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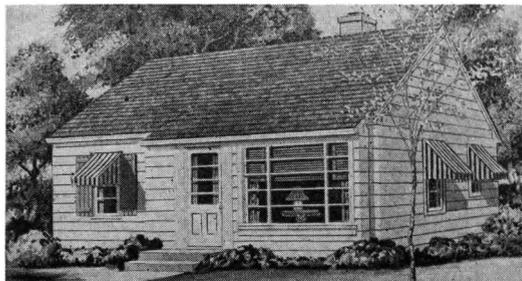


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by **JOHN D. MacDONALD**

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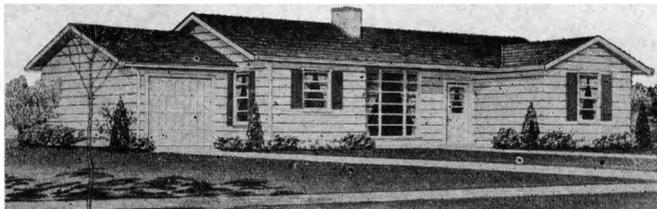


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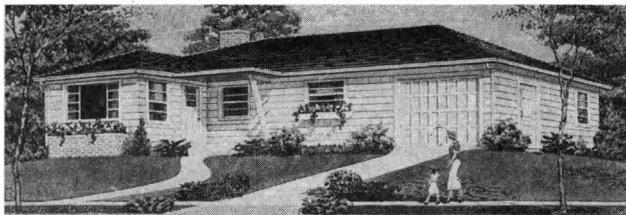
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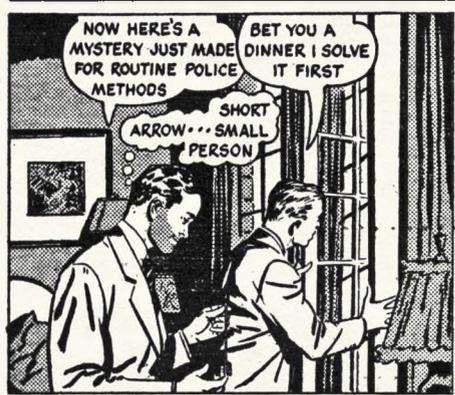
INSPECTOR MOON WON HIS BET AND THEN...



W-WHY IT'S AN ARROW!

KEEP BACK FROM THAT WINDOW!

IN A LOFTY NEW YORK APARTMENT, DETECTIVE INSPECTOR JIM MOON AND A MYSTERY WRITER, H.N. KYNE, ARGUE OVER THE PLAUSIBILITY OF THE LATTER'S NEWEST "WHO DONE IT" WHEN...



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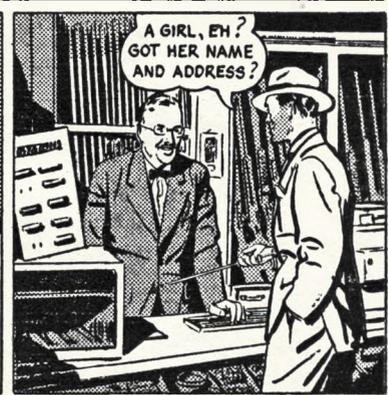
BET YOU A DINNER I SOLVE IT FIRST

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...AND SO, WHILE AUTHOR KYNE TRIES ARM-CHAIR DEDUCTION TO FIND THE MYSTERIOUS ARCHER, INSPECTOR MOON VISITS SPORTING GOODS STORES



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I WAS TARGET SHOOTING ON MY ROOF ACROSS THE AVENUE AND...

THAT EVENING



WASN'T OUR BET "DINNER FOR THREE," MR. KYNE?

SHE'S MARVELOUS

WHY CERTAINLY! SUPPOSE WE PICK YOU UP IN AN HOUR, MISS BAILEY



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VOL. FORTY-FIVE

APRIL, 1950

NUMBER ONE

Hard-Hitting Murder Novel

1. **THE SITTING DUCK**..... *John D. MacDonald* 10
—Walt Huggins, made a fine target for every trigger-happy marksman in town—both cop and killer!

Three Dynamic Detective Novelettes

2. **THIS WAY TO THE MORGUE!**..... *William Campbell Gault* 50
—But Joe Hammond didn't need any directions. He had plenty of "friends" willing to take him—and leave him—there!
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—put the cops on a kill-a-day, corpse-a-day schedule!
4. **CASE OF THE HURRY-UP HEIRESS**..... *D. L. Champion* 112
—who couldn't wait to get married—so she could don her widow's weeds!

Six Suspense-Packed Short Stories

5. **DON'T TANGLE WITH HERBIE!**..... *Dan Gordon* 31
—because, what with bullets and blondes, poor Carpis is going crazy now!
6. **GLAD TO SEE YOU—DEAD!**..... *Frank Ward* 40
—they said of Hanrahan. But still a killer had to burn!
7. **THE FIVE-GRAND CROSS**..... *Alan Ritner Anderson* 67
—taught tough Vic Sasso a lesson about blondes: *Handle With Care!*
8. **A WOMAN'S JOB**..... *Talmage Powell* 72
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—was irresistible—with that gun in her dainty little hand!
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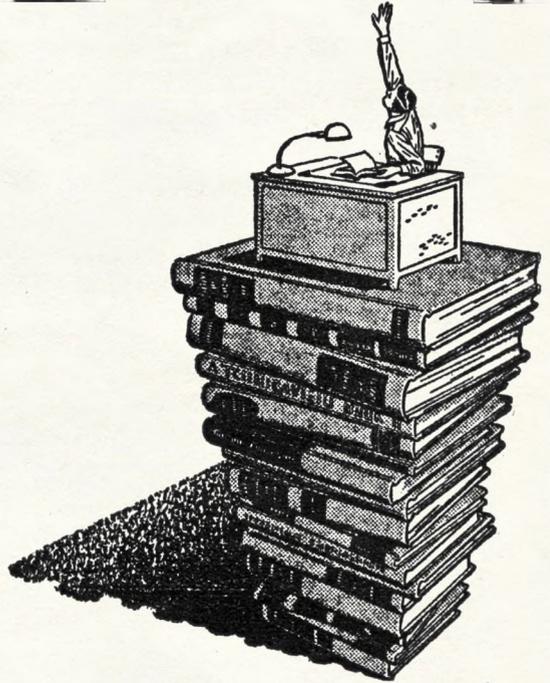
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YOU CAN'T GET AWAY WITH MURDER!



By NELSON and GEER

HOW TO SPELL "MURDER"

They never learn! The idea for his "perfect crime" came to Everett Hughes as his wife, a short story writer, was preparing to entertain members of her literary club in their Pueblo, Colo., home that New Years Day of 1938.

Bursting with his great idea, Mr. Hughes suggested the members would appreciate a sentimental verse—over her signature—as mementoes of the occasion. Mrs. Hughes demurred, he insisted. Finally he offered to write them himself and she signed a number of blank sheets of paper. Chuckling evilly, Hughes wrote nonsense doggerel on five and retained the others.

Next day he pecked out two letters on his wife's typewriter. One was to himself, addressed to Albuquerque; the other to his son by a previous marriage. Both, cleverly centered over Mrs. Hughes' signature, stated that she was leaving her husband for a childhood sweetheart.

The following evening, as the D. A. reconstructed it, Hughes shot his wife as she sat reading. Then he cleaned up the bloodstains, burned all her clothes, put her body in his car, buried it 20 miles out of town, and continued



blithely on his selling route through the Southwest.

A few days later his son, greatly perturbed, was showing "his stepmother's letter" to Sheriff Lewis Worker. The Sheriff spotted one significant fact—Mrs. Hughes used a small *l* instead of a capital *l* in speaking of herself—which seemed odd for a professional writer.

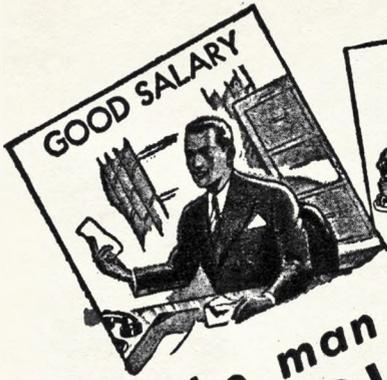


Sheriff Worker intercepted Hughes in Las Vegas and, hinting darkly at murder, made a strange request. "Mr. Hughes, will you typewrite a sentence for me?" The salesman agreed, and to his dictation typed:

This will prove that I killed my wife.

After hours of questioning, the killer broke and revealed the burial place of the body. He was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment—because a dot over an *l* upset his "perfect" crime.





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an ACCOUNTANT'S CAREER



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I am finding a new joy that I have experienced before, for I have always wanted to play, but had given up hope until I heard of your course.
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THE





SITTING DUCK

By **JOHN D. MacDONALD**

It cost Frankie Lamone \$20,000 to buy a front-row ticket to his girl friend's funeral. But it was worth it, for now Frankie could make a real spectacle of it, with a fancy hearse, flowers—and an extra, brand-new, unexpected corpse!



CHAPTER ONE

A Knife for Katrina

A CONSTANT diesel stench hung in the street, a gift from the freight yards. No children played there on this mid-morning in spring, and the corner stores, though open, had a lost, forgotten look.

Walt Huggins marked the street name on his route book, grabbed his sample case and slid out from under the wheel of his small, new, black sedan. He went diagonally across the street. A ragged sheet of newspaper, skimming along with the cold wind, wrapped itself around his ankle and he turned around to let it blow on down the street.

One side of the street, the side where he had parked, was bounded by a high woven-wire fence guarding the railroad property. The other side contained a row of identical duplexes set so close together that a broad-shouldered man would have to turn sideways to walk

Walt had a faint premonition of something unpleasant about to happen, but he shrugged it off and stepped in. . . .

between them. The aged paint looked as though it had been cleverly composed of a mixture of the debris along the gutters.

Each duplex had two tiny porches, two sets of three steps each. He picked one at random, set the case down, pushed the bell button and adjusted his brisk, friendly salesman's smile.

A gaunt, hard-eyed woman yanked the door open.

"Madam, I represent Arcadia Products and I have a gift for you. This paring knife with its dura-steel, hollow-ground blade retails for—"

She slammed the door shut like a pistol shot.

WALT HUGGINS shrugged and picked up the case. Madam, I have a gift for you. Permit me to cut your throat with this dura-steel, hollow-ground paring knife which retails for at least a dollar.

No answer at the second door, the other half of the duplex. A line of box cars in the yard slammed together with a roar that ran all the way down the line.

Walt tried the house on the left. A doughy woman heard him out. "Whadda I got to do for you to give me the knife?"

"Arcadia Products, as an introductory offer, is giving away this beautiful paring knife to every customer who purchases this kitchen knife set. Five knives of various handy sizes in this self-sharpening decorative wall rack which you can hang over your working space in your kitchen. These knives are made of—"

"Yeah, sure. How much?"

"Three ninety-five for the set. And I assure you that there is no better—"

"I doan wan any!" *Bam!*

Lovely street! Charming neighborhood!

He picked up the case, moved onto the adjoining porch and no one answered the bell. He was tall, with the slight stoop of six-foot-three living in a five-foot-eight world. He had the highly styl-

ized good looks of the heroes of most women's magazine fiction. He appeared too mild and too amiable to be successful, unless one noted the glint in the back of the deep-set grey eyes, the firm strength of the jaw under the casual smile.

He tried the bell at the next house, then noticed the frayed card announcing that the bell was out of order. So, with the remnants of anger at the last door slam, he knocked emphatically.

The whine of wind died for a moment and he heard the creak of steps coming toward the door inside the house. They paused. He knocked again. The steps came on cautiously.

The door opened a few inches, enough for him to see one half of a woman's face! Strands of rich blonde hair, one very large blue eye, and a delicate line of cheek. One half of a strawberry-ripe mouth. This, at least, was a bit more pleasant. Walt was accustomed to all gradations of expression in the eyes of his customer-housewives, all the way from bitter impatience to the invitation born of loneliness and boredom. But this girl's eye held a look he couldn't read. He wished that he could see all of her face.

She listened to his spiel, not saying a word.

A man behind her said something in a low tone that Walt Huggins couldn't catch. She said, "We'll buy one. Come on in."

She held the door open, stepped back. The dim hallway was a musty cave in an animal world. Walt had a faint premonition of something unpleasant about to happen. He shrugged it off, smiled cheerfully and stepped inside.

"I'm sure," he said, "that this Arcadia knife set will give you lasting satisfaction and—"

He had his hand on the door to push it shut behind him. It was torn out of his grasp violently and he turned, in surprise, to meet blackness that roared into

his mind, inextricably mixed with the hard-throated clatter of the box cars. His brain was a black velvet tunnel and an endless freight train rocked and ground into it. . . .

HE DRIFTED awake, thinking that this was indeed a very hard and uncomfortable bed. Then his body telegraphed awareness that it was not a bed at all. It was the floor. Could a man fall out of bed and not be awakened? Nausea rolled through him in a sickening wave. He fought to keep from being ill, and slowly, panting, he fought it back down and opened his eyes. He stared at a dirty baseboard inches away. His face felt as though he held a baseball in his cheek, the way a squirrel will hold a nut. And he suddenly remembered that he was in the depressing little mill town of Marland, Ohio, and that somebody had hit him. There is a streak of pride in all men that is most deeply wounded by a blow. In Walt Huggins, this pride was stronger than in most. It exploded into an anger that brought him up onto his feet in one bound, tottering with faintness, but with his fists balled, ready and anxious to hit someone. Anyone.

The fall had burst the lock on the sample case. The packaged knife sets had spilled out. He was in the hallway. The girl who had answered the door stood across the narrow hallway, silhouetted against the pale light that came through the arched plaster doorway from the small living room. She leaned against one frame of the archway.

He reached quickly for his wallet, patted it, yanked it out of his pocket and looked at the sheaf of bills it contained. He put it back in his pocket. ,

"What the hell is the idea?" he demanded. His speech was a bit slurred by his swollen mouth.

She stood there, regarding him somberly. As he grew accustomed to the dim

light he saw that she was looking through him and beyond him. She stood with her right shoulder against the door frame, her left arm across in front of her, her left hand holding the edge of the frame.

"Can't you talk?" he demanded. "Where's your friend? The guy who bashed me when I wasn't looking?"

Still she said nothing. She wore a blue and white print cotton dress with a deep neck line, a ruffle of white around the edge of it.

He took a half step toward her. "Answer me!" he demanded.

There was an odd scraping sound. She slid down an inch or so as her knees bent, her fingernails scraping hard against the plaster wall. There was a dark stain on the print dress, over the diaphragm. He saw then the bright blue plastic handle of the gift paring knife. It stuck straight out from the hollow between the outline of her breasts.

He pointed his finger at it stupidly. "Our—our premium paring knife," he said weakly, as though aiding someone in a search for a misplaced object.

She looked beyond him. Her underlip was protruding and shiny. Bright crimson fingernails broke against the plaster and she went down onto her knees. Her hand swung free of the wall and she seemed to stare intently at his knees for a moment, swayed forward slowly, then faster. He was transfixed by the odd, silent horror of it. Her arms remained at her sides. Her forehead smacked against the toe of his shoe with a force that hurt his foot. She rolled onto her side, a strand of the blonde hair mercifully covering her eyes. She made a soft buzzing sound deep in her throat, half snore, half cough, and then she was still. Very still.

There was no sound in the house. The distant whistle of a locomotive shrilled with a long monotonous note.

Walt Huggins dropped to his knees

and, with hands that were like wooden clubs, tried to fit the spilled packages back into the case. He kept his eyes away from the dead girl. Without touching her, he knew that she was dead. Just like when Scharn caught the steel sliver in that Iwo foxhole. Just one dot of blood at the corner of his eye. But he hadn't had to touch Scharn either.

The stubborn packages refused to fit back into their places. He stopped, took a long, deep breath and tried again, his motions more certain. He snapped the case shut and stood up. Panic was in him as he took a long stride toward the door. He looked at her. She was on her side and he could see the end of the gay blue plastic hilt of the paring knife. Dura-steel with a hollow-ground edge. Worth at least a dollar retail.

He set the case down by the door and walked back, carefully skirting her body, to the phone set into the wall niche at the end of the hall. As he touched the phone he heard the resounding thump of something heavy and metallic against the front door.

He hurried to the door, shoved the case out of the way with the side of his foot and opened it. The prowler car was parked out at the curb. He saw it over the shoulders of the two heavy uniformed men who stood there.

"I WAS just trying to call you boys up," Walt said. "Something has—"

The nearest cop stiff-armed his shoulder, spinning him around. A violent shove in the small of Huggins' back brought him up against the wall.

"Put your hands flat against the wall and keep your mouth shut." Walt did as he was bid. A hard hand slapped his pockets, yanked out the wallet.

"Take a look here, Larry," the other cop said. There was a moment of silence and then a low whistle. The chill wind came in at the open door. Heavy steps

went down the porch steps in a great hurry and Walt heard the official timbre of the voice as the man called in from the prowler car.

"Look," Walt said, "I can tell you what I know about this."

"Turn around," the cop said.

Walt dropped his arms and turned. The cop smiled at him. It wasn't a pleasant smile. "You can't tell us anything, junior. We're going to tell you."

"Look, I—"

"Shut up and stand there nice and quiet."

A crowd had gathered out on the sidewalk. They peered through the open door. Walt looked and recognized the two women he had talked to earlier, the women who had slammed their doors in his face. Sirens whined high in the distance, the noise dropping octaves as they neared, turning into low, deep growls as the cars pulled up in front.

There were two more men in uniform, two men in dark business suits carrying boxes of equipment, and a wiry, dark-haired man with a clown's face—surprised eyebrows, bulbous nose and wide, crooked mouth. He came in with an air of authority. He glanced at Huggins, bent over the girl for a moment, said, "Okay, take over. Don't shift her. Move him into the living room."

Huggins was pushed off balance with each step he took. He was pushed toward an ugly tan overstuffed chair in the living room, and when he turned to sit down he was pushed again so that he half fell into the chair. During the pushing they had managed to rumple his hair, tear open the collar of his shirt. He sat, breathing heavily, as wary as a trapped animal, fighting for the calm that is the mark of the innocent.

The wiry little man with the absurd face came in, holding Walt's wallet. "I'm Burgan," he said. "I'm in charge. You got a little excited when she screamed,

eh? So you let her have it with your kitchen knife."

"Do you want to listen to what happened?"

"Where's your peddler's license?"

"I haven't—"

"Carrying that stuff is a good front to get into houses, eh?"

"Mr. Burgan, I—"

"Lieutenant Burgan to you, Huggins. What's your real name?"

"My name is Walter Huggins and I'm—"

Lieutenant Burgan had turned and walked back out into the hall. In spite of his clown's face, or maybe because of it, Lieutenant Burgan had the smallest, coldest, greyest eyes that Walt had ever seen.

Burgan came back in, holding a lighter flame to his cigarette. He snapped the lighter shut, looked at Huggins with what was almost amusement, though colder than amusement ever is.

"The car has Pennsy plates," he said. "Where'd you lift it?"

"It's my car, damn it!" Walt said hotly. "Will you stop asking stupid questions and listen to me for three consecutive minutes?"

Burgan smiled humorlessly at the cop standing near the mantel. "Get him! Consecutive, yet! Must have done some reading the last time he was in. What were you, Huggins? Librarian in stir?"

"I've never been in jail!"

"Man, you've been lucky! But your luck's run out this time. The doc just finished taking her temperature. She's only been dead twelve minutes." He walked over to Walt, cupped his hand around Walt's chin and yanked his head up, turning it toward the light. "The little girl packed a wallop, eh?"

Walt struck his hand away. Burgan idly backhanded him across the mouth. "You guys are always so damned stupid," he said.

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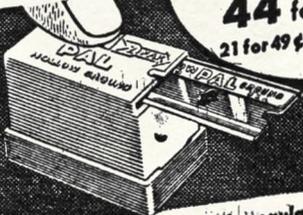
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WALT forced himself to stay in the chair. He made his voice as reasonable as he could. "Lieutenant Burgan, I would like to make a statement."

"Maybe we don't want a statement yet. Ever think of that?"

"You're going to need one sooner or later," Walt said.

"I hate a shiv artist," Burgan said. He walked back out into the hall, a springy, intent little man. Walt adjusted his necktie to hide the ripped collar. He combed his hair back with his fingers. He smiled grimly. All right. Let them play their little games. Sooner or later they'd have to check on him and find out who he was.

A moon-faced man in a shiny blue suit came in, sat down, settled rimless glasses on his nose and flipped open a notebook.

"Name?" he said. Walt told him. "Occupation?"

"Assistant Sales Manager of Arcadia Products, in charge of Sales Research, Advertising and Publicity."

"I'll just put down salesman," the moon-faced man said tiredly. "How do you spell Arcadia?"

Walt sighed and told him. The man said, "Address?"

"Well, you see, when I started this research trip I gave up my apartment and I'll get another place to live when I get back to my desk."

"Local address?"

"I just drove into Marland this morning, early. I was going to find a place late this afternoon—"

"Vagrant, then," the man said, writing.

"I'm no vagrant," Walt said.

"A guy with no address is a vagrant, friend."

Burgan came in with the doughy woman in tow. He said gently to her, "This will be just a preliminary statement, Mrs. Tolland." He turned to the man with the notebook. "Get this, Scotty. Mrs. Albert A. Tolland. Housewife. 1410 Oliver. Okay, Mrs. Tolland, you recognize any-

body here in this room? Be sure now."

"Him over there. He came to my door maybe an hour ago. He said he was selling knives."

"What did he say?"

"He said he wanted to give me a free knife. Then he said I had to buy a whole set to get the free one."

"You got a look at the free knife?"

"Sure. He waved it right in my face. Knife with a blue handle. You showed me that knife out there, Lieutenant, sticking outa the Harris girl."

"That was the same knife?"

"Sure it was. I got a good look at it both times."

"How did the salesman act?"

The doughy woman looked at Huggins and licked her lips. "Well, that's hard to say. There was something funny about him. I could see it right away. He acted like he wanted to get in the house and he had a funny look in his eyes. I don't take no chances in this neighborhood. If I told Al once I told him a hundred times we oughta move outa—"

"He acted funny?"

"Sure. Like he was excited about something. I could see it. He scared me. So I slammed the door and locked it. I looked out the window and saw him coming down this way. Then I didn't watch him many more."

"You heard the scream?"

"I sure did. Wasn't it me phoned you?"

Mrs. Albert A. Tolland gave Walt a sidelong look and licked her lips again. She said stridently, "A fine thing when fiends can come busting into a person's house and stick knives in a person. I never liked the Harris girl none, to be sure, stuck up like she was for no reason anybody could see and she wasn't any better than she had to be, believe me, running around with that man they sent to prison that time, but she had her good points, and—"

"Thanks a lot, Mrs. Tolland. Thanks

a lot," Burgan said. "We'll phone you when we want you to come down for a detailed statement, and if this should go to trial, I'm sure you'll see your duty as a good citizen and be a witness for the prosecution."

"I'll be glad to do it," Mrs. Tolland said as Burgan guided her to the door.

BURGAN came back. "Now we'll listen to you, Huggins."

"I gave the sales talk on the porch. She asked me to come in. Somebody behind the door shut it hard and hit me. It knocked me out. When I came to, the Harris girl was standing over there, facing me, holding herself up by holding the wall. She slipped a little, then slipped again and fell onto her face and rolled onto her side. Just before she fell I noticed the knife handle in her chest. I went to the phone to call you and as I got to the phone there was a pounding on the door and I opened it and nobody's given me a chance to say anything since then until right now."

Burgan rocked back and forth from heel to toe, looking down at him, holding the last half-inch of a cigarette carefully clamped between thumb and forefinger.

"Somebody knocked you out, eh?" he asked softly.

"Cold."

"What did he look like?"

"I didn't see him. He hit me as I was turning."

"You didn't see him."

"That's what I said."

A wide, bald-headed man in a work shirt and pants came charging into the room. His face was bright red and his mouth was working. He looked at Burgan and the cop and the recorder, and charged straight at Walt. He grabbed the front of Walt's suit, lifted him up out of the chair with surprising strength and hit him in the mouth twice before the cop and Burgan could break it up.

Walt sat on the floor by the chair, his head spinning, his vision out of focus as Burgan and the cop wrestled the man away.

"Kill my little girl!" the man roared. "I'll kill you, you—"

"Take it easy, Harris. Take it easy!" Burgan shouted. "We'll take care of him. Settle down!"

The bald-headed man began to weep like a child, a full-throated sobbing, the tears running down his red face. Walt spat blood and a corner of a tooth into his handkerchief.

They got him out of the way. Two cops came in and pulled Walt toward the doorway. The girl's body was gone. They pushed him down the hall, forcing him to stumble, yanking his clothes as he was about to fall. Outside, the sidewalk was bordered by angry residents of the street. The noon whistles were blowing. Some child cut Walt's ear with a sharp stone and a woman kicked him hard in the leg. He was dazed and confused and utterly exhausted. His head hit the edge of the sedan roof as they pushed him into the back seat. He made no protest as they handcuffed his left wrist to the heavy ring set into the arm rest. He shut his eyes against the high, piercing whine of the sirens.

Then there was a big room, smelling of dust and mold, hands pawing at him, a long white corridor, the clang of a steel door opening and closing, unhooded light bulbs, a barred doorway, another clang of steel, and footsteps receding down the corridor.

He stood in the cell and his trousers slid down to his knees. He pulled them up. They had taken his necktie, belt and shoe laces. The cell was windowless. There was a bunk, riveted to the wall and floor. He sat down on it, his elbows on his knees, and stared down at the trowel marks on the concrete floor. But he barely saw them.

CHAPTER TWO

Cheap—at \$20,000

FOR two weeks, ever since he had been paroled, Arthur Clock had lived in this little room, carefully planning how it had to be done. And now it was done. He lay back on the bed, his fingers laced behind his neck, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth. No, there weren't any holes in it. Not a one. No way they could connect him with it, except by checking back and finding that one Arthur Clock and one Frankie Lamone had been in the same cell block, and one Frankie Lamone had once had a girl friend named Katrina Harris. Once, but no longer.

Arthur Clock was a grey, inconspicuous man who looked much, much older than his twenty-nine years. He had the tight mouth of a predatory fish and skin taut and shiny. Remembering that he hadn't yet destroyed the note, he mashed his cigarette in the glass ashtray near his head, reached into his pocket and pulled out the note. Getting Frankie to talk about the girl hadn't been much trouble. After Frankie had spilled that hint about the dough stashed away, Arthur had been very eager to hear about Katrina Harris.

Knowing the pet name Frankie used for her had probably helped.

He looked at the note with the fond eye of a competent craftsman. It seemed almost a shame to have to destroy it.

Dear Teens, baby—I'm smuggling this out by Art Clock. I thought I could do a three-to-five on my head, but I'm going nuts in here. Art's got a way to spring me. Turn over the dough to him and I'll be with you real quick. We'll go away together and they'll never get me again. Frankie.

He had done a careful job of casing the Harris place, finding out what hours the old man worked. And then, when he knew the coast was clear, he had slipped up the back way, to the door. She hadn't unhooked the screen until she had read

the note he had slipped under the door. He was surprised she was so good looking. Frankie was a picker, all right. But Frankie was a dope. His big mistake was the day he said, in the exercise yard, "You're nuts, Art. She'll never cross me, not her. She can lay her hand on the dough any time, but it'll be waiting for me when I get out, and so will she."

Katrina had let him into the kitchen and Arthur had been glad to get inside where no one could see him.

But she was canny. "Frankie says you're a friend. He hasn't written about you in his letters."

"Would that be smart?"

"Maybe not. But I'd rather have him do the stretch and be sure. Things can go wrong when a man tries to get out. He could be killed."

Arthur made his tone confidential. "He didn't write this because he didn't want to worry you, baby. He could get killed in there, too. The wrong boys don't like him and they're out to get him. You know how many people get it in prison. What's a lifer got to lose?"

At that Katrina Harris had bit her lip. "Can't he report it?"

"They won't listen to stuff like that. And next month he goes on the laundry shift with two of the boys that are after him. Once I saw a guy after he got his head shoved in one of those pressers. They come down hard, believe me."

She turned pale, but she said, "I better go visit Frankie first. I'd want to get it right from him, Mr. Clock."

He had concealed his impatience, made his tone wheedling. "And maybe he's dead before you see him. Use your head. If Frankie didn't trust me, would he have told me that you could get the dough?"

"How much do you need?"

"All of it. These things come high if you want to do them right and make sure."

"I can't get it for you. They still watch

me because they think I know where it is. It was a payroll, you know."

"Yeah. Frankie told me. Funny thing. He makes a clean snatch of a payroll and then gets it when he's knocking over a gas station for peanuts."

SHE studied him for a long time. "Well, if Frankie says it's okay . . ."

"Now you're talking!"

"Are you from around here?"

"Youngstown. That's where I report every month. I've stayed out of sight here."

"You go out Highway 40 and turn left beyond the amusement park and go up to the Civil War monument. There's a stone fence around the monument. Frankie was a stone mason, an apprentice, before he got fired. We hid it there one night. Frankie brought cement he'd worked dirt into to make it look old. He pried out the big stone on the northeast corner and chipped a big hole in the wall under where the stone was. We put the money in three tin boxes before we went. Then he cemented the stone back on over the hole. It was bright moonlight. We weren't going to go get it until everybody'd forgotten about it. Then, after he got caught, they found some of the empty envelopes in his room. He thought he'd burned them all, but some slipped down behind the radio. We counted it a lot of times, but there's so much we always got different answers. It's somewhere around twenty thousand. I don't see why you'd need it all to—"

"Somebody at the door," Arthur said harshly.

"They'll go away."

"I think we better answer the door."

"But—"

He moved his hand in the gesture of a man flipping water from his fingertips. The taped handle of a knife slid into his hand from under the rubber band around his forearm. He pressed the point

against her, moving it in a tiny arc. "Answer the door," he said.

He followed her up the hallway. She walked stiffly. He held the point against the small of her back as she talked through the open door.

He almost laughed out loud when he heard the voice trying to sell her some knives. Katrina had enough knives at the moment.

"Have him come in," Arthur muttered. He moved over to the side.

The guy came in. He was tall. Arthur moved the knife so that his thumb was along the blade. He struck hard with the taped, weighted handle as he shoved the door shut. . . .

So far it had been improvisation, but now the picture was clear. The guy lay still where he fell. Arthur swept the little paring knife off the dusty hall carpet and straightened up. Katrina had moved back. She screamed as she saw his intent. The scream had a frightening loudness. He struck hard with the little knife. The guy on the floor moaned. Too late now to add finishing touches. She looked down at the knife hilt. He reached out, drew his fingers along it, smearing any prints he might have left. She clawed at his wrist and he pulled away.

Remembering, he frowned at his wrist. Two gouges along the inside, over the blue veins.

He had stared at her then, and had seen the life fading in her eyes, had known that the knife blow had been good enough. He had left quickly and silently by the back door, gone down the alley, seeing no one.

Now he was back in his room. He burned the note in the ashtray, thankful that he remembered to grab it from the kitchen table.

He giggled aloud. A knife salesman, yet.

Arthur felt good. Twenty thousand dollars within reach. Only two persons

had known of it. One was dead and the other had a year to go. No sense in rushing things. Plan it right. A man would need a small crowbar and an automobile. Nothing else.

FRANKIE LAMONE whistled softly as he waited.

"What do you feel so good about this morning?" Leo, his cellmate asked.

"Beautiful morning. Beautiful," Frankie said. "I'm only a boid in a gilded . . ."

The cell was in D Block, on the upper tier. The bell cut his song short. The two men stepped to the front of the cell and stood shoulder to shoulder. "Open 'er up!" the head screw on the main floor yelled.

The trustees at the ends of the four rows of cells spun the big wheels that undogged the doors. Each cell door clicked. Frankie and Leo pushed out of their cell and stood in front of it.

"Close 'er up!" the head screw yelled.

Sixty steel doors were slammed shut. Everybody faced toward the stairs. They marked time, picking up a fast rhythm of shoe soles against the steel floor.

"March!" yelled the screw.

They reached the bottom of the stairs and stood, marking time in line until the file from the bottom tiers passed. Then they stepped out, keeping time across the fifty feet of yard to the mess hall.

But today Frankie didn't mind the enforced silence, the commands to march, sit, eat, stack plates, stand, march to work assignments. Because, if there was no flaw against his good conduct record, and he intended that there wouldn't be, today left just one year to go. Three hundred and sixty-five more days. Then there would be Teens and, with a little planning, the dough.

As they left the mess hall one of the guards slapped his shoulder. "Step out."

Frankie, puzzled, stood aside until the

line passed slowly, rhythmically, by him.

"Warden's office," the guard said. "Get moving."

The guard followed him. Four locked guarded gates slowed his progress. Frankie worried. He was taken to the anteroom of the warden's office. Ten minute wait. The worry grew more intense. Had Teens been stupid? Had they trapped her into disclosing the hiding place? He sweat and fidgeted.

Finally they admitted him to the inner office. He stood at attention in front of the steel desk. The white-haired man looked at him keenly, checked the number on his pocket against a buff record card on the blotter.

"Ah, yes. Sit down, Lamone."

Frankie sat on the edge of the chair. He licked his lips. "Is—uh—something wrong, sir?"

"Your record here is good, Lamone."

"I've tried to make it that way, sir."

"Fine, fine," the man said absently. He turned and looked out his unbarred window at the steep pitch of the grey stone wall, at the distant guard tower.

The window looked funny to Frankie. He guessed it was because there weren't any bars on it.

"A friend of yours has been killed, Lamone. Murdered."

"Yeah? Yes, I mean. Who, sir?"

"A girl named Katrina Harris."

Frankie leaned forward and put both his hands on the edge of the desk to steady himself. Not Katrina! Not Teens! Nobody could . . .

"Don't kid with me," Frankie said in a harsh voice.

The warden sighed and slid the *Marland Star* across the desk. It was a front-page spread. He saw that they'd used her high school graduation picture. It looked odd to see her smiling, younger.

He read it carefully, moving his lips as he read.

The paper tore in his hand. "A sales-

man!" he said. "A door-to-door crazy with a knife! I got to get out of here. I got to see that guy!"

"Easy, Lamone. I've got the complete record on your case here. That girl was mixed up in your payroll robbery and we know it, though we couldn't prove it. She knew where the money is."

"Suppose she did?"

"That isn't any kind of an attitude, Lamone. We know you hid the money. And we know that your chances of ever getting to use it are almost zero. And there isn't even much point in having money now, is there?"

FRANKIE looked at the floor, at the thick pile of the green rug. "I guess there isn't." He looked up quickly. "I've played ball with you guys all down the line. I—I got to see her again before they shove her in the ground. How about letting me go down there? You can put a

guard on me so I can't get away."

"It isn't going to be much of a funeral, Lamone. Her father hasn't got it to spend, you know. And I don't think you have played ball with us, as you put it."

"You mean about the dough," Frankie said bitterly.

"That's exactly what I mean."

Frankie looked at the high wall and the guard tower. "You want a deal?" he whispered.

"I'll listen."

"Getting that dough back ought to be worth something."

"It might be."

"Give me this, then. Give me the word that she gets a good funeral and give me the word that I get to go to it and I get to send flowers. A hell of a lot of flowers."

"The money angle is up to the insurance company. They could call it a reward. They might not want to do it."

"Call 'em up. Ask them."



oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"... IMAGINE ME dancing with a scarecrow! How can he be so careless about his hair? It's straggly, unkempt, and . . . Oh-oh—loose dandruff! He's got Dry Scalp, all right. He needs 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic."



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"And if they agree to . . . say, one thousand dollars, will you tell us where the money is?"

"I might do that, Warden."

The warden spoke to the guard. "Put him back, John. I'll have you brought in later, Lamone."

Frankie paused at the door. He said, "I heard for sure that you don't go back on your word. Not to anybody."

"That's right," the warden said. "Not to anybody."

After Frankie was taken away the warden looked out the window for long moments. He thought of the shoddy little affair of Frankie and Katrina and how, in twenty-eight years of prison administration, he had yet to find a man who was bad all the way through.

A twenty-thousand-dollar ticket to a funeral. Frankie was the one to decide if it was worth it. He placed the call and got his party. He explained why he had called.

"No," he said patiently. "No tricks. If I give the boy my word, it is going to have to be that way. And if you don't go along with it, I doubt whether you will ever see that money again. I think that out of spite this boy will never try to recover it if you cross him up by refusing a reward. Yes. Then I can go ahead on that basis. No, it won't set any precedents for you because I shan't mention it, and I don't think Lamone will. Thank you so much."

He left his office and checked Frankie's cell location and went to it. Frankie bounded up from the cot.

"You have my word, Lamone. A trip down for the funeral and a thousand dollars to be spent on her burial. That's the deal."

"Okay. Tell 'em to pry out the big rock on the northeast corner of the Civil War memorial fence on Christmas Hill, five miles out of Marland, off Highway 40."

CHAPTER THREE

Protective Custody

THE JAILOR leaned against the cell wall and made casual conversation while Walt Huggins ate the meal from the tray that had been brought around from the nearby restaurant.

"Anything else you need?" he asked as Walt finished.

Walt fingered his bruised jaw. "Where's my car?"

"I guess they drove it in to the City Hall garage."

"There's a suitcase in the back end, locked in the trunk. I'd like a fresh shirt, my electric razor and a hairbrush. Do you think that could be arranged?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. It depends."

"On what?"

"On what Burgan says about how you're to be treated. He didn't say nothing about breakfast, so I brought you the breakfast. But for anything else I gotta ask him. He'll be around in the middle of the morning, probably."

"Can I have something to read?"

"Morning paper okay?"

"Fine. Thanks."

After the paper had been brought, Walt leaned back on the bunk and read the front-page account of the crime. An alert photographer had managed to get a shot of him being led out to the prowl car. It was on the first page of the second section. Walt studied it. If ever any man looked the picture of guilt . . . He cursed softly. An editorial ranted about the lack of enforcement of the local ordinance about licensing peddlers.

No mention was made of his actual occupation or position.

He was in the middle of the paper when the cell door was unlocked and a doctor came in carrying his black bag. "Okay, Huggins," the doctor said. "Strip down and lie on the bunk."

"Why?"

"Never mind why."

Walt shrugged and did as he was told. The doctor inspected every square inch of him with the utmost care. "Okay," he said. "You can dress." His voice was a shade more friendly.

"Ask them out front if I can make a phone call," Walt said.

"I'll ask them."

The cell door was closed behind the doctor.

A half-hour later Burgan showed up, little eyes gleaming in the clown's face. He stood out in the corridor and, when the cell door was unlocked, he said, "Come on, Huggins."

Walt stood up. "I'll come, but I'm telling you one thing, Burgan. If anybody pushes me, I'm swinging."

"Suit yourself," Burgan said. He shrugged. The gleam in his eye could have been amusement.

"Great police force you've got here," Huggins said. "Nice bunch of boys."

"Oh, relax! Go on. The door on the left."

Walt went in. His suitcase was in the small room. There was a shower and a sink.

"Take your time," Burgan said. "Come out when you're ready."

"Aren't you afraid I'll take a necktie out of my bag and hang myself from the plumbing?"

"We'll take that chance," Burgan said, shutting the door.

The extra suit in the bag was in good shape. Walt showered, shaved, dressed. He inspected his face carefully in the mirror. Outside of a purple-blue discoloration on the side of his jaw, a puffiness about his upper lip, he looked all right.

HE PACKED the soiled clothing in the bag and carried it out into the corridor. Burgan was talking to the jailor. He pushed himself away from the wall and

came toward Walt with his cocky stride. "You look better."

"Gee, thanks! What is it? Psychology? Now I'll crack and tell all, you've been so good to me."

"Anybody ever tell you you're tiresome, Huggins? Come upstairs. We're moving you to the bridal suite."

"Special treatment for friends?"

"Call it that if you want to."

"When do I get my phone call?"

"After you've had a visitor."

"Now I get it. You want me prettied up so the visitor can see how humane you boys are."

Burgan gave him a harmless look. "You kill me, Huggins."

"Isn't that my specialty? Killing people?"

"Right in there, boy. Make yourself at home."

Except for the slim bars on the windows and the metal door, disguised to look like wood, it could have been any good hotel room with adjoining bath. There were even magazines on the night stand.

The visitor arrived just as Walt was beginning to get hungry. He was a tall man with a pouter-pigeon chest and a face like a startled owl.

"Ah, Mr. Huggins. Happy to meet you, sir. My name is Kevan Riley. From the State's Attorney's office."

Walt ignored the outstretched hand. Riley coughed nervously. He carried a neat black briefcase with K.M.R. in gold across one corner.

Riley turned the chair away from the writing desk and sat down. Walt was slouched on the bed. "I must ask you, Mr. Huggins, what you would do if you were released immediately."

"Hmm," Walt said. He grinned. "I think that, as a citizen, I would find Lieutenant Burgan off duty and punch his head in. I think I would sue for false arrest and anything else my legal advisors

can dream up. Does that answer your questions?"

Riley pursed his lips. "I rather expected that attitude. Can't say as I blame you. But of course we can't let that happen."

"Oh, can't we?"

"Lieutenant Burgan is now of the opinion that you didn't kill the Harris girl."

"Drop him a curtsy for me. Kiss his forehead. What brought on that startling change of mind?"

"We won't go into that. However, you are still not going to be released."

Walt sat up. "Now *wait* a minute! Remember the Bill of Rights?"

"Excellent document. Please take the chip off your shoulder for one moment, Mr. Huggins. We've investigated you thoroughly. I, for one, am convinced that you are a reasonable man."

"Yesterday morning I thought I was a reasonable man. You'd be surprised how unreasonable I feel right now."

Riley sighed. "Really, Huggins! It won't hurt you to listen."

Walt leaned back on his elbow again. "Go ahead."

"Miss Katrina Harris, we believe, knew the hiding place of some money stolen two years ago. The man was caught later and imprisoned. *If* we assume that you didn't do it, and *if* we believe your story of a man whispering to Miss Harris to admit you to the front hall, we have to imagine a reason for his wanting you inside the house. It would seem likely that he made up his mind to kill the girl and you happened along at just the right time to provide him with a scapegoat. If he had decided to kill the girl, it might be because he had already obtained from her the information as to the hiding place of the money. That man feels at ease now, and he believes that he has gotten away with it. If we should release you, Mr. Huggins, he would know that the scheme had, in some measure failed, and

he would become much more wary. So we are holding you in what we shall call protective custody, and we are not releasing that information to the press."

"Can you do that?"

"My dear man, we cannot only do that, we can hold you until the trial itself as a material witness. But we do not wish to do that. We wish to hold you until we trap the man who killed Miss Harris and then, when you sign a release that will prevent you from taking any action against the department here, we will let you go with our profuse apologies."

"Like that, eh?" Walt said softly.

"Just like that."

"Or I can stay right here until the trial, and then I can get out of here and raise the biggest stink you've ever heard."

RILEY smiled and shrugged. "That's a lot of time off from your position. I'm sure you're not the type to cut off your nose to spite your face."

"How do you plan to trap the guy?"

"We know where the money was hidden. We have put a man or two on the place where it was, watching. In the afternoon paper there will be a human-interest story. Frank Lamone, the man in prison, will promise that if he is permitted to attend Miss Harris' funeral, he will, after the ceremony, tell where the money was hidden by the two of them."

"Very neat! Did you think that up?"

"Goodness, no! Burgan is very good at that sort of thing."

"You seem pretty confident that it's going to work. It depends on an awful lot of *if* reasoning. Suppose the guy never comes after the money?"

"That will be too bad, of course. Then Burgan will have to reexamine his facts. He has been known to change his mind. I've already told him that with what he already has I'd have no fear about bringing you to trial."

"I see," Walt said. He thought it over.

"Your proposition is this. I just stay patient and stay here until you gather in the killer and then I sign a release and go about my business."

"Exactly."

"I'll do it on one condition." He hesitated. "This is going to sound very childish."

Riley's eyebrows went up.

"I would like to be alone in a room with Lieutenant Burgan for five minutes with no questions asked or quarter given. Give that suggestion to the lieutenant with my compliments."

"It does sound childish."

"All right. I'm minding my own business. And then all these people start pushing me around. Oh, there wasn't any third degree or anything. Just the attitude. Say my feelings are hurt."

ARTHUR CLOCK was in the restaurant with the coffee cup halfway to his baracuda mouth when he read the human-interest story on Frankie.

The feel of the hot coffee running over the rim of the cup and spattering on the side of his wrist as it bounced off the counter brought him out of his sudden immobility. There had been a lot of time and suddenly there was very little. He wiped his wrist with a paper napkin and dabbed at the spots on the front of his shirt.

Deep in his throat he reviewed Frankie's

character and the personality of his ancestors back three generations. Twenty thousand bucks to come and see a little blonde tart planted! It was incomprehensible. Frankie got a raw deal with a jail sentence. It should have been a loony house.

He forced the anger from his mind and began to plan. The lassie got it yesterday. Tomorrow they would plant her. Right now it is four-thirty. No time to get hold of a car legitimately. It has to be lifted. A risk. Buy a crowbar first. Noticed a hardware store just down the street. Take the car out of a parking lot near the movie houses when the attendants are busy. Then what? Drive the car back to town and leave it. That way they would think it was just kids. Take a suitcase along. Put the money in it and check the bag at the railroad station. Make out an envelope right now to mail the stub to the Youngstown address, just in case.

He went over it carefully in his mind. It checked.

* * *

The state prison was one hundred and twelve miles northwest of Marland. At five o'clock the state police sedan was forty miles outside of Marland. Frankie, in the back seat, hitched himself around to a more comfortable position.

"Why can't you guys take this steel off



"Elementary!" says Watson

CAIRO, ILL.—Calvin Watson, Cairo businessman, says it's easy to pick today's best whiskey buy. "Judge taste, lightness, mildness, flavor—and you'll switch to Calvert. I did. Elementary!"

me for a while?" he asked. "I'm safe."

"Regulations," the man beside him said. He yawned.

"They found the dough was still where I said it was?" Frankie asked.

"They let you out, didn't they?"

"They would never have got it."

"But they got it now, Lamone. I never heard of such a thing. Twenty thousand

sweating. In the back of his mind he made certain promises to Teens.

CHAPTER FOUR

Prison Kill

A SMALL radio had been brought to Walt Huggins. It played softly while he wrote out a report of what had happened, addressing it to the Arcadia sales manager.

He sealed the envelope, then searched the dial of the radio.

"... Good-evening, this is Mel Hone, with the local news. Tonight we bring you a heart-warming story of a boy and a girl. A sad story. Frankie Lamone was a wild kid. He was only fourteen when he came up against the law the first time in juvenile court. Two years ago Frankie, bitter, defiant, was sentenced to . . ."

Walt clicked off the radio. He was desperately weary of the mess in which he'd found himself. He wanted to hear no more of it. He wanted to walk out and get into his car and be four hundred miles from Marland by dawn. Yet he knew that he could never entirely forget it. Those hours of helpless fear had left their mark on him. He had learned the terror that comes to the innocent who are unjustly accused on the weight of misleading evidence.

The world had been, to Walt, a place where right is right and wrong is wrong, and the guiltless walk unafraid. It would never be quite that same place again. There would always be the knowledge that the cards can be stacked, that virtue is not always rewarding.

* * *

The girl moved closer to the boy as he drove up the winding road on Christmas Hill. She sang the words of the song on the car radio in a husky true voice.



bucks for twenty-four hours outside the walls. That's damn near a thousand dollars an hour."

Frankie said piously, "It's okay with me." Inside he was laughing. Twenty thousand bucks was buying more than twenty-four hours outside the walls. It was putting him close to the salesman who stabbed Teens. In the same building. If a man kept his head and took his chances.

"You know what time the funeral is, yet?" Frankie asked.

"Ten in the morning."

"Is anybody going to see that I get the right kind of clothes?" Frankie demanded.

"That's all taken care of."

"Say, maybe I can get a look at that guy that did it, huh?" He made his voice overly casual.

"I think he'll still be there, kid," the trooper said with heavy humor.

The car droned on down the wide asphalt. The palms of Frankie's hands were

She stopped singing and said, "Say, you seem to know the way pretty well, my friend. Who else have you taken up here?"

He laughed. "I cased the joint."

As he turned into the parking place, the headlights swept across the monument. He turned the lights out, gave an artificial sigh that caught in his throat, betraying his excitement. "Come here," he whispered.

The sudden flashlight beam was like an explosion in the dark car.

"What's the idea?" the boy demanded. His voice shook with fear and he reached quickly across the girl and shoved the handle up to lock the door of the car.

"Just move along. Get out of here and do it fast, kid. Don't ask any questions. Give me an argument and I'll have you taken down and booked."

"Sure," the boy said, fumbling with the switch. "Sure."

Burgan cut the light and moved back into the heavy shadows of the brush.

"More kids?" a darker shadow asked.

"Yes. They like this spot," Burgan whispered.

"Why not? The only hill for forty miles. Do you think Mr. X is going to show?"

"It's no better than a hunch, Larry."

"Can I smoke?"

"No."

* * *

Frankie watched the two drunks they had thrown into the tank across the way. At last they were both asleep. At the end of the corridor the jailor sat at a small steel desk, the hooded light shining down on the open pages of his comic book. He was moving his lips as he read.

"Hey!" Frankie said softly.

The man looked up. "Whaddaya want, Lamone?"

"Come here. I want to show you what

kind of a crummy jail you got. Man, you got animals in here."

The jailor stood up. "The hell you say. This place gets soaked in DDT twice a week." He walked slowly up toward the cell.

"You don't think you got animals, eh? Come here and look at the hole where something bit a chunk outa me."

Frankie stood close to the bars. He intently examined the inside of his wrist. His fist was clenched. Without looking up he saw from the corner of his eye that the jailor had moved close, straining to see.

"Where? I don't see no hole."

"Here!" Frankie said, grunting as he struck. For a moment he had the sinking feeling that he hadn't hit hard enough, even though the pain coursed up his arm as sharp as an ulcerated tooth.

The jailor looked at him, almost blandly. His mouth sagged open. He said, "Ah!" He fell against the bars. Frankie grabbed the front of his shirt to hold him



upright and hit him twice more, vicious, jolting blows. The key ring was on a flat metal snap over the man's belt. Frankie yanked it off and let the man drop. He reached through the bars to work the lock. The third key opened the cell. Frankie ran down toward the desk, sucking his knuckles as he ran.

He yanked open the desk drawers, one by one. He cursed softly as he found no weapon. They were smarter than he had

thought in this jail. There had to be a weapon. The lamp on the desk was a goose-neck with a green glass shade. He quickly took off the shade, took out the bulb, yanked the cord out of the heavy base. He swung it by the flexible neck. Holding it in his hand, he went back toward the narrow circular stairs leading up to the floor above, leading up to the cell where he had learned, by careful questioning, that Huggins was being held.

ARTHUR CLOCK had selected an inconspicuous car, a small, grey sedan. He drove with very strict regard for the speed limits, the traffic lights. Beside him on the seat was the small crowbar. On the floor in back was the empty suitcase. In his pocket was the envelope addressed to himself at the Youngstown address.

He allowed himself to feel no fear. It was always like this. Plan it out so carefully that you can follow the plan almost without thinking. No sudden motions. No quick changes in the plan.

Ahead he saw the whirl and glitter of the amusement park. Not far now. For a moment he had the frightening thought that maybe the girl had lied. No, she wasn't lying. The money *had* to be there. Twenty thousand. Buy a nice little business as a front. Some kind of a store. Then let it be known around in the right places that he'd buy items that were a little warm. A man with some capital could buy cheap and hold the stuff until it had cooled off before unloading it. And no foolish risks. No risks like this one.

He turned left and headed up the hill, driving cautiously. There was the monument. The headlights touched the stone fence. He left the motor running and turned off the lights, got out and stood for a moment to let his eyes get used to the darkness.

It took him several seconds, once he

could see, to figure out which way north-east might be. The black steel of the crowbar was cool in his hand. He waited and listened. All quiet.

The rock was massive. He shrugged, reached with his fingers to locate the cement he would have to crack. His fingers touched it, touched dampness, sank into the fresh cement.

He whirled and ran three steps before the flashlight caught him. He flung the crowbar at the light.

Burgan ducked and heard it whistle over his head, clang loudly against the monument itself.

He held the light centered on the running man and fired high, yelling, "You get the next one in the gut!"

The man stopped, turned and blinked into the light, slowly raising his arms.

Burgan held the gun on him. Larry circled him, slapped his pockets, armpits, belt line. "He's clean."

"For twenty thousand," Burgan said softly, "you killed that girl."

"The hell I did," Arthur said. "Go ahead and check on me. I just got out a couple weeks ago. Frankie Lamone told me where to get the dough."

Burgan moved closer, moved the light across Clock's face with great care, then switched it down to Clock's hands. He reached out, clamped Clock's right hand tightly, turned it palm up.

"So you didn't kill her? You make me laugh."

The police car, alerted by the shot, came up the hill fast, the red spot flashing. Clock kicked suddenly at the gun. Burgan moved delicately, like a cat. As the leg came up he slashed hard across the shin with the barrel. Clock went down onto his knees. They yanked him up and walked him to the official car.

FRANKIE slid the lock back with great care, making no sound. He turned the knob, took a deep breath, shoved the door

open violently and ran in, the makeshift weapon ready.

A tall young man was on the bed. He was asleep, breathing quietly. Frankie moved over to the side of the bed. He swung the lamp base back. Right out of dreamland into death. But that wasn't good. The guy had to know.

"Hey!" he said. "Hey, you!"

Walt opened his eyes and looked up into a malevolent, twisted face, eyes that seemed to be afire.

"Huh?" he said. "What?"

"Wake up, sweetheart. Wake up. I got a present for you. You fixed Teens so I fix you. I want you to see it coming."

"You—you're Lamone! How did you—"

"Never mind how I got here! In three seconds you're going to be dead, Huggins!"

Walt saw the flat killer look in the eyes. "I didn't kill her," he said.

"No, you're just here for a rest. Okay."

Walt saw the shoulder tighten, the slight lift of the hand. He rolled away with one mighty lunge. The edge of the heavy base touched the hair at the back of his neck and thudded against the pillow. Walt landed on the floor on his hands and knees, glanced up and saw Frankie scrambling over the bed toward him, the clumsy deadly weapon raised again. Walt came up onto his feet and his shoulders hit the wall. Frankie raced in, swinging the lamp

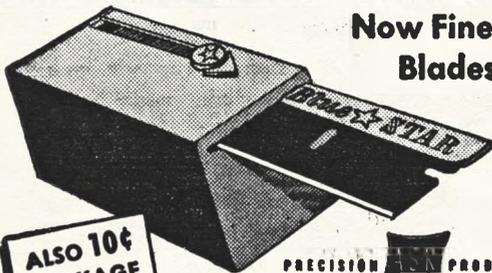
base the way a man would swing a tennis racket.

At the midpoint of the hard swing the base flew off and smashed against the wall. The flexible cable still in Frankie's hand cut Walt across the cheek, the pain so searing that it brought tears to his eyes, half blinding him.

Frankie swung it again and it hit Huggins across the throat. Huggins struck out blindly, missing twice, then feeling a good solidness against his knuckles. Frankie bounced back. Walt could see again. He saw the small radio flying toward his face. He ducked and it hit the wall behind him. Frankie rushed in, kicking at him. Walt turned and took the kick on his thigh. It half paralyzed his leg. As he sagged, hard fingers clamped around his throat. He went down onto his knees and grabbed Frankie's wrists. He could not pull the hard hands away. As the room began to darken he lunged forward, grabbed Frankie's legs and spilled him, rolling on top of him. He struck down again and again at the pale oval of the face under him, his right arm feeling as though it were a stocking full of wet sand. Then he was on his side, sucking the priceless air into his lungs. He got up onto his hands and knees, shaking his head. He staggered up onto his feet. Frankie, pale eyes glaring in the midst of the ruin of his face, was trying to stand up. Walt took one long step and

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hit Frankie solidly just as Frankie's hands came up off the floor. Frankie left his feet, hit on the flat of his back and lay still.

Walt walked on wooden legs to the open door. He leaned against the frame for a moment, waiting for strength to come back to him.

WALT scribbled his name on the release. The sergeant handed him the sealed manila envelope containing the things that had been taken from him. Walt walked over to the bench running along the wall, sat down, tore open the envelope and began to distribute the contents among his pockets.

He saw the feet and looked up. Borgan was looking at him without expression.

"You look great, Huggins," Borgan said.

Walt touched the bandage on his cheek. There was another on his throat where the cable had cut him. His voice was still husky.

"Thanks, Borgan."

"Riley tells me you want to slap my ears off."

"No, thanks. I had to hit somebody. I got it out of my system. Great jail you got here. Suppose Lamone decided to hit without waking me up?"

"We'd be notifying your relatives."

Walt stood up, crumpling the empty envelope. "Borgan, you've got just as much human warmth in you as that plaster wall over there."

"Loving people make lousy cops, Huggins."

"For my dough, you're a lousy cop."

"That make you feel better?"

"A little."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Get in my car and see how far I can get from this town."

"Come and see us next time you come through,"

"Ha!"

Borgan spat on the floor. "You people are all alike. You yammer about police brutality until we're afraid to touch anybody. Then you all scream because we've gone soft, and the crooks are getting away with murder. But every time one of you gets picked up you want U.N. delegate handling. We pushed you around a little to make you mad and keep you off balance. When you're like that you don't think so clear. You don't know good police work even when you fall all over it."

"What did you do that was so great?" Walt asked.

"Saved your neck. The easy thing was to leave the case the way it stood. You were good enough for a conviction. But I had to be thorough. I had to have the lab scrape her fingernails and test what they found. They found some hide and a little blood. Enough blood to type. It didn't match yours and the doc reported no holes in your skin made by fingernails. We found scratches on Clock's right wrist that matched. The blood type is the same. We got the confession at five this morning."

Walt swallowed hard. He looked at the absurd clown's face, the little, bright, cold eyes.

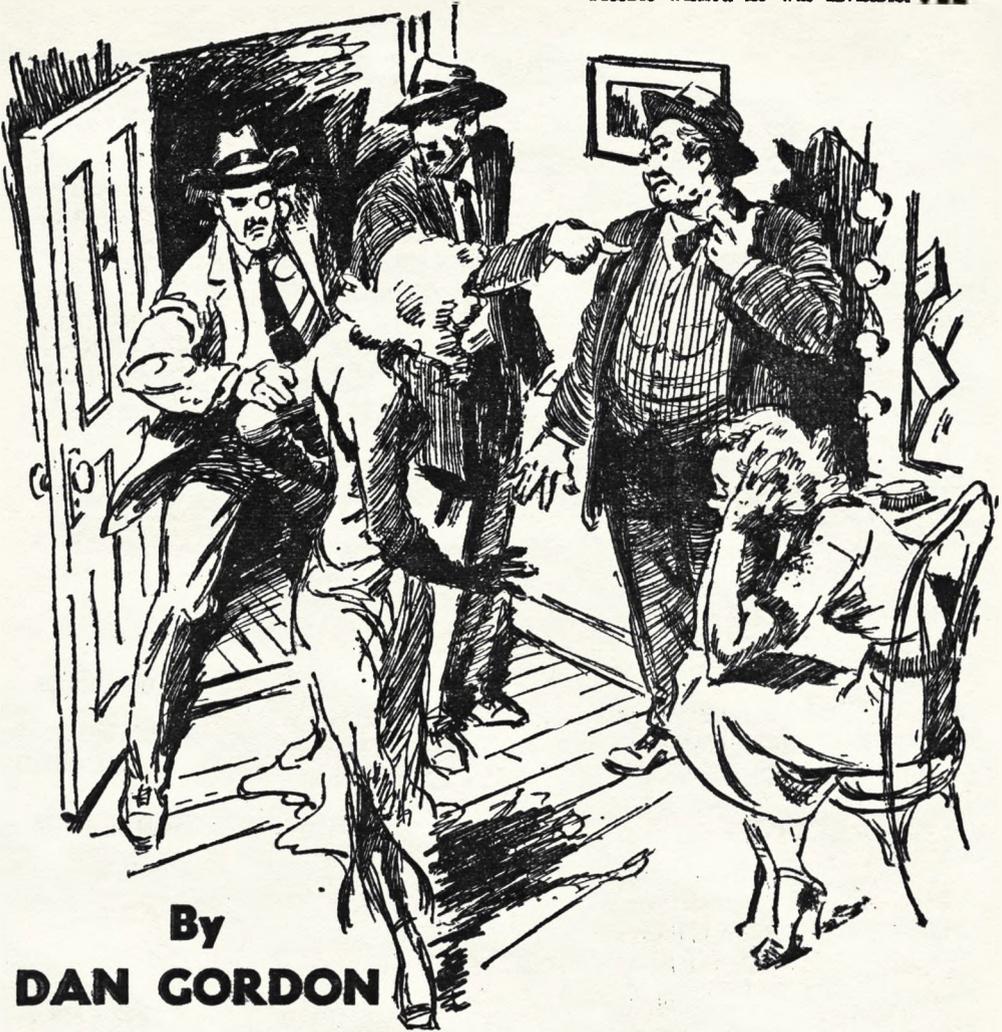
Walt said, "All right, Lieutenant. I've been a big-mouth about this whole thing. I was wrong. I see that now. I'm grateful to you. I owe you a lot." He put his hand out.

For the first time there was a faint trace of warmth in Borgan's smile. He said, "To do my job right I have to be thorough. But there's nothing in the rule book that says I've got to shake your hand, Huggins."

He turned and went off with his cocky little walk, his short-legged strut.

At the door he looked back and winked one cold, bleak, grey eye.

Herbie wished he was invisible. . . .



By
DAN GORDON

Don't Tangle With Herbie!

Kill the girl, would they? Broadway agent Herbie Carpis stormed. Well, they wouldn't get away with it—or at least, only over her dead body!

HERBIE CARPIS cringed as the man in front of his desk swore and threw the photograph down. Always, if you were an agent selling talent, you ran into crazy people. But for Herbie's money, the hoodlum before him was loonier than most.

His name was Bernie Bailey, and he

had, to Herbie's sure knowledge, risen to a position of leadership in the city's underworld within the last two years. And while Herbie preferred to know as little as possible of the town's tough boys and their doings, he had been around long enough to know that so rapid a rise could only be due to certain murderous ruthlessness.

Promotions, in Bernie Bailey's circle, did not come about through taking Civil Service exams.

Consequently, Herbie spoke with gentle patience as he picked up the photograph. "Ah, Mr. Bailey," he said. "You don't like this one either?"

"An agent," said Bernie scornfully. "You call yourself an agent. An agent would have some dames."

"Already," said Herbie mildly, "I've shown you fifty or more. Let me see what else we got." He flicked the intercom switch and told the girl in the outer office to bring in any and all pictures of female performers. He knew he could count on several photographs. They arrived in every mail.

Bernie Bailey looked at his watch. It was a handsome timepiece on a large, hairy wrist, and it seemed to make Bernie unhappy, for he scowled at Herbie and swore again.

Herbie nodded in sympathetic understanding. "I realize," he said, "what a busy man you are, Mr. Bailey. And I'm sorry for the delay." He cast a worried glance at the door and let out an audible sigh of relief when the girl brought a few pictures in.

With hands that trembled slightly, Herbie fanned them out on the desk. "Take a look," he said. "Maybe one of these." He studied Bailey's face as the gangster bent over the prints. It was plain that the man was strong enough and cruel enough to be an underworld power, but having talked to him, Herbie found himself idly wondering who backed Bailey—who, in short, furnished the brains.

One of the prints, a photograph of a slight blonde, had captured Bailey's attention. He held it cradled in one huge paw, looked very pleased, for him, and crooned, "Now this here is something like."

"You'll take her? Herbie said.

Bernie nodded. "She's the kind we

need. Have her down to the club at seven o'clock."

"Mr. Bailey," said Herbie timidly, "the only trouble is, I never heard her sing. She is not yet even a client of mine. Her picture came in just today."

BERNIE BAILEY flicked the file card that was clipped to the picture. "Whaddya mean?" he said belligerently. "It says here she can sing."

"Sure," Herbie whispered. "But all that means is *she* says she can sing. Me, I never heard her. So I can't guarantee—"

"Who's askin' you to? You see, it's this way, friend. The Kling Klub is a classy joint. Lots of dough in the decorations. We get some wren who don't contrast right, she'll louse up the decor."

"Oh," Herbie answered feebly.

"Can she sing is secondary, Carpis. Strictly secondary. See?"

"Sure," Herbie said. "I see. And I'll have her there at seven. I'm getting her on the phone right away." He forgot Bailey for the moment as a wave of self-admiration engulfed him. "What an agent," he marveled aloud. "This morning she sends her picture in, tonight she starts as a vocalist. Solo warbler at the Kling Klub."

"It's very important," Bailey said, "the dame gets there on time."

"Please, Mr. Bailey," said Herbie. "Would I send you a canary that would get herself lost on the way?"

"So-long," said Bernie Bailey.

"A pleasure," Herbie said. He leaned back and folded his hands on his stomach, enjoying the feeling of peace that seemed to come in as the mobster went out the door.

Then, remembering the photograph, he looked at the name on the file card and hurriedly flicked a switch. "Get me Miss Stella Dayton," he said. "A new girl. Is she a client? Certainly. She sent us her picture today."

"Yes, Mr. Carpis." The voice of the girl in the outer office, if not enthusiastic, was certainly resigned.

Not more than thirty minutes later, Miss Stella Dayton, a streamlined blonde, came tiptoeing into the room. "Mr. Carpis?" she whispered.

"Sure," Herbie said, and then, when he noticed her obvious fright, "what's the matter, Miss Dayton? Is somebody chasing you?"

"Oh, no." Miss Dayton got a grip on her jitters and flowed across the room. "It's just this office—and you, a big agent and all. You see when I sent the picture in, I didn't expect an answer."

HERBIE motioned her to a chair and sat down himself. He gave her a satisfied nod. "You got class," he said. "You're a nice girl. Believe me, it's scarce in this business. Right away when I looked at your picture, I saw it. I said, there's a girl we can use."

Miss Dayton's eyes went round and large. "Then you'll try to get me a job?"

"I've got one for you," said Herbie modestly. "I went to work on it right away, as soon as your picture came in. The best I could do was the Kling Klub."

"Ooooooh! That's an awfully expensive place."

"They sell garbage," Herbie informed her. "And their entertainment stinks. But a lot of the customers get their money

direct from the banks. That way, they don't care how they spend it. You start at three hundred a week."

"Three hundred!" Miss Dayton exclaimed.

Herbie shrugged. "It's the best I could do. And it ain't all clear. Out of it comes my ten per cent, and whatever it costs you for clothes." He stopped and leaned forward, carefully inspecting his client's dress.

It had been a good dress once, but now it was somewhat threadbare. "By seven tonight," Herbie said, "you got to be at the Kling Klub—in a very exclusive gown."

The face of the girl before him went crimson. She looked worried and lowered her eyes.

"What's the matter?" Herbie said.

"I guess I might as well tell you. This is the only presentable dress I have. I thought maybe something—somehow. But it's no use. I'd never be able to get one in time." Miss Dayton's large eyes became moist blue pools filled with unshed tears and despair.

Herbie reached for the pad on the desk before him. Resignation was plain on his face. He had told Bernie Bailey he'd furnish a singer, and the gangster had chosen this one. Maybe the dame couldn't sing at all. Maybe Bailey would fire her after she'd worked just one show.

These were chances he had to take. He

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scribbled a note to Charles, a designer, and handed it to the girl. "Run down to my friend, Charles," he said. "Say I want you should have something with swish and class. An original, no less. The best one he's got in the store."

"He'll give it to me without money?" Miss Dayton asked.

Herbie looked at her sadly. "Sure," he said, "he'll charge it to my account."

Miss Dayton got up and thanked him three times, then bounded out of the room.

Herbie sat in morbid silence, computing the probable cost of an original design from the shop of Charles. He found the thought depressing, but when he tried to think of something else, nothing came but stray visions of the Kling Klub and the ugly image of Bernie Bailey.

Though he tried, he could not help feeling that he had more than his money invested in this project. When you tampered with guys like Bailey, you were also risking your health.

You could, Herbie knew, go home and worry and toss all night. Or you could go to the Kling Klub and pray that the girl could sing.

She came back to show him the gown. It was long and covered with sequins. There wasn't much to the top. The sales slip enclosed said three hundred dollars.

When Miss Dayton had gone, Herbie sat for a long time, just staring at that sales slip. Finally he shuddered distastefully and shoved the paper out of sight beneath the blotter on his desk.

He finished his work and ate dinner at an inexpensive delicatessen near the Kling Klub. The cheesecake desert was bad for his too ample figure, but he justified it by telling himself he needed something bracing to compensate for the general state of his nerves.

Feeling better, if not completely at ease, he waddled down to the Kling Klub. Bernie Bailey was out on the sidewalk, looking up and down the street.

Herbie checked his watch. It was seven-thirty. "She didn't show?" he asked.

Bailey didn't answer right away. He looked anxiously up the street. When he did speak, he sounded impatient. Clearly he was a man who had more important things on his mind. "The canary?" he said. "Sure. She showed all right. Got here ahead of time. Only trouble was, I hadda send her away."

"She didn't look right?" said Herbie weakly.

"Looked fine," Bernie Bailey said. "Trouble was she couldn't sing."

Alibis and excuses leaped into the emergency position in Herbie's nimble mind. He was ready to hurl them at Bailey, when it became apparent the gangster wasn't listening. Bailey wasn't angry at all. For Herbie, who was prepared to take a slap in the jaw for his failure to deliver, Bailey's kindness was almost too much.

He had the feeling a lion hunter might have if a roaring, crouching, springing lion had changed its mind at the last moment, sheathed its claws, and licked his face.

It was a stunned and startled Carpis who said, "You mind if I go inside?"

"Go ahead," said Bailey shortly. "It's open for the public."

Herbie toddled in.

THE KLING KLUB was surprisingly small. Or perhaps the really excellent decorating job gave it that intimate atmosphere. Herbie fought a successful battle with the hat-check girl, retained his crumpled headpiece and bore it with him to the table. "Any cover charge?" he asked before he lowered his weight to the chair.

"A nominal one," the waiter said smoothly.

Herbie groaned and sat down. He could argue with the waiter later, or perhaps have a brief talk with Bernie Bailey. "Pepsi Cola," Herbie said. "And if you're

charging fifty cents for ice, I'll drink it out of the bottle."

"There's a lunch counter just down the street, sir. I can recommend it highly."

"No service," Herbie said sneeringly, "nothing but conversation."

The waiter went away.

A lazy group of musicians were kicking out a desultory rumba as they lounged atop a modernistic bandstand. Herbie scanned their faces, memorizing them in an absent-minded way. He wanted to be sure to say no in case any of them ever came into his office asking for a job.

His thoughtful gaze traveled along the front of the bandstand until he was staring at the potted palm at the end. He was very close to that plant, but even so he had looked away before the image impressed itself on his brain. When it did, he looked back again.

The girl was peering between the leaves, looking toward the door. Herbie could see nothing but her face, but that face was a mask of fear.

Some slight sound came from the door, and something flashed behind the palms. And in that instant, Herbie recognized—or thought he did—the expensive dress from Charles'. Then the girl was gone, and only the slight stir of the phony palm leaves marked the place where she had been.

Herbie Carpis looked toward the door.

Bernie Bailey had just come in. Beside him was another man, a sleek, chubby individual who might have been an insurance executive or a president of a bank. He was neither of these, Herbie knew. He was, instead, Major Biddleweight, of the Philadelphia Biddleweights. Herbie had once furnished the talent to entertain guests at a Biddleweight garden party. He could not have been more amazed to see the WCTU arrive in force, with every member drunk.

His bewilderment grew as Bailey, having given the club crowd the once-over, escorted his guest to the rear and guided him through a door. It occurred to Herbie that the gangster might have been ribbing him. Maybe Stella Dayton would appear and sing. She didn't, however. A bleached blonde came on in a little while. She quavered on the low notes and hit the top ones hard.

Herbie tried to shut the sound out, and fervently wished he'd gone home. Yet he knew that he could not—or would not—go home until he found his client. He had to recover that dress.

He waited, but Bailey did not return. Neither did Major Biddleweight. The blonde vocalist went away, and the weary orchestra took up its lackadaisical beat.

Slowly, and most reluctantly, Herbie hoisted himself from his chair. He drifted toward the door in the rear. Nobody moved to stop him. At the door, he took

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a deep and shivering breath, opened it and stepped through.

HE WAS in a carpeted hall. There were doors on either side—dressing rooms, Herbie figured. The deep-throated murmur of men's voices came from behind one of these, and Herbie went on by. Bernie Bailey and Major Biddleweight were talking. Herbie couldn't hear what they said.

A new girl like Stella Dayton—if they'd given her a dressing room it would be something not so desirable—maybe down at the end of the hall.

He raised his hand to knock when some faint sound made him hesitate. He turned and saw the face of Miss Stella Dayton. She was watching him through the narrow strip of a partially opened door across the hall.

"Hey," said Herbie Carpis.

"Shut up!" the girl rasped harshly, and from her angry glare and her rasping voice, it became apparent to Herbie that she wasn't Miss Dayton at all.

"Look," Herbie said, "I don't want no trouble." His eyes flickered over the part of her he could see. "All I want is that dress."

Rage glowed in the girl's narrowed eyes. "A stagedoor Johnny," she breathed. And of all times it has to be now."

One of her hands came into view. It was holding a small, efficient-looking gun. The single round eye looked at Herbie. It didn't wink at all. "Get going, fat boy," the girl said. "I don't know what your pitch is, but right now is a very poor time."

"You can't shoot people," whispered Herbie. "For that they will put you in jail."

"Not me," the girl said. "I can shoot *you* and say I was defending myself. Here I was, dressing, and you tried to force your way into the room. Catch on, Buster?"

Herbie said weakly, "The dress . . ." and then stopped. The girl was listening to something, and then Herbie heard it, too. Down the hall where he'd heard the voice, there had been a sudden scraping of chairs. Now a doorknob rattled as if a hand had grasped it from the other side. Herbie looked in that direction, and when he swung his gaze back again, the girl and the gun had gone.

Having survived so many years in the jungle of Broadway, Herbie could make a fast decision. He had been terrified by the girl with the gun in her hand, and if something was coming that frightened *her*, it was nothing he wanted to face. He had his choice of joining the girl or trying the other door.

He tried it. It was open. Herbie trundled his portly figure in and closed the door behind him. Down the hall another door opened and closed. He heard footsteps strolling toward him, and while he stood there, motionless in the dark, the footsteps halted outside the room.

Groping his way along the wall, Herbie came to a closet. Soft garments brushed his face, and he moved them aside carefully, squirmed his way in behind them.

Somebody opened the door of the room. A light switch clicked.

Major Biddleweight's voice said crisply, "I should think you'd have that door locked, Bailey."

There was an instant's embarrassed hesitation, then Bernie Bailey's voice said heartily, "Why lock it, boss? She ain't goin' nowhere."

"Hmm," Major Biddleweight said. Herbie heard him walk across the room. There was a scraping sound—as of a box or trunk being opened. "A good clean job," the major said. "Very nice indeed."

He sounded as if he were complimenting a gardener for a particularly tidy lawnmowing on the grounds of his country estate. Herbie Carpis wrung his hands in the dark. Learning that Major Biddle-

weight was the brain behind Bernie Bailey—this was an interesting bit. But Herbie didn't much care. He would have cheerfully traded the knowledge, and his ten percent of Miss Stella Dayton, for a safe conduct out of the Kling Klub. Only—when he went, he wanted to have that three-hundred-dollar dress safely tucked under his arm.

"I realize," Major Biddleweight was saying, "that you probably have a sentimental interest in this—er—job. May I ask how you plan to dispose of her?"

"Sure," Bernie Bailey said. "It don't bother me none, boss. It made me feel kind of sad at first, but when you told me she had to go—well, I never was a guy to let pleasure louse up my business."

"Bailey," said the major, "you will go far. Your attitude is objective."

"Thanks," Bailey answered uncertainly.

"I favor," the boss went on, "planting her feet in a pail of concrete. Old-fashioned, I know. But very, very sure."

"Yeah," Bailey answered. "We used to use it back in Prohibition days. Well—we'll dump her some time before morning."

"Do that," the major said. "I think I'll go now." There was a pause before he added, "And leave you two alone."

HERBIE'S hands were very moist now, and as he continued to wring them, they slipped easily over each other. The closet seemed stiflingly hot, or it could have been his state of mind that was making the sweat pop out.

He heard a single pair of footsteps cross the room and go out. Soon after, the door opened softly and a woman's quick tread came in.

A woman's voice said, "What did he say, Bernie?" The tone was eager, frightened, but Herbie placed the voice at once—the lady with the gun.

He wanted to know if she was still wear-

ing the dress, wanted to know so badly that he parted the costumes before him until he was able to see out. She was wearing it. Herbie stifled a groan.

Bernie Bailey was standing near a large steamer trunk. Near him was the young woman who looked like Miss Dayton but wasn't. Bailey glanced at the trunk. "He wants," he said slowly, "we should use the old cement trick an' toss her into the drink."

"That louse!" the young woman said. "He can't do that to me!"

"He ain't doin' it to you," Bailey reminded her. He pointed to the trunk and added, "We're doin' it to her."

In a voice somewhat subdued by terror, the woman said, "Just think. It might have been me."

"A washtub," said Bernie thoughtfully. "We'll have to use a washtub. A bucket ain't near big enough."

"God," the young woman whispered. "Can you imagine why he'd want to have a thing like that done to me?"

Bailey shrugged. "He says you know too much." He looked at the girl sideways and added with heavy humor, "Good thing I thought of ringin' in another dame. Otherwise I'd of had to use you."

The girl took a backward step. "Don't talk like that, Bernie. Not even in a joke."

Herbie waited until they had gone, then staggered out of the closet. The "something" Bailey had thought of, he was practically certain, had cost the life of his client. Now he gingerly moved to the steamer trunk. He thought he had the situation clear and correct in his mind:

Major Biddleweight, as the brains behind the city's underworld, had decided that Bernie Bailey's girl friend "knew too much," as Bailey had said. Biddleweight had ordered the girl's execution and, not completely trusting his lieutenant, had also stipulated that he himself would view the body once the girl was dead. Then Bailey, to save his girl friend, had gone to

Herbie's office to hire a double—a substitute.

Herbie thought he had it straight, and when he reluctantly raised the lid of the trunk and saw the girl doubled up inside, he was certain. He knew for sure.

The face of his client had changed somewhat. She had been carefully made up to look almost exactly like the other girl. She was wearing a tailored suit—doubtless a number that Bailey's girl friend had frequently worn. She was pale, and looked very dead.

Herbie cast one frantic look about the room, and spotted the telephone. He reached it in one bounce. "Police," he said. "I just got a client murdered. I'm calling from the Kling Klub." He cast a fear-stricken glance at the door. They had left it unlocked, which meant they wouldn't be gone for long. "And, please, you should hurry," he begged the desk sergeant at the other end of the phone. "This could also happen to me."

It was at this moment that Miss Stella Dayton murmured a standard, "Where am I?" and sat bolt upright in the trunk.

HERBIE CARPIS screamed. He screamed very softly; the sound was low, but it was an unmistakable scream. When at last he got the words out, his speech was feeble and wavering. Herbie said, "Ain't you dead?"

"I think not," Miss Dayton answered. She held up her arms for assistance, and when Herbie failed to come closer, hauled herself up, swung her legs out and sat on the edge of the trunk. "But I've got an awful headache," she observed.

"Doped," Herbie said. "Did they give you a pill or a shot?"

"What's the difference?" Miss Dayton asked sensibly. "Mr. Carpis, does this happen when a girl goes out on a job?"

"Hardly ever," Herbie answered. "To me it never happened before." His back was to the door, but he knew when it

opened by the expression on the girl's face. Herbie spun like an overfed top and saw Bernie Bailey standing there.

"Hello," said Bailey harshly, "you snooping ten percenter?"

"I came to get my client," said Herbie. "It surprises me she ain't dead. Maybe you're surprised too?"

"Naw. I ain't startled none. The lady got a little jumpy, so we gave her something to quiet her down."

Major Biddleweight spoke from the door. He said, "Better give this one something. She's a trifle nervous, too." Herbie recognized the lady of the gun. The sequins on her dress sparkled gaily as Biddleweight shoved her roughly, sent her spinning into the room.

That room was getting crowded. Herbie wished he were small or invisible. He had the uncomfortable feeling that his pudgy figure was taking up too much space.

Biddleweight was looking at the two girls. He was getting the picture, and he didn't like it.

"Gentlemen," pleaded Herbie. "Remember, there are ladies here!"

Major Biddleweight said, "I knew you were stupid, Bailey. But I thought you'd have better sense than to try and cross me up." The major's hand was out of sight behind him.

Bernie Bailey said, "Who do—" and stopped abruptly. The *do* turned into a squawking sound as a bullet from the major's gun went slashing through his throat.

Herbie sank to the floor in a quivering heap. He didn't fall and he didn't kneel. He just sank, slowly, like a jellyfish drying out on a pier. He saw Bailey clutching his throat and gasping, saw the gangster's bloody hand move down from his throat to his armpit, saw it come out with a gun.

Then Herbie closed his eyes as Bailey sent the slugs pounding into Biddleweight. Herbie wasn't sure, when the

roaring ceased, if there had been three or four.

There had been enough. You could tell that, because the major was stretched out flat.

And Bailey was toppling now. He fell forward. His knees didn't buckle until just before he hit.

Herbie Carpis got up on all fours. Miss Stella Dayton was standing with her palms pressed against her cheeks. Her mouth was rounded into an O, and it looked as if it might stay that way.

Herbie was very shaky, but he was beginning to breathe again when he noticed the other girl flattened against the wall. Her gun was pointing at him.

THEY were frozen there, the three standing up, the two dead on the floor, when the police came bursting in.

The first cop took in the scene and swung his gun toward the girl.

"Wait!" Herbie Carpis said, and started walking forward. His feet kept moving, they didn't stop as they carried him toward the gun. Other policemen crowded in. They held their guns in readiness and watched Herbie walk toward the girl.

She was panting. Herbie could see her bosom rise and fall against the shimmering dress. She didn't blink or move her eyes. Nor did she shift the gun.

Her finger was on the trigger, but she let it go limp as Herbie took the gun from her hand.

A giant sigh went up in the room, an audible, whistling sound. Herbie carried the gun between thumb and forefinger. He held the unfamiliar object well away from him until he handed it to a sergeant.

The policeman murmured, "Thanks," but Herbie didn't quite hear him. His mind was on the photographers and newsmen who were piling into the room. With this publicity, with the part she had played, who cared if Miss Stella Dayton could sing? He would make her into a star.

He started to leave the sergeant. There were angles that had to be preselected if his client were to appear in a very favorable light. He had taken one step when he felt the policeman's hand closing on his sleeve.

"I want to tell you," the cop said, "I've never seen anything like the way you walked up and took that gun. We might've had to shoot that dame if it hadn't been for you."

Herbie shrugged. "Me, I was dying," he said. "But you know what it would have cost me if you had put bullet holes in that dress?"

The very thought unnerved him, but he got a grip on himself again and went over to make a star.

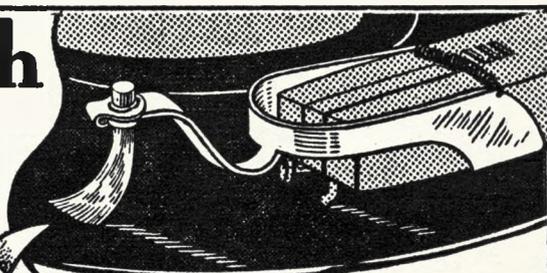
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By **FRANK WARD**



"Don't try to stop me, kid," he said. "It's no good. . . ."

GLAD TO SEE YOU— DEAD!

This Hanrahan, what kind of a man had he been? Six feet of grinning, wife-stealing, glad-handing crook. But he was a cop, and he was dead.

And someone had to burn!

IT HAD been raining all night, a soft, sighing dribble of wetness that slanted gently into the trees and dripped monotonously on the rubber mat on the floor of the squad car, from the triangular-shaped split in the windshield. Now, at

four in the morning, the rain had stopped, and only an occasional gust of late November wind whipped the water from the trees along the road against the car.

Ackerman sat stolidly behind the wheel, his huge hands lax on the rim, driving slowly. There was only the sodden hiss of tires on the road, and Ackerman's hoarse, uneven breathing.

After a while, after we had gone perhaps another two miles, he said, in a flat voice, "I'm cooked, Nickie. They'll say I knocked him off, no matter what I tell them. They'll figure I rigged it up so he got his, like I always said I would. You know what I told the captain, Nickie? I said, 'Captain, you put me on with that slob and I won't be responsible what happens.' I said, 'Captain, you put me in the same car with that guy and I quit.'" He stopped talking and took one hand off the wheel and lit a cigarette. The hand with the match shook a little.

"I should have quit," Ackerman went on dismally. "I shouldn't ever have let them put me on with Hanrahan, Nick. You know what kind of a guy Hanrahan was, kid."

I knew what kind of a guy Hanrahan had been. Hanrahan with the big square hands. Hanrahan with the slap on the back. Hanrahan with your best girl. I knew Hanrahan. The saliva in my mouth tasted acid and bitter.

Ackerman sighed again and swung the spotlight mounted on the side of the squad car so its beam fluttered out along the rim of the ditch on the nearside of the car. He took his foot off the gas, letting the car drift, and shortly he touched the brake and the car stopped.

"Here," he said. I looked down the beam of the light; I could see a pair of feet, neatly shod feet with bright new soles and rubber heels that were hardly scuffed or dirtied at all. Hanrahan's shoes. They projected at an absurd angle from the lip of the ditch, as if perhaps Hanrahan

were lying on his belly trying to pick up an apple floating in the muddy water with his teeth. I didn't think that was what Hanrahan was doing. I didn't think Hanrahan was interested in being the life of the party any more.

I got out of the car and stood looking at the dry soles of Hanrahan's shoes sticking up out of the ditch. My hands felt cold and remote, as if the blood circulated only as far as my wrists. I shoved them into the pockets of my topcoat and started walking over toward where Hanrahan lay. I took a pocket flash out and held it on him, the light jumping a little, and moved it until it touched the back of his neatly cropped head.

He had been neatly cropped, all right. Whoever had trimmed him had used something short, heavy and blunt. The back of his head lay pulpy and red on the back of his neat dark-blue topcoat. He was wearing a shirt with a red collar, the red turning brown, the material stiff and hard under the glazed coating. I took the flash off him.

ACKERMAN came over, moving slowly. He said, "You see how it looks, Nick. You see what I mean, kid? I'm cooked."

"All right," I said. I took out my lighter and touched it to a cigarette, the wind fanning the bright little core of flame, and chewed on the bitter smoke. "All right," I said. "Stop fanning your mouth like that. You get on my nerves, saying I'm cooked, I'm cooked. Shut up." I walked away from him a few yards and turned the light on Hanrahan again, on everybody's pal, Hanrahan, the cop with his hand on everybody's shoulder and his hand in everybody's pocket, the cop with one eye on the captain's door and the other eye on the captain's wife, or on anybody's wife. I looked at him and remembered what he had told me about women, on the nights I had ridden with

him along the night patrol. The cop who made every decent cop wish he were out collecting garbage or pushing a broom around after the milk carts. I spat on the wet road. I said to Ackerman, "Tell me again. Give it to me once more, Connie."

He looked at me, just a big, dumb guy with his feet too big and his belly pushing out against his coat and his sad wet eyes scared now. "I didn't do it, Nick. Not even to him, not from behind. I wouldn't do a thing like that."

"All right," I said wearily, believing him. "Get back in the car."

We got back in the car and Ackerman sat staring straight ahead down the road. I didn't look at him. I said softly, "I don't have to tell you how bad this is, Connie. He was supposed to be riding with you; he had the twelve-to-eight shift. If he got out on you, they're going to ask why you didn't report him for it. You know that."

"He wasn't with me," Ackerman said, for the tenth time that early morning. "I told you that, Nick. I dropped him off on the corner of Hutchison and Squires. I couldn't say no to him; he said I could pick him up again at five, on my way back."

"Hutchison and Squires," I said. I sat there wondering what was at Hutchison and Squires for a man with Hanrahan's tastes, and decided there was nothing there at all for him. It would be just a drop-off point. There was a drugstore on one corner, but it would be closed at that hour. There was a row of telephone booths beside the store. Apart from that, nothing but suburban homes. I said, "The first time, Connie? Was this the first time?"

He shook his head. "Once a week," he mumbled. "For maybe five, six months now. He told me if I opened my yap about it, he'd make it up to me with the captain, one way or the other. The captain would go for his word, Nick. He could put me back in a harness out in the

hills somewhere. I didn't tell even my wife, Nick. Nobody knew."

I blew my breath out against the windshield and watched the fogged pattern fade. "At three in the morning," I said. "What then?"

"I went out through the Grosvenor district. No calls. I went out as far as Ridley street, and then I came back. I went up along the viaduct road, as far as the limits, and turned around and came back. About four-fifteen, Nick. I remember that, because one of those semi-trailer jobs went by and the gravel off his wheels put that hole in the glass. Then I came down here. I was going to pick him up, Nick, like he said. The lights caught the feet." He shivered, "Just the feet, sticking up like that. I didn't know who he was until I pulled up and went and had a look. Then I got scared. I didn't know what to do, I came back like a bat out of hell and I got you."

"That was five, on the nose," I said. "That was a little more than half an hour ago, the time you were supposed to pick him up at Hutchison and Squires?"

He nodded.

"All right," I said. "That sounds straight enough."

"To you, yeah . . . You remember the fight me and Hanrahan had in the squad room last week? And the month before that? I told him if he kept needling me I'd kill him, sooner or later. Meloche heard me, Nick. Meloche and Rose, and you know that Meloche. He'd be in flapping his teeth at the captain before I got through talking. They'll say I got sore and whaled him with a mace and made up the story to cover. I can't prove a thing."

I LOOKED at him. For a big man with a thick head, Ackerman wasn't so dumb. I could almost see Captain Decourcy sneering. I could almost hear him using his pet phrase. A likely story, he'd sneer.

I could see him grinding his teeth, bunching his thin, sallow face up, screwing up his watery eyes, pounding the desk with his fist. He didn't like Ackerman because Ackerman was a normal human being; he wouldn't like Ackerman because Ackerman was a guy with a closed fist when the loose cash was on the prowl, when there was a ticket to be fixed; he wouldn't like anything about Ackerman, because Ackerman was a big man and Decourcy a small one with a mind to match his thin, sharp, prying nose. Decourcy had had big plans for Hanrahan; he had him down for a good soft desk job when the opportunity came. He would miss Hanrahan a lot.

Ackerman moved suddenly, turning toward me. I saw the dashlight glinting on the Police Special in his hand. His big, flat face was serious. He said, "Nick, don't try to stop me, kid. It's no good. They'll nail me up to the cross for this one. You couldn't help enough, Nick. Get out of the car, kid."

I gawked at him, my mouth open foolishly. He said, his voice high in the car, "Don't fool with me, Nick. Please, kid, don't make me hurt you, Nick. I haven't got a chance if I go in. I'm out on a limb and I can hear the machine saws going hard."

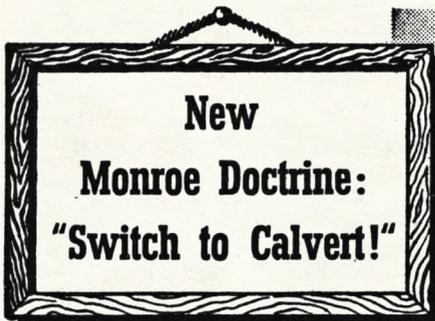
"You fool," I told him softly. All my life a neighbor, pointing a gun at me. "You dim-witted jerk," I said, talking

loudly now. "They won't give you a chance, they won't even call your name before they kill you, you moron, you blubbering big idiot. They'll cut you down so fast it's like you've never been. You must be crazy."

"Sure," he said. He said it quietly, without malice, as if he had his lumbering mind on other things. "Sure, they'll do that, maybe, if I give them the chance. What do they say and do when I walk in now, with you, Nick? Get out and start walking up the road, kid."

I looked at him. I got out of the car slowly and closed the door and stood on the side of the road, watching the rear wheels spin on the greasy road-top in first gear. Then the car was veering away from the shoulder. I took my own gun out and looked at it and at the car, and put the gun away. My mouth felt sore and bruised, as if he had actually hit me. I turned around, after a time, and started walking back down the road, away from the spot, away from Hanrahan's nice new shoes and Hanrahan's neat lisle socks.

DECOURCY put one hand out in front of him, admiring it, and cracked a knuckle. He cracked it with a deliberate sort of malice that would take pleasure from inflicting some sort of pain on anything, even himself. He winced. He said, "Fancy, I ought to break you down to a pimple and squeeze you hard."



NEW YORK, N. Y.—George H. Monroe, New York singer and entertainer, advises men of moderation: "Switch to Calvert Reserve—as I have. Calvert really is lighter, milder, finer. It always makes your occasional highball taste better."

He looked around at the other two men in the room, Meloche, a thin, sour man with a gastric ulcer and wispy blond hair; at Rose, who glanced down uncomfortably at his feet. Rose with his fine ascetic face, his gentle eyes. He looked back at me.

"Hanrahan," he said. I thought his voice would break. He screwed up his watery grey eyes and glared at me. "The best damn cop in this town," he said, almost shouting now. "And you let his murderer get away. You with a gun under your arm, you stand there and let him drive away and you do nothing. What kind of a cop are you, anyway?"

He paused for breath. He said, thinly, drawing the words out fine, "I'll tell you what kind of a cop you are, Fancy. You're a suspended cop. You're out of my sight until I can get to the commissioner with this, and after that, you're collecting garbage." He slammed his hand down on the desk. "You hear me, Fancy?"

I got up slowly. I walked over to his desk, taking my time, and stood looking down at him through the thin veil of red blood that stretched in front of my eyes. There was a loud roaring in my ears. I kept both hands in my pockets, balled tight around the wads of perspiration that leaked through my fingers. I looked at him for a long time, until the haze cleared a little, until I could think with my mind instead of with my instincts. I put my badge on his desk gently, and the badge was wet with the sweat off my hands. I turned and walked out of the room, across the long stretch of office, past Rose and Meloche. I closed the door and went down the long hall, down the stairs and out onto the street.

I began walking down the street, away from the station until I came to Angelo's. I went in, into the soft light and the cheerful smells, and sat down in a booth and stared at the back of the opposite seat, and when Angelo came up, ordered a double Scotch. Sitting there, holding

the glass in both hands so that the liquor would not slop up the sides of the glass, looking at the back of the opposite seat.

After a time I realized the seat was no longer there. I closed my eyes, opened them. Max Rose had come in, quietly as ever, as soft and elusive as the thoughts behind the gentle eyes. He said, "Not like that, Nickie. I know how you feel, but not like that."

I put the empty glass down. I said, "One minute more, Max. Just one minute. I would have killed him. With my bare hands, laughing. Me, Nick Fancy, I would have killed that lousy . . ." I stopped talking and put my face in my hands to hide it from him. Rose stood up quietly and came around and sat down beside me, his hand light and feathery on my shoulder.

It took me a little while. I was ashamed, ashamed to be seen like that, with my palms wet from covering my eyes, and I was still shaking, but not so badly as before.

"Anything," Max was saying. "Anything, Nick. If you need money, I have some saved up. Not much, but enough, until you find yourself."

"No," I said. "No, but thanks. I'll be all right."

Rose sat looking down at the table. Finally he got to his feet. He ran a hand over his fine dark hair and stood rubbing the back of his neck. He said, "I have to go back now, Nick." He glanced down at me. "Do you want me to buy you a drink, Nick?"

I grinned at him wryly. "You worry about people too much, Max."

A little later, with just the one drink inside me, I went home and went to bed. For a long time I lay on my back, wondering about Hanrahan and about what had been wrong with the way Hanrahan died.

AT FOUR the next morning it had begun to rain again. I parked my coupé on Squires, near the corner, and walked

up the rest of the block until I was beside the drugstore, shuttered and dark for the quiet hours. I stood under the awning, which stretched nearly to the gutter, and looked both ways up and down the block, and at the rank of telephone booths off to my left, flush with the building fronts beside the drugstore.

It was here that Connie had let Hanrahan off that morning at three o'clock. I stood on the spot, trying to think as Hanrahan would think on a morning like that, with two hours before Connie would be back in the prowler car. The two hours limited it. A thought squirmed its way into the first twitches of an idea, and fizzled out. I felt tired, despite the long hours of soggy sleep.

With a cigarette in my mouth I walked west on Hutchison. When I was standing again on the corner, I had used up fifteen minutes of some time that nobody wanted, and I had seen nothing, passed no one. My feet were wet now, the hat sodden on my head. I turned and went down the block toward my car, and as I reached its front fender a match cracked like a whip in the dark interior, a pool of flame took strength and began climbing higher in cupped hands.

I opened the door and looked in at Rose, not saying anything. He looked at me sideways, not smiling, his face limp and without expression. He said, "Hello, Nick. Get in out of the rain, boy. You're soaked through."

I said "Sure," and closed the door and went around to the driver's side, seeing the black department car parked across the street, and got in beside him.

I took the dead butt out of my mouth and squinted at it in the darkness. My voice took a careful step forward. "Only Connie and I knew about this, Max," I said.

"That was yesterday, Nickie," he murmured. He drew hard on his smoke, fanning the glow into a bright core that

seemed as big as a marble. "I've got him at home, Nick, at home in bed in the spare room. He was like a lost kid. He didn't know where to go."

"He came to you?"

His chuckle was almost sly. "I've been a cop twenty years," he said softly. "All that time a cop, you learn things and you hear things. No, he didn't come to me. He said for me to tell you he was sorry about yesterday morning, Nick. He told me about it, all of it. He said in the morning he would turn himself in. He doesn't want you to take any raps for him."

"No," I said. I reached over and put the key in the lock and started the motor. I said, "Look, Max, these things are always in patterns. You know that. All the time, there's a pattern somewhere, and once you find the first thread it doesn't take so long. This is the thread, right here, at this intersection. This is where Hanrahan got out, this is where he started. Where did he go? He didn't walk. He didn't walk anywhere where the rain was falling. I remember that. I remember seeing his shoes sticking up out of the ditch, with the soles dry and not very dirty. New shoes, not much muck on them. He didn't walk. He got out of a car, up there under the awning on the corner and he got into another."

I put the car in gear and we moved away from the curb, the lights on low and showing nothing against the gleaming black pavement, and up as far as the Stop sign on the corner. I said, "Nothing west on Hutchison, not for two or three blocks, and then only the odd store, everything closed up, no taxi ranks. Perhaps farther on, but I don't think so."

"There's one about three blocks north on Squires," Rose said. "I passed it coming up here. Let's go look."

WE WENT. The only driver on the rank was an ex-jockey type, small and bored and half-asleep behind his

wheel, keeping one ear perked through the open ventilator window to the dispatcher's call-box on the wall of the building beside the rank. He cocked one eye at me as I came up, breathed hard through his flattened nose and reached for his ignition switch.

I opened one door and looked in at him. I said, "Police business, Charlie," and slid in beside him.

He shrugged. He said, "Okay, so you're police. Do I buy a drink on it, or do you carry your own? I got a right to park here."

I grinned. I said, "Sure. Sure you do. Tell me what I want to know and you got a right to park in front of any hydrant in this town, any time. Yesterday morning, at about three o'clock, you got a call. Or if not you, somebody else in this line. To the corner of Squires and Hutchison. In the rain, Charlie. It was raining hard. Think about it."

He thought, staring at a point just behind my right shoulder, his mouth open a little. He snapped his fingers. "Sure, now. Big man, looked like he might be a salesman. Smooth type. Sharp clothes. Dry, he was. The rain coming down so hard you couldn't see, but him all dry. I remember that."

"Any tickets," I said warmly. "Anything you do, Charlie, you haven't done. Go on with that. Where'd you drop him off?"

He chuckled. "Ah, now look, buddy. That's asking a lot. We went along Hutchison and turned off, I think at Maple. He didn't give any address, just said to keep driving and he'd tell me where to turn. It was a big house, though, sort of long and low, painted white. Plenty of grass around it, white fence, driveway."

"Could you go there?"

"I could try. Is this on the house, or do you pay?"

I put a worn five in his lap. He snapped off his reading light, started the engine

and made a wide U-turn in the middle of the block and drove back to Hutchison and along Hutchison to Maple. I could see my car with Rose in it, half a block back, cruising slowly.

After a while the cabbie put his spot on, driving with one hand and swinging the light with the other. He drove for about five miles, and pulled up. "Along here, somewhere, I think. Right along here. I get the iron deer on that lawn over there. That I remember."

"All right," I said, keeping the excitement out of my voice. "Okay. You got a friend in the department, Charlie. Any time you need one, call Nick Fancy." I got out into the rain and watched him pull away, and in a little while Rose came up, driving with his lights out now, and parked down the block. I waved to him and went on up the block, walking in under the overhang of the trees, until I came to the white fence.

I opened the gate and went up the walk, past dripping bushes and softly moaning trees, until I was close enough to see the number. This was where Hanrahan had come, perhaps only an hour of life left in him then, walking quickly up the gravel drive off my right, where there was no paving to hold the wetness. If he had done that, I thought, he had gone directly to the garage.

A black sedan stood inside the garage, its metal gleaming just a little in the light that went in through the garage window. I tried the window. It gave with a shrill, sharp grinding of sound and creaked on its hinges. Dust fell on my hands, dry gritty dust. I went over the sill easily and hung poised there on one hand before dropping to the cement floor of the garage. There were strong smells—gas, oil, rubber, the smell of metal drying out. There were rain spots on the black body and pieces of gravel caught in the treads of the tires, and with the gravel, dirt and mud.

I prowled about, clearing the way with my pencil flash, and was still on the move when suddenly in the house, through the connecting door that led from the garage to the house, a phone shrilled like a sharp pain in the night. I stopped breathing. I walked around to the back of the car and looked at the license plate, still holding my breath, as if that made me somehow more invisible, and waited with screaming nerves for the phone to stop ringing. It did, in the middle of a burst.

ANOTHER light fanned out from the crack below the connecting door and I stood there with my mouth open, looking at the license plate on the car and then looking at the car itself. I turned and went silently over to the garage doors and peered through the windows, wondering why Rose had not warned me that the man who owned this car was on the prowl. There was a good reason. My car, with Rose in it, was no longer there. Only the dark, desolate stretch of street.

A door slammed, nearer now, and a man's feet began running along a corridor. I moved then, panic in my stomach and on my breath, because I didn't understand this. I couldn't figure it out. I ran to the side of the car and opened a rear door and got in, hunching down low. I fell low along the floor, turning sideways so that I could get my gun and realizing that I hadn't brought it with me even as my

fingers reached the place where it should be. My other hand hit something, half under the front seat of the car. A wrench. I closed my hand around it.

Leather scraped briskly on the cement floor. A man breathed hard and fast and not far away. The garage doors rolled up and the light went on, the car ground into life and lurched out backwards, throwing gravel, and slammed into the street, made a wide, sweeping turn and went away with a rush, throwing me forward against the back of the front seat.

I took a good firm grip on the wrench and waggled it experimentally. It was a nice wrench, the big kind with a long handle and a heavy set of jaws. There was something on the jaws that felt like rust and mud and what might have been short stiff fibers, but none of that would do much to cushion the blow I was planning for the driver's head.

After a time the car began to slow, until it was coasting along. I felt the brakes take and the car stopped, fishtailing a little on the wet surface. There was a long moment of quiet, laced with rain; the car door opened and closed and I caught just a glimpse of him then, walking toward the back, his hat low on his head. The car bounced a little as he braced one foot on the bumper and opened the trunk lid. I started to move, warily, holding my wrench in front of me. I was still moving when the door opened and a sharp, nasal

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voice said, "Not now, Fancy, not now."

I didn't know what he meant. At that moment I didn't know anything; my heart was up in my throat the way it had been the first time I ever had a gun pointed at me in malice and I knew I had good reason to be afraid.

"No," he said, still quite sanely, and I knew of a sudden why the wrench in my hand had muck and hairs on it, and I knew why Hanrahan had gone to the big white house on Wellington road each Tuesday morning. I remembered that Captain Decourcy always worked the overnight trick on Tuesdays; I remembered a lot of things I should have seen before. I could close my eyes and see the dapper captain crouched here in the back seat of the big car, his brain boiling at the talk that must have gone between Hanrahan and the captain's wife, on that Tuesday morning, the two of them so close to him in the darkness. All he had to do when they pulled up on that side road was to reach out. I let the wrench fall on the car floor.

It was a theory made fact by Decourcy's voice, there behind me on the quiet street, but it was a thing I would never prove.

I straightened up. There was a dead cold spot between my shoulder blades. I said, in a remote voice, "You shouldn't have pinned it on Connie Ackerman, Captain. You shouldn't have done it to a nice guy like that."

"Get out," he said softly, and I got out, stumbling on the doorsill and turning my head enough to see the riot gun cradled comfortably under his arm, his finger on the trigger. We had stopped outside a house that was familiar to me, a small neat house set back from the sidewalk behind a low picket fence with a few of the pickets missing. Rose's house, the house where Connie slept like a child in the guest room.

Decourcy twitched his head to take in the house. He sounded undecided, but not undecided enough to miss me if I

started to run. Not with buckshot at that range. He said, "Walk around the car slowly and with your hands away from your body. Go up the walk and stop at the front door."

THE house was dark, absolutely without light or sound. It seemed strangely peaceful there on the front stoop. I had a comical sense of security, as if this were my house and I was coming home from a



"You ring," he said. "You ring, and when he answers, you tell him it's all right."

long hard day at the office, just like anyone else, as if death were not right behind me, scraping its shoes on the walk.

"You ring," he said, at my elbow. "You ring, and when he answers, you tell him it's all right. Everything is all right. Tell him that."

I nodded automatically and rang the bell, knowing how this would look in the papers, seeing my name in print as a credit to the department in that I had died shielding my chief from a homicidal maniac's fire. I heard the rustle of Decourcy's clothing behind me and knew he had taken out his Police Special, because he could not kill us both with the same gun.

The echo of it drifted back through the silent house, brassy in the stillness beyond the door. It took him time, it took him perhaps four minutes to hear it and realize what it was and to think that it was

Rose, coming back, coming in for the night to share a bottle of beer and tell him that everything was fine. He wouldn't know that someone had tipped Decourcy off, that a phone call five miles away was about to kill him and to kill me. And he came at last, with feet that slapped sharply along the bare boards of the hall, and his hands fumbled at the lock and the door opened.

Decourcy's cry was a feral thing, thick and hot in his throat. He swung his arm and the barrel of the .38 knocked me sprawling against the door jamb. The riot gun, wielded by one hand, swept up, faltered, paused. Sliding down the edge of the door with the agony knifing up the back of my neck, I saw dimly the expression of utter idiocy that struck his face.

He gawked, his mouth open ridiculously, and as he stood there staring at the eight-year-old boy who leaned sleepily in the hall, his hand on the doorknob, a man came drifting silently around the edge of the porch, a big, ungainly man moving now like a ballet dancer on his toes.

I kicked with one numb leg, feeling deliriously light headed. My heel caught Decourcy just below the knee; there was a dry, stick-like snap, and he fell, without haste, the scream taking time to form in his throat. The riot gun clattered to the porch and of a sudden, as if the threat of it all had just reached him, the boy slammed the door shut. Decourcy went down, screaming his high, thin, sharp scream, his broken leg flopping ridiculously as he tumbled down the stairs to the walk. The motion stopped but the scream went on, rising higher in the night, wailing over the urgent note of a car's engine as it veered down the block and came to a stop before the house, with Rose catapulting from it even before the wheels had stopped rolling.

Connie Ackerman reached over with great deliberation and raised Decourcy's head by the hair and slammed it hard

against the cement. The screaming stopped. Ackerman straightened up. I grinned at him, my head floating somewhere in a bucket of warm slush. I tried to get up as Rose came up the steps, vaulting Decourcy's body. I was still grinning when I passed out.

THERE was a trial, not the kind you read about in the papers, because it isn't fair to brand all cops with the brush that Decourcy rated. It was a quick trial, to give the public a chance to forget before they really remembered, and he sat through it with his leg in a splint and his face wooden, asking nothing, answering nothing, and not looking at any of us.

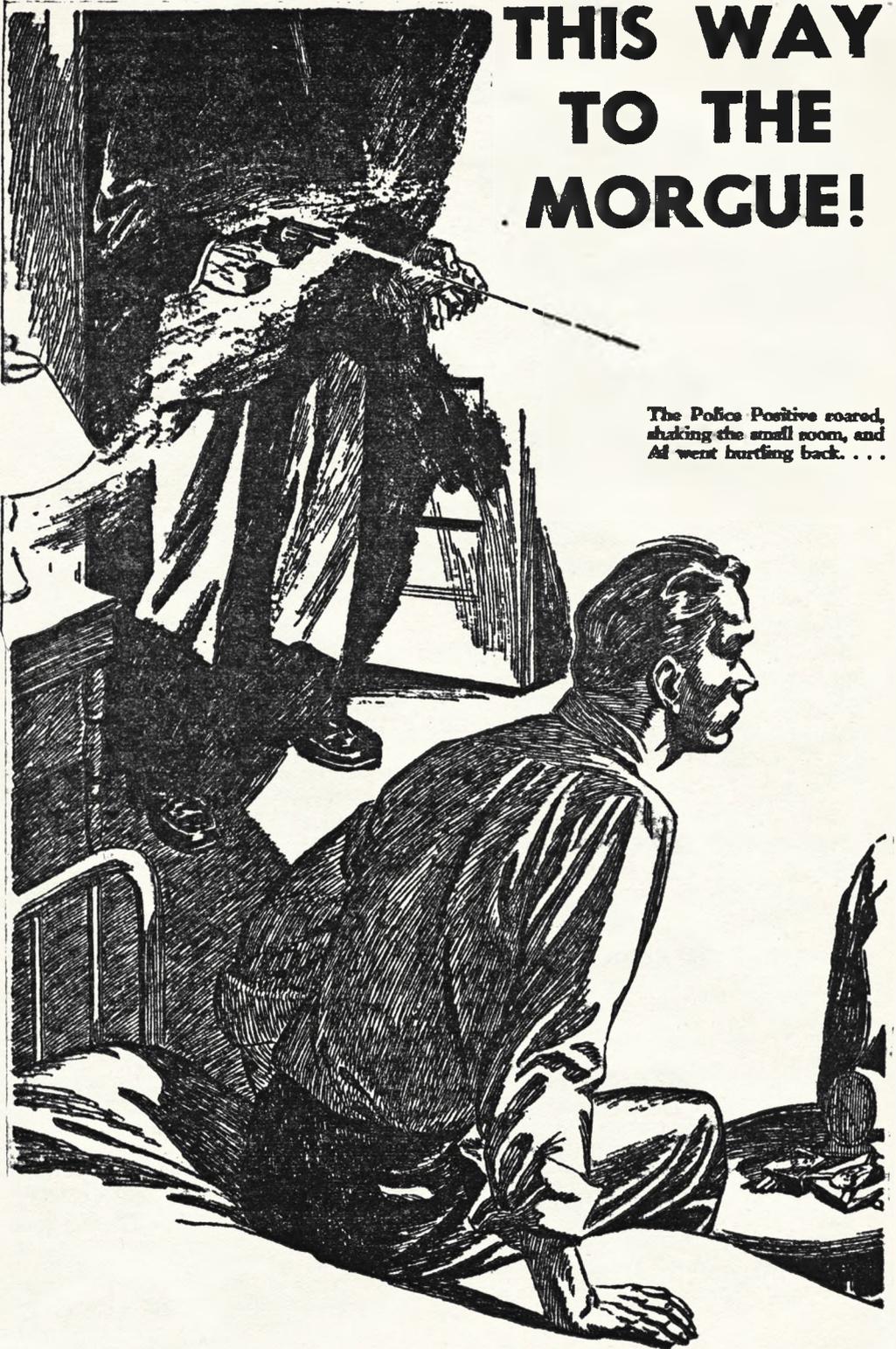
He took the fifteen-year jolt without moving his face or his mouth or his eyes. But when they helped him to his feet he turned for a long moment and stared out over the room at Rose, and his lips moved. He didn't glance at his wife, who had been afraid to talk about it because he had threatened her with another wrench job if she ever did; he didn't even look at me. Not for anyone else in that room did Decourcy have time that dull morning, only for Rose.

I remember looking over at Max then, and I thought, twenty years of it, from pounding the long stretches of the night while men like Decourcy with good connections were jumped over him. Twenty years of fitting patterns together until they made a whole.

I often think about Decourcy now, and I wonder if he ever found out who had called him that night to tell him where Ackerman was, the night he went out to take big Connie dead and square the bill for himself, the night Rose sprung the trap on him. I've often thought of writing him about that; he was always a guy who liked to get his money's worth, and I've never heard of a better investment for one nickel.

THIS WAY TO THE MORGUE!

The Police Positive roared,
shaking the small room, and
Ad went hurtling back. . . .



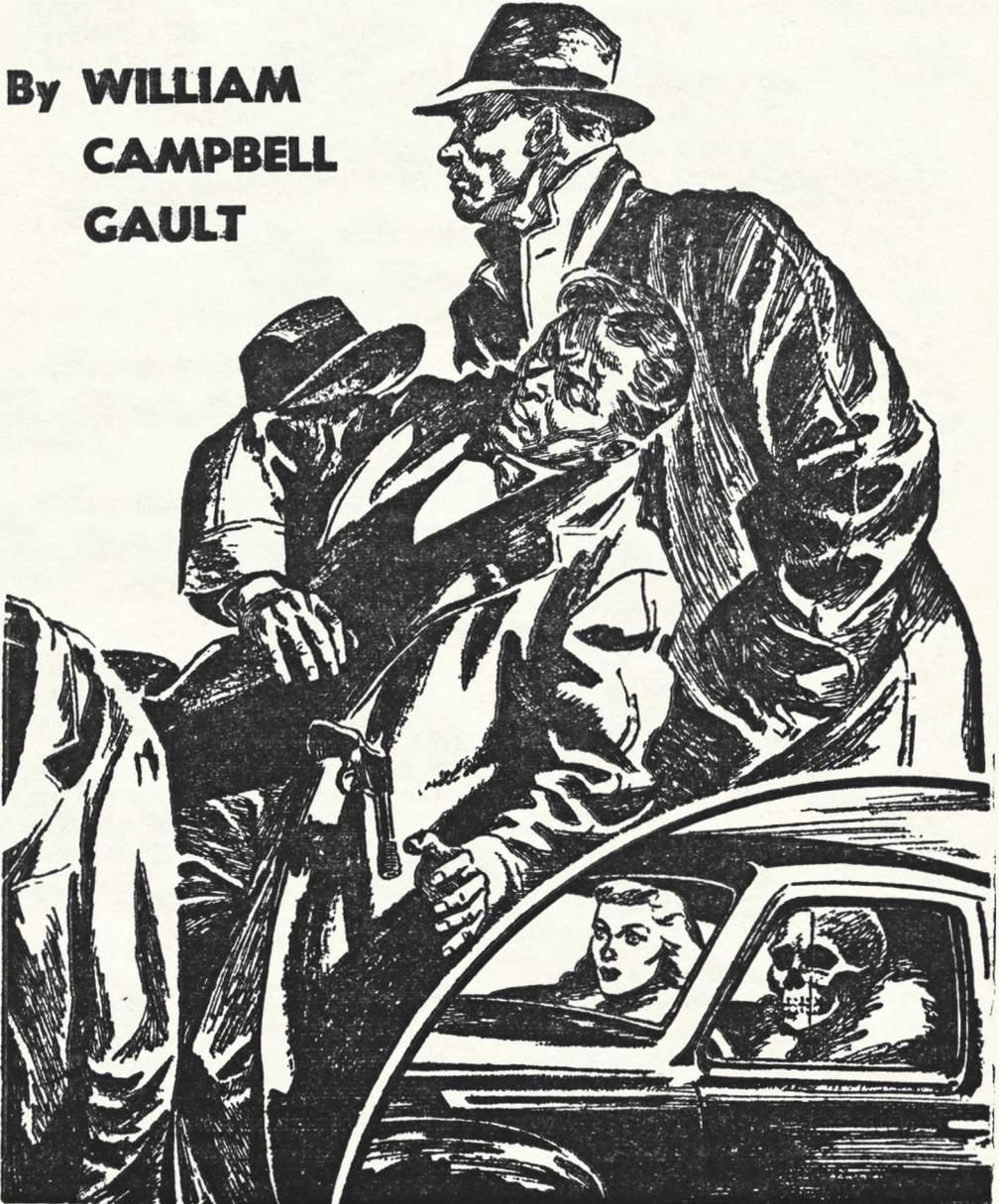
*No one was going to kill Joe Hammond's wife and get away with it—
not while Joe had money left for
one more funeral!*

CHAPTER ONE

Small-Time Guy

HE WAS on a new shift, from seven in the morning to three-thirty in the afternoon, and he got home a little before four. He parked in

By **WILLIAM
CAMPBELL
GAULT**



front and came up the walk slowly, wondering if Elaine was still nursing the ill temper she'd carried from their battle of last night.

She was a strange girl, Elaine. He thought of the nursery rhyme: "*When she was good, she was very, very good, and when she was bad she was—*" Well, she was unvarnished hell.

He'd met her in New York, before he shipped overseas, and married her there. He'd been discharged in New York and then they'd come to this town, because Elaine had said it was a live town and she didn't intend to get stuck in a whistle stop like Arden. Arden was his home town.

He'd have been able to go back to work for Pop Kelland if he'd gone back to Arden. Pop had a coal and feed business there, and Joe would have been set for life.

But Arden was too small for Elaine, so they'd come here, and now Joe was just another production worker at the huge Bucyrus-Farthing plant, and his only security was social security.

Their battle last night had been about Arden.

He came up onto the porch of their four-room G.I. special, mentally steeling himself for the brooding silence that would undoubtedly greet him.

He opened the door and saw that she wasn't in the living room. He went out into the kitchen, and she wasn't there, either. But there was a note propped against the sugar bowl.

Have gone to dinner and a show with Jean.
Won't be home until late. Don't wait up.

It wasn't signed and she had avoided any display of affection by omitting the salutation. She was still angry, then. Joe sighed and went into the bedroom to change his clothes.

If she was with Jean, she was all right.

Jean was the only one of Elaine's many friends Joe had any use for, another subject for controversy.

Jean could have been an Arden girl; she was that nice.

At five, Joe fried a couple of eggs and made some coffee. He read the evening paper while he ate, and tried not to think of Elaine. He'd have an evening to himself, and he intended to enjoy it. He could go to a show, or go bowling, or just stay home and read.

When he'd finished eating, he washed his dishes and the dishes that were still in the sink from the morning's meal. He was thinking of Elaine as he worked, remembering the way she'd screamed at him last night.

She was a beautiful girl, Elaine, but not when her face got tight and her eyes wild and her mouth distorted in anger. He winced at the memory and wondered if the neighbors had heard her. If it had been summer, instead of fall, if the windows had been open . . .

Of course, if he'd kept his big mouth shut about Arden, she never would have got started. Or would she? Lately, she'd seemed to be picking excuses to start a battle, hunting trouble. And yet she hadn't talked divorce, not once. Nor had he. There was still a great attraction between them, despite their differences.

In New York, the week before he'd shipped, it had been like something out of one of those goofy movies, dancing and drinking and staying up with the town all night. Money meant nothing then, and he'd burned it like coal. Great stuff, but New York was five years back and the war long over.

THIS could have been all right, too. With a little effort from both of them, these four rooms could have their special magic. With a kid, with some planning, with some mixing with the neighbors, this life wouldn't need to be so boring. But it

wasn't for Elaine. This was a live town, she'd said, but she hadn't meant this new, raw, G.I. neighborhood.

The neighbors bored her, she said. Where had he read that only boring people get bored? If it was true, it applied to him, too. Because he'd had a bellyful of Bucyrus-Farthing, of punching motor numbers on engine blocks, of punching in and punching out on the time clock, of eating dry box lunches and coming home to bad meals and a yak-yaking wife.

He hung up the dish towel and went into the living room. He turned the radio on and slumped in a big chair nearby, feeling progressively sorry for himself. This time he couldn't blame Elaine for his mood; she hadn't been here to say a word.

He could blame the note and the fact that she hadn't been home to prepare his meal. He smiled at himself and wondered if maybe he wasn't just lonely. Maybe he missed her more than he liked to admit. If she didn't have what he want, surely he'd have divorced her by now.

It was then that the phone rang and he went to the kitchen to answer it. As he walked past the table, the breeze of his passing sent her note to the floor, and he looked at it a second before lifting the receiver. Like an omen, he was to think later.

"Hi—Joe? Is Elaine there?"

"Elaine?" Joe said, momentarily befuddled. "This is Jean, isn't it?"

"Who else? She's talking to me, isn't she? Or did I do something wrong?"

Joe looked at the note on the floor. There was a sickness in him, an ugly, gnawing pain, and he had difficulty getting his breath. Finally he said quietly, "No, Elaine isn't here, Jean. I thought . . . I'll tell her you called."

He started to hang up, but her voice was quick and sharp. "Joe, there's nothing wrong?"

"No," he said evenly. "Why?"

"Your voice . . . I . . . All right, Joe. Tell her I called." The line went dead.

He put the phone back very carefully in its cradle and stooped to pick up the note from the floor. He read it again, but it was plain enough. "*Have gone to dinner and a show with Jean.*"

There might be other Jeans but none that she'd mentioned and none that he knew. She'd lied. Of course, she might have intended to go with Jean and then changed her mind without changing the note.

There were a lot of possibilities, but the *probability* was that she'd lied. And why? She'd gone out before, and he hadn't beefed enough to make a lie worth while.

He went into the kitchen and reheated the coffee. He took a cup of it into the living room with him and sat near the front windows, his gaze on the street outside. He was no innocent; the implications of the note were clear to him. Elaine wouldn't take the trouble to lie unless it was something important. Something like—infidelity.

He knew she'd been married before. "Kid stuff," she'd called it. "I was only seventeen."

He didn't know about her life while he was overseas; she wasn't much of a letter writer, and he wasn't the questioning kind of husband. She'd lived with Jean, he knew, in Jean's apartment and worked out at Ritter-Revere. But that was during the day. Nights? Jean would know.

But he couldn't ask Jean; she was Elaine's friend, not his.

At eight, he put on a jacket and went out to the car. He intended to just pull it off the street, up onto the driveway, but he was too restless to go back to the house, to sit and wait.

He drove out Diversey to Hampton and turned left, toward the lake. He took Lake Drive to the outer drive and traveled that all the way to Wells. This was the

near east side now; this was where Jean's apartment building was located.

He turned up Marshall and stopped in front of the huge, red-brick building. Jean's apartment was in the front, on the seventh floor, and his eyes went up to see the light on in her living room.

She'd think he was snooping. But he was, and he had a right to know where his wife was. She'd lied and he had a right to know why.

IN THE LOBBY he rang Jean's bell and he was at the door when it buzzed. Her door was open and she was standing there when he came out of the elevator on the seventh floor.

She was a fairly tall girl, almost as tall as Joe, with alert, dark eyes and short, dark hair. She was a poised and graceful girl with a low, pleasant voice.

"Well," she said. "Alone, Joe?"

He nodded and her dark eyes searched his face. He said, "I'm looking for Elaine."

"Elaine? She's not . . ." Her eyes were troubled. "Come in."

The living room was dimly lighted, and there was a radio playing softly. There was an open magazine, face down, on the coffee table in front of the davenport. There was a cigarette burning in the ashtray there.

Joe stood near the center of the room and turned to face her. "Elaine left a note for me. She said she'd be out late and I shouldn't wait up for her. She said she was going to dinner and a show with you."

"Oh." The sound was small. "And when I called . . . I see."

"Did you plan on having dinner with her?"

Jean hesitated, her gaze meeting his thoughtfully. Then she shook her head. "No. But—she may have planned it. She may have taken the bus in, intending to meet me at the office, but I left early,

and perhaps . . ." She broke off in confusion.

"Sure," Joe said. "I've been thinking of stuff like that, too. There really wasn't any reason to bother you—only, well, I had to start somewhere."

There was a silence. From the radio came a crooner singing, "Don't cry, Joe. Let her go, let her go, let—"

Jean went over to snap it off. When she turned to face him again, her poise seemed shaken. "She's dead against going to Arden, isn't she? That's where you'd like to go."

He nodded. "I can't blame her for not wanting to go there. She's a big-city girl, Elaine is."

Jean nodded toward a chair close by. "Sit down, Joe. Would you like a drink?"

"A drink might help." He sat down. "Did you know her first husband?"

Jean was standing in front of the liquor cabinet now, her back to Joe. "No, I didn't. She didn't talk about him much when she lived with me. He's probably responsible, Joe, for . . . I mean, he spent a lot of money on her in the few years they were married."

"Money boy, huh?" Joe said. "What'd he do for a living?"

A silence. Joe was looking at the rug, and now he looked up to see Jean facing him, a glass in her hand. Her face wore a puzzled expression.

"I seem to ask the wrong questions," Joe said. "You don't have to answer that one if it bothers you."

Her face was grave. "The last thing he did, before they sent him up, was rob a filling station. That's when Elaine divorced him, while he was serving time for that. That's what kept him out of the Army, and the way Elaine put it, that's the reason he confessed to it. It was the first time he'd ever been convicted of anything." Her voice was bitter. "And now that my claws are showing, what would you like in your drink?"

"Whiskey, water and ice," Joe said, "and I can't see any claws. I won't tell Elaine you told me." He took a deep breath. "I've sure got a lot of hay in my hair, haven't I?"

She didn't answer that. She filled his glass and brought it over to him. She took her own drink back to the davenport with her.

Joe said, "This gang she's been seeing—is her former husband one of that crowd, do you know?"

"I don't know. Al wasn't really a criminal, I guess. He was a gambler, though I don't know if he was an honest one, or if there is such a thing. He knew some pretty big men in this town, men he'd gambled with." Jean frowned. "What made you think of him?"

"Because I realize now why she wanted to come here, after my discharge. She must still be carrying the torch for this Al."

Jean looked at her drink. "That's just a guess, and maybe a bad one. You don't know where she is now, but it doesn't necessarily mean she's some place she shouldn't be."

"What does he look like, this Al, I mean?"

"I've never seen him. All I know about him is what Elaine told me." She paused. "And what I naturally thought she'd told you."

Joe finished his drink and rose. "Well, thanks, Jean. I've got to get up at six, so I think I'll be hitting the hay. Maybe it would be better if I don't tell Elaine I talked to you here. I'll tell her you phoned, but not the rest."

Jean rose and walked with him to the door. There, she put a hand on his arm. "Good luck, Joe. Watch your temper, huh? Elaine's going to settle down eventually."

"I'll be a good boy," he said. "It helped, talking to you, Jean."

Driving home, he wasn't thinking of

Elaine, for a change. He was thinking of Jean. He wondered why some smart guy hadn't grabbed her by now. Some lucky guy.

CHAPTER TWO

The Lady Couldn't Be Deader

THERE was a car parked in front of the house when he swung into the driveway. And there was a man getting out of the car as Joe left his car there on the drive. He didn't have a garage.

Joe stood on his small front porch as the man came up the walk. He saw now that it was a police car, and he was suddenly nervous.

"Your name Hammond?" the man asked. "Joe Hammond?"

"That's right."

A pause, and then, "I'm Sergeant Dykstra. There's . . . somebody down at the morgue we want you to identify. I'm afraid, Mr. Hammond . . ."

Joe felt a wave of dizziness, and he put a hand on the porch railing for support. "My . . . wife . . ."

"So far as we know. You'd better come in our car."

"An accident?" Joe asked.

"Let's be sure it's her first," the sergeant said. "You all right, Mr. Hammond? I was kind of blunt, but—"

"I'm all right. I'll make it," Joe said.

But his legs were almost buckling, and there was a lightness in his head that threatened to blank him.

"We phoned," the sergeant said, "but there was no answer, so I came out. Been out all evening?"

The last sentence was too casual.

"About an hour and a half," Joe said. "What—I mean, she's dead? You said the morgue. She's—"

"She's dead." The sergeant held the rear door open, and Joe got in first. The sergeant sat next to him. The uniformed

man behind the wheel started the car, and they moved off.

Sergeant Dykstra was looking straight ahead. "Where was your wife tonight?"

"I don't know," Joe said quietly. "She left a note saying she was going out to dinner and a show with a friend of hers. After supper tonight this friend called up and asked for Elaine. I couldn't figure it out. I went over to see this girl. That's where I was when you were phoning, probably. I—" He broke off.

Dykstra said nothing. The car turned off on Oakland, heading downtown.

Joe said softly, "It wasn't an accident, was it?"

Dykstra turned now to face him in the darkness. "What made you say that, Mr. Hammond?"

"The way you're acting. I know."

Dykstra expelled his breath. "I doubt if it was an accident. It was a .38-caliber slug, right between the eyes."

Joe seemed to jerk as a muscle spasm hit him, and the trembling started. "Murdered! Why . . . ?"

"I've no idea," Dykstra said. "Yet."

They went past the car barns and cut over to Maryland. Past North Avenue and down into the thicker traffic of the downtown area.

Joe wasn't aware of the cars going by or the lights. He was thinking of New York and the weeks before he'd shipped, the good weeks before he'd gone overseas. A crazy, magic time. That was before the corrupting bickering of this post-war time had taken the glow from their marriage.

They cut into the broad traffic flow of Kilbourn and the police car moved quickly and smoothly through the stream.

Dykstra said, "We checked through a dry cleaner's mark in her dress. There may have been a mistake."

Joe said nothing. He didn't think there'd been a mistake. He had a feeling of certainty. "When did it happen?"

"Not sure. She was found at six, out on the Deerfield Road." A pause. "Within an hour of six, say."

The white, classic whiteness of the Safety Building now, and Central Headquarters. The car pulled onto the ramp beneath the Safety Building.

It was the police garage, and they walked along behind a row of squad cars to a door opening on a flight of steps leading to a still lower level.

It was cool down here, and they went through a small office into the large room beyond. There were three bodies on slabs in this room, the three slabs nearest the door.

Dykstra went over to the middle of the three and pulled back the sheet.

Joe saw the blackened hole between the eyes, the white of the nose bone and the dry crust of blood. The eyes were open; the face was in a sort of frozen repose.

He nodded slowly. He said, "That's Elaine."

They went back up in the elevator, up to the third floor and a small office back of the squad room. Joe didn't remember much of it; he couldn't get that grim picture out of his mind.

He told the sergeant when he'd seen Elaine last, how long they'd been married, where they'd met.

"You've no idea where she could have gone this afternoon? There aren't any other friends she might have gone to visit?"

Joe shrugged. "I don't know many of her friends, except by name. Jean I know, but she wasn't with Jean."

"That's the—girl you were with?" The casual tone again.

Joe's eyes covered the detective's alert, blunt face. "Yes."

Dykstra's gaze dropped to the papers in front of him. "Your wife was married before, to an Alfred Dorian. That's the gambler, is it?"

Joe nodded. "That's what I heard tonight. That's what Jean told me."

DYKSTRA put the papers together and clipped them at the top. "I guess that's all for now, Mr. Hammond. I'll have one of the men run you home." He paused. "You'll arrange to have some undertaker . . ."

Joe nodded.

He didn't remember the ride home, but he remembered coming up the walk to the quiet, dark house. He was still in shock; there was no overpowering sense of grief and he felt shamed that the sense of loss hadn't overcome him.

He went out into the kitchen and turned on the light. He read the note again, drank a glass of water and went into the dark living room. He sat there through the night.

He didn't go to work in the morning, or phone the plant. He phoned Jean.

He told her what had happened and said, "I . . . don't know much about getting a . . . minister and that. Do you know of any? Could you help?"

"Come on over right away, Joe," she said. "I'll hold breakfast for you. I'll phone my minister." Her voice was tight.

She was waiting, as she had the night before, when he got off the elevator. She had no words; there weren't any that would do any good.

He didn't eat, but he drank three cups of coffee. He told Jean, "The detective will probably be seeing you today. I told him about the note."

She nodded. "There's nothing they know? Who did it . . .?"

He shook his head. "I had the feeling this detective wasn't much interested, either. I'll find out, though, if it takes a lifetime."

Jean said nothing for a moment. She was frowning, and her eyes avoided his. Finally, "Joe, you . . . won't do anything rash or foolish? This kind of work is

something the police are trained to handle. You want to be careful."

He looked at her. "Why?"

"You've a lifetime ahead of you." Her chin lifted. "Probably better than it's been."

"Without Elaine?"

"Without Elaine. It's a rotten thing to say now, isn't it?"

He shook his head. "You wouldn't say anything rotten. It's just that you don't understand about Elaine and me."

She was silent. It was then her doorbell rang.

She went over to press the button that released the latch downstairs, and stood by the open door.

It was Sergeant Dykstra. He looked at Joe and said, "You spend a lot of time here, don't you?"

"This is the second time I've ever been here," Joe said, and added, "if it's any of your business."

Dykstra's face froze. "Don't get smart, Hammond. I've been checking with your neighbors. You and your wife had quite a battle night before last, didn't you?"

Joe stared at him without answering.

DYKSTRA took off his hat and sat at the other end of the table from Joe. His voice was calm again. "In Homicide, there's certain things we got to look for." He paused. "One of them's a reason, a motive, for the act. I've checked and cross-checked Dorian, and he hasn't got any. He was my first choice, I'll admit, but if you've got any ideas he was playing house with your wife, you're wrong. He's been out of town up until a week ago, and he's got a blonde girl friend who could keep any man busy twenty-four hours a day. His alibi for the time doesn't matter; he'd have an alibi, no matter what he'd done. But he hasn't got a reason to wish your wife any harm. That almost clears him."

Joe glanced over to see Jean sitting

stiffly on the edge of the davenport in the living room. He looked back at Dykstra without saying a word.

"So," the detective went on, "that brings us to suspect number two, the *current* husband. You'd fought with her. She'd screeched loud enough to be heard three houses up." Another pause. "And I learned that she went out without you quite often. That right?"

Joe nodded.

Dykstra's face was impassive. "Your neighbors don't miss much, do they?"

Joe said nothing.

Dykstra looked over at Jean and back at Joe. "They didn't miss the fact that your car was in front of the house and you were home, as far as they could tell, between four o'clock and eight o'clock. So you couldn't have done it—*not personally*." And now Dykstra looked at Jean again.

Jean was pale and rigid, staring at the detective.

Dykstra said, "What time did Mrs. Hammond meet you yesterday?"

Jean's voice was dry and hoarse. "She didn't. What are you trying to say, Sergeant?"

Dykstra didn't answer that. He asked, "Why did you call Mrs. Hammond last night?"

"I wanted to talk to her about—about a friend of hers."

"About Dorian?"

Jean shook her head.

"About who, then?"

Jean glanced at Joe before answering. "I don't care to tell you that. It had nothing to do with what happened, I'm sure."

"Why not let me decide that?" Dykstra said.

Jean looked down at the rug. She was chewing her lower lip.

"This is a murder case," Dykstra reminded her quietly. "All these things are going to come out eventually. You might

as well tell me now—as later."

Jean didn't look up. "About a man named Carl Embach, a man she'd been seeing a—a lot of. He wanted to marry her. He wanted to tell Joe about them, but Elaine—well, I don't know if Elaine wanted to marry him or not."

"Carl Embach?" Dykstra wrote it down. "Where does he live? Do you know?"

Jean gave him the address.

"What's he do?"

"He's a commercial artist. He works for an advertising firm. He's a fine boy. I wanted to tell Elaine last night to marry him or leave him alone.

Dykstra's eyebrows lifted. "You think a lot of him, eh?"

"He's my half-brother," Jean said quietly. "We grew up together."

"I see." Dykstra's voice was gentle. "That's why Mrs. Hammond used your name. You covered for them before."

"I don't know if she used my name before or not," Jean said. Her eyes were evading Joe's. "I haven't seen Jean more than once or twice in the last three months."

Joe felt the anger stirring in him and felt a weakness in his legs and arms.

Dykstra looked over at him. "Well, we know now who she went to meet, don't we?"

Joe's mouth was dry and his throat. He attempted no answer.

Jean said, "That's not true. I met Carl yesterday, and he promised me he wouldn't see Elaine again unless she got a divorce. He told me he was going out of town last night."

Dykstra's eyes were skeptical. "Alone?"

"Alone," Jean said dully. "If you've got any more questions about him, ask him directly. You've his address now."

Dykstra rose. "I'll do that. I'll be seeing both of you again."

He went out and closed the door behind him. Joe looked at Jean. She seemed

almost on the verge of a collapse. Neither of them said anything for seconds.

Then Jean said, "I'll phone the minister."

Joe shook his head. "I won't need him. There'll be no service. I'll have her cremated."

She closed her eyes. "Joe, don't let all these things change you. I'll phone the minister, and you can have her cremated after the service, if you want." She opened her eyes and looked at him. "We're not the judges, you know."

"Call him if you want," Joe said. "I want to talk to this half-brother of yours, Jean."

"And he'll want to talk to you. Believe me, that's the truth, Joe. He loved Elaine. He wanted to see you time and again, I know."

"He'll get his chance," Joe said.

What illusions he'd managed to maintain about Elaine were destroyed now, leaving him not quite rational. There'd been no malice in Jean's disclosures, but he felt a resentment now that included her. He hadn't eaten in fifteen hours, or slept for twenty-seven.

He left after Jean phoned the minister, and went home. The neighborhood felt alien to him, and he thought of Dykstra going from door to door, collecting the neighborhood scandal.

He sat in the big chair near the radio, emotionally and physically exhausted. He could go to Arden now; he could go any place he wanted and do what he wanted. He could sell his equity in the house and sell the car. Elaine had had some insurance. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

Close to the West

IT WAS a small room in a first-rate hotel and he was registered as Joe Downing. He had a little over six thou-

sand in the City Exchange Bank, some new suits, and a coldness in him that had started at the funeral parlor. He was waiting for a man.

His phone rang, and he answered it. The clerk downstairs said, "A Mr. Nevers to see you, Mr. Downing."

"I'm expecting him," Joe said. "Send him up."

Nevers was short and broad, with a pink complexion and shiny brown eyes. The brown eyes looked the room over and came back to Joe.

"Steve Laski said you wanted to peddle some tickets. Used to work at Bucyrus-Farthing, didn't you?"

"Still do," Joe said. "Not in the same department with Steve, though. I'm in the tractor department. That's virgin territory."

Nevers nodded. "The super in that department is murder on pool tickets, you know."

"I know," Joe said.

"You don't look like a working stiff to me," Nevers said, "or talk like one." He paused. "Or live like one."

Joe smiled. "You mean I need a character reference?"

Nevers laughed. "Okay. Still football. We'll have some basketball tickets in a couple weeks, and they'll run to the baseball season. You can pick up a few bucks." He threw a bundle on the bed.

Joe shrugged. "I'm a simple man. A buck is a buck. You'll pick them up every Friday night?"

Nevers nodded, studying Joe. "This your town?"

Joe shook his head. "St. Paul. The cards weren't running. I heard this was a—a live town."

"It's all right," Nevers said. "We make a living. Well—luck."

"Sure," Joe said. "I'll see you Friday night."

The tractor department was virgin territory, as Joe had said. And Joe

was well liked. He picked up a couple hundred dollars in sales, and played a hundred tickets of his own, at two bucks a throw. Which gave him four hundred to turn over to Nevers Friday, around six.

"Well," Nevers said, "the boss is going to like this. I never figured . . ." He shook his head.

"I'm new to it," Joe said. "That's just a starter. A sweet game isn't it? Pick ten, and get a hundred to one. Should be a thousand to one. How can he miss?"

"He doesn't figure to miss," Nevers said. "Why don't we go down to the bar and have a drink on his money?"

The bar in the hotel was long and narrow, well appointed and dim. They sat at the end near the lobby entrance.

Joe asked, "How about this Palladium pool? That the same house I'm working for?"

"Far from it," Nevers said. He was studying his drink. "Why?"

Joe shrugged. "I was wondering about the commission they paid."

Nevers frowned. "The same, I suppose." He looked at Joe and smiled. "Of course, you're doing pretty good. I'll talk to the boss about a bonus. Four hundred fish is nice money from the tractor department."

The two hundred of his own Joe had invested under a multitude of names wasn't a loss, as it turned out. One, on which he'd picked ten winners, came through and he got his money back.

Nevers brought the money over Sunday morning. "No ties, this week," he said. "That's what hurt." He held up Joe's winner. "How about this guy? Smart?"

"Smart enough so he can't be talked out of anything," Joe said. "What'd the boss say about a bonus?"

"A double sawbuck. Okay?"

"Fair enough." Joe checked the money and put it in his wallet. "Aren't any mild

poker games floating around today, are there?"

Nevers smiled. "How mild?"

"Mild enough for a flunky from Bucyrus-Farthing."

"You're a hard man to figure out," Nevers said. "I'm playing over at the Ritter House, this afternoon. Room 623. Drop over."

"I'll do that," Joe said. "Couple grand be enough?"

Nevers laughed. "You kill me, Joe. For two grand you can buy the Ritter House."

Nevers left, and Joe went down for a late breakfast. He was going through the lobby toward the grill when he saw Jean. She was sitting near the desk, and she looked up when he came near.

"Joe!" she said, and her voice held wonder. "You're staying here?"

He stopped. "That's right."

"But I thought . . ." She broke off, and finished lamely, "Carl stays here. Did you know that?"

Joe nodded. "I knew it before I checked in."

Her eyes held a question she didn't voice. She said, "Oh." Then, "I thought you'd gone back to Arden. I thought that's why . . ." She was plainly flustered. "You're still at Bucyrus-Farthing?"

He nodded.

"Joe, about Carl. I mean . . ."

His smile had no warmth. "I haven't time to talk to you this morning, Jean. I'm late for my breakfast." He passed on.

HE SAW them in the grill later, but made no sign of recognition. Carl Embach was a tall young man, with a ruddy, masculine face and clear blue eyes. Joe had seen him for the first time at the funeral parlor, and ignored him then.

Embach had been cleared, as far as Dykstra was concerned; he'd been out of town. As far as Dykstra was concerned, for that matter, the case was closed. This

was a big town and there were a lot of murders. This was another of the unsolved ones.

Joe drank his orange juice, and ate his eggs, and read the Sunday paper, and didn't look up once. But he saw Jean's face, just the same. He saw the wonder in it and the apprehension.

He didn't eat any dinner. About two, he went over to the Ritter House.

It was a third-rate hotel on the lower east side, a sprawling monstrosity of mammoth rooms and antiquated plumbing. Joe stopped at the desk and told the elderly man, "623. Shall I go right up?"

"I'll have to call first," the man said. "Name?"

"Joe Downing. Mr. Nevers will know me."

The man phoned and indicated the elevator.

Besides Nevers, there were four others, names Joe forgot almost as soon as he was introduced. Men in their forties, with sagging faces and skeptical eyes.

Joe had no distorted ideas of his own prowess at the game. He played cinches only, as he had in the Army, and won, as he had in the Army.

At supper time he was two hundred and fifty dollars ahead, and the heavy winner. He cashed in his chips.

"I don't like to pull out with your sugar," he said, "but I was looking for a game a little rougher."

Nevers said, "Maybe you're in the wrong league, Joe. I'll bring the new batch over tonight. They're printing them now."

"I'll be at the hotel," Joe said, and left.

It was sharp outside, and small crystals of snow were drifting lazily downward, faintly stirred by a northwest breeze. There was a cab stand a half-block up, on the corner, but he turned west toward the hotel.

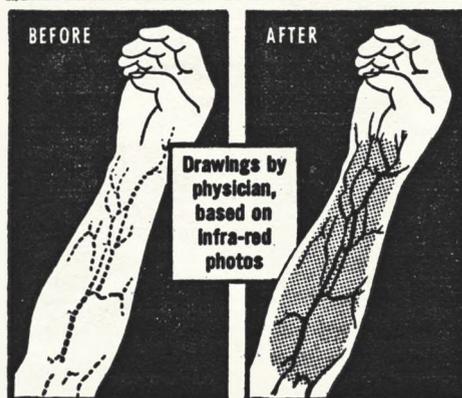
He took a deep breath of the clean air, driving the stale smoke from his lungs. He thought of those tired, dissipated faces he'd been closeted with in 623 and smelled again the musty, smoky odor of the room. Those were the kind of men who looked down on 'working stiff's'; those were the minor-league sharpies of the town.

Clothed a little better and with sun-lamp tans, playing in a better hotel and smoking fatter cigars, they'd be the major-league sharpies, riding the fringe of the law, with contempt for all the working world.

By the time he reached his hotel, the snow was heavier; the streets and sidewalks were turning white with it, and the wind was stronger.

He saw Dykstra sitting in the lobby as soon as he came in. And Dykstra saw him. Dykstra beckoned.

Joe went over and took a chair nearby. Dykstra put down the paper he'd been reading.



HOW SLOAN'S LINIMENT AIDS MUSCULAR PAINS

Here's vital news for sufferers from muscular aches and rheumatic pains. Using infra-red rays, scientists have now succeeded in photographing blood-vessels *below the skin-surface*. These photos (see pictures at left) prove that, after an application of Sloan's Liniment, the veins *expand* . . . evidence that the treated area gets *extra* supplies of blood, to revitalize tissues and wash away waste matter and poisons faster.

When you use Sloan's Liniment, you *know* that it is increasing the all-important flow of blood to the treated area, and that this effect *extends below the skin-surface*. No wonder Sloan's helps to bring blessed relief from rheumatic aches, arthritis pains, lumbago, sore muscles. Sloan's has been called "the greatest name in pain-relieving liniments." Get a bottle today.

"I was here earlier this afternoon. Miss Morrison phoned me. She's worried about her brother."

Joe said nothing.

"I asked at the desk for you," Dykstra went on, "and they said there was no one here by that name. Change it?"

"What difference does it make?"

Dykstra was looking thoughtful. "I don't know. Why'd you check in here?" He cleared his throat. "You got some idea yet about Embach being guilty?"

"I thought the case was closed, for you," Joe said.

"No unsolved case is ever closed," Dykstra said, "even if we don't work on it. I put in twenty hours a day, some days, but it's not enough. I asked you why you checked in here."

"I like the place," Joe said. "They've got central heating."

Dykstra expelled his breath. "You couldn't go back to Arden and forget us, could you? You couldn't take that sweet Miss Morrison along and settle down in your home town. You've got to make like George Raft or Bogart. Why don't you get smart to yourself, before I lose my patience?"

ANGER flared in Joe, but he kept his voice even. "She was just a case to you. She was my wife."

Dykstra swore, and looked out at the snow.

"I'm no cop," Joe said, "but I went over to the *Courier* and checked their files for April of '42. The whole thing's there, for any cop that can read. You were looking for a motive."

Dykstra turned to face him. "What'd you find in the *Courier*?"

"Dick Tracy," Joe said. "You've got more work than you can handle now, Sergeant."

"And I don't want you to make me more," Dykstra said. "You got any ideas about Embach?"

Joe shook his head.

Dykstra stood up. "You were probably a pretty good kid before you came to this town. That's all that's keeping you out of the clink right now. But don't crowd your luck, Hammond. You give Embach any trouble, you'll sit. You give Al Dorian any trouble, I guess he'll handle it himself." He put on his hat. "This town's too big for you, lad."

"I'm beginning to find that out," Joe said. "You're getting worked up over nothing, Sergeant."

Dykstra looked him up and down. "Nothing's the word for it." He turned and walked out.

At the desk, Joe got his key and a note. It was in an unsealed envelope, and from Jean. It read:

Phone me, Joe, when you get in. I must talk to you.

Jean.

"Yours, Mr. Downing?" the clerk asked.

Joe looked up sharply and nodded.

"She thought your name was Hammond," the clerk said evenly. "There was another man here tonight asking for Hammond, too."

"Hammond's my pen name," Joe said. "I don't use it for business, though. If you want, I'll register both of them."

The clerk studied the honest young face in front of him and smiled. "I guess that won't be necessary, Mr. Downing."

Joe looked at the note again and crumpled it in his hand. He dropped it in the sand jar near the elevators as he went past on his way to the bar.

Nevers came around nine.

Joe looked at the size of the bundle he was carrying and smiled. "I'm not that good," he said. "There must be a thousand of them there."

Nevers shrugged. "Printing's cheap. We've got our own plant." He was grinning at Joe. "The boys were kind of hot

tonight. Pikers, the lot of them. You want to get into a real game?"

"Maybe one," Joe said. "I couldn't handle any more than that until I build up the stake again."

"Wednesday night. Suite 81F at the Shorecrest. That's the boss' layout. About eight-thirty."

"I'll be there," Joe said. "I'd like to meet the boss."

Joe went to bed after Nevers left. He tossed for a while, thinking of Dykstra and the coming Wednesday night, thinking of Jean.

CHAPTER FOUR

Kill Once—Kill Twice

HE THOUGHT of Dykstra again when the blonde opened the door to him Wednesday night. Dykstra had said she could keep any man busy twenty-four hours and he'd been right.

Her dress was black and metallic cloth, and gave the impression she was wrapped in cellophane. It disguised about as much, a strapless creation that shrouded none of her charms. Her eyes were a dark blue and her voice a rich contralto.

"Mr. Downing, is it? I know all the others, I think."

Joe smiled "You know the wolves. I'm the lamb."

"That's not the way I heard it," she said. Her eyes appraised him.

A Filipino come to take his coat and hat, and Joe accompanied the blonde to the living room.

Nevers stood near the wall-wide bank of windows facing on the park. The other man in the room was sitting on the davenport a few feet from Nevers, a drink in his hand.

He was close to forty, superficially handsome, with a thin mouth and clear, hazel eyes. He rose and smiled as Joe drew near.

"This is Joe Downing, boss," Nevers said. "I pegged him for a comer." Nevers nodded at his boss. "This is Al Dorian, Joe."

They shook hands. Dorian's hand was slim and strong. He said, "I think you've got Bob puzzled. He thought you were just another clock puncher at first."

"A man has to eat," Joe said. "Anyway, I do. I'll punch the clock until something better shows up."

The blonde said, "Drink, Mr. Downing?"

Joe was conscious of Dorian's scrutiny. "Bourbon and ginger ale," he said, and looked back to see Dorian still studying him.

"I've seen you somewhere," Dorian said. "This isn't your town?"

Joe's face was composed. "No. I came here about two months ago."

The door chimes sounded then, and some others arrived and Joe felt relieved. It was possible Dorian might have seen him somewhere with Elaine, a memory that could come to life at any moment.

There were three men, all well along in their forties and early fifties, none so old he didn't have a word for the blonde. Her name, Joe now learned, was Margo, and she'd had theatrical ambitions before meeting Dorian.

There was some jesting dialogue regarding Al's keeping her out of the spotlight, and then they settled down to the business at hand.

Joe played the game he had on Sunday; it was the only one he knew, five chips for a penny or five blues to the grand. He played cinches, or reasonably accurate fascimile.

It didn't seem as if it was going to be enough for this company. He was fifteen hundred in the soup by ten o'clock and he had an urge to change his game.

He resisted it, fortunately, and at ten-thirty, the cards started to come his way. He won two pots, and was dealt a stinker.

He drew to it crazily, missed—and raised the opening bet five hundred dollars.

They all dropped but Dorian. Dorian called, which is what Joe wanted. Dorian smiled and raked in the pot, and Joe knew he'd get a call on everything, if the cards continued to come his way.

Enough of them came his way to put him four thousand ahead at one o'clock. At three, they broke up, and Joe was still thirty-two hundred ahead.

Margo had a lunch spread out in the dining room, cold turkey and ham and rolls and coffee. Margo looked a little weary, and her smile was mechanical. Joe wondered if Elaine had enjoyed Al's friends, if Elaine had stayed up, keeping them supplied with drinks, arranging for the late lunch. She'd never got up to make his breakfast, but maybe that was different. He was a working stiff.

At four, he left and walked up to the cab stand with Bob Nevers.

"I think you made a hit with the boss, all right," Nevers said. "He was watching you a lot, tonight."

Joe had noticed that.

He was due at the plant at seven, and it was four-thirty when he got back to the hotel. Two hours sleep would be worse than none; he sat up until it was time for work.

HE PUT in a bad day at the plant and came home to find Dykstra again waiting for him in the lobby. Dykstra went up with him to his room. The big detective's face was like stone, and when his voice came, it was rough and nasty.

"What do you figure is going to keep you out of the clink?" His hands were gripping the bottom of Joe's bed, and his big shoulders were hunched forward. "Selling pool tickets, are you, now?"

"Who told you that?"

"Nevers has been here to see you. That came from the clerk downstairs, to Embach, and then to this Morrison girl. She

told me. She's all hot and bothered about it."

"Homicide's business?" Joe asked quietly.

Dykstra's big head shook slowly from side to side. "My business. Don't ask me why, except I was a dumb hick, too, when I first came to this town. Or maybe because I didn't handle that business about your wife, just right. Or maybe just because I didn't read the *Courier*."

"But you've read it, now?"

"This morning. So the filling station stickup is in there. And what else?"

"And Proebius dying, the same night."

"Proebius. You mean when his car went over the dock at the foot of Florida Street?"

"Sure. Accident?"

"That's what the coroner called it."

"Coroner!" Joe said, contempt making his voice ragged. "He's not a medical man. Coroner!" He swore.

Some of Dykstra's wrath was leaving him now. Seeing Joe's white face or hearing the raggedness of his voice might have done that.

"So it wasn't an accident," Dykstra said in a low voice. "But it happened in 1942 and we don't know what it was, if it wasn't an accident. It wouldn't help any with your wife's death, anyway, and you're no cop, Hammond. You've got to remember that. I know Nevers is Dorian's man, and you figure you can get to Dorian. And if you did—"

"I played cards with him last night," Joe said, "at his place. Until four o'clock this morning."

Dykstra stared at him a second. "You're getting along, aren't you? How close to him do you figure on getting?"

"I've no plan," Joe said. "This much I know—my wife didn't go to him for the reason that's probably in your mind, so there must have been another."

"I didn't figure she went to him at all," Dykstra said. "Maybe you'd better go

back to April of '42 and give me your version of it. I've only put in sixteen hours today."

"I haven't been to bed at all," Joe said. "Here's the way I figure it. . . ."

When he'd finished, Dykstra said, "It all makes sense, probably. It ties up pretty good. We figured he was trying to beat the draft, but there wasn't any proof. So if it's as true as the Bible, what can you do about it?"

"I don't know," Joe said. "I don't know. Right now I want something to eat and a lot of coffee. I'm beat out, bushed."

"I could stand a cup of it myself," Dykstra said. "How about that Embach?"

"Clear, as far as I'm concerned. He's why I moved here, but I've changed my mind on him."

Dykstra's smile was thin. "How about that Jean? She worries about you. That's the kind of girl to have. That's the kind a bullhead like you needs."

"I haven't buried Elaine yet," Joe said. "Not in my mind."

Dykstra's smile was full now. "I guess you're all right, Hammond. But don't try and tackle that Dorian alone. He's too much for you. Maybe later we'll figure something out."

They went down to eat in a few minutes.

JOE'S eyelids were heavy, but his mind was active. He picked up the phone and gave the operator a number. The back of his neck ached, and his hands were trembling. He'd had a shower and a lot of coffee and some food to replace the sleep he'd missed. But fatigue was an ache in him, and his mind was fuzzy.

After a moment he said, "Hello, Margo? Al there? This is Joe Downing. It's pretty important."

And then, "I thought you might like to drop over, Al. I've been thinking we should be partners."

"Partners," Dorian said. "You drunk, Downing?"

"Hammond's the name I use to my friends," Joe said quietly. "I think you knew my wife. You were married to her at one time. I'll wait a half-hour, Al, before I call the law. She wasn't much to me, but I could use your kind of living, Al."

A silence, a long silence, and then Dorian said, "You're talking like a maniac, Downing. But I'll be over."

Joe thought of a lot of things in the next twenty minutes. Of Normandy and New York and Arden. The last thing he thought of, just before the knock on the door, was Elaine's staring eyes and the dark hole in her forehead and the chill of the morgue.

The knock meant Dorian hadn't gone past the desk probably. He hadn't heard the elevator door slam, either, and he would have noticed that. Al had walked

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up, and maybe, when he opened the door . . .

He opened the door, and Al stood there, alone. His thin lips were thinner than ever.

Joe said, "Come in," and Dorian stepped in.

Joe indicated a chair, arranging in his mind the half-guess, half-lie tale he would have to tell, wondering how far to go, how much to claim Elaine had told him.

Dorian reached into a pocket, and Joe tensed, waiting.

But it was only a cigarette and a lighter he brought out. The gambler smiled. "Nervous, Joe?"

"A little," Joe admitted. "It isn't every day I talk to a murderer."

The flame of Dorian's lighter didn't waver. He blew out a mouthful of smoke. "Who'd I murder?"

"Proebius, for one," Joe said.

Al frowned. "Who the hell's he?"

"Used to own a printing plant. Had a good thing, too. Pool tickets, mostly, for the trade in this whole area. Drove a big car, had a fine home. Real solid citizen. He was killed the night you claimed you were robbing a gas station."

"What d'ya know," Al said. "Go on, Hammond."

"Gamblers don't go in for the heavy stuff, and the cops should have got smart, but they thought you were just trying to beat the draft," Joe went on. "And that was for the Feds, if they wanted to make a case of it. The guy who did rob that filling station admitted it later. Did you know that, Al?"

Al shook his head.

"Anyway, it gave you an alibi for the night Proebius died and got you a couple years, so you beat the draft, too. And wound up with Proebius' printing plant, buying it cheap from his widow and putting it in a stooge's name."

Al's eyes never left Joe's face.

"And after Elaine married me, things

weren't so good for her. I was just a factory punk, and she's a girl who likes fur coats and things like that. So that night she went to see you, to blackmail you, if she could, not realizing a man who's killed once will kill again."

"What gave you the idea she came to me?"

"She told me she was going to you. She told me she was coming back with both hands full of money. She wound up at the morgue."

"But you didn't tell the cops that."

Joe shook his head and met Al's gaze evenly. "I'm sick of the factory, Al. I like your kind of life. I wouldn't be a bad investment, Al."

Al's smile was cool. "I like your nerve. Maybe you've got me where you want me. I don't like that. I've got my own plant and my own organization, and I've got away with murder—*twice*. The third time shouldn't be any tougher."

Now Al's hand came out from his topcoat pocket, and there was a gun in it. It was a single-shot pistol, and there was a silencer on the end of the barrel.

Al said, "Okay, Bob?"

The door opened, and Bob Nevers came in. "Not a soul in sight, Chief." His hand was in his topcoat pocket, but he didn't bring it out. He closed the door quietly with his free hand, his brown eyes on Joe.

Joe said, "They make a record of all phone calls going out of here. Your number will be on file. They bill us for all outgoing calls."

"I'll remember to tell the cops you phoned me," Dorian said. "I'll tell them you were threatening suicide."

"This is the same as admitting you're guilty," Joe said. "You wouldn't do this, unless you were guilty."

"That's right." Al looked at Nevers and back at Joe. "Only who knows it? Elaine knew it, and she's dead. You knew

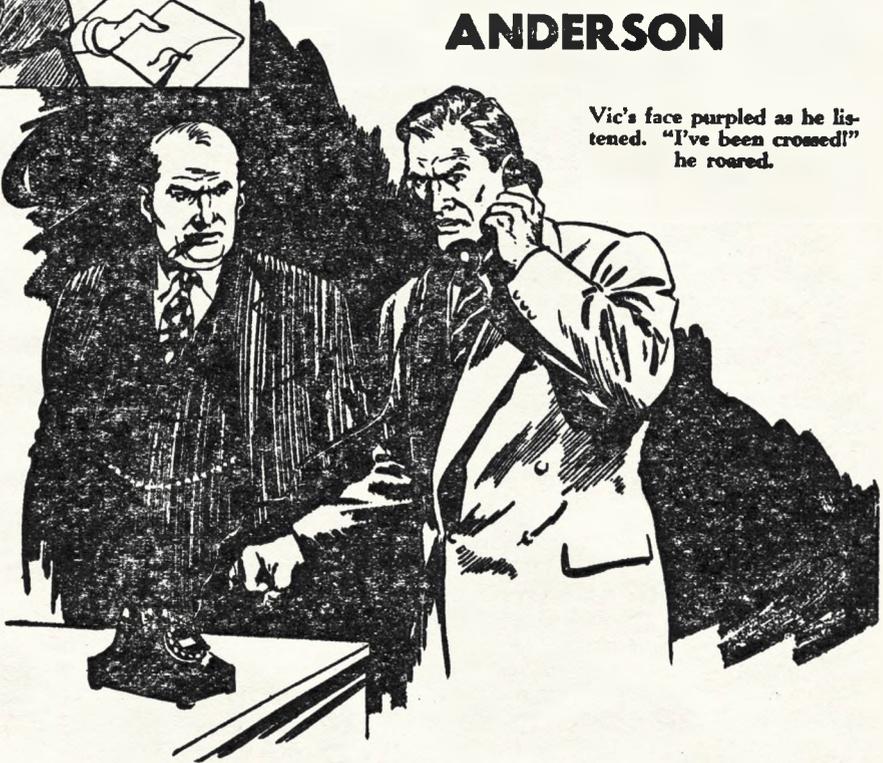
(Continued on page 124)



THE FIVE-GRAND CROSS

By **ALAN RITNER
ANDERSON**

Vic's face purpled as he listened. "I've been crossed!" he roared.



Tangling with Mae Cole was like playing with fire. But Vic Sasso had what it takes to smother any flame—a mittful of cool, never-fail greenbacks!

FOR ten nerve-racking days, Mae Cole hadn't stepped outside the hotel. If the pasty-faced man with the yellow teeth wasn't watching her, it was someone else, because she was always conscious of eyes following her in the public rooms. She could not trust the staff either—the bellhops, the waiters, the

busboys, chambermaids, switchboard operators, or the manager himself. The enemy had connections in high places and money to burn.

Mae Cole could pay for her occupancy but she couldn't afford it. In six weary years of waiting she had built up a nest egg she was now whittling down at a rate

that distressed her. But she didn't dare move to a cheaper hotel, where they might get to her in the dark of night. The Braircliff was too big and important to let a guest be kidnaped or given the third degree by a mob of hoodlums. Her room was the cheapest, an eight-dollar-a-day job on a floor reserved for women. She had discovered how to stretch her food dollar. The roof garden was strictly swank, but just for dinner and supper. Luncheons up there were excellent and cheap. The basement grill, called the Hunt Room, had a sliding scale of prices. Between five and six in the evening you could get a first-rate dinner at a modest cost. But at six and again at seven, new menus came on the floor and the seven o'clock prices were almost three times the five o'clock menu. The main dining room was for soft lights and sweet music, served food from the grill kitchen at outrageous prices. Not that Mae Cole was ever hungry. But she had to eat.

After breakfast that Wednesday morning, Mae Cole went up to the lobby and sat in an armchair facing a narrow mirror moored to a square pillar. Pasty-face with the yellow teeth was alert but stupid, never realized that she watched him in the mirror. Mae Cole was a tall, lean, big-boned woman of thirty with brassy yellow hair and eyes so dark blue they were indigo when her face was in shadowy light. She looked undernourished and fragile. Actually she was tough, the physical toughness that comes from being raised on a farm powered by human sweat. Suspense built up over ten days of do-nothingness had her teeth on edge. Not too far away a man awaited her in a log cabin beside a babbling brook that hissed and bubbled over a maze of white, round rocks. He was her husband and he had not held her in his arms for six long years—you cannot embrace through the heavy wire screen that separates inmates from visitors at the state penitentiary.

Pasty-face's reflection loomed in the mirror. He was chewing a toothpick with relish and, as always, his pale eyes centered on the back of Mae Cole's yellow hair. He took out a racing form and studied it raptly. Mae relaxed. She had worked her hotel life into a pattern. For one hour after each meal she sat in the lobby. If her food had been drugged, they'd carry her up to the office of the hotel physician. She was taking no chances of keeling over in an elevator or in her room from where a husky chambermaid could carry her. They wanted her that bad. She sat watching Pasty-face. Money was an evil thing when the wrong people had it, she thought.

A squat, big-bellied man materialized beside her. Mae Cole's muscles corded up and her shoulders stiffened. Pasty-face was all interest. The squat man was in his fifties. He had a beefy red face and a bald head, and his chubby hands toyed with the big linked watch chain spanning his stomach. His grey eyes were haunted and lusterless, as if he'd seen too many things he'd prefer to forget.

"Mrs. Cole?" His deep voice was pitched to reach her ears and hers alone.

THERE was a sticky lump in her throat. She nodded and her yellow hairdo shivered.

"I'm the house detective. Joe Walsh. I've been watching you for quite a while. Especially with Les Frame keeping tabs on you."

Mae Cole choked down the lump in her throat, and some of the tightness left her muscles. "Pasty-face with the yellow teeth?" she asked, surprised at the firmness of her voice. There was a soft clicking sound close at hand and she was chagrined to see that she was making it by snapping her purse open and closed. She interlaced her fingers and laid her clenched hands atop the purse.

"Pasty-face is a good tag," said Joe.

Walsh. "Les Frame is Vic Sasso's right hand man. Dumb but nerveless."

"A killer?" she asked, heart hammering.

"A killer," Walsh agreed. "I looked back six years. A woman who never leaves the hotel stands out like a red light. I remembered the name. Cole. Wally Cole. So I had a look-see at the newspaper files. Let's step into the manager's office and talk private!"

Fright glazed her eyes and etched wrinkles out from the corners of her mouth. "I trust no one," she said.

"Let's have the desk clerk identify me," he suggested.

Mae Cole stood up and hugged her purse to her lower ribs. In high heels she could see over the top of Joe Walsh's bald head. There was a cluster of freckles in the center of his shiny skull. They fascinated her. She wanted to giggle, then break into mad laughter. It was so ridiculous, those freckles, so, so . . . She conquered her hysteria by locking her jaws and staring at a blank expanse of wall. Joe Walsh took her right elbow and steered her to the desk.

Walsh ordered the desk clerk, "Tell the lady who I am?"

The dapper clerk didn't bat an eye. He'd been there eleven years and was shock-proof. He said, "This is Joe Walsh, house detective of the Briarcliff, madam."

Mae Cole nodded and let Walsh guide her into the office of the manager. She sat down behind a plain oak desk with a scarred top. The office didn't duplicate the glitter of the public rooms.

Walsh remained standing because he could think better on his feet. He summed it up neatly, said, "Six years ago your husband, Wally Cole, drove the getaway car in the First National stickup. Two guards were killed. Wally turned state's evidence and Hal Sasso went to the chair. Vic Sasso loved his brother. He swore a vendetta against your husband. Vic is

hot-blooded. He wants your husband as dead as possible as soon as possible."

Mae Cole had listened with stoic calm. She said, "You miss the motive. I was going to have a baby and we were stony broke. Wally was desperate. It was his first offense. The sentence was unjust."

"Water over the dam. Where is the baby?"

Her eyes misted and her throat worked. "I lost it during the trial," she said.

"There'll be another. I'm not too old."

"You were a school teacher once. Did you go back to it?"

"And starve?" Her voice was bitter.

"No, I got something better. I've been a waitress. At resort hotels around here and down south. We had a plan, Wally and I. He studied agriculture in prison and they let him work on the farm. He was to learn the know-how and I was to build up a nest egg to stake us to a few acres in the country. The warden was a good guy. He knew Vic Sasso would be waiting. So he smuggled Wally out in a laundry truck. Only Vic Sasso out-smarted us."

"How?"

"He sent a man to watch me a week before Wally's release. Wally's safe and waiting for me, that's all that matters. We're not licked. We won't be licked."

"Does Wally know the score?"

"Yes," she said, flat and final. "He'll wait."

"You can't stay here forever, and Vic Sasso is a patient man."

Mae Cole's eyebrows went up. "Patient? I heard otherwise."

"Why don't you go to the police?"

"I understand that Sasso's pinball and slot machine payoffs reach up high."

Joe Walsh fiddled with his watch chain. "I've been thinking," he said. "How to smuggle you out, I mean. Interested?"

"I'm listening."

"One. A laundry cart. You know, the ones with canvas sides that run on little

rollers. You could curl up in it and be covered with dirty sheets. Sound good?"

"What's number two?"

"Strictly corn. But it might work on Les Frame. A ringer. A woman your size with a yellow wig and wearing the same sort of outfit. You go to the lady's room and she comes out. Les trails her and you're on your own."

MAE COLE pursed her lips. She was an amazingly good poker player, one of those rare women men enjoy playing with. Joe Walsh's sudden interest and concern was too phony to be genuine. It was obvious that Vic Sasso had racked the house detective up in the Sasso lineup. Walsh watched her anxiously, the greed bright in his pale eyes.

"They won't do," she said flatly, pulling the rug from under him. "I don't like either of your ideas. In fact, I thought of them myself. But thanks for your interest."

Mae stood up and tucked her purse under her left armpit. Walsh looked deflated and hotly ill at ease. Mae Cole left the office and crossed the lobby. Three couples stood talking at the top of the stairs to the basement. She took refuge behind them and watched Joe Walsh leave the office and hurry into an elevator. *He's here, she thought. Vic Sasso's right here.* The realization frightened her, yet steadied her. Sasso was getting impatient.

Mae Cole broke her schedule by remaining in the lobby all morning. Les Frame hovered in the background, looking unhappy and annoyed, as if her change of routine had done him dirt.

"Mrs. Cole?" The man's voice was pleasant and husky. She looked up warily. The man was tall, dark and handsome, in a ratty manner. His flashy clothes spelled easy money and he was loaded with self-assurance. His big smile flashed blue-white teeth and clefted a dimple in the point of his chin.

"I'm Mrs. Cole," she admitted.

"Me, I'm Danny Aker. I got something for good old Wally."

"What?" she asked. Her lips were stiff.

Aker bent over her chair, but not too far. "Money," he whispered. "Cash on the barrelhead. Five thousand, cash." He tapped the right side of his coat.

So it was money. It talked. Mae Cole's forehead beaded with droplets of sweat and breathing became a chore. Five thousand! She translated that sum into a tractor, chickens, a cow, running water and electricity. A thousand alarms went off in her consciousness. A trap. A money trap. But oh how she and Wally could use five thousand.

She said, "Just chicken feed, five thousand. Wally lent you a cigarette once and—"

"Shh!" Aker warned. "Wally kept me out of jail, honey. I was the stakeout on the job. And there's still twenty-five grand unaccounted for. I want Wally should be happy and keep his gab closed. Old Danny Aker doesn't want in a cop sweat box, honey. Look, let's go up on the mezzanine and chew it over. It's quiet up there, but wide open. If I try to pull a nifty, all you have to do is yip and everybody in the lobby will be up."

Mae Cole got up and dusted her skirt. She walked up the carpeted stairs in a trance. Sasso had swung his Sunday punch, money delivered via sex appeal. The writing desks on the mezzanine were paired back to back and next to the railing. Mae sat at a desk where half the people in the lobby could see her. Danny Aker sat across from her. He took a brown envelope from his pocket and spread it open. He riffled the bills slowly, and she saw the flash of ten five-hundred-dollar bank notes. Her head spun airily.

Aker said, "I got to make sure this goes straight to Wally."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

He said, "Now don't get sore, honey. Everybody says that you didn't give any guy a tumble while Wally was in the jug. But dough's different. How do I know Wally'll ever see it?"

She could begin to discern the pattern now, asked, "I'm not sore. What's your idea?"

Danny Aker riffled the bills again, then licked the flap and sealed the envelope. He placed it atop the shade of the desk lamp. "You, and only you, know where Wally is," he said. "The envelope is stamped. We do it like this. I move far enough away so I can't see what you write on the envelope. Just to make sure you don't pull a nifty. Then you just take it to the mail chute and drop it. That's all. See? Even Vic Sasso wouldn't dare risk a federal rap by cracking a mail box."

Her face was deadpan as she sat staring at the envelope. For a long time not a muscle of her face moved. Then she said, "All right! Move away!"

THE MAILMAN was a nearsighted old man weeks away from retirement. He opened the lobby mail box at 1:55 P.M. Joe Walsh was right there. Mae Cole stood at the front of the lobby staring through the big front window. Actually she was watching the mail box in the thin reflection the plate glass afforded.

It was absurdly simple. Joe Walsh said, "Pop, the woman who mailed the brown envelope can't remember if she addressed it. She doesn't want it back, just wants to know."

The mailman lifted the envelope within six inches of his nose, said, "Yep." Heart hammering, Joe Walsh read: "John Davis, 1114 Rekcus Street, Mayville..." Mayville! Why, it was just across the river, only twenty minutes by auto. Walsh turned and signaled the lobby. Les Frame appeared. The men got into an elevator.

* * *

Vic Sasso was small and swarthy, and a red scar on his left cheek bone raised that side of his mouth in a perpetual leer. He and Walsh sat working on Scotch and sodas.

Walsh looked at his watch. "Les should be there by now. Is he going to—"

"Hell, no!" said Sasso explosively. "He'll just case the joint. We don't plow Wally under till the mailman delivers my five grand. Then we cop the dough and chop Wally down. The woman, too, if she's dumb enough to be around."

The phone rang. Sasso strutted over and answered it. His face purpled as he listened and his dark eyes were murderous. "Come back, Les!" he said, slammed the handset in its cradle.

"What's wrong?" asked Walsh anxiously.

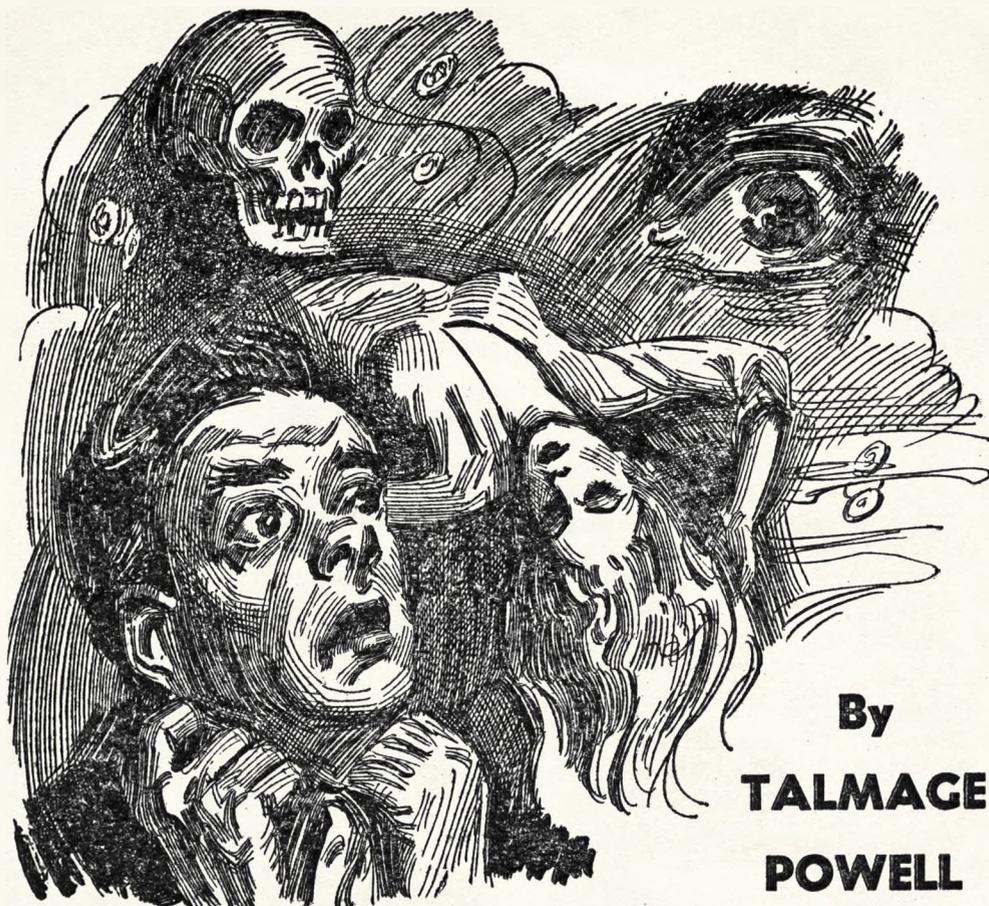
"You crossed me," Sasso said. "There ain't no Rekcus Street in Mayville."

Walsh's face sheeted with sweat. He'd written the name and address down on a piece of paper as soon as he reached the suite. It was on the table in front of him. "I didn't cross you, Vic," he said. "Honest I didn't. It was plain as day. She writes big and neat."

"Nuts!" Sasso scoffed. "Why'd she send five grand to a phony street?"

Joe Walsh's eyes got big and he mentally followed the progress of the brown envelope. "The return address," he croaked. "She wrote the real address on the back of the envelope. The post office will stamp it 'Return to Sender.'"

Danny Aker came in from the bedroom. He said, "It's a cinch they're together by this time, laughing themselves sick while they wait for the five grand." Danny looked over Walsh's shoulder and studied the name and address. "Hey, boss!" he cried. "Get a load of this. Rekcus is a dizzy name, huh? Well, spell it backward and you get S-U-C-K-E-R."



By
**TALMAGE
POWELL**

Sometimes a criminal is too big for the police to touch, or for any one man to tackle. That's when murder becomes . . .

A WOMAN'S JOB

HE LOOKED like any other dead man—loose, disjointed, strange, a pasty sponginess to his flesh. Eyes staring and mouth agape. Looking at them like that it's always hard to think of them once alive, thinking, feeling.

He lay dead there in the alley, and the alley was a black hole in the night. From the vacant, junk-cluttered lot half a block away I could hear the shrill cries of slum kids playing kick-the-can, unmindful of what one of their number had found when

he'd picked the alley as a place to hide.

All around the dead man, life went on. The blare of juke boxes in the gin mills. The cries of the burlesque barker at the joint across the street. The tight, thin laughter of a woman in a hotel room somewhere overhead.

The kid was bouncing from one foot to the other. "Gee, he looks terrible, don't he?"

At the mouth of the alley, Grant, sweating in his uniform, was keeping a crowd

from forming around the dead man.

"Gee," the kid said, "wait'll I tell Eggie about this. I guess Eggie never found no dead man!"

Danaird and Henssen moved like shadows in the alley, speaking in low tones. Doc Prator flashed his light on the dead man's face, grunted softly. The bartender from the Cozy Club wiped his face with his apron, his jowls shaking.

All of us stood in a tight group, watching Doc Prator look over the dead man.

The bartender from the Cozy Club said, "The kid swaggers in the back door of the joint. He says there's a guy croaked out in the alley. I start to chase him, but decide I better look. I find this guy, dive for the telephone, yell copper."

"Policeman," Danaird corrected.

"I yell policeman," the barkeep said.

"He hasn't been dead over an hour," Doc Prator said, "an hour and half at the most." He wiped his face, took off his hat and wiped the sweatband. "He expired from a head wound that drove slivers of bone into the frontal lobe. Looks like a sap did it. The bruises on his knuckles indicate he put up a scrap. I don't think a p. m. will help us much, but we can always try. Who is he, anyway?"

"Name of Danny Pryor," Henssen said. "He worked for the Little Fellow."

"For Kurt Loeffler? He ran numbers for Loeffler, eh?"

"Among other things. He was just a small-time yegg."

No, Danny Pryor was more than that. But I didn't say anything. It wouldn't have sounded right there in the alley. Pryor had been a lot of things—slum kid, drugstore cowboy, tough guy, finally a man. A woman's love had wrought the last change in him.

All those things Danny Pryor had been; but mostly, he had been a husband.

As I rode back to precinct headquarters in the cruiser with Henssen, I thought

about her sitting in their grubby apartment, waiting for Danny to come home.

"Somebody will have to tell her," I said.

"His wife?" Henssen said. "Not me. I don't like jobs like that. You do it, Delaney. You know her, don't you?"

"Yeah," I said quietly, "I know her."

"What do you make of his killing? Like a lot of them, right? Nobody saw anything, nobody heard anything. He could have been waltzed into the alley from any point in the city. If there was anybody in this town big enough to buck the Little Fellow, I might think it was a gang killing."

We rode a while in silence. I said, "Loeffler will have an alibi, an air-tight, leak-proof, bought-and-paid-for alibi."

Henssen shot me a look. "You think the Little Fellow had that job done back there in the alley?"

"I know he did."

"Why? Why would he knock off one of his own boys, Delaney?"

"Pryor wasn't his boy any more. Pryor was bringing me some books."

"Books?"

"Books."

THE LITTLE FELLOW and his lawyer reached my office fifteen minutes after my phone call to him to come over. The Little Fellow was a massive mountain of fat, with a round face and eyes that always laughed coldly at the world. The lawyer was a smooth, slick example of custom tailoring, smelling like a barber shop. His name was Peaseley; he had cold, greedy eyes and thin, nervous hands.

"I will talk for Little Fellow," Peaseley said. "What's on your mind? We want to get back to our poker game."

"I suppose you've been playing poker all evening, Loeffler?"

"He has," Peaseley said. "With me and three other gentlemen. What is it? If this is just a whim of yours, Delaney—"

"Danny Pryor is dead, murdered."

"That's too bad," Peaseley said.

"I don't suppose you know anything about it, Loeffler?"

"He doesn't."

"Let him talk!"

"Why should I talk?" the Little Fellow said. "I pay the shyster twenty grand a year to talk, don't I, shyster?"

Peaseley's face tightened, but he took it.

"Talk to him, shyster," the Little Fellow said.

"Let the flatfoot talk," Peaseley said angrily. "We don't need to talk. The burden of proof is on him. Let him talk big and fast, and book you—or he'll have to hold the door for us!"

I knew Peaseley was right. I looked at the smile in the Little Fellow's eyes. A helpless, sick knotting took place in my gut. There was just his fat, laughing face floating in my vision and the knowing that he was stronger than the power of the city behind me. I couldn't touch him.

"Danny Pryor was fingering you, Little Fellow," I said thickly. "He was going to bring me some books, ledgers, account books, proof that would pin a dozen rackets in this town on you, put your fat carcass in stir for twenty years. So you had him killed."

I got up, walked around the desk, keeping my hands folded behind me because they wanted the feel of the fat throat. "You belong in a zoo, Little Fellow. In a cage. You're a freak, a throw-back, a beast of the jungle."

Peaseley made a motion with his hand; the Little Fellow swung his arm across Peaseley's chest, like the bar of a gate. Not taking his eyes from me, Little Fellow said, "No, let him finish."

"I'm through," I said. "Until I get you in a cage. Now get out of here."

When they had gone, I got my hat from the hook on the wall. The door opened and Henssen came in.

"Lou Baker is in town," Henssen said. "He came in from Chi a couple days ago.

I've got six men on the Pryor thing and Danaird just phoned in that early tonight Baker was seen leaving the Flamingo Club with Danny Pryor. It may be a break. You know Lou Baker."

Strong-arm thug, professional killer. Lou Baker.

"I've got every exit from the city covered," Henssen said.

I nodded and left the office. I stood a long time in the musty corridor. I could phone her, I thought, I could send somebody else. I thought: I don't want to go to her apartment, I don't want to be the one to tell her.

SHE lived in a cold-water walk-up on Garden Street. I climbed the stairs, raised my knuckles to knock on her door. Beyond the door, I could hear a radio playing soft music about love and moonlight. I knocked, and she answered the door.

She was tall, well built, with a nice face framed in hair that had glints of copper in it. A chill washed over her face when she saw me. In that first instant, looking at me, she must have guessed, must have known. A pulse jumped to life in her throat.

"Can I come in, Jean?"

She stood aside, and I entered the apartment. Her touch was everywhere, in the crisp curtains on the windows, the bright slip covers on the couch and chairs. There was a little of Danny in the apartment, too, half a dozen pipes in a cheap rack, an outdoors magazine that he'd left open, face down to keep his place, on the coffee table.

"Something has happened to Danny?" she said suddenly.

"Yes."

"He's hurt?"

I reached out, took her hand in mine. It was icy cold, but steady. She was steady all over in a way that frightened me. "Jean . . ." I said, and because I

could think of no other way of saying it, I said gently as I could, "He's dead, Jean."

Nothing happened, except in her eyes. On the surface they were blank and cold, but they grew depthless and in the innermost parts of their depths a fierce light came alive.

"The Little Fellow got wise to Danny's idea about getting the books, didn't he? You'll have to arrest the Little Fellow, Delaney."

"Maybe it was something else, somebody else . . ."

"Not you, too, Delaney? I thought that out of the whole town at least you and Danny weren't . . . afraid."

She looked about the apartment, as if she had never seen it before, as if looking for traces of Danny Pryor. "We had a week here, Danny and I. That's not a very long time to be married before becoming a widow, is it?"

I licked my lips. "No."

"Danny didn't have to do what he was trying to do," she said. "But he wanted to do it. It would be his way of squaring things, of looking me in the face, he said. I can't believe that it is over now, that it will end with an unimportant man's death, a death passed over and forgotten. Forgotten along with what Danny was trying to do. Are you going to let it end like that, Delaney?"

"No," I said hoarsely. "I'll get the Little Fellow. Danny was as important as anybody—none of us is nameless, Jean."

"Then show me that. Show me that this world isn't an upside-down place where the Dannys can fade like shadows and the Little Fellows go on. You had better show me very soon, Delaney!"

She turned then, toward the window. "I'd like to see Danny, Delaney. Wait a moment for me."

She went in the next room, and I realized I was sweating a cold, fine sweat. I

wiped my face, thinking of her, of Danny, of myself. We had grown up together, the three of us, and our lives had parted, but now the skeins were drawn together again, had been drawn together since I'd stood at City Hall a week ago and watched them get married and known that I had lost her forever. But I'd been able to take it then, because there was the chance that Danny would make her happy, and that's what I wanted. But now? Now her happiness lay on a slab at the morgue.

She came out of the next room. She had dressed in black, a widow in mourning. When we reached the morgue, she asked if she could go into the back room alone. She stayed shut alone in there a long time with Danny. . . .

HENSSEN met me at the door to my office. "How did she take it?"

"In her own way, probably as no other women would have taken it. I'm afraid for her, Henssen."

He followed me into the office. I hung up my hat. Henssen said, "We picked up Lou Baker. I think we got a break. He's in a back room. He has a bruise on his mouth, Delaney, and scratches on his cheek."

I remembered Danny Pryor's bruised knuckles. But it was a thread so thin a lawyer like Peaseley would have no trouble breaking it.

My jerky steps carried me to the back room, Henssen beside me. Three men were in there with Lou Baker, who hulked in the chair under the light. There was sweat on Baker's broad, flat face.

"We grabbed him at Union Bus Station, trying to skip town," Henssen said.

Baker licked his lips. "You got nothing on me. A guy's got a right to travel."

"Not when he's a professional rub-out boy," Henssen told him. "Not when the Chi police have been watching him, and know that he was with one of the Little

Fellow's boys three days. Not when he shows in town and a guy who turned on Little Fellow pops up dead."

"You can't prove nothing! I want a lawyer. Little Fellow didn't hire me to come here and do a job. You can't prove a thing!"

"I guess," Henssen said, "Danny Pryor's fist didn't make the bruise on your mouth."

"You'll have to prove it, copper."

The door opened. Danaird came in, just in time to catch Lou Baker's last statement. "Proof he wants, boys? I'm fresh from the lab. They've got the scrapings from Danny Pryor's fingernails under a microscope, a little blood, a little skin. . . ."

Baker went white, lifted his hand to the scratches on his cheek. He could feel it closing in on him, an invisible net. For the first time his poise was rocked.

I walked over and drove the flat of my hand against his Adam's apple. A ragged, gagging sound came from his mouth. He crashed backwards in the chair. I put my heel on his hand to hold him flat on the floor. "We all know it. Say it, Baker! Little Fellow hired you to come down and get Danny Pryor out of the way."

He rolled his head back and forth on the floor, clawing at his throat with his free hand.

I tipped the chair upright with my toe, dragged him into it. "You're out of your own back yard now, Baker. It'll go a lot easier if you talk, make a deal. Or would you rather burn?"

He opened his lips, tried to say something, clamped his lips closed again.

"You're not leaving me any chance," I said.

He remained silent.

I put my thumb into the pressure point behind the lobe of his left ear, jabbed it to the first joint.

Baker screamed, broke it off in a sob, mouthed, "Okay, okay. I'll make a deal.

It was the Little Fellow—he hired me."

I looked at Henssen, and he said quietly, "I'll pick him up within fifteen minutes."

LITTLE FELLOW went into his cell with the bland smile still on his face, but with something shaken in the depths of his eyes. I knew it was still thin, tricky, and that Little Fellow had plenty up his sleeve, but I felt better; for I had seen it happen this way before, a tiny chink appear that would grow wide as the Grand Canyon. The whole power of police organization was on the Little Fellow's doorstep, the lab boys preparing their own bag of tricks, leg men at work all over the city. When the ship showed the first signs of listing, the rats would turn on the fat rat. Words here and phrases there as the rats tried to get off the sinking boat would weave a strait jacket for the Little Fellow.

When I got back to my office, Peaseley was there. I said, "Shyster, you can't bail the Little Fellow out on this charge."

"And the charge is?"

"Murder."

"You've already put it on the books?"

"I will very shortly."

"You'd better not, Delaney, or I'll put you where you belong for false arrest."

"I'm losing sleep nights," I said.

"Little Fellow won't. But I didn't come to see him, Delaney. I want to talk to my other client, Lou Baker."

I felt a sudden edge gnaw along my nerves. "You're his lawyer for how long?"

"Since your boys picked up Little Fellow at his apartment."

"I figured on something like this, shyster. But you can't see him. I'm holding him incommunicado for twenty-four hours. By that time I'll have everything signed, sealed and delivered—and a charge on the books."

"That's what you think." Peaseley

picked up the phone on my desk, dialed a number. "Judge Crowder? This is Peaseley speaking. Sorry to break into your evening, but something most important has come up. . . ."

Less than an hour later, the Little Fellow walked out of precinct headquarters. Lou Baker remained in his cell, charged with murder. After talking with Peaseley, he had retracted everything. He had killed Pryor, sure, but the Little Fellow had had nothing to do with it. He and Pryor had known each other in the past, and meeting again had started drinking. They'd headed for another bar, got into an argument, fought in the alley. "I didn't mean to hit him so hard," Baker said in his cell, "but it wasn't premeditated. You can't hang anything more than manslaughter on me."

Going back to my office, tasting gall, I knew how Peaseley would handle it. Baker would draw ten years, serve maybe two. Peaseley had convinced him the Little Fellow was on his side all the way. I wondered how much two years of Baker's time would cost the Little Fellow.

As he left the building, Peaseley looked into my office. "I wouldn't try any more capers, Delaney. Don't try to coerce my client again—or I might dig into that beating you gave him to force his lie about the Little Fellow."

"Get out of here," I said.

I slumped behind my desk, not liking the world very much in those moments. I figured every angle I could, and I came up with the same answer every time. The Little Fellow had won. Why not? Who was Danny Pryor, anyway? I was a big boy now, I knew the score. What had I been trying to do?

The phone rang. I couldn't hear the voice at the other end at first; then I had trouble recognizing it. She said, "I've been talking with Danaird on the telephone, Delaney. You want the Little Fellow. Well, I'll give him to you!"

"Jean . . ." I said hoarsely.

"I'll put him on ice for you at midnight, Delaney."

The phone went dead. I rattled the hook, said, "Try to trace that call!"

Then I went out of the office, slammed a door open. "Henssen!" I yelled. "Get four men, Henssen. Throw a cordon around the Little Fellow's apartment house. He's about to be murdered!"

"So now we have to protect him!"

"You don't understand, Henssen. The wrong person is about to do it. Jean. Don't let her in that apartment building, Henssen!"

I pointed the nose of the cruiser down the street car tracks, opened the siren wide. I slammed to a stop before the Little Fellow's apartment building, went up to his layout on the top floor.

MY HAMMERING brought him to the door. His eyes beaded, and he started to slam the door. I put my shoulder against it and said, "You stinking, fat fool!"

"Delaney, I've had my fill of you. I'm going to get you."

"You'd better wait until tomorrow to start trying," I said, "because tonight somebody is going to try to murder you."

For an instant, a light flared in his eyes. Puzzlement, naked fear, mingled with disbelief.

"Are you alone?"

"Yes," he said.

"Then you'd better stay that way. Don't let anybody but me get you to the door. I'll be right outside."

"Well! The big-hearted public servant here to save my life!"

"Go to hell!" I said.

I closed the door. The corridor was quiet; the whole building seemed wrapped in a silence that was too deep. I shivered a little, walked to the end of the corridor. From the window there I saw Henssen and four men spill out of a squad car.

Henssen looked up, scanning the face of the building. I waved to him. He waved back.

I sighed, relaxed a little, lighted a cigarette. As I lowered the match, her voice came to me, stiffening me, the match burning still in my fingers.

"You came awfully fast, Delaney."

I turned slowly. Jean was standing in the dark stairwell of the service stairs at my left. Her face was frozen beauty painted against the canvas of a frozen northern sky. She had a gun in her hand.

"I kept phoning Danaird at headquarters, Delaney. I kept up with developments as they occurred. If no man can stand against the Little Fellow, perhaps a woman can. Perhaps tonight he'll learn there is such a thing as justice!"

"Jean, you can't go through with this! You're crazy!"

"Walk ahead of me, Delaney, and no talk."

I moved slowly to the Little Fellow's door.

"Knock, Delaney!"

I knocked. The Little Fellow opened the door. She moved to one side, the gun flicking in her hand.

"Inside," she said.

The flesh of her face was pulled tight over the bone. She wasn't thinking; she didn't dare allow herself to think. She summoned all her heartbreak and hatred as she looked at the Little Fellow. The things he saw in her eyes turned him chalky, sweating. He backed slowly toward the kneehole desk against the wall of the room.

"Did you think the thing Danny was trying to do could be killed by knocking the life from Danny's body?" she said.

"Listen . . ." The Little Fellow held out a hand before him, palm forward, as if to catch her bullet. "You can't do this! Delaney! Stop her, Delaney! Damn you, stop her!"

He always had insurance, the Little

Fellow. He counted on his words causing her to cut her eyes at me for an instant, long enough for him to grab the gun he had planted under the open magazine on the kneehole desk. I saw it coming. I cried out to her; she swung her gun around, and I rushed for the Little Fellow. The ghost of his bland smile came back as he squeezed the trigger.

UNDER the roar of the Little Fellow's gun, I heard the catch of breath in her throat. I brought up on my toes, turned to her. I wasn't in time to catch her as she crumpled to the floor, blood seeping from her dress over her left breast.

I turned back to the Little Fellow, and I was numb and watery, as if sawdust filled my limbs.

His lips were slack now, quivering, his face oily. He said, "You saw it, Delaney. She came here, threw the gun on me. I had to do it. A plain case of self-defense."

"Hand me the gun," I said quietly.

An instant's pondering, balancing, calculating went on behind his eyes. "Sure, Delaney, sure."

I took the gun.

"We'll go right on down to headquarters and clear this thing up. I'll call Peaseley now. You saw it. Out-and-out self-defense."

"Sure," I said, "call Peaseley. But the shyster can't help you this time. Like you say, Little Fellow, I saw it. I saw you murder her."

The white flame of fear erupted in his eyes. "You're crazy, Delaney. You can't do that. You're a cop!"

"You killed her," I said, "in cold blood. My word against yours. Henssen and his boys will play ball. Who will take your word against that of a cop!"

With a bleat of fear, he dove for the door. I threw the gun aside, went for him with my bare hands. He hit me in the teeth, kicked at me. It was a pleasure,

because every time he took a blow in return. His face was turning to bloody mush.

I fought him back across the room. He clinched, grabbed my throat, forced me back across the sill of the open window. Black emptiness yawning behind me, I tried to squirm from under his weight. A laugh dribbled from his bleeding lips. "I said I would get you, Delaney! I fixed Pryor's wagon, I fixed hers, and now I'll keep that promise to you!"

Stars were pinwheeling in my brain. I tore at his hand on my throat. His blood was dripping in my face, his weight bearing me back. I wriggled one hand free, struck him. He grunted. I was having to swing in the confines of the sill. I hit him again, and then again. Each time he coughed in agony and rage. The fourth time I hit him, he hit me back. I lunged to one side, rolling against the side of the sill. He brought a smashing right down, but I wasn't there. He struck the vacant night, and the force of it carried him forward. I grabbed at his coat. The fabric ripped in my hands.

Then the Little Fellow was gone.

When I dragged myself back from the window, Henssen and one of his men were in the room. "We heard a shot up here," Henssen said. I saw then that he was kneeling over Jean, and my heart began to beat again.

"Is she breathing, Henssen?"

"She's breathing," Henssen said.

Later, in the hospital corridor outside her room, I figured it out in my mind. The Little Fellow would have been a barrier as long as he lived, a barrier against her living again with Danny gone, a barrier between her and me. But the Little Fellow was gone now. There was a chance, a strong chance, she would live, the doctor had just told me. That meant there was a chance I could do something about healing the scars, helping her forget.

The blonde nurse came back down the corridor, the same one who had tried to shoo me away half an hour ago.

"Mister," she said, "I told you it might be hours before she regains consciousness. Are you going to stand there all night?"

"Honey," I told her, "for the kind of dame who is in that room, I would stand here until Christmas!"



Each night she disappeared. . . . Each day she returned to torment him. . . .

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**By
DON
HOLM**



I turned from the phone just as Fensong came in. There was a worried look on his face. . . . "I think I'm going to be murdered," he said.

LETHAL LITTLE LADY

THE CLOCK on the dash said eleven-forty. Gilda wasn't going to like this, I thought. I had been due at her apartment at nine-thirty, and here I was in Colton, two hours later, going the wrong way. That's no way to treat a nice dish like Gilda. She's small with black hair and eyes like a flame-thrower. And

with no shortage of curves, either.

Besides, her bankroll arouses my paternal instinct. The lettuce is Meneman's night club and slot machine fortune, which was left to her when her dearly beloved took a dive in the Willamette River with the assistance of some competitors.

It's not that a big boy like me is scared

of a little wildcat like Gilda. It's just that I've never been sure that she didn't help push when her hubby went splash.

The campus entrance of Western University showed ahead through the rain-blurred windshield. I swung off the highway and turned up a winding, elm-lined road through the college buildings and passed the stadium where I could have been a hero, too, if I'd ever gone to college.

The road half-circled the stadium and climbed the hill behind the campus. On top, I pulled in at the curb in front of an imposing old shack with moss-covered shingles and old-fashioned gingerbread scroll around the eaves.

I tried to put Gilda out of my mind and, brother, it wasn't easy. I had a job, didn't I? I'd tried to call her twice. Once, before I left Portland, and the line was busy. Again at a roadhouse halfway to Colton, where I stopped for a couple of quick ones to boil the damp rot out of my bones. By the time I got the hang of the rural phone system, I was connected with the Odd Fellow's hall in Scappose instead of Gilda in Portland. So I gave it up. At least I had tried.

I GOT out and hurried up the laurel-lined walk to the front porch. The rain had let up a little but the big firs in the front yard were still dripping. The zinnia beds that laced around the porch were out in profusion. How did I know they were zinnias in the dark? Because I'd been here before, pal. The wet wooden steps squished under my weight and I crossed the porch and punched the bell. I could see a single light in the far end of the hall through the glass panes in the door.

A plastic door plate with luminous letters over the bell read:

Ramsey Fenisong, Ph.D., D.Litt., L.H.D.
Professor Emeritus

Fenisong was a scholar in American literature, specializing on Allen Poe. He collected everything Poe wrote, including that gentleman's pleas for more credit.

He was one of Riley's favored customers—Riley's Book Stall in Portland is famous with collectors up and down the Coast—which is why old man Riley intercepted me on my way to Gilda's and told me he had a hurry-up call from Fenisong and to get out there on the double if I wanted to stay on his payroll. He had me trapped. I've worked for Tate Riley since I was sixteen and all I know is how to sell books.

He was a long time answering the door, but when the lock did click I was surprised because I'd seen no one coming along the dimly lighted hall. The door opened as far as the chain would allow.

"I'm Eric Cain," I announced, "from Riley's in Portland. I understand Professor Fenisong called . . ." My words trailed off. I felt like a fool talking to myself.

But a gentle perfume drifted out with the warmth of the house and I knew somebody was standing there. The porch light clicked on suddenly. I didn't exactly jump out of my shoes, but the short hairs on the back of my neck got goosepimples.

A voice said, "Oh, yes. Won't you come in, Mr. Cain?" A nice voice with a tone like a low-muted trumpet. The chain rattled and the door opened wide. She had long russet hair and eyes that glistened meaningfully and full lips curved just right; the pale green seersucker she was wearing followed more undulations than the hills of Oregon. I forgot Gilda ever existed.

"Professor Fenisong . . . ?" I mumbled.

"Come in, please. I'm Lenore, Dr. Fenisong's niece."

She shut the door behind me and chained it. When I turned I found her regarding me with a kind of mixture of surprise, puzzlement and amusement.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Is my padding showing?"

Lenore laughed. "I was just wondering why big, blond he-men become book salesmen." I think she was wondering about something else, too, so I let it pass.

She took my arm. "If you'll wait in the study, Dr. Fenisong will be here soon."

I pulled her up short. Somebody was standing under the arch of the darkened parlour. A motionless man with lean cheeks and slender waist and padded shoulders. His tie was hand painted and his shirt had wide stripes. He looked familiar but I couldn't be sure in the gloom.

"Oh," said Lenore. "I beg your pardon. This is Dr.—Dr. Crofts."

Crofts nodded a sleek head of precision curls, so I was sure he was alive. I said to Lenore, "M.D., Ph.D., or D.D.T.?"

She smiled and steered me toward the study. "Dr. Crofts is an M.D. Uncle—Dr. Fenisong—is rather eccentric, you know. He believes me to be in delicate health, like Poe's wife."

She held my arm tighter than was necessary. I'm physically capable of walking without assistance. But I didn't mind. She had more charge than a twelve-volt battery.

She switched on the lights in the study and I went in. "Dr. Fenisong will be down soon," she said from the doorway. She gave me another look, seemed about to say something else, then smiled and shut the door behind her.

IT WAS a large study with an air of hallowed ground. I'd never been invited in here before. The walls were jammed from floor to ceiling with book-cases, even around the wide bay windows that overlooked the garden. There was a thick blood-red rug on the floor and the hot embers in the fireplace gave the room a close warmth.

Over the doorway, on a carved ledge, was a plaster bust of some goddess or other. And perched on top of the bust was a stuffed black bird—a raven.

I gave this a second look and the little wheels in my mind that had been clicking around the problem of where I'd seen Dr. Crofts before stopped turning. Something else was bothering me. Another elusive thought that refused to come out and be recognized. I looked at the raven again.

Then I had it. One, two, three. Fenisong was a nut on Poe—and you have no idea how nutty some collectors can get—and he even carried it so far he believed his niece was in poor health. Lenore. Yes, Lenore. That was the key. A metric rime began bouncing through my bean:

It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the
angels name Lenore:
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the
angels name Lenore!
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

It came back to me all of a sudden. I'd once memorized a poem for a declamation contest in high school, and the poem had been Poe's, "The Raven."

The stuffed raven intrigued me. I recalled a couple of other lines:

And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting,
still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my
chamber door....

I looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. It was just midnight. Did you ever have a coincidence sneak up and slap you in the face? Well, I had a whole flock of them doing a Maypole dance around me. And it irked me. I get disagreeable when I can't figure things out.

What happened next made me even madder. I had my back to the bay windows when suddenly I heard a frantic tapping on the glass. I whirled around. I could see just his face above the ledge and I recognized the small spade beard,

the shock of white hair, the terrified eyes. The head bobbed down and up, then down, like a Punch and Judy show. I thought I heard scuffling and crossed quickly to the window. I flattened my face against the cold glass. I could see some bushes swaying a little in the square of light from the study. And there was no wind.

I strode to the door angrily. To hell with Fenisong, and Riley, too. I'd stood up my pigeon and driven fifty miles just to play games with a half-cracked professor of literature. Nuts. Maybe I could still get back to Portland in time to square myself. I had a hand on the doorknob when I saw the telephone set in a little niche in the wall. It would be quicker to call, I thought, and they could charge it to the professor.

The line was dead. I jangled the hook impatiently, then slammed the receiver down. Someone must have disconnected the line recently, because Fenisong had called Riley earlier in the evening. This whole affair was getting worse than a midnight spook show.

I felt a draft on the back of my neck and smelled something like the odor of sheep dip. I swung around and there he was, a small wiry man of sixty, wearing a soggy Harris tweed suit. His heavy shock of hair was disordered and he was breathing hard.

"Dr. Fenisong," I said, "I'm sure glad to see you."

Fenisong shut the door quickly. "I'm glad you came, Mr. Cain. I'm glad you came."

"What's this all about?" I almost shouted. "I had a very important engagement tonight, and—"

"Please, Mr. Cain," Fenisong said in a jerky voice. "No time to explain. It was the first thing I thought of. You must help me. I think I'm going to be murdered. No time to explain. Someone cut the wire before I—"

FENISONG had stepped into the study so that my back was to the door as I faced him. When he broke off I got that uneasy feeling again. Someone was behind me.

"Glad you came," Fenisong went on, keeping up the continuity. "It was fortunate Mr. Riley thought of me when that copy of Poe's, *The Raven and Other Poems* came in. He knows how anxious I've been to secure a copy. Very fortunate. I have an excellent set of Poe's *Broadway Journal* for the year 1847 for which Mr. Riley has a buyer. Perhaps you will make the necessary arrangements. I trust you brought the book with you? I wish to *examine* it first, of course."

I didn't miss the emphasis, but that wasn't as screwy as the rest of it. I thought Fenisong had completely lost his buttons. In the first place, he couldn't have a set of 1847 *Broadway Journals* because the magazine expired in 1846, which he knew as well as I. And in the second place, Fenisong already had a rare edition of *The Raven and Other Poems*. I know. I sold it to him two years ago.

I decided it was all for the benefit of whoever was standing behind me so I went along with him. "I'm sorry, Dr. Fenisong, I must have misunderstood Mr. Riley. I brought the First Quarto of *Henry IV*, in the edition of 1548, which has just come in from an estate."

"Shakespeare, bah!" said Fenisong. "A writer of claptrap for the rabble!" He looked past me. "Oh, come in, dear. Have you met Mr. Cain?"

I turned then and saw Lenore standing in the doorway. Behind her, looking over her head, was Dr. Crofts. His clothes were wet.

Lenore smiled and came into the room hesitantly. "Yes, of course," she said. She crossed to Fenisong and if I hadn't been watching her closely I would have missed it. Her hand flew to her breast momentarily and she sort of sagged a lit-

tle. That was all, but it seemed to electrify Fenisong. He caught her elbow quickly, a worried look on his face.

"Lenore, my dear, you've been exerting yourself too much! Come, lie down."

Lenore flashed me a look that said we had a secret between us. "But I'm perfectly all right, Uncle! Really, I'm not ill."

But Fenisong was insistent. He guided her to the couch and piled some pillows behind her. Crofts seemed to recall that he had a medical diploma then and crossed to her hastily and took her pulse. Between them it was a lousy performance.

"Please don't fuss over me," Lenore said. "I'm perfectly all right."

"Now, now, Miss Fenisong, just remain quiet," said Dr. Crofts.

"I'm not ill," Lenore insisted bravely.

Crofts turned to Fenisong. "I'm afraid we'll have to get her up to her room. Will you assist me?"

Fenisong shot a look at me, then back to Lenore. "Can you make it with Dr. Crofts' assistance, my dear?"

"Of course," Lenore said, a bit reluctantly I thought.

"I'll need *your* assistance, Professor," Crofts insisted sharply.

"Oh, very well," Fenisong agreed.

Supporting Lenore on either side, they left the study and went presumably to Lenore's room. I stared stupidly at the door for a long while after they left. It had all happened like a badly acted high school play so far. And if there was anything wrong with Lenore I'll turn in my Junior G-Man badge. Of course not, I remembered. She told me so herself. I could understand Fenisong being a little eccentric but Crofts—where did he fit in?

This was my cue to check out, but I didn't.

I just stood there as if waiting to see what would happen next. And I guess one reason was because I'd finally placed Dr.

Crofts. I stood a little to one side of the door with my hands in my pockets when Lenore came back alone. She didn't see me at first and started for the desk. I must have moved because suddenly she halted and jerked her head around.

"Ah! Are you still here?"

"Yeah," I said, "but don't ask me why. Where's Dr. Fenisong?"

"We—Dr. Crofts gave him a sedative. He was quite upset."

"I thought you were the one who was sick."

She smiled. "Didn't I explain Dr. Fenisong's idiosyncrasy?"

"Not entirely to my satisfaction," I said plainly. "For instance, who called in Dr. Crofts? And what medical school was he graduated from?"

"Why, Dr. Fenisong called him in."

"I doubt that, sister," I said. "The last time I saw your Dr. Crofts his name was Kraus and he was number one boy to the late Jake Meneman, the big vice lord. See what I mean?"

A look of pain crossed her face. Then she clasped her hands and said haltingly, "Not so loud. Then you know?" She glanced at the door and came across to me quickly and caught my hands. "Can we count on you to help us, Eric?" she whispered.

"Who's *we*?"

"Why, my uncle and I, of course."

"What's this Kraus got on you?"

"He—he thinks there is something of Meneman's hidden here in our house. He intends to keep us prisoners until we tell him where it is. He threatened to kill us if we tried to get away.... After Uncle called Riley it was all I could do to prevent him. Oh, Eric, what am I going to do?"

She melted on my chest and, naturally, I folded my arms around her. It was like grabbing a handful of heaven. Just being that close to her was enough to burn my nerve endings to a crisp. Her cheeks were moist and hot when she turned her

face up to mine. She had to stand on tip-toe to brand her lips on my mouth so I guess she knew what she wanted. Who said there is no future in being a penniless second-hand book salesman?

She stirred finally and breathed, "Darling, you will help us?"

Brother, five more minutes with this dame and she could have peddled me her equity in Bonneville Dam. I kissed her again and her hands crept over my shoulders and locked tight at the back of my neck. That was when someone slugged me on the back of the head so hard my teeth cracked against Lenore's and cut my lip. And I'll give you three guesses who did it. No, better make it one. Anyway, I wasn't around to pay off for the next few minutes.

AT FIRST it felt as if I'd just pulled my head out of mouth of a fire siren. I must not have stirred, because they were still talking and Lenore was doing something with my hand. "You're not going to kill him?" I heard Crofts or Kraus ask. It snapped me back to consciousness like a spray of ice water on my spine. But I lay perfectly still.

"If you had any guts we'd be gone by now!" Lenore said angrily.

"Don't be a fool!" said Kraus. "We're clean so far. They couldn't pin a thing on us. But murder's where I draw the line."

My right arm was outstretched and I was lying face down, my head turned to the right. By slitting my eyes I saw what Lenore was up to. She was pressing a smooth-handled hunting knife into my hand. This done she folded a piece of stiff cardboard around the handle and wiped the blade.

"Lenore!" Kraus cried.

"Shut up and come on," the girl snapped.

I thought she was going to plant the stabber in the small of my back, but I was wrong. They moved away from me.

"How about this guy?" Kraus said.

"He's still cold. Let well enough alone. We haven't got all week." This dame could give Lucretia Borgia lessons in refrigeration.

Then they were gone. I jumped to my feet and sagged a moment with a dizzy spell. I spotted the phone and went to it groggily before I remembered it was dead. It probably wouldn't have done any good, I thought. In some of these small towns it takes a formal deposition to get the cops to leave their speed traps long enough to investigate a criminal case. I staggered to the door of the study. To the left of the panel was a large section of book shelves devoted to Fenisong's Poe collection. It rang a bell. Then, for the first time, I noticed that the study was strewn with papers and books and all the drawers had been turned out and rifled. A small wall safe that had been hidden behind a row of books was standing ajar. Still, I was interested in Fenisong's Poe collection.

I ran my finger along the shelf until I came to a thin leather-bound private edition of *The Raven and Other Poems*. Bulked between the leaves I found the bonds. Just like that. A hundred thousand bucks worth of beautiful negotiable bonds, property of the Meneman estate—that is, Gilda Meneman. Or anybody else who happened to find them and believed in finders-keepers. Fenisong was about as eccentric as the First National Bank, I could see that.

Maybe I didn't mention it, but Gilda's erstwhile mate had been a confirmed pack-rat with his dough when he was alive. He had more stashed around in private hiding places than he had in bank deposits. Ever since his demise a couple of years ago hunks of lettuce had been turning up in some of the damndest places. According to Gilda, most of it had been recovered. And she ought to know. She had been a hat check girl in one of his

clubs before she married him for his money. That part of it never bothered me. You can't blame a gal for trying to get ahead honestly, can you? And I knew she wasn't interested in my money.

I stuffed the bonds into my inside coat pocket, feeling like one tenth of a millionaire, which I was.

I figured I owed Dr. Fenisong a debt for making a rich man out of me, so I left the study to see if he needed any help. My skin crept as I edged passed the dark parlour and on down the hall, but nothing happened. The stairway was wide and thickly carpeted. At the first landing, halfway up, I could see a crack of light under one of the second-floor doors.

I heard voices and took the second flight three at a time and made it in time to duck behind an old-fashioned knick-knack cabinet. The door opened and Lenore came out, followed by Kraus. They left the light on.

"Hurry up!" Lenore snapped as she started down the stairs.

Kraus said nothing but followed behind her, looking as if he had to be dragged. I slipped around and went into the lighted room.

Dr. Fenisong, professor emeritus, was propped up on top of the bed with his clothes on, his head lolled to one side. Slightly to the right of his breastbone a plain-handled hunting knife protruded. They had certainly given Dr. Fenisong a sedative, all right.

IT WAS the very same knife Lenore had pressed my fingerprints on. And I didn't have to be an architect to recognize a neat frame job. I crossed to the bed and with my handkerchief wiped the handle of the knife good. Dr. Fenisong didn't seem to mind it as much as I did. Then I went out and slipped my bulk downstairs as fast as I could without making any noise. The hallway looked clear and I figured I could make the door

without being seen. From then on I'd give them odds.

Just as I reached the parlour entrance a shadow fell across the square of light from the study door. I ducked into the parlour without missing a step. An instant later Lenore came out into the hall. She had a gun in her hand.

"He must have gone upstairs," she said over her shoulder. "You search down here."

I wondered why she was doing all the dirty work, but not for long. As soon as she went by I made for the front door. I was reaching for the latch when Kraus came out of the study, saw me, and opened his mouth. I started swinging on the way and when I reached him I knocked his words back in his teeth with a roundhouse. He fell back into the study and I didn't stop to wipe his blood off my fist.

"That's for putting the slug on me!" I explained.

He was wobbling on his heels, so I planted a right in his guts and straightened him out with an underhanded cut. It floored him but didn't knock him out. I must have been slipping. I moved in on him again but he waved me off, twisted up on his knees and stood up meekly.

"All right, all right," he said. "What the hell." As if he wasn't even talking to me. Maybe I had slugged him harder than I thought.

"What the hell," he mumbled again and walked over to the desk and leaned on it with his arms for a moment. "I didn't think she'd do it," he went on tonelessly. "She asked him for the last time where the bonds were. He was too scared to answer. Shocked too, to see his niece the way she really is. She was holding the point of the knife against him. When he wouldn't answer she got mad. She hit the butt with the heel of her other hand and drove the knife into him. Like this." He demonstrated with shaking motions.

"The cold-blooded, murdering little tramp!"

I said, "What did you expect, smart boy? You think you were just going to walk in and walk out with the bonds? Uh-uh. Our little Lenore could do that without Meneman's ex-flunky. But she's the kind of dame who's got to have a fall guy handy.

"The way I get it Lenore hadn't seen Fenisong for years. She's probably too jet-propelled for his kind of society. Maybe in her travels she'd played around with Meneman a little, see? Maybe she remembers his little habit of caching money away, and maybe locates the bonds in one of his love nests. Anyway, she finds them and decides to lay low until she can go on a spending spree. So she comes here a few days ago to visit her long-lost uncle and pulls this sick act, which he falls for. But in the meantime he stumbles across the bonds. Thinking some former tenant forgot them maybe, he hides them good until he can decide what to do. Our Lenore finds out they're gone and is fit to be tied. She calls you in. Maybe you been hanging on her skirts all the time. You pretend you're the doctor. No one knows you or Lenore are here. You got all the time in the world to look. But he gets wise to something and does the first thing he can think of: Calls old man Riley, knowing he'll send big husky me out here. . . . Yeah, I get it all now. I could write a book."

"I didn't think she'd butcher the old man," Kraus mumbled. Then he looked up as if seeing me for the first time. "I got as much right to those bonds as anybody!" he almost sobbed. "I did Meneman's dirty work for ten years and never got a thin dime out of it when he went overboard. I didn't need her. I found the bonds but she persuaded me to let her have them for safekeeping until we could pull out. I should have known she'd take a powder. I'd have never found her if the

old man hadn't stumbled across them. That's when she called on me again. But I didn't think she was going to croak the old guy. By God, I'm not going to the gas chamber for that—that—"

"Easy, Kraus," I said. "Don't get excited. Besides, she hasn't got the bonds. I have." I held my coat open and showed him the tops of the bonds sticking out of my pocket.

That's what a guy gets for bragging too much.

"I'll take them now, darling," Lenore said from the doorway. She held out her left hand. Naturally, when a lady asks like that how can a guy refuse? Especially when she's got one of those snub-nosed .357 magnums in her other hand.

I PULLED them out slowly and when I handed them over my jaw must have sagged a foot. How could I have been so stupid to forget that she was roaming the house with a gun while I was playing the big detective with Kraus?

"Thanks, darling," she smiled. "You're sweet. I'll bet you and I could have had a lot of fun."

I grinned. "We still can. That's a lot of lettuce there."

"Too bad, darling. But somebody's got to stay here with Uncle."

And be the fall guy, I thought. She didn't know I'd wiped my prints off that knife. I didn't see any percentage in telling her.

"Now if you two will just turn around," she went on calmly. "This won't take a minute."

I didn't see any percentage in arguing either, so I turned. As I did so I saw Kraus' mouth working on an ugly grimace.

"You dirty, two-timing double-crosser!" he shouted. At the same time he catapulted himself at her. I'm glad somebody crazy enough to dive at a .357

(Continued on page 125)

IT MADE the front pages of all of San Francisco's newspapers when Mrs. Jesse Hughes' wizened old body was found lying, crushed and misshapen, on a lonely side street several miles from her home. Mrs. Hughes and her late husband were counted among the first families of San Francisco. The list of her friends included the mayor, the police commissioner and other high city officials. Her husband had left her a great deal of money and as the aged woman had no children or other close kin, she used her fortune to quietly aid several bright young people she had taken a fancy to.

Mrs. Hughes had evidently been killed by a hit-and-run driver, some time in the late hours of the night. The wheels had passed over her thin chest, crushing it. Due to her prominence, the police commissioner ordered Detective Captain Charles Dullea to take personal charge of the case.

The police had one promising clue to begin with: The death car had left a clear imprint of its tire marks on Mrs. Hughes' red sweater. These were photographed and prints given to a detail of detectives with orders to trace them down.

Something about the appearance of the case disturbed Captain Dullea, although for the moment he couldn't put his finger on it. His cop's intuition kept troubling him, kept trying to say something, but at first he couldn't tell what it was. Several days after the investigation began he suddenly surprised himself by asking out loud: "Just what was Mrs. Hughes doing, walking at that late hour alone in that little side street? What business did she have there, anyway?" His initial questioning of her servants shed absolutely no light upon this vexing question.

While snooping around the Hughes home, Captain Dullea discovered another startling fact—there were tire tracks going in and out of the garage. What made this so strange was that Mrs. Hughes did

BLOOD IN HIS OWN BACK YARD

not own a car! Continuing to browse around the garage, the detective noted that the floor had recently been washed clean. Poking his hand through the drain he came up with a mass of ooze in which were embedded eight long grey hairs.

Laboratory examinations proved that the hairs were Mrs. Hughes' and the tire tracks were identical to those that had been photographed on her sweater. This was indication enough to Captain Dullea that Mrs. Hughes had been killed in the garage and her body carried away and dumped in the place where it had been found. Instead of a hit-and-run driver, Captain Dullea was now up against a willful, cold-blooded murder.

Captain Dullea now wanted to know who would wish to destroy in so brutal a fashion this mild, benevolent old woman. He proceeded to go through her private papers and came upon her will. The major heir to her fortune was Frank J. Egan, Public Defender of San Francisco!

The public defender in San Francisco and a few other forward-looking American cities is a public official who is the opposite number to, and ranks as high, as the district attorney. His job is to insure the civil rights of even the lowliest by providing top legal advice to any defendant in a criminal case who requires it.

Certainly the chief beneficiary in Mrs. Hughes' will ranked high as a suspect, but the detective had to move cautiously in investigating Egan. "You can't drag someone like that down to headquarters

By
SKIPPY ADELMAN

Police Captain Dullea followed a trail of blood that led — straight back to headquarters!

and tell him he's a murder suspect," the captain told himself. "I'll have to take this slow and easy."

Dullea began to investigate Egan on the quiet. Egan was the latest of Mrs. Hughes' proteges. He had been a San Francisco cop and then a successful criminal lawyer before being elected to public office. Tall, witty and handsome, he was marked by those in the know around City Hall as a comer in municipal politics. He was a firm believer in the theory that criminals could be rehabilitated if given a chance to go straight, and had interested Mrs. Hughes in providing money to give certain ex-convicts a clean start.

"Besides," thought Dullea ruefully, "Egan has a good alibi. He was seen at the fights in Dreamland Pavilion at the time Mrs. Hughes was murdered."

MEANWHILE, the detectives assigned to tracking down the death car finally found it. It was a Lincoln phaeton owned by John Postel, a lieutenant in the police department. Dullea and Postel met for a conference. "I didn't have the car the night Mrs. Hughes was killed, Charlie," Lieut. Postel told his fellow officer. "I lent it to Verne Doran. He said he wanted to go for a little drive."

Captain Dullea snapped to attention; he knew Doran, as did most city officials who had dealings with the Public Defender's office. Doran was a paroled convict who had been released because of Egan's in-

tervention. He had become Egan's man Friday, running his errands and acting as his chauffeur and valet.

The police picked up Doran and, for good measure, Albert Tinnin, another paroled convict who did odd jobs for Egan. Captain Dullea carefully outlined to Doran the evidence he had against him. Then he said, "I know you didn't plan this, Verne. You and I know who did. Are you going to be the fall guy and let him walk free, or will you make it easier on yourself and tell the whole story?"

Doran sighed regretfully and then began talking. "Okay. It was Egan," he said. "He was something like a son to Mrs. Hughes. He handled all her legal work and invested all her money for her. Egan lived high and had to help himself to a good deal of her dough. Lately she began bothering him for an accounting.

"Egan told Tinnin and myself we owed him plenty. If we didn't help him now he'd have us both back in the can. So we had no choice. Then he called up Mrs. Hughes and asked if he could come over that evening with a couple of friends. When she said yes I borrowed Postel's car. The plan was to make it look like a hit-and-runner had gotten her. That night the three of us called on Mrs. Hughes."

"Wait a minute," interrupted Dullea. "Egan was seen at the fights that night."

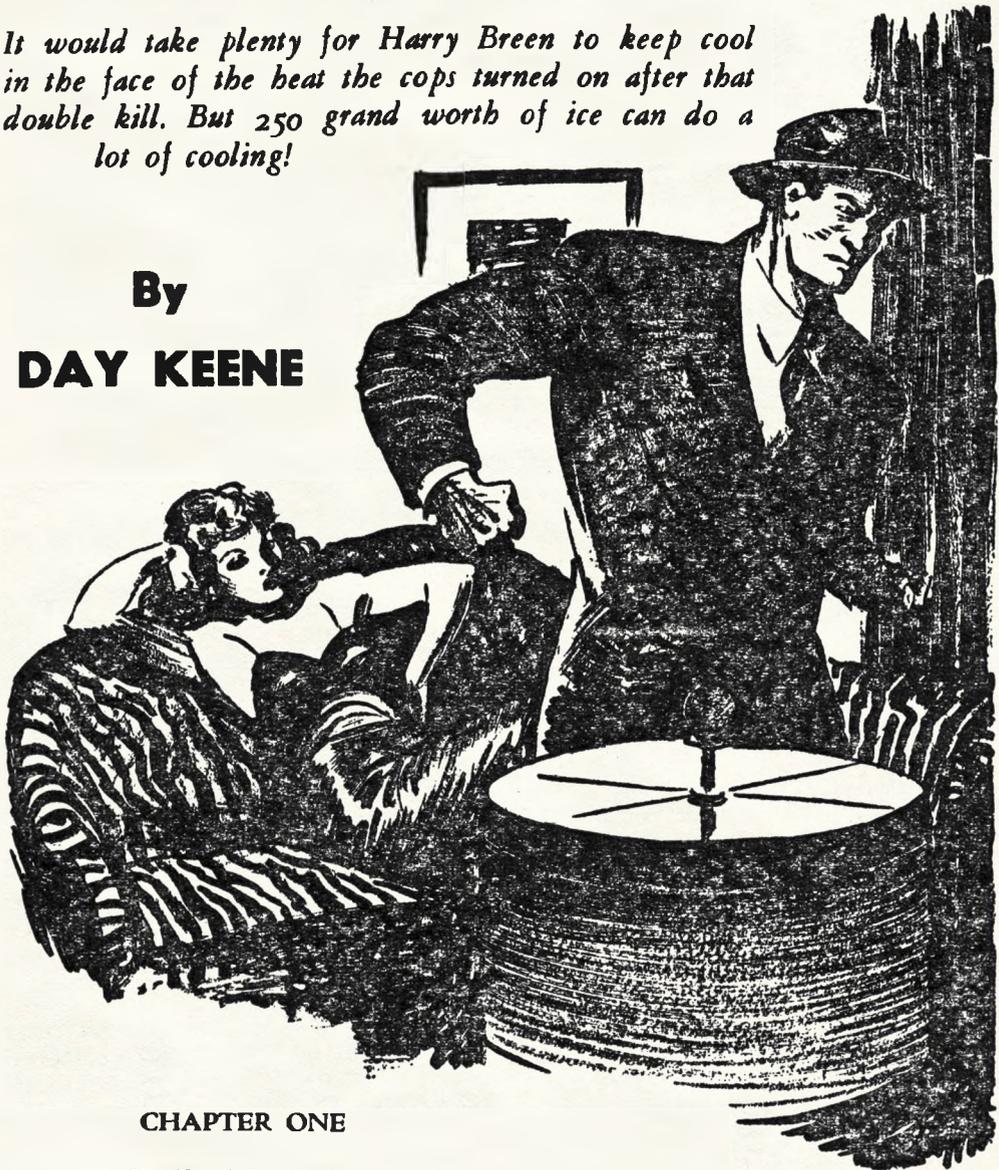
"He left a few minutes after we arrived, leaving Tinnin and myself to talk to the old lady," Doran explained. "Then Tinnin slugged her in the stomach and head and we carried her to the garage. We put her on the ground, and I ran over her with the front right wheel, first forward, then back. Then we drove a while till we found a deserted street and dropped her there."

All three of the murders, Doran, Tinnin and the mastermind, Frank J. Egan, were sentenced to life imprisonment.

OLD HOMICIDE

It would take plenty for Harry Breen to keep cool in the face of the heat the cops turned on after that double kill. But 250 grand worth of ice can do a lot of cooling!

By
DAY KEENE



CHAPTER ONE

One Knock for Murder

FRIDAY was one of those days. It began to drizzle at eight o'clock. It was still raining at four-thirty. 2154 Grant Street was one of those buildings. An ornate grey-stone four-story house, it squatted on the edge of the northward-moving Tenderloin like a booze-battered

old dowager who had given up the struggle for respectability but insisted she still be treated with the respect due her former station in life. The peeling gold leaf on the entry hall door stated in so many words—"No Peddlers or Solicitors Allowed."

WEEK

*Gripping Novelette
of
Hot Ice and
Cold Corpses*



*"What did you do with that ice?"
Marino bellowed, and swung the
gun in a vicious arc. . . .*

Breen opened the door and limped in. He had long since learned to disregard such trifles. If Mary and Mary Joe were to eat and be reasonably well-housed and clothed, he had to keep up with his quota. And no living door-to-door salesman could sell four vacuum cleaners a week if

he paid any attention to signs like that.

Inside the entry hall he shook the rain from his trench coat, got a firmer grip on his demonstrator and climbed the first short flight of stairs

1 A didn't answer. A frowsy blonde with cold cream still on her face at four-thirty in the afternoon opened the door of 1 B but slammed it in his face as soon as she saw the demonstrator.

He had better luck on the second floor. The girl who opened the door of 2 A let

him begin his sales talk, then opened the door still wider.

"Come in," she invited. "Come in. Believe it or not, I've been thinking of buying just that make of machine for some time."

Smiling, Breen accepted her invitation. It all just went to prove that McCarty knew his figures. It was a matter of plugging. It was a matter of making the calls. You banged on so many doors, the figure varying with various factors, and you were bound to make a sale.

An older, thin-faced man slumped on his spine in an easy chair in the living room, looked at him over the rim of a highball glass, then, getting up, offered Breen his hand.

"Well, I'll be damned. This is a coincidence. Hello, Harry."

Breen remembered the man vaguely. He thought his name was Paddy Shale. He shook hands, agreeing it was a coincidence and Shale introduced him to the girl.

"This is Harry Breen, Martha. Six, seven years ago he was the leading contender for the light heavyweight title. Harry, meet Mrs. Shale."

Breen said, "Pleased to meetcha." He was glad he had been right about the name. If he remembered correctly, Shale was a minor fight hanger-on and small-time bookie.

Shale slapped his back. "So you're selling vacuum cleaners. I'll be darned. I wondered what had become of you. How come you gave up fighting?"

"It was the war," Breen explained. "I was with the Marines and—well, I've got a piece of silver where one of my shins used to be."

Both the black-haired girl and Shale expressed their sympathy. "A shame. A darn shame," Shale said. "It bother you much, Harry?"

Breen told the truth. "Only when it rains or I have to climb too many stairs."

"Oh," Shale said. "I see."

BREEN cleared his throat. He didn't want to seem in too much of a hurry, but it had been a long day and a hard one. "But about the machine now, Mrs. Shale. You are undoubtedly familiar with its merits. But may I point out it is the only tank-type cleaner that—"

Shale cut him short. "Forget it. Write out an order on one and let's you and I have a drink." He nudged Breen in the ribs. "Long time no see, fellow. And it's good to see you."

Breen looked at Mrs. Shale. She said, "Stay out of this, Paddy. Please. I want a demonstration. And I want especially to know about the attachments. Is there an attachment for," she indicated the cornices over the windows, "high, hard-to-get-at places like that, and under beds and things?"

"Yes, ma'am," Breen assured her. "There is." He opened his attachment case and gave her a thorough demonstration of all the different cleaning jobs of which the machine was capable while Shale looked on from the easy chair.

Satisfied, the black-haired girl said, "It's a sale. But might I try it myself, please, while you write out the order?"

Shale mixed him a drink as he did. "Dames," he laughed. "They're all alike. She was going to buy one right along. She just made you earn your money, Breen."

Breen said that was all right with him. Informed he could pay cash or sixteen dollars and fifty cents down and five dollars a month on the balance, Shale elected the time-payment plan and Breen so wrote out the order.

It didn't make any difference to him. The sixteen dollars and fifty cents was his commission. It was his fifth sale that week, with tomorrow morning still to go, and the first time he'd exceeded his quota. McCarty would be pleased. And so would Mary. Even minus the deductions it would give him a good week.

The black-haired girl switched off the

machine and sat on the arm of Shale's chair. "There's just one more thing, Mr. Breen. This machine is scuffed in spots. Do I get a new machine or do I have to take this one?"

"A brand-new machine," Breen assured her. "I'll drop it off the first thing in the morning. This is just my demonstrator."

"Oh," Shale said. "I see. You have to turn that one in every night, eh?"

Breen shook his head. "No. I keep this one in my car." His attachments packed, he stood up to go. "Well, thanks for the sale and the drink."

Shale looked at the black-haired girl. She nodded almost imperceptibly. "Think nothing of it," Shale said. "It was nice to see you again, Harry." He took a little black note book from his pocket. "By the way, where are you living now? We'll have to get together some night."

Breen gave him his address and Shale wrote it down. More for the sake of form than because he thought the other man would ever accept the invitation, he added, "Sure. Drop over any evening. We're kinda tied down, what with the baby and all, but maybe we can play some penny ante or cut up old touches or something."

He wondered suddenly, without much interest, why both Mr. and Mrs. Shale were perspiring so freely. It wasn't *that* warm in the apartment. And that was the last he thought of them until ten o'clock that evening.

THE BABY had been asleep two hours. He and Mary were in the kitchen when the knock came on the door.

Mary said she would go. A moment later, her voice strained and worried, she called from the hall, "It's a detective, Harry. He says he wants to talk to you."

As puzzled as his wife, Breen walked into the other room.

A grey-haired man in his early fifties, Lieutenant Kreco nodded curtly. "Your name is Harry Breen?"

"That's right."

"You sell Vacuum-Matic vacuum cleaners?"

"I do."

"And you sold one this evening at approximately five o'clock to a Mrs. Paddy Shale," the lieutenant consulted a paper in his hand, "at 2154 Grant Street?"

"I did."

"Then get your hat and coat. The captain wants to talk to you."

Breen stood on his constitutional rights. "About what?"

Kreco washed the ground out from under him. "A little matter of murder, son. Both Shale and his wife are dead. And, as far as we can tell, you were the last person in their apartment."

* * *

The window shades were drawn against the night, as befitted a house of death. There were uniformed men in the hall and more inside the apartment. The frowsy blonde who lived at 1B, no longer frowsy looking, wearing a low-cut evening gown, her face enameled with makeup, was sitting in the easy chair that Paddy Shale had sat in. There was no sign of Shale or his wife, but someone had methodically torn the apartment to pieces. The stuffing bulged out of slashed curtains. Drawers had been overturned on the floor. Some time after he'd left, Breen thought, someone had certainly raised hob.

"That's him," the blonde in the chair identified him. "That's the vacuum cleaner salesman who tried to force his way into my apartment."

None of the officers in the room seemed much impressed.

"Nix, lady," Breen protested. "You know better than that. All I did was knock on your door."

A heavy-set man heard the voices and came out of the bedroom. "Oh. You found him, eh, Lieutenant?" Then, looking at

Breen, he added, "Aren't you the same Harry Breen who used to fight in the light-heavy division?"

"That's right," Breen admitted.

Captain Hanson asked the inevitable question.

"Then how come you're selling vacuum cleaners?"

It was late. Breen was tired. His leg had hurt him all day. He really didn't give a damn what had happened to Paddy Shale. The more he remembered about him, the less he liked him. The dead man had not only been a fight hanger-on and a bookie, had reputedly been a fixer and a fence. Breen began a hot reply, then thought better of it. The stout man was probably the captain Lieutenant Kreco had mentioned. "On account of I lost part of a leg at Iwo," he said finally.

"Oh," Hanson said. "Well, bring him inside, Lieutenant."

Paddy was lying on the bathroom floor, one arm outstretched as if he had been about to flee into the bathroom when death had caught up with him. The black-haired girl lay a few feet away.

Captain Hanson asked sharply, "You wouldn't know anything about this?"

"No, sir," Breen said. "Not a thing. All I know is they were both alive when Mr. Shale gave me the sixteen-fifty down payment on the cleaner."

An officer standing by the dresser said, "That amount checks with the receipt we found. How was his wallet when you saw it Breen? How much would you say he was holding?"

"Not too heavy," Breen answered.

Captain Hanson asked, "That was all your business with him, trying to sell him a vacuum cleaner?"

Breen corrected him, "Selling him a vacuum cleaner." He admitted, "Not that I had to work very hard. It was almost as if his wife was waiting for me. The first thing she said after she opened the door was, 'Believe it or not, I've been thinking

of buying just that make machine for some time.'"

"That," Kreco said, "is your story."

"It's the truth."

"You didn't know Shale lived here."

"I hadn't the least idea."

The plainclothes man by the dresser spoke again. "Then how come he had your name and address in his book?"

"He asked me for my address. He said we should get together some time."

"Why?"

"He didn't say."

A tall man who had been kneeling by the black-haired girl got to his feet and dusted at the knees of his trousers. "This joint could use a good going over with a vacuum cleaner. The same as the man. I'd say both of their necks were broken with single sharp blows with the blade of the hand." Looking at Breen's big hands, he added, "A blow such as the Army and Marines taught in dirty fighting."

A pregnant silence gave birth to Breen's question. He didn't know whether to be angry or amused. "Hey. Wait. Just a minute, now. You guys don't think I killed them?"

"Well," Captain Hanson said, "I didn't have any particular theory until I recognized you. But let's put it this way, Breen."

"What way?"

"How much did you get for your go with Billy Matson in '41?"

"About ten grand."

"And the night you fought Sternic?"

"About the same. Maybe a grand or two more."

"And you put it all away in government bonds, I suppose?"

"No," Breen admitted, "I didn't. I didn't save a dime. I was just a cocky kid in those days. Besides, despite the fact that both Billy and Gus beat the pants off of me, I thought that sooner or later I'd get a crack at the crown. Everybody else did."

CHAPTER TWO

Escape

"But the war came along, and you didn't. And now, eight years later, a married man with a kid, you're peddling vacuum cleaners door to door for peanuts. Tell me—how much did you make last week?"

"Sixty-six dollars."

"And this week?"

"Sixteen-fifty on top of that. And I still have tomorrow morning."

Captain Hanson shook his head. "No. I'm afraid you aren't going to do any selling tomorrow, Breen."

Breen was incredulous. "You mean to say you actually think *I* killed Paddy and his wife?"

"Well," Captain Hanson said, "let's look at our known facts, Breen. In the first place, Paddy wasn't married. He didn't even live here. He just used this apartment as a drop and a business meeting place. And from the looks of the joint, he wouldn't know one end of a vacuum cleaner from the other."

"But—"

"No, the dead girl wasn't his wife. She is, or was, Elaine Fitzel, a big-time international jewel thief. Paddy was a known fence. And since discovering the bodies we've learned that Paddy spent the afternoon raising, or trying to raise, fifty thousand dollars, presumably to consummate some deal. You didn't happen to see that money?"

"No, sir," Breen said emphatically. "I did not."

Captain Hanson relighted his dead cigar. "Now, add to that the fact you admit being in the apartment at the approximate hour of death and that blonde nitwit out in the other room swears that as soon as you left the building she cracked her door, expecting her boy friend to call, and that not another soul beside yourself went in or out until shortly before seven when the janitor discovered the bodies. Sure. There are holes in the deal. I admit it. But what would you do in my place?"

IT WAS the second time Breen had been in the office. The only other time had been when the D.A. had questioned most of the boys in the fight game regarding an alleged fixed fight. He had known nothing about the fight. He certainly hadn't killed either Paddy or Elaine Fitzel. But how the D. A. would score the round was entirely in the hands of the gods.

He sat in a hard-back chair with his sodden trench coat folded across his knees. Mary was probably worried sick by now. Certain he hadn't done anything wrong, he had told her he would be back in a few minutes.

The smoke in the office grew thicker. The hour hand of the big clock on the wall tapped lightly at the figure twelve. A new day was beginning.

A new day, Breen thought wryly. He'd thought he was beginning a new day when he and Mary had been married, when Mary Joe had been born, when he'd taken the job with McCarty.

"Sure. Door-to-door selling is the lowest form of salesmanship," the little black Irishman had admitted. "But it's also one of the most difficult and highly specialized. A man who can make a living selling door to door can sell anything, son. It's the best possible training and there's always room at the top for a good salesman."

All he had to do to succeed was keep on banging doors. But it would seem that he had banged on one door too many.

The D. A. was talking to Captain Hanson. "Is there a back door to the place?"

"Yes, there is. But anyone using it would have to go through the boiler room. And the janitor claims he was in the boiler room all afternoon replacing a set of burned-out fire grates."

"What's his reputation?"

"Good."

The D. A. consulted his memorandum pad. "And this Miss Fay?"

"She sings at one of Como Marino's places. The Pink Lady. I don't imagine she's any girl scout. But on the other hand she hasn't any record and I can't figure out any motive for her to lie."

"How about her statement that Breen tried to break into her apartment?"

Captain Hanson shook his head. "That was so much bushwah. You know how some folks feel about door-to-door salesmen. And she admits now all he did was rap. But she was peeved because she thought he was her boy friend and the boy friend never did show up."

"And Breen?" the D. A. asked. "How about his record?"

Captain Hanson was fair. "That's the hell of it. He hasn't any. He was always a square fighter and his service record is top drawer."

"You searched his apartment and his car?"

"Yes, sir."

"How about his vacuum cleaner? I mean the one he admits demonstrating for Shale?"

"Clean as a whistle. Not even a pinch of dust."

BREEN opened his mouth to say something, then thought better of it as the germ of an idea rooted in his mind.

"It's a problem," the D. A. admitted. "You've definitely established the fact that Shale did raise fifty thousand dollars yesterday afternoon?"

"We've back-tracked thirty-six thousand. And, man, are the money boys weeping!"

"Hmm. And no jewel theft in that class reported. Unless, of course, Elaine turned a trick somewhere else and came here to do business with Paddy."

Captain Hanson pointed out, "If Paddy was willing to fence them for fifty G's, that

means the stuff was worth five to ten times that. There might have been more, too. And there's been no theft of that magnitude reported anywhere in the country."

The D. A. sighed. "Well, it's your problem, Captain. I can't ask for an indictment on what you have so far. But if I were you, I think I'd hold Breen the seventy-two hours the law allows us for investigation. In that time something may turn up."

"Yes, sir." Hanson picked two of his younger detectives from the men in the office. "You. Morgan, Tonelli. Take Breen upstairs and put him in a detention cell."

"Yes, sir," Morgan said.

The D. A. stopped them in the doorway. "Just one more question, Breen. How did Paddy and Miss Fitzel act? I mean, were they composed or did they appear to be nervous?"

Breen thought a moment. "Well, like I told the captain. They didn't seem to be nervous. But both of them were perspiring. You know. Like it was hot. And it wasn't."

"I'll bet," Tonelli said. "I'll bet they were perspiring. Come on. Let's get going, fellow." He pushed Breen out into the hall and toward the bank of elevators.

It was a fetish with Breen. He didn't like to be pushed. And, accused of murder or not, he didn't intend to be pushed. "Watch it, fellow," he said sharply. "I don't like that."

Morgan opened the door of the cage. Once inside with the steel door closed, Tonelli said, "Oh, so you don't like to be pushed around, eh? Then why don't you come clean and admit you killed Paddy and the doll and save us a lot of leg work proving it on you?" He pushed Breen again, harder this time.

The gesture was instinctive. Breen's fist traveled less than six inches but Tonelli's head banged off the wall of the

cage as if he'd been hit with a mallet.

Morgan reached for his holstered gun. "Hold it right there, Breen." To widen the distance between them, he pushed Breen away with his left hand—and got what his partner had gotten. His eyes glazed, he forgot his gun and kneeled on the floor of the cage.

Breen had no thought of escape. But a lawyer would come high. A lawyer would take every penny he and Mary had saved. But if he could talk to the blonde in 1B, get her to admit she was lying about no one else having entered 2154 Grant Street, and then look in a certain trash can—well, it could just be he wouldn't need a lawyer.

The gesture was as instinctive as the two blows had been. Reaching out, he pushed the stop button of the self-service elevator, then started it down toward the lobby.

The midnight shift had already gone on duty. The four-to-twelve shift had gone home. There was no one in the lobby but a fat custodian pushing sweeping compound across the tiles. Closing the door of the cage behind him, Breen limped across the lobby to the street. There would be hell to pay in a few minutes. But he wouldn't need much time. At least so he thought at the moment.

Out on the wide walk it was still raining. There were a dozen police and private cars at the curb but there wasn't a cab in sight.

As far as escape was concerned he might as well go back in the Bureau, get back in the cage with Morgan and Tonelli and run himself up to the tank. He hadn't hit either man hard. Both men would be stirring by now. In a few seconds full consciousness would return. Time had been when he could run. He couldn't now. And by the time he had limped a block a dozen police car sirens and spotlights would be splitting and criss-crossing the night.

He said an unprintable word. Then, lighting a cigarette, he turned to walk back in the Bureau, turned again to look towards the street as the door of the sedan in front of which he had been standing opened and a tall, white-haired man in evening clothes stepped out on the walk.

"Aren't you Harry Breen, son?" the man asked.

"Yes," Breen admitted. "I am." The old man's face was vaguely familiar. Then he realized he was Mike Fennel. "Yeah. That's right. I'm Harry Breen, Counselor. But I didn't do it. Honest. All I did was sell the guy a vacuum cleaner."

From in back of the wheel of the car, a second man said, "Sweetheart."

The lawyer asked, "You out on bail, or what?"

"What, mostly," Breen said wryly. "Captain Hanson and the D. A. think I'm on my way up to the tank. But I slugged the two dicks who were in the cage with me and—"

"Escaped?"

"Yeah."

Fennel stooped and spoke to the man in the car. "It's all yours from here on in. I want no part of it."

Turning up the short black velvet collar of his coat he turned and walked off swiftly through the rain.

"Get in, Harry," the man in the car invited.

Breen got into the car and it pulled away from the curb before he could recognize the driver. Then he saw he was Como Marino.

They drove two blocks in silence. Then the first of a half-dozen sirens screamed in the night behind them.

Marino increased the speed of the car. "Kinda looks like they've missed you, eh?"

"Yeah." Breen rode in puzzled silence, wondering why a big shot like Marino should to this thing for him. He asked him bluntly, "How come?"

"Let's say I want to talk to you," Marino said, and left it there.

CHAPTER THREE

Dead Man's Ice

THE former racketeer and current night club owner drove west for another two miles, then into a private garage, the doors of which opened and closed automatically in front of and behind the big car. Breen was sorry now he had gotten into the car. He didn't know Como Marino except by sight. He knew of no reason why the other man should help pry him out of a jam. He said, "That singer of yours must have lied. I didn't kill either Paddy or the doll."

Marino got out of the car. "Sure. Of course not. That's one of the things I want to talk to you about. Come on. You can call her a liar to her face. She's waiting for us inside."

Still hesitant, Breen followed the night club owner up a short flight of stairs and down a long hall into a huge sunken living room like the one that he and Mary had seen pictured in *Better Homes and Gardens*. It was the type of living room he intended to have some day.

The blonde, her eyes swollen with crying, was sitting on the edge of a zebra-striped sofa while a brittle-looking brunette paced the parquet flooring nursing a half-filled highball glass. Seeing Marino, she asked, "Have you got them?"

His voice was flat. "No. Not yet. But if you'll keep your yap shut for just a minute, I'll find out where they are."

The brunette jeered, "That's what you've been saying for two days."

Marino slapped her without heat. "Shut up." Then, turning to Breen he said, "Okay, fellow. Let's have it. Where are they?"

Breen told him the truth. "I don't know what you are talking about."

Still without heat, Marino said, "I'll bet." As big a man as Breen, he brought up his right fist in a blow that rocked Breen back on his heels. "Start talking, fellow. Maybe you weren't in on it. Maybe you just blundered in and Paddy used you. It doesn't matter. Gimme. I want that ice."

Breen repeated he didn't know what the other man was talking about and the night club owner said, "Ha."

The brunette said, "Answer Como. What did you do with my diamonds?" She looked past him at Marino. "I want them back tonight. Or I'm going to the police in the morning."

The blonde on the sofa spoke for the first time. "He has 'em, all right. He was in Paddy's apartment almost half an hour. He'd just left when you got there, Como. And he had a grin on his face."

"That," Breen explained, "was because I'd exceeded my quota."

Marino lost his patience. "Damn you."

He swung another hard right hook, but Breen, expecting this one, let it slide by his head and countered with a left jab that left Marino spitting blood.

The brunette opened a drawer in a table and took out a small revolver. "Stop playing games with him, Como. You told me if I didn't report the theft to the police, you'd get them back for me. I want them. I didn't spend three years with you for love."

Marino held out his hand. "Give me the gun."

Realizing she'd said too much, the brunette bit at her lower lip. "No. I think maybe I'd better keep it."

Breen backed a step. "This is all over my head. If you don't mind—"

His face livid with anger, Marino said, "But I do. What did you do with the stuff you took out of Paddy's apartment? And don't tell me it wasn't there. I know different. Paddy showed me the ring before he tried to hold me up."

The brunette's eyes narrowed. "That's a new angle. What do you mean, hold you up?"

Marino closed a big hand on her wrist and twisted the gun from her fingers. Then he slapped her with both the palm and the back of his hand until Breen was afraid Marino was going to slap her head off her shoulders. "So it wasn't for love, eh?" Marino panted.

The blonde on the sofa fluttered her artificial lashes hopefully. "And you so good to her, Como."

Marino pushed the sobbing brunette away from him and turned back to Breen with the revolver in his hand. "Okay, Breen. Start talking. What did you do with the ice you took out of Paddy's apartment?" He swung the gun in a vicious arc. "Start talking while you can."

Breen deflected the blow with his right forearm. Then, praying his left leg would hold for just the one punch, he brought up his clenched left fist. Pain knifed his bad leg like a lancet. But Marino no longer looked angry. He looked silly. His mouth was slack. His eyes were glazed. He teetered a moment like a drunk trying to step up on a curb. Then, turning in air, he fell flat on his back, the gun skittering across the floor.

Breen limped after it and picked it up. "I'm borrowing Marino's car. You can tell him when he comes to."

The brunette was crying too hard to care. The blonde had transferred her affections. "What a man! Look, mister, you can give me a demonstration any time you want to."

"I'll ask my wife," Breen told her.

The car purred through the rain like magic. It was the kind of a car Breen had always wanted to own. He could own one now. And he wouldn't have to wait until he was a big shot with the Vacuum-Matic Corporation. All he had to do was look in a certain trash can and then keep right on going. Captain Hanson himself had said,

"If Paddy was willing to fence them for 50 G's, that means the stuff is worth five to ten times that."

THE LOBBY was filled with men now, but all were too intent on finding Breen to recognize him. He got into the cage and rode up to the third floor before Morgan, hurrying down the hall, recognized him and gasped, "It's Breen."

"That's right," Breen nodded pleasantly. He limped on into the D.A.'s office and laid the small, stout, sealed brown paper bag that he was carrying on the D. A.'s



desk. "I think what you want is in there," he told him. "I haven't looked, but it should be. That was probably why the black-haired doll insisted on using the big attachment herself while I was making out the order. She probably had them stashed back of a cushion or under the couch and she was afraid I'd hear the click click." He patted the demonstrator still standing by the D.A.'s desk. "You know, like when the powerful suction of the machine picks up a button or change or a hair pin."

His face crimson, Captain Hanson got to his feet. "Where have you been?"

Breen shifted his weight to his good leg. "Oh, here and there. But mostly out to Como Marino's." He told of the incident in front of the Bureau, then added, "You know, I think he's the guy you want. I know he was in the apartment. And the jewels were stolen from his doll, but he wouldn't let her report the theft for some reason, and he also said Paddy was trying to hold him up."

The D. A. shook his head in a vain at-

tempt to clear it. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"I'm not quite certain," Breen admitted. "But I didn't want to be shot. So," he laid the gun on the blotter, "I took this gun away from him, got the stuff out of my ash can and brought it down here to you fellows."

Captain Hanson passed a hand over his eyes, then barked an order. The D. A. ripped open the brown paper bag and emptied its contents on his blotter. Along with the rolls of dust and hairpins and wadded lint, a glittering matched-stone necklace and a double handful of rings and pins and diamond clips fell out.

Breen spread his hands. "So now it's up to you. Why Paddy wanted to get rid of it, I wouldn't know. You guys are the cops. Me, I sell vacuum cleaners."

Opening the middle drawer of his desk, the D. A. took out a jeweler's glass, screwed it in his eye and picked up the necklace.

He whistled. "How my wife would like to get her little hands on this stuff! Must be a couple hundred thousand dollars' worth. The way I see it, Como must have accumulated this stuff in some illegal way, where he couldn't squawk to the police if it were stolen. The Fitzel girl, a girl friend of Como's heart throb, lifted the stuff and then tried to fence it to Paddy. Paddy agreed to buy it, not knowing where it came from. Then he pulled the big boner of trying to sell Marino's own stuff back to Marino."

"Sounds logical," Captain Hanson agreed.

"Marino," the D. A. went on, "agreed to pay Paddy off for getting the jewels back. But after the agreement was made, Paddy probably changed his mind, decided to put the ice on the market for what it would bring. But first he had to get the stuff out of his apartment. And that's where Breen came in. Paddy recognized him limping along the street. And

what better hiding place than in Breen's demonstrator? When Como left, all Paddy had to do was drop by Breen's place and pick it up again. That's why he took his address."

"That sounds," the D.A. agreed. "But it didn't work out that way. Como lost his head and killed them both. But he still didn't have the ice."

IT WAS all very interesting, but Breen yawned. The affair really had nothing to do with him. It was long past his bedtime and he had to get some sleep if he was going to bang on doors in the morning.

"Look," he asked Captain Hanson. "Please. If there is no charge against me, I'd like to go home, Captain. Afternoons don't amount to a darn. But Saturday mornings are good. A lot of husbands are home then. And if I could sell another cleaner in the morning—"

The D. A. cut him short. "Wait just one minute, Breen. How come this stuff wasn't in your demonstrator when Captain Hanson had you picked up?"

"Because the last thing I do every night," Breen told him, "after I put my car in the garage, is take the removable, self-sealing, inter-liner, throw-away sack out of my demonstrator and put in a fresh one." Squatting beside the demonstrator he twisted off one end and showed them the fresh inter-liner.

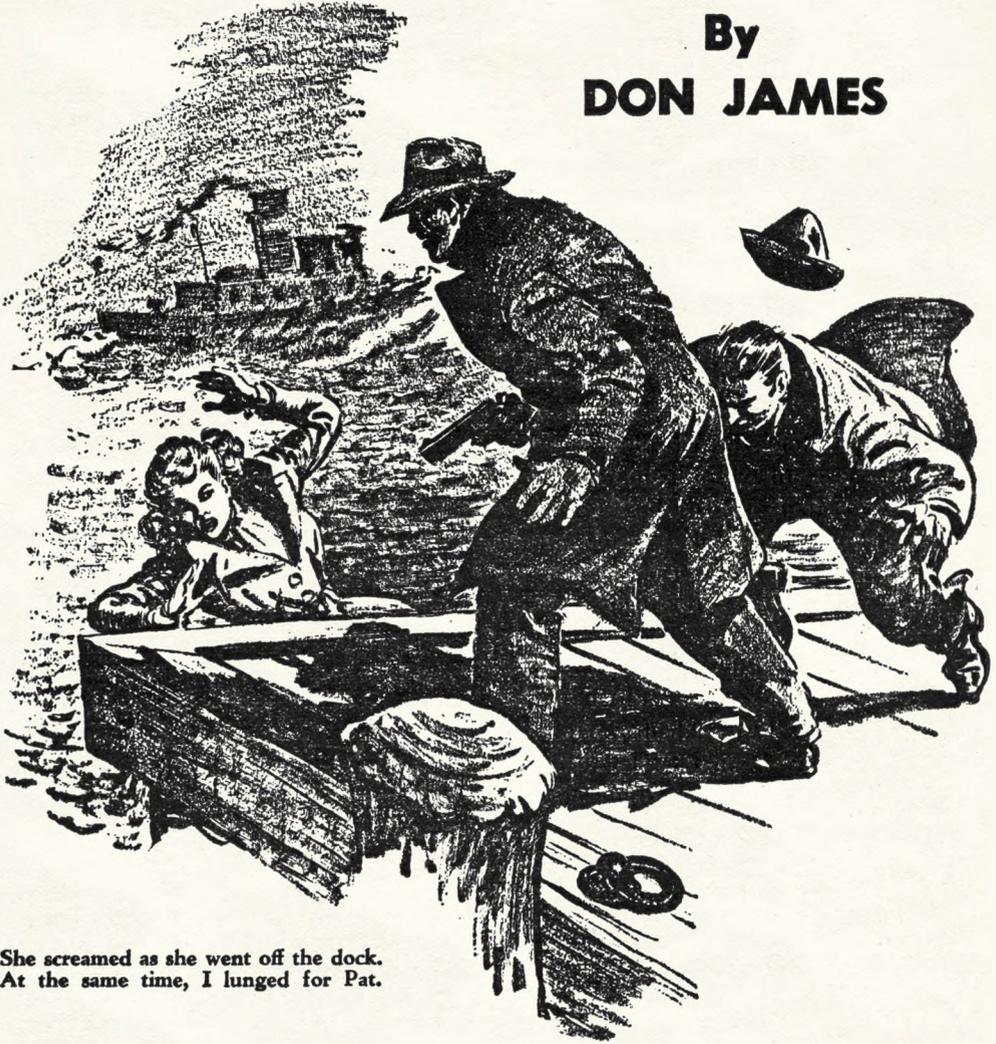
Captain Hanson squatted down beside him. "Say, that's clever. There's a paper sack on the inside, huh? And you just throw it away when it's filled."

A new light came into Breen's eyes. He was no longer tired. This *was* Saturday morning. He even forgot that his leg was paining him. Simulating shock, he said, "Why, Captain. You don't mean to tell me that your wife is still using an old-time-type, cloth-bag cleaner, a natural storing and breeding place for every known form

(Continued on page 127)

New Bride—New Bier!

By
DON JAMES



She screamed as she went off the dock.
At the same time, I lunged for Pat.

George Kalen's wife came all equipped for her new estate: looks, marriage license, and for a dowry—a brand-new, brass-studded bier!

IT WAS my room, all right. The room in the small hotel where I'd been living for three months. The closet door was open and I saw my neckties, my suits, my topcoat. My alarm clock was on the night stand beside me. My clothes

were draped over the chair by the window.

The girl sat in the other chair. She was fully dressed and she was pretty. She smoked a cigarette and stared at me.

Despite my pounding headache I sat

up in bed. My mouth was dry and foul tasting. Someone had replaced my blood with distilled water.

"King-sized hangover?" the girl said. "Mine is."

"Any hangover is king-sized."

She smiled and showed good teeth.

"This one is extra king-sized."

"Oh?"

She nodded thoughtfully. She had brown eyes and blonde hair. Her fingernails were painted scarlet.

She said, "Don't you remember? Think hard."

The old familiar alarm filled me; the time I'd wrecked a car, the time I'd knocked out a bartender. The mornings after, when someone told me what I'd done the night before because I didn't have sense enough to stop after the third or fourth or fifth drink.

"Let's have it," I said. "What did I do?"

"You got married."

I closed my eyes and pressed my hands against my temples.

"Say that again."

"Married. You're a husband."

"Whose?"

"Mine."

"Who are you?"

"The girl you married last night. Nina Larou. Now it's Mrs. George Kalen."

After a moment I said, "I'd like to get up." I looked significantly at her. She smiled as if she were amused and went to the closet and found my robe. She threw it to me and looked away while I got into it.

"On you, the robe is good looking," she said. "You need a shave. Do you shave every morning?"

"Every morning. I take a shower, too. Then I go out for breakfast and to work at an advertising agency where I write copy until five o'clock. I'm thirty-two and a veteran. I'm six feet tall and weigh one-seventy. I was born in Twin Falls,

Idaho. I was married in 1946 and divorced in 1947. She said I wasn't a good husband. I drank too much. She said that I'm neurotic, a fit patient for a psychiatrist. I say I was bored. Either way you look at it, I'm no good as a husband. That's all you need to know about me. So if you'll get the hell out of here and let me know who your attorney is, we'll arrange a divorce. Providing you can prove we're married—or that it can't be annulled."

SHE went to my dresser and opened a pocketbook and unfolded a paper. "Marriage certificate," she said. "And it can't be annulled. I'm your wife."

"Maybe legally. Otherwise, no. I'm particular about wives. I like to know them before I marry them."

She shook her head and leaned back against the dresser. She was about five and a half feet tall and all the curves were in the right places. She wore a brown jersey dress and brown shoes. A brown tam was on the dresser. At least, I thought, I retained good judgment when I was blacked out.

She said, "Let's not try to be clever. Not with hangovers. It's serious. We're married and we have to do something about it."

"Dissolve it. You look like a nice girl and you're probably fun, but I had one wife. I don't care for it."

She had a short, straight nose and a generous mouth. Her chin was small and neat and determined. Her brown eyes were wide apart. When she smiled she was pretty. When she was angry, she still was pretty. I watched the transition.

"All right," she said. "That's your side. How about mine? What makes you think I want to be married to you? What happened last night happened because we had too many drinks, but in the cold grey dawn of sobriety—as the writers say—maybe I dislike it as much as you do.

You can think what you like about me, and I can put you down as the world's prize heel."

"Frankly, I don't care what you think," I said. "You haven't improved my opinion of women. Let's just say I've been taken. How much do you want? I haven't much, but I'll pay off as much as I can."

Tears of anger came to her eyes and her lips trembled.

"You *are* a heel!" she said.

"I said I was. How much do you want?"

She left the dresser and stood in front of me. "Nothing," she said. "I'll do the paying off!"

She slapped me. I grabbed her hands. She struggled and I pinned her against me with my free arm until she stopped fighting. She glared up at me, cheeks tear-stained, her lips wet.

"I've hated men," she whispered. "But never like I hate you!"

There was a healthy firmness in her body, a warmth and femininity. Her lips were full and close.

What the hell, I thought. She's my wife. It was a perverted gesture of humor—that kiss. I made it too hard and too long. I didn't like myself for it, but my face stung from her slap. I was angry about everything—the world, the girl, and mostly myself.

When she broke away she really let me see hate in her expression. I didn't like that, either.

"Okay," I said. "I'm sorry. Let's cut out the dramatics and talk it over. Sensibly. I'll leave you alone."

"I know you will!"

"I said I'm sorry."

"What you say doesn't matter . . ."

Someone pounded on the door. I thought it probably was Mike Merica, the house detective.

I went over to open the door. "Okay, Mike, you can—" I stopped. The man

wasn't Mike, nor was his companion. I didn't recognize either of them.

The man who had knocked was middle-aged, about my height, and heavier. He had sharp blue eyes and the hair beneath his snap-brim hat was greying at the temples.

"You George Kalen?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I'm Del Thomas." He nodded to the man with him. "Pat Sut." I glanced at Sut and saw a short, heavy-set man with black eyes.

Thomas pushed by me and Sut followed, closing the door behind him.

Thomas said, "Hello, Nina. This guy your husband?"

She faced him rigidly, bright spots of color in her cheeks.

"Yes."

"That's fine, Nina. Just fine!" Suddenly he slashed an open hand across her face. She stumbled away from the dresser.

He said, "Did you think you could do that to me?"

"Del . . . please . . . dont . . ."

I started toward Thomas. "Not in my room," I said. "Let her alone."

"Stay out of this, Kalen." Thomas didn't turn.

"*Let her alone!*" I said again.

Sut caught my right arm and spun me around. "Uh-uh," he said softly, like a parent warning a child.

A fist caught me in the solar plexus. I doubled over, gasping for breath. Another fist crashed against my jaw and I was down. I tried to roll away from Sut's vicious kick. That's the last thing I remember about it.

I DON'T know how other people regain consciousness after being knocked out. Suddenly I knew I was on the floor and my jaw ached. I was nauseated and wanted to get up and go to the bathroom, but I had the feeling I couldn't stand.

Deep breathing seemed to help and after a while I got to my hands and knees. I looked around the room. The girl was on the floor near the dresser. Her lips and nose bled, but I could see her breast rise and fall and hear her breathing. She was alive.

Thomas and Sut were gone. The door was closed. The clock on the night stand ticked merrily. Down the hallway a door slammed and a man and woman went by toward the elevator. They were quarreling.

I decided it would be easier to crawl to the bathroom. Cold water felt good on my face and I tried a luke warm shower. I began to feel better and dressed.

The girl—my wife, Mrs. Nina Kalen—still was unconscious. With a wet towel I wiped blood from her face. It had made a mess of the brown jersey. She opened her eyes and looked at me.

I said, "All right now?"

"Yes. Help me up."

She was unsteady for a few seconds, breathing deeply until she had strength to go to the bathroom. When she came out her face looked better and she'd sponged blood off the jersey. She sat in the chair and took the cigarette I offered her.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"Your pals have nice manners."

"Don't be sarcastic. I said I'm sorry."

"All right. You're sorry. Do I get an explanation, too?"

She looked away from me. "Yes. I was supposed to marry Del Thomas last night. At eight o'clock. At seven I knew I couldn't. I ran away. Then I became frightened and I had a drink—and another—and when I found out it made me less frightened I had more."

"Escape drinking. I know all about it."

"Then I was in the small bar on Seventh and we were in a booth and I was telling you about it. You kept ordering drinks and listening. We had a lot to drink. You said I'd better marry you. I

—well, I don't remember all of it, either. We got people out of bed and there was a justice of peace and coming here in the taxi you kept saying, 'It's all right now, Alice. Everything is all right. We're together again.'"

So my subconscious had tripped me. I had double-crossed myself.

She stopped talking and lit another cigarette. "Okay," I said. "It wasn't all your fault. Alice was my wife."

"Still crazy about her?"

"I didn't think so, but I must have married you thinking you were Alice." I thought over what I'd said. "That doesn't sound so hot. Don't let it throw you. You're better looking than Alice ever was. She's on the minus side in other ways, too."

"You don't have to explain. I'm just worried about what I may have done to you."

"My jaw will be all right. We can still get a divorce."

She shook her head and frowned. "Del Thomas," she said.

"Just who is Del Thomas?"

"He's the man who runs the rackets in this town."

"Oh?"

"He's mean and hard and he'll go to any lengths to—"

This time it was the telephone. I answered it, and again Del Thomas had interrupted her.

"Del Thomas," he said briefly. "You and Nina are not staying in town to remind anyone that I was the fall guy. You're both out of town by six o'clock, or else."

"Or else what?"

The telephone clicked in my ear.

I put it down. "Thomas," I said and gave her the message.

She went to the window and looked out. I saw the tear that rolled slowly down her cheek.

"It isn't enough just to say I'm sorry,"

she said. "Only I don't know what else to say."

"I do," I said. "Tell him to go to hell."

She turned. "No. You can't do that. You haven't a chance. Listen—I don't want to make any more trouble for you. I'll go to him. I'll fix it somehow."

"It takes two to make a marriage. I'm the party of the second part. You can't do anything about it, but the police can."

"Do you know the district attorney's name?"

"No. I've only been here a few months."

"It's Carl Thomas. They're brothers. See what you're bucking?"

"Nice city you have."

"It's not my city. I'm from Detroit."

"Maybe you'd better go back there."

She shook her head. "Never mind me. I'm worried about you. What are you going to do?"

"Stay here."

"I don't blame you for feeling that way about it. It's not your fault that I barged into your life and messed it up. But please—you've got to take Del seriously. He means it."

I SHOOK my head and picked up the telephone. "I'm going to stay, and I'm going to take the day off." I dialed the agency number and told Susy, the switchboard operator, to let them know that I wouldn't be in.

"Wait a second, George," she said. She sounded worried. "Mr. Emler said he wanted to see you when you came in." Emler owned the agency.

"All right, connect me."

Emler hesitated after I identified myself. "Oh, yes. George, something has come up. Maybe you'd better come down here."

It was in the tone of his voice, in everything about the call, and I knew without asking.

"I'm out of a job. Is that it?" I said.

"I'm sorry. Your check will be waiting for you."

"Would you mind telling me why?"

"I don't know what you've done, Kalen, but four of our largest accounts called this morning. They insisted that we let you go or they'd withdraw their business."

"I understand," I said. "Thomas works fast."

"What?"

"Never mind." I hung up.

The girl questioned me with a frown.

"I'm out of a job," I said.

She shook her head angrily. "I'm going to see Del." She went to the dresser and began to put on the brown tam. I walked over behind her. Anger had tightened her lips.

"Cut it out," I smiled. "It won't do any good. We've already settled that. We're married and he's lost face. He wants us out of town."

"But this is so unfair to you, George. I'm not going to—"

"You can't do much about it. You're not going to see him. And I'm not getting out of town."

"What *are* you going to do?" she had stopped fussing with the tam and watched me in the glass.

"Stay. I'm not going to be shoved around. I've had enough of that for a lifetime. A lot of things. A brunette named Alice. Some stuff that comes in a bottle. I'm just sick and tired of it. I'm sore at the world and at myself. I'll have to make a stand some time or fold up into a skid-row bum. I might as well make the stand now. And don't blame yourself. If it hadn't been you, it would have been something else. Does that make sense?"

"I don't know."

"It doesn't matter. I'm staying. I'll buy you a ticket out of town if you want to leave. This is my private scrap now."

She turned from the mirror and faced me with calm eyes.

"Maybe it does make sense. I've been

running, too. Do you mind if I stay?"
"Not at all."

We smiled a little grimly. "How about some breakfast, Mrs. Kalen?" I said.

WE MADE it lunch. After we'd eaten we felt better.

"I'll pick up my check," I said. "We may need money."

"I have about eighty dollars."

"Keep it. The party's on me."

"In six hours—"

"Don't worry about it. We'll kill time until then and see what happens."

I got my check and cashed it. We stayed away from bars. We walked. We talked. We took in a show, and left early. We didn't like it. I don't know why we happened to go into the art museum. It was there and we had to go somewhere.

At four o'clock I made up my mind about something. We went down back streets and found a pawn shop. I picked out a small, .32-caliber automatic. They wanted my name. I said it was Harold Gregg and that I wanted the gun to carry in my car. They didn't believe me, the pawnbroker and his clerk, but they sold me the gun and some shells they happened to have.

Outside, Nina sunk her hands deep in the pockets of her covert topcoat and shuddered. "I wish you hadn't," she said.

"I don't think I'll lose my head and do any shooting that isn't necessary."

"If anything happens to you, I'll—"

"It's my party. Remember?"

"Yes."

At five o'clock we had dinner in a small Italian café. We had ravioli and strong Italian coffee. We didn't order wine. There was Italian music on the juke box. A bit of atmosphere was in the place and it was cozy. But I found myself watching the clock and the door.

She told me about Del Thomas and herself, how she'd been singing in his night club, and Del had made a big play for

her. "Not just passes," she explained. "It was different. Strictly on the up-and-up. He wanted to marry me. I said no. He was nice about it. Any time I changed my mind—and he meant it. And then after a while—well, I just got lonely, I guess. I accepted. And then—then, I just couldn't go through with it."

"Even if a gal changed her mind, I wouldn't slap her around."

"That's why we're crazy to stay in town. Del is—well, he came up the hard way. The really hard way. I know a lot about him. I know men who work for him. I've heard about murders. You've been around. You know about rackets, and syndicates, and men like Del."

"I guess so."

"That's why we're crazy to stay. He can stand anything but being crossed. He'll go to any lengths to keep on top of the pack."

The Italian proprietor came over and smiled. "Everything fine?"

"It was wonderful food." She had a charming smile.

"Some wine now? Delicious wine? On the house?"

"No thank you. We—we're not drinking."

"More coffee," I said. It was five minutes of six.

I held a match to Nina's cigarette and when she took the cigarette from her mouth her hand trembled.

"It's almost six," she said.

I smiled. "And nothing is going to happen. We've been building this up. There's nothing to worry about."

I glanced at the door as I said it, and when I looked back at her again I knew she had seen him, too.

Pat Sut looked around the place until he saw us. He walked leisurely in our direction, his hands free at his sides. He stopped at our table and looked down impassively at us.

"It's six o'clock," he said.

SUT pulled a chair out and sat down. Nina bit her lower lip and punched out her cigarette in a tray.

"You two are suckers," Sut told us. "You should have scrambled."

"That's a matter of opinion," I said. "What can he do about it?"

Sut's eyes narrowed. "Use your imagination."

"I don't think he'd have us killed. Even to a man like him, it couldn't be serious enough for that."

"You don't know him, Kalen. Hasn't Nina told you?"

"His D.A. brother would have a tough time explaining such obvious killings."

"I'm not paid to think. I'm paid to do what I'm told, and the pay is good."

Nina's hand found mine across the table. "Listen to me, George. We're wrong. It's a mistake." She looked at Sut. "We'll go. You come to the station with us. Watch us leave. Will you give us that much of a break?"

He looked at her. "Okay."

I shoved my chair back and pulled money from my pocket and left enough for the dinner and a tip on the table. Nina watched me anxiously.

I said, "I'm not leaving. Nina can go—that's up to her. But I'm staying. I don't think he'll do anything, and this is once I'm not running away."

Sut regarded me with disgust. "Don't be dumb. Get out while you've got the chance."

"No."

"We've had a guy tailing you. We know about the gun. If you think that will help you, get hep to yourself. *Nothing* will." Abruptly he stopped speaking and a thoughtful smile came to his lips.

He stood. "Okay, it's your funeral." He turned and walked out of the place.

Nina and I looked at one another for a moment. "I think Thomas is bluffing," I said.

"I don't."

"Snap out of it," I said. "This isn't the middle ages. Even an underworld big shot doesn't go around killing people because his girl married someone else."

"Skip it. What do you want to do now?"

"Get out of here," I said angrily.

She was angry, too, but she didn't say anything. We walked out of the café and I went to the curb to flag a taxi. A dark sedan pulled up and stopped. Two men got out.

Inside the car Pat Sut looked at me and said, "You wouldn't believe me, Sonny. That's too bad."

In the back seat they took the gun away from me. They put Nina in the front seat between the driver and Sut. The man with me was quiet and large.

The driving appeared to be pointless, with no definite destination. Darkness closed in and we still rode through the city. Sut abruptly spoke to the driver. "It's time." The car picked up speed.

We crossed through the business district and by dark warehouses in deserted streets. Nina stared straight ahead of her, shoulders hunched as if to ward off the two men.

All the thoughts that raced through my mind were steadily mounting into cold fear. I could be wrong about Del Thomas. Very wrong. I began to remember news stories about bodies found in back alleys. Stories about victims disappearing in dark waters with feet encased in concrete.

The sedan stopped in front of a waterfront saloon. Mist was settling in from the sea and the night had the earmarks of dense fog.

Sut opened the car doors and motioned us out. The saloon was deserted except for an unsmiling bartender who nodded toward a door and said, "The back room, Pat."

It was a stark, cold room with a single drop light over a card table, where Del

Thomas sat with a drink before him.

"So you wouldn't go," he said.

Nina said, "Leave him out of this. He didn't—"

"I gave you a chance and you didn't take it."

I said, "You can't get away with anything." My voice sounded hollow and dry.

"I'll take care of you in a moment," Thomas said. He continued to look at Nina. "I don't like to be taken for a sucker and I hate a welcher. I'm going to even things so you'll remember for a long time."

"Leave George out of this, Del. Can't you understand that—"

"He'll leave both of us out of it!" I said. "He isn't God. He isn't running the world to suit himself. We're going to walk out of here safe and unharmed."

"Shut up, Kalen," Thomas said. He looked back at Nina. "There are places in South America where they want girls like you."

She dug her fists into her coat pockets and stared at him.

"A tramp steamer leaves here in a couple of hours. You'll be on it. You won't be back. The girls where you're going never come back. Maybe after a while they don't even care."

I started toward him. The two men jerked me back.

Thomas said to me, "I wouldn't want you telling what happened to your wife. I don't want immigration men looking into this. So there's not much else I can do about you."

He finished his drink and stood. "Take care of them, Pat."

PAT SUT looked at him quizzically without moving. "Around six o'clock we got an idea, Del," he said.

Thomas abruptly became alert. "Go on."

"The boys think it's time for a change. You're taking a big slice and passing out

crumbs. The boys and I have decided I'd make a better boss. Catch?"

"You're writing your own name on a slug, Pat."

"You mean we're afraid of big brother? The D.A.? That he'd add two and two and come up with hot seats for us?"

"You read my mind."

Sut shook his head. "That's why we needed a gimmick. Now we've got one. Nina walked out on you. You've broadcast enough for your brother and others to know you're sore. A few people know you worked them over. I made sure of that. You mentioned it yourself here and there."

"So what?"

"So the new husband got off the beam. He bought a gun in a hock shop. He got you down on the waterfront. He didn't tell his wife what he was going to do. Then he shot you—and his wife—and himself out there on a dock. The gun will be there by his hand. The bullets will match the gun. The hock shop boys will tell the cops that he bought the gun under the name of Gregg. We know, because Baldy asked them if the guy bought it. Said he were worried about you. The guy was dangerous and had been making threats about you."

Sut smiled confidently. "Even your brother will have to accept that one, Del. Just one of those cases where a guy goes nuts over a dame. You've read about things like that."

Thomas said, "Someone will sing. Too many know."

"Too many makes it safe. Too many are in it and would take a rap. That'll keep them all quiet."

"You can't—"

"I can," Sut said. He pulled my gun from a pocket and shot twice. Thomas started toward him, but his knees buckled and he abruptly plunged face down to the floor.

Nina stifled a scream with her hand.

Involuntarily she came to my side and my arm went around her.

Sut spoke to us without looking up from the body. "One stiff is enough to pack. We'll take care of you out on the dock."

He nodded toward his victim. "Pick him up," he told the men. "We'll use the back door and the dock down by the warehouse."

He gave us his attention. "Follow them. Remember—I'll have a gun. It doesn't make much difference if I let you have it here or there. Only it will be less trouble out on the dock. Just don't make a break."

The fog was heavy. Foghorns mourned the night and occasional overhead street lights were dim balls of illumination. Water slapped against dock pilings.

The two men groped their way cautiously ahead of us, the body suspended between them like a grotesque hammock. Nina huddled close to me and I could feel her shiver.

The men stopped and dropped the body. It made a dull thud. Nina gasped and turned against me, her head buried against my shoulder.

A few yards from us, ship lights rode in the gentle swell of the bay. In the fog I could barely see the edge of the dock. Somewhere at a cross street behind us a car cautiously crept by, its engine droning in second gear.

THERE wasn't time to warn Nina. Sut was stepping toward us.

I grabbed her arms and held her away from me angrily. "You did this!"

She staggered and I caught a glimpse of her face, the hopeless fright and despair.

"Get away from me!" I said.

I shoved. It was a powerful, hard thrust that sent her stumbling back. I held my breath. Her heels hit the capping at the edge of the dock. She screamed and suddenly she was gone and the fog closed in where she had been. A muffled splash sounded beneath us.

Sut swore sharply and started toward the edge of the dock. I lunged low and hard. My shoulder hit the small of his back. He stumbled forward, arms flailing and then we were falling. We hit the water together and were down in its coldness.

When Private-Op Morgan played fire inspector for an inflammable cutie and her boyfriend, he discovered . . .

TWO'S COMPANY THREE'S A SHROUD

Detective-Action Novel

by Burt Sims

15 STORY 25c
DETECTIVE



Plus yarns by John D. MacDonald, Donn Mullally, Johanas L. Bouma, and eleven other dramatic stories and features in the big April issue on sale now.

His arm crashed against my face and we struggled toward the surface. I clutched at his shoulders and pulled myself above him and broke for air.

He fought to the surface. I cracked an elbow into his face and shoved him down and away from me.

I held my breath and listened. To my left I heard splashing and swam heavily toward it, fighting the weight of wet clothing. Nina grasped frantically at the slimy wetness of a piling.

I deliberately sank and slipped out of my topcoat and jacket together. I came up behind her and managed to get my legs around the piling.

"I'll hold you. Get out of your coat. Quick!"

She struggled against me for a second. "Stop it!" I snapped. "Get out of your coat. I'll hold you up."

She coughed water and then stopped thrashing and squirmed out of her coat. "Your shoes," I said.

"They're gone."

"Can you swim?"

"Yes. I just lost my head for a moment."

"Wait until I get out of my shoes," I told her.

It was dark and cold under the dock. We swam quietly from cross-brace to cross-brace. Behind us they were calling to Sut. Once we heard his voice. The calling faded in the fog and slapping of waves.

We found a ladder and I cautiously went up. I looked around. The dock was deserted.

"Can you make it?" I called down softly.

"Your hand, George. . . ."

I reached down for her and in a moment we were on the dock. Cold pierced us as we walked rapidly toward a small, lighted waterfront café. But we were still alive.

HOURS later, after dawn, we sat in the hotel café and drank hot coffee. They had dried our clothing at the City Hall and they'd found shoes for us. We were dead tired and the reaction was setting in. The coffee helped and we began to relax.

Nina put down her cup. "They'll find Sut, won't they?"

"They'll turn the city inside out. They'll have every cop in the nation alerted. Sut hasn't a chance. He killed the D.A.'s brother."

"It's all over, isn't it?"

"I guess it is."

"You'll get your job back?"

"Probably."

She looked down at the cup and I noticed that her nose was shining and her lips were very red without lipstick. She looked like a high school girl just out of a swimming pool.

"Your nose is shining," I said.

She smiled. "I haven't any powder. My compact was in my coat."

"Better get some before our date tonight," I told her. "We're going dancing."

The smile softened and her hand touched mine.

"Look, George—you're being sweet and nice about all of this. You don't have to be. It's okay. Tell me to run along. I've caused you enough trouble."

"Don't try to shove me around," I grinned. "I'm through with that business. I'll do the shoving!"

"You did!" she laughed. "Into dirty, cold water!"

We were silent for a moment. Then I said, "About that date. It's sort of a buildup. I might even ask you to marry me one of these days."

"That would sort of make it legal, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Kalen," I said. "It certainly would!"



Every so often, when our file of incoming letters starts to bulge and threatens to spill over onto the floor, this department makes a practice of re-reading the letters and going through them for those that might interest our readers. This month's batch has something of an international flavor, including as it does one from England, one from Mexico and one from the Union of South Africa.

We'll start off with our English friend:

May I congratulate the editors of *Detective Tales* on their fine magazine? We here in England find it very difficult to procure copies of American magazines, and it is only through the kind offices of an American friend that I was able to read the issue I did (October 1949). I especially enjoyed the novelettes by Alan Ritner Anderson ("Dead Man's Shoes") and Charles Larson ("Clairvoyant Corpse"). There are almost no detective magazines here in England, and certainly nothing like *Detective Tales*, so you can understand with what joy we English welcome your publication.

Walter Pearson
London SW, England

And here's the latest from Mexico:

Just a word of appreciation on Day Keene's latest, "They Call It Murder, Honey-Chile!" in the February issue. I became a Day Keene fan about ten years ago, when I was a student in New York University, and since then I read every magazine

that prints one of his wonderful stories.

Roy Lopez
Mexico City, Mexico

Thanks for the kind words, Roy. We're glad to say that we have a Day Keene novelette in this very issue, and we expect to print many more by Day in the future.

I sure got a good case of homesickness when I came across an issue of *Detective Tales* in the home of an *Afrikaner* friend of mine here in Johannesburg. Where he got it he wasn't certain; he thought that possibly another American had left it there by accident. But it sure was a gift of the gods to me, for I sat up almost one whole night reading it. It was a February, 1948, issue, and there's a story in it by Peter Paige. Brother, that guy is good! I can hardly wait to get back home so that I can get all the American magazines I want, especially *Detective Tales*...

Charles R. Porter
Johannesburg,
Union of South Africa

Well, friends, that's about as much space as we have this month for letters. Maybe next month, we're hoping, we'll have more room for them, in addition to the thrilling line-up of murder yarns we've got on the fire. Just to give you an idea of what's in store, we'll mention the names John D. McDonald, Francis K. Allan, Donn Mullally, Dan Gordon. Heard enough? See you March 24th. —*The Editor*.

By **D. L. CHAMPION** **CASE of the**

Meet Thelma, the most impatient girl in the murder business. First she couldn't wait to be a bride. And then she couldn't wait to be a widow!



There was an automatic in his hand, aimed at Thelma's head. I sprang toward him. . . .

HURRY-UP HEIRESS

CHAPTER ONE

Out of Stir

MULCAHEY opened the door. He said, "All right, Desmond. The big guy's ready for you."

He stepped back as I came into the corridor, and eyed me with mocking admiration.

"My," he said, "you look pretty."

I didn't answer him. I didn't look pretty and I was quite aware of it. My suit was unpressed, shiny serge. My shirt collar was frayed and it was too big for me. My tie was wrinkled as a philosopher's brow.

I followed Mulcahey through the barren

*Thrilling Novelette
of Mayhem and Murder*



corridor, through the steel doorways, and reflected with satisfaction that I was making this trip for the last time.

Mulcahey ushered me into an office, then respectfully retired. I stood before a wide desk looking at the warden seated on the other side. He was a portly man who gave a strong impression of never having missed a meal in his life. His hair was greying, but neither from worry nor overwork. His face was round and his smile smug as a bank.

"Ah, Desmond," he said. "Since you're going out into the world let me give you some advice."

I said, "Let me give you some advice as to what to do with your advice. I came here to get some money you have for me, not a valedictory address."

A frown flickered across his forehead. He said, "It seems you need the advice badly. I consider it my duty to give it to you. After all, *I've* never forged a check, Desmond."

I looked at him coldly. I said, "You remind me of someone—of someone I don't like. My uncle. He never forged a check either. And for the same reason you haven't. He's well fed. He's lousy with money and he's as stuffed a shirt as you are. Now, if you'll give me my belongings and my dough I'll get out of here."

He jerked his thumb toward the battered valise that contained my wardrobe. He took a sheaf of bills from a desk drawer and pushed them across the blotter toward me.

He sighed heavily, and in a voice damp with crocodile tears said, "You still have the wrong attitude, my boy. Now, if you'll only let me advise you—"

This time I explained the precise physical procedure to be employed in the disposal of his advice. I picked up the money from the desk and strode from the room. There, a screw was waiting to escort me to those huge steel portals that

separate the guys who have forged checks from the guys who haven't.

AN HOUR later I walked into the Palace Hotel. The name was sheer irony. It was situated in the heart of skid row, flanked by a grubby pawn shop on one side and a noisy saloon on the other.

The lobby was occupied by six brass spittoons and two men. One of them was tremendously fat, with tiny slits of eyes. His clothes were of good material and had been cut by an expensive hand. The front of his vest, however, was spotted with food stains and dusty with cigar ash.

The other man stood behind the desk, leaning on the dog-eared register. He glanced up as I entered, but it was the fat man who spoke.

"If you're looking for a flop," he said in a high-pitched voice, "the payment is in advance. Six bits a night."

I said, "I'd expect to pay in advance in a dump like this."

I put a dollar on the desk. Behind me the fat man got out of his chair with a wheezing sigh, crossed the lobby and stood at my side.

He said, "You better keep a civil tongue in your head around here, son."

I met his eye. I said, "Or else what?"

"Or else you might get your curly head knocked off."

He turned and waddled out of the lobby before I could phrase a suitably insulting reply.

I said to the clerk, "Who's that guy?"

He put my quarter change on the desk and said, "Skelly."

"What makes him think he's tough?"

"He owns this joint. He owns the hock shop next door and the saloon. He owns half of skid row."

"If he's got that kind of dough what's he hang around this joint for?"

The little clerk shrugged. "He says it's because he's democratic."

I said, "Yeah. Like Stalin." I picked

up the big key and carried my valise up the uncarpeted wooden stairs.

I locked the door of my bare cubicle, sat on the edge of the narrow bed and worked out a plan of action. The cash in my pocket totaled something slightly in excess of a hundred bucks. The first disbursement would be for clothing. The suit in the valise was in worse shape than the serge I was wearing. After that an investment in barbering. Then I could look for a job. If I lived cheaply I should be able to hold out until I got something. After that I'd make bigger plans. I'd forged one check. I wasn't going to forge another. I'd gone down as far as I could go. Now I'd start to come up.

I went down the stairs again, into the street. The beery stink of the saloon came to my nostrils. A juke box blasted into my ears and above the hammering music I heard the laughter of a girl. I hesitated.

It had been a long time since I'd had a drink, a long time since I'd talked to a woman, even a B-girl. It took very little to convince myself that five bucks less in my bankroll would make no difference at all.

I drew a deep anticipatory breath and marched into the barroom.

TWO DAYS later, on Wednesday morning, I opened a pair of aching eyes and stared at the chipped plaster ceiling of my cubicle. My mouth was dry as a camel halfway between Cairo and Tangier. In the forepart of my skull a trap drummer exercised his art with great vigor.

I sat up with effort and lighted a cigarette. I was dimly aware of two facts. One, that I had consumed a vast quantity of liquor in the past couple of days; two, that I had done most of my drinking in company of a blonde named Thelma.

I was *acutely* aware of the fact that I had spent my hundred dollars.

I coughed as the first puff of the ciga-

rette gripped my throat. I shook my throbbing head and decided I was the damnedest fool in Christendom.

I was broke. All my noble, Rover-boy plans were still-born. I'd tossed my stake away in Skelly's barroom. I pulled myself to my feet and groaned aloud. I ducked my head under the faucet, shaved and dressed. Then I studied myself in the mirror. It confirmed my suspicion that I looked like a bum.

My shirt collar was frayed and dingy. My tie was wrinkled. My suit was baggy and worn. Certainly no one was going to give me a job on my appearance. Well, I'd have to try anyway. I didn't even have the price of a cup of coffee in my pocket.

I went down the scuffed stairway to the lobby. The little clerk behind the desk eyed me nervously. He said, "Mr. Skelly wants to see you," and pointed an un-manicured finger toward the rear of the lobby.

I turned my head. Skelly sat in a wide chair, and ash from his cigar dribbled down his vest. He glanced at me coldly and said, "Hey, bum, we don't give no credit here."

I stared at him. "Who's asking for any?"

"You asked for it last night."

"I paid in advance for the two nights I've flopped here."

He shook his enormous head. "You paid Monday night, all right. Last night you were short. I never would have let you in. But Smith, over there, is too soft hearted."

With some effort I stirred my memory. After a moment I recalled giving the clerk what cash I had when I'd staggered in. I told this to Skelly.

"You didn't give him all of it. You only give him sixty-eight cents. You hung him up for the rest. You'd never done it if I was here."

I said, "My God, you're raising this stink for a lousy seven cents?"

"Lousy or not," he said. "You ain't got it."

"You'll get it. Don't worry."

He grinned without mirth. "You're damned right I'll get it. I'm locking your room. You don't get your stuff until I get my seven cents."

* * *

At six that evening I sat on a park bench and shivered in the evening breeze. I had just endured the worst day of my life. My stomach was sick and empty. I'd eaten nothing for almost twenty-four hours. My legs ached and my feet were burning.

I'd walked for miles. I'd asked for work at every conceivable place. I'd drawn brusque refusals and grins of contempt. I thought of the cell I'd left two days ago with some favor.

Well, I had to do something. I could go back to Skelly's flophouse and beg him for a break—for a flop on credit and four bits for food. It meant trampling my pride in the dust and the odds were fifty to one against any success, but my numbed and throbbing brain couldn't cook up anything else.

I came into the lobby like a whipped dog. Little Smith was behind the desk, looking more frightened than ever. Skelly sat in the same chair and looked as if he hadn't moved since morning.

I went over to him and said, "I want to talk to you a minute."

He took the cigar from his mouth, nodded his massive head slowly and said, "I know. You got no dough. You were looking for a job which you didn't get. You're hungry. You got no place to flop. You want to put the bite on me."

I smiled wanly, hating him. I said, "Give a guy a break. I don't want much. You'll get your dough all right."

"Go into the bar. Tell the bartender that Skelly said to feed you. And have

a shot while you're waiting. You look like hell. Have a few drinks."

I blinked at him. "Say that again."

He said it again and added, "I've been in tough spots myself. Glad to help."

CHAPTER TWO

Bait for the Murder Trap

A FEW minutes later I was wolfing a greasy plate of hamburgers and beans. Full, I pushed the platter away and ordered a double whiskey. As I felt its warmth banish my fatigue I put my puzzled brain to work on the problem of Skelly. How could a guy change from a bully, howling about seven cents due him, to a nice gee in less than twelve hours? It just didn't add up.

I pondered it for a while, then shrugged my shoulders and gave it up. There was no sense in playing dentist to a gift horse. I leaned back in my chair and lit a cigarette. It was then that the blonde came up.

She was a tall girl with hair the color of butter and eyes like cobalt. She slid into the chair on the other side of the table and said, "Hi, Joey. Remember me?"

"Sure. You're Thelma."

"You've been so tight for the past couple of days I thought you mightn't remember. Boy, did we lap it up! You bought champagne for the house once."

"Yeah," I said bitterly. "I'm a big shot."

She caught the note in my voice and lifted her plucked eyebrows. She said, "What's eating you, boy? Nothing a round of drinks won't fix. Let's have a double something."

"Go away."

She clasped her hands behind her head. "What's the matter? Am I poison?"

"Look," I said, "the party's over. I'm broke. Flat. I'm drinking a charity drink

right now. You can't collect your percentage on me any more. Go find yourself a fresh sucker."

She shrugged her lovely shoulders and said, "What's money. I'll buy *you* a drink." She lifted her voice and called to the bartender, "Harry, send over a bottle of rye."

"A *bottle*?"

"What good will one drink do a couple of experts like us?"

I sighed and put my head in my hands. The world had suddenly turned Christian and it was too much for me. First, Skelly, who was marked strictly as a louse in my book, had given me a lavish handout. Now, a hard, brassy B-girl was buying me a bottle of whiskey. It just didn't figure.

The bottle arrived and Thelma poured a pair of stiff drinks. I had a strong premonition that I was going to get tight for the third night in a row. I emptied my glass with a feeling that maybe things were breaking for me at last. Well, I'd drift along with my luck. I was too weary to examine the angles.

The bottle was half empty when Thelma leaned across the table and touched my cheek with cool fingers. She said, "Baby, I like you. I've got a wonderful idea."

"You mean you're going to order another bottle?"

"Sure. When we finish this one. But my idea's better than that."

"Shoot."

"I want to get married."

"Great idea." I was now in a benign alcoholic haze. "Home, babies, back yard and everything. Who's the lucky guy?"

"You."

I put down my glass and met her blue gaze. Her eyes were cold as the Arctic Sea. I said, "You want to marry me? Why?"

She took my hand in hers and said, "I love you."

I said, "Nuts," withdrew my hand and picked up the bottle.

She hesitated a moment, then said, "All right, I'll tell you the truth."

She lit a cigarette. "Some years ago I was married. I had a baby and shortly afterwards my husband died. I had to take a barroom job in order to live. So my husband's people got a court order and took the kid away from me, claimed I wasn't a fit person to rear a child. Now my lawyer tells me that if I married, if I'm respectable, I can get the kid back. See?"

I saw, all right. But not quite as she expected. I said, "The Homesick Heart."

She blinked and said, "What's that?"

"That's the title of the movie you swiped that situation from. I saw it three years ago in Denver."

She bit her lip, said, "All right," quietly and emptied the bottle into her glass.

AFTER a few minutes she lifted her head and said, "So I was lying. So I ask you flatly, will you marry me?"

"This is so sudden," I said. Then, because the events of the evening had me completely baffled, I got angry. "Damn it," I snapped, "lay off me. As I said before: Go away."

She leaned over the table. "Look, I'll make you a proposition. You're broke. You're out of work. You need a stake. Okay, I'll give you one."

"Why should you?"

"For marrying me. I've got about five hundred bucks stashed away. I want to get married. You want a stake. Let's do business."

Between the liquor and the dialogue my head was reeling. "But why? Why do you want to marry me?"

"You won't believe my lies and I'm not going to tell you the truth. It's a straight business deal. You marry me. I'll give you the dough. Afterwards you can leave me if you want to. What do you say?"

I rubbed a hand across my brow. I sighed and said, "I'll think it over."

"While you're doing that, I'll get a

fresh bottle. This one's about shot."

She stood up and walked over to the bar. I watched her go and bewilderment enveloped me like a heavy shroud. It was then that the kid came in with the note.

He was a ragged urchin I'd seen outside the saloon presiding over a home-made shoe-shine box. He thrust an un-addressed envelope in my hand and beat it without asking for a tip. I slit the envelope open and read the penciled writing on the dirty piece of paper.

Turner:

If you'll meet me in the alley back of the hotel after I get off duty, say a little after midnight, I'll do you a big favor. Later you can do one for me.

Smith

I read it again. Smith was, of course, the little clerk in Skelly's flophouse. But it was neither his signature nor the message that impressed me. It was the salutation—"Turner."

That was my name, all right. But it wasn't the name under which I'd served time. It certainly wasn't the name on Skelly's register. It was a name I hadn't used for six years. How in heaven's name had Smith found it out? The events of the night were becoming more and more inexplicable.

Thelma and the bottle came back to the table. "Well, Buster," she said, "have you thought it over?"

"Thought what over?"

Her tone was a trifle impatient, a trifle eager. "Marrying me. And collecting five hundred bucks for doing it."

I looked at her. The alcohol was throbbing through my veins. She was an attractive girl, a desirable girl. I was young and at the moment bewildered. After the toughest day of my life things were breaking. I'd be a fool not to snatch up Thelma and a half a G besides.

I said, "Sure, I'll marry you. First thing in the morning."

"No. Tonight. Look, I know the town

clerk in Masefield. That's not far away. He'll give us a license. We can be married tonight. I'll pay you in advance."

She reached into her bag and took out a wad of bills. She slapped them on the table and said, "I'll go and fix myself up. I'll be right back and we'll get started."

I put the money in my pocket, reflecting that if the whole world had gone suddenly crazy it wasn't doing me any harm. As I stowed the money away, my fingers came in contact with Smith's note. I glanced at the big clock behind the bar. It was twenty minutes past twelve.

I put my hands on the table and pushed myself to my feet. I was primarily interested in knowing how the little clerk had stumbled on my right name.

I WENT out the side door of the saloon, I walked a few yards down the street and turned into the unpaved alley which ran into a dead end beyond the rear of Skelly's flophouse. It was a dark, moonless night. A distant street lamp cast a dim yellow glow onto the metal garbage cans which lined the sides of the alley.

I breathed deeply. The night air was bracing, after the smoke and stuffiness of the bar. I reached the back door of the hotel without seeing anyone. I decided to wait a few minutes. Then as I lit a cigarette and paced casually, my foot struck something soft and yielding.

I came to a dead halt, bent down and peered through the darkness. There was something huddled and human at my feet. I took a book of matches from my pocket and struck one. Its flicker revealed a white contorted face, Smith's face. Blood soaked his coat and shirt front and there was an ugly gash across his throat.

Hastily, I threw away the match and straightened up. Smith was dead. There was no doubt of that. And there was no doubt of the fact that a guy like me who had just come out of stir should get away from the corpse as soon as possible. For

an instant I thought of calling the coppers. I threw the idea away almost as soon as it came to me. I wanted no part of murder. Not with my record.

I moved down to the street end of the alley and peered out. No pedestrians were in sight. I slipped into the street and re-entered the saloon by the same door I'd left by.

Thelma was back at the table, a frown on her face. She saw me and a great relief seemed to come over her.

"I thought you'd run out on me," she said. "Come on. This is our wedding night. We'll grab a cab and take the bottle with us."

I nodded. I wanted to get as far away from Smith's corpse as possible.

"Sure," I said. "We'll get married in Masefield, then go south—Mexico or somewhere—on a honeymoon. The hell with this place."

Her blue eyes narrowed. "Oh, no we won't. Don't forget this wedding is a business proposition. I'm coming right back to town after the ceremony."

I picked up the bottle and poured a stiff drink. Smith's white face persisted in my mind; liquor might wash it out. And that was the drink that really did it. Up to this point, I concede I'd been tight. Those last four ounces moved me up a drunken notch. Now, I was drunk. My head reeled and my feet were unsteady on the sawdust floor.

Thelma picked up the bottle with one hand and took my arm with the other.

"Come on, big boy," she said, "while you can still climb into the taxi."

I fell on the taxi floor before I managed to get into the seat, and for every traffic light we passed I saw four. It was in this sanctified condition that I set forth to enter the holy state of matrimony.

I OPENED my eyes to see the dirty plaster of the ceiling. I lay on my back in Skelly's narrow bed and the ache in my

muscles was only equaled by the nausea at the pit of my stomach. With an effort I sat up. It was painful. This, I thought, was like no hangover I'd ever had. I felt as if I'd been doped.

Slowly the events of the previous evening trickled through my brain. I vaguely recalled signing an application for a marriage license, mumbling some words to a drowsy justice of the peace.

This, then, was my wedding morn.

Dimly, I remembered leaving Thelma at her rooming house on Oak Street. Vaguely, I recalled the cab driver helping me into the hotel lobby. I shook my head in amazement at the heights of folly I could attain when drunk, then I thought of the five hundred bucks and felt slightly more alive.

I climbed out of bed and picked up my trousers from the floor. They were dirty and wrinkled but there was half a G in them anyway. I went through the pockets. As I did so my seething stomach turned slowly over. I found exactly two dollars in silver.

I went through my coat pockets. There were half a pack of cigarettes and some matches. Nothing else. I stood in the middle of the room and cursed my wife.

The tramp had talked me into marrying her for her own mysterious purposes, had given me five hundred bucks for the job, then doped my drinks and taken the money back. Anger made me feel less sick. I pulled on my clothes, stuck my head under the faucet and combed my hair. I was going out to get my money back if it was the last thing I ever did.

I was just about to leave when the door of the room opened and a short, wide-chested man walked in. He nodded slightly.

"What's the matter with knocking at the door?" I snapped.

He said, "It doesn't pay in my business," and held out his hand, palm up. There was a police shield in it.

He said, "We found a body in back this morning. What do you know about it?"

"Nothing. Why should you think I do?"

"We got a tip." Keeping his eyes on me he moved over to the wardrobe in the corner of the room. He opened the door. I noticed that my other suit, which I had hung up, was now lying crumpled on the floor.

The cop picked up the coat with one hand. There was a brown stain on its front.

"That looks like blood to me," he said. "Let's go downtown while they check it."

In that instant I was certain of but one thing. If I went downtown with him, I was dead. With my record, with a planted bloody suit in my closet and Smith's body in the morgue, I didn't have a chance.

He looked at me oddly. "I've also heard," he said, "that you were broke yesterday. And that last night you were buying a lot of drinks. Put on your hat."

I walked to the bureau, passing in front of him. I picked up my hat with my left hand and swung my right with the weight of my whole body behind it.

It landed flush on his surprised jaw and I smashed him with a left as he was falling. I raced across the room, flung a leg out the window sill and dropped one story into the alley beneath. I ran until I reached the street, then slowed to a brisk walk.

CHAPTER THREE

Homicidal Heiress

USING the back streets, I got to the park on the far side of town. There I left the paved walk, crossed a wide lawn and entered a thick grove of trees. I threw myself down on the ground. My heart was beating, my pulses pounding. I lay

there for a long moment. Then I whipped my brain into action and began to think, hard.

I thought first of Skelly. He was the guy who had access to my room. It would have been easy for him to plant a bloody coat on me. I thought of his odd behavior of the previous evening when he'd staked me.

I played with that for a while, then turned my mind to Thelma who was so anxious to marry me, then so anxious to roll me for the fee she'd paid. I didn't make much headway there either.

Then I thought of the dead man, Smith. He'd wanted to see me. Why? I recalled the phraseology of his note. He'd said he wanted to do me a favor. But he'd also said that he expected a later favor from me. Now, how could he figure a guy in my position could do him a favor? A favor apparently worth risking his life for?

My head ached with considering it. It seemed that all of a sudden I'd become extremely valuable to Skelly, Thelma and Smith. At least temporarily.

I considered every angle, practical and remote. An hour or so later a wild idea came to me. It was a long shot. It was crazy. But it was the only theory I could evolve which could account for what had happened.

I got to my feet and walked out of the park. I knew the whole town would be looking for me but there was something I had to find out. I went into a drugstore, into the phone booth, and pulled the door shut behind me.

I got the long-distance operator and said, "I want Green Falls, Minnesota. A person-to-person call. I want to talk to Mr. Roger Harmsworth. And reverse the charges."

I waited for what seemed an unconscionably long time. At last the operator's voice droned into my ear. "I am sorry. Mr. Harmsworth died three weeks ago.

Will you speak to anyone else at that number?"

I hung up, slumped against the wall of the booth and lit a cigarette with fingers that shook. The last piece of the puzzle clicked into place. Now I had it. I also had a nice one-way ticket to the electric chair.

The fact that I'd slugged a copper and scrambled, plus the fact of my blood-stained suit, was damning evidence that I'd killed Smith. Skelly would swear he hadn't staked me to food and drink, thus establishing robbery as motive. Thelma would vow, and truthfully, that I'd suggested going to Mexico after the wedding.

With two bucks in my pocket and an alarm out, successful flight was impossible. Even if I hadn't been rolled for the five hundred the chances were that I'd be picked up. But with the five hundred I'd certainly be in a better spot. There was one person to see about that five hundred—Thelma. I marched out of the drugstore and headed for Thelma's place.

I APPROACHED it with caution. At a distance of two blocks I saw no police outside the place. I moved a block nearer, cut into a side street and came to the rear of the house.

The back door was unlocked and opened on to a hall that cut right through the building to the front. I walked along it, noting from the outside bells in which apartment Thelma lived. Then I went up the dusty, carpeted stairway.

I heard the low drone of voices as I stood before the door. I set my jaw and pounded sharply on the panel. Thelma called, "Come in."

I opened the door and walked into a large room. An unmade day bed stood against one wall. Thelma, in blue negligee, sat on its edge. Opposite was a flowery armchair. In it sat Skelly.

He regarded me coolly. He nodded his head in what might have been a greeting.

Thelma smiled faintly. She said, "Ah, my erring husband."

"Hello, darling," I said. "I know what it's all about now. I just called my uncle. I know he's dead."

Skelly's grunt was non-committal. Thelma regarded me with mild approbation.

"I got a bright husband," she remarked to no one in particular. "Did you figure out the whole deal?"

"I figured the whole deal. It could only have happened one way. Uncle Roger's been dead a few weeks. I'm the only member of the family left. He didn't approve of me, but I'm the only heir of blood lineage. So when the will was read the lawyers must have begun looking for me."

Thelma lighted a cigarette and crossed her bare legs. She said, "Clever boy," as if she were talking to a child.

"I was in the pen, then," I went on. "They must have tracked me that far, tracked me as far as Skelly's hotel. But they couldn't have been sure as I wasn't using my right name. So they must have buzzed Skelly about me, giving him a description. He stalled them off and worked out the idea of your marrying me before I knew I'd inherited a fortune. You'd give him a cut of your share for the information."

"Absolutely right," said Thelma. "But aren't you a sucker to come here? The coppers are keeping an eye on me."

"I came here for my dough," I said. "You tramp, you rob me, you swindle me, then you roll me for the five hundred you gave me."

She smiled sweetly. Skelly said, "You won't need dough where you're going."

"I'm not going anywhere," I said. "You killed Smith. I didn't. I've got that figured out, too."

Thelma lifted plucked eyebrows. "He's really smart," she said. "Tell us about it."

"Smith overheard the lawyers talking

to Skelly. Skelly had to cut him in on the deal. But Smith figured I'd be easier to do business with than Skelly. So he wrote me a note telling me to meet him in the alley, where he could tell me what was going on. He figured I'd take care of him after I'd collected the inheritance."

"That's right," said Thelma. "But Skelly saw him give the note to the boy. Skelly took it from the kid, read it, then told the kid to deliver it anyway. So he followed Smith to the alley and knifed him. It was one less to cut in and it got rid of you beautifully."

"Sure," I said. "He took my suit and smeared it with Smith's blood, then tipped off the coppers."

Skelly's great bulk stirred in his chair. "It's foolproof," he said without emotion. "You better give yourself up."

I sat down. I was through, done and dead at twenty-six.

Skelly said, "I guess he ain't going to lam, Thelma. Phone the cops."

Thelma said, "I have. I phoned just after you got here."

Skelly blinked. "How come? How did you know—"

Thelma smiled. "They're coming for you, Skelly. You didn't think I was going to let them take my husband, did you? He's a valuable property. It's you they want, Skelly."

Skelly's fat body didn't move. But his head did. His little eyes narrowed, glared at the girl.

"You mean," I said, "that you'll tell the truth, that you'll come clean? I apologize for what I called you."

"If I don't turn Skelly in," she said, "I've got an accessory after-the-fact rap hanging over my head. Moreover, I'll have to split with him whatever dough I chisel out of you. I'm working for little Thelma, that's all. It's better for me that Skelly takes this rap instead of you. The fact that he's actually guilty is purely coincidental."

HER eyes were cold and hard. Her face was set, beneath the makeup. The siren sounded directly outside the house now, and I heard a doorbell ring.

"All I have to do," said Thelma, "is tell the cops that my loving husband was wearing the same suit all last night and that it wasn't the one with blood on it. That should be enough to fry my pal, Skelly."

I heard a distant door open, the murmur of voices and heavy feet on the stairs. I heard the sharp intake of Skelly's breath. His right hand moved with incredible swiftness. It plunged into his coat pocket and when it came out it held an automatic.

My action was pure reflex. Just as he aimed the muzzle at Thelma's head I sprang across the room. I landed on him at exactly the same moment the weapon cracked. The smell of cordite was in my nostrils as I wrenched the gun from his fat hand.

Thelma screamed as two uniformed coppers charged into the room. With Skelly's gun in my hand, I turned my head to see Thelma lying across the day bed, blood flowing down her breast.

One cop said to me, "You're Turner?"

"Yes. But it's this guy, Skelly, who—"

"I know. The dame told the sergeant over the phone. Get up, Fatso."

Skelly got slowly out of his chair. I crossed the room to the other cop, who was bending over Thelma.

"Bad," he said. "Got her lung, I think. I'll call an ambulance. Don't let her move till the doc gets here."

They took Skelly down the stairs with them. I put a pillow under the girl's head, put a wet towel on her wound. She bit her lip with pain, looked up at me and said softly, "Sucker! You damned sucker!"

"Why?"

"You shouldn't have jumped him. He

(Continued on page 128)

ODDITIES IN CRIME

By MAYAN and JAKOBSSON



1. A fickleness-of-fame note comes from Western Bulgaria. There Toena Djiroff, constable of the small town of Ihtiman, was privileged to issue railway ticket vouchers for transportation of prisoners. One day Djiroff's wife asked him to take her to the city of Sofia for a little shopping—and, rather than give her money for a ticket, he arrested her and took her to town for free. Somebody recognized Mrs. Djiroff during the trip, represented the constable as a hero who had not permitted family ties to keep him from stern duty. Family ties, however, were not

enough to keep Mrs. Djiroff quietly in jail—she blurted out the true story, and Djiroff got a free ride to jail and free lodging for four years!

2. Somewhere in England there is a man who is grateful to a gang of hoodlums, but unable to express it. Disabled by lumbago, dyspepsia and a bad case of ulcers, Jim Strong, took a job as night watchman. One night a band of crooks broke into the establishment under his guardianship, beat up Jim and made away with their loot. The shock of the beating, in some way not yet clear to medical science, cleared up Jim's lumbago, fixed up his dyspepsia, cured his ulcers. Back on the active list, he quit his job for a better one!



3. It took the liberal Frenchmen to think this one up—and they started it five centuries ago. On the theory that every dog should have his day, a Thieves' Fair has been held at Sabies d'Otonne, once a year, in midwinter, for just about that long. During the Fair the cops take a holiday and anybody is allowed to swipe anything he can at the various shops and stalls. If the shopkeeper catches you, there's just one penalty—you've got to buy the article you meant to steal!



4. A gent who believed in eating his cake and having it, too, was George Remus, big shot of the bootleg era. Remus came out of jail in 1927 to find his wife had absconded with his considerable worldly goods and a new boy friend—hunted her down and killed her. Acting as his own defense lawyer, Remus successfully pleaded insanity, was committed—and promptly subpoenaed the former prosecution witnesses to testify at a new hearing that he was sane!

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DETECTIVE TALES

(Continued from page 66)

it, and—"The gun lifted as Al came closer. The gun was pointing at Joe's forehead . . .

From the closet doorway, Dykstra said, "Hold it, Dorian. Against the wall, both of you."

Al swung, at the sound of the voice, and the muzzle of his pistol was pointing at Dykstra.

Dykstra couldn't be sure, and he wasn't a man to take chances. His Police Positive roared, shaking the small room.

Al went slamming back. The slug must have hit a bone, for Al actually hurtled through the air as he went back and crashed into Nevers. Nevers hadn't pulled his hand from his pocket as they went down.

IN THE small room behind the squad room, Joe waited, his head on the desk. But sleep wouldn't come. Dykstra came in from the hallway quietly and came over to shake his shoulder.

Joe looked up, the question in his eyes. Dykstra nodded. "He's cracked. He's got an idea he's going to die. He's half delirious, I guess. He's spilling his guts. He might die, at that, and save the state some electricity." He sat down across the desk from Joe. "You'd better get some sleep, boy. I'll have one of the men take you home."

Joe nodded and rubbed his forehead. "And get back to Arden, huh? That's your kind of town, Joe."

"That's where I'm going, soon as I get straightened around," Joe said. "Where's your phone book?"

Dykstra pulled out a book from his desk drawer and slid it across to Joe. "Calling your lawyer? You're clear."

"No," Joe said. "Not my lawyer."

He found it finally. *Morrison, Jean.* "No, I'm calling my girl. It's about time."

THE END

LETHAL LITTLE LADY

(Continued from page 87)

was present. Lenore fired and it must have hit him, but he batted her down and twisted the gun out of her hand. Then he clubbed her across the head with a sickening thud. I shuddered. After all, I'd been smooching with that gorgeous creature not long ago.

I closed in on Kraus. He was just straightening up when I swung hard and put all my beef behind it. My fist clipped him just under the point of his jaw, which turned out to be pure Libby-Owens. He took an excursion to the dream world this time. Just to be sure I kicked the gun over into a corner. Then I transferred the bonds to my own pocket and picked up Lenore in my arms. Even dead to the world she almost went to my head. What a gal, I thought. I steeled myself against relenting and carried her up the stairs to Fenisong's room. I held her limp body with one arm and managed to close her fingers around the handle of the knife that was still sticking in the professor with the other hand. Then I carried her back down to the study again and replaced her on the floor. Her skirt had pulled up around her thighs. I was modest enough to pull it down again over her knees. Yes, I was.

Next I opened the front door and ran out on the walk. I spotted the telephone wire leading to the house and found the box on the wall under the eaves of the porch. A wire had merely been pulled loose from a connection post. I replaced this and went back to the study. When I picked up the phone it worked. I could hear the dial tone.

I took time to look up the sheriff in the phone book, rather than ask the operator, and dialed the number. After a moment a voice answered saying he was Sergeant So-And-So.

"Listen, this is the janitor of the gymnasium at the college," I said, trying to

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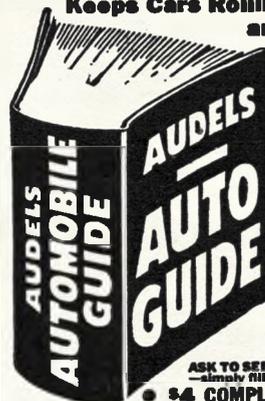
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DETECTIVE TALES

sound like a janitor. "You know where Dr. Fensong lives?"

"Sure, sure," said the bored deputy.

"How long would it take you to get to a murder?"

"Five minutes maybe. Why? Hey, who the hell you say you were?" He was getting interested, I could tell.

"Well, listen," I said. "I was passing by Dr. Fensong's house just now and I heard some shooting in there. You better hurry up and get out here."

"I'll dispatch a radio car right away. What did you say your name—"

I broke the connection and took one last look around. Then I hurried out and jumped into my buggy and didn't turn the lights on until I reached the stadium. I had just left the campus and swung into the highway traffic when the radio car roared by with red lights blazing and siren going full blast.

I DROVE sedately through the town and at the first roadhouse on the other side I stopped and put in a call to Portland. For once I got the right combination. Almost immediately I heard Gilda's voice. She must have been sitting there with her hand on the receiver all this time. And for once she wasn't mad. In fact, she sounded a little worried.

"Lover," I said, "have you looked at your bank balance lately? Never mind. . . . No, I'm not drunk. I've just been detained. Put the coffee pot on, sweetheart—I got something for you you're going to like." She purred a little and we hung up.

It was then I realized what a sap I was. Here I had a hundred grand and nothing to stop me from taking an extended vacation on the Riviera. And here I was on my way to Gilda's apartment with it. So I'm a sucker, huh? Well, maybe I'm after bigger game.

I keep telling myself.

OLD HOMICIDE WEEK

(Continued from page 100)

of bacteria injurious to the human health? You mean she has to shake out that bag, with the wind blowing back into her face the filth that the feet of your family have tracked in on your carpets?"

Captain Hanson looked guilty. "Yeah, I guess she does. But this bag comes right out, huh?"

"This self-sealing bag," Breen corrected. He showed how the paper inter-liner sealed itself when it was removed, and the D. A. squatted down beside them.

"Well, I *will* be damned. That is clever. And you just throw the whole thing away."

Lieutenant Kreco came in to report that a squad had just picked up Marino.

"Fine," Breen beamed. "That's just fine, Lieutenant. But if you'll excuse us a moment, please. We're busy. That is, unless you love your wife. Then you can listen, too."

Kreco shook his head, then squatted down beside Hanson to see what he was looking at, and Breen included the lieutenant in his sales talk.

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The three men's heads moved closer to observe the feature Breen was pointing to and, standing in the doorway of the office, First Grade Detective Morgan grinned painfully. "The guy is good."

Standing beside his partner, Tonelli fingered his own jaw. "Huh. You're telling me. I'll give you ten to one he sells 'em."

THE END

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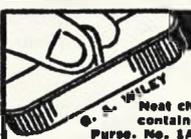
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would have killed me right away. You'd be rid of him and rid of me."

I shrugged. "I wasn't going to watch him shoot you and not do anything about it."

Her smile faded. She said in a hoarse whisper, "You dirty swine."

I blinked. "What's the matter now?"

"All my life I've fought for a dollar. I've been a car-hop, a B-girl and worse. Then I make this deal. I hook a guy who's been left a fortune. And look what happens."

"What happens? I'm still hooked, you know."

She shook her head. "Not any more. I'm a louse. But I've got my limits. I can't shake down a guy who risked his life to try to save mine. I'm an unlucky hag."

Her voice died away. She closed her eyes and lost consciousness. I sat and watched her until the ambulance came.

I SAT in the lawyers' offices, acutely aware of my new grey suit, my expensive shoes and my recent grooming. A sedately attired clerk sat across the desk from me, with a pile of documents between us.

He said, "First, Mr. Turner, a few routine details. Name in full?"

"John Latham Turner."

"Age?"

"Twenty-six."

"Marital status?"

Before I could reply, the telephone rang. The clerk spoke into it briefly. He said, "It's the hospital. For you."

I took the receiver, said, "Hello," and listened for a moment.

The clerk said again, "Marital status?"

I said, "Widower," and wondered at the strange sense of loss I felt over something I'd never had.

THE END

UP THE RIVER

By LAURI WIRTA

A cop's billy is less than two feet long, but under proper conditions has a reach of more than ten city blocks. Made of special locust wood, that's how far you can hear it ring on a quiet night, if it's dropped a certain way on a hard pavement. The idea is for an officer in difficulty to be able to summon assistance without resorting to a whistle, if he doesn't want to betray his whereabouts.

An opinion handed down by a justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court puts the court on record as feeling that, if a lawyer has the ability to resort to tears at a moment's notice, and can thereby win sympathy for his client, it is his duty to do so, unless he indulges "to such an extent as to impede or delay the business of the court."

Ancient Greek juries consisted of five hundred members, were underpaid at the approximate equivalent of two bits a day—and were eager to go along with, or against a defendant, according to how much money he had.

An Ogden, Utah, citizen not too long ago won a suspended sentence for a traffic violation when he frankly confessed his guilt. Explained he was riding three in front with a couple of gals and was too much of a gentleman to operate the old-fashioned gearshift under the circumstances.

An Easton, Pa., jury once decided a case on the flip of a coin.



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