FAMOUS DETECTIVE

NOV. 25¢

132 PAGES

DEATH DEALS DIAMONDS

THRILLING "Dr. Poggioli" NOVELET

by

T. S. STRIBLING

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November, 1952

Volume 12 Number 6

FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES

132 Pages of New Stories

In This Issue

DEATH DEALS DIAMONDS

Feature "Dr. Poggioli" Novelet

by T. S. STRIBLING 10

We're proud to introduce our readers to this famous detective, by an author who is a Pulitzer Prize winner!

Eight Complete Stories

Three Special Features

Robert W. Lowndes, Editor

FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES. November, 1952, published quarterly: February, May, August, and November, by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices, 241 Church St., New York 13, N. Y. Entered as Second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. Single copy 25c; yearly subscription, $1.00. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed envelope to insure return if not accepted and while reasonable care will be exercised in handling, they are submitted at author's risk. Printed in U. S. A.

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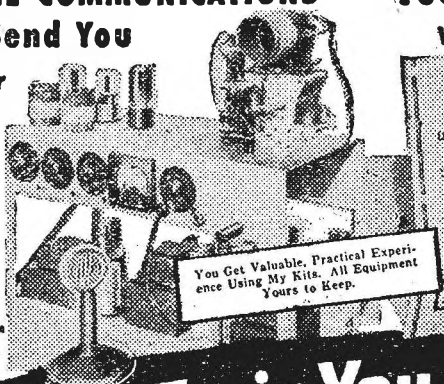


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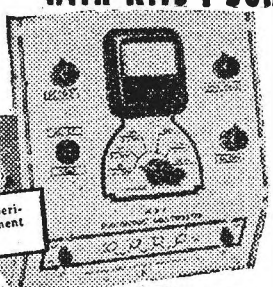

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SPOTLIGHT ON CRIME

By Harold Gluck

THE WALKING CLUE

CAPTAIN Howard T. Pearsons of Homocide was both tired and disgusted. The tall, lanky ex-football player loosened his shirt-collar preliminary to leaving off some steam. "I never saw a case that looked so simple and difficult at the same time. The obvious suspect is John Altwater. He hated his ex-partner, and there was in existence a non-cancellable $50,000 policy payable to the survivor. If ever there was a clear motive for murder, you have it right here in this case."

Pearsons sighed. "The thing that makes the case so difficult is you can't find the opportunity. How can a man who has to sit in a wheelchair, because both of his legs are paralyzed, run to the back of a house, shoot his victim, and then run away? It just can't be done."

Detective Peter Reilly also felt the effect of the heat. It would have been much better to take a dip at the beach than to worry about this case. "Why can't Altwater be a faker? He might have perfect use of both of his legs. We have a witness who swear that the masked killer ran towards Altwater's house. It would be a cinch for Altwater to unmask, hide the gun, and get into his wheel chair. I say he's our man!"

A simple shrug of the shoulders indicated Pearsons' mind. "We'll make another call on Altwater, but it won't do any good; he has a nurse who has worked for him for the past ten years. The hospital records show that his legs were paralyzed, after encountering a hit-and-run driver; Dr. Felix Mertzel will testify to it. We haven't a leg to stand on..."

All of a sudden a smile appeared on Pearsons' face. "I'd better change my complaint; *we* haven't a leg to stand on if Altwater can't stand. But if *he* can stand, then our case can stand."

John Altwater was sitting in his wheelchair when the nurse brought both officers into his library room. "What, again?" he challenged. "This is persecution. Can't you leave me alone? I shall go to court and take legal measures to prevent you hounding me."

The captain was most apologetic. "This is the last time we are going to bother you. I have been told you are able to go about on a pair of crutches. Will you show me how you can leave your chair and walk across the room?"

[*Turn To Page* 8]

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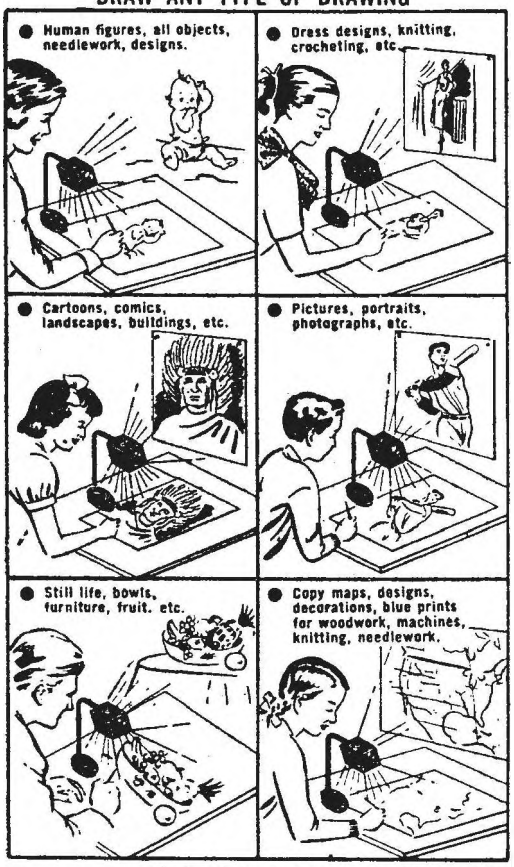

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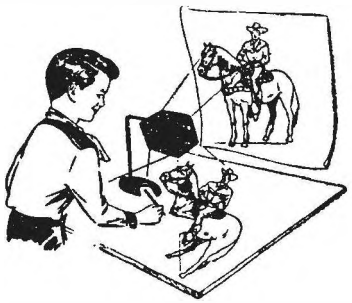

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SENT ON APPROVAL

"I will," replied Mr. Altwater, "but I never expect to be bothered by the police again." He wheeled his chair to a corner of the room, then took a pair of crutches. "Help me up," he said.

Detective Reilly assisted at once, and Captain Pearsons watched Altwater go across the room. Only the tips of his shoes touched the floor.

"You never use your heels?" Pearsons asked.

"I can't touch the heel part of either foot to the floor," was the answer. And then the officer, with the "T" in his name that meant "thorough," knew that he had his man.

QUESTION: How did Captain Pearsons know he could prove that John Altwater was capable of walking? (You'll find the answer at the end of this department.)

●

POOR JONATHAN

WOULD YOU convict a man on circumstantial evidence? Would you convict a man with a gun in his hand and a dead body at his feet? This is the sad tale of Jonathan Bradford. He ran an inn at the city of Oxford, and one evening a gentleman of wealth—by name of Mr. Hayes—and his manservant put up at the inn.

Bradford decided to rob his guest, so he waited till the late hours of night. Then with a dark lantern and a carving knife he started on his evil task. He went into the room very quietly and tiptoed over to the bed, his object to cut Hayes' throat. Just imagine Jonathan's surprise when he found someone else had beaten him to the game; his intended victim had already been murdered!

Two guests heard a commotion in Hayes' room. When they arrived, what did they find? The landlord with the dark lantern and a knife in a state of astonishment gazing at a corpse.

The jury didn't take long to return a verdict: "Guilty". So they took out poor Jonathan and hanged him. Not a soul would listen to his plea, "I'm innocent. I never killed Hayes."

Later the real murderer confessed on his death-bed; he was none other than Hayes' manservant. Of course if the servant hadn't got the idea first, then Jonathan would have succeeded; and been caught anyway!

●

HIS HONOR HAD THE ANSWER

EVERY CRIMINAL has an excuse for his actions. His hope is to impress the judge so that, at the worst, he receives a light or a suspended sentence.

Edwin H. Nash appeared before Judge Albert L. Watson in the United States District Court. He was charged with stealing a car—an offense which is not exactly uncommon in this country. In the old days it was horse-thieves who plagued the country; the breed still exists, but merely in a changed form.

F. B. I. Agent George Tucker explained to the judge that the gentleman in court had a long criminal record, which included three car thefts. But Edwin had a nifty excuse for his actions. "You see, Your Honor," he explained, "I want to get away from my wife. So I steal cars."

The judge let that novel excuse sink in, meditated, and decided that he wanted to be certain he had heard exactly what he thought the defendant had said. "Did you steal the cars each time to get away from your wife?" he shot back at Edwin.

"Yes," was the single word answer.

Assuming that Edwin was telling the truth, that he wanted to get away from his wife, it would be very simple to see that justice was done, and also give Edwin what he wanted.

[Turn To Page 126]

Build a Fine Business... Full or Spare Time! We Start You FREE—Don't Invest One Cent!

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Rush Coupon for FREE Selling Outfit!

NOW IT'S EASY to make BIG MONEY in a profit-making, spare-time business! As our man in your community, you feature Mason's fast-selling Horsehide, Capeskin, Suede, other fine leather jackets — nationally known for smart styling, rugged wear, wonderful warmth. Start by selling to friends and fellow workers. Think of all the outdoor workers around your own home who will be delighted to buy these fine jackets from you. truck drivers, milkmen, cab drivers, gas station, construction men — hundreds in your own community! You'll be amazed how quickly business grows. And no wonder! — You offer these splendid jackets at low money-saving prices people can afford! Our top-notch men find it's easy to make up to $10.00 a day EXTRA income!

Be the first to sell men who work outdoors this perfect combination!— Non-scuff, warm Horsehide leather jacket lined with wooly Sheepskin—and new Horsehide work shoe also warmly lined with fleecy Sheepskin and made with oil-resisting soles and leather storm welt!

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Mail coupon today — I'll rush your powerful Free Jacket and Shoe Selling Outfit including 10-second Air-Cushion Demonstrator, and EVERYTHING you need to start building a steady, BIG MONEY, repeat-order business, as thousands of others have done with Mason!

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Name Police Offic
In Bottle Club B
A full-dress investigation of unseemly stylish bottle club, in which an irate p portedly used a liquor bottle on the head was ordered late yesterday by Police Com
Called on the carpet at headquarters was Inspector Cornelius Lyons, chief of Manhattan's Sixth Division.
Monaghan ordered the probe after discovering an embarrassing conflict in the Police Department's own accounts of what happened
Court Rules
Bars S
engineers and motormen was of hours the men were back all branches of the railroad
Vaiting
pen Shop
his children's apparel at 9 A.M. yesterday as legro men robbed him of neckties and escaped.
tack on Liner
To Be Simulated
Without his mustache, it was difficult to believe that the stranger had ever resembled other man closely.
"Your men?" Campion sounded relieved.
Luke nodded. "I put them on the entrance doors in case. They spot— and used their
He was a very—very sweet p you know."
A wave of old-fashioned black anger swept over Luke's dark face.

DEATH DEALS DIAMONDS

Thrilling "Dr. Poggioli" Novelet

by T. S. STRIBLING

WILLIAMS, the customs inspector, stood at our doorway with a man whom I at once deduced to be a smuggler. He evidently had brought him for Dr. Poggioli, the criminologist, to analyze and give the customs officials a lead into his criminal background. I remarked briefly that I, myself, had become rather skilled in sizing up criminals and I would be glad to be of help to our caller. The inspector either did not catch my suggestion or ignored it; he asked if Dr. Poggioli was in. I said he was and the three of us went inside

In his study, the criminologist was

absorbing the morning papers. That is, his mental setting-up exercises, choosing some crime of the day, then going over all the papers, word by word, to pick out other articles and stories which could have some bearing on it. His philosophy is that newspapers are a reflection of life, uncorrelated and slap-dash, just as is life itself; but a man with patience and insight can pick out the details which are relevant to each other. And he does things with his idea.

He looked up as we entered and said, "Good morning, Inspector. I see you have brought Mr. Starke, a jeweler from...*mm*...let's say Atlanta, who wants to ask me how the Jewelers' Association can stop the illegal entry of precious stones into Tiamara."

Our visitors glanced at each other in that amazement which every newcomer feels over Poggioli's *tours de force*. If things were as they should be, this man Starke would have been a smuggler, as I'd deduced upon seeing him. I sighed at the injustice of it all. Mr. Starke, the jeweler, was the most bewildered, naturally because he had never visited us before. He asked Poggioli how he knew his name.

"There it is on the tag in your lapel with the ribbon, *Jewelers' Convention*. I've just been reading here in the paper about your meeting. You have an attendance of twenty-three hundred and fifty-eight members. You come from as far off as Waco, Texas. Since Williams brought you here, I knew you must have come for some action against smugglers of precious stones. Nobody ever calls on me just out of curiosity...or friendship, Mr. Starke."

"I'm really not from Atlanta, I'm from Augusta," corrected Starke. "I was born in Atlanta, but I moved my business to Augusta four years ago this coming September."

"You still buy your clothes in Atlanta?"

"Yes, I do."

"That's what deceived me." Poggioli then continued with his rather obvious analysis of what our visitors wanted him to do. "You have come to ask me to address your convention and outline a program against smuggling. Unfortunately, I can't do this; I doubt if anybody can. Laws are programmatic, but criminals are individualistic and opportunistic. That is why the law can never stop crime, Mr. Starke; it's like catching water in a sifter."

"But, Dr. Poggioli, couldn't you personally take up this..."

"No, no, Mr. Starke. I never leave this study; I look at the world through the newspapers. It's amazing the intricate interconnections, the explanations of the most obscure..."

"Dr. Poggioli," interrupted Starke, "won't you come on to the luncheon as my guest. I just want to show the boys a man who can tell who you are, what you are, where you're from, what you want, and turn you down before you can get in a word edgewise. I'll simply have to show you to 'em, Dr. Poggioli, or my reputation as a truthful man will be ruined."

POGGIOLI went along, and I learned later that Starke was on the permanent entertainment committee of his Association, because no public entertainer had ever succeeded in refusing him his services.

The luncheon was held at the airport, a location which may have been chosen with some reference to smuggling.

The four of us sat at the long 'U' shaped table with Gebhardt, a *Times* reporter just across from us. Mr. Starke, who evidently expected criminological miracles straight out of Poggioli's hand, asked in a low tone: "You don't suppose any of these fellows here are it, do you, Henry?" This "Henry" referred of course to the name on Poggioli's lapel—"Henry Poggioli."

Gebhardt looked across with a reporter's genial, half-humorous inquisitiveness. "Are what, Sam?"

"Diamond smugglers," said Starke,

"but we don't want to let it get out that a great detective like Dr. Poggioli is here, or it might scare away our birds."

"No, no, we don't want anything to get out," agreed the reporter; "but what makes you think there is anything to get out?"

"I've met competition in selling diamonds in Augusta that suggests wholesale smuggling to me. And I find boys from the port of entry before selling. Little Rock have, too."

"Is that so? I hadn't heard anything about it here in Tiamara?"

"That's because they get them away from the port of entry before selling. They don't want to spot where they came into the country."

"*MM-mm*, I see; you're something of a detective yourself, aren't you, Sam? But don't you think this diamond-selling could come from the depression? People have to rake up extra money to pay their taxes."

"No, it couldn't be that; if you buy a quality stone from a quality store, you can bring it in and get your money back at any time. Buying a diamond is like putting money in the bank and if you'll keep 'em in a deposit box, they're just as safe as the bank." Starke said this with the unction of a salesman.

At this point, the chairman began introducing the members from different states. They arose when their states were called. One man said, "I am Dave Dillon of Detroit. When you think of diamonds think of Dave Dillon of Detroit."

"Yes, we'll do that, Dave," called several voices and there was laughter.

Another member had something special to say. He was Bill Bills of Waco, Texas. He owned a jade mine in Mexico and he would like to meet anybody interested in jade novelties.

Hisses at this straight out advertising and Mr. Bills called back, "Go ahead, whoop it up. From my competitors that's praise!"

Starke of Augusta didn't laugh at the chivvying of Mr. Bills of Waco. "That's a suggestive point," he said. "I imagine Mr. Bills' jade novelties are carved in Mexico by the Mexicans?"

"Naturally," I said, "the natives are good at that, and cheap." I didn't see why he made the remark.

AFTER the members had identified themselves there came visiting guests, a congressman, an army officer, etc.

One distinguished guest was a Dr. Drum who owned the Drum Hospital for Tropical Diseases in Tiamara. The doctor made a short speech. If any member of the convention needed hospitalization on short notice he, Drum, was waiting and ready. Great applause and laughter at this for the humor was inward and personal to each visitor.

Then the doctor went into a humanitarian speech. He had established his hospital, he said, here at the gateway of two continents in an effort to advance international medical service and good will.

"Now he's going to ask for a contribution," suggested Mr. Starke of Augusta.

"No, he won't," defended Gebhardt. "He's quite a boy around here, but I never heard him put out a line for help."

"Has his hospital already got a subsidy?" asked Poggioli.

"No. I cover the City Council, and he has never asked them for help, either."

Starke nodded with the earnestness of a merchant who is always being appealed to for donations. "That's very commendable, very."

"It's unusual," said Poggioli, look-

ing at the physician who was still speaking.

At this point Dr. Drum broke off. "Mr. Chairman," he said, "may I use a doctor's privilege and run away in the midst of this delightful luncheon? The Demarara plane is just coming in, and I have to meet some patients on it. So, gentlemen, if you will excuse me..." He lifted his hand, bowed, and set off among the tables toward an exit on the flying field side.

Applause. Everybody watched him go out the door and presently reappear on the field below. He reached the airstrip just about the time the incoming plane rolled to a stand. Sure enough, three stretchers were brought down the dolly, and a little group of persons evidently awaiting the invalids moved forward to meet them. A man and a woman bent over one of the cots and embraced the person on it in effusive Latin fashion. The man patted the sick man encouragingly and reached under him to adjust his pillow and blanket. He lifted a hand of respect to Drum, then he and the woman went away; an ambulance took in the patients and Dr. Drum and motored out of the field.

This broke up the luncheon and everybody started going. Starke of Augusta was in distress; he had expected a marval out of the criminologist. He asked me if Dr. Poggioli were not going to interview Mr. Bills of Waco while he was here.

Surprised, I asked, "Why interview Bills?"

Starke looked at me evidently on tenterhooks." If Bills imports jade novelties out of Mexico into Texas, how easy it would be to slip stones into jade receptacles and ship 'em in." He lifted his brows at me.

Naturally I would not take up Poggioli's time with any such notion as that; on the other hand I didn't want to appear curt to Starke. So I told him I would walk over and interview Bills myself.

"But are you a detective?" asked the jeweler. He evidently wanted only the very best sleuths working on his clue.

I told him I had been writing Poggioli's criminological notes for twenty-odd years and I ought to know his methods. That satisfied him, or at least seemed to. He told me to go on and talk to Bills and to watch carefully for any small but clear indications that he was a diamond-smuggler.

Starke evidently expected me to reproduce Poggioli's analysis of himself, since I knew Poggioli's methods. So I went over and had a talk with Bills, all the while wondering what he would think if he knew Starke's suspicions of him. I found him very warm, ebullient and Western. Presently I came back with his card. *Bills and Blanton, Jewelers, Wholesale and Retail, Waco, Texas.*

CHAPTER II

WHEN I returned I found Mr. Starke very apologetic. He said: "I'm awfully sorry I sent you to see Bills; it couldn't be him." I asked him why it couldn't.

He continued, "I was just talking about it to Dr. Poggioli here. He said the cities which felt this diamond importation were Atlanta, Augusta, Birmingham and cities in the Southeast; that if the center of distribution had been Waco, the line up would have been, Galveston, Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and so forth. He said the smuggling, if there were any smuggling, was going on here in Tiamara."

Poggioli was standing next to us but we talked as if he were a monument and heard nothing we said.

"Why should he pick out Tiamara if the Jewelers feel the pinch in Atlanta, Birmingham and so on?" I asked.

"He said the gang moves the diamonds out of this city, so as not to pinpoint their operations," explained Starke. "Your friend is the most marvellous man I have ever met; you tell him that from me." Then he shook hands warmly with Poggioli, thanked him for coming to the luncheon, made his adieus, and lost himself in the departing crowd.

I was amused at such incense-burning. Poggioli's feats have long since ceased to be extraordinary to me. When we started home in a taxi I asked him what he thought of Mr. Starke's suspicions.

"Starke seems a very sensible man indeed," answered Poggioli gravely. "I'm going back home now and read the afternoon papers carefully, with Starke's idea in mind."

"Do you expect to find anything about Starke's idea in the afternoon papers?" I inquired, a little bored with Poggioli's obsession.

"Certainly. Our American newspapers are a disorganized but curiously-complete picture of American life, both civil and criminal; and if we only have the wit to read it..." and on and on and on.

. The droll part of this was, Poggioli wasn't really making that speech to me at all; he was still talking for the benefit of Mr. Starke of Augusta, trying to put on an Olympian show for him, although he happened to be gone away.

Well, when we got home he settled down to the afternoon papers to read diamond-smuggling into them; it really seemed one of the most far-fetched things he had ever done.

I got a paper and pencil and began figuring on a story based on Mr. Bills bootlegging diamonds in jade containers. For purposes of fiction, I could, of course, simply move Bills from Waco to Tiamara. Or, since there were no jade mines near Tiamara, I thought of shipping the diamonds in Cuban pineapples—although that would be messy.

THE TELEPHONE aroused me from my invention. I went to it and to my surprise it was from Dr. Drum. He asked that Poggioli come to his hospital at once. I had taken a distaste for Drum; I didn't like his after-dinner speech at the luncheon. It sounded too much like all after-dinner speeches at all luncheons. I told him I was very sorry, but Dr. Poggioli was very busy and couldn't possibly see him.

Poggioli looked up from his papers. He said, "That's Dr. Drum!" I admitted it was. He said, "Tell him we'll be right over, as soon as we can get there."

I was disgusted. I said, "Poggioli, what do we want to go there for? Nothing criminal happens at hospitals, except black-market babies; and once in a while some rich person is confined as insane, when he is perfectly rational but a tight-wad."

I had my palm over the telephone receiver and Poggioli answered in a lowered tone. "I'm going over to see what he wants, because he has never asked this city for a subsidy."

"Oh," I said, "out of good will for a civic-minded physician?"

"No, certainly not; I'm going because that's a minor mystery for a hospital not to want a subsidy. It really ought to lead into something.... more interesting."

"I thought you were now studying jeweler Starke's clue, and wouldn't want to be bothered with Drum."

Poggioli made a gesture almost of despair, "Will you never learn that this world is a single intricate web-work, and that one abnormality leads into another."

I made a moue at Poggioli and said into the receiver, "Dr. Drum, Dr. Poggioli says it is a great honor to be of service to a public benefactor like yourself; he'll be right over."

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When we reached the hospital, Drum seemed greatly relieved to see Poggioli but glanced dubiously at me. He said he had a very delicate matter to discuss with the criminologist. Poggioli told him at once that I was his assistant, from whose notes he always formed his conclusions.

"I see. May I ask before we go into this—did you gentlemen remain at luncheon after I went out on the flying field?" We said we did and Dr. Drum continued nervously, "Do either of you recall seeing a man approach one of my patients, lean over his stretcher and embrace him?"

Poggioli remembered it; he said he thought the man was a Latin.

"He *is* a Latin," said the physician in a disturbed manner, "and I want very much to get in touch with him again."

I guessed Drum's worry was about his patient's bill, this the result of the hospital's lack of subsidy from the city. So Poggioli was right; things apparently disconnected hang together in astonishing ways. I wondered what would be the next link in this chain of circumstance. Poggioli himself evidently had the same idea for he asked: "Doctor, your patient has become worse, hasn't he?"

"Yes, he has."

The criminologist pulled thoughtfully at his bluish chin. "I think I know exactly what has happened and why you hesitate to mention it to anybody?"

This was a sort of question and statement combined. Dr. Drum looked at his caller for a long second. "I am hesitant," he admitted, "but why do you think I hesitate, Dr. Poggioli?"

"I am led to think by your manner and your secrecy, that your patient is afflicted with some malignant and highly contagious tropical disease. . ."

An odd expression went over the physician's face. "Why do you guess that?"

"It's very simple, hardly a guess. You are greatly disturbed about a man who leaned over a stretcher and touched your patient. Evidently you are afraid this man will contract the disease and spread it through the city. You want me to find him and get him to come to you at once, remaining here in the hospital until the period of incubation is past. It's a safety precaution for the city."

The head of the hospital really was moved. "What a pleasure to find an understanding man!"

"Now how long a time do we have to work in, Dr. Drum?"

"How do you mean?"

"How long after exposure will the disease become contagious? That would be our limit, naturally. After that you would have to call in the health department."

"Certainly. . . I see what you mean. We have six days to hunt him in perfect safety to everybody. After that . . . we must do something else."

So that was our problem. After a little more discussion Poggioli and I left the Drum hospital on our mission to find the contaminated man.

I MUST SAY I was rather pleased at this turn of affairs. It was not exactly a crime story, such as I always write, but it held a certain suspense that we were trying to save a city of half a million population from some plague. As we left the hospital the criminologist and I began planning how we were going to find the missing man. Undoubtedly, he was in the Latin quarter of our city. The trouble was all Latin-American men looked much alike to me. They all

seemed smooth handsome brunets with dramatic eyes, picturesque mustaches and modeled features.

Poggioli and I decided we would separate and thus cover twice as much ground than if we hunted together. I started in at the *Cafe Conchita* on Paez street. There were a lot of Spanish-Americans there eating and drinking.

As I said, all of them looked a little like the man I had seen at the airfield, but not enough for me to take any one aside and tell him he had contacted a terrible disease and was wanted at the hospital. I knew if I made a mistake, picking up the wrong man, the news would be all over the city in a day and it would ruin our tourist trade. It really was an awful situation. I left the *Conchita* and went across the street to the *San Salvador;* here the patronage was slightly poorer, the clothes of the patrons a little cheaper. As I recalled the man's clothes better than I did his face, I decided this was not the proper place either and went on down the street to *El Pollo Frito,* a beer joint.

Upon entering I noticed a woman at the counter. She was a relief from the men, so I went over and took the stool next to her. Then it seemed to me she had a slightly familiar appearance. As I never consort with females of her obvious class, that suggested she must be the woman I had seen at the airfield. I was wondering how I should go about getting acquainted with her in an impersonal way, when she smiled and pushed me the salt for my beer. Then I saw a large diamond on her finger.

I took the salt, thanked her, and sat thinking about her diamond ring. Of course it wasn't a diamond; it was an imitation. A woman of her status certainly wouldn't be wearing a large genuine stone like that. However she kept glancing at it from time to time. Presently she murmured aloud over her stein that doctors often prescribed beer for thin persons. She seemed to be addressing the ring on her finger.

I said aloud that she didn't look too thin to me.

She said,, *"Gracias, Senor,* but I must stay this way; a woman's figure is the most important thing about her." She admired her ring again.

It occurred to me that here was a woman who would be able to distinguish one Latin-American man from another and she could aid me in my search. So I said, *"Senorita,* do you live around here?"

"Not too far away," she answered in a casual tone.

I explained at once why. I had asked her the question. "I am looking for a man whose name I do not know, but I think he comes from Guiana."

She took her eyes off the ring and glanced at me for the first time. "Which Guiana?"

"I do not know that, either."

"What do you want with him?"

"I want to warn him that his life is in danger."

The woman put down her stein. "But you don't know who he is?"

"I saw him only once, at a distance; I haven't the faintest notion who he is or what he looks like."

"Where did you see him?"

"At the airport this noon, when a plane came in from Guiana. It had three patients on it for the Drum Hospital. Dr. Drum sent me here to find the fellow if possible."

The woman seemed not only inter-

ested but startled. "What does *he* want with him?"

"That I'm not at liberty to say, but he is wanted very badly at the Drum Hospital."

The woman took the rest of her beer at a single draught. "I wish I could give you some information." She wiped her lips. "But I can't, and I certainly do thank you for the beer," She got up and walked quickly out into the street.

The proprietor came along the bar to give me two checks and I could see him adding them together. At that moment I heard Poggioli's voice on the next stool over.

"Very good," he said. "Quite clever."

CHAPTER III

I LOOKED up at Poggioli, then back at the checks. "What's clever?"

"You recognising the woman we saw at the airfield and contacting her."

"Was that her?" I slid off the stool and scuttled toward the door.

The proprietor called, "*Senor*... the beers! You have not pay for the beers"

I stopped at the door and stood looking up and down the street. There were men, two other women, a newsboy and a cat—but the woman had vanished as if dropped into a sewer. I have seldom been so undone by anything; I went back glumly and got on my stool again. Poggioli had paid for the beers.

"I thought I had seen her before," I began lamely.

"Then you hadn't recognized her?"

"Almost...why is it, Poggioli, you can tell Latin-American women apart easily enough but not Latin-American men?"

"It's a sex-conditioned response. If you were a woman, you could tell the Latin-American men apart quite easily...but not the women."

Such wise-cracking gaffed me. "How can you talk like that," I demanded, "when we have just missed an opportunity to save the city from a terrible plague?"

"A what?"

"A plague! A plague! The terrible tropical disease that Dr. Drum warned us about!"

Poggioli was mildly astonished. "Did you believe that?"

I looked at him in amazement. "Didn't you?"

"Certainly not. *You* know I'm a criminologist and wouldn't spend time on a health program."

"But you are the one who suggested it!"

"I know; I made it up and offered it to him, just to see if he would accept it. If he took it without making any changes in my invention I knew his real motives were something different, and possibly had some criminal connection in which case I would be interested. I thought *he* would fall for it, but I didn't expect you to."

Such intricacies gave me a dizzy feeling. "But that doesn't prove Drum's crooked."

"No, but it goes along with, and strengthens the odd fact that he doesn't ask the city to give him a subsidy for his hospital."

"Back to that again," I said with a touch of distaste.

"Certainly. Why wouldn't a private hospital ask for aid, if it had nothing to conceal?"

"I don't know."

"Why would Drum allow me to invent a cock-and-bull story about a plague if again he had nothing to conceal?"

NATURALLY the situation put me in a kind of jitter. "What are we going to do next?"

"Go back home."

"What, go home while we are standing on the very threshold of success!"

"Success in what?" asked Poggioli.

"Why, you've found the woman; through her we ought to be able to find the man!"

"And what would we do with him? What would we say to him? We know there is no contagion; he hasn't been exposed to anything. Would it be wise for us, as citizens, to further Dr. Drum in some enterprise he's evidently trying to keep in the dark? Besides that, another mystery has developed that requires thought."

"What's that?"

"We came to this section of the city, didn't we, because we thought the people we were after were Latin-Americans in moderate circumstances?"

"That's right."

"But we found the woman wearing a carat and three-quarter diamond."

I dropped my mouth open. "Wasn't that an imitation?" "Of course not! Did you ever see a woman turn her hand this way and that to admire a paste jewel?

"How did she come by it? A cheap street-walker like that? Did she steal it from a customer?"

"Certainly not; it wasn't a man's ring, and she was displaying it openly. But the interesting point is that the plane which she met on the airfield came from Guiana by way of Curacao. Curacao is a Dutch free port where you can buy anything tax-free; that includes diamonds."

My head began to swim. "And Mr. Starke of Augusta mentioned diamonds..." I added on my own.

"And you remember that?" Poggioli lifted his brows at me.

My friend's irony is always ill-timed. "I still don't know why we are going home," I told him shortly, "Right here where we're beginning to get onto something..."

Poggioli soothed me down tolerantly. "I'll think this situation over and read the newspapers. We have enough inklings now to hook into any further hints we find in the news. You know our press, our American press, is a vast daily outpouring of surface-facts which nobody in the world takes the trouble to collate and study for their inner connections. What's the use in having all this information, unless somebody is going to do something with it?"

That again! I was disgusted. "Do you expect to find out more about this case in the newspapers!"

"It'll be there—in one form or another. Everything unusual and startling is caught by the reporters and printed in the newspapers. Crime always gets in, because it is unusual. When it ceases to be unusual, it ceases to be crime and becomes custom, and the given civilization drops to a lower level. So let's collect the afternoon papers, take them back to the study, go over them carefully as a patriotic gesture..." He talked on and on like the theoretical college professor he once had been.

That is what we did: went home and read the Tiamara journals. I was disgusted with our inactivity and was honestly gratified that we didn't glean a thing out of the newspapers.

NEXT MORNING, our telephone rang. Gebhardt was on the line. He wanted us to come immediately to Red Road and 110th Street South. He said a woman had been found murdered in a palmetto hammock. I must explain here that a palmetto hammock is not a hammock to swing in; it is a large sunken area overgrown with palmettoes.

I told Gebhardt that Poggioli and I couldn't go; we were only interested in unusual crimes, and so many women were found murdered in and around Tiamara that for us they had lost their crime appeal.

Gebhardt defended this one. "Wait a minute," he begged, "this one is not as routine as you think; she's pretty mysterious. Neither I, nor Captain

McFall, nor the medical inspector, nor the thirteen-year-old boy who went rabbit-hunting and found her can make a thing out of her. She's dissected. I told Dr. Brausch, the medical inspector, if we could only get Poggioli to come down here, he would straighten the whole thing out like that.

Our telephone was a loudspeaker which anybody could hear. "Ask him, does he mean she was cut up, put in a bag and brought out there," put in Poggioli.

When I repeated the question Gebhardt answered, "No, that's the unusual feature. She was strangled in town, but brought out here and dissected."

"That is sufficiently unusual," said Poggioli to me. "Tell him we'll come."

When we reached the hammock, Gebhardt was explaining to the policemen and Brausch, the medical inspector, that he had a theory.

"Here is the body," continued the reporter. "The reason her stomach was opened and cleaned out was because the murderer was a very canny fellow. He had poisoned her, and he wanted to be sure his poison couldn't be identified and traced through some drug store record."

"That doesn't fit the fact that he strangled her," pointed out Poggioli, walking up.

Gebhardt defended his theory. "Glad to see you, Dr. Poggioli; very generous of you to come. But about the strangulation. I imagine he poisoned her, then grew impatient for the poison to take effect and strangled her. Intellectual criminals, you know, often have very unstable personalities."

Police Captain McFall was a little out of his depth. "Dr. Poggioli—please take a look at the body and tell us what really happened—who did it, why they did it, and how we can lay hands on him."

"What's your theory, Captain?" asked Poggioli.

McFall cleared his throat, "In a case like this I always have one theory; a criminal attack and a maniacal cutting up afterwards. It works like that so often, I never use any other theory."

Poggioli pondered. "This woman, Captain, I am sure didn't fall under your rule; no criminal attack would have been necessary with her. I have seen her twice while she was alive. First at the airfield where she came to meet one of Dr. Drum's incoming patients from Guiana, the second time at *El Pollo Frito* on Paez street."

Gebhardt, the reporter suddenly became excited. "Dr. Drum!" he said. "Look at the professional way her stomach has been dissected. I wonder if it's possible that Dr. Drum...?" He glanced about at the group questioningly.

WHEN I LOOKED at the dead woman I received quite a shock. Then, suddenly, Gebhardt's query set off a possibility in my own head. Drum had sent Poggioli and me to search for this woman and the man who was with her, had lied about

the reason he wanted to find her. Now the question came to me; why did Drum want this woman and her man companion brought to him? And how came this woman here, with her stomach dissected expertly as if a surgeon had done the work? I opened my mouth to tell Gebhardt what I knew of Drum's possible connection with the murder, when Poggioli glanced around at me and slightly shook his head.

"Now, gentlemen," he said aloud, "let's be conservative about this matter. Mr. Gebhardt can't afford to raise a suspicion against Dr. Drum, merely on the grounds that the murdered woman has been skillfully dissected. That would be a damaging blow to a hospital that is serving a fine purpose in our city. Besides that, Drum certainly didn't do this work; a surgeon wouldn't have left a cadaver exposed in a palmetto hammock when he could have disposed of it with acids or quick-lime. The dissection is scientific but, the disposal is unscientific; you gentlemen see that, don't you?"

We all saw it, of course. The police captain said, "Dr. Poggioli, what line shall we follow?"

"Find the man who was with this woman," directed my friend. "That's indicated. And you should have no trouble finding him. I can describe him to you; I saw him with his victim at the airfield during the Jewelers' Convention."

"I saw him, too," put in Gerhardt. "I am sure I can identify him if we catch him."

"He's the man to pick up," assured the criminologist. "If he didn't kill her himself, he knows who did. They were evidently living together and quarrelled over something. They were probably both drunk and he strangled her; then he brought her out here and cut her up to make a mystery of it. That's common enough, you know—to make something dark and complex out of a simple matter, in order to throw pursuit off the track. I realize that because I happen to be a Latin myself." Poggioli laughed briefly.

CHAPTER IV

THAT WAS the end of our investigation. We left Gebhardt and the police planning a dragnet hunt for the man whom the reporter had seen at the airport with the murdered woman.

I must say that I drove home with Poggioli under the greatest tension. I said to him: "Poggioli, why in the world didn't you let me tell the men that Drum was looking for this man and woman and had invented a most amazing cock-and-bull story as to why he wanted them?"

Poggioli turned his head to look at me beside him in the back seat. "*I* invented the story, and I don't want Drum to know that he is under suspicion."

My mouth dropped open. "Is he?"

"What would you think? He sent me out after the man who was seen with the woman. Now the woman turns up dead!"

"It seems to me, Poggioli—if I may be allowed an opinion on this matter—it seems to me that the man should have turned up dead, the woman having murdered him at Drum's request."

"That is reasonable," agreed Poggioli; "it would be the simple, obvious way." He stroked his bluish chin and said, finally, "Of course, there is Mr. Starke of Augusta..."

I was completely bowled over. "Poggioli, you don't suspect Mr. Starke killed this..."

My friend made a hopeless gesture. "S t a r k e—mentioned—a—diamond—leak," he said, spacing his words in disgust."

"What are you going to do about that?"

"Read the papers," said Poggioli.

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I can say one thing: I have never spent a more miserable time than the two days after these events took place —which Poggioli spent in his study reading the papers. What a way to find out anything about a crime! But that was his obsession; anything he wanted to know of the outside world he looked for in the papers and by putting completely disperate articles together he reached his objective. I myself am of a more active, if possibly less analytical, temperament and it almost slew me sitting there at home reading the papers when there was a mystery outside which I felt sure I could write up and sell if only I went after it.

However, I cooperated with Poggioli because I really couldn't get along without him. I read all the papers that he did. All I saw was Gebhardt's two-paragraph account of the dead woman being found in a palmetto hammock on Red Road with a brief comment on how she had been dissected. It really hadn't much newsvalue, because that sort of thing happens too often.

THE NEXT day, however, things picked up a little. The police arrested Senor Orlando Gomez of Curacao for the murder of the unknown woman found in the palmetto hammock. I had expected this; the Tiamara police are quite expert in catching criminals but not so successful in convicting them. Gomez' trial was set for the fourteenth instant.

This made the first page on all the newspapers, but it wasn't enough for me. I must have complications and sinister surroundings to make a proper, salable story. Poggioli, however, continued his absorbed reading although I did not know what he was after, now. So I luffed and yawed in the criminological doldrums until, at 9:14 Tuesday morning, Poggioli slapped his paper down and cried out, "Here it is at last, thank heaven!"

I caught up my own copy of the *Times*. We were buying two copies so we would not interfere with each other's research.

"Poggioli, what have you found and where is it?"

"Page fourteen, Section C," he directed; "among the medical notes."

I caught up the section, thumbed to the page and found absolutely nothing at all. I asked Poggioli again what he had found, but he had got up, and was hustling out of his dressing robe into his jacket. I asked him what was the idea and where was he going?

He answered hurriedly, "Get on the telephone and have Captain Andrew McFall meet us at the airport at Information in twenty-two minutes!"

I did this, naturally, just as quickly as I could, and in the midst of my dialing I asked again what he had found.

"You didn't notice it in Section C, page fourteen?" he inquired.

I took page fourteen out of Section C and read it all the way to the air field, and found not a single thing on it that related in the faintest degree to the murder. Besides that, there was no longer any mystery to the murder. The man had been found, and while not convicted yet, he soon would be. I decided Poggioli's brain had finally given away under the strain of his complicated criminological deductions, and I asked him anxiously if he felt all right. He said he did.

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At the airport, when we met McFall at the Information desk I stuck right by the criminologist's elbow and heard him explain to the police captain one of the most fantastic, and yet at the same time, one of the simplest solutions to a crime that it has ever

been my luck to record. He took the very sheet I had brought along with me and showed McFall this brief note:

The Drum Hospital For Tropical Diseases will receive two more patients from the Dutch West Indian island of Curacao.

Poggioli pointed this out to McFall and asked in a taut voice, "Andy... that suggest anything to you?"

Naturally, it didn't—any more than it did to me.

Poggioli went on. "I'll give you the background. At the recent Jeweler's Convention a Mr. Starke complained to me that diamonds are being run illicitly into this airport. I won't burden you with his argument. Inside half an hour, a plane arrived from Demarara with three patients on it for the Drum Hospital. Drum went out and met them; so did a Latin-American man, and a woman—in fact, the man you now have on trial for murdering that same woman."

McFall was surprised, and glanced swiftly, out over the airfield from where we stood at Information.

POGGIOLI went on. "As I say this Latin-American met at the plane; he leaned over and embraced one of the stretcher-patients and went away. I certainly didn't think anything of that; Latin-Americans are very affectionate people. But about two hours later, Drum sent for me in great stress. It seemed that he wanted to find that man and that woman; would I look for them and send them to him? I asked why he wanted them. He put me off. So I suggested that old riddle about the man who has been exposed to a deadly contagious disease and how he must be apprehended and placed under restraint. It's a kind of puzzle that young people tell each other for fun.

"Drum grabbed at it. He said that was his reason for finding the man, without notifying the papers or the police. He didn't want to start a big scare in town unnecessarily and ruin the tourist trade. I knew that wasn't true, and it made me wonder what *was* true. So I went in search of the woman. I found her in *El Polla Frito*, a beer joint, and she had on a new diamond ring. I saw it was new to her by the way she looked at it and turned her hand. Now as plain as that was, I still didn't get the point, because the plane had come from Demarara."

"As plain as *what* was?" asked McFall, groping.

"Smuggling, smuggling," repeated Poggioli a trifle impatiently. "Next came this woman's death. She was strangled, but she had been brought out to the hammock and her stomach dissected. You see through that of course, or shall I supply the steps?"

"You are outlining the case, Dr. Poggioli, and just for the record, you might as well supply the steps."

"Certainly; it's obvious to a professional like you. The man had let this woman of the street wear the ring. I'm sure they were both drunk; he was or he never would have done such a thing—and she was, or she would immediately have taken to her heels and got away.

"The next morning he tried to get the diamond from her and she resisted; she swallowed it as a last resort. He strangled her trying to make her disgorge the gem. He knew enough not to eat her up there, so he hired a 'U-Drive-It', took her out to a lonely place in the palmettoes, dissected her stomach and regained his stone. You've got your murderer. Sweat a confession. That's all there is to it."

A kind of chill went over me. Even Captain McFall seemed affected. "Now what do we do here?" he asked.

"I don't do anything," said Poggioli "Two more patients are due—from Curacao, this time—for the Drum Hospital Mention of the free port, Curacao, is what put me onto it. These new patients may or may not have illicit gems in their bedding; you can find out. I believe the loudspeaker is announcing the plane now; I leave it with you."

And to my utter frustration Poggioli turned away just as the Curacao plane spotted the southern horizon. Even McFall was shocked. "Aren't you staying to see whether. . . "

"Why? The problem is solved, Captain McFall. No use in my checking routine details. I never do; I'm a consulting criminologist" And out he walked to the taxicab rank as the Curacao plane grounded.

Like an oaf I followed him. I am sure I could have remained with McFall and watched the search for more diamonds, but habit, and the fact that I was bewildered by Poggioli's coup, dragged me along after him.

NOBODY but a mystery writer can imagine the torture I endured for the next sixteen hours. Not that it wasn't a fair story just as it stood, but I wondered how it would actually end. Would there be diamonds on this plane? Would there not be diamonds? Would Drum get into legal trouble? I could see easily now why he did not apply for a subsidy from the city; he didn't want any accounting for his funds or any investigation of his procedures. I asked Poggioli how would he ever know for sure what the Curacao patients had on them?

"Why, you'll read it in the paper in the morning," he replied indifferently.

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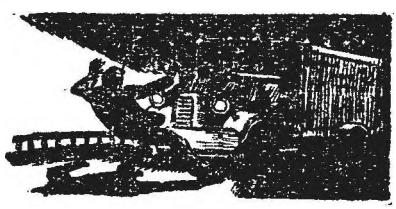
It was the longest night I ever spent; I didn't sleep at all. My watch has an illuminated dial and I honestly believe I lay and looked at that thing all night long. At last I heard the paper boy throw our *Times* on the stoop. I had it before it quit rolling. I opened it up and in the grey light of morning read the headlines: *Gomez at Liberty by Order of the Court on Recommendation of Captain McFall. Trial will Continue but Acquittal Probable.*

I felt dazed in a way. My story was gone; they had found no diamonds. I thought to myself, "Well, I just won't write in this ending. I'll close my account of it there at the Information Desk at the airport with the plane coming in. Any reader who wants to can hang on by his lashes, and those who don't can throw the tale away."

I went in to Poggioli's bedroom, waked him up and showed him the *Times*.



"There weren't any diamonds on the plane," I said. "I am really glad we didn't stay; it would have been a disappointment after all my work. And McFall, of course, has set Gomez at liberty on his own recognizance. That's what the headlines are today."

"Anything else in the paper?" asked Poggioli.

"That's all there is about our case." I said.

"Give me my copy," said Poggioli, and I handed it to him.

I made breakfast and served it with Poggioli still combing that paper with a fine-toothed comb. He is a very poor loser; it amused me in a dour way, for him to work so hard when he hadn't a cent up on it and there I stood who had lost a story. This is a funny world. I never realized before how much more philosophic I was than Poggioli.

I was clearing away the breakfast things when Poggioli removed his eyes finally from the *Times* and said, "See if Williams, the customs inspector, is in his office."

"Poggioli, it is too early for Williams," I objected.

"I know it; find out when he'll be in. We'll run over and see him."

A thrill went through me, then it died out. "Poggioli is this the same old case or is it a new one you're starting?" I asked skeptically.

He said it was the same case.

I drew in a breath. "Poggioli," I demanded, "what have you found?"

"Read it for yourself," said Poggioli, "Page eight, Section D—under Real Estate."

Of course, I read page 8 section D over and over. I was still reading it when we reached the Customs Office in the Post Office Building. There was not a single word in Real Estate about the murder; naturally there wouldn't be.

We went up to the third floor and got with Inspector Williams. Poggioli explained the whole matter to Williams just as he had to McFall. Then he said: "Williams, Gomez gave McFall that hot diamond to let him off and the captain took it. I regret to say that you will have to clean up both a murder and a smuggling case at the same time."

"How do you know, Dr. Poggioli?" asked Williams, attentively and deferentially.

"Read this note under *'Real Estate',"* said Poggioli, and he directed the inspector's attention to this paragraph: *Yesterday, to the surprise of financial circles in Tiamara, Captain Andrew McFall of the local Police Department acquired a fifty-one percent interest in the Drum Tropical Hospital of this city. It is a private hospital and is operated without any subsidy from the city fathers.*

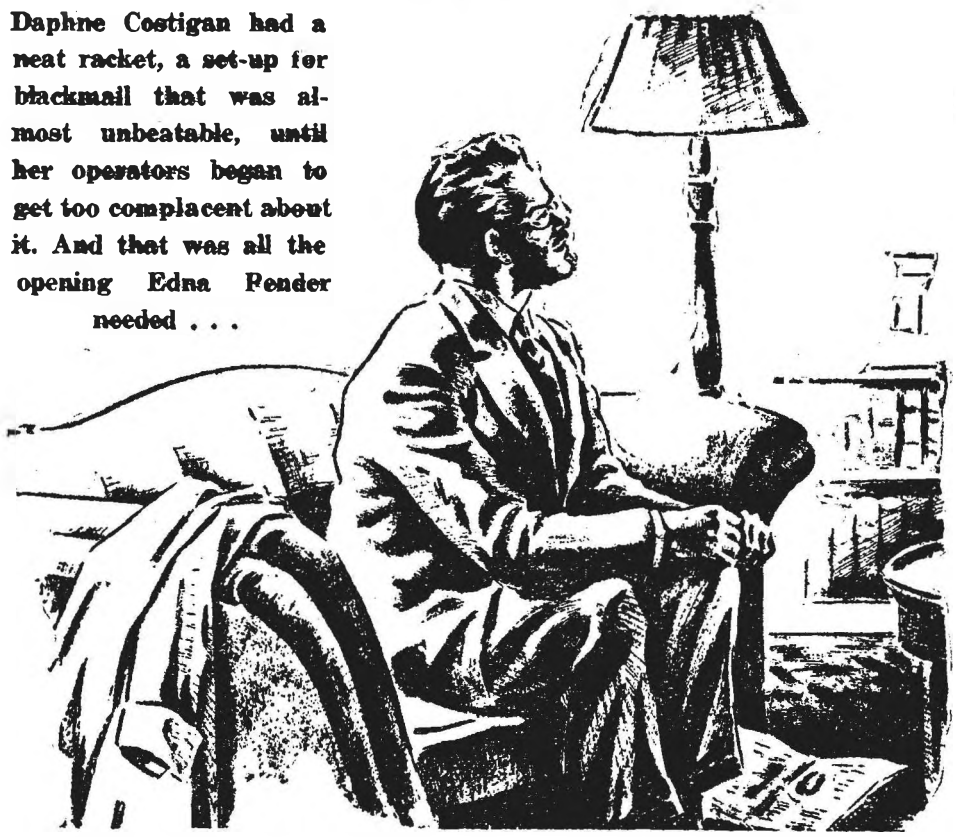
★

Miss Pender's Loose Thread

Feature Ware & Pender Novel

By Seven Anderton

Daphne Costigan had a neat racket, a set-up for blackmail that was almost unbeatable, until her operators began to get too complacent about it. And that was all the opening Edna Pender needed . . .



MISS EDNA PENDER entered the Ware and Pender office suite shortly after nine o'clock in the morning, wearing an expression that dared anybody to make a remark. She wore no hat, the better to flaunt her man's haircut. She had sacrificed her hair to disguise herself as a man, when the gambling syndicate has sent top trigger-men to St. Louis to rub her out.

For once, Steve Ware had reached the office ahead of Miss Pender. He was sitting on a corner of Grace Mitchell's desk in the reception room; Steve and the striking redhead had been discussing Edna. They both answered her crisp good morning and Grace accepted the challenge of Miss Pender's tone and expression. Grace's status as Edna's girlhood friend long outdated her status of employee.

"Edna," Grace sighed, "why did you do it? Your hair was so nice. It was the—the most—"

"You had the right start," Miss Pender cut her off. "It was the only thing about me fit to be seen; now I'm the most god-awful sight in St. Louis. So what? Long hair wouldn't have done me any good on a morgue slab."

"I want to talk to you about that, my fran," Steve Ware said. "You are still a likely candidate—in case you don't know."

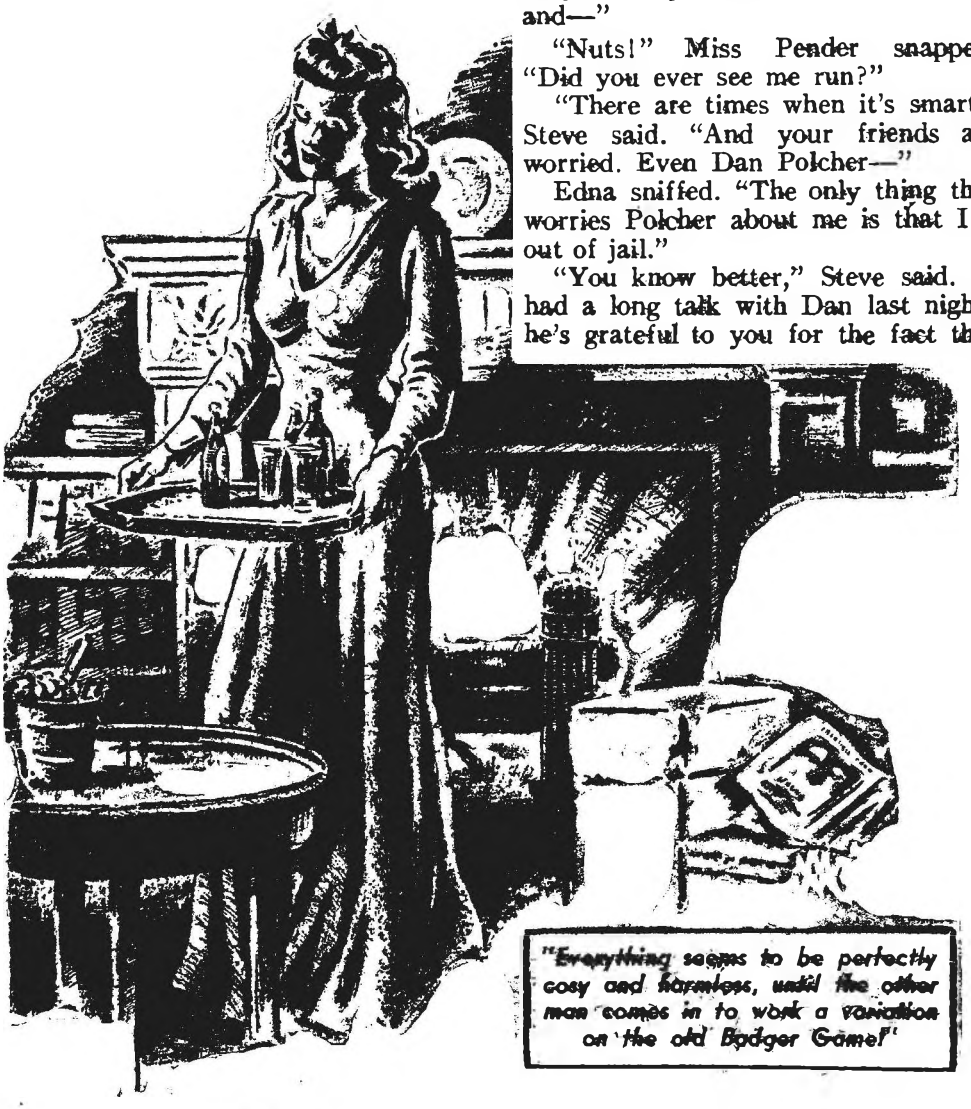
"That's right, Edna," Grace Mitchell said. "And you should be careful. Why don't you take a little vacation and—"

"Nuts!" Miss Pender snapped. "Did you ever see me run?"

"There are times when it's smart," Steve said. "And your friends are worried. Even Dan Polcher—"

Edna sniffed. "The only thing that worries Polcher about me is that I'm out of jail."

"You know better," Steve said. "I had a long talk with Dan last night; he's grateful to you for the fact that



"Everything seems to be perfectly cosy and harmless, until the other man comes in to work a variation on the old Badger Game!"

he is now a lieutenant, and—"

"And he'll forget it in a week," she retorted. "Any—"

The corridor door opened behind her; Miss Pender ceased speaking and turned to face the caller. He was a well-dressed man, stout and carrying some paunch, who looked the prosperous small-business man. His face was florid and there was a worried air about him; he removed his hat to expose a bald spot in his blond hair.

"What did you wish, sir?" Grace Mitchell asked.

"I—" he licked his lips, "I've come to see—Ware and Pender, I guess." He fumbled with his hat.

Miss Pender had been sizing him up. "Trouble," she said crisply, "and you want us to get you out of it?"

The man nodded.

"I'm Miss Pender," she said, "and this is Mr. Ware, my—"

"I know; I've seen your pictures in the paper."

"All right," Edna said. "We'll go into Mr. Ware's office. Grace, lock the hall door and come on in." She explained to the caller, "Miss Mitchell is our secretary and looks after the office end of our cases."

Steve winked at Grace as they rose and followed Miss Pender and the prospective client into his office. Steve took the swivel chair at his desk.

MISS PENDER indicated the comfortable client's chair and said, "Sit there, Mr.—"

"My name is Arthur Salmon," the man said as he dropped heavily into the chair.

Edna perched on a corner of Steve's desk. Grace Mitchell drew a straight chair out from the wall and sat down with a notebook on her lap. Salmon looked from Miss Pender to Steve and back again.

"This—this matter," he said, "must be absolutely confidential; otherwise, I would have gone to the police."

Miss Pender nodded. "Once we have a retainer," she said, "anything you tell us is privileged information and goes no farther. Ten dollars will do for the retainer and pay for consultation if we don't accept your case."

Salmon produced a wallet and laid a ten-dollar bill on Steve's desk.

"Paid," Edna said. "Now tell us your trouble and we'll either go to work on it or forget all about it."

Salmon seemed unable to begin.

"Woman trouble?" Edna prompted.

"In a way," Salmon replied. "It's blackmail; I've been a damned fool."

Miss Pender nodded. "You're the

right age and sex. Tell us about it."

Salmon produced a handkerchief, wiped his plump hands and began, "I came to St. Louis to attend the Hardware Dealers' convention. I'm in business in Warrensburg with a branch in Clinton. I'm married and have a family; I don't chase around with other women like—like you might think."

Edna sniffed faintly.

"Besides for the annual convention," Salmon went on, "I come to St. Louis every now and then on business. Sometimes there is a dinner or theater-party arranged in the evening and I obtain a lady companion for the occasion through a club—"

"Daphne Costigan?" Miss Pender cut in quickly. "Don't tell me *her* foot has slipped."

Salmon shook his head. "Miss Costigan," he declared, "is reliable and honest and a lady of fine character. She is in no way to blame for this trouble."

"Then why bring her in?" Edna demanded.

Salmon licked his lips. "To—to convince you that—well, since you know of the club, you can understand that I would have been in no trouble now, if Miss Costigan had been able to supply me with a companion as usual."

"Just a moment," Miss Pender said. "Steve, do you know about Daphne Costigan's racket?"

"Heard of it," Steve replied. "Classy front for snazzy call-girls, isn't it?"

"Better have a good lawyer if Daphne hears you say so. I'll tell you more about it later. But her racket is legal and has almost the odor of sanctity; go on, Mr. Salmon."

"I maintain membership in Miss Costigan's club," Salmon said, "and I want it understood that my trouble in no way reflects upon the club or Miss Costigan. I got myself into this mess after Miss Costigan was unable to supply me with a companion for the evening; I foolishly picked up a young woman whom I met accidentally in the lounge at my hotel."

"Hm-m," Edna said; "who arranged the accident?"

Salmon's face reddened. "I know, now, that *she* did," he admitted.

"Okay, Skip the—"

Steve frowned at Edna. "Let's have the background," he said. "Tell us everything that happened, Mr. Salmon; we'll ask questions afterward."

SALMON went on, "Well, I struck up a conversation with this young woman. She was nicely-dressed and appeared refined and ladylike—quite modest, really. She said her name was Beth Belden and that she was from Des Moines, visiting her brother and his wife in St. Louis. We went into the cocktail lounge and had one cocktail each. She was very good company and—well I asked her to go to the party with me last night."

Miss Pender winked at Steve, but kept silent.

"She was reticent," Salmon said. "but agreed to go after I assured it would be a perfectly proper evening in company with two other couples. But she said she must go home first to have family dinner with her brother, and that I should call for her at eight o'clock at her brother's home.

"I drove my own car down here, so I drove out to the address on Horton Place, just off Hamilton, to pick her up. It was a nice house in a pretty lawn. She answered the door in a sort of house-dress and told me she was sorry, but she couldn't go; she said her brother and his wife had gone out with another couple for the evening and left her to sit with their two small children who were already in bed. She said she had really wanted very much to go out for the evening and then she suggested that I stay there and—and—"

Edna made a raucous sound. "So the gal hooked you. Just tell us how. There may be a little variety in that, but I doubt it. Of course you never chase women, but—"

"I think—" Steve put in.

"Listen," Miss Pender cut him off, "we're selling this chump help, not sympathy; we don't have to like him. He asked for what has happened to him. Look at him. Fat, fifty and foolish—with a wife and kids at home who probably think he is a great Poo-Bah or something. So he comes to St. Louis and kids himself into thinking that a beautiful young wench simply can't resist the temptation to spend the evening in his company. Rats! The—"

"All right!" Anger stiffened Arthur Salmon. "So I'm a chump. But I'm paying you—or I was going to—"

"And you still are," Edna snapped, "because nobody else can get you out of the mess you are in. Why did you pick Ware and Pender instead of going to the police—or anybody else?"

Salmon squirmed. "Well, I saw in the papers that—that—"

"That we produce results," she picked him up. "Well, we do. We hate crooks, but that doesn't make us love the saps who make their pickings fat. Quit explaining what an innocent lamb you are; just tell us how you're hooked and quit trying to make yourself look good—because you can't. We'll get you out of trouble for pay, but we won't even try to like you. If you don't like it that way, goodbye; we'll forget you before you can get to the elevator."

"Jake," Salmon almost snarled. "That suits me. How much to get me out?"

MISS PENDER interrupted, "First, how deep are you in? Spill the rest of it."

"Well, I stayed," Salmon said, "and we had some drinks and got cozy. She said her brother and his wife would not come until after midnight. Anyhow, we were there on a big couch when there was a bright flash of light and a man stepped out from behind some curtains. He had a camera and a gun. He held the gun on me while the woman searched me and took nearly six hundred dollars that I had in my wallet."

"Nice pocket money," Miss Pender observed, "and then?"

"And then the man told me that I would have to mail a hundred dollars to that address every month—on the first day of the month—or prints of the picture he had taken would be mailed to my wife, and others of my family, and to friends in Warrensburg. Then he told me to get out and not ever come back. I left. But the more I thought about it the madder I got. I can afford the hundred a month, but I remembered reading about you people in the paper and decided to come here. To hell with your sympathy; I just hope you're as good as your reputation. I'll pay anything in reason if you'll get those crooks and keep this quiet. My wife is the best woman in the world, and—"

"None of that," Edna Pender cut in; "she may be, but you only seem to remember it by spells. You're a louse. The hell of it is that your wife and kids have to stand the gaff. We will do this job for them, but you'll pay for it. Write us a check for five thousand dollars, now; it will be returned, minus expenses, unless we bring you out of this clean. If we do the trick, you'll pay all expenses in addition to the five grand."

"It's a deal," Salmon said after a moment, and got out his check-book.

"Now," Edna said as she handed Salmon's check to Grace Mitchell after flipping it at Steve, "what is the address of that Horton Place house?"

Salmon gave it and Grace made a note of it.

"Now, exactly what were your instructions about sending the hundred dollars a month?"

"Ten ten-dollar bills in a plain envelope. No message. Mail the envelope as ordinary first class mail at the Warrensburg postoffice on the first day of each month. Address it to Paul Belden at the Horton Place house; that's all."

"Um. Now describe the man with the camera and gun."

"He was tall and slender—almost skinny. Thin face with a crease in his chin. Sandy brown hair combed straight back and heavy eyebrows that almost came together. He wore—"

"Never mind what he wore. Anything else about his face or hands to identify him?"

"Wel-l. He wore a ring with a big green stone."

"Now the woman."

Salmon didn't do so well with the woman. She was small, he said, with dark hair and eyes; otherwise, all he could say was that she was beautiful.

"Did you see any of the house except the one room?" Edna asked.

"No. I wasn't there an hour."

Grace smiled.

"How was the living room furnished?" Miss Pender continued. "I mean, did it look like a place that might be rented furnished?"

"No. No, it looked expensive, like a very nice home."

"Television?"

"No. But a fine radio-phonograph cabinet."

"I see. When do you go back to Warrensburg?"

"I planned to go right after the business meeting this afternoon."

"Do that," Edna said. "This is the

nineteenth. I don't *think* you'll have to mail that money on the first, but mail it exactly as directed unless you hear from us before then. If Mr. Ware telephones for you to come back here on business, you do as he says. Now get the hell out of here before I change my mind about this stinking job."

CHAPTER II

STEVE WARE said when Salmon was gone. "That was a hell of a way to treat a client."

"That was a hell of a client," Edna retorted, "his kind make me sick. I'd have let him stew in his juice, but I have been itching for a crack at Daphne Costigan for a long time."

Grace smiled and closed her notebook. Steve looked puzzled. "I don't see. Tell me what you were going to tell me about Daphne; maybe I'll see it then."

Edna had moved to the client's chair; she looked almost smug.

"All I know about Daphne," Steve went on, "is that she runs the *Club Congenial,* upstairs on Pine Street—not far from my old office. I've had it pegged as a cross between a lonely-hearts racket and a plush call-house. Pays heavy protection, I suppose—" He stopped and looked darkly at Edna. "Look, are you fixing to cook up another headache for Dan Polcher?"

Miss Pender shook her head. "Daphne doesn't pay protection; she's too cute. She hires lawyers. Everything about that damned club is legal—and as proper as your grandmother's prayers. Daphne even has a permanent injunction to restrain the cops from raiding the joint. But now she has left a loose thread—and brother, watch me grab it and unravel her playhouse."

"Some metaphor," Steve smiled; "I detect a grudge. What did Daphne do to you—or was it to some of your friends?"

Miss Pender glanced at Grace, then back to Steve. "The snooty witch," she said, "called me some names once when I went there to see what she was trying to suck Grace into. I was practically kicked out, but I kept Grace out of her stable. I looked Daphne and her club up as well as I could after that, but I wasn't set like I am now. However, I found out this: Any woman Daphne supplies from that club is a companion for an innocent evening—and nothing more. Every female on her list is checked and double-checked before they are taken on. None of them are married; all of them are self-supporting, or live at home with a good family. You'd be surprised at the jobs some of them hold down. Not a one of them has a police record. They are simply on call after working hours—they get ten dollars, plus dinner and entertainment for the evening. They have not only the privilege, but orders from Daphne to walk out the moment a party gets rough. That's all on the up and up—as the cops found out at the time Daphne got her injunction."

"Sounds airtight," Steve commented. "And men like our client supply the gravy for Daphne. How about that end of it?"

"That's even tighter. The *Club Congenial* is exclusive, with a capital X. Daphne is not only a smart wench, but careful; *Who's Who* is easier to crash. Any sucker who wants to be a member has to come recommended by a member; he fills out a two-page application which Daphne then checks and double-checks. Believe me, she finds out more about the guy than his wife, the census-taker and the tax-collector know. If Daphne decides to accept him, he plunks down two hundred bucks for his membership

card. That's yearly. After that, it costs him twenty-five bucks every time he is fitted out with a companion for an evening. Of course he is guaranteed a lady fit to meet any of his friends, and who will in no way embarass him during the evening or afterward."

"Cute," Steve nodded, "Daphne must do all right."

"She owns a couple of apartment houses," Miss Pender replied, "and nice stocks and bonds. Very quiet, very legal and very profitable, her little club. But now she has left a loose thread; wait until I start yanking on it."

STEVE growled, "Damned if I see it; the only way she is concerned in our client's trouble is that she happened to be fresh out of what we are coyly calling 'companions'."

"That's it," Miss Pender said. "Daphne is never out of women; I know several dozen who are on her book—and five will get you a hundred that some of them were not working last night. I'll know for sure before long, and we're going to do some checking on that Horton Place house."

"Hell," Steve said, "you don't think there will be any birds in that coop now?"

"I do," Miss Pender nodded. "Use your head; Salmon is to mail his dough to that address."

"And you never heard of a change of address?"

"I said, use your head; that set-up is too good and too expensive to be exhausted just to get what cash is in one sucker's poke, and to set up a hundred-dollar-a-month shakedown. Salmon's dough—and a lot of other dough, is going to be brought there by the mailman. There will be an out, of course; anything Daphne Costigan sets up will be plenty slick. Can't you begin to see her finger in this pie?"

Steve shook his head; Grace Mitchell nodded.

"All right," Edna said, patiently. "If I'm right, and that Horton Place house is a permanent setup, this follows: The men who are coaxed into that trap are known to be saps who will pay off and keep their mouths shut. That means that their financial, social and business backgrounds are known—and where is all that information on file?"

Steve batted his eyes. "Costigan."

"Certainly. Now follow it up. Our dumb client calls on Daphne for a companion. He has faith in her because she has formerly furnished gals to help him kick up his silly heels; but Daphne fails him. There's your loose thread. Mr. Sap goes back to his hotel, and lo and behold there is our beautiful and demure little man-trap waiting for him to pick her up. Remarkable coincidence, no?"

"I'll be damned," Steve declared; "you may have something."

"I'll have Costigan, before I get through," Edna Pender said. "And now I've got to get out and see a few friends. I'll have an outside job for Grace a little later on, so you stay around here, Steve, until I call in or come back. I'll have more ideas after I talk to some friends." She was on her way before any more could be said.

Steve grinned at Mitchell. "The secret of our success," he said—"her remarkable assortment of friends. I'd like to see the lot of them in a bunch. The Pender Legion of Brands From the Burning. What do you suppose they cost her per head?"

"Look, you cluck, most of Edna's friends have long since paid back every penny they ever owed her—and the others soon will. Get it through your thick head that she has never *bought* a friend. Look at yourself; look at me. It's what she does, not the money she passes out—and gets back—in doing it that—"

"I see what you mean," Steve stopped her. "You can't help liking her," he chuckled, "even with that haircut."

Grace smiled. "I'm going to transcribe these notes before they get cold."

"Make a carbon for me," Steve said.

HALF AN hour later she had brought the carbon into Steve's office and they were talking when newly promoted Detective Lieutenant Dan Polcher arrived. As usual when he entered the Ware and Pender domain, Polcher's back was up.

Polcher had bought a new suit to mark his promotion, but it already looked as if he had slept in it. His beefy face was flushed and his burly body bristled with belligerence.

"Hello, Lieutenant," Steve greeted. "Is this visit necessary, or can I buy you a drink?"

"No drink now," Polcher growled. "I didn't come here to pinch anybody, but that scarecrow partner of yours is driving me nuts. Look, Steve, she sure as hell wrecked the syndicate in this territory, and shook the devil out of it all over the country. I'm drawing more dough because she handed me a chance and a lot of credit. But she's in a hell of a spot, you surely know that; look what happened to the guy that turned in Willie the Actor."

Steve nodded. "I know. I've told her, but I might as well talk to the wind."

"And I know," Polcher declared, "what kind of hell would pop in this town if she was to be bumped off. So I took steps. I put two of the department's best, Daly and Bladen, to covering her. So what happens? They picked her up when she left here a while ago—and ten minutes later she lost them in Butler Brothers. By gawd, it ain't possible: with such a mug, and a man's haircut, and a shape like a bad dream, she loses two good tails in a crowd of human beings."

Steve couldn't help grinning. Grace laughed softly.

"Listen, Steve," Polcher went on, "will you go along if I take her into protective custody and put her where I know some torpedo won't burn her down?"

Steve shook his head. "I wouldn't do it, Dan—on general principles. She'd have Murray Holden over there in a minute; besides, she's hot on a new case right now."

"Oh no," Polcher groaned. "Now I know I'm going to run her in. Hell, it's going to take a month to clean up the mess that anti-gambling caper of hers dropped in our laps; what in blue blazes is she stirring up now?"

"You know I can't tell you that; a client handed us a confidential case with the stipulation that there must be no publicity. Working on that basis, Edna can't possibly involve the department—"

Polcher snorted. "The hell she can't. That walking cartoon could start a game of marbles and involve the State Department before she got through. It wouldn't be so bad if she'd ever give us some kind of a break, but—"

"Her attitude," Steve cut in, "is that you never give her a break."

"She's a goddam cop-hater," Polcher snarled.

"Not exactly; I think she hates—Listen, Dan, she has given *you* some breaks. She kept you from stopping a bullet not long ago. Why don't you have a talk with her, without getting mad—"

"How the hell," Polcher grumbled wearily, "do you talk to that she-devil without getting mad?"

"If you'll talk to *me* without getting mad," Grace spoke up, "I might tell you how to get long with Edna."

POLCHER barked, "Why the devil do I have to get along with her? I got enough—"

Grace sighed. "There's the nub of it. Your attitude that cops don't have to get along with anybody. I've known Edna a long time—and been through a lot with her. She has the naive idea that every person is supposed to be innocent until proven guilty; she read that somewhere. She thinks cops should live up to it. Edna has never been proven guilty of anything, but for an innocent person she has had some very peculiar treatment from the police. She doesn't think she should have a record."

"She ain't got no record," Polcher growled.

"No? The last time you jailed her, you stuck her into a woman's lineup and read off seven arrests, no convictions."

Polcher smiled wryly. "I'm sorry I done that, but she makes me so goddam mad. That was the time she ha' conked Sam Fowler with a rock in her purse—and got away with it—because he had stopped her on a dark street without telling her he was a cop. Hell, if she'll just try to be decent, I'll take every mention of her out of the files."

"Tell Edna that," Grace said, "in a nice way, and you might even wind up with a friend."

"Maybe I will," Polcher growled, "if she lives long enough. The hell of it is that whether she likes it or not I've got to keep her from being killed by some trigger-man. The people in this town would mob the department for not protecting her. So I'd better go get on the job. What a life!"

●

Miss Pender returned to the office just before noon. Steve and Miss Mitchell were still talking in Steve's office with the door open so Grace could watch the reception room.

"I ordered steak dinners sent over from the Shamrock," Edna said as she entered, "so we can talk this thing over while we eat. I told you Daphne Costigan is slick and careful; we've got to be slicker and make no slips. I can tell you this much: I've found out that three gals on Daphne's companion list spent quiet evenings at home last night. That's one point made. Grace is going to prove the next one as soon as she has her dinner. I'm—"

She stopped as a waiter and a bus boy arrived with the food on covered trays. It was served on Steve's desk and the waiter and bus boy were dismissed.

"What's my job?" Grace Mitchell asked when they were alone.

"You go to WFDP, and pick up some forms. You are going to make a radio survey on Horton Place."

"Oh-ho," Steve said. "Got one of your friends at WFDP?"

"No," Edna answered, "but Murray Holden has. The point is that this is on the up-and-up in case anybody checks. And you make it good, Grace. Horton Place is short. You start at the Hamilton avenue end and work every house on it. Fill your form at every one—and don't quit until you are sure you are not being watched, if you have to work another street. The purpose, of course, is to find out if our man-trap is still at the Horton Place stand. And be strictly business; careful is the word, until we get a good grip on this loose thread."

She continued to instruct Grace until towards the end of the meal, when Steve asked, "And what does the *senior* partner of this screwy firm do to further the project in hand?"

"You stick with the office," Edna replied. "And if another case comes in, nail it down. This one isn't going to take long—if it works the way I think it will. You and I have got to keep well under cover in this; there have been too many pictures of us in the papers. But we'll get some action in the mop up. I wouldn't miss slapping down Daphne for all the gold in Fort Knox. You better get started, Grace; it's going to take you some

time at the radio station. You ask for Theodore Ellis. I'm going to get a few more friends ready to work on this. I'll be back here by five o'clock or before."

CHAPTER III

STEVE WARE spent the afternoon reading a detective novel. The only interruption was when two bus boys from the Shamrock came for the trays and dishes. Edna returned at four o'clock. She was angry.

"I've just read the riot act to Dan Polcher," she told Steve. "I spent half my time losing a pair of his baboons. I told that bone-headed cop to call them off, or I'd have Murray do something about it. And, you know, he's got something up his sleeve. Damned if the big ox didn't try to be nice."

Steve grinned. "Why not try meeting him halfway?" he suggested. "Dan isn't a bad sort; if you would make a friend of him—"

"I only make friends that I can trust," she cut him off; "nobody can trust a cop."

"Did you ever try it?"

She sniffed.

Steve shrugged. "What did you do besides losing your protectors?" he asked. "You know I might be of more use in these shenanigans of yours if I knew a little more about what's going on."

"I just got a few friends set to help, in case I'm right about that Horton Place spot," she said. "I told you we have to keep out of sight for a while. I can't even plan any more moves until we see what Grace finds out."

"And then—" Steve began and stopped as Grace Mitchell entered the reception room.

Grace came on into Steve's office and sat on a corner of his desk. "Well," she said, "the beauteous dame and the slick guy with the cleft chin were there. They are Mr. and Mrs. Martin Belden; they own their home; they listen to—"

"We don't care what they listen to. Does he work?"

"So he says. He sells insurance. Prudential. She's a housewife."

"That's enough," Edna Pender snapped; "the set-up is permanent, and that means it's covered to a fare-thee-well. So we are going to do some covering of our own. I'm set for that. Beginning tonight, we'll have steady reports on every move that is made around there."

"There is a telephone in that house," Grace said, "but I looked in the telephone book and it isn't listed —not under Belden anyhow."

"I've checked on that," Edna Pender replied. "It's an unlisted number; I've got it."

STEVE GRINNED and Grace sighed. "Try to think of something first around here," she said. "I should have remembered your trouble-shooter friend at the phone company."

"So, mastermind," Steve said. "What happens next? Have you got a wire-tap on the *Club Congenial* phone?"

"No," Miss Pender replied. "I doubt if that would be worth the risk. Remember, we've got to be careful—and everything we do in this thing has got to stand up. I'll tell you everything I know right now—and it isn't much, some of it may be of no use at all. We'll see as things shape up. Daphne lives in the penthouse on top of the Argyle Apartments on Kings highway. Alone—for the record. Her reputation is spotless, but there is this; Walter Barlow lives in the Argyle, and—"

"Silk Barlow!" Steve cut in.

Edna nodded. "And the handsome

Mr. Barlow manages the *Blue Lantern* night club, out in the county; Daphne owns it. Anybody who lives in the Argyle could get up to the penthouse without being seen—and that works both ways. I have it that Daphne and Barlow are very, very friendly, so much for that. But the *Blue Lantern* may be something to hook up with the house on Horton Place. I'm having that covered."

"Friends, I suppose," Steve said. "How much of our client's five grand is going to be left?"

"All of it," Miss Pender snapped. "All I put out for extra help will be listed as expenses. The bill should give that Salmon louse something to think about. But here is the most important thing right now. The State Bankers' Convention opens here tomorrow—for two days."

"And your loose thread is looped around that?"

"It may be," Miss Pender replied. "Where could our smooth friends find a safer victim than an outstate banker? Suppose one of those boys calls Daphne for a companion and learns that Daphne is sorry, but her companions are all busy?"

"And just how," Steve asked, "are you going to find out if that happens?"

"Simple," Miss Pender assured him, "from the right end. When the disappointed banker goes back to the hotel, he's going to meet our lovely and lonely little Miss Belden—and I'm going to know every move that wench makes from tonight on."

"If I had my hat on," Steve said, "I'd take it off to you. But one thing, my fran. If this thing is what you think it is, there's big dough involved—and tough trouble could pop up."

"We'll be watching for it," Miss Pender said. "Which reminds me: Grace, are you sure you didn't stir up any suspicion at the Horton Place house?"

"I think they watched me for a while," she replied, "but I worked every house on the street—and I never looked back at that house only from the corner of my eye."

Miss Pender nodded. "I think you got by," she said. "If anybody had called the radio station to check on you, I'd know it by now. All of us better get some sleep tonight. We better do it and get set for a busy stretch, unless my hunch is wrong. I'll get some reports early in the morning. I'm going to sleep in my office, so Bob can call me if anything hot comes in."

Bob was Bob Goodrich, the disabled veteran who stayed with the office telephone at night.

"I'll sleep here, too," Steve said. "If you go tearing out of here at night, I'm going to be along. I'm beginning to be afraid I couldn't enjoy life without you."

Edna gave him a glance that was momentarily wistful. Grace Mitchell smiled. "You two," she observed, "will wake up one of these days. How about we all go and have some chop suey on me as soon as Bob comes? I'll eat fast and beat it."

STEVE and Edna Pender went out for an early breakfast the next morning, then came back and sent Bob Goodrich home half an hour before Grace Mitchell arrived at eight o'clock. Miss Pender began getting telephone reports soon after that. When they were all in she told Steve and Mitchell.

"The cover worked. The Beldens spent the evening at the *Blue Lantern;* they talked with Silk Barlow. Daphne went straight home from her office—and stayed there. The Beldens went home just after midnight. No callers. I wish I could figure out some safe way to get a check on the mail that comes to Horton Place for Paul Belden."

Steve chuckled. "What, no friends in the postoffice?"

Edna frowned. "No, but I think I'm going to do something about that. At

least I'll know what kind of mail is delivered there this morning. This is an aggravating job right now; all we can do is sit tight right here and wait. It will be worse if they don't grab off one of these bankers."

They waited all morning and the only result was a telephoned report that the mailman had left three or four letters at the Horton Place house. He had rung the bell and waited to hand his delivery to the man with the cleft chin who came to the door. That had been at ten-twenty-five.

At noon they had lunch brought over from the Shamrock. At one-thirty Miss Pender received another telephoned report; the cleft-chinned Martin Belden had left the Horton Place house in a car and gone to the Argyle Apartments. There he had left two letters with the desk-clerk and driven back to Horton Place.

"Another strand of thread," Edna said. "A lot of saps like our fat client

are mailing shakedown money to that Horton Place address. It goes to the Argyle. Hm-m."

"We could telephone the Argyle," Steve suggested, "and ask for Paul Belden."

"And blow up everything," she snapped. "I tell you Daphne Costigan is smart; all we can do yet is sit tight and give her enough rope."

"Or thread," Steve said dryly.

It was ten minutes past three when another call came for Miss Pender. She listened, then asked, "How long since they left?... And Mike Rosso is tailing them with his cab?... All right Jigger, stay on the job."

EDNA PUT down the phone and said to Steve and Grace, "This could be it. Both Beldens left Horton Place a few minutes ago in their car; she was dressed to kill. Mike Rosso is following them. He knows what to do. He should call in before long. The Belden dame could be going to pick up another sap like Salmon; if she does, school will soon be out."

"I wish," Steve said, "I could see the inside of your head work. Right now, do *you* know what you are going to do ten minutes from now?"

"How could I?" she countered. "I've got to know what *they* do first. I've got plans laid four or five—"

The telephone rang and she snatched it up. After listening a few moments, she said, "So he let her out and drove away?... All right. You go back and stay there at the Hamilton Hotel."

Miss Pender broke the connection, then quickly dialed another number. "Hello, Jefferson Hotel?... The bell captain, please... Hello, Ted, this is Edna Pender. The woman got there a few minutes ago. She is small and dark and wearing a light gray suit with a small green hat that has a long red feather— Oh? Well, watch her; if she picks up one of the hotel's guests, you know what I want. I'll wait for your call."

Miss Pender's eyes were bright as she put down the phone. She nodded to Steve and Grace.

"Right to the pattern," she said. "Our lonely lady is now sitting in the Jefferson lobby, watching the door. Pretty soon some nice, fat banker who had just been bitterly disappointed at the *Club Congenial* will come back to the hotel. That's where most of the bankers' convention delegates are registered. And what a lovely surprise is going to be waiting for our downcast banker. At ease, people; we'll hear all about it in time."

Steve hoisted his feet to his desk and got out his pipe. "This is the way I like to get rich," he said. "By telephone, while your busy little

friends do all the work. Why don't you make all of our cases this simple?" He struck a match and set his pipe going.

Edna frowned at him. "You'll get some action," she promised, "before you sleep again. Remember, this is one we wrap up without any cops."

●

Half an hour later the telephone rang. Edna Pender had been sitting right beside it the entire time. "I'll put the amplifier on," she said before picking up the instrument. "One gets you five this is it."

A moment later the telephone conversation boomed out in the room. "Hello, Miss Pender speaking."

"Hello, Miss Pender. She picked him up and it was sure a slick job. What a sucker!"

"Was he one of the bankers?"

"Sure. Button right on his lapel. His name's Porter Enwright. He's registered from Butler, Missouri."

"What happened?"

"They messed around a little in the lobby and then went in for a cocktail. He dated her up for tonight; I got that when he took her out and put her in a cab. She gave him an address on Horton—"

"I know that; did you hear what time?"

"No."

"Now listen, Ted. The minute he leaves the hotel tonight, you call room 312 at the Hamilton Hotel and tell Jigger how he is dressed. What does he look like?"

"He's big but not fat. Lots of hair. Gray. Big nose."

"Good enough, Ted. I'm depending on you. 'Bye." Miss Pender cradled the phone.

"You win," Steve said. "So what's next?"

"We are going out to Horton Place later on and watch the wheels of Daphne's little mill go around. I don't think we are ready yet to toss a monkey-wrench into them, but we'll see what develops. And we really should have more money for this job; maybe we will acquire another client."

"Oh-ho," Steve grinned. "What was it Dan Polcher said about your scruples. We stand by and watch the sucker caught, then offer to get him off the hook for a price."

"We can't warn him," she argued. "If we blew up the Horton Place set up now, Daphne Costigan would get away—and I want Daphne. We've got to watch every angle until we have her tied in tight, so why not take on another client?"

"I wonder," Steve said plaintively, "how I spent so many years in the detective business and never learned anything about it."

"Maybe," Grace suggested, "you just never noticed loose threads."

"You, Grace," Edna said, "go out and eat as soon as Bob Goodrich comes, then come back and stay around here a while; we might need you later on. Steve and I will go in my car," she glanced at her watch, "we want to be out there plenty early, but we'll have time to stop at Chris Stathias' place for some food."

"Is Chris in this?"

"No, but I want to talk to him. Let's get started."

"Do we wear guns to this soiree?" Steve asked.

"I always have mine," she said.

STEVE removed his coat, got his shoulder-gun from his office closet and put it on. Edna waited for him at the door with her black leather purse slung from its shoulder strap.

Edna parked her Buick before Chris Stathias' tavern and restaurant at Delmar and Taylor at half past five. The stout little Greek proprietor came hurrying to meet them and ushered them to a table in a booth towards the rear of the dining-room. He was one big smile of welcome.

"How are you, Chris?" Miss Pen-

der asked. "And how is Mamma Stathias?"

"I am fine," Chris said. "Mamma Stathias is fine and fat, but in my kitchen it is sad." His blue eyes twinkled, "I have lost my best dishwasher."

During her masquerade as a man, Edna had been a part-time dishwasher in Chris' kitchen.

"They come and go," Miss Pender said. "What's good tonight, Chris?"

"The goulash Kirkyra, you shall eat," Chris replied, "with the antipast and the white rasino. Also the sweet rye bread."

"Have it brought on," she said, after a nod from Steve, "then sit here with us. I want to know something."

When a waiter had been dispatched with particular instructions, Chris sat down.

"Are the horse-books open again out this way?" Miss Pender asked.

Chris grinned. He was a rabid two-to-four-dollar-a-day h o r s e-p l a y e r. "They are being very careful," he said. "Are you going to again make it tough for Chris to place a little bet?"

"Not unless somebody pays me to," she said. "I may even want you to do some heavy gambling for a while; have you ever played at the *Blue Lantern?*"

"A few times," Chris replied. "There is no horse book, only cards, and—"

"I know," she cut in. "Can you find out for me if the gambling room is running again out there?"

"I think so. Carlo Marcello who has the fruit and vegetable store on Delmar plays there. I will telephone—"

"Do this, Chris," she said. "Tell Marcello that you want to try to make a bundle quick and want to go to the *Blue Lantern* with him tomorrow night, if the games are running."

Chris nodded and got up and went to his little office in the rear. The food had been served when he returned and Steve and Edna were eating.

"It is arranged," Chris said as he sat down.

"Now, Chris," Miss Pender said. "I may need you for quite a few evenings. You will gamble with my money, and I will pay for any extra help—"

"Mama Stathias," Chris stopped her, "will come down and be boss," he grinned; "that makes her very happy."

"Good. I must have somebody I can trust for this. You will go to the *Blue Lantern* tomorrow night, and every night that I tell you to. Buy two hundred dollars worth of chips each time when you go in. Play as you please, but be sure you always have at least a hundred dollars worth of chips to cash in when you leave. Keep the money you get for your chips separate to give to me. Understand?"

Chris nodded.

"Then we will finish our dinner and leave," Edna said, passing a tight roll of bills across the table. "I'll be getting in touch with you after tomorrow night."

CHAPTER IV

WHEN CHRIS had gone, Steve asked, "Now what was behind that?"

"Daphne's racket," Edna replied, "is u n d o u b t e d l y bringing a lot of cash to that Horton Place address. And you can bet she's got a slick system to keep it from soiling her pretty hands. I'm playing a long hunch that it gets passed out over the *Blue Lantern* tables."

"And Chris may get some of it," Steve nodded. "But how are you going to know it?"

"I'll fix that."

"Even so, how will you tie it to Daphne?"

"We'll be closer, anyhow, and we have to take this a step at a time. Finish your coffee and let's get up to Horton Place."

●

The old Hamilton Hotel faced Horton Place at the top of Horton Place; it was a quiet neighborhood. Miss Pender parked her Buick in front of the hotel just before seven o'clock, in a spot that provided a good view down tree-shaded Horton Place.

"The third house on the left hand side," she told Steve, "is our sucker-trap. I've got it covered tight. Jigger Moore has room 312 in the hotel, and the windows are about above us; a girl you don't know rented a room today in a house right across the street from the Belden place; that cab

parked back there behind us is Mike Rosso's."

"And in case you don't know it," Steve said, "the black sedan parked a little farther back followed us from Stathias' place. There are a couple of Dan Polcher's watch dogs in it."

"Damn!" she snarled. "I'll—I'm going into the hotel—and I better not be followed in. You stay here."

It was ten minutes before eight when Edna returned to the Buick, her dark eyes snapping. "What have Polcher's stooges been doing?"

"Just watching. Daly got out once and walked up and looked into the lobby. Then he went back to the car."

"I'll have a stop put to this tomorrow," she said grimly. "But now we have to get the damned cops away from here. I wanted to see this, but I've got it set, I hope. Our playboy banker just left the Jefferson in a cab. We are going back to the office; if Jigger and Mike don't pick up the sap, I'll figure out another way to get to him."

She started the motor and drove away down Hamilton. The official car fell in behind.

BOB GOODRICH and Grace Mitchell were gabbing in the reception room when Steve and Edna entered.

"Bob," Miss Pender said, "connect my desk phone for all calls. Grace, bring your notebook." She went on into her private office, followed by Steve and Grace. She sat down at her desk and drew the phone close. Her face was dark with anger.

"Why be sore at Polcher?" Steve asked; "he's just protecting you the best he can."

"Nuts. Cops interfering with my business. Well, all we can do now is wait to see if the first trick works."

"And what is the first trick?" Steve asked, stoking his pipe.

"The sucker," Miss Pender said, "went out there in a cab. If the Belden siren gets him to stay, he'll dismiss the cab. Then when they kick him out he'll be looking for a way to get back to his hotel. I'm hoping he'll see Mike Rosso's hack and hire it. I gave Jigger a note to give to Mike after we led the cops away. If

the sucker gets into Mike's cab, Mike will hand him the note—and I hope it will bring him here."

"So we wait," Steve slid down in the client's chair and threw a leg over its arm. "This should be fun."

"Stop gabbing and let me think," Edna snapped. "I wish I could get more than one jump ahead of this thing."

●

A half hour had passed when Miss Pender's phone rang. She snatched it up and answered. After listening a moment, she said, "All right, Jigger; stay with it until Banty comes, then get some sleep."

Steve raised his brows in query when she put down the phone.

"The chump took Mike's cab; we'll know in fifteen minutes or so."

It was twenty minutes later when Bob Goodrich opened the door and let a big, well dressed, gray haired man into Miss Pender's office.

"Mr. Enwright?" Miss Pender asked.

"I'm Porter Enwright," the man replied. "Maybe you will explain the note that was handed to me by a taxi driver."

"It explains itself," she retorted. "You want to be gotten out of the mess you just got into, or you wouldn't be here."

"I'm here," Enwright snapped, "because your name was signed to the note and I have read about you lately. But what the devil do you know about the mess I'm in—and how do you know?"

Miss Pender indicated the client's chair from which Steve had risen. "Sit down, Mr. Enwright," she said, "and I'll tell you. This is my partner, Steve Ware—and Miss Grace Mitchell, our secretary."

Enwright nodded to both and sat down, very much on guard.

MISS PENDER said, "You are in St. Louis to attend the bankers' convention. This afternoon you tried to arrange for a woman companion for the evening—through the *Club Congenial*. You were told that, unfortunately, none were available. You went back to your hotel where, by good fortune, you met a young woman who later agreed to go out with you on an evening party. You went out to the Horton Street address she gave you and there learned that the lady was baby-sitting for her brother, but she invited you to spend the evening there. Some time later, a man took a picture of you in, shall we say an embarassing position. Then you were robbed and forced into paying blackmail for Lord knows how long to come. You'd like to avoid that, and see the people behind it taken care of—so you are here. Right?"

"Partly right," Enwright said. "But how do I know this isn't part of it? If you knew all this was going to happen, why didn't you—"

"You were not our client," Edna stopped him. "We would like to put a stop to this racket and jail the people behind it, but we are private investigators. We must have clients, and some cooperation from the clients. If you will retain us, anything you tell us and anything that we know connecting you with the case will be privileged information and absolutely confidential. And ten dollars will be sufficient for a retainer."

Enwright looked puzzled. "Cheap enough," he said, "but I can't have any publicity about this—even if I have to pay—"

"That's understood," she interrupted, "so if you want us to get you out of this, retain us; if not, go on about your business—with our promise that what we know now will be kept just among us three, unless we break the thing from some other angle."

"You think you can—can stop these people, and keep my name out of it?"

"Yes."

"There will be a fee, of course?"

"Five thousand dollars, collectable only if we succeed."

Enwright's eyes calculated. "I'll buy that," he said, "but you'll have to take my check for your retainer. Those people left me two dollars—and I gave that to the cab-driver."

"We'll take the check," Edna said. "How much cash did they take off you?"

"Only seventy dollars. But I'm supposed to mail some more yet tonight, so they'll get it in the morning."

"How much?"

"Five hundred dollars."

"To Paul Belden at the Horton Place address?"

"Yes."

"In cash, in a plain envelope—regular mail?"

"Yes. They said all in twenty-dollar bills."

"You can get that at your hotel?"

"Yes. They know me and I have a credit card."

"How long do you plan to stay in St. Louis?"

"Until day after tomorrow morning."

"Write that retainer check, then go straight to the hotel, get that cash and mail it—but make a list of the serial-numbers on the bills and keep it. We'll get in touch with you. Don't come back here, or even telephone here until we do. One more thing: how much money were you supposed to mail to that address on the first of every month?"

"Two hundred dollars."

"You could afford that without too much pinch?"

"Yes."

Miss Pender nodded. "It fits; they gauge the chump. You were soaked this extra five-hundred for having chicken-feed on you, but that's a break for us. May save us a wait until first of the month. Hurry back to the hotel and get that dough in the mail. Make that retainer-check for fifteen dollars and we'll give you cab fare."

"So what now?" Steve asked when Enwright had gone.

"Wait, dammit," she snapped. "I told you I can only keep one jump ahead of this thing. We can get some sleep now; tomorrow we sit here and watch for the cat to jump."

IT WAS A slow day. Steve read two detective magazines. Miss Pender sat at her desk and received reports from time to time. At eleven o'clock, she told Steve that one letter had been delivered to the Horton Place house. At noon she sent Grace Mitcheil to the Jefferson hotel to get a list of serial numbers from Porter Enwright. At two-thirty she reported that Martin Belden had made a trip to the Argyle Apartments and left an envelope at the desk. At five, Bob Goodrich came and Edna told Steve to take Grace Mitchell to dinner before she went home. Miss Pender would stay the night in her office, she said; Steve said he would be back.

Just after midnight, Chris Stathias arrived at her office, having telephoned Edna half an hour before. Miss Pender had awakened Steve. Chris was excited; he placed a flat roll of money on Miss Pender's desk.

"I won four hundred and twenty-five dollars," Chris said. "There it is."

"All this came from the cashier for your chips?" she asked.

"Yes."

Edna produced her list of serial numbers. "Sort out the twenties, Steve," she said, "and start reading off the serial numbers."

Half an hour later they had finished the check.

"Five of Enwright's bills," she said. "We know they went to the Argyle at two-thirty this afternoon. But that still doesn't tie them to Daphne; they may have gone to Silk Barlow."

"So?" Steve asked.

"I've got to sleep on this. We know a lot, but we can't prove much of it and keep our slimy clients in the clear.

But there must be a way—and I'll find it. As tight as I have everybody covered, there will have to be a break. All I want is one straight lead to Daphne Costigan; then we'll move in."

"Do I go again tomorrow night?" Chris asked.

"Not unless you just want to gamble," Edna said. She took two hundred dollars from the pile of money and pushed the rest to Chris. "Buy Mamma Stathias a present," she said, "and thanks for the help, Chris."

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Early the next morning, Steve and Miss Pender went across to the Shamrock for breakfast. "So what came of sleeping on it?" Steve asked.

Edna shook her head. "Not much. Damn Daphne; she has certainly got this thing covered six ways from the ace. I got one idea, but we'd have to wait ten days until the first of the month. That's too long. I think we might be able to force her into the open by moving in on Horton Place during the next shakedown party. I'm thinking it over."

"That's when the party *could* get rough," Steve said.

She nodded. "I don't care how rough it gets—if we can land Daphne. The hell of it is that there isn't another convention in town until next week. Damn it, Steve, don't crowd me. The next move is Daphne's; all I can do is wait."

"I'm not pushing, my fran," Steve soothed. "I'm learning about loose threads. What did you do to Dan Polcher? I haven't seen any of his boys hanging around since night before last."

"I sent Murray Holden over to talk to Polcher," she replied; "that cop and all of his monkeys had better lay off me."

Steve smiled and gave his attention to his ham and eggs.

CHAPTER V

BACK AT the office, the day started off quietly. Steve read and smoked his pipe. Miss Pender stayed in her office with her telephone, receiving frequent reports on the activities of Daphne Costigan, Silk Barlow and the couple who occupied the house on Horton Place. It was three o'clock in the afternoon when she came into Steve's office. He put down his magazine.

"We've got a break," she said, "but it could be a lot better. Our lonely damsel has just been delivered to the Coronado Hotel by her boy-friend—and left her there. Mike Rosso tailed them. He parked on the street and watched because he guessed I didn't have a contact at the Coronado. A man brought the Belden siren out after a while and put her in a cab. Mike couldn't hear what they said, but it looks to me as if another chump has a date at Horton Place. We are going to be in on that; I think we can get to Daphne by taking over at Horton Place and playing our cards right."

"Hm-m," Steve said. "I've given up trying to follow your dizzy reasoning, but I'll string along. You have managed to come out on top so far. How do we work this one?"

"You can't plan far ahead on anything like this one; there has to be an 'if' in everything. For instance I've got one idea that may work *if* tonight's chump goes out there in a cab. I've still got to work out one in case he has his own car. But I'm tired of fiddling with this case—and something tells me that it's time to move in on Horton Place. We started with one loose thread; now we have several. I think we can tie them together at

Horton Place—and the string will lead to Daphne Costigan."

"How?" Steve asked. "Damn it, you must have something more to go on."

"Look, Steve," she said, "I have this. I *know* that Daphne is the master-mind in this racket; don't you?"

"Yes," Steve admitted, "I do now. But there isn't a thing we can *prove*. Not on Daphne."

"We'll get something tonight," Edna promised, "and don't ask me what; we'll have to grab it when it pops up. This I can see: Horton Place is the weak spot in the set-up. It's been working nearly two years, and they are so sure that they are careless. I've had a dozen people covering. There are only the Belden siren and her boy-friend living there; the place isn't even guarded while the chumps are being taken. It isn't necessary, because Daphne has made so sure that her suckers won't fight or squeal. By crashing tonight's caper, we'll find something that will nail Daphne."

"Name one possibility," Steve urged.

"The pictures," she said.

"The pictures?"

"Certainly—or the films. It figures that they have bagged a hundred or more chumps; they certainly don't have those films developed by any outsiders. And remember I have had every move watched. The films are either developed right there at Horton Place, or taken to the Argyle. And they are kept somewhere—with records. Do you think Daphne Costigan is going to leave that stuff in the hands of anybody that might take a notion to break away and go into business for themselves?"

STEVE SIGHED, "My fran, I give up. Your fantastic mind goes in too many directions at once for me to follow. Pardon me all to hell—but I'd just as soon tonight was over."

"Daphne Costigan will wish it had never come," Edna retorted grimly. "And if—" she stopped as Grace Mitchell opened Steve's office door to admit a dark, chunky man in a not-too-neat taxi driver's uniform. His name was Mike Rosso and he was one of what Steve called the Pender Legion of Brands from the Burning, who would go to hell for Miss Pender without even asking why.

"Hello, Mike," Edna said, "did you get a good look at the chump that Bender twist picked up at the Coronado?"

Rosso nodded. "I'ma know him all

right."

"Even if he changes clothes?"

"Sure."

"Then here's what you do, Mike. Go back out there and watch for him to leave the Coronado. If he leaves in a cab, just follow him and park somewhere in front of the Hamilton Hotel; my car will be parked there. If he leaves in his own car, get to a phone as fast as you can, describe the car to Jigger, then come on out to the Hamilton and park. You'll be waiting for somebody, and stay in your cab until I give some word."

Mike nodded again. "Is gonna be fun pretty soon?" he asked.

"The last time you had fun," she said. "You damn near got killed. You remember you've got Rosa and the bambino to take care of."

Mike grinned. "Sure. I'ma get some bumps and for that I get two hundred dollar froma you. With that I buy beeg insurance policy. I'ma dead,

Rosa be rich and getta good man."

"Scat," Miss Pender snapped. "Rosa might be better off, at that."

Rosso left, still grinning.

"Come on," Miss Pender said to Steve, "we'll drive out to the Chicken Hut and get something to eat. I'm going to be damn sure that none of Dan Polcher's monkeys are around when we close in on that Horton Place dump."

●

Dusk was settling over St. Louis when a taxicab came along Hamilton avenue and turned into Horton Place. Mike Rosso's cab, which had been following the other, pulled in behind Miss Pender's Buick and stopped. The Buick had been parked there for nearly an hour. From the front seat, Edna Pender and Steve Ware watched the first cab pull up at the Horton Place house.

"Another lamb to the slaughter—only right now he thinks he's a wolf," she jeered as a neatly-dressed man got out of the cab and went up the walk to the cozy and innocent appearing lair of the Beldens.

The cabdriver had evidently been told to wait. The fare rang the bell of the Belden house and the door opened. There was a glimpse of a feminine figure in pink, then the visitor stepped inside and the door closed.

"He's getting the works now," Edna said. "He'll soon come out and pay off the cab."

She was right. As the man started back to the house after dismissing the taxi, Miss Pender picked up a package from the seat beside her. It was a carton of cigarets which she had bought at the Chicken Hut and had wrapped in plain paper.

"Here we go," she said to Steve. "I'll get Mike Rosso set for his stunt. Wait." She stepped from the Buick and went back to Rosso's cab.

A FEW MINUTES later Edna returned without the package and slid under the wheel. She started the car and swung it into Horton Place where she parked at the curb directly across the street from the Belden house.

"Perfect," she said to Steve, "blinds all drawn, but light shows around the edges. Watch those living-room windows and don't even bat your eyes. They use a flashbulb to take the picture, and the white flash around the blinds will be our signal. We mustn't miss it."

"Damned if you don't think of everything," Steve said.

"I try to, and I hope I have. Jigger and Banty are covering that back door. I've got Daphne covered at the Argyle and Silk Barlow at the *Blue Lantern*. I think that when we crowd the Belden witch into a corner, we'll sew this thing up fast. Now keep quiet and watch for that flash."

●

Almost an hour passed before the yellow outline of light about the watched blinds turned brilliantly white for a fraction of a second.

"There!" Miss Pender exclaimed softly. "Now remember—don't make a sound on the walk or porch. As soon as we get to our spots on each side of the front door, Mike Rosso will do his hokus pokus. Come on."

Horton Place was quiet as they left the Buick and moved across the street. It was now fully dark and under the big trees the pillar street lamps only slightly dispelled the night. A few moments later, Steve and Miss Pender stood pressed against the wall on either side of the front door. Then Mike Rosso's cab rolled down Horton Place and stopped before the Belden house. Mike got out and came boldly to the door, carrying the wrapped carton of cigarets in his hand. He pressed the doorbell.

The sound of voices inside had been

but a murmur to those on the porch. But when the doorbell rang even the murmur stopped. Soft movements were barely audible on the porch. Mike pressed the bell again.

For another moment there was only silence, then steps approached the door and it was opened by a small, dark-eyed woman in a house-dress that was almost negligee.

"Yes?" she said, blocking the opening with her body.

"I'ma find this in my cab," Mike exhibited the package. "Musta belong to the man I'ma bring here while ago."

"Oh," the woman put a world of relief into the word. "It was nice of you to bring it back, but Mr. Lessing has gone back to town. You can find him at—"

"Help!" a hoarse cry came from inside the house. "Help, dri—"

The somewhat muffled report of a gun cut off the cry in the middle of a word. Mike Rosso dropped the package and threw both arms about the woman. Before she could even cry out, he had half pushed, half carried her back across the room. There was the soft thud of something falling. Edna Pender and Steve Ware came through the door and into the room side by side. Miss Pender's automatic was in her hand.

ACROSS THE nicely-furnished room the cleft-chinned Martin Belden stood just in front of a curtained alcove. He had a nickle-plated thirty-two revolver in his hand. At his feet the well dressed man who had arrived by cab lay sprawled on the gray and green carpet. Belden raised his gun and took a step towards where Mike Rosso clung to the now furiously struggling woman. Then Belden snarled and swung towards Edna and Steve Ware as they burst into the room, Steve kicking the door shut behind him.

"Drop it, you," Miss Pender ordered, gun leveled at Belden. The last thing she wanted was a rumpus that would bring police before she was ready. But Belden turned and brought his gun around.

Mike Rosso prevented shooting; holding the fighting woman with the other arm, Mike snatched a pinch-bottle of scotch from a stand-table beside him and flung it hard, hitting Belden on the side of his head.

The revolver dropped from Belden's hand and he crumbled to the floor beside the other body. Rosso had the woman about subdued when Edna took over with her gun. "Quiet," Miss Pender poked her gun muzzle urgently into the Belden woman's side.

The woman obeyed and there was sudden silence in the room for a moment. Then Edna said, "Mike, go out on the porch and watch the street. Make it look good; you are just waiting on the porch for a fare. But if it looks as if anybody is getting excited, ring the doorbell and I'll be on that phone calling cops before any get here."

Mike stepped around the Belden woman and headed for the door. Steve was examining the two men on the floor.

"What's there, Steve?" Edna asked. She had pushed the Belden woman into a chair.

Steve looked up from beside Belden. "This one's just out like a light; the other one is dead, or soon will be." He frowned. "Better call—"

"Not yet," she stopped him, "we can wait—"

The Belden woman was staring at Miss Pender, wide-eyed. Her face had paled until rouge and lipstick stood out livid. There was stark fear in her voice as she gasped. "You're that—Edna Pender!"

"Right," Miss Pender snapped, "and if you're half smart, you'll sit still and keep still and hope no neighbors heard or saw anything to make them call cops. If your boy-friend killed that chump, it's your murder

rap, too." She glanced at Steve. "That shot wasn't very loud; there may be no alarm. I didn't expect this thing to fall into so many pieces so quick, but we may still have time to pick them up. I'm ready to grab the phone. You find that camera. It must be close around."

STEVE STEPPED to the alcove curtains and pushed them apart. The alcove was a small spare bedroom with one single bed. The camera lay on the bed, a burned flashbulb still in the socket. Steve got it and returned to the living room.

"Put it there on the table," Edna said. "It goes to the cops for evidence—if they come. If they're not here in five minutes more, they're not coming. While we wait, frisk the pretty boy and see if the chump's wallet is on him."

As Steve knelt to search, the Belden woman started to say something and Miss Pender told her to shut up. Steve found the wallet in a side coat pocket and looked hastily through it.

"Any dough?" Edna asked.

Steve nodded. "Quite a wad. The guy's name was Fred Lessing."

"Put the poke back in pretty-boy's pocket until we see if the cops come; if they do, we have to loose it. Now go out and take a look. If everything is quiet, tell Mike to go sit in his cab and sound his horn twice if trouble shows. We may make this pay off yet."

Steve was back in a couple of minutes. "No rumpus," he reported.

Miss Pender turned to the other woman. "Now sister," she snapped, "we've spent a lot of time getting set to cut in on this racket. Your boy-friend has gummed up the big money by making it murder, but if the cops don't show up maybe we can latch onto a bundle yet—if you help. And you'd better help, unless you want to go along with your boy-friend on the murder-rap."

Some of the fear left the woman's eyes. "What do you want?" she asked. "Just give me a chance to get out of this and I'll do anything I can."

"Why in hell did your boy-friend kill the chump?"

"I don't know," the woman answered. "Because the guy yelled, I

guess. When the doorbell rang, Marty told him in there out of sight to hold a gun on him until I answered the door. Then—"

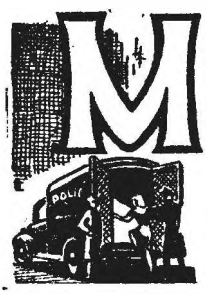
"That's enough," Miss Pender cut her off. "He loused it up for all of us. He has to go to the cops, but maybe we can still save the racket, if Daphne can be kept in the clear. Can the cops tie this to her, if you take a quick powder?"

Beth Belden's eyes grew crafty. "Marty won't take a murder-rap alone," she said. "He'll spill all the dope first—and he knows it. But if we both got away, this house couldn't be hooked to Daphne; she's too slick for that."

Miss Pender appeared thoughtful, and Beth Belden watched her hopefully. Steve stood frowning; a murder was growing cold on their hands.

"Damn," Edna said. "It might be done, if we could dump the chump's body out in the country." She stood up, turned her back on Beth, and winked at Steve. "You keep things under control here," she said to him, "while I go out and talk to Mike."

CHAPTER VI



MISS PENDER was back in about ten minutes. She pointed to Belden's sprawled body. "Can we bring him around?" she asked Steve.

"Not very soon," Steve replied. "I just had a look at him. Pulse is regular but weak; concussion, maybe."

"I know a safe place to take him," Beth Belden said—"where we can get a safe doctor."

Edna turned to face her. "Listen, sister, so far we can back out of this clean. The cops will even thank us, but once we got rid of this chump's body we're in deep. For that we have to know damn sure where we stand. For one thing, this house has to be clean; where do you develop the films?"

"Darkroom in the basement," Beth replied. "But, look, if we are going to play ball, let's get Marty to where the doctor—"

"The faster we clean up here," Miss Pender interrupted, "the quicker we can do that. You show me that darkroom. Steve, you stay here until Mike comes in; come on, sister."

Beth Belden led the way to the basement, Edna right behind her with gun in hand.

"Is there any hot stuff anywhere but in the darkroom?" Edna asked as they crossed a furnace-room.

"No," Beth replied. "Everything's in here." She opened a door into a fair sized darkroom, well-equipped, and switched on a light.

"Where are the films and records kept?"

"In here," Beth replied, opening a cupboard above a sink.

Miss Pender's mouth fell open, then snapped shut. The shelves of the cupboard were filled with brown paper envelopes. Edna got back in stride. "Hell," she said, "I thought Daphne was smart; you mean all the films and records on the chumps are right here?"

"Sure," Beth said. "They are as safe here as anywhere. If I hadn't thrown a little switch under the cupboard, the whole works would have been burning the minute I turned the knob of the door—and film really burns."

Edna was still puzzled, but she was careful. "Well, this stuff has got to be cleaned out of here," she said. "Is there a carton or some wrapping paper around?"

"In the upstairs hall."

"Let it ride for a minute," Miss Pender said. "Think now. Is there anything else around the basement that could possibly lead to Daphne? We'll bundle this stuff and take it along with you and Marty, but—"

Edna stopped as Steve appeared at the darkroom door and nodded to her across Beth Belden's shoulder. "Mike's up there," Steve said. "What's the layout down here?"

"Some hot stuff to move out of here," she replied, as she drew a metal wastebasket from under a sink. "I'll put it in this. You take her and look over the basement for anything else; show him around, sister."

As Steve and the woman went out into the furnace-room, Miss Pender began a hurried inspection of the filed envelopes. She quickly found the two she wanted and slipped them [illegible] inside her bra. The rest she dumped into the basket which she carried out into the big furnace room; Steve was standing with Beth Belden beside a practically-empty trash-bin.

"Looks clean down here," Steve

said; "we better get upstairs and get ready to move."

MIKE ROSSO was sitting on the edge of a table watching the two still forms on the floor when the other three entered the living room.

"All right, Mike," Miss Pender said as she put the basket down on the floor at the end of the sofa. "Go out and wait. I'll open the door when we are ready to move the stiff."

Mike went out.

Miss Pender motioned Beth Belden to a seat on the sofa and sat down beside her. "Now," Edna said, "we've gone as far as we can until we're sure of the dough. How much cash comes to this house in the mail every month?"

Beth Belden hesitated.

"Don't waste time," Edna snapped; "I can check those envelopes."

"More than twelve thousand dollars now," Beth said.

"Nice business; and all the chumps too scared to mark it, or do anything to make it hot."

"Wouldn't hurt if they did," Beth said. "Daphne scatters it too fast; she has a slick set-up for that."

"Hm-m. Has Daphne got any other records or prints in case we have to get rid of the stuff in this basket?"

"No. Only some little check-marks on the membership cars at the club—and those couldn't be connected—"

"All right," Miss Pender cut in. "This house may never be suspected, but we'll leave it clean, anyhow; we have everything set, now, but we'll not make a move that puts us where we can't throw it to the cops until we have cash in hand. So you better get Daphne on the phone, now; she's at her place on top of the Argyle. Call her on her direct unlisted phone. Tell her exactly what the situation is here, and that we want twenty grand in cash to dump the chump and leave her in the clear. Otherwise we call the cops."

"Why don't you call her?"

"If you call her and give her the picture," Miss Pender replied, "she'll know I'm not just trying to pull a fast one on her. I'll talk to her after, if she wants. Give it to her straight, because the sooner she gets that dough here, the sooner you and Marty can be on your way."

"She may not have that much cash handy," Beth protested.

"She can get it from the *Blue Lantern*. Get on that phone and let's get roiling."

Beth Belden moved to the phone which was on a stand at the end of the sofa. A minute later she was talking to Daphne Costigan. Beth poured out the story in short words. "And now they are sitting tight for the twenty grand," she finished. "As soon as they get it they will get rid of the body and I'll take Marty... All right." She cradled the phone.

"Well?" Edna asked.

"Daphne will call back in a few minutes; she wants to talk to you then."

WHEN THE phone rang, Miss Pender picked it up. "Edna Pender speaking... Yes. Beth gave it to you straight; the chump is dead. I'll take care of him as soon as you bring the dough. I want you to make sure this house is clean in case anything should lead the cops... All right, but make it as fast as you can. And no monkey-business; any time, until we start loading the stiff into the cab, I can throw this to the cops—and if I do the Beldens will sing.... Okay."

Miss Pender looked at Steve as she put down the phone. "Daphne said she will be here with the cash in about an hour. I hope she will, but we are going to take some precautions." She went to the door and beckoned to Mike Rosso.

"Mike," she said as Rosso entered, "help Steve carry Marty down to that darkroom in the basement. Beth and I will bring some quilts and pillows to lay him on."

A few minutes later the still-unconscious Martin Belden lay on a pallet

on the floor of the darkroom.

"Mike," Edna said, "you stay here with Beth. Steve and I have a few things to do upstairs."

"What the hell is this," Beth cried, "a double-cross?"

"Not unless Daphne Costigan pulls it," Edna snapped. "But I'm counting on her."

"She won't," Beth declared; "she knows Marty and me would—"

"Not if you are dead," Edna cut her off. "*Maybe* she will come with the payoff, but don't depend on it. Anyhow, you stay right here with Mike and your boy-friend until we see what happens; come on, Steve."

Up in the living room, Miss Pender pulled a tape recorder out from under the sofa, while Steve took the microphone out of a bridge-lamp that stood behind the sofa near the telephone. Mike Rosso had brought it from Edna's Buick and set it up with Steve's help, while Miss Pender kept Beth in the basement.

"Now," she said, "if Dan Polcher don't mess up his part of this, Daphne Costigan will soon be a cooked goose. I think I convinced the big baboon when I telephoned, while Beth thought I was out fixing to get the chump's body hauled off. Polcher wanted to barge right in, but I told him he'd have to play it my way if he wanted to sink Daphne—and that injunction of hers has been burning the cops for a long time."

Steve grinned. "My fran, you don't play both ends against the middle. You grab forty ends and play 'em wild. I see one ray of hope. You *did* call Polcher. And he *is* playing ball—or he'd be here now; remember that. And before my hair gets any grayer, what kind of a shenanigan are you looking for?"

"Don't be dumb," Edna snapped; "it's easy to figure. There is nothing to tie Daphne to this house, so far as she knows, except the people that are in it and this basket of records. Suppose she comes with a bunch of goons and torpedoes and wipes us all out and destroys the records? Remember, like all crooks, she thinks everybody else is crooked. In her book, we are waiting here for the payoff; there are no cops wise. The Belden pair are washed out as far as she is concerned. One will get you ten that hell is going to pop around here before long.

"I told Polcher to let enough of it pop to give him something to work on—unless Daphne walks into this house by herself. Then he is to follow her right in. Now time is getting short, unless I'm wrong. You take this basket of records and films down to the darkroom. I'm taking the recorder out back and giving it to the boys I have watching out there. I want them away from here, and they'll take care of the recorder. You keep Mike and the Belden wench in the darkroom, with the door open. I'll be watching from the top of the basement stairs, but I may want in with you in a hurry."

Steve shook his head. "I still wish I could see how your noggin works."

CHAPTER VII

SHORTLY after ten o'clock, events took place in quiet old Horton Place—events from which residents of the neighborhood will date history for years to come. For nearly an hour, three innocent-looking private cars had been parked before the hotel at the Hamilton end of Horton Place. Only one man in each car was visible to passersby. But in each car, four others crouched or lay on the floor below window level. Lieutenant Dan Polcher sat behind the wheel of one of those cars. Three blocks away, at the De Hodiamont

end of Horton Place, two more similar cars were parked. The uncomfortable men on the floorboards grunted, groaned, and swore softly from time to time as they waited.

Then three sedans came sedately up Hamilton from Delmar, turned into Horton Place and stopped in front of the watched house. Lieutenant Dan Polcher switched on the lights of the car in which he sat. The car was parked where it could be seen plainly from the other end of Horton Place. Officers in all the five cars rose quickly and got into position to use their weapons—machine-guns and riot-guns. The drivers started their motors and made ready to follow when Polcher led.

Before the Horton Place house, men emerged from the three sedans and ran swiftly across the lawn. One, then another and another raised their arms and hurled objects which smashed the glass of windows and went into the lighted living room. Almost immediately blasts followed which shook the neighborhood. Then other men in the attacking party were throwing uncorked bottles of gasoline into the shattered building.

In less than a minute after they had started the attack, the nine or ten men who had left the sedans were racing back towards them. Flames were already roaring inside the bomb wrecked house.

"Cut loose," Lieutenant Dan Polcher shouted, "and blast as long as anything moves."

Some officers leaped from the cars to better handle their weapons; the rest opened fire from the windows. From a range of less than a hundred yards a withering blast of buckshot and machine-gun bullets cut down the men racing towards the sedans. One of the gangster cars never moved; the other two leaped away with gears howling, only to be met by the blast of lead from the police cars at the De Hodiamont end of Horton Place.

In room 312 in the Hamilton Hotel, Jigger Moore, as the first bomb was hurled, turned from the window and said one word to a small man who sat at the telephone. That word was, *Fire*. The wail of approaching sirens from the direction of both Olive and Page was heard less than a minute later.

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Miss Pender was standing at the top of the basement stairs when the first bomb shattered a living room window. She was at the bottom of the stairs when the explosions rocked the building and flung her to her knees. She scrambled to her knees and ran to the door.

"Hurt?" Steve asked.

"No," she replied. "Everybody keep inside, but leave the door open for air as long as we can."

"Fire?" Steve asked.

"Sure," Miss Pender said. "What could suit Daphne better than all of us dead in a heap of ashes? I had—"

Beth Belden went to pieces and started screaming. Mike Rosso calmly clipped her on the jaw with a brown fist and she fell in a heap beside the unconscious Marty.

"I had her figured—and outfigured," Edna went on. "The fire won't last long. Listen."

The rattle of heavy gunfire came faintly through the whoosh and crackle of flames upstairs. Even in the basement, the temperature began to rise. A minute more passed before they heard the sirens of fire equipment. The light in the darkroom went out. Miss Pender and Mike Rosso both produced flashlights; the basement was hazy with smoke in their beams.

"You and your loose threads," Steve Ware growled.

"They did the job," Edna retorted. "Set that basket of records and film up in a sink; there'll be water coming in here."

SHE WAS right. Ten minutes later, the water was six inches deep in

the darkroom. Martin Belden was propped up in a corner to keep his head out of water. Beth, revived, stood supported by Miss Pender; Beth was shaking and sobbing.

"Your friend, Daphne," Edna told her, "has fixed you up fine; there will be cops all over the place now."

Ten minutes more passed before Dan Polcher shouted Steve's name from the basement stairs. Steve answered and Polcher came sloshing across the basement. He was carrying a flashlight, and four other officers followed him.

"By Gawd," Polcher barked as he held Miss Pender in the beam of his torch, "there ought to be a law against you. Seven dead goons up there and three that will—"

"She's in this," Beth Belden cried, "she—"

"You shut up," Polcher snarled at Beth; "she's in every damned thing—"

"Listen, Polcher," Edna cut in. "Have your men take this man-trap and her boy-friend away; pretty-boy needs a doctor. Then I'll have something to tell you."

Polcher glared at her for a moment, then turned and gave orders. The Beldens were taken away.

"Now," Miss Pender said, "you take charge of that basket there in the sink, then get us three out of here and let us fade before too many notice us—if you want credit for mopping this up. Steve and I will wait for you at our office, with all you need to get Daphne Costigan, and—"

"We've *got* Daphne," Polcher growled, "and Vince Carson; I had a hookup to her telephone while all that blabbing was going on. You ain't the only one—"

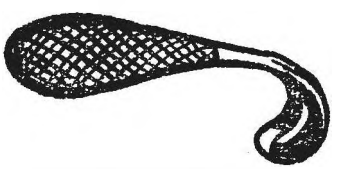
Miss Pender cut him off. "Get us out of here, and the baby is all yours. Mess us up, now that our job is done, and I'll have the papers making a monkey of you instead of a hero. And we'd better be gone before any reporters spot us; we can go by the back door."

Polcher thought it over, fast; a few moments later he was clearing the way to Miss Pender's Buick across the turmoil of the street.

Horton Place was clogged with fire equipment, ambulances, police cars and the wrecks of two gangster sedans. People had poured from their homes and more were flowing in from Hamilton and De Hodiamont. The blast-shattered Belden bouse was charred, but the fire was out. Hose-lines were being rolled up. Voices shouting orders and asking questions made a cacophony of sound. Under this, Miss Pender said a few words to Mike Rosso who then headed towards his parked cab.

WHEN EDNA and Steve were in the Buick, Miss Pender told Lieutenant Polcher, "There will be a recorder tape at our office that you can have for your very own; don't forget that you had that house bugged. If you don't fall over your flat feet now, you'll have a nice feather in your cap. How about getting us some gangway out of here?"

A uniformed prowl-car officer called by Polcher opened a path for the



Buick. As Edna tooled the car along behind the officer, Steve chuckled.

"All this from a loose thread," he said. "My fran, you are a cockeyed wonder; I'm even beginning to believe we'll stay out of jail this time."

Miss Pender turned her head for a second and gave him what Steve had come to think of as The Smile. Ugly as sin at other times, Edna's thin and rather long face was transformed miraculously by that infrequent smile. It blended the mismatched features into fleeting and breath taking beauty.

As she turned back to her driving, Steve leaned over, dropped his left

arm about her shoulders and kissed her on the wide and surprisingly soft mouth.

With her hands busy steering the Buick along the path being cleared through the excited crowd, all Miss Pender could do was swear. She did that sulfuriously. She not only knew the words, she carried the tune; a stevedore might have stood mute in admiration.

Steve drew back grinning. When she ran out of breath he said, "Tut, tut. Such language—from a lady."

"I'm no damned lady," she snapped.

"That," Steve retorted, "I'm going to find out about before this night is over. My attention has been called—"

"I'm going to fire Grace Mitchell," she cut him off sharply.

"Too late." Steve observed blithely; "I've been doing some thinking of my own."

They had reached De Hodiamont. Edna sniffed as she stepped down on the gas, but made no reply.

Mike Rosso's cab was parked in front of the office building and Miss Pender pulled in behind it. Mike got out and stood by the cab as they approached; Edna fished a billfold from her shoulder and gave Mike some big bills.

"You go home, Mike," she said, "and get Rosa and the bambino and take them on a vacation. Lake of the Ozarks would be a good place. Rent a nice cabin and send me your address. Go in your cab and stay until I write you to come home; don't waste any time getting started."

"No more fun?" Mike asked as she thrust the money into a pocket.

"Not this time," she replied. "You get moving now."

"What's that for?" Steve asked as they crossed the lobby to the elevators.

"I don't want any of my friends dragged into this," she replied, "and Mike is the only one who could be."

IN THE RECEPTION room, Grace Mitchell and Bob Goodrich were sitting at and beside the desk.

"All over?" Grace asked. "We've been tuned in on police short wave."

"Just about," Edna replied. "Wait until we get into some dry things and I'll tell you about it."

Experience had taught them to keep some emergency wardrobe at the office, and ten minutes later Steve and Miss Pender had changed. All four gathered in Steve's office, leaving the door open. Edna told Grace and Bob what had happened at Horton Place.

"So Dan Polcher will be around after a while," she concluded. "Did the boys bring the tape recorder and mike?"

"It's in your office," Grace replied.

"Good. While we wait, make a list of these expenses."

Grace got her notebook and sat down with it on her knee.

"Five hundred dollars to Mike Rosso," Miss Pender said. "Three hundred each to the rest—Jigger, Banty, Red Ling, Ada, Dude Brant—" She named eleven on the list.

"What about Chris?" Steve asked. "You left him out."

"Chris did all right," she replied, "if he doesn't take a notion to go back and press his luck."

"Um," Steve said, "thirty-eight hundred bucks expenses. Our clients may squawk."

"They won't; I've got the films and data they hired us to get. In the morning, you'll call them up and tell them to come to St. Louis and settle their bill and get the documents."

Steve grinned. "And we clear ten grand. That loose thread you spotted was certainly silk. More than a hundred grand in six weeks and—"

"Don't get plutocratic," she cut him off. "You don't think we can keep all that in the bank, do you? And I'm certainly not going to let crooked tax-collectors get much of it to spend on mink coats and Florida vacations."

"Now we're going to dodge taxes,"

Steve said dryly. "I hope they feed good in the pen."

"It'll be legal," she snapped; "I've got Murray Holden working on it. The summer camp for kids will open some time next month. So will a decent and humane sanitarium for curing drug-addicts like Anna Mueller. Dr. Paul Davis will superintend that. By the time we get through, we may not have enough income left to pay taxes on; now go ahead and squawk."

"Nary a squawk," Steve said, grinning at her. "I've got something else on my mind."

Miss Pender's face flushed. "What mind?" she snapped. "Grace, call the Shamrock. Let's eat while we wait for Polcher and see how bad he has messed up his end of this."

IT WAS NEARLY two o'clock in the morning when Lieutenant Dan Polcher arrived. He looked tired and angry. He growled greetings and accepted a drink which Steve poured.

"Look," he said as he put down his glass and glared at Edna. "I played it your way—and now I'm hooked. How the hell did that taxi driver get in on it? I've got to have him. The Belden dame has talked and one of Vince Carson's gunsels. We have Daphne and Vince sewed up, but Daphne's mouthpiece is into it with both feet. They are trying to drag you into it in spite of hell, and—"

"Cool down; just stick to what I told you. We went to Horton Place to check up on something for a client and were just in time to get caught in the fireworks; you and your boys saved our lives. We'll testify to that, if we have to. But stop looking for Mike Rosso. If you drag him in, I'll have to testify for him—and I won't risk any perjury rap. In that case, there goes your credit and glory."

"I'm as crazy as a bedbug," Polcher snarled, "or I'd never listen to any proposition of yours, or—"

"And you'd still be a sergeant."

Polcher looked angrily at Steve. "Goddam it," he growled, "she needles me."

"She needles me, too," Steve smiled; "the trouble is that she usually has something on the needle. But I'm getting wise to something. A man can do better with her when he gets her alone." He rose and looked at Grace Mitchell and Bob Goodrich. "Come on folks, we'll do a fade."

Out in the reception room with the door of Steve's office closed behind them, Grace Mitchell quirked her eyebrows at Steve. "Could it be, handsome," she asked, "that you are getting smart?"

Steve winked at her. Half an hour later, Polcher and Miss Pender came out of Steve's office. Polcher looked almost happy.

"Grace," Edna said, "get Polcher that tape out of the recorder."

Grace brought the roll of tape and Polcher put it in his pocket. "Now, keep it simple and stick to it, no matter what Daphne Costigan says. We'll go with you all the way."

When Polcher had gone Miss Pender said, "Come on Grace, I'll take you home."

"I'm going along," Steve said. "I want to talk over these good deeds we are going to do."

In front of the apartment house, Grace got out of the Buick, smiled good night and ran into the building.

"Now," Edna said to Steve, "you go home."

"With you," Steve smiled. "Unfinished business, my little holy terror."

"We have no business," she snapped, "that can't be finished in the office."

"What I have in mind," Steve said, "wouldn't do for Dan Polcher to walk in on. Roll this chariot on up to your place."

SHE SWITCHED on the dome light. "Steve," she said sharply, "look at me."

"I'm looking; what am I supposed to see?"

"Me."

Steve grinned. "I've had lots better looks at you than I can get here. There is more to you than meets the eye. Even more than met my eye that night we swam to the shanty boat. But let's check up."

He took her right hand from the wheel and held it in a firm grip until she quit tugging. It was a small hand and very slender.

"Hm," Steve said, "Four fingers and a thumb. No deformities. On the whole, a pretty fair hand. The mate probably matches. Now for the head," he lifted his eyes but held on to the hand. "We'll skip the inside of the head, pending more study. The top is covered with hair, which is normal. There's a face on the front and—"

"And what a face!" she said bitterly.

"One nose," he tabulated, "two eyes with brows, one forehead, two cheeks, one mouth and a chin. Nothing missing or in the wrong place. And still the face is unique. I didn't appreciate that at first."

"Unique!" she snapped; "it's a mess."

"Compared to messes I've seen turned out of beauty parlors," Steve said, "Nature's work is superior. It has the advantage of being original. Anyhow, except for an ear on each side, so much for the head. Now let's see how good my memory is."

"Never mind," she said.

"You started this. Two legs—slender and somewhat—"

"Skinny," she snapped, "and bowed to beat hell."

Steve shrugged. "Both the same length and they bend in the right places and reach the ground when you stand up. We will move up to the bosom."

"I can drive out to a dairy farm," she said, "and show you some a little bigger on a cow."

"There's a law," Steve said, "against keeping a cow in an apartment—I think."

"That's enough of this foolishness," she declared. "No man is going to seduce me—with smooth talk or otherwise. If I ever have a man, he'll be my husband. Now will you go home?"

She jerked her hand away from him and started the motor.

"With you," Steve insisted. "Be reasonable. Before a fellow takes on seduction as a regular job, he has to convince himself that he *can* do it."

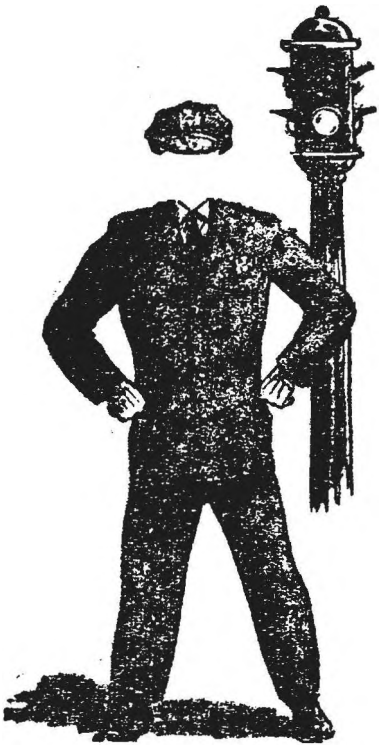
Miss Pender glared at him for a moment, then without warning she smiled. The Smile. But before Steve could make a move the Buick was moving so fast that it would have been foolish to distract the driver. Steve relaxed and chuckled softly. She was driving in the right direction.

★ ★

COPS ARE ALSO PEOPLE

Fact Feature Series by Thomas Thursday

5. TENDER TOUGHS



ALTHOUGH police officials of all ranks are as tender and sentimental as other humans, they too often pay dearly for misplaced sympathy. It is normal and just to give your fellows a break in the harsh game of life; you feel that, as John Wesley said many years ago, "There, but for the grace of God, go I!"

The chief objection to giving breaks to criminals, especially major, is that too many of them give you a break right back, with a bullet or a knife. The seasoned cop will take no chances; he has but one life to give and, if he has to give it, he prefers to do so the hard way. The Honor Board in every police headquarters is dotted with gold stars beside the names of cops who gave breaks to maggot-minded murderers.

Even judges have discovered, after much experience, that many underworlders, like leopards, never change their spots—or their bloody ways. Consider the case of one of the great criminal attorneys of the country, Samuel Liebowitz, now a judge in New York City. For more than twenty years, prior to his judgeship, Liebowitz practiced criminal law almost exclusively, during which time he defended nearly 150 birds of all criminal feathers. Early in his legal career he learned never to have too much faith in his clients.

Time was, however, when Liebowitz wore his heart on his sleeve and often felt pangs of pity for some of the toughs. For instance, there was the case of one Tony Tichon, which came to Liebowitz' attention when he became a judge. Tony had had many bouts with the cops and was finally wounded when he tried to escape via running head-on through a plate-glass window. Asked to surrender by the pursuing officers, Tony muttered something that sounded like, "Go to hell," and got winged for his pains.

At his trial, Tony came into the courtroom lying on a stretcher. Most everybody felt sorry for poor Tony; the gun-shot had paralyzed him and he could talk only in a whisper. He beckoned with his right hand for Judge Liebowitz to come down off the bench and bend over him.

"Judge," whispered Tony, "I've been a damned fool. If the kids in

my neighborhood could only see me now they would not think I was so smart. They think I am a very tough guy. I ain't. I now know that I was just dumb; I know now that crime don't pay."

Judge Liebowitz was touched. He told Tony that he believed he was sincere and wanted to reform. "I would like to help you," said the judge, "and I want to show you clemency. And I shall do my best to see that you get fine medical care when you go to Sing Sing."

The district attorney was also touched. "I think it would be only fair to grant clemency to Tony," he said.

So Tony Tichon got a break. His sentence was for only two years. He was so grateful, apparently, that tears streamed from his eyes. He was sent to Sing Sing and, while there, a major miracle happened. He became a well man in a short time, and when his term expired he walked out of prison as good as new. One would imagine that Tony would promptly call on Judge Liebowitz, and also his precinct police station, and tell his benefactors that he was now ready to prove their faith in him. This would have made a pretty hearts-and-flowers story, one that sentimental old ladies and professional do-gooders would have pointed at, and exclaimed, "See! That proves that poor Tony never had a chance when he was a boy. He said he would reform and he has kept his word!"

Right here may we remind you that such men as Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas A. Edison, and a host of others, were likewise poor boys, but none of them turned to crime; instead, they turned to the most potent factor for success on earth—*work*. The standard alibi that poor boys don't have a chance is mostly bunk and baloney. They all have a chance to select one road or the other—Crime Highway or Success Street. This worn-out "poor boy" theory gives cops a pain in the sitspot. Besides, did you ever hear of a plain cop who was born to wealth?

Now, let us see how grateful Tony was for the break he got. First, it was learned that his paralysis was nothing but an act to gain judicial sympathy. He fooled Judge Liebowitz, the district attorney and, in the end, himself. For shortly after his release from prison, he was involved in at least three known robberies and murders. This time he did not appear before Judge Liebowitz. But his attorney must have been good; Tony turned state's evidence, squealed on his brother-in-crime, and walked out of the courtroom a free man.

YOU WOULD think that the case of Tony Tichon would have curdled the sympathy of Liebowitz. It certainly left no love in the hearts of the arresting officers; cops are practical men. If sentiment and sympathy ran rampant in their souls for confirmed criminals, you—Mr. and Mrs. Honest Citizen—would not be able to walk the streets in safety. If you would like to know how many bums and lice are in your home-town, just let your police force suspend operations for a few days.

A young man named Bill Samet was sentenced to twenty years, this time by Judge Abel in Queens County, N.Y. The judge informed Samet that, when he had served his time, he would be tried for another matter still hanging over his head. Samet served his time and the second case came before Judge Liebowitz.

By this time Samet was nearly forty and his hair was fast graying. As he stood before Liebowitz at the bar, he looked like a clean-cut business-man, with an open face that would deny any criminal tendencies. When he spoke, the judge was astonished at his evident culture and obvious refinement; it seems that Samet had educated himself while in prison and had made himself a first-rate musician and portrait painter.

"As I understand your case," said Judge Liebowitz, "you went to prison at the age of 19 a practical illiterate. Now you appear a refined and cultured man. How do you explain this?"

"Well, Your Honor," replied Samet, "when I reached prison, it wasn't long before I did some serious thinking. I soon found that honesty is not only the best policy, but it is the right one. I now understand that any dope can get a gun and hold up people. I owe a lot to Father Hyland, the prison chaplain; he took an interest in my painting and he had me do the stained glass windows for his new chapel."

At this point, the assistant district attorney said, "Your Honor, I happen to know that everything Samet has said is correct and true. I have consulted Father Hyland and several prison officials, and they all inform me that this man has been a model prisoner and student. Personally, I feel certain that, if given clemency in this present case, he will never commit another crime."

Judge Liebowitz, still wearing his heart on his sleeve, agreed. He then asked Samet numerous questions about his fellow prisoners, and prison life in general, and was very much impressed by Samet's scholarly and soft-voiced answers. The judge was so impressed that he informed the prosecuting attorney—equally impressed with Samet's reformation—that he thought the man would make an excellent prison warden.

"I'd like to dismiss the indictment," said the judge, "if the District Attorney does not object."

"I can assure your honor," said the assistant D.A. "that the District Attorney has no objection to giving this man a chance to become a useful citizen."

Bill Samet was free—free to become a first-rate and honest American or a fourth-rate louse and heel. He most certainly got a break. He could not howl the old, hackneyed cry of most criminals to the effect that he was being hounded by the cops and kangarooed in the courts.

When he was dismissed, Samet walked happily to his old mother and sister sitting in the front seats of the courtroom and embraced them. They were happy, and Samet discussed the possibility of opening an art shop and also of giving lectures to various groups on the ever-with-us subject, "Crime Does Not Pay." He also gave an interview with numerous newspaper reporters. The interviews appeared in papers all over the land, and thousands commended Judge Liebowitz for his keen discernment in giving poor Bill Samet a break.

So—how did Mr. Bill Samet appreciate the fine break? It would be a keen and unusual pleasure for us to inform you that Brother Samet settled down as a paragon of virtue and general deportment, winding up as one of the great American painters—rivaling Grandma Moses or even James McNeill Whistler. Unfortunately, this is a true tale, taken from official records, and must not be misconstrued as fancy fiction.

For about ten months Bill Samet dropped from public view. If any did recall him, they probably believed that Bill was now wearing a halo, complete with wings, as previously advertised. Surely, any man with a spoonful of brains would take advantage of his opportunity to go straight and become an honored and respected citizen. But not Bill Samet. As all cops beyond the rookie stage know, this country is lousy with Bill Samets—one born every day, and no judge and jury to take them.

We now take you to Tulsa, Oklahoma. The place is a bank, where they usually keep money. A masked bandit, with machine-gun, waves it in the direction of bank employees and demands plenty of quick and unearned cash. As he is leaving, Tulsa police face Samet and his Thompson rapid-firer and beat Bill to the bullets. Wounded, Samet is taken to a doctor.

Shortly after, he escapes—but not for long. Within less than two weeks he was captured and, at this moment, Brother Samet—the Man Who Was Too Dumb To Appreciate a Break—is serving a life sentence in the state pen.

Throughout the land, court records and parole documents are top-heavy with cases a la Tony Tichon and Bill Samet. And your average cop does not like too much clemency. His reasoning is basically sound. He knows that when criminals strike—either first offenders or those on parole, he, the policeman, is in the line of fire. In short, the cop is first in the danger zone when he apprehends the underworlders. By the time the bum gets before a judge and jury, the criminal is safe and unarmed. Note the difference?

LAST TO SHOOT, FIRST TO DIE

CHIEF OF Police Frank Brantley is dead. He didn't die naturally of fire and in the line of official duty. Chief Brantley was executive head of the Homestead, Florida, police department; Homestead is a small city just south of Miami, where this is written.

Brantley was only 34 years old and just beginning to bud and bloom as an honest and efficient police-officer. Of course, he had a wife and children, as most cops have. But neither the life of Brantley or the wife and children held any interest for a young man named Carroll. It seems that Carroll had one outstanding characteristic; he liked to drink. And when he drank he usually got very mad at something or somebody.

Recently, Carroll and a friend went into a bar in Homestead and had a few snifters. In the same bar were a number of Puerto Ricans. They kept talking in their native language and, occasionally, one of them looked at Carroll. Believing that the men were talking about him, Carroll walked over to the group and voiced his disapproval. The men merely laughed. This enraged Carroll who, from past records, seems easily enraged.

First cursing the group, Carroll took his friend ouside and said, "Let's go to my house; I'll fix them s.o.b.'s!"

At the Carroll home they had a few more drinks, then he went to a locker and got out his .45 revolver. "Come on," said Carroll; "let's go back and show them sons that they can't laugh at us!"

Entering the bar, they found the same group talking. Carroll walked up to the one he fancied was doing the most talking about him and started calling him profane names. The Puerto Rican resented the implications, especially those concerning his mother, and invited Carroll outside to settle it. As soon as they left the bar, a revolver-report was heard. The men rushed out and found their companion on the ground, shot by Carroll.

Carroll and his companion jumped into their own car and raced away. Police headquarters was notified, and soon Chief Brantley and brother officers appeared on the scene. Several hours of search failed to find Carrol. Then, late that same night, Chief Brantley got a tip that Carroll and his pal were hiding out in an old warehouse. Approaching the warehouse with lights out, the chief and his men began to surround the place.

Hearing a noise, Chief Brantley yelled, "Come out, Carroll, with your hands up. Nobody is going to hurt you; I'm Chief Brantley."

For reply, several shots streak-flamed through the air. Two hit Chief Brantley and he dropped to the ground, with both hands clutching his chest.

A moment later, a male form rushed out of the darkness, with hands up, hollering, "Don't shoot me! Please don't shoot. I surrender. I didn't fire any shots. Carroll fired them!"

It was Carroll's friend

"Where's Carroll?" asked one of the officers.

"He ran into the swamp back there; he's drunk and crazy!"

An all-night search failed to locate the gun-gooty Carroll, but the following afternoon he walked into headquarters and surrendered. He said he couldn't remember what happened. "I was drinking and must have got mad," he stated. His voice was matter-of-fact, like some one saying, "I went to the ball game last night and had a swell time."

When informed of the death of Chief Brantley, Carroll pursed his lips, whistled, then uttered one word, "Gosh."

NOW, HERE'S the point we'd like to make: It is a fact, corroborated by fellow-officers, that Chief Brantley saw the form of Carroll and could have saved his own life by shooting first. However, it is almost a national police rule that no officer shoots a suspected criminal until the criminal shoots—or tries to shoot—first. In many respects this is a good and sensible rule, but it is all in favor of criminals. That 36 police officers were killed in 1950, while obeying this rule, attests the fact.

On rare occasions an innocent man is shot, when an officer fires first. Last year, for example, Detective Jimmy King, of the Miami police department, winged a man who was unfortunate enough to be in the right spot at the wrong time. It happened this way:

Several doors from police headquarters, on Flagler street, is a small, two-story bank and loan company. Directly adjacent is the Roberts hotel, seven stories high. One Saturday night several guests looked out of their room windows and were somewhat amazed to note two men working on the skylight of the bank. Promptly, they phoned the desk clerk, and the clerk came up to one of the rooms and took a quick glance at the roof of the bank.

"It looks funny to me," said the clerk, and forthwith phoned the police.

At the time of the call, the only detective in the bureau was Jimmy King. He rushed downstairs and into the building, just this side of the bank. Getting to the roof he was just about to look over the parapet to the bank, when fire-engines—housed next door to police headquarters—came roaring out, with sirens screaming. Hearing the sirens, the two men on the roof left the skylight they were working on and rushed to the front to see what was going on.

It was while they were running that the head of Detective King rose above the parapet, took in the scene, and naturally assumed that two bank burglars were trying to escape.

"Hold your hands up high!" shouted Jimmy, then gave the customary identification, "I'm a police officer!"

One of the men stopped running and his right hand went to his hip pocket. Now, if you were in King's place, what would *you* think? You would think that the man was going for his gun and that it would be up to you to beat him to the draw. So, King fired first—not to kill, but to wound sufficiently to render the man helpless.

The bullet hit the man in the hand. He yelled and then turned toward King and said, "What the hell is the big idea?"

"What are you men doing here?" demanded King.

"Repairing a leak in the skylight," one replied.

It was the truth. However, had the bank notified the police department that two men would be at work on their skylight, everything would have been all right. Meantime, King was justified in shooting, although the victim failed to appreciate King's marksmanship.

ROUGH STUFF FOR TOUGH STUFF

REGARDLESS of talk and scuttlebutt to the contrary, the day of the old "bang 'em and bust 'em"

Third Degree is over. Unquestionably, a lot of the official roughstuff was cruel, and hurt the feelings of some nice burglars and even rapists. The public or taxpayers, reading colored, and greatly exaggerated, stories in bright yellow newspapers, would howl and hoot all cops and refer to them as Cossacks.

The chief duty of a police department is to apprehend criminals. More, they must also present bona-fide evidence, with which the district attorney can nail the crimester to the cross of conviction. The modern cop always tries to get his evidence the easy, kindly, gentle way; he asks questions and expects right answers. However, you would be amazed at the number of guilty guys and dolls who think all cops are quaint, and who can lie so often that they actually begin to think they are telling the truth.

Official words do not intimidate such fine fowl. They have practically made a career out of giving the wrong answers to the right questions. Naturally, when an official knows, *positively,* that the guy is guilty, he becomes somewhat bored with marathon-questioning and begins to get down to first principles. What, then, are first principles? Simply this: Brute force fears only superior brute force.

You will shudder perhaps, and say that rough stuff never should be used on criminals. Well, consider this, and it is only one of many, many similar cases:

A six-year old girl was raped by a neighbor. He crept through the window of the room where she was sleeping alone at 2 A.M. Two days after the outrage, the little child pointed out the neighbor as the guilty one. He denied it. His record was checked and it was found that he had been arrested three times for child-molestation in the past. He played the old game of sitting beside an unaccompanied child in a dark movie theatre.

The officials of the juvenile bureau questioned the man very patiently for a day and a half. He not only continued to claim his innocence, but threatened to sue the city for false arrest. Finally, one of the officers, himself the father of two small daughters, lost his patience and gave the punk a few right hand wallops to his fat belly. The change was sudden and electric.

The louse dropped to the floor, and begged, "Okay. Okay! Don't hit me. I admit I did it!" Proving his national color was a deep yellow.

Now, do you think this uncouth and harsh police procedure was proper or would you prefer to have the semi-moron and pervert go free and, who knows, rape *your* daughter?

Although it is not for publication, there are times when a little closed-door chastisement is essential in order to bring forth testimony that will prove the positive guilt of certain non-cooperative baddies. Although the modern police official is all for scientific interrogation, such methods can go just so far—and then more emphatic systems must be used. If this did not occur, please believe that the murder of free ciminals would be added to in large, crime-laden hordes.

There is the story of the new police chief of a small town who had gone off to college and took several courses in criminal psychology. When he returned to his home town, he began to use his newly-acquired knowledge. After suspects were apprehended by his staff members, he would ask that they be brought before him for interrogation.

One afternoon a burly fellow was brought in, accused of stealing two expensive diamond rings out of a hotel room, where the man worked as a porter. The chief questioned the mugg in the latest scientific mode for more than an hour.

"I swear to God, Chief," said the guy for the 'steenth time, "I never took them rings!"

At that moment a detective sergeant, who knew naught of scientific interrogation, lost his temper and whanged the fellow on the chin with a hard left hook. From the floor, where he had been dropped, the innocent lad shook the clouds and little birdies out of his head, then said, "All right, boys! You got me right. You sure got me!"

With that he took off his right shoe and removed the two stolen rings. From then on the chief lost some faith in his scientific interrogation.

All seasoned cops know this:

If you treat 'em tender, they will treat you tough. And vice versa.

★

TICKET TO THE CHAIR

Quiz story by J. J. Mathews

SHERRIFF Tad Higgins was most contented as he rested on large rock and watched his float in the stream. Not a fish had nibbled during the last hour. The large, middle-aged man who represented the law in Warton County turned to his companion.

"You can't fool me, young man. You really didn't come with me to go fishing; I can tell by your shoes. You are wearing a good city pair. You want a story. Well, why should I disappoint you? I'll tell you how I caught old man Ben Marsley and made my reputation. Mind you, I don't know much about the new-fangled devices they use to catch criminals. But I know human nature; a criminal commits a crime in terms of his background. Learn his background and you can find the weak spot.

"Marsley owned a cabin on top of Lookout Mountain. Outside of himself, the only thing he loved was money. I guess he would steal the pennies from the stand of a blind newspaper man. You can imagine how the town felt when we heard he had married again...his fourth wife. He came home from Newport on the milk train; got into town at two in the morning, and wouldn't hire a cab to take him up to the hill. Made his wife walk with him.

"At five my woman yanks me out of bed. 'Pete is here and says it's mighty important. They found Ben's wife down the hill; seems she slipped while walking with him to the cabin. Get dressed and meet the coroner'.

"Doc Pearsons made his report to me. 'She might have been pushed over the hill, and then she might have just slipped; I can't say it was murder or an accident. All I know is that the poor gal is dead'.

"So I went to see Ben. The old hypocrite was trying to shed some tears but couldn't find them. This was going to be the fourth wife he would bury and of course collect the estate.

" 'You want to know how it happened?' he began. 'We were almost up to the top when she sort of twisted her foot and slipped down. Not a thing I could do to help her...and a mighty nice wife she would have made for me. Too bad for poor Elsie'.

"What could I say? Had to watch my tongue. Felt it was murder; he had the motive and the opportunity. But you could never prove it—unless—and that gave me an idea. *Unless* his background could help me prove he killed that gal.

"Late that day I took the train to Newport, and spoke to the station master. He introduced me to Walter Johnson who was on the late shift. I showed him a picture of Ben.

" 'Sure I recognize that man', he said. 'When he bought the tickets he told the woman with him to go to the other side of the railing. Guess he didn't want her to hear what he wanted. But could it be that important?'

"But when Walter Johnson told me how Ben had bought the tickets then I knew I could prove premediated murder."

Question: What was it that Ben said that could send him to the chair? You'll find the answer on page 71.

★

THE BLACK FOG DEATHS

An "Archie McCann" Story by David Macgregor

Jason French was used to McCann's ways, he thought, but when Archie maintained he could crack this mystery with anthropology, the police chief decided this was carrying indolence too far!

BLACK FOG, the chilling kind that creeps out of the jungle at night, blanketed Marienberg, New Guinea with its clammy, sticky dampness. The street lights appeared to be dim fireflies, and the city was becoming a place of shadows.

Archie, anthropologist and unofficial assistant to Jason French, the local Chief of Police, stepped out of a popular Chinese restaurant, in the native part of the city, where he had just consumed a vast amount of sweet and

sour pork, his favorite food. He stopped abruptly as he saw the fog; it had been clear when he had entered the restaurant several hours before.

His nostrils were filled with the heavy scent of the decaying jungle and mist brushed his cheeks—an involuntary shudder passed down his spine. He grumbled under his breath.

Although it was only ten o'clock, there were no people on the street. He could hear the soft drip of the condensed fog as it fell from the eaves; a large water-rat scuttled into a gurgling sewer beneath his feet. He started forward. He had gone only about three hundred feet when a door burst open in front of him and struggling forms surrounded him, carried him into the center of the street.

He saw a blinding flash as a club crashed against his head, felt himself falling, then lost consciousness. The next he remembered was a pounding in his head. As he became more fully aware of his surroundings, McCann found himself lying on the cobblestone street, with the body of a man lying across him. His head ached unmercifully, and there was a swelling over his right ear.

As he endeavoured to extricate himself, the same door of the building from which the strangers had come opened cautiously, and McCann could see the dim form of a man against the yellow light inside the room. The man appeared to be listening. After several seconds he stepped outside, turned on an electric torch and swept its rays over the several men lying on the pavement. The man went to each one and scanned his features carefully; McCann closed his eyes and feigned unconsciousness.

The rays of the torch fell on McCann's face. The man emitted a startled hiss, and McCann could hear the other's fast breathing as he leaned over the anthropologist. The torch was turned off and McCann heard the man running toward the door and his excited shout as the door slammed behind him.

McCann pushed the inert form off his chest and staggered to his feet. He made a wobbly lunge for the opposite side of the street and took cover in a set-in-opening store-front with a huge supporting pillar.

Just as he took his position behind the pillar, the door on the opposite side of the street opened again and several shadowy forms dashed toward the spot where he had been lying. Not finding him on the cobblestones, they began to chatter in bewildered amazement.

McCann grew tense. He recognized several words—they were Russian. He listened intently and caught a full sentence in Russian. "There is no Englishman here," the Russian barked.

"But, Excellency," protested another voice in Russian, "I saw an Englishman there on the ground."

"Send out a searching party," growled the first voice; "find that Englishman or don't come back!"

The men hurried back into the building and McCann waited for the next developments. In about five minutes, several men slipped out of the house into the darkness and scurried away in various directions. McCann waited for nearly ten minutes more, then started cautiously across the street toward the house they had just left.

McCann was unarmed, so, as he approached the door he braced himself for action, his hand found the latch. He listened for sounds inside the house. All was silent. He lifted the latch carefully and the door swung open.

INKY BLACKNESS confronted him. With his pencil torch, McCann made a quick survey of the interior. It appeared that the room was a storehouse for a Chinese drygoods merchant. He satisfied himself that there was no one in the room, then stepped inside and closed the door behind him. His torch swept the walls. There was a bolted door at the rear of the room. He moved to it, soundlessly, and

placed his ear against one of the panels. Hearing nothing, he slid the bolt carefully, opened the door, turned his torch light into the room and froze into immovability. There was the body of man on the floor.

McCann took a deep breath and advanced. He glanced around the room; it was very small and had no windows. The only entrance was the door through which the anthropologist had entered. He beamed his torch on the body. Glassy eyes stared up toward the ceiling and his mouth was open in the relaxation of death. McCann reached down and touched the hand of the man. It was cold and stiff; rigor mortis had already set in.

A slight sound made McCann turn swiftly, and his torchlight caught the movement of a piece of cloth covering something at the side of the room. A faint groan came from under the cloth. McCann moved quickly across the room and jerked the cloth away. A Chinese, securely bound and gagged, started up at him in terror. McCann removed the gag and turned the torch on the prisoner's face; he recognized Chan Dhku, one of the cooks in the Chinese restaurant where he was in the habit of eating whenever he was in Marienberg.

"What are you doing here?" demanded McCann.

"Who—you?" quavered Chan.

McCann raised the torchlight to his own face.

"Massa McCann," gasped Chan. "Quick, Massa McCann. Untie me—bad men coming back quick now."

McCann untrussed Chan, and then the other revealed a plot so fantastic that McCann could hardly believe his ears.

Chan told McCann that Ivan Knauv, a high espionage agent of the Kremlin, was in Marienberg with a group of Chinese Reds; the plan was to impersonate Nationalist Chinese merchants and to direct a program of sabotage of Australia and New Guinea.

Chan further explained that Wun Lun, the owner of this store, had invited him over to spend a social evening. As they sat playing cards, Ivan Knauv and his men had entered with drawn pistols. There had been six men at the table playing cards when the Russian had entered, and before they could recover from their astonishment, they had been knifed and dragged out into the street to die.

McCann rubbed his head. "That's where I came in," he grunted ruefully. "But what happened to you? They certainly didn't knife you."

"Me no savvy," answered the Chinese. "Me get hit in the head. Me wake up. You find me. Me wake up. Men make much talk. Big Lussian him talk Chinee. One fellow get away. Lussian plenty mad. They go now and find this fellow. Meboe come back soon now."

"What did this Ivan look like?" asked McCann. "Have you seen him before around Marienberg?"

"No can tell, Massa McCann," said Chan. "All have false face."

"So they came masked," mused McCann thoughtfully. "Smart."

"Why you come this place?" asked Chan curiously.

McCann grinned. "Oh, I'm always getting myself into trouble. Trouble's my second name. Now, Chan we've got to get busy; you come with me."

Chan followed McCann to the front door of the store. McCann opened the door slowly and listened. "No one's around," he whispered.

"What will Knauv do when he comes back and finds that I have escaped?" asked Chan.

"You've got something there," said McCann.... "I have it we'll fix a dummy."

After they had fixed a reasonable facsimile of Chan, they hurried down to Police headquarters to put the case before Jason French, the chief of police.

ARRIVING at Police Headquarters, McCann routed French out of his

Thumbnail Sketch of a Lazy Man

Archibald Sylvester Brewster McCann graduated from medical school, then decided that a doctor's life was much too strenuous. So he salvaged as many credits as he could from medical school, and took to the law; after being admitted to the bar, he soon found that a lawyer's life was not an easy one, either.

What he wanted, was a job that required a minimum of exertion.

He bought a second-hand book on anthropology one day, skimmed through it that evening, and noticed in the following day's papers that helpers were wanted for an expedition about to depart for the Bismarck Archipelago in the South Pacific. Archie applied for a job, and proceeded to dumbfound the pedantic professor-director of the expedition with double-talk he spouted off the cuff, interspersed with what he remembered from the book. He was hired on the spot.

Once in New Guinea, Anthropologist McCann built himself a crude shack in the native village of Tambu, just outside the city of Marienberg, and won the confidence of the natives by living their own life. He participated in all of their tribal rituals, and was accepted into the innermost secrets of the forbidden temple—the Haus Tamberin.

During World War 2, McCann and Jason French worked together on numerous subversive matters instigated among the natives by the enemy; afterwards, he returned to his anthropoligical siesta in Tambu, but any urgent occasion would find him assisting French.

regular after-dinner nap which sometimes extended far into the early hours of the morning. "There are a bunch of Chinese reds in town," he told French. "They are led by a Russian named Ivan Knauv—"

"Knauv?" French was wide-awake. "When did he get in town?"

McCann quickly told him of the events that had transpired.

"We'll surround the place and bag 'em all," said French, and pushed a button on his desk.

"Take it easy, Jason," cautioned McCann. "They know I got away; they won't come back to the store—they'll be suspicious."

French scratched his neck. "What bothers me," he said thoughtfully, "is why they didn't kill Chan—why did they just tie him up."

"Mebbe me know," said Chan nervously. "Me head man Chinese Tong. Me keep all money. Mebbe they want money?"

"Could be," agreed French.

"Me help ketch," said Chan. "Me call son. Him home."

Chan called a number and spoke to his son in Chinese. As the conversation progressed, Chan became excited. He finally turned to French, trembling with apprehension. "Some one call my son alleady. Tell him they hold me foh money. My son velly flightened!"

McCann was sober. French was exultant. "They don't know that Chan is free," said French; "we'll set a trap for them." He turned to Chan. "Tell your son to agree to pay the ransom. Have him tell us where he is to deposit the money and we'll make a dummy and have our men cover it. Tell your son to keep in touch with me."

While Chan was instructing his son,

French called in a detail of his native police and told them to watch the store of Wun Lun. As French gave his final instructions to the police, the telephone rang. It was Chan's son, he said that he had just been called again and was ordered to take the ransom money to a certain place in the jungle the next morning, and then to leave the vicinity at once if he didn't want to be shot.

French told him to make up a dummy package, take it to the jungle and then go home.

●

It was a grim and determined group of men who formed their plans for the capture of the Russian and his Chinese cohorts. With native police, trained in the methods of jungle infiltration, stationed at strategic positions around Wun Lun's store, they waited for the enemy to walk into the trap. The bodies of the dead Chinese were left in the street to lull suspicion; machine guns covered every inch of the store, both front and rear.

About two o'clock, a sailor came along the street and stumbled over the bodies of the dead Chinese. He started shouting at the top of his voice. It was necessary for the police to take action and to remove the bodies to the morgue.

MORNING came, but no Russian or his gang. French ordered a blackout on the news of the murders and ordered the sailor held in protective custody. Chan's son deposited the dummy package in the jungle as ordered, but no one showed up at the spot or the store.

"They're wise," grumbled French. "If they don't show up pretty soon, I'm going to comb the town for them, they can't get away with this with me."

McCann grinned at French as he paced back and forth across the floor, "Why you?" he inquired laconically.

"Don't be simple," snapped French.

"Now, anthropologically speaking—" began McCann.

"Rubbish—this is murder, not pattern-study!"

"Oh, I don't know," continued McCann easily. "If you know a behaviour-pattern—it usually works out."

"Well—?"

"Most of these Reds hate a frontal attack," explained McCann; "they like to sneak up behind. You'll never catch them with your Occidental police methods."

"And just how would *you* go about this matter?"

McCann didn't answer; he only grinned. French scowled for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders and sat down. "What have you got?" he asked with a tired sigh.

"Wait—and keep your eyes open," said McCann. "They can't hold out forever."

"As you say," said French; "but in the meantime I'm sending the Chinese section of my police to comb every section of the town for them."

●

French and his Chinese police literally turned Marienberg upside down in their search for the Russian and the Chinese Reds, but in vain; not a trace of their presence could be found. After a week, French was convinced that they had fled, but McCann insisted that a tight alert should be maintained.

"Are you hiding something from me?" demanded French in irritation.

"Did I ever keep you in the dark?"

"Well—no," admitted French.

"I'll do a little bit of investigating myself," said McCann and hitched his trousers up on his narrow hips.

"Want a man to cover you?"

"Of course not," grinned McCann, "I'm the bait. They're hunting me. I want them to know I'm on my own."

"And get bumped off!"

McCann merely grinned and shuffled out of the office.

Jason French

●

For the next few days McCann appeared to be loafing. He wandered around in the Chinese quarters, keeping watch of the crowds. On the third day, he and Tegek—his native houseboy—were in a crowded British store, purchasing food, when his attention was attracted by a small young Chinese talking to one of the clerks.

The Chinese pointed to a sack of rice on the counter. "Rice," he said to the clerk.

McCann grasped Tegek's arm and whispered rapidly in his ear. Tegek's eyes widened and his lips parted. He glanced at the Chinese and then said, "Yas, Massa McCann. Me savvy," and hurried out of the store.

McCANN MADE several purchases and then strolled leisurely back to the office of Jason French.

"Anything new?" French asked.

"I'm still on the job," said McCann and dropped lazily into a wide-armed chair beside French's desk. "Thought I'd come in and see if you had any leads."

"Leads?" French glared at him. "Don't be facetious!"

McCann slouched deeper into the chair and interlaced his fingers behind his head. "Anthropology has been making progress," he said laconically. "I think we'll be able to do something about those reds pretty soon now."

French looked up quickly from a letter he was reading. "What's that?"

"I'm not sure yet," McCann yawned. "If you don't mind, I think I'll take a short snooze here and await developments."

The radio operator entered and handed French a radiogram. He read it and tossed it over to McCann. Automatic stupidity," he snapped.

McCann read:

HAVE RELIABLE INFORMATION KNAUV IS ESTABLISHING RED CELL IN MARIENBERG

WILLIAM H. MOSS
Major British Intelligence
ANGAU

"Stupidity?" questioned McCann.

"Because we have already wired headquarters and informed them about everything that has happened here. Now they send this fool radiogram; if it isn't automatic knowledge it's automatic stupidity!"

French picked up his sun-helmet and started for the door. "I'll be seeing you," he said briefly and opened the door.

"Where you going?"

"Wouldn't you like to know," snapped French and slammed the door behind him.

About thirty minutes later French called from the military intelligence headquarters, said that he wouldn't be back to the office until later in the evening, and asked McCann to wait for him. McCann selected a book from the shelf behind French's desk and settled down in his chair to read. Before he had finished the first chapter he was sound asleep and didn't awaken until nearly eight o'clock. He glanced at his watch, got up, stretched lazily and then began to wonder what had happened to Tegek.

He decided to leave and started to hunt for paper to write a note to French. He found a pad but there

was no pencil or pen on the desk. He opened the center drawer of French's desk and found a fountain pen, but when he started to open it found that it was not a pen but a gas-pen, used in subduing criminals. It was loaded and ready for use.

Tegek burst into the room. "Massa McCann," he said breathlessly. "Tegek find place where Chinee boy stop."

"Where?"

"In big cave in mountain—long way in jungle," said Tegek, and gave McCann a detailed description of his shadowing of the Chinese boy through the jungle. "All fellows stop there—big Russian many Chinee."

Just as Tegek finished French came in.

"Tegek has located the hideout," McCann informed him, and told him about the events of the afternoon.

"Good," said French and reached for the button on his desk. "We'll take a detail of police and surround them—"

"Don't get excited, Jason," interposed McCann. "We'd never catch them that way, we'd make too much noise. What we'll do is this: The three of us—you, Tegek and I, will go there; or—" McCann grinned, "if you are afraid—"

"Rot!" snapped French. "Let's go."

ARMED WITH automatic rifles, hand-grenades, and a flame-thrower, McCann and French, guided by Tegek, set out for the mountain hideout of the reds.

The night was dark. The black fog of the jungles hung like curtains of ink across the trail that led down through the swamps and up through the foothills. Slimy vines slid across their faces and hands and the fog, condensed on the foliage, dropped like rain as they stole along.

As they neared their objective, Tegek stopped. "Place pretty near soon now," he whispered.

They moved forward cautiously. Suddenly Tegek reached back and tapped McCann sharply on the chest. Almost at the same instant black forms swept out of the jungle and pounced upon the three men.

The attach was so sudden that it was impossible to make any kind of successful resistance. Ju-jitsu came into play with telling effectiveness, and McCann, French and Tegek found themselves securely bound hand and foot. They didn't have a chance to use their weapons—they were overwhelmned too quickly.

No words were spoken until they were firmly secured; then a voice spoke curt commands and they were carried to the mouth of the cave where their captors held a consultation. They were then dragged into the cave and candles were lighted.

McCann looked the men over. One of them was the Chinese boy who had ordered the rice, an older Chinese with a scarred face gave an order which McCann was able to understand, but which he recognized as the dialect of the Mongolians. "Set the strings across the trail again," the Chinese said. "There be more coming, I believe."

McCann swore underneath his breath, he should have guessed that trick, he thought ruefully.

"Bring in their weapons," the Chinese continued. "We can make good use of them."

He turned and glared at the Chinese boy who had been in the grocery store. "You are too clumsy to work with us." He drew a pistol and barked, "Take him out." Then he turned to McCann. "Ha! The Englishman!" He inspected French and Tegek, but made no further comment. A single shot came from outside the cave. He moved to a far corner of the cave, and McCann could overhear voices but could not tell what was being said. However, he did catch phrases and words, it was evident that the reds were expecting reinforcements to arrive in Marienberg. He also learned that there was only one trail leading to the cave.

McCANN EDGED himself nearer to French and whispered the information that he had heard.

"Looks bad," said French.

"Sure, but we're not dead yet."

"I've a feeling that it won't be long."

"Sh-h-h," warned McCann; "they're looking this way."

There was a noise in the opening of the cave, and Ivan Knauv came in. He walked over to where the three men were lying and beamed his torch on them, held the light on McCann's face for several seconds and then called the Chinese who'd had the boy executed. He spoke to him in broken Chinese, with a heavy Russian accent, and told him to get ready to go down to Marienberg; they would act immediately; they would act while French was a captive, and there would be no chief of police to direct counteraction.

He then ordered a large Mongolian to remain with the prisoners while they went to Marienberg.

As the Russian and the Chinese went down the trail the Mongolian went to the door of the cave and leaned indolently against the side of the opening.

"Jason," whispered McCann.

"Yes, Mac."

"I've got something in my jacket pocket," said McCann. "Can you edge up a bit so that your hands can reach my pocket?"

"What you got?"

"I slipped your pocket-pencil—the gas one—into my pocket while I was in your office," whispered McCann. "Lucky they missed it when they searched us."

"Good," grunted French and began to inch himself into position. They kept a sharp watch, but luckily, the guard didn't turn around.

French's hands were tied behind his back. His fingers were numb and clumsy, but he finally managed to work himself close enough to reach into McCann's jacket pocket. "Got it."

"Put it in my hands," said McCann, and French gave it to him. "Now move back to where you were."

When French was back in his original position, McCann called to the guard in Chinese.

The Mongolian appeared surprised as he whirled and then came toward McCann. "What you say?" he demanded in Chinese and drew a knife as he approached. He stood over McCann and beamed a torch at his face. "Who talk Chinese?"

"I did," said McCann, "you want to make much money?"

"You die," growled the guard.

"I have much money," insisted McCann, "I can pay much money if you let me go."

The guard was silent, but McCann could hear him breathing heavily.

"You will be big rich man—own much land," continued McCann.

"Where you got money?"

"At my place in Marienberg."

"How I get it."

"I got key in my hip pocket; I give it to you. You go my place. I send house-boy with you. He show you place."

The guard was silent, but was begining to breath rapidly. "I take key now," he said roughly. "I kill you; you no good."

McCann saw him stoop to take the key; that was what he wanted. McCann aimed the gas-pencil at his nostrils and released the trigger; there was a blinding flash and the ethyl chloride sprayed into his nostrils.

The guard toppled forward and fell across McCann's legs; his knife clattered to the floor.

"I've got his knife," whispered French.

Tegek rolled rapidly toward French. "Cut ropes, Massa French cut ropes on my hands quick."

Tegek pressed his hands close to the knife and French, by sense of

touch, went to work on the ropes around the boy's wrists. A few strokes and Tegek was free; he cut the ropes around his legs, then released French and McCann.

They tied and gagged the Mongolian, secured his torch, and located the automatic rifles in the corner of the cave.

McCANN GAVE Tegek one of the automatics and told him to wait while they went down the trail and prepared an ambush for the returning reds.

McCann and French left, carrying their guns at alert; they advanced down the trail, cautiously. A short distance from the cave they came to a denss growth of tall grass. It was an ideal spot for the ambush. They concealed themselves carefully, and settled down to await the return of the reds.

It was well past midday when a flurry of small birds overhead warned McCann that someone was approaching; a few minutes later they saw the Russian leading the Chinese back up the trail.

"Wait until I give the word," said McCann tersely.

He waited until the entire group was within fifty yards. "Halt," he shouted in Chinese and sprayed bullets over their heads.

The men stopped, their faces blank with astonishment. "Put up your hands or die," roared McCann.

One of the men made a dash for the jungle; a shot rang out and he plunged forward on his face and lay motionless.

French and McCann were startled, then McCann grunted approbation. "Tegek's a pretty good shot," he grinned; "he fired from the cave."

McCann shouted another warning and the reds raised their hands quickly. "Turn your backs this way," he ordered. They obeyed without hesitation.

"Disarm 'em, Jason," said McCann. "I'll keep you covered."

Tegek came running down from the cave. He held a long rope in his hand. "Me tie fellows quick," he said and northern Chinese can. I heard this ly around the necks of the reds, tandem style. Their hands were tied behind them and fastened to the slip knots so that any attempt to escape would mean choking; the now-revived guard was brought down and attached to them.

The reds moved down the trail toward Marienberg. Tegek held the end of a long rope that he had attached to the nooses in order to throttle any of the group who became obstreperous. He swaggered along proudly behind the prisoners with McCann and French following.

Suddenly French called out to McCann who was several yards ahead of him. "I say, Archie, old boy—I just happened to think about it—how in the devil did you know how to find these fellows so easily?"

"Very simple," laughed McCann. "The Chinese in New Guinea cannot say the letter "R"; a Mongolian, or northern Chinese can. I heard this young felow who was killed ask the clerk in a British store for R-ice, and knew immediately that he was an outsider—most likely was one of the reds who was with Knauv. I sent Tegek on his trail—and that's that, anthropologically speaking, don't you know, old chappie."

French scratched his head thoughtfully, then said, "Where are some of those anthropology books of yours, Archie—guess I'll read a couple of 'em."

Answer to "Ticket To The Chair"

He asked for two tickets to his destination. But he specified that one was to be a round trip ticket and the other a single trip ticket. That meant he intended going back alone. He planned to kill his wife!

The Triumphant Exit of Cathcart Hagthorn

Even his admiring associates didn't believe that Hagthorn could solve this case!

By John Thomas Urwin

CATHCART Hagthorn felt trapped; behind him, the derisive voices of the other two detectives seemed to be prodding him closer to the rain-smeared window before which he stood. A fierce slash of lightning darted malevolently. Cathcart ducked instinctively.

"This time, Hawkshaw, you're stuck," he heard Ponce say. "I said it before, and I repeat—you'll never crack this one." He scratched his hip savagely, shifting his great bulk in the creaking chair.

Cathcart turned slowly from the window, his shoulders moving ahead of his head, his eyes seeking some relenting in the storm outside. Ignoring Ponce, he spoke to the other man. "Grinkey, don't tell me—I know; you think as Ponce thinks, that I'm stumped. You think that I'll never be able to prove who killed McMurdo Smith at about six this evening, in his very swanky office in the bank, don't you, Grinkey?"

There was a note of mockery in Grinkey's voice, "Well, Chief, you were lucky with those other cases, but I don't see how you can get anywhere with this one. Me and Ponce here done the groundwork. Nothing. We even checked the light-well—even though the bars on the window showed they hadn't been moved in their frame.

"Why, not only that and the regular routine did we do, but we checked the grille in the sidewalk that covers that there light-well. It's locked with a chain, and it so happens that the only key is one the janitor has. You know where *he* was today; only last night you tossed him in the can for being drunk and disorderly." Grinkey made it sound as though he thought Cathcart had deliberately disposed of a witness who might have helped break the mystery.

"Now," Ponce carried on the razzing, "if Smith had been shot, that would have been easier. It's just barely possible that *if* McMurdo, pardon the familiarity, were crouching in his financial lair in the basement of the First National Bank, and *if* the window were open, and if a man got a lucky shot between the steel lattice of the grille as he stood ouside, and above on the sidewalk—I repeat, *if* McMur-

do had been killed thusly, you might be able to solve it. Some chance passer-by in the evening throng might have *noticed* a man standing there, vengefully shooting down into the body of the murderee."

"Sure," Grinkey chimed in, "that mighta been a lead if it happened like that, but McMurdo Smith was *stabbed,* right through a pack of mentholated cigarettes and two vital organs—I think it was two. Why, the only thing there's too much of is guys with motives; even Ponce here had a pretty good reason." Grinkey leered at the big man, who stirred swinishly in his chair.

"Lay off me," Ponce grunted. From his pocket he half-withdrew a pack of Spuds, then pushed them back again.

CATHCART pushed himself away from the frame against which he had been slouching. "As a matter of fact," he began as he started toward the two men, "the harder you make it sound, the easier it is for me. You're right about the clues, there *aren't* any." Cathcart smiled a confident smile. "You're right about the throng of people with motives; but just the same, I *know* who killed McMurdo Smith." Stepping suddenly swiftly, he brought up short in front of Ponce. From his left-hand back pocket he slid a pack of Kools; with a sudden definite gesture he flipped them into the big detective's lap.

"Ah," Ponce's voice was carefully controlled, "I see that the great sleuth has found the only clue. *I* missed it, *Grinkey* missed it, and lo *he* finds it—a pack of mentholated cigarettes. Unstabbed."

"Hell," Cathcart said, "that is definitely *not* a clue. Never smoke that kind myself, so thought you might like them." He stood tensely as Ponce tipped back his chair. The chair groaned. "Quiet!" Ponce told the chair. He put the Kools in his other vest pocket, directly across from the Spuds. "Thanks, Chief," he said taking the Spuds all the way out and lighting one. He replaced them in his pocket across from the Kools. All except the lighted one.

Cathcart moved a little closer, so that the crease in his trousers dented against the ponderous knees of the other man. "But," Cathcart went on and his voice was definite if velvety. "*But* although I haven't a clue in the true sense of the word, I have *this*—and because of it, I know who the murderer is." From his jacket pocket, he fished something small enough to be concealed in the palm of his clenched fist. He swung the fist directly over Ponce's lap and opening his fingers, let the object fall.

"A Parchesi counter." Grinkey's voice was awed; he had seen Cathcart break a case with just such evidence.

"And just how," Ponce inquired, "does the deductive genius nail the guilty one with this little fugitive from a parlor-game?"

"Easily." Catchart was blandly confident Grinkey had slid to the edge of his chair.

"Easily," Cathcart repeated. He reached for his trench coat, draped across a chair, and struggled into it, his eyes not once leaving Ponce's. "You see, at precisely one minute to six this evening, I was walking past the side of the First National Bank." He backed toward the door, and, reaching behind him opened it. No sound of rain crept into the room.

"I just happened to look down to the sidewalk, and there, just on the edge of the iron grating of the light-well I saw the little red counter, or marker, or whatever you call it."

CATHCART paused to put his hat on, and pull it rakishly down toward one gimlet eye. "Naturally, I bent to pick it up; I was looking through the grating, and the bars *and* the glass of the window. I saw the slayer murder the victim, right through his mentholated cigarettes." Cathcart slammed the door hard and started back into the room towards the two

men, grim purpose in every line of his face.

Grinkey started and looked suddenly at Ponce. Ponce was in the act of slamming down the front legs of his chair. From his shoulder holster he had half-withdrawn his service automatic. The bulging pack of Kools made him fumble. "You won't take me!" he rumbled; "I'll kill the both of you."

Before the legs of the chair had quite hit the floor Grinkey kicked. The chair tottered and spun off-balance. Ponce crashed to the floor. Cathcart stood over him, his heavy foot clamping the other's wrist to the floor.

"You want to talk about it now?" Cathcart said, his voice carefully controlled.

"Nuts," Ponce said, rolling his head, "I'm not sorry I killed the guy; he had it coming."

"Why didn't you spring this before? Why didn't you take Ponce in when you saw him do it?" Grinkey's voice was aggrieved. "Why did you string us along like this?"

"I don't know," Cathcart's face was a little sad as he looked down at the man with whom he had worked on so many other cases. "I sort of hoped he'd give himself up. Sentimental weakness, you know."

"Nuts," Ponce said as two policemen came in.

"Saw you signal to us," the shorter of the two said. "Oh, it's Ponce, eh?"

"Yes," Cathcart said regretfully, "it's Ponce. He'll tell you all about it on the way to the station. Take him away boys; Grinkey has his gun."

"You see," Cathcart explained to the puzzled Grinkey, as the sound of footsteps crossed the porch and died away on the gravel of the driveway, "I didn't *know* it was Ponce, but in the last six hours I've pulled that phony gag about being a witness to the murder on seventeen other suspects, all with good motives. First real action I got was Ponce's." He smiled into the admiring eyes of his assistant, "Well, better get some sleep. Good night."

And opening the door again, Cathcart Hagthorn, detective, stepped disconsolately into a squall of driven rain and scuffed along the slithering gravel.

Hobey Scrambles Some Yeggs

by Mark Hope

His best friends never accused Hobey of having anything between his ears except muscle — like the muscles all over him. But even Hobey could smell something rotten, when they pushed him too far.

SOMETIMES a citizen can try this line and that, and noodle around for years before he finds what he wants; that's the way it went with Hobart Wilkus before he applied for the job as Sparky Crile's bodyguard. Before that, Hobey had never made a success of anything—from sell-

ing insurance to coaching football for his high-school. As a pal once remarked "Anybody taking inventory on Hobey's brains could use a very short pencil and the edge of a match-folder."

But Hobey is a sweet guy, everybody's friend, the kind of guy everybody looks to when trouble pops. He has a face like William Bendix and he stands maybe five foot six, weighing right around 200—even though there is no more fat on him than a steel spring. He gets along well with everybody, and outside of hustling around to make scratch, nothing much ever bothers him—unless maybe it would be an earthquake right under his feet.

Hobey has got his old lady to look after, and a kid brother, and every two-three weeks his sister Bonnie leaves her everloving and comes back home to put away regular groceries. Then one night Slippy John tells Hobey he's a sucker to go on playing it legitimate, when all he's got to do is ease into the Crile mob. The neighborhood respects Slippy John more than somewhat, because rumor has it that he is the main guy who once held up the Tremont Ice Company for something like $650,000.

"You think maybe he'd take me on, huh?"

"Sure, he'd take you on, Hobe. And right now with him bein' in this war with Johnny O, he'd be more than glad."

"How much do you think he'd pay?"

"Hard to say. At least three yards a week."

"All that for just keeping an eye on him?"

"Trouble with you is you're used to these forty-bucks a week squares aroun' here. Sparky's the biggest wheel since Dutch Schultz."

"And all he'd want me to do is see that nobody shoves him around?"

Slippy laughs and nudges Hobey in the ribs. "That'll be enough for you, me boy."

Well, next day Hobey goes downtown to a place called the Ham 'n Eggs Cafe, where Sparky hangs out. Only at the cafe it seems nobody has ever heard of Sparky. The waiters all make with the deaf-and-dumb; the hatcheck girl informs him that Sparky is visiting his grandmother in East Orange, Madagascar; and the bartender looks back at him while polishing an old-fashioned glass that has more expression than he has.

Hobey gets somewhat sore, but still and all he knows how it is with strangers. Finally he walks up to another barkeep. "Look, pal, I gotta see Mr. Crile bad; friend of mine says he'll gimme a job."

"Yeah?"

"And I need that job. How's about this? Say I wrestle you here on the bar and if you lose, you tell me where Crile is."

The bartender smiles, and maybe he has something to laugh over, at that; he's about twenty pounds more than Hobey, and he looks like the kind of guy who plays handball with beer barrels. "You think you're pretty strong, huh? You don't look like no Mr. America to me."

"All right. Make it five bucks on the side."

"You got a deal. Say, Jack, watch this corner here; I got a chump."

While everybody nearby starts to look on, they put their arms up on the bar, get a good grip on one another's thumb and start heaving. Hobey gives him a fair shake, letting he barkeep grunt and strain awhile. But when he's ready Hobey bends him over like breaking a match.

"You tell me where Mr. Crile is and keep the five."

"You don't look like a hard-case to me," says the barkeep; "you look regular enough." He leans over so nobody else can hear him. "You go through that door there and up one flight, and say Pete sentcha."

THIS IS okay and, in two minutes, Hobey finds himself in a big room that is slightly colossal. First

off, there are those deep leather chairs, where a guy can spend maybe three weeks soaking up comfort. All he has to do is reach over to the pool-table in the middle, where there is not only Scotch and bourbon and glasses and soda and sandwiches and cigars, but all the newspapers and even a private telephone. Eight or nine guys sitting around give Hobey the small hello, while Big Abe fans him and then tells a little guy who is wagging a cigar up and down that Hobey is clean.

"Mr. Crile, I came down here to ask you about a job; Slippy John says you can use a good bodyguard."

"Slippy John, eh?"

The little man looks Hobey over real careful while listening to him announce how he is pretty handy with his dukes and never been known to go back on a pal. Around there, Hobey runs out of words while Sparky is still giving him the inspection.

Right then, the outer door opens up and a guy rushes in all excited. He leans down to tell Sparky something which seems to make the little man sizzling mad.

"Traven, eh? Why I'll blast that guy he comes in here; I'll set fire to that chiseling bum. Send him in."

The man says okay, and sorry, and a minute later he returns with a tall guy in a long racetrack overcoat. This tall guy is a sad looking party who maybe saw his own ghost awhile back and the ghost asks him 'What's keepin' ya?'

"Why, you 8-to-5 crook," says Sparky. "You know better than to bother me about a lousy five grand at a time like this."

"That's a lotta money where I come from, Sparky."

"I could give it to you one-two-three, only I'm holding on to every cent right now until I run Johnny O out."

The sad-looking guy doesn't say anything, just takes out an IOU and regards it very mournful like.

"You see all the trouble I got?" Sparky tells Hobey. "A bodyguard is for me somebody who keeps guys like this out."

"You want me to take him away, Mr. Crile?"

"No. I got a better idea. Traven, I owe you five big ones; that right? Howja like to cut one time double or nothin'?"

It's plain to see that Mr. Traven is wondering that if Sparky can't pay him five how is he going to pay him ten grand? But all the other guys in the room look at Traven like he should be swept back under the rug, so he says okay and funny but he's got a deck right on him.

"None of that potchky; Abe, open up a new one."

Well, things get kind of tense in the room while everybody gathers around to watch the big cut. Five big ones on one flip is as good as anything you see at Monte Carlo over the weekend. Then Traven makes a funny gesture with his hand for luck, like he's chasing away a whammy. Sparky mumbles something, cuts, and when he turns up he's got a red jack.

Guys begin to relax because that jack should hold up very nicely. Except Sparky. Hobey can see about what they mean by his being worried these days; the little guy is wound up tighter than an expectant father's watch, and when Traven picks and shows them all a big king, Sparky looks like he knew it was coming.

"Okay. So I owe you ten. Whats yer hurry?"

"Wait a minute, Sparky. The fact is—"

"Who sentcha anyway? Kid Johnny O? Whatcha puttin' on pressure for? I ain't never run out."

"A man in my business knows there's always a first time, Sparky. And fact is I been kind of hard hit myself. Bookin' ain't what it used to be."

"So cry. Nothin's like it used to be. Nothin'. So cry. Abe, bring me a drink."

Hobey wonders why everybody is silent then, except it doesn't last long. Before Sparky can take a swallow of his drink, Traven begins again. "Now looka here, Sparky, I can't go on waitin' indefinite like this. You first owed me three grand in August, then four— Now—"

"Shuddup." Sparky looks at him over his glass. "I got enough heat without you futzin' around. Shuddup."

But Traven can't see a red light; he stands there, folding and unfolding the IOU, while Hobey wonders if maybe this is a good time to usher him out and show Sparky he's just what the doctor ordered—except Hobey feels kind of sorry for the guy.

"Tell you what I'll do, Sparky," Traven begins. "I'll—"

"You won't do another lousy thing," Sparky cries. And with that he whips out a little belly-gun and fires at Traven three times.

THE LAST bullet clips a button off the guy's coat. It goes flyin' through the air while Traven drops to his knees and something dark spreads where the button has been.

"Nothin'." Sparky looks down at him, takes the IOU out of his mitt, and with something like a smile he reloads his gun.

The boys all crowd in now, regretful like. Sparky shouldn't have done it, and this is a tough jam to square, and everybody better scram before—

"Shaddup. Hey, Buster, commere."

Hobey is so surprised he walks right over without a word.

"You say you wanna job? You got a job. You get Eisler for your mouthpiece, you get off with a year for manslaughter. You do that inside and when you get out I'll give you his ten grand. Whaddya say?"

Abe cuts in. "Sparky, let's take a powder. On the level; this is hot."

"Shuddup. Whaddya say, Buster?"

Hobey doesn't know what to say. This has all blown up so fast he's still dazed. But ten grand will buy a real parcel of groceries.

"I don't know, Mr. Crile. It seems to me—"

"Come on, c'mon." Sparky snaps his fingers very impatient. "This is a faster, Eisler will frame a story, and maybe they even let you off; then it's five gees. Make up your mind."

"Well, okay, Mr. Crile. You know more about these things—I'll take a chance."

"That's my boy. Here. Catch." Sparky pitches him the gun. "Okay, boys, we go down to Miami for awhile."

In another thirty seconds, everybody is through that door and they move so fast the last guy out is practically riding piggyback. Sparky hollers he'll phone Eisler, and then Hobey is all alone with the late Mr. Traven.

Hobey is very much aware that he is quite a situation, and that the cops are going to take a very dim view of a stranger found alone in room with a gun and a fresh corpse. But a deal is a deal, and Hobey figures it's only a matter of time until the truth comes out. Besides, five or ten grand will buy his mother a fur benny and his sister all the new kicks she can walk out in a year; and Tommy, his kid brother, can have the brightest and biggest bridge-building set they make.

When Hobey goes down to the bar to have a beer and think out what he's going to say, he finds Big Abe sitting next to him. "Say, champ, can I buy you a beer?"

"Why that's mighty nice of you. But I'm still working on this one. Sparky get away okay?"

"Yeah. He's halfway to nowhere by now. Look, champ. You ever hear of Kid Johnny O?"

"Sure. Ain't everybody heard of the Kid? What about him?"

"You ain't called the law yet, huh?"

When Hobey says "No," Abe squints at him real hard like he's trying to get into his mind with a corkscrew. "Look, supposin' Kid Johnny O was to walk in here right now and you was to tell him what you know, and I was to tell him what I

know—Sparky would sure be in one tough spot, huh?"

"What are you driving at?"

"A smart guy could make some real cabbage out of this, Champ. Especially if he was to get up there and swear he saw Sparky lay Traven away—so that Johnny O could move in without no competition."

With that Hobey backhands Abe off the barstool so hard he lands smack on his home base. The bartender leans over for a better look and starts laughing. "I ain't forgettin' this, Champ," says Big Abe.

Then Hobey, feeling like he has gone swimming in some very muddy water indeed, takes himself a walk. Being on a knife-edge like this, where if something goes wrong he might find himself getting barbecued at Sing Sing come eleven o'clock some night, makes him think more than he ever has in his life. The truth is he doesn't dig these Sparky and Abe characters at all. So Hobey takes himself a walk around the block to give his brain a little air.

WHEN HE gets back to the Cafe' he breaks a quarter and phones Police Headquarters. "Hello, Police Headquarters? This is Hobart Wilkus, and if you don't mind I'd like to report an accident."

"Yeah? What kinduh accident?"

"Well, I was sitting talking to a guy and he said a couple of things I didn't like so I pulled a gun on him, and the next thing I knew it went off and now he's dead. So if you don't mind I wish you'd send a car around."

"We don't mind. Whereabouts did all this take place?"

Hobey starts to give them the address of the Ham 'n Eggs Cafe and is explaining how they get through to the upstairs room when the cop on the other end stops him. "We know all about that, Mister that's Sparky Crile's place and the Department will be over there before you can say Bobo Newsom."

It's nice to be well-known, Hobey thinks. Saves a lot of time and fuss. In about three minutes a squad car steams up, chockful of cops in and out of uniform, and right behind are maybe four or five taxis with the newspaper men. They all boil right through the Ham 'n Eggs Cafe, annoying all the regulars there in various and sundry ways, since if there is anything a regular at the Ham 'n Eggs Cafe does not care for it is cops coming in unannounced. Hobey welcomes them and steers them up stairs to where Mr. Traven is reposing.

Up there, he has left the main door on the latch but now Hobey is somewhat surprised to note that the door is locked. He bangs on it a couple of times and some noise-loving cops help out with their nightsticks, and in no time at all the door is opened up by nobody other than Big Abe. Right behind him is a character Hobey has never seen before. But the man in charge of the festivities, Inspector Blennerhasset, appears to know him very well.

"Well, well, Kid Johnny O himself. How ya keepin', Kid?"

"Can't complain, Inspector. How's the ducks?"

"All present and accounted for," says the Inspector, and leading his boys, he marches in. Resting nice and easy, without a worry in the world, is Mr. Traven, only somebody who may turn out to be an interior decorator has put a cushion under his noggin.

"Now, Wilkus, tell us what happened here," says Inspector Blennerhasset. "And there will be no flashbulbs or any funny stuff from you news yeggs. Mahoney, lock the door."

Hobey starts to tell them what's happened. "Well, it's like I said on the phone, Inspector. This guy Traven—"

Before he can get any further Big Abe is smiling the sun comes up over China and Kid Johnny O is laughing

like somebody's banging a bass drum inside him.

"If you guys think this is so funny," says Hobey, "I will be glad to take you downstairs, personally, and instruct you otherwise."

KID JOHNNY O butts in here. "Look, Inspector, we know each other a long time, right? And we speak the same language, right? Then lemme tell you I am here to prevent a carriage of misjustice." He studies his fingernails, looking highly straightforward.

"This is a twist," says the Inspector. "You got me all ears."

"This character here, this Wilkus fellow, is a stooge for Sparky Crile. Big Abe was here all the time and heard the whole thing. Sparky shoots Dave Traven and then offers this lug ten gees to take the rap, and Wilkus here tumbles. It may surprise you, Inspector, but there are some guys who will do anything for money."

"Such as and for instance?" remarks the Inspector.

"Like Wilkus for instance. Now you ain't gonna let a nice boy without no record take the rap for what Sparky Crile did, Inspector."

"Abe, what do you know about this?"

"Johnny O gives it to you straight," says Big Abe. "Only it happened so fast there was nothing I could do about it. Sparky has been nervy, off and on, for weeks; and when this Traven guy comes in and tells Sparky he's got to pay up the five gees he owes him Sparky blows a fuse. He blasts him. Then it's like Johnny O said; this meatball here says he'll take the rap."

"It's funny you tellin' me this," says the Inspector. "Up to now, I always figured you workin' for Sparky."

"Sparky is not a considerate boss," says Big Abe. "Overtime. Alla time overtime. So I made new connections."

"This is all spite work, Inspector," says Hobey. "Sparky had no more to do with this than Broadway Rose. I, and I alone, killed Mr. Traven."

The Inspector looks at him as if wondering how he would go in a fruitcake, then tells the newsmen it's open season on Hobart since he is taking him downtown. The police come in to start photographing the murder scene; the news flashbulbs go off while they all get good pictures of Hobey and the body, and Abe and Johnny O; a bunch of guys are writing down Hobey's lightest word on folded copy-paper, when all of a sudden it dawns on Hobey that Inspector Blennerhasset has said nothing about arresting Abe or Johnny O. This seems to him somewhat illegal.

"Say, inspector. How about Abe and Johnny O? Aren't you taking them downtown?"

"No."

Hobey looks very hurt indeed.

"And I'll tell you why," says the Inspector. "Those two have posed for so many front and side pictures, that anytime we want them all we have to do is send out the word and any guy on a beat will bring them in. They're not going anywhere. Are you, boy?"

"Leave New York?" says Kid Johnny O. "Inspector, have you counted your marbles lately? There's no other town in the world like New York; I wouldn't leave New York if the Hudson River was on fire."

"Well, don't play with any matches," says the Inspector. Then he puts the bracelets on Hobey, tells the uniform cops to mush, and they all go out through the Cafe' again. There is some more muttering from the regulars, who find all this very distracting from the business of estimating whether Kid Gavilan should be 8-to-5 or 2-to-1 in his next fight, and if Spartan Valor got 126 up whether he can last it for a mile and a half.

One thing looks bad for Hobey. And that is, when they frisk him, they find the gun on him. What they can't figure out is why he re-loaded so fast,

but it is very plain indeed that this roscoe has been fired quite recently.

DOWN AT Center Street, they book Hobey for felonious assault, which the Inspector hints may be changed to first degree murder. They take away all his property and lock him up nice and snug in a cell. Only he is not alone; there is an old guy in with him named Tallboy Wilson. Tallboy is like his name says, tall and stringy, with broomstick arms and an adam's apple that works twenty-three to the dozen since he is popularly considered to be quite a loquacious character.

"Whatchu in for?" right away he asks Hobey.

Hobey tells him, and Tallboy regards this as no worse than a bad cold. He himself is in for illegal walking, and at that he laughs a great deal. Then Tallboy starts comparing the Tombs to other prisons he has been in, and though he says it is not the champion, the Tombs is still quite a lot better than some other mousetraps. He is, in fact, what the cops call a "prison shopper"; for the last 35 years, Tallboy tells Hobey, he has only had to go out and earn his living a little over 8 of them, the rest of the time Tallboy being a guest in one stony lonesome or another. Now Tallboy likes San Quentin better than Joliet, because at Quentin everybody's allowed a radio in their cell, and after dinner all the prisoners have three hours when they can play checkers or tune in "The Lone Ranger," or maybe build ship-models before the lights go out. The scuff is better, too, and after awhile Hobey realizes he's talking about food.

"But I never ratted on nobody," says old Tallboy. "Not one solitary peeping time. Many's the time I could have had some comforts, things made easier all around, if I'd fag for some guard. But not me; not this boy. I remember the time when Billy Masters got a shiv in him—I couldn't a been more than three feet away. From here to there it was—" He held his hands about that many feet apart. "From here to there. And the first thing they did is haul me down to the Warden's office. That's right. 'Tallboy here saw the whole thing,' one screw says. 'He can tell ya who killed Masters.' In a pig's-eye I told them. In a pig's-eye I'd rat on anybody, even though me and Masters was buddies. That's with me like iron. Never rat on a pal."

Hobey goes to bed thinking very hard. The next morning Max Eisler, the big-shot lawyer that Sparky mentions is a very smart potato, has Hobey brought up to see him in the attorney's room. Eisler has a face that makes Hobey think of his dead father, a kind and patient face that knows the score and always gives a fair call. "Tell me how it was," says Eisler, and you know without asking him that what he means is the truth.

So Hobey tells him. Then Eisler, who has hardly opened his yip all this time, pats Hobey on the shoulder and tells him everything is going to be all right. At first, he says, Inspector Blennerhasset was all for keeping him locked up on one charge or another until Martians are walking up and down Third Avenue. But now he sees the light and is going to let Hobey go that very afternoon.

"And, Hobey, have you ever heard of a man who gets into water over his head?"

"Sure."

"Well, if you don't mind my saying so, I think that's what happened to you. If I were you I'd forget all about it. I'd go back to the Bronx and forget I ever saw Sparky Crile."

"You mean all this was just for the exercise?" says Hobey. "You mean Sparky only used me to make a getaway?"

"I'm afraid that's about right," says Eisler. "Sparky is a very hard character who is not above framing his grandmother if he thinks she would look good on the wall."

"So I was the chump through all this, huh?" says Hobey. "Me, I was nothing but a fall guy."

Max Eisler opens up his hands then as if to say, "Sometimes that's the way life is, kid, and there isn't a hell-uva lot you can do about it." Then he pats Hobey again, leaves him a fresh pack of cigarettes, and goes out.

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Back in his cell, Hobey is plenty burned. Even Tallboy notices it and asks him what for he's so mad.

"Because I've been made a sucker," says Hobey. "Because I thought I'd be a smart guy and tangle with the racket boys. Because I thought if I played square and lived up to the rules, I'd make out. Instead I am strictly a chump and everybody from here to Greenpoint is laughing like crazy."

THAT AFTERNOON, early, the cops let Hobey go. The turnkey opens up the door, tells him to get his things together; another cop takes him into a room where he signs for what property he had; they push an envelope at him containing everything that was in his pockets (except the gun), open up the door and there is the wide sunshine and the great big world.

Hobey doesn't go home. He calls up his old lady and tells her everything is okey-dokey, he'll be home the next day, and to keep his kid brother from busting any more windows. Then Hobey goes back to the Ham 'n Eggs Cafe'.

All the regulars are there, and sitting over in a corner playing canasta are Big Abe and Kid Johnny O. Since Sparky has moved away for the time being, Johnny O has made himself very much at home around the Ham 'n Eggs Cafe', him being a great fancier of potato pancakes with gooseberry jam. "I want to talk to you guys," says Hobey.

"So who's stoppin' ya?" asks Kid Johnny O.

"Not like this; I mean private."

Johnny O looks at Abe, and Abe nods his head like he's saying, "Maybe the square is starting to wise up." Abe gets up and Johhny O and Hobey follow after him until they are all seated around the pool table in the upstairs room.

"Now look you guys," Hobey begins, "it is all nice and friendly to play me for a sucker, except I don't like it."

"We was your friends, kid. If it wasn't for us," says Johnny O, "you would still be in the sneezer. Ain't that right, Abe?"

Abe nods his head slow and solemn, like there can't be anything more right and regular than what Johnny O has just released.

"Being in that can has taught me something," says Hobey. "And now the first thing I want to do is get my mitts on Sparky."

"That's only natural," says Johnny O. "Perfectly natural; but if you will excuse me, how are you going to find Sparky?"

That's the stopper all right. You can't go to work on a guy unless you can first look him in the eye. Then Abe starts to fiddle around with a deck of cards. "I might be able to help you put the arm on Sparky, provided the payola is okay."

"What are you giving this boy?" Johnny O demands. "If you know where Sparky is, how come you ain't told me?"

"Listen, Johnny," says Abe, looking more than somewhat scared, "I was savin' it. Believe me, I was savin' it. After all Sparky useter be a frienda mine and if you was to catch up with him you would hang him up to dry. Soo-o—"

Both of Hobey's mitts go out; he grabs Abe by the neckwear and in no time at all he is shaking him from side to side like an angry puppy shakes a slipper. About ten seconds of that and

Johnny O is used to having to hide out when one of his boys are picked up.

Abe is getting green and in another five he is ready to tell everything right back to the day the doc slapped him on the back.

"H-h-he is—p-p-pp-put me down a minute, huh?"

Hobey shakes him a little more to show him he can keep that up all day if necessary. Abe gets back on his feet and straightens out his clothes and tells him that Sparky is holed up in a place in Jersey called Phillipstown. It is his regular hideaway, and he has already send word that Abe is to meet up with him there. Hobey can see that this is a straight steer and after warning the gentlemen not to peep to Sparky that he is on his way out, he takes off for the bus terminal.

As soon as Hobey is out the door, Abe remarks to Johnny O with a smile "That's the last time we are bothered with *that* meatball. On account of the only thing that can take Sparky outa there is the New York Yankees *and* the Marines. With clubs."

AN HOUR later Hobey climbs off the bus in Phillipstown. It is a small burg, with a World War I cannon on the courthouse lawn, the usual bunch of tobacco-chewers in front of the post office, and a general air that nothing much has happened since Washington slept there.

The first thing Hobey does is to go to the liquor store. Knowing that Sparky, with his worries and all, gets thirsty several times a day Hobey figures that it's only a matter of time until he needs a little reinforcement.

"What I want you should do," says Hobey, "is to take this five bucks and the next time Sparky Crile calls up for liquor I want you should let me deliver it."

"That's all right with me, Mister, but how do you know he's gonna call up?"

"Sooner or later, he'll call up," says Hobey very satisfied, and he sits down to wait.

An hour or two goes by, and several local citizens have wandered in for a fifth of this and a quart of that, when the phone rings and the proprietor signs with his head that he's talking to Sparky. He writes down an order for Old Glockenspiel Scotch, says it'll be right out, and that's that.

"You take good care of the truck now," the proprietor reminds him. "It's got 34,000 miles on it but there should be a long life ahead of it."

Hobey picks up the package, thanks him and thinks to himself, "I wish I

could be sure *I* had." The proprietor has given him directions, and after a short drive Hobey pulls up in front of a house that any Sunday motorist would take for where old Uncle Jake has settled down to grow lilacs.

As Hobey gets out of the delivery truck, a taxicab goes by, not moving very fast, and Hobey flags it to a stop. He opens the rear door and sitting there is a quiet guy in a blue pinstripe who has a face like a dog catcher.

"Pardon me, I do not like to interfere with your business," says Hobey, "but would you mind telling me why you have been on my tail ever since I left New York?"

The dog-catcher grins. "You have more brains than we think, Hobey. It is Inspector Blennerhasset's idea that if we leave you go you will lead us right to Sparky, and we would like to ask him a couple of questions."

"I figure maybe it was something like that. And this is the place. But suppose you wait right here, and if I do not bring Sparky out very soon you can come in and see what good a badge will do."..

"That is very good with me. But I tell you right now that it will take a large hunk of man to get Sparky to leave New Jersey."

Hobey does not answer that, not being one to brag, and a minute later he is knocking on the front door of the Crile hideout. The door opens a little way on a brass chain.

"Liquor for Mr. Crile," says Hobey, Hoping nobody will recognize him.

"Well if it ain't Laughing Boy," says the mug at the door; "aren't you way out in the field over here, chum?"

"This is quite a coincident," says Hobey. "But I got some business to talk over with Mr. Crile."

Then a voice that Hobey recognizes is Sparky talking bawls out for them to let him in. "Maybe he'll give me a coupla laughs," says Sparky. "It is a very long time since I had anybody to laugh at."

"Hello, Mr. Crile," says Hobey; "here is your Old Glockenspiel."

"Larry, take it out inna kitchen an' mix us a coupla drinks." Sparky sits back, very comfortable behind his cigar. "Well, chum, I see you got away from the law okay. You see Eisler?"

"Yup, we talked together. But we haven't got time to cut up any touches, Sparky; I'm taking you back to New York."

"What'd I tell ya," says Sparky. "This guy hasn't been here five minutes an' awready he's makin' with the comedy. What if I don't want to go back to New York, chum?"

"Then I'm taking you anyway," says Hobey. At that he moves in, gets his arms around Sparky and lifts him up like you or me might lift up a doily. Sparky squawks and hollers, drops his cigar and orders a couple of his boys to take Hobey apart. And Hobey hasn't got anything else to throw so he slams Sparky at the nearest guy like you pass a basketball. The receiver goes down, Sparky on top of him, and for a minute there they are all kicking arms and legs. Meanwhile, Hobey goes quietly over to a corner of the room, yanks up the rug they are thrashing around on which deposits them with a bump, comes back, picks up Sparky by the back of the neck, and then proceeds to wrap him tidily up in the rug.

ALL THE while Hobey keeps talking. "I am really doing you a favor," says Hobey, "because Big Abe is no longer a friend of yours, and now Johnny O knows where you are, and in no time at all he will be over here with some roscoe-boys and they will puncture you where it hurts. So, until this bad feeling dies down, I think the safest place for you is jail. Maybe they will even put you in with Tallboy so he can tell you what a nice place the Tombs is.... No, I would not do that," says Hobey and bats a rod out of Sparky's hand.

Then he hoists Sparky to his shoulder, still nicely wrapped in the rug and starts out the door.

"This is impossible," Sparky yells. Nobody gets away with this; the minute ya set me down I'll ventilate you plenty, Wilkus. I'll pulverize ya."

"My, my," says Hobey. "If there is one thing I have learned up in the Bronx it is that the harder the language, the softer the yegg. And if any of you other mugs want to interfere, now's the time."

He looks around then at Sparky's boys, but they can all see the handwriting on the wall. There is nothing quite so undignified as a grown man wrapped up in a rug and toted off like Monday's laundry, and it will be a very long time indeed before Sparky can make them jump when he snaps his fingers.

Out on the country road, Hobey finds the taxi waiting. And because he is a little tired of Sparky's bad language, and also because he needs both hands free to drive the delivery truck, he dumps Sparky on the floor of the taxicab.

"He is all yours," says Hobey. "And if you want to find out who killed Traven, ask Big Abe. As for me it is getting close to supper time and I do not like to keep Mom waiting. So if you don't mind—"

"I don't mind," says the cop on the taxi, all smiles. "But Inspector Blennerhasset will have a job on the force for a man like you."

"It's an idea I have been mulling around in my mind. And if all mugs are like this one, it is a pleasure to shove them around while getting paid for it. Maybe I'll be seeing you."

With that Hobey waves goodbye and climbs in the front seat of the truck. He is glad he is alone now because as he can readily see there is a beautiful sunset coming on. And if there is one thing Hobey likes to watch it is a great big poached-egg sunset.

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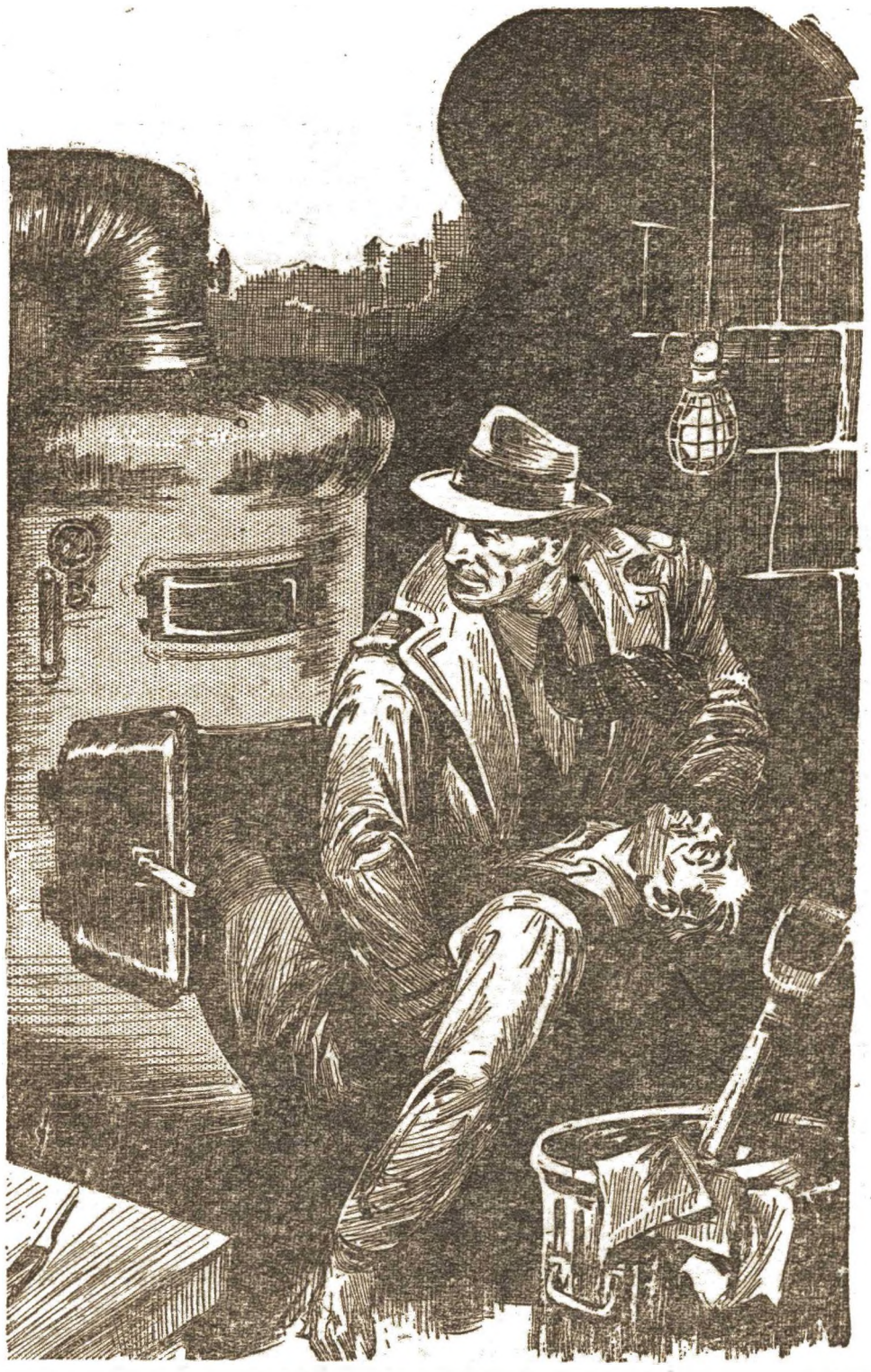

As his ex-partner always said, Frazer got panicky too soon.

HOOK, LINE AND SUCKER!

By Robert Turner

FRAZER, the big, dark one with the short-cropped black hair, who would have looked like a handsome, fresh-faced collegiate, except for the yellowed muddiness of his eyes and the almost viciously blunted sullenness of his mouth, worked feverishly in the moonlight down by the river. He kept telling himself that there was really no great hurry, to take it easy. But it didn't work. He dug furiously into the soft earth of the river bank, sweat soaking his checkered hunting shirt.

He cursed Lyman for insisting on burying the box so deeply. It hadn't really been necessary. But wise-guy Lyman had to do it his way. "Don't be stupid," Lyman had told him. "Suppose something goes wrong and we get caught? All right, so we do our time but when it's done we come back here and get the cash and live like kings from then on. Getting caught and doing a piece won't be so bad if we've still got the hundred grand to come to when it's over. But if we don't bury it deep, it's likely not to be here. Suppose some fisherman decides to dig for worms right in this particular spot? Crazier things have happened. Where will our hundred grand be then? Let's not be dumb, Frazer. Let's not take any chances. Keep digging. Get that hole good and deep!"

Lyman, skinny, scrawny little Lyan, The Brain, who thought of everything. Real tricky, real smart Lyman, who had nothing but scorn for Frazer's big shoulders and good looks, who was always letting Frazer know how dumb he was. Frazer grinned through the shine of sweat on his handsome face. But who was dumb now? Where was Lyman now? What good did his brains do him, spattered all over the wall of the hunting lodge, back up the trail, by the shotgun that had blown half of his head off.

Frazer bent to his job of digging up the metal box containing the hundred thousand dollars in small denomination bills that he and Lyman had gotten in that last payroll holdup. A lump caught in his throat and his heart

jumped like a frog in a bucket just at the thought of all that money. It had been their biggest, best job yet. It had gone smoothly, thanks to Lyman's careful planning. There had been the usual hue and cry afterward, by the police and the newspapers and Lyman had figured that to be on the safe side, they'd best hole up in this lonely fishing lodge for a couple of weeks, to let the thing blow over.

That was when Lyman had started to become too smart for his own good.

Almost from the first day that they'd settled down in the lonely little fisherman's shack near the river, Frazer had started to think about how nice it would be not to have to share that hundred grand with Lyman, to have it all to himself. He didn't need Lyman's brains any more. There would be no more jobs. He could live on that hundred thousand for the rest of his life. And he hated Lyman's guts, anyhow, for his sharp, sarcastic tongue; because he *was* dumb and Lyman *was* clever and no getting away from it; and even if Lyman wasn't always reminding him of it, rubbing it in, he still would have hated the little man, just for being that way.

FOR TEN DAYS now, Frazer had tried to figure some clever, foolproof way to get rid of Lyman. But every time he thought he had something tricky figured out, a loophole would turn up and he'd have to abandon the scheme. And that damned hick sheriff, Clayburn, complicated things. An old duffer with walrus-like mustaches, he'd stopped by their fisherman's shack in that lonely spot on the river, the second day, to chat with them, he said. And also to check them on fishing licenses.

Clayburn had given Frazer a bad moment then, when he'd asked to see their licenses. Frazer had gotten panicky, picked up the shotgun, was ready to blast the sheriff. He wasn't going to let them get caught by a silly little oversight like that, get them arrested by some over-conscientious hick sheriff. But Lyman saved the old sheriff's life. He'd quickly produce the licenses. It seemed that clever-boy Lyman hadn't made any such oversight. He'd bought the licenses, unknown to Frazer. Clever Lyman.

Every night after that, around ten o'clock, though, Sheriff Clayburn would stop by their shack. "To chat awhile," he'd tell them. "To check up on you greenhorn babes-in-the-woods, to make sure you ain't drowned yourselves in the river, or gone over those falls."

Frazer paused in his digging to sleeve sweat from his face and listen to the distant roar of those falls a few hundred yards down stream. A shiver took him at the very thought of them. Several times while they were out in the little rowboat, fishing, Lyman would grin his crooked grin and taunt Frazer.

"Those falls must be a hundred feet high, handsome," he'd say. "And those big jagged rocks underneath it, they'd smash a little boat like this to pieces—and whoever was in it—if it ever got washed over those falls. Now wouldn't that be ironical, Frazer, if something should go wrong? If something should happen to this boat and it should drift down and over those falls? You can't swim, can you Frazer? You wouldn't have a chance. The current's fairly swift but I *might* make it to shore before I was swept over the falls, with a little luck. But you never would, kid. And just when you're rich, set up for life, with your share of our loot. It would be a shame if anything like that happened, kid."

"Cut it out, Lyman!" Frazer had snarled at him. "You're talking like a fool. The current's not so strong you can't row against it. Nothing's going to happen to the boat. What are you trying to do, torture me?"

Lyman had just laughed. After that, Frazer had trouble getting himself to go out in the boat onto that swiftly flowing river above the falls, to go fishing. But he'd had to go. Lyman had insisted. "Suppose," Lyman said,

"that busybody old rube of a sheriff is spying on us? We're supposed to be crazy about fishing, aren't we? Isn't that what we're supposed to be holed up in his Godforsaken place for? We've got to go out there and go fishing, every day, to make it look good. We can't take chances with anything, at this stage." And Frazer had to give in. He knew Lyman was right. He was always right. That was proven a couple of times when Sheriff Clayburn *did* turn up by surprise, during the day, and holler to them from the shore.

Frazer was glad the whole damned thing was over now. In another few moments he'd have the metal cash box up out of this deep hole in the ground. It wasn't much farther down. He'd dug nearly three feet already. When he got the box out, he'd put it in the boat, row across to the other shore, which was in another state. There was a dirt road that led into a main highway after about a mile. By morning, he'd be back in New York. They'd never find him. Even if they pinned Lyman's murder on him, what did it matter? They'd be too late. By the time they traced back Frazer's real identity, he'd be in South America.

It just proved, Frazer decided, that sometimes the simplest plans were the best. And a man should be himself. If you didn't have a tricky mind, inclined toward complicated schemes, like Lyman, there was no sense in trying to force youself to be that way. Some people were just direct, basic in their thinking. That didn't mean you were dumb, like Lyman claimed. What had happened, proved that Frazer wasn't dumb, by a long shot.

WHEN FRAZER had caught Lyman putting rat poison into the biscuits, tonight, it had floored him for a moment, realizing that the little man had also decided that he didn't want to share that hundred thousand with a partner, that Lyman was planning to kill him. What had happened, then, had partly been in anger on Frazer's part, but mostly it had been because of the calm, deliberate acceptance of the fact that if Lyman had made up his mind to kill him, Frazer didn't have much chance of living. If Lyman failed one time, with one method, he'd try another. And Lyman's being so much cleverer than Frazer made the result a foregone conclusion. Frazer had only one defense. He would have to kill Lyman, quickly, simply and not put if off until he thought up something tricky, or for the right opportunity to present itself.

Once Frazer made up his mind to do something, he went ahead with it. If there was something that had to be done, he'd go ahead with it, no matter how unpleasant it might be. Like the times in a couple of smaller stick-ups before this last big one, when it had been necessary to kill, Frazer had to take care of that end of it. Even Lyman had to compliment him on that. "One thing I'll give you, kid," Lyman said. "You're decisive. You're not squeamish. You don't let a little think like looking a man right in the eye while you shoot him, bother you."

So after catching Lyman putting the poison powder into the biscuit mix, it hadn't bothered Frazer at all, once he'd made up his mind what he had to do. He'd gotten the big shotgun out of the closet. He'd called out: "Hey, Lyman, turn around here a minute." And when the little guy did that, he'd watched the horror and disbelief crawl like live things across Lyman's face. He'd listened to Lyman scream: "Wait, Frazer! You—you don't know what you're doing! Put that gun down Frazer! Are you crazy?"

Frazer just grinned at him. He said: "Lyman, a man who would try to poison his pardner, ain't fit to live. So long, Lyman. Goodbye, smart stuff!" And he'd squeezed both triggers of the shotgun. The recoil caught his shoulder like a mule-kick. The sound of the simultaneous blasts was deafening. When the smoke cleared away, there was little Lyman, twisted

on the floor, without any face and not much left of his head, either.

Without hardly glancing at the dead man again, Frazer had calmly packed his things, lugged them down to the river and tossed them into the boat. He was all set to leave, now, just as soon as he got the cash box dug up out of the hole. He heard the clang of metal against metal as the spade finally scraped against the top of the buried box, and a little cry of triumph broke from his dust-caked lips. He had just began to worry whether or not he was digging in the right place.

A few moments later, though, another sound turned the marrow in Frazer's bones to ice. It was the rattle of gravel along the path that led down from the fishing shack to the edge of the water. At the same time a rasping voice called: "Hey, Greenhorns, where are you?"

Frazer glanced up toward the shack, saw the glare of a flashlight bobbing along the path, moving down toward the water. His brain seemed to explode. He glanced at his wrist watch in the moonlight, saw that it was a few minutes past ten. He'd forgotten about Sheriff Clayburn's nightly rounds. In the excitement of all that had happened, he hadn't even given the grizzled old lawman a thought.

Now he was caught. He fought off the panic that engulfed him and tired to think. He remembered that he had turned out the lights in the cabin and locked the door. If Clayburn hadn't gotten too nosey, flashed his light in a window, he might not have discovered the corpse.

DROPPING the spade, Frazer turned quickly away from the hole he had dug, moved down toward the tiny wharf where the rowboat was tied. If he could get there before Clayburn, he could grab up one of the fishing rods that had been left in the boat, pretend that he was just down here doing some night fishing off of the little pier. If he acted perfectly natural and normal, the old geezer wouldn't suspect that anything was wrong. He'd talk a few minutes and then go on his way. Everything could still work out all right, Frazer told himself, if only he didn't go haywire, blow up, lose his head.

He reached the wharf, got the rod and reel out of the boat and had cast a plug out onto the dark, swirling surface of the river, just as the Sheriff joined him. Clayburn shone the flashlight in his face, barked in his peculiarly brusque way: "Hey, what's goin' on here, young fella? Ain't you out a little late? Where's your pardner at?"

Frazer's throat felt as though it was stuffed with cotton. For a moment, he couldn't answer. He kept reeling the line in, swallowing, trying to find his voice. He finally made it. He forced out a nervous little laugh. "Just doin' a little night fishin'. Lyman, he—oh, he's probably asleep already."

"Is, he?" Clayburn said. "I stopped by up at your cabin and—"

His words broke off as he watched something suddenly jerk Frazer's line taut, bend his pole almost double. Frazer felt relief flow through him. His luck was holding out. A big fish had struck at his plug as he was reeling it in, taken Clayburn's mind off of his questioning. The sheriff watched silently as Frazer horsed in the line, finally lifted a fat and wetly shining four pound small mouth bass, wriggling and bucking at the end of the line, up onto the small dock.

"Hey, how do you like that one?" Frazer said, laughing. He grabbed the bass, worked the plug from its mouth and held the still squirming and struggling fish up in the glare of the sheriff's flashlight. "Look at him! A beaut! How do you like that kind of fishing, sheriff?"

For a moment Clayburn didn't answer. Then he said, gruffly: "I don't, son. I don't know, you city fellas are supposed to be so much smarter than us hicks, but sometimes I wonder. You come up here to the woods and commit the boldest faced

crime, right under the very eyes of the law and think you can get away with it. Just because I befriended you, I'm an easy-goin' old—"

"What—what are you talking about?" Frazer blurted. He felt as though his eyes were starting right out of his head. His feet and his fingers felt numb. His head began to ache. "I—I haven't committed any crime!"

"Look, son," Clayburn said. "I've got you redhanded. Don't try to talk your way out of it. Won't do you any good." There was the slight clanking sound of the old, heavy metal handcuffs that the sheriff always carried strung from his belt. "I reckon I'm goin' to have to lock you up, Mister. You city men, comin' up here and tryin' to get away with murder, just—"

The sheriff didn't get a chance to finish. Frazer slung the bass at him. The fish struck the old man in the face with a wet *smack* of sound. Then Frazer, his stomach churning like cement in a mixer, punted the flashlight out of the old man's hand. It turned end over end through the air, still lit, and fell into the lake with a small splash. The sheriff made one cry of protest, then was still as Frazer's big fist crashed through the dark against his jaw. He went down.

Trembling, stumbling through the dark, Frazer raced back to the hole he'd been digging, frantically finished unearthing the metal cash box that contained the hundred thousand dollars, returned to the pier and dropped the box into the boat. He saw with relief that the sheriff was still out cold as he untied the boat from the wharf, jumped into it and pushed out into the river.

The little rowboat was about fifty yards from shore and Frazer was having a little trouble rowing against the strong current that swept down toward the roaring waterfall, when he felt something give way under his right foot. Almost instantly that foot was soaking wet up past the ankle. There was the sound of water gurgling and bubbling. With a little cry, Frazer looked down at the bottom of the boat. It was coming in around the edges of a square of wood that had been not quite sawed all the way through, right where his foot, braced for rowing, would be placed and pressure put upon it. The water was coming in fast. The bottom of the boat was already covered and Frazer's other foot was immersed, in just those few seconds. He screamed, a shrill, horror-struck sound, like the shriek of some night animal.

"Lyman!" he gasped. "In case the poison didn't work, he was going to get me this way! He was going to drown me!"

HE REMEMBERED that tomorrow, it was his, Frazer's turn, to row across the river alone, take the road over there into the nearest town for supplies and cigarettes. Clever, cautious Lyman! It would be just like him to make doubly sure of a crime to have a second method all worked out in case the first one failed. It seemed in the sudden silence over the river that from somewhere, Frazer could hear Lyman's high pitched, derisive laugh. The sound grew louder and Frazer realized that it wasn't just his imagination. Somebody *was* laughing. At the same time, he realized that it wasn't Lyman, couldn't be the dead man. It was that damned sheriff, Clayburn, back on shore by the dock.

When the laughter cut off, Clayburn's voice rolled echoingly across the river as he shouted: "Where are you, fella? Come back here! Serves me right, I suppose, but damned if I'm ever goin' to josh with you again. Didn't reckon you'd take me *that* serious! It *is* agin the law in this state to fish after nine o'clock at night but I wasn't really going to take you in for it. Was just goin' to scare you some, give you a warning, but you..."

The rest of Clayburn's words faded off and Frazer didn't seem to hear them. He was too busy trying, vainly, to bail out the water that was nearly

filling the boat, with one hand, and to try and plug up the hole where the section that Lyman had sawed through had come loose, with the other. He wasn't having any success other way. In another moment the little rowboat went completely under water and heeled over, spilling Frazer, screaming, into the chill, swirling water of the river. He managed to reach out and claw a grip onto the side of the overturned boat and hold on for all he was worth. But he knew that only gave him another few minutes to live, at the most. The half submerged boat was drifting fast toward the falls, carried along by the current, the oars gone.

As the roar of the falls grew louder, Frazer seemed to hear little Lyman telling him: "The trouble with you big, husky, stupid oafs is that you get panicky. You don't *think*. You let your *emotions* run away with you!" Frazer had an idea that this would have never happened to Lyman. His dead partner wouldn't have let the sheriff throw him into a scare like that. Smart-guy Lyman would probably have somehow figured it out that the sheriff couldn't have possibly been talking about a murder. Frazer would have to tell Lyman about this, admit once and for all that he, Frazer, was just a big dumb slob like Lyman had always said. He had an idea that he would be seeing Lyman soon to tell him that.

Then he felt the terrible pull and drag of the water at the edge of the falls, felt his fingers yanked lose from their grip on the edge of the overturned boat and he stopped having ideas. There was nothing but the all-over pounding roar of millions of tons of water and the sensation that he was like one of the little matchstick boats that used to rush, spinning and twisting through the torrent of water in the gutter after a storm, back when he was a kid...

☆

Payoff in Lead

by R. M. F. Joses

She knew Jim couldn't be guilty.

The murdered man was trying to leave a message, but what did the extra shells mean?

HE JUMPED. For an instant, space was a dizzy vortex of sky and earth and sun. Then he hit the hillside below

the road and a knifing shock drove through his ankle. The soft earth of the slope slammed against his face and he was rolling, twisting over and over in the powdery soil.

Above him on the mountain road, the jeep ground to a stop in a cloud of dust and a reverse gear shrieked. A hoarse yell ordered him to stop, but Jim Cory couldn't now if he tried. Momentum sent him spinning in a tangle of arms and legs. His side hit a rock and a groan wrenched from him, then another as he spun against a sapling. The tree checked his roll enough for him to grab the trunk and pull himself to his feet. The hillside rocked crazy before his dizzy eyes and his twisted ankle ached dully.

"Come back here, you damned fool!"

He twisted a dirt-streaked face back for a glimpse of the two deputies standing on the shoulder of he road, a hundred feet above him, before he plunged on, running downhill in leaping steps that carried him six feet in each jump. Something cut past his head with a whirring sound and bark splintered angrily from a tree ahead of him. On the heels of it, the report of a pistol reached him, and Cory dodged instinctively.

They were shooting now—not to warn but to kill. He doubled his pace and the pain in his left ankle became almost unbearable each time he landed on it. Spiny manzanita branches lashed at his bare arms, leaving long bleeding gashes in the skin.

A hundred yards ahead of him, the barren slope flattened into a screen of cottonwoods and alders along the stream bed. There he would be safe, at least for the moment; but here on the slope there was no protection, nothing to shield him from gunfire.

Two more pistol-shots cracked behind him as dust spurted where he had been a moment before. Cory lunged to the left and landed on the bad ankle with a jolt that tore a smothered cry of pain from his open mouth. The leg crumpled under him and he fell headlong, beginning the crazy roll again. A boulder stopped him this time and he struggled upright, dazed, a smear of blood across his forehead where it had struck a jagged corner of the rock.

Sheer desperation forced him on; minutes later, when he reached the timber, his eyes were glazed with exhaustion and pain. He stopped in the fringe of trees, chest heaving, and watched the jeep swing around and head back with one of the deputies behind the wheel. The other began the descent to the canyon bottom and Cory saw sunlight wink on the pistol in the man's hand.

He turned and hobbled through the underbrush, wincing with each step, pushing deeper into the timber.

THE SUN was below Bald Mountain and dusk had crept along the stream. A blue, crested kingfisher dove into the shallows of a pool and came out with a fingerling in its beak. Swooping across the stream it lit on a branch above Cory's head and ate the trout.

Wryly, he wondered how raw fish would taste .Hunger-cramps convulsed his stomach but he couldn't risk a fire. Around the next bend in the stream the road crossed and a section of the wood bridge was in sight of his hiding place. He huddled in a niche in the granite formed by high waters and longed for a number of things that were as far out of his reach at the moment as the Hope Diamond: a steak, for instance, medium rare, thank you, with plenty of french-fries; a chance to soak his throbbing ankle in hot water; or even just a smoke instead of the unlit cigarette that hung from his lips. He couldn't risk lighting that, either. The smell of burning tobacco would be a dead giveaway if anyone came along the stream.

Most of all, he wished Justin Kinter's murder wasn't hanging on his neck like a paving stone.

Headlights swept over the bridge and a car rumbled halfway across the planks. Cory hunched back into his niche as a spotlight played up and down the stream. They were back again. Every twenty minutes, a car had stopped on the bridge and searched the banks for him. The hills must be full of men hunting him; it was only a matter of time before they flushed him.

The spot blinked out and the car moved on. Cory slumped against the rock at his back. He was young but strain and fatigue aged his features and his gray eyes restlessly moved around him. He touched the cut on his forehead gingerly. The bleeding had stopped, but the jagged line running into his sandy hair was puffed and sore.

Narrowing his eyes at the sky, he decided it was dark enough now to try a trip down to the stream. He stood and caught his breath as weight bore on his ankle. The laces of his boot were loosened but the swollen flesh took up all the slack.

Mud-caked khaki pants clinging to his legs, he made his way down to the stream, drank and washed the cut. By the time he got back to his niche he was weak and sick with the pain of his ankle. Badly sprained, maybe broken. In either case it was no asset to a fugitive from justice.

THE ANKLE was a finishing touch to the nightmare that began when he found Kinter on the shelf jutting from the side of Bald Mountain, dead, with a bullet-wound through his chest: A nightmare that had burst into terrifying reality when Norvak, the sheriff, had said curtly, "Maybe it was supposed to look like an accident, but it wasn't one; and everything points to you, Cory."

He had watched the gradual change in the man's lined face, had seen uncertainty shade into suspicion, and finally that into conviction. In the jeep with the two deputies, Cory had realized for the first time the sheer weight of evidence against him. Circumstantial, true, but piece by piece it was mountainous. The argument he and Kinter had the night before the man was killed—the argument that had ended with Kinter snapping, "You'll see me dead before I let you marry Eveline!"

That in itself was bad enough, Jim thought, testing his weight on the ankle, but that wasn't all. Of the three of them in the woods at the time Kinter had been shot—Mark Fitch, Downs and himself—only his gun had been fired recently. The other two were clean.

He limped toward higher ground. The sunset had faded to purple and the whispering of the stream grew fainter as Cory climbed. He came out on the crest of the ridge and below him the lodge lay, a sprawling shake building at the foot of Bald Mountain, its windows yellow with light. Somewhere in the cluster of lights Kinter's murderer was congratulating himself on having gotten away with it. It had to be either Nelson Downs or Mark Fitch—but which, and why?

The hunting trip had been Eveline's idea. "It isn't you, Jim. Dad's just soured on marriage since my mother left him. Get him out in the hills and he'll loosen up."

Kinter had loosened up, all right, Cory thought—with a slug from a high-powered rifle through him.

It still seemed strange how the man had called Jim, a day after accepting the invitation, to ask if he could bring the other two along. *Fitch and Downs.* The names came back to Cory again. One or the other. The reason was hidden as deeply as the proof, but both were somewhere. An undercurrent of tension had existed between the three men; Jim had sensed that from the start of the trip. Both of them worked for Kinter and had for years, but Jim couldn't un-

derstand why Kinter had squeezed them into the trip with the friction between them.

He passed over the ridge and moved down towards the rear of the lodge. He was close enough now to the buildings to hear a murmur of voices and catch a tantilizing smell of frying food. A pine cone crunched under his foot and he swore silently. Chances were Norvak, the sheriff, was counting on him to backtrack; without food or money, he couldn't do anything else.

He reached the rear of the main building, then worked east, clinging to the shadows. The cabin he and Downs had shared was somewhere in this direction and Cory was banking on its being empty and unguarded. Even if he couldn't get food there, at least his money was in the cabin.

Light filtering through the trees reached him and he edged towards the bright window. Through the edge of it he could see Downs inside. The man was facing the window, talking, and the murmur of his crisp voice reached Cory. In his fifties, Downs was a handsome man with wavy grey hair, a moustache to match and a thin, tanned face.

Jim circled the window, but Downs' companion was hidden from his view. He heard Downs' tone sharpen, then a chair scuffed and a shaft of light fell on the ground as the door opened.

Jim pressed back against the side of the building as a girl came out and walked fast towards the lodge, her head held high and stiff. Hobbling in the shadows, he paralleled her path until she was beyond voice range of the cabin. Then, "Eveline!"

The quick grating of her heels in the gravel stopped and she turned at his voice, her lips parted, eyes searching the darkness. He moved a step closer and then she saw him. She looked back at the cabin once and moved into the shadows to meet him.

DIMLY HE saw the soft contour of her pale, strained face, the gentle flow of jet black hair, and the unspoken question in her dark eyes. Sharp awareness came to him that this was the daughter of the man he was accused of killing. Greater than anything else, that fact stood now.

"Whether you believe me or not," he said slowly, meeting her searching eyes. "I didn't do it."

She hesitated for an instant, then her arms tightened around his shoulders. "I never really believed you did, Jim; all the way here on the plane I kept telling myself it wasn't true."

The perfume of her hair clung in his nostrils. He said her name over and over in a kind of litany until she raised her face. "Jim, we've got to do something. These men here, the sheriff, they all say you shot Dad. Just now, Nelson Downs was trying to make me believe it."

"Do something, sure," Cory said bitingly. "What we need now is a miracle."

Her fingers tightened on his arms. "Tell me about it, Jim—everything that happened. I want to hear it from you."

Cory shrugged hopelessly. "There isn't much to tell. The four of us went out early this morning and split up. A couple of hours later while I was on the east side of Bald Mountain I heard a shot, and a minute or two later, three more close together."

The girl frowned. "That was Dad, calling for help?"

Cory nodded. "I headed in the direction of the shots and found him on the other side. He was on a granite shelf behind some boulders. By the time I got to him, it was too late to do anything for him."

The girl's teeth tugged at her lip. "But he didn't...didn't die right away?"

"No. He was hit about fifteen feet away from where I found him. His binoculars were there, smashed where

they had fallen off his neck. He crawled behind the rocks."

Cory didn't mention the trail of blood across the barren granite that marked Kinter's agonized effort to find cover. "It was no hunting-accident; your father was in plain sight and he was wearing a red shirt. Norvak could tell from the point the bullet hit him that the person who shot him was standing in the open about fifty feet away. The way the ground lies up there, it couldn't have been anything else. There's no bullet to check; it didn't stop when it hit him."

"What else?"

Cory moved his shoulders. "A few empty shells and a box of matches in his hand. I guess..." He broke off abruptly and narrowed his eyes, trying to recall the scene where he'd found Kinter. "There were five empty cases," he said thoughtfully, "but I'd swear I only heard three shots—not counting the first one."

"Couldn't either Downs or Fitch have shot Dad and cleaned the rifle afterwards?" the girl asked earnestly.

"That's what I tried to tell Norvak. He wouldn't listen; it still doesn't explain the two extra cases." His teeth ground as he shifted his twisted ankle. "What difference does it make? There's no use. I came back here to get some money and food, but I know now I was crazy to jump out of the car."

The girl's hair whipped her cheeks as she shook her head. "Don't call it quits," she pleaded. "Dad knew who shot him and he must have known he was dying. He would have left something to point to the right person. I know he would."

"That's what I thought. I tried to figure out what I would have done and the only thing that came to me was to scratch a name or initial in a rifle stock. But there wasn't anything on his."

"There still must be something, Jim. Go back to the place where you found him. Please, just as a last chance."

Jim gave her a thin smile. "All right. One last shot at it, then they can have me; I can't keep on running."

The quick, tight pressure of her cheek against his still rested on it as he worked his way between the cabins, moving from one patch of darkness to the next as fast as his ankle permitted. The moon was up now, full and bright, and to reach the base of Bald Mountain, he had to cross the road running in front of the lodge. He clung to the timbered shoulder and watched the building a few hundred yards away. A car was stopped outside the long porch, headlights off, and Jim gambled they wouldn't go on. He filled his lungs and skipped awkwardly across.

He lost. Light flooded the road as he reached the other side. For an instant it caught him frozen against the trunk of a tree, then, as his breath stuck in his throat, the car wheeled and moved in the other direction. His jaws aching from tension, he turned and jerked shock still at the sudden exclamation of his name.

HE WHIRLED. A few feet away Mark Fitch stood, short, barrel-chested, with surprise stamped on his face. Cory saw Fitch's eyes note his empty hands and confidence flood the man's heavy face.

"You haven't got a prayer, Cory," the man said, moving closer. "Don't be crazy."

"I'll take my chances."

"You didn't give Kinter one. What makes you think you deserve anything?"

The swelling of the man's chest and parting of his lips gave Cory warning of the yell that was coming. He ducked in towards the man, swinging with his left. Fitch moved quickly for a stocky man. His forearm knocked down Jim's jab, but the yell died before it sounded.

Cory gritted his teeth and shifted

to the bad ankle. Everything he had went behind the right to the man's head and he felt the jar travel to his shoulder. Fitch grunted hollowly and stumbled back against a tree. Jim was on him before he could move, pounding rights and lefts into the man's belly until his guard dropped. Then Jim swung once more with the right.

He stood with his legs spread and back heaving over the unconscious man. Sweat glistened on his strained face as he watched for a movement, then seeing none, he limped into the timber.

●

The granite shelf stood out on the hillside like a layer of ice in the moonlight. Cory slid to his knees as he reached the lower edge of it, his lungs raw with exertion. Behind him the slope of Bald Mountain angled darkly down to the valley and a pinpoint of light marked the lodge. Wind hummed in the pines and the underbrush stirred at his back with secretive sounds.

Jim pulled himself to his feet and moved up to the granite to where a few fragments of glass marked Kinter's fall. He stood there, reconstructing the scene as he had earlier that day. Kinter had been crossing the shelf, heading down the ridge, when the bullet hit him. The angle of the wound established that.

Facing in the direction Kinter had been walking, he calculated the point from which the shot had come, a point well out of the timber in the open. It had to be there; Kinter was out of range from any other direction. Cory saw how it happened: Kinter crossing the granite towards the man facing him, unsuspecting, an easy target. Then, a rifle raised quickly, the trigger pulled and Justin Kinter pitching forward.

A trail of black smears on the rock pointed the tortured path of the man to the cluster of boulders where Jim had found him. There the smears mushroomed into a pool on the granite. Kinter had huddled there while life slowly drained out of him and his murderer had been stalemated. So long as Kinter still had his rifle, the killer wouldn't dare follow him.

Eveline was right. Somehow her father must have named his murderer. But how? No one carried paper and pencil on a deerhunt and the steel-jacketed bullets Kinter had been using wouldn't mark the granite like a soft lead cartridge.

The crumpled match-folder caught Cory's eye and he picked it up. What had Kinter been doing with it just before he died, and why the five empties after only three shots from Kinter's gun?

HE DROPPED to his knees and searched the rock-surface, moving fast. Time was closing in on him. Mark Fitch must have recovered consciousness long before and Norvak's deputies would be combing the hills. Jim tore out one of the matches and lit it, bending close to the granite. Something bright, wedged in a crack, caught his eye and he dug at it with raw fingers until it came free. A steel jacketed bullet, marred and scratched against the rock.

He lit another match and peered in the crack. A second bullet caught part-way down the fissure shined in the match light. Here was the explanation of the five empty cases and the three shots. Kinter had pried the bullets out of two of them, using the crack in the granite. But that still didn't tell Cory why.

The match burned low and he dropped it. Another flared in his fingers and he moved it an inch away from the surface. Near the base of one boulder gray crystaline powder met his searching eyes and he crawled closer to it. The crystals seemed to form some indistinct pattern, hardly discernible against the rock. Cory lowered the match, then dropped it as flame licked at his fingertips.

For an instant the flame flickered, then brightened into a hissing flare that raced across the rock. His face was only inches away and he jerked back, but the flare died almost as suddenly as it had begun. Its brilliance still danced before his eyes as he struck another match with shaking fingers. In the wavering light, letters stood graven in the rock by a burning trail of powder.

The matches in Kinter's hand, the unexplained empty cases, Cory realized what they meant now. With the last of his ebbing strength, Kinter had forced the bullets out of the cases and used the powder to trace his murderer's initials. Then, a moment before he could fire the powder, death had struck. Here was something Norvak would be forced to believe, a dying man's last effort. Relief flooded Jim as he stood and turned. Then it died in a cold chill.

He saw the figure in the moonlight, squat, heavy, the frosty glow casting a faint shimmer over the gun in the man's hand. Speechless, Jim watched as the man moved forward, half-crouched, and jerked the pistol at him.

"Move, Cory. Let's see the fireworks."

The beam of a flashlight fell on the rock and the initials *M.F.* stood out black against the granite. Fitch grunted and his bootheel ground against the powder burns, trying unsuccessfully to scuff them out. He looked up a showed Jim a puffed eye and bruised mouth.

"I was afraid Kinter would do something like that; not that it matters now."

Cory took a step towards the man, his jaw muscles knotting and the pistol swung at his belly. "Come ahead, Cory," Fitch taunted. "I'd like nothing better than to pay you back for that slugging down at the road."

"You're going to, anyway," Jim said. "So long as I know you killed Kinter, you aren't going to turn me over to Norvak."

The skin around the man's mouth was taunt. "I'll turn you over—but you won't be talking when I do. I'm one of his deputies." He grinned icily. "Would you believe it? He deputized the whole lot of us." The grin disappeared as he swung the pistol again. "Now move. Back to where we started down by the lodge. Only this time I've got a gun; I like it better that way."

JIM HOBBLED across the granite shelf with Fitch a few paces at his back. This time there was no escape for him. With his ankle in the shape it was after climbing Bald Mountain it was all he could do to walk, let alone making a run for it.

"A jury might have given you a break, Cory," Fitch mocked. "I can't afford to and I don't give breaks to people who crowd me—like Kinter. If he'd given me time, I would have made good every cent I squeezed out of the business. All I needed was a little luck. But not Kinter. He would have thrown the book at me as soon as he uncovered enough."

Through clenched teeth, Jim said, "You're crazy, Fitch; he wouldn't have asked you up here if he'd suspected you of anything."

"Don't kid yourself. Kinter had a line on me, only he wasn't sure whether it was me or Downs. He got us up here so his auditor could go through our records without any interruptions. All very hush-hush and undercover. Well, they won't find anything that easily and the whole thing will break down with Kinter dead. I'll have time, all the time I want."

They were in the timber now and the trees shaded out the moonlight. Fitch kept far enough back so there was no chance to wheel and knock down the gun. Cory slipped and grabbed a branch for support. The limb arched in spring-like tension and snapped back as Jim released it.

Behind him, Fitch swore as the

branch switched against him, and hope raced in Cory. With each step bringing him closer to eternity, anything was worth the chance.

They were almost at the bottom of the slope when Jim took it. A low-hanging limb crossed their path and he waited until he was a few feet from it. Deliberately, he stumbled and fell forward, clutching at the branch and letting his full weight bear against it. Almost on the ground he let go and the limb whistled back over his head.

Fitch saw it coming and ducked to one side. The flashlight in his hand swung in a crazy arc and the tip of the limb raked his face. The man yelled and the light fell from his hand. Cory saw the pistol then in a sweep of the beam, halfway between them on the pine needles. Scrambling for it, he lit fullforce on his ankle and a pain-blinding shock sent him sprawling. Helpless, he saw Fitch paw at the pistol, sweep it up in his hand, then glaring light showed him the man half-erect with the gun clenched in his fingers.

For a terrifying instant the muzzle of the pistol centered on Cory, then swung to the light and flame spurted from it. The light winked out, and Sheriff Norvak's calm voice drifted through the darkness. "There's a half pound of buckshot in this gun, Fitch. Better drop yours unless you want a load of it."

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Side by side, Cory and Eveline Kinter watched Norvak's deputies load Fitch in a car and seat themselves on either side of the man. Jim's ankle throbbed, his head ached and he was ravenous, but he felt fine. In fact, he felt better than he could ever remember. He grinned down at the girl and tightened his hold on her arm.

Sheepishly, the girl said, "Jim, I've got to tell you that Norvak didn't just happen to find you; I told him where you were."

"You told him?"

"I did," she admitted firmly. "After you left, I tried to find Mark Fitch. He was gone and no one knew where. I couldn't stand waiting; I was sure he had followed you. So I went to Sheriff Norvak and told him everything."

Jim was stil staring at the girl open-mouthed when Norvak came out of the lodge.

"Listen," Cory whispered to her. "Suppose I hadn't found anything. Do you know what that would do to you?"

Norvak stopped in front of them. "About five years in the woman's penetentiary," he supplied. He leveled a thick forefinger at Jim. "I've already eaten crow for your benefit, Cory. Now it's my turn. I guess we could still drum up a pretty good charge against you for all you've done today, but we'll forget it on one condition."

Jim didn't feel so good now. "What's that?"

Norvak's weathered face broke in a sudden grin. "Marry the girl. Anybody who let a girl like that one get away deserves to be locked up."

SILVER SCREAM

by Philip St. John

There were plenty of screams when the lights came on . . .

IT WAS a typical Hollywood party, junior-size, with the only good thing the liquor, and nobody enjoying that. I drained my highball, watching the host. Rod Greshan was making corny love to Shasta's new find, Linda Peters; her husband Bob was watching it with me, pretending he didn't care. But his lips were too tight, and he was too quick to lift his glass when Linda looked his way.

Me, I'd come on business; I was fed up on writing all the good lines for Shasta's epics and seeing him get screen-credit on his shopworn reputation. When he had me assigned to the latest with him, I saw magenta, and the others had to pull us apart. Now I'd come out to punch his nose into the back of his neck, and found the others there; I was wondering whether Greshan had planned it that way.

Somebody shoved another glass into my hand, and I looked up to see Sue Brail, the prettiest redhead in Cali-

The one person who should have killed Rod Greshan, hadn't done it; that left Sue and me as the best candidates . . .

fornia, even if she couldn't act. After her marriage to Greshan broke up in divorce, I'd tried giving her the rush, but now that was written down among my failures and almost forgotten. Even with her four-year-old kid, I'd have been willing to revive it; but she was off men for good, it seemed.

"Hi, Blake," she said, and her voice did more to me than the perfect thirty-six she was half-displaying under what they called a dress out here. "You look as fed up as I am with this; let's get some fresh air."

"What about Vic Hallet?" I asked. Vic had turned up in the divorce proceedings, vaguely; and Sue had been seen with him—off and on—since. He'd probably brought her along, and the scandal-column he ran for the paper was poison enough; I didn't want trouble with him.

She shrugged, and gave me a hand up. It wasn't smart, maybe—but I didn't need begging. There was a moon out, and the air smelled better as we located a porch swing out on the terrace. Then I forgot the air as Sue dropped down beside me; she started to say something about the part she had in a Western quickie, decided it wasn't worth talking about, and leaned back against me.

From the way she met me as I bent over, she'd gone a long time without being kissed properly. Her hands crept up to the back of my neck, and she leaned backwards. The dress obligingly rubbed against the back of the swing and began to come off one shoulder, but she didn't seem to know it. Her lips were burning against mine, and—

"Damn!" She came upright, making a frantic grab for something, while I was still trying to get my senses back. Then I saw she was examining a hole in one stocking, snagged against the rough edge of the glider. "My last decent pair, too. Maybe, if I cover it with nail polish... 'Scuse me, Blake, while I find what I did with my bag."

Women! She was still getting three hundred a week from Rod Greshan, plus maybe half that from her work in the quickies—and she had to worry about nylons. I finished the drink, grunted, and got up to look for more. The library window was open, and the shortest route to the kitchen, so I headed for it.

GRESHAN and Vic Hallet were there, moving a big mahogany table over under one light. "Gonna show movies," Greshan announced. "Gotta get alla lights out. Damn servants all out, switch won't work. You wanna get up'n unscrew the bulb?"

"I want a drink," I told him.

He'd had plenty, but he nodded. "'Sa good idea."

We all trooped back to the kitchen, where Vic mixed them. I left them there and headed back to the terrace, but Sue hadn't come back. Maybe two or three minutes later, Vic popped out and dropped down beside me.

"Damned shame," he said idly. "Sue's a good kid. Hear the latest? Umm. Greshan's so hopped up about Linda Peters, he's going to buy her a divorce from Bob and marry her. Now he figures on cutting Sue down to fifty a week for the kid, so he can spend the rest on Linda. And Sue, the dope, never even had a settlement in the divorce. Think you'll get screen-credit for your next?"

He rambled on a couple more minutes, picked up his drink and left. I smoked another cigarette, swore, and waited for Sue; I'd tossed away two more butts before she came back.

"Sorry, Blake," she said. "I had to locate some thread and sew it up. How'd you like to ditch this party?"

It was a good idea—but I didn't have time to say so; a thin, high scream cut out of the library window, the silver voice of Linda Peters tarnishing in a hurry! The scream continued, fading as she must have ducked back to the rest of the house.

I made a jump for the window, then began pushing Sue back. It wasn't too bad, but it was bad enough. Rod Gresham lay on top of the mahogany table, his big leather heels turned up and reflected on the polished surface; his body was crumpled up, his head hanging over the edge—and a pair of woman's manicure scissors were sticking out of the back of his neck, pointed right for the medulla oblongata.

Sue's gasp cut against my ear. "My scissors!"

I could hear feet pounding down the hall, but I made a lunge, grabbed the things, and was back out again. There was a fish-pond for fancy goldfish twenty feet away, and the scissors plunked faintly as they fell into that. Then I had her by the hand, and was dragging her off in a hurry. "Where's your car?"

She pointed, and we made tracks for it. It was far enough away that nobody in the house would have heard it start, and we were heading toward L. A. before she had a chance to catch her breath. I had sense enough not to go too fast, but I was crowding the margin. Finally Sue stirred. "Now they'll think one of us did it, Blake; we shouldn't have left." But her voice wasn't accusing—just worried.

I swung into a drive-in restaurant, waited until the boy had taken our orders for coffee, and brought them. I'd been careful to stop where the light wouldn't hit us in the face, and he wouldn't know we'd been there.

"The last I heard, everyone had moved into the kitchen," I said. "When did you see them last—before you came back out?"

"When I went in for my bag. They were leaving then, going out where there were plenty of drinks. I told them I was leaving, went upstairs to fix my stocking and put my makeup back on—and nobody was around when I came back. Why?"

It could have taken that long, I guessed, and she could have played it the way she told it. But with her wandering around, and Greshan alone in the library...she'd admitted they were her scissors...plus the fact Greshan was cutting off her income...

"I'm just figuring," I told her, and tried to keep my ideas from showing. "There was about a quarter of a drink on the chair near the body. He must have come back to the library, added the rest of it to what he was carrying already—ten minutes, at least, in his condition, for a drink like that, probably fifteen. Then he climbed up, and somebody got him, somehow; maybe when he was losing his balance already, and his head was low enough. Okay—you left right away, just picked up your bag and beat it, maybe fifteen minutes before the cops will figure he got it. I saw you go, just before Vic came out to talk to me; then I got bored and left."

She put her untasted coffee back on the tray, reached up, pulled me down, and kissed me. "Just a natural boy-scout, protector of women! Blake Armour, you damned fool! So you think I killed him?"

"Bob Peters could have," I told her, remembering the look in the guy's eyes when Greshan was kissing his wife. "Anyhow, I'm on your side, Sue."

She shook her head, wonderingly. "What about your own alibi? Vic apparently saw you near the window, handy to him, and the boys on the lot know you had a fight with him. Who do you think will be the cops' number one pin-up boy? I'll bet right now the police are swarming out to your place, all set for the arrest!"

I HADN'T thought of that at all. After all, I knew I hadn't killed the guy, and I guess I'd figured that took care of it. But Sue was right enough; I could practically smell the

cyanide gas. I should have chased her off and gone back to join the party, giving her a better alibi, and at least seeming innocent; but it was too late for that now.

I signalled the boy for the tray, swung the car around, and began heading back. I'd suddenly realized that the cops might be dropping by her place, too, and it wouldn't look too good if she wasn't in to receive them. I told her so, and she started to protest—then decided against it. We were both busy doing some heavy thinking, and didn't have anything to say until I pulled up at her place.

Sue was living in the little four-room-and-bath house she'd bought out in the sticks, after Greshan and she broke up; there was no more swank to it than there was to her battered old Ford. Maybe she was too proud to use the money Greshan kicked in. She hopped out and opened the little garage, and I noticed that the hedges and trees made a perfect cover from the neighbors—which was all to the good. I put the car away, got out, and started for the road.

Her hand pulled me back. "Uh-uh, boy-scout. We're serving scotch and conversation inside; you go back to your room at this time, and you're a gone goose."

"So I'll go to a hotel."

"Where the boys in blue won't think of checking up? Nope. Until we get this thought out, you're staying here. Jimmy's staying with his grandmother in the country this week, so you can have his room—he has a regular bed, so you'll fit. There's no good reason why the police should think we're together, and they won't expect you here."

The phone started ringing just as we got inside the trim little kitchen-dinette. Sue let it ring a few times, and then picked it up, yawning into it. "Hello. Susan Brail... No, you didn't wake me up; I was just getting ready for bed... He *what?*..."

She wasn't much of an actress on the screen, but it sounded fine now. I couldn't make out much from one side of the conversation, except where she told the other person how I'd mentioned going home early, and she'd decided she'd had enough of the party, too. She was doing her best to throw suspicion off me, but smart enough to know she couldn't lay it on thick. Finally, after a series of agreeing to things, she hung up and came back to me.

"They think you did it, Blake, from what I can guess. Wait a minute."

She came out of her bedroom a couple minutes later with a housecoat on, instead of the dress—one of the simple, long ones that shows up every line of a figure, as it should on Sue. She was carrying a bottle and a couple of glasses, and we took our shots neat, before she dropped down on the couch beside me, and gave me what she'd pieced together.

APPARENTLY, they hadn't suspected her, but merely been checking because she'd been at the affair. Linda Peters had mentioned her leaving; Vic had claimed he saw her leave, several minutes before the cops figured Greshan could have been killed. He'd also told about seeing me out on the terrace. Well, I'd never liked the snooper, but most of his story was honest enough, and I couldn't dislike him for a little kind-hearted lying about Sue; I'd have done the same.

"What's Vic Hallet to you?" I asked, letting my arm stay on the back of the couch.

"Nothing—now," she answered, giving a hitch that brought her closer to me. I put the arm down where it fell best, around her waist, and she slid even closer. "There was a time—well, he was a lot more than he should have been, Blake; that's what broke Rod and me up, along with Rod's

drunkenness. But it's a long and sordid story, and it isn't helping solve anything now. What comes next?"

We figured on it, getting nowhere. She was out of it now, as I tried to convince her; that left Linda and Bob Peters, Vic Hallet, and myself. I hadn't done it, but Bob Peters should have—even if he hadn't. Proving it would be the only way to save me—but, as she reminded me, I was only the guy who sometimes did the scripts for private eye stories; I wasn't an experienced man myself. The talk petered down, while we turned on the radio, listening to the broadcasts and learning nothing beyond the fact the cops were looking for me. And finally she broke out of the clinch and pushed me away.

"Uh-uh, it's three o'clock, Blake, and we need our sleep. I like you, boy-scout, maybe more than I thought I'd like a man again until tonight. But I'd like you a lot better alive next year than framed, and this isn't getting us anywhere; you'll find everything ready in Jimmy's room. 'Night."

●

She woke me up next morning with the smell of coffee under my nose, dropping down on the bed and holding the cup while I drank. She looked even better in a little gingham housedress. Even though the seam had been ripped out and let down, it was still short enough to show that her legs were assets in any house.

"The cops were here early," she told me quietly. "I'm still safe enough, though they warned me to stay where they could find me; they weren't at all like those tough cops in the movies."

"No, most of them aren't." I waved the toast away, and gulped down the tomato juice, feeling some of the fuzz go out of my head. "They're just guys doing a job, like you and me—or like we should be, if this hadn't come up."

"How far is it to Mexico, Blake? And could we make it in one day? Maybe if we started now, I could drive you there and come back—"

"Not a chance. But if you want to lend me your car—" I saw her start to nod, and cut off the idea before it formed. "Not to Mexico! I want to drive over and take a look at Bob Peters' place. I'm not cut out for running around dodging police in forty-eight states and three countries, kid; if it comes to that, I'll take my chances with twelve men and a good lawyer. But if I can find anything to give me a good lead, maybe I can remember some of my crime scripts."

SHE ARGUED about that, but finally compromised by driving me, with me in the rear, well hidden. She was probably right—I'd have been spotted half way there. As it was, I waited until the car came to a stop in a gravelled lane, waited longer while she looked things over, and then went out on the double. Luck was with me; one of the windows was unlocked, and I swarmed inside on the double.

I started with the basement, where Peters had his workshop; I'd been to the house before, letting him handle some law-affairs for me, back when I was getting more screen credits and could afford good legal help. I figured a toolshop was the best place to begin; but there wasn't anything there.

The trouble was that I didn't know what I was looking for. In a script, there should have been a diary, or a letter, or maybe some bloody clothes. But somehow I didn't expect them—and didn't find them. I went through the basement, through the first floor, and up the second, hoping the servants were either out or would stay

in their own part of the house. I stumbled on something, once, and had heart-failure for long minutes; but nothing came of it.

I felt better on the second floor, since they wouldn't be to be up here. I listened outside the master bedroom, heard nothing, and eased the door open slowly.

It wasn't exactly a pain when it hit; I just went numb and sick all over; my knees went out from under me, and hot blackness swept in on me. My eyes wouldn't focus, and things swam about in circles.

But I could still hear, and Bob Peters was busy on the phone. His words babbled into it, telling how he'd heard a noise that woke him up, waited, and caught me—trying to murder him, as he put it. Even in my semi-conscious state, I knew that the guy wasn't putting on an act; he was still scared, and he was the most genuine man-alone-with-murderer I'll probably ever hear.

But some of the fog was clearing, and I knew I had to do something. I tried to get to my feet; no use. Finally, I hitched forward, expecting him to turn at the first movement. I guess his own voice drowned out what sound I made on the rung. Then my hands were on his ankles, and the fog was gone. I jerked, he came down, and I was on him.

It didn't take long. He was whipped before he was hit, scared into a blue funk. I put the phone back, and began tieing his hands and feet together with the sash from his robe.

"Take it easy," I told him. "I'm not here to kill you, damn it; I was looking for proof that you killed Greshan, but I've learned better. You didn't, I didn't—nobody did. Maybe he was just tired of living—I dunno. There. You can yell if you want to—the cops will be here in five minutes, anyhow. Be seeing you."

He was tied up by then, and I went out, knocking my fist into the face of one of Peters' man servants as I went. There was no other trouble, and I was out, into the car as Sue saw me and threw the door open. We got out of there like a scared rabbit, with the gears taking it somehow, I was slumped forward in the front seat now, with my face practically buried in the hem of Sue's dress. It had slid up half-way to her hips as she swung to the door and back, and now she made half-hearted efforts to straighten it. But I was too busy thinking to give more than half appreciation to the view.

I filled in the details for her in a hurry. "So it wasn't Peters," I finished; "I'm sure of that."

I DIDN'T want to go on. Peters hadn't killed Greshan; I hadn't. And Sue—I let my eyes run up to her face and back down to her legs, and I didn't like the idea. If she had killed Rod Greshan, and I was sure of it—well, what would I do? I couldn't just lie low in the car, studying the run in her stocking.

Then it hit me—a lot of things all together, things that had probably been lying in my head all the time. "Sue, you've got a run."

She swore, then shrugged. "I always have, it seems. But these are cheap ones—seventy-nine cent seconds. I—oh, bother the stockings!"

Girls who made nearly five hundred a week, counting everything, but let out the hems in their housedresses and sewed up seams in their best stockings just didn't exist without a reason. I'm no expert on women, but I know that much; finally I fitted some of it together, along with the hints she'd dropped the night before.

"So Jimmy isn't Rod Greshan's kid," I said finally, watching her. She jerked the car, nearly went into a ditch, and then brought it back; her eyes were tense, and her lips white,

but she looked down and nodded.

I could see what she meant by sordid story now—a pretty old story, I guess, when a kid of seventeen marries a man twice her age, and he turns out to be a drunken sort of a pig. Most of those girls probably get away with it, but Sue'd been out of luck from the start, because the snake in the bushes had also been a louse.

"I suppose you had blood-tests made to be sure? Yeah, and he liked that! So he's been shaking you down for every cent he could get since then, leaving you just enough to get by on. Why didn't you tell him to peddle his kite and go see Greshan about it, kid? You can earn your own way."

Her lips trembled a little, but her voice was steady enough. "And have Jimmy pointed to by every other kid whose evil-minded mother ever read about the affair in the papers? No, thanks, Blake; I didn't want Rod's money, and I didn't want him getting it. But I couldn't do that to Jimmy—he's a swell little tyke, whatever his father and mother were."

I couldn't see anything wrong with the mother—but the father was another matter. "We're going there, kid, and I'm tired of riding down here."

I slid up, and she tensed again; but then the car was heading the way I wanted it to go, and she let it out.

I could remember a lot of things, but only one bothered me. "Sure your manicure scissors aren't in your bag? A lot of them look alike."

She handed the bag over, and I riffled through it. The scissors were there, all right—the same type as the ones that had killed Greshan, but mercifully not the murder ones. "So maybe those were Linda's, and maybe they just happened to be around; it doesn't matter. But I noticed Rod was wearing leather heels on his shoes—and I can remember the top of that table—without a scratch mark on it! Rod wasn't on it when he was killed, Sue. He was put there, just as part of his drink was poured down the drain."

WE CAME to a red light then, and drew up beside a police car, before we even noticed it. The cops were looking straight ahead, though; then the light changed, just as one of them looked around. Sue hit the gas, and we screamed away. She took a corner on two wheels, ducked into an alley I thought was a dead end, braked, came almost to a halt, and swung ninety degrees and down another alley. We did a few more fancy turns, before coming out on Vine street and joining the other cars, cruising along normally. Finally she headed back toward Vic Hallet's apartment.

"Go on," she said; she probably knew what was behind my idea, since I'd told her about joining Hallet and Greshan in the kitchen. But she wanted to check her deductions against mine.

"So, Vic must have killed him in the kitchen, carried him in, and put him there. He was out with me in a couple of minutes, and mixing with the guests after that—so he looked pure as the purest snow. And whoever thought he had a motive? He even told me about Rod's planning to cut down your weekly amount, but I didn't see the connection."

Three hundred a week is a nice sum of money for a man who likes to live nicely, but only makes what a gossip columnist of local fame can expect. Vic would have hated to see his little graft of blackmail dry up at the source—hate it enough to kill Greshan before he could cut it off.

"Was the four hundred also in Greshan's will?" I asked.

She nodded. "He fixed it that way, or told me he did."

●

Then we were at the apartment-building, a nice ritzy place for a two-bit reporter. I tried to push Sue back, but she wasn't having any. "My party, too," she said. I figured maybe she was right; she wouldn't be squeamish at anything I did to him.

I didn't bother to ring and give him warning; I hit a button at random, waited till the door buzzed, and sailed in. Sue held up three fingers, and we went up the stairs, moving on the double. Below, a querelous voice wanted to know who it was, but we weren't bothering to announce ourselves.

It was a new building, and I had an idea the contractors had saved a little here and there. I was right; when my shoulder hit the door, the small screws in the lock popped out and I almost went down on my face. Sue's hand grabbed me, helping to keep my balance. And then I was charging through the foyer, and into the living room.

Vic Hallet came out of the dining alcove, his bland face as smooth as oiled silk, and his robe something out of the latest Esquire. But his voice had an edge to it. "Nice manners, Blake. Well, well, Sue, so you've taken to going with murderers."

"I've given it up, Vic," she said levelly. "And blackmailers. I've found there's more than one kind of man—a few are decent!"

He sniggered at that. "And after all we were to each other, darling!"

That's when I hit him, twisting my hand as it met his face, and letting my ring rake out a section of flesh from under his eye. Blood oozed out, and he went down, the grin leaving his face, and something grey and cold replacing it. He drew back against the wall and started to get up. I waited.

Vic was up—and something big and blue and ugly came out of his robe and pointed straight at my stomach.

"Prepared for all contingencies," he said. "I knew something was odd when you hit that door. This took only a second to pick up. Too bad you didn't have a spare second, Blake; too bad I'll have to shoot you in the stomach and let you die here slowly while I get around to calling the police about how you tried to kill me because I could prove you were the only man convenient to Rod. We'll miss you, Blake!"

He was as satisfied a louse as there could be, without exploding. I probably would have been scared green, normally; but too much had been happening, and maybe none of it felt quite real. I took a couple of steps toward him; he waited for me to get just near enough to begin hoping. Then his hand stiffened, and I stopped; Sue started forward, but he stopped her.

"You'll only make the bullet come out quicker, darling. And you won't make any trouble. Our little Jimmy needs all your love and care, Sue. You'll stay right here with me and tell the police how your boyfriend tried to kill me. All right, Blake, here it comes!"

I KICKED at the gun, knowing I was too far from it. My foot missed—but Hallet jumped back a step, and I was in luck; he didn't squeeze the trigger, as I'd expected. Then I was on him, cuffing the automatic down with one hand and driving at him, using whatever I had—knees, hands, heels. He spun backwards as the automatic hit the floor, jarred from a blow to the nose.

Then my luck changed; as I started for him, my foot hit the gun, sliding it over the rug, and right into his hand! He caught on quick. His legs kicked him back against the wall, and the gun came up.

It was too late to do anything about it. I came to a halt and stood facing him again as he got up slowly, red

hate seeping over his battered face.

"I'm going to like this," he said tensely. "I never thought I would, Blake. I had a helluva time driving those things into Rod's neck; every minute I was there talking to you afterwards, I was sick in my guts. But this is going to be different. You asked for it—now you'll get it."

"Where'd you get the scissors?" Sue asked sharply; I knew she was stalling for time, and that this was something that might as well be over and done with. I tried to motion her to shut up, and he grinned crookedly, without taking his eyes off me.

"Department store. They sell them, you know—and they fit in the pocket, aren't suspicious, can't be traced—and can kill a man just as well as a butcher-knife, if used right. Rod told me three days ago he was changing his allotment to you and his will—talked it all over with Bob Peters when I was there. So I had plenty of time to figure it out; anything you'd like to know, Blake?"

"Go to hell!"

He grinned again. "I probably will; but I might as well go for killing two, as for killing Rod alone. Watch the birdie, bright boy!"

His finger began tightening slowly, and Sue let out a scream and tried to run between us. I heard the report of an automatic, just as I jumped to head her off, but I couldn't feel any pain. Then I noticed Vic Hallet settling down to the floor, letting his gun fall from his fingers, the grin slowly fading from his face.

"You all right, Armour?" It was a deep voice behind me, and I swung around to see the boys in blue pouring into the room. One was pocketing a police special .38, shaking his head sadly. "I tried to hit his arm, damn it; now I guess the rat's dead. Damn, the captain'll fry my hide for this. Look, you men saw me—I couldn't help it. Right?"

They nodded. He brightened up a little, looking back at me, wiping the sweat off his forehead.

"I'm fine—now," I told him, prying Sue out of my arms slowly. "But how—?"

HE SIGHED. "We almost didn't. When the boys in the car let you get away, they reported in. We'd heard about you and Peters, so we figured it would be one of the others, and sent men out to all of them. We heard the whole thing, Armour; when we're after a killer, we don't just bust in, because he might have the other guy cornered and shoot when he heard us."

"Then he's free?" Sue asked quickly.

The sergeant shook his head, but he was grinning a little. "I wouldn't say that, lady; not technically. But he will be when we make our report. And I guess maybe I can stretch a point and let you two go home, if that's what you want. Hube, you and Cassidy can sort of cruise along behind them and keep watch, just to see we're being proper about this. And they won't bother you and Armour none, lady."

Sue didn't wait to hear more. She grabbed me, kissed the sergeant quickly in passing, and we were out of there, not even looking back at the two cops who came after us. She didn't say anything as she got behind the wheel, and I didn't feel much like talking either. It wasn't until we got back to her little house that we could quite believe it was over.

Then she was up against me. "I'd be proposing to you, Blake, if I had a right to. But—"

"Jimmy's a nice kid," I cut her off. "That's all I know about him, except that he needs a new father—in a hurry."

★

HOW DEEP MY GRAVE

by Day Keene

"You've done a lot for me before, Barney, so you'll help me just once more. And if anything goes wrong, your girl gets it first!"

Big Jim hadn't been personally involved in his killings, but ...

MORNING tiptoed on little wet feet into the shabby cabin of the forty-nine foot party-boat, *Tarpon*, and attempted to wake Barney Fogle by shining in his eyes. When he persisted in sleeping, a soft, on-shore, wind came to morning's assistance.

Hey, you, the wind whispered. *Wake up. Yesterday is dead. Last night is*

dying fast. Just like Hymie Maxim. Remember? Hey, you, Counselor. Wake up. This is a new day.

A big blond man, Fogle lay a long minute listening to the whispering of the wind and the drip of condensation as the Florida sun rose out of the palmettos and paved the Gulf of Mexico with gold.

He wondered why he should think of Hymie. Hymie had been dead for three years; Fogle hadn't killed him—Big Jim Murphy had. All he had done was cut a few legal corners to get Big Jim off the hook.

His being disbarred was the best thing that had ever happened to Fogle. If he had kept on in the rackets, he'd probably be dead, or in prison by now; you could only play with fire for so long.

He counted his blessings as he slipped into a pair of pants and sneakers and went on deck. Four more payments and the *Tarpon* would be his, and he could marry Jane. He was living in an entirely different world. The men and women he met since turning over his leaf liked him for himself—not for the flashy clothes he wore or the money he was willing to flush down a bar drain. They respected him for his seamanship, because he knew where the fish were and could catch them—not because he was willing to get out of bed at three o'clock in the morning to argue a writ or post bail. His, *"Good morning, Your Honor,"* days were over; the Bar Association had seen to that, and he was grateful. Fogle was one man who had turned his avocation into a successful vocation.

Lighting a cigarette, he looked at the sky. It was going to be a good day. Even this early, the rising sun was hot. A dozen fleecy clouds, herded by the on-shore wind, drifted lazily across the sky. The full of the incoming morning tide and the major Solunar Period should coincide with his first anchorage. And nothing pleased a northern snow-bird more than to pull in a ten or fifteen pound grouper the first time he dropped a line.

"You want to fish with Captain Fogle," he'd boast. *"There's one 'you-all' who really knows his stuff."*

Fogle grinned at the thought. It all just went to show what a man with a mind and a flair for acting could do. Until he'd come to Florida three years before, the farthest south he'd ever been was Gary. His seamanship had been learned on the Great Lakes. Still, in the two years he had been running the *Tarpon,* he'd met a dozen men and as many women whom he had known in Chicago and not one of them had recognized Barney Fogle, the boy legal wonder, in the bronzed fishing-boat captain sailing out of Dead Man's Pass.

Whistling, he went ashore to eat breakfast.

WHEN JANE saw him, she called, "Four sunny-side up with grits and a double order of bacon." His appetite was a standing joke between them. "I like men who eat," she'd once told him. "That's the trouble with this country; there's too many one-egg men."

"How's my baby this morning?" he asked her.

If he was a fake "you-all", Jane was bottle-in-bond. Her folks had settled in Palmetto County when the word "hog" still meant a razor-back, and not one of the donkey-engine netters who were doing their best to deplete both the pass and the gulf by their illegal and tremendous hauls of fish. "Tard of bein' cooped up in this ol' restaurant," she told him. "How's for goin' out with you today, Barney, if I can get one of the girls to spell me?"

Barney patted her hand. "Fine." His reservation-book was filled, but there was always room for one hundred pounds of loveliness aboard the *Tarpon.* Besides, Jane was a good fisher-

man. And the sooner the *Tarpon* was paid for, the sooner they could be married. Her father, old Captain Clauson, commander of the Coast Guard Cutter, *Retribution,* had insisted on that. It was only fair. Fly-by-night charter-boat captains were as thick on the west Florida coast as hoodlums in Chicago—and about as dependable. But with a boat bought and paid for a man was likely to stay put.

Jane moved on down the counter to wait on Captain Paul of the *Miss Georgia,* and Fogle waited for his eggs, listening to the newscast squawking from the radio back of the cigar counter.

Big Jim was still at liberty. The police hadn't had as much as a sight of him since he and his boys had pulled the Express Company job in Atlanta. Almost a million dollars was still missing. Some authorities thought Big Jim had headed back to his haunts in Chicago; still others thought he had headed south. Only one thing was clear, at least in Fogle's mind. Sooner or later the police would get Big Jim. The big clean-up he'd always talked of had backfired in his face; and this time there would be no legal boy wonder to defend him. Two guards had been killed in the hold-up; this time, Big Jim Murphy would go to the chair which he had cheated so long.

When his eggs and grits came, Fogle ate them with relish discussing the bait situation with Harry O'Neil of the *Alabama Girl.* Both agreed it looked like a big season if the bait would only hold out. Captain O'Neil shrugged. "But those damn donkey-engine men are cutting off all our noses to spite their future bank accounts. To those guys a fish in the hand are worth ten at twenty fathoms. They'd sell their wives for a buck."

The Fisherman's Rest was small, but the food was good and the restaurant filled rapidly. Finished, Fogle told Jane he would expect her, and got up to give a standee his stool. The girl's face was vaguely familiar. A big, rather pretty, blonde, dressed in shorts and a halter, the girl glowered back at him.

"No. You don't know me," she said before he could speak. "I didn't meet you in Naples or Sarasota. Mi gawd. Don't you crackers ever think of anything but food and women?" She looked at a small jeweled watch. "And at seven thirty in the morning."

Grinning at O'Neil, Fogle tossed a bill on top of his check and walked out onto the wharf. Some women were a panic. They'd been on the make so long themselves they thought every man who looked at them was a wolf. Still, he had been about to speak. The girl's face had been familiar.

He wondered if he *had* met her, then Tommy Cork, the punk who helped him on the *Tarpoon,* reported that the auxiliary-pump supplying the bait-box was acting up; Fogle promptly forgot the blonde as he tore the pump to pieces and as expertly put it back together again. A steady supply of fresh salt water was essential; a man couldn't fish with dead bait.

IT WAS EIGHT o'clock and time to cast off when he had finished with the pump. The deck of the *Tarpon* was filled with fishermen but Fogle noted, with satisfaction, few of them had brought their own rods and reels. For a three-dollar fee, (keep all the fish you can catch) he furnished bait and a hand-line. But at least fifteen of the fisherman aboard would rent a rod and reel for a dollar and that meant another fifteen dollars nearer to marrying Jane.

Fogle asked Tommy if he had checked the reservation-list against the crowd and when his helper said he had, he went directly to the wheel and revived the idling motor while Tommy cast off the lines. The *Miss Georgia* and the *Alabama Girl* were already moving down the pass.

"A fine thing," Jane said at his elbow. "You not only flirt with strange

blondes right in front of my nose, but you tell Tommy to cast off before you even know if I'm aboard."

Reversing the motors, Fogle stooped and kissed the pert little nose she had mentioned, as he backed from the slip and felt the easing out-going tide grip the *Tarpon*. "Honey-chile," he told her. "If I hadn't seen you aboard out of the tail of my eye, I'd have stayed tied ashore if fish were a dollar a pound wholesale."

His future wife patted his arm. "That's what I like about you, Barney; you lie so nice and convincing. But who was that girl?"

"I'll be damned if I know," he admitted.

Somehow the sun wasn't quite so bright; he still had one hurdle to leap. Before he and Jane were married, he'd have to tell her and her father the truth; any other course would be unthinkable. This was a new life he was starting. And he didn't want any ghosts from the past to crop up and spoil it. Jane was too fine a person. He'd put off telling her the truth about his past too long, now, as it was. He hoped she would understand, understand how a hungry kid who'd had to fight his way through law school on his own, had gone hog wild at the sight of so much easy money.

"Think we'll catch any fish?" Jane asked him.

"Don't I always?" he grinned. "You're marrying the best damn cracker-captain on the whole West Coast. They tell me I was born with a gaff in one hand and a twenty-pound red grouper in the other."

A strange look came into Jane's eyes. "That must have been hard on your mother." She laid her hand on his arm. "Look, Barney. The reason I asked to come out with you today—"

Before she could finish the sentence, Tommy Cork padded bare-footed up to the wheel house. They were well out of the pass now, into the open Gulf; it was time for Fogle to make his round of the customers to collect his three-dollar fee, get the jackpot or the biggest fish caught going, and crack a joke or two to set the mood for the day. A happy, laughing, boat caught fish and came back and fished again.

"In a few minutes, honey," he told Jane. "Right now I have to collect another partial payment on the *Tarpon*."

The strange look was still in her eyes. "I'll be here," Jane said. "But watch yourself, Barney; some days your southern accent slips, and this is one of the days."

TOMMY TOOK over the wheel and Fogle made his round, pondering the remark. Jane wasn't herself; she had something on her mind.

"Yes, ma'm," he agreed with a fat lady admiring the fish in the bait tank, "up north the Yankees would use them for pan fish. But just you wait 'till you see the size or the fish you're goin' to catch."

The fat lady turned her admiration from the bait-tank to his bronzed torso and Fogle collected the three dollars due him—a dollar for the pole and reel she wanted to rent, fifty cents for the jackpot, and moved on as rapidly as he could. The bare torso was part of the act. In sneakers and white pants and cap he looked like a cracker-captain. But the torso was fortunately spoken for.

Three times thirty was ninety dollars, plus—say—fourteen for pole rental, made one hundred and four dollars; minus his insurance and gas and Tommy's wages, plus what fish he had and Jane caught and the tourists didn't want—it would make a tidy payment. If only he knew just what was on Jane's mind.

Finished collecting from the fishermen on the jump-stools on both sides of the boat, and from three enthusiasts who insisted on squatting on the anchor rope on the prow decking, so the salt spray could blow in their

faces, he walked back to the round stern of the *Tarpon.*

With a sick feeling in his stomach, he recognized the big blonde the second time he saw her. Consuello hadn't changed, except to grow three years older. The last time he had seen her, her hair had been black, her face loaded with make-up, she had been wearing a slinky evening gown, and she had been a lowly B girl in one of the old Capone joints that Big Jim had taken over.

"That will be three dollars," he managed to say.

The girl made no move to pay him. "Came the dawn," she said dryly. "I was afraid for a moment that you'd made me back in that grease joint; that's why I laid it on so thick."

Fogle didn't want to look at the man beside her, but he had to. Big Jim handed him a crisp new five and three ones. "Six for fare and two for the poles," he said. "I think you'll find that correct, Captain." He added another bill. "Oh, yes. And a buck for the jackpot; put us down as Mr. and Mrs. John Smith, Captain."

Fogle took the money automatically, wondering why, pounding as it was, his heart didn't beat his ribs to pieces.

As big a man as Fogle, as dark as Fogle was fair, Big Jim Murphy added in a somewhat lower tone, "And if I were you, Captain, I think I would be very careful what I said over that ship-to-shore phone of yours. You pulled me out of a bad spot once." The big man smiled without mirth. "So when I got into another spot, what could be more natural than for me to think of you."

Fogle found his voice. "I can't do a thing for you—"

"Mr. Smith," the other man prompted. "And I'll be the judge of that. You just follow your usual routine; after you've made your first anchorage, you and I will have another little talk."

"And if I refuse you; if I call in and tell the Coast Guard to come get you?"

Big Jim parted his coat slightly, just enough to reveal the waffled, black, butt of a gun. "It's old; it's corny; but it's true; a man can only burn once, Barney. And if the Coast Guard should poke its nose in before you and I have our talk, I'm very much afraid that the Fisherman's Rest will have to put a *Waitress Wanted* sign in its window tomorrow morning."

FOGLE'S hot anger turned to ice. By thinking only of himself, by not telling Jane and her father the truth about his past, he had put Jane's life in danger. Big Jim meant what he said; he had nothing to lose, would shoot at the least hint of betrayal. "Okay. I'll see you later on," Fogle said and walked back to the wheel house.

"Boy," Tommy whistled, "is that dame you were just talking to stacked."

Jane gave Fogle a dirty look and walked up to the stern and sat on one of the jump seats talking to a fisherman who patronized the Fisherman's Rest.

"Did I say something wrong?" Tommy asked.

Fogle took over the wheel. "So it would seem."

The two-hour trip out to the grouper bank seemed endless. There was no sea, but there was a swell and several of the would-be-fishermen on the stern lost their breakfasts and most of their enthusiasm. His back to Big Jim and Consuello as he stood the wheel, Fogle was tempted a dozen times to talk into the busy two-way but, thinking of Jane, refrained. He couldn't, he wouldn't, endanger her life. Besides, the moment he opened his mouth his own shoddy past would come out. He wouldn't be Captain Fogle any longer; he would be Barney Fogle the ex boy-wonder whom the

bar association had found unfit to be an officer of the court.

He wished he could figure Big Jim's angle. Big Jim couldn't hope to escape in an old tub like the *Tarpon*; it was neither fueled nor fit to cross the Gulf. Besides, an hour after the *Tarpon* was overdue at the pass, the Coast Guard would come looking for him. If he failed to answer his phone, the base would send out an amphib to find him. And after being found, if he appeared to be in trouble, the cutter, *Retribution,* would come out to tow him in, or send a tug to do so.

Still, Big Jim Murphy didn't go for joy-rides; the man was a crook and a killer, but he was smart. Big Jim had something in his mind, some scheme up his sleeve. More, from the way he was guarding his over-sized tackle box, he had most of the loot from the Atlanta express job with him.

THERE WERE no other fishing boats in sight, but O'Neil speaking into the two-way announced he had made his first anchorage; so far the spot was a dud. Fogle continued on his course another fifteen minutes, then idling his motors he told Tommy to try the bottom. Climbing up on the rail, Tommy swung the lead then heaved it. Then, pulling it in, he examined it and grinned, "Right on the nose."

Fogle killed his motors and Tommy went forward to lower the anchor.

"This is it," Fogle called. "Let's see those lines get wet; last one in is a sissy."

It seemed incredible the familiar routine could go on with Big Jim Murphy, wanted for bank robbery and murder, fishing calmly from the stern of the boat. But it did. The fat lady's line barely had time to reach bottom when she squealed: "I've got one. I've got a big one. I can tell."

Tommy looked at her bent pole as she struggled to reel the fish in. "That's it. Keep his head up, lady," he advised. Then picking up the gaff he grinned at Fogle and repeated, "Right on the nose. I don't see how you do it, fellow."

The fat lady's fish was big, upward of twenty pounds. And it had barely been boated before three other fishermen had strikes. Then the fish really started to bite. Fogle and Tommy went from one to the other, giving a word of advice here, reaching down with the gaff to flip a big fish aboard, or helping to unsnarl a back lash.

As Fogle passed her, Jane admitted, "You're a fisherman all right."

Fogle wondered what was eating her, but was too preoccupied with the problem of Big Jim Murphy to think very much about it. When he reached the stern he asked the wanted killer if he was ready for his little talk.

Big Jim glanced around him to make certain everyone was fishing. "Any time. But first let me say this, Barney; no hard feelings. You got me off a bad hook once and I appreciate it."

"Go on," Fogle said.

Big Jim kicked his tackle box. "I've got a lot of dough in there, Barney. Enough to last me the rest of my life."

Consuello corrected him. "Enough to last *us* the rest of *our* lives."

His grey eyes cold, Murphy nodded. "Sure. That's what I meant." He tempted, "And you can make twenty grand of it, Barney. Enough to buy yourself a real boat." He snapped his fingers. "Like that."

"How?" Fogle asked.

"Just by playing ball. What time do you usually do in?"

"It depends on how they're biting; I usually start in by four."

"You could delay that, say, two hours, without anyone getting suspicious, or figuring you overdue?"

"I could."

Big Jim poked Fogle's bare chest with his forefinger. "Then that's just what you're going to do. You're going to have a little engine trouble, see?

Nothing you can't fix yourself, nothing that might bring another fishing boat or the Coast Guard snooping around. And shortly after dark, Consuello and I will leave you."

Fogle was amused. "You don't say. What are you going to do, swim to Yucatan?"

Big Jim reproved him, "You know me better than that, Barney. A Polish freighter left New Orleans early yesterday morning; at approximately six thirty it's due to pick me up at your afternoon anchorage. All you have to do is stay anchored until they lower a boat and take Consuello and myself aboard."

HIS VOICE hot, Fogle asked, "How do you know so damn much about me?"

Big Jim grinned. "We've been holed-up with one of your pals, Frenchy Greer, for a week."

"That damn donkey-netter," Fogle said.

Consuello's smile was thin. "He feels the same way about you. Look; be sensible, Barney. You can make twenty grand by just sitting tight and nobody will be the wiser. Of course, if you refuse to play ball—"

"What happens then?"

Big Jim Murphy shrugged. "Then, of course, I'll have to take over. I don't want to burn, Barney, believe me." He looked at Jane as he spoke. "And if I have to take over, the little dame that you're sweet on is almost certain to be one of the first to be hurt."

Fogle forced himself to be calm. "So I play ball. And as soon as we make shore twenty-eight tourists are going to blab."

Big Jim shook his head. "I doubt it. It will be dark for one thing. The boys handling the freighter end of the job know their business, and so do Consuello and I. And you see, to earn your twenty grand, you're going to create a diverson while we're slipping into the boat. Maybe you and your punk helper will stage a fight. I wouldn't know; that's up to you. But when you dock at the pass again you'll only have twenty-eight aboard and, if all goes well, no one will be the wiser."

"And if I refuse to play ball?"

"I'm desperate," Big Jim said simply.

Struggling with a thirty-pound grouper, Tommy Cork called, "For gosh sake, give me a hand, will ya, Captain? Every pole on the boat is loaded."

"Go ahead," Big Jim said.

Fogle moved on automatically, aware Jane's eyes were following him. He couldn't let her be hurt; he wouldn't let her be hurt. So Big Jim escaped the country. So what? So he would have twenty grand, enough to buy a good boat, enough to marry Jane.

On the surface, the plan sounded screwball but Big Jim was a master at such things. He planned every one of his jobs as an architect might design a building. If he said a ship's boat would pick him up at six-thirty, a ship's boat would pick him up at six-thirty. And even if one of the fishermen aboard should see their departure in the dark, and blab, by the time the news reached the proper authorities, Big Jim would be on the high seas and could no longer be intercepted without a lot of international red tape.

"That's four for me," the fat lady said. "But I think that first one I caught will win the jackpot, don't you, Captain."

Fogle wiped fish slime on his trousers. "I'm almost sure it will, madam."

AFTER THE first flurry was over, the fish stopped biting so avidly and two hours passed with only a strike now and then.

"Better move on again, I guess, eh?" Tommy suggested.

"I guess so," Fogle agreed; "bring in the hook."

FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES

Once the *Tarpon* was underway again, he tried to talk to Jane and find out what was on her mind, but she avoided the wheel house like it was contaminated. Here and there a tripper broke out his or her lunch; even Big Jim and Consuello had a box packed by the Fisherman's Rest, but Fogle wasn't hungry. He was too busy wrestling with the devil.

If he kept his mouth shut and went along with Big Jim, he could pick up twenty grand and no one be the wiser. On the other hand, it was merely a variation of the legal short-cuts that had tripped him before. And he had sworn to himself, when he'd met Jane, that from here on things would be different, that he would never do anything in the least crooked again. And here he was considering becoming an accessory after the fact of murder—not so much for the money, as to protect Jane.

It was a problem.

He made anchor thirty miles out, over the forty fathom banks and hit them, again, on the nose. There was another flurry of excitement; more fish were caught. The hour-hand of his watch swept close to four. Both the *Georgia Girl* and *Miss Alabama* reported their hooks were up and they were heading in; still, he hesitated.

Not quite so cocky, now the moment of decision was at hand, Big Jim showed him the butt of his gun again, nodded at Jane, and asked, "Well?"

For answer, Fogle told Tommy to raise the hook. Then, starting his motors, he flooded them and both of them pooped out while Big Jim grinned his approval.

"Better drop the hook again," Fogle told Tommy. "I seem to be having a little trouble." He added into the ship to shore phone. "Fogle on the *Tarpon* calling in. I'm having a little engine-trouble, and I'll be a little late but it isn't anything serious."

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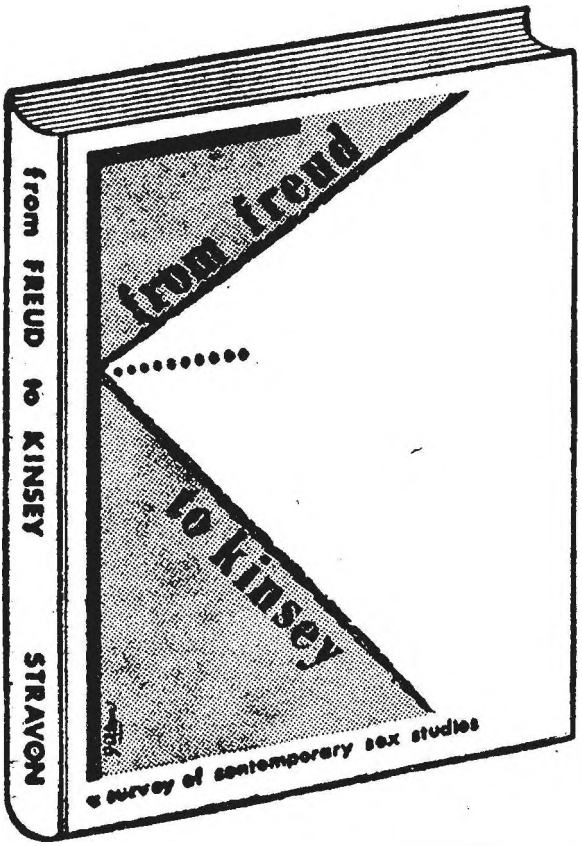

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"Keep us advised," the shore warned him.

While his passengers stewed and sweated, eager to get to shore to be photographed with their fish, and Tommy Cork looked on, puzzled, Fogle tore the lee engine down and proceeded to work on it.

"What's the idea?" Cork asked.

Fogle evaded the question with one of his own. "Did Frenchy or any of the donkey-crowd come aboard while I was having breakfast?"

"Yeah," Tommy admitted. "They did; they insisted we had 'em all wrong, that they were just poor working guys trying to support their families."

"Ha," Fogle said and let it go at that, letting Cork think what he would. Frenchy coming aboard explained the failure of the auxiliary. Big Jim had paid Frenchy well to create the minor diversion that had allowed him and Consuello to slip aboard without being recognized.

At six o'clock the shore contacted him. "How you coming, Fogle? Want some one to come out and get you?"

"Hell no," Fogle scoffed. "I'll be underway in a few minutes now."

At six fifteen, when night had blotted out everything but the riding lights and the powerful light Fogle was working by, he felt Jane standing behind him and looked up to see her eyes dark with accusation. "What's the big idea, Barney?"

Looking back at the plug he was screwing in, he said quietly, "Everything's okay now."

And suddenly it was; he knew what he was going to do. He couldn't allow Jane to be harmed, but a man had to live with himself. "Yeah. Everything okay now," he repeated.

He wiped his hands on some oily waste and stepped out on the dark deck. He could see ship's lights now, far away. The freighter was on time and had come straight to the rendezvous. He walked aft, still wiping his

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hands, listening to the drip of water from lifted oars.

"Nice work, Barney," Big Jim grinned. "For my money, you're still the boy wonder." He stooped to open his tackle box. "And speaking of money—"

Fogle shook his head in the dark. "Don't bother."

Big Jim straightened again. "I beg your pardon?"

"I said, 'don't bother'," Fogle repeated as he hit him.

"He's crossing us," Consuello screamed.

Grunting with pain, Big Jim went for his gun and got it free as Fogle's second swing went wild. "Why, you rat. You filthy rat. I warned you; the dame goes first."

As he spoke he leveled the gun on the girl silhouetted in the door of the wheel house and Fogle did the only thing he could, hurled himself against the other man. Big Jim cursed in pain, then screamed in fright as the aged rail snapped behind him, catapulting both himself and Fogle into forty fathoms of water.

[*Turn To Page* 124]

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"And this," Fogle thought, *"is it."* The black waters closed over his head and he went down and down and down, swept by the tide away from the boat, then started up again. As he broke water he heard Jane scream.

"Get Barney; he's over there to your right, almost under the stroke oar."

A STRONG hand caught at Barney's bare shoulder, then fastened in his hair. The voice certainly wasn't Polish. "Nice work, Barney," Captain Clauson said. "I had a hunch that, even with your background, you had good stuff in you." had good stuff in you."

Fogle caught hold of the gunnel of the *Retribution's* longboat and shook his hair out of his eyes. "You knew," he accused; "you knew all the time."

"About you?" The Coastguardsman nodded. "All the time. But the tip on Big Jim Murphy just came in this afternoon when Frenchy Greer got drunk and shot off his mouth too loud."

"And the Polish freighter?" Fogle gasped.

"Was advised to keep on her course," Captain Clausen said dryly.

"And Big Jim?"

"We hooked him, too," Clauson said; "he's lying across a thwart draining a little water right now."

From the rail of the *Tarpon,* Jane called, "You get my man out of that water. You want Barney to catch cold?"

Captain Clauson was shocked. "Heaven forbid such a thing should happen to my future son-in-law even

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if he is a damn yankee masquerading as a cracker."

"I don't care about that," Jane sobbed. "I don't care what Barney is; I love him."

His voice dry but his eyes twinkling, Captain Clauson said, "So I am given to understand. But you seem to have done all right on your little fishing trip, Jane. You caught yourself a man."

"Well, bring him here," Jane insisted. "You want me to tell him how much I love him in front of twenty-eight people?"

"To hell with your boat," Barney grinned. Pushing himself away, he swam with long, powerful, strokes towards the running lights of the *Tarpon*. He had no doubt he could make it. With Jane waiting for him, he could swim to Yucatan.

★

SPOTLIGHT ON CRIME

(*Continued From Page 8*)

"Well, I'll fix that," His Honor announced, "five years!"

●

MEET THE COUNTERFEITER

LYMAN PARKS, counterfeiter, was a man of refinement, well-educated, and a tender father. But he did believe in keeping his business in the family. He engraved the plates and did his own printing. Daughter Julia was the type who can make a man's heart flutter; she could imitate any handwriting, and it was her job to turn out a name that would make the owner swear he wrote it.

Parks was a bit of a snob. Once when Sile Doty, horse-thief, came to him to get some of this counterfeit stuff, he got a dose of a man who felt he was tops in his profession.

For Parks eyed Doty up and down and said slowly, "I presume you think

my business to be wholly confined to men as you have seen in the trade, which is a mistake. I deal with men in high life. Men of wealth and influence living as far off as New Orleans, Charleston, Richmond, and Washington. And many of them are bankers and brokers."

This Lyman boy had a touch of the theatrical, which came in handy. The authorities suspected him, but a search of his home revealed nothing incriminating. In order to get into his working-quarters, he would open a closet door; then the floor would be moved aside and he would descend into a secret basement by means of a ladder. He also had another hidden place.

It overlooked the Connecticut River and to the outsider there was only a large rock to be seen. A flat stone was moved aside and there was an opening which was large enough to admit a man's body. Down you went into a large secret cavern and here he specialized in creating coins that would fool anyone. That was the trouble with his product—he had to be careful not to take it himself.

●

WANT YOUR CAR STOLEN?

STRANGE as it may seem, a recent police survey shows that the carelessness of the automobile owner is the major factor which permits his car to be stolen. People often leave their keys in the ignition, and this is an invitation to the auto-thief, who is waiting for just this opportunity. The best rule is to always take the key out of the ignition and lock the door. The fellow who lets his motor run, while he goes inside the house for a moment or two, is just advertising for thieves. Some people lock the car door but let the window down an inch—to air the car, as they claim. A wire can be slipped through that space and manipulated so as to move the door

[*Turn Page*]

handle. Keep your windows shut tight as a safety precaution.

Many a driver boasts about how clever he is, keeps an extra key under the hood in case he should lock himself out of the car. A better and safer idea is to keep the key in a wallet, and the other keys on a ring or key case. Why let information out about how easy it is to steal your car?

One set-up for stealing cars involves the crooked garage employee. He has duplicate keys made from the keys left in the garage-office; these he turns over to a confederate, with information about the make of the car and where the owner drives on business. Then the car is stolen, miles awy from the garage, and the puzzled owner tries to figure out how a thief could get inside his locked car and drive away.

A similar technique is used by the crooked second-hand car salesman. A fly-by-night dealer offers a special in a recent second-hand car. The prospect looks it over and buys. A week later, it is stolen by a confederate of the salesman and another sucker will soon be found.

Ever find a well-dressed gentleman seated in your car, who at once apologizes with the remark, "Why I thought this was my car!" Then he points to his car, right back of yours, and you understand at once the reason for the mistake. Same model and same paint job.

This certainly is a neat idea in stealing cars. Even if you are suspicious, you'll hesitate about making a fuss and calling a cop; it might be an innocent mistake. But the detectives of the Automobile and Forgery Squad can soon tell you whether they have a sharper or not when they spot the man.

If the door is open and the brakes can thus be released, a rather daring method is to simply tow the car away! Which means that the owner who feels he is secure, because his steering wheel is locked, is liable to awaken and find his car not there.

If you find a nice parking space on a side street, where few people pass, the thief may find your door open and use the old trick of jumping the circuit to get the car started. His lookout will whistle if someone approaches. Or, if he is daring, he merely dresses up as a mechanic.

Motor-vehicle transfer papers can be forged. And one daring ring of thieves tried the idea of buying crashed cars to get the papers, then stealing cars of similar make and models, and switching things around.

At least, it can be said, no person alive can steal *my* car; I don't own one.

●

ANSWER TO "THE WALKING CLUE"

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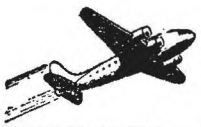

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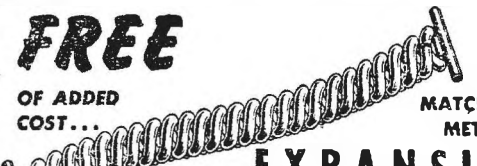

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