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CHAMPION OF THE DOOMED
THRILL-PACKED FEATURE NOVEL
by **WAYNE ROGERS**



10¢

**WHAT ELSE CAN
I EXPECT, SIS—
WITH A FACE
LIKE THIS...**



**BUT JIM
FOLLOWS
A TIP
THAT ENDS
HIS JOB
WORRIES**



OH. HELLO, JIM... HOW ABOUT THE JOB... ANY LUCK THIS TIME?

NOPE - DREW ANOTHER BLANK - GEE, IT'S DISCOURAGIN' - OTHER FELLOWS DON'T HAVE BAD BREAKS LIKE I DO!



I WISH JIM DIDN'T WORRY SO ABOUT A JOB. HE'S AWFULLY UPSET, TOO, ABOUT ALL THOSE PIMPLES HE HAS

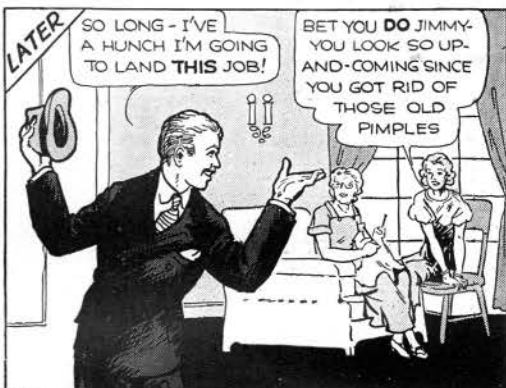
I DON'T BLAME HIM. PIMPLES ARE SO CONSPICUOUS - BUT CAROL, I'M SURE FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST WOULD GET RID OF THEM. DO GET HIM TO TRY IT



THE NEXT DAY

LISTEN, JIM - KIT SAID THIS FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST IS THE BEST THING OUT FOR PIMPLES. SO I GOT YOU SOME. TRY IT PLEASE!

SAY, IF IT CLEARS 'EM UP, I'M YOUR SLAVE FOR LIFE



LATER

SO LONG - I'VE A HUNCH I'M GOING TO LAND THIS JOB!

BET YOU DO JIMMY - YOU LOOK SO UP-AND-COMING SINCE YOU GOT RID OF THOSE OLD PIMPLES



3 MONTHS LATER

WHAT D'YOU KNOW - THEY'RE GIVING ME A RAISE AND A BETTER JOB - GOSH, I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE MY LUCK!

OH, JIM - HOW PERFECTLY GRAND!

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DETECTIVE TALES



12 STORIES

TEN CENTS

VOLUME THREE

JULY, 1936

NUMBER FOUR

1 Novel of High-Powered Human Drama and Mystery 1

CHAMPION OF THE DOOMED *By Wayne Rogers* **8**

Dodo Temple was at it again—going to war in the cause of a slain friend and a girl in jeopardy! But though he always made it a point to out-think his enemies by at least one jump—he could not foresee the grim shadow of double-cross.

2 Strongly Moving Stories of Crime-Fighting 2

REPRIEVE FROM DEATH *By Norbert Davis* **50**

She was the daughter of the man Carson had sworn undying vengeance against—and she had gotten herself in a spot where all Carson had to do was say the word, and she would be on the way to the death house he himself had just escaped!

SATAN TAKES A PICTURE *By Paul Ernst* **78**

There are no worse crooks than those who held Winnie Fay a tortured captive. And though the famous detective, Tiger Murray was on her trail, he knew that the closer he got to her—the nearer she was to death!

9 Smashing Short Stories of Crime and Detection 9

SUBSTITUTE KILLER *By John H. Knox* **35**

Sharron would have to kill to quench the fire that burned in his wife's eyes!

KILLER TRAP *By H. K. Miller* **44**

Nora found that, even without knowing it, one may be assisting Satan.

TOAST TO DEATH *By Wyatt Blassingame* **67**

Booze Bottle, drunken reporter, wrote his greatest story in his life's blood!

FLATFOOT BREED *By Arthur Leo Zagat* **73**

Dan O'Fallon volunteered for a ride in that death car—knowing it was a one-way trip!

GUNS FOR A GUARDIAN *By Jack Donohue* **95**

Map Collin's well-fitting uniform was of little use when he confronted the man who had sworn to kill the girl Collins loved

MURDER TRAIL *By Emerson Graves* **100**

Officer Swayne loved Jeanie—and so did Bogas, the killer!

MURDER TO MUSIC *By J. Lane Linklater* **105**

The man had died to music—the tune Tad always whistled in Death's Alley.

THEY ALSO SERVE *By Henry T. Sperry* **113**

Betty Hewitt learned a truth that shattered the faith and love of years.

COUNTERFEIT JUSTICE *By Joel Stephens* **118**

Myrna's only fear was that she would not be suspected of her husband's murder!

— And —

FLATFOOT COURAGE *The Inspector* **6**

THE CRIME CLINIC *A Department* **126**

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"Not a light showed anywhere, only the cold heaving sea, the dark, cloud-ridden sky and the icy gale that tore at me with the clammy claws of Death.



"There seemed little use of holding on any longer... when a searchlight from a distant boat cut through my despair! With all my strength I shouted for help. Finally, that bright finger of light pointed me out. If I could hang on just a few more minutes! I would be saved!... Safe aboard my rescuer's boat; I said it was a good thing he had a powerful searchlight.

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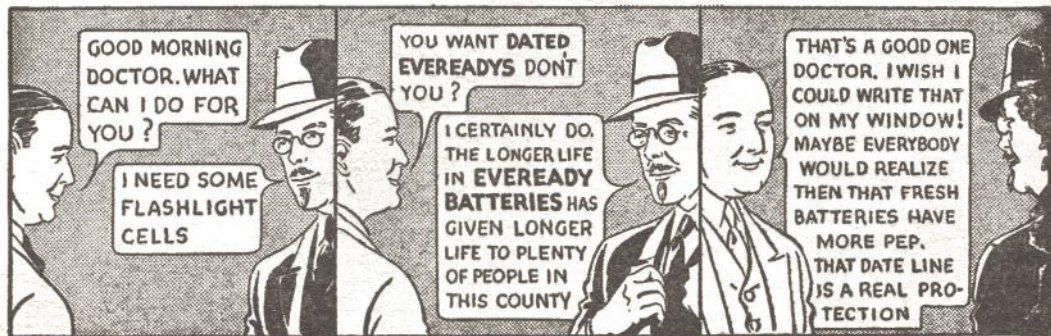
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IN LINE OF DUTY

THE sirens scream along the street where the careless wheels have crushed one more helpless body. The crowd gathers. Suddenly through the press comes the blue coat.

"Quiet, people. Please stand back and give him air."

Instinctively the hard-boiled metropolitan crowd obey whom they know is their guardian. The sergeant comes through and turns over the still form on the pavement—so broken and bloody. Behind the sergeant there is another—a young newspaper man, familiar with the beat, but still so unsophisticated that he carries a flask and turns up his coat collar.

"Good lord, Mac," he says. "The last of the Simonzi snatch gang. The one you've been trying to get. The one who burned down your best friend. You've got him on a spot. Jeez, I hate to see how smashed up he looks."

"Hold your tongue," says Sergeant Mac. "Here's the ambulance." Again the sirens. The white-clad internes hurry from the car. The rat-faced gangster is put on a stretcher.

"You may as well come along, loud mouth," says Sergeant Mac to the reporter. "You will anyway."

At the hospital the young newspaperman turns down the collar of his coat and says to the pretty nurse:

"Give me the dope, will you, kid? Sergeant Mac is a friend of mine."

"Sergeant Mac is a friend of mine too," replies the girl. "At this moment he is giving a blood transfusion to his worst enemy."

The young newspaperman who thought he was hard-boiled reaches for his flask. He holds it in his hand as he stares at the pretty nurse.

"Saving—saving the life of the man he hates most in the world?"

The soft mouth of the nurse speaks quietly:

"That's our job—the job of nurses and cops. Saving lives. Take your drink, reporter, and go away."

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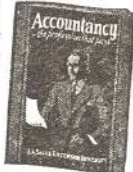
The liver should pour out two pounds of liquid bile into your bowels daily. If this bile is not flowing freely, your food doesn't digest. It just decays in the bowels. Gas bloats up your stomach. You get constipated. Your whole system is poisoned and you feel sour, sunk and the world looks punk.

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FLATFOOT COURAGE

STREET lamps were making the dingy shadows on Maury Street darker when Officer Forti stopped little Rosie Pilzek on the corner.

"Run along home now," he said. "It's late for little girls."

"Okay, big stuff," answered the ten-year-old, and ambled happily on, while across the street her brothers watched.

"Look at him," sneered Frank Pilzek. "Givin' candy to kids. Tellin' people to drag in their garbage cans, seein' the Dutchman's door is locked at night, gettin' flat feet from walkin' around this lousy block all night. What's wonderful about that? Yet just on account he keeps talkin' to you, you get a job, instead of bein' smart like me and runnin' with Cokey Moe."

Young Stan Pilzek winced as if from the memory of many blows.

"I know, Frank," he said. "I get awful tired of them wheels and machinea. If I thought I could make a big wad of dough all at once I might join with Cokey. Only he ain't never done anything important."

"He's doin' something tonight," returned Frank. "Look."

He lifted his coat and Stan saw the metal of a revolver. . . . Just then a terrific scream stunned Maury Street—the scream of a child in terror.

"O God!" cried Stan. "That's Rosie. Somebody's grabbed her. Listen! It's comin' from the alley by the flat. Frankie, hurry. You got a gun."

But Frank had not moved.

"Them—them kind of guys is pretty dangerous," he muttered. "I—"

Then he and Stan and all the people of Maury Street saw a sight they had never seen before—Officer Forti running. The flat feet carried him with surprising speed. They heard a command, a curse. Then—the shots.

Officer Forti had no marksman's badge, and he had to be careful of the white spot in the dark that was Rosie's dress. He was perfectly silhouetted against the alley entrance, too. But he could keep the other fellow busy maybe—could keep taking them in the chest, in the legs—until. . . .

The squad car came and it was all over. That was a blind alley.

Rosie was safe in her mother's arms when Stan turned to his white-faced brother in the midst of the jabbering crowd.

"Nothin' wonderful, eh?" he shouted. "Why, you imitation tough!"

Smack. Despite the tumult Maury Street folks were amazed to see stern old Sergeant Schmidt stand by while Stan Pilzek beat up his big brother. But the sergeant had to stop it very soon.

"Listen, you," he said to Frank. "I've been going to do something about you for some time. But maybe tonight will be a lesson. Will you get a job alongside of Stanley and help support your folks if I let you off?"

Frank nodded dumbly, then shook as with sudden fear. "Cokey—"

"You needn't be afraid of Cokey," said the sergeant. "Look."

He raised the sheet from one of the still forms on the sidewalk.

"Cokey," gasped Frank. "It was him—"

"Yeah, it was Cokey," said the sergeant. "You learned your lesson? All right. So I'm sort of unofficially going to parole you in the custody of your brother and of Officer Forti."

"But Forti's dead!" cried Stan. "That's him under the other sheet!"

"He's dead, and yet he ain't dead," said the sergeant. "When a policeman keeps patrolling a beat in the same neighborhood for all the years that he did, and doing all the good that he did, no rat's bullets can stop him."

It takes one kind of courage to plod patiently about a city's streets, day after day, doing the obscure and often unpleasant tasks that put the populace safely to bed at night and get them safely to work in the morning. It takes another kind of courage to face a dope-crazed gunman up a dark alley. Few men have both. Most of the few that do you will find on our police forces, in uniform or plain clothes, and it is their superb spirit we try to portray in stories in DETECTIVE TALES.

—THE INSPECTOR.

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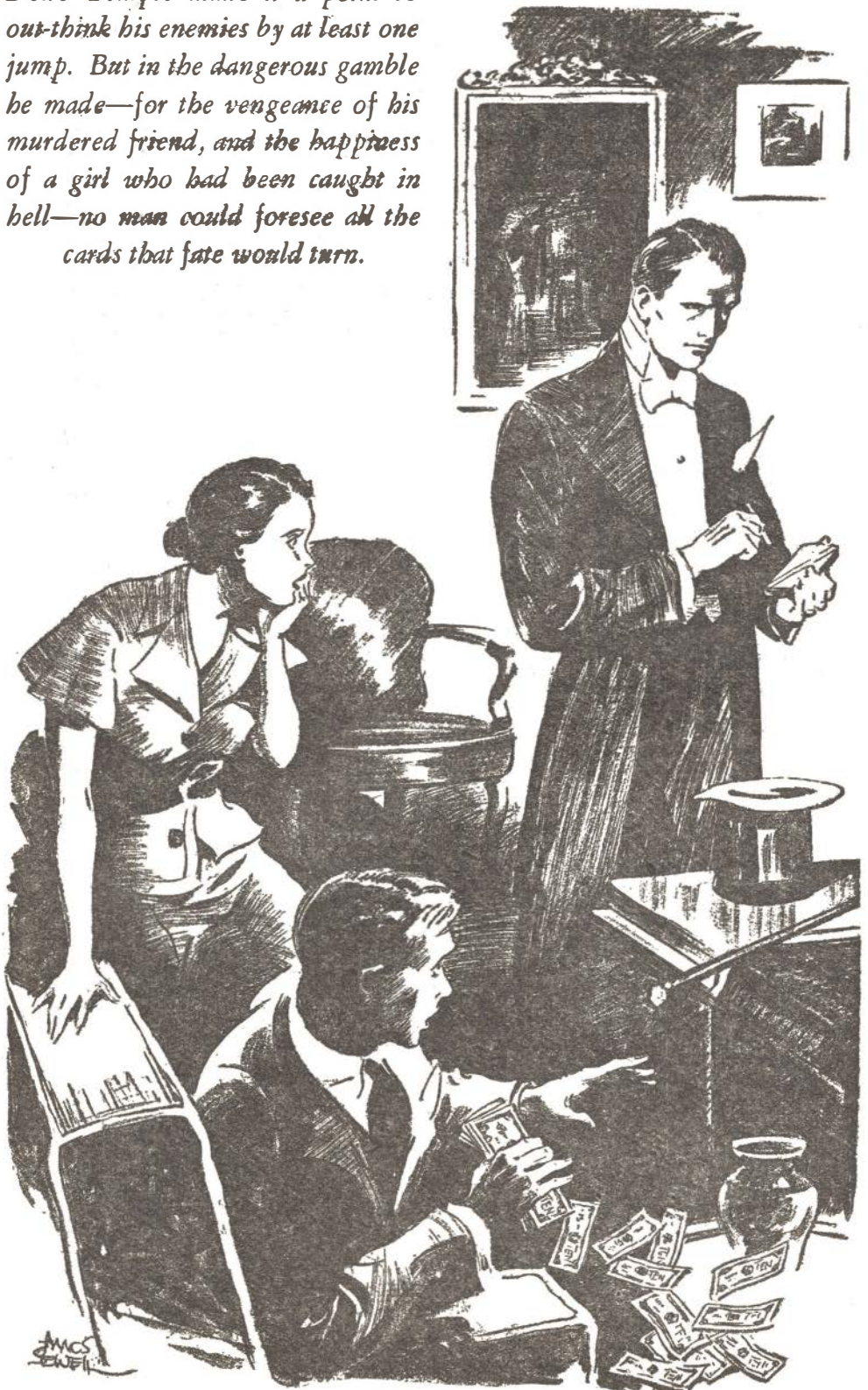
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Dodo Temple made it a point to out-think his enemies by at least one jump. But in the dangerous gamble he made—for the vengeance of his murdered friend, and the happiness of a girl who had been caught in hell—no man could foresee all the cards that fate would turn.



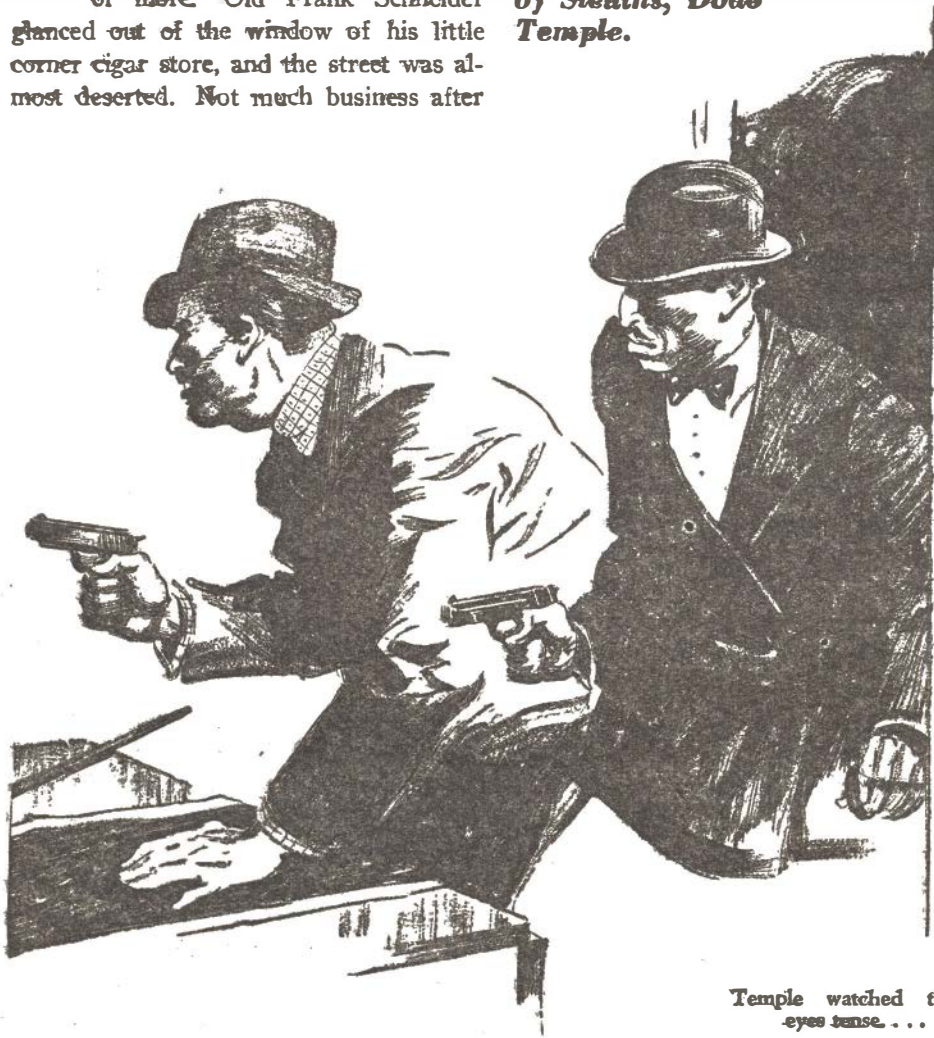
CHAMPION OF THE DOOMED

By WAYNE ROGERS

(Author of "Satan's Blonde Pawn," etc.)

EIGHT-THIRTY—and there hadn't been a customer for ten minutes or more. Old Frank Schneider glanced out of the window of his little corner cigar store, and the street was almost deserted. Not much business after

Another Great Full-Length Novel About that Smoothest of Sleuths, Dodo Temple.



Temple watched them,
eyes tense. . . .

seven or seven-thirty. Might just as well close up—especially with August feeling the way he did.

Frank glanced sympathetically toward the dark doorway of the room behind the store and shook his head worriedly. He would just straighten up a bit, balance his cash, and—

He glanced up as a taxi came to a stop

in front of the store and two men stepped out. Customers in evening dress. One of them—the young fellow—he'd seen before; he came in once in a while.

"Two packs of Players," the younger man ordered, and picked a bill out of a well-filled wallet.

"Here—save your money," his companion growled as he tossed a dollar bill on

the counter. "Lemme pay for them."

But the younger man shoved the dollar away and flipped a ten-dollar note on to the counter.

"Your money's no good," he laughed. "Put it away. I need the change, anyway."

Schneider held the note up to the light, scrutinized it carefully and subjected it to the regulation tests. It was new but apparently perfectly good. Perhaps he'd ought to check it—but the older, shorter man was irritable and touchy.

"What's the matter—think we're trying to pass a phony on you?" he snarled. "If you had a thousand sawbucks like that one you'd be sitting on top of the world. We haven't got all night."

With a quick apology Schneider counted out the change, and they were gone. But after their cab got under way he opened his cash register again and took out a long typewritten list of numbers, peered at them near-sightedly—and drew back with pursed lips and lifted brows. That intuitive warning had been right—this bill was hot money!

As if it would burn him he lifted it gingerly and again compared it with the list. Yes, there was no doubt about it; there the number leaped out at him terrifyingly!

His fingers trembled as he dropped it back into the drawer and glanced uneasily around the store. His face white and troubled, he paced the floor behind his counter nervously. Then, some minutes later, he came to a decision and dialed a number on his telephone.

"Hello, Dodo. That you?" he called anxiously when a voice responded at the other end of the wire. "This is Frank Schneider—Frank, down by the cigar store—an' it looks like I'm in some trouble." His voice lowered hoarsely as if he thought the walls of the empty store might hear him. "Just now I took in a ten-dol-

lar bill that's wanted. Hot money, Dodo. It's not good that I say too much about it, but the police are looking for it all over the country. What should I do? Take it to the station house? You know what that means, Dodo—plenty of trouble. I don't want I should have that. But I can't take it to the bank or try to pass it. Better I tear it up, maybe, eh? But ten dollars—an' with business the way it is—I'd bring it over to your place, but August, he has another of his bad spells. He's layin' down in the back room an' there's nobody to leave."

"Stay right where you are," came the crisp instruction. "Put that bill aside and I'll be right over to have a look at it."

Old Frank sighed with relief as he put the receiver back on the hook. Dodo could handle things like that; he'd know what to do.

And then his eyes became two round, bulging wells of terror! Standing there, just inside his door, were two grim, hard-faced men who scowled at him savagely. Men with hands thrust deep into their coat pockets. How long had they been standing there? Too long, he knew, from their narrowed eyes and sneering lips. They had heard what he had said—heard too much!

His goggling eyes opened even wider as the ugly snouts of automatics came out of their pockets, as they cat-footed across the store. One went straight to the cash register, opened it and pawed out all the bills it contained. The other backed Schneider against the wall, the automatic digging into his stomach while death leered out at him from the fellow's mocking eyes.

There was no mistaking that message, no mistaking the killing lust that contorted the man's face into a diabolical mask as his fingers tightened on the trigger. Old Frank opened his dry mouth to scream. . . .

POLICE cars lined the curb and there was an inquisitive crowd in front of the cigar store when Dodo Temple arrived. Frank Schneider's body was still where it had crumbled to the floor behind his counter, and August, his sallow-faced, hollow-chested son, was tremblingly repeating the spare details of what he knew of the murder.

Grizzled old Inspector Gallagher looked up as Temple shouldered his way through the crowd, and his face lit up with immediate interest.

"So you're here, eh?" he growled. "What's that mean? What d'you know about this, Dodo?"

Temple's strong, heavy-featured face became an even more perfect poker mask as he looked down at the pathetic heap on the floor. Only in the depths of his grey-green eyes hot rage leaped and seethed.

"Just passing, Inspector," he answered shortly. "Frank was an old friend of mine, so I stopped to see what was going on."

Gallagher's blue eyes gleamed with suspicion; then, reluctantly, he shrugged. Some day, he had promised himself, he would lay this smooth, dapper young lone wolf by the heels—but obviously this was not the day.

"Nothing much to see," he growled. "Just another stick-up, with a little too much hop behind the trigger. This fellow was asleep an' can't even give us a description. No prints or anything else to give us a lead. Afraid this will stump even you, Sherlock."

But Dodo had caught a meaning glance from August Schneider's eyes, and he stayed in the store after the inspector and his men were gone.

"I was awake when those dirty killers came in," August confided as soon as they were alone. "I saw them—but I knew the old man would want you to handle them for him. One was just an ordinary-

looking mug, but the other was a dark-skinned feller with a scar the whole length of his left cheek. Looked like an Italian—thin and swarthy."

"Were you awake when Frank phoned me?" Temple asked.

"Yeah, I heard that," August nodded. "I was coughing an' couldn't sleep. I saw the men who came in with that bill, too. One was a good-looking young chap with nothing in particular about him. The other was a feller with big wide shoulders an' hardly any neck. Made him look sorta like an ape—"

The grey-green eyes flickered, and an identification popped out of the card index that was Dodo Temple's mind. That description was made to order for Gorilla Gunther, a racketeer and small-time mob leader.

"The big-shouldered gent was griping because they stopped here to get cigarettes," young Schneider recalled. "I heard him say that they could've got them from Manning, but the young feller laughed an' said that Val Manning never had his brand when he wanted it. Do you think they had anything to do with the murder?"

But Temple was looking down at the dead body of the man he had come to see, and there were suspicious traces of moisture at the corners of his eyes.

Years ago, when he was a ten-year-old youngster whom the world knew as Frank Temple, gangster lead had blazed out of the night and snatched both his father and his mother; left him lying beside their bodies for dead. Out of the unforgettable nightmare of that night had arisen the Dodo Temple of today, implacable enemy of the cowardly, bullying underworld. But there had been years of struggle and grim preparation in between—and in those years Frank Schneider had played an important part.

Schneider had been kind to the young

and walked down the hallway to his office he heard a cricket chirp. Instantly he whirled in his tracks—only to find himself covered by an automatic in the hand of a man who had stepped out from around a corner of the hallway, and to see another hood come padding down from the floor above. They had been waiting for him at both his apartment and office.

"Go ahead, unlock it," the heavy-set fellow at his back growled as Temple stood with the key half extended toward the lock. "You've got company. That's right," as the key turned in the lock and the door swung open. "Now switch on the light—an' no funny business. I've heard of this trick office—an' my finger's mighty nervous on the trigger."

The gun jammed against Dodo's backbone and he made no attempt to resist. The light flashed on and the thugs followed him into the office and locked the door behind them.

"The dump don't look so mysterious," the slighter of the two observed as he gazed around the room and nosed into drawers and closets.

"Never mind that," his partner snapped as he felt over Dodo for weapons and then relieved him of his cash. "What'll we do with this rat? Gimme that silencer an' we'll let him have it right here. Good a place as any to—"

His voice died on his lips as his keen ears caught the sound of a car braking to a stop in front of the building. Keeping his gun on Temple he ran across the office and peered out of a window.

"Cops!" he bit off savagely. "There's a gold badge gettin' out—and I'll bet he's comin' up here. Just our damn luck! Too late to get out now. What the hell we gonna do?"

"We can't bump this guy now," his partner scowled. "Let's tie him up an' chuck him in that empty closet. Douse that

light. Maybe the cop won't come in, but if he does we'll take care of him."

In the next moment the light snapped off and they were both upon Dodo, pinning him helplessly, while they tore off his coat and used it to tie up his arms, tugged loose his belt and lashed it around his ankles, and crammed handkerchiefs in his mouth and tied them in place with the sleeve they ripped out of his shirt. Bound and gagged, they dumped him into a closet at the side of the room.

"Make a sound an' we'll open this door an' drill you!" the heavysset leader warned, and the key turned in the lock.

If there was a "gold badge" coming up to see him, it was Inspector Gallagher, Temple surmised—and those hoods were out there waiting for him! Gallagher would not be fooled because the light had been put out; he had undoubtedly seen it from the street and would think that Dodo was trying to play possum. He would insist on being let in—and they'd kill him and make it look as if Dodo had done it!

Drops of sweat formed on his brow as he realized the jam he was in. A clout over the head with Gallagher's revolver, and he would be found lying beside the inspector's dead body—and no jury on earth would believe his story when he was tried for murder!

Desperately he tugged and tore at the binding that held his arms. It wasn't very secure and was beginning to give. One arm was almost free—but he could hear a fist pounding on the office door, could hear Gallagher's voice bellowing his name and demanding to be admitted. In an intervening moment of silence he heard the lock clicking back. They were letting the inspector in to meet his doom!

Frantically Dodo tore at the binding—and his hands were free! Outside there was a rush of feet, the sound of falling bodies, and the door closed again. Cursing, snarling, kicking, flailing bodies—

But Dodo was on his knees in the closet, prying loose the baseboard at one side. Quickly his fingers delved into the opening behind the board and pressed first one button, then another. Almost immediately there was a change in the sounds from the office. Gallagher's roaring bull voice became thick and choked; the thugs were coughing, gasping.

"It's gas!" one of them screamed. "Open that door!"

"I can't!" came a choked gasp. "The damn thing's locked, an' I can't budge it." His gun hammered futilely against the panel. "It's steel!"

Temple could hear them running to the windows. Then a shot rang out. Another. And after that stunned silence.

"God!" a strangled voice sobbed. "The damn winder's bullet-proof! We're trapped—ugh—I can't breathe!"

But meanwhile Dodo had taken a gas mask from the baseboard compartment and slipped it over his head. Next he took a pair of long, thin pincers and inserted them in the keyhole, to grasp and force out the key. With a duplicate key from the compartment he unlocked the door, pressed two more buttons behind the baseboard—and stepped out into the now quiet office.

Inspector Gallagher lay in the center of the floor with his arms tenaciously wrapped around one of the thugs, while the other lay beneath the window he had been unable to open. Temple opened the now released door and windows to air the office, snapped on the light and then repossessed himself of the money the thug had taken from him.

Next he turned his attention to Gallagher and soon had the inspector revived,



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sitting up and cursing luridly as he began to understand the situation.

"Red Skelton and Ernie Witte," he quickly identified the still unconscious hoodlums. "Two of Gorilla Gunther's gang. They're going to be mighty sorry for this night's work!"

Then he turned what tried to be stern eyes on Temple, but now much of the bluster had gone out of him and he was more than a little taken aback by the thoroughness of the preparations that had made this office a trap that was almost infallible.

"I came to see you about that Schneider killing," he admitted. "I checked up with the telephone company and found that Schneider called you up about fifteen minutes before he got his. So you didn't just happen to drop in—did you?"

"Oh, that call." Temple grinned widely. "I didn't think anything of that. Forgot all about it. Frank was always calling me up trying to sell me a new batch of cigars."

"Yeah, I know." Gallagher shook his head sagely. "I thought it was something like that. That's why I drove around."

Mentally he kicked himself for being a fool. He might have known that he would get nothing out of this tight-mouth. Instead he had managed to place himself under obligation to the man he would like nothing better than to trip up and land flat-footed.

CHAPTER THREE

A Man in Trouble

AFTER the inspector and his driver had left with their prisoners Temple closed the office and went upstairs to his apartment. It was nearly midnight, but the telephone was ringing as he stepped into the private hallway, and Rickey, his valet, was just coming from his bedroom

to answer it—and now to gape in astonishment at Dodo's tattered clothing.

"I'll take care of it," Temple waved him back. "And don't worry about me; I'm not as bad as I look."

Over the wire came a frightened, almost hysterical female voice.

"Is this Mr. Temple—Dodo Temple? Oh, thank Heaven you're home!" it sobbed. "This is Clara Blanton, Mr. Temple—and I've simply got to see you! I know you don't know who I am—but Maureen Haley is one of my best friends. I know what you did for her, Mr. Temple—and I'm in such trouble that I don't know which way to turn. Oh, I *have* to see you! Please, Mr. Temple!"

A friend of Maureen Haley. . . . Dodo's face softened at the mention of the girl whose life he had saved only to hand her over to the arms of his successful rival. Maureen was the only woman who had ever struck the romantic chord in him—and deep in his heart he was convinced that there would never be another.

Probably it was the magic of Maureen's name that made him ask this girl where she was located; that made him jot down the address of an exclusive uptown apartment hotel.

"All right," he agreed impulsively, "I'll be right over."

Quickly he changed clothes, and this time he strapped twin automatics in their close-fitting holsters beneath his armpits. Something about that call—perhaps the girl's hysterical excitement, perhaps the memory of the storm of lead through which he had waded to insure Maureen's life and happiness—had put him on the alert, made him speculate about her as a taxicab sped him uptown.

Clara Blanton was at her apartment door the moment he stepped out of the elevator. She was pretty, he saw at a glance, even though her eyes were red and puffed from weeping and her blond hair

was disordered as if she had been restlessly running her fingers through it.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came!" she breathed the moment he was in the door. "I've been so worried! Not about myself," as his eyes looked at her questioningly; "about Stanley Hogarth, my fiancé."

Stanley Hogarth! Temple's impassive face betrayed no unusual interest, but the quick blood leaped in his veins. Stanley Hogarth—the game at Val Manning's—Frank Schneider's murder; it was beginning to tie together.

"I've known that he was in trouble for some time," the girl was saying. "He needed money so badly—and lately he's hardly had time to see me. But now he's in real trouble. His cousin, Wilton Hogarth, telephoned me just before I called you and told me that Stanley's running away. He has a reservation on the midnight plane for the Coast, but he went to Wilton for money. Wilton didn't know what to do. He tried to talk him out of running away and refused to help him—but Stanley stormed out of the house and said he knew where he could get money. Then Wilton telephoned me to see if I could stop him from making a fugitive of himself. But what can I do?"

"Why didn't you go to the airport and stop him?" Temple suggested.

"You don't know Stanley!" she sobbed. "He wouldn't listen to me; there's nothing I could do to dissuade him. If he even saw me there he would never come back. He's in some terrible trouble that only a man like you can get him out of. Please don't let him ruin his life, Mr. Temple! Please stop him before it's too late!"

"All right, I'll have a talk with him," Dodo agreed, but the girl's gratitude made him squirm uncomfortably; if this thing shaped up the way he was beginning to suspect she probably would soon be damning him instead of thanking him.

There were a lot of questions he wanted young Stanley Hogarth to answer, and he prepared them carefully as he taxied to Newark. But there was no sign of young Hogarth at the airport when he arrived; no sign of him when the midnight plane roared off down the field. More than that, as Temple had begun to suspect, he found that there was no reservation in Hogarth's name, no reservation that had not been used.

Ten minutes in a telephone booth, and Temple's jaw was set angrily as he emerged. He had called all the other airports around the city to be sure that Hogarth had not chartered a private plane; nowhere was there any trace of him.

"She made a sap out of you—sent you on a wild goose chase," he railed at himself as he was driven back to New York.

But that hardly made sense. Why would Clara Blanton want to send him chasing over to New Jersey in the middle of the night? There was something decidedly queer about the whole thing, he decided. Must be some mighty good reason why she wanted to get him out of the city. . .

The moment he unlocked the door of his office and flashed on the light he knew what that reason was! The place had been ransacked in his absence, every drawer turned upside down.

Even before he went upstairs and unlocked the door of his apartment he knew what he would find. The place had been turned topsy-turvy, and the secret panel at the side of the fireplace stood open, the receptacle behind it empty, looted of the damning ten-dollar bills he had put in it for safe keeping.

"Damnation!" he swore grimly as he stared at the looted cache. "She sure played me for a sucker. Got me over to Jersey so that the coast would be clear—"

But it should have taken the searchers hours to find that cache, unless they had had dumb luck—or unless—

Quickly he stepped across the apartment to the door of Rickey's room. There was a light burning inside, and in an easy chair sat the valet, in his pajamas, an open newspaper in his hands and his head hanging forward on his chest.

Chloroform! Temple smelled it the moment he opened the door, and immediately he got to work on Rickey, bringing him back to consciousness, helping him into bed after he had been sick from the drug's effect.

"I answered the door when the buzzer rang, and somebody threw a bag over my head," Rickey gasped weakly. "That's all I remember."

But Temple's attention was caught by the paper he had taken from the valet's hands. At the top of one column a news item had been circled with black crayon—the account of a lifer who had escaped from prison, been caught and returned to his cell, only to end his life by committing suicide by hanging himself from the bars.

Somebody knew Rickey's past—knew that he was a fugitive, an escaped convict from a Western jail, and that Temple had given him sanctuary and a job because he believed him innocent! That fact flashed into Dodo's mind, and with it came vivid memory of the last time Rickey's secret had been uncovered. That time it had almost cost Dodo his life when the terrified valet followed the orders of those who held the threat over his head.

Keenly he glanced down at Rickey, but the valet pretended to be very sick and would not meet his probing eyes. The man's face was ashen and he was trembling with fear. How much, Temple wondered, did he actually know about what had happened?

Well, there was one person who did know what this was all about: Clara Blanton—and she was going to talk, Dodo told himself grimly as he set out for her address. He had an explanation coming,

and Clara Blanton was going to give it to him.

Again the girl met him at the door of her apartment, but this time a new eagerness, a new trust, seemed to dominate her terror.

"Did you stop him?" she demanded anxiously. "What have you done with him? Where is he now?"

"Cut it!" Dodo snapped as he stepped into her living room. "I admit you're a swell actress and all of that, but the comedy's over—and I want to know why you made a chump of me. What was the idea of sending me to Jersey on a fool's errand so that my apartment could be looted?"

"Then you didn't find him—you didn't stop him!" The words came dazedly from her lips. Gradually she seemed to comprehend what he was charging. "I told you the truth," she cried brokenly, "nothing but the truth! But it doesn't matter now. He's gone and—"

Suddenly they both froze to silence and stood looking at each other questioningly. There was somebody at the door, a key turning in the lock—and in ran Stanley Hogarth, his face livid with terror.

"Stanley!" the girl screamed, but he hardly seemed to hear her.

"You've got to hide me somewhere!" he panted. "The police—they're after me! Someone tipped them off that I was leaving town and they're closing in on me! They may be here at any—"

Then he saw Temple—and in the same instant Dodo landed on him knocked him to the floor and held him powerless in a viselike grip while he took a roll of bills out of his pocket. They were nearly all tens, all wanted money of the same series as the bills Hogarth had lost at Val Manning's place.

Gripping him by the coat lapel Temple dragged him to his feet and backed him up against a wall.

"Now maybe you'll tell me where you

were a week ago, on the night of July tenth," he gritted. "If you don't—"

But the mention of that date seemed to fill young Hogarth with new, fanatical strength. Frenziedly he tried to break away, tried to fight his way out of the apartment; and now the girl pitched in to help him.

"All right, then, take it," Temple growled, and his fist smashed into Hogarth's face, drew back and landed solidly again. "Get back or I'll hit him again," he warned the girl, and then shoved his face close up against the trembling youngster's. "Where were you? Out with it!"

"All right," Hogarth groaned. "You might as well know—everybody will know soon anyway. It all started because I had so little money, even though my grandfather is a millionaire. I had to get money some way so I started to gamble, but I lost and ran up debts that I couldn't pay. That made me even worse off than before. Then I simply *had* to have money, so I foolishly got mixed up with Gorilla Gunther's crowd—helped them in a few petty crimes.

"I never meant to do anything really criminal," he pleaded, while the girl's eyes looked at him like great round saucers, "but that night—the night of July tenth—I drove the car for them when they robbed the Tradesmen's National Bank! When I discovered what they intended to do I tried to get out of the car, but one of them held a gun on me and forced me to stay at the wheel.

"The watchman was killed in that hold-up," he half whispered, "and the police are after the gang with murder warrants. They are keeping the news of the hold-up quiet until they land the crooks—and I've just been tipped off that they have a line on me."

Temple listened to that story with growing amazement. He knew that the hot

money wasn't from any bank hold-up; it was part of the fifty thousand dollar ransom extorted for the return of little Dorothy Pell, the child whose dead body was finally recovered by the police. This crazy alibi might convince Clara Blanton, but—

"You're a liar!" he flung at Hogarth. "These bills I took out of your pocket aren't from any bank hold-up. They're part of the Dorothy Pell ransom—and you're the dirty dog who kidnaped and murdered her!"

"Oh, God, no!" Hogarth screamed. "I don't know anything about that! You can't turn me over to the police for that! You can't—"

"Don't worry about him, buddy; he ain't turning anybody over to the cops," a voice from behind Temple snarled—and even before he slowly turned his head he knew what to expect.

A hard-faced thug was stepping in from the fire-escape, his automatic trained on Dodo's back, and another was following him. Now there was the sound of a key turning in a lock, and two more swarmed in from the hallway, one of them a swarthy, dark-skinned individual with a scar slashed across his left cheek.

Helpless under the command of their guns, Temple stood with his hands outstretched while one of the thugs relieved him of his automatics and rummaged through his pockets. Only his expensive cigarette case seemed to interest the fellow. He fumbled with it awkwardly and almost dropped it when it sprang open and revealed two partly filled layers of cigarettes.

"Mind if I have one?" Dodo grinned, as he reached over and took a cigarette from the top layer.

For a moment he held it in his hand as he struck a match—and suddenly the room was whited out in a blinding explosion of flashlight powder that took the thugs entirely off guard.

In that split second Temple grabbed the gun out of the hand of the nearest yegg and clouted him over the head with it, then crouched and aimed carefully at where a snarling, scar-faced visage was just becoming distinguishable through the clouds of white smoke. The gun roared—and a round black hole sprouted in the very center of the swarthy forehead of the murderer of old Frank Schneider!

Savage satisfaction surged through Temple as he saw the scar-faced killer topple to the floor. That settled the grim score with the trigger-man—but the brains behind old Frank's wiping out, the devil who had ordered it, was still alive. And Stanley Hogarth was the one connecting link that might lead Dodo to him.

Hogarth was standing there like a statue, his face blanched and his trembling hands dangling helplessly at his sides. The girl had shrunk back against a wall and was cowering there, trying to shut out the sight with her wide-spread fingers. Dodo made a lightning survey of their positions, then hurled himself across the room—and the blood-stained barrel of the automatic smashed down into another snarling face, raised again, and whipped downward.

But this time steel met steel as the thug parried the blow with his own weapon. A shock of pain shot up Temple's arm at that numbing impact, and the gun fell from his nerveless fingers—but in the same moment his left fist arced upward and landed solidly against the fellow's jaw. With one motion he snatched up the fallen weapon and whirled to sink its snout into young Hogarth's ribs.

"Over to that window!" he panted. "You're not getting out of here with your playmates; you're coming with me. Out of that window and up the fire-escape! You, too," he nodded to the girl. "Can't leave you here with these rats. Out the window after him."

The trembling, fear-paralyzed youngster

hesitated, seemed incapable of obeying; then the girl's fingers closed on his wrist and she urged him toward the window. She went first, Hogarth after her, while Temple backed up behind him, alertly covering the still smoke-fogged room with his recovered gun.

He heard their shoes scraping on the metal ladder of the fire-escape, saw Hogarth's feet disappear upward into the darkness—and then he started backing out of the window himself, just as something hot seared his ribs and almost knocked him off-balance. With a leap he swung himself out onto the landing and started scrambling up the iron rungs, zig-zagging his body from side to side to avoid the leaden hornets that buzzed up around his ears as bursts of orange flame blazed into the night from the landing he had just left.

Temple's jaw clenched grimly. At any moment he expected to hear the girl scream in agony or to feel Hogarth's body tumbling down on top of him. Any one of those wildly questing bullets might find them, but there was nothing he could do to stop that fire. Almost as soon as he had picked up the automatic his gun-wise trigger finger had told him that it was useless—jammed by the blow that had knocked it out of his hand.

The roof was their only hope, and that seemed an interminable climb into the darkness past occasional shade-masked windows where frightened faces peered out cautiously—faces that would quickly turn back and make for telephones to notify the police, he knew. And he didn't want police interference just then.

At last they reached the top rung and Temple stepped off the ladder to peer around the dark roof.

"Over there, in the farther corner, is a roof entrance," the girl said quickly, and then he could distinguish a blacker blob looming against the darkness of the

starless sky. "It opens onto a stairs that leads down to the basement. If it isn't locked—"

Dodo led the way to the tarpaper-covered structure on the run and breathed a sigh of relief as the door swung out under his grip. Then they were inside and making cautious haste down the twenty flights of stairs that terminated in the basement. Again the girl was ready when they stepped out into the dark cellar.

"There's a delivery entrance over at this side which will take us out onto the side street," she suggested—and Hogarth started forward eagerly.

Too eagerly. Again Dodo's automatic jammed into the young fellow's side as they climbed the few steps up to the street level.

"You're coming with me—and you're coming quietly," he warned. "If you try to make a break I'll hand you over to the cops—and collect the reward for delivering the Pell kidnapper!"

That took all the starch out of Hogarth. His breath gasped through his twitching lips in a half sob, and he went along docilely when Temple led the way along the quiet street to the farther corner and there hailed a taxi, to give the driver low-voiced directions.

It wasn't safe to take Hogarth and the girl to his apartment or his office, he knew. That would only be inviting trou-

ble—would quickly bring all of Gorilla Gunther's hoods swarming around the place. But the address toward which the taxi was speeding would be a safe refuge for the girl and an equally dependable lodging place for young Hogarth.

Jake Donahue's place wasn't a boarding house or a hotel. Rather, it was a "retreat"—a place where certain folks at times found it expedient to stop over for a few weeks, secure in the knowledge that they would not be molested by the police or other inquisitive visitors. And a place where certain other folks occasionally stopped over somewhat against their will to wait until the matters that had brought them there were satisfactorily adjusted. Jake was an old friend of Temple's and had more than one favor he was anxious to repay.

The taxi stopped in front of a three-story brick building, and Dodo led the way into a smelly vestibule, closed the outer door behind them—but opened it again on a thin crack and watched until the cab disappeared. Then he stepped back into the street and led the way rapidly around the corner to an eminently respectable looking two-story and basement brownstone that set back some distance from the sidewalk.

For some moments there was no response to his ring at the basement door, but a light flashed on in a panel in the

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side of the doorway, and Dodo knew that they were being carefully inspected from within. It seemed ages they stood there—and he put out his hand to steady himself against the doorway as a wave of dizziness swept over him. That wound, he realized, had been draining him of blood, sapping his strength.

And then the door was open and Jake's ring-battle scarred countenance was grinning out at him.

"I've brought two guests for you, Jake," Temple told him as soon as they were inside. "Miss Blanton and Mr. Hogarth. See that they get the best you have. Gorilla Gunther might like to know where Miss Blanton is—and Mr. Hogarth seems to think the police are interested in his whereabouts."

"I understand, Mr. Temple," Jake grinned broadly, and winked over the heads of his new guests.

"I'll be back to see you in the morning," Dodo told them as he started for the door. "Meanwhile, just sit tight and leave things to me." And then, as an afterthought to the girl, "And don't worry."

The look in her eyes puzzled him as he taxied back to his apartment. Big, round eyes that were filled with concern for her man; filled with concern and with alert suspicion. Clara Blanton was trusting him because she had no other choice, Temple realized, but she was scanning his every move, weighing it carefully—and the moment she thought that he was placing Hogarth in danger she would take matters in her own hands.

And then what would she do?

CHAPTER FOUR

Baited Trap

THOUGHTS of Clara Blanton would give him no peace as Rickey helped him remove the bloodstained coat and the

shirt that was matted to his side. The girl was a fool to throw herself away on a skunk like Stanley Hogarth—but that didn't make it any easier for Dodo to forget the look in her round, saucerlike eyes as she stared at her fiancé and listened trustingly to his lying confession. It was hell to have to prick a hole in such faith.

"Patch me up as well as you can," he told Rickey. "I've got to go out again tonight."

But when he tried to stand, his legs would hardly hold him up. That wound had bled more than he had thought and had left him surprisingly weak and dizzy.

"Drink this—it will brace you up," Rickey urged as he came running with a tall glass of whisky.

The whisky helped. It drove off the dizziness, but it could not hold off the sleepiness that was overpowering him. He mustn't go to sleep—but dimly he realized that Rickey's arm was around his waist, that the valet was half carrying him. And floating in the air, just in front of him, was the girl's pleading face—her great round eyes—

It was nearly noon when he opened his eyes and then sat bolt upright in bed. Nearly noon—and the dull, heavy feeling in his head told him why he had slept so long. That confounded Rickey had dosed his whisky with a sedative. Taking care of him again—but then Temple remembered the marked paragraph in the newspaper in Rickey's lap; and he wondered. Was Rickey obeying orders? Was that the reason for that doped drink? To keep him out of the way until almost noon?

Almost noon—nearly time for the news reports. Temple leaned out of bed and turned on his radio, then lay back with closed eyes and listened to the announcer skim the headlines. But a New York item chased all the drowsiness from his brain and brought his every sense alert.

"P. J. Hogarth, the multi-millionaire oil tycoon, died this morning of a heart attack," came the announcement. "Death came suddenly as he sat at his desk in his home—"

P. J. Hogarth—young Stanley's grandfather! Dodo's sixth sense took command, sent a warning tremor down his spine. Old Hogarth's death at just this time was too pat; it fitted in too well to be merely a coincidence. But what did it mean?

Suppose young Stanley's story was true? Suppose he actually was innocent of the Pell kidnaping? How could the kidnap money have come into his possession in such quantities? Planted there! But why? So as to incriminate him in the passing of it. And again, why?

For a moment Temple considered—and then the answer to that question dawned upon him, and filled him with contempt for his own blindness. Once the youngster passed that ransom money he would be entirely at the mercy of whoever got hold of it—both he and his grandfather. It would be a fearful weapon to hold over the head of old Hogarth—a weapon with which any amount of blackmail might be extorted!

"Damn you for a know-it-all!" Dodo cursed himself as he leaped out of bed and ran to the bathroom.

Those kids were in trouble up to their necks, and it was up to him to give them a hand. First of all, he would hurry over to Clara Blanton's apartment to see what had transpired there after she left. Perhaps he could glean something from the doorman.

But before he had finished his shower Rickey's voice called to him above the noise of the splashing water.

"There is a telephone call for you, sir," he announced. "Inspector Gallagher. He insists on speaking to you."

Gallagher was jovial, could barely conceal his elation, when Dodo picked up the

receiver. He wanted Temple to come down to Headquarters, wanted to talk to him. That meant that he wanted to crow, Dodo knew, as he thoughtfully dropped the instrument back into its cradle. When Gallagher was after information he came to Temple; this summons could only mean that he already had all he needed—or thought that he had. And that information would probably concern the killing of Frank Schneider. Had the inspector managed to tie young Hogarth up with it?

Dodo picked up the instrument again and dialed a number, held the receiver to his ear until a familiar growl greeted him from the other end of the wire.

"Hello, Jake," he spoke softly. "The guests that arrived with me last night—they're all right, I suppose?"

"Okay an' restin' comf'table," Jake Donahue chuckled. "But maybe I oughtn't t' say that," he amended. "The young feller, he keeps pacin' up an' down like he had ants in his pants, an' the gal, she just sits an' looks at the wall. Any message t' cheer them up?"

"No; I'll be over in an hour or so," Temple told him and hung up.

Hogarth and the girl were still safe. At least Gallagher hadn't had the youngster picked up. But Dodo decided to stop off at the girl's apartment on his way down to Headquarters. Before meeting the inspector he preferred to know just how much Gallagher knew of what went on in that apartment the night before.

A dollar bill slipped into the hand of the doorman outside the apartment hotel when he asked whether Miss Blanton was at home quickly brought him the information he desired.

"Miss Blanton?" The lackey's face beamed with the importance of his news. "Haven't you heard, sir? She disappeared. There was a great disturbance in her apartment last night, and when the police arrived she was gone. They are in charge

of the apartment now. Inspector Gallagher was here himself, sir."

So Temple was prepared in a measure for the wide smile that wreathed Gallagher's usually dour face when he stepped into the inspector's office, but it was none the less irritating. Gallagher was entirely too expansive, too completely satisfied with himself.

"I called you over to tell you that I've solved the murder of your friend Schneider," he announced patronizingly. "While they were giving the store a fine-combing my men discovered a ten-dollar bill that the old man had jammed beneath one of his showcases. That bill was one of the Dorothy Pell ransom notes! This morning another of those bills was found in the dead hand of P. J. Hogarth as he lay crumpled over his desk. Someone had been in to see him and revealed that his grandson, Stanley Hogarth, was the Pell kidnaper. The shock was too much for the old man and his heart quit on him."

Gallagher leaned back in his creaking chair and puffed on a big cigar with audible satisfaction.

"Why his grandson Stanley?" Temple knew that was the question he was supposed to ask—but it was also the question he wanted answered.

"Because Stanley's scrambled," the Inspector rose to his cue with alacrity. "Both he and his gal friend, Clara Blanton, flew the coop when the game became too hot for them. The dragnet's out for them now, and we'll be asking them a few questions shortly. The way I figured it out, Stanley Hogarth was the real brains of Gorilla Gunther's mob. He passed that hot sawbuck on Frank Schneider and then ordered the old man rubbed out because he became suspicious of the bill. He must have shown that he recognized it—and that signed his death warrant. Too bad about the old fellow, of course—but his death helped us to solve a tough kid-

napping and put the finger on a lowdown murderer."

It was a long time since Gallagher had been able to crow so confidently before Dodo Temple, and he was making the most of it—but Temple hardly heard him; his mind was busily following an entirely different track.

"Nice work, Inspector," he nodded, "but, by the way, how is that watchman in the Tradesmen's National hold-up getting along? Out of the hospital yet?"

"Watchman?" Gallagher's face was puzzled and he was a bit annoyed. "He wasn't even injured. That wasn't a hold-up. It was a fizzle; an amateur job that blew up when one of the mob got scared and started shooting. They lit out without even getting into the building. But what the devil's that got to do with Hogarth or the Pell kidnaping?"

Temple didn't bother to explain. That bit of information about the Tradesmen's National job was worth listening to all of Gallagher's bragging, he told himself as he left Headquarters. Now the devilish ingenuity of the trap into which young Hogarth had fallen was becoming clear to him.

The Tradesmen's National hold-up had never been intended to go through. It was a fake to make young Hogarth think that the police were after him. After that Gunther supplied him with the damning kidnap bills and planned to have him lose them to Val Manning's house men. Once they were in his hands Manning could have demanded any sort of blackmail from the youngster's grandfather to keep the story from the police.

Stanley Hogarth the Pell girl's kidnaper! It would have meant utter disgrace and ruin for the entire family! Yet once the coup was sprung the youngster would not have dared to deny it—for to do so would have tied him up with the bank

robbery that took place on the same night, a tie-up that he had been told meant the death chair!

Now that his grandfather was dead, the youngster's value to the gang became problematical. They might wait until the estate was settled and then blackmail him—or they might take no chances but decide to silence him and the girl immediately.

They were both in deadly peril, Dodo realized, and the king-pin of the gang—Frank Schneider's real murderer—was still unpunished. He would remain unpunished now, because Gallagher was so sure that he had pinned the crimes on Stanley Hogarth.

There was one point in the inspector's complacent narrative that had caught Dodo's attention, and which he intended to investigate it. Gallagher had mentioned a man who called on P. J. Hogarth with one of the ransom bills just before the old man's death, but he had made no mention of the caller's identity. Perhaps there was some reason for his reticence on this point, and Temple wanted to know what it was.

But a few minutes spent with the servants at the Hogarth house gave him the surprising answer to his question: the inspector didn't know! Nobody seemed to know the identity of the mysterious visitor—and none of the servants would admit having let him into the house. Only Armand, the old man's valet, had even seen him.

"I can't rightly say that I saw him, sir," he explained when one of Temple's bills had oiled his tongue. "I went to Mr. Hogarth's study to ask him a question, and through the door I saw a man sitting beside his desk, talking to him. All that I caught was a rear view, and there was nothing familiar about that, sir. The next thing I knew I was called and the master was lying there on his desk, dead, and the

man was gone. No, sir, nobody saw him leave, either."

A man had been there in conference with old Hogarth, yet none of the servants had admitted him or saw him leave. That meant it must have been someone who had a key—someone who was familiar with the house and could make his way about without being seen.

Suddenly a flash of understanding burst in Temple's brain—and he knew that Stanley Hogarth and the Blanton girl had only hours to live once they left the security of Jake Donahue's establishment!

And, by the same token, his own life had become a mighty poor insurance risk!

CHAPTER FIVE

Snatched!

THE fiend who had engineered this deviltry no longer needed Stanley Hogarth to grab the fortune for which he was angling; in fact young Hogarth now stood in his way. And both Hogarth and Clara Blanton were a continual menace to his safety. At any moment they might put two and two together and read the answer to this crime riddle.

But before they had an opportunity to do that, Temple knew, no effort would be spared to close their mouths forever. Even Jake's hitherto impregnable stronghold now seemed a poor hiding place—and Dodo's fingernails beat a nervous tattoo on the metal wall of a drugstore telephone booth as he waited impatiently for Donahue's customary growl.

The phone didn't answer—the line was dead. And Temple knew with undeniable certainty, that he was already too late! In some way young Hogarth had been trailed and the trap was already closing on him.

"Step on it for all you're worth," he ordered as he shouted the address to the

cab driver who answered his signal. "Double fare if you get me there in twenty minutes!"

The cabbie did his best, but red lights seemed to take unholy delight in flashing just as they approached. A police car whizzed by the red signals on its way downtown. An ambulance careened past on its uptown course—but vigilant traffic cops held the taxi chained helplessly while Dodo fumed and counted the flying minutes.

It was nearly half an hour before they rounded a corner and turned into the block on which Donahue's place was located—and immediately Temple knew that his premonition had not been without foundation. The middle of the block was crowded with curious onlookers, and there was an ambulance—the same that had passed them a few minutes before—waiting in front of Jake's building!

An ambulance! That must mean that the killers had already been there; that Hogarth and the girl had been silenced for all time!

Grim-lipped he sprang from the cab and elbowed his way through the gaping crowd, past the courtyard railing and up the short flight of steps, to pound lustily on the closed door. For a moment there was no answer to his thumping summons—then the door swung inward noiselessly and a white-uniformed interne stood blocking the way.

Dodo crowded past him and pushed his way into the hallway—only to pull up with a start as the muzzle of a gun thudded into his ribs.

"Back out of the way there—and keep your mouth shut!" the interne's harsh voice rasped in his ear as the fellow's hands ran over his clothes, expertly feeling for a gun.

Back out of the way—that meant over against the far side of the shadowy hall-

way where Jake stood swaying drunkenly while blood rushed down in a stream from his laid open scalp! Over against the wall where the body of a uniformed policeman lay sprawled on the floor!

Now two white-uniformed attendants were issuing from a room at the end of the hall, carrying a stretcher between them—and staring up sightlessly from the canvas Temple saw the unconscious face of Stanley Hogarth. Another white-uniformed figure opened the door and the stretcher was borne out to the waiting ambulance.

Four men on one ambulance! That alone, without the silenced automatic in the hand of the fake interne who stood guard over the prisoners, would have told Dodo that this was a fake set-up. That ambulance came from no recognized hospital. It was a decoy, a kidnap car manned by Gorilla Gunther's gangsters—and they were taking Stanley Hogarth out to his death!

Then they were back again with the empty stretcher, back in that room at the end of the hall—to emerge a few minutes later with the silent figure of Clara Blanton stretched out beneath a white blanket. The girl's eyes were closed, but the drug with which they had subdued her had not been able to smooth the lines of terror out of her face.

Once she was in that bogus ambulance her doom was sealed! The odds against him were hopeless, but Temple could not stand there and see her carried out to her doom. As the stretcher passed him a low moan escaped from her parted lips—and caution was thrown to the winds. Suddenly he ducked out from under the muzzle of that threatening gun and flung himself desperately at the feet of the rear bearer.

His hands clutched the fellow's knees, grabbed and clung—but in the same instant he saw that gun barrel swinging

down in a vicious swipe at his head. Saw it just in time to bob out of the way—and then the weapon landed numbingly on his left shoulder and slammed him down onto the floor.

Excruciating pain lanced through that shoulder and seemed to paralyze the whole side of his body. Dazedly he climbed to his knees—but the front door was open and the stretcher bearers were lugging their unconscious prisoner out into the street. Helplessly Temple watched the door close behind them—and then flung himself flat on the floor as the white-uniformed devil in the doorway began to empty his automatic down the hallway!

Bullets drilled into the wall right over Dodo's head, tore splinters out of the floor at his side. He heard Jake scream in pain, saw the body of the policeman jump as hot lead smacked into it—but by some miracle he managed to escape unhit as

he inched his way along the wall on his belly and then scrambled into the protection of an open doorway.

Sanctuary 'for a moment, until the bloodthirsty killer followed. . . .

But now there was an interruption at the door.

"The hell with them!" a gruff voice snarled. "We're waiting for you—wanna hang around here until the street's full of cops?"

The street door slammed solidly, and there was quiet in the semi-dark hall; quiet broken only by the panting of Dodo's own breath and by Jake's agonized wheezing. Then by the clang of the ambulance's bell as it went careening down the street bearing away its two helpless victims.

"I couldn't help it, Mr. Temple," Donahue groaned as Dodo staggered out of the doorway shelter and leaned against

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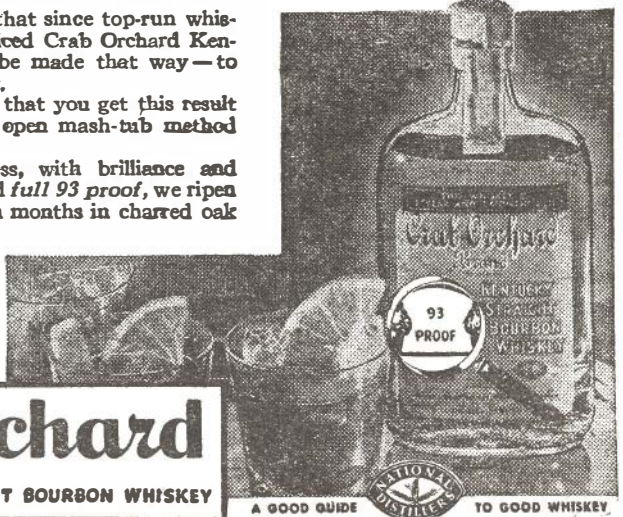
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the wall of the hallway. "It wasn't my fault. I tried to keep them out, but they had Muller here, the cop on the beat, with them. He's been leery of this place for months an' he jumped at the chance to force his way in. They knocked him over the head the minute they was inside—an' then they give me mine."

He held a bloodsoaked handkerchief to his torn scalp and howled for Aggie, his dull-witted maid.

"It wasn't your fault, Jake," Temple assured him as he and the slovenly maid helped Donahue to his feet. "What gets me is how they managed to trail me here. I'm sure that cabbie last night wasn't wise, and nobody else—"

He stopped short as Donahue's eyes widened and filled with quick, incredible suspicion. Suddenly the big fellow made a grab for Aggie's left hand and held it to the light. On her bony, work-scarred pinky flashed a solitaire that was worth several thousand dollars of any jeweler's money.

"Where'd you get it?" Jake barked. "Where'd you get it, I tell you!" as his hamlike fists grasped her thin shoulders and shook her until her mouth hung open and her dull eyes threatened to pop out of her head. "Where'd you get it?"

"That lady—she give it to me," Aggie whimpered. "I always wanted one, an' she said I could have hers."

"What for?" Jake's thick fingers closed around her scrawny neck and started to dig into her throat. "What for?"

"I didn't mean no harm," the moron whined. "I just called a telephone number like she told me an' told a man she was here. She said it would be all right—said it was the young feller's cousin an' that he'd pay you lots of money to get them out."

Clara Blanton! This was the answer to the question Dodo Temple had asked himself only the night before. Goaded to

desperation in her anxiety to save Stanley she had managed to get a message out to Wilton Hogarth—and that message was now speeding her and her fiancé to their doom!

No man had ever been able to crash his way in or out of Jake Donahue's stronghold, but it had fallen before the blundering love of a woman.

Defeated and at a loss to know which way to turn, Temple started back to his apartment. He had failed miserably in his attempt to keep those youngsters out of harm's way; had succeeded only in bringing down a load of trouble on Jake Donahue's well meaning head. Trouble that could only be squared by rounding up Gorilla Gunther and the scheming devil who was behind him and delivering them into Inspector Gallagher's hands.

It was plainly in the cards that Stanley and the girl must die, and just as unmistakably it was written there that he must follow them in death—for he knew far too much to be allowed to live. The killers were undoubtedly combing the city for him at that moment. Deliberately he started back to the place where they would be sure to find him.

In that lay the last slim gleam of hope for Stanley Hogarth and the girl who loved him.

CHAPTER SIX

Death Rendezvous

RICKEY was gone. Temple sensed that the moment he stepped into his apartment and saw no sign of his valet. On the living room table was a brief notation saying that Miss Blanton had telephoned and would call again later—but that was all.

Miss Blanton had telephoned! Dodo's grey-green eyes were cold as ice as he stared down at that lying message. Quick-

ly he made a hasty search of the rooms to be sure that nothing had happened to his man. Then he concentrated on Rickey's personal belongings—and soon came upon a penciled note that had arrived in the morning mail. Only a dozen words, but words that held terror for Rickey:

REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED
TO DANKIN—AND LOOK OUT
THAT YOU'RE NOT NEXT!

Dankin was the returned convict who had committed suicide in his cell—and as Rickey had read that note he must have seen the penitentiary gates opening wide to receive him! Temple stepped to the telephone and called his garage. As he expected, his car was gone.

"Rickey drove it out about an hour ago," the attendant reported.

Yes, Rickey had gone—but had he fled in terror, or was the devil who held his liberty in the palm of his hand forcing him to still further treachery?

There was one way that Temple could check up on that. Downstairs, in his office, he disconnected the dictograph machine attachment which recorded every sound from his apartment on the floor above, and turned on the phonograph switch. Only meaningless sounds came from the reproducer at first; then the telephone bell ringing, and Rickey's voice answering it.

"Yes, this is Mr. Temple's apartment.—No, he's not at home.—You are Miss Blanton?—And you are at what address? Four hundred Walton Road.—Yes, miss, that's in the Bronx—North Bronx; I understand.—Yes, miss, I'll see that he gets your message as soon as he returns."

Dodo's cold eyes were narrowed into grim slits as he shut off the instrument and considered the possibilities of that message. Of course it had not been Clara Blanton at the other end of the wire.

Someone had impersonated her. Obviously the call was a trap—a trap set to lure him to that house on Walton Road.

But why hadn't Rickey left the correct address message for him? For what matter, was it even a genuine telephone message, or was Rickey aware of the dictograph arrangement that recorded his goings-on in the apartment and had he deliberately faked the whole conversation so that Temple would discover it and be lured to his death? Once before he had furnished the address of a death trap when the Damoclean sword of threatened imprisonment hung low over him. . . .

Temple didn't know—but this was the only lead he had, and as he stripped off his coat he laughed contemptuously at the trap that probably was waiting for him. According to the fatalistic philosophy that had shaped his life, gangster traps held no danger for him. If he was to die by gangster bullets he would never have survived the slaughter that had robbed him of his father and mother; never would have come back from the jaws of death to become the avenging Dodo that he was today.

Gangster bullets could not stop him—but before stalking into the waiting trap he made certain preparations. The bullet-proof vest, with knitted mail skirts that slipped down into his trousers and protected his loins; the twin automatics in their sheaths beneath his armpits; various little devices and gadgets that might at some time spell the difference between life and death—one by one he donned them or hid them away about his person.

A modern knight, girding himself as the knights of old, for battle.

Then he was ready—and half an hour later he stood in front of 400 Walton Road.

The building was a ramshackle old wooden affair that had been allowed to go to ruin. Located in a sparsely built sec-

tion of the city's northermost extremity, it was situated in wide grounds that were as ill kept and gone to seed as the house itself.

The place looked deserted from the outside, but in the weed-grown driveway he detected tire tracks that had been recently made. Carefully he crawled through the tall, matted shrubbery until he was within a hundred feet of the boarded up front door. Then he stopped to debate the best means of gaining entrance. There was a ground-level door at the side. If he tried that—

"Mr. Temple!" Dodo froze on crouched knees and listened intently. The call seemed to have come from a short distance to his right, but it was so low that he could not be sure. "Mr. Temple!" There it was again—and now he was certain that it was Rickey's voice.

Now the bushes were stirring a short distance away, and Rickey's agitated face was framed for an instant in an opening among them. Temple turned to work his way in that direction—and in the next moment half a dozen hands grabbed at him, something blunt and hard crashed down against his skull, and the world swam sickeningly! Frantically he tried to get a grip on those clutching arms that surrounded him—but he felt himself falling, felt himself being seized roughly and dragged across the grounds and into the side door of the building.

He was entirely recovered from the daze of that blow by the time they reached the house. Already he had recognized his captors as Gorilla Gunther and what appeared to be two of his hoods. On his own feet he climbed the short flight of steps from the doorway to the first floor and stepped out into a barren, dust-laden room that was half dark in the restricted light from the boarded up windows.

As his eyes became accustomed to the gloom he made out the figure of Stanley

Hogarth and Clara Blanton lying bound and gagged on the bare floor. Over them stood Val Manning, the gambler, his ugly face even more repulsive looking as he turned to leer at his latest captive.

"Figured I'd find you somewhere in this dirty mess," Dodo lashed at him contemptuously. "So now you're taking a hand at kidnaping and woman-killing—"

"Tie him up and shut his trap," Manning ordered sneeringly, and the thugs leaped to their task with a will.

BY the time they were finished Temple could hardly move a hand or foot and the gag that had been thrust between his teeth bit into the corners of his mouth.

"All right, cart them out to the car," Manning grunted—and Dodo realized that the death trip had begun.

Tears were streaming from the girl's eyes and her throat muscles were straining as if the thwarted screams must break through the very flesh. Stanley Hogarth's face was pale and tense, but now a new strength, an unsuspected courage, had come into it and flashed defiance from his blazing eyes.

One by one they were dragged out of the house and to a big brown limousine that drew up beside it. Temple was thrust into the middle of the back seat, between Gunther and one of his hoods, who sat with automatics held ready. Another thug took his place between Hogarth and the girl on the folding seats in the center of the car, and Manning rode in front with the driver.

With a smooth meshing of gears they were off, the terrified, gagged faces of the prisoners safe from outside observation behind the drawn blinds. North the car headed—toward the city line and the open fields, any one of which might suddenly bear a harvest of death.

It would be only a question of minutes now, Temple knew—and the knowledge

made him more cautious, more certain in every wary, constricted movement he made. This was no time for wasted effort, no time for useless tearing at those knotted ropes. Slowly and unobtrusively he wriggled his arms so that they slid a bit higher in his shirt sleeves—so that the cuffs were just a trifle lower.

Two or three vain clutches—then his fingers caught one of the cuffs, pulled it lower, and rubbed against a hard object that was concealed between the layers of material until the biting blade of a razor-sharp piece of steel cut through the cloth and into his flesh. His fingers were bleeding and cut to the quick before he managed to get the steel into position, but Dodo smiled inwardly. Half the battle was won—now if there only was time. . . .

Cautiously he sawed away at the ropes, careful that his captors did not detect what he was doing. One strand gave way—another. In a few minutes his wrists would be free.

The car was actually slowing for a stop—when Dodo caught the purr of a powerful motor driving at top speed. A car was creeping up on them. Manning cursed and ordered more speed, but the other car hung on tenaciously. It gained; then began to creep abreast. Through the slit of light beneath the drawn curtain Temple thrilled with wild elation as he recognized his own specially built coupé!

It was forging ahead, foot by foot, until he could see Rickey crouched desperately over the wheel, his eyes glued to the road in front of him.

"Get that rat!" Manning snarled, but even before the words were out of his mouth the side windows of the limousine were being towered and three black-snouted automatics were blazing away at the car alongside—spouting lead to pelt harmlessly against solid steel sides and bullet-proof glass windows!

Gunther was cursing vilely and frantically trying to find a vital unprotected spot in the car's armament; Manning was screaming wild, hysterical orders—but the maroon streak alongside was forging ahead, crowding over. And then it swung half in front of the limousine—and clouds of thick smoke began to pour out from beneath the running board and the fenders. Manning's driver muttered grim oaths and tried desperately to swing out of that dense cloud of smoke—but it was all around him, blinding him absolutely.

The wheel was useless in his straining, white-knuckled hands—and in the next instant there was a terrific crash as the two cars locked and skidded over the road in a mass of tangled wreckage.

THOSE split seconds were all that Dodo Temple needed. His hands were free. The instant the machines crashed he lunged in front of Gunther and grabbed the gun out of his hand, to bring it smashing down with terrific force into the racketeer's suddenly scared face. Then a bullet from its blood-dripping muzzle plowed through the head of the dazed gangster on Temple's other side.

All was wild confusion in the hissing wreckage, but Dodo bent over quickly and sawed with the piece of steel until the ropes around his ankles fell away. Only seconds for that, but even before he could straighten up the gangster was upon him, knocking the automatic out of his hand.

The thug's eyes lit up with triumph as he saw that he had Temple disarmed—but what he did not see was that razor-edge length of steel. He didn't see that until it was slitting his throat from ear to ear—and then what he saw made no more difference.

Rickey and the chauffeur were locked in furious combat, Temple saw as he dragged first the girl and then young Ho-

garth out of the wrecked limousine and to a spot where they would be out of danger should the leaking gasoline explode. Rickety was more than able to hold his own in a scrap like that, unless—

What Dodo feared was about to happen right before his eyes. Val Manning had climbed out of the machine and was hovering on the edge of the fight, automatic ready, waiting for the first opportunity to send a slug through Rickey's brain. His finger tightened on the trigger and his upper lip curled in a snarl—but just as he fired Temple leaped in front of him and took the bullet.

FORTUNATELY the leaden slug smashed into his side and ricocheted off the bullet-proof steel. Had it struck him head-on it must have gone through even that tried and tested vest. Even so, the force of the blow was breath-taking and knocked him off balance, but in the same second he lashed out at Manning's jaw.

The gambler had no stomach for a fight of that sort. Just the sight of Temple's fist flashing by within inches of his face filled him with panic—panic so demoralizing that he took to his heels and darted across the road to where the ground sloped up to a patch of trees.

In a flash Temple was after him, empty-handed, intent only on getting his hands on that ugly, scarred face. His pounding footsteps filled the fleeing murderer with mad terror, whirled him around to empty his weapon at his Nemesis while hysterical curses snarled from his lips. But his feverish excitement precluded any chance of his making the head or throat shots that were the only ones that would have stopped that oncoming avenger.

Dodo laughed at him—a cold, chilling laugh that reduced the killer to cringing helplessness. And then Temple was upon him, snatching the useless gun out of his

hand and tossing it away, smashing him full in the face with solid, battering blows.

By the time Dodo got him back to the wrecked automobile several police patrol cars had arrived, and the officers had taken the gags from the mouths of the captives.

"Might as well leave you tied up, though," one of them growled as they recognized young Hogarth. "Instead of these ropes you can slip your wrists into a pair of handcuffs."

Hogarth's face was white and he attempted no answer, but the girl gasped an ineffectual protest.

Then Dodo took a hand.

"Wait a minute, Officer," he called as he dragged Manning up to the gathering. "That won't be necessary for young Hogarth, but—"

As he spoke his hand darted to Manning's head, grabbed at his dark brown hair and tore it loose, to reveal a head of thin blond hair beneath it. Then those devastating fingers found a constricting cord that squinted half of Manning's face up over one ear, tore it loose, and scraped off several of the skillfully simulated scars.

"—you can slip them on his cousin, Wilton Hogarth, alias Val Manning," he finished as he held the cowering masquerader. "He's the Pell kidnaper and the brains of the Gorilla Gunther gang."

"Wilton!" Clara Blanton gasped in stunned amazement. "Why, he was helping me. He was the one I called this morn—"

"Exactly," Dodo nodded grimly, "and that's why you're here now. I'm afraid you've been playing his game beautifully for him, and that's why we almost didn't come back from this little ride.

"Wilton needed money just as Stanley did, so he made his ruthless plans to get it—schemed to bleed his grandfather out of millions under threat of exposing Stan-

ley for supposedly being the Pell kidnaper. It was he who called on the old man this morning in his guise as Manning. That was how he got in without being announced: he used his key—and that little slip was the first thing that made me suspect him. But he pulled his biggest boner in thinking that he could force old Rickey to fall down on me. Rickey seemed to be doing as he was told—but he was only biding his time, as I think Mr. Hogarth now realizes. It's a long story, Officer, but get us down to Inspector Gallagher's office."

BUT Inspector Gallagher didn't quite have it all straightened out several nights later when he leaned back luxuriously in one of Dodo Temple's easy chairs—and, what was more, he had a sneaking suspicion that there were certain angles of the case that would never be altogether clear to him.

As always when he was in that living room, Gallagher's gaze turned fascinatedly to the mantelpiece over the fireplace and settled on the four black-framed pictures which lined it. Photographs of four corpses sprawled in their death agony.

And as always Gallagher felt a curious prickling at the base of his spine. There was something inhuman, something cold-blooded, about this fellow Temple; something savage and gruesome about those

framed pictures of the killers who had murdered his parents. It was like hanging up their scalps in triumph.

"Well, Dodo," he growled with a snort of distaste, "with the Pell reward money you ought to be able to buy yourself a nice gold frame for the photo of Wilton Hogarth squatting in the hot seat. That'll sorta round out your collection."

But Dodo Temple laughed easily.

"No, Inspector," he corrected, "Hogarth is Rickey's trophy, not mine, and Rickey doesn't believe in wasting his half of the reward money on picture frames. He's planning to use it to make a trip to his old home town to straighten out some personal affairs. The other half is taking young August Schneider out West where he can recover his health."

The grey-green eyes were twinkling with satisfaction and the strong, heavy-featured face was softened as Temple stared down into the glowing fireplace.

"A queer, cold-blooded devil," Gallagher told himself for the thousandth time, but now there was a new respect in his favorite descriptive phrase for Dodo Temple.

So that was why he had been risking his life in this case—to avenge an old fogey of a shopkeeper. . . . And suddenly the inspector wondered whether Temple was really such a cold-blooded devil as he had always supposed!

THE END

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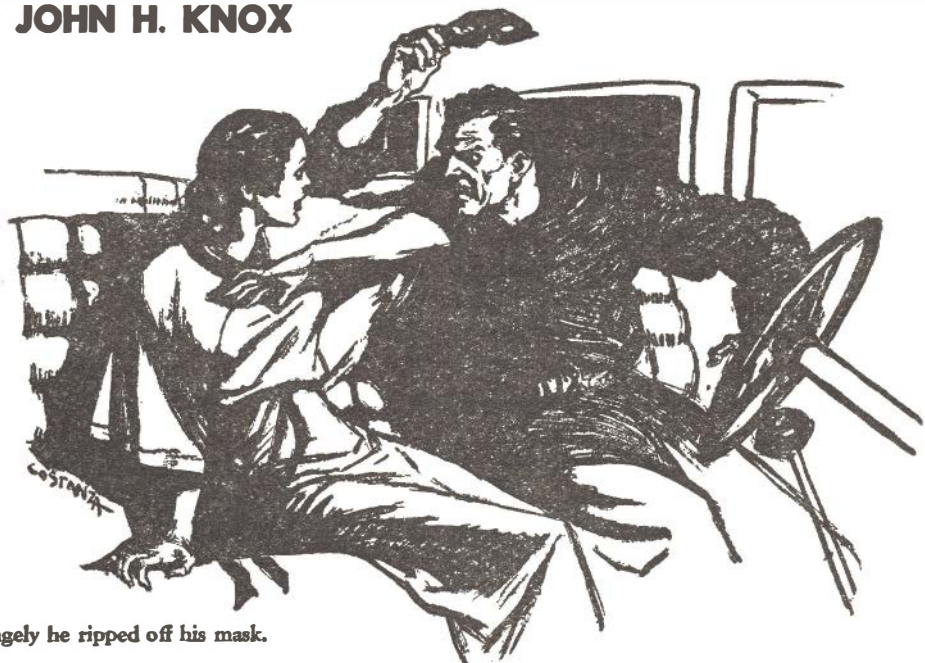
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SUBSTITUTE KILLER

By JOHN H. KNOX



Savagely he ripped off his mask.

Hart Sharron knew that he would have to kill—if he were to quench the fire that burned in the eyes of his beautiful wife. . . .

FRIEDA had never been more beautiful than on that night Hart Sharron decided to murder her. He stood near the entrance to the wide dance floor, and his eyes followed her green-clad figure as it moved in and out among the gay dancers.

He had planned that green costume for her carefully, with the cruel eyes of an executioner. Green was her color, and the long gown of a medieval princess was of just the shade of velvet to match the color of her startling eyes, and the silver circlet that imprisoned her tawny hair was set with two huge paste emeralds that shone like lesser stars above those eyes.

Her face was turned toward him now. How they pierced him, those strange green eyes, how they maddened him! Well, tonight he would put an end to it. Tonight he would close those green eyes

forever, and they would trouble him no more!

Speculatively he appraised the man in the monk's cassock who was dancing with her. Yes, Oliver Morant was almost his twin in build. It was fortunate too that Oliver had chosen that particular costume. With the cowl, and the mask over his face, it covered one thoroughly. The thing to do now was to get Morant drunk. He would pretend to be drunk himself, but he would remain sober—deadly sober. The orchestra finished the number and Hart Sharron moved out upon the floor.

THE time came when Sharron decided Morant was sufficiently stupified with liquor. He drew him aside.

"Got something real good here, old man," he whispered. "Been keeping it away from the crowd. Come along."

Morant followed him unsteadily to a table in a deserted corner. There Sharron produced his flask and Morant drank. A few moments later, as the two men stumbled back toward the dance floor arm in arm, Morant's legs suddenly buckled under him and he went down, dragging Sharron with him.

Sharron rose unsteadily as a half dozen men rushed to his assistance, but Morant remained upon the floor.

"He's out," Sharron pronounced sagely, wabbling a bit.

"Take him to the back room," someone said.

They lifted Morant and carried him to a small room in the other wing of the building where there was a bed. Sharron followed.

"Be all right when he sleeps a little," one of the men said. He turned to look at Sharron, who stood leaning in the doorway, his head drooping. "You better lie down a bit too, Hart," he warned.

Sharron grinned groggily.

"Believe I will," he agreed. "Jus' a lil' nap's all I need."

He staggered over and threw his body down upon the bed beside the other.

The men went out, snapping the light off. The door closed.

Hart Sharron raised himself soberly on his elbows. Moonlight shining through the window revealed the cassoched form of the sleeping man beside him. Sharron's lip curled.

"She wanted you all the time," he whispered, "and she married me. Why? Because I had the money. And with my money to dress her in gowns to match those green eyes, she could make herself lovely for you." Then, in a whisper so faint that it was scarcely more than a movement of the lips, he added, "But after tonight there'll be no more green eyes to torment me!"

He slid noiselessly from the bed,

grasped Morant by the shoulder and shook him. He might as well have shaken a sack. The harsh rhythm of the breathing was scarcely disturbed. "Good," Sharron congratulated himself. "The dope will hold him."

He tiptoed to the door and stood for a moment listening to the sounds from without. Then he turned the nightlatch quietly and went back to the figure upon the bed.

A FEW moments later, Sharron stood by the window and looked out. The monk's robe which he had taken from Morant's body completely covered his own Robin Hood costume, and a mask hid his face. A pair of kid gloves, also from Morant's pocket, were on his hands.

The moon shone faintly from a late October sky. Over the tops of the double line of parked automobiles he could see the dark silhouette of the old vacant house across the road—the old Ern place, a decaying structure reputed to be haunted. It had never looked so grim and forbidding as it looked to Hart Sharron that night.

Murder is a terrible thing, Hart Sharron thought, a terrible, irrevocable thing. But is it any worse than the burning, gnawing jealousy that eats a man's heart out and maddens his life? Softly he opened the window and eased himself to the ground.

He circled the house, a swift, soft-footed shadow, and crept up to the window that opened on the dance floor. Presently he picked out Frieda's green swathed figure swaying gracefully in the arms of a plume-hatted cavalier. As they swung about and moved near him he looked into her face, saw the paste emeralds in the circlet glittering in her tawny hair.

Then her eyes were full upon him, shining with the reflected light from the chandelier. Then she smiled, a smile of

happy recognition. She took him for Morant, of course. He beckoned to her, made a gesture toward the front door. Over the shoulder of her partner she nodded understandingly.

He stood there a few moments to let others see him and recognize the monk's costume. Then he hurried to the front of the place and stood a little way from the door, waiting. Presently she appeared, paused to stare out, and then came toward him eagerly.

"But I thought you were drunk, darling!"

He laid a gloved finger to his lips.

"Shh!" he hissed.

He took her arm and piloted her toward Morant's car. She snuggled close against him.

"Very mysterious, I see," she said, and laughed softly.

When he released the clutch in the car it started back with a jerk that threw her forward and against him. The silver circlet with the two huge emeralds fell from her hair. It was when she bent to pick it up that she saw his feet—the archer's shoes protruding from the cassock. He caught a glimpse of the quick look of consternation that passed across her face. Then she lifted her hands to replace the emerald circlet about her hair. In that instant she had composed her features. Always the actress, Frieda!

Now she laughed, with just a faint note of uncertainty.

"What sort of joke have you and Oliver framed up, old dear? Do you think I haven't known you all along?"

"Of course you have," he said.

The car swept out of the grounds, crossed the road, and turned into the driveway of the old Ern place. Sharron swung it in so that the house shielded them from the road. He cut off the motor.

She was silent now, no longer attempt-

ing to laugh. Sharron's heart was hammering violently.

"Come on," he said, "let's get out."

"But why, dear?" She was distinctly uneasy now.

"Just a little joke on the bunch." He tried to keep the tremor out of his voice. "I'll tell you. Come on." He grasped her arm. She hesitated a moment. Then she got out and followed him.

At the door she stopped, shivering a little as she peered into the darkness.

"Hart!" she protested, "this is too absurd!"

"Go ahead!" he urged, and pushed her in. "Now, upstairs!"

A musty smell of age and disuse enveloped them in the dark. Their voices, echoing through the empty rooms, sounded strained and hollow. He shoved her ahead of him up the creaking stairway. At the head of the stairs she stopped.

"I won't go any further with this," she announced.

"No?" His tone was deadly quiet. He stepped up to her level, stood a moment breathing heavily, then seized her wrist. With a short frightened gasp she drew back. He gave her a jerk that almost threw her off her feet, and pulled her into one of the front rooms. He shoved her rudely into the middle of the room, slammed the door, and stood there with his back to it.

He saw her slender figure, dark against the window, facing him, frightened and defiant. He even fancied he could see her green eyes blazing at him out of the black silhouette.

"What's the meaning of this?" she demanded hoarsely.

"A little game we're playing," he said in a voice so soft that the mockery was barely evident. "A little joke on the bunch—on Oliver Morant especially. We're going to pretend that I've killed you for being unfaithful to me."

The silence that followed his words was almost tangible. Then a laugh, sharp, hysterical, broke from the woman and trailed off into a cry. "Hart! You're joking, of course!"

"Of course. You were joking when you married me to get all you could out of me and then throw yourself at the feet of that pig. Are you trying to pretend that you've been faithful to me?"

"You beast!" Her words burned like fire in the air. "Of course I haven't, since that's what you want me to say! Of course I love him!"

She suddenly threw herself upon him, clawing at his face.

He struck her—twice. She fell back into the window, the lower pane of which had been broken out. He sprang toward her, thinking that she was about to fall to the ground. Then quickly she swung her body about, reached wildly out into the bare limbs of the elm tree that brushed the window, tried to lift herself out by a branch of the tree.

He seized her. She strained away from him, kicking. He braced himself, tugged at her body. Her tawny hair had come loose and was tangled in the branches of the tree. He dragged her back into the room, still clutching broken twigs in her hands, and threw her to the floor where she lay sobbing.

"Oliver will kill you for this!" she cried.

He stiffened. Even now he might have relented but for those words. They decided him. He stepped to one corner of the room and picked up the joint of pipe which he had placed there earlier in the day. . . .

HART SHARRON stood at the front window and looked out. Across the way the lights of the roadhouse glistened on the tops of the parked automobiles. The blare of the orchestra came faintly to his ears.

He turned back to the room. The silence of the house was horrible. Somewhere a board creaked; the limbs of the elm tree scraped the window. There she lay—the green-eyed girl—very still. He felt himself trembling.

Mastering a revulsion that threatened to overpower him, he went quickly to where she lay and lifted her in his arms. Her unbound hair fell loosely about her face. Slowly he carried her out of the room, down the steps, out the back door, keeping his eyes stubbornly away from her face. He wondered whether those eyes were open or closed. But he would not look. He placed her in the car.

He returned to the room and brought back the piece of pipe. He threw this on the floor of the car at her feet. Then he got in beside her and drove back across the road. He parked the car just where he had found it, almost at the end of the line, near the road.

He glanced about furtively. He could see no one in any of the other cars. The dance was in full swing; gaily costumed couples glided past the windows. He waited a moment and then circled the line of cars and went slinking along in the shadows to the window of the room in which he had left Morant. He lifted himself quietly over the sill.

Morant seemed to lie in the same position in which he had left him.

There was blood on the gloves, and Sharron removed them carefully from his hands and thrust them into Morant's pocket. Then he removed the monk's robe, lifted one of Morant's arms and thrust it into the sleeve. Morant's breathing, though not so husky, was still regular. Sharron spread the robe along his back, and carefully, slowly, rolled him over.

Then he pulled it underneath him and finished dressing him. When he had fin-

ished this, he wiped his own hands carefully on the handkerchief he had taken from Morant's pocket and thrust it into a sleeve of the cassock.

Now he tiptoed to the door. It was still locked on the inside. No one had been in the room while he was gone. He paused to think. Had he overlooked anything? He could think of nothing. He took from his pocket the flask with the liquor which contained the narcotic. There was one small drink left. He gulped it down and replaced the flask. Then he unlatched the door, tiptoed to the bed, and lay down.

HE felt the narcotic creeping slowly over his senses. The din of the music, the voices, the shuffling feet, diminished to a confused murmur, and he slept.

But his sleep was fitful. A vision of Frieda's green eyes ran through his uneasy dreams. It seemed that he knew that the woman was dead, but that in some strange way the eyes remained alive. He was awakened by sounds in the room. He sat up with a start, and groggy, bewildered expression that no mere acting could have stimulated. Men were in the room, men with grim faces.

"Your wife," a man said, laying a solicitous hand on Sharron's shoulder, "your wife, Hart, is dead."

"Dead! Frieda dead? What do you mean?" He sprang to his feet, clutching the bedstead for support.

Two men came to his aid and led him from the room. They led him outside and up to Morant's car, where a group was gathered. The sheriff was there, a justice of the peace, a doctor. Oliver Morant was there too, and in the glare of the automobile headlights his face was a terrible thing to see. The sheriff and a deputy supported him between them.

"But I tell you I didn't!" Morant was stammering. "I couldn't have! I was on the bed all the time—completely out."

"Maybe you were out on your feet," the sheriff said, "and didn't know where you were. Besides, you were seen by several people—at the window of the ballroom, leading the woman toward your car. Then there's the blood on your robe and the gloves. No use, Morant."

"But I couldn't have!" Morant almost shrieked. "There's some mistake—some horrible mistake!"

Sharron gazed about him with the baffled look of a man who does not understand what is going on.

"What's that?" he asked. "What is it? Morant? What about Morant?"

"You want to see?" a man holding one of his arms asked in a voice of pity.

Sharron nodded. They led him close to the open door of the car. The beam from a flashlight laid bare the horror. Sharron recoiled with a sick gasp like a man struck suddenly in the stomach. He

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threw one arm across his eyes. Then he removed it slowly, stared incredulously.

"Frieda!" he said hoarsely, "Frieda!"

Excellent acting, Sharron told himself, excellent acting. Yes, the eyes were open. He had seen that. And the terrible look they had sent him made his sobbing more than half natural. He had never thought that dead eyes could look like that. The flashlight had struck green fire from them, and they had blazed at him for an unforgettable instant, accusing, threatening.

Harry Burnham took him home. Harry was Sharron's partner in the oil business. He was quiet, self-effacing, pudgy man, with a guileless face and mild, incurious eyes. Sharron was glad enough to be in Harry's charge. Harry was not a suspicious type; he was the sort of man who never sees anything but the good in his friends.

After putting him to bed and giving him a stiff drink of brandy, Harry went off, promising to return. He came back in a couple of hours. Sharron, who had been lying there wide awake, raised himself shakily and asked, "Well?"

"Maybe we better not talk about it tonight, Hart."

"No, I want to hear."

"Well, they've got Morant in jail. He must have sneaked out the window, lured her to his car and struck her without warning. Somebody saw a car leave, but it was so far from the roadhouse that they can't be sure it was Morant's. Besides, nearly everybody was a little drunk. The sheriff thinks she was killed right there by the car and pulled into it. The bloody pipe was in the car. The doctor thinks she was killed instantly—probably didn't make a sound. But Morant was positively seen with her. There's no doubt of that."

That was substantially the testimony that everyone contributed to the investigation. It was simple, and there was nothing to contradict it.

Hart Sharron bore himself with the restrained grief which he thought becoming. After the grand jury had indicted Morant he felt reasonably secure. Only one thing troubled him, and that was something difficult to explain to himself.

It sprang from those queer spells which came over him at times, when suddenly, for no reason at all, he seemed to see Frieda's green eyes looking at him.

It was annoying, and he recognized the danger in such a trend of thought. He therefore refused to let Harry Burnham take the burden of the work from his shoulders, as he wanted to do. Sharron needed the work to occupy his mind, and he plunged into it with surprising energy. He began to insist on handling the out-of-town business. This necessitated short automobile trips to nearby towns, and Sharron found that the drives in the fresh air quieted his nerves. He was returning from such a trip when he saw the eyes for the first time.

The night was moonless. The motor hummed pleasantly, and the white road slid smoothly under him. He was enjoying a mood of security and well-being, and as he neared the old Ern place, which loomed darkly against the star-filled sky, he looked at it and thought of his crime with a sort of grim pleasure.

Rounding a curve, his headlights splashed the gaunt structure, and his eyes instinctively sought the window of that upstairs room. It shone behind a lattice of bare branches. Then he saw them—blazing and vanishing in an instant—two points of green fire, like a pair of green eyes staring at him!

HE slammed on the brakes. Gripping the steering wheel convulsively, he stared, stared until it seemed that his eyes would burst from his head. But he could see nothing.

He opened the car door and got out. His knees felt weak under him. He stood there by the running board and continued to stare. Had he really seen them? Could he have imagined anything so startlingly real? He remembered how Frieda's eyes had glistened under the chandelier, how horribly they had gleamed in the beam from the sheriff's flashlight.

He got back into the car. His forehead was damp with sweat. There was a queer, hollow sickness in his stomach. He drove on, keeping his eyes glued to the window until he had passed the house. But the eyes did not reappear.

He went to bed but could not sleep. He tossed about feverishly, and from the fitful dreams which visited him he awakened in a cold sweat, choking, gasping, finding that he had buried his face in the pillow to shut out the green eyes which seemed to fill the darkness of the room.

Next morning, the face that confronted him in the shaving mirror was pale and haggard. At the office, Harry looked at him curiously and said nothing. From time to time during the day Sharron caught his partner staring at him with a furtive, worried look.

After leaving the office that evening, Sharron could scarcely wait for darkness to come. The old house and the terrible eyes in the window seemed to draw him like a magnet.

Tense with excitement, he drove his car out beyond the house and turned. Then he drove back, moving slowly, keeping his eyes glued to the window. And again, at the turn, he saw them.

He stopped the car; but as before, they had vanished. But there could no longer be any doubt. They had been staring from the lower part of the window, just where a wounded person might have peered over the sill—a wounded body painfully lifted, raising itself to stare out into the night,

Frieda's body, with her eyes shining green.

With his heart hammering wildly, he began to back the car, slowly, slowly, watching the window. Again they flashed and vanished. It was enough. He shot the car forward, drove to town with reckless speed. One idea possessed his mind—to get a gun, to settle this business once and for all.

Swinging up to the front of his house, he swore at the sight of Harry Burnham's parked car. He started to drive away, but just then Harry came away from the front door. He stopped and got out. "I must be careful now," he told himself, "or I will give myself away."

He met Harry on the walk.

"How you feeling, Hart?" Harry asked, with a searching, solicitous look. "You've been feeling bad—worrying too much. I noticed you at the office today."

"Oh, I'm all right," Sharron said, annoyed. But his manner and his voice proclaimed the lie. "Well, as a matter of fact, I have a little headache . . ."

"I just thought," Harry ventured, "maybe if you'd go with me and let Doc Sterner have a look at you . . . You never take care of yourself, Hart."

"Oh, rot!" Sharron said. "I'm all right. Going to bed—get a little sleep now, if you don't mind, Harry."

Sharron brushed by him and went into the house.

A few moments later he was back at the front door, peering out to see that the coast was clear. He had a .38 revolver in his pocket and a .30-30 rifle under his arm. He hurried to his car.

He drove carefully to the exact spot on the road from which he had last seen the disturbing sight. Back and forth he maneuvered the car until the points of green light glared again from the lower square of the window. But as always,

they flashed for only an instant—twin jets of green flame, then darkness.

Now he stopped the car. He leaned out the window with the gun raised. A car appeared in the road ahead. He drew in the gun and waited for it to pass, giving it scarcely a glance as it whirled by. Then he brought the gun up again, rested it against the edge of the windshield, and took careful aim at the black pane-less lower square on the window. He shifted his position and moved the gun slowly from side to side. Then his heart jumped violently. In the window's dark square the green eyes blazed, and this time actually moved, slightly, but unmistakably.

He fired, continued to fire until the magazine was empty. With the last shot the pane in the upper square of the window came out with a crash and a shower of bright fragments fell glistening in the beam of his headlights.

Panting with excitement, Sharron continued to sit there and stare at the window. A wave of savage joy surged over him. The window was now dark, utterly dark. Whatever those green eyes were he had blotted them out forever!

He settled himself behind the wheel, bent forward to snap on the switch. Then he stopped, frozen stiff in this leaning position. Beyond the bare branches of the tree, in the black blot of the window, the green eyes glared again and went out.

For a moment he was unable to move. Then he laughed, a queer, short laugh, like a sob. His hands were shaking. He started the engine, drove straight up to the place, swung his car in and parked it behind the house. If the thing was still there, he would go in and meet it. He had to, despite the terror that gripped him, he must face the thing, grapple with it, annihilate it!

He got out, took his revolver in one hand and a flashlight in the other, and went into the house by the back door. He

groped through the darkness to the stairs, began to ascend. His knees, as they lifted the weight of his body, trembled.

He went slowly along the upper hall, his eyes glued to the yawning doorway of the murder room. Would she come out? Would she stand there at the door and look at him?

He snapped on the flashlight and the bright beam lashed out into the darkness. The doorway yawned empty; he stepped into its embrasure, played the light about the room. It was empty. On the floor lay broken glass from the upper pane of the window, and the dark stains of blood.

Now he was suddenly active. He sprang to the closet in one corner of the room, opened the door. Empty. He turned back, looked closely at the floor. The dust was not thick enough for footprints to be plainly visible. He hurried out of the room and searched the house.

Then an idea struck him.

He went into the yard behind the house, found an old tin can, and began to fill it with soft, powdered dust from the driveway. He would sprinkle this upon the floor near the window. Whatever the thing was, it must leave a track of some kind. He would go back to the road then and see if the eyes were still there. Then he would return to the house and look for the tracks. And they would have to be there! Either that or he was mad!

He crept back into the house, carrying the can of dust. Once he stopped, thinking he heard soft steps above. He almost hoped that he would find something there. He went on. Anything would be better than this horrible, bodiless something that was nothing but a pair of green eyes shining out of the dark air.

He climbed the steps and went into the room. As before, it was empty. Carefully, starting near the window, he began to sprinkle a thin film of dust over the floor.

THE closet was behind him. At the first sound of the door opening, he thought that his ears were deceiving him. Then he went suddenly cold and whirled about.

"Frieda!" he gasped, "Frieda!"

The beam from a flashlight shot out and bathed him in a flood of light against which he blinked, trying to make out the dark forms behind it. Then the can dropped from his hands. He whipped out the revolver.

"Hart!"

Harry Burnham stepped out into the light. Sharron staggered back, brandishing the pistol.

"I'll kill you for this!" he swore. The whole world seemed to be falling about his head. Harry's suspicious looks suddenly took on a different meaning! "Laid a trap for me, didn't you? Baited me with those green eyes . . ." He stood with his back to the window, snarling.

The man holding the light, whom Sharron now recognized as Dr. Sterner, was staring at the round bright spot which the flashlight threw upon the floor. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed. He stared at Sharron, then at Burnham. "Bloodstains on the floor! And he was covering them up!"

"Don't play innocent!" Sharron rasped. "You suspected me all along, didn't you, Harry? Well, how's it going to help you now, when I kill you both? But first you're going to tell me about those eyes, those

damnable eyes!" He laughed hysterically. "How did you manage that, Harry?"

"But, Hart! Good God, man!" Burnham stammered. "Eyes? I don't know what you mean!"

Just in time he saw the pistol swing level with his chest. He ducked, dived at Sharron's feet. The gun exploded. The doctor sprang to Burnham's aid. He knocked the pistol from Sharron's hand, struck him a blow in the face.

Sharron fell back into the window, lashing out with his fists at his assailants. Suddenly he twisted his body about, flung his arms out and grasped a limb of the elm tree. He kicked his feet loose from Burnham's grasp, swung them out and up, threshing about for a hold among the small limbs of the tree. Then the weak branch to which he was clinging snapped, and carrying it with him he fell head-foremost to the ground.

Burnham and the doctor hurried out. Sterner bent over the prostrate man.

"Dead," he pronounced. "His neck is broken."

"My God!" Burnham exclaimed huskily, "I never dreamed he'd done it, doctor. And look here!"

He swung the light to one side, played it upon the broken limb which Sharron still clutched in a dead hand. Caught in the fork of a branch was a silver circlet set with two huge paste emeralds which glistened in the light like baleful eyes.

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EXCESS ACIDITY

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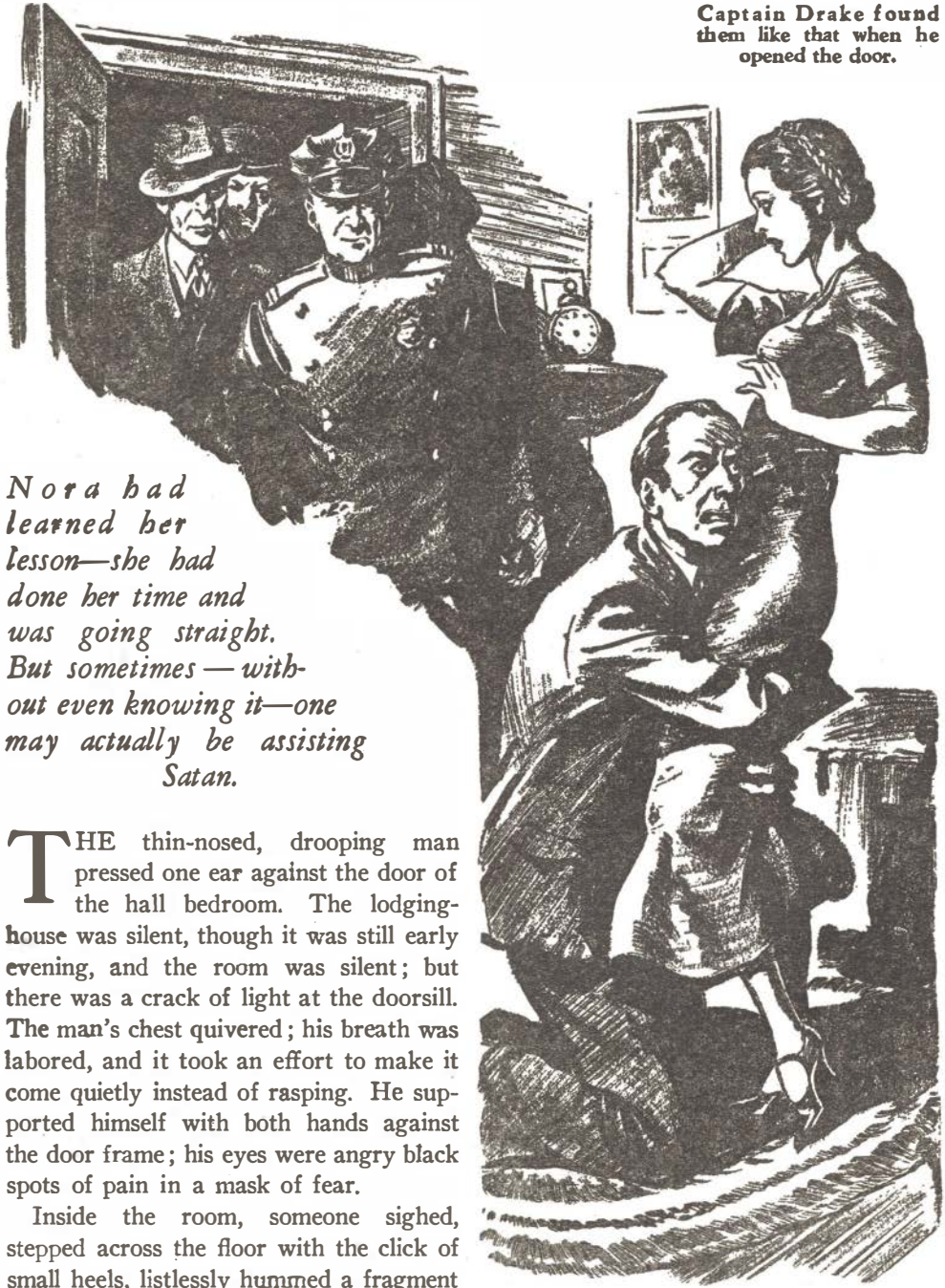
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TUNE IN THE NATIONAL BATH DANCE SATURDAY NIGHT NBC-NETWORK

KILLER TRAP

By H. K. MILLER

Captain Drake found them like that when he opened the door.



Nora had learned her lesson—she had done her time and was going straight. But sometimes—without even knowing it—one may actually be assisting Satan.

THE thin-nosed, drooping man pressed one ear against the door of the hall bedroom. The lodging-house was silent, though it was still early evening, and the room was silent; but there was a crack of light at the doorsill. The man's chest quivered; his breath labored, and it took an effort to make it come quietly instead of rasping. He supported himself with both hands against the door frame; his eyes were angry black spots of pain in a mask of fear.

Inside the room, someone sighed, stepped across the floor with the click of small heels, listlessly hummed a fragment of a song and broke it off on another sigh.

Nora Steele must be alone. That was what Two-Finger Joe Marsh wanted to

know. If she had anyone with her, there would surely have been some conversation in the four or five minutes he had spent listening. The thin man's breath gradual-

ly came more easily. He clenched his right hand, and the hall light played coldly on its disfigurement. The third and fourth fingers were missing; only their palm-joints remained, ungainly lumps beside the two sound fingers that were curled like the claws of a hawk. With extreme softness, he tapped on the door, and held his breath.

The light steps halted, came toward the door; but it did not open at once. The girl's voice had an undertone of fear:

"What is it?"

"Me—Joe. Open up. Say—" The man's voice choked and rasped, whispering through the keyhole; he tried the door softly, but it was locked—"say, damn you, open up! Oh, for God's sake, Nora!"

He ran his maimed hand through his hair, pushing back the seedy cap that covered it; he chewed his sagging underlip, moved away from the door but immediately came back, before there was any sign of its opening.

"I'm in trouble, Nora," he whispered.

She opened the door at last, and stood with bright light on her red hair; slim, past her youth but pretty; cheaply dressed—but there was a sort of distinction about the way she wore her shabby frock. Her eyes were steady, but her bright mouth was not.

"Joe—I don't want you here. I don't want to see you. Ever again. I told you that. I'm fed up. I'm through."

Joe Marsh silently shut the door and leaned against it, appraising her with cold sharpness. He grinned, but his mouth sagged again, and he shivered.

"You're through. Don't like it, huh? Well—you gotta like it. I got nobody to help me but you. They're after me."

She said bitterly and slowly:

"Always after you, ain't they? That's why I'm through, Joe. I'm fed up on the way you live. God knows, I had my share

of it. I don't want any part of it now. You please go and let me alone."

Joe Marsh caught her shoulders.

"You used to like me. . . ."

She wouldn't look up at him.

"Sure—God help me! I—still do. But I don't want you around. I don't want to see you again. Let me alone. Please go."

Joe Marsh dropped his words slowly at her miserable face.

"This ain't small-time racket stuff. It ain't only the cops after me—maybe they ain't, yet. It's Logan himself. . . . I killed a guy. Instead of sticking by me, Logan's sore. I guess he's out to get me. If you don't help me—"

She started up, when his voice trailed away; she made weak motions to push him off.

"You—killed—"

"If you don't help me this one time—you might get some of the same. I'm past caring, see? I don't give a damn, what I do. See? I could cut you down. . . ."

NORA STEELE said hoarsely:

"Let me go. . . . What d' you want me to do?"

Marsh laughed, released her.

"That's more like it," he said. He glanced around the cheap, bare room. "You're a funny twist. Time was, you could 'a' come in on the mink and emeralds if you'd worked it right. . . . Nice joint you got here."

"It's honest."

Marsh whirled like a stung animal and slapped the flat of his left hand across her face; he snarled:

"You come that holier-than-thou on me just one more time and I'll cut you open for the fun of it. For the fun of it, hear?"

"Joe—Joe—I wasn't—I didn't mean—Listen to me, won't you? I've gone straight, more than a year—just because I wanted to. I've got a—a friend—"

"The way you snivel, a man 'd think—"

Oh, sure. Your nice new boy friend. I know all about it. I've kept an eye on you." Small spots of red flared in Marsh's cheeks; he made as if to strike her again, but then a look of desperate shrewdness crowded away the show of anger. "I know the guy," Marsh said. "It ain't anything to me. Charlie Corbit—the guy that works in the same store where you got the twelve-a-week job you're so holy about. Yeah—I get it. I can read your face, baby. That's the guy. Rags to riches. Hardware clerk to bank president—I've seen the damn' pink-cheeked scum. So of course Joe Marsh is out. You wouldn't want anything to do with Joe Marsh." He shoved her down on the bed, grinned; thrust his tormented, still grinning face down at her. "You can't tell me you get a thrill out of that nance, Nora. Not like you got out of me—before you decided you was too nice to associate with me."

"I'm going to marry him," Nora said in an empty, defeated voice. "When we can. . . . All right—maybe I don't love him an awful lot, if that's what you want me to say. But he's decent. We're going to be married—give me a *chance*, Joe. I haven't done you any harm."

Marsh grew wheedling and reasonable.

"You help me this once, baby, and I'll fade out. I won't ever bother you again. You can marry the punk. But if you won't help out, I'll—I'll fix *him*, Nora. I'll get at you through *him*, see? Spread 'm out on a cold slab—you wouldn't like that."

"What d'you want me to do?"

Joe Marsh dropped beside her, clenching and unclenching his hands, talking fast in a thick undertone.

"It's like this. I been collection man for Stump Logan. He's got a sweet racket, shaking down a string of independent grocers for what they're worth, and I been picking up the sugar for him. **Today**

there was a damn little runt got funny and tried to put up a scrap—wouldn't take it lying down like the rest of 'em, so—so I had to gun him out, see?"

Nora's hands were over her mouth. Marsh stared sidelong at her.

"Soft as mush, ain't you? Always were. Hell, he was just another damn little potato pedlar. I had to—"

Nora jumped up, moved blindly for the door. Marsh caught her, spun her around.

"You gotta hear the rest of it. You don't walk out on me. Listen now. Logan ain't standing by me. I talked to 'm on the phone. He's chucked me out, see? Says he didn't want no killing to gum up the racket. Why, damn the fat ape, he's rubbed out a few himself, but when one of his own guys gets caught short and has to rub out a sucker, Logan won't stand it. He as good as said he'd give the cops a hint. He won't do that. But I guess he's got his own guys after me—guys I've worked with myself."

Marsh held her tightly, watching her, furious and sly.

"Listen, baby—I still got the day's take with me. I come straight here after I talked with Logan, damn his guts. I can lam. I got three grand, just from the day's take. You can have a cut. You can have a cut, see?"

She spoke as if her voice didn't belong to her:

"What d' you want me to do?"

"O.K. Get it now. You're gonna run down to police H.Q. and give 'em a tip on Logan. You're gonna say you know he was doing his own collecting today and done that shooting himself. You're gonna tell 'em you used to be Logan's girl and now you're squealing because you're sore at his giving you the air. They'll swallow that, easy. You run down there now, and I'll wait here; you come back and le' me know how they take it, and I'll—give you a cut, and then I'll lam, Nora. I'll quit

the country—won't ever bother you any more. You and your boy friend 'll be all right."

Nora said:

"I—won't—do it. Tell 'em I was Logan's girl! Why, that'd be front page. They'd put me in jail—material witness or something—lose my job—never get another. Charlie Corbit wouldn't stand for *that*. Oh, before God, Joe, I can't do it—I can't do it."

Marsh flushed; spoke hoarsely, holding himself in check:

"All right—you don't have to tell 'em you was Logan's girl. You can figure out some way to tell 'em so 's to keep your nose clean. You're smart. Say you overheard something—or some stuff like that."

"I won't do it," Nora said.

Marsh stared; his hands jerked up from her shoulders to her throat, and pressed into its softness, thumbs on the windpipe, fingers boring in at the sides. Nora's scream was cut off; she fought with helpless hands; dropped to her knees trying to break free, but he pulled her up and shook her back and forth while her face darkened, and he intently watched it darken.

When Nora's eyes rolled, started to protrude, Marsh released his grip and held her up, almost gently, while the breath poured back into her tortured lungs, and her face changed from darkness to a deadly pallor. Then he said:

"Sort of nice to come out of it, ain't it, baby? You do what I say and everything's all right. You don't, and I'll give you some of that—only, you won't come out of it, see? See? You'll just be something on a slab in a big cold room, just something under a sheet for the cops to squint at and think what a hell of a shame for a nice-looking kid to end up like that." He touched her bruised throat lightly. "Get it? Will you go, now?"

Nora shivered. She whispered: "I'll go. I'll go."

MARSH sighed shakily; the strength seemed to go out of him too, with her surrender; he said:

"All right. Get started. Wait. Make it like this: if they got anything to say about me, you tell 'em I quit Logan four days ago and beat it out of town. Tell 'em you think I went out to the Coast, see. If they don't ask nothing about me, you find some way to bring that in, natural-like, see? Just easy and natural, when you're talking about Logan. You're smart. You can do it. Tell 'em—tell 'em Joe Marsh figured the racket was shaping up tougher than he liked, so he had a scrap with Logan about it, and beat it out of town. That ain't bad. All right. Get started."

Nora Steele fumbled on her hat and coat, moving like a marionette. Marsh slumped on the bed, watching her. When she was at the door he jumped up, caught her again, put one hand on her throat.

"Get this too, baby. You got any notion of turning *me* in, I got a friend 'll do things to you worse 'n I ever would. I got just that one friend. He knows I come here, see? If I get the heat, he'll know who's responsible."

Marsh's face was twisted and queer; it was written in that face, that he was lying; he had no friends left. But Nora Steele was not looking at his face; her gaze was fixed on the floor, and her eyes were still cloudy, badly focused, from the torture of slipping half-way down to death.

"The guy I mean," said Joe Marsh, "is Fat Lannigan. You've heard of him. You know how *he'd* fix you up. He ain't easy-going, like me. He's got the kind of rep he has because he likes it."

Nora knew all about that. Her lips were tight. She said hoarsely:

"Let me go. I won't double-cross you. I gave you my word."

"Your word!" Marsh laughed and flung her away. "All right. Get going, Girl Scout—and hurry back."

JOE MARSH stared at the closed door, and panic spread up from his heart and tightened his throat. Suppose she knew he'd been lying about Fat Lannigan! Or suppose she made some slip with the police—they might turn on some persuasion, crack down her story. Maybe she wouldn't even go to them. Maybe—

Marsh started after her, got as far as opening the door. But the front door downstairs closed, and Marsh retreated, back into her room. He ran to the window, stared down into the street. There she was, waiting at the curb for a truck to pass before she crossed. Marsh's hand swept under his armpit, drew his gun half-way out. It might be better, he thought, to stop her. . . .

He thrust the gun back, and dived down below the level of the window-sill.

There was a man slouching across the street, loafing in a dark doorway, and the truck's headlights had touched his face long enough for Marsh to recognize him. Slim Shannon, one of Logan's men, a hop-head who didn't care what happened when he had enough snow in him. Marsh had been tailed here. There wasn't any other answer. Marsh pressed his forehead against the wall below the window-sill and heard his own voice whimper:

"God, don't let 'em! Don't. . . ."

Marsh hadn't told Nora Steele the whole story about himself and Logan. What he told her was true enough, but there was more. Joe Marsh had been entertaining grandiose ideas about Logan's racket—ideas much too grandiose for a collection man. The killing he had done that day was only one sign of what Stump Logan described as "Little Joe Marsh

getting too big for his pants." Marsh had let himself think how nice it would be to be boss, and Logan had a habit of finding out those ideas in the men he hired.

Marsh stood up close to the wall and pulled down the shade without exposing himself; then he switched off the light, and peered down through the crack between the shade and the frame. Nora was out of sight now, but Slim Shannon was still in his doorway, a black blur, waiting. Marsh trained his gun on that blur, and lowered it. No good. Even if he did have the luck to pick off Shannon, it would give him away.

He wondered if the back of the house would be watched. Most likely. If he went through the bedroom at the rear—blasted his way through, maybe—and made the fire-escape, they'd be waiting for him when he got to the ground. A fatalistic sense of defeat began to get hold of him, chilling his hands and slowing his pulse. He fought it off. There must be some out.

Joe Marsh dropped face down on the bed; he mumbled into the pillow:

"Wait'll she gets back. She'll think up something. She's smart. She's all right, Nora is. She's a swell kid. She's all right, Nora is. . . ."

HE was whimpering into the pillow like a sick child by the time Nora returned. She closed the door and leaned there, staring at him with no expression in her face at all. She said:

"Well. I've done it. They took it all right, Joe, far as I could tell. Now, please go."

Marsh stumbled toward her; he dropped on the floor and put his arms around her knees.

"Nora—they're waiting for me outside. I seen 'em, from the window. Do something. You think up some way to ge' me

outa here. I can't think no more. You help me."

"What can I do? I did what you wanted. How can I get you out?"

She touched his head, then tried to draw away, but he clung to her.

"Help me, Nora."

"I would if I could."

There was pity in her face; Joe Marsh didn't see it, would not have understood it if he had. He was nothing now but a bundle of raw fear, and clung to her knees like a child.

Captain Drake found them like that when he opened the door and said:

"Well, well, well, well."

JOE MARSH shot to his feet. His wet face glared at the police captain for a frozen second, and at the two plainclothesmen behind him. Then he whirled on Nora Steele, livid and not human.

"Damn you—you lousy, dirty double-crossing tramp—you'd turn me in—you—"

Marsh's gun was out. Captain Drake's spoke once, shot the thing out of Marsh's hand. Handcuffs snapped home over what was left of Joe Marsh's wrist; one of the plainclothesmen planted Marsh on the bed and kept him there. But Marsh seemed scarcely aware of the officers. Nora Steele leaned against the wall, white and sick, and Marsh strained forward against the hands that held him, raving, until the other plainclothesman slapped his mouth shut. Captain Drake said:

"You got a funny slant on this business, Marsh. The kid didn't turn you in."

Marsh turned on him, panting.

"What? What?"

"She didn't turn you in," said Captain Drake. "She gave us a swell story about you skipping town. Only we knew she was lying. We knew more than that, Marsh." Drake walked over to Nora,

slipped his arm around her waist. She needed it, for support. "She's a good kid. We knew she was doing it because she had to, Marsh. You see, we were already tipped off on the Gutmann murder. We knew that was your work, and that gun of yours will cinch it—it'll fit the bullets we took out of that poor little guy. God, some day we're going to get the city clean of you and your kind! So—all we had to do was find you, Marsh." Captain Drake gently pushed down the collar of Nora's coat. There were ten livid black and blue circles on her throat. Two thumbmarks over the wind-pipe; on her right side, four finger-marks. On the left side, only two.

"When you strangle a girl," said Drake—"or half-strangle her—you don't stick out your little finger like a perfect lady soaking up a cup of tea. You use all four—if you have all four. Sending her to us like that—why, Marsh, you might as well've sent a card saying 'Come and get me!' We knew she'd be coming back to you, so we tailed her, that's all."

Marsh muttered.

"All right. You got me. By God, she's accessory."

Drake hauled him off the bed, signed to the others to take him out. He turned to Nora, put his arm around her again, said:

"I remember you—did when you came in, though I didn't speak up. We've had an eye on you, since you did your time. You've been on the up and up, ever since."

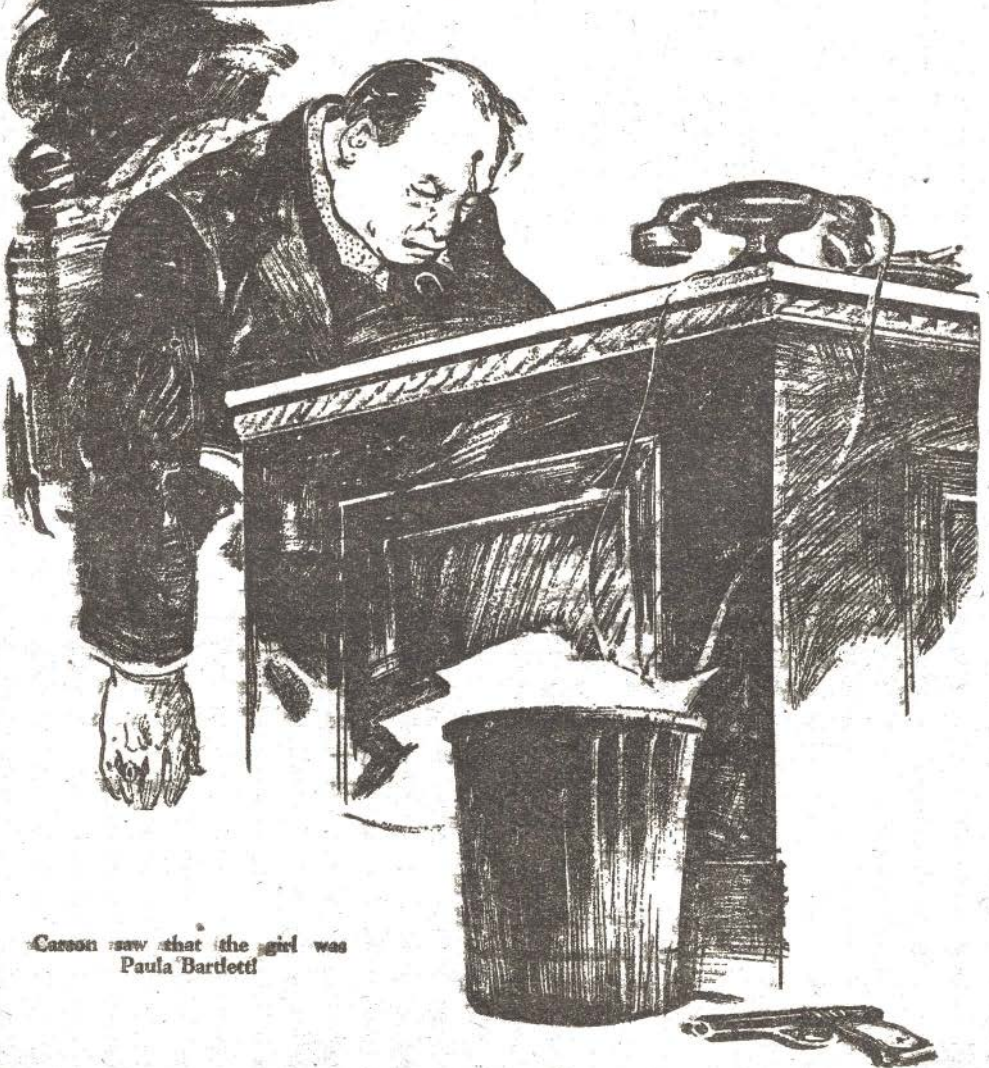
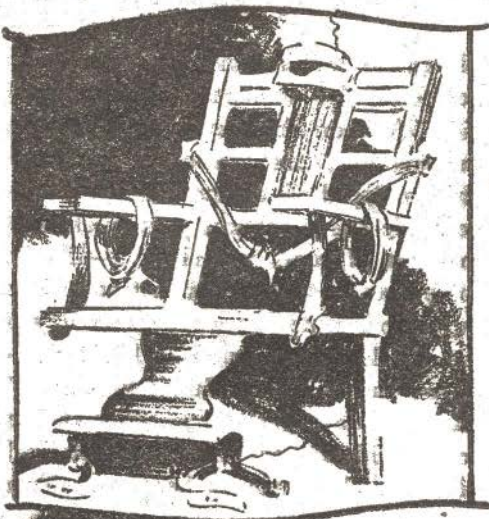
"What he said," Nora whispered—"accessory—"

"It's damn' funny," Drake said, "how bad my hearing is getting. Memory, too. I guess I'm getting old. Yeah, that's it. Hell—you poor kid. Turn in and get some sleep."

Across the street, the panhandler who looked like Slim Shannon was just turning up his coat collar, about ready to move on in search of a more lucrative spot. . . .

REPRIEVE

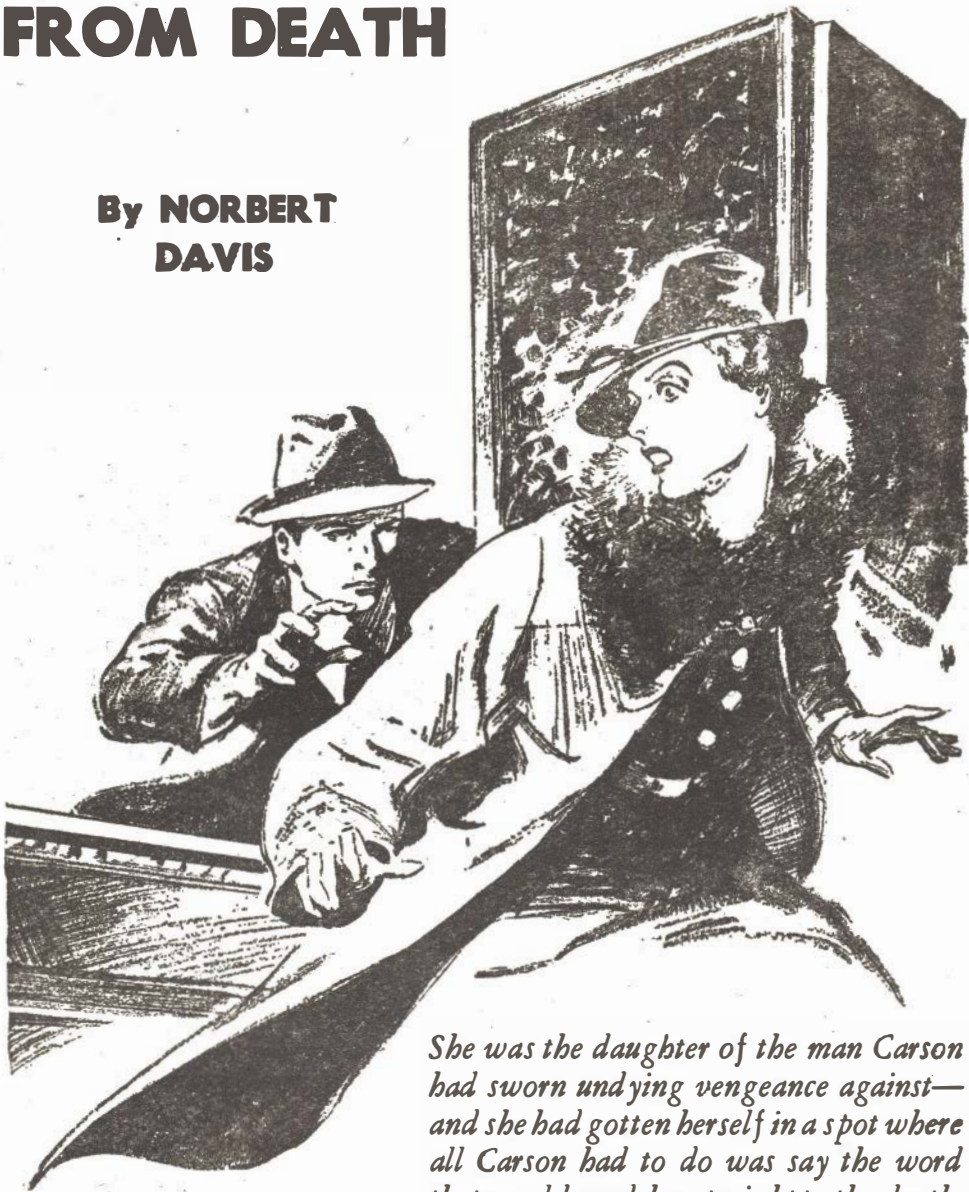
A Dramatic, Fast-Action Detective Novelette of Warring Emotions and Clever, Unexpected Twists.



Carson saw that the girl was
Paula Bartlett

FROM DEATH

By **NORBERT
DAVIS**



She was the daughter of the man Carson had sworn undying vengeance against—and she had gotten herself in a spot where all Carson had to do was say the word that would send her straight to the death-house. Carson knew that such a fate for her would mean the squaring of accounts for all eternity. . . .

“**T**HEY won’t burn me!”
It was Mardrigi whispering in a thick, choked voice. He was in the cell next to Carson’s. It was after midnight now, and it was quiet in the death house. But the lights were on. They were always on.

“You hear, Carson? You hear? They’ll never burn me!”

Carson slid off his bunk, leaned against the door of his cell. He could see the guard at the end of the corridor, dozing in his chair, tipped back against the wall.

“Take it easy, Mardrigi,” he said softly. “Don’t let it get you.”

Mardrigi’s fingers were like muscular cables wrapped tight around the bars of the cell door. Mardrigi’s dark, thin face

was pushed tight against the steel, and his dark eyes seemed to boil and bubble in a sort of mad triumph.

"You think I'm nuts, huh? You think this joint has got me like it's got that little nutt up front! Do you think I'm yellow?"

"Of course not," Carson said.

He knew Mardrigi's history. He was a cold-blooded and vicious killer—a gangster. He and three others had robbed a bank, shot down a teller, a customer, a bank guard. But the police were waiting for them when they came out. Mardrigi's three companions were all killed. He was wounded and captured.

"They'll never put me in the hot seat," Mardrigi whispered. His breath hissed through his teeth suddenly, and he seemed to writhe and squirm against the bars. "Never!" His knuckles bulged whitely with the force of his grip. "Never!"

"Take it easy," Carson said again.

Mardrigi's breath rattled and choked in his throat. "Fooled 'em! Knew I had it all the time, but never said a word. The doc told me before I pulled that bank job—that if I didn't have it out, it was gonna break on me!" He groaned a little, bending over. "Now it has!" He laughed—a horrible, grating croak.

"What—" Carson said.

Mardrigi moaned. He stared at Carson with bulging eyes. There was a thin black line of blood sliding down his chin from where he had bitten his lips. Then suddenly he twisted clear around and fell backward out of sight into his cell with a thumping clatter.

The guard brought his chair-legs down on the cement with a jerk, blinking around in a sleepily started way.

"Here!" Carson called. "It's Mardrigi! Something's the matter with him!"

The guard came down the corridor. There were stirs and sullen mutterings from the other cells. Sleep was a precious

thing in the death house. It freed tortured minds of the slow, terrible anguish of watching each succeeding hour slip silently past.

"Mardrigi!" the guard said, peering in the cell. "Here, Mardrigi! What's the matter with you?"

"Get the doctor!" Carson said impatiently.

The guard looked at him blankly, and then Mardrigi moaned a little and threshed spasmodically on the floor. The guard whirled and ran down the corridor.

The other prisoners in the death house were up now, peering through their barred doors, shouting excited questions at Carson. Then the short corridor seemed to fill with uniformed guards. They opened Mardrigi's cell, crowded in. Carson couldn't see inside the cell from his door, but he could hear them trying to get Mardrigi on his bunk, hear him groan in that horribly thick, choked way.

"Hey, the guy's dyin'!" a guard said suddenly.

Symonds, the prison doctor, came hurrying in. He was a thin, bald little man with a nervously futile manner. Pince-nez glasses were set askew on his thin beak of a nose. He was always worried, always in a hurry. He talked in a whining monotone.

"Quick!" he said. "Take him to the infirmary! He's got to be operated on at once!"

"What's the matter with him?" a guard demanded.

"Ruptured appendix," Symonds snapped. "I'm afraid it's too late now. Peritonitis. He's been keeping still about it on purpose—bearing the pain. Must have hurt him like the very devil! Hurry!"

They carried Mardrigi out on a stretcher, and then the death house was quiet again. Quiet with that queer breathless stillness it always seemed to have. Nerves

drawn wire-tight with strain, ready to jangle and screech. The baby cop-killer—eighteen years old—in the end cell began to weep. One of the other prisoners cursed him viciously.

"All right, boys," the guard said uneasily. "Quiet down, now. It's all over. Go to sleep now."

CHAPTER TWO

Release From Hell

IT was almost two hours later when two guards came quietly in the death house. They were men from the warden's office, and they stopped in front of Carson's cell.

"Ready to go now?" one asked.

"Sure," Carson said. "Any time."

He had long since rolled the few personal belongings he was allowed into a bundle. He got up and put on his coat.

One of the guards opened the door, and Carson stepped out into the corridor. The guard shut the cell door again quietly, and the three of them walked down the corridor.

The big Negro who had killed his wife with a razor was leaning against his barred door.

"So long, boy," he said softly. "As long as it can't be me, I'm glad it's you."

"Thanks, Moe," Carson said. "Good luck to you."

The baby cop-killer was awake, too.

"Take me with you!" he begged hoarsely. "I gotta get out of here! Take me—" His voice rose to a hysterical scream. "Take me! Take me! I gotta get out! I can't stand—"

The death house guard was holding the outside door open, and the two warden's men and Carson went through it.

"Take me!" the cop-killer shrieked. "Take me, too! I can't stay here any longer! Take me with—"

The door clanged shut.

CHAPTER THREE

Death Makes His Choice

WARDEN DAY was a thin man with sparsely grey hair. His lined face was haggard, careworn, and his eyes were old and cynical and weary. He sat behind his big desk and watched Carson thoughtfully.

"The law," he said slowly, "made a terrible mistake in your case, Carson. I hope you don't hold it against me. It's not my



When the horse runs home, and the ground is hard,
And you wish you were safe in your own back yard,
Don't faint, don't swear, and don't count back—
Just rip off the wrapper and yield to that yen . . .

Compose yourself

with



the
Quality Gum

duty to judge a man's innocence or guilt. The courts said you were guilty. I have to carry out the sentences they pronounce."

"I don't hold anything against—you," Carson said.

Day nodded. "It was a mistake. Just forget it."

Carson smiled wryly. Just forget it! As if he could! The pitiless prying publicity. The gaping stares of the curious. The terrible suspense that was like a cold hand gripping your throat. The death house. Waiting—waiting—waiting. Waiting for death.

"It hasn't hurt you much, Carson," Day said. "You're young. You've got a fine education, and you've got a little income of your own. Go away somewhere. Forget the whole business. Make a new start."

Carson was thinking back. Make a new start. He wondered if he could. He had been an architect, and a good one. For so young a man he had made quite a reputation. He had been enthusiastic, confident, hopeful. But now! Now he was aged a thousand years.

"And about Bartlett," Day said slowly. "I wouldn't hold anything against him, either."

Carson's grey eyes narrowed. Bartlett! Bartlett was the district attorney who had prosecuted him. He had conducted the trial with a waspish, personal vindictiveness, twisting every word that Carson said, using every sly trick he knew to influence the jury, lashing at Carson with a voice that dripped malice. It was he who was responsible for Carson's conviction. There was a doubt—and without Bartlett to spur them on the jury would have heeded it.

"You *do* hold it against him," Day said. "Don't, Carson. It doesn't pay." He coughed uneasily. "And I wouldn't play too much with Forgan if I were you."

Forgan was the man who had got Car-

son released—got him a pardon three days before he would have been electrocuted. He was a political power in the state. He never held an office. His name never appeared on the party rolls. But he pulled the strings that made the puppets dance.

Carson stood up.

"Thanks for your advice. Can I go now?"

Day nodded.

"Yes. You'd better do more than thank me for the advice, Carson. You'd better follow it. I'm releasing you at this hour to avoid the reporters. I didn't think you'd want to see them for awhile, and there's sure to be a plague of them around on account of Mardrigi."

"How is he?" Carsoa asked.

"He died an hour ago," Day said.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bullets From Nowhere

THE ponderous gates swung slowly shut behind Carson, leaving him outside. It was nearly dawn now, and the fog was creeping in from the bay in huge revolving billows that rolled themselves along the ground like strangely puffy, creeping animals. The thick greyness blotted out everything, and Carson seemed to be alone in a little world all of his own.

He stood there in the shadow of the gate, staring straight ahead, rigid. He was free. Free—free—free! The word was a hammer pounding at his brain. He wasn't going to die. They weren't going to strap him in the chair and throw the lever that would send a thousand invisible tearing knives through him. Free!

He breathed deeply, trying to get a grip on himself. He had sworn that he wouldn't let his emotions get the better of him. But he could feel the sweat coldly on his face, feel the rigid tenseness of his muscles.

The fog lifted a little, and he saw the sleek gleam of a big limousine parked in

front of the gate. An indistinct figure loomed up hazily in front of him.

"Ah! There you are! I couldn't figure out where the hell you'd went to!"

"Who are you?" Carson asked unsteadily.

The man was thick-bodied, stocky, with a flatly battered face. "Me? I'm Bill. I do odd jobs for Forgan now and then. He wants to see you right away. He sent me down to bring you."

"How did you know I was going to be released at this time of the night?"

The man laughed. "How'd I know? Hell's bells! Why, Forgan owns this damned prison and everybody in it except that stiff-necked warden. Come on. Forgan's waitin'."

They walked toward the limousine. The ground felt strangely soft and springy under Carson's feet after the hardness of his cell floor.

"Look out!" Bill yelled suddenly.

He kicked Carson's feet from under him, slammed down hard on top of him. At the same instant there was a whipping crack, flatly muffled in the fog. Carson heard the whisper of the bullet over his head.

Bill rolled free of him, struggling to draw a revolver out of his hip pocket. He was swearing in a thick undertone.

There was another whipping crack, and gravel sputtered up a foot from Carson's face. Up on top of the prison wall a guard shouted excitedly.

The pointing white finger of a searchlight flicked around, boring through the moving white billows of the fog. It touched a crouched, indistinct figure up the hill-side a little way, glinted brightly on the blued steel of a gun barrel. Even as the figure was revealed, the fog slid down softly white, hid it again.

The guard's sub-machine gun rapped out in a chattering roar of sound, and the searchlight swept back and forth in short,

quick arcs. But the blurred black figure was gone.

"Wow!" Bill said breathlessly. "That was close! I just happened to see that son of a gun move before he shot!"

Carson got up slowly off the ground.

"Thanks," he said tightly. "You saved my life."

"Huh!" Bill said. "Mister, I don't give a damn how many people pop at you, or when. Only Forgan told me to bring you to him, and believe me when he tells me to do something I do it. Otherwise he gets mad. He don't take no excuses. Who's got a mad on with you, mister?"

"I don't know," Carson said.

CHAPTER FIVE

Veto for Vengeance

FORGAN was fat. He was more than fat. He was like an evenly rounded mass of flesh with no life in it at all. There was no life in his eyes, even. They were wide and grey and flatly slick, like wet pieces of obsidian sunk in the yellowish rolls of fat.

He sat behind the big desk in the study of his big, barrenly undecorated house. It was cold in the study. There was no heat, but Forgan didn't seem to notice the lack of it.

"I had you brought here," he said in his low, toneless voice, "because I wanted to talk to you before you talked to anybody else."

Carson wrapped his overcoat a little more tightly around him. He was a strange contrast to Forgan. He was tall and thin and sparsely built. His face was thinly sensitive. He looked well-bred, aristocratic. His eyes were grey, like Forgan's, but they had life and intelligence and feeling. The death house had put deep lines around his thin mouth, across his forehead. It had melted all the

dross, all the useless flesh, away and left him finely tuned, fit.

"I haven't thanked—" he began.

"Don't," Forgan said flatly. "I don't want any thanks. I didn't do it for thanks. You were accused of killing James Denham, convicted of his murder, and sentenced to be electrocuted. I knew Denham. He was a lawyer, and he used to do legal work for me before he got to be such a drunk that he couldn't think straight. I knew personally that he was a rat and a crook. Plenty of people had reason to put him down."

"I had no reason," Carson said. "I didn't even know the man. I went to this party given by an artist friend of mine. Denham was there, drunk. He got insulting, and I knocked him down. That was all that happened, and I didn't think any more about it. Then I went to the bathroom later in the evening. Denham was there, lying on the floor with his head smashed in. They found me kneeling over him, and they accused me of his murder."

"And John Bartlett convicted you," Forgan said.

"Yes," Carson said levelly.

"And it's lucky for you he did."

Carson stared at him. "What?"

"Because otherwise you'd have fried," Forgan said. "That's the reason I got you out. Because he convicted you. You know he's running for governor?"

Carson's lips were flat against his teeth. "Yes. On the big reputation he made out of my trial!"

"Exactly," said Forgan. "He's running against my candidate. And that's why you're here. I got you out because I wanted to give him a black eye. And I did it. I proved that he convicted an innocent man and damned near got him executed. He'll have a tough time talking that down. I spent a hell of a lot of time and money proving you were innocent. I found the man who really killed James Denham—a

two-bit gunman by the name of 'Junk' Smith. Somebody hired him to do it. I don't know who, and I don't give a damn. He's the one that did the killing, and that's all I wanted. I got a confession out of him. My boys had to knock hell out of him to get that confession. In fact, they beat him up so bad that he died of it. But they got the confession, and it was corroborated, and it stood up, and it got you loose."

"I know," Carson said. "I'm grateful."

"All right," said Forgan. "Just remember this while you're being grateful. John Bartlett got you convicted, and you got ideas that you're gonna get even with him for it. I'm telling you to lay off."

"You're asking a lot," Carson said thinly. "He came as close to getting me killed as any man could without doing it. He disgraced me and my name and ruined my career. He did all that, and more, and then you ask me to sit here and not strike back at him."

"I'm not asking you," Forgan said. "I'm telling you. Right now, all the sympathy is on your side, against him. He's the man that did you a terrible wrong. That's the way I want it to be. If you start after him, then the sympathy will be on his side. People will start bein' sorry for him, instead of you. I don't want that, and I'm not going to have it."

"I see," Carson said. He began to have some conception of the sly, coldly scheming mind that lay behind the mask of immovable flesh across the desk from him. There was no feeling in it, no humanity, no human passion. As cold and ruthless and efficient as a piece of well-oiled machinery.

"Remember it," Forgan said. "I got you out of the death house. Maybe I could put you in a worse place. By the way, Bill said somebody took a shot at

you outside the prison tonight. Know who it was?"

Carson shook his head. "No."

"I'll try and find out," Forgan said. "And if I do, that bird won't do any more pistol practising. It cost me plenty to get you out, and I ain't gonna have somebody blowing you down before I get a chance to use you."

CHAPTER SIX

Daughter of the Devil

CARSON registered at the Drake Hotel under the name of Towne. He wanted to avoid the reporters. He wanted to avoid the friends who had conveniently forgotten him when he was in trouble. He had no relatives in the state—no close relatives anywhere.

He wanted time to adjust himself. To begin to live again. He wanted most to hear people laugh, see them enjoy themselves. There is no laughter in the death house except the feverishly hysterical laughter of fear.

He spent the whole of the next day wandering alone around the city, watching people. He was tired when he came back to the hotel, but the horrible tightness inside him had relaxed a little. He was beginning to think and feel like a human being instead of a dead man.

He saw the girl when he came in the lobby. She was sitting in one of the big, worn leather chairs thumbing through the pages of a magazine. Carson thought, however, that she hadn't been reading the magazine at all, that she had just been holding it up in front of her, watching the doorway. She didn't move when he came in, but he knew she was watching him closely.

He went across to the desk and got his room key, and when he turned around again, she had gotten up out of the chair

and was sauntering casually toward the elevator. She got in it ahead of him.

"Three," she said to the boy.

That was Carson's floor. He nodded to the boy, and the elevator rose silently.

Carson studied the girl out of the corners of his eyes. She was small and dark, and she was very pretty in a pertly confident, sophisticated way. Her features were small and even, clean cut. Her eyes were a deep, smooth brown, alertly intelligent. She wore a long fur coat, and both it and her tailored suit were luxuriously, expensively plain.

The elevator stopped at the third floor, and the girl preceded Carson out of it and along the hall to the right, toward his room. She stopped when she got to his door and turned around and waited for him to catch up with her.

"Is your name Towne?" she asked.

Carson nodded, watching her curiously. "Yes."

"It was Carson when you were in prison, wasn't it?"

Carson nodded again, smiling a little. "Yes, it was. What of it?"

She moved her slim shoulders indifferently. "Nothing. I just wanted to make sure. I'm a sob sister from the *Journal*. Will you say a few words for publication?"

"Certainly," Carson said. "If you'll step inside, we'll have a little more privacy." He unlocked the door of his room, held it open invitingly.

She nodded and strolled inside the room and looked around it in her casual indifferent way. Carson offered a chair, but she shook her head.

"I can only stay a second. I'll have to get right back and write this up. Mr. Carson, what are your feelings on coming out of the death house? That's a pretty silly question, but I mean are you bitter against society on account of the thing you've gone through?"

There was a little glint of amused contempt in Carson's grey eyes. "Why not come to the point, Miss Paula Bartlett? What you want to know is whether or not I'm holding a grudge against your father, isn't it?"

She stiffened rigidly. "You—you recognized me?"

Carson chuckled. "Your imitation of a girl reporter wasn't very convincing. Besides, I've seen your picture in the papers several times since your father started to run for governor. I've been quite interested in his campaign—for a number of reasons."

She stared at him, her dark eyes narrowed a little. "You hold my father responsible for what happened to you, don't you?"

"Yes," said Carson. "I do. Because he was."

"He was not! He honestly and sincerely believed you were guilty, and he tried to the best of his ability to get you convicted, because that was his sworn duty!"

Carson smiled thinly. "His duty fitted in nicely with his plans for his coming campaign for governor."

She came a step forward. "Do you dare to insinuate that my father would send a man to his death to get himself elected governor?"

Carson nodded. "That's putting it very nicely. That's just exactly what I'm insinuating."

"You lie!"

Carson shrugged indifferently. "Have it your way."

She was trembling with anger, and she bit her full lower lip, trying to regain control of herself.

"Can't you understand, Mr. Carson, that a man like my father puts his duties to the people who elect him above everything else? He was wrong in this case. You'd been falsely accused of that murder. But my father didn't know that. He

thought you were guilty, and thinking that he tried in every way he knew to see that justice was done. He didn't have any personal ill-feeling against you. It wasn't that at all. He was just trying to do what he had promised to do when he was elected."

Carson laughed contemptuously.

"You sound like one of your father's campaign speeches."

She drew a deep breath.

"You—you— You're in with that crook Forgan! I know! The two of you mean to do something to my father! But you won't get away with it!"

"No?" Carson said easily.

She watched him silently for a moment, and her brown eyes were widely dark, frightened and at the same time determined.

"I knew my father was afraid of you— of what you'd do when you got out. I know why now. There's something not—not human about you."

Carson smiled a little. "Maybe there is. Were you ever in a death house? Did you ever think about sitting in one of those little cells and hearing the seconds click-click away in your brain, every one bringing you a little step closer to your death? You don't die all at once, you see. You die a little bit every day. I was there for three months. Dying for three months. That's what your father did to me. Not because he hated me. I could understand that. But just because my death would bring him closer to being elected governor. He didn't care whether I was guilty or not. I was just a means by which he could get publicity for himself."

"You're going to kill him!" she said in a queer, tight voice.

"No," Carson said. "Oh, no. If I do anything to him at all, it will be something much worse than that."

She gave a little gasping cry of despair, and then she suddenly whirled through

CHAPTER SEVEN

Murder at Midnight

FORGAN lived in the older residential section. His house, slatternly unkempt, was set deep back in the lot, masked on both sides and in the front by high, thick shrubbery.

Carson had turned the corner and was walking along the hedge in front, when a voice said suddenly out of the darkness:

"Hey, you! Stop!"

The hedge heaved and crackled under the thrust of a burly body. A man stepped out in front of Carson and shot the beam of a flashlight in his face.

"Oh! Sorry, mister." He turned the flashlight off, and Carson caught the dull gleam of brass buttons on a blue uniform.

"Some trouble, officer?" he asked.

The policeman tipped up his cap, wiped his face with a thick forearm.

"That damned hedge," he grumbled. "I stuck myself in twenty places, I bet. Yeah, I was walkin' my beat when I seen somebody sneakin' along the hedge. I yelled at him, and he ducked out of sight somewhere. I thought maybe you was him, only he was a lot smaller than you are. I guess he's beat it by this time."

There was a sudden thudding boom.

The policeman whirled around.

"That was a shot!"

"In there!" Carson said, pointing to Forgan's house. "You take the front. I'll take the back."

They pounded up the rough brick walk.

"Watch yourself, mister!" the policeman warned. He hurdled up the front steps, hammered on the door with the butt of his revolver. "Open up in there!"

Carson ducked to the left, around the house. The tall grass snatched clingingly at his ankles. He jumped over a low hedge, reached the back door.

The knob turned under his groping

fingers, and he stumbled into the thick blackness of a kitchen.

There was a sudden splintering crash from the front of the house, and Carson knew the policeman had broken through the door. And then he heard another sound—the quiet, stealthy shuffle of a shoe sole on the smooth linoleum. There was someone in the kitchen, moving very cautiously toward the back door.

Carson took one step forward and hurled himself straight at the sound. His shoulder smashed into another figure, hurled it to the floor with a crash.

The swinging door into the kitchen smacked open under the thrusting heave of the policeman's shoulder, and light from the hall cut a flat yellow swath across the tinted linoleum floor.

Carson was looking squarely into the face of the person that he had knocked down. It was Paula Bartlett.

"I'm sorry," Carson said to Paula Bartlett. "I didn't know it was you—I couldn't see—"

He stopped short. He was staring through the door, past the bulk of the policeman, down the hall. The door of Forgan's study was open, and through it Carson could see the flat desk. He could see Forgan sitting there behind it.

FORGAN was sitting very still, slumped down a little. There was a round blue hole squarely between his greyish, glazed eyes, and blood had tricked out of the hole and spread across the puffy face.

"You!" said Paula Bartlett, pointing a rigid arm at Carson. "You did it! You killed him!"

"Now, lady," said the policeman, "you're just crazy. This man was talkin' to me outside when the shot was fired. But where was you, and what was you doin'?"

She stared at him, bewildered. "Why—why, I was hiding in the hall closet."

"So?" said the policeman incredulously. "Hiding, was you? Hiding from what?"

"If I were you, I'd think pretty carefully before I answered," Carson said quietly.

"But I don't understand," Paula Bartlett said faintly, looking from one to the other. "You don't think that I—I killed—"

"No," said the policeman. "We don't think, we're pretty damned sure you did. It's a cinch he didn't kill himself because there ain't no powder burns and the gun's lyin' on the floor on the other side of the desk, and there ain't nobody else but you around here, is there?"

She stared at him, horrified. "But there was another man! I sneaked in the back door and—"

"Be careful," Carson warned.

"Oh," said the policeman. "You sneaked in the back door, did you? And why?"

"I wanted to surprise Forgan—"

"I bet you did, too," said the policeman. "I bet he was pretty surprised when you put a bullet in his brain."

"No!" she gasped brokenly. "No! If you'll only listen to me—I sneaked in the back door. I wanted to see Forgan, and he had refused to talk to me earlier in the evening. But I was determined to see him. I came through the kitchen, and then I heard voices in the study. Forgan was talking to some man. I opened the kitchen door and went into the hall. I could see Forgan, but I couldn't see the other man. They were quarreling about something. I hid in the hall closet, waiting for the other man to leave. And then I heard the shot—"

"That's a nice story," the policeman said. "I hope you can find somebody who'll believe it. What'd you want to see Forgan about in the first place?"

"I—I wanted to warn him to leave my father alone."

"Who's your father?" the policeman asked skeptically.

"John Bartlett."

"John Bartlett!" the policeman exclaimed. "So that's the way it is! He couldn't beat Forgan by votes, so he thought maybe he could do it by bullets! You come with me—in here where I can telephone!"

They went into the study, and Forgan's red-smear'd features leered at them from behind the desk with a ghastly set smile. The policeman covered his hand with his handkerchief and picked up the telephone off the desk. Paula Bartlett turned her head away from Forgan with a gasping sob.

"You did this," she said thickly to Carson. "I don't know how you did it, but you did. You planned it all. This is your revenge on my father, isn't it? You're striking at him through me."

Carson shook his head. "I didn't! I had no idea—"

"You liar. You sneaking liar. I knew you'd do something horrible, something underhanded and low and vicious. But I didn't think even you would do this."

Carson didn't answer her. There was nothing he could say. There was no use in trying to convince her that he didn't know anything about this.

The policeman was talking into the telephone:

"No, I'm not goofy. I tell you it's John Bartlett's daughter, and she killed Forgan. The gun's right here on the floor. She leaned over and let him have it right between the peepers. Probably her old man put her up to it. Me and this other bird caught her trying to pull a run-out through the kitchen."

His voice grew suddenly dim in Carson's ears. Carson was staring at the round copper ash-tray on the corner of the

littered desk. That ash-tray was beside the chair in which he had sat when he had visited Forgan the night he had been released from prison. It had been empty then, but it wasn't empty now.

There were three cigarette butts in it. Butts from hand-rolled cigarettes made of brown, coarse paper. These cigarettes had been made in a very peculiar way. The paper had not been moistened. It had been doubled back along one edge in two tiny parallel creases and the other edge of the paper fitted neatly into the crease.

The room seemed to fade out in front of Carson's eyes, and he was back again in the stillness of the death house. He was leaning against his cell door looking out along the bare corridor. In this imagination he could see two brown, thin hands poked through the bars of a cell door rolling a brown paper cigarette with painstaking, careful skill. Making that tiny crease as evenly as a machine could have, fitting the other edge of the cigarette into it, crimping the ends with a quick double twist.

Those were Mardrigi's brown, thin hands he had seen doing that, and he could hear Mardrigi's voice saying:

"Why don't you try one of these? They're better than that hay you smoke."

Mardrigi! But Mardrigi was dead. Mardrigi couldn't have come here tonight and sat in this chair and made his cigarettes and shot Forgan. Mardrigi was lying in the prison grave-yard clad in a cheap prison shroud, nailed in a cheap prison coffin. Mardrigi had been lying there, dead, for three days now.

Carson reached out with numb fingers and felt the cigarette butts. One of them was warm to his touch.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Lovely Prisoner

THE visiting room of the city jail was a long bare rectangle with a close-knit

wire screen stretched down its middle. The prisoners and their visitors could talk to each other through the screen.

Carson stood at the far end of the room on the visitors' side of the netting. The room was familiar enough to him. He had talked to people through the wire netting a good many times in the past, but always before he had been on the other side.

He watched the fat matron waddle through the door that led back to the cell corridors and approach him.

"Miss Bartlett says she don't want to see you," the matron said in her stolidly unemotional voice.

"Did you give her my message?" Carson demanded. "Did you tell her that I wanted to help her?"

The matron nodded.

"Yes. She said she could do without any help from you. She said you had got her in here and wasn't you satisfied with that. She said she didn't want you gloating over her."

"Please go back and explain again to her that I don't want to gloat over her. I want to help her."

The matron shook her head slowly.

"It won't do any good, mister. I'm sorry, but she got so mad when I told her you was out here that she started to cry. She hates you."

"Yes," said Carson slowly. "Yes, I guess she does."

He turned around wearily and went out the door into the long, marble floored corridor. He had really wanted to help Paula Bartlett, and he still did. He knew the terrible feeling of injustice that she was experiencing now—the awful sense of loneliness. He wanted to comfort her, cheer her up. But probably his visit, feeling as she did about him, had had just the opposite effect. No matter what he tried to do for her, he always seemed to blunder, to make things worse.

"Carson!"

It was John Bartlett. He was a thin elderly man, erectly straight, distinguished looking. He had iron-grey hair, an iron-grey mustache. His eyes were icy blue.

"You did it, didn't you?" he said. Ordinarily his voice was smoothly cultured, trained, but now it had a hoarsely thick note. "I'll hand it to you, Carson. I was afraid of you when you got out of prison. I thought you'd try to get even with me, and I knew you were clever and intelligent enough to think of a good way to do it. But you were cleverer than I thought."

"I didn't have anything to do with this," Carson said. "I'd already given up the idea of getting back at you before this happened—just because hurting you would hurt your daughter."

"You meanly-mouthed liar," Bartlett said, and his eyes had the flat sheen of blued steel. "You're rubbing it in now, aren't you? Don't you think I know what she is and what I am? You're making her pay for what I did to you, and you're demanding a big price, aren't you?"

"I'm not demanding any price," Carson said evenly.

"I'll demand one," Bartlett said.

His arm jerked up, and a flat automatic gleamed darkly in his hand. He meant to shoot. There was no doubt about that.

Carson hurled himself forward in a low, driving tackle. Somewhere down the corridor a woman screamed shrilly. Bartlett's automatic smashed out deafeningly, racketing between the narrow walls in a thousand barking echoes. Carson felt the hot flare of powder in his face, felt the bullet twitch at his coat. Then he hit Bartlett hard just above the knees.

Bartlett smashed over backwards. He half-turned, crashed head-on into the wall, dropped in a limp heap.

Carson stood up, wiping his forehead with a trembling hand. He had done it again. He had hurt Paula Bartlett once

more. There was suddenly a close-packed press of people around him, all shoving and yelling.

CHAPTER NINE

Devil's Drink

IT was two hours before Carson could get free of the reporters and the police and get back to his hotel. Bartlett had suffered a bad concussion when Carson had knocked him against the wall and had been taken to a hospital. Carson had refused to press any charges against him.

There was a man in his room, lounging indolently in a chair with his feet propped up on top of the bed. It was Bill, the man Forgan had sent to bring Carson from the prison.

"Howdy, boy," Bill said thickly. He waved a lax arm. "Thought I might as well wait here where it was comfortable. I seen this bottle here and I knew it was brandy because I could read the label through the wrapping, so I helped myself. Good stuff, too. Hope you don't mind."

"Bottle?" Carson said, puzzled.

Bill nodded. "Sure. On your table. All wrapped up pretty in tissue paper. See?" He picked up a bottle from the floor beside his chair and held it uncertainly aloft. "Wanna drink?"

"No, thanks," Carson said. "Did you want to see me?"

Bill nodded slowly, as though it was a great effort to move his head. "Yeah. Wanted to see you. Forgan's dead. I got no boss. Broke. Maybe—sell you something. Say, this is strong stuff. Only had—three drinks. Feel—very funny."

"What did you want to sell me?"

"Information. I know—who killed Forgan. You wanna—know?"

Carson leaned forward tensely. "Who did it?"

Bill blinked his eyes, trying to focus them. "You—pay?"

"Yes!" Carson snapped impatiently. "Of course, I will! How much do you want?"

"Well—lemme see. Gotta have enough—get out of country. Say, what's matter—with this brandy. So tired—dizzy. Sleep." He slumped sideways.

Carson swept the bottle up off the floor. The dark liquor in it had a peculiar sweetish smell. Carson seized the telephone.

"Get a doctor!" he snapped when the desk clerk answered. "Quick!"

He lifted Bill's thick body, rolled him on the bed. He shook the man hard. "Bill!" Carson said tensely. "Bill! Who killed Forgan?"

Bill's lips muttered half-incoherent sentences. "I wasn't there—but saw him—comin' in—when I left. Funny—him doin' it."

Carson shook him again. "Who?"

"Dead," Bill said. "Funny. Forgan—hiding him. Kills Forgan. Funny."

"Hiding where?" Carson demanded.

"Forgan's—lake—cottage—"

Bill's head rolled from side to side, and his thick body shuddered spasmodically.

There was a sudden imperative knock at the door. The desk clerk came in with another man.

"This is the doctor," the clerk said uncertainly. "What—"

The doctor paid no attention either to him or to Carson. He had hurried to the bed, was leaning over Bill.

"What'd he drink?" he snapped over his shoulder.

"This brandy," Carson said. "I don't know where it came from. He said he found it on my table."

"I sent it up while you were out," the clerk said, white-faced. "A messenger brought it, said it was for you."

The doctor stood up. "You drink any of that brandy?"

Carson shook his head. "No."

"Lucky for you," said the doctor. "This man's dead." He picked up the brandy bottle, sniffed at it. "Off-hand I can't say what's in this. It's some sort of violent poison mixed with morphine to conceal its taste and effect."

"Good God!" the desk clerk said, staring hard at Carson. "That was—meant for you!"

"I know," Carson said tightly.

CHAPTER TEN

Return From Death

IN the dusk the pine trees were straight and slim like tall sentinels standing at rigid attention, whispering together very softly as the wind stirred their branches. Through them Carson could see the flat, metallic blue sheen of the lake.

He walked forward very quietly, his feet noiseless on the thick, springy carpet of pine needles. According to the station attendant where he had last purchased gas, Forgan's cabin was somewhere near at this end of the lake. Carson had driven up, alone, in a rented car. He had parked it back a mile on the road.

He came out at the end of a steep little gully and saw the sharp peak of a gabled roof on the flat below. He stood there for awhile, concealed in the brush, watching. There was no smoke coming from the chimney, no signs of life anywhere.

Carson stepped forward quietly. His right hand was in his coat pocket, gripping the butt of the snub-nosed revolver he had taken from Bill's body.

He came up to the back door of the cottage and cautiously tried the latch. The door was unlocked. Carson pushed it back a little at a time. He was looking into the shadowed dimness of a long, low-raftered kitchen, and then a voice said:

"Come right in, Carson."

It was Mardrigi. It was Mardrigi,

alive, not dead. Mardrigi, sitting in the corner behind a big wooden table and grinning in his darkly sinister way. His right elbow was resting on the table top, and his right hand held a .45 automatic centered on Carson's chest.

Carson drew a deep breath and stepped slowly into the kitchen.

"Kinda surprised, ain't you?" Mardrigi inquired sarcastically. "Kinda surprised to see me jumpin' out of my grave and runnin' around on the loose."

"How did you escape from the prison?" Carson asked levelly.

"Would you like to know, now?" Mardrigi asked. "Would you? Well, I might as well tell you, because you ain't gonna be tellin' anybody else. Your pal, Forgan, got me out. Do you wanta know why, Carson?"

"Yes," Carson said.

"All right, I'll tell you. Because I knew something about him. You remember a guy named Junk Smith? Yeah, you do. He's the guy that killed Denham, and Denham was the guy they almost fried you for murderin'. Well, who do you suppose hired Junk Smith to biff Denham? Why, it was our old pal Forgan again. That's how he figured out who done the killin' so easy. You see, you was in jail for the murder, and that was okay with Forgan until he found out that Bartlett was gonna beat Forgan's candidate for governor on the big reputation Bartlett made convicting you. Forgan decided to put the bee on that. He was a great schemer, Forgan was. He hired a couple of tough babies to work on Junk Smith. They beat him up and got a confession out of him, and then they finished him off so he wouldn't talk any more."

MARDRIGI paused to wink knowingly at Carson. "Get it? The old double-x, and very neat, too. Denham was

dead, Junk Smith was dead, and Bartlett's big reputation for convicting you bounced right back and hit him in the eye. Oh, that Forgan was a smartie! Only, there was me. I knew all about the whole business, because Junk Smith was my pal, and he told me. And I told Forgan he'd better get me out of the big house, or I'd get him in there. He got me out."

"And then you killed him," Carson said tonelessly.

"Yeah, the damned fool," Mardrigi said. "I went to see him and told him I'd have to get some heavy dough to get out of the country. He got tough about it and pulled a gun on me, so I let him have it. That was a bad spot for me. I was hidin' in the library when the cop busted down the front door. I thought I was gonna have to cook his goose, too, only about then you and the dame started your wrestlin' match in the kitchen. The cop went past the library, and I walked out the front door. You saved me!"

Mardrigi suddenly laughed sneeringly.

Carson whirled sideways against the wall, jerking at the snub-nosed revolver in his coat pocket. Mardrigi's .45 exploded with a *wham* that shook the walls of the cabin. Carson felt the bullet, high up on his left side, like a great club smashing him. He slammed backwards into the wall with a breathless jar.

And then the revolver was up in his hand, and he felt the butt jar back against his palm as he pulled the trigger again and again.

A white hot iron touched Carson along the side of his head, and everything went very dark in front of his eyes suddenly. He was falling, and as he fell he could see, very dimly, that Mardrigi was falling, too, sliding down over the table.

Carson lay there on the floor, and the room seemed very still.

Then a door creaked very softly, and after awhile feet shuffled a little. The feet came slowly and cautiously across the room, stopped beside Mardrigi for a moment, then started for Carson.

Carson made a tremendous effort and sat up, leveling the revolver.

"Hello, doctor," he said thickly.

It was Symonds, the prison physician. He stood there, staring down at Carson, a bent, thin little figure with his spectacles awry and his pale face twisted horribly.

"I'm going to kill you, Symonds," Carson said.

Symonds screamed in terror. "No! No, no! In God's name, no!"

Carson braced himself against the wall.

"You're the one who's been at the bottom of all this. Forgan hired you to fake that appendix business, pretend Mardrigi had died of the operation, and then smuggled him out of prison."

"I had to!" Symonds gasped frantically. "Forgan made me! Don't shoot, Carson! For God's sake, listen—"

"You found out from Mardrigi about the Denham murder, and it was your idea to blackmail Forgan for that. But you knew he'd never pay blackmail as long as I was alive. All he would have to do would be to have me say I killed Denham. It wouldn't hurt me any. I'd already been tried and convicted and pardoned. I couldn't be tried again for the same thing. But if I was dead, Forgan couldn't rely on me. So you tried to shoot me outside the prison, and you fixed up that poisoned bottle of brandy."

"No! No, Carson! I swear—"

The hammer of Carson's snub-nosed revolver clicked softly.

Symond's voice was a terrorized croak. "Yes! I did it! But, Carson, listen to me! You want to save that girl! I'll confess! I'll tell everything about Forgan's murder! I swear I will! She'll go free!

Don't shoot, Carson! There's a telephone here! I'll call the police and tell them everything! Carson! Please—"

"Find the telephone," Carson said.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Escape to Life

THE taxi ground to a stop, and Carson got stiffly out of it. His wounded shoulder was in a cast now. It felt clumsy, unwieldy, and it ached with a dull throb that seemed to be an echo of the throb in his bandaged head.

A red-cap came up.

"Carry your bags, sir?"

Carson nodded.

"Yes, I'm going out on the Limited. Drawing room A, car seventy-three."

"She leaves in five minutes, sir."

Carson nodded again. He fumbled in his pocket, paid the taxi driver. He turned around, and then a voice said softly:

"Running away?"

It was Paula Bartlett. She was standing close to him, staring up into his face, smiling a little.

"Yes," Carson said thickly.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because I couldn't stand it any longer," Carson said. "I couldn't stand being near you when you feel the way you do about me."

"Does it make you feel so badly to have me love you?"

"Love?" Carson repeated numbly.

"Love—me?" Suddenly the whole world seemed to brighten up before his eyes, and all the ache and weariness was gone.

"You mean—"

"I mean we'll have to hurry if we catch that train," Paula Bartlett said. "Come on!" She seized his right hand in both hers and held it tight.

TOAST TO DEATH

By **WYATT BLASSINGAME**

(Author of "Death Waits in the Swamp," etc.)

Booze Bottle was only a drunken reporter—but he wrote his greatest story with his life's blood.



Booze Bottle swayed drunkenly. "A toast!" he muttered.

IN THE musty newspaper library, stretched on an old leather sofa and snoring softly was a tall, lean man of about twenty-eight. His face was sharp, with clean cut features, a high forehead, thin, sensitive nostrils. The odor of liquor was heavy about him.

When Bill Jorgens punched the sleeper's shoulder the man muttered, "Oh, to hell with it," and turned away. Jorgens shook him again.

"All right," the man said finally. "All right. You're not going to hang me out

with the wash."

He ran a lean hand through disordered, straight black hair and stood up. There were lines of dissipation under his eyes and the whites were bloodshot. It had been more than twenty-four hours since he shaved. His clothes were baggy; yet about the whole man there was something aristocratic, and attractive, and intelligent. A brilliant man who hadn't made the best of his talents.

"The Chief wants you," Jorgens said. "In a hurry."

The man said, "All right." He stumbled out of the door.

The night editor, green eyeshade shadowing his face, watched Booze Bottle Baker enter the newsroom. He said, "Lieut. Powell called from headquarters. There's something strange breaking down there and he wants you."

Baker rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand, brushed ineffectually at his hair.

"What is it?"

The clock on the far wall showed ten after two.

"I don't know." The night editor stuck a pipe between his teeth, struck a match, and pulled deeply until the bowl was glowing. "It's your last job on this paper, Booze Bottle," he said, speaking around the pipe stem.

Baker straightened.

"What do you mean? You firing me?"

"Not exactly." The night editor's eyes peered from under the shade. "Why do you stay in this town? What keeps you here? You could make four times the money you are making in this dump."

Baker said flatly:

"I kind of like it here. And I don't have to work hard."

"Well, you're working hard from now on," the older man said. "I've got you a job with the *Star* in New York. You'll start at eighty a week and you'll double it within a year. You've got too damn much ability to rot in this little burg. This is your last job for us, Booze Bottle."

A sweet bitterness surged through Baker, contracting his muscles, clogging his throat. With the back of his hand he rubbed at his eyes again. Then the emotion was gone. He said:

"Thanks, Chief. I appreciate what you've done. But I can't take that job in New York."

Baker went down the rickety wooden stairs and stepped out onto South Lawrence Street. For a moment he stood

gulping the cool air. Then he walked to a small roadster, took a whisky flask from the pocket and uncorked it.

For ten seconds Baker held the flask at the height of his eyes and looked at it. He said, very quietly, "I don't remember just when I first took to you, but it's too late to stop now—even if I had a reason. And—" he smiled crookedly—"I don't have any reason."

The door of the police station, when Baker arrived, was open against the spring heat. Sergt. Murphy looked up from his *French Frolics* as the reporter entered.

"Hello, Booze Bottle," he said. "Powell's in his office. He wants to see you."

"Thanks." Baker went down the corridor partitioned off by sections of beaver board into private offices.

Police Lieut. James Powell was no older than Baker. He was not as tall, but he was heavier in the shoulders and waist. His face was pleasant, square-cut, determined. He was obviously an honest, hard-working young man destined to succeed.

Now his expression was drawn, his blue eyes deadly serious, almost afraid. "Thank God, you've come," he said as Baker entered. "I need you."

Baker said, "You generally do, if the case is important. What's wrong now?"

Powell bit his lips, slumped in the chair behind his desk. Slowly his eyes met those of the reporter.

"It's Arthur," he said. "It's Jane's brother. And it's going to kill Jane."

Baker's body stiffened. He seemed to grow taller, to stretch until his wrinkled clothes pulled tight around him. The circles showed plainly under his dark eyes. His mouth, ringed by the stubble of beard, was a straight line. Twice he had to swallow before he could speak.

"What's wrong? What's going to hurt Jane?"

Powell's hands clenched. "Arthur's in trouble. Murder. And it's my case.

Arthur says he's not guilty, but there's too much proof. It's going to be bad enough on Jane to have her brother—a murderer, but—"

Baker said flatly, "But if her fiance has to be the man who convicts her brother, it'll be worse. Is that it?"

"Yes." The policeman's face was grey with pain. "Arthur will always come between us. We're to be married next month, but we couldn't do it . . . We couldn't ever be happy if I sent her brother to the chair."

In the shadow Baker's face showed only as a stubble of beard. His breathing was heavy, his hands clenched at his sides.

"What am I supposed to do about it?"

Powell stood up suddenly, leaned across the desk and caught Baker by the coat.

"You've got to help me. You've solved cases for us before, lots of them. Cases nobody else could touch. And you've always given me the credit. I don't know why—unless it's Jane. But I know you are more responsible for my promotions than I am. And you've got to help me again. You've got to solve this case—and take the credit for it."

"You mean," Baker's voice was barely above a whisper and it sounded as though something in his throat were choking him, "you mean, you want me to get the proof that Jane's brother is a murderer—and let Jane know I did it."

"You don't need to get any proof," Powell said. "We've got enough on him now. But I want you to get all the details."

"What if he's not guilty? Doesn't he claim he's not?"

"Yes, but—"

"Tell me about it."

husband had been murdered. At twenty minutes after one Arthur Royce had been picked up with blood on his clothes and a gun in his pocket from which one shell had been fired.

There had been a poker game at the Duncan home that night with Mr. and Mrs. Duncan, Arthur Royce, and two other men. Arthur had lost heavily. The game broke up about midnight. Later someone had called Mr. Duncan and he'd gone downstairs. There had been the sound of a shot.

"All I want you to do is get the confession from him," Powell said. "My men picked him up. I won't have to testify if you'll get the confession."

Baker stayed rigid in the shadows. "What's Arthur's story?"

"The poorest I ever heard. He claims he went to Johnny Rogers' saloon and had a few drinks after the game broke up. He says he can't remember what happened after that until we picked him up. But he swears he didn't kill Duncan. He says he doesn't know where the gun came from. There wasn't anyone else in the bar with him."

"Who were the other men in the game? What about them?"

"Ed Peters and Philip Montgomery. They are both down here. I had my men get them and Mrs. Duncan too. Their stories all hold water."

Baker took the flask from his inside coat pocket and began to unscrew the top. "Let me talk to them," he said.

Powell said, "Just a minute." He went out of the office.

Baker took a short drink from the flask, then rested it on Powell's desk. His eyes were wide and terrible, the bloodshot lines showing crimson. His lips were parted now, his breathing heavy.

IT WAS an open-and-shut case. At five minutes after one Mrs. Pete Duncan had shouted over the telephone that her

Jane Royce had always said she wanted a man who accomplished things. She had

taken a friendly interest in Baker's drinking and tried to make him look for better jobs. But Booze Bottle had always smiled and shook his head. What was the use? The girl was already in love with James Powell. And Baker knew that he would never leave whisky alone.

Or would he, if he had Jane to help him? He loved her with the passionate devotion of a man who has but one thing in his life to worship; and he had never mentioned that love to her. He had always given Powell the credit for cases he had broken because Jane loved the policeman and wanted him to get ahead. Baker had been glad to help Powell because in doing so he helped Jane. But now if he could save her brother, she'd be grateful to him. She'd realize it was his intelligence back of Powell's work. He'd take that job in New York, quit drinking. . . .

But could he quit drinking? Would he be happy if he did? To refuse Powell at this point would be almost like double crossing him. But the policeman wanted him, Booze Bottle, to take the blame for sending Jane's brother to the chair. Jane would never speak to him after that.

And what of it? A drunken newspaper man. . . . But if he make Powell convict her brother, and he took the job in New York. . . .

THE door behind him opened. Powell said, "Here they are."

Baker lifted his flask, sipped at it, screwed the cap on and put it in his pocket. Then he turned to look at the persons who had entered.

He knew Philip Montgomery, one of the city's younger attorneys and blue bloods. He was blond, good looking but weak. His mouth was full, his chin lacked strength. He said:

"Hello, Booze Bottle. Have you joined the police?"

"I'm on the prohibition squad," Baker

said. He looked at the other man.

Ed Peters was in his late thirties. He was short, but stockily built. His face was cut in hard, bold lines, his mouth slightly crooked and sarcastic. Baker knew of him although they had never met; a professional gambler who took too many chances.

Mrs. Duncan was a beauty. She had red hair, sensuous lips and bold eyes. She looked Booze Bottle over calmly, then turned to Lieut. Powell.

"How much longer do we have to stay here? It's getting late."

"Just a few more questions," the lieutenant said.

"Well, hurry."

Baker said, "Handle the lady gently. Lieutenant. She's hysterical with grief over the death of her husband."

Peters made a short movement, and stopped himself. Montgomery laughed.

"You don't have to worry," he said. "I don't think Ida's broken-hearted."

Sudden fear showed in the woman's face. Her lips trembled, then went firm again.

"I didn't like my husband," she said flatly. "But I didn't kill him. You know that Arthur Royce killed him. What are you holding us for?"

"Why should Royce have killed him?"

For a moment no one answered. Montgomery swallowed and smiled weakly.

"The cops already know. Arthur owed Duncan a lot of money. Tonight he lost a lot more. He and Duncan had a fight before Arthur left. Arthur promised to get him."

Baker said, "How did you come out in the game, Philip?"

The lawyer tensed. His face went pale. He gulped, said:

"I—I lost a bit."

"How much?"

"A—a thousand dollars."

"Could you afford that?"

Montgomery's lips trembled, then pulled tight. He snapped:

"It's none of your damned business! I could afford it if I had to."

"Okay," Baker said. He looked at Peters. "And you?"

"I won about three hundred. Mrs. Duncan won a little, not much."

Lieutenant Powell interrupted.

"There's no need to ask about where they went after the game broke up. Mr. Montgomery and Mr. Peters went home to bed, they say. They've no proof but both were in bed when I sent for them."

Baker said, "All right. Let 'em go."

He turned toward the door, stopped and snapped his fingers.

"I want to use the phone in the next office," he said rapidly. "There aren't many telephone girls on at this time of the night and a good reporter always keeps in touch with them. I've got an idea."

When the operator answered he said, "Hello, baby. Did anyone call Cedar 4327 between midnight and one o'clock?"

She said, "I'm not a baby and I don't know whether anybody called that number or not. I don't know whose it is and wouldn't pay any attention."

Baker had never seen this girl, but he talked to her every night, had sent her flowers once when he learned she was ill. She had done him favors before.

He said, "Good! Do you know who made the call, baby?"

She said;

"I told you I'm not a baby and I don't know if anybody called."

"I wish you knew who it was. But what did he say?"

"Are you crazy?" the girl asked. "What are you talking about?"

"Thanks a lot!" Baker said. "I can make him squeal. You've probably saved a life tonight."

He hung up, scribbled a brief note to the Lieutenant and left it lying on the desk. Then he went out into the corridor.

Montgomery and Mrs. Duncan had already gone. Peters was standing at the front talking to a detective. Powell said, "Well?"

"Look around for yourself," Baker said. "You ought to do some work."

JOHNNY ROGERS' Bar was on Felder Avenue beyond a group of close packed apartment houses. The blocks in this part of the city are more than an eighth of a mile long, the street lights far apart. Booze Bottle Baker drove through the darkness with his body hunched tight over the wheel, his muscles corded.

The liquor flask in his pocket weighed heavily against his ribs. He'd probably wish it was a gun before long. Hell, he was a reporter, not a cop. He didn't carry a gun.

He was in the middle of the apartment house group when it happened.

He saw the car shoot at him out of a dark alley on the left. It whipped alongside, running without lights. Only the reflection of his own dash lights showed the gleaming gun barrel.

Baker jerked the steering wheel to the right, stabbed on the brakes. The gun, not three yards away, roared. Something hot skidded across his cheek. Then he was out of the roadster, running. A dark alley showed up between the apartment houses. He plunged into it. Ten yards and he struck a brick wall head on. The world seemed to spin dizzily.

He had run into a blind alley. He knew that while he lay, stunned, unable to move. There was blood on his face and he couldn't tell if it was from the bullet or where he had struck the wall.

And then he heard the steps. The man who had tried to kill him was coming down the alley!

Booze Bottle tried to get to his feet, and couldn't. He knew that he ought to get up, ought to find some way of escape, but his muscles refused to answer the frantic call of his brain. And if he did manage to get up, what escape was there? A blind alley.

The steps came on, closer, cautious. Abruptly a white cone of light prodded the darkness, swung from side to side. The killer looking for him with a flashlight! The light came closer, swinging. He could see the gleam of the revolver muzzle. He could hear the man's heavy breathing.

And suddenly he was almost glad. In a queer clairvoyance he knew that he would never have made Jane happy. She loved Lieut. Powell. That was the man for her. "Even if I could live," Baker thought, "I'd never give up drinking."

Then the cone of light fell on him.

A man said, "You asked for it, and you're getting it. You're too damn smart for a reporter. But you forgot about those walls at police headquarters. I heard you talking to the telephone operator."

The gun flamed.

Baker felt the bullet strike, twisting him, knocking him backward. Then fluid was running down across his belly.

But a strange thing happened. He did not lose consciousness. Like a man in a trance he watched the dark figure of the gunman sway, lean forward. He watched the gun slide from his hand, the flashlight fall. The man went over on his face.

Lieut. Powell came sprinting down the alley. "Did he get you, Booze Bottle?"

Booze Bottle was on his knees by now. He said, "No. Your shot got him an instant before he fired and knocked him sideways. His bullet hit me glancing, on my flask, damn him. I've got liquor all over the outside of my belly, but none inside. Do you have a bottle?"

BAKER leaned his right arm on the bar and looked at Powell. "If Arthur's story was true then he'd been doped and the evidence planted on him. If he'd been doped he got it in his liquor at Johnny Rogers. That was the only chance. If he got it there the bartender had given it to him, because there was no one else there to do it. And if the bartender slipped it to him, somebody had phoned the instructions since the barkeep had no reason for doing it."

Powell said, "Ed Peters told us his reason before he died. He and Mrs. Duncan were in love. He wanted the old man out of the way."

"So I pulled that bluff telephone call," Baker said. "He figured no one but me knew about the bartender and he meant to knock me off. I knew he'd try that or try to get the bartender so I left the note for you to watch both of us."

Baker tapped his glass on the bar, "Fill it up, Mike." He turned to Powell. "That should make you and Jane solid—if you needed any thing. But she loves you enough anyway."

"You mean . . ." Powell said slowly.

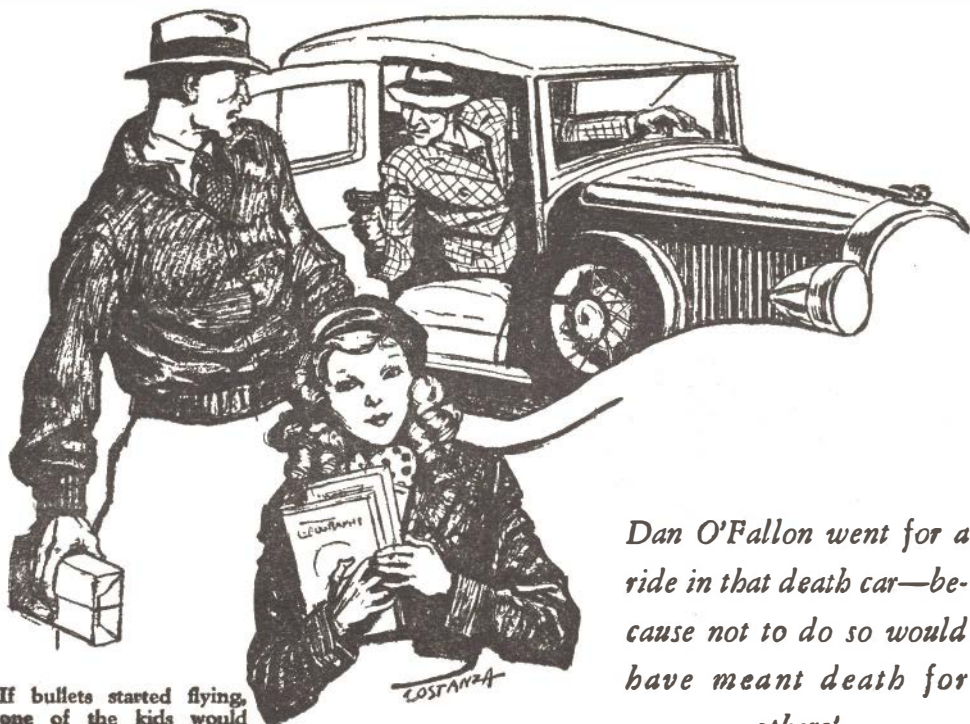
Baker said, "Sure. I'm nothing but a whisky head. The paper would fire me if they caught me messing too much with the police. You just keep quiet. I've already written a story about how you figured out the case."

The policeman took Baker's hand, hard. There were tears in his eyes. "And what do I do for you?" he asked huskily.

Baker said curtly, "Buy me a new flask." He gulped the whisky before him, turned suddenly and walked out of the saloon.

Looking after him Powell noticed that the reporter's hands were tight clenched and there was an unusual quiver to his shoulders.

FLATFOOT BREED



If bullets started flying, one of the kids would certainly be hit!

Dan O'Fallon went for a ride in that death car—because not to do so would have meant death for others!

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

(Author of "Death Wears a Mask," etc.)

DETEKTIVE Frank Fallon crouched in the dank cellar's tar-barrel murk.

His eyes smarted, trying to make out the staircase he knew to be somewhere in front of him, and his palm ached with the grind of the gun-butt on which it was clenched.

Overhead, heavy feet thumped dully on a tenement hallway's uncarpeted flooring. Then there was muffled sound of knuckles rapping on door-wood and the unintelligible rumble of a hoarse voice.

Frank Fallon's spine prickled. Hell was going to break loose in a second. That was John Forbes, calling on Matches Lessagno and Tony Gato to come out of their hide-out in the janitor's flat from which the stairs descended. Ike Levy was at the foot of the firescape outside. The three detectives had the three rat-holes stopped,

but if the dope-sellers made a break there would be only one cop to the two of them, whichever way they tried to get out.

Forbes rapped again. Nothing happened. Maybe the stoolie had lied. Maybe Matches had been warned, again, and had flown the coop, in spite of the fact that Frank and Ike and John had kept the tip to themselves. Frank Fallon almost hoped that was so. Lessagno and Gato were vicious killers. Cop-killers.

Wood scraped against wood. Abruptly a grey oblong cut through the unseen ceiling. It was blotted by a shapeless, Stygian form that slid soundless down the still invisible staircase. Another followed. A pulse throbbed in Frank Fallon's temples.

"Put 'em up," he growled. "I've got you covered." Jumped sideways.

Someone grunted—and orange-red jets spat out of the darkness. Fallon heard lead slash the spot where he'd been. His own gat jumped in his hand, belching flame. The basement was filled with thunder, was laced with fiery, lethal streaks. Wood-crash, splintering sharply through the gunfire tumult, told that Forbes was smashing down the flat door.

Frank Fallon kept moving as he fired. The furnace, toward the back, could shelter him. But that would give the thugs a clear way to the front exit. He stayed out in the open where there was no protection.

A gurgling scream heralded a hit. A pellet gonged on an iron column. Ricocheting lead seared the detective's wrist, jolted his gat out of it.

He went down on a knee to grope for the clattering weapon with his left. Red fire knifed his shoulder. The darkness exploded into a monstrous white blaze in his skull.

DAN FALLON, big and raw-boned and ungainly in the blue serge suit he wore on Sundays and holidays, leaned back in a creaking kitchen chair. He was dog-tired. Twice as tired than as if he had been wrestling crates all day across the loading platform at Universal Drug's warehouse. Tired and kind of empty inside, like a sucked orange. The only other time he had ever felt anything like this was after he had finished the written examination down at Police Headquarters for which he had studied so hard, and for which Frank had drilled him every night.

Today too, he had been down at Headquarters. Not to take an examination. To stand in a high-arched lobby and stare at a name new-cut in a cold marble slab. To read it again and again. FRANK FALLON, II. To read the gilt letters at the head of the list, DEAD WITH HONOR, and to read that other name near the top

of the list. FRANK FALLON. That one had been carved long ago, longer ago than Dan could remember.

But she could remember, the tiny, shrivelled woman who had stood straight and brave under that slab while the Mayor himself pinned a medal on the black satin of her mourning. She could remember when that first FRANK FALLON had been white with newness, and another Mayor had pinned another medal on her mourning.

Mom was inside now. Asleep. At least Dan hoped she was asleep.

There was a knock at the hall door. Dan got to his feet, lumbered across to it. It was a postman who had knocked and he thrust a long, official-looking envelope at Dan.

"Special delivery," he said. "Sign here."

Dan looked at the envelope the postman had given him. It was shaking a little in his hamlike red hand. His name was typewritten on it, and 220 Morris Street. In the corner was printed, "City of New York, Police Department, 240 Centre Street, New York." Dan was afraid to open the letter. He was afraid it would say, "Failed."

It didn't say failed. It said PASSED. It said, "Standing on List of Police Eligibles—67!" Dan's blood boiled with elation. A shout tore at his throat. He didn't yell because that would wake Mom, but he danced a silent, clumsy jig.

A narrow slip jolted out of the envelope, scaled to the floor. Dan stopped his bear-dance, picked up the paper. The writing on it was in pencil;

Dan: I'm sending this to you Special Delivery because it will mean more getting to you today. There will be a hundred appointments next week and you are sure to be included.

If your father, alongside of whom I pounded beat twenty years ago, were alive he would be very proud. He was a real cop,

and so was your brother. Remember that you are a Fallon. And that Matches Les-sagno is still at liberty.

Best wishes.

RICHARD ROURKE,
Inspector of Police.

Gosh! This would make Mom feel better if she knew it. He could hardly wait to tell her. Maybe she wasn't asleep. Dan tiptoed into a narrow passage, reached a bedroom door, opened it softly. Very softly—

Mary Fallon wasn't asleep. She wasn't even lying down. She was kneeling alongside her bed, and her hands were together, palm to palm, and her eyes were closed so that she did not see her son peering in.

She was speaking, in a low, rapt tone. She was talking familiarly to One Who to her was a living, palpable Presence. "Dear God," she was saying. "I know You won't do it. I know You won't let them take my baby from me. It was Your will that the others should go. Because You made them fine and noble and brave so that when they were given a trust they carried it out even though it meant death to do so. But Danny's all I have left. I couldn't bear it to see him swaggering out in the blue and the brass, and to fear every minute, every second that he is not in my sight that the next time I see him he will be bloody and lifeless. Every minute would be a separate, terrible agony. Don't let him get on the Force. Make them flunk him...."

Dan Fallon didn't hear any more. He had closed the door softly as he had opened it and he was stumbling back to the kitchen. The life was out of him, and the joy. He moved gropingly, like an old, old man.

There was a bottle of ink, a pen, and paper in the dish closet. Dan got them out. He sat down at the table, pushed back the red-checked cloth, and started writing.

Police Department, New York City.

Gentlemen: Due to circumstances beyond my control I must request that you strike my name from the police eligible list.

Respectfully,
DANIEL FALLON.

He folded the letter, carefully, neatly. There wasn't any envelope. He'd get one at lunch time and mail the letter then. If he put it in the pocket of the jacket he wore to work he would be sure not to forget it. No danger of that.

THE noon whistles blew, but Dan Fallon was unloading a truckload of drugs and it looked like rain. In about ten minutes he slid the last jute bag off his shoulder, in the dim safety of the receiving floor, turned to get his jacket and go out to lunch. Not to lunch. He didn't feel like eating. To get an envelope and a stamp and—

"Fallon!" Roger Stanley was calling him from the doorway to the office. "Come here a minute, please." The superannuated shipping clerk had a package in his hand, about the size of a candy box. It was tied with bright red whipcord that was fastened with a metal seal. That meant it contained narcotics, Dan knew. Morphine or cocaine.

"What the blue blazes do you want?" he growled, pounding up to Stanley.

The old man pursed fleshless lips.

"Will you do me a favor? The Regal Sanitarium just 'phoned for this stuff. They need it in a hurry, for some emergency operation, and the special messenger is out. I can't trust the kids that are here. I'll see you get extra time if you'll hustle it over. Regal's at Morris Street and—"

"Yeah. I know. Next door to where I live. Give me it." The package was heavier in his hand than he had expected.

"Be sure to get the signed narcotic order. It's imp—"

"All right." Dan's rejoinder cut off

the high-pitched, querulous voice that was rasping nerves he never knew he had. He jolted stiff-legged out to the street. The walk would do him good. It was only about ten blocks.

Morris Street was bustling with kids hurrying back to school. Dan Fallon crossed a debris-strewn gutter to the two-hundred block.

"Danny! What are you doing here?"

He stopped, looked up to the first floor window of the tenement.

"Hello, Mom."

The little old lady was leaning out of the window and her faded eyes were anxious, deep-sunk in a seamed, yellow-grey face.

"I'm not fired, if that's what you're thinking." He grinned reassuringly. "I'm just taking this over to the Sanitarium." He pulled the red-tied package out of the pocket where he'd shoved it. "It's narcotics. Dope. Bet a junk-peddler would give a couple of grand for what's in here."

She'd get a kick out of knowing how much he was trusted.

"Oh, Danny! Isn't it dangerous?"

He laughed. "On Morris Street, Mom? Listen, you stay there and I'll chin a minute with you on my way back. They're in a hurry for this and I got to get it to them."

Dan turned away, started off. A coupé slid along the curb. Stopped just ahead of him. Its door opened across his path. A low voice said, "Get in here. *Pronto!*"

Metal glinted from the dim interior of the little car, blued metal of an automatic snouting at him. A hatchet-sharp face was vague above it.

"Step on it. Or I'll let you have it." Muscles tightened in Dan's thighs, his biceps. A little girl laughed, right behind him, reminding him that the sidewalk was crowded with youngsters. *If bullets started flying one of them would be sure to be hit.*

"All right," Dan Fallon said, smoothly.

"Keep your shirt on." The running-board swayed under the pressure of his foot and then he was inside the coupé, on the leather seat. The iron jabbed into his side.

"Close the door."

Fallon reached out to obey. The motion swung him so that he looked up, straight at the window out of which Mom had leaned. She was still there. Her hand was lifted and there was something in it. Something gold.

The car leaped into motion, twisted around a corner. Shot along a sleazy, tenement-bordered block and twisted again. The driver was laying a zigzag trail the cops couldn't follow even if Mom could get word to them. She couldn't—not word that would do any good. Dan didn't have to see them to know the license plates were so covered with mud Mom couldn't have read them.

He was on his own, alone with the gun and the killer who held it. Not alone. Two phantoms rode with Dan Fallon. Two invisible wraiths evoked by the little disk on which the sun had flashed yellow in a shriveled, toil-roughened hand.

The gat was a dull, thrusting pain against his ribs. "Shove that package in the door-pocket," the man lipped. Dan did as he was told. The fox-faced one chuckled, gloatingly. "Nice of Universal Drug to send it to me by special messenger."

"You—you knew it was coming?" The coupé bumped over torn-up paving, slewed into Sixth Avenue. It was going uptown.

"Why the hell shouldn't I know? Didn't I 'phone for it."

That made Dan feel better, just a little. It hadn't been his dumb bragging to Mom, then, that had gotten him into this mess. His damn-fool yelling to give her a kick out of how much he was trusted.

Trusted! That was a laugh! Hell of a guy he was to trust with anything. Good

thing he wasn't going to be a cop. *Was he going to be anything, after this?*

The fellow was driving one-handed as dextrously as another could with two. He was stopping at red lights, wasn't going too fast. He wasn't taking any chances on a traffic cop's getting too nosy. The wheel-rim plucked at the cuff of his glove and his captive saw a puckered scar, braceleting white a swarthy wrist.

A pulse throbbed in Dan's temple.

"We don't know his mug, but he's marked by a match-burn on his wrist."

Frank's voice, from the grave, whispering in his ear. This was Matches Lessagno!

The coupé went under the El at Fifty-Third Street, and Central Park wasn't far ahead. There were deserted by-roads in there where Lessagno could. . . .

"Your a lucky stiff," Matches remarked. "If I didn't have to get the stuff tuh the two-ten train at Grand Central I'd take you out o' town—an' leave you there."

Lessagno wasn't going to kill him! He was going to let him go!

At Fifty-Seventh Street a red light turned to green. The car started to slide past a traffic cop, the last one before the Park. . . .

A sunbeam, reflected from the Lord alone knew what, made a dancing, golden disk on Dan Fallon's breast. Vanished. . . .

Dan slewed around, flailed a fist for the pointed, grim jaw alongside him. Something popped flatly. Anguish knifed Dan's belly. His knuckles landed, weakly. Red-hot pain burned up from his middle to his chest, his brain. His arms were around Lessagno. The thin frame he held on to jerked. The popping noise sounded again and new, fierce torture sliced through Dan. The sunlight faded. Everything was in a topsy-turvy flurry. Someone shouted. Blue shoulders, brass buttons, hung in the whirling dimness—

THE sheets were cool against Dan Fallon's thighs and his insides didn't hurt too much. He opened his eyes to the lined, austere white of a hospital room.

Someone was moving, to his right. He rolled eyeballs in that direction and he saw Mom, bent and small and feeble. She was sitting on a chair and on a small table alongside of her were a little pile of coins, a wallet, a handkerchief. The things that had been in Dan's work-jacket. There was a paper in her hand and she was reading it. A paper that had been neatly folded. . . .

Too bad she had found it! He had wanted her to think he had flunked—

"He's a fine boy, Mrs. Fallon." Dan couldn't see the man who spoke but he knew the voice. He had heard it at Frank's funeral. It was Inspector Rourke.

"He's got the blood of his father and brother in him," the voice went on. "The blood and the backbone. We got it out of Lessagno that the boy knew he wasn't going to be killed. Dan took the awful chance he did just because it was his duty to protect the narcotics. It's men like him that's the life of the Force."

"He's my life too." Mom looked up from the letter and her face was grey, the grey, almost, of Death. "All I have left—" It was as if she argued with the grizzled veteran, and he not realizing it. No. She was looking at someone only she could see. "My—our youngest—"

"It's the spirit of the Fallons he has." The Inspector was an old man and garrulous. "The courage to do his duty no matter what the odds. He belongs to the Force. It's his birthright."

"Mom!" Dan pleaded. "Give it to him."

"His birthright," she whispered. Her fingers tightened on the letter. She was going to hand it to the Inspector! She was— *The paper tore across and across.* Many times. The bits of white fluttered like snow to the black cloth across her lap.



AND
SENELL

There are all kinds of crooks, but none worse or lower than the ones into whose hands fell Winnie Fay. And though Tiger Murray, internationally famous detective, was searching for her through hell's by-ways, he knew that the closer he got to her, the nearer she was to death!

PPRIVATE Operative Murray sidestepped a puddle on the sidewalk. Coincident with the move, he heard a soft, tearing sound and saw molten metal splashing down from a deep new pock-mark in the stone of the office building.

Private Operative Murray moved, and moved fast. He was two normal jumps from the office building entrance. He



made it in one jump and darted inside. There, he looked at his ripped coat and cursed.

Murray knew death when he heard it, felt it, and saw its balked results. He had just missed death, by about eight inches, when he chanced to sidestep the puddle.

The nasty, soft, tearing noise of a high-powered rifle shell is distinctive. Murray

SATAN TAKES A PICTURE

By **PAUL ERNST**

(Author of "His Money's Worth," etc.)

*A Stirring, Emotional Novelette
of a Grim Battle With the Lowest
of all Crooks.*



Murray raised his gun.

had heard it often enough not to mistake it. Some one had shot at him from across the downtown street—and had almost got him.

"The son of a son," Murray said, staring out the building door and at the enigmatic rows of windows across the street. His blue-green eyes were narrowed and his long jaw was set, with the muscles a little white along it. He took a step back toward the door, then shrugged.

If he went across the street he knew what he'd find: A vacant office somewhere in line with this building entrance; a few cigarette stubs; a cartridge shell. The man who had fired at him would be long since gone—to try again another day.

Resignedly, Murray went to the elevators and up to his office on the sixth floor. He swung into his anteroom, six feet one, deceptively slender, deceptively well-tailored, and threw his tan felt hat at a hatrack beside a desk at which sat a girl with reddish-brown hair, a disapproving frown, and deep brown eyes. They were guileless eyes; but guileless in appearance only. Murray had known those eyes when their owner was a subtle tool of a most efficient jewel-pinching gang.

"Tige!" the girl exclaimed.

"What's the matter?" said Murray.

"Your coat!"

Murray stared at the long rip in his coat just under the left armpit. He had raised his arm a little when he sidestepped the blessed puddle.

"I know, damn it," he said. "This suit's practically brand new, too."

"What happened?" asked Winnie Fay, Murray's secretary since her jewel-purloining days.

Murray rubbed his nose.

"Have I put the clamps on any one lately who might turn nasty in his desire for good red vengeance, Winnie?"

"Only several dozen in the last year. Tige, what did happen?"

"Some gentleman with a very good pea-gun propped himself in some window across the street, and blew on me as I started to enter this building doorway. He ripped my suit, left a neat pit in the elegant cut-marble lintel, and no doubt stole angrily away."

"My God—you might have got killed!"

"I wish you'd hunt the gentleman up and tell him that," Murray said plaintively. "I don't want to seem unreasonable, but—"

"Tige, this kind of put it out of my mind, but you have a client in your office."

"New or old?"

"New."

"Male or female?"

"Female."

"Good looking?"

"Go to the dickens!" said Winnie.

"Okay. So she is good looking. Goodbye now."

Murray went to the other door of the anteroom and opened it. The door was double, as were the walls. The office was well sound-proofed; people screamed in here sometimes.

SITTING in the red-leather visitor's chair beside a desk which was pretty ornate for a humble private detective, was a woman of twenty-nine or thirty, with distressed blue eyes, a face whose pallor could not hide its piquancy, and a round, attractive chin that began to quiver as soon as Murray came in.

Murray hastened into routine.

"I'm Tiger Murray," he said, quickly sitting down at his desk and looking distant and professional to stem the impending flow of tears.

The formula worked as it usually did.

"Tiger! Tiger . . . Murray? That's a nickname?"

"No, my real name is Tiger. My old man had a fond notion that I might be a prize

fighter. So he named me accordingly. And I am talking to—?"

"Marcia Renier," the woman said, with her chin beginning to tremble again, but not, Murray was glad to see, as noticeably as before. "Mrs. Harry V. Renier."

"Your husband is Renier the architect?"

The woman nodded. Moisture glistened in her eyes.

"Yes. That is, he is now. He—he may not be in a few months."

"What might induce the change in status, if you don't mind the question."

"Harry will certainly divorce me if I can't—if you don't—"

"Help you?" Murray nodded. "Well, that's my job. And now let's hear the story."

Marcia Renier leaned forward over the desk. Her blue eyes fastened desperately on Murray's cool greenish ones.

"It's blackmail. An old story to you, I suppose. There's a picture. . . ." She stopped, shivering.

Murray nodded. His eyes were very cold. One of the few things that could move him was this particularly slimy method of extortion.

"I see. You were with some sleek young gentleman, probably quite innocently. He surprised you by suddenly putting his arms around you. There was a flash. Next day you were shown a photograph of yourself in the gentleman's arms—with your clothes retouched out of the picture."

Marcia Renier nodded, upper lip clenched between her teeth.

"How much do they want you to pay to keep from showing the picture to your husband?"

"T-twenty thousand dollars."

Murray whistled.

"I could never raise it," the woman said desperately.

"The name of the gentleman with you in the picture?"

"He called himself Anthony Atwell. I met him at a reception given by a friend one evening—"

Murray waved his hand. "These blackmail routines are pretty similar. We'll skip it. Anthony Atwell—a phony name, of course. Can you describe him?"

"Yes. He is of average height, slim, with blond hair that is always combed very sleekly, and a small blond mustache, waxed at the tips. He has light eyes, blue or grey, and a trick of bowing from the waist that makes me think he is Russian, or something of that kind. He has a slight accent, too."

Murray reached for his phone and called police headquarters.

"Oh—don't!" wailed the woman. "The publicity—"

Murray's glance reassured her.

"Tom Phelps?" he said, when a voice finally answered after he had asked for Detective Phelps of the Bureau of Identification. "Tiger Murray talking. Could you give a shamus a bit of information? Thanks. The cocktails are on me. Young fellow going by the name of Anthony Atwell. Blond, small waxed mustache. Bows from the hips. Foreigner, perhaps Russian. Blackmail stuff. Will you call back at the office and leave any dope on him you can find? Thanks again, Tom."

Murray hung up the phone and rose from behind his desk.

"Come on," he said.

The woman stared at him. "Where?"

"To your husband's office," said Murray. "We're going to let him in on this stuff."

"Oh, no! No!"

"Listen," said Murray. "I've handled lots of these cases. There's only one thing to do: go to the person you're trying to hide the picture, or note, or whatever, from. Tell him all. A detective with you will help. Another thing, in cases of this kind: No photographer can retouch a pic-

ture and make a naked body of a clothed one that will exactly correspond with the body of the person photographed! There is nearly always some distinguishing trait. Take yourself. Haven't you any mark or conformation on your person that is unique?"

Marcia Renier's face lit up a little with hope, for the first time.

"Why, yes," she said. "I didn't think of that. I have a small diamond-shaped birthmark on—"

She stopped, blushing furiously.

"That ought to spike the whole thing," nodded Murray. "Where can we find Mr. Renier at this hour of the afternoon?"

"Home. He has his office there."

"Right."

Murray led the way out of his office. He got his hat, and said to Winnie Fay: "Some information will come from Tom Phelps. I may phone in for it—I may come back. See you later."

"Your coat—" said Winnie.

"I'll get a tailor to stick a stitch in it."

He went out with Mrs. Renier, and got into his car around the corner in the parking lot.

But he walked circumspectly, with his eye on the windows across the street; and he moved with clumps of people so that never was his figure alone on the walk.

The Renier home was a three-story stonehouse not far from Central Park. Mrs. Renier fitted the key in the lock, and looked at Murray with pleading eyes.

"You're sure—" she faltered.

"I'm very sure," Murray said gently. "Exposure is the cure for these things."

Mrs. Renier sighed and opened the door.

"Harry," she called, looking up the stairs. "His studio is on the second floor," she explained. "Oh, Harry!"

There was no answer.

"The servants have today off. He may have gone out for a late lunch—"

Murray followed her up the stairs. And he began to frown a little. Not superstitious, he yet placed a lot of faith in the queer things called hunches. He had a hunch now that something was wrong. And the hunch grew as he followed Marcia Renier down the second floor hall.

At the end door she started to tap against the panels, then looked down at the threshold. Murray saw her face suddenly become ghastly in its bloodlessness, saw her throat cord with a scream that came from her blanched lips only as a croaking gasp.

He looked in the direction of her gaze.

From under the door was coming a thin trickle of red. Blood. It was already crusting at its edges.

Murray thrust the woman aside and wrenched open the door.

The room within was large, outfitted with shelving and cabinets and drafting boards. Near the door, dressed in a Nile green robe, was a body. It lay sprawled on the floor, with dead hands reaching out as though in supplication. A silver-handled knife stuck out from the corpse's chest, evidently the handle of a paper knife.

"My God," whispered the woman. "Harry . . . murdered . . ."

The glazed, open eyes of Harry Renier, architect, seemed to stare at her as though in confirmation of the obvious remarks.

CHAPTER TWO

Bucket of Blood

TIGER MURRAY whirled on the woman. His eyes were like jade.

"Did you come directly to my office from this house?"

"Yes," she whispered. Her voice was dull with a shock that presently would make a screaming wreck of her but which for the moment left her a numbed autom-

aton. At least—that was the way it sounded.

"He was all right then?" snapped Murray.

"Yes."

Murray went to the body. The green robe, of fine flannel, was soaking up the red pool that had spread around the corpse.

"This man has been dead for some time," Murray said, his eyes piercing the woman's. "No doctor can tell within quite a few minutes, though . . ."

He stopped as his gaze caught something under the dead man's outflung left arm. He picked it up.

It was a cambric handkerchief, tiny, fine. It was slotted with red. Initials were on one corner. The initials, M. R.

"Yours?" said Murray, very quietly.

"Why—yes— I— Oh, I can't think! Can't talk! Harry—"

Murray grasped the woman's wrists, forced her to look at him. His face was rather frightening.

"Listen. You wouldn't try to ring me in on anything, would you? You wouldn't have done—this—yourself, and then have come to my office to establish an alibi on your time?"

"Oh, my God! Of course not! Harry—I loved him!"

"A blackmail picture," Murray said relentlessly, jade eyes piercing the woman's. "You couldn't pay. This morning a copy was given your husband. He threatened to divorce you. He's a rich man; you're his beneficiary. You killed him to get the fortune you'd lose if there was a divorce."

"I didn't!"

Murray looked down at the corpse in its green robe. Then he bent again. There was something flat in the uppermost pocket. He took it out.

It was the picture of a nude woman in

a man's arms. The face on the woman's body was that of Marcia Renier.

She shrank back from him, staring at his face, at the photograph.

"So I'm the set-up," Murray purred. "Well, you'll not use me as an alibi!"

"Oh, God—I swear—"

THERE was the sound of a police siren in the streets outside. Murray leaped to the window.

"Squad car. *Stopping here!*" He stared at Marcia Renier with amazement beginning to cloud the cold fury in his eyes.

"Who could have called the police—except you? And why would you call them—if?"

The woman said desperately: "I wouldn't! Can't you see that? What am I going to do? They'll electrocute me for this! The handkerchief and picture—"

There was a sound of banging at the front door, and a voice:

"Open this door in the name of the law!"

Murray's jaw clicked shut.

"I'll play along with you for a while. I think I knew a way to check on you . . . If the cops get you, they won't hunt any further! Not with the picture and handkerchief. Any way out of this place besides the front and back doors?"

"No! Wait a minute—there's a door in the roof—used for gutter repairs and—I don't know if that will help."

"We'll see."

The pounding on the door was louder. The woman bit her lips and shivered. Murray pounced down on the dead man. One of the tassels of the robe's cord was in the blood pool, the other was dry and outside the pool.

He cut both off with his knife and put them carefully in an old envelope. In the same pocket with the envelope went the handkerchief and picture.

He stared deep Marcia Renier's eyes.

"Concealing important evidence, aiding a murder suspect in a getaway—with luck, that is. I'm sticking my neck out for you, Marcia Renier. If I find you're guilty, God help you."

They ran down the second-floor hall, up to the third floor. There was a crash of entrance as they got to the attic. Murray heaved up on the trap door in the almost flat roof. It creaked open.

"Aiding a murder suspect in a getaway—with luck," he repeated softly as they came out on the roof and he closed the trap behind them.

There was luck. On each side of the house towered an apartment building. Each had a fire escape zigzagging down the side. The one on the right hand building skimmed past the Renier roof within reach.

Murray helped the woman get to it. They went up, to a door opening onto one of the apartment building corridors.

The building had a side entrance on the next street. Right across from it was a small hotel, the Sheldrake.

"Register there," Murray said. "Take the name of—of Mary Crayton. That's as good as any name. Don't go out of the place. Don't answer any summons at the door. Answer the phone, though, because that'll be me—nobody else will know the name and number."

"Thank you for—" Marcia Renier began, shakily.

"Thank me for nothing!" said Murray. "I'm checking on you." He touched the pocket in which was the envelope with the two dressing-robe tassels. "If it turns out phony—you go to the cops at once!"

He saw her enter the Sheldrake Hotel doorway, then jumped a taxi.

Behind him, near the front of the Renier home, he left his car. It was parked in a line of cars belonging to tenants of the apartment buildings. It might be found; it might not. In any event, he didn't feel

like going back and getting it, risking recognition by some of the boys hunting around for a killer to fit the corpse of Harry Renier. A lot of the men from headquarters didn't like him much.

He made one stop on the way to his office, and then breezed in after a look-around to make sure the police weren't already there waiting for him. In his hand he held a pint-sized paper bucket, of the type ice cream is packed in. But the bucket showed red near its folding top.

"What on earth!" said Winnie Fay, her brown eyes wide.

"New kind of clock," said Murray, gazing at the bucket. "Have our friends the police phoned or called in the last few minutes?"

"Detective Phelps did," said Winnie, still staring at the bucket. "Said he'd been delayed on getting the information you asked for, but would phone it in soon—if there was any to phone. What's in the bucket, Tige?"

"I hope he does make it soon," said Murray. "There's blood in the bucket."

"Blood?" gasped Winnie.

"Yes," Murray said. "A bucket of blood, literally."

He took the old envelope from his pocket and got out the two tassels he had cut from murdered Harry Renier's green robe.

"Blood," he went on to Winnie, "but nothing to get excited about. I got it from the butcher down the street."

He measured the tassel which was clotted with blood. It had soaked up Renier's life fluid till two and three-eighths inches of the tassel was stained.

"Capillary attraction," said Murray, getting out his watch and laying it on Winnie's desk. He held the clean tassel from Renier's robe over the container of blood. "The number of minutes it takes this tassel to soak up blood enough to redden it for

two and three-eighths inches, will tell me something I want badly to know."

"Such as?" Winnie said.

Murray looked at her. "Mrs. Renier and I left here to tell everything to her husband in a blackmailing case—as you must have heard on the extension."

Winnie nodded. "I made shorthand notes as I do of all your talks in there."

"Well, we got to the Renier home, and found Harry Renier murdered, with two very dirty clues pointing straight to Mrs. Renier as the killer."

"Tige!"

"Yes. Pleasant. To cap it, the squad car comes just as we are bending over the body. Who sent for that, I don't know. But I got her out over the roof tops, and parked her in the Sheldrake Hotel under the name of Mary Crayton. And now—I'm checking on the lady."

HE held the clean tassel steadily over the container of blood, with the tip of the tassel in the red fluid.

"This bloody tassel, from Renier's robe, fell with its tip in the blood around him. It started drawing blood up just after he was killed. Now, when the clean tassel is reddened to the precise length of the one stained with Renier's blood, I'll know within a couple of minutes the time that elapsed between his murder and the minute when I cut it off."

"And that will tell you?"

"Whether she could have killed her husband, and then have hurried here to say later in court that she was in my office at the approximate time of the killing the coroner would set."

Winnie's eyes were admiring—an expression she seldom let show when they rested on Murray.

"I'd hate to be back in the crook business, Tige—and have you against me. However, I'd hate to be back in it under any circumstances."

"Skip it," said Murray. "You were with a big-time jewel crowd. When I nailed 'em, at your promise that you were through with that kind of stuff, I eased you out of the picture. Now you're a respectable, if slightly lousy, secretary, and that's that."

"Lousy sec—" flamed Winnie.

Murray grinned.

"Looks like this tassel thing will take quite a little time," he said. "I'll drape the other end over the edge of the pail so it'll hold itself in place. Watch it. Don't let it slip. I'll be back in a little while."

"Where are you going?" said the girl.

"I want to get Johnny, at the parking lot, and have him slide uptown unobtrusively and retrieve my car. It's still in front of the Renier joint."

He went out, while Winnie sat and watched the tassel slowly soak up calf's blood . . .!

"Twenty-eight minutes!" Murray said, when the tassel showed red to the two and three-inch mark. He had been back from the parking lot for ten of them. "That clears Marcia Renier. Allow fifteen minutes for our trip to her house from the office, and another five minutes from the time we went in her door till I cut the tassel off Renier's robe. That's twenty. Renier was stabbed to death eight minutes earlier—and Mrs. Renier was in my office at that time. I'll go and get her at the Sheldrake, bring her back to this building, and park her in the vacant office two floors up that I use as a spare. Then I'll get Bill Keenan, of Homicide, over here. Bill will give an ear to what I've got to say."

"He'll jail you for cutting off those tassels and obstructing justice!"

"I think he'll agree to forget about that in exchange for my producing Mrs. Renier and giving him the time-information that'll keep the Homicide gang from making a so and so of itself by hounding the

wrong person. Anyhow, I'll have to risk it."

"Tige," said Winnie, "who do you suppose did kill Harry Renier, if Marcia Renier didn't?"

"That," said Murray softly, "is a very interesting question. Almost as interesting as the question: 'Who put this rip in my coat with a high-powered rifle. The answers to both will come—I hope—after Tom Phelps kicks in with the dope on that blond lounge lizard posing with Mrs. Renier in the blackmail photo.'"

He waved and went out, hopping a cab to the Sheldrake Hotel.

He felt fairly well satisfied with events. The trail to the killer of Harry Renier hadn't even begun. But it was Marcia Renier who was his client and first consideration; and he had, with a little fast and risky work, kept her from a premature arrest that would have been disastrous for her.

He went to the desk phone in the lobby of the Sheldrake, mindful of his injunction to her to answer nothing but her telephone. She wouldn't open the door to his knock if he didn't phone up first.

"I'd like to speak to Mrs. Mary Crayton, registered here about an hour ago," he said, when the switchboard girl had answered.

He stood holding the phone, waiting. And again his odd sense of hunches came into play. Something was wrong.

He saw the desk clerk stare at him, after he had given the name. Then the clerk walked slowly toward him, with narrowed eyes.

"You wanted to speak to Mary Crayton?" he said.

Murray nodded, staring at the man over the phone.

"I'm afraid," said the clerk, with frank hostility and suspicion in his eyes, "that you came too late."

Murray slowly put the phone back in its cradle.

"What do you mean, too late?" he asked.

"The police," said the clerk. "They came not ten minutes ago, and arrested her for murder. They called her Marcia Renier, and—they're looking for an accomplice of hers!"

With the last words, Murray became aware of two things: The clerk had his foot on something under the counter—and from the direction of the elevators a stocky man was hurrying with House Detective written all over him.

Something flashed in the clerk's hand.

Murray leaned across the desk, and a sound like a cleaver striking meat smacked out. The clerk went down like a log, with a .32 clattering from his hand to the floor. Murray darted out the door with the house dick bellowing to him to halt.

He got back into the taxi he'd told to wait for him, and got out of there. He eased the driver's alarm at their haste with a ten-dollar bill, and gave his office address again.

As he rode, he leaned back in the seat and closed his eyes. And on his normally careless, rather reckless face, fine lines began to appear. They were lines of pain.

This arrest of Marcia Renier was bad. Damned bad! It threw his hand—made any evidence he could produce smack of prearrangement. Before, he could have given the woman over to custody as a gesture of his good faith and his confidence in the exonerating alibi he had uncovered. Now he had no such gesture to make; and the result was going to be correspondingly rotten for Marcia Renier.

But it wasn't this that brought the pain lines to his face.

Things were beginning to shape up in his mind, now. The death of Harry Renier while Marcia was in his office! The tip-off

to the police as to her hiding place and the name she was masquerading under!

Yes, things were beginning to shape up. And the direction they were taking made Murray curse softly, wearily, under his breath.

CHAPTER THREE

Photographer of the Fiend

WINNIE FAY'S face was very white as she looked at Murray across her desk in his anteroom.

"So you're accusing me of selling you out," she said, her voice flat and quiet.

Murray stared back at her.

"It was very shortly after I ordered Marcia Renier to make a clean breast of things to her husband, that Harry Renier was killed. It was at just about the time I was at the parking lot telling Johnny to pick up my car, that Marcia Renier was arrested at the Sheldrake."

Winnie looked at him, white, tense.

"That office of mine is sound-proof," Murray said. "Somebody wanted Renier killed the instant it was decided in here that he was to be told of the frame-up. That somebody wanted him killed to avoid prosecution. Also, the killer set the stage to make Mrs. Renier the goat, which was a plant I wrecked by getting her away from the cops. But the minute her name and address was spoken in here—the cops go to her hideout, ask for her by her fake name, and pick her up!"

"And you think I—"

"There is only one way talk can be heard outside of my office. That's on your phone extension at this desk. There's only one person besides myself who knew that Mary Crayton at the Sheldrake Hotel was Marcia Renier."

In Winnie Fay's white throat a vein pulsed, and was still.

"An old cop once told me that no crook ever really reformed," Murray said de-

liberately. He was as calm as ever; but his face looked ill. "I've never believed that. But now— How much were you offered, Winnie?"

The girl said nothing.

"You phoned some one the minute I ordered Marcia Renier to confess to her husband," Murray said harshly. "You phoned again while I was out at the parking lot. As a result, Renier was killed, blocking prosecution for blackmail, and his wife was framed for the murder. Who was it you got in touch with, and how much is he paying you?"

Winnie Fay's pale lips moved.

"I'll be leaving this office for good, Tige."

Murray's short, hard laugh rapped out.

"Maybe you will. But you won't be going far. Not till you tell me what I want to know. You've fixed me up, all right! Marcia Renier will spill plenty! She'll lose her head and tell who got her out of the house when the cops broke in. She'll tell of the picture, perhaps even of the handkerchief I carried away. And they'll know, of course, who cut up that dressing robe. Out with it, now! Who—"

"If it's a lead you're after," Winnie said, in that flat, quiet voice, "I'll give you one as my last official act as your secretary. Detective Phelps called a few minutes ago. The man you asked about is named Feodor Korloff, with a dozen aliases. He has been mixed up in two known blackmail cases and half a dozen suspected ones in the past year."

Murray's greenish eyes bored into her brown ones.

"I looked him up under his real name," Winnie went on. "The cases he's been mixed up in are all cases in which Benjamin Zeit was suspected of doing the photography. And Zeit, you know, is supposed to work for Maurice Marquer."

Murray spoke very softly, eyes like jade. Winnie had seen them take on that tint

before—but never when they looked out at her.

“Would this be a trap, sweetheart?” Murray said.

Winnie flinched as though he had hit her with his fist.

“Suppose I go to Zeit on that tip,” Murray went on. “There wouldn’t be a gang waiting for me, tipped off by still another phone call from you, would there?”

A queer sound came from Winnie’s pale lips. It wasn’t a moan; it wasn’t quite that loud.

“God forgive you for that,” she said. “I won’t.”

Behind tense jaws, Murray caught his tongue in his teeth. The look on her face was beating him down a little. But, damn it, no one else could have tipped off whatever blackmailing powers were against him in the way they *had* been tipped off.

“Maybe I—” he began.

He never finished. Loud steps sounded in the building corridor outside the door. With the first sound of them, he leaped to the door of his private office.

The anteroom door burst open. He saw two plain clothes men and a uniformed patrolman.

“We want you, Tiger Murray,” one of the dicks said. “We want you on the Renier murder.”

Murray slammed his door and locked it. Fists banged on it.

“Open up, you fool. You can’t get out of this. The Renier dame spilled the works. And we listed your car in front of her house just after the killing.”

Murray went for his window, opened it. He looked down six floors sheer to concrete sidewalk. But just under his window there was a stone ledge. It was very narrow. It seemed an impossible way of escape. But once before, Tiger Murray had had to thread his way along it, and he knew it could be done.

They were battering at his door, now,

to break it in. He lowered himself to the ledge, worked his way to the end window of the building.

This window opened onto the men’s room for the floor. He climbed in, darted across the corridor to the stairs, with the sound of a crash back in his office telling that his private office door had gone down.

He sped down the stairs and out onto the street.

Benjamin Zeit! Trick photographer in the employ of a big shot blackmailer known as Marquer—at least as far as police rumor went. So it was Marquer he was up against!

Murray got into a cab and went to a certain Eighth Avenue tavern. There was a barkeep there who was indebted to him, and who carried in his head a list of names and addresses that the police would have given much to know. He’d know where Zeit kept himself.

TWO hours and a quarter later, at seven in the evening, Murray slouched in a doorway on Third Avenue and stared at a dingy red brick building across the street. It was in there that Benjamin Zeit, crooked photographer, hid from the re-cremations of a world that did not like his particular style of work. But for a moment Murray delayed entering the place.

His face still looked as though he were slightly ill. The face of Winnie Fay burned in his brain; Winnie smiling, Winnie perplexed and curious, Winnie criticising with valuable common sense some theory of his.

“And all the time it was only a question of how much,” he breathed. “A blackmailer’s dirty money could buy her.”

He gazed at the building. In view of the circumstances, the treachery in his own office, it was almost certainly a trap for him. But he had walked into traps before, and had come out again. Besides

the cops, following along the same trail, would probably be here soon—if, indeed, they hadn't already come—and they might get him out of a jam, even if it was only to take him to headquarters on the Renier murder.

He walked across the street and into the building.

The barkeep had told Murray that Benjamin Zeit's name now was Karl Sweitzer. That name was on a second floor mail-box. Murray went up dark stairs to the second floor, walking softly. He saw it as soon as he got to the top of the stairs—a door at the end of the hall that was cracked open a little. Light came out the crack, to lie in a beam athwart the dingy corridor.

A partially opened door. There'd be men in the room behind that door, watching the hall, watching the door opposite.

Murray tiptoed along till he had gone as far as he could without getting in the range of the door-crack. Then he flattened against the wall on the stair side of the door. Ten feet beyond the partly opened door, the end wall of the hall showed blank and windowless.

He wanted something heavy, something that would make a big noise. The only thing he had with him of that description was his gun.

With his lips thinning at the deliberate disarming of himself, he drew his automatic, set the safety more firmly, and tossed it butt-end first against the end wall.

It clattered against the wall and then crashed down on the bare board floor, making a devil of a racket. Murray heard curses from behind the partly opened door, heard a rush of steps.

Two men wrenched the door all the way open and jumped into the hall, with guns in their hands. They took a step away from Murray, toward the spot where the racket had sounded.

The father who had given Murray the first name of Tiger because he'd wanted his son to be a prizefighter, had gone farther than that in following his vicarious ambition. He had trained Murray in the use of his fists from the time he was six.

His left fist caught the man nearest to him on the side of the jaw in a blow guaranteed to put him to sleep for half an hour. The other man whirled as Murray went on. He snapped his gun up—doubled with Murray's right fist in his midriff, snapped back again as Murray's right got him under the chin.

The closed door opposite the one that had been watchfully open, popped wide and a rabbitlike face peered out in alarm at the sounds in the hall. It was an elderly face, with blinking, evil eyes behind thick lenses, and with a timid but vicious jaw.

Murray's hand flashed out. He stiff-armed the weakly cruel face. The owner fell backwards on the floor with a crash. Then Murray dived for his gun, and, having retrieved it, turned back to the door just in time to put his foot inside as the elderly man was trying to close it.

Benjamin Zeit, alias Karl Sweitzer, bleated in fright as Murray faced him.

"Back up to that next room," Murray grated. "Go on—now shut the door on yourself!"

The second door shut. Murray went back to the hall, dragged in the two unconscious hoods there, and handcuffed them to a radiator in Zeit's living room.

Then he called:

"Come out, Zeit!"

He stepped to the side, kicked out as the bedroom door opened and the elderly man with the thick glasses jumped forward. The kick landed true—against Zeit's right wrist. The revolver in the man's hand turned end over end in the air and slid along the rug ten feet away.

Zeit cowered, nursing his wrist. Mur-

ray stared at him. A warped genius at his line, which was photography and retouching, the man had probably caused more unhappiness than any other rat in the city. And Murray's contemptuous hatred was expressed in his voice as he said:

"Zeit, I've come here for some information. I haven't got much time. I want it quick. First, are you working for Marquer on the Renier case? And did you do the retouching on Mrs. Renier's picture?"

Zeit said nothing. Murray took a step toward him.

"I don't know anything!" Zeit cried. "I swear it! They keep me here like an animal in a cage, guarded, just to do the work they want done. I never get out, I never talk to anybody, I don't know anything!"

"Is Marquer behind the Renier case?"

"I—I—" Zeit screamed again as Murray's fist doubled. "If you mean the woman with Feodor Korloff, yes! I did it. And it was for Marquer."

Murray nodded. "Where's your dark-room, Zeit?"

The old man bit his lips. Murray, not waiting for an answer, strode toward the second door of the living room. Like a terrified rabbit, Zeit scuttled to get between him and the door.

"No, no! You don't get in there! You can't!"

Murray pushed him aside and went on in. There was no bed in the place. There was a complete dark room outfit, and a narrow, tall steel filing cabinet.

Murray went to this. "Probably what I want is in here."

Zeit's manner confirmed the guess. The elderly man was beside himself, mouthing curses, jumping toward Murray and then cowering away again. Murray pulled out the drawers of the cabinet.

There was an index, with names on

it. Many of the names he remembered reading in newspapers—in connection with scandal. In the cabinet's drawers were folders, one for each name.

Swiftly, with Zeit's agonized mutterings sounding in his ears, Murray emptied the folders. In a moment he stood with a pile of negatives in his hands. Pictures! In each, a woman was held, nude, by a man. He looked at the first two, recognized one of the faces as that of a well-known society woman.

"Oh, my God," mouthed Zeit. "A million dollars' worth of negatives! Oh, my God! Eddie! Brace!"

But the two he called on were still lying inertly chained to the radiator in the other room. Murray, grinning bleakly, selected one of the folders and put the whole lot in it. Then he slid the folder under his belt.

"Where can I get hold of Marquer, Zeit?"

"Marquer's at 1210 Eastbourne Street!" whimpered Zeit. "Don't hit me! It's the truth! I swear—"

Murray released the man. Then, as Zeit scabbled at his belt to get at his precious negatives, Murray hit him as mercifully as possible, stepped over his prostrate body, and left—to go to Eastbourne Street.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Room in Hell

WHEN he reached there he found that 1210 Eastbourne Street was a private residence, once ornate, now decayed and looking like a tenement, in appearance matching the shabby buildings around it.

Murray watched the entrance from the shadow of a parked sedan; and on his face the look of a man a little ill had increased. It had increased with the closing of the

door of the place, two minutes ago, over three figures.

Till now, Murray had held deep within him a slight scrap of hope that he'd been wrong about Winnie Fay. But that scrap had been wiped out of existence.

For, two minutes ago, a car had drawn up before the entrance—and Winnie Fay had got out of it! With her were two men who were rats if Murray had ever seen rats.

Tiger Murray cursed deep in his throat to try to ease the lump there. Then he went swiftly in the shadows to the side of the tattered old house. He had spotted the basement window there as he looked over the place.

In the blackness of a narrow runway between Marquer's house and the blank wall of the next, Murray investigated the cellar window. His heart sank as his fingers encountered steel bars, rose again as the entire frame holding the bars gave in his hands. The iron frame had rusted through years of neglect. He lifted it, after loosening two segments of cracked cement, from its frame, and then slid back the rusty catch of the window itself with his knife.

Upward and ahead of him, he saw hair-lines of light indicating an inner door from the basement. He started for it, then stopped in his tracks.

From somewhere upstairs a scream had knifed out in the stillness. It was a girl's scream, and Murray felt his heart give one great bound and then seem to stop altogether at the agonized sound of it.

"Winnie!" he exclaimed.

He began running toward the inner door, risking a fall in the darkness that would have brought Marquer's men—and death—with its resultant noise. But nothing caught at his feet. He got to the door, listened, opened it.

He stared into a kitchen, which was empty. Darting across it, he came to a

back hall, with stairs across from the kitchen. He heard another scream, then, which was cut off with ghastly abruptness.

He took the stairs two at a time, still maintaining a measure of silence but subordinating the risk of noise to his urgent anxiety to get to the source of that screaming.

At the top of the first flight of the rear stairs he stopped abruptly, retreated half a dozen steps, and lay so that the stairs hid him. He had heard footsteps in the second floor hall.

"Hell-cat!" he heard a man spit out.

Another man agreed with a less printable word, and added: "She'll do it or else!"

"It'll have to be 'or else' anyhow," the first man said. "She knows too much now to—"

Voices and steps faded toward the front of the house. Murray came back up the stairs and peered into an empty hall. A door toward the middle of the corridor's length caught his eye. Light streamed from under it—and from under none of the others.

He went to the door, listened.

"—same thing every time you yell," he heard a man's voice say. It was a suave, even voice, but with deadly undertones. "Use that phone, now, if you know what's good for you."

Murray tried the doorknob, with infinite care. It turned, and the door moved a little. In the very headquarters of the Marquer gang it was evidently thought unnecessary to lock doors.

Gun in hand, Murray opened the door, an inch at a time. When it had opened eighteen inches he saw a sight that put red flecks in the whites of his eyes.

A girl was stretched taut against the side wall of the room—a barely furnished bedroom. Her ankles were bound together. Her arms were extended stiffly

up over her head—stiffly, because they bore the whole weight of her body.

She was suspended by the thumbs from an iron ring in the ceiling.

Beside her head there was a wall telephone. And standing next to her, with the receiver off but with the hook held down so that there was no connection with central, was the owner of the suave, deadly voice.

"You'll call Murray," the man said, dark eyes narrowed almost sleepily, dapper body relaxed indifferent, "or you'll see your own thumbs come out at the joints."

Winnie's toes stretched toward the floor to ease the strain on her thumbs. But she couldn't quite do more than barely touch the floor.

"Murray's got something we have to get back," the man said. "Something worth a million dollars or more. And you'd be surprised what we'd do for a million."

Murray tiptoed in through the door.

No sound came from the girl. Her shoulders were tense; the writhing of her body told of its agony.

Murray raised his gun, and the dark man, warned perhaps by a whisper of fabric, whirled toward him.

A strangled curse came from his lips, and then Murray was on him. And it was with a savage ecstasy of pleasure that he brought his gun down on the head of the man who could torture a girl as Winnie Fay was being tortured. The man dropped, and Murray had a conviction that he would never move again.

He leaped to Winnie.

"Tige," she whispered. "Thank God!"

He cut her bonds, lowered her gently in his arms.

"They got me—just as I left the building—" Winnie said. "A car—here—wanted me to get you here—"

"I know," said Murray. "Don't talk.

My God. And to think I thought you came here of your own free—"

As the dapper torturer had whirled just before his death, so Murray whirled now.

Three men stood in the doorway of the room, staring at him.

One was heavy-set, dressed as though for a banquet, in impeccable dinner togs. And this was Maurice Marquer, known to be the most competent blackmailer in the city but never yet even taken to police headquarters. The two men with Marquer were of the type such men use: young fellows, handsome in a way, as sleek as cobras and twice as deadly.

Each of the three had a gun in his hand.

Marquer's jaw was open with amazement as Murray turned. But it clicked shut and a smile shaped the blackmailer's thick lips.

"By all that's holy! Tiger Murray! At least you seem to agree with the descriptions of Pendleton, here."

"That's Murray, all right," one of the two men said. "I had him over my sights, and got plenty of flashes of his face when I trailed him to Renier's."

Murray's jade green gaze centered on the man.

"So you're the gentleman I owe the slug through the coat to?" he said.

The man nodded, snarling a little.

"I was trailing Marcia Renier. We thought she'd cut up rough instead of paying. She did. She went to your office, and you were out so she waited for you. I waited for you, too—in an office across the street with a gun in my hands."

"But I jumped a puddle, and got away," said Murray evenly. "So then you went to Renier's house and killed him."

The man shook his head.

"Not me. When I missed you, I went to your floor to try again. I couldn't get into your office unseen through the door, so I crawled to the window of it along a ledge on the outside of the building. I

meant to pop you there. But I couldn't hang on to the ledge and still have a hand free. I heard you say you were going to tell Renier, though. So I beat it back into the hall and to a phone. I got the boys here, and they went over and nailed Renier—"

"And framed Marcia Renier for it," nodded Murray. "Then, still tailing me, you saw me put her in the Sheldrake Hotel and tipped the cops later. Which makes me the dumbest guy that ever lived. Because I thought—"

He stopped. Marquer had taken a step forward, and in his cold, arrogant eyes was death.

"We can dispense with the remarks, I think," he said softly. "We'll get to the point. Zeit phoned here, some time ago, and said that you'd looted his place of all his negatives.

"Those negatives are everything we have, Murray. They're our stock in trade, our sole reason for existence. It has taken years to collect them, and they are worth about eighty thousand dollars a month to us. I want them back. Where did you hide them on leaving Zeit's?"

"I gave 'em to the apple woman on the corner," said Murray. "She needs eighty thousand a month more than you do."

Marquer's expression did not change.

"We'll do things to you that you've never dreamed could be done to a living man—and still have him live—if you don't produce the negatives, Murray. And the same goes for your little friend. Come to think of it, we'd better treat her first—with you watching. That ought to soften you up."

Perspiration came out on Murray's forehead. He was listening tensely, now, and trying not to show it.

"Well?" said Marquer expressionlessly.

"You're going to kill us anyway," Murray said slowly. "What good will it do to give you the negatives?"

"If you tell us where they are, we'll let the girl live. We can stand just one witness—it's only her word against ours. You'll get it, but you'll die painlessly and quickly."

Murray felt the drag of his gun in his coat pocket, knew he would fall with a dozen slugs in him before he could get it out and in his hand.

"If I could only have some guarantee that you'd do as you say," he muttered slowly. He thought he heard something now—the thing he'd been listening for.

"Damn you, you're stalling for time. Why, I don't know. We can fix your lights an hour from now as well as now—"

He broke off suddenly, and listened. So did the two men with him. And then the three stared at each other with tense, alarmed eyes.

From the street outside came the faint, far cry of a police siren.

"They can't be—coming here," mumbled Marquer. "It must be some other place. Look and see, Pendleton."

The smaller of the two men with him ran from the room.

The siren grew louder, then stopped. Pendleton's voice came:

"Mark! For God's sake! They *are* stopping here!"

Swearing, Marquer glared at Murray.

"You're responsible for this! You left word you were coming here—something—"

And then the man with Marquer saw the thing Murray had been fearing for ten minutes that one of them would see.

"Mark! My God! The phone!"

He was staring at the wall telephone near where Winnie had been suspended. His eyes were starting from his head.

"The phone! Look! *We've been talking with the receiver off!*"

With his face livid, Marquer turned a

little to look at the wall telephone. And Murray sprang.

The other man's gun cracked out, but the slug missed Murray. He got Marquer by the right arm and wrenched till the blackmailer moaned and dropped his gun. He heard another cry and his eyes flicked sideways long enough for him to see Winnie hanging to the gun arm of the other man with lacerated hands.

He tripped Marquer, leaped to aid Winnie. The man went down under the crack of Murray's fist. Then Marquer was on Murray again.

With the false strength of mania, Marquer got Murray down while his pudgy fingers fumbled for his throat.

"You tricked me!" he raved. "Got me talking! That damned phone—"

There was a crash as the street door was battered in, and then shots.

"I'll get you . . . anyhow . . ." panted Marquer, his plump face insane with fear and rage.

"I think not," said Tiger Murray.

His hand shot out to clamp over Marquer's hand, in the fingers of which a knife abruptly glinted. He twisted. There was a muffled snap. Marquer shrieked and sagged to the floor, holding his dislocated wrist. Heavy steps sounded up the stairs, and a bellowing voice:

"All right, now! Everybody! Stick 'em up and keep 'em up. You're under arrest!"

AT ELEVEN that night in Murray's office, Winnie and Murray dipped with paper spoons into a container of chop suey sent up from the neighboring Chinese restaurant.

Murray was not eating with any great appetite, and he was avoiding Winnie's guileless eyes.

"We'll get the negatives in the morning," he said. "When I left Zeit, I dropped into a drug store, sealed the folder containing the negatives with gummed tape, put stamps on it, and dropped it in a parcel post box addressed to me here. With them, and all the stuff that operator heard over the phone, the whole Marquer outfit is on ice."

"I'd forgotten all about the man dropping the receiver when you hit him on the head," Winnie said.

"Curious," said Winnie, eyes very guileless indeed, "how Marquer's man got along the ledge outside your window—and listened in on you. I wouldn't have thought any one but you was acrobatic enough to manage it."

Murray opened his lips, and shut them again.

"And trailing you to the Sheldrake, so they could tip the police that Mrs. Renier was there as Mary Crayton—which you thought I'd done! That was smart, too, wasn't it?"

Murray's eyes were almost entirely blue—a shade they took on only when he was not at all proud of himself.

"Funny about the gang kidnaping me, though," Winnie murmured. "They seemed to think I meant something to you—"

Murray's eyes lost their uncertainty at that. His hands found her shoulders.

"Mean something to me?" he repeated, a little hoarsely.

A little later he wiped lipstick from his mouth and said humbly:

"If you can ever forget what I said to you—thought of you—"

Winnie borrowed one of his own phrases.

"Skip it," she said, giving him more lipstick to wipe off. "I expect I'll be around here a long time after all. As your secretary—or something!"

GUNS FOR A GUARDIAN

By JACK DONOHUE



His shoulders had a prideful swagger.

Hap Collins was proud of his good looks, his well-fitting uniform—but these were of little use to him when he faced the man who had sworn to kill the girl Hap Collins loved!

“I’M sentenced to death!” Helen moaned. Slumped hopelessly in her chair, face drained of color, and eyes filmed with dread, she thrust the paper with the screaming headlines at Hap. “I’m doomed!” Hysteria crept into her voice. “He’s out again! Read this.”

Hap Collins stifled the jest that he had

been about to utter. He silently took the proffered paper. "Whew!" he exclaimed, "Joe Pagani, a lifer, escaped from San Quentin today and is believed headed for San Francisco—"

He avoided Helen's eyes as he read that in escaping Pagani had ruthlessly killed two guards. The article further described him as a merciless killer, and recounted his past deeds. Hap readily saw why the girl was so terrified.

"Now, Helen, don't get your wind up. I'll take care of you. That crook won't get within a mile of you with me around," the young cop promised.

Helen seemed not to have heard. Her eyes had an awed, dread-filled expression. "He swore he'd kill me if he ever got out. He was certain that I had trapped him." Terror stalked bleakly across her face, a face that was perfectly molded, and beautiful even in fear.

"Funny how sure he was of that, and you didn't even know that he was hot. The boys just happened to trace him to your apartment. Look at me, honey," Hap commanded, "You know that I've got a drag with the captain. He was an old friend of my Dad. It'll be a cinch to get him to detail me to protect you," he gazed at her confidently as though the problem were completely solved.

"But, Hap, catching escaped convicts, and being the best looking cop on the force, are two different things." She blushed confusedly. "Oh, I didn't mean that the way it sounded. I'm so upset I don't know what I'm saying. I'm sorry, Hap."

"O. K., kid. O. K." Hap rose from the lunch table, self confident to the 'nth degree. "I'll fix this up right now, just as I'll fix that crook if I lay eyes on him. Now's my chance, the captain sent word that he wants to see me at one. Chances are that he wants my advice about something. I'll spring it when I see him. Ev-

erything is going to work out all right. See you tonight."

Helen proudly watched him stride from the lunch room as she thought of their approaching marriage. What she had ever seen in Joe Pagani was beyond her now. She watched him as he looked down on lesser men from his six foot plus. Six feet topped by a handsome face that constantly wore a devil-may-care expression.

His shoulders had a prideful swagger, and his uniform was cut a trifle more stylishly than the average cop's. That he was proud of that uniform and the authority that it represented was apparent in his every move.

HAP took the steps two at a time at the Hall of Justice. He nodded good-naturedly, totally oblivious of the sarcasm in the "Hello, handsome," that greeted him on all sides.

He knocked briefly on the captain's door, and swung into the room. Finding the captain, a grey veteran, alone, Hap dispensed with all formality. "Hi, Cap," he flung himself carelessly into a chair with the nonchalance of an old friend.

"Stand up! Salute, when you come in to my office!" the captain bellowed angrily.

"Oh! Oh, sure."

"That's better. Now sit down and listen to me, you swell-headed pup! You let that pickpocket slip through your fingers like the greenest rookie." The old veteran's jaw thrust out angrily as he raised his hand to silence any objections. "The best looking cop on the force. Pfah!" he spat his disgust. "Why, if your old man was alive today he'd beat the tar out of you. Your pictures in the paper shaking hands with a dog, and helping pretty steno's across the street! What a hell of a cop you are! I don't think you'd have the guts to pinch a drunk."

Hap roared, "Listen—"

"Shut up!" grated the captain. He continued, "You handsome cops are fine for the papers, but you're not there when there's real work to be done." He shook his finger in Hap's anger flushed face. "You're through at Central Station. Tonight you start pounding a beat on Bay Street."

With a gone feeling in his stomach, and flaring anger in his brain, Hap shouted, "Not tonight, I won't!"

"You will, or I'll have you thrown off the force!" the captain snapped.

The young cop's anger faded in his concern for Helen. He swallowed his pride and in a softer tone, he said pleadingly, "You know that Joe Pagani escaped from Quentin today, and you remember that he swore to get Helen Rhodes when he got out, don't you? Well, Helen is my girl, and I promised her I'd get the detail to protect her. Aw, please, Cap. Give me this one break for old times' sake."

The captain shook his head sadly. "I never thought I'd see the day that I'd have to say this to Fighting Sam Collins' boy. But I don't think you've got the guts for the job. We'll take care of Helen. I'll detail some real men for that job. We got along somehow before you came on the force, and we'll get along without you now if you don't show up on that beat. Be there at twelve, or I'll rip that star off your chest!"

As Hap wheeled hopelessly away, with anger and shame burning in his eyes, the captain hurled a final insult.

"And don't let any of those big, bad rats around the lumber yards scare you, handsome. Maybe at that you'd make a better rat-catcher than a cop."

He smiled knowingly at Hap's angry back.

AT a quarter to twelve that night, Hap said a final sorrowful good-night to

Helen. He had told her some of the events of the interview, but not all.

"Now don't you worry, honey." He took her to the apartment window, and pulled aside the curtain. "See down there, those two shadows? Well, they're cops here to protect you. Wish it was my job, but they're good men, and you'll be O. K. So long. I have to hurry now."

"I'll be all right, Hap," Helen said through trembling lips, but not fully believing herself. She kept seeing Joe Pagani's face twisted in a venomous leer, as he was dragged off to jail, snarling—

"I'll get you for this, you tart, if it's the last thing I do!"

AFTER two and a half hours of listening to his own footfalls echo down empty streets, Hap spied a light through the fog in a combination saloon and restaurant. He was cold and troubled. He hurried his steps, looking forward to a warm cup of coffee, and some one to talk to. He hoped Helen was all right and he wondered if the captain was right. Maybe he was yellow. He'd never had a real chance to test himself. Hap's usually serene brow was wrinkled in a frown.

Hap was so preoccupied that he failed to notice that the three men in the lunch room stiffened as he came in, and glanced anxiously toward the back door. The two that were drinking held their glasses poised in mid air, and their right hands snaked to their armpits, as they waited.

"Let's have a cup of java and a piece of pie, buddy," said Hap. "It's sure a lousy night out, huh?"

"I got no coffee made," said the man shortly. One hand was concealed beneath the counter.

"Well, make some," said the young cop indifferently, "I've got all night."

"I ain't got time. Just closing up."

Hap looked at him hard.

"Say, what the hell are you trying to pull? What's eatin' you anyway? Make me some coffee, or I'll take you to the can for breaking the one o'clock liquor law. Now I suppose you're going to tell me that those two guys over there are just drinking ginger ale."

The man behind the counter glanced quickly over the patrolman's head at the others. One of them, hand under armpit, nodded shortly.

"Well, all right. But I did want to get home," a forced cheerfulness entered his tone. "We don't want no trouble with you boys. No, sir."

"That's more like it," said the cop. The by-play had escaped him entirely.

HAP was unable to free his mind of the events of the afternoon. He was musing over some of the things that the captain had said:

"Yellow! Wouldn't know a crook unless he had a number painted on him." He snorted his disgust and chagrin. "The hell I wouldn't. I can smell crooks. I'll show that old so-and-so some day."

Hap, his face buried in a cup of coffee, was abruptly jerked from his moody reverie as the sounds of a scuffle, punctuated by a muffled scream, came from the back room.

All talk and movement in the lunch-room hung suspended. The burly cop sensed two pair of burning eyes staring at his back, and under the vizzor of his cap, could see the man at the counter poise with face turned in his direction.

Just then an agonized scream rent the silence, and came loud and clear:

"Joe! Joe! Oh, God! Don't . . ."

The voice, Helen's fear choked voice, broke off in a muffled sob. The man's voice, Joe Pagani's, Hap thought, could be heard cursing. These things penetrated Hap's brain as he sprang into action.

IN one leap he was at the door, clawing at his .38. A hurtling bottle crashed into the wall above his head, showering him with glass and whisky.

Hap spun on his toes and snapped a quick shot at the waiter. His fleeting glimpse caught blasting guns in the hands of the other two. Pain flashed in his brain as a slug struck him heavily in the left arm. In that glance he had recognized Soapy, one of Pagani's henchmen. Then it must be Joe Pagani that had Helen.

Hap ducked instinctively as two more shots roared at him. His gun spat twice in rapid succession. Not stopping to see what effect his shots had, he crashed through the door.

The room was empty, but an open window pointed the way. His left arm pained terribly as he crossed the room.

He leaped through the window to land heavily in a Stygian black alley that reeked evilly of garbage. As he hesitated uncertainly a shot plowed into the wall above his head. He plunged blindly in the direction of that spurt of orange flame.

Unseen objects clawed at his legs as he heard Helen's cry for help. Throwing caution to the winds he sped down the alley. In his eagerness he stumbled and sprawled headlong as another shot zipped over his head.

His left arm sadly hindered his progress as he raised himself painfully and plodded on. Pain flared in his head, and lightning blazed behind his eyeballs. Yet he dared not shoot with Helen out there somewhere in the dark. Faintness was creeping on him, and his side was warm with sticky blood, his own blood.

He stumbled again. Pain racked muscles refused to respond, when another scream ripped through the black night. "Yellow, huh? He'd show 'em." His teeth ground with the effort, but exultation flooded his pain tortured brain as the realization came that he was not yellow.

On he staggered, left arm flapping, and bumping the wall like an empty sleeve. He had to get that dirty rat Joe.

A dim light showed at the end of the passage. Hap faintly saw two figures, Helen and Joe, flash through the opening. An added burst of speed, and he was through the door in time to see them enter a lumber yard.

Joe, face contorted with hatred, paused at the opening. Holding Helen in front of him, he took careful aim and fired.

The impact in his left arm spun Hap half around. But there was no pain and he plunged doggedly on.

A gun belched flame before his face. Only Helen's struggling spoiled Joe's aim, and saved Hap from instant death.

With his remaining strength he crashed his gun down on Joe's head, and saw the hated face go blank.

"Helen! Helen! Are you all right?" he cried hoarsely.

"Hap, it is you!" Helen sobbed hysterically, then stiffening. "Oh, Hap! Look out!"

He whirled to see two figures racing to the alley. "Get the gun off Joe. Quick!" He aimed his last two shots, as carefully as his fast dimming eyes allowed him, at the oncoming figures.

One of them staggered, coughed hollowly, and fell to the ground to lie still. But the other came on with his gun spitting fire.

"I can't find it, Hap!" Helen cried.

Hap pushed her back into the deeper darkness. He stood over Joe waiting tensely, while fighting the numbness in his head.

The man stopped in the entrance, then stalked carefully into the alley.

When the man came opposite him, the young cop crashed his silent gun down on the thick skull. With a gurgling groan Soapy crumpled into a bloody mass.

Hap was pulling deep gulps of air into

tortured lungs when he felt his ankles clutched and he crashed to the ground.

Joe, fighting with the desperation of a cornered rat, had regained consciousness and now had him down.

With one last mighty effort, Hap sunk his right fist deep into the crook's face. His last sensation, as his own lights went out, was the crunching of bones and teeth beneath his heavy fist.

THE next day at the hospital, Hap raised himself on his good elbow to greet the captain.

The captain spoke, "I see that you did meet some big, bad rats in the lumber yards," his face softened. "I had to talk to you that way yesterday, Hap. You needed it to bring you to your senses. I had to shake you up. No hard feelings, I hope."

"That's O. K., Cap," Hap grinned wanly. "I guess I had it coming to me. But dammit, now I'll have to buy a new uniform. My old one must be a wreck. That'll set me back another seventy-five bucks. Just that much longer before Helen and I can get married." He looked mournfully at the girl.

"Don't worry about the uniform, Hap. You won't need it anymore," the captain said.

The young cop looked at him in alarm. "What do you mean?" He had visions of being thrown off the force. Or perhaps he was going to lose his arm.

The captain grinned at his concern, "I mean that you're too good for harness, son. You're a detective from now on, a rat catcher. You know the kind of rats I mean."

Helen smiled proudly over the captain's shoulder. "You can't find any more excuses now. I guess you'll have to marry the gel, handsome." The way she uttered the name sounded more like a caress than a spoken word.

MURDER TRAIL

By EMERSON GRAVES

(Author of "A Gift for Satan," etc.)

"Reach high, Bogas," said Matt evenly.



Officer Matt Swayne thought Jeanie was the swellest-looking girl in the world—but that was also the opinion of Bogas, the killer!

"Hi, Jeanie," was all he got out.

She looked up from the crate of big, blue, hothouse grapes before Nick's fruit store. Very expensive grapes!

"Hello, Matt."

"You must have got a raise at the theatre to be buying grapes like that," said Matt.

"No raises," smiled the red-haired girl. "I'm just being extravagant. I love these big, showy-looking grapes."

"Hear your place was held up last night," he said, wishing to God he could talk as fluently to this girl as he could to girls he didn't care anything about.

Jeanie Cadogan nodded, with a shiver.

"Yes. A car stopped in front of my cage at the Olympic Theater and two men got out and made me hand them over a thousand dollars from the drawer."

Matt stared admiringly at her.

SHE was red-haired and blue-eyed. Officer Matt Swayne thought she was the swellest-looking girl in the world. But he didn't have the nerve to say so.

"Detective Feeney says you were right out in front with descriptions of the guys. You've got brains—and sand."

Jeanie's lips moved in the smile that always made Matt's heart feel like a flat-iron had been set on it.

"I was scared as anything, Matt. Well, I've got to get along to the theater."

She waved at Matt and went east with a pound of the huge, showy blue grapes in a paper bag. Matt walked slowly west two blocks to the end of his beat, turned and started slowly back.

SWELL kid, Jeanie Cadogan! He had admired her even in grade school days. She could throw like a boy, climb, skate and ride a bike with the best of them.

Something like a dull blue marble caught his eye. It was a grape; a big, blue, hothouse grape. It lay in a crack in the sidewalk.

Matt grinned. He had a picture of Jeanie hurrying along here, ten minutes ago, pressing one of her sinfully expensive grapes to her red lips, dropping one in her haste.

But a few yards further along, another grape lay on the walk, and Matt's heavy eyebrows went up.

Those grapes were a rare extravagance for Jeanie. She helped support her mother, and every dime counted. Funny she was dropping them around—unless they were rotten. . . .

He picked the grape up. It was perfect, unblemished.

Quite a distance elapsed and he was about to dismiss the subject of grapes from his mind when he saw a third, at the edge of the walk.

"Maybe they're dropping out a hole in the bag," he mumbled.

But even as he thought this, he shook his head. Nick had shaken them to free them from sawdust, back at the store. None had fallen then. Besides, it was

odd that Jeanie would be eating them without having washed them. . . .

He began to walk pretty fast, now; and he came to a fourth grape, and a fifth. All were perfect, without blemish. Jeanie wouldn't have discarded them for rottenness; and she couldn't have lost so many out of the bag without knowing it.

Had some one else passed here with a bag of the purplish-blue grapes? It was pretty unlikely.

There was only one answer left: Jeanie was leaving a trail, hoping he'd see it and follow!

He began to run, and at every few strides he saw a grape. His last doubt was dispelled at the carline street. Here, where Jeanie should have boarded a street-car for the Olympic Theater, a purple trail showed that she had gone on across the street and headed toward the tough tenement district nearby.

"What's happened to her?" he breathed tensely. "She wouldn't be taken for dough. She hasn't any. But—"

But if she'd been snatched, why was she being walked away instead of driven in a tightly closed car?

On the next corner, he saw three grapes in a bunch. He looked left. No grapes. He gazed right. Down the walk lay a big, purplish-blue sphere. He turned right.

A quarter of the way down this block four more grapes in a cluster indicated a change in direction. From under narrowed lids, Matt's eyes went over the vicinity.

An unsavory neighborhood! Paintless houses sagged against condemned loft buildings. At his elbow was a poolroom with a shady reputation, and a dingy cigar store with an even worse one. Between the two was a narrow walk littered with papers and rubbish. It led to an old house set on the alley behind the store shacks.

Matt cursed under his breath. There

were two blue grapes in the narrow walk.

He stared more closely at the old house. It was boarded up. The front steps were broken and the porch caved in. It looked as though no one had entered for a decade. But—there were the two grapes.

Somewhere in the dilapidated, sinister-looking old ruin, there was Jeanie.

A weedy-looking man slunk from the pool room, eyed Matt suspiciously, and slunk on. Matt waited till he'd turned the corner, then went unobtrusively down the narrow walk toward the deserted-looking house.

At the rear of the house, between the wall and the high alley fence, was a slanting cellar door. And here, in the filth of the back yard, was one last blue grape.

With his heart hammering, Matt looked at the door. It appeared to be nailed shut; but when he cautiously tugged at a rusted iron ring, the door raised, nailheads and all. The nailheads were camouflage.

He drew his gun, leveled it before him, and slid down a short staircase into the gloom of the basement. For an instant his body was silhouetted against daylight for any one in the cellar to take a shot at. But no shot came, and, soft-footedly, he reached the cracked basement floor.

Dim light from a single unboarded cellar window showed a rusty furnace in the center of the basement, and the rough wall of a nearby coal bin.

Matt started toward the bin with dread in his heart.

A voice stopped him in his tracks; a harsh, flat voice coming from the coal bin.

"Stop that jerkin' around! And remember! One yelp out of you—"

Now Matt saw light gleam through a crack in the rough board wall of the bin. The light was yellow, flickering; that of a candle.

"You're a good-looking jane," came the deadly, flat voice. "Nice of you to drop in on me like this."

"You won't think it's so nice before you're done," came a voice in answer.

A girl's voice! A spirited voice! Matt's chin went up with pride in Jeanie. He moved soundlessly toward the open front end of the bin, gun steady before him.

He made a tiger leap around the end of the bin, and into it. The camera-shutters of his eyes, opened widely to the dim light of a candle set in a bottle on the floor, recorded a swift picture.

Jeanie Cadogan twisted in silent desperation to get her left wrist loose from the cruel grip of a man. In her right hand was still crumpled a brown paper bag from which, like pale purple blood, oozed the juice of a few remaining grapes. Her silky red hair was loose and flying around her head.

The man who held her captive was a narrow-shouldered fellow with dead black eyes that seemed to be all pupils, like the eyes of an animal. A scar showed white on the left side of his thin nose, and another scar laced his left temple.

Matt knew that scarred face. It belonged to Pinch Bogas, once a big shot in the lotteries racket, now suspected of more deadly activities.

"Reach high, Bogas," Matt said evenly, coming into the bin, revolver on a line with the man's heart.

Bogas' lips thinned to show yellowish teeth. But his hand stopped its drive for his shoulder-holster. He reached high.

Jeanie let one syllable, like a sob, tell of the anguish she had been through.

"Matt!"

Then she controlled her trembling lips.

"You're pretty late," she said. "What held you back?"

"You ought to leave a plainer invitation when you want me to meet your friends," Matt said.

"Friends?" said Jeanie. "Well, hardly! Meet one of the two men who held up the Olympic Theater last night. I saw him

on my way to the street car, recognized him, and followed him here."

"You little devil," Matt growled. "Why didn't you chase back and get me?"

"And lose him, or put him wise, in the meantime? No, sir! I tagged after him while I had the chance. But he caught me in the yard outside. I—I'm kind of glad to see you, Matt."

Matt grinned bleakly at Bogas. It was going to be nice, bringing in this hood.

"So you're holding up movie theaters now, Bogas?" he said.

Bogas' dull, dead eyes swung from the girl to the patrolman.

"How'd you get here?" he grated at last.

Matt pointed to the bag crumpled in Jeanie's right hand.

"She outsmarted you, wise guy. She left a trail of grapes right to your doorstep. All I had to do was follow my nose. Now all I've got to do is gather you in."

Matt reached for his handcuffs.

"*Look out!*" Jeanie suddenly screamed.

But she called too late. Before Matt could turn, he felt a gun muzzle jammed against his spine. He had forgotten that snakes are often found in pairs.

"Drop the rod," said the voice of Bogas' rescuer.

For an instant the three held their positions: the man behind Matt jamming his gun against the policeman's spine; Matt training his gun on Bogas; Bogas with his hands up but with a sneer of triumph on his thin mouth.

"Better be good, copper," purred the unseen man.

Slowly Matt opened his fingers and dropped his gun.

Now the man came around in front of him. Matt saw that it was Butch Allen, known as a pal of Bogas'.

"Nice going, Butch," Bogas said, lowering his hands. He picked up Matt's gun and thrust it into his belt. Then, without

a flicker of warning, he punched the patrolman's face.

"Watch the jane," Butch growled.

Bogas turned just in time to avoid being clawed by a red-headed fury. He gripped Jeanie's wrists savagely.

"How do ya do!" leered Butch, while Matt stared in open-mouthed amazement. "She's soft on the copper! What'll we do with the pair of 'em, Pinch?"

"Two guesses," said Bogas phlegmatically. "The jane knows we stuck up the theater last night. The copper knows now just who we are."

"I get you," nodded Butch.

Matt tasted the dregs. By a clever trick and at the risk of her life, Jeanie had handed him the Olympic Theater stick-up men—and he had fumbled his chance and brought them both to the end of things!

Bogas grunted thoughtfully.

"This is going to make noise, Butch. And the car's down the block. Get it and roll it around in the alley. Then we can get out of here quick."

Butch nodded.

"I'll be back there in a couple minutes. I'll honk twice."

He left. Bogas backed slowly after him to the open end of the bin, automatic covering both Matt and Jeanie.

The girl's throat swelled a little.

"Go ahead and yell," said Bogas. "But the minute you do, I'll plug him." His head jerked toward Matt. "I'll hit for the knee-cap first. Got any idea what it feels like to have your knee-cap smashed to gravel by a .38 slug?"

Jeanie's deathly pallor deepened. She caught her quivering upper lip between her teeth.

"Sorry I—was so damn dumb," Matt said with a break in his voice.

She couldn't answer him. She only nodded, to show she didn't blame him. She was crying a little now, but that was all. She hadn't fainted, or killed them both

with noisy hysterics, as most girls would.

"You're swell, Jeanie," Matt said hoarsely. "I—wish I had the chance to say a few things—"

"Shut up," snarled Bogas.

Matt stared at him. His wide shoulders sloped down as his muscles tensed, ever so little, under his blue coat.

"You've sure got us cold, Bogas," he said in the dull tone of a thoroughly beaten man.

But Jeanie read his purpose in his eyes, and a startled gasp came from her lips.

Bogas flicked a wary, suspicious glance at her, looked quickly back at the patrolman.

In the alley behind the house an automobile siren sounded twice: the signal Butch was to give when the car was ready for the getaway.

Jeanie screamed. Matt leaped. And the candle went out.

Just a flash Matt had gotten of a crumpled brown paper bag knocking over the bottle in which was the candle. Jeanie always had been able to throw like a boy.

Bogas' gun roared a fraction of a second after Matt had hurtled his big body low in the darkness. The flash seared Matt's face, but the bullet clipped harmlessly past his ear.

Bogas, cursing maniacally, snapped the trigger again; but Matt had him around the knees by then and the second shot went completely wild.

Matt heaved with all the power of his big body. The gunman shot up from the floor and fell again—on his head and shoulders. He lay like a log, without even moaning.

"Matt!" gasped the girl in the darkness. "Darling!"

"I'm all right, Jeanie," Matt rumbled.

He struck a match, fist cocked to knock Bogas' head off if the man were shamming. But the bandit was past shamming or anything else.

Matt touched the candle wick with the match. Light flared out, revealing Jeanie in the far corner. She started to get up, but Matt suddenly put his finger on his lips. He had heard the cellar door creak open.

"Pinch!" came Butch's voice. "Everything's set. What the hell are you waiting for?"

Matt shuffled back and forth over the concrete, and panted as if engaged in a life-or-death struggle. They heard Butch Allen start to run.

"I'm coming, Pinch! Hold the flattie for just a sec—"

He rounded the end of the bin, tried to snap up the gun in his right hand. Matt's toe cracked against his wrist with a sound like that of a stout stick breaking. Butch screamed in agony as his gun dropped.

Matt picked up the gun and handcuffed Butch Allen to the unconscious Pinch Bogas.

He frisked both the men for possible extra guns, but his manner was abstracted, and when he was done he hesitated a minute before dragging them toward the door.

"Jeanie," he said haltingly, "a minute ago you called me something. Something besides Matt. Did you—were you just so scared you didn't know what you said—or—"

Jeanie's knees were trembling. But she could smile—the smile that made Matt's heart feel like a flatiron had been set on it.

"I'm taking tonight off from the Olympic," she said. "You might come around—and see what I say when I'm not so scared."

"Gosh, Jeanie!" said Matt. "You—gosh!"

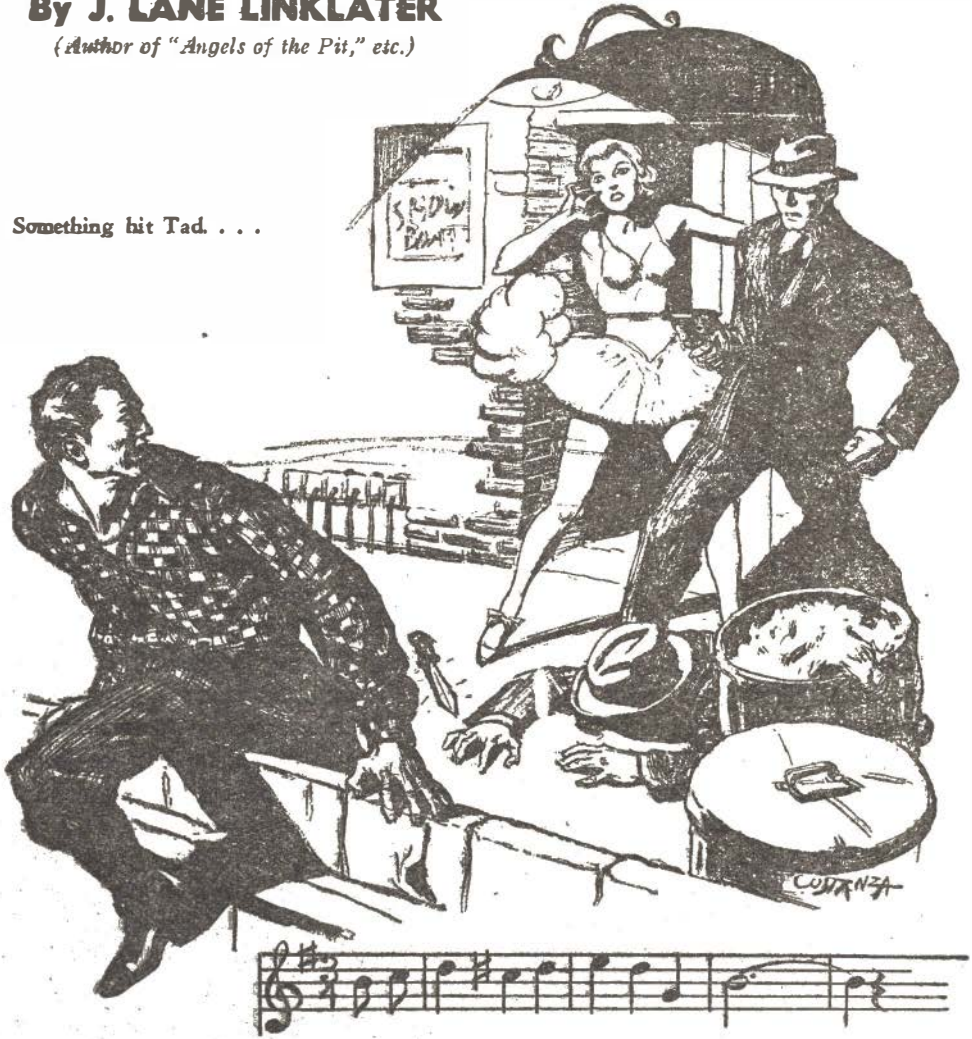
"If you come," said Jeanie, "bring some of those big blue grapes—will you? I didn't get much—chance at—the others."

MURDER TO MUSIC

By J. LANE LINKLATER

(Author of "Angels of the Pit," etc.)

Something hit Tad . . .



The man had died to music—the tune Tad always whistled when he walked down death's alley . . .

THE alley alongside Seroney's dance-hall was narrow. It was also very quiet, and dark—always dark. It wasn't much used. On one side of it was the brick wall of the dance-hall, and on the other side a high board fence. Tad was walking down the alley to a side door near the back end of the building, feeling his way, and whistling.

Tad always whistled as he went down the alley; always the same tune, the only

one he knew. He had been doing it for a couple of weeks. He was a cheerful young fellow, not easily scared, but dark alleys had always worried him, especially this one. So he always pushed his hands into his pockets, and whistled.

He reached the door, pushed it open and went in. He entered the dance-hall at a spot near the end of the bar farthest from the front entrance. There was a semi-enclosed space there, just a few

yards square, which was not much used by the patrons. And usually there was an empty box around, which Tad could sit on for hours without being disturbed.

There was one there now. He sat on it.

This was better than walking the streets after midnight, chilled by the wind and in constant danger of being picked up by a policeman as a vagrant. A night in jail might not be so bad, but Tad had the instinctive aversion of the wanderer to placing himself in the hands of the police. So he avoided them.

From where he sat he could see part of the crowd on the dance floor and at the long bar. But somehow his eyes never left just one person; one of the girls. It hadn't occurred to him, but perhaps it wasn't the wind, or even the police, that brought him here night after night. Perhaps the girl had something to do with it. Her name was Jean. That was a name, Tad thought, that really didn't belong to a dance-hall girl. For that matter, he had often thought that Jean herself didn't belong in a dance-hall.

Jean was rather small, and she had a shy way about her. And when she laughed as loud as the others it seemed to Tad that she was forcing herself to do it. And once he had seen her crying. He couldn't help seeing her because she had come over to his own little corner to do it.

At the time, she had become suddenly aware that he was looking at her. She looked up at him, startled. And then she smiled—while she was still crying.

"Don't pay any attention to me," she said. "I—I'm just a little crazy."

"Aw, that's all right," Tad said. "Only it makes me feel kinda sorry."

Every evening after that she made a point of smiling at him and saying hello. And Tad wouldn't leave the place until that had happened at least once. Somehow it had never occurred to him that it could ever go any further. True, he

wasn't so bad to look at—fairly tall and very strong and clean-looking—but his life consisted simply of going up in the hills to work for awhile, coming to town and going broke, then going back to the hills again.

There couldn't be a girl in a life like that.

And all she knew about him was that his name was Tad. He looked at her for some time, somewhat more intently than usual. It seemed to him that there was something very uneasy about her tonight. He had been sitting there for a long time when she slipped over toward him, and it seemed to him that she was afraid someone might be watching her.

"Tad," she said hesitantly, in a very low voice, "I want you to do me a favor."

Tad's heart leaped jubilantly.

"Why, sure!" he said.

"I'll be off duty in about fifteen minutes," she said. "I want you to wait for me around the corner on Nesson Street. Better keep out of sight, because—well, someone warned me not to see you."

Tad didn't seem able to find his voice, so he just nodded his head. She walked away. In a little while a young man approached her and said something to her. Tad, watching, wanted to get up and smash the young man. He had seen him before, and his name—Tad had heard it often—was Guy Sella.

But he knew that it wouldn't do to start trouble, especially when he didn't know what it was all about. So soon he got up and went out the side door to the alley.

He whistled again as he stumbled down the alley toward the street. He whistled a little louder than usual, because he had a peculiar feeling that there was something sinister about that alley—that something was going to happen there soon.

Out on the sidewalk, in front of the dance-hall, he stopped. Saroney's dance-

hall was in a decrepit part of town, most of which was poorly lighted. But the entrance to the dance-hall itself was a brilliant flare, making the crowd of men milling about look like a mass of hazy, half-tipsy human moths.

Tad saw one man going through the door, and wondered vaguely if that man had anything to do with Jean's trouble. He was a plump, good-natured little man with a guileless face. Tad had seen him a number of times, and he had danced with Jean a great deal. His name was Lambert Wilton, and Tad thought that his persistent attentions had worried Jean rather than offended her.

Mr. Wilton's rotund form disappeared. Tad moved on down the street a half a block to Nesson Street. He turned the corner—it was a small side street and there was no traffic at all—and waited deep in the doorway of a closed second-hand store.

He waited for some time. And as the minutes sped by, he grew more and more restless. He was sure that Jean was in danger of some sort, and it seemed all wrong to him that there should be anything but happiness in life for a girl like Jean. He had no watch, and there was no clock in sight, but presently he knew that the fifteen minutes he had to wait for Jean were long past.

The fifteen minutes had stretched to half an hour, perhaps more. He could wait no longer. He stepped out of the doorway and walked rapidly back toward the dance-hall.

Half-way there he broke into a run. There was still a crowd near the dance-hall, but it had shifted from the main entrance; it was now massed about the mouth of the alley.

When Tad reached the alley he found that the crowd was being held back by two policemen. But neither the crowd nor the policemen could stop Tad. He pushed

through the crowd and faced one of the policemen.

"Get back there, you hick!" snapped the policeman.

Tad's reply was an unintelligible gurgle. His shove pushed the policeman half around, and he lunged down the alley.

This time he did not whistle.

But neither was it so dark in the alley. Someone had swung an electric light on the end of a long cord out over the alley, through the side door. And the light illuminated a group of men standing around something lying on the ground.

Tad didn't take more than a few seconds to become a part of the group. Then he found out what was on the ground. It was the plump, innocent-looking Mr. Lambert Wilton. And, from all appearances, Mr. Wilton was dead.

OVER somebody's shoulder, Tad stared down at Mr. Wilton. The dead man looked pitifully inert. He was curled up in a sleeping position. He had obviously been stabbed in the back. A large man was kneeling beside the body.

"Poor guy!" muttered Tad, aloud.

The man over whose shoulder he was peering seemed to start suddenly. He jerked his head about and looked at Tad. He was a short, very heavy man with tremendous jowls and small eyes. Tad wasn't paying any attention to him, although he knew that he was Mr. Sarony, the owner of the dance-hall.

"Trasker!" Mr. Sarony said in a hoarse voice.

He was talking to the man kneeling beside the body; obviously a detective. The detective, Trasker, glanced up. Sarony shook his head backward in a motion that seemed to say: "Here's the guy I told you about!"

Trasker got up slowly. He was a leathery-faced man with a fixed suspi-

cious gaze, and his gaze was on Tad. He reached a big hand across Sarony's shoulder and took Tad by the arm.

"Come along with me," he said quietly.

"Me?" said Tad.

It was the first time he had ever had an officer's hand on him. He wasn't afraid, but he felt a little disgraced, and confused. The others in the crowd made way for him, silently, and Trasker led him through the side door to the little enclosure just inside. Several people were standing around there, a hushed group, including Guy Sella, the smooth, well-dressed young man who had spoken to Jean.

Jean was there, too.

Tad stood and looked at her. At first he couldn't see anyone else; just the girl. She wasn't crying. But her face was white, and she was staring straight ahead with her chin up, and her hands were clenched.

Tad, without thinking, spoke aloud: "Jean!"

She turned and looked at him, and smiled. In this smile, it seemed to Tad, were both relief and anxiety.

"Tad," she said, "I'm sorry."

Tad didn't exactly know what she was sorry for, but it didn't take him long to find out. The detective, Trasker, had been joined by another detective. And Trasker had started to ask him questions.

"Okay," Trasker said to Tad. "What did you do with the dough?"

"What dough?" said Tad.

"The dough you took off Wilton, when you bumped him off," Trasker said.

Anger drew the blood from Tad's face. But he kept his voice down—he felt that he had to keep cool on account of Jean.

"I took nobody's dough."

The other detective laughed a little, but Trasker merely stared at Tad coldly.

"That ain't gonna do you no good," he said presently. "We know the whole story." He jerked a thumb at Jean. "This

dame and you been working together. She's the come-on. She gets Wilton nuts about her. Then, when he's ripe, she tells him she needs dough. He brings it down here. But she knows she's got to stay in the clear. She tells him to go out in the alley. You're out there, waiting in the dark. You let him have it, beat it with his dough. You ditch the loot, come back here to see how things are going—"

"That's a lie," Tad said.

HE wasn't looking at Jean now. But he knew that she was looking at him, and that she worried because he had been brought into it. He knew, too, that she was depending upon him to do something about it.

The detective, Trasker, was unmoved. He seemed confident—and relentless.

He went on as if Tad hadn't said a word: "The dame was seen talking to you just before Wilton got here. You seen her, didn't you, Sella?"

"Sure," said Sella. He had a soft voice, and he smiled. "Why, I warned her about it, see? But she wouldn't listen—"

"I didn't trust you, Guy," Jean interrupted. "I spoke to Tad because I felt friendless. I felt as if he—he was the only one I could trust."

"Sure, I know," Sella said complainingly. "But I tried to be your friend."

"Never mind that," Trasker cut in. He still had his heavy hand on Tad's shoulder. "You waited around in the alley—"

"I didn't," said Tad. "I was around the corner all the time."

"Yeah? Well, I been checking up, see? It seems you made a practise of using that alley—and you always whistled. Well, right after Wilton went out that door to the alley, someone was whistling out there!"

"Must've been someone else," said Tad. Trasker ignored the suggestion. "Seems

you always whistled the same tune, an old song called *In The Shade Of The Old Apple Tree*. Now, that ain't a popular song now—hardly anybody would whistle that. Well, that was what was bein whistled out there just before Wilton got murdered! More than one heard that whistling—”

“I heard it,” put in Sarony. “And so did one of the bartenders. I was standing right close here, with Guy Sella, when the whistling started.”

“Did you hear it?” Trasker asked Sella.

“I wasn't paying no attention,” Sella said. “I was just talking to Sarony.”

“Doesn't matter,” said Trasker. “Two people at least heard it. Maybe more. And a few minutes after Wilton stepped out there, the whistling stopped. That right, Sarony?”

“Sure,” said Sarony. “It stopped dead. Stopped sudden. I had gone back there by the bar, and I wasn't listening, but I noticed the whistling stopped all right.”

Jean was looking at Tad, and he was looking at her. The look simply said that they believed in each other; that they were depending on each other.

“I can't help that,” Tad said flatly. “It wasn't me. And I'm sure Jean didn't—”

The hand on his shoulder tightened its grip abruptly. Trasker's face came closer to his own.

“How about *this*?” he said.

This? At first, Tad didn't know what he was talking about; he didn't see what *this* was. And then he saw it—a knife! The knife was in the other detective's hand. It was a large pocket knife, such as is often used by men around camps. The big blade was sticking out, and it was bloody. On the bone handle, initials had been scratched.

They were Tad's initials. And the knife, as he could see at once, was his knife!

Trasker was waiting for him to speak. Tad knew that Jean was still looking at him, anxiously, but he was staring at the knife. It took him some time to find his voice.

“Sure,” he said then. “That's my knife. I—I lost it a couple of nights ago. I didn't know where. I guess it must've dropped out of my pocket right in here somewhere. I—”

He was interrupted by a laugh. It was the other detective, laughing sarcastically. Trasker didn't laugh. But he seemed to think that everything was quite settled.

“Well, that's that,” he said. “You come along with me now—down to headquarters—you and the dame!”

Tad was dazed. It had all happened so quickly. He had never been arrested, even as a vagrant, before. And now, for the first time, he was going to jail—on a charge of murder!

And Jean was going, too!

Tad was facing the alley door. It was just a half dozen steps away. He could visualize that alley now. It was narrow—and still dark, except for the spot just outside, where the body of Wilton was lying. It was a blind alley, too, with just one opening. The opening was on the street, where there were policemen and a lot of people.

Trasker's hand was still bearing down on his shoulder.

But Tad was strong, and lithe, and very quick. He suddenly dropped his shoulder, so that it was free of Trasker's hand, dodged, then dashed at the door. There was only one way to go—and that was straight at the fence, which was about seven feet high. He sprang upward. His fingers clutched at the top of the fence. Without being conscious of the effort, he drew himself upwards, swung himself astraddle.

A shot rang out. It missed him.

“WELL get the dirty so-and-so,” Trasker said bitterly. He was stamping up and down Sarony’s office.

“It’s only fifteen minutes since he broke away,” cut in Sarony smoothly. “Your boys’ll head him off, all right. It’s a cinch he’s guilty, else why should he bust away like that?”

“Sure, he’s guilty,” muttered Trasker. “Guilty as hell!”

He stared at the wall silently for a minute, then snatched the door open and went out. Sarony watched him go with a shrewd smile. He sat down and drew slowly on a cigar. He didn’t move for several minutes. Then the door opened again and Sella came in.

Sella was smiling, too. He kept his voice low:

“Located him, all right!”

“Swell! murmured Sarony. “Where you figured, huh?”

“Sure. I been watching that punk for days. The cops wouldn’t know it, but there’s only one place he’d head for, and that’s the little settlement hangout three blocks up the line. He’s got his bundle of blankets there, and—”

“Better tip off the cops,” suggested Sarony, “right away. They can go get him!”

He got up, started for the door. Sella stopped him.

“No,” he said. “Don’t tip the cops. I got something better!”

Sarony stared at him.

“Spill it!”

“This hillbilly punk they call Tad,” argued Sella, “might be poison, even if they pinched him. He may be wise to something, see?” Sella’s voice dropped lower. “Be much safer to drill him!”

Sarony was silent a moment, eyes calculating. “Sure. That would clean up the works for good. But how?”

Sella grinned. “You go see him, see? Give him a line. You know what to say.

Tell him *Jean* wants to see him—she’s waiting for him in the alley! That sap will fall for anything if he thinks the dame wants him.”

“Sure. But what—”

“This is how it is. I already handed you the dough. You got it there in the safe—it’s with your own dough, and no one could identify it. But I still got the empty wallet, see?”

“Okay. I got a knife on me, too. Well, this guy, Tad, comes sneaking along the alley, expecting to see Jean. I’m out there, instead of Jean. I let him have it—use my gat. And right away I plant the wallet on him and drop the knife down beside him. Get it?”

Sarony’s black eyebrows almost met.

“Sure,” he said. “The cops come and you tell ’em that you just happened to go out there and seen Tad. Looks like Tad come back there to contact Jean. But he sees you, gets panicky, goes for you with the knife—and you drill him in self-defense!”

Sella chuckled.

“Right! Couldn’t be better, huh?”

Sarony tapped Sella’s shoulder.

“You keep out of sight, so Trasker won’t be bothering you. Then when I get back we’ll fix it so Trasker is close to that alley door!”

The dance-hall owner slipped out. He waddled up a side street, made two or three turns and appeared in a few minutes in front of a low building. It had a very large window, behind which was a room that resembled the lobby of a cheap hotel. Human derelicts were dozing in the ancient chairs. There was no sign of Tad. Sarony went in.

He went toward the grimy desk, behind which was a sleepy attendant. Half-way there he stopped.

Tad was just coming out from a back room. He hesitated as he saw Sarony as if he wasn’t quite sure what to do.

Sarony grinned in friendly fashion, shuffled toward him.

"Sorry you got into this jam, kid," he said smoothly. "Too bad. I kinda think you're a right guy."

Tad's feet shuffled uncertainly.

"But I didn't do it, Mr. Sarony. Honest I didn't. And Jean had nothing to do with it. I just been talking on the phone—to Mr. Wilton's housekeeper."

"Sure," said Sarony. "But I ain't got time to talk, see?" He was very close to Tad, whispering confidentially. "A message to you from Jean!"

Tad's eyes grew suddenly intent.

"A message from Jean?"

"That's right. She asked me to look you up—it was her idea maybe I could find you here. But she can't leave my place, and she's in pretty bad, see? So she wants you to come back down there."

"But I—"

"You wouldn't go back on Jean, would you?" challenged Sarony.

"Go back on Jean!" Tad's voice sounded shocked. "No, but I—"

"You don't have to come in the place, kid. Because if you do, Trasker'd nab you right away. But I can fix it so Jean will be waiting for you out in the alley—~~near~~ the alley door. You just wait here about ten minutes, then you beat it back there. You'll be all alone there—you and Jean!"

"Me and Jean!" Tad said in a whisper. "Thanks, Mr. Sarony. I—I'll be there!"

STANDING back in a corner of the lobby, Tad glanced up at the clock on the wall. Eight minutes to wait. Tad frowned with tight-lipped concern.

Sarony was a crook. Tad was sure of that. He might be leading him into a trap. Still, why should Sarony come to him at all if he meant to do him harm?

If he was an enemy, why hadn't he told the police where to find him?

It came to Tad, then, with sudden force, that Sarony's friendship was false; that the whole scheme was a trick! He knew it—just as well as he knew the time on the clock in front of him—because he knew that Jean, no matter how urgent her need, would never have asked him to return to danger.

Yet it seemed to him just as clear that it was going to be necessary for him to go back to the alley.

Tad slipped out of his corner, rapidly crossed the lobby, stepped out into the street. He kept to the shadows and was soon within half a block of the dance hall. The big front light was doused now; business was over for the night.

Here, on the corner, was a dingy drug store, still open. Tad found the phone booth, rapidly thumbed the directory, used his last coin to call a number. A gruff voice answered—the voice of the detective working with Trasker.

"A message for Trasker," Tad said quickly.

"What?" snapped the detective.

Tad was calculating rapidly. He figured that he was due in the alley in about two minutes. "Tell Trasker," he went on, "that he might find the stolen money just inside the alley door."

"Who the—"

"That's all," said Tad. "Tell him to look around there, and not to get more than ten feet away from that door!"

"But what—"

Tad snapped the receiver down, hurried out to the street. Two or three lurking figures were barely visible in the block ahead. He moved on until he was directly across the street from the mouth of the alley.

Again, Tad felt that vague yet insistent feeling that it was a sinister place—that danger hung all about it. But he

knew that he couldn't keep away from it. And swiftly he sped across the street to the alley entrance.

There, for a brief moment, he hesitated. It was about fifty feet down to the side door, now closed. Nothing was visible.

Jean should be waiting for him down there somewhere near that door. Jean—or some else!

He pulled himself together, shoved his hands in his pockets, started strolling casually down the alley, *whistling*.

IT seemed the natural thing to do—to whistle going down a dark alley. But this time he had done it deliberately. *In The Shade Of The Od Apple Tree.*

Then things happened with startling rapidity. The dark alley was no longer dark. There were lights.

And something else came whistling down the alley—bullets from an automatic!

But that was not all. The door was flung open. The light from inside shot an oblong blaze out into the alley. And that blaze fastened itself upon a picture of a sleek young man crouched in the alley, against the wall, his face grinning, yet murderously tense. In the man's hand was a flaming gun.

Something hit Tad in the chest, near the shoulder. He tried to go on but couldn't. So far as he was concerned, the lights were vanishing again. And he felt himself weakly sinking down on the cold paving of the alley.

THERE was a small crowd around him when he came out of it. But Tad couldn't see anyone at first except Jean. She was down on her knees beside him. Her hands were stroking his face. Her eyes were wet.

"Tad!" she cried anxiously. "Tad!"

"I'm all right," Tad said feebly.

"They tricked you, Tad," said Jean. "Sella and Sarony—they tricked you!"

Tad could only smile. He heard another voice then—the gruff voice of Trasker, the detective.

"Guess you're in the clear, all right, kid," Trasker conceded. "I was just inside when I heard that whistling. Of course I busted right out. Sella was doing his best to plug you. And it was a cinch, that you didn't know what it was all about, or you wouldn't have been walking into that lead—with your hands in your pockets!"

Tad raised his voice with an effort. "But how about Sella?"

"Aw, him?" said Trasker. "Why, the damn fool got jumpy when I barged out of the door, and he tried to drill me! So I let him have it. He's croaked—but before he went out he spilled the dope on Sarony, too, like the rat he was."

Jean's face was down close to Tad's. But he heard Trasker as he went on talking. There was a puzzled note in the detective's voice as he said: "But that whistling in the alley when Wilton got bumped off—I can't figure that at all. Sella didn't have time to tell me—"

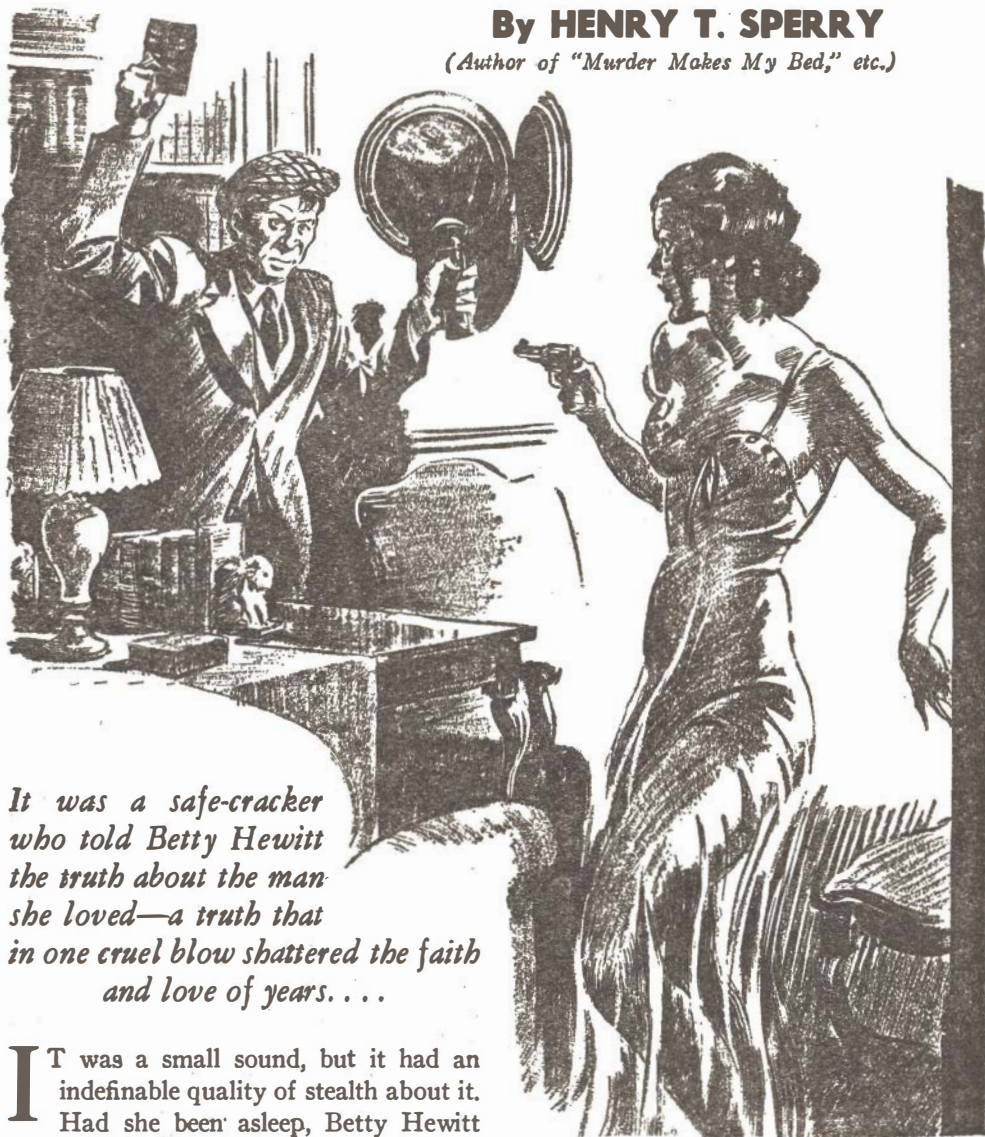
Tad interrupted: "Mr. Wilton's house-keeper told me about that when I phoned her. She says Mr. Wilton was going around the house all evening—before he came down here—practising whistling that old song. It was Sella who was using Jean as a come-on, without her knowing it. And Sella told him that when he came down here he was to go out in the alley—and whistle that song to let her know he was waiting for her. Mr. Wilton was doing the whistling."

Tad sank back, exhausted. But, in the flare of the light from inside, he could see a smile on Jean's face. And her smile told him that perhaps, after all, there might be a place for a girl like her in the life of a man who worked in camps.

THEY ALSO SERVE—

By HENRY T. SPERRY

(Author of "Murder Makes My Bed," etc.)



It was a safe-cracker who told Betty Hewitt the truth about the man she loved—a truth that in one cruel blow shattered the faith and love of years. . . .

IT was a small sound, but it had an indefinable quality of stealth about it. Had she been asleep, Betty Hewitt would never have heard it. Certainly it was not loud enough to awaken the lightest of sleepers. But Betty was wide awake.

Betty Hewitt was a detective's wife. She was one of that silent army of women who frequently lie awake in the night wondering when, how, and *if* their men are coming back to them.

With Betty it hadn't been so bad before her brother Bob, also a detective, had gone to his front door in answer to a

"Listen, lady," he pleaded, "you can't kill me in cold blood. . . ."

ring, one night, and fallen in his tracks with ten machine-gun slugs in him. Bob had preferred lead in his body to silver in his pockets. He had turned down Clipper Grice's proffered bribe. He had told Clipper Grice to his face that he was going to smash the policy racket that Grice and his mob controlled, if he had to turn the

town upside down. But Bob had gotten smashed instead, and he had left behind a girl whose hair was turning white at twenty-four—a wife of six months.

Ever since then Betty Hewitt had lain awake and counted the hours until her own husband, Joel, had come home. She had counted the hours and listened to the sounds in her house—sounds that she had never heard before she started to lie awake nights. She had come to know them all: the little creaks of shrinking or expanding boards; the whispery ticking of the clock in the hall; the ghostly rattle of mice's feet

The sound she heard, now, was different. Betty didn't have to hear a repetition of it to know that someone was creeping stealthily over the floor downstairs.

There was a small .32 revolver in the drawer of the nightstand at the head of Betty's bed. In the same drawer was a flashlight. Silently she reached over and drew them out. Silently she slipped out of bed and crept out into the upper hall. She paused at the top of the stairs for several moments, but she heard nothing. Then, as faint as reflected starshine, a light flickered in the lower hall for a moment, and went out. Diffused, all but imperceptible, it seemed to come from the direction of the living room. As she descended the stairs it flashed on and off twice more.

BETTY HEWITT carefully put down her flashlight on the cushioned seat of a chair in the hall. Then she reached around the edge of the doorway and switched on the lights in the living room.

"Put up your hands," she said, and neither her voice nor her gun hand shook in the least.

But the command was hardly necessary. The man in front of the wall safe was too experienced in his craft not to know when resistance is foolish. With

the snapping on of the lights he had whirled—with his hands in the air. One hand held a small red leather-covered book, the other held his flashlight. A bulge in his right coat pocket showed where his gun was—in a very inaccessible place, under the circumstances. But the tense fright in his face eased a bit when he saw that he was being confronted by a woman.

"Take it easy, lady," he said. "I ain't resistin'."

Betty looked at him steadily for several seconds. Then she said, "You're Ben Schere, one of Clipper Grice's killers, aren't you?"

The man's face fell into lines of innocent amazement.

"Me, lady? I never heard of Clipper Grice or this, now, Ben Schere. I—"

"Don't lie!" Betty's voice was ominously cold. "I know you, Ben Schere. You are in Detective Joel Hewitt's house—you know that. I'm his wife. It was my brother Clipper Grice and his murderers killed, when he wouldn't take their filthy money. Afterward, my husband took me down to headquarters, showed me the pictures of Grice's gang, and I memorized every one of them. Yours was there, Ben Schere. My brother Bob would lie easier in his grave if I killed you now—"

"For God's sake, lady!"

The man's face went pasty-grey, and he seemed to shrink physically as his knees flexed under him.

"—and I could do it without fear of being arrested, since you have broken into my house!"

The man gulped and his small eyes drew into pin-points of fear and frenzied calculation. His right hand released its grip on the red-bound book, and it dropped to the floor. Then his hand slowly started to descend. But if he contemplated going for the gun in his coat pocket,

an ominous movement of Betty's trigger finger quickly changed his mind, and the hand shot upward again.

"Listen, lady," he said, "you can't kill me in cold blood. I meant no harm, comin' here—that's levelin'. I'll tell you the God's truth—I came to get that there little red book. That's all. I had to get it, or Clipper'd cut the heart right outta me—he sure would."

Betty was silent for a moment. She had never seen the book before, but if Clipper wanted it badly enough to send a cracksmen after it, it was probably some sort of evidence against the policy mob that Joel had secured. It was strange Joel hadn't turned it in at headquarters; but undoubtedly he had his own good reasons for not doing so.

"Very well," she said, "I guess I can't bring myself to kill you—unless you give me an excuse by trying to escape or go for your gun. . . . Turn around so your face is to the wall, while I phone for the police."

The man obeyed almost with alacrity, but as he did so, he said over his shoulder, "Thanks, lady—and just for that I'll give you a tip: burn up that book before the cops get it!"

Betty's red mouth twisted a bit.

"So Clipper Grice won't cut your heart out?"

"No, lady—" The man peered at Betty cautiously over his shoulder. "Look, now," he said, "you take it easy, lady, and I'll tell you somethin' for your own good. You don't have to take my word for it, because you can prove it for yourself. . . . That there book has the names in it of every big-shot in this town that has taken money off'n Clipper Grice—protection money. See? And if your old man takes it in, or the cops find it here, his job won't be worth a nickel. He—"

Betty gave a dry little laugh.

"You must think I'm an awful fool.

There's enough honest men in this town to rout out the dishonest ones—and protect my husband. . . . And if you knew anything about my husband, you'd know that wouldn't make any difference to him, anyway."

The man risked another peek at Betty over his shoulder, and the girl saw that he was trembling violently.

"Jeez," he said. "I don't know how you're gonna act when I tell you this lady—but remember I'm doin' it for your own good. . . . That book's got Joel Hewitt's name in it, too!"

FOR perhaps ten seconds Betty Hewitt stood silent, as motionless as a statue. A voice in her heart assured her that the man lied. It was the calm, warm voice of loyalty and love; but the longer she stood there, the more that voice was submerged in another that spoke clearly and coldly from her brain: "The man knew he was risking his life to say that. . . . He knew I might kill him. . . . Why hasn't Joel turned the book into headquarters if he has nothing to hide? . . . At least, I can look for myself. . . ."

At last she spoke, and now her voice was lower, and some of the steely calmness had gone out of it.

"Turn your face back to the wall," she said, "and kick the book in my direction with your heel. Move slowly and carefully. At the first quick move I'll shoot to kill."

The man's extreme care in shoving the book into place with his heel so that he could kick it toward her—and the precision of his kick—were almost comical.

Betty advanced a few paces, picked it up, and backed to her former position.

"I'm going to look at it," she said, "but I'll have an eye on you, too. . . ."

"Don't worry, I won't move a finger," said the man, "but I wish you'd let me

lower my hands a little, lady. My arms are gettin' awful tired"

"All right," said Betty, "clasp them on top of your head."

Her voice shook a little. She despised herself for it—for permitting herself to doubt Joel even for a moment. But love for her husband was everything to Betty Hewitt—so much so that even the shadow of anything that might come between them must be dispelled immediately. It wasn't lack of faith, she told herself—she was just going to prove to this man that he was lying

She watched him until his fingers were laced on top of the greasy cap he wore, then holding the book with the free fingers of her gun hand, she flipped its pages with the other.

There were many names, here, opposite amazingly large sums of money—names of aldermen, politicians, attorneys, police officials. And near the end of the list, in the back of the book, appeared Joel Hewitt's name, not once, but several times.

BOB SHORE was Betty Hewitt's brother. A sturdily-built, sturdily honest young detective he had been—and he had died to keep his name out of Clipper Grice's red book. If Ben Schere had only known it, he could have made his get-away without a chance in ten thousand of being shot. Betty Hewitt's eyes were so full of scalding, bitter tears that she couldn't even see the pages of the damning book she held in her hands. There was an intense heat in her heart that she knew was the fire of a love that was burning itself out.

There was the sound of a car coming to a stop in front of the house, of footsteps coming up the front walk. . . . Betty sank back against the wall, the gun in her hand sinking until it pointed at the floor.

There was a muffled exclamation from the darkened hallway, and then Joel

Hewitt sprang into the living room, his Police Positive pointed at the back of Ben Schere, who still stood motionless, his face to the wall.

"What the devil is this?"

Hewitt advanced to Betty's side, threw an arm around her, his eyes back on Schere. "Don't worry, baby—we've got him. Thank God I got here—"

Slowly Betty straightened, shook off her husband's arm.

"Never mind calling headquarters, baby," said Hewitt, his eyes still on Schere. "I'll take this mug down myself."

"No," said Betty, and now her voice was as calm and cold as when she had first discovered Ben Schere. "I'm going to headquarters—you're not. You'd drive that killer home—and collect another fifty dollars from Clipper Grice. I'm going to take your car and drive to headquarters—and give Captain Morrissey *this!*"

Joel Hewitt's startled eyes jerked from Schere to see Betty standing there, holding out the red book in one hand, and covering him with the other—which held the .32 revolver he had given her.

Shock held him silent for a moment, then he snapped, "Put up that gun—and give me that note book! Quick!"

There was a sudden movement on the part of Ben Schere, which both of them missed seeing. Then the crash of a shot—and the lights went out. Guns spat fire from both sides of the room, and Betty was running out into the hall. Blindly she caught up a coat from the chest where she had left it that afternoon, flung it on while the guns still thundered in the living room. Then she was out of the door, flinging herself into her husband's patrol car, and speeding off into the night.

IT was at least three miles to police headquarters, and Betty knew, before she was half-way there, that she was being followed. In her rear-vision mirror

she could see a car behind her, matching her mad speed, dodging in and out of the sparse late traffic, paying no more attention to stoplights than she was. . . . She held down the siren button and pressed down the accelerator as far as it would go.

Brakes screamed behind her, but she didn't look around as she fled up the steps of headquarters building and burst through the revolving doors. But rapid footsteps followed her, caught up with her before she had gotten half-way down the corridor. A steely grip caught her.

"Give me that book," snapped Joel Hewitt. "Do you want to make fools of both of us?"

He snatched the red-backed book from Betty's strengthless hand, as she gazed at him with bitterness and despair.

"Now," said Hewitt, "come along!"

Betty's brain was numb, but she realized her husband was propelling her toward the big swinging doors behind which was the captain's office.

Captain Morrissey looked up from his desk as they entered, his face registering surprise, and then polite pleasure as his eyes lit on Betty.

"Oh—good evening, Mrs. Hewitt," he said. "Hello, Joel!"

"Evening, captain," said Hewitt. He tossed the red book on the captain's desk. "Here's that book I phoned you about this afternoon. I should have brought it down as you suggested. But I wanted to get out and check up on that lead you gave me, and I thought it would be safe for a few hours in my wall box. . . . It wouldn't have been if Betty, here, hadn't been on the job. She caught Ben Schere trying to lift it. I left Ben outside with one of the boys . . . !"

"Congratulations, Mrs. Hewitt," beamed the captain. "You have remarkable courage; but if I may say so, you look rather done-in. You better take her home, Joel!"

"Just what I'm going to do," returned Hewitt. Then, with his eyes quizzically on Betty's wan face he added, "and—by the way. . . . I've got the graft money I took from Clipper, in order to keep him from getting suspicious, in a separate account at my bank. I think it is only fair to give it back to him so he can pay a mouth-piece with it when he comes to trial. It won't do him any good, anyway."



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COUNTERFEIT JUSTICE

By JOEL STEPHENS

Myrna Marvin's dead husband lay at her feet—and her only fear was that she would not be suspected of his murder!



MYRNA MARVIN stood in the warm dusk staring down at the dead man and her body shook with sobs. The dead man was her husband, but she was not sobbing for him.

"O God," she breathed hoarsely, "it's all on my account; it's just the same as if I'd done it myself. But Peck will have to pay. . . ."

The body of Lafe Marvin lay across the chopping block near the woodpile. The ax had just dropped from one outflung hand. There was a small hole drilled neatly on one temple and blood had run down upon the swarthy cheek.

The girl stared uneasily about her. There was no sound except the crying of the child in the house. Dusk was thickening over the cotton fields.

"Where is Peck now?" she wondered. "Did he run off—or is he hiding about somewhere?"

Swiftly her mind went back over the

Myrna lifted the rifle and fired.



last few minutes. She had been coming through the pasture, driving the cows home, when the thin crack of the .22 rifle reached her ears. It seemed to her now that she had known at once what had happened. Peck Newby, her brother, had done at last what he had threatened to do. He had said that if Lafe Marvin ever lifted a hand to her again he would kill him, and he had done it.

She stared down at the angular, brutal face. Death had not softened its coarse and cruel lines. She thought of the five wretched years she had spent with him, of the abuse she and the child had suffered at his hands. Even now, seeing him dead, she could not be sorry.

"It's better he's dead," she sobbed. "He wasn't fit to live. But, oh Peck, they'll catch you, hang you. . . ."

Again she glanced about. She was only twenty-one, a little pale, a little haggard from overwork, but with a firm, well-molded body under the gingham print dress, and with a certain wistful beauty in her face. Her blue eyes were wide now, anxiously scanning the surrounding cotton fields and pastures.

A few workers still lingered in the fields. Peck wouldn't have run out and chanced their seeing him. He must be hiding somewhere. She hurried to the cow lot, ran into the barn, calling softly:

"Peck, Peck."

She looked in every crib and cow stall, climbed up and peered into the loft. He wasn't there. She came back out into the yard. A little distance down the road she saw a parked car. A man was patching a tire. He must not have been there long, she reasoned, or he would have come to see what the shooting was about.

She went into the farm house by the back door. Her son, Tracy, a chubby little two-year old, sat in the middle of the parlor floor, crying among his toys. Stealthily she searched the whole house,

but her brother was not there. She tip-toed into the kitchen, stood there thinking.

It was awful, horrible! Not only had Lafe Marvin abused her and the child, but he had once attacked Peck with a knife, when her brother had tried to protect them. But now that Peck had killed him, he would have to pay for it. Man's justice was blind, she thought bitterly. Then a sudden idea struck her. If it was blind it could be cheated!

The plan flashed into her mind complete in every detail. She ran to her bedroom and from beneath the mattress of her bed pulled out a cotton stocking half-filled with loose silver and tied with a shoe string—her savings. She carried this outside, climbed the wooden ladder that was propped against the rain water cistern near the back door, raised the cistern lid, and dropped the money-filled stocking inside.

Back in her bedroom she began to open closets and drawers and throw their contents on the floor. She threw the mattress of the bed back and rumbled the covers. Then she went to a rickety chiffonier in one corner of the room, opened the drawers, disarranged the contents and allowed part of them to drop out. At the bottom drawer she stopped. The room already looked as if a cyclone had struck it, so she left the bottom drawer closed.

Now she went quickly into the hall, took a .22 rifle from the rack on the wall and ran out the back door yelling. She saw the man in the road leave his car and come running toward the house. She ran around the house on the opposite side, lifted the rifle and fired.

"Stop!" she shouted. "Stop!"

The man came around the corner of the house, ran up to her, stuttering questions. She recognized him as a neighboring farmer. The man caught her as she swayed uncertainly and supported her in

his arms while she stammered her story.

She had been bringing the cows home when she heard the shot, she told him. She had run up and found Lafe dead. Going on into the house, she had found a strange man ransacking the bedroom. The man had snatched up her hoard of money and fled. She had grabbed the gun and followed him but he had escaped in the shadows.

The farmer went with her and looked at Lafe Marvin's body. Then he went back to the road, hailed a passing car and sent for the officers.

IN the breathing-spell this interlude afforded her, Myrna Marvin began fortifying herself against the coming ordeal. Would her story hold water? The farmer had not appeared to doubt it. But would Sheriff Gabe Warley accept it without question. Would—? Her heart went suddenly cold as another name flashed into her mind. Clyde Austin! She had forgotten that Clyde was a deputy now.

"O God!" she prayed. "Don't let Clyde come!"

Standing in the silent darkness on the front porch, she let her mind go back five years, back to the time when Clyde was courting her, back to the ugly quarrel that had separated them, that had resulted in her marriage to Lafe Marvin. Clyde had been bitter about it, had seemed to feel that she had played the traitor. Would she be able to fool Clyde now, Clyde with his shrewd grey eyes that pierced you, that scorned deceit and lies and sham? But maybe he wouldn't. . . .

The farmer, standing below her said: "I hope they get hold of young Austin. There's a boy that will track the killer down!"

Myrna bit her lip. She could have screamed. The next instant a pair of winking headlights blazed at the turn toward town, jogged toward them. The

flivver stopped; two men were getting out. Myrna held her breath. The short, waddling figure was Sheriff Gabe Warley, and yes, the tall, lean man behind him with the slightly swinging stride of a horse-man was Clyde Austin!

Myrna was glad for the dark then. It hid her face from Clyde Austin's eyes while she stammered her story. She finished, breathless, frightened, half expecting a cool drawl to come out of the dark and tear apart her pitiful fabric of lies. But it didn't. Clyde said nothing at all. The sheriff grunted, asked a few questions. She answered readily. The robber, she told them, was a total stranger. He looked like a tramp.

They went out and looked at the body of Lafe Marvin. It wasn't quite clear in the sheriff's mind why the robber had shot Lafe. Perhaps, Myrna suggested breathlessly, Lafe had seen him sneaking up, had started at him with the ax. The sheriff said that might be so. Clyde Austin said nothing. His silence was beginning to get on Myrna's nerves just a little.

The doctor came. He could add nothing to what they already knew. The sheriff and Clyde searched the place, the barn, the storm cellar, the chicken house. When the body was carried in, the sheriff sent back a description of the robber, based on Myrna's story, and instructions to pick up all tramps about the railroad yards and highways.

It was not until they went into the house that Myrna got a clear glimpse of Clyde Austin's face. It was grave, thoughtful, and the grey eyes seemed to avoid her glance. But that, Myrna told herself, proved nothing. Clyde had said nothing to indicate that he doubted her story. She was beginning to feel better. Perhaps she had saved Peck after all.

They were standing in the disordered bedroom when the sheriff, starting to pick

up something from the floor, noticed that a little blood had got on his hands.

"Let me get you some water," Myrna offered, and led the way to the kitchen.

CLYDE AUSTIN went in with them too, glancing casually at the other rooms. Myrna went out to the cistern and drew a bucket of water.

"You're extravagant with your rain water, Mrs. Marvin," the sheriff said as he poured some of it into the basin.

"The cistern's low," Myrna explained. "We were going to let it empty, and then clean it . . ." her voice faltered. The sheriff, about to dip his hands into the water, had paused. Something that looked like a worm was floating in the basin. He fished it out with a laugh. It was a short length of shoe string.

Myrna went suddenly hot and then cold. But the laugh relieved her. How foolish she was, getting a nervous chill at every shadow! She shot a quick glance at Clyde Austin's face. If his expression had undergone any change she could not tell it now.

They went back into the bedroom. The sheriff asked her to show him just where the man had been when she surprised him, just what he had done.

The sheriff was nodding with approval as she finished her description of the scene. She took a deep breath of relief. Then she noticed Clyde Austin.

He was standing by the rifled chiffonier in one corner. His head was lowered and he was staring, absorbed, at the bottom drawer.

"Myrna," he said. It was the first time he had spoken to her. "Myrna, what's in the lower drawer?"

"Why," she replied, completely bewildered, "why, some of mother's things—pictures and things, you know—that she gave me before she died."

Clyde had lowered his eyes again.

"Yes," he said, and his eyes were on her face again—that clear steely glance. "But Myrna, you surely didn't kill Lafe Marvin yourself. So why have you lied about it?"

"Why," she choked, "why—what do mean?"

He shook his head reproachfully.

"It's no use, Myrna," he said. "I know a stranger didn't ransack this room."

"But how—?" she began incautiously.

"Look here," he said "you told us that you saw the man snatch the money from under the mattress, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Then he must have already searched the chiffonier?"

"He must have." She was still puzzled.

"Then why didn't he search the lower drawer? No, wait, I'll tell you why it wasn't searched. It was because when you were tearing the room up you didn't want to throw your mother's things out on the floor. Now, Myrna, why did you lie?"

It was no use. She sank weakly into a chair, buried her face in her hands.

"It's true," she sobbed, "it's true. I made up the story. But Lafe was already dead. There was no use."

"But look here," put in the sheriff, who had just recovered from the shock of Clyde's words, "if that's the case, you're shielding someone—" He paused, blinked and the light of understanding dawned in his face. "Why, it's Peck Newby, of course! Where's your brother?"

Myrna had lifted her tear-wet face.

"Oh, but it wasn't Peck!" she cried. "I didn't see anyone, Mr. Warley. I made it all up. There was no one here at the house when I came up—I swear it!"

"Do you know where Peck is?"

"Why, no," she stammered, "no. I saw him this morning; he was going hunting—" She broke off. That was the truth, and now for the first time she realized that Peck would have no alibi at all.

The sheriff, now suddenly alert, was looking at Clyde Austin. "You stay here, Clyde," he said. "I'm going after Peck."

Clyde Austin sat down. Myrna was staring at him but he avoided her eyes. He was looking into the other room, watching the child, who was playing among his toys. The sound of the sheriff's starting motor came through the open window. The exhaust backfired with a loud report. The child jumped.

"Why does he jump that way?" Clyde Austin asked.

"He's nervous," Myrna said. "Once he was playing with a loaded gun and it went off. I have to spank him to keep him away from guns."

Clyde got up and went into the other room. He stooped beside the child and picked up a toy gun. "Bang, bang!" he said. The child looked up, made popping noises with his mouth. "Unkie Peck gun go bang, bang!" he said.

"Tracy, hush!" said Myrna.

Clyde turned toward her. "Maybe he saw something tonight," he suggested.

"No, no," she cried. "He calls all guns Uncle Peck's gun. Peck didn't—" Her voice trailed off in a sob. The tears came. But she choked them back. Abruptly she sat upright, facing the man. "Did you have to give me away tonight, Clyde?"

"I suppose you feel good about that, Clyde—proud of yourself."

"Myrna!" He shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. "You don't think that, Myrna. You know I'm a sworn officer of the law. You were trying to obstruct justice. . . ."

"Justice!" her lip curled with scorn. "Just words, Clyde. Lafe Marvin got justice. But to pin it on Peck, hang him where's the justice in it even then? Maybe I was wrong to lie about it, make up false evidence. But even that sort of counterfeit justice is better than what you're working for."

She paused breathless.

"He used to beat me—lots of times. You'd have killed him too."

She saw him stiffen, clench his hands. Then seemed about to make a quick reply, then changed his mind.

"There's no proof," he said, "that Peck killed him. Get a lantern, Myrna. We'll look over the place again."

They stopped before a door in one wing of the barn. The door was fastened by a rusty padlock and in the bottom of the door there was a small opening about twelve inches square. The place had once been used as a hen house.

Clyde stared at the door thoughtfully.

"It's the only place we haven't searched," he said. He examined the rusty lock. "It's obvious it couldn't have been unlocked lately, and it'd be impossible for a man to crawl through that chicken hole. Still, we might as well have a look."

The rusty lock yielded and they stepped into a small low room containing a carpenter's bench littered with tools and shavings. At the back of the room a window overlooked the garden. One of the small square panes had been broken from the window, but this hole too, was too small to admit a man's body.

Clyde examined the window, found that it was nailed shut. He walked back, set the lantern on the table and stared about. Then he saw the gun.

IT was a single-shot .22 rifle and it lay on a shelf above the work bench.

"That's Peck's gun," Myrna said, "but it's been locked up in here for a couple of weeks. I remember when he left it there. He doesn't have a key to this place."

Clyde drew down the lever of the gun and opened the breech. There was an exploded cartridge in the chamber. He turned toward the window, stared at the the broken pane.

"Last time you were in here," he asked, "was there anyone else in here with you?"

"Just Lafe," she said, "and the baby."

Clyde nodded. He gave the lever of the gun a downward jerk and ejected the exploded shell. Fumbling in his pocket, he brought out a .22 cartridge, inserted it and closed the gun. Then he laid it back on the shelf and turned to Myrna. "We'll try a little experiment," he told her.

From a corner of the room he picked up a piece of wide planking about seven feet long. He drove a heavy nail into the plank at the top, and then, with the lantern in one hand and the plank in the other, went out again. Myrna followed.

He located the spot where Lafe Marvin's feet had rested when they had found him. Here he stood the plank upright and hung the lantern from the nail. "Now," he told Myrna, "get down on your knees and hold the plank just like that."

He went away. Myrna held the plank steady as he had directed.

From the back window of the work room came a shout. "Now take the lantern down but don't change the position of the plank. Then get back on your knees. I'm going to fire."

Myrna managed it, got back on the ground. A moment later the sharp crack of the rifle sounded, and at almost the same instant something struck the plank.

In a moment Clyde was at her side again. He picked up the lantern, peered at the spot where the bullet had torn a hole through the wood. "About five and a half feet from the ground," he commented. He straightened, looked toward the house. "A car seems to have come up," he said. "We'd better go back."

As they rounded the barn two men came lumbering out of the shadows into the glare of the lantern. They were the sheriff and Justice of the Peace Copley. The sheriff's thick face was flushed.

"Peck Newby's gone," he announced.

"Started out this afternoon, said he was gone huntin', ain't come back . . ."

"But he often does that," Myrna put in fearfully. "Sometimes he goes out to the old ranch place, stays all night."

"You still swear you ain't seen him?"

"I swear it!" she said.

Justice Copley stared at her.

"Maybe we better take her into custody," he said, "until she decides to tell the truth."

A hot flush blazed in Myrna's cheeks. "All right," she flung at them, "I'll tell the truth. I killed him myself!"

"You—" the sheriff began.

Then Clyde Austin stepped up. "Before this goes any further," he said grimly, "I want to ask *how* she killed him."

Myrna shot him a quick glance. "With the gun," she replied "the .22 that's in the house."

"Will you bring it out here?"

Clyde Austin took the gun from her hands. It was a single-shot .22 but of a different model from the one in the work room. Clyde flipped the bolt and exposed the dented cap of the cartridge.

"Hold the lantern close," he said. He looked at Myrna. "Is this the same gun the farmer heard you fire—when you were pulling your little act?" he asked.

Myrna nodded.

"And you had already killed Lafe Marvin with it?"

"Yes."

"Then," Clyde said, "you must have performed a miracle. You must have fired two shots from the same cartridge. Look, sheriff. Look, Mr. Copley. The cap of this cartridge is green with corrosion and rust. See here, the ejector won't bring it out. It's been in there for months probably. So her confession is absurd."

The sheriff looked at Myrna sharply.

"Any other guns on the place?"

"No," Myrna replied. "Only the one

in there." She nodded toward the work room.

"Yes," Clyde Austin said, "there was a gun in that locked room, and it's the gun that killed Lafe Marvin. Come in, I'll show you."

With puzzled looks they followed him inside. "There," said Clyde, pointing, "is the murder gun, just as it lay when I found it."

The sheriff stared about the room.

"But it can't be," he objected. "I looked at that padlock closely when we first searched the place. There was a spider web on it. The door couldn't have been opened tonight."

Justice Copley stepped to the window. "And this square where the pane is broken," he said, "is too small for anyone to crawl through."

"That is true," Clyde Austin agreed, "which leaves only the hole at the bottom of the door where the chickens used to come through. A hen couldn't have crawled through that either. Still, that's the gun that killed Lafe Marvin."

They stared at him.

"Listen," said Clyde Austin, "and I'll tell you what I just did. The gun there had an exploded shell in the chamber. I reloaded it and laid it back just as I had found it, pointing toward the window. I had Mrs. Marvin hold a plank up just where Lafe had been standing by the chopping block out there beyond the thicket. When I fired the gun the bullet went through the plank at a place just about five and a half feet from the ground. That would be just about the height of Lafe Marvin's temple."

"Jumpin' catfish!" exclaimed the sheriff. "Is that a fact, Clyde?"

"I can prove it in a moment."

THEY filed into the farm house parlor. The child lay sleeping among his toys. A small wooden gun was hugged to his

breast. Clyde spoke to him. He awakened, began to stroke the gun.

"He's crazy about guns," Clyde explained. "Mrs. Marvin says she has to hide the guns from him."

He fished in his pocket, brought out a little packet of mints and offered one to the child, who grasped it greedily.

Clyde looked at the sheriff. "I noticed a rather funny thing tonight," he said. "When you drove off your exhaust back-fired, and the boy here jumped like he was shot. It looked like he might have been scared by a gun firing."

The little boy was reaching up his hands, begging for more candy.

"Tracy," said Clyde Austin, resting a hand on the curly head, "I want you to show me where Uncle Peck's gun is."

After a moment's hesitance, the child got to his feet, toddled to the door. He climbed down the front steps and trotted across the yard toward the barn.

A candle still burned in the work room, but Clyde had closed the door. Tracey, however, did not hesitate. He dropped down upon his hands and knees and crawled through the hole in the bottom of the door. They followed the child into the room.

There was a tool box near the work bench. Tracey climbed upon the box and from there to the bench. He crawled straight for the shelf upon which the gun laid. He laid his hand upon the gun, looked at Clyde.

"Make the gun go bang, bang!" Clyde urged, "like you did awhile ago."

The child placed a pudgy finger on the trigger of the rifle. Then he turned away, made a wry face and clapped his hands to his ears.

"No!" he said. "Candy!"

Clyde gave him the candy. Then he turned to the stupefied sheriff a face that now wore a quiet smile.

"That makes it clear enough, doesn't

it?" he asked. "The boy, you remember, was alone in the house while his mother went out for the cows and his father was chopping wood. He had seen the gun when it was placed here a couple of weeks ago, and because guns fascinate him, he had not forgotten it. When his mother left the house tonight, he seized his chance. Mrs. Marvin said she found him crying when she came back into the house. It was the explosion of the gun that had frightened him of course. He couldn't have seen his father through the thicket, couldn't have had any idea of what he had done."

Clyde picked up the little boy and held him in his arms. The sheriff and Justice Copley had stepped outside again, were offering apologies to Myrna.

The two men left. Myrna came back into the room. Her face was beaming. "It was wonderful, Clyde," she said, "the way you figured it out and all . . ."

Clyde set the little boy gently on the ground, stood patting his curly head. "I had to figure something out, Myrna. There in the room tonight, when you were talking, I realized that nothing mattered except you—not even my oath as an officer of the law."

Myrna frowned, stabbed by a sudden pang of alarm. "But you did it, Clyde, you brought the truth out!"

"Maybe," he said. He looked up smiling quizzically. "Or maybe just a counterfeit. The fact is, I started out to frame the whole thing up. Seeing the gun in there gave me an idea of how I could do it. . . ."

Myrna's heart sank. Suddenly she seemed to understand it all. It was so simple! With the gun lying on the shelf there, and the lantern outside shining through the thicket, it had been a simple matter for him to move the gun, aim it. The sheriff had trusted him, of course.

"Did you move the gun, Clyde?" she interrupted fearfully. "Did you aim it?"

"The gun?" he looked surprised. "Oh, no. That worked out just as I told them. I would have moved it if it had been necessary, but it wasn't."

"Then doesn't that prove—?"

"It proves it," Clyde said, "unless there's some stronger evidence to contradict it. Unless, for instance, we should find that Peck was hiding on the place after all." He was looking at her now, sharply, questioningly. "I'll find that out when I look in the cistern."

"The cistern!" she cried. "You think Peck was hiding in the cistern?"

"If he was hiding anywhere, he was hiding there," Clyde said. "When I saw that shoe string in the water—saw your frightened look when the sheriff picked it out of the basin—I guessed it then. Shoe strings don't often get into a cistern, Myrna. But if a man was standing there in the water, and his shoes began to get tight, and he snatched at the string. . . ."

"Oh, Clyde!" The light of understanding had dawned in her mind. She ran to him, caught his hands, looked up with shining eyes into his worried face. "And if you knew," she asked, "that Peck was never there at all, you'd be convinced that it happened as you told them?"

His face brightened. "I'd be convinced," he said.

"Then it's settled, Clyde, for he wasn't. That's where I threw the money I was pretending the robber had stolen. I looked in then and the cistern was empty. You can look for yourself though, and see that there are no tracks on the bottom."

"That shoe string?" he asked. "Why were you frightened when you saw it?"

"I didn't want you to find the money there," she said, "and see that I was lying. As for that old shoe string, it was tied around the stocking the money was in!"

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Many of you have favored us with letters, some of criticism, some of praise. We would like to have more of them—both kinds. No doubt, many times after you have finished reading a story in DETECTIVE TALES you say to yourself, "Well, that was a good yarn; but if I had written it I would have—etc., etc." If that does happen, we wish you would write and tell us about it. Why not set yourself up in business as an amateur critic—just for the fun of it? You will amuse yourself—and, in the process, give us a lot of genuine assistance.

Then, again, sometimes you feel that the story you have just read couldn't possibly be improved upon. You feel thrilled and exhilarated—want to tell somebody about it. All right—tell us! We don't mind a bit, getting that sort of a letter; and in passing it on to the author of the story we give a boost to his spirits that usually results in his writing another yarn for us, just as good or better than the one which drew your applause. These writers need that sort of needling-up, once in a while, you know, or they get down on the world and feel that their genius is being wasted on the desert air.

The fact is, if you enjoy first-rate, vital, moving, detective tales—and you do, or you wouldn't be reading this magazine—you can practically write your own ticket. We editors have to keep our ears pretty close to the ground—that is one of our main reasons for existing—and you may rest assured that an expression of any sort from you is going to get our prompt and interested attention. If you like a certain type of story more than another type, let us know about it. If you like a particular

(Continued on page 128)

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(Continued from page 127)

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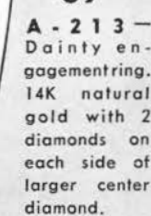
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