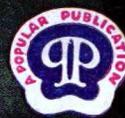


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NOVEMBER

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Many Beginners Soon Make \$5, \$10 a Week EXTRA in Spare Time

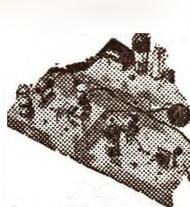
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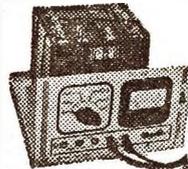
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10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



EVERY STORY COMPLETE

EVERY STORY NEW—NO REPRINTS

Vol. 43 CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER, 1943 No. 4

2—SUSPENSE-FILLED SERIES-CHARACTER NOVELETTES—2

Watch Mr. Maddox navigate the intricate mazes of

Weather Fair—Track Bloody.....T. T. Flynn 8
And squeeze past the judge's stand in a fantastic photo finish. Oscar is trotting alongside, of course, and Cassidy, track-detective extraordinary and Maddox' personal mote-in-the-eye, keeps a hand on the halter.

Imagine Inspector Allhoff's chagrin when he discovered that

Aaron Had a Rod.....D. L. Champion 84
And that it was the Inspector's own '38. Not even the absence of coffee rationing could sweeten the java-tipping Satan of Centre Street's curdled disposition after a Nazi saboteur temporarily outsmarted him by playing on Allhoff's one weakness.

A COMPLETE MIDNIGHT MURDER MYSTERY

You'll get no Army-Navy "E" if you

Keep 'Em Dying.....H. H. Stinson 60
As Pvt. Francis X. McKane discovered when he tackled his first job in Army Intelligence. A pretty stuffy assignment, he thought, until it developed into a double murder with a pixie loose, tossing around hand grenades like they were yo-yo's.

2—EXCITING DETECTIVE SHORT STORIES—2

"Utterly fantastic," you say, to hear

A Great Whirring of Wings.....Day Keene 41
And yet the Doc heard them—twice! Once when his brother was killed, and again in the dead of night, this time with fingers pressing against his throat. The Doc was a man of science, who didn't put much stock in such things. All he wanted was to be left alone to continue his experiments. . . .

You better revise your opinion, if you think that

The Dead Don't Tell.....Julius Long 49
Because here's one corpse who came back to pin his own murder on his beautiful young wife and business partner. Oddly enough, his predictions came true in every detail—except for a trick finish that not even Freud could have foretold.

AND—

We want to know if you are

Ready for the Rackets.....A Department 6
In this revealing series giving the lowdown on currently popular swindle-schemes. Here's a chance to test your ability as a reporter and win \$5.00 at the same time.

The December Thrill Docket..... 6
Some of the sure-fire hits scheduled for production in the next DIME DETECTIVE.

Cover—"His hand was clamped over the blonde's mouth."
From *Aaron Had a Rod*.

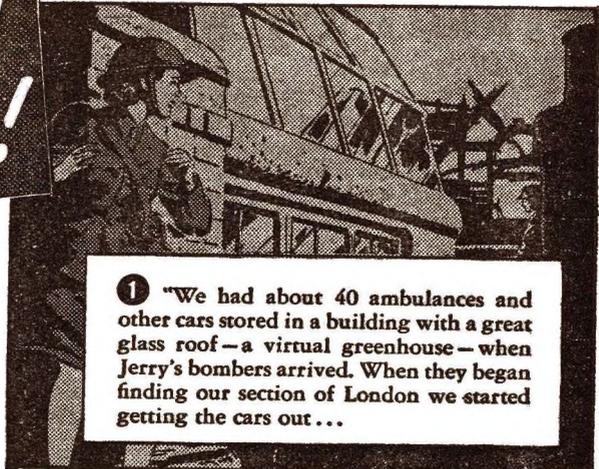
The December Issue will be out November 10th

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BLITZED IN A GREENHOUSE!

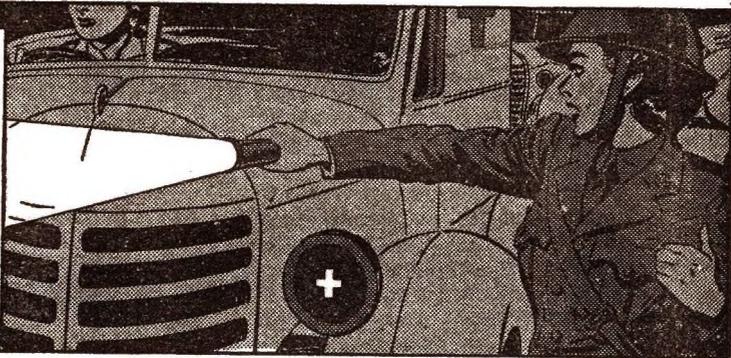


(The exciting experience of Margaret Bridges, of the London Auxiliary Ambulance service, during one of London's heaviest raids. Pretty, attractive 30-year-old Miss Bridges is part English, part American. She volunteered for the ambulance service, reporting for duty just three days before war was declared.)

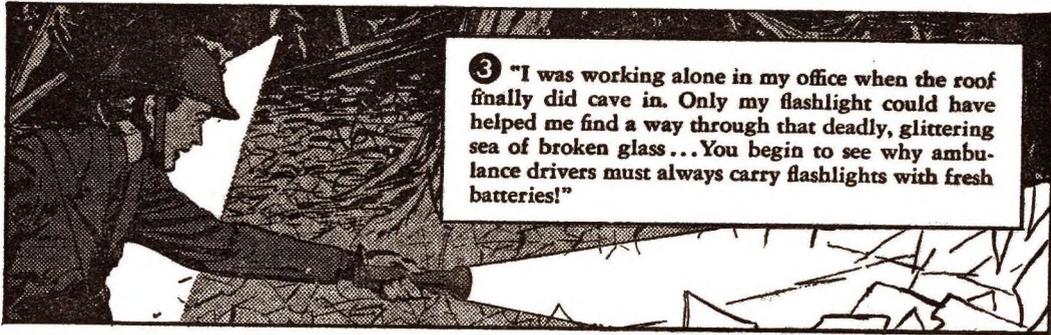


① "We had about 40 ambulances and other cars stored in a building with a great glass roof—a virtual greenhouse—when Jerry's bombers arrived. When they began finding our section of London we started getting the cars out ...

② "Naturally, the transparent roof taboo'd ordinary lights. Yet we hadn't a moment to lose; with every sickening crash we expected the roof to splinter into a million heavy daggers. I got out my flashlight. In about ten minutes I had guided all the cars to safety ...



③ "I was working alone in my office when the roof finally did cave in. Only my flashlight could have helped me find a way through that deadly, glittering sea of broken glass ... You begin to see why ambulance drivers must always carry flashlights with fresh batteries!"



Your dealer may have no "Eveready" flashlight batteries. If so, please don't blame him—almost the entire supply is currently going to the armed forces and those war industries with the highest priority ratings.

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THE DECEMBER THRILL DOCKET

THE Dean is back!

That walking encyclopedia of esoteric trivia picks up his Magnum and using it for a baton drum-majors the *Parade of the Empty Shoes* through the crimson-saturated labyrinths of Elmscroft. Up the stairs, through the boarded-up shutters of the gruesome rookery, out onto the roof, down an ivy-twined pillar to prance across the weed-festered yard he wends his apparently aimless way, to wind up finally at coffin-side with the answer to the strangest kill-riddle of his career at his weapon's muzzle. Of course the spectacles, the sawed-off shotgun, the algometer and the dollie he garnered along the course all helped as MERLE CONSTINER so aptly demonstrates next month in the newest and best episode yet about the most fabulous none-such in current crime fiction.

NORBERT DAVIS returns with "Bail Bond" Dodd in tow—the guy's been absent from these pages far too long—to crash a blue-blood lawn-binge in the hope of drumming up some fiduciary bonding business to pad the income from his night-court petty pickings. The ubiquitous Meekins hustles murder out to Dodd in a cloud of dust before the hapless bondsman can snatch his second highball from the butler and corral his prospective client under a secluded beach umbrella. Limes and Lillicott, the headquarters dark horses on Dodd's azure sky, loom on the scene before you can say "Alibi!" and from then on in it's Dodd against the field till he signs his client on the dotted line behind the bars of the city jail. *Take It From Me* is what DAVIS calls his new novelette but it's anyone but Dodd he means, for the lead character catches hell from all concerned from the first paragraph on.

DAY KEENE gives us *The Female Is More Deadly*—as unusual a novelette as we've encountered in months and there are shorts by TOM MARVIN and others.

This great DECEMBER issue will be out on NOVEMBER 10th.



Ready for the Rackets

A Department

Racketeers and swindlers of all sorts are lying in wait for you, eager to rob or cheat you of your hard-earned cash. All you need to thwart them, guard against them, is a foreknowledge of their schemes and methods of operation. Write in, telling us your own personal experiences with chisellers and con men of various sorts. It is our intention to publicize—withholding your names, if you wish—the information you have passed on, paying \$5.00 for every letter used. No letters will be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope, nor can we enter into correspondence regarding same. Address all letters to The Racket Editor—DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 205 E. 42nd St., N. Y. 17.

THE war offers some people new green fields in which to ply their vicious rackets.

Here's one that's particularly malicious, playing as it does on the sympathies of a service man's family.

The Racket Editor,
DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Dear Sir:

Since newspapers have made a practice of publishing a list of those service men killed or missing in action a particularly gruesome racket has sprung up.

Parents of a soldier, sailor, or marine will receive, a few days after notice of his death has appeared in the paper, a letter addressed to him from an old buddy.

From the text of the letter the parents are able to surmise that the writer was a good friend of their son, and that he has lost contact with him and would like for him to write immediately.

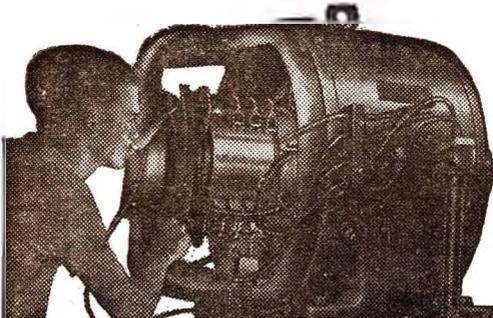
Then—and here is the snare—as a post-script, the "buddy" will add words to this effect: "Incidentally, pal, I'm running a little short this month and I am wondering if you could return the fifty dollars that you borrowed when we were out together the last time. . . I wouldn't ask you for it, but I'm sure you won't mind."

The grieving parents, anxious to settle any of their lost son's affairs, do not hesitate in sending the amount of money, usually with a kind letter informing the writer that their son is dead and often an invitation to keep corresponding with them or visit them.

The fake buddy, once he receives the money, naturally makes no further contact with the parents, for he merely copied the name and address of the service man from the newspaper and sends the same letter, with minor changes, to several parents.

So, a warning to relatives of service men—be sure that you are dealing with an actual friend of your son before you, out of your mutual sympathies, offer him any money or material tokens.

Corporal Darrell Roberts,
Camp Santa Anita
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WEATHER FAIR—

A Mr. Maddox Novelette

Mr. Maddox heaved his bulk past the glassy-eyed man he'd knocked out, and jumped from the careening car.



CHAPTER ONE

The Sport of Killers

TWENTY thousand people saw Herbie Tucker die that bright clear day at the Hawthorne track in Chicago.

Herbie died as he had lived. The flags were flying atop grandstand and clubhouse. The infield grass and hedges were lush green. Red flowers bloomed gaily. The crowd was roaring. The horses were rushing through the stretch to the finish wire.

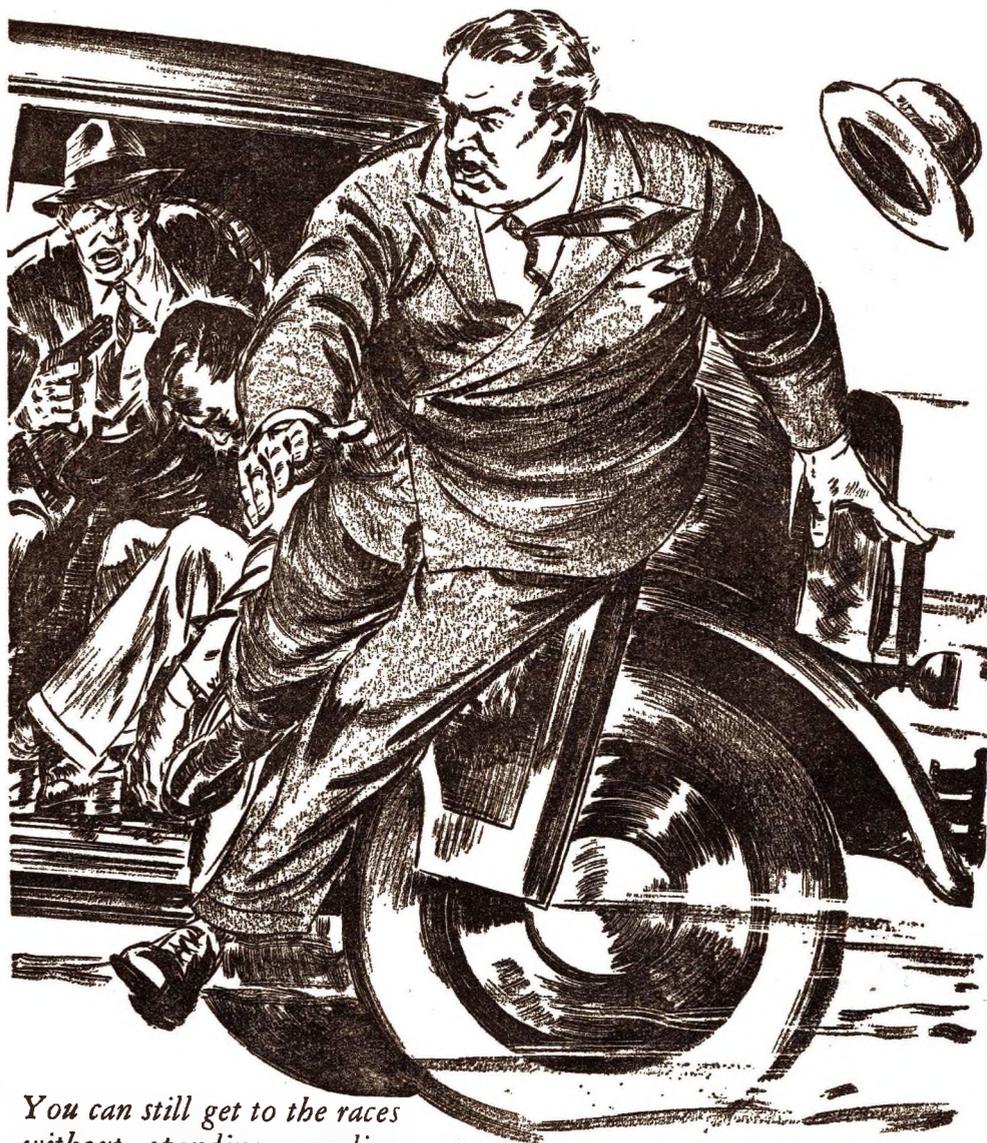
It was the fifth race. Rows of chairs,

red, blue, green and yellow chairs, were placed on the wide terrace steps in front of the clubhouse. The thronging clubhouse spectators included many faces familiar to Chicago society. None of the men looked more important, none more impressive than the vast, comfortably suited figure of Mr. Maddox, genial bookmaker to many of the exclusive names at the track today.

The broad bland face of Joe Maddox was equally well known from coast to coast among turf enthusiasts. In more than thirty years of making a race book, Joe Maddox had come to know them all, wealthy and poor, honest and crooked, young and old.

TRACK BLOODY

By T. T. FLYNN



You can still get to the races without spending gasoline coupons and getting in the OPA's hair. Just join Joe Maddox, the bland Buddha of the bangtail circuit, at the Hawthorne track, where the most fantastic photo finish in turf history occurred. Cassidy, track-detective extraordinary and Maddox' personal mote-in-the-eye trots along, too, just to keep a hand on the halter.

The fifth race today was a six-furlong sprint, claiming, for four-thousand-dollar horses, three years old and up. Not the best, not the worst grade of horses.

Now as Mr. Maddox watched, the horses came sweeping around the stretch turn. Didwin, who was frankly not the best horse or running at the best odds, trailed the leaders, three lengths back in a field of ten.

The spot was bad. The rail was blocked. Horses in front were running strongly. The spectators began to surge from their seats as the announcer's voice grew strident in the loudspeaker horns.

For the jockey took Didwin wide, dangerously far out from the rail. With whip and rein and skillful riding, he brought the brown colt storming through the smooth open stretch.

It was a driving finish to electrify any crowd. The one lone horse offside by himself drew up, up with the leaders. Squarely in front of the long grandstand he passed them and took the lead, going away.

The jockey was crouching far forward, using the whip with a master's touch. But then the jockey was good. He was better than the horse. He was Herbie Tucker, respected, liked, admired by thousands of racing fans.

Mr. Maddox, watching with an expert eye, noticed trouble first in Herbie's whip. The fast, rhythmic sweep of the leather bat, forward and back . . . forward and back, almost too fast to see as it flicked the last straining speed from Didwin, was suddenly broken.

Herbie Tucker's right arm flung out stiffly, awkwardly to the right side. Then the arm jerked high overhead, as if Herbie Tucker were reaching frantically for something up there above him.

Incredibly, faster than one could think or tell about it, Herbie was falling to the left out of the saddle.

A quick catch in the crowd roar turned into something like a massed gasp and groan as Herbie hit the dirt, rolled, slid to a stop in a smother of dust.

The horse ran on. The rest of the field raced under the wire. But even as Herbie Tucker fell out of the saddle, he had ridden across the finish line to win.

MR. MADDOX swore softly when he saw the jockey fall. Then he looked around for Herbie Tucker's kid sister. Her name was Kathleen, but all friends called her Sissy. A few moments back, Sissy had

been standing under the facade of the clubhouse, eagerly waiting for Herbie to come flying through the stretch.

Sissy was still there, frozen and motionless, as if unable to believe Herbie had fallen. A few steps from her was a fat, triple-chinned, middle-aged man and a red-headed young woman.

Mr. Maddox knew the man slightly. He was the Honorable Michael Patrick Dooley, ex-judge, ward boss, professional politician. He was Hunky Dooley to the newspaper boys and his intimates. The tiny and smartly-dressed red-head with him was an eyeful to any male.

A red-headed girl and a loose-chinned ward boss should have been of scant interest at the moment. But Hunky Dooley was strangely affected by what had happened to Herbie Tucker. Blood had rushed into his loose jowls. His eyes seemed to bulge. His big, slack mouth was opening and closing. He looked like a purple-faced fish gasping for air.

The red-headed girl shook his arm and said something under her breath. She seemed to say it wildly and sharply. Hunky Dooley passed an unsteady palm across his eyes, as if trying to shut away what he had just seen. Without any more warning than that, Dooley dropped where he stood.

Sissy Tucker had started blindly forward toward the fence, beyond which Herbie Tucker lay sprawled on the smoothly harrowed track. Mr. Maddox blocked her way.

"Don't get in that crowd, Sissy," he advised bluntly. "You can't help."

"He's not getting up!" Sissy said wildly. "I've got to get to him!"

The ambulance was speeding along the track from its post in the infield, opposite the grandstand. Mr. Maddox pointed to it.

"They'll have Herbie before you can get to the fence. He's probably coming out of it now. An excited sister won't help."

"I'm not excited! I'm f-frightened!" Sissy stammered. "G-get out of the way!"

Mr. Maddox shrugged and stepped aside. He wanted to clear a way for her. The matter of Michael Patrick Dooley seemed more important. Most attention was still on the track, where the ambulance was stopping beside Herbie Tucker. Not many had noticed Dooley's collapse.

Three or four men were surrounding the spot. The red-headed young woman had vanished.

"How do we get a doctor for him?" one man was demanding excitedly.

"He had a heart attack when the jockey

spilled. Maybe he's dead now," another said helplessly.

Mr. Maddox ploughed through them like a huge and brisk wave of common sense.

"Stand back! You'll be stepping on his face! Where's the woman who was with him?"

"What woman?" the nearest man asked.

Mr. Maddox knelt. Dooley's wrist had a pulse. The man was breathing. The purple color had left his face. He stirred. His lips moved. Mr. Maddox had to bend close to Dooley's face to catch the muttered words.

". . . do to me . . . Can't do this to me . . ."

A gruff voice demanded: "What's going on here? Joe, are you praying over him?"

It was Cassidy of the Masterton Detective Agency. The big, grizzled detective looked harried as he knelt beside Mr. Maddox. "Everything's got to happen at once!" Cassidy growled. "What's wrong with this guy?"

"He got tired," Mr. Maddox offered.

Cassidy glared. "Never mind a wise crack! Is he a customer of yours, Joe? He with you?"

"Not with me. Don't you know the Honorable Michael Dooley? He cuts a slice of city politics."

"Oh—one of them," said Cassidy with scant respect. "Just so he don't kick out in the clubhouse here. What's he trying to say?"

Dooley opened his eyes. His staring glance was wild. Then he tried to sit up. Cassidy helped him. Dooley jerked his arm from Cassidy's grip.

"Wh—what happened?" he blurted. "D' someone slug me? I was standing up, look-in'—looking. . ." Dooley swallowed the rest of it.

"Looking at the track where Tucker had just fallen off his horse," Mr. Maddox said blandly. "Remember Herbie Tucker?"

Dooley gave him an angry look, just short of fear. The man's mind was working fast enough now, as his reply proved.

"I don't remember anything!" Dooley snapped. "I've had another heart attack! Help me up!"

"Where's your girl friend?" Mr. Maddox asked as he and Cassidy assisted Dooley to his feet.

Dooley's look was just short of venomous this time. "Aren't you Maddox, that cheap bookie?" Dooley asked.

"He's the bird," said Cassidy cheerfully. "I see you gents know each other well."

Dooley jerked his arm from Mr. Maddox'

hand. "I don't know the likes of him an' I don't want to. I gotta have a drink."

"How about the lady friend?" Mr. Maddox persisted blandly.

"There wasn't any lady friend!" Dooley all but snarled. "What's it to you? Can't a man have a heart attack without some cheap crook making cracks? I need a drink to wash the taste of you out of my mouth!"

DOOLEY stalked away. Someone behind Mr. Maddox whistled softly, commented: "That fellow don't mind telling a guy off. Next time I see him with a heart attack, I walk the other way."

Cassidy was grinning broadly as he looked at Mr. Maddox. "I see he knows you well enough, Joe. You must have welshed on a bet with him."

Cassidy was rubbing an old feud and a sore spot between them. One duty of the Masterton detectives was to suppress all bookmaking around the big race tracks, so that all money passed through the mutual machines.

Many men and women who wagered large sums did not want their money depressing odds on the horse they favored. They liked to wager with a bookmaker who never allowed their money to work against the odds. From coast to coast, in all the big racing centers, Joe Maddox was popular and trusted as a bookmaker who would take any size bet on any horse, and pay track odds. In thirty years of big-time bookmaking he had never failed to pay off.

For years Cassidy had been trying to prove that Joe Maddox accepted such bets at the tracks. He had never succeeded in doing so. The fact rankled. Acrimonious words were often exchanged between the two men.

This time Mr. Maddox ignored Cassidy's remark. His eyes followed the triple-chinned figure of the Honorable Dooley. His broad face was as bland and smiling as an inscrutable Chinese Buddha.

"Heart trouble," Mr. Maddox mused aloud, "can be very dangerous."

"That," said Cassidy, "is a dumb remark. Sure it's dangerous. The guy might have croaked."

Mr. Maddox plucked a thick, black, expensive cigar from the breast pocket of his coat. He bit off the end with a snap. Hardness touched his blandness.

"Maybe he'll wish he had," Mr. Maddox said dryly. "And don't forget, you fat-head, that I've got a stable of horses here at the track. Keep your lip buttoned over anything

else you can't prove. I should sue you for libel."

Mr. Maddox walked toward the track fence as Cassidy's unimpressed snort followed him.

CHAPTER TWO

Death Finish

THE ambulance was turning back on the track. The curious crowd ebbed from the fence. Sissy Tucker's slim young figure came out of the press. She saw Mr. Maddox and came to him.

"I couldn't get to Herbie. They put him in the ambulance on a stretcher. He didn't move," Sissy gulped.

She was all of eighteen. They had made her for gingerbread frosting and hungry male eyes and had broken the mold. Small like her jockey brother, Sissy had nicely sun-touched skin and soft brown hair. Usually her face was lively, very pretty and perky.

Now unshed tears were bright in Sissy's eyes. Her chin was trembling. Mr. Maddox happened to know that Sissy loved her brother with a proud, tender, almost maternal passion. They were orphans. Each had reared the other, one might say. They were very close.

"Let's go to the office and wait for word. They'll know as soon as anyone," Mr. Maddox suggested, taking her arm.

"I don't want to wait. I've got to know how he is," Sissy insisted shakily. Her arm was trembling in Mr. Maddox' big hand. "What made Herbie fall? His horse didn't do anything."

"Stirrup might have broken. Saddle could have turned."

"The saddle stayed on. Herbie's stirrups don't break. He's too careful with his tack."

Mr. Maddox knew all that. He had only tried to soothe her. A fall from a racing thoroughbred was bad enough at any time, with the danger of driving, smashing hoofs coming from behind. Herbie had been spared all that by riding wide of the field. But the way he had gone down looked bad. Something had seemed to happen to Herbie inside.

Coupled with that were the strange actions and muttered words of the Honorable Dooley. Joe Maddox would have laid 50 to 1 that the man's heart was as sound as his reputation was bad.

Whatever had happened to Dooley had some direct connection with Herbie Tucker's

collapse on Didwin. Dooley had simply lied about the red-headed young woman, for reasons known to himself. She had been with him. She had vanished the moment Dooley himself had collapsed.

Dooley and the red-head both undoubtedly knew why she had deserted the spot so hastily. Whatever the reason, it was still capable of putting fear into Dooley's eyes.

All that was running through Mr. Maddox' mind as he escorted Sissy out of the clubhouse enclosure and through the jostling crowd under the long grandstand.

A race had been run. Another race was coming up. Losers were adding their discarded mutuel tickets to the litter of torn and trampled tickets already scattered underfoot. Winners were hastening toward the cashier windows.

A shrill-voiced woman brushed past. Her comment to her escort was audible.

"Good thing he had sense enough to stay in the saddle till he passed the finish. It'd slay me to lose a bet because the jockey couldn't stay in the saddle."

Sissy stiffened and turned a blazing look after the woman.

"Forget her," Mr. Maddox advised. "She's not thinking what she's saying. It won't help to let her worry you."

Sissy said a strange thing in reply. She said it despairingly under her breath.

"What will help?"

Mr. Maddox gave her a keen look. Sissy had spoken to herself. For the moment she seemed to have forgotten he was walking beside her. Her despairing breath of a question was another strange and queer fact to tuck away and ponder over.

THE paddock was at the far end of the long grandstand. Beyond a runway leading from the paddock to the track was the office. A guard at the runway gate touched his cap to Sissy Tucker.

"Tough luck, Miss," he said.

"Have they heard how Herbie is?" Sissy asked quickly.

"No, ma'm. Here comes Fred Clayton. He oughta know."

Clayton was assistant trainer to the Carrndale Stable, which owned Didwin, and for which Herbie Tucker was contract rider. Sissy turned down the runway to meet the assistant trainer.

Mr. Maddox expected her to run. She walked slowly, seeming to force her feet. Mr. Maddox had no trouble keeping up with her.

Fred Clayton's grave face made Mr. Mad-

dox regret bringing Sissy to this end of the grandstand. Still, whatever the news, she'd have to know.

Clayton snatched off his straw hat. He had been hurrying and was still breathing hard. His face was oddly pinched and pale. He looked uncertainly at Mr. Maddox, rather than at Sissy.

"How—how is Herbie?" Sissy asked.

Fred Clayton licked his lips. He looked appealingly at Mr. Maddox.

"I think we'd better know," Mr. Maddox suggested.

Still it was an effort for Clayton to get it out. "Herbie. . ." he said. "Uh—the doctor says that Herbie's—"

"Dead?" Sissy said.

"Well—yes."

Sissy turned blindly and bumped into Mr. Maddox. She did not seem to know he was there.

"I was afraid it would happen," she whimpered, and then she fainted.

Mr. Maddox caught her. She was a light little thing, very limp now, ashen-faced.

"Why'd I have to be the one to give it to her?" Clayton asked miserably. "She had me cornered."

"She had to know," Mr. Maddox said, walking toward the office with his burden. "What did the doctor say caused it?"

"Doc's got an idea Herbie was dead before he landed on the track. Heart trouble, probably. I was looking when it happened. Herbie never moved after he stopped rolling."

The guard had closed the gate to the runway against another rush of curious spectators. "Want a doctor?" he called.

"Nope," Mr. Maddox decided. He spoke to the little group of horsemen who made way for him to enter the office. "Any smelling salts around here?"

"I got a little Kentucky corn on my hip," one veteran halterman volunteered as he followed them through the doorway into the office.

Mr. Maddox put his burden on the office counter.

"Keep back from her," he said to the horsemen who started to gather around. "Let's have the bottle."

"It'll cure anything," the owner bragged.

Mr. Maddox looked regretfully at the limp figure he had put on the counter. Then with two gulps he almost emptied the small bottle.

"You got a nerve!" exclaimed the indignant owner. "I meant it for her!"

A fit of choking all but strangled Mr.

Maddox. Red-faced, breathing hard, he returned the bottle.

"She's got trouble enough," Mr. Maddox gasped. "Anyone with poison like that on his hip is a public menace."

The excited entrance of a jockey dressed in scarlet, blue and yellow racing silks stopped the ripple of humor. The boy blurted: "Someone said Miss Tucker was in here sick!"

"She fainted, son," Mr. Maddox said calmly. "She'll be all right."

The jockey was Rube Russell. His agitation suggested more than friendship for Sissy. He began to rub one of her small, lax hands.

Mr. Maddox chewed the thick black cigar. His thoughts went back to the queer way Herbie Tucker had died, to Dooley and the queer remarks Sissy had dropped.

THE horsemen were talking among themselves. Others were coming in. Someone at the door called: "Let Mr. and Mrs. Carrnigan through."

Way was made at once. John Carrnigan was a name in the construction business and well known in the world of thoroughbreds. Sporty, likable, Carrnigan came in, requesting: "What's this about Miss Tucker collapsing?"

"Nothing serious," Mr. Maddox said, and he lifted his hat to Mrs. Carrnigan.

Solidly built, weatherbeaten, John Carrnigan resembled somewhat the steel and concrete his organization built with. He nodded to Mr. Maddox, knit his forehead slightly at the jockey standing beside Sissy.

"Jockey Russel?" Carrnigan questioned just short of brusquely.

"Yes, sir."

"Aren't you taking Tucker's place on my Rameylad in this next race?"

"Yes, sir."

"Get in the paddock then, boy. They're saddling now," Carrnigan directed. He noticed the troubled look young Russell gave Sissy Tucker, and he said: "Mrs. Carrnigan and I will see to her."

Mrs. Carrnigan, slender, chic, and in her fifties, gave the boy a reassuring smile. Rube smiled back with an effort.

"It's gonna hurt her bad, ma'm. She thought a lot of Herbie."

"Yes, I know," Mrs. Carrnigan agreed. "We'll do everything we can."

Thanks. . . Herbie'd like to know that, I guess." Rube cleared his throat, tried to smile again, and then swallowed, gave a last look at Sissy and hurried out.

He was barely through the doorway when Sissy stirred. Mrs. Carrnigan helped her sit up.

"I thought I heard Rube Russell," Sissy said weakly.

"You did. He had to leave for the next race," Mrs. Carrnigan told her. "Do you feel like coming home with us now?"

Sissy's question was quick and apprehensive. "Rube's taking Herbie's place in the sixth?"

"Yes."

"I—I wonder if something will happen to him, too," Sissy said with a catch.

"Of course not," Mrs. Carrnigan assured her.

Mr. Maddox was looking at Sissy shrewdly and thoughtfully. She noticed him. It was as if Sissy read his mind. She flushed and glanced away. When she put her hand out John Carrnigan helped her down. Sissy looked wan and stricken as she left with the Carrnigans.

The office seethed with talk when they were gone. Mr. Maddox stood there and listened. He heard nothing that suggested why Herbie Tucker had died.

The high pulse-stirring notes of the bugle announced another field of horses leaving the paddock. Mr. Maddox walked out in front of the grandstand and watched the race intently. Rube Russell's horse, off-edge between wins and stepped up in price, came in a bad fifth. Nothing unusual happened during the race.

BACK of the grandstand, on the other side of a strip of roadway, was a line of green-painted horse sheds. Mr. Maddox walked over there. Still farther beyond the sheds was the smaller track and the yawning, empty grandstand of Sportsman's Park, where the horses had been racing before Hawthorne opened.

A man who could listen patiently around the horse barns often heard things of interest. Few angles of racing were hidden from the swipes and exercise boys, the jockeys, trainers and owners. This afternoon Mr. Maddox was big, bland and smiling as he stopped here and there for snatches of casual talk.

Joe Maddox knew everyone from the lowest Negro swipe to wealthy breeders and owners. In more than thirty years of making a track book and owning his share of horses, the big bookmaker had become friendly with almost everyone in the racing world. Cassidy, that grizzled and cynical Masterton detective, had sworn for years that Joe Maddox shipped four worn-out thorough-

breeds and a useless stable crew around the country merely for the prestige and the convenience of wearing an owner's badge at the tracks.

Cassidy was ignorant of a certain deep satisfaction a man got in watching his own horses run under his own colors. Winning a race was not the point, however gratifying. You had to have horses in your blood to understand. But then Cassidy was only a hard-boiled agency cop.

Steve Wagner, standing in front of the Carrndale stalls, was a newspaper man who wrote shrewdly about sports with a cold-blooded lack of glamor. Often it seemed that horse racing was Steve Wagner's pet dislike. He spared no angle of racing which could be attacked. More than once he had made sarcastic and slighting reference in print to Joe Maddox, whom he had dubbed the Behemoth Bookie to the Sucker Elite.

Wagner was pulling his lip and scowling into space. He looked up, eyes narrowing.

"Since when have you made folding dough in hustling bets around the barns?" he greeted sarcastically.

Mr. Maddox stopped by the smaller man. Despite Steve Wagner's ramrod back and pugnacious chin, two of him would hardly have equaled the prosperous bulk of Joe Maddox. Now Wagner looked wary and irritable.

"You wouldn't be hunting a tip on a winner?" Mr. Maddox chuckled.

Steve Wagner snorted. "When I join the saps and suckers I'll print it. I want a tip on what happened to that jockey."

"He's dead," Mr. Maddox said, sobering.

"I know," said Steve Wagner. His eyes were narrowed as he looked up at Mr. Maddox. "Everyone around the barns here has clammed up. They won't talk. Is it a family secret?"

"Might be there's nothing to talk about. Could be it's just you," Mr. Maddox suggested amiably. "You swat the horsemen with your typewriter every chance you get. Makes you about as popular around the barns as shipping fever."

"I write it like I see it," said Wagner, shrugging. His eyes bored. His pugnacious chin jutted a bit more. "I didn't like what I saw when that jockey spilled."

"No one did. He was well liked."

"I don't mean that. I mean the way he flopped. He was dead before he hit or I'm a liar."

"I could find odds on that last," Mr. Maddox offered blandly. "What's your idea about Tucker?"

"I'm lousy with ideas," said Wagner. He snapped out the words, sure of himself. "If I'm right, there'll be sweating before this is over. The way I get an iron lip around here ain't helping anyone."

"Stevie, you interest me. I'll talk if you will."

"Maybe you'll talk before I will. I saw you thick with Tucker's sister right after it happened," said Wagner unpleasantly. "What does she say about it?"

"She's heart-broken—or would you know about a heart?" Mr. Maddox said. "I know now why they invented rat poison. Want to know?"

Steve Wagner grinned unpleasantly. "Tell me after I'm through with this business," he said and walked away.

CHAPTER THREE

Mr. Maddox Takes a Ride

MR. MADDOX looked after the strutting little newspaper man. Steve Wagner was no fool, however much you disliked him. He got around. He saw and heard things. Herbie Tucker had been well liked around

the barns. Al Drum, the lanky, cheerful trainer, was regretful some minutes later.

"The boy was on top of the world," said Al Drum. "All the horses he wanted to ride. No trouble making weight. He didn't have a worry on his mind."

"Sure about that?" Mr. Maddox asked.

"Seemed that way to me," Al said. "A week ago Sunday I met Herbie downtown on State Street. 'Going to church?' I says, 'or maybe you've been.'

"'It'll kill you,' says Herbie. 'But I've just been to church and how do you like it?'"

"'I should be ashamed I wasn't sitting behind you,' I said. 'Looks like I should buy the drink.'"

"'Not me,' Herbie says with a big grin. 'I've got a red-headed girl and a speedboat a mile long waiting for a spin on the lake. I'll be seeing you.'"

"A red-headed girl?"

Al Drum nodded. "Did you good to see the kick Herbie was getting out of it. He looked like everything was under control and he thought it was great."

"What else did he say about the girl?"

"Herbie was wound up for a big day and didn't want to waste time talking about it." Al sighed. "Y'know, Joe, I get kind of a kick



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out of thinking Herbie had that Sunday like he did. Just like he wanted it."

Mr. Maddox nodded. But he persisted. "Did Herbie say the red-head owned the speedboat?"

"Well . . . I guess not. What difference does it make? Herbie was thinking about the girl. He'd have settled for a rowboat."

"Herbie never seemed to go for girls," Mr. Maddox mused. "He was busy with his riding."

"You know how it goes," Al Drum said. "A kid gets a yen to be a jockey. If he gets started around the tracks he don't have much time for anything else. He's busy at one meet an' then he's off to the next one. Up at daybreak, early to bed and not much dough to spend. If he makes the grade after he loses his bug, the pressure stays as bad. Then when he does fall for a babe, he's hooked hard."

"I wonder what sort of a girl she was. For fifty cents you can buy a speedboat ride off Grant Park. But a girl with a speedboat of her own is something else."

"I'd say the boat came with the girl," Al guessed. "Herbie didn't say so—but that's the way I took it. What's the difference now? Herbie's gone."

Mr. Maddox nodded and walked on. Al Drum would have been surprised at the dynamite in his casual talk. But then Al Drum had not seen the red-headed girl with Hunky Dooley. Al had not seen the girl vanish when trouble broke or noted the fear on Dooley's fat face.

Joe Maddox was a big, rather awkward-looking figure as he walked with a loose stride to the street corner at the edge of the track grounds.

Here buses from the elevated line discharged and picked up passengers. Here on the corner one could share a private taxi to the El station or all the way downtown.

An ancient bus pulled away with a packed load of passengers. It left a sizable crowd waiting in the hot sunshine for the next bus. Out in the street a raucous-voiced individual with rolled-up shirt sleeves was calling: "Taxis right out! Twenty-five cents to the El! Downtown for a dollar!" The man saw Mr. Maddox and veered over to him.

"To the Loop for a buck, mister? One going right out. Only three in it. Plenty of room. Straight to the Loop as soon as you get in!"

Mr. Maddox hesitated. His big blue sedan was put up for the duration. He'd been riding the El and hot crowded shuttle buses.

Today he wanted to get downtown quickly.

He glanced indecisively at the crowd of bus passengers waiting ahead of him. There would be a long elevated ride after he got off the bus.

The man seemed to read his thoughts.

"Taxi's waiting for you, mister! Leaving as soon as you get in. Only a buck. It's worth twice as much. . . Right here!"

A signal brought a weatherbeaten sedan, similar to the other private taxis. The barker opened the rear door with a flourish. "Pay the driver. Goin' out right now."

A comfortable rear seat with plenty of room between the two passengers already sitting there was too much. Mr. Maddox got in and sank back with a gusty sigh of relief. The door slammed. The taxi rolled on across the intersection.

A SANDY, freckled, sharp-nosed little man seated on Mr. Maddox' right hunched around and blinked. "Beats the El, don't it?" he commented.

"It's a dollar's worth of comfort," Mr. Maddox agreed.

"I win that twenty-three-dollar-horse in the second race an' still come out thirty-nine Johnnies back of the eight-ball. How'd you do?"

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "I never bet much. Too risky for the blood pressure."

"You got a pressure, huh? Maybe laying off the gee-gees makes you smart, too."

"Hard to tell," said Mr. Maddox, chuckling again. "If I bet steadily, I might win."

The passenger seated beside the driver had no interest in the back seat talk. Mr. Maddox noted the big ears that stood out from the man's head. The black, gray-sprinkled hair above the ears needed clipping. A blue-striped shirt collar below the ears was soiled and wilted. Behind the left shoulder of the man's tan coat a slight smudge of yellow marked brief contact with fresh paint. Joe Maddox had a habit of noticing such little things. Sitting there now he idly guessed that the man wasn't aware he'd brushed against paint.

The sandy little man was talkative.

"Show me the guy who pushes the gee-gees steady an' wins, and I still won't believe it," he said ruefully.

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "I know a man who cleans up. When he loses one bankroll, he comes back and wins another."

The muscular, solid man who had been sitting silently at Mr. Maddox' left, spoke abruptly. "You talking about System Sam Sweeney?"

Mr. Maddox lifted a surprised eyebrow.

"You seem to know your way around the tracks, friend."

"I been around," the stranger said. His heavy face had a pale, bloodless look, as if he seldom got out in the sunlight. In a way he was a queer one. From the moment Mr. Maddox had sat down beside him, the solid stranger had not moved. He sat there motionless with powerful hands hanging loosely between his legs. He did not turn his head when he spoke.

Mr. Maddox gave him a brief look. "Have we met?"

The man continued to stare at the back of the driver's neck. "We ain't met. I've seen this guy Sweeny, though. He's a ball of fire when he's hot on the hides."

"Sam's hot when he's in the groove," Mr. Maddox agreed. He gave the stolid stranger another keen look. The man talked like one who knew the tracks.

The sandy little man drew a wistful breath. His manner was almost dreamy.

"A guy like that would be something to have around," he said. "Wouldn't it be the nuts to sit back easy at the telephone with a long cold drink and have the guy on ice in the next room? When you got ready to tap your bookie for another grand or so, put the squeeze on this fellow an' make him produce a winner. Me—I could take plenty of that."

"How much of it could he take?" said Mr. Maddox a trifle grimly. "Your ideas sound a little rough."

"I got rough ways when I feel like it."

The sandy little man looked at Mr. Maddox. His thin lips were back over his teeth in a grin. Eye corners were crinkling in humor. But somehow the effect of humor was lacking.

WITH a slight shock Mr. Maddox realized that this harmless freckled little fellow with the pointed nose would like nothing better than to do just what he'd described. He could be cruel, cold-blooded if it suited his purpose. The taxi swung off street-car tracks, to the left.

For a moment Mr. Maddox thought nothing of it. Then suddenly he realized what was wrong.

"This isn't the way to town!" he said sharply to the driver.

The man gave no sign that he heard.

Mr. Maddox leaned forward and punched a finger into the man's shoulder. "I'm not buying a sightseeing trip! If this is the way you get to the Loop, stop and let me out!"

Even as he spoke, nerves were tightening. The hard certainty of trouble was balling in his middle, under his belt buckle. You couldn't brush against the rough and seamy fringe of the underworld all these years without being able to spot trouble quickly.

Still the driver did not look around. Mr. Maddox had all the answer needed. The freckled little man had hunched over in the corner of his seat so that he half-faced Mr. Maddox. His thin lips had drawn into another grin.

"Maybe he didn't hear you," said the little man. He crossed one leg over the other so that both legs blocked the door on his side.

"So?" Mr. Maddox said softly.

The stolid man on the other side was still eyeing the back of the driver's neck.

"You're Joe Maddox, the bookie, ain't you?" he said.

Mr. Maddox sat loosely on the seat edge. The drive, the force and indignation seemed to have left him. He was a big and slightly puzzled man as he agreed: "I'm Maddox. What's all this about?"

For the first time the muscular man turned his head in a full, unblinking stare.

"You ain't dumb," he said. "We just want a little talk with you."

Mr. Maddox looked at the two men siding him on the back seat. He reached to the breast pocket of his coat for a thick black cigar, and bit off the end, and lit the cigar. The huge diamond on his left hand caught his eye. He regarded the costly stone thoughtfully and pulled deeply at the cigar.

"Four of you waiting back there on the corner for me—and I walked into it like a dope," he said without rancor. "Here I am. Spill it."

Still the man beside the driver did not look around. The set of his head suggested that the large ears were missing nothing.

The solid man blinked slowly. Just once.

"They say you're smart," he said in a level voice. "I like a smart guy. Sometimes he don't make so much trouble. He's reasonable. You been around town awhile now. I bet you're tired of Chicago."

MR. MADDUX drew on the cigar again. His broad face was bland and unsmiling, without much expression at all.

"It's a nice town," he said mildly. "Should I be tired?"

The sandy, freckled little man snickered.

"You oughta be, Maddox. The city water ain't so good this Summer. Newspapers say there's danger of an epidemic." He showed all of his teeth this time. Narrow strong

white teeth. "You wouldn't want to get caught in an epidemic, would you?"

Mr. Maddox rolled the cigar to the other side of his mouth. "Nothing like having someone worry about my drinking water."

The muscular man scowled. "Red, keep your mush out of this. Maddox, you aren't dumb. It's time for you to leave town. You going?"

"Why should I?"

"Too many bookies."

"Would the Syndicate be putting a tap on me?" Mr. Maddox questioned.

The Syndicate was that vague, nebulous group who controlled gambling, horse parlors and related matters in the Chicago area. The muscular man shrugged.

"Take it any way you want. Are you gonna beat it?"

"You'll take my word for it?" Mr. Maddox asked curiously.

"Why not? You've got a rep for keeping your word. Say you'll take a night train out and we'll dump you at your hotel. No hard feelings. Maybe next Summer things won't be so tight. You can try it again."

"I hadn't heard things were tight."

"You're hearing."

Mr. Maddox savored the cigar, took it from his mouth and studied it. His mind was curiously detached. Danger seated to right and left and in front of him. Only a fool would disregard it. But when he considered the danger, Mr. Maddox thought of the triple chins, the loose jowls of the Honorable Michael Dooley.

Any way you sliced this taxi trip you came back to Mike Dooley—to Hunky Dooley—standing there under the clubhouse facade with eyes bulging and fear gnawing.

You came back to Herbie Tucker's collapse, to Kathleen's grief and queer comments under her breath.

"... what will help? ... I was afraid it would happen ... I—I wonder if something will happen to Rube, too!"

"Thirty years I've been coming to Chicago," said Mr. Maddox slowly. "I've got friends here. I'd counted on being around for the Arlington meet at Washington Park."

"The hell with that!"

"I like the town," Mr. Maddox mused. "Next year I might not have time to drop around."

"Suit yourself!"

"Why not?" Mr. Maddox agreed reasonably.

The muscular stranger never did reply. The cigar that Mr. Maddox dropped prob-

ably escaped his attention. The big bland bookie who sat so loosely and helplessly on the edge of the seat moved only slightly.

But the big fist that erupted up to the stranger's jaw landed with a sodden smack. It drove the man's head back, bouncing off the seat top. The head was waggling loosely toward the left shoulder as Mr. Maddox's big fist struck a hammer smash against the driver's taut and startled neck.

CHAPTER FOUR

Murder Is An Ugly Word

THE sandy man squealed a belated oath. The driver sagged forward over the steering wheel, paralyzed by the blow on his neck. The silent man with the prominent ears scrambled around on the front seat as Mr. Maddox snatched at the door handle.

All of it happened in seconds. Despite his bulk, which looked fat and mostly was not, Joe Maddox could act, move with deceptive speed.

He realized all the danger. The sandy little man was dangerous. So was the passenger on the front seat.

But the sedan was out of control. The front wheels were swerving toward the curb. There was no time to tackle the remaining two men. Mr. Maddox heaved his bulk past the glassy-eyed man he'd knocked out and jumped.

An instant after his feet struck the pavement a shot reached after him.

At better than twenty miles an hour only leaping, staggering strides kept Mr. Maddox upright. Only the one shot was fired at him. It missed. The sedan swerved on, out of control.

Mr. Maddox thought it was going to hit a parked delivery truck at the curb. The front wheels were wrenched straight at the last instant. Mr. Maddox glimpsed a confused scramble on the front seat as the big-eared man clawed over at the wheel.

The back door was dragged shut. While Mr. Maddox stood in the middle of the street trying to read the license number, blue vapor spewed from the exhaust pipe and the sedan picked up speed.

It swung fast around the next corner and vanished. The smile on Mr. Maddox' face was hard and unpleasant as he retrieved his Panama hat from the pavement.

He did not expect the sedan to come racing around the block after him. Both sides of the street were lined with small shops. People on the sidewalk had heard the shot,

had witnessed his leap from the moving car. They were staring. Police might drive up at any moment. No, the four men wouldn't be back—for the time being.

Some two hours later Mr. Maddox relaxed in the bathtub of his suite at the Grafton House. One hand held an empty Scotch and soda glass, the other a half-smoked cigar. "Oscar!"

Oscar entered the bathroom with another frosty glass. He was a wizened, sardonic little man with hard-bought experience etched on his sharp, shrewd face.

Few people saw Oscar around town with Joe Maddox. Many knew his voice well. Oscar handled the telephones and the betting sheets in the suite. He was fast and accurate at laying odds and deciding when to lay off money. But above all else, Oscar was loyal to Joe Maddox, who had taken him out of the gutter and given him a prosperous life and new self-respect.

This evening as Mr. Maddox took the fresh drink with a grunt of satisfaction, Oscar made a sour comment.

"You could do better than lapping Scotch and soaking like a dopey walrus. You oughta be packing."

Mr. Maddox drank deeply with relish and drew on the cigar. His eyes were all but closed. "I'm thinking," he murmured placidly.

"You don't need to think after that warning to leave town," Oscar said coldly. "Next thing you'll get shotgun slugs in your back."

"Why?" Mr. Maddox murmured.

"How should I know? We went over it soon as you came in. There wasn't any unusual betting on that horse Tucker was riding. Ain't been any whispers around the horse parlors about him. Tucker croaked. So what? Ten thousand other people were watching him. But you still have to think it's got something to do with you getting run out of town."

Mr. Maddox submerged until the water lapped about his chin. He rested the cigar on one side of the tub and the frosty glass on the other. His broad face looked like a full, contented moon poised drowsily on a miniature sea.

"Who," he asked, "is being run out of town?"

"You mean you ain't going—after getting tough with those hoods?"

"We're doing all right."

Oscar groaned at such folly. He started to leave with the empty glass, and turned back, visibly forcing patience as he argued.

"It's plain enough, Joe. You been snatching fat bets that the Syndicate books would

like. Some of them have squawked. So you get the bum's rush out of town."

The bland moon on the miniature sea smacked on a swallow of cold Scotch and soda, and blew a fog bank of rich smoke swirling over the water.

"Telephone's ringing," Mr. Maddox murmured without opening his eyes.

Oscar glared at him and went to answer the telephone.

SEVERAL moments later Oscar was back, speaking through the doorway. "Lady wants to talk to you."

"I'm busy."

"She says it's important."

Mr. Maddox opened one eye. "All ladies are important. I'm still busy. What's her name?"

"Lydia Carrnigan," said Oscar. "She got anything to do with the Carrndale Stable?"

Mr. Maddox came out of the tub in a cascade of water and Scotch and soda slopping out of the tall glass.

"Why didn't you say who it was? She's half the Carrndale Stable! Here, take this glass! Tell her I'll be there in a minute!"

Mr. Maddox shoved the cigar hissing into the nearly empty drink and snatched for a towel. He was a vast expanse of damp flesh with the towel wrapped around his middle when he hurried out of the bathroom and caught the telephone from Oscar.

Lydia Carrnigan sounded nervous and worried.

"I couldn't think of anyone else to call, Mr. Maddox. My husband has had to take the plane suddenly for Washington. Kathleen Tucker seems to consider you a close friend."

"Nice to know she feels that way. What's wrong with Kathleen?"

"Nothing, I hope. But I can't help being worried. Kathleen was in a highly nervous state after we reached our apartment. She didn't feel like eating and went to her room."

"That's understandable," said Mr. Maddox calmly. "Can't you get her to sleep?"

"She isn't here," Mrs. Carrnigan said nervously. "A few minutes after my husband left, Kathleen told me she was going out. John had arranged for her brother to be taken to an undertaker. Kathleen said she had an errand or so to do, and then she wanted to see the undertaker personally. I was to meet her there."

"And she didn't show up?" Mr. Maddox guessed quickly.

"It's too early. I'm still at home. Kathleen hasn't been gone more than ten or fifteen minutes." The line went silent.

"Yes?" Mr. Maddox urged.

Her voice came over the wire uncertainly.

"I don't know whether I should tell you this or not. But with my husband gone, I don't know what else to do. Someone close to Kathleen should advise me."

"I'll do the best I can. Anything that will help Kathleen is a pleasure."

"She's sweet—and I think she needs help," said Lydia Carrnigan impulsively. "I didn't know about this until a few minutes ago. The maid told me, and she wasn't certain that she was doing right."

"While John was hurrying to leave, Kathleen made a telephone call from her room. The maid was in the next room and overheard some things Kathleen was saying."

"Yes?" Mr. Maddox said.

He reached mechanically where the breast pocket of his coat should be. No pocket, no cigar. He smiled wryly at such absent-mindedness and gave all his attention to the voice in the telephone.

"The maid says that Kathleen sounded angry when she was telephoning," Lydia Carrnigan said. "Kathleen said: 'He was killed! You know he was killed!'"

Mr. Maddox whistled softly. "That is something! You did right in telephoning."

OSCAR brought a cigar and a match. Mr. Maddox waved him away. Lydia Carrnigan had more to tell.

"The maid admits she listened closely after hearing that. Of course she has no idea what the person at the other end of the line said, but Kathleen listened and then burst out: "Don't lie to me! I know he was going out with you! And if he hadn't been, he'd be alive now! I'm going to tell you so to your face. I advise you to wait there for me.'"

"Holy smoke! So that's where Sissy's gone?"

"I suppose so," Lydia Carrnigan assented miserably. "You understand I knew nothing of this when she left. She was pale and quiet, but otherwise she seemed all right. I was still thinking about Mr. Carrnigan's unexpected trip and meeting Kathleen at the undertaker's. If I'd only known, I wouldn't have let her go. A girl in her state of mind shouldn't be seeing anyone to whom she has just made such an accusation."

"Quite right," Mr. Maddox agreed. "Well, that part of it can't be helped now. She's gone. I don't suppose you have any way of knowing whether she could have gotten a gun?"

A gasp came over the wire. "You don't think . . ."

"I'm trying to think of everything. Matter of fact, I doubt if anything serious will happen. But Kathleen should be located at once. Does the maid have any idea to whom Kathleen was talking?"

"No. It was another woman, of course."

"Was her name mentioned?"

"Not that the maid overheard."

"How about a record of the call on your switchboard?"

"We have a private wire that doesn't go through the switchboard. I'm really worried, Mr. Maddox. Shouldn't the police be notified?"

"I don't think so," said Mr. Maddox hastily.

"But you realize what Kathleen was saying? She thinks her brother was killed!"

"She's upset," Mr. Maddox said calmly. "If the hospital is releasing Herbie to an undertaker, everyone must be satisfied that Herbie's death was accidental and—er—normal, as such things go. You're suggesting murder, you know."

"It sounds terrible, put so bluntly."

"No other way to put it. Murder is murder. But I think in this case the hospital must know what it is doing. Can you give me the undertaker's address?"

"I have it here. . . Just a moment—"

"Pencil!" Mr. Maddox snapped to Oscar. "And that cigar!"

He was chewing the unlighted cigar as he wrote down the name and address that Lydia Carrnigan gave him.

"What can you do? What shall I do?" she begged.

"I don't see that there's much of anything you can do, except keep this to yourself until we talk with Kathleen," said Mr. Maddox with calm assurance. "Why don't you go to the undertaker's as you planned? Kathleen will go there. It might be best not to say anything to her about all this for the time being."

"Yes, of course."

"Can your maid be trusted not to speak to anyone about this?"

"Susan has been with us for years. I'm sure it will go no further."

"Good. I've an idea that may help. Suppose you leave it to me for the time being." She sounded relieved. "I'm so glad I called you."

Mr. Maddox hung up—and then he almost ran Oscar down getting to the Scotch bottle across the room. The towel started to fall off. Mr. Maddox grabbed it around him with one hand and snatched for the bottle with the other.

"What is it?" Oscar demanded. "What kinda talk was all that about murder?"

"Hell of a mess, whatever it is!" Mr. Maddox gulped from the bottle, coughed, gulped again, set the bottle down hard. "Get my black shoes! And my blue suit! Help me get dressed! I'm in a hurry!"

"You ain't gonna leave town?"

"Stop that yammering about leaving town!"

"But you been warned, Joe!" Oscar wailed as Mr. Maddox made a dash for the bedroom.

"I'm warning *you!*" Mr. Maddox snapped over his shoulder. "Stop that blabbing! Help me dress."

Oscar was a sulky and apprehensive valet. Between them they clothed the large, impressive figure of Joe Maddox in record time.

"Where you going?" Oscar demanded.

"Pleasure stroll. If anyone telephones, inform them I'll be back shortly. Find out what they want. Kathleen Tucker may telephone, but I doubt it. If she does, tell her I'll see her at the undertaker's."

Oscar gulped. "Undertaker's?"

"Mortician, if you like it better."

Oscar licked his lips. "You going to visit the undertaker yourself—or get carried there in a basket?"

Mr. Maddox looked at Oscar's wizened, worried face and chuckled. "I'd like to know," Mr. Maddox admitted, and he left that for Oscar to brood over.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Gentleman in the Boudoir

A BLOCK east of the Grafton House beautiful Grant Park faced the vast sweep of Lake Michigan.

Dusk lingered in soft purple haze. Blacker night hung like a sable curtain far out over the lake. Gem points of light spangled the tall buildings along Michigan Avenue as Mr. Maddox hurried toward the lake front.

Beyond the breakwater two aircraft carriers swung majestically at anchor, deck lights twinkling against the oncoming night. Soldiers, sailors strolled in the park with girl friends. Mr. Maddox overheard snatches of light talk and laughter.

He thought of Herbie Tucker, too small for Navy and Army even before the doctors discovered crushed bones in one foot, which Herbie had tried to hide. A horse had fallen on the foot when Herbie was an exercise boy.

Joe Maddox was probably the only one to

whom Herbie had opened his despair and resentment.

"What good am I?" Herbie had said in a flat voice as the two of them stood by the track fence with the sun only an hour high. "Just a monkey on a stick for the crowds to bet on or razz when I don't win for them. No good to anyone now!"

Herbie had struck the top of the fence. "I wish I'd never seen a damn track or heard of a horse! Maybe I could have gotten by if it wasn't for the foot this lousy sport gave me!"

"Tough," Mr. Maddox had said.

"Skip it!" Herbie had said bitterly. "So I'm a bum now. It's my worry."

"See that grandstand?"

The new sun was pouring warm light into the great yawning empty grandstand. Herbie's glance at it had been bitter.

"The hell with it!" Herbie had flung out. "Maybe I can get a job in a defense plant."

"Thousands of people will be in those seats," Mr. Maddox had said thoughtfully. "Soldiers, sailors, marines, factory workers who've been putting in overtime. Most of the crowd will have friends, or loved ones away in uniform."

"I won't be away!" Herbie had reminded bleakly.

"They'll all have worries," Mr. Maddox had said thoughtfully. "Out over the country millions will have worries they should forget for a little. The boys up in the press box, and the radio broadcasters will reach them."

"So what?"

"When the bell sounds and the horses break, and the jockeys bring them down the stretch, that grandstand full of people and far more people out over the country get a lift they need, son. Overseas many a soldier and sailor wants to know how his favorite jockey is booting them home."

Mr. Maddox had chuckled. "Some of them might even think kindly of their bookies—although that's asking a lot."

Herbie's shoulders had come back a little. He had looked long and intently at the warm sunlight on the empty seats of the huge grandstand.

"Well, maybe someone's got to boot 'em home," Herbie had said, carelessly, indifferently.

That was all. But from that Herbie had ridden like one inspired. Mr. Maddox reached the lake front, where couples sat close on the grassy banks. Herbie had ridden under the last finish wire in his own secret uniform of gay racing silks. Perhaps only Joe Maddox knew that Herbie Tucker had

been trying to do his bit as best he could.

It didn't matter. Herbie had known. Before the end Herbie had had his moments, too, on this lake front with his girl. His red-headed girl—with a speedboat a mile long.

SLIM-MASTED sailing craft, sleek power boats rode easily at anchor buoys. There was a pier and yacht club quarters, and a graying watchman.

"I'm looking for a red-headed girl who takes a big speedboat out now and then," Mr. Maddox stated genially.

"You a member, sir?"

"Just a visitor in town, more or less."

"Ain't anything I can tell you," said the watchman politely but firmly.

"Regulations or don't you know?"

"Might be both."

"A friend of mine went out with her now and then," Mr. Maddox said easily. "Young fellow, built like a jockey. He didn't tell me her name. I can't get in touch with him and I want to see her. If the speedboat is moored out there, you must have some way of telling me who she is and where I can find her."

"It'd seem so, the way you tell it," was the grudging admission.

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "I can't tell it any other way. Naturally you're not interested. This make it more reasonable?"

The watchman looked at the crisp twenty-dollar bill Mr. Maddox folded between big fingers.

"Detective?"

"I'd show you a badge if I were. I merely want to talk with the girl."

The watchman reached for the money.

"Sounds reasonable," he said. "I heard over the radio that the boy got killed this afternoon. I was talkin' to him one day. He told me who he was."

"Did he come here often?"

"Three-four times. The girl's been here oftener. Wasn't her boat, you know?"

"Whose boat?"

Belongs to a man name of Dooley. He's left orders for her to use it any time she's minded to."

"What is she—Dooley's girl-friend?"

"I wouldn't know, mister, I c'n tell you her name. She's a Miss Lanya Redding. It stuck in my mind because she has red hair and a name that starts with red."

"Know where she lives? Does she have a telephone?"

"Never had any reason to get that. Can't tell you any more. Want your money back?"

"You've earned the twenty," Mr. Maddox said without hesitation.

It was an effort to depart leisurely. Mr. Maddox smiled at the thought of Joe Maddox running recklessly through the park in search of a telephone directory.

In a Michigan Avenue drugstore he leafed hastily through a telephone directory. There it was! Miss Lanya Redding. An apartment. Mr. Maddox made a note of address and telephone number, stepped outside, waved a taxi to the curb, and gave the address.

"Is it far from here?" Mr. Maddox asked as the taxi started.

"Six or seven minutes," said driver. "I had a fare near there yesterday."

North of the Loop, near the lake shore, the taxicab swung into a cross street and slowed as the driver scanned building numbers.

"That's it ahead there, across the street."

"Never mind turning. I'll get out on this side of the street."

MR. MADDUX was opening the billfold as the cab stopped. Only chance sent his glance across the street to a fat man with loose jowls emerging from the gray stone apartment building.

It should not have been so surprising to see the Honorable Michael Dooley leaving the building. But it was. Dooley saw the taxicab and started across to it, lifting his hand to the driver.

"Changed my mind. Drive on, quick!" Mr. Maddox ordered sharply.

Dooley was left standing in the street. Odds were about even that he'd not noticed who was in the cab.

"Drive around for five minutes or so and then come back," Mr. Maddox directed.

The driver was curious but asked no questions. When he turned back into the block, on the right side of the street this time, Dooley was gone.

Lanya Redding had a tenth floor apartment. After seeing Dooley emerge from the building, Mr. Maddox had no doubt the red-headed girl was inside. He hoped Sissy Tucker had not arrived while the fat politician was there.

Perhaps Sissy had gone and the Redding girl had hurriedly summoned Dooley. The man had come out of the building as if he were in a hurry. It might mean anything.

Mr. Maddox considered the apartment door before he knocked. Many answers probably lay beyond that door. He had a feeling some of them would not be pleasant.

He knocked twice before the door opened. Mr. Maddox stood for a long moment staring, no expression at all on his face.

Cassidy, standing in the doorway, showed his surprise. The big grizzled Masterton detective seemed dumbfounded.

"I'll be damned!" Cassidy said.

It made Mr. Maddox chuckle.

"Every rat hole," he said, "has its rat. Since when have red-heads been your weakness?"

A slow grin lighted Cassidy's face. "You're just in time. Come in, Joe. Make yourself at home again."

"That," said Mr. Maddox as he entered, "sounds like a dirty crack. Or a fat-headed guess. Either one wouldn't surprise me."

Cassidy closed the door. He had a growing look of satisfaction as he watched Mr. Maddox scrutinize the room.

Small though the apartment was, it showed good taste. Several watercolors on the walls deserved appreciative study. A bookcase held volumes that looked as if they had been read. Mr. Maddox glanced at some of the books.

"*Municipal Planning!*" he murmured. "*Theory and Application of Sewage Treatment! Four Loves Has Serena!*"

"I didn't know you could read, Joe."

"I'll teach you some day," Mr. Maddox offered blandly.

He regarded a leather-framed picture of Herbie Tucker on a horse. Herbie and the horse had evidently just won a race. Herbie was about to dismount for the weighing. Though not in color, the diagonal bars of Herbie's silks and the white star on the horse's forehead were enough.

"Herbie on Guy Gill, after the Mentone Handicap, at Belmont last year," Mr. Maddox said. "Guy Gill broke the track record."

"And Guy Gill broke a leg the next month and had to be destroyed," said Cassidy. "Now Tucker's gone, too."

Mr. Maddox nodded. "Tell the lady to come out of hiding. I'm broadminded."

"Tell her to come out yourself," said Cassidy. "In the bedroom, there. Me, I'm bashful."

MR. MADDUX opened the door. The small bedroom was done in pale blue and rose. A woman's blue silk dressing gown was tossed carelessly over the foot of the bed. Silk mules had been kicked off carelessly between the bed and dressing table.

Mr. Maddox said: "She's not—" His mouth closed tightly on the rest. Distaste spread over his face as he eyed the bed. The

spread was drawn up over the occupant's head.

"You look like you bit into a lemon," said Cassidy from the doorway.

"It's lousy humor," Mr. Maddox said, and he spoke curtly to the covered form on the bed. "Miss Redding?"

The covers stayed up.

"Don't be bashful. Yank her out, Joe."

"What's wrong with her?" Mr. Maddox demanded with sudden suspicion.

"Ask her."

"Dead?" Mr. Maddox guessed, eyeing the bed where no movement had been apparent since he stepped into the room.

"Take a look—and then see how fast you can think, Joe."

A few times in the past Mr. Maddox had felt hollow and helpless. The sensation returned now as he thought of Sissy Tucker.

Sissy had been made for love, devotion, sincerity and laughter. Not tragedy. Now this had to happen.

Mr. Maddox almost groaned. If Sissy could have been headed off; if he could have gotten here sooner.

Never had a stage been set better for murder. Sissy's grief flaring against the Redding girl must have been heedless, dangerous. Mr. Maddox pulled the spread back and looked down at a profile which might have been relaxed in peaceful sleep.

"My God!" Mr. Maddox gulped.

His hard yank piled the covers at the foot of the bed. He looked at the body of Steve Wagner, the sports writer.

"End of Act Two," said Cassidy moving into the room. "Surprised, Joe?"

CHAPTER SIX

Second Down—One to Go

"IS HE really dead?" Mr. Maddox demanded.

"Oh, dear me, yes," said Cassidy. "Pipe the poniard above his plexus."

"You sound like a rose-chewing ghoul! How did this guy get killed?"

"Stabbed. And I ain't a ghoul. I'm a cop. He ain't the first stiff I've found."

"I don't know what you are," Mr. Maddox said. "I see he was stabbed. Plenty."

A little blood had seeped down on the bed from other wounds about the heart. The weapon was buried to the handle in the heart. And a curious handle it was, of brass, shaped like the head of a serpent, each tiny scale beautifully patterned in the metal.

"From India?" Cassidy said.

"Or China," Mr. Maddox growled. He swung on Cassidy. "What are you doing here?"

"And you?" countered Cassidy, not smiling now.

"I came to see Miss Redding."

"Ditto."

"How'd you get in?"

"I usually get in when I want to," said Cassidy.

Mr. Maddox let it go at that. Cassidy had brought a key that fitted the door, or he'd used his badge and bribery or Masterton pressure on one of the apartment house staff. Cassidy was an old hand at such matters.

"How long have you been here?"

"I'd just found him when you knocked," Cassidy admitted. "He was on the bed here, covered up like you saw him. Or do you remember?"

"What's behind that crack?"

"Got a cigar?"

Mr. Maddox passed over one of the fat black cigars. Cassidy sniffed it appreciatively.

"There's a big blob of cigar ash on the floor in the living room, Joe. Not a sign of a cigar butt around the place. Wagner hasn't got a cigar in his clothes. You could smell cigar smoke pretty strong when I walked in. Someone carried the butt away or flipped it out the window. I haven't looked down on the street yet. And while I was wondering who Wagner or I knew who smokes cigars all the time—and who might have been here, guess who comes tapping at the door?"

"Rot!"

Cassidy sniffed the dark tobacco again.

"With a fist full of cigars in his coat pocket, Joe, he comes like he couldn't stay away from the crime. I'll bet he figured it'd be smart to duck back and play dumb and innocent."

"You bray like an ass, Cassidy!"

MR. MADDOX was thinking of Dooley hurriedly emerging on the sidewalk, and seeking a taxi that would get him out of the neighborhood fast.

"Sometimes I get bright," said Cassidy. He carefully stowed the cigar inside his coat. "Like this afternoon when I caught those cracks at your fat friend Dooley about his lady. First you dig him about Tucker, and then you jab him about a girl. And he don't like none of it."

"Hogwash!"

Mr. Maddox was wondering if Sissy Tucker had been here before Dooley. Or

would she turn up any minute? And where was the red-head? How did Steve Wagner happen to be in the apartment?

"It turned out you wasn't the only one at the track who knew Dooley and had seen him with a red-head," said Cassidy. "So if you and Dooley and maybe the red-head should be interested in Herbie Tucker dying, why shouldn't I be curious about why the rest of you was interested?"

"You'd be just the one to start a line of screwball reasoning like that," Mr. Maddox said. "So you found out who Dooley's lady was and came here to talk to her?"

"Yeah. I found out she was Dooley's secretary," Cassidy grinned. "His extra-special confidential secretary. The guy who tells me is Wagner. I'm to meet him here at her apartment, accidental, like the law is interested in her on one side and the newspapers on the other. Only I'm a little late, it seems."

"Or Wagner was a little fast. I don't suppose it occurred to you that the lady might have stabbed him."

"While she was smoking her big cigar and scattering ashes on the rug," said Cassidy sarcastically.

"Well, where is she?"

"She's lammed, to hide out from the pokey—or she don't know anything about this," said Cassidy. "It'll come out. What I want is the guy who was smoking a cigar in here about the time Wagner was carved. Some guy who don't want publicity. Some guy who decided Wagner knew too much about something, after maybe talking to Wagner at the barns this afternoon."

Mr. Maddox bit off the end of a cigar. He was placid now. His broad face looked pink, confident, unworried.

"I talked to Wagner at the barns," he admitted. "Wagner had a hunch that Herbie Tucker didn't die naturally. That's all I know. Eight-to-five you don't know any more. Steve Wagner was too smart to tip his story to a dumb flatfoot."

Cassidy sneered. "You know a lot about it!"

"Steve Wagner kidded you along," Mr. Maddox said. "He pumped you—but he didn't give out anything you didn't know."

Cassidy's expression was a better answer than words. Mr. Maddox chuckled.

"I thought so. Each of you tried to pump the other about Dooley and the red-head. As usual you played the sap by agreeing to meet Wagner here."

"It was my idea!"

"Sucker," said Mr. Maddox cheerfully. "Wagner was smart. He got here early.

You know why, by now. He wanted to get at the Redding girl before you did."

"Somebody got at him," Cassidy said heavily.

"Suppose Miss Redding didn't kill him. What makes you think she wasn't here when it happened?"

"I got other ideas," Cassidy was red-faced, irritated. "You're doing some fancy hot-airing, Joe! Let's see how it goes over at headquarters!"

"Tell 'em I arrived with a fool-proof alibi covering the last hour or so—and found you locked in the apartment with the dead man."

"I was to meet Wagner here!"

"All you need is a word from him to prove it," Mr. Maddox reminded helpfully.

CASSIDY snorted and stalked into the living room. Mr. Maddox waited a moment, then quickly, quietly he leaned over the bed and reached inside the dead man's coat. A billfold was all he found. Money in it, but no papers in the billfold or pocket.

Mr. Maddox was straightening up when he stiffened and examined the dead man's coat sleeve. Near the cuff, on the outside of the sleeve, was a tiny smudge of yellow paint. Fresh paint. When Mr. Maddox rubbed the spot with a finger, the lingering odor of new paint came off on the fingertip.

But Wagner was dead. He'd never tell where or how he had happened to brush fresh yellow paint today, just as had the man with the big ears who had ridden in the front seat of the taxi.

In the living room Cassidy was standing at the telephone as Mr. Maddox entered. "Waiting for something?" Mr. Maddox asked mildly.

Cassidy abandoned the telephone.

"You win, Joe. Let's get together on this."

"End of Act Three," said Mr. Maddox. He took the cigar from his mouth, serious now. "I didn't kill him. You didn't either."

"How much do you know, Joe?"

"Not much. I didn't like what I saw when Herbie Tucker fell. Mike Dooley didn't like it either. He collapsed. This Redding girl was with him. She vanished just after Dooley passed out."

"Why'd she do that?"

"You heard me ask Dooley about her. You saw he didn't like it. He even denied such a girl was there."

"Yeah. I heard. His own secretary."

"I thought it over," Mr. Maddox said. "It seemed a good idea to look her up, on the chance she might tell something interesting."

Cassidy considered that. He stepped to the bedroom doorway and looked in at the dead man. Silently he wiped the door handle with his handkerchief.

"If Wagner knew any more, he kept it to himself," Cassidy muttered. "But he had a strong hunch something was wrong. Joe, you walk down the stairs. I'll meet you at the corner."

Mr. Maddox reached the stairs without being observed.

The descent from the tenth floor seemed endless, and in a way a waste of energy. The elevator girl wouldn't see Joe Maddox leaving. But she'd probably remember him going up to the tenth floor. If she didn't, the watchman at the yacht club would recall the big stranger seeking information about Lanya Redding.

Either way the police probably would have Joe Maddox handcuffed before it ended. But there was a chance this way of keeping Sissy Tucker out of it. She had enough trouble.

Sissy might have hurt the Redding girl under certain circumstances. But not Steve Wagner. Sissy had no reason to kill Wagner. Or did she?

Mr. Maddox growled under his breath and walked down and down. Passengers were leaving the elevator as he came off the last flight of stairs. He walked outside with them and no one seemed to notice him.

A few minutes later Cassidy joined him at the corner.

"You're out of that sweet and neat," Cassidy said. He was smoking the cigar Mr. Maddox had given him. He winked. "Stay away from red-heads, Joe. You see what happens?"

"I'd rather see this particular red-head and ask questions," Mr. Maddox growled.

"I'm going to hang around and watch for her," Cassidy said. "Want me to call your hotel and tell you what happens?"

"Rather have you forget you saw me tonight."

Cassidy clapped Mr. Maddox' broad shoulder.

"You're a bookie, not a butcher, Joe. I thought at first you could give me an idea why Wagner got it in her apartment. Soon as I saw you were clean, I gave you the breaks. See you at the track tomorrow."

Mr. Maddox smiled with relief. He shook the hand Cassidy put out. "You're a pal," he said with some emotion. "I won't forget this. See you tomorrow."

"There's a hack-stand at the next corner, pal," Cassidy said heartily.

A taxi carried Mr. Maddox to State and

Randolph. Neon signs blazed in the surrounding blocks, crowds jostled along the sidewalks, theaters, restaurants, nightclubs were packed.

From a booth in a corner drug store Mr. Maddox called Oscar. "Any news?"

"Three telephone calls, Joe! Three different guys! Each one asks has Maddox started to leave town yet!" Oscar's voice broke slightly. "Ain't you got any sense, Joe? They mean for you to leave town!"

"You're convincing me," Mr. Maddox said. "If Cassidy telephones tell him I'm in bed."

"What's that dumb cop got to do with it?"

"He's following me right now, trying to pin another murder on me," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "I'm going to shake him."

"Another murder?" Oscar said wildly.

"Just one," said Mr. Maddox. "I don't know who's next."

Mr. Maddox was hanging up as Oscar's anguished voice came over the wire. "You'll be next, Joe! Maybe me! Joe . . ."

THE disturbing thing was that Cassidy was still interested in Joe Maddox.

Mr. Maddox walked west on Randolph Street, a big, leisurely, unhurried figure among the jostling pedestrians filling the sidewalk. He turned into the busy lobby of the Hotel Mordan, entered a packed elevator without having shown interest in anyone who might be following him.

On the third floor he walked from the elevator to the emergency stairs, and came leisurely down again to the other side of the spacious lobby. A taxicab carried him away from the front. He was not followed.

"The *Globe*," Mr. Maddox directed the driver.

Giant presses were turning in a subdued roar when Mr. Maddox entered the tall building where the newspaper was published.

These busy hours of the first edition were hardly the time to call on Peter Stamm, the managing editor. Mr. Maddox sent in his card with a brief scrawl on the back. It was potent enough to open doors ahead of other people who had been waiting.

Stamm was a short, compact man, addicted to loud shirts, louder neckties. A deceptively quiet manner masked the energy that had lifted him to this large, quiet, sound-proofed office. The room had an almost lazy atmosphere. Stamm himself seemed to have all the time in the world as he shook hands warmly.

"Don't see you very often, Joe. What's wrong?"

Stamm tapped the card on which Mr. Maddox had scrawled, *S. O. S.—Joe Maddox*.

Mr. Maddox chuckled ruefully. It's really *S. O. S.*, Pete. Is ex-Judge Michael Dooley connected with the Syndicate?"

Stamm's alert manner showed quick interest. "You're not branching out on dangerous ground, are you, Joe?"

"I'd like to know. I thought you might be able to tell me."

Stamm leaned back in his desk chair and regarded Maddox soberly. The office was very quiet. "Dooley is small fry. Not a chance of his being part of the Syndicate."

"Does he still swing weight in politics?"

"Quite a bit. The gambling Syndicate's another matter—as far as anyone knows."

"Who would know *all* about it?"

Stamm considered, fingering his necktie, reaching for a pencil to tap on the desk-edge.

"I've known you a long time, Joe, since those days when I was a kid in the office at Washington Park. You've always been a hundred per cent. I'll answer that question in strictest confidence."

Mr. Maddox nodded.

"One of our reporters knows more about the Syndicate than any man alive, except the insiders," Pete Stamm said, leaning back and locking hands behind his head. "He's been working four years on it, getting ready for the time when something blows the Syndicate wide open."

Stamm smiled faintly. "The *Globe* will be ready with headlines when it happens. No one but myself and this reporter knows that we're getting ready. You probably know his name, at least. Steve Wagner, who writes sports stuff mostly. He's due in any minute. You can talk to him."

Mr. Maddox' broad face was reflective as he sat in silence. The breath he drew had a shade of regret for what had happened, what might happen after he spoke. Pete Stamm deserved no less than the truth now.

"Steve Wagner won't be back," Mr. Maddox said. "He's dead."

STAMM came forward abruptly, asking facts. He leaned elbows on the desk, eyes searching Mr. Maddox' face while he heard about Steve Wagner, Herbie Tucker, Dooley, Lanya Redding, Cassidy.

"The police may have found Wagner by now," Maddox finished. "Cassidy may know a lot of the answers. I don't. But I liked Herbie Tucker. I want this to end the way Herbie would want it to end, if his death wasn't on the level."

"Even if you get taken for a ride, Joe?"

"Nobody would miss Joe Maddox very much."

Pete Stamm stood up, walked to the windows and came back.

"This is the way it goes," he said. "Steve Wagner has seen more tough spots than any other two reporters I know. And he has to end on the bed of a red-headed wench with a fancy knife in his chest. Just another murder for the police files. But if Michael Dooley killed him—"

The story Pete Stamm was visualizing grew eager on his chunky face.

Mr. Maddox said: "Headlines for you, Pete. Me, too, I suppose. Only I gave this to you confidentially, too. Do I get a break—or do I get a ride to headquarters for questioning?"

"What kind of a break, Joe?"

"A little common sense, Pete. If Dooley doesn't pull weight in the Syndicate, who's decided I have to leave town? Who had those men watching for me to leave the track? Would Dooley have a carload of strongarms at hand so quickly?"

"Steve Wagner probably would have known. He might have the answers among the notes, affidavits, statements and information he's gathered, Joe. It's all locked in safety deposit. Can't get at it until tomorrow."

"Might be if I know who wants me out of town, and why, I'll have all I need," Mr. Maddox said. "Give me what breaks you can, Pete."

"Not so fast." Stamm lighted a cigarette. He was smiling and blunt. "You're not kidding me. The jockey may have been a swell guy. His sister may be Cinderella in distress. You're softie enough to worry about her. But you're stubborn as hell, Joe. You don't want anybody to run you out of town."

"That's good enough, isn't it?"

"No," said Pete Stamm, his smile broadening with relish. "You're a good newspaperman who turned bookmaker. You can't stand a mystery. You've got to have the answers. How about helping get the answers for the *Globe*, too?"

Mr. Maddox was already edging toward the door. "I'm going to be busy."

"Damned busy," Stamm agreed, coming around the end of his desk. "I haven't got anyone who can take up tonight where Steve Wagner left off. We'll work with you."

Mr. Maddox continued toward the door. Stamm followed, talking fast.

"I'll have a man cover the Redding girl's apartment on some pretext. I'll have head-

quarters checked for what they know on this. I'll keep Miss Tucker out of it as much as possible. I'll give you Steve Wagner's report of his movements until seven P. M. today."

Mr. Maddox stopped. "You've got Wagner's record for today?"

"I haven't had time to read it. Steve wrote a report in the office here each day. He had a vague hunch he might get his, and he wanted everything down."

"Why didn't you say so? Maybe some of the answers are there! Let's see this report."

"Not so fast. Are you working with the *Globe*?"

"It's blackmail!"

"Sure. In a good cause."

"Let's see his report," Mr. Maddox grumbled.

Stamm unlocked a file drawer in the bottom of his desk, handed out a sheet of paper partly covered with typing.

"Did you get the license number of that taxi you took from the track?" he questioned.

"The tag was too dusty and dirty. And I didn't go back and check on the man who talked me into the ride. Might not have been healthy just then. He probably wasn't there five minutes after I left, anyway."

MR. MADDOX was rapidly scanning Steve Wagner's last report.

A. M. Saw Gus Messick in a new Cadillac in front of his horse parlor on Dearborn. Asked Messick how he rated new car and C card. Messick winked, spoke of a farm sixty miles down-state and reminded me he owned a piece of Cross-State Trucking. Memo: Check possible Syndicate pressure on Messick's ration board. Might lead to something.

Memo: Look for more business fronts that allow muscling on war profits and privileges.

Another whisper about Colekenny Ordinance. No proof again. Have a feeling F. B. I. may show on Colekenny yet. Judge Mike Dooley mentioned again. Can't trace Dooley to Colekenny. Jockey Tucker still a possible weak point.

Lunched at Band Box. Needled Al Sunday about C Ordinance and F. B. I., if rumors true. Al squirming but not admitting any knowledge.

P. M. Jockey Tucker dead at Hawthorne! Too pat for accident. My guess heat is on. Still can't figure where Tucker rates. Blow-off of Colekenny might lead from him. Tucker's sister thick with Maddox, the bookmaker. She left track with John Carrigan and wife.

Question: If Tucker murdered, who gets it next?

Memo: Dooley might talk if needed as murder suspect. After Tucker, anything can happen fast!

Mr. Maddox looked up from the paper. His smile was grim, his manner surcharged with new interest. "Better read this, Pete. I'm listed as suspect. What's this Colekenny Ordnance?"

"The twenty-odd-million Colekenny Ordnance Plant finished not long ago," said Stamm as he scanned the report. "Not a breath of suspicion connected with it until Steve Wagner began to smell Syndicate-backed contractors and supply sources, collusion, padded payrolls and so on behind a righteous front of patriotic energy. Steve was building a terrific scoop for the *Globe*."

"Not by linking a dead jockey with it," Mr. Maddox said dryly.

Stamm laid the report on the desk. "I wouldn't know about that, Joe. These comments seem to suggest that Steve was waiting for the next murder to give him the break he needed." Stamm shook his head. "And Steve was the next one. There's irony for you. Especially if Steve's own death supplies the answers that Steve was looking for. . . . Joe, are you going to help?"

"I'm not a reporter or a cop!"

"You're a suspect," Stamm reminded with a bite of humor. "You're up to your knees in it already, with an inside track to Tucker's sister. You wouldn't be warned out of town if someone important didn't consider you dangerous. Makes you valuable to the *Globe*, Joe."

"Makes me a poor insurance risk!"

"Count on the *Globe* for all the help we can give."

"Just like Steve Wagner counted," Mr. Maddox reminded sarcastically. "Who is Al Sunday?"

"He owns the Band Box, on Randolph, west of State Street. Fancy floor show, high prices and good food. That's Al's front for some gambling spots and horse parlors. He stands well with the Syndicate even if he is small fry."

Mr. Maddox stood there in the quiet office, big and thoughtful. He shook his head.

"A jockey friend dies," he said. "So I find myself up against the Chicago Gambling Syndicate and details of a twenty-million-dollar Army ordnance plant. If it wasn't happening to me, I wouldn't believe it."

"You'll be doing a lot for me, the paper, and the public," Pete Stamm reminded.

Mr. Maddox thrust a fresh cigar in the corner of his mouth. "The hell with you, the *Globe*, and the public!" he said. "Herbie

Tucker's kid sister is all I'm worrying about. Get to work on your end of this. I'm going to see her."

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Harmless Stick of Gum

IT WAS strange how black shadows, unknown faces, automobiles slowing as they passed, could so suddenly hold threats.

The undertaker's chapel, not far north of the Loop district, was dimly lighted, heavy with the cloying scent of flowers, the sober trappings of death.

Herbie Tucker lay peacefully in his casket, looking even younger than he had in life.

Two tall candles in massive gilt candleholders lifted unwavering points of clear flame at the head of the casket. Mr. Maddox looked down at Herbie and thought of the blaring loudspeakers at the racetracks, the driving, straining thoroughbreds and jockeys whom Herbie had so often dominated.

The excited cheering crowds were not here tonight, or ever again for Herbie. The deep quiet, the two unwavering flames were suddenly oppressive.

A low, worried question made Mr. Maddox turn abruptly to Lydia Carrnigan, who had approached inaudibly and asked: "Have you any idea where Kathleen is?"

Her severely tailored black suit and small black hat suggested subdued grief, without lack of the middle-aged smartness which always seemed part of her personality.

"I expected to find her here," Mr. Maddox said.

"I've been waiting. Kathleen hasn't even telephoned. I—I hope nothing has happened."

"Probably not, ma'm."

Lydia Carrnigan looked at the casket and shivered slightly. "Can't we talk near the door? I'm sorry, but I'm sensitive to things like this. And I'm more worried than ever."

"Has anything else happened?" Mr. Maddox asked as they moved toward the entrance.

"I hope not. Perhaps it's all a mistake. A knife is missing from Kathleen's room."

"Knife? What kind of knife?"

"Well, it's really a letter opener. That is—it was used for that. My husband bought it in New York several years ago. There seemed no harm in leaving it on one of the writing desks, to open letters."

"Just what kind of a knife was it?" Mr. Maddox asked carefully.

She managed to smile and frown at the

same time. "I'm being rather silly, I know. But if you'd seen the knife, you'd understand. It has a snake's head for a handle. The blade is sharp. It—it could be a dangerous weapon."

"The chances are, Kathleen never noticed it."

"I—I suppose so. But it seems to be gone. And—and after that telephone call she made. . . . We can't do anything but wait for her, can we?"

Mr. Maddox had never been so bland and casual as he glanced at his wrist watch.

"Unfortunately I can't wait, madam. If Kathleen isn't here in another few minutes, I suggest that you go home."

"But I'd feel as if I were deserting her," said Lydia Carrnigan nervously. She opened a jade plastic compact, glanced at her face, and forced another smile. "I'm taking this as hard as if she were my own daughter!"

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "You don't look old enough to be Kathleen's mother."

She liked that and showed it.

But when he was outside in the night, shorn of forced gallantry and unconcern, Mr. Maddox was unsmiling and anxious. A little sick too, over Sissy Tucker. Lydia Carrnigan, babbling uncertainly, nervously, had laid murder squarely on Sissy's small straight shoulders. The evidence of premeditated violence was perfect.

The flaw was there if you knew Sissy. Why had the knife ended in Steve Wagner's chest?

Wagner was dead. Sissy had vanished.

Lanya Redding was out of sight somewhere. Judge Dooley undoubtedly was trying to cover the fact that he had left the apartment house where Steve Wagner lay dead.

Mr. Maddox swore quietly and deliberately under his breath and walked faster. Tragic, dangerous events were crowding his heels.

THE shop windows, theater marquees and lighted signs seemed brighter, gayer, more unconcerned when he returned to Randolph Street. If possible, the sidewalks were more crowded. Al Sunday's Band Box was below sidewalk level.

The descending stairs were carpeted, silk tapestry covered the stairway walls, chromium handrails were brightly polished—and the last person Mr. Maddox expected to see was standing at the top of the steps.

Rube Russell, the jockey who had taken Herbie's place in the sixth race, stood there, neat, slender, good-looking in a blue pin-striped suit.

The slightly bowed set of Rube's legs, strong hands and shoulders, tanned face and alert manner, marked Rube as a successful jockey. He was surprised and on guard when the big bland figure of Mr. Maddox confronted him.

"Well, Rube! Going in for night life?"

"Why not?"

"You wouldn't know where Kathleen Tucker is?"

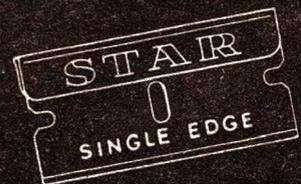
"Me?" said Rube innocently. "Why should I?"

HEY--NO
ROUGH STUFF!

NOT ME!
I SHAVE WITH
STAR BLADES!



4 for 10¢



"Kind of like her, don't you?" Mr. Maddox said blandly.

Rube's flush deepened. He was about Herbie's age, and he'd come from the broad Western cattle ranges. He had the Westerner's clear, straight glance and direct manner.

"Herbie was my pardner," Rube said. "That takes in his sister, too."

Mr. Maddox nodded. "I heard you talked Herbie into buying an Arizona ranch with you."

"I grew up in that Tonto country. Herbie'd been out there," Rube said shortly. "He knew what he was doing."

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Get the chip off your shoulder, Rube. I was Herbie's friend, too. I wouldn't be surprised if Sissy's not glad she's a pardner with you now in the ranch." Mr. Maddox cleared his throat. "A ranch like that would be a nice place for Sissy to settle down some day, too."

"Maybe it would," Rube said, fiery red.

Mr. Maddox moved closer, to let couples down the stairs. He was trying to guess what had brought Rube to this spot. To Al Sunday's place.

"Come down and have a drink, Rube."

"Got to be moving along," Rube refused. He was passing a wrapped stick of gum from one hand to the other, fingering it nervously, turning it over, bending it, straightening it out.

"What are you so jumpy about?" Mr. Maddox asked bluntly.

Rube looked down at the gum, as if suddenly aware of it. He broke off a piece and put it into his mouth. "I'm not jumpy."

"Step down and talk for a few minutes, son," Mr. Maddox said. "I think Sissy's in trouble."

Rube's quick look was strangely haunted. "O. K.," he agreed.

Rube's jaws were working convulsively on the bit of gum as he went down the steps with Mr. Maddox. "You know," Rube said abruptly, "I'd die for Sissy! There never was any girl so swell and sweet—"

Two couples were starting up the stairs as Rube stopped speaking. Mr. Maddox was looking at the strangers below. His first warning of something wrong was a startled recoil by one of the young women.

By then it was too late to catch Rube's falling figure.

Without any warning at all Rube had stumbled and pitched down the stairs. His arm seemed to catch out futilely for the chromium hand-rail, and missed. Rube went downward into the silk-covered wall near the foot of the curving stairs. He landed in

a limp heap at the bottom and did not move.

The strangers watched helplessly as Mr. Maddox knelt beside Rube and felt his wrist. They had no way of knowing that the big grim man was recalling how Herbie Tucker had died just as quickly, as unexpectedly as Rube Russell had pitched down these stairs.

RUBE'S pulse was beating weakly. But it was beating. A dinner-jacketed figure came hurriedly from a small foyer inside, demanding: "What's wrong here? Is he drunk?"

"He fell down the steps! Call a doctor and an ambulance quick!" Mr. Maddox snapped.

"We've got a Navy doctor inside at a table. I'll get him."

"Get any kind of a doctor!"

The young woman closest to Mr. Maddox spoke to her escort in an excited undertone. "Get me out of here before we're in the papers! You know what'll happen if Hal finds I'm out with you tonight!"

Both couples left hurriedly. Mr. Maddox was glad, and hardly conscious of staring, curious pedestrians gathering on the sidewalk above. There was a reason for Rube's collapsing like Herbie. There had to be a reason.

Rube's pulse was still thumping weakly. All the boy had done was nervously put a bit of harmless chewing gum in his mouth and admit how much he loved Sissy Tucker. Harmless chewing gum. . .

Mr. Maddox found the rest of the gum on the stair carpet, trampled by the strangers who had bolted from publicity. He put the gum in his pocket, and as he turned a Naval officer hurried from inside and knelt beside Rube.

"His head struck the wall as he fell—but I think something else may be wrong," Mr. Maddox suggested with deceptive calm.

The doctor looked professional, competent as he tested Rube's pulse, turned back an eyelid.

The dinner-jacketed man returned. "An ambulance is coming. So is our lawyer. We'll want witnesses of this."

Someone who had descended the stairs unnoticed put a hand on Mr. Maddox' arm with unpleasant authority. Cassidy's low voice was sarcastic and ominous.

"Another jockey friend of yours, Joe?"

"You're an epidemic!" Mr. Maddox said with scant welcome as he turned.

Cassidy's tight smile was unpleasant.

"Your stooge, Oscar, told me over the telephone you were in bed. But he wouldn't

call you to the telephone. Maybe you're walking in your sleep now."

"And having you for a nightmare!" Mr. Maddox snapped.

The doctor stood up. "Perhaps a mild concussion," he said.

Too late Mr. Maddox felt an expert hand in his coat pocket. Cassidy plucked out the broken stick of gum.

"Since when did you start scavenging gum off the carpets, Joe?"

They were talking low, for each other only. "Rube dropped it. He'd put a piece in his mouth just before he started down the steps. I'm guessing poison in the gum."

"Gum!" Cassidy exploded softly. "Why didn't somebody think of gum?" Cassidy inspected the sugar-coated gum, sniffed it, started to touch it to his tongue, and warily did not.

An ambulance arrived noisily at the curb. The doctor ran lightly down the steps. His quick exchange with the Naval doctor, a brief, hurried examination of Rube was followed by an order for Rube to be put in the ambulance.

"A word with you, Doc," Cassidy said to the ambulance medico.

Mr. Maddox saw Cassidy palm his Masterton Agency identification. Cassidy spoke urgently in a near whisper. The young doctor reacted with a queer, startled look, and turned the gum over in his fingers, put it in a pocket. "Thanks," he told Cassidy. "We won't waste any time. Coming with him?"

"Me and this fat gent have got business that won't wait," Cassidy said.

THEY were on the sidewalk when the ambulance pulled away with Rube. Not until they walked to the next corner and turned right off the crowded street did Mr. Maddox speak sarcastically.

"Important business?"

"Yup," said Cassidy. "A pinch. And, brother, you'll stay pinched this time."

Mr. Maddox stopped. Cassidy stopped. "How smart are you?" Mr. Maddox wondered aloud.

"I ain't got a swelled head about it," said Cassidy modestly. "We had a hunch a break would come after Herbie Tucker was laid out natural at the undertaker's. It was my idea, too, as soon as headquarters tipped us that Tucker had been poisoned."

"So they're sure of it!"

"Yup," said Cassidy. "And the Masterton Agency has a better line on racetrack people than the police. 'Pretend he died natural,'

I said. 'Somebody is sure to get careless.'"

"A genius!" Mr. Maddox marveled.

"Yup," Cassidy agreed. "Only no one could figure how Tucker got poison not more'n a minute or two before he broke from the starting gate. No one was around him but the other jockeys and the assistant starters."

"So that makes you try to arrest me!"

"I've done it," Cassidy corrected. "When you came to the Redding girl's apartment, it looked bad, Joe. I gave you some rope to see what you'd do. After you shook me at the Mordan, I knew you were working fast to get out from under. The undertaker called in that you were there, so I hustled over and picked you up again."

"Terrific deduction!"

"Good enough," said Cassidy. "You bounced straight to that gin mill around the corner and went into a huddle with a jockey who was riding in that fifth race with Herbie Tucker! That put everything in the bag—the jockey who was close to Tucker before the race started, and the fat slob who passed the poison!"

"Cassidy," Mr. Maddox wondered with som restraint, "did anyone ever suggest you were a moron?"

"You must have figured Rube Russell wouldn't keep his mouth shut, Joe. What a plan! The kid was to take more gum from you, and then chew it!" Cassidy shook his head. "I was a dope myself not to figure another jockey could have slipped Tucker poisoned gum on the way to the post. It's double murder now, Joe. Maybe triple, counting Steve Wagner. Are you coming up to the office peacefully and sign a confession—or do I have to handcuff you?"

Mr. Maddox took the last fat, black cigar from the breast pocket of his coat. The cigar was at a bland and jaunty angle in the corner of his mouth as he chuckled.

"One little thing, you mush-brained genius. Rube Russell will testify I didn't give him the chewing gum." Mr. Maddox rolled the cigar to the other side of his mouth. "He'd not do that if he thought I'd tried to kill him."

"You got a safe bluff there," Cassidy sneered. "With him probably dead by now!"

"He seemed to be holding his own when they put him in the ambulance. He only chewed a bit of the gum."

Cassidy glowered, unwilling to argue that he might be wrong.

"Go on and be the prize chump of town. Arrest me—and then have Rube Russell make a statement that clears me."

Mr. Maddox jabbed the unlighted cigar at Cassidy for emphasis.

"Act like a moron in this and I can't help you. But if you want real facts, if you want your teeth in something really big, come along with me and I'll give you a break." Mr. Maddox bit hard on the cigar. "That is," he decided, "if you'll keep your mouth shut and let me do the thinking."

"Why do I have to listen to you?" Cassidy complained. "I know you're guilty as hell! What do you want to do, Joe?"

"Go back to that gin mill."

"Well, convince me," Cassidy decided dourly.

THE dinner-jacketed young man was at his post inside the lower doors and not too glad to see them again.

"Where is Al Sunday?" Mr. Maddox asked.

"You want an argument about that accident on our steps?"

"Not from a door flunkey!" Mr. Maddox said curtly. "Tell Al Sunday he's got visitors he'd better see."

Few men could be so impressive and convincing; but then few men so looked the part. The loud music inside made inaudible the dinner-jacketed man's words over an inter-house phone on the wall. He hung up and was blankly polite. "This way, please."

The Band Box was larger than it seemed from the street. Tables and bar stools were filled, the dance floor was crowded.

Halfway back, along the right wall, their guide turned through swinging doors covered with maroon leather. Beyond the doors, to the right, subdued chatter and noise came from the kitchen. On the left a single door, also covered with maroon leather, seemed to be locked. The guide pressed a button, waited, and then opened the door.

Cassidy tested the thick door as he passed. "Axe-proof and locked," Cassidy grunted. A moment later Cassidy looked at his coat sleeve which had brushed the wall of the passage they had entered. "Fresh paint on my sleeve! Why'n hell didn't you warn me?"

"Nice fresh yellow paint," Mr. Maddox commented. "Well, well! Lovely color, Cassidy."

"You're too damned cheerful about it!" Cassidy said ill-naturedly.

At the end of the carpeted passage their guide opened another door on the right. "Here they are, Al," he said, not going in. "Need me?"

"No."

Cassidy went in glowering. Mr. Maddox looked with interest at the low-ceilinged, rather large room, air-conditioned, indirectly lighted, more like a comfortable living room than an office. But there was a desk by a false window. The man who sat behind it was blond, athletic, apparently pleasantly interested in their visit.

Al Sunday was in his middle thirties, Mr. Maddox guessed. After looking at the office and the man, he was not surprised at the silver-framed picture of a pretty wife and three children which rested on the mantel of a fireplace to the left of the desk.

"I understand there was a slight accident," Al Sunday said noncommittally.

"Rather slight—if he lives," Mr. Maddox agreed cheerfully. "It was Jockey Russell, the partner of Herbie Tucker, who died at Hawthorne this afternoon?"

"You don't say," Al Sunday said, eyebrows lifting a little. "That's an interesting coincidence. I was at the track today. What am I expected to do?"

"Not much," Mr. Maddox chuckled. "After all, we're not the F. B. I.—as Steve Wagner would say."

"Wagner? Oh, yes—that newspaper fellow."

"That newspaper fellow," Mr. Maddox agreed. He looked at the family group on the fireplace mantel. "Lovely children. Charming mother. Your family?"

"Yes," Al Sunday said. He had stopped smiling.

"Every man should have a family like that to go home to at night," Mr. Maddox beamed. "My name is Maddox. Joe Maddox. This is Cassidy, of the Masterton Agency."

Al Sunday gave a sharp and startled look at the broad beaming face. The line of his jaw set straighter, tighter.

"Never heard of either of you. What's on your mind?"

"One thing and another. Politicians like Mike Dooley, smart reporters like Steve Wagner, smarter cops than Cassidy. The F. B. I., for instance," said Mr. Maddox cheerfully. "And horse parlors, gunmen, night clubs, war plants. And what happened to that jockey today."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Mr. Maddox Plays for Keeps

ONE would hardly expect a blond, not bad-looking man who went home each night to an attractive wife and children to

become so ominously stony and threatening.

"Trying to suggest I know anything about that jockey?" Al Sunday asked harshly.

Mr. Maddox stepped close to the desk. Cassidy in past years had seen the bland good humor change as quickly as it did now. Al Sunday had not. He was caught off-guard by the rock-like, challenging man biting out words across the desk.

"What's the idea of having me snatched out at the track and warned out of town, you fancy hoodlum?" Mr. Maddox asked.

"You're crazy!" Al Sunday said angrily.

"Like Steve Wagner was crazy about Colekenny?"

"Why, you—"

Mr. Maddox drove a big fist across the desk, hard, smashing to the point of the jaw. Al Sunday missed the desk chair as he fell.

"You *are* crazy, Joe!" Cassidy said angrily. "Smacking a guy for arguing with you?"

Mr. Maddox was already around the end of the desk. He stooped and looked under the desk edge, and turned his attention to Al Sunday's groggy movement while Cassidy blurted: "He can yelp for a legitimate pinch on this!"

"He won't," said Mr. Maddox. "I was watching for his move. He was starting to press a button under the desk edge."

"Who's going to blame him?"

Mr. Maddox pulled his victim away from the desk. Al Sunday groggily felt his jaw, and started to swear dazedly as he sat up.

"Stay down or I'll slap you down again!" Mr. Maddox warned coldly.

Cassidy passed a handkerchief over his face. "And I had to listen to you!" he said in agitation. "I got enough of this!"

"So have I!" Mr. Maddox growled. His big hand slapped Al Sunday's smooth, good-looking face so quickly and so hard that the man went to the floor again.

With a quick, swooping movement, Mr. Maddox turned the man's coat back and dragged an automatic from an arm holster.

"My God—my God! What you'll get for this!" Al Sunday gasped. The slapped cheek was fiery red, he was shaking as he sat up.

"I was due to get it anyway," Mr. Maddox said coldly as he stepped to the desk. "Cassidy, kick him down if he tries to get up. We're playing for keeps now."

"We?" said Cassidy, red-faced himself.

WITHOUT answering Maddox dialed his hotel. Oscar must have been beside the telephone, upset, apprehensive by the way he sounded.

"Any more news?" Mr. Maddox asked shortly.

"Cassidy telephoned, Joe. I told him you were asleep. I don't think he believed me."

"Cassidy never believes you. I'm with him now. Anything else?"

"Another man telephoned about you leaving town! He said it was the last warning!"

"Kind of him."

"Joe, will you listen to me?" Oscar pleaded. "Let's catch a train!"

"I'm afraid we can't at the moment," Mr. Maddox explained reasonably. "I've got a gun in my hand, and one of the Syndicate's prize pals squirming on the floor and wondering how I can be rubbed out before I leave his office."

"Oh my gosh! . . . J-Joe, you want me to come there and help?"

"Don't bother."

"What are you gonna do about that girl?"

"What girl?"

"Didn't I tell you? That Tucker girl telephoned, too. She sounded like she'd been crying. Her voice was shaking an' she was talking so low I could hardly hear her. She said to tell you to come quick, because she was afraid something awful was going to happen."

"What was going to happen?" Mr. Maddox bit out.

"I don't know," Oscar said helplessly.

"Where is she?"

"The line went dead, like it'd been cut. I couldn't find where she'd been calling from!"

"Stay where you are until you hear from me," Mr. Maddox ordered. He slammed the handpiece down.

"What's all that about?" Cassidy wanted to know.

Mr. Maddox ignored him. "Where's Herbie Tucker's sister?" he asked Al Sunday quietly.

The man tried to sneer at him, with slight effect, for the broad, rock-hard face seemed to fill him with uneasy fascination.

"Don't know anything about her," he denied almost civilly.

"I hope not," Mr. Maddox said. He dialed another telephone number. "The managing editor," he said several moments later. "Tell him it's Joe Maddox, urgent."

"If that's a newspaper, lay off!" Al Sunday put in hurriedly. "We can make a deal."

"About the Tucker girl?"

Al Sunday shrugged. "I don't know anything about her."

Peter Stamm's voice came on the wire, brisk, curious. "What is it, Joe?"

"Pete, can you tell me where Kathleen Tucker is?"

"Sorry, but a strong hint from police headquarters suggests there's more than an accident about her brother's death. And we've located ex-Judge Dooley. He's at home, refusing interviews. Says he's been in bed all evening under a doctor's care. That alibi will be hard to crack, considering who he is."

"How about Steve Wagner?"

"I sent a man to watch the building. About ten minutes ago he reported nothing unusual had happened there so far. No trace of the Redding girl. What are you doing, Joe?"

"Send a man to Haley Memorial Hospital," Mr. Maddox said. "Rube Russell is there. A little while ago he collapsed at the entrance to Al Sunday's Band Box, exactly as Herbie Tucker did. He may have a chance to pull through. Find out where Rube got the stick of gum he was chewing and what an analysis shows about it. There's your clue to Herbie Tucker and Rube Russell, too. I'm in Al Sunday's office. Al's gun is in my hand. Al is on the floor wondering how to make a deal or stop me before things get worse."

"Good God, Joe! Can you make all that stick? Do you want the police?"

"Detective Cassidy, of the Masterton Agency, is with me."

"Al Sunday is dangerous!" Pete Stamm warned with a show of excitement.

"I'm sure he is," Mr. Maddox agreed. "If you don't hear from me in an hour, you'd better start the blow-off."

"What blow-off, Joe?" Stamm asked, obviously puzzled.

"Yes, just as planned," Mr. Maddox said calmly. "Remember, not longer than an hour."

CASSIDY was rubbing his chin, puzzled, undecided, as Mr. Maddox left the telephone. Al Sunday had a queer, nervous look. His eyes followed Mr. Maddox' glance to the framed photograph on the mantel. He drew a slow breath.

"I'm going to get up," Al Sunday said. On his feet he rubbed the cheek where the angry blood had ebbed. In the last few minutes the man had become wire-taut, unreadable. He looked again toward the mantel.

"Make the pinch and let's get it over with," he said abruptly.

Cassidy started to say something. Mr. Maddox waved him silent and put the automatic out of sight in a coat pocket.

"I'm in a hurry. We don't intend to lose you on the way out, Sunday. Keep remembering it."

Sunday shrugged again. The noisy, crowded main room of the Band Box looked a little unreal as they walked to the entrance. The dinner-jacketed man looked expectantly at his employer.

"I'm going out," was all Al Sunday said to him.

They found a taxicab at the curb, a short distance away. Mr. Maddox gave the driver an address. As the taxi swung into the traffic, with Al Sunday seated between Cassidy and himself, Mr. Maddox spoke with somber sarcasm.

"He really wants to be locked up, Cassidy. When the blow-off comes on the front pages, no one can claim he double-crossed them."

Al Sunday turned his head. "I could have made a deal with a smart guy like you. Now it's too late. Newspaper headlines take it out of my hands."

"I thought so," Mr. Maddox said.

He was aware that Cassidy was still uneasy, puzzled, uncertain. Cassidy did not understand what was happening, but was involved too deeply to air his grievances in front of Al Sunday.

The taxicab gave a brief, false illusion of everyday comfort and safety. Mr. Maddox touched the hard bulge of the gun in his coat pocket. It was another illusion of protection.

"We're not going toward headquarters!" Al Sunday decided, looking out.

"One thing at a time. I'm going to see a man first," Mr. Maddox said calmly. "You know Judge Michael Dooley, of course."

Al Sunday gave him a quick look and then shrugged his unwillingness to admit anything. But Cassidy's interest visibly picked up.

Dooley lived some ten minutes fast driving north and west of the Randolph Street Bridge. Mr. Maddox had never been in the neighborhood before. When the taxi halted in front of a three-story brick house, he told the driver to wait. To Cassidy he said: "Wait here in the taxi for me. And watch our friend. He might change his mind."

"It ain't him I'm worrying about," Cassidy answered with resentful meaning.

Mr. Maddox got out without replying. Cassidy was not carrying the worry of Sissy Tucker—Cassidy had no idea of the urgency.

Even now it might be too late to do anything for Sissy, despite the fact that Joe Maddox might be guessing right and doing the right thing. Death that had struck Her-

bie, Rube and Steve Wagner would have scant mercy for Sissy if she had become a threat too.

The street was lined with similar old brick homes, standing wall to wall in solid respectability that defied unwarranted suspicion of crime. The doorbell Mr. Maddox punched rang thinly back in the house . . . he rang again, and finally pressed a big forefinger against the bell-button and stubbornly kept it there.

SHADE-COVERED windows on the second floor showed light, a dim bulb burned in the front hall and the basement was dark. But the bell was answered from the basement. The man who spoke had stepped out of the basement door to the side of the front steps.

"There's a sick man in here. Stop ringing that bell," he said. "What do you want?"

Mr. Maddox descended the steps, big and hearty with sympathy. "Is Judge Dooley very sick?"

"Sick enough so he can't be bothered."

The shadows were thick under the front steps. The man had moved back into the ground floor doorway as Mr. Maddox confronted him, peering to see who it was.

"He'll see an old friend like me," Mr. Maddox said confidently. "Tell him it's about his secretary, Miss Redding, and very important."

"What's your name?"

A match-clip in Mr. Maddox' big hand spewed sparks and then a burst of flame around the matches he had struck. The small, sandy, sharp-nosed man was dazzled for an instant by the glare, tried to step back through the doorway. Mr. Maddox caught him with a big, fast hand.

"I thought you sounded familiar," Mr. Maddox said jovially, snatching him close and pinioning both arms. "We don't want any noise or trouble, do we?"

The prisoner struggled furiously for a moment and then went passive and panting.

"We don't seem to want any trouble," Mr. Maddox said. He searched quickly with one hand and found a snub-nosed revolver in a coat pocket.

"Now let's go up and see Dooley," he said. "And if your pals are hanging around in the darkness inside there, they'll be making a mistake to jump me. You'll be smart to warn them."

"You win," said the sandy little man glumly. "There ain't anyone here but me. Come on in. You c'n let go my arm."

"Be a pleasure," Mr. Maddox agreed. "I'll

just hold you by your coat collar. And remember it's Dooley I want. Not one of those muggs trying to run me out of town."

"I told you there ain't nobody else inside! The steps is on the left here."

Narrow creaking steps took them up from the dark ground floor. When they were half way up, Mr. Maddox was certain he heard the noise of a passing automobile abruptly muted as the door he had left open was quietly closed. He did not look back or mention the fact.

They passed through the semi-lighted front hall above and continued on upstairs. The sandy little man was stolid and silent and Mr. Maddox continued to grip his coat collar firmly.

Mr. Maddox chuckled regretfully. "I hated to leave you the way I did this afternoon, friend. I wanted to slug you, too. Better luck next time, eh?"

His guard made no reply. They seemed to have the house to themselves. At the rear of the second floor the sandy little man opened a bedroom door and they walked in.

CHAPTER NINE

The Dis-"Honorable" Mr. Dooley

THE Honorable Michael Patrick Dooley was in bed and he looked sick. The covers were drawn up to his fat triple-chins. Flaccid jowls and loose face looked gray and sick.

"This guy grabs me and starts in to see you," the sandy little man said stolidly. "There's a taxi outside with some more guys in it, I think. You want to talk to him?"

Dooley's big, slack mouth worked for a moment as he swallowed and moistened his lips. He shook his head.

"See?" said the sandy man. "Leggo my coat. I told you so."

"So you did," Mr. Maddox agreed. He shoved the man toward a chair against the wall. "Sit down. Stay there. Don't bother us. I'll talk to Dooley. He doesn't have to answer."

The bed creaked as Dooley moved. Still the house seemed very quiet. The sandy little man perched on the chair edge. His eyes were bright. He had a rat-like, waiting look. He did not seem greatly worried.

Two windows in the left side of the room evidently looked out on a rear yard. The bed faced the doorway. In the right wall of the room a second door connected with the adjoining room. Mr. Maddox walked to the

side of the heavy walnut four-poster bed and threw the covers back, despite Dooley's quick grab to hold them. The man was fully clothed, even to his shoes.

"If you can be around Lanya Redding's apartment while Steve Wagner is being stabbed, you can stop faking while I'm here," Mr. Maddox said. "Get up, you slob, and talk like a man."

The sandy little man made a dash for the doorway. He scuttled with the speed of a cornered rat and slammed the door and was gone before Mr. Maddox' lunge could overtake him. A key dropped from the slamming door. Mr. Maddox was picking the key up when Dooley came off the bed, lurching toward him. "L-Lock it!" Dooley stammered. "Quick! Lock it before they get in!"

Mr. Maddox locked the door, aware now that he had only a terrified, incoherent man to deal with. "The other door!" Dooley gasped. "The key fits it too! Quick! Hurry!"

Mr. Maddox had one of the two guns out as he locked the connecting door. He dropped the key in his pocket. All his bland sarcasm was rock-hard again. His voice was hard, manner threatening as he swung on the shaking, frantic politician.

"What kind of an act are you giving me? Talk quick! I know how serious it is! What's happened to Herbie Tucker's sister?"

"Oh, my God, I don't know!" Dooley all but babbled. "They're going to kill me! I know they're going to kill me like—like that man was killed in Lanya's apartment!"

He caught Mr. Maddox' arm and shook it. "Have they framed me for killing that fellow? Do the police think I did it?"

"Why shouldn't they? You were there weren't you?"

"I—I'm not admitting anything."

"You don't have to. I saw you."

Dooley moaned. His chins and gray jowls were shaking. The successful, cynical politician had been obliterated by sheer fright and terror.

"I stopped there to see Lanya," he groaned. "I knew she needed to be cheered up. She wasn't in but I carry a key to her door, and I let myself in as usual to wait for her. The dead man was there. I thought Lanya had killed him and run away. I got out as quickly as possible and went to find her."

"She leaves you flat when you pass out at the racetrack, presents you with a dead man in her bedroom—and still you pretend to be fool enough to want to help her. What

kind of hot air are you slicing for me?" Mr. Maddox growled. "An old wolf like you would shake any tootsie before she turned half that sour."

Michael Dooley stared at him with wide-eyed amazement, then, with a rush of indignation that had all the ring of sincerity, Dooley said: "You're crazy! Lanya was in love with young Tucker. They met one morning several weeks ago when Lanya went out to the track with me. They fell hard for each other in an hour. When Tucker fell off his horse today Lanya couldn't think of anything but getting to him."

"So?" was all Mr. Maddox could think to say. He was taken aback and suddenly sheepish at the way facts fell into line to support Dooley. He got more facts in a rush.

"LANYA'S father was my old pal,"

Dooley told him. "Lanya went to work for me after he died three years ago. I couldn't do without her now. She writes my speeches, answers most of the mail, reads books for me and keeps up on facts I have to know. I hated to hear her talk about getting married. Why, when young Tucker was in trouble—" Dooley stopped on that, gulping, eyes darting around the room fearfully.

Mr. Maddox had been listening for trouble. "Who else is in the house, Dooley?"

"I don't know. They're all over the house. They'll be coming after us any minute."

"Well, talk fast then! What kind of trouble was Herbie Tucker in?"

Dooley groped for a handkerchief and wiped his face. His hand was shaking.

"I—I don't know," he muttered. "What does it matter? The boy is dead."

Mr. Maddox caught the fat man by the shoulder. "Why is he dead? What did you have to do with it? How did Herbie have anything to do with that Colekenny matter—so that you had to mumble at the track today: 'They can't do this to me'?"

"You've been talking to Tucker's sister," Dooley mumbled, wiping his face again.

"Never mind. What about it?"

"Well, young Tucker was buying an Arizona ranch—"

"I know all about that."

"It cost a lot of money. They had to make improvements and buy cattle. Tucker borrowed eleven thousand dollars on his share of the ranch."

"I'm asking you about the Colekenny angle!"

"I'm telling you," said Dooley, swallow-

ing, looking fearfully at the door. "It wasn't the boy's fault that he got mixed up in it, except the way he got stubborn and patriotic. I'm patriotic too, Maddox, but when it's just myself I don't see any harm in making a few dollars off of crooks who can afford it."

"I know what kind of a man you are. Come to the point."

"A man in my position hears things. People come to me and talk," said Dooley, swallowing again. "And when I got plenty of proof of the grafting at Colekenny Ordinance, I passed the word along to the right party that I had the proof in a safe place and was willing to be reasonable. I thought it was going to be a business deal between gentlemen. And then I find out that this big crook who holds Herbie Tucker's note says to Herbie: 'You're going with that girl who's confidential secretary to Judge Dooley, I hear. She'll tell you anything. Find out from her what kind of trouble Dooley can really make for me, or I'll need all my money and I'll have to sell you out in the ranch. But if you help me enough, I'll tear up the note. It's easy money for you, all honest and earned.'"

Dooley shook his head, fear for the moment giving way to other feelings. "Lanya didn't know I was trying to make a few dollars on the side. She came to me all upset, wanting to know what kind of a business this was. So I told them about the proof I had and told them not to worry. 'I'll buy up the note myself,' I said, 'or have it torn up as part of the deal. I've got them cold with plenty of proof and they don't want the Justice Department knocking on their door.' And that," said Dooley sadly, "was the wrong thing to have done with young Tucker."

"Why?"

"He was too patriotic," Dooley said. "He wouldn't wait for me to settle things reasonably. He said if there was crooked work about Government war contracts, he wasn't going to profit any by it. He was going to report it quick. It was all I could do to make him hold off a little while I straightened things out."

"And instead of that you let the crooks know Herbie was more dangerous than you were—and when you saw him fall off that horse, you knew they'd rubbed him out," Mr. Maddox said with cold clarity.

Dooley shuddered. "I had a feeling that was what they'd done. After I got home and thought it over, I realized suddenly that Lanya might be in as much danger as young Tucker. She knew everything he did and

had been too much in love with him to let it drop if she suspected the truth. I telephoned her apartment. She wasn't in, so I hurried there to wait for her. I tell you, I wasn't looking for a dead man there."

"No one was but the man who must have been waiting there for Miss Redding to come in," Mr. Maddox said with another flash of cold clarity. "When he was caught in there by Steve Wagner he shut Wagner's mouth—then evidently didn't have the nerve to wait around any longer."

MR. Maddox fumbled in the breast pocket of his coat for a cigar, found the pocket empty and frowned annoyance. His eyes were studying Dooley's loose, pasty face.

"The knife that killed Steve Wagner came from John Carrnigan's house," he said slowly. "Carrnigan is a contractor, a builder. Herbie was his contract rider and might have borrowed money from him. Carrnigan is the man, isn't he?"

Judge Mike Dooley nodded.

"Then he's in the gambling syndicate!"

Dooley nodded, licked his lips. "Carrnigan is bank-rolled with Syndicate money. He started down-state as a small road contractor and when he got bigger he stayed close to where the big money was. Nobody much knows it but me—and I had to dig hard to find out."

"No wonder he can own a racing stable," Mr. Maddox growled. "The dirty, two-timing, smooth-faced crook!" Mr. Maddox froze. "Carrnigan and his wife took Sissy Tucker home! It couldn't have been friendship after the rest of this! Carrnigan had her right under his eye where he wanted her. And the knife that killed Steve Wagner—"

Mr. Maddox drove one big fist furiously into the other palm.

"The knife that killed Steve Wagner was a deliberate frame-up against Sissy. Maybe the telephone call Sissy was supposed to have made to Lanya Redding was a frame-up too, and slipped to me as a perfect witness. What a sucker they must have thought I was! That must have been a phony trip Carrnigan made to Washington tonight."

"Washington?" Dooley said. His voice rose. "John Carrnigan's in the house here! Or he was before you came! They've got Lanya Redding, too. She came here to see me. I tell you none of us will get out of this alive!" Dooley was shaking again as he finished. He looked near collapse.

"What are they doing here?"

"They're trying to make me deny everything and turn over all the proof about the Colekenny contracts that I have." Michael Dooley drew a shaking breath and was for a moment the cynical, skeptical, rough and tumble politician he had been through the years. "Then," he said bitterly, "it's good-by Mike Dooley. But first they've got to be sure my information won't get into other hands. And they can rot in hell before they get anything out of me. Lanya Redding's as near a daughter as I'll ever have. She looked me in the eye and accused me of killing the one thing she'd ever loved."

Dooley turned away, mumbling: "I can't forget that."

CHAPTER TEN

You Can't Do Business With Murder

"LISTEN!" Mr. Maddox said. They both heard steps entering the adjoining room, then Cassidy's irritable voice demanded: "Where's Maddox? I don't see him. Why you red-headed —"

They heard the soft soggy blow which struck Cassidy down. The floor shook slightly as Cassidy fell heavily.

A short, hard laugh was followed by Al Sunday's voice. "Never give a sucker a break. Red, I didn't think he'd fall for that stall about Maddox sending you outside for us. Where's Maddox and John Carrnigan?"

The sandy-haired little man said: "Maddox and Dooley are locked in the next room. Mr. Carrnigan and the boys kept out of sight until we got the copper in the room here where Jack was waiting to sock him. We didn't want no shooting."

More steps came into the room. John Carrnigan's heavy voice sounded accusingly.

"This is a fine mess, Al. Couldn't you do better than bring that bookie here?"

"You saw how I brought him here. They brought me! Why, they're wise to everything. When you told me at the track today to have some of the boys run Maddox out of town or shut his mouth, I didn't know it was going to turn into anything like this. It's too big to handle now. There's a blow-off coming in a newspaper in less than an hour! Maddox telephoned from my office and told a newspaper to start it. Where's that Tucker girl? Maddox came looking for her! Maybe if I'd known anything about her I could have stalled this off."

"Newspapers!" Carrnigan said. His voice was a clue to the shock the information gave

him. "Maddox is on the other side of that door?" he asked.

"Locked in," another voice said.

"Well, get him out! No—wait . . ." John Carrnigan's voice spoke just on the other side of the door. "Maddox?"

Mr. Maddox cuddled Al Sunday's automatic in his big hand and pointed the muzzle experimentally at John Carrnigan, directly on the other side of the thin door.

"I'll lay you fifty-to-one you're more worried than I am, Carrnigan."

"Listen, Maddox, I'd rather do business so everybody makes a profit. I'll give you my word—you and that Tucker girl can write a blank check if you'll keep this out of the newspapers and forget about it."

"That the best you can do?"

"No," said John Carrnigan, and there was no doubt he meant what he said. "If you don't, neither of you will go out of here alive. Think it over quick."

"Is Miss Tucker all right?"

"Yeah," the sandy little man's voice answered. "Bat's got her and the other girl upstairs in the library. The Tucker girl tried to sneak a phone call out and Bat yanked the wires loose just in time to stop her. He ain't let her out of his sight since."

"Hear that, Maddox?" John Carrnigan queried through the door. "It's up to you what happens to her. And to yourself!"

"They mean it!" Dooley said heavily.

"I'll think it over, Carrnigan," Mr. Maddox said. He took the sandy-haired little man's gun out of the other pocket and removed the clips to see how many cartridges it carried.

"Personally," said Al Sunday in the next room, "I think we're all washed up. I had a hunch that way, Carrnigan, when you slipped Red that snake-handled knife and told him to get the Redding girl. When Red came back and said he knifed a newspaper man instead of the girl, I saw the handwriting on the wall. When you hurried in and wanted the boys to come here to Dooley's house with you and settle Dooley, I tried to argue with you. I knew things were getting out of hand. But I'm only Al Sunday, who gets a pat on the head from the big boys because I'm useful. So you wouldn't listen to me."

"Never mind all that," John Carrnigan said roughly, feverishly. "I want this newspaper business stopped at once."

MR. Maddox stepped silently to the hall door. His big fingers slipped the key delicately into the lock. Dooley was watch-

ing him fearfully. In the next room they could hear Al Sunday having his say.

"It's too late now; take my word for it. When a tramp bookie like this Maddox starts telling me things nobody but us should know, then's it's time to duck. He knew I had Bat and the boys pick him up when he left the track. He knew Red had knifed Steve Wagner. He knew all Dooley's dirt about Colekenny. He knew both those jockeys were knocked off. He had everything in the bag, hooked up with one of the newspapers and ready for the blow-off. I don't know how he did it, coming straight to me and throwing everything in my teeth—but he did. Don't kid yourself about him, Carrigan."

"I'll handle him. Maddox, how about it?"

Mr. Maddox jerked the door open and stepped out into the hall fast and lightly. One man only was there in the hall, leaning against the door frame of the adjoining room where he could watch the hall and see and listen to what was being said. He was the muscular, solid man, pale and bloodless, who Mr. Maddox had knocked cold before leaping from the taxi.

"He's out!" the man blurted. Surprise had caught him. He had been toying carelessly

with a revolver. The huge, vengeful figure bursting out with a gun in each hand apparently surprised and unnerved him. He could have fired one deliberate shot that might have stopped everything.

He fired three shots, wildly, hurriedly. One bullet struck Mr. Maddox' arm.

The blow was neither painful nor crippling. It felt like a blow, nothing worse. The other gun seemed to be still blasting at him when Mr. Maddox squeezed the trigger of Al Sunday's automatic.

He had taken time to aim carefully. He fired once. It was enough. The big, pallid-faced man made a staggering jump into the bedroom, gun hand going involuntarily to his chest. His yell was choked.

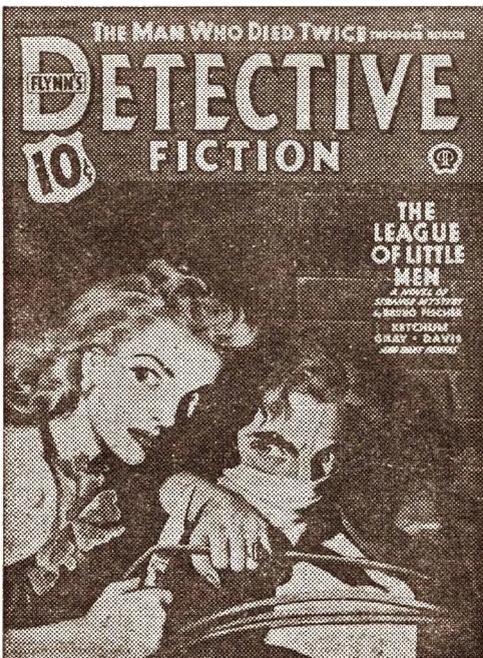
"He's got two guns! Look out!"

Someone slammed the door before Mr. Maddox reached it.

He kept going along the hall, and as he passed the door he heard Al Sunday's loud, angry voice.

"Stop him, you fools, or you won't even have a chance for a getaway!"

Stairs went up to the third floor. Mr. Maddox started up. Gunshots reached after him along the hall. He caught a glimpse of Al Sunday, who had plunged out of the



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room and was following him. Mr. Maddox raced on up.

The man who had run out of the study, gun in hand, was the same big-eared man with gray-sprinkled hair who had ridden the front seat of the Hawthorne taxicab. He was the man whose paint-smudged coat had matched the paint on Steve Wagner's coat sleeve. They both had walked Al Sunday's office corridor.

He saw Mr. Maddox burst up from below and fired. The bullet chipped wood off the stair post. Before the man could shoot again a small, red-haired fury caught his gun arm from behind. A second shot went wild. Sissy Tucker darted out of the room and caught the other arm.

It was Gulliver harassed by the Lilliputians. Both girls were thrown violently around but clung to the arms. Mr. Maddox did the only thing he could to end it quickly. In close he slugged with Al Sunday's automatic. Sissy Tucker was almost knocked down as the big fellow reeled and dropped.

"Get back in the room!" Mr. Maddox panted. "There'll be more of this!"

More gunfire, yells of warning, shouted orders racketed downstairs. Al Sunday had not followed up to the third floor.

Before Mr. Maddox returned to the head of the stairs, he heard a loud bawl of warning down on the first floor.

"The rest of you come out with your hands up or get machine gunned! The back of the house is covered too! Come out with your hands up! It's the police!"

MR. Maddox put the guns in his coat pockets and turned back to the girls. He was still panting hard as he chuckled. "It looks like you girls will get a break after all. Thanks for saving my neck." And then he asked: "Sissy, what are you doing here?"

It was queer how self-possessed both girls were, although pale and shaken.

"I thought Lanya was partly to blame for —for Herbie," said Sissy. "I told her so over the telephone. She asked me to come here and talk to her and Mr. Dooley. I was wrong. We understand each other now."

"I suppose you know Herbie was killed. The police know it. John Carrnigan was back of it, Sissy. Didn't you suspect?"

Sissy nodded. She looked tiny and sorrowful, but spirited and determined, too. "Herbie had told me everything. I went home with the Carrnigans so I could do something about it. I—I was afraid Rube Russell would be next." Some slight change in Mr. Maddox' face brought quick, panicky

concern to Sissy. "Is Rube all right? Do you know anything about him?"

"What was Rube doing this evening?"

"While I came here Rube was going to watch the Carrnigan house," Sissy said. "He was helping me. I don't know what he did after I left him."

"Let's go downstairs," Mr. Maddox said. "I think we can find out. The police seem to have things in hand. Don't know how they got here just when they were needed."

Police guns covered them when they appeared on the stairs. Peter Stamm, running up from the first floor, cleared them with a call of warning: "Those are the people we're looking for!"

"So you did this, Pete?" Mr. Maddox said.

Stamm nodded and paused a moment to catch his breath.

"I went to the hospital myself," he said. "The boy had recovered enough to talk. He said John Carrnigan gave him the gun. He'd followed Carrnigan to the Band Box. Carrnigan went downstairs and came up unexpectedly several moments later and saw the boy on the sidewalk."

"I begin to see," Mr. Maddox said.

Stamm nodded. "Carrnigan and the boy were both surprised. Carrnigan asked him what he was doing there. Russell said he had a date with a girl. Carrnigan seemed to accept it and offered him a stick of gum, talked a moment or so and went downstairs again. He must have left by another exit. Russell was standing there, not sure what to do when you came up. The hospital said the chewing gum had been coated with sugar and powdered psysostigma. It seems to be a dangerous poison that acts quickly. Young Russell told me that Miss Tucker had come here. I thought it was time to get the police in action, Joe."

Sissy asked in a small, faint voice, "Is Rube—is Rube really all right?"

"He will be when you get there," said Peter Stamm with smiling understanding. "He's running a temperature with worry over you."

While Sissy blushed with pleasure, Stamm turned and said: "Captain Schwartz, can't we leave now and save questions until later? I'm needed at the paper."

"Sure. I guess it'll be all right. Both you men with the *Globe*?"

"Both with the *Globe*," Mr. Maddox said firmly. "I'll lay you ten-to-one Stamm can't do without me."

"As one old newspaper man to another," Pete Stamm said without the quiver of an eye, "you win, Joe. Let's go."

A GREAT WHIRRING OF WINGS

By **DAY KEENE**

*Author of "Lie Down—You're
Dead!" etc.*



July 13th

IT WAS a sight that I shan't soon forget. Even as much as I have hated Isaac for these last twenty years, I knew a moment of pity. He, who had been such a power, looked so pathetically helpless lying there in the middle of the flame vine covered patio calling on his Savior to help him as the hundreds and hundreds of blue jays pecked

viciously at his nose, his eyes, his scalp. I reached him shortly after Caldwell had fired and the birds had been frightened away. He had stopped screaming. I felt for his pulse. It was faint. By the time that the others had reached him, he was dead. I shan't pretend that I am sorry. I feel, and justifiably so, that he robbed me of my career.

There is not much excitement in Coveport,

especially during the summer months, and Isaac's death will be a godsend to the community, as well as to those of us of his family who are mentioned in his will. I suppose that Martha's son will inherit the bulk of his millions, although I admit that I never could see why Isaac should favor Caldwell over me, his own flesh brother. Both life and death are so difficult to understand at times.

July 14th

THE coroner's inquest, a tiresome affair, was held this afternoon on the spot where Isaac died. He would have died a second time, of apoplexy, if he had been alive to see the invasion of his privacy. Literally hordes of people used a pretended interest in the manner of his death—God knows that it was bizarre—as an excuse to prowl the grounds that for so long have been forbidden to the general public. Nothing

punitive, he who had played with and broken men's lives as one might snap a match, had been assaulted by a screaming formation of blue jays on the grounds of his own spacious Gulf-front estate. It is, to quote one of the younger reporters, to laugh.

A good many religious leaders and parlor pinks are regarding his death openly, and I presume to their profit in print, as a divine manifestation of a just and a vengeful God. This belief was further bolstered by the testimony given at the inquest by Isaac's two male nurses, in reality two solid, unimaginative men from one of New York's most reputable agencies which has supplied Isaac's bodyguard for years, and, I suppose, by Caldwell and myself.

The agency men's names are Morrison and Carter. They had accompanied Isaac from New York, the three of them arriving in Coveport only a few hours before his death.

I quote Carter's testimony verbatim: "The

An odd family, the Hargroves, with a streak of ruthlessness running through them. Old Isaac, hated and feared, unscrupulous in life and violent in death, with a swarm of blue jays pecking at his bald dome—nephew Caldwell, spoiled and vain, an old man at forty—and Isaac's brother, the Doc, who just wanted to continue his experiments. . .

that the Coveport Chamber of Commerce could have conceived would have had the same stimulating effect on local business as did his death. Although Isaac retired from active business years ago, he was still a figure of national importance, the last of the old robber barons of another day. All the great newspapers of the country, as well as the various press associations, have sent their representatives to cover the inquest and the cremation. Most of them came by plane from spots as far distant as Los Angeles and Montreal.

The manner of his death seems to have intrigued the public fancy, no easy thing to capture in this age of war and sudden death. One moment he had been alive, a very old but still a very wicked and lecherous old man. The next moment he was clay, his face and the top of his bald skull well scarred by angry beaks. He, who had stolen a quarter of a continent and had looted it of its oil and other mineral resources with im-

old man and Mr. Caldwell had been having an argument about the birds, see? Caldwell said that they had been raising hell for three days and he had phoned the sheriff's office for permission to shoot them but he hadn't been able to contact the sheriff."

HERE, Sheriff Cobb admitted that he had been on a four day fishing trip, sudden death and crime being a rarity in Coveport, and he not being clairvoyant enough to have foreseen that his services might be needed. A soft spoken, middle-aged, man, Cobb looks and acts like a fool. I believe that his looks are deceptive. He reads too much to be a fool. Such men are always dangerous to those who need to fear the law. His sole contribution to the inquest, however, was to ask Carter if Caldwell had warned Isaac about the birds before he went into the patio.

Carter answered: "Yes, sir. He said that the jays were dangerous and warned Mr.

Hargrove not to go out until something had been done about them. But the old man was bull-headed, as usual. He said that he had faced guns, mobs, and Congressional investigating committees all of his life and he was damned if he would be intimidated by a bunch of birds."

At this point there was such a howl of laughter that the coroner was forced to inform the spectators that they would preserve the decorum commensurate with the occasion or he would be forced to bar the public from the inquest.

Carter continued: "Mr. Isaac Hargrove walked out of the French windows into the patio. Then, suddenly, before any of us could do anything about it, there was a great whirring of wings and maybe a couple of hundred of screaming birds swooped down out of the trees and began to peck hell out of the old man. While we are standing there like fools, he grabs at his heart and falls. His brother, Doctor Hargrove, with me right behind him, runs out to try and scare the birds away when I hear a shotgun let loose behind us. Mr. Caldwell is the only one who keeps his head, see? He grabs a shotgun and blasts right into the middle of the birds and they scam. We count them afterwards and he gets seventy jays with the two shots."

Caldwell was called next. I must say that he made a good appearance on the stand. He gave his profession as an explorer and a writer, and admitted openly that he had reason to expect he would inherit the bulk of Isaac's fortune. More, he admitted frankly that he felt no sorrow over Isaac's passing. He was glad that the old man was dead, but regretted the manner of his death. He confirmed the previous testimony that he had phoned the sheriff's office for permission to shoot the birds. Cobb, I noted, eyed him thoughtfully all the time that he was on the stand.

As Isaac's examining and attending physician, I was the next and the last witness. There was little I could tell them. I testified briefly as to the condition of the body and to the fact that I had certified the death, in non technical terms, as heart failure, and had so signed the death certificate.

The jury brought in their verdict promptly—death by misadventure. The case is closed. Only Sheriff Cobb and the young reporter, whom I previously mentioned, seem disappointed. Both expressed a belief that Isaac had been murdered. Such a theory is, of course, ridiculous. There was a great whirring of wings—and Isaac died. *Sic*

semper tyrannis. And sic transit gloria mundi, for that matter.

July 15th

ISAAC'S will was read this afternoon. It is needless to write here that I am disappointed. Outside of a few minor bequests, Caldwell inherits his millions. I, his own brother, who gave up a brilliant career to serve as Isaac's personal physician for years, have been cut off with a paltry ten thousand dollar annuity, even this inadequate sum to be stopped if I attempt to resume my long interrupted practice or leave Coveport. There is no longer any doubt in my mind. Isaac was insane. Even in death his bony fingers have reached out from the grave to stay my arm from perfecting the many marvelous benefits to mankind that I once had planned. I am to be no better than a well treated prisoner here on the estate. The only ray of hope that I have left is that Caldwell may die before I do, or before he marries and begets legally. In that event, I would inherit, I being the last of the Hargroves.

The little local Methodist Church and the municipality both did much better than I did. Isaac left them one hundred thousand dollars apiece, all taxes paid, and no strings tied to their acceptance. I could have done a lot with one hundred thousand dollars. I could have returned to Boston, fitted up a surgery and laboratory and continued with my experiments that Isaac so brusquely, so inhumanly, and so selfishly interrupted.

Tomorrow the cremation.

July 16th

ISAAC is gone. All of his pomp of yesterday, as Rudyard Kipling wrote in his *Recessional*, "one with Nineveh and Tyre!" The services were really quite impressive. The local minister, thinking of Isaac's bequest, could scarcely speak for sneiving. Senator Hooper did much better. He traced Isaac's career of theft from its beginning, but of course gilded it with the respectability of big business. Outside the crematorium, solid ranks of reporters, the hoi polloi, and nationally known congressmen, senators, and industrialists, stood, bare-headed under the mid-summer Florida sun. The latter, I presume, attended the simple rites not so much out of respect to the deceased as to assure themselves that the old devil was really dead, and died without leaving any notes or records that might prove incriminating to them.

I must go through Isaac's personal papers

tomorrow and burn any that might harm anyone. I doubt, though, that I will find a thing. Isaac belonged to the school of men who believe in carrying anything incriminating in their heads, knowing that they cannot be forced to testify against themselves.

The boom to the town is remarkable. There have never been so many people in Coveport at one time since its origin. All of the small hotels and the boarding houses are filled. They have even opened the large luxury hotel, that customarily is open only during the three or four most severe winter months. The sidewalks and the beaches teem with people. I would give a pretty penny, if I had one, to continue my work right here. Perhaps I shall. There is so much to be done. The more that a man of my profession sees of mankind, the more he realizes the crudities and incompetency of nature.

Sheriff Cobb and the young reporter, whose name, it develops, is Mason, and who is with the Associated Press, were snooping in the house when we returned from Isaac's funeral. In fact they were searching through his desk and had it littered with his papers and news-clippings. Caldwell was forced to speak to them sharply. He contends, and rightly, that one can't very well arrest a scattered flock of blue jays for murder, and that if Sheriff Cobb had been at his post as he should have been, it is very unlikely that the whole thing would have happened.

Cobb accepted the rebuke calmly and turned the subject matter so deftly into other channels, mainly Caldwell's various expeditions to the Guianas, and the Mato Grosso, (he had read both of Caldwell's poorly written books) that the pompous young fool was not only mollified, but actually invited both Cobb and Mason to join us in a supper of speckled trout that he had caught from Isaac's, or rather his own private pier that morning.

The table conversation was boring, being mainly by Caldwell about Caldwell. I made my excuses and retired to my room early to read a new medical treatise and to think, leaving Caldwell with considerably more wine than was good for him under his belt and talking excitedly. Sometimes I wonder if anyone in the family but myself is really sane. All that Isaac thought of was money. All that Caldwell thinks of is women. His escapades and peccadillos cost Isaac thousands of dollars in the past, and I noted tonight at supper that the youngest and pret-

tiest of the serving maids is beginning to show signs of his handiwork. It is fortunate, very fortunate for Caldwell that Isaac died when he did. We are, I fear, a very sticky family.

*Much Later,
Almost Dawn*

THERE is something very horrible happening in this house. I am tired, but I do not dare to sleep. Tonight someone, or something, tried to kill me. I had barely begun to doze when I heard a great whirring of wings, felt fingers on my throat, flexing, choking. I tried to scream. I couldn't. I struggled with the frenzy of a madman in the dark. Then a scream burst from my lungs. The fingers on my throat relaxed. The whirring of wings faded through the open window. But it was no illusion. There still are dull red fingermarks upon my throat. I must consult the sheriff in the morning. Perhaps Sheriff Cobb is right. Perhaps my brother was murdered. Perhaps it was Caldwell who killed him. In that case, and if it can be proven, the money will be mine. But no. It is too fantastic to consider. I know. I was there. I saw the birds attack Isaac. I was the first one to reach him. No one touched him but myself. Still . . .

July 17th

IN THE clear light of day what I have written seems fantastic. My mind was over-tired. It was merely something that I dreamed. Still, I thought it best to follow my first impulse and phone the sheriff. He was, as usual, not in his office, but young Mason who seems to have elected himself the sheriff's secretary kindly made an appointment for me for later in the day.

I spent the morning, before Caldwell had arisen, with Isaac's papers in which we had found the sheriff snooping. There had been no need for anyone to worry. There was nothing of a confidential business nature. Isaac's desk was, to me at least, a revelation. It revealed a soiled side of his character that I had not known existed. He had been a student of the morbid and the gruesome. There were reams of newspaper clippings and press photographs, all of them dealing with murder, and most of them concerning the so called "Butcher Killings" that took place in Boston's swank Back Bay district some twenty years ago. I remembered the killings well. I had been at the height of my fame as a surgeon in those days, and quite as well known in my field as Isaac had been in the world of finance. I had been overworked,

and harassed by the inadequacies of nature to be sure, but I had been happy in my work until Isaac overpersuaded me to give up my private practice and become his personal physician. I began to hate him then, I think, but I did not realize it at the time. But to return to the "Butcher Killings." Most of them had been vagrants and street women, but I had known one of them quite well. She had been a young patient of mine. The police had questioned me concerning her, but there had been nothing that I could tell them. I had been as shocked as they when her nude, mutilated body had been found wrapped in bloody burlap in a man-hole.

For a moment, staring at the clippings, I knew fear. Isaac had been extremely nervous at about that time, and had shown symptoms of it since. He, for example, was very sensitive about anything concerning flowing blood and would suffer a boil to burst rather than allow me to lance it and ease his sufferings. Was it possible that he, his mind straining under the tremendous financial burden of mergers and corporations that it carried, had sought relief in an atavistic orgy of murder? Was that why he had wanted me with him? It was some-

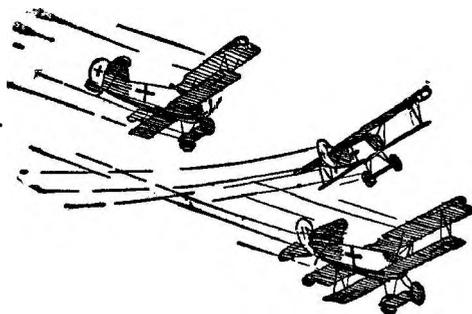
thing to consider. He had retired from active business at about that time and had announced his firm determination never to leave Coveport. Nor had he ever left it except for his recent trip up to New York.

On the other hand, there was Caldwell. He had just turned forty. He would have been nineteen or twenty then—and most of the victims had been women. Still, so far as I could tell by skimming through the clippings, the murders had not been sex crimes and the "Butcher" had gained little but sadistic pleasure. Still, there were two sides to Caldwell. He was definitely the victim of a split personality, or technically speaking, schizophrenia. And for some reason Isaac had seen fit to keep the clippings.

It was all very confusing. I determined to burn the clippings, and I did. The last of them was turning to ashes in the fireplace when Caldwell entered. His hair was tousled. His face was puffed with drink. His good morning was, as usual, both profane and abrupt.

"What the hell are you doing?" he demanded.

"Protecting the family name," I told him curtly, and left to keep my appointment with the sheriff.



THE WINGS OF THE IRON CLAW

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COBB was waiting, and sympathetic. I told him what had happened, or what I thought had happened on the night before, and he asked me to demonstrate the hold that the fingers had upon my throat, which I did using my own hands.

He asked: "And you still think that there was someone in your room?"

I told him that I had been positive the night before, and had so written in my diary, but I admitted that my doubts had grown with the morning, and that if it hadn't been for the whirring of the wings I would be inclined to think that it was merely something that I had dreamed.

Mason wanted to know then if I had ever heard the whirring of the wings before. I told him that I had, on the day that Isaac died.

"And you are how old, Doctor?" Cobb asked me.

I told him: "Sixty-eight. I was seven years younger than Isaac."

Mason grinned: "His baby brother, eh?", and we all laughed.

They were really very pleasant men and I enjoyed conversing with them. That was why when Mason asked if I minded answering some questions that might clear up the case, I told him: "Not at all."

To the best of my recollection, the questions and my answers were as follows:

"You have been your brother's personal physician for how long, Doctor Hargrove?"

"Almost twenty years."

"He was ill often during that time?"

"Not often," I admitted. "That is one of the reasons that I feel so hemmed in, futile. I feel that I am wasting my life."

Mason nodded. "I can understand how you feel. You see, I have looked up your record in Boston, Doctor, and the older surgeons there still speak of your skill with a scalpel with awe."

I liked the young man immensely. Age is so easily pleased.

"All of them are agreed, however," he continued with a smile, "that due to that very skill you were greatly overworked. Have you—er—ever considered resuming your practice, Doctor?"

I told him in no uncertain language that I had and both Cobb and Mason were most sympathetic when I explained that the terms of Isaac's will had very definitely ended that. For the experiments that I had meant to make a lot of new equipment and money would be needed.

Then the sheriff handed me a clipping. "You happen to see this in the local paper,

Doc? Say, about two months ago."

The clipping read:

Chicago—Mack Beemer has designated his tree-shaded backyard a danger zone—in possession of a flock of blue jays.

Since the jays moved into the some dozen trees growing in his back yard, Beemer has ventured out a few times but each time he was attacked by a screaming formation of jays that attempted to take chunks out of his head. His wife won't go past the back door and their four year old son has temporarily lost his playground.

Beemer wants police permission to shoot the birds and the police have promised to investigate.

"Yes," I nodded, returning the clipping. "It was in the *Morning Times* or in the *Evening Independent*. I don't remember which."

"And your nephew Caldwell saw it?"

"He did," I answered truthfully. "We discussed the coincidence when the jays took possession of the pepper trees in Isaac's patio."

"And that was two or three days before your brother's return from New York?"

I informed him that that was correct and Sheriff Cobb thumbed through an *Esquire* on his desk dated May, 1940. "And what," he asked, "if anything, do you know about *neku*, Doctor Hargrove?"

I asked him to spell the word and when he had, I told him: "Not a thing. I have never even heard the word before."

"That's fine, just fine," he told me. "Now you go on back home, Doctor. We'll be along in a few minutes to arrest your nephew Caldwell for the murder of your brother. But don't you worry about a thing. We are going to take good care of you."

The relief that I felt was intense. *It had been Caldwell who had murdered Isaac, however fantastic it might sound.*

"You can prove that?" I demanded.

"I can prove it," he said grimly.

I shook hands with Cobb and Mason. I had never known two men whom I liked better.

December 20th

SO MUCH has happened since I last made an entry that I scarcely know where to start. In a way, I feel sorry for Caldwell. But he brought it all on himself, and my new assistants, here in the spacious laboratory that I have purchased with a portion of Isaac's money, have promised faithfully to remind me of the day that he goes to the electric chair in Raiford, (the Florida State

Penitentiary) in the event that I should be so engrossed in an experiment that I overlook the date. It was a terrible thing that he did, and I hope that Isaac speaks to him most severely when the two men met in the after-world.

I, however, have my own bone to pick with Isaac. Why didn't he tell me that the minor stomach pains of which he had complained shortly before his last trip to New York was really acute appendicitis? Why did he go to another doctor to have such a simple operation performed? God knows he had no reason to fear my skill! I have performed many an appendectomy in less than eleven minutes. And my incisions are clean and neat. I am no butcher as some of these younger doctors are. In my day speed was essential and to hell with all this antisepsis nonsense. You see, the longer that the internal cavity of the body is exposed to—but I must not get started on that. To go back to my return from the sheriff's office.

Caldwell was nastily drunk. You are in for it, young man, I thought. But not so much as by a look or a word did I even intimate what Sheriff Cobb had told me. I had a certain little matter of my own that I wanted to attend to before Cobb's arrival.

I would have passed him by without a word, but drunkenly he stopped me. "Where you been, you old loon?" he demanded. "Out carving up a few cadavers?"

"I know one that I'd like to carve," I told him, and went directly to my room.

Cobb arrived almost on my heels. Mason, and four men whom I didn't know were with him. I learned later that they were county officers.

Caldwell offered them a drink, but they refused it.

Cobb came directly to the point. "This is a business call. I have come to arrest you,

Caldwell Hargrove, for the murder of your uncle."

I never saw a man sober so fast. "You are insane and absurd!" Caldwell spat. "Uncle Isaac died of a heart attack after being assaulted by a vicious flock of blue jays."

Cobb said, patiently: "The jays worked in just fine. They probably gave you the idea. But if they had moved on by the time he had returned, you would have found some other way to have had a bird peck at him. Maybe you might have bought a parrot. As it turned out, you didn't have to."

THE four men left the room to search the house under his instructions. He took a vine-like plant from his pocket which I had noticed Caldwell cultivating assiduously in one corner of the hot house.

"That's *neku*," Cobb told me. "Caldwell must have brought a plant or slip back from the Guianas. Birds or other animals can eat it. They can even peck their beaks into pans of grain that have been saturated with it. But you as much as scratch a man, or beast, or fish with it, and it is as sudden as prussic acid. The natives use it as a poison on their arrows."

I told the truth. "And he did feed those jays. I saw him. It was after Isaac had phoned from the station."

Caldwell turned deathly white.

Cobb continued: "You see, the murder business being kind of slow in Coveport, I get quite a bit of time to read and fish. And when old Isaac died, I just happened to remember an article that I had read in *Esquire* and put two and two together. Maybe you read it. Maybe not. What with one thing and another, including Fanny-May's condition, I don't think that little things are going to make much difference to a jury."

Caldwell blustered: "You're bluffing."



Cobb shook his head. "We dug up them seventy jays that you shot and washed enough stuff off their beaks to wipe out the whole town of Coveport. Moreover it matched up exact with the foreign substance that the county coroner found in old Isaac Hargrove's blood."

"Then—er—my death certificate wasn't accepted?" I asked. "There was an autopsy?"

Young Mason patted my shoulder. "I am happy to say that there was. But don't you let it worry you, Doctor. Your brother was dead when he hit the ground and the overdose of digitalis you jabbed in him didn't do him a bit of harm. You can't, of course, kill a dead man."

I felt better than I had in days. Fratricide is *so* distasteful a thing, even if Isaac had stood in the way of all of the big things that I wanted to do. "But the birds! The ones who flew away?" I worried.

"I've been holding my breath," Cobb told me. "But it's a kind of a volatile stuff and it sure as hell must be washed and pecked off their beaks by now."

One of the officers returned with the syringe I had hidden in Caldwell's room.

"I'll just keep this, Doc," Cobb told me. "That is, if you don't mind."

I told him that I didn't. I was beginning to feel like a fool. Here, I had felt like a murderer for days and I had been perfectly guiltless.

Caldwell had come to some decision. He looked a lot like Isaac, cold, and hard, and ruthless. "O.K. You think that you have a case. I have forty million that says that you haven't. And it might be that I'll win."

"It might be," Cobb admitted. "Juries are sometimes stupid as hell."

Caldwell hesitated, said: "I am admitting nothing. But I would like to ask one question. What made you suspect me?"

"The fish," Cobb told him promptly.

"What fish?" Caldwell demanded.

The sheriff grinned and scratched his ear. "The speckled trout that you served me for supper on the night of your uncle's funeral. You know and I know that there is a closed season on trout from the 15th of June to the 15th of July. You boasted that you had caught them that morning. Breaking one game law didn't mean a thing to you. *But still you wouldn't shoot a flock of blue jays because you were hoping to use them in a little murder.*"

TWO of the officers took Caldwell out, struggling, and cursing profanely. Mason and Cobb stayed with me.

"It—it was an awful thing that he did," I said.

"An awful thing," Cobb agreed. He hesitated, added: "But how about you, Doc? Now that you will come into the money have you any immediate plans?"

I had. And I told him so. I told him that I wanted to get back to work as soon as I possibly could. He seemed to think that was a good idea, but suggested that I stay in Florida. He said that he knew just the sort of a place for me.

"I'll tell you what, Doc," he suggested, spreading a legal paper of some sort on Isaac's desk. "You just sign this paper for me, giving up a sort of a power of attorney like, and I'll fix you right up with one of the nicest laboratories that you ever saw."

That was just splendid with me, and here I am. This really is a most delightful place, and my assistants are most helpful. I put on a gauze mask and a fresh clean white operating apron every day and am busy all day in my surgery planning the things that I intended to do. I have so many things I want to try. For one thing, the nasal appendage is in such a silly place, exposed to cold and to bacteria. Now, if a really clever surgeon like myself could cut off a man's nose and graft it onto his hand, and make it grow and function, it would be such a vast improvement on nature. And take the internal organs. How many hundreds and thousands of doctors have labored and sweated and cursed as they cut through the layers of flesh and fat and muscle that forms the abdominal wall? Now, if all of the internal organs that are apt to need repair could be carried in a little convenient flesh sac grafted under one's left armpit say, how much simpler, convenient, and humane it would be to get at the seat of most troubles.

All I need now is patients on whom I may experiment. My assistants are scouring the countryside for them. And they tell me that I may expect to begin work daily. I can hardly wait for that first clean cut of the scalpel with the blood oozing over the edges of the wound.

There is just one little thing that worries me at times. And it is then that I beat at these bars that we have put on the windows to keep the curious out. It is then that I hear the whirring of the wings and feel the phantom fingers at my throat.

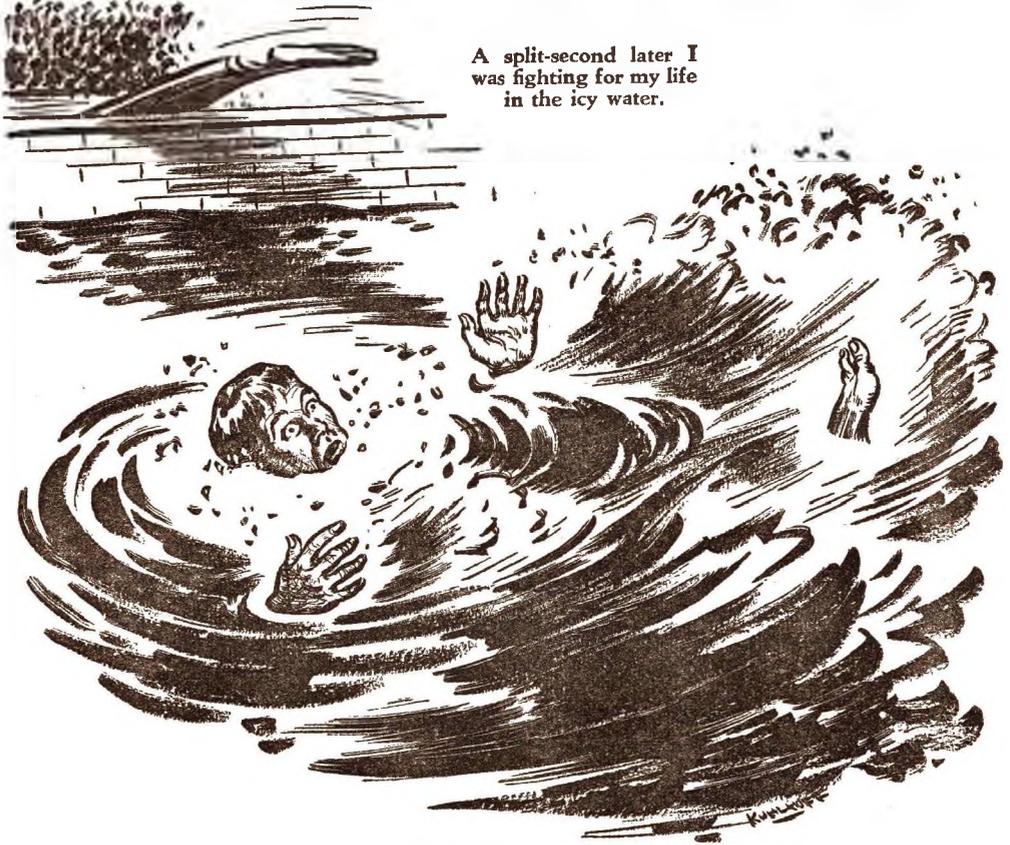
Why did Isaac save those clippings of twenty years ago? Why did he interrupt my practice so abruptly as he did? Who do you imagine was the "Butcher"? Was it Isaac, or was it Caldwell?

THE DEAD DON'T TELL

By JULIUS LONG

"If you are reading this, Burt, you'll know I'm dead, you'll know my dream came true—and I want you to hang them both." A strange testament for a man to leave—predicting his own violent end and accusing his beautiful young wife and junior partner of the deed. And, oddly enough, the dream was right in every detail—except for a trick finish that not even Freud could have foretold.

A split-second later I was fighting for my life in the icy water.



THE second time I started across the pool it happened. I suppose the water was colder than usual, anyway the cramp was far more severe than any I had experienced. I cried out, not for help, but in pain. Then I went under, swallowing water. But I flailed my arms wildly and managed to stay up until Johnnie got to me.

He towed me to the side, where Louise

helped pull me out. I lay at the edge of the pool, not saying anything, just trying to get my breath back to normal, and resting. Johnnie kept asking me if I was all right, and I could hear Louise crying.

That made me feel wonderful, hearing her crying. I was glad I had had the cramp, glad I had nearly drowned, even though the thought of drowning staggered me. Drowning meant losing Louise. I sat up before I

was really ready—I just wanted to look at her.

She was something to look at in her two-piece bright yellow bathing suit. It was one of those halter affairs, and her golden-browned midriff was bare and flat and beautiful. Her hair was almost as yellow as the suit. She was the most beautiful girl in the world, and she was mine.

"Thanks, Johnnie. I was in a bad way." Johnnie grinned.

"Think nothing of it, H.H."

Louise wiped her eyes with her hands.

"You've got to be more careful. You can't seem to remember you aren't a kid any more."

I saw Johnnie look quickly away. Louise blushed, for she realized too late how it had sounded. You see, I'm fifty-three and Louise is twenty-two. Everybody said that I had bought her.

She had come from an awful family. Her father had been a drunk, her mother the talk of the neighborhood. She had a brother still in the reformatory, another who was a poolroom bum and two sisters who were tramps. But Louise had had the gumption to come up from it all.

She had taken a secretarial course, and she had been with Carter, Mason & Dempsey when I first met her. One afternoon Jack Mason had called me up and told me he was sending over a notice of appeal in the Stillwell case and he wanted a signed acknowledgement. It was Louise who brought the notice.

A notice of appeal is about fifty words long at most. But I spent ten minutes with this one, most of the time looking at Louise out of the corner of my eye. Finally, I signed the acknowledgement and said playfully: "How about coming out to my place for a swim?"

She could have passed it off as kidding, but she said: "Why, Mr. Bennett, do you have a private swimming pool?"

So it wasn't necessary to pretend I was kidding. By the time I took her home that night I knew I wasn't, either. Two weeks later we were married, and what people said about it didn't seem important.

I NEVER deluded myself that Louise loved me all out, but I was satisfied that she was giving me a reasonably accurate facsimile of the real thing. If true love is like a blue-white diamond, this was like a commercial white stone. Not perfect, but the kind they put over the counter at the best places.

A year passed, and it still lasted. I told myself that if it lasted another year, I'd settle. I tried to feel resigned about losing her, inevitably I knew I would. It was something to look forward to, like death. Sooner or later she would go overboard for some young chap like Johnnie Mathews, my new junior partner. He was handsome enough to be a movie actor, and twenty-six.

The first time I brought Johnnie home, I thought, well, if this doesn't do it, nothing will. If Louise can look at this boy and still stay on the beam, my worries are over. I didn't really dare to think about it.

I knew I wasn't getting any younger. I'm only fifty-three, but I'm not a young fifty-three. You can't keep up the pace I've kept up for the past thirty years and not show it all over you. The way I folded up my second trip across the pool shows you how it was. Those cramps had been coming more frequently of late.

Yet, Louise got my goat when she made that crack about not being a kid any longer. I could imagine the look she would give to Johnnie after she said it, the look I would miss. But Johnnie came through beautifully.

"Suppose we call it a day and go back to the house. This heat's got me, too. I'm all in myself."

A great boy, Johnnie. On the way back to the house I decided to throw him an extra bonus in the Stillwell case, just as a reward for his tactfulness. A kid like that ought to go far, I thought. If Louise had to go overboard for anyone, I hoped it would be Johnnie.

Back at the house Leona and Jake, the couple who are my only servants, went up in the air about what had happened to me. I could see that Leona, fat old soul, was angry with Louise. She and Jake both seem to think Louise is killing me, the way she expects me to keep up with her like a youngster. They rushed me off to bed, and I had a long nap. After dinner I felt much better.

We sat around listening to phonograph records, mostly hot jazz. Louise and Johnnie had quite an argument over who was the best hot piano man, Art Tatum or Earl Hines, Louise taking Tatum. Every time they played a record to prove their point I had to ask them which was which, and they seemed to think this was a terrible thing.

Finally Louise saw I was bored and suggested: "Suppose we all go out to the pool for a swim. We hardly got started this afternoon."

I said: "Sure, you kids go right along."

I'll watch, maybe, but I've had enough."

"You've got to come too," said Louise. "We won't go in without you. Besides, you should go in right away after what happened this afternoon. You're like a flyer that's cracked up and ought to go right up again."

So they talked me into it. We put on our suits, and I felt self-conscious as hell walking out to the pool with two such specimens as Louise and Johnnie. He was all straight and she was all curves. Me, I just slouched along, a bent old man.

"Race you across," said Johnnie, and, like a fool, I went for it. We both dived at the same time, and it surprised me when I was still ahead half way across. I looked back to see what had become of Johnnie. He was right on top of me. His left hand lashed out, flattened on top of my head and pushed me under.

This was a hell of a time to play games, I thought, as he held me down. And he wasn't too bright, either, holding me so long. Then, when I felt the grip of his right hand on my shoulder, I knew it wasn't any game. This was the pay-off. I wasn't going to come up, ever.

I fought like hell, kicking, giving Johnnie everything I had. I didn't have near enough. Finally I had to give up my wind. When I breathed again it was water.

I've always read that drowning was an easy way to die. Don't ever fall for that bunk. That water was like molten steel poured into me and churned inside my chest. I had no peace until *it* came.

It was death.

June 19, 1943

Hon. Burton M. Keever,
District Attorney,
Lucas County

Dear Burt:

If you have read the enclosed manuscript, it means that I am dead. I wrote it hurriedly, trying to get it all down before I forgot anything. You know how it is when you dream—you forget the dream fast, even forget eventually that you ever had such a dream. That's why I'm afraid, Burt, afraid I'll forget this one and be off my guard if and when this dream comes true.

As I said, if you're reading this, I'm lead, and you'll know by this time whether it did come true. It's because so many of my dreams have come true that I'm afraid about this one. You'll remember the Dawes case, the time I came up with the missing witness that saved Dawes' neck. I know you've spent a lot of time wondering how I found out about that witness, how I got his address.

It was nearly a year before the trial that

I dreamed that I was questioning this witness on the stand. I asked him his name; he told me. I asked him his address, and he told me that, too. I still remember it, the name of a little third-rate hotel in San Francisco.

But I had forgotten all about the dream when Dawes phoned me that night and told me you'd had him booked for the murder of the Foley girl. His name alone wasn't enough to bring it back to me, but gradually, as he unfolded his story, I remembered my dream. I remembered that witness, too, that even Dawes didn't know to be in existence.

I saw right away it would take that witness to clear him—you had that much on him, Burt. You can imagine my horror when I realized I couldn't remember his name or his address. I don't know how many nights I lay awake joggling my memory, but the case was under way before I did remember. It was lost until then. Afterwards acquittal was certain.

I'm not bringing up the Dawes case just to rub it in—I'm trying to explain why I'm afraid that the dream about my own murder may come true. Of course, you'll ask yourself: why didn't H.H. do something about it if he took it that seriously? In his shoes I'd have got rid of Johnnie Mathews and divorced my wife. At least I'd have been on my guard at that pool!

But it wouldn't be fair to Johnnie to fire him merely because of a dream. As for Louise, I couldn't give her up, no matter how seriously I took the dream. As for being on my guard, past experience with these dreams has shown me that invariably I never realize they are coming true until they're half over. It's like picking up some old novel you've read ages ago and discovering at the end of chapter twelve that you've read it before.

So, if this dream about my murder does come true, I'll be off my guard. There's no use trying to avoid the inevitable anyway. I can't explain it, though I've read up on the subject. The psychologists contradict each other, and mostly they hedge and admit time may be like a phonograph record. When the needle gets off the track and in an advance groove, you live ahead of time. Later the needle gets back in the groove and in due course you go through the same experience again.

Of course Freud laughs at this and says we merely rationalize, working the fragments of some half-forgotten dream into a pattern that fits actuality. But I know better. It's happened to me too many times, Burt, and it will happen again. This dream I've written about may be the last.

You'll know by this time whether it has or not. If the coroner's report says I died accidentally from drowning while swimming in my pool, you'll know my dream's come true. I don't know, of course, how they'll attempt to cover up—they had plenty of time to think it out that afternoon while I took my nap. My guess is that they'll say I went

out to the pool alone to catch up on my swimming, the swimming I didn't get that afternoon. And while out there I got a cramp—as I did that afternoon. Good old Johnnie did his best to revive me, but I drowned!

But don't believe them, Burt. If I drowned in the pool, it was the way it happened in the dream. In the event I want you to hang them both. That's why I've written out the dream and put it into this envelope together with this letter and my will.

About the will, you may be surprised to discover that I've divided my estate equally between Louise and Johnnie. My prior will left everything to Louise. It's because I'm morally certain that she's the brain behind the plot to murder me, because I'm sure that Johnnie is only a helpless tool in her hands, that I've cut her out to the extent that I legally can under the laws of this state.

Of course, if you convict both or either of them, neither of them will inherit a dime, for a murderer can receive no inheritance from his victim. But I'm afraid they may get away with it. That's why I'm dividing the spoils myself. If they should get away with it, at least I'll have the satisfaction of knowing Johnnie will get his share. Otherwise, I'm positive Louise would swindle him out of it.

Yes, I realize I'm taking for granted that the dream will come true. Above all else I want you to crack the case, and this is how I think you can do it. Nail both of them at once, get them into your office and read them my story of my dream. I know Louise—she'll crack by the time you've finished. It will be as if she hears my voice from the other world. Her nerves won't stand it. After that, breaking down Johnnie will be a cinch.

Do as I say, Burt. Of course, if I'm wrong about this dream of mine, burn this letter with the manuscript and never let either of them know of my horrible suspicions. It would hurt Johnnie terribly, and, as for Louise, well, I can't think of that. . . .

Here it is, Burt. It's all yours.

Your friendly rival,
(signed) H. H. Bennett.

BURTON H. KEEVER, district attorney for Lucas County, laid Bennett's letter beside the other papers on his desk. Like the manuscript and the will, they were in longhand. They had been contained in a manila envelope, the end of which Keever had slit open before our eyes. We were only two, Miss Saunders and myself. Keever fixed his round, calculating little eyes upon her.

"Well, Miss Saunders, what do you think?"

I felt sorry for Miss Saunders. She was

an efficient, though abnormally shy little creature whom Keever had employed as a favor to an east side ward healer in love with her kid sister. I wondered why Keever had dragged her in here to listen to Bennett's bizarre manuscript and letter. Keever's next words answered that.

"You remember Bennett coming here and giving me the envelope, don't you, Miss Saunders? You and Corbett, here, were both present at the time. You'll recall that I questioned Bennett and tried to find out what it was all about. The way the envelope was addressed, 'To District Attorney Burton H. Keever, to be opened in the event of my death,' sounded suspicious enough. Remember, Miss Saunders?"

Miss Saunders nodded. "Yes, Mr. Keever, I remember. I think you were afraid Mr. Bennett's life had been threatened."

"Exactly." Keever now turned to me. "Of course you recall the incident, Ben."

I nodded. "This letter and manuscript, as well as the will—are they the McCoy?"

"There can't be any doubt. I'd know Bennett's handwriting anywhere, and there can't be any doubt about the signature on the letter and will. Besides that, the will's witnessed."

"Is the will like Bennett says?"

"Yes." Keever picked up the document and tossed it across his desk to me. "Have a look yourself."

I did. The will divided Bennett's estate as his letter stated. The signature meant nothing to me, but the names of the witnesses did. The first witness was Flora Andrews, Bennett's secretary. The second was Jack Mason, of the firm of Carter, Mason & Dempsey, the lawyers mentioned in Bennett's manuscript.

"The witnesses should be easy to check."

Keever thought this too obvious even for a nod. He signaled to Miss Saunders, and she left precipitately. The reading of the manuscript and letter had thoroughly unsettled her. Keever turned back to me.

"Well?"

"It's your lead, not mine."

Keever doubled his left hand and rubbed it with his right. He did this as if he had to do it a certain way and no other. Then he began to talk, more to himself than to me.

"**W**E'VE both read the coroner's report. Bennett, it says, died last night, August 7 at about 9:45 from suffocation by drowning in his private pool out at his Riverside Road estate. There were no marks on his body, and the coroner's guess is he

died of a cramp. He'd had several of them, one only that afternoon. Johnnie Mathews had had to drag him out.

"Last night he went out again, alone. Mathews and Louise Bennett remained at the house. The old couple that are his servants weren't there—they'd gone to a drive-in movie. After Bennett had been gone half an hour, Mathews went out to see how he was getting along. He found him under water, dragged him out and tried to use artificial respiration. When he saw he couldn't do any good he called the city for a resuscitator. By the time it reached Bennett, it was too late."

Keever looked up from his doubled fist.

"You've got to admit everything checks. It could have happened like Bennett's dream."

"That's right, it could have. But it could also have happened the way young Mathews said."

"You can't laugh off the way things check with the dream."

"No, you can't. It gives me the creeps, I'll admit. Especially when I think of the possibility that Bennett was trying to make his suicide look like murder and pin it on his wife and Mathews."

"You really think that's possible?"

"I do. If he had definite proof the two were having an affair, he'd go to any length for revenge, even a posthumous one. I don't have to tell you he had the brains to plan it. How many cases was it that you tried, seven or eight? All tough ones for the defense. I know that you thought you had every one of them in the bag, like the Dawes case. But Bennett always turned up a witness or some new angle that licked you. Blocking out a frame like this would have been child's play to him."

Keever winced at my mentioning the several decisions he had lost to Bennett. In a courtroom Bennett had always won the decision, and Keever would have been inhuman if he had liked it.

"I think you're wrong about the suicide angle. Bennett counted on wringing a confession out of his wife by reading the dream. If it was a phony, that wouldn't work. It would have to be real, an absolutely authentic version of what actually happened to make her break."

I realized this made sense.

"But you're not seriously accepting the theory that Bennett actually had a preview of his own murder?"

"It'll do till a better theory comes along."

I shrugged. "For your own sake, I hope

the reporters don't get wise to your idea."

There was a knock, Keever grunted and Miss Saunders came in with the announcement: "Mrs. Bennett's outside."

"Wait till Ben goes out, then send her in."

Miss Saunders left. I studied Keever.

"You sent for her?"

"Only to tell her I had Bennett's will. She's entitled to know that, and there's a chance I may find out something."

"Well, I hope you don't stick your neck out."

"Don't worry. I'm not springing anything till I'm reasonably certain I've got a case. That's where you come in. While Mrs. Bennett's here you can run out to the estate and see how the land lies. Talk to that old couple, Bennett's servants. See if they know anything, or even suspect anything. But keep this office out of it."

I walked out the front door, curious to see Mrs. Bennett. I wasn't disappointed. She was a knockout. I could almost understand why Bennett had kept on living with her after he had been morally certain that she meant to plot his death.

"Mr. Keever will see you now," Miss Saunders told her as I closed the outside door.

FIFTY minutes later I turned into the winding drive that led to the Bennett house. It, together with a multi-car garage, was situated in the middle of what must have been a two-hundred-acre estate. The land rose to a knoll a hundred yards to the rear of the house. I saw no sign of a swimming pool.

A bent little woman answered my ring. I flashed my badge, but put it away too quickly for her to see that I was from the D.A.'s office.

"I'm from the coroner's office. We need some information for our report. Tell Mrs. Bennett I'm here."

The little woman shook her head. "Mrs. Bennett isn't here. She drove into town this morning."

"All right, I'll talk to you and your husband. Where's he?"

"In town, too. He went in to buy a suit for the funeral."

A life of hard work had bent the little woman, but something within her stood erect and straight. She eyed me squarely.

"Do you think Mr. Bennett was murdered?" she said.

It was a calm question. I tried to be equally calm.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I *know* he was!"

I stared. Her eyes did not waver.

"If you have any evidence to prove your statement, I'd be glad to hear it."

The little woman scoffed.

"I can't prove it, I just *know* it!"

"You must have some basis for knowing it."

Mrs. Parks pursed her lips.

"If you'd been around here, young man, and seen what was going on like I did, you'd have known, all right. A blind man could have seen the girl was tired of him. She wanted to get rid of him so bad she'd stop at nothing. She couldn't do it herself, so she had to get that young fool to help her. Johnnie Mathews. They did it together last night when Jake and me was to the drive-in."

"That's a very grave accusation, Mrs. Parks."

"Of course it is! But it's the truth, and I hope you prove it. As for Jake and me, we're gettin' out of this place as soon's the funeral's over!"

She knew nothing, but her suspicions meant something. I said: "I wonder if you'd let me see the room with the phonograph."

"Anything you say, young man, if it'll help."

She led me to the living room. It contained a phonograph that must have set Bennett back about fifteen hundred dollars. The same figure must have been spent on a collection of records, all jazz and all hot. It was apparent that they hadn't been put away after their use the night before. I looked them over. They were about evenly divided, Tatum and Hines.

"Have you found a clue, young man?"

Mrs. Parks studied me intently. I shook my head.

"No, but I might find one if I had a chance to look over the grounds. Is there any place I could leave my car where it wouldn't be seen?"

"You can put it back of the garage. It won't be seen there."

I satisfied myself that this was true and acted accordingly. I was positive that I could count on Mrs. Parks' discretion. With luck I should be able to cover the grounds before Mrs. Bennett's return. Keever would hold her, I knew. Wondering what was going on in his office, I started up the knoll in search of the swimming pool.

It lay beyond in a hollow. Besides its natural protection from inquisitive eyes, it was surrounded by a box hedge. There were

four flood lights, but even with them on, no one could have seen anything at the pool from the neighboring estates. It was not a large pool, only twenty by thirty. Bennett must have had one foot in the grave, not to have been able to make it twice across.

It was empty. Its draining seemed natural enough. Probably Mrs. Bennett would forswear it for the brief remainder of the summer as a sort of mourning. That seemed a shame, for it was a hot day, and a cold, refreshing swim seemed too good a thing to pass up for sentimental reasons.

I sat on the steps to the diving board and lit a cigarette. I knew I wasn't getting any place. Those phonograph records, sure they checked with Bennett's dream, but that didn't mean anything unless you were trying to prove the dream had come true. I wasn't.

WATER began to gush into the pool at a high rate of speed from a six-inch pipe. I watched perplexedly, listened for the sound of a pump and heard none. Then I understood the pool's seemingly inconvenient location beyond the knoll. It had been located there because of an artesian well, and the well was used to fill it.

The valve had been turned from the house. That meant Mrs. Bennett. Only she would have authority to fill the pool, only she would intend to use it. I put out my cigarette, buried it and waited. The pool was filling rapidly, within about an hour it would be full. As the water neared the overflow outlets I retired beyond the box hedges.

Presently Louise Bennett appeared. She wore a white robe, which she removed to reveal a body on which a yellow bathing suit was hardly noticeable. In Keever's office I had thought she was something. Beside the pool I could even understand why Bennett had remained with her, gnawed as he was with his hideous doubts.

She climbed to the diving board, walked out to its tip where she paused to adjust a bathing cap upon her head. Then she posed for a dive. But she did not dive. She stared at the water beneath, began suddenly to sob. Then she sank to her knees, buried her face in her hands and gave way to convulsions. It was then that I left. I went back to my car and drove to Keever's office.

Keever was out.

"He's at Mr. Bennett's office," Miss Saunders said. "You're to go there."

Bennett's office had been closed, but his secretary, Flora Andrews, let me in. I had

always thought she was a honey, but after just leaving Louise Bennett, even Flora seemed plain.

"My boss is here," I told her. "He said to join him."

Flora eyed me appraisingly.

"What's up? Why's the D.A.'s office interested in the Bennett case?"

"Is it?"

I went on to Mathews' private office, which adjoined Bennett's. Flora regarded me coldly as I rapped and went inside.

I could see that Johnnie Mathews was plenty mad. He was a good looking kid, as handsome as Bennett had said, but now his face had an ugly flush. Keever regarded me with a smile. It was the kind of smile he used in a courtroom in a murder case. I said hello to Mathews, he grunted, and Keever said casually: "I've just been talking to Mathews about Bennett's will. It was quite a shock to him—he says he never even knew there was such a will!"

Keever made his disbelief manifest in his voice. Mathews' eyes flashed.

"Damn it, Keever, I *didn't* know about the will! It was a complete surprise to me. I knew he liked me, but I didn't know that he liked me enough to cut out half of his wife's share and give it to me!"

"But you're going to take it?" Keever cooed.

"Of course! Why not? Who am I to go against his wishes? Besides, I'm not depriving Louise of anything. Even after the taxes are paid, she'll have over a million in her own right!"

"That *is* a lot of money!" conceded Keever.

Mathews was about to come back at the district attorney's tone, but caught himself. He whirled upon me.

"What are *you* here for, Ben? To make the arrest?"

Keever feigned astonishment.

"Why, what arrest, Johnnie? Who said anything about an arrest? And for what?"

Mathews snarled: "Murder! Don't kid me, Keever! You didn't come here smelling around just to congratulate me upon my good luck in inheriting a lot of money. You two ghouls are toying with the idea I helped Bennett to drown!"

Keever shook his head.

"Really, Johnnie, I don't know what's the matter with you, unless it's a guilty conscience."

Keever had meant to needle Mathews, and he succeeded. The youth sprang to his feet.

"Get the hell out of here, both of you!

Don't come back until you've got a warrant!"

KEEVER shrugged and together we left. Mathews followed us menacingly to his door. From across the room Flora Andrews caught his eye. He turned then and went back into his private office, slamming the door behind him. Outside in the corridor, Keever chuckled.

"He's our man, all right! Ten will get you five he and the girl did the job just like Bennett said!"

I hated to do it, but I told Keever about the phonograph records and the yellow bathing suit Louise Bennett had worn. We were down in the street at Keever's car then, and he almost jumped up and down.

"See. I told you, Ben! Everything checks! They *did* play those Tatum and Hines records last night! And Bennett's wife *does* have a yellow bathing suit like the one Bennett described in his dream. It's a cinch she was wearing it yesterday afternoon!"

"So what of it? So some of the things Bennett told about in his dream actually did happen. That doesn't prove the rest of it happened, that he was murdered."

But Keever was not to be discouraged now.

"You don't know the half of it. When I showed Bennett's wife his will she almost hanged herself and Mathews both! She threw it down and said: "Why, the dirty double—" and then caught herself just in time. What she had meant to say was that Mathews had double-crossed her. And he couldn't double-cross her unless they'd been in a conspiracy!"

There was something to that, I thought. But I changed the subject.

"You didn't hold her very long in your office. I was lucky, ducking her the way I did. She'd have spotted me easily."

"She was too mad to be stalled. My guess is she wanted to soak herself in that pool to clear her thoughts. Take it from me, she wasn't crying out there over Bennett. She was crying because she figured Mathews had tricked her out of half the loot!"

"You seem pretty sure of yourself."

"I am. I'm going to play this thing out the way Bennett said. I'm going to have both of them picked up and read them that dream. You can bet your shirt one of them will break!"

I shrugged. "You're the boss. When are you going to spring it?"

"Tonight. I'm counting on the psychologi-

cal effect of reading Bennett's dream at the approximate time of his murder."

"You're procuring warrants for murder?"

"Just in case. I'll have Bennett's wife and Mathews picked up as material witnesses. I don't think the murder warrants will be wasted."

"I suppose you know what the newspapers will do to you if you flop."

"Of course. But if I connect, it'll be a sensation!" Keever's eyes gleamed.

I LEFT him and went to my own car. I had missed lunch, but I wasn't hungry. I drove to the public library and asked for a book by Freud, the guy Bennett had mentioned in his letter. Ordinarily I never read anything but detective stories, but this boy Freud had it on all the mystery writers. The stuff he could find out from dreams made Sherlock Holmes look elementary. It was so fascinating that it was eight o'clock before I realized it.

"Where have you been?" Keever demanded when I turned up at his office. "I want you to be on hand tonight. McCracken and Bishop from the sheriff's office will pick up Mrs. Bennett and Mathews and stand by, but I want you to make the pinch. This is my baby, and I'm not letting the sheriff's office get the credit."

"Or the horse-laugh when it blows up in your face."

"It won't."

But Keever had a bad case of nerves by the time McCracken and Bishop showed up with Louise Bennett and Johnnie Mathews. Neither came alone. Jack Mason had been with the girl, and he had insisted on coming along. As for Mathews, he'd been nailed at Flora Andrews' apartment, and she, too, had insisted on coming along.

"You two may as well join us," Keever said coolly, "since you were witnesses to the will."

So there were nine of us, including Miss Saunders and her notebook and pencil. She sat by like a frightened mouse but gamely taking down every word.

"You're probably curious as to why I've sent for you," Keever began. "I've brought you here to read a curious document personally delivered to me several weeks ago by Mr. Bennett. Miss Saunders and Ben, here, were witnesses to the occasion, and this morning they saw me break the seal of the envelope which contained the document. I shall now read it."

Keever read slowly and with the clear enunciation his legal training had given him.

By the time he had read a couple of paragraphs, Mathews had started forward in his chair. A few seconds later he was pale. As for Louise Bennett, she seemed hypnotized by Keever's voice. Neither Jack Mason nor Flora Andrews seemed to be able to guess what it was all about.

But Louise Bennett did. By the time Keever got to her suggestion that Bennett go along to the pool, I thought she was going into hysterics. But she held on till the very end. It seemed that Keever's silence broke her. Her lovely face contorted, she sprang to her feet.

"Stop, stop it! I can't stand it any longer! I'll tell everything! It's all true, everything he wrote! Johnnie *did* kill him, just like he said! I can't hide the truth any longer! I've got to tell it!"

She whirled defiantly at Mathews then, and Mathews, deathly pale, rose slowly from his chair. He spoke hoarsely.

"You little fool! You don't know what you're saying! How can you think I killed Bennett? We were both in the house together when it happened!"

Sobbing, the girl shook her head.

"It's no use, Johnnie! You can't make me lie for you any longer!" She faced Keever. "He threatened me, made me tell that story about us being in the house! He said he'd kill me if I didn't! I was so frightened I didn't know what to do. I couldn't understand why he would do such a thing, kill his best friend. It wasn't until this morning when you showed me the will that I understood!"

Mathews lost his head. He leaped forward, spun the girl around and gave her a back-hand slap that sent her reeling. A split-second later Jack Mason floored Mathews with a roundhouse swing, and Mathews didn't get up. Flora Andrews watched as if from the vortex of a nightmare. Poor Miss Saunders seemed about to faint.

I nodded Mason to one side, knelt beside Mathews and slapped him a couple of times. He opened his eyes, and I helped him to his feet. Keever handed me a warrant. I spoke mechanically.

"Mathews, I'm serving a warrant for your arrest for the murder of H. H. Bennett. I'm warning you that anything you say will be held against you. You are entitled to benefit of counsel."

Mathews stared at the warrant as if it were not real. I thrust it into his pocket. Then I turned to Keever and regarded him questioningly. He shook his head, opened the lap drawer of his desk and deposited there

the warrant he had prepared for Louise Bennett. He got up and walked to her sobbing figure.

"There, there, Mrs. Bennett, you have nothing to fear. Mathews won't attack you again!" He turned to Mathews. "Have you any statement to make?"

Mathews rubbed his jaw where Mason had hit him and shrugged.

"As a lawyer, I know I need a lawyer. I'm not talking until I see one." He regarded Flora Andrews. "Don't let this throw you, Flora. There's nothing to it. It's just a frame to bilk me out of my inheritance under Bennett's will. Bennett died the way I said he did, and she knows it. But you'll have to get me a damn good lawyer. Go find me Jerry Greiner, if you can."

At Keever's nod, I turned Mathews over to McCracken and Bishop, giving them the original warrant. They started off to headquarters with Mathews, and Flora hiked out to find Jerry Greiner.

WHEN I got back to Keever's private office, he was saying: "Of course, Mrs. Bennett, I'll want you to sign a statement. Just tell your story. Miss Saunders will take it down and type it out."

It didn't take long. According to Louise Bennett the trio had gone out to the pool that night, precisely as Bennett had described the event. Then, as he had started across the pool with Mathews, the younger man had lagged behind and pushed him under. At first Louise had thought it was a bit of horseplay, and she had mildly remonstrated with Mathews.

But then she had seen he was in grim earnest. Too frightened to move, she had only cried out in vain terror as the murder had been done before her eyes. Then, his crime completed, Mathews had frightened her into submission. In mortal fear she had agreed to keep silent, convinced that he could carry out his threat to kill her. But the reading of the realistic account of the crime had broken her resolve.

Miss Saunders, with her usual efficiency, had the statement typed in a matter of minutes. Keever read it back to Louise Bennett. She signed it and Mason and I signed as witnesses. Then Mason took her away. I handed Keever a cigarette and lit one for myself.

"So you're letting her walk out of here scot-free?"

"Why not? Her story sounds good to me. Of course I originally thought she was in on it, but that was because Bennett's letter

fooled me. I hadn't realized that the dream left her out of it; I'd just jumped to the conclusion that the pair were acting together."

"You're jumping to another conclusion when you assume Mathews had a motive for murder. If his motive was inheritance under Bennett's will, how did he know about it?"

"From Flora Andrews. She was a witness. You saw how thick they are."

"She was a witness, but that doesn't mean she read the will. If it does, by the same token, Jack Mason knew what was in it. And you can see that he and Louise Bennett are at least good friends. Suppose Mathews is on the level, suppose he is being framed so that all his inheritance under the will goes to the widow. It could be that he and Louise Bennett stayed at the house exactly as he says. And it could be that while old Bennett went out to the pool alone Mason laid for him and did him in."

Keever exhaled a stream of smoke in disgust.

"Ben, you're slipping. Mason couldn't have done in Bennett for the simple reason that he was playing bridge last night. With whom? With yours truly. Thirty other players were present."

"So I'm off the beam on that. But have another idea. This afternoon at the library, I—"

"So that's where you were! Well, after this, you might be checking some of your wild accusations instead of passing the time of day in the library!"

I decided it was no use. Insofar as Keever was concerned, the Bennett case was open and shut against Mathews. And it did look bad for him. Not only was Louise Bennett's story strong, but the idea of Bennett's dream coming true would capture the imagination of a jury, appeal to the deep vein of superstition in all men.

I walked out into the sultry night, got into my car and began to drive aimlessly. Then I realized I was behaving the way people behaved in the book by Freud that I'd read that afternoon. Subconsciously I had headed for the Bennett estate. I didn't appreciate this until I was well out onto Riverside Road. When I reached the estate I pulled over to the side of the road and stopped.

There was a limestone fence. I climbed it and walked through a field in the darkness. Coming close to the house, I saw lights in the living room, saw that Mason's car was still there. I kept on across the field toward the pool. It held a powerful fascina-

tion for me. I felt that the secret of Bennett's death lay within it.

Its limpid clear water looked inviting. I stood at the edge, staring at the water, aware that my mind was as murky as it was transparent. Then an idea came to me, an idea that I ought to swim in the pool as Bennett did. It wasn't just because I was hot and felt that a swim would feel fine—there was something more to it than that. Maybe this Freud could have explained it.

Anyway, I peeled off my clothes, confident I wouldn't be disturbed. Then I walked out on the diving board, tested its spring, which was excellent, and dived. A split-second later I was fighting for my life.

THE water was an icy monster that seemed to crush me in its relentless grip. It bound my legs, paralyzed my arms, hampered my every muscle. A horrible cramp surged through my legs, my stomach seemed a rigid mass. Down I went, flailing, fighting. It seemed that I would never come up. But when I did, when I gasped a fresh breath of air into my pain-wracked lungs, I was no longer trying to swim. I merely tried to keep afloat, attempting only to propel myself ever so slowly toward the pool's edge.

It seemed that hours passed as I fought that icy water. Then finally I was at the edge, grasping at its top. My fingers caught it, and I hung there without trying to keep count of time. Finally I had my wind back, was able to pull myself over the side. I wanted to lie there indefinitely, just to lie there and enjoy living. But I got into my clothes as fast as I could, not trying to dry myself as I pulled them on.

I had discovered the secret of the pool.

Half an hour later I was in Keever's office. I had a key, his desk was never locked, and I readily found the warrant for Louise Bennett's arrest. A call to the sheriff's headquarters got me McCracken and Bishop. I snapped orders. Ten minutes later they had picked up the warrant and were on the way. Then I set about collecting Keever and Miss Saunders. I called the latter first.

"We'll need you again tonight," I apologized to her. "You'll have to take some more dictation."

She acquiesced with her usual obsequiousness. But rounding up Keever was another matter. I knew he would be celebrating his masterful solution of the Bennett case, that I wouldn't find him at home. But I hadn't counted on the run-around they gave me at his club. Finally I got a call through to him.

"What the hell, Ben?" he growled. "I'm

in a poker game and loser by thirty bucks."

"The Bennett case. I've just had Mrs. Bennett arrested."

"What?" His voice blasted my ear.

"Take it easy, Burt, I've cracked the case. They're bringing her to your office. You'd better hurry over."

Keever said something excitedly, and I guessed it had to do with my job. But I knew he'd be over and fast. Five minutes later Miss Saunders walked in. I nodded her into Keever's private office.

"Please wait, Miss Saunders. There'll be some people here presently."

Miss Saunders went on inside. Another five minutes passed, then the two sheriff's deputies strolled in with Louise Bennett and Jack Mason. Mason was a fiery red.

"What's the meaning of this, Ben? Why has Mrs. Bennett been arrested?"

I shrugged, nodded toward Keever's private office.

"There's another State's witness. But we'll have to wait for Keever."

The elevator doors clanged down the hall then, and I knew we wouldn't wait long. Louise Bennett was taking the thing very calmly. Of course McCracken and Bishop hadn't used the cuffs on her. She clutched a handbag in both hands, and stared at Keever as he strode into the office.

"Damn it, Ben, what—?"

"Everything's O.K.," I cut him off. "I've got a State's witness inside that's broken the case. Let's get in and get it over with."

Keever was too nonplussed to make a reply. I knew from the look he gave me that I'd better come through. Otherwise, I was through. I opened the door and nodded to Louise Bennett.

She entered the room first, eyes alert. There was no one in the room but Miss Saunders, seated primly beside Keever's desk, notebook and pencil in hand. Louise Bennett tore open her handbag, whipped out a small automatic pistol and fired five times at Miss Saunders.

Four of the bullets were wild, but one of them tore through Miss Saunders' throat. She toppled from her chair, bled to death before our eyes. There was nothing anyone could have done, the bullet had got her jugular vein.

MCCRACKEN and Bishop hauled Louise Bennett screaming from the room. Jack Mason stared at her as if she were some girl he had just seen for the first time.

"For God's sake, why did she do it?" he asked Keever. Keever shook his head.

"This is your show, Ben. What's it all about?"

"It's about murder. I didn't know she had a gun, that she would kill Miss Saunders. But I did know that she had a temper and would give herself away when she thought Miss Saunders had turned State's witness."

"Miss Saunders—? I don't get it."

"I didn't either till I went out to Bennett's estate tonight and took a swim in his pool.

"I realized then how he had been murdered. The pool is fed by an artesian well. Water from an artesian well is like ice. It would take that water several days to warm up in a pool the size of Bennett's. When I dived into it tonight it was still icy cold because it had been filled only this afternoon. Thanks to my comparative youth and strong constitution I was able to get out of it.

"But Bennett was an older man and burned out physically. Even with the water at ordinary temperature he had cramps, one of which was almost fatal to him yesterday afternoon. You can imagine what happened when he dived into icy water.

"Yes, Burt, that was how it was done. Louise Bennett and Johnnie Mathews remained inside the house last night, precisely as he said. But Bennett's doom was already sealed. His wife had drained the water from the pool, run icy cold water into it.

"Don't ask me how she got him to go out there alone. Perhaps it was pride on his part, perhaps he felt safer being alone, having the suspicions he had. Anyway, she managed it, managed at the same time to frame Johnnie Mathews for the job.

"The incident yesterday afternoon made that possible. Bennett's cramp together with Johnnie's pulling him out provided the necessary element of coincidence. From then on she set the stage according to the script. She not only knew about the will disinheriting her of half Bennett's estate, she knew his story of his dream verbatim.

"It was a simple matter to arrange things to fit the dream—playing those Tatum and Hines records, wearing a yellow bathing suit, and all. But she couldn't do it alone—someone had to give her that information.

"I was positive it couldn't have been Jack Mason, here, or Flora Andrews, who were

witnesses to the will. I was equally certain that the information had come from this office.

"Only the three of us in this office knew about the Bennett envelope. And only the three of us have access to your private files. Of course I eliminated myself and you. Even though you had no love for Bennett, you're no killer, and besides, you have too much money to have had a motive.

"But, consider Miss Saunders. She had no means but her salary. She sensed that there was something very important in the Bennett envelope, steamed it open, and when she discovered this, she saw a chance to turn it to profit. She sold that information to Louise Bennett.

Keever shook his head incredulously.

"Yes, I know she was a shy little creature, repressed as a mouse. I read all about such creatures this afternoon at the library. All their repressions have to burst out somewhere. When they do show up there's usually hell to pay.

"My guess is she directed the whole play. This morning, for example, Louise Bennett filled the pool and came out ostensibly for a swim. Actually she came to the pool because Miss Saunders had warned her I was there. It was a beautiful opportunity to give a fake exhibition of grief and show me she had a yellow bathing suit at the same time. Making the reality check with the dream was what she counted on. She had to make it appear that the dream had come true.

"Only by doing this could she manipulate you into reading that dream in her own presence and Johnnie Mathews'. That final scene, the climax of her drama was all worked out to perfection. She 'cracked' at exactly the right time, as Bennett had anticipated. But, as Bennett hadn't anticipated, when inventory was taken only Mathews' neck was in the noose. Her own was free."

Keever muttered half-aloud: "And she really cracked when you sold her the idea Miss Saunders had turned State's witness! With the Saunders killing on her hands, getting a confession on Bennett's homicide will be easy."

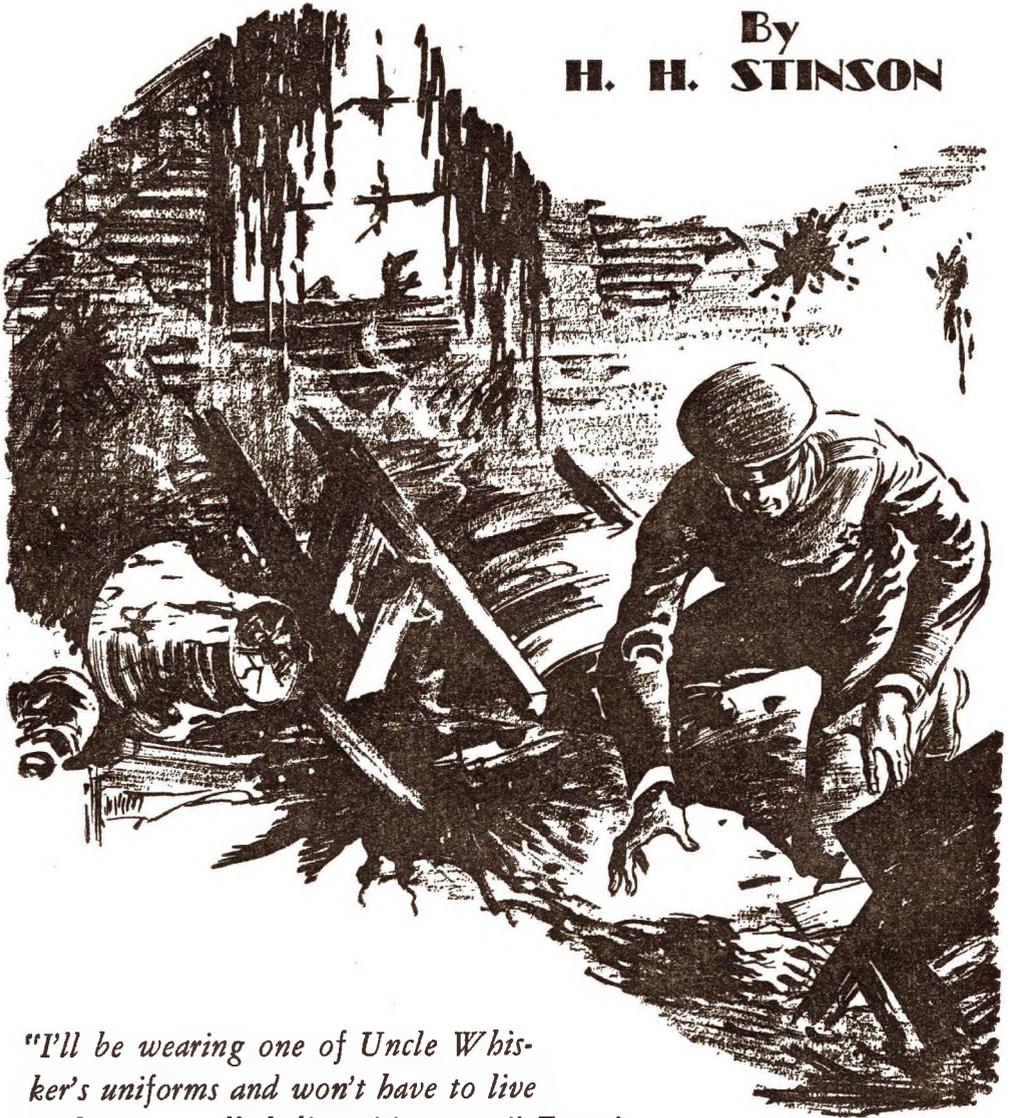
I nodded. "At least it'll be easier than trying to prove dreams come true!"

IF YOUR COPY OF THIS MAGAZINE IS LATE—

We regret that, due to the difficulties of wartime transportation, your magazine may sometimes be a little late in reaching you. If this should happen, your patience will be appreciated. Please do not write complaining of the delay. It occurs after the magazine leaves our offices and is caused by conditions beyond our control.—The Publishers.

KEEP 'EM DYING

By
H. H. STINSON



"I'll be wearing one of Uncle Whisker's uniforms and won't have to live with your curdled disposition . . ." Francis X. McKane ranted at the head of the Keller Detective Agency. Pretty short-lived triumph, for Pvt. McKane's first assignment turned out to be in Army Intelligence working right under old Lucius P. himself on a divorce case, of all things. Mighty stuffy—until it developed into a double murder with a pixie loose, tossing around hand grenades like they were yo-yo's.



Tarheel knelt beside a dark, jagged fragment on the rug in the bomb-wrecked room.

CHAPTER ONE

This Is the Army, Mr. McKane

FRANCIS X. MCKANE came into the offices of the Keller Agency at nine A. M., and in a high good humor. He shoved his hat jauntily onto the back of his head, blew a kiss at Miss Foltz, who was Lucius P. Keller's elderly secretary, and

sat down at a desk to scribble off something on a sheet of Keller Agency stationery.

When he had it finished and signed, he went, whistling *The Stars and Stripes Forever*, into Lucius P. Keller's sanctum and threw the note on the big desk. He said, "Goombye."

Keller said acidly: "I hate guys that whistle in the morning. What's this?" He picked up the note, read it. "A resignation, huh?"

Keller was long, wiry and sour-looking. McKane had never seen him smile before noon and rarely after that, and the two of them had got along together but not well for

ten years. Sometimes McKane didn't know why he stuck with Keller unless it was because he enjoyed making Keller sore more than he hated having Keller make him sore. But, anyway, it was all over now.

He said: "A fond farewell, chum. You see before you a fighting man of the U.S. Army—or at least I will be in another couple of hours."

Keller threw the resignation into the wastebasket. He said: "That lesion you call a brain must have finally ruptured. The Marines turned you down, the Navy and the Coast Guard said they could make it just swell without you and even your draft board finally asked you would you please quit cluttering up their office. They don't want guys like you, particularly when you can't read color charts."

McKane's chunky figure managed a strut even though he didn't move. His square, brown, good-natured face gloated at Keller. "That's what you think," he informed Keller. "This morning the draft board calls me on the phone and says, do I want to be a soldier? So I say, why do they think I've been sticking around their headquarters with my bare face hanging out for the last year? So they say, well, come on down and get measured for a pretty uniform."

Keller shook his long, slabsided head in disgusted amazement. "Either the board is crazy or they're working for Hitler."

McKane's good humor wasn't ruffled. He said: "Not only do I have the inestimable privilege of wearing one of Uncle Whiskers' uniforms, but no longer will I have to live with your curdled disposition and dictatorial whims. Instead of tailing unfaithful husbands for you, I will be trailing the enemy. When you and your hirelings are chasing some ten-buck check artist, I will be cornering Hitler and Hirohito, Public Enemies 1 and 1-A. When you are stumped by the murder of some John Doe, I will be committing slayings by the score—I hope. So it all adds up to goombye."

"I can't believe," said Keller, "that the Army has reached such a point of desperation for manpower. But if so—well, here's luck."

He held out his hand and McKane took it, touched. He said: "By God, Lucius P., I never really thought you'd wish me luck!"

"You!" said Keller, horrified. "Hell, the luck I'm wishing is for the Army."

MCKANE got to his draft board at ninety-three and to the induction center at ten. At eleven he was holding up his right

hand in front of a crisp, elderly major and he was still surprised at how easy it had all been. It seemed they didn't even care about his color blindness any longer. In fact, it had all been simple to the point where, if he had not been so elated, he might have been mildly suspicious.

The major finished with the oath and McKane took his right hand down and grinned companionably at him. "O. K., Maje," he said. "What's first?"

The major said coldly: "First, Private McKane, you learn to address your superior officers as 'Sir' and not 'Maje'."

"O. K.," said McKane and amended it hastily. "Yes, sir. And where do I report?"

The major studied a paper on his desk for a moment. He said: "We have an assignment for you, McKane. It's with G-2, which, for your information, is Army Intelligence. You will report at once to Captain Lucius P. Keller."

McKane said: "To whom?" His tone was so horrified that the major didn't bother to bring up the matter of "sir."

"Captain Keller is waiting for you in the next office."

McKane still didn't believe a thing like this could happen to him. He said: "Sir, it couldn't be the Lucius P. Keller who runs the Keller Agency here in town? Sir, kindly tell me it couldn't be the same."

"I believe he ran the Keller Agency."

McKane was almost weeping. He said: "But Major, sir, the Army can't do this to me. You mean I got to go on taking orders from that—that . . . Something's got to be done. I joined the Army to fight. I want to fight."

The major beckoned to a sergeant who sat across the office. The sergeant weighed around two-twenty. He had five hashmarks on his sleeve and his jaw looked approximately as hard as teak. "Sergeant," said the major, "this man wants to fight. See that he's accommodated if he isn't in the next office within one minute."

"With pleasure, sir," said the sergeant, rising.

"Never mind, sergeant," said McKane. "I believe in obeying orders even if it kills me. And the look on that guy's puss when he sees me is going to kill me."

Captain Keller was just as wiry and sour as ever in his captain's uniform.

McKane came into the room and said: "You dirty heel!"

"What did you say?" barked Captain Keller.

"I said, you dirty heel, sir."

"Don't forget that 'sir' again," said Keller. "Well, McKane, how do you like the Army?"

"I'm still open to conviction. But I didn't think the Army would do this, sir. Incidentally, what the hell are you doing in the Army—and a captain?"

Keller preened himself a little. "Army Intelligence can always use a good head. My commission has been on the way some time. How do you think you got in?"

"I know now. I was jobbed."

Keller permitted himself a wintry smile, the first McKane had ever seen on his face before twelve o'clock meridian. He said: "I got the War Department to waive those red-green-invisible eyes of yours on the ground that I needed you. May Heaven forgive me for that lie, but you've been belly-aching so long about getting in the Army that I thought I'd fix up a nice little surprise for you when I had the chance."

"Surprise hell!" snarled McKane. "You knew if I knew that I had to be your dog-robbler to get into the Army, I'd have joined the Russian guerrillas first. Now how do I get out?"

"Well," mused Keller, "the only way I know is for you to talk the Nazis and Japs into unconditional surrender. But stop worrying, McKane. The Army and I may be able to make something out of you. It's undeniable that you have an inordinate amount of that freak quality known as Irish luck. You also have an inexplicable appeal to the opposite sex. G-2 can use both of those characteristics with my brains to direct you and Army discipline to insure that you follow my instructions to the letter, which in itself will be a new experience for you."

McKane shook his head. He was very low. "All this," he muttered, "and fifty bucks a month."

"Exactly—instead of the exorbitant hundred a week you have been extorting from the Keller Agency. Incidentally, McKane," Captain Keller added, taking out a handkerchief and polishing the bars on his shoulders ostentatiously, "kindly remember the 'sir' when you address me. Now let's get down to business."

MCKANE brightened a little. "Well, I guess running down spies can be a bit of fun, at that."

"Spies?" said Keller derisively. "What would you know about counter-espionage? I'm assigning you to a divorce case."

McKane's mouth dropped open and then

he closed it with a snap. He said: "Great sense of humor, sir. Sir, you had me going for a minute, sir."

"You know I never joke about business, McKane."

McKane began to look worried. He said, more to himself than to Keller: "Now, look, this has got to be a rib. What the hell would G-2 be doing in a divorce case? I ask you—sir."

"Don't ask me, McKane. Does General MacArthur tell his buck privates why he wants a certain beach taken? Does General Eisenhower disclose his campaign plans to every doughboy? Am I any different from other officers?"

"You can't make me answer that one, sir," McKane muttered. "It would just lead to trouble."

"In the Army, McKane, you will learn to let your superiors do the thinking. All you have to do is obey orders. Your orders as of current date are to proceed to the American Aircraft plant at Kenwood and report to the Chief of Plant Protection. He will arrange for you to go to work as a buckler in the wing-riveting department on the swing shift. Your riveter will be a Mrs. Fay Naseby, who is our subject. Mrs. Naseby took her job two months ago after filing divorce proceedings against her husband, Walter, who is head of Airlog Instrument Company. The suit alleges mental cruelty. It is your assignment to become acquainted with Mrs. Naseby—your unaccountable appeal to the ladies should help you do that."

McKane scowled at Captain Keller's leer. "What the hell do you think I am?" he said rebelliously. "A gigolo?"

"We won't go into that, McKane," said Keller, still leering. "Your orders are to use whatever means you see fit to become friendly with her and win her confidence, which prompts me to pity the poor woman from the bottom of my heart."

"I never harmed a dame in my life and you know it," yelled McKane. "I'm just a friendly guy, that's all. Now what is it that G-2 suspects?"

"I can give you a brief outline," said Keller, "but just remember, McKane, I'll handle the important phases of the case. Your orders are merely to become friendly with the woman and report what she says, if anything, about her husband. The situation is that Naseby, through his company, has a very lucrative contract with the Army. Now those contracts are re-examined every once in a while for exorbitant profits. The auditor the Army puts on Naseby's books

committed suicide by shooting himself three days after he went on the job—that was a week ago. We think it might not have been suicide, so we're covering all the angles. It's probable that if there's any chiseling going on, Naseby's wife knows about it. So you're to cover her—but nothing else. Don't get any of those screwball inspirations that used to turn my hair gray or you'll learn something about Army discipline. Stick to your orders."

"Sir," said McKane, "what would I get for popping the captain on the nose?"

"About five years in Leavenworth," said Keller quickly.

"Then," sighed McKane, "that, like a lot of other luxuries, will have to wait until after the duration."

Captain Lucius P. Keller named an address and phone number at which McKane could reach him any time. He said: "Now do a good job on this little assignment and perhaps I can get them to make you a PFC. In fifteen years or so, maybe you could work up to a commission—like me."

McKane had an answer to that one, an answer not at all respectful coming from a buck private to a captain. He opened his mouth to put it into words and then quickly shut his mouth again because, along with the idea for the retort, he had just had a beautiful inspiration. So Keller was going to pull rank on him, was he? So he was going to force McKane to be a snooper instead of a sniper, eh? Well, you could lead a man to a case but you couldn't make a detective out of him if he didn't feel like detecting, could you? He almost laughed in Captain Lucius P. Keller's face. When he got through showing how dumb a guy by the name of McKane could really be, G-2 wouldn't have him around even to open doors.

Captain Keller looked at him suspiciously. "Well, why don't you say something, McKane?"

"Yes, sir," said McKane respectfully. "Is that all, sir?"

"Hmm," Captain Keller said, eyeing McKane thoughtfully. Finally he nodded, said shortly: "That's all. Dismissed."

CHAPTER TWO

"She Never Knew What Hit Her"

FROM time to time that evening McKane found a spare moment to curse Captain Lucius P. Keller under his breath. It was bad enough to have been shanghaied into

the guy's command, but Keller could at least have assigned him a subject who didn't drive rivets as fast and as continuously as Mrs. Fay Naseby. Holding a bucking bar for her hour after hour was about the same as nursing a private earthquake giving out with four hundred temblors per minute.

Aside from her appetite for work, however, there seemed definitely nothing wrong with Mrs. Naseby. Even in slacks, jacket and bandanna, she was pretty in a buxom, matronly way. She had brown eyes, slick black hair, and a nice smile when McKane's eyes met hers over the top of their wing. When she discovered McKane hadn't thought to bring a lunch, she shared hers with him. She had even introduced him to a cute little copper-haired number down the aisle toward whom she had caught his eyes straying. The copper-haired number's name was Gerda Hoffman and the fact that she failed to throw any fits over the introduction didn't change his opinion that she was cute. He figured cute numbers had to develop sales resistance as a protective measure.

McKane had been holding the bucking bar for something like a century when the midnight whistle moaned. He went with Fay Naseby down the aisle toward a time-clock, hurrying a little perhaps because the copper-haired Miss Hoffman was just ahead.

Fay Naseby said: "Tired, McKane?"

"Me?" said McKane. "I could do eight hours of that and then turn in an honest day's work—with a week's rest between." He held out his right arm and the muscles twittered like jello. "And give Little Egypt lessons, too." He glanced at Miss Hoffman for sympathy.

She said, yawning: "A Hoffman could do it, standing on his or her head."

"It's his first day," said Fay Naseby placatingly. "Here's your card, McKane."

"Can I help you punch the clock, McKane?" said Miss Hoffman sweetly.

"Hey," protested McKane, grinning. "What've the McKanes ever done to the Hoffmans?"

"Nothing," said the copper-haired number, "and they'll never get the chance. Good night." She punched her card briskly and hurried off into the parade heading for American Aircraft's east gate.

McKane blinked. "Is she like that with all the boys in school?"

Fay Naseby had a good, warm chuckle, but it sounded puzzled. "She's been here only a week but she hasn't seemed like that before. She's been very sweet and friendly to me. But you never can tell about folks

you meet in war plants. Take us—we've been working together all night and getting along fine, but what do we know about each other?"

McKane skipped that one. Fay Naseby certainly didn't know much about him or, he figured, she probably wouldn't have touched him with a twenty-foot pole. Eight hours with her had convinced McKane that she was about as nice as they came and that if there was any conniving going on she probably knew nothing about it and certainly didn't have anything to do with it. He was glad he had come to that conclusion about her because he very definitely didn't want to find out anything for Captain Lucius P. Keller and this way he could be stupid about Mrs. Fay Naseby with an entirely clear conscience.

He was sure he was right. He had had to associate with too many stinkers in his time not to recognize a decent individual when he ran across one. But just so he could make his story to Keller complete, it might be a good idea to tuck the lady in for the night.

He punched his card and said, hoping that by some chance she hadn't seen him arriving in his own car that afternoon: "How does a guy get home from here at this time? Do they have any buses running over to the Kenwood carline?"

It was so easy that McKane's conscience hurt him a little. Fay Naseby looked happy that she could do another good turn for McKane. "Why, I live just two blocks from the carline and I ride with John Harker of hydraulics. He's very nice—at least, he's been very nice to me—and I'm sure he'll have room for you."

McKane said he thought that would be swell and they went out the gate together. Mitchell Boulevard in front of the plant was a maelstrom of arriving and departing aircraft workers. Buses honked slowly through the crowd and cars poured out of the huge, camouflaged parking lot like ants out of a nest. Fay Naseby clung to McKane's arm to keep from being swirled away from him into the mob. They were halfway across the boulevard when Fay Naseby slowed beside McKane. The drag on his arm turned him and he saw that she was staring at someone in the crowd behind them.

Her eyes had widened and she drew in a small, sharp breath. McKane tried to judge the direction of her stare but there were hundreds of workers milling around them. There was only one possibility that McKane could figure—a mild-looking little fellow in a

prim gray hat and a neatly-pressed overcoat. He didn't look like anyone who could startle even a woman but he was the only one who seemed out of place in this milling mob of workers. However, he was not looking in Fay Naseby's direction and a moment later he had disappeared in the shifting crowd.

McKane said: "Anything wrong, podner?"

"Wrong? No—I just thought I saw someone I knew."

THEY dodged a bus and McKane hauled Fay Naseby bodily out of the path of an automobile as they made the entrance to the parking lot. Under the floodlights at the end of a long row of cars they halted beside a dingy little sedan. A plump young man with rosy cheeks and incredibly thick glasses sat behind the wheel. In the back seat were a gray-haired woman and a middle-aged brunette.

Fay Naseby said: "Harker, I've got another rider for you. This is McKane of wing sections. McKane, the ladies are Bruno of tail assembly and Smith of the squawks department."

McKane shook hands all around and Harker said: "Glad to have you, feller. It'll be two bucks a week—in advance—and maybe now I can get some new tires if there are any new tires. Hop in."

The sedan shivered and shook and got under way, became a part of the crawling procession along Mitchell Boulevard.

Harker said: "New here, McLoon?"

"McKane," said McKane. "Not as new as I was at four this afternoon."

"Well, if there's anything you want to know, just ask me. I'm a veteran—been here four weeks now." Harker's laugh had a tinge of bray to it. "What you been doing before you came here, McMahan?"

"McKane," said McKane. "I've been doing research."

"Excuse me, McLane," said Harker. "What kind of research?"

McKane said: "A little biology, a little sociology, a little psychology. I wasn't particular."

"Psychology, huh? No wonder you came out here—a simple step from nuts to rivets, hey?" Harker brayed.

The middle-aged brunette giggled. She said she thought Mr. Harker was just a card. McKane agreed with her but he didn't name the low card he had in mind.

They got into Kenwood, which consisted of acres of little stucco bungalows, neatly painted and nudging one another across pocket-

handkerchief lawns. The sedan shuddered to a stop at a traffic light and the gray-haired woman got out. Three soldiers crossed in front of them. Two sailors crossed the other way. A husky Marine with a noticeable list weaved across in front of the sedan, changed his mind in midstream and came back, man-aging to carom off one of the fenders as he did so. He swore casually and made the side-walk again.

"Poor fellow," said Fay Naseby sym- pathetically. "Harker, isn't that the same Marine?"

"Huh?" said Harker, turning his head for a second look at the retreating Marine. "Yeah, it does look like him. And boiled again, too. He ought to be reported before he makes more trouble."

Fay Naseby said: "Oh, he didn't mean any harm. He'd just had a little too much to drink, poor boy."

They went on, dropping the brunette at the next corner, and at an intersection two blocks short of the carline, Harker made a right turn into a side street. He drove two blocks and the farther he got from the boulev-ard, the darker it became. There weren't even dimmed-out street lights. Apparently the war had caught the subdividers with their light standards down. At the third corner the sedan swerved into a driveway beside a green stucco house and stopped there, pant- ing triumphantly.

"Another happy landing, folks," said Har- ker. "And, McVane, if you feel like it, you can pay the two bucks now. The good old Rolls-Royce will be waiting for you here at three-thirty tomorrow afternoon."

McKane dug up two bucks and they all climbed out.

Fay Naseby looked at her watch. "There's an owl car in five minutes, McKane."

Harker went toward the door of the green bungalow, whistling and swinging his lunch pail. McKane fell into step beside Fay Nase- by.

She said: "I only live two blocks from here and the street car is the other way. You'll miss the car."

"You mean," McKane said, "that comedian won't go two blocks out of his way to drop you at your door?"

"He's all right," said Fay Naseby. "He's just afraid that some time that jeep won't get even as far as his own house."

"There'll be another car later," McKane told her. "And it's pretty dark and lonesome around these parts, podner."

"Nothing ever happens out here, but it's nice of you."

They got to the next corner, turned right.

"What the hubby say about you doing a night shift?" said McKane.

"Nothing. You see—well, I live here alone or, that is, with a girl who works the grave- yard shift. This is it."

They stopped in front of a white stucco bungalow on a corner lot. It was as much like all the others in the block as though they had been stamped with the same die.

"Thanks for seeing me home, McKane." Fay Naseby shook hands with him, her clasp firm and friendly. "I hope you'll like it at the plant and stick with it. The boys that are fighting need folks like you and me to make the things they have to have. You can be proud of what you're doing."

She went up the short walk toward the darkened house, unlocked a front door and went inside. The door clicked shut behind her after a moment and McKane cut across the intersection as though he were heading for the carline. He went twenty feet along a high hedge and then came back to stand at the corner of the hedge.

FROM there he could see the neat white bungalow. McKane knew he wasn't going to find out anything, hanging around there. But he would at least be able to tell Captain Lucius P. Keller, sir, that Fay Naseby was a good girl who went to bed nights and didn't associate with the wrong type of people. Watched her place for hours, sir, and didn't discover a thing suspicious, sir.

The bungalow was still dark when Mc- Kane got back to the end of the hedge. It was dark a minute later, two minutes later, five minutes later. McKane didn't like that. He didn't think that ladies went to bed in the dark, on account of how could you get your makeup off in the dark?

On the chance that a bathroom light might show at the corner of the bungalow hidden from him, McKane went across the inter- section, reconnoitered on both sides of the structure. Still he could detect no light, no sign of life.

He said, "Hell," under his breath and cat- footed up a driveway to the back of the house. He made a complete circuit of the little place and, although curtains were not drawn at some of the windows, there was not the faintest gleam of light anywhere inside.

He drew off indecisively for a minute. Perhaps Fay Naseby liked to sit in the dark and relax for a while before putting her rivet-wearied frame to bed. Maybe fuses were blown. Maybe there was some win-

dowless inside room. But he had a strong feeling that none of these explanations was on the beam, that something had happened behind the silent walls of the neat white dwelling that ought to be looked into and quickly.

Presently he was on the small front porch. His finger found a button and he could hear the bell ringing shrilly and echoing inside. He rang it again and there was still no sound of movement inside. He tried the door and wasn't surprised when he found it locked and immovable. But he was considerably surprised when his hand, leaving the knob, brushed against the cold oval of a key in the lock.

He wished that he had not left his gun locked in the glove compartment of his car back in the American Aircraft parking lot but he knew that if Fay Naseby needed any help she needed it without delay. The key rotated silently under his fingers and he opened the door slowly, not more than a dozen inches. He didn't step in at once but felt for the light switch that should be on the wall beside the entrance. He found it but no light resulted as he clicked it down.

McKane took a deep, quick breath, like a swimmer diving toward icy water, then went inside fast, and took two side steps away from the door. He reasoned that if anyone were in there, waiting for a guy named McKane to stick his beak into this matter, that person would be crouching where the opening door would provide cover.

In this reasoning McKane was completely wrong. He decided later that never before had he really known the meaning of the phrase, "the guy never knew what hit him." There was no discernible shock, simply a

gaudily-tinted explosion inside his skull. He had a not unpleasurable sensation of being zoomed heavenward in some sort of a giant swing. When the swing reached the top of its arc, McKane fell off and spun like the stick of a dead rocket into soft, painless darkness.

THE darkness was still present when McKane's eyes opened but it was no longer painless. For a moment he had not the foggiest notion of where he was or what he was doing there. He was conscious only of a gang of riveters who had moved into his skull to get out a rush job. When the simile of the riveters occurred to him, it didn't take him long to remember Fay Naseby.

Even then, it seemed a long time before he could do anything about anything. Finally he rolled himself off his face and sat up. There was only one sound in the house, a measured tapping which he eventually identified as the drip from a leaky faucet. Presently the fog cleared out of his brain to some extent, although the pain was still no less than appalling. He got to his feet and searched himself, coming up with a crumpled box of matches.

The flare of the match was like a blow on his throbbing eyeballs but he managed to pierce the screen of yellow light enough to see Mrs. Fay Naseby.

She lay bonelessly on the floor at the end of the small living room. Her lunchpail had upended, dumping a vacuum bottle, sandwich wrappings, on the cheap rug. One of her capable hands was outstretched as though she were trying to collect the debris.

The match went out and McKane took two careful steps forward before lighting another. It flared as he stood above Fay

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Naseby and he knelt quickly beside her. In the wavering light she looked merely asleep and McKane felt hastily for the outstretched wrist. The flesh was cool and there was no pulse and a last gleam of the match showed a crusting pool of blood beneath her head, further darkening the magenta of the rug. The match flickered out.

McKane continued to feel for a pulse, knowing with certainty that he would not find one. He began to curse in a low, bitter voice. It was not that he hadn't seen death a good many times. In fact, he had arranged the process for several individuals at various stormy points in his career. But with so many heels in the world to whom a cracked skull would be no more than simple justice, he felt it was almost a personal affront that one of the few decent people he had run across had to have luck like this.

He was still in a white rage about it when he finally located a fuse box in a tiny pantry and, masking his fingers carefully with his handkerchief, screwed in the fuses that had been loosened. He looked at his watch as the pantry light went on. It was nineteen minutes after two.

With the curtains drawn and only one room lighted at a time, McKane went through the house. It was, he found, in a hell of a mess. He didn't bother to do much checking of the wild melange of furniture, papers, letters that had been left. If the killer had been unable to find what he was looking for, knowing what it was, then McKane would certainly have no better luck. If whatever it was had been found, then it was too late for him to do anything about it. Anyway, the cops and G-2 and the FBI would take over a routine job such as fine-combing the little bungalow and probably make a much better job of it than he possibly could.

Back in the living room, he stood above the body of Fay Naseby. She still presented the peaceful appearance of someone who slept and McKane hoped fervently that she, like himself, hadn't known what hit her.

He started toward the light switch and then abruptly came back and went to his knees beside the body. He looked for quite a while at the long, copper-colored hair that lay threaded across Fay Naseby's bosom. He didn't know why he had not noticed it there before, except that his head had been oscillating with pain and a flickering match doesn't lend itself to a detailed examination.

Presently he said "tsk" with a regretful intonation. He got to his feet, snapped the lights off and went out, closing the door.

CHAPTER THREE

Cherchez the Red-Head

CAPTAIN Lucius P. Keller was outraged.

His voice was a snarl over the phone. He said: "I will be the joke of G-2 from the Mediterranean to China. I give you the simple, kindergarten assignment of getting acquainted with a woman and, by God, if you don't let her be murdered right under your nose and yourself knocked cold so you don't have the least idea who did it. McKane, you're a disgrace to the Keller Agency and an insult to G-2. I knew I was a fool to get you into the Army. Why didn't you use a little of the training I've tried to beat into you? Why at least didn't you use your flash on the room before you waltzed into the place?"

Before getting Captain Keller on the phone, McKane had made a good resolution—he wouldn't let Keller get him sore. If you were a buck private and got sore, there was no telling what you might talk yourself into. The guardhouse, maybe. Or even being kept in G-2 under Lucius P. Keller. Dumb, that would be McKane. Dumb and respectful. But McKane's head still hurt and the fetid air of the phone booth in the all-night hamburger joint wasn't helping it any. His good resolution sagged a bit. He snarled back: "And how do you know I didn't?"

"Huh?" said Keller. "Don't try to throw me off the track, McKane. If you'd used a flash, you'd have seen the guy, wouldn't you? I don't suppose, stupid, that you learned anything about the dame."

McKane's resolution sagged a little farther. He snapped: "Enough to know she was clean on any Army chiseling racket."

"How do you know that? I suppose she told you so and you believed her?"

"I know a good hunch when it hits me."

Captain Keller barked: "You and your hunches! If she was so lily-white, why was she knocked off?"

McKane said stubbornly: "I don't know—but I'd lay you dough it hasn't anything to do with chiseling on the Army . . ."

"What dough could you lay?" demanded Captain Keller. "On your fifty bucks a month you haven't got any dough."

The resolution was developing serious cracks. McKane shot back: "I wouldn't need any dough because by the time I finished this case I'd be collecting yours and . . ."

Captain Keller's yell seriously endangered telephone company equipment. "You are finished with this case. You report to me in the morning and I'll give you an assignment you can handle, something like filing dead reports. What was that you said?"

"I said nuts—to the reports."

"McKane, you couldn't find a three-alarm fire in a blackout and I'm jerking you off this case before you can do any more damage. Report to me in the morning."

"Nuts," said McKane, "and I don't mean to the reports."

"McKane," yelled Captain Keller, "those are orders!"

The bottom fell completely out of McKane's good resolution. That big heel! Who did he think he was shoving around? McKane snarled: "This is a lousy phone connection. Are you there? I can't hear a word you say—sir."

The way Captain Keller bellowed, McKane had a momentary hope that it might herald an imminent attack of apoplexy. "McKane, you're in the Army now—remember that? I'll report you as a deserter. I'll charge you with mutiny. I'll have every MP on the coast looking for you. You'll draw ten years in Leavenworth!"

"Raise it ten years," McKane yelled back, "and it would still be worth it to ram this case down your throat and your teeth with it. And the next time I see you I'll do just that and chin myself on your captain's bars besides."

He slammed up the receiver, hoping the crackle would rupture Keller's eardrum, and stood snorting at the instrument for perhaps half a minute. Then he scratched his head and said, ruefully and half-aloud: "Now, you damn fool, you've done it."

If he didn't crack this case before Keller and the rest of G-2, he'd draw a court-martial and maybe a year behind GI bars. If he did crack it, he might still draw the court-martial or—he didn't know which was worse—be considered good enough by G-2 to be stuck under Keller for the duration.

AFTER a while he caught an owl bus back to American Aircraft, picked up his car there and headed for Jonn Hannson's Swedish baths downtown. It was as good a place to sleep as any and, he figured, the steam might do something for this throbbing head.

At nine o'clock McKane woke up and dressed, feeling pretty good until he tried to put his hat on. Jonn Hannson said soberly: "You should be looking vere you are yoomp-

ing, McKane. Or did you yoost walk into a dure—backwards?"

McKane said with equal soberness: "It was a revolving door and caught up with me." He went down Spring Street to an armchair lunch, buying a late edition of a *Morning Record* as he went. Over a sliver of ham and a midget egg he went through the paper. There was nothing in it about Mrs. Fay Naseby. But the lack didn't give McKane the notion that Keller and G-2 had just let the killing lay. Probably G-2 and the FBI and maybe even the Kenwood cops had been swarming over the little bungalow for hours. He thought morosely that they had undoubtedly picked up a lot of new stuff to add to what they already knew about the Naseby case and McKane didn't.

He brightened up a little, however, when he decided that maybe he had a couple of angles of his own. Maybe G-2 didn't know about the cute copper-haired number, Miss Gerda Hoffman, for instance. McKane, himself, had no particular idea as to why Gerda Hoffman might have been lurking in Mrs. Fay Naseby's home to tee off on her—and, later, on himself. He wasn't sure it would have been possible for the red-haired girl to reach the bungalow, gain an entrance, locate a fuse box and loosen fuses before Fay Naseby's arrival. But he was certain that very few persons had hair the exact shade of copper red exhibited both by Miss Hoffman's tresses and by the single strand that had lain across Fay Naseby's bosom.

Then there was the mild-looking little man whom Fay Naseby might or might not have been staring at in the crowd outside American Aircraft. There was, also, Walter Naseby. Checking back, single-handed, on Gerda Hoffman and on the small man might take some doing but he should be able to find out something about Walter Naseby in a hurry.

He folded the paper and went a couple of blocks down Spring Street to the offices of the *Morning Record*. At that early hour there was no one in the city room but the church editor and Johnny Duncan, the sandy-haired and blunt-chinned day city editor. Duncan lifted one finger languidly in greeting.

"Hiyah, chump," he said, yawning. "Let's go out and you detect me a cup of coffee so I can wake up and hear what nation-shaking case you're on now."

McKane said virtuously: "I've had my legal cup a day. How's to use the *Record* library for a few minutes?"

"Help yourself. We get first crack at the yarn?"

"It's a deal," McKane promised, "if I can break it." He went back to a big room where filing cases lined the walls. An elderly woman dug up an envelope of clippings on Walter Naseby for him. There were not many clippings and the earliest of them was only about eighteen months old. Naseby, he found, had until Pearl Harbor been the owner of a small shop that specialized in repairing and servicing automobile instruments and electrical systems. Early in 1942 he had established the Airlog Instrument Company to accept an Army contract for some sort of aviation instrument. The newspaper stories very carefully skirted the subject of what the instrument might be. Three months previously the Airlog Instrument Company had been awarded the Army-Navy "E". Just one week later Mrs. Fay Naseby had filed suit for divorce.

There was nothing more on Walter Naseby save a newspaper shot of him accepting the "E" award from an Air Corps colonel. The picture was smudgy after the fashion of newsprint reproductions but Naseby appeared to be youngish, blond and harried-looking as became a war plant executive. A crowd of employees looked pleased in the background, and as McKane studied the faces of the crowd his blood pressure felt a pleasant upswing.

Just behind Naseby, face partially hidden, was the meek-looking little man of the American Aircraft east gate. Not only that, but on the fringe of the crowd in the picture there was another face that looked familiar. He couldn't be sure because that part of the shot had been out of focus, but the face looked very cute, cute enough, in fact, to be that of Miss Gerda Hoffman, currently of American Aircraft wing sections. He couldn't be absolutely certain, but the matter was well worth looking into and now.

HE bunched the clippings in his hand, headed for the city room. The church editor had vanished and Johnny Duncan was alone. He was just hanging up one of the four phones on his desk and was no longer languid.

"My friend," said McKane, "if you want that yarn you're going to have to work for it."

"Mac," said Duncan sadly, "what did you do it for?"

McKane cursed silently but didn't let his face betray anything. He had intended to spread his cards on the table—or city desk—

for Johnny Duncan. But it would be tougher now because he'd have to do more convincing than if he had been able to swing the first punch. He said: "The Fay Naseby killing in Kenwood?"

"And how, chump. A Frank McKane is being sought and, although they call him an aircraft worker instead of a shamus, the description fits you like a rubber bathing suit." Duncan's hand, which had been out of sight, now came from a drawer, hanging onto a well-worn .38 Police Special. "Mac, I've got to salt you away until our first edition hits the street at six P.M. After the cops and the opposition have read our yarn, I'll turn you in to the gendarmes. Now where the hell can I store you? How would you like to be locked up in the publisher's office? He's away and it's a nice office with a swell view and a cellarette full of rye and Scotch."

McKane said irritably: "Put that gun away before you shoot yourself somewhere. You've known me a long time. Am I the kind of a guy that beats women to death?"

Duncan eyed McKane speculatively. "No," he conceded, "not good looking dames anyway. Was she good looking?"

McKane nodded. "She certainly was, and a nice doll, too."

"You ought to be ashamed. Well, go ahead and confess."

"What would you do," McKane said, "for an exclusive on this?"

"Maybe beat someone to death, myself. Possibly you, Mac."

"Would you hold off and work with me a day, maybe two?"

Duncan was noncommittal. "I'll listen anyway, chum."

McKane made it as brief, as pithy as he could, starting with Captain Lucius P. Keller and G-2. He said: "So I've got to bust this and lay it in the Army's lap or that heel will make sure I spend the duration in some GI hoosegow. Do you work with me or yell copper?"

He knew he had Duncan sold when the city editor said: "I never did like that slug, Keller, myself. Who d'you think did it—the red-haired gal, the little guy, Naseby, who?"

"Right now," said McKane, "I don't care who did it so much as why. When I find that out, the rest won't be too tough."

"You don't think this Mrs. Naseby was threatening her hubby in connection with the Airlog outfit chiseling on the Army contract?"

McKane shook his head with conviction. "No. A guy gets hunches about things."

Duncan nodded. "Yeah, I get 'em myself."

Sometimes I'm wrong. What's your deal?"

McKane flipped the picture of the "E" presentation scene on the city desk. Duncan put the gun back in the drawer and looked at the clipping. He waited.

"The present state of my diplomatic relations with Keller and G-2 have me stymied some," said McKane. He pointed out the little man in the picture and the face he thought belonged to Gerda Hoffman. "I want conversation with both of them but I can't buzz around American Aircraft or the Airlog outfit to locate addresses. One of your bright young men could."

"Mac," said Duncan, grinning, "I'll be my own bright young man as quick as I can get some relief on the desk. I haven't had a good local yarn to sweat over for months."

"You can do it without scaring 'em off?"

"They won't even know I'm around."

Duncan broke off and eyed McKane a little uneasily. "All I hope, my lad, is that I'm not being had by you."

"Would I let a guy like you down, Johnny?"

"Not," said Duncan, "unless it was to your own best interests. Well, I'll gamble. Call me here around four."

Down the street from the *Record* McKane stopped at a cigar stand for cigarettes. At first he thought it was a bum looking over his shoulder and then he realized the reflection in the glass behind the counter was that of McKane. There was a dark stubble around his jowls, his hat rode askew to miss the bump on his skull and the clothes he had donned for the riveting job looked as though they had been slept in by a contortionist. His hotel, a shave and clean clothes were just four blocks away. He wondered if it was safe to make a try for them.

He went a block east to Broadway and south two blocks toward the yellow-brick bulk of the hotel. A block from it he crossed Broadway and went past the hotel entrance with passing traffic as a partial shield. He kept on going. One MP lounged by the hotel doors, another stood a hundred feet up Broadway from the entrance. It might have been just a coincidence that they were there but McKane didn't think it was. He thought that Captain Lucius P. Keller, the heel, had really been in earnest, and under his breath he nominated the captain for a very unhappy fate in the hereafter.

Drifting down Fourth to Main, he found a cut-rate barber shop and presently felt better without the stubble. There wasn't anything he could do about the working clothes.

AT four in the afternoon McKane put in a call for the *Record* from a drug store phone booth on Kenwood's main stem.

He had burned a lot of rationed gasoline driving back and forth between American Aircraft and the vicinity of Fay Naseby's little white bungalow. On the last trip he had discovered a circuitous route of back streets, connected by a short length of dirt road, that took him from the plant to the house, as quickly as he could make it on Mitchell Boulevard even during the afternoon's moderate traffic. At the time of the shift change the saving, he figured, would be perhaps eight to ten minutes.

It wasn't much to build on but at least it proved the possibility that either Gerda Hoffman or the pint-sized man of the plant gate could have been at the house, waiting for Fay Naseby.

The *Record* operator came on the wire and McKane asked for Johnny Duncan. When Duncan's voice burred in his ear, McKane identified himself. "Brother," said Duncan, "no wonder you wished that address-locating job off on a sucker like me. I've been tossed out of places by cops, G-men, court bailiffs and just plain bouncers but I never knew what technique could be until a couple of Army guards did the honors for me."

McKane chuckled. "Condolences. What did you find out?"

"Your sympathy touches me. Before I was given the old heave-ho at the Airlog place, I learned that the little guy is Oswald Hartz, treasurer of the outfit."

"What about the girl?"

"No dice. It's probable the respectable portion of G-2 is on the trail there. I have a good pal in American Aircraft public relations who promised to get the dope on her for me. So I call back and the guy is veddy, veddy sorry but suddenly it's against all the rules to give out an employee's address. Hell, Mac, that guy has done everything but crash planes to get an American Aircraft yarn in the *Record* and there is something very piscatorial in the situation there. How many years in Leavenworth will you draw if you don't scoop the rest of G-2 on this caper?"

"Probably too many. Well, thanks, pal."

"Got any other bright ideas we can sweat on?"

"Not for the moment," McKane admitted. "I'll keep in touch."

"You'd better," said Duncan. "You promised me an exclusive break on this, chump, and a Duncan never forgets a promise unless it's his own. Adios, laddie."

McKane dropped the receiver on the hook and went outside to the corner. A newsboy was cutting the binding on a stack of afternoon papers and McKane tossed him a coin, took one of the sheets. He found the story on Fay Naseby's killing on the first page of the second section. There was only half a column and that was admirably restrained. G-2 was probably concerned in that. Even with a war on, the slaying of the wife of a war-plant president rated more newspaper space.

The story gave no hint that the killing might be anything more than a personal tragedy for Mrs. Fay Naseby. The murder had assertedly been reported to the Kenwood police by Mrs. Naseby's housemate and the cops were quoted as believing it the upshot of either a robbery or an attempted criminal assault. The fact that she had been suing Walter Naseby, head of a manufacturing concern, for divorce was duly noted. Naseby, interviewed, had been deeply shocked. A war-plant worker named Frank McKane was reported to have been seen last with the woman. He was being sought for questioning. That was the extent of the story.

The reading left McKane with a darkly gloomy hunch. Captain Lucius P. Keller and G-2 undoubtedly knew a lot more about this Naseby affair than was in that half column of bare facts and also a lot more than Francis X. McKane. Probably he was covering thoroughly-plowed ground in his preoccupation with Gerda Hoffman and Oswald Hartz and Walter Naseby. But he had one slight consolation. He wouldn't draw any more guardhouse for sticking with this thing a day longer and there was always the chance he might stumble onto some fresh lead. His luck couldn't be bad all the time.

Reviewing matters over a hamburger at a nearby counter lunch, he wondered if perhaps he hadn't stumbled onto something that G-2 and Keller didn't have—the plastered leatherneck of Mitchell Boulevard, with whom Fay Naseby had evidently had some trouble. He considered it at length and finally decided it probably meant nothing. But he might as well check on it while he still had the chance.

CHAPTER FOUR

That's Him—All Over

IT was a few minutes short of twelve-thirty when headlights poked up the dark sidestreet and curved into John Harker's

driveway. McKane, standing behind a squat stucco pillar on Harker's porch, smothered a yawn. The yawn was generated by the feeling that he was wasting his time. He had been there for four hours, having checked the house for signs of occupancy around eight o'clock. Apparently Harker either lived by himself or his family was away.

The car halted and Harker whistled as he climbed out, came up the walk. McKane let him get the door open before he stepped out from the shadow of the pillar. He poked a rigid finger into the fat, round-shouldered back, said: "Hello, Harker. Let's get inside."

Harker stood paralyzed for the moment. Then his voice said with a panicky, sobbing sound: "McKane! Oh—my—God!" He made no slip now on the pronunciation of McKane's name.

"Stick a hand in and light up. Then get inside."

Harker's arm lifted and lights went on inside the room. As though in a trance he took stumbling steps inside. McKane followed, heeling the door closed behind him. Suddenly Harker slumped bonelessly to the floor. His bulk plowed into McKane's ankles and McKane pitched sidewise, clawed at air for balance, went down heavily. Instantly Harker was all over him, his plump fists punching blindly, his voice shrilling: "Help! Police! Help!"

McKane heaved up wordlessly, caught Harker's lapels in one hand, slapped the yelling mouth with the other. Harker was silent, looking piteously at McKane.

His chin trembled and he mouthed: "I've done nothing to you, McKane. You can't kill me. After all, I only told the police how you took Mrs. Naseby home from here. You're not—not killing me for that!"

McKane loosed the lapels, dumped the plump young man into a chair. He said, "Relax," and scowled thoughtfully at him for a moment. "Just talk and quit having hysterics."

Harker let his breath out with explosive relief. He resettled the thick glasses, still on his nose despite the struggle. He said, "Yes?" but not with too much confidence.

McKane made it brief. Probably Harker's yells hadn't been heard outside but he couldn't be sure of that.

"That Marine," he said, "the one that walked into your fender on Mitchell Boulevard last night—you and Mrs. Naseby made a crack about the guy being 'the same one.' The same one that what?"

Harker was still frightened but he looked puzzled also. He said: "All we meant was that that same Marine stopped Mrs. Naseby as she started home from here about a week ago. He was drunk but I'm sure he meant no real harm. I heard it just before I went in the house and I ran down the block to them. I told him he should be ashamed to bother a fine woman like Mrs. Naseby and a war-plant worker, too, and he left. What's that got to do with you and what you—what happened last night?"

McKane didn't answer that one. He hadn't really banked too much on the angle of the plastered leatherneck but he had had hopes and now he felt a little deflated. His eyes were murky and sour and Harker shrank under his stare. McKane said: "How well did you know Mrs. Naseby?"

"Not very intimately. About as well as you get to know anyone, riding back and forth with them. From what I knew of her I admired her greatly and it used to worry me, having her go home to that dark empty house in the middle of the night. I used to tell her she ought to work the day shift. I don't understand why you're asking me all this."

"Did she ever mention having trouble with anyone, being afraid of anyone?"

Harker was becoming less apprehensive. "She wasn't afraid of anyone or anything and she didn't have any trouble I know of unless you call divorcing her husband trouble. Say, are you trying to make me think you didn't kill her?"

McKane shrugged. "What'd she have to say about her divorce?"

"She'd hardly discuss it with a comparative stranger."

"How'd you know about it?"

"I read of it in the paper like anyone else. I didn't mention it to her, of course, since it was none of my business. But when I found out what a lovely person she was, I couldn't help thinking it was like so many marriages—a couple sticks together on the way up and then when the husband makes a lot of money, like Naseby has with that navigation instrument, he chases after younger women and breaks up his marriage."

McKane said: "Naseby's been chasing, has he?"

"Heavens," said Harker, "how would I know? I don't know the man at all. I just meant I figured that was what happened."

McKane said, "O.K.," and stood, considering the plump young man. It was time to be on his way in case some citizen had heard

Harker's hysterical yells and had happened to invite the Kenwood cops into the matter. He said: "Harker, I suppose when I leave, you wouldn't right away tip off the cops, would you?"

Harker was frightened again. He breathed: "I swear I won't."

"You're not even a cheerful liar," said McKane.

Harker cowered farther back into his chair. He quavered: "You're not—not going to kill me, McKane? I swear I won't tell the police a word about this."

"Sure you will," said McKane, "but not right away. Got a nice roomy closet around the joint?"

"Yes," Harker said huskily. "Off my room." He looked ineffably relieved and made no fuss about being herded into the closet.

McKane locked the door on him and said, "Harker."

"Yes?"

"The key's on the floor somewhere outside the door. I'll phone the cops after a while and have them drop over and spring you."

With the door between himself and McKane, Harker's courage began to sprout again. He yelled: "McKane, you can't get away with this. Crime doesn't pay!"

"And that," said McKane, "ain't propaganda. Adios."

MCKANE left his car on a curving road bordering Silver Lake's smooth oval and went up the steep darkness of Belvoir Drive on foot and with as little fanfare as possible. It was about time, he had decided, to throw some very relevant questions at Walter Naseby who, so the telephone directory said, lived at an exclusive low number on Belvoir. It was probable that Naseby wouldn't be exactly enthusiastic about discussing the murder of his wife with a total stranger at two in the morning but McKane had to take a chance on that, being quite sure that Keller by now had the Airlog plant studded with MP's.

Indeed, he wasn't certain that Keller might not have had an attack of intelligence and ordered Naseby's home covered on the theory that McKane would eventually show up there. It was for that reason that he had left his car down on the lake road. In the course of his career McKane had had plenty of experience with infuriated cops but none with MP's. He had an uneasy notion that an Army cop yelled, "Halt!" just once and after that the barrage. Maybe they didn't

even yell once. He wasn't anxious to find out.

The homes on the hills around Silver Lake were large, scattered, slumbering above a city that was vague and ghostly in the dim-out. McKane found the number he sought on a brass plate imbedded in one of the brick pillars flanking a driveway. The drive curved across sloping grounds to a sprawling, white, comfortably big house. McKane could see no lights in the structure.

However there was the metallic shine of cars on the gravel just inside the grounds and McKane edged onto the soft turf beside the drive, pausing at the rear of the first car. He felt out the license numbers on the tag, jotted them down mentally and moved on to the second car. Johnny Duncan could check them in the morning.

McKane followed the curve of the driveway and discovered eventually that somewhere along the route it had forked and landed him in the service yard at the rear of the big home. He skirted a tennis court, a swimming pool and found himself looking down a long wing. The orange glow of lights seeped past draperies at a big window near the end of the wing and McKane wormed through thick shrubbery toward it. The draperies blocked any view of the room beyond so he kept on going around the corner of the wing and found a huge, arched window there.

It was not curtained at all, possibly because the site there sloped so sharply from the house that no one could peer in unless, like McKane, they clung precariously to the shrubbery below the sill. The room beyond the window was lighted softly by two expensive floor lamps that glinted light from the luxurious, masculine furniture of a den. Walter Naseby stood, spraddle-legged, behind a big desk of some dark wood. He wore a robe, pajamas, slippers and he looked as though he was pretty sore about something. He wasn't keeping quiet about it, either, but at first McKane couldn't see the person he was addressing. He craned his neck a little and brought the other person into focus.

HE was so pleased by his discovery that he almost forgot to hang onto the shrubbery. The second person was the cute and copper-haired Miss Gerda Hoffman. No longer clad in slacks and jacket, she wore a clinging green dress that was positively a stroke of genius with her red hair. It was cut pleasantly low at the top and pleasantly skimpy in the skirt and it left not much of her to the imagination. She was, McKane decided, a very luscious dish.

At the moment, however, she was not working at being seductive. She was being either pretty mad about something or else frightened. McKane didn't have time to decide which, because things came to a head fast. Naseby shot words at the girl and then he reached for the phone on the big desk. Gerda Hoffman came out of her chair fast and got her hand over that of Naseby, holding the phone down on its cradle. They strained there momentarily, the girl shaking her head and talking rapidly. McKane wished that at some time in the past he had been foresighted enough to take up lip-reading.

Naseby took his hand from the phone and the girl stood away from him, her breasts rising and falling breathlessly. Naseby lifted his head and McKane could see his throat tighten as he called out. In the tick of seconds a smallish man appeared at the arched doorway at the end of the den. McKane wasn't particularly surprised when he saw that the smallish man was Oswald Hartz. Every once in a while a man's luck hit an upbeat and McKane figured this was his particular moment. All he had to do was pop through the front door and start talking. Some one would start talking back and anything could come of that.

Then McKane wasn't too sure of his luck. Hartz stood aside in the archway, waiting, and Gerda Hoffman shrugged sullenly, teetered across the room on high heels and went out of sight past the archway. The smallish man followed her. It looked like the brush-off for Miss Hoffman and, since one of the cars in the driveway was probably hers, she would be well on her way before McKane could reach his own car down on the lake drive to tail her. However, he still had Naseby and Oswald Hartz left.

McKane sought a foothold below him to ease down from the window. The move probably saved his life. His eyes were just pulling below the level of the sash when he saw, a little indistinctly because of his movement, something black and round come skittering along the floor through the archway that the girl and Hartz had vacated. He tried to raise his eyes to the window again but hadn't quite made it when the room beyond the glass suddenly dissolved in a furnace-like blast of white fire and sound. The window bulged and shattered. If McKane had been exactly in front of it, the flying shards of glass might well have decapitated him.

The shrub he clung to came out of the ground as though rooted in soft butter. He

fell backward down the slope, dazed, blinded by the instant of fierce white glare. After a moment he got to his knees, ears still ringing to that gigantic thunderclap. Above him there was no window, not a great deal of wall. He went, weaving, rubber-kneed, around the corner of the house, headed for a balustraded portico where a front door stood open.

He was almost there when someone came darting out of the lightless doorway and down shallow steps to the drive. McKane spread his arms and they met solidly. The person was soft, small and full of violent protest. A fist jolted McKane in the stomach. Small feet flayed his shins. He swore violently and let his weight fall forward and then the other person was on the ground beneath him. He fended off flying fingernails from his eyes, made out a small, white face below him.

He panted: "Hello, Red."

Gerda Hoffman stopped struggling. She gasped, "McKane!"

"Yup. Were you going somewhere?"

"Get off me, you—you Casanova!" She wriggled her slim body beneath him angrily. "You gigolo!"

McKane released her wrists and stood up. Miss Hoffman also got to her feet. She was holding a dark wrap which had slipped from her shoulders, and from the ground she rescued a voluminous handbag.

McKane said chidingly: "Red, don't you know it's impolite to run out on your host like that? Besides, maybe the guy is still alive and could use some help."

There was a shudder in the girl's voice. "He isn't—I looked. And I'm getting out of here and you'd better, too."

"Don't hurry off, folks," said a third and drawling voice. The beam of a flashlight suddenly pinned them against the darkness. McKane's eyes pierced the glare sufficiently to see that the voice came from a lean, wiry man in the blue uniform of a city cop who had materialized very quietly out of the night. He said: "Now I'll just bet, folks, that boom-boom me and my pardner done heard means something ain't quite right around here. You-all oughtn't to run off and leave us mystified and everything. You ought to stick around."

Feet grated on the gravel and a thick-necked, red-faced cop came into the cone of light. He said unpleasantly: "Who's this pair, Tarheel?"

"We ain't been introduced yet, Max," said Tarheel, "but I reckon we'll get around to that. Let's us go inside, folks."

CHAPTER FIVE

Pineapples Make a Juicy Kill

WITH the flash spearing a path for them, McKane and Gerda Hoffman mounted the steps, went through the wide door into a long hallway, dark save for a faint glow at the end outlining an archway. The flashlight probed, revealing blackened plaster at the arch, and finally swung down on the diminutive figure of Oswald Hartz in the center of the hall. Hartz was on hands and knees. He tried to get up but managed only to fall back to his haunches where he sat looking blankly at the light for a moment. Then his face convulsed and he muttered: "I must have fainted after I saw—my God, it's awful!"

Max hoisted him and his eyes got saner when they saw the blue uniform. His eyes swung and when they stopped on Gerda Hoffman, he stiffened. His finger came up, pointing. He said shrilly: "That girl should be arrested. She's killed Walter Naseby."

"So?" said Tarheel. "Where?"

"In the den. He—he's blown to bits."

"Well, let's us have a look," Tarheel said.

He herded McKane and Gerda Hoffman and Hartz toward the arch.

Max grumbled: "Tarheel, whyn't you let the dicks find things out? We'll be spending a month of our own time in court like on that liquor-store killing."

"Won't hurt to look," said Tarheel.

McKane had never seen a place quite so thoroughly wrecked as the den. A single bulb in an overturned floor lamp had somehow survived and its light showed the outer wall leaning crazily, the expensive furniture mere kindling, a rug littered with scorched plaster. There was a gaping hole in the flooring and moist splotches on the walls. There were fragments that certainly could not readily be identified as Walter Naseby. Gerda Hoffman gasped faintly as though she had not seen all this before and McKane heard Max gulp noisily. Tarheel said nothing. The flashlight had picked out a dark, jagged fragment on the rug and he stepped forward, knelt beside it. He got his eyes close to it but didn't touch it.

Max protested: "Don't go finding clues. Leave it to the dicks."

"Take the folks in some other room," said Tarheel. "I'll call the bureau in a minute, Max."

Max found a library that seemed oddly decorous and undisturbed after the shambles of the den and sat them down there, the red-

haired girl in one corner, McKane in another, Hartz in a third. The Airlog treasurer was still shaken, horrified. A mole on his cheek stood out against the pallor of his face and his lower lip hung and trembled under a couple of long teeth that made him look more than ever like a rabbit. He glared at Gerda Hoffman and then at Max.

He demanded: "Aren't you going to arrest her? I told you . . ."

"Now, now," said Max, "I'm just a cop. You tell it to the detectives when they get here." He still didn't want any part of it.

McKane knew how Max felt because he felt the same way. He didn't want any part of it, either, but there wasn't anything he could do about it now. Before the dicks got through with him, he would be connected with the Frank McKane of the other Naseby killing. He would be popped into a police cell and Captain Lucius P. Keller would then pop him out and into an Army cell. He could see now the sadistic gleam in Keller's eyes as the transfer came about. Well, to hell with it. And with Keller, too.

Lounging in a big chair near the library fireplace, McKane leafed through magazines he found on an end table and discovered them to be pretty dreary, inasmuch as they were all house organs of the Airlog Instrument Company and filled with gossip that meant nothing to an outsider. There was the safety record of department 19 and the doings of the girls' soft-ball team and a pep editorial by Walter Naseby and in every issue an Honor Roll of ex-employees in service. He tossed the magazines back to the end table and sat mooning at nothing for a moment. Then he said, "Hmm-hmm," under his breath and reached for one of the house organs. He found the Honor Roll and went through it name by name. Four men were listed as members of the Marine Corps. He stuck the house organ quietly into his pocket.

THE detectives turned out to be Riordan and Miller from Central Homicide and McKane knew both of them. Tarheel came in with them and a bored deputy coroner followed on their heels. Miller nodded at McKane and Riordan said: "Hi, Mac. What cooks here?"

"You boys know this here gentleman?" said Tarheel.

"Sure," Miller said. "He's a shamus and not a bad egg in spite of it. What goes on, Tarheel?"

"Man by the name of Naseby been blowed up by a hand grenade."

Everyone in the room looked astonished, not excepting McKane. Even the deputy coroner was bored no longer.

"The hell," said Riordan. "How d'you know it was a grenade?"

"I was in the Army long enough," said Tarheel, "to know fragments of a grenade when I see 'em."

"My God," marveled Miller. "I hope before this war's over our killers don't take to General Grant tanks. Who did it?"

"Her," said Max, pointing to Gerda Hoffman.

If the two detectives had been surprised before, they were astounded now. "Not that cute doll?" said Riordan. "Did she confess?"

"No," admitted Max. "The little guy said she did it."

Miller and Riordan fixed stares on Oswald Hartz as though they didn't like stool pigeons. Miller said roughly: "O.K., fellow, let's have it. Why'd she do it and how and a few minor details like that."

Hartz popped out of his chair. He said: "My man, I don't like your attitude. I'm Mr. Hartz, treasurer of the Airlog Instrument Company."

"O.K., Mister Airlog," said Riordan. "But get to the point. You say this doll has been pitching hand grenades at guys. Why?"

"Mr. Naseby threatened to have her arrested for blackmail. She formerly worked in our office and was fired for snooping into correspondence that didn't concern her. Also she—well, very obviously tried to become more friendly with Mr. Naseby than her position warranted."

Miller said: "You mean she was on the make for him?" When the small man nodded, Miller whistled. "And he gave her the brush-off. Boy, with a doll like her, that's character. What's the blackmail angle if he gave her the brush-off?"

"She came here tonight and said she had information concerning the murder of Mrs. Naseby. . . ."

"Hey," said Tarheel, "you mean this Naseby is related to the Naseby dame that got knocked off in Kenwood?"

"He was her husband," said Hartz. "Anyway, this girl said her information would be very damaging to Mr. Naseby and she would go to the police unless he paid her ten thousand dollars."

The detectives looked at Gerda Hoffman sadly. McKane could see they really hated to believe things like that about her. Riordan said: "How about it, miss?"

The red-haired girl was entirely self-possessed and also very beautiful. She said: "I

won't make any statement until I see my—lawyer. But I can say this. I certainly didn't throw any hand grenade. I don't know who threw it. The hallway was dark and I was at the open door, waiting for Mr. Hartz to find his overcoat. He was going to drive me to the bus. He might have thrown the grenade or it might have come through the open door."

Nobody had been paying any attention to McKane as he lit a cigarette, got up, moved over to the fireplace to dispose of the burnt match. He moved to the French windows, flanking the fireplace, and lounged there.

"And besides," said Gerda Hoffman, "hasn't anybody wondered how a girl would be able to get her hands on a grenade? They're not very common outside of the armed services, are they?"

"You got something there, baby," agreed Riordan. He frowned at Hartz. "Did Naseby ever have a run-in with any Army or Navy guy?"

The small man's jaw went a trifle slack for a moment. His eyes widened. He muttered: "Now I wonder . . ."

"You wonder what, buddy?" said Miller.

"Why, this evening I had an appointment here with Mr. Naseby. While I was waiting for him to return from a conference at the plant, a Marine sergeant who was—well, under the influence of liquor—came to the door and asked for him. I told him Mr. Naseby wasn't expected for some time. . ."

"You answered the door, huh?" said Riordan. "Where were the servants? Where are they now? How come you got in the joint?"

"Hmmp," said Hartz, "you evidently don't know much about the servant question these days, Lieutenant. Mr. Naseby has been lucky to have a maid who cleans up and goes home at four o'clock. As for me, I have a key for the house. Now this Marine left. He didn't seem to wish to cause any trouble even though he was quite intoxicated."

McKane said: "What'd this leatherneck look like?"

Eyes turned toward him. Hartz said: "Why, he was tall and dark-haired but rather pale. I didn't notice much else."

Riordan said: "Say, McKane, we haven't got around to you yet. What're you doing in this Naseby case?"

"McKane?" said Tarheel. "Is that that boy's name? Now there's a McKane wanted in that Naseby killing down in Kenwood."

"By God," Miller said, "you're right. Say, McKane—"

There were no guns out, so McKane knew he could make it. He swung one of the French doors open with his elbow, said, "Adios, chums." He took a fast step backward and felt his shoulder hit the edge of the door. It slowed him a fraction of a second, just as long as it took Tarheel to unlimber the gun from the black holster at his belt. The way Tarheel handled the gun, McKane knew he could shoot—and would.

The gun swung up and Gerda Hoffman let go with a scream that raised the hair on the back of McKane's neck. She came out of her chair, still screaming, fainted in the middle of the scream and fell backward at Tarheel. McKane was outside into welcome darkness when Tarheel's wild shot smashed plaster above the window.

JOHNNY DUNCAN finally opened the door of his hotel room, yawning and scowling at McKane.

"For God's sake, McKane," he groaned. "Go away! Come to the office in the morning and give yourself up."

McKane said: "I brought you a drink, Johnny." He produced a bottle of good rye and shook it invitingly.

"I had a drink," said Duncan.

McKane pushed past Duncan and closed the door behind him. He said: "You need another. You're just about to start working."

"Who said so?" demanded Duncan. He took the bottle, opened it and let a generous slug trickle down his throat. He sat on his rumpled bed, holding the bottle, and regarded McKane with slightly more toleration. "Who said so?"

McKane took the Airlog house organ from his pocket. He opened it at the page containing the Honor Roll, tossed it to Duncan. He said: "Those four names—USMC—check 'em at the *Record* morgue and see if there's anything on any of them. Do it now, chum."

Duncan took another drink. "Why should I?" he said.

"Because you want an exclusive—and we're getting warm."

"I've been thinking about that. Suppose G-2 nixes it?"

"I can't insure you against that," McKane admitted. "But here's something for your late street. Walter Naseby has been murdered, blown to bits by a hand grenade at his home. If you'll hurry, you can get it out of the cops before G-2 clamps down. And the Frank McKane wanted in Mrs. Naseby's killing is Francis X. McKane, operative for

the Keller Detective Agency. Play that big so Lucius P. will have apoplexy, the louse. Also McKane phoned the *Record*, asserting his innocence and promising to surrender to the authorities."

Duncan was wide awake. He climbed into his clothes fast, said: "Stick here. I'll phone you from the *Record*."

When Duncan had gone, McKane got on the room phone. He called the Kenwood police department and got a Lieutenant Buckley. He gave the address of John Harker's bungalow and said: "There's a guy locked in a closet there. Better hop over and let him out." He hung up on a sputtered question.

In less than twenty minutes Johnny Duncan called. He said: "Here's a little on one of your leathernecks, a Harry Volmer. He's a hero but, unfortunately, a dead hero, killed on Guad. We had an interview with his buddy, a Sergeant Joe Stritch, two weeks ago when Stritch got back. Stritch's mother lives at the Carlita Apartments."

"Getting anywhere on the Naseby bombing?"

"We're working on it. Keep in touch, chum."

McKane hung up, started for the door, changed his mind and came back to the phone. He rang the Kenwood cops again and once more got Lieutenant Buckley. He said: "Did you find that guy in the closet O.K.?"

"I let him out myself," Buckley said. "And, friend, if your name is McKane, I'd advise you to come in and surrender."

"I'll do that," McKane said. "In fact, if you'll stick around until late afternoon, Buckley, I'll surrender to you personally. Be seeing you."

McKane found it all took longer than he had expected. There was Sergeant Joe Stritch, USMC, to locate and there was some other checking and there was the business with the Kenwood cops. He took time out also to check both the *Record* and the afternoon papers and, although the bombing of Walter Naseby was well covered, not a word was printed about the arrest of a Gerda Hoffman. He called Johnny Duncan.

"The city cops haven't pinched her," said Duncan, "but I'm tipped G-2 is working her over on the quiet. How you doing?"

"O. K. And if you'll be at Walter Naseby's place at eight, I'll prove it to you."

All that had taken time so it was nearly dusk when Captain Lucius P. Keller arrived at the Kenwood police station in answer to a summons by Lieutenant Buckley. Buckley,

a spare, quiet guy, brought Keller into the detention room where McKane was lounging in a chair, half asleep. Captain Keller regarded McKane with the malevolent affection of a king cobra for its prey.

He crowed: "So you finally got caught up with, McKane! By God, a court martial will hand you at least a year for this."

McKane yawned, stood up, saluted and yawned again. He said: "I could use that much rest after what I've been through, cracking this Naseby matter—sir."

Captain Keller narrowed his eyes at McKane. He said: "What d'you mean, you've solved it?" It was impossible to tell whether he was sore or sourly pleased.

"I know why the Naseby couple got murdered. And who did it."

"All right, all right—out with it."

McKane shook his head. "If I'm drawing a court martial, naturally I have to save the story for my defense."

Keller's mouth opened and closed without a word coming out. Finally he sputtered: "Why, you—you . . . now listen, McKane!"

"Yes, sir."

"This is blackmail. It's your patriotic duty to disclose the facts." Keller added bitterly: "And where's your gratitude? Haven't we been associated for ten years? Didn't I get you into the Army?"

McKane grinned. "That's all I want to know. You haven't got to first base on this yourself and they're riding you. O. K., if I'm under arrest, they can ride you until you get saddle sores."

Keller rumbled: "Lieutenant, I want a private talk with this man." Buckley went out, grinning. Keller harrumphed a couple of times, scowling at McKane. He said: "I might have expected blackmail like this from you. All right, you're not under arrest. Now who killed the Nasebys? And you'd better be able to prove it or you're right back under arrest."

McKane yawned again. He was very tired. He said: "I've got several prospects—for instance, a red-head named Gerda Hoffman, Oswald Hartz of the Airlog outfit, a Marine sergeant named Joe Stritch. You round up the girl and Hartz. I'm having the Marine brought in and we'll get 'em together at the Naseby villa and I'll make my pick."

"Why there?"

"I want to check on something I didn't have time for last night. Incidentally, we might also have a John Harker, American Aircraft swing shift, there to identify the Marine, if they'll give him time off. Lieutenant Buckley can see about that."

CHAPTER SIX

G-2 Roundup

JOHNNY DUNCAN was lounging in front of the big home on the Silver Lake hillside when McKane's car pulled into the drive at eight-thirty. Duncan was sore. He said: "The Army just threw me out."

McKane turned off his lights, climbed out. He said: "I'll fix it. Who's here?"

"Keller and a G-2 colonel named Haggerty. The red-head and Hartz and a guy named Harker. A Kenwood cop and Miller and Riordan from the city homicide squad."

They went inside into the long hallway. McKane paced it and found it was nearly thirty feet in length. The porch was at least ten feet wide. When he had that data he and Duncan went into the library. Captain Lucius P. Keller was strutting impatiently before the fireplace. The colonel, a man with a rocky face and hard, smart eyes, sat impassively on a divan. Hartz, Harker, Miss Gerda Hoffman and the three cops sat ranged along one wall in chairs that had very evidently been brought in from the dining room. They all looked up at McKane like an audience expecting the show to begin.

Keller barked: "I threw this reporter out once."

"I need him for this," said McKane. He looked at the granite-like face of the colonel and added, "Sir."

"Well, where's your Marine?"

"I said I'd have him brought in. He ought to be here any minute, Captain." McKane got out a cigarette, found matches and was about to strike one when there was the sound of tires on gravel outside. He said: "In fact, he's probably here now."

He went out and presently he was back again, shepherding a tall man in a Marine sergeant's uniform, a small gray-haired woman beside him. The sergeant tacked unsteadily toward a big chair, the elderly woman guiding him tenderly. He flopped down in it and the woman patted his arm reassuringly and then sat down in a chair beside him.

"Mr. Harker," said McKane, "the sergeant has admitted to me that he was in Kenwood and tried to speak to Mrs. Naseby that night so maybe you've had this trip for nothing. But in case he should change his mind on the story, I'd like you to identify him."

"That's the man," said Harker. "And he's drunk again."

"No," said McKane. "Joe never touches a drop. His mother here will tell you that. He was on Guad for five months and he's got a bad case of shell-shock. He just doesn't coordinate very well. Right, Joe?"

The Marine nodded. He said thickly: "Tha's ri'."

"Sergeant Stritch told me a very enlightening yarn today," said McKane. "Maybe I'd better pass it on here. Correct me, Joe, if I get off the beam." The Marine nodded and McKane went on. "It starts with a young guy named Harry Volmer."

He turned his gaze on Oswald Hartz and Hartz squirmed a little.

"Yeah, Hartz," said McKane, "you know all about this Volmer, don't you? For the benefit of the others here, I'll explain that Volmer used to work in Walter Naseby's automobile instrument shop. For a couple of years the kid had been working on a bright idea for a navigation instrument and just before Pearl Harbor he got it completed. He didn't patent it because that would have disclosed the details to anyone who wanted to keep an eye on patent applications—and the Axis undoubtedly has guys doing just that. He simply turned it over to Naseby under an agreement that Naseby would interest the government in it and put by for the kid fifty per cent of the profits on any contract he was awarded. Then Volmer, not satisfied with doing that much for his country, signed up as an aviation mechanic with the Marines in December, 1941. He got some training here and more in Australia before being sent on the Solomons job.

"But before he left Australia he married a girl there and decided that instead of having Naseby put by half the profits it would be better for the money to be sent to his wife. He wrote Naseby and got no reply. He was worried and, being smarter at inventing things than at protecting himself, he sent off his copy of the contract to a lawyer here, a fellow named Horace Cline. Volmer didn't hear from Cline, either, and I discovered the reason for that today. Cline died from a heart attack in his office one day just about the time he would have received Volmer's letter. Well, Volmer got shipped off to Guad and got his there. But before he died in a field hospital, he told the story to his buddy, Sergeant Stritch, and Stritch promised that if he got back to the States, he'd look into it for Volmer's wife. Am I correct so far, Joe?"

The Marine nodded and beamed. "Tha's ri'."

McKane went on: "Volmer had told Stritch to see Mrs. Naseby first because she had always been swell to him. Stritch found out from the maid here that the Nasebys were separated and she was living in Kenwood. He was looking for the address that first night when he recognized her on the street from Volmer's description and tried to talk to her. Harker, here, thought he was drunk that night and brushed him off. He was trying again night before last but he got tired and his mind got confused so he quit for then. Yesterday he read about the killing of Mrs. Naseby so he came out to see Naseby here last night. He didn't find Naseby here."

MCKANE broke off to light a cigarette, inhaled deeply. Keller looked sour, enigmatic. The colonel was impassive but interested.

"Now," said McKane, "it's safe to assume that the big wad of profits Volmer didn't get supplied the motive for the killings. I'll make some guesses now. Mrs. Naseby was divorcing Naseby because she wouldn't stand for a dirty deal being engineered on a young guy who was fighting for his country. She'd probably threatened to talk and had to be shut up. Naseby was knocked off because he either knew or suspected who had killed his wife and, although he was crooked, he wouldn't stand still for it."

"All right, all right," snapped Captain Keller. "Quit giving us guesses and tell us who did it."

McKane nodded. "Let's check over some likely candidates. Sergeant Stritch, Miss Hoffman and Hartz all had the opportunity. That is, I can show they were all in or around Kenwood at the time of Mrs. Naseby's murder and any one of them could have been concealed in her home, waiting for her. They were certainly around here last night. So we'll have to start eliminating. Stritch, for instance, might have tossed a grenade at Walter Naseby in revenge for the deal his buddy got but he'd certainly have had no sane motive for killing Mrs. Naseby. And because of his condition we can forget him in last night's murder. That hallway is thirty feet long and you can add another ten feet outside the door. The guy who split the plate in Naseby's den with that hand grenade had to have control like a big league mound artist and Stritch couldn't hit a phone booth with a bean bag if he was locked inside. Next we have Miss Gerda Hoffman."

He smiled at the red-haired girl and she was visibly startled.

"We'll eliminate her immediately," McKane said, "because she's working with Captain Keller. I think she's a WAC, assigned to G-2."

Gerda Hoffman said: "Well, I'll be darned, McKane! You knew it all the time?"

"No," said McKane, "not until I started thinking things over. For instance, Captain Keller told me over the phone I'd been foolish to barge into Mrs. Naseby's house without casing it with my flash. How did he know I didn't use a flash unless somebody told him. I knew you'd been around that night because one of your bricktop hairs was on Mrs. Naseby's jacket. So you were probably either the killer or the somebody that had reported to Captain Keller. Incidentally, you didn't give me much of a break that night."

The girl flushed a little. "I watched the place for an hour after you went in. I thought—well, there's no need of going into what I thought. You see, I'd been told . . . oh, anyway, I watched the place. The killer must have left by the back door while I waited. When I did go in, I found Mrs. Naseby was dead and you were unconscious but apparently not badly hurt. But I rushed out and called Captain Keller for instructions. He told me to stay away from the house and go on working under cover."

"Anyway," said McKane, "thanks for spoiling that cop's aim last night. That was another tip-off and there was one more thing that I'll go into at some length later."

The colonel nodded his rock-hewn head slightly, said: "Very good, McKane. So Mr. Hartz then draws the eight-ball?"

"I don't think so, sir," said McKane. Somehow he didn't mind saying "sir" to this rugged, quiet man. "In the first place, anyone clever enough to have killed Mrs. Naseby without leaving any real clues to his identity, would have found a way to kill Naseby without any witnesses around, such as Miss Hoffman. Although Hartz was at the American Aircraft plant that night."

Hartz said: "I wanted to talk to her, ask her to drop the divorce case. But she was with you, McKane, and I decided to wait until I could see her alone. I assure you I had nothing to do with her murder."

"I believe you but not just because you say so. Miss Hoffman pretended she had information on that murder and if you'd been the killer, you'd certainly have included her in the bombing. And, also, if Naseby had had you pegged as his wife's murderer, he wouldn't have let you wander around the house here out of sight. So I don't think it

was you. I cast my vote for John Harker."

Harker got to his feet slowly, his plump face a picture of bewilderment. "McKane, you're not serious. Why should I have done a thing like that?"

McKane nodded soberly. "That's what bothers me, Harker. I still don't know just how you fit in. Maybe Hartz can tell us."

Oswald Hartz shook his head. He said after a hesitation so brief that if McKane hadn't been watching for it he probably would not have noticed the pause: "I've never seen the man before."

"Well," said McKane, "for my money it's still Harker. I haven't had time to check back on him but the cops will do plenty of that and they'll find out how he connects."

HARKER'S eyes snapped behind the thick lenses. He said: "I have a right to know what grounds you have for such a horrible accusation."

"I got several little things out of our talk last night," said McKane, "and they started me thinking about you. In fact, I hotfooted from your place up to see Naseby and find out what he knew about you. But you beat me to him. For instance, you said you told the police I'd gone with Mrs. Naseby to her home from your bungalow. How did you know that—unless you saw me go to her home with her?"

Harker snorted: "That's a pretty flimsy bit of evidence."

"Sure," agreed McKane, "and so is the fact that, although you said last night you'd been worried about Mrs. Naseby going home to a dark and empty house in the middle of the night, you wouldn't drive out of your way two blocks to see that she got home O.K. It made me wonder if perhaps you hadn't been figuring on knocking her off and wanted it known that she always left you at your home. And when I showed up you saw a swell chance of establishing that alibi completely and maybe pinning it on me."

"Ha," said Harker triumphantly, "there's where your whole theory falls down. You left me at my home and walked two blocks directly to her bungalow. How could I have got there ahead of you?"

"Ever study geometry?" asked McKane. "The houses are at opposite corners of a square and, while it's two blocks by street—the sides of the square—it's just a hop, skip and jump if you take the diagonal which is the back yards and the alleyway. I proved that this afternoon."

"There isn't a word of proof in all you've said," cried Harker.

"No," McKane admitted. "They were just little things that got me thinking about you. But here's something else that's a little stronger." He turned to Hartz. "Mr. Hartz, is the nature of the instrument manufactured by Airlog pretty generally known?"

"No," said Hartz. The small man was nervous but positive. "In fact, only our highest executives know what it is. Our employees make various small parts which might be those of any aviation instrument. The assembly is done by the Army and Navy. We observe the greatest secrecy."

"That's what I figured," said McKane. He swung back at Harker. "But you knew—and told me last night—that it was a navigation instrument. How did you know?"

The plump young man was beginning to sweat visibly, to lose his air of righteous indignation. He muttered: "Why, I—I suppose I guessed it was something like that. Or perhaps Mrs. Naseby mentioned it to me. And anyway how can you prove I said that? There's only your word for it."

McKane glanced around at the others in the room. His smile was crooked. He said: "Now we have your word for it."

Harker said, his voice thin: "But I still say your accusations are ridiculous. You yourself say the person that killed Mrs. Naseby also murdered Naseby. I couldn't have been here last night when that happened. I was a prisoner in the closet off my bedroom the entire time. You locked me in there yourself. Lieutenant Buckley here released me. That alone should clear me."

"No," said McKane flatly, "it just ties you in tighter. The lieutenant and I thought of that so this evening we took a look at the lock on your closet door. The screws on the inside plate show fresh burrs and there are fresh scratches on the plate. Someone worked the plate off, with a penknife or some other makeshift tool, so the lock could be manipulated. We figure you got out of there in a hurry after I left, hightailed it up here, did your bit and hurried back to lock yourself in again. I'd like to see your penknife, Harker."

Harker backed away as McKane advanced. His round face had gone gray and venomous. He snarled: "I haven't any penknife."

"We'll look you over and find out."

McKane reached and the plump young man evaded him like an eel, retreating toward the French windows. His right hand dove inside his coat, came out with a rounded, corrugated object of dull metal. His left hand clasped a ring at the top.

"Keep away from me, McKane," he panted. "You saw last night what one of these will do."

McKane stopped. Indeed, he took a couple of slow steps backward and a trickle of perspiration began a journey down his spine. After last night he had a great deal of respect for hand grenades. He said dryly: "No wonder you couldn't go for being frisked."

Harker snarled at him. "You devil, I wasn't sure why you wanted me here but I came prepared. Now I'm leaving and at the first move to stop me, I pull the pin and we all go to hell together."

He backed slowly toward the French windows. McKane didn't move and from the silence behind him, he didn't think anyone else was moving either. Harker reached the window. He manipulated the catch with an elbow, kicked the windows wide open, a second later was gone into the night. Someone behind McKane said thinly: "Thank God," and the words were still in the air when a small missile arched through the open windows, bounced at McKane's feet. He spun, hand outstretched for it, missed.

The colonel leaned forward from his chair with one, smooth motion and fielded the grenade on the first bounce. His arm swept with the same smooth motion up and over and the grenade went on a line back through the window like a rifle-shot throw to first base. It must have still been in the air when it exploded outside. One fragment buzzed by McKane's head and buried itself in the far wall. From the darkness outside a scream welled up, was suddenly choked off.

McKane looked at the colonel. He said prayerfully: "Pal, that's what I call fielding—sir."

The colonel didn't seem displeased. He grinned and said: "You get the credit for the out, McKane. Just mark me down for an assist."

AROUND midnight McKane got back to the homicide bureau after having managed to drink three cups of much-needed black coffee by the simple expedient of visiting three lunch counters. He let himself into the squad room, plowed through reporters and photographers and on into the anteroom of the inspector's office. It was quiet there, the only occupant being Miss Gerda Hoffman. McKane looked at Miss Hoffman admiringly, not missing anything from her ankles to her hair.

Miss Hoffman flushed. She said: "Do you have to look at me like that?"

"I don't have to," said McKane, "but it's a pleasure."

The door of the inspector's office opened and Johnny Duncan came out. He said: "Where you been, Mac? They got this whole thing wound up now and the skipper insists that I pass the story on to the rest of the boys. Not that I mind—the *Record* will be on the street with the yarn in ten minutes. So long, kid, and thanks for the scoop."

"Hey," said McKane, "I'd like to know the story myself."

"Little Hartz has cracked wide open. Seems he and Naseby were 1-A lice. They simply appropriated Volmer's share of the profits on the chance that he'd never come back or, if he did, they'd rig phony books or wriggle out of it somehow."

"Where did Harker come in?"

"The guy got a medical discharge from the Army about three months ago—incidentally, that's probably how he happened to have a few hand grenades in his memory book for some opportune moment. Myself, I brought home a G.I. .45 automatic out of the last war. Anyway, Harker had been a steno in civilian life so he went back to that, his first job being with the lawyer, Horace Cline. He hadn't been there more than a couple of days when Cline ups and dies. Probably Volmer's letter and the contract had come in about that time so Harker saw a nice chance for blackmail. He got Naseby on the phone, giving a bum name, and arranged a meeting at a downtown hotel. Then he confronted him with a photographic copy of the contract and a demand for plenty of dough. Naseby kicked through and promised a regular split. That was where Mrs. Naseby came in. She overheard her hubby and Hartz talking it over at Naseby's home a few nights later. Being the kind of gal she was, she was pretty horrified and she left Naseby, threatening to bring the whole thing out in her divorce suit unless Naseby made complete restitution. Harker found out about it and he decided he was going to protect his interests. He moved into the American Aircraft plant and got acquainted with Mrs. Naseby so he could watch for a good chance at her. And that's all there is, there isn't any more. Except for Hartz. He's being held by the city cops as an accessory after the fact in Naseby's killing. Yoicks, my friend, and good hunting on your next one."

He went on to the squad room and McKane began admiring Gerda Hoffman from scratch again. He was just getting a good start when words drifted through the open

door from the inspector's office. It was the voice of Colonel Haggerty.

"That man, McKane," said the colonel. "Pretty good head, Keller. I could use him, myself."

McKane rubbed his hands, grinned at Miss Hoffman. Under his breath he said: "Ha—now I'll be working for a real guy."

Beyond the door Captain Keller's voice said doubtfully: "He's all right, Colonel, but I'm not sure someone who doesn't know him like I do could get results with him. Temperamental—very. But after ten years of it, I know how to handle him. I needle him—very subtly. For instance, on this case I had an idea he planned to goldbrick. So I just threw the fear of God into him. I kept the guardhouse dangling over him all the time, and he delivered. No, Colonel, I'd suggest you leave him with me."

McKane swore feelingly. "So he was needling me! So he was throwing the fear of God into me! That dirty hypocrite! That stinking heel! Why, I'll—I'll— . . ."

The colonel's voice said gruffly: "Well, all right, Keller. But see that you recommend him for sergeant. He rates it on tonight's work."

McKane couldn't hear a reply, if any, but

he could imagine the sour look on Captain Lucius P. Keller's face. That made him feel a little better. Looking down at Miss Gerda Hoffman increased that feeling. He sat on the walnut bench beside her and gazed into her eyes.

He said: "Well, working in Keller's organization will have some lovely compensations."

"Not too fast now, Casanova," said Miss Hoffman warningly.

"And that's the other thing I meant. You gave me the brushoff the other night at the plant like I was a heel. And you pulled that gigolo line on me last night at Naseby's. So I figured you'd been talking with Keller. He's the only guy that ever gave me that reputation."

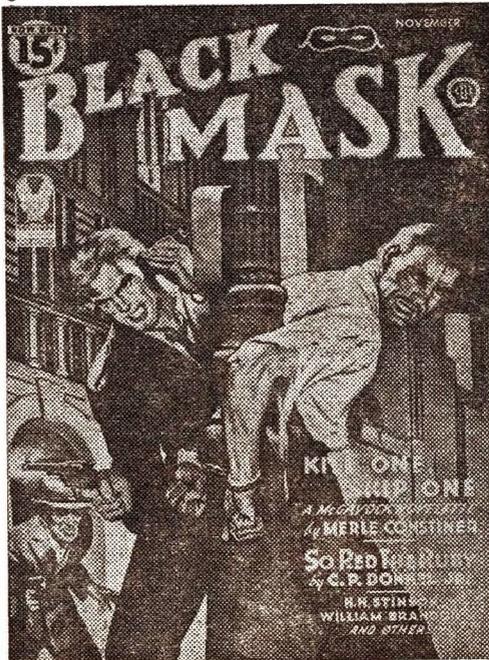
"Is that so?" said Miss Hoffman. "What about yourself?"

"Me?" said McKane aggrievedly. "Why, Red, I'm just a friendly guy, that's all."

Miss Hoffman moved down to the end of the bench. She said, although not very angrily: "You can be just as friendly at two feet, can't you?"

McKane moved down the bench himself. He said: "I don't know, Red. I've never tried it."

SOMEONE HAS BEEN STEALING MY HOT BISCUITS



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AARON HAD A ROD

AN
INSPECTOR ALLHOFF
STORY

By D. L. CHAMPION

Author of "The Diplomatic Corpse," etc.

The inspector had reiterated twice that Aaron Waxman had no gun. Well, Aaron had a rod now all right. And the fact that it was Allhoff's didn't ease the situation any.

ALLHOFF beamed at me as I came in the door. He grinned over the rim of the chipped coffee cup and said: "Good morning, Sergeant. And how are you this crisp and sunny day? The wife is well, I trust. And the little one. . . ?"

He lifted the cup to his lips and sucked in coffee with the sound of a tired sewer in a monsoon. I blinked at him, clapped my hand to my head, and said hopefully: "Are you ill, Allhoff?"

"Ill?" he said. "I never felt better in my life. Would you care for a cup of coffee?"

I declined the coffee. I went over to my desk and sat down bewildered. Allhoff's being benign was a little too much for me. His solicitude for my family was very suspicious, indeed, and his offer of a cup of coffee was as amazing as Hitler offering the contents of the Reichsbank to Bundles for Britain.

I lit my pipe and wondered if Allhoff's affability and sense of well-being was expansive enough to embrace Battersly. Ten minutes later, to my complete and utter astonishment, I found out that it was.

At 9:15, clad in his neatly pressed patrolman's uniform, Battersly entered. The expression on his face told me he was fully aware that he was fifteen minutes late. It told me further that he expected Allhoff to

remind him profanely of the fact. Allhoff crossed us both.

"Good morning," he said, with the affability of a rector greeting his wealthiest parishoner, "and how are you?"

The honest answer to that was that Battersly was stunned. He didn't say so, however. He muttered something about being quite well, crossed to his desk, sat down, and looked inquiringly at me. I shook my head. I didn't know what had happened to Allhoff's spleen, either. Allhoff picked the burbling percolator up from its electric plate. He filled his cup with the liquid, blacker than sin and equally unholy. He lifted the cup to his mouth and looked over his shoulder at us.

"Coffee," he said. "Mankind's most magnificent panacea. There would be no war, no strife, if everyone drank a gallon of coffee every day."

He drained the cup like Gladstone toasting the Queen. Then as he put it down, it came to me.

We were winning the war, at last. Germany's submarine bases at Cuxhaven and Dieppe were under constant bombardment. The navy was blasting the wolf pack out of the Caribbean. Once more the ships were sailing up from Brazil, their holds bursting with bags of coffee beans. The president had decreed the end of rationing and Allhoff, staining his insides with a gallon of caffeine, was a happy, happy man.

I was neither fool nor optimist enough to think it would last. However, it did for much longer than I had believed possible.

ABOUT half past ten Horatio Enders came into the room. He was a fat little man wearing a purple shirt and a tie which should have been looked at through smoked glasses. His face was pink, plump and massaged, and there was a general air of fastidiousness about him which evinced itself as his little eyes glanced about Allhoff's apartment.

As usual, there was a quarter inch of dust on the floor. Dirty dishes were stacked precariously in the sink beneath which a horde of cockroaches dined indiscriminately. The door of Allhoff's bedroom was ajar. Through it could be seen an unmade bed whose sheets were the color of an unwashed ghost. Allhoff's laundry leaned, a weary acrid mountain, against the wall.

Horatio Enders said: "I am Horatio Enders." His nostrils wrinkled in distaste. "The commissioner sent me over to see Inspector Allhoff." Again he looked around the room,

and added dubiously: "You *are* Inspector Allhoff?"

Allhoff admitted his identity cheerfully. He offered Enders a chair with alien hospitality, drained another cup of coffee, and muttered an inanity about the glorious state of the weather.

Enders, it appeared, had more on his mind than meteorology. Brusquely, he interrupted Allhoff's tribute to the brown, bracing days of autumn.

"I'm the vice president of the Summit Research Corporation," he announced.

"Summit?" I said, looking at the onion skin report on my desk which headquarters had sent across the street early that morning. "That's the place where the FBI picked up Aaron Waxman yesterday afternoon."

"That's right," said Enders. "That's what I'm here about."

Allhoff put down his coffee cup. "Why should you be here about Aaron Waxman?" he asked. "He's a saboteur, isn't he? Didn't they nail him dead to rights blasting a safe in your place trying to get at some blueprints?"

"I believe he was framed," said Enders firmly. "I want you to look into it."

He reached into his pocket and withdrew a slice of bread. He nibbled half-heartedly at its crust. Battersly and I watched him in amazement. Allhoff refilled his coffee cup and said: "Stomach ulcers?"

Enders nodded. "Yes," he said, "an empty stomach is very painful. I have to nibble bread all day." He sighed the sigh of a sorely tried man. "And now all this saboteur business. I'm nervous enough as it is. I'm Aries, you know. Nervous. Very highly strung."

"What have you got on this Aaron Waxman thing?" Allhoff said to me over his shoulder.

I picked up the onion skin report. "Not much," I said. "The FBI doesn't do much talking these days. It seems the federal guys have had an eye on him for some time believing that he was an agent in the enemy's pay. Actually, a city cop picked him up at the plant yesterday. He's in the Tombs, now. The FBI will take him in their custody this afternoon."

"Well," said Allhoff to Enders, "do you know anything more than that?"

"Our plant," said Enders, "has a number of important experimental laboratories and storerooms built underground. It is a vast labyrinth of underground chambers and passageways. Very few people know where to find what they want in those chambers. It is alleged that this Aaron Waxman was steal-

ing the blueprints to that part of the plant when he was arrested."

"So," said Allhoff, "with the blueprint he has the whole plan of the laboratories. He would know which one to go to to get what he wanted. Is that it?"

"Yes," said Enders, "But I don't believe Aaron Waxman is guilty."

"Why? Do you know him personally?"

"No-o. But consider this: Aaron Waxman is Polish. Is it likely he'd be in the pay of Germany?"

"That's pretty thin," said Allhoff. "Kaltenbach and Ezra Pound are Americans."

Horatio Enders stood up. "I tell you I am certain of his innocence. I am a friend of the commissioner. He instructed me to tell you to give me all the aid you could. Will you do it?"

Allhoff shrugged. "Why not?" he said. "Tell me, is there anything worth stealing in that mysterious basement of yours?"

"Several things," said Enders. "One, in particular. And even if anyone failed to steal the working model, he might choose to destroy it. That would mean two years' work shot to hell. We'd probably not be able to use it in this war."

Allhoff ran gnarled, bony fingers through his hair. He said quietly: "You're vice president in charge of what?"

"A great many things."

"Personnel, perhaps?"

"That's right. How did you know?"

Allhoff didn't answer that. He refilled his coffee cup and pointedly ignored Enders until the latter uncomfortably left the room.

"IT'S a wonderful case," said Allhoff.

"We don't know what our saboteur was trying to sabotage. We don't know what clue led to his arrest. And I am very much afraid the FBI won't do any talking, even to us."

He was so right there, I didn't bother discussing it. It seemed simple enough to me. Eddie Hoover's boys don't make many mistakes. It was a good eight to one in my book that Aaron Waxman had done whatever they had charged him with. Enders' interest was a little baffling. Perhaps, since he was in charge of personnel, he took the Waxman arrest as a reflection upon himself.

Anyway, the whole thing seemed screwy, and entirely inconsequential. I promptly forgot about it.

That is, I did until lunch time.

I stood by the window, refilling my pipe, gazing down into Centre Street, and idly wondering whether Noonan's forty cent plate

du jour was corned beef or fish cakes. Across the street the tired red brick of headquarters lifted itself in pale October sunlight. Next door stood the Tombs.

Suddenly, a doorway expelled half a dozen running men into the street. Half of them wore uniforms. They all held drawn guns. On the sidewalk they hesitated for a moment.

Then, from the corner suddenly emerged a thick-set, coatless man, with slouch hat jammed over his ears, and a great desire to be somewhere else in a hurry.

One of the coppers—it looked like Sergeant Cummings—yelled: "There he goes!"

His Police Special blasted the exclamation point to the sentence. The fleeing man staggered for an instant, clapped his hands to his shoulder. He dived into an areaway between the corner building on our side of the street and the building next to Allhoff's.

By now the coppers unleashed a barrage that sounded like an attack on Hamburg. Allhoff's voice sounded in my ears.

"What the devil are they doing out there? Have they moved the pistol range into Centre Street?"

"It looks as if some guy got away as they were taking him to the Tombs from the courthouse," I told him.

Down in the street police whistles were blowing and men running in all directions. I turned to Allhoff. "They'll probably throw a cordon around this block," I remarked.

Allhoff smiled happily. "There'll probably be a departmental trial about this," he murmured dreamily, then buried his nose in his coffee cup.

Allhoff's prime amusement in life was enjoying the woes of other people, especially other policemen. He considered everyone on the force except himself an addle-brained incompetent. It pleased him that this theory was being proved at the moment down on Centre Street.

Suddenly, there was a great picking up and laying down of heavy shoes on the rickety stairway. A moment later Sergeant Cummings, flanked by two patrolmen, appeared breathlessly in the room.

"Have you seen him?" he asked. "Did he come up here?"

Allhoff put down his coffee cup. He grinned broadly and embarked upon an atrocious Negro dialect which would have baffled the governor of Georgia.

"They ain't nobody heah, boss," he said, "jes' us chickens."

Cummings glared at him. "This is no time for clowning," he shouted. "We're looking for a guy. We lost a prisoner."

Allhoff switched from his minstrel show accent to a very phony show of solicitude.

"No," he said. "You lost a prisoner? I simply can't believe it. You boys are entirely too efficient to—"

"Damn you," yelled Cummings. "Have you seen him? That's all we want to know."

THIS time I came into the dialogue myself. "Who?" I asked.

"Waxman," said Cummings, "Aaron Waxman. We were taking him over to the Federal Commissioner's office, surrendering him to the FBI. He jumped out of a window and got away."

Allhoff turned his head suddenly, and looked toward the rear of the room, his head cocked like a setter. Then he turned seriously to Cummings.

"You've got the block surrounded?" he asked.

"Of course," said Cummings. "Do you think we're fools?"

He was so wide open there I was surprised when Allhoff let it pass.

"You've watched each fire escape?"

"Of course. And we've been in every room in every building on this block. It's my guess that he went right through the block to the east before we had it surrounded. We've got to get him. He's a dangerous man."

Allhoff shrugged. "He can't be too dangerous. He's unarmed, isn't he? You must have mugged him. You can have an alarm and a thousand dodgers out in no time."

Cummings sighed and clumped out of the room like a police sergeant who expected to get hell from the commissioner which, as a matter of fact, he was.

As the door closed behind him Allhoff turned to me with a peculiar smile on his lips. "So," he said, "Aaron, the saboteur, has escaped. This is very interesting. It would be even more interesting if he paid us a visit. We could ask him some questions about that affair out at Enders' plant."

"Do you think he'd answer?" I said. "If he's a German agent I can't see any reason why he'd talk to you."

Allhoff smiled sweetly. "You forget something," he murmured. "Aaron hasn't got a gun. I have. Possibly, under those circumstances he would talk to me."

Allhoff filled his coffee cup and opened the top right-hand drawer of his desk. He withdrew a .38. He said slowly: "I Aaron did not escape through Cummings' cordon, if he did not travel up a fire escape, if he is not in any room on this block, where do you think he is?"

I hadn't the slightest idea, and I said so. "Did you hear a slight scraping sound while Cummings was here?"

I shook my head. But if Allhoff had heard it I was prepared to concede it. Allhoff had radar ears.

"There is a drain pipe," said Allhoff, "which comes down from our roof and passes within two feet of our bathroom window. Putting all these things together, plus the scraping sound, it is quite possible that Aaron Waxman is, at this moment, seated rather apprehensively upon our toilet."

Allhoff pointed the muzzle of the .38 at the knob of the bathroom door. He said, in the tinkling accents of an old maid calling her cat: "Come out, Aaron."

BATTERSLY and I gaped as the bathroom door pushed slowly outward. On the threshold stood the man I had seen a few moments before running a gauntlet of bullets across Centre Street.

He wore a patch over one eye, and the exposed pupil was blue, bright, and defiant. There was blood on his shirt at the shoulder. He stared unwinkingly at Allhoff's gun barrel and did not speak.

I knocked the cold ashes out of my pipe and reflected that in addition to his reluctantly admitted talents, Allhoff was a fool for luck. Two birds were about to die with the stone he would cast. First, he now had a chance to pick up some information in the Enders matter; second, he would gain a departmental bow for the return of an escaped prisoner, and his sneers at Cummings and his men would resound for at least a week.

"Come over here, Aaron," said Allhoff quietly. "Come over here and sit down."

Aaron Waxman inhaled deeply. It seemed to me that there was an expression of thoughtful cunning on his face. He did not move.

"Come," said Allhoff. "I repeat. You haven't got a gun, Aaron. I have."

Aaron Waxman breathed deeply again. He took a step forward and his right knee buckled. He uttered a cry of pain, and limped agonizedly to the chair at the side of Allhoff's desk.

Allhoff looked at him sharply, and frowned. "What's the matter?"

Aaron Waxman gained the chair, sat down, and turned a tortured face to Allhoff.

"My knee," he said. "They shot me in my knee. It's killing me."

Battersly glanced at me apprehensively. Allhoff's face became more deadly serious than I had ever seen it.

"Your knee," he said, "You fool! You've been sitting in there for twenty minutes with a shattered knee. You idiot! Don't you know that's damned dangerous. Battersly, call a doctor, quickly. My God, a bullet in a knee cap might—"

As he was talking he had bent solicitously over Aaron Waxman. The thirty-eight in his right hand hung limply, its muzzle pointing at the floor. Waxman moved like a striking snake.

His foot, the one which was attached to the alleged shattered knee cap, kicked hard against Allhoff's wrists. At the same moment, Waxman seized his throat. An instant later, before either Battersly or myself could spring into action, it was Aaron who had the gun, not Allhoff.

He stood up, covering us all. There was a cold smile on his face.

"Fool," he said to Allhoff. "Sentimental fool, I thought you'd fall for that. Turn around you two."

This last remark was addressed to Battersly and myself. I looked for a hesitant moment at Aaron's gun barrel, at the cold merciless expression in his blue eye. I shrugged my shoulders and turned around. I had a lot of dough in the pension fund. It certainly wouldn't do me any good after I was dead.

Aaron neatly frisked Battersly and myself for our weapons. He threw them in the bathroom and locked the door, putting the key in his pocket. Then he backed slowly toward the door.

"I still have some work to do," he announced. "Thanks to the stupidity of the police, I shall be able to do it."

HE SLAMMED the door and raced down the stairs taking Allhoff's gun with him. Battersly and I followed him a moment later, after we had retrieved our own weapons. Chasing Aaron Waxman unarmed was my idea of suicide. I hoped against hope that Cummings' cordon was still functioning downstairs.

It wasn't. The sergeant, convinced Waxman had escaped to the east side, was, at the moment, organizing a posse to track him down. Waxman wasn't in sight when we reached the street. Slowly, we returned upstairs again.

My apprehension at what Allhoff was going to say when he recovered his breath was partially overshadowed by a chuckling amusement in my heart. Aaron, Allhoff, had said twice, didn't have a rod. Well, he had one now. And it was Allhoff's.

But when I looked at him, crouched over his desk, his little eyes aflame, his lips contorted into a hideous grimace, I knew we were in for a tough session. Battersly looked at me, mute appeal in his eyes. But at this point there was nothing on earth I could do.

Allhoff glared at us and took a deep breath. We steeled ourselves. It was coming now and unless I was badly mistaken it was coming with a force unique and more powerful than ever before. Allhoff leveled a none too clean finger at Battersly.

"You cowardly scum," he roared, "why didn't you grapple with him? Did you see what he did? Made a fool of me. Made a fool of me by playing on my only weakness. A weakness that you inflicted upon me, you _____"

His next six nouns were devastating enough to have shocked an habitu  of a bordello. Allhoff thrust both hands deep into the cesspool of his vocabulary and hurled black and slimy invective at Battersly.

As he did so, he pushed his swivel chair away from his desk, revealing two leather stumps where his thighs should have begun. As his crescendo shrieking hammered against the walls and our ears, his leather stumps wriggled horribly.

I didn't attempt to stem the tide of his wrath. This time, I knew it was utterly impossible. A copper's greatest humiliation is losing his gun. And in Allhoff's case it was infinitely worse than that.

Our sabotaging friend, Aaron, had doubtless heard of Allhoff. He had known quite well that he was minus a pair of legs. Therefore, he had run a magnificent gamble predicated on that fact. Obviously, he had reasoned, if there was one thing in the world that could touch Allhoff's emotions, one single thing which would throw him off his guard, it would be a man who had been shot in the leg, a man, who perhaps, faced the loss of a limb.

Aaron had played it that way and won handsomely.

Battersly stood, pale and trembling against the wall by the window. Deliberately he averted his eyes from Allhoff's face. Allhoff continued to blast him until he was completely out of breath. Then, black in the face with rage and exhaustion, he abruptly turned his swivel chair back to the desk and picked up the percolator with a trembling hand.

Battersly muttered a shaken sentence about needing cigarettes and slamming the door behind him, raced down the stairs. I sighed, picked up my pipe and sat down at my desk.

THE genesis of all this trouble occurred some few years back. Allhoff, then a legitimate inspector of police with legs as good as those of Gunder Hägg, was ordered to lead a raiding squad upon a rooming house on Upper West End Avenue. We had been tipped off that two notorious killers for whom we were searching, were holed up there.

We had also learned that they were possessed of a Tommy gun, which mounted on the stairway commanded the front entrance. Battersly, a raw recruit at the time, had been given the assignment of entering from the rear and disabling the machine gun operator at the precise moment Allhoff came charging through the front door with the squad.

Battersly had entered the house, all right. Then, for some hidden psychological reason, had become panicky. Instead of carrying out his assignment, he fled up the stairs to the roof.

The result of that action was that Allhoff received a score of machine gun bullets in his legs as he entered the house. Gangrene set in and amputation followed.

The commissioner, of course, realized that regulations would never permit him to carry a legless inspector upon the payroll. Nevertheless he was of no mind to lose his best man.

Through some devious bookkeeping device, it was arranged that Allhoff collect his former pay, while he rented this slum tenement opposite headquarters.

With a grim sense of poetic justice the commissioner had agreed to Allhoff's request that Battersly be assigned to him as an assistant. I had been sent along as a man with a level head upon his shoulders to keep what peace I could in the household.

It was a task with which I was thoroughly fed up. On that day when Allhoff had lost his legs he had lost part of his mind along with them. He never forgot the injury Battersly had done him. Moreover, he never permitted Battersly to forget it either.

He was, in short, sadistically psychopathic and if I hadn't had a family and a pension to consider, I would have thrown up my thankless job many years ago.

I smoked my pipe apprehensively and stared at Allhoff's brooding back. Battersly came back into the room, sidled unobtrusively to his desk. Allhoff gulped coffee with the sound of a pillow falling in the water.

I knew he was furious. I knew he would get Waxman if it took him the rest of his life. Allhoff, like an elephant who has taken a memory course, never forgot a slight. And Aaron had taken his gun from him!

WHEN he finally withdrew his corvine nose from his dirty cup, he surprised me by discussing Enders instead of Aaron.

"Why should a guy like Enders worry about Waxman's guilt or innocence?" he demanded of no one in particular.

"Maybe he really believed the guy was getting a raw deal."

"Even so, why should he concern himself? Apparently, he didn't know the guy. There was nothing between them. If he had any positive proof of Waxman's innocence, he could have taken it to the Federal guys. There was no point in seeing me."

If Allhoff couldn't answer that, I certainly couldn't. And Battersly was famous for never having the answer to anything at all. Allhoff poured eight more ounces of coffee into his system. He banged the empty cup back on the desk top and said abruptly: "Tail him."

"Who? Enders?"

"Of course. You two guys will have to take twelve-hour shifts. Don't let him out of your sight. It's the only way I can hope to find anything out about his motive."

"His motive?" I echoed. "What do you suspect him of?"

"I have to know why he wanted me to try to clear Aaron. I have to know that first. Pick Enders up first thing in the morning, Simmonds. Battersly will relieve you at seven tomorrow night."

According to Civil Service regulations, I was supposed to work eight hours a day, save in emergencies. I sighed and didn't argue about it. It wouldn't have done me the slightest bit of good, anyway.

The following evening I arrived home with a pair of aching feet and one salient fact about Horatio Enders. He was apparently a very hungry man. He had lunched at a well-known midtown restaurant. From that point he had taken a hack down to the Village where he had entered a second eating place. He had remained there for a good three-quarters of an hour.

In mid-afternoon, he had quit his office and returned to the Village restaurant. He had spent a full hour stuffing himself this time. At seven P.M. I had turned him with relief over to Battersly.

I reported to Allhoff early the following morning. Battersly was already there.

"This Enders," he was saying as I entered, "has a woman in his life. The clue is along those lines, Inspector."

Allhoff looked at him like Hitler at a general who has presumed to instruct him in strategy. He transferred his attention to me.

Aaron Had a Rod

"Have you a love nest theory, too?"

I shook my head. "All I can tell you is that Enders eats about six meals a day."

Allhoff lifted his eyebrows inquiringly and I told my tale. When I mentioned the Village restaurant, Battersly interrupted me.

"He wasn't eating in that joint, sergeant. That's where he meets the dame."

Allhoff turned to me. "Did he meet a woman when you were trailing him?"

"I don't know. I didn't go in. I know enough about tailing guys to—"

"You don't know enough about anything," snapped Allhoff. To Battersly: "What sort of a woman was this?"

"A sort of a middle-aged dame," said Battersly. "Dignified looking. So I figured—"

"My God," said Allhoff, "do I have to listen to what you figured?"

He waved us to our desks, filled his cup with coffee, and proceeded to dispose of it like a shoat ingurgitating skimmed milk.

AFTER some fifteen minutes, Allhoff spoke. "I can see part of it," he said. "It's just a matter of calling that Village restaurant to check. But, it's going to be most difficult to pin this rap where it belongs." He glowered at the wall for a moment, then said abruptly: "Have those cretins come close to Waxman yet?"

I shook my head. "They've plastered the state with a thousand dodgers. The FBI is taking it big. But they haven't found him."

Allhoff combined a curse and a sigh, and reached for the percolator. A moment later, a uniformed copper from headquarters across the way walked into the room and laid the latest batch of onion skin reports upon my desk. Idly, I thumbed through them. Two minutes later I lifted my eyebrows. I turned to Allhoff and said, "Hey."

"Shut up," said Allhoff. "I'm thinking. No remark of yours could hold any interest."

"No?" I said. "Not even the fact that a guy called Untermyer has just been stabbed to death?"

"My God," said Allhoff, "why should I care?"

"Well," I said, with phony contrition, "sorry to have bothered you. It was just the peculiar coincidence that struck me."

"Coincidence? What coincidence?"

"The fact that this Untermyer succeeded to Aaron Waxman's job in Enders' plant."

Allhoff spun around in his chair like a top. He snatched the report from me and scrutinized the page rapidly.

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Dime Detective Magazine

"Get over to the morgue," he said, "at once. Take a look at the corpse. Take a good look. Then come and give me the details."

I got up and took a taxi to the morgue. I spent ten minutes in its clammy atmosphere contemplating the dead body of Harry Untermyer. I spent ten more talking to the guy who had brought him in. Then I went back to the office.

"Well," said Allhoff, "what did you find out?"

"Nothing of importance," I told him. "Except he's dead. Stabbed in the back. And death was instantaneous. He was picked up early this morning on Eleventh Street, coatless, wearing just a shirt and pants."

"What else?"

"What else could there be? The shirt was bloody, of course. Saturated in the back and a smaller patch in the front around the shoulder. His trousers were denim, and I forgot to ask the size of his shoes. I trust this solves your case for you."

Allhoff stared at me fixedly for a full minute, then he banged his fist upon the desk. "Maybe it does," he muttered. "By God, maybe it does. Battersly!"

Battersly jumped up as if he had been sitting on a steel spring.

"Both of you," said Allhoff hastily. "Get out to Enders' plant immediately. Be ready to use your guns. Hurry!"

"What'll we do when we get there?" I asked. "Who're we looking for?"

"Aaron Waxman, you fool," shouted Allhoff. "Bring him back here."

WE SAW Aaron Waxman before we ever arrived at Enders' office. Battersly saw him first. He yelled: "Hey, sarge, come on," and snatched his gun from its holster.

Some fifty yards away before a huge sliding door was Aaron Waxman. His great left hand was clamped over the mouth of a young, personable blonde. His right hand held a wrench which was about, at any moment, to descend upon her skull.

The lower part of her body was being held by a dark-faced, saturnine character, obviously a confederate of Waxman. As Battersly and I charged across the yard, a young man armed with an automatic pushed through the sliding door and fired a wild shot at Waxman.

Aaron looked up, inadvertently removing his hand from the girl's mouth. A blood-

Aaron Had a Rod

curling scream ripped into my ears. Aaron closed with the young man. His left hand seized his gun wrist, the right swinging the wrench through the air in a lethal arc.

Battersly and I fired simultaneously. The wrench spun from Waxman's bloody hand. The girl screamed again. The saturnine character released her and dived into his hip pocket. By that time I was close enough to slug him on the temple with my gun barrel.

The whole joint was now in a panic. Somewhere a siren howled. A police whistle blew and half a dozen private guards charged over to the scene. In the distance, I saw Enders, white faced, and wide eyed, running toward us.

Battersly stuck a gun into Aaron Waxman's midriff, while I established our identity and began to sort out things and people. It took me a good twenty minutes to get the story down properly.

An ambulance took the girl to the plant hospital, and the young man with the gun, who was a confidential secretary, returned to his desk. I took Enders, Aaron and the saturnine guy, whose name was Kinstler, back to Allhoff's office.

On the ride back I found several items puzzling me, not the least of which was how on earth Allhoff had divined that Aaron, at precisely that moment, would be out at the Enders plant. After a while I gave it up.

ALLHOFF'S eyes brightened triumphantly as we trooped into his office. I observed that the bedroom door was closed. Allhoff bestowed his prime grade A number 1 nasty look on Aaron Waxman.

"Where's my gun?" he said.

I had taken it from Waxman's pocket twenty minutes before. I handed it to Allhoff. Allhoff waved Waxman and Kinstler into chairs with the gun's muzzle. Enders, pale and shaken, sat down himself and muttered: "I don't understand it. This was supposed to be the good month. This was—"

"You are a fool," said Allhoff blandly. "Now, what happened out there?"

"As I put it together," I told him, "Aaron, here, and Kinstler got into the plant through an unguarded entrance leading to Enders' office. It was supposed to be a secret entrance known only to the top executives. There they pulled a gun on Enders' secretary, forced her to accompany them to the entrance of the underground laboratories.

"They figured her presence would get

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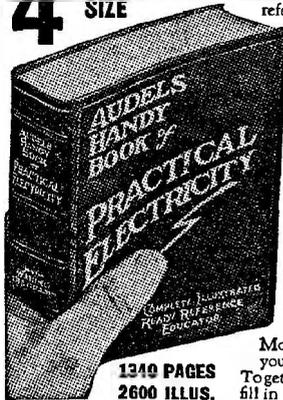
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Dime Detective Magazine

them safely past any guards. At the entrance, however, the secretary screamed for help. Kinster grappled with her, and Aaron was about to slug her with a wrench when we arrived. How the devil did you know he'd be there?"

"Because of the blood," said Allhoff.

"Blood?"

"The blood on Untermeyer's shirt," said Allhoff, as if that made everything clear.

Enders mopped his pallid brow with a monogrammed handkerchief. "I don't understand it," he said. "The stars can't lie."

"The soothsayers can," said Allhoff. He fixed Waxman with a baleful eye. "You and Kinster will burn for this," he said.

Kinster found his voice.

"What have you got on me?" he asked. "Except maybe assault. Simple assault."

Allhoff laughed unpleasantly. "What you did to Untermeyer wasn't simple assault. Maybe you think it was only petit larceny because you stole his shirt."

He chuckled wickedly again.

"Let's begin at the beginning," said Allhoff. "Someone in Berlin offered a hell of a lot of money to the guy who would swipe a working model or something from Enders' laboratories. So Aaron gets a job in the plant and goes after the blueprints which would show him how to get to it.

"Unfortunately, Aaron gets nabbed as he's swiping the prints. Then the number two man took over. Untermeyer got Aaron's job. He got to the prints, copied the part he wanted, and went home intending to do the main job the next day."

"It sounds screwy to me," I said. "Was it sheer luck or pure coincidence that got Aaron and Untermeyer that particular job?"

"Neither," said Allhoff. "It was the planets. Wasn't it, Enders?"

Enders blinked, but in spite of his bewilderment he appeared to know what Allhoff was talking about.

"In a way," he said, "your idiocy is as responsible for all this as anything else. They couldn't have pulled this trick on anyone save an utter fool."

"What trick?" I asked.

"The trick of getting Aaron that job and then pushing Kinster in his place."

I thought that over. "If you mean that Enders gave out those jobs, it seems to me that he's more than a fool. That he must have been in on the deal somewhere."

"You're wrong again," said Allhoff. "Batterly, drag that hag out of the bedroom."

Aaron Had a Rod

BATTERSLY walked toward the bedroom. All our eyes were focused upon him as he opened the door and crossed the threshold. A moment later he emerged again.

Accompanying him was a woman slightly the wrong side of middle age. She was fat and dumpy. Her hair was gray and none too neat. There was fear in her eyes.

As Battersly led the woman up to the desk he said excitedly: "Inspector, this is the dame. This is the one Enders was visiting. This is the woman in the case."

Enders half rose in his chair, said: "My God, Madame Dupré!"

Kinstler made a little gasping sound, and for the first time Aaron's expressionless face became dark. Apparently, everyone in the room was familiar with Madame Dupré except myself. I said so.

"Madame Dupré," said Allhoff, "is an astrologer—a fact which was as simple for you to ascertain as it was for me. Your conclusion, however, was merely that Enders was a glutton. Battersly's even more juvenile theory was that the Madame formed the second part of a love nest. Naturally, neither of you was right."

"You mean," I said, "that Enders' constant visits to the Village restaurant were to consult an astrologer?"

"Precisely," said Allhoff. "Enders is one of those nuts who lives by astrology. He believes in it implicitly and runs his business by it. There are a lot of 'hard headed' business men who worship at the same shrine."

Now, it began to seep into my brain. "So," I said, "Aaron found this out. He got to Madame Dupré."

"He did indeed. He paid her a fat fee to tell Enders just what he wanted him told. Enders was in charge of personnel. The Madame instructed him to employ Aaron. Then, when Aaron was locked up, Untermyer, who was scheduled to take over if Aaron failed, was also recommended by this good lady."

This good lady glared at him. She admitted her stringy hair with trembling fingers. Enders stared at Allhoff, then at the Madame. He looked rather like a little boy who just has found out that Santa Claus, after all, was merely his Uncle Jake with a pillow attached to his midriff.

Aaron Waxman shifted in his seat. I switched an alert eye on him and kept it there. Aaron looked like a man who, having nothing to lose, was prepared to gamble for his life.

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Dime Detective Magazine

"God," said Enders, "you mean I was tricked into hiring these thugs?"

I interrupted him. I already understood about Enders. What I didn't understand was that Allhoff had said Aaron and Untermeyer were working for the same cause. If that were true, why on earth should he have accused Waxman of killing Untermeyer? I voiced the question.

"That worried me for a moment," admitted Allhoff. "But it's rather simple, after all. There was a lot of dough at stake. Doubtless, Aaron's principals had offered a substantial bonus to the man who actually did the job. After he escaped, Waxman went to Untermeyer's place. Untermeyer told him he had the prints. Aaron killed him, took the prints in order to collect the fee himself. Conjecture, true, but sound."

A SINGLE glance at Aaron's face showed that it was both. Allhoff continued.

"Then Waxman, picking up Kinstler as an aide in case something went wrong, advanced upon the plant. You know the rest."

"But how could you know he was at the plant? How could you know that he had killed Untermeyer?"

"The shirt," said Allhoff, reaching for the coffee pot, "the shirt with the bloodstains on the front."

"It's still opaque to me," I told him.

"You fool, you saw the shirt and I didn't. You said it bore a wide bloodstain on its back. That was reasonable. Untermeyer was stabbed in the back, wasn't he?"

"So?"

"So, you told me he also had a stain on the front of his shirt, near the shoulder. In just about the same place that Aaron Waxman was wounded when he escaped from the Tombs."

He gulped coffee and looked at me triumphantly.

"You mean," I said slowly, "he was wearing Aaron's shirt?"

"Click," said Allhoff. "You should retire and set up your own agency."

"All right," I said wearily. "And why was he wearing Aaron's shirt?"

"My God, don't you see it yet? Aaron switched shirts. The first reason that occurs is that he wanted Untermeyer's shirt. Again why? After a moment's thought it becomes clear. It must have been upon the shirt fabric that Untermeyer traced the blueprints. Aaron takes the shirt from the corpse. He replaces it with his own. I had

Aaron Had a Rod

it checked at once in the laboratory. The blood on the front is a different type from that on the back."

"So you figured then that Aaron with the shirt was on his way to the Enders plant?"

"Right," said Allhoff, "and that's the end of everything. Battersly, book all these people, save Enders. The Madame for conspiracy and fortune telling. The other two lads for murder plus whatever the FBI wants to pin on them."

Pandemonium reigned in the next ten seconds. Madame Dupré shrieked and fainted. Enders waved his handkerchief ineffectually under her large nose. Aaron Waxman kicked his chair back and sprang at Allhoff.

Battersly and I interposed our bodies before he landed. I fell to the floor, the wind knocked out of me, as Battersly clicked a pair of handcuffs on Waxman's wrists.

I got up to see Allhoff, gun in hand, glaring at Waxman. Allhoff's lips opened and he spat forth an unspeakable name which he usually reserved specifically for Battersly.

"Rat," he said, "once you told me your knee was blown off. You lied. Well, by God, I'll blow it off now. I'll—"

He lifted the gun. "Allhoff!" I said sharply.

He drew a deep breath and put the gun down on the desk. "All right," he said in a tired voice, "get them all out of here."

Slowly he picked up the coffee pot.

We booked everyone across the street and returned to the office some twenty minutes later. Allhoff lifted a pair of bitter eyes over the edge of his coffee cup. Staring at Battersly, he said: "You know, even on a rat like Aaron, I couldn't pull the trigger. I couldn't blast off a man's legs. Not even a traitor and a killer. I just couldn't."

He smiled a horrible crooked smile and added: "It's lucky for Aaron you weren't me, Battersly. You have no conscience about things like that."

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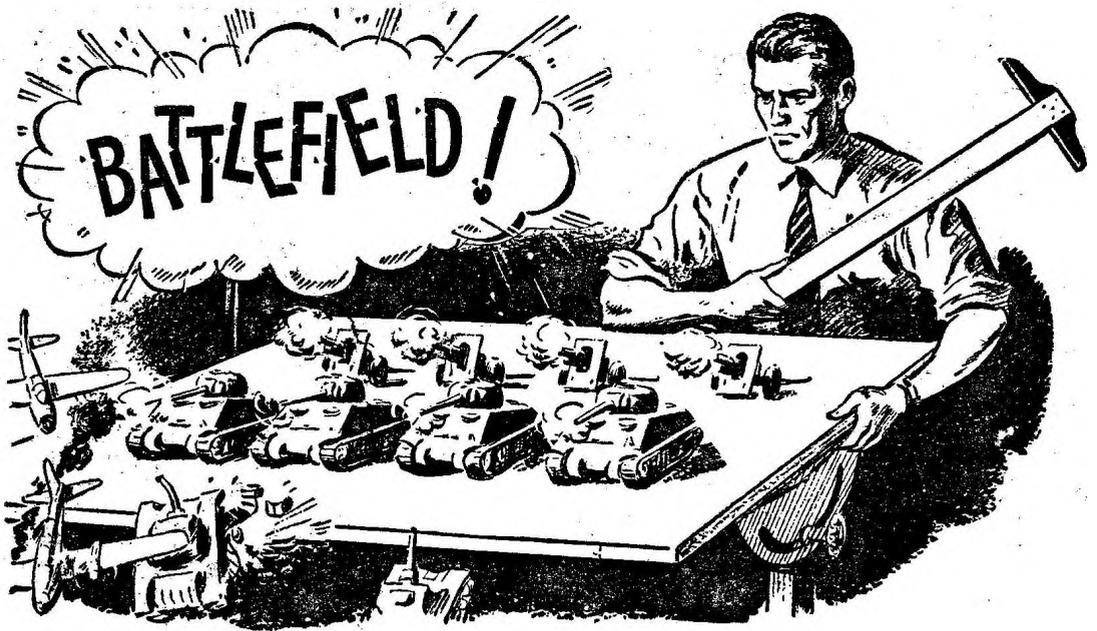
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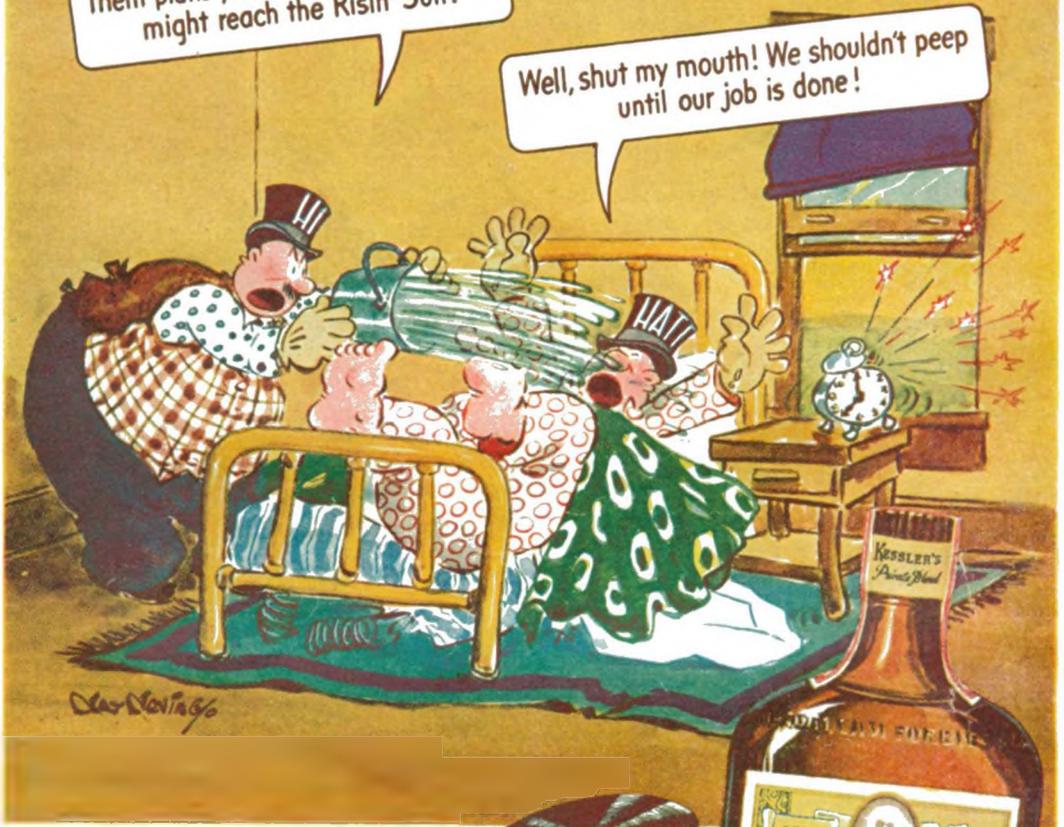
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