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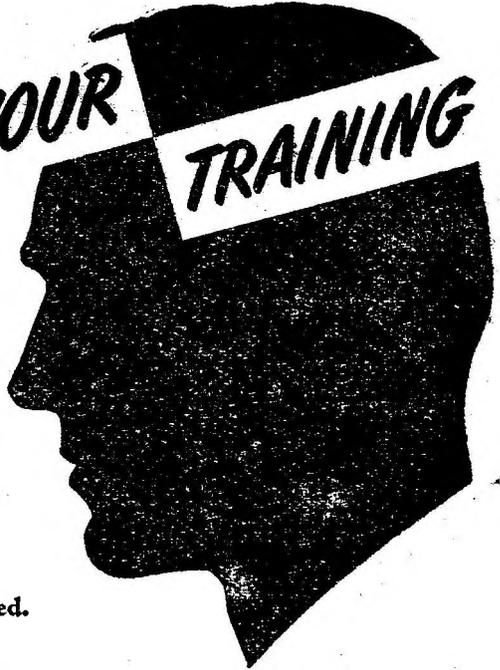
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Volume 11
Number 3
August, 1950

32 MORE PAGES

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- ONE CORPSE, GUARANTEED! Murray Leinster 8**
Tom Cantrell promised his guests a big show, and they got one all right—but not as Cantrell expected!
- DAMES, DAMONDS AND DEATH Oscar J. Friend 40**
The disappearance of a fifty-grand diamond necklace invites murder, and one killing is just the beginning!
- KILLING ISN'T ENOUGH R. S. Bowen 108**
The case against Medford seemed clinched, except that it was too pat... something more than murder seemed the motive.

Short Stories

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Sometimes people with good eyes can't see as well as a blind man can...
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The solution to this mystery was as old as Archimedes!
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A cop can get behind the flashy fronts—and he has to be able to see through them, too!
- THE GOOD OLD SUMMER CRIME .. James MacCreigh 100**
The guy wanted a rush job, but Death was in still more of a hurry...

Robert W. Lowndes, Editor

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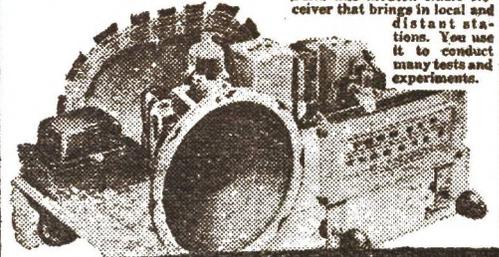


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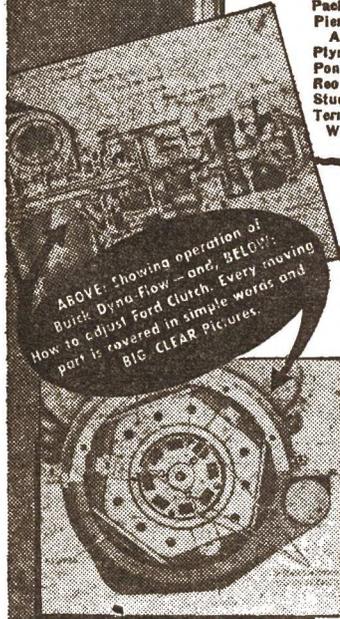
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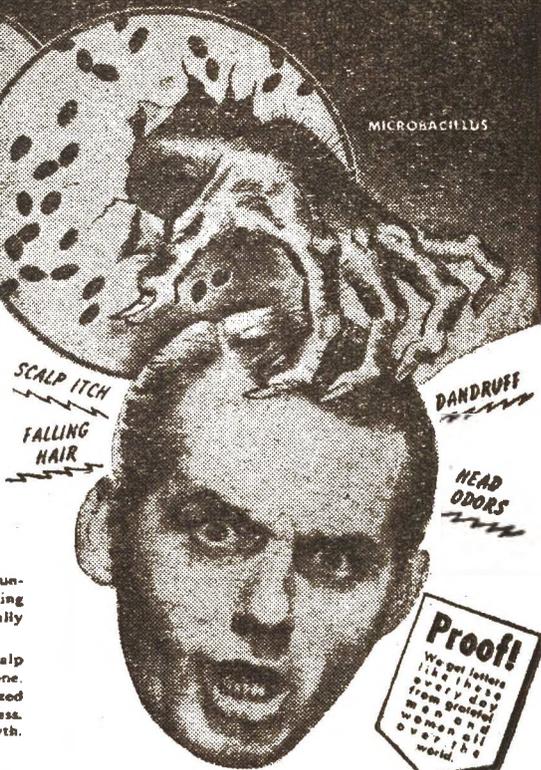
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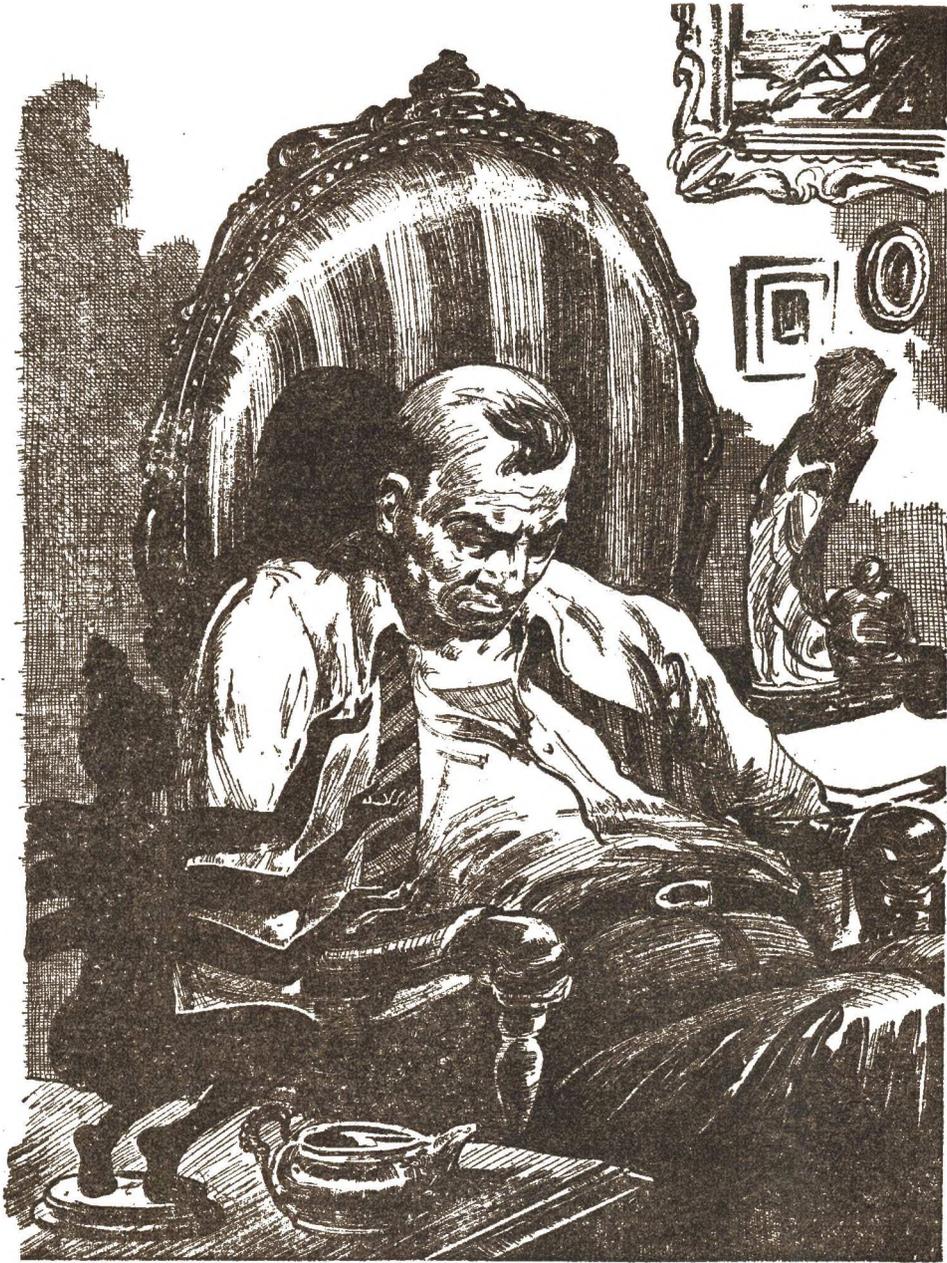
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Tom Cantrell gathers his relatives and an antique dealer for a surprise show. But no one is more surprised than the host—only a murdered man can't show it. And Sam Morden's only hope of evading the rap lies somewhere in or about Cantrell's rococo desk.

WE HAD just reached the salad course when Adele—she sat next to me at dinner—looked again at Tom Cantrell and made a small sound of satisfaction. Then she nodded to me.

"That's it," she said confidentially. "I've got it now!"

"Got what?" I asked.

"An explanation of our host," she

told me. "He rather alarmed me at first. He's so—overpowering. But now I know what he is; he's an extrovert."

"He's what they named it for," I said, "—or should have."

She took no risk in saying that of Cantrell. He sat at the head of the table, big and white-maned and beaming, in love with himself and the world and filled with beaming triumph. I regarded him with detached foreboding. When Cantrell was triumphant, other people were apt to be uncomfortable.

"He's an extrovert," repeated Adele, "about to—to—what is the word? Swimmers swim; Burglars burgle. What do extroverts do?"

"They show off," I said.

Jermyn, the butler, changed my

plate. Adele waited until he moved away, then smiled frankly at me. "Will he, tonight?" she asked. "Show off, I mean."

"He will also breathe," I told her. "He looks like he has something special in mind, though, and his schemes usually make other people uncomfortable. Not intentionally, perhaps, but they do."

Cantrell boomed at me. "Morden! Sam Morden! If you can tear your eyes away from the young lady—"

I flushed. "I didn't hear you before."

"I've been talking to Purcell here," boomed Cantrell zestfully. "He's a photographer, Sam. An artist photographer. He's going to take pictures of my collection for some stupid picture magazine... Have you met him?"

He waved a ham of a hand. I had seen Purcell before dinner, and I'd been introduced to him by Cantrell's nephew Terry. We nodded to each other again.

"Telling him about my Fouche traveling-desk," said Cantrell. "You tell him about it, Sam."

I looked at Purcell and said carefully; "It's a very nice piece. A traveling-desk, Empire, in rosewood and apple, with sand-box and ink-bottles complete. There's not much doubt that it belonged to Fouche, Napoleon's Minister of Police, you remember. In Bourrine's memoirs he mentions Fouche writing at that desk, giving orders for sabotage or that ghastly spy-school of his."

Cantrell chuckled. Adele looked at me interestedly. "Am I sitting next to a monster of erudition, or what?" she asked. "How do you know such details?"

"Business," I admitted. "By profession I deal in fine furniture and objects of art. You might say antiques if you want to be unpleasant; I've sold Cantrell some stuff."

Cantrell raised his voice. He boomed out a detailed account of the spy-school Fouche created for Napoleon, relishing every word of it.

That school took abandoned or kidnapped children of every nationality and trained them to be ruthless and dependable secret agents. It also supplied Fouche with a series of youthful mistresses, who were later his spies as well.

Adele listened for a moment or two, and shivered. "I don't like that," she admitted to me. "He—"

"He collects pieces associated with the most disreputable characters of history," I explained. "I don't think he'd harm a fly out of malice, but he isn't remarkably tactful and—as you said—he's an extrovert. That's all."

CANTRELL went on. The story about the spy-school is quite authentic; his face got redder and he beamed more widely as he saw faces turned to him. To Cantrell, happiness seemed to consist of having people look at him with strong emotion. Of any sort.

Adele turned her head away from him. "Let's talk about something else," she urged. "Don't you know any nice, homey scandal about somebody here tonight?"

"No-o-o-o," I said. "I'm afraid not. Being in the family, you'd know any scandal I did."

"Oh, but I'm not really in the family," she told me, "I think our host is my second cousin once removed, or something like that. Nothing that really counts. I was visiting Aunt Cassie"—her eyes went to Mrs. Winthrop, across the table—"when she packed up to come here. I'm close enough kin to be brought along, but that's all. We just got here this morning."

She added with amiable malice. "It's hoped to have something promised for Joe's education, but I'm the poor relation of a poor relation."

Cantrell's story came to an end. Mrs. Winthrop said, "You have such fascinating possessions, Tom! You must have an extraordinary talent for finding them!"

"Wait till after dinner!" he said gleefully. "I'm going to put on a show that'll make Sam Morden want

to cut his throat! You haven't seen anything yet!"

Sitting at the head of the table, shaking with amusement, Cantrell wore the expression of a cat that has swallowed an unprecedented number of canaries. He cocked an eye at me. "Remember that South American stuff, Sam?"

I nodded.

"Did you hear about my new rococo desk?"

I nodded again. I hadn't seen it. I'd heard of it and its association with a fine scoundrel named Poisson, and that it had been sent to Cantrell on approval. He'd evidently bought it.

"Just wait till after dinner!" repeated Cantrell. "You're going to be hit harder than you were by that South American stuff!"

Adele touched my arm, as I stared at my plate. "Talk scandal to me," she whispered. "If you don't say something soon, he'll know he has you disturbed."

I managed a smile of sorts. "There's not much gossip about," I said without enthusiasm. "You know Terry and Sally."

She looked at the other two members of the dinner-party who were near our own age. Terry Cantrell was Tom Cantrell's nephew and supposedly his heir. Sally Morris was his second cousin and a nice kid. But they looked horribly uncomfortable; in fact, I thought Sally was trying not to cry.

"Terry's a pretty good guy, except for a slight penchant for going off an getting quietly stewed occasionally. Living with Cantrell should excuse that."

Adele said meditatively, "It might."

"It does!" I assured her. "Terry says he hates his cousin Sally, and she patently adores him. Nothing dramatic in that. I don't know this Purcell person at all. Just met him."

"He's a photographer," said Adele, "he had three pictures in *Life*, once. He is an Artist. He is a Great Man. He's staying here to photograph the collection, and he made tentative

passes at me within one hour of our first introduction."

I found myself bristling. Adele nodded, smiling at me. "Thanks. But I handled it. Permanently. I doubt that he knew he'd been squelched. Please don't scowl at him!"

CANTRELL raised his voice again. "Check my facts on this, Sam!"

He beamed, red-faced and waited until he saw my eyes on him. "I was telling Purcell about the desk. The rococo one. It belonged to Poisson. I'm going to have Sam expertize it for me," he explained to Purcell, "because he's the only honest dealer in America. —Eh, Sam?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Now, Poisson was a scoundrel for you!" said Cantrell happily. "I've always wanted a piece he'd owned. He was Secretary for Police Affairs to the Directory. He arranged denunciations and it's said he sold orders of execution to people who wanted their enemies out of the way. It's not on record that he ever sold a pardon, though! He was in charge of the royal possessions in the Louvre for a while. Half the crown jewels disappeared, but he caught most of the thieves with their loot and collected a fine bonus and the thanks of the nation. The thieves said he'd helped them steal the stuff in the first place, but nobody believed them because every major stone in the crown jewels was recovered—all but the Regent diamond. That's never been seen from that day to this. Oh, Poisson was a thorough-paced scoundrel! He was a prosperous *rentier* under the Consulate until somebody who disliked him caught him and quite literally cut his heart out. Charming!"

He turned to me.

"The essential facts are there," I said drily, "and quite correct."

"And Sam knows!" crowed Cantrell triumphantly. "He knows all about furniture and history and such stuff. Everything! And he's honest!"

Adele looked at me curiously. "Now why does he harp upon your

honesty? Why does he say that you are the only honest dealer in the country? Are you a sort of freak of nature?"

"Not at all," I told her. "But, speaking generally, an honest dealer is one who takes a loss on what you buy from him; a crook is one who breaks even or makes a fair profit."

As a matter of fact, Cantrell did have a special reason for considering me honest, but it wasn't anything for me to brag about. I looked at my plate again and Adele said in a mildly hopeful tone, "Would I rate as a crook? My father brought some pewter back from the Argentine years ago, and I sold some of it for a ridiculous price."

I had no suspicions. I said, "There's not much Spanish pewter, and almost no South American. But it's good stuff, what there is. It does fetch very good prices."

"You probably know the pieces I sold," she told me. "Our host—my second cousin once removed—is the proud owner now. He paid me a hundred and twenty-five dollars for a dozen platters."

Crash! If the plaster of the ceiling had suddenly detached itself and fallen down upon the dinner-table, knocking us all out of our chairs, it might have been more of a shock. But I doubt it.

"I wish you'd say that again," I said with a quite incredible calmness. "What did he buy from you? And what did he pay?"

"A dozen pewter platters," said Adele. "It was last year. They came from South America a long time ago—Buenos Aires, I think. They were about a foot across, with decorations in relief around the rim. That hundred and twenty-five dollars bought my last year's Spring outfit."

She smiled at me, and I was stunned—because I did know those platters. They were why Cantrell considered me an honest man. He'd showed them to me before he'd bought them, and I'd told him what they were. They were plainly Spanish ware, and as plainly South American. But they hadn't the dark, almost purplish patina of ordinary

pewter; they had an ever-so-faintly greasy feel, and they rang when they were struck. Pewter doesn't ring that way. So I told Tom Cantrell what the platters were. I could even tell him who'd made them; they'd been made by a gentleman who was hanged in Buenos Aires in the year 1803. His offense was counterfeiting Spanish coins. These platters—like the two or three other known examples of his work—were beautifully done. They were practise-pieces, I'd say, for coining. But the odd part was that they were counterfeit, too.

Tom Cantrell had showed me counterfeit pewter, made by that storied Spanish-American scoundrel who'd counterfeited sound silver eight-real pieces—in platinum! He wasn't the only man ever to do so. More than one man essayed dishonesty in that fashion a hundred and fifty years ago, when platinum had no value whatever and gold and silver had. A dozen times over, right here in the United States, a quaint old pewter piece has turned out to be worth several times its weight in gold as platinum bullion. But Tom Cantrell had found a dozen foot-broad platters!

PRESSURE began to build up inside me. I might have exploded at that instant, but there came a stirring. Cantrell heaved out of his chair and led the way to the living-room. Tall French windows opened out-of-doors from there. It was a big room, full of showy pieces, of which each one had once belonged to a notorious scoundrel. But Cantrell had never looked quite so suitable an inheritor of their possessions as he did to me now!

He chuckled to himself, and I looked away from him, abruptly raging. I'd helped cheat Adele without knowing it. He'd bought the platters after I told him what they were. He hadn't bragged about that particular *coup*—I'd thought because he couldn't claim his own cleverness as the source of it. Now, though, I saw why; he'd victimized a girl, and kin at that.

He did keep the platters on a special hutch cabinet in his study, and sometimes he gloated to me privately, but that was all. Now he had some other idea of what seemed to me devilish in mind. He grinned exuberantly at Terry and Sally. Terry looked rather sick. Sally was white, but I couldn't read her expression.

"Are you two ready?" Cantrell asked them, beaming. "I'm going to make a show of it!" Then he boomed at me. "Remember that South American business, Sam! You're going to see something, now! I'll need a few minutes to get everything set, and then I'll call you in. Get ready to cut your throat!"

Shaking with anticipatory chuckles, he went into his study and closed the door. I found my hands clenched; I was seeing red. I heard Purcell hail the butler.

"Er—Jermyn," he said. "Did you say someone would be going downtown presently who could mail a parcel for me?"

"Yes, sir," said Jermyn unbendingly. "One of the servants goes off-duty and will mail it in the post-office, sir. Mr. Cantrell usually sends mail in by someone going off-duty like that, sir."

"I've a roll of colored film to be mailed," said Purcell. "I'll pack and stamp it."

He nodded to me as he passed on the way to the stairs leading up.

"We'll talk presently, Morden," he said condescendingly. "You might do the captions on the pieces I've photographed, eh?"

I didn't answer; I was simply too sore to think of but one thing. What Cantrell had done was legal enough. Buying and selling on the open market in fine furniture and objects of art is strictly a *caveat emptor* affair; you may get a bargain, or you may not. But to cheat a girl who is related to you, in cold blood and with my help—

Adele said in my ear, "How long will the performance be? If it'll take time, I'll get my cigarettes."

I automatically offered mine, but she shook her head. "My one eccen-

tricity, a special brand. What will the show be like?"

"I've no idea what he intends," I said evenly, "but I'm getting an idea of what it may turn out!"

I was getting an idea, seething as I was.

"Such as—?" said Adele, curiously.

"He could intend anything," I said savagely. "Anything on earth that would make him the center of a big scene! If sending a man to his death or ruining a woman's reputation would put him in the limelight for one second, he'd do it without malice and think of it as a gigantic joke!"

Adele didn't smile. But there wasn't anything in particular to say. After a moment she observed, "I'll run up then. I hope it's not what you seem to think."

"Now," I said grimly, "it's what I intend!"

I'd made up my mind in the past five seconds. Adele went upstairs. I fumed to myself. Joe Winthrop eased out of a side door. We adults were pretty dull company for a sixteen-year old boy. His mother blinked, and said with determined enthusiasm, "Cousin Tom seems quite thrilled over what he's to show us! I shan't want to miss anything. I'll get my glasses."

She went upstairs after Adele. That left only Terry Cantrell and Sally Morris and myself in the room, which was big enough to leave us practically alone, separately. I lighted a cigarette, my hands shaking, and Terry said with bitter courtesy, "There's a moon outside, Sally. Shouldn't we pay it a visit? I think Uncle Tom would approve!"

She flushed. "You didn't have to say that, Terry! Go look at it yourself!"

"Oh, come! come!" said Terry, "we should be romantic! Especially tonight!"

Tears glinted in Sally's eyes. She got up and went out of the room. Not toward the moonlight.

TERRY LOOKED at me and I ignored him. I went over to the

library door. There were some good pieces even in there. One, especially, would be my explanation later on, if one were needed. It was an early Regency side-chair, with X-stretchers in the form of swan-necks, and a typical Louis XIV shell. I could make a pretense of examining it again. I thought it an extremely early Meissonier, but Cantrell liked it because it had belonged to the Comte de Massine, who is usually credited with the poisoning of Marguerite, daughter of the Duc d'Orleans.

Just as I turned into the room, I heard the clatter of a French window. Terry'd taken Sally's advice and gone out-doors alone. It would be rather beautiful out there. Cantrell's house was at the extreme end of some very optimistic city limits and he had four acres on a hilltop with a stone wall all about and some excellent landscaping within. With a suitable companion, plus the moon, it wouldn't be bad at all. But he went out alone as I entered the library. I moved the chair, took down a couple of books. Then I left.

And then the whole thing, rococo and baroque and macabre, too, began.

It was one of those things that shouldn't have happened, and by the ordinary laws of probability couldn't have happened. But it did. And twenty minutes later I was back in the library with an awfully sickish sensation in my stomach, desperately pretending to be absorbed in that side-chair, when I heard a noise in the doorway. I looked up. People stared in the door at me. Somebody said sharply, "There he is!"

I straightened up and put my hands in my pockets. They were shaking badly. There was a curious look on the faces that regarded me. Adele stared at me with a startled, almost frightened expression. I came out into the living-room and the party was all together again, but Purcell was the only one who looked normal. Terry Cantrell was dead-white and his eyes burned; Sally Morris looked like a marble statue, her lipstick lurid against a

completely colorless skin. Mrs. Winthrop had sunk into a chair and somebody—a very pretty housemaid—was holding smelling-salts to her nose. The maid's hands shook horribly. Joe Winthrop looked enormously excited and gawkily loutish. And Jermyn, the butler, was literally gray; I've never seen a living man look more like a corpse in my life.

"Sorry to have held up the party," I said severely. "I've been right here all the time. I—got absorbed. Everything's ready? We go to see the show now?"

There was a shocked pause. Terry Cantrell made an irresolute movement. Purcell said languidly, "Why—yes! Let's go in to see it! In our host's study. Lead on, Morden!"

But Adele said swiftly and angrily, "That's not fair!" To me she added, as if the words hurt; "Mr. Cantrell's been murdered!"

"Mur—Cantrell's murdered?" I must have sounded rather unconvincing, now that I think of it. I stared about me. "Not Tom Cantrell?"

Joe Winthrop said in a voice that cracked with excitement, "We mustn't touch anything! We've got to leave everything for the police!"

But I started for Cantrell's study; I don't know why. Nobody stopped me. I went to the study door and opened it, and took a step inside. Then I stopped short.

I saw Cantrell. It was so. He sat in a big, oval-backed Louis XVI piece that he used as a desk-chair. It had belonged to Talleyrand, who was scoundrel enough for anybody. I stopped short on the threshold. The whole thing was so incredible that I'd almost persuaded myself it wasn't so—but it was. The expression on Cantrell's face hit me like a blow. His face was empty; it had lost the look of triumphant braggadocio he had undoubtedly worn even in his sleep. For the first time in the four or five years I'd known him—and tried to sell him fine furniture and art objects—his face wasn't a beaming brag.

I stood there staring. Then I realized the sort of silence that held

in the living-room behind me. It was an accusing silence; they were waiting for me to say something that would be proof I'd killed Cantrell.

I didn't. I was a little bit prepared. After all, I'd been in the study ten minutes before, and he'd been dead then, too.

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CANTRELL'S house was at the extreme edge of the city limits, practically in the country. But the city police were the ones to answer a notification that murder had been committed, and they arrived in a hurry. Terry Cantrell had phoned for them; it had been done before they found me bending over that chair in the library, and I had barely turned away from the door of the study when there was a trampling of feet and two uniformed men, and a man with a doctor's bag, and then Nolan came in.

He was rather short, and not at all impressive, and he had the disillusioned look that one expects on the face of police reporters. It isn't usual on a cop, though they have as much to do with crime as anybody else. The difference may be that police reporters don't believe in anything, while cops still believe in politics.

"This way," said Terry, politely. "I'm Terry Cantrell. It's my uncle who's been murdered." Then he added bitterly, "I'm his heir, I believe, and your logical suspect."

Sally Morris said quickly, "Nonsense, Terry! I can testify—"

Nolan waved his hands. "Let it go, let it go!" he interrupted fretfully. "This is business with us; it ain't a movie. We ain't suspecting anybody until we got some idea about what's happened. This way, you say?"

Terry led the way into the study, closed the door. After two or three minutes—while the rest of us simply sat or stood around—he came out again. Adele wet her lips. "What—what did they say?"

Terry glanced at her. "They say it's murder," he said ironically; "they'll ask all of us questions in a little while, and please stick around. I think—" He looked at Sally—"I think we could all do with a drink. I know I could."

He rang for Jermyn. The butler came in, still ghastly to look at. "We need a drink, Jermyn," said Terry. Then he added, "I think you'd better take one yourself. You look like you need it. —That's an order, Jermyn."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," said Jermyn.

Purcell leaned back in his chair and said meditatively, "Queer that such things can happen and one has no warning of them. I was up in my room packing that film for the mail. And I was whistling a tune. I'd no idea..."

"I," said Terry sardonically, "was out on the lawn. By myself, by the way, and I'm chronically broke and expectant."

"I saw you, Terry," said Sally Morris quickly. "I—I watched you the whole time."

Then she flushed, horribly embarrassed.

"I think it unlikely," said Terry, with elaborate politeness.

Purcell looked at me. I said shortly, "If the conversation has turned to alibis, I haven't any. You saw where I was and what I was doing."

JERMYN CAME back with glasses and soda and bottles of Scotch and one of sherry. Mrs. Winthrop asked for sherry in a weak voice. Adele shook her head. She looked at me oddly. I took a drink; I needed it.

Then we sat around and sat around. I remember that Adele sat staring at nothing for a long time. She shivered a little. I'd liked her a lot, during dinner. I'd felt protecting and indignant and ferociously resolved to get justice for her, when I went into Cantrell's study—and was the first person to see him dead. But not Adele or anybody else was very

good company for me right now. Because I knew of a motive for Cantrell's murder—one hell of a good motive—that would not only fit me, but practically anybody else in the house including the servants. It made me feel pretty sick.

It was those platters. They were a fortune. As far as I was aware, only Cantrell and myself knew of their value. But anybody else who learned of it—

Adele came over and sat down beside me. She said rather embarrassedly; "It appears that none of us has an alibi. Were you—were you in the library the whole time? Didn't you see anyone at all?"

"I was there the whole time," I said untruthfully.

"Oh..." said Adele.

Her voice was queer. After an instant she got up and went back to the fireplace, shivered as if she were chillier than before. Then Purcell burst out suddenly, enormously pleased with himself; "By George, this is a chance!"

He looked around eagerly. "I'll see if I can wangle permission to make a picture-story of this! We'll have to pose the discovery of the body, of course, but I can make a complete, actual, picture-record of the whole thing as it happens, up to the actual end of it all!" His enthusiasm increased. "Any picture-magazine in the country would jump at it! You wouldn't mind, would you?... Nothing like it's ever been done before!"

He grinned excitedly, like a man who has just had the bright idea of the century. But just then Nolan appeared in the study door. "Okay," he said. "I'm sorry, but I got to ask you people some questions, one at a time. Who'll come in first?"

Terry Cantrell stood up, went in. He was inside for probably fifteen minutes. A cop came out and went off on some errand. Terry emerged. As he came out the door, Sally Morris—very pale—got up to go in. He stopped her and said harshly, "Look here! You tell the exact and literal truth! That's what I've done!"

She went in without making a reply. She was very white, indeed. Terry gnawed at his fingernails while she was inside. She came out, paler still. Adele looked at her somehow appealingly.

"It's not bad," said Sally unsteadily. "But of course—with Uncle Tom's body still in there..."

ADELE WENT in. Mrs. Winthrop was next. She took her son Joe with her. I think he'd have preferred to go in alone, as more dignified. When they came out he looked crestfallen and his mother was weeping copiously.

The cop came back from his errand, whatever it had been, and went in before Nolan could call Purcell or me. Nolan came out and told us he'd be back in a minute. He hurried off somewhere and was gone for half an hour. Adele sat rather stiffly, staring at nothing.

But something had occurred to me and I wanted to get back into that room to find out if I was right.

I heard cars roll up to the wall outside the house; they stopped there. It was so deadly quiet that I even heard voices. More police, of course. Maybe reporters.

Then Nolan came back. Very quiet and businesslike. He jerked his thumb at Purcell. Purcell went in the study. He was in there for a long time. He came out beaming, Nolan beckoned to me. "Let's get it over with. It shouldn't take long."

I followed him inside. I was shaky as the devil. I'd had the better part of an hour and a half in which to think, and I was in one ungodly mess inside. When I went in to row with Cantrell—and found him murdered—the shock had knocked everything else out of my head. But now I wanted to know if those platters were gone.

They were.

Nolan waited for me inside the study. I took one step in the door, and a sinking feeling went all over me. Cantrell had kept the platters in his study, displayed in a hutch cabinet. They were safe there because as far as I knew only he and I knew of their value. Now the cabinet had

been moved to make room for the rococo desk—and its shelves were empty.

The rococo desk would normally have taken my eye immediately. It was something on the order of that rather over-famous *Bureau du Roi* in the Louvre, by Oeben and Reissner. But there were the empty hutch-cabinet shelves, and there was a sheet over the chair at Cantrell's ordinary desk, and there was something under the sheet. Cantrell.

"Okay," said Nolan. "I know your name an' all that. You got anything to say that might help?"

I shook my head numbly.

"Sit down," said Nolan. "Look here!" He pointed at the sheet-covered figure. "He was gonna put on some kind of show. What was it?"

"I've no ideas," I said.

It was true. I didn't know what Cantrell intended to do. Only what I'd intended to make him. But I stumbled, found I'd blundered into Purcell's camera-tripod with the camera on top, all set up to take pictures when Cantrell's now-never-to-take-place show was staged. I pulled up a chair and sat in it.

"He specially invited you to come out here," said Nolan. "You were one guy he was bound to have on hand. That so?"

I nodded. Cantrell had telephoned me and had insisted feverishly that I put aside everything else to come out to dinner. He mentioned some remarkable event then.

"This guy Terry Cantrell," said Nolan, "says the only show he knows of is that his an' Sally Morris' engagement was gonna be announced. How do you rate in on that?"

"I don't," I said. "I didn't know it, but—"

I shrugged.

"Mmmmm. This guy Terry Cantrell don't talk like a guy who's crazy about the girl. What's the matter with him?"

"Nothing," I said. "But he's lived with his uncle; that would make almost anybody a little bit queer."

"Huh? How's that?"

I tried, but it wasn't an easy task to explain Cantrell to anybody who

hadn't known about him. He simply smothered everybody by sheer insistence and exuberance. Terry had never been allowed to accomplish anything in his whole life. If, as a small boy, he'd started to make an aeroplane model, his uncle grandly ordered a dozen of the finest power-driven toy planes for him. And Terry naturally got no pleasure from them and was deterred by their perfection from trying to make his own. Even Sally was quite possibly the result of Cantrell's ebullient showing off. It was quite likely that he'd seen Terry showing signs of romantic interest in Sally, and had promptly spoiled everything by shoving him forcibly toward a marriage he'd have wanted if he'd been left alone.

NOLAN listened, seeming to be thinking of something else. "Uh-huh," he said when I stopped. "But this show, now. You must have some kinda idea what it was gonna be about!"

"The only guess I can make," I said, "is this desk. I heard about it and its association, and heard it had been shipped to him on approval. Maybe it's remarkable in some way, though I can't see it at the moment. From this camera, set up as it is, it looks like Purcell was going to make some pictures as part of the exhibition, showing-off, or whatever it was that Cantrell planned. If the desk is something really outstanding, Cantrell might have intended to gloat over me for not having sold it to him. He loved to boast of a bargain. Shall I look it over?"

"Go ahead!" said Nolan.

Again he seemed to be thinking of something else. I went over the piece. In spite of my private worries, it was absorbing. After five minutes or so I heard Nolan grunt. He was regarding me speculatively.

"It's late Louis XV," I said. "The extremest of rococo style, with everything from marquetry to *espagnolettes*—they're the little bronze busts at the corners there—but with bisymmetrical shells, which dates it late. It's a fine piece. A very fine piece. But it isn't unparalleled, and I can't

see why anything connected with it should make me—well—want to cut my throat.”

By the way Nolan grunted, I knew he'd heard that phrase quoted as Cantrell's statement of what he expected of me.

“Mmmm,” said Nolan. He asked suddenly. “Say, what was Cantrell killed with?”

“I wouldn't know,” I said. “In fact, I looked in and saw him dead—the others probably told you—but I saw no wounds or anything like that.”

Nolan pointed to the hearth of the study fire-place. The brass fire-tongs of a set from Benedict Arnold's English home—the home he'd occupied after he was an exile from America forever—the brass fire-tongs lay on the hearth. They were discolored and scorched and oxidized as if they'd been pulled out of the fire itself.

“Somebody threw the tongs in the fire,” said Nolan. “Like they wanted to get ridda their fingerprints after beatin' Cantrell in the head with it. They got ridda the fingerprints, all right. Only it ain't what Cantrell was killed with. Want to see?”

I didn't.

“A funny kinda wound,” said Nolan detachedly. “I don't know what made it. Something shaped like a cone or a small pear, prob'ly, only with a fancy lump stickin' out where the point would be. About half an inch across. Like this.”

HE SHOWED me a sketch in his note-book. To me it only suggested a small funnel with a cut-off spout.

“You sold him a room-full of furniture once,” said Nolan meditatively, “an' promise to buy it back on demand.”

“Yes,” I said. “I needed money badly at the moment. He found it out, and drove a hard bargain, then gleefully put in that proviso just for the hell of it. If you knew him, you'd know he'd do that sort of thing just so he could dangle it over you. It would amuse him enormously, though he probably never intended to make use of it.”

“But he did,” said Nolan. He sat on the opened, elaborate desk which had replaced the hutch cabinet, the one where the platters had been. “He told Purcell he was gonna turn it back an' refurnish that room around this piece. Does that make sense?”

“In a way,” I admitted. “If he thought this piece important enough it would be reasonable to collect around it. He hadn't told me he expected to turn back that Jacobean stuff, though.”

Nolan nodded. “You'd be a fool to admit he had,” he observed.

I opened my mouth, and then shut it.

“The point is,” said Nolan flatly. “You had a dam' good reason to kill him. You' in a bad fix financially, huh? If he pulled this trick you'd go bankrupt?”

I said evenly, “No. It would be embarrassing; no more.”

“You were in the library all the time between when Cantrell came in here an' the time the folks found him dead, huh?”

“I was,” I said shortly. I was confident there was no proof to the contrary.

“But two people looked in there for you an' didn't see you,” said Nolan. “Got any explanation for that?”

“I was there the whole time,” I said doggedly.

“It looks kinda bad,” said Nolan. He waited.

It did look bad. He didn't know half how bad it could look if he found out some other things. “You mean,” I said grimly, “that you think I murdered him. All right. I didn't. What motive could I possibly have, anyhow?”

“Just think, guy!” said Nolan ironically. “Just think!”

The platters were enough for almost anybody to commit a murder for. But Nolan didn't know about them!

“I'm thinking,” I said sardonically, “and still I can't remember either killing Cantrell or having any reason to.”

“Okay!” said Nolan. “If you wanna have it that way, that is the way it goes. But remember this!” He bent

forward and tapped impressively with his finger for emphasis. "He was gonna put on a show, Morden. You were gonna be it; you were gonna want to cut your throat. Maybe it was the furniture he was gonna turn back, an' maybe it was somethin' else. But you were gonna be the star of the show he was gonna put on! An' you wanted to stop it! An' you did!" Then he straightened up. "Okay! Stick around. Don't try to go home. Stay right here. If you wanna talk, I'll listen. You'll be better off if you do."

As I went toward the door he added significantly, "Hangin' is kinda messy, Morden. Even life's better. You got a chance to get pardoned, then. Think it over, Morden; it might mean a lot to you!"



TERRY CANTRELL came up to the room Jermyn had assigned me, later; he came in and put a bottle on the bed-table. "I thought you might like a drink," he told me sombrely. "I would."

He'd brought a glass for himself. He went into the bathroom and brought one back for me. "If this is hospitality, Terry," I told him. "Maybe you don't know that Nolan has practically accused me of murdering your uncle."

Terry looked at me, and then grunted. "The hell with that," he said. "I'm in a fix, too. He doesn't think I did it, as far as I know, but he acts like he thinks I'm trying to shield the one who did. Maybe he'll think my coming here is proof."

"In that case," I agreed, "a drink won't do any harm."

Terry had a queer, angry expression on his face. "Sally told him she sat at her window and watched me strolling about on the lawn," he said seething, "all the time the murderer was busy! And he believed her!"

"Didn't you?"

"As a matter of fact, I went out and sat by that ghastly faun that Uncle Tom bought because it once belonged to Cagliostro. I was right

there, swearing to myself, when Uncle Tom was murdered. But she could not see me from her window; there's a thick screen of shrubbery in between! She might have seen me walk there, but once I was hidden I could have gone anywhere! She lied, to shield me from suspicion!"

It came into my head that for Sally to claim to have been watching Terry was not only an alibi for him, but for herself also.

"Nolan tells me your engagement was to have been announced tonight."

He swore. "Uncle Tom was practically knocking our heads together. I told him I hated her guts and he beamed at me; he simply didn't believe it. I was to marry her. My income kept up as long as we were engaged and would increase when we were married. It stopped if we weren't engaged tonight, and stayed stopped until we were. And, dammit, he was sort of guardian of hers, and the same thing happened to her! I could take it for myself, but—"

"Ah!" I said. "Chivalry!"

"Nothing of the kind! Have you ever seen a damned fool making an ass of himself, and all the time thinking he was being wise and kindly and doing something benevolent and really rather beautiful? That was the old duffer! He was an awful fool, Sam. He was just about as irritating as a person could be; he messed up all my childhood and was working on the rest of my life. But he meant well, and no matter how mad I got with him I couldn't hate him or really want to hurt him!"

He paused a moment and said wriily, "That's the devil of an epitaph for anybody! *He meant well!*"

TERRY sat on the edge of my bed with a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. He looked all broken up and bitter.

"You think the announcement of your engagement was the show he was going to put on?" I demanded.

"What else?"

"Something," I said drily, "was to make me want to cut my throat; something was to be done to see how

much I could take. I was to be part of the show. How do I fit into the announcement of your engagement? Nolan figures I was to be the show, and that I killed your uncle to prevent it. You wouldn't have murdered him to keep from marrying Sally?"

"Of course not! Sally's all right if you happen to like her," he protested. "I don't—though once I thought I did. But when somebody's rammed down your throat—"

I cut in. "There were two of us connected with the proposed show Nolan thinks your uncle was killed to stop. But your reason is inadequate, so I must have done it. It's infernally plausible, only I didn't."

"It isn't plausible! It's silly," he protested again. "You—"

"How about the others? Did any of them have reason to kill him? Mrs. Winthrop? Joe? Purcell? Sally? Adele?"

I carefully didn't emphasize Adele's name, but if he picked it up it would mean he knew about his uncle's having gotten the platters from her and what they were...had quite legally done her out of a fortune.

"No-o-o," said Terry. "None of them could have any motive..."

He poured himself another drink then stopped and looked at his glass for a good ten seconds. Then he went and poured it down the sink. After a moment he said, "It's all silly! I'll talk to Nolan in the morning. Let you know what he says."

Terry went out abruptly, and I looked after him and figured that quite possibly I'd convinced him that I was the person who'd killed his uncle, after all.

I poured myself a drink, then put a cigarette in my mouth and fumbled for my lighter, couldn't find it. And of course I had no matches.

I sat there with an unlighted cigarette in my mouth and grouched all by myself. My motives throughout had been of the best, and I regretted nothing I'd intended to do. It was my purpose, when I slipped unseen into Cantrell's study, to blackmail him. I didn't know what sort of

spectacle he planned, but I was going to make him change it to the sort I wanted.

I had plenty to blackmail him with. All I needed was the one fact Adele had told me with no idea of its importance—that those fabulous platinum platters had been bought from her for a hundred and twenty-five dollars. When Cantrell bought them he knew their real worth, all right! I'd told it to him!

Cantrell's consuming vanity would shrivel at the idea of being exposed as such a particularly shabby sneak; he couldn't take that! So it had been my intention to present him with the ironic choice of having the whole story told—or of making his dramatic scene one in which he revealed, himself, the actual value of the platters, and presented Adele with a check for their real price.

That had been my plan. But when I went quietly into his study by the back doorway he was dead. Murdered. Those platters were an adequate reason for me or almost anybody else to kill Cantrell. And now they were seemingly gone.

Thinking of all this got me thoroughly wrought up, and made me want a soothing smoke more than ever. So presently I went downstairs to try to find some matches.

I FELT a queer sensation when I got down; there ought to be a detective or two around. I moved with a defiant absence of any attempt to be silent, expecting at any instant to be challenged.

I wasn't. A dim light burning in a hallway shone into the living-room. The furniture cast long shadows across the floor. There was darkness in the corners of the room and the light was cold and dead; I found myself looking behind me much more often than was necessary.

I didn't find any matches. I went into the dining-room. There shouldn't be any matches there, but I looked. Then I came back to the big and now creepy larger room. There was the library and the study and the big

music-room where Cantrell really spread himself in displaying his collection-items. I glanced in the door of the library; it was like looking into a cave where anything unpleasant might be hiding.

It was nerves. I had an unlighted cigarette in my mouth and I wanted a smoke and dammit, I was going to have one! I turned on the study light. Quickly. There were matches on Cantrell's desk—not the new, rococo one, but the one he'd used all along. I struck one and lighted the cigarette I'd carried in my mouth all this while. It was amazingly satisfying.

The study was fully lighted, and it was a relatively small room. No dark corners. But, the platters were positively gone.

That wasn't news. I stayed in the study, smoking. I told myself that now I was here I might as well take a really good look at that rococo desk. Maybe Cantrell had meant only to show it off. The idea didn't make sense, but neither did anything else—And I was naggingly aware that Adele had mentioned the platters...

I opened the desk to have something else to think about. The piece was, in its way, really magnificent, and professional interest came to the fore in my mind. The work "rococo" has come to mean all that is shoddy and in bad taste, nowadays. Perhaps that usage is justified. But the workmanship of pieces that are actually of the original rococo period is marvelous. It was a time when craftsmanship had overtaken and passed the artistry which should have directed it. The ornamentation of a rococo lock or a panel may be overdone. It may be shoddy and meretricious in conception. But it is masterly in execution. There has never been marquetry or ormolu to compare in sheer perfection of workmanship with the pieces that were made in the years when French taste was at its worst. The little *espagnolettes*—the small bronze female busts or figures like misplaced caryatids which are placed at the corners of late Regency and rococo tables and commodes and such

—were marvelous. They are merely finish-pieces for the legs, but those on his desk were the most perfectly executed bits of bronze-work I have ever seen.

Oh, the desk was possibly appalling. Maybe it was an atrocity; a lot of rococo stuff is. But even the tragedy of such good work put into such messy design has its charm—and good workmanship isn't to be despised anywhere you come upon it.

I went over the desk thoroughly. Meticulously. If it had a suitably sanguinary association, it might have been something Cantrell would have unveiled with enormous enthusiasm and boasting. But I knew who it had belonged to, and though Poisson was a dirty scoundrel, he wasn't unparalleled. The desk, as such, wouldn't have explained the show idea.

THEN SOMETHING else occurred to me. Cantrell owned a fourteenth-century seal ring that had belonged to a disreputable member of the Orsini family. It had been offered as the possession of a Borgia but he knew better. It was possible, by twisting the bezel, to make a tiny fang stick out in such a fashion as to wound anybody you shook hands with while wearing it. And there was a dried-up, gummy mass upon that little fang which Cantrell wouldn't have had cleaned off for anything.

That would explain everything. Cantrell's intention to furnish a room around it, scrapping the furniture I'd sold him, which had only an ordinarily disreputable history. His having Purcell's camera set up in the study to take pictures. His calling me to the house to watch his triumph. But the proof would have to be good and the villianly spectacular.

It was the most plausible guess yet. I began to hunt for secret hiding-places in the desk; such things aren't hard to find if you know how. The naivete of our ancestors in some lines is only less remarkable than their bloodthirstiness. I knew how to look. I found one tiny secret drawer. It was empty. But any ordinary hid-

ing place would have been found long ago. I began to search away from the regular, normal locations for hiding-places... And I found it.

One of the little *espagnolettes*—the bronze figurines I mentioned—yeilded—the barest suspicion of a hair. I got to work. I found a bit of relief decoration that shifted. The two together...

The *espagnolette* swung down upon a beautifully contrived hinge. It revealed the bare unstained wood beneath, just as the rougher-in had left it before the *ebeniste* took over. And in that naked wood there was a neatly chiseled opening perhaps two inches by two by four. It was cut into the massive wood of the desk's framework. It was empty, yet clinging to the wood-fibres there were threads of unspun wool. Where we would pack something in cotton-wool, nowadays, there was a time when wool itself would have been used. Something had been hidden here...

Then it hit me. It added up perfectly! Why Cantrell had said it would hit me harder than the South American stuff—the platters. Why he'd chosen this night to insist upon announcing the engagement of Terry and Sally. Why he'd had Purcell on hand to take photographs, with his camera ready, and why it would make newspaper headlines, and why he was going to refurnish a whole room around this piece...

The platters had nothing to do with the show he'd have put on, and probably nothing to do with his murder, either. The show itself was something nobody but Cantrell would have thought of. This discovery changed everything. Everything! And Adele was left out. My head fairly swam with relief.

I carefully pushed the little *espagnolette* back into place. Then, for no reason at all, I jumped as if I'd been shot, and wheeled to gasp at the open door of the study. I hadn't seen anything. I'd been faced three-quarters away from the door. But I felt as if a shadow had crossed behind me...

Then I clenched my hands and

stalked into the living-room; it was empty, of course, but somehow I wasn't satisfied. I poked in the still-dark corners; I had an insistent feeling that there was someone else downstairs.

Somehow I couldn't go into the library, but I did push open the door that led into the music-room. I saw a man, almost snarled at him. Then I recognized him.

He was a uniformed policeman—one of the two who had come with Nolan. He was seated in the most comfortable chair he could find, his head leaned back, peacefully sleeping with his mouth open.

I looked at him for seconds. Then a grim satisfaction filled me. Tomorrow morning I'd tell Nolan all this, and show him what I'd found.

WHEN I waked next morning, though, I did not have a headache, but I think I'd have felt better if I had. It occurred to me that the policeman would deny vehemently that he had been asleep. If he had been awake I could not possibly have made my discovery; the rococo desk had arrived since my last previous visit to this house. Nolan had watched me examine it once. If I described the hiding-place, Nolan would be able to believe in only one possible time for me to find it—the time when Cantrell had been murdered.

I went downstairs, and Nolan greeted me with an ironic politeness. "Mornin', Mr. Morden," he said. "Big doin's during the night."

I imagine I went pale. He said flatly: "I hadda cop on duty downstairs, name of Houlihan. He was on guard so nobody'd mess with the stuff in the study or anywhere. But somebody did; somebody ransacked all downstairs last night, lookin' for somethin'. O'course, to get a chance to do all that, they hadda get rid of Houlihan. They did; they smashed his skull in. "Don't know yet whether he'll live or not."

I wanted to swear.

Then Nolan said sourly; "Now, if I could prove you were downstairs last night, as I'm pretty sure you were..."

4

IT WASN'T easy to take. I don't mean Nolan's continued suspicion. I could take that all right. Nothing could be done about it anyhow. But this business of the cop hit on the head knocked my discovery galley-west, knocked all significance out of it.

Nolan started to move away. I stopped him. "There's something I'd like to point out," I said. "Could you assume for a moment that I'm not guilty of killing Cantrell?"

He looked at me detachedly. "Just for the sake of argument?"

"Yes. Exactly. Suppose I'm not guilty. Now, if I didn't kill Cantrell, and if I didn't hit your cop on the head last night, then somebody else did. And if last night's criminal was Cantrell's murderer, he was pulling off something because he didn't get what he wanted when he killed Cantrell. It follows?"

"Mmmmm," said Nolan. "I see the point."

"And if," I said, "he still didn't get what he was after, what'll he do next?"

"You tell me," said Nolan.

"He'll figure that I must have pulled off something for you to suspect me so frankly," I told him. "He'll figure that somebody had to pull off something, or he'd have gotten what he wanted. So he'll think I've got what he killed Cantrell for. And his next victim is apt to be me; I'll be the next corpse."

"Interestin'," said Nolan. "If somebody murders you, I'll start thinkin' maybe you didn't kill Cantrell; that's fair enough. But what was Cantrell's killer after? An' you still mighta wanted to kill him just to get outa a jam, guy!"

"I suggest one more bright thought," I said. "If I'd killed Cantrell to keep him from putting on his show—as you've hinted more than once—what would I gain by crashing Houlihan?"

Nolan shrugged. "The argument that it couldn't ha' been you, because

you wouldn't gain nothin' by it—nix, Morden! I'll tell you, honest, that all I need is the murder-weapon an' the proof that somebody was in Cantrell's study between the time he went in an' the time the folks found him dead. Gimme those two things, an' I'll close the case an' be dam' glad of it."

His manner was convincingly matter-of-fact; he seemed to mean exactly what he said. He spoke without enmity, but like somebody talking to an antagonist in a contest of supreme importance. So I scowled at him.

"I thought crime-detection was a science," I said with heavy irony. "Why not get a lab man out and get your proofs?"

"Fella," said Nolan, "the doc said that Cantrell's eyes were rolled back in his head like he was already dead or out cold when he was murdered. Y'know why he was out cold?"

"Thanks," I said sarcastically, "for assuming I don't know!"

"That was a slip," he admitted. "Forget it. But I'll tell you anyhow. There was sand in the ashes of the fireplace this mornin'. Get it? Cantrell was socked first with a sandbag. A sandbag knocks you out, cold. Handled right an' hit hard enough, a sandbag kills, too. Y'know that, huh?"

I growled.

"The—murderer," said Nolan, "expected Cantrell to conk off from bein' socked with a sandbag. It woulda looked like a heart-attack or maybe apoplexy an' no murder at all. He was old enough. Only he didn't die; he just passed out. His heart kept on beatin'. So the murderer socked him again—an' again. He musta known who was in there with him. He hadda die, or he'd tell. So the murderer went kinda crazy when he didn't die from bein' hit with a sandbag, an'—made sure. The killin'd be known as a murder, then, but it just hadda be done! An' then the murderer threw the sandbag in the fireplace. The cloth got burned up. There was just some extra sand in the ashes. If Cantrell had just seemed to've kicked the bucket from a heart-attack, nobody woulda

noticed sand in the ashes."

Nolan spread out his hands. "Somebody smart like that, even if his trick didn't work just right, ain't goin' to leave any evidence around. It'll come out another way; but it'll come out!"

He spoke detachedly, but I felt sick. "Good Lord!" I said thickly. "If it was like that—"

"It was," said Nolan. "An' all I need is proof that somebody I know was in the room when it was done, an' what kinda thing made that funny sorta hole in Cantrell's skull. I got to have those two things or just knowin' the murderer ain't worth a damn. For instance, this ain't any good."

He flipped me my cigarette-lighter. I stared at it.

"I found it in the study," said Nolan; "it proves you' been there. It don't prove you were there the time I gotta prove, so you can have it back."

He turned on his heel and walked away.

I WENT on to the dining-room. I was shaky. I'd undoubtedly lost my lighter when I found Cantrell dead, when I was struggling to raise him in his chair to—as I thought—revive him.

It was not a happy morning hour. Jermyn served me coffee, and I wanted a lot of it. He looked as if he'd aged fifteen years overnight. He spilled my coffee when he poured it.

"You're in a state of nerves, Jermyn," I observed. "What's the matter?"

"I expect to be arrested, sir," he told me. "For the murder of the master if not of the policeman, sir."

"Nonsense," I said sourly. "I'm the official suspect."

"I might as well tell you, sir," said Jermyn. His face was haggard. "Mr. Nolan will undoubtedly find it out, sir. I'm an ex-convict, sir. It will be only natural for me to be arrested on suspicion, sir. I'm afraid it will be—rather bad. Especially after the policeman, sir."

"It might depend," I told him, "on what you served time for."

"For robbery, sir," said Jermyn. "With violence. When I was quite a young man, sir. Mr. Cantrell knew all about it; it rather pleased him to have someone with a criminal record in his employ."

I could believe that. It fitted right into Cantrell's character. The only strange part was that he hadn't boasted of it.

"It would please him," I agreed grimly. "He had his hobbies. The whole matter of his murder, in fact, probably hinges on one of them... What sort of spectacle did he plan to show us last night, Jermyn? What was he up to?"

"I couldn't say, sir, but he was very much pleased with the new desk in the study, sir. Very proud. I was serving him and Mr. Purcell drinks, sir, while Mr. Purcell was taking photographs of it, and I heard him saying proudly that it had belonged to one of the greatest scoundrels in the French Revolution, sir. He said the person helped criminals steal things and then caught them for the police, sir."

Poisson. That checked with the theory I'd had to discard. But I said with elaborate casualness, "By the way, Jermyn. I notice the pewter platters are gone from the hutch cabinet in the study. Those South American platters. —Very fine pieces."

"I couldn't say, sir," said Jermyn apologetically. "I never paid much attention to the collection-items, sir. Running the house proper, sir, has been more my line."

No help there. Twelve platinum platters, worth more thousands than would sound at all probable, received no attention from the servants in Cantrell's house, because only Cantrell and myself knew what they were worth. They might merely be put away, or they might be stolen, or the murderer in our midst might still be hunting for them—witness *l'affaire Houlihan*. And by every rule of decency they belonged to Adele, since the price she received for them was an outrageous swindle.

Jermyn went away. I drank my

coffee. Through a window I could see a man in a business suit on the lawn. He was down on his hands and knees outside the window of the study where Cantrell had been killed. He'd be looking for the murder-weapon, perhaps, or for something else that Nolan needed in order to pin the murder on me. A pleasant thought.

THERE WAS a little clicking of heels behind me. Adele came into the dining-room. She looked as if she hadn't slept well. She caught her breath at sight of me. "I—I wanted to see you," she said awkwardly. "I want to apologize, I think."

I looked blank. I had thought more steadily about her in the past twelve hours than about any other girl in my life.

"You see," she explained, "I told Mr. Nolan last night that I thought you were in the library when the murder took place, but I did admit that when—Mr. Purcell and I looked in there for you when the discovery was first made, the library was empty."

"Now why," I asked mildly, "did you say that?"

It was undoubtedly the truth, but I was in trouble enough.

"Because we thought it was so!" she said unhappily. "We did look in and didn't see you. But we didn't actually go inside the room; I thought it over later and there are alcoves there formed by the bookshelves, and if you were standing in one of them..."

I picked up the idea in my stride, as it were. "Oh! I see now! As a matter of fact, I did refer to a shelf-book once, to verify an idea about a chair I think is a Meissonier. You might have looked in then."

Her expression lightened. She waited almost breathlessly.

"The book," I added convincingly, "is 'Chair-makers of the Regency'. It is on a shelf in an alcove. I was looking up a certain type of *rocaille* decoration that's on the chair."

She drew a quick breath. "There!

That explains everything! I'm so glad! That will cancel everything I said to Mr. Nolan!"

"I'm afraid not," I told her wryly. "He may consider only that it proves I know where a certain book is kept on the library shelves. And, strictly speaking, he's right."

Her face fell; she looked acutely uncomfortable. "I'm so sorry!" she said anxiously; "is there anything I can do to fix it? I hardly slept, for worrying that I might have thrown suspicion on you without real reason."

That was irony. There was reason to suspect me, all right.

"You might talk things over with me," I said. "I might get some good out of talk that wasn't exclusively reasons for thinking I slaughtered Cantrell, plus my increasingly feeble rejoinders."

She managed a quick little smile, but the anxiety didn't leave her features. "Let's walk outside."

We went out-doors. It was a singularly fine morning, and everything did look quite incredibly serene and peaceful. But I did get a nasty turn when I saw some men coming up one of the back walks toward the house with one of those gruesome wicker baskets that only undertakers use. The murder had only happened last night; it seemed longer.

I led Adele in the opposite direction.

Then, almost immediately, we came upon Purcell taking pictures of two men in business suits, doggedly turning over each leaf and grass-blade in an area they had marked off with string. I'd only seen one before. They were hunting for anything that might have been thrown out of the study window. For a weapon, perhaps.

Purcell said cheerfully, "If you two will let me get a picture of you watching them hunt, it might come in handy."

"Guests at the Murder-Party," I suggested unpleasantly, as a caption, "*Watching the Search for Clues Which May Convict Them of Murder. Is that it?*"

He grinned happily. "Maybe... D'you know, if Nolan comes through with a solution and a conviction on this, I might make it into a regular book—all pictures! No text except captions! Rather neat, eh?"

"Except," I suggested, "that Nolan may not be able to get a conviction. Maybe a burglar or a prowler is responsible. Someone Nolan won't be able to find."

Purcell aimed his camera. "Not likely," he said blithely. "Not after the cop was hit on the head and everything ransacked last night. The murderer's still on the premises."

I raised my eyebrows. I felt Adele trembling, beside me.

"How do you know?"

He pressed the camera-shutter. The picture, if it turned out, must have showed me scowling ferociously. "Guards all around the place," he said happily. "Nobody could have gotten in or out."

"Then who do you think it was?" I asked.

"I rather credit the official view," he said affably.

"Meaning me?"

He grinned. I turned and walked away. After a moment Adele came after me.

"What did he mean when he said a policeman was hit on the head and—everything turned upside down?"

I TOLD HER as much as I knew, which was no more than the bare fact. Then I walked on grimly. I was haunted by the fear that Houlihan's assailant had been hunting for the platters. I'd have tried a slight case of assault myself, if I'd thought I could get the platters and turn them back to Adele.

She looked up at me. "Are you trying to get rid of me? If you want to be by yourself, I won't mind; but if you've got the idea that you're disgraced because Mr. Nolan is silly enough—"

"I'm surely going to be tried for a cold-blooded murder," I told her wryly. "I might even be convicted. That ought to excuse a certain reserve of manner."

She said with conviction, "No! You won't even be tried! Why should you be?"

"Why not?" I asked.

We'd arrived at the sculptured faun that once had belonged to Cagliostro. The landscaping here was very good, but I paid no attention to it. I halted and looked down at Adele.

"Well... After all," she said restlessly, "I got you into this by saying you weren't in the library when you were. I could get you out, say that I was mistaken. That I looked in the library again and I realize that what I thought was a shadow in an alcove was you. That I distinctly remember seeing the shadow and it isn't there now so it definitely was you."

I stared at her.

"But why lie like that?" I demanded. "I've had girls lie to me before, but never one offer to lie for me!"

"Why should it be a lie?" she demanded indignantly. "Weren't you there?"

I hesitated for a long moment. Then I said with that insane confidence that makes men tell women things that get them hanged—saved, depending on the woman. "As a matter of fact, I wasn't. I've not been truthful about it, because it would look damned bad."

She stared up at me. It was still fairly early in the morning, and all the world seemed fresh and new. Adele was a very pretty girl. Now, looking at me startledly, she was a lot more than merely pretty.

"You weren't in the library when the murder took place? Where were you?"

"I'm not sure," I said, with what should have been completely fatal imprudence, but without any doubts at all. "Perhaps I was, at the moment of the actual killing. What would be awkward to admit is the fact that I was in Cantrell's study about five minutes after the murder, and probably ten minutes before anybody else knew anything about it."

She looked at me steadily, and hard; she even swallowed. Then she

made up her mind, apparently. She gave me a quick little smile. "In that case," she said, "it looks like you really do need somebody to do some fibbing for you, doesn't it?"

THE THING that came into my mind just then was that if Adele was actually like this, then having even unwittingly been the cause of Cantrell's cheating her was more than usually a crime. Which I would not now add to.

"I'm afraid," I told her, "you'd better step aside. This affair is really bad! For an extra item, I was downstairs last night. I saw Houlihan, the cop, asleep in a chair. And you just heard that somebody hit him on the head, later."

I think a little color went out of her cheeks. "But why do you tell me?" she asked protestingly. "You didn't really kill anyone, did you?"

"Not a single murder," I admitted grimly. "Not even part of one. But if the real murderer isn't turned up I'm going to have to substitute for him, apparently. So you want to get out from under. You don't want to become involved. You'd better simply cut me dead from this moment on—unless or until the real murderer is found."

She looked at me with the same steady, speculative regard.

"But if he's ever found," I said unhappily, "I'd like to know how to get in touch with you. I have ambitions to go places and do things with you if happier times should ever come."

Then she grinned at me. "That's silly! I shan't cut you. I'm a poor relation. In fact, I'm a poor relation of a poor relation. It doesn't matter if I associate with the criminal classes. Especially when they aren't criminal. Let's go on walking."

"But—" I began.

"I've had passes made at me before, but you're the first man who ever acted like he liked me and tried to chase me away at the same time. Isn't that reason enough? Your technic interests me. Let's let it go at that! I think this is going to be fun!"

Her grin was pretty good, but I stood my ground doggedly. After a moment the grin began to fade at the edges. "Of course, if you think I'm simply an officious nuisance and you'd like to—bust me on the nose, that's different. If I'm mistaken in thinking you need somebody to believe in you—as I do..."

"I don't want to bust you in the nose!" I said angrily. "As a matter of fact, I want like the devil to kiss you!"

She jumped. Literally. Then she stared at me. And then the grin came back, slowly, first as the beginning of a smile and then something warm and mildly wondering and a little bit mocking and altogether very satisfactory.

"My dear man!" said Adele. "Your technic is unprecedented,—and very effective." Then she put her head on one side. "Even that might be arranged," she said meditatively, "if you were very persuasive and—told me the whole story, every bit of the truth about how you got into such an awful mess."

But I shook my head; I certainly wouldn't tell her about those damned platters now.

5

I GOT RID of Adele by walking her to the house and firmly walking away again. She smiled at me almost mournfully. But she was irritatingly good to look at, and I had a very savage suspicion that she'd be able to wrap me around her little finger if I wasn't firm with her. So I was firm.

"You're going to stay out of this mess!" I told her.

"The truth is mighty and will prevail," she said pleasantly, and very persuasively. "And if you really want to kiss me—"

"That's true enough."

"And if," said Adele, "you also told the truth about not having murdered anybody even partially, why—that truth is going to prevail too. And I'd like to help it."

And she smiled at me; it almost

worked.

But I growled and turned and left her. I didn't want to, and she knew it. And somehow she knew that I knew she knew it. Our minds seemed to fit together, somehow.

The platters. The desk. That hiding-place in it, with threads of sheep-wool clinging to the rough wood-fibres. Cantrell, murdered and with that pathetic blank expression on his face. Houlihan, too—but I'd seen Houlihan only twice, and one of those times he was asleep in a chair, and an unbeautiful sight.

I stalked about the grounds, trying to piece things together in my mind, but feeling uncomfortably aware that Adele was probably watching me from the house and wanting to go back to her.

Nothing made sense! If Cantrell had been planning to show off the desk—as my discovery seemed to hint at—then undoubtedly one could account for everything up to a certain point. It would explain Terry's and Sally's engagement announcement; Cantrell's gloating prophecy of how I'd feel, and a very plausible guess at the murderer. But that murderer would have had a motive which didn't imagineably lead to cracking a cop on the head and ransacking Cantrell's collection in search of something! That second crime was most plausibly explained with the platters as the motive. But the platters wouldn't have urged anybody necessarily to murder Cantrell as things looked now, and certainly they couldn't have had anything to do with Cantrell's planned dramatic moment.

The combined items simply didn't make one sum; they might make two.

A plainclothes man came and told me Nolan wanted me. I went in the house and found him sitting by a telephone, smoking a disreputable, leprous cigar.

"I'm waitin' to eavesdrop on a phone-call for you, Morden," he told me.

"What's that?"

"A phone-call," repeated Nolan. "I'm waitin' to listen in. A guy's called up for you three times this

mornin'. Only he won't give his name an' he won't hold the wire. He keeps askin' for you to come wait by the phone for him to call back."

"The devil!" I said. "I came out here for dinner last night; I didn't expect to stay. Nobody knows I'm here!"

"Oh!" said Nolan. "He don't know you're here! It's just an accident, then, that he's so cagey he won't give us a chance to trace where he's callin' from!" He said ominously. "Listen, Morden! Since Houlihan got hit last night, I'm gettin' ideas! Maybe you didn't kill Cantrell just to get outa a jam! Maybe you're still after somethin'! Maybe this guy could tell me a lot I'd like to know!"

"To hell with you!" I said savagely. "The calls aren't for me; I don't want 'em and won't take 'em!"

I swung about and went furiously away from there. I wanted to get by myself and swear. This made less sense than anything that had gone before. But it had to fit in somewhere!

I FOUND a place in the rock garden where nobody was likely to come, and I fumed to myself. Presently Joe Winthrop came shambling loutishly out and picked a soft spot on the grass not far away. He sprawled out to read a book he'd brought with him.

I scowled at him. He didn't see me; he had a book from the library and read absorbedly. From time to time he pulled something from his pocket and chewed on it. He'd made some contact with the kitchen for food between meals. I sat and smoked and scowled, going over and over everything that had happened and getting nowhere. Those phone-calls, now...

A long time later I heard Adele's voice. She didn't know I was around and I hadn't seen her come. She was standing beside Joe where he sprawled on the ground. "How are you doing, Joe?" she asked.

He looked up and grinned, then said zestfully; "There're some swell books in the library. There's a

history of English highwaymen that's a pip. Read it yesterday. I've got another honey, now."

From my vantage-point, among rocks and shrubbery I could look out over miles of grass and woodland. This part of the lawn sloped away from town. But I looked down as Adele sat on the grass beside Joe. Not many girls can be friendly with a boy half a dozen years their junior without patronizing him.

"It's a book on jewel-thieves," said Joe, with relish. "History of the Koh-I-Noor. The Korloff. The Regent, and so on. There's not a big stone in the world that hasn't been stolen and murdered for, except the ones that've been found lately." He took a bite, and said with his mouth full, "More fun! More people killed.... They all turn up, though. There's only one big enough to have a name that's still missing."

His voice changed suddenly. "What's the matter, Adele?"

"Nothing," said Adele. She asked restlessly, "Have you seen Mr. Morden?"

"Nuh-huh," said Joe. It was a negative.

A moment's silence. Then Adele; "I don't think Mr. Morden killed your unc—Mr. Cantrell. Do you?" Then she said suddenly. "How about doing some detective work, Joe?"

He looked up alertly, raised himself on one elbow. "Mother'd raise the devil," he said cheerfully. "Have you got an idea, Adele?"

"I've been talking to Mr. Nolan," she told him. "He says he knows who killed your Uncle Tom. He says he needs just two things. One is proof that the person he suspects was in the study at the time of the murder. The other is the weapon the murder was done with. So... What would be shaped like a small onion, Joe? The thing that killed Mr. Cantrell was something round, about half an inch across, and it tapered almost to a point, only the point stuck out a little. It must have been already in the study, because Mr. Nolan doesn't think the murderer intended to do his killing with it, but counted on a sandbag to do the trick and

grabbed it up when Mr. Cantrell didn't die from sandbag blows. It must have had some weight behind it, because it pierced the skull. But it was at hand when he got desperate because the sandbag wouldn't kill... What could it be, Joe?"

Silence. Then their voices began again, lower-pitched. Adele sketched an outline on the grass. The outline of the deadly part of the weapon that had been used on Cantrell. It wasn't part of the fire-tongs; it wasn't anything anybody normally carried in his pocket. It could conceivably have been a finial on a baroque chair-back, but in wood it wouldn't have had strength enough to puncture a brain-case. It must have been metal. And Adele had described its shape more accurately than Nolan. He'd showed me a diagram and called it cone or pear-shaped; Adele said a small onion, and that was much closer to the diagram, even to the blunt extension of what could have been a dullish point. Nolan had said it was half an inch across.

People don't carry pieces of metal like that. They don't even use pieces of metal like that. Nolan would have been better off with an ordinary blunt instrument to look for. At least he'd know what that could be!

A MAID came out of the house, looking around. She saw Adele and picked her way toward her. "Luncheon is served, ma'm."

Then she saw me. I was in plain view, if you looked. The maid spoke to me. "Luncheon is served, sir."

It was the pretty young maid. She turned and went back to the house. Joe looked after her with self-consciously sophisticated admiration. But Adele looked at me with her head on one side. "Haven't we met somewhere before?"

"I was eavesdropping," I said stiffly. "Eavesdroppers rarely hear good of themselves, but I did. Thanks."

Joe said "Hello" and looked after the little maid.

"We have been deducing and deducting and so on," said Adele. "About the murders; we are still baffled."

I said sourly, "Has the phone still been ringing for me?"

Adele nodded, looked at me earnestly; I scowled.

We walked toward the house. Joe Winthrop came along, his nose in the book again since we didn't include him in our talk. There was a heading at the top of the page he was reading. "*The Regent.*" The Regent was a blue diamond on the order of the Hope, which disappeared during the French revolution. It had never been recovered. It fitted everything neatly together. The name of Poisson, who had been Secretary of Police Affairs for the Directory. A rococo desk, and Cantrell's boast that he was going to make me feel worse than that affair when he'd bought a set of pewter platters from Adele, after I'd told him they were counterfeits, made of platinum in the days when platinum had no value. Cantrell had felt that I envied him his luck—that I resented the fact that it hadn't been mine. He didn't know how savagely I resented the whole business now!

It all added up, beautifully. The announcement of Terry's and Sally's engagement fitted in. There was even an overwhelmingly plausible guess at who must be the murderer. But there was no evidence. Nolan couldn't even be told of my theory, because I'd found the cubbyhole which started it at a time and under circumstances which—if I admitted them—would fix Houlihan's injury or death irrevocably upon me.

We went into the house. I went upstairs to wash my hands. I went into the room Jermyn had assigned me, and then I stiffened. There was something wrong, somehow. I'd had no luggage when I came, because I'd only come for dinner. I was wearing one of Terry's shirts now. But there was something wrong about the room.

I felt it so insistently that I looked, and even then it was almost pure chance that I found it. The room was large and the furniture was naturally a part of Cantrell's collection. It was XIV century stuff,

massive and heavily carved and almost incredibly stuffy. It had belonged to that Marguerite de Crillon who married six times, poisoned five husbands, and lived to a ripe old age with the last. There was her *cassone*—a sort of hope chest of the Middle Ages—with very fine primitive decoration. There was an *armoire*, or press, to hold linen.

On top of the *armoire*, high up near the ceiling, I caught a faint dull gleam of metal. It didn't belong there. I climbed up to see.

THE TWELVE pewter platters that were worth so many times their weight in gold were piled up behind the *armoire's* decorative top. Adele's platters. The fortune I'd helped cheat her of. Somebody had cached them in the room I occupied. Found there, they would at the very least provide a motive for me to have murdered Houlihan the cop, after my supposed murder of Cantrell failed to yield them. If they weren't discovered, ultimately the murderer and thief would get a chance to take them away...

I got down to the floor and reflected grimly. After a bit I took a towel from the bathroom and climbed up again.

A little later I washed my hands and went down to lunch.

It was not a pleasant meal. Terry sat still, not scowling but not uttering a word. Sally Morris didn't appear. Mrs. Winthrop ate with a mournful appetite and in a quasi-melancholy silence. Joe Winthrop ate with normal sixteen-year-old voracity. And nobody but Adele spoke to me. Purcell regarded me with a cheerful wariness and said nothing whatever.

Two separate telephone-calls came for me during lunch. The first time whoever called simply asked for me and hung up immediately when the cop Nolan had on the job said he'd call me. The second time he said; "*You tell that guy he'd better be waitin' for my next call!*" Nolan, of course, had an extension ready to

listen in on; he'd told me so, blandly.

I grinned at him angrily when he suggested that I spend some time waiting by the phone. "No thanks," I said. "I have what is sometimes known as a hunch. There is dirty work at the crossroads, Nolan. I don't know the gentleman who's calling for me; I don't want to know him. He doesn't want to talk to me, anyhow. He wants to talk to a couple of other guys."

Nolan looked at me almost respectfully.

"I assure you," I told him, "that he doesn't know me. If you'll have somebody answer the phone and pretend to be me, my unknown chum will take the bait and speak as my companion in crime. But you, Nolan, will know that he isn't my companion in crime if he doesn't recognize my voice. He'll be—to put it vulgarly—a phoney."

Nolan said, "You're smart, Morden!"

"I'm smart enough," I told him, "to have arrived at the thought that I want you to have somebody watching me every minute, but not to let you get anything on me. Come to think of it, I wouldn't mind being pinched. Now. Right away. At your earliest convenience. Can it be arranged?"

Not pleasant conversation for the luncheon-table. Nolan shook his head. "I couldn't make it stick," he said without resentment. "I ain't got the two pieces of evidence I need. I can't prove you were in the study at the time I wanna prove it, an' I ain't got a smell of a idea what the killin' was done with."

Mrs. Winthrop pressed a handkerchief to her eyes. Terry scowled. Adele looked from one to the other of us, her eyes somehow anxious. Purcell listened with an air of cheerful interest.

I got up from the table and said politely, "I've decided that I want to stay in the public eye for a while. I shall talk to one of your cops until somebody else turns up to talk to me. When you get a chance, I would like to have a conference with you."

I went out of the dining-room. I rather expected the telephone-calls to stop. As it turned out, they did.

I HAD A sort of program in mind, but didn't have a chance to carry it out. Nolan didn't confer with me; he was conspicuously busy all afternoon. But Adele came out-of-doors and sauntered over to where by that time I sat in dourly visible solitude. She stopped by me and said politely, "Are you still grumpy?"

"I wasn't grumpy," I said angrily. "I was sensible!"

"Are you still in a mood of stern intelligence?" she asked with the same air of polite inquiry. "If not, I might sacrifice myself to sit down by you for a while."

I grinned reluctantly.

But Adele was good for me. She didn't argue; she began to talk, casually, and presently we were getting along famously, and suddenly she stopped short and said in mild inquiry, "Did I understand you correctly this morning? Did you say you wanted to kiss me? And did I say—"

"You did," I told her grimly. "I did. And you did say it could be arranged if I'd tell you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But I refused to meet the conditions."

She shook her head at me. "Sooner or later," she told me, "you will rue the day."

* * *

When we went in to dinner, it was just about as bad as lunch-time. Sally invisible; Terry scowling and wordless, not speaking to anyone at all, and only Adele really speaking to me. But when Purcell asked her to pose in some pictures he was making of part of the furniture collection—to give them life, he said—she agreed cheerfully. Nolan disappeared. I was left alone. It was absurd for me to be irritated, but I went up to my room and sat there with the lights on, smoking savagely.

About eight o'clock, I heard an excited uproar out on the lawn; I stayed grimly where I was. The tu-

mult spread to the house. Then I heard a car start up beyond the outer stone wall, and when I looked out I saw its tail-lights and the glow of its headlight racing toward town at top speed.

There weren't so many people in the house, but there was an atmosphere of jitters; of excitement; of something close to horror. Just the sound of voices conveyed it. And I got curious. Curiosity wouldn't be too healthy for me, but it wouldn't be wise to be too incurious, either. I went out of my room and down the stairs.

WHEN I appeared, with a cigarette in my mouth, Jermyn looked at me in stupefaction; Joe Winthrop gaped at me; Adele was deathly white. She stared at me with stark incredulity in her eyes. Somebody ran and told Nolan. He came into the big living-room just as I was asking curtly; "Well, what's happened? I heard excitement and came to find out what's up. What is the excitement, and what's happened to make you look at me as if I were a walking case of halitosis?"

Nolan stared at me hard. Then he beckoned behind him. "He's here," he said flatly. "The guy's got nerve, anyhow. Take him, boys; we got enough to tuck him away on now!"

Two cops appeared. They approached me warily. I said sardonically, "I hate to trouble you, Nolan, but would you mind telling me what all this is about?"

Nolan nodded as if to himself. "You got nerve, Morden. You're smart. But I think it's all over but the shoutin' now. We're gonna have a showdown."

There was a cop at each of my elbows.

"But would you mind," I repeated in ironic politeness, "just satisfying my innocent curiosity? What's happened to make me demonstrably a scoundrel rather than just a suspicious person?"

Nolan scowled at me.

"Still pullin' the innocent gag, huh? All right! Terry Cantrell's headin' for a hospital an' a blood-

bank now, with one chance in three of bein' alive when he gets there! We found 'im on the lawn. He hadda get to a hospital, an' fast, but he could talk. He said you did it. Said he'd caught you with some platters that are worth plenty of cash. He accused you of killin' his uncle for a chance to grab 'em off—an' you hadda knife an' you used it!"



I'D LIKED Terry well enough, but I wanted to laugh without any amusement at all. The mention of the platters had ruined everything, but I was sure Terry hadn't said what Nolan reported. It didn't happen to be true. If Terry had been found stabbed, he was probably too far gone to talk, and Nolan was bluffing to try to break me down. And I raged.

I grinned savagely at Nolan. I was mad as hell.

"Tough guy, huh?" said Nolan. "Let's see!"

He glanced around him. Adele stared at me with an urgent, frightened question in her gaze. Purcell was fiddling excitedly with a hand-camera, his eyes bright, fitting in a flash-bulb with fingers that shook with his excitement. Joe Winthrop stared at me with the queerest expression I've ever seen on anybody's face. To a sixteen-year-old boy, presence at the unmasking of a murderer would be an overwhelming experience.

"Er—Nolan," said Purcell agitatedly. "I'd like to get a picture of this, but the grouping's all wrong..."

Nolan nodded to him. "Yeah. Let's go in the study. Appropriate, huh?"

I suspected Nolan of playing up to a situation, which would be natural enough. But I said nothing. I was bitterly, savagely wise, now. It wasn't time to play what few trump cards I had. I said only, "I'd like to have a lawyer, Nolan."

"You'll get one," he said flatly. "Right now, I think, you're gonna talk— An' there are gonna be plenty of witnesses, so's you can claim

third-degree stuff later!"

With a cop at each elbow, I went into the study. The others crowded behind me. Purcell darted off somewhere and came back with his big camera and tripod—the same one that had been set up to take pictures of an entirely different sort in this same study only last night. He'd been taking pictures of Adele with various items in Cantrell's collection at the time of the reported attack on Terry. Now he spread out the legs of the tripod, fairly quivering with excitement. He began to make the adjustments which fill so much of a photographer's time that the actual picture-taking is anticlimactic.

I was still bitterly amused when I found myself with the two flanking cops taking the center of the stage. The cops had led me there, and they would be prominent in the picture. Joe Winthrop dutifully went for his mother, and Purcell hastily asked Jermyn to send upstairs for Sally Morris. He was all loaded up to take pictures. I imagine he expected a dramatic picture when Sally came in.

He got it.

She came in the door, and I'd thought Jermyn looked ghastly the morning after Cantrell's murder. But Jermyn never looked like Sally did. She'd only just heard about Terry. She was dazed and numbed by shock. But when she looked at me her eyes were black with anguish, and there was a terribly accusing look in them, and she moved like a sleep-walker.

A FLASHLIGHT glowed intolerably for the fraction of an instant. I don't think she knew it. Nolan motioned for her to be led to a chair alongside the desk that Cantrell had actually used—not the rococo new piece. Nolan sat casually on that. Purcell changed plate-holders and stuck in another flash-bulb.

"We might as well go over the works," said Nolan briskly. "I got reason to believe that somebody can fill out one point that had me stumped for a while. I knew right from the beginnin' who done the

job on Cantrell, but I didn't have the evidence. Then that job on Houlihan rocked me back on my heels, but what Terry Cantrell told me while we were carryin' him to the car—that pulled it all back together again."

I saw what was coming. I said politely; "Not that I've been rogues-galleried, Nolan, may I sit down to listen?"

He waved his hand toward the desk-chair. Purcell swung his camera to get a picture of Nolan, lecturing. During all the rest of Nolan's talking, Purcell shifted his camera to individual after individual, and shot an excellent sequence of portrait studies of people under strong emotion. It was, when you think of it, almost a photographer's idea of heaven.

"When I got here," said Nolan, painstakingly, "I found Cantrell sittin' in a chair—that chair—" (It was the chair in which I happened to be sitting, by the way.) "with a wound in his temple that was enough to kill him. It was a funny kinda wound. I never saw one like it before. An' the doc said he'd been out cold or dead when it was made. Remember?"

He looked about the room. Purcell snapped his picture. Mrs. Winthrop came in, stricken; Nolan ignored her. He paused impressively and pulled a delapidated cigar out of his pocket—while Purcell made his camera ready again. Nolan inspected the cigar and licked its wrapper delicately to hold it in place. He fumbled for a match.

"I questioned everybody," he went on, making a gesture that included everybody in the study. "I found that one person in the house had plenty of reason to kill Cantrell. He said he'd been by himself in the library when the killin' was done. Two other people had looked there for him when the killin' was first discovered, though, an' they didn't see him."

From the depths of the armchair in which Cantrell had been murdered, I said sardonically; "Shall I take a bow, Nolan?"

He paid no attention. Having found a match, he struck it. "The trouble was—" He puffed at the impossibly tattered cigar—"the trouble was that I couldn't find out what he'd done the killin' with, an' I couldn't get any lawyer-proof evidence that he was in this room when the killin' was done. In court it woulda been a circumstantial-evidence case. Hard to get a conviction. But I knew who done the killin', all the same."

Sally Morris looked at me. Her hands were twisted in her lap. Her affection for Terry Cantrell hadn't brought her any great happiness, but now that he was dead—Nolan had tried to bluff, but I believed him dead—now that he was dead her anguish was pitiful to see. And she believed I'd murdered him.

"I started diggin'," said Nolan. "I was hopin' for a break. I kept the party right here—nobody leavin', waitin' for somethin' to crack. Then Houlihan got his." He puffed. "That meant I'd been wrong. Not about who done the first killin', but why. Killin' Cantrell mighta got Morden outa a jam, but Houlihan,—no. Morden was already outa his jam. Houlihan was killed so somebody could hunt for somethin'. I didn't know then what he was huntin' for."

I waited with grim anticipation. I wasn't disappointed.

"Morden asked the butler, here—" Nolan nodded at Jermyn—"what'd happened to some pewter platters that'd been in the study. I got to wonderin' about them. It turned out they were missin'. I asked Terry Cantrell what they were. So he jumped. He said—"

SLOWLY, CAREFULLY, deliberately, Nolan told us about the pewter platters Cantrell had bought from Adele. He didn't mention her, and her expression did not change. She didn't identify counterfeit pewter platters made of platinum with the ones she'd owned. Nolan told how the man who'd made them had been hanged for counterfeiting good silver coins in worthless platinum, and how the supposedly

pewter platters were of the metal which at the time of their making had no value at all.

But Sally Morris' eyes changed. This was a motive for me to have killed Cantrell—and Terry, too. From anguish her expression passed through accusation to a terrible, burning hatred.

"We found those platters finally," said Nolan negligently. "Morden'd hid 'em." He looked at me sharply, but I did not look either indignant or surprised. I felt, in fact, some grim satisfaction. When they tried to prove that I knew the whereabouts of or had ever touched those platters, they would be surprised. "Yeah. Morden'd hid 'em. He didn't know we'd found 'em. An' maybe half an hour ago, he started to talk to Terry Cantrell, got him mad. An' Terry busted out with what he knew—that Morden had killed his uncle to get outa a jam an' for a chance at the platters, an' Houlihan so he could hunt for an' find 'em. An' when Terry Cantrell spilled that to Morden,—why—Morden jumped him. With a knife." Then Nolan added detachedly. "Because it was quiet, I guess. But Terry Cantrell was able to tell us before he d—"

He stopped. But everybody finished the word. It was "died."

There was a terrible silence. Sally Morris made a little choking sound. I hadn't killed Terry Cantrell; I was sorry for Sally. I had plenty to worry about on my own account but—well—to keep them from looking at her, I said evenly;

"It's pretty ingenious, Nolan. If I didn't know better, I'd believe it. Unfortunately—"

It was probably my voice that did it. Sally Morris started to her feet, and her hand groped on the desk beside her, and then in a horrible sobbing flash she ran at me. She'd picked up a paper-knife. It wasn't sharp except at the point, but that was quite sharp enough. I caught it in my forcarm. Then the cops beside me had her. She struggled desperately for an instant and then went limp. She'd fainted.

Nolan had been an instant late in stopping her. He looked vexed. Jermyn started forward. I scowled him back.

"Lay her down somewhere—no. Put her right here!" he said angrily. "I gotta finish this! I ain't talkin' just to hear myself talk! I gotta reason for talkin'! You all right, Morden?"

One of the cops pulled the paper-knife out of my arm. Blood followed it. Not much. It hurt, but not unreasonably.

ADELE CAME over, quickly. Without a word, she pushed my coat-sleeve back, folded back the shirt-sleeve—it was Terry's shirt—and found the wound. She was chalky-white, but her lips were set firmly. I fumbled with my other hand and gave her a handkerchief. Without a word, she tore off a strip or two and tied up my arm to stop the bleeding. It was an odd sort of interruption. After a glance at the wound, Nolan waited scowlingly for the thing to be over. And I realized that Purcell had made at least one flash-bulb picture, though I didn't know until later that he'd snapped Sally plunging at me with the knife.

"Okay! Okay!" said Nolan sharply. "I ain't just showin' off! I gotta reason for tellin' this stuff in detail just like this! Now stay right here an' listen! I'm gonna ask everybody one question. It's time for somebody to come through!"

He glared about him. Mrs. Winthrop bit at her lips, blinking in horror. Joe was thrilled. Jermyn's face was a study in amazement. Adele was shockingly pale. She looked at me in a sort of pleading question. Suddenly I felt an amazing feeling that the world wasn't so bad after all. I looked at her and managed to smile a little bit. And I shook my head reassuringly.

"This is the stuff I wanna know!" said Nolan angrily. "There's somebody—an' I think they're right in this room!—that can fill out this case complete. I got to have that somebody come through!"

He wasn't impressive, Nolan, but he dominated us all in spite of the nasty small incident just past. I sat back in my chair.

"Jermyn, here," said Nolan savagely, "found Cantrell's body. He went in the study, an' saw his master dead. All of you know the rest of it. But somebody was in that room before Jermyn got there! Somebody was in there between the killin' an' the time Jermyn found the body! I wanna know who was the first person to know that Cantrell was dead! Come clean, now!" He pounded with his fist. "Who straightened Cantrell up in his chair? When he was killed, he fell over! There's a blood-stain to prove it. Somebody come in, saw him there—maybe thought he'd fainted or somethin'—and straightened him up to try to revive him! An' that somebody musta figured they'd be accused of murder, an' beat it! I want that person to talk, now! I gotta have the evidence they can give! If you think a cold-blooded murderer oughta fry, come on, now!"

He glared. At Jermyn. At the pretty maid-servant, who shivered and shrank back. At Adele, who was still looking at me with that frightened questioning look. At Mrs. Winthrop and her son.

I looked at Sally, only now opening her eyes and moaning softly. If she'd believed Terry killed his uncle—

There was another blinding flash. Purcell had made another picture. He had an unparalleled opportunity for dramatic photography, had Purcell. Now he changed his plate and said ruefully, "Since you put it that way, Nolan, I guess I'd better confess. I'm the one you mean."

Nolan swung his head and stared. "Huh? You? Why in hell didn't you tell me—"

Purcell shrugged. He looked definitely sheepish. "I didn't dare, Nolan. Not until you found the real murderer. I was supposed to take pictures of the great event Cantrell intended to stage. It was to be the announcement of Terry Cantrell's

engagement to Miss Morris, here. After dinner, last night, he went in the study and I started upstairs, but it occurred to me I'd better make sure about the lights. Just after I'd gotten upstairs, I went down the back way and into the study by the back door."

He nodded at a door behind me, the second entrance to the room we were in. I'd entered the study by that door, just after Cantrell's murder.

"I'd gone up to get a roll of color-film," explained Purcell. "I meant to have one of the servants mail it. Jermyn will remember that. He mailed it for me, later. But after I went upstairs I went down again and into the study, and I found Mr. Cantrell murdered."

NOLAN RELAXED. He even smiled. "Aha!" he said in satisfaction. "Now shoot the works!"

"It happened just as you said," said Purcell apologetically. "I thought at first he'd fainted. I straightened him up. Then I saw he was dead, realized he'd been murdered. And then I realized that it was a perfect set-up to incriminate me."

Nolan blinked. Purcell said more apologetically still; "Mr. Cantrell had been killed with my camera-tripod, Nolan. I was supposed to be upstairs. I'd no plausible excuse for being down—apparently sneakily down. If I went upstairs to fix film, and then come out of the study announcing that Cantrell was murdered and I didn't do it... You see?"

It was plausible. For Purcell to come out of the study where he wasn't supposed to be, announcing that he hadn't killed Cantrell though his camera had—But there was a question.

"Look!" said Purcell.

He did something to the top of his tripod and lifted the camera off. He lifted the heavy tripod from the floor. The legs ended, of course, in heavy rubber tips like those on the bottoms of crutches, but heavier. And Purcell twisted at one of those

tips and it came off. Underneath there was a rounded metal piece shaped rather like a small onion. It would be used in place of the rubber tip, to hold the tripod solid out-of-doors. Indoors, it held the rubber tip on.

"Cantrell was killed with one of these," said Purcell. "One tripod was lying on the floor with the rubber tip off. Fortunately, the camera hadn't been harmed. Somebody'd pulled off the tip, jabbed savagely with the weight of the tripod behind it, and that was that. But you figure what a fix it put me in, being in the room where that had happened, with no convincing excuse for being there!"

Nolan looked triumphant.

"Okay! Okay! Swell! So what'd you do?"

"I put the rubber tip back on and set up the tripod again. I was panicky," admitted Purcell. "I was scared to death! And then I thought there'd be a question of what weapon was used. If they found the tripod put together again, they'd blame me for it. My fingerprints would be on the tip, too. So I—" He looked apologetic and ashamed at once. "I—I tossed the fire-tongs into the fire, to make it look like they were the weapon and had been thrown in there to get rid of the fingerprints. Then I went out again, sneaked upstairs, fixed up my roll of film, and brought it downstairs again. I gave it to Jermyn and he mailed it. I admit that I did wrong, but I think that anybody else would have done the same."

Nolan looked so complacent that he almost acquired a likeness to Cantrell. He beamed. "This winds up the case, all right! Did you clean off the tripod tip?"

"I—just slipped the cap on," said Purcell. "I meant to, later, but there wasn't anything to clean—"

"A test'll show it," said Nolan expansively. "That winds—"

Purcell said awkwardly. "There's another thing—"

Nolan stopped instantly and waited, exuberantly.

"I—couldn't say it before," said Purcell. "You see, with all the evidence against me, for me to accuse someone else would have seemed merely—well—phoney. So I didn't say anything. But I saw somebody else come out of the study just as I started down the back stairs to go in myself. I didn't think it odd at the time, and after I found Cantrell I was scared. But—I can tell you who was in the study before me."

"Go ahead!" said Nolan cheerfully.

"You've already guessed it," said Purcell with an air of relief. "It was Sam Morden, here."

I sat tight-lipped while Nolan nodded and grinned.

"That's swell!" said Nolan. His voice was triumphant indeed. "You can make the pinch now, boys!"

So the policemen who stood by my chair moved forward. One of them got out a pair of handcuffs. There was an instant of blank, incredulous amazement.

Then Purcell was staring in utter stupefaction at the handcuffs on his wrists.



NOLAN IS not an easy man to like, and it is especially hard for me to feel any great affection for him. But he did try his best to make amends afterward. After Purcell had been hauled out and rushed off to jail—where the District Attorney was already set to take over—Nolan tried to make up for everything.

He turned to Sally Morris first. He seemed ill at ease. She was deadly white and stricken, and tears flowed in a steady, silent stream.

"Lookahere, Miss Morris," he said uncomfortably. "You're gonna think I'm a pretty rough customer, but I hadda do it. I hadda convince the guy! I didn't have no more notion than the man in the moon what it was that Purcell killed your uncle with; I hadda make him tell me. I didn't like it, but there wasn't any way out! An' nobody saw him come

in the study here to do his killin', an' nobody saw him go out. I hadda make him admit he was in here! So I—well—it was pretty rough on you, but there wasn't anything to do but ask Mr. Terry Cantrell to help."

Maybe Sally heard him. If so, she gave no sign. She stared straight in front of her with tears rolling quietly down her cheeks. Nolan said impatiently, "Dammit—I oughta break it gentle, but I never heard of anybody dyin' for joy, yet. Wait a minute!"

He went out. I wasn't quite as dizzy as some of the others, because after all I'd known that I was innocent of Cantrell's murder. But I felt rather peculiar, at that. I grinned wryly at Adele. She came over to me. She tried to smile, but it was all twisty and her lips were quivering.

Nolan came back. With Terry Cantrell, who looked singularly unlike anybody who had been stabbed. He looked sheepishly healthy. I gaped at him. Adele gasped. Mrs. Winthrop let out a scream. But Sally Morris stared at him, and—her face like chalk—went up to him and touched him, and then laid her head against him and began to cry in the most heart-broken fashion I have ever heard. Terry looked singularly like a fool.

"I hadda convince Purcell that somebody else was pullin' off stuff," said Nolan unhappily, "so he'd try to frame 'em an' give me the evidence I hadda have? You see, don't you, Morden? I knew he'd bumped off Cantrell, but I couldn't prove it! I hadda make him give me the proof—him thinkin' I was gonna use it against somebody else! Ain't it reasonable?"

I was holding Adele's hand. Her face worked queerly.

"That's why I hadda fake it that Houlihan was crashed," complained Nolan. "That's why I had those fake phone-calls come, figurin' they'd be a excuse to pinch you. You caught on they were fake an' I hadda stop 'em, Morden. Dammit, I hadda make Purcell think there was

another crook he could unload his stuff on! I'm sorry, Morden. There's some platters in your room now we were gonna spring—"

"They're not there now," I said in grim amusement. "You'll have trouble finding them! I've plans for those platters!"

"The old duffer left them to you," said Terry, acutely embarrassed by Sally's sobbing. "He said you were the only honest dealer he ever knew, and you told him what they were."

"You knew what they were!" I was dazed. And also, I was a little bit angry. But if they belonged to me now...

Nolan said guiltily, "Listen! Help me out, willya? I wanna put over the case to the District Attorney. I knew Purcell done it, right from the start, because he'd handed a package to somebody to mail. It hadn't left the house when I got here. I went out an' looked at that package just before I started questionin' you las' night, Morden. Purcell had mailed out a roll of color-movie film. That's what the box said, an' that's what he said later. But it was addressed to him at home, instead of to a place where they'd process it. So I opened it in a dark room by feel—an' I found something in it."

CLICK! LIKE a blinding light the whole business became magnificently clear. I stood up and said gently, "Don't tell me, Nolan! Let me guess! It was a blue diamond of about forty carats, rose-cut I think, and worth more money than you like to think about. It was probably wrapped in raw sheep's wool. And no such stone has been reported stolen, or—"

Nolan's mouth dropped open. "Hey! You—"

"Not guilty, Nolan," I told him. "It used to be called the Regent diamond. Marie Antoinette wore it with the crown jewels of France. It disappeared during the French Revolution and was never heard of more. And—"

I went over to the rococo desk. I pushed a bit of ornament and pulled on the appropriate *espagnolette*. A

tiny, oblong cubbyhole showed in the unvarnished wood beneath. I pointed.

"It stayed in there," I said, "for a hundred and sixty years. A chap named Poisson, who was Secretary for Police Affairs for the Directory stole it from somebody he probably had guillotined for stealing it from the Louvre. Last week Cantrell bought this desk because it'd belonged to Poisson—a notorious scoundrel. He hunted for secret drawers. Naturally. Everybody does. Only he found the Regent diamond, and he made me come here last night because he thought I'd want to cut my throat from envy when I saw what he'd got; he was going to have Purcell photograph it for a newspaper story so he could boast to all the world—and he insisted on having Terry and Sally announce their engagement at the same time so he could show off by giving it to them as an engagement present! Anybody want to bet against that story?"

Nobody did. Nolan drew a deep breath. "That's it! Sure! He'd ha' told Purcell about it in advance so he'd have the right kinda color-filters an' such to use in gettin' the pictures. Purcell would be the only other man in the world to know about it! Only him an' Cantrell! So he knew that if he could bump off the old guy with a sandbag before he told anybody else—"

The rest followed. All of it.

* * *

THAT'S ABOUT all. I suppose it was an hour later when Terry Cantrell came moodily into the library where I was talking to Adele. We were arguing very contentedly over whether she had found out first that she liked me, or—

"I wish," he said irritably, "you'd wipe that lipstick off your face, Sam! Look here! I'm in trouble! It's Sally!"

"Ah, woman-trouble!" I said. "I'm not interested."

"She's locked in her room," he said bitterly, "She won't let me talk to her. She's ashamed, she says, and never wants to see me again. She's crying!"

He seemed indignant. Adele put her hand where I could reach it without too much trouble. I reached.

"I used to think I hated her," said Terry, fretfully, "Before that, I was pretty keen about her. But you know my uncle! I got sort of interested in Sally, and he tried to ram her down my throat! He messed up all my life that way! And the way I liked Sally, I didn't want somebody to arrange our marriage! I wanted to fix it up myself! I wanted to—well—I wanted her to want to marry me because I'd made her want to! He spoiled everything! I got so I felt like I hated her. But every so often I'd think that maybe she'd marry somebody else, and then I'd go off and get stewed just thinking about it. See?"

"I'm remarkably uninterested," I repeated contentedly.

"But dammit!" said Terry, more indignantly still. "If she cared enough about me to try to kill you, just because she thought you'd murdered me—why—that changes things! He couldn't have made her feel that way! I made her feel that way! And if I did it—She couldn't have wanted to kill you for any other reason than caring about me just for myself! You see?"

"Quite right," I agreed. "She displayed an enthusiasm for the idea which was far beyond the call of duty."

"So," said Terry gloomily. "I want to marry her. But now she won't speak to me. And I feel like—like—"

"Terry, my friend," I said firmly, "your minor psychological symptoms are fascinating, but Adele and I have a lot to tell each other, and only the rest of our lives to tell it in. Go upstairs and break down Sally's door. Tell her about yourself. She'll be interested. She may pretend not to be, but she really wants to hear... Get the hell out like a good guy, won't you?"

HE STARTED for the door. And something belatedly occurred to me. I said, "Wait a minute! You knew those platters were plati-

nium, Terry! I thought only your uncle and I knew that!"

"Oh, he told me," said Terry without interest. "I got them out of the safe for Nolan. Uncle'd put them away. I suppose because the desk and what was in it was a bigger prize, and one to be more proud of—He left them to you. Did I tell you that?"

"You did!" I said in satisfaction. "But did he tell you who he bought them from?"

"Some dealer," said Terry impatiently. "A dealer who'd stuck him once, years ago. He gloated over that. Anything else?"

He went out—to break down Sally's door, most likely. I turned to Adele, blinking. "I thought you sold those platters—"

"My platters?" said Adele blankly. "I sold them through a dealer. Of course. I wouldn't have sold them directly! He'd have thought I was trying to trade on being a second cousin once removed! He never knew I'd owned them. Why?"

I drew a long breath.

"Dammim!" I said ruefully, "the old duffer sneaks the spotlight even after he's dead, and when I'd rather be talking about something else. He wasn't a scoundrel, Adele; he was just an extrovert. And as soon as I can legally turn them over to you, you'll get your platters back and be a rich woman."

"Will that make you like me any better?" she asked.

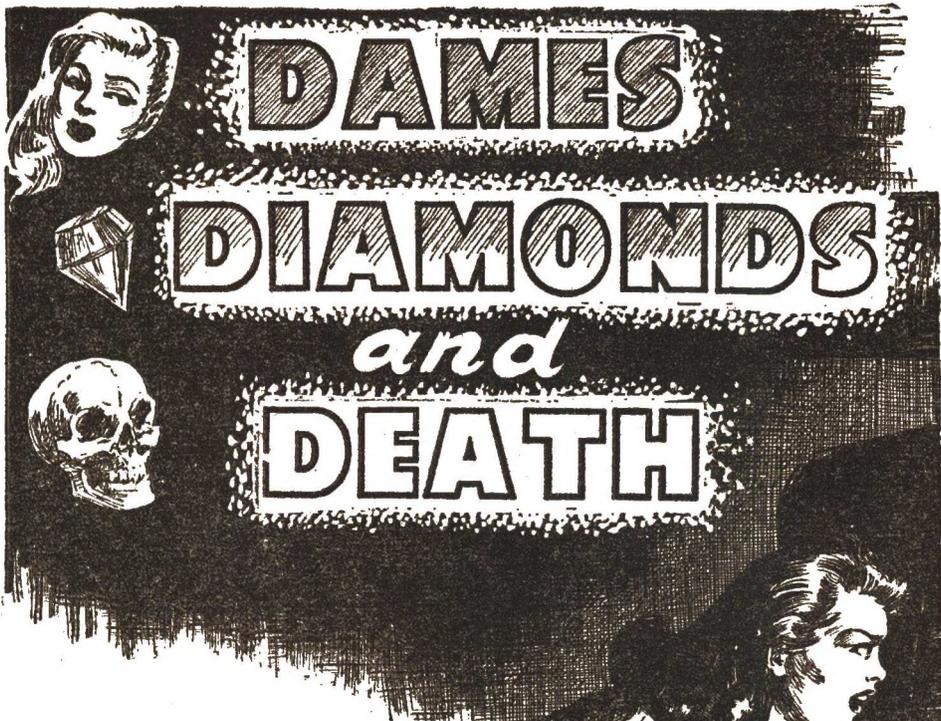
I moved toward her wrathfully. She put her hand on my arm, looking at me very pleasantly. I said "Ouch!" It was where Sally had poked a paper-knife into me. Adele said in sudden viciousness, "I hate her!"

"Darling!" I protested gently. "You shouldn't think about such things now! After all, you have to decide whether we will be married by a sleepy justice of the peace tomorrow morning, or by a very bored minister of the gospel in the afternoon—I'll help you think."

After an interval she panted, "But—but Sam! Let me breathe!"

I did.

THE END



by
**Oscar J.
Friend**

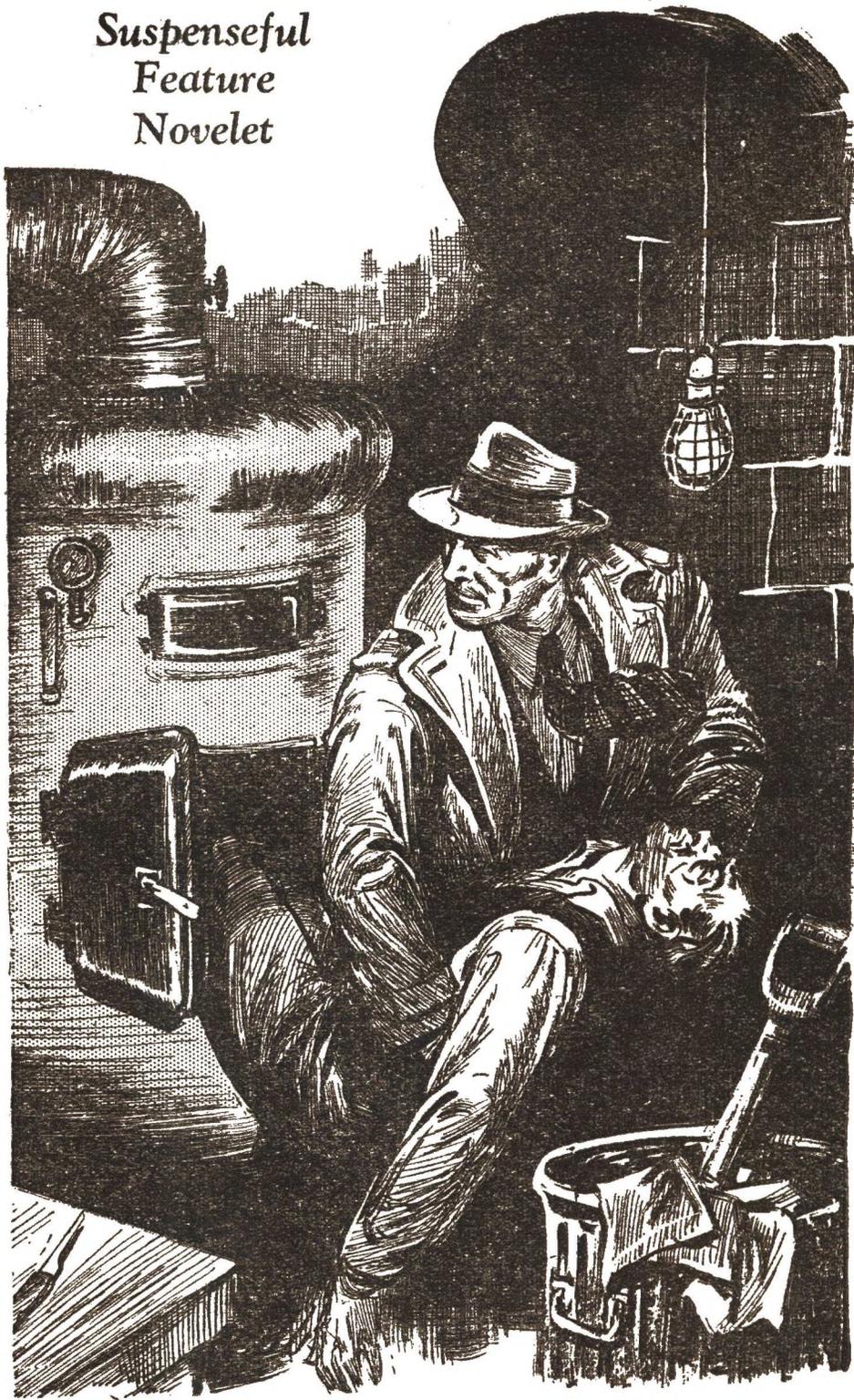
When a fifty grand diamond necklace, and a con man, posing as an actor, disappear at the same time — can murder be far behind?

NOW I GOT mixed up in the Anthony Adams disappearance case in the first place is something I can attribute to Edith Shaw of the *Morning Tab*.

Don't get me wrong. I'm big enough to shoulder my own mistakes, and gosh knows I've made plenty in my time. What private detective hasn't? Just because I am Bill Walker, ex-lieutenant on the force and ex-G-man doesn't mean my foot never slips. And whoever said that blondes are dumb never met Edith Shaw; she can do things with those big, violet eyes and that agile think-tank—



*Suspenseful
Feature
Novelet*



It began that morning when Mrs. Milton Van Ashley retained me to recover her fifty-thousand-dollar diamond necklace, been stolen from her Park Avenue apartment. Are you asking me why a woman—even one as wealthy as Mrs. Van Ashley—would be so foolish as to have that much ice laying around loose? I can't answer that.

I accepted the case over the telephone, nabbed Littlefield, my camera and fingerprint, and dashed up to the Van Ashley place.

Mrs. Van Ashley was fair, plump, and fortyish—a handsome dame clutching at the slipping garment of youth. Her husband was still at home when I got there. He gave me some preliminary dope on the servants. The butler was all thumbs as he tried to carry on his regular duties, while the maid hovered around Mrs. Van Ashley, smelling salts in one hand and aspirin in the other.

Milton Van Ashley was trying to finish his breakfast. He was about fifty, well preserved, clean-shaven; he was a successful broker down in the financial district, and it was obvious that he was deeply in love with his wife. On his left hand I noticed a plain gold wedding ring.

"Now, let's get this matter straight, Mrs. Van Ashley; night before last you wore your necklace. Anthony Adam had an early dinner with you and Mr. Van Ashley before going to the theatre. Mr. Van Ashley went to his club to play bridge. But you didn't leave the house. At ten o'clock the butler departed with the maid and you put your necklace away in the wall safe yourself. You didn't open it again until this morning. Then you found the necklace—and nothing else—missing."

Both husband and wife nodded agreement.

"The safe was uninjured, and nothing was disturbed," I continued. "Nobody heard or saw anything suspicious and you don't know whether this was a day or night theft. Townes and Celia, the butler and maid, have both been with you for more than two years, and their references are in order. Nevertheless, this has the earmarks of an inside job."

Mrs. Van Ashley glared at me. "In-

side job," she said. "I don't understand."

"It will be necessary to investigate your help thoroughly," I explained. "Of course—"

A crash stopped me and made Mrs. Van Ashley jump. Townes had dropped a water glass. Murmuring an apology, he knelt swiftly to clean the mess. I glanced casually at his averted face, and resumed.

"Of course, I am taking it for granted that neither of you has any private knowledge concerning the necklace since—"

"Just what do you mean by that, please, Mr. Walker?" demanded Van Ashley.

"Nothing much, sir," I told him. "Sometimes a husband or a wife hold out on the other, and this case looks like inside work. I'll be as painless as possible. The necklace was insured, I presume; have you notified the insurance company or the police?"

"No," said Van Ashley. "You are the only one my wife has informed. Walker, I am inclined to agree with you about this being an inside job. If that's so, the less publicity we have in the matter, the better will be your chance of tracing the necklace. There's a ten percent commission for you if you succeed, but expenses only if you don't."

I LEFT it at that. There was more I would have liked to talk to Mrs. Van Ashley about, but not in front of her husband. So I went back to the office, leaving Littlefield behind, still busy. As a matter of routine I put out Matthews and Hewitt, my two leg men, to make the rounds of certain fences. I was searching my files for similar cases, when the telephone on my desk rang.

"Bill," came the lovely voice of trouble over the wire, "I've something big to tell you; meet me at the cafeteria in ten minutes."

"Now, look, Edith, I do have a paying case now and then. I've been retained by Mrs. Milton Van Ashley on a funny job, and—"

"What a coincidence!" Edith interrupted me. "It's about Anthony Adam I want to talk to you; see you

in nine minutes."

I was thoughtful as I made my way to the cafeteria. Anthony Adam was a flashy, smooth English actor, appearing in a current stage play, *While Women Weep*. He had a reputation of being a Lothario, was the protege of Mrs. Milton Van Ashley.

Edith Shaw and I shopped along the steam tables for food, got seated at our table. "Bill, Anthony Adam has disappeared; he's been missing twenty-four hours!"

I stared at her. "Ummm—so have Mrs. Van Ashley's diamonds. Coincidence?"

"Bill! Just because Anthony Adam runs around with Mrs. Van Ashley, you don't think he's a thief."

"I don't think anything, baby; I'm just commenting. Go on."

"Adam vanished after leaving the theatre last night and hasn't been seen since."

"That makes him missing for thirty-six hours. Have they dragged the cocktail bars and hotel lounges? I understand Adam is at his best in such places."

"You're in a dirty mood, Bill Walker. Adam has been gone thirty-six hours, so we'll start searching for him right after lunch. We can begin by going through his effects at his suite in the Hotel Pali-Savoy."

I swallowed hard and looked at her lovely face. "Kid, I love you but I only hunt eggs for money. Unless Adam has involved himself in fifty thousand dollars' worth of necklace, I wouldn't be interested; think he swiped the rocks?"

"Of course not! Why should a rising actor do a silly thing like that?"

"Okay, sugar. I'll bet Milton Van Ashley sent him on a sea voyage in a leaky yacht."

"Bill, you're horrible! There's nothing to that gossip. Madeline Van Ashley is just a silly, middle-aged woman who has more time and money than is good for her."

"You needn't describe it to me," I said with a grimace. "I spent two hours with her this morning. But, in spite of her nonsense I'm going to find that string of jewelry for her husband."

"Then you won't go with me?"

"Can't sounds better."

EDITH was still burning when I put her aboard a Sixth Avenue bus that would take her by the missing actor's hotel; I went back to the office.

Littlefield was in the darkroom developing his film on the various shots he had taken at the Van Ashley apartment. The leg men had not reported. I called Thompson, the office man, in to make notes.

"Get hold of Matthews; have him tail Cyril Townes, the Van Ashley butler. Townes was nervous this morning while I was there. I want the maid checked, too; her name is Celia Hines. Tell Littlefield to pick out his best stuff and put it on my desk with any information he has before I get back. I'm going to run down to headquarters for a talk with Copeland on the—"

The buzzing switchboard in the outer office interrupted. Thompson hastened out to answer. "For you, Bill."

"Hello, hello, Mr. Walker?" The fluttery voice of Madeline Van Ashley vibrated against my eardrum. "Oh, Mr. Walker, isn't it just terrible about Anthony? He has been missing since the very evening he dined with Mr. Van Ashley and me. I'm so excited I can scarcely think. Of course, you must find Anthony immediately, Mr. Walker'. To think that I've been so agitated over my necklace that—"

"Hold on a minute!" I shouted desperately in the transmitter. "How did you find out that Anthony Adam is missing?"

It was like whispering in a whirlwind. Before Mrs. Van Ashley ran out of breath she told me Anthony Adam was the most wonderful actor on the stage, that he meant more to Madeline Van Ashley than her diamonds, but she wanted both. She also said he had been snatched and was in dire peril of his life, because Miss Edith Shaw, a charming representative of the *Morning Tab* had told her so. Also I was herewith drafted to include the search for the missing actor with my necklace job.

S 2 S

THE HOTEL Pali-Savoy was a swanky hostelry at the south end of Central Park; hardly a place I'd have picked as a hang-out for Anthony Adam, but New York is a crazy town.

I had to pass myself off as a plain-clothes man from headquarters to get into Adam's suite. If anything went sour I was letting myself in for a nasty session with the police, but I've gone over higher hurdles than this.

Once inside, I went through his stuff and it didn't take long to reach one obvious conclusion. Adam had not planned on taking a run-out powder; he had simply walked away one evening and just failed to walk back. I conceded a point to Edith.

Something else looked funny. There were no telephone numbers or correspondence lying around loose; it looked as if somebody had been here before me.

I went down to the cocktail bar and ordered a martini. Being early afternoon, it was a dull hour, and the barman had the time to be friendly. I pumped him carefully; yeah, Duke, the bartender, knew Mr. Adam pretty well. A fair drinker; good spender; nice tipper, and good looking. His specialty was the ladies; Duke remembered Adam's last two visitors distinctly, because they were men.

The first one he described was the Van Ashley butler, but I didn't turn pale at the news; there were a dozen legitimate reasons why Townes could have visited Adam.

The second man had come to the Pali-Savoy only once, so far as Duke knew. Had met Adam in the bar about two weeks ago, and the pair had engaged in low-toned, vehement conversation. Adam had resented this man's visit, or so it had seemed to Duke. The stranger had been a smallish chap—blue eyes, sandy hair, deadpan expression, and a small blue scar on his chin. Answered to the name of Joe and once he addressed Adam as Harry. That was all of the picture—Duke had run out of paint.

But I recognized the second man

by his description and Adam's resentment. Joe Pelmetti, a small-time crook whose specialty was burglary and the manipulation of safe combinations.

I WENT back to the office. Littlefield reported to me: All the prints belonged to the broker, his wife, and the two domestics. Apparently neither the butler nor the maid had been near the wall safe.

"Okay," I said. "Get your duffle together again. I have another job."

I went through my files for Joe Pelmetti. I didn't have anything on him, but knew where I could find plenty. When Littlefield was ready, we went back to the Pali-Savoy. I worked my headquarters act again, turned Littlefield loose on toilet articles in the Adam suite. Then we hurried back to the office to develop the films.

With several damp prints in my pocket, I went down to police headquarters to visit Lieutenant Tom Copeland.

"Pelmetti?" Copeland answered. "Yes, he's around; want him for something?"

"Not yet, Tom. But I'd like a good set of his prints—if you can dig 'em up for me."

Copeland nodded. "Can do."

I passed him the prints from Adam's apartment.

"While you're at it, you might check up on these for me. Probably haven't anything on 'em, but it would be such a good joke if you have. Gosh, I'll laugh."

The lieutenant cocked a quizzical eye at me. "There's something dead up the creek, you hyena; you wouldn't hold out on the police department, would you, Bill?"

I merely grinned at him.

"Blast these educated detectives," he growled. "Come on to the file room with me."

I don't know who was the more surprised, Copeland or I, when we found those fingerprints on file. They belonged to a crook named Harry Powell—"English Harry," he was called.

English Harry had been one of the most promising confidence men until

his disappearance four years before. He could talk a lone wolf out of his hide. His specialty had been rich women; he'd reaped a fat harvest up to the time he had mysteriously dropped out of sight. There were no convictions against him, but he was still wanted on three counts.

I read every word about him. My own case was practically closed. "Thanks, Tom," I said, getting ready to depart.

"Hey, not so fast, slick boy," he roared. "Where did you get these prints?"

"Aw, Tom, I can't tell you until I see my client."

"Where did you get those prints? I can see it's a police case, Bill. Hurry up, come clean!"

"Tom, you know I always play fair with the department," I assured him earnestly. "But I haven't a thing for you yet. After I find English Harry, I'll give you the facts. Thanks for the information and Pelmetti's finger marks. You must come up to see my prints some time."

"Wait!" called the lieutenant after my departing figure. "Come back here! I'll have your license canceled! I'll—"

I waved good-by through the closing door and lammed out of the building, with copies of Pelmetti's prints. This was news for Milton Van Ashley.

VAN ASHLEY was pretty busy, but interrupted his routine long enough to see me.

"Mr. Van Ashley, your wife has instructed me to start searching for the actor, Anthony Adam, who is missing?"

Van Ashley raised his eyebrows. "Indeed? How long has Adam been missing?"

"Since the night before last. I've reason to believe he took Mrs. Van Ashley's diamond necklace with him. Shall I go on?"

He nodded. "If you please."

"This is a delicate subject, sir. Although Anthony Adam is now an actor, he used to be one of the most notorious confidence men in the country. His true name is Harry

Powell; he is still wanted by the police.

"His specialty was defrauding rich women. He dropped out of sight about four years ago, traveled to England, changed his name to Anthony Adam, altered his appearance as much as possible, and went on the stage. Better notify the insurance company. You may use your own discretion about calling in the police. I considered it my duty to tell you this before sending out a general alarm."

He looked at me in such a queer way I felt sorry for him. I remembered all the rumors I'd heard about Madeline Van Ashley.

"You say that Anthony Adam is a crook?" The broker pulled at his lower lip with his left hand, the gold wedding band gleaming dully on his third finger. "But he couldn't have stolen the diamonds; he disappeared before Madeline put her necklace in the safe that night."

"I didn't say just how he got the diamonds, Mr. Van Ashley."

He frowned. "No, no, so you didn't. This will shame her. You haven't reported your discovery to the police?"

"Not yet."

"Very well. Under the circumstances, we'll just drop the case."

"What? And lose fifty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds?"

The broker expelled a deep breath and shoved his cigar humidor across the desk in my direction. "Have a cigar, Walker, and listen to me. Are you a married man?"

I shook my head as I selected a nice Havana.

"Anyway, you have a wide knowledge of the world. Frankly those diamonds were not worth fifty thousand dollars. They were paste—worth about five hundred dollars. Originally they were real, but my wife handled them so carelessly. I had them duplicated in paste. Then I made a substitution. The real stones are safe in my deposit box at the bank. But—get this—my wife doesn't know that!"

I sat up straight in my chair. "Then why did you call me; I don't work for nothing, you know."

He shrugged helplessly. "I had to

satisfy my wife. I was prepared to pay your fee. Now, in view of what you tell me about Adam, I can't make my wife the laughing stock of New York.

"You think Adam talked her into giving him the diamonds but I don't think so. In any case, I must protect my wife. So I am willing to pay you a five percent commission to call the whole thing off."

I considered this proposition. Van Ashley was willing to pay twenty-five hundred dollars to cover up his wife. Being in love makes a man do crazy things.

"But how can I explain to Mrs. Van Ashley?" I asked him.

"You don't; I'll take care of her. But you must promise to remain silent."

"Yes, perhaps that's best, Mr. Van Ashley," I agreed. "We'll deal."

I remembered Lieutenant Copeland without a qualm. Since Van Ashley felt that way, there was no case against Anthony Adam. Of course, Copeland eventually would learn Anthony Adam was "English Harry" Powell. Flight had given Adam away.

Van Ashley nodded. "Good. I'll give you my check right now. Mail your report to me here at the office. And thank you very much, Mr. Walker."

With a feeling of pity for the broker in my heart, and his check for twenty-five hundred dollars in my wallet, I went back to my office to work on my final report on the case.

IT WAS quitting time when I had finished. Then my Nemesis waylaid me again. "Telephone for you, Bill," said Thompson from the switchboard. "It's Miss Shaw."

"Hello, Bill," came the deceptively sweet tones of Edith Shaw. "Did you have a nice time this afternoon, running around all by yourself?"

"I had a very successful day, you double-crossing wench."

"Such language! Are you really mad at me, Bill?"

I laughed. "Not very. I have a fat check from Van Ashley in my pocket; the case is closed. Thanks for

putting me on to Anthony Adam, darling."

"The case is closed? What do you mean?"

I told her all. "Remember, I promised to look into the Adam business if the case warranted it," I concluded. "So he's our old smooth-talking friend, English Harry Powell, in the guise of an English actor. Golly, has that boy got talent. But he slipped badly when he ran off with that string of phoney diamonds."

She was silent for so long that I said, "Hello! Edith?"

"Bill, I don't know how you got this information, but it still doesn't change the fact that Anthony Adam has been snatched. How do you account for me finding his car in the street in front of the garage—with the seat covered with blood?"

"What!"

"I've just come from the garage on East Fifty-sixth Street," she told me sweetly. "I am calling now from the corner drug store. Why would Anthony Adam skip without his car? And, if he did, who brought the car back? Also, why? And whose blood dried on the seat?"

I surrendered. "You win. I give up, baby. Where did you hide the body?"

"I'll be waiting here at the Marlborough Pharmacy," she said in her most dulcet tones. "Are you bringing anybody with you?"

"They've all gone home." I groaned. "So, to satisfy you, I'll have to analyze the stains, fingerprint the car, and cross-examine the garage staff myself."

"That's sweet of you," she cracked back, and hung up.

3

UP TO THIS time I had treated the missing Anthony Adam in a lackadaisical manner, but now I really went to town; I could afford to. Van Ashley had already paid me a fat fee and Edith Shaw obviously didn't intend to let me rest until I got busy.

At the Fifty-sixth Street garage

I turned the night man inside out. His brain hadn't had such a working over since he'd quit the eighth grade in Eidskog, Norway. Mr. Carl Janorgsen told me Anthony Adam had his flashy sky-burst twin-six speedster, of blue and chromium with yellow pigskin upholstery, delivered at his hotel every evening in time for him to drive himself to the theatre. There Adam always parked the machine in the areaway—by special arrangement.

The garage would send and get the car at whatever hour Adam saw fit to return to his hotel. The fact that Adam failed to do so the night before last had failed to excite Carl Janorgsen.

Early this morning, to his faint surprise, Carl had discovered the car parked out in the street. Nevertheless he had run it up to its proper parking place on the third floor as a matter of course. The only thing he had noticed was that it needed washing and polishing.

No, it hadn't occurred to him to report the unusual manner of the car's arrival, before going off duty. Nor had he notified the police. If Mr. Adam wanted to do strange things, that was his right, wasn't it, Blood? Was that brown stuff blood? Mr. Janorgsen had taken it for a tobacco or liquor stain.

"Skip it," I said, dismissing him. "Rig me up an extension light, and go back to your work."

While Edith held the light for me, I took samples of the encrusted mud and whitish clay from the fenders and tire treads. Then I investigated the blood stain. There was a sizeable splotch about where a man's head would roll if he had been slugged at the wheel. I got enough to test.

Next I went after fingerprints, found four different sets and some glove marks. Downstairs I eliminated two of the sets; they belonged to Janorgsen and the garage mechanic. The other two we took back to the office.

On the way we stopped off at the theatre. After the stage door keeper had verified having seen Adam drive away alone on the night he had disappeared, we went on to my office.

Edith manipulated the microscope for me while I made sure the stain samples were human blood. The dirt was more puzzling. Two specimens came from Long Island, I was sure, but Long Island is a fairly large chunk of land. Tiny marine particles in one sample offered interesting possibilities of placing this specimen but the whitish clay had me stumped.

One set of fingerprints proved to be those of Anthony Adam. The others I was at a loss to figure until I thought of the set Copeland had given me on Joe Pelmetti. I made a comparison. Yep, Joe Pelmetti had been there, all right!

"Well?" demanded Edith, her eyes starry with excitement.

"This absolves Madeline Van Ashley," I admitted; "she did not give the phoney necklace to Adam. He arranged a burglary, either with Pelmetti, or Townes, the butler. Pelmetti was with Adam in the car, and possibly Townes, too, with gloves on. They quarreled over the swag; somebody slugged Adam and pushed him into a ditch. Probably thought he was dead."

"Then they got the necklace?"

"They must have," I said. "To delay discovery the car was sneaked back to the garage. But it didn't work out that way, and Adam wasn't dead. When he came to, he got cold feet and beat it. Now Joe Pelmetti or Cyril Townes has some hot rocks on his hands—phony but red hot. It's a sweet fix for somebody to be in—"

THE SUBDUED buzzing of a call on the switchboard interrupted me. I walked into the outer office and plugged in the trunk line. "Hello? Hello?" a harsh voice said. "Lemme speak to Bill Walker."

"Nix, on the brass, pal," I snapped back; "you don't have to holler. This is Bill Walker, and I'm not deaf."

"About dat Tony Adam mug," the voice blared, a trifle less stridently. "Youse can forget him. He's all washed up on dat nutty Van Ashley dame, see? He took it on the lam."

"What about it?"

"Just dis. If you want to stay healthy, tell Van Ashley youse is t'rough. Lay off!"

With this he hung up. As I pulled

the jack, I was wondering where I'd heard that voice before. A fine mobster he was, saying "youse" and "you" both.

"Who was it, Bill?" demanded Edith.

"I'm revising my theory again," I answered her. "Your hunch was right; Anthony Adam, alias English Harry Powell, is dead."

"Who called?"

"He didn't mention his name, darling."

"What did he say?"

I told her the text of the conversation and she became indignant. "He's got a nerve," she said. "Now how do you deduce that Anthony Adam is dead?"

"The gent who just called knows of Adam's whereabouts; also knows we have been checking Adam's car. Why should he threaten me instead of warning Adam? Obviously Adam must be dead."

"Right!" exclaimed Edith. "What do we do now?"

"I already have a man tailing Cyril Townes. My job will be to hunt up Joe Pelmetti and get a confession out of him. But you are not going along, pal; collaring tough yeggs is no occupation for nice girls."

"Bill Walker, the *Morning Tab* assigned me to investigate the Anthony Adam case," she protested. "If I don't turn in a decent spread by tomorrow, MacDonald will have my scalp. Who suggested Adam's car? Besides, I've covered the morgue so I can stand it. Am I going with you, or do I go hunting for Pelmetti by myself?"

I saw it was no use arguing. "Here's hoping this business doesn't take you back to the morgue. That baby on the phone sounded as if he meant business."

"Since he was watching Adam's car, it shows that Adam's body can be found."

"Cherchez le corpse," I answered, putting on a shoulder holster and slipping a blackjack into my hip pocket. "Come on. There's a combination restaurant and bar in the Forties east of Broadway where

we can get a line on Pelmetti along with a midnight supper. If not, I can find him tomorrow through the police department.

WAS I A FINE mug, to be thinking of the police after having sold out my interest to Van Ashley! But that had been before Edith dragged me back into the case by the heels.

Le Sommeil must have been laid out by a jigsaw puzzle expert who had made every inch of space count. The place was decorated in continental style. The waiters were French; Italian was featured; and the proprietor was a Greek by the name of Georges Papalopolis. We selected a booth which gave us clear vision, and ordered a spaghetti supper.

"Quit paying so much attention to that red-headed cashier," Edith warned me. "If you want to look at girls, look at me."

Georges Papalopolis came over to have a cocktail with us. I knew him well, having made it a point never to get him into a jam. Because of this, Georges saw to it that many stray bits of information came my way.

"You have met Miss Shaw of the *Morning Tab*, Georges? If not, forget about her. I mean that, Edith. This is Mr. Papalopolis. Edith, you stay out of here in the future."

"How do you do, Mr. Papalopolis," Edith said politely. "Don't mind Mr. Walker's manners; he was raised in an ash-can. Won't you join us?"

"Only for a cocktail," Georges answered, smooth as grease. "Consider yourself welcome here any time, Miss Shaw. Francis, the wine list, please. How have you been, Bill?"

"Fair and warmer," I assured him after we had ordered. "By the way, ever see anything of a little squirt named Joe Pelmetti?"

Georges glanced sidewise at me. "Officially, no. Unofficially, yes—tonight. He was agitated; has someone been putting on the heat?"

"A little. I'd like to ask him some questions?"

Nothing more was said on that subject. After our spaghetti arrived, Georges excused himself.

"And what have you learned?" Edith promptly demanded of me.

"Wait," I said.

We had reached our coffee and dessert stage when Papalopolis returned, dropped one of his business cards in front of me and inquired about the food. I palmed the card. After he had moved away, I turned it over; on the reverse side, written in Georges' round, flowing hand was a brief message.

Pelmetti is on make for my cashier. He gave her his address in Greenwich Village.

The last line on the card was a street and number in the Village.

Edith read the card and then looked at the red-headed cashier. She said later she was trying to figure out why any man would fall for a dame like that.

* * *

IT WAS gloomy and deserted down in Greenwich Village. We found the Pelmetti address, a dingy old three-storied apartment house. Pelmetti had the left rear apartment on the top floor. I was genuinely surprised to find him in. He called an inquiry through the bolted door in answer to my knock.

"This is the police, Joe," I told him in my best plain-clothes voice. "Come on, open up! I want to talk with you."

"Nothing doing," he growled sullenly. "Whatcha want?"

I could hear him breathing through the door because I had my ear against it; I had made Edith stand to one side.

"Never mind what I want," I snapped. "Do I have to kick in the panels?"

"Without a warrant?" he snarled. "Go lay an egg, copper."

For answer I rattled the door ominously.

"I got a gun in my hand," the voice inside snarled. "And I got a permit for it, too; I'm clean, see?"

"Then why yammer about a little talk? Open up."

"Who's with you, flatfoot? I heard two sets of feet."

"Just a lady. Don't make me sore or I'll get rough."

"Please, Bill," said Edith impulsively. "Stand away from the door; the fool might shoot."

The feminine voice decided the wavering Pelmetti. The bolt shot back. —"Come in—slow," he directed. "I ain't joking."

I flung the door wide open and didn't enter until I had spotted Joe in the middle of the room. I went in, Edith treading behind me. Pelmetti had an ugly automatic and an uglier face above it.

At sight of me his pale eyes widened. "So I don't know you, huh?" he snarled. "You're Bill Walker, ex-cop and private cop. What d'you want with me?"

"Can't you guess, Joe?" I asked holding my hat in my hand. "Sit down, Edith."

"Never mind sitting down," Joe retorted savagely. "This is a stall of some sort; both of you get outa here before I turn loose with the rod."

"You wouldn't really shoot, Joe, would you? A blaster makes too much noise."

He had the shakes. "Whatcha want? I'm just going out."

"Like a light!" I said; I threw my hat at his gun hand to distract his attention and sprang forward. He didn't pull the trigger. After a sharp scuffle, I gave him a lesson in disarming a man; he uttered a howl of rage as I tossed the gun to Edith.

"Close the door," I directed her grimly. "Now then, Joe, listen carefully and don't lie. What did you do with Anthony Adam's body?"

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VELMETTI turned green. To say that I startled the little crook could be putting it mildly. His condition was pitiful; he simply folded up and dropped weakly upon the bed.

"Better answer him, Joe," Edith ad-

vised. "He gets mean when you don't give him the right answers."

I walked across the room and stood above him. "Don't stall, Joe; Anthony Adam is English Harry, if you know him better by that name. You killed him, didn't you?"

Joe groaned. "I didn't kill anybody! I don't know what you're talking about."

"Back to you, Joe. You and English Harry lifted the Van Ashley necklace, and you killed him over the loot. Where did you dump his body? Where are the diamonds?"

"Honest, Walker, I don't know anything about it."

I grabbed him by the collar and shook him hard, as if he'd been a rag doll. Edith gasped. I didn't like what I was doing, either, but I knew if I scared him enough, he would talk.

"Bill," Edith protested faintly. "Is that necessary?"

"I warned you this would be nasty," I said without looking around. "Open up, Joe, before I really get tough."

Joe proceeded to open up all right. His language would have made a longshoreman gape in admiration. I learned some new ones myself before I shut off the obscene flow with a slap across his kisser. He flopped back on the bed, and I grabbed his coat front and jerked him upright. He moaned, staring up at me with fear-dulled eyes.

"Where is Adam's body? What did you do with the swag?"

"I don't know!" he screamed hysterically. "I tell you I'm clean."

"If you keep yelling, somebody in the house will call the cops," I said.

"I can stand it if you can; I can prove you visited Adam in the Pali-Savoy. Your fingerprints are in his bloody, mud-covered car. You've got the Van Ashley diamonds; what did you do with Adam?"

"Listen, Mr. Walker," he began to plead. "I didn't even know Harry was dead. Why I ain't been in his car for a week; I didn't know it was bloody."

"Better go out into the hall, Edith," I said grimly. "Come back when I'm through with this punk."

"No, Bill!" She gave a shudder. "He means it. Can't you see? Don't beat him up; I can't stand it. I didn't know you could be so brutal."

"You haven't seen as many hard eggs as I have," I answered. "He's got you fooled. This cluck knows something. I never liked the third degree but that won't stop me. Are you going to talk, Joe?"

"I'll kill you for this!" Pelmetti screeched. "You can't learn what I don't know."

"Bill!" Edith pleaded in a strained voice. "Let's get out of here. Please!"

I pretended reluctance. "All right, the lady saves your hide, Joe, but you haven't kidded me any. You'll do your talking down at headquarters. This is a murder rap; I'm turning all my evidence over to the Homicide Bureau. That's all for tonight, Joe. Come on Edith."

I PICKED up my hat, and shoved Edith out of the apartment. She didn't speak until we reached the street. Then: "Sometimes I'm afraid your work is brutalizing you, Bill."

"Perhaps," I finished for her, "I was just throwing a scare into him."

"Why didn't he confess, then?"

"I don't know. Maybe it has to do with what happened to Anthony Adam. If so, he wouldn't dare admit anything about the necklace; perhaps Townes may have put over a fast one."

"Are you really going to the police?"

"No. Just another bluff to start Joe moving. You better go home; the subway is only a block away."

"What are you going to do?"

"Tail Pelmetti."

"Be careful darling." Her voice trembled. "Call me in the morning."

"Sure. Beat it, kid."

We parted. From my vantage point in a dark areaway I watched her trim figure until it passed under the distant street light and turned onto Hudson Street. Then I settled down to wait for results.

Thirty minutes later, from the entrance of the cheap apartment house, a shadow materialized and

hurried toward Broadway. Under the first street light I recognized Pelmetti; he was going eastward.

It was now early morning and the streets were deserted. He led me to the east side and into the Brooklyn Bridge district, went to the last place I would have suspected. It was Lawson's Jewelry Shop.

Ivan Lawson operated a chain of hole-in-the-wall jewelry shops, but lived in the back of his first store, near Brooklyn Bridge. Lawson was well past middle age. He had a thick gray beard, long graceful fingers, and fine dark eyes. He spoke half a dozen languages.

He knew everything that was going on, but the police had nothing on him because he was straight. Yet he was not such a moralist that he squawked for the law every time a crook crossed his threshold with some hot jewelry, looking for advice. This was no place for Pelmetti, but it confirmed my hunch he was mixed up with the phoney necklace.

At length Pelmetti succeeded in arousing Lawson, who took him into the depths of his shop.

IN LESS than fifteen minutes, looking more like a whipped dog than ever, Pelmetti was back on the street. He seemed to be uncertain what to do next. Then he started south, and stopped at an all-night restaurant where there were telephones.

I saw him get change and enter a booth. I would have given a lot to have been able to check on that call, but didn't dare close in on him now. In a little while he came out, sat at the counter and gulped a cup of coffee.

A few minutes later, Pelmetti came out of the place, walked north and then westward to the *Vernon House*, a cheap hotel. Here he went in and registered. A bellhop took him up to a room.

At once I went in and asked the clerk for change for the telephone. I watched the arrow of the elevator stop at the eighth floor. A glance at the register told me Joe had been

assigned Room 815 under the name of Elmer Oliver.

Going into the phone booth, I called Matthews and Hewitt and waited for them outside the Vernon House until they arrived.

Leaving them on the job, I headed for my own apartment in the Forties overlooking East River. It was just about dawn when I went up to the eleventh floor in the automatic lift.

I remember yawning as I walked along the short corridor to my suite.

While unlocking the door to my apartment I felt a sudden draft. Holding the spring lock back with my key, I glanced back along the dimly lighted hallway; a detective learns to be suspicious of anything which is odd.

In this case my alertness saved my life. Halfway down the short corridor, the heavy metal fire escape door was open. It had been closed when I passed it. Sticking out into the hallway and lined right between my shoulder blades was the wicked snout of an automatic with a silencer fitted to it. I could just see the blurred white hand gripping the weapon, the merest smudge of a face, and the other hand, resting up a handkerchief, against the door casing.

I did the only thing possible under the circumstances. Shoving open my door with all my strength, I plunged headlong through. Just as I went sprawling I heard the soft *spinckkk* of the silenced gun, and felt a fiery streak burn across my left shoulder as I dropped flat.

I was rolling as I hit the floor. How I got both guns out of the shoulder holsters I don't know to this day, but I had them in my fists and, prostrate on the floor, I placed one shot from each just waist-high through that black hole of ambush.

Of course, I was too late; the metal door was already swinging shut.

My shoulder stinging, I scrambled to my feet and charged at the door. I found both my bullet holes in the iron door, not six inches apart. Good shooting, but futile. I was through

the doorway and down one flight of steps in the inky blackness before my neighbors could have had time to crawl out of bed and come to their doors to complain about the noise.

But it was useless. My attacker had disappeared. I raced down the stairs in vain. Later I figured out what he had done; he had gone up instead of down. From the twelfth floor he had used the automatic elevator and beaten me down by a wide margin.

Safe in the seclusion of my home, I stripped and examined my nicked shoulder in the bathroom mirror. I also recalled the telephone warning of that gent with the brassy voice. As a suspect for this incident, Joe Pelmetti was out. Hadn't I, myself seen Joe seek rest in the *Vernon House*? All the indications, therefore, pointed to Brassy Voice.

So I took a shower, painted the crease with iodine, put the chain bolt on the entrance door, and went to sleep. But I got a jolt about ten a.m. I answered the telephone sleepily; it was Matthews. "Bill," he said. "Bill, Pelmetti's gone! He ducked out on us."

5

I WAS WIDE awake in a second. Matthews went on to explain. Hewitt had guarded the lobby of the *Vernon House* while he himself had supervised the floor on which Pelmetti had his room by hiring an adjacent room.

When Pelmetti didn't stir by eight o'clock, Matthews had investigated, found our man had disappeared. The bed wasn't even mussed up. No, it wasn't magic; Pelmetti had used a fire escape.

"What shall I do now, Bill?"

"Go home and drink a cyanide cocktail," I told him.

"Aw, Bill!" he protested. "Pelmetti must have skipped before you put us on the job."

Score one for Matthews. He had something there—I had to admit that. Joe Pelmetti might have ditched me at the *Vernon House*;

if so, definitely he was back on the suspect list as the stairway shooter.

"Okay, Henry," I said. "You boys hop over to the Van Ashley place and dig up everything you can on Cyril Townes. Then report at the office."

While dressing, I put the think tank to working, reviewing the facts and considering the possibilities. It all boiled down to two things. I wanted to question the butler, Townes, as soon as possible, and an interview with old Lawson definitely was indicated, also.

Just as I was leaving the apartment, the phone rang. This time it was Edith.

"I thought you promised to call me this morning and report," she snapped. "What sort of a husband will you make if you keep forgetting such things?"

"Probably the world's worst, baby. I just got up to an awful of bad news. I put Matthews and Hewitt on Pelmetti's tail last night and they lost him. I've got to find him again; I'll call you around noon at the *Tab* office."

"All right." She hesitated. "Listen, Bill, I've been thinking about Pelmetti all night. Maybe he was telling the truth about the disappearance of Anthony Adam; maybe Cyril Townes double-crossed them both."

"Maybe you do better when you don't try to reason," I answered. "Last night Pelmetti visited Ivan Lawson. That means that Pelmetti has the phony necklace and he's in the mess up to his neck."

I hung up before she could think of a retort and went straight down to see Ivan Lawson. The old man smiled when he saw me entering the shop. "This is both business and pleasure, Ivan," I greeted him. "The business has to do with the answers to a few questions."

"If I can give you information, I will," he said, inviting me rearward. "Watch the shop, Herman."

The watch maker at the window peered up over his glasses and nodded. In the back room Ivan got out a beautiful decanter of wine and

a pair of crystal goblets.

"Sit down, William, and sample this exquisite Madeira. As for what you want to know, I can guess; it concerns the visit of Joseph Pelmetti, last night."

I stared at him over the glass in surprise. "You're in the wrong business Ivan. It's you who ought to be the detective."

Ivan smiled and sipped his wine. "It was the manner of and reason for his visit, which tells me why you are here. A diamond necklace. How you detectives ferret out such things so quickly always amazes me."

"I trailed him here last night myself, Ivan. I know that Pelmetti wanted to pawn or sell that diamond necklace and I can surmise what you told him. He telephoned somebody after he left here. Can you tell me who it was?" I shrugged. "I lost him later and must find him again—quick."

IVAN FIXED his limpid gaze on my face as he nodded slowly and rolled his wine around in his glass.

"Pelmetti," he commented at length. "He's a helpless product of generations of misbreeding. He was frightened and I pitied him, not for his obvious predicament, but for what he is." Ivan sighed again. "He tried to sell me the diamond necklace at half price. When I would not consider this proposal, he offered to pawn it. He must have needed money desperately, for he finally came down to the ridiculous figure of five hundred dollars."

"Which is what the necklace is really worth," I said.

Ivan raised his eyebrows. "So?" he said softly. "You are referring to the diamond necklace that Pelmetti showed me last night?"

"What?—You don't mean he had it with him?"

"Precisely," Ivan nodded, sipping delicately at his wine. "I should say, conservatively, the necklace Pelmetti displayed is worth not a cent less than forty thousand dollars at importers' prices."

I almost dropped my glass. "You

mean the thing was real?"

"A beautifully matched rope of blue-white stones," the old jewel expert said, obviously enjoying my discomfiture. "Surely, you are not displaying all this interest in paste jewelry?"

This news staggered me. First, because Pelmetti had more nerve than I suspected by traveling with the necklace immediately after my visit; second, because it was genuine and I had let it slip through my fingers.

But Van Ashley had assured me he himself, had tucked away the real ice in his deposit vault at the bank. Perhaps Madeline Van Ashley had slipped over a fast one on her husband; good paste jewels closely resemble genuine ones, and Van Ashley was no gem expert. He could put the wrong ones away in the safe deposit vault.

I did not, for an instant, question the accuracy of Lawson's assertion. If he said the diamonds were genuine, they were genuine and no fooling.

"Thanks, Ivan," I said. "Did Joe give any hint of where he was going?"

"No. I'm sorry."

"So am I," I admitted frankly. "I must run along; much obliged."

AFTER LEAVING Ivan, I went straight to Headquarters. Lieutenant Copeland looked me over as if I had a bad case of anthrax. "What do you want, you viper?"

"Nix, no harsh words, Tom," I said brightly. "I'm back here to do you good."

"Oh, yeah?" he grunted sourly. "I can guess what brings you back. You're stuck again and you want help. I've a notion not to give you any; what's wrong?"

"I've been playing games."

"Such as using the hall of your apartment house as a pistol range," he thundered. "I heard all about that. A couple of the boys are up there investigating right now."

I threw up my hands in mock disgust.

"And here I come galloping all the way down to Headquarters to give you a break, and this is all the thanks I get for it." I scowled at him. "I've a notion to walk out and leave you flat. But I won't, because I have a kind heart. Now, here's the favor. Send out a general alarm for Joe Pelmetti; have him picked up right away."

Copeland took a cigar from his vest pocket, stuck it unlighted into his mouth, and began to chew. "Just like that, eh?" he said sarcastically. "Maybe I'd better detail the Commissioner to help look for him. Gosh, that's nice of you." Then his eyes narrowed in sudden suspicion. "What have you got on Pelmetti? What's he been doing?"

I managed to look blank and innocent. "Nothing. Nothing at all, Tom. Joe and I are old friends and I lost his address. I just want to talk with him; we used to play together when we were kids."

Copeland removed the cigar and squinted at me. "What's he done? I never knew you to act like this unless it was serious. Come on, open up. Then maybe I'll oblige."

"Pick him up first, and I'll spill everything I have," I told him earnestly. "That's a promise."

He hesitated. "I'll be sticking my own neck out."

"If you don't, you'll regret it," I insisted. "I've given up plenty of tips, Tom. Have I ever handed you a bum steer yet? Send out that general alarm."

When he reached for the telephone, I saw I'd sold him a bill of goods and got out of there fast.

Back at my office, there was a surprise waiting for me. Sore at losing Pelmetti, Matthews had gone after Townes with blood in his eye, evidently, for he had rounded up the Van Ashley butler and brought him in without any undue ceremony. Townes was looking as ruffled as it is possible for a well-trained butler to be. He was seated in a chair near my desk, with a smudged collar and an annoyed expression on his face. At his feet was a Gladstone bag.

"Chief, I went up to the Van

Ashley place, this morning and they said Townes wasn't there?" Matthews said. "But I had a hunch and hung around outside. Sure enough, a while ago, he came trotting in with that bag. So I grabbed him and brought him down to explain."

"It's highly irregular," Townes grumbled. "You will hear from Mrs. Van Ashley about this, you know."

"Quite likely, Townes," I agreed amiably. "I hear from all sorts of people. It was also irregular for them to tell Matthews you weren't there when you were. It was more than irregular. It was right careless, in fact."

Townes didn't answer that. He just looked sullen. So I sat down, leaned back in my swivel chair and looked him over. I had obtained some information about him and the maid, Celia, from Van Ashley at the time I had first taken the case.

CYRIL TOWNES was English. Van Ashley had picked him up in London more than three years ago and had brought him back to America. He had been in her employ ever since. He was forty years old and unmarried. In the winter he lived in a lodging house on Amsterdam Avenue where his behavior had been most decorous. In the summer he lived with the Van Ashley family in their summer home on Long Island. His one ambition was to acquire a fortune and return to England. Cyril Townes was a clean shaven, muscular and wiry, and was nobody's fool.

"Now, Townes, you called on Mr. Anthony Adam at his hotel? What business did you have with him?"

The butler's eyes flickered. "I prefer not to answer your question," he replied.

"Indeed," I snapped. "Why were you nervous yesterday morning when the loss of the necklace was discovered?"

"I can explain that," he said. "Mrs. Van Ashley, sir, has the—ah—unhappy faculty of flustering those around her in her moments of excitement."

"Very smooth," I told him. "You have smooth ways, Townes."

"Thank you, sir," he answered, wooden-faced.

"Why were you fooling around with English Harry Powell?" I shot out at him. "What was your business with Anthony Adam, alias English Harry?"

He didn't bat an eye. "I never heard the gentleman had two names, sir."

"Yeah." I frowned. "Townes, I advise you to open up; or do you prefer telling it to the police?"

This threat softened him a trifle. "I've nothing to conceal, sir," he insisted.

"Why did you go to see English Harry Powell?"

"English Harry Powell? I never knew Mr. Adam had any such a name. If you will hold it in strictest confidence, sir, I will tell you why I went to the Pali-Savoy Hotel."

"I'll keep mum," I promised. "Give."

"I—ah—took personal notes to him from Mrs. Van Ashley. Nothing at all out of the way. He was a protege of hers. That is the truth, Mr. Walker."

I nodded. "Possibly. We'll pass that for the present. Where were you this morning? And what is in that bag?"

"Mrs. Van Ashley sent me over to the summer home to get a certain evening gown."

"Why send you instead of the maid?"

"The house is closed for the winter, sir," Townes assured me. "Mrs. Van Ashley knew I am familiar with her possessions. She thought it best to send me."

"Open the bag," I said.

"Sir?" he protested, staring to his feet.

"Sit down and shut up," I said. "Open it, Matthews."

Disregarding the butler's expostulations, Matthews dragged the Gladstone away from him and promptly unsnapped the fastenings. Folded carefully against wrinkles was a frilly pink effusion trimmed with ostrich feathers. It was just such an atrocity as Madeline Van Ashley would wear. There was nothing else in the bag.

"Mrs. Van Ashley will be furious

when she learns of this," Townes muttered ominously.

I shuddered. "Put the dress back quick, Matthews. It gives me a headache. That's all—for the present, Townes. Beat it."

Radiating insulted dignity, Townes marched out. Matthews gave me the interrogating eye.

"Freeze to him," I said. "Keep the Van Ashley place under surveillance."

WHEN HE had gone I sat there, deep in thought. Absently I studied the chair where Cyril Townes had sat and pondered over facts which didn't correlate. It looked as if I wasn't getting anywhere fast.

I glanced at my watch. It was far past the lunch hour. Hastily I grabbed the phone and put through a call for the *Morning Tab*. It was too late. Edith was gone, after leaving behind a sizzling message for me.

As I started to rise from my desk. I saw—

Dried mud!

There on the floor beneath Townes chair was a little flat, slick cake of dried clay which had come from the arch of one of his shoes between the heel and the sole. Its peculiar gray-white color brought me down on the floor like a pointer, in a hurry.

With a piece of plain white paper I carefully gathered it up and raced for the laboratory. I already knew what I had, but it had to be proved beyond possible doubt.

In less than an hour I had enough evidence to convince any court that Cyril Townes and Anthony Adam's car had been at the same spot.

The two specimens of gray-white clay were identical!

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CALLING Thompson in for a conference, I went over the entire case with him up to date. I felt sure the solution was in our hands if we could assort it in the correct order. We went over every scrap of evidence we had. I called Lieutenant Copeland. He said the police hadn't picked up Pelmetti yet. I was just about ready to go out

when Matthews called in with some pleasant news. It was around five o'clock in the afternoon.

His voice came mournfully over the wire. "Bill, I'll mail my resignation and badge to you in the morning. I don't want what I've got coming to me."

I didn't like the way he said it. "What the devil's eating you now?"

"It's Townes," he said sadly. "He's gone."

"What?" I yelled in the transmitter. "You left here right on his coat-tails. Did you go to a movie, you dumbbell?"

"Pour it on," he said meekly. "I got it coming. Townes took a sneak the back way—through the service entrance. I found that out from Mrs. Van Ashley. She told me she had let Townes have the rest of the day off and that he's been three hours. Now, do I come in to get fired?"

"No!" I yelled. "You're not fired. But don't show up here; if you do, I'll murder you. Tell Hewitt not to lose that maid if he has to marry her! You beat it down to Papalopolis' restaurant right away and freeze onto that synthetic red-headed cashier. Don't muff this one. And call in every hour."

"Yes, sir," he answered.

I hung up and swung around angrily. Thompson had discreetly withdrawn to the front office. Right then I got another phone call. This one was from Edith.

"Bill!" she cried excitedly. "I've found him for you! I trailed him to his hide-out over here on Long Island. Aren't you glad?"

"You've got whom?" I demanded.

"Why, Joe Pelmetti, of course. He's hiding in the closed up summer home of the Van Ashleys. I had to leave him there long enough to come to Port Washington to put in this call."

"Port Washington?" I cried. "You do get around!"

"Say!" she came back angrily. "Do you want this report, or don't you?"

"Keep talking, baby," I groaned.

"Okay. Remember that red-headed cashier? Well, when you didn't call me at noon, I went back to *Le Sommeil*. Pelmetti was there, so I fol-

lowed him out here."

"I told you to stay away from that joint!" I yelled. "Where are you right now? Tell me quick!"

Her laugh was mischievous. "I'm at Clam Point," she said. "I'm going back to watch that place. It overlooks the Sound. I'll keep Pelmetti hemmed up until you get here."

"Tell me one thing," I said. "Did you see any grayish white clay soil around there?"

"Yes. In the road leading up to the house."

"It fits!" I cried. "Listen, Edith!" I put my heart in my voice. "Don't go up there on the point. There's a killer on the way right now to meet Pelmetti at that deserted house. Wait for me where you are."

"I'll wait on the road in front of the house," she said acidly. "Hurry up!"

She gave me the directions and then hung up. Hastily I told Thompson the latest development as I gathered up flashlights and ammunition clips for my guns.

"Hang onto this switchboard for dear life, Thompson," I said. "I'll get you word if you should call in the cops. So long. Port Washington! Good grief, it'll take me an hour."

I CAUGHT a train just leaving the Pennsylvania Station. Luckily it was a long Island express which made few stops, but I practically sat on the edge of my seat having visions of Edith Shaw meeting death on a lonely shore road in the darkness.

I wasn't much afraid of Pelmetti leaving the house on Clam Point, but I couldn't call the police in until I had concrete proof that I had a case. I had to reach Pelmetti before he could give that diamond necklace to the man I knew would meet him there. And Townes had been at Port Washington just this morning—and was missing now.

It was black night by the time I found a stray taxicab at the station at Port Washington and set out for Clam Point. Then I sat and shivered as I watched the desolate, curving up-grade unwind before the ancient machine's uncertain headlights.

Not a soul did we pass after we left the little town. Finally, to my relief, Edith rose out of the night like a wraith from a boulder beside the road.

"Bill?" she called guardedly, coming to the side of the cab. "At last!"

The driver had stopped automatically. "What do I do now, boss?" he inquired. "This is private property."

"Right," I said, getting out of the car and grabbing Edith in my arms. "Take this lady back to Port Washington—"

"Hold everything. Bill," she interrupted me. "Why must I go back?"

"Edith, it's unlawful to go around, busting into places."

"Bah!" she said. "We'll ask for adjoining cells, Come on."

It was no time or place to argue. I decided to take a chance.

"Go back to Port Washington and call my office." I instructed the driver who was eyeing us both suspiciously. "Here's my card. A Mr. Thompson will answer. Tell him I said to call Lieutenant Copeland at Police Headquarters and crack the case wide open. That's all you have to say. And here's five bucks more than you asked for. Can I depend on you?"

Merit may count in this world but it's the dough that gets results. The driver reassured me heartily, backed his cab around, and highballed it down the road. I turned to Edith. "All right, Minerva, you've asked for it. Here's a flash-light and a gun. I hope you can use both."

VERY CALMLY she accepted the articles. Gripping one in each hand, she led the way toward the heavy fence which encircled the property. "You never let me tell you what happened," she said. "You got too excited. I didn't go into the Papalopolis place; it wasn't necessary."

"How did you and Pelmetti get out here?"

"We walked up. And are my feet hurting?"

"You should wear sensible shoes, baby. Are you sure Pelmetti didn't know you were shadowing him?"

"I am positive he didn't. He was anxious to get here and didn't look around even once. I think he's meeting Anthony Adam. Who else would feel at home out here?"

I could have told her, but I just said, "Go on."

"The place is a large two-storied house, half stone and half wood. It is built close to the steepest part of the Point. There's a garage, to one side, which is closed. The gray-white soil is over there on that driveway. I didn't follow Pelmetti into the grounds. He went straight to the front door and knocked. There was no answer. After awhile, he took out a big bunch of keys, found one that fitted the front door, opened it, and ducked in.

"I hurried off and called you. Then you started throwing a fit. Just the same I picked up the trail after all you men had failed."

"I admit that," I said gently. "Women have a way, my sweet, of jumping at conclusions. If they are right, they are miles ahead of us. But when they are wrong, they are terrible. I didn't want you barging around here alone, because someone is playing marbles for keeps." Then I told her of the attempt on my life.

"Why didn't you tell me that this morning, Bill?" she demanded. Her alarm for my safety made me grin.

"I didn't want to worry you, kid. Don't flash your light when we get near the house. How did you find out this is Van Ashley's property?"

"When I went to call you. Weren't you surprised?"

"To be truthful, not very. Townes was in Port Washington this morning and came back with some gray-white clay on his shoes. I hadn't got around to this place when you called me. A whole lot has happened since I talked to you last."

"What, for instance?"

We were nearing the house. We had climbed the fence and crept up to it through the underbrush and shrubbery. It was a solid structure which could have served as a winter residence. Now it loomed blackly against the sky. Not a light was visible.

The wintry wind blew chill from Clam Point. Pale stars gave the slate shingles a faint gilding as of hoarfrost, and the soft sound of the restless water on the distant beach sighed like a faintly discernible dirge.

"Tell me what happened, Bill?" Edith asked again in a whisper.

Before I could answer, the muffled but distinct sound of a pistol shot came to us from deep within the house.

There was a wavering cry which choked away into nothingness. Then silence reigned again.



EDITH AND I stood transfixed, until the last echoes of the pistol shot had died away. Then I heard Edith sigh as she let out her breath. She clutched at my arm.

"Did you hear that?" she whispered. "It was a gun. Somebody must have slipped into the house, while I was meeting you, and joined Pelmetti; they are quarreling."

"They were quarreling," I corrected her grimly. "I'll bet one of them has been unlucky."

"Quick," Edith said. "Let's smash a window and get into the house."

"No, there's a better way; I've got a set of keys, like Pelmetti. Let's try them. And keep quiet."

Swiftly we approached the porch and mounted the steps. It was dark there, under the porch roof, but I found the front door. By touch I identified the type of lock. It was of the modern spring latch variety which calls for a flat milled key with a serrated edge. But the master keys I had with me failed to solve it and I didn't dare delay too long. Every moment counted now.

By this time Edith was fairly dancing up and down with impatience as I stepped back to visualize the mechanism of the lock. The door would open inward. Therefore the tapered side of the lock was facing me. If Pelmetti had not shot the night bolt, I believed I could open the door.

As I drew a special knife from my pocket and opened a screw-driver type of blade, I could hear Edith's excited breathing. Selecting a spot where the latch entered the keeper in the wooden doorstop and the casing, slowly working the blade inward and crowding the latch back out of its slot and into the lock proper mortised in the door. Then I pushed gently.

The door opened. Putting away my knife, I drew Edith into the house after me. In another moment I had closed the door again. We stood in the inky blackness of the lower hall and listened, heard nothing. The house was deathly still.

To keep from bumping into furniture or walls in the darkness, I decided to risk one brief gleam of illumination. I flicked on my flashlight, holding it well away from us, and sent a beam swiftly around before snapping it off.

Nothing happened. We were standing in the middle of a reception hall. Arched doorways opened on either hand, and a colonnaded staircase led upward a few paces in the rear. In the hall and adjoining rooms we glimpsed plenty of furniture which was swathed in coarse white covers.

"Stick close to me," I whispered into Edith's ear. "Better take my coat-tail. Our pal who fired that shot may have lammed; but I'm betting he's still in the house."

"Where do you think the shot came from?" she murmured.

"From the cellar, but we'll explore up here first."

We made a careful round of the first floor with an occasional flash of a torch to guide us. We found nothing.

ARRIVING finally at the kitchen we noiselessly opened the door to the cellar. A draft of slightly warmer air eddied upward, air strong with a queer, unpleasant odor and a taint of gunpowder smoke. But the basement was pitch dark.

I didn't like to go down in that black hole but there was nothing else to do. So she took hold of my coat-tails again and I went down the cellar steps on my hands and knees

with her following in the same way. Slowly we descended into the unknown darkness. From below came no sound.

Getting to my feet on the concrete cellar floor, I switched on my flashlight. We were in a commodious laundry. In the far wall was a solid door leading to the front part of the cellar. Overhead were fat asbestos-coated furnace pipes.

Holding the flashlight in my left hand, and slipping the safety on my .45 in my right, I abandoned all further attempts at silence. Either I had my suspect cornered yonder in the furnace room, or he had escaped. So, with Edith on my heels, I moved forward and flung open the door with my pistol hand.

The ray of light cut through the blackness beyond, struck the huge-bellied side of a coal-burning furnace. Nothing happened. I crossed the threshold and swung the light about me in swift arcs. There was a large half filled coal bin, some shovels, and a drum of gasoline.

On the opposite side of the room was a solid eight-foot table. On this table lay a saw, a heavy cleaver, and a pair of wicked looking knives. Between the table and the large fire door of the furnace was a small but dark pool on the floor.

With Edith beside me, I moved forward and turned my light on the spot—fresh blood!

I had no time for squeamish reactions. I flashed my torch over the strange assortment of cutlery on the table. A terrible suspicion dawning on me, I swung the light toward the furnace, bent forward and opened the fire door.

This time I recoiled.

The body of a man lay inside. But I soon recovered from my dismay; handing Edith my flashlight to hold I grabbed the ankles and pulled the body out of the furnace.

As I turned the body face up on the concrete floor, Edith who had rallied from the shock focused the light on the body. It was Joe Pelmetti. He had a bullet hole through his chest and he was dead, but still warm. The killer must have heard Edith and I approaching. He had

hastily crammed the body into the firebox and fled.

Edith began to shiver.

"Steady, babe," I muttered. "Bring the light closer and remember the morgue."

That taunt braced her and she complied. I hastily frisked the body. My search was fruitless. Joe, at last, was what he had claimed to be last night—clean. There was neither weapon nor diamond necklace on him.

I took back my flashlight and returned to the furnace door as Edith switched on her own. Still gripping the automatic in my right hand and thrusting the light ahead of me, I stuck my head and shoulders into the cavernous maw of the firebox to examine the grating and the space beneath. I didn't find the necklace. But I found other things and they weren't nice.

Down in the clinkers of a recent savage fire were remnants of charred bones. I could recognize part of a human scapula and a fragment of skull. No diagram was needed to tell me what this meant. These were the incinerated remains of Anthony Adam.

Behind me I heard Edith utter a scream of terror. Backing out of that firebox, I turned around beside the body of Joe Pelmetti.

THE FURNACE room was brilliantly alight now. Edith had shrunk against the furnace, her hands sagging impotently with flashlight and gun. In front of the doorway stood a man with his face masked by a white handkerchief in which two crude eyeholes had been hastily hacked.

In his right hand was a heavy revolver. He had assumed the crouch of a desperately determined man as his weapon menaced both of us. I sighed regretfully. Now I realized I had made the mistake of my life in not exploring the second floor before coming down to the cellar. We were face to face with the murderer of Anthony Adam, Joe Pelmetti, and the gunman in my own home.

"So?" he said in furious tones.

"I didn't kill you this morning, Mr. Nosey Walker?"

"No, you muffed it," I said straightening up. My right hand, still gripping my gun, was hidden from his view, my left hand, holding the flashlight, was in plain view.

"Stay where you are," he commanded harshly. "Drop that flashlight. You do the same, young woman. Make no mistakes; I'll shoot without mercy!"

"Why not?" I asked softly. "Once you get the habit, it grows on you, doesn't it?"

His eyes glittered insanely behind his make-shift mask. "I warned you to lay off this case; I tried to save your life. Now I've got to kill you both."

"Like you killed Joe Pelmetti, eh? You'll cut up and burn our bodies like you did that of Anthony Adam?"

"Yes. You should have stayed away from here. You fools. You idiots." His voice ended in a shriek of rage.

I knew his control was wearing thin. I had to be careful, for I wanted to talk him out of this. It was my wish to take him alive if I could—not shoot him down, even if he was a cold-blooded killer. Perhaps I could break his nerve; it was worth trying, anyway.

"I came here tonight hoping to save Joe Pelmetti's life." I told him. "But already it was too late to save him; your case is as full of holes as a Swiss cheese."

"You lie!" he shouted, making the handkerchief billow like a napkin in the wind. "You have no case against me!"

I WAS RELENTLESS. "You gave yourself away step by step. Even now proof is in the hands of Lieutenant Copeland of the Police Department. You can't win, Milton Van Ashley. Why don't you take off that handkerchief?"

"You did go to your bridge club the night Anthony Adam disappeared. But you left in time to meet him after he left the theatre. You knocked him unconscious and drove him out here. It was the best place you could think of to hide the body. Maybe you didn't intend to kill

Adam at first, but he was a slick crook, and perhaps he goaded you into it with taunts about your wife. Anyway, you killed him instead of investigating him. That was your first mistake. It made you sick when you learned that, didn't it? You could have got rid of him so easily by turning him over to the police—if you had known.

"But the theft of the necklace honestly puzzled you at first, and you let your wife call me in on the case. You didn't suspect that Adam, being a crook, had already made plans with Pelmetti to rob the safe. But when the trail led back to Anthony Adam, you tried to buy me off. You did, but other things developed. To fool me you lied about the value of necklace. And you told me that Adam couldn't have stolen it himself because he had disappeared before the necklace did—and I hadn't told you just when Adam disappeared. So that was your second mistake.

"You sneaked Adam's car back to the garage, but you forgot about the gray-white clay mixed with beach sand that is peculiar to your driveway at this country home. But you were uneasy enough to watch the car. And when you learned Miss Shaw and I were investigating. You tried to frighten me off by telephone. Then my investigations led me to Joe Pelmetti, who was already scared to death at the mysterious disappearance of his partner in burglary.

"He wanted to return the necklace for any sort of a reward and no questions asked. You arranged to meet him here tonight. You killed him hoping to destroy the last link of evidence which might connect you with the murder of Anthony Adam.

"It might have worked, too, in spite of your earlier mistakes,—if you hadn't tried to kill me this morning. You gave yourself away. You see, I recognized you before you fired."

"You lie!" he screamed, shaking with rage and anguish. "You didn't see me!"

"No, Van Ashley," I agreed, my grip tightening on the hidden automatic. "I didn't see you, but I knew you. You gripped the door casing with your left hand, using a hand-

kerchief to prevent fingerprints. But you forgot about your wedding ring. Wait! I know thousands of men may wear plain gold wedding rings—but you were the only one doing so who fitted into the case.

"Mad with jealousy, you undertook to remove a worm in your path by stepping on it. And it's a shame your wedding ring should be the final link in the chain that convicts you. Van Ashley, I'm sorry for you, but I call on you to surrender—"

HE CRACKED wide open at this point, but not the way I had hoped. Perhaps his mind had given completely away. With a cry, he yanked up his gun to cover me. His knuckle went white as he sought to shut my mouth forever.

At the same moment I flung up my own weapon and began squeezing the trigger of my .45.

He did manage to fire one shot which clanged into the open fire-door close to my head.

Three times I fired, correcting my aim slightly on the second shot. Later it turned out any one of the three would have been enough; he took one shambling step forward, and crumpled down on his face.

Trembling slightly, I turned toward Edith. She had fainted dead away. I carried her upstairs and placed her on the shrouded divan in the living room. Then I heard footsteps on the front porch and had to

hurry into the hall to admit four men from the Port Washington police station.

For a brief time we were busy in the basement. We found the missing necklace in Van Ashley's pocket where he had placed it after taking it from Pelmetti. It was the final bit of evidence. I chose to think that the money I had already been paid was, after all, for the recovery of these diamonds and not for a private execution.

Leaving the police busy with their investigations I went upstairs and got busy reviving Edith Shaw. When she opened her eyes I was bathing her forehead with cold water.

"Bill!" She started up wildly. Then, finding me close, she sank back with a shudder. "Oh, Bill, it was—was horrible!"

I couldn't joke about her inability to take it as I gathered her in my arms. But neither could I resist answering a dig she had given me over the phone.

"Horrible is the word for it, baby," I said soberly as I cuddled her. "And this is an example of the man angle you dizzy dames ought to know more about. You drive us crazy."

"Oh, Bill!" she whimpered. Her arms tightened fiercely about my neck. She kissed me.

Instantly, I was just as batty as that poor devil Van Ashley had been.

THE END



Pattern for Doom

by Norman Ober

It's a blind man's buff — a little strip of leather with a curious pattern of holes in it. But did it contain a message that men with eyes couldn't see?

NED SICKLE and Pricilla Kane walked arm in arm, oblivious to the color of the eateries and the quaint shops that lined Eighth Street, commercial center of New York City's unique Greenwich Village. They were too wrapped up in one another to pay much mind to the sights, familiar enough to them, that brought tourists by the scores to Manhattan's artist colony.

Together, Ned and Pricilla moved along Eighth Street until they reached the front of Will DeVal's Pottery Shoppe. Ned served blind Will DeVal as apprentice and assistant; Pricilla was the sightless artist's secretary-salesgirl.

The two peered through the glass display window, past rows of interesting pottery exhibited, tastefully arranged. Ned put a hand over his eyes and leaned closer to see better.

The lights in the showroom were out, but the fluorescent beams from the workshop indicated there was still something going on inside. Ned shook his head in disapproval. "Look, Pricilla, we guessed right; Will's still working."

Ned took a key out of his pocket. Pricilla sighed. "When that man gets started on something new, he won't even take time out to eat until he's finished. I told you he'd stay late, in spite of his promises."

Ned unlocked the door and the two entered the dark front showroom of the shop. From neat showcases, gleaming decorations and unique patterns reflected the dim glow that escaped from the back room. Even before the door had slammed behind

them, Ned felt the oppressive heat of the kiln.

"Holy mackerel!" he muttered. "It's hot as the blazes in here. What the devil's Will doing back there?" His rapid footsteps echoed in the shop as he strode to the curtain that separated the showroom from the workshop. Pricilla's lighter steps tattooed directly back of his.

Ned swept the curtain aside, his eye moving quickly from the overheated kiln to the bench in the center of the floor. "Will!" he exclaimed. Pricilla's scream of terror shrilled before he could say another word. The blind artist lay slumped over his bench, still squatting on his workstool, in an attitude of surrender and relaxation. On the floor beneath him was a stain where blood had dripped until it had stopped falling from the wide blotch that reddened his chest.

"Oh, Ned! He's...he's..." Pricilla couldn't phrase the words. Ned rushed over to the blind man and tried to straighten him up. But the artist had already stiffened in his sitting position; the body refused to yield. Ned, looking at his left hand with horror, brought it away stained by the blood that was still clotting at his mid-riff.

The two exchanged terror-stricken glances. Pricilla, eyes wide, began to sway on her feet. Ned rushed over to give her support. "Easy, darling! That won't help. Get a grip on yourself, Pricilla. I've got to call the police. Will's...been murdered."

Pricilla brought a fist to her mouth and bit against her whitened knuckles. Sobs burst in a torrent



from the girl, as full realization came to her. "No!" she protested. "He can't be! Who'd...who'd want to kill...sweet old Will?" The tears overpowered her and she sank to the floor next to the bench.

Ned started for the phone, shook his already dripping forehead, passed a hand over it and turned to shut off the kiln. The heat in the room was close to unbearable. The electric baking oven had been allowed to continue in operation by whomever had murdered the blind artist, building up heat in the room to a dangerous point. The apprentice abruptly

moved to the switches controlling the oven and shut them off. Then he returned to the telephone.

Seconds later, he heard his own voice, dry and unreal, speaking the words, "Operator, give me the police. There's...been a murder!"

Ned spoke more words into the telephone as he got his connection. Dumbly, automatically, he answered the terse questions of a desk sergeant. Within thirty seconds, police were on their way. Hanging up, he turned to Pricilla, stiffly strode to where she had slipped to the floor and helped her to her feet.

NED UNLOCKED the door and admitted them, a plain-clothesman in the van. "I'm Lieutenant Donovan!" he snapped, moving into the shop. "Where is he, back there?" Still moving, he pointed with his chin towards the rear. Ned stepped aside, nodding, as the fast-moving detective pushed through the curtain and took a look. A moment later, he emerged. "Touch anything?" he grunted.

Ned shook his head in the negative, then amended. "Only the telephone...and the kiln."

"Kiln?" Donovan barked. "What's that?"

"The baking oven," the younger man explained. "It had overheated, been running since... I turned it off."

Mollified, the detective demanded, "Who're you two?"

Ned explained, adding the circumstances of their finding the dead man. "We'd quit work at 5:00," he said. "We both live in the Village. I walked Pricilla home to change for dinner. Then I went to my own place to freshen up, went back and got Pricilla, had dinner and came back here."

"Where'd you eat?" Donovan asked.

"Toni's, down the street," the girl put in. The detective turned to her.

"Everything he said check with you?" She nodded. Looking from one to the other, the Lieutenant asked quietly, "You two good friends...uh, steadies?"

Ned nodded. "Well, I'm waiting for the medical examiner. Any ideas who did it?" He looked from one to the other.

Ned shrugged. "You'd have had to know Will, Lieutenant," he explained. "Nobody...just nobody could have wanted to kill him. He was too...wonderful a guy."

Donovan scratched his chin reflectively and added, somewhat callously, "Yeah, but he's dead. Looks like there's a bullet hole right into his ticker. Nobody could've done it...but it's done. Stay here!" With that, he turned and started for the back room again. Turning once more,

he barked to a policeman standing inside the door, "Soon as the medical comes, shoo 'im back. Leave the lights out here. No sense drawing flies." He disappeared. Already, however, idlers were eyeing the police outside the shop, staring past them into the dark shop, curious, smelling drama.

Donovan and his men gave the workshop a thorough going over. They hadn't been at it long when a bespectacled little man with a black case and a tired suburban look clattered into the shop. Seeing the couple on the bench, he asked in a weary voice, "Thataway?" nodding towards the back. Ned assented and he disappeared.

The couple shuddered at the burst of noisy greetings that met the newcomer. "They're certainly hardened to their jobs," Pricilla murmured. Sitting in the dark familiar show-room, the two were becoming more and more aware that blind old Will DeVal was really dead. The man who had overcome a tremendous handicap and made a career of creating plate and pottery of rare design; the man who had been more than a friend to them both, whose fatherly interest had followed their romance from its infancy, kindly, indulgent, absent-minded, lovable Will DeVal was dead—killed.

Their thoughts ran parallel. Pricilla began weeping silently again; Ned bit his lip, comforted her. Abruptly, Donovan burst out of the back room. "Shot through the heart between five-thirty and six-thirty. Hard to tell exactly. Intense heat from the kiln probably speeded the process of decomposition. Where's the light in this room?"

Ned got himself up and put on the light. Donovan pointed to cash registers on either side, flanked by glass showcases. "Anything in them worth taking?"

Pricilla sniffed, "No. I took almost all of it to the night deposit chute at the Home Exchange Bank, down the street, at 5:00."

Donovan grunted. "In this City, men've been murdered for the price of a subway ride!" He inspected first

one register, then the next, ringing up *No Sale* to open each. "Take a look!" he commanded the girl. "Anything missing?"

PRICILLA went from one to the other. "It seems to be untouched," she managed, after making a rapid count in each. "Will didn't do any business after we left, probably just settled down to work up that new pattern for a pottery line he's been developing."

"Hand work?" Donovan asked.

"Mostly," Ned answered. "Patterns are roughed out with hand tools, then smoothed and baked in. I did the paint work for Will. It was the only thing he couldn't manage himself."

"Why?" the detective demanded.

"He was blind!" Ned answered.

The detective blinked, took a few seconds before answering. For the first time, his callous aplomb broke. "Well, I'll," he muttered, "be damned. This is a dirty one!" Then he went on, "You both live close by?"

Ned said, "Yes, within a few blocks."

Donovan pointed to the girl and said, "Go home. I'll have lots to ask you in the morning." To Ned, he snapped, "You stick around; I have lots of questions about that back room. So damned much equipment I don't understand, I'd appreciate your giving me a picture of it."

Pricilla moved towards the door. Ned hesitated a moment, then stiffly opened it for her, kissing her on the cheek as she brushed past. "Don't worry, darling. It'll all work itself out somehow."

Pricilla tried to smile but didn't succeed. Her eyes grew watery again and she murmured a hasty, "Good-night, darling. I'll be all right." She turned and walked down the sidewalk. With a quick jerk of his chin, Donovan indicated to one of the policemen standing outside to follow the girl. His movement was so unobtrusive that Ned, standing right beside him, failed to notice the signal.

The two men moved back to the center of the showroom. Donovan

looked around at the cases with their wares. "All this stuff made in the back room?" he asked. Before Ned could reply, he noted the seldom used shades above the display windows. He leaped nimbly into one window, then the next, pulling down the shades all the way. "That'll take care of the tourists," he said, not without satisfaction. "Now we can leave these lights on."

The detective waved a hand towards the workshop and followed the younger man in. The heat, so intense before, had only partially subsided. The medical examiner, working in shirtsleeves, was perspiring copiously, as were the two men who seemed to be inching patiently around the room, one applying dusting powder here and there, the other making notes of the many details.

The center of the room was the work bench at which the dead man had been found. Ned swallowed as he watched, in spite of himself, the efforts of two policemen to straighten out the body and get it into a stretcher. It was not pleasant, involving a struggle against the rigor mortis that had set in while the corpse was in sitting position.

The medical examiner had finished. He was packing away his instruments. The quiet of the room was punctured several times as the policemen administered sharp blows to straighten out the dead man's limbs. Each one made Ned shudder, more perspiration beads break out on his brow. Donovan noted his discomfort. "Sometimes happens that way," he shrugged. "Can't be helped. Tell me, did he have any family...married, kids, or any of that?"

"He's a bachelor," Ned managed. "As far as I ever heard him mention, he has only two relatives living, a half-brother I've never seen and a sister named Elizabeth. I haven't seen her more than twice, I think, in the five years I've been here."

"Your girl friend working here that long, too?" the cop asked.

"Longer. She'd been here over a year when DeVal took me on. She did all his bookkeeping, writing

work and sales besides. This place couldn't have operated without her. She was Will's eyes."

"Tell me about everything," Donovan said. He had a habit of changing subjects abruptly. Gruff of manner, he seemed to exude efficiency. As briefly as the younger man had observed him, Ned already knew the detective didn't waste a single movement. He was fast, sharp, smart.

"We do all sorts of pottery," Ned expanded, pointing around the room. "What you see on the bench now is something Will was very anxious to finish. He'd gotten in a shipment of buff."

"Buff?" Donovan raised an eyebrow quizzically.

"It's a tough buffalo leather. We call it 'buff' in the trade. It's something new with us. Will was experimenting with it, carving patterns and designs in the leather, then stripping leather designs to the pottery. We'd gotten some interesting effects in the experimental pieces and Will was working out a permanent pattern for mass production."

NED WENT over to a shelf and took down three specimens of the type he had described. Each one was different; all three were attractive. "Seems like a good idea," Donovan murmured, inspecting them. Ned put them down on his own work bench, which was located to one side, opposite the kiln. He walked back to DeVal's bench and swallowed as he noted the dried bloodstains on the bench and floor below.

He picked up the pottery piece, a raw affair with two handles, unimpressive, undecorated. It was the faint pinkish color that many of these unworked items had before any art work was done to them. "We buy them like this," Ned told the detective, "in wholesale lots. They cost next to nothing like this. Then, when the art work's added, we set our own prices. DeVal pieces have a very high rating; we sell them for plenty."

Behind them, the policemen carried out the body. The medical examiner said, "I don't think it'll help,

but I'm going to perform an autopsy. I'm interested in the effects of the heat on the body. If anything comes of it, I'll let you know, friend." He gave Donovan an automatic smile and took his departure without ceremony. Over his shoulder, he threw, "Good luck, Irishman; you'll probably need it."

Donovan gave the dead man's work bench his full attention. "This crude hunk of pottery here was going to end up with fancy leather designs on it, is that right?" Ned pointed to the rack of tooling instruments.

"We do the work with these knives and styli. I've been learning. Will DeVal had a remarkable feeling for design. He didn't need his eyes for it; his fingers told him everything he needed to know."

Donovan picked up a strip of leather that lay under a sharp knife-like tool. "Then the chances are DeVal was working at this bench when his murderer entered. The killer either shot him without warning or there was some talk and DeVal didn't expect to get it, but got it!"

Ned interposed, "His ears were amazing. Once DeVal heard your step, he always recognized you after that. He could tell whether it was Pricilla, or myself, or any of dozens of people who came often. He even recognized customers from their voices and steps, coming back a second time."

Donovan continued to play with the strip of leather, probing the dotted designwork that had been carved into it with the knife that had been on the bench. "Then you'd say," the detective summarized, "that it's unlikely anyone sneaked up on the man without his hearing him."

"I'd say it was impossible," Ned replied. "Whoever did it had to gain admittance by attracting his attention and getting Will to unlock the door. Nobody was here when Pricilla and I left and locked him in; it must have been someone he knew well enough to admit after hours, which pretty much eliminates strangers."

Donovan waited a moment before answering. "I'm glad to hear you say

that," he finally rejoined. "Because that gives us better than a fighting chance; it practically means one of his close friends killed him."

They fell silent while Donovan continued to probe the leather design with the knife. Suddenly, the detective held the leather strip up to Ned, together with the knife. "Would you say this knife could have made a design like that...all those dots dug out of the smooth leather?" he demanded.

Ned examined the leather and glanced at the knife. "No," he answered. "A pointed stylus made those dots, not a knife." Ned motioned towards the rack of delicate tools. "One like that," he indicated, selecting another of the hand tools.

"That's the way it looked to me," the detective frowned. "Then if this knife was on the piece of leather, the chances are DeVal wasn't working at the time he was murdered; he must have been just sitting here, talking with the killer."

NED EXAMINED the pattern in the leather. "This is an odd pattern he was working out...doesn't seem to have any symmetry at all. I really can't see what he was trying to accomplish here. The pattern doesn't seem to make much sense." The young man studied it further. "Of course, it's incomplete."

The detective shrugged. "Anyway, if he'd been working, the stylus—or whatever you called it—would have been next to his hand, wouldn't it? Or could he have been doing some work with the knife...or getting ready to?"

Ned looked puzzled. "That's hard to say. Will was an extremely neat worker. Being blind, he had to have a set place for everything. Nothing he was doing on that leather called for the knife you found on the bench." Ned looked over the rack of tooling instruments and counted two empty spaces. "That's funny," he murmured.

"What?" Donovan demanded.

"Notice, there's two empty spaces in the instrument rack. One of them

belongs to the knife, no doubt. But Will had that rack full; one of the tooling pieces is missing!"

"You're sure of that?" the detective asked. Ned was already looking around the bench and then the floor. Turning to his two operatives, Donovan asked, "Either of you guys pick up something like this knife around the floor?"

Neither man had. They joined in the search, however. All the instruments had black bone handles and steel tips or blades. Several moments of searching failed to turn up the missing piece. Dusting his hands and giving up, Donovan dispatched the others to finish their other chores and muttered, "Well, it may not mean anything. Anyway, it's not around."

From outside the shop, a policeman yelled in, "Hey, Lieutenant! The press has arrived. Ready to let 'em in?"

Donovan groaned. "Hold 'em off another few minutes. We still have a few things to do." Then he turned and asked Ned questions about every phase of the operation, rapid fire. By the time the newspapermen were admitted, Donovan was ready to give them a guided tour of the premises with complete details about the Greenwich Village killing. His last act before opening the doors to them was to send Ned home. Unknown to the young apprentice, however, he took the precaution of putting a plainclothesman on his tail when he departed.

~ 2 ~

NED DID not go directly home. Concerned about Pricilla, he knocked on her door. In fact, Donovan's detectives both spent their time of waiting in low conversation outside of Pricilla's apartment house for some two hours until Ned emerged and went to his own apartment. This fact was reported to Donovan before the night was over.

Lurid press accounts of the blind man's murder made the front pages

of nearly every New York newspaper the following morning. Millions of Gothamites read the details over their breakfasts and chewed their toast a little faster in borrowed excitement.

In the subways and at work, speculation and second guessing about the crime was a principal subject of conversation all over the metropolis. The odd circumstances of the crime, set in Greenwich Village, involving a blind man and an artist, fired the imaginations of the city citizenry as few crimes had before.

Pilgrimages of lunchtime curiosity seekers descended in droves on the Eighth Street *Pottery Shoppe*, blocking traffic, impeding pedestrian progress and making the entire Village area a kind of open-air carnival. Police were hard put to control the mob, let alone keep it moving.

Donovan, freshly shaved and looking as if he'd had a night's sleep instead of no more than ninety-seven minutes of shut-eye on a station house bench, had trouble getting through the collection of humanity that had grown to great proportions even by the time he returned to the scene of the crime. "Some day," he muttered, "I'm going to find me a job in a small town where there isn't enough population for crimes to be committed and mobs to be formed!"

If it was difficult for Donovan to get into the art shop, it was twice as hard for a tall, cavernous-looking, down-at-the-heels character who materialized out of the Village environs. But through sonorous pleadings of an extraordinarily deep voice and through persistent shoving, this individual managed to find himself confronting the policemen who guarded the front door of the store. To them he confided in Shakespearian accents, "Will you minions of the law be good enough to escort muh to whoevah is in charge here?"

The police tried to shake him off, but the man with the voice like a turn of the century melodrama insisted, "I have information pertinent to the solution of this terrible crime against conscience! I demand to see

the Inspector, or Captain, or whoever it is!"

After considerable argument, the figure convinced the policemen he knew something of importance. Enjoying the attention of bystanders no little, the elongated ham was finally taken inside the store. A moment later, he found himself face to face with Donovan.

"Well?" the detective growled, eyeing with evident disfavor the obvious Village prototype that had thrust itself before him.

"My residence," the curious man intoned, "lies dirrrectly accrrross yon thoroughfare!" He rolled a mean letter *r* in speaking and pointed with a generous sweeping gesture across the street from the store.

"So you live across the street!" Donovan snapped. "Cut out the theatricals and get to the point. Who are you?"

"I am Rodney Dale Trrelawney!" the other rejoined, as if it were a title of nobility. "I am a retired actor and one of the greatest living exponents of the Shakespearian Tradition!"

"I suspected as much," the detective snapped. "What do you know?"

The "retired" actor leaned towards the detective in an attitude of deep confidence and whispered, "I saw, last evening, something you should know."

"What?" Donovan demanded.

"It was exactly five-thirty-two. I know because I happened to be winding me timepiece at the veddy moment! I saw young Neddie, De-Val's handsome understudy, y'know, re-enter this shop with his own key. I thought nothing of it until I read about the murder in the papers."

DONOVAN'S mind was working fast. "At five-thirty-two, Ned Sickle came back to the shop; you'd be willing to swear to that?"

Trelawney raised an eyebrow indignantly. "Upon a stack of bibles high as me modest garret window!" he trumpeted.

Donovan pushed the startled performer into a chair. "Siddown!" he

snapped. Turning, he barked, "Bring in Ned Sickle and pick up that girl of his, too!" Giving the actor his attention again, he said, "Now you just sit here and relax until I want you, thespian!"

Trelawney bowed formally and boomed, "I seen my duty, officer, and I...uh...*did* it!"

Donovan opened his mouth to speak further but a plainclothesman, rushing out from the workshop, buttonholed him and whispered several excited words into his ear. The detective turned on his heel and disappeared, saying, "Well, I'll be damned; let's have a look!"

While the Shakespearian cooled his heels and Donovan waited for Ned and Pricilla to be brought in, another party with an interest in the Pottery Shoppe put in an appearance, a woman in her early fifties, thin-faced, severe of mein, shrill-spoken, who crossed the police lines after convincing them she was the sister of the murdered man.

It was indeed Elizabeth DeVal, spinster sister of the unmarried blind man. Confronting Donovan after fighting her way in, she waved a black umbrella at him and ordered, "If you're in charge, I demand you clear out of here with all your men...and take that miserable mob with you!"

The Lieutenant gave her an amused look. "Put down your umbrella, Carrie Nation, I'm not a drinking man," he protested.

"I'm Elizabeth DeVal, nearest kin of the deceased. I know my rights, young man; this place belongs to me, lock, stock and barrel!"

Donovan pursed his lips impatiently and located her pointed nose with a fingertip, thundering, "Look, lady! I'm sure you're a taxpayer and a citizen, too; but this is a murder investigation and I'm going to be giving the orders here until I'm good and ready to pull out. After that, you and any other surviving clucks can tear the place apart!"

Effectively silenced, the woman swallowed and put in more quietly, "Well, I thought I ought to come

down and look after things. Will's junk here's valuable; I wouldn't want to sustain a loss."

The detective made no effort to mask his disgust. "You are an old bird of prey, aren't you!" he snapped. "Where the hell were you last night between five and seven?"

Elizabeth DeVal scored him in the pit of his stomach with her umbrella tip. "You can't frighten me, young man," she sneered. "I was home receiving seven maiden ladies for supper last evening and my maid can swear I was in all afternoon preparing for the old hens, before that!"

Donovan scratched his head. "You're a regular rip, lady, aren't you?"

"I didn't kill Will, but he's dead and there's no fixing that. I'm his closest relative and what Will left's mine. The way I reckon, he's left plenty!"

Abruptly, Donovan shoved under the woman's nose a pencil-shaped object, charred, with a discolored metal point at one end. "What's this—got any idea, lady?"

Elizabeth DeVal scrutinized it. "Looks like one of them pens that write under water," she snapped. "Fall in the fire?"

"Siddown," Donovan growled, irritated. "There!" he commanded, indicating the empty spot on the showroom bench, next to Rodney Dale Trelawney. The ham actor favored the woman with a formal bow as she threw herself down beside him.

"Rrrrather warrmm, madam," he commented. Having heard the entire conversation between Donovan and Elizabeth, he added, "Permit an ex-thespian to offer sincere condolences, Mrs. DeVal."

"It's Miss DeVal!" she snapped in return, "and who wants to make anything out of *that*?" Rebuffed, the actor assumed an attitude of reproachful injury and kept silent.

THERE WAS more hubbub outside the front door. A tall, heavy-set individual bearing horn-rimmed spectacles and dressed in dark clothes, was wearing down the

patience of the protective officers, who had had about enough invasions for a short time. Donovan strode to the door and opened it. "What's up, Mac?" he demanded.

Before the officer could answer, the big man in the dark clothes sputtered, "I'm the dead man's half brother! I insist that I be allowed to come in!"

Donovan gave him a quick once-over. "Stop insisting; I've been waiting for you." He motioned to the cop to let the man in.

Coming through the door the man repeated irately, "You see, I'm very much interested in Will's estate. I'm an expert at these same lines. Naturally, I'd be the best person to take charge of..." He broke off abruptly as his eye fell on Elizabeth DeVal.

A malevolent smile froze over the woman's granite features. "Hello, half brother Andrew," she sneered. "As you see, Will's *whole* sister Elizabeth beat you to the punch. I knew you'd be nosing around looking for an easy touch; that's why I made it down so fast. You won't get a penny's worth of Will's things, not a red cent! So you might's well take yourself off right now!"

Donovan watched transfixed as the other, completely forgetting the detective, turned his full attention to the woman. "Now, Elizabeth!" Andrew DeVal exclaimed, "I've been expecting we'd meet again since...well, when I read about Will. I know you haven't much use for me, but think before you make up your mind. I can run this place for you...we could be partners; it'd be lots more profitable than just selling out to the highest bidder."

A crafty look crept into Elizabeth's face. "Might at that," she agreed. "But you're such a slippery eel, you'd probably cheat me out of my share in no time!"

The exchange had gone far enough for Donovan. "All right, shut up, both of you! I'm running this show and until I bow out, neither one of you's got a look-in." To Andrew DeVal, he snapped, "Where were you between five and seven or so last night?"

The dead man's half-brother thought a moment. Then he said, "I was in Philadelphia all day until close to five. I was in several galleries, looking for a rare pottery piece for a client. Dealers I know well can testify to that. I took the five o'clock Pennsylvania train back to New York. I dined after getting off...Soloway's—excellent pastries—near the station. I think my waiter would remember me, a short, bald-headed chap. We talked at length about his pastries."

DONOVAN looked from Elizabeth DeVal to Andrew DeVal. Motioning Andrew to a seat next to the woman and the actor, he said, "You two are nothing but buzzards. You're anxious as hell, both of you, to get your lunch hooks into what Will DeVal's left behind. Each of you has a scheme in mind for getting fat on his remains." He paused, then added thoughtfully, "But I guess there's nothing I can do about that, unless it develops that one or the other of you killed Will for what you had in mind to take away from him."

"Ridiculous!" the woman snapped.

"Preposterous!" Andrew DeVal echoed.

"Logical!" Donovan rejoined. "Stay there, all of you." With that, he turned and disappeared into the back room. For the first time, Andrew DeVal seemed to notice Trelawney; he favored him with a suspicious glance.

In the back room, Donovan bent over two policemen, in shirt sleeves, sitting on the floor in front of a small but compact-looking steel safe. They had every tool of the burglary trade spread out before them. "How you doing?" the Lieutenant asked.

One of the men looked up and grumbled, "She's strong as hell. We'd get 'er lots quicker if we blew 'er!"

Donovan shook his head. "Nothing doing. Get 'er open." He added, "A dozen skin-men in the county jail could've cracked that by now. You guys better look 'em up and take lessons."

"Nuts!" the other rejoined. "This

beats hell. That girl probably knows the combination, so why'n hell...?"

At that moment, his partner, head touching the safe, fingers manipulating the dial, sighed, "Sssh..." and the door of the safe came open as he gently pulled on it. Smiling, he shrugged at Donovan, "Just call me Jimmie Valentine from now on—or better make it *Mister* Valentine!"

Taking careful note of what he was removing from where, Donovan waded into the contents of the safe. He muttered to his assistants, "Make sure those birds out front don't wander outa their seats." Then he systematically began probing the papers, making notes, grunting when he came upon one particular document. After giving it a careful reading, he put everything back where he had found it, straightened up, and muttered to nobody in particular, "That wraps it up; sure coulda fooled me, too!"

Donovan locked the safe again, much to the disgust of the cop who'd cracked it. "It's all over but the hanging," he murmured, shaking his head ruefully.

It wasn't long before Ned Sickle came in, a cop on either side of him. Pricilla, also accompanied by gendarmes, arrived a moment or two later.

Donovan waited until the girl showed up before springing his surprise. "Can you open the safe, honey?" he asked her.

Pricilla paled and stammered, "N—no, I never knew the combination."

Ned, eyes wide, confronted her with, "Wh—what do you mean, Priss? We both know that combination! There's no reason to deny it!"

Donovan looked from one to the other. "No reason," he grunted, "except the old man's will. Apparently Pricilla knows how it reads even if you don't—though I don't believe that for one minute!"

"I've never poked through that safe!" Ned declared hotly, "except when Will DeVal asked me to get him something!"

"But your girl friend has," Dono-

van sneered. Her expression betrayed that she had.

Pricilla burst into tears and threw herself against her startled lover. "Oh, darling! I—I was afraid they'd find the will!" Wheeling to Donovan, tears staining her face, she wailed, "But Ned didn't kill him! He didn't—he couldn't have! We both loved Will so!"

Ned swallowed and paled in his turn. "What's this all about?" he demanded. "Who says I killed him?"

Donovan murmured, "I do! There's a broken-down ham actor outside who saw you re-enter the shop after you'd left and dropped your girl friend. You killed him then! And the last will and testament gives you plenty of motive. The deluded blind man left the whole shooting match to you! What does that add up to?"

"Trelawney's a liar!" Ned shouted. "He's half crazy and capable of inventing any kind of nonsense to get himself under a spotlight!"

"Nuts!" the detective answered. "Trelawney saw you come back here at five thirty-two. You walked your girl home from work, started back towards your house, dropped in, killed Will DeVal, continued on home, changed, picked up your girl and had dinner. Then you walked past here, pretending to be concerned about the old man working late. You let yourself in and 'found' him dead. You even fooled your girl friend!"

"I didn't come back! I didn't kill Will!" Ned exclaimed.

"Run 'im in, boys!" Donovan growled. "He can tell his tale to the jury; hard-working cops have other things on their minds."

The cops closed in. Ned protested, "But you're arresting an innocent man. I didn't kill Will! Someone else did and you're going to let him get away!"

Pricilla's tears and sobs grew hysterical as the struggling young artist was dragged away in spite of his efforts to wrench free. "He didn't do it!" Pricilla moaned. "He didn't! He couldn't!"

Donovan patted her gently. "Easy, sister. If you could be sure of that, you'd feel lots better!"

3

LIEUTENANT Donovan looked across his desk and gave his visitor a look of distaste. "Make it fast, madam," he commanded. "I'm a busy man."

Elizabeth DeVal did her best to look pleasant. "Why?" she demanded, "can't we open up shop now that you've arrested your murderer?"

Donovan replied, "The police padlocks stay on that joint until after the trial. Nobody...*nobody* gets in until we release the premises. Is that clear?"

"But we're losing money every day!" the deceased's sister protested. "It isn't fair!"

"It's found money," the detective shrugged. "What's it to you how soon you get started?" Changing his tack, he said, "We're losing money, I believe I heard you say. Does that mean you've made peace with your brother's half-brother?"

"Why not?" she demanded. "What's it to you?"

"Nothing, nothing at all. I think you're both keeping good company. But you still don't get inside that shop until we release it. Now get out and stop bothering me."

The woman got to her feet. "I'll see the district attorney!" she threatened. "You can't do this at my expense."

Donovan pointed through the front door of his office and the woman, muttering, disappeared through it. The door slammed with a shudder in her wake and the detective shuddered, too. Looking down at his hands, he found himself turning over and over in them the charred stylus with the discolored steel tip. "This," he muttered to himself, "is the only damn thing that doesn't add up!" Abruptly, he dropped it on his blotter and reached for the office intercom.

"Is Ned Sickle's girl friend still waiting?" he barked. A few crackling phrases came back through the speaker. "Well, send her in; I'll see her after all!" he snapped. A moment

later, the door opened and a hollow-eyed Pricilla walked in. He motioned her to a seat next to his desk.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Ned's innocent!" Pricilla said without prelude. "I've thought and thought and I know he didn't do it. You've got to understand, if you'd worked with us, you'd know. Will loved Ned like a father."

"Sons have been known to kill their fathers," Donovan said, taking a kindly tone. He riffed through some papers on his desk. Pulling out a file, he argued, "See! *The Bull Sears Murder Case*. Son parted his father's hair with a meat cleaver!"

Pricilla sucked in a gasp and started crying. "All right!" Donovan muttered, hastily withdrawing the file. "I'm sorry. I'm not as brutal as I sound! I like your boy friend and I like you. I'd much rather see that buzzard, DeVal's sister, or, for that matter, his half-brother, go to the chair for Will's murder. But evidence is evidence; *I'm* not in love with Ned Sickle, you know."

PRICILLA got control of herself. Her eye fell on the charred stylus on Donovan's blotter. "That looks like one of Will's tooling pieces," she commented, eyes focusing on the article with sudden interest. "Where'd you get it?"

Donovan handed it to her. "It's Will's, all right. We found it in the kiln. Remember, the oven was going while Will was murdered. This tooling piece was missing; after the oven cooled off, we found it inside."

"That's odd!" Pricilla said, her excitement growing. "Will must have thrown it in."

"Or dropped it by accident," Donovan commented.

Pricilla shook her head. "Not Will. He didn't have accidents. You see, being blind, he couldn't afford to make any missteps. He was methodical; everything had its exact place. Otherwise, being sightless, he never would have been able to find anything. No, I don't think Will *dropped* that stylus. He was too sure-handed for that."

"Sounds logical," the police detec-

tive agreed. "They say nature recompenses the faculties a man has when he loses one or another. It sounds logical—but what does it prove?"

The girl leaned closer to the detective, eagerness showing in her expression. "I think you ought to re-examine the kiln. If Will threw that stylus into it, he did it in hopes it would be found, maybe in the hope of drawing attention to the kiln. Ned said there was no reason for the oven to be going. Will was tooling leather, probably with that very stylus."

The big cop eyed the girl thoughtfully. He shook his head slowly and murmured, "We've been over that kiln. There's nothing in it, nothing strange about it. Once we removed that stylus, there wasn't a significant fact about it worth talking about. No it's not the kiln. But..." Here his voice trailed off as he tangled with a complex thought that was nibbling away at him from down inside.

"That actor!" he suddenly blurted. "That Trelawney; is it possible he's just making up that business about your boy friend coming back to the store?"

Pricilla's gaze grew scornful. "Ned says Trelawney's lying! And Ned's telling the truth!"

"He's kind of nutty, that ham actor," the detective admitted. "But he's not balmy enough to accuse a man of murder just to take a few bows. That doesn't stack up at all. Still..." Again the detective retired to the privacy of his thoughts, his expression running a gamut of changes. Suddenly, he leaped to his feet. Pricilla, watching him closely, drew a frightened breath and got to her own feet hastily. "Come on!" Donovan commanded, steering the girl directly for the door of his office. A split second later, it slammed behind them, a decisive crashing of wood against wood.

EXACTLY six minutes later, another door suffered at the hands of the burly police Lieutenant. A startled Rodney Dale Trelawney, responding to the thumping on his panel door, admitted Donovan who

shoved past the actor and demanded, without ceremony, "All right, Hamlet, show me your view of Will DeVal's store!"

The actor sputtered, "Why, what is the meaning of this crass intrusion upon my...?" He got no further. Donovan eyed the dingy interior with distaste and noted two windows, side by side, in the one-room apartment. He tried one, then the other. Wheeling, he demanded an explanation of the frightened Trelawney.

"Which one of these windows did you happen to be looking out of when you saw Ned Sickle re-enter the shop?"

"Why, the one on the left, I b'lieve...uh, that is, *no*, it was the window on the right!" the actor managed, paling.

Donovan moved back to the right hand window and looked out. "You had the window open, is that it?"

"Oh, yes," the actor intoned, his composure struggling to return. "I have to lean out slightly in order to view DeVal's store front."

"As I remember your story," Donovan countered, "you knew it was five-thirty-two when Sickle re-entered the store because you had just happened to be winding your watch. Where's the watch?"

The actor held up his wrist, indicating the timepiece on it. "In other words," Donovan snapped before the other could speak, "you were winding your wristwatch and noticing the time while, at the same moment, you were *leaning slightly* out of the window and noticing Ned Sickle go in the front door of DeVal's store! Trelawney, I think you're a liar!"

"Not at all!" the actor protested. "I had just *concluded* winding my timepiece when I leaned out of the window. I might have expressed it poorly before, but that was what I had meant to convey."

Abruptly, Donovan ordered, "Come over here!" The actor came over to the window next to the detective. "Look down at Will DeVal's store now and tell me if you recognize the party in the doorway!" the detective growled.

Trelawney thrust himself into the window frame and leaned out as far as he dared. With considerable relief in his voice, he trumpeted, "Why, that's the young lady, Pricilla what's-her-name, who used to work there!"

Donovan extended a hand at the actor, his index finger pointing directly under Trelawney's nose. "I wouldn't," he snapped, "go anywhere at all for the next few days if I were you, understand, Shakespeare?"

The actor nodded, swallowing. Donovan crossed the room and strode through the doorway, slamming it behind him. Trelawney waited a moment to be sure the policeman was gone, then shook a fist at the door, muttering defiantly, "Ill-mannered oaf!"

A moment later, Donovan crossed the street and unlocked the front door of DeVal's *Pottery Shoppe*. With a tilt of his head, he motioned Pricilla to enter with him. As he did, he cast a glance up at the building that housed the actor's down-at-the-heels room. Trelawney, framed in his window, quickly withdrew as Donovan engaged his eye.

INSIDE, Pricilla started to ask a question. The detective stilled her by holding up his hand. He swiftly parted the curtains separating showroom and workshop, made sure they were alone, then went to the telephone. Donovan phoned headquarters and began barking orders into the mouthpiece. As Pricilla listened, her eyes widened with growing interest. By the time the plain-clothesman hung up the phone and turned to the girl, a question framed itself in the girl's lips. "What?" she demanded, "did you find out?"

"Patience," the detective parried, "is a virtue."

"But you must have found out something to want Ned, Elizabeth and Andrew DeVal brought down here right away," Pricilla protested.

Abruptly, Donovan said, "There's a mistaken idea afoot that a cop is just a conviction-hungry automaton willing to sacrifice anybody rather than let a case go unsolved. But a cop

has to live with himself between cases and he couldn't do it if his conscience wasn't clear.

"I'm moving into a new line of thought on this case. Mind you, when I had Ned Sickle arrested, I was sure in my own belief that he was guilty. And I'm not telling you yet that he's clear; he's got motive and he had the opportunity. But even though there's a case against him that could stand up in court, we're going to try something right here that might have interesting results. I may be hungry for a conviction at that, but I want to be damn sure I take care of the right party."

Donovan fell silent and began moving around the workshop. He removed from his pocket the charred stylus and carefully set it into the one empty niche in the row of tooling pieces at Will DeVal's desk. He went to a supply shelf and removed a sheet of buffalo leather from a box. Taking a tooling knife with a razor-sharp edge, the detective began cutting, carefully as possible.

"What are you going to do?" Pricilla asked.

"Sit down and relax," Donovan commanded. "It'll be some time before the gang's all here and I've got plenty to do."

* * *

The police detective was right. It was over two hours before Elizabeth DeVal was brought in, Andrew DeVal found, Ned Sickle, flanked by police, admitted and, finally, the actor Trelawney summoned. Puzzlement showed in every face. There was curiosity too, at the presence of a blind man, with a seeing-eye dog at his feet, sitting to one side with an air of patient waiting.

"I'd like to know!" Elizabeth DeVal demanded, "what's responsible for my being dragged out of my home like a criminal!"

"It might be," Donovan responded irately, "because you are a criminal!" That shut her up sharp.

Andrew DeVal took a more reasonable tone. "Anything," he commented, "that speeds the end of this case, Elizabeth, speeds the day when we

occupy this store. We may as well be more cooperative."

"I fail to perceive," Trelawney the actor murmured in mournful tones, "why I must be subjected to invasions in my own home hourly on the hour by unfeeling, obtuse members of our totally inadequate police force!"

"Your failure to perceive," Donovan snapped, "has plenty to do with this meeting. My suggestion to you ...and to all of you, for that matter ...is to be patient and cooperative. I've brought together this little group for good reasons that will be clear enough in a while."

"Pointless melodramatics!" Trelawney snorted.

Ned Sickle glowered and threw in, "I don't get this. You seemed pretty sure you had your murderer when you had your men drag me off, Donovan. What's up now?"

Pricilla, standing at Ned's side, whispered, "Please, darling, don't say anything; let the Lieutenant do what he has to do."

SILENCE fell. Again, uneasy eyes sought out the quiet blind man, who sat stroking his dog, oblivious to the goings-on in the workshop around him. Finally, Donovan spoke. "I," he said quietly, "am going to impersonate the late Will DeVal. What you're about to see," Donovan continued, "is our theory of what took place here immediately before DeVal's death. You see, there are a number of details that, up to now, have defied explanation and we think we've figured them out."

Lieutenant Donovan took up his place at Will DeVal's workshop bench in the center of the room. He picked up a piece of leather and indicated, "Will DeVal was tooling this leather when someone, the murderer actually, rapped on the locked outer door of the store. Will went to the door, found it was someone he knew, admitted that person and went with that person back into the workshop. The actor, Trelawney, happened to be looking out of the window, according to his story, and saw this person admitted."

Trelawney snorted derisively and gave Ned Sickle a look of utter disdain. "I certainly and unequivocally did!" he snapped.

Donovan held up a hand for silence. "Will DeVal returned to his bench and continued working on this piece of leather as he talked with the person he'd admitted. As their conversation continued, however, Will DeVal must have made up his mind that the other party in the room wanted to kill him. After that, his mind operated like lightning."

The detective moved from the bench to the kiln. "Quite casually, Will DeVal snapped on the electric controls for this kiln. It's my belief that the killer probably didn't even notice Will doing it. Either that or the killer decided Will was going to use the kiln for some operation and attached no significance to it. At any rate, Will DeVal had also removed a stylus from his bench. It was probably the one he'd been tooling the buff with. This, he threw into the kiln. I'm certain he managed to turn his back in such a way that the killer didn't detect his doing it."

Donovan dropped the charred stylus into the kiln, his back to the others, who were grouped around the front of Will DeVal's workshop bench. Then he returned to the bench and eyed them all. "What makes me believe Will DeVal knew he was going to be killed? It took a while to sink in—but actually, Will DeVal wasn't doing anything that would have justified turning on that oven. He was working with this leather buff. If he'd thrown leather into the oven, it would have been charred into uselessness. He certainly didn't have in mind to bake that strip of buff. But he did turn the oven on, as I just did. And by the time we found him, this oven had heated to the danger point. All we found inside was the charred stylus that I've just thrown into it now. It's obvious that Will DeVal wanted us to find that overheated kiln and the stylus inside it. The question is, why?"

THE OTHERS watched the slowly moving detective with fascina-

tion. Behind them, uniformed police strained to see around the closer participants in the drama. Only the blind man seemed impervious to the enactment. He sat, hand on his equally imperturbable dog, waiting, hardly seeming to be listening.

"The answer to that question," Donovan said at length, "was right at this bench, where Will DeVal returned after turning on the oven and throwing in that stylus. Because his next operation was obviously to get his hands on another stylus, similar to the one he'd thrown away, and continue tooling this piece of buff. He worked rapidly, because his time was getting short." The detective paused.

Trelawney demanded, impatient at the halt in the man's explanation, "What was he doing?"

Elizabeth DeVal echoed the thought. "Go ahead, young man! What the devil was my brother doing?"

The kiln had already begun heating up. When he had turned it on, Donovan had switched it on high. The beads of perspiration that broke out on all foreheads however, were only partially due to the growing heat in the room. Everyone strained forward, eager to hear the Lieutenant's next words. But Donovan said nothing. He merely held up the piece of buff, letting it dangle from his fingers. On it was the peculiar design that Will DeVal had etched in it with his stylus. The detective looked from one face to another.

Comprehension showed in Ned Sickle's face...not only comprehension but sudden hope. "Braille!" Ned cried. "That's what it is! Will DeVal wrote a message in braille on that buff! That's why the design didn't make sense!"

Donovan grinned pleasantly. "Exactly, it's braille," he murmured, "the written language of the blind, braille." He paused, then continued. "Will DeVal was smarter than his murderer, much smarter. He was also much more clever than the investigators, until a few hours ago. I have to admit that the kiln and the charred stylus didn't mean a thing to me,

until the theory I had formed exploded in my face."

"Do you mean?" Rodney Trelawney throated, "that the identity of the murderer has been carved into that piece of leather in braille characters?" He looked across at Ned Sickle and intoned, "You see, young man, murder will out! Blood will tell!"

The heat in the room continued rising. Miss Elizabeth DeVal slipped out of her topcoat nervously, wiping her brow with a handkerchief. "Turn off that cursed oven," she snapped, "and tell us what the leather says!"

ANDREW DeVAL slipped out of his coat and searched his pockets for a handkerchief. The cops in the room began opening their coats, looking uncomfortably at their superior. Donovan nodded. "This blind gentleman will be able to translate the message on the buff," he said. He looked around the room, "unless, of course, the killer wants to spare him the job."

"Stop this nonsense!" Elizabeth DeVal commanded. "And in the name of goodness, turn off that awful oven!"

The buff dangled in the detective's hand. He made a partial turn. "Oh, yes, the oven," he said. "It is getting warm in here." He took two steps in the direction of the oven.

"Don't turn off that oven!" a voice commanded. "And the first person in this room to move gets shot!" All eyes turned, drawn by terror.

"Give me that buff!" Andrew DeVal commanded, pointing his gun at Donovan, his eyes taking in the movements of every person in the room. "You cops throw your guns over here! Quick!"

Donovan nodded carelessly to his cops and they complied. The detective tossed the buff over to DeVal, the dead man's half brother. Andrew, gun still in hand, backed with it to the oven, opened the door and threw the buff directly on the red hot electric wires inside. A sizzling, crackling sound followed and a trickle of smoke rose from the burning leather. Andrew DeVal let the

kiln door slam shut and stood, back to the oven, menacing the room with his gun.

"Until that buff is destroyed," he muttered, "nobody move or I'll shoot!"

"How far do you think you'll get, murderer?" Donovan asked casually.

"I'm not going anywhere," Will DeVal's half brother rejoined in a smooth voice. "You see, once that buff's burned, all you can hold me for is destroying evidence. Nobody's heard what was written on the leather, the evidence is gone. Who knows what Will wrote? It could have been his murderer's identity or it could have been a line of poetry!"

"Got it all figured out, haven't you?" Donovan put in amiably. Well, you're pretty smart at that. It's better to take the rap for destroying evidence than for murder."

Elizabeth DeVal found her tongue. "I always knew," she managed, purple with rage, "that you were no good! And to think I almost went into business with you...you blood-thirsty killer!"

Pricilla cried. "Can't anyone stop him? Ned, if that leather's destroyed, the case against you's all that'll be left!"

Electrified by the thought, Ned Sickle suddenly took wing. He made a leaping dive for Andrew DeVal, who, rattled, fired point blank. Pricilla screamed and the police closed in. Donovan scored DeVal with a straight punch to the jaw, following it up by wresting the gun from the killer's hand.

"Okay!" the Lieutenant growled. "Show's over!"

Ned, narrowly missed by the wild bullet, scrambled to the oven and opened the door. "I'll get that leather!" he grunted.

"Don't burn your fingers!" Donovan told him, snapping handcuffs on Andrew DeVal.

DeVal yelled, "It's too late! The leather's ruined!" Inside the kiln, the strip of buff was indeed a shapeless, smoking ember. "There goes your evidence, detective!" Andrew DeVal triumphed.

DONOVAN shook his head ruefully. "Sucker," he murmured. Reaching into his pocket, he withdrew another strip of buff. "You fell for the decoy, mister," he said. DeVal uttered a wild yell of anguish and struggled to get at the strip that dangled in Donovan's hand. But he was restrained in a grip of iron. Crestfallen, he stopped struggling, resigned.

"The decoy," Donovan informed him not without pride, "was a creation of Lieutenant Donovan of Homicide. You killers are nearly all alike—most of you get panicky and lose your brains! Sure, this piece of buff name's you as the killer, but if my little masquerade here hadn't scared the grey matter out of your noggin, you'd realize as I did that even that didn't constitute infallible proof. If Ned Sickle had killed DeVal, he could have carved out that message in an attempt to incriminate you! Pricilla here, who was his secretary and who actually knew braille, could have done it to help cover her boy friend and make you the goat. No, this piece of leather alone wasn't enough. I had to trap the killer into giving himself away. If you hadn't made a move, it would have been enough to convince me that you, not having killed your half brother, had no reason to feel guilty. It would have meant Ned Sickle, with or without Pricilla, had killed him. But you cleared that up by chucking the decoy into the red hot wires, just what I wanted you to do!"

Donovan handed the buff strip to the blind man, who had been sitting quietly and awaiting this moment. "Now, we'll have this thing read."

Andrew DeVal had stopped struggling. Pinioned by four policemen, he listened to the last words of the man he had murdered. The blind man Donovan had brought in ran his fingers over the pattern Will DeVal had cut into the buff strip. As his fingers crossed the braille pattern, he said, *Andrew, my half-brother, wants to kill me. He is here now and his words convince me I am about to die. May God guide Ned and Pricilla to these words, so*

I may be avenged. Marry, children. The store is yours.

There was a pause. Ned and Pricilla exchanged glances, tears in the girl's eyes. Elizabeth DeVal broke in. "I'm his closest kin! He can't leave this store to them! I'll fight the will!"

Furious, Donovan turned on her. "What's been lost on you, woman, is the fact that the correct solution of this case has saved your hide!"

"Wh—what do you mean?" the woman faltered.

"Do you think Andrew DeVal planned this murder just to play second fiddle to you? He was shooting for the whole works, not a partnership with a disagreeable shrew! He'd have seen to it your life didn't last long, once the two of you took over!"

Elizabeth DeVal eyed Andrew in askance. "Why, that's true!" she stammered. "I see that now!"

"I doubt," Donovan continued, "if you could make a claim stand up in court after Will DeVal left a final message that ended with his thinking of these two kids. The best thing for you to do is clear out and be glad you're still alive!"

TRELAWNEY pushed himself forward, amazed. "I must say," he chanted in stentorian tones, "you have done a remarkable piece of sleuthing. Reminds me of a portrayal I did some time ago, episode of Sherlock Holmes. You see, I was..."

Donovan grinned and turned to the others. "Save me," he begged, "from this ham!" Then, as Trelawney's face fell, he quickly added in

softer tones, "Cheer up, Shakespeare, you were really responsible for starting me off on the right road!"

Trelawney's eyes bugged alarmingly. "I was?"

"Sure!" Donovan rejoined. "When you identified Pricilla here from your window, I realized you were all wet about your claim that you'd seen Ned returning to the store!"

"All wet?" the actor echoed. "How so?"

Donovan laughed. "The fact is, I stopped a middle-aged woman on the street and had her stand in that doorway. You may be the world's greatest actor, Trelawney, but you can't see worth a damn! Your claiming that woman was Pricilla tipped me off Ned Sickle hadn't been lying after all and left me right where I'd started, with an overheated kiln and a charred stylus that needed explaining!"

The actor drew himself up to his greatest height and murmured in wounded tones, "Happy to have been of service, Inspector!"

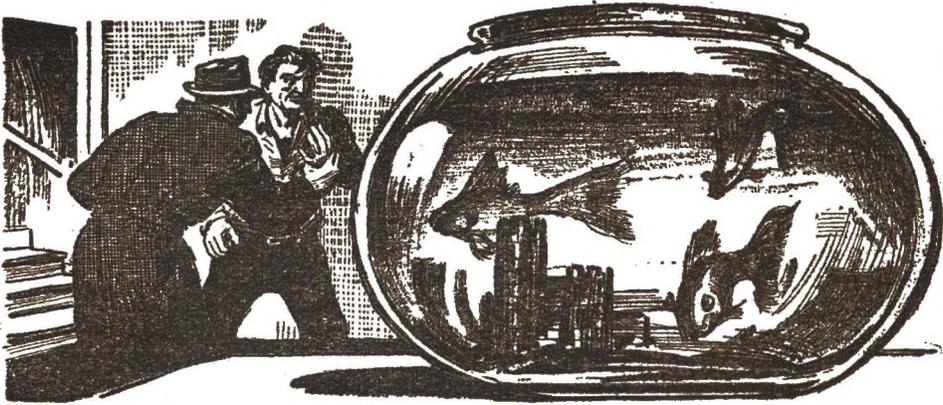
Ned and Pricilla laughed. Turning to them, the police Lieutenant said, "Well, it's your show from now on. This case is closed tight as a drum. It's all over but the wedding!"

Holding tight to Ned's arm, Pricilla answered. "Thank you, Lieutenant Donovan. And, unless you're busy solving more murders, you're invited!"

Donovan nodded his head towards his cops, a gesture that started them on their way with their prisoner. "That," he said, winking, "is one date I'll be sure to make!"

THE END





A Matter of Science

by Ray Cummings

(author of "The Clock Says 'Murder!'")

A fishbowl holds the secret of guilt between two men, either of whom might have slain old Amos . . .

I'VE BEEN a cop for thirty years and it gripes me to have my young squirt of a son tell me how to run my business. Young people think they know everything. That's all right with me, if they'd only shut up about it. Sure I'm a flatfoot. Rookie, patrolman, motorcycle, corner traffic, Desk Sergeant—in thirty years I've been them all. Now I'm Police Detective. Timothy McCarr, just old man Mac to the boys, and you never heard of me. That's okay, why should you? I'm just like thousands of others, only maybe older than average; they all do a swell routine job and you seldom hear of them.

But my kid Alan, who's twenty-two and a Senior at College, he thinks I ought to operate like Sherlock Holmes or something.

"You're too old fashioned, dad." That's his song. "Science is the thing. Science, psychology, inspiration—"

"Perspiration," I tell him. "Don't kid yourself."

He asks me why should I work so hard? He thinks a detective can sit easy and smoke his pipe and solve

things by brainwork—but the fact is most of the time a detective's brains have to be in his feet. Your only clue, for instance, is half of a dirty Chinese laundry ticket. Does it have any fancy fingerprints? It does not. And it doesn't smell like heliotrope either. So all you can do with it is pound around to fifty-nine Chinese laundries in half a dozen towns, trying to match it up. See what I mean?

Anyways, what I'm getting at—my kid Alan had a chance one night to get mixed up in my business. That was last summer; it was the start of his vacation and I drove over to the State College and was bringing him home. We were coming down through the Rambo Hills. I was at the wheel of my roadster, in civilian clothes, my night off. I guess it was about midnight—one of those warm, breathless, humid nights, with low ragged clouds over a half moon. And as it happened, Alan was nagging me on the same old thing when the scream sounded.

"Always watch out for some scientific angle, dad," he was telling me in that condescending, superior way young people have. "When you think

you're stumped, see, that's when you've got to dig up a new angle. Work it with science, and—"

"I see," I told him. "Like maybe you sprinkle salt on the corpse or shoot X-rays through its brain so it temporarily revivifies and tells you who bumped it off."

Have you ever noticed how young people hate to be razzed? "Okay," Alan said, "Stay a flatfoot all your life, I don't care. But if you—"

And right then was when we heard the scream. It was a nasty scream, a man's blood-curdling outcry ending in a choked gasp followed by a thump. It seemed to come floating down a lawn from a house that stood on a rise of ground back from the road. The hills around here, a couple of miles from the nearest town were dotted with summer homes.

I pulled up the car. It was a modest but nice looking white house, with a garden around it and the lawn sloping down in front. Like most of the others we had passed it was dark, with just a single light in one of its windows. For a minute Alan and I sat startled, listening. There was only silence up there now. Then all at once an uproar broke out—angry men's voices, thumps, the crash of furniture. It sounded like a fight.

"Holy Mackerel," Alan gasped. "Come on, dad."

WE DASHED up the lawn. It was a fight all right, quite a snappy fight. The lighted room had big French windows opening onto a flagstone terrace. The fight was in the room, but as we got closer figures came lunging out onto the terrace. It was two men slugging at each other. Then they were on the flagging, rolling, pummeling, cursing. They were still at it like a couple of wildcats when we dashed up and pulled them apart.

"Well," I said, "what's the idea?"

"I saw him do it!" one of them panted. "I've got him red-handed—"

They were both youngish fellows, maybe about thirty. Both of them in dressing gowns over their pajamas. We yanked them erect. I held one and Alan the other, with both of

them trying to get in a last wallop.

"I saw him do it! I've got him," the one I was holding repeated. He was a skinny little fellow, but strong and wiry. "I saw him do it—caught him at it!"

"Why you—you—he's crazy! I heard the scream—it woke me up—" Alan's prisoner took another lunge at his late antagonist. "You—you—cursed liar—what you mean—" He was a big beefy fellow; his face was puffed, his lip split, drooling blood. He seemed to have been getting the worst of the fight. He twisted around in Alan's grip. "Lemme go—who the devil are you?"

"Go call the police," the other one said to me. "Leggo of me, you big lug—"

"Shut up," I said.

Well anyway, we got them quiet in another minute. Both of them were yelping for the police, "Hah!" Alan said. "That's easy!" "You want a cop—there he is."

Alan jerked his thumb at me. I flashed my badge. "Anything to oblige," I said. "What you want me to do, arrest you for fighting?"

It quieted them all in a hurry. Both of them turned grim. "He—he—I saw him in there, I'm telling you—" That was the skinny little dark haired fellow.

"Saw him do what?" I demanded.

"He's a liar!" the beefy one declared hotly. "That—that's a rotten lie! I tell you when I came downstairs—"

"You evidently both live here," I said. "Isn't there anybody else in the house? With all this racket—"

The place was dark and silent upstairs. "Whose place is this?" Alan put in. "What're your names?"

The skinny one was Jerry Raleigh; the heavy-set fellow was his cousin Frank.

Frank said, "The housekeeper's upstairs, asleep I guess. Anyway, she's deaf as a post—wouldn't hear anything. But I heard it, I tell you. The scream woke me up and—"

"You said that before," I interposed. "Who else is here?"

Frank Raleigh wiped his bleeding lip with the sleeve of his dressing

gown and flashed his cousin Jerry a look. "Nobody, only—only—"

Now both of them were staring at each other, angry, but mostly terrified, you couldn't miss it. "Okay, so you're a cop," the pallid Jerry Raleigh said. His thin face had a sort of sickly grin. "That's swell—when I'd—I'd polished this fellow off I'd have phoned for you." His skinny hand gestured toward the open French window. "There it is—inside there. Go take a look."

You couldn't see it from the window. What we saw was an ornate, old-fashioned style room with a piano in one corner and a drop light over a desk; big oil paintings on the walls; a big mounted fish and a deer's head; potted palms; a smallish goldfish bowl.

"See what?" Alan demanded.

"Over—over there." The mottled red was fading out of Frank Raleigh's beefy moonface. "By the piano. And he—Jerry's a cursed liar—trying to twist it onto me, when what happened is I came down here—saw him and jumped on him—"

THE CORPSE was lying in a sort of recess on an Oriental rug beside the piano—a grey-haired man with a white rolling mustache. He was dressed in smoking jacket, trousers and slippers. One look at his puffed, purplish face, popped glazed eyes and darkened protruding tongue was plenty; he was dead all right.

Well now, if you think that didn't give Alan and me a shock you're plenty wrong. Some people have the idea finding a murdered man is just a casual thing in the life of an up-to-date, busy detective. Not with me, and I'm average. I guess it was five years at least since I was intimately in a murder case. Anyway—it was a shock. Maybe more so to me than to Alan; the young are good shock-absorbers. I guess I stood gaping; then I bent down over the corpse.

"Strangled," Alan said as he bent beside me. "Wasn't he, dad?"

"Yeah, looks like it."

The side of the head had a bloody bruise and cut. On the floor lay a broken vase with a crumpled table

scarf beside it. Evidently the vase had been thrown at the old man, hitting him on the head, felling him probably; and probably that's when he screamed. I said so to Alan.

"And then the killer jumped on him, polished him off by strangling," Alan said.

All this time the Raleigh cousins were standing over us babbling. This was the owner of the house, their wealthy Uncle Amos. They managed to tell us that much, then they were cursing each other, pretty incoherent. Didn't seem any use trying to untangle it. Not at first. There was a phone here. Headquarters was only six miles away, at Brainerdsville, the County Seat. I phoned, got Jilks. Then I located Captain Bird at his home; and Doc Carlton, the County Medical Examiner. In half an hour or so plenty of them would be here.

"Meanwhile, you're in charge, eh dad?" Alan was at my elbow. He had a queerly intense, excited look. "You are, aren't you?"

"Yeah, of course."

"I was thinking—wouldn't it be swell if you could break the case—nab the murderer—hand him right over to 'em when they arrived?"

"Yeah," I said. "Just swell." See what I mean? Just wave a wand and here's your murderer all laid out on a silver platter for you to hand your boss and take your modest bow. That was Alan's idea of solving a murder case. But any Police Detective knows it just doesn't work out like that. You get days, weeks, maybe months of routine checking this and that, and then maybe the break comes and maybe it doesn't. I'd be mixed up in this, of course, with a whole lot of us, under Cap Bird and maybe the Commissioner—maybe even the FBI, how could you tell? Plenty of work...

"Will you two shut up," Alan was saying to the two voluble cousins. "I'm not a cop. This is my dad—he'll question you."

I SENT Alan upstairs to rout out the old woman housekeeper. She'd been asleep all right. She came down in a dressing gown, petrified,

holding an old fashioned ear trumpet to her ear; and she collapsed on a couch in the foyer.

By this time I had big Frank Raleigh and his skinny cousin Jerry pretty well cowed and sullen.

"Okay," I said. "Now let's have it, one at a time. You Jerry, what happened?"

"I was asleep," Jerry said. "Uncle Amos screamed, I guess. It woke me up. I rushed downstairs—" He gestured toward the foyer door. "I guess I stood out there. Anyway, all I could see was Frank in here—wiping his hands on that scarf that's there by the—the body—maybe wiping off that broken vase—his possible fingerprints maybe. I—didn't see Uncle Amos—you can't from there by the door. Then when Frank saw me coming in—I saw the body then—and Frank jumped me—"

Frank Raleigh's moonface was turning purple. "That's all a lie—a lie I tell you—I was the one who—"

"Take it easy," I said. "You'll get your turn."

"What good is that?" Frank remonstrated. "He's telling you everything I want to tell you. I came down and caught him here—"

I guess maybe they'd have been slugging each other again if I hadn't gotten between them. "And I'll tell you why he killed Uncle Amos," Frank was shouting. "He's a wild spender, with no job and he's got a girl—he's heir to half Uncle Amos' Estate—"

"And you, the other half," the saturnine Jerry interjected. "Quarreled with Uncle Amos all the time—you ask Mrs. Green."

"So did you," Frank retorted.

Well, there wasn't any argument, on that point anyway, and old Mrs. Green confirmed it. Uncle Amos was a crusty old fellow. He was fond of his nephews but he wasn't the type to show it. The gist of the thing was pretty clear now. One of these two had sneaked down here, gotten into an argument with the old boy and thrown the vase at him. Then frightened, had jumped on him and finished him up in a hurry. The other one, awakened, had come down,

caught him just as he was wiping off the broken vase.

Simple enough. But which was which?

"That's just the point," Alan said. "One's guilty, one's innocent, and the whole thing's solved. Hammer at 'em, dad."

Sure, wouldn't it be nice if I could sort them out and present them to Cap Bird when he walked in here? That's what Alan was expecting. I could agree it would be very nice, so I hammered at them with the come-clean stuff. No go. When you've been a copper as long as I have you get to know types pretty well. Some you've got a chance of knocking into a confession, some you haven't. These two were stickers. It was the damdest thing, they both told exactly the same story—completely simple, apparently unshakable story and they stuck to it.

In ten minutes I was about as exhausted with it as they were. But Alan was more intense than ever. "We've just got to figure it out," he said. "Dad it would be just wonderful—caught red-handed—an actual eye witness—"

"Look," I said, "what legal proof is it what they say? You can't believe either of them—"

"Plenty of proof, dad. If one is definitely proved innocent, what he says is plenty important evidence."

"Okay," I agreed. "Prove one innocent—I agree that just about proves the other's guilty. Fair enough."

THAT POOR kid of mine, he just didn't seem to realize he was ducking the issue—only substituting one problem for another. "Go right ahead," I told him sarcastically. "Make it snappy, Cap'n Bird'll be here soon with the rest of the boys. Then the work begins. Get busy—don't let's have to do any work. Maybe you better ask the corpse who bumped it off?"

Well, when you hand out a sarcastic challenge like that, I guess a kid just burns to take you up on it. Alan flushed.

"Okay dad," he said. For a minute he stood thinking, or maybe covering up that he had no idea what to do. Then he was over examining the corpse; and he picked up the crumpled table scarf that lay by the broken vase.

"Easy!" I warned. "That'll be photographed—don't touch things."

"Okay, dad." He dropped the scarf, turned and confronted the cousins. "Your Uncle Amos wore a ring, didn't he?"

"Sure he did," big Frank Raleigh said. "The ruby—"

"His finger shows it—the skin's whiter where it was," Alan commented.

Well of course I could have noticed that, simple enough. But that sort of thing—possible robbery motives and such—would all have to be gone into later. Both the cousins seemed startled that their Uncle's ring was gone. He always wore it; had it on tonight, they both agreed. Evidently it was an odd ring for a man to wear—a big square ruby, as big as the stone in a man's seal ring. They agreed it was probably pretty valuable, several thousand dollars maybe.

"Well, the killer seems to have taken it," Alan said. Again he stood thinking, gazing around the room with the two cousins tensely watching him. Now he was in front of the goldfish bowl. It was a bit bigger than a man's head; a tiny tropical fish, rainbow-hued, swam around in it. The bowl had a big silver saucer like an oversized soup plate under it; the saucer was on top of a small taboret.

"You got some idea?" I asked Alan.

He nodded. "Some of the water in that fishbowl got spilled out. See it there?"

There was water in the saucer under the bowl. "So what?" I said. "Spilled when? This afternoon? Yesterday?"

"Very recently, dad. See those drops of water?" His gesture indicated them. "When it spilled, some

of it sprayed out, up there by the rim of the saucer. See them? If it had been very long ago, they'd have evaporated, wouldn't they?"

I couldn't deny it. Alan made no move to touch the fishbowl. "Look dad—" He lowered his voice. "One of these cousins arrived here just in time to see the other wiping his hands on that table scarf. You can see little green-slime spores on the scarf, as well as blood from the broken vase. His hand was wet—with water from the fishbowl."

"He reached down into the bowl?" I murmured. "That layer of sand at the bottom—he poked the ring down there, hiding it?" I started to reach into the bowl, but Alan stopped me.

"Wait, dad, don't touch that water! See, I'm figuring—the old man screamed—the killer knew he had to get out of here in a hurry. He had the ring—his instinct would be to hide it quick, some place where he could retrieve it tomorrow. He had just hidden it—was wiping his hand when his cousin appeared in the doorway and jumped him."

Alan turned to the cousins. "Get me a piece of wire, will you?"

Frank Raleigh nodded, went out to the kitchen. Jerry stood staring. Then Frank came back with a foot-long bit of wire.

"Thanks." Alan bent the wire into a hook at the end. Then he was probing down into the inch or two of sand at the bottom of the bowl. Just for a minute, then the hook caught. The massive ring came up, dangling on the hooked wire, with water and sand dripping off it.

"And there you are," Alan said. "That your Uncle Amos' ring?"

THE COUSINS mutely nodded. I stared at it—a gorgeous affair, that big square ruby. I swung on the frightened cousins. "Which one of you poked that in there?" Well I've no doubt they'd have both gone into violent accusations of each other again, but Alan interposed.

"Don't waste your breath dad. We've got the proof!"

"Proof?" I murmured. "You mean

you can tell whose hand went into that fishbowl?"

"Sure I can, dad. It's just a simple problem in physics. Anything immersed in water, displaces water to the exact amount of its own volume. You can tell what the original amount of the water was in that fishbowl—see where the green-slime algae has stained a ring on the inside, up near the top?"

It was obvious where the water had stood in the bowl. "So when this fellow put in his hand," Alan was saying, "it raised the water more than to the top and some of it spilled over—an amount—the rise of water plus what spilled is exactly equal in volume to the killer's hand and wrist that were immersed! Don't you get it, dad?"

Well of course I did! And I was gazing at the two cousins—big, beefy Frank Raleigh, gasping, gazing with a terrified look down at his big pudgy hands—the skinny, saturnine little Jerry, with the last vestige of color draining from his face as he stared wildly around the room.

"We can get the exact mathematical proof," Alan was adding, "by having each of them do it and comparing the amount of water they spill. But I don't think it's necessary—not for now anyway in this case." Alan's voice turned ironic. "There's such a discrepancy between them."

I sure got it now! And Alan was adding, "There's not enough spilled water—not for that big bulky hand, wrist and part of the forearm of Frank Raleigh, dad! We'll try it after while—you'll see! A physical impossibility for him to have poked that ring down there in the sand! So he's the innocent one! And I

guess the jury'll believe him all right when he says he saw his cousin in here, standing by the corpse, wiping the water off his hand and his possible fingerprints off the smashed vase! So there you are—no mystery—"

Little Jerry Raleigh's thin, ratlike face was ashen, and suddenly he let out a cry and made a bolt for the door. I guess it was just the instinct of terror—the instinct of a trapped animal to get away. He might have made the door at that but with a flying tackle Alan got him around the knees and brought him down.

And that was when one of our radio cars and a couple of motorcycles arrived; and Captain Bird and the boys dashed in.

Believe me, I tried to explain how Alan had doped it all. But he kept shutting me up and I couldn't very well let the thing degenerate into a family argument. Anyway, they sure congratulated me with enthusiasm. Cap'n Bird wrung my hand warmly.

"Mighty clever of you, Mac."

"You bet," Alan agreed. "Like dad always says—when you're stumped, think up a new angle. Science, that's the thing."

So I took the bows, and let it go at that. And I'll say this for that kid of mine, he's never mentioned the thing since. Of course that Raleigh case was an exceptional affair. Still, you never can tell. Maybe every case has a new angle, if only you can find it. Legwork is okay, necessary, naturally. But maybe I better give a little thought to the fancy, scientific stuff. No use being a flatfoot all your life.

THE END



Return to the Scene

True Fact Feature by Glen Peggie

ALTHOUGH ACTUAL facts don't seem to bear it out, the theory that the murderer always returns to the scene of his crime is a familiar one. In one strange case, however, a killer actually did this, and even went one step further...

Several years ago, the body of a prominent resident of Denver, Colorado, was found lying on the floor of his study in his suburban home. It was a shocking murder—his head had been crushed in with his own walking stick, and apparently the killer had continued to pound at his head long after he had died. The victim was an ex-merchant who had been retired for many years, and had few friends and, apparently, no known enemies. In fact, the police found upon investigation, there seemed to be nobody around who had known him well enough to want to kill him.

Each trail the police followed led into a dead end, and finally there were no trails left. The case was tabbed as "unsolved," and the home in which the victim had lived remained sealed up.

And then the neighbors began to report strange occurrences. The house had been shut up for months, and yet people swore they heard sounds of movement and footsteps inside. Several reliable witnesses report that they had seen a white, skeletal face hover briefly in front of a window. The pile of these reports became so heavy that the police unsealed the house and made an inch-by-inch examination, but didn't find a thing. And still the reports of the ghost poured in.

There was something cockeyed, all right. One neurotic, maybe even a few, can imagine ghostly footsteps and skeletal faces, but not a whole battalion of intelligent, unhysterical residents. As the reports continued to arrive, the Homicide Squad assigned two of its best detectives to hide in the bushes outside the house and watch and listen.

Several days passed without event, and the detectives began to wonder if, perhaps, it wasn't a case of mass suggestion after all. And then, just as they were about to give up, a ghostly white face appeared at the window...

The detectives rushed from their hiding-place, opened the door. They were just in time to catch hold of an incredibly emaciated, tattered remnant of a man. They caught him by his legs and pulled him down just as he was about to scuttle up into a secret attic opening in the ceiling.

He was their murderer...he confessed

it the moment they took him down to Headquarters. After a short stay in the prison hospital, and an increasing diet of honest-to-goodness food, he told the whole story.

The killer had known the victim during boyhood, more than forty years before. He had lived in Denver at that time, but had moved away, and had run into a lifelong spell of bad luck. He had lost every job he had tackled, had been caught up without funds during the depression, and had eventually taken to tramping around the country begging and stealing food.

He had come back to Denver one day, and had recognized his old friend, despite the passage of years. An odd streak of pride, coupled with a burning envy of his friend's success compared to his own failure, had kept him from approaching him—but he had sneaked through an open window into his house one day in search of food or valuables.

The murderer was in a bad situation at that time, worse, even, than before. He had not eaten for three days. He had been tubercular for years, and was so weak movement was a struggle. It was bitterly cold outside. He got a good meal out of the icebox, and, in hunting around, had accidentally stumbled on the attic entrance—and the attic was full of jar after jar and can after can of preserved food. It was also obvious that, judging from the dust, the attic had not been visited in some time, and probably would not be visited for some time. And so, too weak to move on, the killer decided to stay.

He had never, he said, intended to do his old friend any harm. He had lived in the house for six months, eating the preserved food, sometimes sneaking down to the icebox for food, and taking just a little so that the retired merchant would not miss it. For those six long months, he had skulked around the house, with the owner never aware that he had a hidden guest.

But then, one day, as he went to the icebox for the food, the merchant returned suddenly. The merchant raised his walking stick, and the killer whirled on him, pulled it out of his hand, and beat him to death with it. All the envy that had been built up in him poured out in that beating, causing him to keep pounding madly for almost ten minutes.

And then, when it was all over—well, there was just no place to go. So the killer went one better on the old tradition of returning to the scene of the crime... he just stayed there.



Lovely Ladies of Larceny

by
Tom Thursday

(Author of
"They Got Away With It!")

When it comes to swindling on a grand scale, the female is deadlier than the male!

PERHAPS no woman will ever become the heavy weight champion boxer of the world, or even surpass men in the art of cooking. Nevertheless ask any police official how the alleged weaker sex rates in the criminal social set and his answer will astound you. Moreover, it will be utterly factual.

From the crimson category of murder to clever confidence games the dreadful dames have made their male compatriots resemble angelic amateurs. Even in the perfidious profession of stolen merchandise a larcenous lady is still champ over all male competitors.

Let's start with the Queen of Con, known to her parents as plain Lizzie Bigley. Liz was of Canadian birth, one of a large family of poor but honest farmers. She discovered at an early age that, although one could make hay while the sun shone, the profits thereof were far from affluent. Liz had a headful of imagination and it begot criminal notions.

She believed that honesty was the

best policy, if you could earn a living at it, but she never tried.

Miss Liz Bigley began her con game career while still a teen-ager. Obviously she was not one of the Sinatra swooney type of fan in pig-tails and gingham and, if romance ever entered her life, it was employed to enrich her exchequer. In short, Liz was a whiz.

You have probably heard of a smart smooch named Weil, known to fellow consters as Yellow Kid Weil. The Kid was tops in the male-mulcting racket, along with such flopheaded eminentos as Freddie Buckmeister, and also known as the Deacon. Both Weil and Buckmeister thumped their chests in honor of their sucker-shaking systems, and they really did right well. Their hauls of loot scaled from \$1000 up to \$100,000, and they made their pay while the suckers shined.

However, compared to the ability of Lizzie Bigley they were like unto the pilot fish hitch-hiking on the shark's torso. Lucky for the world's supply of boobs that La Bigley never

teamed up with Buckmeister and Weil in the crummy game of confidence. More, she would have trimmed them both with dispatch and likewise profit.

You may recall Lizzie Bigley under her *nom de bunco* of Cassie Lydia Chadwick. Although she was far from a Lana Turner or Ingrid Bergman in either form or facial beauty, it is evident that she used sex in a habit-forming quantity. That is, she started the habit and the men did the forming. Her normal and natural prey were always males; if she ever fleeced a female, or attempted to, it is not on official records.

Liz specialized in Big Shot hennen. That is, men of vision, financial kings, gents who prided themselves on their hard-headed business acumen. Yes, sir—or ma'am—Liz went after the hard heads and made them soft.

AMONG her repertoire of prime boob-bumpers was a corking fairy tale which she told often and damned effectively. Her tale was backed up by a stack of golden-hued certificates that really *looked* good. At least, the top layer of the junk was real; had the saps made a more searching examination of the stack, and taken their eyes off Liz's legs, they might have found the majority of certificates were worth about one cent a piece, if printed in a union shop.

You think bankers are very smart and shrewd people, huh? Of course if you tried to raise money on the Old Homestead you have found that bankers are very tough. On the contrary, Liz Bigley found them very tender, and she devoted practically all of her talents to the boys with banks. In fact, she once remarked that plug-chewing farmers were far smarter and she never tried to bilk one, not even out of a cow.

Before her career wound up in the bottom of the ashcan Lizzie Bigley, or Cassie Chadwick, plucked her banker playmates for nearly 13 million, which is a nice round figure if you can get it, and Liz got it. Old-time bucks, that is, not the inflation-



ary variety you have today. Her 'take' may have been more, but due to the bashfulness of some of the bankers she bunked, it is not on official records. It seems the boys would rather not hear any more about it, which silence was highly satisfactory to Liz.

She discovered early in life that farm work was just that and little else. And she noted that her parents were buffed and bent from too much hard labor. So she left the farm, minus the parental blessing, and went to Ontario to see what a plain little girl, with fancy ideas, could accomplish.

She had a card printed, reading, *Miss Elizabeth Bigley, Heiress To \$15,000*. With such an obvious fake she actually went into various department stores and calmly proceeded to run up nice charge accounts. One wonders how the sound-and-sensible business men permitted Liz to get away with such a flagrant fraud. However, it doesn't take brains to make money, just gaze at those who have it.

It must be granted that her *youthful* technique was stupid and silly and showed very plainly that Liz had not even developed into a third-rate conster. Most certainly it was a crude beginning for the world's greatest flim-flammer.

Pretty soon some of the merchants,

who chanced to be awake, began to smell more than a mouse, and they asked Liz for a little more pure and authentic identification. This did not annoy Liz, for she promptly wrote out a flock of I.O.U.'s, believing they would settle everything. But all they did was settle Liz; she was arrested and became a guest in one of His Majesty's clinks. She didn't stay long, however; her brain began to do a little heavy thinking and she started the now-old insanity gag and got plenty of other prisoners to prove her case.

The jury, all good men and simple—and simple is right—acquitted Lizzie and right there she learned a lesson she never forgot. Promptly she began to suspect that Canada did not appreciate her peculiar talents and forthwith went to Cleveland. There, she found certain males roaming around who claimed their wives did not understand and would like a little extra-curricular sympathy. Liz was very sympathetic and shook the boys down for whatever they had; but that was chicken fodder, so Liz went in for plain and fancy forgery.

She shoved off from Cleveland and went to Toledo, and there began Operation Liz. Unfortunately, something failed to operate according to plan and when some gentlemen frowned upon her activities a wide-awake jury, paying less than no attention to Liz's legs, tagged her with ten years in the official can. Three years later, she was out on parole, and how this was accomplished, we'd like to know. But, then, a gal like Liz should have some privacy, and anyway she was free again.

During her three years in prison her brain expanded and she did some neat plotting and planning. Not how to be a good girl, because she had the bad idea that good girls were no good. Shortly after her release she met a gentleman and switched her name from Lizzie Bigley to Cassie Lydia Chadwick.

SHE MET one Dr. Leroy S. Chadwick at a church social and the good doc thought Liz was just what his soul required for a mate. The doc

had a fine social position, a magnificent home and plenty of cash. Any woman with a thimbleful of honest brains would have stopped right there with such security and settled down to a life of home, happiness and husband. But not our Liz Bigley; her head must have been the wrong shape because it was not very long before Cassie began to work on the good doc and she gained complete control of his fortune.

From then on she lost interest in peanuts and went in for bigger and better financial nuts. While still the ever-loving wife, it says here, of Dr. Leroy S. Chadwick, she got the interest and attention of the minister of an upper crust church—the one attended by John D. Rockefeller, who made a few bucks in the oil business. Of course she met the reverend gentleman by design—her design—and she was some designer. With eyelids fluttering demurely and her eyes about to drop a spare tear, she accosted the minister and gave him her full, albeit secret, confidence—with the accent on the 'con.'

She informed the right reverend gentleman that she was not only slightly imperfect but her life was over-shadowed by a dark, dank skeleton, and it was rattling all over her closet. Would the good reverend be so kind as to help poor little Cassie? All she asked for was that the minister give her a short note of introduction to a certain rich and affluent banker. The kindly pastor was naturally delighted to help a lost sheep find the fold, so Cassie got the note of introduction.

It was a note to one of the biggest bankers in the staid old city of Boston and you may be assured that Cassie wasn't after beans.

Getting an immediate audience with the banker, Cassie prefaced her story by hinting that there was something very unfortunate in her pure and puritanic life. "But, sir," said Cassie, "before I tell you, I must first ask you to promise me on your word of honor that you will keep my secret. Forever and forever."

The banker gave his solemn word and then Cassie drew nearer, almost

within embracing distance, if you get it, and brazenly informed the big moneyman that she was—get this, now—the illegitimate daughter of Andrew Carnegie, the steel king. At that time, of course, the famed steel magnate was still alive and an international celebrity.

“What proof have you of what you tell me?” demanded the banker. And Cassie was all primed for *that* one. Accompanied by friends of the banker, as witnesses, she went to New York and drove directly to the Carnegie mansion on Fifth avenue. Boldly she rang the front door bell, no servant entrances for her. A butler or some flunkey answered, and Cassie walked right in, as if she had been born there.

Just how this feat of near-magic was performed is not known and Cassie never told until the day of her death. However, by the time she came out, a matter of half an hour, the banker’s witnesses were convinced that she was the real McCarnegie, viz., the genuine, bona fide illegitimate daughter of Andrew Carnegie, king of the steel racket.

BACK AGAIN in Boston Cassie gave the banker a promissory note for a very hot half-million dollars. The note was allegedly signed by Papa Carnegie. She wanted to borrow some cold cash from the banker and, as she said, she did not want Papa Andrew to know about it. Thus the secrecy.

“I’m afraid it would upset Pahpah dreadfully,” said Cassie, with the correct portion of demureness. “It is his desire that I keep the note until after his passing.”

Cassie began by borrowing a small sum, while the banker held the note. This was paid back right on time and thereafter she borrowed additional small sums; they, too, were repaid promptly, and at the agreed upon interest. You have no idea the interest a banker takes in interest.

With her final borrowing from this banker, which was for a more substantial sum, Cassie went to another financial intitution and bought some gilt-edged securities, all legitimate.

Next—and watch the plot thicken—she went to Cleveland and asked another banker to come to her home for an important conference. His name was Ira Reynolds and Banker Reynolds had a fine reputation as to character and sound business principles. Like his Boston counterpart, Reynolds was in business for business, not spinach and spaghetti.

Cassie informed Reynolds about the hocus-jokus of her being the bastard—pardon, illegitimate—daughter of Old Andy, and he appeared both astounded and impressed. As she talked, she kept putting securities into a large envelope, seeing that he had plenty of time to scan them as she worked. Although ninety-nine per cent of the certificates were phonies, she managed to trick Reynolds into believing they were the real thing.

“I have here,” said Cassie, “15 million in stocks and bonds, Mr. Reynolds. I want you to keep them safe for me because I know I can trust you fully.”

She got the receipt for the dough and then Cassie really went to town. Calling on banker after banker, she showed them the receipt for \$15 million, borrowed large sums on it, telling each banker the fairy tale about being the hush-hush daughter of Andrew Carnegie. And for how long a time do you think Cassie befuddled these astute bankers? For weeks, for months? No, indeed; Cassie, formerly Liz the farmer’s daughter, kept the money boys fooled for years, men who traditionally demand that borrowers get water out of Plymouth Rock for collateral.

Eventually the banker in Boston began to get chills in the cash department and he brought suit against Banker Reynolds forbidding him to dispose of any part of the 15 million pile. It was then that Reynolds began to sniff a whole family of mice. So he went to the vault and examined the securities. He was amazed, not to say dumbfounded, to find that only a few of the top-layer certificates were genuine.

From then on the career of our little Canadian highflyer began to flop over like Niagara Falls. For one-

C.T. Beckwith, executive head of the Citizens National Bank of Obelin, Ohio, went into bankruptcy. They had advanced Cassie \$240,000. The disgrace caused poor Beckwith to commit suicide. Promptly other fleeced financiers called on Andrew Carnegie and demanded some potent information about his illegitimate daughter.

"Why, I never heard of the woman!" boomed Old Andrew. "And I most certainly have no illegitimate daughters. My signature is a rank forgery!"

Then the law was called upon to take care of Cassie, but you can't say the 'dumb cops' should have apprehended Cassie long ago. Her business, remember, was all transacted with brilliant bankers. So they arrested Cassie for very grand larceny and the judge, who appeared to have no interest in legs, sentenced her to ten years in the Ohio state pen.

She never served her full sentence; you can't cage an eagle like Cassie and she was an eagle among con birds of the world. After vainly flapping her wings against the steel bars for a few years, she died in October, 1907. And if any male or female conster has equaled her career of frenzied finance, we should like to see the record.

* * *

NOW LET us take a snapshot of the career of—**MA MANDELBAUM.**

Her name was Frederica G. Mandelbaum, a wench of wondrous witchery. (There is a word that rhymes with 'witchery' but *Famous Detective Stories*, being a highly moral magazine, wouldn't print it). Madame Mandelbaum reigned in New York City during the Gay '90's, and gave the boys in blue many a case of dis-temper and high blood pressure.

Those who met her face to face said she had the phiz of a cold-blooded flounder. She was inclined to be rather buxom and had the over-all figure of a beer barrel. She was perhaps the original Mrs. Five-By-Five, and weighed more than 200 pounds. Anything honest and legitimate bored her intensely.

Being straightforward was strictly against her sole religion, which was thievery on the grand scale. She was born in Germany and, had she lived during the days of Adolf Hitler, he would have appointed her Commander of the Grand Larceny Corps. "Ma" Mandelbaum, as she was known to the under-worlders, had a protegee, known as Lady Lyons, whose real name was Sophie Elkins. Ma took a real interest in Sophie, especially when she found that La Elkins was the best female pickpocket in the land. Sophie married one Ned Lyons, who had the dubious honor of being the best safe-cracker on earth.

Ma's maiden name was Goldberg and she got the Mandelbaum handle when she went into the small store of one Wolf Mandelbaum, did some shopping—and shoplifting—and within a few weeks married poor Wolf. She soon put Wolf in sheep's clothing and then did some tricky shearing. She then took complete charge of the store and turned it into the greatest hangout for crooks the world has ever known. She specialized in dealing in hot or stolen merchandise.

In the beginning, she waited for free-lance thieves to bring her their loot, but she became impatient and streamlined the racket. She got to know all the first-rate pickpockets, bank-robbers, safe-crackers and welded them into a kind of international crime corporation. Ma, of course, was both president and treasurer. Leave it to Ma.

THE BURGLARIOUS bums who had just got out of prison, or escaped, and needed a little working capital to get started again, always found a pal in Ma Mandelbaum. She was business-like, however, and always got her investment back, with triple compound interest.

Loft robberies seemed to hold her attention immensely. She would buy stolen horses, trucks, and then repaint both horse and truck and do some cartage work with the equipment. As to just what the cartage work was, we leave to you. The store, which was rather shabby, became the premier crime clearing house for

stolen goods, and Ma was queen of the den.

She soon became rich and no one ever double-crossed her twice. She had a temper and, when she switched it into high gear, much woe unto the crook who cheated or held out on her. She would even go so far as to sic the cops on him and that was the end of the louse.

Above the store was a small apartment, furnished in what Ma considered elegance, and it was barred with a heavy steel door, covered with a red plush curtain. The whole abode was furnished with stolen merchandise although you can bet Ma took great pains to remove all identifying tags. In the store she had a large fire place, in which was concealed a secret dumb-waiter. This was used to transport goods that needed prompt hide-awaying when the police made their too frequent visits.

After many years of underworld activities, Ma became somewhat careless. Some stolen cloth was found in her thieves-haven and she was brought into court for trial. Naturally, she employed the best and most expensive legal talent of the day. Although the attorneys in her defence made some in the courtroom laugh out very loud when they told of her

virtue, purity and all-around honesty, the jury was impressed with the speeches and acquitted her.

A few weeks later she was caught again, the cops becoming real old meanies. This time Ma began to figure her luck had run out and so she ran out with it, jumping bail and fleeing to Canada. At that time, the Dominion was a kind of duck-in territory for boys and girls on the lam from the States.

It is known that she lived in Canada, more or less legitimately, for several years and then she disappeared. What became of her no one seems to know. She may have been taken for a one-way ride by some disgruntled lad who did not like the way she operated or perhaps she just died, under the nom de plume of Schultz or Murphy.

Regardless of what happened to the larcenous lady, the New York police were delighted with her absence, noting that theft had dropped about 85 per cent.

As to whether or not women can compete with men in practically all forms of criminality, we can name at least 50 more who rivalled the best in the male line. All lovely ladies of larceny.

And you can have them.





I pushed Vivian into an unglamorous sitting position on the floor and conked the big lug with my sap.

Murder Under A Paper Moon

by Norman A. Daniels

(author of "Written in Red")

Joe Allen learns you have to look behind the tinsel and flashy fronts to stay alive, let alone solve killings!

I WAS hanging onto the support of the big police car and wishing I wasn't so damned nervous. Beside me was the bulk of Captain Bill Porter who headed the famed Broad-

way Squad. A guy I respected and liked even if I'd only known him for some twelve hours. The third occupant of the back seat was equally famous. A columnist-reporter named Ken Miller. As sleek and polished as the night spots he frequented. As calm as a goldfish in a bowl.

Captain Porter glanced at me. "The name is Joe Allen, isn't it? Yeah—sure. Joe, you're a third grade dick. Maybe, if you do a good job on this, I'll see you're transferred to my squad. How'd you like that?"

I ran a finger around the totally unfamiliar wing collar which was an essential part of my evening clothes. "Like it, sir? I'd like nothing better."

Porter had a wide, very unhand-some face. I guessed he was about fifty and I'd heard he could break a man's arm in something less than two seconds. I knew that crooks promptly crossed Broadway when they saw him coming and there were some who tipped their hats to him—because he told them to. He was built like a bull-dozer.

He said, "Well, Joe, are you afraid to die? Are you afraid to kill?"

That one stumped me for a minute. "Yes." I decided he'd know if I didn't tell the truth. "Yes, I'm scared to die. I'd fight my head off to keep from dying. Afraid to kill? I don't know, sir; I never killed a man, but I think I could."

Porter laughed harshly. Ken Miller lit a cigarette and said, "Stop pulling his leg, you big, overgrown hunk of blubber. He's young; he'll learn."

"Yeah, he'll learn," Porter barked. "He'll learn when a slug smashes into his kisser. This is the Broadway Squad, Miller. It's tough and rough and ready to take it or dish it out. We're a little better at dishing it out. Joe—you know what to do?"

I said, "Yes, sir. I show this card to the man at the door, get inside and walk down a very long corridor. There I enter Toby Talbot's gambling place, play for a little while and make certain things are ripe for a raid. Then I take the man at the door, let you fellows in and—that's all."

"That'll be enough. If you get

away with it, you're a whiz," Porter told me. "One thing—Toby is a crook and he knows we know it. The joint makes him a mint and he'll do anything to keep us from crashing the place. I said he'd do anything and that includes slitting your throat with about as much exhibition of a conscience as if he was peeling a grape. Okay—synchronize your watch. I've got twelve fifty-one."

"Check," I said a little nervously.

"At one-twenty you have the guarded front door open. That's all. We'll let you out here and good luck."

The car rolled to the curb and I got out. Ken Miller grinned at me. "Take things easy, kid. You won't find that half as tough as the eminent captain seems to think it will be. The best to you."

I THANKED him, pulled at my black felt and started for a taxi line at the corner. I was driven to the joint. From the outside it looked like a small, fashionable and very ordinary apartment house. There were apartments in there too, only certain floors were ripped out to make big rooms for gambling. I also knew that Toby Talbot was as deadly as a flame thrower, that every dime he owned was invested in the place, and he'd fight like hell to keep it. I had been briefed to the effect that Toby was crooked, his wheels, cards and players were crooked, but he was careful. Very careful. He never took anybody for very much at one time.

You had to be in a tux or evening clothes to get in; Toby didn't fool with two-bit players. I paid off the cab driver, glanced at the lobby and walked in. I passed the elevator, kept going until I encountered a closed door. I tapped discreetly. It opened, on a very thick chain, and an ugly face peeked out. I handed over the card Captain Porter had given me. The door closed, opened again and wide this time. I passed on through. The gorilla on guard was big enough to take six guys like me. He wasn't going to be easy.

At the end of the hall I passed through another door, but I wasn't stopped. Toby's first floor looked

like a set out of a movie musical. There were huge chandeliers shimmering like diamonds, but not gaudy at all. There was a long bar, stocked with everything a man's throat could possibly desire and manned by white-coated bartenders. There was even a gesture toward a free lunch, but here the stew was caviar, the bread was thin scones that melted in your mouth. The pickles were fancy canapes. Only the hard-boiled eggs made this free lunch in any way similar to the old Third Avenue joints.

I had money and I bought a stack of chips. After all I would have to testify I played the wheels. I lost fifty dollars in that many seconds. I figured maybe the taxpayers wouldn't like that so I drifted away from the table and had a drink on the house.

I glanced at my watch. In ten minutes the fireworks were going off and I was the fuse. I rubbed my hip against the bar to get the feel of the blackjack in the specially sewn pocket. Then the blonde climbed onto a chair beside me.

She looked familiar, but I couldn't place her. She was a half pint, but had all the salient features of a six foot show girl. She knew how to wear makeup and clothes. The dress, I judged somewhat unfamiliarly, must have cost about two hundred. She had a nice smile too—aimed straight at me.

"Hello," she said. Her voice was like music.

"Do I know you?" That was what I asked. You can see how accustomed I was to spots like this.

"I know a lot of people. Maybe I know you. Surely you do recognize me."

I said, "I'm sorry..." and felt like a heel.

She laughed and picked up the drink she'd ordered. "Such is fame." she sighed in mock resignation. "I'm Vivian Lloyd."

"Not *the*...?" Boy what a hick I was. What a Broadway Squad dick I'd make.

She laughed with me, not at me. "Yes, I'm the radio singer. Now, where did we meet?"

The minute hand on my watch was spinning faster than a second hand, I thought. In three minutes I was due to start the fireworks. Recollection of such a duty brought me back to earth and out of reach of this scintillating angel perched almost on me knee. I said, "Excuse me, please. I'll be right back."

She put her drink down, slid off the stool and grabbed my arm. I wondered how it would be to go back to work behind the counter of a grocery store because that's where I was headed. I tried to shake her off, but she only clung harder.

"Oh no, you don't. I'm not being brushed off like that," she said. "Not Vivian Lloyd. Before I let go, you'll have to tell me just who you are."

"Okay," I said in desperation. "But not here. We'll step into the corridor..."

She raised her eyebrows. "Oh-ho, so that's what you're up to. You don't scare little Vivian. Go ahead."

I half dragged her into the corridor and the guy at the far end of it, on guard at the door, turned to watch us. It wasn't a bad play at that. He'd never be suspicious of a guy who had a girl hanging onto his arm. I was lucky enough to keep one hand free. I reached into my hip pocket and gently extracted the sap. I kept dragging her toward the door and she started dragging me back.

THEN THE big lug at the door decided to see what was up. He stepped closer and must have recognized Vivian because he started to laugh. That was when I pushed Vivian into an unglamorous sitting position on the floor and conked the big lug with my sap.

He didn't go down, just stood there, shaking his head as if he didn't believe it at all. I slapped him again, near the temple, and that rocked him back until he hit the wall. He bounced off it and came at me with both arms wide open. I ducked under, drove a fist into his massive stomach and another smack against the point of his jaw. He was one of those kind who can take anything so long as it hits him on top of the head, but a

chin punch is different. He went down as if I'd socked him with a telegraph pole.

I was half a minute late and Captain Porter wasn't going to like that. I was at the door when the shot rang out. It came from inside the place somewhere. Well muffled and I guessed it originated on the second floor where most of the card games were conducted. There was no time to investigate. I unlocked the door and left it open, then I turned and sprinted back toward the main gaming room. I passed Vivian and said, "I'm awful sorry, baby." She followed me.

I barged into the gambling room, pushed people aside and moved up to the biggest table. The croupier looked at me, at the gun I held and slowly raised his hands.

"Everybody freeze," I shouted. "This is a raid."

It was too. Captain Porter and twenty men came storming into the place. They knew how to take one of these dumps over. In two minutes the guests were lined up against one wall, the employees against another and a cop guarded every money-laden table. The police pension fund got what was on the tables and I guessed there might be a raise for all pensioners.

Porter came over to me. "Nice work, kid. As good as any man could do..."

I said, "Captain, just as I opened the door, somebody fired a shot. I think it came from upstairs."

Porter gave me a little shove and we went tearing across the room. Ken Miller materialized from someplace. He looked as if he was enjoying this. His notebook was out and he was taking down names. Important names that would grace his morning column. He tagged behind us. It seemed that Ken Miller had permission to do just about anything he pleased.

We found the stairway—or Captain Porter did. It led to the second floor where there were a number of private rooms. There was likewise a back entrance and at the top of the stairs lay a man all huddled up. Porter dropped to his knees beside him.

"It's Carter Lloyd of the movies," he gasped. "Somebody potted him through the eye."

I instantly thought of the man who always took policeman parts in films. When he appeared on the screen, you automatically knew he was a detective. He had really been typed and stayed that way for years. Ken Miller threw the beam of his flash on the man and then turned and ran like mad.

"He's heading for a phone," Porter explained to me. "Go find Toby Talbot."

I FOUND the gambler in his office. It wasn't another movie set—just a plain, efficient business establishment with filing cabinets, a big safe, two desks and several chairs. Toby sat behind one desk and was careful to keep his hands in sight.

"Broadway Squad," I told him in a snappy fashion. "It's a pinch."

"What the hell did you think I thought it was—Hallowe'en? Listen, copper, I know there's a stiff out in the hall, but that's all I know. I didn't kill him."

I took Toby out to Captain Porter and then my job was just about done. Until half an hour later when a patrolman told me Porter wanted me in Toby's office. I went there to find Ken Miller, Toby, several of his important aides and Vivian Lloyd present. Vivian was quietly weeping and suddenly the thing made sense. The dead man was Carter Lloyd—Vivian's husband.

Porter said, "Allen, tell me just what happened before you opened the door to admit us."

I told him, holding back nothing. I pointed at Vivian. "She was a little high, I guess. Anyway she clung to me and I had to drag her into the hall. She was right there, sitting on the floor where I'd pushed her, when the shot was fired."

"All right," Porter said. "Mrs. Lloyd, you can go home any time you like. I had to check your alibi, understand. Your husband was murdered. You and he were estranged and—well..."

"I understand," Vivian told him and shifted her baby blues at me. "Thank you, Officer. I'm glad I made a pest of myself."

Ken Miller said he'd take her home. Some cops took Toby away and Porter and I were alone in the gambler's office. Porter looked worried.

"It was a beaut of a raid, Joe. Perfect—until that bum decided to get himself bumped. Now the gambling charge is peanuts and we're noplacé on the murder. Now—I'm putting you on the Squad as of tonight. This is a sweet opportunity to show me how you'd handle something like this. Suppose you tell me what you think."

I lit a cigarette and felt prouder than a peacock. "I've thought about it, sir. Lloyd is known to every movie-goer as a cop. I'll bet he's better known than the most famous cop in the whole country. So—one of the gun boys Toby kept on hand, spotted him and forgot Lloyd was a movie actor. All the guy saw was a man he knew very well was a cop; maybe Lloyd made a pass or something and the gun boy let him have it."

Porter smiled. "Not bad, my boy. In fact it's very, very good. No real evidence to back it up. Toby's boys claim they had nothing to do with it and we didn't find one carrying a rod that had been recently fired. I'm going to ask you to do something."

"Certainly, Captain." I was Johnny-on-the-spot.

"Good. I want you to report that you aren't certain that Vivian Lloyd was downstairs. Say she was at first, but when the shot was fired, you didn't see her around. That's a lie, a great big lie, but I want you to say that. Will you?"

"But why?" I implored.

"For me, kid. Just for me. Do it and I'll see you start climbing the ladder in my squad until you're right up there beside me."

All I could do was nod my head. It was the screwiest thing I ever encountered and I wondered if Captain Porter was some sort of a crook bent on shakin' down Vivian Lloyd. But I did it. I recanted my alibi for Vivian. Said after thinking it over,

I wasn't at all sure. Then I went home.

IT WAS three-thirty when Vivian came to my hotel room. I'd never got around to marrying and a hotel room is the easiest way for a bachelor to live. She wasn't announced, just came up and knocked on the door. I let her in and it was she who closed the door and turned the bolt.

"A few minutes ago two detectives came to my home to arrest me," she said. "For the murder of my husband, and it's all your fault. I was with you when the shot rang out and you know it. What do you want of me?"

"Why, I..." There wasn't any explanation that made sense and I was on a spot. I mentally damned Captain Porter all over the place.

Vivian said, "If it's money, I have some. Enough to keep you quiet. My husband and I have been separated for years. He was a louse. I had reason to kill him, but you know I didn't. I... wait—did Captain Porter put you up to this?"

I shrugged and said nothing. She did. Plenty. "So that's it, Porter, eh? Listen, you young stupid kid who thinks he's a big brave cop. Porter and my husband used to be pals and Porter has hated me for years. This is his way to get back. Now tell the truth. I was with you when my husband died."

"I—don't know. I'm—not sure..." I stumbled like a kid who faced his teacher unprepared to answer anything except who discovered America.

The telephone gave me a lease on life. Ken Miller was downstairs. I was ready to tell him to come up when something touched the back of my neck. It was a cold circle of steel. That part of a gun from which the slugs come smashing out.

"Look, Ken," I said and wondered how the words ever came, "I'm in bed. Can't it wait until morning?"

He banged up, but I had a good idea he'd be knocking on the door any moment. Vivian stepped back, the little pearl-handled gun level with my heart. "If he comes, you'll hide me; you'll tell him nothing, do

you understand?"

All I could do was wave my arms helplessly. Me, with a .38 hanging in a shoulder clip off the back of a chair five feet away. Then Ken was hammering on the door. I pointed to the bathroom and Vivian ran for it. I felt reborn, but I had to get rid of Ken. I picked up a newspaper, tucked it under my arm, kicked off my shoes and rumbled my hair. Then I went to the door.

Ken came in, sniffing like a bloodhound. "What's the idea of not letting me come up?" he demanded. "This mess is news—or hadn't it entered your skull yet, Joe?"

"It's also three-thirty in the morning," I reminded him. "What do you want?"

"How come you switched stories? The truth now. There's something behind this. My reporter's instinct tells me so and I want it. Come through, Joe."

"Look," I said, "the girl was with me at the bar. She followed me into the hallway. After that, I don't know what happened. I was busy with the gorilla at the door. I forgot all about Vivian. What else can I say?"

"She was there. I believe her and I think you're holding out for a reason, Joe. Look—don't be a fool. Lots of cops go crooked and get plenty of dough to retire on, but they don't enjoy life. If you're hunting a plum, forget it. Tell me the truth. I'll protect you to the limit."

"I am telling the truth," I said. "Now beat it, will you? I'm dead on my feet."

"You're short on brains," he snapped. "Okay, I'm going, but this doesn't end it, wise guy. Not by a long shot. Before I'm through, you'll tell the truth to a Grand Jury."

He slammed the door hard enough to make somebody bang on my wall. I had sensitive neighbors. Vivian came out then, the little gun still pointed at me. I disregarded the thing and sat down. She was smiling now.

"I imagine Mr. Miller will see that the truth comes out," she said. "Oh yes—he can do it. You'll be all nicely cooked on both sides, copper. And

you can tell Captain Porter for me that he'll get the same treatment."

After she left, slamming the door again, I wondered why I hadn't pinched her for carrying a gun. Then I wondered if she'd have plugged me if I tried. I was glad I didn't have to make up my mind about it now. I went to bed and—by some quirk of nature, I fell asleep.

CAPTAIN PORTER was in the lobby ringing my phone when I woke up. He came right to my room. I was brushing my teeth while he talked. "Thanks, Joe, for the assist. Vivian came here last night and probably told you I hated her. Well, I do, in a way. As much as a man can hate so beautiful a woman, which isn't too much. What's she going to do?"

"Have me up before the Grand Jury and maybe sue me as well," I groaned and wiped the excess toothpaste off my lip. I slipped out of pajamas and started dressing. "Captain, why? Why must I take a rap like this? You know that girl couldn't possibly have killed her husband even if she'd wanted to."

Porter lit a cigarette and grinned. "Joe, you're young and new to the squad. Unused to the glitter and fantasy that is Broadway; you don't know its people like I do. The backdrops and sets look real to you. You don't see that the silvery moon is made of paper like they say in the song. But it is, and a murder in these parts has angles. I'm an old hand; I see them. Just keep insisting you don't believe Vivian was with you when the shot was fired. It may get you into a jam. Keep that hardware oiled up and remember—it was murder."

I knew what he meant an hour later when two of Toby Talbot's boys persuaded me to see him at his apartment. Their persuasive methods consisted of two guns and two pairs of eyes that told me they'd like nothing better than to shoot a fledgling cop before he hatched into a detective who might make trouble for their kind.

Toby should have apologized. He didn't—he sneered at me and let

those two goons stay in the room with their guns drawn. Toby stepped in front of me and slapped me across the mouth. Not hard, just enough to exhibit his contempt.

"Yahhh! Lying, wise guy cop. How much do you want to tell the truth?"

"Figure out how much you got and multiply it by fifty," I suggested. "Offer it to me and I'll put the bracelets on for trying to bribe an officer. Look, Toby, you're not scaring me any. Neither are your two boys. I don't know what you want and I'm not even interested enough to ask. But I'm going to get up and walk out of here. Right now."

"Try it and you'll get yourself cooled," he shouted.

I arose. "Okay—cool me, but I won't be stone cold before you're on your way to the chair. So long, Toby. I'll see you in court."

He grabbed at my arm. "Listen, copper, they're trying to pin this kill on me. On Toby Talbot, and I had nothing to do with it. Happens the dead guy owed me a lot of dough and there's a motive, but me nor my boys didn't do it. The dame did and all this is a beautiful stall to make me act. To tip my hand. You say the dame couldn't have done it. Then you pull a switch and say maybe she did. It's all a smart business to rig me with a rap I can't bust. I know how Captain Porter works. He plays both ends against the middle. He's trying to throw a scare into me and at the same time make me think he's on the dame's trail and not mine. But sooner or later he'll put the arm on me. The dame knocked her husband off and you can't go back on your statement like I know you intend to do."

It was all getting me dizzy. First Vivian said I was lying to put her on the spot. Now this gambler claimed I couldn't honestly alibi Vivian because Captain Porter didn't want me to. I sat down again, told Toby to shut up and I started thinking hard. Very hard.

Finally I looked up. "Toby—last night before the shot was fired—did anybody come in the back door?"

"How could they?" He threw up his hands. "There was a flatfoot

every two feet all around my building. That's what is going to crucify me."

I got up and walked to the door. Nobody tried to stop me. They knew how futile it was. If I died, every cop in New York would know Toby had done the job. Still, I felt a little nervous having two guns at my back. I walked out of the room, down the stairs and across the short lobby to the door. When I hit the street, I felt a little better.

Somebody yelled, "Hit the dirt!"

I did—right on my kisser and not caring one whit whether or not it got skinned against the sidewalk. The bullet hit about two feet beyond me. If I'd been standing, I'd be dead right now. Across the street Captain Porter erupted from a car. There was a gun in his fist. He was halfway across when he was hit. He went down, hard, and stayed there, but he wasn't dead. He was playing dead though. I could see his eyes.

I PICKED the .38 from my shoulder clip, turned and ran toward Toby's place. I darted through the door, skidded to a halt and went out to slip around the corner where there was an alley and a service entrance. Ken Miller saw me the instant he stepped out. His gun flamed and the sudden pain somewhere on the left side of my anatomy told me I was hit. But I stayed on my feet. I kept my gun on him. He was coming toward me, lips drawn back in a snarl of rage. I guess he thought his bullet must have paralyzed me or I was scared into immobility. He stopped and levelled the gun a little better. That was when I shot off his kneecap and as he went down, I dived at him. I got the gun away and bracelets into position.

Later, after they'd extracted the bullets from our hides, Captain Porter beamed at me. "Nice going, kid. I even bet you know what it's all about."

"It took me long enough to tumble," I said. "Vivian and Miller wanted to get rid of her husband and he wouldn't take the hint. Miller left the raiding squad before you got the

boys planted. He knew the ropes, slipped into Toby's place through the back door. I expect he bribed the guy on guard there. Miller shot Vivian's husband while she was hanging onto me for dear life—because she knew I was a cop and I'd give her a perfect alibi. When I switched my story, at your behest, she figured I was wise and wanted some dough. So she came to me with an offer. Ken came too, to throw off any suspicions I might have had of him. Of course he planned on his own alibi too—being outside with the raiding squad.

"Then Ken watched me. When I was picked up by Toby's boys, he trailed us, slipped into the apartment building and when I left, took a shot at me. If I died, it would be blamed

on Toby. But you were tailing me too."

Porter sighed. "I'm getting old. I should have known he'd cut me down, but I was afraid he'd make another pass at you. Like I said, you have to know the angles on this squad. Keep right up to date on what wife is two-timing what husband and what playboy is giving her a rush. It's all tinsel, until the kill and then it gets real. Terribly real."

"I'm going to like it though."

"Sure, I did too, when I was young. Joe—know how to play gin rummy? You do. Good! I'll start right now taking your pay away from you. We'll be here for a few days. Holler for the nurse and get some cards."



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The man was desperate to get some films developed, but he only wanted negatives. It was a rush job, but murder moved more quickly still . . .

KAREN LOOKED up from her book hopefully when the man came in, but all he wanted was to have some photographs developed.

She took the roll of 35 millimeter film and said, "We make enlargements too, sir. If you can tell me now which pictures you want enlarged I'll be able to—" She stopped. The man was shaking his head, almost fearfully.

"No!" he squawked. "No enlargements! Don't even make prints."

Karen blinked. "No prints?"

"Just develop the negatives, that's all. And I'm in a big rush for them. I—I need them first thing tomorrow morning. Without fail."

Karen sighed, and wrote out his receipt. He clutched it and hurried out. At the door of Karen's novelty shop he looked furtively up and down the torn-up street, then stepped gingerly out into the expanse of mud.

Karen followed him to the door, watched him pick his way around the excavations the road-repair squad had left. He looked out of place in this summer-resort village, she thought; not much like a vacationer at all. He was a big-city type, rather dark and heavy-set. And he had an atmosphere of nervous strain that most people left behind them when they came into these mountains.

She stared abstractedly at the torn-up road and sighed again. The novelty shop had seemed like such a sure-fire idea when Madge and she invested their savings in it. Madge had worked in a shop just like it and Karen herself, with her photographer's-assistant background, was a natural to handle the camera sales and picture-developing that went with it. But they hadn't counted on the village

making long-delayed street repairs that turned their front door into an impassable swamp!

There was a noise at the back and Madge came in through the storeroom with Chad Connel. Karen turned to greet them with a lifting of the heart. Madge never seemed downhearted, even on that first horrible day when the excavations began. And Chad—Karen had a special fondness for that tall ex-pilot.

"You're relieved, Karen," Madge said cheerfully, setting down her suitcase. "Chad came along to take you to dinner. Did anything exciting happen—like a rush of customers, maybe?"

Karen shook her head dolefully. "I finished the novel I was reading," she reported. "So we can rent it out again—if any lending-library customers come. I dusted the shop, swept the floor—and, oh yes. I took one forty-eight cent order to develop a roll of film."

Madge gave her a wry grin. "The usual rush of business. Well, have a nice dinner. I'm catching the eight-thirty bus to the city, so I won't see you until late tomorrow. Anything you want me to get you, besides the regular run of supplies?"

"No, thanks."

Madge patted her shoulder. "Then go eat your dinner."

Chad, on the other side of her, took her arm and skillfully piloted her through the storeroom to the back door, out onto the paved street beyond. He said: "In case you've forgotten since last night, Karen, the offer is still open. Say the word and you can give up this flea-bitten shop and be Mrs. Sheriff Connel."

Karen smiled wistfully. "You're a

"Hands up!" Karen ordered
in a trembling voice.



lamb," she told him. "If I ever marry a sheriff it will be you. But right now it wouldn't be fair to Madge."

"Why not? I'll make it fair. Tell you what—as sheriff, I'll padlock every other shop in town if you marry me. Then the trade will have to come here, mud or no."

Karen shook her head, but she was still smiling. "Ask me again when the summer is over," she invited. "Meanwhile, what about that dinner?"

THEY ATE the usual Hawthorne House dinner—scrawny roast

chicken, liquid mashed potatoes and brilliantly green peas. The summer hotel's hot little dining room was crowded with men in T-shirts and women in bright summer clothes. But Karen, seated facing the window, was gazing enviously at the village's main street. There was plenty of traffic there, all right... if only Madge and she had been able to get a store on that street, instead of the hard-luck site they had finally had to take.

She brooded until Chad, looking up from his coffee, said: "Hey!

Karen, you look positively rapt. What are you concentrating on so hard?"

Karen started, then smiled self-consciously. "I was being envious," she admitted. "Green-eyed envious."

"Envious of what?"

She waved at the street. "Of those stores. Look at them! The Acme Grocery. Harper's Printing Shop. Lee Won Tu's Laundry. They've got such lovely locations, right here where everyone passes by—while we're marooned in that muck ocean in front of our door."

Chad laughed at her with his dark eyes. "Don't envy them, Karen," he said. "They're full of their own troubles. Lee's Laundry is a strictly winter-time proposition—in the summer, all the tourists get their washing done in the hotel. And that print shop—I don't know how Harper keeps himself alive. I never see a customer go in there."

Karen shrugged. "But they've got the location. And don't they know it! We tried for a month to get one of those shops, but we—oh, hello," she broke off. Coming toward them was Jim Hawthorne, owner of the hotel. He barely nodded to Karen. To Chad, he said in a worried voice:

"Look at these, Sheriff. What do you make of them?"

He held out three crisp new ten-dollar bills.

Chad glanced at them casually, then his jaw set. There was a new hardness in his voice as he said, "I see what you mean, Jim. It doesn't look good. I guess you'd better come down to the office with me while I check over my Treasury reports."

Karen asked, "What in the world is the matter?" Silently Jim Hawthorne passed over the bills. She glanced at them curiously, held them up to the light.

"I don't see anything wrong with them," she objected.

Chad said, "Look at the serial numbers."

"Serial numbers? Oh." Karen's eyes went round. "They're all the same!"

He nodded soberly. "Counterfeits. We haven't had much of that lately. Did these all turn up today?"

"Yep," said Jim Hawthorne. "Heav-

en knows how many others there are in town. Maud, at the cage, noticed two of them in the cash register about half an hour ago. She got worried and looked until she found the other."

Chad finished his coffee and got up. "Sorry, Karen," he said, "but I guess I won't be able to take you home. Business before pleasure. I'll phone you."

He blew her a kiss, picked up the check and paid it while he was questioning the cashier. Karen watched him until he went out, then sighed, ate the rest of her dessert and picked up her gloves and bag.

IT WAS dark night when she left the restaurant, with the abrupt darkness of a summer sunset. Karen started home slowly, disappointed at being deprived of Chad's company. With him busy and Madge off to the city on a merchandise-buying trip, her plans for the evening were disrupted.

Halfway to the cottage on the village outskirts where she and Madge lived, she stopped abruptly. "Oh, damn," she said to herself, remembering the film she had promised to develop by the next morning. Annoyed, she turned back toward the store.

Coming down the empty street behind the store Karen thought she heard a man's voice cry out. She listened, but it was not repeated. Frowning, she unlocked the back door.

There were no lights in the store; Madge had closed up and caught her bus. The street was dark, and Karen was conscious of a little tingle of apprehension as she let herself in and switched on the lights in the little storeroom.

She stopped stark-still, her hand on the switch.

There was something going on. A curious, faint rasping sound came from the front of the store, as though something were being dragged across the floor. It stopped suddenly. There was silence, then a subdued click, then again silence.

Karen called shakily. "Who—who's there?"

No answer. Karen bit her lip, then bravely marched to the connecting

door and flung it open. She pulled on the overhead light—and braced herself for what she might see.

The shop appeared to be empty. The front door was open; no one was in sight.

Her mouth a round "O" of surprise, Karen forgot to be cautious and hurried to the street door, peered out. Splintered wood on the door jamb showed how the intruder had forced his way in. She stared into the street.

Someone was out there, hurrying away. In the darkness she could see only the suggestion of movement. Then a car sped down the highway which intersected the street outside, and in the momentary brightness of its headlights she saw a man's figure. It was only for a fraction of a second as he leaped clumsily across a puddle of mud. Then he dodged around a corner and was out of sight.

Karen allowed herself a delayed-action gasp of surprise. "My goodness!" she whispered to herself. "Burglars!"

She didn't know whether to be frightened that they had been robbed, or relieved that the robber had run instead of making a stand. She compromised by marching determinedly toward the phone to call Chad.

As she picked up the phone she saw that something had been spilled under the counter. It was spreading out, sticky-looking and dark. She leaned over to see what it was.

It was then that she saw the body of the man, curled up in a lifeless heap behind the counter.

WITHOUT Chad it would have been a terrifying ordeal, Karen knew, but he was so swiftly competent about everything that a good deal of the affair's brutality was softened for her.

Still, there was an agonizing moment when he tilted the dead man's lax face to get a look at it. Karen stared, "Why—I know him!" she said. "He was in this afternoon. With films!"

"Oh?" Chad glanced up at her, then examined the body swiftly and threw a counter-drape over it. "Excuse me,"

he said. He phoned a doctor somebody, then hung up and came back to Karen, who had retreated to sit white-faced by the door.

"Poor kid," he said, arm comfortingly around her shoulder. "We can get out of here now. That was the coroner. He'll take over."

"Oh, Chad," she said dizzily. "I—I feel sick."

He patted her arm. "What was that about films?"

"He was the customer I told you about. Came in with a roll of 35-millimeter just before we went to dinner. He was in a tremendous hurry for it, too." She told Chad about how nervous the man had seemed, how he had refused violently to let her make enlargements.

"Hmm," said Chad. "Are the films here?"

"Why, yes," said Karen. She reached under the counter, then drew back frowning. "They're gone!" she said.

Chad nodded. "Might have known they would be," he said. "Well, come on, Karen. I want to get a statement from you at my office before you go home."

In the cool night air, driving along in his open-topped car, she began to feel a little better. The dead man seemed like a highly improbable dream as she looked at the normal stars overhead. But—

"Chad," she said. "That man was murdered, wasn't he?"

"Stabbed," he said soberly.

"But why?"

He shrugged. Indirectly, he asked, "You say you'd never seen him before this afternoon?"

"Not that I can remember, Chad."

"How about the other man? The one you saw running away?"

Karen hesitated. "I—I didn't really see him at all. Not enough to know what he looked like. He was just a sort of a shadow jumping across the mud."

He nodded. "Well, don't worry about it. It'll be all right," he promised.

At the sheriff's office Chad pointed to a typewriter. "Karen, sit down there and write out a statement of

what you saw," he ordered. "Keep it brief—just a couple of lines. Then you can go home."

The girl nodded obediently, sat and began to write. It was a very simple account, and she was almost through with it when the door opened.

Harper, the printer, stood in the doorway, a surly-looking man in an oddly clashing costume of business suit, sedate dark type and brilliant, gaudy yellow basketwork sports sandals. Behind him the short Chinese laundryman, Lee Won Tu, was peering apprehensively into the room.

"There you are, at last," Harper said sourly. "Come on, Sheriff, let's get started with this meeting about the counterfeit bills. I've got a printing job to get back to."

Chad hesitated. He looked at Karen, who was staring at the man in the door with a transfigured expression. "Karen!" he said sharply. She jumped, then looked at him. He said, "Will you need any help on your statement, Karen?"

"Why, I don't think so, Chad. I—I mean—well, I guess I'll be all right."

He grinned at her. "Then I'll go in with these gentlemen," he said. "We're getting all the village's merchants together to talk about this counterfeit money. The other merchants are here already."

"All right, Chad. Don't keep them waiting."

When they had gone in and closed the door she remained staring at it in abstraction for long moments. Then she nodded her head decisively, typed a few more lines on the paper, jerked it out and signed her name to it.

She handed it to the middle-aged woman who acted as sheriff's clerk for Chad. Then, before the woman could recover from surprise and stop her, Karen went to the inner door and opened it.

The tiny room inside was thick with smoke, filled with a dozen overheated men listening to Chad's plans for catching the counterfeit money passers.

Chad saw her and broke off what he was saying. "What do you want, Karen?" he asked doubtfully.

Paralysis suddenly gripped her

tongue. She fought it; avoiding the eyes of the men in the room, she went ahead with what she had planned to say.

Rapidly she said, "I—I just wanted to tell you one thing, Chad. I was holding out on you."

"Holding out on me?"

She nodded. "The murderer—he didn't get what he was after. He took the wrong roll of film. I have the other one—here." She patted her bag. "I'm going to take it home and develop it tonight...and see what it is that he wanted so badly to hide." To Karen, the words sounded all jumbled up and unconvincing as they came out, but there was nothing she could do about it. She slammed the door and hurried out of the building.

She was halfway down the block before she heard Chad's puzzled voice calling after her, and she pretended not to hear even then.

At the corner, she risked a quick peek behind her. As she had expected, Chad was hesitating uncertainly in the doorway. While she watched, he shrugged and went back inside to his conference.

"YOU'VE DONE it now, Karen,"

she told herself, and could not repress a slight shiver of worry.

She let herself into the dark bungalow, wishing vainly that Madge had not gone to the city. Fingers of chill apprehension played along her spine as she reminded herself that a man had committed murder to get the roll of film she'd told Chad she had. Had she done the right thing...or had she just set herself up as a likely candidate for Corpse No. Two?

She squared her shoulders and closed the door behind her.

She snapped the lights on, and at once the bungalow seemed less like a trap and more like a place to live. She trotted around, putting away her things, then carefully closed, without locking, the door, and went down cellar to her tiny darkroom...

Twenty-five minutes later she heard the noise she had expected—and feared.

A board creaked in the living-room floor over her head.

Karen repressed a gasp of panic. She opened the door to the darkroom, left the dim red safelight burning, and walked silently to a spot behind the cellar stairs. A knuckle of half-inch pipe was heavy in her hand, the nearest thing to a weapon that she possessed.

The next moments were terribly long to Karen.

Then a man's foot, pale and washed-out looking in the faint red glow from the darkroom, appeared noiselessly on the stairs. Karen waited, heart in her throat, until the man had cautiously come down the whole depth of the flight, carefully stepping on the extreme sides of each step to keep them from creaking. He paused at the bottom, listening. Then he started purposefully toward the dull red glow of the open darkroom door.

Karen walked quickly up behind him, thrust her imitation weapon in his back.

"Hands up!" she ordered in a trembling voice.

The man's reflexes were like chain lightning. He spun like an atom-powered whirligig, struck the length of pipe out of her hand with the real automatic in his own.

Karen gasped and stumbled back, really frightened for the first time. She stared at him in silent terror. The man was Harper, the printer.

He glared at her, then glanced at the length of pipe that had been her "gun". He laughed sharply. "Comedian," he snarled. "Come on now, where's that film?"

Karen trembled. "—I won't tell you," she said desperately.

He poked the gun at her. "You will," he said. "Where is it?"

"I'll make a bargain with you," Karen whispered. "Give yourself up—I won't say anything about this. It won't do you any good to kill me. Chad—the sheriff will find the film, and it'll convict you of two murders."

He shook his head, eyes narrow slits of menace. "I'll make a bargain with you," he said. "Give me the film, and I'll shoot you. Otherwise—I'll just knock you out, and set fire to the cottage; when it burns down, you and

the film will both be where you'll never bother me again!"

Karen cowered back. "You—you're going to kill me," she said unbelievably.

"You should have kept your nose out of it," Harper said stolidly. "Him—I had to kill him, because he was going to blackmail me with those pictures. The fool! It was a sweet set-up, me printing the counterfeit money, him taking it to the city and passing it, until he got careless and began passing it here. And when I told him we were through, he decided on blackmail!" Harper grinned savagely. "I knew he took the photographs. And I followed him when he brought them to you. And now—give them to me!"

"No." Karen tried to make the word brave, but it was more like a moan.

The man grunted. "Your last chance. Where are they?"

Karen bit her lip, but said nothing.

Harper said grimly, "I'm counting to five. Either you tell me where the pictures are, or when I reach five—Understand!"

Karen leaned helplessly back against the wall.

Harper grimaced, and the gun in his hand centered on Karen's heart. "One," he said. "Two. Three. Four. Five—"

The gun-shot and the sound of breaking glass came at the same moment.

Harper had no time to look around. There was the shot from outside the cellar window, and an expression of incredulous astonishment on his face as he dropped to the ground...

And he was dead.

CHAD KNOCKED the rest of the glass out of the cellar window with the butt of his gun, then swung his body in, too much in a hurry to come through the kitchen and the stairs.

"Karen!" he gasped. "Karen, are you all right?"

Karen looked at him blearily. "All right?" she repeated dizzily. "Why, of course I'm all ri—"

Suddenly the dark cellar swam

around her, and her last memory was of Chad catching her in his arms as she fainted.

She came to with her head in his lap, and they were upstairs in the light again.

"Oh, Chad," she said, as soon as she could speak. "I—I thought you weren't going to make it."

He didn't smile. "So did I," he said briefly. "That note of yours on your statement—if my secretary hadn't noticed it and shown it to me, I never would have known enough to come out here. Karen, if you ever dare—" He stopped what he was going to say with great effort. "Never mind. Come on. Let's have the story."

"It's very simple," she said. "Harper was the murderer. He was counterfeiting money in his print shop. The—the other man, whoever he was, was passing money for him. Until they broke up, because the other man got careless and passed some in the village here, and then he tried blackmail with those photographs. And Harper killed him."

Chad groaned. "Obviously, Karen," he said. "The way Harper buzzed out of the meeting as soon as he could—the way he looked when he heard you say you still had the film—I should have known it myself. What I want to know is, how did you figure it out?"

Karen, feeling stronger, said proudly, "His shoes, Chad."

"Shoes? Karen!"

She nodded. "It made sense, really, Chad. Harper was such a conservative kind of a man, dear. He dressed as though he was trying to avoid attention—and maybe he really was, at that. And then, tonight, he showed up at your meeting with those horrible yellow shoes. Doesn't that suggest anything to you?"

Chad stood over her. "My heaven, Karen," he said wildly. "Is *that* how you do it? Detect criminals by the color of their shoes?"

Karen said stoutly, "Don't make fun of me, Chad. Why would he wear shoes like that? The only reason I could think of was that it was an emergency of some kind. But what sort of an emergency? Well—the one

that came to mind was, suppose he had got his other shoes all muddy, and didn't have time to clean them. And—well, Chad, the murderer's shoes must have been full of mud, because I saw him hopping around in the puddles in front of the shop!"

Chad shook his head. "The way your mind works," he said admiringly, and left the thought incomplete. "Next thing you know, you'll be detecting crimes with tea leaves."

Karen nodded calmly. "You see?" she said. "I knew that you'd take just that attitude if I said anything to you. So I didn't speak. I—I told you that fib about the film—it was a fib, Chad; there wasn't any other roll—and made sure that Harper heard it, and... Well, nature took its course."

Chad looked at her solemnly. Then he got up and walked around the room.

When he came back his face was relaxed again. "It all makes sense, Karen," he admitted. Then, fervently, "Look, Karen, now you've got to marry me! I'm the sheriff of this place—and if you're going to be taking care of my job, you'd better take care of me too!"

Karen grinned at him, then stretched out her hand to be helped up. She rocked back and forth experimentally, then reached up and kissed him gently.

"Ask me again after the season... darling," she invited. "Right now, Madge and I are going to be too busy at the shop for me to take time off for a honeymoon."

"Busy at the shop?" repeated Chad. "In that mudhole?"

Karen blushed and shook her head. "N-no, Chad," she said. "You see, that's one reason why I was so interested in this thing. Oh, I'm awfully sorry that Harper was a murderer, and all, but really... it's all sort of for the best, don't you think?"

Chad blinked. "You're too much for me," he said truthfully. "What are you talking about now?"

Karen said carefully, "His store, dear. He—he's dead now, and that beautiful location is going to be vacant. And, as soon as they move his stuff out—Madge and I move in!"

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by **R. S. Bowen**

(author of "Murder, Collect!")

Medford wanted to break with his partners, Pearson and Brass Kirkwood — he didn't like their methods. But wanting to quit a crooked set-up isn't enough, and sometimes murder isn't enough, either!

HALLODON, Chief of Homicide, accepted the cigar with a grunt and inspected it critically. Craven, of the *Record*, chuckled and lighted a cigarette for himself.

"Found it in the gutter over on Parsons," he said. "It's as good a bribe as any. What's new, friend?"

The detective completed his examination, decided to take a chance, and lighted up. "Why ask me?" he growled through a cloud of pale blue smoke. "Your sheet always claims to be ahead of the cops."

"Only after the crime has been committed," the reporter said pleasantly. "Not before. What's on the blotter, Hallodon? I'm story starved."

Hallodon snorted, and tapped a copy of the *Record* on his desk. "You should go on starving for keeps!" he snapped. Then leaning forward a little, he went on, "This signed piece of yours. *Bad Blood Result of Night Club Brawl?* Nuts! Just because a couple of guys have a few too many, you have to make it sound sticky. You give me a pain!"

"Pearson gave Medford that, and more, last night," Craven said. "I saw it. Might have been a case for you, if the waiters hadn't broken it up. And, know something, my friend?"

"You never credited me otherwise," Hallodon muttered, "so why should I say yes?"

"The little woman scorched the oatmeal again, eh?" the reporter said with a grin. "Well, last night was only the beginning."

Hallodon opened his mouth to ask the obvious question, but instead he snapped it shut, and scowled. "Now, look, Craven," he said evenly, "we have enough troubles without you feeding up more through your sheet. It was just a night club brawl, so why not skip it?"

"You miss the point," Craven said. "I don't mean Pearson and Medford; I'm talking about Brass Kirkwood."

Hallodon blinked at that, and allowed a combination of expressions to slither across his wide face. "Brass Kirkwood? What in the world are you raving about now? That combination split up two, three years ago."

"Leave us let history pass in review for a moment," the reporter said with a casual wave on his cigarette. "Once upon a time Brass Kirkwood, Chet Pearson, and Frank Medford, were just like that. Love pals in business, which happened to be every construction contract in town. Right?"

"And the biggest crooks in town, too!" Hallodon snapped. Then quickly, "But don't print I said it!"

"I won't because you're partly wrong," Craven replied. "I grant that Kirkwood and Pearson had sticky fingers in the early days, but Medford was always a good guy. It's not in that story, there, because I didn't have proof, but I'll bet next year's pay that brawl was because Pearson wanted to pull something fast, and Medford said no."

"I can just see that flashy Medford saying no to an extra dollar,



"Medford and Pearson had a terrific fight at the Kit-Kat club — then Pearson is found dead!"

earned or unearned!" Hallodon sneered. "But where's the connection with Brass Kirkwood?"

"I'm coming to that," Craven told him. "Well, the three ran a sweet business, then something went sour. My guess is that Brass wanted to steal the city hall. Anyway, he was bought out of the business, and Pearson and Medford continued it together."

"My, my, I had forgotten all about that!" Hallodon rasped. "Now tell me that Kirkwood went from bad to

worse, and now that the other two have started slugging each other in night clubs, he figures to make something out of it!"

"Wonderful!" Craven cried in mock acclaim. "So early in the morning, too. You're absolutely right. Kirkwood did go right down on his uppers, and he never stopped hating Pearson and Medford for freezing him out. Yup! This is his chance to shove in between them some how, and set himself up again."

"Nuts!" Hallodon said with an em-

phatic shake of his head. "Too many drinks, that's all. Huh! A million times I've seen the best of pals get swacked and take a poke at each other."

"Last night's pokes were from the heels," Craven said, shaking his head. "No, my friend, I'm willing to lay a little bet that the firm of Pearson and Medford, contractors, is going to be busted up. And another little bet that Brass Kirkwood lines up with one or the other. Gee, I wonder?"

"Wonder what, you crystal ball?" Hallodan growled.

"About Brass Kirkwood," the other replied, and stared thoughtfully at the opposite wall. "I wonder if he was really back of that fight last night?"

To that the Chief of Homicide snorted, and began pushing papers around on his desk. "Go away, I'm busy!" he grunted. "Stop trying to make news for a change. Stick to facts, and be sure they are facts!"

"Yes, teacher," Craven grinned and stood up. "Thank you so much. And I hope your fallen arches go right through the floor."

"On your way, scribbler!" Hallodan said and deliberately tossed his half-smoked cigar into the cuspidor. "Five-centers he brings me, and stink weeds at that! Beat it!"

CRAVEN chuckled, and started toward the door. However, it practically blew open in his face and a red-faced desk sergeant came bursting through. "A killing over at the Bridgewater, Chief!" he panted out. "The manager just phoned in. A cleaning woman found him. Dead as a doornail, the manager said."

"Who?" Hallodan barked. "Who got it?"

"Geez, I didn't tell you, did I?" the sergeant said with a dumbfounded look. "It was Chet Pearson, the guy in that night club go last night."

As the sergeant spoke the last he pointed at the copy of the *Record* on Hallodan's desk by way of explanation. For a second complete silence hung in the room, then Hallodan blasted it.

"Pearson?" he boomed out, half-rising from his chair.

"Yeah, Chief! Chet Pearson. Guess he must have messed up that Medford fellow enough to get him really sore, huh?"

Hallodan didn't comment; he was too busy getting all the way out of his chair and grabbing for his hat. He stopped short when Craven started to fall into step on the way to the door.

"No!" he snapped.

"Yes!" Craven said sweetly. "Or I write a Sunday feature of this morning's interview with the Chief of Homicide, on the matter of crime in our fair city. How to keep one's eyes closed, would be a good head, don't you think?"

Hallodan went sunset red from collar line to hair line. Then rumbling something deep in his throat he charged out through the office door. Craven threw a wink at the desk sergeant and charged out after him.

2

WHEN HALLODON parked his police car in front of the *Bridgewater Hotel* a portly built, bald-headed man of uncertain years came hurrying out of the entrance and across the sidewalk. Nervous worry stood out on his face in lumps, but when he saw that Hallodan and Craven were the only two to step out of the car the man seemed to gulp aloud with relief.

"I'm Mr. Hoff, the manager," he introduced himself to Hallodan. "I was afraid there would be a number of you, and... Well, the *Bridgewater* is a very quiet and respectable hotel, you understand."

"We understand," Hallodan said crisply. "Just take us up to his room."

"Certainly, certainly," the manager said. And then as he seemed to see Craven for the first time he gulped again, but not with relief. "You're—you're a newspaper reporter, aren't you?" he demanded excitedly.

Craven grinned, but he didn't have

a chance to say anything.

"Never mind that!" Hallodon snapped. "Take us up to Pearson's room!"

The manager looked like he wanted to object violently, but he didn't. He turned away hurriedly and led the way into the lobby and over to the elevators. They got off at the fourth floor and went right down the hallway three doors. Manager Hoff used a pass key to open the door, then he stepped to one side with a look on his face as though he expected the opening of the door to set off a bomb inside. Hallodon stepped through into the living room of a two-room suite. The bedroom was off to the right, but what they had come to see was right in front of them, not eight feet away.

Chet Pearson was seated in a big comfortable chair, his head thrown back a little, and his two arms resting on the arms of the chair. Save for one thing he might be a man comfortably relaxed and asleep in the chair. The one thing that belied that, though, was his right eye. It was a stomach-turning mass of glistening crimson. A thread of the blood ran down his cheek to the point of his chin where it dropped off to his stained white shirt front.

"Mr. Pearson usually left very early," the voice of Hoff broke the silence. "The cleaning maid didn't expect to find him here when she used her pass key to get in to fix up the rooms. Dear me, I sincerely hope that..."

The man let his voice trail off when Hallodon simply walked away from him, and over to the dead man. Craven went over, too, and took a good long look.

"Somebody he knew, that's a cinch," he murmured. "Taking it easy, and bingo...from somebody right in front of him."

Hallodon turned his head enough to give him a scornful glare. "You should be a cop!" he grunted. "Just wonderful how you figure things out!"

"Thanks," Craven said and grinned. "I also figure out it wasn't the guy I first thought it might be."

At that Hallodon turned all the way around. "Medford?"

"Right," Craven nodded. "After last night Pearson wouldn't be taking it that easy with Medford within poke's reach."

"Medford, did you say?"

The voice was high with excitement, and came from the lips of Hoff. Both the others looked at him quickly. "Anybody by that name call on him this morning?" Hallodon demanded as he jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the corpse.

"Why, why no," the manager said, and swallowed rapidly. "That is, not exactly, I mean."

"What do you mean?" Hallodon cracked at him as the man began fumbling for words. "Come on, let's have it!"

HOFF SWALLOWED some more and that seemed to do the trick. He didn't stumble over his own words. "A Mr. Medford called at the desk downstairs about eight o'clock," the manager said. "The day desk man hadn't shown up yet, so I was filling in until he arrived..."

"What about Medford?" Hallodon stopped him.

"Why, he came and asked if Mr. Pearson was in his suite," the manager said. "Of course I didn't know he was a Mr. Medford until I asked his name. Naturally we never..."

"Naturally!" Hallodon snapped. "Did Medford come up here?"

"No he did not!" the other said testily; "that's what I'm trying to tell you. He asked if Mr. Pearson was in, and after I had learned his name I said, yes, and asked if he would like me to announce him over the phone. But he seemed to change his mind; he said, no. He said that he would see Mr. Pearson at his office. Then he went away."

"Out the front door?" Craven put the question.

The manager gave him a withering look. "Of course, out the front door!"

"Anybody else call to see Pearson?" Hallodon demanded. "Any phone calls, or anything?"

"No," was the quick reply. "No one

to see him, and no phone calls."

"What time did the cleaning woman find him?" Craven asked, after noting that his own watch said nine twenty-five.

"A few minutes after nine," the manager said. "I remember because I was setting the lobby desk clock when she came down and told me. But she can tell you that, herself."

"Later," Hallodon grunted, and went over to the telephone stand.

He took the receiver off the hook and called Police Headquarters. In past years Craven had seen him do that a dozen times or more, so he didn't bend an ear to listen to Hallodon's orders for the Medico, photographers, finger print men, and so forth. Instead he walked around the room taking in all details with shrewd, appraising eyes. And from that room he wandered into the bedroom. By the time he came out Hallodon was through at the phone, and the reporter was convinced that he had just taken a useless tour of inspection for himself.

In other words, he hadn't spotted a thing worth looking at twice. No telltale cigarette stubs; no signs of body conflict, or anything like that. No nothing. To all events Pearson had let his murderer in the door, draped himself in the easy chair, and allowed the killer to shoot him through the right eye. Just as simple and as uncomplicated as that. Because it seemed so simple and so uncomplicated, Craven immediately slipped his brain into high gear.

ALL OF THE answers, however, added up to not one single revealing thing. That is, nothing except that the description the manager gave of the Medford who had called to see Pearson, and seemingly had not seen him, checked with the Frank Medford who had received a beating from the dead man in a night club less than twelve hours before.

And then the parade of Headquarters men came into the room. The hotel manager looked like he was going to burst into tears, but nobody noticed him. Hallodon snapped

orders thick and fast, and the Headquarters men went to work on their respective jobs pronto. Hallodon waited long enough for the police medico to state that the death bullet had been of fairly large caliber, that death had been instant, and that he'd have the slug out of the brain by lunch time.

The Chief of Homicide growled for him to make it sooner than that, and went out into the hall. Craven went out after him quickly, but Hallodon shook his head, and nodded back into the room. "Stick around and get your story," he said. "This time I've got private business."

"Let me guess," Craven said with a grin. "You're just dumb enough to think it's Medford, huh?"

"Not dumb, smart," the detective countered, and actually allowed a smile to play across his lips. "For once it's murder in the bag. Medford made that phoney call for a sweet alibi. *But*, he went out front then in the back way. A thousand killers have done that trick—and burned in the chair. Pearson thought he came to apologize for last night. After all, they are...were business partners. So he relaxed in that chair. But Medford didn't apologize; he shot him."

"Just like that?" Craven murmured.

"Just like that!" Hallodon snapped. Then after a keen look at the expression on the reporter's face, he said, "Just give me something better, if you can?"

"I can, but I won't," Craven said slowly. "At least, not right now. First, let's go make this call on Medford that you have in mind. Maybe what he has to say will add up on a couple of other things."

Hallodon started to give his head a savage shake but checked himself. "What couple of other things?"

Craven put a finger to the side of his nose, winked, and shook his head.

"After we talk to Medford, maybe," he said. "And look, Medford and I know each other pretty well. He'll talk more to the two of us, than to you alone. Or would you like to lay a little bet on that?"

Hallodon clenched his teeth, twitched his lips, and then with a few choice comments about newspaper men in general, he gave a jerk of his head toward the elevators.

3

FRANK MEDFORD lived with a spinster sister in a small but very nice looking house on the edge of town. There was a two-car garage attached, but when Hallodon parked in front both he and Craven were able to see that only one car, a Ford coupe, was in the garage. The Buick that Medford usually drove was missing.

"Doing it the hard way, aren't you?" Craven murmured as Hallodon jumped out with a scowl on his face. "Why not his office first?"

"Because, smarty, I checked on that by phone!" the detective snapped. "From Pearsons' place. Wait for me."

"Oh, sure," Craven said, and got out quickly and joined him.

Hallodon didn't waste time insisting. He stamped up the red brick walk to the door, and jabbed the bell. After a moment a rather sweet looking middle-aged woman opened the door.

"Yes?" she inquired of Hallodon. And then seeing Craven, "Oh, hello, Mr. Craven!"

"Hello, Miss Medford," the reporter said with a warm smile. "Is Frank around? He isn't at his office."

The woman didn't answer at once. She leaned out the door slightly and looked up the broad street leading away from town.

"You haven't missed him by more than a couple of minutes," she said. "Frank said he was going over to Conway. Whether he'll be back tonight, or not, he didn't say. I believe, though, I saw him put his bag in the car."

"Conway, eh?" Hallodon spoke up for the first time. "Then—er, er, thanks a lot!"

"Why not at all," the woman said and looked startled. Then as her eyes widened, "Goodness! You're...

you're from the police, aren't you?"

Hallodon didn't answer that; he had already turned and was running down the walk toward his car.

"Just wanted to see Frank about nothing important, Miss Medford!" Craven called over his shoulder, as he went off in hot pursuit. "G'bye!"

The reporter just made it; if he had waited a split second longer Hallodon would have zoomed the police car away from his hands reaching for the door. As it was the violent start almost threw him off the running board. He made the seat beside Hallodon with most of the air knocked out of him.

"Hit and run, is a major offense, too!" he gagged out when he was able to.

"Did I ask you to come?" Hallodon snapped. "Shut up and hang on. That guy's just too smart for himself this time."

By way of emphasizing his intentions the Chief of Homicide rammed the gas pedal to the floor boards, and the police car would have taken off if the front fenders had been flat instead of curved. Craven hugged himself to the seat and didn't say a word until the car was clear of cross streets and on the arrow-straight highway that pointed at Conway some sixty-five miles distant. Then he relaxed, but not too much.

"Still getting this thing cockeyed, aren't you?" he said above the well-oiled whine of the engine under the hood. "Me, I don't think Medford's your man."

"No?" the other rasped without turning his head. "Well right now he'll do okay for me."

"Too bad he didn't tell his sister where he was going to stop!" Craven jeered. "That would have made the trail even easier for you to follow."

HALLODON opened one corner of his mouth, as though he was going to make a snarling retort, but he checked himself. Instead he knitted his shaggy brows together in what might possibly have been just a bit of a puzzled frown. Crave saw it, grinned faintly to himself, and

lapsed into silence. Hallodon remained silent, too, and for the next twenty-five minutes, or so, both simply watched sections of the ribbon of cement sweep up to the car and flash past under the wheel.

Then, suddenly, both caught a glimpse of a car about a mile ahead traveling in the same direction but at about two-thirds their speed. A couple of minutes later the unmistakable rear end of a Buick made itself known. On impulse Hallodon reached for the siren button, but jerked his hand away with a shake of his head. And about two minutes after that the police car was abreast of the Buick, and Hallodon was easing off its speed as he roared at the driver of the other car.

"Pull over, there! Pull over!"

Frank Medford was behind the Buick's wheel and the grin of greeting changed to an expression of puzzlement, and then to anger as Hallodon edged the police car closer and closer. Rather than fly off the side of the highway Medford slowly braked his car to a full stop. Hallodon shot the police car ahead a few feet, and then toed it in and stopped, blocking the way. He was out and running back to the Buick almost before Craven could get the door on his side open.

"All right, Medford!" Hallodon snapped. "Get out of there!"

Anger and wonderment were still battling in Medford's good looking face. He took his eyes off Hallodon to glance at Craven running up. Then he looked back at Hallodon.

"What gives, Chief?" he asked, a bit tight-lipped. "Is a drive against speedsters on? I wasn't even touching fifty, and the limit on this highway is..."

"Get out!" Hallodon grated. "You're under arrest!"

Medford started to laugh, then stopped. His eyes narrowed and a white spot appeared in each cheek. He didn't move.

"For what?" he asked evenly. Then as he looked at Craven again, "Oh! My God, you don't mean for last night?"

"I mean for this morning!" Hallo-

don said dangerously. "Get out, or do I pull you out? And just keep your hands in sight, too."

Medford was still either too angry, or too dumbfounded, to move.

"It's about Pearson, Frank," Craven said on the spur of the moment. "He was shot this morning. Dead!"

Hallodon jerked his head around and swore savagely, but the newspaper man didn't even hear. He was too busy watching Medford's face. For a half second the man's expression remained just as it was. Then slowly his jaw sagged, and his narrowed eyes opened wide.

"Pearson?" he said in a weak voice. "Shot?"

THIS TIME Medford obeyed instantly. Perhaps it was because of the fact that Hallodon had drawn his gun. But he didn't look at the detective. He kept his eyes, still wide and a very odd look in their depths, fixed on Craven's face. In a way he acted like a man struck paralyzed. At any rate he didn't seem to know that Hallodon expertly patted him all over from arm pits to ankles, and found no gun. He just stood there. Then suddenly his face began to twitch violently, and he swiveled blazing eyes around to Hallodon's cold ones.

"You...you think I shot Chet Pearson?" he shouted. Then stabbing the same blazing eyes at Craven for a brief instant, he went on. "Be... because this dirt chaser wrote up that little unpleasantness at the Kit-Kat last night? You're mad! You're nuts! Why...why should I shoot Pearson?"

"You can tell me that, later," Hallodon said dryly. Then with a jerk of his thumb toward the police car, he said, "Come on, you can tell me back at Headquarters."

Crimson filled Medford's face now, and the veins at his temples were purple under the skin.

"I can't tell you a thing!" he shouted. "Here, or at Headquarters! Besides, I've got an appointment in Conway to keep, and..."

"And you're not keeping it!" Hallodon cut him off. "Not right now,

anyway. Conway is over the State line. Get into my car, Medford. We're going back to Headquarters."

The other opened his mouth to roar louder than ever, but suddenly he seemed to think better of it.

"And leave my car way out here?" he finally got out with an effort.

"I'll send somebody out for it," Hallodon said, and just a bit doggedly.

"Oh, why bother?" Craven spoke up. "Let him lead the way back... just in case there *is* a mistake. Save everybody that much trouble."

Hallodon shot him a look that should have killed on the spot, but presently the detective gave a slight nod of his head.

"All right!" he growled. "Drive your car back, Medford. But don't try any speed track stuff, understand?"

"Not a reason in the world I should, Hallodon!" Medford said, stiff-lipped, and got back behind the wheel of his Buick.



THAT HE was sitting in Chief Hallodon's office surprised Craven more than a little, when he gave sudden thought to it. By all rights Hallodon should have kicked the door shut in his face after ushering Medford inside. All the way back the Chief cursed bitterly under his breath, and Craven well knew that ninety per cent of the words were directed at him for speaking out of turn twice. However, Hallodon had permitted him to come into the office, so the reporter let well enough be, and tuned his ears to the first question the Chief of Homicide directed at Frank Medford who sat in a chair opposite him, obviously fuming inwardly.

"What was that fight about last night, Medford?"

"A personal matter," the other replied. "Not important now, anyway. I want to know about Pearson. When was he shot? Where?"

"Did you see him this morning?" Hallodon countered.

"No."

"But you tried to, didn't you?" Hallodon shot it out.

Medford bit off some kind of an answer that was coming off his lips. He looked hard at Hallodon for several seconds.

"Are you accusing me of the murder of Chet Pearson?" he demanded.

"Maybe!" Hallodon said crisply.

"Then I've a right to call my lawyer!" Medford said hotly.

"You can call him, later!" Hallodon snapped. "Right now you're answering a few questions."

The Chief of Homicide suddenly stopped short himself, and reached out a hand to tapped the morning's copy of the Record that was still on his desk.

"There's all kinds of proof of motive," he said evenly. "You're in a spot. Okay, don't talk, if you don't want to. But add these up! A hundred persons saw Pearson beat the blazes out of you! This morning you went to Pearson's hotel, and asked for him, but you suddenly changed your mind when you were told he was in. Instead, you left...for where? The rear entrance, maybe! And when I finally caught up with you, you were heading for the next state, packed bag, and all."

Hallodon suddenly grabbed the phone and slid it across the desk so violently that it almost toppled off off the far side. Frank Medford stared at it for a long moment, but didn't touch it.

"I'll call my lawyer later," he said. Then, tight-lipped, "If I have to!"

"That's better," Hallodon said almost reluctantly. "All right, what about last night?"

"A personal affair, as I told you," Medford said. "However, if you insist on knowing, we disagreed on a contract offered us. I didn't want to take it, but Pearson did."

"So you slugged it out in a night club?" Hallodon said with a slight curl of his lips.

"We were both a little tight," Medford said after a moment's pause.

"Tell me if rumor is true, Frank?" Craven asked pleasantly. "Were you and Pearson on the way to break-

ing up your partnership?"

Medford turned his head and gave the reporter a look, and there was definitely no love in it. Then suddenly the look vanished, and he smiled. "Why should I lie?" he said. "Most of the town knows that rumor is true. Yes, we had just about come to a parting of the ways."

"Why?" Hallodon snapped.

MEDFORD shrugged faintly and gestured with one hand. "I got fed up with Pearson's way of doing business," he said. "It wasn't my way; I finally got tired of arguing with him."

"He slugged you first last night, according to this story," Hallodon said, tapping the record again. "What did you say to him?"

"Plenty!" Medford said, tight-lipped. "He didn't like it."

The Chief of Homicide suddenly leaned forward and fixed Medford with his eyes.

"And you didn't like the beating he gave you!" he snapped "Right?"

Medford didn't waver a hair under the steady gaze, but storm signals began to fly in his eyes. "Right!" he replied angrily. "But I didn't shoot him, if that's what you're trying to work up to!"

"Then why did you go to see him this morning?" Hallodon asked before the other's echo had died away.

"To tell him the partnership was broken as of today," Medford replied instantly. "And to tell him that I was moving my stuff from the offices."

"Couldn't wait until he came down to the offices, eh?" the Chief of Homicide scoffed.

"He never got in until around noon," Medford said; "he usually spent the morning with his City Hall pals. So I went to his apartment to tell him."

Hallodon let forth with a tight, brittle laugh. "And when you had made sure he was there, you suddenly changed your mind, eh?"

"Exactly," the other replied evenly. "I suddenly remembered an appointment I had in Conway with the First Selectman. I'd forgotten all

about it. I decided to keep it and have my final talk with Chet Pearson, perhaps tomorrow. And that's my story."

"See anybody after you left his hotel?" Hallodon demanded.

Medford looked at him for several seconds without speaking. Perhaps the man was trying to remember.

"For an alibi, Hallodon?" he suddenly said. "No, I don't recall seeing a soul I knew. Only my sister when I got home to pack my bag; maybe she remembers the time I got there, but I don't."

BY NOW some of the steely glint had faded from Hallodon's eyes, and was being replaced by just a shade of cautious thoughtfulness. He drummed his fingers on the desk top softly, and stared at them in a sort of absent minded fascination. Craven took the moment of silence to ask another question.

"Did Pearson have any special enemy, Frank? Or enemies?"

"Plenty of them," the other said dryly.

"But would you say one in particular?" Craven asked in a casual tone. And then, added, "Such as Brass Kirkwood?"

Chief Hallodon made sounds in his throat but neither of the other two paid any attention. Medford looked again at the reporter and both nodded and shrugged.

"Kirkwood would give his left arm to do any kind of harm to Pearson," he said. "But he feels the same way about me, too."

"You don't seem worried, after what's happened to Pearson," Hallodon said grimly.

"I'm not," Medford said quietly. "I think I can take care of myself."

"With what kind of gun?" Hallodon barked.

"None!" the other barked back at him. "I don't even own a gun! All right, Hallodon, charge me and let me call my lawyer, or else let me get out of here!"

The Chief of Homicide ran the tip of his tongue across his lips and

[Turn To Page 118]

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let the rest of his face settle in grim, dogged lines. He nodded at the phone.

"Better call your lawyer," he said. "Conway is still in the next state."

As Medford reached for the phone Craven jumped to his feet with an exclamation and a look at his wrist watch.

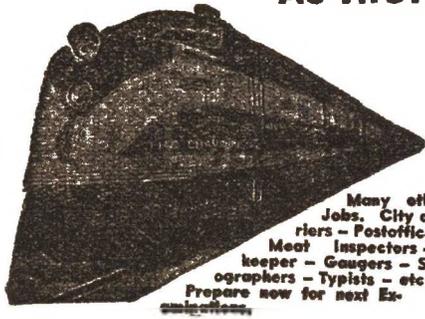
"Gee, just remembered, myself!" he gasped and headed for the door. "Got a date this A.M. with the City Editor. Be in to see you later, Halldon."

The Chief of Homicide shouted something after him, but Craven only half heard, and he didn't pause. He simply barged through the door, and sprinted for the stairs at the end of the hall outside.



WHEN CRAVEN reached the street out front he flagged down the first cab that cruised by. He did not, however, give the address of the Record, nor had he had any such intention when he decided to leave Halldon's office in a hurry. Instead, when he climbed into the cab, slamming the door shut, he gave the driver Brass Kirkwood's office address in the downtown business district. And as the cab rolled downtown at traffic speed the Record reporter lounged back on the

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seat cushions with closed eyes and reviewed several things that he knew, and mulled over various other things that he did not know. As a result, when the cab finally drew up at its destination a slight frown furrowed his brows, and a sense of nervous uncertainty made him jumpy inside.

The frosted glass on the outer office door stated that Kirkwood was a consultant, but it didn't say of what. The inner offices totaled two. A small one where a faded number, who had probably been second row chorus during Wilson's first administration, sat doing her nails. And a much larger office where Brass Kirkwood sat smoking a cigar and reading the morning paper. Craven saw him through the partly opened door, and before the faded number could shift her chewing gum and speak he gave her a wave of his hand and walked into the office.

Brass Kirkwood, so called from his early gutter days when he wore the metal on his knuckles, looked exactly what he was; a one-time big-shot ward healer who had gone to seed fast. He was not a particularly big man. The baggy way he wore his clothes simply gave the impression. But his face was big, coarse-skinned, and heavily veined about the nose and cheeks. His eyes were like those of an iced fish, and the lids never seemed to wink.

When Craven entered Kirkwood turned his head, looked at him and through him, and then smirked. "How much dough would your lousy sheet pay?" he suddenly demanded in a rusty tin pan voice.

"Huh?" Craven gulped and pulled up short. "Come again?"

Kirkwood laughed and showed bad teeth. "The story how I got Pearson, of course!" he said, and tried to look surprised.

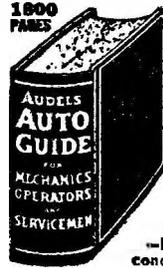
Craven didn't reply for a moment. He sat down in a chair, without taking his eyes off Kirkwood's face.

That depends on the story, Brass," he said slowly. "Let's hear it, and maybe I can give you a possible figure."

Kirkwood laughed harder than

[Turn Page]

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ever and the ashes spilled from his cigar down onto his vest already speckled with them.

"Had you believing it, huh?" he boomed. "You newspaper guys go for anything, don't you?"

"Yeah, if there's a story in it," Craven said quietly. Then, "How'd you know about Pearson?"

The other stopped laughing, and his fish eyes glittered for a moment. Then he smirked. "A little bird told me," he said. "Have the cops picked him up yet?"

"Who, Brass? The little bird?"

"T'aint funny, stupid!" Kirkwood growled. "The guy who plugged Pearson. Medford, of course!"

"Oh," Craven murmured, and let his eyes widen. "Medford killed him?"

The other snorted and smacked the copy of the Record he had been reading with the flat of his hand.

"Who else?" he demanded. "Didn't you write this story, or didn't you? Nuts! Medford hated that guy's guts almost as much as I did!"

Craven gave a casual wave of his hand and half grinned.

"Just as a routine question, Brass," he said. "Where were you between eight and nine this morning?"

THE OTHER started to sneer but thought better of it. Instead he leaned forward over the desk, and the eyes he fixed on Craven made the reporter think of orbs of milky ice.

"Don't be cute, Craven!" he said in a nasty voice. "If it's that kind of a call haul your dirty nose out of here. Fact is, haul it, anyway! You always were a stinker in my book."

Anger started to simmer up in Craven but he didn't let it get the best of him. Not because he was afraid of Kirkwood. On the contrary, because things were clicking over in his brain, and his main job was to turn them into a scoop for the Record, if possible.

"I said it was just routine, Brass, so skip it," he said. "But maybe you will answer this. A rumor that's been kicking around for some time. That Medford was going to cut with

KILLING ISN'T ENOUGH

Pearson, and go back into a partnership with you? Right, or wrong?"

For a moment Kirkwood looked thoroughly stunned, and then the walls shook with his laughter. "Boy, that's hot!" he cried. "Medford and me together? In a pig's eye, Mister! Me, I ain't begging for what Pearson got. I don't want any part of that Medford. No bullet is going to come to rest in my guts, bub. The one scare he give me was plenty. And I don't scare easy, either."

A tingle went down along Craven's spine. He got up and went over to the desk, and perched himself on one corner. "Scare, Brass?" he echoed wide eyed. "What do you mean?"

The other started to shake his head in refusal, but checked the movement. He looked at Craven darkly. "Off the record, Mister," he said evenly, "or maybe there'll be a newspaper job open for somebody!"

"Off the record, of course, Brass," Craven said, and beat back the urge to reach out and shove in the big face with his fist. "Do you mean Medford's threatened you?"

"Just that!" came the instant reply. "And right here in this office, too. A couple, three weeks ago it was."

"Why?" Craven pumped. "What about?"

"I've still got plenty connections," Kirkwood said, "even though those two stinkers took me for my last dime. There's a piece of business over in Conway that Medford wants bad. The guy over there is a good friend of mine. I can queer Medford's chances with just a phone call. He knew it, and he came here to see me. Warned me to keep my trap shut. And he had a nice little derringer pistol in his hand when he gave me the warning."

"Yeah?" Craven breathed after successfully checking a sudden start. "A derringer."

"Right," Kirkwood nodded. "Up until he flashed it I thought it was a bluff. I guess he pulled the same on Pearson, and Pearson wasn't smart like me. He did call the bluff."

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FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES

CRAVEN HALF nodded and didn't say anything. He was fingering a card, a business card, on Kirkwood's desk.

"Well, that could be, Brass," he said. "Thanks for telling me, and I'll keep it under my hat."

"Do that, bub," Kirkwood said as the reporter moved toward the door. Then in a louder voice, "I mean, unless something happens, see?"

Craven spun around on one foot and stared at him hard. "Unless what happens, Brass?"

Kirkwood curled his lips and looked disgusted. "What do you think, stupid?" he growled. "I mean unless I get what Pearson got, the stinker!"

"Oh, oh!" Craven said softly. Then turning back to the door, "Well, watch it, Brass."

"Don't worry about that, Mister!" "Could be somebody's wrong, Brass," he said. "The cops have Medford, now...but they're sure he didn't do it."



IT WAS AROUND four o'clock that same day when Craven again walked into Hallodon's office at Police Headquarters. The Chief of Homicide was sitting at his desk with an ugly look on his face. The reporter's entrance didn't brighten it up any. In fact, the ugly look became a stony glare. "What do you mean telling Kirkwood that we had Medford, but were sure he didn't do it?" he rasped out.

Craven ignored the outburst and dropped into a convenient chair. "You let Medford go, didn't you?" he asked quietly.

"I hadn't let him go when you saw Kirkwood!" Hallodon barked. "You know, Craven, for two cents I'd kick your...!"

The detective suddenly stopped, growled deep in his throat, and hunched forward in his chair a little.

"What did Kirkwood have to say to you?" he asked in a far less vicious tone of voice.

"You visited him, too, eh?" Craven murmured.

"Of course!" the other replied, "I'd be a dope not to play every angle."

"And what's the angle on Brass?" the reporter asked.

"None," Hallodon said. "I checked his alibi; it seems good enough."

"Medford's must have seemed good enough, or you wouldn't have let him go," Craven said. Then with a grin, "Or is his lawyer smart?"

"Maybe they're both too smart!" the detective said darkly. "Now answer my question! What did Kirkwood have to say to you?"

"A nice little fairy story," the reporter said. "All about how Medford threatened him with a derringer. Of course the Doc didn't find a derringer slug in Pearson, by any chance?"

"He did," Hallodon nodded. "And Kirkwood told me about that, too. Maybe it isn't a fairy story."

"Maybe, but I'll cover all your bets," Craven said. "Did he, by any chance explain how he knew so soon that Pearson had been shot?"

"A friend called him and told him," Hallodon said. "You know how news of a killing spreads."

"Many a lost scoop has proved that fact," Craven said sadly. "Well, I found out a couple of other things, since last I saw your smiling face. One, it seems that Brass was at the *Kit-Kat* last night, and saw the fight. I didn't see him, though. Two, when Pearson got home from the *Kit-Kat* he got a phone call. The night man at the Bridgewater told me that. He didn't know who made the call, though."

"So that adds up to what?"

"Brass saw the beating Medford got, and it gave him an idea," the reporter said slowly. "And the phone call was from Brass to Pearson...maybe making a date for the murder this morning."

"I think it's no sale," Hallodon said.

"There's just one thing that doesn't check," Craven said with a frown. "It was Medford who really

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shoved Brass out of the three-cornered firm. He got Pearson to see that Brass would do them more harm than good. I mean it's Medford's guts he hates more than he hated Pearson's. But he killed Pearson instead of Medford."

"Well, I'm not scratching Medford off my books," Hallodon said grimly. "Not by a long shot. His alibi is far from air-tight; he may yet sit in the chair!"

"I wouldn't bet on..." Craven began, and then suddenly stopped.

Bright lights flashed in his eyes. He gnawed hard at his lower lip, and snapped his fingers.

"What's eating you?" Hallodon demanded sharply.

"The reason that could make it check," Craven said, as though talking to himself. "Yeah! Medford in the chair for Pearson's murder. Now..."

THE REPORTER cut the rest off as the phone bell on Hallodon's desk jangled harshly. The detective scooped it to him in an arm sweeping movement, put the receiver to his ear, and spoke into the mouth-piece.

"Hallodon, Homicide!" he announced.

Craven could hear the static-like sound of the voice at the other end of the wire, but he couldn't catch a single word, much less recognize the voice.

"All right," he said. "Stay there. I'll be there at five on the dot. 'Bye.'"

The detective hung up, and Craven didn't give him a chance to speak... if he was going to.

"About the Pearson murder?" he asked. "You seem excited."

"That was Kirkwood at the place where he lives," Hallodon said with a glance at the wall clock. "Medford called and made a date for five o'clock. Just fifteen minutes from now. Kirkwood thinks Medford may follow up his threat about the Conway deal he wants to make, so he wants me around."

The detective got up and reached for his hat. Then suddenly he turned and stabbed a finger at Cra-

KILLING ISN'T ENOUGH

ven. "Don't know why I told you, but I did!" he growled. "But if you give one peep of this to your paper before I get back, I'll tear you apart with my bare hands."

"Fear not, my friend," Craven said, standing up. "I'm going along with you, so's you can be sure about that."

"You are not!" Hallodon snapped. "And this time I do mean it!"

"Okay!" Craven said with mock resignation. "But I made another call today. A very interesting one! Could be, it might stop you from being a chump!"

"Yeah?" Hallodon barked, and stopped walking toward the door. "Out with it, then. If it has any connection with..."

* * *

It lacked just one minute to five when Hallodon parked the police car in front of the cheap five-story transient hotel on the east side of town where Brass Kirkwood lived. And it was exactly five o'clock when the detective and Craven went into the crummy looking lobby, and over to the desk. Half way there, though, they both pulled up short, and stared. Over at the desk, and apparently arguing with the sleezy looking clerk, was Frank Medford.

Hallodon took one good stare, and then went the rest of the way fast. Medford, on the point of turning away, saw Hallodon and checked himself in mid stride.

"What now, Hallodon?" he asked in a tight voice. "Been tailing me all day, eh?"

The detective ignored the question and planted himself squarely in Medford's way.

"You been up to see Kirkwood yet?" he demanded.

"No, not that it's any of your business!" Medford cracked back. "Kirkwood phoned me this afternoon, and asked me to call. Said he knew of some business Pearson still had in the fire. So I..."

"He called you?" Hallodon almost shouted. "You mean you called him!"

"You're crazy!" the other said hot-

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FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES

ly. "What would I ever call him about? Anyway, he isn't in. The clerk, here, has been ringing!"

At that the sleezy lad behind the counter nodded his head.

"That's right," he said. "He don't answer. But I give him his key, and seen him go up no more than half an hour ago."

"And he didn't come down?" Hal-lodon barked.

"Not and go by me, he didn't," the clerk said firmly. And then as a clincher, he added, "And why should he go out the back way?"

Hallodon didn't make any reply to that. He suddenly took hold of one of Medford's arms, and held out his other hand to the clerk.

"Let's have the pass key!" he snapped. "Come on, come on! I'm the police. Hand it over!"

The clerk gulped, looked like he was going to faint, and then swept a hand under the counter, and came up with the pass key.

"Now see here, Hallodon!" Medford raged. "You haven't..."

"Yes I have!" the other cracked in. "This time I don't want to have to go hunting for you."

MEDFORD'S FACE blazed up a bright red, and for a fleeting instant Craven, coming along behind, expected to see Medford wrench himself free and swing on the detective. However, he seemed to beat down the urge.

Kirkwood's room was on the third floor rear, and when the trio reached it they all saw that the door was just barely closed to, but not securely. Hallodon didn't bother knocking. He seemed to know what was inside for he kicked the door wide open, and went in quickly, hauling Medford after him. Two steps inside the room everybody stopped short. Brass Medford was there, but he wasn't looking at them. He was flat on his back by a window staring straight up at the ceiling because he was stone dead. A bullet hole just a shade to the right of

KILLING ISN'T ENOUGH

his nose, and an inch under the right eye told the story.

The split second of sudden silence was shattered by Hallodon making sounds in his throat. Then he went into action, fast. He whirled Medford into a nearby chair, pulled a gun, and kicked the door shut.

"All right, Medford, where's the derringer?" he grated. "This time it didn't work! Kirkwood knew why you were coming, so he called me. You told him five, but you came here earlier...and up the back way. Then you went down the back way and around in front to get that desk clerk set with your alibi. Right?"

Since entering the room Frank Medford's face had been a pasty grey.

"So help me God, Hollodon!" he choked out. "I didn't do this, man! I tell you, Kirkwood called me, and asked..."

"I know what you told me!" Hallodon snapped him off. Then moving close, and his gun pointing at Medford's middle, "Stand up!"

Medford didn't utter a single word of protest.

Meanwhile, Craven had been paying no attention to either of them; hardly even hearing their words. His eyes, deeply troubled and baffled, he kept fixed on Brass Kirkwood's outstretched body. Then suddenly he moved over to the body and knelt down. Kirkwood's right hand was closed in a fist, and trailing out from between the second and third finger was about three inches of black thread. The reporter started at the thread, then slowly got to his feet, and stared down hard at the position of the corpse. Then he raised his eyes to the high-silled window above Kirkwood's feet. The lower half was opened about five inches. Like a man in a trance Craven stepped over to the window. It looked out over the next block of one-story stores. And below it was what once had probably been some kind of a court yard. But now the place was choked to three feet high with weeds.

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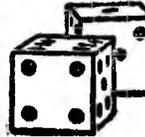
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FAMOUS DETECTIVE STORIES

As Craven peered down at the weeds something seemed to click in his brain. He caught his breath in a startled gasp, spun around on one foot, and raced for the door as though the Devil, himself, was on his tail. Hallodon roared as he jerked it open and went through, but Craven didn't answer, much less check his stride. Once in the hallway he turned right and sprinted for the fire stairs. Down them he went, and out the back way into the weed-choked court-yard. A split second to check the position of Kirkwood's opened window, and then he dropped to his hands and knees. A half minute after that he was on his feet, his two hands cupped to his lips, his head tilted back, and shouting Hallodon's name.

Almost instantly the detective stuck his head out the window and glared down.

"Come down here, now!" Craven shouted. "Your case is on ice!"

HALLODON opened his mouth to speak, but snapped it shut, and ducked his head back in out of sight. Three minutes later he came into the court. Craven saw that he had handcuffs on Medford, but he made no comment. He waited until Hallodon was beside him. Then he parted the tall weeds with one foot, and pointed.

"The derringer," he said. "A present from me to you."

Hallodon gaped at the small gun on the ground, and then quickly dropped to his knees and reached for it.

"Prints!" Craven said sharply. "And five will get you fifty that they're Kirkwood's prints. On that suction cup, too!"

Hallodon had picked up the gun by the barrel end with a thumb and forefinger, and was staring at the small suction cup fitted to the trigger guard, and at some two or three feet of black thread that dangled down from the trigger.

"Stuck it to the window-sill, crouched down, and plugged him-

self," he said in a low, awed voice. "The kick knocked this off and down here. But it didn't pull all the thread from his hand. It broke."

"I'll give you one hundred per cent for that," Craven said. "Just as it happened. And why? Let me tell you. Kirkwood's first plan was to kill Pearson, whom he hated, and frame Medford for it, so's that he could enjoy an even sweeter revenge by Medford's burning in the chair. However, his framing of Medford wasn't good enough. It didn't stick, and he realized that things *might* start pointing at him. You follow me?"

Hallodon's lips were curling in a derisive grimace. "So he killed himself, eh?" he snapped. "And figured to make his own killing look like Medford's job?"

"One hundred per cent for you again," Craven said. "He called Medford. Then he called you. He knew that you both would meet in the lobby. Maybe even on the way up to his room. But he'd be dead by then, and he was staking *all* that Medford couldn't prove he hadn't come a few minutes earlier."

"And...and I couldn't have proved that!" Medford suddenly spoke up in a hoarse whisper. "I was walking around killing time. He said on the phone to be here at *exactly* five o'clock."

"So he killed *himself* to get his revenge?" Hallodon said disgustedly. "You mean to tell me that...?"

"I am telling you, now!" Craven cut in, and pulled the doctor's appointment card from his pocket. "I slipped this off his desk today. See? An appointment for two weeks ago."

"Hematologist?" Hallodon blinked as he looked at the card.

"Blood specialist to you," Craven said. "Brass must have figured something was wrong with him, and his own doc sent him to this hematologist. Well, I went to see this same doc today. I know him slightly, so he was willing to talk off the record. He told me that Kirkwood

was suffering from Leukemia, bad. And..."

"Loo, what?" Hallodon demanded.

"Leukemia," Craven repeated. "In your language, an increasing deficiency of white blood corpuscles. Medicine as yet has no cure for it. It is really slow death. Kirkwood was too far gone. The doc had to tell him that even with hospitalization he didn't have more than three or four months to live. So, when the Pearson killing fell through on him, he played his final card. Why not? He had but a couple of months to live. He was broke, and ruined in this town. Maybe it made him feel good to die, believing that Medford, here, would surely sit in the chair this time. Okay, take that apart, my friend."

Hallodon sighed, brushed a hand across his face, and heaved an even deeper sigh. Then, as though he hardly realized that he was doing so, he fished a key from his pockets and unlocked the handcuffs on Medford's wrists.

"Okay," he mumbled. "My error."

Anger blazed up anew in Medford's face, but he suddenly checked it. He shrugged, and absently rubbed his wrists. "Forget it, Hallodon," he said quietly. "You were only trying to do your job. Maybe I'd have done the same in your shoes. How long before you can get away from here?"

"Huh?" Hallodon grunted. "Maybe an hour. Why?"

"I'll wait," Medford said. "I think the three of us could do with a drink. Scotch for Craven and me. And for you, maybe only beer!"

Hallodon's eyes went dark, then he sighed the third time.

"And grateful I'll be with only beer," he said. "You could raise a stink, you know, Medford?"

"Could, but not me, Hallodon," Medford said quietly. Then jerking a thumb upward, "The stink is up there, and the sooner it's carted away, the better for the whole town!"

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT PIMPLES

Acne, Blackheads, and other externally caused Skin Blemishes



WHEN pimply skin is your problem, the first thing to get straight is that you *can* and *should* do something about it. To develop the attractiveness of your face is not mere vanity. It is an "open sesame" towards bringing the real YOU closer to other people and giving your personality the poise and confidence it needs. Your good qualities — intelligence, character, dignity — all go to naught... are completely cancelled out by a skin that "nobody loves to touch." Remember, the YOU that people see first is your face.

SKIN PROBLEMS DEMAND IMMEDIATE CARE

Medical statistics tell us that blemished skin usually occurs from adolescence on through adult life. The problem at the adolescent stage is serious enough to deserve attentive care as a family matter. In adulthood, when life's responsibilities are so much weightier, it is doubly important to exert great effort to eliminate these blemishes. And, there is no better time to get pimples under control than *now*.

DON'T ABUSE SKIN

The first instinctive reaction to pimples and blackheads is to squeeze them out with your fingers. A bit of experimentation along these lines soon provides convincing proof that this succeeds only in inflaming your skin and spreading the infection. Under no circumstances should pimples and blackheads ever be squeezed.



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MICROSCOPE SHOWS IMPORTANT BASIS FOR EXTERNALLY CAUSED PIMPLES AND BLACKHEADS

Let's take a look through the microscope to see what's behind those unsightly pimples. The high-powered lenses show your skin coated with a covering which originated from two sources—one, internally and the other, externally.

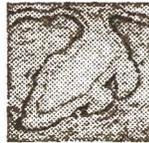
The internal substances on your skin include dead cells, residue from the sweat glands, and a high quantity of oil excreted by the sebaceous glands. A most important factor in skin disorders occurs when thousands of these tiny sebaceous glands discharge more oil than the skin can use for lubrication. Unless special care is given, the oil forms a heavy film which attracts foreign matter to your skin much as any oil mop picks up dust. These infectious external substances may be classified into three general groups:

1. Airborne materials such as dust, pollens, condensation products of smoke, vapors, etc.
2. Materials brought in contact with the skin, such as tiny fragments of clothing, bedding, cosmetics.
3. Micro-organisms such as bacteria and fungi.

See the difference between a healthy skin and a pimply skin in the microscopic reproductions below.



A. Normal skin



B. Sick, pimply skin

Diagram A shows a normal-size, smoothly functioning sebaceous gland. Diagram B pictures sick, pimply skin. Notice that the sebaceous gland is a swollen mass of trapped oil, waste and infectious bacteria.

TRY THIS SENSIBLE WAY

Two sensible aims to achieve in controlling this skin condition are: to clear the pores of clogging matter, and to inhibit the excessive oiliness of the skin. Toward these ends, Dornel Products' research makes available two formulas. One is to aid in thorough cleansing by highly detergent penetration which simplifies the removal of waste and foreign matter. The other is to discourage oiliness with clinically-proved ingredients, and to kill infec-

tious bacteria often associated with externally caused pimples and blackheads.

BLEMISHES COVERED UP

To remove the distressing embarrassment of these skin blemishes, the second Dornel formula exerts a "cover-up" action on your broken out skin while the medication does its work. This, plus its pleasant odor, will spare you the mental distress which is associated with unsightly, melodorous, medicated preparations. Imagine! You can apply this Dornel formula to your skin by day and face the immediate present with greater confidence in your appearance, while secure in the knowledge that medication is acting to remove old blemishes and keep away new ones. What this "cover-up" action alone is worth in peace of mind is beyond calculation. No longer need prying eyes make you wince with humiliation and misery. Now because of this wonderful feature of the Dornel treatment, you can put your best foot forward... at once!

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED OR DOUBLE YOUR MONEY BACK

We know what the Dornel treatment has done for others, so we want you to try it at our risk. A few minutes a day invested in our treatment can yield more gratifying results than you ever dared hope for. This is what we say to you: If you are not delighted in every way by the improved condition and general appearance of your skin in just 10 days, simply return the unused portion and we will refund not only the price you paid — but **DOUBLE YOUR MONEY BACK!** Can anything be fairer than that? You have everything to gain... and we take *all* the risk!

How to get the Dornel Treatment immediately: Just send your name and address to DORNOL PRODUCTS, INC., Dept. 2189, 4257 Katonah Ave. New York 66, N. Y. Be sure to print clearly. By return mail we will ship the Dornel treatment to you in a plain package. When postman delivers the package, pay only \$1.98 plus postage. Or, if you wish to save postal fee, send \$2 now and we will pay postage. Which ever way you order, the **DOUBLE REFUND GUARANTEE** still prevails. Don't delay another minute, send for the Dornel Medicated Skin treatment with "cover-up" feature... at once! Sorry, no Canadian C.O.D.'s.

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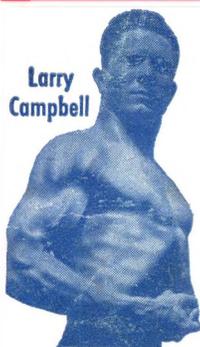
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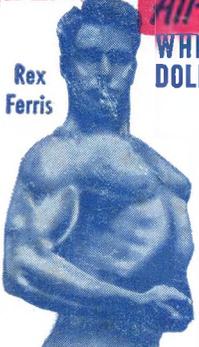
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