

Street & Smith's

DETECTIVE

Story Magazine

MAY



**"DOCTOR,
YOUR
MURDER
IS READY!"**

AND OTHER STORIES



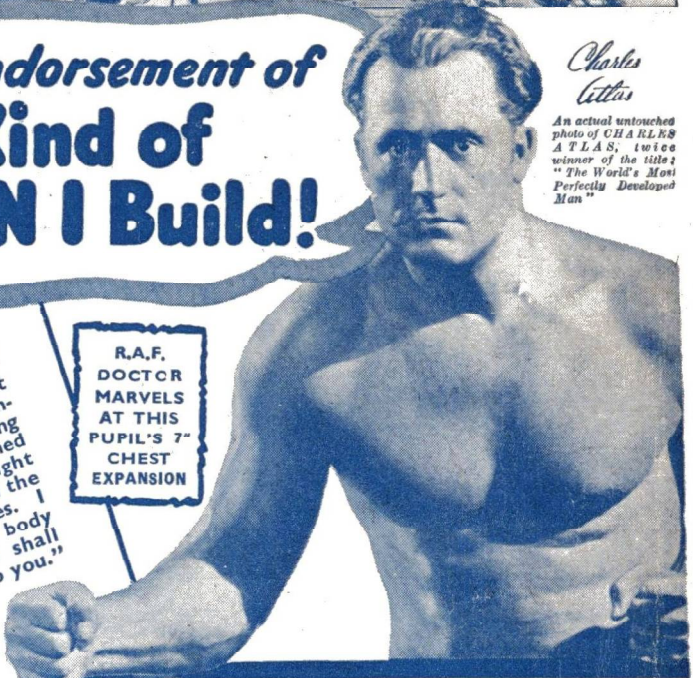
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ABSOLUTELY NOT! THE ATLAS WAY-WITH NO APPARATUS-MAKES MUSCLES GROW LIKE MAGIC!

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"I was passed Grade one by an R.A.F. Medical Doctor on Tuesday. The Doctor who measured my chest said it was the best expansion he had seen for a long time, and he examined fifty every day. From right down to fully expanded the expansion was 7 inches. I am developing my body beautifully now and shall always be grateful to you."
Your pupil,
D.R.P.—(Glam.)

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CHEST
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ADDRESS.....
.....

STREET & SMITH'S

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

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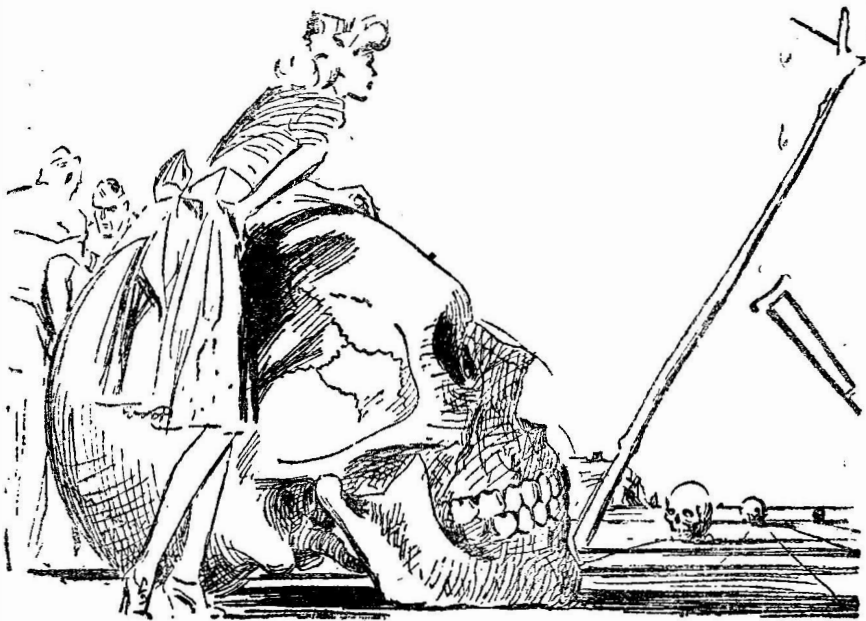
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All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

“DOCTOR, YOUR MURDER IS READY!”

By VICTOR M. VICTOROFF



I.

THE faint, flat, smooth taste of the glass was still on Jerry's tongue as he sourly watched Lieutenant Cooper, army medical corps, maneuver the thermometer into position under the desk lamp. The lieutenant raised a black eyebrow, and considered his words carefully.

"You feel pretty lousy," he said slowly. It was not a question, and Jerry didn't feel called upon to do more than shrug in acquiescence. The room felt unbearably stuffy and hot, yet a tiny draft from somewhere felt cold on his neck. There was a distinct buzzing in his ears, his chest felt constricted and his breathing was limited. The cough was unremitting and bit deep into his chest beneath the right armpit with

each paroxysm. In his left hand, Jerry held a sopping handkerchief.

"This is the third day you've run a fever, Moore"—Cooper smiled sympathetically—"and there's no use kidding about what's got to be done, exams or no exams."

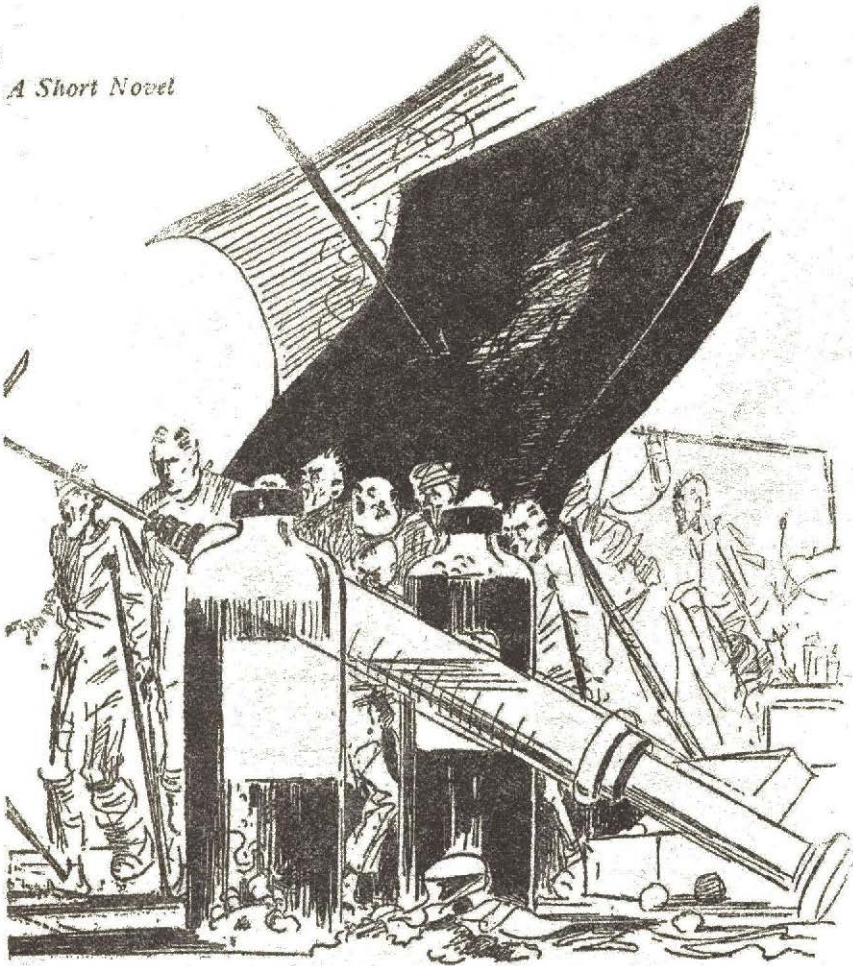
"I finished the last of them this morning," said Jerry. He added ironically, "I'm up for a ten-day furlough, if you O.K. it, sir."

The physician studied Jerry carefully for a moment, then lowered his gaze to a set of cards, which Jerry recalled looked like the record cards issued to every soldier on induction, and held by his commanding officer for review of abilities and past accomplishments. Apparently, the lieutenant was satisfied.

"Moore, I want you to concentrate on what I have to say. I have an assignment for you."

"DOCTOR, YOUR MURDER IS READY!"

A Short Novel



"An assignment!" gasped Jerry, seeing his furlough float lazily out of reach. "But the unit is supposed—"

"To go home?" smilingly finished the officer. "Yes, the unit is on furlough, but you are going on special detail." He leaned forward earnestly.

"Perhaps you remember your classmate, Private Samuel Cole, of the Fourth Platoon, who died recently?"

"Why, yes, sir. He was picked up by ambulance after collapsing in the street, and taken to the hospital. He died of pneumonia that same night."

"Well," meditated Lieutenant Cooper, "he died, all right. The point is this. The United States army had a big investment in Cole, just as it has in each of you. And even as a routine, it would be natural to expect an investigation into the sudden death of any

enlisted man, from whatever cause. In this affair, however, there seem special indications for a thorough review of the situation surrounding the death of Cole."

A little dizzy with the effort to understand, terribly uncomfortable, Jerry persevered. "But that was months ago, sir. Why have you waited until now to investigate? And what has it to do—"

"The circumstances were examined at the time, and the case, so far as the war department is concerned, closed with my report. But, you see, I have never been satisfied. In this day of therapy, pneumonia is simply a poor excuse for dying. But that's the least," the officer continued. "Since Cole's death, my friends at the hospital have told me of rather peculiar failures in treatment in the same ward where Cole died.

"I want you, Moore, to go to that ward

for treatment. Keep your eyes open. Observe anyone who works, belongs or even visits the floor. And that includes doctors, nurses, attendants, porters, and even your fellow patients," the lieutenant finished slowly.

"Then I'll play a . . . spy, more or less?" asked Jerry.

"Don't misunderstand, Moore. This is a volunteer job. You can refuse it if you wish. It certainly involves risk beyond the normal dictates of duty. If there is a vindictive or psychotic murderer at large up there, you're at his mercy. Especially if he discovers your primary purpose."

The officer scribbled across a sheet of paper.

"Well, sir, I'll do my best, but when you say 'primary purpose,' you imply there is a secondary one?"

"Yes," explained Cooper. "Secondarily, for you to get well," he said, handing the paper to Jerry. "You can read it. Give this to Dr. Harris across the street."

Jerry stood up, saluted shakily, and was dismissed.

Outside the office, he opened the note and read the words as if through the medium of a foot of wavy green water:

Attention Dr. Lee Harris, Admitting
Office

Manhattan City Hospital
New York City, N. Y.

Dear Lee:

Please admit Private First Class Gerald S. Moore, ASN: 1221446, to Medical Ward R-6 for immediate hospitalization with tentative diagnosis of upper respiratory infection, four days duration, complicated by onset of pneumonia.

Signed: Samuel J. Cooper
1st Lt., AUS
Medical Corps,
Attached

P. S. This man is between terms at the medical college, going into his senior year, army training program. This is as good a time as any for him to learn there are two ends to a stethoscope.

Please send me a note on progress.

Sam

Jerry stumbled across the street, swearing at the cold bluster of the late-fall wind that tore at his hulking army overcoat. He found the admitting office, Dr. Lee Harris, and answered mechanically a host of questions. Finally, it was ended with, yes, he did want to wait to undress until he got to the ward. Yes, he had two dollars and fifteen cents, a wrist watch, no other valu-

ables. No, there was no one he wanted to notify. Positively no, he didn't need a wheel chair.

"Ward R-6, soldier," said the nurse. "Ask for Dr. Millet. Left turn to the elevators"—she pointed.

It seemed to Jerry that every atom of warmth in his body suddenly left him as the elevator smoothly accelerated upward. He started to shake in a violent chill, so much so that the woman on the gray side of thirty with bleached hair, who stood next to him, looked askance, then sidled away, murmuring, "Soldiers these days—" It was ridiculous, but Jerry was powerless, as he stood there shivering, to control himself. He got out at the designated floor, thankful no one got off with him.

Jerry turned the corner, walked with unsteady steps past the deep-set, rounded bay windows designed to catch the sunlight, and came to the glassed-in double doors that seemingly ended the hallway. Neatly etched in blue glass set in a steel frame was the caption, "Medical—R-6—Male."

A white-jacketed doctor hurled past Jerry, and hard on his heels, another intern rushed, obviously trying to keep up a conversation that had been finished conclusively. The doors swung closed again, but not before Jerry had caught a glimpse of the cheerfully sunlit ward. There were three rows of beds, one in the center, and two lining the long, windowed walls.

"But, Mr. Millet, you didn't say—Shall we start intravenous glucose and saline immediately, or wait until you get Dr. Samuels?" pleaded the younger man. He was tall, his black eyes deep-set and rather expressionless, even though the slant of cheek and drooping corner of his mouth revealed acute concern. His build was that of the professional football star, and the only sign that he lived a more sedentary existence was the salmon-colored ribbon of fat that projected over the back of his collar.

"Damn it, Hollander, you know the routine for thyroid crisis!" raged Dr. Millet, turning on his heel. He was a smaller man than Hollander, but his features were regular, almost patrician, and carried the hint of genuine dignity to grow with advancing years.

"Start hypodermoclysis. cold sponges, pack wet sheets, immediately. Hold off iodine. If you've got a liter of sugar ready, shove it in. Try to keep him alive until I get back."

"But what about oxygen?" asked Hollander despairingly.

Dr. Millet flung back over his shoulder, "For God's sake, ask a nurse." Then he was gone. Dr. Hollander turned back to the doors, ignoring Jerry completely. A little nonplused at the exhibition of temperament, Jerry, nevertheless, followed Hollander into the ward. The intern's face, now sullen, was set to a little closet labeled, "Emergency. Oxygen."

A nurse with blue eyes, a determined expression contorting what might be a promisingly pretty face, stalked out of the oasis of white curtains in the middle of the floor. She carried her right shoulder higher than her left, and apparently was aware of the defect. In an effort to compensate for it, she lifted her ankles high and swayed her hips as she walked, accenting the startling femininity her white, adequately concealing skirts could only suggest.

"Miss Purdee," she called. A very young, mousy student nurse responded, walking out of a linen closet.

"Yes, what is it, Miss Straughn?"

"You've seen P.M.'s done?"

Miss Purdee started twisting her fingers as if she wanted to unscrew them. "Why, you mean post-mortem service? Ye-yes. Once, I think," she said anxiously.

The blue-eyed nurse considered her with weary detachment. "Never did your own? Well, there's always the first time. You're going to do one now. Mr. Hunt, the thyroid case, just died."

Another intern appeared at the intersection of two screens, and waved his hand brusquely to catch Dr. Hollander's attention. His definitive, jerky wrist movement indicated finality. He came up to Miss Straughn and spoke in an intimate, low, husky monotone, made interesting by the fact that such a masculine voice should be the property of a soft-featured, small-boned man.

"Sybil, call information. Tell them to send out telegrams to the family."

She shook her head, looking up into his face. "There is no family."

Jerry was struck by the unprofessional intimacy between them. In the environment of the ward, and especially after a death, the display he had just seen struck him as being in pretty bad taste.

Millet entered with a rotund, florid-faced elderly man with a shrewd face. They stopped short when they saw Hollander and his white-coated assistant talking to the

nurse. There was only one possible explanation. Regretfully, the older doctor shook his head.

"Millet, you've got tough breaks. I still think you underdosed with Lugol's, but on your regimen, he should never have gone into crisis."

"The routine was successful in every patient up to now," contended Millet stubbornly, "and I don't think even now, if I had it to do over, that I would have treated Hunt any differently."

Jerry was getting quite weary of standing around waiting for attention. He stepped forward to approach Dr. Millet. He passed a patient who was walking into the washroom, and the man, his eyes glittering peculiarly, whispered, "Another one for the ice truck, aren't you, my boy?" He laughed, and shuffled away.

The buzz in his ears annoyed Jerry. It went to a higher pitch—he couldn't locate it. It seemed to come from everywhere at once, then seemingly dissolved with a wooshing kind of sound. His knees had no sensation, and as he fell, his eyes veiled by gray-blue lights that flashed little pinpoints deep back in and behind his eyeballs, he was only dimly aware of a voice booming peculiarly, like one heard down the length of a tunnel. "Ye gods, now what's this?" The last thing he felt was a cottony jar as his face hit the floor.

"—and the orderly brought his clothes down and checked them in."

"I see you've put the chart sheets together. Might as well begin now. Dictate your findings and I'll put them down."

"His temperature is 103.2. Pulse 108. Respirations—" The voices droned on.

Jerry became aware of several things at once. That he lay flat in bed, and had been put into pajamas. That there were two people, both young women, talking about him at the foot of his bed, one of whom was Miss Straughn, the charge nurse, and the other, to judge from her voice at least, was a gorgeous dame with a sense of humor and a figure out of the cigarette ads. She must be, he thought vaguely, short and blond, with curly hair that caught the lights.

Then he was conscious, and realized he could open his eyes whenever he chose, and with this realization, a sudden tormented signal from his stomach told him he was going to be very, very sick.

He shuddered, struggled up on one rubbery elbow and hoarsely demanded, "Give me something!"

The girl he'd visualized as short and blond, with the lithograph figure, had him under the shoulders and a basin under his chin, before it happened. Only she was Latin dark, with dreamy, wide eyes crinkling at the corners, mahogany hair escaping under her peaked white hat, and creamy skin. And she was tall. But the figure was all, all there.

"What a hell of a way to start up an acquaintanceship," Jerry gasped exhaustedly, essaying a slight, bilious smile at the two nurses.

"Now, that's the sort of thing you needn't do again. It is awfully easy to control," Miss Straughn was saying in her best professional manner, when the slight but compactly built young intern Jerry had seen earlier introduced himself.

"Hello, doc," he said in a breezy, informal manner. "My name is Harry Judson, and this is my own little darling, Miss Sybil Straughn, charge nurse on this ward."

"Why, Dr. Judson!" exclaimed Miss Straughn coyly, her eyes vivid. "Why tell him? Let him guess."

"And this Andalusian beauty with the magic eyes is senior student nurse, Ruth Champlain. As we're the only people around here who do any work," he joshed, "the rest don't rate an introduction."

There was something more than good-humored lightness in the greeting. Judson seemed to be straining himself to act politely. His grin was forced, and as promptly as it came, it departed. Gravely, Jerry acknowledged the manifest friendly intent, realizing he was in a privileged rôle as a patient, and could expect favors.

"We've just been getting acquainted."

The next hour was a hectic one of saying, "Ah-h-h-h-ah-h-h-h" with the mouth wide open, chest thumping, a ride on a wheel chair out to the drafty fluoroscopy room, blood-letting, deep breathing that cut like a knife, and a medical biography taken down in complete detail.

After it, Jerry had to admit that Judson was a competent doctor but was more confirmed than ever in the opinion that the man was tense, even excited, and his temperament, frenetic as it was, reminded Jerry of an overloaded electric light bulb, blazing bright, but ready to blow out.

Judson had been gone for at least an hour, and Jerry rested comfortably with his eyes closed. Distinctly, the atmosphere in the ward from the first moment he had come in was perturbing. The distinct im-

patience of Dr. Millet, the sullenness of Dr. Hollander, the playing-at-work between Sybil Straughn and Dr. Judson, the remark of the hard-eyed patient who had passed him just before he fainted. Despite the gay sunshine that flooded the big room, the patients did not talk much, and when they did, it was in low whispers. It was an oppressive, eerie feeling which transmitted itself to Jerry even more as he thought about it.

These men in the adjoining beds were quiet, he felt, as if they were waiting for something.

Suddenly, he started. He had dozed off, and now felt long, supple, cool fingers at his wrist. It was Miss Champlain. She shushed him and counted his pulse, then handed him a thermometer.

Jerry sleepily looked across the ward. Miss Straughn was sitting at a white-enameled desk near the swinging doors, writing on charts. A few patients shuffled wearily down the lines of beds. Around his own bed, screens had been placed, to designate an infectious case.

Jerry intrigued himself with looking from the tip of Miss Champlain's left ear, down the curve of her cheek to her chin, then up to the other ear. It was usually good for a rise, but two things happened which shouldn't have. Jerry noted, in the tracing, that the girl was really lovely, and next, that she was unaware he was looking at her. Her lips moved as she counted. Then she looked him full in the eyes, and both felt guilty and uncomfortable.

"For your interest," she laughed, "the upper lobe of your right lung is solid with pneumococcal pneumonia, and you're likely to be in our hotel for quite a while, Private Moore."

"Call me Jerry," he said, between coughs. "By the way, what was that sweet and sickly stuff I heard this afternoon between Judson and your charge nurse?" he demanded, looking for information, but also a conversational lead that would keep her overtime with him.

"Don't believe a word of it, Jerry," she said easily, reading his thermometer and charting. "Sybil's heart is in the South Pacific, and she doesn't care a bit for Judson."

"And your heart?" asked Jerry, unaccountably feeling an upsurge of warmth, which was not entirely fever, flood his face. As the girl moved her medication truck

down to the next bed, she threw back over her shoulder.

"It's in good old Manhattan City, Jerry."

Only several hours later, Jerry realized suddenly with acute, tingling embarrassment that the two nurses had most certainly undressed him and put him to bed.

II.

It was entirely possible, Jerry granted, that Miss Bryant, the night nurse, came of non-criminal parents, that she might be mistaken at first glance for an easygoing Irish lass without a single character fault, and that they might even let her into public conveyances, just like other people. But Jerry knew positively that Miss Bryant was a baleful witch. Only a woman with her soul made in hell could wake a man at five thirty in the morning, and greet him with a cheery smile.

"Good morning. Did you sleep well? Anything hurt you? Any complaints? How's your appetite? Is there anything you want? What are your symptoms this morning?" she rattled on at high speed.

Jerry wanted to tell her the truth, but sleepy as he was, he caught a hint of the tired, forced heartiness that lay behind the smile. She had been working since midnight, without a break, and would not go off duty until eight in the morning.

"You seem to enjoy your work," he suggested.

She considered this for a moment. "Frankly, Dr. Moore, it was swell up to a couple of months ago. Then everything seemed to go to pieces. Why, I don't know, but all of us, including the patients, seem to feel it. Everybody used to be so smooth, and although we got the sickest patients, Dr. Millet kept the record for the lowest mortality of any ward on the medical division for over six months. The interns, everybody, tried to make things pleasant. But now—" She paused.

"And now?" prompted Jerry, his mind leaping to possibilities.

"It's all different." Miss Bryant bit her lip, and Jerry sponged his face with a washcloth, encouraging her to continue.

"We've lost an awful lot of patients lately. And Dr. Millet gets hell from Samuels, and passes it down to his interns—"

"Who pass it on to you?" finished Jerry.

"That's about it. But . . . but I don't like it. Things happen. Valves stick, patients

with acute lung diseases manage to get cigarettes, and cough themselves to death. Drugs get mixed up. X rays are misplaced when they are needed most. Syringes break at the most inopportune moment. All our sterile gloves, one time, had pinholes in them. I bless the night I get through without some crazy accident—or a death."

"Jinxed, eh?" grinned Jerry. "I'll bet you think superstitious people are silly!"

"It's no jinx." The nurse shook her head. "And not bad management either. Sybil is one fine nurse—"

Crash!

There was a shattering noise, and the tinkling of glass. It came from the medicine cabinet near the nurses' desk. Her hand to her throat, Miss Bryant ran to the cabinet, which gaped open. A patient laughed hysterically. The nurse came back to Jerry. She was trembling and near tears.

"Now, what am I going to do? You see!"

"What was in that cabinet?" demanded Jerry, his mind racing.

"Just ordinary medications, the standard drugs."

"Anything new, anything put in there recently?"

Miss Bryant wrinkled her brows. "Only a couple of tubes of ethyl chloride—"

Jerry leaned back, immensely relieved. Ethyl chloride was used as a local anaesthetic. Bottled under pressure, it evaporated very quickly, and froze the skin, producing numbness.

"Forget your ghosts. The tubes of ethyl chloride are liable to blow up like that unless kept in a cool place. It was carelessness to leave them there.

Miss Bryant ran down the ward to quiet the patient with hysterics, and Jerry meditated that a few accidents in the beginning could have made the staff jumpy and self-conscious. No one could work efficiently under the strain of anticipating accidents. And patients did die, even in the best regulated wards. And yet—

Dr. Millet made rounds with Dr. Hollander at nine. When Millet had finished with Jerry, the student knew he had been gone over by a brilliant diagnostician, and his respect for him mounted. What Jerry particularly liked was the discussion Millet had with him, accepting that Jerry was an advanced medical student and would be interested.

"You see, Jerry, we're not going to put you on sulfadiazine because there's no

laboratory evidence of a pneumococcal infection, and there is a relative paucity of signs on physical that do not correspond to the findings on fluoroscopy. Our bet is atypical virus pneumonia, and there's nothing the sulfa drugs can do for you except give you the symptoms of toxicity."

"Then I'm going to have a course of at least two weeks, and perhaps longer?" asked Jerry, aghast. He saw the swing doors open, and Ruth Champlain came in with Dr. Judson, each carrying a stubby flask.

"Don't feel too badly, Moore," sympathized Millet. "After all, this is a marvelous opportunity. Study the nurses—"

"That'll be a pleasure," promptly exclaimed Jerry.

"I mean, their techniques. You can ask for charts, if you wish, and I'll tell Dr. Judson, and you, too, Dr. Hollander, can help Moore and explain things he may see. After all, it's not many a doctor who can say he's spent twenty-four hours consecutively in a ward," laughed Dr. Millet.

"Judson's here," said Hollander curtly. He had remained aloof and morose. "He seems to have the whole blood we need for the Addisonian anaemia."

Dr. Millet looked at him levelly, sighed, and turned back to Jerry.

"This is a strictly routine procedure, Moore," he exclaimed. "Lehr, the patient in question, is that fellow fourth down, across from your bed. He has a twelve-year history of anaemia, and now he's in relapse. Seems he went on a binge and forgot to keep up with his clinic visits. Now he's in pretty serious condition, but with transfusion, there's every chance of his coming around. Only, these days, you never know," he said, half to himself.

"Call Dr. Judson, won't you?" he asked Hollander. Judson was standing at Sybil Straughn's desk, on which the flasks of blood sat. They were talking animatedly, and Hollander didn't seem to like it a bit.

Judson came away reluctantly, and approached. "I've brought up two units, 500 cc each," he announced. "Typed and cross-matched 'em myself," he added.

Millet nodded approbation, then said, "No reflection on you, Harry, but I wonder if you'd mind getting an additional sample of blood. I'd like to cross-match Lehr myself. You know, there've been so many—" He stopped, and made a meaningless gesture. Judson looked at him swiftly, and seemed hurt.

"I haven't much time." Millet frowned.

"Got a damned surgical consultation to attend. Be a good fellow and get it right away, won't you?"

Judson hesitated, then walked to the desk. It didn't take an expert lip reader to tell from the way Sybil spoke, and her shrug of helplessness, that whatever it was Judson wanted, she didn't have it to give. He returned, face impassive.

"No sterile syringes, Dr. Millet. But if you'll wait, she'll boil one up."

"Can't wait twenty minutes," said Millet. Then he shrugged. "Oh, go ahead with it. I'm getting positively neurotic in my old age. Give him one unit now, and the rest tonight. I'll sign the order."

Dr. Millet stood up, folded his stethoscope and put it into his pocket, smiling at Jerry. He turned to the two interns. "By the way, have you fellows had your X rays taken?"

"The plates were done day before yesterday," said Judson. "We should get the reports pretty soon."

A half-hour later, Hollander and Judson came down the ward with the blood to Mr. Lehr's bed. They adjusted the curtains so that Jerry could study the procedure.

"Now, this won't hurt a bit," said Hollander, as if he didn't believe it himself. The patient looked up wearily, and resignedly extended his arm. Across the ward, Jerry could see the extreme pallor of his face, so marked that it was difficult to know where the lips began and ended. While Judson hung the flask in a sling on the ring-stand, Hollander carefully sponged off Lehr's arm, and with a deft, accurate stroke, inserted the needle into the vein and withdrew a sample of blood. Expertly, he transferred the contents of the syringe to a test tube, then, hardly wasting a second, accepted the needle-adaptor from Judson who had by now got the flask ready for delivery.

Jerry looked at the face of the patient with vague disquietude. The man took a deep inspiration as the blood flowed into his veins. Judson turned away, satisfied, and adjusted the materials on the truck, setting things in order while Hollander regulated the rate of flow by means of a clamp on the rubber tubing. Some instinct, born out of experience, prompted Hollander to watch his patient very carefully. Jerry felt, with a quickening of his own heartbeat, a sense of impending tragedy, and swore at himself for being silly. Then he thought of what the night nurse had said about things going wrong, and watched, craning his neck.

Hollander turned swiftly to Judson and whispered urgently to him. Both men observed Lehr closely. The patient suddenly gasped for breath. He cried, "Doctors, you're killing me, you're killing me! Please stop!"

His breathing became more and more exaggerated. He struggled to a sitting position, resting on stiffened arms for support. He gave loud, coughing grunts which whistled throughout the big room, and stopped the surprised murmur of conversation. The attention of every single person on the ward focused acutely on the drama enacting itself across the ward from Jerry. Miss Straughn, shoulder bobbing, fairly loped down the ward. Meanwhile, Judson and Hollander stopped the transfusion and tried to support the patient's shoulders.

"Oxygen, positive pressure apparatus, please," rapped Hollander to the nurse. "And hurry!" Lehr was turning faintly blue in the face. He suddenly clutched his chest with both hands, bent in half by pain. His hoarse screams mounted louder and louder. He choked, fell back, and died.

Lehr had obviously died as a result of transfusion reaction. Ruth had told Jerry, however, that when the blood from the patient had been matched originally, there had been no agglutination. The last sample taken did agglutinate, however, and no one could explain where the switch in blood had occurred, and who, if anyone, could be blamed for what seemed to be an unfortunate accident?

"Millet is being put on the carpet," said Ruth, as she brought the dinner tray to Jerry. "But there is really no evidence that he is guilty of any negligence."

"Yet," Jerry noted, "if the crossmatching had been done before the transfusion, the accident never would have happened." He reached down, picked up his napkin and found a bar of chocolate under it.

"Present?" he asked, in surprise.

"To you from me," lightly murmured Ruth. "I don't think you're getting enough to eat, and anyhow, we give candy to kids up in pediatrics to keep them quiet and well-behaved."

Jerry thoughtfully turned the chocolate in his fingers. It was a standard packaged brand, and the wrapper was untouched. His eyes met Ruth's puzzled ones.

"I . . . I'm sorry," he muttered, a little confused. "I guess I'm just as bad as the rest of the patients." He derided himself.

Ruth had come to the ward a week before he was admitted, and could hardly have been responsible for the accidents that had occurred before.

"You thought maybe it was poisoned, didn't you?" Ruth asked softly. "Well, I hardly blame you, or the other patients either. They're scared." She shivered. "No," she whispered, "I don't blame them."

Sally Bryant bustled in, saw Ruth, and rushed over to the bed. "Have you heard the latest dirt?" she asked excitedly. "Is Judson burning! Sybil broke a date with him to go out with Hollander! Didn't I tell you she was out to get him?"

Ruth frowned, and Jerry looked thoughtful, a bit embarrassed at being one of the recipients of powder-room gossip. But Sally went right on unburdening herself.

"And Dr. Millet is going to get the ax if he doesn't watch his step."

Spiritedly, Ruth exclaimed, "Why, he's the best man they've got around here!"

"Not according to staff committee," said the night nurse.

Grimly, Ruth asked, "Anything more this edition, my love?"

Sally considered this gravely. "Oh, yes," she answered. "I don't know whether it means anything, but Miss Purdee, one of the student nurses, told us at lunch time that she'd heard the interns fooling around with Sybil, and one of them, Dr. Hollander, I think, promised, sort of kidding, that he'd propose to her if and when he got his residency."

There was probably a good deal of truth in that, Jerry thought, remembering that Dr. Hollander was intensely jealous of his rival, Dr. Judson, and showed it. Yet, Sybil barely paid any attention to him. At least, up to now. Sally was tiresome with her chatter, and Jerry felt himself on good terms with her. This entitled him to tell her rudely that she was a perjured teller of tall tales, a purveyor of misinformation, and generally a woman of terrible character who went around waking strange men early in the morning, and who specialized in reputation-wrecking.

Round-eyed, Sally objected, "Why, Dr. Moore, do you mean to imply I gossip?"

The time passed, and Jerry felt symptomatically much improved. His cough, though persistent, was well-controlled on small doses of codeine, and there were signs that the lung findings were changing for the better. And he and Ruth were at the hand-

holding stage. Sybil and Judson barely spoke to each other.

At the next bed, an old-time Negro boxer, Lexington Rayburn, was battling it out with acute heart failure. Dr. Judson stopped to see him.

"Is your breathing any easier tonight, Mr. Rayburn?" asked Dr. Judson, with spigot-tapped medical sympathy.

"Ah could climb raght outa bed, and tak' on Jim Jeffries hisself," painfully gasped Rayburn. Judson read his chart, and from the corner of his eye, Jerry watched. The intern's mouth contracted in a thin line, and he snapped the cellophane protector back over the clip-board.

Sybil was just leaving. It was five o'clock. "Miss Straughn," called the young intern. She turned about and came to his call.

"Did Dr. Millet sign this order? For only one tenth digitalis?" he asked, more coldly than professional depersonalization demanded.

Sybil answered him in kind, her head tossed high, voice flat and insultingly over-respectful. "Yes. Mr. Rayburn got along pretty well after his initial dose of aminophylline. Dr. Millet mentioned something to the effect that the patient had been heavily dosed with digitalis before he came in, and there was a question of his being toxic—"

Jerry could not see them now, but he could fairly hear the crackling overtones of antagonism and hurt that reverberated in Judson's voice. They spoke for a while, drawing away from Lexington's bed, but Jerry could hear. He listened with closed eyes.

"Sybil dear," Judson implored in a muffled tone, "suppose it were I who became resident? I mean, after Millet leaves, would you? Please?"

"Please—what, Harry?" she answered. "Nothing's changed between us. I've told you why I can't marry you."

"But what about Hollander?" challenged Judson tensely, and from the way the intern said the name, Jerry felt the intense hate that must lie between these two men for the favor of a girl who probably loved someone else.

Sybil murmured, deprecating his fears, and between narrowed lids, Jerry watched her take him by the arm and walk outside. The ward was unattended for fifteen minutes.

Jerry fell asleep that night wondering if any man could love any girl enough to kill for her, in violation of every oath and prin-

ciple of his profession. He dreamed uneasily of being a judge in a big black robe, armed with an enormous ax. Arrayed in front of him were the doctors, nurses and orderlies who served on the ward. In his dream he glared about him, and pointed savagely with his ax at Ruth!

The best part of the day was when Ruth came to give him morning care. And the best part of morning care was the back rub. As she generously sloshed him with pungent-smelling alcohol, her long fingers digging into his back muscles, he was conscious of a peculiar mixture of pain and soothing friction that was at once invigorating and tranquilizing.

"Honey, if I ever marry you, it's going to be because I can't get along without your back rubs," he grunted.

"Fine thing. Not a word about how beautiful I am. All you want is back rubs. I'll buy you a long-handled brush and that'll be the end of our romance," she complained.

"Ruth, I dreamed about you last night," he said, quietly and seriously.

"Why," she exclaimed flippantly, "how dare you?"

He shook his head. "It wasn't that kind of dream. I was a judge, and you were the one I picked for execution."

She was quiet.

"You've been thinking a lot about these happenings on the ward, Jerry. Let's agree that statistically, it's improbable that they could occur by themselves, and that someone is behind them. Now, you've been asking yourself—who? For your sake, I wish you wouldn't," she finished nervously.

"Then what you are getting at is that the series of deaths here have not been accidents, but deliberate murders on the part of either someone who stood to gain from their deaths, or a homicidal maniac. And we're both thinking of the same person."

She nodded. "Jerry, I really am afraid. Yes, and his initials are Harry Judson," she added incisively.

"Add it up," Jerry suggested.

"Well, he's crazy about Sybil. He's ambitious and a hard worker, and has felt for a long time that he ought to be next resident, certainly before Dr. Hollander. Yet, I've reason to believe despite his unquestioned ability as a doctor, he is not as popular with the staff as his rival. He's the most stubborn man you can imagine."

"Wasn't Dr. Judson with the thyroid case

who died the day I came in? He and you came up with the flasks of blood for the transfusion on Lehr. And I think he's the one who ordered ethyl chloride, and had it put into the cabinet. What better way to spread confusion and break morale in the ward?" recalled Jerry.

"True enough, and while I told the investigators, then, that I didn't see any irregularity in the typing and cross-matching of blood, it's possible that Judson could have transferred the little bottle of blood that's taped to each flash for the tests—"

"With the result that a false sample would be taken, and that if all the tests seemed compatible, Lehr would be given contents of the flask with blood that actually was not his type, and that would almost certainly kill him in his weakened condition," analyzed Jerry.

Miss Straughn was calling, "Miss Champlain! Desk, please."

"Got to go now, Jerry. Probably have to get some medications at the drug room. Please don't talk about this to anyone else. If we're right, and Judson ever gets the idea that you're curious—well, he's got you where he wants you."

"Miss Champlain, please hurry," urged the charge nurse, coldly, as she separated the portable screens around Jerry's bed. She looked like an automaton, her eyes bright in a tired mask. Whatever responsibility had been laid at Dr. Millet's door for the disorganized ward, she had shared. Ruth nodded, and with an outrageous wink to Jerry, hurried off. Sybil would have turned and left, but with an impulse of charity and curiosity, Jerry called to her.

"Hi, Sybil," he ventured. It was the first time he had addressed her by her first name. She turned about, somewhat surprised, but gracious.

"Hello," she said, relaxing. "I thought Ruth had a monopoly on the lone, good-looking doc in the ward."

Jerry grinned, on firm territory now. "You never give a guy a break. You're always running about catching up with your tail."

She said soberly, "Heaven help me, I wanted to be a nurse," then sighed. "It's pretty tough when you can't get help, when things you can't help go wrong, and when you've got personal problems."

She looked haunted, and in a brilliant, scrubbed way, beautiful.

"I've got broad shoulders," Jerry told her lightly. "Tell me about them."

Sybil's face was transmuted as if by mar-

velous alchemy as she smiled. It was an expression into which eyes, chalky cheeks and mouth conspired by a dexterous trick to throw her presence as a desirable woman at the beholder. Jerry felt himself respond to it, and could sympathize with the interns who had fallen to her fascination.

"You're nice. But I'd have to say the trouble was, nobody loves me!" she said, narrowing her eyes in an instinctively flirtatious animation.

"Now, that's a lie," challenged Jerry.

"No, it's true. If you're thinking of Dr. Judson and Dr. Hollander—well, they don't really count. I am, or was, terribly crazy about a boy in the navy. He's a midshipman, and wanted to give me a ring before he sailed. Fool that I was, I refused it. Couple of months ago, weeks after he'd been away, I got a telegram from him announcing he'd released me from all obligations, as he had met another girl in San Francisco.

"It was shortly after that we had a change of staff, and Harry and Lester came on R-6. To tell you the truth, I've been impartial to them both with dates, dinner and favors, but recently Harry has become so . . . so demanding," she mused, her face worried.

"And for that reason, you're paying more attention to Hollander, to keep Judson under control, is that it?" suggested Jerry, shifting impatiently in bed.

Sybil seemed to be listening, with her head cocked, but Jerry could not be certain she was entirely concentrating on his question. With her eyes miles away, she stared abstractedly, and said soberly, "He's a terror, that man. I don't know what he'll do if I put him off again."

"Has he threatened you?" asked Jerry sharply.

The girl hesitated, bit her lip, then came to a decision.

"I . . . I shouldn't tell you this, but I've got to tell someone. No, he hasn't threatened me directly. But he has shown me what he is capable of doing. Each time I have refused him, a patient has died of some accident. I know this is not mere imagination. I have tried so hard to accept these incidents as reflections on Dr. Millet. But we who work with him know how good he is, and how little basis for the suspension proceedings there really is."

She stood by his bed, a figure of appealing helplessness, terrified by nightmare. Jerry was sympathetic, but his mind was racing. How could he trap Judson? It cer-

tainly was time to inform Lieutenant Cooper of what he had discovered.

He smiled at her. "Listen, Sybil, if he starts up with you again, let me know. Keep your eyes open for any deliberate nastiness on his part, and I will, too. Perhaps, if you're right, we'll have him where he belongs before there are any more accidents. I guess you don't want me to talk to Dr. Millet or the supervisors, do you?"

She shook her head vehemently. "Who'd believe me? It's worth my job."

Jerry resolved he would stay awake and watch from his bed at night, and catch what sleep he could during the day. In order to do this, he had first to get Dr. Millet to discontinue the sedative he had been receiving regularly. He called out to the resident, after the patient in the next inclosure had been examined.

Millet responded, heard his request, and simply said: "It's all right with me, if it's agreeable to Dr. Judson. After all, he's on tonight, and I have an iron-clad rule that my interns can follow any regimen they please, so long as it's for the good of the patient."

That was a bad break. Jerry swore silently. Of course, it would be to Judson's advantage to keep him drugged.

Dr. Judson and Sybil came down the ward, from bed to bed, he prescribing, she dispensing on the spot. Cathartics, anodynes, and soporifics were given out at the request and need of the patient.

A peculiar unrest was in the air. A kind of secret anticipation. The war grapevine had it that there had been some trouble among the doctors, but it was nothing specific. Dr. Judson's jaw was set hard, and he looked distracted.

"Sleep all right, Moore?" he asked brusquely.

"You bet, Dr. Judson. I don't think I'm going to need any more dope. The codeine kept my cough away, but made me groggy. Now that's nearly gone and I can get along without the stuff."

Satisfied, Dr. Judson nodded, then said, "Keep it up, soldier, and we'll have you out sooner than you expect. But I'm going to have to continue sedation until your temperature comes down and your restlessness improves. I've heard that you've been exposed to lots of exciting conversation lately, and I wouldn't want it to keep you awake."

His eyes burned into Jerry's, and his lips curled. Sybil was quiet, a look of resigna-

tion tinged with fear on her face. Had he forced her to tell that Jerry had questioned her? The student's breath came fast. This was going to be tough.

"Dr. Millet said it was O.K. with him. And I don't want it anyway, see?" said Jerry truculently. To his surprise, Dr. Judson turned on his heel and marched off.

Sybil left without a word of farewell to the intern so far as Jerry could see, and Judson stood staring after her. Then he came back to Jerry's bedside.

"Forgot to check your pulse, Moore. What in hell ails you? We've got enough trouble from people who don't understand what they need to make them well to have to take it from you."

Jerry lay back, and extended his arm. Dr. Judson took the wrist and felt about clumsily for the radial pulse. Suddenly, with an elbow-wrenching pull, he straightened out Jerry's arm, and bringing his other hand up snakily, injected a short needle into the forearm musculature. Caught unprepared in the painful grip, Jerry was helpless.

He grated, "I'll get you for this, you phony. Nurse! Nurse!" he cried. Sally Bryant came on the run.

"Call up somebody and tell them this imitation of a doctor is trying to knock me out," he shouted, beside himself with anger.

"A postpneumonic reaction, nurse," smoothly interjected Dr. Judson. "It happens sometimes. He'll be quiet in a few minutes."

"Poor guy, and he was doing so well, too," murmured Sally in sympathy.

Jerry tried to tell her how crazy she was to listen to a maniac, when a warm heat beat against his temples, and he had a piercing headache that caused little balls of red and blue light to explode soundlessly, then he drifted into unconsciousness.

It was not a sound that woke Jerry, but a peculiar lack of one. Some noise, like the hum of a city, like the whir of machinery during factory hours had become part of him, and ignored till missed. Now it was gone, and Jerry, his thoughts floating by, slowed like motion picture film run at half speed, did not know what it had been.

III.

DR. LESTER HOLLANDER intercepted Sybil as he came out of the hospital. Without a word, he took her by the elbow and forced her back indoors, to the elevator. Something decisive and foreboding in his aspect

paled her, but she was not really afraid. To casual onlookers, the tall, husky intern and the nurse made a strikingly handsome couple.

"I'm so tired, so tired, Lester," Sybil murmured, brushing back a stray lock of her bright hair against his sleeve. They got out at the floor before the top, where the intern's quarters were, and cautious as conspirators, walked up the stairs, intercepting no one. As Dr. Hollander unlocked the door to his room, he muttered, "Now we'll settle this thing between us."

It was after one in the morning. Ruth reached out her hand and took her dressing gown, slung it carelessly over her shoulders and answered the soft knocking at her door. It was the stiff, funereal figure of the night supervisor of the nurses' home.

"Miss Champlain. Please. There is a telephone call from the hospital. Miss Bryant needs some information and cannot locate her charge nurse. Can you help?"

"Oh, of course. I'll be right down," whispered Ruth, a sudden catch of fear tightening in her chest, making her heart beat fast.

"I need hardly tell you this is highly irregular," said the superintendent in a tone a prosecutor might use in demanding a confession for the last time, with a single hope of clemency. Ruth looked up into her face. It was bland, placid, and just the ripple behind the mask gave the girl the clue that this was a friend. With an abrupt nod, the matron stalked off.

"Hello, this is Miss Champlain. Who is it?"

There was a muffled gasp at the other end of the wire. From the way the voice came over, with a tinny, amphoric quality, Ruth could imagine Sally sitting crouched over the phone, speaking into her hand, funneling her voice.

"Ruthie!" she exclaimed. "I thought you'd never come. There's hell to pay. You know about the fight this afternoon, don't you?"

"Who doesn't? It's all over the hospital. The only one who didn't know up to five o'clock was Sybil. But was this why you woke me up?"

"Gosh, no! Now listen. The fight wasn't much. It was out in the hall. Lucky no patients were around. Dr. Judson asked Dr. Hollander something which various people have agreed was about Sybil—something about his intentions, or telling him to leave her alone. She's a nice girl, and all that."

Impatiently, her feet cold in the drafty hallway, Ruth yawned.

"So Dr. Hollander socked him? Good."

"No-o-o. Not so good. Because instead of really giving Judson a good crack in the jaw, all Hollander did was to laugh, push his big mitt into Judson's face and give a shove. It was the way you'd push a baby out of the way. So the big lug got into the elevator without even saying a word, and little Judson was so mad he nearly cried.

"Well, what's the matter now?" asked Ruth. "Get to the point."

"Listen, I'm telling you. I came in at five, just as Sybil walked out. And at that moment, that boy friend of yours—"

"Jerry Moore!" gasped Ruth. "Oh, what's happened?"

"Well, I don't know, but Judson had injected him with something right in the forearm, without taking sterile precautions, you know. And that seemed funny. Was Jerry sore, and scared, too! So was I. Judson gave me some phony talk about post-pneumonic reactions which I never heard of."

"Sounds to me like one of those phrases the medics use when you ask them a question they can't answer, and they try to hide their ignorance behind big words," volunteered Ruth, pulling over a chair with her ankle, tense, but listening.

"That's what I guess. Anyhow, your boy friend pooped out, and he's deeply narcotized. I played along with Judson, pretending to be taken in, and Judson stalled around for hours, even had supper brought in to him, before he'd leave the ward. Hardly spoken a word all night. Anyway, he just this minute left, and I called."

"I'm coming right over, honey. Hold the fort," Ruth said swiftly. "I can see how far we'd get if we spoke to one of the supervisors at this hour. We'd be expelled, the both of us. Judson would have everything well explained, if we ever started someone else in to investigate."

"I thought so. That's why I called you, Ruthie. I tried to get Sybil, but she's not in her apartment, and she hasn't got an official date, so far as I know. Get over here fast."

Ten minutes later, Ruth nudged the sleepy elevator man, and was taken to the sixth floor. She walked into the ward, superficially lighted only with one shaded bulb at the desk to the right of the door, and dull-red exit bulbs that cast no light beyond their fixtures spaced down the ward. Sally,

her Irish eyes snapping, worn with anxiety, came away from the shadows.

"Now look what's happened," she whispered. "That nice colored man, Lexington Rayburn. I . . . I just checked the patients—"

"He's dead?" asked Ruth, for the moment forgetting Jerry.

Lexington was dead. But Sally mutely pointed to the oxygen tank. It had not been delivering. Experimentally, Sally turned the valve. The water in the jacket churned, and a faint hiss came from the end of the nasal catheter. Someone had shut it off.

"Judson checked this himself."

"Have you called him?"

"He doesn't answer his phone. The buzzer doesn't seem to work," replied Sally. "I was just going to call Dr. Millet. Dr. Hollander is off, and it's unlikely he'd be around."

"I'm going upstairs and get Judson," decided Ruth. "If he's not there, I'll knock on Hollander's door. This is no spot to be in. Call Miss Rodriguez, the night supervisor, and get her to cover you. Tell her everything," urged Ruth. Then she went to Jerry's bedside, noted his breathing was deep and regular, his pulse slow but good, kissed him lightly and ran out.

Ruth clumped upstairs noisily, opened the heavy fire door, and stepped into the hallway. She felt that in the event anyone should hear her, the legitimate nature of her errand would be easier to establish if she walked with her usual stride instead of in a stealthy manner. If the girls ever heard she'd been on the interns' floor at two-thirty in the morning—

Her heart stopped.

A small, tearful figure came away from a doorway down the hall. It was Sybil, and there was no mystery of make-up to hide the reddened eyes and tear-stained paleness of her cheeks. She was miserable, and ashamed.

"Ruth! Thank God it's you, and not someone . . . someone I can't trust," Sybil whispered, clutching her sleeve convulsively. "I . . . I was with Lester. And now he hates me. He thinks I'm cheap and no good. But I love him. You hear? I love him!" she sobbed.

Sybil saw the outstretched arms and buried herself in them. Ruth held her close. "Don't, please. He really does care for you," she murmured, and her eyes turned down the empty corridor, waiting for some cynical intern to discover the two of them. Hollander was obviously a dog, she thought.

"He said he knew now why Dr. Judson was so . . . so possessive. He left a half-hour ago, and told me to get out before he came back. He thinks—"

"Sh-h-h. It isn't as bad as that," Ruth said soothingly. "Now keep quiet and go downstairs. Go home. There's some trouble on the ward, but I'll never tell anyone I saw you here. That's your secret."

"Yours and Hollander's," she thought to herself, hoping Hollander would at least be decent enough not to mention the incident.

Utterly broken, Sybil nodded affirmatively and choked a teary, "Thank you." Then she headed for the stairs.

Ruth found a neatly lettered name plate at eye level on a nearby door. "Harry Judson, M.D." She knocked lightly. There was no answer, but under her tapping, the door opened slightly. There was no light and no sound. Holding her breath, she listened for the inspiratory noises of a sleeper. She heard nothing.

Resolutely, Ruth knocked louder, squeamish purls of shivery nervousness running down her spine. Light flickered down the corridor into the room. At the threshold, her foot clicked against metal. She picked up one blade of a surgical scissor. Initialed were the letters, "L.H." Ruth started violently as her eye caught a movement in the room. The door softly creaked wider, and there, on the opposite wall, in the dim light, she saw herself reflected in a mirror placed over a small desk.

Ruth moved into the room, cautiously opening the door to illuminate the cubicle better. Her senses rebelling, she fought down nausea, as, peering down to the floor to determine what peculiar stickiness held her feet, she saw a dark pool.

This was fed by a thick, viscid stream that began at the intersection of the handle of a scissor with Dr. Judson's neck.

Someone had come upon him from the door and stabbed deeply, with a roundhouse swing that must have buried the scissor and knocked Judson off his chair at the same time.

Ruth weakly put her hand out for support. There was a soft step and a rustle behind her, and a white-coated arm flashed about her throat. Her attacker kicked the door shut. Somehow, Ruth managed to force her weight back, trying to snap her head into the jaw of the strangler. She fought gamely, but the vindictive killer grabbed a full handful of her hair and twisted her head to the side.

The cheerful, clattering rattle of the elevator door down the hall and around the corner was bare encouragement for renewed resistance. "Why, I can die with people outside that door," Ruth thought. But her consciousness left her in a blaze of furious red and blue coruscations. She slumped to the floor, practically on top of Judson.

As he came to, Jerry pieced the integrals together of the sounds of normal activity in the ward, and found one missing. As he came to full consciousness, he realized instantly what it was. The oxygen, bubbling into the glass valve, had made a low-pitched, blowing, hissing noise. Now it could not be heard.

Fearful for Lexington, Jerry parted the curtains between their beds, and called, "Hey, Lex!"

It was bright daylight, obviously late in the morning, the ward was busy with activity, and there was no bed next to Jerry's. Bewildered, he sat up, winced at his own headache and watched Dr. Millet file his way across the ward to his bed.

"You're up, I see," exclaimed the physician.

"What did that jerky intern stab me like that for?" demanded Jerry, becoming angry as he remembered.

Dr. Millet sat down at his bed, and thoughtfully traced meaningless patterns on the white top of the bedside stand with a forefinger. Then he said steadily, "Lots of things happened while you were asleep, Moore. You and Miss Champlain, I know, have been good friends, and I think you're entitled to know—" His voice drifted off.

"What's happened? Did Judson hurt Ruth? I'll tear him apart, the sneaky— And by the way, where's Mr. Rayburn?"

"Judson injected you, and a lucky stab must have sent a mild narcotic into a vein, which would account for the fact that you fell asleep almost immediately, and also that you're still alive."

"But why?"

"Don't interrupt. Sometime last night, after Miss Straughn left the ward, Judson cut the oxygen on Rayburn, who probably died fairly promptly, since he was in a bad state of cardiac decompensation and had a good deal of pulmonary edema in addition. After making his own rounds alone, to delay the discovery of Rayburn's death, Judson told his ward nurse, Miss Bryant, he was going to his room.

"Well, he went, and Miss Bryant, who had seen him inject you, and was suspicious, called Miss Champlain, asking her to come over and help on the ward. I believe . . . er . . . that she may have realized your welfare would be of interest to Miss Champlain. Anyway, the girls found Rayburn dead. His body has been removed, and the bed's been taken down."

Jerry waited anxiously for more information. "Well, and Ruth?"

"Your girl friend did a brave, but foolish thing. She went up to Judson's room, probably to question him, and found him stabbed to death. Somebody had put a scissor blade through his right internal carotid artery."

"Who?"

"Apparently Dr. Hollander. While Ruth was in the room, someone came in and strangled her—"

"My God!" exclaimed Jerry, paling.

"No need to worry. The night supervisor and I had been called by Miss Bryant, and the sound of our arrival, noise of the opening elevator door, must have frightened Hollander off before he seriously injured the girl. Ruth has got a nasty bruise under her chin and marks on her throat, but she's all right now, and Hollander must have run down the stairs before we realized what had happened. Anyhow, she's getting some rest now."

Peering beyond the screens, Millet said, "By—" and never finished his thought, because Ruth had just come in. Sybil went over to her anxiously, but a moment later, reassured, shrugged her shoulders. Then Ruth came to Jerry and Dr. Millet.

"Hello, darling," she said, a trifle hoarsely. Her neck was neatly bandaged.

"You really all right?" Jerry asked tremulously, taking her hand. She nodded, her eyes still frightened.

"Dr. Hollander's skipped out, and the police are looking for him, Miss Champlain. The other half of the scissor you picked up killed Judson. The initials on the handle is the evidence that will convict him," said Millet, rising from the bedside chair. "Though what I'm going to do without an intern staff today is anybody's guess."

"What about your status here, Dr. Millet?" asked Ruth.

He smiled ruefully. "I was due to be canned, and my resignation was to be asked for today. Only, we found at the desk Dr. Judson was sitting at when he was stabbed, a suicide note, addressed to Miss Straughn.

and telling her to inform those concerned that he was responsible for the deaths of four patients in the ward, and that his motive was to cast aspersions upon my management, seeking my place as resident."

Jerry shifted and stole a glance at Sybil, who sat tensely, and managed to keep her feelings under restraint, but not sufficiently to hide how distraught she was.

"But why should he want to commit suicide?" asked Jerry.

"For a couple of reasons," Millet said. "First and most important was the report from the radiology department. He had a florid, exudative tuberculosis lesion on X-ray, and the card was affixed to this note. Then, feeling trapped by the suspicious attitude of a number of persons, and miserable about his failure to win Miss Straughn, there didn't seem to be any way out."

Millet excused himself, and Ruth, shuddering, went over her experience minutely with Jerry. Then she brought him some things he asked for. Drug-room receipts, case histories, laboratory notes, X-rays, postmortem summaries, and the like.

His bed piled high, Jerry spent the day poring through the ward cases, a mine of information for the serious student, recreating the course of disease. It was better than a textbook.

Jerry grinned at Sybil and tried to cheer her up, but she walked about morose and unhappy.

The notes were exceedingly interesting, so much so that when Ruth slipped over to him at about four, he hardly looked at her.

"The police have just caught Hollander. He denies everything. Dr. Millet's secretary just told me."

Jerry begged, "Please stay on a little later tonight, won't you, honey?"

Ruth's eyes watched his curiously. "He loves me, the dope," she said. "All right. It's almost time for medications. I'll make them up and help Sybil dispense. See you in a little while."

A few minutes later, Jerry caught Sybil's eye and beckoned to her. She came over and apologized for being so grumpy. He assured her he knew how it was. He certainly did.

"But listen, Sybil. I want you to hear something crazy. I've been working on it all day. It goes like this."

As he spoke, Sybil sat down, smoothed her hair, again the fair entrancer, and listened.

"You're entitled to know it because, after

all, you probably have been blaming yourself for the deaths of your patients, and the tragedy last night. From what I've been told, Judson did commit suicide last night, even though he was seemingly murdered!"

"Why," Sybil exclaimed, "surely you're joking?"

"But I'm not. Ruth told me how she started when she saw her own reflection in the mirror over his desk. Judson must have seen his murderer come into his room, and sat, quietly waiting to be killed. Maybe he hadn't figured on how to do the job and said to himself, 'If Hollander is jealous enough to kill me, so much the worse for him.' Do you get it?"

"I . . . I never thought he was so . . . so horribly cold-blooded." Sybil shivered. "A man must be insane, absolutely insane—" She broke off, her face in her hands, hiding from the picture she conjured up in her mind.

Ruth appeared. "Medications are all ready for distribution, Miss Straughn." Then she teased, "Have a good time last night?" and winked.

Getting a grip on herself, Sybil smiled wanly and answered:

"Heavy date with a mattress. I was so tired, I went to my room and didn't even hear the telephone ring. I'm so sorry I wasn't around last night."

Then she paused, biting her lips, and nodded to Jerry. "Carry on your story after I get back. It's got possibilities."

Ruth watched Jerry staring after her, and observed meaningly, "Nice ankles, eh?" Jerry laughed, then explained his thesis to Ruth, who thoughtfully admitted he had a point.

A half-hour later, Sybil offered Jerry his vitamin tablets. He spilled them into his mouth, and swallowed them at a gulp with some water.

"Shall I continue the story?" he started, when suddenly there was a wild flailing of arms, and Ruth tore suddenly into view like a miniature cyclone, wrapped her arm about Sybil's throat and wrenched her violently to the floor.

"You damn little poisoner! You would pull my hair, would you?" Ruth grimly increased her pressure on Sybil's trachea. Jerry leaped over them, amazed, and tried to stop the fight. The ward was in an uproar. A couple of up-an-about patients pulled at Ruth ineffectually. Dr. Millet sprinted in, and was at the bedside before the doors swung closed behind him.

"What's the meaning of this?" he roared, pop-eyed. "This is absolutely the last straw!" He yanked at Ruth's arm. "Break it up, somebody. What is this, a hospital or a battlefield?"

Jerry tried to be funny.

"Oh, Sybil knows where you get nylons, and she won't tell Ruth, and I—"

Ruth got to her feet triumphantly, a long, bleeding scratch across her cheek. Sybil collapsed. The student nurses desperately tried to help, and got in everybody's way until Millet peremptorily ordered them to put screens around Jerry's bed, disappointing everybody.

"Did you take it?" Ruth wailed, trembling, her finger pointed to the little jigger that had contained the vitamin pills. It was, of course, empty.

"Wasn't yours, was it?" asked Jerry defensively. "Don't tell me? She did it! She really did it! She poisoned me, and I was only trying to be subtle," he moaned, aggrieved.

Ruth, frankly crying now, murmured, "Oh, you fool. Neither you nor any other man could trick that little devil." Then she told Dr. Millet, who had by then initiated artificial respiration on Sybil as she lay prone on the floor, "Jerry has taken about a hundred milligrams of morphine sulphate. Maybe you'd better do something."

It wasn't the overdose that was so bad. The stomach pump got most of the tablets before there had been much absorption. But Jerry had always been hypersensitive to morphine, and he went into shock, had convulsions, and woke up two days later.

"As soon as Sybil had been revived, she promptly and ungratefully made a dive for an open window. Millet himself tripped her up," recited Ruth. "After she'd spent a couple of hours in the female prison ward, she got over her hysterics and confessed."

Ruth and Jerry were in the solarium, and most of the other patients and nurses were at the other end, consciously, deliberately leaving them alone.

"My idea was simple," said Ruth. "I left the morphine bottle open, next to the tray where the jiggers were. I'd already prepared your vitamin tablets. Then I walked away, leaving her alone, hoping she would put the morphine tablets into your cup and discard the vitamin tablets."

"That was clever," observed Jerry sarcastically. "And imagine! She did!"

"Oh, but I didn't expect her to come right to your bed, first."

"Her idea was, I suppose, to put the blame on you, since you were, after all, the nurse who did put the medicines out. Well, I knew she was a—what's the word?"

"Never mind," briefly censored Ruth.

"Sybil Straughn was an unscrupulous, conniving female, bent on getting a doctor for a husband, using her profession, nursing, toward that one end. Not like you, honey," Jerry hastily added, foreseeing the course the conversation might take.

"She knew Judson was terribly afraid of getting tuberculosis. He had spent a couple of months on chest service. And she transferred his last two chest plates, by juggling names and numbers, so that he got negative reports, when actually, he had a minimal lesion a few months ago. She trapped him into believing he was chosen to be the next resident, when she knew all the time his disease would disqualify him. And she made him fall in love with her as well.

"All this was for Hollander's benefit. She's probably crazy about him in her own warped way, and planned to take advantage of his promise to marry her, when he got the residency. First, she'd get rid of Millet by planting a number of deaths on his doorstep, apparently caused by his gross negligence, and then she'd tell Judson he had T.B., and leave the field for her true love, Hollander. Meanwhile, she stalled Judson by telling him she couldn't be unfaithful to her sailor-sweetheart."

"But, darling," asked Ruth, "why didn't Hollander make a play for the girl sooner? Surely, she must have let him know how she felt?"

"I'm guessing, but there are two considerations at least. First, she was afraid of scaring him off by rushing into his arms. From the story you told the police about meeting her upstairs, seems that may have been just what happened. And the other was that she had genuinely ambivalent feelings toward the sailor. Actually, he did not desert her, as she claimed, but he begged her to remain true to him.

"Well, Hollander was disgusted with her the night of the big fireworks, after she told him about this guy—he's made that plain. And he felt pretty low himself, for going for the girl of a serviceman. That's why he walked out of the hospital. He told her to get out of his room and not come back, and took a walk, and ended up across town where he decided to spend the night at a hotel. He was going to call up, resign and enter the army."

Ruth carried the story along. "Then she must have been furious with him, and killed Judson with the scissors, framing him beautifully. He couldn't have subsequently proved she'd been in his room."

"She had even more reason for killing Judson," Jerry put in. "She told him I was suspicious of him, which in turn made him watchful of a deliberate murderer, an idea he had probably never seriously entertained. Then, maybe he saw Sybil kill Lex Rayburn by turning off his oxygen. That's probably why he put me to sleep as soon as he discovered Lex was dead, fearing I might discover it before he could figure out how to cover Sybil. He really loved her, for all her slinky, wood-rat character."

Ruth mused sadly. "Then he would have committed suicide, to take the blame for her, realizing where her true affections lay, and also that he had T.B. Can you imagine the poor fellow's feelings when he saw her creeping up behind him?" She grimaced, and gripped Jerry's hand hard under the corner of the blanket.

"I guess he said to himself, 'If she wants it this way, then it's all right with me,' and let her stab him," suggested Jerry. "It's ironic that she would have won Hollander at that if she hadn't mentioned her sailor friend, and if she knew Judson was going to kill himself for her."

Ruth stretched, peeked around, and Jerry helped her by picking up the blanket. They enjoyed that kiss.

"Stop that—you interrupt my continuity of thought," she simmered, in feigned anger. "What a woman she turned out to be! And I'll bet you liked her, didn't you?" she demanded accusingly.

"I did not," he said indignantly. "You know, she made the mistake of charting sulfonamides as given to a boy named Samuel Cole, another med student. He died, and never got the drug. I discovered that by noting that the same day, she had declared herself as having no stock of the sulfa drugs, and had ordered some from the drug room. Her order was not brought up to the ward until the day after Cole

died. She killed Mr. Hunt, the thyroid, by withholding iodine, charting doses that were never given. And she substituted a sample of blood of another patient with the same general type as Lehr's, but which probably didn't cross-match. Judson found the blood in the bank compatible with the false sample which, when injected, killed the poor guy. I'll put money on it that Sybil had another syringe when Dr. Millet wanted to recheck the transfusion, but knew he was in a hurry."

"She was some actress," agreed Ruth, remembering Sybil's act in the corridor. "After she cried in my arms, she came back and tried to murder me. But what made you really suspect her, dear? Most of what you've said is circumstantial."

"Simple. If it had been Dr. Hollander whom you'd been fighting, that guy would have broken you in two. You wouldn't have had a chance. He'd wrestled and played football in college. Then, do you remember showing me how bloodstained your shoes got, dabbling around on the floor in Judson's room?"

"Why, yes," recalled Ruth slowly. "And were hers—"

Jerry nodded. "I suspected, but wasn't sure. That's why I invited her over to see me, just before she gave me my ticket out. There were distinct, reddish blotches on the shoes. You know how she walks with that funny, shoulder-rolling, leg-lifting gait?"

"It's the envy of all the student nurses who have ever seen a man's eyes follow her down the ward. Her charm, no doubt?"

"More than that. You remember bawling me out about watching her ankles? Well, that's when I was looking for the stains. The police found them, too."

Ruth sighed languorously. "My way was easy. After thinking about my battle in Judson's room, I realized that no man would grab a woman's hair if he were in a fight with her. That's strictly female brawling, dear."

Jerry shrugged his shoulders insolently. "Well, darling, you should know."

BONDS and TAXES

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DARK MASQUERADE

By MAUD McCURDY WELCH

Hollywood was new to me, and so was murder, but when I landed plunk into the middle of a West coast murder, I got a swell education fast.

I.

WHEN I came to Los Angeles, I had no intention of going on a nursing case in Hollywood and certainly not of getting myself mixed up in a murder case. I had come to California to meet Kenny Craig, the young man with whom I'd been going steady for several years. He'd be back on a furlough before long from the Pacific war zone, at which time we expected to get married. In the meantime, I planned to put in my time seeing the sights and having myself a good time.

But this was just an idea I had. I met Dr. Eubanks on Sunset Boulevard the second day of my arrival, or rather, I should say, he overtook me, for I was walking and he was driving along in his convertible. We'd been on cases together back East. He began by pointing out the serious shortage of nurses and reminded me that I'd have a week or so to wait before Ken's ship got in.

Dr. Eubanks could talk the Statue of Liberty into doing a dance around Battery Park. Before I knew what had happened, I found myself on the way to the San Fernando Valley to take care of Mrs. Gordon Winthrop, a young widow who was suffering with a bad case of nerves.

The house was an imposing structure of red brick with nothing unique in its plan. It was square, with six fluted Ionic columns supporting the two-story roof of the veranda. Somehow, it didn't have that look of impermanence so many Hollywood houses have. It looked solid and substantial, as if it had been there a long time and would remain, no matter how buffeted by the storms of time.

I walked up under the graceful columns to the heavy front door and touched an electric button. There was no answer. The place seemed to have a queer air of somnolence, of sleepy quiet. I knew I had come

to the right place for there was the number just below the magnificent fanlight above the big door. I touched the button again.

Suddenly, I heard angry voices coming from somewhere inside. The next thing, the door was flung open and a girl ran out. I just had time to glimpse a tear-stained face and a slim, seductive figure in a brown-and-white-checked suit before she went past me like a small, furious tornado.

She had left the door ajar. I went in hesitantly, found myself facing an exceedingly angry young man in the uniform of the army air force. A good-looking young man he was, too, with a straight nose, a sculptured mouth and dark hair waving back from a handsome brow now corrugated in a dark frown. He waited for me to speak.

"I am Agatha Smythe. I'm here to take care of Mrs. Winthrop."

"You mean you're a nurse? Is Mad ~~Smythe~~—my sister—is she ill?" There was surprise, apprehension, in his voice. He made a desperate gesture. "That just about ties it. I come home on my first furlough and find everything shot to—" He stopped. "I beg your pardon. Come on. We'll go up."

We went up a lovely spiral stairway. Rapping lightly on a door to the right, the young man beckoned me to go in. He followed me. Almost immediately there was a sobbing cry from a dark-haired young woman on a chaise longue. "Jerry, oh, Jerry darling!"

There was a quick embrace, then the woman's voice came on a sudden note of fear. "I wanted to see you. I need you. But you mustn't stay, Jerry. It's best for you to leave at once."

The young man straightened up, his face taut and stern. "Don't think I'm afraid of our darling brother."

"You mean, you already know? You've seen Carmen?"

He nodded. "I'm going to see this thing through, Madolyn."

"Oh, no! No, darling, you mustn't. Drew acts like a man possessed. You must go away at once."

Mrs. Winthrop's voice rose to such a note of hysteria, I decided it was time to take charge. Motioning Jerry to leave, I sat down beside my patient. Except for being feminine and fragile, she was almost an exact prototype of Jerry. I found out later they were twins.

She said gently, "Dr. Eubanks wasn't sure he could get a nurse. It was nice of you to come. And your name is Agatha Smythe." She was looking at the card I'd handed her, then was looking back at me. "Mind if I call you Aggie?"

"Everybody does. I like it."

She smiled, a wispy ghost of a smile. "You see, Aggie, I need a friend as much as I do a nurse. It's just that I'm nervous and—well, a little frightened. There's an undercurrent of evil in this house, and I'm afraid something dreadful is going to happen."

I explained to her that such feelings came from upset nerves and that after a warm bath and an alcohol rub, she'd feel like a different person.

She'd sent the servants to a movie, she said, even her maid Hilda. They all had to be humored these days, and if I needed any help—

Well, I didn't. After the bath and rub, she became drowsy as I'd hoped. "If I go to sleep, you must wake me in time to dress for dinner. It's at eight, and it's going to be unpleasant enough, but I may be able to help a little. Be sure not to forget," she instructed me.

It was a quarter to five. "You have lots of time," I assured her.

There was a light rap on the door then, and another man came in. He was slightly above medium height with a square chin and rugged features. His hair, which was wavy, was cut short. It had just escaped being red. He gave me a pleasant word of greeting, moved over with quick grace to the chaise longue. "How are you, Madolyn, my dear?"

The woman turned her face away and did not answer.

He reached out a square, vital hand, touched her shoulder, his well-cut mouth suddenly grim. "Madolyn, did you invite Julia to dinner tonight?"

She turned and faced him then, her dark

eyes blazing. "Yes, Drew, I did, and there's nothing you can do about it. Just because you jilted her, you don't want me to be her friend. But there's nothing you can do about that, either."

Drew stood up, his square face impassive, but there was a look of pleading in his deeply set dark eyes. "Why won't you believe me, Madolyn, when I tell you I never spoke a word of love to Julia Amberson in my life?"

"Because I believe her," his sister retorted.

Drew made a futile gesture with his hands, moved to the door. Madolyn raised herself up on one arm. "And listen, Carmen has been here this afternoon. She and Jerry have met."

Drew shrugged. "And what of that, my dear? What is more natural than for them to meet?"

"Drew, how can you be so callous? How can you?" Madolyn's voice was near hysteria again. I went over, helped her back on the pillows.

Drew went out quietly.

"It is very bad for you, Mrs. Winthrop, to become so upset," I reproached gently.

"I know. But you don't understand what Drew is doing. Even if he is my brother, I think I hate him more every day."

After that, I knew a light sedative was necessary. She took it without complaint and was asleep in a few minutes.

At a little past seven, the white ivory telephone on the bedside table tinkled. Mrs. Winthrop awakened at once, had the set in her hand before I could reach it. "Julia, darling," she exclaimed happily. "I've been frantic because you haven't called."

Even at the distance from which I stood from the phone, I could hear a rich, mellifluous voice from the other end, "Sweet, I'm simply desolate. You see, I'm going to be late. I simply can't tell what time I can make it."

"But you will come—you won't disappoint me entirely?"

"The very first minute I can. I promise."

So that was how I happened to join the family and guests at dinner. Madolyn insisted. There would be a vacant place. I would have to fill it. Fortunately, I had a black semiformal chiffon which was suitable. Madolyn was kind enough to say that the dress did something for me. "Uniforms are so unbecoming," she went on. "I didn't even realize you're quite nice-looking until you took it off. Now I see you have nice brown hair and pretty hazel eyes."

I thanked her with a smile. We all like to hear things like that, and can only hope they are somewhere near the truth. Before we went downstairs, Madolyn told me a few things about the family and guests. Drew Allison, her stepbrother, was thirty-nine. He was a very popular director. But he could be hard at home with his family and the servants. Jerry, her twin, was a perfect darling. They were much younger than Drew, would soon be twenty-seven. The guests would be few, because of her nervous condition. Giles and Noel Burke would come over from the next house, where they lived. Noel was a screen writer whose pseudonym was Lynn Roslyn. Jacques Lenoir would be there. He'd once been Drew's secretary, but was now associated with him in some other capacity. Then Carmen Ray would be there. She was the cause of most of the trouble, though it wasn't her fault at all.

Before we left her sitting room, I picked up Madolyn's bag and knew there was a revolver in it. I made up my mind I'd tell Drew about this. Nervous people like Madolyn shouldn't have revolvers around.

The dinner was excellent, served by an impeccable butler whose name was Blithers, assisted by a pert little maid. The conversation was stilted. I'd never before been in a group of people who were trying so hard to mask their emotions. Jerry looked handsomer than ever, but his face was still grim. Carmen Ray was the girl who'd rushed past me this afternoon. There were still traces of tears around her blue eyes. I was struck by the flawless gold of her hair, a shade so rarely seen out of childhood, naturally curly, I was sure, and beautifully matched by the gold brocade of her simple but expensive dress. The only note of color was the vivid scarlet of her lips and high-heeled red sandals. She wore no flowers. Later, I heard Drew reproaching her for not wearing the brown orchids he'd sent, and she had replied carelessly that they had not matched her dress.

Mrs. Giles Burke, or rather Lynn Roslyn, as she was more familiarly known, looked to be about thirty-five. She had expressive brown eyes, soft brown hair, which she wore cut close against her small, well-shaped head, and a few brown freckles sprinkled over her nose. Her husband seemed to be much older. He was stout and rather apoplectic, with a round florid face and small gray eyes. He looked disgruntled,

and one glance at his face told me that he was a dipsomaniac. The other guest, Jacques Lenoir, looked to be anything but French, as his name might signify. He was tall and slender almost to the point of emaciation, with sharp, pointed features.

It was a strange group, even for Hollywood. The only person who seemed to be at ease was Drew Allison. Carmen sat at his right. Once or twice he spoke to her endearingly. At the close of the long formal courses, he rose and, taking her by the hand, smilingly announced their engagement, which he said would be in the papers in the morning.

There were quick congratulations, a toast to the bride-to-be. I couldn't help noticing that Jerry's dark eyes glittered with mockery and bitterness when he lifted his glass.

At last, to my relief, we were gathered in the library where two tables had been arranged for bridge. For an hour or so, we played without enthusiasm, and I'm afraid, equally without skill. A little before ten, Giles Burke was dummy. He went out on the terrace, saying he needed fresh air. I could agree with him as to his need, for he had kept on drinking from the decanter which Blithers had placed on the coffee table. I noticed his wife's eyes followed him uneasily.

When we finished the rubber, she went outside to look for him. A few minutes later, the other table had finished and Drew Allison also went out for air.

It was past eleven when Lynn Roslyn came back in the library. She said she believed her husband had gone on home, apologized for his rudeness in not saying "good night," and added that she thought she'd better run along.

Drew stepped over the French doors at that moment and asked Jerry to see her home.

They'd just gone out the front door when we heard a car drawing up at the curb. A minute later, Julia Amberson came in. She was a slender woman, very blond and fair-skinned, dressed in a smartly cut black suit with a tiny black hat perched over her upswept hair. She and Madolyn greeted each other with effusive kisses and embraces. "You're so dreadfully late, Julia. You'll simply have to spend the night. I shan't think of letting you leave me now."

Julia smiled, bringing into display two attractive dimples. "If you hadn't asked me, I'd simply up and invite myself. What a day! Be glad you don't ever have to go

house-hunting in Hollywood. But I found what I wanted—signed the lease just before leaving. That's why I had to wait."

"You should have found something out here," Madolyn pouted.

"Oh, you'll see enough of me. Probably too much, at least for Drew." She threw him an arch look.

"Oh, not at all," Drew murmured, his voice even, but I could see he was beginning to look restless, and his deeply set dark eyes took on an harassed expression.

It was a relief when everybody decided to go to their rooms a few minutes past midnight. Carmen, who was a week-end guest, and who had hardly opened her mouth during the whole evening, was the first to say "good night."

Drew went with her to the stairs, where he bent his head and kissed her. He had hardly got back to the library when a sudden terrible scream tore the air.

We rushed upstairs to find Carmen in the hall, her face chalk-white. She could not speak, but could only point soundlessly to the room from which she had come, the door of which was ajar.

Drew went in, motioning me to follow. A man lay on the floor near the four-poster mahogany bed. It was Giles Burke. I needed only one look to know that he was dead. He had been shot through the heart. A long pool of blood, already beginning to dry, stained the rug.

In the confusion that followed, I don't remember who called the police. There was considerable argument among the three members of the Allison family Drew wanting to wait, but it was Jerry, I think, who grimly overruled him.

By a little past one, Lieutenant Gleason arrived with the medical examiner and a police assistant, a rather burly man by the name of Brooks. The servants had gone to their quarters with the exception of Blithers, the long-faced, moody-eyed butler. He was questioned first, but had no information to give except that Mr. Burke was "in his cups," as he usually was. Gleason told him to go to bed and had the rest of us re-assemble in the library. Lynn Roslyn was back among us by this time, quite composed after the first dreadful shock of the tragedy, slightly reddened eyes being the only sign of her emotion.

We all told the same story, that earlier in the evening the murdered man had gone out for fresh air. None of us knew the

exact time. Of course, it came out that Mrs. Burke had gone out not so very long afterward, and that Drew Allison had followed a short time later.

Gleason had found the weapon in the room, a small revolver which was identified as belonging to Madolyn Winthrop. He was much chagrined to find that none of us had heard the shot, but cars, regardless of gas rationing, still whizzed by the place, and there's always more or less backfire. We all went through the humiliation of being fingerprinted, and were at last permitted to go to our rooms.

Carmen was given another room, of course, and it was arranged that Lynn Roslyn would remain with her, as the girl was still shaken and near hysteria. At Drew's request, I gave her a mild sedative, and went to put my patient to bed. Julia was in Madolyn's room with her, and Madolyn was sobbing a little wildly, "It was Drew, of course. It couldn't have been anybody else. But I'd never have believed him capable of murder—never, never!"

Julia glanced at me and warned in a quick whisper, "Don't say a thing like that, darling. Don't you know you mustn't even whisper it?"

Madolyn glanced at me uneasily then, and said she was ready to go to bed. Julia kissed her, said she'd see her in the morning, and went to her room across the hall.

Lieutenant Gleason was a small, wiry man with sandy hair and sandy brows. He was on the job early the next morning. By nine thirty, he had given instructions for the family and guests to come to the library again. I was eating breakfast in the small, oak-paneled dining room when he came in and took a seat beside me. "Just what do you know about this affair?"

"Not a thing. I'm a stranger here myself." I wasn't feeling flippant, although my words may have sounded that way. I explained how I happened to be there and why I had come to California. He narrowed his eyes at me. "Oh, so you're going to meet a boat, eh?"

I didn't consider an answer necessary. After a minute of careful scrutiny of my face, he went on, "Had any experience before with murder?"

"Certainly not."

"Not even in detective stories?"

"Oh, yes, I've read lots of them."

He narrowed his eyes at me again, moved his chair a little closer. "It's quite possible

that you, being a stranger, might have a better perspective than some of the others. Anyway, it's worth a try. Now, from my investigation so far, I'd say that the wrong man had been killed."

"The wrong man?" I echoed a bit dumbly.

"Yes. The man who should have been killed, who maybe was slated to have been killed, was Drew Allison."

"But why should he, or anybody else for that matter?"

He gave a shrug, lighted a cigarette. "I don't believe you read detective stories, after all." He offered me a cigarette then, went on, "You see, Drew Allison, you might say, was more or less marked for murder. His sister and brother hated him. He'd been speculating with the family fortune, had refused to make a settlement."

"That's hardly a motive for murder."

"You'd be surprised at the motives some people find for murdering people," he said darkly.

"Do you think that Mr. Burke was killed by mistake then?"

"The room in which he was killed had belonged to Drew Allison. In fact, he'd just changed only a few days ago, I understand."

While I was digesting this, Blithers announced that the family and guests were now in the library. Gleason very kindly let me finish a second cup of coffee, and we went in together.

Gleason took his seat behind a big carved desk, while the others sat grouped around it. He fixed his eyes first on Lynn Roslyn, whose face was still pale, but who appeared quite composed. "You went to Reno about a year ago, didn't you, Mrs. Burke, for the purpose of divorcing your husband?"

Her expression didn't change in the least, though I could see that one of the fingers on her right hand, lying so quietly in her lap, moved ever so slightly. She said, "Yes," rather faintly.

"But you didn't go through with the divorce. Why?"

"My husband promised to reform. He . . . he had been drinking heavily, and I wanted to give him every chance."

"What was his business?"

"He used to be a producer, but for the past few years—" She stopped.

"For the past few years you've supported him, isn't that true?"

Once again the answer came faintly in the affirmative.

Gleason pursed his mouth, narrowed his

eyes, then shot her a direct look. "Your husband left an insurance policy in the amount of thirty thousand dollars, I understand?"

A faint tinge of color showed in Lynn Roslyn's face. "Yes, that is true."

Gleason turned to Drew Allison next. "Have you been able as yet to think of any reason why anyone in this house should want to kill Giles Burke?"

Drew countered with a question of his own, "Are you convinced that it was someone in the house?"

"Quite."

Drew knitted his dark brows. "Giles was a harmless sort of chap. I don't believe he had an enemy in the world."

"He has a most attractive wife," Gleason shot at him.

There was a faint suggestion of a smile on Drew's dark face. "I don't find it hard to agree with you on that. But I hardly believe that could have anything to do with poor Giles' death."

Gleason looked at him belligerently for a long moment. "Was Mrs. Burke financially involved in any way?"

"I'm not in a position to answer that," Drew evaded.

Gleason took his eyes away from Drew with reluctance, turned to Julia Amberson, still in the black suit, looking trim and beautiful, even so early in the morning. "How long have you known Giles Burke and his wife, Miss Amberson?"

"I hardly know them at all. I think perhaps I may have met them here once before at dinner."

"Do you know anyone in this house who had reason to benefit by the death of Giles Burke?"

Was it my imagination, or did Julia Amberson's blue eyes turn just slightly toward Drew Allison? But her answer came promptly. "Such an idea is preposterous, in the extreme. In my opinion, everybody in the house seemed fond of Mr. Burke."

Gleason looked at her thoughtfully, his eyes narrowed, then turned abruptly to Carmen Ray. She looked younger than ever this morning, with that flawless gold hair brushed back from her temples and tied with a blue ribbon. "Miss Ray, wasn't your engagement to Mr. Drew Allison a bit sudden?"

The girl turned deathly pale. Her eyes sought Drew's in frantic appeal. Drew began smoothly, "Our engagement may have appeared sudden to some—"

Gleason interrupted him, "Please let Miss Ray answer." He kept his eyes glued on the girl. "Was your engagement to Mr. Allison the ordinary kind, or was there some reason back of it? In other words, give me an answer in plain 'yes' or 'no,' Miss Ray. Did you want to marry him?"

There was a poignant silence. Gleason said sternly, "Answer 'yes' or 'no,' Miss Ray."

"No," the answer came at last through trembling lips.

Jerry sat up stiffly, a dark flush coming to his face. Drew had himself under admirable control. His expression did not change by the merest flicker of an eyelash.

Carmen appeared ready to dissolve into tears, but Gleason gave her no mercy. There was a triumphant expression on his thin, crafty face, as if he were mentally rubbing his hands and saying to himself, "Now we're getting somewhere!" He demanded, "Why did Drew Allison force you into an engagement against your will, Miss Ray?"

Carmen did not answer. A tear dropped slowly from her eyes and splashed on the front of her pongee dress. It was Jerry who spoke next. "I think I can answer that question, lieutenant."

Gleason turned to the young air pilot. "Go ahead."

"My brother holds control of the Allison estate, as is pretty generally known. He has not been very generous with Madolyn and myself. Before I left for the air service, I helped myself to a certain sum of money I needed. I had a right to it, but my brother didn't see it that way. He made me sign a paper to the effect that I had practically stolen this money. It is quite possible that he . . . he has been holding this over Miss Ray as a sort of whip hand, threatening perhaps to disown me, perhaps even to hold me liable by law. He's quite capable of such an action." He stopped, went on, "This is the only explanation I've been able to find for such a fantastic engagement."

It seemed to me that Mrs. Burke, who had been sitting tense in her chair, her face pale and set, suddenly relaxed, leaned back, with a sort of tender radiance in her nice brown eyes.

Gleason was now looking around the room, a certain belligerence in his shrewd eyes. His glance finally lighted on Drew Allison. "How much of this story is true?" he demanded.

"Most of it, in substance." Drew was able to smile.

But I wasn't listening to Gleason very carefully now, or Drew. I was looking at Jerry and Carmen, whose eyes were completely lost in each other's, as if they had each come from a great distance and found each other again. I think I know real love when I meet it face to face. It made my heart warm and glad.

It was after lunch before I saw Gleason again. He found me on the terrace where I was sitting in a comfortable porch chair, admiring the geraniums and wondering why they never grow so large or handsome at home, when he came and plopped down beside me, holding his hat between his knees.

By this time I was beginning to have a few ideas of my own. I told him about Blithers, the dour, moody-eyed butler whom I'd found in my room when I'd gone up to smooth my hair before lunch. He hadn't been able to give a very good reason for being in my room. "Thought I'd find a tray in here. Hilda's getting careless," he'd muttered.

I told him I'd had breakfast in the small dining room. He knew it.

He'd left then, muttering some other vague excuse, and I made up my mind I'd keep my eyes on him from now on, but Gleason wasn't at all impressed by my story about Blithers. He gave a smirk, the nearest approach he had to a smile. "It's always the butler in detective stories, isn't it?"

"No, sometimes it's the secretary."

He sat up straighter. "You may have something there." Then he frowned and slumped back in his chair. "I thought I was going good—had an insurance angle. Thirty thousand dollars is a lot of money, you know. But a woman wouldn't kill her husband for his insurance when she was making over a hundred thousand a year herself, would she?"

"I should think not."

He sat back, his brow corrugated in thought. "It's one of those dual-pay policies, not old line."

I knew very little about insurance. He took a few minutes to explain. "These policies are issued in groups of about twenty-five to thirty, usually in an amount of one thousand dollars or more. Burke belonged to a group of seven. Not many men can afford this amount of insurance—premiums pretty stiff. The way the thing works, each policyholder is given a number, and the reason it's called dual pay is that

when a member of the group dies, not only the man's widow, or estate, gets paid, but also the man in this same group, or woman, whichever it is, who holds the top number. Of course, I've checked on all the policy-holders."

"Sounds like a pretty good gamble."

Gleason was off on another track. "Which one was lying this morning, or were they all? I mean, about that story Jerry told. It's so old, it might have originated with old King Tut himself."

"It might be true."

Gleason shook his head, got up restively and walked up and down.

"Know anything about Miss Amberson?" he stopped at last to ask.

I shook my head. "Nothing except that Drew Allison doesn't like her, and Madolyn seems to be quite attached to her. Something was said about Drew's jilting Julia, but I think maybe it's just Madolyn's notion."

Gleason, who had started pacing the terrace again, stopped and groaned. "Don't hand me another triangle. I can't take it."

He saw Drew, then, coming from the garages, and beckoned him to come to the terrace. Drew smiled at me pleasantly, sat down easily on the balustrade.

Gleason stood before him, his hands in his pockets, his eyes narrowed. "Mr. Allison, why did you pay your former secretary, now a business associate, the sum of five thousand dollars?"

Drew dropped a cigarette he'd just taken from his silver case. He offered one to me, and took out another before answering, then said nonchalantly, "Oh, just for an investment."

"What sort of investment?" Gleason pinned him down.

Drew made a careless gesture with his square, carefully tended hands, "Oh, Santa Anita—that sort of thing."

Gleason's gray eyes were hard. "You're known to be conservative with money, Mr. Allison. I can't imagine you throwing away such a sum on the horses. Besides, the check was only made out yesterday. Funny you'd be thinking about horses with a murder investigation going on."

Drew frowned in an effort at concentration. "Let me see. That check was post-dated. It was made—oh, quite some time ago." He hesitated, went on with an effort, "You see, due to investments, I don't always have this much money in cash. I had to date

the check at such a time when I was sure I'd have money to cover it."

"Due to speculations, you mean, don't you? And were all of them on the up and up? Weren't you involved in at least one speculation that was—well, a bit off-color?"

He was evidently getting close to the mark, for Drew colored, started to say something, but Gleason was not through. "Little off-color speculation in which, say, Mr. Burke was also associated?"

Drew had himself under control again. He said evenly, "I assure you that Giles Burke and myself have never been associated in business deals in any way. In the first place, poor Giles has had no money for several years except what his wife has given him. I understand, however, that she was always generous."

Gleason let it go at that, very much to Drew Allison's relief, as I could not help seeing.

The house was quiet by eleven that night. No one felt like bridge. By eleven thirty I had my patient in bed, and went to my room, but not to sleep. I don't know why I was so wakeful, but it was midnight, then one, then two, before I dropped off to sleep. I was awakened within a few minutes by what sounded like stealthy steps in the hall. I got into a robe and slippers, and opened my door carefully. I fully expected to find Blithers snooping around, but the hall was dark and mocked me with its eerie silence. I was glad to jump back into bed.

It was toward morning when I was awakened again, this time by a low, muffled scream coming again from the hall. Once more getting into robe and slippers, I opened my door and looked out.

To my surprise, Julia was out there in a long, filmy negligee, with her long blond hair down. "What happened?" I asked. "I thought I heard a scream."

Julia said, "I'm quite certain you didn't. We're all jittery, more or less, I suppose." She went back to her room.

I was certain I had heard a low, sort of strangled cry, and I believed Julia had also. But once again the eerie stillness of the hall seemed to mock me.

I had my breakfast about eight. Gleason showed up, told Blithers to bring him coffee, and slid into a seat near me. "I'm forty-five and single. Did you know that?" He broke off, then said, "But I suppose you're determined to meet that boat?"

"Of course!"

"O.K., O.K." He waved his hand airily, went on, "When you finish, come into the library. I think Miss Julia Amberson is about ready to talk."

"Did she scream last night? I heard someone, I'm sure."

He nodded. "She was going to slip a note under Drew Allison's door, was tiptoeing down the hall with the note, and didn't see Brooks who was sitting on the stairs. Well, he caught her just as she was in the act of slipping it under the door."

"And she screamed?"

"Yes, I think she did. Women usually do when caught unawares." He handed me a slip of paper on which was written:

Drew darling, don't worry. Nothing will induce me to tell. You are perfectly safe as far as I'm concerned.

I read it and gave it back.

A few minutes later we were in the library where Julia sat on the big couch, looking almost unbelievably beautiful.

But Gleason was unmoved by her limpid blue eyes and blond fragility. He said sternly, "Miss Amberson, it's perfectly clear that you have been concealing evidence, and I must remind you that you're likely to find yourself in plenty of trouble if you don't tell what you know."

Her eyes were suddenly filled with unshed tears. "I don't know a thing, lieutenant—that is, not anything important. I just . . . just wrote the note to Drew to sort of comfort him, if you understand."

"Why did you feel it necessary to comfort him?"

"Just a . . . a woman's feeling."

"That answer is inadequate. You can either tell me what you know right here, or we can go to headquarters."

Julia looked frightened. Once again her blue eyes were moist with tears. "Can't you see what a difficult position you're placing me in? I'm a friend of the family. I can't betray their confidence."

Lieutenant Gleason flattened his thin mouth. "I must warn you that my patience is not inexhaustible. What do you know about Drew Allison that has to do with the murder of Giles Burke?"

Julia had her handkerchief now to her eyes, her slight figure shaking with tight sobs.

Gleason once again tightened his mouth. "Go ahead, please." I could see that he was convinced that at last he had a break in the case.

Julia straightened up, touched her eyes delicately. "I know nothing, as I've told you except that . . . that Drew was once in love with Lynn Roslyn, Mrs. Burke. They worked together and I think that was how it started. But it's over now. Drew is quite mad about Carmen Ray, I am sure." She hesitated.

Gleason kept his eyes glued on her. "Go on. Go on."

"But that's all. I knew Drew was trying to keep it secret, the fact that he was once in love with Lynn Roslyn, because in a way—well, you know, people say things. I just wanted him to know that if . . . if there should be any gossip—"

Gleason motioned Julia to go. After she had closed the door behind her, he began summing things up. "It's beginning to fit. Drew Allison is in love with Mrs. Burke. He announced his engagement to Miss Ray for a blind—that is, it was intended to blind Giles Burke. But, evidently, Burke didn't fall for it. He knew the truth. Probably threatened to make a scandal. This was the one thing Drew was trying to avoid. It's probably the reason why Mrs. Burke came home without going through with the divorce. Gossip, a scandal in Hollywood, is something to be avoided at almost any cost. Drew's prints were on the small automatic—" He stopped, looking at me. "All right, what's wrong with this reasoning?"

I suppose I must have looked doubtful. "I think I've got the explanation for Mr. Allison's prints on the automatic. Soon after I came into Madolyn Winthrop's room, I picked up her purse, found it heavy, and knew by the feeling that there was a gun inside. Knowing her nervous condition, I spoke to Drew about it when I had a chance. He probably took it out."

"Pretty good. His prints were only on the barrel, not on the handle. The handle itself had been wiped clean. He wouldn't have cleaned the handle, and left his prints on the barrel." He broke off. "How old are you, anyway?"

"Now, is that a nice question?" I countered. But I told him. My age never bothers me. "I'm going on thirty."

"A nice sensible age," he commented, went on, "Now as to Miss Amberson's story— What'd you make of it?"

"She is an actress, if there ever was one. She should be in the movies."

"She's tried hard enough," he muttered, looking at me thoughtfully. "So you think she was putting on an act?"

"But definitely."

He stared at me, his sandy brows knit. "Takes a woman to see through another woman."

We were interrupted, then, by the entrance of Madolyn and Drew. Gleason had left word for them to come down. Madolyn took a seat near Gleason. Drew stood with one arm on the white mantel, his face dark and impassive. A few minutes later, the others came in with the exception of Jacques Lenoir. Julia, still looking teary-eyed, came in last.

Gleason looked at Madolyn first. "Was your brother at any time involved in an affair with Mrs. Burke?"

Madolyn turned pale. "Why, you— How could you— I mean—" She wasn't making sense, of course.

"Let me speak for both of us," Drew interposed. "There was a time when . . . when I hoped to marry Mrs. Burke. She went to Reno, but—well, she simply couldn't go through with the divorce. After all, the only fault Giles had was his drinking."

"Your reason for announcing your engagement to Miss Ray was for the sole purpose of pulling the wool over Mr. Burke's eyes, isn't that true?"

"No. There had been a little gossip. I hoped the news of my engagement would stop it."

"That means, I think, that you're still in love with Mrs. Burke, doesn't it?"

Drew raised his head proudly, but didn't answer. He didn't need to. The look on his face gave him away. A lovely color crept into Noel Burke's face. As for Julia Amberson, if ever I saw malice in a woman's face, it was certainly there. Was she really the "woman scorned"? If so, I was afraid her revenge would be complete. It seemed to me that Drew Allison had succeeded in incriminating himself more with every word.

Jacques Lenoir had not joined us. Gleason sent Blithers to look for him. He was gone a long time. When he came in at last, he said almost as imperturbably as if he were announcing dinner, "Mr. Lenoir is dead. He has been shot through the heart. He was not in his room. I searched the house and grounds. Found him in one of the garages."

After that, confusion again—reporters, the medical examiner, more reporters. Gleason showed up in the late afternoon, after Lenoir's body had been taken to a mortuary.

I was again on the terrace when Gleason found me. He seated himself on the balus-

trade and regarded me with his sandy brows furrowed in a frown of concentration. "Everything still points to Drew Allison. Jacques Lenoir was blackmailing him. I'm convinced of that."

"He didn't do it."

"Intuition?" He asked a little scornfully, and slid from the balustrade to a chair beside me. "Look, I only needed a motive. Now I've got two that will stand good in any court of law. Drew had the opportunity, and his prints were on the first gun."

He hadn't found the second gun, the one that killed Jacques Lenoir.

"But only on the barrel," I reminded him.

"That makes it stronger. He took time to wipe off the handle, but forgot to wipe off the barrel. As far as I'm concerned, it's an open and shut case."

We were called to dinner then.

That night, after making my patient comfortable, she told me that she had bought the revolver at Julia's suggestion. "She was always saying that I wasn't any too safe out here and that I should learn to handle a pistol in case of need." Madolyn's voice became strong. "Aggie, Drew just took the revolver out of my bag and laid it in a drawer in my desk. Drew often makes me angry, but he . . . he's not a murderer. I just know he's not."

"Of course he isn't," I said soothingly.

I went back downstairs when Madolyn fell asleep. Gleason was in the library with his feet on a chair, smoking. He took his feet down when I came in. "The last time I saw you, you were down on all fours crawling around in the back alley. Haven't you any dignity?" I teased. I'd been walking around the grounds for some air, and had seen him. We were not allowed to leave the grounds, as yet.

Gleason explained that he'd been in the alley before, investigating car tracks. Someone had been out there with a brand-new synthetic tire on his car. He didn't consider it important, but thought he'd take another look.

I didn't know anybody who had a new synthetic tire. About all I knew was that they were extremely hard to get.

None of us had any alibis when it came to the murder of Lenoir, Gleason pointed out, except Julia Amberson to whom he'd given permission to go to her hotel for some clothes. She was to return early the next morning. She didn't have a new tire on her car. In fact, the ones she had were about shot, and she was in her room at or about

the time Lenoir had been shot. This was substantiated by one of the hotel bellboys who had brought her cigarettes at almost the very moment Lenoir was shot, according to time established by the M.E.

I told him what Madolyn had said about Julia's insistence that she buy a small automatic, but he was not impressed by this.

Before I went to my room, Gleason talked again with Drew in my presence. "In my opinion," Gleason began, "you killed Lenoir because he knew you had murdered Giles Burke."

"I am not a murderer." Drew threw back his head proudly, went on after a thoughtful pause, "You had it right the first time. I was paying Lenoir blackmail to protect Noel"—his voice grew soft and tender at the name—"from Hollywood gossip, which can be terrible."

"And he demanded more money, so you killed him."

"No, he didn't demand any more. He had something he wanted more than money, a business association with me which enabled him to meet people high up in the movie industry."

"Such an association must have been distasteful to you."

"I expected to terminate it when Noel and I—" Drew stopped.

"Exactly." Gleason flattened his mouth. "When you and Mrs. Burke could be married, and were safe from gossipers. Since there was no divorce, your only chance was to kill him."

Drew shook his head silently.

"It will be necessary for me to take you to headquarters in the morning, Mr. Allison. I suggest that you make your preparations tonight."

"Very well, lieutenant." Drew walked out with quiet dignity.

Gleason sat silent for a moment, his brow furrowed.

He looked up when there was a knock on the door, and Blithers came in with an apologetic cough. "Beg pardon, sir, I promised you I'd keep my eyes and ears open, and I'd like to suggest, if you could find Ruth Sherman, sir, you might be able to find the murderer."

Gleason almost jumped out of his chair. "What do you know about Ruth Sherman? Tell me quick."

"Not much, sir. It was just that last night I took down the telephone receiver on the extension line in the back hall, just sort of listening in, as it were. I knew someone

was talking. It was real early, and it sounded like Mr. Lenoir. He said, 'Just thought I'd tell you I know about Ruth Sherman. I'll keep quiet for a good-sized slice of that dough.'"

"Who was on the other end?"

"I don't know. I just heard a sort of gasp, and the line was broken."

Gleason had reached the door by now. The next thing I heard was his car tearing out of the driveway.

Julia came back the next morning, bringing a small overnight bag, wearing a red flannel suit with a hat that consisted mostly of a veil and a spray of some kind of small, artificial flowers.

She and Madolyn ordered breakfast in Madolyn's sitting room. I came down to the small dining room, was just beginning my first cup of coffee when Gleason arrived with two officers. One of the officers took the place of the man who'd been on duty all night. Gleason went upstairs with the other officer. They came back down in about a half-hour, to my intense surprise, with Julia in custody. The officer who had gone upstairs with Gleason held a pair of handcuffs. Julia shuddered daintily. "I'll go quietly," she said. When she started past the dining room door, she looked at me and said nonchalantly, "They say a blonde can get away with anything, even murder. Now we shall see."

In a few minutes Gleason came to the dining room, asked Blithers to bring him some coffee and slid into a chair beside me. "She confessed when we got her in a corner."

"I never once dreamed—" I began.

"I was suspicious of her all along. You take a beautiful woman without any money—it's a dangerous combination. It was the change in names that threw me off." Blithers brought the coffee. After a few satisfied sips, he went on to explain that he'd traced the telephone call from here to Julia's hotel. It had been Lenoir talking to her about Ruth Sherman. He had also been able to trace the synthetic tire. Julia had had it on her car when she had driven in the alley, quite some time before she appeared at the curb. She'd remembered it, and had time to go to a station, have it removed and the worn spare put in its place, before she came back the second time.

"She came by way of the back alley, slipped up the servants' stairs? Then she must have known where Giles would be?"

He nodded. "She did. She'd called him, asked him to come up to this room at a definite time. But I was certainly dumb not to know there was a tie-up between her name and Ruth Sherman. I'll have to give Blithers a war bond or something for finding that out. Afterward, it was easy."

I was still in the dark.

"You see," he went on, stirring his coffee again. "Julia's real name is Ruth Sherman. And Ruth Sherman's name is at the top of the group of policyholders in this dual-pay insurance. She took this other name when she came to Hollywood, pretending to belong to a prominent family in New York City. The real Ruth Sherman worked as an artist's model and in night clubs in the East. She met Giles Burke in one of these clubs, had a date or two with him, and easily persuaded him to take a policy in her group. He signed his death warrant when he did it. She came to Hollywood with the intention of killing him. Being on the top of this list, when any member of this group died, she would stand to receive this sum of money. She had false credentials and easily made friends in Hollywood, but Madolyn Winthrop was the one with whom she wanted to become intimate."

"I see. Because Giles Burke lived next door."

He nodded. "Then it was easy enough for her to find out the family secrets from Mrs. Winthrop. When she found Drew was in love with Mrs. Burke—well, nothing could have suited her plans better. It looked easy enough to fix it so that Drew would be convicted of the crime."

"Drew Allison must have suspected that she was an adventuress," I said. "He disliked her very much. But she pretended to Madolyn that Drew had made love to her, then discarded her, in order to win Madolyn's sympathy." It was beginning to be clear to me now.

"She didn't skip anything. She wrote that note, pretending to want to slip it under Mr. Allison's door, but knowing all the time that Brooks would take it from her. Deep, I'd say."

Gleason paused to draw a breath, went on, "As for Lenoir, we may never know how he found out who Julia was. He may

have guessed, or may have seen a picture of Julia when she was a model, and recognized her. Or Giles may have described her. He and Lenoir went around together sometimes. At any rate, Lenoir was sure Julia would have this money, and he saw a chance to get his share in the deal. Julia called him after he'd told her over the phone that he knew who Ruth Sherman was, asked him to meet her out at the garages to talk the thing over. This time, she brought her own revolver."

"What about her alibi at the hotel?"

"We broke that, at last. The bellhop didn't see Julia, just knew there was someone in her room. Julia had cleverly planted another girl. When she came back, after shooting Lenoir, she entered the room by the fire escape. She'd thrown the gun away on the return trip to the hotel."

I'd finished my breakfast by then. "Well, I've got to see how my patient is taking this. Hope it doesn't go too hard with her."

Gleason rose. I said, "Good-bye and good luck," and went out.

I found a happy group in Madolyn's sitting room. Lynn Roslyn and Drew looking at each other, Jerry and Carmen holding hands, and Madolyn Winthrop's eyes shining. She called out happily. "Aggie, Drew had a confession to make also. It seems that our father didn't leave us very much money, after all. Drew took what there was, and after investing it and re-investing it, he managed to increase it so that now all of us will have a nice little fortune. Wasn't he clever? And now he wants to make a settlement."

"I think that's just splendid. I'm so glad for all of you."

I decided to go on downstairs again. They had lots of things to talk over, family affairs, of course, and there were two marriages in the offing, I felt sure. Jerry and Carmen, and later, Lynn Roslyn and Drew.

Downstairs in the hall, Gleason was standing a little uncertainly at the big heavy front door. He waited until I reached the foot of the stairs. "You're still bound and determined to meet that boat?"

"Oh, yes!"

"O.K., O.K." He raised his hand airily, opened the door with a flourish and went out.

THE SLEEP THAT TALKS

By LOUIS DEVON

They were powerful eyes, hypnotic and deadly, and they held under their spell helpless men and women in bondage.

I.

THE re-opening of the Igloo had been played up for weeks in all the newspapers. Even Jerry Maiden's column in the *News* reported how the night spot was splurging on decorations and carried an item about the headlines in the show. And Jerry was an easy-going cynic who didn't usually go overboard that way. If his bosom pal and critic, Bart McCabe, didn't exactly share his enthusiasm it was simply because he had a drugstore to run.

In fact, when Bart's phone rang he was beset with a whole batch of prescriptions.

"Doin' anything, doc?"

Jerry's drawl from the comparative ease of the *News* office riled him.

"Just trying to fill a couple of prescriptions," he shot back. "That is, if you don't mind."

"Don't snap like that! I only wanted to know if you'd be too tired to go to the Igloo opening with me tonight."

"Who said anything about being tired?"

"That's better. Meet me outside about eleven."

The brightly lighted entrance was cluttered with a striking assortment of blue bloods, bookies, café society debs and number writers.

As Bart started to make his way through to see if Jerry had arrived, an individual who looked like a punch-drunk fighter shoved up against him and held him back. He saw that there were quite a number of these characters stationed around the door and that they were giving everyone close scrutiny.

At that moment Jerry wandered up. The mugs greeted him like a long-lost brother.

"He's all right, fellas," Jerry said. "He's with me."

They went up the carpet-lined stairs toward the sound of soft music, and entered a den of frosty silver and blue. With its

domed ceiling of blocks that glittered like ice, it made a breath-taking igloo that probably cost a young fortune.

The head waiter came forward. "Hello, Dominic," Jerry said. "Fine-combin' them tonight, I see."

Dominic showed white teeth. "Just in case. Muskeeta's pretty sore, you know."

He led them to a ringside table, a tribute on opening night. In front of them, on the crowded floor, a tight mass of humanity moved in a semblance of dancing and on an elevated platform of blue-white ice blocks to the right, the musicians sent out blaring brass. A good imitation of Northern Lights flashed and flickered behind them.

"Look at those starched fronts," Jerry said. "Like a bunch of penguins on an iceberg." Then he spotted someone at the next table and half rose from his chair.

"Good evening, major," he called.

An impressive, smartly uniformed man, graying at the temples, smiled and waved to him from the midst of a large party.

"Major Brendle," Jerry said. "Intelligence, and pretty important. The tall girl next to him is his sister. Good family—Angela Brendle. Big gent on his left is Dr. Yahontis, brain specialist just back from Portugal. The little girl in white is his niece. I don't know the bitter-looking pill next to her, but the other couple are the Hendrickses. He's the shipbuilder."

"I'm impressed," Bart told him. "Angela has looks, and red hair."

"You're not the only one. There's Duncan Mallory, the ensign at the next table. Remember, he played end for State? Had a violent crush on Angela last season. Almost altar-bound. I don't know what happened, but look at the way he's hanging on."

Bart lighted a cigarette and gazed around with satisfaction. "Quite a gathering! But how come you called me and didn't bring the doll? Don't tell me you're losing your grip?"

Jerry leaned forward, smiling. "To tell

the truth, Bart, Gladys was sore as hell. She wanted to come in the worst way. But this boy Muskeeta used to be a partner in the Igloo and they cut him out. If he comes up tonight, it'll be nasty."

"Oh, so my neck's all right to risk?"

"What are you beefing about? I'm here, too."

"You get paid for it."

"What about all these people? They're paying *couvert*. I guess you never heard of that in your luncheonette, but it's a fee and it's considerable."

"They don't know what it's all about, so it's all right for them. But I don't like sitting here, waiting for the knives to start flying. And keep my drugstore out of it. I've just had fifteen hours of it and that's enough."

Jerry whistled softly. "O.K., but odds just dropped two to one that Muskeeta is a-comin'. If you want to leave, now's the time."

"I haven't had a drink yet," Bart beefed, "and if you think I came all the way down here to—"

"All right, don't say I didn't warn you. See that big fellow over there, standing in back of Dominic, the head waiter? That's Jumbo, finger man. He never shows unless there's murder in the wind, and, brother, it's stirring."

"If you're kidding, I don't like your sense of humor."

"Kidding, eh? Here's Muskeeta now!"

A thin scarecrow of a man stalked slowly up the stairs. A smile was drawn tightly across his lined, olive-tinted face, as if the lips were stitched back. Behind him came a young, dark-skinned boy in uniform.

Bart glanced apprehensively to the spot where Dominic and Jumbo had been standing. They were no longer there.

Muskeeta came toward the dance floor with an arrogant but cautious swagger. As his glance fell upon Jerry, the forced smile went like a window shade snapping upward and a flood of genuine warmth came to his swarthy features.

He slapped Jerry on the back. "My good friend! I want you should say 'hello' to my boy Orlando. He is soldier now, going to fight for his country. You will put that in your column for me, Jerry, yes?"

Orlando grinned broadly as he shook Jerry's hand. "Not just publicity. The old man's proud as a peacock. As if I were the only one—"

"You are my only one. So I come here

tonight with open hand an' good heart. No more trouble, no more business fight. My boy is all I care."

"Hope he sent that word in advance," Jerry told Orlando. "They're pretty tense around here."

"Oh, he'll get straightened out," Orlando laughed. "Just watch, they'll be wrapping their arms around each other's necks in a little while."

He followed his father through the narrow space between the tables until they came almost in line with the orchestra dais. Here a heavy-set waiter saw them and belligerently barred the way. He obviously had previous instructions and was not listening to reason.

Bart could see the back of Muskeeta's neck turning red as he stiffened and pushed forward. The waiter stood firm.

Both men were waving their hands and shouting for all they were worth, but the din of the music covered everything. Then the waiter swung, a clumsy roundhouse blow that fanned the top of Muskeeta's head. Orlando stepped in close and dropped the offender with a compact jolt to the jaw.

Every waiter in the place started for the trouble spot.

Jerry jumped up. "Somebody's got to get to Dominic and Jumbo and tell them he's friendly. Look! There they are, by that side curtain!"

"Wait, Jerry," Bart said. "I don't want to get you alarmed, but isn't that your blond doll coming in now?"

Jerry whirled toward the stairs.

"Of all the dumb dames! You might know," he groaned. "She won't stay back there where it's safe. She'll be right up here."

Gladys came threading between the tables in a shimmering red gown. A gloating expression shone on her baby-face features.

"I told you I'd meet you here," she said to Jerry, whose ruddy face was a battleground for anxiety and rage. "Sorry now?"

Jerry grunted like an Indian. "My God, I can't see murder done! Keep your eye on her, Bart. I'll be back."

He darted toward the side, where the commotion was getting out of hand.

The music had grown louder, but the dancing was no more than the movement of a gelatinous mass becoming aware of an excitement outside itself.

Gladys remained standing in the aisle, bewildered and on the verge of tears. As

Bart leaned over to get her to his table, he noticed something very strange.

Through the empty chair space, his eyes alighted on a woman's hand under the cloth at the next table, a hand toying with a small bottle which she held in her lap. What held his interest was the fact that, as a druggist, he recognized the bottle and the colored capsules which she tumbled into her palm. He knew them to contain a fast-acting barbiturate compound for inducing sleep.

His gaze followed the long, graceful arm upward. It belonged to the major's attractive sister, Angela. She was leaning forward toward the Hendricksons, apparently absorbed in their chatter.

Fascinated, he watched the undercover work of the tapered fingers as they opened the capsules and shook the contents into her palm. She was putting on a good listening act, but Bart thought that her smile became a bit too forced, her gaze too fixed. By the time the third capsule was emptied, he began to sense her impatience.

It was then that the shot rang out.

All heads turned toward the side of the dance floor where a heavy puff of smoke was rising toward the ceiling. In that interval, as Bart watched transfixed, her palm came up and emptied itself of the powder. It went into the major's glass.

Her own brother's glass!

The powder dissolved quickly in the tall drink. Conversation resumed where it had broken off. No one seemed to have noticed anything amiss.

And yet Bart could have sworn that Dr. Yahontis' rapt attention was on the glass. He seemed to be immobile, caught in that brief, momentary inflexibility of suspense which cannot be concealed.

The doctor had a huge, pear-shaped head. A good specimen for other brain specialists to work on, Bart mused. A long, drooping mustache sagged the corners of his mouth. He was completely bald, with an unusually broad, bulging forehead in which his large, glaring eyes stood out prominently. They were set directly on the white patch of tablecloth where the major's drink rested.

Suddenly, the niece turned about and Bart caught the frightened look on her face. Her chair, which was closest to him, had been placed so that formerly he saw only the back of her white organdy dress. Now he looked into pink harlequin glasses dominating a tiny mouth and chin.

For a moment he thought he knew the

small, birdlike features. They stirred something in the dim recesses of his memory, but beyond that he could not go.

All this happened in the short interval between the first and second revolver shot. As this rang out, seemingly louder than the first report, Angela rose quickly and raised her own glass. The others did likewise, apparently to finish their drinks.

Now the niece was pleading, appealing to the stern, cruel-looking martinet next to her. She winced in pain and Bart saw that her arm was held in his grip and that he was twisting it relentlessly.

Bart grabbed a fork from the next table and jabbed it into the man's hand. He let go fast. Now the major had his glass up-raised with the others. Bart tried to stop him.

But there was Gladys, hanging onto him and wailing like a spoiled child. He shook her off quickly, but as he got moving Duncan Mallory decided to stagger over to the party.

"You've been ignorin' me all evenin'," he mumbled over Angela's frigid shoulder. "I can't stand it, honey."

By the time Bart got around them, the major was swallowing the last of his drink.

It made an awkward moment for Bart. There he was, barging into them for no apparent reason and facing an officer to whom he was a total stranger.

He put his arms about him in friendly-drunk fashion and turned him toward the dance floor. They went off a few paces and Bart whispered in his ear, "Major, they've slipped you a Mickey."

He felt the man stiffen. "When?"

"Just now."

"What'll happen?"

"Sleep, I think."

The major put his arm about him and smiled broadly. He was a good actor.

"They mustn't suspect I know." He spoke quickly. "You're a friend of Jerry Maiden's. I can trust you, Listen closely. I must be in Washington tomorrow to make a confidential report. If you love your country, don't leave me."

The crowd swirled about them. The last notes of music faltered discordantly in the air like a harsh warning signal. Some tables were overturned in the rush of people and there was the shattering of glass. A woman screamed and it began to look like panic.

Bart's roving eye found Jerry pushing Muskeeta toward the kitchen. He didn't seem to need any help.

"We'd better get out of here, fast," he said.

Others had the same idea. They went down the stairs in a solid, shoving mass.

It was raining hard. The drops were bouncing like vicious little arrows on the shining pavement. There wasn't a cab in sight.

Dr. Yahontis turned up his coat collar and hunched his massive shoulders. "My car is right around the corner."

Bart and the major filed along after him, close to the building. As they turned the corner, a sleek black limousine pulled up. They made a dash for it and kept piling in.

Bart found himself squeezed in between the major and the girl with the harlequin glasses. Facing him was Dr. Yahontis, looking very unhappy with a wet, disheveled Gladys perched on his lap. Beside him was the statuesque Angela, with Duncan still attached to her.

The car cruised slowly.

"I want to go home," Angela announced. "Duncan, we said 'good-by' a couple of months ago. I wish you'd let it stay at that."

"A' right," Duncan agreed hoarsely. "See you home first."

"Doctor," she said, "I'll ask you to drop my brother and myself at the town house at once. He has a busy day ahead of him."

What was she up to now? Bart glanced toward the major and saw that his head was dropping to his chest. He was obviously fighting a losing battle against sleep.

"What about me?" Gladys piped up. "I'm soaked and my gown is a mess. Just look at it."

"You're shivering," the doctor said, "and the major seems tired. I suggest that we all come to my place for a while. It's warm and cozy and you'll all be comfortable."

To Bart that sounded like the safest place for the major. No telling what his sister would do if she got him alone.

"All right, make it your place," he spoke up. "O.K. with you, Dunc?"

"O.K."

Dr. Yahontis turned and tapped on the glass for the chauffeur.

"No!" Angela insisted with sudden fierceness, "No, I say!"

While they were arguing, Bart felt a quick tug at his sleeve. He looked down at the doctor's niece.

"Aren't you Bart McCabe?"

"Sure."

She took off her glasses. "Don't you re-

member me? Selma Mayros? We were in chemistry lab together at research."

"That's right." Now he knew the tiny, heart-shaped face. "You were a sweet kid," he said.

She let that go. It didn't matter right now. She glanced toward the doctor to see if he were listening, but he was giving the chauffeur his instructions over Angela's protests.

"Don't go," the niece whispered, terror in her eyes. "Bart, say 'no'! Before it's too late!"

It was already too late. The car had picked up speed and was heading toward the suburbs.

The doctor's eyes were upon him. "You were at the next table," he remarked. It was a polite way of saying he didn't belong.

"Close friend of the major's. He asked me to come along."

The doctor shook his head. "I don't think he's well. He's been undergoing too much strain. I'll have to take a look at him as soon as we get home."

Again Bart felt a pressure on his hand, but Selma was staring straight ahead.

The rain beat down on the roof of the car and they drove in strained silence. It seemed like a long ride. Occasionally, Dr. Yahontis leaned over and shook the major's knee. His mumbled responses became more and more blurred. Angela watched in bitter, smoldering silence and the atmosphere became unbearably tense.

The tires swished over the gleaming blackness of the wet asphalt and no one seemed able to break the spell until Gladys giggled nervously.

"Well, here's mama's little girl on somebody's knee," she prattled, "and doesn't even know who or where."

"I suppose introductions are in order," Bart obliged brightly. "Dr. Yahontis, you've got yourself a genuine Powers girl. You may have seen her face on last month's *Vanity* and those pegs have graced many a fashion page. Gladys Worth, meet Dr. Yahontis, famous brain specialist."

"Oh, my! A brain specialist!" Gladys played it strong. "I'd be a total loss to you, doctor."

Angela's voice cut in pleadingly, "Please! Let me take the major home. Then we can go with you if you like."

"Nonsense," the doctor declared. "We're almost there, child. I'll see that your brother is amply provided for. You needn't fret."

There was a soothing reassurance in his

voice. It possessed a strange, hypnotic quality that pervaded the crowded space.

Angela settled back and a sigh escaped her lips.

They turned into the diveway of a stone house half hidden by dense shrubbery and a row of towering trees.

Bart peered out of the car window at the dark mass of a tall Gothic structure with narrow arched windows and the shadowy outline of crooked spires reaching skyward.

As he looked, a faint yellowish light appeared in one of the bottom windows.

A wave of foreboding swept over him.

The cold, gloomy edifice, with the shrubs hunched over like crawling animals in the beating rain and the wind moaning through the tops of the trees, drove away all thought of gaiety.

The doctor seemed to sense the mood.

"Like a retreat in the moors, isn't it?" he observed, as the car came to a stop before the door. "I must have quiet in my work, but it's more cheerful inside."

"I wonder," Gladys said. She had forgotten her baby voice.

The major was fast asleep. Bart and Duncan propped him up between them and hastened for the cover of the portico with the others bringing up close behind them.

The door creaked open. Behind it stood the stiffly erect man who had been twisting Selma's arm at the Igloo. Surprise showed on his features, but they soon resumed their bitter stolidity.

Bart was stunned. He thought they had left this fellow far behind them. He didn't like it.

But here they were, wet and uncomfortable, and without further ado they hurried through the doorway. They stood in a richly paneled mahogany hall from which a long, unbroken flight of stairs led upward in steep ascent.

"Mr. Ulrich, my assistant," the doctor said. He turned to him with an unctuous smile. "We are a gay company tonight despite the weather and circumstances. We must not let circumstances intervene, Ulrich."

"Everything is prepared," Ulrich said, "just as you wished."

He led the way through a wide arch into a high-ceilinged room with stained-glass windows while Bart was pondering how Ulrich had reached the place before them. They hadn't lost much time influencing

Angela to come so they must have used a circuitous route.

For what reason? So that Ulrich could prepare for what?

The light was beginning to bother the major. He tossed his head from side to side and muttered incoherently.

Dr. Yahontis and his assistant exchanged hasty glances.

"He'd better get to bed right away," the doctor said. "Undue strain now, on top of mental and physical fatigue, would be serious. If you please, gentlemen, Mr. Ulrich will show you the way."

Angela reached out a protesting hand, then let it fall futilely to her side.

Ulrich turned with ill-concealed eagerness and Bart and Duncan, with the major between them, followed him up the stairs.

At the top there was a square, dimly lighted room with a bed in the center. There were no windows, but a sliding door opened into a smaller chamber which glistened white.

They placed the major on the bed. As Bart was loosening his clothes, he noticed with a start that there were leather thongs attached to the head and foot of the bed. He wondered what kind of treatments the doctor gave.

"We'll leave him here for a little while," Ulrich said. "I'm sure he'll be all right."

They started down the stairs. Duncan came close to Bart and whispered, "Quite a place he's got up there. Did you see the other room? Regular surgery."

The whole thing rubbed Bart the wrong way. First the unexpected presence of Ulrich. Then the elaborate setup, and the recollection of the way the doctor's niece was mistreated.

He reached out and tapped Ulrich. "How's the hand?" he asked.

The assistant glared at him. "Some patients require forceful handling," he said. "You were crude to interfere."

"You mean she's under your care?"

"Yes, I do."

"But what is it? What's the matter with her?"

"You'll have to ask the doctor."

There was nothing wrong with Selma when he'd known her. She was a studious kid and she took her work seriously. Still, she managed a quiet, elfin humor that had definitely made him take to her. He decided to get a word with her at the first opportunity. There was more than one thing she

could explain when Ulrich was out of the way.

They came down the stairs.

There was the small group already set in comfortable positions, Dr. Yahontis was putting a record into an elaborately carved cabinet, handling the disc with care.

"One of my favorites," he said, with the air of one bestowing a gift. "An early Paderewski recording."

As they stepped softly into the room, Ulrich in a funereal voice, "The doctor is a great musician. One of his many accomplishments."

Angela sat beside the machine. Her hands were folded across her lap and she stared into space, calm resignation on her classic features. Duncan went and stood beside her, plainly uneasy because he could not get a chance to talk to her. Selma sat on a sofa rubbing her eyes, while Gladys stood beside a massive grand piano picking at a candy dish.

Bart joined her. "Think you can cover Ulrich for me? I want to get a few words with that little girl."

"She's cute," Gladys said. "But I'm scared, Bart. I don't like this joint. I wish Jerry were here."

"You and me both. I've got to talk to her."

"All right, pal. I'll do my best."

She licked a sticky glazed fruit from her finger and turned toward Ulrich with the kind of smile she usually saved for the camera.

"Classical music is not my line, Mr. Ulrich," she simpered, attaching herself to his elbow. "Isn't there anything in that juke box one could dance to?"

Bart didn't find out what answer Ulrich had for that one, but calling the machine from which deep, resonant harmonies were vibrating, a juke box was equivalent to calling the congressional library a magazine stand.

He sat at Selma's side and took her hand. It was cold and clammy.

"Talk fast," he whispered. "Ulrich says you're a patient."

"What do you think?"

"I think he's lying."

She nodded. "You're in trouble, Bart. Keep your eye on me and I'll try to give you a— Careful! Here he comes now."

Gladys was waging a losing battle, trying to steer him away. "Oh, let the young people be. You interest me, Mr. Ulrich, in a way you'd hardly imagine—"

"No use." He detached himself from her and turned upon Bart. "You have been asking questions?"

"I intend to," Bart said.

"Perhaps you'll tell me what's on your mind."

"Let me tell you what's on mine," Gladys interrupted, giving up the game. "I miss a certain individual named Jerry Maiden. I don't like the music and I have no taste for this party. Since we can't get along here, do you have any objection to my calling a cab?"

"The doctor has no telephone," Ulrich said. "One of his many idiosyncracies."

"You couldn't get a cab on a night like this, anyway," Bart put in. "Maybe the doctor will let us use his car."

"I'm sure he will," Ulrich said. "As soon as the major is rested."

"And when will that be?" Gladys insisted more loudly. "I want to make it soon, and he seems to be in a stupor."

"No wonder!" Bart shot the works. "A handful of barbiturates would put anybody in a stupor."

Ulrich eyed him narrowly. "I did not know he took barbiturates."

"Neither did he," Bart challenged. "But Angela knew."

Duncan came across the room. "Knew what?" he asked sharply. "I've a right to know. I can't figure what's come over her. She acts as if she doesn't even see me."

The room suddenly became very small.

Bart strode deliberately to Angela's side. Her eyes appeared to be gazing inward. The smile on her face was fixed, as in a person asleep.

He bent down over her. "Why did you give your brother those capsules?" he asked.

She trembled. Her head came up slowly, as if she were coming out of a trance, and her whole body quivered. "The capsules? Yes. The doctor said he needed to relax. I thought I would take him right home—"

Her eyes, staring wide now, focused on Ulrich. Harsh realization burst upon her features. She rushed out of her chair and made a sudden lunge for him.

"He fooled me!" she screamed, clawing at him violently. "He fooled me again!" She burst into sobs. "I didn't know they planned to bring him here."

Bart tried to restrain her. "Why didn't the doctor broach the subject to the major himself?"

"My brother is stubborn. I knew he

wouldn't listen. I thought it was for his own good."

The music had stopped. Duncan's voice, cold with rage, stamped itself into the stillness.

"She's been taking treatments from this doc for some time," he said, "and ever since she started she hasn't been the same. That's what broke off our engagement, if you want to know, but I'll be damned if I let it go at that. Where is that doctor? I'm getting to the bottom of this, and the sooner the better."

"Not so fast," Ulrich said.

The doctor was gone.

"Where is he?" Duncan demanded. "Speak up!"

Ulrich smiled calmly, but said nothing.

"I'll tell you!" Selma's voice rang out. "He's upstairs, trying to get some information from the major. To get it out of him by drugs. Now I've told you. They'll probably kill me for it."

"Why, you little fool!" Ulrich hissed. "As if they don't know your mind is gone. Now you'll have to come with me."

He started toward her, but Bart got in the way. "No, she'll stay here."

"Come on," Duncan said. "We'll see for ourselves."

Ulrich retreated to the doorway. "I wouldn't advise anything so rash," he told them grimly. "The stairs happen to be guarded, as you can see."

The man who had acted as chauffeur appeared in the hall with an ugly black gun in his hand.

Bart looked him over, from the bloated, pig-eyed face to the stocky limbs, and decided he didn't want any part of him. As he stood there menacingly with legs outspread, in high leather boots and dark whipcord uniform, he looked like a Nazi storm trooper.

The war came very close.

"All right, Franz, take over," Ulrich ordered. He turned his back on them and started for the stairs.

"Oh, yeah?" Duncan took a flying leap and dropped Ulrich on his face. He dragged him back and pulled him up as a shield.

"You stay with us, dear friend."

"Franz!" Ulrich commanded. "Come get me!"

Franz raised his gun. "Let him go or I shoot."

Duncan laughed. "Try anything and I'll break his neck. Like this." He showed her the proper hold to do it.

The doorbell rang. Nobody moved.

"My gosh, hurry!" Gladys cried. "Maybe that's for me." Her voice was high-pitched and quavery.

Another short ring.

"Go answer the bell, Franz, you dope," Duncan said.

The chauffeur stood his ground in stolid silence. Duncan tightened his grip on Ulrich.

This time the ring was more insistent.

"Better answer it," Ulrich gasped.

Franz backed toward the door.

In a moment they heard Jerry's voice. He sounded annoyed. "What d'ye mean, no one's here? I'll take a look around."

Bart yelled, "Look out, Jerry! He's got a gun."

There was the sound of a scuffle. Gladys screamed. Then the lights went out and a heavy thud came from the hall.

In the darkness, someone got hold of Bart's hand. "Come, quick!" It was Selma.

She led him back to a far corner of the room. He bumped into the sofa and she guided him around it into what he figured was a small alcove that had been hidden from view. A pale shaft of light showed as she unlocked a door and they entered a hall with a narrow flight of stairs leading upward.

He followed close behind her in a space so cramped that his shoulders scraped the walls. Halfway up, she stopped and turned toward him. There was some light seeping through from above and he could see her face. She had been crying.

"I didn't know about my uncle," she whispered, "until it was too late. After his last trip abroad, I was certain. The major has a new gas expansion formula for rocket planes. They're trying desperately to find out what it is. The Axis powers are frantic—they'll pay any price."

He put his lips close to her ear. "Why the capsules?"

"Just a start. Angela had no idea what it was all about. He's had her so stupefied with drugs, she'd do anything. Now that the major is here, the technique consists of alternating consciousness and sleep. On the border line, the patient talks freely, without inhibition."

"Rationally enough to reveal a formula?"

"Maybe. They don't need much. One or two processes."

"You can get me to them?"

She nodded. "If you want to risk it."

He pressed her hand and they went to the top of the stairs. They squeezed through a narrow corridor that seemed to be the hidden space between the true wall and a partition. Bart realized why there were no windows in the room where they had placed the major. It was like a pocket, a cul-de-sac.

The corridor led to the dim whiteness which Bart recognized as the surgery. He pointed toward the operating table. Selma shuddered.

"If necessary," she whispered. "On the brain, to release the nerve. He has experimented."

At the sliding door, which was closed now, she stopped. It was very quiet. Bart could hear her hurried breathing. Her hand was on the knob. She looked up at him with a question in her eyes.

They were large and black, the same as he had known them at college. Shining black, but frightened.

She smiled, a tight little smile. "Careful, Bart."

He put his hand over hers on the knob and pushed the door wide open.

The room was bathed in a purplish light. The major was still in bed, but now the thongs were attached to his ankles and wrists. His face was covered with perspiration and the sheets were badly mussed, as if he had been struggling.

Dr. Yahontis sat over him, listening intently. A hypodermic syringe was in his hand.

Bart could see the needle, gleaming purple and silver. He could hear the major talking—snatches of sentences, hoarse mumbled throatings, badly articulated words, then two or three that were startlingly clear, and back again to the mutterings.

Yahontis was leaning forward. He had hold of the major's wrist, ready to inject again, when he saw them.

Bart darted forward and knocked the syringe out of his hand before he could rise.

He heard Selma slapping the major's face. "He's just going under," she said crisply. "This'll help."

The doctor let out a sharp sound like a rattler. He bent down for the syringe and Bart stepped on it. The glass splintered.

"You are killing your friend," Yahontis declared.

"Don't believe him," Selma cried. "I'll get some cold towels."

Bart turned his head just long enough to watch her hurry into a small washroom at

the side. A blast rocked his eardrums and he felt a burning sensation in his shoulder.

He put his hand to it quickly and his stomach did a queer nip-up as he felt the warm, sticky blood through his coat.

A blunt, business like automatic was pointed at him.

"Fool!" the doctor spat at him. "How dare you interfere?" The enormous, telescopic eyes grew terrifying as Yahontis closed upon him.

Bart felt faint. He wanted to swing, but the pain in his side was too great. He moved back as Yahontis advanced toward him, but he was unable to break away from the doctor's glance.

"Do you think I would let you stop me? Now, when I have everything ready?" Yahontis thrust the gun at him. "Get in there!"

He backed him into the washroom and slammed the door. The lock clicked shut.

"Oh, Bart! I knew he'd do it. I told you!" Selma tore open his coat and he saw her face and lips drain of color. She took a wet towel from the washbasin and forced it inside his shirt over the wound. It was cold and good.

He put his head back and closed his eyes while she kept changing the towels which she had gotten ready for the major.

They seemed to check the bleeding and it was surprising how much better he felt. He opened his eyes and looked around.

They were crowded into a small room just large enough for a washbasin and a high metal closet opposite it. The closet door was open and he saw that it contained more towels and a few shelves of medical supplies.

There was a tiny window about shoulder-high. Bart pushed it open with his good hand and the rain beat in on his face. He could see nothing but blackness.

"We've got to get out, kid," he said. "But how?"

He tried to pull himself up, but he could not make it. In his condition he knew it was impossible to squirm through that narrow opening.

"Let me try it," Selma suggested.

He went down so that she could climb on his back. The room began to reel. He closed his eyes tight for a moment and tried to shake off the dizziness.

When he got up, Selma was perched on the sill. "There's a pipe running alongside," she told him, "but some distance over. If I can reach it I think I'll be able to get down."

"Wait!" He grabbed the rest of the towels from the closet and knotted one to the other. Then he tied them around her waist. There were a few feet of length left.

"I'll hold this until you reach the pipe."

She raised her knees and her skirt slid into her lap. She wasn't too scared to blush.

"Turn your head."

Her lithe limbs swung out of the window.

"Oh, Bart!" There was a quaver in her voice. "It's high, and I've never done this before."

He held tightly to the towel as she disappeared from view. Her shoes scraped against the stone wall. He knew that she was reaching, grasping for the pipe.

"I've got it. All right now."

The length of towel passed from his hands. He got his chest out of the window and the blood began dripping on the sill. He looked down along the wall and the height sent a shiver through him. It was a sheer, precipitous drop.

Over to the side, he could see Selma dangling from the pipe. She was hugging the wall and making slow progress downward.

The thought came to him that Dr. Yahontis might have to replace his broken syringe. He went over to the closet to see if it contained any new ones. There were three of them.

He went back to the window and dropped them out. He thought he heard a faint cry. He looked for Selma and could not see her.

"Selma," he called.

There was no answer.

He pulled himself over the sill again and looked down. In the darkness below, a patch of white was spread out motionless, like a water lily floating on a black pool.

Fear gripped him. He yelled again and again. The patch did not move.

He blamed himself bitterly for letting her go. There was nothing he could do for her. He could not get out of that window. And now the possibility of help from her was gone.

He went back to the door and pressed his ear against it. He could not hear a thing. He noticed that the cold water was still running in the basin. As he bent over to dash some across his face, he caught the sound of the lock turning.

If that were Yahontis, it was the finish. Unless . . . unless the doctor needed another syringe and had to get to that closet—

Bart pressed himself against the wall behind the open closet door. The rain, splash-

ing through the little window, washed the sill and sent smeary driplets of blood streaking down the wall. He held his breath and hoped the open window would throw Yahontis off his guard, if only for a moment.

The door opened.

Through the crack where closet door hinged to the wall, he saw the doctor, gun in hand. He sensed his surprise and chagrin, felt the movement of the bulging, luminous eyes, the deliberation.

The split-second interval of waiting seemed unending. Perspiration burned away the cold water on his face. Then, at last, he saw the dark cloth of the doctor's sleeve reaching into the closet. He banged the metal door with all the strength that was left in him.

It pushed Yahontis off balance. He fired point-blank, but his position was cramped. *Zing!* The bullet struck the corner of the closet door.

The metal clanged like a pair of cymbals. Weird vibrations bounced crazily from wall to wall.

Bart fell in close and got his arms around the doctor's huge back. They struggled into the other room.

Yahontis turned angrily and scraped him against the wall. Bart held on. He knew that if he let go, the gun would finish him. Again Yahontis banged him against the wall, jarring him with all his weight.

The pain in Bart's shoulder became unbearable. He gritted his teeth and mustered his waning strength.

Yahontis humped his shoulders and charged with the fury of a bull. They went across the floor in sudden rushes. Every stop was a back-breaking jolt as Yahontis turned him against the wall.

They struggled in the unearthly purplish light. Bart felt the doctor slipping from his grasp. He took a fresh hold and tried to pull him down, but Yahontis was too heavy.

Another dizzying rush started. Bart swung his weight suddenly toward the center of the room and got the doctor up against the bed.

He kicked sharply and the doctor's knees buckled. He went down alongside the bed. At last, Bart could grab with both hands for the arm that held the gun. He began twisting it.

The major eyed them weakly. He seemed to know what it was all about and he began a feeble struggle against his bonds. They were made to defy maniac strength.

Yahontis fought like a cornered animal. His nostrils flared wide. His grimacing lips pulled back the long unkempt mustache so that yellow teeth showed, ready to snap.

His strength was superhuman. A look of contempt came into his features as he began turning his wrist, moving the gun back toward Bart.

The short muzzle moved like a second hand, closer, closer. Bart felt weakness overtaking him. His face and forehead burned. His grip was becoming ineffective.

The muzzle swung another fraction of an inch. The major was watching as the gun came in line with the doctor's eyes, with his skull. Bart could not stop it. Another couple of inches and it would be pointed at him.

Bart saw the major clench his helpless fists. His outstretched body arched suddenly upward and banged the doctor's elbow. Yahontis was unprepared for that kind of blow. The muzzle struck his temple hard. The gun went off.

It was almost in Bart's face. The report was like a bomb bursting in his ears. Flesh and bone seemed to disintegrate before his eyes.

The doctor's body collapsed under him. It seemed to Bart that the major smiled and closed his eyes. But it did not occur to him to loosen the major's bonds. His only thought was to get out.

He staggered up weakly out of a welter of blood and went toward the stairs.

Ulrich came bounding up in response to the shot. Bart was too lightheaded and dizzy to know fully what he was doing, but he rushed him just as he reached the top of the stairs.

They both went down together, headlong, with Bart on top. It was a bone-crushing fall. At the bottom of the steps, in the glaring brightness of the hall, Bart was still able to drive a fist into Ulrich's face. The head twisted all the way around and hung limply.

It made Bart feel sick. He clambered over the still figure and staggered down the hall. The carpet was shoved to one side and there were signs of a struggle.

He found Jerry heaped in the corner like a sack of meal. As he bent over him, Jerry opened his eyes.

"Hy'a, kid?" Jerry tried to grin, but his face was too badly mauled.

Bart started to get him to his feet. He had almost succeeded when Jerry yelled, "Look out!"

Bart moved aside and a blow grazed his head. He turned and saw Franz, the chauffeur, swinging a blackjack. The return blow caught him on the side of the face and knocked him against the wall. He saw Jerry get up, none too spryly, and go for Franz.

"You again!" the chauffeur said, as if he were a little bit weary of working on him.

"Yep, me." Jerry got through and landed one on the chauffeur's chin. But it was not enough. Franz came in with that jack and started hammering again. He had a fairly easy time with both of them because they were pretty far gone.

To Bart, the up and down strokes of the blackjack seemed to become confused with a hammering at the door. The banging kept up and then the door flew open.

He saw a uniformed figure charging in and things began to happen. Franz was grabbed and twisted around. An uppercut lifted the chauffeur off his feet.

Then Bart realized whose fist had done it. Orlando! He saw the soldier brace the figure up and knock it clean across the hall before he knew that Muskeeta was also in the doorway, looking in shocked amazement at the bloody turmoil.

"Thanks!" Jerry said, leaning against the wall and feeling a swollen lip.

"Don't thank me." Orlando grinned, rubbing his fist. "You saved my father's life tonight. This was the least I could do."

"I have no idea what it's all about," Jerry confessed. "I got the doctor's address from the Hendrickses and Muskeeta drove me out. I told them to wait in the car till I got you. And right off, I got banged in the head—"

"We heard the shots, so we broke in."

"But what was going on here?" Jerry was still in the dark. "Where's Gladys?"

"I don't know," Bart said. "Where's Duncan and Angela?"

They heard a muffled shouting coming from the next room. The sounds made it easy to locate a locked door.

They opened it and Gladys popped out like a jack-in-the-box. She flung her arms around Jerry. "Oh, darling! I shouldn't have put the lights out. I thought it would help you."

Jerry felt a lump on his head. "You sure helped me! You all right, doll?"

"All right? Why didn't you make me stay away from that horrid night club? This would never have happened. Why didn't you explain—"

"How do you like that? The way I pleaded—"

Duncan had his arm about Angela. She came forward, trembling. "My brother?" she asked. "How is he? Where—"

"He'll be all right, I think. He's up stairs," Bart said. "We'll have to untie him."

"But the doctor?"

"He's dead."

"What?" Jerry exclaimed. "Dr. Yahontis dead? Boy, what a story! Famous brain specialist— I better call the paper right away."

"Better not," Bart said. "The government might want it first. You've got a little spy ring here."

Angela laughed, a harsh, hysterical laugh, but there was relief in it, the lifting of a terrific burden from her heart.

"I'll be happy now, if my brother is safe."

She started up the stairs. Duncan went after her. "We'll be all right," he called. "You'll see."

As he went around Ulrich's body on the steps, Bart told him, "That was a swell tackle you made, Dunc. Gave us our first break."

"Say!" Jerry demanded "Tell me what happened here."

"It started in the Igloo," Bart said, "when the major—"

"Hey, you're bleeding, Bart! You're shot, man. How did—"

Bart felt his shoulder, and suddenly remembered. "Not now. I've got to find Selma."

He ran out the door into the darkness and the rain. Around to the side of the house where a patch of white was on the ground. It was moving now, ever so little.

He bent beside her and took her head in his lap. "Selma!"

Her eyes were open. "Bart, my foot—"

He raised her a little and moved the twisted ankle from under her.

"Ouch! I fell, didn't I? The rain—it made the pipe so slippery."

"Come," he said, "we'll get you to a doctor."

"My uncle—"

"Dead. His own gun."

She sobbed. "I would have killed him. Don't let Ulrich get away. He sends the messages. And Franz."

"They won't get away," Bart said.

She was able to stand on one foot. Her dress was torn and she was shivering. He took off his blood-stained coat and put it around her.

She was so appealing and helpless, and yet so strong. He felt the urge to kiss her, but there would be time for that later.

He propped her up against his good side and waited as he saw Jerry coming to get them.

THE CAT AND THE GARDENIA

This thing of fur and eyes and selfishness,

This cat, was hers. And she belonged to him,
The cat, who knew her shoes, her hat, her dress.

She pampered paws, or claws, and every whim
He chose to show; and he all unaware,

In his cat way—until the man brought her
That flower, its scent so heavy in the air,

Wax-white. She loved it so. No smallest pur
Was in him as with jealous rage he saw

Her put that flower into *his* favorite dish,
His very own. And then he put his paw

Against the flower and drank—and made a wish.

His tongue lapped up the water, then he sighed—
And crouched to watch the flower while it died.

GLADYS BARRETT.

DEATH LIES WAITING

By ROLAND PHILLIPS

Detective McGuire worked on the theory that once a woman figures in the life of a criminal, she figures in his death, too.

I.

THE drizzle of the early evening had turned into a steady, cold rain now. Under the scattered lights, the deserted walks and streets were puddled with gold. Water ran ankle-deep in the gutters. Detective McGuire, wrapped in a disreputable slicker that flapped about his long legs, hat pulled well down over his bleak face, splashed along toward the warehouse garage. He had forgotten to put on his rubbers. His feet were wet and he knew his wife would fuss. A man his age ought to take better care of himself. Sort of foolish to be heading this way at this time of night and in such weather, but he had promised to meet Eddie Harper, ride part way home with the patrolman after he had pulled his last call box.

McGuire had been doing this on and off for some time now, whenever he was out late and in the neighborhood, joining Harper at the garage for a mug of hot coffee which old Nick Foster, the watchman, always had brewing around midnight. These meetings would soon be ended, for Eddie Harper was to lay aside his blues for khaki within a week. McGuire was going to miss the young man, but he knew Eddie was eager to tackle his new job and would, undoubtedly, do himself proud. Already, an older brother was with the marines overseas, and every time he had a letter from him, it was read and reread at the midnight sessions. McGuire got as much of a kick out of the scribbled reports as Eddie himself.

The two big covered trucks that roared out from a dark side street and skidded perilously into the avenue sloshed a sea of dirty water against McGuire's legs. He bellowed and jumped aside, almost lost his footing on the slippery pavement. Army trucks they were, he decided, watching the twin red tail lights wing out in the murk. Plenty of them in the area now, rolling day and night toward the long piers where gray ships were always loading. The husky lads

at the wheels certainly knew how to handle the brutes, but they were sometimes indifferent to traffic regulations.

The detective pushed on. The wind was freshening, and when he turned the last corner, the rain whipped into his face and drove the breath from him. Because his head was lowered against the wet blast, McGuire did not notice that the big double doors of the garage were standing open until he was within a dozen feet of them. The unexpected-sight brought him up short. The heavy doors were always closed and locked at this hour. The only entrance to the premises was a small door at one side that led into a cubbyhole of an office where the watchman stayed. The door had a foot-square glassed opening cut into the top panel through which prospective visitors were scrutinized before being admitted.

Now that door was closed as usual, but the garage doors were wide open to the driving rain, which was unusual. Moreover, the garage was empty. Suddenly remembering the trucks that had rumbled past him a few minutes before, McGuire began to swear and put himself into motion. He slipped a hand under his raincoat and curled his fingers around the butt of his service revolver as he pounded into the garage. A single light burned overhead, and he saw that the door leading into the watchman's office was ajar.

"Hey, Nick!" he shouted. "You in there?"

The watchman lay face down on the floor, a sack over his head, his arms roped behind him, his legs bound. He began squirming and mumbling through the cloth. McGuire stripped off the sack, slashed the cords and helped the man to his feet.

"Thought that was you yellin', Mac," Foster began. "Wasn't stirrin' none till I was sure. Them dirty apes—"

"Got away with two trucks, did they?" McGuire broke in, reaching for the phone on the desk. "How long ago?"

"They ain't been gone more'n five minutes," the watchman declared, and glanced at the clock. "It was twelve exactly when I opened the door."

McGuire dropped the instrument when he saw the snipped wires.

"Another phone just inside the door at the top of them stairs," Foster told him. He fished a bunch of keys from his pocket, selected one and thrust it at the detective. McGuire bounded up the short flight of stairs, unlocked the door and groped for the light switch beside it. A moment later, he was talking to the sergeant at the neighborhood precinct station.

When he came down into the garage again, Foster was rubbing his head and swearing at the top of his voice, "The dirty apes! They fooled me plenty. I should have been more careful. But seein' the time, I figured it must be Eddie at the door."

McGuire suddenly stiffened. "Where is he? Where's Harper?"

"Ain't showed up yet. I thought it would be him at the door, the way he always knocked. Three taps and then two with his stick. You know."

"That's the way the mugs got inside, was it? Using Eddie's signal?"

Foster nodded. "That's how it was. I had the coffee boilin'. I opened the door without lookin' or turnin' on the outside light. First thing I knew, I got a clout across the head and a bag over my face. Didn't see who it was. Wasn't hurt much, but I didn't put up no scrap. Just lay quiet where they dumped me, thinkin' you or Eddie would be along and grab the bunch."

Apprehension touched McGuire now. If the culprits had used Harper's signal to get inside the garage, they must have checked up on his regular movements. The watchman saw the look on the detective's face and scowled.

"Say, you don't think maybe—" he began.

McGuire turned and stumbled out into the rain. Presently, he began to shout, but realized that was foolish, and splashed along the dim street beside the warehouse. It was too dark to see much, but he knew the location of the nearest call box and headed toward it. The thieves must have been smart enough to let Harper make his last report, so that no prowler car would be warned and show up to investigate. The job had been carefully planned ahead of time.

The box was a block beyond at the corner of a small park. There was a hooded light

on the post, and even before he reached it, McGuire saw the figure sprawled below in the gutter.

"Eddie! Eddie!" he called, and knelt down in the running water to touch the white, upturned face.

He picked the young man up in his arms and started back toward the garage. Before he had crossed the street, a car swept up and skidded to a stop beside him. He was dimly aware of the two officers in slickers who piled out, flashed a light in his face, and spoke his name.

"Who you got there, Mac?"

"It's Eddie Harper," McGuire explained. "I . . . I'm afraid he's bad hurt. Get him to the hospital right quick, will you? I'll go along. We better hurry."

The men relieved him of the burden, and one of them turned the light on the patrolman's face, held it there a moment.

"No use hurrying, now," he said.

The garage was filled with men, bright with lights. McGuire, still dazed and unbelieving, sat on a bench in Foster's office. He had let the tears come and wasn't ashamed. It was Inspector Ramsey who came in presently and sat down beside him.

"A lousy, rotten break, Mac," he acknowledged. "God knows we can't afford to lose men like Harper these days."

McGuire knotted his fists. "It wouldn't have been so bad if he'd gone down fighting," he choked. "He might have died for a cause worth while and been proud of it. But to go out like this with a slug in him from some cheap punk, and just for a cargo of liquor."

"Sure, I know," Ramsey agreed. "But we'll round up the bunch. There were three of them, Foster tells me. And their leader was addressed as Skeet."

"Skeet?" McGuire repeated sharply. "Skeet Spofford? Sure of that, Nick?"

"That I am," the watchman assured him. "The Skeet part, I mean. I kept my ears wide open every minute. They done a lot of gabbin', thinkin' I was out cold."

"This would be his dish, all right," McGuire declared bitterly.

"You got him last time, Mac. He went up for three years and was sprung only last month."

"I'll root him out again. I should have killed him that time when I had a chance."

Ramsey nodded. "You'll get another chance. This is the third job of its kind in the last thirty days. That's just as long as Skeet's been out, too. He's lined up a new

racket, grabbing off liquor shipments, likely supplying black markets. Big money and quick. We haven't been able to get a lead on the outfit until tonight. Now maybe we can go to town. Remember who Skeet used to play around with?"

McGuire's mind swung back. "There was Baldy Egan and a louse by the name of Terry. And a girl friend—"

"Egan's doing time," the inspector broke in. "Terry's still around, I hear, but girl friends were a dime a dozen with Skeet."

"One girl in particular," the detective said. "A hooper, with a voice and looks. She changed her name after Skeet went up, appeared in a Broadway show and made a hit. I can't remember how she was billed."

"It'll come to you. Better get along home and turn in," Ramsey advised. "You're soaking wet. We can't do anything until morning, and by that time your mind will be sparking."

McGuire protested, but finally gave in, and a prowler car dropped him off uptown.

He remained awake a long time after crawling into bed. It was still cold and drizzling the next morning, but the detective was up early and was among the first to appear at headquarters. There he learned that one of the stolen trucks had been found wrecked several miles north of the warehouse, its driver a casualty. The dead man was Terry, one of Skeet Spofford's former companions.

"Too bad he had to croak," Ramsey grumbled. "We might have sweated something out of him. He was packing an automatic, but it hadn't been discharged. The boys from ballistics report that a small gun, a .25, fired the slug into Eddie Harper. That's a thought to keep in mind. Not many crooks tote a rod of that caliber."

The newspapers hadn't devoted much space to the night's affair. After all, the theft of a whiskey shipment and the murder of an obscure patrolman were items of a minor importance in a world at war. Spofford's name had failed to appear in print, an omission that Inspector Ramsey thought advisable.

Leo Craig breezed into the office presently, and greeted the occupants. A former private investigator for an indemnity company, Craig had relinquished that arduous post to become part owner of a bar and grill in the theatrical district. A tall, husky blond man, always well-groomed and affable, he had made his establishment

popular as well as profitable. Ramsey didn't exactly refer to him as a stool, but McGuire was aware that the man passed along valuable bits of information when occasion required. Whether the inspector had anything on Craig the detective did not know, and cared less.

Craig nodded to McGuire, who was reading the sports section of the morning paper, and turned to Ramsey. "You wanted to see me?"

The inspector said he did and mentioned Spofford's name. Craig shook his head. The name didn't ring a bell with him.

"Ralph Spofford's his full moniker, but he was always known as Skeet," Ramsey added. "Hasn't been in town this time for more than a month. Used to pal around with Terry. Maybe still does."

"Yeah? Well, I saw Terry a couple nights ago. Had a tall, good-looking chap with him. A stranger to me."

The inspector thumbed over a batch of prints on his desk and tossed one across to his visitor. "This the man?"

"That's the bird," Craig declared, scanning the photograph. "Looks more like a movie hero than a punk. The next time Terry blows in I'll—"

"He won't," Ramsey broke in. "Terry seems to have been with an accident early this morning. A fatal one."

"That so?" Craig cocked an eye at the inspector and grinned. "An accident, eh? Well, that's too bad. I had him on the cuff for ten bucks which he promised to pay today."

"Something must have happened," Ramsey commented wryly. "What I want is Spofford's address. See what you can do, will you?"

"I'll try to dig it up," Craig promised. "And in case he should drop around to my place, what?"

"Keep him there and give me a ring. And you can get rough about it if he doesn't want to linger."

"I used to be pretty good at that," the other remarked. "Well, you'll be hearing from me." He waved a hand and departed.

When Craig had gone, McGuire tossed aside his newspaper and reached for the telephone directory. "Jordan!" he exclaimed. "That's the dame. Vera Jordan."

Ramsey stared at him. "What you mumbling about?"

"It just came to me. That girl of Skeet's." "You sure? Vera Jordan's big time, Mac. She was featured in that big revue."

"She's come up fast," McGuire said. "Here's her address. It might be Skeet's, too," he added grimly, and picked up his hat. "That would be a break, wouldn't it?"

"Hold on!" Ramsey cried. "You can't start any rough stuff with that number. It's liable to get us in trouble."

"Get us out of it, you mean. I've a hunch she can put a finger on Skeet. He was nuts about that hooper, and she was on fire, too."

"If the flame still burns she isn't going to hand out any information," the inspector turned. "We've got to watch our step, Mac. I think it would be better if you asked her to come around and see me today, and be nice about it, understand?"

"Sure," McGuire said. "I'll be flawless in my approach. I'll be the very pink of politeness, however painful it may be."

The street itself wasn't one of the best in the Riverview section, but the apartment house was new and ornate, with a preponderance of tile and chromium. The detective passed through the hushed lobby, ignoring the girl at the switchboard who eyed him sharply, murmured Miss Jordan's name to the brown-skinned elevator attendant who let him off on the fourth floor.

McGuire jabbed the button under the engraved card beside one of the doors, and almost at once the door swung open to reveal a startled young woman in a flowing house-coat. He recognized her at once. She was far better-looking than when he last had seen her—shining black hair parted in the middle and combed flat against her head, big gray-blue eyes with long curling lashes.

"The name's McGuire," he announced, and smiled. "Detective McGuire."

"Yes?" she returned faintly, and moved back a few steps.

McGuire walked into the room, closing the door behind him. "Sorry to intrude at this unseemly hour, Miss Jordan," he said, "but Inspector Ramsey would appreciate it if you would call on him sometime this morning."

"I don't believe I know a Mr. Ramsey."

"I'll wait until you get dressed. Ramsey is an inspector, detective bureau. It's about a friend of yours. A one-time friend at any rate. Ralph Spofford. Better known as Skeet. Remember him?"

The woman continued to retreat across the room, her frightened eyes upon her visitor. McGuire wondered why she kept

one hand concealed behind her back. He didn't imagine she would have a gun.

"I . . . I remember him," she admitted. "It was a long time ago."

"Three years," McGuire said mildly. "Maybe you remember me. You were with Skeet that night at the Como Club when I picked him up, after knocking him down. You put on quite a battle yourself, called me a lot of hard names. Seems like I had to slap you a couple of times. It was a big night."

Vera Jordan had backed away now until she was standing against the table at the front window. She hadn't removed her hand from behind her back. The table held a tall vase of roses, some books and a potted flowering plant.

"I haven't seen the man since that night," she stated quietly. "I never expected to. I didn't know he was a . . . a criminal. I heard afterward that he had been sentenced to a long term in jail."

"It wasn't long enough. He's out now and back in town."

"And you want him again?"

McGuire nodded. "We like to keep in touch with the fraternity. It's an old police custom."

The woman straightened. She used both hands now to smooth back her hair. She seemed more composed. "I don't know why you should come to me for information. You can go back and tell your inspector—"

"I'm sure he'd rather you told him yourself," McGuire put in patiently. "Those were my orders."

"This is an outrage!" she broke out. "Do you think because this man's back in town that I'd be seeing him? What do you take me for? I'm not being dragged down to police headquarters now or any other time, Mr. Detective, and you can tell your big shot just that."

McGuire swore under his breath and tried to keep his temper in check.

"I'll tell Ramsey how you feel about the matter," he said, surprised that he could speak so calmly. "Maybe I'll be able to persuade him to come up here. The only thing against that is—well, he'd have to be cagy about the visit and shake off the flock of newspaper boys."

"What have they to do with it," she demanded.

"They've been hanging around headquarters all morning, smelling a story, I guess. You know how they are. That's why

the inspector asked me to see you. If you'll let me use your phone—"

"Never mind." The woman's tone and manner changed abruptly, and she started across the room. "I just remembered I've a rehearsal at noon. I can stop off on my way. I'll get into some clothes. It won't take long."

"I don't mind waiting," McGuire told her, and sat down in a chair near the hall door.

When the door closed behind the woman, he grinned. He had called her bluff, scared her. She might not have objected so much to Ramsey calling, but it was evident she didn't want reporters nosing around, possibly trailing her. Sometimes they were worse than detectives.

He got up and surveyed the comfortable room and its furnishings. There were a number of framed photographs on the wall and piano, but none of them aroused his interest. He eyed the door through which the woman had vanished and wondered if she were alone on the premises, considered inventing some excuse to prowl the rooms beyond, but decided against the idea. If he should stumble upon Skeet Spofford, well and good. If he did not, there might be the devil to pay.

Suddenly recalling Vera's singular behavior when he first confronted her, and her actions afterward, he stepped over to the table. Between the books and the potted plant lay a pair of opera glasses. He stared at them and frowned. Apparently, these were what the woman had held behind her all the time and finally managed to drop here. But there didn't seem to be much sense in doing that, he reflected, and scanned the table closely to see if it held anything more significant, but he saw nothing except the half dozen books.

A queer piece of business, McGuire reasoned, hiding the glasses and doing it clumsily at that. What had the woman been afraid of? He glanced out the window that overlooked the roofs of the houses and small shops across the street. The view certainly wasn't inspiring, particularly on a day like this. The tallest of the buildings was almost directly opposite—a three story brownstone front with its conventional iron railing, areaway and high stoop.

He picked up the glasses, leveled and adjusted them to his eyes. The lenses were powerful. The few pedestrians on the walks and the passing cars fairly jumped up at him. When he shifted the glasses higher, he

could look into the rooms opposite where the shades were not drawn, see almost as clearly as if he had his nose pressed against the windows.

Perhaps Vera got a kick out of spying on her neighbors, he thought. Some women were like that. Maybe that was what she had been doing when he knocked.

McGuire held the glasses on one of the windows for some time and finally let out a grunt. He was still intent upon what he saw when a sound reached him from somewhere in the apartment. He dropped the glasses back on the table and moved away quickly from the window. Vera Jordan, dressed for the street, found him sitting in the same chair when she swept into the room.

"I'm having my car brought around," she announced.

McGuire got up and put on his wet hat. "It'll save waiting for a taxi," he said.

They descended to the lobby with no more words between them, and stood under the sidewalk awning until a sleek, gray town car drew up at the curb. The driver, a short, unsmiling man with a flat nose and wide through the shoulders, jumped out and helped the woman into the rear seat. He wore a cap and belted raincoat. McGuire eyed him speculatively, surprised that so smart a car did not rate a liveried chauffeur.

The man held open the tonneau door and glanced inquiringly at the detective who remained on the sidewalk.

"Aren't you coming with me?" Vera asked.

McGuire shook his head. "You know the address, don't you? Ramsey will be expecting you. I just remembered I've got an appointment.

The woman frowned and shrugged. The driver shut the door and got into the front seat. McGuire turned and walked away briskly. He did not look up when the car rolled past him, and it was not until it had swung around the corner that he cut across the street and headed toward the brownstone front.

A faded sign on the stoop read "Furnished Rooms." About to ring the bell, the detective noticed that the front door was slightly ajar, pushed into the dimly lighted entry and mounted the stairs.

Except for a radio playing somewhere below, the house was quiet. He met no one in his ascent. Reaching the top floor, he moved along the hall to the door of the middle front room. There he listened a

moment, his hand on the knob. Hearing no sound, he turned the knob and stepped into the room.

The overhead lights were burning, although the shades were not drawn, and they shone down upon the pallid, upturned face of the man lying full length on the floor. His eyes were wide open, glassy, his coat unbuttoned, the front of his shirt soggy red. He had been dead for some time.

After a quick glance about the room, McGuire went out into the hall again, careful to close the door behind him, dropped a coin into the pay phone at the head of the stairs and waited to get through to the inspector's desk.

"Hello, Ramsey," he greeted softly. "Vera Jordan show up yet?"

"Haven't seen her. I thought you—"

"Stall off the quiz program until later," McGuire broke in. "And if you should see her, don't give out you've talked with me."

"What's the idea? Where are you?"

"I don't know the number, but it's the brownstone front opposite the Jordan apartment on Riverview. Get up here in a hurry."

"Why'd I do that?" the inspector demanded.

"Because I've found a very dead man in the third-floor front who happens to be Skeet Spofford," McGuire replied, and hung up.

II.

GRINNING a little at the shock he had handed his chief, McGuire went back to the room. This time he leisurely explored the shallow closet, the contents of a suitcase, and opened some of the dresser drawers. Later, he knelt and went through the dead man's coat pockets. They gave up a pack of cigarettes, matches, some keys and a little silver, and the stub of a reserved seat ticket for a prize fight. He examined the latter speculatively before returning all the articles.

When Ramsey's car drove up below, McGuire met the inspector in the hall and led him into the room.

"It's Skeet, all right!" Ramsey exclaimed jubilantly. "No mistaking that handsome mug. How in thunder did you find him?"

McGuire explained in detail what had taken place in the Jordan apartment and afterward. The inspector stared at him incredulously.

"Well, I'm damned! Suppose she could have been holding the glasses on Skeet when you walked in on her?"

"Don't know what else there was to see," the detective replied. "I wouldn't have thought much about it if she hadn't tried so hard to conceal the things."

"Think she suspects you might have found and used them?"

McGuire doubted it. "I waited until the car got out of sight before coming over here," he added.

"Vera rolled up just as I left the office," the inspector said. "I made my apologies, told her I'd try to see her later on today. She seemed agreeable enough. Where'd that flat-nosed chauffeur appear from?"

"He brought around the car, that's all I know. I wasn't introduced."

Ramsay contemplated the dead man. "How've you doped out this afterpiece?"

"From where I'm standing," McGuire observed, "it would look as if Skeet and his partner, who might have been on the truck we haven't found yet, drifted back here last night and got into an argument. They could have collected for the job and the partner wasn't satisfied with his split, so he pots his chief and departs with the bank roll."

"Sounds O.K. to me," Ramsey approved. "You stumble across any lead yet that—"

"We've been discussing her, haven't we?"

"Meaning Vera Jordan knows who's responsible? Could be, but how're we going to prove it? If the woman sticks to her story we'll have to swallow it. We can't put on the pressure simply because she knew Skeet three years ago and you caught her juggling a pair of opera glasses. No, she's out, Mac. Safest thing to do is let it ride for the present.

"After all," Ramsey went on, "this little episode isn't anything to get excited about. One two-bit lug smokes his playmate. So what? Nobody cares. Hell, the thing won't rate a dozen lines in any paper. It's murder, of course, and we'll try to find the killer, but we can't drag Vera into the affair. I'll phone Carson and his homicide squad to take over. Maybe they'll dig up something that isn't too hot to handle. If they don't—"

A knock brought both men alert. McGuire being nearest the door, opened it slightly. The tall, angular woman with dangling jet earrings who stood in the hall, addressed him sharply:

"I'm Mrs. Huss, the landlady. I want to speak with Mr. Spofford. He's in, isn't he? I've come about the rent."

"If you're in charge here," Ramsey spoke up and gave McGuire the nod, "you better

come inside. Your roomer seems to have met with an accident. We're from the police."

The woman glanced into the room and fell back with a cry. Ramsey took her arm, led her to a chair. "Sit down, please. I'll have to ask some questions."

Mrs. Huss controlled herself with an effort, her eyes upon the dead man. "Mr. Spofford killed himself?" she gasped.

"What can you tell us about him?" Ramsey parried.

The landlady knew very little. Spofford had engaged the room a month before, remained in it much of the time during the day. No, she hadn't heard any disturbance on this floor, and evidently none of the other tenants had, since they failed to mention it.

"He owed a week's rent and promised to have the money for me this morning," she declared. "He told me that when he went out last night."

"Do you know what time he returned?" McGuire asked. "Was he alone?"

Mrs. Huss shook her head. "I don't know. He always stayed out late. I don't know what his business was either, but he didn't seem to have much money. I tried to get him to move to a back room, which was cheaper, but he wouldn't. He didn't say why, but I knew the reason. Wanted to keep an eye on that place across the street."

"The apartment house, you mean?" Ramsey asked. "He was interested in it?"

"Interested in a woman living there," the landlady snapped. "He thought I didn't know, but I soon caught on."

"Ever see them together?"

"No, but I've seen her often enough, going in and out. Her name's Vera Jordan. She's an actress of sorts. I've seen her picture in the magazines."

"She's pretty well known," McGuire acknowledged.

"It's dreadful," Mrs. Huss broke out, wringing her hands. "A suicide in my house. I hope it won't be written up in the newspapers. Bad enough to lose a week's rent and have the police romping over the premises. I'll have to have the rug cleaned, too. And all these lights burning this hour of the day!" she added indignantly, and jumped up to switch them off. "Times like this . . ."

"That'll be all for the present," Ramsey interrupted, opening the door. "Thanks for your information. We may have to call on you later. Until then, please don't discuss this matter."

The woman turned and marched stiffly from the room. Ramsey watched until she had descended the stairs before closing the door.

"Well, well," he murmured. "So Skeet apparently takes these quarters just to get an eyeful of Vera Jordan. It must have been love. And Mrs. Huss persists in calling this a suicide. The old girl's due for a relapse when she learns it's a slight case of murder with the victim an excon who pulled off a neat job himself."

"Does it occur to you that all we've got to go on there is what the garage watchman told us?" McGuire ventured.

"You think Nick Foster lied?"

"No, but some things happened last night that—"

"Listen, Mac!" Ramsey broke in. "Use your head. We know Terry was driving one of the stolen trucks. He's been palling around with Skeet. Both men were broke, both owed money which they promised to pay today. Evidently, they expected to grab off some ready cash last night, and it isn't hard to figure what they had in mind. Besides, these whiskey raids, three in a row now, didn't commence until Skeet showed up around here a month ago. All that's something to back up Nick Foster's statements, isn't it?"

The detective admitted as much. "I was just thinking aloud, that's all," he said. "Just wanted to be damned sure we get all the punks who were in on Eddie Harper's murder."

"We got a pair of them," Ramsey came back. "We'll round up the third before long."

McGuire decided not to argue the matter and walked glumly to the window, looked down into the street. "Vera Jordan must be home again," he observed. "That's her car out in front."

"Forget it!" Ramsey snapped. "That dame may be wise to a few things, but we're not sticking our necks out. Not right now. We're not tossing charges her way until we've got something to back them up."

The inspector buttoned his coat, started toward the door and turned. "You stay here until Carson takes over," he said. "Then report back to the office, straight back. If I catch you talking to Vera again, I'll plaster you with a three-month suspension. Understand that?"

"Just as you say," McGuire responded.

He heard Ramsey at the phone in the

hall, heard him tramp downstairs, saw him cross the walk below, climb into his car and drive off. With a resigned sigh, the detective turned from the window. He supposed he should have mentioned finding that bit of pasteboard in Skeet's pocket, but Carson would eventually do that. Perhaps the inspector would make something of it and not be so cocksure of himself, so quick to jump to conclusions.

Looking down at the dead man, McGuire suddenly recollected that the murder victim wasn't armed. There was no gun in his coat, and he wore no shoulder holster. Might be something on his hip, though, he reflected, and knelt beside the body to investigate. No luck rewarded him. He was getting to his feet again when a glint of something under Spofford's arm caught his attention.

He thrust a finger into the crevice and, with a grunt of surprise, extracted a ring—a wide, plain gold band. He stepped to the window where the light was better and inspected his find critically. Pondering over the discovery, McGuire finally concluded that the wearer of the ring must have placed his hands under Spofford's arms and, for some reason, dragged him into the middle of the room before leaving the premises. The ring must have been loose on the man's finger, had slipped off when he removed his hand. There seemed to be no other way to account for its presence in that singular spot.

Undoubtedly, the wearer was Spofford's murderer, or had been a participant in the killing. But the evidence the man had left behind wasn't much to crow about just now. There was nothing distinctive about the ring, no engraving inside the gold band. McGuire realized that he hadn't a single suspect in mind, and it would be several days before the police could round up a few likely prospects. Carson's men would probably turn in a batch of fingerprints, and some of them might provide a lead. But all this would take time, and McGuire chafed at delay, the slow, cut-and-dried routine. He saw no excuse for it at all, except Ramsey's con-founded stubbornness.

McGuire felt pretty certain that Vera Jordan could identify the ring and name its owner, but there wasn't a remote chance of that coming to pass now since the inspector had warned him to steer clear of the woman. Even with this new bit of evidence, it was doubtful if the overcautious Ramsey would relent.

The detective swore to himself. His hands

were tied. Given the opportunity, he might find a way to wring some information from the woman without getting himself or the department in hot water. All he wanted was a chance, and that had been denied him. The idea of treating Vera like a sacred cow was absurd and for a moment he was tempted to disregard Ramsey's orders, confront the woman. The inspector wouldn't learn of it, and with any kind of luck—

He scowled down at the car parked across the street and instinctively raised his eyes to the fourth floor. Vera Jordan and probably the man who had driven the car were somewhere back of those windows, and not too far back, he wagered. They must be interested in what was taking place in this room. As that thought registered, McGuire's scowl gradually vanished, and he brightened as a plan began to shape itself in his mind.

Smiling now, he inspected the ring again, turning it over slowly in his fingers. Then, tucking the ring into a vest pocket, and with a final glance about the room, he closed the door on Spofford, walked briskly downstairs and stepped out upon the stoop where a frayed awning offered some protection against the rain. If Mrs. Huss had seen or heard him, she gave no sign of it since she did not make an appearance.

Lieutenant Carson and his squad arrived presently. The detective told them where to find the evidence they were looking for, but without the particulars leading to its discovery.

"So it's our old chum Skeet Spofford, eh?" Carson said, after his men had disappeared into the house. "A lovely surprise for a wet day. How in thunder did you stumble onto him in these remote diggings?"

"Well, I wouldn't want it to leak out." McGuire confided, "but I'm just naturally psychic. I happened to stroll past here and—"

"Yeah?" The lieutenant chortled. "Got a crystal ball stowed under your belt, have you? I always figured it was your stomach that made the bulge— Hold on!" he exclaimed, as the detective turned up his coat collar and started down the steps. "Aren't you sticking around?"

"Not with your bunch of ghouls. You tell Ramsey when you see him that I might be a little late reporting back to the office as he requested." From the tail of his eye, McGuire saw a figure appear in the street

doorway of the apartment house, thought he recognized the thick-shouldered man in the belted raincoat who had played chauffeur to Vera Jordan that morning.

"And if I don't get in touch with him by dark," the detective added, "the inspector better hold that postponed quiz session with a certain female party in this area who might know the reason."

"That's very clear indeed," Carson grunted. "I'll relay the message. I suppose the chief can dope it out."

"It shouldn't be hard to do," McGuire returned, and started away.

He plodded along the walk for some distance, not looking back, before crossing the street. When he reached the opposite sidewalk and glanced guardedly over his shoulder, it was just it time to see someone dart out of the apartment house and climb into the parked car. The activity did not surprise him, nor was he surprised when, a moment later, the gray car rolled alongside him at the curb and the flat-nosed driver leaned from the window.

"Going downtown?" he called out. "Hop in. I'll give you a lift."

"Much obliged," McGuire said, and promptly squeezed himself into the front seat beside the unsmiling driver.

"Seen you before, ain't I?" the man remarked, as the car moved swiftly away. "You was with Miss Jordan this mornin'. From the police, she was tellin' me. You a detective, huh?"

McGuire admitted he was, and covertly eyed his husky companion. The man certainly didn't look the part of a hired chauffeur, and the detective wondered just how he rated among Vera's associates.

"You been around here all the time since we left, huh?" the driver asked. "Seein' about business, eh? Have any luck?"

"Considerable," McGuire admitted.

The man turned his head slightly. "Must be somethin' stirrin' in the neighborhood," he ventured. "I thought I seen a bunch of coppers pilin' into that brownstone front just now."

"They get around." McGuire glanced speculatively at the man's gloved hands on the steering wheel. It was possible that the ring he had found might have circled one of the driver's fingers.

The car swerved presently from the avenue and turned into the park. "Not so much traffic here," the driver explained. "We can make better time."

Although the rain-blurred windows were

difficult to see through, McGuire realized they were following one of the more secluded, winding roads.

"I'm in no hurry," he said. "You can drop me off somewhere near police headquarters if you're headed in that direction."

"Goin' right past the place," the other declared. "Get that pack of smokes out of the side door pocket, will you?" he added.

McGuire leaned over to unbutton the flap and the gloved fist caught him on the jaw, slammed his head against the door. The blow was hurried and poorly timed and the detective did not immediately lose consciousness. He kept his eyes closed, his body limp. He heard the brakes applied, and almost before the car stopped, he felt the man pressing close to him, probing his pockets, cursing as he did so. It was not until the car had started up again that he slipped contentedly into oblivion.

III.

McGUIRE opened his eyes and blinked up at the dim ceiling. He was flat on his back and not uncomfortable, except that his jaw thumped a little and one arm, cramped under him, felt numb. Moving a hand across his chest, he was abruptly aware that he was in shirt sleeves, that his coat and vest and shoulder holster was missing. His shoes were off, too. It was almost like being at home, stretched out on the sofa and waiting to be called to supper.

When he tilted his head slightly, he could make out the confines of the room where several floor lamps were burning—a spacious, well-furnished room, its walls covered with pictures, the window shades down. A mumbling voice reached him faintly from some quarter beyond. He started to sit up, but changed his mind when the voice lifted angrily, and he lay back, ears alert.

"I told you what happened, didn't I? Stop yellin', will you. I couldn't dump him off in the park. . . . Sure, nobody seen us. I come around back and Tony helped me. . . . Yeah, the car's there. You better get over here."

The voice sank again and McGuire cautiously lifted his head, looked through a doorway into an alcove that adjoined the living room. The flat-nosed man, still in cap and raincoat, was hunched there over the phone, his back toward the detective. Only a few words of the ensuing one-sided

conversation were audible now, but what McGuire had overheard and readily interpreted, brought a smile.

He lay back and closed his eyes when he heard the receiver slam, opened his eyes again as if for the first time when footsteps approached and he felt a prod in the ribs.

"Come out of it, McGuire!" the man snapped. "You been snoozin' long enough. Set up and get your tongue oiled."

The detective blinked, propped himself to an elbow and, as if with an effort, swung his legs off the divan.

"You don't pull your punches, Shorty," he remarked with a grimace.

"Didn't intend to." The man shed his raincoat and pulled up a chair. He had a gun in his hand and McGuire recognized it as his own. "You and me are goin' to have a talk. I want that ring. I seen you put it in your pocket and—"

"Good strong glasses you were using, weren't they?"

The man shrugged. "You ought to know. I drove around the block and seen you duck into the brownstone front."

"Knew what I'd find, didn't you?"

"I want that ring," the other repeated.

"You know I haven't got it," McGuire said, and looked down at his coat and vest on the floor, and at his shoes beside the divan. "You frisked me in the car, and you must have done a more thorough job up here."

"You know where it is."

"Sometimes I mislay things."

"You better start rememberin'."

McGuire calmly raked one of his shoes toward him and slipped it on. "Put up the artillery and skip the threats, Shorty. I don't scare easy. You're not getting too rough until you find your property."

"Maybe I don't have to find it. I could play safe by puttin' you out of the way."

"A little late for that. You've got yourself nicely hooked." McGuire did not look up as he fumbled for his other shoe, stamped his foot into it and tied the laces. "I'm just marking time until the man you phoned to walks in."

The divan under him acted as a springboard. He launched himself swiftly, accurately. The top of his lowered head rammed the man's chin, and at the same time he struck aside the gun, sent it across the room. The man and the chair crashed backward, and when they hit the floor, the detective was uppermost. He scrambled to his feet. The man, tangled in the wreckage of the

chair, groaned and stirred a little, finally lay quiet.

McGuire rubbed the top of his head and grimaced. Commando tactics brought results, but they were somewhat wearing on a man's skull. Still unhurried, he donned his coat and vest, scooped up the service revolver, saw that it was in working order and thrust the heavy weapon into his shoulder holster which he rescued from behind the divan.

That done, he stepped over to where his victim's raincoat lay across a chair, reached into a side pocket and came up with the ring, having prudently transferred it there shortly after getting into the car that afternoon. Even before he bent down and tried the gold band on the man's finger, he realized it was much too small. But the discovery failed to distress him. Better luck later on, he reflected, and put the ring back into his own pocket.

McGuire now gave his attention to the apartment, prowled through the other rooms, returned and lugged his victim into an adjoining bedroom. Working swiftly, making use of the sheets, he trussed the man securely, and after dumping him upon the bed, proceeded to rummage the desk and dresser, seeking some clew that might identify the occupant of the premises.

In the top dresser drawer he came upon a small, stub-nosed revolver, fully loaded and apparently new, with an ornate, imitation tortoiseshell butt. He looked over the weapon speculatively, but did not remove it.

Out in the living room again, ears cocked toward the door, he continued his explorations. Among the framed photographs on the walls, he suddenly spied one of Vera Jordan. It was larger than the others. Across the lower half, and above the signature, was written, "To Tommy with all my love." The detective saw that all the photographs bore inscriptions of similar nature. Obviously, Tommy, who must be the owner of the apartment, was popular with the ladies, and Vera Jordan seemed to stand high among them.

When further search brought no more definite information, McGuire moved to a front window and raised the blind, curious to learn just where he had been made prisoner. It was already dusk outside and still raining, and what he could see told him little. Opening the window and leaning out, he judged he was five or six floors above the street, but what street it was McGuire was unable to determine.

There was not much traffic. Some dis-

tance beyond, and on the opposite side of the street, he saw the projecting marquee of a theater. After a prolonged scrutiny of the diamond sign, he finally spelled out what appeared to be the title of the picture showing there. Repeating it, the detective grinned. The three words were rather ominous and perhaps appropriate, considering the present situation.

McGuire closed the window and turned back into the room, no wiser than he had been before. The sight of the wrecked chair and the garments of his victim lying nearby, reminded him he should put the room in order. But as he started to remove the evidence, the ringing of a bell halted him. Deciding that it announced a visitor, and was not the telephone, he eased the gun from under his arm, stepped to the door, opened it.

Vera Jordan stood in the outer hall, stood transfixed, wordless, staring at him. For an instant neither moved nor spoke. Then the woman turned as if to run away, and the detective caught her arm, drew her into the room and closed the door.

"It's all right," he assured her, and put his gun out of sight. "Needn't be alarmed. I was expecting somebody else. Evidently you were, too."

The woman shrank against the wall, her face stricken. "What . . . what are you doing here?" she faltered.

"Just hanging around," he said. "Waiting for Tommy. He ought to be along any minute now. You know him, don't you? I didn't get his last name. Perhaps you'll tell me."

Vera Jordan did not answer, did not seem to have heard. Her frightened eyes darted past him to the damaged chair, swept on to the cap and raincoat that lay on the floor.

"Your chauffeur and I—" McGuire began, and sprang forward to catch the woman as she went down.

He carried his burden to the divan. A poor time for a thing like this to happen, he grumbled. His experience with fainting females was limited. Just let them alone, he decided, and trust they wouldn't go into hysterics upon awakening.

What had brought Vera Jordan here puzzled him. No doubt she had witnessed the pickup this afternoon, knew where the car would be headed afterward, but why she wanted to appear on the scene had McGuire mystified. That she had realized what must have taken place in the apartment, was obvious, and the detective promptly carted the broken chair and the garments into the

bedroom, regretting that he hadn't done so before. The man on the bed, wrapped like a mummy, still slumbered.

Returning to the living room, McGuire suddenly recalled the instructions he had given Carson. By this time the lieutenant must have finished his routine job at the brownstone front, reported back to headquarters and delivered the message. Ramsey would suspect what had happened, would be worried.

That thought carried McGuire to the phone. He dialed the number, waited expectantly, and after the connection had been made, heard the inspector's impatient bark.

"McGuire reporting," he announced, and braced himself for the anticipated eruption. The explosion fairly deafened him.

"Hold everything!" he protested, when the roar momentarily subsided. "Don't blow a fuse, chief. The situation's well in hand. . . . Sure, I'm all right. . . . Yeah, that's what happened. Carson saw the pickup, eh? Well, I asked for it. If you'll pipe down, I'll try to explain. I'm liable to be interrupted any minute, so I'll make the talk short and snappy."

McGuire told of his discovery in Spofford's room, of the ruse that had brought about his ride and the events that followed. He was on the point of mentioning Vera Jordan's unexpected arrival, but checked himself. The inspector would probably collapse if he knew the woman was on the scene.

"So now," the detective concluded, "I'm standing by waiting for Tommy Something-or-other to make his entrance. Is everything clear?"

Although somewhat pacified, Ramsey did not get enthused over the setup. "I figured out what had happened after talking with Carson, but I didn't know why, and I wasn't messing with Vera Jordan unless it was necessary."

"Something tells me that's on the program," McGuire said. "The way things look from here—"

"I don't see where this Tommy person fits in," Ramsey grumbled. "We've got Terry and Spofford. If the bird you've nabbed turns out to be the third member of the trio, that's all there were, according to Nick Foster."

"Well, whoever is missing seemed to be mighty upset because I was parked on his premises," McGuire replied. "Besides, the ring I found doesn't fit my present victim's fingers. So I'll have to try my luck elsewhere."

"Like the prince and Cinderella," he added. "Only it doesn't happen to be a slipper."

"Where'd you say you were?"

"I didn't say. Can't see much from my window. It's a nice layout on the fifth or sixth floor. There's a flicker house on the opposite side of the street that's featuring 'Death Lies Waiting.' You could check on where it's showing and—"

"Your phone's got a number, hasn't it?" the inspector cut in. "Or can't you read?"

"Yeah, that's right. I'd forgot," McGuire said. "But listen," he pleaded, "don't gum up things. Keep your eager beavers in the background until you hear from me. I'll handle the situation. The phone's Belgrade 2666. Got it?"

The inspector did not respond, but McGuire abruptly hung up and turned when a sound reached his ears. Vera Jordan was on her feet now, clinging to the edge of the table, watching him intently.

"You passed out on me in a hurry," he remarked, walking toward her. "But now that you're awake, and before we're interrupted, we ought to compare notes. You're in a tough spot, lady. It's too late to stall. You see that, don't you?"

"I'm listening," she said quietly.

"You knew where Skeet Spofford was this morning, didn't you? You saw him lying on the floor in that room across the street, just as I did later. You were scared, tried to keep me from seeing the glasses you'd been using. Right?"

"I saw him," the woman confessed.

"Knew he was dead?"

"No no! Not that. I didn't know what to think. I was frightened and—"

"Why were you holding the glasses on him?" McGuire demanded.

"I wanted to see if he was in his room before I phoned."

"Oh, you've been doing that, have you? Giving his place the once-over? Phoning him? Seeing him, too? You're still in love with him then?"

"You should have guessed that much," she replied. "He was going straight this time. He promised."

"Sure, they all say that. So his three years in the jug didn't extinguish the old flame, eh?" McGuire shook his head. "I should have guessed it. You didn't know he and a couple playmates were suspected of pulling off a robbery and murder last night. But you got jittery when you heard the police were looking for him. Maybe you had a

hunch he hadn't kept that promise. Just the same you intended to protect him. All right. You tried to. Then, suddenly, you decided to take my advice and see Ragasey. You phoned for your car. Who's the driver?"

"Fred Keenan, a friend of Skeet's. It was his car. I told him what had happened, what I'd seen and about you being at the apartment."

"That brought him around in a hurry, didn't it? I suppose he didn't tell you anything, even when he saw me heading for Skeet's house later."

"He seemed angry, but he wouldn't tell me why or answer my questions. I . . . I didn't know Skeet was . . . was dead until we came back."

McGuire eyed her skeptically. "No? What did you think after you'd returned, watched me from the window and saw what I'd found?"

"Keenan used the glasses. I didn't know what you'd found and wasn't told. All I know is that he suddenly became excited and hurried downstairs. I saw him get into the car and drive off."

"And it meant nothing to you when you saw him pick me up?"

She met his gaze steadily. "I didn't see that."

"I'd like to believe it. You must have known something, knew where to find Keenan, or you wouldn't have shown up at this place."

"I came to see Mr. Barnes. Mr. Tommy Barnes, my manager. This is his apartment."

"Barnes? The theatrical producer?" McGuire exclaimed. "Why would Keenan bring me here?"

"I don't know," she said. "I didn't know why you met me at the door with a gun. But when I saw the cap and raincoat on the floor, recognized them—"

"You realized you'd stepped into trouble," McGuire broke in. "I don't wonder you blacked out. Keenan talked with somebody over the phone," he went on. "I judged it must have been the owner of this apartment. Maybe I'm wrong. It's hard to believe that Barnes would—"

He broke off. The woman didn't seem to be listening. She was staring past him. He spun around to see Leo Craig standing in the doorway that led into the rear of the apartment, his hands thrust into the pockets of his topcoat.

McGuire gaped at the newcomer, too confounded to speak or act. It wasn't until the man stepped into the room that the detec-

tive's mind began functioning and he reached toward his shoulder.

"Don't do that!" Craig warned sharply. The hand that came from his pocket held a gun. "No fireworks! Just relax!"

McGuire slowly let his arm drop, cursing at his stupidity. Craig's eyes shifted to the woman.

"What are you doing here, Vera?" he asked. "Is this a pinch?"

"Not yet it isn't," McGuire spoke up.

"The old bloodhound," Craig murmured, surveying him. "I had an idea I'd find you on the premises. I let myself in the back way, intending to surprise you."

"You did," McGuire admitted. "I was expecting somebody else. Apparently, you weren't just sure how you'd find things here. You couldn't depend much on Keenan."

"Perhaps he's learned a lesson," Craig said. "I unrolled him, packed him off. He made himself a lot of trouble, jumping at conclusions."

"He seems to have put the finger on you, Leo. The inspector's going to feel hurt the way his pet stool has turned rat."

Craig shrugged. "Ramsey won't hear of it." He turned to Vera Jordan. "Get his gun. It's under his left arm. Don't be afraid."

The woman hesitated a moment, then came up to the detective, tugged the revolver from its holster and stepped back. Craig took the weapon from her hand, dropped it into his pocket.

"You haven't told me why you're here." he reminded her.

"I came to see Tommy Barnes."

"Oh, that's it. And ran into McGuire instead." Craig seemed relieved. "I forgot to tell you, Barnes went out to Hollywood for a month and I've taken over his place. Sorry. You better run along now."

"I'm not going yet," she returned calmly.

"I want to keep you out of trouble, Vera. Go home and stay there. If Ramsay shows up and asks questions—"

"I've told McGuire all I know," the woman broke in. "I'll tell Ramsey the same. Why shouldn't I?"

McGuire looked on, surprised and not a little pleased. Vera Jordan wasn't frightened now. She was angry and defiant, and Craig seemed disturbed.

"Don't let McGuire upset you," he protested, his face darkening. "What he thinks he knows won't be repeated. He and I are having a talk presently and reaching an understanding."

"Might as well start now," the detective

spoke up. "Miss Jordan ought to be interested. I'm beginning to think she's been kept pretty much in the dark about Spoford. We found him this morning, you know. Murdered."

Craig's face remained expressionless.

"Keenan makes a dumb play by taking me for a ride through the park and bringing me here, after seeing me pocket the ring I'd found under Skeet's arm," McGuire continued. "I discovered it wasn't his property. He wanted to do you a good turn by recovering the evidence, because I've a hunch the ring fits one of your fingers, Leo."

"Got it all doped out, have you?" Craig charged placidly.

"Just about. You and Keenan walked in on Skeet and one of you knocked him off. It wasn't originally planned that way. You intended to pin a job on him he didn't do and later, when you were afraid he might have an alibi and queer the setup, you killed him just to be on the safe side."

Craig remained as indifferent as before, idly juggling the gun in his hand. Vera Jordan was staring at him, wide-eyed, incredulous. McGuire smiled. He had let himself talk, not only to enlighten the woman, but to give Ramsey time enough to check on the phone number and reach the scene. A lucky break, the detective reflected, that he had talked with the inspector before Craig's surprising appearance.

McGuire had no doubt but that his captor proposed to take desperate measures, shut his mouth permanently. There was no other way out for the man now. But he was far too smart to go that far here, wasn't leaving any evidence behind him, any trail for the police to pick up. He would be forced to escort his intended victim off the premises, and that couldn't be done once Ramsey's men were posted at every exit.

Almost as if he had read what was passing through the detective's mind, Craig spoke.

"You can wipe that grin off your face, McGuire," he said quietly. "Ramsey isn't going to show up. The line you talked to him over is an extension. I was listening in on the phone in the bedroom. When you started to spill the number I hung up, which cut short your conversation."

McGuire suddenly recalled that the inspector hadn't responded to his last query, remembered now that, hearing a sound in the room, he had hung up and turned to find Vera Jordan awake and watching him. The situation wasn't so cheerful, but he

did not become panicky, did not betray alarm.

"We won't be interrupted," Craig went on, smiling. "You run along, Vera," he said. "I'll get in touch with you later, tomorrow."

Vera Jordan's reaction was swift, impulsive and wholly unanticipated. The bulky handbag launched from her fingers caught Craig across the mouth, rocked him back on his heels. As it struck, McGuire sprang. His attack carried the man off his feet, slammed him against the wall. The gun in his hand sailed from his upflung hand. McGuire's knee rammed him hard in the stomach and the man went down, the detective sprawling beside him.

Cursing, Craig rolled over. His foot lashed out and the heel of his shoe ground into McGuire's cheek. Stunned for an instant, the detective groped blindly for the gun on the floor, found it. Rearing to his knees he heard the woman's shrill, warning cry, saw that Craig was on his feet again and tugging to free a gun from his pocket. McGuire abruptly remembered that it was his own revolver.

He fired twice. The gun in his fist jumped against his palm and the explosions sounded loud in the closed room. Craig lurched and slipped sidewise, staggered toward the rear hall, doubled over as he reached it and pitched to the floor. The detective was up then and standing beside the fallen man. Craig was quiet. The two slugs had ripped through his chest and the sight wasn't pleasant.

McGuire put his gun away and walked back into the room. Vera Jordan was huddled against the table. He reached down, picked up the handbag and extended it.

"Quick, wasn't it?" he said. "I'm much obliged.

The woman's voice was a whisper. "I . . . I knew what Leo meant to do. I couldn't let it happen."

"It didn't." McGuire eyed her a moment, fingering his bruised cheek. "I guess I've got the answer to one thing that's puzzled me," he said. "The motive back of this whole affair. I hadn't suspected you and Leo Craig were acquainted. He was in love with you, of course."

"But . . . but I never thought he'd do the terrible thing—" she faltered.

McGuire shook his head. "Leo wouldn't stand for competition, and Skeet made himself an easy fall guy."

Vera Jordan began crying, and he waited patiently until she had quieted.

"You want to be more careful who you pal around with from now on, lady," he advised. "You might not get out of a jam so easy next time." McGuire stepped to the door and opened it. "Get along now. I'll try to do what explaining is necessary."

The sound that reached him seemed to come from the rear of the apartment. He stiffened, wondering if perhaps Keenan had risked coming back. Vera Jordan looked up and started to speak, but McGuire took her arm, thrust her into the outer hall, closed the door and leaned against it, gun in hand.

The faint scuffling of feet reached him now. He moved cautiously across the floor, halted with an exclamation as Ramsey emerged from the bedroom and Carson loomed up behind him.

"Here you are!" the inspector cried, and stopped short, staring down at the dead man on the floor.

"Don't go busting a blood vessel!" McGuire protested. "It's Leo Craig, all right, and I potted him. I'll give you the whole story with sound effects, but it'll take time and I'd like to know first how you found this place."

"By using my head, that's how," Ramsey came back tartly. "When you cut short your chatter I decided somebody must have busted in here. But what you'd mentioned about the picture gave us a lead. We learned where it was showing, and this happened to be the only six-story apartment house across the street. Carson and I prowled around back, discovered the gray car parked there, and when we stumbled over that flat-nosed chauffeur in the areaway—"

"Keenan?" McGuire exclaimed.

"Dead as he ever will be," the inspector said. "From the shape he was in, we concluded he'd fallen from the fire escape while trying to make a getaway. So we climbed up until we found an open window, decided it marked his point of exit and that you would be somewhere inside, crawled through, and here we are."

"Craig turned Keenan loose," McGuire explained. "Maybe he did fall as you say, or maybe he was pitched out the window. I wouldn't put that past Leo. He knew we were looking for the man, and if caught, might be induced to talk."

"Then Craig walked in on you, not the

Tommy person you expected?" Carson asked.

"He let himself in through the service entrance and caught me napping. Seems he was occupying these premises while the owner, Tommy Barnes, was away, and of course had keys to the place. He lifted my gun and blamed near succeeded in using it on me. But before that happened, I'd got hold of his gun and beat him to the fireworks. It was quick and unexpected," the detective added, but he did not go into details on that point.

"It must have been," Ramsey agreed. "Just how—"

"Here's the trinket I found," McGuire hurried on, and tossed the ring to Carson. "Seems to be a mark around the middle finger of Craig's right hand that shows a ring has been worn there a long time."

Carson knelt beside the body. "The thing fits all right," he declared a moment later, and got to his feet. "How the devil did you—"

"And here's his gun," the detective interrupted, passing it to Ramsey. "He lifted it from a dresser drawer in the bedroom. I saw it there after I'd tied up Keenan. It happens to be a .25, too, which ought to remind you of something."

The inspector took the weapon, examined it closely. "Might be the one used on Eddie Harper. We'll soon know." He looked up. "Ballistics just reported that a bullet fired from the same gun was dug out of Skeet. That means one gun did both killings. Be nice if we find this is the rod and that it's sunk a couple slugs into Craig."

"There's a word for it," McGuire said.

Ramsey nodded. "Yeah. Retribution. But look here, Mac!" he grumbled. "I can't hook things together. We know Skeet and Terry were in on last night's job, and more than likely, this bird Keenan. That accounts for the trio which Nick Foster claims took part in the raid. Where's Craig fit in? You want to make it out a foursome?"

"I don't think Spofford was there."

"No? Seems to be you intimated something like that before."

"I started to, but you weren't in a mood to listen, so I laid off," McGuire returned. "Maybe you will now. For instance, didn't it seem queer to you that these mugs should make short shift of Eddie Harper, but handle the watchman with gloves, barely tap him on the jaw and tie him up? And that afterward they'd do so much gabbling? Crooks don't usually toss a name around

on a job where outsiders might get an earful. Not unless they want the name repeated."

"Come to think of it—" the inspector began.

"You find a seat check stub in Skeet's coat pocket?" McGuire asked, turning to Carson. "A green stub torn off a prize-fight ticket?"

"Among other things, yes," the lieutenant admitted. "I didn't pay it any mind. Why?"

"The fight was pulled off last night at the Eastend Arena, a good ten miles from the warehouse. The main bout didn't wind up until midnight, according to the newspaper I read. And you may recall that Eddie Harper was shot down a few minutes before twelve o'clock. Does that mean anything?"

"You want to believe Skeet was framed?" Ramsey demanded.

"I'm pretty sure he was."

"Maybe Skeet didn't stay for the finish," put in Carson. "Or he might have got hold of the stub somehow to flash on us in case we picked him up."

"What's the odds?" Ramsey contended. "Why argue? It doesn't make any difference one way or another now."

"Perhaps not, but it started me thinking we might be following a blind trail," the detective said. "I wasn't particularly worried over Skeet's passing. I just wanted to be damned sure we'd get all the punks concerned in Eddie Harper's murder. That was the important thing. We might have learned something from Vera Jordan," he added, "but you couldn't see it that way, so I had to dope out other means to confirm my suspicions. After I'd found the ring, stood looking at it in the front window and realized that probably certain interested folks across the street would be training the glasses on me, the idea popped into my head."

"You get good ones once in a while," conceded Ramsey. "A bit risky, though. You got a lucky break this time."

"More ways than one," McGuire admitted, grinning. "Of course, the ring itself wouldn't have been much help. We'd have had a job trying to locate the owner. I saw that and had to count on somebody being dumb enough to fall into my trap. Keenan was, and did. He was foolish enough to try to retrieve the ring and convict himself, and blundered still more by carting me here."

Ramsey nodded. "Looks like Craig's been the leader in these whiskey raids. And all

the time I'm banking on him for information. I hope my face isn't too red."

"It's a trifle on the pink side," McGuire asserted.

"The one thing I'm thankful for is that we didn't crack down on Vera Jordan. I was afraid you'd go off half cocked and get us in trouble. Sometimes you don't know when to let well enough alone, Mac."

"You warned me to steer clear of her apartment, and I did," McGuire said. "I usually obey orders."

"I'll pin a medal on you this time." The inspector stared off across the room, frowning a little. "You know," he mused, "it would be interesting to learn just how Vera figured in this affair, wouldn't it? Why she was using glasses on Skeet's room, why Craig framed Skeet, if he did, and why it had to end up with a killing."

"Well," McGuire ventured. "I've got sort of a theory. Vera was still in love with

Skeet and had been seeing him all the time. She might have been taking a squint through the glasses, just before I showed up, intending to phone if he was in his room. Craig was in love with the lady himself, didn't like competition, and decided to eliminate it. It seemed easy enough to pin a job on a man who'd already served time for robbery. He might have succeeded, and without resorting to violence, except afterward he learns Skeet attended the fight last night and could probably establish an alibi. So Craig thinks he'll play safe by blasting him, only he forgets to lift the green stub out of his victim's pocket. That's the way it looks to me."

"Sounds pretty far-fetched," Ramsey grunted, "but we'll let it go at that."

"Yeah," chortled Carson, "the old swami himself speaks! You must have been looking into that crystal ball of yours again."

McGuire nodded and smiled. "The second time today."

DIRGE FOR A DROWNED GIRL

Lais, the lovely one, has gone to join the water flowers;

Wandering at dusk before the star-blue shadows fell,

She swam alone beyond the moon-cold lotus.

(The water lilies tell—)

Lais, the drowned one, drifts in peace through water gardens,

The fluid petals of her fragrance cup the air;

The chalice of her body is the water-lily blossom,

Its leaves her long green hair.

Lais, the lovely, hides beneath the lotus-waters,

Lais, the lily, lies sleeping, dreamless and deep;

Shadowed in the pool where the moon reflects her beauty:

Sleep, water lily, sleep.

Laura Lourene LeGear.

WHAT A DETECTIVE!

By F. E. BLACKWELL

A slip of a girl ties a noose of blue ribbon around a crook's neck.

LOOKING and acting like every other man in general and no man in particular, was Harold Grew's greatest asset in making his living. There was nothing about his person or his clothes that was "different." He was neither short nor tall, slim nor stout. His complexion, hair, eyes and teeth, were just those things and nothing else, all quite lacking individuality. As for his clothes, they, too, were just clothes. The same could be said of his voice and manner.

During a crime, should Grew have been in the neighborhood, he would seem even less than a shadow, for a shadow would have been dimensional, noticeable—not Grew. And the name, Grew, didn't mean or stand for anything. He had picked it out after much thought. Harold, certainly, was mild, innocuous.

Humor, save for a little on the grim side, Grew did not possess. But one hoary joke had always mildly amused him, about standing in front of a bank, "because there was money in it."

That's where Grew stood now, in front of a bank. But it was not money in the bank that interested Grew. It was money withdrawn, for he was no safe-cracker, no payroll snatcher or holdup man, either. A moderate depositor in that bank, his technique was to wait until indications and his own intuition told him that money had been withdrawn, and that it was likely to be retained long enough in a place which would make it possible for Grew to safely get his hands on it.

It was near closing time now, and Nancy Norton, in her smart blue suit and hat, hurried up the avenue on this sunny May afternoon. She was a very pretty girl, slim and active. Her brown eyes sparkled and her haste had given a glow to her cheeks. She was happy and smiling. She had every reason to be. Soon she would be Bill's wife! Bill was to get a two-week leave, and Nancy would start for California from New York early next morning. Now, to all but clean out her account.

Slip made out, forty-seven dollars for deposit laid with it in the right page of his bank book, Grew stood directly behind Nancy in line. No bills and deposit slip in her book, just a check in her hand, drawn to herself for twenty-nine hundred dollars.

It gave Nancy an instant's pang, as the teller pushed the bills to her waiting hand. A lot of work and self-denial had gone into saving all that money. But it was only for a moment that a flash of concern rested on her face, then it was gone, and smiling and radiant again, she put the money into her alligator bag, tucked it under her left arm, and for double security, grasped the strap with her left hand.

Dormant indeed the senses of any person whose eyes were not drawn with delight and whose heart was not warmed at the sight of Nancy. Out of the bank and down the avenue toward Washington Square she hurried. Now for a late lunch, some last packing, then to bathe and rest. Tomorrow—

If Nancy had any fear that someone might try to steal her bag before she got safely back to her room, such apprehension was needless. Grew, floating along, half a block behind her, would let no purse-grabber get that money. He would have been the first to retrieve and return it to Nancy, with contents quite intact. Grew didn't take his game on the wing—he wasn't that kind of sportsman. It was not until the game was "sittin'" with its back turned that Grew aimed and fired. He was a pot-hunter.

The hotel clerk saw Nancy coming. All men saw her coming and going. He took the key, 807, from her mailbox and handed it to her with a smile and an apologetic, "Sorry, Miss Norton, no mail." Then, regretfully, "Sorry, too, that we're going to lose you tomorrow morning."

No one had noticed that Grew had entered the lobby of the hotel, seen the key number, 807, and heard what the clerk had said. Nor was it noted, that having done so, he left the old hotel, for the plumage

and ways of this predatory evil bird of prey blended with everything about him.

Two hours later, Grew was in the rattling elevator of the ancient hostelry. At the feet of the colored bellboy was a neatly packed, not too old, not too new, not too heavy, not too light, suitcase. In the bell-boys' hand, a key, and fastened to it, a buzz-saw brass tag numbered 707. Room 707 was, of course, directly below 807, was also in the rear of the hotel, on the same fire escape, and it looked out on the same blind alley.

Night had come. The last noisy child had left the Square and gone home. Muted noises of the city blended into a purr that rather soothed than disturbed. Nancy had finished packing, bathed, and now, propped up in bed, under the light of the shaded lamp, was listlessly trying to complete a cross-word puzzle in the evening paper. But she was not really interested. Her thoughts were on tomorrow's start, and at the end of the journey, Bill! She put the paper aside, laid her head back on the pillow, closed her eyes, dozed and fell asleep.

No particular noise, but the feeling of an immediate, strange and undesirable presence caused Nancy to open her eyes. What she saw made them grow larger and larger, until it seemed as if they would burst from their sockets. And so rigid had her body become, that she was not able to so much as flex a single muscle.

Standing just inside the window, was a man. A narrow black mask covered the upper part of his face. Through two slits in the mask, eyes looked steadily into Nancy's. There was a small black revolver in the man's right hand. It was pointed across the bed, directly at Nancy's heart.

Softly but clearly from the man's lips, "Not a word out of you."

Gliding around the end of the bed, Grew stood by the little night table at Nancy's right.

"Now, show me where that money is. I mean the twenty-nine hundred. Come, get out of bed and show me."

Mention of the money and everything it meant to her, shocked Nancy out of the paralysis of thought, emotion and muscle that had fastened upon her. And it was not the idea of self-preservation that galvanized her mind and body, but a grim determination to save her money. Fight, courage took possession of her, and her quick wits worked as never before. She would, she must, get the better of this beast. But an instinctive

flick of her eyes at the closet, a few feet to her right, betrayed the money's place of concealment.

"In the closet, eh? Well, come on then, show me just where." Grew moved the revolver into his left hand, and held out his right for Nancy's left, grasping it firmly.

As Nancy started to lay aside the covers, though Grew kept the revolver pointed at her, he turned his head a little to one side. It was not so much a feeling of decency that made him do this—he was just that kind. Besides, he was now on business, money business, serious, dangerous business. He was not at all interested in Nancy's looks, only in her money.

Nancy swung her feet and legs out of the bed, stood up for a minute as she shook down her negligée, then bent over and groped under the bed table for her mules. She seemed to have difficulty in finding them. Grew became impatient, and gave a jerk to her hand. "Come on. And don't touch the phone on that table beside you. Come, show me where that money is, then a nice long sleep for you." Grew patted the bottle of chloroform in his side pocket.

Resisting for a moment more, Nancy then stood up straight, and the long, wide blue sash of her negligée trailing behind her, she followed Grew into the closet.

Then, both inside, her right hand swiftly grasped the side of the door and slammed it shut!

"What's the idea?" Grew pushed Nancy to one side and reached for the knob on the door. There wasn't any! Ironically, Grew muttered, "There's been a law in this town against having closet doors with no knobs on the inside, for years. Too many persons got shut in by mistake and couldn't get out."

Striking a match, Grew, who was not the kind to waste energy and time getting mad, looked the door over. Of heavy wood, and quite innocent of any inside fastenings, completely smooth. The match burned out. Grew struck another. "Where's the money?" He needed no answer, for there, on the shelf at the end of the closet, was the alligator bag. Opening it, Grew pulled out the wad of bills and thrust them into a side pocket.

Darkness in the closet seemed to add to its increasing stuffiness. Grew pushed Nancy down on the floor. Once there, she gave a violent jerk on the blue ribbon sash that had trailed under the door. There came a slight thud from outside. Nancy heard

it. If Grew did, he gave no indication that he'd done so. He was busy getting a small bottle out of his pocket and then pouring some of its contents on a handkerchief. A woman, unconscious, was quite harmless, but if not, she could be a screaming, clawing wild cat. The closet reeked with the fumes of chloroform.

Suddenly, Grew reached down and grabbed Nancy by the back of her neck with his left hand, while, with his right, he pushed the soaking handkerchief over her face. Nancy, whose hands had been, seemingly, fumbling about at Grew's ankles, was forced into breathing the stuff. And, before she could put up any kind of resistance, the chloroform began to take effect. Her body relaxed, and she sank into unconsciousness.

Three raps came on the door of the room that led into the public corridor. Then a pause. Now the knocking came again, this time louder and more insistent. Then it stopped.

There had been something demanding about that last knocking. Would the knocker just go away, or send for a passkey and come in?—Grew wondered.

The answer was not long in coming. Grew heard voices outside the door. Now two persons, at least, were in the room.

"That's why Miss Jenks got a signal and no answer. See, Mr. Sullivan, the table's tumbled over, and the phone's on the floor. Miss Jenks sent me up. I knocked. No answer. So I phoned for you to come up with your passkey, Mr. Sullivan."

Old Sullivan, a retired cop, now the house detective, was tall, stout, gray and florid. "Look in the bathroom, Sam." While the colored bellboy obeyed, Sullivan stepped over to the telephone, put the receiver in place, and was just going to raise the little table that had held it, but which now lay on the floor when he noticed that a broad blue ribbon was fastened to one of the table's legs. Sullivan turned and followed with his eye the direction taken by the ribbon, saw that it ran under the door of the closet.

"Those damn one-knob doors again, Sam. They'll get the boss into trouble some day. Guess they have now. She's in there. Fainted, too, probably. Lucky for her, Sam, that sash of hers caught on the table leg, dumped the table and the phone with it. But the ribbon looks as if it had been tied."

Sullivan's hand was on the knob of the closet door. Behind it, crouched Grew, legs

flexed, mind alert, ready, like a sprinter on his mark, awaiting the signal to go!

It came, the signal, Sullivan's turning the knob. Before he even had time to pull the door toward him, Grew put all his weight and strength into a violent push. The door flew open.

Quite unprepared, taken off balance, the door struck Sullivan and knocked him backward on the bed. Sam, seemingly with two completely white eyes, stood in the bathroom doorway, mouth open, hands hanging at his sides.

The window was a natural for Grew's exit, and he started for it with a leap, the little table, like a thing alive, bounding behind him, till it caught Sullivan's legs. But the leap ended before Grew landed again on his feet, for, with hands outstretched, he fell headlong on the floor, striking his temple against the corner of the bureau as he went down.

Sullivan was fat, and the years had taken their toll, but he was still active. Certainly, he showed himself to be now. For it was only an instant before he was off the bed, sitting on the prostrate, insensible Grew, and yelling for Sam to telephone for the hotel doctor, and then come and lend a hand.

With his handkerchief, Sullivan fastened Grew's wrists behind his back. It was then that he noticed that the other end of the blue ribbon was looped securely about one of Grew's ankles. Slipping the ribbon from the table leg, Sullivan wound the ribbon around Grew's legs.

Still unconscious, Grew was left as he was, while Sullivan and Sam carried Nancy to the bed and tried to revive her. But soon the doctor came and got to work.

"Will she come around, doc?" asked Sullivan anxiously.

The doctor nodded. "Yes, there was a flicker of an eyelid just now. But a little longer, and she'd never have awakened, not in this world." The doctor's tone was grim, but it was evident he was relieved.

"Some wit, some grit, and did she use both!" exclaimed Sullivan. "I'll say, there is a girl!" What a detective she is! Ties the sash to the leg of the phone table. Pulls it over. Miss Jenks gets the signal. And then, before this crook all but kills her, she loops the other end of the ribbon about his ankle. He jumps the gun, then falls on his face. Anchored! What a girl! She's sure got blue-ribbon wits and grit, and she used them, during the crime, not after it."

THE CAT CRIED

By CATEAU DE LEEUW

It was a nondescript black cat belonging to a nondescript little boy, but it was destined to play an important part in the lives of six people.

ALL the way over to Niles Witter's workshop, that sunny October afternoon, I was saddled with a vague feeling of unease. It wasn't a matter of clairvoyance, there was no real foreboding. I'm not that kind of person. But I couldn't help feeling that the whole excursion was a mistake.

To begin with, I didn't like Niles Witter. Or, rather, I didn't quite trust him. His letter to Lansing, for instance:

I wish you'd come over on Saturday and see the new propeller blade I've developed. I think it's something revolutionary. You might be interested in it, and I'd be glad to have you bring along someone to check on it from an engineering standpoint. I've already applied for the patent, and I believe this will turn out to be my most successful experiment. Cordially yours—

Now, just on the face of it, that was a perfectly innocent letter; but not if you had known Niles Witter and Lansing Metcalfe as well and as long as I had. We'd gone to school together—I was a little older than the other two, but we had palled around in our teens—and there had been no appreciable change in our characters since. An intensification with age, of course, and now that we were all on the wrong side of forty, a subtle hardening into the mold.

Niles always had been a little bit wacky, full of cock-eyed ideas that, surprisingly, turned out well frequently; silent, reserved, bearing a grudge against the world. Lanse had been just the opposite—jolly, free with his money, a good fellow—almost a play-boy, but steadied by an unexpected streak of shrewd good sense. And I—well, you can see what I am; slow and cautious, the born lawyer, I guess. Longing always for the ability to let go, but never being able to. An onlooker at life.

There were five of us in the car that day. Besides Lanse and myself, there was Elias Culp, the banker, old with years and responsibility for other people's money;

Springer, an aviation engineer from Hartford; and Tempy Blair. I wished with all my heart that Lanse had not brought her. Didn't he know, I wondered crossly, that she had been Niles' girl until a couple of years ago? Or didn't he care?

Tempy herself seemed to feel no sense of embarrassment, and before we reached the long brick building where Niles made his experiments I began to doubt the gossip I had heard. People said that Niles had been crazy about her, not that he had ever said anything because he needed every cent he made for his work, there wasn't enough left over for the support of a wife and a possible family. Of course, the gossip always continued, if he'd had the sense to hang onto that dust consumer, he'd have been a rich man by this time, and Tempy would have been Mrs. Witter.

But he hadn't. That was one of the reasons for my unease. Two years ago he had sold the patent for his dust consumer to Lanse, and Lanse, with the money to promote it, had made a pile out of its manufacture and sale. A pile that would grow steadily larger when the war was over and he could turn his factory back to the production of an item that housewives clamored for. It was by far the most successful invention that Niles ever had made, and—oddly enough—the only one he had been willing to sell. He had said nothing while Lanse's bank account had swelled on the profits from the dust consumer, while Lanse himself gradually had annexed the time and attention of Tempy Blair. But surely, I thought now, he must be resentful!

When we got to the workshop, I was relieved. We wouldn't stay long, I was certain, and then that would be behind us. Lanse got out and helped Tempy from the car. Culp and Springer stood a moment, staring up at the brick building and murmuring together. "Queer-looking place," the banker said, turning to me. "What was it

before Witter took it over? Or did he build it?"

"I think it used to be the repair-shop for a bus line," I answered. "This was their terminal, something like the car barns we used to have for trolleys. It was pretty well equipped, and Niles picked it up for a song when the line's franchise ran out and they didn't renew it. Of course, he ripped out a lot of stuff, but I imagine it has come in handy to have a place like this if he's experimenting with airplane propellers."

They nodded, and followed the others in. For some reason, I was loath to go, myself. I lingered outside the gate, staring at the big double doors, in which a smaller door had been cut, unwilling to leave the bright October sunshine and the clear, sharp air.

A touch on my sleeve made me start. I looked down at the dirty boy beside me. "What do you want, sonny?"

I saw he had been crying. There were tear streaks in the grime on his thin face, and his eyes pleaded with me. "Are you . . . you going in there?" he asked. He jerked his head toward the interior of the building.

"Yes. What's the matter?"

"I . . . I'm scared of him, mister, or I'd sneak in behind you."

I studied the worried face. "Why do you want to go in?"

"It's my cat, Blackie. Bill stole her from me the other day, and sold her to him!" His head jerked again, and the words began to come in a rush. "Blackie's my cat, and Bill hadn't any right to sell her. I heard her crying last night. I listened, and every time I called her, she'd answer me, so I know she's in there."

"Somebody sold your cat to Mr. Witter?" I asked. His head nodded violently. "But then, why don't you tell Mr. Witter? I'm sure he'd—"

"No!" He looked terrified. "He . . . I'm afraid of him. But I thought if you knew him, if you'd ask him—I'll give him his money back; I'll earn it. Or I'll get him another cat. But this Blackie—"

The distress was real, and I promised quickly. "I'll speak to him. I don't think there'll be any trouble, sonny." I went into the building before he could thank me, but I had to stop a moment, just inside the door, to adjust my vision. Coming from the bright sunlight, and facing the huge square of brilliance at the far end where the large doors in the opposite wall were wide open, I could not make out objects near at hand.

I thought briefly, that the lad should have

stopped Lanse instead of me. I liked cats well enough, but Lanse was crazy about them. He would have charged in and rescued Blackie at a moment's notice, I knew. There were always two or three cats in the Metcalfe ménage, and one of Lanse's hobbies was the finding of homes for friendless kittens.

"Hello, Orville," a voice said beside me, and I felt my hand gripped briefly. "We thought you had been lost in the shuffle. Where were you?" Niles' slow voice greeted me.

"I was detained," I started to answer. "A boy out there wanted me to—"

"We'll have to have this door open, too," Niles was saying, as if I had not spoken at all. I realized he was talking to Springer. "Have to have a through draft, of course."

I remembered the huge signs plastered over the outside of the building. DO NOT ENTER: DANGER—KEEP AWAY FROM THIS DOOR. I recalled that we had had to stop and open a heavy wire gate before we got into the yard. Apparently, Niles really thought he had something, this time.

The others were grouped around me, and I was suddenly aware of a feeling of tension. Tempy stood helplessly beside Lanse, who wore a slightly embarrassed air. Elias Culp was studying an overhead crane, with his scrawny neck tilted back and his old eyes squinted toward the ceiling. I wondered what had been said before I came in.

With the opening of the doors behind me, the workshop was considerably lighter. I saw now that there was a low dais, or platform, in the center of the floor, and on it was mounted an airplane engine with the new propeller attached. It didn't look too different from other propellers to me, but then I had not seen it up close, and besides, I'm only a lawyer. Niles was herding us together near the entrance while he talked. The engine was idling, and the powerful hum made my ears feel full after a while. The propeller, Niles explained, was disengaged at the moment, but as soon as he had finished his explanation, he would connect it and give us a demonstration.

His voice went on and on. Technical terms were strewn all through his discourse, and it was natural that my attention should wander. Springer, of course, was listening with complete attention, and so, to my surprise, was Elias Culp, although I was perfectly sure that he was as uninformed on such matters as I was. Tempy was half turned away, as if unwilling to face her former

sweetheart, and shifted her weight from one slender foot to the other with obvious impatience.

And Lanse, the man for whom the whole thing had been arranged, kept straying from the group to examine the machine tools at the side, to poke into the piles of scrap, or stare at the sheets of shining metal propped against the wall. Always, just as he seemed about to get out of earshot, Niles would call him back. "I want you to hear this, Lanse. This is the crux of the whole thing." Or "Wait a minute, Lanse, don't leave us! I'll give you the theory behind this propeller in words of one syllable, if you'll hold your horses!" Lanse always came back with a grin, but it was apparent he was out of his depth, and several times he protested.

"Gosh, Niles, you knew it just goes in one ear and out the other! What do you think I brought along all these experts for?"

The time he said that, I had seen Niles' eyes go involuntarily toward Tempy as if to ask just what sort of expert she was. Lanse had seen the glance, and had flushed darkly. He was regretting having brought her now, I knew.

But Niles had his way, and we stayed together in a close group listening, willingly or unwillingly, to his long dissertation. I grew very nervous, for some reason. The slow, unhurried voice, the heavy hum of the engine, the eye-piercing light on the concrete yard outside all contrived to give me a headache. I wanted nothing so much as to be away from this place, and the question in my mind grew more and more insistent.

Why had Niles invited us here? Why did he want Lanse to invest in this invention of his? I cast my mind back over the years in which Niles had struggled against constant poverty, the years which had seen one failure after another, with only an occasional meagre success. In all those years Lanse never had helped him financially that I knew of. And that wasn't odd either, because Niles never had wanted to sell any of his inventions. He held onto them as if they represented untold wealth. And yet everybody knew what fiascos most of them were, always just missing success, always putting him a little deeper into debt.

It had surprised all of us when he suddenly had offered his dust consumer for sale. He said he needed the money to complete his experiments with this airplane propeller, and he had accepted Lanse's offer of a small outright sum of money at once. I

was convinced that he never had dreamed it held the seeds of fortune in its casual network of wires; that he had not intended to raise Lanse to the status of a wealthy man; that he had not suspected Tempy would find Lanse, gaiety and money more enticing than himself hard work and poverty.

The voice had stopped, and I looked up in surprise. "I'll give you a demonstration now, if you like," Niles ended. "But I must warn you"—his voice was raised, to follow Lanse who had wandered off, as usual—"I must warn you not to go further forward in the shop than the halfway mark of the platform. Beyond that point it is dangerous when I am running the engine at full speed, and the propeller is connected."

Lanse turned and nodded, to show that he had heard. Tempy went to the side of the shop and found a seat on a bench that looked slightly less dirty than the floor. Springer was standing by with a massively intelligent and thoughtful air. Elias Culp, to my surprise, accompanied Niles to the platform. "D'you mind if I watch? I've always wanted to fly, and I guess this is as near as I'll ever come to it," he said. Niles looked momentarily annoyed, then agreed with astonishing grace. I followed at a leisurely pace.

I saw that Tempy had risen and was coming with me. From that moment on, everything seemed to happen with a nightmare quality in which slow motion and speed were strangely mingled.

Lanse was ahead of us. His strolling figure suddenly lost its casualness and straightened purposefully. His head thrust forward, and his steps quickened. At the same moment, Tempy and I came abreast of the platform.

"What is that noise?" she asked, and I cocked my head to listen. "Is that in the motor?" I thought I heard a high, whining sound, but before I could be sure of it, the engine's hum deepened to a roar that was deafening. The thought came to me at the same moment that Tempy's shriek soared above the noise. Lanse was well past the center of the platform, and going forward at a run.

I started after him—I can say that to my credit—but Tempy held onto my arm, a dead weight. I saw Lanse's figure caught up into the air as if a giant hand had lifted him. His arms and legs shot out ridiculously as he was hurled through the building, out

through the large open doors, out into the pitiless glare of the sunshine.

There was shouting and confusion. Someone shut off the motor—I learned later that it was Elias Culp—and we all ran toward the crumpled heap on the concrete that had been Lansing Metcalfe. I wouldn't let Tempy come near, though she tried to. I can still see her white face and the queer, drawn look which aged her ten years in as many seconds.

"He's dead!" Springer called out. As if we didn't know that! No human being could have survived that gargantuan death cast. "It was the air stream—he shouldn't have gone forward!"

I looked around the yard. This was where they had washed the busses. There wasn't an inch of soft earth or green grass. Nothing but concrete to receive a figure hurtling forward in the remorseless clasp of air. Springer looked up, and we all stood stunned. The silence beat upon my ears as the hum and roar of the motor never had done. And, loud in the sudden silence, came the crying of a cat.

That feeling of inertia only lasted a moment, I suppose. Then Niles was running inside, shouting something about telephoning for an ambulance. Tempy, looking faint, followed him. "Small good it will do to get an ambulance," Culp grumbled. "I'm going to phone for the police!"

We stood about the workshop, a silent, shocked group of people. There seemed to be nothing to say; we even avoided one another's eyes. The clanging bell of the ambulance foretold its arrival only a minute before the siren announced a police car. We moved out into the courtyard again, watching the white-coated figures bend over what was left of Lansing Metcalfe. Then the body was carried away and we went inside again.

The police captain looked serious. "A terrible accident," he said solemnly. "And Mr. Metcalfe was one of our finest citizens."

I had seen Tempy's start when he spoke. Now she stood up and came toward him. "It was no accident," she said distinctly. "It was murder." Her accusing eyes sought and found Niles Witter in our group. Her finger pointed at him. "He did it."

"You're upset, Tempy." I hurried forward. "It's understandable—You've had a terrible shock—and he was your fiancé. But to accuse a man—"

"I do accuse him," she interrupted swiftly.

"He knew how much Lanse loved cats, everybody who knew Lanse knew that, and he had placed a cat right here, inside the door where Lanse would be sure to hear it crying."

Springer's face was a study in distaste. "But Mr. Witter warned us all, Miss Blair, not to go forward of the center of the platform when the engine was running full speed. You heard him yourself. And Mr. Metcalfe heard him, I know."

She shook her head from side to side, as if in pain. "Of course. But that was part of the plan. To make it look like an accident. Niles knew that Lanse would never remember his warning if he heard a cat in distress." She whirled toward the corner of the building, inside the door through which Lanse had gone to his death. "Look!" Do you see that basket? When Niles came in here to telephone for the ambulance, I followed him. I saw him stop for a split second on his way through the shop. This basket was upside down, but it didn't rest solidly on the floor. I saw him thrust his toe under it and lift it for a moment, and a little black streak shot out from under it, and disappeared. It was a cat!"

She brought the words out triumphantly. I stared around at the circle of men. Niles' face had set into ugly lines, and I could see that he was restraining his temper with difficulty. Culp's features were strangely stern. The police captain looked as if he were humoring an hysterical woman.

"How about it, Witter?" he asked.

Niles glowered, but his slow voice had not changed when he spoke. "Yes, there was a cat there. It's a young cat I keep here in the place. I've had it since it was a kitten. It still acts like one sometimes, gets frisky and knocks things over, shadow-boxing with itself. It seems to have knocked that basket over on itself this afternoon. Miss Blair is correct when she says it streaked out from under there. She's right, too, when she says she saw me lift the basket with my toe so it could get out. I heard it crying, that's why. And I guess Lansing Metcalfe had heard it crying, too. That's the reason he went forward against orders—to release it, I guess. I'm sorry it was there. If I'd known—"

I suddenly remembered the boy outside the gate. Tempy had said the cat was a little black streak. "You say you've had this cat for some time?" I asked.

I saw Niles' features twist with im-

patience. "Yes. A couple of months, I should say."

"Not a couple of days?" I persisted. "A boy stopped me outside your place and said his cat Blackie had been stolen by someone named Bill, and had been sold to you a couple of days ago."

"The cat was lost a couple of days ago, and I paid some kid a reward for bringing it back," he snarled.

Dead end, I thought. I was as sure as Temy, now, that Niles had murdered my friend, but how to prove it? It had been made to look like an accident, and nothing we could do or say would change that aspect of it for the police. But Temy was not to be discouraged. She went over to the basket, lifted it up and stared at it.

"This is heavy," she said suddenly, into the grave silence. "Come here and lift it, captain." The police officer obliged her, looking surprised as he lifted it. "It's got a thick metal rim around the top, do you see?" Temy's voice showed sudden excitement. "To make it heavier."

"Well, what of it, miss?" the captain asked.

"Don't you understand? If the cat had been playing around, as Niles says, and the basket had fallen onto its neck, it would have been killed. It's a small cat."

"Yes," the officer agreed. "It would have killed the cat, all right. But only if it fell on its neck. And if it fell on some other part, it would have been injured, and you say it wasn't injured. But if it fell over, and the cat was imprisoned inside, then the animal wouldn't have been hurt at all. Only scared."

She shot him an impatient look. "But don't you remember? Or didn't I tell you? I could see the cat's head sticking out before Niles released it!"

Niles stepped forward quickly. "That's not true! The cat was under the basket—altogether under it!"

But now the officer had the bland, closed look that comes of inner conviction. "But you said yourself, Mr. Witter, that you lifted the basket with your toe so it could get out." He stooped and placed the basket upside down on the floor. "With the cat's neck to raise one side of it, there would be a purchase for your foot. But this way—

Let me see you lift it with your toe now, sir."

Niles draw back and his eyes glittered. "What are you trying to say?" he stammered.

Elias Culp stepped forward. "I'll say it," he volunteered. "We're trying to tell you that we know now you placed that cat under the basket as a deliberate lure to get Lansing Metcalfe forward of the danger point. You had the engine idling when we came, and you kept us all at the other end of the shop, as far away from the cat as possible, so that distance and the noise of the engine would drown its cries. You waited until Lansing heard the cries and started to its rescue. Then you speeded up the motor and killed him!"

Two white lines circled Niles' nostrils, and his lips were dangerously thin. "You'd like to make it look like murder, wouldn't you?" he whispered. "But you can't! I had my back to Lanse when he went toward the cat—even as you did! You're the man who'll have to swear to my innocence. Because you were right beside me on the platform, and you know what I'm saying is true."

I saw Elias make a subtle signal to the police captain, saw that officer brace himself for trouble. "It's true enough," the old banker acknowledged. "But it's not all the truth. I stood beside you, and so I, too, was able to see Lanse's reflection in that sheet of bright metal against the wall, that sheet of metal which is placed to act as a mirror. I, too, saw when he had passed the danger point. And that's when you threw in the clutch, and put the motor into full speed!"

Niles made a dash for freedom, but it was abortive. Not until he had been taken away did Temy break down. I had my headache in real earnest by the time we closed the great doors behind us and started toward the car, Lanse's car. There was only one bright note in the whole affair, and that was the appearance of a dirty little boy just outside the gate. He clutched a small black cat to his thin chest, and his smile was beatific.

"Thank you, mister," he called out, as I helped a weeping Temy into the front seat. "Thanks for getting my cat back!"

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