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by W. T. BALLARD

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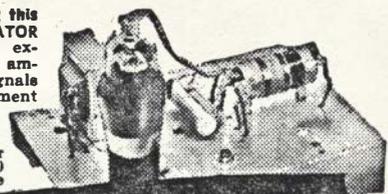
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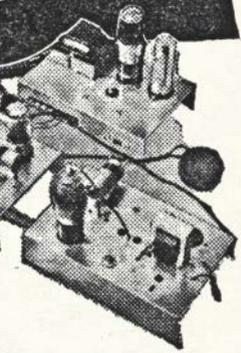
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VOL. THIRTY-TWO

DECEMBER, 1945

NUMBER ONE

A Novel of Murder Below the Border

1. **HIDE-OUT IN HELL**.....*W. T. Ballard* 10
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Dramatic Novelette of the Underworld

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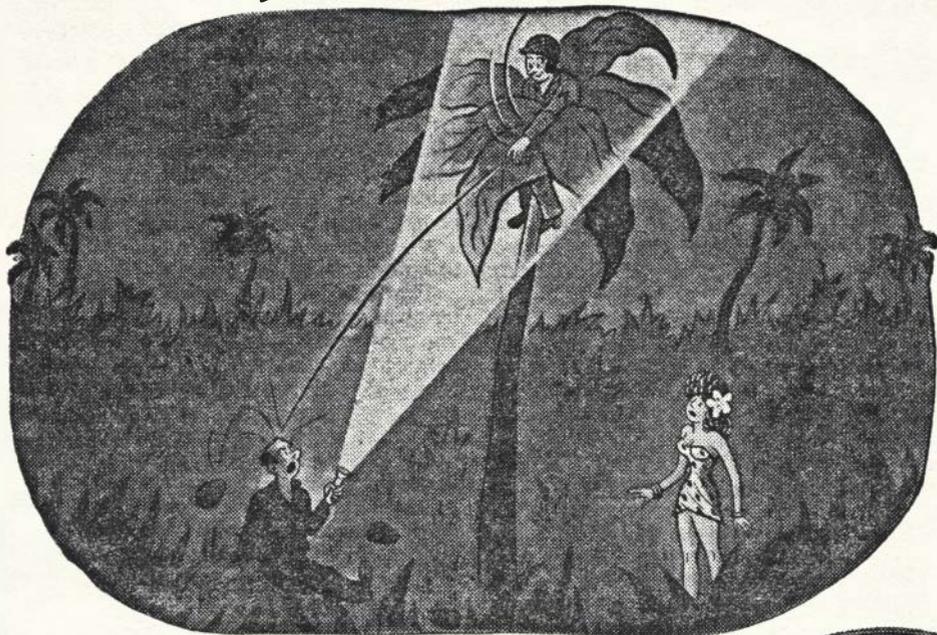
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THE CRIME CLINIC

EIGHT years ago a Pennsylvania choirmaster was convicted of murdering his wife. In his confession he explained that he hadn't hated his victim at all; in fact, he'd been extremely fond of her—so much so that he couldn't bear to hurt her by asking for a divorce. After six years of marriage, he had found the love of his life in a young local girl—and it seemed kinder to kill his wife with a mercy bullet, than to let her know the bad news.

Our man was obviously sincere, in a warped quasi-natural way, all the more dreadful for its faint resemblance to normal human reaction. That is the thing about crime—it is always committed by human beings, and against human beings! It is not a bracketed phenomenon inclusive only of typed, shadowy figures known as Killers and Crooks—and other, even more shadowy figures known as Victims. Crime is alive, as a cancer is alive—it involves not only the vast passions, but the little moods and peculiarities of a man. Murder is often built upon little things, and the daily papers give us only a cold, statistical hint of this fact.

Fiction—our type of fiction—should fill in the picture, and should be of vital interest to everyone, since the last available statistics show that *one out of every four persons in the United States may expect to come into direct contact with a major crime in the course of his—or her—lifetime!*

When the editors of DETECTIVE TALES launched this magazine, America was flooded with crime fiction of the conventional type—with lanky, well-bred sleuths and stock criminals, who were invariably both vulgar and sinister. In fact, you recognized them as much by their patois as by the massacred corpses they left behind them.

We felt that such writing showed a certain contempt for realities. We felt that among intelligent people who enjoyed a good detective story—as who of us doesn't?—there would be a demand for an *interpretive* story—a story that told of the feel and impact of crime on living men and women. We dared to base a magazine on the premise that what people understand best are *people*—that mere corpse-riddles or dry mathematical puzzles about who killed whom—and who cared—really is pretty slim entertainment for the intelligent type of reader who wanted a convincing, dramatic crime-mystery story.

Does that seem a startling idea today? It was at that time when the sheer mechanics of the murder mystery were heavily emphasized at the expense of the human-interest and convincing emotional angle on the story.

We went into a huddle with the best writers in the field. "Remember," we said, "the extremely involved now-you-see-it-now-you-don't jig-saw puzzle story may be all right in some book-length novels, but we are set to do a streamlined job here.

"Mystery? Of course we must have mystery but if the readers don't care about the person who is killed and don't care about the man or woman who is in trouble and who must solve his problem, for our money, you can take the mystery and throw it out the window.

"In other words, we want a job that will give us characters anyone can believe in. Real flesh-and-blood people with whom the reader can identify himself. Let him share the thrill of perilous adventures with the leading characters and let them, above all, be people easy to know and generally likeable."

That was the start, and it proved to be better than we had even dreamed of. In following consistently that general policy—with the help of our authors and you, our readers—a type of detective magazine has emerged which, we believe, carries with its outstanding, varied entertainment in the crime-mystery field. . . .

As to variety. Well, are you—or do you know—a housewife whose husband smokes too much? Ever chide him gently and sensibly, "for his own good," and urge him to mend his habits? *We* have a housewife in this issue who'll make you gasp—and yet she's not unlike either you, or someone you know. *Not in her own mind, anyway.* You'll meet Vivian Banister, the very *fatale femme*, in Dorothy Dunn's brilliant story, *The Lady Says Die!*

And yet we like excitement and high adventure as well as any man—as presented in our lead novel, W. T. Ballard's *Hide-out in the Hill*. Murder can happen in Mexico as well as in Michigan—and yet happen to people you know.

Story color and background is valid—it exists everywhere—but we do not add the concept, as have some of our contemporary novelists, that it must also be drab. In other words, we're publishing a magazine of entertainment for mental grown-ups, and we feel that the best is none too good for them—or for us!

Next month's murder menu brings you a racingly paced, long novel of a cop who got all dolled up to meet his best gal—and found murder answering the doorbell—by William Rough; one of the best Christmas crime stories you've ever read, from Cyril Plunkett's feeling pen—Another Dan Trout novelette by William R. Cox, and many others. Meet us at your favorite newsstand on November 28th!

THE EDITOR

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ODDITIES IN CRIME

by LEE and JAKOBSSON



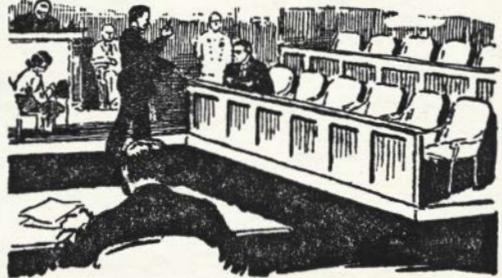
asking for lifetime support. The judge threw his case out of court, and suspended her license—whereupon she hired Kovacs as her chauffeur!

Socrates—who said, "Know thyself"—was tried and sentenced to death by a jury of 501 men. Not so long ago the smallest jury ever to try a case in the U.S. proved the weight of old Soc's wisdom.

When a snowstorm blocked the roads on Long Island, and prevented the arrival of all but one juror in court, both the prosecution and the defense in the case then on the docket agreed to abide by his decision. Our gentleman listened to the evidence gravely, heard witnesses pro and con, and the lawyers' summations, and then retired for two hours of solitary deliberation.

When he came out of it and the bailiff formally asked him, "Gentleman of the jury, have you reached a verdict?" he fidgeted nervously.

Finally he blurted, "No—I disagree. . . ."



After Mr. Meyer D. Nitzburg, who owned a liquor store in New York, had presented the police department with four slightly used hold-up men, whom he'd rendered Non Compos by so many accurately tossed champagne bottles in the course of a little more than a year, the cops formally presented him with a pistol and told him to go ahead and use it. Sure enough, somebody tried to hold him up again almost immediately after.

Mr. Nitzburg shot the gentleman in the toe and, disgruntled, fired again. Nobody knows what became of the second bullet, and Mr. Nitzburg was reaching for another champagne bottle when the hold-up man surrendered.

Mr. Nitzburg presented him, fully conscious and in reasonable repair, to the police—hung up his pistol and served warning that he was going to stick to bottle tossing.



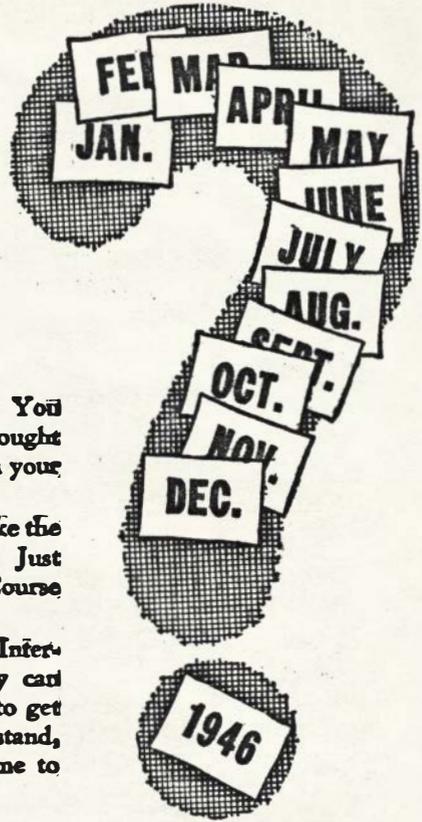
The last time Rumpus Island, in the Missouri River, lived up to its name, it brought about one of the strangest murder trials on record. Jesse Wirick, a farmer, leased a portion of the island and fenced it in. This angered his neighbor, Hurshman, who had used the land for grazing his cows and horses—the result was a shotgun duel in which Hurshman was killed.

Wirick was brought to trial for first-degree murder, and pleaded self-defence. The court in trying to get at the rights and wrongs of the case, and who was trespassing on whom, discovered the disputed territory was ownerless—best claim on it belonged to Mormons, who had long since moved on!

But a man had died—and another stood trial for his life—over nothing!



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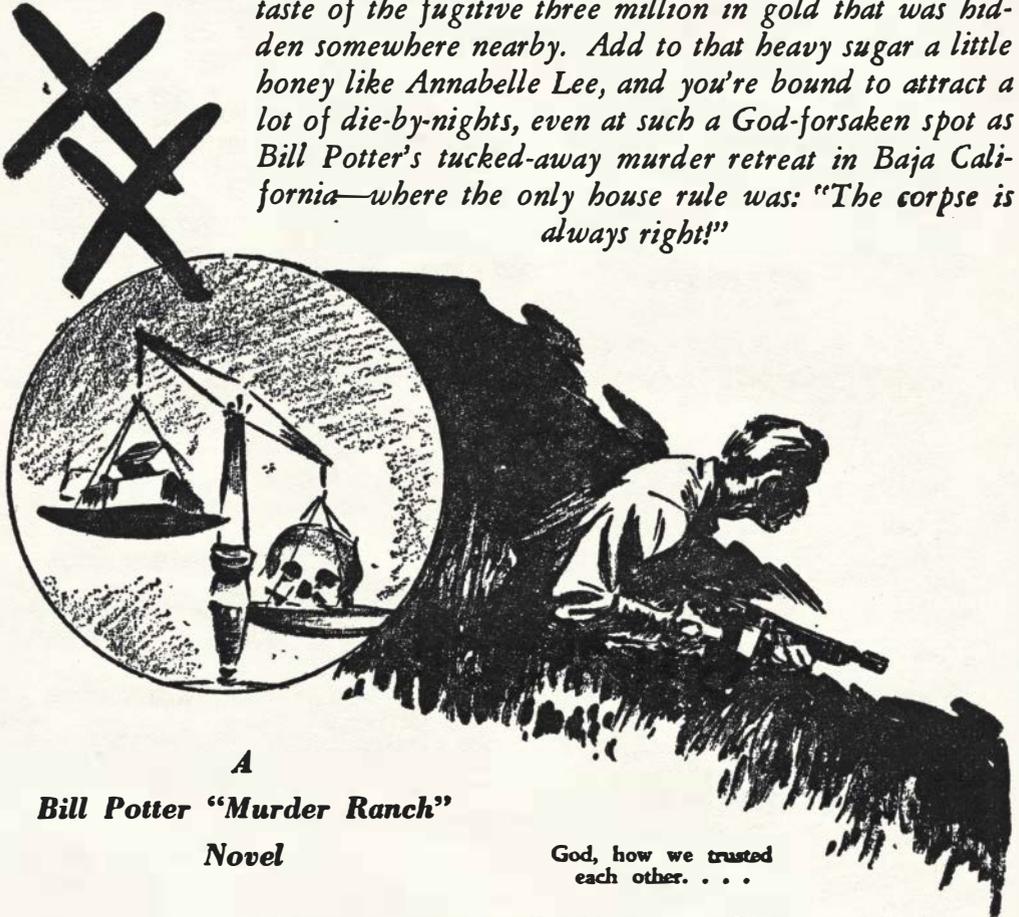
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Who wouldn't resent being gypped out of ten grand by a man too dead to enjoy it—but that was just a short taste of the fugitive three million in gold that was hidden somewhere nearby. Add to that heavy sugar a little honey like Annabelle Lee, and you're bound to attract a lot of die-by-nights, even at such a God-forsaken spot as Bill Potter's tucked-away murder retreat in Baja California—where the only house rule was: "The corpse is always right!"



A
Bill Potter "Murder Ranch"
Novel

CHAPTER ONE
Murder With a Smile

IT WAS my bedtime when the phone rang. I almost didn't answer it and at times I've wished I hadn't.

Joe Streeter was on the other end. His whiskey baritone asked if I'd come over. "I want your advice," he told me. "You're the only one who can help me in this. I trust your judgment."

"Come over here," I said. "It isn't any further for you to come than for me to go."

He chuckled. He was a big shot and there weren't many people in the world who talked to him that way. I wasn't trying to be tough, though. I was just tired.

He said, "I would, but I'm waiting for an important long distance call. I'm at the office.

God, how we trusted
each other. . . .

You'd better come. It's a story I liked to hear and I think it will interest you."

I didn't have any idea of what he was talking about, but I went. Streeter was that kind of guy—people usually did things for him. I don't know why, and never really stopped to figure it out. He's about as important looking as the iceman.

But his office is chrome and light brown leather, with a beige rug on the floor and fluorescent lights hidden in little wells in the ceiling. It's an office—what I mean.

"Sit down," he said, shoving over whiskey and soda. "I'm going to tell you a gangster story."

I thought he was kidding. He calls himself an investment counsel. What he actually does is invest his own money in what you could seldom call an investment. He likes his profits big and doesn't mind the risks.

HIDE-OUT IN HELL

By W. T. BALLARD

In a minute you can see why—I did.

He said, "Two weeks ago a couple of characters whom you don't know and who can remain nameless walked into my house and asked me how I'd like to buy three million dollars worth of gold."

I stared at him. "And you got me out of bed for that?"

"I thought they were kidding, but after five minutes they convinced me that they meant business, too. You know that gold in this country is set up at thirty-five dollars an ounce, but there are restrictions on foreign gold. The other countries have been hoarding what gold stocks they could for the postwar period. Several of the smaller ones have quite large stocks on hand.

"Due to this, and the fact that gold mining was curtailed or stopped altogether in most places because of the war, the lack of machinery and labor, the price of gold in

world markets such as Cairo rose to unprecedented heights."

I NODDED to show him I was listening and he went on. "These men explained that this gold was stolen, high-graded from several big mines over a period of years, and the government freezing order caught them. They had the gold but they couldn't sell it because they weren't registered mine owners and they couldn't account for having it in their possession. They'd planned to market it to jewelers through connections they had, but the war, plus the O.P.A. plus labor shortages, etc., kept them from so doing."

Again I nodded.

He smiled. "So, they're faced with a high world price, a lot of gold, and yet, they're broke. They smuggled most of it into Mexico



and now they can't move it any further."
"So?"

"So they came to me. At first I laughed at the story. It sounded like a skin-game. I didn't think they had any gold. To prove it, and here's where the gangster element came in, they took me down to a car, blindfolded me, and drove around through the Hollywood hills, winding up finally at some house. I haven't the slightest idea where it was.

"All I know is that we went down three steps into a living room, they took the handkerchief away from my eyes and led me across to a small bar. In back, where the shelves should have been they had gold bars stacked up like cordwood."

I stared at him, hardly knowing whether to believe him or not, but Joe Streeter was a man who seldom showed emotion and his voice trembled a little now; his forehead held a small line of sweaty drops.

"And you bought them?"

He grinned. "I bought them. I'm no fool. I merely called the treasury department and explained the whole deal. The government would pay me full price for the gold if I turned it in. The stuff hadn't been in my possession at the time of the freezing order, so they couldn't get me on that. As for the original owners, it had been melted and mixed. Gold has certain characteristics and experts can often tell what mine or locality it originated in, but mixed this way there was no hope. The government men took the position that it was better to get it off the world market than have it floating around."

"And you made some dough?"

"Five dollars an ounce."

I whistled. "What do you want me to do, steal it back from the treasury?"

He shook his head. Save your wisecracks. You haven't heard the full story. There was only five hundred thousand involved in the first deal—the rest has already been smuggled into Mexico."

"Why can't they ship it to the world markets from there?"

He grinned. "They could, but they need someone who is powerful enough down there to get it out of the country. Otherwise it will be held by the local authorities."

I saw what he meant. "So you bought it? You're going to ship it to the world markets. No thanks, I've been working for Uncle Sam. I'm not going to start bucking him."

Streeter chuckled. "You're wrong on both counts. I haven't bought it yet. You're going to buy it, and we aren't going to ship it to the world markets. We're going to play fair with the treasury people. They want that gold, but officially they can't do a thing about it until it's back on U. S. soil. So, we're going to smuggle it back into this country."

I told him he was crazy. "How are you going to handle that much gold?"

He grinned. "In a boat, a tuna boat. It will stand close in shore and pick you up some dark night. All you have to do is go to Bill Potter's hunting ranch and make contact. Be careful, these people are touchy and gun-happy."

"Why don't you go yourself? You know the country as well as I do."

His thin lips twisted. "Because someone might get killed and if that happens, I'd rather it would be you than me."

I ALWAYS liked Bill Potter. The old scoundrel was eight different kinds of crook, and had been arrested at least once in every trade port in the world, but he hated trouble. At least he said he did.

He was saying so now as we stood in the little bar of his Baja California ranch. "I tell you Duce, it's okay for you young guys, but for an old crook like me it's plumb hell, that's what it is."

He had a wheezy, cockney voice, salted by twenty years at sea.

"I'm not saying," he whined on, "that I didn't run a few Chinks in my day, or that I never brought in opium, or whiskey, but that's all in the past. I'm a quiet citizen. I've settled down in Mozo-land to mind my own business, running a ranch for hunters. I wish I could get that through the authorities' heads."

I grinned and finished my drink. Bill sounded so earnest that I feared he might break into tears, but either the border patrol didn't believe in change or they were holding old scores against Bill, for he couldn't cross the line.

"Trouble is," he went on. "People believe my reputation. Every crook beats it in this direction when he gets the heat turned on him. I don't want crooks for customers—they spoil the tone of the place. I want respectable guys with dough, not crooks."

"I'm respectable."

He shook his head slowly. "No, you aren't. I'm not accusing you of being dishonest, but you got impulses that way, and everywhere you go, trouble shows up right afterwards. And the cops aren't always certain that it wasn't your fault."

"I've never been convicted."

He bobbed his head. "Bragging again. But you will. Nobody's that smart. I was hoping the Army would change you, but the boys say you won seventeen thousand in Australia."

"It was only twelve," I told him, "and I lost most of that in Manila. Some of those sergeants know their dice."

"Anyhow," he went on, "you see my point. We're pals, but you gotta scram. I'm out for high class trade nowadays and I

just can't have you around, stinking up the landscape. I'm sorry."

"Sure," I said, "and so am I. But I'm staying."

We stood and looked at each other. I knew there was a shotgun under the bar and that it was loaded. I also knew that if Bill thought it worth while, he'd use it. I was gambling on his thinking it wouldn't be worth the trouble to blow my insides all over his bar-room floor.

He sighed and poured himself a drink. Ordinarily he didn't touch anything stronger than Cola. I knew by that that he was laboring under great stress.

"I'm a reasonable man," he complained. "I got some swells staying at the ranch, now, and I just can't have a card sharp and high class dice man around. You gotta go, Duce—I love you like a brother, but so help me, if you continue difficult, I'll just naturally have to stoop to murder."

"And who are you going to kill?"

The voice was rich and full and warm, and it held a lot of amusement. I turned around and looked at its owner. She was like her voice and very nice to look at, indeed. Her hair was light brown, with traces of gold, her eyes were grey and looked greyer because of her suntan.

My heart did a flip-flop like an ace coming out of a cold deck.

"He's going to kill me," I told her, "with a shotgun. It'll be messy. You wouldn't care to stand around and watch."

"But I could use a collins," she told me. "A tall one, with lots of ice and plenty of rum."

Bill Potter was looking at us and his monkey face was screwed up with disgust. "There you go," he said. "Just when I get some big-time trade, you spoil it. I should cut my throat with a dull razor. I never would get this place improved while the likes of you make it headquarters. I'm sorry, Miss Lee."

"I'm not," she said. "Why not introduce the gentleman?"

"You'll regret it," he promised her. "This is no gentleman. They threw him out of the Army for winning all the general's medals in a short-card game. They call him Duce Callahan because he never has a duce in his hand unless there are four of them."

"It's a lie," I said. "They call me that because I never have more than a two dollar bill."

"I'll tell you the truth," said Bill, finishing her collins and shoving it across the bar. "If you want to know, he got the name because he's such a rotten shot that he always has to use two bullets to kill a man."

The girl laughed. "You two—are you try-

ing to frighten me away from the ranch?"

Bill was gloomy. "I'll tell you how it is," he explained. "Because of this funny-looking map that nature gave me in place of a face, everyone mistakes me for a crook, so, for years, all the easy money boys used this as headquarters."

"I'm trying to stop that. I'm going to cater only to nice people, like you."

The girl thanked him with a smile, then turned to me. "Mr. Potter hasn't learned all the social graces. I'm Annabelle Lee."

I said, "I'm Clarence Callahan. We'll skip the Clarence. The name is really Duce. Now I'm going to move my bags in before Bill changes his mind."

He started to reach for the shotgun, looked at the girl and didn't. Having nice people around certainly cramped Bill's style—he didn't act natural at all.

THE key rack in the big front room showed that number ten was empty. I helped myself and climbed the stairs. I was still using a barracks bag and it was heavy. I went along the hall and pushed open the door, stepping into a big, square, airy room. Outside it was getting dark. The air was cooling although it still had the hot smell of summer dust and I went over to the window, raised it and stood admiring the hills and feeling freer and more content than I had for a long time.

Then I turned around and saw the man with the beard.

He wasn't a very big man and the beard wasn't very large. It was grey, trimmed to a point in what they once called a Van Dyke before beavers went out of style. The beard lay outside the covers. His head was in the exact center of the pillow. His eyes were brown and slightly glazed and stared unseeingly at the ceiling.

He'd been dead some time.

I went over and pulled the covering blanket down off his shoulders. He wasn't very big, but the bullet hole over his heart was. I stood gaping down at him for a long time—then turned and, locking the door behind me, went back to the barroom.

The girl was no longer in sight. Bill was behind the dark counter, washing glasses.

He looked up and caught my eye. I just stayed there, looking at him and after a while he began to fidget.

Finally he ran his tongue nervously around the circle of his lips. "What room did you take?"

"Ten," I said, still not moving.

He didn't speak. He gave me a long, penetrating glance, then reached under the bar for his shotgun.

"Put it down," I told him. My automatic was in my hand and he must have known I

meant business, for he put the gun down regretfully.

"So you don't like trouble," I said. "What were you planning to do, keep the guy with the beard on ice?"

His monkey face got a hurt look. Without turning he reached up behind him, got a bottle and took a long pull from the neck. His face looked like a yellow mass with a tinge of green in it.

"I don't like stiffs," he complained, wiping his thin lips with the back of his hand. "You want to make five hundred dollars?"

I stared at him. Bill Potter loved a dollar as much as he hated trouble, probably more. "What gives?"

"Take him away," said Bill. "For twenty hours I haven't worried about anything else. Twice last night I started to move him and every time one of my high-toned guests wanted service of some kind. It's getting so a man can't call his soul his own."

"Or dispose of his own bodies," I added.

"He's not mine," Bill squawked. "He came in here night before last and registered as Professor Adams. I never saw or heard of him before. He claimed to be a bug-hunter, down to study the insects of this country. Who the hell wants to study insects?"

"Maybe this guy did. Is that why you killed him?"

"I didn't—" Bill began.

"How'd he get killed?"

"You should ask me! I found him out behind the garage early this morning. I put him in the Ford, figuring to watch my chance and take him back in the hills, and right away that Lee girl shows up and wants the Ford for a trip to the beach. While she was getting her stuff together I hoisted the professor to the balcony and moved him into ten. I haven't had a chance to switch him again."

"Very careless to leave the key on the rack," I said.

He swore at me. "How'd I know you'd come snooping around? I figured you were a million miles away. No one else would have walked in there."

"Where's the guy's baggage?"

His face got its hurt look again. "So now you're going to accuse me of rolling a stiff."

"It's your guilty conscience talking," I said. "I haven't accused you of anything. I just like to know the name of a stiff before I bury him. I want to enter it in my record book."

"I told you his name was Adams." The voice was sullen.

"Sure," I said, "and I've signed Smith on a lot of hotel registers."

He threw up his hands. "Okay. His bags are in the closet of ten. Go on, look through

them, you ghou! but be sure to move him as soon as it's safe. Having him in my best room doesn't help business any."

I didn't argue that point. I went back upstairs. I don't know what warned me just outside the door of room ten. I don't think that I heard any sound, but I was dead certain, suddenly, that there was someone in the room.

I GOT my gun in one hand, took a firm grip on the knob with the other, pulled the door toward me so that the latch would have less chance of clicking as I turned the knob.

The lights were on within. The professor still lay on the bed, staring at the ceiling without interest, and there didn't seem to be anyone else around. I was just letting my pent-up breath out slowly when she backed from the closet.

She was carrying a heavy bag and didn't see me until I spoke.

"Having fun?"

Annabelle Lee's big grey eyes were large, soft and startled. "I didn't hear you."

"I didn't mean you to."

She had trouble finding words. "I—would you like to make five hundred dollars?"

"That's the second offer I've had within ten minutes," I told her. "The guy on the bed is already dead, so it can't be for murdering him."

Some of the softness went out of her eyes and I found they could be hard and glittery upon occasion. "Nothing like it." Her words were clipped. "I've lost something, something valuable. I've got to find it."

"In the professor's luggage?"

She started. "You know who he is, then. I—I thought you were a gambler. Who are you, really?"

"A gambler," I told her.

"You're something else." She was suspicious. "You're mixed up in this somehow."

"In what?"

She was floundering. "I—well, this man," she indicated the quiet figure on the bed, "stole something that belonged to me. I followed him down here to get it."

"And put a bullet in his chest when he wouldn't come across."

"I did not. Do you think I look like a murderer?"

"You look like a pin-up girl," I said frankly. "All sweetness and light, but you're still rummaging in a grip that belongs to a dead man and the law might want to know why."

"The law," she was startled. "You mean the Mexican police?"

I nodded. "They're very strange people, but they have their ways of dealing with murder."

She seemed to be thinking it over. I didn't know exactly what was going on in her mind. If I had, I would never have let her bring out the small gun.

As it was, I didn't even see where she got it. But it was in her hand suddenly, pointing directly at my wishbone.

"On second thought," she said, "why should I pay you anything? Drop your gun."

I didn't answer. There was nothing to say. She was too far away for me to grab her, and I didn't relish the idea of a gun-duel with a pretty brunette.

"Drop it," she said, as if my mind were an open book. And then, "Get into that closet."

I obeyed. Something in her tone told me that she would stand for no foolishness. The door closed and I heard the bolt go over.

That closet wasn't made for general living. It was close and dark and I've never liked dark places.

when I heard the shuffling noise outside. I stopped, waited. A key turned in the closet lock, and I shoved with my foot.

The door banged back and I heard a grunt, and came with both fists swinging. It wasn't the girl this time—it was a yellow-haired guy in a grey-checked suit. My left caught his stomach as he pawed at his face, which apparently had been pretty badly bumped by the door.

He doubled over and the air wooshed from his lips. Then he sat down and I thought he was going to be sick. His face turned the color of the rug.

Apparently he'd been holding a gun. It lay on the floor, a couple of feet to his right.

I picked it up, made certain it was working, and thrust it into the waistband of my pants. Then I watched him pull himself together. Gradually the wind I'd knocked out of him was coming back. The green faded from his cheeks and the strained, pain-twisted look went out of his eyes.

When they got normal he focused them on me and said reprovingly. "What—you have to do that for?"

"I didn't like being locked in closets," I said.

"I didn't lock you in." His wind was still painful and he had difficulty in gaining his

CHAPTER TWO

Dead Man's Gold

IT WAS a good twenty minutes since the girl had locked me in. I put my foot under the lock and was about to shove, resting my shoulders against the rear wall for purchase,

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feet, but he finally made it. "I let you out."

I nodded. "With a gat in your mitt. Where's the girl?"

"What girl?"

"The pin-up number that calls herself Annabelle Lee."

"Oh!" It was evident that he knew Miss Lee. "Did she lock you in there?"

"I caught her frisking the professor's baggage." I indicated the silent corpse with a jerk of my head. "I'll bet he doesn't rest easy. When I die, I hope they give me peace and quiet. I've always been taught to respect the dead, but no one cares how much noise they make around him."

Apparently the man in the checked suit had little interest in the dead professor. "Did she find anything?"

I didn't know. I was tired answering questions, I thought it was my turn to ask some. After all, I now had the gun. "Look," I said. "I'm a bystander, see? So far I'm innocent, but I'm likely to start making corpses myself unless somebody tells me what the hell gives. I'd just as soon start with you."

"Who are you?"

I said, "Look, Buster, you've got the routine all mixed. I'm the straight man, asking the questions. You're supposed to fill in with the funny answers."

"Why should I?" He had blue eyes which bordered on green and his hair might have been redder if he hadn't been out in the sun a lot.

I showed him his own gun. "This is one reason. Shall I think up a better one?"

He said, "I see your point—I guess there's nothing else to do but tell it straight. I could play tough, let you maul me around and find it in my pocket anyhow."

"Find what?"

He pulled a little leather tab from his pocket. It held a round badge with a shield on the front. "Treasury agent," he said. "Internal revenue division."

I said, "When did you boys start hunting in Baja California—or are you hunting?"

"Three million in gold," he said. "Wouldn't you hunt, too?"

I stared at the badge, then at the man. A treasury agent horsing around complicated matters. I didn't offer to return the gun. The badge looked okay—I'd seen badges like it before—but after all a badge was merely a badge. You can have them made at certain joints I know and they don't ask you any questions, either.

I started to say something and then didn't. He was looking at me and smiling in a way I didn't like.

He said, "Well, Callahan?"

I started. "You know who I am?"

His smile got wider, but it held no more warmth.

"It's my business to know things like that. You're twenty-eight or -nine. You're a gambler who works for himself and for other people. You were in the Army three years and came out with a medical discharge, the Purple Heart and a couple of medals. Right now you're down here representing Joe Streeter and you're supposed to buy three million in stolen gold and smuggle it back into the United States."

I whistled. "You seem to have the book open at the right place."

He shrugged. "That's our business. We made a kind of deal with Streeter and as far as we know he's on the level, but you never know."

I thought that over.

"You know so much," I said, finally, "that maybe you know a little more—things which would help me. Streeter wasn't very explicit. I was to meet a guy down here, a guy who would call himself Professor Adams. This Adams was to put me in touch with the boys who are guarding the gold. I understand it's hidden in an old mine shaft somewhere."

He nodded. "That's correct."

"So I arrived today," I went on, "and the first thing I found is this Adams in my bed, only he isn't in any condition to tell where this gold cache is."

He gnawed at a knuckle thoughtfully. "That makes it bad. I thought you'd know. Streeter was down there once, wasn't he?"

"Sure," I admitted, "but they had him in blinders at the time. The only thing he told me was to come here, contact Adams and buy the gold."

"And there wasn't any clue in the professor's luggage?"

I shook my head. "I wouldn't know. The Lee girl made off with it while I was locked in the closet. Maybe we should ask her."

He brightened at that and turned toward the door. I said, "Hey, wait. You forgot something. You didn't mention your name. I can't just run around calling you treasury agent, now can I?"

He turned back, his lips smiling, but his eyes cool and green-looking. "Sorry," he said. "You can call me Verl. Verl Marcus."

I sighed. "That must be right. No one but a mother could think of a name like that."

I TURNED and moved to the hall door, opening it. There was a man standing in the hallway outside. A dark man with a white suit and nice wavy hair that glistened. He smiled and his teeth were as white as his suit.

"Ah! Señor Callahan. It has been a long time."

It had been a long time—and I wished it had been a lot longer. Ordinarily I liked Rodriguez. He had a lot of savvy and he was tolerant for a cop, but just now he was the last person in the world whom I wanted to see.

I stood in the doorway so that my body would block his view of the bed. "It's swell to see you. I'll tell you what. Go on down to the bar and I'll be with you in a minute. We'll knock over a couple to old times. In fact, we'll knock over a dozen."

His dark handsome face was impassive. "The bar does not please me, señor. I much prefer to knock them over here, as you put it."

"Sorry." I stepped out into the hall. "But a friend of mine is asleep in here and I wouldn't like to wake him. He's had a hard day."

"But I want to meet this friend of yours." There was nothing tough about Rodriguez, but neither did he give an inch. His black eyes were hard.

I shrugged, knowing I was licked. He'd never have acted this way if he hadn't known something. I stepped back and he came cautiously into the room, moving like a cat.

He stopped just inside the door and looked Verl Marcus over with a slow, steady stare. Then he turned his attention to the bearded figure on the bed and then to me.

"Your friend sleeps very soundly indeed."

I said, "He's no friend of mine. I found him in this room when I arrived. He died sometime last night judging by the condition of the body."

"So?"

"I wasn't here last night. Bill Potter can tell you." I knew, even as I said the words that they were a mistake. Bill would never back me up on this. It was too good an out for him.

"And where were you last night? You crossed the border yesterday afternoon. A man of mine recognized you."

I swore under my breath. I had crossed the night before. I'd stayed with some old friends who had a goat ranch south of Tia Juana, people whom I'd known for years. But they were poor and unimportant. They would be scared of the police and their word would have little weight. I was nicely caught and knew it. I'd had experience with Mexican law before. It is just, but it adheres to the letter of the rules.

"And why are you in Mexico?" He was unbending. "The last time you were warned that your presence was not wanted."

"That was before the war. Surely—"

"We feel the same." He was entirely unemotional.

I saw the whole deal going up in smoke.

Whether or not I cleared myself of the charges arising from the little bearded man's death was unimportant. There would be questions asked, every guest's movements would be traced. It was certainly not a time to try and move any hot gold.

I looked toward Marcus, thinking at least if the worst came to the worst he could put in a word for me, but his face, too, was expressionless, his eyes glittering a little greenly.

"Call in your men," I told Rodriguez. "I've nothing else to say."

He appeared surprised. "I have no men. Have you forgotten I handle things alone?"

Something flashed in my brain. It was crazy, yet it would give me a few hours. What I could accomplish in that short a time I didn't know, but I've lived for years by taking chances, by playing my hunches. He was watching carefully to see that I didn't pull a gun, but like most Latins he forgot that a man can use his fists.

I pivoted on the ball of my left foot and sent across a right jab that crashed into his chin. I'm not sure that he even knew what hit him. He sat down and then rolled over on his side.

I turned around, my gun in my hand, covering Verl Marcus. "Want to make something of it?"

He looked at me, at the gun. "Why should I?"

"He's a cop—" I indicated the quiet man on the floor—"and you're a treasury agent."

"Without jurisdiction down here."

I nodded. "Listen, you know why I'm down here. It's to the advantage of the department for me to succeed. I've got to beat this rap. I'm going to tie him up in the wine cellar. Chances are he won't be found until morning, which gives me that much time, but I need help."

"Okay." He didn't blink.

"Then take a look at the hall. If it's empty go down the back stairs. If the way's clear, whistle and I'll bring him down."

Three minutes later I heard the whistle. I carried my charge down and put him among the wine barrels. It was as simple as that, but I had the shakes when I got back to my room. Verl Marcus gave me a drink from his flask.

ANNABELLE LEE was seated before the brush fire in the big stone fireplace, talking to a couple of men, as we came downstairs. She looked as crisp and fresh as if she'd stepped from a Vogue advertisement—and as unconcerned as if she'd never seen a gun, a dead man, or a closet door.

"Why, there you are, Mr. Callahan!" she sang out. "I was beginning to wonder what had happened to you."

"I've been smothering," I said. "Mr. Marcus rescued me. The closet door blew shut, or something."

She never batted an eyelash. They were so long that I wondered whether they were real or not. The rest of her suddenly didn't look real, either. I don't know quite what I mean by that, but it was as if she'd been kept under cellophane all her life and might break if she stepped out into the air. I wondered what a dame like that was doing in the brush country, but I've found that gold does funny things to people—and people do funny things for gold.

I'd been so busy with the girl that I hadn't paid any attention to her companions. Both were done up like a couple of Abercrombie hunters with all the trick gadgets in clothes you could think of, and I'd marked them down at the back of my mind as a couple of tenderfeet—from Hollywood, probably—the kind of trade Bill Potter was angling for, all dough and no brains.

It jarred me to my teeth when one said in a lipping tone, "Hi-yah, Duce."

I looked at him twice then, and it was like meeting a figure out of a bad nightmare. I hadn't seen Bozo Scovill for four years, not since the night I'd won ten gees in his Reno night club and had to pull a gun to get out with it. He was a short man, and thick, and he looked thicker in his dude hunting rig. His face was flat, his nose not much more than a button and his eyes stuck out almost as far as it did.

I looked at the other guy and heard Bozo say, "You remember Phil Ryan."

I remembered Ryan. They'd called him the king of the confidence men in the twenties. He'd peddled more sour mining stock and oil royalty shares than any four other easy-money boys in the racket. A dangerous guy, they'd always said. He broke a rule which confidence men seldom break. He always carried a gun and he'd used it a couple of times, although the cops never made any charges stick.

I looked from one to the other and then I looked at the girl. The parts of the puzzle were beginning to fall into place. These three seemed to belong together like a quart of water belongs with a gallon of oil, but I had it figured now. She was the pigeon, the sucker bait, with these two wolves lurking in the background to pluck the chump after he had fallen for the dame.

And these were the nice refined people Bill Potter was catering to, the people he wanted at his ranch in place of me. I wanted to laugh aloud. Either old Bill was slipping or he'd been kidding. Certainly he should have been able to spot them for what they were.

I said to Scovill, "Just like old home

week. I thought you were in jail or dead."

He grinned. His teeth were yellow and broken—not a handsome character, any way you took him.

"You know me, Duce, never in jail. I'm too smart."

"Then I should think you'd have stayed in Reno" I said, sitting down on the arm of the girl's chair. "What with the industry the war brought, the naval storage dump and the air fields, that country should have been rich pickings."

"It was," he grinned. "Any time you feel like losing dough go up there. I still got the club. But at the moment we have larger fish."

"Like three million in gold," I told him.

He shot a quick glance toward Verl Marcus and frowned, looking like an angry frog who has just missed catching a fly. "You always did open your mouth too wide."

"Don't mind him," I said, nodding toward the silent Marcus. "He's interested in the gold too, aren't you, Verl?"

The blond treasury man nodded. "At times." He yawned, as if the subject bored him.

"Look," I said. "I don't know the score, or why you people are down here. I can guess, but it would be sweet if you'd tell me and save us all a lot of trouble. We're either working together, or we're trying to cut each other's throats. If the latter is the case, you know what will happen in the end. We'll have a nice, quiet little private war and finally the Mexican authorities will step in and grab the works. Time is short."

Phil Ryan spoke unexpectedly. He had a deep, resonant voice like an old fashioned preacher. "Duce is right," he said. "We're on the same side. There's no need for us to play hide and seek with each other."

"All but him." Bozo Scoville jerked his thumb toward Verl Marcus. Where does he cut into this?"

"He's my special man," I said. "He goes around letting me out of closets when your girl friend locks me in."

"You mean he's working for you?" Scovill wasn't convinced.

"You can call it that," I said. "Or maybe I'm working with him."

Scovill looked at Ryan who shrugged. "What have we got to lose?" the big confidence man said tonelessly. "If he gets in the way—" he let the words drift with his cigar smoke, but his meaning was clear. Marcus looked around at him quickly.

SCOVILL cleared his throat. "Okay." He sounded as if he were talking against his better judgment. "What is it you want to know?"

"The works," I told him. "If you fit into the picture the way I think you do, you're the

guys who did business with Joe Streeter in Hollywood."

"He told you that?"

I didn't answer yes or no. We were supposed to be trading information and if they knew I had nothing to trade, they'd clam up quick.

I said, "Never mind what Joe told me. It's your turn. Mine will come later."

Bozo didn't like that. He'd gambled for years, but always with a cold deck. He didn't like playing in the dark without any marked cards.

"Okay, wise guy. We were the men who talked to Streeter in Hollywood. We showed him half a million in gold."

"And he bought it," I said. "We've kind of got the cart before the horse. You're starting at the end of the story. Let's jump in at the first and go through the whole thing. How did you get into this gold deal in the first place? I'm not asking from curiosity. I've got a good reason."

"What reason?" It was Ryan cutting into the talk.

I turned to look at him. "You're a smart bird, Phil. At least so I've heard. You shouldn't have to ask me that, but I'll tell you anyhow. My orders were to come down here, to meet a guy named Adams who knew where this gold is hidden. Then I was to get it out of the country."

They nodded.

"Okay," I went on. "I came down here and the first thing I found was Adams' corpse. I've got to know who Adams was and where he came from, because he must have had friends and associates somewhere, and one of them might know where the gold is. Otherwise it's lost for everybody concerned, as far as I can figure."

They nodded again.

"So the best thing you can do," I went on, "is to tell me everything you know. Otherwise I might as well throw my duffle into a bag and head back for L.A. Joe hired me to buy some gold and move it out of Mexico but how in hell can I buy something when I don't know where it is?"

"That's hitting the hammer with the nail," Ryan admitted. "Go ahead, Bozo, tell him what we know."

Scovill took a deep breath. "Well, it's this way. Five years ago a miner I know came to see me in Reno. He said that a lot of the boys had been hi-jacking gold from the various mines in which they were working and turning it over to an assayer named Adams, up in Idaho. There was a lot of it and they didn't know what to do with it. They'd had some fool scheme about finding a claim and pretending that the gold came from there, but this Adams was a smarter cookie and told

them that wouldn't work. Any expert could spot gold by its color, silver content, etc., and know that it couldn't have come from their phoney mine.

"They were in a spot. They had the gold and they were starving to death. They wanted me to use my connections and arrange to sell it to shady jewelers and such. I didn't know that game, so I called in Phil." He nodded toward Ryan. "Phil used to do business in fake jewelry and the like and he had connections all over the country. We peddled a little of it that way—then came the freezing order. That didn't bother us too much, except we had to be more careful. But the war made a big difference. We'd advanced a lot of dough to keep the boys going and we had part of the gold. They delivered it to us in small batches as we paid for it."

"They didn't trust you," I grinned.

"Where gold is concerned," he said unruffled, "no one ever trusts anyone else. At any rate, we got in pretty deep. We finally had half a million on our hands and no market. That's when we went to Joe Streeter and made the first deal. He paid us."

I nodded. We didn't seem to be getting anywhere, but I curbed my impatience. I wondered what they would say if they knew that I had a Mexican police officer tied up in the cellar and that someone might show up looking for him at any time.

If Scovill noticed my abstraction he gave no sign, for he went on. "The deal gave us enough to buy into the rest of the cache—two million and a half." He rolled the words off his thick lips lovingly. "We talked the boys into smuggling it into Mexico. They brought Joe Streeter and me down here. They blindfolded us and took us all around the country. Finally we arrived at this deserted mine and there the gold was, all piled up, ready to be shipped, but I couldn't find that mine again in a million years. And I'm afraid Streeter couldn't either."

I was afraid so myself. It all sounded exactly like a story out of the Arabian nights. It didn't ring true and if I'd had the sense of a two-year-old I'd have cut and run for the border. But there had to be gold. Streeter, Ryan and Scovill were tough and hard-boiled and without scruples, but they were smart. They wouldn't fall for a gold brick swindle, or for buying the Brooklyn Bridge.

"You're sure it was gold," I said. "Not fake bricks?"

He looked at me pityingly, as if I'd asked him if he knew his name. "Of course I'm sure. Joe and I selected a couple of bricks at random. We took corings and had them assayed when we got back."

"If this gold was already in Mexico, why did this Adams and his people need Streeter,

or you? They could have made a deal with some ship captain to carry it to Europe or Cairo—"

He laughed harshly. "Don't think that didn't enter their minds, but they knew they'd probably lose it. Don't you think they figured that out by themselves? Gold right now is about the most dangerous thing you can have—and the easiest to lose. They needed someone like Joe Streeter whose credit it good, who stands well with the Mexican government and with the various exchanges as a front man. How we got in I've told you. And we don't want out."

That made sense.

I asked them, "How well did you know this Adams?"

Bozo Scovill shrugged. "We didn't know him at all," he said. "I never saw him in my life until I saw him as a corpse."

I turned to stare at him. "You didn't! But I thought you did business with him?"

"We did," Scovill admitted, "but we did it through another man, a guy named Heath, the miner I was telling you about. Adams was cagey. He never showed his face. That's one reason I came down here, because I understood he'd be here and I wanted to see what he looked like. Another reason was I don't trust Streeter and, if you want to know, I don't trust you. I've got a stake in this, a big stake. No one is going to freeze me out, not while I'm alive and breathing."

"It looks," I said, "as if we are frozen out. Adams is dead and none of us know where the gold is hidden—that is, unless your man Heath was in on the know."

Scovill spread his hands. "We get no help there," he told me. "Heath died in Hollywood a month ago. Someone shot him in the back while he was drinking beer in a joint on Santa Monica."

CHAPTER THREE

Please Pass the Body

IT WAS an hour past dinner and I was sitting at the bar alone. I'd smuggled a drink to Rodriguez and gotten cursed for my pains. Bill Potter wasn't around and he evidently hadn't discovered the new tenant in his wine cellar.

Personally, I was discouraged. I didn't know why I still hung around instead of scrambling when I could. The gold seemed as lost as if no one had ever seen it. Another buried treasure, I thought, for men to dream about.

I heard a noise and, turning, saw the girl. She stood framed in the lighted doorway and a prettier picture you will never want to see.

~~It hurt me to look at her.~~

I'm no angel myself, but I always figured that when I got emotionally tied up with a dame it would be the kind you could take around and be proud of, not a tramp. And this wren was worse than a tramp. She glittered all over and she made the suckers fall for her, but she gave nothing in return.

I cursed myself for going soft, and I wondered who had killed the little bearded guy, and why. Was it Scovill, was it Phil Ryan, or Bill Potter, or perhaps this girl? My feelings made my voice harsh as I said, "What do you want?"

"A brandy," she smiled. "And I don't see Bill Potter around."

I didn't say anything. I got off my stool, went around the counter and served her.

"Self service?" she asked with a smile and sipped the drink.

I said, "I do as I please."

"Do you always?" She considered me carefully with her eyebrows raised.

I shrugged. "It's no worse for me to serve Bill's liquors than for you to make off with that dead guy's baggage. Find what you were looking for?"

She didn't answer directly. Instead she said, "I'm sorry about locking you in that closet. I didn't know you were in on the play. I thought you were just a tourist who had stumbled into things."

"Skip it." I wasn't looking at her, but I was very conscious that she was sitting so close that our elbows just missed touching.

"No," she said. "On a deal like this people should understand each other and work together."

"You aren't working with me. You haven't told me if you found anything in Adams' luggage."

"I didn't—not a thing."

I turned to look at her. Her grey eyes were shadowed and hard to read in the uncertain light. I changed the subject. "A nice pair of customers you're teamed up with."

She didn't pretend to misunderstand. "They've always treated me all right."

"I'll bet. How did you get into the racket anyhow?"

"Racket?"

I was sore. I didn't know exactly why. I had the sudden impulse to slap her, to see how she would look when she cried. I'd never wasted much time on women and less on thinking about them, but I couldn't keep my mind away from this girl. She was like a slow poison.

"Look," I said. "We're both over twenty-one and we both know that two and two makes four. Why a gal with your class and possibilities should be bird-dogging for a couple of lousy chiselers is more than I can figure."

The long lashes came down. "Maybe I like to eat."

I snorted. "Don't give me that. The girls in the stores eat. Anybody can eat. You could have a dozen jobs tomorrow and get by. With proper handling and your looks you could really go places."

"Mr. Callahan, is that a proposition?"

I slapped her then, hard, using the back of my hand. I hit harder than I intended. The action was entirely involuntary. It knocked her off her stool. She sat there on the floor for a full instant, not moving. I didn't move either, didn't try to help her up. Her eyes blazed at me, but she said nothing until she had gained her feet. Then deliberately she picked up my glass, which was nearly full, and threw its icy contents directly into my face.

"Damn you!" she said and the words fairly grated against her teeth. "Damn you for a fool! Let this cool you off." Then she turned on her heel and went quickly out of room.

I still didn't move. I sat there as if the ice from the drink had frozen me. I knew that the whiskey and water were dripping off my nose but I didn't care. I didn't move until I heard him laugh.

I swung around then, my hand moving instinctively toward the gun under my arm. Then I saw the man who called himself Verl Marcus, who said he was a treasury agent, standing in the door of the wine cellar.

The wine cellar opened off the bar. You went down four steps into the long dark room with its casks and racked bottles. It was damp and dusty and not a place to stay in merely for the fun of it. He must have come in the outside way and had a look at Rodriguez. I wondered what he'd been doing there and said so.

He gave me a thin-lipped smile. "Don't worry, your boy friend is still all tied up nice and tight."

"And how long have you been listening at that door?"

He came over and lowered his voice. "Long enough to learn what I wanted to know."

This kind of talk didn't make much sense. "Deal them out on the table." I was jumpy as a cat. I didn't know whether to trust him or not. Maybe he'd turned Rodriguez loose and was stalling to give the latter time to get clear.

He stared at me a long full minute, his eyes glittering greenly in the low lights. Finally he said, still in the low voice. "I had to make up my mind about you and the girl."

"To hell with her. She's a witch."

"You never can tell where women are concerned," he went on slowly. "Sometimes men do funny things."

"Get to the point."

"Joe Streeter wouldn't have picked you for this job unless he thought you could handle an emergency, and I liked the way you handled Rodriguez."

THAT surprised me, but I was getting very tired of the double talk. Either he had something to say or he didn't, and I told him so.

He sat down on the stool at my side and his voice was so low that it was difficult for me to hear what he said, even though his lips weren't six inches from my ear. "What if I tell you that that treasury badge doesn't belong to me?"

I didn't turn my head. I raised my eyes so that I could see him in the back-bar mirror. "Well?"

"You aren't surprised?"

"I'm never surprised," I lied.

"And what if I tell you that my name is Adams?"

That got me. I turned my head then to find that he was smiling thinly. "So you're Adams? Then who is the little dead guy upstairs, the guy with the beard?"

"The bird who belonged to the treasury badge. I took it out of his pocket."

We looked at each other a long moment in

SMART WOMEN WEAR TREDS



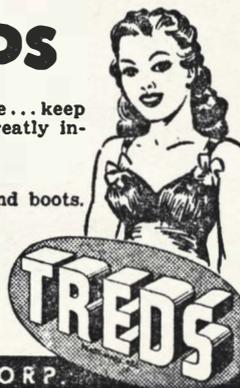
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silence. Then I began to laugh. I laughed silently and without mirth, though it was funny at that. Here Bozo Scovill, Phil Ryan and I were all hopping around lost, because a guy named Adams whom we'd never seen had been killed, and all the time Adams was sitting around watching us.

I stopped, wiping my eyes with my handkerchief. "You're quite a joker," I told him. "Or maybe you had a reason."

"I had a reason." His mouth was tight. "There's an old saying: When you lie down with dogs, you get fleas. Scoville and Ryan are a couple of dogs. When I found them down here I knew something had to be done."

"So you killed the treasury man and saddled him with your name?"

His eyes flared. "I didn't say that. When I found him dead I decided to use him."

"And why are you telling me this?"

"Because," he said, "I've got two million and a half in gold to sell and you have the money to buy it."

I grinned. I was beginning to get the picture. "So it's a freeze-out. You do business with me and Bozo and Ryan whistle for their share, to say nothing of the girl."

His thin face got an ugly look. "To hell with them. They made a lot of promises. They were going to buy the gold and handle it themselves. That was the original deal, but when the time came to deliver, they wouldn't, or couldn't. They stalled along and finally they got Streeter into the deal. But they still wanted their original cut."

I shrugged.

He was watching me closely. "You see why I had to know how you stood? You seemed to know them—and the girl made an impression on you."

I swore under my breath. Was it getting as obvious as that? "In my book," I told him, "They're a bunch of cheap chisellers. They can whistle for their share for all of me."

I could see the relief grow in his face. "Then that's settled."

"You make it sound easy," I told him.

He shrugged. "It is easy. All you have to do is to pay for the gold and take it. As simple as that. Have you got the sight drafts on London that were agreed on?"

"They're in my pocket."

"Let's see them."

I took the gun from the clip. "You'll pardon me if I'm a little cautious," I grinned. "There's been too much passing the body in this deal to suit me and, after all, I'm responsible for seeing that Joe gets his money's worth."

He waved his hands. "No need to worry. Streeter is my last chance. I can't market the stuff myself. My neck is out too far."

I saw what he meant. "Still," I told him,

"I don't know that you are Adams, and I don't know that you can deliver the gold. These are bearer drafts. Anyone can use them. They're the same as cash. If you've checked Joe's credit in London you know that."

His voice was short. "I have Canadian connections. I've checked."

I pulled out the drafts then. They were for two million. The gold was worth two and a half. The rest was Joe's profit if he turned it in to the government.

Me, I didn't like any part of the deal. There were too many holes in it, too much chance of a slip. And I was sitting in the middle, any way the thing broke. Joe was holding me responsible. Bozo Scovill and Phil Ryan would come looking for me, if they ever found that the deal had been made and that they hadn't had their share. It all added up to my neck, one way or the other. I was sitting in a tight game with a busted flush and hoping that I didn't get busted in my turn.

And I couldn't forget the little guy up on the bed in number ten, the guy with the beard, the dead guy who had owned that treasury badge. Nor could I forget the miner named Heath, the man who had served as the first go-between. He was dead—someone had shot him in the back. I wondered why and who. Rodriguez would be certain that it was me.

All this went through my mind while he examined the drafts. I couldn't tell anything by the expression on his face because there wasn't any. This monkey was a cool customer, if I've ever seen one. He'd been jockeying around with that hot gold for several years, and now he had the result in his hands. Mine would have trembled a little; his didn't.

He said merely, "They seem okay. Just tell Joe Streeter that if anything goes haywire, I'll kill him."

"Nothing will," I said, "provided you deliver. When can we get it and how soon can it be moved?"

"Tonight," he told me.

I stared at him. "You mean it's close here?"

His thin grin flashed as he returned the drafts. "In half an hour you can be looking at it. We've got burros. You can move it anywhere you choose."

I drew the first full breath I'd had since Rodriguez had appeared. If we could finish the business this night—if I could get aboard the tuna boat, my troubles would be over for the moment.

I KNEW where to find Bill Potter. At least I thought I did. He had a little workshop down under the garage which looked like a junk dealer's dream. Here he'd gathered scrap for ten years, machinery from abandoned mines, parts of old cars, boats, rope, harness,

almost everything. He loved to tinker and he was tinkering as we came in.

I didn't waste time asking what he was building. The last thing had been a rocket which he intended to fly to the moon. Luckily he'd tried it out on the deserted beach and gotten nothing worse than a singed hand when it backfired and chased him into the water.

"Get out," he said. "How can a man concentrate with you bums around?"

I told him to shut up. "You're going to get in trouble one of these days, lying to me."

"Everyone lies to me—" his voice was plaintive—"why shouldn't I get back at 'em?"

"You're not supposed to get back at anybody," I said. "Now listen. You told me the guy with the beaver, the dead guy was named Adams."

"He got me to." Bill pointed to the man who had called himself Verl Marcus and was in reality Adams. "He gimme a hundred bucks."

"He overpaid you," I told him, "but that's none of my affair. For some reason he trusts you. I guess one crook always recognizes another."

"Damn you!" He reached toward the bench behind him and I guessed rather than saw that the shotgun lay there. "I'm getting tired of your insults, Duce Callahan. I'm going to stop them, once and for all."

I was getting fed up on his heroics. "You bum," I said. "I'm trusting you too." I held up the envelope with the drafts. "Now listen. Be down at the beach in two hours, at the point where we used to swim in the old days, remember?"

He took the envelope suspiciously. "So?"

"You'll hear someone coming down the trail from the bluffs. When you hear that, light this green flare and set it on the beach. When we get there, if I say yes, hand the envelope to Mr. Marcus or Adams, or whatever he calls himself at the moment. Got that straight?"

"More trouble," Bill grumbled. "I can feel it. If the Mexican guards show up—"

"They won't," I promised, though I wasn't any too certain myself. I wondered what he would say if he knew that Rodriguez was an unwilling guest in his wine cellar. Bill was always in trouble with Rodriguez anyhow.

"Just pray for luck," I added. "Got that straight?"

He nodded.

"And don't let your high-toned guests trail you. If they see what's in that envelope, they'll cut your throat."

"What's in it?"

I hesitated. I hated leaving those drafts with Potter, but I didn't dare carry them back into the hills. My throat can be cut as readily as anyone else's. Adams seemed to trust Pot-

ter. Why shouldn't he? If Bill failed to show up with the drafts, Adams would still have his gold. I had to take the chance.

"Two million in drafts on London," I told Bill. "I'll tell you to save you the trouble of steaming open the envelope. And don't get funny ideas about them because they belong to a big shot. If you try and go south, he'll see that they aren't cashed and you won't live long, either."

"There you go, insulting me again."

"Just warning you. If you really don't like trouble, play this straight." I turned to Adams. "Okay, let's go."

We kept away from the hotel. I got my knapsack from my car in the garage and we cut across the hills. Adams had a sense of direction. I was lost in five minutes.

Walking through the brush is a man-sized job, even in daylight—at night it's something to shudder at. The knapsack wasn't heavy, but it was something extra to worry about.

We must have walked for thirty or forty minutes. I guess we went in a straight line. I could think of no other reason why we should wade through loose sand of the washes or clamber up the steep rocky hillsides.

Finally I realized that we were following a path. The moon was out, but it seemed a long way away and it didn't give much light.

It wasn't much of a path, either, winding up through the brush of the mountainside, but it ended finally in a small dump. Someone had driven a tunnel into the side of the hill a long time ago. From the condition of the dump I'd have said that the place hadn't been worked on for fifteen or twenty years.

As we came up the trail a hoarse voice challenged us and Adams answered. They called to each other for a couple of minutes—then I saw a shadowy figure emerge from the rocks above us. He moved down warily and I saw that he carried a rifle at ready.

Another man appeared at the tunnel mouth. He had a submachine gun, and I recalled Joe Streeter's words "*They're tough and gun-happy. . .*" He hadn't been kidding. These boys were looking for trouble and ready for it when it came. I was glad that I'd left those bearer drafts with Bill Potter. This crew would have made short work of me if it had served their purpose.

After a few more mumbled words the guy in the tunnel mouth produced a lantern. I stepped into the circle of its light, careful to keep my hands well away from my sides. I didn't want them to make any mistakes.

Adams said, "This is Duce Callahan, Streeter's man. Everything is all set."

"Where's the dough?" It was the guy with the machine gun.

Adams explained and I could tell by their faces that they were disappointed.

I'd expected that. So had Joe Streeter. I said, "If you don't want the drafts, there will be two million in cash. That's the approximate price for thirty-six hundred pounds of gold which is what you're supposed to have. When we hit the beach you can have the drafts, or the cash—whichever you prefer."

They mumbled a while among themselves. Finally Adams said, "The boys prefer the cash."

I shrugged. "Okay by me."

"Then let's go."

I told him to hold on a minute. He was moving a little too quickly. "I haven't seen the gold, and I want to sample it. I don't buy pigs in pokes."

They took me back to the tunnel. I'm no assayer, but I can give gold a quick test and come close. I bored into the center of five bars, took the corings, weighed them on scales from my knapsack, then heated them with a small blowtorch which I'd also brought along. Getting one button, I tested it. The test showed up well. There was some silver, a little copper—that was to be expected with the home smelting they'd used—but one thing was certain. The bricks were really gold.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Corpse Is Always Right

SATISFIED, I began to hurry them. I was in a sweat now to get to the beach, to get the stuff off my hands. Until this moment I had hardly believed it; but now it was real, it was something men dream about and never see—two million in gold.

We were paying them thirty dollars an ounce. If it were turned in to the government it meant between two and three hundred thousand in profit for Joe Streeter—but if he should not turn it in to the government—if he should market it abroad through channels of his own—he could make seven or eight times the amount!

My mouth watered a little as I thought of it, and of the sucker that I was—for Joe was paying me ten grand and it was my neck that stuck out. He wasn't risking much. Nothing, in fact, for he could stop payment on those bearer drafts.

And suddenly I knew that Bozo Scovill and Phil Ryan had never expected him to turn it in to the government. That was why they had had Adams and his boys smuggle it into Mexico, knowing that Adams didn't have the means of getting it abroad alone, and thinking that once it was here they could talk Streeter into forgetting the treasury, and shipping it to Europe.

I hoped that they wouldn't get wise—that they wouldn't get down to the beach. I had

troubles enough without them. The whole thing was like a big rock, balanced on a point and any little thing going wrong could send it tumbling. First I had Rodriguez and the Mexican authorities to worry about. If they caught us with this unregistered gold we'd probably wind up in a Mexican prison for the rest of our lives. Then there was Bill Potter. He might decide to cut himself in, and finally the crew of the tuna boat. Why shouldn't they decide that gold belonged to whoever found it and latch onto the bars?

The more I thought about it, the more I realized what a damn fool I'd been to get mixed up in this mess. There was just one thing certain. I was going to be blamed for the death of the little bearded treasury agent. Rodriguez would never believe that I'd have knocked him down and tied him up unless I were guilty. It looked as if Duce Callahan was due to take a long trip somewhere, where neither the Mexican nor the U.S. authorities could lay their hands on me.

All for ten grand. I wondered if there were such a spot left on the globe.

THE loaded burros half slid, half plodded down the last cut-bank and gained the shelving beach. With the tide in, the ribbon of sand was little more than a ledge along the foot of the cliffs.

"Okay," Adams said as we stopped, and for the first time his voice showed strain. "Where's Potter? Where's your boat?"

I was beginning to be worried. "Bill," I called. "Hey, Bill!"

"Here." He sounded disgusted as he stepped into sight from the fringe of bushes. "Shut up. Do you want the patrol on our necks?"

I laughed with relief. "Where's the boat? Didn't you light the flare?"

"They're standing off shore. Why don't you dry yourself behind the ears, Junior, before you take up a man's work?"

He couldn't insult me then. I was feeling too much relief. I heard the creak of oars as the boat pulled through the light surf. Another five minutes—ten, at best, I thought—and I'd be on the tuna clipper, safe for the time at least.

Adams issued a tense order. The man with the machine gun squatted at the edge of the bushes, so his gun could rake the beach. They weren't taking chances.

The first man ashore was Joe Streeter. I was surprised. Usually he left these excursions to underlings like me. It showed how much importance he attached to this job.

"Hi, chief."

He wasted no time in greetings. "Did you get it?"

"Yeah, and we gotta move fast. I'll explain later."

Adams guessed who it was. "Those sight drafts are okay by me," he said tensely, "but my men want cash."

Streeter never blinked. "I thought they might. The cash is on the tuna boat."

"Get it."

"And have you grab the cash and keep the gold? No, thanks."

They stared at each other.

I was in a fever of impatience to be gone. "Stop arguing. You've got to trust each other a little. What about sending out a quarter of the gold, let the boat bring back half the cash and take another load, then it can bring back the third fourth, get its load and bring the rest of the cash on the final trip."

They both thought it over. Adams said, "I guess that's okay."

Streeter chuckled. "Good old Duce. You should be sitting at the peace table. You can always think of a compromise."

I couldn't tell him how much I longed to get off that beach. My hunch was working. I could feel trouble.

I turned to Bill Potter. "Okay, give Streeter those sight drafts. They won't be needed."

He was cautious. "Do I still get that thousand you promised?"

For answer I pulled a roll of bills from my pocket and paid him. He counted them twice, then gave Joe the envelope. Streeter checked the contents. We certainly had a lot of faith in each other.

Two men from the boat and the rifle man were loading the bars. The man with the machine gun stayed where he was. When the five hundred thousand in gold had been loaded, Joe started to climb into the boat. Adams said tonelessly, "You stay here."

Streeter looked at him. "I've got to get the cash."

"Send a note to the captain."

I'd have liked to have gone, but I was certain that Adams wouldn't want me out of his sight either. After a moment Joe shrugged, scribbled a note and gave it to one of the oarmen. The rowboat moved out through the surf. We could just see the outline of the clipper lying well off shore. In half an hour they were back with the cash and loading a second time.

Bill shivered. "Too cold for me. I'm going home."

"No, you don't," I said, remembering Rodriguez in the wine cellar. "You might talk to your guests. They'd pay well to know what goes on around this beach at the moment."

"Trying to insult me again."

A SOFT voice from the bush behind us said in the lisping tones of Bozo Scovill, "Don't worry about him telling us, Duce. We're here."

I swore at Potter. "So you did talk, you louse."

"He didn't," said Scovill. "We tailed him."

"It won't do you any good," I said. "There's a guy with a machine gun, covering the beach."

"And Phil Ryan's covering him," Bozo chuckled. "We're old hands at this kind of game." He raised his voice. "Check, Phil?"

"Check," yelled Ryan. "I got the scatter gun. Anyone that moves gets chopped. Keep your hands in the air."

I put my hands up, high. The moonlight wasn't very good. I wanted Ryan to be sure to see them.

There was a sob in Adams' voice as he swore. "You crossed me, Callahan."

I didn't answer. Instead I said to Scovill as he took my gun. "You made a mistake. There's only a million in cash been brought ashore."

"We know that." He was perfectly calm. "We don't want even the full million, only half of it. That's our share and we aren't hogs. If we took the works, we'd either have to kill all of you or have you on our tails for the rest of our lives. As it is, you probably will be glad to get off so easy and won't kick." He turned, walked over to Adams and knocked him down.

"That's for trying to freeze us out," he said. "Now, wrap a half million in cash up in this," he tossed a sack to the ground, "then all of you walk out into the water up to your necks. Don't try and get funny. Phil loves to play with a machine gun."

I started to walk, right then. So did Bill Potter. I noticed that he walked funny and realized that he had the shotgun up in front of him, buttoned inside his vest.

I didn't look back. From the splashes and curses I judged that everyone was following me. Suddenly from somewhere came a spit of gun fire. I thought it was Ryan, getting trigger happy, and ducked into the surf. When I came up the tuna boat had cut on its searchlight and was spraying the whole beach with its white beam. I saw Joe Streeter hurrying toward shore, trying to run in the shallow water.

I expected him to go down any minute. When he gained the beach unhurt I decided it was safe to follow. I was puffing as I came in, demanding what had happened. Ryan was flat on his face, dead. Scovill had a bullet in his chest. Adams and his two men had their hands up and the blonde girl was held between two sailors.

"What happened?" I demanded of Streeter.

He laughed. "These people don't know me very well, Duce. I had another boat land around the point and the men crept over the bluff."

I stared at him, beginning to understand. Those men hadn't been landed from the fishing boat to stop Scovill and Ryan because Streeter hadn't known that Scovill and Ryan were going to show up. They'd been landed for another reason.

"After you got the gold," I accused. "You were going to hold up Adams and his two men and take back the cash, weren't you?"

He nodded, still smiling in his thin-lipped way.

Looking at him, I realized suddenly that I'd always disliked him. I'd never given it much of a thought before. "A fine chiseler," I said. "I'm surprised that a guy with your morals would bother to smuggle the gold back into the U.S. and turn it over to the treasury. You could as easily have your tuna boat meet some ship at sea, and send the gold where you choose."

He slapped his leg. "You are smart. That's exactly what I intend to do."

I stared at him. "But the treasury story?"

He said, "Duce, my boy. I thought that up while I was talking to you that night. I heard that you'd developed a conscience during the war. I figured you'd work better if you thought you were helping Uncle Samuel."

"So you crossed me too. You louse. If I had a gun, I'd straighten things now. I'd—" Bill Potter was standing at my side and I realized his back was to the search light and that he was unbuttoning his vest.

I reached over, grabbed the shotgun and swung it up until the double barrels poked into Streeter's stomach. They'd all been so busy watching me that they had ignored Bill.

"Now," I said, "tell your pretty boys to bring that gold back to the beach. Tell them quick for if I know this gun the triggers are filed and all this has got me nervous as hell!"

He hesitated, then gave the order.

I told Bill, "Get their guns. If they try anything funny, Streeter dies. We don't want the boat crew. We'll have a cutter pick them up before they can make any port, but hang onto Adams and his two men."

THAT'S why Rodriguez found so little to do when he arrived, which he did in less than five minutes. I never thought I'd be glad to see the guy but I was at the moment. True, I had the gun in Streeter's stomach, but I couldn't tell when one of the sailors might get funny ideas and take a crack at me. Bill had lifted their guns, but someone might have a hidden one.

Rodriguez took charge. He had about twenty soldiers with him. Where they'd come from I didn't know, or care. My anger against Streeter had worn off and I began to think what a damn fool I'd been. I didn't need to hear Rodriguez order a couple of the troopers

to arrest me to know that my goose was cooked.

"Okay, big boy," I told him. "You've got me. Just take Streeter, Adams and those two miners along too. Ryan's dead. Scovill's got a bad hole in him, but Bill Potter and the blonde are in the clear. They weren't mixed up in this."

The girl had been standing to one side ever since Bill had freed her from the two sailors. She turned her head now and gave me a startled glance.

Rodriguez started to laugh. "Señor, you amuse me. How one man can be so dense, I do not comprehend. Who do you think it was rescued me from the wine cellar? Who do you think summoned these soldiers, and called the cutter which is even now lying off the point, waiting for that fishing boat to try and put out to sea?"

I stared. "You mean she did? But how—why? What was she doing in the wine cellar?"

"She was looking for me," he said. "She it was who sent me to your room, saying that there was a dead man there, one of her colleagues. When I disappeared she summoned the soldiers and then searched until she found me."

"Her colleague?" I looked toward the girl.

She was smiling. "There was a manpower shortage during the war," she said, "and they haven't fired me yet."

"And that's what you were doing, bird-dogging for those two chiselers?"

She nodded. "For two years. We've been after the gold that long. Sawyer, the dead man, was working on Adams, posing as a miner."

I breathed deeply. "Then everything is swell."

"No," said Rodriguez. "Everything is not swell for you. I admit you turned on your employer and helped save the gold, but the murder of the bearded one—"

"He couldn't have done that," the girl said hastily. "He wasn't at the hotel at the time."

"I'm no detective," I said. "But my pick would be Adams. This guy Sawyer was working on him, and Adams must have gotten suspicious and killed him. He had Sawyer's badge and he posed as an agent. There's something else, a man named Heath was killed in Hollywood a month ago. He knew what Adams looked like and since Adams was getting ready to cross Ryan and Scovill he may have killed Heath to close his mouth. It's worth working on, anyhow. You boys have ways—" I winked and was surprised when Rodriguez winked back. I began to think he might be human after all.

Later the girl and I were having a drink at the ranch bar. Bill Potter leaned on the counter in a talkative mood. "You know, Duce, I

always liked you, but I wasn't certain you was a right guy."

"Skip it," I said. "Why don't you go to bed?"

"I ain't sleepy," he told me. "You could have knocked me over with a feather, Duce, when you told the cops I was in the clear. No one ever did it for me before. Of course I give you the shotgun, but still and all, you didn't have to go to bat for me, especially when you thought your own neck was in a jam. I'm going to buy you a free drink."

"Look," I said. "We don't want a drink.

We don't want to hear you talk. We want to be alone."

Bill looked hurt, his eyes raveling from me to the girl and back. "All right, all right. I can take a hint. Only, I'm warning you, Duce, women cause trouble, especially blonde ones."

With a sigh he picked up the shotgun and went through the wine cellar, we could hear him for a long time, muttering to himself outside—then everything was still save for our own voices.

Somehow we seemed to have a lot to say to each o her.

THE END



THEY'RE BACK

...AFTER YEARS
ON THE
FIGHTING
FRONTS!



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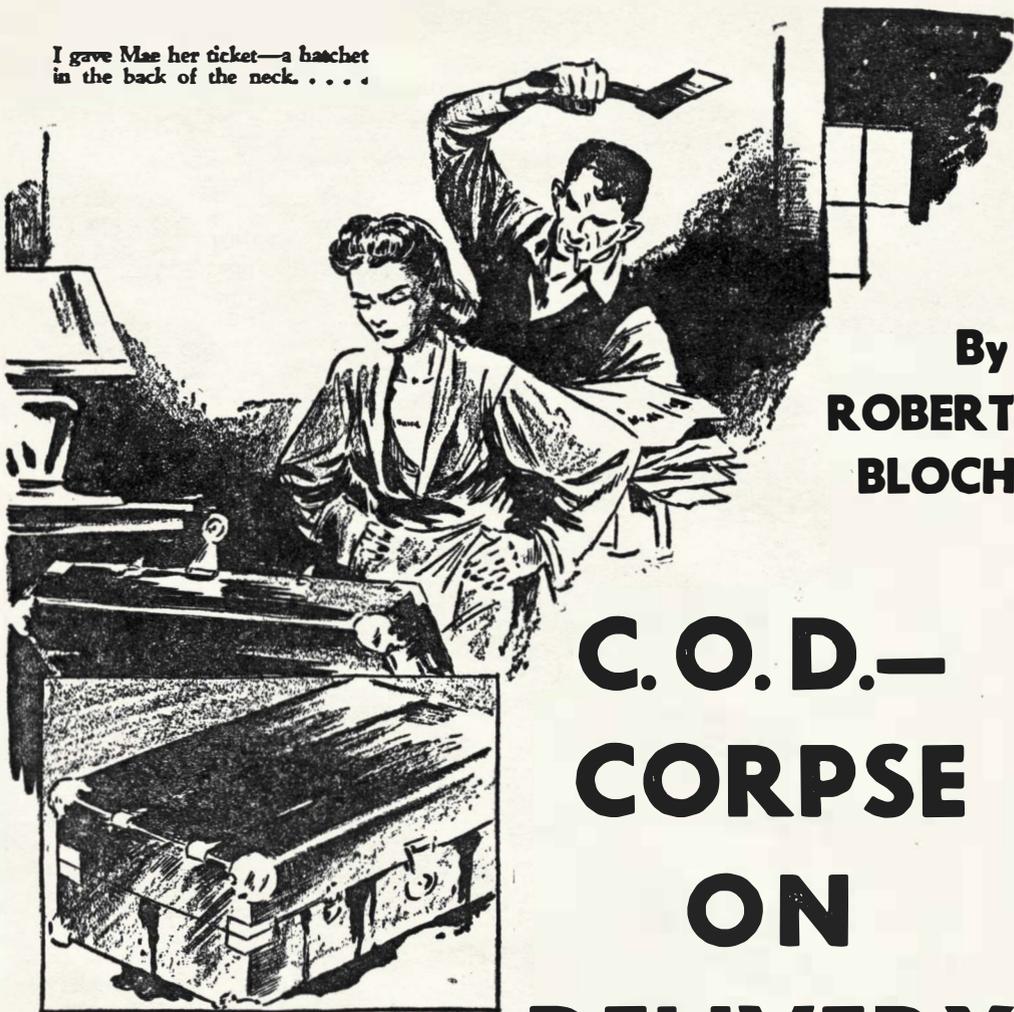
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I gave Mae her ticket—a hatchet
in the back of the neck. . . .



By
**ROBERT
BLOCH**

C. O. D.— CORPSE ON DELIVERY

WHEN I came in, the living room was empty. I set the trunk down in the middle of the rug and lay down next to it.

I was too bushed to move. I lit a cigarette and panted on it. My coat was sweated under the arms, so I took it off and used it for a pillow.

After a while I got up and went over to the window. I pulled back the shade and looked across the street to the cigar store. That's where I figured he'd be, if he'd picked me up again.

He was there, all right. Just loitering in the doorway with a waiting-for-a-street-car look. Well, maybe he thought it was going over. It might have, if I lost my nose. But outside of that, I can smell a shamus a mile off—and cheap dicks like Logan I can smell from here to Hoboken.

I peeked just long enough to make sure he

*Mae didn't like going away alone,
but I couldn't go where she went.
For I had a date with a redhead—and
she had one with death!*

wasn't going to move for a bit. Because while he was playing cigar-store Indian, I had work to do.

I walked back, doused my cigarette, took another look at the trunk on the floor, and headed for the bedroom. Sure enough, Mae was asleep in there. She was lying on her stomach with her kimono all tangled up under her. Quite a dish, all right. But this was no time for sentiment.

I reached down and slapped her in a friendly spot. She snorted and opened her eyes.

"Hello, honey. When'd you get in?"

"Little while ago. Figured I'd let you rest. You don't know it, but you got a long stretch ahead of you."

"Huh?"

"Rise and shine, baby. You're pulling out of this dump."

She sat up and stared at me, pushing her hair out of her eyes.

"What's cooking, Tony?"

I smiled. "Plenty. It's all lined up. You're taking a little trip, starting tonight. Chicago."

"Alone, you mean?"

I nodded.

She got that sulky look. "What's the big idea? You trying to pull a fast one?"

"Come here, baby," I said.

I pulled her off the bed and over to the window. You could see the cigar store from here, too. Logan was still standing in the doorway, trying to look inconspicuous. His feet stuck out a mile.

I pushed the curtains back and pointed him out to her.

"Copper?"

I shrugged. "Logan. He's been tailing me all over town today. I shook him for a little while, but he must have picked me up again. He doesn't know enough to put the finger on me yet, but he sure as hell won't like it if he sees us scrambling out of town together. That's why you're going alone."

She gave me one of those searching looks. I didn't mind. When it came to reading my mind, Mae needed glasses.

"What about you?" she asked. "How do I know you aren't pulling a fast one?"

I heaved a sigh. "I can't figure this, baby. We hook up together. We plan the slickest heist you ever saw. You case the job for me, but I pull it off alone. Why? Just so they can't pin anything on you if something goes wrong."

She didn't say anything.

"I plant the ice in a safe place until we can turn it into cash," I went on. "Then I run around town brushing dicks off the trail. Now we're being tagged. So what do I do? Before I get the dough, I take all kinds of chances just to figure a way to get you

out of town ahead of me, in the clear. And then you ask me if I'm pulling a fast one!"

I sighed, just for emphasis.

"Aw, gee, Tony. You know I trust you."

"You better trust me," I said. "You're getting on a train tonight. Alone. Logan may tail us, but he'll stick to me. Tomorrow, some time, I'll manage to shake him. Then I'll get the cash. It's coming through; don't worry about that."

"Honest?"

"Sure." I grinned. "I saw Fat Frisco today. He's made a connection."

"How much?"

"Eighteen."

Her eyes got wide.

"Eighteen grand?"

I nodded. "In cash. Strictly. Three days from now I'm joining you in Chj with the folding. After that, we're hitting for the big time. Okay?"

"Okay," she said. But she didn't sound as if she meant it.

I grabbed her by the shoulders.

"Look, Mae. You're dumb. Suppose I don't show up? What then? You know all about the job, don't you? You know just how I stuck up the joint—you ought to, because you used to work there. You got the time, the details, everything. You even know I planted the ice with Fat Frisco. So if I don't show up, you run to the law and sing. Do you think I'd turn a canary like you loose ahead of me if I didn't intend to play it square? Look at your hand, baby—you've got aces."

She grabbed me and kissed me. I could tell that she was sold, all right. We fooled around for a minute and then I pushed her away.

"Better start packing," I said. "The train leaves at eight."

"Packing?" she said. "What'll I pack in?"

"I got it all fixed," I told her. "Brought you a trunk."

SHE followed me into the living room and I pulled down the shades. It was getting dark outside and I figured the bright lights from the living room would dazzle Logan's eyes. When I turned them on, Mae got a load of the baggage.

"Where did you get that crummy outfit?" she complained. "It's second-hand."

"I know it. I'm sorry, baby. I told you how Logan's been sniffing my heels all day. I didn't dare shake him to go into a luggage store, or he'd get panicky. Had to ditch him down along Fourteenth and duck into Fat Frisco's. He gave me the trunk. It was the best he had."

She looked at the big green old-fashioned trunk and shook her head.

"After all," I said. "What does it matter? After you hit Chi and I come out, you'll get the damndest set of luggage you ever laid eyes on. Airplane luggage, baby. From now on we travel in style."

"Sure, Tony. It's all right."

"That's a good girl. Well, snap into it. I'm going out and have a drink. It's been a tough day."

I went into the kitchen and poured a shot. I needed it. After I got it down I figured I needed another, so I took it. Then I began to sweat, so I had a third one.

That did it.

I reached down for a pile of old newspapers. Mae was always after me to throw them out, but I'd kept saving them. I knew they'd come in handy at a time like this.

I put them under my arm and walked back into the living room.

Mae had opened the trunk, but she wasn't packing yet. She just stood there looking sick.

"Brought you some papers to line the bottom with, I said. "Keep your clothes clean."

"Oh, honey, I don't like this. Going away and leaving you all alone with that dick following you."

"Cheer up. It's just for a few days."

I patted her shoulder.

"But it's such a long trip. I don't like long trips, Tony."

I stood behind her and breathed down her neck. It made the little blonde curls jump up and down.

"Well, it's just one long trip you've got to take," I told her. "We all have to take things as they come."

"Did you get my ticket?" she asked.

"Yeah," I said. "I got your ticket. Lucky you reminded me. Here you are, going away on a trip and I almost forgot to give you your ticket. Here it is."

I reached under the bundle of newspapers and gave Mae her ticket.

A hatchet, in the back of the neck.

IT WAS funny about those newspapers. They'd helped me all the way through.

Reading a story in one of them about a trunk murderer had given me the idea in the first place.

Carrying them in when I talked to Mae helped to hide the hatchet I used.

And now they kept the blood off the rug.

It took me quite a long time to do what I had to do, in order to fit Mae into that trunk. A couple of times I stopped and went out for a drink. The sweat just poured off me. Even though the hatchet was plenty sharp, I had to work. There were five separate jobs to do before I got her to fit the way I wanted. Sort

of like a jig-saw puzzle, except for the thumping.

I hoped Mrs. Callahan downstairs wouldn't notice the noise. But after some of the drunken brawls Mae and I used to throw, she ought to be used to it. Besides, this was the last time I'd be bothering her.

When I was all finished, I used the newspapers again, this time to pack around Mae inside the trunk. I should have used salt, I guess, but it didn't matter. She wasn't going on a very long trip, after all, and the newspapers would keep her in pretty good shape. Damned good shape for the shape she was in.

Just for good luck I went through the bureau drawers and dumped in all of her clothes I could find. I wrapped dresses and blouses around each loose part and then put more newspapers over the top. That made it perfect.

I threw the hatchet in, slammed down the top, and locked the trunk tight.

After that I took one more drink, a double shot this time, and stepped over to the window. Sure enough, Old Faithful was still doing sentry duty.

I looked at my watch. A little after eight, now. I had to get moving.

I went into the bedroom and looked around for a clean shirt. There was a pile of stuff in the top drawer—mostly a lot of bills, unopened. Mae's work. I always gave her enough to pay the bills, but she couldn't be bothered.

Well, it didn't matter. Another day or so in this town and after that they could all whistle. Bill collectors, coppers, the whole pack.

I found a white shirt from the laundry, right next to Mae's purse. She wouldn't be needing that any more. I opened it and looked for loose change.

She had it, all right. A wad of small bills, not exactly big enough to choke a horse but plenty to choke a Shetland pony.

One hundred and eighty-eight bucks, I counted. Plus—a ticket to Palm Beach dated for just two days ago.

That set me back on my heels a little.

No wonder she wasn't paying bills! Holding out a roll and buying a ticket to Palm Beach—it was as plain as the nose on what used to be her face.

Evidently I'd done the right thing just in time. No wonder she wasn't sold on the idea of blowing for Chicago. She had her own plans. Probably meant to squeal on me and get a cut for the return of the ice. Only thing holding her up was she didn't know where I'd planted the stuff.

I may have felt a little sorry for her, particularly while I was doing some of the

messier work with the hatchet, but I didn't any more.

She got what was coming to her, all right. Got it in the neck.

I put the bills and the ticket in my pants pocket and then slipped into the new shirt. I chose a tie, went in the closet and got my sports jacket, turned out the bedroom light and walked back into the living room.

Eight-thirty.

I hoped it wasn't too late. But the Ace Express ad in the phone book said "Night or Day Service," and I hoped they meant it.

I dialed their number.

"Hello? Ace Express? This is Mr. Anthony Carello, four-one-six-three, Hyde Mount Avenue. Apartment twenty-five. Got it?"

The voice on the other end got it.

"I want you to pick up a trunk over here right away. Yes, a trunk. It goes to Mr. Sid Frisco, Frisco, F-r-i-s-c-o, one-eight-one-eight Fourteenth Street. That's right. Frisco's Auction Shop. Collect. He's expecting it before eleven tonight. Yes. What's in it? Oh . . . books. Books. Uh-huh. Tell you what you do. I won't be here when you come. I'll leave it sitting right in the front room. You can get the pass key from my landlady downstairs. Apartment one. Mrs. Callahan. Right? Thank you."

I hung up.

You could bet I wouldn't be here. That was part of the gag. My cue was to scam out now and let Logan follow me. Then he wouldn't be around to see the trunk when it came down.

Eight forty-five. Almost time to go.

I had it all timed down to the split second, almost. You got to do it that way in this business. Nothing can go haywire, or the whole thing falls apart.

This was a perfect set-up.

I'd send the body to Fat Frisco in the trunk. He was wise, of course. He'd promised to get rid of it for me in a hurry.

That's why I liked old Frisco—he was so good at getting rid of stuff. Anything from hot ice to cold meat.

I couldn't take a crazy chance and dump the body myself. That's the mistake the guy made I read about in the paper. He sent his trunk off in care of General Delivery or something. And sure enough, it turned up.

But I was sending it to Frisco. He'd quicklime it in the cellar of his auction joint. He'd quicklime anything for a cut of eighteen thousand bucks.

Tomorrow he'd pick up the ice and give me the cash. By tomorrow night, if I ditched Logan, I could hit out of town. Maybe I could use Mae's ticket to Palm Beach. Thoughtful of her to pick it up for me.

By the time Logan found out I was gone for good, there would be no loose ends. The trunk would be gone, Mae would be gone, I would be gone. If Logan investigated, he'd find out that Mae had worked for the jeweler. And since she wasn't around, he'd probably figure she had copped the ice in the first place.

Neat, very neat. Now I'd go out, get Logan to follow me, and then ditch him. I just wanted him at my heels long enough to get the trunk away during his absence.

* * *

Five to nine. Time to go.

I pushed the trunk next to the door where they couldn't miss it. They'd get the pass key from old lady Callahan downstairs.

I could have left my key, but I knew what that meant. The old dame might come up and sniff around. It wouldn't be smart.

It was cold when I hit the street. Logan saw me and drifted along behind as I walked towards the corner, slowly. He wasn't taking any chances of losing me.

I grinned.

The next hour was just good clean fun.

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I took a taxi, rode on the subway, ducked down an alley. Logan had an interesting time, but I finally got tired. Fun is fun, but there's a limit. Besides, I had a heavy date.

I ditched Logan uptown in a bar I knew. It had a long back corridor leading to the washroom. What Logan didn't know is that a side door led out to the street again.

I took the side door, and ten minutes later I was in the Ace of Clubs, watching Cormie in the floor show.

Connie did one of those military numbers, wearing a big fur hat. Shako, they call it. And she certainly knew how to shake.

After her act was over, she headed back to her dressing room. I followed.

I didn't bother to knock, just walked right in. She turned, and when she saw me she made a big red "O" with her mouth.

"Tony," she said. "You've come back." She put her hands on my shoulders. "Remember what I said, Tony. Nothing doing until you get rid of that woman."

"I remember." I kissed her. "And—I got rid of her. For good."

"Honest?"

"Cross my heart. From now on, it's just you and me, kid."

I walked over to the dressing table and picked up her big fur shako. I reached inside the lining and pulled out a lot of stuff that gleamed and glittered. It was the ice, of course. I'd planted the jewels here for safe-keeping a week ago.

"Tony! Where did *that* come from?"

So I told her. Not about Mae, of course—I just explained that Mae had gone away forever. But I gave her the pitch on the jewels. We'd get the money tomorrow and head for Florida.

Connie clung to me. She got powder all over my lapels, but I didn't care. "Darling, you're wonderful," she whispered.

That was the start of a very big evening. But the next morning. . .

THE next morning I came walking up to Fat Frisco's auction joint, very fast, and almost bumped into a man in the doorway.

It was Logan. He stood there, big as life, pretending to read a paper. His big face was blank and his puffy eyelids only flickered as I brushed past him.

This was bad. He must have been nosing around trying to pick up my trail and found out I visited Fat Frisco recently. So he was hanging around here on the chance I'd show.

Well, his dumb hunch paid dividends.

Now I couldn't head for the back room and see Frisco. Not with Logan tagging me.

I decided to stall. The easiest way was to sit down and make like an auction-hound.

It was almost noon, and the joint was crowded with live ones. I never figured the deal that gets them into these places, but they come. There was a bunch of women and a lot of old whiskers in the dump, and I noticed one or two quaint faces in the lot—Frisco's shills, of course, planted to heist the bidding. The auctioneer was up on the platform, spiling. He was a tall skinny wallio with a smooth line. Rico Zucconi—one of Frisco's boys. He had on a morning coat and his hair was plastered down. He looked like a waiter in a clip joint, but he could make with the tongue.

I sat there listening to him raffle off a grandfather's clock—a genuine antique that Frisco probably made over in Jersey—and he raised the ante on bidding to \$145.

Easy dough. But then, that's what Fat Frisco liked. Easy dough.

I looked around for him out of the corner of my eye, but couldn't spot him. Instead, I spotted somebody else.

Logan.

The big dick was sitting two rows behind me. He still looked half asleep, but when I gave him the eye, his cigarette flared up and I knew he was breathing hard.

I didn't breathe so easy myself.

I had to see Frisco, get the dough, and catch the night train with Connie. But I didn't have any extra ticket for Logan.

It was a bad spot. I turned my head back to the auction platform and sat half-listening to Rico Zucconi's patter.

Then it was as if somebody had stepped up the volume on me. All at once his voice came booming out.

"And now we come to Lot Four-fifty-six. Lot Four-fifty-six, ladeez an' gen'mum, consistin' of one trunk, locked and sealed, contents unknown. To be sold for storage charges. . ."

I looked at Lot 456. It was a big second-hand green trunk, all right. Rico Zucconi hadn't lied about that. But he did lie when he said the contents were unknown.

I knew what was in that trunk.

Mae was!

No, there was no mistake about it. I saw the trunk I'd brought home last night—sitting up there on the platform, waiting to be auctioned off right now!

Zucconi was giving with the heat.

"A sporting proposition," he said. "Who knows what this trunk contains? Clothing, bonds, jewelry—even cash. There is no key. The lucky owner can break the seal himself. All right, what am I offered for this trunk, contents absolutely unknown—what am I offered for this treasure chest? Who has the feeling that this is his lucky day?"

"Ten dollars!" yelled a voice.

I looked around, gulped. It was my voice that yelled.

Zucconi spotted me, gave me a grin. "Gentleman bids ten dollars! A ridiculous offer! Think of it, friends, this trunk may be worth a fortune—"

He was telling me!

"Fifteen!"

The bid came from behind me. Two rows behind me. From—Logan.

He wasn't playing possum any more. He was sitting up straight, staring right at the trunk.

"Twenty!" I snapped.

"Twenty-five!" Logan again.

Zucconi was a little confused, but happy about the whole thing.

"Twenty-five from the sporting gentleman—a man who knows a good thing when he sees it!"

I could tell Zucconi was excited, because he remembered to pronounce that "t" in "gentleman." Well, he wasn't the only one who was excited.

"Thirty!" I yelled.

"Forty."

"Fifty!"

When I said it, sweat ran into my mouth. I just couldn't figure it out. I sent the trunk to Frisco. Now he was auctioning it off. What was this—a double-cross?

"Seventy-five" said the voice behind me. And Zucconi was chanting, "Seventy-five once, seventy-five twice—"

"One hundred!" I said, but my throat choked up, so that it was only a gasp. I put air into my lungs to shout, but before the words came out, Zucconi had done it.

". . . seventy-five three times, and—sold!"

Logan got up and walked briskly down the aisle.

I couldn't scream now, either—because there was something new in my throat. My heart.

Logan walked down the aisle to the side of the platform and slipped bills to Zucconi's assistant at a little table. He didn't wait for a receipt.

Zucconi was working on Lot 457, and nobody bothered to watch Logan when he took out his pocket knife and began to pry the lid off the trunk.

That is, nobody watched him except me. I watched from way over next to the door. I should have run, but I had to look. I had to.

Logan was prying at the lock, and he was so excited the knife kept slipping. I didn't blame him—I was excited, too.

Then at last the lid gave, and there was a loud creak, and the trunk opened.

Logan looked down inside it.

I couldn't see his face.

All at once he slammed the lid back down with all his might. He shrugged, and walked up the aisle towards me. I didn't run, just waited. I put my hands behind me, holding the blackjack very tight.

Logan drew abreast of me, but he didn't stop. He didn't even look at me. He just walked straight out of the store and disappeared down the street.

I went down that aisle in five steps and tore the lid off the trunk.

It was full of old books.

IT'S too bad there were no track officials around to watch me. I broke the world's record for the one hundred-yard dash, getting into Frisco's back room.

Fat Frisco was hunched over his desk. He didn't look so hot to me, because he resembled a big fat killer shark. Then he smiled, and that was better. He still looked like a killer shark, but a happy killer shark.

I didn't return his smile. I grabbed him by the nearest roll of fat on his neck and pulled him to his feet.

"All right," I said. "Spit it out. Where's the body?"

"Body? What body, Tony?"

I shook him into quivering blubber. "I sent it to you in the trunk. I know you got it, because you just auctioned the trunk off now."

"I never got any trunk with a body in it, Tony. So help me—"

He was going to need help before I got through with him. The help of a licensed embalmer. Two kills come as easy as one.

"Cut it. I saw the trunk auctioned off out there. The big green trunk I bought from you yesterday to hide Mae's body in. I had the express company deliver it last night to you here and—"

"We didn't get any trunks in." He blinked

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his eyes and shook. I helped him shake a little.

"Now I understand," Frisco wheezed. "That trunk I sold you yesterday was part of a job-lot I bought. All green, all alike. I filled the rest with junk; old books and stuff. You saw one of them out on the platform. But I didn't get any trunk by express from you."

I dropped Frisco in a hurry and picked up the phone.

What Ace Express had to tell me didn't help much. Sure, they called for my trunk. But the landlady was out. Nobody there to let them in. They figured on picking it up again this noon—

"Cancel the order!" I yelled and hung up, sweating.

This was sweet. Very sweet. The trunk was still sitting in my apartment. We still had to get it out without Logan seeing it.

I explained matters to Fat Frisco. He shrugged.

"What can I do?" he said.

"Plenty. That is, if you're interested in these items."

I fished the ice out of my inside pocket. It made a very pretty glitter on his desk. But it had to go some to match the glitter in Fat Frisco's eyes.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he whispered.

Why should I contradict him? It seemed like a pretty sure prediction.

"All right," I snapped. "Where's the moola?"

He opened a drawer in his desk. When I saw the big bills, my eyes made the glitter unanimous.

"Everything's okay, then?" he asked. "It's a deal?"

"Just one little detail left. You have to help me dispose of that body. But fast."

He started to shrug again, but I was tired of that routine. I picked up the jewelry, and let him grab my arm.

"All right, Tony. I've got it figured. We can get the body ourselves. Right now. We'll take my truck. Pick up the trunk and bring it back here."

"What about Logan?"

"You'll be inside the truck, won't you?" Frisco reminded me. "And he won't pay any attention to my truck pulling out."

Frisco was right, it turned out. Because when we drove out of the alley ten minutes later, Logan wasn't around to pay attention. I couldn't spot him anywhere on the street.

I got a little happier as we drove along. I was beginning to figure things straight, now. There was nothing to worry about.

Logan didn't know about a body. He didn't know there *was* a body. The dumb shamus

was just tagging me until he could spot those jewels. When I bid on the trunk, he figured the ice was inside—so he outbid me. After he saw what he'd bought, he went back to headquarters to sulk.

Well, by the time he got over his little pet, it would be too late. Quicklime would have the body, Frisco would have the ice, and I would have my eighteen grand and a ticket south for Conaie and me.

It was perfect. When we went through the hall and upstairs without meeting anybody, it was still perfect.

I opened the door of the apartment and walked in. The trunk still stood in the center of the rug, lid down. That was perfect, too.

"Everything set?" Frisco asked.

"I'll make sure," I told him. I took a quick look around the place. Nothing had been disturbed. We were clear.

We lifted the heavy trunk and carried it down to the truck. I slid it in back and then climbed in next to Frisco. The motor started.

I looked at the street ahead and smiled into the bright sunshine. It looked so pretty—I couldn't understand how all at once everything turned black.

* * *

I can't understand it even now, when I'm sitting here, with the D.A.'s reporter taking the whole confession down in shorthand.

Of course, Logan is here too, and he explained a lot.

He said he didn't get suspicious at all until he saw me bidding on that trunk at the auction. He figured the jewels were planted there, and he was disappointed, of course.

But when he marched out, he got to thinking. Guess he'd read about trunk murders, too, in his day.

Because he started calling the express companies in town—and when he hit the Ace Express, it was the tip-off. So he beat it over to my place and found the stuff.

They had already picked Mae up—a lot less of her than I'd once picked up—when Frisco and I arrived.

Then we came, carried the trunk out to the truck, put it in, and started away.

That's when Logan sapped us, of course. And here we are.

Still, it bothers me. How could Logan sneak up behind and knock me over the head? I know for a fact he wasn't hiding outside, and he wasn't crouching down in back of the truck when I put the trunk in. I know, because I looked.

I just asked Logan that question, and he told me.

I might have known the answer.

He was hiding inside the trunk.

DRESSED TO KILL

I kept pulling, and finally
the whole corpse came
out....



By
WILLIAM R. COX

If Mendl, the cop, had had his way, most of us neighborhood guys would be in the pokey most of the time. The kid was sensitive about it—until his best pal took him off the dumb stuff, and dressed him to make the biggest killing we'd ever had!

RILEY, the cop, had a niece. She was his brother's daughter, the brother who was knocked off when Riley was a kid, and nobody ever knew who did away with him, and his wife died soon after. The girl's name was Erin and Riley sent her to a convent and went on the cops, but he never did find his brother's murderer.

Riley stayed on the cops and could have been a lieutenant of detectives, and finally they did put him in plainclothes. But he stayed in our neighborhood and refused to leave, which is a very good thing for the neighborhood, as people down there often need a sympathetic copper to keep them from the pokey. In fact, our neighborhood being the kind it is, if Mendl had his way most of us would be in the pokey a considerable part of the time.

Mendl was given to Riley because Riley

would not leave his old friends and go up to headquarters and be a gumshoe. Mendl was neither born nor raised in the neighborhood, but comes from over on the South Side where the ginnies and the polacks and the Irish live amidst spaghetti and pizza and ravioli, like Little Italy owned it and the rest liked it. While some of the characters from the South Side imagine they are tough, it is the reform school candidates in our neighborhood who are the real McCoy. Mendl is a cop who does not like us and we do not like him.

Therefore, when Erin Riley busts out of the convent, aged eighteen, and changes her name to Erin De Vere and somewhat amazingly learns to be the best tap dancer in town and shows nightly at the Green Light in a routine of her own, and Mendl spends every one of his nights off uptown at a ringside table, beaming upon Riley's renegade niece, the neighborhood sits back and waits for the explosion.

The Chink who runs the modern steam laundry, a very educated bloke, even went to an alderman and asked him to remove Mendl from around Riley's neck, but the alderman was busy trying to get a new contract for his cement outfit and only grunted that she was packing them in at a place in which he is more than a little interested and, anyway, there wasn't much of a Chinese vote in the neighborhood. Ling, whose mother was Irish, came back and reported to the gang.

He said sadly, "Our alderman has gone uptown on us. Our elected representative is no longer interested in our small problems."

Ling is a handsome, black-haired, tall young man who does not look very oriental, or very Caucasian, either. He has slanted eyes, all right, but his skin is tanned and healthy and he wears clothes considered very conservative and collegiate in our neighborhood, which may be because he has gone to Yale or some place and got quite some education.

He said to Steve The Wop and his pal Marty, "You boys are supposed to be clever at angles. Cannot Mendl be eliminated from our midst?"

Steve said hastily, "Not by me. I am not knocking off no coppers. People do not think well of me now."

Marty said, "Maybe I could plant something on him, if it was not for Riley always eagle-eyeing me. Like stolen goods—if someone would steal some goods. But I would not care to steal something and have Riley discover it and fling me in the pokeny."

Somebody else said, "Riley will not hold still for such doings. You know how he is. Conscientious."

Ling drank a beer and was unhappy. Of course everyone in the neighborhood knows why he is so extremely dolorous about this

business. He was seen at the Green Light, gazing at Erin Riley while she tapped through her act and there were folks who said he looked even more lovelorn than Mendl. But as Ling was known as a right gee and Mendl as a South Side jerk, nobody mentioned this to Riley. There was some doubt as to how Riley would feel about Ling's oriental ancestry.

WE ARE all sitting in Larry's when Riley comes in. He is a lean copper, with a sharp nose. He does not laugh a lot, but he is an okay gee and what he does not know about the neighborhood is not happening.

He says, "Well, gents, how are you and how long have you all been sitting here drinking Larry's fine beer?"

Larry takes the hint and slips Riley a tall one, in a special tumbler he keeps for the purpose. We all admit to having been in Larry's for hours.

Ling said, finally. "Where is your hair shirt, Mendl?"

"Off, tonight," said Riley shortly. "You all sure you've been right here for over two hours?"

Ling said, "Now that you mention it, I came in maybe an hour ago."

"Uh-huh," said Riley. "Where were you before that?"

"Uptown," said Ling. "I take it something has occurred?"

Riley said, "Uptown—where?"

"Visiting," said Ling. "Who got robbed now, Murphy?"

Riley said, "Your laundry. The day's take and the payroll. Your safe is wide open."

Ling said slowly, "You think I did it myself, Riley?"

Riley said, "I don't think. I am a copper. I ask questions. I ask about everybody. Sometimes I find out things that way."

Ling said, "In that safe was a jade vase. It belonged to my father. It was of the Ming dynasty—a coincidence which made it precious to him. Also, it was worth ten thousand dollars—and it was not insured."

Riley said, "But your dough was insured."

"You've already talked to my insurance man, I see," smiled Ling. His eyes were bright, but he was very calm.

Riley said, "You'd better scam over and have a look. It was a yegg job. The safe is all busted to hell."

Ling said, "Thank you." He got up and walked out.

Nobody said anything, and Riley finished his beer and went out. Then we all sat and still said nothing for a little while longer. Steve The Wop, looked thoughtful. He had been known to crack a few iron boxes in his day, which seemed only yesterday at that.

His pal, Marty, was fidgety as a mouse's ear. People came and went, and from the conversation, the word hadn't spread. Nobody seemed to know yet about Ling's wash-joint being robbed. The Wop and Marty drifted out about eleven o'clock. I left sometime after.

I went down to the laundry to have a look on my own. It was quite an establishment, with big vats and whirling thingamajigs and drying vats and a warehouse in the rear. I came in that way, because I did not particularly want people to see me. I saw the light in Ling's office and waited, listening for what I could hear.

I am an oldish character around the neighborhood and there are many angles I know which are not common knowledge. Like I know Ling's father before he took off suddenly from poisoning, brought on, they say, by eating in a Chinese restaurant uptown which advertised oriental dishes a la Canton but had a Jap cook. And I know Riley's brother, who got scragged just before Ling's father took off.

Ling, Sr. was a right guy—fat, smiling, honest. It is only fair to record that Riley's brother was not such a right guy and in fact was a good deal of a jerk. He was much older than Riley and he never worked and usually drank a lot of bad whiskey in Patsy Geoghan's joint, which was not like a neighborhood bar.

In fact, to get right down to it, Riley's brother was the sort of guy he once threw rotten eggs all over Ling, Sr.'s clean laundry when he was stiff, causing much anguish and great damage to the shirts of several people, including me. Furthermore, I happened to witness this silly behavior and as one of the shirts was silk, with stripes, and my favorite, I took occasion to remonstrate with Riley's brother and he forthwith and suddenly was taken ill. With contusions. And abrasions. In the hospital.

I will say that Riley never held it against me what I did to his brother, but has always been very nice and polite, even when suspicion has pointed its long and dirty finger at me in regard to small deals uptown which made me a profit. Mostly, of course, card games.

SO THERE I am, standing among the wet wash, listening to small talk in Ling's office, which is partitioned off from the rest of the warehouse floor and has a door leading to the customers' front entrance and one to the working quarters where I am standing. Meanwhile, it is necessary that I gander around, because there is something about this robbery which bothers Riley, or he would not be asking questions of Ling like he did. Be-

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ing very fond of Ling, I think it is a good idea to poke my nose into that which seems none of my business.

In one of the vats, a soaking-vat half full of liquid, I discovered a very incongruous thing. My little flashlight caught the toe of a shoe. Now I know very well that Ling does not soak shoes in vats like this, and in fact leaves shoe-cleaning to others altogether.

I clicked off the flash and took hold of the shoe. There was something in it. Another tug and I see it is a foot.

I went back in the dark and listened again.

Riley was saying, "You fill in this blank, describing the jade statue. List everything that was lost, money, papers, everything. There ain't a fingerprint nor anything in the joint, so you probably won't ever get it back, any of it. But fill it out, just in case."

Ling said, "The loss of the money is covered. But the jade—that is a very sad loss."

Riley said, "I remember your pa took a lot of pleasure from junk like that. I never knew it was so valuable. My brother had a couple hunks of it—I never knew where he got it. I give them to Erin and she took them into the convent."

Ling said, "Now that is interesting. I would like to see those pieces. Maybe they would match my missing one."

Riley said slowly, "That would be a coincidence, huh?"

"Yes," said Ling smoothly, politely. "A charming one."

I went quick back to the vat where I had found the shoe. I hauled carefully on it. After a while a whole body came out of the thing. I had to be very careful as this solution stank and if it got on my clothing, I would be forced to answer questions which I would not dare to answer. I lugged the corpse out the back way, the way I had come in, locking the door behind me with my special key, which could lock and unlock almost any door.

The corpse was not very heavy. I got it out in the back lot behind the laundry and turned the flash on, just a quickie look. It was Steve The Wop. He was not in very good shape. Someone had scragged him with a hunk of wire, and then he had been put in the vat. He did not look drowned. He looked scragged and very wet and he stank from the chemicals in the vat.

I dragged him to the far corner of the lot and put him under some assorted junk. I left him where the air could get at him, but it was a lead pipe cinch that when they found him they would at least think his suit had been cleaned just before or after he was scragged. Always your suit smells like that after being in this particular vat, until it gets a good chance to air, which is usually in the airing place your tailor has, I think. And there have

been times when he forgot to put mine in there and it smelled but bad until I hung it on a line in the sun and then it had to go back, being out of press. But not when you gave it to Ling, who was a very careful laundry keeper indeed—one of the best in town.

I went back to the front of the laundry and saw Riley come out, his hat over his eyes, and get into the prowler and drive off. Then Ling came out and started for the cab stand on the corner. It was just twelve o'clock and the third show at the Green Light would be on and in ten minutes Erin would be tapping her taps in front of a chorus of not-so-hot broads.

I took a hack right behind him and got off a block from the Green Light and saw him go in. Then I drifted in and washed my hands good in the gent's room and smelled myself all over, hoping the vat-stink would be gone. Then I went upstairs.

I saw Mendl at a table for two near the orchestra. I saw Ling at a table for two against the wall. I saw various and sundry other people I knew, but they did not see me. They would swear they saw me later if I needed an alibi, which I did not expect to need.

On the floor, Erin Riley was doing her tap dance. It was not such a good tap dance as Bill Robinson could do, but it was okay, and she had things to do with which Bill never had. She was a tawny-haired babe, with high shoulders and long legs, built like a race horse. She had big, dark eyes, like headlights. Her mouth turned down a bit at the corners, like I remember her father's did.

Mendl, a hulking, wide-faced cop, was in civvies, drooling into his whiskey, his eyes never leaving the gyrations of Erin Riley. Ling, in the darkness beyond the spotlight, sat motionless, inscrutable. The girl jiggled up and down, her toes and heels tapping out the rhythm of *Somebody Stole My Gal*, with the drum giving it the off-beat and only the piano filling in melody.

Marty came in and sat down opposite me. He was a thin guy, with narrow shoulders, but he always wore tweed coats, padded but good, with patch pockets, because they made him seem broader. He had a narrow face, like a fox, and he was very smart.

He watched Erin for a moment, then turned to me and said, "Personally I never can see what makes those two go for that twist. She is an all right twist, and all that, but she rates low in my black book."

I said, "Mostly the dames in your book are about the color of the cover, inside if not out."

Marty said, "Okay, if you want to insult me. I came in here just to see you."

I said, "About a marked deck of cards, maybe?"

"You know I do not fool with the pasteboards," said Marty. "Horses, yes. Cards, never. No, I came in here to ask you if you had seen Steve since you left Larry's place."

"Where did you lose him?" I asked.

"He had to see a guy," said Marty, scowling. "But he was to meet me here after eleven. Steve is not bright, but he is prompt. He is always on the nick of time."

I said, "That is a well known fact about Steve. Where do you think he might have gone to?"

Marty leaned forward and spoke out of the corner of his mouth. "You know the way Riley was cracking at Ling about his tin box being blown? Well, Steve is touchy. You might even say he is sensitive. You know that before he began running with me he was a yegg. I smartened him up and took him off that dumb stuff, but he thinks people hold his past up against him."

"You think he took a small powder?"

Marty said, "If he did, Riley will grab him quick. Riley will know he—will think he is guilty. Cops are like that. They jump at conclusions, like you might say."

"I would not say anything of the sort," I shrugged. "Maybe Steve got into a jam."

"Maybe Riley has got him downtown," said Marty. "I do not want Steve under the headquarters in that room they call Coney Island. The coppers are unkind to folks in that room."

"Steve is not a lad who will sing to coppers."

"No, but they will hurt him," said Marty. "Truthfully, I am fond of the kid. He has saved me some trouble from time to time. He is quick with a sap and I am not rough and tumble and many the time he has saved me embarrassment. And a couple socks in the puss."

"It is established that you speak truthfully," I told him. "And you can ask Riley about Steve, because here is Riley now."

RILEY came in and paused by my table. He said, "The neighborhood seems to have moved uptown. Can't you guys stay home nights?"

Marty said, "Have you seen Steve tonight, Riley?"

"Yeah."

Marty said, "He was supposed to meet me here."

"He couldn't make it," said Riley.

"I don't get that at all," Marty said, frowning. "Steve always makes it."

"Yeah," said Riley. "But someone stopped him."

Marty said, "What are you getting at, Riley?"

"I don't know," said Riley. "But I am going to put an awful try on picking up a murderer."

"Who got murdered?" demanded Marty. "Not—"

"I found Steve," Riley said. "In the lot behind the laundry. Someone scragged him. He smelled bad."

Marty said, "Not my pal! Don't tell me that, Riley! Why, he was only going to see his uncle about something—he was supposed to meet me here!" Marty almost wept.

It is funny about these characters that are so smart, they get a stooge to pal around them—because anyone half-brainy would not touch them with an eleven-foot pole—and they are like brothers forever after. Marty was a clever schemer, but you would have thought he lost his left brain the way he carried on.

I got up and left him there, following Riley. Erin finished her act and started for the table occupied by Mendl. Then she saw Ling and hesitated and you could see it as plain as daylight, the indecision, her guard down for the moment, the hesitation in her between the cop and the Chink. Then she saw her uncle, Riley, stop at Ling's table, and averting her head she sat down opposite Mendl. There was a glass of water and she reached for it, and a little spilled.

I was right behind Riley when he said to Ling, "I want to ask you some more questions."

Ling said, "Isn't it after hours?"

"Cops ain't got hours," said Riley.

"Except Mendl?" asked Ling gently.

"He's no cop, he's a damned Romeo," said Riley. "I got to take you back to Erin's dressing room and ask you something. I don't like doing this, Ling, but I remember things too good."

Ling said, "Erin doesn't want me back there."

"She learned decency in the convent," sighed Riley. "Praise be! Come on, Ling."

He started back of the band stage, where the door led to the dressing rooms. He went past my table, but Marty was gone—to the morgue, maybe, to mourn his dead pal. Erin leaped up. Mendl lumbered to his feet. I let them go by me and the whole procession wound up in the dressing room. There was not enough space for me, so I waited in the hall. The door was open.

Riley said, "Erin, let's see your old jade pieces. You keep them in here for luck, do you not?"

She said, "You know I do."

Riley said, "Two pieces, you've got."

She said, "Yes, uncle." She spoke like a convent girl, all right, polite and nice to her guardian, even though they were not on very good terms since she had taken to tap-dancing. She reached into a box on her dresser. It was not locked or anything, and I could see Ling's

frown and headshake at such carelessness, but then Erin did not know that the jade was extremely valuable, but just thought they were cute. She drew out two little figures.

Then she stared and said happily, "Why, here is another one! Someone has surprised me with another to match my other pair!" Again she stared at all of us and said, not so happily, "But who could have done it? My dressing room is always locked. I don't allow people in my dressing room."

Riley said to Ling, "That's the piece, huh?"

"I could not deny it," said Ling quietly. "Others know the piece well."

Erin said, "How did you get in here, Ling? I told you, like I tell everyone—"

Riley said, "Yeah, how did you get in here, Ling?"

"I did not come in here," said he. "I do not steal from myself, nor from anyone else."

"Your day's take is insured," said Riley. "Your payroll was in there today—that makes a good haul. When I found Steve's body just now, he was stinkin' from your vats. It looks funny, Ling. Maybe you had better come downstairs and answer some more questions."

Erin said, "But he couldn't have put the statuette in here. I saw him when he came in, and he did not have time!"

"But he was uptown earlier," Riley explained. "If he caught Steve in his place, robbing it, he could have killed him, lifted his own payroll, which is insured, planted the jade here and left me to blame whoever I could figure on. That would look like Mendl—who is always mooing after you."

Ling said very quietly, "If you think you can make that stand up, Riley, let's go to headquarters at once."

Riely said, "I know I cannot make it stand up. But I am going to find someone I can lay this onto. A robbery and a murder in one night could give the neighborhood a bad name."

Mendl said, "Could give? *Could* give! Tell me, can you kill a dead dog? This Chink is guilty. Throw him in the can and lemme have him. I'll make him talk!"

Riley said to him, "Shut up. This is your night off."

Ling said, "Then you want to go back downtown and talk?"

Riley said, "I will meet you at your laundry in an hour. By then I will have all the pictures they took of the place and all the results from the fingerprint bureau and the medical examiner and every place where they measure things and make chemical tests on things found at the scene of robberies or murders."

This was a very long speech from Riley, and I listened carefully to it and it occurred to me that he was warning someone. There was an open window in the dressing room.

It had been closed and locked when they came in, but Erin had opened it because it was stuffy in there. I tiptoed away from the dressing room and went outside and got a cab.

I SAT in it for a moment, watching things in front of the Green Light and pretty soon Ling went in a hack ahead of me, and then Mendl, Riley and Erin got into the prowl car. I said to my driver, "Hit it up, make the turn by the viaduct, and don't stop for red lights."

He gave my money a look—then we went like a bat out of hell down around the viaduct and I got out on the street behind Ling's laundry establishment. In the old days when Ling's father had hired his help to work by hand, before he got modern machinery, there had been a ditch along this edge of the property, but now it was all filled in and a man could keep in the shade of a high fence and not be seen. I got as far as the back door I had used earlier and waited a while. Pretty soon there were lights in the front and voices.

I waited a while longer, wanting a smoke, and wondering if it would work. Then, sure enough, someone came past me, never looking right or left. He went into the back entrance of the laundry, using a key.

I followed right along like Mary's little lamb, except I guess you would call me old and tough enough to be Mary's ancient goat. We got into the place and it was dark, but in the front the people were talking. This guy ahead of me moved with no noise at all, like he was familiar with the place.

I heard Riley say, "Ling has been here because the joint is open. But where is the character?"

Then the figure in front of me made a quick motion, which now that my eyes were familiar with the darkness, was a very familiar move to me. I had seen it done many's the time, especially in the old rough and ready days. He is outting with a rod, which he carries under his armpit.

I made a short dive, skidding a little because laundry floors, even modern ones are always a trifle on the wet side. I hit this guy from the side. His gun went off, but I knocked up his arm with my shoulder and put the rabbit punch to him. He slipped sideways and I upped his feet and he went splash into the very vat from which I had dragged Steve the Wop.

Riley was yelling, "What was that? Who fired that shot?"

I answered him, "It was me, and turn on those lights."

So they all came into the laundry, and Ling came from where he had been hiding in the front. Ling had an automatic in his hand and was quite pale.

He told me, "I figured the truth would

come out, when you gave me a high sign in the hall at the Green Light, but I had a hunch to hide in here and wait. He must have spotted me somehow or other."

I said, "The street light threw your shadow on the wall."

Riley said, "Are you going to drown him or haul him out?"

I hauled him out. It was Marty, all right, and he was very ill from the stuff in the vat. I said to him, "Well, Steve did not drink any of it, on account of he was dead when you put him in there."

Marty choked and managed to croak, "Are you nuts? I was investigating the kid's taking off and I seen this shadow and was going to holler for the guy to come out, thinking he was maybe a stick-up or something."

Riley said, "Uh-huh, I see!"

I said, "What do the pictures from headquarters tell you, Riley? Was the safe blown by Steve's method of operation?"

"No," said Riley. "It was blown by an amateur."

I said, "It was blown by Marty. He made a pass at Erin and she gave him the brush, over a month ago. Did you not, Erin?"

"Why, yes," she said. "Of course I could not go out with him. Uncle would not approve."

I said, "Marty blew the safe. He glommed the dough and the jade. He did it earlier than you let on, Riley, when you saw us in Larry's. Right?"

"Could be we were off on the time," said Riley carefully.

"But Steve did not like the looks of it, him being sensitive about safes. So he came down here and was looking it over for himself. Marty followed him, and they had a quarrel about the dough Marty stole. They were supposed to be partners. Marty had done this alone and Steve wanted in. So Marty scragged Steve and planted him in the vat. Then he went uptown and planted the jade on Erin. He figured to implicate Ling, because the

whole thing was strictly hammy. It would look like an inside job."

Marty gagged, "You can't prove that stuff on nobody."

Mendl said, "They're all a bunch of crooks. Throw 'em in the can!"

"Shut up," said Riley. "How you going to prove this," he asked me.

I said, "I saw something sticking out of Marty's pocket when we were down at Hoople's. I saw it again uptown. Take a look."

He had those patch pockets, like I said, and they naturally bagged a bit. Riley dived into one. He came out with a laundry ticket. It was a half a ticket, the half that belongs on the garment in the rack.

Riley said, "It's a coat of Mrs. Humperknickel's."

"Right there," said Ling, pointing to a rack alongside the vat in which I had found the Kid.

Riley picked up the sleeve of the coat, where the tag should have been. It was gone. There was no tag.

Marty said, "I won't stand for it! It's a bum beef!" He tried to go away from there, very fast, which was silly. Riley tripped him and put the cuffs on him.

I said, "Okay, let Mendl turn him in. I got a little more business with you, Riley."

WE WENT into Ling's office. I said, "Riley, I'm going to tell you something, although I am not one to spiel to cops, as you well know. Ling's father was robbed many a year ago."

Riley said quietly, "I know what you're goin' to say."

"Sure," I nodded. "Now what have you got against the boy, here?"

Riley said, "Why, nothin'! His mother was Irish, wasn't she? That dumb Mendl ain't got a drop of Celtic blood in him!"

Erin looked confused, then impossibly demure. Ling gasped a little, him being brought

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The advertisement features a black and white illustration of a man's face on the right, smiling. On the left, there is a box of 'PROFESSIONAL' blades with a price tag that says '5 for 25¢'. Below the box is a circular badge with '5 for 25¢'. At the bottom left, there is a small image of a blade with the text 'PROFESSIONAL' and 'SURGICAL STEEL'. At the bottom right, there is another small image of a blade with the text 'PROFESSIONAL' and '5 for 25¢'.

up refined and polite. But I led Riley outside. Mendl was in the car with Marty, threatening Marty with everything in the book.

Riley said, "I know my brother stole them other two pieces of jade from old Ling. My brother was not such a very good guy, sometimes. And I thank you for keeping quiet about it all these years."

I said, "The jade will all be in one family if Ling pops it to her. She was playin' Mendl off against him, woman-like."

Riley said, "I am not going to ask you how you know my brother cops this jade. Or how you managed to slip that ticket in Marty's pocket and make him believe he carried it all the way uptown and back all evening without knowing it."

I said, "Riley—do you think I am dumb? I planted that ticket on him, took it off him, and planted it again three times tonight. In Larry's, in the Green Light, and down here. I know he scragged the kid, and you know it. I know he robbed Ling and you know that, too.

If God gave me the gift of palming slips of pasteboards, He did not mean me to confine it to playing cards for money, did He? Cannot I do a good deed now and again?"

"Okay," said Riley. "Okay! Don't honor me with one of your fast-talks. I am satisfied and Marty will sing, because he thinks we have got him. And, anyway, knowing what we do now, the detectives down at headquarters can work backwards and break all his alibis. Okay, pal?"

I said, "Well, do not come back at me with quibblings, then."

He got into the car and drove off. One thing he will never know, I hope, and that is what became of his brother after he had robbed Ling and tried to kill me because I found it out.

The river being as deep as it is, and concrete blocks being heavy, and his brother's dirty feet being big, I do not believe Riley will learn, not until Judgment Day, and then I will have old Ling as my witness!

• THE HOMELESS HOMICIDE •

YOU can look at it this way—maybe somewhere there's a murder that just fits you. A ghastly, insurmountable combination of horror and circumstance, just waiting for somebody to come along and try it on you for size, like Cinderella's slipper—or Prince Charming's pet jive pump. Only—you will be unpleasantly surprised.

Tom Gilliland was, when they picked him up in Terre Haute for murder. So, for that matter, were the police, for they were looking for a man who had killed his wife in jealous rage, callously buried her in a wheatfield, and then absconded for parts unknown, driven by his fear. Instead they found a very personable young man, well-mannered, well-spoken and with nothing to hide. But they had their murder—and they proceeded to show Tom Gilliland how well it fit him.

First of all they took him back to Granite City, Ill., where Tom and his wife had lived and where the murder had been committed. Then they showed Tom papers, forms signed by people he knew, people who'd known Serena Gilliland—known her well. There was her grandmother, for instance, and there were others.

These people had sworn and attested to the identity of the corpse, an insurance company had paid off without a murmur—they had her description down in black and white, down to the minutest detail, including dental work and even the unique and all but invisible scar which Serena had borne over one temple.

They finally even convinced Tom. They

showed him the spade he'd used to dig her grave; they showed him how he'd strangled her—and lastly they told him why. They trotted around neighbors who'd seen Serena trysting in the moonlight with another man, over by the levee.

Tom got his face set. He said, "That's a lie. We didn't get along, Serena and I, and we decided to go our ways. But she wasn't like that!"

Well, they didn't need his confession, anyhow. They had their man and they had their case—the strongest case of circumstantial evidence they had ever seen against any man, the Granite City police called it.

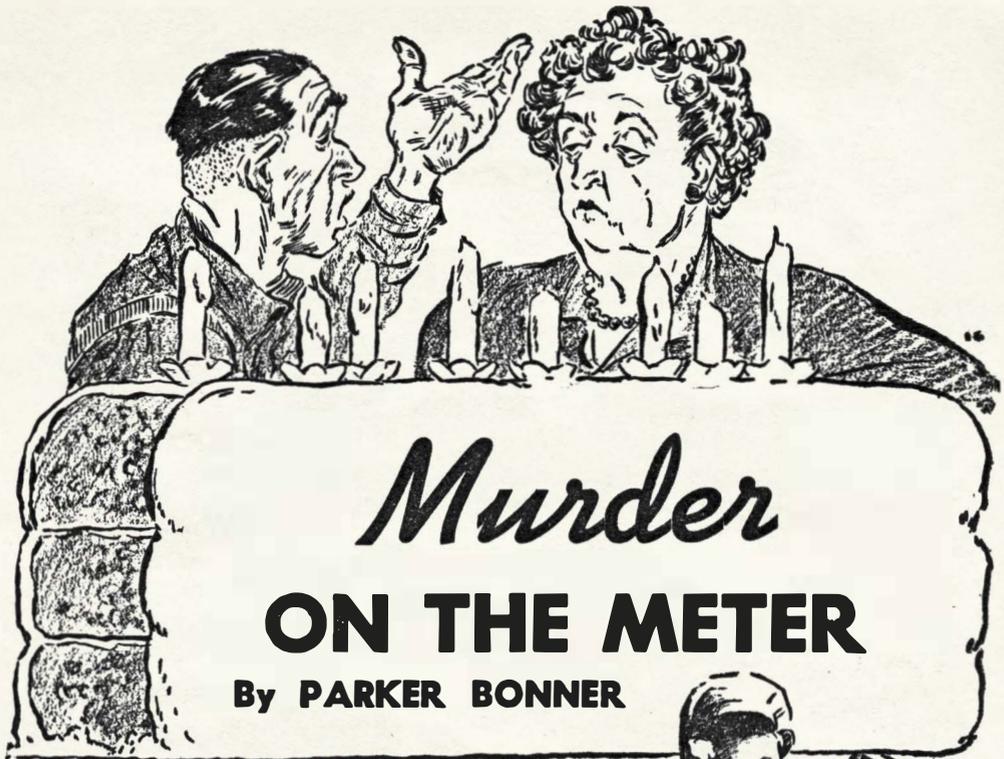
Then Serena Gilliland came back. She came back complete with scar and dental work identical with that found on the corpse—and looking pretty much as she always had. She'd been away to Cincinnati, where the papers had carried no news of Tom's arrest.

She came back to help Tom just in the nick of time.

And the police? Well, they took their perfect case and proved it was still perfect! In every detail! They found a man named Arthur Dorman—who *had* killed his wife, who *had* trysted with the stranger on the levee in the moonlight; who *had* used the spade to bury her in the wheatfield. Nora Dorman *had* had identical dental work with Serena Gilliland, and had also had a similar scar, besides resembling Serena in other particulars.

And at last the homeless murder fit.

Eric Carlton



“This,” the Captain said, “is Hymie Beerman, the dumbest hackie in New York.” But, honest, I was just playin’ in my usual lousy luck, for there in the same room was the best mouth-piece in town. Only trouble was, he
•
•
was too dead to talk!

THE trouble with you, Mamie, is that you don’t never try to put yourself in a man’s place. Honest, I didn’t forget your birthday party. Look, I got you a swell bottle of perfume—expensive, a dollar ninety-eight for only an ounce, and I had it fixed so I’d get off at six sharp, and if you don’t think it’s hard to get off at six, it’s because you’ve never had the pleasure of conversing with that female, Juanita which the boss hires as our new dispatcher. How any woman can weigh almost three hundred and still not have one good-natured pound in her is beyond me.



Yeah, I know, I was supposed to be home at six-thirty and the kids were waiting up, and Bunny cried, and your sister and that no-good husband of hers come over and brought a bottle of wine. I know all that, and I didn't get to the party at all, and there's blood on my coat. But in a way it is your fault and if you will please shut that yap for three whole minutes you will understand, and if you don't believe me, you can call Captain Scott down at the bureau and he will tell you that I was unavoidably delayed.

It's like this, see. At a quarter to six I'm wheeling down Madison, heading for the garage, and the traffic is fierce, what with all these new guys who only been driving for three or four years and don't know the difference between their brake pedal and their horn. The air is hot and so wet you could wring it out and put it in the radiator, and I haven't had but four tips all day. I'm just beginning to believe that maybe you are right and that twenty-three years jockeying a cab is too long, although I still differ when you try and contend that it don't come under the heading of a steady job.

Well, I see this customer standing on the curb at Thirty-fourth, waving his arms like crazy. I'm just about to pass him up, 'cause I'm heading for the garage and already late, when I recognize him from them newspaper pictures. It is Marty Styles, the big mouth-piece who just sprung Frankie Broch on that bank job, and he is about the most important mouthpiece in the world.

Well, remember how you're always jawing that the other drivers get to carrying important people for big tips, and maybe a mention in somebody's will. So I slide to the curb, hoping it is maybe only a four-block haul and I can still make the garage by six.

I swing the door open and say, "Get in, Mr. Styles."

He looks at me sharp and then he gets in, and I say, "I am just on the way to the garage because my wife is having a birthday party. Although why she should still be counting them after all these years is something which I am not smart enough to understand."

He sits there looking at me. He has a kind of narrow face with a nose which comes to a point and his eyes are so light they hardly show. They are very queer eyes, and you can take my word for it, my back kind of itches when he looks at me.

"Take me up to Riverdale," he says. "And fast. I'm in a hurry."

I get the idea he's mad about something, but I'm a little sore myself.

"Maybe you should get another cab," I suggest. "Because as I told you, I've got to sign in and—"

He cuts me short. "You'll take me if you

want to keep your license. Riverdale's along the Hudson, just below Yonkers. Take the West Side Highway. I'll show you where to turn."

Well, I am about to object, but I look again at his eyes and I decide that he is not the kind of a guy with which I should get in an argument. Maybe you should, baby.

I WHEEL out and get going, figuring I can make it in twenty-three minutes and maybe not be too late. By the mirror I see that Styles keeps glancing back like he thinks we might be tailed, and I get kind of uncomfortable.

So I start to talk.

"That was a nice job, Counselor, springing that Frankie Broch when everyone figured he was good for twenty or maybe thirty years, anyhow."

This Styles drills the back of my neck with them funny eyes. "What do you know about it?"

"Why, nothing," I says. "Only what I see in the papers, and them paper guys are notoriously wrong." I say this because I've also heard that Frankie Broch is sore at Styles because he left the bank loot in his care and he forgot to give some of it back.

There's a noise in the back of the cab like Styles is coughing or choking or something. Then he says, "Never trust people, anybody—do you understand, Hymie?"

He must have read my name off my license. I says, "I don't never trust nobody except relatives, and them even less."

He kind of chuckles and tells me that's pretty smart, which is no news, since I know it all the time.

Up above Two-hundred-and-fiftieth Street I'm lost. The streets are crooked and there are trees and one tree is just like another to me, like I said when we went out west to visit your cousin in Jersey. But finally we turn in through a gate and there is a fieldstone and brick house, about the size of the public library.

Well, it's not taken as long as I think and I figure that if I don't get lost going back I can maybe make it in time—if the gums hold and the old hearse don't throw a rod—when Styles jumps out and tells me to wait. Then he goes chasing up the steps and into the house like he owns it.

I see some lights go on and I don't know what to do. I'm tempted to shove, but there is better than three bucks on the clock and I ain't got that much to turn in. Besides, this Styles seems to like me and I figure it will not be wise to offend a smart connection like that, even for your birthday party, baby, so I wait.

Nothing happens except a big police dog comes snuffing around like he is all out of

red coupons and planning to use my leg for part of his dinner. I tell him nice pooch, and finally I stretch out a hand and just touch his head. I don't lose no fingers so I figure that maybe he likes me or something. Just then the lights in the house go off and I feel good, thinking we will be heading back toward town.

But nothing else happens. Five minutes pass—ten—and no Styles. I don't know what to do. The dog begins to whine and presses up by the hack as if he is lonesome.

Maybe it's the way the dog acts, maybe it is because I am not a dummy and I sense things quicker than most, or maybe it is because for a guy who said he was in a hurry, Styles is taking his time. Anyhow I feel something is wrong, so I get out my wrench, the one you sewed up in that cloth so I could handle bad drunks, and get out and go up to the door.

I might have had to hunt around a spell if it hadn't been for the pooch, but he goes tearing down the hall and into a room at the end and I can hear him making like a Brooklyn fan talking to an umpire.

I go rushing after him, clicking on the light as I enter, and there is Marty Styles stretched out on the floor. Something tells me that he is not well and that he isn't going to ever be well again.

The dog is acting like crazy, so I grab him by the collar and pull him across and shove him out of one of those french windows. Then I come back and find my first thought is right. Styles is dead, due no doubt to the large bump which some unknown person has put upon his head.

Only whoever hit him must have used something not wrapped in a cloth because the skin is decidedly broken and there is quite some blood.

I look around. There is a wall safe behind a picture, which is pulled aside. The safe is open. The desk has drawers pulled out and the room is a mess like someone has been looking for something which they don't find.

YOU know me, Mamie, and how I don't see eye to eye with the law. You can take a boy right out of Flatbush and put a uniform on him and right away he becomes difficult to get along with, especially if you happen to be a cab driver. I have this in mind as I stare at the *corpus delicti* and I think perhaps it will be the better part of valor if I go quietly away and let some other chump summon the law.

But I am still short the getus which shows on the meter, and the way I figure things I would not be in Riverdale save for Marty

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IMPORTED BRIAR

Send for a copy of "Peatstare on Pipes"—FREE L & H Stern Inc., 58 Pearl St., Stern Bldg., Bklyn 1, N.Y.

Styles but instead happily with you, listening to your no-good brother-in-law tell how he won the war as a plant guard in Jersey.

So I bend down and give Marty the frisk. You know me, Mamie, my ethics. I never roll a drunk unless I have something against him on the clock, and when it becomes my unpleasant duty I never tip myself more than four bits. Well, I have no more than this in mind when I pull out his pigskin poke and honest, baby, you never see so much money! There is a wad of grand notes which you can hardly hold rolled with one hand, and nothing smaller than a C in the bunch.

I'm stumped. I can't grab a C. Then I think of his pants pocket and, sure enough, there's some small bills and change. I take enough to cover the clock and a four-bit tip, which is little enough considering he made me miss your birthday party, and I am just ready to leave when I hear the hack's motor.

I'd know it in a million with the wheeze in the number two gasket, and I know it ain't in the habit of starting by itself. So I let out a yell and go running down the hall. I am just in time to see the tail-lamp disappear down the drive.

Now I'm wondering who would want to come clear out here to steal a hack, and besides the office is going to be sore when they learn it is gone. And you are probably sore already. Furthermore, I cannot well report the hack stolen from this address without telling the cops about the body.

Then I recall how you are always jawing because I do not improve myself and that does not make me feel much better. Still and all, I am in a bad enough spot to start improving.

I still do not like precinct cops, so I call Captain Scott down at headquarters and tell him to come out to Marty Styles' house, hoping he will know the address. Then I go around and look at the safe, but I don't find much—only the picture of a blonde on the desk.

This blonde I recognize as Clara Thorne who poses for the same things you wear and still looks nicer than most dames. There is writing on the picture which reads, "To Marty with all my love," which may be so, and probably ain't.

Anyhow I'm thinking that this is no page-three killing. Not only is Marty Styles important, dead or alive, but Clara Thorne takes the kind of pictures people will spend more than three cents to see. I'm also figuring it is quite a break and you will have something to brag to Mrs. Schultz about, when she is telling you about her brave son who is a fireman and the best checker player on the east side, but I am still just whistling in the dark, when the local law comes, having grabbed the flash out of headquarters.

These precinct men are ambitious and they want to crack the case before Captain Scott arrives, so they jump on me with both feet. And just when they are getting rough, Cap Scott shows up. He is unpleasant too, but at least it is an unpleasantness which I am used to so, I mark it with a discount.

"Ah, Hymie," he says. "I see you are still trying to please that battle-axe wife of yours and improve yourself by butting into things that don't concern you."

The local plainclothes stiff turns around. "You know this egg, Captain?"

"I know him," says Scott. "If it wasn't for him, I'd have twice as many hairs left as I have. Also many more patrolmen."

That is a very unfair statement and entirely untrue since I can remember when he is in harness—even before prowl cars—and he don't have much hair even then. And there are just as many patrolmen as ever, which is too many. But I keep my face shut, figuring I'll get a better break if I don't get him sore.

He goes on. "This is Hymie Beerman, the dumbest hackie in New York."

I know he's giving me the old needle so I stay clammed up until the hound which I have locked in the kitchen starts to raise hell with one of the plainclothesmen and I dash to the rescue.

One of the other Joes figure I'm pulling a fade-out and tries to collar me, but I'm too quick and he falls all over his feet. The other is wrestling with the dog, trying to get his service gun out with one hand. The dog is happy—he has the other wrist and is gnawing on it like he liked the taste.

I grab his collar and pull him loose, all the time giving out with the soothing words. And then it is all I can do to keep them from shooting the pooch. The way they carry on you'd think the mutt and me have not only killed Marty Styles, but also every other mouthpiece in New York.

They take turns hammering questions at me, but they cannot figure the reason why I should make this corpse and then leave thirty thousand dollars in his kick. It is the only thing that stops them.

I do not explain that I couldn't do that because I have you, dear, and little Oscar and Bunny, who is the smartest kid in the fourth grade. It would make no difference to them, and they wouldn't believe me, anyway.

After they have picked on me for a long spell they begin to get rougher ideas, and Captain Scott is just about to haul me downtown when the phone rings. It is a report that they have found my hack.

I am very relieved, because as you know, I have fixed the hack up special and there isn't another like it in New York, what with my patent cigarette lighter and the little rack I

fix on the steering wheel to hold a magazine while I am waiting on the stand, and the foot warmer. Right now I could use that foot warmer, though it isn't a cold day.

"Is it in good shape?" I demand as Captain Scott turns away from the phone.

"It is," he says, "which is better luck than you deserve. And here's a funny angle. It was found in a parking lot up in the west seventies, close to an apartment where Frankie Broch has holed up since he was acquitted on that bank job. You wouldn't have any ideas about that, would you?"

"Who, me?" I ask him.

"I hear Frankie didn't like Marty."

I grin at him. "In town there are only two kinds of people," I observe. "The kind which know Marty Styles and hate his intestines, and the kind who never met him. I never met him myself until tonight," I add hastily.

But Captain Scott's mind is now on other things.

"That damn dog," he says. "He is going to kill someone yet. Every time any of the men go near him he practically relieves them of an arm or leg. You go out there and keep him quiet. You've got him hypnotized or something."

I go out and talk to the hound. I'll take pooches to cops any day, and he feels the same about hackies. He is glad to see me, and he acts real decent. Things pick up a little more when I find some cold beer and a half a chicken in the ice box.

Then the plainclothes stiff comes back and tells me I'm wanted in front. The dog kind of shows his teeth, and I tell him to hush. He obeys just like as if I've been training him for years, but he don't like being left alone, so I find a piece of clothesline in the pantry, loop it around his collar and bring him along.

I GET back to the front room and Marty Styles' brother and girl friend are there. The brother's name is Albert and he looks enough like Marty, so they might have been twins. Only he is making a big noise, while Marty is laying quiet under a sheet in the bedroom.

The girl is the same as in the picture on the desk, only her bob is longer and looks silver. I have to try hard to keep thinking of you, baby, but with one thing and another I manage.

The brother is trying to get somebody's attention away from her. "Do something!" he raves. "My brother has been struck down as if he were no more than a bowery bum!"

The blonde chips in with her two cents' worth. She is all broke up with grief, and she can hardly talk, but she gives out with having known that dear Marty was in danger.

She says, speaking to the captain, "I had a

dinner engagement with Marty for tonight, and he called me about five and said he would be late because something had come up which must be taken care of at once. I know from the way he talked that he was burning up with rage inside and that it must be serious, so I did not argue with him. Marty darling was not the type of man you argue with."

The captain says that he understands. "Did Mr. Styles give you any idea at all what might be worrying him?"

She shakes her head. "He did say, 'That damn Frankie Broch!' and then he swore some more."

Albert Styles can't keep out of it any longer. "What about this cab driver?" he demands, pointing at me. "Has he been questioned? Has he been searched?"

Scott says I haven't. Right then I like Scott more than I have for years, but this Albert is waving his finger around in the air and demanding his rights, so Scott signals one of the men to frisk me.

The hound growls as the plainclothes stiff comes over, but I tell him to hush. I've been frisked before and I know it don't mean nothing—but this time it is different, because first they find the padded wrench which is in my coat pocket and has slipped right out of my mind, and second they haul out the change in my pocket, and Albert Styles hops on one of the four-bit pieces.

He turns it over and shows us a small dent where a bullet has hit it.

Seems that five, six years back some Joe who is angry at Marty takes a crack at him with a small gun. The bullet hits this four-bit piece which is in Marty's vest pocket and he figures it saves his life, and from then on he carries it as a good luck token, which he wouldn't spend even if he is starving on a desert isle, or fingered for a corpse right in his own house.

They want to know how I get it and Albert is jumping around saying it is as plain as the nose on Captain Scott's face that I am a killer, or was tied up with the killer. He points to my padded wrench and says there is the weapon, and they should make me talk and find out who hired me, or what.

Cap Scott is not excited because, as he says, there is thirty gees in Marty's pocket and if I am the killer I would probably have grabbed it and scrambled, and he asks Albert if he figures a man would commit homicide for a bent half buck when there is thirty gees lying around.

Not even Albert has not got an answer to that, but he keeps insisting I am a desperate character and how do I happen to have the bent half in my pocket? So I finally spill out the truth—how I had dough on the clock and not enough to turn in and how Marty Styles

owed me his fare and tip, even if he is dead.

By their faces I know the story isn't exactly making things all rose water and lilac, but I can tell that Captain Scott at least believes me. And just then their minds are put on other tracks by the arrival of Frankie Broch with eight accompanying cops.

FRANKIE is about the toniest stick-up man in the business and the escort becomes him well. He has been on such jobs as the Muldon payroll and the Central National holdup, although this has only been proved in the newspapers and not in court.

He doesn't look tough, except in the eyes, which are coal black and very steady, but he is not the kind of customer I would want on a rainy, dark night. He has a very pleasant and easy way of talking to the police which he has acquired through long practice.

"This is an error, Captain. I have a fourteen-carat alibi, which I don't think you can break."

"No doubt," says Scott, putting on his poker face. "Maybe this will make you even happier—I would be more inclined to believe you're innocent if you didn't have an alibi."

If it didn't make him happier, Frankie didn't show it.

"That is very unfair," Frankie says. "Also it is silly to think that a man like me would kill the best mouthpiece in New York." He doesn't crack a smile. "There is no living man with as much need of a mouthpiece as I have."

Captain Scott kind of grins. "What about the rumors around town that Marty Styles holds out your loot from this last job?"

Frankie shakes his head. "Them rumors like most others, wrong both Marty and me, Captain. The court found me not guilty of holding up that bank, so how could I have any loot for Marty to hold out? If you want to know, Marty was a very fine man and he and I were just like that." He holds up two fingers which have beautiful manicures.

"If anyone had reason to wish Marty dead," he goes on, "It was that brother of his, standing there. Marty told me personally that his brother is a bum and that he would have given a thousand bucks not to have him around. But since I am not in that line of work, I did not take him up on the offer."

Albert Styles starts to sputter. "I refuse to stand here and be insulted by a known criminal. Isn't there any law left in the land to protect decent people from such slander?" His face gets red and I am afraid he will blow a fuse, but after a minute he gets control of himself.

"If no one will protect me, I will have to protect myself. I, too, have an alibi," he turns

to look at this Clara wren who is wiping the corner of her eyes with a handkerchief. "As it happens," he goes on. "I was supposed to dine with Miss Thorne and my brother. We've been at her apartment all evening, waiting for Marty to show up. Isn't that right, Clara?"

She nods nervously. "We couldn't understand why Marty didn't come."

Personally I am getting tired of all talk, and since the cops who bring out Frankie Broch also bring out my hack, I am wondering why I can't shove. But I know from experience that Captain Scott will not let anyone leave before things are cleared up—unless you have a lawyer like the late Marty Styles. So I chew on this thing right along with the cops, and finally decide that Albert is lying because he is the one which gave his brother the rap on the head and I say so, loudly.

Captain Scott swings around and he laughs. "Always trying to master-mind things, eh, Hymie?"

He doesn't bother me at all. First I tell him, "You should consider the angles like this dog which has been chewing your cops all evening when I did not prevent him from doing same, but he made no disturbance when someone came in and conked his master. Now, how would you explain that except if the dog knew the killer and was not excited by his presence?"

Captain Scott gets a funny look in his eye as if he can hardly believe his ears. "Go on," says he. "You actually make motions as if you could think."

I know this is merely the needle because he must know better. So I don't pay him any attention.

"This Albert is Marty's brother, so naturally he and the pooch are acquainted and the dog would not raise any hell if he was around, as proved since the dog didn't raise hell when you bring Albert back."

Scott shakes his head. "You're spoiling your own case," he tells me. "Because the hound acts like a lamb when Frankie Broch comes in, too."

"You are correct," I admit. "Marty was the attorney for Frankie and naturally Frankie has been out here a lot of times."

"Then why do you think that Albert killed his brother? Why couldn't it have been Frankie?"

I look at the captain with pity because he is only exposing the dumbness which I always thought him capable of. "Frankie Broch is an old hand at this kind of business," I say, "and I ain't meaning no offence and I hope he don't take it that way. But being an old hand and not being dumb, he would certainly not come here with the intent to kill and not have a get-away car handy to scam in. It is the first thing which would enter his mind,

right after he had arranged for a watertight alibi.

"The man who conked Marty had to steal my hack to make his getaway, and then he left it in a parking lot right close to where Frankie lived. That is the last place Broch would have left a stolen cab and it is a piece of carelessness which he would never in this world dream of."

Albert by now is very mad. He strides over in front of me. "You are off your head," he shrieks.

I ignore him. "And the thirty gees in Marty's pocket," I go on. "Frankie Broch would have been looking for dough, especially as Marty was supposed to have held out on the bank loot. Frankie is not the type citizen to overlook thirty gees at any time, but Albert might, because the chances are that he or the girl would get Marty's dough under the will."

Captain Scott's eyes are small. "But he has an alibi—and what was his motive?"

"His alibi is his motive," I says, pointing to the blonde. "Everyone around town knows she is seen as much with Albert as she is with Marty, and have you watched her since I have been talking? She is more worried about Albert than about the fact that Marty is dead."

Scott turns and the girl manages to say, "Absurd!" But her face is pretty white.

Albert laughs. "You're soft in the head."

I tell him, "Here's what I guess happens. There was a dinner date like you said and Marty goes to the girl's apartment, only she tells him something important has come up and you are out at this house and he has to come out here. He rushes out and over to Madison and flags me down. He is mad and in a hurry. I drive him out here and you two have words and you conk him and then looks out and see the cab.

"Maybe you didn't know your brother told me to wait. You couldn't get your car from the garage because I might see or hear you. You waited, thinking I will go away. But instead I go in, looking for my dough, so you grab the cab and drive back to town and on the way get the idea of parking it near where Frankie Broch is living, because you knew the rumors about Frankie and Marty, and thought maybe the cops would pin the kill on Frankie."

I have just remembered something I read in that science magazine you are always getting for me to improve my mind. It is all about a invisible paint, and now I tell Albert:

"You make a pretty had mistake stealing the cab of Hymie Beerman, because I am a careful guy and I take my own measures to prevent sneaks and cheats from stealing my hack and getting clear with it. I got an in-

ventor customer down on Fourteenth Street and this guy gimme some invisible paint which I put on the steering wheel, so that if anyone drives my hack, they get the stuff on their mitts.

"It don't show at all in ordinary light, but this inventor has got a machine which they use in war plants and such to find out who touches things they shouldn't."

Captain Scott is staring at me hard. "You mean black light, Hymie?"

I nod, surprised he has heard of it because as a general thing cops are the last to hear of such.

This Albert is staring at his hands as if they have suddenly turned bloody, and the blonde is staring too, and suddenly Albert jumps me, and then is when I get the blood on my coat because he hits me right in the nose and you know how I am with nose bleeds.

Anyhow they are all so surprised that maybe he would have got away, for he knocks me down, but the minute he hits me, the dog grabs him and hangs on. That is about all. The blonde cracks and gives us the story how she and Albert are in love and Marty finds out and Albert, it seems, has also stolen securities from his brother to cover market operations and Marty, catching him, has made him sign a confession.

Well, when Marty learns he is being two-timed he threatens to send Albert to jail, so they figure to kill him, just about like I said. The only thing being that they don't figure on him keeping my cab waiting.

And it seems Captain Scott knows all about this black light and he is fit to be tied when he finds that I ain't got any paint on my steering wheel and I made the inventor up from my head and I read about this paint in a magazine. He threatens to arrest me for getting evidence under false pretenses, only I know that there ain't no such charge on the book. Otherwise half the cops would be in jail.

So finally I ride Frankie Broch downtown since he don't like to ride in the hurry-up wagon when he is not on business and he tips me a ten-spot. He is very grateful for my getting him out of a spot and he will call me every time he needs a cab, only I give him a phoney number since I got a beautiful wife and two kids and lots to live for. And you would have a hell of a time finding yourself even something better than a hackie, with my brains, baby.

And that's the straight of it, Mamie, and if you don't believe me, you should call Captain Scott.

Only please wait until morning because now I am very tired and the only thing I want is sleep.



GIANT'S RETURN

ABE droned brassily through his megaphone, "Positively, folks, the last chance, last chance to see the daring, the bee-ootiful, the spectacular dive of the love-lee ladies into the bawth of suds. Step right up, ladeez and gemmun, a show for all—a show yuh can bring yer Sunny School Class ta, the love-lee ladies in a bawth of suds!"

He lowered the megaphone and, out of the corner of his mouth, said to the man who grinned at him, "Ya big geek, whatcha doin' back? Yer not with it, are ye? I heard ya struck it rich."

Monty Boodle, seven feet, six inches, lanky, his wide cheekbones glistening in the lights of carnival midway, said in his almost falsetto voice, "Hiya, Abe? How's everybody? I jest couldn't stick away, Abe. How's Carrie?"

Abe's jaw tightened. He muttered, "You di'n't hear?"

The former freak's eyes widened, then became inordinately sad. He said, "The big worm got her. I knew it would."

Abe said, "Ya better see Little Doc. He owns the show, now."

"I heard Horton got kilt," said Monty

●
By JOEL REEVE
●

Even as he let him have his last chance, Doc, the biggest little man in the carney circuit, knew that, dead or alive—the geek was big!
●

Boodle. "I been in Oklahoma. I been collectin' heavy sugar like crazy." He wore a checkered suit which must have cost a mis-spent fortune, tailored to his dimensions. "I come back to spend some of it. They kept me, them mouthpieces and jerks. I come back soon as I could."

Abe said, "See Doc. I gotta bally up another show."

Monty said, "I come back soon's I could." He stumbled away, suddenly abject.

He had always been a simple freak, Abe thought, wearily picking up the megaphone. A good guy, a right guy, but simple. They had struck oil on the farm where he had been born and Monty was rich now, but Carrie, the snake charmer, had held him off too long and would never marry him now. Carrie was mouldering in a grave, on the shores of the Jersey river where she had mysteriously died. Abe shivered and began his spiel.

On a dais behind an elaborate, cream-colored trailer a short man, wide as he was tall doubled up an amazing forearm and biceps. His muscles rippled and bulged and the crowd around the med man gasped. Little Doc said suavely, "Now I do not say that my Home Remedy will make each and every one of you as strong and healthy as I am. . . . I make no extravagant claims for my product. But, folks, I take each day the prescribed dose of Home Remedy. I take it religiously. I believe in it. And, folks, you can see the fruits of regular living when you look upon me. I have been called 'the biggest little man in the world' by leading physicians."

Monty paused on the outskirts, careful not to distract the attention of Doc's pitch by his proportions. He waited patiently until the spiel was finished. Then he unerringly picked the moment when the crowd was hesitating, awaiting the leader, the man who would boldly go forward and buy the first package of Home Remedy and thrust forward, his huge frame gently brushing people who gaped and stared. Monty's gentle, high voice, said, "Gimme one, Doc. It's allus been good to me, the ole Home Remedy!"

It was a sensation. Little Doc's mouth twitched but remained solemn as he deftly took in dollar bills and handed out packages of the medicine which had made him rich, had enabled him to buy Horton's Portable Phalanx, Inc., and which had never harmed a purchaser—even if he doused himself with it. Monty stood by, beaming upon the Clems and Judys of the small Maryland community, until the last one had reluctantly gone on to the next attraction.

Doc folded the table on the dais, rolled up a violently colored chart of the human innards and handed Monty back the dollar he had paid for the Home Remedy, accepting the

package in return. He said, "You are some stick, Monty. Since young Slick went to New York and the big time I haven't had one. I only throw a few pitches to keep my hand in. I spend a lot of time in the white wagon these days. Running a show isn't all cakes."

HE WAS usually a reticent talker to show people, was Little Doc, although voluble enough among those he considered his equals. He was a strange little man with no past of which he cared to speak, a lone man, a misogynist, a hypochondriac. Tonight, however, he felt extremely sorry for Monty Boodle, the inoffensive giant who had returned, rich, to claim his girl.

Monty said quietly, "Give it to me straight, Doc. The big worm got her, huh?"

"The boa constrictor?" Doc said. "Hell, no. That thing was so old we had to kill it because it couldn't swallow any more pigs. One of our best attractions—I'm sorry, Monty. No, the snake did not get Carrie. She just—died."

Monty doubled himself in half to enter the trailer where Doc lived in luxury on a miniature scale, and accepted a drink. Doc was on one of his streaks of abstinence and sipped a coke. Monty crouched on a low stool and said again, "I want it straight. Carrie wasn't no sickly gal. She di'n't jest die."

Little Doc had once held a license to practice medicine. He said quietly, "You know the carney customs. We kept John Law out of it. But Carrie was poisoned. The local coroner didn't get it. I've been looking around."

"You got any ideas yet?" asked the big Oklahoman. His bony face worked convulsively, but his manner was quiet.

Doc said, "Not yet."

Monty said, "You'll put me back in the geek show?"

"Now, Monty, we don't want trouble," said Doc. "You've got an oil well. You could lead a decent life, avoid the stares of the mobs, raise cattle like you always wanted—"

Monty said, "You'll take me back?"

Doc sighed. "Yeah. You're a good man, Monty. You kept the geeks from biting each other for years. I can't refuse you."

"Eke-okey," nodded Monty. He could not straighten inside the trailer. He crawled out and standing on the ground his head was almost even with Doc's. "I'll look around, too. I was powerful fond of Carrie."

A shadowy figure materialized at the giant's side. A woman said, "Why, Monty!"

The big man's sombrero came off, he bowed over her. "I come back, Sandra."

"You poor boy!" she breathed. She was dark, in her early thirties. She had pallid skin and wide-spaced, dark eyes, and there

was beauty in her, not blatant, not soft, but full of steel. "I'll talk with you about it, Monty. Maybe I can help."

"Gee, Sandra," he said. "Gee, that'd be somep'n, huh?"

She went past him, barely touching him with her fingers, and gracefully stepped up and into the trailer. Monty stared at her rounded back and then went off toward the nearest grease joint. He had a weakness for hamburgers, especially in moments of stress, and could consume a half dozen without blanching, Doc remembered.

The woman sat on a stool and said, "Doc, it's fate. Monty comes back just as I get a glimpse. The curtain folded back, just for a moment, and I saw Carrie."

Doc said flatly, "Baloney."

"You doubt me," she said softly. She shivered inside a shawl wrapped around a colorful gypsy costume.

"You're a mitt reader, Sandra," said Doc. "You're a faker. You have the goods to bring 'em in and make 'em like it. But a mitt reader, however good, is still a phonus bolognus."

She sighed, her wide mouth tremulous. "I wish I knew why you hate women so. I wish I could convince you—" She shrugged and slipped down to the ground, peering back through the open door into the lighted, leather-upholstered trailer. "I'll find Carrie's killer and convince you. Monty will be my inspiration."

She disappeared, and Doc thought that was the word. She was not a small woman, but she could whisk herself on and off the scene as though there really were something in her powers . . . he threw off the thought.

It was damned nonsense; he was a medical man—or had been—and he knew dark Sandra was a fake, that she had been making passes at him, and that she would certainly make passes at poor, gullible Monty, with every intent of getting her hands on Monty's money. She would probably succeed this time, marry the poor big geek and live happily ever after.

Well, he couldn't blame her. She had come with the show five years ago, straight from a Broadway joint, with some scandal in her background which no carney would pry into. She was big time, playing the small time in a mitt joint, unhappy as most women without a home are unhappy. But he felt for Monty, too. He scowled, locking the trailer, carrying his box of money from the evening's shows over to the old, big wagon which served him as headquarters and office.

Abe was waiting for him. The wry-necked tough old carney had his box of money from the Venus in Soapsuds act. He proffered it and said glumly "Stick it inna can fer me, huh, Doc?"

Doc grunted. Abe was an honest character,

as carneys went, one of the few men on the lot allowed in the white wagon unless summoned for business. The sturdy little safe swung open and Doc deposited the two bundles of coin. He said, "You've been spending it on Sandra as fast as it came in. You're pretty thin, Abe."

"I woik all me life, I get me a floozie joint in a Sunday-school show, I fall fer a broad," mourned Abe. "I'm doin' all right, see, and that big geek comes back, she's got him in the mitt tent givin' him bizness. She was always hot for Monty. Me, I'm a fatalism. He come, she went. Eke-okey, I'm t'rough."

"Sandra was always too big time for you," said Doc sharply. "Women are the cause of a hundred per cent of the world's trouble. A man your age should have more sense."

"I hoid you onna subjick before," said Abe. "I'm gonna retire and buy me a farm. Wit' pigs. Be comfortable."

"All carneys are going to retire to farms," said Doc irritably. "I wish one would retire to a penthouse on Fifth Avenue some day."

They were silent for a moment. The air was cool, but somehow oppressive, as though charged with an intangible force which Doc could not distinguish. He jerked his broad shoulders. They were heading for down yonder and the Tampa Fair and it would soon be time to worry about storms. Maybe a storm was brewing.

Abe said, "About Carrie. You reckon it was arsenic, Doc?"

"I know it was," said Doc shortly.

Abe's lined face twisted. "Sandra didn't t'ink so. She t'ought Carrie took somep'in."

Doc said, "Sandra is a conniving woman. The truth is not in her."

Abe said, "One o' them worms didn't bite Carrie, huh? The way she twisted 'em around 'er—it gimme the willies."

"Carrie knew snakes like you know ballying," said Doc. "None of hers were harmful."

"Somebody give her arsenic," Abe whispered. "I don't like ta think about it. A killer inna carney."

Doc said sharply, "I don't know why I stick with this glorified lint."

"Ya stick because ya like it," grinned Abe wryly. "We all like it. God help us, we dunno no better."

He went out and Doc took up the mail, the wires from his advance man, the thousand details of coordinating the separate concessions which go together to make up a traveling carnival. It was a big outfit and he had spent his last dime to buy it from the estate of Horton. He wished young Slick and his bride were back to help him, but the kids were wowing the yokels in a Fifty-second Street class joint. . . .

He must try to stop talking carney. He was

disagreeable company even for himself this night. The freaks were acting up again—their dim minds jealous always of each other. It would be fine to have simple Monty good-naturedly smoothing them over: He must wise Monty up at once that Fat Emma and the thin man, Ogle, weren't speaking and the Siamese twins were battling with the pinheads from Georgia—and he must remember that in Georgia the pinheads were from Texas and must be so billed, necessitating a new canvas for the geek tent, which needed one anyway. . . . Too damned many details! He ran his finger inside the size eighteen collar of his custom-made white shirt.

HE DROPPED to the ground, locking the white wagon, and stood a moment, glowering at the dead avenue which led between the tents, concessions, the carousel and Ferris wheel of the midway. It was dark now and completely disheveled, like a frowsy old crone, a smelly, unkempt street of broken dreams, he thought. He walked warily in its shadows, knowing that the bunk tent and the trailers lined up behind it on the edge of the lot contained life, awake, muttering, debating about the return of the giant, Monty Boodle, and the death of Carrie, Monty's old girl. It was bad for discipline, bad for the show to have an unsolved murder hanging over it. Carneys are tough, but not that tough, he ruminated.

He saw a sliver of light coming from the shrouded entrance of the mitt tent. He paused, shamelessly eavesdropping. He heard the low-pitched voice of Monty Boodle, speaking of Carrie. He heard the full, sympathetic tones of Sandra, but could not distinguish the words. Then there was silence, then another voice spoke.

He froze, listening. He could swear that

was Carrie speaking. The dead snake charmer had had a full, throaty voice, a drawing manner of slurring certain syllables. The voice said, "*Well, it ain't for me to say about Monty. . . . He's a good man, but he may not come back. Abe's being nice to me and I like old Abe. . . .*"

The damned woman had made a recording of Carrie's voice, Doc thought irately. He knew she had a recording device with which she played, planning an act which she had proposed to incorporate in her show, and which Doc had negated firmly. She had thought a spiritualist seance would make a big hit in the sticks and Doc had told her it was dynamite, that local law would stop it when the gulls began falling for it, as people always fell for the occult.

He almost went in and stopped her, but that was against carney practice and he thought better of it. He could see her privately tomorrow and stomp on her—he could not do it before the man to whom she was directing her advances. He stumped away, making a tour of the lot in his anger and worryment—for he admitted now that he was worried.

He saw Abe climb slowly into his trailer, the last one on the line, waved his hand and went back to his own comfortable quarters and retired. He lay in his soft bunk and thought of Monty Boodle and the wad of bills he had displayed when buying the Home Remedy at the end of Doc's pitch, and of Sandra's soft voice and wide, aware eyes and acquisitive ways. There had been C notes galore in Monty's roll, a sight to make a woman's mouth water. Maybe Monty would like to buy an interest in the carney, he thought sleepily. It would relieve the pressure on him to have a little oil money, and the good-natured giant would not be a bad partner. . . .

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He dreamed of pythons, boa constrictors, spectral voices chanting in chorus, giants and pygmies dancing a macabre ballet to the tune of the calliope of the carousel while Abe barked for them on a big white horse which turned black as a cloud overcast the ensemble and lightning slashed the electric air.

A rough hand shook him awake.

He mumbled, "Monty?" coming awake. "That you, Monty?"

A harsh voice answered, "No, and you ain't likely to hear Monty ag'in, neither, in this world."

DOC sat up straight, a square body in blue pajamas, his legs in front of him. His hair was rumpled and he was angry. The man who had so rudely handled him was Sheriff Bulkley, no friend of carneys, the local law and a suspicious citizen. He had a red nose and smelled of corn whiskey and he carried a .45 Colt revolver like a Western badman of the '70s and was altogether fantastic.

Doc said, "You come in here and wake me up at some ungodly hour and without a warrant, you clown! What was that you said?"

"I come in here and snapped you out of it to take a look at a corpse," said the sheriff nastily. "I got one of your men under arrest and I thought you'd like t' know. You kin go back t' sleep fer all o' me."

Doc said, "You mean Monty Boodle is dead?"

"I mean a bum from your cheap show called me and woke me up and told me there was a murder here and you ain't no better'n me." The sheriff leered.

Doc thrust his legs into trousers and pulled on an ample T-shirt. Even the hostile John Law stared at the muscles thus displayed, but Doc's vanity was not in play and he only thrust his small feet into moccasins and rushed out of the trailer.

Bulkley led him to the bunk tent and now the carney was coming to hazy life and by Doc's watch it was three-thirty in the morning. Men ran, then were still as they saw the little frame of Doc coming and many of them melted into shadows, waiting for word from him with the clannishness of the tent shows.

Monty Boodle lay in a flare of light from a big electric torch, his lank length too still, his head buried in the dirt, his long arms out-flung. He lay mercifully on his face so that all could not see the anguish of his dying, and in his back the haft of the knife still protruded. He lay twenty feet from Abe's trailer, on the edge of the line.

Two strong hick deputies had Abe between them. He wore pants and a pajama top and he was shivering, staring bitterly down at Monty. Sandra came from her tent as Doc

watched and stood dramatically over the body and wailed in a low voice. "Oh, who could have killed that kindly man? Who?"

Bulkley said, "We know who. We want this big freak identified."

Doc said savagely, "Monty Boodle was my friend. His heart was as big as his body."

Bulkley said, "He's dead, now. This barker of yours was pretendin' to sleep, but we got his prints leadin' to the body and that's all the prints there were."

The ground was soft on the edge of the lot. Abe looked despairingly at Doc and his lips moved. "Ixnay."

Doc's expression did not change. He stepped close to Abe and said for all to hear, "You dirty killer! Stabbing in the back! You filthy fool, you've given my show a bad name it will never live down in the State of Maryland! You're through, do you hear? You can fry or hang or whatever they do to you here and to hell with you!"

Abe's head dropped. He seemed to sag in the hands of the deputies. Bulkley said in a mollified voice, "Now, now, Doc, calm down. We got him and all we want's fer you to tell us somep'n about the giant."

In a seething rage, Doc waved his arms. "Take that killer away! I can't tell you anything while the scoundrel is in my sight!"

They dragged Abe to a waiting automobile and thrust him roughly within. Doc breathed deeply, inflating his enormous chest to its full capacity, waving his arms. "Clear out! Everyone of you—except you, Sandra, dear. You were fond of Monty. You can tell them about him."

The woman faced the sheriff, composed, a soft robe about her, the shawl she always wore about her head and neck framing her round face. Bulkley awkwardly removed his hat and in a firm voice she gave him the name, address, occupation and other items he required to know about Monty.

Doc, unnoticed, went swiftly to the side of the corpse. Bending, he examined the knife. It was from the grub tent, all right, a common butcher knife with H.P.P. burned in the handle. The handle shone cleanly in the light—there would be no prints.

He heard Sandra say in a low voice, "I know nothing of any quarrel between Abe and Monty. Nothing."

"The guy who called me said they both had a yen fer the same gal," Bulkley said. Doc's ears almost protruded a foot in the direction of the sheriff. "A dead gal, he said."

Sandra said, "I know nothing of that."

"It'll do." The sheriff nodded. "I'll sweat the rest outa him."

They were close together and the sheriff was intently admiring the woman, thoughts of his frowzy wife at home in a rumpled bed far

from his mind. Doc bent closer to his dead friend and used the deft swiftness of his surgeon's hands. He slid Monty's wallet from his hip pocket. Monty had always carried it there, despite Doc's warning of dips who could lift the leather without disturbing the breeze. Well, poor Monty would never know of this heist.

In a split second the wallet went back, empty. Then Doc was straightening and the morgue wagon had arrived and they were coming with a stretcher—on which Monty would not fit. Doc motioned for the razor-backs and they came and shoved the sleepy attendants aside and gently lifted the big man from the ground and put him with all tenderness into the hearse, and there was stony silence in the carney as the sound of departing motors took two of their number, one living, one dead, to the adjacent town.

DOC found himself left alone. They would not speak to him now, or at any other time, and his show would disintegrate, because he had repudiated Abe. Even if Abe had committed two murders, he could not rant in public, before John Law, against a carney and get away with it. Not even Little Doc, a fabulous carnival figure in his own right, could so brook the carney law.

He shrugged and walked out of the lights which were already going out. He slid into the white wagon and took the contents of Monty's wallet out and spread them on the desk. He counted the wad of money over and over. Then he spread out the bills and looked at their edges. It was four-thirty when he arose, extinguished the lights, went out and again locked the wagon.

He made his way along, wondering when the first flush of dawn was due, wishing he knew the hour of the sunrising. It was still dark, but he feared there was a lightening of the eastern sky. He ducked behind the mug joint which was next to Sandra's mitt tent and called her name in a low voice.

She answered almost immediately, "Doc? I was awake. I thought you'd come."

She was sitting on the air mattress she used for a bed. She preferred to sleep here, in the back section of the tent where she gave her two dollar readings of gullible palms, and many of the carney folk resented it.

Doc stepped in and said, "Well, I guess things have gone to pot."

"Poor Monty. He was in here a few hours ago." She had the shawl wrapped around her head and shoulders and chest and wore a long robe beneath it.

"Poor Abe," rejoined Doc. "Being grilled by that hick Sherlock—Sandra, who could have called the sheriff? That's not carney stuff. Who is Abe's enemy with the show?"

Sandra said, "You don't think Abe is guilty?"

"Who hates Abe?" Doc reiterated.

"Why—I don't know," she said slowly.

Doc said, "Look, Sandra. Over in the bunk tent they are talking about it right now. Discussing it and cussing me. They wouldn't peep if I walked in. But if you went over and acted scared and lonely, they'd talk. Will you



"What a goin'-over dem hicks gimme. . ."

do it and try to learn who could have called Bulkley?"

She said, "I'm not popular, Doc."

He said, "But you'll do it—for me?" He choked a little. Begging a favor of a woman was the hardest thing he had done in more years than he cared to remember.

Her eyes brightened. She said, "Doc, maybe we could work together, at that. Maybe it was destined that we should. If you only were not so cynical—"

"Please, Sandra," he murmured. "Find out what you can for me."

She touched his massive shoulder with her fingertips, letting them linger a moment caressingly, then went past him to the door of the tent. Then she was gone toward the bunk tent a hundred yards away.

Doc watched her for a moment, then plunged back into the rear of the tent. She had a small bureau, covered with gay material, several cases and boxes containing her belongings, all cleverly designed as props to her palm reading. He went through them as swiftly as his hands could move, which was very fast indeed. Finally he plunged beneath the trestle on which she placed her air mattress, squirming in with difficulty.

Triumphantly he wiggled around, coming out head first at the foot of the improvised bed. In his hand was a leather envelope.

He saw without hearing the quick motion, the cuffs of trousers moving speedily toward him. Under the bed his muscles were of no

avail. He knew there was another knife, that the killer could get to as many as were needed. He snapped his head back, like a huge turtle going into its shell. He heaved and rolled, exerting his tremendous strength, wondering in that fatal second if the bed were bolted down, or sunk into the earth beneath the boards of the floor.

Something ripped and crashed, there was a confusion of violent movement. The entire tent tottered, collapsed as Doc thrust his compact strength upward and in a moment the folds of canvas were down, enveloping him and the would-be killer and the possessions of Sandra in suffocating folds.

Doc grunted.

If he had never known terror, he knew it now, straining to free himself. It was as though Carrie's boa constrictor, magnified in bulk a thousand times, had come to life and were using his own struggles against him. And somewhere, enveloped with him, was the killer with the sharp blade which would cut his bulk as keenly and as surely as it had that of the dead giant.

It seemed hours, but he found his way out and bounced like a rubber ball into the air, his hands thrust out in defense, his eyes glaring. The tent had collapsed completely and people were coming slowly, staring, unbelieving.

He roared at the razorbacks, "Come and put it up, you clowns!"

They came and he stood stoically, expecting that his adversary would be disentangled, unconscious perhaps from a blow of the falling tent pole. The men raised the structure with practiced skill.

One bent and picked up something and said, "Hey, Doc! Looky here."

HE ACCEPTED the knife. But there was no sign of his attacker. He shrugged now, almost sure of himself. The sun sent its first warning ray across the leaden sky. In the light of an electric flash he examined the leather wallet he had appropriated.

The tent was up and Sandra, wrapped in a long, enveloping cloak which belonged to one of the other women, said, "What was it, Doc? What happened?"

He whispered, "Did you learn anything?"

"No," she said. "Only that Abe had been gambling. Maybe a tinhorn got mad at him."

Doc said, "I'm calling a meeting."

The word went out and no man, woman or geek failed to gather at the white wagon. Doc was inside, staring at the portable telephone he had installed in the wagon. It was the only phone on the lot and the wagon had been locked at the hour the sheriff had claimed he was called from his sleep to attend a murder.

In a few moments the sheriff's car drove

up. Abe was huddled between two men in the rear. Bulkley strode through the carney folk and knocked at the door. He entered at Doc's bidding and said, "That guy of yours denies everything."

"He's not guilty," said Doc tonelessly. "The killer attacked me not a half hour ago."

"Dammit, why di'n'cha ketch him?" demanded Bulkley.

"I'm going to let you do that," said Doc. "This is bad for the carney, and ordinarily we take care of our own. But this time I've got to let you do it."

Bulkley blustered, "You won't git outa town until you produce the murderer, y' know."

Doc said, "I don't like you, Bulkley. You're strictly a hick dummy. But come out here and I'll give you a killer."

He stood on the steps of the white wagon, a short step-ladder of stairs, and he was so small his head was almost on their level. But his voice was firm and resonant. He said, "Folks, the sheriff claims a character called him and shot him the works. This gee blamed Abe for killing Monty."

There was a murmur of dissenting voices, of rage for a traitor. Bulkley began to shift his hand toward his preposterous gun.

Doc said, "I threw off on Abe, so the killer wouldn't think I was hep to his antics. But I knew it wasn't Abe."

He let that sink in, so that they would have them. He saw that they were glad to accept it. The sun began to glow in a red ba and he saw Sandra standing a bit off from the crowd, smiling at him.

He said, "Monty was all cut up about Carrie. He knew Carrie hadn't died a normal death. He had his suspicions of who did her in. The big guy wasn't as dumb as he looked or acted. He came back and, although he couldn't prove it, he knew at once who killed Carrie."

Bulkley growled, "What's all this clownin' about Carrie? Carrie what?"

Ignoring him, Doc said, "Monty got with the killer and stalled and made his accusations. He got put off with a song and dance, but he was sure. He headed over to talk about it with Abe. He got stabbed and but for one thing no one would have known who did it."

He paused again. His voice dropped and the magnetism which held crowds every day around his medicine pitch came into him. "I heard Carrie's voice tonight. I heard her speaking, and she mentioned Abe, too. It almost fooled me, and it almost fooled Monty. But you all know how it was with Carrie and the big geek. If the voice didn't quite fool me, it didn't fool Monty!"

He wheeled dramatically, pointing a finger. He opened his mouth to make the denuncia-

tion, but he never finished. Instead he uncoiled his knees and dove off the steps, his arms going wide, then closing, grabbing at knees, twisting and turning. A shot went off and lead punctured the dawn and the sheriff bawled, struggling to get his gun out of its holster, where it stuck fast and would not be moved.

Doc twisted the weapon from the flaccid hand. He arose, brushing dirt from his shirt. He said, "Sandra killed Carrie and she knifed Monty. I found this money and wallet under her bed. Only the edges of the money are bloodstained and in the dark she didn't realize it. Some of the other bills, inside the wagon, are more stained. She didn't take those. I might tell you, Bulkley, that I can read a wad of bills at a glance—all carneys can. I pinched Monty's roll the minute I saw it was light—that some had been removed. She'd have got away with it if she hadn't been so greedy. She wore men's pants under her robe and shawl and moved around right pearly."

She was speechless, white, sullen, but she kept the shawl wrapped around her, only her face, full of hatred, exposed. Upon inspiration Doc jerked the shawl away from her. There were red marks on her neck, the marks of long, strong fingers. Doc said, "Only Monty's hands would fit those marks. He was choking a little information out of her, sure she was Carrie's murderer, then he got soft-hearted and quit. That's why she murdered him. She tried to throw him off with fake spirit tricks—and fell down trying to imitate Carrie's voice. I know because I heard and at first I

thought she had a record, but then I remembered Carrie's southern drawl and Sandra did not quite have it down."

The sheriff said, "But who's her accomplice? Who called me?"

"You chump," said Doc scornfully. "I just told you she was a ventriloquist!"

They took her, then, but reluctantly, and the deputies were gingerly handling her. Her white beauty was desperate now, and the hate in her eyes would have killed Doc on the spot if she could somehow have managed that, too.

She said only, through set jaws, "I want a lawyer."

Abe came, rubbing his wrists where the cuffs had chafed him. He said, "Cheese, Doc, you put it over big. They all t'ought you was chuckin' me. What a goin'-over dem hicks gimme."

Doc said, "She tried to kill me! I always knew it would happen!"

Abe said, "She perzoned Carrie, huh? She had a record when we got 'er. But you knew damn well no real carney would calla cops onna phone. Dey didn't when Carrie was knocked off. Dey knew it."

"That's right," said Doc. He shook himself. "She came at me with a knife and she almost got me. Women! Damn them!"

Abe said, "Yeah. Anna next time you go on a bat you'll have t'ree of 'em spendin' yer dough, ya little character!" But he was very careful not to let Little Doc hear him say that, for the tiny man naively believed that no one on the circuit knew of his occasional weakness.

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MANHATTAN MANHUNT



●
By
**JACK
BRADLEY**
●

Kennedy went to work on Petey in earnest. . . .

HE MOVED about the kitchen, still half asleep, starting coffee, putting on cereal for his two oldest boys, handling pots and pans carefully so as not to awaken Nora in the next room. While the coffee was percolating he went in to change the baby, his big, broken-knuckled hands moving the tiny body deftly. He was a big man—a not young man—a little past forty, with iron grey hair and the beginnings of a paunch. Later, when he was shaved and dressed in a neatly pressed pin-stripe suit, he would look very much like the average, fairly-prosperous business man.

Instead he was a plainclothes detective, first grade, on the police force of New York City. His name was Morton Kennedy.

He cooked and ate a hearty breakfast and

Mort Kennedy's kids thought their old man was a hero, but Mort knew that being a cop only added up to sore feet, black nights, and mornings that were tinged with dog-weariness and—sometimes—with a bitter burning hatred that commanded him to kill!

then, seeing that it was still too early to leave for the station, went over to the window and looked out at the rows of backyard gardens. He had lived in this two-family Brooklyn house for three years, sharing it with the Nolan family downstairs, and he had never yet grown tired of looking at those backyard gardens in the early summer mornings.

He stood there for a long moment, staring down at the riot of carnations that bordered his own and Walter Nolan's plot. An insect droned across the flowers and, even this early, the sky had a brassy hue. It was going to be a scorching hot day and by ten o'clock, he knew, his legs would be giving him hell. He sighed and turned back for another cup of coffee, idly picking up a detective story magazine one of the boys had left lying around in the kitchen.

He opened it at random, and presently smiled wearily and put the magazine down. Maybe it was so, and maybe it wasn't. He had lived long enough to know that almost anything could happen. Stranger things had happened than a man named Morton Kennedy's becoming a hero, coming out on top.

But usually those things didn't happen.

Downstairs he heard Walter Nolan cry out hoarsely. "Oh, my God! No! No!" A door slammed loudly and Walt's slippers feet were pounding up the stairs. He was bawling, "Mort! Mort!" with every step.

Kennedy, shaken out of his embryonic day-dream, met him at the top of the stairs. Nolan was still in pajamas, his hair uncombed, his face twisted in agony. He shoved out a piece of paper with a hand that shook. The note was crudely printed in lead pencil:

If you keep your head and don't go running to the cops you can have her back safe and sound. But it's going to cost you ten thousand dollars. Have it ready because we won't want to wait too long.

"It's Kathy. I found it on her pillow," Walter Nolan said dully. "I thought, at first, that she had just got up to go to the bathroom. And then I saw the note, lying there on her pillow."

"But I don't get it," Kennedy argued, staring at the note. His mind was grappling with realities. "How could a kidnaper get into your apartment without waking you or Marge?"

"He didn't have to get into the apartment," Nolan said shakily. "All he had to do was reach in through the window and lift her out. Kathy's bedroom window isn't more than four or five feet from the sidewalk, you know, and in this hot weather she sleeps right next to the window. All the rat had to do was to

slip the catch on the screen and reach in and lift her out."

NOLAN was staring in horrified fascination at Kennedy, and even in this moment of tension Mort felt a sense of irritation at the part he had to take. He was starved in a hero's role without being one—the man who did things when every one around him was too dumfounded to move. Little Kathy Nolan was six years old and he had known her for three of those six years. He had held her in his arms when she was sick. He wanted to sit right down with Nolan and feel helpless and desperate as hell. But because of his job he had to think of her as an impersonal problem. He had to ask questions and make out a report.

A door opened downstairs. "Walt? What is it? What's wrong?" Mrs. Nolan called. Walter Nolan turned miserably toward the stairway. Then he looked at Kennedy, and Kennedy shook his head. Margaret Nolan had a heart condition that even the doctors couldn't be sure of.

She came toiling up the stairs, now, a flabby, moon-faced woman, her fat body wrapped in a sleazy bathrobe. Her eyes were wide with apprehension.

"What is it, Walt?"

Kennedy met her at the kitchen door. "It's all right, Marge," he said soothingly. "There's been a little trouble but it's nothing serious. You just take it easy."

She saw the note lying on the kitchen table. Before Kennedy could stop her, she had snatched it up and read it. Her moon face seemed to expand, her eyes bulging. Nolan jumped forward and grabbed her shoulders.

"Come out of that, now, Marge! This is just a gag some damn fool has—"

She pitched over in a dead faint. Kennedy kicked out a chair and slid her deftly down into it. Walter Nolan stood there staring helplessly at his wife.

"Oh, damn!" he said.

"Never mind. It's done now. Help me get her into bed." Kennedy walked around behind her and slipped his hands under her armpits. With his foot, he pushed open the door leading into the bedroom. Nora was already up, pulling a dressing gown around her.

"What is it, Mort?" she asked sleepily.

"Phone Doc Ryan and tell him to get over here on the jump. And ask him to tell you what to do until he gets here." She turned to the phone without further question, obeying him the way she always had in times of crisis. He wet a washcloth in cold water and put it on Marge Nolan's head, then turned to Walt.

"Soon as Nora gets through phoning, I'll

call the station house and have them start things. They'll throw out a dragnet and start yanking guys in for questioning. It may take a little time but, sooner or later, one of the guys they yank in will give 'em a lead. They always do. It's just a question of time, that's all."

Not heroism, he thought, but didn't say it.

Nolan let the sentence die unfinished and Kennedy dropped his eyes before the stark misery in the man's face.

His voice was almost harsh, when he spoke. "Hell, Walt, I don't know the score any more than you do. I'm not a miracle man. I'm just a plain, ordinary cop. It might be some guy who knows where you work and knows that you handle big cash. It might be some louse that's got a grudge against you. Try to think."

Nolan shook his head helplessly. There was a cold chill in Kennedy's stomach as he went to the phone to call the station house. He tried to keep his mind on the routine.

Walter Nolan was cashier in an insurance company—Mort knew his salary to a dime. Nolan had beefed about it often enough. It was exactly fifty dollars a week. And Nolan played the ponies. He had, as a matter of fact, introduced Kennedy to his bookie, had given him tips a number of times. Furthermore, he liked to go out with the boys, now and then, and those outings cost money. Mort doubted if Nolan had as much as a hundred dollars in his bank account. Hell, he thought sickly, now he'd have to watch out for possible embezzlement as well—by a man he called a friend.

When he had finished phoning, Nolan was still sitting on the bed, staring numbly ahead of him. Mort jerked his head toward the kitchen and went out. When Nolan came out Kennedy was already pouring out a stiff shot of rye.

"Here, kill this off," he said with forced cheerfulness. "The boys from the tech squad will be here pretty soon and I want you to be in shape to talk to them. Lieutenant Pierson will be in charge and there's not a better man in New York than Pierson for a thing like this. When he gets here tell him everything you can think of, even things that don't seem important to you. Strangers you've talked to in the last few days and things like that. Things you wouldn't tell me. Now come on, drink that down, will you? Then I'll pour some coffee for you."

Nolan took a small swallow of the whiskey, set the glass down. "Mort? You're going to be working on this, yourself, aren't you?"

"I sure am, pal. Aso soon as Doc Ryan gets here I'm starting out. And I only hope I can get my hands on the rat that did this before

the rest of the boys get to him. Kathy meant a whole lot to me, Walt."

But even as he said it, he knew it plain as day. Hell, he wasn't a hero.

THE first break was a sheer accident and Kennedy almost missed it. Dr. Ryan lived only a few doors down the street and, as he hurried past, Billy Ryan, the doctor's twelve-year-old son stuck his head out the window.

"Hi, Mr. Kennedy! Say, what's the matter with Kathy? And why didn't they call in my dad instead of a strange doctor?"

Kennedy waved a greeting and said something vague and went on. He was halfway down the street before the import of Billy's words registered. He turned back.

"What was that again Billy?"

"The doctor that took Kathy to the hospital this morning. I got up early to put my pup out because dad don't like for me to keep him in my room overnight. And I saw this doctor carrying Kathy out to his car and I asked him what was wrong. He said she was sick and he was taking her to a hospital."

Kennedy didn't know it, but he was beginning to breathe again.

"I see. What did this doctor look like, Billy?"

"Well—he wasn't a very big guy, not near as big as you. And he was kinda dark."

"Would you know him if you saw him again?"

"Oh, sure. Anybody that muscles in on my old man—" Billy read the comics, Kennedy noted in passing. Especially the detective ones.

"All right, then. Tell you what I'll do. I'll take you over to New York with me this morning. There's a lot of pictures over there and I want you to see if you can find one of the doctor who took Kathy out this morning."

The kid's eyes popped with excitement. "You mean the rogues' gallery? Gee! Wait'll I get my clothes on. I won't be a minute, Mr. Kennedy."

"All right, Billy. I'll go and tell your father I'm taking you with me. He's up at my house now."

So even heroes used the gallery, Kennedy thought. He was beginning to feel a little funny, himself.

IT WAS over much sooner than Kennedy had expected. For nearly half an hour they had gone over an endless succession of pictures. And then Billy Ryan suddenly said, "That's him!" His grimy, little finger pointed to a black-haired, weasel-faced picture.

"You sure, Billy?"

"Sure, Mr. Kennedy. I'd know him anywhere."

"All right, then. You wait here until I show the picture to the lieutenant. Then we'll go home."

Back in his own apartment, again, Kennedy called Walter Nolan out into the kitchen. Marge Nolan was lying on the bed, her eyes staring blankly at the ceiling. Nora sat beside her.

"How is she?" Mort asked.

"Pretty bad. Doc Ryan gave her a sedative but he says she won't stand too much. Did you find out anything?"

"Sure did. The rat that pulled this is a guy named Little Petey Renfrew. He's strictly small time. Runner for the numbers racket, card shark, race track tout. His last pinch was for bootlegging rot-gut during the whiskey shortage. I can't figure a punk like Little Petey trying a snatch job but we'll soon know all about it. The boys'll have him before night."

He spoke bravely, but there was a sickness inside him.

He handed the picture to Nolan and took the bottle of rye from the cabinet. "Ever see him before?"

His legs were already hurting him and he knew only too well what kind of a day was before him. He poured out two glasses and waited. Nolan was staring at the picture.

"Mort, I just don't know," he finally admitted. "Seems to me I've seen him somewhere and I can't remember where. Couple of weeks ago, I was over in New York with the boys and we were all pretty high. I remember talking a lot about the job and this guy might have been there while I was shooting off my face like a damn fool. But I just can't place him for sure."

"That's all right," Kennedy said. "Don't worry too much about it. We'll pick him up before night, most likely. It was a break that Ryan kid saw him."

"You said it," Nolan tossed off his drink and poured another.

All through that hot summer day Mort Kennedy worked as he had never worked before. He did a lot of leg work; he asked a lot of questions.

He had no trouble whatever in getting a line on Little Petey Renfrew. Up to the day before, the man's trail had been as clear as that of an elephant. And then with night-fall he had dropped completely out of sight. Somewhere in New York City, Little Petey was holed up. Kennedy thought of frail little Kathy in some grimy hideout, her face streaked with tears, and there was a lump in his throat.

And at four o'clock in the afternoon something rang in his brain and he swore harshly. His bunions were giving him hell, but he kept slapping them on the pavement until he found a cab.

Hot needles were lancing up along the insides of his thighs and his underwear was sticking to him like a wet, dirty rag but there was a sudden lift in his heart. This was it. It just had to be.

HALFWAY across Brooklyn Bridge, he realized that the joint would probably be closed since the lid had clamped down. Then he put his brain to remembering other details, and felt better.

But the place *was* closed.

He got out of the cab and made for a phone booth, dialed his apartment and asked for Nolan.

Nolan's voice was strained. "Have you got a lead, Mort?"

"I don't know, yet." Then he posed his question. Nolan answered with a readiness that brought Kennedy his first relief in a long time.

Then Nolan asked, "Where you phoning from? The station house?"

"No. And don't go getting any ideas. You'll queer things. I'll call you back."

(Please turn to page 95)

NEXT TIME SAY

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By **DOROTHY
DUNN**
•



Murder was our baby, the inevitable fruit of our ill-starred marriage. So why not welcome it with a party, Gerald suggested, with friends and flowers and music—and himself as the corpse of honor!

I HAD it all planned. If a man gets drunk at his own party and falls out of a window ten stories up, that doesn't mean his wife pushed him. It doesn't even mean anybody was murdered. It just means that Gerald Bannister guzzled himself blind as usual and met with an accident as usual. Only this time, the accident would be fatal and would mean money in instead of more going out. Gerald's insurance was about all he had left, but the double indemnity clause made the policy better than money in the bank.

I needed money. Not just a few hundred for clothes. I needed ten thousand to keep Max Gruner quiet. I wasn't foolish enough to think I'd get rid of the blackmailer by paying him. You never do. Besides, Max has been bleeding Gerald and me for so long that he's practically one of the family. As for the next payment not getting rid of Max, that was all right with me. I didn't want to get rid of Max.

Not just yet.

Max plays a smart game. He took a fortune from Gerald and I'm sure we weren't his only clients. He must have the kind of money that talks by this time. Max always said with a shrug, "Money talks, then I don't have to. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

He said it with an amused glitter in his eye like a rakish gypsy, keeping up the pretense that his fraud was legitimate. In a way it was. We had to pay or be indicted for murder. He had solid proof.

We had killed once, Gerald and I, together. We hadn't been clever about it. We had been too eager to get our hands on the money his first wife had. But all we inherited, really, was Max Gruner.

Of course, if we had been pulling together we'd have killed Max right in the beginning. But Gerald had taken to drinking and his nerve ran out as the whiskey sloshed in. For a year I've been afraid that he'd crack and tell the whole story in one of his garrulous stages. That's why I decided to kill Gerald. Max wouldn't tell. The secret was valuable to him.

But the secret was hanging like a heavy weight on Gerald and he might resort to confession to get it off his mind.

He had tried everything else. And I couldn't imagine him keeping me out of the confession. He hated himself for the crime he had committed and he hated me for helping him. Once the thing was done, he seemed to forget that I had talked against the idea when he first mentioned it. He seemed to think I was responsible, somehow, and made him do what he did. He's built of a fiber too weak for murder.

That's the surprising thing. I was the one who held back. I was the one who blanched at the idea of killing her. But once she was dead, I didn't care. I didn't worry about it, I mean. Except for Max Gruner. I knew we'd have to see that Max was kept in line.

NOW the money was gone and Max was insisting on another ten thousand.

"We'll have to get it somewhere, Gerald," I had said.

"Impossible!"

"Don't say it like that. I'm not talking about new furniture or another maid. This isn't an expense that you can dismiss with a wave of your hand and the word 'impossible'.

You can't consider blackmail in terms of extravagance."

"Sorry, Vivian. It's a luxury I can no longer afford."

"Max won't take that for an answer."

"Then he won't take anything. He comes too damn high."

"Please, Gerald. Do you know what you're saying? Do you know that we'll be dragged through a murder trial if you don't get this money somewhere?"

"I can't get money forever! I could borrow. But the time will come when I can't raise another cent. I'm sick of it, I tell you! I'm sick of Max Gruner. I'm sick of this lousy scotch! I'm sick of—"

"Me, Gerald?"

He had dropped his hands between his knees then, staring at the rug. Some of the whiskey in his glass spilled out and dripped across the toe of his shoe.

"Don't make me say it, Vivian. Don't make me say the things I feel. It wouldn't be pleasant. Some people see snakes in their hallucinations. They're lucky. I feel them. They slither around in the slime of what's inside of me. A killer! I squeezed the life out of her. We handled her body like a sack of potatoes!"

"Your remorse is a little late, Gerald. What's happened to you? Don't tell me you've decided you loved her after all!"

His eyes were enormous in the sunken cheeks.

"Love? Good God, that has nothing to do with it! It's the little things you remember. The way she looked with cold cream on her face. The way she frowned when she was reading. The vitamin tablets she took—"

That had shocked me. I had thought Gerald's first wife out of the picture long before we killed her. I hadn't ever seen her before that night. And even then I didn't see her alive. But I had thought Gerald's description of her accurate enough: *She's a stick, darling. A woman with dollar marks where the curves ought to be. . . .*

"You lied, didn't you, Gerald? You said she had never meant anything to you."

"Oh, get out of here and leave me alone, Vivian! What difference does it make? I didn't love her. But I lived with her, damn you! Now give me that bottle."

"You've had enough."

"Don't you dare take that scotch out of the room. I have plans that include it. So leave it here, and get out. Or, on second thought, you might like to share it with me. Don't you feel the snakes crawling inside you, too?"

"No, I don't."

"You're callous, maybe?"

"Let's just say I didn't live with her. You did."

"Right you are. The bottle please."

"Listen, Gerald. Please listen for your own sake! There isn't any way you can change a thing you've already done. You can't undo it by being sorry. What's the point in drinking yourself to death?"

"I like it this way. What's the good of anything else? The bottle, Vivian! Thank you, that's better. Now I'll get on with it. Here's how! And the sooner the better. I'm so damn tired of the whole damn—"

"What about Max? The ten thousand?"

I got no answer. He had passed out.

That's when I decided to kill him.

MAX GRUNER invited me to lunch the next day. He always maintained a pleasant social attitude toward us and I found myself forgetting, on occasion, that he was not a friend, that he was a talon dug deep into our flesh. When Gerald was surly to Max, our friends assumed that my husband was jealous and the debonair blackmailer seemed to enjoy the double role.

He asked me to meet him at the Pump Room. Perhaps I dressed with special care to match the sheer elegance of the restaurant with its liveried waiters. Or perhaps I thought someone might see me with Max and wished them to credit his interest to my glamor. Or perhaps I was just thinking of his impish eyes with their strange conflicts of merry lights and cruel depths.

Max was waiting for me in the lounge of the Ambassador East. His eyebrows went up and he walked toward me slowly, his lips parted in approval.

"Hello, Max."

He didn't say anything. He took my extended hand, made a half turn and linked my arm through his and his fingers stayed across mine on his coat sleeve, as we walked toward the door of the Pump Room.

"Don't drool, Max. Gerald wouldn't like it and I'm not sure that I do, either."

He looked down at me with mock chagrin.

"Sorry. I forgot for a moment that you were Mrs. Bannister. And so beautiful, too. So utterly beautiful! Tell you what."

"What, Max?" My smile curved up at him like a reflex. I had a sudden surge of confidence that was thrilling. Max was a man like any other man. I could handle him.

"Today is different. Today you don't have any last name. You're just Vivian. It becomes you."

Max chose a cream cushioned-leather booth with an eye to privacy and the solemn-faced waiter swung the table top around so we could slide in.

"The wine list," said Max, without asking me. I had told him I never started drinking until late afternoon and cocktails.

"Today is different," he told me. "It's a

day without hours, without habits. It's a day for everything to be turned topsy-turvy."

The dignified waiter in the red knee-breeches brought the wine list.

"Do you always insist on having your own way, Max?"

"Most of the time, my dear. Now and then I let somebody else plan something and if their way turns out to be my way, then I give in."

"But it always has to be in agreement with your own ideas. Isn't that a little selfish?"

"Not really. I always know what's best. Take us, for instance, right now. Champagne is what we need. Lobster and coffee would be a business man's luncheon. You don't want that, do you?"

Business. No, I didn't want that. I didn't want the Max I had been dealing with for two years. I didn't want to begin talking about the ten thousand dollars. I didn't want to think about Gerald and the party I was going to give in our town apartment, ten stories above Michigan Boulevard.

"I guess you're right, Max. A heady wine. I find I'm as thirsty for it as you are."

"That's better," he whispered. "I thought you would be!"

My green shoes began to pinch a little and I eased the right one off under the table. I knew we'd be there a long time.

BY THE time he took me home I was sure I had him right where I wanted him.

But after he had said good night in the lobby, he kept my hand in his and looked steadily into my eyes.

"And Vivian, darling—the ten thousand dollars. You won't forget to remind Gerald about that, will you? I've already given him an extra week."

I wanted to hit him. I wanted to reach out and claw that silky voice to shreds! The way he said it, you'd think he was a kindly landlord giving Gerald an extension for the rent. And I felt that he was laughing at me. I knew he was. He had played up. Oh yes, he had played up beautifully! And now he was telling me that it had been fun, but it was the money he really wanted.

I didn't slap him. That wouldn't have done me any good. I had to be smarter than that. Much smarter.

"Of course, Max. You made me forget about it for a while. Gerald is going to raise the money. Can you come to a party I'm giving next Thursday? We'll have it for you then."

"I'll be delighted, darling."

And all the way up to the tenth floor I kept biting my lip, thinking bitterly that Thursday was two days off and wishing it could be this very night.

A day without hours, without restrictions,

he had said. A topsy-turvy day. I'd like to have seen his eyebrows go up in a peak of surprise, midway between our French window and Michigan Boulevard. He never got hurt, did he?

Gerald was sober for once. He was sitting on the divan with a pot of coffee on the tooled-leather top of the table in front of him.

"You ought to have something under that pot, Gerald. If it's hot it'll leave a ring."

"Oh? I didn't notice."

He slid a magazine under it, as docile as his old self. He had a sheaf of papers in his hand and his shell-rimmed reading glasses on. For a moment I thought he even looked like his old self, like the competent executive I had married. Then I glanced at him again and knew I was wrong. He didn't look crisp in the glasses any more. He looked like an owl. And he didn't look important holding the papers. He looked foolish because his hand trembled and the business-like papers rattled like dry leaves.

"What's that, Gerald?"

"This? My insurance policy, Vivian. I carry a very heavy one, you know. Incidentally, I'm cold sober. You notice?"

"Yes, I see you are. But why the policy study? Premium due?"

"Not until next week. No, I was just checking up on the wording of the thing. Funny. You take out insurance in blind moments. This is all wrong."

I poured a cup of coffee for myself and sat down beside him, kicking my shoes off. I didn't want him to guess how interested I was.

"What do you mean it's all wrong?"

"The double indemnity for one thing. I get it for accident or murder and I don't get it for suicide."

"Good heavens, Gerald, you don't think about that when you're sober, do you?"

"Don't I? But double indemnity for murder. I wonder why the devil I had them put that in? My premium is way too high and always has been. Now if they paid off double

for suicide, we might get some return on the investment!"

"Stop talking like a fool! If you have to die to collect, what do you care about the money? Really Gerald, I wish you'd get that idea out of your head. I know you don't love me any more and haven't for a long time. But you ought to have some consideration."

"That's just the point, Vivian. I am considering you. God knows I hate you and blame you when I'm drinking, but not any more than I hate and blame myself. I'm not malicious toward you. I want to die. That's my own business. I intend to die. But I might as well figure it so you can collect on this policy. I suppose I owe you that much."

"You mean—kill yourself and make it look like an accident?"

I was tired. The strain of the day was in my bones and Gerald was frightening me a little. Thinking about pushing him out of the window hadn't scared me, but his cool talk about his own death seemed a little insane. I wondered if his mind had cracked. Then I wondered if he meant what he said. Maybe he had just outguessed me. Maybe he planned to take my life instead of his own.

"Just what are you talking about, Gerald?"

"What you said a minute ago. I want my suicide to look like an accident so you'll collect the double indemnity."

"Or make it look like murder?"

"Maybe. That could be done, too. We'll have to decide which we want it to be. Out with Max Gruner today?"

I yawned. "Yes."

"Have any luck?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"The ten thousand."

"He wants it."

"Of course. I could have told you you couldn't work around him. I've known Max for years, worse luck. If I hadn't, he wouldn't have come barging into my garage the night we were getting rid of Linda's body. He has absolutely no use for women. A woman made

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a fool out of Max once. He's never got over it."

Gerald took his glasses off and tapped them on the back of his hand like a grandfather.

"Are you in love with Max, Vivian?" he asked suddenly.

"In love? Are you crazy, Gerald? I hate him! I loathe the very sight of him. I'd like to see him squirming and begging. I'd like to see him dead!"

"I thought you were," Gerald said. "But it's no good. Max is the cruelest person I know."

"Do you think you're telling me anything I don't know? I meant what I said. I hate him. I'd like nothing better than to see him get what's coming to him."

Gerald was quiet for so long that I thought he was ready to call it a night. I started to leave the room.

"Wait a minute, Vivian. You're sure you want Max out of the way?"

"Quite sure."

"H'mm. Double indemnity for murder. How would it be if Max killed me? That would give you the money and get him off your neck at the same time."

"Fine! About Max, I mean. I'm not keen about what you plan for yourself, though."

"We don't need to pretend, Vivian. Let's be practical. When will you see Max again?"

I told him about the party Thursday night. I told him I had planned to push Max out of the window to keep from paying the ten thousand. That was partly true. At the moment, I felt a lot more inclined to have it be Max than Gerald.

"The window? Let's see."

He went over to the French doors that opened onto a two foot balcony.

"An architect's whimsy," he mused. "Yes, Vivian, I believe it would work. I could get Max over here with me. You could hold the attention of the other guests, so their backs would be toward Max and myself. I could shout: 'Max! Don't push me!' Then I could jump. It would have to be fast. I could be toppling over by the time the guests turned around and Max would be standing there with his arms outstretched. I think he'd try to hold me back. And the verdict? Murder! The result? Double indemnity for you and the death sentence for Max."

"My God, Gerald!"

That was all I could say. I don't know why it upset me so much to see him standing there, checking the drop to the street. My stomach turned over and I went into the bedroom and slammed the door.

ALL day Thursday I was jittery. It seemed to me that every time I walked into the living room, Gerald was standing by the win-

dow, looking down. When I spoke to him, he didn't answer.

"Gerald!"

He turned then, taking his pipe out of his mouth absently. He looked like a picture in slow motion. And his eyes had the expression of someone waking out of a deep sleep.

"Huh? What say, Vivian?"

"I said, come away from that window. Are you trying to drive me insane? I have enough on my mind arranging for this party. Flowers, liquor, food. Did you call Ellison?"

Gerald came over to the divan then and sat down.

"My lawyer? Yes, he's coming. And Vivian—"

"Yes?" I was arranging sweet peas in a flat bowl.

"You needn't worry about me, Vivian. I won't jump too soon. That's what you're afraid of, isn't it? That I'll get a sudden impulse to have it over with and leave you holding the bag? Meaning the demands of Max. But I won't do that."

I guess it was nerves that made me cry. I don't know. But without warning, the tears came and my words fought their way over a hard knot in my throat.

"I wasn't thinking about the money or about anything . . . except . . . except—"

Gerald leaned forward, inspecting my face with surprise. His scrutiny was embarrassing. I tried to control my voice, to stop sniffing, but it was a nervous reflex by this time.

"All right, Vivian. Tell me. What were you thinking about?"

"Just how awful you looked there at the window." I decided to give it to him straight. "You seemed to be getting pleasure out of torturing yourself. I had the feeling that you were picking out a particular brick, that you were experiencing the fall again and again in your mind. *And enjoying it!*"

His mouth was a thin line of bitterness and there was contempt in the restraint of his words.

"How little you know, Vivian. How very little!"

My tears turned to anger. For a moment, when he had assured me he wouldn't jump too soon, I had felt sorry for him. I had wanted to talk him out of dying. But looking at him now, I couldn't pity him. He had got me into the whole mess in the beginning.

"*Darling—I can't live without you,*" he'd said once.

Sure, I'd listened to him and that much was my fault. But he brought most of it down on his own head and mine, too. Suddenly his dramatics disgusted me.

I told him, "You're getting some kind of abnormal thrill—"

"*Why, you cheap little ingrate!*"

I couldn't stop him. He turned at the window, leering at me like a madman and tumbled himself over the railing. He screamed as his feet turned up into the air and it was a shrill agonized cry of pure terror, of full realization.

I must have fallen to my knees because I remember pressing my face into the chintz cushion of the divan, trying to blot out the look in his bulging eyes, trying to stifle the sound of his scream.

But I couldn't press hard enough. I kept seeing him throwing himself back without looking, turning himself over like a high-diver doing a back-flip. Only there was a difference.

Crazy thoughts raced through my mind. Not the sort you would expect to have. Disconnected thoughts that I couldn't control. A springboard—heavy burlap, ragged on one side—the smell of chlorine . . . No, Michigan Boulevard—through the air with the greatest of ease . . . that awful scream. . . .

I knew then, of course, and it gave me a strange feeling in the pit of my stomach to know. I remembered my first diving lesson years ago. I stood on the board looking down. It didn't seem very high. But I couldn't go off. I stood there staring down at the water and the water kept getting farther away. It had taken only minutes of staring for the distance to become insurmountable. I backed off the board, shaking. My teacher called me a coward. I went back up and jumped off without looking, holding my nose. The minute I felt myself falling, panic gripped me and I sprawled in the air, arms flailing. That was my last attempt.

This was Gerald's last, too.

I had driven him to it. I should have known why he had been standing at the window all day. I should have guessed that he was afraid to jump, that he was trying to get up the nerve and the street kept getting farther and farther away.

Someone touched my shoulder. It was the maid and her face was just a white blur. A policeman stood behind her, twirling his hat awkwardly.

"Mrs. Bannister—" he began, and stopped.

I got up and sat down on the divan.

"I know," I said. "I saw him fall. He was a little drunk and tripped. He—he tried to catch himself. He. . . ."

"Drunk, you say?"

"Yes, officer. He started drinking right after lunch."

The maid interrupted.

"But, Mrs. Bannister—"

"Quiet, Helen."

That wasn't very smooth, but I had to shut her up. She knew as well as I did that Gerald had made a special effort to keep sober for the party that night. His effort had consisted in my locking the liquor cabinet and keeping

the key. He had stormed for a while and Helen had heard him.

I expected the policemen to tell Helen to go ahead and have her say. But he didn't. He turned back to me.

"Would you say your husband had been despondent over anything lately, Mrs. Bannister?"

"Despondent? I should say not. He was in



I jerked my head toward the door so fast that my neck hurt. . . .

the best of spirits. Oh, it's horrible! An accident like this happens so quickly and there's nothing you can do about it! Nothing—nothing!"

I expected some sympathy after that. But the officer's eyes were strangely cold.

"So it wasn't suicide," he mused. "Could your opinion possibly be colored by a clause in an insurance contract?"

That was pretty rough talk to a woman who had just gone through the shock of seeing her husband topple to his death.

"What do you mean, officer? Of course it wasn't suicide. I know of no earthly reason why Gerald should want to die."

"Don't you?"

I jerked my head toward the door so fast that my neck hurt. I knew that voice! But I couldn't believe it.

Gerald stood there handcuffed to another man. And the other man was Max Gruner!

"Don't you know why I wanted to die?" asked Gerald in a hollow voice. "Sure you do, Vivian. Tell the man why!"

"You're not . . . you *can't* be . . ."

"Alive? But I am. Not much alive. Just a thread left. A thread for the law and a thread to wind around your lying throat!"

Ten stories! He couldn't be, but he was. One shoe was gone. His trousers were ripped, one side of the material flapped open up his

right leg, revealing a long red gash. One arm hung sickeningly limp, bent so that the hand was twisted around with the thumb at a crazy angle.

And Max Gruner, handcuffed to him. Max Gruner looking stern and righteous, hard and incredibly different.

I fainted. My knees buckled up and I sank into the darkness gratefully.

WHEN I came to, they let me look out of the window. They had to. They had to show me the unbelievable thing they were talking about.

I looked down and it was true enough. A white thing spread like an awning from the porch of the apartment below us. Like a fireman's net. In fact, that's what it was. Gerald had back-flipped from the window into it, but his landing had been bad and one of the supporting rods had caught him.

I sat down on the divan, glaring at Gerald and Max. I felt trapped, sick and desperate. I didn't know what to say.

Gerald volunteered one of the answers.

"I've confessed, Vivian. They know all about what we did to Linda and how we did it."

By that time I didn't care much. My first thought was a gloating one. Max Gruner had no hold on me now. I didn't have to pay any more. His silence was worth exactly nothing. I looked at him triumphantly, careless of my words and the witnesses about.

"And you're handcuffed, too, Max darling! You'll have lots of days without hours now, won't you, Max?" I finished up shakily. "Topsy-turvy days, but they tell me there are plenty of restrictions while you're waiting in jail. And you don't get champagne, either!"

He looked down at the floor than before he met my eyes and spoke.

"That's the only thing I'm sorry about, Vivian. The only thing I'm ashamed of. I got a little too much into character that day. God knows how I could have! But let that pass. You might as well know now that I've been working *with* the law, not against it."

"The police go in for blackmailing? Don't make me laugh."

Gerald interrupted. "Shut up and get it straight, Vivian, so we can get out of here. Max isn't a policeman. He was a friend of Linda's, though. A good friend, before I married her. I told you he was bitter about one certain woman. I was wrong—he wasn't bitter, just unhappy. That woman was Linda. He was, still is, in love with her. He saw us dump her into the car, remember? We burned the car in the garage and there wasn't any way to prove it was murder."

"That's the point, Vivian," said Max. "I

didn't have proof. I wasn't even sure of what I saw until you paid off the huge demands for money. I was sure then. I told the police what I suspected and they worked for months trying to get the smallest shred of evidence. They couldn't get a thing. It was my word against yours and that wouldn't have meant a conviction. There was only one way to work it. Stick with both of you and get your backs against the wall, keep pressing you back and down until I got a confession. I've kept all the blackmail payments in a safe deposit box to turn over to the police. Now do you see the light?"

I saw it. I saw what fools Gerald and I had been to let him bluff us into thinking he had evidence. I saw what amateurs we were. I felt the snakes for the first time.

"So now you've got even, haven't you? You've avenged the death of a woman you loved once. What good does that do you?"

"Not much," he said, working his jawbone back and forth with clamped teeth. "A little, but not much. You wouldn't understand about that, I'm afraid."

Maybe I wouldn't. Before I met Gerald, I might have. But that was a thousand years ago and I had been different then. I might even have been fool enough to fall in love with Max in the old days. But not now. Gerald was wrong thinking I loved Max. I didn't at all. That really *would* mix things up!

I heard an officer say, "The wagon is here."

But there was just one thing I wanted to know about the masterful Max Gruner who always got what he wanted.

"That canvas catching rig," I said. "How did you know Gerald was going to jump out the window?"

He showed me the dictaphones leading to the apartment below, which he had rented for the purpose.

"I knew as much as you did, Vivian. When you were goading Gerald this afternoon, I knew he might jump any minute to keep you from getting the insurance. I already had the net there in readiness for the party and just on a hunch I spread the thing out. A few minutes later, he jumped."

I looked at Gerald then. At what was left of him.

"You didn't know it was there! You really tried to kill yourself, didn't you?"

"Tried? I succeeded, Vivian. Max has only postponed my happy moment for a little while."

He was right about that. He died in the wagon, on the way to police headquarters.

And me? Well, I died, too. Back there in the apartment when I was looking into Max Gruner's eyes, knowing that I was *everything* he wasn't.

By
**KEN
LEWIS**

Dressed in blue trunks,
Eric Fillmore still huddled
on the beach. . . .

BODY- GUARD

●

There was more to his best friend's death than Malone had bargained for. Of course, it did bring him power and wealth but—as a ghastly jest—it also destroyed all that he could use them for!

●

MALONE smiled silkily at the mousy little man across the desk, but there was something disconcerting in the studied fixity of his eyes. The little man seemed to feel it. He squirmed.

"Pierce," Malone mused, fingering the card on the desk. "Fletcher Pierce. You had a bad dream, Pierce. There's nothing in the facts to back up your story. The facts are that two years ago Mr. Fillmore went alone to Frisco, on business. On the way from the station to his hotel, he was dragged into an alley and slugged by holdup men. He came to with no identification and a case of total amnesia. He finally drifted to Reno, invented a name, and got a job in a gambling place.

"Last month he saw a newsreel. The newsreel showed one of our Navy helicopters res-

cuing two seamen. He'd helped design the ship. While watching it, something snapped in his brain. He remembered who he really was. So he came back." He spread his blunt hands in a gesture of finality.

The little man shook his head. "But his picture was in all the papers, right after he disappeared," he said almost timidly.

Malone sighed. "The pistol-whipping scarred him up and smashed his nose. How did he know what he'd looked like before? No one else hooked him up with those pictures—and there were plenty looking. The reward his wife put up took care of that."

The mousy man seemed half convinced. "Maybe you're right, Mr. Malone. Maybe it was just coincidence that Mr. Fillmore disappeared in Frisco the week-end my sister was murdered there—and reappeared here only a few weeks after the only witness who saw the murderer stagger from Gloria's apartment was reported killed in action. . . . You've known him a long time, haven't you?"

"Long enough," Malone said tiredly, "to know he'd have no reason for killing a third-rate blonde in a waterfront hotel."

The little man winced as though he'd been slapped. Then his eyes became meek again. "My sister was not a good woman, Mr. Malone. Why try to hide it? She got in with a bad crowd back in Detroit when she was still a girl. Two men I remember her mentioning especially—a tall blond gambler called Tip Reilly, and his bodyguard, a black haired, blue eyed man of medium build, named Monty Moore."

The tiny lines at the corners of Malone's eyes flickered. His eyes were blue, the brows and hair above them black. He stood five feet seven and weighed 160 pounds. Many who had known him in the past would have sworn he was bigger than that. It was an illusion which, once gained, was hard to shake.

"Your description of this second man fits someone I see every morning—while shaving," he said softly.

The little man smiled apologetically and said nothing.

Malone went on. "So you think Fillmore is Reilly; that your sister knew it and when she tried to put the squeeze on he strangled her." His laugh had a soft, feathery quality which seemed to embarrass the little man—or frighten him.

He said quickly, "It does sound fantastic, doesn't it? But of course there's a way to find out. The police have a record of the murderer's fingerprints, taken from a newel post where he leaned to steady himself before starting downstairs. Gloria had hit him with a lamp during the struggle, remember—"

Malone stood up slowly and leaned across the desk. When his face was perhaps a foot

from the little man's, he said, still softly, but through clenched teeth, "Listen, you lousy little creep! If you think the Johns'll print a big shot like Eric Fillmore just because you had a nightmare, you'd better switch your brand of fags. There's a stiff rap for malicious slander—and an even stiffer one for attempted blackmail!"

The little man crab-raced back, almost upsetting his chair. Halfway to the door he turned.

"What you say is all very true, Mr. Malone," he said primly. "But neither penalty, I believe, is quite so severe as the one for first degree murder!"

MALONE watched the office door swing to behind him—the door lettered, HELICRAFT, INC. MARTIN R. MALONE, VICE-PRESIDENT—and swore softly. Then he went out, walked down the hall past the doors labeled, ERIC J. FILLMORE, PRESIDENT and JOHN LANDIS, SECRETARY-TREASURER and took the elevator to the ground floor.

Outside, he moved through the Sunday afternoon hush of the small testing field beside the plant, climbed into a late model two-seater helicopter parked there, flicked the starter and ignition switches, threw in the clutch, pulled back on the rotor pitch control handle, and let the tiny craft climb a thousand feet straight up before nudging the control stick between his knees and moving forward.

For the next fifteen minutes, while the L.A. coastline fell away beneath him, bright in the afternoon sun, his mind was occupied with the past. Not with Eric Fillmore, wealthy young industrialist, or his chief of operations, Marty Malone. But with a couple kids named Tip Reilly and Monty Moore, growing up together in a little Midwestern town and planning plans and dreaming dreams that were far too big for them, considering the side of the tracks where the dreaming was done.

Automatically, he skirted the green ridges of the Palos Verdes hills and came in low over the tiny, rock-bound semicircle of a private beach. A man sitting alone on the sand half beneath a red and gold beach umbrella, lifted his head to wave. He wore sun glasses and a shapeless canvas beach hat, but Malone thought he made out the bent tip of nose, the ragged scar slashing the right cheek.

He waggled the plane's tail, taking care not to sandblast the other with the downdraft from the big overhead rotor, then drifted left a few hundred feet and set the helicopter down on a concrete tennis court which topped the low bluff fronting the beach itself. The court faced a Spanish-style beach bungalow.

A small strawberry blonde girl with dancing eyes and a small tip-tilted nose met him at the door.

"Darling—you've saved my life!" She had a throaty, vivacious voice. "Doc Ross is in the bathroom washing up and John'll be here any minute, and I haven't even started the drinks!"

She stood very close to him in the doorway, with the front of her lavender playsuit brushing his chest and her full lips poised expectantly. For a moment, while he looked down at her, something that might have been pain, or passion, or both, darkened his eyes. Then, slowly, he shook his head.

"Not now, Christy. I have to see Eric."

The full lips straightened. "Trouble, Marty?"

"Could be."

"But, Marty—can't it wait? He's in one of his moods again. Honestly, I don't know what to do with him since he came back. I—I think he's worried about his mind—"

Again his eyes darkened. "So?" he said softly, after a while. "Well, don't worry about it, baby. He'll snap out of it."

"I try not to. But still, won't this business of yours keep till he's had a couple drinks and a meal inside him?"

He saw the entreaty in her eyes and shrugged.

"It's kept two years, baby. A few more minutes shouldn't matter."

He followed her into a small bar off the living room, began to help her stir things in glasses. In a minute or so the sound of a shower died in the bathroom at the rear, and a large man with piercing grey eyes and silvery temples joined them.

"Hi'ya, Doc."

Malone went on mixing the drinks. He'd never felt that he had much in common with the big man who headed Helicraft's board of directors and owned more of its stock than anyone else, except Eric.

Five minutes later the sound of a high-powered car cut off in the drive and a tall slender man in blue tropicals came through the front door. John Landis, Helicraft's executive

secretary, had black pin-point eyes, a foppish black mustache, and a society-page smile which turned into a smirk whenever he saw Malone and Eric Fillmore's wife together.

"John!" Christy used the pleased inflection with which women hide their true emotions under social necessity. "How nice! Why don't you and Doc go down and pull Eric out of the sand? Marty can help me finish here."

After the door had banged behind them, she turned to Malone and her violet eyes no longer danced. "I guess it means more to me than it does to you," she said dully. "Having a few minutes alone together again. . . ."

His square, almost blunt face hardened. "It shouldn't," he said tightly. "It shouldn't mean anything to either of us. When it looked like Eric had run out on us both, that was different. But now—"

She shook her head. "His coming back wouldn't matter, Marty," she said softly. "Nothing would—not if you really loved me."

"Okay, baby. Put it that way, then."

But when she came over suddenly and laid her head against his shoulder and began to sob, he put his arms around her and let his fingers tangle absently in the web of reddish curls at her neck, his dark eyes brooding. He had to push her away, fast, when the pounding footsteps sounded on the path outside.

"Malone!" It was hard to recognize the ragged voice as belonging to the mustached, foppish John Landis. "You'd better come down here, fast!"

He was halfway to the door before he remembered to turn and look at the girl.

"You stay here, baby. I'll call you if it's anything important."

DRESSED in blue trunks, Eric Fillmore still huddled on the sand, half beneath the umbrella. His shapeless hat and dark glasses lay beside him and the fingers of his right hand touched the pearl butt of a .22 revolver. His

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blond head was cradled on drawn knees, and the sunset sparkling beyond the cove softened the broken tip of his nose and the ragged scar marring his cheek.

Malone fingered the wrist which Doc Ross had just let fall, noticed that it was already cooling. He saw the scarlet stain at the roots of the blond hair, the tiny hole in the crown from which it spread.

And he thought, *So this is how it ends. A kid in a track-side tenement has a dream, and for fifteen years he plans and works and fights to make it come true. Then someone shoots a pea-sized piece of lead into his brain, and the dream is done and the fifteen years and everything else with it. . . .*

Doc Ross was pacing the sand with long, savage strides, his grey eyes queerly hooded. "The poor crazy fool!" he exploded suddenly. "I told him these fits of depression were only natural after amnesia, that the plastic men could fix up his face as good as new! And now—Lord, what this'll do to the value of our stock when it gets out!"

Malone's blue eyes fastened on him opaquely, "The eminent Dr. Arnold Ross," he said acidly. "I've seen some cold fish in my day, Doc. But when it comes to stinking, you cop the prize. Maybe you think I don't know about that deal you pulled a week ago—right after a visit from a little creep named Fletcher Pierce. I hope you weren't sucker enough to let him con you for any of the proceeds."

The doctor's eyes blazed venomously for a moment, and then he resumed his pacing. John Landis stepped into the breach.

"Creep?" he drawled. "You must have had an interesting background, Malone. In moments of tension you seem to slip instinctively into the argot of the underworld. You and the newly-widowed wife haven't been too subtle about what's been going on between you the past two years. I wonder if you ever killed a man—"

Malone's fist swung in a short, almost lazy arc, more like a rebuke than a blow. But Landis stumbled back, arms windmilling, and sat down abruptly on the sand.

His mustache twisted. "You dirty little gutter-rat! If it wasn't such an obvious suicide I'd—"

Malone's hard face relaxed. He grinned deliberately. "It looks," he murmured, "like you have the picture all filled in. I bet you'll be mad when I spoil it."

* * *

Uniformed prowl car deputies had herded them all back into the bungalow living room when Lieutenant Paul Perry of the sheriff's homicide squad came in from viewing the body. He sent the harness men to guard the

outside doors, and regarded the others inscrutably—a thick-necked, greying cop with bulky shoulders, a Roman nose, and pale, cold, probing eyes.

"I understand," he said shortly, "that somebody thinks this was murder."

Malone nodded grimly. "You think about it a minute, Lieutenant. Would a guy fixing to do the Dutch bother to look up and wave at a friend just a minute or so before he put the slug through his skull? Would he use a popgun like his wife's little .22, when he always kept a loaded .45 handy? And did you ever see a self-made corpse shoot himself in the top of the head that way?"

Perry appraised him slowly, then nodded. "I might buy that, except for one thing." He rustled his sheaf of notes. "If your own statement is true, Malone, it couldn't possibly be murder. Let's check the possibilities. Who had motive?"

Malone shrugged. "Who didn't? Christy—Mrs. Fillmore—inherits. Landis stands to get Eric's job as president of the company. And there's—"

"I thought you were vice-president."

"I am—thanks to Eric. But Landis got his job as secretary through knowing the right people among the stock-holders. He still knows them. I don't—at least not socially."

Perry shook his head. "According to your statement, Eric Fillmore had already been dead for at least several minutes by the time Landis got here and he and Ross went down and discovered the body. You say Fillmore waved at you when you flew over the beach at approximately four-seventeen. That shows he was alive then. If there had been anybody on the path between him and the house, you'd have seen them. The same's true of anyone who might have been approaching him over the rocks which wall off that part of the beach, or from the sea in a boat. Right?"

Malone nodded.

"So to be murder, it would have to have been done by someone who sneaked down from the house after you got here. Yet you say Mrs. Fillmore met you at the door only a few seconds after her husband waved to you from the beach, and you were with her constantly until after the body was discovered. Dr. Ross backs you up on that. He came out of the bathroom after taking a shower, and—"

"He says," Malone cut in. "But I couldn't find any wet towels in there when I looked a minute ago."

Ross smiled coldly. "I was trying to keep cool. I didn't use a towel—just wrung out the washrag and mopped myself off with it."

The detective thought a minute. "The bathroom has an outside entrance, for the convenience of swimmers from the beach. Could Ross have slipped out that way, gone down

the path to the beach, killed Fillmore and got back to the house again between the time you came in and the time he joined you in the bar, Malone?"

Malone was silent for several seconds, frowning. At last he shook his head. "He might have made it down there—but he could never have gotten back again in time."

"Then where's your case?"

Malone's face tightened. "That's what you're paid to find out! I just want to make sure you know there is a case!"

The lieutenant's grin mocked him.

Landis spoke suddenly. "Wait a minute, Lieutenant. Maybe there is a case, at that." His black eyes licked vindictively at Malone. "Malone here's been comforting the widow, while her husband was gone the past two years. It's not a job a man would want to give up—especially if a few hundred thousand in inheritance money went with it.

"One of the remarkable things about helicopters, Lieutenant, is their ability to hover in midair—without moving—at any altitude from a few inches to thousands of feet. Malone's a top pilot, and also a top pistol shot—a knack he had need of, I imagine, somewhere in his past. Now, then, suppose Eric did wave to him as he flew over the beach. And suppose that, instead of waving back, Malone poked a gun out the cabin door and pulled the trigger. The roar of the rotor would drown the sound of the shot—and there's the hole in the top of Eric's head!"

Christy's face was suddenly sharp and white. "No!" she cried brokenly. "Not Marty, John—"

Malone grinned at her tightly. "Relax, baby. I'd have to be quite an expert to toss that gun right under his fingers the way it was found."

Landis scowled. "I'm not so sure it was under his fingers till you got there," he said sullenly. "In fact, I don't remember it at all, till you stood away from the body. Do you, Doc?"

Ross glanced obscurely at Christy. "Why, no," he said slowly. "Come to think of it, I don't."

THE lieutenant's blue eyes had frozen solid.

His hand dipped into a coat pocket, came out holding a gun.

"I think," he said almost lazily, "it's time you and I had a little talk, Malone, down at headquarters."

Malone's eyes tightened. Then, deliberately, he made himself shrug. "You're calling 'em, Lieutenant. But first, there's something in the bathroom that might interest you, if you'd care to see it."

Perry eyed him narrowly.

Malone lifted his arms and turned. "I'm not

heeled," he said almost tiredly. "Frisk me."

Perry patted his hips and shoulders with his free hand. "Okay."

Malone led him into the bathroom, shoved the door shut behind them. He paused uncertainly. "I roomed with Eric for twelve years," he muttered. "I ought to remember where he liked to keep things—let's try the linen closet."

He pulled open the double plywood doors, scanned the shelves inside, while Perry watched with cold, unblinking eyes. Malone's hand fumbled beneath a pile of clean towels in one corner. "I think this is it."

Perry leaned forward slightly to see, and Malone whirled, crashed the .45 belly-gun from beneath the towels into the back of the detective's head. Perry's knees began to buckle and his gun clattered to the tile floor. He stumbled back, his head thumping against the top of the porcelain sink, sweeping it clear of its litter of cold cream jars, lip rouge and adhesive tape spools. He crumpled slowly, sprawled inert across the stool.

Malone studied the scene a moment; then turned to confront the tableau posed in the suddenly opened door from the living room.

"Come in," he invited softly, gesturing with the .45. "Line up against the tub and keep your hands on the shower curtain rod overhead."

Doc Ross cleared his throat. "We might as well do as he says, John. He won't get far, anyway."

Christy stepped forward. "Let me help, Marty."

He shook his head. "You better stay out of this, baby."

"No. You'll need all the help you can get, now. Just tell me what to do."

He shrugged tiredly. "Okay. Get Perry's gun off the floor and help me keep 'em covered."

He shifted the bellygun to his left hand and crouched in front of Ross. Landis twisted suddenly and dived for his gun hand. Malone brought the gun up hard, chopping it into the dark man's mustache, and Landis toppled backward into the tub and lay there bleeding. But before Malone could turn back to Ross, the doc's big knee came up and smashed into his belly and the .45 skittered from his numbed fingers.

Ross kned him again, then whirled to scoop up the gun. Through the fog of nausea swirling through his brain, Malone tensed himself for the shock of a shot.

But Christy fired first. The doc's grey eyes widened hollowly and his jaw sagged as blood began to spurt from the hole in his neck. The hand holding his gun relaxed, and he crumpled slowly to the tiles. Malone stepped forward painfully and retrieved the .45.

"Okay, baby," he said dully. "Stand ready if I pull another boner. I want to see if Doc's wearing a swim suit."

She stood there a moment, eyeing him queerly, the Detective Special rigid in her hand. Then, slowly, she nodded.

He knelt at the big man's side, began to tug at the leather belt.

Christy said, "Blue swimming trunks—like Eric's!"

He nodded wryly. "Still covered with beach sand. It was him, not Eric, who waved at me from the beach."

"But I don't understand—"

He shrugged. "Neither did I, till Perry's head knocked the make-up kit and adhesive tape off the sink here. Then I realized how he'd done it. I saw a man half-hidden beneath an umbrella, his hair covered by a wide-brimmed hat, his eyes by dark glasses. It was the bent nose and scarred cheek which made me tab him as Eric. And at that distance, those were easy enough to fake with flesh-colored adhesive tape and lipstick pencil.

"When he got here this afternoon, he came into the bathroom, turned on the shower, pulled on the trunks, made up to look like Eric, then slipped out the side door and down the path to the beach. He shot Eric, hid his corpse under the umbrella, took his place in the sand and waited for me to fly over. He was already running up the path to the bathroom door again when I stepped through the front door with you. It took him only a few seconds to pull his clothes on over the trunks, remove the rouge and tape, turn off the shower and join us in the bar."

Her eyes were miserable. "And to think he almost got away with it, because of me. If I hadn't kept you here when you first wanted to go down and see Eric—"

He shook his head. "It's no good, baby," he said wearily. "You had to be in on it, too. You insisted on my getting here when I did, then suggested I use the helicab when I told you I couldn't make it on time by car. You slipped Doc your little gun and Eric's duplicate trunks, then kept me inside here while he was running back from the beach. And when you shot him just now, you shut him up for good as well as protecting me."

Her face suffused, and her eyes began to glitter. He watched her with a strange sense of unreality. There was a sound to the right, where Lieutenant Paul Perry stood up stiffly.

"All right." He glowered at Malone. "Are you going to compound a felony by letting her get away, or are you going to hand me that gun?"

Malone's shoulders sagged. "I didn't think you could be out all this time— Here's the gun. You'd get her sooner or later, anyway."

Perry took it. "I still don't get Ross's angle. Why should he kill Fillmore?"

Malone eyed him sourly. "What's the first thing people think of, when a big shot business executive commits suicide? Bankruptcy, embezzlement, some kind of financial shenanigans. Stockholders hop around like fleas, trying to unload before the bottom drops out. The price per share takes a nose-dive. You can buy up a controlling interest in the suicide's company for a song."

"But Ross was a heavy stockholder. Fillmore's suicide would hurt him, not help him."

Malone shook his head. "He was," he said, "till a little creep named Pierce visited him last week. Then the Doc sold all his stock at a price well above par. He was going to use the dough from that sale to buy up three times as many shares when the crash came after Eric's death.

"He even had a motive for the suicide, which would come out later, during the inquest, and shove the price of the stock down further. Pierce gave it to him, Pierce knew that Eric had killed a girl in Frisco two years ago. The girl had been blackmailing Eric; had known him in the old days, when he was a Detroit promoter, trying to pick up enough scratch to establish a front out here, interest investors in his plans for a new type helicopter.

"I don't think he meant to kill her. But when she put the squeeze on him, he probably lost his head. Eric could go all out. She got scared and broke a lamp in his face, and he strangled her. That's why he was away the past two years."

"Ross would see that this all came out at the inquest, of course. The idea would be that Pierce had been blackmailing Eric since his return, and that rather than be squeezed for the rest of his life or go to prison, Eric had decided on suicide. As soon as it leaked out that the president of Helicraft, Inc. had been a blue sky promoter and murderer, Ross knew that the other stockholders would be glad to take even less for their shares."

Perry thought about that. "Well," he mused at last, "you got a nice little business dropped into your lap tonight. I checked with Fillmore's lawyer before I came out here. That's why I was so damned suspicious of you. I found out that if anything happened to Fillmore, the voting power of his stock automatically went to you. Which would hand you a controlling interest in the company."

Malone's lips twisted. "Yeh," he said bitterly. "I sure got the business tonight, all right." He dropped a hand on Perry's shoulder. "Come on—let's go some place away from here where I can stand you a drink. I want to tell you all about women."



WHEN GANGDOM RULED

AN ILLUSTRATED CHRONICLE OF THE TURBULENT TWENTIES BY WINDAS

The worst blot on organized crime's soiled escutcheon was the sorrow caused countless families by the "snatching" of children of wealthy parents for ransom. Paul Witterman died of a broken heart after paying kidnapers 50,000 dollars and receiving in return his son's dead body.



Pretty Gloria Bergstrom's abduction roused citizens of California to fever pitch. Her mother dropped dead upon reading the kidnapers' warning. Finally the frenzied father found his daughter unharmed at the edge of Mojave desert, but her abductors were never apprehended.

Neither Bert Healy nor Hans Tanglandt enjoyed the "pay-off" from Oilman Brooks when they released the latter's baby. They turned automatics on each other while quarreling over spoils, and were both dying when the police burst in on them.



Little Corry Jackson was never found. His fate remains a mystery since the June morning in 1923 when Detroit was buzzing over his disappearance. Three times his parents received phone calls from his snatchers, but could never contact them. Then the calls ceased, and years passed until, in 1936, the saddened parents became victims of a fatal auto accident, and books on the case were closed.



CHAPTER ONE

Kill One—Kill Two

I GOT in at five. From Miami. From Natal, in Brazil. From Capetown and Bombay. The funny thing was, how you run into people. There was Muggsie Morgan, over scotch, in India. And Muggs said, in India, "It's the truth—but don't take it hard, kid."

In the old days Muggs was first chair in the band—the brass, the Gabriels. Muggs was like Henry Buse, like Harry James. When Muggs hit the Armstrongs—but never mind the high notes, or the old days, or the stuff we used to do with music.

"Don't take it hard, kid," Muggs said.

He meant Velma.

And in Capetown I ran into—but I don't know her name. I never knew her name. She

sold cigarettes in the old Typhoon—you know the place, Jukes Jennings' dump? And how you get to saying, "Hi, babe," to a chick like that? Pretty legs, honey hair, bare shoulders. She was wearing G.I. in Capetown, though. Wac. My ship was on the way out; she was going in—C.B.I. Anyway, we found a spot and had a drink of gin.

"First it was Eddie Slane," she said. Slane was the guy who'd taken on the band when I checked my baton for a bo'sun's whistle. Not the Navy—the Merchant Marine.

Slane was the guy who'd said, "Just leave it all to me, Pat. When you get back you'll



The dead man was moving
—he fell to the floor with a
crash. . . .

find things are just the same. All of them."

Uh-huh, just the same, I thought.

The chick saw the way I looked down at my glass. She saw the white spots on my knuckles.

"Don't take it hard, Pat," she said.

We had us a good neighbor for a while in the old days—in the band, I mean. Remember how it was, the play they gave the rhumbas? He was a swell guy, this Latin from S. A.—he was supervising cargo now in Natal for the duration—and his teeth flashed when we met by the quay. Then we drank spiked *maté*, and it was he who told me all about Torrega.

"He's from the Argentine," my friend said. "*Politico?*"

My friend thought this was "fonny." "He is, how you say it, playboy—one hot Señor!" "Money, eh?"

Slane, Torrega—and how many more? When she'd promised she would wait for me.

So I called her from Miami. Parkway—one, six hundred. I got excited, tense. It would all depend on what *she* said, of course.

DEATH SINGS A TORCH SONG

By **CYRIL PLUNKETT**

A Dramatic Underworld Novelette

I had it all figured out—two could die as cheaply as one, since Velma no longer loved me. But I hadn't planned on seeing myself framed into a hell-on-earth by a girl I'd never seen—a girl who sang her torch-song through that death-filled night, a mean, minor chant that seemed to light the way straight to the electric chair!

But she wasn't in.

"Look," I said, on the phone—it was her maid, I guess. "Is she still singing?"

"*Oui*," the maid said coldly.

French. Dough to spend, to throw around now. "Singing where now?" I said.

"The Typhoon."

I frowned at the phone. You could twist that any way you liked. Maybe Slane had upped her salary. Maybe Jukes, the Typhoon, was now going great guns.

Whose dough is she spending?

"Look," I said, "you tell her it was Pat. You tell her I'll be in next Thursday, and you tell her—" I heard a door close, through the

phone. I heard the maid's aside—she gushed, cooed at someone in the room with her.

"Señor Torrega. . ."

Okay, it was still Torrega.

"You tell her—" I was saying once more, to a dead phone, to dead wires.

WELL, looking back, I guess I should have known. With Velma it had always been the money. I'd picked her up in Chicago. I was playing at the Aragon that week, Pat Crome and his Orchestra—she was singing in a State Street dive.

She had a lot of what it takes to get along; a sultry voice with a tear in it, like Helen Morgan's. Velma Vaughn, the Bluebird of Blues. She had dark hair, almost black, and milk-white skin and big blue eyes. She had a contract with the dive, but she'd found a way to break it. Contracts, I guess, meant no more to her than they did to Hitler.

But what I have not yet made clear was what all this did to me, how it warped my thinking.

It began one night while I was lying in my bunk; it was a thought that anyone might have, on the wrong end of a doublecross. "*The dirty rat*," I said. Slane, I meant. Yes, and this other one, Torrega. "*The dirty rats*," I said. I could hear the steady throb of the ship's engines, and they got into me. They got into my head and pounded in my temples.

She'd said she would wait for me. I'd built my life around her, and my future. "*The little tramp*," I said.

I began to build strange scenes in my mind. Slane, the smooth things he would have to say. Okay, see him, talk to him, act like what he'd done did not really matter. Get him in a car—and suppose the door flew open on a curve? I could make it look that way. Suppose then that he fell out and hit his head on the pavement?

Torrega? He would have a soft spot. A man always had a soft spot, and if you probed you found it. Women were his dish. I'd have to proceed slowly, meet him, sound him out; and if the ship laid in long enough, one night a quick knife thrust? In the silence of his rooms, with certain little things left carefully behind to tie the case up tightly?

A woman's scarf, perhaps—her glove. Velma's!

Before I knew it I'd laid out the whole plan. When I realized what I was doing I sat up in the bunk. The moon was bright on the water outside and my eyes were bright, I knew—and my hands were trembling.

Not—not murder. . .

She was selfish, grasping; no, she wasn't worth it. But the seed was planted and it grew. It grew out of the blank days at sea, the loneliness; and when, at five o'clock on

Thursday, I got in the U.S.A. seemed to rock beneath my feet and everything was different.

I took a cab uptown. Play this just as though you didn't know, I thought. Check in at the hotel, your old rooms. Order flowers. Phone her, keep the blackness from your voice. Don't let her know you've lit the torch, or let her see it burning. . . .

But murder! Good God, I wasn't really like that. I was young—twenty-six now, healthy, strong and tanned. I walked around my room; sat down, got up, walked again. What had I been thinking? Why had I let a thing like that grow? She might have some explanation. After all, she did sing with the band. She would be seen with Slane around the gin joints and the restaurants. And this man Torrega, the big shot of the hour. It was good publicity, sometimes, to front with millionaires, to be in the swim. What did I know of conditions?

Good God, what had I been thinking?

I lit a cigarette. Now was the time for it, to get on the phone. To call, to say, "Hello, hon." And yet I stood by the phone, icy, afraid of it. Suppose she'd say coolly, "Oh, hello, Pat." Suppose she wouldn't say, "Why, dahling!" Then what would I say, and what would I do?

Parkway—one, six hundred. . .

I waited. The phone shook in my hands. Please, I whispered in my mind, *let it be like always*. I waited, and suddenly I knew she wasn't going to answer. Suddenly I knew that instead of tension breaking at this point it was only winding up. This was not the end, but the beginning.

I SET the phone back on its cradle. Such a little thing, to change the course of life like this—and death.

Parkway—one, six hundred, and nobody home.

Hadn't the maid told her I was getting in at five tonight? Where was the maid now? Canned—because Velma blew up when she'd heard the brush-off I'd got when I'd called from Miami? I tried to be sane, objective. Velma had to eat, she had to work. She had to sing for people who would dine and dance tonight.

I paged through the phone book, called Jukes Jennings at the Typhoon. His voice had always sounded spectral, like it came from a hollow tree.

I said, "Look, Jukes, about Velma—"

Queer. He got wrapped up in his words. He acted like a cat all tangled up in yarn. He harped about the O.P.A. restrictions, problems that he had. *Things were not the same*, he meant to tell me?

"Could I talk to Velma?" I said.

He said, "She's not here."

"But the show's on—" I could hear the band, my band, faintly through the phone now.

"Pat, where are you?" he said swiftly.

"Hotel, same old place, same room."

"Just get in?"

"That's it." I began to wonder if the sweat was standing out on his head, too. "She's coming in though, later?"

"Kid, what's the matter? You don't sound the same to me."

I didn't sound right to myself.

"I'll tell her where to reach you," he said. "So stick around, Pat." What he'd meant to say was, *Don't force it, kid? Don't pick the brawl out here?*

I looked at that, examined it.

I stood there by the phone. Parkway—one, six hundred. A phrase skipped through my mind: *You've got to face it.* Yes, I had to fight this out first, right here. I thought about the flowers I'd just sent, the "*dah-ling*" that I wanted, the way she'd said it in the past. Then I shook myself and went back downstairs.

Where was the bar now? Had they moved it? No, the same old alcove, the same door to the bar. It was my eyes; they'd blurred. She would call, though—I'd give her this last chance—when she got my message. . . .

She did call—at twenty of eleven.

SIX o'clock to ten-forty was a long time—a lifetime, an eternity. I spent it with my elbows on the bar, or my head down, face buried in my arms. Maybe you think this was funny. Maybe you think I should have said, "So what?" and gone out searching for new lips to kiss. But it wasn't Velma, now. It was this fight to the finish I still had to make. It was how I'd take it when I saw her. It was what I'd do to her, to Torrega, and to Slane.

For of course I'd see her, I would have to look up Slane. There was business with the band that would need attention. As long as I sat here and drank I could chain, if not ignore,

the dark thoughts. So it wasn't just tonight, just Velma, but the future.

It was what would happen if Slane *did* ride with me in a car. If, by some coincidence, I *did* meet Torrega. All the forces so far dammed could be set in motion by the smallest move or word, by accident or impulse.

Once I went out and walked around the block. I wasn't drunk, but somehow folks I passed all looked at me. Then I wondered if it had become that plain, if it showed in my eyes. I got scared at being on the streets and swayed back into the bar. I doubled on the drinks and downed them fast, and the damndest thing happened: I got to talking with the barkeep about murder.

Who used the word first I can't remember. I was filled with it and it might have spilled out. But there I was, my elbows out, my legs around the stool, scowling, *telling* him I'd thought of murder.

"What you need," he said, "is some shut-eye. Why don't you go up to your room?"

"Oh, no," I said. "I'm no dope. I got murder in my room."

He chuckled. He cocked his head to one side though, like he wasn't sure. "Pink elephants," he said.

"Oh, no. It's like blood. It's murder on the walls, a stain right in the paper. It's on the ceiling, on the doors, and stretched across the window. Ever see a word like that stretched across a window?"

He took my bottle, put it back behind him.

"On the phone," I said. "That's where it centers—ready to start talking. Ever hear a phone start talking?"

He took the bill I'd laid out, gave me change.

A phone rang at that moment behind him, at the corner of the bar. He picked it up.

"Crome," he said, "for you."

For me? My heart began to race. Oh, so now she calls, huh? Now she wants to see me. I fumbled with the black receiver. "Hello?" I said.

Kidneys Must Remove Excess Acids

Help 15 Miles of Kidney Tubes Flush Out Poisonous Waste

If you have an excess of acids in your blood, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may be overworked. These tiny filters and tubes are working day and night to help Nature rid your system of excess acids and poisonous waste.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, head-

aches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

The voice was hollow, deep, not Velma but Jukes Jennings.

"Still there?" he said. He sounded sad and sympathetic as he went on, "Pat, I told her."

I could hear the tricky tinkle of a piano through the phone, and a soft voice singing:

*Baby likes your lovin', darlin',
'Deed yes!
Baby likes your huggin', darlin',
'Deed yes!
Baby even likes your lousy G.I. pay—*

Jukes said, as though he'd looked into my mind, "The floor show's on. You know, the new curfew law. Last show starts at ten. A single, this kid. I've just booked her in. Name's Dixie Merrill." The singing seemed a little louder. "Like it?"

"Sure I like it. She's got lift. It's new."

I wondered why he'd really phoned and what he had to tell me. Then I heard a clicking, like he'd tapped a pencil on his desk, like he was nervous. The clicking stopped. The music stopped as though he'd closed a door.

"I hate to be the one to tell you," he continued, "but you're washed up, kid, with Velma. She's all out for dough. She's off to Hollywood next week, big contract, to begin a picture."

He seemed to think I would blow up. I didn't.

"Pat?" he said. "She didn't phone you?"

"You know damned well that she didn't."

He drew in a deep breath. "You stick where you are a few more minutes. Pat, I'm for you. I'll do everything I can."

She did call then, in about fifteen—twenty minutes.

She'd always kept her voice intimate and low. Come hither always spilled from Velma's lips like sap—but tonight it was different.

She said, "Pat? Oh, I hoped I'd find you there yet!" Her voice was pitched too high, and then I heard her quickened breathing. She was calling from the Typhoon, from her dressing room, she said. She was scared, scared stiff. I got that impression instantly.

"Pat, I've got to see you." She whispered this, or she'd looked aside, across one shoulder. "Now, tonig! immediately!"

I looked at the phone, puzzled at this outburst. For me the blade was dulled, the edge was gone, the tension had all left.

"Are you there, Pat?"

"Yes, still here."

"Pat, we've meant so much to each other." She began to cry. Not hysterically. She was much too smooth, too polished for that. Wherever it might be that real tears are made, she'd dried the place up long ago. So they were small, dry sobs. They hit me over the phone. They got inside me and turned and twisted.

"Please, Pat," she whispered. "I need you."

She hadn't needed me through the many months I'd been away. She hadn't needed me at five tonight, when I'd got home, or through the evening, until Jukes exerted pressure.

"Please, Pat," she was saying, over and over.

Sucker, I thought. I always had been. She could twist me right around her finger. She could whistle—I would dance—I always had for her.

I tried to say, *It's over, let it go. Good-by now.*

The four words that I said were, "Where will you be?"

"Right here! The big room, Pat—second door in."

"How long?"

"Until you get here, Pat."

Ten of eleven now. The new law made Jukes close at midnight. "Okay, make it half an hour."

"Pat, wait! Have you got a car?" Seconds passed; her voice began to plead, "Can you get a car, Pat?"

"I'll try. I think I can get one, honey."

Then she breathed. "Oh do, Pat, do!" And I heard the chatter of her teeth around the last word, "Hurry—"

CHAPTER TWO

Corpse Cache

TWENTY minutes and I had a car lined up.

I was lucky. The car was garaged down the street though, so I lost a few more minutes. The car was a sedan, big, with lots of room in the back seat. Like old times, I thought, driving out the Parkway. I could look down on the river. I could look back on the warm nights we had parked beneath the elms.

Even then she'd had a way of getting what she wanted. We would often plan arrangements here at night, on a new tune, a new song.

"*Why don't you cut the brass, Pat?*" She would argue. "*Or triple-tongue it, but keep it in the background. Pat, listen while I sing it.*" She would want the song for herself, of course, like she always wanted baby spots, with all the band blacked out. Like she wanted money and top billing.

It was queer, coming back like this. This tension and this fear, instead of gladness and nostalgia. I ran the car in the back way, around to the dressing rooms, went in the back way, down the dim hall to the second door. I rapped, opened the door, and she looked at me, her hair like night around her white face and the milk-white shoulders. She was standing with her back to the mirror, her hands behind her on the make-up shelf, and

the gown she wore drawn tight about her hips.

She might have planned it that way. My band, what was left of it—Slane's band—playing something sweet; the lights around the mirror her special halo. But there was an off note, harsh, like the crash of cymbals. Two bright spots on her cheeks, and her eyes were haunted.

"*Dah-ling—*" she said.

I kicked the door shut behind me, and curiously I had no quick impulse to reach out for her neck and grasp it. I felt no hatred, no despair, felt nothing at all. She sighed, closed her eyes as though to say, *After all this time, now, at last, the ugly past is over.*

Once I would have kissed her eyes, but I stood there. And then the lids snapped open. Puzzled—surprised?

She whispered, "Pat, sit down."

"Can't," I said. "As long as I'm out here anyway I got Slane to see, and Jukes."

I didn't give a hang about Slane or about Jukes. Not now, maybe not ever. I didn't care about Torrega. All I could think was, *this it is. This is what I needed.* It was her voice, her nearness, her perfume; she spent these wiles like counterfeit. What I'd thought and planned and feared tonight had been sheer madness. I could still admire her, her beauty, but the blind hate, the blind drive for revenge, was all gone. Wiped away, and the cure for it so simple! Just to hear and see her.

I lit a cigarette. I leaned against the door, grinned and said, "Did you get my flowers?"

She ignored that. Something else was in her mind, a thing she was fighting hard. "Darling, you—you were gone so long," she said. "Pat, I—I was lonely."

Uh-huh. Slane. But I didn't worry much how it would be now when *we* met. Let him spill his line! I could laugh at it, I didn't care. He was smooth, like Velma. Dark, like Velma. And always in a jam, like Velma—money. I could hear the band, off down this little hall, swinging into jive.

"I—I didn't know what to do," she was saying. "And then I met Torrega—"

"Oh," I said. "I've been wondering what had happened to him."

She drew in a sharp breath, shuddered. "Pat, I never loved him! He was only—" She started to cry, and amazingly real tears appeared. They ran right down her cheeks unchecked, unnoticed. "I knew you were coming home. Last week, Miami—darling, I was desolate! I so wanted to call you back that day. I didn't know how, though, or where. Then tonight, when Jukes said you'd arrived—Pat, it was tonight I told Torrega it was over."

So that was why she hadn't phoned? It sounded pretty thin, but I almost believed her. I looked at her, said flatly, "Hon, let's have it straight. There's something wrong."

Her eyes stared assent. Then her lips began to move. She wet them but no words came. She swallowed, tried again, and suddenly she was moaning. She had come to me, her face was pressed against my chest.

"Pat, he's lying in my apartment!"

Torrega?

She was trembling all over, and she whimpered, "Blood—murdered—"

These were the words she said. The very words I'd fought back into a corner.

Ash dropped off my cigarette. I looked at it, looked down at the floor. Only then my mind began to pick up scattered pieces.

"When?"

"I don't know!"

"You don't know?"

She raised her head, her blue eyes widening as though she'd been slapped. "But you don't believe I did it?"

"Then who did?" I said. "Slane?"

She caught her breath. "That was nothing, Pat, nothing! He meant nothing to me!"

"Start from the beginning," I said.

"I SKIPPED the dinner show." She walked around the room as though the room had become a cage. "What did it matter? I've signed a contract with Colossal Pictures. I'm soon leaving all this, anyway. I—I had business at the bank, and I'd dined alone, downtown, and afterward—naturally, I stopped in at home. About seven-thirty, I guess."

Now it was nearly twelve. "Where was your maid?"

"Fifi? I fired her yesterday. I didn't need her any longer."

"All right. You'd stopped in at home."

"Of course he'd come to see me," she continued. Torrega, she meant. Apparently now she meant Torrega had been brushed off earlier, *not* tonight, or at least well *before* the dinner hour.

Was she getting mixed up—or was this lie number one for her?

"I—I knew he would be desolate. And—and he had a key," she said. *Oh, so Torrega had meant nothing to her?* "I—I mean finding Torrega there alive wouldn't have surprised me, but—" She swayed, reached out again, clutched my arm—"It's a private entrance, Pat—you remember. The door was unlocked. I—I went in. And I couldn't do anything for a moment. I just stood there—"

"Run?"

She couldn't seem to get the words out, but she nodded.

"Lock the door when you left?"

You could see she tried to think, and couldn't think, remember.

"You came right on here?"

"Yes."

"Why?" I shot the next word. "Alibi?"

"Either she missed it, or side-stepped it. "What else could I do?" she said. "I had to go on with the band, for a while at least, until—"

"Did you tell this story to anyone else? Slane? Jukes?"

"Whom could I trust, Pat, but you?"

"All right," I said. "Anyone see you at home?"

"I've said, Pat, it's a private entrance!"

"Did you come in a cab?"

She hesitated. "The driver wouldn't remember."

"How do you know?"

"We—I mean we stopped up the street."

We? Lie number two—she hadn't come home alone? I wondered how many more I'd missed, and what missing them could do now.

"All right," I said. "You let it ride for hours. That's bad. Now the rest of it. Who would want to kill Torrega?"

"I don't know!"

"How did Slane feel about the jilting you gave him?"

She said intensely, "No, Pat! That's insane!"

"Well, how do you know Slane was here all evening? Did you ask him?"

"No, Pat. He could have been out. He's gone right now, since ten, but—"

"Was it a bullet?"

Her eyes closed. I barely heard the words. "His head. It was covered with blood."

"Hit, eh?" My heart missed a beat. I made a quick about-face in my mind. "With what? Did you see the instrument?"

"Yes, a bronze vase—" Her eyes betrayed her. They snapped open as though the lids had been jerked by springs. A vase—she knew she shouldn't have known that. Or—and then I knew the real truth she'd been hiding.

She'd grabbed up the vase herself and struck with it—and only now remembered that her fingerprints were still on it.

"Please, Pat, please!" she was sobbing.

"Get me out of this. My name, Pat. The contract I've just signed—my career! I'll do anything. Anything for you, Pat. I'll marry you tomorrow, only save me. Take the body away—"

MAYBE I was glad that she had come to me in trouble and in danger. And sick to think that she had got herself into this mess. Maybe it was that no matter what had happened I still loved her. You take strange streets sometimes, on impulse. She was down. I could kick her. I could walk out. I could shrug.

Yet I myself tonight had planned Torrega's death. . . .

So I turned around, went down the dim

little hall again. I crossed the parking court outside and I got in the sedan. I looked at the thing she'd given me, held loosely in my hand.

The key to her apartment.

She had quarreled with Torrega. That part of her story, at least, was true. But she had quarreled over what? Because I was coming home and he didn't like the brush-off.

They hadn't quarreled over me; she'd waited hours to phone me, so I was convinced of that. The quarrel went deeper. Only desperation could end like this, in death.

But driving up the Parkway I began to wonder how it was a man had come to leave himself wide open. The blow could not have been premeditated, for never would Velma plan a murder so crude. She would first take care of Velma—and she hadn't. Obviously, therefore, it had been a lucky blow; but even so, did the guy, Torrega, just stand there and take it? Didn't he try to dodge, or raise an arm? *Would a blow, partially deflected, and backed only by the strength of a slim woman, kill?*

I weighed the situation, all of it, again cautiously, and arrived at the same answer. Torrega wasn't dead. She'd cut his head. Stunned him. She'd got scared. She'd run. Torrega, I was beginning to believe, had long since come to, with no more than a scalp wound, a mild concussion, a headache.

I grinned. I began to hum, *Baby likes your lovin', darlin'—dead yes!* My feet were back on old and solid ground. I would go in, call her on the phone. "Baby," I would say, "it's all fixed for you."

So I drew up at her place, a few blocks from the Typhoon. Shrubbery just as I remembered it; the building rising high. I cut across a strip of velvet lawn, to her private entrance. Her door wasn't locked. Fine, I thought. Torrega wouldn't stop to lock up when he left! I paused just inside and the fragrance here was sweet and cloying. It was Velma as I knew her, all around me.

My hand explored the dark wall, found the light switch. Three steps up. "Baby," I would phone, "it's okay now." But what the hell, I thought as I came to the big room at the foyer's end.

Who had slit upholstering, upset chairs? The rugs were partly overturned, pictures were pulled off the walls. A cabinet stood with doors and drawers wide open. The nerves along my spine began to tingle. The bronze vase lay there on the floor, exactly as she'd said; and there was blood there on the oyster-white rug, as she'd said there would be. I looked at the small dark stain. Torrega wasn't dead. No, Torrega had recovered and gone home a wiser man. But this wild confusion?

It was then I noticed that the door into the

room was only half open. It should have swung back at my touch, yet, even when I pushed, something held it firmly. I stepped inside.

I held onto the door. A body lay behind the door. The head had a round hole in it.

The twisted, dead face, etched with terror, was not Torrega's. Oh no—Fate was skipping rope with me tonight. Here, wedged in the corner, lay the other man I'd wanted to kill. Here, after I'd swept desperation from my mind, found that I could breathe and laugh again, was murder indeed.

Here lay Eddie Slane.

I WAS too surprised to move. I just stared, standing there. Then I touched his flesh. The skin was still faintly warm. I heard my own breathing—it was ragged, fast.

The room itself was very still; a vault it seemed, with its high ceiling and with all the draperies drawn. The stillness pressed upon me, demanded that I break this tension, that I flee. I walked on to the bedroom instead, looked in the bathroom, tried closets. All were ransacked, empty. There was no one here but Slane and I, and yet. . . .

I listened. I'd thought I'd heard footsteps. In another suite, above perhaps? Death could not walk, of course, and yet— New thoughts went darting through my mind. *She* had not done this. Not Velma. She would surely not have sent me here to find Torrega—

Torrega! He was the killer!

All right. I'd made strides. I knew now what had happened if not why. Obviously Torrega, recovering, had searched the apartment; obviously Slane had slipped away from the Typhoon, intent upon a quick search also. For what? Letters? Were they finally aware that Velma schemed, and were frightened lest she might some day blackmail?

My thoughts ran all around the real issue. I didn't want to face it, where I stood in this mess. *The poor kid, I would think, she's in it now. They'll tear her into shreds, her reputation. They'll crucify her.* Still seconds only had passed, a minute or two at the most. I stopped, pulled a rug across the bloodstain on the carpet. Mr. Fixit. But by nothing so simple could I secrete Slane's body.

What would I do with the body?

Now I realized that wherever it was found it would involve me. I had come home, just tonight. Slane was known to have double-crossed me; I had brawled and talked of murder. Where had I been when the killing took place? *In the bar? Or tramping the block, round and round, seeing no one I knew and therefore without alibi?* My heart began to race. I felt smothered. Still drilling through my mind was the sound of footsteps.

They were not above. They were outside,

near. They were coming up the walk. Coming to the door now. The sound of chimes came softly.

Not Velma. She would come in. Not Torrega. He wouldn't come back. Who was out there, and what did they want?

I began to count seconds, got up to ten—and the chimes rang again. A throat was cleared. It came faintly, but I heard it. It was a man out there. Panic flared in my brain. The outer door wasn't locked. How soon would he discover that he could turn the knob—and walk in?

Then what? I didn't have a gun. Would that clear me? But suppose the murder gun was here in the apartment? Could I prove I hadn't covered my hand, hadn't fired a weapon? I looked around.

I raised Slane to his knees. I stood him up, and the bloodstained face, so near my own, wobbled on its soft neck, leered at me. I cursed him, slapped him up in the L of the two walls. In the corner, behind the door to the hall. I slammed the door against the body, to hold it. But while the body fit tightly and nicely in this three-cornered niche, the door alone wouldn't hold it. The door swayed; the body sagged back to its knees. I looked around frantically. What I needed was the table, with books weighing down its two shelves!

I held the door with my foot, leaned far out, touched the table, grasped it and jerked savagely. There was a squeal, and there it was, at last. The table just before the door, the door firmly wedged—

And the outside door was opening.

I could see into the hall. The man there could see me. My heart turned over in my chest. He advanced. He had a gun. I looked at him. I knew this man—a detective named Lessing.

CHAPTER THREE

The Perfect Try

ONCE, long back, I'd made a run in a squad car with Lessing. He was in his forties and quite a guy. He knew all the night spots, all the big names, all the answers. A man had run amok that other night, and Lessing, along with his brother officers, knew they'd have to face a barricade and a sawed-off shotgun. But he'd laughed, lazily. He'd stretched his six feet two out in the cruiser and we'd talked of music.

It seemed Lessing had a hobby that was funny for a guy like that. The piano. But boogie-woogie stumped him, the *ya-ya* with the base, the left hand. So I'd hummed, drummed the thing out on the seat for him. But I'd never thought his chin could set like this, or that his eyes could look so hard.

"Crome," he said, his eyes narrow, "What goes?"

I managed a laugh. It sounded silly and foolish. "You took it from my mouth, the very words," I said.

"We got a call from a tenant in the building. Seems this tenant thought he heard a shot." Lessing paused, as though to let this bold fact sink in. "I was rolling up the Parkway—my job to look in. How long have you been here?"

"Five—ten minutes."

Lessing frowned, gnawed his lips before he said, "As a matter of fact, this tenant heard the shot a long while back—"

"How long?"

"Ten after ten, I guess."

I cocked my head a little to one side. "Don't you think a report like that sounds fishy?"

Lessing took exception. "No, it happens. They aren't sure. They don't know what to do if it's a jam. They get scared of the notoriety. So they kick the thing around—"

He'd reached the door. He looked past me. Cyclone in the room. That would be a good excuse! I waited, anxious about what he'd do now, what he'd say. He didn't say anything. He just motioned me ahead of him into the room and then he stood very still.

The thing was, he'd know about Slane and me and Velma. He'd know about Velma and Torrega. I tried to read his mind, and failed, and then I crossed the room. A phonograph stood by the phone, the window. I flipped its switch. There was a clicking sound, and then a tricky piano and a tricky tune.

"Turn that damn thing off," Lessing growled.

I flipped the switch again, shrugged, lit a cigarette.

Lessing asked, "Why the search, Crome?"

"Hell, I couldn't find the lights. I knocked over some chairs."

He shook his head. "Crome, it stinks. Maybe it was Miss Vaughn's jewels?"

"What jewels?" I said. "She never made that kind of money."

He made a jerking movement with his left hand, like he was annoyed. "Women don't buy jewels, you know that." Then he added, "Not with money."

I looked at him. "I don't like that crack."

"I don't like what I see here, either," he said. "Where is she?"

"Velma? The Typhoon."

Lessing looked at his watch. "It's after twelve. They're closed. She know you're here?"

I waved to the phone. "Why not call her?"

"I said they're closed." He walked on, to the bedroom, to the bathroom; he opened doors to closets.

"As a matter of fact—" I began as he returned.

But I stopped. He was looking straight at the door, Slane's door. I stopped breathing. Now I saw the scars on the rug where I'd dragged the table.

"WHAT fact?" Still Lessing stared. I think he saw the scars and was puzzled by them. "You searched the place, Crome. That's the fact. Been here long?"

"I told you. Five—ten minutes."

"I mean in town. When did you get in?"

"Tonight."

"Long enough to hear things?"

"Torrega?" I laughed. "That's over."

"Since when?"

"Since I got home. Tonight."

Lessing kicked the rug, the one with which I'd covered the bloodstain. He stooped and rearranged the rug again carefully. Then he walked to the phone, and I took a deep breath again.

"Ever get that left hand on the piano, Lessing?"

"Left hand?" He dialed with his gun hand, without putting down the gun. "Oh, sure. Sure, it was easy after you showed me." He spoke into the phone. "Hello, Jukes? So you're around yet? Jukes, this is Lessing. Uh-huh, lucky that I caught you in. Miss Vaughn still there? Would you look?"

I waited. I listened. I could hear Jukes' hollow voice but not the words. Then Lessing looked aside at me. I looked away. At the door. I gasped. I almost fainted. The table was slipping! The door had edged an inch back into the room!

"That's too bad," Lessing was now saying. "By the way, did you see Pat Crome down there tonight? Uh-huh. . . . Talked to him on the phone. I see. Okay, thanks a lot, Jukes."

Lessing set the phone down. He turned, his voice soft and lazy as he said, "Got your wires crossed a little, did you?"

It's coming now, I thought. *It's got to come. It's got to end.* I tried to keep my eyes on him. "But Jukes wouldn't have seen me. I parked in the back, where it's dark. I went in the back way. I didn't see anyone but Velma. I doubt if anyone saw me."

He kicked a chair around, straddled it, sat down. "So the little girl is washed up with Torrega? You know, Crome, it's funny thing, a guy when he's nuts about a girl."

"What's funny about it?" I said.

"Well, he loses his timing. He does things he wouldn't do at all, not normally. He sticks out his chin, like you, like here. 'Call her,' he says. He knows it's bluff. I know it's bluff. But still he says it— Like I say, he's lost his timing. Crome, she left the Typhoon a while ago—with Torrega."

(Please turn to page 86)

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(Continued from page 84)

I just stood there. I knew I should be dismayed. Did Torrega tell her Slane was dead? No, he would not. He would want to claim his innocence. He'd gone back; she'd welcomed him; she'd handed me another doublecross. I watched the table slipping! I was sick with tension, with what I knew was going to happen any minute.

I walked away from Lessing, to the window, where I could turn and then look through him. So I could watch the table. No grip on the smooth rug. That was it. I watched it move with little jerks. It crawled. It turned me into ice.

"Question is," Lessing was saying, "was it only fury?"

"Was what fury?"

He waved his hand. "This here. You tore the place apart. It belongs to her—you destroyed it. I got a word for that. It's infantile. It's like a kid would do, but like I say, you'd lost your timing. Or you might have been after Miss Vaughn's jewels—"

"I tell you I don't know anything about her jewels!"

"Uh-huh. Don't worry. I intend to search you."

He pursed his lips, seemed to consider. His eyes were very small and shrewd. "We also got a shot the tenant heard, and that's the thing that worries me."

He was worried! The body was moving—I could see Slane's hand. His wrist showed, his coat, more and more of it. I could see up to the elbow. The thought ran through my head, *No wonder Slane had leered.*

"You're not nervous?" Lessing asked me.

"Well, it's late—" I said.

He laughed. "She'll be home. I'm no ogre. If she says forget it, I won't pinch you."

The body fell sideways with a bang.

Lessing moved fast. "Crome, I knew it!" he said, but I beat him to the punch.

I hit him. The chair fell with him, on him. I hit him again, and his jaw cracked, his head jerked back—the blow numbed my whole arm. Then I ran across the room. I ran down the hall, out the door. I locked the door and ran across the lawn, to the sedan.

MY FINGERS were all thumbs. I couldn't find the key; and then I dropped it; and then I couldn't get it in the lock. The starter whirred, but didn't catch. I looked back, half expecting to see Lessing. He wouldn't be unconscious long. If he couldn't get out he could phone. I should have cracked the phone—the Parkway would be blue with cops in minutes.

I got the motor going and muffed the clutch this time—and stalled.

Now would be the time. To be caught like

this. Now would be just perfect! In the act. Before I could find Velma and Torrega. Damn the car! Everything to gain, nothing to lose. No clues to find. Only Torrega—

This time the motor raced. I swung into the street. Halfway down the block I looked back once more, through the rear-vision mirror. There was something in the mirror, a head, a face, rising from the blackness of the back seat.

I didn't try to turn or slip the door to break away. I didn't try to dodge the blow I expected. My feet found the pedals. In the same motion I rose in the seat. My arms flew up and back, closed around a neck. The car was buckling, squealing to a stop, and this sudden stop jerked my body forward. The figure came forward with it, somersaulted right over the seat and into my lap.

Now, Mr. Torrega! I thought.

I heard a muffled, "Mr. Crome!" And was surprised not by the cry so much as by the slimness and the lightness of this body. There was silk beneath my hands. And hair, a cushion round the neck, long and silky tresses.

She struggled to rise, to get her legs down; I to find her arms and hold them. She was very young and very pretty I saw then by the dash light. The car had climbed the curb, to come to rest aslant.

"Mr. Crome—" she said again, gasping.

I released her hands. They went first, reasonably enough, to her face and hair. She said, "I'm going to have a lump—oh golly, a big lump—where my head hit the wheel."

I didn't plead sorry, not yet. Her hiding in my car, outside Velma's apartment would need explaining.

"Do you always do that?" she demanded. "I mean with a hug like that? Is that the way you always meet people?"

It was the way she said it, the lilt in her voice. I had to grin. "Baby likes my huggin'?" I said.

She pouted. "That old song."

"It's new to me."

"I hate it. It's ancient."

"All right! It has whiskers. What I want to know is, what were you doing in my car?"

"And I'm trying to tell you! I crawled in so he wouldn't see me."

"Who?"

"The cop. I stayed in the car because I was afraid he'd come out any minute. I didn't want to see him. I was waiting for you!"

She shuddered—she was so close to me I could feel the tremor of her body.

"Mr. Crome, I heard a shot. And—and you ran away?"

"We'll skip that."

"No we won't! It means he really was dead. Oh—and I tried so hard to stop you."

I drove on again and cut off the Parkway. After a block I spoke.

DEATH SINGS A TORCH SONG

"It means who is dead?"

"Why, Señor Torrega!"

"What do you know about him?"

"Why, I've said. I tried to warn you. I tried to run after you, at the Typhoon. Only she stood by her door, after you'd left, and I couldn't get out. Not quickly enough. Then when I did, you were driving off. And—and I nearly fainted when I got up here and saw the cop standing by the door. I knew you were inside. I knew you'd be caught with the body—"

"Wait a minute. Whose body?"

"Why, Señor Torrega's!" Then she giggled and said, "We haven't been introduced, have we? How do you do, Mr. Crome. I'm Dixie Merrill."

Baby likes your lovin'—she even talked like that. Not affectedly, she simply was like that. Her voice was soft and low and it had a way of getting into you.

She told a curious story, told it swiftly, vividly. The Typhoon's dressing room walls were thin. Her own room was just inside the exit, with Velma's next to it. And on the previous night, on Wednesday—she gave it to me complete, with accent.

"You do not comprehend," Torrega had said. "You laugh, but it is anything but fony, señorita. Now I must do something queek!"

"Then why did you give the jewels to me?" Velma had flared.

"Geeve? I nevair geeve! I permit you should wear them. In my report I say you are like—how you say it—window dressing. But to you I nevair say—"

It didn't make sense to me, and Dixie explained, "He was to raise cash for the jewels, a fabulous sum. He had to hurry. Of course I didn't get all of it, but apparently the jewels came originally from Central Europe, through Spain. Some big man over there feathering his nest, or some underground organization."

"Go on," I said.

"Well, he pleaded. He told Velma his life was at stake."

I whistled softly.

"That's what he said," Dixie went on. "He'd pay with his life, if he got caught. If he didn't produce the jewels or money. But he didn't intend to be caught. He was one jump ahead, he said. He had a plan. If she would skip with him they could be safe and rich forever."

Dixie looked at me.

"How did Velma react to Torrega's plan?"

"She temporized," Dixie said. "But to me it was as plain as anything she wasn't going to return the jewels to him, or go away with him either. We, all of us at the Typhoon, knew she'd just signed a contract with the movies,



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and that was what she wanted. Well, she said she couldn't get the jewels until today—I mean Thursday afternoon. They were in her bank. She said vaguely she'd see him this evening."

I idled on up the dark street. I lit another cigarette. It wasn't right. It didn't jell. Too much still was missing. Or too much was there—with Slane. Why had Slane gone to Velma's apartment?

Slane was always in a jam, he always needed money—had he seen in the jewels an answer to his problems? Had Torrega already found the jewels when Slane arrived, and did Slane try to take them from him? In no other way did Slane's murder make sense. Not if Torrega were the killer. Not unless the men Torrega feared were unknown factors in this case.

But it was Torrega's actions, *after* the murder, that didn't make sense. If he'd found the jewels, as I believed he must have, and killed Slane to keep them, as I still believed he must have—why, then, did he return to Velma?

The jewels should have been Torrega's first concern. A career was Velma's. Logically these two would not interlock. And yet he *had* returned to her—I had Lessing's word for that—and she had gone away with him again.

I said abruptly to Dixie, "Of course you were in your dressing room tonight, when I was with Velma."

"Yes, I was."

"And you overheard us, everything we said."

She nodded like a child and whispered, "Yes, I did. S-some of it. I couldn't help it."

"So when you followed me to Velma's apartment you thought Torrega was dead. It was nasty. It was murder. You thought I would get involved, by trying to do something with the body. But why try to save me, a stranger?"

Her lips began to tremble. She said, after a moment, "She was using you. She didn't tell you about the jewels. She wasn't playing fair."

"Is that all?"

She didn't answer. She wasn't looking at me now.

"Dixie?"

"Yes, Mr. Crome?"

"You're not putting all your cards on the table."

Her head jerked around. "But I've told you—"

"That's just it. You've told me only what you wished to tell. And you haven't asked me anything. Why not? Aren't you interested in what happened in the apartment?"

"I—I'm afraid it's all bad."

"Torrega isn't dead."

"Oh!" She sighed. It was wonderful to hear, and yet—the sigh stopped sharply.

DEATH SINGS A TORCH SONG

"It was Slane."

"M-murdered?" she whispered. Then she added a word that surprised me. "When?"

"Ten. A bit after ten, maybe."

"Ten—" Her hand flew to her mouth. She changed suddenly, stiffened, drew away. It was like turning the page of a book, to find unexpectedly a new chapter, a new scene. "Mr. Crome," she said, and her teeth began to chatter, "will you take me home now, please?"

CHAPTER FOUR

Baby Likes Your Livin'

I DON'T know when I first became aware of the pressure on my spine. Whether it was while driving Dixie Merrill to the address she gave me—a brownstone house on a narrow side street—or later. It was a dull ache. It annoyed me all the way. It was not important, and I'd changed my posture, wriggled in the seat, ignored it.

She'd left her purse and keys at the Typhoon, when she'd run out after me; but even this, the little fear she'd not get in, did not stay or sway her.

"Good night, Mr. Crome," she said. She ran from the car, across the walk, not once turning back to smile or wave before the dark door opened. Apparently the outer door had been unlocked, and I watched until the dark jaws of the house closed again after her.

I drove on then. It was after one now. In a few hours dawn would break. In a few hours people would begin to stir. And listen to their radios and read, as the day unfolded, the night's news. Then they'd know all about Pat Crome. Who he was and how he looked. There'd be pictures, one from the thousands I'd sent to the press, to people in the old days—but not labeled, "Yours sincerely," this time. "Killer," rather. The man who'd dreamed murder and awoke to find it real.

The pressure on my spine continued, no matter how I twisted. Finally I reached around in the seat—and touched steel.

I stopped the car. Then my fingers tried again, and clutched a smooth steel barrel. A revolver. I broke it, saw the empty cartridge in one chamber.

This was the gun that had killed Slane.

For moments I stared blankly through the windshield. Torrega had showed up at the Typhoon, and Velma had welcomed him, had rejoiced that he was alive. Well, why shouldn't she? The Typhoon was closing for the night—why wouldn't she leave with Torrega? I hadn't returned, as she would think I should have. Torrega was her unsolved problem, not Eddie Slane. It began to look as though Slane



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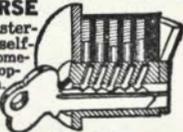
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were not Torrega's problem either, but mine and—

Dixie Merrill's. . . Caught hiding in my car—was she Slane's killer? Was she the "tenant" who had called the cops? Had she followed me from the Typhoon, to plant the murder gun on me?

I turned the car around, gunned the motor. A sweet little blonde with a lilt in her voice—a sweet little killer. The thought hurt.

The outside door was still unlocked. I didn't pause or wonder why. I ran up the stairs. Yes, the front room—light drew a pale thin line beneath her door. I rapped, waited, heard a clicking sound but nothing else inside. But she was in there, and her stillness would not turn me back. I rapped—reached down, turned the knob.

From the open door I could see the blue rug and the golden draperies; the cocktail table with its bottle and its glass; a music box, the cabinet with its records, and a flowered day-bed. She lay huddled on the daybed.

I said, "Dixie—!" and went over and touched her, but she didn't rouse. Her face was flushed, but she was cold and scarcely breathing. I raised an eyelid, found the pupil pinhole size.

"Dixie! Dixie!" I began to shake her, and suddenly knew I'd heard a door, that someone had come up the hall, to stand behind me. It was a woman, staring, her lips apart and sure to scream.

"You fool," I said, "don't stand there!"

Surprise clogged her throat. She blinked, tugged her bathrobe tight about her dumpy figure and began to tremble.

"Hurry!" I said. "Call a doctor."

Still she didn't move, but I knew the words she tried to say, "W-what is it?"

"She's drugged," I said. "Can't you see she may be dying?"

The woman ran off down the hall. I could hear her at a phone, her voice high.

Damn the clicking, I thought. It was rhythmic, metronomic, like a clock; like a voice that whispered without pause.

The woman came back, running.

"A hot pad," I said. "And coffee."

She got them and I forced the stuff between Dixie's lips. She choked at first. She swallowed a little, and it came right up again. "That's fine," I said, "that's fine. Get the stomach empty, that's what we got to do. Where the hell is that doctor?"

Then someone shoved me away, a grey man in a grey suit, with a kit he had already opened.

He said, aside as he worked, "Were you with her?"

I said no.

DEATH SINGS A TORCH SONG

He said, "H'mm, tongue, throat red—could be chloral hydrate." His gaze locked with mine an instant, "Then she was alone."

I said, "I don't know."

"Would she want to commit suicide?"

"Damn it, I don't know!"

"Better call the police."

I stiffened. The cold around me felt like dry ice. "Wait a minute. Think of her—her reputation. You're going to bring her through this, aren't you? You're going to save her?"

"We're trying. We're in time, I think. She has a good chance." He turned to the woman and said quietly, "Call the police."

I reached around to stop her; then something I saw stopped me, instead. My picture on a table. Yes, in the far away days, the days of heavy fanmail, I had sent out thousands like it, all signed "Sincerely yours, Pat Crome." But here, in a fine gold frame. . . .

Confused, I looked around the room. She'd come into this room tonight, from me, nervous, tired—scared. Well, what would she do? She might pour herself a drink of wine or whiskey. Yes, she'd had a drink; the glass and bottle were on the cocktail table. Then music—outlet for depression a girl who sang would seek. Yes, she'd put a record on the phonograph; and this, the phonograph, was the infernal clicking that I'd heard.

It was the needle, going round and round and round on the nub of the record.

I heard the woman coming back again from phoning.

"Attempt at suicide it's got to be," the doctor was saying. "Or attempted murder."

The woman, wringing her hands, was blocking the door. I pushed her out of my way.

"Wait!"

I was in the hall. I began to run when I hit the hall. I ran across the walk outside, and now I fancied I could hear, faintly, from far off and drilling closer through the night, a siren.

Upstairs, the woman had opened a window. "Doctor, he's trying to escape!" she said.

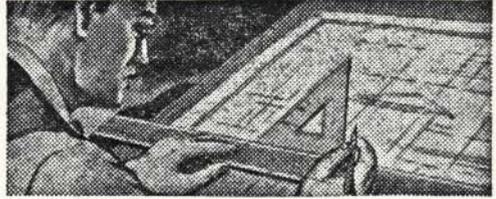
And then she did scream, finally.

WHEN I got to the Typhoon, I cut my lights, left the car and prowled the darkness of the parking court.

The sprawling, inky building showed no sign of life, of course; and yet the very darkness seemed now to be charged, tense, mistrustful, listening. I drew the murder gun, stole toward the rear door, the same door I had used before this night.

The hall was pitch dark, although ahead I saw a thread of light to guide me. Light from the room second on the left, the room I knew so well.

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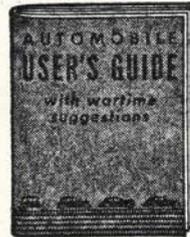
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DETECTIVE TALES

"Ready for the ride now, señor?" the chuckling voice was saying.

By this time I had reached the door, and through its slit I could see a hand.

My spine began to chill. I knew I had reached the last turn in the road. I knew I had found, at last, Torrega.

"Ready, señor?" the chuckling voice repeated. Then a burly figure came into view. It stooped, strong arms reaching down for Torrega. There was the sound, of a sharply indrawn breath. Torrega's raised body sagged, hit the chair, slid on to the floor.

The burly figure remained crouched, looking at me and cursing.

"Pat!" Jukes Jennings whispered.

He looked at the gun. A bead of perspiration gathered on his upper lip.

"Pat, you don't understand. This is big. Don't make a mistake. Don't be a fool—don't shoot—don't lose your head, kid." The sweat began to form on his forehead. "Pat, we can make a deal."

I said, "I'm out on a limb, Jukes!"

He began to shake. It was like a tree, massive. "Pat, use your head—it's all fixed! It's a natural. Torrega takes it all from here. It swings either way, on you, on him—and I know when I'm licked, kid. I know aces when I see 'em. Look, all I had to do was keep Velma here, tie her up and then search her things. I found the ice, Pat, in her make-up box. So all I had to do was phone Torrega. 'I can get the jewels for you,' I said, and he was ready to do business. He came on the run. No brains at all, he fell right into my arms. They left together, that's what I told Lessing. But Torrega's car is outside, and all I got to do is finish Velma and we'll dump the bodies."

He hesitated. Was his fear sham, I wondered? Was he waiting for an opening? When still I didn't speak his lips began to jerk.

"Pat, you know how it was—"

Yes, I knew now how it was. Dixie, scared with what she'd overheard of jewels and death—Dixie had told Slane and, anxious for advice, she'd also told Jukes Jennings. She'd probably planted the seed, the idea.

Tonight the jewels were anybody's prize, but Jukes had started searching Velma's effects first—and when Slane had walked in on him he'd met a bullet.

He'd acted with neat dispatch in the moments after the first murder. He saw the phonograph in Velma's suite, with a record on it of the Lovin'-Huggin' song that Dixie had once sung. He'd played the record to me, on the phone, as though he'd cut me to his floor show. He knew I would be suspected of Slane's murder, and the murders of Velma

and Torrega which were yet to follow. He knew that in trying desperately to alibi myself, I would report the call he'd made, the time, the place from which he'd seemed to make it, and thus build an alibi for him. And he knew then how next to use me.

His voice changed, became hoarse, frantic as he cried, "Pat, don't—"

I moved toward the phone. I'd reached it when he threw himself at me.

The queer thing was that he'd overlooked Torrega's body. Or maybe it was destiny that pulled this tiny string there at the end. Not that Jukes could possibly have won. For one, he'd failed to kill Dixie; and Lessing was too shrewd. At Dixie's house I learned later, Lessing had picked up my trail again. He'd found my parked car on the street, near the Typhoon.

But as I've said, Jukes moved with amazing speed for one so big. And his hands did reach their goal. They reached the gun, and me—but his feet didn't, for Torrega's body lay between us.

I didn't go down as Jukes planned. He didn't quite get the gun. He clawed at me as he tripped and fell, blank surprise on his face. The blankness remained there as I brought the gun down, slashing, on his head.

I FOUND Velma in a closet across the hall, bound and gagged. It was Lessing, though, who came, released her; and of course she put on a show for him. She cried a little.

The cops said gruffly they could fix it. Because—and she played this part to perfection—because she hadn't known until tonight that Torrega's jewels were smuggled. All she'd wanted, she said, was to keep them from Torrega—for the government.

I felt queasy, but kept still.

SULTRY SINGER RISKS HER LIFE

Maybe you remember reading of it?

I said aside to Lessing, "When Dixie ran after me tonight, she'd left her purse and keys down here. So although Jukes had planned to hold her, kill her along with Velma, he had the keys to get into her room. She was his loose end. She'd told him about the jewels—he wasn't sure but that she'd seen him plant the gun in my car. So he was there, waiting, when she arrived home.

"Originally, Jukes didn't expect me to show up. And when I did, he didn't want me around the Typhoon tonight to complicate his plans. He steered me away, didn't tell Velma I was home or had phoned—until he had to switch



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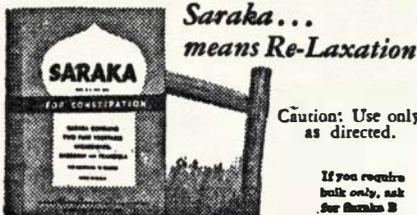
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DETECTIVE TALES

his plans, when he was forced to kill Slane. That changed everything.

"He phoned me from Velma's apartment, returned quickly to the Typhoon and urged Velma to call me. She needed no urging. He watched for my arrival, planted the gun, and discovered from Velma I was going to her apartment. He was your cagey 'tenant', Lessing. I had to be stopped from returning to Velma, from interfering with his final act. The cops, he thought, would catch and trap me with Slane's body."

Lessing wasn't listening. Lessing was listening to Velma. I cleared my throat and tried again.

"It was the clicking noise on Dixie's phonograph that finally steered me right. An old song, she'd said; it wasn't likely she'd have used it on the floor show tonight. Moreover, I'd heard a clicking noise over the phone when Jukes called me, between ten and ten-thirty tonight."

I hesitated—a moment. I thought of ten tonight and of what had been going through my mind then, with a last small shudder.

"Of course," I went on swiftly, "when I told Dixie about Slane, she was shocked and anxious to get away from me. After all, she didn't really know me. She couldn't be sure that I hadn't killed Slane."

Lessing shot a glance at me. Lessing looked pained as he interrupted, "Can't you let the little lady tell her story?"

Even Lessing, I thought. The little lady finally rolled her great big eyes and cooed at me, "Dah'ling, won't you take me home now?"

So I put her in the car and started up the Parkway.

"Oh, I've just remembered!" she said. "Pat, we can't! The police will still be there, and perhaps the body!"

We were passing a hotel. I swung the car in, stopped.

"Good night," I said.

She said, "But, Pat—dah'ling!"

I said, "Drop me a postcard from somewhere, some time."

She said a lot of caustic things. "Fool," was one of them.

I just smiled, and hummed *Baby likes your lovin', darlin'—'deed yes*. As pretty as could be. Not Velma. Dixie. Soft voice with a thrill, a lilt in it.

And my picture on her table. Like Sinatra.

Well, what could she have said when I asked her why she'd done all this tonight for me? I whistled as I drove on down the Parkway. I had a new tune now myself, changed a little, true, but a theme song nevertheless.

I wish I were with Dixie...

THE END

MANHATTAN MANHUNT

(Continued from page 61)

He hung up and started up the street. This time he came to a candy and cigar store. There was a burly, battered-faced lug behind the cigar counter. Mort went quietly over to him.

"I want to speak to Moe."

"Moe ain't here."

Kennedy sighed. "Look, I'm a cop but this is not a pinch. I don't work in this precinct. But Moe knows me."

Those hot needles were lancing up the inside of his thighs worse than ever. His hand had slipped quietly to his blackjack. He saw the big man groping for the push button under the counter, saw his attention wavering.

Kennedy reached out and grabbed the man's necktie. He yanked him forward over the counter. The little blackjack flashed up and down, and the man groaned. Then he slid to the floor.

The back door of the place opened and another man stuck his head out. Kennedy said, "Hullo, Moe. I wouldn't move if I were you."

Kennedy had his gun in his mitt. Just like in the books. He shoved the pasty-faced man back into the room.

Kennedy said, "I told your punk I wasn't here for a pinch. I just want some information and I want it damn quick. I'm gonna show you a picture. While you're looking at it, I'm gonna be counting up to three. You won't hear me, but unless I have what I want when I get there, I'm gonna spill your guts all over the place."

He took Little Petey Renfrew's picture from his pocket and handed it to Moe. The bookie glanced at it and nodded miserably. "Yeah, I know him. He comes in here now and then to put in a bet. But how could I know that—"

"You're wasting time," Kennedy reminded him. "Where does he hole up?"

Moe's flabby shoulders lifted in a shrug. "That I don't know. But Mike out there knows. The guy you sapped." Kennedy went to the door and saw Mike wiping the blood from his shattered mouth.

Kennedy said, "Look, Junior, you're going to take me up to Little Petey's hideout. After we get there, you can take a walk for all I give a damn. But if you don't take me there, and take me there damn quick, you're going to get a working over that you'll remember the rest of your life. And after that you're going up the river for a nice, long rest. What'll it be?"

He knew the answer even before the man spoke. He had seen so many men look at him with terror in their eyes during the long, long years. It didn't take a hero to scare a rat.



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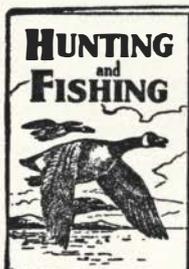
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DETECTIVE TALES

THE place was a ramshackle, run-down rooming house, down on the worst part of Brooklyn's Fifth Avenue. The front door was unlocked and, as he followed Mike in, the heavy smell of garlic and old cooking hung on the hot air like a blanket.

"That's his room."

He stepped aside and, as Kennedy went up to the door, he heard the big man tearing away down the hall. He knocked and was surprised when the door opened at once. The weasel face of Little Petey showed in the opening.

Kennedy hit the door with a crash, sending the little hood halfway back across the room. He snapped back, glaring angrily, and Mort reached out, yanked him forward with the efficiency of long years of practice and slapped deaf hands over his pockets. There was a cheap, mail-order gun in Petey's pocket.

Mort took it and looked around the room. One glance covered every inch of it. Kathy was not here. He locked the door.

"All right, Petey," he said calmly. "Where's the little girl you took!"

Petey said nothing.

Kennedy took off his coat, then his shirt, keeping Petey covered with his gun.

He said, "I don't want your blood on me where it'll show, punk."

"Listen, copper—the kid's safe. Right now she's stashed away with my girl friend. . . ."

Kennedy's fist sent him sprawling to the floor. Then he went to work. He worked methodically until Petey raised a hand, palm outward, while he sucked air into his lungs.

"Okay," he gasped. "I'll talk, all right. All of it. I've—gone just as far as I'm going—with this—"

It was quite true. Little Petey Renfrew had gone as far as he was going. Mort Kennedy barely heard the pop of the .22 from the open window back of him. In fact, he hardly realized what had happened until he saw the terror vanish from Petey's face, saw the little hood sink back on the bed, a neat, round hole above his right eye. He jumped forward and bent over the man, then whirled about to the window.

He was just in time to catch a vague blur of a man diving through a broken place in the high backyard fence.

He stood there in that grimy, stinking, little hall bedroom, looking down at the dead body of Little Petey Renfrew and suddenly he had the answer to the whole thing and there was a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach. . . .

MARGE NOLAN was still in his apartment when he got home, but she was a different woman now. She was smiling, radiantly happy. A freshly bathed, freshly fed Kathy

MANHATTAN MANHUNT

squirmed happily in her arms. Walter Nolan stood to one side, beaming. Kennedy beckoned to him and led the way downstairs to Nolan's apartment.

"Boy! Was that a surprise," Nolan chattered. "Right after you phoned me for Moe's address, I went downstairs for a drink—not wanting to kill off *all* of your stock—and my own phone rang and this guy was on the wire.

"The whole thing was a mistake, he said. They'd got the wrong address, that was all. And if I'd promise never to tell where I found the kid, I could go and get her at once. I grabbed a cab and went there in a hurry and, sure enough, there was Kathy, safe and sound. And, Mort, I'm going to keep that promise. Law or no law, I'm not going to take a chance on Kathy getting—hey! What's the matter with you?"

Kennedy was standing before him with his big fists clenched, his eyes reddened with fatigue. Suddenly he dropped his fists.

"Damn it! All the way over here I told myself I'd beat the hell out of you before I took you in and now I just can't do it."

He reached out disgustedly and yanked Nolan to him. He took a .22 automatic from Nolan's pocket and slipped it into his own. He watched stark terror come to Nolan's face.

"Mort—what's the matter with you? You know I got a license for that gun!"

"Cut it out, you louse! You hired that punk to kidnap Kathy and you'd have gotten away with it, if Doc Ryan's kid hadn't seen him. When I phoned you that I was going to Moe, you knew you had to cover up. So you raced over to Petey's and shot him with this gun before he could talk."

"And can you tell me what reason I'd have to kidnap my own child?" Nolan asked sarcastically.

"Sure, I can," Kennedy said wearily. "You wanted to kill Marge. You knew her heart was so weak that a couple of days of excitement would be very likely to kill her and you had heavy insurance on her. Maybe you were short in your books at that insurance company, or maybe you had met some floozie over in New York that looked better than Marge—I don't know. And I don't care."

He stared miserably out the window at the garden he and Nolan had worked on. A light, night wind, blowing across the back yards of Brooklyn brought the scent of the carnations in through the open window but he did not smell them.

Already, he was forcing his tired mind to the problem of breaking the news to Marge as easily as possible. It would be up to him to think of something. He was the guy in charge.



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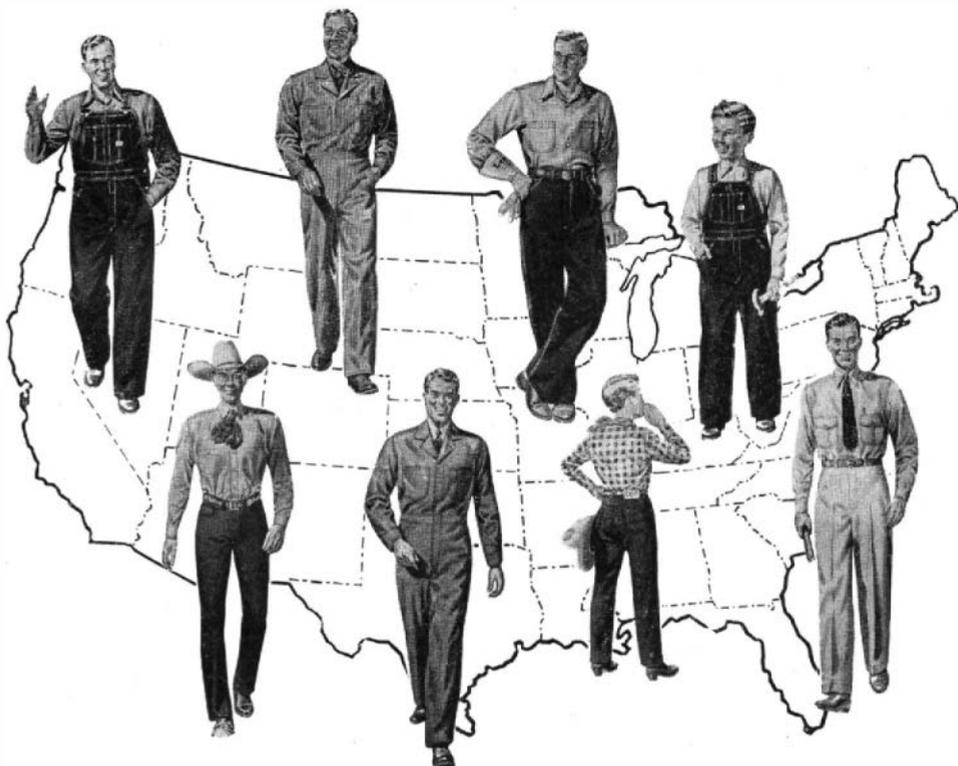
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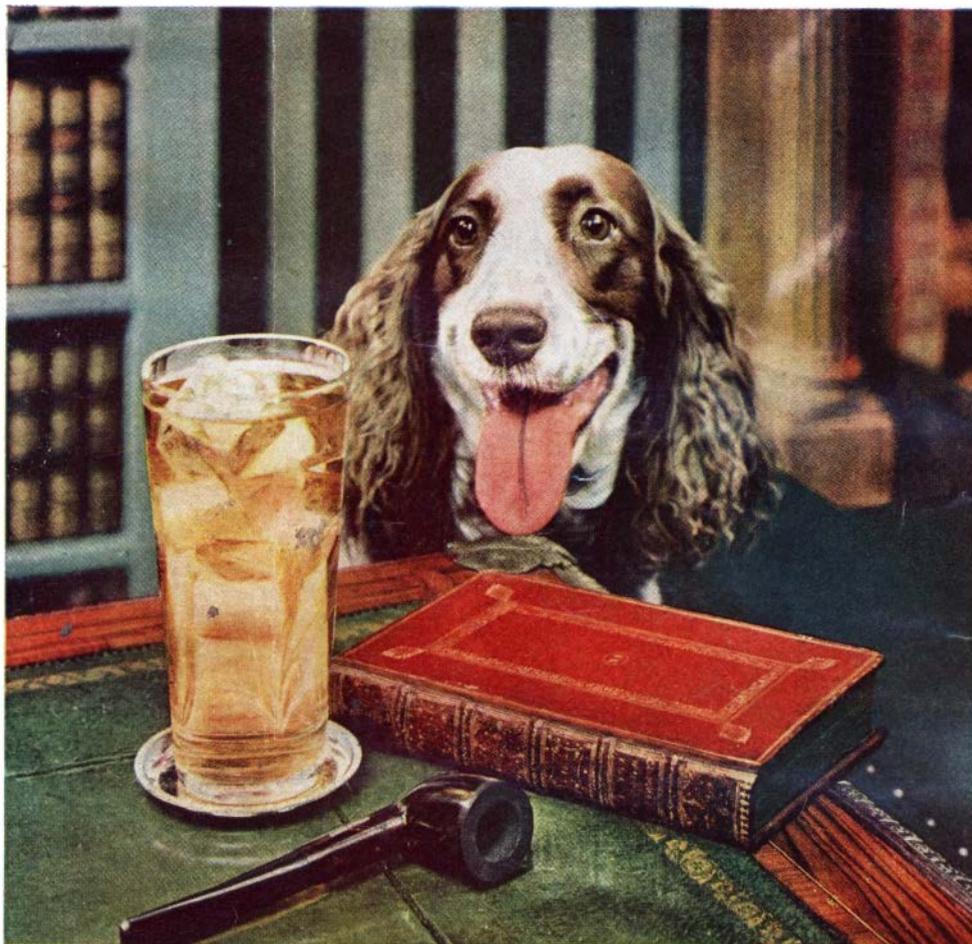
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