

OCT.



25¢

DIME

# DETECTIVE

## MAGAZINE



### DEATH, MY DARLING DAUGHTER

by **FREDERICK C.  
DAVIS**

**CHARLES  
BECKMAN, Jr.  
AND OTHERS**

# Send Only \$1

**WE WILL SEND ANY ITEM YOU CHOOSE FOR APPROVAL UNDER OUR MONEY BACK GUARANTEE**

**New York's Largest Mail Order Jewelers Established 1878**



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P305

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K204

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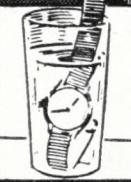
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- SHOCK-RESIST
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# IT WAS NIP AND TUCK FOR JACK UNTIL...



JACK ROSS AND HIS GROUP OF STATE FORESTRY STUDENTS ARE LOOKING FOR A CAMPSITE AT THE END OF A DAY-LONG HIKE WHEN...



SIT TIGHT, MISS. HANK, LEND ME YOUR AIR PISTOL.  
CHASE HIM AWAY!



WAIT 'TILL HE STARTS FOR ME, THEN RUN LIKE BLAZES!



DAD AND HIS NICE TAME BULL! IF YOU HADN'T COME ALONG...  
IT WAS NOTHING!  
SAY, MAYBE YOU KNOW A GOOD CAMPSITE



UNLESS YOUR MEALS TOO FAR ALONG, WE'D LIKE YOU TO JOIN US FOR SUPPER.  
SOUNDS WONDERFUL! WE CAN CLEAN UP IN A FEW MINUTES

ONE HOUR LATER



WOW! THIS BLADE PULLS!  
TRY A THIN GILLETTE



SAY, I GO FOR THIS BLADE! NEVER ENJOYED A MORE REFRESHING SHAVE.  
THIN GILLETTES ARE MIGHTY POPULAR ON THE CAMPUS. THEY'RE REALLY KEEN AND LONG LASTING



SHUCKS, YOU LADS CAN CAMP THERE ANY TIME.  
GREAT! YOU'LL BE SEEING A LOT OF US.  
I HOPE SO... YOU'RE MY IDEA OF A HANDSOME MAN

ENJOY EASY, GOOD-LOOKING SHAVES AND SAVE MONEY TOO. USE KEEN, LONG-LASTING **THIN GILLETTES**. THEY'RE PRECISION MADE FOR YOUR **GILLETTE RAZOR** AND PROTECT YOU FROM THE DISCOMFORT AND IRRITATION CAUSED BY MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR THEM IN THE TEN-BLADE PACKAGE WITH USED-BLADE COMPARTMENT

**THIN Gillette 10 BLADES** **10-25¢**  
**THIN Gillette 4 BLADES** **4-10¢**

NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

# 25¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



**Vol. 66      CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER, 1951      No. 2**

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*Copyright, 1943, by Popular Publications, Inc., under title: "Hollywood Will Hunt."*

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**The next issue out October 3rd.**

**Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.**

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# BOGART'S SOCKO IN "SIROCCO"



...beyond Casablanca,  
in Damascus--where  
day begins when the  
sun goes down!



Columbia Pictures presents **HUMPHREY BOGART** in **SIROCCO** co-starring **MARTA TOREN** · **LEE J. COBB** with  
**Everett Sloane** · **Gerald Mohr** · **Zero Mostel** · Screen Play by **A. I. BEZZERIDES** and **HANS JACOBY** · Based upon the novel,  
"Coup de Grace", by **Joseph Kessel** · A **SANTANA PRODUCTION** · Produced by **ROBERT LORD** · Directed by **CURTIS BERNHARDT**

# READY for the RACKETS

## A Department

Dear Detective Fans:

We're back again this month, trying to sell you on using caution in your dealings with charming strangers. Charm is the swindler's best asset, and common sense should be yours. We're backing our sales talk with our monthly list of people who were victimized by some of these suave heels, and we hope you won't follow in their footsteps.

But if you have, try recouping some of your losses with a letter to The Rackets Editor, *c/o Dime Detective*, 205 E. 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. We'll pay you \$5.00 if we can use your letter, but we cannot enter into correspondence regarding your letters, because of the press of mail in the office. Neither can we return any letters, unless they are accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes.

### Fit to Be Tied

Dear Sir:

On one of New York's busiest streets, a men's-sock salesman was displaying his wares. Arranged in a long cardboard box there were socks of all colors and sizes.

"Six pairs for a dollar!" he chanted nasally "Six pairs! Look 'em over!"

A pair of bright-colored golf socks caught my eye. I examined them. Stamped "first quality," they were a good grade—easily worth fifty cents a pair, I guessed. This was a real buy!

I gave the fellow my dollar after picking out a bundle of six socks, neatly folded, and held together by a band of paper.

Maybe you can guess the rest! When I arrived home and examined more clearly the socks I had purchased I was fit to be tied—with the socks! The schemer who sold them to me must have bought them for almost nothing. They were perfect, except for one thing—they had no toes! They had been folded so carefully that the missing toes could not be noticed unless the bundle were broken and each sock examined.

Who was it who first said, "Live and learn?"

W. Woerner  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

### Satisfaction Brought Him Jack

Dear Sir:

The smoothest racket I have seen in years was

the following, which I observed in a small town where I was on business a short time ago.

I saw a crowd gathered around a car just off the street. Being curious, I walked over to see what was happening. A man had just started his spiel, which went about as follows:

"I am here to advertise jewelry. The company pays me well for my work and all my expenses." He reached into his grip and brought out a handful of plain band rings and then went on, "These rings are not gold, but they look like gold and will never turn." When he sowed the handful over the crowd, you can imagine the scramble.

He then reached into another bag and brought out a handful of key rings and fasteners for the belt. Starting to sow them over the crowd, he stopped and said, "I noticed when I threw out the rings that most of them were picked up by kids. Kids don't need key rings, so I am going to pass them out differently. Everyone who wants one, pass me up ten cents."

Perhaps fifty passed up the dimes, and he said, "Now, everyone who got a key ring hold up your hand." He gave each of them his dime back and went on, "Because you had confidence in me, I am going to make you a little present." Then he gave each one of them an additional dime and yelled, "Is everybody satisfied?" and the crowd roared back. "Yes!"

Then he reached in and this time came out with a bunch of men's billfolds and asked, "How many will pass me up twenty-five cents for one of these?" About fifty did. Then he asked again, "Are you all satisfied?" and was answered by another chorus of yeses. He proceeded to pass back the quarters, with an additional quarter to each one.

Next, lighting a cigar, he held up the burned match and said, "Who will pass me up five dollars for this?" and, when several hands went up, he took one five-dollar bill and again said, "Are you satisfied?"

The man said he was, so he gave him back his five and, handing him an additional five, said, "Use this to buy your wife and kids some groceries."

He then brought out a box filled with watches, which were worth perhaps ninety-eight cents apiece, and said, "These watches are not gold, but they won't turn and will last you for years. Now, how many will pass up five dollars for one of these watches?"

A good guess would be that he passed out fifty watches and received that many five-dollar bills, and, when a man passed up a ten-dollar bill, he would hand him two watches, saying he didn't have time to make change.

After he had finished taking in the big money, he said again, "Are you all satisfied?" and they again yelled, "Yes!" and he said, "That's good, for I'm due up the road right now!"

(Please continue on page 8)



# "I pinned my hopes to a penny postal"

**JESSE K. KIMBALL**  
 Chief Building Inspector, Washington, D. C.



"I often wonder what sort of job I'd have now if it were not for a penny postal and the International Correspondence Schools.

"Today I'm Chief Building Inspector for the District of Columbia. It's a good job and pays a good salary. Just recently, I got another \$600-a-year raise. I. C. S. instruction made it all possible."

THE coupon you mail today might very well start a chain reaction that could change your entire future. For it brings you information about successful careers and how to prepare for them. It puts you in touch with the world's largest educational institution. It starts you off the way hundreds of today's leaders in business and industry started. Why not mail it today?

## INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS



BOX 3278-F, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course BEFORE which I have marked X:

- |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses</b>               | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Structural Engineering</b>              | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Industrial Metallurgy</b>         | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Textile Courses</b> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Air Conditioning   | <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Machine Shop                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heating  | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Communications Courses</b>              | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineering               | <input type="checkbox"/> Loom Fixing            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration  | <input type="checkbox"/> Electronics                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Mold-Loff Work                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Designing      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing   | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical Telephony                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Patternmaking—Wood, Metal            | <input type="checkbox"/> Woolen Manufacturing   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Fitting  | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio, General                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading Shop Blueprints              |   |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Contracting and Building                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Aeronautical Engineer's, Jr.               | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Stationary Engineer's Courses</b> |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering  | <input type="checkbox"/> Aircraft Drafting                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Boilermaking                         |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lumber Dealer  | <input type="checkbox"/> Forging                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Combustion Engineering               |   |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Drafting  | <input type="checkbox"/> Heat Treatment of Metals                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Power Plant Eng'g                    |   |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Engineering                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engr.                          |   |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Instrumentation                 |   |   |

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Home Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Working Hours \_\_\_\_\_ A.M. to \_\_\_\_\_ P.M.  
 Present Position \_\_\_\_\_ Employed by \_\_\_\_\_

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

(Continued from page 6)

And, with that, his confederate started the motor and, within a moment, they were on their way, leaving as sick a bunch of folks as you could ever find.

W. W. White  
Murfreesboro, Tenn.

### "Glowing, Glowing, Gone!"

Dear Sir,

The radio spiel was enticing. "The Greatest Bargain Of All Times," it went. "Your Christmas tree will be the envy of everyone in the neighborhood. Imagine—not twenty, not thirty, not forty—but fifty beautiful, glowing ornaments for only one dollar!

"Now, if your order is received in the next twenty-four hours, you will get, in addition, a bonus of six giant icicles, six giant glowing snowmen, six giant canes, six giant three-dimensional stars! And, as an added bonus, six glowing Santa Claus ornaments. You can throw away your light sets, because no wiring is needed. Send your order to 'Trees,' in care of this station. You must act fast, as the supply is limited."

Well, off went my dollar, and I waited six to eight weeks. Five days after Christmas, the package arrived. It was a large envelope. In it were a dozen sheets of paper, eight by ten inches. On it were partially cut-out drawings in dim colors—outlined with phosphorescent paint.

I don't think I shall ever buy another article advertised on the radio.

K. A. Heitzmann  
Pine Hill, N. J.

### Little Boy—Blue

Dear Sir,

What seems to me to be about the meanest, shabbiest trick in the world was played on a small boy who was pinch-hitting for his grandfather who was ill and unable to take care of a newsstand he owned and operated in the lobby of the large office building where I worked.

During the rush hour, when he was busy handling a great many customers, a man approached him, bought two magazines and a newspaper and threw down two half-dollars. After he had pocketed the change, the man asked the boy whether he could give him a five-dollar bill for some additional half dollars that he had.

The child said that he could, so the man stacked up ten half dollars, counting them one by one, grabbed the bill and rushed out of the building.

When the boy started to put the money in his cash drawer, he was surprised at the lightness of it. When he looked at it closely, he saw that what he had thought were half dollars were ten round, tinfoil-wrapped pieces of chocolate, cunningly stamped to resemble silver coins—candy money for children!

The little boy's distress was really pitiful, and I am glad to say that, when a number of us heard about it, we were able to make up the amount and reimburse him.

J. W.  
Chicago, Ill.

### Sing For Your Sucker!

Dear Sir,

I write songs as a hobby. One day back in 1942 I saw an ad in a magazine in which a music company in California offered to publish songs for a reasonable amount. I answered the ad and later sent in my manuscript.

I had agreed to pay fifty dollars to get the song on the market. I was ill at the time and could barely send half of the money. I signed a contract, and the song was theirs. Soon as I sent the balance, they were to publish my song and have radio artists "plug" it. Unfortunately, I was stupid enough to believe their promises.

In about a month, I sent a check for the balance, with high hopes. Then one day, to my complete surprise, my letter with check was returned unopened. On the face of the envelope was stamped: MOVED, ADDRESS UNKNOWN.

I wrote the Better Business Bureau in California, explaining my case. In two weeks I received an answer that stuck a pin in my balloon. The BBB was unable to track them down, as they had changed the name of the firm and moved too often. Some friends of mine told me they heard my song on the radio, so they stole that, as well.

Muriel Hutchins  
Dallas, Tex.

### Subscription Scheme

Dear Sir:

When a salesman came up to our office to sell magazine subscriptions, he did a landslide business. And why not? He could get them for us cheaper—a three-year subscription for the price of a one-year, a four-year for the price of a two-year, and so on.

We all placed our orders for at least three or four magazines for three or four years each. At the suggestion of the salesman, we all post-dated our checks a month ahead, to make sure the offer was "on the level." In that way, they could be cashed only after we started to receive the magazines.

Within a few weeks, we were all reading our buys, well pleased with the bargains we had struck. Imagine our disappointment when, six months later, the magazines failed to arrive.

When we made belated inquiries, we learned that the subscriptions had been placed for six months only. Our super-salesman had pocketed the difference and was nowhere to be found.

M. Z.  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

### Ask and You Shall Receive

Dear Sir:

A young man—about twenty-three—approached the pastor of a small church in our community with the sorrowful story of how someone had lifted his wallet—containing his week's salary—while he was swimming at the athletic club.

He added that his rent was due and that he had no lunch money or carfare for the week. The kind pastor picked up the phone and got the bookkeeper to make out a check for the needed amount.

(Please continue on page 110)





For Boys - Girls - Hunters - Campers -  
Everybody!

# THE MOST AMAZING SUN WATCH IN THE WORLD!

JUST LOOK  
AT WHAT IT DOES!

## TELZALL 9-in-1 THE TIMEPIECE OF ADVENTURE!

**1. TELLS TIME**  
the truly scientific  
sun dial way

**2. WEATHER  
FORECASTER**  
secretly concealed,  
changes colors to  
predict weather

**3. GLOW-IN-THE-DARK  
COMPASS**  
tells directions day  
or night

**4. STRAP**  
is durable plas-  
tic 8" measure

**5. 6-POWER  
MAGNIFYING  
and burning glass,**  
secretly concealed

**6. WORLD'S SMALLEST  
BALL POINT PEN**  
writes thousands of  
words

**7. SIGNALLING DEVICE**  
on the back watch

**8. CONSTELLATIONS  
Chart** shows how to  
find the North Star

**9. MORSE CODE**  
engraved on the back

You'll be the envy of all your friends when you wear this sensational 9-way wonder — the amazing, patented new TELZALL SUN WATCH. It's the only watch of its kind in the world. This tickless time piece tells the sun time... nothing to go out of order.

The gracefully designed case of gleaming jeweler's bronze with durable red plastic 8" measuring strap looks like an expensive watch on your wrist. The weather forecaster and the magnifying and fire-starting glass are secretly concealed inside the case.

You'll marvel at the other fascinating features of this wonderful new invention. It may even save your life—with the Morse Code permanently engraved on the back, a glow-in-the-dark compass, signalling mirror, all right on your wrist in case of emergency! What fun, too, being able to predict the weather at a glance, measure objects, write with the world's smallest ball point pen, and locate the North Star and other constellations. Don't delay—rush your order today to be sure of prompt delivery.

**SEND NO MONEY** Wear the 9-in-1 Telzall Sun Watch on your wrist. See how perfectly it operates. If you don't agree it's worth many dollars more than the small cost, simply return within 10 days for full refund of purchase price.

Patented  
© 1950  
Webster  
Enterprises, Inc.

Amazing Value  
**\$1.98**

### 10-DAY TRIAL COUPON

TELZALL, Dept. W-315  
430 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill. **RUSH**

Gentlemen: Rush  9-in-1 Telzall Sun Watches described above—on your no-risk 10-day money-back guarantee offer. On delivery I will pay postman only \$1.98 each plus C.O.D. postage, with the understanding that if I am not completely satisfied I may return within 10 days for full refund of purchase price.

Name..... (please print)

Address.....

City..... Zone..... State.....

I enclose \$1.98 for each—send the Telzall 9-in-1 Sun Watch all postage charges prepaid—on money-back guarantee.

**MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE—ORDER TODAY**

TELZALL, 430 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago 11, Ill.

**CONFIDENTIAL**

*To: Special Prosecutor Winslow Rossiter,  
Criminal Courts Building.*  
*From: Jay Danvers, Private Operative,  
Formerly with Troy Detective  
Agency.*  
*Re: The circumstances leading up to my  
sudden demise.*

**D**EAR SIR: When you receive this letter I will be dead. It's a solid bet that I will be dead indeed when you read these lines, because otherwise you would not be hearing from me at all.

In this wise I have made special arrangements with my old friend Mame Daly, the ticket seller at the Trocadero, down on

Grace Street. That is, I have left with Mame certain simple, but important, instructions. She is to keep both ears wide open, and, upon hearing the news that I am suddenly no more, she is to drop everything, hustle straight over to the Criminal Courts Building and, taking no sass from anybody, place the accompanying reports in your hands personally.

You will have noticed by now that Mame

**By**  
**FREDERICK**  
**C. DAVIS**



# Death, My Darling Daughter

**Dramatic Crime-Adventure Thriller**

*While her daddy slaved to bust up rackets,  
high-flying Glenda was out busting up the town—  
and painting it red with blood!*



He began clubbing me  
— fast, nose-crushing,  
scalp-hacking blows.

is a big, hard-bitten blonde, and you may have gotten the impression that she feels all men are popeyed rodents. If so, you are quite correct; she does. In spite of this, however, I'm sure I can depend on her. I even hope that when receiving these reports from her you were able to discern a trace of mist in her stony eyes. I like to think that after selling me all those miles of tickets, one by one, she may really miss me.

If you will glance at tonight's *Evening Star*, Mr. Rossiter, you will probably find a small news item to the effect that the undersigned was violently bumped off such a short time ago that his body isn't even cool yet. At this writing, of course, I can't rightly say whether I was found riddled with bullets in some dark alley, accidentally shoved off a penthouse terrace, or smacked down by a mysterious hit-and-run car. To me at this point it hardly matters, but if you would like to hear them, I'm sure Mame will fill in the sad details.

To get down to the bloody business at hand, Mr. Special Prosecutor . . .

In the other sealed envelopes which Mame handed you along with this letter, you will find a series of reports which are my findings in the Glenda Rossiter case—Glenda Rossiter being, as you well know, your daughter.

It will no doubt come as a shock to you to learn that there *is* such a thing as the Glenda Rossiter case. Until now you haven't even heard that a private detective agency has been diligently keeping an eye—a startled eye, I may add—on your fast-stepping daughter Glenda.

We took on the case in the strictest confidence at the anxious behest of one of your oldest and dearest friends, who was acting generously and solely in your behalf. None of us expected the assignment to add up to much more than a routine tailing case. Instead, it rapidly developed into a rich and rare assortment of sin, corruption and homicide. And since you haven't even suspected that any of this was going on, Mr. Rossiter, I feel I must warn you that it's going to hand you one of the most memorable shocks of your life.

Just get yourself solidly settled in a good, stout chair, with at least a double scotch at your elbow, and make a comparatively quiet start on Report Number One. As

you read on, please bear in mind that so far no one else—not even my boss at the Troy Detective Agency—has seen these reports. I wrote them all strictly on my own, privately, more or less as a measure of self-defense.

It was just before dawn today that quiet orders went out to get Jay Danvers, to shut me up for keeps. All day, hour after hour, I have felt it coming. All day Old Man Death has been sneaking around looking for me.

I am holed in down here in a sooty cubby-hole of a room, no bigger than a broom closet, in the crummy Hotel Royale, hard by the lower bridge. I sneaked in early this morning, while the city was still asleep, and registered under a phony name.

I'm all alone here, with only my portable typewriter and a fifth of rye for company, but I'm not kidding myself that this is a foolproof hideaway. No place in town could be that. I'm only one guy against a whole combine operating with county-wide resources—a bunch as smart as they are ruthless. The odds are a hundred to one that they'll find me and finger me very shortly now.

The fact that this letter has reached you means that, as of this moment, they have got me and that the news is out.

They probably got me by using a cheap little hood who'll never even get picked up for it, much less nailed. I'm not too concerned about that part of it, Mr. Special Prosecutor. Catching the punk who killed me certainly isn't the most important angle here. The really big thing is the fact that the last laugh is ours after all.

In spite of everything the pressure boys could do, including murdering me, I've outfoxed 'em on the very last play—and I must confess I'm proud of it even if I am dead.

Because killing me wasn't enough; they haven't succeeded in shutting me up after all. These written pages are telling on them plenty. At this moment I may be lying on a slab down in the ice-box in the morgue, but I'm talking right out loud anyhow.

Well, since I'm pretty dead now, this is really the most I can do. The rest is up to you, sir. It will hurt and hurt badly, chiefly because of the hair-raising way your daughter wrote herself into the script, but everybody knows you're a solidly honest man who will push it through to the bitter finish

regardless—which was why the Governor appointed you Special Prosecutor in the first place.

Anyhow, Mr. Special Prosecutor, I sincerely wish you better luck than I had.

Forever yours—and I do mean forever—  
The late Jay Danvers.

**REPORT NUMBER ONE**

*4 a.m., Friday, July 13*

**L**ATER this morning, at nine o'clock on the nose, I am expected to drag myself into the office of the Troy Detective Agency, down on Grace Street, where I will sit under the clear, stern eye of my chief and type out a routine report on tonight's professional activities.

The last lines of my report will read: *Subject then proceeded alone in her car to a house in Ruysdale Valley where she joined a small group of friends. Subject left this house at 11:20 P.M., alone, and drove directly to her home, where presumably she retired to her bed for some much-needed rest.*

This will be a masterpiece of omission. In between these two sentences plenty happened. What happened was murder—but not *merely* murder, you understand. It was an exceptionally classy job.

So far, however, only four people know about it—the culprit, two other witnesses and me. All four of us, including me, can be counted on, each for certain personal reasons, to keep quieter about it than four clams with lockjaw.

I have decided, as a measure of self-protection and for possible use in an emergency, to write a detailed and accurate account of what really happened between the lines tonight. These reports, unlike those I will turn in at the office, will leave nothing out—but nothing.

Because something can slip. When or if it does, a frightful hassel is certain to follow, with criminal charges, counter-charges and denials flying wild. When the town begins reeling under the shock of the scandal, an accurate play-by-play record like this one, to refer back to, may come in mighty handy.

Let's take it back, then, to yesterday afternoon—only twelve short hours ago—when this witch's brew began to simmer.

At four o'clock yesterday afternoon I happened to be in Billy's, an oasis I had arrived at gratefully after a long, arid trek up from Joe's, three blocks farther down Grace Street. Outside it was a sizzler of a July day, but here in this place of life-giving refreshment it was mercifully cool and dark.

While I was trying to revive myself, Billy strolled up behind the bar with a friendly greeting and said, "Your office was on the phone just now, Jay. You're wanted back there right away."

"To be sure," I said. "My chief has only to speak. I will lose not a fraction of a second getting back there, after I have finished another well-iced beer."

"Jay," Billy insisted, "you better roll if you don't want to get fired."

"Fired indeed," I answered calmly. "I have no fear of getting fired. For one thing, the agency would crumble apart without me. For another, my boss is not the firing type. Prefers more sadistic types of discipline. For coming in late of a morning, twenty strokes of a bull whip on the bare back. For drinking on the job, hanging by the thumbs overnight. I will now have another ice-cold beer, Billy."

"I'm tellin' you, Jay," Billy answered adamantly, "your boss sounded hotter'n a firecracker. Somethin' pretty important must be cookin'."

"All right, then, all right," I sighed. "Cancel the beer. I am a fool for punishment, the victim of my own high sense of duty."

So I walked dutifully through the blistering heat to the Troy Detective Agency, which occupies the first floor of a small, ancient brownstone—once a fine home and now a down-at-heel office building. Going in, you first notice that instead of walking up three or four steps, you climb a wooden ramp tracked by countless passages of a small-wheeled vehicle. Stepping into our Victorian waiting room and then into the chief's consultation room, you find an old wheelchair sitting in one corner, unoccupied but well dusted.

Robertson Troy, the former owner, was confined to this wheelchair following an accident some twenty years back, but regardless he had continued to operate the agency until his death—he burst a blood-vessel in a high dudgeon—four months ago. I felt

that this memento of the founder should have been stored away in his attic, but instead it was being kept here in his old sanctum in an excess of family sentimentality.

The wheelchair was something of a monument, and of course no one would dare commit the irreverence of sitting in it—certainly not in the presence of our present boss, who had inherited the business from its former occupant.

AT THE big desk in the center of the room sat the person whose presence invariably struck a new client with astonishment. Time and again I have seen a man, entering our office for the first time, come to a startled, staring stop upon beholding the late Robertson Troy's successor.

She sits there, tall behind a scrupulously neat desk, straight-backed, square-shouldered and cool as champagne in her blonde loveliness. Her hair is unique among operators of private detective agencies—a dusky yellow, like jonquils in the twilight. Her mouth changes a great deal, thin when she's impressing a client with her efficiency, but soft and delicious when she forgets herself—and tucked in at the corners with exasperation when she faces me.

She looked at me like that as I entered. Inside her lovely exterior she was burning. She bounced up from her chair, her lovely violet eyes fixed on me—eyes of lovely violet ice.

"Well! It's high time."

"Sorry I was delayed a little, Dale," I said quickly. "Being an Eagle Scout from 'way back, I had to stop and do a guy a good turn." The guy I meant was me.

"Mr. Danvers, please," she snapped back at me. "I've already reminded you a thousand times to call me Miss Troy—at least during business hours. Now let's get a move on."

Life for me had turned very hard lately. Not too long ago, when Dale was taking full-time care of her irascible old man and I was functioning as his entire staff, we'd been pals. Now that she had taken over her father's agency, in spite of my best efforts to dissuade her, she was a Career Woman with no time to spare for being human.

"We may be too late already," Dale went on, clicking rapidly to the door on her high heels. "Thanks to your dawdling, Mr.

Danvers, we may have lost our biggest case of the year."

"Somebody's lost a dog?" I asked. "That big?"

This earned me a glare. "There's no time for bum jokes," she said. "Really, it's big. Please shake a leg."

As she went steaming down the stairs, it was easy to notice that she had slicked herself up in her very best duds. She was delectably sheathed in a light-blue suit, and her new shoes flashed, and a Feathers-and-Flounces hat was cocked pertly on her pretty head. She had gone into hock for this rig and wore it only on state occasions. This was enough to convince me that our new case really was urgent and top-drawer.

When we'd levelled out on Benton Boulevard, the city's classiest, and were cruising along nicely, Dale found time to give me a you-loafer-you look. She was really sore at me, as she almost always was.

"Your mouth, sugar," I reminded her sadly. "It's so nice but so frustrated. It's the kind of mouth that loves to smile, but you just won't let it."

"My profession is important to me, Mr. Danvers, even if it isn't to you," she said, not smiling. "One of my worries is an assistant I can't entirely depend on."

Assistant. That was me. Formerly a pal but recently demoted without honors.

"That's unfair," I protested. "In certain ways I'm completely reliable. For example, you can absolutely rely on me to go on being nuts about you. Sometimes I don't know why, but it's true."

"Please, Mr. Danvers," she said while the car whished on. "I've told you before, that's not the proper way to talk to your employer."

"Please, Miss Troy," I groaned. "Stop acting as if you're a Wac lieutenant and I'm a buck private. You think I can forget how it used to be with us? Hardly. I keep remembering how, once in a while, when you weren't too busy oiling the old man's wheelchair, we used to have dates. Cocktails sometimes. Dinner. Dancing. Lazy, pleasant drives in the country. We had fun. We could do it again, too, if only you'd relax and go back to being the natural-born honey you were—and stop trying to out-Pinkerton Pinkerton."

"I am simply doing my best to carry on a fine family tradition," she said, chin

Maxine sipped hers straight,  
keeping her dark eyes on me.



lifted. "It's a big job, and it leaves me no time for such romantic diversions." She thinned those lively lips. "We will confine our conversation to business matters, please."

"Okay. Purely as a business matter I think you should sell the damn agency. Noise it around that you're open to an offer and—"

"Never." Dale said flatly. "I think of the agency as a trust, a sacred trust bequeathed me by my father."

"A sacred trust to you, baby. To me this is a racket that often gets ugly, violent and dangerous, and a lovely dish like you simply does not belong—"

"Really, I *do* know what I'm doing. After all, for years I was right there at my father's shoulder—day after day for years, listening and learning. I'm quite sure I can make a go of it."

"I'm equally sure you're too nice a girl for it and some fine day you'll get innocently caught up in—"

"No," my employer said firmly. "Besides, what you *really* think is that I'm just *incapable* of carrying on the business. Well, you're wrong. Mr. Jay Danvers, and I'm going to *prove* it."

**W**ITH that she whipped the car sharply off the boulevard and through a stone gate. Slowing, she followed a gravel driveway toward a huge Colonial house that looked like a family manse in the old tradition. This was, in fact, the city's oldest and toniest residential district, inhabited almost exclusively by well-heeled blue-bloods. I could now understand Dale's haste. Whatever this new case was, it had to be something really special.

The driveway circled among thousands of bucks' worth of landscaping. Near the six-stall garage sat a Lincoln convertible, top retracted, monogrammed MPR. Next we neared a swimming pool where a man and a girl had been sunning themselves. Now they were coming toward us. The

man, wearing beige slacks and a gaudy basque jersey, had a head of wavy, snow-white hair—really a man-of-distinction type. The girl in her way was even more distinguished.

Her hair, still wet from a plunge and slicked straight back, was raven-black. That she had other points of merit could hardly be doubted, no material having been wasted in constructing her bikini. She swung a hip-length jacket over her bronzed shoulders as she followed the white-haired man, smiling prettily, the water droplets on her long legs twinkling in the sun.

"Mr. Martin Prescott Reece?" Dale said.

"Miss Troy, of course," he answered courteously. "Delighted to see you—and greatly relieved." He grasped my hand in a knuckle-cracking grip as Dale introduced me to him as "My assistant, Jay Danvers." Then turning to the wet, black-haired girl, he added, "Miss Troy and Mr. Danvers, my daughter Maxine."

These names clicked. I had never before met any member of the prominent Reece family, but theirs was a name often noticed in the newspapers—and not only in the society columns. Like twenty or thirty other top-bracket families, they were often front-paged as having been appointed to the Mayor's Committee for Something-or-Other, or master-minding a horse show, or heading this year's community improvement drive. As clients, they were the kind we might dream about when the monthly bills come in, but rarely get.

Besides his dough, prominence and distinction, Mr. Reece also possessed a fairly well-advanced case of the jitters. His movements were jerky, and I sensed somehow that he was impatient to take off for some other place. Into the house, I hoped. I'd noticed that all its doors and windows were closed—air-conditioned throughout evidently. It must be heavenly cool in there, but obviously I'd fallen in with a pair of sun-worshippers. Mr. Reece motioned Dale and me to chairs right here, so I chose one under a broad, bright umbrella.

Maxine draped herself on a chaise-longue, her legs looking seal-sleek, and for some peculiar but pleasant reason devoted her attention to me. Meanwhile, talking rapidly, her father got busy at a portable bar.

"I knew your father, Miss Troy. Splendid man. Fine record. Retained him sev-

eral times, years ago, on certain confidential matters. Excellent results. Inspiring to see you carrying on his work, really inspiring. As Robertson Troy's daughter, you can be counted on, I know, to handle a ticklish matter with great tact and skill."

Dale beamed while I politely suppressed a frown, wishing Reece would skip the amenities and get down to cases. He was only making it tougher for me to argue Dale out of being a lady detective. She liked this brand of butter too well.

He went on spooning it out to her, talking constantly while delivering the drinks. To me his scotch was as tasty as his flattery was to Dale. Maxine, a beautifully tapering figure on the couch, sipped hers straight, with a slow, provocative pursing of her lips while keeping her dark eyes on me. All this was beginning to have a heady effect.

"Now, Miss Troy," Reece said in a down-to-brass-tacks voice, "you of course know the name of Winslow Rossiter?"

"The new Special Prosecutor," Dale said.

Reece nodded. "Winslow is my oldest and dearest friend, Miss Troy. I cherish no friendship more highly than his. There is nothing, nothing on earth, that I would not do for Winslow. His need is my command—which is precisely why I'm consulting you." He asked, "You know, of course, for what purpose the Governor appointed Winslow Special Prosecutor?"

"To drive out the gambling ring."

"Just so, Miss Troy. This graft-ridden city is in the grip of a powerful criminal faction and Winslow's task is to break it up."

Which was true. The police department had become so infested with bribe-takers, from rookies to chief inspectors, that gambling rooms ran openly and unmolested. It was reliably whispered that even our Central High basketball games were fixed. The honest officers in the police department found it futile to stage raids on horse parlors or plush roulette palaces when the joints were tipped off from the inside well in advance, and equally futile to make arrests when even the D.A.'s office was bribed into a state of lucre-stuffed apathy.

But by now the slot machine barons had been eating off the hog too high for too long. Indignant civic leaders had drafted Winslow Rossiter out of retirement and put



him into a position of power where he would be able to knock their well-barbered heads off and restore a little healthy law around here.

"A man eminently qualified for the task, Miss Troy," Reece continued. "Fearless. Never tires of fighting for the right. An attorney of long experience and unsurpassed skill. Winslow can drive out those swaggering scoundrels if anyone can." Then Reece grew soberer. "If his luck holds out, that is. With all his wonderful qualities, Winslow is advancing toward pitfalls which he doesn't even suspect—and they may well be disastrous."

Dale asked quickly, "But Mr. Reece—how?"

"Winslow unfortunately has certain weaknesses which the gambling tycoons may try to exploit. If they plan it carefully they might succeed in wrecking the whole clean-up campaign."

Really concerned, Dale asked, "In what way?"

"Winslow has—well, ah—certain blind spots. As much as I love and admire him, I must confess there are times when the man can't see beyond the end of that elegant nose of his. For example, he has already taken on, as one of his assistant prosecutors, a man who may not deserve his faith. I'm hopeful that I can open his eyes—tactfully, of course—to that particular danger. But the *worst* hazard of all, Miss Troy—and one of which the man is utterly oblivious—is Glenda."

"Glenda?"

"His daughter. His only child. He is so immensely, even fatuously, captivated by her that even I, his closest friend, wouldn't dare hint to him that she is not quite the ideally decorous young lady he imagines her to be. Fact is, Glenda is—ah—high-spirited. Very. Fact is, dammit, Glenda's downright wild."

**N**OW Maxine spoke up in an attractively cynical way. "Let's lay it on the line, Dad. Glenda knows the ins and out of every major gambling casino in town, not to mention a rare assortment of low-down dives. She's dropped plenty of coin all over town. And money isn't all she plays with, either."

"So Glenda must be watched," Maxine's father went on earnestly. "Watched like a hawk. Otherwise she may unwittingly do

something regrettable, something that will let the gambling czars use her as a weapon against her father—a weapon that may leave him defeated and disgraced, not to mention broken-hearted—in a veritable shambles of sensational scandals." Looking horrified at the thought, he added, "Which is precisely why I urgently wish to retain your services, Miss Troy. A preventive action, you see—to keep a sharp eye on Glenda Rossiter and guard her from all possible harm for her father's sake."

"It's quite a sizable order, Mr. Reece," Dale said, seeming a little scared by it.

With a wry glance, Reece nodded, "More so than you know, perhaps. Especially because it's necessary for you to act in complete secrecy. Neither Winslow Rossiter nor, of course, Glenda must have the faintest suspicion you're watching her. I am doing this entirely for Winslow's sake, but if ever he learned of it he would never get over being bitterly angry at me. It would cost me the friendship I prize more highly than all others."

"You can count on me for my very best," Dale promised.

"It will be a long job also. Frankly, Miss Troy, money is no object. I will send you my check. Will three thousand be sufficient as a retainer?"

"I think so, Mr. Reece," Dale said quietly. "Of course there will be expenses also."

I stared at her. Well might three thousand be sufficient without any mention of expenses. All the cases we'd handled so far this year hardly added up to that much. This windfall was just ducky for Dale, of course, but to me it was bad news. The more the situation brightened for Dale the worse it became for Danvers. With business booming for the Troy Detective Agency I'd stand even less chance of inducing her to lump it.

"May I intrude into this dialogue?" I said, possibly sounding a little sour. "Just how we can keep this filly from making a misstep if she has her little heart set on it? I mean, if I'm shadowing her one balmy moonlit night and I'm waiting in the street *outside* for her to show again, just how can I know what's she's up to *inside*?"

It was Maxine who answered quietly, "I'll fix that for you, Mr. Danvers." My interest mounted as she went on explaining. "You're just Glenda's type—handsome

in a sort of rugged *un*handsome way, if you know what I mean. I'll introduce you to her, say, as a friend visiting from Hollywood. Then you simply go to work on her. That is, try to date her. I know that won't be too hard for you, and after that you squire her around as much as possible—take her out to the very nicest places instead of the cheap holes she prefers."

As if this proposition wasn't enticing enough already, Maxine added, "Of course all the bills you run up will go on your expense account."

"Miss Reece," I responded heartily, "permit me to assure you of my fullest cooperation . . ."

As we drove back, Dale seemed a little less delighted with her biggest case of the year. We had discussed the ticklish situation further with Mr. Reece and Maxine and had taken our leave briskly, but after that Dale had lapsed into a thoughtful quiet. My spirits, however, continued to waft about in anticipation of pleasures to come.

"After thinking it over, sugar," I said lightly, "I've decided I don't want you to abandon the private detecting business after all. Not if you're going to bring in such tasty little assignments as this one."

My high-minded employer didn't even answer. Just gave me another thin-lipped look.

## REPORT NUMBER TWO

10 a.m., Saturday, July 14

**S**HORTLY before seven this morning the writing of my first super-confidential report on the Glenda Rossiter affair was interrupted by a phone call.

It was my favorite dish, Dale. I mean it was Miss Troy, my employer. "Everything went off all right last night, I hope?"

The brightness and briskness of Dale's question showed that she had had a good solid eight hours of sleep, at least. Lucky girl. I'd had no sleep at all. It had been a bumpy night, something less than "all right." Having now topped it off with several hours' of report-writing, I felt punchy.

"Well?" Dale insisted as I hesitated.

"Everything's just dandy so far, chicken," I said, trying to sound truthful and light-hearted. "Glenda went to somebody's house in Ruysdale Valley. I managed to

watch her through an open door—just sipping iced tea, conversing politely and listening to chamber music on the record-player. After absorbing about an hour's worth of culture, she went home alone and to bed. That's all."

"So you're satisfied she behaved herself there?"

"Oh, quite."

This was such an enormous falsehood that I half expected to be struck dead on the spot, but it appeared to make Dale feel better. Relieved her doubts, it did.

"That's fine. Now please go to the office immediately and put it into a report for Mr. Reece."

"Immediately? Look at the time, cupcake. I'm not due at the office for two hours yet."

"This case calls for a little extra effort on your part, naturally. At least *I'm* on the job early. Just a few minutes ago I phoned Maxine Reece at the special number her father gave us."

Mr. Reece, in the course of our consultation yesterday afternoon, had said, "If you should wish to phone me, don't call the number in the book. Use the unlisted number," which he then wrote down for us.

I had also talked to Maxine at that number, but hours ago. I'd phoned her to make sure of her attitude toward the night's shattered statutes. Her end of that conversation could be summed up in several phrases which she had uttered with a shudder.

"I'm telling nobody about our little soiree, brother. But *nobody*."

"Not even your father?"

"I have suffered a sudden attack of total amnesia. My memory is a perfect blank."

To Dale I said carefully, "What did Maxine have to say?"

"Miss Reece said Glenda is an early riser. Please get busy accordingly. But *after* you have written the report for Mr. Reece, please."

Why did I go on working for this frosty-hearted lass? I knew why. I was a knight in shining armor striving to rescue her from a dark and fearful fate. Besides, I would rather take a licking from her than a smile from any other babe.

"Okay, Dale, honey-pie, you vixen," I muttered. "You're the boss."

So I did. I prodded myself down to the agency and wrote for Mr. Martin Prescott

Reece a report both remarkably innocuous and shamelessly fraudulent.

Now I've sneaked back to my apartment to steal enough time to continue my private version. Glenda Rossiter will, I hope, stay for a while at her hairdresser's, where I left her after trailing her downtown from her home.

What comes next. Mr. Whom-I-May-Concern, is a true chronicle of what happened last night—a lurid little episode of which Dale Troy, Martin Reece and also, of course, you, Mr. Special Prosecutor Rossiter, not to mention the public and the police—remain in blessed ignorance. And I trust, always will.

**D**ALE and I had been back at the agency from the Reece place only half a minute when Maxine rang in. Listening to her on the phone, Dale answered in a series of oh-so-brisk monosyllables while her cheeks lost a little color. Disconnecting, she turned her lovely violet eyes on me for a moment of uneasy speculation.

"Mr. Danvers, can I depend on you to keep your mind strictly on business?"

"Relax, Dale. I'm just Glenda's type, remember? What did Maxine call up about?"

"Miss Reece phoned to say she'd just learned that Glenda is going to a party tonight. It's a very good chance for you to meet her. Black tie. Miss Reece will pick you up at your apartment at nine."

"Gad, what a fortunate fellow I am!" I said, grinning at Dale. "I really love this case!"

Except for a darkening of her pretty frown, my chief made no comment . . .

By nine o'clock I was slicked up my unhandsome lady-killing best in a linen tux—rented, but not bad. Promptly at nine, an expensive horn tootled melodiously in the street.

From behind the wheel of the convertible, Maxine Reece greeted me with a shining smile. Her black hair was now an upswept, captivating cluster of burnished jet ringlets. Her strapless evening gown was a thing of magic, held there on the thin borderline of a social lapse.

She peppered me with light chatter while we rolled magnificently along, giving me a briefing on Glenda Rossiter practically from bibhood. By the time we arrived at the

scene of the evening's festivities, I had gained a strong impression of Glenda as an unpredictable, audacious, hard-to-handle chick who'd been tempting a racy scandal for years, while artfully keeping the wool pulled thickly over her dotting father's eyes.

We pulled into the driveway of an estate located in the midst of some of the choicest real estate in town. Maxine informed me in her attractively cynical way, "This sparkling affair is said to be a housewarming—sort of."

"Sparkling" described it all right. The whole house radiated light like the premiere of a new gas station in Hollywood. Festoons of colored bulbs trailed through the gardens. Scores of well-waxed cars twinkled along the driveway and on the lawn. Maxine led me into a crush of guests who were bedecked with costly ornaments. Other sparkling objects on trays were being wafted about by servants in monkey jackets. As they went past, I grabbed off two, one for Maxine and the other for me, and they turned out to be ultra-dry martinis in champagne glasses.

I noticed, oddly, that many of these opulent-looking characters seemed to be wearing their classy clothes self-consciously, and among them were a number of furtive-eyed fish wearing business suits fully as seedy as my own working clothes.

"Where's Glenda?" I asked.

"Haven't spotted her so far. She's probably not anywhere around here, though, because right there's the boy who brought her."

The boy Glenda had come with was not over twenty-one and looked lonely in all his 250-odd pounds. Glenda was the sort of girl, apparently, who fitted off from her escort immediately upon arriving at a social function and rejoined him somewhere along toward the tag end of the evening, if then.

I asked Maxine, "Just whose house is this event warming up?"

"It's a little hard to say. *His* as much as anyone's, I guess."

The man Maxine indicated was the five-star executive type—massive, sparse, gray-touched hair smoothly brushed, flawlessly attired from his perfectly knotted tie to the toes of his gleaming shoes, and to women, of course, as smooth and easy to take as a chinchilla coat. You might expect to find his picture on the financial page of any

stolid, respectable-type newspaper. However, my first glance at him caused a swallow of my super-martini to turn into clam chowder halfway down my throat.

The man's name was Lennox Bryssel. It was no great secret hereabouts that he was the top man in running the gambling ring that was running the town. However, one of the difficult tasks facing Special Prosecutor Rossiter was, first, to reach him, then to prove it.

A light winked on in my mind. This fine old home, once a proud showplace . . .

"Maxine, do you mean this lush occasion celebrates the opening of another new casino? *Here*—less than a golf-shot from Rossiter's own home?"

"Yes, indeed," Maxine nodded. "Our best and biggest. Yesterday, in the company of one of my dissolute admirers, I got in here ahead of the mob. Preview given for the choicest and best-heeled chumps in the Social Register. You really should see the game rooms upstairs—gaudier than a movie set." She nudged me with a bare shoulder and said quickly, "Of course that's where our little Glenda's been. She's coming down now. This is it, Jaybird. Get set to turn on the charm full blast."

I STEERED precariously after Maxine through the coronets and the cocktails, toward a great golden staircase, without taking my eyes off the descending girl. Somehow everybody all along the line had forgotten to mention that Glenda was a green-eyed redhead. Also I was not prepared to find that she looked like an adorable little angel.

Startled, I couldn't believe that this was really the Glenda Rossiter I'd been warned about. It was practically impossible to imagine any kind of sinful notions hiding behind the serenely smooth forehead of this little seraph. On the other hand, it was now very easy to understand how she managed to keep her adoring father fooled forty ways from breakfast.

"Glenda, *darling!*" Maxine was burbling. "Here's a perfectly wonderful guy and old pal of mine just *perishing* to meet you. You've *surely* seen him in the movies—*millions* of bobby-soxers simply swoon over him, my dear—and here he is, Jay Danvers, in the *flesh*."

And *what* flesh, eh, baby? That was

Maxine's implication anyhow, so I grinned enchantingly, radiating charm. I radiated charm so damned hard I could feel my blood pressure bumping the ceiling. I bowed with courtly courtesy and beamed upon Glenda Rossiter with eyes as limpid as those of a fawn in springtime.

She said, "Why, how *nice* of you to meet me!" and breezed past.

Gazing dazedly over one shoulder, I caught her briefly patting the cheek of her plump and unhappy escort, who had trailed us toward her, and murmuring, "Be right with you, dreamie-boy."

Then she was gone.

"You see how it is?" I remarked to Maxine. "Just one little glance at me, and the girl came all unglued."

"Come on!" Maxine grabbed my free hand. "She's got something hot on her mind—I know the signs. Let's not lose her."

I ran interference for Maxine, and we plowed our way back through the tiaras and the sequins until we came out on a terrace. It was also overloaded with people. Glenda was nowhere in sight, but Maxine seemed to know just how to catch up with her. Once in the clear, Maxine went flying prettily across the lawn on her spike heels, and in another half minute I found myself beside her in her convertible.

Fortunately she had parked it in a spot having a clear view of the gate and quick access to it also. Almost at once a little foreign-make car with Glenda at its wheel churned past us and out.

Maxine went off after Glenda with a skill that earned my professional admiration. First giving Glenda a long lead, she then jogged over to a parallel street one block away, speeded up and checked on Glenda's progress at successive intersections. Suddenly she braked, settled back and said, "Ah. Now that she's gone this far I know just where she's going—Paul Millard's place in Ruysdale Valley."

Maxine swung the car rapidly around a series of corners until we hit Ruysdale Drive. She said, "Glenda's behind us now, I think," and began twisting the bejeepers out of the speedometer. We rode a hurricane into Ruysdale Valley. Then Maxine braked and drove slowly while thinking fast.

"Paul Millard?" the name was one I vaguely remembered from somewhere. "Is

he someone whom Glenda shouldn't see?"  
 "Paul Millard is a very married man whose wife is momentarily not at home. To Glenda her absence is delightful. She and Paul fell for each other too hard—they've lost their heads—it's a really heavy romance."

"You don't mean it's part of my job to break it up, I hope. I'm afraid I forgot my helmet and my axe. Anyhow, I'm no fireman."

"We'd be silly to try that. Love was finding a way long before Glenda discovered it. No. But this charming little romance is loaded with dynamite, and your mission for tonight, or any other night like this one, is to keep it from going boom."

"How, for example?"

"Paul's wife might stage an unexpected return, with slightly sensational results. You were hired to nip such things in the very bud."

The job was looking more ticklish all the time, but at least it offered a little novelty. Usually I walked in behind the indignant wife. This time I was supposed to whistle when she showed. Already I was looking

forward to watching Dale's face when I reported that her most important assignment of the year was to make profane love run smooth.

MAXINE had been insinuating her comvertible through the ultra-classy little suburb called Ruysdale Valley, where the streets wind among little gardened hills and the haphazardly placed houses seem to have come straight out of story books.

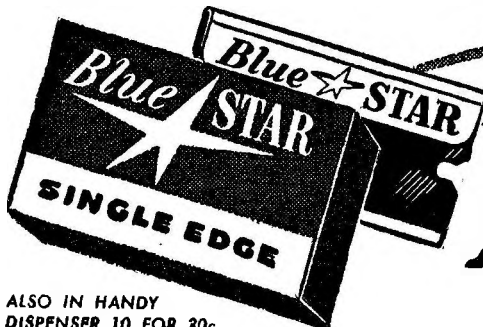
We eased onto a rustic bridge and across the little river that gives the village much of its pictorial charm. Maxine parked under a tree in a tucked-away spot and doused all the lights. I could gladly have continued working the case right there, but Maxine slipped out. We backtracked. I followed her across another little bridge, then leftward off the road and across grass. She tugged me to a bush-banked spot on a little hillside from which we could look down into the back of a small house as if from a grandstand seat.

Actually it was like watching a well-lighted stage from the front row of the first balcony and being the only spectators in the

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theater as well. The rear wall of the ground-floor room was all glass. The sliding doors were open, the curtains were pulled wide to catch any stray breeze and the room was bright with light.

This was a beautifully equipped rumpus room, having in it, of all things, a pistol range. There was a trick target standing against the far wall beside the fireplace. It automatically fed in colored discs, like poker chips, and was so constructed to trap the flying fragments and the spent bullets as well.

A young man wearing a white nylon shirt and maroon walking shorts was using it now. He was pumping away with a .22 revolver, aiming casually, but smacking the chip every time. A gun nut, obviously. A glass-doored cabinet on the wall nearby contained a collection of firearms.

I asked Maxine quietly, "That's Millard?" She nodded and squeezed my arm. The little foreign-made job was just now turning into the car port. Glenda hopped out eagerly and ran toward Millard, who had come out to meet her. The embracing and osculating which ensued fully verified Maxine's earlier diagnosis. That clinch was the beginning, and what followed should never have happened to the daughter of a Special Prosecutor.

It proceeded quietly enough at first, however. The two of them went into the rumpus room hand in hand and Millard then gave Glenda instructions in target shooting. In order to correct her grip on the gun he had, of course, to stand very close behind her with both arms busy. This led to considerable by-play of a provocative nature. Glenda seemed to like to shoot.

Millard mixed drinks, stiff ones, and they got in some more target practice. Millard reloaded the gun and their glasses also whenever it became necessary. They laughed and had lots of fun. Glenda's skill with the gun couldn't compare with Millard's. At first she cracked a few bull's-eyes, but the more fun she had the worse her marksmanship grew.

This playful pair were alone in the house and I expected that very shortly now those window-curtains would be pulled shut and the first act would be over.

At that point Maxine squeezed my arm again, this time quickly, in alarm. She pointed, wide-eyed. Down there in the

shadows beside the house was a slow, furtive movement.

"Oh, no-no-no," Maxine groaned in my ear. "Please, not Paul's wife already."

I whispered back, "It's a man."

He was crouched down beside a lawn chair, hatless and coatless. He was holding something in his hands, but I couldn't make out what it was. My first guess, that this guy might be a private op hired by Mrs. Millard for divorce purposes, was off the mark. For one thing, he was alone, which is not the approved method of picking up divorce evidence because of lack of corroboration; for another, although he looked familiar somehow, he definitely was not any of the ops working around town. He was here on some special, private deal of his own—one boding no good for the pair inside the house.

He stayed there, watching the all-too-affectionate pantomime in the game room. He was a spooky presence threatening plenty of trouble for me. Maxine shivered as she watched him, and I began sprouting a crop of the jitters.

The temperature indoors was rising.

Glenda and Millard had turned to something even more enjoyable than target practice. After an especially caloric clinch they went hand in hand through a door off to the right. A soft light went on in there, then closely drawn curtains obscured the glow.

Thereupon the watching man moved—he straightened and advanced soundlessly toward the rumpus room. In the brighter light I could see that the object he was carrying was a camera equipped with a flash gun. I also recognized the man—a specimen named "Chick" Ellis.

**E**LLIS was a character of noisome reputation—and his talent for petty blackmail was no idle rumor. To judge from tonight's operation, he had apparently developed some ambition in that direction. At any rate, among all the double-eyed skunks in town he was the one I would the least wish to see here tonight—especially with a camera.

The night air had taken on a chill. Should I tackle this louse now or corner him later? I decided to wait. Maxine had one arm tight around me. She was staring at the skulking figure of Chick Ellis and shivering.

Ellis eased silently through a glass door, then toward the closed adjoining room into which Glenda and Millard had gone. He checked his camera, held it ready in his left hand and put his right gently on the knob of that closed door. For a moment or two he stood perfectly still.

I almost yelled out a warning but managed to swallow it.

Then—all in one motion Ellis flung the door wide open, stepped back, aimed and flashed his camera.

After that things happened faster.

Ellis himself, however, apparently feeling he had the evidence well in hand, seemed in no special hurry to depart. He stood there wearing a confident smile while Paul Millard came out that open door in a rush. Millard had discarded his nylon shirt in the next room.

He snarled at Ellis, "Gimme that camera!" and leaped.

Ellis apparently hadn't expected such a fast and violent response. He tried to break away too late. Millard yanked at the camera strap, and Ellis smacked Millard across the face. Infuriated by the sting of it, Millard took a roundhouse swing at Ellis which telegraphed itself four blocks away, and yet it connected. Ellis went down hard, the camera slid across the floor, and Millard dived for it.

That was only the first round.

Ellis bounced up like a rubber doll while Millard was still fumbling with the camera, and jumped him from behind. Millard went out flat under Ellis' weight. Ellis sat on him, grabbed the camera in both hands and began pounding Millard's head with it.

As the thing kept coming down at him, *thunk, thunk, thunk*. Millard screamed, "Glenda, Glenda!"

Miss Glenda Rossiter, daughter of our Special Prosecutor, then emerged from the adjoining room. Her garb now consisted of a little black lace bra and panties to match. Responding to Millard's cry for help, she grabbed at Ellis and tried to pull him off her man. He didn't budge—just went on pounding Millard's head to a pulp with his camera.

Millard shrieked, "Gun—Glenda, the gun—"

Thus reminded, Glenda bounded across the room, an entrancing figure despite the circumstances. She snatched the revolver

off the table where Millard had left it, bounded back as beautifully, and jabbed the gun at Ellis.

"You quit that!" she ordered.

Ellis paid no attention—just went on methodically beating Millard's brains out.

"Stop him, Glenda!" Millard yelled.

"Shoot him, shoot him!"

Glenda pulled the trigger.

The gun went *bang!*

Ellis stopped. He dropped the camera, then turned slowly toward Glenda, claws lifting to grab her.

She screamed. Her gun went *bang, bang!*

This time Ellis stopped for good. He slid out on the floor face down in a way that indicated he would stay here. A slow stream of thick red flowed from his mouth.

Glenda stood over him, paralyzed by a realization of what she had done, while Millard pulled himself up. I was amazed to see that his head still looked like a head. His nose was bleeding, and his forehead looked as if it had been kicked around by a horse, but he was able to function and on the whole he'd got off easy. He pushed at Ellis with one foot, shook his head in the way people shake their heads over dead bodies, then stood listening, as if wondering whether any of the neighbors had noticed the disturbance of the peace.

What happened within the next fraction of a minute I did not see. Maxine clenched both arms around me, pressed her head hard under my chin, and her whole body quaked with silent sobs. I held onto her, feeling I had to hold onto something, but too heartsick to properly enjoy it. Me, I was the big, brave detective who had been entrusted with the task of keeping the Special Prosecutor's daughter out of trouble. Yeah, me—and I had stood right here and watched her murder a man. . . .

That was the high point of tonight's little drama, but not its end. Not quite.

**W**HEN I focused on the room again Glenda had disappeared, but she reappeared immediately from the adjoining room carrying her dress. Millard gestured to her desperately, speaking urgent words we couldn't hear. He was telling her for God's sake to get gone from here.

She hustled out. In her car, still wearing only panties and bra, she backed into the road, then whished off. There was hardly

any need to tail her. It seemed safe to assume that at this point she would call it a night and go on home to bed.

Paul Millard stood looking down at Ellis and fingering his punished face. Then he began pacing back and forth beside the body. It didn't take him long to decide what to do.

He gripped both Ellis' wrists and dragged him—out of the room, off the terrace, across the small lawn and to a spot near a small tool house. He turned on no lights, but in the dark he made noises. Chains rattled. They rattled for several minutes. Then, in the gloom, we could dimly see him lifting Ellis in his arms.

Staggering under that dead weight, Millard came laboriously up the little hillside where Maxine and I huddled out of sight. We were still the helpless spectators of an unfolding horror, able to do nothing except watch. So we watched Millard tottering past with Ellis' corpse and its wrapping of tire chains, and we couldn't possibly leave without seeing it through to the final curtain.

As quietly as the night breeze we followed him, moving just over the crest of the hill, and from there we continued to watch Millard's grisly labors. He forced himself on, not stopping once, until finally he reached the middle of the little rustic bridge. We saw faintly a loose flailing of arms and legs as the body went over, then heard the flat splash.

It's a narrow river, but deep in spots, and in summer the current is fast from the up-country rains.

Millard came trudging back. We heard his hard breathing as he passed. Still coldly fascinated, we watched him return to the murder room.

The first thing he did was to use the phone. Obviously it was Glenda he was calling, and he got an answer. His gestures signified to us what he was saying to her: "Stay clammed up about this. I think it will work out all right, so sit tight and keep absolutely quiet."

Then he got a towel and a pan of water and began cleaning the blood of Glenda's victim off the floor.

I heard myself saying, "What became of the camera? I don't see the camera anywhere in there now."

Somehow that was the topper for Maxine

—she'd had all she could take tonight. Pulling me, she half-ran back to her car. I took over at the wheel. She covered her face with her hands and made choking noises all the way back to my apartment.

When I got out she looked hard at me and said, "What are we going to *do*?"

"First, think it over—but above all, keep it entirely under your wig. Glenda may get away with this murder. I don't condone homicide by bad little girls, understand, but if Glenda gets away with this one it will certainly be a lucky break for everybody concerned. Chin up. I'll phone you."

Maxine slid over to the wheel, drew in a deep breath that strained the construction of that strapless gown and said, "Aren't you going to thank me for a lovely evening? Wasn't it charming?"

### REPORT NUMBER THREE

*Dawn, Sunday, July 15*

**A**FTER finishing the two previous reports, I sealed them inside an envelope and carefully carried them down to the Trocadero on Grace Street—carefully because I did not wish to get smacked flat by a truck and have the wrong hands find those documents on my body. In the wrong hands they could be exploded with A-bomb effect. I figured Mame Daly's hands were the right ones. When I stepped up to the familiar wicket Mame gave me her standard so-you're-back-again-you-pop-eyed-rat look and peeled off a ticket.

"Sorry, but I'm too busy right now to indulge my appreciation of art and beauty," I said, regretfully pushing the ticket back and sliding the envelope in.

I asked Mame to keep it safe for me, to sit absolutely tight on it because it was highly confidential stuff. For some hunchy reason I added that in case "anything" happens to me, she is to hustle it right over to the Special Prosecutor himself, personally. She promised she would faithfully do this, and I know I can rely on her because Mame would never stoop to the depths of taking advantage of such a low form of animal life as the human male.

I then got busy with a phone—one in a well-insulated booth. First calling the city room of the *Evening Star*, I asked for Chick Ellis. He had worked there off and on, I



knew, as a news photographer. The switch-board operator told me this was another of his off periods—he'd been fired six weeks ago. Where could I connect with him? She gave me a number, which I called next.

The scratchy-voiced woman who answered this time was the landlady of the dump where Ellis roomed. He wasn't in, she said, and if I really wanted to reach him I'd have to exercise some patience because sometimes he didn't come in for weeks on end.

In other words, the news of Ellis' death had not yet broken. Apparently nobody knew about it so far except Glenda Rossiter, Paul Millard, Maxine Reece and me. Considering Ellis' wandering ways, he might not even be missed for quite a while, and possibly his body might never be found.

Illegal, immoral or not, that would be all right with me. I would not care to make a practice of covering up murders, but this one was really exceptional.

Heading for the office, I reflected that I might now be crowing "I told you so" at Dale. I had warned her—and now she was technically snarled in a tangle of really

choice crimes. The only way to ride this thing out, as far as I could see, was to make like it hadn't happened at all and I keep praying.

So my routine office reports had stopped far short of the truth, and I had even twisted the facts to the extent of telling Dale that during Glenda's visit to Millard's house she had just sipped food tea, conversed politely and listened to chamber music—Lord have mercy on me.

When I stepped into the office, my chief gazed up from the phone, looking both aloofly professional and irresistibly tasty—a tough combination to take.

"I'm having a fine, easy day of it, sugar," I reported. "Just now Glenda is enjoying the double feature at the Strand." If she wasn't sitting there and doing plenty of heavy thinking instead.

"Make sure you pick her up in good time, Mr. Danvers," my employer said in her executive voice and held out the phone. "This call is for you."

In answer to my brisk "Jay Danvers speaking," an impressive voice said, "The Special Prosecutor's office calling."



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I had a hunch my fine day was taking a quick turn for the worse.

"Mr. Rossiter wishes to talk to you, Danvers. Here. Immediately."

I swallowed and said, "I happen to be tied up in an important case that—"

"We can slap a subpoena on you, of course, and let you talk to the grand jury instead."

Full of chills, I explained, "I was about to say, before you interrupted me, that I think I can work you in."

Disconnecting, I heard myself mumbling to Dale, "Personal matter." I didn't get it. Why should the Special Prosecutor's office, obviously meaning business, suddenly reach for my collar? I couldn't even guess. I could, however, cling to a wild hope that it had nothing to do with last night's escapade on the part of the Special Prosecutor's little girl-child.

Mumbling something else to Dale, I headed out the door quickly, before she could begin getting curious.

This was another steamy day but I covered the six blocks to the new Criminal Courts Building in record time and arrived there with a cold wave still prevailing inside me. By way of steps, an elevator and an endless hallway, I came to a doomful door and found myself in a waiting room as sober as a funeral parlor.

The pretty receptionist was expecting me. She said sweetly, "Follow me, please." I followed her into what appeared to be a conference room, and she left me alone there. Presently another door opened, and a man came in and said to me, "Mr. Danvers?"

Couldn't answer. Struck dumb. Just stared at him.

He was Paul Millard.

**N**O POSSIBLE doubt about it, either. He said so. "I'm Paul Millard, one of the Special Prosecutor's assistants." This was really cute. If I looked groggy at the moment, it was because I felt that way.

Smiling faintly and seeming in surprisingly good repair after last night's beating, Millard said, "The Special Prosecutor will see you right now."

I followed him into another room, a big, austere office. There was a chaste desk in one corner. Behind the desk sat the most powerful official in the county, a man who

could, and no doubt would, break judges, shake up the police department and stand the D.A. on his ear—Special Prosecutor Rossiter, whose offspring's antics I had witnessed last night.

He is completely bald, spare of frame, severe of eye and an aristocrat in every line. He is also one hell of a smart lawyer, as he had proved repeatedly in practice—one you would get fresh with at your peril. It is hardly necessary to add that he is utterly incorruptible.

"Mr. Danvers," he began in brittle tones, "you will please answer my questions precisely as if you were under oath."

"Yes, sir."

"You will also treat this conversation as strictly confidential."

"Yes, sir."

"You are probably aware that this office is investigating the ramifications of organized gambling in this town. You realize, I imagine, that its illegal operations total many millions of dollars a year and that it reaches into high places. A number of well known, supposedly reputable, business men are controlling it in association with a staff of purely criminal tycoons who started their careers with lead pipes in their hands. I intend to expose these greedy hypocrites, and I shall do it despite all the pressures they are exerting on me. Also, of course, the organization reaches down to the common alley variety of petty hoodlums."

"Yes, sir." All this I knew already. It told me nothing about why I'd been pulled onto the official carpet. I stopped wondering, however, the very next instant.

"What do you know about a man named Chick Ellis?"

I swallowed twice slowly. The Special Prosecutor eyed me sharply in the silence. Behind him, in the person of his assistant, stood the man who could answer the question even better than I. Millard also eyed me keenly—with, of course, his own special, secret appreciation of the query.

"Well, Mr. Danvers?"

"Nothing special," I heard myself answering in a normal tone of voice, more or less. "No more than his other casual acquaintances can tell you—that he's a bar buzzer, can't hold a job, chronically broke."

"And frequently lives for quite long periods with no visible means of support?" Rossiter went on thoughtfully, "I'm unable

to reach Mr. Ellis this morning. Can you help me out there?"

Paul Millard, the man who could really help him out there, remained standing behind the Special Prosecutor with his eyes pinpointing me.

I said, "No, sir." Then, taking a chance, I went on, "May I ask, sir, why you singled me out for these questions about a man I hardly know?"

Rossiter plucked off his pince-nez and ran the black ribbon thoughtfully through his long, thin fingers. "This office receives many tips, Mr. Danvers. Most of them are worthless but all of them must be checked. In the operations of organized gambling in this town the bribing of certain officials plays a key part, and it is important for us to identify the bag men, or pay-off boys, as they are called. We have reason to believe—remember, this is strictly confidential—that Ellis is one of them. We have also been told—anonously, it's true—that you can give us an important lead on him."

It kept getting richer every minute. I managed to say, "Your informant is mistaken."

Rossiter levelled his fine eyebrows. "Mr. Danvers, can you tell me where I can find Ellis?"

I looked at Paul Millard. He was as poker-faced as the jack of spades. Still looking at him, I answered Rossiter, "No, sir, I can't."

Special Prosecutor Rossiter tapped his glasses on the desk and said, "Very well, Mr. Danvers. This will do for now. However, in the event that you do acquire any pertinent information concerning Ellis, I will expect you to report it to me promptly."

"Yes, sir."

Millard's gaze stayed on me as I groped my way out. I was dizzy, didn't know what was happening to me, couldn't figure any angle as to who, why or how somebody had tipped the Special Prosecutor on a possible tie-up between Ellis and me. I was scared. Also I was getting sore, in an odd non-directional way, not at anyone in particular, but at the whole damn hassel at once.

From the first phone booth I could find I called the special number given me by Martin P. Reece.

I said, "I've got to see you fast."

He said, "How about one hour from now?"

I said, "How about thirty seconds from now?"

He said, "Make it thirty minutes."

THE thirtieth minute was ticking off when I swung into the drive of the Reece estate. Maxine's car wasn't there this time. Maxine wasn't beautifying the pool, either, and I was running too high a fever to miss her very much. Her father came to meet me, hurrying from his deck chair in the sun.

"Not to waste any time over this, Mr. Reece—yesterday you made a statement about Winslow Rossiter to the effect that he had taken on, as one of his assistants, a man who was not entirely deserving of his faith. Was it Paul Millard you had in mind?"

Reece said tightly, "How the devil did you find that out?"

"That's my job, finding out things. *Why* did you say that about Millard?"

Reece hesitated, then answered, "Paul has had very little practice since leaving law school, and his salary as Winslow's assistant is certainly not a great deal. His wife has no money of her own, yet they live lavishly and always seem to have plenty to spend."

"Good grief! You don't mean you suspect Millard is on the gravy train of the big roulette and dice boys?"

"I believe he is. I think he's one of their fixers. I have no proof, and Winslow wouldn't even listen to such a charge, but I'm morally sure of it."

That, of course, made this little fandango even cuter.

"So Rossiter has unwittingly taken on as his assistant one of the very same operators he's trying to nail. That in itself is bad enough, but there's even more. Glenda and Millard are carrying on a little romance. Did you know that?"

Reece was getting jumpy again. "I'm not too sure how far—"

"I am. Very sure. Very far." I wanted to let it go at that—to leave out the homicide and assorted lesser crimes. "Now look here, Mr. Reece. I believe yours is an impossible assignment. The situation is too loaded with explosive possibilities. Only a miracle can keep it from blowing up and rocking the whole damn county—and I, Mr. Reece, am no miracle."

Reece blanched. "But you can't give up. Not before we've really tried to work it out. There must be *some* way—"

He broke off to watch a car rolling up the drive—a massive black limousine, the excessively opulent kind that you can instantly spot as the property of a big-wheel crook. It stopped and two men got out of it, both moving with ominous deliberation. The smaller one, who stayed near the car, was an unrefined species of hood, the out-and-out movie gangster type, which is really a little dated now. The other was bigger, smoother and a little smarter looking, but still distinctly a gorilla-type guy. I had never seen him before, still don't know his name and have no desire ever to meet up with him again.

"Lookin' for a friend of mine, Mr. Reece. Thought I might find him here. Young fella name of Chick Ellis."

My fever was changing into chills again, and I wanted to stay entirely out of this sun-drenched little nightmare.

Reece said stiffly, "I don't know anyone named Chick Ellis."

Ignoring this answer, the mug continued, "Funny thing. Chick hisself's been missin' since last night, but somehow his camera's still handy."

More stiffly Reece said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

Me, I did, and to a staggering degree. Last night I had noticed that Ellis' camera had somehow vanished out of Millard's rumpus room while Maxine and I had our backs turned to watch Millard disposing of Ellis' remains. Now I knew how it all added up. Ellis had been operating, not in his own behalf only, but for the ring. Object, of course, to force Winslow Rossiter out of office, thereby to make room for a substitute who could be more easily reached. He hadn't been alone there, either. Someone working with Ellis and staying out of sight, had also watched developments. That little hillside had been practically crawling with eavesdroppers last night. There was no way of guessing whether Ellis' unseen partner had actually witnessed the killing itself, but he certainly had sneaked off with Ellis' camera.

"Found an interesting picture in it," the gorilla said. "Like to see it, Mr. Reece?"

He removed an eight-by-ten enlargement from inside his coat and passed it to Reece.

After one goggle-eyed look Reece frantically ripped the print to bits and flung the foul fragments into the pool. The gorilla shrugged, indicating that the destruction of this print made no difference because plenty more could be made from the negative.

"We sort of thought Mr. Rossiter might take it a little better from an old friend like you, Mr. Reece."

Thereupon the pair boarded the big limousine and rolled it away. *There*, I told myself, in final resignation, *goes the old ball game*.

Martin Reece couldn't even speak. He just fell into his chair and covered his face with his hands. The merciful thing to do, I felt, was to go away now and leave him alone in his overwhelming despair. . . .

## REPORT NUMBER FOUR

### *Same Day of Reckoning*

**A**T THAT point in the writing of these reports I found myself feeling so disheartened that I had to stop and swallow a few doses of rye-type nerve-soother. . . .

I left Reece with my tail dragging. Remembering that I should go back to keeping an eye on Glenda, I decided nuts to that and somehow found myself in Billy's, seeking solace.

But I couldn't stop shuddering over all the hell our little Glenda was playing. Nobody was in a better position than I was to appreciate *what* hell. I began to get good and sore at her. I kept on thinking about her until I began to simmer. By the time I headed off, looking for her, I was briskly boiling.

I timed it so that I wouldn't have long to wait on the corner outside the Strand. I had left her there about two feature-lengths ago and unless she had ducked me she was due to show any minute now. Presently she did. She came out, looking sober and pale and lonely, and walked slowly, apparently having no special place to go next. I swung into step with her.

"Hello, Miss Rossiter. Remember me—Jay Danvers, the devastating movie star? I permitted Maxine Reece to introduce me to you at the housewarming last night. Damn nice it was of me, too, as you mentioned at the time. Now I'm going to be

even nicer to you and buy you a drink."

She looked vaguely puzzled. Not startled, not offended, just puzzled. I took her arm, to steer her into the cocktail lounge next the theatre, and she didn't resist. She didn't say anything, either, but just came along quietly to the booth I selected in a secluded corner. She kept looking at me, still mildly and distantly puzzled, while I ordered a pair of drier-than-dust martinis.

"I'm not really in the movies, Glenda. Actually I'm a private detective. I've been keeping a close watch on you since the big party last night. I know exactly what you've been doing every minute since then. Every minute."

As I had figured it, there was no longer any point in spooking around—certainly I had nothing to lose by facing this poisonous lass squarely with the facts. So now she was getting them, right on her little dimpled chin. She turned paler, and her lovely green eyes grew rounder, and still she stayed silent.

"To take it from the beginning, honey-child—any way I look at you, I don't understand you. For example, I don't see how the daughter of the Special Prosecutor can be so goddam larking in ordinary caution, not to mention respect for her father, as to patronize the very same gambling dives he's trying to break up. Hasn't it ever occurred to your little bird-brain that it might possibly embarrass him a little?"

She answered indignantly. "Why, I'd never dream of doing such a thing."

So, along with all her other talents, this sweet-looking little miss went in for bald-faced prevarication.

"Don't feed me that, Glenda, dear. After all, we met, or almost met, last night in one of them."

"What are you talking about? You mean there at the old Cashley place?"

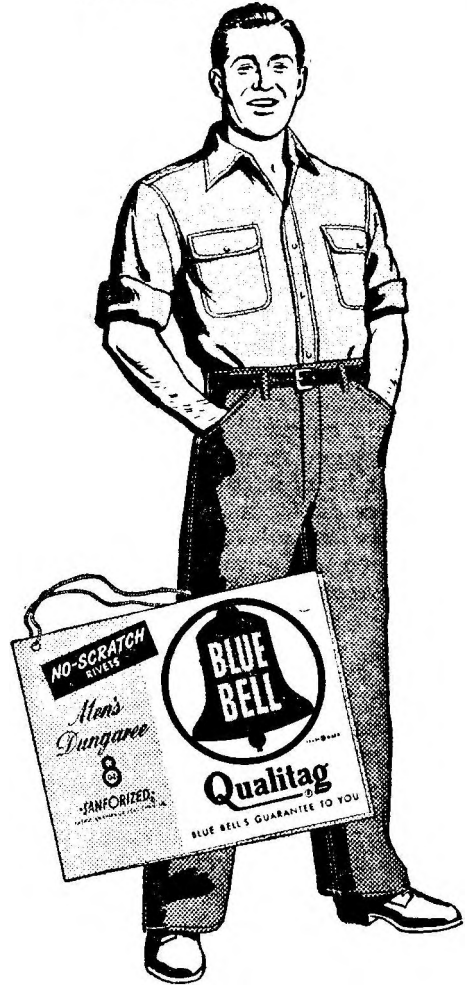
Cashley? The name struck a bell somewhere far back in my mind but I couldn't stop now to listen.

"It wasn't a house-warming anyway, as you called it," Glenda went on. "The Cashleys sold the place, and they just wanted to throw this big party for all their old friends before moving out."

Seemed to me she was getting just a little too fancy, lying in such unnecessary detail.

"Let's square away on this, angel-face. I happen to be hep—so hep it hurts. That

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affair last night was the formal opening of the city's newest, biggest and best gambling casino—which you must know even better than I do, since you were upstairs admiring the game rooms."

"Have you been hitting the pipe or something?" Glenda said. "The reason I was upstairs was because that's where the powder room is, and if you'd been in my shoes you'd have done the very same thing." She asked suddenly, "Do you *mean* it? The Cashley place has been turned into a gambling house?"

"That's the way I heard it."

She turned another shade paler and said shakily, "I didn't know. I wouldn't have gone."

Who did she think she was kidding? "Cut it out, Glenda. It may be one of the plushiest dives you've been in, but it certainly isn't the first."

She said quietly, "I've been around, if that's what you mean. I like my fun, and I've had a lot of it. But, really, you might give me credit for a little ordinary sense. As soon as Daddy became Special Prosecutor I started staying away from such places and behaving myself."

I could give her credit, all right, but for something else, if this was lying. In that case she was really a nimble wit. But a strange feeling was coming over me—the feeling that just possibly this gal had been misrepresented to me. The way to test her, I decided, was to dig at her about something I could be sure of myself.

"What about such pastimes as keeping a joyous little rendezvous with a married man?" I inquired. "Have you sworn off there too?"

SHE looked at me for a long, silent moment, her cheeks turning crimson. Then she said in a whisper, "I'm in love with Paul Millard. He's separated from his wife, and she's going to divorce him and then I'm going to marry him—and I'm really, truly in love with him."

"And you just can't wait."

Her face went white. "Just how much do you know about what happened at Paul's last night?"

"Everything," I said. "Every damned thing. By that I mean *everything*."

She said evenly, "You couldn't have *seen* what went on in that other room."

"No, but—" and I smirked evilly.

"I'll tell you what went on," she insisted. "I went in there with Paul to see his new color slides."

"Now it's color slides. Etchings are a little old-fashioned."

She closed one fist on the stem of her cocktail glass, and for a second I thought she was going to hit me with it.

"I went in there to see Paul's *color slides*," she repeated through her fine white teeth. "He accidentally spilled a can of film cement on my dress. He tried to reach a big bottle of solvent off a shelf in the dark and spilled that too, over both of us."

"So you had to remove your drenched dress, of course, and he naturally took off his wet shirt."

"Yes." She said it again: "Yes." She underscored it: "*That is truly and exactly what happened.*"

I went on leering skeptically. "As to what then ensued, kitten, there can be no argument. I saw every charming little bit of it." Should I tell her the rest of it? Well, why not? This thing couldn't possibly be kept under wraps much longer anyhow. So I added, "What's more, it was also witnessed by my lovely companion of the evening, Maxine Reece."

That puzzled look returned to Glenda's face. "That's the second time you've called her Maxine Reece. What's mixing you up? That wasn't Maxine."

Suddenly feeling that something terrific was about to happen to me, I echoed blankly, "It wasn't?"

"She *couldn't* be Maxine Reece because right now Maxine is traveling through France with her parents."

"She's *what*? With her parents? *Both* of them? *Including her old man*?"

Glenda nodded, half suspecting I was off my trolley. "I got a postcard from them only this morning, from Nice."

I felt as if I were hanging onto a run-away merry-go-round.

"Then who *was* the girl I was with last night?"

"Paul's wife."

I just stared, stunned. "Say that again?"

Speaking distinctly, Glenda said, "The woman who tried to introduce you to me last night is Sibyl Millard, Paul Millard's wife."

Now I felt as if I had been slugged with

a king-size ball bat. I remembered Paul Millard's wife speaking of herself as another person and acting like another too—standing beside me and witnessing all that smooching going on between him and Glenda and never peeping. Was any woman ever built that way? It seemed impossible—except in the instance of a woman watching her husband enacting a love scene in a play. So—*was that it?*

I sat still, staring at Glenda, while all the facts I knew about the case, or thought I knew about it, began flip-flopping about in my mind. Then the sun began to rise on them, a dazzling sun heralding a new day in a changed world, and out of the dawn a thought came blowing like a chill wind.

*This is a frame. This whole thing is one enormous, expertly staged frame.*

**T**HEN I began to see the false notes that had been there all along—false notes composed into a seductive song of deception. The big Reece house, all closed, not because of air conditioning, but because the family had gone abroad. No servants in sight. Sibyl Millard and the white-haired man—whoever the hell he was—were both probably friends of the real Reeces and had surreptitiously used the pool as a setting for their phony act. That was why the man had been jittery, anxious to get gone. They must have brought their own props, even the ice cubes. The initials MPR on "Maxine's" car? Window-dressing especially for this occasion, a convincing detail showing very sharp minds at work.

Here came an incidental sour note in the score of this evil symphony: Dale Troy would never receive a check for \$3,000, or for any other amount, from the counterfeit "Mr. Reece."

"Maxine" or Sibyl, in "realizing" where Glenda was heading in her little car, had led me to a carefully set stage. I must have sensed something unreal about it at the time because I'd kept thinking of it in terms of the theater and make-believe. Only Glenda's affection for Paul was real, and those diabolically clever so-and-sos had used it to bait her into all this grief.

Chick Ellis had actually been acting a part for the special benefit of an audience of two—Glenda and me. The pic he had flashed was damaging enough—in fact, it was a vital objective in this cunning plan.

But the fake fight that had followed (the few marks it had left on Millard proved the fakery) had no doubt been rehearsed, including Millard's frantic cries to Glenda to get the gun and shoot.

I'd seen her bang at Ellis three times at close range. The oldest gag in the book—blank cartridges. That was why Glenda had consistently missed the bull's-eye after Millard had reloaded several times—no bullets coming out. The blood flowing from Ellis's mouth? Probably ketchup—the movies and TV drip with the stuff.

Glenda had been thoroughly fooled, no doubt of that, and me too. She had fled the place believing she had killed the guy—and she still did believe it.

The final act of this elaborate dramatic forgery—the "disposal" of Ellis' "body"—had been directed at me alone. Ellis had probably shaken off the tire chains in the water and then quietly swum out. Wherever he was holed in now, dry and cozy somewhere, he would lay low while waiting for an opportunity to slip away to far parts, never to come back—and for the rest of my life I would believe him to be a skeleton lodged in the river bed.

That item was the crucial deception, of course, and I was the complete fall guy, the convinced witness of a murder that had occurred right in front of my eyes, yet hadn't happened at all. Except for my rash impulse to confront Miss Glenda Rossiter, she and I would have gone right on building ourselves up into a pair of tools for prying Special Prosecutor Rossiter out of office.

Bro-ther!

My tired old braincells were really clicking over in high now.

Of course they had wanted me to get panicky about the "murder," to sound off about it. A level-headed dick would almost certainly drop the case into the law's lap in order to keep clear. But I'm not the level-headed variety—I couldn't be, working for Dale Troy—and for her sake I had clammed up. They hadn't expected that. So then they'd begun putting the pressure on in tricky ways—the tip to Rossiter, the gorilla's blackmail picture and "threat" against Rossiter through "Reece." The pressure would stay on, would be pushed up the scale until inevitably the valves would pop.

That was the plan.

Until I figured the best pitch on this, I would be well advised to keep the kisser stitched up.

"Jay, kid, you've pulled off a smart piece of figuring here," I said aloud. "It's so smart it's likely to be quite fatal."

To a puzzled Glenda I went on, "Sugar-cake, you have just changed the whole course of my life, and yours too. I will never, never be the same again. If we're lucky, Christmas will come for you soon, and you will become a happier and wiser woman."

Looking a little hopeful also, Glenda said, "If this means you suddenly feel I've told the truth, I wish to thank you very much."

"I believe every word you say, baby, every little word. Now tell me one more thing, if you can. There is a certain man, very possibly a friend of the Millards, who has snow-white hair, a curly crop of it, parted in the middle—plus a sun-tanned face, pale blue eyes, weight—"

"That's Horace Cashley," Glenda said, not waiting for more details. "He taught me math at Central High, but he's retired now."

So. He wasn't really *very* retired. Our Mr. Cashley, besides turning the old home-stand into a gambling club, was probably functioning as the ring's odds-setter.

"Now Glenda, please sit still for a moment," I urged her, sliding out of the booth. "I couldn't bear to lose you now. Don't even blink an eyelash until I get back."

**I** WENT only as far as the nearest telephone booth, and from there I could watch her.

I looked in the directory and found Horace Cashley listed at a new address in a fairly lush residential district. Evidently he had moved there after selling his house to the casino kings. His new phone number was the same one he had given me as "Reece."

This definitely tied Cashley in with Millard and both in with the big horse-parlor boys. Evidence of this might possibly be found at either house. Since Millard's had been chosen for the staging of the Big Frame, his seemed the richer possibility.

I called the Troy Detective Agency.

"Dale, something hot has come up. Can't go into it now. You've got to trust me on this one, sugar—do just as I say and do

it fast. Shutter the agency, then drive straight out to the village green in Ruysdale Valley. I'll pick you up there."

I disconnected before she could give me any back talk and returned to the little red-headed angel-face.

"Glenda, baby, you may have started out like cyanide, but now you're my mascot. You're bringing me a really rare streak of luck. Stick with me, honey-child."

Glenda sat beside me in my car, watching me curiously and keeping quiet, while I tried to figure the best angle.

The crooks' carefully built-up plan could, of course, be brought crashing down simply by finding Chick Ellis—except that "simply" wasn't quite the word for it. Finding him quickly seemed too much even to hope for. It couldn't be done without a long, hard stretch of searching. There must be an easier and faster means of knocking the whole thing gally west. Perhaps the best way was to show Millard, in the presence of witnesses, that I was wise to all this elaborately staged monkey business, which would automatically kill their chances of putting it across.

I might even sock them between the eyes by calling in Special Prosecutor Rossiter himself to hear me spill it. That would, in fact, be a really masterly move—it would cook Millard's goose to a crisp and at the same time give Rossiter a honey of an opening to crack straight through to the book-makers' top brass.

First, though, I'd better do a little preliminary checking in order to choose the best moment to hit 'em with it.

Dale was waiting for me in front of the Ruysdale Valley postoffice. I hustled Glenda over to her car and said, with all the politeness she usually didn't get, "Miss Troy, may I present Miss Glenda Rossiter?" This startled her, and made her even more annoyed with me than usual, because contacting our "subject" was in direct violation of our "client's" instructions. As I squeezed Glenda into the seat between Dale and me, she said worriedly, "I hope you understand, Mr. Danvers, you're not to make any important moves without specific instructions from me."

"You'd be surprised at what I understand, madam. I'll tell you all about it the very first chance I find. Right now we have work to do. Let's roll."



As to Dale, I could now reverse my policy—I could lay it right on the line, show her how she'd been helplessly foxed and point out that she was being saved from this calamity in the very nick, thanks only to a brilliant piece of work on my part. This should convince her how foolish it was for her to waste herself running a musty old detective agency, and I could then persuade her to let me take it over while she stayed home and I learned to cook.

Dale, driving under my instructions, took the same course "Maxine" had taken. Glenda was growing jumpy and looked adorable that way. I left the car under the same tree, sternal the two girls down the same lane and then across to the same bush-banked spot where I had had my wig shocked off me last night.

"We'll just watch this place for a little while," I suggested. "Interesting things happen here at times."

Hot sunlight shone into the hedge-bordered yard behind Millard's house. Two expensive cars sat in the port, one of them the classy convertible with the fake monogram.

Presently a man and a woman appeared—Paul Millard and his wife, Sibyl, alias Maxine Reece—unaware that they were under observation. They went hand in hand to Paul's car, patted there to beam at each other, then went into a tight clunch. Glenda had reported this couple separated, but at the moment they weren't separated very far.

The sight shocked a gasp from Glenda. Grasping the chance to bring her to her senses, I muttered to her, "Sucker-r." Furiously bitter tears began sparkling in her eyes. I grasped her hand to hold her quiet. So far as she knew at this point, she had killed a man in defense of a sneaking, two-timing louse. Very probably she felt now that she had shot the wrong guy.

By the time Paul and Sibyl were finally ready to proceed with other matters, my grip on Glenda's arm was really stiff. Otherwise she might have gone flying down there and scratched all four of their eyes out.

The strain went down a little as Paul and Sibyl rolled off in his station wagon, but Glenda was going to go right on seething with womanly furies for some time to come.

Had the Millards' departure left the

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house empty? There was no sign at the moment of anyone else in the place. This could be my chance to pick up any evidence that might be lying about. It would do no harm to have a little material evidence to garnish the sizzling platter of facts which I hoped to serve up to Winslow Rossiter.

DALE, impatient and puzzled, said, "Could you please explain just *what* we're doing here, Mr. Danvers—or is that expecting too much?" Her mouth was a warning that as soon as she found the chance she would bawl the bejeepers out of me.

"This is a time for bold, decisive action, not idle talk," I answered. "Please stay right here and watch the house while I take Glenda inside. She knows the place and may be helpful."

I led Glenda down the hillside while Dale watched from behind the lilacs, full of disapproval. Glenda balked at the terrace door, in full ferment. A gentle push eased her in, and I followed.

The door connecting with the corner room, where Millard had spilled things on Glenda last night, was closed. The rumpus room was full of a golden glow, the shantung silk curtains having been drawn against the heat of the day. Otherwise it was in practically the same condition I had seen it in at the final curtain of last night's little playlet.

On the floor was a clean spot where Paul Millard had mopped up Ellis's "blood." The "murder" weapon lay nearby on a table beside several boxes of cartridges. I took it up and saw that it had been cleaned and reloaded with .22s, the kind that don't kid. Putting it back, I took Glenda's trembling hand, led her to the opening of the hallway into the front of the house and said, "Keep your pretty eyes peeled, chicken. That room there in the corner. Is it Paul's study?"

She nodded. So. No doubt conferences had been held in there between ranking members of the ring. Some overly confident crooks grow even so careless as to leave incriminating documents within reach. At any rate, Millard's study was certainly the best start for a search. I moved to the closed door, reaching for the knob.

Before I could touch it the door opened suddenly, and a man stepped out.

The man was Chick Ellis.

Ellis stopped short, fully as stunned as I was, utter incredulity frozen on his face. At sight of him Glenda let out a cry. As for me—his unexpected appearance here couldn't have jarred me harder if he had stepped out wearing nothing but his bones—although I should have known that this was the logical spot for him to hide out.

We didn't stand around staring at each other for very long, however.

Ellis straight-armed me as he went past, bouncing me against the wall. He headed for Glenda and the hallway as a fast way out, evidently realizing his only hope was to lam from here. But Glenda grabbed his arm and held on. She held on for fully three seconds before he shook her off, but that was time enough for me to try a go at him.

I reached Ellis, caught his shoulder, pulled him around, uncorked a terrifically powerful right—and missed by a whisker. I lurched off balance like a stumble-bum, giving Ellis all the opening he needed to really go to work on me.

With an automatic dragged off his hip he began clubbing me—fast, nose-crushing, scalp-hacking blows. He was cutting me down unmercifully, and I knew that as soon as I hit the floor, he would get gone fast.

I heard myself squawking out a desperate, nightmarish echo of the very same cry I had heard Millard utter last night:

"Stop him, Glenda! Stop him, *stop him!*"

I was squirming on the floor, half blacked out, when something in the room went *bang-bang-bang!*

I tried to push myself up, struck with horror and staring through a whirling haze of pain.

First I saw Ellis turning as if on a pivot, curiously looking down at the blood flowing out of his chest—*real* blood this time, pouring out of three real bullet holes. He turned one complete revolution, then went down heavily, all at once, dead before he hit the floor.

Then the full irony of the nightmare—Glenda standing there over him with that same target pistol in her little fist.

Lying there in a delirium of confusion, I tried crazily not to believe it—tried to deny the undeniable truth that this time she had actually done it—killed Ellis, the one man we needed to bring in alive in order to prove her innocent of his murder.

Now we were right back where we'd

started from, only worse—far worse, because this time there was no fakery about it. *This* little homicide by the Special Prosecutor's daughter was the real thing.

### REPORT NUMBER FIVE

#### *Night, Under the Bridge*

**T**HAT last report, the fourth, was written in fits and starts, in my apartment, during the long, long night following the second killing of Chick Ellis.

I wrote it behind blacked-out windows—in longhand so as to avoid even the noise of a noiseless typewriter—while listening every minute for a step in the hallway and a hand on the knob of my locked door. That would be Death calling.

They know—and I know it, too—that they'll have to get me soon. Now that Ellis is really dead, they can, with the help of the scandal-raising picture he'd taken, go right ahead with their original plan to use it to blow up Special Prosecutor Rossiter—*except for me.*

Dale, if put on the stand in a homicide trial, would make a honey of a witness—but for the prosecution, because after hearing the deadly shots she saw Glenda running from the murder room with a gun in her hand. As for Glenda herself, her lawyer wouldn't dare let the D.A. have a chance to grill a kid so loaded with confusion and emotional turmoil—she would talk herself right into a homicide rap. No; this is entirely my baby.

Along toward dawn my beat-up nerves were crawling. I couldn't stay there any longer in my one room apartment, waiting for it like a cornered rabbit.

When the new day was at its blackest, I stuffed a few personal items, including a bottle of nerve-bracer, into my briefcase along with the reports which I had not yet put into Mame Daly's hands. Lugging my portable typewriter also, I sneaked down the back stairs and out into a bush-walled alleyway. At that point I expected to get it—and at a half dozen more points along the way. I cut across back yards to the tree-shadowed spot four blocks away where I'd left my car. As far as I could see, I was getting away with this, and my luck is still holding here at the crummy Hotel Royale, down under the lower bridge.

I'm not kidding myself that this is a safe hideout. Actually there is no place in town which that organization of slick operators can't reach readily enough. They must know exactly where I am right now, and when they want me they'll get me.

Out of this endless night following the second death of Chick Ellis has come a solid hunch, the probable reason why they are granting me a little borrowed time. I think it's because, with me, they don't want it to look like murder. Another out-and-out kill would be too raw, too obviously a silencing. It would throw doubts on the Big Frame. Much better to make me look like the victim of an accident. So, if this is true, I'll be among the living only as long as it may take them to arrange to kill me "accidentally."

Meanwhile I can't do better than to go on with this report—to try to get the last of it on paper, as long as my luck keeps running.

Let's take it back now to that nightmare moment in Paul Millard's game room . . .

Chick Ellis, lying dead there on the floor, was no fraud this time. His corpse was all too solid.

Glenda stood over him, paralyzed with horror, the weapon still clenched in her fist, and for a moment the whole house was silent. She'd been caught up in such an unthinking panic that almost automatically she had repeated her previous response.

I heard myself spluttering, "Out! Out fast! Out, out!"

I pushed Glenda out the rear door and across the terrace before she stopped short. I gave her the arm again, but she stood there rooted, staring down at her hand which still held the gun.

She wailed, "H-how did this g-gun get in my hand? D-did I really shoot him? I do-don't remember—"

I snatched the gun away from her. "Pete's sake, keep moving!"

I forced her on farther, until we reached Dale. Plenty scared, Dale had come hustling partway down the hillside.

"Get her up to your car, Dale. Don't wait for me—just take her home as fast as you can make it."

I crowded them into motion again, together.

"Dale, don't go near the office. Keep yourself under wraps at the Rossiter place. Glenda, you're going out of circulation in-

definitely. Don't tell your Daddy anything, not anything at all, not yet. You'll hear from me, I hope. Keep moving!"

I watched them hustling prettily until they passed from sight on the lane. A moment later the motor of Dale's car surged and gravel crackled as it rolled away.

I was now left cozily alone with Ellis' corpse and a little time to try to pitch a way out. This seemed utterly impossible, but I had to try anyhow.

I scowled down at that damned little gun and, not half knowing what I was doing, split it open. The ejector automatically dropped the cylinder's full load into my palm. I stared at the cartridges as stupefied as an axed steer.

All six of them were intact. Not one had been fired.

It couldn't possibly have been the gun in Glenda's hand that had made that earth-shaking bang-bang-bang.

This was at least a miracle. I couldn't believe it even with the evidence right there under my eyes. But believe it or not, it was true. *Glenda really hadn't killed Ellis this second time either.*

**I** REALIZED then that I had just now made another big mistake. I should have checked the gun sooner. Then I would have both Dale and Glenda as witnesses to its condition. As it was, nobody knew this except me.

Danvers, the detective genius, the infallible.

I reloaded the cartridges into the cylinder, tucked the gun under my belt and stood looking at Millard's house. After a minute or so beating my dizzy brain I went back into the next room where Chick Ellis lay sprawled on the floor on a large spot of genuine blood.

I wasn't entirely sure what I was up to here, but I had no time to waste doing it. I wanted a weapon in my hands. *Not* the target pistol—I didn't dare fire it now. After a few fumbling seconds my eye lighted on a possibility—a small fire extinguisher of the carbon tet type. That might do, if my luck hadn't run out.

I eased the extinguisher from its wall clip, then moved to the telephone. Without lifting the receiver, I spun off the zero. While the dial was still whirring I shifted rapidly to a spot against the wall and three

feet inward from the door of the corner room. Then I began a quiet monologue, directed at empty space, like this:

"Operator? This is an emergency. Please connect me with the office of Special Prosecutor Rossiter. I don't know the number, but please don't get technical. Connect me as fast as possible."

While saying this—not into the telephone, of course, but just into the atmosphere—I watched the door. Somebody was behind it. There had to be. I had realized a little earlier that the study was used for criminal confabs, but until now I hadn't suspected I'd almost walked in on one, between Ellis and someone else.

That room had no other door. The man who had been in there at the moment of Ellis' sudden death was in there still. He was the man who had really killed Ellis. He had simply fired through the crack of the door. The reason: The killer's fast realization that the Big Frame, on the verge of exposure, would collapse without a genuine corpse in the shape of Chick Ellis to hold it up.

I watched the door. The handle of the extinguisher disengaged now, I aimed it horizontally at head level and was all set to pump.

"Special Prosecutor's office? I have a very important message for the Special Prosecutor personally. Tell him it's Jay Danvers calling, about Chick Ellis. And please snap it up."

Standing still and tight, I kept aiming the extinguisher laterally past that closed door.

"Mr. Rossiter? Jay Danvers calling. You asked me for news about Chick Ellis. I have some for you now. He's dead, sir—murdered. You'll find his body—just a minute, sir! Listen to this, please. Don't let the coroner's office do the autopsy on him. Get a surgeon you can trust. Then call in an honest ballistics expert. That way, but not otherwise, you'll get yourself a solid case. What, sir? Where? You'll find Ellis' body—"

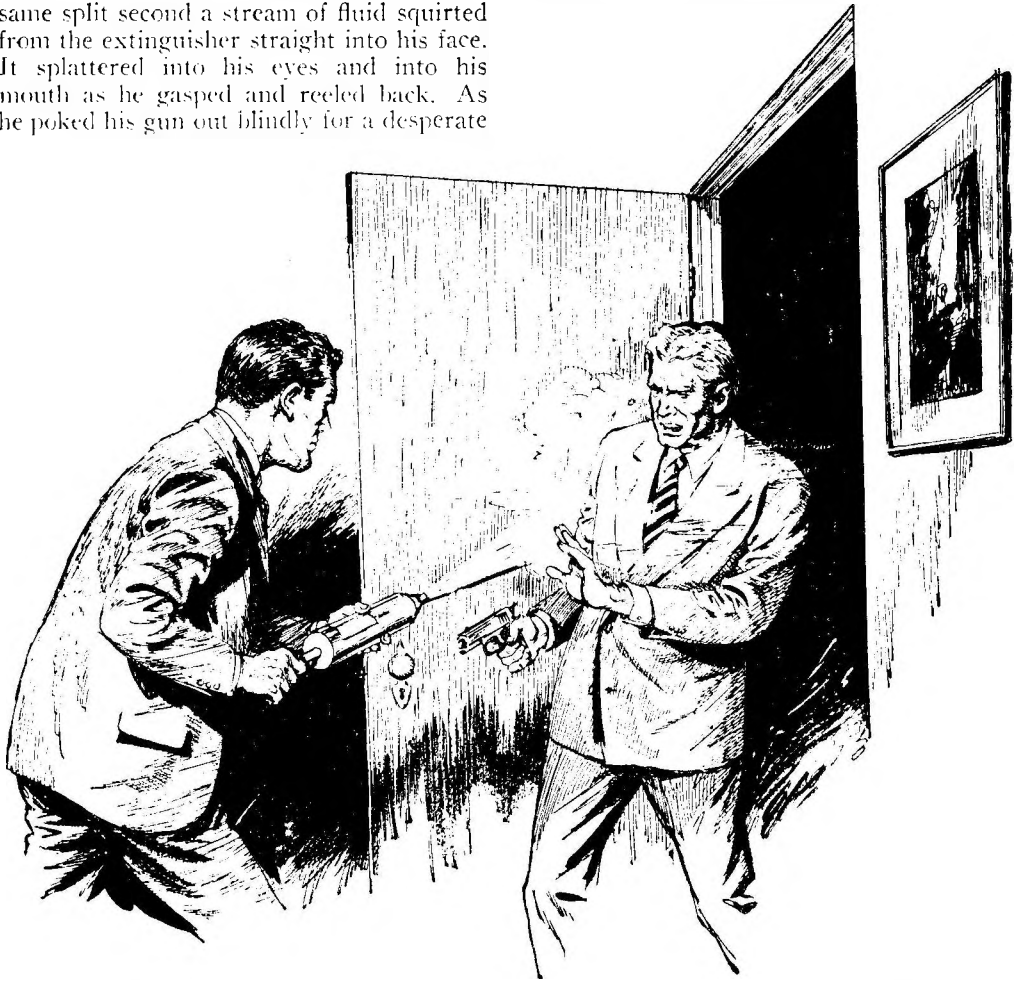
That did it.

The door snapped open.

The man who came out with an automatic in his fist and murder in his eyes was white-headed Horace Cashley, alias "Martin Prescott Reece."

For one split second he paused, confused at not finding me at the telephone. In that

same split second a stream of fluid squirted from the extinguisher straight into his face. It splattered into his eyes and into his mouth as he gasped and reeled back. As he poked his gun out blindly for a desperate



blast in my direction, I swung the extinguisher like a giant blackjack against his extended arm. The gun struck the floor and bounced. Cashley, panicked with unbearable pain, whirled around and ran.

He was at the terrace door when I tackled him from behind. He thrashed both fists upward and backward in a lunatic overhead blow that connected with crashing force. He dragged himself loose as I went down, and I was still down when he reeled out of there in the convertible bearing the forged monogram.

That wasn't too bad. *Let him go. He won't get far—he'll get picked up later.*

The really big item was the automatic lying there on the floor. It was the real weapon of murder. I hoped Cashley had left a set of fine, clear prints on it. It could

be matched up with the bullets in Ellis' body. Together with the unfired gun I had taken from Glenda, it added up to final proof of her innocence.

Question: What to do about Ellis?

The answer seemed clear enough: bypass the graft-ridden police, sidestep the equally rotten D.A.'s office and put it directly in the hands of the Special Prosecutor.

**I** WENT to the phone again and this time actually called Rossiter's office. After going through several hold-the-wires and just-a-mintues, I was rewarded by the stuffy-sounding voice of a woman who asserted herself to be the Special Prosecutor's confidential secretary.

"Really, Mr. Danvers," she said, after a bit of insistence on my part, "nobody is

brushing you off. It's quite true that the Special Prosecutor is not in his office. The fact is, he's out of the city."

"Then where can I get hold of him?" By now I had begun to run a fever. "Positively, this can't wait."

"I am afraid there is no way you can reach him," the secretarial voice said coolly. "At this moment Mr. Rossiter is aboard his motorboat somewhere out on Lake Michigan."

He had picked a honey of a time for it. I groaned over this news. "There must be some way of getting word to him!"

"What would you suggest, please? The boat has no marine telephone. The only possible way of reaching him would be to send out another boat to search, and even then it might easily miss him. If you insist on seeing him personally you really have no choice but to wait until he returns tomorrow afternoon."

Tomorrow afternoon? Just dandy. It was like asking me to hold my breath under water that long.

"Meanwhile, Mr. Danvers, I see no reason why you shouldn't place your problem in the hands of one of Mr. Rossiter's assistant prosecutors."

Hah! So? Paul Millard, perhaps? How could I know there weren't more like Millard on Rossiter's staff? Hell, I didn't dare trust any of them, not even the Special Prosecutor's confidential secretary. The only man in the whole setup whose honesty could be counted on completely was Rossiter himself.

I hung up without even answering that one and stood there wondering numbly how I could hold the fort single-handed until Rossiter could officially take over.

One thing was sure—Killer Cashley, his side-kicks and his top brass were in a huddle right now over the best way to bounce this homicide off the Special Prosecutor's head. Their orders could bring a choice selection of crooked cops into the picture at any time. With the aid of a pressured D.A. and an obliging coroner, as well as other graft-hungry officials, they could put some fancy twists in it—conceal the ballistics evidence and prove circumstantially that Glenda had killed Ellis in a panic over his blackmailing, but keep the whole thing hush-hush and leave the case in the unsolved file in return for Winslow Rossiter's resignation.

That would do it.

What's more, it could be in the works already—the cops might be on their way right now.

This urgency was my reason for doing what I did next, and if anybody wants to put me into the pokey for it, they'll probably have to dig me first.

I picked up Cashley's automatic, using a pencil inserted in its barrel, and stowed it inside an expensive cigar box belonging to Paul Millard, along with the unfired .22 revolver. Walking fast, I carried this evidence the short distance to the village green, then drove back to the Millard house. No cops had yet arrived, for which I offered up fervent thanks. Next, I dragged the dead Ellis out and across the terrace, in much the same way Millard had dragged the live one last night, and stuffed him into the trunk of my car.

At this moment, almost twelve hours later, my car is stowed away inside a garage around the corner and Ellis' corpse is still reposing in the trunk.

So far the Big Frame has not been sprung because of the lack of that corpse. They really need it. Even more than that they need the lack of me.

They must have started dragging the town for me immediately after the cops arrived at Millard's and found no murder there to hook into.

On my first stop I called the Rossiter home from a pay phone and spoke soothing words to Dale. I couldn't reassure her completely because she knew too little about the build-up, thanks to the way I'd held out on her, and it was too complicated a story to spill over the phone now.

"Just tell Glenda she really hasn't killed anybody, because she hasn't. Dale, stop making those sputtering noises and tell Glenda she didn't really murder the guy, and what's more I'm going to prove it—provided I live long enough."

Why didn't I take my dead man and my evidence straight to the Special Prosecutor's home and hole in there? Because that would be practically the first move the crooks would expect me to make. No doubt they were already waiting to welcome me there with a committee of thugs and fistfuls of hand grenades.

The early part of those past twelve hours I spent parked in a cemetery out beyond the

city limits—a seemly place, considering the condition of my passenger. It was early morning when I sneaked back into town with my license plates smeared with mud. Leaving the car parked four blocks away, I managed to slip into my apartment and get the previous report on paper. Then another move, here to the grimy Hotel Royale, which brings me up to now.

What next?

More interminable waiting. The problem of getting my case into the Special Prosecutor's hands personally. And the Big Question of whether I'll make it.

When I finish this final report, I will write a covering letter to Special Prosecutor Rossiter. Then I'll chance a round-about skirmish over to the Troc and slip it under the window of the ticket booth with a reminder scribbled on the envelope.

Assuming optimistically that I will have survived that long, I will not return to the Royale because I prefer not to be a sitting duck. By that time the hunt for me will be really hot. My best bet, I think, will be to find some isolated cranny on a remote back road and stay holed in until Special

Prosecutor Rossiter returns to his office.

Then, finally, I'll make the crucial try to reach Rossiter with my trunkload of dynamite, knowing that in case I don't quite make it Mame Daly will.

EPILOGUE

Item From the Evening Star:

*Freak Accident Fatal to Detective, Reveals Slain Man's Hidden Body.*

*A freak auto accident on Upper State Bridge cost the life of Jay Danvers, 32, of 107 W. 40th street, shortly before 3 P.M. today. In the wreckage, police discovered a man's body which Danvers had apparently hidden in the trunk of his car. Mr. Danvers was employed by the Troy Detective Agency.*

*Witnesses do not agree to the cause of the accident. Several drivers stated that while crossing the span Danvers appeared to lose control of his car. It accelerated rapidly, the onlookers said, and was soon traveling at a rate far above the legal speed limit for the bridge.*

*Danvers was seen to jump from the car on the right hand side, shortly before it veered and crashed into the guard rail. He was thrown over the rail and fell to the river*



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thirty feet below. Witnesses who rushed to the rail seconds afterward say he did not reappear.

*Police are attempting to recover Danvers' body.*

*The strangest feature of the freak accident was the body found in the car's trunk, identified as that of Charles Ellis, 47, of 116 S. Winters Avenue. Ellis was at one time employed by this newspaper as a photographer. He had apparently been shot to death.*

*At a late hour this afternoon the police had issued no further information about Ellis' death, except to announce the launching of a sweeping investigation which, one official said, "may reach into high places."*

### CONFIDENTIAL

To: Special Prosecutor Winslow  
 .  
 Rossiter.  
 From: The late Jay Danvers.  
 Re: Developments following my  
 sudden demise.

**D**EAR Sir: I am herewith complying with your request to complete my record of the Ellis murder case.

If I may be permitted to boast a little, Mr. Special Prosecutor, I am proud to have a deciding hand in this case which promises to blow a powerful gambling organization off our local map and bring about a much-needed clean-up. I also appreciate your attitude that it is results that count the most, even if my way of arriving at them was a little illegal at times.

Although we are now assured of a happy outcome, my position, while waiting interminably for you to return to your office, was far less pleasant.

It dawned on me then, in fact, that actually there was no way I could reach you without running into a deadly trap on the way.

In my last report I explained why I did not attempt to go directly to your home. I sensed I would never even get inside your gate in one piece. It wasn't until later that I realized the far greater danger of any attempt on my part to reach you at your office.

In the first place, I didn't dare phone you and ask you to meet me and my dead freight somewhere. Millard, at your elbow, or some other stooge of the slot machine sultans, would instantly flash out a tip and a gunman would get to me first.

Secondly, the approaches to our new

Criminal Court Building are wide open. It is surrounded by grassy plots and parking spaces—enough room for a regiment of trigger-happy hoods. On one side it is passed by Broad Boulevard, a six-lane thoroughfare made to order for a fast getaway. The only other direct approach is across Upper State Bridge, and this way, with its fan-shaped approaches and low speed limits on the span, looked like absolutely certain suicide.

That was when I remembered, out of my peculiar experience as a private operator, that the best way to trip up a slicko is to turn his own tricks back on him.

That was why I decided on the deadliest approach of all, the Upper State Bridge.

So I set out on the last mile I had selected for myself, and no sooner had I rolled up the ramp than a big black car swung in directly behind me. It was the same big black car I had once seen pull around the driveway of the Reece home. The big man at its wheel was the same gorilla I had seen there. Beside him in the front seat sat the white-maned Cashley, the ex-math teacher turned odds-setter and killer. I didn't need to see the gun in his fist to know he had one cocked and ready.

There, directly ahead of me and across the long span, sat the fine new building housing your office, Mr. Special Prosecutor. And there, directly behind me was certain death on wheels.

The news accounts of what happened next are accurate enough. I suddenly speeded up, just as they said. I deliberately aimed the car into a crack-up, jumped out a few seconds before it crashed and intentionally threw myself over the guardrail. I had something in one of my hands—my briefcase, containing the two evidence guns.

The reason my body wasn't found is that I got myself under water to the opposite side of the bridge, to which nobody was paying any attention, then stayed low in the water against the stanchion. The police had to keep the traffic overhead moving, which meant nobody could hang around to watch, and by the time the grappler arrived I was under a wharf, on the far bank, where I watched operations in reasonable comfort until darkness gave me an opportunity to come up unseen.

By that time, of course, Mame had al-

*(Please continue on page 108)*



# MURDERERS THREE



By  
**BRYCE  
WALTON**

I heard the door open fast  
behind me.

I SAT behind the white-oak desk while the three of them came in and sat down. One of them wanted to see me dead, so three of them seemed like strangers to me. Lara was just another woman. She might be my wife again, and she might not. She might or might not have killed my friend Martin. I didn't know whether it was she or one of the other two. Burkeson

or McWilliams, who had tried to kill me the night before.

McWilliams, a little fat and sweating in his business suit, said nervously, "I ought to be down there in the house, Al. It's busy. This going to take long?"

I said it wouldn't take long. "What's the urgency?" Burkeson said. He was as usual neat and brown in expensive sport

*Three people could be wanting me dead—  
my honest partner, my loyal friend,  
and my lovely, loving wife.*

togs, his thin face sympathetic. "I got your telegram and drove all the way from the Palms like this place had caught fire!"

I got up. My joints felt stiff, and my nerves were scratchy. Lara just sat there with slim legs crossed, her black hair shining, her face as impassive as it was beautiful. Three of my closest friends, so when I mixed their drinks, I didn't have to ask them what they wanted. Lara, martini. Burkeson, scotch and plain water. McWilliams, brandy.

Lara didn't look at me. During the trial for killing Martin, and the two weeks since she'd gotten out of it, I hadn't seen her much, exchanged practically nothing but a few clipped words.

They'd noticed the hunk of gauze stuck to my head above the left ear. I explained "Someone came that close to putting a high-powered rifle bullet in my head last night. By moonlight. A pretty good shot at that."

Lara's lips twisted a little. Burkeson and McWilliams were very much concerned. They seemed to be. But how could I tell? I couldn't trust any of them. But I could give them the money test, and that way I could find out for sure.

McWilliams said. "Who the hell would try that, Al?" And Burkeson said. "Whoever tried it, won't try it again."

Then Burkeson leaned forward. "Maybe it was just a wild shot, Al."

"No." I was watching their faces. I didn't know why. I'd been watching their faces a long time without seeing anything that would say one of them would try to kill me. "I went out there to shoot jacks, out by Eagle's Head. Some people knew I went there, knew I was going there. They were waiting with high-powered rifles. I fell down like they'd got me, and they didn't try it again, so I guess they believed it. They're not in Vegas anymore, I know that. I'm sure they've gone back to L.A."

"You haven't told Sheriff Higgins?" McWilliams said. I said I hadn't. Burkeson said he could put some of his boys on it if I didn't want to go to the cops. I said no.

"I know who it was," I lied. "And it's personal. Just between them and myself."

They said all the things you'd expect them to say. They couldn't let me risk my neck, they would help me. We were old friends. I explained why they couldn't help me. How it was a feud that had started

before I took this job for Burkeson in Vegas. How a couple of enemies of mine had told me to get out of L.A. and not come back if I wanted to live, so I'd taken this job for Burkeson in Vegas. Evidently, though, their feelings had gotten the better of them, and they'd come here to get me. I made it sound good, I hoped. I would have to settle it now if I ever wanted to sleep peacefully again.

I told them I was leaving for L.A. that night to settle it for good. They protested violently as good friends should. They wouldn't let me make a damn fool of myself.

"I've made out a will," I said. "I have a tape-recorder going now, taking all this down, so we don't need a witness. The will's all typed up, and Richman the lawyer has it now." Lara seemed nervous as she lit a cigarette. But then, I thought, she had gone through enough to make anyone a lot more nervous than she was.

"It's called a conditional will," I explained. "Lara and I've talked this thing over—about cutting you two guys in on my savings and real-estate, and she's agreeable to splitting it. We're all friends. Now—I intend to come back, but I might not. So I've made out this conditional will. It leaves half of what I've got to Lara. You two guys split the other half. A conditional will is—conditional on whether or not I do come back. In the will I say I'm leaving on a dangerous trip to L.A., and if I don't come back, you three get the profit. But if I do come back, then the will's all off. The will's also fixed so that if something happens to any of you, the others get his share."

The big ashtray jangled under Lara's cigarette. They argued some more, all but Lara. Odd how the hands shake, the smiles go off and on, and the words of good fellowship fly back and forth. All automatic, and how can you tell when it's sincere? They protested some more, and finally Burkeson and McWilliams left reluctantly, slowly.

Lara lingered a while in the doorway. The sounds of the roulette wheels, the croupier's droning voice, the clicking of dice tables and the hum of voices crazily getting rid of their money came up to us along the hall.

She had stayed in our apartment during and after the trial. But I'd moved into my combination suite and office above the Digger Club which I managed for Burkeson.

Now she said, "Thanks for the lawyer, darling." Her face was like a mask. Only her eyes had feeling in them, but I didn't know whether it was real or not. "All I had to do was repeat again that I didn't kill Martin, and your lawyers did the rest. Witnesses, everything, all for me."

"I'm sorry about the whole thing," I said lamely. She'd said she didn't do it. That was what anyone would say. If it were your wife or a close friend, why should you believe it any more than if a stranger said it? That was the question. I had to know the right answer.

What if I'd laughed and said as they do in the movies, "I know you couldn't have done it, darling. I know you couldn't have tried to kill me either. I love you, and that's how I know."

So what if I did that and we went off together down the hall now. I thought, and down longer halls, how could I ever really know? She shook her head slowly and closed the door.

**F**OR a while I drank scotch. I answered the phone twice. First it was McWilliams. "Let me go with you, Al. I didn't want to say anything in front of Burk and Lara, but you can't do a crazy stunt like this! Let me go with you."

"I'd feel pretty good, wouldn't I, dragging you guys in on something personal like this, maybe getting you killed. These guys are pretty hard."

"But Al—"

He was swearing at me when I hung up. Then Burkeson called. "Don't argue with me, Al. I'm going along."

"No," I said. "That would be silly."

"Listen, I can't let you do this, Al. I'm no business man. I haven't saved, and I'm

in debt. The Club's making plenty of profit, but the eastern stockholders plus my own lousy business sense keep me busted. I need you. But it isn't because you're the best damn club manager in the business and I'd be sunk without you. That isn't it!"

I knew it wasn't, she said. So we argued awhile, too, and then I hung up on him. I killed another hour. And then I got my .25 automatic from the desk, and got my topcoat and went down the back stairs to the parking lot. The lights of Vegas twinkled in the desert dark like the flickering lights of a big gaming machine. Three oranges and you're dead.

The big convertible was gassed and ready. The top raised up and slowly settled down around me. Like a cowl, Lara had said. She hated convertibles. Always afraid the wind would take the top off or that we'd be thrown out at high speed. The parking-lot attendant assured me no one had been around the car. I'd left him to watch it.

I left Fremont and hit the highway toward the California state line. If my plan worked right, someone would try to kill me somewhere along the way. It was funny, but the way I felt, the plan would still work out all right for me even if I was murdered—as long as I knew who did it, knew for sure.

As I drove, I tried to kill the suspense that was rising in me by trying to figure those three. Lara had friends in Vegas—guys like Joe Harvey and Ral Schiller. A lot of friends, and she never had seemed to worry much about whether they were real friends or not. Schiller and Harvey would do a job like this for a small percentage of the take. But she had gotten to be more friendly with me than with anyone. Friendly enough to say she loved me and to marry

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me. Love and hate, the razor's edge. Sure, I thought, that was it. Only one who loved you the most could hate you enough.

I had the convertible up to seventy-five. Each of them could have a logical motive. I'd made it tempting enough—a few hundred grand. Secondly, if I was murdered, I'd exonerated the three of them in advance by making that tape and saying it was a party in L.A. who was trying to get me and to whom I was going with a good chance of getting killed. One of those three couldn't fail to pass up such an opportunity.

Actually there were no old lethal friends in L.A. I'd never known that kind of guys until I came to Vegas to take the job for Burkeson. He had been an old high school pal and had kept pretty clean, except for some mix-up during the war—something political, for which he'd done some time. The big money offer had sounded too good for me. I'd done all right in the University of California, and later in the war, and had been doing good with a big chain outfit. Working for Burkeson, I'd played the cards close, kept my mouth shut. Falling in love with Lara, the marriage and the honeymoon in Mexico were about the only bright spotlights along the way. I was in the wrong racket. I'd made a mess of things.

I wondered who would manage the club for Burkeson if I disappeared. In Vegas you can't have any fingerprints on file and still own a casino, not officially. But Burkeson had trusted me. So the club had been in my name. I was the legal owner, but only took a salary, a good one though. It was all done on trust. He'd put up the initial investment, and he really owned it, but it was in my name.

Lara might kill me, I figured, just for the money. She seemed to like nice things. Since the fracas with Martin, which had turned her into a stranger to me, she would be scared I'd get a divorce, deprive her of money, so maybe she had decided to kill me. So far, I'd told her I'd changed no will, or decided to make no changes in property settlements. But she might not trust me. I'd heard rumors that maybe she and Burkeson had been strongly interested in each other. I didn't know whether to believe that or not, either. That could also be a motive. She might be a little crazy. She probably was—plotting a big theft with Martin that way, then flipping her lid and killing him.

I couldn't believe it of Martin, or her either. And still—I didn't know.

We'd all got the best lawyers to help get her off. But you help friends and wives in a situation like that even if you don't know whether they're guilty or not. It's known as loyalty.

And Burkeson? He depended on me as manager of the Digger Club. Why would he want me dead? Love for Lara? Or he might be afraid I'd suddenly take my position as legal owner seriously and start raking the profits and put him on a salary. He might have lost faith in my integrity.

And McWilliams? Hard to imagine a motive for Mac. No apparent reason for him wanting to kill me. He might have been raking off a little private percentage of the house money and wanted to get rid of me before I found out. Then it would be a cinch to pull the wool over Burkeson's eyes. Burkeson didn't know the difference between a ledger and a comic book. He hired his brains and spent their money. He paid well, though.

And for all three of them—money. That was the real test.

And then I saw the lights waving at me up ahead.

I slowed down, got the automatic out and put it on the seat beside me. The other car, a dark sedan, angled across the lonely stretch of highway. I stopped and sat there. I got the spotlight on the left side of the car ready. So far it had seemed a kind of game, not real. Now it was no game at all, and it was too damn real.

I felt my stomach flutter. There was a cold wash of fear over me. I thought suddenly how crazy it all was. I should have got out, run away, started over. What was I trying to prove? Why should I get myself murdered trying to show that someone loved me, that I had a friend in the world?

Some twenty-five-dollar a session headshrinker could tell me, I figured, but it was a little too late to think of that now. The two were close enough. I flicked on the spotlight. I got what I wanted—a look at their faces. A bullet went through the glass.

I got my head down, scooted across and out the other side and behind the car, then went on around the back of the car, stepped out and started shooting. That's how simple it was for me. I didn't feel any more fear or excitement or anything. I'd seen

their faces, and suddenly I didn't care.

LARA'S pals. Harvey and Schiller. So now I had the answer. I thought then that it would have been better if I'd never found out. Her contact with them had certainly seemed okay—until all this mess had started. Lara was friendly with everyone. Pals. Buddies. Nothing serious. Broad-minded people. Schiller played golf and she wanted to learn. "He's really a stupe. Al, but he plays golf and so I learn golf from him. And Harvey's a good swimmer, and I want to learn to swim. He's a stupe, too, but I'm learning how not to drown."

I'd spent late hours at the club. Lara understood that. I'd never thought about it much except that Higgins had said both of them had run around with some pretty rough strings.

I must have yelled Lara's name, because Harvey laughed in the dark and said, "You're right, Al, and now you're dead."

I was on one knee. I fired again. And then I felt that odd whamming in my arm, as though it were ripped from its socket. It flung me flat on my back. I lay there seeing the flame in my face. My heart felt like ice, and I could feel the blood the bullet brought.

Harvey's face was up there, twisting above the gun. No one else. Just Harvey now. I realized then that Harvey couldn't see my eyes open. He thought I'd passed out. He was giving me the *coup de grace*. Way off, I heard a car coming, felt the pavement tremble. I lifted the gun above my face when Harvey had to take a look the other way for the car. My arm was stiff, and when I fired, I remember how it drove my shoulder into the pavement like a hammer.

It got Harvey under the chin. His body snapped back, and he windmilled ten feet before he fell. There was another one there. Two of them stretched out.

I managed to get up. My arm felt as though it was going to fall off, and then as though it wasn't mine at all. I put my folded handkerchief over the wound as a compress and held it there and got back into my car and got it backed around and headed back toward Vegas as the other car came up.

It stopped, but I kept on going. I felt dizzy and weak as I drove, but stronger than the pain and weakness was the hot

angry flame in me as I thought of Lara.

I went directly to Lara's apartment down at the end of Fremont, parked and got out and stopped at a public phone booth there on the corner. It had occurred to me all at once to phone Burkeson and McWilliams and tell them I was okay. I'd need them too in a little while. I told Burkeson what had happened, about the will being a test, and that I'd found out who'd tried to kill me.

"You damn fool," he whispered and started to say something else but I hung up.

And then I hesitated outside Lara's apartment door on the second floor. I had a bad shot in the upper arm, but I didn't seem to feel it at all now. All I could feel was the way I felt about Lara and that was worse than any physical pain.

I guess I hadn't really believed any of it, not really, up to tonight. All that about her and Martin planning to run off together and take about a hundred grand from the house bank, and Martin deciding at the last minute to skip without her, with all the dough for himself. And then her shooting him. And the idea of her trying to kill me. I hadn't really believed it until tonight.

I didn't know what I was at her apartment for, except that I had to see her admit the truth. I had to tell her what I thought of her. Maybe I had an idea of doing something a lot worse than telling her off.

I still had a key. I went in and flicked on the floor lamp. Evidently she had heard me rattling at the door, because she was standing there in the opening into the bedroom looking at me.

I could see the efforts at control working and pulling behind the surface of her face.

The lamp cast a subdued green glow. Her skin was pale under the tan so that for a minute, in her negligee, she looked like one of those sparsely-dressed mannikins in a store window. My throat was dry and there was a painful tension in my chest, but not the kind a bullet brings. I felt sweat itching my neck.

I moved in a little farther and stood there. I called her some names I'd never called any one before. She swayed and put her hand on the back of an overstuffed chair for support.

"You're hurt," she whispered. "Al—"

"But your friends didn't get me," I was saying. "They won't be bothering any one anymore, except maybe the morticians."

"What?" she whispered.

"Harvey and Schiller. I got them instead. Not that that matters much now. What matters is that I found out what I wanted to know. I know now what you are."

"Do you know, Al?" she said "You sure?"

I told her about the conditional will being just a test. And all the time she stood there as though she didn't believe it.

I was wondering then if that laughter was hers, but it didn't sound like laughter anyway. It was pushing hard at hysteria. I could see the cords straining in her throat. "You poor Simon," she said then. "Love's a funny thing, and I guess no matter how much of it there is, it can be stretched too far. Anybody, everybody—they can take too much. Al, you'd better get out. Get out, Al—"

"What would you do, plug me?"

"Get out, Al. Please—right now—"

I heard the door open fast behind me, and Lara's eyes got bigger as she looked over my shoulder.

I started to turn.

"Just stand that way, Al," I heard Burkeson say. "She's right. You got to get out, Al. But Lara, too. You, too, Lara, you come along."

**H**E MOVED around into the room so I could see him better. I felt someone else's hands go over me, the automatic taken from my pocket. "You can turn around now," Burkeson said

Burkeson looked a lot different than I'd ever seen him. His face drawn and dark, his eyes seeming glazed a little and distant. He'd put up a wall, or maybe he'd had the wall up all the time, and now it wasn't there anymore. Behind him, with a gun on me, was a little man in a business suit, wearing glasses. Someone like a bank clerk I'd never seen before.

"You got those two boys of mine," Burkeson said. "I didn't think you were that tough, Al. I really didn't."

"Your boys," I said. I felt a lot sicker than than physical pain or the fear of dying can make any one. I didn't look at Lara who stood behind me now.

"Come on," Burkeson said. "You too, Lara. It's chilly out. Maybe you'd better put on a few more things."

I started to say something. Burkeson cut in. "I'll explain it to you, Al, on the way to L.A. That's where we're going. It'll be a waste of time telling you, because nothing will mean anything to you very much longer. But being that we're old friends, I feel maybe I should tell you. The principle of it."

The man Burkeson called Jimmie drove. Lara sat up there with him. I sat in the back with Burkeson, and he held the gun on me all the time. We went back down the highway toward L.A. This time the night seemed heavier, blacker, more silent, and we went a lot faster than before.

It was a one-way ride. Lara knew it, and so did I, and for a while no one said anything. Finally I said, "Lara." She didn't turn around. Burkeson grinned at me when I said it again.

I didn't care about Burkeson being there. I wanted to talk to Lara. "You didn't kill Martin either, did you, Lara? I know you didn't do that either."

Lara didn't say anything. Burkeson said. "No, she didn't. It was all fixed—to put the blame on her, and then get her out of it. I had to get rid of him, but I didn't really want Lara to take the rap."

Helpless rage choked in my throat. "Why?" I said.

"You brought in your C.P.A. pal Martin, and he found out some things about me. He talked to me before coming to you so he never got to you. He knew you and I were pals, so he thought he could talk to me first and maybe straighten it out. It was a mistake. I got him over to Lara's that night and got him killed, and later there were witnesses I had to show why Lara had shot him. It was all a frame, and you never questioned it, Al. I figured you wouldn't."

"And I told Lara the score—that I'd get her off if she'd play it dumb. And if she didn't, I explained how I would kill you. I convinced her. She played it dumb."

*Lara, I thought. Turn around. Look at me.* The car went faster, boring into the dark.

"But now," Burkeson grinned, "things aren't like they were, so Lara's got to go, too. That's what love does. Sometimes you have to go all the way." He laughed.

So Burkeson explained the rest of it. Martin had found out about Burkeson's income-tax evasion, and about some wires

tapping other rackets in L.A. He didn't want me to know. As I was the legal owner of the club, Burkeson had figured all along that his dirty business would get stuck on me. That's why he hadn't been too careful. Martin started pressure though. And Burkeson got to thinking about the Feds cracking down. So Burkeson finished Martin, then decided to get rid of me too. If I died before any investigation, still the club's legal owner, they'd just stick me with the crime and bury me and forget the rest.

But if they investigated and I was still around, I'd have known the score and could have given dangerous information that would have put Burkeson in a bad spot. Dead, of course, I couldn't defend myself. It would all be on my ledger, not Burkeson's.

I guess it was in the back of Burkeson's mind from the start—to get rid of me eventually while all the crime could be stuck to me.

My killing out there by Eagle's Head would have been fixed to look like an accident. Everybody knew how I went out to hunt jacks all the time. He believed the conditional will story of mine. It seemed like a golden opportunity for Burkeson. He could murder me, take me into L.A. and drop me. The evidence was on the tape, about my going into L.A. to settle it with some old enemies. My expecting to get killed. He needed the money. He was in debt. He could kill a couple of birds. He'd sent the boys out there, still making me think it was Lara, when those two boys had been Burkeson's all the time. Higgins, Burkeson said, would take care of the story about those two. He had a car out there and had cleaned the mess up already. There was nothing there when we went by.

The car rocked with a misleading gentleness, considering its speed through the dark.

"When you came back and called me tonight, Al, it seemed even better. No one knows you came back to Vegas except Lara and me and Jimmie. So the conditional will still works for me. Now we take care of Lara, too. Lara and you get killed in L.A. McWilliams and I get her half the money. Mac doesn't suspect anything. He'll be good to have around to make things look better, and he knows the business pretty good. And it'll probably look like Lara was one of those who had it in for you in

L.A., or maybe they'll think she contacted them to help get you. After all—she's already been on trial for one killing."

And he wouldn't be in it at all, I thought. I owned the club, legally. Burkeson would get the money, and all the dirty stuff would be pinned to my gravestone and Lara's.

"We're driving into L.A. in your car," Burkeson said, "so we can plant it right. We've got alibis, witnesses to show we've never left Vegas tonight. We take a private plane back tonight. Another boy of mine you don't know is driving Lara's car to L.A., and then he'll come back with us on the plane."

"You've got everything figured out," I said. And I thought how actually I had really fixed it. I'd fixed everything, fixed things for good.

"**W**E'VE got the spot all picked out," Burkeson said. "We've even got some evidence planted to throw some leads into a couple of guys in L.A. we don't like. You didn't mention any names, Al. That was thoughtful of you. Why not have some real guys there, I figured?"

"Why not?" I said. I wouldn't be around to care. The one person in the whole mess who shouldn't be in it was Lara. So I had to try something, anything at all, but something. Lara couldn't die. But what if she did? *Turn around, Lara, I kept thinking, and look at me, just once. . . .*

She didn't turn around.

The car was like a big black coffin taking us to hell, whooshing dark and powerful through a tunnel of its own light into a darkness no one could know. *If I wasn't afraid for Lara, I thought, I could do it. I could get us all.* Jimmie was a hell of a fast driver. The speedometer would be up around ninety, I figured, and I could feel the air whining past the black metal. One lunge up over the seat and onto Jimmie would do it. Burkeson wouldn't have time to do anything. One sharp swerve of the wheel—

But we'd all go probably, and I wanted Lara to live. If I waited, something might come up. Always a chance as long as we stayed alive. . . .

"We're going fast," I said.

"We sure are," Burkeson said. "Jimmie's a great little driver. What's she hitting now, Jimmie?"

"Ninety-three."

"One of the tires might not be so good, Jimmie," I said.

Jimmie didn't look back. The car picked up speed, if anything. "I can handle any wagon," Jimmie said. "Even without tires."

"Best man at the wheel I ever saw," Burkeson said.

"His mother must be proud of him," I said and added, "Lara doesn't like to go fast. Specially in convertibles."

I hoped she'd take the hint. Sweat ran down my face. Lara would catch on, know what I was getting at. She wanted to live.

Burkeson saw her sudden movement, but he didn't have time to do anything. She raised up, her hand jerked down, released the catch that latched the top. No need to pull out the T-bar that set the hydraulic device to working. When the catch was released, the top came up a little, just enough to catch that ninety-five mile an hour wind. The wind ripped the top back, twisted metal, ripped steel.

Burkeson screamed as I grabbed at his gun arm. I heard and felt the crunch of bone in his left arm as the twisting steel came back and ground through flesh and bone like sheering blades. The gun came away from him without any trouble. He hardly noticed it as I dragged myself up, felt the burst of air sweep around, sucking at me like a tornado.

I got the barrel against Jimmie's neck and all he could do was concentrate on the wheel. I yelled into his ear for him to slow her down, for him to turn her around and go back to Las Vegas.

Jimmie did that. I felt Lara's hair under my arm as I leaned forward. Burkeson was passed out, his arm torn half into by the twisting steel of the top.

It took a lot of unscrambling, but it was finally over, and I was out of it. The Feds were moving in anyway to investigate Burkeson, and the notes Martin had hidden and McWilliams' and Jimmie's and Schiller's testimony cleared things for me.

I settled up with my lawyers, arranged for a divorce under whatever terms Lara wanted but I didn't see her. I went to McWilliams, and he was getting ready to go to work for Drake over at the Last Chance.

He shook hands with me as though nothing had happened, and he wished me luck.

I was intending to apologize for thinking him capable of killing me, but I just mumbled something and got out.

That last look at McWilliams was the clincher. When a guy gets to the point where his friends, his wife, anybody, might want to kill him, it's the way he sees the world that's mostly wrong. When you get to seeing people that way, it's high time to start taking a long fresh look at yourself. So that was what I was going to do.

I went back to the apartment, and Lara wasn't there, so I packed a few of my things and went back out. I started along the sidewalk toward my car, and the taxi came up and Lara got out.

She was standing there near me under the street light, her hair moist and glistening, her eyes bright. I didn't want to be there, I didn't want to see her. I wanted to get out and leave her own world to her. She said, "Where you going in such a rush, Al?"

I told her how I'd fixed it with the lawyers so she could go ahead and arrange it any way she wanted.

She stood very close to me, and her eyes seemed darker than I had ever seen them.

"So you made some mistakes, Al," she whispered. "Don't make another one and leave your old pal."

"What?" I think I said, and then I was holding her and her face was soft and wet against my cheek.

"I was wondering how much it would take to drag you out of that shell of yours," she was saying. "You've found out something, Al, about yourself—and I've always waited for you to find it out. I always knew what was there. You never lacked faith in me or other people, Al, but only in yourself, and I guess that's because you were in the wrong place, the wrong business, and you didn't want to admit it."

"You're so right," I mumbled.

"Trouble with men is," she said against my ear, "they should cry more, like women, but they don't. It makes men sick not to cry."

"Then I ought to start getting healthy."

"One thing," she said, "one thing, darling."

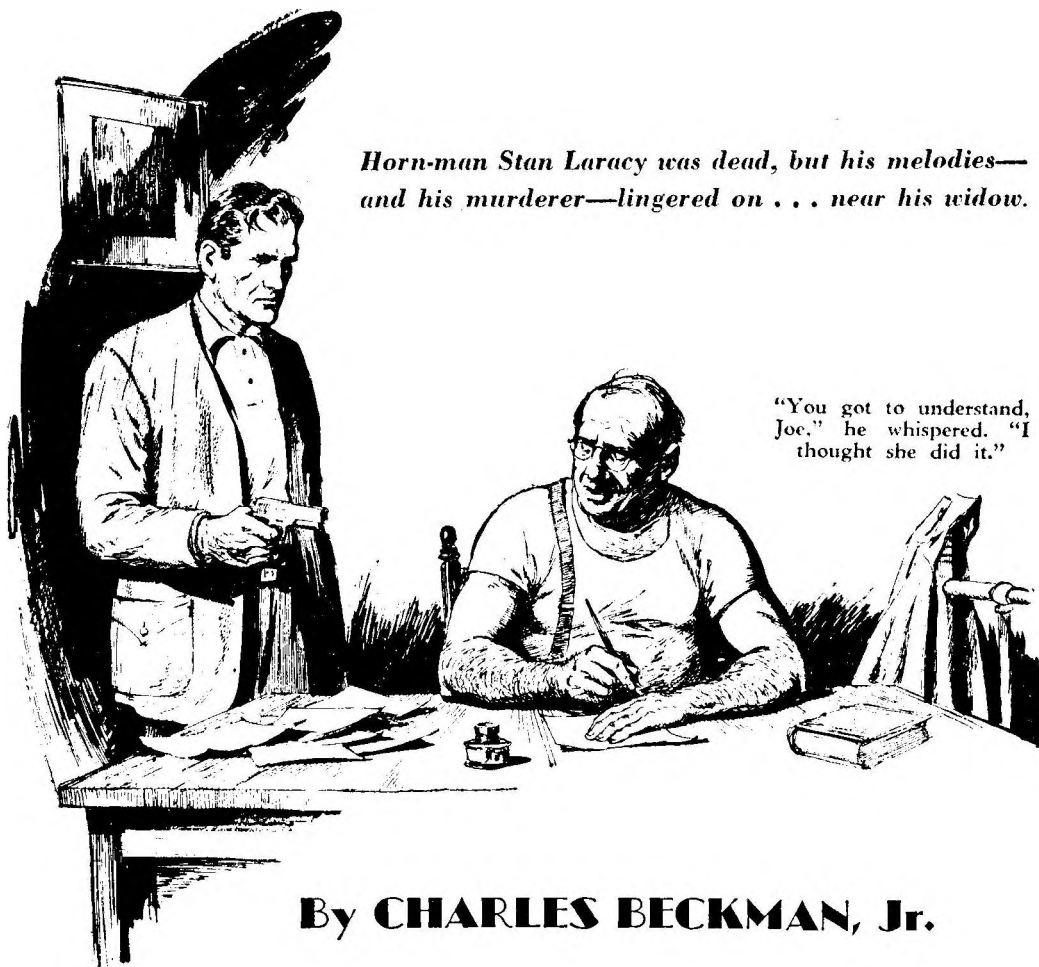
"Yes—?"

"We trade the car in for a sedan. I never trusted convertibles."

And we did that the very next day.



# Hell's Hot Lick



*Horn-man Stan Laracy was dead, but his melodies—  
and his murderer—lingered on . . . near his widow.*

*"You got to understand,  
Joe," he whispered. "I  
thought she did it."*

**By CHARLES BECKMAN, Jr.**

**T**HEY gave Stan Laracy a real New Orleans funeral, the kind he would have appreciated, being a musician. All of Bourbon street was at the cemetery, huddled around the vault in the cold, drizzling rain. Musicians, bartenders, bookies, show girls, jazz fans. His blonde wife in a simple black dress. . . .

Stan played his last engagement to a full house.

Carrying out the tradition all the way, the guys from his band, along with others, played the slow funeral dirge. Afterwards, they wound their way between the slick, wet marble vaults out to a waiting truck.

When they reached Rampart street, they let the tailgate down so the trombone man had room to run his horn, and they swung out with two-beat jazz, the way New Orleans funeral bands had done forty years ago when they gave birth to that kind of music.

They played "*Let The Tailgate Down,*" "*Rampart Street Parade,*" and "*Tin Roof Blues.*"

It was a fitting tribute to a guy who had played that kind of music all his life.

Not that he was so well liked personally, but he had been a big name to jazz fans all over the country. The musicians' trade

paper carried his picture on the front page with the caption: *Stan Laracy Commits Suicide*. People wondered why. He was riding the crest of the Dixieland craze. A movie recently finished on the West Coast, and large record sales, were rolling in a heavy income for him. Why blow his brains out?

Stan could have told them the whole story. But he was sealed up in a vault now, and his lips didn't work so good any more. So he couldn't tell them that he had been murdered. . . .

By that night Bourbon street had forgotten the funeral. It wasn't one to mourn for long. It had a lot of jazz to play and absinthe to drink and pretty girls to watch.

The rain was still coming down slowly, steadily. Narrow, crooked streets in the French Quarter and ancient wrought-iron grillwork in front of windows and balconies gleamed darkly. Ghosts of Creole ladies, Napoleonic soldiers and swarthy pirates hovered in the dripping shadows of courtyards and behind shuttered windows.

"Dixie" Joe Bonifacio turned off Royal street and stood on the corner of Bourbon and St. Louis. The pain and stiffness were worse. Maybe because of the rain. He had to stop and light a cigarette and rest.

The glow from the match in his cupped hands played over a pale, slender face with sensitive nostrils and lips. He had long, thin arms with big hands. He was wearing a light tan cardigan coat, dark-spotted with rain drops, dark green trousers and brown suede shoes.

He was a young man who lived too much at night, smoked too many cigarettes, burned his stomach with too much black coffee, read too much, and thought too much. There were deep shadows and lines of pain in his face.

He flipped the match into a running gutter and walked in his stiff, limping way up to the Sho-Tune Bar in the next block. All around him Bourbon street was coming awake. The two-beat rhythm of jazz music floated out of bars, and neon tubes glowed around inviting photographs of bare-legged dancing girls.

Six nights a week, from ten until four the next morning, he blew clarinet with Stan Laracy's band in the Sho-Tune bar. It was hard to say who was the bigger drawing card. People who heard him play

wondered why Joe hadn't branched out with his own band long ago.

Since Stan's sudden death two nights ago, Jesse Laracy, Stan's brother, had taken over the band. Jesse and Stan had been business partners. Lacking Stan's looks and personality, fat, dumpy little Jesse had been content to let Stan front the band and take the glory, while he played piano and handled the business end.

So Jesse hired a new trumpet player to take Stan's place, and they went right on, and the crowds that came to drink and listen were as big as before. Except that now they came to hear "Dixie" Joe Bonifacio play his clarinet.

HE MADE it up big and mellow, out of the shadows of smoke and dripping rain and fog on the Mississippi, out of the licorice taste of absinthe and the smell of close-packed bodies and marble vaults, wet and cold in the night rain. He made it up and blew it out of his horn, and it made the people laugh and rock, and sometimes it made them shiver.

He played like that tonight, a thin young man with large bony fingers that rippled sinuously with the intricacies of the musical pattern he was improvising to the insistent two-beat rhythm.

They played "*Muskrat Ramble*" good and solid—the way it had been played here in the French Quarter, the *Vieux Carré*, for the last forty years.

He put something of his own in it. Something of the loneliness of the years and the new, cold fear inside him that had grown with the pain and the stiffness. . . .

And while he was playing, he opened his eyes a little and saw her, off through the fog of smoke. She had just come in, and beads of rain glistened in her hair like diamonds and on her cheeks like tears.

She threaded her way through the crowd. The Sho-Tune was a long, narrow room with wine plush walls, sparkling chandeliers over the bar and a dais behind the bar for the band. The customers sat around the walls in booths or on high stools at the bar and watched the musicians perform. She edged her way to the end of the bar and waited for the band to finish.

Helen Laracy . . . Stan Laracy's widow.

When he could leave the stand, Joe Bonifacio went down and found a booth in a

dark corner of the room, and in a minute she joined him.

She was a leggy girl almost as tall as he. Her blonde hair was parted in the middle and drawn back flat around her ears and gathered at the nape of her neck with ribbon, giving her a madonna-ish appearance. She had a very wide mouth with relaxed lips that could look loose and sensuous.

She was wearing low-heeled shoes and a black jersey blouse and black skirt.

They didn't say anything at first. She looked more tired and numb than bereaved. "You—you sound good tonight, Joe."

He nodded without speaking.

He didn't like to just make conversation.

Some nights she used to come and listen to him play for hours, and during intermission they'd sit in a booth like this and sip absinthe. They'd do that when Stan was on one of his drunks. She felt safer around Joe then, because he was a little afraid of Joe. But eventually she had to go home, and then the next time Joe would see her maybe she'd have reddened eyes and a bruise that powder wouldn't quite mask, and then the dark shadows in Joe Bonifacio's eyes would turn black.

"Forget about him," Joe told her now. "He was a stinker."

She nodded and shivered a little. "I didn't know there were people like him, Joe. . . ."

She took her left glove off and Joe saw that she was no longer wearing her wedding ring. She almost got her drink to her lips when it began spilling over the rim, and she put it back on the table quickly.

"Joe, I—I'm scared."

His eyes widened. "What's the matter?"

"The police. They were up at the apart-

ment again asking questions about Stan."

"I thought they got through with that Monday night."

"I know. I did, too. I wish they'd leave me alone, Joe."

Her face was going to pieces.

The kid had had a rugged time of it. She'd been the one to find Stan. He probably hadn't been a very pretty sight sprawled out on their bedroom floor with the top of his head shot off.

He let her hold his hand until she got something of a grip on herself again.

"Take it easy, honey. This is just routine. They have to do it with all these cases."

"Do they, Joe?" Her eyes were large and solemn. "I—I just wondered. Everyone knew I hated him. And then I was the one to find him. . . ."

"Don't borrow trouble," Joe commanded sharply. "This is just routine stuff, I tell you."

"Sure." She smiled without moving her lips much. "I just wanted you to tell me it was all right, Joe. I'm okay now. I'll go back to the apartment." She gathered up her gloves and purse. "Joe," she said softly, "call me tonight—when you're through work." Then she melted into the smoke and shadows.

An hour and a half later, the police arrested her for the murder of her husband, Stan Lacey. Joe got the news from Mike Klosky.

IT WAS near twelve when he saw Mike huddled over a beer at one end of the bar. He went down to talk to her. Mike was a newspaper woman. She was about forty. Once her hair had been a bright red,

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now it was a faded, straggly orange. She used too much powder, too much lipstick, too much gardenia perfume. Her blouses were always soiled. She had a voice and a face that should belong to someone named Mike Klosky. But her figure and legs were still good.

The *Vieux Carré* was her beat. She knew every street, every shop owner, bum and bookie from Bourbon street to the river.

"Hello, Joe," she said in her foghorn contralto. "Nice send-off you boys gave Stan."

She had something on her mind. It wasn't easy for her to break the news to him. She waited until he got his drink, and then she told him as easily as she could that Helen had been booked on suspicion of murder.

He sat very still, hearing the words repeating themselves like a cracked phonograph record. He felt sick and lonely and blurry-eyed, like the time he came home from school and the neighbors told him his mother had passed away that afternoon.

Everything got mixed up. The clink of glasses, the voices, the rain outside. It was mixed up and blurry in his head, and he was sick and tired and a thousand years old.

Mike's voice droned through the blur of sounds.

"Heaven knows Stan wasn't overburdened with friends. Everybody hated the guy. But everyone else has an alibi. You were in your apartment playing your clarinet. The people next door heard you at the time Stan was killed. Three of the other boys were in a poker game. Jesse and the drummer were at your arranger's home. That took care of the band. And the police have checked everyone else who might have had a possible motive.

"Everyone had an alibi except Helen. She told them she was just out walking around. She said she came in a few minutes after nine and found Stan that way on the floor with the gun in his hands.

"But tonight a new witness turned up. Alec St. Creaux, the little cross-eyed fellow who runs the antique shop under Helen and Stan's apartment. He told the police that Helen stopped and exchanged a few words with him that night at eight-thirty, then went upstairs. And she didn't come down until after nine. The coroner placed the time of Stan's death at between eight-

thirty and nine—which isn't good for her.

"Joe—" She patted his hand awkwardly. "—she's a beautiful girl. The soft kind that you don't think could harm a fly. But you can push anybody just so far, and Stan treated her like a dog, beat her up several times—nearly killed her once. She hated him."

Joe sat there a moment longer. Then he scribbled a note on a slip of paper telling Jesse that he was taking off for the rest of the night, handed the note to the bartender to give to Jesse, and went out into the night.

He limped through the cold rain, each step bringing pain. The numbness was spreading faster now.

He saw her face ahead of him in the rain. And he saw a little girl in pigtails playing hop-scotch on the sidewalk. His cheeks were wet and it wasn't all from the rain.

*She'll be alone now, Joe. You haven't much longer to help her. She'll be afraid, alone.*

Bourbon street. Royal street. He bumped a party of tourists waving a half-empty bottle and singing loudly off key. A taxi splashed by.

More blocks. It was a long way. Sweat stood out on his face from the effort this was costing him.

It was way back in the French Quarter. Ancient, tightly shuttered buildings from a bygone era walled the narrow, dark streets. Then he found the place and hammered on the door until Alec St. Creaux got out of bed and came down with a flashlight and opened the front door.

The tiny bell over the door tinkled. It was a loud sound in the hush of the musty antique shop.

Huge old clocks like the faces of gorgoyles peered down at them from the shadows. Vague white forms of Café Brulot cups, tarnished silverware, guns and boxes littered the shelves, all covered with a heavy mantle of dust, like a gray shroud.

"How much are you getting for this deal, Alec?"

The swarthy, pot-bellied little man wore a greasy undershirt and baggy gray trousers that hung from a suspender over one shoulder. He poked the flashlight in Joe's face, squinting his crossed eyes for a better look. Then his face turned the color of cheese. The light trembled.

"Listen, Joe, you get outta here. I don't

want no truck with crazy musicians. I told the cops what I saw, like a good citizen oughta do. That's all. I told 'em what I saw."

Joe moved closer to him, and the antique dealer back pedaled, his shapeless slippers scraping the floor. He pushed air with a palm as if to ward Joe off.

"Listen, you keep away from me, Joe, or I call the cops. Why don't you keep outa this? You're a good boy. Don't get mixed up in a family shooting between a man and his wife like this—"

Joe pushed him in a corner, wedging him in there, with his forearm across the man's throat. St. Creaux's face was shiny with perspiration. His eyes bulged like a frog's.

"Who paid you and how much?" Joe asked through his teeth.

St. Creaux shook his head, too frightened to speak. His mouth worked silently, and his teeth chattered.

Joe pushed his weight against the arm with crushing pressure on St. Creaux's Adam's apple. A hoarse croak came from the squirming antique dealer.

"You'd sell your wife for the right price," Joe Bonifacio panted. "What was the deal, Alec? If you ever want to draw another breath, you'd better tell me the whole mess."

St. Creaux's eyes had nearly bugged from his head. He nodded violently.

Joe released some of the pressure. St. Creaux wheezed like a steam-boat, sobbing with pain and fright.

"All right," he panted after a moment, his breath still whistling. "I'll tell you, Joe—[fl—"

Joe heard the noise, but not in time. He heard only the faint scrape of a shoe sole on the rough floor behind him. Before he could turn, a crushing weight seemed to come right through his skull, splitting his mind into fragments of darkness that whirled together in a single great pool, sucking him downward . . . downward . . . downward . . .

**F**RAGMENTS of many things. A bit of Gershwin music he'd heard once in New York. A lick from a Louis Armstrong record. A girl's husky voice singing an unrecognizable tune off in the fog. Soft hands brushing his cheek. A young girl's voice—fingers sticky with molasses. Then a grow-

ing coldness and pain that was first only a distant murmur but picked up tempo and volume until it became the center of his entire consciousness, pounding in his head like a kettle drum.

He came awake suddenly, staring up at darkness above him.

It was a different kind of darkness. Not the soft, velvet kind he had emerged from, but a hazy, grayish sort with an undefinable shape to it.

He was aware of an overpowering lethargy and a heavy nausea. He was so drowsy. It would be delightful to let go and sink back into the velvet depths he had come from. He wondered at the vague struggling, the subconscious fright that was keeping him from it.

The air was heavy with an odor that made him think for a moment of Mike's gardenia perfume. Each time he drew a breath, the air seemed a weight on his chest, and the sickening nausea grew worse.

He could hear a soft hissing off in the darkness. Like air escaping from the valve of a tire.

There was something he was trying to remember. . . .

Yes, now he had it. That time he'd gone to sleep with the gas fire on. Somehow the flame had gone out. He'd nearly suffocated in his sleep. Only a neighbor pounding on the door had saved him.

*Now, this feeling was the same, and the smell was the same.*

He tried to get up, but there was no strength left in his muscles. It was like a nightmare he couldn't shake off.

He fought the drowsiness now with sudden growing panic. The animal fear speeded his heart, released reserves of strength and energy.

He rolled off the side of the bed. He was crawling now, swaying on his hands and knees like a drunken animal. His breath sounded hoarse and loud in his ears. His mouth was dry with fright.

Just a little longer, please. She needs somebody. She needs help. She can't do it alone anymore. . . .

He found the door. Cold, slippery metal knob between his fingers. Stuck, locked. He rattled it futilely, banged at the door with his fists.

Helen.

Little girl.

Okay. We'll make it. The main thing is not to go to sleep. That's the important thing.

He got half to his feet, reeled several steps and sprawled. His flailing arm scattered a stack of phonograph records and books.

There was a familiarity about the whole set-up. The bed, the location of the door, the stack of records.

Sure it was familiar. It was his own room.

Well, that made it simpler. Bed, door, records. You kept on straight ahead and found a window.

It was miles away. Only eight feet. But miles.

It's all right, Helen. Don't be afraid.

He touched cold, damp glass. Rain was beating against it from the outside. Just one-eighth of an inch away there was fresh air again, and life. He struggled weakly at the window. Locked. He picked up something. An ash tray. He used the last of his strength to heave it. A splintering crash and a rush of wet, fresh air washed over him.

He lay there, crying with relief, drinking in the good clean air.

After a while he was able to turn the gas jet off and switch on the lights. The breeze was blowing drops of rain in through the smashed window. The clock on his bureau said ten minutes to two.

He had reached St. Creaux's antique shop a little before one. He'd been unconscious for a bit more than an hour. Whoever knocked him out there had carried him back here to his own apartment, deposited him on the bed, closed all the windows tightly, turned on the gas and then left, locking the door after him.

There was no blood where he had been struck—it had probably been with some kind of sand bag or shot-filled leather sap. So all this gave the convincing appearance of another suicide.

His eye was suddenly attracted by a gleaming object on the bed. He searched the bedspread and found pieces of broken glass. Fitting them together in the palm of his hand, he had a lens from a pair of glasses. It was the kind of unusually thick lens used by a very near-sighted person.

He studied the bits of glass for a moment, then dropped them into his pocket.

He washed his head under the cold water tap in the bathroom. Then he half filled a glass with straight bourbon, drank it quickly. In a bureau drawer, under some shirts, he found his small .38 calibre automatic—the gun he carried when the band was on the road. He fitted a fresh clip in the gun, pocketed it, unlocked the door with a spare key and walked downstairs into the night again.

Not much more time left for him now. But he didn't need much more. Just thirty minutes. . . .

HE HAILED a cruising night taxi, conserving the last of his strength. It was after two, but Bourbon street was still frolicking. The bands were still going strong.

They reached the destination in another part of the Quarter in less than ten minutes. Bonifacio paid the driver and the cab sped away, leaving him alone with the rain and the darkness.

This part of the French Quarter was dark and deserted. Ancient apartment buildings loomed above him like black shadows out of the past.

His right palm closed around the comforting edges of the gun in his pocket. He drew a breath, weary beyond even being conscious of it anymore. Then he entered a passageway, crossed a patio filled with puddles from dripping trees, and walked up rickety stairs.

On the second floor, light seeped from beneath one of the closed doors. He turned the knob, pushed it open fast.

Jesse Laracy was busy packing. He was stuffing shirts and socks into a suitcase so fast they spilled over the edges. He spun around when the door opened.

Fat, blubbery little Jesse. Stan Laracy's brother, the band's pianist and business manager.

He was wearing his other pair of glasses and the lenses, almost as thick as the bottoms of pop bottles, magnified the overhead light into white half-moons on his pink cheeks. His wet, red mouth gaped as if he were looking at a ghost. Then his eyes darted around like trapped little mice.

"Start writing, Jesse," Bonifacio said wearily. He placed the bits of broken glass lens on a table. "Get out your pen and start writing."

Laracy's tongue darted out, licking at his

red lips. Perspiration stained his pink shirt dark under his fat arms and dripped from his extra chins.

Joe lifted the gun. "I don't have to have it. I can clear her without it. But it will make things simpler. Take your choice." His finger started to squeeze the trigger.

Jesse looked into the thin clarinet player's eyes and saw Death there. Shivering, he sat down and hurriedly unscrewed the cap from a fountain pen; his plump, dimpled fingers—so sure on a piano keyboard—were clumsy and fumbling now.

"You've got to understand, Joe," he whispered. "I thought she did it. I really did. But there was no proof. And I had to cinch it because of the insurance. I didn't kill Stan, I swear I didn't."

"Put it all down. How much you paid Alec St. Creaux."

"Five thousand," Jesse gulped. He passed a trembling hand over his eyes and then his pen began scratching rapidly. "It was because of the insurance, Joe. Stan and I carried a joint policy because we each had half-interest in the hand. If either of us died, the policy paid the other fifty thousand dollars.

"But there was a suicide clause in it that canceled everything in the event that either of us killed ourselves. So you see, I had to make it look like murder somehow, or lose fifty thousand dollars. I paid Alec five thousand to go to the police and tell them

Helen got to the apartment a half hour earlier than she actually did."

"And tonight you followed me to Alec's antique shop, slugged me and took me up to my place and turned on the gas. Write that down, too."

The fat piano player made a wet, sucking noise with his lips. "I was desperate, Joe," he said hoarsely. "I've never known the whole story about you and Helen, but I know you're crazy about her and I knew you'd do anything to protect her. . . ."

He reached under a pile of papers for a blotter and with the sudden speed of a striking rattler, his fat hand brushed the papers aside, came up with a Luger pistol that had lain hidden beneath them. The gun blasted the silence of the room to shreds.

Joe started and coughed. His eyes were surprised. Very carefully and deliberately he shot Jesse between the eyes.

The fat piano player collapsed over the desk like a deflated balloon, his gun tumbling from his dead fingers.

Joe picked up the blood-splattered confession, folded it carefully into a pocket. Then he used Jesse's phone to call a taxi.

**J**OE walked slowly, deliberately, keeping his eyes straight ahead of him. The patio was cool and dark. The rain had stopped, and there was only the sound of

# THE BIG-MOUTH KID

*A Baseball Block-buster*

By Daniel Winters

Rookie Dan Brady carried a hickory chip on his shoulder, a swelled head behind his catcher's mask, and a pennant-hungry team that pounded the enemy nines—whenever they couldn't pound him!



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water dripping from fern and magnolia leaves.

The taxi was waiting. He gave the driver an address and sank back into the cushions, holding his left hand inside his coat.

He laid his head back and watched the familiar scenes passing the taxi window in review. He looked out at the French Quarter of New Orleans, the *Vieux Carré*, where he had been born and had grown up and learned to blow his horn.

They passed the spot where his mother had run a laundry to keep him in school. The corner where a skinny, dirty-faced little kid, Joe Bonifacio, had peddled papers to buy his first horn. The place he first heard Louis Armstrong blow his mighty trumpet. The other places where he had learned to play by listening to other great jazz musicians who had played before him there.

He saw Helen.

He closed his eyes, thinking about her. He must have drifted away for a moment, for the next thing he knew they were at the newspaper building.

He walked up the stairs slowly. There was Mike Klosky at her desk in the city room, frowning at the copy in her typewriter. She looked up, frowned with surprise. "Joe." Then her face got white and she stood up. "Joe!"

He shook his head. He swayed for a moment, but motioned her back to the typewriter.

He placed Jesse's confession beside her typewriter. "Jesse is dead now, so I don't know how this would go in court. But tell them to wave it under Alec St. Creaux's face, and he'll confess to his part in it."

Mike had been in the newspaper game for twenty years. She was conditioned to keeping her head. She put a fresh sheet of paper in her typewriter and listened, for she could see Joe didn't have many words left.

He was getting very sleepy now. It was a good feeling. He didn't hurt anywhere anymore. He just felt warm and sleepy, and this time he didn't want to do anything about it. He sat down beside Mike. His left hand, still under his coat, was growing wet and sticky.

"Stan wouldn't give Helen a divorce. He was rotten to her, but as long as I was around, he wouldn't do her any real harm. That's why I stuck with his band so long.

"But a few weeks ago, I found out I

wasn't going to be around much longer to watch out for her. The doctors told me I had multiple sclerosis. They couldn't do anything . . . it was just a matter of time.

"So I had to make sure Stan wasn't going to be here to hurt her after I was gone. I went up to his place with a gun to scare him into going away and leaving her alone. As rotten as he treated her, still he said he'd kill her before he'd let her get away from him. We fought, and the gun went off. I put it in his hand and left."

Mike said, "But the neighbors heard you playing in your room."

"Records. I cut some of just my clarinet, set the automatic time clock so the phonograph would start playing at about the time I reached Stan's place. I didn't know what might happen up at Stan's apartment—and I didn't want to spend my last few months behind bars."

Mike's ugly old face had gone to pieces and tears were streaking crooked paths through heavy, caked powder. "You must have loved her a lot, Joe."

He smiled a little. "Nobody around here knew, Mike, because she was away with relatives and at school since she was just a little girl. And she was so far above me, I didn't want anyone to know she was related to a run-down Bourbon street clarinet player. But Helen is my kid sister. . . ."

He closed his eyes and leaned back in the chair. It was nice now, knowing she was safe, to relax and go to sleep. . . .

A couple of high school boys were sitting over a record player. They were smoking cigarettes, and one held a trumpet and the other had a clarinet across his lap.

"Play that part over. The diminished lick."

He put his cigarette down, picked up the player arm. Something like rapture was lighting his skinny, sensitive face. "Jeez, that guy Bonifacio played some horn. Wonder how he got the ideas, the feeling?"

"He must've had something eating him. Guy plays like that—he's got to feel all kinds of things to be able to play them. Shame he had to get killed."

Dead? Joe wasn't dead.

He was blowing his horn for them now, the way he liked to play it. He was teaching his style to the skinny kid with the clarinet . . . and someday the skinny kid would take it up where Joe left off. . . .





Dib Hutcheon is my name. I came from a long way off to help out a pal—a murdered pal. He was found in a ditch, and it was his sister who sent me the wire.



Cal had a widow—and a gorgeous widow she was, too. A toothsome blonde with watchful green eyes and a wary manner. She knew something she wasn't telling.



Everyone knew something he wasn't telling. For instance, the manager of Cal's business, a mystery man who liked Cal and hated the widow, and was close-mouthed about his plans.



There was a convenient suicide to make it harder—and hotter—for me, as will appear in John D. MacDonald's "The Girl Who Wanted Money," in the December issue, out October 3rd.

# RED HANDS

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"No. Not any more," he told Shad. "And this time it's for murder."

## CHAPTER ONE

Sweet and Low

IT WAS three o'clock in the morning when Jim Blade's phone bell rang. He should have been asleep. He wasn't. For hours he had lain staring at the ceiling, trying to find the answer to his problem. It didn't seem to have a solution.

"Blade speaking," he said.

"Listen, mug," a voice said coldly, "lay off the dame, see? She didn't do it. I did."

"Did what?" Blade demanded.

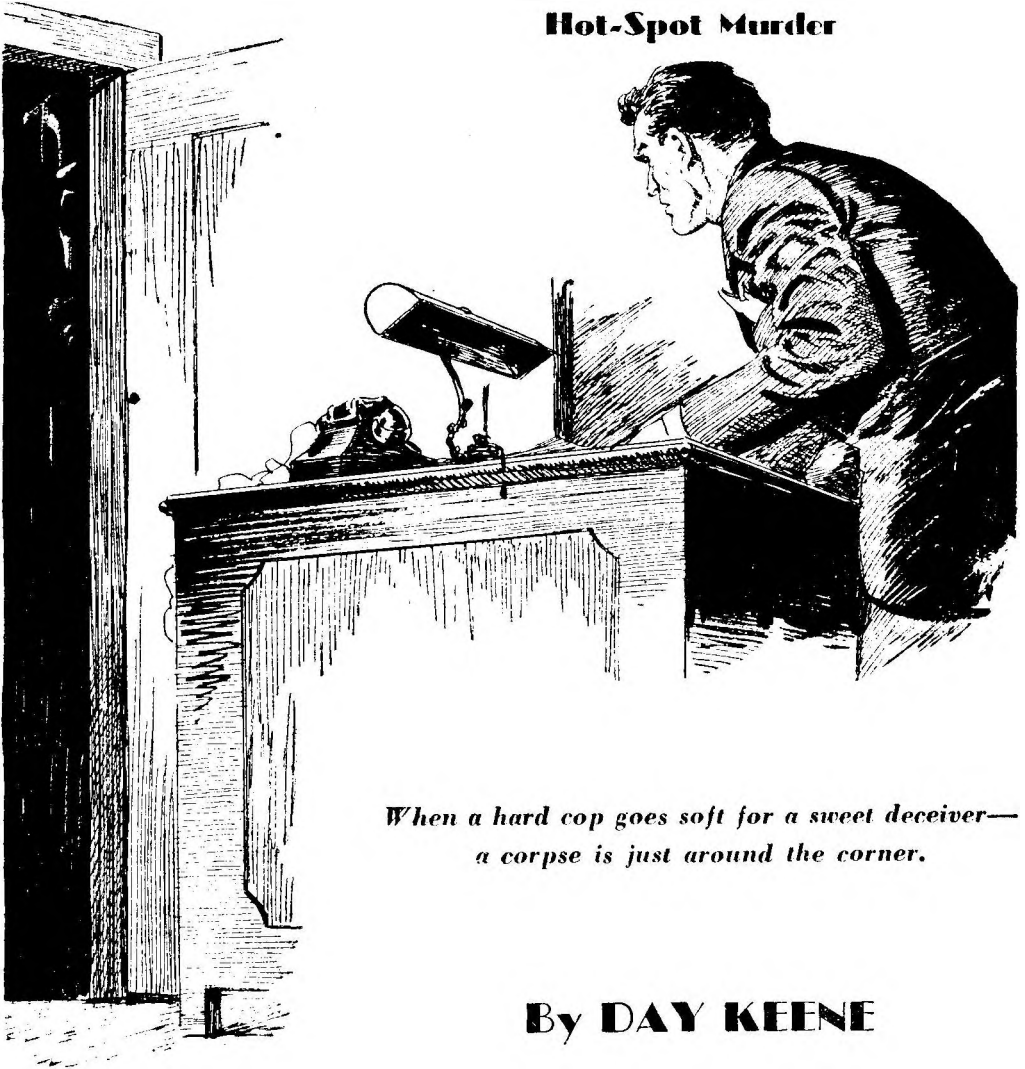
"You'll find out," the voice informed him. And if you try to pin any false raps on the chickadee—so help me, I'll kill you."

There was a sharp click on the other end of the phone line as the man replaced the receiver. Blade juggled the cradle of his own phone.

"Find out where that call came from,

# I LOVE

## Gripping Novelette of a Hot-Spot Murder



*When a hard cop goes soft for a sweet deceiver—  
a corpse is just around the corner.*

By **DAY KEENE**

will you, Gertie? That's a good girl!"

"It came from Harve Exter's Sweet and Low Club on Rush Street, Lieutenant," the night switchboard operator told him. I checked while the party was speaking. And don't hang up, please. I have another call waiting." She plugged in a second line. "Go ahead, Inspector Rican. You are connected with Lieutenant Blade."

"Jim?" Rican demanded curtly.

"Speaking. What's up, Harry?"

"Harve Exter has been murdered."

For a moment Blade was silent. Then he asked, "Would you repeat that, Harry?"

"Harve Exter has been murdered. As I have the story so far, he was shot to death in a private dining room of the Sweet and Low. The other boys have just pulled out."

Inspector Rican hesitated briefly. "You want in on this or not?"

"I want in."

There was relief in the other man's voice. "I thought you might. McManus went out of here as officer in charge. You take over when you get there. I'll send Pete to pick you up."

Blade thanked Inspector Rican and the other man hung up. "Gertie?" Blade said quietly.

"Eavesdropping," she reported.

"Mum is the word."

"I'll keep it under my arms," she said.

Blade dressed carefully and quickly. A tall, big-boned man, he moved with an effortless coordination of mind and muscle.

Blade smiled gently as he knotted his tie and slipped into his coat.

Harve Exter's death had solved the problem for him. The way that Blade felt about Mignon, he had even considered murdering the man himself. That had been no secret, not even to the Department.

On his way out he stopped at the switchboard to thank Gertie for tracing the call.

The red-haired girl said, "Forget it. It's a liberal education to work your line, Lieutenant. I presume you'll be marrying the widow?"

"Suppose," Blade suggested, nettled, "that we bury her husband first, or at least find out who killed him."

He strode out through the dimly lighted lobby. The redhead nodded at his retreating back with approval. Then she studied her reflection earnestly and critically in the small hand mirror on the board.

"And what," she demanded, satisfied with her inspection, "outside of a gin-husky voice and another man's son, has Mignon Exter got that Mrs. Covina's little girl Gertie is lacking?"

**A**LL of Chicago knew the answer to that one. The willowy, torch-singing blonde with the faint French accent had Lieutenant Jim Blade of Homicide—wound around her little finger.

In front of the hotel, on wind-blown Dearborn Street, Blade cupped his hands against the cold blasts off the lake and lighted a cigarette. More snow had fallen and the Sanitation Department plows were busily scooping it up against the morning rush-hour traffic and piling it on top of the

long and dirty windrows that already lined the street.

A big car, coming fast, braked abruptly across the street. His head down against the wind, Blade crossed to intercept it before Pete should be tempted into trying a U turn and stalling in the drifts.

It wasn't Pete. The collegiate-looking youth at the wheel rolled down the window and said, "Hello, Lieutenant."

The man on the seat beside the driver and the three men in the rear seat of the big car merely stared. There was a smell of well-oiled metal. It wasn't from the motor.

"Hello, Jerry," Blade said. He put both hands in plain sight on the car door. "You boys looking for me?"

"That's right," Jerry said. He was Shad Rorick's second-in-command. "Shad is down in the Sweet and Low, and it seems that there's been a sudden demise down there?"

"So—"

The youth at the wheel was no longer smiling. "So as soon as we found out that Inspector Rican had assigned you to the case, we thought we'd drop out and see you."

"That was nice," Blade said.

Schlitz Murray on the seat beside the driver growled. "Why kick the ball around? We've been paying plenty, Blade. And—while we don't know that it was Shad, see—Shad was plenty high the last time we seen him. And if he was the lad who cooled off Exter, he's not standing any murder rap. We need him in our business."

"You've been paying me how much?" Blade asked.

"Well, not you," Jerry admitted. "But it's been going through the usual sources to—"

"I'd just as soon not know," Blade snapped, cutting him short. He slipped the handle of the door, pulled the hoodlum out from under the wheel and slapped him hard across the mouth. "But this is from me to you. You can't buy immunity from a murder rap, not even in this town. And if it was Shad who knocked off Exter and I can prove that he did, he'll fry."

The hoodlum stared at him, defiant. "And you'll marry the widow, huh?"

"Perhaps," Blade agreed. "I hope so." Still holding the struggling hoodlum by the collar, he bent down and peered into the

darkened interior of the car. "Are there any other of you bums who'd like a beauty treatment?"

The smell of oiled metal was stronger here. Blade could see the dull gleam of a sawed-off shotgun resting across one of the hoodlums' knees. He was answered by a surly silence. The tall police lieutenant had a reputation for being as tough as he was honest. A former back-of-the-yards boy, he preferred to use his fists.

Still twisting helplessly in his hand, Shad Rorick's second-in-command snarled: "Leave loose of me. Some day you'll go too far."

Blade sat him back behind the wheel so hard that he bounced. "Let me know when I do," he told him pleasantly.

"Yah," Schlitz Murray found his courage as the driver ground on the starter. "Listen to the honest cop. Him and the Lone Ranger."

The big car leaped forward and roared on down the street. Blade stood staring after it thoughtfully until the twin tail lights turned right toward the Outer Drive on East North Avenue. He was still standing in the middle of the street when Pete Cussack braked beside him.

Blade nodded. "Hi-yo, Silver."

"You walking back from a ride or just starting out on one?" the squad-car driver demanded.

Blade slid into the seat beside him. "I'll be damned if I know," he said.

**T**HERE were three cars parked in front of the night club. One was Homicide. One belonged to the tech squad. The third was the coroner's car.

The large red neon sign that named the club had been turned off but small amber lights still spelled out *Mignon* on the marquee.

Blade, followed by Cussack, pushed through the usual crowd of the morbidly curious, shivering with cold, and banged on the glass door. A uniformed patrolman let them in.

McManus was in the foyer, arguing with a black-haired, flashing-eyed woman in her late forties. She had a wisp of starched lace in her hair and a shabby gray squirrel coat thrown cloak fashion over a pert maid's uniform. The detective seemed relieved to see them. He tapped the woman on the

shoulder and pointed to Lieutenant Blade. "You argue with him, see, sister? He's the boss."

The woman tossed her head. "Comment?"

"What's the matter?" Blade asked.

"She talks French, and I talk English," McManus told him earnestly. "I don't get what she's driving at."

"Her name's Celeste," the doorman said from a corner. "She's one of them refugees. Mr. Exter just hired her the other day."

As near as I can make out," McManus added, "she's only the ladies' washroom attendant, had nothing to do with the murder, and wants the hell out of here."

Blade strode on into the club. "Nobody leaves," he called back over his shoulder.

A dozen couples were sitting in sullen silence around the postage-stamp-sized dance floor. The musicians were huddled in an apathetic group at one end of the small bar.

Blade strode past the closed doors of the private dining rooms to the one where flash bulbs were popping. He found Coroner Westman taking off his coat.

"I just beat you by a minute," the coroner told Blade cheerfully. "A hell of a night, eh, Jim?"

"A hell of a night."

He stood looking at the corpse. It was, as always, difficult for him to reconcile a girl of Mignon's beauty living with such a man. In life, Harve Exter had been a pot-bellied little weasel. Death hadn't added to his looks. The manner of his exit from the world seemed clean-cut. There were two brown stains on the front of his dress shirt in the region of his heart. The powder stains indicated that the death gun had been fired from a distance of not more than six inches. There was surprisingly little blood.

After a quick glance around the room and at the table set for two, Blade knelt beside the dead man and felt underneath his armpit for the holstered gun he knew was there. Exter had carried a heavy-calibered automatic. Both the chamber and the clip were filled.

"Funny," the lieutenant puzzled, "that Exter would let anyone with a gun in his hand get so close to him."

Pete Cussack said earnestly, "It must have been someone he trusted."

Blade shook his head. "Harve Exter

didn't trust anyone. He couldn't. He had a finger in every dirty pie on the near north side. No one heard the shots, I suppose?"

Hartley, the finger-print man, looked up from the wine glass that he was dusting. "I heard one of the waiters tell McManus that he thought that he heard two shots just before three o'clock. But it being a pretty cold night outside, he figured them for backfires."

"And the body was found when and by whom?"

"At five minutes after three, Jim. By one of the waiters." McManus came into the room mopping at his forehead with his breast-pocket handkerchief. "Boy. Would I hate to be married to that dame. If some of them things that she called me in French mean what I think they do—"

"Wow!" Pete Cussack grinned.

"Wow," McManus agreed and turned to Blade. "I've got the boys making the usual frisk and getting the names and addresses of everyone in the joint. You want what I've got so far, Jim, or do you want to prowl it on your own?"

"I'll take what you have," Blade said.

"Well, the joint is lousy with motive," McManus admitted. And whoever did it is still here. The doorman says no one has left since about two forty-five or ten minutes before the waiter thought that he heard two shots."

Blade picked up one of the wine glasses from the table and sniffed at it absently. "Go on."

McManus enumerated his suspects on his fingers. There were four of them. The first, the dead man's wife, he skipped over hastily in deference to Blade's feelings. The other three were Slim Alcott, a gambler to whom the dead man had owed money, Shad Rorick, the racketeer, who owned half of the club, and a little blonde dancer who had come to the club with Rorick and who felt that Exter had wronged her.

"Where's Shad now?" Blade demanded.

"Passed out on the couch of the dining room three doors up the hall," McManus told him. "But he hasn't been passed out long. The bartender said that he made a phone call to somebody or other at exactly three o'clock."

"Let's wake him up," Blade said. "This might prove interesting."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Two Times Death

McMANUS led the way down the hall. The second private dining room was identical with the first. The table was set for two. Shad Rorick lay snoring soddenly, on a red leather studio couch. A big, handsome Irishman, he looked more like a Hollywood leading man than the vicious racketeer and gunman that he was.

A young blonde, sultry-eyed and slightly disheveled, eyed the two detectives from across the room. She was building up a terrific hangover by drinking straight rye with champagne as a chaser.

"Thish ish a private dining room," she informed them with drunken dignity. "So Harve Exter's dead. So what? I didn't shoot him. I haven't got a gun. Now get the hell out of here!"

Lieutenant Blade jerked the sleeping man on the couch into a sitting position with one hand and tried to slap him sober with the other. Either Rorick was a clever actor or his drunken stupor was genuine. His head lolled from side to side. His eyes opened ~~clearly~~, but there was no recognition in them. He sagged back limply to the couch when Blade released him.

"You checked his gun?"

"I did," McManus said. And it wasn't his rod that killed Exter. It was as clean as a whistle."

How about a hide-away?" Blade's big hands fanned Rorick's body deftly as he asked.

He found the second gun, a pearl-handled .32 automatic, in Rorick's cummerbund. Using his handkerchief to handle it, he slipped the clip and pumped it. The firing chamber reeked of freshly discharged powder. Assuming the clip had been filled, two shots had been fired.

"Okay. That's a horse on me," McManus admitted. "I should have thought of a hide-away."

Blade showed the gun to the blonde. "You ever see this before, sister?"

"No," she said quite soberly. "I never have. And it wasn't Shad who killed Harve Exter." She spoke like a small and frightened child who had memorized a piece. "Shad has been here in this room with me

ever since two-thirty this morning. So he—”

“Without even leaving it once?”

“Without even leaving it once.”

Blade and McManus exchanged glances. “We’ll be back,” Blade told the girl. In the hall he called Pete Cussack and posted him at the door. Then he took the automatic into the room where the print men were still working. “See what you can give me on that, will you, Hartley?” He turned back to McManus. “Now what’s this about Mignon?”

“Well,” the detective admitted unwillingly, “when I first got here one of the waiters—guy by the name of Allier—told me that Harve and Mrs Exter had a hell of a row.”

“Let’s talk to Allier,” Blade said.

They found the waiter in the kitchen eating a liverwurst on rye and washing it down with coffee. A new man to the Sweet and Low, he didn’t know about the torch Jim Blade was carrying.

“Yair. Sure I heard ‘em fighting,” he admitted. “Mr Exter says that he’s got his belly full of being two-timed by a cheap little chiseling tramp. He says he is going to toss her out on her ear without any alimony and is going to keep their kid with him on account of she was an unfit mother.”

“Go on,” Blade said grimly.

“That’s all I heard,” the waiter shrugged, except that Mrs. Exter said, ‘I’ll kill you first.’ I didn’t think anything about it at the time. But Mr. Exter was shouting and swearing something awful. And when Mrs. Exter comes out of the room she has the makings of a beautiful black eye.”

“I—I’ll talk to Mignon—alone,” Blade told McManus.

“I thought you might want to,” he said.

Blade strode out of the kitchen and rapped sharply on the door of the star’s dressing room.

**MIGNON EXTER** was half French, half Irish. She had come to Chicago from New York five years before. Her first job on the near north side had been behind a green maize counter of a twenty-six game. Then Harve Exter discovered she could sing. Six months later he married her, and in due time a son was born. For a year they had been happy. For the last two years—or so Mignon had told Blade—Harve Exter had made her life a living hell.

“It’s Jim,” Blade called as he rapped.

The door opened immediately. Tall, beautifully formed, in her middle twenties, the platinum-haired torch singer clutched a wholly inadequate negligée together with one hand. She released it entirely to throw her arms around Blade’s neck. “Oh, Jim,” she whispered huskily. “I’m so glad you got here.”

Blade closed the door behind him. “You didn’t do it, did you, honey?”

The singer looked at him reproachfully with one eye. The other, swollen almost shut, was beginning to turn purple. “You know better than that, Jim. But Harve was raising hell about us, tonight just before he was killed and—” She broke off and began to sob quietly.

“He had nothing to raise hell about,” Blade said truthfully. “We shot square with him all the way.” He smiled ruefully. Hell. When I came in just now—it was the first time that you ever kissed me.”

The girl stopped crying to nuzzle his cheek. “That wasn’t my fault, Jim.”

“No,” Blade admitted. “It wasn’t.”

A few stolen minutes together, a few drinks, a few furtive hand clasps had been the sole extent of their affair. Mignon had been willing to go further, but Blade hadn’t. He wasn’t a prude but it wasn’t in his code to make love to another man’s wife. Carrying a torch was one thing. Two-timing was another. He had gone to Harve Exter openly and asked him to agree to a divorce. The little night club owner had laughed at him.

“Go home and play with your handcuffs, chump,” he had said. “You don’t realize what a break you’re getting by me saying no. But Mignon is my wife. She’s the mother of my son. And she’s going to stay my wife as long as I want her to.”

Blade looked at the picture of Mignon’s three-year-old son on her dressing table. The boy was as dark as his mother was fair. Mignon idolized him. “What was the row about tonight?” he asked.

“Us,” the singer told him. “Harve said he was going to divorce me and take my boy away.” She hesitated briefly. “He—he said that I wasn’t a fit mother.” She added hopefully, “It was Shad who killed him?”

“It begins to look that way,” Blade said. “You know the little blonde he’s with?”

Mignon shrugged. “She used to be one

of Harve's girls, I think." Her lips twisted in a bitter smile. "You see it didn't matter if Harve two-timed me. That didn't make him an unfit father."

Blade nodded. "Slip on something that will cover up a little more of that white space and come on out. I want to see what Westman and Hartley have got."

Mignon kissed him again, hard. "But you love me and you trust me?" she demanded.

"I love you and I trust you," Blade said. "You'll marry me as soon as I can get this case washed up?"

"Maybe," she said, teasing him.

At the entrance to the hall, Celeste descended on Blade with a torrent of voluble French. He lifted his eyebrows at Mignon.

The singer translated. "She says that she is only the ladies' washroom attendant, had nothing to do with the murder and does not see why she should be held like a common criminal."

"Tell her we're letting them all go in a minute." He added, "She's new here, isn't she?"

Mignon nodded. "Harve hired her yesterday. She claims she used to be a Folies Bergere star."

Pete Cussack noted the elderly maid's trim ankles with approval. "About 1917 I bet. I seen the show when I was in France with the A.E.F." His eyes brightened at the memory. "Wow!"

THE door behind him opened, and Shad Rorick staggered out. "What the hell's going on?" he demanded of Lieutenant Blade.

"Murder," Blade told him crisply. "And it looks as if you're tagged. You should have stashed the murder gun before you passed out, Shad."

"What gun?" the racketeer said thickly. "You're nuts."

Blade shrugged and walked on down the hall. Coroner Westman was just wiping the hose of a stomach pump with a wad of cotton saturated with alcohol. "You notice what little blood there was, Jim?" he demanded as Blade appeared in the doorway.

"I did."

"There was a reason," Westman told him cheerfully. "Exter was dead when he was shot. He had been dead at least five minutes. It seems that someone made him

a cyanide cocktail—just between friends." Rorick had followed Blade down the hall. "It wasn't me," he muttered. "I wouldn't kill a guy that way. Besides, I've been passed out for an hour. I can prove it by the little chickadee who—" He stopped abruptly, sobered, "Hey! If he was poisoned, what's this about a gun?"

Blade looked at the fingerprint man.

Hartley said, "I found the same fingerprints on the gun that I found on the glass that must have held the cyanide."

"Rorick's prints?"

Hartley shook his head. "Hell, no," he exploded a bombshell. "Both sets were made by a dame."

Blade felt Mignon's fingers bite deeply into his arm. "I didn't do it! I didn't do it!" she cried. "I fought with Harve tonight. I even threatened that I'd kill him." She began to cry. But I didn't."

The elderly French maid took the sobbing girl in her arms. "*Non, non, ma chere*. You must not cry." She glared defiantly at Lieutenant Blade.

He crossed to the table on which Hartley had been working and picked up the pearl-handled gun. "You ever see this gun before?" he demanded of Rorick.

"It's my gun," the racketeer said sullenly. "It's my hide-away gun." He began to curse, deep blistering oaths. "Why the dirty, two-timing little tramp."

"Bring that little blonde in here," Blade ordered Cussack. "You want to talk?" he asked Rorick.

"I'm not saying a word," Rorick said, "until I see my lawyer." He then added bitterly, "But this is what happens to a guy when he tries to give a dame a break."

Blade pulled the racketeer to him by his coat front. Then you admit it was you who phoned me?"

"I'm not saying," Rorick said.

Pete Cussack flat-footed it back down the hall. His voice was shrill with excitement. "Jim! Doc Westman! Come here. She's dead. The little chickadee is dead!"

Westman and Hartley hurried from the room. Blade turned to follow, stopped as Shad Rorick said:

"I'll be damned! She lost her nerve and did a dutch."

Mignon raised her tear-stained face from the maid's bosom. "That proves it. That proves it, Jim," she sobbed.



"Proves what?" Blade demanded.

"Proves that she poisoned Harve."

"I know she did," Rorick said grimly. "She confessed to me that she had." He added bitterly, "But I didn't know that she stole my gun while I was passed out—and plugged the jerk."

Blade strode down the hall. The little blonde was slumped forward on the table. She still held a glass in one hand. Hartley was busily printing the fingers of the other.

"Everything checks," he told Blade finally. "It was her prints that I found on the gun and on the glass in the other room."

Coroner Westman sniffed the glass then smelled of the dead girl's lips. "More cyanide," he said.

Blade merely stared at the girl. There was nothing he could say. There was no way that he could prove it. But it wasn't a hunch, it was knowledge. He knew that he had been outsmarted. The dead blonde had lost her nerve too conveniently. The solution to murder was too pat.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Mother Hate

**M**ORNING was a dirty gray and two hours old when Pete Cussack pulled up before the pile of melting slush in front of Blade's hotel. A newsboy on the corner was already bellowing an extra.

"Wuxtra—Wuxtra paper! Blonde dancer kills night club owner!"

Blade stepped wearily from the car, knee-deep into slush. "The hell she did," he grunted.

"But we can't prove it," Pete said consolately.

"At least we haven't so far," Blade said. "Pick me up in an hour, Pete."

As the squad car pulled away, he plowed through and over the windrow of melting slush to the sidewalk, mildly surprised to find no reporters waiting. It was Jim Blade's considered opinion—and he had gone on record as saying so—that the perfect murder had been committed.

Over his bellowed protests, Shad Rorick had been released on bail an hour before. Shad maintained that he had merely felt sorry for the little blonde and had tried to give her a break by confusing the trail

before he had learned that she had stolen his belly gun in an attempt to pin the crime on him. He knew, his lawyer knew, and Jim Blade knew that it was very doubtful if a grand jury would indict him, or a trial jury convict him if they did.

Shad had, so he claimed, merely acted on drunken impulse. He had told his boys of his intention. Jerry Lait and Schlitz Murray had sworn before the Commissioner that Shad had told them that the little blonde had confessed to poisoning Exter and their attempt to pressure Blade had been made in an effort to save Shad from himself. Blade himself had been forced to admit that Shad Rorick had called him from the Club. It seemed incredible that any man really guilty of murder would have done so.

As the final topper for his arguments Shad had challenged Blade to prove a motive for his wanting Harve Exter dead. There was nothing that he stood to gain. The dead man's widow would inherit his half of the Club. They held no joint insurance made out in each other's favor. The books were in perfect order. If Shad Rorick and Harve Exter had not been friends, they had not been enemies.

Still for all of that, Shad Rorick would still have been in jail if the turning wheel of the law had not uncovered an illicit purchase of cyanide by the little blonde. Her name was Mary Phillips, and, as a discarded plaything of Exter's, the girl had ample reason to hate him.

On the other hand, it was hard for Blade to believe that even a desperate girl would drop cyanide in Exter's drink, shoot a dead man twice to lay the blame on a man who was befriending her—and then fail to wipe her fingerprints off either the gun or the glass. Such things just didn't happen.

"And to think," Blade sighed as he stomped across the shoveled sidewalk, "I could have been a C.P.A."

He got his room key from the desk and walked into the coffee shop. Gertie was sitting at the counter reading a morning paper.

"Ah! The return of Sherlock Holmes," she said. "A cup of coffee black, a stack of wheats, and a double order of pork sausage for Lieutenant Blade," she told the counter-man.

Despite his weariness, Blade grinned as he dropped down on the stool beside her.

"The reporters been here yet?" he asked. "I shoosed them away," she said. "I told them that Jimmy didn't live here any more."

Blade thanked her and sipped his hot coffee with relish. Gertie returned to her newspaper. It had gone to town pictorially. It had a picture of Mignon on the front page and grouped around it were pictures of her three-year-old son, Harve Exter, Shad Rorick and Mary Phillips. Blade leaned over and tapped the picture of Mignon's boy with his spoon.

"This is a hell of a thing, isn't it, for a lad that age to be mixed up in?" He added, "Or a sweet innocent kid like Mignon for that matter."

The red-haired operator glanced at him sharply. "What are you stuck for, Jim?" she asked.

"A motive for Shad Rorick to want Harve Exter dead," he told her candidly. He continued to stare at the picture of Mignon. "Can you imagine a man wanting to play around with anyone else if he was married to Mignon?" His voice held a note of awe. "She's beautiful, isn't she, Gertie?"

"Her curves are in the right places," Gertie admitted, "but who does her kid take after? He doesn't resemble her, and he doesn't resemble Exter."

Blade grinned. "Meow."

"Maybe I am jealous," but I'll be darned if I'll let an addle-pated blonde make a horse's neck out of you."

Before Blade could reach out a hand to restrain her, she slipped off the stool and walked out of the coffee shop.

"Those redheads," the counterman grinned as he slapped Blade's wheatcakes and sausage before him.

"Those redheads," Blade agreed.

But somehow his appetite had left him: He and Gertie had been good friends before he had begun to carry the torch for Mignon. He shouldn't have kidded her the way he had. After all, she was a swell kid, and there were two or three cases to his credit at the Bureau that he might never have broken except for her common-sense reasoning and advice. Both of them had come up from back-of-the-yards.

He paid his check and walked out into the lobby, but Gertie Covina was gone. The day switchboard operator saw him then and called, "You're wanted on the phone, Lieutenant. Will you please take the

call in booth three? It's over there on the left."

Blade sat down in the booth.

"Jim?" Coroner Westman demanded. "I'm calling from the morgue, Jim. I just finished the post. And I've been wrong as hell about Exter."

"Just exactly in what way?" Blade demanded.

"He was poisoned, and he was shot. But it wasn't the poison, and it wasn't the shots that killed him," Westman said. "There was more cyanide in his lungs than there was in his stomach. In other words, it was poured into his mouth after he was dead."

"But you just said," Blade protested, "that it wasn't the shots that killed him."

"They didn't," Westman said crisply. "Harve Exter died of being stabbed through the auditory canal of his ear with some thin, sharp-pointed instrument that was long enough to pierce the brain. Perhaps a woman's hatpin or a ground-down ice pick."

Blade fought a sudden wave of fatigue.

"Yes. I'm positive," the physician snapped in answer to his question. "And if you want my opinion of it, Jim, three different people had a crack at Harve Exter last night. But the lad or lady with the hatpin got there first. The other two missed the train. They thought he was drunk. He wasn't. He was dead."

He called the Bureau and asked for Inspector Rican's extension.

"Blade reporting in," he said. "You've talked to Westman?"

Just," the Inspector said. And you'd better start rounding up all those possible suspects you let wander away, Lieutenant, or there will be a familiar signature missing from the pay sheet."

Inspector Rican hung up abruptly. Dry shoes and clothes forgotten, Blade strode out of the hotel and hailed a cab.

"When Pete Cussack comes to pick me up," he told the doorman, "tell him I've gone down to the Bureau."

In the cab he changed his mind and gave the driver the address of the swank apartment building in which Harve Exter had lived. He wanted to see Mignon. He wanted to search through her dead husband's personal papers in the hope of finding something that might shed some light on this new development.

THE building on Lake Shore Drive was both new and expensive. A doorman let him in. A second doorman led him to a desk where still a third man demanded his name and business before he would even phone upstairs and inform Mrs. Exter that he was calling.

Blade tinkled his gold shield on the desk, and the clerk forgot to call.

"Of course, officer," he bowed. "Please go right up."

It was the first time that Blade had been in the building. "What's the number of the Exter apartment?" he asked the elevator boy.

"Eleven twenty-one, sir."

Blade strode grimly down the ankle-deep carpet. His salary wouldn't pay the rent of a mop closet in this building.

He paused, his hand halfway to the ornate bronze knocker on the door of eleven twenty-one, as a muffled but vaguely familiar feminine voice was raised in anger on the other side.

"—and if you think you're going to get my man, you two-timing blonde alley cat, you're crazy. I knew as soon as I saw—"

Blade heard the soft scuff on the carpet behind him—too late. He turned just in time to catch the blackjack—intended for the base of his skull—full on the temple.

The carpet was soft underneath him when consciousness returned. Blade eased himself to his knees, then to his feet. There was no one in the hall. The angry feminine voice behind the door was stilled. Blade raised his hand again to knock, then stopped. It was either an optical illusion or he was standing in front of apartment ten twenty-one.

He sat down on the hall window sill for a moment and stared out over ice-locked Oak Street beach at the gay waters of the lake until his dizziness had left him. Then he looked at the number again. It was still ten twenty-one.

He strode back to the elevator bank and punched the button.

"Sorry, sir," the boy said—too quickly and too glibly. "I guess I let you off on the wrong floor."

"So it seems," Blade said. "Who followed me down the hall?"

"No one that I know of, sir."

The boy was lying, and Blade knew it, but he let it pass. There was no way he

could prove it. Disdaining the knocker he pounded with his fist on the door of eleven twenty-one. There was no answer. Worried now for Mignon's safety, he pounded on the door again.

The door knob turned haltingly. The door opened slowly and seemingly by itself. Blade could see no one in the hall. His hand went instinctively to his gun. "What the hell—"

"At's a bad word," said a small voice on a level with his knees. "My mama says it is."

Blade looked down at his feet. Mignon's boy in a pair of flannel sleepers was studying him with interest with one eye as a chubby fist dug the sleep from the other.

Blade smiled. "Hello, Bub. Where's your mama?"

"My mama's sleeping."

Blade looked at the number on the door, then back down the hall. It was possible that he had been mistaken. The tenth and eleventh floor were identical. He needed sleep. He needed a drink. The bull fiddles of fatigue were sawing in his brain. "Suppose," he suggested to the youngster, "you tiptoe in and tell your mother that I'm here."

The youngster's lower lip thrust out in a strangely familiar pout. "Who shall I say you are?" the boy demanded. "Are you the man my daddy doesn't like? I heard him telling mama that man has got to stop coming here when—"

"Jim! How wonderful!" Mignon floated across the floor, her well-rounded curves emphasized by a clinging sheer silk housecoat. "Come in, darling. I am so glad to see you. But what are you doing here this time of the morning?" She clung to him and kissed him.

"You've been asleep?" Blade said.

"But of course," she answered.

"I was sure I heard voices," Blade said. He explained the mysterious attack outside the door.

Mignon's eyes grew wide. "I don't understand it," she said. "You must have gotten off on the wrong floor, Jim. There's been no one in this apartment but Sonny, myself and the maid." She touched the bruise on his temple with her fingertips. "Oh, you poor darling boy. Why don't you—"

"Call the cops, I suppose," Blade said

grimly. He took the girl into his arms almost savagely. "Look. You're shooting square with me now, aren't you, Mignon?"

She clung to him, her body soft and warm against his own. "Of course I am, sweetheart."

She lifted her lips to be kissed. Blade kissed her.

The youngster pounded at Blade's knees. "You stop 'at kissing my mama," he demanded. "'At's what 'at other man does all the time."

**B**LADE pushed the girl in his arms away and knelt beside the boy. "What other man do you mean, son? What other man kissed your mother?"

"A bad man," the boy insisted stoutly.

Mignon laughed throatily, but there was a note of fear in her laughter. "Don't be silly, Jim. Sonny doesn't know what he's saying. He's only three. He's just repeating some of the vile things that he's heard Harve say during our quarrels.

"I wonder," Blade said crisply. He took the paper from his pocket and showed the front page to the boy. "Is the other man's picture on this paper, Bub?"

"Go to your room, Sonny. Right now," Mignon insisted sharply.

"'ess," he said obediently, then jabbed Shad Rorick's picture with a stubby thumb.

"'At's a bad man," he confided and then toddled off—too late.

Blade got slowly to his feet. "So," he said quietly. "So. While I've been carrying a torch, you've been making a sucker out of me."

He walked slowly towards the girl. She backed away. "You're crazy, Jim. You don't realize what you're saying."

"But Shad did come here?"

"He did. Why shouldn't he? After all, he was Harve's partner. They had a lot in common."

"I wouldn't be at all surprised," Blade said. "This mother love is quite a thing, eh, Mignon? You really didn't give a damn about me, or Shad, or Harve. But you did love your boy." He paused a moment, then asked abruptly: "You last saw your own mother—when?"

The blonde singer eyed him warily. "What is this, a gag? I wouldn't know my mother if I saw her. My father took me away from her when I was just a little

girl." Her voice was bitter with scorn. "He *said* she wasn't fit to raise me."

"Just like Harve said about you. This happened where?"

"I was too young to remember," she said. "Why?"

"Just checking my facts."

He had the picture now—not all, but most of it. He wondered how he could have been so blind even with the smoke that had been getting in his eyes. He knew now who had killed Harve Exter. He believed that he knew why. He even knew who the girl was whose muffled voice had sounded so familiar just before he'd been sapped.

"Where's Gertie Covina?" he demanded.

Mignon's eyes widened slightly with fear, but her voice remained low and throaty. "I don't know what you're talking about, Jim." She entwined her arms around his neck, pressed her lips to his. "Please believe me, Jim. Believe I love you."

Blade removed her arms.

"The boat sailed a few minutes ago," he told her. He picked up the phone and dialed his own hotel. "This is Lieutenant Jim Blade talking," he told the day girl on the board. "By any chance did Gertie Covina tell you where she was going when she left there this morning?"

"Why, yes, she did," the switchboard girl said. "Gertie said that she was going over to the Beach Apartments and snatch Mignon Exter bald-headed."

Blade thanked her and hung up. Then he dialed Inspector Rican at the Bureau. "This is Blade again," he said. "And I think I've cracked this case wide open. Put McManus on, will you, Inspector. I want him to pick up a few folks for me."

When he had finished with McManus, he dropped the phone back in its cradle and took his watch from his pocket. "We can find her," he said to Mignon, "but it might take time—more time than we have." He glanced at the dial of his watch. "You have exactly one minute," he told Mignon, "to tell me where Shad took Miss Covina after he waltzed her out of here."

"Or what?" the singer defied him.

"That's fifteen seconds," he said. He added quietly. "I can make it easy, or I can make it tough on you, Mignon. Harve Exter was a louse. He deserved to die. I think I can get you a plea." He shrugged.

"But of course if you rather have the State of Illinois raise your boy—"

"I'll change sides," she said simply.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Hair of the Dog

**T**HE first floor was a one-hundred-car garage fronting on North Clark Street. It was well known as the drop for whatever business Shad Rorick was conducting at the time.

The upper floors were offices, and one of them was Shad's own. He was sitting there now, back of a glass-topped desk, glowering at the red-haired girl on the sofa, bound with clothesline.

"How much do you know? Who else knew that you were going to Mignon's apartment?"

Gertie Covina said, "Don't you wish you knew?"

"Slap her," Shad ordered Jerry Lait.

The gunman slapped her hard across the lips. "Wise up, sister," he told her. "You aren't with your pals."

"Who knew you were going to Mignon's apartment?" Shad persisted.

"Lieutenant Jim Blade," Gertie lied, "and Inspector Rican and—"

"Slap her again," Shad said. "And stop worrying about Jim Blade. I tell you Mignon has that dumb shamus twisted around her little finger."

The office door opened slowly, and Blade leaned against the door jamb, surveying the occupants of the room over the long barrel of a .38. "No. Not any more," he told Shad. "And this time it's for murder—" he included Jerry Lait and Schlitz Murray with a nod, "—with you two boys tied in for perjury and as accessories before the fact."

"How did you get in here?" Shad demanded.

"I mopped up as I came along."

"You're alone?"

"I am." Blade lied deliberately.

"Then to hell with you!" Jerry's hand streaked to his shoulder holster, and Blade nailed it there with a .38 slug.

"I was hoping it would be you," he said to Shad Rorick. He smiled, as he added to Gertie Covina. "I'm seeing better."

"You're looking grand," she said.

"Any other conscientious objectors to coming quietly?" Blade asked.

"No," Schlitz Murray said. "I'll take a chance on a fix. You want me to drop my gun or you want to take it?"

"He'll take it!" Rorick swore. His hand lifted from his desk drawer holding a spitting automatic. The first slug went through Blade's left arm. A second tugged at his topcoat. Then a shot from the doorway sent the gun spinning from Rorick's hand, just as Murray dived at Blade.

"Kill him! Kill him!" Rorick bellowed, his bleeding hand pressed to his side. He threw himself at Murray and Blade, and the three men became a rolling, thrashing ball of arms and legs. Then Blade's slashing gun barrel found Murray's head.

"That's two." Pete Cussack grinned from the doorway.

"Stay out of this," Blade yelled.

The two men were well matched. Each had lost the use of an arm. Rorick was larger and heavier, but Blade was the more powerful. A lucky kick by Rorick sent the gun spinning from Blade's hand to thud against the baseboard. The racketeer broke loose and scrambled after it, Blade right on his heels.

Then Rorick had the gun and turned. A wild shot blasted the ceiling. Then Blade's fist found his jaw. The racketeer grunted and lay still.

"Right on the button!" Pete Cussack crowed. "Boy! Was that a wallop! Wow!"

Jim Blade slipped his penknife from his pocket with one hand and cut the ropes around Gertie Covina's wrists and ankles. "I've been a fool," he said.

"Hmmm. You're telling me?"

**I**N THE cold gray light of winter afternoon Inspector Rican's office looked bleak and bare, despite the crowd of men and women sitting in the straight-backed chairs that lined the wall. Gertie Covina sat near the desk watching Mignon, who was crying openly.

Lieutenant Blade came in, his left arm in a sling. He was followed by Pete Cussack.

Blade sat down on one edge of the desk, looking at the faces and choosing his words with care. "This isn't in any sense a reconstruction of the crime," he said finally. "We know who killed Harve Exter. But there are one or two little points that we

would like to straighten out before we close the case. That was why officers were sent to bring in everyone who was at the Sweet and Low last night when Harve Exter and Mary Phillips died."

Slim Alcott lighted a cigarette. "Never mind the taffy. Come to the point. It was this Mary Phillips who knocked off Exter?"

Blade looked at the gambler. "Whoever it was cost you money?"

"They did. I was holding Harve's markers for almost thirty grand."

"That's one of the points I wanted to know," Blade said. His eyes swept the faces in the room. Most of the employees, as well as the patrons, of the Sweet and Low were there. He recognized Allier and the doorman and the chef and Celeste, the ladies' washroom maid. She sat not far from the desk looking very chic, her knitting needles clicking busily as she listened.

"You mean," Alcott demanded suspiciously, "that you're trying to tie me into this?"

"No," Blade said. "You're as clear as cellophane, Slim. You may not have liked the man but you didn't hate Harve Exter thirty grand worth."

The gambler grinned. "Go on. I can enjoy the party now. Who killed him?"

There was an uneasy stir in the room and a murmur of conversation as Blade went on. "It wasn't Mary Phillips." He called to the men waiting in the hall. "Bring Shad in, will you, McManus?"

The racketeer swaggered in, handcuffed to McManus. Blade continued:

"Here's the way I see the story. Check me if I'm wrong, Shad. You and Mignon have been two-timing Harve for years. Last night he was sure of his facts and called for a showdown. He needed money to pay off Alcott—and he wanted it from you. He had a club that couldn't miss. Unless you dished up the dough, he threatened to take Mignon's boy away from her."

He paused. There was no sound in the room but Mignon's stifled sobbing.

"Harve was roaring drunk and made a hell of a scene about it," Blade continued. "But you knew it was coming and were prepared. You knew Mary Phillips hated Harve. So you had her buy some cyanide, making sure that the purchase could be traced to her, and you promised to slip it to Harve. She wasn't a mental genius,

and you undoubtedly convinced her that if the two of you swore that the other hadn't left the room you would have an unbreakable alibi. Am I right, Shad?"

"You can't prove one damn thing."

"Oh yes, I can." Blade smiled. "Here's what happened, Shad. Mignon quarreled with Harve, but not until she had fed him enough liquor to put him in a stupor. A little later you slipped into the room. Harve was waiting for you to pay off. But by the time that you got there, he was slumped down in his chair, passed out, or so you thought.

"You dropped the cyanide in his glass and poured it down Harve's throat. Then you shot him twice with your belly gun to confuse the trail and lead it back to Mary. Then you called me and had your boys brace me on the street.

"That made you out a swell guy instead of a louse. You were giving the little blonde a break. I found the gun as planned. Mary Phillips made her speech. She said that neither of you had left the room. But she didn't know about the phone call. That made her out a liar and destroyed her alibi."

"Words." Shad Rorick sneered.

"No. Fact," Lieutenant Blade corrected. "A fact that is going to send you to the chair for Mary Phillips' murder. You see she couldn't have killed Harve Exter, Shad. *Harve Exter was already dead when you poured that cyanide into him and shot him with your pop gun!*"

Shad Rorick's mouth gaped open. A tinge of green began to spread upwards from his jowls. "Dead? Harve Exter was dead?" he gasped.

"That's right," Blade said quietly. "You see Mignon had double-crossed you. She was so afraid that Harve was going to take her boy away from her that before she left him last night she stabbed him through his left ear with an ice pick or a hatpin!"

Mignon sobbed: "You promised me—"

Inspector Rican slapped his desk. "This is murder!" he bellowed. "You killed your husband, Mrs. Exter. And you're not only going to lose your boy—you're going to the chair!"

"Non, non, non!" Her black eyes blazing fire, Celeste rushed to the Inspector's desk and loosed a torrent of voluble French.

**T**HE police interpreter translated as Celeste was speaking: "You cannot do this to my baby. It was not she who killed Mr. Exter. It was I, her mother, who did it. I did not mean to do it. I did not even mean to tell her that I was her mother. Years ago my husband took her from me. He said I was an unfit mother. Perhaps I was. I do not know. But all of my life I have loved her. It has made me a no-good. This I would not have happen to Mignon.

"When I came to this country I searched for her for months, not to tell her who I was but just that I might be near her. When I find her, I take this job—me, Celeste, who has been a Folies Bergere star. I do not speak so good the English but I understand. And last night I hear them quarreling from where I sit knitting in the washroom. Monsieur Exter struck my baby with his fist. He told her he would take her child away. This thing must not be. When she has left I go in to plead with him. He laugh at me—"

The Frenchwoman made a gesture with one hand, and the steel knitting needle glittered silver.

"I grow excited. I am not realize what I do. I forget I hold a needle in my hand."

She stood a moment staring white-faced at Inspector Rican, then Mignon rose to take her in her arms.

"Okay," Blade said. "That's all, folks." Inspector Rican squeezed his arm. "After all, it's only manslaughter, Jim. Don't feel so bad about it. We'll let both of the women take a plea. Rorick will go to the chair alone, for the one murder he did commit—that of Mary Phillips. That killing was obviously his own idea."

Jim Blade agreed. He walked back into the darkened squad room and lighted a cigarette.

Gertie Covina followed. "How did you know that Celeste was Mignon's mother?"

"The same way that you knew that Sonny Exter was really Shad Rorick's boy," Blade said. "And that Mignon was merely feeding my torch as a cover to keep Exter from getting wise. They both were French and except for the difference in their ages and the color of their hair they might have been sisters." He paused a long moment, then said quietly: "I—I'm sorry, Gert."

The redhead squeezed his hand. "It's okay, Jim," she said. "You just let the smoke get in your eyes, that's all. What you need is a little hair of the dog that bit. Red hair," she added hopefully.

Inspector Rican nudged Pete Cussack. "Have Jim and Gert made up? Is he kissing her yet?" he asked.

Pete Cussack peeked into the squad room. "Is he kissing her! Oh, boy. Wow!"

THE END

## MY KNIFE IS RED

By G. T. Fleming-Roberts

What would you do if you found yourself riding a bus you never took; wearing clothes you never bought; and carrying a wad of money in someone else's wallet—and a bloodstained knife you *hoped* you hadn't used. . . ?

Don't miss this great suspense novelette in the October issue of this magazine, together with a line-up of the best in crime fiction by such authors as Robert Turner, William H. Hendrix, Johanas L. Bouma, H. C. Malcolm and Larry Holden.



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# A Bullet Marked Benny

By **CARROLL  
JOHN DALY**

**O**LD BENNY, the perennial patrolman. If any one had said he was going to give the boys down at the 3rd a laugh they'd have howled you out of the cop house. But he did just that. We were talking about Crane Matson.

"Matson," Benny snorted after he got his fill of it. "He was a hood years ago, and he's a hood today. He should be back in the gutter he crawled out of. Woman-strangler. I'd drag him in if he so much



Old Benny wouldn't go  
down.



*Old Benny put the faith of his life into his Ouija board—  
in the hope that it would not spell out his death.*



as tossed an orange peel on the sidewalk of my beat."

It was true. Old Benny was dumb enough. Years before, Matson might have been an ulcer on the underside of the city—today he was a cancerous growth. He was a power—money, influence, politics. Yet a rumor persisted that Matson had strangled again and that this time there had been an unfriendly witness who, everyone understood, had been taken care of.

The laugh was old Benny pulling in the feared Matson. Benny, who never did anything more than settle a few family rows, guide innocent drunks home—and comfort lost children. And the nights, of course, that he spent at the boys' clubs. Old Benny, who hadn't had a gun out of his pocket on duty in years, though the rookies he trained on the pistol range swore he could draw faster and shoot straighter than a movie sheriff.

Cops have few illusions. So it would jar you to walk into the back room of the 3rd and see a big harness bull sitting there with an Ouija Board balanced on his knees and holding his fingers gently on the little heart-shaped, three-legged table as it slid over the letters of the alphabet spelling out a message.

One of the two men who sat hunched over that board was always old Benny, more years on the force than most of the boys have lived.

Like as not some hard-boiled cop would get up from that board and, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, mutter that there was nothing to it.

"Of course there ain't," Old Benny would agree. "It's all in fun—just in fun." But he'd say it with such deep meaning that you'd know he thought it was gospel.

I never believed in fortune-telling but the truths that Ouija told were surprising. Young Newton, for instance, who never expected the stripes of a sergeant that year, got his first information from the Ouija board. And Skeller, who was so sure he was sitting pretty, was tipped off he was going to walk a beat in the sticks. But mainly it warned lads when they were getting out of line, to watch their step.

It came true like clockwork—even the warning to me not to be pushing, for I wouldn't get charge of the 3rd until our own Captain Flannigan was an Inspector.

It wasn't true I was pushing for the job, but Flannigan thought I was, so I was careful after that because a captain hears things before anyone else.

Benny thought that being a cop and simply a cop was the grandest job in the world. He told me once:

"Only a cop on the beat, George, is close to the people—close to the kids. I like that."

I knew he meant it. I knew he had another Ouija Board down at the Elm Street Boys' Club. Captain Flannigan, who fancied himself something of a psychologist, told me that the Ouija board always gave the kids good advice.

"Old Benny pushes it, of course," Flannigan said. "He doesn't know it. He pushes it subconsciously, he tells people things he's heard, things he's seen. Since old Benny is fundamentally good and honest, why only good and honest stuff comes from the Ouija board."

Dumb cop, old Benny. Maybe he wasn't over bright. But he envied no one. Maybe, at that, down deep we envied his contentment—the picture of his long-dead wife Martha. His three girls, now married. His eleven grandchildren, all girls.

There's the picture. Who would believe you then if you even hinted that old Benny was to push the cold war off the front pages, have city editors rushing out extras and burning light all night to get editorials into the papers. And all this while the Ouija board was ready and willing—yes, and eager—to spell D-E-A-T-H for old Benny.

Like all things with old Benny, it was simple. Yet it was terrifying. Old Benny was passing through an alley down by the docks, looking for drunks who might fall into the river, unfortunates who had no home or boys and girls who ran away. Benny didn't look in the window with the torn shade, for he wasn't interested in what went on in lighted rooms but what went on in the outer darkness. He didn't know that there was a rip in that shade, but one of the two men in that lighted room did know it because the struggling girl he held by the throat tore it.

Crane Matson looked through that slit, and his hands fell from the girl's throat—a girl he had hunted for weeks, a girl who had fled in panic and terror—for she had

been a witness to the strangling of another woman by Crane Matson.

Crane Matson looked through that window and saw only a white face. He thought fast, as he always thought. Here was a man who had seen and would know when the girl turned up dead. Men who prowled the docks at that time of the morning knew life and knew the value of money. Such men could be bought.

Matson tapped on the window and called. Benny had seen nothing before, and, since the shade had flapped over a bit, he saw nothing now. He heard simply the voice of a man who wanted him, who needed a cop.

It was a credit to old Benny that the moment he entered that room Crane Matson recognized him and knew the truth. No amount of money would fix this man. Matson knew, too, that for the first time in his life he was going to kill a cop. There was no other way—not with this cop.

He called to his companion, an ace trigger man.

"Give it to him, Eddie." And Matson reached for his own gun. "It's old Benny," he cried, "the dumb cop. The honest cop." And with those derisive words, he paid Benny his greatest compliment.

Crane Matson died before he hit the floor. Old Benny bounced about on rubber legs but wouldn't go down. His grey eyes were cold and his black gun was hot. The trigger man, Eddie, died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. The girl lived to tell it all.

**CAPTAIN FLANNIGAN** told me when I came in to the 3rd. "Benny would like to have had his Ouija Board tonight, George. Good news for us under other circumstances. I'm to be an inspector the first of the month—and you'll take over my job here. What a kick Benny would get pushing that information out to you ahead of schedule."

I flicked at my lips. They had never been so dry.

"His chances?" I finally asked.

"Nil," said Flannigan as he blew his nose and coughed. "Matson, no less, and his best gunman. Old Benny did for both of them. There's a slug in his heart, George. Lord knows Benny's heart was so big you couldn't miss it. Don't stand there staring at me. Get up to the hospital. He

wants to see you." And when I started for the door his voice choked, "Take the Ouija board with you. Benny asked for it."

I knew Doctor Moffet pretty well. He gave me the bad news.

"He might live through the night like that. But he'd die on the table under surgery. Doctor Stewart has arrived—but a surgeon, not a miracle man."

Somehow old Benny knew he was going to die. His voice was low and weak. His hands burnt and his eyes were bright, but his head was clear.

"There isn't much time, George," he said slowly. "There's the castor oil for Bebo, she's Agnes' second child. I didn't get around to it last night. And I got a deposit up at Goldberg's for a doll house for Charlotte—that's Elizabeth's oldest—her birthday is the fifteenth. And the Dock Street Boys' Club. I wouldn't like to go without knowing if the money will be raised for it. We can ask the Ouija. Doctor Stewart was here a minute ago."

"Yes," was the best I could get out.

"An operation is hopeless, George. Even then it would have to be within the next fifteen or twenty minutes. So I'm against it."

"Against it. What do you mean, Benny?" I was startled.

"Well—" he said, "Jessie is flying over with the kids from Buffalo. Agnes just got home up in Riverton and is on her way here. I'd like to see them and the kids before—before I go." And he added, with that old smile, "Might as well die now as twenty years from now with cramps in the stomach."

"Hopeless?" Doctor Stewart, the great surgeon, said in answer to my question. "Most men would tell you that I suppose. I'll simply say that if he's set on seeing any of his family who can't arrive within the hour—it's for him to decide. He's resigned to death and that's bad."

"You mean—not the will to live?" That wasn't like old Benny.

"Not that at all," Doctor Stewart corrected me. "Precognition. Spiritual warning. I like to call it intuition. But he knows."

About the Ouija, Doctor Stewart overruled the others, after I told him about Benny and the board. He said:

"If he wants to play with it, let him."

It cut into Benny like a thousand knives propping him up with pillows. Never a moan out of him, understand. You could see it in his face, his twisted lips, his agonized grey eyes as I sat on the edge of the bed and placed the Ouija board between us, my fingers and his on the little table.

It moved. The little table slid easily up to YES when he asked about the completion of the boys' club.

"That makes it easier," Benny sighed. "I was worried about that, George."

"Better—" I hesitated and tried again, "better get ready for that operation now."

"No operation," Benny shook his head. "I want to see the kids. No, George. I'd have a try at it if there was a chance. There isn't. You know how I am about knowing things. It's—it's—" His lips set tight. I thought it was pain but it wasn't. Almost at once his voice was better, his words not so thick. "I've been ducking something, George. Afraid to face the truth, even though I know it. I'll ask the Ouija board. It will tell me." His hands went out and his fingers sought the little three-legged table and rested on it again.

I never saw the Ouija board act like that before. The little table made a direct line for the letter D, switched off and around the left side of the board. Then it darted back again straight for that D but stopped before it reached it. Something was pushing it toward Death. Something was holding it back.

And I knew. There was nothing supernatural about what was holding it back, nothing subconscious either. I wouldn't let it hit the D. I wouldn't let it spell out D-E-A-T-H. There was a struggle between me and the Ouija board and maybe Benny's subconscious—and the pressure was severe. But I won, and the Ouija table shot to L, two letters back to I, along the same upper line of letters to F and then the E was easy.

"Life," I almost shouted the word.

Benny never suspected, never doubted. His voice sounded far away but there was a pleasant new ring to it.

"You can forget about the doll house, George. That's a couple of weeks yet, and I'll tend to it. The castor oil, though. Don't forget that."

"You're going to—to risk the opera-

tion?" I was a little frightened at what I'd done.

"Of course," Benny said. "I don't want to die. I was wrong. Hunches are all right in little things, George—but don't you trust them when the Ouija is around. Better get Doctor Stewart." There was a chuckle. "I want to know how long after the operation before I can see my kids."

I was back at the cop house with Captain Flannigan. We sat there looking at the phone.

"I don't know, Cap," I told him. "It's like I sent a man straight to his death without—without his last wish being granted. Nothing subconscious about that. I pushed it—pushed it deliberately and hard."

"Good for you, George," the Captain said. "There's the psychology. You gave Benny a belief in getting well—that might be enough to do the trick."

"It was going to Death," I told him.

"Sure it was," he nodded. "That's what Benny believed. That's what the Ouija always told—what Benny believed. He'd hear things around—mostly from me—and he'd work it back through the Ouija board where it would do the most good. Tonight he believed he was dying—until the Ouija board told him different. That's the important thing—faith."

The phone rang then and I grabbed the instrument.

"It's the hospital," I said as I half-collapsed into the chair again. "It's Benny. He's out of surgery. The operation was a near miracle. Got at his heart, cut the slug out—sewed it up again and—and—he's going to get better."

"It was his attitude," Captain Flannigan leaned back and lit a cigar and his sigh must have been heard out at the desk. "He believed it all along and did good with it all along, as he believed it tonight and is alive. Not alive because of the Ouija board but because of that belief—that faith that is old Benny's."

"I should have known," I said. "But Benny—old Benny. He must be simple-minded."

"Old Benny simple-minded?" Captain Flannigan's head moved from side to side like a metronome. "No, not simple-minded, George. A simple man—yes. But a fine man—a really fine man."

*In the labyrinths of New Orleans' French Quarter  
the G-man sought a killer—and found an . . .*

# ATOMIC BLONDE



Suddenly, her voice cut in,  
"Drop your gun and get your  
own hands in the air."

By  
**HUMPHREY  
JONES**

**S**PECIAL AGENT Rick Myron looked at the body on the morgue slab and felt the hair rise on the back of his neck. It was the stoolie.

What stirred Myron's hackles was the fact that it was less than two hours since he had left the pigeon's fleabag room in the French Quarter, with the information that he would find his man at the *Café Vicur Carré*. And the fact that he had just by a

hair missed drawing a berth on the next slab himself. The chill of the place struck into him.

The pale object under the white light had a plain meaning: Rick Myron was up against an organization, and already they had him spotted. They must have been watching him when he went up to the stoolie's room. The stoolie's death had followed within minutes.

Only quick action with his shoulder-clipped Magnum had kept Myron alive. Strang had been at the café all right—waiting for Myron in the back alley. The knot still throbbled on the back of Myron's crew-cut head, where the sap's first blow had landed. Only his instinctive speed in falling before the blow landed, at the sound of the footstep behind him, had lessened its force, and left him conscious enough to wing his ambusher. And conscious enough to recognize the giant form of Strang, the escaped lifer.

That little trap had been proof enough that he was spotted. Coming here to the morgue had been only a matter of clinching the final grim evidence.

There was only one answer now—get Strang before Strang got him.

Myron thought swiftly. He couldn't go back to his own room—not now. And Strang would have disappeared again into the labyrinths of New Orleans' French Quarter, bleeding from the Magnum slug in his arm. The best chance was to go back to the café, where the trail was still hot. In a public place, he'd be out of their reach for the moment. And he might uncover something.

He turned to the morgue attendant and said, "Okay, Sammy, thanks. You can cover him up now."

The smocked oldster drew the sheet back over the body. Rick Myron essayed a macabre joke: "Don't close up, Sammy. You may have a busy night."

Then he went outside and waved down a cab. This was one time when walking might not be a healthful form of exercise.

Rick Myron dropped down the steps into the murky atmosphere of the night club. The place was crowded with a mixture of jive-happy college kids, French Quarter characters, a few tourists with money to spend, and the assorted hangers-on who lived off them. Rick's eyes searched the room quickly but thoroughly. Strang wasn't there. But he could easily be hiding out in

a back room, if Rick's slug was bothering him enough to make traveling uncomfortable.

The thing to do was to pass himself as one of the crowd. Let one of the leeches hook onto him, then do some pumping. Rick knew that with his close-cropped hair and the boyish look of his face, he could be taken for a college man himself—post-graduate type. Many people had been fooled by Rick Myron's unsophisticated appearance.

He found a table which had just been vacated near the bandstand, and sat down.

He was too busy studying the crowd to glance at the entertainer gliding back and forth under the shifting spotlight. It was the voice that hit him.

It was low and torchy, exactly on key, but with a suppressed throb that gave the words of the song an intensity of meaning that the songwriter had never put into them. The kind of voice that went straight into your memory—and into your blood.

Rick turned in surprise. It wasn't often you heard a canary like this in a basement dive.

The sight of the girl struck Rick like a physical shock. She was standing directly facing him, only a few feet away. The spotlight that held her caught Rick at its edge. She was holding her hands out in a gesture of appeal, a tawny cascade of hair falling down over her shoulders, her clear, delicate features touched with a sultry smile. Her gown was a golden sheath that matched her hair and lined her body with flame.

Rick stared. His eyes unexpectedly met the girl's, and Rick felt an electric charge leap between them. The girl's eyes suddenly went wide, and he knew she had also felt it. Then her eyelids came down again, as she masked her emotions. She whirled abruptly away, and finished her song without coming near Rick again. The room was loud with the applause. Then the spotlight flicked off and the girl disappeared from sight.

The emcee was on the microphone, saying, "That was Sheila Dawn, folks. If you liked that, stick around. She'll be back with more of the same."

Rick sat back and lit a cigarette. He inhaled deeply, relaxing. He had just realized that he had been sitting on the edge of his chair.

**A** REDHEAD, who had been talking to the hatcheck girl when he came in, drifted up to the table.

"You all alone, handsome?"

"I was." Rick's gaze went over her. A little faded, a little hard and tired, brightened up with too much paint. The girl smiled consciously and sat down.

"I could use a drink."

Rick signaled a waiter and the redhead ordered a highball. When it came, she tossed down the whiskey straight, and sat stirring the soda with the stick.

Rick was pleased. The girl was a regular in the place, and would probably know something.

Rick decided to play the college-boy act. Give him an excuse for inquisitiveness.

"Good music here," he said. "The real blues."

The girl laughed, somewhat stridently. "Yeah. That's right. But you don't look like any hepcat to me. What gives?"

Rick gave her the boyish grin. "No—not a hepcat. Making a study of it. Doing some write-ups. I really like jazz, though."

The girl cocked an eyebrow at him wisely. "Write-ups, eh?" She laughed again. "Say, I could tell you enough about these musicians to write a book."

"Fine. That's what I'm after."

"Well, buy me another drink."

Rick flagged down the waiter again. He went off to get the order. The girl leaned forward, her elbows on the table and smiled slowly, hugging to herself some private knowledge. "Yes, sir. You could write a book."

The waiter came back, his tray empty.

He leaned over and whispered in the redhead's ear. She looked up at Rick, startled, and said, "Excuse me—I gotta see somebody."

Rick cursed inwardly as the girl got up and headed for a table at the side of the room. He saw her stop beside a swarthy, thick-set torpedo in a dinner jacket, who stood up and spoke to her angrily, his narrowed eyes flicking toward Rick. Rick saw the girl's mouth drop open. Then she hurried away. The torpedo sat down and stared narrowly across the intervening tables at Rick.

Rick felt the chill in his spine again. The torpedo obviously was one of Strang's mob. Though nothing would happen as long as the crowd was there, Rick was bottled up as surely as if they had him cornered in a blind alley. Step outside, and he'd be cut down before he got ten yards. But he couldn't stay here forever, either.

Of course, Rick knew, he could step to the phone at any moment and call the city cops. A squad car could be waiting to pick him up the instant he stepped out the front door. But that was out. Rick wanted to play this his way.

Besides, the case was just beginning to get really interesting. Sheila Dawn was back on the floor, moaning another torchy ballad, and this time she wasn't avoiding Rick's table.

Apparently she had had time to think about that moment when Rick's eyes and hers had met—and decided that electricity was a good thing. She came sweeping close, and now stood before him. Honestly, frankly, she was singing straight at him.

Rick's pulse stepped up a beat. He let his gaze merge with hers. She returned his look. A warm feeling spread inside him, and he turned on the boyish smile—this time without deliberation. Sheila Dawn finished a phrase and paused, and a smile touched her lips. It was a shy smile. Then she went on with the song, and turned away, finally.

Rick's emotions rocked him. Sheila Dawn—she was a nice, sweet kid! The tinsel glamor was no more a real part of her than the gown she wore. Singing to him had not been an act, he was sure. She would have picked one of the rich, one-night tourists for that. Instead, she had picked a clean-cut guy she just liked the looks of—and Rick knew instinctively she wouldn't like the looks of many.

This time, instead of going to a dressing room when she finished singing, she sat down at an empty table beside the bandstand.

Rick got up and went over to her. She looked up, still half-smiling.

"A drink?"

"Thanks. I'd like one."

Rick sat down.

"You haven't been here long, have you?"

"How did you know? No. I was an organist, and played piano sometimes in a band. But somebody decided I had other talents, and I needed the money, so—"

"So here you are. That's fine," Rick said. "That's wonderful."

Sheila Dawn looked down at her fingers. "I'm glad you liked me." Still the half-smile.

Rick waited till she looked up again, then said quietly, "Not did. Do."

The waiter came, and took their orders. Rick glanced around and saw the heavy-set torpedos still watching him. From other parts of the room, he could sense other eyes on him. But Sheila Dawn apparently was not part of the setup. The waiter was impassive when he brought the drinks, and departed quietly.

Rick sat and drank with her. But at his back, he still felt the tension in the place, and was aware of the customers beginning to thin out. The night spot would be closing before long, and he still had to think of something.

"Going to sing again?" he asked.

"One more number."

Rick saw a way out. "I'll take you

home," he said. If he left with the girl, the mob wouldn't try any rough stuff.

"Yes," Sheila Dawn said. "Wait for me." It was as simple as that.

From the back seat of the cab, Rick could see the car tailing them. It was black, a late-model sedan that didn't look like small-time stuff. But then, Strang had never been small-time. Not in the prohibition days, not when he was running narcotics, not when he had shot it out with a small army of Feds and drawn life. Even in prison, he had been top dog. Three other cons had been riddled in the break—but Strang had made it. Even now, hunted like a rat, Strang was a power in his own world.

The cab drew up in front of an apartment house on a tree-lined street. Rick helped Sheila out and paid the driver. Sheila said, "Come in for a while." The invitation was artless, innocent.

In the apartment, a small, tastefully decorated flat on the third floor front, Rick went to the window and looked out while Sheila took off her coat. The sedan had drawn up on the opposite curb. Rick could make out the shapes of four men sitting inside, waiting.

Rick found himself getting the jitters. If there was a back exit, that would be covered, too. He was stuck here. He hoped fervently that his charm would keep working. Luckily, with Sheila, he wouldn't have to put on an act.

Sheila had gone into the little kitchen, and came out with a couple of drinks she had mixed. She handed one to him. "A nightcap."

Rick took the glass. Then he reached out and took the other one from her hand. He set them down on the table at his knees. Sheila stood looking at him, her lips parted. Rick stepped forward and crushed them under his.

There was a roaring in Rick's blood, and then they broke apart. For another moment they clung to each other fiercely

All at once, the reaction hit Rick. All the day's furious activity, the tension, the beating in the alley, left him abruptly weak and exhausted. He felt his knees buckle slightly under him.

Sheila sensed it. "Oh—you're tired!"

Rick nodded. "Yeah. Sort of. I'll be okay in a minute."

She led him to a divan and made him stretch out. Then she sat by him while she loosened his tie and brushed her fingers over his hair. Rick let himself relax completely for the first time that day.

He let his eyelids drop, and through the slit of the lids, watched Sheila's face bent over him, her hair falling loose on each side.

"It's funny," Sheila said. "I don't even know your name."

He thought it over for a minute. For some reason, he wanted her to know his right one. He didn't see how it could do any harm.

"Rick—for Richard. Rick Myron."

"Rick," she murmured. She leaned over and put her face against his. Rick was stirred. He had never met a girl so lacking in coyness or pretense.

He touched her hair. The knowledge of the men waiting outside was like a bad memory, something in another world. He let his eyelids drop the rest of the way, and fell into blackness.

**R**ICK felt the sunlight hot on his eyelids, and opened them. He looked around, groggy. It took him a few seconds to realize he was still in Sheila Dawn's apartment. He sat up. Sheila had removed his shoes and drawn a blanket over him. He cast the blanket aside. He still had his coat on, and his gun was untouched.

From the small kitchen came a sound of glass rattling, and he heard Sheila humming to herself. Then she came out, carrying a tray with a coffee pot and cups. She was wearing a flowered house dress, and looked like a school girl.

"Well, good morning, dopey. I was just going to wake you. Coffee?"

Rick grinned sheepishly, and searched for his shoes. He found them and put them on. He brushed his hair straight with his hand, and took the steaming cup she held out to him.

While he drank it, he managed to glance out the window. The sedan was gone. He looked at his wristwatch. Past nine o'clock. The boys outside had decided daylight wasn't good for them, he judged.

Rick smiled an apology. "Thanks for your hospitality. I guess I was knocked out last night. But I can't stay."

Sheila stuck out a lower lip. "Oh—I was hoping to adopt you."

Rick was worried. He didn't have time to waste. "No fooling—I got to shove." He felt a pang of guilt when he realized he might have gotten in deeper with this girl than was good for either of them. If she was in love, it might be with a man slated to be measured for a box instead of a wedding suit. And himself—love was poison for a man playing hide-and-seek with a gang of killers. Nothing could foul things up worse than a woman on his mind.

He didn't know if he could keep Sheila off his mind—but at least he could let her out of it. He put on his hat and went to the door.

"Do you have to go?"

"If everything goes right, I'll see you at the club one of these nights. I can't tell you any more."

She came close to him. He caught her to him for a long minute, then turned and shut the door behind him. He went out feeling shaken. A man in his job had no business even thinking about women. It was going to make it tougher.

He left the building the front way. Better for his plans if he was seen now. He walked quickly to the end of the block and turned the corner. Then he stepped back around and into the door of the drugstore that was there. He went inside. There



was a window from which he could see the length of the street he had just come down. There was no sign of the men or their car. But he had a hunch they were still somewhere around, and if they were, he wanted to know about it. And he wanted Sheila safe.

He waited for ten minutes before he saw what he was looking for. The black sedan rolled up to where it had been parked before. He guessed they had been watching the apartment entrance from another building. He felt a hot wave of anger rising in him. If they had any ideas about bothering Sheila. . . .

A big man stepped out of the back seat of the car and started across the street. Rick noticed that one sleeve hung loose. The coat was bulky at the side, as if he carried one arm bandaged to his body.

It was Strang! Strang himself. The escaped lifer, the Fed-killer.

Rick knew he was heading for Sheila's apartment. He probably thought he could force the girl to tell where Rick had gone. But she didn't know. Rick broke into a sweat when he thought what Strang might do to her.

At the same time, he felt an exultance rising in him. Strang was here, right in his grasp. He could grab him now.

He stepped back to the phone booths in the rear of the store. He got the city police chief on the line and ordered a squad car or two sent to cover him and nail the mobsters outside. He was going in after Strang himself.

Hanging up the phone, he headed for the back entrance. On the street, he flagged a cab and got in, sinking back in the seat. He had the driver pull up in front of the apartment building. Then, his hat pulled down and the cab between him and the sedan across the street, he got out and went inside the building. He was indoors before the cab pulled away. He knew the men had not gotten a look at him.

One of them might take a notion to check

on him, though. He had to move fast. He headed for the elevator and ran it up to the third floor. There he left it with the door jammed open. Anyone following him would waste minutes over that.

He ran to the door of Sheila's apartment and tried it. It was locked, automatically. Rick got the Magnum into his hand, and braced his shoulder. Then he threw his weight against the door.

It broke inward with a splintering crash, and Rick's momentum carried him stumbling into the room. In front of him, he saw Sheila staring up with a white face at Strang's huge figure looming over her.

"All right, Strang!" he barked. "This is it. Get away from the girl, and get your hand in the air. Don't try anything, because there'll be a squad car full of cops outside in about two seconds. And don't try to warn your men, or I'll blast you."

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Sheila backing away. She was obviously scared. He could imagine what Strang had been saying to her.

Strang faced him, his big features full of hate. "Well—it's the G-boy. You've got the drop on me, copper. But don't think you're gonna get me back behind bars so easy."

Rick let him talk. He was waiting for the sound of that squad car pulling up outside. "Just don't try anything, Strang. Because this time, I won't wing you. They teach us to shoot straight, you know."

Sheila had backed clear out of the line of fire now, and Rick breathed easier.

Strang said, "I'm not through yet—you'll find that out."

Rick said, "The game's up, Strang."

Sheila was leaning against a dresser. Suddenly, her voice cut in, low and husky, "Oh, no, it isn't. G-stuff. Drop your gun and get your own hands in the air."

Rick made a half-turn toward her and stared. From out of the dresser drawer, Sheila had snaked a black .38 automatic, its snout as ugly and deadly as a copper-

head's. She had it pointed straight at Rick.

For a second, shock and surprise held Rick rigid. Then he started to lower his gun arm.

But instead of dropping the gun, he ducked his whole body and made a dive for the girl. Her .38 went off wildly. Then Rick was grappling for her legs. If he could pull her down between him and Strang. . . . It was as though a bucket of ice water had washed all feeling for her out of him.

There was a crashing explosion in the direction of Strang, and Rick felt a bullet hit him like a mule kick. It knocked him down onto his side, away from the girl. He struggled to get his gun up, to shoot back at Strang.

The world went into a spin, and Rick was tugging at a ton of lead. It pulled him down, down, spinning into a bottomless whirlpool. . . .

**T**HERE was a time of delirium. A time of fever and wild dreams. Dreams in which the face of Sheila Dawn floated, now shining like the face of an angel, now twisted and changed into the mask of a witch from hell. And, finally, there was a time when Rick's senses returned to him, and he dimly became aware of his real surroundings.

The first time he consciously opened his eyes, he saw that Sheila Dawn was more than a dream. She was there, with him. She was leaning over him, bathing his face with a damp cloth. As he looked up, she met his glance, and then turned away.

Rick's head whirled. First the girl makes a play for him, then she pulls a gun on him and gets him shot, then he wakes up to find her nursing him. He didn't know whether he wanted to pull her into his arms, or strangle her.

He started to roll onto his side, then groaned. His torso was taped up, and he felt as if he had a hole in him big enough to drag a cat through.

He lay back, and stared at Sheila Dawn, moving around the room. The whole thing didn't make sense. Sheila had on a pair of riding pants, and a man's shirt.

Rick examined the interior, and discovered they were in a cabin. There was a pineboard floor, with a few rugs scattered around, and some rustic furniture. There were electric bulbs in the lamps, but outside he could hear the chugging of a power generator. He could hear water flowing, and trees—swamp sounds. He decided they were in a fishing shack, somewhere in the bayous. He saw a primitive field telephone on the table, and wondered where it led to. Nowhere that could do him any good, he decided. Beside it sat a portable battery radio. Shotguns, for birds.

Altogether, it looked like a pretty well provided little setup. Strang's place, more than likely. But in that case, what was he doing here—alive?

Sheila came back, with more damp cloths. Rick caught her wrist and held her, as she started to put one on.

"All right, baby," he said. "Give. What's it all about. What're we doing here?"

She let him hold her. "I didn't want you to die," she said. "So I brought you here."

Rick gave a coughing laugh. "Didn't want me to die? When you just did your best to get me killed?"

"I couldn't help that," Sheila said. Rick could have sworn she looked as innocent as a baby. "You see, I didn't have any idea—before—that you were a G-man. Not until my father told me."

Whirling lights burst over Rick. "Your father!"

"Yes. My real name's Sheila Strang. Now do you understand?"

Rick slowly closed his mouth. Yeah, that did make sense. That explained why Strang was hanging around the *Vieux Carré*! And why Sheila might have needed money all of a sudden. Rick felt a quick sense of shamed respect for the girl. She and the old man must have been pretty close.

Sheila went on. "You can see why I had to help him get away. I couldn't stand the thought of him going back to spend the rest of his life in prison. He's got so few years left—"

Rick loosened his grip on her wrist, and ended by crushing her hand in his own.

"Sure. But you know he's a criminal? He'll have to go back. They'll catch him—or kill him."

"I know. But he's the only father I've got."

"What happened at the apartment?"

"The squad car came just as Dad was getting away. He and his men shot it out with them. Two of the police were killed. I'm—sorry about that."

"He's hiding out, here in the swamp, too?"

Sheila nodded. "But they won't find him."

Suddenly, Rick knew where that field telephone went to. Another cabin, across the bayou—probably a hunting cabin, stocked with shotguns and more lethal armory. A dangerous place to jump. Strang and his mob, the ones that were in as deep as he was, would be holed up there.

His own part in this still wasn't clear to him.

"And just to make sure they won't find him, you brought me here, right?" He was bitter again, now. "The cops are probably squatting all around the bayou. But if they come in, you finish me off, is that it?"

Sheila looked shocked. To Rick, the expression seemed genuine. "Oh, no! No, Rick!" She put her head on his chest, easily so as not to hurt him.

"Rick, I want you alive!"

"When my father got away from the apartment, he left you there on the floor. I had to get away, too, because I'd been helping him. I was guilty of that. But the police were after Dad, and I had time to get you out, too. I brought you here, myself. Dad and the others don't know anything about it.

"Rick, I saved your life. I took you to a doctor I know, and he got the bullet out. Then I took care of you. You would have died if I hadn't!"

"Why didn't you let me? I'm a G-man."

Sheila moaned and gripped Rick with her arm. "Oh, Rick, please. Forget about all this—this manhunt. Let the others do what they have to. Neither of us can do anything more, now. Wait until the whole thing is over. Then we—you and I—can go somewhere. Live as if it had never happened."

What Sheila said rang true. There was little either of them could do to change the outcome now. Rick felt a wave of hunger for her rushing over him. After all, he couldn't blame her for her father's crimes. And her loyalty to him was a thing Rick could not but admire. He reached and took a handful of her hair in his clenched fist. Then he pulled her mouth to his. . . .

"Yes," Rick said. "I think we could do that."

**A**FTER a few hours, Rick found that he could get up and walk around, though every breath he took was like breathing flame.

Inside him, stronger than the pain of the wound, was a vast sense of relief and happiness. He'd be going back on his oath, he'd have to resign the service if he went ahead with this. But Sheila was worth it. And it wasn't wrong. People got caught up in circumstances—they couldn't always help the things that happened.

Sheila started singing as she went about the cabin. Every once in a while the thought of her father, holed up like a hunted animal at bay, hit her and she sobered. But her own happiness burst through. She danced around Rick and held up her lips to be kissed, again and again.

Still, time began to drag. Out in the swamp, the silence was ominous. It became dark, and there was no sound of life any-

where around them. Rick switched on the portable radio.

A newscaster's voice poured from the speaker, smooth and meaningless.

"Police have sealed off all roads going to or from the bayou. They are convinced that Big Jim Strang and his men are in there, somewhere. For three days they have waited patiently for Strang to crack and come out of his own accord. But word is received that if Strang has not given himself up by dawn tomorrow, the entire force will start through the swamp, combing every backwater, every clump of trees. It is known that Strang's men are armed, but the governor has said that criminals of his stamp cannot be allowed to roam at large. Even though good men must risk their lives, Big Jim Strang must be captured. The governor said—"

Rick snapped the radio off. The governor was a damned fool. He wished those two city cops had not gotten themselves killed—dragging in all the local law in the area. Strang's men would kill twice their number before they gave up.

But that, Rick realized, was his fault. It had been he who had called the squad car. It was his fault those cops had died.

"Sheila," he said.

She came close to him. "Yes?"

Rick held her away. "It's no good. Your scheme. I can't buy it."

Sheila's face went white. "Why? Rick, why?"

"You heard the radio. That guy said a hundred cops are going to start through here in the morning. Your dad's got guns. Some of those men'll be killed, Sheila. And two have already been killed."

"Rick!" Sheila cried. "There's nothing you can do!"

"Yes, there is. I can hunt out Strang myself. Maybe I can get the drop on him. That's a long chance. If not, if there are any shots, the position will be given away, and the cops can pinpoint the place."

Sheila relaxed slightly, though her face

was still anguished. "You'll never be able to find them, Rick. You'll wander around in the swamp all night. No. Stay here, Rick." Her voice was a plea.

"I can find them," he said. "That field telephone. My guess is the wire leads straight to where your dad is hiding out. All I have to do is follow it."

Sheila spun around and stared at the telephone as though it were a buzzing rattler. Rick could tell by her expression that he had hit home.

Rick went to the wall and took down a shotgun which hung there on pegs. There were shells, and he picked them up and shoved a couple into the breech.

"So, good-by, Sheila." He started toward the door, the shotgun almost too heavy for his weakened body to carry.

Sheila suddenly darted to where the .38 automatic lay on a table. She grabbed it and whirled on him, once more covering him with it.

"Don't step into that door. If you do, this time I'll shoot straight." She gasped the words, as though they were torn out of her. Rick continued toward the door.

"And draw all the cops in three counties?" he said. "Remember, they can trace that telephone wire as easy as I could. Easier."

For a moment, Sheila looked stymied. Then the answer occurred to her.

"Then what's to stop me picking up the phone? I can call, and they could get here and blow you to pieces before you got a hundred yards. And they'd get away before any cops got near here."

Rick knew she had him. If Strang came looking for him, he wouldn't have a ghost's chance of coming out alive. He couldn't wreck the phone, because he knew she would use the automatic on him if he tried it.

The two dead cops decided him. "All right, use the phone. But tell Strang I'll get him if I can."

He stepped through the door and out-

side. He headed for the brush, and plunged in. Through the open door, he could see her picking up the phone.

Rick soon saw why Sheila was so sure Strang could nail him. The cabin was on an island. It would take a boat to get off it. Rick worked his way around the rim of the island for half an hour, before he was convinced there was only one boat landing—the one near the cabin. He had hoped he could get away on land, but he was forced to return to where the boat—a small power launch—was tied up.

In the time he had spent exploring, Strang could have gotten a dozen boats through the swamp to the island. Crouching down in the brush, Rick peered intently across the narrow channel. He looked for the phone wire, and could see it strung across from one side of the channel to the other, on trees. If Strang was over there, he was within easy shotgun range—either way. Luckily, it was dark enough to give him a chance.

Rick crept down the beach toward the landing, trying to keep in the deeper shadows. Once arrived at the landing, he got down and crawled along it toward the boat at the other end, trying to keep from making himself a target. Getting into the boat and getting it started before they spotted him was his only chance.

He reached the end of the float and looked over. The boat bumped gently against the logs where it was tied. He eased forward and started to inch over the edge.

Just then, there was a sputtering roar right beneath him. The boat's motor had started!

Rick drew back involuntarily in surprise. Suddenly, from the other side of the channel, a couple of searchlights sprang to life. They swept over the water and focused on the small boat.

At the same moment, a figure stood up in the boat, exposing itself to the full glare.

Lying prone on the float, Rick saw that it was Sheila, dressed in the riding pants, and her hair pulled up under a man's hat.

From across the water, a tommygun opened up. Rick saw Sheila's body jump as the slugs tore into her. Then she crumpled into the bottom of the boat.

The searchlights cut off, and Rick heard engines starting up across the channel. A pair of boats came nosing out into the clear, then. Rick saw a huge bulk looming in the prow of one. Strang.

Rick gripped the shotgun and said, "Strang!"

Big Jim Strang turned, swinging the tommygun upward. Rick fired. The shotgun blast took Strang full in the chest. He toppled slowly, and fell into the water with a splash. He floated there.

The other men in the boats moved nervously. Rick stood up and swung the shotgun over them.

Then he heard the sirens of the police boats. In half a minute, the state patrol had swung in.

Rick had got Sheila's shattered body up onto the float, and knelt down by her, holding her head up with his arm.

"Sheila—you crazy kid!" he whispered. "What were you doing?"

She found his hand, and somehow managed a smile.

"I'm always saving your life—aren't I, Rick?"

"Sheila!" He couldn't think of anything to say. "Why? Why did you?"

"It's all right. My father was a wrong guy. You were a right one, that's why. I was a wrong one too, for not seeing things straight before. So it's all right. I just—I just wish things could have been different, Rick—"

Her body slumped in his arms and became a lifeless weight. As he held her like that, Rick Myron found himself, too, wishing desperately that things could have been different. . . .

*Sam was such an inconvenient husband—  
coming home from the Army . . .  
at the wrong time.*



She heard Sam call her.

# Tetanus For Two

By CORETTA SLAVSKA

**D**ENA had thought Sam would be in Korea by this time, but he was coming home. She rolled the telegram into a tiny ball and tossed it into the waste basket.

In another day Sam would be here—here in this new apartment he had never

seen. She had told him a little about it in her letters, but he probably thought it was like their old one-room efficiency apartment. *That joint*, she thought in sudden disgust and despair!

What would he think when he saw these three spacious rooms—the terrace—the

modern bronze lamps? She could go on this way for hours, speculating on what her husband's reaction would be. It was useless to hope he wouldn't ask questions. He'd suspect the truth.

Dena looked at her left hand. The narrow wedding band Sam had given her five years ago was still there. It was barely noticeable. The large emerald in the platinum setting which she wore behind it dwarfed the ring that symbolized her marriage to Sam.

She walked up and down the room—a beautiful, restless woman, her grey-green eyes wet with angry tears. She tried not to give way to her troubled thoughts.

*I could kill Sam*, she thought suddenly, and an unreasoning hatred for him filled her heart. His telegram had said simply that he had been discharged from the Army. *Probably his heart*, she thought. Well, it didn't matter now. He'd be home again—he'd forgive her. Or maybe he would even swallow the tale that she had gotten a sufficient raise in salary to furnish the new apartment. But it would mean she couldn't see her boss any more—that is, not socially!

*I could kill Sam*, she thought again, and she turned the possibility over in her bewildered mind. If he were dead, everything would be fine. She had thought of him dying—as a hero on the battlefield. Then she would marry her boss. But Sam wasn't a dead hero—he was an alive husband. He would never divorce her. He had said once, "You're my wife—for always." He meant it.

Sam seemed like a stranger—gone two long years. She had seen him only a few times. He was stationed in the state of Washington—the country lay between them. She had been lonesome in New York . . .

Dena went into the bedroom and put on her riding boots. She took her suede jacket from the closet and in the long mirror surveyed with satisfaction her slim, graceful body. Her sensual mouth trembled a little as she thought of the humdrum life that might again be hers, if Sam remained here. She cracked the riding whip across her hand until it stung. *I'll do something—I'll think of some way*, she muttered. And she went to the Broadway Academy for her daily riding lesson.

Few people were there at the early hour of nine o'clock. Dena waved to her riding instructor who was taking her out this morning.

He looked worried. "Had a bad accident here yesterday," he said. "Young fellow cut himself and has a case of tetanus today."

Dena looked puzzled. The riding instructor pointed to one of the stalls. "The guy bent over, got caught on a nail in one of the boards. The tetanus germ apparently was on it—you know there's always danger in these stables—and he got a deep gash. But he's fine. He had a shot of anti-toxin, and he'll be O.K. Just talked with his doctor."

"That's swell!" Dena had the answer now. It lay before her—the deadly tetanus germ. It would be easy enough. Take the hatpin from her hat—and one of the pins from the shoulder of her blouse—smear them well into the dirt that lay in the stable. It would take but a moment.

If she could later use the pin on Sam—and if he couldn't get an injection, he'd die of tetanus. If one pin didn't do it, she'd use the other one.

"Wait for me outside," she called to the riding instructor who was leading her horse outdoors. He walked on ahead. It was very simple. Both her hat pin and the dainty shoulder pin were now thick with dirt—and something else, the tetanus germ.

Dena wrapped both pins carefully in a handkerchief and put them deep into her hand bag.

She joined the instructor outside. "I can't ride too long this morning," she said, "I have an important engagement—with my husband."

SAM was on time. He rang the bell promptly at seven o'clock. He looked the same, tanned and apparently in good health.

"My heart started really kicking up," he told Dena, and he held her at arm's length. "Still beautiful," he said, and there was the old look in his eyes. She knew it would always be there.

He kissed her, tenderly at first, and then with a hunger that frightened her. The pin was on the shoulder of her blouse again. She moved her arm up, so the point of it turned to Sam. *Do it now*, she thought

wildly, while he still seems like a stranger! Her arm tightened around his neck, she twisted her body and the point of the pin went deep into the flesh of his arm. He yelped aloud and jerked away, swearing futilely.

"Hell! What *tears* that!" A little blood appeared on the cloth of his jacket. "A pin! Why in heck do you women wear those pins!"

"I'm sorry! Wait, I'll stop the bleeding."

Dena pressed deep before Sam could take her hand away.

"Let it bleed," he insisted, but she pretended not to hear, and her arm tightened about him again. He held her close. He forgot everything else.

It was morning again . . . and Dena watched Sam as he lay sleeping. His face was flushed, and he looked feverish. Suddenly he opened his eyes and looked at her.

"I'm chilly," he said slowly.

"I'll make some tea," Dena called out, and she ran to the kitchen.

Sam lay quietly. He didn't speak, but looked long and curiously at his wife.

He didn't mention the apartment, nor its lavish furnishings. *Maybe he knows*, Dena thought in sudden panic. *Maybe that's why he really came back—one of his buddies may have seen me somewhere.* At the thought, fear came to her, and she was glad she had done her best to rid herself of Sam.

Yet, he wasn't a bad guy. Shiftless, always out of a job, never held one for long. He had won her in a whirlwind courtship and held her by worship of her.

Though the doctor'd said his heart wasn't too strong, the Army didn't agree. He had been in service for two years—why the sudden discharge? Perhaps it wasn't true!

Dena made the tea for Sam, and her hands trembled. She took the tea to him, and he smiled his thanks.

Suddenly she couldn't bear to look at him, and she went into the living room and groped in her handbag for her vanity case. As she lifted it out, a sudden, sharp pain in the palm of her hand sent her to the floor, almost on her knees. The hatpin she had forgotten to remove had torn her flesh, and she felt her hand throb and tremble with pain. And the pin was full of tetanus germs.

Dena gasped. She'd have to go and find

a doctor at once and get an anti-toxin shot. She heard Sam call her from the bedroom.

"Get me a doctor," he cried. "I feel rotten!"

"O. K. Take it easy." Dena reached for her hat and coat. "I'll be right back," she said.

She walked down the street, frozen with fright and a throbbing pain in her hand that seemed to reach to her finger tips. How to get a doctor to take care of her—and not mention Sam? And if she didn't get back to him soon, he would get suspicious and try to get a doctor himself.

*I'm being punished, she thought desperately. I can't go through with this—it's crazy. I'll tell Sam. Tell him everything. He'll forgive me.*

Suddenly she crumpled up on the sidewalk. She lay there for half an hour. Then someone passed, and finally the police car came. She had no identification on her, so she was taken to a city hospital.

When she opened her eyes the next morning, she found herself curiously numb. She called a nurse. "I must speak with a doctor," she whispered.

The nurse nodded. A doctor followed her back, and bent over Dena.

"Help me—quickly! I stuck myself with a pin—it probably had tetanus germs on it as it fell into some dirt in the stable of the riding academy." She fell back, exhausted.

The doctor's face showed horror. "Hope we're in time. You should have had anti-toxin at once."

He left and was back in a moment and gave Dena the injection. She lay quietly, thinking about Sam. Finally she fell asleep.

When Sam found her that night at the city hospital, she still lay quietly, awake now, but her eyes seemed to look beyond him.

"Too bad," said the doctor. "She's such a beautiful woman. Your wife?"

Sam nodded.

"You know, she hasn't got a chance. Sorry to be so blunt, but it's always better to know the truth. Tetanus. The bacilli got into the tissues very rapidly. We didn't suspect tetanus until she told us she had stuck herself with a pin that lay in the dirt in a stable. She was unconscious from psychosomatic shock. Sorry to tell you this."

"That's O. K." said Sam. He trembled

(Please continue on page 108)



*Pete tried to bluff three-of-a-kind  
into a dead man's hand.*

"You know the odds,"  
Pete said carefully.



By **WALLACE  
UMPHREY**

**P**ETE DRESSLER stood looking out of the front window of Sally's house. The street outside was wide and clean. It was a town of wide, clean streets and nice schools and churches and playgrounds. Pete's brother John was responsible. The knowledge left a murky taste in Pete's mouth. Ends didn't always justify means. "You know that I love you, Pete," Sally Halpert said. "And you say that you love

me. Pete, why won't you break clean?"

Pete turned. Sally was sitting on the edge of the sofa with her chin in the palm of one hand. Her hair was as bright as the sunshine outside.

"My brother needs me," Pete said.

"It's not that so much. It's your job. I hate it all."

"What's wrong with my job in the tax office?"

## SUICIDE IN SPADES

"It's political. That's what's the matter!"

Pete shrugged wearily. "There's nothing wrong with politics that a little honesty won't cure."

Sally didn't answer right away. Pete waited, knowing it was no use. They'd been over this so many times before.

"You won't try to understand," Sally said, not looking at him. "You know what your brother John is. You know what Laverne Wahl is. I'm not a cop's daughter for nothing." Her slim body began to tremble. "I've seen what politics has done to my father. This town is outwardly peaceful and quiet only because your brother is the mayor and he made a deal with a racketeer."

There was nothing for Pete to say because it had all been said before. Words. Words without the basis for understanding. He pulled Sally to her feet and took her in his arms. Now there was communication, but on a different level. If only, Pete thought, you didn't have to exist on so many different levels. Then everything would be so easy.

It was dinnertime when he got home. His brother John was already there, slumped deep in a chair with his coat slung over the padded arm. There was a strong similarity about them, the same clean-cut features, the same dark eyes, the same sense of strength. John held a glass in one hand—not the first drink of the day, nor of the past hour, Pete judged.

"Tired?" Pete asked.

John Dressler smiled wryly. "I have to work pretty hard for Laverne Wahl."

"Bitterness doesn't become you, John."

"Wahl wants the license of a River Street dump switched to a new place on Grant," John said. "Grant Avenue has never been zoned for business but Wahl figures a bar there will pay off. I tried to reason with him but he only laughed. The town council didn't like my recommendation."

"They'll pass it," Pete said.

John finished his drink. "I withdrew the recommendation."

Pete looked up sharply but his brother was looking away. It was impossible to tell what was in his brother's mind. Maybe, Pete thought, this was what he himself had been hoping for. A man can be led around by a ring in his nose for only so long.

"Well, let's eat," Pete said.

"I'm going out," John answered, shaking his head. "Wahl's called a poker game. It's

one of his crises—and I brought it on." John shrugged into his coat. "There's nobody so big he doesn't want to get bigger. I wonder why that is."

He stepped into a bedroom and when he came back, one of his pockets bulged.

"Why the artillery?" Pete asked.

"Wahl gave me this gun a long time ago for protection. I feel the need of protection now. It's queer how a gun can make a man feel bigger than he really is."

"Well, John," Pete admonished, "don't do anything foolish."

"I never do," John said, his hand on the door. "Pete, never sew yourself up so tight you can't cut free. Always leave yourself an exit. Everything has to end sometime and when it comes—run like hell." He smiled.

"Did you see Sally today?"

"We still don't agree."

John put an urgent hand on Pete's arm. "I need you, Pete. You're all I've got in a topsy-turvy world. Don't leave me."

Pete watched at the window while his brother stepped into his car and drove away. The shadows began to lengthen. Pete guessed he knew how it was. John had raised him—"from a pup," he liked to say. There were sixteen years difference in their ages. Pete was like a son rather than a brother—except who was leaning upon whom?

Pete ate the dinner which Mrs. Carlson, the housekeeper, set before him. Once he caught himself looking at the bust of blind justice which his brother John was always toasting so cynically. He thought about Sally. When he was through eating, he telephoned her.

"I still love you," Pete said.

"Quit your job, Pete," Sally answered.

"Get out of politics. Why hang on to that piddling little job in the tax office? You can do something bigger."

"It's no to the first. Only maybe to the second."

"All right," Sally accepted coolly. "Will you be over?"

"I'm worried about John," Pete said. "I'd better stay here."

THE closing door shut out the swirling gray fog of daybreak. Pete waited in the small parlor, the thick rugs soft underfoot and the odor of dead flowers cloying his nostrils.

A man gestured to him and they went

down a long corridor to a workroom at the back. John Dressler's body was laid out on a trestle table, ready to be prepared for burial. The mortuary assistant, withdrawing, clicked his tongue against his teeth.

Pete could see the dead lines of his brother's face. He could see where the bullet had struck just over the heart. But most of all, he could see how John had been last evening—bitter and tired and full of a desperate need, but still alive.

Pete's fist unclenched slowly. He turned away and put his forehead against the smooth panel of the door. After getting control of himself, he drove down to the Public Safety Building.

Morey Halpert's office was cramped and cluttered and yet somehow clean. It fitted his character. Morey Halpert was both Sally's father and the police chief. He was a tall, simple, honest man with a vast shadow of self-doubt across his face.

"I'm sorry, Pete," he said uneasily.

"Tell me how it happened."

Halpert eased himself slowly back into his chair. "There was a poker game at Wahl's apartment. The usual bunch—your brother John and Tim Kress and Laverne Wahl and Wahl's two lieutenants, Toomey and Stopes. Wahl kept baiting your brother. Finally John pulled a gun and then Wahl shot him." Halpert shook his graying head. "It must've been a shock."

"No shock—just pain." Pete glanced down at five poker hands lying face down on the desk. "Was my brother drunk?"

"No more than usual."

"When he left home last night, he had a gun and a conscience weighing him down. Those poker parties—they were really just business meetings. Poker was incidental."

"John had just dealt," Halpert said quiet-

ly. "Nobody got to play out the hand. Everybody just laid down their cards, and they were that way when the police walked in. Wahl himself put in the call." Halpert was talking carefully. "We've got Wahl's statement. Self-defense. The rest of the crowd agrees."

"Which is my brother's hand?"

"There."

Pete picked up the indicated card. "Nice hand to draw to. Too bad John never got to play it."

"Take it easy," Halpert said.

Pete examined all the cards. "Last night," he said, "my brother John was either expecting or looking for trouble. How could he pull a gun and then have Wahl shoot him?"

"Pete," Halpert said drily, "your brother didn't know any more about guns than you do."

"You don't have to know much about guns to shoot a man sitting across the table from you."

Halpert sat up and perked open the top drawer of his desk. Pete leaned forward, looking at the two guns lying there. Both were identical .32 automatics and both were neatly labeled with small tags wired to the trigger guards.

"This one is John's," Halpert said. "The other belongs to Laverne Wahl."

Pete leaned back. "What are you going to do about it?"

Morey Halpert eased the drawer shut. "Nothing. Wahl's too big. It was self-defense. The rest of the players are witnesses. Tim Kress liked your brother and he's honest as they come." Halpert added as an afterthought, "He'll be the acting mayor now."

Pete shook his head. "Nothing will be changed. Nothing except that my brother

### ◆ ◆ BLOTTER BLURBS ◆ ◆

Arrested near Grapevine, Tex., an escaped convict explained he had locked a stolen truck when he abandoned it because he "didn't want anybody to swipe it."



After searching more than two years for an escaped convict, Virginia police found him working as a guard at a North Carolina prison camp.

One citizen called on Detroit police to say that he had been robbed right across the street from their headquarters.



While praying in front of the holy water font in a Cleveland church, a man was robbed of \$5 by two men who held knives against his neck.

H. H.

John is dead. The set-up will be the same."

Halpert got up and went to the window. "Let me tell you how it began, Pete. A long time ago the rackets moved into town. There were half a dozen mobs all fighting to be top dog. The mobs were set to turn the town into a shambles. Your brother was the mayor and I was the police chief. John didn't have the power and I didn't have the men to cope with the gangs. Laverne Wahl came to us with a proposition. He'd clean up the town if we'd leave him alone afterwards."

Halpert turned from the window. "I let your brother make the deal. There was a night of carnage and then the other mobs were gone. Only Wahl was left. And the town's been peaceful ever since."

"I don't know," Pete said. "It could've been done some other way."

"You can't blame us, Pete." Halpert was almost childishly eager for affirmation. "What else could we do? Pete, don't blame your brother John now."

"The funeral's tomorrow at eleven," Pete said. He went to the door and closed it carefully and his heels drummed hollowly down along the linoleum-covered hallway.

**T**HE chapel was banked high with flowers. It took quite a while to tell about the dead mayor's accomplishments. Laverne Wahl's name wasn't mentioned.

Afterwards the funeral procession was long, as befitting a man who was well liked if not always respected. Pete Dressler, Morey Halpert, Tim Kress and Laverne Wahl were among the pallbearers. The box was lowered and a brief eulogy given. The crowd melted swiftly.

Pete was the last to leave. He glanced back to see the diggers already throwing dirt into the hole.

"It's tough, Pete," Laverne Wahl said, out on the sidewalk. "I know it won't do any good to say I'm sorry."

"It won't."

Laverne Wahl was a small pale man whose eyes were cold behind the lenses of his glasses. He managed to give the appearance of a man who had learned the rules of social conduct late in life.

"Maybe this isn't the proper time to mention it, Pete," he said, "but I want to have a talk with you. Your brother was always dear to me. I'd like to do something for you, Pete. Drop around in a day or two and we'll

have a chat. There's a place for you in my organization. No use keeping that two-bit job in the tax office."

"Where are your two bodyguards?" Pete asked.

"Toomey and Stopes aren't bodyguards." Wahl was smiling icily. "I'm in no danger now."

Sally and her father were waiting at the edge of the sidewalk. Wahl spoke politely to them and then drove away.

"I've got to get back to the office," Halpert said to Pete. "Will you see that Sally gets home?"

Pete drove in silence. Sally was close beside him in the seat but he knew their differences were between them. Something had to be done.

"I've quit my job," Pete said.

"When?"

"Just now."

He noted the look of pleasure in her face. "Wahl just offered me a job."

"Oh, Pete—no!"

"Remember the old addage," Pete said. "If you can't lick 'em—join 'em."

He drove home alone. Mrs. Carlson was off for the day. The moment Pete got inside he knew the place had been thoroughly searched.

Later, he went to see Tim Kress. Kress was a large, bluff, hearty man with a fringe of reddish hair around a bald pate. As chairman of the council, he'd become acting mayor.

"I'm sorry, Pete," Kress said.

"Don't be," Pete replied, sitting down. "I've been doing a lot of thinking. My brother John brought me up alone from the time I was a youngster. I felt I owed him something and I never tried to be anything other than what he wanted me to be. I think now that the arrangement lacked a certain amount of merit."

Kress looked away. "Your brother had his own problems, but he was okay."

"He always liked to be told that. Somebody had to spoon-feed his ego. I was elected." Pete shook his head. "Tell me how he got shot."

"It was all so sudden," Kress said in a troubled tone. "Your brother had dealt the cards and then Wahl muttered something about a showdown and then your brother jerked out a gun. Everything was confused. I thought your brother pulled the trigger

but Wahl shot him. Wahl is fast with a gun. I expect that comes from never really trusting anybody."

"Wahl never trusted my brother?" Pete said. "I didn't know."

"Wahl's already been to see me," Kress went on. "He wants to open a place on Grant Avenue—"

"It seems like a small thing."

Tim Kress stiffened his jaw. "It's not a small thing. It's a very big thing. And there has to be an end to everything sometime. Even a defeated army has to make a final stand. There's more than pride involved—there's self-preservation." His jaw relaxed a little. "It's easier to end something before it starts."

An end to everything, Pete thought. His brother John had said it, too. Always leave yourself an exit, John had said, and then run like hell.

"You know," Pete said softly, "I think my brother finally realized all that. Even a broken army can be dangerous in a last-ditch stand. Wahl knew that—and he still knows it. My brother John was an object lesson. You won't dare buck Wahl on that Grant Avenue thing now. Have you picked a handy exit?"

Kress leaned forward. "Crazy or not I'm not running. And I'm going to buck him."

Pete laughed without humor. "He'll kill you."

"I'll take the chance," Kress said.

**M**OREY HALPERT'S office was empty when Pete entered. He slid into Halpert's worn swivel chair to wait. Tim Kress had surprised him. Kress had always seemed a pliable man.

The door opened and Laverne Wahl came in, Toomey and Stopes close behind. Wahl looked frail by comparison.

"Hello, Pete," Wahl said. "So Morey's out. Here's an order for the release of my gun."

"Better wait for Morey," Pete said.

Wahl nodded. "Come and see me, Pete. Make it tonight."

"That sounds like an order."

"I meant it to."

Halpert came in. He glanced down at the order which Wahl handed him and then pulled open the top drawer of his desk. Wahl slipped the .32 automatic into a shoulder rig. Then he went out, followed by

his two loyal friends, Toomey and Stopes.

"I talked to Tim Kress," Pete said to Halpert. "He's going to start out by bucking Wahl."

Morey Halpert looked uncomfortable. "Wahl's too big. I'll have a talk with Tim."

"It won't do any good. I've changed my opinion of him. He won't bend an inch—and it'll get him killed. That's too bad, because I think he'll make a good mayor." Pete hesitated. "May I get my brother's gun released?"

Halpert was surprised. "What for?"

"Sentimental reasons—I liked my brother." Pete said. "I'm throwing a poker party tonight. It's a crisis." He grinned. "Better join the fun."

"When did you take up poker, Pete?" Halpert asked, his jaw sagging.

"About ten minutes ago," he answered. "Can I have my brother's gun?"

Pete was home now. He cradled the telephone receiver against his ear. "Wahl? Come on over tonight for a poker session. Bring Toomey and Stopes along."

There was a pause. "I don't like to be told what to do, Pete. I do the telling."

"My place here," Pete said over the wire, "was searched today. I don't think Toomey and Stopes found anything. You're worried that my brother John put some of his deals down in writing. Toomey and Stopes didn't know where to look."

"Anything John put in writing can't hurt me."

"It might prove a little awkward."

"I don't like what you're doing," Wahl said.

"I'm not asking you to like it," Pete responded.

"Be careful, Pete."

"And you be here." Pete racked the phone.

Tim Kress arrived first, followed shortly by Wahl, Toomey and Stopes. Pete had set up the table in the living room. Mrs. Carlson was gone for the evening.

"You're a fool," Wahl told Pete. "Where's the stuff your brother had hidden?"

Toomey and Stopes answered together, "We looked every place."

"A little poker first," Pete said. "Afterwards we'll get down to business. Anybody want a drink so we can toast the bust of justice over there?"

Nobody wanted a drink. The tension was

*(Please continue on page 112)*

*Newshawk Devon knew  
where all the Hollywood bodies were buried—  
and his latest assignment from scandal-hungry Polly Peek  
was to dig one up.*

By  
**DALE  
CLARK**

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title: "Hollywood Wolf  
Hunt."*



## CHAPTER ONE

### Wished on a Star

**T**HE girl behind the counter at Sara's was blonde, blue-eyed, and new to the place. When she pulled the waxed cap off my bottle of chocolate milk and seemed surprised to find a second lid inside, I decided she was new to the town, too.

I grinned at her. "Well, how do you find Celluloid Alley?"

The blonde said, "The streets look like

any other streets to me. I haven't seen any stars yet."

"You won't," I told her. "They live out in Beverly Hills or Bel-Air, except the ones who've got ranches in the San Fernando Valley."

"I know—but they come to work in the studios, don't they?"

"There aren't many studios in Hollywood. Most of the lots are way out, fifteen-



I flooded it into his face  
and cried, "Mildred! Is  
he your brother?"

**Novellette of Stars and Screams**

# **HOLLYWOOD KNIFE LIFE**

twenty miles from here, outside of town."

She looked at me. "What does that leave Hollywood—the juke joints?"

"You mean night clubs? Yeah. Except the exclusive, fashionable spots. You'll find those on Sunset, out in the Strip."

The girl counted off, "Stars, studios, hot spots. . . . What is Hollywood, anyway? A mirage—or a ghost town?"

I sipped the chocolate milk. The girl was new, her story old. I knew as well as if she'd told me, she'd come here for just one reason: to break into the picture racket. She knew the chances were a million to one against—but at her age, with her looks, a million meant herself and 999,999 mere dopes.

She was green, therefore worthless to me. In six months, it might be a different story. In six months, she might be very worth knowing. Unfortunately, it'd be too late then. She'd be wisecracked, hard, a sharpshooter.

I decided to make it a smile instead of a grin. I said, "No, you're wrong. It's two towns. You can find one of them on the map—a little northwest of the Union Station. That's the Hollywood you bought a railroad ticket to—or was it a bus?"

"Maybe I hitchhiked," Miss Blue-Eyes snapped. "So what!"

"It's as good a way as any. You can't buy a ticket to the other Hollywood—the Hollywood you read about in Polly Peek's column. You do read Polly's stuff, don't you?"

To say she admitted it would be understating the case. Actually those blue eyes lit up like a pair of Juniors—spotlights to you.

"Gee, yes," she said, all glowing like. "It's wonderful. It makes you feel you're living right next door to Clark Gable and Lana Turner and everybody."

I concealed a shudder.

"Don't get the wrong impression," I said hastily. "This town is like a tree. The studios, the stars, the night spots—all the guff you read in Polly's column—is only the visible part of the tree. It's full of climbers. It's overcrowded with hangers-on. Some of them hang on for years, but they never really become a part of the tree.

"Because, sweetheart, trees get their growth out of the ground. So does Holly-

wood. If you want to become a part of it, you've got to be absorbed through the root system. Beware of the guys who offer you a big boost up, so you can pick the apple of success off the top branches. That's strictly a sucker proposition."

The blonde gulped, "'Scuse me!" and jumped to wiping the counter as the pudgy night manager bore down on us.

He was making for me, not her. "Phone call, Mr. Devon."

The phone was at the end of the counter. I helloed into it. A voice screamed back. "Dixie! This is me, Polly!"

"Sorry—out of crackers."

Polly Peek shrieked, "You dumb louse! Pull that wisecrack once more and you'll be out— Oh, never mind! I've had three secretaries phoning for almost an hour, trying every gin-mill on the Boulevard. This is important! It's terrific! It's front page!"

I needed no television apparatus to picture her at the other end of the wire, probably in her nightgown, uncombed gray locks tumbling around her sunken cheeks. My vision included countless cigarettes, a dictaphone, and a special open wire to the syndicate offices in New York.

I yawned. "What star punched which playboy's nose in which well-known cafe this time?"

She yelled back. "It's a murder, you fool!"

"Murd— Who was—?"

"I don't know! The police don't know! The body hasn't been identified yet! That's what I want you to do, Dixie."

My mind tried to feature Polly Peek getting out of bed for an unidentified corpse. It wasn't her line. The column she wrote—or rather pasted together—was pure gossip. Two million people, subscribers to forty different morning newspapers, read the tittle-tattle. I didn't know why the hell they bothered. It was nine-tenths publicity releases from the different studios, another nine percent female fashion notes, and only about one percent that could be called genuine Hollywood low-down.

"You want me to go to the morgue and look at a stiff?" I said.

"Not the morgue! It's in Sandra Shayne's apartment! Here, I've got the street number—I want you to hustle right over there!" She hung up, hard.



The manager was at my elbow. He knew my connection. He spluttered. "I—I thought I heard you say something about a morgue?"

I nodded. "Yeah, newspaper morgue. Place they keep their clippings. Some reader in St. Cloud, Minnesota, wants to know who won the Oscar for the best supporting role back in thirty-seven. You know, Polly's Q and A department. I guess I'll have to go and check it."

"But—you said a stiff!"

"That's newspaper slanguage. They call clippings stiff." I lied with elaborate unconcern and took my time fumbling for the price of my post-midnight snack. "By the way, who's the new one? Miss Blue-Eyes?"

"Oh. Hason, Mildred Hason." His interest deflated, he swung into the cashier's cage to accept my financial tribute.

I sauntered outside, dived into a cab and mentioned Sandra Shayne's address to the hackie.

**I** DIDN'T think I could identify the corpse. I'd been in Hollywood since the days when directors wore monocles, camera-men wore their caps backward, and cameras wore hand-crankers. I was supposed to know everybody, hear all, and forget nothing.

I was Polly Peek's right-hand man, the anonymous reporter who dug up the one percent of genuine news her column printed. Through me she got the spice which saved her grist from being just a stale rehash of studio-inspired publicity. Yet I never cocktailed at *Ciro's*, lunched at the *Derby*, or attended a premiere at *Grauman's Chinese*.

In fact, I could hardly have identified Sandra Shayne. I knew of her only as a name in the column. She'd been imported from the New York stage and was getting a big build-up through the Mogul publicity department, but they hadn't sprung her first picture on the public yet. She was a familiar figure in the night clubs and was being squired around by this or that Mogul leading man. All of which didn't mean a damned thing to me.

The cab stopped. There was already a herd of reporters in front of the building. I got out without any enthusiasm and flashed my press card at the cop on guard,

getting, "No dice," for an answer. I didn't care. I was backing off when suddenly a wedge of cops shot out of the door and split the press pack apart.

They were dragging a prisoner—a young guy, hatless, perspiring, as pale as death. He saw me and sobbed out:

"Dixie! Tell my wife—mail carbon—"

The cops heaved him bodily into the *Black Maria*. Reporters swarmed onto me. "Who is the mug? Come on, open up!"

I tried to figure out whether I should answer. The young guy was Lowell Mock, a friend of mine. He belonged on the accredited list of fan mag writers, meaning he wrote occasional interviews with cinema celebs. Sometimes he confided to me the cold truths he couldn't put in his sugar-sweet, gushy articles.

The cop at the door saved me from having to answer at all. "You're Dixie Devon? Go on up to Four C. Lieutenant Boscane's waiting for you!"

The door of 4C stood ajar, letting forth enough cigar smoke to justify a fire alarm. The biggest, blackest cigar in the room fitted into the smallest face—Boscane's. He was almost a midget among the herd of large homicide dicks, police photographers, deputy coroners, and specials from the studio.

He steamed over. "Dammit, I said no report— Oh, you're Devon? Well, come on. Miss Peek phoned, said you could identify the guy if anyone could."

Bless her soul.

I squeezed in and peered at the body. It sprawled on its back in front of the gas-burning fireplace. The man was thirtyish, black mustached, tinged with gray at his temples.

His garments consisted of a T-shirt and a natty pair of shorts. There were bullet holes in his belly. A tiny scar traced faintly across the left temple, and he had a gold tooth.

"Where's the clothes he came in?" I asked.

"Gone. But he was dressed when he got shot. The slugs punched some blue serge particles into him." Boscane broke off. "Well, do you, or don't you?"

"I don't."

"Then get the hell out of here!"

I hesitated. "What was young Mock doing—"

"Shut up and scram!" yelled Boscane.

Strong hands shoved me out into the corridor.

To avoid the press gang in front, I bypassed the elevator. A ruby bulb over a door at the end of the corridor marked a fire stairs and I slipped through.

The built-in fire stairway was a feature of the building's up-to-date architecture, lined with walls of fireproof masonry. At the alley level, the exit door was steel-sheathed and knobless. It was worked by a drop-rod that extended the door's width. In the event of tenants stampeding down the fire exit, there'd be no fumbling for a knob. The sheer pressure of bodies piling up would depress the bar and throw the door open.

I mention all this because somebody had thoughtfully tied two yards of black cord onto the drop-rod. The end of the thread tagged under the door and out into the alley. All the somebody, standing outside, had to do was pull that end of the cord and the door would fly open.

I wondered whether Lowell Mock's brain had dreamed up the device. I was still wondering about Mock as I scudded down the alley and into a cab. Mainly, I mulled the essential fact that Hollywood had made the kid dangerously bitter.

A FEW years ago, some executive at Mogul had looked over the payroll of \$1500-a-week studio writers and been afflicted by a brainwave. Why, he mused, wouldn't it be cheaper for the company to raise its own authors? Why not do as other big companies have done for years—pick and choose among the current crop of college graduates, select the most promising material to put under option?

Lowell Mock had been one of those starry-eyed recruits, so dazzled with the surety of success that he'd arrived with his bride on his arm. Three months later, of course, the executive had forgotten the whole thing, the options had lapsed, and young Mock and his bride were stranded. He'd been picking up his rent and grocery money ever since by grinding out what he considered drivel for the fan mags.

His address testified to his failure. He lived in a bungalow court, in front of which I now told the cab to wait.

Louise Mock opened the door. She was

a tiny creature in a faded dressing gown, her dainty feet lost in over-sized carpet slippers. She was incredibly pretty, in her gentle, little-girl way.

"Dixie!" she gulped. "I thought Lowell forgot his key—"

"He sent me. He's been arrested, Louise." There wasn't time to stall around, soften the blow. Besides, I didn't know how.

"Sandra Shayne?" she whispered.

I felt sorrier for her than for Mock. Hollywood had given the kid three wonderful months—and then this. Lord knows, it's always the wife who takes the rap.

Their tiny income was spent mostly on Mock. It had to be. He needed carfare, decent clothes, money for lunches and drinks for the studio publicity men who arranged the interviews on which that income depended. It left nothing to buy Louise a new dress or to take her to lunch at the Derby.

I hated to prod her with questions, but I had to. "What was he doing in Shayne's apartment tonight?"

She answered in a dead-tired voice. "He interviewed her two weeks ago. It was for *Flicker Fan Magazine*. They ordered the article, promised seventy-five dollars for it."

"And turned it down?"

"No. They haven't seen it yet. Their deadline—they telegraphed tonight—has to catch the morning airmail, or they can't use it at all."

I was shocked. "It couldn't take the guy two weeks to write one of those raves!"

"The trouble is," Louise said, "that *Flicker Fan* was sued for libel a few years ago. Now they insist that every interview be read and okayed by the star personally."

A light dawned. "And Shayne wouldn't okay Lowell's stuff?"

There was deadly weariness in Louise's voice as she said, "I guess she hasn't even bothered to read it. He mailed her a copy days ago. She—we never heard from her. Tonight, when the telegram came he dashed out to find her—to get that okay or else."

She moistened her lips. "He was desperate, Dixie. It isn't just the seventy-five dollars. Failing to meet that deadline means losing one of his few markets. He—I suppose he quarreled with her—"

"No." Telling Louise the truth was like biting my tongue. "Some bird got knocked off in that apartment tonight."

"Oh, no! Lowell didn't—he couldn't—"

"Of course not. The cops are probably just holding him as a witness."

The kid was blinking back frightened tears.

"He wasn't worried about that angle," I evaded. "All he said was for you to mail the carbon."

"She—Sandra Shayne okayed it?"

"I don't know. Sandra's red-hot copy right now. Maybe for once the mag will break its rule."

Louise nodded. "All right. I'll rush right out and mail it."

"You don't have to go out. I'll take it, Louise."

She fetched the carbon copy and a manila envelope. Her face was queer, scarlet. "Dixie—this is terrible—about the stamps. I haven't— I mean, Lowell took the money—"

So it was like that. Her man in jail, maybe charged with murder, and she didn't even have the two-bits to buy postage to mail the script.

"Yeah," I muttered. "He mentioned it. I almost forgot. He slipped me this for you." I opened my wallet and pulled out a twenty. I shoved it into her hand and closed her fingers over it.

By the look on her face, I figured she knew—he didn't have twenty bucks. In a hurry to get away before she could refuse the loan, I crammed the carbon copy into the envelope and headed for the door without saying good-by.

Her faint voice followed. "Thanks, Dixie."

She was so tiny, fragile-looking in that faded robe, and helpless. I couldn't help it. With my hand on the doorknob, I told her:

"Don't worry. I'll handle it. Just leave everything to me, keed!"

And what a promise that was!

I realized it as I rode along in the cab. Must be I was going Hollywood at last—playing the big shot, making chin-chive that I couldn't deliver. . . .

Well, I didn't see how I could! I was in a sweat of consternation by the time I paid off the hackie in front of Polly Peek's hilltop castle.

## CHAPTER TWO

## Elusive Exclusive

MY ONLY chance was to work on the horse-faced Polly, and sell her a crusade in behalf of Louise. I felt grim enough to dive into Polly's \$25,000 swimming pool—empty, because she was economizing on water bills. I hurried past it, crossed twin patios to reach the office.

Polly Peek wasn't wearing the night-gown I'd expected. She was gowned in two-hundred-bucks worth of negligee, had on enormous powderpuff mules, and a smile so sugary it could have frosted a cake.

The man with her wore a dinner jacket, a white cummerbund instead of a waistcoat, and a worried look. A Doberman at his feet lifted a narrow head from its paws and watched me.

Polly preened herself, managing to look like a cat that has dined on robin. Waving her diamond rings, she said, "You know Steve Lestrade, naturally."

I knew him. He had a nice, clean-cut, boyish face. He had never quite reached stardom, but was mildly famous as a Mogul leading man. They were playing him opposite Sandra Shayne in her first picture, perhaps because they knew he wouldn't try to steal the honors. In Hollywood, that was something. But the guy had never been a scene-thief or lens hog. He was apparently content with a modest career, quiet life on his ranch, and the blooded Dobermans he raised as a hobby.

I wondered aloud at him. "What brings you here?"

"I came to Aunt Polly for advice," he admitted.

"Advice?"

"I'm in a terrific dilemma, Dixie," Lestrade said. "I happened to be Sandra Shayne's escort tonight. I took her home—oh, about midnight. I didn't go into the apartment, as a matter of fact. Said good night at the door, you know."

"Well?"

"That man was killed very shortly afterwards. Within half an hour, to be exact. I happen to know the exact time was twelve twenty-four. I got that straight from the studio officials, who got it from the studio specials. They're working with the cops."

"Are you really in the clear on that?"

"Absolutely. That young fellow Mock saw me go. At twelve fifteen. So did the desk clerk in the lobby."

"Then what are you worried about?"

"Because he's supposed to be in love with Sandra, you idiotic dimwit," Polly Peek snapped. "It's just a publicity romance, but I've mentioned it in my column. Therefore, two million people believe it—and they also believe a man will protect the girl he loves, with his life-blood, if necessary."

I stared. "You mean, he ought to admit he dood it."

Lestrade flushed. "No, no. But I could tell a gentleman's lie. I could say that Mock and the clerk are wrong, I didn't return with her until twelve-thirty, after the shooting—"

"The public would understand," Polly simpered. "He had to lie—for her sake."

"Yes, it's an easy out for me," Lestrade said. "But, good Lord, I don't know what Sandra's story will be. Maybe she didn't kill the man. Maybe she's got a perfectly good out. By committing myself to a gentleman's lie, I might be making real trouble—maybe convicting her of murder."

"Why don't you get together with her?"

The leading man looked anguished. "Because," he moaned, "the girl's gone. She's disappeared."

Polly Peek was smoothing her gray locks. "Steve," she ventured, "I think I can guarantee my readers will think none the worse of you for your silence."

"What silence?" I asked.

"Don't be a moron, Dixon. It's perfectly obvious Steve mustn't say one word until Sandra is found and has told her story. In that way can he defend the poor, unfortunate, misguided girl."

I blinked at her. With her right hand—me—she was trying to crack the case wide open. With her left hand—Lestrade—she was trying to cover it up.

"That means avoiding the police," Lestrade said. "I—I've got a little cabin up in the hills. I could just go there—and say I hadn't seen a newspaper or turned on the radio."

Polly beamed. "Excellent, excellent."

"Come, Tiger." He stood. "Thanks, thanks millions. You've been a real friend, Aunt Polly. I won't forget it."

She tagged along to the door, as solicitous as a cow with a day-old calf. I opened the desk, hunted for airmail stamps and found some.

As she turned back, I said, "Are you losing your grip? The guy's weeping on your shoulder for just one reason. He thinks he'll need a good press in the morning. He thinks asking your advice will swing the column to his side. If he needed advice—hell, the studio has a staff of high-priced lawyers."

She glared. "Never mind. Who was it?"

"The corpse? I couldn't help them there."

"Of course not, Dixie. You're not paid by the police department. But you're paid by me, and you can tell me."

"The guy was a stranger," I said.

Polly Peek shook her gray locks at me. "You don't know? Well, for pity's sakes, find out! Don't just stand here, you jerk! Get busy!"

"Be reasonable," I said. "A thousand cops are trying to find out. Every dick on the Mogul payroll is sniffing the trail. They've got the fingerprints, the clues, the whole case. I can't compete—"

"You've got to compete!" she shrieked. "Have you forgotten there's a war on?"

"I don't see what the hell that's got to do with this!"

"It's everything. . . . The Korea news is crowding my column out of a lot of papers. My contract with the syndicate comes up for renewal next week. I've absolutely got to have a red-hot, inside, absolutely exclusive scoop or I won't get a bonus for signing that contract!" Polly paused and then added, "And the only thing I've got so far is Steve's cabin—"

"You'd print that?" I gasped.

Well, that's Hollywood. But it settled something in my mind. I wasn't going to sell her the idea of backing Louise and Lowell Mock, as a sure-fire sentimental bet.

Polly was smart enough to sense the value of sentiment in her column. Right now, though, she wanted blood, red blood. I wasn't giving her the chance to crucify little Louise to get it.

"Damn it, Dixon, you've simply got to find out who that corpse is!" She paced the floor, the negligee swishing angrily. "And find Sandra Shayne, too, while you're about it!"

I WAS stuck—but good. My usual methods simply wouldn't work. Normally, even at this hour, I could have jumped to a phone and wrung background information out of my contacts.

But here everything centered on the missing Sandra Shayne, who wasn't even Hollywood. She was New York. Her beginnings were Broadway.

What I needed was some lead to Sandra Shayne's past. I flung out of Polly's office into the file-room. Enormous, almost ceiling-high filing cabinets contained the essential facts on almost everybody who counted in the town. One of Polly's four secretaries had a full-time job keeping the clippings up to date—and picking out the answers for readers who wanted to know Cary Grant's real name, birthplace, pet superstition, and favorite breakfast food.

I jerked out Sandra Shayne's dossier. Glossy pictures of the gal were in it, publicity write-up, New York stage reviews, a human interest memo from the studio—but nothing I could use.

Suddenly I thought—the carbon copy in my pocket. I took a shot at it, reading as fast as my eyes could sprint over the pages. It was the usual Cinderella story. It could have been a good, simple, human interest yarn. It wasn't. It stank. It stank because Lowell Mock hated writing it, deliberately gooeed it up with phony glamour he knew wasn't there. Or maybe it was there, and he couldn't see it.

My eye lit on one line, stopped, and I dug deep for the meaning. It seemed this wasn't Sandra Shayne's first trip to Hollywood. She'd been here once before, as an "upperflight danseuse in an international troupe."

I could see the leer on Mock's lips as he wrote the line. I knew damned well it wasn't so, for if the girl ever had been a danseuse the studio would have exploited the fact. Mock was hinting at something, taking a sly dig at a situation he daren't expose openly.

For a bewildered instant, I fumbled for his hidden meaning. *Upperflight*. . . *Upperflight*. . . Why, hell, he meant upstairs! Dancing upstairs in an international troupe. . . Great slithering pythons! Sandra Shayne had been a taxi-dancer at Joe Hylai's All-Nations Club!

Two minutes later, I was at the wheel of

Polly Peek's station wagon, boiling toward the beer-and-burlesque sector of L.A. Presently I parked, dived around a corner, pushed my way past a Brass Buttons who was both doorman and barker for the joint.

Multi-colored lights tried to make the dreary stairs inviting, but invitation stopped at the top—you had to buy tickets to get in. I took five bucks worth.

Down at the end of the floor, a band brayed out music on the installment plan—a minute a dance. The patrons were ship's cooks, seamen off the South American boats, a sprinkling of swing-shift defense-plant workers, and the casual, tramp labor which haunts the Drag between jobs.

Six hostesses hit me at once. I waved off five—all but the hard-featured redhead who looked as if she'd been around the place longest. I shoved a glossy photo of Sandra Shayne at her. "Remember her?"

She took one look. "No." She took another look. "Why—it's Gladys Kersmig! Only she's changed, wearing her hair different. Her eyelashes are longer—"

I ripped off a wad of tickets, pushed them into the red-headed hostess's palm.

"She used to work here?"

"Yeah. That was three years ago. She was just a kid, too young for this racket."

More tickets.

"Remember where she lived then?"

Loyalty to the departed Gladys Kersmig fought with the yen for tickets. "She—she stayed at the Regal Palms."

I paid off for that. "There might have been a guy. Around thirty, easy on the eyes, but had a small scar on his temple—"

**S**UDDENLY a narrow hand, but steely as a grappling hook, clamped onto my shoulder. The man swung me half-around, then chewed at the hostess through his nicotine-stained teeth: "Beat it, Red!"

"Y-yes, Mr. Hylai!" She quivered into flight.

Hylai's face was angular and pallid. Obviously he knew the famed California sun only by hearsay. The man was as bloodless as a termite.

To me he said, "Come on, gumshoe. In to my office."

I noted two burly bouncers converging from each side. The prospect of being slugged, robbed, and tossed into the back alley didn't appeal.

I trailed Hylai into the office. So did the bouncers. I was far from sure Hylai hadn't been using the unidentified murder victim in an effort to blackmail Sandra Shayne. Maybe she had just grabbed a gun and shot her tormentor, not realizing he was merely the front man for the extortion racket.

The taxi-dance king interrupted my thoughts. "Now, wise-guy, what's your game?"

I produced the picture, slid it, face up, onto his desk, praying he wouldn't turn it over and see the *Mogul Films* rubber-stamping on the back. "I'm looking for this girl."

His face told nothing. It was as cold and pallid as if embalming fluid ran in the guy's veins.

"Gladys Kersmig," I said. "You must remember her. She worked here once."

"That was years ago. What do you want of her now?"

"She inherited a little money from an uncle," I said glibly. "I'm trying to trace her whereabouts. The law requires a search be made."

Hylai grunted. "You damned near cost yourself a hospital bill, snooper. Next time, come to me with your questions. Don't ever again try bribing the girls behind my back."

I was relieved. It sounded like I'd gotten away with it.

His desk phone rang. He picked it up and said, "Hello? Who? I don't know any—" His eyes bulged. "She's Gladys—why—by the—"

The bouncers crowded closer, their bellies fairly brushing me. I didn't know who was at the other end of the wire, giving Hylai the tip-off. I didn't stop to find out. The moment of surprise was mine to grab. I reared back and shot out both elbows. The bouncers gasped apart, opening a path to the door.

I eeled through the opening.

The pound of pursuing feet came to my ears as I raced across the dance floor. There was no time to cut for the head of the stairs. I simply grasped the stair rail, vaulted through paper decorations, and crash-landed halfway down the steps. The door-man barker whirled, spread out his arms to grab me.

I plunged frantically, jumped at him feet first. He went down. So did I. I jumped

up, skinned for dear life around the corner and into Polly Peek's station wagon.

The Regal Palms wasn't regal, nor had it any palms in front of its dingy exterior. It catered on a weekly basis, to the burlesque and taxi-dancer population of the neighborhood. Scarcely better than the transient flops where a man could bed down for 35c a night, it nonetheless had a shabby theatrical air. A bulletin board in the lobby carried carnival and jive-band help-wanted ads.

To the doddering night clerk I snapped, "Miss Kersmig?"

"Yeah?" he responded.

It was half lurch, half shrewd reasoning on my part. Because airports, buses, and railroads would be watched. Sandra Shayne had to hole up somewhere. There aren't many places where a woman can take refuge, after midnight, without creating comment. The Regal Palms, since she was already known there under a different name, would have seemed as safe a spot as any.

I waved the manila envelope. "This is for her—important—urgent. She's got to sign for it."

"Three-twelve," the clerk said. "Go on up."

I thought that was the way they ran the place—free and easy. It didn't occur to me she might have left instructions to send up an expected caller. She might have been waiting for somebody.

My knuckles shook the door. It opened, and Sandra Shayne looked out. She wasn't the beauty that the magic of make-up, camera, highlights, and shadows made her out to be, but she was Sandra Shayne, nee Kersmig, beyond doubt.

I grinned. "Hullo, Gladys."

Her coppery brunette head jerked back. "No! There's some mistake!"

I had my foot in the doorway, my shoulder shoved against the panel. "You're darned right there's some mistake," I said. "Lowell Mock's arrest is it. You're not going to leave him holding the rap for your murder."

Sandra Shayne shrank steps back into her room. "My murder? I didn't kill Baggett! Who says I did?"

Baggett. She meant the unidentified corpse. I stared at her, the name stirring some lost chord in the depths of my brain.

"Who the devil was—"

Clunk! From behind the opened door it came. Somebody standing there slammed onto me—and the roof came down. Call me a sucker, sure! But how could I guess she wasn't playing a lone hand?

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Name Me a Name

**D**OWN, down, down, I went, with bubbles bursting in my ears. I saw a lightning flash and then nothing. After awhile—minutes, it must have been—it began to rain. The big raindrops pelleted onto my face.

The drops came from a water-soaked towel being lifted from my forehead. An angel's face smiled encouragingly at me.

I damn near passed out again from shock. The face was Louise's. Louise Mock! The scared doll-wife!

"What—what the—how did you—"

"I thought Sandra might just possibly come back here to hide," she said.

"You knew about her?"

She nodded. "I knew. It was when Lowell lost his job, our first year in Hollywood. We were dead broke. I answered a help-wanted ad—for dancing instructresses."

"The All-Nation Club?" I gasped.

"I worked there for a few weeks. At the same time Gladys—Sandra Shayne—did."

I tried to picture Louise—shy, dainty little Louise—in the tawdry hostess line of a dime-a-dance spot. It helped me understand Mock's gnawing hatred of the tinsel glamor of the industry.

"After you left, Dixie," she went on, "I hurried to police headquarters. They let me have a few minutes alone with Lowell."

"Yeah," I said sourly. "Yeah, just you and him and a hidden dictograph in the room."

She flushed. "Do you think they—"

I was sure of it. "What'd he tell you?"

"He didn't kill that man. He walked the street in front of the apartment building until twelve-ten when Sandra and Steve Lestrade returned. He waited another five minutes for Lestrade to leave.

"He was watching the time, because he had to catch the one a.m. mail collection, or else go all the way to the Burbank airport. When Lestrade left, he slipped into the lobby, waited for the clerk to turn his back,

and ran upstairs. He found the door unlocked and the man lying there dead."

She hesitated. "He—he didn't call the police. He started hunting for Sandra Shayne. He wanted to get that article okayed by her before the police took her away. . . ."

It sounded thin, but he needed the seventy-five bucks. What worried me more was the time angle.

"He must have been in there by twelve twenty-four!" I flashed at her. "How'd the cops fix that?"

Some tenant had heard the shots, she explained. "They don't know who. People who live in buildings like that don't want to be dragged into court as witnesses! But whoever called said he'd just heard the shots."

"Didn't the call go through the switchboard?"

"No. Most of the phones in the building are private lines. You know, big shots with unlisted phone numbers."

It was no good. It allowed no time for Sandra—or anyone else except Mock—to strip the outer clothes off the corpse.

"Louise! Does 'Baggett' mean anything to you?"

She shook her head. Her mind was on other things. She tried to tell me she'd come here instead of telling the cops because of that damned twenty-dollar bill! She'd thought Lowell must be mixed up in it somehow, to have that much on him.

I wasn't listening to her. Baggett! I'd heard the name, but where?

I drove Louise Mock to her apartment, then headed the station wagon for its home. To a grim-faced Polly Peek, I reported that Sandra Shayne had slipped through my fingers, but at least I had the name of the murder victim.

"Baggett?" the old girl gasped, and we ran practically a dead heat to the file room.

It wasn't there. The thing that had slipped my mind was so trifling it had escaped the filing secretary's eye at the time—if it had ever been in print at all.

Which left just one possibility. I glanced regretfully at my strapwatch—it said three-thirty—and grimly started killing beautiful friendships by telephoning my contacts to find out whether they remembered. Seventeen voices in a row cursed me for a graceless dog, three didn't answer at all, and the

sleepy twenty-first growled back crossly: "Jay Baggett? He's dead!"

I gulped. "You heard the news already?"

"*Already?* Good Lord, Dixie, it happened eight-nine years ago. That can't be news even in Polly's stinking column."

She was at my elbow. "What'd he say, Dixon?"

"He says your column ain't perfumed. Go on, fella."

The voice said, "Jay Baggett. Canadian. He done the Dutch. Put a shotgun between his teeth and his big toe on the trigger."

I was remembering it now. "I owe you a case of scotch, pal." I hung up and turned to Polly. "That was Ed Fine, prop man at Mogul. Jay Baggett was a Canadian extra who committed suicide some eight-nine years ago."

"Not on your expense account!" she screamed. "No nine-year-old corpse is worth a pint of scotch to me."

I was in deep thought. I said, "You can't do it. Louise can't, because Sandra Shayne knows her. It's a job for a complete outsider."

I remembered one. I dialed, got Sarra's and asked for Mildred Hason. "How would you like," I purred, "to go on a personally escorted tour of Hollywood high life with the famous Polly Peek?"

She would love to.

"Dixie," the old girl shrilled, "you're nuts!"

I grinned. "It's the scoop of the century. Hollywood Kill Solved By Lady Columnist, or Polly Peeks at Perilous Perfidy in Person. I'm dumping it in your lap—or your reasonable-facsimile-therof."

**C**URSING, she sprinted for an ermine wrap. I tooled the station wagon to Sarra's front entrance. The blonde waitress shivered in the doorway, obviously thinking dark second thoughts about the matter. Her hesitation resolved into elation as she saw La Peek's horsy face at the station-wagon window.

I swung north through the Pass, then west through the valley, meanwhile giving Mildred Hason an action sketch of the happenings to date. The time schedule as recorded by Mock. His discovery of the body, and my discovery of the cord device on the fire exit door, Shandra Shayne's

flight, discovery, and renewed flight. And the identity of the murdered man.

I was wondering whether Mildred Hason's mind, uncomplicated by Hollywood relationships, would conjure up the same answer that was vexing my brain cells.

It didn't work that way. She gulped. "I don't see what a nine-year-old corpse can have to do with it!"

"You don't know the circumstances, kid. Jay Baggett was a penniless extra who'd been kicked out of his room and had holed up secretly in an old warehouse on the Mogul lot. That's why Ed Pine remembers the case. He found the body there. The point is Baggett had a roommate in similar plight. The roomie's name was Sam Lessinghope. As a result of the tragedy, the studio executives took notice of him, something they probably wouldn't otherwise have done. He was screen-tested and signed up—under the stage name of Steve Lestrade."

Polly Peek erupted. "Great heavens, Dixie!"

"You should read your own column," I said. "Some inquiring reader wrote in for Lestrade's real name, age, and matrimonial batting average within—oh—the last two weeks."

She sniffed. "The question-and-answer department is a mere secretarial chore. I don't bother my head with it. After all, practically every star in the business is operating under a professional alias. Not many people have names that are short enough, snappy enough, and alliterative enough to look well in electric lights."

"Sure," I said. "Mock calls himself Louise Lowell. Gladys Kersmig becomes Sandra Shayne. Sam Lessinghope comes out of his cocoon as Steve Lestrade. Polly Peek is—"

"Shut up!" she shouted.

"Polly Peek is the exception," I yielded, "but I make up for it by being anonymous—Mr. Nobody to your two-million readers."

The old girl shot a look through the window. We were grinding out of the valley into the hills.

"Dixie!" she protested. "You're nuts! I know where you're heading, and you're dead wrong. Steve Lestrade was out of that building a good nine minutes before the shooting—"



"Be reasonable" I said. "You ought to have sense enough to realize who slugged me in that hotel room—the one person she'd have there who would be likely to help her."

"Steve?"

"You're cooking. Now, where'd he take her—when the hotel got too hot for a hide-out?"

"His cabin?" the old girl gulped. "We're going after her, then?"

A sideroad opened ahead. I swung onto it, then switched off the motor. In the dead, pre-dawn silence, the perking of a motor could be heard a long ways. I reached into the glove compartment, lifted out a gun, pushed it into my pocket.

"Yeah, we're going after her," I said. "And bringing her back alive, with a little luck."

We started climbing, Polly Peek cursing as the loose sand worked inside her mules. It gave me an idea. In the darkness under the trees, I struck a match to make out the freshly printed tire tracks in the little-used road. The tracks were double. Two cars had gone this way.

That shook me. I didn't feel so damned smart about the two women I had in tow. Maybe little Lieutenant Boscane would have made better company after all.

"You two wait—"

I hurried ahead. Some preliminary scouting was in order. A hundred yards on and up, I found the denser shadow made by a sedan parked at the bottom of Steve Lestrade's cabin lot. I risked another match. A glimpse of the ownership certificate warned me—the setup was a time-bomb on a quick-action fuse. The sedan belonged to Joe Hylai!

Twin impulses tore at me. One was to get the two women out of this, and the police in. The other was full-steam-ahead and damn the torpedoes.

I heard a yell, a growl, and then a wild clatter of racing feet. The significance of the sound turned my blood cold. I jerked the gun out and ran into the yard.

Against the slightly lighter sky, I saw a running figure overtaken and brought down by a hurtling shape that seemed merely a darker segment of the night itself—except for the flash of fire-pitted eyes.

A frantic, inhuman scream began—and ended with horrible abruptness.

I LEAPED toward the spot, the gun ready in my hand. Those fiery eyes flashed up at me. The gun jolted my palm twice.

I struck a third match. The Doberman was dead. So was Joe Hylai. The animal had scooped out most of his throat in one fierce-gaged thrust.

Suddenly the earth gave an extra tilt under my feet—or else I'd reached the hilltop, where the light was better than down under the trees. I could pick out the white flash of an advancing, cummerbund-wound figure.

"Steve?" I blurted. "It's me—Dixie!"

He rayed on a flashlight with one hand, with the other pushed a gun into the cummerbund. He looked at the corpses and said, "You—you killed poor Tiger."

"Tiger was quite a killer himself," I said, pointing.

"The poor devil only did his duty. Dobermans are the real police dogs, you know. I've been breeding them for that purpose and for war plant jobs—protection against sabotage. That man came here as an interloper. He sneaked up on the place and tried to peep in the window."

My nerves quivered. I'd almost tried the same stunt.

"So you set the dog on him?" I asked.

"I didn't have to. A window was open. Tiger sailed straight through it." He stared at Hylai. "I wonder who he is—was."

I said, "Call Sandra out. She can identify him."

"Sandra—how the devil did you guess she's here?"

"That's easy. You're trying to protect her, aren't you?"

"Yes, of course, but—"

"And you couldn't leave her at the Regal Palms, the first place a rat like Hylai'd think of looking."

"No-o." He turned, listening sharply. The gray dawn had lightened enough to reveal two figures hastening from the road. I marveled briefly at Polly Peek's hardihood in coming on, after the shooting started. She hadn't always been a glamor columnist, of course. At one time, she'd really been a working reporter.

"Aunt Polly!" Lestrade exclaimed. "But who—" He was staring at Mildred Hason.

He was off-balance. I reached, jerked

the flashlight out of his hand. I flooded it into his face and cried, "Mildred! Is he your brother?"

The blonde waitress reacted in a perfectly convincing manner because she wasn't acting. As surprised as Lestrade himself, she blurted, "My brother! No, of course not—"

"That's it, Lestrade," I said swiftly. "That's the answer. She's Mildred Lessinghope. She's Sam Lessinghope's kid sister."

He floundered in amazement. "You're lying! Damn you. Sam had no sister—no family of any kind—" He stopped, with his foot in things so deep now he couldn't pull out.

The dawn turned another degree lighter, giving a glimpse of Sandra Shayne slipping from the cabin toward us. I wanted her to hear. I made it good and loud.

"Why do you speak of him in the third person?" I asked.

When he didn't answer, I said, "It's because Sam Lessinghope committed suicide eight or nine years ago. You're the Canadian, Jay Baggett. You traded identities with a dead man, Lestrade."

He snapped out of his speechless coma. He started fighting back—like a hooked fish testing the strength of the line.

"I—why should I?"

"Because," I said, "like all aliens in the industry, you had only a temporary visa—a six-month permit. Without a job, you couldn't renew it. You borrowed Sam Lessinghope's name, because with it went his American citizenship and the privilege of staying in Hollywood indefinitely, which you needed badly."

Polly Peek gulped.

"It was illegal," I went on. "At any moment, you were liable to be arrested—and deported. And with such an offense on your record, you'd probably never be allowed to re-enter the States. You got away with it in the first place because both you and the real Lessinghope were so utterly unknown. And in the second place, because with success you very cleverly changed your name to Lestrade.

"It explains your very private, private life. For years, under that cloud, you laid as low as an actor could. But eventually, of course, you got careless. You took a chance by sharing the limelight with Sandra Shayne.

"THE inevitable happened. The movie fans began to get interested in you as a personality. Some autograph-collecting schoolgirl wrote in for the facts. Polly Peek printed your assumed—supposedly real—name, for two million people to read."

I was making a long speech.

"One of those readers was the Baggett you murdered tonight—a distant, black-sheep relative of yours. He knew you weren't Sam Lessinghope. He smelled a chance to blackmail you.

"His difficulty was to make a safe contact. The studio was out, because he couldn't get inside. The mail was out because private secretaries open mail and answer phones, too. He dared not tackle you at your own home, surrounded by those murderous mutts you raise as a 'hobby.' He hit on Sandra Shayne's apartment as the answer.

"On some pretext or other, maybe just walking in, he found a chance to fix a thread gimmick to the fire exit door. Tonight he used it, hid in the stair well, and nailed you as you and Sandra unlocked the apartment.

"I don't know what he said. Probably it was, 'Remember me? I'm Such-and-So Baggett.' It was enough to tip you off. You saw your chances—to be bled white by the guy, or to shut him up. You shut him up, with a gun you must have been carrying all those years for just such an emergency."

Lestrade's face was rigid and ghastly. I peered at Sandra Shayne, found her almost as pale. "But you, sweetheart! What persuaded you to run interference?"

"I had to," she said. "He—he called Abe Malroon, our producer, on the phone. Malroon said Mogul couldn't have us mixed up in a killing. He said the studio would fix things—"

"Sweetheart, did you talk to Malroon yourself?"

She shook her head. I said, "You fell for the oldest gag in the books. Lestrade made no such call. He faked it, with a finger on the phone's cradle bar."

I could see how she'd fallen for the gag. She was new, making her first picture, anxious not to get in bad with the studio bosses. She had played along, believing that was what they wanted.

It all added up. "You were the fall girl,

since it happened right in your apartment.

She shook her head.

"Oh, yes. Every move points that way. Let's see what your pal Lestrade did. He stripped the body, so it couldn't be identified and connected with him—he hoped. Then he left by the front lobby, giving himself an out. Meanwhile you smuggled the dead man's clothes out by way of the fire exit. And what did Mr. Louse Lestrade do? He ran to a pay phone, called the cops, and sold you down the river by timing the shots at 12:24. When, in a soundproof modern building, the shots weren't heard by any of the other tenants."

Polly said, "That was cutting it close."

"He had to cut it close. Modern medical science can figure the time of death close, too. A call put through half an hour later wouldn't have been convincing. Besides, sweetheart, he had to drive you to the Regal Palms right away. And then rush to Polly Peek and pose as your would-be protector. Do you know why?"

She didn't.

"That build-up gave him an excuse to duck the cops a few more hours. He had other things to do. He had to bring you here. And he had to put through a phone call that would bring Joe Hylai here, too."

Sandra Shayne stared.

I said, "He was going to sell it to the cops this way—that you knew of this cabin, that you induced Hylai to bring you here, that, unknown to you, he and the dog were already here—and that the murderous mutt killed you both."

She gasped. "He wouldn't—no—I don't believe—"

"You little fool! Don't you realize you were the one witness who could pin it on

him? That you'd have to, when the cops caught up? That you'd be bound to when you found that phone call to your producer was a fake?"

I was cooking with high pressure. She began to believe. She said, "Well, I'll call Abie and ask."

From the tail of my eye, I saw Lestrade's hand doing a dive at his cummerbund. I whirled. I was too late.

The shot came just at sunrise. It roared from the sack sleeve of Polly Peek's ermine wrap. The old war horse had been clutching a .45 automatic every step of the way. She'd been holding it on Lestrade every instant of the time, a little to the left of his middle.

"Dammit, Dixon," she snarled, "never turn your back on a man when you call him a killer. You might be right, you know."

I didn't tell her I'd only half-turned my back, in the secret hope he'd risk just such a damned fool play, that my gun had been in my hand, too.

I whipped out Mock's carbon copy and said to Sandra Shayne, "You'll have to okay this, and why didn't you before now?"

She looked. "Why, I did. I turned it in to the publicity department."

And some guy in the department had shelved it, forgotten the whole thing. I wondered if it was still possible to catch the airmail. I decided it wasn't.

Polly Peek is still wondering how-come her phone tolls to New York ran \$50.00 over the average last month. If she reads this, she'll know. It was because I had to read that damned rave over the trans-continental wire. But who else would sell her murder scoop for fifty bucks and a case of scotch?

THE END

## RIOTOUS REACTIONS

Answering the call of a frantic woman who said some "wife beating" was going on, Atlanta police found a woman belaboring her husband with a pistol. She looked up at the officers and explained: "I couldn't stand it any longer."

◆ ◆ ◆

A St. Louis cab driver was asked by a passenger: "You ever been held up be-

fore?" The taxi driver replied in the negative. The passenger remarked, "You are now," and took \$10 from the surprised cabman at the point of a gun.

◆ ◆ ◆

Sentenced to five years in Harrogate, England, for strangling his wife, the prisoner said she nagged him as he was trying to read the Bible.

H. H.

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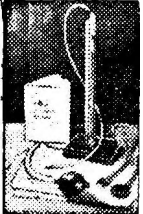


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**Frederick C. Davis**

(Continued from page 40)

ready put my reports into your hands and all hell was beginning to bust loose.

You see, Mr. Special Prosecutor, I figured that if a smart crowd of crooks could dispose of a body in a river, I could too, especially my own.

One thing more before closing. The news of my "death" had unexpected results in an unexpected quarter. It had the effect, your daughter told me, of sending my employer, Miss Troy, off into fits of hysterical self-denunciations. She seemed somehow to feel it was all her fault. Upon my return she greeted me in a way indicating that a great change had occurred in her attitude toward me and the private detecting business.

If you don't mind my closing on a personal note, Mrs. Danvers and I would be delighted to have you and your daughter to dinner some night, just as soon as Mrs. Danvers learns to cook.

Sincerely yours,  
Jay Danvers  
Manager  
Troy Detective Agency.  
THE END

**Coretta Slavska**

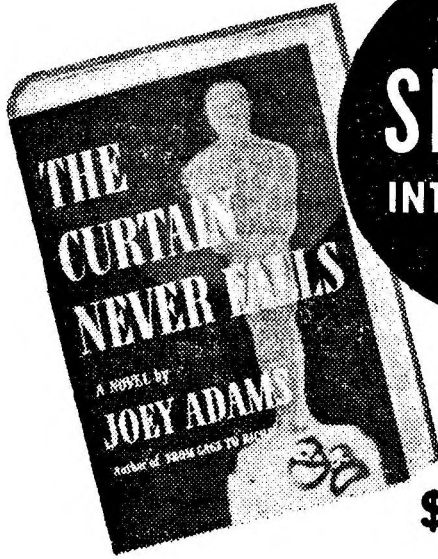
(Continued from page 88)

and looked at his wife. "She's pretty careless with pins. She stuck me, too, last night. Don't know if the pin had tetanus germs on it—but it wouldn't matter. In the Army we're immunized against tetanus. Our shots are good for at least four years. So I guess I'm O. K. I felt rotten this morning, but the feeling were off."

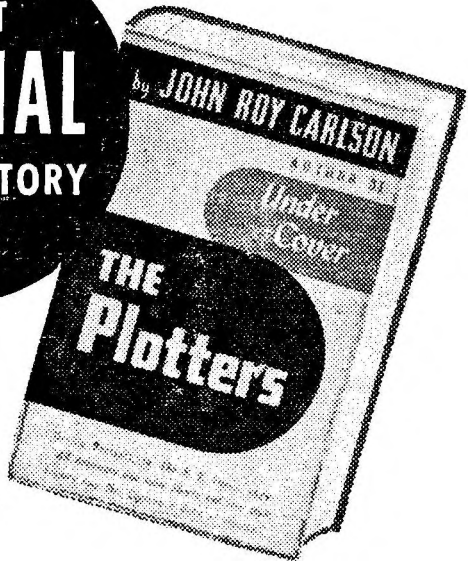
"You're okay," said the doctor. "You're lucky you're full of anti-toxin."

Sam looked at his wife again. He filled his eyes with her shapely face, her full lips and soft brown hair that he knew he'd never touch again. "I was going to tell her to divorce me," he said slowly and almost with wonder. "What good would I be to a gorgeous woman like that—me with a bad heart. And when I saw the set-up she had in that apartment—I knew I'd have to fade out of the picture—and fast. So she would have had her freedom. I guess she wanted it badly!"

"She's free now," said the doctor. He bent over and closed Dena's eyes.



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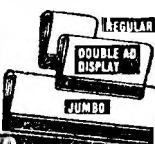
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## Ready for the Rackets

(Continued from page 8)

He agreed to deliver the check himself to the address given by the young man.

When he arrived at the rooming house, the young man was not in. Questioning the landlady, the pastor learned that her tenant did, indeed, owe a week's rent, and that he had gone out to get a check cashed. That bothered the pastor. If the young man had already cashed his weekly check before going to the athletic club, where would he have gotten another on Saturday afternoon?

Checking by phone with several other ministers in the area, he learned that three others had been approached with a similar story, but a different name. He'd received fifteen dollars at one place, five at another, and so on.

The pastor's prayer on Sunday morning was: "Dear Lord, please help the unfortunate young men who go about obtaining money under false pretences, that they may be guided in the ways of religious living. Amen."

Paul V. Waddell  
Seattle, Washington.

### Phony Feds

Dear Sir:

Maybe you wouldn't have fallen for it, but I was busy that day, and the situation was made to order for my little gas station.

I had just put five gallons of gasoline into a sedan, and the man gave me a fifty-dollar bill. He looked nervous all the while he held it out. I took the bill and gave him change.

Soon after that, two men drew up in a car, flashed a badge and looked the place over.

"This is the F. B. I., son," one of them said. "We're after a tall, dark man, wearing a light topcoat and driving a black sedan. One of our spotters saw him come in here. Did you change any money for him?"

I remembered the incident and told them about the suspicious way the guy had acted.

"Let's see that fifty."

I hurried in and opened the register. One of them examined the bill with a magnifying glass and nodded quickly, putting the bill in an envelope. "It's phony, all right, but his goose is cooked. We'll have him back here within an hour. Think you can identify him?"

I assured them I could, and they left. Five minutes later, it dawned on me that I hadn't even taken a license number—not that it would do me any good. It was the old G-man caper, and I went down for better than forty-eight bucks—besides giving them gas to lam out of town.

M. Poe  
Portland, Oregon

### Pigs In a Poke

Dear Sir:

My neighbor is the mother of a nineteen-year-old boy who is fighting in Korea. Several weeks

## Ready for the Rackets

ago, she received a long-distance phone call from a man in New York. He told her that he was connected with a freight company and was holding in his yard a large package of valuable furs, satins and trinkets which her son had bought in Japan and shipped to New York.

He said that her son had written him that the package was being shipped and asked that it be forwarded on to his mother. Not knowing what the duty on the package would amount to, the boy had asked the shipper to add it to the freight charges and get the entire amount from his mother. Therefore, if she would send him \$29.95, he would ship the valuable package on to her.

My neighbor hesitated. The man went on hastily, saying that the quicker she acted, the better, because storage charges of 75c a day were piling up on the package. If she would wire him the money now, however, he would ship the package to her directly and thus save on storage. Rather than lose the things which she thought her son had bought, the woman sent the money—which she could ill afford. She never received the package, and when she called New York she learned there was no freight company by the name the man had given her. She later discovered that her son had never been in Japan.

The strangest thing about the incident was that the man evidently knew the boy's serial number and company. How he got this information is a mystery, but he must have his methods—and be planning to use them on the parents of other servicemen

O. S.  
St. Louis, Mo.

## Count Not Your Chickens . . .

Dear Sir:

Several years ago, my teen-aged son was very interested in raising chickens. He saw an ad in the newspaper, offering baby chickens in lots of one hundred at greatly reduced prices. It had been placed by a minister.

Not having enough money for a hundred, he wrote and asked if he could buy fifty, as he was just a high-school student and that was all he could afford. The minister sent him a very nice letter, saying he would accept the order for fifty and commending our son for his interest.

We sent the money and waited a week. Nothing happened. We wrote to ask about the delay, and the minister answered that he was waiting until orders mounted up to a truckload, so that he could save money on simultaneous shipment. We waited another ten days or so—still no chickens. We then contacted the Better Business Bureau and were told that they had received other complaints.

They turned the matter over to the Post Office. The minister was caught and sentenced to the penitentiary, for using the mails to defraud.

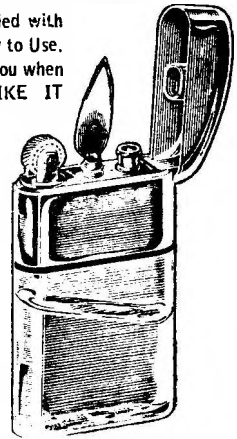
Mrs. R. J. Davis  
Mountain View, California.

We'll be back on this beat next issue with more info on beating the rackets.

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## Wallace Umphrey

(Continued from page 93)

a living thing. Pete seated them—the same seating arrangement as when his brother John had been shot. He ignored the muttered comments of Toomey and Stopes, the anger of Wahl, the questioning look of Kress. He produced a deck of cards and began to deal.

Toomey barked, "Hey! Ain't we gonna out for deal?"

Pete kept on dealing. The hands held the cards which Pete's brother had dealt just before he was killed.

"My brother," Pete said, looking at Wahl, "was unlucky at poker. He always lost. The night he was killed he dealt himself a fat hand. I'll tell you now he had three aces so you'll all know what you're up against. He never got a chance to better his three-of-a-kind. I'm playing out his hand."

Wahl pushed back his chair. "This isn't funny."

Pete brought up a .32 automatic. "Sit down."

"You're a fool," Wahl gritted through his teeth. "I don't know what your game is. I don't care. I can draw and kill you before you can squeeze the trigger."

"I doubt it," Pete felt sweat running down his back. "You baited my brother. You knew he was keyed up—ready to blow his top. He was going to buck you and that was something you couldn't allow. Once it happened it would happen again. My brother John's mistake was in not bucking you from the start."

"You must be crazy," Wahl snapped.

"Tim Kress has decided to buck you now. It's a good idea—except that you'll get rid of him." Pete worked on a smile. "I'm going to see that Tim gets his chance."

Wahl smiled coldly. Deliberately he reached toward the gun in the holster at his shoulder.

"That's not courage," Pete said.

"It doesn't matter what you call it." Wahl jerked out a .32 automatic. "I know the odds."

"You know the odds," Pete said carefully, "because you make them. A long time ago you gave my brother a gun. You've never trusted anybody—and so you took the powder out of the shells."

"Don't make me kill you," Wahl said.

"You can try." Pete laughed, a deep



## Suicide in Spades

brazen laugh. "Today I switched tags on the two guns while I was alone in Morey's office."

Laverne Wahl's face went blank. Then it seemed to dissolve. Neither his carefully-learned rules of social conduct nor his early training with the wolf-pack breed helped him now. He stared down at the gun in his hand and then his fingers opened and the gun dropped to the rug.

Toomey and Stopes both came awake.

"Morey," Pete called out.

The bedroom door opened and Halpert came out. His gun swept the room. "I heard it, Pete."

"It wasn't self-defense," Pete said. "Wahl murdered my brother John."

Halpert looked old. "Wahl's big. It'll be hard to prove."

Pete's face was hard. "Morey—"

"Okay, okay," Halpert said hurriedly. "We'll try it." He looked suddenly younger. "How'd you get the idea of switching guns?"

Pete mopped his face. "I didn't. I just told Wahl that. He's helpless when the odds aren't fixed."

Tim Kress laughed a little shakily. "The hand got played out with nobody drawing a card."

Later, Sally was looking at Pete. She was wearing a quilted robe. She looked fetching.

"So you quit your job in the tax office, Pete. So you didn't really consider Wahl's offer of a job. That's nice. Now that you're out of politics—" She smiled warmly. "Now you can ask me to marry you, Pete."

"Not quite," Pete said carefully. "There's still a basic difference in our thinking. You don't believe in politics at all. I happen to believe in honest politics. My mistake has been in not doing something about it."

Some of the warmth left Sally's face.

"Would you marry an honest politician?"

"Pete—"

"I'm organizing a good-government league," he told her. "Tim Kress will be put up for mayor in the next election. Someday maybe I'll run for public office myself—" His voice got louder. "Make up your mind. Because I'm going to be pretty busy from now on."

Sally's face changed, becoming soft and warm again. "I'd love to marry a politician," she said humbly.

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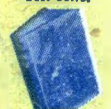
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