder.

The sheriff made a quick but rather thorough inspection. On the ground about the car he found only a few bits of broken glass and a casing that had been twisted from the right front wheel. The back of the

sedan had been filled with hand luggage that was now piled to the side of the car that lay upon the ground. He crawled up, then lowered himself with some difficulty into the front of the sedan.

He retrieved two road maps and Boyce's wadded felt hat. Mrs. Boyce's wide purse was wedged in between the cushions and the side of the car. He opened it, found handkerchiefs, lipstick and vanity, spectacle case, keys, currency and change, a notebook, and other odds and ends that seemed of no importance. He found one of her sports Oxfords and a shattered wrist watch that had been torn from her wrist.

It was fifteen minutes before he reached his own sedan again. Boyce was sitting slumped in his seat, both hands over his face. Pomeroy got in without a word and started the motor. He didn't stop again until he parked before the Flintrock mortuary.

Boyce brokenly informed the undertaker of his wishes. He would take his wife's body back with him to Nashville as soon as he felt like traveling. He wrote out a wire to his mother in Nashville and asked the undertaker to send it for him. Then Pomeroy took him over to the Arizona Hotel and saw him up to a room.

The sheriff returned to his own office. He considered for half an hour, then called Globe and put through a wire to Nashville authorities. He had no evidence whatever that Maxwell Boyce had killed Ruth. He had only a motive—and suspicions that were growing stronger every minute.

It was ten o'clock the next morning when Theodore Cogwill, Flintrock's only active lawyer, came into his office with Boyce. Boyce's head was bandaged and strips of adhesive came down to the sides of his cheeks.

"Good morning, Jim," Cogwill said oratorically after clearing his throat. "A terrible tragedy, wasn't it? An awful shock to us all. The whole town's upset over it. We all knew Ruth. Lucky you were on the road last night. Not much travel on that road and Mr. Boyce might have had to stay out there all night if you hadn't come along."

"That's right." Pomeroy nodded.

"I always handled Mike Patterson's legal business," Cogwill said a bit pompously. "The estate was all settled. I was ready to turn over the money to Ruth the minute she got here. Now I talked to Judge Cunnerburn this morning and he agreed that, under the circumstances, we could expedite matters in this case. We all know that Ruth has no other kin. And that Mr. Boyce, here, takes whatever estate she leaves. Mr. Boyce wants to return to Nashville with the body as quickly as possible. He's wired his mother to make the necessary arrangements for burial in the Boyce family plot there. I'm having him appointed administrator of his wife's estate today so I can turn over the assets to him."

"All the assets are cash, aren't they?" the sheriff asked.

"That's right. Except the ranch, of course. Mr. Boyce has authorized me to take my time and dispose of the ranch for the best price I can get—which won't be much, considering present conditions. We've kept the cash, fifty thousand dollars, in the safe-deposit box. It's still there. Now the bank here doesn't carry that much cash in any of their correspondent banks so they can't very well give Mr. Boyce a draft. And rather than ship the money, Mr. Boyce has decided to take it with him to Phoenix.

That's only a hundred and twenty miles. He can drive over there this evening with the hearse, get a draft for the cash in the morning, and leave for the East on the noon train. I think we can handle it all so he can get away tonight."

Sheriff Pomeroy leaned back in his chair and shook his head slowly. "I don't believe I can make it by that time," he said rather firmly.

"Make what?" Cogwill asked sharply.

"My investigation of the case," Pomeroy told him. "There are certain things I've got to do."

"What?"

"Well, I've got to have Doc Logan examine the body, for instance. Make a complete report of every cut, bruise, and broken bone."

"He can do that today, can't he?"

"Maybe he can. But there's other things to look into. Everything considered, I want to get every fact that I can before I release the body."

"Surely, sheriff, you don't think that—" Cogwill broke off and stared.

"Think that Maxwell Boyce killed his wife?" Pomeroy asked coolly. "I haven't drawn any conclusions at all yet. But I, as sheriff, am bound to note all suspicious circumstances."

"But what suspicious circumstances are there?" Cogwill demanded.

"Several minor ones, Cogwill. For instance, the accident occurred on one of the few straight stretches of road on that highway. For the most part a car could run off that road without any disastrous consequences. It struck me as a bit peculiar that Ruth just happened to go to sleep and run off the road at the place where there was a high embankment, where the car would hurtle down a full thirty feet and be almost completely demolished."

"But that's the way accidents do happen, Jim," Cogwill said.

"Sure. There are a lot of freak accidents, I'll admit. But then the way that sedan was smashed up, it seems to me to be almost a miracle the way Boyce got out of it alive. Ruth was crushed from head to foot. He only got a few scratches on his head. I sent Doc Logan up to fix him up after I took him to the hotel. Doc reported to me that his head wasn't bruised much, in spite of the cuts on it."

"I can't defend myself against such vicious gossip," Boyce said hoarsely. "Because I don't know what happened myself. All I know is that I came to on the ground. I was completely bewildered, befuddled, until I looked over and saw the wrecked car. I must have been thrown from the car as it struck. But I don't know. I can't dispute *anything* that might be said about it."

"Which might be very convenient —if you did kill her!" the sheriff said with an edge in his voice. "You put yourself beyond cross-examination."

"It's preposterous!" Boyce returned a little angrily. "Why should I kill my wife?"

"The motive is the plainest thing of all. Isn't fifty thousand dollars a lot of money? Fifty thousand in cash. Particularly if it turned out that you and Ruth hadn't been hitting it off so well. Of course, I'm just speculating—as it's my duty to do."

"I think I see, sheriff." Boyce spoke with a faint smile on his face. "Maybe I can't blame you for being a little suspicious. It's the fact that Ruth and I came out here not only to visit among her old friends but also to collect that money that's worrying you, isn't it? I can see

that now. Fifty thousand dollars is a lot of money in Flintrock, isn't it? I might as well tell you now—"

He stopped speaking as the phone on the sheriff's desk rang shrilly. Pomeroy picked it up, answered, then said, "Wait a minute." He pulled over a pad of paper and picked up a pencil, said "All right," and scribbled as the words came over the wire. The wire was from the Nashville police. After he had hung up, he read the words that he had written:

Sure any suspicions in this case unwarranted. Maxwell and Ruth Boyce very popular and respected couple in this city. Friends say they were very much in love and devoted to each other. Boyce worth at least half million himself. Murder for those motives inconceivable. Any action against Boyce without positive proof will be highly resented here.

"I just wanted to tell you, sheriff," Boyce said earnestly as Pomeroy lifted his eyes from the paper, "that no man ever loved his wife more than I loved Ruth. As for the fifty thousand, I've already decided to spend it on a new wing for a hospital in Nashville—dedicate it in her name."

The sheriff leaned back in his chair and sighed a little.

"I guess all sheriffs get kinda mean and suspicious after they've been in office a few years," he said a bit lamely. "I assure you I'll complete my investigation as fast as I can. I want to take another look at the wreck out there. I guess I was pretty badly upset when I found out it was Ruth that was dead in that car. I can remember her yet as she used to ride in from the ranch with her uncle Mike. They'd come tearing down the street in a cloud of dust. Ruth with her face tanned by the sun and wind, with her hair flying out behind her head as they raced, and her—"

The sheriff's head jerked a little as he stopped. He stared hard at the wall for a few seconds as though he was trying desperately to remember some long-forgotten incident. Then he shrugged. "You go ahead and get things fixed up, Cogwill," he said almost eagerly. "I'll hustle around and see if I can't wind my end of it up today."

He waited until Cogwill and Boyce had left the office, then reached for the phone and called old Doc Logan. Ten minutes later he hurried from his office, jumped into the little sedan, and disappeared down Main Street in a cloud of dust.

The sheriff was back at his battered old desk at four o'clock that afternoon. He bowed politely and waved his hand to chairs when Boyce and Cogwill marched into his office. Cogwill frowned at him critically.

"You've completed your investigation, Jim?" he asked sternly. "You're ready to release the body so Mr. Boyce can start home tonight?"

"Yes, I've completed my investigation," the sheriff admitted. "I don't see any reason why I shouldn't release the body now."

Boyce relaxed in an obvious sigh of relief. "I knew that you'd reach the inevitable conclusion that it was just a terrible accident, sheriff," he said forlornly. "I'm a reasonable man and I can see why suspicion might arise in your mind, why you would want to satisfy yourself thoroughly on every possible point. I've no doubt that you wired back home and satisfied yourself that I'm not the type of man that would murder my wife—and that I had no possible motive to do a thing like that."

"Yes, I wired back." Pomeroy nodded. "I'll admit I found out that I had guessed wrong. And I'll admit that, when I brought you into town last night, I was sure that you had killed your wife. The motive was so plain. Fifty thousand dollars is a lot of money—in Flintrock at least."

"It's a lot of money anywhere, sheriff," Boyce said with an amiable smile. "But I'm worth more than a half million. I'd hardly kill my wife for fifty thousand—even if I had hated her, which I didn't. I loved her with all my heart."

"Yes, when you came in the office this morning, I had a motive and no evidence," the sheriff said in measured words. "I got that wire from the Nashville police while you were here. So when you left, I had no motive—but I had a little evidence."

"What?" Boyce asked, seemingly puzzled. "What evidence?"

"Why, evidence that was brought up by my memory of Ruth Patterson as she used to ride her pony into town years ago when she was a harum-scarum tomboy. I can see her yet, with her hair flying in the wind—and with spectacles over her eyes."

"Spectacles?" There was blank surprise in Boyce's exclamation.

"Sure. Ruth wore glasses then. At least when she was riding. So it popped into my head that she must have been wearing glasses *if* she were driving last night when the tragedy occurred. But she wasn't wearing glasses. Her glasses were in the spectacle case in her purse, unopened and unbroken. When I thought of that, I called Doc Logan. He's our only doctor and he fits eyeglasses for everybody in town that wears them. He fitted glasses for Ruth several times before she left here and went away to school. Her vision was myopic, he said. Nearsighted. She could read without glasses, get along in a room without them. But she couldn't ride without them. More important, she couldn't drive a car without them. She wouldn't be able to see clearly for more than a few feet ahead of the radiator."

Boyce's body had tensed a little as the sheriff spoke and his eyes had grown very bright. But now he leaned forward with a broad smile on his face.

"That was true, sheriff," he said smoothly. "Ruth was very nearsighted when we were married. But I sent her to a fine specialist. He corrected the condition. She could see almost as well as I can."

"But she was still carrying her spectacles in her purse, Boyce."

"Sure. But she only used them when her eyes started hurting her."

Sheriff Pomeroy expelled a long breath that was almost a regretful sigh. "That's the reason I didn't spring it on you this morning when I thought about those glasses she used to wear. I figured you were smart, a fast thinker, and you'd have a glib lie ready as soon as I sprung it on you. So I held it—until I could get a little more evidence."

"I'm getting a little tired of this nonsense!" Boyce's tone was irate and indignant. "You admit there was no motive. Do you mean that, on the strength of some flimsy, farfetched evidence, you're going to flatly accuse me of murdering my wife?"

"No, I'm not." The sheriff's voice was calm but grim. "I have no intention of arresting you for the murder of your wife. But I am arresting you for the murder—of Maxwell Boyce!"

Boyce came out of his chair and crouched on springy knees as though

he were about to lunge for the open door.

"Try it, Boyce," the sheriff said pleasantly. "Maybe I'm not quite as fast on the draw as I used to be. But I'm still plenty fast."

Boyce licked his lips as his face turned pasty with fear. He slowly sank back in his chair. He looked as if he might become violently sick.

"Yes, I knew you were smart," the sheriff went on. "And I'm pretty dumb, a very slow thinker. I got plumb out to the wreck before I tumbled, tumbled that no smart killer like you would have overlooked that spectacle item. Ruth Boyce was pretty young and perhaps a bit vain. She didn't wear those spectacles under ordinary circumstances. She could read or see in a room without them. She only put them on when she had to see clearly for some distance ahead. You, Spencer Boyce, Maxwell's cousin, didn't know that. If you'd been her husband, those glasses would have been smashed on her face. So it finally percolated into my thick head that you were not her husband. I came back into town and called Nashville, talked to Maxwell's brother.

"He told me that there was a cousin, Spencer Boyce, who resembled Maxwell. Spencer was no good, a tinhorn gambler. He'd served a year for forgery of Maxwell's name to a thousand-dollar check. And Spencer knew the whole set-up out here. Knew, of course, that Maxwell had never been out here and that he, Spencer, looked enough like Maxwell to get by the pictures that Ruth had sent to her uncle Mike and a few friends here. Besides, you cut yourself so that your head was bandaged and there were pieces of tape on your face. There wasn't a chance to catch up with you on that angle. Cogwill didn't suspect."

"Of course not," Cogwill said in a stunned voice. "I brought some of

those pictures in from Mike's when I closed up his place. He looks like the photos."

"You knew the whole set-up and it was the chance of a lifetime, you thought, Spencer!" Pomeroy charged. "You were broke as usual. You quizzed the family, found out all the details, knew just when Ruth and Maxwell would leave. So you beat them out here and looked over the road they would have to travel to reach Flintrock. You spotted that little detour where the road was washed out, ten miles back of the place where the car was actually wrecked. You picked that place to meet them. They had to drive at a crawl there for almost a hundred yards. Maxwell was probably astounded when you stepped out. But he couldn't refuse to allow you to get in the car. Or maybe you pulled a gun on them from the first. I rather think you killed them right there. If you didn't, you made Maxwell turn off and drive four miles up the trail to Red Creek Rocks. There you had ample seclusion among the great rocks to take your time and set things. And the creek was there —with convenient deep holes where you could sink Maxwell's body with assurance that the body would not be found for a long time, if ever.

"There's no doubt in my mind that Ruth was dead when you drove your car back to the main road. You could see up and down the road there for miles before you exposed yourself. And it was about the only place on the road where you were sure that Maxwell would have to slow down. There's hardly any traffic on the road anyway.

"When you were sure the road was clear, you drove swiftly to the place you had picked for the wreck. You put Ruth beneath the driver's wheel, got the car going in the right direction, then leaped to safety yourself. You watched the car smash, turn over twice, come to rest on its side. Then you bruised your head and cut yourself with rocks until blood flowed freely. All you had to do then was wait for a good Samaritan to come along. I happened to be the one.

"Fifty thousand was no motive for Maxwell Boyce. It was plenty of motive for you. Maxwell carried all the correspondence he had had with Cogwill in a brief case. You had a chance to look that over. You had already forged Maxwell's name to a check once, so you knew you could sign any necessary papers without suspicion.

"We found Maxwell's body in one of those holes, Spencer, and that cinched you. We found your own car hidden up among the rocks. You figured they'd be safe enough there until you could get to Phoenix with the money. You'd have started for Nashville with Ruth's body—but the body would have arrived alone. And by the time someone would have started the inevitable investigation, you'd have been far away with that fifty thousand with a new name and a changed appearance."

Cogwill glared at Boyce. "We ought to string you up!" he roared.

Boyce shrank and cowered from the lawyer's wrath.

"Yes," Sheriff Pomeroy agreed. "He ought to be swung from a limb. But I'm the sheriff and I got to protect him. I was kinda hoping he'd run for it so I could dispose of him quickly and legallike. But he's got no mind to die with his boots on. So I got to adhere to my very distasteful duty and hunt him up a nice safe jail. And that, Brother Cogwill, I know damn well ain't gonna be any jail in Flintrock, Arizona!"

TOO MANY DICKS

by ERIC HOWARD

They didn't resemble each other. The boy was dark-skinned, dark-haired, gray-eyed. The girl was a golden blonde, with brown eyes. They introduced themselves as brother and sister, Joseph and Betty Drake.

The girl leaned forward. She was a cute young trick, just turned eighteen. There was something

very warm and winning about her. A nice kid, with a lot of natural appeal.

"Please, Mr. Mattson!" she said. "Please say you'll come. Joe and I are so worried about mother . . . about everything—"

"We can pay you practically all of our allowance money," the boy urged, dragging at his cigarette.

He was about four years older than his sister, a lean, quick nervous chap, but well set-up, in good trim.

They were in my office, sitting opposite me, with their faces turned to the light. I leaned back in my squeaky chair, puffed at my cigar. I considered the matter as they both looked at me.

"Well," I said finally, "I think you've allowed your natural dislike of your stepfather, Stephen Duane, to make you unduly suspicious. After all, no matter what you think of him, Duane is a man of good reputation, a sportsman, well liked. He may have his cruel side. He may pay too much attention to women other than his wife, your mother. He may cause her suffering and distress. But, after all, a lot of marriages are like that. It doesn't mean that he's plotting her death. Frankly, I don't believe it. That kind of thing doesn't happen often. And when it does happen, you'll find the murderer is a neurotic or a psychopath. And whatever you say about Duane, he isn't either. No, children, it would be a waste of money for you, a waste of time for me. If your mother can't tolerate him, there's Reno."

"Oh, Mr. Mattson!" the girl said, very disappointed.

"Wait, Betty," Joe said, getting up nervously and walking to my desk. He leaned on it, looking me in the eye. He was very much in earnest. "No, Mattson," he said, "you can't dismiss it as a case of unfounded suspicion. There are all these things that have happened—little things, granted, but when you add 'em up, they become significant. He fired the chauffeur who had been with us for years and hired this big-eared thug. Then there's this new 'housekeeper,' as he calls her; why, anybody can see that she never had such a position before. Old Myra, who has been with us ever since Betty and I were babies, has threatened to leave. She sees what's going on. Mother does, too, but she's afraid of him. Oh, lots of things have happened—little things, petty bits of cruelty—that show what he means to do. Then there's the will. Our father left us each just a few thousand dollars, the rest to mother, naturally expecting she'd leave it to us. But when she married Duane, she trusted him so completely and needed business guidance so badly that she willed him everything; with the understanding, of course, that he was to see that we were taken care of."

"She could change that will," I pointed out.

"She's terrified," Joe said. "She's watched all the time. She couldn't go to a lawyer, couldn't have one come out, without Duane knowing it. If she wrote her own will, it probably wouldn't stand. Or he'd find it and destroy it. I tell you, Mattson, he's fiendishly clever and dangerous."

"Oh, please, Mr. Mattson!" Betty said again. "Just come out for the week end, this afternoon. Just stay tomorrow and Sunday. You could be back in town Monday morning. If you think everything is all right, that we're just being silly, you'll only lose the week end. Won't you, please?"

Well, the girl won. I said: "All

right. I'll have a look at the situation. But I'm sure you've let a few trifles upset you. I'll bet I find everything all right. I'll drive out in my own car, get there around five. That all right?"

"Fine!" said Betty.

"What shall we say about you?" Joe asked. "How shall we introduce you? You don't look like a detective; that's good. But Duane will be suspicious of any friend of ours."

"Call me Madison," I suggested. "You're interested in boats? Say I'm with a speed-boat building firm and you want a job with us."

"Good!" Joe agreed. "Duane would like to see me clear out and get a job—as far away as possible. Where's your firm's headquarters, Mr. Madison?"

"Say Detroit," I suggested. "I'm here on the West coast to establish a factory branch and sales office. But your job, if you get it, will take you to Detroit."

Joe nodded. Betty's eyes were shiny.

"It's like a story," she said, "or a conspiracy."

I agreed. "I am a lamb in wolf's clothing," I said. "How much formality do they go in for?"

"We dress for dinner," Joe said. Otherwise, slacks and sweat shirts."

I nodded. "See you around five, then."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Mattson . . . Madison," Betty said, and gave me a smile that made me wish I were twenty again.

When they had gone, I picked up the phone and began gathering all the dope I could on Stephen Duane, his wife, his stepchildren. I had a good many sources of information: a couple of reporters, the man in charge of the morgue at the *Evening Post*, a pal of mine who worked for a big agency, some boys at headquarters.

Well, it didn't add up to much.

But I did get something about the father of Joe and Betty. Matthew Drake had been a fighting district attorney; he had a good chance to be governor, to go to the U. S. Senate. Then, in the prime, he died of an appendectomy. The kids were young then; his widow was young and good-looking; she had inherited some money besides what Drake left her. It was not surprising that she married Steve Duane. He had very little money, but he had the right connections and many friends. He got along all right.

That was about all. Duane was about fifty, still full of life and zest; he had an eye for the ladies, and the ladies liked him, but there had never been any scandal. The reports said that he and his wife were reasonably happy.

I began to be sorry that I had promised Betty I would show up at the Duane home. It was in an exclusive suburb, some fifteen miles out of town; five acres of oak trees, lawn and garden surrounding a rambling house that the architect had called Spanish in type, with a wall all around it. Duane kept a couple of horses—the subdividers had cut bridle paths through the section and up into the hills and canyons back of it—and a couple of cars. My dope said he was always over his ears in debt, but you know how some of those guys are. They can owe a lot of money and still ride along. It's a gift.

Well, my word is just like a government bond. I went home, packed a bag, and rolled out there. After all, a week end in the suburbs wouldn't hurt me; I've been through worse things than that.

The ornamental iron gates were

wide open and I drove up the tree-lined asphalt drive. There was a tennis court at the east of the house. Joe and Betty had been playing. When he saw me, Joe came running over to the car. He put out his hand and greeted me like an old friend. Betty came up, too, and he introduced me as though I hadn't met her before.

"Just leave your car here," Joe said, "and come along with me. I'll have Sims put it in the garage. Sims!"

"Yeah?" somebody said.

I looked over toward the garage. I saw a big ape there, dressed in a badly fitting chauffeur's uniform. He looked like a composite of all the thugs I've ever known.

"Put Mr. Madison's car up," Joe said.

"O. K.!" Sims said in a surly tone.

Joe gave me a look. I gave it back. So that was Sims, the man Duane had hired to take the place of the chauffeur who had been with them for some time. Joe was carrying my bag, Betty trailing along swinging her racket.

I saw a woman sitting on the deep, cool veranda.

"Mother," Joe said, "may I present my friend, Mr. Madison?"

I took a look at Mrs. Duane. She had the same kind of warmth and sweetness as Betty; she was still a very good-looking woman, with fine features, bright eyes, and a pleasant smile. There was a little gray in her hair, but it seemed to set off her looks. She greeted me very naturally and pleasantly; if she was under any sort of strain—and there was something in her manner that suggested nervousness and fear,

possibly poor health—she wasn't showing it to a casual guest.

"Mr. Madison's room is ready, I'm sure," she said to Joe. "If there's anything lacking, call Myra."

I followed Joe into the house. Betty remained with her mother. The room he took me to was large and pleasant, with a tile floor waxed and polished and a few Navaho rugs; the French doors opened on a little terrace and the windows looked out on a spread of lawn, the hills beyond, and the swimming pool at one side.

"Nice," I said.

Joe went into the bath to see that Myra had given me plenty of towels. I had seen Sims; I asked him about the other servants.

"There's Myra," he said. "We couldn't do without her. Then the cook—an old Irish woman who hasn't been here long. But she's a good cook. A maid, the cook's niece. A gardener who comes three days a week, but doesn't live on the place. And then this housekeeper, Mrs. Prescott. He hired her to relieve mother, so he says, of the details of managing the household. You'll see them all. What did you think of Sims?"

I grinned. "I've seen guys I liked better," I said.

Somebody knocked on the door. Joe crossed the room to open it. I saw a thin, white-haired woman, in a neat black dress. She looked fragile and humble, but she had very bright black eyes.

"Is everything all right?" she asked.

"I think so, Myra," Joe said. "Myra, this is Mr. Madison. He'll be with us a few days."

She looked at me, for just a second, with what I thought was suspicion. I've been looked at that way before, but not by people like Myra. I was beginning to feel that there was something very queer about this place. That thug, Sims, didn't fit in. I had an impression that Myra was a contradictory character; there was a lot of strength, of some kind, in that fragile old figure.

She bowed and retreated, murmuring that if I needed anything, I should ring for her.

"Dinner's at seven," Joe said. "He'll be here . . . and Mrs. Prescott dines with us."

"All right." I said. "I'll struggle into my clothes. See you later."

I stood at the window, looking out, smoking. I had discounted all that Joe and Betty had told me, in the office; now I wasn't sure. There was nothing tangible to go on, but there was something wrong in this place. I have been in this business long enough to be able to scent it.

When I went into the living room, later, Duane was there. And a red-haired dame, in a form-fitting green dress—with a form to be fitted—whom I took to be Mrs. Prescott, the housekeeper. She was looking up at Duane, laughing; and if I've ever seen a come-hither expression, her eyes had it.

"Hello, there," Duane said, offering his hand. "You're Madison, eh, Joe's friend."

I admitted it.

"Glad to have you with us," he said heartily.

He was a powerful man, in fine shape for his years; handsome, too, except that his mouth was a little loose, perhaps, and his eyes too large. I was introduced to the Prescott woman, and she gave me that look, too. Duane had no monopoly on it. I decided she was just one of those girls—she was a little thing, but well curved—who work that big-strong-man look overtime.

"Cocktail?" Duane asked. "The

others will be along presently."

I had a Martini. When the others came in, I had another. Then we went into dinner. There was a long refectory table in the dining room. Duane sat at the head, with Mrs. Prescott on his right; Mrs. Duane at the other end. I was near her, opposite Betty. Joe was at my side. Joe didn't say a word during the meal. Mrs. Duane and Betty tried to make the conversation light and general, and I helped them all I could. But I was studying the gang, too. I saw that Mrs. Duane seldom looked at her husband or the Prescott woman; never spoke to them unless she had to. There was a lot of subdued tension around that table.

The maid, a thin girl with a homely face, made some little mistake in serving. Mrs. Prescott snapped at her and she looked frightened, glancing toward Mrs. Duane. The latter smiled gently and shook her head slightly.

"That girl is simply stupid!" Mrs. Prescott remarked.

"Does it matter?" Mrs. Duane asked mildly.

"Of course it matters, my dear," Duane said. "After all, we might as well have decent service, you know."

Joe nudged me. Betty looked down at her plate, flushing.

Not a very gay or festive party. After dinner we went into the living room. Duane started to ask me questions about boat building. I stalled along. I knew enough about the business to get by. I observed that Mrs. Prescott had gone to the rear of the house, perhaps to lecture the maid. She came in after a time.

"I can't find Myra anywhere," she said, rather petulantly. "She was to do some mending and bring it to my room. She hasn't. And now she seems to have gone. It isn't her night off—unless she simply took it."

Betty looked up from the magazine she'd been reading. She started to say something, then bit her lip.

Half an hour later, Sims came in, and I got a good close look at his tough, battered, sullen face.

"She ain't anywhere around, ma'am," he said. "I looked all over."

"Myra?" Joe asked.

"Yeah," Sims said.

Betty really looked frightened, then, and I saw Mrs. Duane put her hand to her lips.

"Perhaps you'd better look, Joe," she said. "It isn't like her—"

"I already looked," Sims cut in rudely.

"That'll do, Sims," Duane said sharply. "You may go. She's probably walking somewhere in the garden. Look for her if you like, Joe."

Joe looked pretty mad. He resented Duane's tone. But he walked out and I followed him.

The boy started to do some pretty wild talking. I took his arm and told him to keep still; he might be overheard. We started past the swimming pool and toward the rear wall.

"Hey, you!" Sims shouted at us, suddenly. "There's somebody in the pool, here at the shallow end. Gosh, it's old Myra!"

II.

He squatted, bent down, reached for the black-clad figure. I broke into a run and got to his side. We lifted the frail form up, laid it on the tiled ledge above the water.

"Any lights here?" I asked.

"Yeah, sure," Sims said, and went over to the switch on the garage wall.

When I looked down at Myra, I

was sure she was dead. There was a dark bruise above her left eye, as though she had struck her head in falling—or had been hit before she fell into the pool.

"Is she . . . dead?" Joe gasped. "Myra . . . dead?"

"Dead as they come," Sims said gruffly. "An' it looks to me like somebody hit her with a sap an' dropped her in the pool. Yeah. It looks like murder to me!"

His voice was so loud that the maid and the cook appeared at the side of the house. The cook shouted a question, Sims answered; and then, in a moment, the whole household was out there, Betty and her mother clinging together, Mrs. Prescott looking pretty frightened, Duane very serious and subdued.

"I'll call a doctor and the police at once," he said.

"You won't need a doctor," Sims told him.

"Tell the police to bring a medical examiner," I suggested. "It will be important to establish the time and the cause of her death."

I went over to Mrs. Duane and Betty, suggested that they go indoors. They did, and Mrs. Prescott followed.

Two cops in a squad car got there very soon. They were all right, but not too bright. I was glad to see a young, competent-looking interne swing down from the police ambulance that came a few minutes later. He went to work at once.

"I think she's been dead about two hours," he said. "It seems she was struck over the head. The location of the bruise suggests that. It didn't come from a fall. And from marks here and a rip in her dress, I think she was held under water until she drowned. With a rake, or something of the sort."

"Why, there's a rake over there," Joe pointed, "leaning against the tool house."

He started for it.

"Don't touch it!" a cop yelled. "May have prints on it."

Sure enough, the lower end of the rake was still slightly damp.

"Yeah, just what I thought," Sims said. "Somebody slugged her an' dropped her in. Then held her under with that."

That seemed clear enough. But Why? And who? The doctor could not be too exact in placing the time of death. It must have happened just before we gathered for dinner. At that time, Duane, Mrs. Prescott, and I had been in the living room. The cook and the maid had been in the kitchen. The sun had gone down shortly after my arrival; the pool had been in semidarkness, at least, when someone held Myra under the water. And there were dark clumps of shrubbery around the pool. At about the time of her death, the cops' questions brought out, Sims had also been in the kitchen, eating has dinner; afterward, he had sat outside the kitchen door, talking to the cook. He had been there when Mrs. Prescott, unable to find Myra in the house, had sent him to look for her.

Betty and her mother had been in their rooms, dressing for dinner, they said. Joe, likewise.

Which left it anybody's murder. One cop was scratching his head; then he went to the telephone and called the captain in charge of the little substation. The doctor had left, in the ambulance. He was going to make a careful examination of the body and report later. Captain Hastings, in charge of the substation, drove out and dismissed one of the cops, keeping the other with him. Hastings was an old-time cop,

up from the ranks; gruff, authoritative, blunt.

He went after all of them—all of us, I should say—very hard. He was especially tough on Sims, to whom he took an instant dislike.

"You've been in prison, haven't you?" he barked.

"Sure," Sims said.

"What for? Murder?"

"Nix. Robb'ry. The boss knew that when he hired me. Ask him. He gave me a chance. You can't pin a thing on me. I got along fine with old Myra."

Duane was biting his lip. "Yes," he said, "I knew Sims had a prison record. I'm sure he had nothing to do with this. He couldn't have had, if the doctor's right, because he was either in the kitchen or just outside, within the cook's sight, the whole time."

"Yeah!" Hastings sneered. "You were all somewhere, weren't you?" He turned to me, squinted. "Haven't I seen you somewhere?"

"I don't think so, captain. I'm just out from Detroit, you see."

He glared at all of us. "Well, I want to go to this woman's room. Stay here, all of you, and see that they do, Tim!"

He stalked out, came back in about fifteen minutes with a crumpled piece of paper in his hand.

"She had money, didn't she? And now it's gone! How much? Speak up!"

No one said anything for a long moment. Then Betty spoke.

"Yes. She told me. She had nearly twenty-five hundred dollars in a metal box on the shelf in her closet. I saw her counting it one day. She . . . she was saving to

pay her way into an old lady's home. I told her to put it in the bank. She said it was safer there; that nobody knew she had it."

"You knew!"

"But . . . she trusted me," Betty said. "She knew I wouldn't tell. And I never have, till now."

Hastings looked at the paper in his hand. "Twenty-four hundred thirty one dollars and fifty cents, saved out of her pay over a long time. The dates and the amounts are written down. Somebody killed her for that money. Somebody here, in this house. One of you! And I'll find out which one!"

Maybe he would, but I didn't see how. He hammered away at everyone, dug into Sims' past, Mrs. Prescott's, Duane's. Mrs. Prescott was a widow, whom Duane had met while she was managing a restaurant; he explained that he thought she could manage the house, saving Mrs. Duane the bother and doing it economically.

I couldn't see that Hastings made any progress. I yawned. I was glad when he told us we could go to our rooms, with the warning that we should stay there all night. He left the cop on guard, put two more men outside. Sims went to his quarters over the garage; the others to their rooms.

I hadn't been in mine long when Joe came in.

"What do you think?" he demanded.

"Nothing . . . yet," I said. "What can I think? Someone robbed poor Myra and then, perhaps when she discovered the loss and accused the thief, she was killed. The money must still be here, somewhere. But who knew about it, besides Betty?"

"Duane!" the boy said. "He knew! I saw him pay Myra her wages, last month. He joked about it. He said: 'That old sock of yours must be nearly full, since you never spend any.' And she said: 'I let others spend, sir; I save for the rainy day.' He knew she had money—and not in a bank! And he needs money badly, now as always! If you'll search his room, that woman's room, I'll bet you'll find it."

"That's an idea," I said. "I'll try it, later."

Betty knocked and called.

"Come in," I said.

"Joe, mother wants to talk to you."

He nodded and went out. Betty moved close to me.

"Mr. Madison," she whispered, "I'm terribly afraid . . . for mother. Something might happen . . . to her. Poor dear Myra! I can't believe—"

"Nothing will happen," I said. "You go to your room, try to sleep. In the morning we'll all be able to think and see more clearly. Meanwhile, the police are on guard and I intend to do a little investigating."

She nodded. She was a brave little kid, at that. I watched her go down the hall. I knew the layout of the rooms, where everybody was. I stood there a moment, then Joe came out of Mrs. Duane's room, closed the door gently, and joined me. He was very white and his hands were clenched.

"Mother's in a bad way . . . grief and fear," he muttered. "This is terrible. Can't you do something?" He put his hand over his eyes, shivered a little. "She took a bromide to quiet her nerves. I hope she can sleep. I can't."

"I'll do all I can," I said, putting my hand on his shoulder. "Go to your room and stay there. I'll keep watch. I'll even do as you suggest —try to find the money."

"That would cinch it, wouldn't it?" he asked eagerly. "I mean, if you found it in his room or in that

Prescott woman's, then you'd know they were the ones who killed Myra."

"Robbed her, perhaps," I agreed. "They were both with me at about the time Myra was apparently killed."

"That doctor could be wrong. It might have been earlier."

"Yes," I said. "Run along. Keep quiet. I'll do my best."

He did. I moved a chair close to the window, switched off my light, looked out. Where a wing jutted out, I could see the lighted windows in the Prescott woman's room and also those in the chauffeur's quarters. One of the cops who was on guard outside strolled along beside the pool, then disappeared.

I sat there for some time, trying to figure things out. Then I heard movements in the hall and voices whispering. I went to the door and opened it slightly. Down the hall, in front of Duane's door, Duane and the Prescott woman stood. Duane went into his room, the woman started down the hall in my direction. I closed my door quickly and switched on the light.

To my surprise, she knocked lightly. I opened the door. She slipped inside quickly and smiled at me.

"May I come in?" she asked.

"If you promise not to compromise me," I said.

There was something about her that made you talk to her like that. She uttered a throaty laugh, moved to a chair and sat down.

"Pull the shades," she said.

When I had done so, and offered her a cigarette, she leaned toward me.

"Let's put the cards on the table, Mattson, and work together. I may need you, you may need me." She laughed. "You have a well-trained poker face, buddy, but that surprised you. Look!"

She put out her hand. From what she held in her palm, I learned that she was Amy Preston, an operative employed by the Apex Agency.

"O. K.!" I said, with a shrug. "Have you told anybody who I am?"

"Of course not. Did young Joe hire you? What did he say?"

I told her, and asked her who hired her and what for.

"Duane," she said. "To protect himself and his wife. You see, all sorts of strange things have been happening. Myra has always hated him, ever since he married Mrs. Duane. He's wanted to get rid of her, but Mrs. Duane wouldn't consent, Betty was fond of the old woman, and young Joe, too, resented Duane's criticism of Myra. In her quiet way, she tried to run everybody. When he engaged me, on the housekeeper pretext, she was furious. She's fought with me ever since. Duane thought she was dangerous—that she was a little off and would try to get him sometime, somehow. Or that she might harm Mrs. Duane, with the crazy idea of freeing her from him. Well, now she's gone, and that shows that he was all wrong about her. It's someone else. This place and this job have me down, brother. I'm glad you're here."

I looked at her steadily for a minute. "You and Duane seem to get along all right," I said.

"That's an act. And a silly one, I guess. When I first came, everybody was antagonistic. Myra, especially. I tried to win Mrs. Duane and Betty. No dice. They wanted Duane to fire me. I had to stick, so I lined up with him. His idea was that if we gave Myra the idea he was neglecting his wife on my account, she'd do something . . . and

give him a good reason for getting rid of her. He really thought she was off."

"And you?"

"Sometimes I suspected so. She had a queer way of looking at you. But I really don't know what to think."

"It might be this way," I said slowly. "Duane is a foxy guy. He knows all the tricks. Suppose telling you to keep tab on Myra was just a way to cover himself. Suppose he wanted to get rid of his wife."

She frowned. "But he couldn't have killed Myra."

"Not with his own hands, maybe," I agreed. "But I'm not sold on the idea that the cook could keep her eye on Sims."

"Oh, Sims!" she said. "He's my assistant."

"Too many dicks!" I growled. "You and Sims and me! How about the cook and the maid? Are they dicks, too? And Hastings and his cops. We'll be stumbling—" I jumped. "What was that?"

Amy ran to the door, opened it.

"Mrs. Duane . . . screaming!" she said, and ran down the hall.

I followed. We went into Mrs. Duane's room, switched on the lights. She was sitting up in bed, rubbing her throat. Her eyes were wild; she had a drugged look. She stared at us.

"A man . . . a large man," she gasped, "tried to choke me! When I screamed, he ran . . . out there."

There were only two large men on the place, besides myself. Duane and Sims. And the cops, of course. Sims couldn't have crossed from his quarters to the house very well without being seen by the cops. Duane's room adjoined his wife's, with a bath between, and also opened on the same flagged terrace.

I thought for a second Mrs. Duane had had a nightmare. But the fingers of the man had left bruises on her throat. She had been choked.

The cops came, on the run. Betty appeared; then Duane and Joe. One of the cops found Sims sound asleep, snoring noisily. The cook and the maid were awake, but had locked themselves in their room in fear and for a long time refused to open the door.

A cop phoned Hastings and the irascible old captain returned. He stationed a man outside Mrs. Duane's door and Betty remained with her. Duane very solicitously insisted on calling their doctor; the medico came and gave Mrs. Duane something for her nerves.

Hastings was mad. He gave his men the devil, then beckoned to me and Amy Preston. We followed him into the living room. When we were alone with him, he snapped: "Well, who are you two? There's nobody named Madison with the company you claim to represent. And nobody named Mrs. Prescott ever managed the restaurant you named. You don't know each other, huh? I've got a mind to lock you both up and sweat something out of you."

"O. K., chief, you win," I said. And told him who we were.

"No wonder things happen!" he growled. "Wherever you birds go, there's trouble. If I had my way, I'd take your licenses away from you. That ex-con, Sims—"

"—is my assistant," Amy said. "You see, my boss thinks I'm a poor weak woman who needs protection. He sends Sims along to provide it. Oh, Sims has a record and his manners are bad, but he really has a heart of gold. Chivalrous, a real diamond in the rough."

"Bah!" said Hastings. "Then who in hell—"

"You promised to find out," I reminded him.

He swore, under his breath. "I will," he muttered. "It would be easier if you people weren't here!" He snapped his fingers. "I'm going to search the house for that old woman's money."

The others had returned to their rooms. Amy and I sat down in the living room. Hastings put his men to work. They went over the whole house, thoroughly, with the exception of Mrs. Duane's room. It took them over two hours. Duane's room was the last they searched, and there, wrapped in a soiled pajama coat on the floor of his closet, they found what they were seeking—the exact amount of money Myra had hoarded and kept in her little metal box.

"You robbed her!" Hastings accused him. "If you didn't kill her yourself—and you could have before you met Mrs. Prescott in the living room—you had her killed, because she knew you took her money!"

"That's absurd!" Duane said evenly. "I never saw that money before. I had no idea it was there. It was planted."

"They all say that!" Hastings observed. "Dig up the gardener that works here part time, boys," he added. "I've got a hunch he may be the guy Duane hired to do the job, if he didn't do it himself. There were no prints on that rake, but gardeners wear gloves. Get him."

"Of all the silly—" Duane began, but Hastings cut him off sharply.

Amy and I were standing at the door, looking in at Duane. Joe came out of his room, stepped up behind me and took my arm.

"What did I tell you?" he whispered excitedly. "That's it! He robbed Myra, killed her or had her killed; he's always hated her! And he tried to choke mother!"

"Take it easy," I said. "Leave it to Hastings. "If he gets the gar-

dener and makes him talk, we'll learn things. Did anybody see the gardener on the place today?"

"No, but he could have been here. He's a sneaky old fellow; Duane hired him!"

The boy was nervous and excited, puffing furiously on a cigarette. I was afraid he was all set to shout a lot of wild accusations, which he couldn't prove. I preferred to let Hastings go ahead in his own thorough fashion. If he was right, he might be able to get the truth out of the gardener in short order. He left a man in the hall, by Duane's door, another outside on the terrace. Duane sarcastically asked if he was under arrest.

"But that's absurd!" Amy said to me, when we had gone back to the living room. "If Duane did rob her, he certainly would not have left the money to be found. He isn't a fool."

"No. But he may have thought he would not be suspected. I understand he does need money and even to a guy like him twenty-five hundred might look like a lot."

"Did need money," Amy said. "He doesn't now. He's on the board of directors of a realty firm—just a figurehead, you know—but he recently put over a big deal. His commission will square what he owes and give him quite a bit of cash. It's in escrow now; he should have it almost any day."

"You sure?"

"You bet. I checked on that before I took the job. Apex wants to know that we get paid. We don't go to work for anybody just on the strength of his social standing. No, we want to know about bank accounts."

"I'm not so careful," I said thoughtfully. "But I'm not Apex. I'm just a lone wolf trying to get along. What you say puts a different light—"

Hastings pushed the old gardener into the room. The man was wearing cotton-flannel pajamas, bedroom slippers, and an overcoat. Hastings' men had dragged him out of bed. He was protesting that Myra was an old friend, and that he knew nothing about her death until the police had come for him.

"Bring Duane in here!" Hastings ordered. "We'll put 'em together and make 'em talk. I'm convinced this fellow used the rake on the old woman, and Duane paid him to do it."

"No! No! It's a lie!" the gardener protested.

A cop called to the man on guard outside Duane's door.

"Bring Duane!"

I saw Joe, in a dressing gown, hair ruffled, emerge from his room. He wanted to be in at the kill. He wanted to see Hastings prove Duane guilty.

"Cap!" the cop shouted. "Duane's dead . . . poisoned!"

III.

"Damn it!" Hastings roared. "Oh, damn these cases! I'd rather—"

He hurried down the hall. I followed. Duane was dead, indeed. Cyanide.

"There!" Joe cried. "You see! Suicide! Because he was guilty! Because he knew he'd be proved guilty! There's proof for you—he robbed and killed Myra, or had her killed; he tried to kill mother. Then, when he knew Hastings was bringing the gardener to confront him, when the money was found, he knew the game was up! He was always a coward. He killed himself." He laughed hysterically.

"Looks like it," Hastings said.

"Oh, it's impossible!" Amy protested. "It's utterly ridiculous!"

"I didn't kill her!" the gardener cried. "You lie, all of you! You can't—"

"Shut that fool up!" growled Hastings.

"Oh, Joe! Joe!" Betty called from Mrs. Duane's door. "What is it now? Mother wants you, Joe, and—"

"It's Duane!" Joe cried exultantly. "He's killed himself! That's his confession of guilt. He was afraid to face the music, so he took poison. Mother's free, sis. You and I are free!"

Betty put her hand to her lips. "How terrible!" she sobbed. "Do you mean that he . . . he killed Myra?"

"Yes, or had her killed!"

He went into his mother's room. Betty stood there in the hall, shocked and uncertain. Then she came toward us, walked up to me and said:

"Is it true? Did he—"

"Duane took poison, all right," Hastings cut in, "and why should he if he wasn't guilty? It looks like he killed the old woman, all right, after stealing her money. Or had this gardener do it for him. Well, we found the money—evidence—and scared him into doing the Dutch."

Amy thrust herself forward. "I tell you Duane was murdered!" she said.

"Sure!" said Sims. "That guy wouldn't kill himself; he had too much to live for."

Betty looked as though she were going to faint.

"Look after Betty," I said to Amy. "I think you're right! I'm going—"

"Where?" she whispered.

I didn't answer. Betty collapsed. Sims caught her. Amy moved up to her. All the others were looking at her. I thought I knew what had caused her to faint. I thought I saw, suddenly, clearly, what was wrong in this troubled household.

I hurried into Duane's room, out on the terrace, then along it to Mrs. Duane's. I chose this way because I was sure the hall door would be locked.

And I saw Mrs. Duane sitting up in bed, pointing her finger at Joe. She was speaking, too, but I could not hear her words. I saw Joe step toward her, and I knew his intention. As he bent over her, his shadow on the wall was enormous. I knew then where Mrs. Duane had got the idea that a large man had tried to choke her—from that shadow; if she had not deliberately withheld the truth.

"No, Joe! You've done enough! You poor mad boy!"

I heard those words from her lips as my shoulder crashed the French door. Joe whirled, saw me, and bared his teeth; his hand went swiftly to the pocket of his dressing gown. Mrs. Duane seized his arm, crying, "No, Joe! No more!" Except for that, he might have got a shot at me. But as he tried to jerk free from her, I moved in and swung. It was an uppercut. It caught him on the chin. It dropped him.

Mrs. Duane, covering her face with her hands, sobbed painfully.

I took Joe's gun and stood over him.

"You'd better talk, lady," I said.

Hastings, or somebody, was hammering on the door. I went over and unlocked it. They crowded in, the whole mob. But not Betty. She hadn't come out of it yet; the cook was looking after her.

"This is the man you want, Hastings," I said, and pointed to Joe. "He robbed Myra, killed her, hid the money in Duane's closet; he told me Duane knew Myra had money and urged me to search his room. He's the one who tried to choke Mrs. Duane. Yes, and he put the cyanide

in Duane's water bottle. Mrs. Duane was accusing him and he was going to choke her, this time, when I came in."

"Man, you've lost your senses!" Hastings said. "His own mother!"

"Ask her!" I said.

"I am not his mother," Mrs. Duane said. "Betty is my only child. He . . . he is the son of a man Betty's father, Mr. Drake, sent to the chair . . . for killing his wife. We . . . adopted him, to save him from an orphan asylum. We tried . . . I have tried . . . to control him. Sometimes I thought I had succeeded. He was brilliant in school; often very affectionate. Then something would hurt him or he would be depressed and unreasonable. He couldn't stand censure or rebuke. Myra knew him so well, my husband, Mr. Duane, too. He grew to hate them. When we had to reduce his allowance, he became very angry. I was afraid of what he might do. I didn't think . . . until it happened . . . even then I couldn't believe . . . that he'd rob and kill Myra, who had always been so good to him. But he did. He was near the pool before dinner. I saw Myra go there, too, and speak to him. That's all I saw, but she must have been accusing him of taking her money. It's the madness in him, the wild violent anger. Betty is the only one of us he did not hate. And now— It's my fault, all my fault!" she cried brokenly. "Steve was afraid of what might happen. He urged me to let him send Joe away. We quarreled over that. And now . . . Myra! Steve!"

When Joe came out of it, he saw handcuffs on his wrists. He looked at us, a long stare of hate; then turned to the sobbing woman on the bed.

"Cut it, you old fool!" he said. "Why in hell didn't you leave me where you found me? I should love

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you, huh? You and Drake! You were so good to me! Yeah, he sent my old man to the chair, didn't he? Aw, to hell with you!"

But he cracked up, the hardness went soft, when they took him out,

"Don't let Betty see me!" he begged. "For Heaven's sake, don't do that!"

I drove Amy Preston back to town. She had no car out there and we left Sims to get in by bus or hitchhiking.

She didn't have much to say. She was pretty gloomy.

But as we got into the traffic, she said: "A fine team we make. You hire out to a killer and I let my client get poisoned."

"I really hired out to Betty," I said. "But I'm a dope, at that. I should have seen what Joe was, almost from the start. Betty backing him up is what threw me off. Of course, she's a young and impressionable kid; he made her see things his way. He's always been able to do that. Three or four times, he said things that made me suspect him; but I was suspecting everybody, even you. I discounted them, thinking he was so upset and nervous he was talking wild."

"But at the last you were the first to guess. How?"

"Hastings was being so dumb. But it was really you who tipped me. You were so dead sure Duane would not have killed himself. Then who had killed him . . . and Myra? The reason Mrs. Duane wanted to see Joe hit me suddenly and I knew what I'd find there. So we do make quite a team. Do you suppose you could shake your protector-assistant, Mr. Sims, now and then, and go places with me?"

"I could try," she said.

All I got out of the Duane case was meeting Amy. But it's been worth it.

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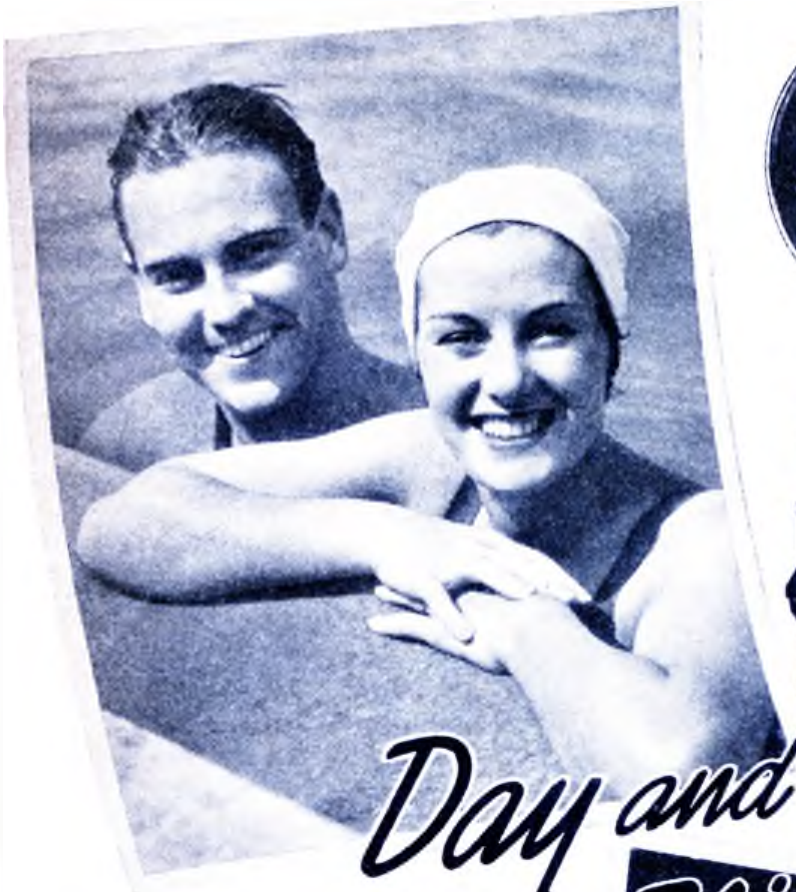

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