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by *R. L. Bellem*

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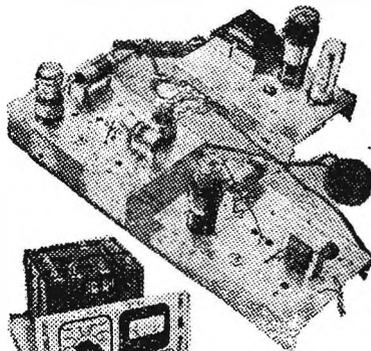
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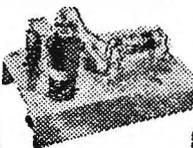


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When answering advertisements please mention HOLLYWOOD DETECTIVE



Vol. 5

November, 1944

No. 1

Book-Length Novel—Complete in This Issue

- NO MOURNER SHALL WEEP**.....by Edward Ronns 4
Was it just hatred and greed or was it some jinx that follows the sea and seafaring men? In any case, murder followed, and everyone the least bit involved paid his share of the costs.



Novelettes—Featuring Dan Turner

- REMAKE FOR DEATH**.....by Robert Leslie Bellem 30
Dan is a patient man, but when it's a case of murder, involving Jap spies and saboteurs, he's likely to blow his top.
- CLEVER CORPSE**.....by Robert Leslie Bellem 56
The cafe was a cheap spot. And bodyguarding a singer in that joint wasn't much of a job. But the fee involved made it seem really worth-while.



Dan Turner in Pictures

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NO MOURNER

FROM the depot the rutted street wiggled eagerly downhill to the waterfront. At the statue of Joan of Arc, Hasty glimpsed the clear blue of the harbor and the dusty, ramshackle sheds of the Town Landing. Most of the fishing feet was out. The remaining draggers were sharp green and gray against

the bright water. Gulls screamed and wheeled in the warm spring sunlight.

He slowed his long-legged stride and took a deep breath. The girl with him did the same, and immediately crinkled her nose.

"It smells," she commented.

Hasty Akers grinned, his brown face

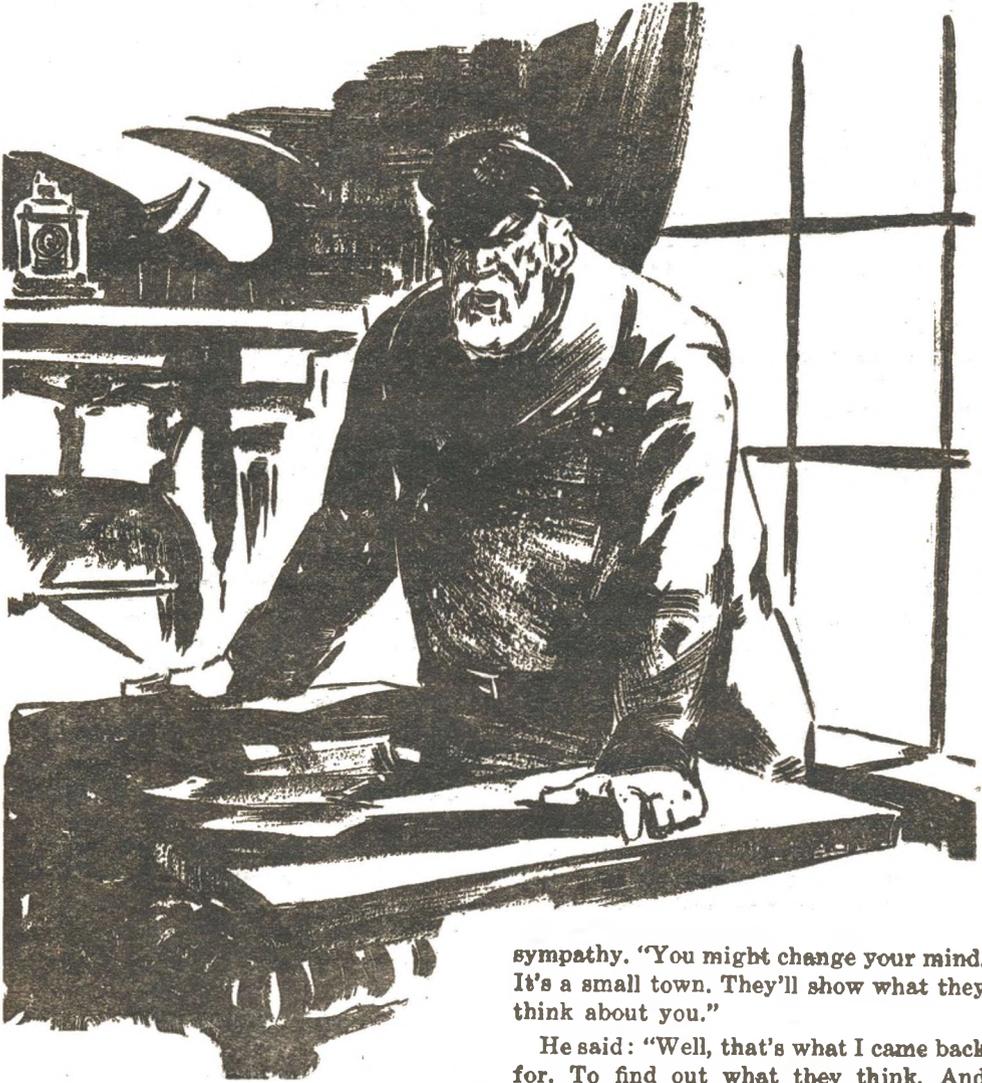


*He twisted the intruder's arm
behind her shoulders.*

By
EDWARD
RONNS

SHALL WEEP

Perhaps the fishing schooner Thetis was cursed by a jinx of the sea—or maybe greed and hatred in the crew led to murder—and to seaman Hasty Akers taking the rap with that odd girl reporter



lighting briefly. "It's the fish," he said. "But it's home."

"You feel pretty good, don't you?"

"It's good to be home," he said.

Judy Randall watched him with curious

sympathy. "You might change your mind. It's a small town. They'll show what they think about you."

He said: "Well, that's what I came back for. To find out what they think. And maybe to kill a man."

She shuddered elaborately. "You're too bloodthirsty for me."

Hasty Akers was a tall man, in his late twenties. He wore no hat, and his thick

black hair was ruffled by the wind that blew from the inner harbor. His tie was loosely knotted and the collar open, with the fisherman's inherent desire for freedom. He carried his suitcase easily in a square, hard hand. His green eyes had the faint squint of a man long accustomed to staring at the open fields of the sea.

He picked up his suitcase and started off again, crossing the square at the end of Main Street. Judy Randall followed without complaint, her high heels clicking unevenly on the brick pavement. Her suitcase was only a little smaller than his, but he didn't offer to carry it. She was following him to get the finish of this story for her newspaper. Odd girl.

She was a little short of breath, trying to keep up with him. The top of her taffy hat was just level with Hasty Akers' shoulder. Her gray eyes were exasperated. Her yellow boxcoat flapped open, revealing a demure pinstripe suit with lacy ruffles at the throat.

"Do we have to walk *everywhere* we go?" she asked.

"You can take a taxi," he told her. "I like to walk."

Gulls flew in screaming, hungry circles overhead. The crew of a small schooner, loaded down with redfish to less than two feet of freeboard, came sauntering across the street from the fish-company wharf, the job of unloading left to the chattering lumpers. Hasty stood his ground and waited, eyes alert and careful.

He said: "Hello, Joe—Les—Howie. Have a good trip?"

The group of fishermen broke in two and flowed around him, their huge rubber boots clumping awkwardly on the dirt square. Their seamed and tired faces were tight. One of them answered, "Hi." briefly and looked immediately from Hasty to the girl.

Hasty spoke a little louder. "Is the *Thetis* in?"

The same one said: "Just yesterday."

Hasty was speaking to their backs now. "Where is she tied up?"

There was no answer. They spilled around the corner and vanished. Hasty's mouth was white with anger. Judy Randall touched his arm.

"Relax," she said quietly. "It's like I told you."

He said bitterly: "What do they think I am?"

"They think you're a murderer."

"But the Norfolk police—"

She spoke with the patience of many repetitions. "Of course. The Norfolk police were satisfied and let you go. That doesn't mean you're free of suspicion. The *Thetis* got in yesterday—and in an hour everybody in town heard how you were arrested for throwing Seastrom overboard."

"I proved I didn't do it."

"If I were you," the girl said, "I'd see the chief of police, or marshal, or whatever law and order you have in this town."

"Town Marshal Tucker," Hasty said absently. "Willie Tucker."

"Well, I'd have a little talk with him. Let him know you're back."

He was suspicious. "I suppose you want to come along, too?"

"That's my job. I don't intend to miss a thing, Mr. Akers. If you didn't kill Hilding Seastrom, then there's still a murderer aboard the *Thetis*, and you intend to find him, don't you?"

"Yes, I'll find him," he said.

"That will make a nice story for the New York newspapers. Glamor, mystery and murder in old Gloucester. The strap-hangers will eat it up."

He eyed her slim, straight figure. "All right, come along."

She had to run to catch up to him as he started off.

"You don't like me much, do you?"

"Now that you ask me," he told her, "no, not much."

"Is it because of your girl here? The one you and Hilding Seastrom allegedly fought over?"

"No," he said. "Laurie Adams isn't my girl."

"But you're going to see her, aren't you?"

"Maybe."

She took another running step to keep up with him.

"That ought to be nice," she said. "You could be nasty to her for a change."

MARSHAL WILLIE TUCKER liked to look fat and sloppy and stupid. He cultivated this appearance in the belief that it disarmed his enemies and developed tolerance among his friends. The sunlight behind him made him seem a pudgy heathen idol. He wore a white shirt that ballooned over his waist belt, and he sat with his knees apart, like most fat men. His normally placid, ruddy face was sober as he watched Hasty's tall figure.

"Sit down, boy. I'm glad you're back."

Hasty took a worn seat. "You're the first one, then."

The town marshal's little black eyes were lazy. "Never no mind what folks say. I gather you already heard a few." He pulled at his lower lip and let it snap back with a click. "It's a strange thing, Hasty. We heard a lot of versions of the happenin' from Cap'n Bowhead and the rest of the crew, and we read quite a lot in the papers. Seastrom was an important man hereabouts. But I'd like to hear the story from you."

The office was warm and sunny. Hasty clasped one raised knee.

"Even if Hilding Seastrom was vice-president of the Sea Pride Company, I never liked him and I never thought much of him. But I never hated him, and it seems to me you've got to hate a man to kill him."

"This was your first trip on the *Thetis*, wasn't it?"

"Cap'n Bowhead needed a spare hand, so I shipped on. It was Hilding's first trip, too. I'd like to know why he left his nice warm office at Sea Pride and took a vacation as a deck hand on the *Thetis*. He wasn't the type. It doesn't make sense."

"It's a question," the marshal admitted. "Why *did* you go?"

"I'm a fisherman," Hasty said simply. "You know I lost my own vessel when Sea Pride attached it. That was due to Hilding's fine hand; he never lost a chance to hurt me. According to rumor, that's my motive for killing him—because he got my boat from me. But I'd never have shipped on the *Thetis* if I knew he would be aboard."

"How did the killin' happen, exactly?"

"We were dragging, getting mostly

scup and sea bass, and there was a heavy ground swell. Most of the men were below, leaving Seastrom and me to handle the net. I was running the winch when Hilding jumped under the bag, trying to pull the slip-knot and empty the catch into the hold. The vessel was pitching heavily and the bag was swinging pretty wild. When the line parted from the winch, the bag and three tons of fish knocked Hilding clean overboard. We never saw him again, although we searched all through the next morning. They accused me because the winch line that parted was found to have been cut with a knife. But I proved to the Norfolk police that I had no knife with me at the time. I had been below for two hours before that and the winch line, used by the other men, had been secure when I left for my bunk."

The fat little marshal stared at the ceiling.

"But the others still think you did it."

Hasty nodded. "I'd had a fight with Hilding and knocked him off the dock at Norfolk the day before. They claimed there was bad blood between us, which was true enough."

"What was the fight about?"

"The usual thing. We just never got along." Hasty watched the fat little man. "I've been hoping you and Cap'n Bowhead would believe in me."

"Well, sure, I suppose. I know you, Hasty, and I knew your dad. I don't think you did it at all." The marshal paused. "You followin' Seastrom aboard the *Thetis* is what makes it look so bad. You're the only one with a motive."

Hasty said: "Someone else on the *Thetis* killed Hilding; but I don't know why. He got along with all of them, loaned them enough money to make 'em like him. There was just seven of us: Cap'n Bowhead, Doody Walsh, Newfie McWilliams, Laurie's brother Kirk, Seastrom, myself, and the Portugee cook, Joaquim. One of them cut that line, and I'm going to find out who it was—and why."

"It won't be easy," the marshal said. "People are kind of afraid of you. Most folks liked Hilding a lot—or said they did."

Hasty said: "I'll just have to get along with it. I'm shipping back on the *Thetis*, if Bowhead will have me, to do my own snooping."

"I wish you luck. You've got a good point there, wondering why Seastrom went aboard the *Thetis* in the first place. I've been trying to find that out myself. But just remember I'm on your side, Hasty; and try to stay out of trouble." The marshal stood up, very squat beside Hasty's tall and muscular figure. "You tell that little gal reporter I'll see her later, huh? I've got a little something to do right now."

"Don't let her get in your hair." Hasty smiled. "She can be an awful nuisance."

"At my age," Tucker said drily, "I think I could tolerate it."

CHAPTER II

For Or Against

IT was not the best hotel nor the best view in town. It was too early for the seasonal inns that catered to the wealthy and bohemian tourist trade. Hasty's window faced inland, away from the harbor. The red-gabled roofs of the old New England houses, built by many a past trader of the sea, marched by irregular routes up Portugee Hill to the twin white bellfries of Our Lady of Good Voyage. Hasty studied the warm, sunlit scene thoughtful moments before turning away. This was home to him, and unless he managed somehow to break the witch's spell of suspicion that surrounded him, he would have to leave.

He did not intend to leave.

He soaped and washed away the soot and grime of his long train journey first. His battered pigskin case yielded fresh linen, a heavy flannel shirt, and a pair of worn corduroy trousers. He felt immediately more comfortable in these clothes. He studied his broad, tan face in the mirror as he shaved, made the usual futile attempts to comb his thick black hair, the heritage of a Mashpee Indian who had somehow slipped in among his Cape Cod forebears. It was a satisfactory face, he

decided; at least, he didn't look like a murderer.

The thought turned him to Laura Adams—tall and patrician, and her great house on Bass Rocks overlooking the sea. He picked up the telephone on impulse and called her number.

The phone seemed to ring a long time as he stood there waiting. Then Laurie's formal voice answered. She said:

"Hello, Hasty. I heard you were back. It's a surprise."

"Didn't you think I'd return?"

"Well, after all, everybody said—"

His eyes were angry. "You're thinking like the rest of them."

"I was very fond of Hilding, Hasty. Of course, I'd like to see you, just as soon as possible. Please come up as soon as you can."

He said grimly: "I will," and hung up the receiver.

He was shivering a little with his anger. She and Hasty and Hilding had long been a familiar threesome. He made a dissatisfied sound, remembering the cool formality of her voice, and turned to his suitcase, withdrew a Belgian Mannlicher 7.65 automatic—compact, blue and dead-ly, reflecting the sunlight. He checked the loaded magazine, then slid the gun inside his shirt, firmly secured by his broad leather belt. Its presence wasn't noticeable.

He left the hotel by a back entrance, running lightly down the dark stairway, and turned toward the waterfront in a search for the *Thetis*.

The schooner lay at McGittigan's Wharf, riding high with empty holds on the flooding spring tide. Her ninety-foot length looked trim and sturdy. Her pilot house was a glistening white against the green, black and gold of her counter. A giant gray gull perched hungrily on her tarred rigging. Three men were on deck, working at the endless chores of a fisherman's crew. A city patrolman lounged at the street end of the dock.

Hasty worked his way among the rows of slowly turning seine-net spindles and stood by the piling, looking for Bowhead Johnson. The fat old whaling captain wasn't in sight. One of the men, a giant

No Mourner Shall Weep

stripped to the waist with broad back bared to the sun, turned and stared, said something to the others, and spat over the side. His face was dark as he circled the mainmast and walked with long arms swinging toward Hasty.

Hasty dropped lightly to the deck and waited.

The big man said. "You get the hell off'n this ship, Hasty Akers."

Hasty said: "I'm looking for Cap'n Bowhead, Doody."

"He don't want to see you. I'm surprised you come back here, after what you did." The big man was drunk. Little beads of sweat glistened on his face and heavy chest. His hair was cropped to with-



They crashed to the deck, floundering, fighting viciously.

in a quarter inch of his hard, ridged scalp. He finished thickly: "So you get ashore and stay ashore. We don't want you around here."

Hasty checked his temper. "You and I used to be friends, Doody."

"What you did don't deserve nothin' but a good lickin'. And I'm the man what can give it to you, too."

Hasty said quietly: "I didn't come here to argue with you, Doody. I'm sorry you feel this way, but I still want to see Bowhead."

"You can see him ashore."

"I'll see him here," Hasty said.

THE other two men had come quietly up the deck and stood behind the half-naked giant. There was no friendliness in their eyes. It seemed incredible that they should be so loyal to a dead man they had known only a few days. There was Joaquim Fialho, the Portugee cook—his face dark and trigger tight; and McWilliams, the Newfie engineer—blond and thin, with long stringy muscles and a gray face. Hasty was glad that young Kirk Adams wasn't among them.

Hasty stood his ground solidly against the trio.

Doody Walsh put a huge, flat hand lightly against Hasty's chest.

"You and me been friends a long time, Hasty Akers. Now I'm tellin' you to get off this ship before I hurt you."

Hasty didn't look at the hand pressing lightly against him.

"Put it away," he said.

"You gettin' off?"

"After I see Bowhead."

The Portugee cook said urgently: "Toss him in the drink, Doody."

The big man didn't seem to hear. He was breathing quickly and lightly, and he smelled of alcohol, sweat and fish. He said throatily: "All right, Hasty," and stepped back, as if to give way.

He swung the instant Hasty moved forward. His fist was explosive, just scraping Hasty's jaw; the impact of his body as he charged made a dull, flat sound. Hasty reeled back, twisting to avoid the giant's embrace. He heard Joaquim's high scream of glee and the Newfie's snort of pleasure,

then his body jolted hard against the rail, knocking the breath out of him. For an instant he almost went overboard, but the jar loosened Doody's grip. Hasty managed to get one knee up and kicked out with all his strength, the heel of his shoe hitting hard in the giant's stomach.

The breath went out of Walsh with a grunt and he staggered back, slamming against the mast. Hasty leaped after him from the rail and they both crashed to the deck in a floundering, struggling mass, rolling over and over until brought up short against a pile of netting. Doody was on top. The giant attempted to straddle him, his elbows grinding into Hasty's face.

Hasty grabbed at one arm, applied a quick twist, and the big man flipped over on his back like a helpless crab. Hasty wriggled onto him in an instant. There was no hair on Doody's scalp to grip, but his fingers closed on the big man's ears. He raised the giant's head and slammed it hard against the deck.

"Behave, Doody," he gasped.

The Portugee cook and McWilliams were silent now, standing a little away from the lashing bodies. Doody heaved, and Hasty slammed the big man's head against the deck once more. Their breathing was ragged.

"You going to behave?" Hasty rasped again.

The big man heaved once more and this time sent Hasty in a flying arc over his head. He landed on his shoulder, skidded across the deck, and crashed painfully into a hatch cover. He scrambled to his feet in time to meet Doody's bull rush. This time he ducked, deftly thrust out one foot, and tripped the giant. The big man plunged on unchecked. He hit the rail, jack-knifed over it, and dropped to the cold water with a tremendous splash.

Hasty straightened his shirt, adjusted the gun in his waistband, and dried his hands and face. The Portugee edged around him, then jumped to fish Doody Walsh out of the water. Hasty stared for an instant at his hands and wiped a streak of blood from his palm. He seemed unaware of Doody's wild yells and flounderings. He eyed the sullen McWilliams.

"I'll see Bowhead now, if there's no objection."

The engineer shrugged. "He's been watching the last five minutes."

IT was true. Leaning negligently against the pilot house, his gnarled hands busy cleaning his pipe, was the enormously fat figure of Cap'n Bowhead. Hasty tightened his belt and strode toward him.

Bowhead's greeting was calm. "I seen your gun while you were fighting, Hasty. Why didn't you use it?"

"I didn't need it."

"You know I'm the only one who carries a gun aboard my ship?"

Hasty grinned. "That's at sea. We're not at sea now."

Bowhead Johnson nodded. His face defied the years; he might have been fifty or eighty. His white beard was only slightly tinged with tobacco stain. His eyes were pale and blue, his hands powerful. Long ago, as a boy, he had shipped from New Bedford on a whaler, getting his father drunk to sign the ship's articles for him, because he was under age. When his father sobered up he had dragged Bowhead, then a gangling youth of eighteen, through the streets of New Bedford by his ear, taking him home. Bowhead had promptly run away and rejoined the whaler, sailing that night. He had made and lost several fortunes since, and his resentment centered on his being reduced at his age to ground-fishing, after a lifetime of whaling. His blasphemy was notorious, his temper feared, his wisdom of the sea respected.

His eyes were friendly, studying Hasty. "Last trip out of Norfolk was a short one, account of the happenin'. The others collected their share already. I held yours for you till you showed up."

Hasty said: "It's two hundred and sixty dollars."

"And eighty cents. Come along."

He followed Bowhead's massive, grunting figure down the ladder to the after cabin. There were harpoons rigged over the roomy bunk, a small and sturdy table, a rug, and a little ship's safe. From the safe Bowhead withdrew a thick roll of

bills, a pinch bottle of Scotch, and two tumblers. He passed the bottle to Hasty, said, "Your face is bleeding, son," and began counting the currency carefully. Hasty tilted the bottle into his palm and rubbed the cut over his eye with the stinging alcohol. He silently accepted the money for his fishing share and pocketed it without comment.

Bowhead eyed him over his drink.

"You going to look for a new site now, Hasty?"

"I'd like to stay aboard the *Thetis*," Hasty said earnestly. "I didn't push *Seastrom* overboard. Somebody else did that job. I figure the best way for me to clear myself is to stay aboard. Doody was a little drunk just now, but he'll get over it." He paused. "Why are they all so loyal to *Seastrom*? As if he were a little tin god!"

The fat skipper shrugged. "He was free with money. He tossed money around the crew like water. Me, I never liked him. Hilding was peculiar—mean as a swordfish one minute, a spendthrift the next." Bowhead grunted, made his huge weight comfortable on the edge of his bunk. "The boys are also sore because you spoiled the trip. Down in Norfolk the police wouldn't let 'em ashore; wouldn't let 'em take laundry or gear off the boat. Same thing up here. The marshal's got that cop posted at the end of the dock just to keep us from carting any gear home."

"Why is that?" Hasty asked.

"I don't know. The Norfolk police say the death was accidental—but I think they're just watching and waiting. Your not having a knife on you at the time makes the rest of the crew think you purposefully fixed up an alibi." Bowhead grunted. "I don't give a hoot if you killed Hilding, son. I reckon you had reason, if you did. Hell, I killed men in my day. Never thought about it at all. The courts tried to hold me for murder, but I proved mutiny on 'em. That was a long time ago, when I was whaling."

"But do you think I killed him?" Hasty insisted.

"I wouldn't tell you if I did." The fat man stood up. "If you want to keep your site as spare hand aboard the *Thetis*, that's all right with me. Fishermen like

you are rare. We're sailing tomorrow, dragging off Cashe's Ledge."

"I'll try not to make trouble for you, Bowhead."

"I was teathed on trouble." The white-headed fat man reached under his bunk and weighed a long-barreled Colt in his meaty palm. "This goes on me when we clear Ten Pound Island. I reckon I can handle anything that comes up. And if I can help you, Hasty, I will. I don't like the idea of a sneakin' killer aboard my vessel any more'n you do." The fishing captain looked up sharply from under bushy white brows. "You seen Laurie Adams yet?"

Hasty paused suddenly on his way out. "Not yet, no."

"She was aboard, askin' questions. Women is worse than whales sometimes. When you're huntin' 'em, you never know which way they'll turn."

"I'll remember that," Hasty said. He turned and went above deck. A brisk wind came over the harbor and the sun felt cold, sinking over the mainland. There was no sign of Doody Walsh or the other two. He shivered and climbed slowly to the dock, made his way up the street to his hotel.

WITH the money from his share he first got his coupe out of storage, then drove back to his room. He ate alone, slowly and thoughtfully. Judy Randall, the reporter, wasn't in sight. It was dusk when he went upstairs.

He could hear the telephone ringing as he fumbled for his key, and paused abruptly as he heard Kirk Adams' voice speaking inside. He heeled the door open a moment too late. The blond boy was just putting down the phone. He held a bottle of rye gripped tightly by the neck, the contents gurgling as he spun around to face Hasty. His features were white and slack in the gloom.

"Oh, there you are."

Hasty said: "Who wanted me?"

"Some girl. She didn't give her name. She wouldn't leave a message." Kirk Adams moved away from the phone and lurched to a seat on the bed. His blond hair straggled loosely over his forehead

and his tie was awry. He wasn't much over twenty. His hands were long and fluttering in the dusky room. He grinned and said awkwardly: "I didn't break in, Hasty. I've had a master key to this flea trap a long time—since I was a kid. I just let myself in."

Hasty said evenly: "Make yourself at home." He was wise enough not to advise Kirk to put the bottle away. He kept the room in its murky state of light and began changing his clothes. "What brings you here?"

"I just wanted to talk to you. I heard about your fight with Doody Walsh. He used to be your best friend, wasn't he?"

"He still is," Hasty said grimly. "We've fought before."

The blond boy said: "Well, no matter what they all say, Hasty, I want you to know I'm with you. I wouldn't even care if you did kill Hilding Seastrom—though I know you didn't."

Hasty was surprised. "You're the first one who doesn't regard Seastrom as a patron saint. What's the matter?"

"Nothing." Kirk ran shaky fingers through his yellow hair. "I never liked him much. I always hoped Laurie . . . that is, between you and Hilding—" He flushed a little. "Well, you know. I wish Laurie would feel differently about the whole thing. Women are certainly peculiar."

"Sure," Hasty said bitterly. "What about your own girl?"

"Cassie?" Kirk kneaded his hands together. "She—she's up in Maine, I guess. Visiting folks. I'm rather disappointed, too. She didn't write that she was going away. She—" He broke off again and started searching for his hat. Hasty scooped it up from under the bed. "Well, the maine thing I came for was that you should know how I feel, Hasty. No matter what Laurie thinks. If I can help you in any way—"

Hasty said abruptly: "How much money did Hilding lend you?"

"Five hu—" The boy straightened with a jerk. "That doesn't make any difference now."

"Five hundred?" Hasty demanded sharply.

The boy moved toward the door. "Yes."
"Did you sign an IOU?"
"Everybody knows Hilding's IOU's. He never called them in."
"Did he call yours?"
"No." The boy opened the door and

The girl brought a fresh bottle. "You won't be able to walk," she said. "I'm going now."



hesitated. His face worked in the dimness, long and thin and pale. "I just wanted to tell you about Laurie . . . and Cassie being away . . . and how I felt. That's all, Hasty."

He was gone the next moment.
Hasty sank slowly into a chair by the window. The evening star shone with a steady light in the purple sky. He picked up the bottle of rye and held it on the table with one hand, but he didn't drink any of it.

CHAPTER III

Multiple Burglary

THE telephone was like a sudden explosion in the stillness. The room was completely dark. Hasty groped blindly, awakening, and knocked over the bottle

of rye, heard it hit the floor with a thump. Liquor gurgled musically over the carpet. The telephone kept ringing, a long urgent finger of sound that prodded his mind awake. He picked it up.

The voice in the receiver was deep and vibrant, whispering hoarsely.

"Hasty? Is that you, Hasty?"

It was Cap'n Bowhead. There was a humming sound in the wire.

"This is Hasty. Can't you speak louder?"

"Don't dare, son. You better get here in a hurry. I'm in the Seastrom house. Had a hunch and came snooping. I—"

Abruptly the line went dead, with a single efficient click. Hasty rapped, "Hello? Hello?" and then hung up. The luminous hands on his wristwatch were horizontal at a quarter past nine. He was dressed in three minutes, swearing softly. He didn't forget the Mannlucher when he slammed outside.

It was four miles to Halibut Point. Hasty kept his foot on the floorboard all the way, the little coupe roaring with the effort. Glimpses of the open sea flashed by, broad and silvery in the moonlight. The town of Rockport was quiet and dark, its crooked little streets deserted, and he worked the car savagely up a rutted, twisted road, past scrub brush and bleak, empty cottages.

Caution advised him to park the car a little distance from the Seastrom estate. The house was lonely and gaunt, perched on a knoll that gave its widow's walk a commanding view of Ispwich Bay. Long ago Hilding's grandfather had built the house with proceeds gleaned from the African trade. There was a story of how Jonathan Seastrom had been cook aboard a schooner off the Gold Coast and had come upon a village stricken with epidemic. As cook, he was called upon to prescribe for the natives—and used the only medical knowledge he possessed—liberal doses of castor oil. As a result of the painful aftermath the schooner lost a profitable trading post to the natives' resentment.

Those were the early years of the Seastrom glory. Wealth and Yankee in-

genuity had built the house and fortune, and two succeeding generations lived to wreck and spend it. Hilding Seastrom had been the line of the line. There were no more of the family, and the lonely house on the hill seemed to know and lament it. There would be no mourners left to weep.

Hasty shook his head as if to clear it of his morbid thoughts, and transferred the Belian automatic from his waistband to his pocket. A low stone wall encircled the grounds, paralleled by orchard trees. The lawn was overgrown with weeds. Deep pools of shadow lay along the slope of the hill.

Then the sound of a snapping twig froze Hasty in his tracks, under the shelter of a giant elm. Abruptly footsteps pounded toward him from beyond the shrubbery. He crouched a little, waiting.

The brush suddenly crackled and a figure ran diagonally across the narrow road. It was Kirk Adams. The boy's face was white and frightened as he glanced back at the house.

Hasty stepped from the shadows.

"Kirk!" he called sharply.

The boy halted in mid-flight. For a moment he just stood there, trembling. His eyes jerked wildly as Hasty strode toward him, gun in hand.

"Kirk, what's going on?" Hasty demanded.

The boy stared with unseeing eyes, and a chill crept up Hasty's back. Kirk's eyes were filled with great, blinding tears. The boy made a sobbing sound and tore free, swung a wild fist that landed harmlessly, and darted away. He ran irregularly, with a staggering gait, and in a moment vanished around the stone wall.

Hasty took two undecided steps after him, then paused, dropped the gun into his pocket, and drifted silently over the lawn toward the house. Another car was parked here, run into a bed of wild iris, and he recognized it with sudden uneasiness. It was Laurie Adams' car. The radiator shell was still warm. There was no sound but the distant booming of the surf mingled with the shrill, wild glee of crickets.

THE house stood silent and dark. With his claspknife he swiftly worked the hinge off a casement window and stepped inside, to stand in deep and utter blackness. The rooms smelled cold and musty. After a moment he made out the misshapen bulk of covered furniture. Familiarity from previous visits led him without a sound through a deserted library into the main hall. Moonlight filtered through the glass of the front door, shining on a large brass ship's bell, a glistening ship's wheel and binnacle. The telephone was in the study, and the double door was partly open. He slipped through, gun in hand—and almost stumbled over the elephantine body sprawled there.

Cap'n Bowhead's massive bulk lay almost within reach of the phone that stood on a low taboret. One thick arm was outflung, and his silvery hair seemed to gather up all the dim light in the low-ceilinged room. There was a gash in his heavy coat and a tiny trickle of blood stained his beard.

Hasty dropped to his knees beside him with a muttered exclamation. Just then the fat man stirred and moaned. Hasty's chest ached, and he realized he had been holding his breath for a long time. He straightened, without touching the fat man, and found a silver-chased flask of brandy in a liquor cabinet against the wall nearby. He found Cap'n Bowhead's bright blue eyes staring wide at him when he returned.

He spoke quickly, in a whisper: "It's all right, skipper. It's Hasty. You're all right now." The big man nodded, took a giant swallow of the brandy, and shuddered as he sat up. Hasty said: "Somebody slugged you. I got over here as fast as I could, after you telephoned."

Cap'n Bowhead grunted, licked his lips. His eyes were brighter.

"What time is it, son?"

"Nine-thirty. Did you see the man who hit you?"

"Yeah, I saw the thievin', slinkin'——." The fat man's face was hard and bitter. "I heard him prowling around, same as I was doing, and called you to witness it. I thought I could stay hidden until you came."

"Who was it?" Hasty demanded sharply.

Cap'n Bowhead whispered harshly: "It was Doody Walsh. I'll break him in two when I get my hands on him. No man ever slugged me before, son, and forgot it easily."

Hasty said: "Didn't you see anyone else? Didn't you see Kirk Adams, or Laurie?"

"No, no one else."

Hasty's puzzled eyes slid carefully over the moonlit room. Hilding's study looked as it always had. Shelves of books reached from ceiling to floor along one entire wall. Over the brick fireplace were two enormous ivory tusks, relics of Jonathan Seastrom's African trade. There was a wide, plateglass window that looked out over the shimmering sea, and a mahogany desk.

THE desk had been thoroughly searched. All the drawers were open and the fine wood was marred by a long jagged scratch. Papers were strewn in a snowstorm over the gleaming top. Hasty turned to meet Cap'n Bowhead's blue eyes. The old fishing skipper took some crumpled sheafs of paper from the depths of his coat pocket.

"I messed up the desk a little, Hasty," he said quietly. "I got to thinking, after you left, and you need plenty of help. Besides, I don't like the idea of a murderer in my crew at all, as I said before. Breaking and entering may be quite an offense, but I found these. IOU's from almost every citizen in town. Hilding was doing quite a business—as a loan shark."

Hasty took the thick pad of notes. They were of all sizes and shapes, some merely scrawled, illiterate notes. He whistled softly as he rifled through them in the moonlight. "There's thousands here!"

"It's lucky for some people," Bowhead said heavily, "he didn't call for them. He seemed to have pretty steady customers, too, including your good friend, Miss Laurie Adams. She borrowed over two thousand from him."

Hasty frowned. "I know Laurie hadn't too much money, even though she kept up pretenses. That's why Kirk Adams went fishing—to make money." He stuffed the

notes into his pocket. "D'you suppose Doody came here to recover his own IOU's?"

"Maybe." The fat man nodded. "This is getting a little deep, Hasty. Hilding Seastrom hardly ever asked to be repaid, but he seems to have kept a pretty careful record of every cent. His death changes the picture. Presumably, with no one to inherit the estate, the banks will administer Hilding's property. And a bank has no conscience. Any lawful notes will be collected. So quite a few people would like to get their hands on those IOU's. Maybe Doody was getting back his own; I don't know. All I heard was his footsteps." Captain Bowhead's blue eyes were suddenly bleak and his huge body was motionless; he stared first at Hasty, then at the ceiling, and licked his lips. "Footsteps," he repeated slowly. "like those—right now."

Distinctly, there came the sound of a cautious tread overhead.

Hasty's scalp prickled. The footsteps proceeded diagonally across the ceiling and faded out, then there came the click of a heel on the stairway, headed for the study door. Hasty glanced at Bowhead, and with one accord the two men flattened on either side of the wide double doors. Gun in hand, Hasty waited and listened. There was no further sound throughout the house except the distant, muffled boom of the surf.

It seemed a long time before the intruder came through the doorway. There was a gleam of blue steel in a white hand, a flicker of white clothing,—and Hasty reached out accurate fingers to close on the gun in the other's grip. There was a quick, smothered scream. He twisted sharply. He had the other's arm now, locked firmly behind the intruder's shoulders. Then perfume tickled his nostrils and he began to swear in a flat monotone.

It was Laurie Adams.

She was tall and slender, dressed like a man in gray flannel slacks and a warm leather windbreaker. Her dark hair was done in a tightly braided coronet. Her long hazel eyes were wide with fear, but there was none of it around her red, stubborn mouth. Her oval face turned quickly

from Hasty to Cap'n Bowhead's enormous bulk. Her voice was husky.

"Let me go, Hasty! It's only me."

He relaxed his grip on the gun in her hand and she stepped back, her eyes fixed on Hasty's tall, dark figure. She moistened her lips.

"This isn't quite the way I planned to greet you, Hasty. But I'm certainly glad it turned out to be you."

Cap'n Bowhead's voice was like a heavy hand. "What are you doing here, Miss Adams?"

She glanced at the desk. "I should have looked here first. I see you've found the IOU's." She turned again to Hasty. "You must understand. It would look simply awful if people knew. I mean . . . I must have those IOU's. Will you give them to me?"

"They go to the marshal," Hasty said flatly.

"But why? Hilding never intended that they should be paid!" Her long eyes were suddenly narrow, glistening and white in the moonlight. She caught her lower lip between hard white teeth and suddenly swung the gun to cover Hasty and the mammoth old skipper. "I must have those papers, Hasty. Don't force me."

He ignored the gun in her hand. "Why did you borrow all that money from Seastrom?"

"I needed it for Kirk," she said tightly. "To keep him out of trouble. He had gambling debts. Hilding never asked for any explanations."

"Did Kirk come with you here?"

"No."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"No."

He said quietly: "Put away the gun, Laurie. We can settle the question of the IOU's with the marshal, when we see him."

Her smile was tired. "You're not very afraid of me, are you?"

"I don't think you'd shoot me," he told her.

"No," she said. "I don't think I would, either."

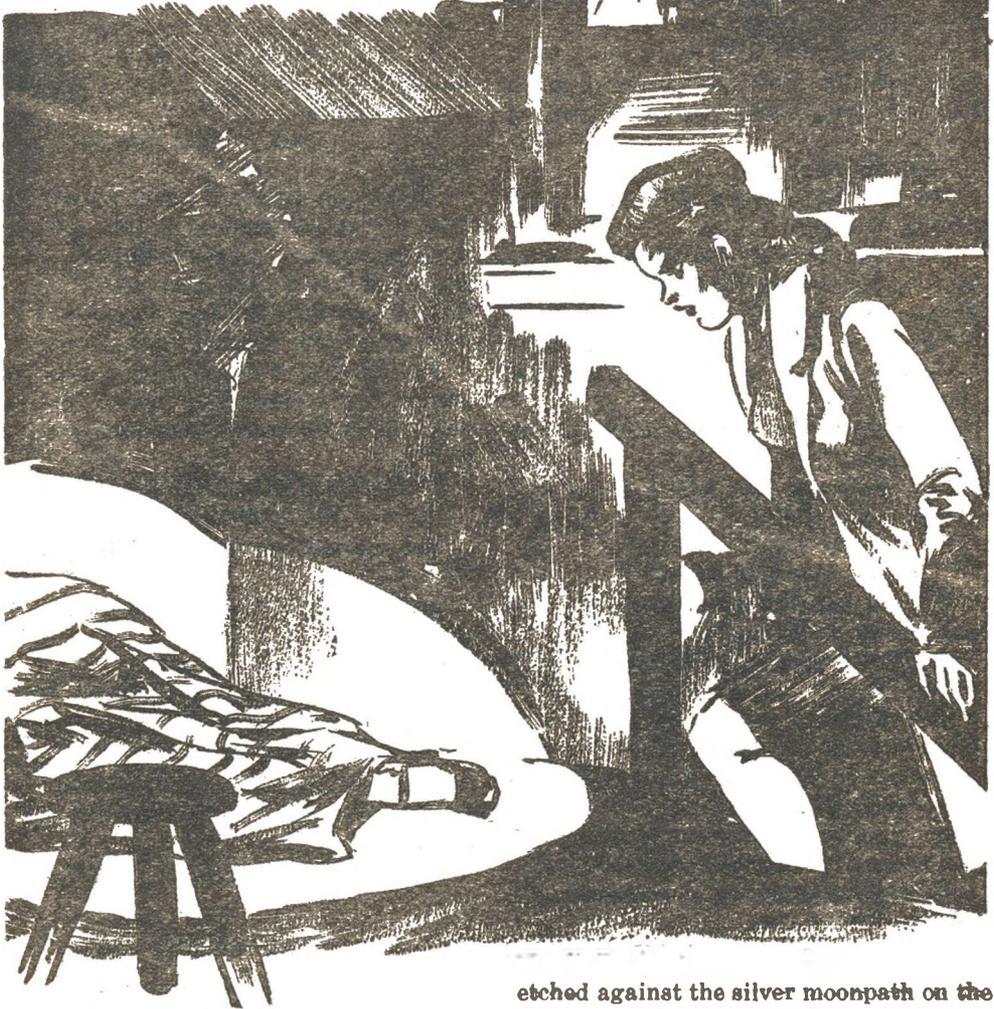
He said: "Then you'll come with me?"

"I—I'd rather not, Hasty. I'm going home." She glanced at Cap'n Bowhead's

bulk. "I've got my own car here. I'm all right."

There was nothing he could do. Cap'n Bowhead maintained a mountainous silence as they stepped outdoors. Laurie's tall and capable figure was lovely in the moonlight. Hasty helped her into the car and stood watching until it was out of sight.

She saw then the foot that thrust from under the blankets.



THIRTY minutes later Hasty, having dropped Cap'n Bowhead off on Main Street at his own request, turned his coupe toward the waterfront where the *Thetis* was berthed. The tide was flooding again, and the schooner's masts were

etched against the silver moonpath on the water. To Hasty's eyes the vessel was a creature of mysterious beauty. Though her sailing days as a Gloucester racing schooner were long over, she still retained the grace and speed of line that had marked her past performance, despite her stumpy bowsprit and lack of topmasts.

He leaped aboard with only the sound of a creaking boom to accompany the thud of his feet on deck. There was no one in the crew's quarters forward, but a light shone in the galley and he headed there. Joaquim Fialho was bent over his tiny work-table, computing grocery bills. The Portugee's face darkened with quick alarm as Hasty's tall figure filled the doorway. Joaquim's fingers scabbled on the table, clawing for a knife.

Hasty said: "Relax, Joe. All I want is Doody. Where is he?"

"I dunno," the little man whispered. "We took 'im to the Institute after he fell overboard. That's the last I saw of him."

"Was he all right?"

The Portugee tried a grin. "Jus' a N'l bit wet, Hasty."

Hasty sat down on a three-legged stool as Joaquim let the knife slip from his fingers. He picked up a cookie and munched on it, asked abruptly: "How much money did you owe Hilding Seastrom, Joe?"

The Portugee studied his hands. "I owe him nothing."

"Didn't he pay your wife's doctor bills when she was sick?"

"Yes, he did that."

"Did you pay him back?"

"It was not necessary. He would not take money from me."

"Did he ever ask you to repay him?"

"No. Hilding was a fine man, Hasty."

"Nevertheless, somebody hated him enough to kill him."

The Portugee looked up and said nothing—eloquently.

Hasty said: "How about McWilliams? Did he owe Hilding money, too?"

"Hilding give money to ever-body. He was like that."

Hasty stood up, baffled. "Well, if you see Doody Walsh, tell him I want to talk to him. Tell him there's no hard feelings."

"He'll be glad to hear that. He really likes you, Hasty."

"Sure," Hasty said. He ducked under the doorway and went up the ladder to the wharf. It still lacked an hour to midnight.

Marshal Tucker was waiting in the

hotel lobby when he came in. The marshal's bright eyes were brooding as Hasty swerved toward him. The lawman looked discontented.

"I finally gave that reporter gal an interview," he said. The marshal sighed. "She's an inquisitive little snip. There's too much snooping going on in this town all of a sudden. Everybody's playin' at detective. Even got a report of hi-jinks at the Seastrom place, but time I got there it was all quiet. Then this reporter, Miss Randall—she ain't above a little light burglary at all. She was caught bustin' into the Sea Pride offices not twenty minutes ago."

Hasty laughed. "What was she doing there?"

"Rifin' the desks," Tucker said calmly. "She claims the answer to this mystery is there. Anyway, I got her locked up and made her comfy; she sent me to you to get you to vouch for her. I promised I'd release her into your custody, Hasty."

But Hasty was occupied by a startling new trend of ideas. He took off his hat and studied its worn creases and frowned into it.

"Would you mind keeping her locked up for a while, marshal?"

The marshal stood up and hitched at his trousers. "Thought I was doin' you a favor—puttin' that nice little girl in your custody."

"Just tell her you couldn't find me, will you? Then let her go in an hour. She's harmless—just has too much curiosity."

The stout little policeman shrugged, rocked back and forth on his heels, then turned and went out through the lobby door.

Hasty was only a minute or two after him.

CHAPTER IV

Lethal Lead To Lester

NEIGHBOR JACK'S on the waterfront at Rocky Neck, was a strictly masculine establishment, spotlessly decked out in whitewashed plaster walls, clean sawdust on the floor, and ancient swordfish, nets, blocks and tackle. It was picturesque and normally would have drawn

the best of the artist trade among Rocky Neck's summer colony. Together with his ale, Neighbor Jack served excellent Virginia ham and pickled eggs. The place was a throwback to the decades when a taproom was dedicated strictly to drinking and enjoying masculine insobriety.

It was officially closed when Hasty parked on the dock and walked across the creaking planks to the side door. The tide licked at the boards beneath his feet. The main room was lighted, and more windows were alight in the little apartment on the second floor. The apartment was occupied by Lester Mawhinney, chief bookkeeper for the Sea Pride Company.

And Mr. Mawhinney was Hasty's objective.

He found the man in the closed taproom, seated alone with an enormous ham sandwich and a tall white bottle on the table before him. He was thin, with an elfin face, transparent ears like a faun's. His eyes were like two boiled eggs. He was very drunk. The boiled-egg eyes rolled solemnly to watch Hasty's entrance through the back door, and that was all of Mr. Mawhinney that moved until he spoke.

"Neighbor Jack's gone home. I'm closing up for him, Hasty."

Hasty said: "That's all right. I'll keep you company."

Lester Mawhinney nodded and then bellowed: "*Sincera!*" in an enormous voice for such a little man. He giggled for a moment and measured the liquor in the bottle. The label read Holland gin. The bottle was empty.

Hasty said: "I'd like to talk to you about Hilding Seastrom."

"A fine man," said Mawhinney. "Most ambitious man at Sea Pride. And generous to a fault. Quite a fault."

They were interrupted by the appearance of Sincera, carrying a fresh bottle of Holland gin. She was a slim little girl wearing a faded blue smock. She had a sad, dark face, Latin eyes, and two long braids dangling around her neck. She uncorked the new bottle and put a glass in front of Hasty with silent efficiency.

Mawhinney said: "Sincera is wonder-

ful. She's had a hard life. She's an orphan. I take very good care of her."

Sincera spoke without emotion. "You are drunk, Mr. Mawhinney."

"Yes, my dear."

"Stinking drunk." The girl turned her sorrowful eyes toward Hasty. "If you never drank this stuff before, I wouldn't start, if I were you."

Hasty said: "There's nothing like the first time."

She went away as silently as she had come, disappearing through a curtained doorway. Mawhinney filled his glass from the new bottle.

"Bottoms up, Hasty."

The stuff was liquid fire, burning and wriggling down Hasty's throat like cyanic acid. It settled in his stomach and after some debate remained there, pulsing gently. After the first shock, it felt good.

He said: "What was wrong with Hilding, anyway?"

"He was too generous. Like I told him two weeks ago, half the town was in his debt, for one thing or another. Have another drink?"

"Thank you. You're pretty drunk, Lester. How could you have talked to Hilding two weeks ago when he was aboard the *Thetis* in Norfolk?"

"Was he?"

"Well, was he?"

Mawhinney's head jiggled with mirth. "No, he wasn't in Norfolk. He flew up here between trips—just before he was killed." He suddenly looked sly and leaned across the table to wink at Hasty. "By the way, just between us—did you kill him, old pal?"

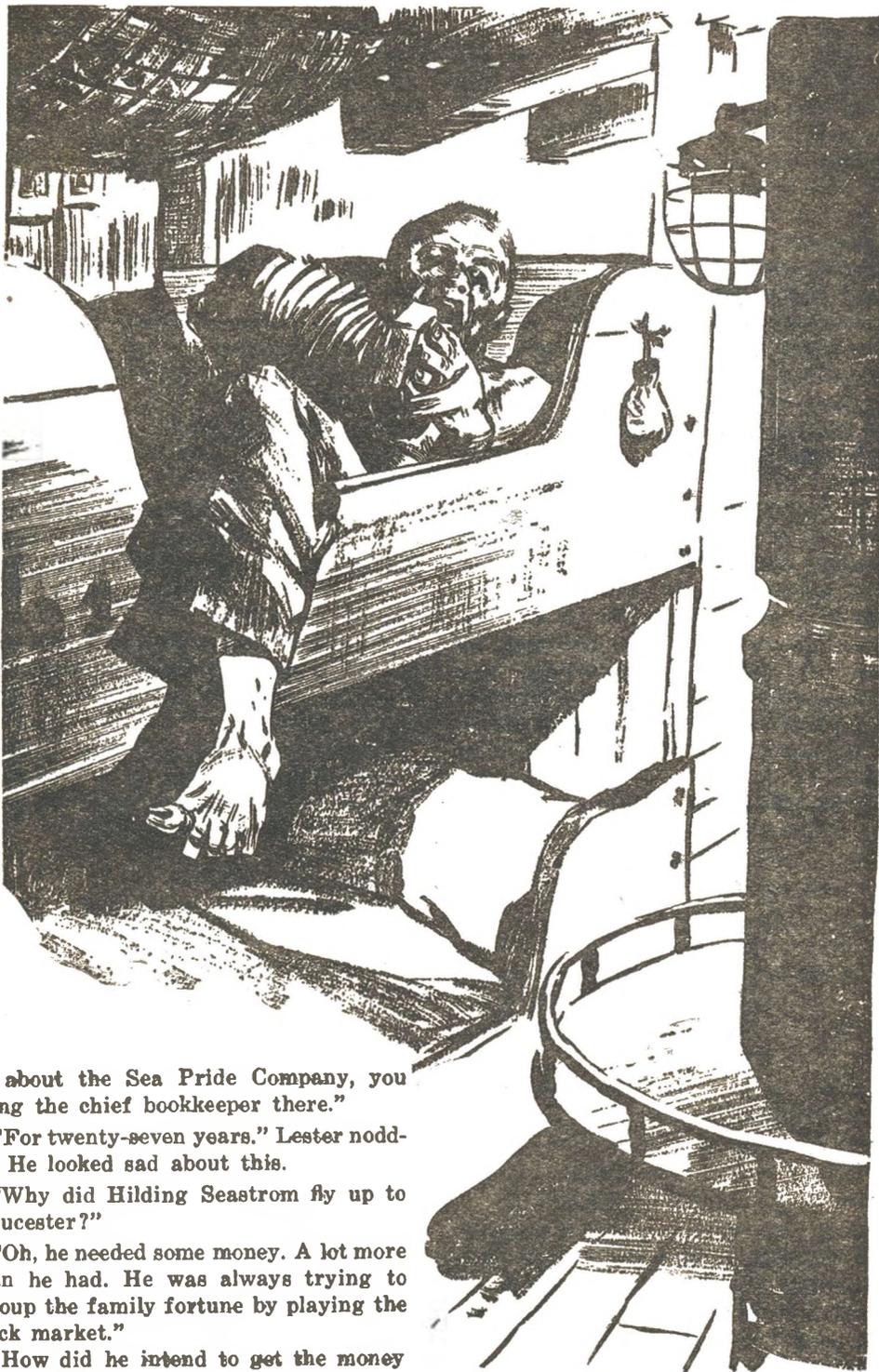
"No, I didn't." The warm, pulsing sensation in Hasty's stomach was very pleasant. His legs felt like rubbery lengths under the table, but his head was very clear. He said again: "No, I didn't kill him, Lester. Do you think I should have?"

"You should have waited."

"For what?"

Mawhinney looked owlsh. "That would be telling."

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want to. But I'll bet you know a lot that other folks don't know. I'll bet you know



all about the Sea Pride Company, you being the chief bookkeeper there."

"For twenty-seven years." Lester nodded. He looked sad about this.

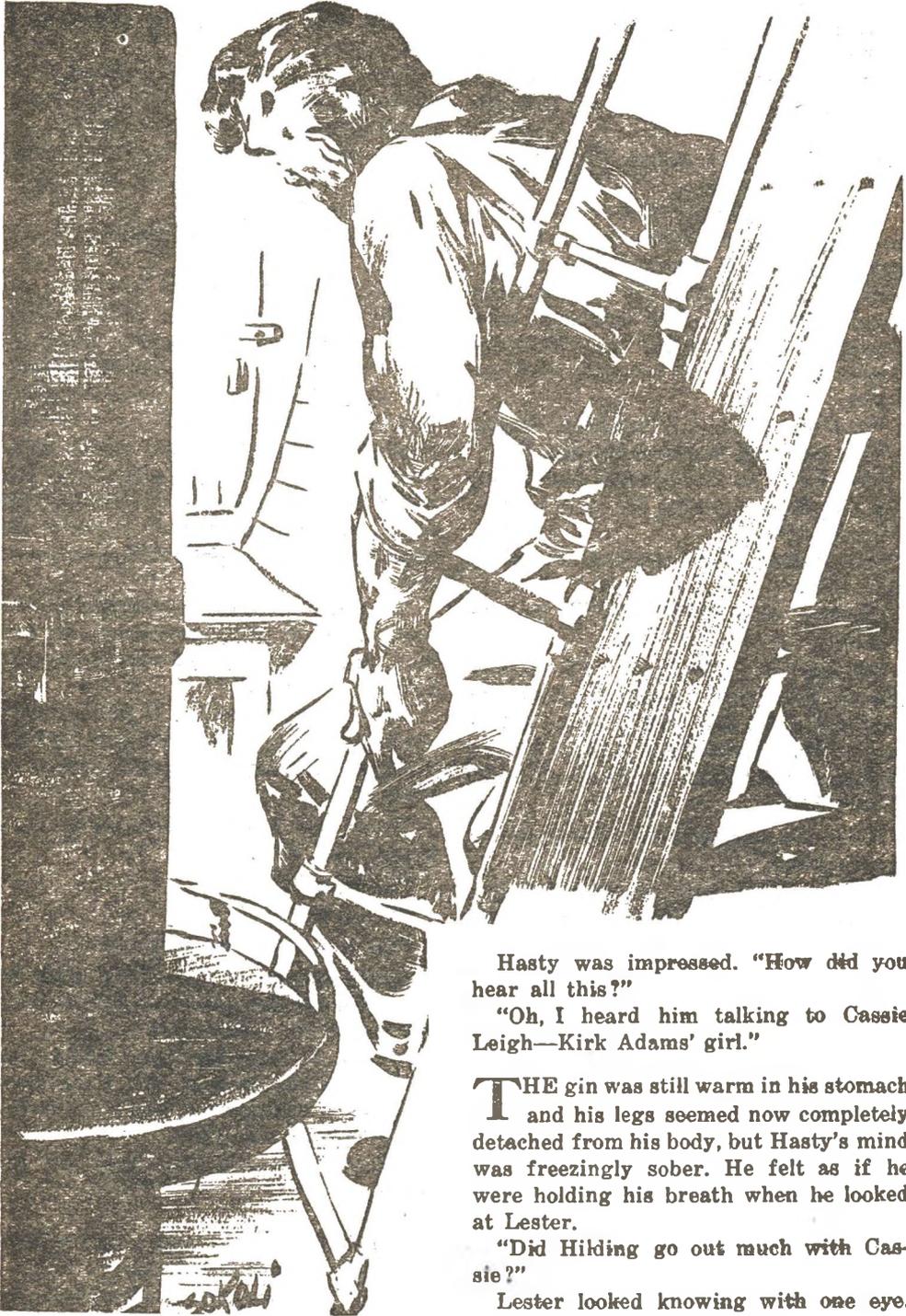
"Why did Hilding Seastrom fly up to Gloucester?"

"Oh, he needed some money. A lot more than he had. He was always trying to recoup the family fortune by playing the stock market."

"How did he intend to get the money he needed?"

"He wanted the company to lend it to him."

The big man stopped playing and said:
"A knife ain't for me. I do it with
my fists."



Hasty was impressed. "How did you hear all this?"

"Oh, I heard him talking to Cassie Leigh—Kirk Adams' girl."

THE gin was still warm in his stomach and his legs seemed now completely detached from his body, but Hasty's mind was freezingly sober. He felt as if he were holding his breath when he looked at Lester.

"Did Hiding go out much with Cassie?"

Lester looked knowing with one eye. The other was squeezed shut.

"They worked together," he admitted.

"Did he like her?"

"She was a nice little girl."

"Did they?"

"Nope. It was too much. He wanted a couple hundred thousand."

Hasty said carefully: "But Hilding was always very strict about such things. Besides, he was in love with Laurie Adams."

Lester Mawhinney giggled. He sounded slightly insane.

"Lots of things about Hilding that people don't know."

He turned and bellowed again for Sincera, rapping the tall bottle of Holland gin lustily on the table. The girl came in with a third, fresh bottle. Her slight little figure looked tired. Her sorrowful eyes moved thoughtfully from Hasty to Mawhinney as she swabbed the table with her smock.

"How do you like it?" she asked Hasty.

"It's peculiar. I've lost my legs."

"You won't be able to walk. Neither of you. I'm going out now, Mr. Mawhinney. It's past eleven."

Lester Mawhinney wagged his pink, elfin head.

"You're abandoning ship?" he demanded.

Sincera said: "You can sleep down here tonight with your big friend. Neighbor Jack will wake you up tomorrow. Good-night, Mr. Mawhinney." She looked at Hasty soberly. "You'll see, you can't walk. Goodnight."

After she was gone they began drinking seriously.

It might have been five hours or five minutes later when Hasty remembered the purpose of his visit. His head still felt marvelously clear. Little Lester Mawhinney was crooning a lilting lullaby to himself. The gin bottle was empty and dry when Lester deliberately tapped on the table.

"Wouldst care to be guest and sleep here tonight?"

"I wouldst indeed," said Hasty. "If I canst walk." He slid carefully to the edge of the booth and stood up—on his knees. His legs refused to function, and he remained on hands and knees, laughing softly. "How do we get upstairs?"

"I dunno." Lester slid to the floor and they both crawled laboriously to the back of the room. Twice Hasty tried to stand up, and each time he landed on his head with a resounding thump. Afterward, he

realized that the thumping helped keep him awake.

From the wall Lester secured some block and tackle and after much explanation Hasty got an iron hook through an eye splice and tied a bowline around Lester's tiny frame. The elf giggled.

"Now what?"

"We hoist ourselves upstairs," said Hasty.

He found he could reach four steps up, and by using the hook on the bannister and arranging a simple pulley tackle, he hoisted Lester up to the level of the hook and block. He was sweating quite a bit when Mawhinney reversed the procedure, reached the hook to the eighth step, dropped the bowline down to Hasty and pulled feebly. Hasty slowly crawled upstairs, passed Lester, and repeated the maneuver, hauling the little man above him.

They were almost to the top of the stairs when they paused to rest. It was then that Hasty recalled what he wanted to learn. He said:

"One moment, Laster. What happened when the company wouldn't give Hilding Seastrom the couple of hundred grand he needed?"

There was a glazed look on Lester's round, pink face.

"He took it."

"From where?"

"He took the company's money."

Hasty considered this. "You mean he stole two hundred thousand dollars from the Sea Pride Company?"

"Yurp. Ruined my nice books, too. Threw the balance way off." Mawhinney hiccupped. "Excuse me, but I think I'm going to be a bit ill."

Hasty persisted: "Did they get the money back?"

"Nope."

"Is that why they won't let the crew take anything off the *Thetis*?"

Lester's answer was a long, whinnying snore. Hasty shook him, but the chief bookkeeper of Sea Pride was fast asleep. Hasty cursed in a low, tired monotone. He decided he was very drunk and was annoyed at his legs, for not working. He

hauled himself up by the bannister, gasping, reached the top of the stairs and crawled laboriously down the little corridor, proceeding to the bathroom on hands and knees.

After much effort he turned on the cold-water spigot in the bathtub and held his head under the icy stream. The shock revived him a little and he plugged in the drain. The bathtub filled rapidly. When there was enough water inside he turned off the spigot, muttering to himself, and jack-knifed face-down into the tub. He almost drowned before he managed to get his legs over the side and in. The cold water made his whole body scream, but after a moment he could flex his legs. That helped. After another moment, sobering rapidly, he crawled weakly out and at last stood, swaying and shivering, on his two feet.

He took off all his clothes and put them on a radiator, dried himself thoroughly, and waited for his pants to dry. It was long after midnight when he went downstairs. Lester Mawhinney was curled in cozy sleep on the stairway. Hasty made him fast to the bannister with the bowline and left him there.

The moon was down when he got into his car and drove toward Eastern Point and Laurie Adams' house.

THE living-room of the Adams house was on the English pattern, long and narrow, with raftered ceilings. There was a huge stone fireplace, a gray couch, an inlaid coffee table on which a copper coffee pot of Persian design steamed gently. There was warmth and tradition in the marine painting over the hearth and the small but priceless Oriental rug on the peach stucco wall.

Laurie Adams suited her home. Perhaps she had deliberately molded herself to blend with its tradition, or perhaps she had been born to it. Her head was small and finely shaped, and the coronet of silky black hair lent a regal touch to her appearance. Her hazel eyes and smile were only a little strained. She smoked a cigarette like a man, her hands jammed flat in the pockets of her gray flannel slacks. Her perfume made Hasty think of

autumn and the tang of burning leaves drifting through the woods.

She offered him a drink and he shuddered, accepting coffee instead. He stood with his back to the glowing fire, like a dark, tall satyr.

"Has Kirk come home yet?" he asked.

"He was here when I got back. But I wish you wouldn't see him now, Hasty. He's very upset. I made him lie down, upstairs."

"I'm afraid I must talk with him," said Hasty.

Her hands moved in a faint gesture. "You always were a brutally frank beast, Hasty Akers. Let the boy alone. He's only a child."

"He's man enough to run you both into debt," Hasty said flatly.

She sat down and studied her quiet hands in her lap. Her eyes were far away. A spark crackled loudly in the gently glowing fireplace.

"There are a lot of things you don't know, Hasty. Some of them I wish you would never know. But someone will tell you, anyway, and I'd rather it be from me." She lifted her head suddenly, staring at his dark figure. "Kirk isn't upset so much about the debts to Hilding. It's about Cassandra Leigh . . . and Hilding."

Hasty put down his coffee cup very deliberately. "Yes?"

"I just learned of it today. And Kirk hates me because of it."

"Hates you?"

"He thinks I could have prevented Hilding from bothering Cassandra. He thinks I could have influenced him and made him let the girl alone."

Hasty said impatiently: "You couldn't tell Hilding what to do. It's not as if you were married to him and had a legal right to stop his philandering."

Laurie's voice was very soft. "That's just it. I did have the right. Hilding was my husband. We were married two months ago. Kirk knew about it."

Hasty didn't move a muscle. His eyes watched the girl's still figure as she leaned forward a little on the couch before the fire. He could hear the sea wind sighing softly in the trees outside; he





Hasty clung to the rigging, hearing a wild shriek as the mighty sea swept over.

could hear the fire, crackling softly behind his back.

The girl didn't look at him. After a long time she said:

"You can see what a fool I've been."

"It changes a lot of things about the murder," he said. "As executrix of the estate, those debts aren't important any more."

"They never were important. I went to the Seastrom house tonight because of Cassie Leigh. I was really following Kirk. I was afraid he would learn just how much—how bad Hilding was. Kirk was also upset because of my marriage to Hilding. Hilding had told me to keep it a secret because he expected to make a great coup in the stock market and have

a grand reopening for his house. You know how he felt about perpetuating his family and restoring the Seastrom fortune."

Hasty's eyes were alert and puzzled, watching the girl's quiet, relaxed figure. Her words seemed shallow and meaningless. She seemed to be waiting for him to say something, and for a long moment there was no sound except the ticking of a grandfather clock in the hall outside the room.

Then Laurie Adams said: "I wish you would tell me something, Hasty. I wish I knew who really killed Hilding, and I think you know."

"You mean you think I did it," he said.

"No. I want to know if Kirk did it. He had just as much chance aboard the *Thetis* as you did, remember."

Hasty said: "In addition to being a philanderer, Hilding stole a couple of hundred thousand dollars from the Sea Pride Company. He had it in cash. I don't know whether he took it aboard the *Thetis*, but I'm inclined to think he did. That would let Kirk out, if Hilding was killed for the money. Kirk wouldn't murder for money; and he didn't know about Cassie then."

Then Kirk Adams spoke from the doorway, startling them:

"I didn't know for sure, but I suspected the ——"

THE boy had been drinking all night, and his eyes had a hot, hollow light behind their wide pupils. His clothing was muddied and torn, and he wore no shoes. He stood swaying in the doorway, his breathing heavy.

Laurie said sharply: "Kirk, you'll drive yourself crazy this way!"

The blond boy paid no attention to his sister. "I suspected it on the *Thetis*," he said hoarsely, "but I didn't know what I know now. I'd have killed him myself, if I did."

Hasty said quietly: "Cassie will turn up all right. She's in Maine, isn't that what you said?"

Kirk's eyes flashed momentarily to Laurie's taut, tall figure.

"Yes, that's what I said. But she isn't in Maine. I checked. I asked everybody. Some folks saw her driving around with Hilding Seastrom when he was up here two weeks ago. But she hasn't been seen since. She told her family she was going to Maine, and I haven't told them yet that she isn't there. She isn't anywhere. I've looked all over, and she's gone. Just gone. I can't find her."

Kirk's eyes were filled with blinding tears. Hasty looked at Laurie, who nodded faintly, then he took a long stride toward the boy.

"You'd better get some sleep Kirk."

"I can't. I've got to find her, and she's gone. Just gone!"

Hasty said: "You'll get some sleep now."

He struck just hard enough to knock him out. Kirk looked surprised, then his knees buckled and he crumpled forward. Hasty caught him and stretched his slender length on the couch. He spoke to Laurie.

"Give him a sedative the moment he starts coming to. Keep him sleeping for twenty-four hours—otherwise he'll wind up insane."

The girl nodded, just as the telephone rang. The bell tinkled imperatively and she hesitated before picking it up. She listened for a moment, then turned the phone over to Hasty.

"It's for you. It's the marshal."

Tucker's voice had lost its sleepiness. He sounded brisk.

"This is important, Hasty. I thought I might find you at Laurie's, and I'm glad I did. I thought you might have run away."

"Why should I run away?" Hasty rapped sharply.

"Did you go to see Lester Mawhinney tonight?"

"Why?"

"It's important," the town lawman said. That girl, Sincera, says she left you both drunk at Neighbor Jack's. Is that right?"

"Why have you been talking to her? What's the matter?"

"Well," the marshal said, "Lester is dead. Somebody wrapped a line around his neck and left him hanging from the

stair bannister. He choked to death. To me, it looks like murder."

Hasty snapped: "It is. I'll be right over."

CHAPTER V

Death's Third Strike

TO JUDY RANDALL, the car looked and drove like a hearse. It was a huge black sedan, formerly used as a local undertaker's limousine, and it cost her three dollars an hour. The garageman had rented it not without obvious reluctance and disapproval. She sat up high on a cushion behind the wheel, peering at the winding road before her. It was after two in the morning.

She was angry, both at herself and Hasty Akers. She was furious at the big lug for leaving her in jail with Marshal Tucker while he went off uncovering clues that made Hilding Seastrom's true character traits look like crawly things you find under a rock.

The road was incredibly lonely and deserted, crossing the wild interior of Cape Ann. The broad highway that followed the meandering Annisquam River wasn't bad as far as it went—but she was forced to turn off in following the garageman's directions. Now she had difficulty tracing the rutted dirt road into Dogtown Common—a bleak and desolate area of hilly brush and ancient glacial boulders. Dogtown Common, as she learned from brochures picked up in the hotel lobby, reeked with the tradition of early settlers. But looking at it in the wee hours of the morning, Judy decided they had given it back to the Indians and the Indians had refused to accept it again. She didn't in the least blame them.

The last house was well behind her when she found the cut-off. The rock marker was just as the garageman had described it—a flat plane of granite with faded white letters inscribed on its face by an overly zealous local philosopher.

"*Seek and ye shall find,*" Judy read. "Let's hope so."

The road was almost invisible, climbing an embankment and plunging deep into the woods. She was on high land now,

in the center of the Cape, but the trees cut off any glimpse of the surrounding sea. The loneliness was oppressive.

Hilding Seastrom's hunting shack was built in lean-to style against an outcropping of glacial rock. It looked deserted and mournful in the starlight. Judy stopped the big sedan and sat there listening; without the motion of the car the wilderness closed in with a long stride, reaching for her. She was reluctant to leave the familiarity of the big sedan.

She didn't know what she expected to find here, but poking into Hilding Seastrom's past looked profitable, even if unpleasant. At least, she reflected, the garageman knew where she was; and if she failed to return with his precious wagon, he would certainly be after her before long. The thought was comforting and balanced a very sensible fear of being stranded in this dreary wilderness. She got out of the car.

THE shack had a tiny, rickety porch with two broken-down Boston rockers and empty windows boarded up with two-by-fours. The starlit shadows were silent. The door opened at a touch and she entered quickly—

The hands that grabbed her, clapping across her mouth, were hard and horny. The shock of surprise and terror made her knees weak, but instinct helped her lash out, kicking with all her strength. The man was short and slight and breathed hard. His eyes were white and wild in the darkness. Fear was a screaming wildcat inside her.

It took a moment to realize that the man was pleading with her. His voice was ragged and rasping. "Please, lady! Please, stop!"

The hand over her mouth was slowly withdrawn. She recognized the little man now in the dim light that filtered through the doorway. It was Joaquim Fialho, the cook on the *Thetis*.

"What are you doing here, lady?" he whispered.

She felt her breathing return to normal. She said slowly: "What are you doing here?"

"I look for Doody Walsh. The skipper think he might be here."

Judy's courage was fast returning as she forgot the enormous strength in the little man's arms. Her voice turned aggressive.

"Why should you both be prowling around this place?"

"I dunno. Cap'n Bowhead send me here is all I know, lady."

"What's inside?" she demanded.

Fright and terror lived in the Portugee's eyes.

"You not go in there, lady! Please!"

"Why not?" The chill that raced up her back was nothing compared to her curiosity. "I'm going in, anyway."

"You go in yourself, then," the little man warned.

The Portugee backed slowly away, then, amazingly, he broke and ran, his figure vanishing into the nearby underbrush. An auto, hidden on the road beyond the shack, started with a grinding of gears, then slowly faded away until its echoes were lost among the desolate woods. She was alone.

Judy turned very slowly to look inside the cottage. Her flashlight showed a wicker chair, a couch, a straw throw-rug, a rustic table. She took a deep breath and crossed into the tiny kitchen. There was nothing unusual here, either. A wood stove, a broken table, a barrel. The barrel was empty.

There was a ladder-like stairway reaching to the second floor. She mounted the steps silently, and didn't see anything out of the way at first. There was a studio couch covered with an old Indian blanket and a battered walnut dresser. The closet was empty. The windows had been shattered long ago, and the air blowing through felt chilly and damp.

Then she saw the foot that thrust from under a pile of old blankets and comforters in the corner. It was a girl's foot, wearing a red leather pump that was foolishly gay. It didn't move.

She knew the rest of it then, but she had to be sure. She lifted the topmost blanket just a little, her hand shaking, shuddering inwardly.

She didn't look at the dead girl long.

Judy stifled a little scream, then turned and blindly groped her way downstairs again. Somewhere on the way she lost her flashlight, and the resulting darkness made her way out a path of horror. She couldn't think. She couldn't breathe. She stumbled outside to the path and her car and then, as she afterward described it, did a very foolish thing.

She fainted.

MARSHAL TUCKER'S office was warm and sunny the next morning, with bright bars of light laddered across the floor from the Venetian blinds. The little marshal looked as placid as ever, although he had not been to sleep at all that night. Cap'n Bowhead was mountainously inscrutable in a heavy leather chair at one side of his desk. Hasty, sitting opposite him, looked strained from the all-night, questioning he had undergone. Just now his eyes were half closed and Tucker's voice was a droning monotone in his ears.

"So Mawhinney told you all about the missing money, did he?"

Hasty's answers had become crystallized from constant repetition.

"You know I didn't kill him, marshal."

Cap'n Bowhead stirred his bulk a little. "Understand, Hasty, I'm trying to help you. But it looks bad for you. First Hilding, then Lester Mawhinney. If Lester told you anything else, you ought to yet the marshal know."

Marshal Tucker added: "We knew Hilding had absconded with a cool quarter million, Hasty. We were keepin' it quiet, thinkin' the murderer would feel safe and take it ashore. But we have no trace of it yet."

"We've been over this before," Hasty said. "I've told you how it was. I left Lester lashed to the stair bannister. I made sure he was comfortable, and he most certainly was not hanging by the neck when I left him. No matter how he might have slipped, fallen or wriggled in his sleep, I made certain he couldn't have hanged himself. Unfortunately, Sincera wasn't there when I left. She went out about eleven."

Cap'n Bowhead said heavily: "The girl

says you were both so drunk you couldn't walk. How are you so sure of what you did when you left there?"

"I was sober then," Hasty said patiently. "You can check with Laurie Adams as to what time I showed up at her house—and in what condition."

"Why did you go to the Adams house?" Tucker asked.

"I was concerned about Kirk, that's all."

The town marshal folded his fat little hands over his fat little paunch and suddenly smiled. "I'm inclined to think Mawhinney's death was accidental, in a way. Somebody followed you there, and I think this somebody went in after you left and tried to question Lester about you—what you wanted to know and what you learned. Somebody is desperately afraid of you, Hasty. When Mawhinney wouldn't answer—bein' in a drunken coma—maybe this somebody slapped him around a little, maybe accidentally broke his neck. So to cover himself and frame you, this party rigged the tackle to make it look as if you left little Lester hangin' himself to death."

Hasty said: "Then you're not charging me with murder?"

"I've only been questioning you, son."

"Am I free to go now?"

"In a moment." The marshal raised his voice and called: "Sincera!"

The little Italian girl came in. She still wore her faded blue smock and her eyes swung maliciously to Hasty. She said, grinning: "Hi, rummy," and waited.

The marshal said: "Is this the man with Lester last night?"

"Yes, sir." She kept looking at Hasty. "You sure can put that stuff away. I woulda bet you wasn't able to walk."

"I couldn't," said Hasty. "Not at first."

The marshal asked: "Have you thought over all the customers you had at Neighbor Jack's last night, Sincera?"

"Sure. You were right, Mr. Tucker. Two were from the *Thetis*. McWilliams and Joe Fialho, the Portugee. They were in about nine o'clock."

Cap'n Bowhead grunted. "Were they looking for Mr. Mawhinney?"

"They were looking for Doody, they

said. They left right away. Then McWilliams came back alone, but he didn't stay long. He looked as if he was waiting for somebody, but he went out by himself. He gave me a tip."

Tucker looked dissatisfied. "All right, Sincera, you can go now."

The dark little girl stood still. "Where shall I go, Mr. Tucker? Mr. Mawhinney used to take care of me. He gave me a home. I don't have any place to go now."

The marshal said briskly: "All right, Sincera, you go down and see the matron. She'll take care of you for the time being."

It was a matter of complete indifference to the girl. She turned to the door, looked at Hasty, said: "So long, rummy," and went out.

The marshal coughed. "Let's have Laurie Adams in next. We'll take her with Joe Fialho."

LAURIE was wearing a tweed skirt and a cardigan sweater and her perfume was still woodsy. She used no lipstick. She preceded Fialho into the warm, sunlit office and took a nail-studded leather chair.

Tucker said: "We have a few questions to ask Fialho, Mrs. Seastrom, to see if he can repeat the answers he gave before."

Laurie Adams nodded. She seemed disinterested.

Tucker turned to the Portugee. "You're the first one who found Cassie Leigh's body?"

The Portugee licked his lips. "I did, yes, Mr. Tucker. I go to Hilding's shack, as I tell you, because Cap'n Bowhead wants Doody and he say for me to try there. He say Doody may be looking there for IOU's he gave Hilding. This does not seem honest to me, this stealing from a dead man, but it is not my business. So I go there for Doody. But mostly I think of Kirk. I know Hilding is friends with Miss Leigh and I worry in case Kirk find out about it and get in trouble talking too much.

"So I go to the shack in Dogtown Common. Cap'n Bowhead, he tell me to try everyplace I can think of where Hilding

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Remake for Death

BY SOME minor miracle there was a parking spot at the curb almost directly in front of the restaurant. I jockeyed my jalopy in the hole, slid out from behind my wheel. Then this under-sized punk sidled at me, trying to look tough.

He was a sallow jerk in a fawn topcoat that hung loosely from his narrow shoulders the way his lower lip hung from his kisser. He had dark blue circles under his glims and an automatic of the same color in his left duke. The roscoe's muzzle just barely peeped from his coat pocket



Me, Dan Turner, I don't c&rave to have tough-acting jerks warning me to keep away from anybody, even a top-shot executive like Lew Boxer—but when it stems off into murder, Jap spies, or saboteurs, then I'm apt to blow high and mean

By
**ROBERT
LESLIE
BELLEM**

The moute biggie shivered. "I came to kill her. But she was dead when I walked in."



so I could see it, but not enough to attract the attention of anybody else passing by.

"All right, sport," he said almost inaudibly. "You know what a bullet can do to a guy's guts. So freeze—unless you

want it to happen to yours."

You don't expect to step into a stickup in broad daylight, especially in the heart of Hollywood's shopping district—unless you happen to be in my business, of course. Then you never know what's liable to pop up. It's part of the game.

I stood still, waited for the punk to make his next move.

He said: "You're Dan Turner," as if he figured I needed the information.

"So I've heard," I said.

"You're a private snoop."

"I've heard that, too."

"You've got a lunch date with Lew Boxer," he said. "Production chief of Paratone Pictures. He phoned you to meet him here."

I said: "News gets around," and reached for a gasper.

His rod snaked out another inch. "Don't go for your gat, chump. I'll blast you if you try."

"I just wanted a smoke, was all," I showed him my pack and carefully selected a coffin nail, stuck it in my face. I didn't set fire to it, though.

The jerk growled: "Stay away from Lew Boxer."

"Why?"

"Because I say so. Now pull your freight, bub."

"Okay," I rolled the king-size pill between my front teeth. "I never liked Lew much, anyhow. *Phoooo!*" And I blew a terrific breath through the little white tube.

It was loaded with pepper instead of tobacco, and the grains hit the punk full in the optics. He clawed at his map with both mitts, tears spurting through his fingers. "My eyes. My eyes!"

I BOPPED him on the gullet with the edge of my hand to paralyze his voice, keep him from drawing a crowd. Next I ground my brogan down on his instep, slid the automatic from his pocket to mine in one quick motion. Then I opened the door of my bucket, bunted him into it. Nobody even stopped to glom a gander.

He hunkered forward on the seat, pawed his streaming peepers. I thrust my noggin inside the coupe and said con-

versationally: "Never monkey with a buzz saw. Didn't they teach you that in reform school?"

His throat was too disjointed for him to talk above a whisper. "Cripes! You've blinded me!"

"Temporarily," I grunted. "You're lucky my gadget wasn't full of acid. Who hired you to scare me away from Lew Boxer?"

"I can't see. My eyes—"

I said: "Spill before I bend your neck like a pretzel. Who was behind this caper?"

Instead of answering, he doubled over and went limp.

I cursed, shut the door on him, ankled toward the corner looking for a cop. Maybe the sallow jerk would need a trip to the hospital before he could be made to sing, I reflected glumly. That was up to the police, not me. I reached the intersection, glanced around.

There wasn't a harness bull in sight. There never is when you want one in a hurry.

I decided to go back to the restaurant, use their phone, call for a radio cruiser to pick up the punk. When I got to my chariot, though, he was gone. I'd been away less than four minutes, but it was long enough for him to quit playing possum and lam.

Even as I looked up I piped a Chrysler station wagon making a U-turn in the middle of the block against traffic rules. There was a jane at the wheel, young, red-haired, competent; she tooled the gaudy buggy like a veteran. The gunsel in the fawn topcoat sat behind her, still knuckling his glims. Neat gold lettering on the door of the station wagon read: *Paratone Ranch.*

"So," I said. I took the jerk's roscoe out of my pocket, kept it covered so it wouldn't scare anybody. It was an unloaded Luger with a metal tag fastened to the knurled grip.

Anger seeped into my nooks and cranies. I wheeled, went hotfooting into the cafe, pegged Lew Boxer sitting in a side booth waiting for me. He was a chunky slug with tight, curly black hair hugging his conk like a skullcap. His threads were

expensive and he had the shadowy blue jowls of a guy who has to shave twice a day or look like a beachcomber.

He had a brunette cutie with him, a gorgeous dish in a sweater ensemble that would have sent the Hays office into hysterics. In addition to possessing the kind of curves that go best with a sweater, she wore just enough makeup to let you know her skin didn't really need that kind of assistance. She was a knock-out.

Boxer spotted me, stood up, beckoned. "Hiya, Dan. I want you to meet Miss Velve Vantyne. Baby, this is Dan Turner, the cleverest dick since Philo Vance."

"How do you do, Mr. Turner?" she purred low in her throat and turned her glowing dark glims on me full blast. If she was putting the vamp on me, though, it was unintentional. She was the kind that couldn't help making you think of soft lights and scented sofas.

I said: "Scram, sister."

"Wh-what?"

"You heard me. I want to talk to Lew. Alone."

She stared at Boxer. "Am I being ribbed?"

"Sure," he put a sickly grin on his puss. "Dan's a great kidder. Always clowning."

I kept looking at the brunette cupcake. "Do you scram or do I heave you out?"

She flowed up on her feet. Her movements were fluid, graceful, like oil being poured. "Well, really!" she purred. She didn't act indignant or outraged, however; she didn't pout. She was as smooth as her curves. "I'll go to the little girls' room and paint on a new mouth. Maybe you'll like me better."

"Maybe," I didn't commit myself. "Right now all I crave from you is a copious quantity of absence. Good-bye, please."

She gave me the puzzled focus, then shrugged and took a powder. A lot of guys glued the glimpse on her as she headed for the rear of the joint. I was one of them. I drew a tingle out of the way her sleek contour rippled when she walked. That knitted ensemble clung as if it had been painted on with a spray gun.

WHEN she was out of view, I shoved my pan close to Lew Boxer's and said: "What you need is a smack in the snoot."

He tried to look innocent. "Why? What's biting you?"

"This," I pulled out the gat I'd taken from the sallow punk. "I ought to cram it up your nostril."

"But—but—"

"I won't be shoved around." I said. "Even if it's only a gag. I don't like somebody to hire some punk actor to toss a scare in me. I don't scare worth a damn."

"Meaning what?"

"The jerk knew too much about your phone call inviting me to lunch. You must have told him. He powdered in a Paratone station wagon. And this heater has a metal tag that says Paratone prop department."

Boxer flashed his white grinders. "All right. So he was a bit player working for me. I figured your natural stubbornness would make you take this job I'm offering you if someone tried to steer you away with a gun."

"Shove your job," I growled. "I'm not interested."

He said: "How do you know you're not? You haven't let me tell you what it is. Or how much it pays." He pulled his wallet, counted out ten crisp fifties, pushed them across the table at me. When I didn't reach for the geetus he peeled off ten more. "A grand in advance. Is that hay?"

"You must want somebody creamed," I said.

No. I want you to protect someone from getting creamed."

"Who?"

He said: "First let me explain. I'm about to begin production on a remake of *Yellow Invasion*. Remember it?"

"Yeah," I frowned. "You must be going nutty."

"Nothing's nutty if it makes a profit. Lots of the old silent hits have been successfully re-filmed as talkies."

He was right about that. But *Yellow Invasion* had a hex on it. The original silent version, back in the mid-twenties, had starred a matinee idol named Hiro Sayakamo, who'd been at the top of the

Hollywood heap despite the fact that he was Japanese—or maybe because of it, for the novelty. As the pic's final scene was being shot, this Sayakamo had croaked a supporting actor, one Lanny Vann, for making passes at his wife. Then he had deliberately committed hari-kiri in front of the grinding cameras.

Those two deaths were what had made *Yellow Invasion* a success at the box office; people had paid to see it just out of morbid curiosity. Aside from that, it had been just another silent thriller. I said so to Lew Boxer.

He gave me an argument. "You're wrong, Hawkshaw. It had some good stuff in it. I ought to know. I was assistant director on the set when Sayakamo bumped himself off."

"That was twenty years ago," I said. "You can't capitalize on it now. The present generation won't even remember the guy."

"Somebody remembers him. I've had three anonymous notes warning me not to remake the opus. The threats were aimed at the girl who's to play the lead. My fiancée."

"Who is she?"

"Velva Vantyne," he said somberly.

Then, just as he spoke the brunette quail's name, there came a she-male scream from the rear of the restaurant.

I SAID: "What the hell—!" and leaped from Boxer's booth, went hurtling toward the back of the joint with the Paratone mogul at my heels. That scream had sounded like the genuine article. There had been fear in it. And pain.

You don't stand on ceremony in a case like that. I catapulted at the door reserved for dames, yanked it open, lunged over the threshold.

The first person I piped was an Oriental chick in maid's uniform, complete with lace cap pinned to her slicked-back ebony hair and a frilly white excuse for an apron fronting the black satin costume. Her skirt was knee-length, flaring, and she had the typically short stems of the average Asiatic cookie. They were shapey enough to command a second swivel,

however; and the bodice of her uniform was plumply filled out.

But it was her map I studied most. Her almond glims were sullen, smoky, and there were finger marks on her left cheek where she had taken a stinger across the chops. Her yapper was open, ready to give vent to another banshee bleat.

Nearby, with red-lacquered fingernails all set to rake furrows down the Oriental wren's puss, stood the luscious Velva Vantyne. I grabbed her, pinioned her so she couldn't move; tightened my grip and said: "Ix-nay, sister. It's impolite to brawl with the help."

"Let go of me. I'll show her she can't try to stab me with her manicure scissors!"

The slant-eyed cookie stiffened, looked shocked, then put a blank mask on her map. "That's a lie," she said in quiet English with no trace of accent. "I don't even know this woman. Why would I try to stab her? I was minding my own business, folding some towels, when she yanked me around and slapped me."

A lot of guys and dolls were clustered at the open doorway by that time, craning their necks to see what the hell cooked. Pretty soon there would be reporters on the job, hunting headlines. In Hollywood you find gossip columnists under every loose rock.

Lew Boxer drew his wallet, separated a fifty from his depleted stack, thrust it at the maid. "Forget it, kiddo. It was all a joke. Buy yourself a cigar." Then he hauled the Vantyne goddess from my grasp, steered her toward the door. I heard him whisper: "Haven't I warned you to control your temper, sweet? This isn't the kind of publicity we need."

The curious customers parted, let us through. We barged back to our booth where Boxer got his hat and the thousand clams I had left on the table. He handed me the lettuce. "Let's beat it out of here, Sherlock. Drive us to the studio."

"Okay," I said reluctantly.

We scrambled out the front entrance, stopping just long enough to pay the check and fee a head waiter whose questions drew him no satisfaction. Then we

Blam! Something maced me across the back of the conk with terrific force.



wedged ourselves into my heap, Velva between us, and I pulled away from the curb. Nobody said anything until we all ankled inside the brunette wren's lavish private dressing bungalow on the Paratone lot ten minutes later. There Velva narrowed her sultry glims at Boxer.

"So you think it was my temper," she purred.

He said: "I've seen you manhandle servants before. And a few who weren't servants, but guys who were gone on you."

She lifted a gorgeous shoulder. "All right. I lied when I said that maid tried to stab me. I picked the fight myself. You admit we need publicity."

"Not that kind."

"Oh, no? Well you're wrong. The girl was Ruth Sayakamo."

"What?"

"I said it plainly enough. Hiro Sayakamo's daughter."

I dipped my oar into the dialogue. "You

mean it was her papa that butchered himself in the silent version of this pic you're going to remake?"

"Yes," Velva drawled.

Boxer said: "But that's fantastic! All the Japs have been moved off the west coast since the war started!"

"But some have been brought back," Velva countered. "Or maybe this girl is passing as Chinese, who knows?"

I MADE an impatient mouth. "So all right, but what the hell has that got to do with you taking a pop at her?"

"Well, since we had been threatened by anonymous notes concerning our movie, I thought I'd make capital of it. As soon as I recognized Miss Sayakamo, I had a hunch she might have sent us those warnings. So I pretended she had attacked me."

"Why?" I persisted.

"So that we could have her arrested and perhaps force her to confess. At

least it would have made headlines."

I said: "Suppose she didn't write the threats?"

"We'd still have our headlines," Velva purred indolently.

This was too much for me. She'd been willing to fasten a frame on the almond-eyed cupcake, guilty or innocent, for the sake of a front page break. I growled: "Sister, it stinks. Maybe the wren is an American-born Jap and maybe she isn't; I've only got your word for it that she's the late unlamented Sayakamo's kid. As a matter of fact, she looked more like a Chinese to me. That's beside the point."

"Then what is the point?" Velva smiled.

"The point is I don't believe any of it."

"Meaning—?"

"I don't think there ever were any anonymous warnings, for one thing," I snapped. "That was just another gag for publicity purposes—and I'm fed up with gags."

"Really?"

"Yeah, commencing with the guy that tried to scare me with a property Luger." I turned, started toward the door. "The hell with it."

Boxer blocked me. "Wait a minute, Dan. I—"

"One side, bub," I grunted.

"No, please wait. I've paid you a thousand dollars to look out for Velva—"

"She seems perfectly capable of taking care of herself."

He held out his mitt. "Don't be that way, gumshoe. You mustn't throw me down now. Besides I can prove we received those threats I mentioned. Look, I'll get them for you." He turned to the brunette wren. "Better start dressing, honey. We'll be ready to go on the set pretty soon."

"Yes, darling," she drawled.

He hauled bunions and I started to follow him. I was plenty peeved. But the Vantyne tomato undulated toward me and said: "Wait, handsome. I've got something to tell you."

"Make it snappy," I grated impatiently.

She made a petulant mouth at me. "Maybe I deserve your suspicions. I wish I could make you believe the truth, though."

"What truth?"

"That I'm really in danger if Lew persists in remaking *Yellow Invasion*."

I said: "If the jeopardy is genuine, why go to so damned much trouble to hook me in? Why not let it stand on its merits?"

"We were afraid you'd think the real story too fantastic. For one thing, there's a modern war angle in the scenario—Jap atrocity stuff. Naturally the Japanese government doesn't want that sort of thing screened—if they can prevent it."

"You sound like a dime novel," I said.

"All right. Disregard it. But here's something you can't disregard. Japs are crazy on the subject of family honor. You know what happened in the picture's silent version."

"Yeah, Hiro Sayakamo bumped an actor named Lanny Vann and then stuck a shiv in his own clockworks. So what?"

"Lanny Vann's real name was Vantyne," the brunette dish whispered. "He was my father."

"*Hunh?*"

"Now you know why I think I'm in danger, if not from Jap secret agents, then maybe from some fanatic member of Sayakamo's family holding a blood grudge." She reached for the zipper of her costume. "You can go outside a minute now. I've got to change my clothes and . . . I don't want you to think I'm trying to bribe you."

THAT brand of bribery was no longer necessary. What she'd just told me had sounded plenty sincere; had convinced me she needed a bodyguard—or thought she did. It amounted to the same thing. And I could think of nothing nicer than guarding a body like hers, particularly for a thousand hermans.

So I said: "Okay, Tutz, it's a deal."

"You—you mean you'll protect me in—in case—"

"Yeah," I said, and blew her a kiss; turned toward the door. "Maybe you can think up some nice way to reward me when the danger's over," I added, picking up a black chiffon stocking from the bureau and pretending to admire it so she'd catch my dirty drift.

She said: "If that's a leer in your voice, skip it. I don't play that way. Besides, Lew's so jealous he'd probably kill me if he caught me even looking at another man."

"My mistake, sweet stuff," I said, and put the stocking back on the bureau; ankled out of the igloo—

Blam! Something maced me across the back of the conk with terrific force and a bomb went off inside my think-tank. The ground lifted up, slugged me on the smeller. I rolled over, piped a pair of she-male tootsies twinkling into motion; going away fast. The tootsies wore curious woden sandals with built-up soles; that was the last memory I carried with me to dreamland. When I woke up I was knee deep in a murder mess.

SOMEBODY siphoned a charge of Bourbon past my tonsils, snapped me conscious. I blinked my blurry peepers, saw I'd been lugged back inside Velva Vantyne's dressing bungalow during my snooze. I was on the floor with a lump the size of a baseball festooning my scalp. A brawny bozo was bending over me, breathing his halitosis in my kisser. He was my friend Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad.

I mumbled: "Go chew a clove. You're gassing me."

"You'll sniff a worse kind of gas unless you can explain the thread of black chiffon we found under your fingernail, Hawkshaw. It matches the material that did the dirty work."

I propped myself up, copped a foggy gander past him and came damned near tossing my caramels. On the far side of the room lay Velva Vantyne, throttled by a sheer black stocking which had been twisted into a makeshift rope around her throat. Her puss was livid, her glims bulged like oysters on the half shell, and her tongue protruded as grey as a length of liverwurst. She was deader than false whiskers.

The joint bulged with bulls. A medical examiner had just finished inspecting the late lulu's remainders and was ordering her carted off to the morgue. Lew Boxer stood at the doorway looking stark crazy.

"Good heavens!" he kept moaning. "Why don't you do something for her? Adrenalin—a pulmotor—"

The medico snapped: "Her neck's broken. You can't patch that with chewing gum, brother. Better buy yourself a bromide."

"I'll buy myself a gun!" Boxer whirled toward me with killery in his peepers. I think he'd have bumped me then and there if he'd had a roscoe handy.

I staggered to my pins. "Lay off, dope. I didn't strangle your sweetie. All I did was pick up one of her stockings for a gag; probably snagged it with my nail. That explains the chiffon thread. It was all perfectly innocent."

"You tired to make passes at her and you call that innocent? Why, damn your eyes—"

I said: "The pass was merely verbal and it bounced off. She was too loyal to you. She ordered me out of the cottage and then I got bopped on the sconce by some jane wearing wooden sandals—that gives me an idea!" I loped at the door.

DAVE DONALDSON tried to tackle me. "You're under arrest, Philo. You aren't going any place except the gow."

"That's what you think," I said. I made a regretful fist, nailed him on the button. What I craved was freedom in copious quantities. Somebody had tried to glue a murder rap on me and I wanted the personal satisfaction of collaring the killer. It was a job I couldn't undertake while languishing in the bastille, so I dumped Dave on his hip pockets; catapulted out of the bungalow.

I raced hellity-blip to my jalopy on the studio parking lot. It had a funny tilt when I reached it; the right rear tire was as flat as a cop's instep. "Oh, for the love of muck!" I moaned.

Then I noticed a gaudy chariot parked alongside; a Chrysler station wagon with *Paratone Ranch* lettered on its door. It was the one that had made the illegal U-turn against downtown traffic a while ago, carrying off the fallow gused in the fawn topcoat. And the red-haired jane who had driven it then was still at the



wheel now, stepping on the starter and getting ready to go somewhere.

I rasped: "Hold it, babe," and made for her. Close up, she was even prettier than she'd seemed when I caught that fleeting swivel at her in front of the restaurant. Her short-cut bob was the color of sunrise and her profile piquant, irregular. She wore a military tunic and skirt cut from some sort of green whipcord material tailored to stress her boyish slimness, and the word *Paratone* was sewn on the lapels.

She turned slightly pallid around the edges when she tabbed me coming. Her mitts got nervous on the gear shift and her blue glims opened wide, startled. "Oh-h-h . . . !" she gasped.

"You a studio driver?" I clipped out, remembering something I had heard about Lew Boxer trying an innovation in the form of she-male chauffeurs.

She gulped, nodded. "Sandra Shane. But listen, Mr. Turner. You mustn't—

I didn't m-mean—"

I bounced in alongside her and said: "Okay, Sandra. Forget the formalities and tickle this heap. I've got places to go, people to see. You're elected."

"But—but I'm taking Tommy home from the studio infirmary. I can't—"

"Who the hell is Tommy?"

"Tommy Hardesty. His eyes—"

From behind me a masculine voice said: "You might have blinded me with that fake cigarette, you know." The tone was pleasant, held no rancor, but I jumped two feet when I heard it. I twisted around, saw the sallow punk slumped down on a rear seat below window level. Horn-rimmed black cheaters hid his inflamed optics. You could tell he had some of his vision back, though. He added: "Not that I blame you, Turner. I had it coming. I stuck my neck out."

"No hard feelings, son," I made peace with him. "It was all Lew Boxer's fault." Then I turned back to the Shane chick.



*I sagged like a wet sock
and my knees went limper
when the lamp's metal
base hit me.*

"Pull the anchor, pet. Get rolling. This is important.

She toed her throttle and the wagon surged forward through the studio's rear gates reserved for trucks and commercial equipment—where Dave Donaldson hadn't posted any headquarters heroes. We went whamming into the side street on squealing skins and the red-haired cutie asked me where I wanted to go.

I told her. She said: "Couldn't we drop Tommy at his apartment first?"

"Sorry, babe. That'll have to wait."

SHE shrugged, made knots. Presently we parked double in front of the restaurant where I'd had my lunch date

with Lew Boxer. I pegged a Yellow cab up front, also double-parked. A frill was standing by it but I couldn't tell whether she was just leaving or just arriving. However, I tabbed her from her black satin uniform, coarse ebony hair and almond glims. She was the cafe maid.

I lunged out of the station wagon, barged at her. "You hauling hips, hon?" I said.

She spun around. "Why—why, y-yes. It's my afternoon off. I'm going home." Her map was an Oriental mask.

Maybe she was leveling, maybe not. If she'd been on duty in the eatery until now, it might make an alibi for her. But if she was returning from a jaunt it

would be a different story. I looked at the Yellow's driver and said: "How about this?"

"How about what?" he said around an insolent toothpick sticking out of his kisser.

"The lassie here. You bringing her or taking her away?"

"I wouldn't know from nothing, palsy-walsy. My teachers says I ain't very intelligent."

I flashed my special badge. "Take your choice, wise guy. Talk or have your license yanked."

"Oh. It's that way, huh? Pardon my curly tonsils, colonel. The despatcher sent me here to pick up a fare. She's it, I guess," he flicked a thumb at the Asiatic cupcake.

Which meant she was probably telling the truth about just leaving the joint. On the other hand, that didn't prove she'd been on the job all the time until now. She could have moseyed off to the Paratone lot, clouted me over the thatch, chilled Velva Vantyne, and then returned here hoping to waterproof an alibi.

Even the restaurant management might not be in a position to substantiate this, one way or the other. It was entirely possible for her to have sneaked out through a window of the little girls' room without being tabbed by any other employees. And the stray feminine patrons going into the place to wring out their eyelashes wouldn't pay much attention to a maid's temporary absence.

One thing was certain, however. This slant-eyed cookie packed a reasonable motive for rubbing Velva Vantyne. Velva had popped her on the puss, publicly humiliated her; and an Oriental usually doesn't take that kind of treatment lying down. As a rule they do something drastic to get even.

MOREOVER, the Vantyne quail had claimed this Asiatic cupcake to be the daughter of Hiro Sayakamo—that Jap hambo who'd sliced himself to his ancestors twenty years ago after chilling Velva's father for busting up his home. If this relationship was really on the level, it was conceivable that the maid might

still have toted a family blood-grudge. Even more remote was the possibility that she was a Jap secret agent charged with the job of sabotaging Lew Boxer's remake of *Yellow Invasion*, a war opus exposing Nip atrocities in the Philippines.

Any single one of these theories could spell murder motive. I wasn't interested in theories, though; I wanted facts. And I craved to do my investigating with no further delay; time was fleeting and the cops were after me for a kill I knew nothing about. I had to solve that bump or I'd be in a personal jackpot all the way up to my adenoids.

I edged closer to the almond-eyed filly, copped a thorough hinge at her footwear. Her pumps were black patent leather with spike heels—but of course she could have changed into these after wearing wooden sandals on her homicide mission. The next question was, where might she have hidden the sandals if she'd actually worn them?

Well, the answer might be in her oversized handbag, a blue cloth affair damned near as big as a laundry sack and bulging at the sides. I said. "This may be impolite, babe, but it's necessary." Then I snatched the handbag, snapped it open.

She wailed her indignation at this but I ignored the protests; frisked the satchel. It contained several clean restaurant towels, filched no doubt, and half a fried chicken among other she-male equipment. But I found nothing resembling a pair of wooden-soled sandals.

"You dirty louse!" she caterwauled, and grabbed the bag back from me, swung it, slugged me on the profile with it. The blow wasn't heavy but it startled hell out of me, made me duck. This ducking routine, in turn, caused me to stumble off-balance. While I was still trying not to make a spectacle of myself by toppling into the gutter, the jane scrambled into her waiting taxi and yeped: "Take me away from here! Quick!" to the hacker. He meshed into second and went clattering away at top velocity.

"Ah, nuts!" I snarled, frustrated. And I ankled to Sandra Shane's studio station wagon, climbed in. "I drew blank," I told the red-haired quail. "Wheel this wreck."

She shifted gears expertly, pinned the startled focus on me as we merged with southbound traffic on Vine. "You must be insane!"

"Why?"

FROM the back seat the punk named Tommy Hardesty said: "Going around snatching girls' purses takes a lot of crust. You're one weird operator, Turner."

"Weird be damned," I said bitterly. "I'm looking for a pair of wooden sandals. When I locate them, I'll know who biffed me and murdered Velva Vantyne."

"Velva Vantyne . . . murdered?" the Shane jessie almost sent our wagon climbing up a telegraph pole. "How—why—wh—who—?"

I said: "That's what I'd like to know. The kill was pulled after I got conked to dreamland. I thought this slant-eyed doll might be my answer, but apparently I was wrong. Now I've got to go sandal hunting again, dammit. And the cops are looking for me."

"You w-want me to drive you somewhere?"

"Take Hardesty home first," I said. "It'll give me time to get my think-tank clicking."

She turned out Sunset, stopped in front of a shabby apartment building. She helped the kid out of the wagon and said: "I'll see you upstairs, Tommy. Be right back, Mr. Turner."

I watched them ankle inside the stash; waited a minute. Then I followed them. I stopped in the frowsy lobby long enough to learn the number of Hardesty's flat from a row of brass mail boxes in the wall. He was 209. I gumshoed upstairs to the second floor, glued my ear to his portal.

I heard what I expected to hear. The red-haired jane's voice was quavering: "I'll leave them with you, darling. Burn them—put them in the incinerator—but don't let anyone know—"

That was my cue. I yanked out the .32 automatic I always tote in a shoulder holster for emergencies. Then I smashed my hundred and ninety pounds of heft at the door.

It crashed off its latch, burst inward, I thundered over the threshold and snarled: "Freeze, both of you."

The Shane chick's puss went as pallid as adulterated milk. She'd been in the act of giving Hardesty a pair of platform clogs from her handbag, but when she piped my roscoe, she tried to hide them behind her. This made no difference now as far as I was concerned. I'd already seen what I wanted to see.

"Very nifty," I said. "Especially the wooden soles."

THE HARDESTY jerk moved his undersized frame a step toward me and said: "Now wait a minute, Turner. You can't—"

"Ring off," I told him. I backed it up with my cannon; pinned the sardonic glimpse on Sandra Shane. "Everything adds up to make sense," I said. "All except the kill."

"I—I don't understand."

"You called this guy 'darling' just now. That means he's your sweetie."

Her chin tilted defiance at me. "I love Tommy, yes. Don't tell me it's against the law to be in love."

"No. But it's against the law to commit assault and bashery on private detectives," I said. "Being goofy over this punk, you were sore because I blew pepper in his glims. When you tabbed me coming out of Velva Vantyne's dressing bungalow, you saw a chance to even the score. You swatted me with a tire iron or something."

"I—I didn't—"

"Lies won't buy you anything," I grunted. "I got a gander at your sandals as I went down and I'd recognize them if they were on an Egyptian mummy. Not that I suspected you when I saw you a little later and asked you to chauffeur me hither and yon. You were upset, nervous, but I was too damned dumb to guess the reason. Actually, you were scared I was hep to you—even though by that time you'd switched to other footgear just to be safe."

"Prove it!"

"The clogs are proof enough, sister. I figured to find them on the Oriental quail,

but I was haywire. By conducting my search in front of you, though, and explaining what I was looking for and why, I tipped you off that the sandals were dynamite."

"I still don't see—"

The hell you don't," I sneered. "You realized that possession of them would incriminate you. That gave you the drizzling meemies—which I noticed, wondered about. So, on a hunch, I followed you upstairs here; heard you trying to ditch the evidence. Now are you satisfied?"

She drew a deep breath that pinched in her nostrils. "All right. So I had an impulse and obeyed it. I saw you coming out of Miss Vantyne's bungalow. There was a wooden stake on the ground. I picked it up and clubbed you with it because you'd maltreated Tommy."

I said: "But what impulse made you cream the Vantyne bim after you knocked me cold?"

"I didn't do that," she whispered. "I didn't kill her. I swear I didn't."

"Tell it to a jury," I said, and reached in my back pocket for a pair of bracelets. This was a mistake. Tommy Hardesty moved like a ferret, fast, deadly. He picked up a table lamp and heaved it at me.

It was a small lamp with a metal base. The metal part caromed off my features, dented an extra dimple in my chin. I sagged like a wet sock and my knees went as limber as a dish of boiled noodles. I heard the punk yelp: "Come on, Sandra Quick!" and they both went lamming out of the flat while I was still counting stars.

The blow didn't bash me stiff, however. I was just stunned, unable to get my sinews tracking. I felt like a fighter who'd been tagged on the button by a round-house haymaker; the room pinwheeling around me like a crazy whirlpool. By the time the starch came back in my stems the Shane cupcake and her sallow boy friend were long gone.

I KNEW it was no use chasing them; they had too big a start on me. It would take a police dragnet to catch Sandra now, what with the Hardesty jerk helping her to hide. I spotted a phone over

on the other side of the flat; shambled to it, dialed the Paratone lot.

They told me Dave Donaldson and his homicide minions had left ten minutes ago, gone back to headquarters. I hung up, dialed again, got Dave's official connection. I caught him as he was just coming into his squad-room. His voice drifted over the wire, gruff, rasping. "Well, who is it and what for?"

I said: "Dan Turner," and stopped long enough for him to blow his safety valve. Then I snapped: "Get out a radio beef for a red-haired jessie named Sandra Shane." I described her, mentioned the she-chauffeur's uniform she was wearing. "She admitted conking me senseless outside Velva Vantyne's cottage," I wound up.

"The hell you utter!" Dave roared. "Where are you now?"

I told him. "And you can come pick me up. It'll save me taxi fare. I haven't got my jalopy with me."

He said: "You're damned right I'll come pick you up. You're not out of the woods yet by a hell of a sight." He buzzed off.

I killed time by prowling the punk's tepee; discovered a pint of rye in the kitchenette. Scotch is my tippie but anything will do in a pinch when you need liquid reinforcements. I poured out enough to fill a tumbler, squeezed a lemon in it to drown the flavor. It still tasted like rye, though.

By the time I'd burned ten gaspers, Donaldson came lumbering into the stash. "All right, Sherlock," he grunted. "Let's have all of it."

"All of what? Did you put out the beat for Sandra Shane?"

"Yeah. I want to know where she fits in the picture. How come she confessed macing you?"

I gave him the whole lowdown. When I got to the part about the Oriental doll, he halted me for details. "You mean to tell me this slant-eyed filly had all those possible motives and you turned her loose because she didn't have the right kind of shoes?"

I said: "Sure. Remember, I located the wooden-soled ones on the Shane cupcake



*I pinned her to the wall.
"Talk or I'll slap you
cockeyed!"*

later. Which cleared the cafe maid."

"It cleared her of conking you, yeah. Sandra Shane did that. But suppose Sandra lammed after slugging you, without going into the dressing bungalow?"

"Then anybody might have croaked Velva Vantyne," I said.

"Anybody my elbow! I'll draw you a diagram. The Asiatic quail goes to the Paratone lot to rub Miss Vantyne for revenge or some such reason. She finds you conveniently knocked cold. She sneaks into the bungalow, Jap style, without warning. She jumps the Vantyne jane—"

I said: "Wait. I've just thought of something. Velva was scared something was going to happen to her. If the maid had entered her quarters she would have yeped for help."

"Oh. So now you think she got chilled by somebody she knew pretty well. Somebody who could ankle in on her and not draw a squawk."

"It's a reasonable assumption," I said.

"Blaah! The slant-eyed dame sneaked up on her; caught her when she wasn't looking. She never had a chance to make a struggle. Jiu-jitsu rendered her helpless so she could be choked with her own

stocking. Then the maid powdered back to the cafe where you found her—and like a dope, you let her go!"

I said doubtfully: "Could be. But how in hell are you going to make it stick, this side of kicking French pastry out of her until she whistles?"

"I'll handle that part. The first step is to grab her. Where's her hangout?"

"We'll see," I said, and went to the phone book; found the restaurant's number. I called it, asked the manager a question.

He gave me the answer and added: "What is this, a rib? I'm too busy to be handing out that address every fifteen minutes—"

I STIFFENED, slammed the receiver back in the hook, spun around. An ugly premonition was creeping up my leg, nipping me on the asterisk. "Get the rag out of your elbow!" I barked at Donaldson. "There may be some more slaughter!"

We went belting down to his official chariot. I took the wheel, aimed for a bungalow court on Fountain. When we got there, I yanked Dave to the sidewalk,

barreled toward a rear cottage. This was the Oriental cutie's modest drop. Its front door was open and a guy was just coming out, looking sick at the elly-bay.

He was Lew Boxer, the Paratone mogul. His chunky frame seemed to have shrunk in his expensive threads and he was gulping like a dog coughing pork chops. "Turner—in there—good heavens—!"

I said: "Drag him back in, Dave," and took the lead; went larruping inside the tepee. When I gained the bedroom, I drew up short and gargled: "What the hell—!"

The restaurant maid's carcass hung suspended by the neck from a light fixture in the ceiling; a drapery cord had been used as a hangman's noose. Gently swaying, she dangled a good three feet off the floor; an exquisite ivory doll. But when I reached for her wrist, I could find no hint of pulse. She was already cooling off, her skin almost clammy to the touch. She was as dead as last month's weather forecast.

A NOTE was pinned to a pillow on the bed. Donaldson put the grab on it, read it aloud: "*I murdered Velva Vantyne. Signed, Ruth Sayakamo.*" He folded the slip of paper, put it in his pocket and said: "Can you beat that? A confession and a suicide! And she really was Hiro Sayakamo's daughter!"

"Whale feathers!" I snarled. I got a chair, stood on it, unhooked the noose from the ceiling fixture and lowered the defunct cookie. I put her on the bed and added: "Her neck's broken. That couldn't happen in so short a drop. She was croaked first, then hanged. And besides, there was no stool or chair in the middle of the room where she could have taken the big jump. That's where the killer came a cropper."

Dave yodeled: "Then—then—this note must be phony! The whole thing was staged to throw us off the scent of that first job, the Velva Vantyne kill!"

"Now you're cooking with butane," I said.

He fastened his dukes on Lew Boxer's lapels. "And what in hell were you doing here, mister? Speak up, before I bat the tires out of you."

The Paratone biggie shivered. "I—I came to—kill her—"

"Aha. So you confess."

"No. Listen. That girl was dead when I walked in. It was just a moment ago. I found the front door open and I was looking for her because I thought she was the one who had murdered my fiancée. There was—"

I cut across his torrent of gab. "How did you learn this house number?"

"From the manager of the restaurant where she worked as a maid. I phoned him."

"Once or more than once?"

"Once. Why should I—?"

"Go on with your story," I said.

He steadied himself against the foot of the bed, kept his glims turned away from the deceased dame. "Nobody answered when I rang the doorbell. The door was ajar. I walked in and saw . . . the corpse . . . It was hanging where you found it. I knew what a spot I'd be in if I got caught on the scene. I started to run away but you were coming up on the porch—"

Dave Donaldson peeled his lips back. "You lie in your throat, you rat. You bumped Velva Vantyne yourself, because she was two-timing you or something. I know damned well you were jealous of her. You almost blew your top earlier this afternoon when Turner admitted making a pass at her. So okay. Then you pulled this second bump, hoping to pin the first one on this maid by means of the phony letter you planted. Being dead, she couldn't deny it."

"No. It isn't that way at all."

"The hell it isn't. Maybe you planned it this way right along. Maybe there never were any threatening notes. Maybe that was a cover-up."

Boxer's map turned a greenish color. "I'll admit there weren't any threats. I just wanted to make Turner think Velva was in danger. By hiring him as her bodyguard, I figured we'd get a lot of publicity for our new picture. But I wasn't planning to k-kill the girl I loved! I didn't know she was in genuine peril—"

"Gah-h-h!" Dave made a disgusted

noise. "Let's try these bracelets on you for size."

BOXER held out his fins. Then, crazy as a wild mule, he lifted a knee; buried it a mile and a half in Donaldson's groin. Dave moaned, doubled over, grabbed himself where he hurt. Boxer pulled out a roscoe from his hip pocket, covered me with it. "I'm going out," he announced.

"Are you?"

"Don't try to stop me."

"I won't," I said. "This tweed coat cost me thirty-seven dollars. I don't want any holes in it."

He inched to the bedroom door, moving crabwise. "I may decide to wait on the porch a few minutes and shoot you if you come out too soon."

I said: "Your script is corny, cousin. What you'll really do is run to beat hell."

"You want to take that chance?"

"No. Because I don't think you're guilty," I said.

His peepers looked puzzled. "What do you mean by that?"

"You said you came here to kill the Oriental twist because you had the idea she bumped Velva."

"Well?"

"If you thought she was guilty, it means you weren't guilty yourself. Not of the first job, anyhow."

"You're trying to trick me. Keep your distance."

I said: "And I don't think you throttled this quail, because she's been dead quite some time. Long enough to start getting chilly. If you just arrived, that takes you out from under the rap."

"Smooth talk, Turner. The funny part is, it's all true. But you don't really believe a word of it. You're trying to catch me off guard so you can get my gun. I'm hep to you. And I'm walking out of here, understand?"

"Go ahead," I said. "Beat it."

He whirled, sped to the front door of the wikiup. I heard it slam shut after him, heard his footfalls pounding down off the porch. He was gone.

I went to Donaldson. "Want a cold compress, chum?"

He straightened up slowly. His puss was grey, agonized. "You stinking son."
"Why?"

"You let that guy lam, knowing I was in no shape to stop him."

I said: "You heard me explain how he couldn't be guilty."

"Explain hell! How do we know he had just arrived here? Maybe he'd been right in this room long enough for this carcass to cool. Ever since he did the job. You're a double-crossing heel, gumshoe. I'm going to get your badge for this. I'm going to throw you in the bastille until you sprout mutton-chop whiskers. But first I'm going to pay you back for that poke you gave me in Velva Vantyne's dressing quarters."

Then he doubled his duke, nailed me on the jowls.

I rolled with the punch. It didn't hurt, but I played it big. I fell forward on my trumpet. I had my reasons.

Donaldson said: "Stay there or I'll kick out your front teeth." Then he limped from the bedroom, hunting a phone to call headquarters. I waited until I heard the dial clicking. Then I went to a rear window, opened it, shoved myself over the sill. I put a lot of distance between myself and that cottage. There were things I wanted to do—alone.

A BLONDE cookie opened up when I knocked on the door of the late lamented Velva Vantyne's apartment at the Tower Plaza. She hung the surprised gander on me and said: "Well, fry me in lard if it isn't Handsome Dan, the dapper dick!"

I was a little startled, myself. This golden-haired dish was an old acquaintance of mine, a good-time Tessie from away back. Her name was Rhoda Loring and she played bit parts around the lots whenever Central Casting got a spot for her, which wasn't too often. In between, she picked up all sorts of odd jobs to eke out the income. She'd warbled in night clubs, danced in a Main Street burleycue house, shilled for a gambling joint. You wouldn't find a more versatile frill in a month of Mondays.

You wouldn't find one as crooked to the

nostrils, either. I had to reach out, steady her, to keep her from taking a dive out in the corridor. "Hey, what the hell?" I said.

"Come in, Hawkshaw. I'm celebrating."

I ankled inside, closed the door, kept an arm around her waist. "Celebrating what?" I asked her.

She poured a snort of Vat 69, handed it to me. "Haven't you heard the good news? The witch is dead."

"Witch?"

"Velva Vantyne. I've been her secretary the past few months. But you wouldn't know that. You never come around."

I settled my heft on a divan, hauled her down beside me. "So you didn't like Velva."

"She was a heel. Until she hooked Lew Boxer. Then she turned good all of a sudden. Who wouldn't? He's decent. But a sap. A complete sucker. Have a drink."

I said: "I've got one. Look, babe. About Velva. What made you dislike her so much?"

"She was too free with her slaps. Hey, what is this?" Rhoda tried to fix the groggy focus on me. "You working on the case, by any chance?"

"In a way," I said.

"Then nuts to you. I won't talk. Whoever killed her deserves a medal. Wanna talk about something else, Sherlock?"

Hell no, I didn't want to talk about anything else. I'd been maced with a length of lumber by Sandra Shane, slugged in the puss with a table lamp by the Hardesty jerk, and clipped on the prow by Dave Donaldson's knuckles. Idle dialogue was something I could do without for quite some time. I said persistently: "Who else hated Velva's interiors besides yourself, hon?"

"Everybody that knew her. Servants. Guys she ditched. And sometimes even Lew Boxer when he suspected her of chiseling on him."

"Did she ever chisel?"

"I wouldn't know. I never went with her to the other apartment."

I stiffened. "What other apartment?"

"The hideaway flat she rented over on Franklin. You don't think she'd be dumb enough to throw wild parties here,

do you? Not in this strict building! They'd have tossed her out."

"What was the address?" I said.

SHE made a face at me, swayed over toward a console radio. She said: "Wouldn't you like to know?" and snapped the switch. "Wanna dance. Wanna get dance music."

But when the radio warmed up, it was tuned to a news broadcast. The announcer blatted: "*—positive that Boxer murdered his fiancée and later killed the cafe maid in an effort to shift the blame to her. A city-wide police search is being conducted for the missing motion picture executive, who is thought to be in hiding somewhere in or near Hollywood. Authorities have advanced the theory that he may possibly commit suicide rather than allow himself to be arrested and tried for—*"

Rhoda Loring twirled the dial, cut off the rest of the bulletin. A swing band blared in the loudspeaker and she began to waggle her shoulders. "Wanna dance."

I sprang at her, realizing that radio report must have come from Dave Donaldson's office. And I knew he had played spang into the killer's hands. I yowled: "The address on Franklin, hon! The address! Tell me!"

"Wanna dance first."

I pinned her to the wall. "Talk or I'll slap you cockeyed!"

She sobered slightly. "Must be important," she mumbled. Then she told me what I wanted to know.

I was across the room in three leaps; switched off the radio, grabbed a phone, got police headquarters. Luck roosted all over me; Donaldson was there. I barked: "Turner talking. Pay attention. You're to flag your britches to the address I'm giving you. Meet me there—fast. This may be the payoff."

I hung up on him before he could fire a lot of crazy questions at me. I blew a kiss to the blonde Loring chick; took a hasty powder. My taxi was still waiting downstairs at the curb where I'd left it, the meter clocking four dollars and a half. I told the hacker it was highway robbery but I'd double it if he souped his cylinders.

He souped them and we tore a yammering hole in the dusk, flying toward Franklin. The guy was good. He bent over his wheel, took corners on two tires and a prayer, scattered pedestrians like monkeys in a cyclone. Once a motorbike copper took out after us but the last I saw of him was when he got snarled in a traffic tangle and sat down under a stop signal with tears streaming down his frustrated puss.

And then, suddenly, my joy-ride was over. The cabby said: "This is it, pal. Gimme the dough."

I paid him off, heard a siren moaning in the distance. It got closer, rose to a wail, died in a low growl as a police sedan skidded to a halt on the other side of the street. Dave Donaldson came pouncing out of the bucket, made for me. "This better be good," he puffed.

"I think it will be. You were right on the Velva Vantyne bump-off. It was a jealousy motive. I hope."

He said: "Sure. Lew Boxer. All I've got to do is find him."

"I'll take you to him," I said. I added: "Unless my hunch was haywire."

"What hunch?"

"Velva had a hideaway in this apartment building. She and Boxer used to throw parties in it on rainy evenings. And a lot of others before Boxer's time, probably. Anyhow, wouldn't this be a logical place for him to duck under cover?"

"That's sharp thinking, Philo. You know the flat number? Let's go!"

We climbed stairs to the second floor. The door I wanted was at the end of the hall. "Sh-h-h-h!" I whispered. "Damn your squeaky shoes, flatfoot. Listen!"

VOICES came through the closed door. Boxer was saying: "You can't do this. You're insane."

"Quit bellyaching. You had your fun. Now pay for it." I recognized the click of a cocking gun-hammer.

I pulled my own heater; hit the portal with my poundage. It shrieked off its hinges and I hurtled inside the room. Lew Boxer was on his knees, pleading for his life. "Mercy—!" he gibbered. Saliva

drooled down his kisser.

Directly behind me, Dave Donaldson's service .38 sneezed: *Ka-chow!* and that ended the threat to Boxer's life. The guy who had been on the verge of drilling him staggered under the battering impact of Donaldson's bullet; went down in a collapsed heap, covered by his fawn topcoat.

He was the Paratone punk, Tommy Hardesty.

Boxer said: "He—he used a key—walked in on me—said he was g-going to k-kill me and plant a c-confession note on me the way he did the restaurant girl. He—he said that way both murders would be on my d-doorstep—"

I walked over, bent down by the fallow jerk. His chest was caved in, splintered, where the .38 slug had dug a tunnel through both lungs. Ketchup welled out of the mess, thick ugly.

His inflamed glims glared up at me, glassily. "So . . . you had . . . me . . . spotted . . ."

For once in my misspent life I was honest. I said: "No. This is something of a surprise. I figured Velva Vantyne had been cooled by one of her former boy-friends but I didn't know which one; she'd had so damned many!"

"You're . . . telling . . . me," the jerk choked.

I said: "Anyhow, whoever bumped her was somebody she knew pretty well; somebody who could ankle into her dressing bungalow and not draw a protest. A discarded swain would mesh with that description.

"And you were the discarded swain. Velva had tossed you over for Lew Boxer because he could do more for her career. Then Boxer, not knowing the score, hired you to help in a publicity setup for Velva's new picture, *Yellow Invasion*. That gave you plenty of angles. You could kill her and make it look like Jap spy work or a grudge held by Ruth Sayakamo—if she really *was* Sayakamo's daughter.

"Your biggest break came when Sandra Shane conked me. Sandra, for some screwy reason, is in love with you. You

(Continued on page 77)

DAN TURNER

20

HOLLYWOOD DETECTIVE

"TRAP FOR A BOOBY"

by
BELLEM & BARREAUX

DAN TURNER IS ON THE SUPERTONE LOT FOR A NOON LUNCH DATE WITH A PAL.

PARDON ME, IS PAT CARSON AROUND?

YEAH -



PAT'S PLANTIN' EXPLOSIVES ON A BATTLEFIELD SET. GO RIGHT IN...

THANKS -



ONSTAGE, CARSON, DYNAMITE EXPERT, IS LAYING LAND MINES AND BOOBY TRAPS FOR A MOVIE BATTLE SCENE.

HI, PAT --

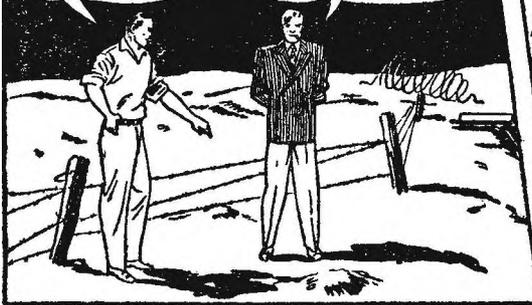
HELLO, SHERLOCK - BE WITH YOU SOON AS I BURY THIS POWDER CHARGE ...



PAT CARSON EXPLAINS HIS JOB.

I PLANT THESE EXPLOSIVES AND RUN WIRES TO AN ELECTRIC KEYBOARD.

YOU SET OFF THE BLASTS WHEN THE CAMERAS ARE ROLLING, HUH?



YES, THERE'S NOT ENOUGH TO INJURE ANYBODY, BUT IT LOOKS GOOD IN THE PICTURE.

I SEE --- JUST LIKE SHELLS GOING OFF ...



AS TURNER AND CARSON START TO LUNCH, A DRUNKEN BIT PLAYER NAMED JEFF DOANE APPEARS ...

JUSHT A MINUTE, CARSON, Y'LOUSHY CROOK!

LAY OFF ME, DOANE, YOU'RE DRUNK!



WHY PACK A GRUDGE BECAUSE I WON YOUR DOUGH IN A CRAP GAME?

THE DICE WAZH CROOKED!



THAT'S A LIE! SAY IT AGAIN AND I'LL KILL YOU!

YOU COULDN'T KILL A COCKROASH!



TAKE THAT!

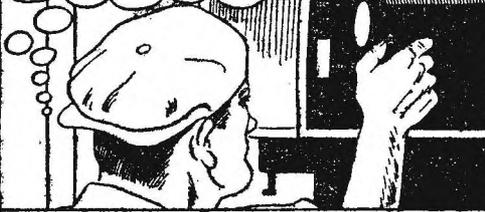
WHAT A POKE!





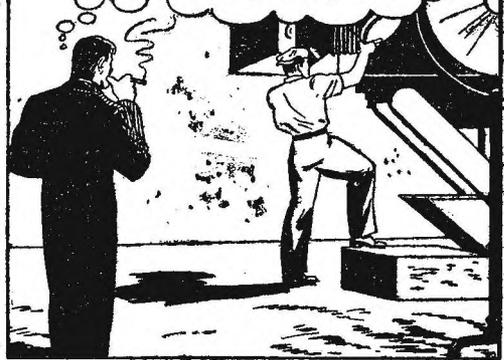
ON THE SET, A CAMERAMAN
MAKES AN ODD DISCOVERY ...

GOSH, THIS CAMERA'S RUNNING -
IT USED UP A SPOOL OF FILM!
WONDER WHO SWITCHED IT ON?
BETTER NOT MENTION
IT ... THEY MIGHT
BLAME ME FOR
WASTING FOOTAGE.



TURNER NOTICES THE CAMERAMAN
RE-LOADING HIS MACHINE.

THAT GUY'S DELAYING
THE TAKE ...



FINALLY,
THE BATTLE
SCENE
STARTS -



SATISFIED, MULLINS GRANTS A RECESS

CUT! WE'LL PRINT THAT. TAKE A HALF HOUR'S REST.



...BUT ONE FALLEN NAZI FAILS TO RISE.

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THIS GUY?



IT'S JEFF DOANE, THE BIT PLAYER.

HE'S DEFUNCT. HE HIT A REAL BLAST INSTEAD OF A PEEWEE CHARGE. IT BLEW HIS TRIPES OUT.



MULLINS ACCUSES THE EXPLOSIVE EXPERT.

CARSON, YOU GOT CARELESS AND PLANTED TOO MUCH POWDER!

NO! ALWAYS MEASURE IT.



I'VE HEARD THERE WAS BAD BLOOD BETWEEN YOU AND DOANE.

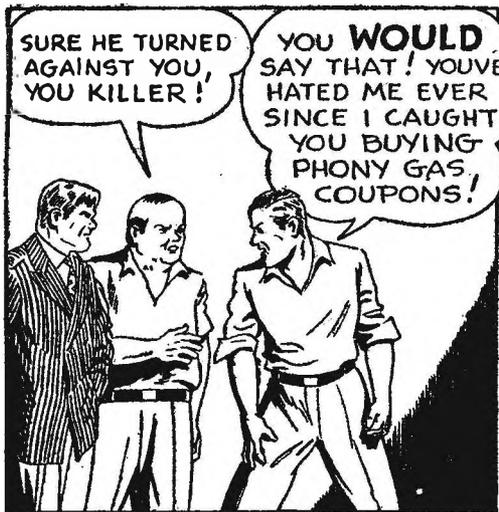
-- BUT I WOULDN'T DELIBERATELY KILL HIM!



YOU'LL ADMIT YOU HAD A BRAWL WITH DOANE BEFORE LUNCH!

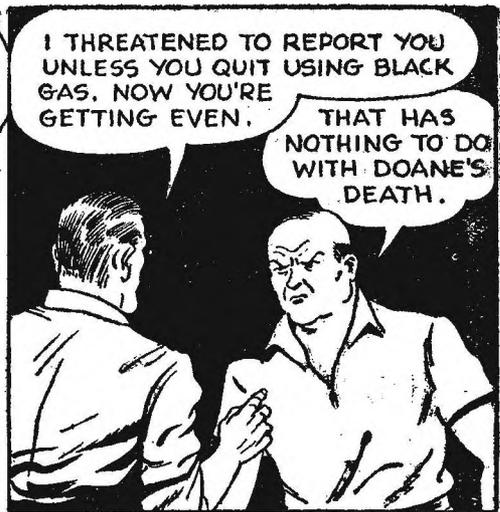
SO YOU'VE TURNED AGAINST ME, SHERLOCK?





SURE HE TURNED AGAINST YOU, YOU KILLER!

YOU WOULD SAY THAT! YOU'VE HATED ME EVER SINCE I CAUGHT YOU BUYING PHONY GAS COUPONS!



I THREATENED TO REPORT YOU UNLESS YOU QUIT USING BLACK GAS. NOW YOU'RE GETTING EVEN.

THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH DOANE'S DEATH.



SORRY PAT. I'LL HAVE TO HOLD YOU FOR THE COPS.

I WON'T LET YOU!



KEEP AWAY OR I'LL THROW THIS VIAL OF TNT!

IXNAY!

LET HIM GO - WE'LL BE BLOWN TO PIECES!



YOU'RE BLUFFING!

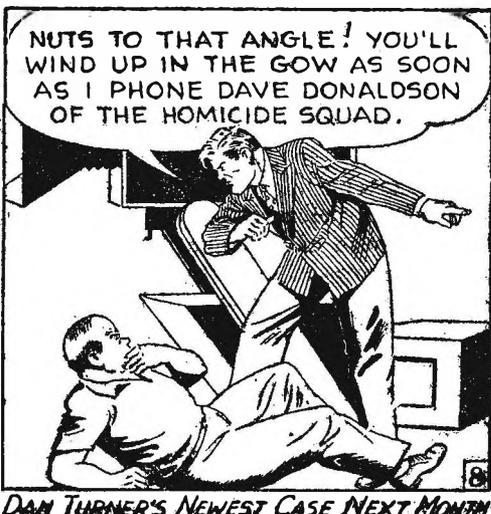
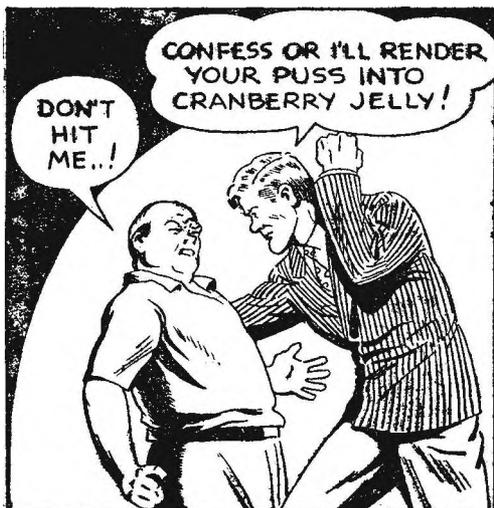
HAWKSHAW! - BE CAREFUL!



YOU'LL DO NO MORE BLASTING FOR A WHILE, CHUM!

HEY!





DAN TURNER'S NEWEST CASE NEXT MONTH

CLEVER

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM



YOU CAN find plenty of glamor in Hollywood, but the town has its tawdry side too. Take a lot of the cocktail joints along the stretch of LaBrea south of Wilshire, for instance; the dance-and-eat dives that masquerade as cabarets. Go ahead, take them; I'll have vanilla. Even a private snoop draws the line somewhere, and I draw mine at lousy liquor, soggy grub, second-hand tinsel decorations, and third grade entertainers.

The Purple Turtle was typical of these deadfalls, a low, dimly lighted barn with tiers of tables rising on set-back platforms along either wall, the tiers starting

CORPSE

Turner didn't care much for bodyguarding a singer in a cheap night club; but with a fat fee and a narcotic angle involved, he took the job

at ringside floor level and ascending step by step, like seats in a college football stadium. Instead of goal posts, though, one end formed the entrance; the other contained a sort of stage occupied by something that called itself a dance band. This consisted of piano, traps, and braying brasses which substituted noise for

"That's what you get for trying to out-gun me!" I snarled.



melody and gave you the earache if your table was too close.

My table was too close.

I sat there in solitary sullenness, sipping imitation Scotch, and burning my way through a deck of gaspers that tasted like a bale of mildewed hay because the place was thronged with patrons and consequently saturated with stale tobacco fumes. For a half hour I'd been squirming on my chair, wondering why I'd been silly enough to fall for an anonymous phone call; promising myself I would haul bunions as soon as the hands of my strap watch pointed to eleven. Unless somebody braced me during the next fifteen minutes I was going home.

Then, suddenly, trouble began to brew.

IT started with a fading of the house lights so that the jam-packed dancers on the polished floor became a thick, moving sea of shadows. The music's volume dwindled so you could hear the shuffling scrape of feet dragging in muted tempo, a surf-like wash of sound with a broken rhythm: *shoosh-swoosh, crump, shoosh, shwoosh-shoosh*. Then a pale amber finger reached its glow toward the bandstand—a beam from a baby spotlight. It bathed a brunette cupcake who was stepping forward to render a vocal solo, the lyrics of the tune being played.

And she really rendered the song. She tore it apart and destroyed it. Her voice might have been velvety once upon a time but it was like sandpaper now, coarse, throaty, too fuzzy in the low registers and harsh when she hit the high ones. This seemed curious, because she wasn't a bad-looking dish at all; she had a nice complexion, nicer curves, and a smile that matched the slinky way she carried herself. She was garnished in a burgundy gown that made your optics tingle.

She chanted straight at me. She did it deliberately. flirtatiously—almost maliciously.

I commenced to feel uncomfortable. Everybody in the Purple Turtle could see that Gypsy Torreo was slipping me the torchy routine, aiming her song and her wiles in my direction. I was abruptly conscious of being stared at; aware of

knowing leers behind my back. It irked me, because I didn't really know this Torreo canary; in fact, I'd never even met her personally. I couldn't savvy why I should be the recipient of her sultry smirks, her obvious attentions. The longer it kept up the uneasier I became.

Not that I'd have minded if it had been any other cookie except Gypsy Torreo; after all, I'm no plaster saint and I'm a sucker for a pretty ankle. But Gypsy was Vic Castelli's private property—so the rumors said. And Castelli was a tough monkey in anybody's league. He was a former character hambo in the galloping snapshots, a guy who'd specialized in gungel and gangster roles until he acquired a stake, got out of the movies, and started operating a string of class B night spots.

This Purple Turtle dive was one of his enterprises, and I wouldn't have allowed myself to be caught dead in it if it hadn't been for that phone call. A rasping voice had told me I'd pick up a case and a fat fee if I came here tonight between ten-thirty and midnight, and I fell for the bait because I never refuse dough. I'm in the detective racket for all I can collect; I'm trying to save up a retirement fund in war bonds so I can spend my declining years in comparative comfort.

NOW, though, a hunch whispered that my only payoff would be a mess of trouble—particularly if the Torreo jane kept dishing me those come-hither glances. Intuition told me there was dynamite in the offing and the fuse was sputtering.

I beckoned my waiter, asked for my check. He nodded, said he'd get it for me. Then, just as he ankled off, Gypsy finished her number. She stepped down from the bandstand, drifted toward me with her hips swaying.

"Dan Turner?" she said.

I nodded. "According to my birth certificate."

"How's for acting like a gentleman and inviting me to sit down, handsome?"

I said: "Dicks aren't gentlemen." All the same, I held a chair for her; seated

her. I didn't want to but she was forcing my hand.

She leaned her noggin back against me as I shoved the chair under her. "Thanks," she said. Then, in a whisper: "I mean much obliged for coming, Sherlock."

"Oh. Then you're the one who phoned me?"

"That's right. I'm in a jam. I need you."

I barged back to my own seat; fastened the speculative focus on her across the table. "Is this a rib? If so, pardon my sense of humor; it's on a vacation."

"It's no rib, gumshoe. I'm leveling."

"Look," I said. "This doesn't add up right. If you're in a jam, what's the matter with Vic Castelli getting you out? He's got a lot of drag, I understand; politically and with the so-called underworld element."

"That's just the point."

I said: "Yeah. Since you're Castelli's lady-friend—"

"I'm not."

"I've heard different," I said.

She made a bitter mouth. "Sure, sure. You've heard I'm his one and only. Well, maybe I was—until tonight."

"What about tonight?"

"I split up with him."

"So that's the scenario," I growled. "A lovers' quarrel."

"It wasn't a quarrel," she corrected me. "It was a knock-down-and-drag-out fight. He's used his fists on me for the last time, Hawkshaw. 'I'm through.'"

I said: "And where do I come into the picture? You want to hire me as referee?"

"Quit putting gags in the dialogue," she said. "I'm in the nastiest spot you can imagine. It isn't funny, it's serious—plenty serious. Deadly serious," she added, accenting the *dead*. "If you get my drift."

I studied her. "Sorry, toots, I don't get any part of it. I never poke my sniffer in family brawls."

"Not even for—say, five yards?"

"Five yards?" I stiffened a little. "And what am I supposed to do to earn five hundred hermans, pray tell?"

"Keep me from being murdered," she answered calmly. "Listen. You probably don't know it, but joints like the Purple

Turtle aren't Castelli's only source of income. He's been dabbling in smellier things."

I grinned. "Show me something that smells worse than this cabaret."

"Okay," she said. "I will." She was toting a small beaded vanity, which she now opened under cover of a napkin. She pulled something out of the vainty, tossed it across the table at me. "That does."

It was a cigarette; looked ordinary enough until you picked it up and took a careful swivel. Then you saw the dry greyish weeds where the tobacco should have been. I said: "Oh-oh! Reefers, hunh?"

"Bright lad," her kisser twisted. "Reefers, yes. Mary Warners. Hop-sticks. You asked me to show you something that stinks worse than the Purple Turtle. Okay. Marijuana."

"Vic Castelli's peddling them?"

"He controls the entire market in this neck of the woods," she said. "Plus gum opium when any happens to be smuggled in—which is seldom since the war started. Also snow; cocaine and heroin."

SOMEbody directly behind me said: "Your check, sir. Unless you decided to stay a while longer, maybe?"

I twitched as if I'd been rammed with a darning needle; piped my waiter at my elbow. He was a swarthy ginzo with hair like wet patent leather and glims as expressionless as a pair of black ball bearings. How long he'd been standing there I had no way of knowing; nor could I tell whether or not he'd eavesdropped on Gypsy Torreo's chin-music. His mush was impassive, a slight sneer hovering around his yapper.

Gypsy put up a bold front. "I'll take a vodka Collins if you don't mind, handsome," she purred at me. "Half size on the Collins and double strength on the vodka."

"That'll be a buck four bits," the waiter grunted. "You paying for the lady's drink, mister?"

I gave him an indignant glance. "Certainly. She's with me, isn't she?"

"If you say so, brother. Who am I to argue with the customers?" He scribbled

on his order pad. "Vodka Collins, double up on the vodka. And what's your, pal?"

"Another prescription of that stuff you sell for Scotch," I told him.

He leered unpleasantly as he moved off. "We got a bathtub we imported from Scotland. That's what we make it in. Sure it's Scotch." He vanished, worming his way through the crowded dancers.

"Now, then," I turned to Gypsy. "What's all this about Vic Castelli being in the narcotics racket?"

She lifted a shoulder, let it sag. "It's true. And there's another chapter. Somebody ratted on him to the Federals."

"Who?"

"I don't know. It doesn't matter. They're closing in on him, that's what counts. They may crowd him in a corner any time now. And he thinks I'm the one who squealed."

"So that's why he slugged you," I said.

"Yes. The slugging was just a sample. He threatened to kill me."

I said: "Why didn't you scam? Why stick around here and go on singing?"

"Scram!" she made an ugly sound with her lips. "You think I could go any place where he couldn't follow me and find me? Be your years, Sherlock. I don't want a place to hide. I want somebody to protect me; somebody who knows what a gun is for."

"And you want to hire me for the job?"

"Yes."

I said: "No dice, sis. I'm a private ferret, not a bodyguard. You can get those for a dime a dozen."

"Not your kind," she said. She made an abrupt gesture, leaned over the table, grabbed my right mitt and squeezed it. "What's your price if it isn't money?"

A tray slid itself between us. The tray had two tall glasses on it: one a vodka Collins, one a synthetic Scotch highball. The hand that steered the tray was swarthy, hairy. I looked up, expecting to lamp the waiter.

Instead, the guy was Vic Castelli. He flashed his dazzling white grinders at me in a smile as cordial as the hangman's. He said: "A very charming scene indeed. Get up, Gypsy, my gorgeous Judas."

CHAPTER II

Drugged!

CASTELLI'S dark brown peepers had a smoky quality I didn't like. They looked vengeful, murderous. His grin was so phony it gave me goose pimples and his voice might have been coming out of a refrigeration system. It dripped snow.

"Vic—!" the breathless whimper came faintly from the brunette cupcake. "Vic, you—I—"

"Get up, I said." He was embellished in a tuxedo that must have notched his bankroll two hundred seeds, not counting the cummerbund and the black pearl studs, and the jacket was so expertly tailored you scarcely noticed the slight flat bulge below the left shoulder where he was packing a gat in an armpit holster. He didn't need the gat to toss a scare in Gypsy Torreo, though. His manner took care of that.

The jane came out of her chair, jerkily, and her map was as pallid as adulterated milk. Against this whiteness her makeup made unwholesome crimson splotches and her kisser was twisted with the ugliness of fear. When she stood up I followed suit, as if from motives of politeness but actually ready to make with the violence in case Castelli wanted it that way. He looked like a lug I could lick.

He lamped my move and lipped: "Keep your seat, gumshoe, and maybe you won't get hurt."

"Thanks for the warning," I told him. "At least you're staying in character."

"Meaning what?"

"Rattlesnakes always buzz first," I said.

He chuckled. "So okay, I'm a rattlesnake. So what?"

"So if you're figuring on committing a spot of assault and sluggery on this Torreo quail, guess again," I said. "I've just taken the job of protecting her."

"You don't tell me. Well, consider yourself fired. Go ahead, Gypsy, say it to him."

The brunette cookie blinked uncertainly. "Say w-what?"

"Tell this shamus to blow while he's all in one piece. Tell him, or you'll get a worse beating than you've already got coming to you."

"Sorry, babe," I said, smacking her in the kisser.
"You asked for that."



She cringed. "No, Vic—no, please—"
"Look," I said. "Speaking of rattle-snakes."

"Yeah?" the swarthy bozo eyed me.

I said: "They warn. I don't." Then I whipped the vodka Collins off the tray, drenched Castelli's pan with it. The liquid dynamite took him in the optics and he staggered backward, clawing at them and

squalling at the top of his tonsils. While he was still blinded, I doubled my dukes, flogged him full on the kisser. His lips split and puffed up; spurted ketchup. I corked him again and he sat down on the floor so hard he bounced four times, during which he tried to unlimber his cannon.

HE was too slow on the draw. I tote a .32 automatic in a shoulder rig myself, and I produced the fowling piece

before you could say Hershkowitz. I leaned down, branished the muzzle fer-
 ninst his features. "Look what I've got,"
 I said.

At several surrounding tables, dames
 screamed and guys began swearing, duck-
 ing for cover. Castelli also did some
 dodging, but it wasn't very effective be-
 cause he was hunkered on the floor and
 his movements were restricted by the
 chairs around him. "Hey—!" he yeeped
 frantically.

"Quiet, sucker," I told him grimly.
 "I'd just as soon bore a tunnel in your
 tripes as look at you. Sooner, in fact."

"You—you can't get away with—"

I kicked him in the short ribs hard
 enough to make him grunt. "Don't tell
 me what I can or can't do, butch. Right
 now this heater makes me the champion.
 If you feel like arguing the matter, you'll
 discover you've got air-conditioned in-
 testines. Do I make myself clear?"

"Damn you," he said, and made another
 reach for his coat. I interrupted this by
 pistol-whipping him across the com-
 plexion, knocking out a front tooth as a
 by-product. He whimpered, which wasn't
 like him at all. Evidently I had him scared
 sweatless.

"That's what you get for thinking you
 can out-gun me," I snarled. "Thy it again.
 I dare you. Maybe you don't care how
 many battle scars you get."

"Cut-cut it out!" he bleated. "I was
 only g-going to pull a handkerchief. For
 the blood," he added. "You cut hell out
 of my mouth."

"You're lucky you're still breathing,"
 I said. Then, turning to Gypsy: "Want to
 pull your freight now, hon?"

She shivered. "Yes. T-take me away
 from here."

"Better take her, far away," Castelli
 said from where he was squatting. He
 glared at her. "Your time will come, baby.
 It may take me a while, but—"

I peered down at him malevolently. "If
 you bother her, I'll make arrangements to
 have you installed in a wooden overcoat,"
 I promised him. "Bear that in mind." Then,
 abruptly, I tabbed a cluster of
 hardboiled waiters and bouncers heading
 my way with mayhem in their glims. You

could catch an occasional glitter of brass
 knucks.

Gypsy Torreo began to quake. "They're
 coming after us. We—we're caught!"

"Not by several miles," I said. I
 grabbed her arm, steered her toward the
 bandstand; kept my roscoe in my free
 hand, flourishing it for all to observe.
 "The first son who gets in our way will
 wish to hell he hadn't," I announced
 loudly. "I'll burn him down."

Gypsy angled toward a door alongside
 the small stage. "This way, Sherlock,"
 she panted. "It leads to the dressing
 rooms and Vic's private apartment.
 There's a back exit. Come on!"

We gained the portal, sprinted into a
 dark corridor, pelted past a series of
 doors on either side. Some of these were
 open and you could pipe fleeting glimpses
 of chorines applying makeup, getting
 ready for the next floor-show. I didn't
 have time to enjoy the scenery, though;
 my mind was otherwise occupied. Dead
 ahead there now loomed the exit I craved,
 apparently giving access to the rear
 parking lot where I'd left my jalopy.

And then somebody appeared in my
 path.

THIS somebody was of the she-male
 gender, young lissome, and togged
 out in a set of heavy Shantung silk loung-
 ing pajamas the color of her coiffure,
 which was flame-red. For all her dainty
 dimensions, it was her puss that caught
 my attention. She seemed familiar; or at
 least she resembled someone I knew. This
 resemblance included smoky brown lamps,
 an ivory rind as smooth as whipping
 cream and flashing white grinders.

"Just a moment," she said. "This hall-
 way is private—Oh-h! Gypsy. It's you."

"Yes, Francine. We're going out."

"We?" the redhead lifted an eyebrow.
 "Who's the good looking escort?"

"A—a friend of mine," the Torreo
 ruffle answered nervously. "Let us by,
 Francine. Please. We—we're in a hurry."

The chick named Francine didn't move.
 "Hurry? Why?" Her peepers narrowed.
 "You wouldn't be trying to run away
 from Vic by any chance?"

"Could be," I poked my beak into the

conversation. "Is that any affair of yours, kitten?"

"I believe so, considering the fact that I'm Vic's sister." She opened her kisser a little wider. "I think I'd better call for a couple of the boys and have them hold you here until I can ask Vic what—"

"Ix-nay," I rasped, and made a loose fist. "That's exactly what you mustn't do." Then I popped her regretfully on the button, knocked her sprawling on her cornerstone. "Sorry, babe. You asked for that. Come on, Gypsy, let's ramble."

We rambled with extreme velocity, barreled outdoors. Yanking the Torreo frill along with me, I catapulted toward my coupe with my hip pockets dipping gravel. Then I boosted Gypsy into my bucket, got in beside her, settled my hundred and ninety pounds under the wheel and kicked hell out of the starter. The motor caught hold with a roaring clatter and I jammed my gears in reverse, backed out of the hole, twisted the rudder and aimed for the street in a cloud of peanut brittle. Ten seconds later we were ripping a gash in the night, thundering forward under forced draft.

Gypsy hunched herself close to me; shuddered like a cat coughing oyster shells. "You—you sh-shouldn't have d-done that. It was the wrong th-thing to d-do."

"What was?"

"Knocking Francine d-down."

"She was trying to stop us, wasn't she? What the hell." Then I added righteously: "Besides, I apologized."

"That w-won't make any difference to Vic."

I whooshed around a corner on two wheels and a prayer. "How come it won't?"

"Francine's his only sister; his only living relative. He—well, he worships her. She's about the only thing in the world he really cares for."

"All right," I said. "What of it?"

"He'll never forgive you."

I GRINNED. "There's something else he probably won't forgive me for. Remember I mussed him up in public."

"That's wh-what f-frightens me. He's

got every reason to hate you, now. And when he hates somebody—"

"Nuts, babe," I said. "I'm capable of looking out for myself. I've been doing it for years. Besides, you told me the Feds are about to close in on him. Once they take him out of circulation I'll have nothing to fret about."

"But that hasn't happened yet," her husky voice was quavery. "And until it does happen, you and I are b-both in danger."

I said: "I told you I can take care of myself."

"That's all right for you to say. But what about me?"

"Consider yourself under my wing," I reassured her. I qualified this with: "Temporarily, anyhow. Call it five hundred bucks' worth, since that's the fee you mentioned."

"You—you m-mean you'll protect me?"

"Yeah. Now where do you want me to take you? Have you got a hideout or do you want to go home?"

She trembled against me. "I—I wouldn't d-dare go home. Vic would look for me there first th-thing."

"A hotel, then?"

"N-no." She squirmed around, drew a ragged breath. "Couldn't I st-stay in your apartment . . . j-just for tonight?"

I yeepled: "Hey, now wait a minute! Leave us not get scandalous. Keep it pure and innocent."

"Please . . . d-don't misunderstand me. It's just that I'd feel safer . . . with you. In the morning I'll get some traveling clothes and leave town . . . go some place where Vic can't reach me . . ."

I pondered this; mulled it around in my think-tank and found I didn't like the flavor. Still, though, I hated to refuse a jessie who was definitely in jeopardy. Moreover, she hadn't yet produced that promised five centuries; up to now the whole routine had been a waste of time. If, by lodging her for the night, I'd find myself richer by half a grand—well, what the hell? Nobody ever got wealthy wondering what the neighbors thought of him. I decided nuts to the neighbors; let the gossips wag their tongues and be damned to them.

"It's a deal, kiddo," I said. And I bent my rudder to the right; made knots in the direction of my bachelor apartment stash. Presently I parked in the basement garage, steered my curvesome guest to the automatic elevator, wafted her up to my floor. "Welcome to the wigwam," I keyed my door open, made lights and bowed her inside.

She sighed as if a lot of care had been lifted off her liling shoulders. Then, copping a gander at one corner of the front room, she asked me: "Is that a cellarette?"

"Yeah."

"Would there be anything to drink in it?"

"Genuine Vat 69," I said. "More precious than rubies at current prices. Would you like a snort?"

"I could use one," she admitted. "I hope you don't think I was hinting."

"Not at all. Glad you reminded me," I said. I added truthfully: "I need a little tonic myself." I broached a fresh fifth and poured two healthy drams into a pair of tumblers. "Straight okay for you?"

SHE said she preferred a chaser. "If it's not too much bother."

"A pleasure," I said politely, and put both drinks on an end-table by the davenport; drifted to my kitchenette and got a slug of water from the tap. Returning, I gave it to her; picked up my jorum of snake-bite remedy and tossed it off. It tasted slightly bitter. "That's funny," I remarked.

"Wh-what is?"

"Vat 69 is usually smoother than this. You notice anything about yours?"

She sipped reflectively. "No. It seems all right to me." Then she looked at the divan. "Will it be okay for me to sleep on that? I mean—"

"Nix," I said. "You take the bedroom and I'll move out here. After all, you're going to pay pretty steep rent." I hung the fuzzy focus on her. "Speaking of rent, suppose we go through a brief formality."

"Formality?"

"You cross my palm with folding money. Five yards."

"Oh, that," she smiled wanly. "You'll have to wait until I get it for you."

"Get it where?"

"I c-carry an emergency fund in my girdle. Which way is the bedroom?"

"Over there," I pointed, and watched as she moved in that direction. She closed the door after her and I stretched myself on the davenport, made myself comfortable while waiting. The wait was mighty long, it seemed to me. I wondered, drowsily, if she had to peel that girdle with a can-opener. My eyelids felt as if somebody had poured glue on them.

I yawned, relaxed. There was a faint buzzing in my ears and I had a sudden uneasy sensation that I was about to drop off a precipice into a deep dizzy void of blackness. The room started swimming around in circles.

"Cripes!" I mumbled, and tried to sit up. It was no dice. I lifted my voice to a harsh blurry croak: "You drugged me, you she-male heel! You slipped knockout drops in my Scotch while I was getting you a chaser from the kitchenette!"

Gypsy didn't answer me. She didn't come out of the other room to confirm or deny the charge.

I rolled off the sofa, hoping the impact against the floor would jar some of the numbness out of my nooks and crannies. It didn't work though. I landed on the rug and went inert. Waves of dark fog swept over me.

With these came nausea. I made swimming motions, attempted to crawl toward the bathroom. My progress amounted to an exact five inches.

Then I passed out.

CHAPTER III

Framed!

THERE was a landslide, accompanied by thunderous roars. The roars became explosive, like depth bombs going off in eleventeen fathoms. My noggin throbbed worse than an ulcerated tooth and I had a taste in my kisser like the rind of a limburger cheese buried beneath a skunk's nest. I felt terrible.

I opened my misty peepers, realized I

was still on the floor near the divan. "Gypsy!" I breathed. "Gypsy Torreo. Come here and get me a stomach pump, damn you!"

There was no response except an in-



I said, "Hold that pose, baby, or you'll find daisies growing out of your ears."



was sick. Then, weakened but feeling a little better, I prowled the premises; found no signs of the brunette chick. Having doped me senseless, she'd lammed without trace. She was gone.

creased volume of pounding that hammered against my skull the way a blacksmith flogs his anvil. Groggy, I raised myself on all fours; started crawling. The bathroom was my first stop. I

By squinting and concentrating, I managed to pipe the hands of my wrist watch. An hour and five minutes had passed since I'd dropped into a stupor; now I was alone with a hangover the size of Grant's Tomb and a complete inability to figure why Gypsy had drugged my drink and powdered.

I couldn't figure anything; couldn't

make my grey matter operate. Maybe this was because of that constant pounding—which I suddenly realized to be a knocking on the front door of my apartment tepee. Over this booming sound came a voice, brisk with authority and full of ire. "Open up in there, Turner. This is the law. We know you're home; we can hear you moving around." There was a pause. "Are you going to open up or shall we bust in and give you your lumps?"

I called thickly: "Never mind, I've just had some lumps—internally." Then I lurched to the portal, yanked it open and blinked at the two plainclothes bulls who confronted me with their roscoes drawn. "Hey!" I protested.

One of the cops, the one with the beefy features, was my old friend Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad. He gave me a shove that sent me staggering; followed me and laid horny mitts on my shoulders. "Hold still, Philo," he said grimly.

"Hold still for what?"

"For a frisk," he grunted, and fanned my pockets; located my .32 auto in its armpit rig. "Ah."

I made an indignant face. "Ah, my nostril! What's the idea of crowding in here like a bevy of Gestapo and—"

"Quiet," he said, breaking my gat open and sniffing it. "Recently fired." He extracted the clip. "Four cartridges missing." He sighted through the barrel, holding it against a lighted lamp. "Rifling fouled."

"You're out of your mind," I snapped. "That rod hasn't been used since—"

He glowered at me. "Shut up. You're a cooked goose and you know it, Hawkshaw. I never thought I'd see the day when I'd really have the deadwood on you this way."

"What deadwood?" I caterwauled. Then a hideous hunch sneaked up my slacks, nibbled on me. "Who's defunct?"

"Vic Castelli. As if you didn't know."

I sat down on the divan because my gams seemed as limber as boiled spaghetti. "Castelli—you mean he was bumped?"

"Yep. You did a permanent job."

"Lay off that!" I said. "Surely you don't think I—"

HE sneered sourly. "I not only think it, I know it. And I'll prove it. Or anyhow the prosecutor will, on evidence I furnish. A fine thing," he tacked on. "You a private dick with a badge and everything; a pal of mine. And you go around scalding people as if it was perfectly legal."

"Now wait," I said. "This is ridiculous. I—"

"Save it for a jury," he advised me. "Plenty of witnesses in that Purple Turtle cabaret saw the brawl you had with Castelli. You knocked him down, kicked him in the ribs, and pistol-whipped him across the puss. Do you deny that?"

"No, but—"

"Moreover, you were heard to threaten his life. So now he's dead and I'll lay you seventeen to two that when the ballistics bureau checks your gun against the slugs in Castelli's steeple they'll match up."

Fury began to seethe through my sinews. "Okay, they'll match up!" I barked. "And I'll tell you why. A dame framed me. Castelli's dame."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah. She came up here with me and we had a drink. I'd been hired to protect her—"

"Protect her against what?"

"Against Castelli himself. Stop interrupting. I tell you she hired me to take care of her and I brought her here to my stash. She was to hide out until morning, then scam out of town. Anyhow that's the setup she fed me, although I can see now it was a pack of lies."

Donaldson lifted a lip. "Get a new scenario, Sherlock. You sound like a B picture."

"Nuts to what I sound like. I'm leveling," I snarled. "The jane slipped knock-out drops in my tippie and rendered me useless. Then she must have swiped my cannon, drilled Castelli with it, and subsequently returned here, planted the gun on me where it belonged. After that she took a powder, left me to take the rap."

"Hm-m-m. And who was this jane?"

"Gypsy Torreo. A brunette canary that warbled at the Purple Turtle."

Dave looked aggrieved. "You sound like a candidate for the bughouse, bub. Or else

you think *I'm* screwy—if you expect me to swallow that nonsense.”

“Nonsense? How come it's nonsense?” I demanded.

He took my arm. “Come with me and I'll show you.” He and the other flatfoot then steered me downstairs to an official sedan, bundled me into the tonneau. The flatfoot drove while Dave stayed with me, keeping me covered with his service .38 and warning me he'd perforate my giblets if I made a wrong move. I was too upset to argue the matter.

PRESENTLY we parked by the municipal morgue and paraded inside, down a long corridor that smelled of formaldehyde and into the room where they keep the cadavers. Just as we entered, I piped an attendant guiding a red-haired jessie out through another doorway; a dainty cupcake I recognized. She was Francine Castelli, the wren I'd bopped on the dimple while helping Gypsy Torreo get away from the cabaret; in other words, Vic Castell's sister. Right now she was sobbing like a suction pump, weeping tears as big as hailstones.

She cast a backward glance at me; but if she tabbed me, she didn't indicate it. Then she was gone and Donaldson hauled me toward a marble slab that had an occupant. The occupant was covered by a white sheet which Dave whisked off. “Glom a swivel, gumshoe.”

I obeyed; felt caterpillars crawling in my clockworks. Corpses aren't pleasant to look at under the best conditions, and Vic Castell's remainders were particularly sickening. He was still wearing his expensive tux, but his mush was something to haunt a guy's nightmares.

Donaldson nodded dourly. “Messy, eh?”

Messy wasn't the word for Castell's map. It was a smear of ketchup, and obliterated ruin. One bullet had ripped off the top of the skull, another had chewed into the right optic and taken several ounces of meat with it. A third had made a cavern where the smeller had been . . .

I turned away. “I didn't do it, I tell you. I wouldn't do a thing like that. Even if I did croak a guy, I wouldn't keep on

shooting his pan to pieces!”

“There's the evidence. You can't refute that.”

“The hell I can't!” I screeched. “It was Gypsy Torreo. She's the one who creamed him. Then she brought my roscoe back and put it in my shoulder holster—”

“Lies won't buy you anything,” Donaldson said through clenched grind-ers. “You know damned well the Torreo girl couldn't possibly be guilty. Quit stalling.”

“What do you mean, stalling? She drugged me, swiped my heater, cooled Castelli—”

“Sure, sure. Then she turned the gun on herself and, later, her ghost took it back to your apartment. I'll bet the judge at your trial will love that one.”

Goose pimples suddenly festooned my spine. “Her ghost? Are you trying to say she—she—?”

“This is what I'm trying to say,” Dave's voice wasn't chummy. He hauled me to a second slab, ripped off its white covering. “We found her with Castelli's body. In the hallway outside his living quarters.”

The bottom dropped out of my elly-bay. I was staring at the corpse of Gypsy Torreo embellished in the burgundy gown she had been wearing the last time I'd lamped her. There was a hole in the gown now, though; directly over her breast. There was also a slug in her heart and she was as dead as Philadelphia on Sunday.

CHAPTER IV

Where The Case Began

DONALDSON and his plainclothes henchman roused me from the corpse emporium, along the corridor that smelled of formaldehyde, and into an ante-room up front. “Okay, fireball,” Dave bellowed. “How's for making a statement?”

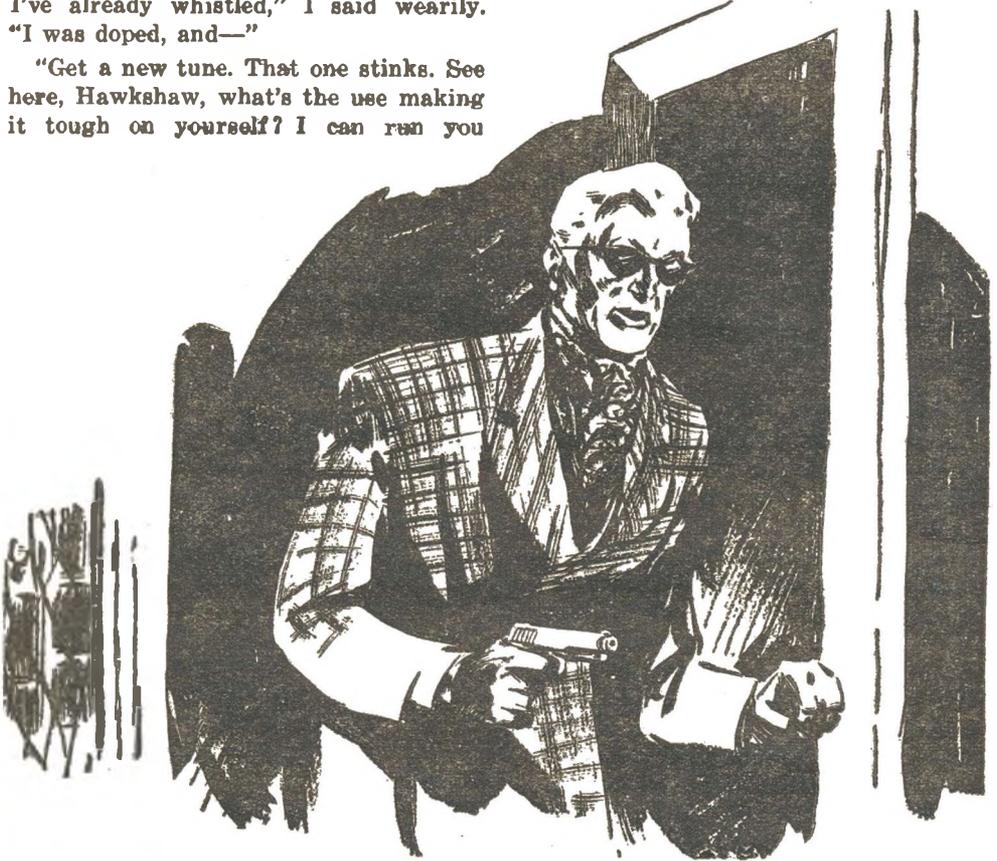
“I haven't got a statement to make.”

He shoved a ferocious scowl up close to my pan. “Then you'd better invent one in a hell of a hurry. You're behind the gas chamber eight-ball, remember.”

“I don't know any more about it than

I've already whistled," I said wearily. "I was doped, and—"

"Get a new tune. That one stinks. See here, Hawkshaw, what's the use making it tough on yourself? I can run you



through the wringer if you insist, but I'd hate like hell to put you on the receiving end of a length of rubber hose. Why not come clean so we can wash it all up and button it?"

I said: "I did come clean. I'm not going to confess a crime I didn't pull."

He sulked. "Look. Castelli's dead; his sister identified the body. She also identified Gypsy Torreo. She likewise put us hep to the fracas you had with her brother in that night spot; told us how you got out the back door after smacking her down."

"Correct," I nodded. "Francine wasn't lying about any of it. I admit knocking her down after brawling with her brother. What I deny is killing him. Hell, maybe she did that herself."

He thinned his kisser. "Oh, come now! That's reaching much too damned far—" His voice petered out at this point, due to a sudden uproar issuing from the

morgue's rear room where all the stiff's were salted down. The uproar consisted of oaths, yells, scuffling, the sounds of a sharp struggle and then a heavy *tunk*-noise like smacking a ripe watermelon with a baseball bat. This was followed by a slumping thud, whereupon silence descended in sinister quantities.

Dave gasped: "What cooks?" and pivoted, started racing down the long hallway with his headquarters minion following. Nobody invited me but I went along out of curiosity. You don't expect to hear riots in a morgue, and when you do, it arouses your snooping instincts.

WE burst into the white-walled chamber like three exploding rockets; stared around without noticing anything peculiar. The brunette Torreo quail lay sleeping the deep sleep on her *marble slab*, and nearby there was a *white sheet* over the body of her erst-



I pivoted. "Hello, killer," I said to Vic Castelli.

white boy-friend, Vic Castelli. At least we assumed it to be Castelli's remnants until we removed the wrapper.

"It's the morgue attendant with his cranium stove in!" Dave strangled. He stared wildly from north to south. "And where's Castelli?"

That was the sixty-four dollar question, and none of us had the answer. All I could think of was: "He's been corpse-napped!" Then, impulsively, I sprinted buckety-blip toward the rear exit, the door through which Castelli's red-haired and weeping sister had lately lammed.

Donaldson wheezed along in my wake. We panted up a slanted ramp which gave access to a wide alley, the ambulance and

hearse driveway; and we were just in time to see a black limousine moving out onto the street, traveling fast and gaining momentum at a hell of a clip. Its tail lights were doused and its tags daubed with some substance that obscured the

numbers—mud, probably. That's an old law-evasion trick; I've used it myself.

"Well, there goes the corpus delicti," I said.

Donaldson whirled, his squinters blazing. "You stinking son! You arranged that, I'll bet! You thought if you could get a few pals to swipe the body, you couldn't be held for murder!"

"Don't be a dope, Dave. You've still got Gypsy's shell. One corpse is as good as two when it comes to a homicide trial. Had I arranged the snatching routine, I'd have made sure both stiff's were glommed."

Dave's assistant piped up: "That's right, lieutenant. Besides we got the bullets that killed them people. The doc dug them out, remember? So if they match Turner's rod, we still got him where the hair is short."

"Yeah," Donaldson rubbed the stubble on his chin. His voice grew dubious. "But who the hell took Castelli just now?"

I made a suggestion. "Maybe some of his underworld buddies, to give him a private funeral." Then I added: "Or maybe it was the real murderers, trying to beat the rap by destroying their victim."

"Real murderers? Dammit, you're the real murderer!" he came back at me. "And I'm going to toss your toenails in the bastille right now, before it gives any more shenanigans. Stick out your fins for the hardware."

I resented that. If there's one thing I dislike it's wearing steel bracelets—especially when I've got work to do. In this instance I had plenty of work ahead of me and I needed both my freedom and time. Two croakings had been dumped on my doorstep, figuratively speaking, and unless I put the big finger on the guilty party I might find myself over a barrel.

With pretended meekness I extended my dukes. Then, as Dave hauled forth his glittering nippers, I double-crossed him; fed him a powerhouse smash on the dewlap. He hiccupped, teetered on his heels and crashed backward into the startled arms of his headquarters companion, who let out an infuriated bleat and began struggling to free himself of his inert

burden. While thus engaged, he couldn't prevent my next move.

I WHEELED toward the mouth of the alley and ran like hell. I was on the street and out of range before the gunfire commenced. An assortment of slugs hummed through the darkness and whined as they ricocheted, dragging tails of sound behind them as the cop's gat barked its spiteful: *Ka-Pow-Chow-Pyeowp!* Dripping sweat, I scissored my stems into rapid motion! kept them pumping under me as I raced for the far corner. Gaining this, I scuttled around the turn and ran into a shower of good luck. A Yellow was just cruising past.

"Hey, you!" I yodeled.

The cabby slowed briefly, then seemed to reconsider it. "No, thanks," he called to me as he shifted into second and prepared to speed his cylinders. "I ain't haulin' no lammisters. I don't like coppers shootin' at me."

I leaped for his running board. "You silly jerk, I'm not a lammister," I lied. "I'm one of the coppers hunting the lammister." And I flipped my lapel, gave him a momentary swivel at my private badge without letting him know it was private.

"You mean you're the guy was doin' that there triggerin'?" he said.

"Yes. A criminal just got away." I bounced into his tonneau. "Stoke this boiler."

He stoked it. "Sure, cap. Where you wanna get took to?"

"Straight ahead," I answered. "I'll tell you when to turn." That seemed the least suspicious order I could give, and at the same time it afforded me a little breathing spell. I settled myself against the cushions, tried to make my think-tank do its stuff. For the moment I was safe; but that safety wasn't going to last long, I realized. Not unless I wriggled out from under the murder frame that had been fastened around me.

My getaway from Dave Donaldson would make it all the tougher for me, too. There was only one way I could square that caper: find the bozo who had bumped

Vic Castelli and Gypsy Torreo. Then I'd be a hero instead of a heel.

I tried to reason out the situation; considered all the angles, and followed each one to its logical conclusion. No matter how you looked at it, though, each avenue of thought came up to a dead end represented by the Torreo canary. She was the chick who'd glommed my fowling piece after drugging my Scotch. She'd been the logical party as far as motive was concerned; any idiot could see why she might have craved to put the chill on Castelli. She'd been scared of him, and the only way she could be free of that fright, was to knock him off.

Therefore she had deliberately tricked me with her phone call; had lured me to the Purple Turtle, dished me cargo of malarkey, made a sucker of me by wrangling her way into my bachelor apartment joint. She'd had the knockout drops ready for my whiskey; it had all been pre-arranged, premeditated, a scheme to borrow my gat for killery purposes—with me as the eventual fall guy.

All of which summed up to make sense until you stumbled on one vital sidetrack. Gypsy herself had also been creamed; and my automatic had been returned to me as I lay in dope-induced dreamland—after the brunette frill's death!

Which meant there was somebody else who'd known about the plot; someone who had been privy to Gypsy's plans and realized the murder weapon belonged to me.

Who was this mysterious third party?

FOR that matter, why had Castelli's husk been spirited out of the morgue a few minutes ago? True, I'd given Dave Donaldson two theories about that. First, maybe some of the guy's pals wanted to give him a private burial. Or, second, perhaps the actual murderer swiped the defunct character in a screwball effort to blow down the homicide beef.

Personally, I didn't think much of either explanation. The thing went deeper; and somehow I felt it was linked up with the return of my .32 cannon while I'd been unconscious and after the twin killings had been committed. Once again

the dial spun around to Gypsy Torreo. Why should she drug me and glom my rod if she had known she was going to get bumped by it?

Well, obviously, she hadn't known that was going to happen to her. She'd intended to croak Castelli and frame me; but somehow her plot had slipped a cog and she, too, stopped a hot pill. Then the unknown third party gave me back my gat—and who the hell was this third guy?

There's an old saying that a murderer always returns to the scene of the crime, which is a lot of hogwash. It applies to the detective racket, however; when you're at a loss for clues, you should always go back to where the case began. Maybe you'll find something you or the cops overlooked.

I leaned forward, spoke to my cabby. "Head for LaBrea south of Wilshire, cousin."

"You bet." He tooled around a turn. "Any particular block?" he asked me.

I said: "Yes. Do you know a joint called the Purple Turtle? It's—"

"A dive," he supplied. "I been fried there many a time." He stiffened. "Say, ain't that where Vic Castelli got rubbed off tonight?"

"Right."

"You workin' on that case, cap?"

"I am."

"Well, gosh! Imagine that. Hey, do you know who squibbed him?"

"Not yet," I said rancidly. "I hope to learn, though."

He took both mitts off the wheel and scratched his dandruff, thereby coming within a whisker of colliding with a passing milk wagon. The milk wagon's driver screamed bitterly and leaped for his life; the air was presently raining glass bottles and extract of cow. My cabby grabbed his rudder and clucked his tongue with disapproval. "Some of them dopes oughtn't be allowed to have a license. Think of the guys that ain't gonna have no cream for their coffee in the mornin'."

"Shut up," I said, "Look, there's the Purple Turtle ahead. Pull in. I'll get out here and walk the rest of the way."

He wanted to debate this. "Why?" he

demanded. "I can drive you right to the door. The joint's closed anyhow. The cops shut it up soon as they got that bump discovered. What am I saying? I should tell you that stuff when you're a cop. Cripes, am I stupid."

"That I'll buy," I agreed. "Which makes it unanimous. Pull over to the curb before I blow my cork and hand you a citation for reckless disregard of life and limb."

HE dragged anchor. "Sure, cap, sure." He hopped out, opened the tonneau door for me. "That'll be two bucks even."

"Oh, yeah?" I glued the glare on him. "Charge it to City Hall."

"Nix, cap, you can't do that. Not without you gimme a paper or somethin', you know, a due bill or whatever they call it. My clock says two bucks and—"

I made a fist, waved it under his trumpet. "Would you care to have your adenoids altered?"

He slid under his wheel sullenly. "Okay. But this ain't right. You ain't givin' me a square shake." His glims narrowed. "Why, hell, I bet you ain't no cop at all!"

"Get going, bud," I snarled.

He clashed his gears with a resentful clatter. "Yeah. But you an' me ain't heard the last of this, cap." Then he screeched into a terrific U-turn and went yammering back downtown with his exhaust pipe spitting a streak of profane flames.

I waited until he was out of view, then ankled forward; tiptoed toward the frowsy night club where my troubles had originated. The dive was deserted, dark, its Neon signs doused and its interior swathed in solid shadows. There was one thing in my favor; no harness bulls had been staked out around the premises. I breathed a thanks to Golly for this and fished out my ring of master keys, found one that operated the front door's lock. Presently I was inside.

Sounds drifted to me.

They were scraping noises, the kind a shovel makes when you dig into gravel. As an undercurrent there were low voices, which seemed to issue from somewhere beneath my brogans. I hauled out my pencil flashlight, broomed the cabaret

with its thin white splash of glow. The tables rose in ghostly white tiers on either side of me, with the bandstand at the far end, silent now and devoid of so-called musicians. I stalked in that direction with my senses peeled to razor edge. It struck me that the scraping sounds and the hushed talk came up from the floor near the stage.

My surroundings reminded me of a Boris Karloff movie, a terror feature replete with specters and haunts. The white tablecloths were like ghosts and the muttering voices gave me a sudden case of the shivering jabberwookies. If Frankenstein's monster had abruptly put the grab on me I wouldn't have been at all astonished.

Instead of a monster, I found a trap door.

It was propped open, a little to the left of the orchestral shell, and a steep staircase slanted downward into a basement under the dance floor. Peering, I saw that this cellar was some kind of storage space for cases of bottled goods and canned food, a cache for the cabaret's reserve provisions. It was paved with cement, walled with shelves and lighted by a dangling electric bulb, raw and unshaded. In this gloomy illumination I copped a gander at a scene that crinkled my kidneys.

By sheer happenstance I had located the kidnaped corpse.

CHAPTER V

Vic's Sister

A BRAWNY bozo with a sledgehammer, pick-axe, and crowbar had chopped away a section of the cellar's concrete flooring; you could lamp the tools he'd used and the rectangular hole he had thus created. Another stalwart ginzo was just finishing a job with a spade, digging a fairly shallow orifice in the moist dark earth. As fast as he shoveled the dirt, the first brown character scooped it into gunnysacks; no doubt for convenience in carrying it away later. Both these workmen were guys I tabbed as combination waiter-bouncers in the Purple Turtle, members of the mob that

had come at me with brass knuckles at the conclusion of my fracas with Vic Castelli upstairs a couple of hours ago. They'd looked plenty sinister then, which had been one of my reasons for scrambling with Gypsy Torreo in a thundering hurry; but they looked even tougher now, doubling in brass as amateur grave-diggers.

Nearby, a third plug-ugly was busying himself with buckets of water, a bag of sand, a bag of cement, a wooden trough, and a mixing hoe. The cement sack was plainly labeled, the quick drying kind, and the use to which it was about to be put was laid out on the floor in defunct slumber—the carcass of the murdered citizen that had been glommed from the morgue. This individual was about to be inserted in a concrete shroud and planted to rest where it wasn't likely he'd ever be disturbed.

Judging from appearances, some fourth party to the plot had done the actual body-snatching; had lugged his gruesome trophy here and then taken a powder. The trio currently on the scene had quite evidently been attending to their labors quite a while in advance of the slain guy's arrival, for they were now almost ready to hold the funeral. It was obvious that Vic Castelli was scheduled to vanish from this globe of sorrow from now until Gabriel tootled reveille on his saxophone.

Unobserved from the brink of the trap-door opening, I treated myself to a long and queasy hinge at the late lamented. His mush looked just as horrible as it had been when I studied it downtown, the noggin shattered, the right glim blasted out, the smeller shot to hamburger. Below this carnage the lips were peeled back from uneven yellow choppers in what the doctors call risus sardonius, the dead man's grin. Observing it, I felt a sudden surge of satisfaction.

Now I savvied why the cadaver had been pilfered, and I had a damned good notion as to the identity of Gypsy Torreo's killer. But proving my theory and trapping the murderer would be a horse of another tint; the chances were all against me. A wild idea sneaked into my mental apparatus and I decided to give

it a try—but I knew it was going to be the same as tossing loaded dice with the Grim Reaper.

I DREW back from the trap-door, went catfooting around the bandstand, located the portal which gave upon that long rear corridor leading to the parking lot exit. This was the hallway I'd traversed earlier in the scenario, with the entertainers' dressing rooms on either side and another door near the end, leading into Vic Castelli's private living quarters. At that spot Castelli's red-haired sister Francine had attempted to stop me as I'd lammed with the Torreo cupcake, whereupon I had been compelled to dole Francine a knock on the button.

Apparently I hadn't injured her too severely when I dumped her on her ear, because subsequently I'd tabbed her at the municipal morgue, leaking brine after identifying her brother's lifeless clay. She'd given no indication that she recognized me then, but I felt pretty certain she would know me now.

I reached the door of the Castelli apartment.

Unless I was badly mistaken, Francine should be here. I recalled the heavy crimson Shantung silk lounging pajamas she had been wearing when she'd tried to impede my progress, a type of costume not generally associated with street attire but usually sported in the privacy of the home. Therefore I was willing to wager the chick had lived here with her swarthy brother, maybe keeping house for him.

I knocked.

Pattering footfalls sounded within; then the portal was pulled inward. Sure enough, there stood the dainty Castelli ruffle blinking at me. Her dark peepers widened when she got a thorough swivel at my stern mush.

"Y-you—Mr. T-Turner—!"

I buried my right duke in the pocket of my coat, extending the index finger and hoping it resembled the barrel of a roscoe. That was the best I could do under existing conditions, not having a genuine firearm on my person. Dave Donaldson had seen to this by confiscating my .32 auto, and without it I felt as naked as a

plucked rooster. Still, though, you can frequently get away with plenty if you know how to bluff.

"Hi, precious," I growled. "Hold that pose and don't squeak. If you make with the vocal chords, you're likely to wind up with daisies growing out of your ears."

Her kisser sagged open and she put a palm against it; gasped audibly. "Wh-wha-what—?"

"Quiet," I rasped, barging in over the threshold and giving the door a backward kick to close it. "Speak when you're spoken to."

She hung the flabbergasted stare on me. "Say, look. If you think you can—"

"I think I can do anything I feel like doing, baby. I take it you're alone here now that Vic's deceased?"

"Y-yes."

I said grimly: "That's fine. That's just dandy. It makes it easier for me."

"Easier?"

"Yeah. To get a confession out of you."

She flinched. "A confession? What kind of confession? What d-do you want, anyhow? What's the idea?"

"I crave to know why you creamed your brother and his sweet patootie."

"Are you insane?" she whispered. "I didn't—"

"You did. You bumped Vic and you cooled Gypsy Torreo. I intend to make you come clean if I have to squeeze it out of you like toothpaste from a tube."

SHE took a faltering backward step. "Don't you t-touch me. Don't you d-dare lay a hand on me, understand?"

"Why not?" I leered. "There's nobody around to stop me. Of course if you care to make a clean breast of it you'll save yourself a quantity of bruises and abrasions. Otherwise I'm ready to commence establishing a beach-head on your anatomy."

"You—y-you c-can't—"

"I can and I will, pet. Unless you sing the truth."

"Wh-what truth?"

"About croaking Vic and Gypsey."

"But I—I didn't! You did!"

I said: "Aha. So you knew about the

scheme to frame me, hunh? That's a damaging admission."

"It's nothing of the sort. I—I heard you'd been arrested. I knew you'd fought with my brother. Naturally I—"

"Oh, stop it!" I barked. I moved toward her. "What's the use lying? I've got you in a corner and you may as well surrender."

She began to tremble. "But—but I—you—"

"That's enough," I reached forth, fastened the clutch on her wrists. "I guess I'll have to get rough."

"No—please!"

"Then yodel. Why did you pull that double bumpery?"

She twisted, tried to release herself. She threw snake-eyes. "I—I didn't murder them! I was here in my room, reading, when . . . when it happened."

"Just where did it happen, toots?"

"In the hallway, halfway between here and the bandstand. I . . . I heard f-four shots . . ."

"And then what?"

"Then footsteps . . . running . . . and a door slammed."

"Continue," I said.

"So I rushed out into the hall and . . . and found . . . Oh-h-h, it was t-too awful! Why must you make me s-say it?"

I frowned fiercely. "Because I'm a stubborn gee, that's why. You found what in the hallway?"

"Vice . . . and Gypsy . . . d-dead. I was t-too late to save them . . . too late to c-catch you as you escaped . . ."

"Belay that patter," I snapped. "I wasn't the shooter. Moreover, I don't believe a word you've uttered."

She whimpered: "But it's true! The police believe me. I . . . I told them just wh-what I'm telling you. I identified the bodies at the m-morgue. What m-more can I do?"

"You can lay off kidding me," I tightened down on her wrists. "I'm not as dumb as the cops. I'm a private man and I can smell a lie from here to Harper's Ferry. You slipped Vic and Gypsy the big chill."

"No—no! You—you're hurting me!"

I twisted her slender arms. "I'm about

to belabor the custard out of you," I rumbled. "This nonsense has gone far enough. I'm fed up."

"But—but you have no authority to—"

"I'm bigger and stronger than you are. I weigh a hundred and ninety without my bridgework. That's all the authority I need to run you through the wringer." I stung her with a whap across the chops. "Sing and be rapid about it."

She screamed hysterically at the top of her tonsils. It was a shrill, raw bleat, harsh with pain and fear. I aimed a second slap at her ivory complexion and she screeched again.

Across the room a side door opened and somebody catapulted into view. "Let her go, Turner, or I'll burn you down!"

I released the red-haired cookie and slowly pivoted. "Hello, killer," I said to Vic Castelli.

CHAPTER VI

The Meat of the Matter

HAVING SERVED a stretch in the cinema studios playing tough mugg character roles, Castelli was hep to the use of theatrical makeup. His glossy black locks were tinted grey and had been given a curly wave; he was wearing dark cheaters, false padding in the region of his midriff to make him seem afflicted with the portliness of middle age, and his trumpet was now arched like a parrot's beak—probably by means of a subcutaneous injection of paraffin. At least it looked too realistic to be an application of putty.

The .44 Colt in his fist looked realistic, too.

He flashed me a mocking smile, notable mainly for the puffiness of the lips and the absence of a front chopper, obth souvenirs of the pistol-whipping I had slipped him when we tangled some time ago. "So you recognize me," he purred.

I said: "Of course. In fact, I was expecting you."

"Expecting—?"

"That's why I lowered the boom on your sister, here. I figured you were hiding somewhere on the premises, and I knew you'd come out of your rat-hole if I made

her scream loud enough. It worked."

"You guessed I wasn't dead?"

I nodded, trying to keep my knees from knocking together like castanets. The muzzle of his cannon looked bigger than the Holland Tunnel and it was aimed straight at my vest. "Sure I knew you weren't dead."

"What put you wise?"

"Something I lamped in the cellar."

His puss darkened. "You've been snooping, eh?"

"Oh, slightly," I made a disparaging gesture.

"Skip the small talk, buster. You said you saw something in the cellar. What was it?"

"A funeral. Without benefit of flowers."

"Whose funeral?"

I shrugged. "I wouldn't know the guy's moniker. Off-hand I'd say he was the waiter who served my table when I was a customer tonight. You remember that waiter; he was about your build, your complexion; had patent leather hair like yours. Whoever he was, I knew damned well he wasn't Vic Castelli."

"How did you know that?"

"Because I got a good gander at him noticed something I overlooked when his corpse was at the morgue. His yapper wasn't cut and he had all his front teeth; whereas I remembered bashing you on the crockery, knocking one out of its anchorage. So if the cadaver didn't have any indication of bruises on its lip or missing dental equipment, the body wasn't you."

Castelli chuckled. "Very clever of you, Sherlock."

"Elementary, my dear Watson," I said. "That's merely part of the story. Would you like to hear more?"

"I'd love to. I find it extremely entertaining—particularly since I realize you're just talking to postpone death."

I cocked an eyebrow. "Who's going to croak?"

"You are, gumshoe. Very soon you will join that waiter downstairs. I'm sure there'll be enough cement to hold you down. In the meantime, let's have the rest of your pipe dream. Francine and I are all ears."

"Hers are prettier, though," I cast an admiring glance at his sister. "Well, let's see; where shall I start? Oh, yes; the narcotics racket."

"What about the narcotics racket?"

"You've been in it up to your big brown peepers. Gypsy Torreo told me that, and it's about the only part of her conversation with me that was kosher," I said. "Your cabaret deadfalls were just a part of your setup. The rest of it was marijuana cigarettes, opium, snow, and so forth. From what I've observed, you had quite an organization."

HE sucked at the space where an incisor was missing. "Hurry it a little. My trigger finger's getting itchy."

"Okay. The G-men were onto you; closing in. You were slated for a good stiff rap in the Federal jug. You probably realized you couldn't scam; no matter where you might go, they'd track you down sooner or later. The only way you could get out from under was to die—or to make the world believe you had perished."

"Now you're getting to the meat of the matter."

I said: "Thanks. Well, so you framed it with the Torreo filly. She phoned me, lured me to this Purple Turtle drop and dished me a load of sheep dip about splitting up with you because you had accused her of stooling to Uncle Sam's laddies. She pretended she was scared and wanted to hire me for protection. To make this look good, you showed up and began throwing your weight around—thereby causing me to commit violent assault on your complexion."

"It was violent enough, I'll give you that," he said. "Continue the lecture."

"Yeah," I made a sour mouth. "The whole routine was phony; a sucker's game. I was the sucker. I gave you a flailing and even threatened your life in the presence of witnesses, which was precisely what you wanted. It stacked the cards against me. For the next act, Gypsy went home with me; drugged my drink."

"And—?"

"When I passed out, she glommed my gat; brought it to you. In the following reel you used that heater to scald a waiter who resembled you in a superficial way. You put three slugs through his mush to mess him up so the resemblance, even though remote, would fool the cops; especially when your sister falsely identified the corpse as yourself."

"Keep it up," he nodded.

My palms were bedewed with perspiration and I wondered if I could talk long enough to lull the guy so I might take a chance, jump him. Aside from that slim possibility, my number was up and I damned well knew it. I said: "Now we come to Gypsy Torreo. She was in on the deal, and that made her dangerous to you."

"In what way?"

"She was your sweetie, but that might not last," I tried to make my voice casual. "Romance has a habit of fading. Anyhow, Gypsy was hep to everything; had participated in part of it. The time might come when you and she would really split up—and if that happened, who knows what a spurned she-male will do? Maybe she'd blow the whistle on you, squeal to the law. So when you croaked the waiter, you also cooked Gypsy"

"Self protection," he agreed politely.

I said: "You then returned my rod to me while I was snoozing off my knockout drops. This dumped me into a jackpot and left you as free as the breeze. Officially you were deceased. A touch of makeup and you could haul hips to some other city, start life all over again. There was only one flaw."

"And that was—?"

"The murdered waiter's remnants," I answered. "Your sister had identified him as yourself; but there was always the chance that the bulls would penetrate that lie. Perhaps they would fingerprint the body, for instance, and find that the prints didn't belong to Vic Castelli; then they'd know you weren't really defunct."

HE bowed sarcastically. "So of course I had to steal my victim from the morgue."

"Right. And have your gunsels bury him here in the basement. Which they're doing now."

"That reminds me," he said. "I must tell them to fix another grave. As I said before, Sherlock, you've got too much on me. It stands to reason I've got to kill you."

My throat felt dry. "Yeah. Just like you killed the waiter, Gypsy, and that morgue attendant."

"Exactly. Well, bright-eyes, this is it. Say hello to the devil for me." His knuckle tightened around the trigger of the .44 and there was a sudden blurt of flame, a roaring explosion. It didn't come from Castelli's roscoe, though. It came from the doorway behind me.

It was a police positive that sneezed: *Ka-Chow!* and pushed a pellet against the weapon in Castelli's grasp. The impact caused Castelli's rod to be deflected at the instant it was fired; and instead of shooting me, the swarthy ginzo plugged his red-haired sister smack between the glims.

She screamed, toppled. She was deader than chopped bait before she hit the rug.

I yeped: "What the hell?" and whirled; lamped Dave Donaldson lumbering into the room with two harness bulls in his wake. They had another character with them but I didn't pay too much attention to him just then. Vic Castelli had the center of the melodrama's stage at that moment. He was staring at the jessie on the floor.

"Francine—I—I killed her!" he gibbered. Then he pulled a stunt that was plain and simple suicide. I think he did it deliberately, knowing what would happen to him and welcoming it. He lunged at the eops.

Their artillery mowed him down like wheat.

I blinked at Donaldson. "Dave! How did you get here? Talk about the Marines coming to the rescue!"

"You can thank this guy," he jerked a thumb at the citizen he'd brought with him. It was the taxi driver, the one I'd dismissed with an unpaid bill of two bucks on his meter. He'd gone to headquarters and made a beef; whereupon Dave, adding up the correct answers, sallied forth to nab me.

Only I wasn't the gink who got nabbed. A rush for the cellar netted us those three hoods as they came up the ladder to find out what all the shootery meant. They found out, all right. In a brace of shakes they were nippered, and then I conducted Donaldson to the murdered waiter's new cement grave. "Which cleans up the whole clambake," I said. "That is, if you arrived in time to catch Castelli's confession."

"I caught it," he grumbled.

I said: "Meaning I'm out from under?"

"Yeah. There's just one little detail left."

"What detail?" I demanded.

He pointed to the taxi guy. "Pay that hacker his two hermans or I'll run you in for defrauding a public carrier."

Remake for Death

(Continued from page 47)

were in the studio infirmary getting the pepper out of your peepers when Sandra lowered the boom on me. But you sneaked out of the emergency ward just long enough to strangle Velva Vantyne with a black stocking. Then you went back to the infirmary; nobody missed you."

"You didn't . . . know . . . I was . . . the . . ."

"No," I admitted again. "As I say, I

had a hunch the killer would turn out to be a discarded sweetie. So I just let nature take its course."

He coughed feebly. "Well . . . I fooled . . . you that . . . much . . ." Then he kicked the bucket.

Dave Donaldson took charge from there. I wanted to get back to the blonde Rhoda Loring. Maybe she still had some Vat 69 left in her bottle, I hoped.

No Mourner Shall Weep

(Continued from page 29)

used to be. I know of the shack because once Hilding takes me there to cook for him while he goes hunting. I go there and I found the body. She is dead. She has been stabbed a long time ago. I do not touch anything and I start to go out. I am very frightened, alone in that place with that . . . thing. I am a coward that way. Then Miss Randall come along and I frighten her, but I do not mean to, and she recognize me. I tell her not to go inside. I am too frighten myself to stop her, but after I drive away I think to myself that I am not much of a man, to leave Miss Randall alone with that in there. So I come back and I find her on the path outside."

Hasty said sharply: "You're sure she had just fainted?"

"That is all. I swear it, Hasty. I brought her right back to town."

The marshal turned to Laurie. "As I told you over the phone, Miss Randall gave us a coherent story, but she was suffering from shock. She is still sleeping, under an opiate the doctor gave her. I thought it just as well to keep her quiet and out of further mischief." The marshal gestured to Fialho. "All right, Joe. You can go."

THE little Portugee backed out gratefully. When the door closed behind him, Tucker sighed wearily and struggled to a more upright position in his chair. He addressed the wall between Laurie Adams and Hasty.

"Cap'n Bowhead and I are convinced now that one of the *Thetis* crew killed your husband, Laurie. In the light of Mawhinney's death and the discovery of Cassie's body, there can be no doubt now that Hilding was murdered. We are up against a determined killer. Ever since the *Thetis* returned, lots of things have been happenin'. Seems as if Hilding was not the pillar of society folks thought he was. Seems as if he encouraged a number of people to take an intense dislike of him."

Laurie said quietly: "Is it necessary to go into that now?"

"The more motives we find, the wider the range of suspects we must cover. Anybody on the *Thetis* could've killed Seastrom for the embezzled money—assumin' it was, and still is, aboard. But besides that, we know Hilding was hard-pressed to meet his market commitments and was plannin' to call in the money he had so liberally loaned to others, even though he led them to believe he would never ask for payment. Almost every man aboard the *Thetis* owed Hilding money, except Hasty and Caap'n Bowhead. The one that owed the most was Kirk. And we know Kirk couldn't pay."

"Kirk wouldn't kill him for that," said Laurie coldly.

"No, not just for that. But we also know Kirk disapproved of Hilding as a brother-in-law. Maybe Kirk suspected you had to marry Hilding to keep Kirk out of trouble. And we must remember that Kirk was under heavy emotional strain because of Cassandra Leigh. He knew Cassie had to put up with Hilding's attentions while she worked for him. Well, we now know that Cassie is dead. She didn't go to Maine. She was seen with Hilding when he flew up here two weeks ago. And now she is dead in his hunting shack. We can assume Hilding never told Cassie he was married to you. Maybe he promised marriage to Cassie, and when he showed up with the money stolen from *Sea Pride* she guessed where it came from. Maybe revulsion overtook her and she threatened to leave him and inform the authorities. So he killed her. I think there can be no doubt that Hilding Seastrom murdered Cassie and then fled to the *Thetis* in Norfolk. Apparently his plan was to get as far south, legitimately, as possible, then vanish."

Laurie's fingers twisted the purse in her lap. Her face was white.

"What are you trying to say, marshal?"

The marshal said: "I'm arrestin' Kirk for murder."

Laurie's voice was sharp. "You can't!"

"He had the best motive of all, Laurie. Several motives." The marshal glanced at Hasty, then back to the girl. She was taut and strained. "My men haven't been able to locate Kirk all morning. Where is he?"

"I don't know," Laurie said.

The marshal's voice was suddenly hard. "It will be better if you stop hiding and sheltering Kirk, Laurie."

"I don't know where he is. And if I did, I wouldn't turn him over to you. Kirk isn't a murderer! He didn't kill Hilding." She stood up, her eyes angry. "Unless you have any further questions, I'll go now."

The town marshal had slumped down in his chair once more.

"Stay in town, please, where you'll be available."

Hasty stood up as the door closed behind the girl. Cap'n Bowhead sighed and raised his mountainous bulk with an effort. His white hair glistened as he inclined his heavy head toward Marshal Tucker.

"With your permission, marshal, I'm sailing the *Thetis* at one o'clock in the morning, bound for Cashe's Ledge. The whole crew will be in my hands, at sea, and they won't very well run away. It's my feeling—and Hasty's—that the solution to the case is aboard the *Thetis*. Hasty has an idea that under similar circumstances, with the same crew, this whole mess will get cleared up. I agree with him."

Marshal Tucker nodded, eyed the two fishermen—Hasty's tall, dark figure, and Cap'n Bowhead's massive weight.

"I'm a fool, I suppose, but—good luck," the lawman said.

CHAPTER VI

Dip in the Deep

THE hotel lobby was crowded with noon-time diners as Hasty pushed his way through the swinging doors and went upstairs to Judy Randall's room. There was no answer to his knock. He tried again; then, after a moment, he tested the knob. The door was open, and he stepped silently in.

The bed was rumpled but empty. He stood still, aware of something wrong here, but unable to put his finger directly on it. There was no sign of disorder, except for the crumpled counterpane. The pillow was still indented where she had slept most of the morning. The room was a little too neat. There was nothing on the bare bureau—no brushes, combs, none of the little articles that show a room is lived in. He crossed to the closet in sudden alarm, yanked open the door. Her heavy airplane luggage was gone.

For a moment he stood in complete puzzlement. Then, spinning on his heel, he ran downstairs to the lobby and the desk clerk.

"Where is Miss Randall?" he demanded.

The clerk was not disturbed. "She checked out an hour ago, and left no forwarding address. We shipped her luggage to the railroad depot."

"Was she all right? Was she alone?"

"She seemed perfectly all right. Yes, she was alone."

Hasty telephoned the depot. Her luggage was there. It had arrived with instructions to hold it for her, with no advice as to destination. He turned away with a queer sinking sensation and walked aimlessly down Main Street, trying to think where she could be. He tried all the restaurants, even telephoned the town marshal and Laurie Adams. There was no message from her at the desk when he returned to the hotel.

The corridor to his room was dimly lighted by a single bulb at the head of the stairway and a red Exit sign over the fire-escape. Judy Randall's room was still empty. He went to his own, fumbling for the key, and wondered if he should board the *Thetis* if he received no word about the girl by one o'clock. He decided he would have to; he couldn't back down now.

He was having a little difficulty with the lock, bending over to insert the key in the latch, when the attack came. He heard only a quick whisper, then a hard, wicked thump as a knife hissed by his head and bit deep into the door. It was luck that made it miss. If he had re-

ained upright, it would have split his neck vertebrae with the accuracy of threading a needle.

The glistening blade still quivered in the door as he whirled, reaching for his gun. Footsteps thudded hard on the stairway. A door down the hall was swinging slowly ajar. Hasty sprinted, reached the head of the stairs, and just glimpsed a man's hand, clutching the newel post below him. The footsteps pounded rapidly down the hall toward the fire-escape. Hasty plunged down to the second floor in time to see the fire door sliding shut.

It took Hasty only seconds to skid outside on the iron platform. The alley below was wrapped in thick gloom. There wasn't a sound. Hasty flattened against the wall, suddenly cautious. But nothing moved. His gun was ready, but there was no target. If his assailant had already gained the street, it was hopeless to think of overtaking him. Hasty waited for several minutes, searching the darkness for movement, but there was none. Putting the gun away, he went back into the hotel and upstairs to his room.

Nothing had been disturbed. He pulled the knife from the door and examined it curiously, frowning. With its braided loop through the hilt and its glistening, curved blade, it was easily recognizable.

The last time he had seen it was in Fialho's galley on the *Thetis*.

Shrugging, he began packing his gear into a small, canvas seabag.

AT ONE o'clock the moon was a huge orange disc setting in the west over the dark land mass of Cape Ann, and the sturdy Diesel engine pound the *Thetis* forward over a long, lazy ground swell. The beacon at Eastern Point winked as Hasty watched the land fall away. Once past Dogbar Breakwater and into the open sea it was perceptibly colder, the wind rattling irregularly in the rigging. Cap'n Bowhead's dark figure bulked in the pilot house aft, leaning against the wheel with easy familiarity.

Hasty clicked his tongue impatiently and made his way forward, skirting the fish hold and swinging around the galuses and stowed trawl gear to drop down

to the galley below. From the forecstle came the strains of a concertina, loud and whining in the smoky air.

Joaquim Fialho moved only his eyes as Hasty crowded into his tiny compartment. A pot of coffee simmered on the compact stove. Hasty dropped the curved knife on the mess table and said, casually:

"Here's your knife back, Joe."

The Portugee continued peeling potatoes, nodded mute thanks.

Hasty said: "It's a good throwing knife."

"Yes." Fialho was sweating a little in the hot galley. The concertina in the forecstle rasped painfully. He flicked a glance at the knife, but didn't touch it. "Yes, it could be thrown. Is a ver' good knife."

"When did you use it last?"

"Yest'day. Then I lose it. Is the truth, Hasty."

"Were you ashore this evening?"

"A li'l while, yes."

Hasty rapped suddenly: "Who tried to stick me with it?"

The Portugee's face was impassive, blank, emotionless.

"Could be anybody," he said simply.

"Could it be you?"

"Not me, no."

"Doody Walsh?"

"Ask him." The Portugee nodded toward the forecstle. "In there."

Hasty's face was as stony as the cook's. He turned, stepped into the forward compartment. The roll of the vessel altered as Cap'n Bowhead cleared the light buoy off Thatcher's Island and changed course to the northeast. The steady thump of the seas at the bow became a rhythmic accompaniment to the thin, wailing concertina.

Just one dim light was burning, dulled by thick gray cigarette smoke that clung to the rough tiers of double bunks. Doody Walsh's long leg, encased in a heavy boot, dangled from an upper bunk, swinging to the roll of the schooner. He turned over, still pumping the concertina, as Hasty stepped in.

He said, "Hi, chum," casually, and went on playing.

Hasty said: "Nice to see you. What did Bowhead say about you conking him on the noggin at Hilding's house?"

"Nothing. I asked him what he was going to do about it, and he agreed we neither of us belonged in there. How do you like my come-to-come-fro?"

"Nice if you could play it," Hasty said. "Did you ever kill anybody?"

"Me? Naw." Doody Walsh's short-cropped hair stood like a brush on his ridged scalp. He grinned with white, strong teeth. "Did you?"

"If you ever did, would you use a knife?"

"Not me." The big man was emphatic. He stopped playing the wheezy concertina and leaned over the bunk, staring down. "A knife ain't for me. What I can't do with my own two fists, I just don't do. What made you come back aboard the *Thetis*, Hasty?"

"I'm looking for Hilding Seastrom's murderer."

The big man said: "I hope you live through it." He rolled over on his back, presenting meaty shoulders to Hasty's glance, and his concertina was silent. Hasty watched the naked light bulb dance from the overhead to the heave of the schooner, then shrugged and ducked up the companionway.

He had to go on deck to reach the after quarters. The moon was a waning sliver of light over the distant smudge of land. The wind had veered northeast. He noticed these things without effort, with an instinct born of his years at sea. The engine throbbed effortlessly, smoothly; whatever else McWilliams might be, he knew and loved his motors.

HASTY'S bag of gear was still on deck at the foot of the mainmast, where he had dropped it on coming aboard. The *Thetis*, as a former sailing craft, was roomy and built for comfort. Even with the fish pens amidships, capable of holding a quarter of a million pounds, there was a large cabin aft for Bowhead and a tinier compartment between that and the engine room. Hasty's own quarters were the middle compartment, just large enough for his bunk.

Cap'n Bowhead was leaning idly from the pilot house when Hasty went by and dropped with his gear down the ladder. McWilliams looked up through the engine-room hatch and blew his nose loudly in a greasy red bandanna.

"Have a nice trip, Hasty."

Hasty said: "Next time, take better aim when you throw a knife."

The engineer looked startled. "Who threw what?" When Hasty didn't answer and started to turn away, McWilliams added: "You seen what the skipper allowed on board? You seen that dame?"

It was Hasty's turn to be surprised. "A woman on board?"

"That nosey little chick, the gal reporter."

Hasty just stared. The tension inside of him collapsed like a dam giving way to a flood of relief. His knees felt weak.

"Where is she?"

"Skipper's quarters."

He spun around and went down the narrow corridor to Bowhead's cabin. Judy Randall was seated on the bunk, dressed in oversize corduroy trousers and a heavy gray turtleneck sweater. Her soft red hair looked wonderful. She watched him from the doorway and grinned.

"Took you long enough to find me," she said.

His voice was furious. "You little fool!"

"Why?" she asked defensively. "The story is on this boat. I just want to be in at the finish, that's all."

He said grimly: "This vessel is no place for a woman. How did you wheedle Cap'n Bowhead into letting you stay aboard?"

"He's easy for a good listener. The poor man hasn't had a fresh audience for his whaling yarns for ages. I think he's marvelous."

"He's tough and dangerous," Hasty snapped. "And so is every man aboard." He wanted to tell her how every nerve screamed of danger from the moment he stepped on the *Thetis*. "You know there's a murderer in this crew right now. He wouldn't stop at another killing to save himself."

"I think I'll be safe. You're here, aren't you?"

He asked: "Where does Bowhead intend to sleep?"

"In the pilot house. You go forward." When he let out another explosive breath she held out both hands defensively. "Wait a minute. There's something else. I'm not the only stowaway on board. Somebody is asleep in your bunk right now—though he's out like a light at present."

Hasty stared at the girl. Her red hair curled in ringlets around the rough gray sweater. Her soft little face was serious now.

He said quietly: "Kirk Adams?"

"Yes." She nodded.

He said: "That's just fine. Now there's no doubt that the killer is among us. The complete, original crew of the *Thetis* is back on board. Have you got a gun?" he demanded suddenly.

"I . . . no."

"You'll need one. Stay here."

He wheeled and went to his own compartment. The water made a slapping, hissing sound against the vessel's side. Kirk Adams lay loosely in the narrow bunk, his slender body rolling with the vessel's movement. His shoes were off and he reeked of liquor. In sleep, his young face showed slack lines of dissipation. He moaned a little and his mouth worked as Hasty stared at him, but he didn't waken.

Hasty had stowed his gun in the seabag, knowing Cap'n Bowhead's prejudice against weapons among the crew. It took a moment for Hasty to realize the truth as he reached deep down among his gear. He had wrapped the gun in his oilskins, but its hard bulk was missing. He probed deeper, and in a moment reached the bottom of the bag and came up empty-handed. His face was suddenly drawn as he realized his loss. Somebody had rifled his seabag when he left it unguarded on deck.

The gun was gone.

CAP'N BOWHEAD'S eyes were serene as Hasty approached. He was standing just inside the pilot house and the *Thetis* was making a steady eight knots toward her destination. The hoisting gear

forward creaked and rattled in the strengthening breeze. The Diesel chugged steadily.

Hasty wasted no words. His voice was dangerously soft.

"I want it back, Bowhead. Give it to me."

The fat old whaler grunted. He was wearing his long-barreled Colt .45, sagging from his hip. His thick white hair stirred in the dark breeze.

"It's going to blow," he remarked.

Hasty's eyes narrowed. "You heard me, Bowhead. I want my gun."

"Sure, I heard you. I haven't got it, son."

"I know your rules about carrying weapons aboard," Hasty insisted. "But I don't want it for myself; I want to give it to the girl."

"What's the matter with her? She's all right. A right smart lassie. I like her—and she won't need a gun. I'll see to that."

There was no satisfaction to be gained from the fat man. Hasty said: "Well, what about Kirk Adams? He's wanted by Marshal Tucker for murder."

"Kirk came aboard drunk," the old whaler said evenly. "I let him sleep it off. He'll be all right by daybreak, and we need all hands in the crew we can get." The fat man turned and faced Hasty, his eyes snapping in the dim pilot light. "You forget I'm skipper here, boy. I'm the law. Kirk Adams is just as safe here as anywhere. He can't run away. If he's the murderer, we'll find out this trip. That's what you want, isn't it?"

There was nothing more Hasty could say. After a moment he went below again. Judy Randall was asleep in the bunk, lulled by the steady motion of the schooner as it plowed into the Gulf of Maine. She breathed evenly and lightly, and her mouth looked soft and moist. He noticed again the dark sweep of her lashes against her cheek and lit a cigarette, studying her for a long time. She didn't wake up. After a while he left the cabin, closing the little door carefully, and sat down on deck beside the companionway hatch.

Dawn was a long time coming.

AT EIGHT the next morning they made their second set, beating through greasy gray rollers under a low overcast. Well to the northward a convoy felt its way into the wide reaches of the North Atlantic, shepherded by two Navy blimps. The wind was raw and chilly, blowing all the way from Ireland. The sun was a fugitive behind the dirty clouds.

The first drag had yielded 12,000 pounds of redfish. Doody and Fialho had stowed these, packing the cargo in chipped ice in the fish pens. The deck was already slimy and stained. With Kirk, Hasty dropped the drag buoy overboard—a half keg with the *Thetis*' name lettered in bold red. He was acutely aware of Judy beside him, clad in awkward oilskins against the spitting spray. His face was pink and bright with excitement.

"Since I was a kid," he said. Kirk Adams glanced briefly at the girl and moved to starboard, manhandling the chafing gear and block over the side, watching it pay out through the snatch block on the gallus. He looked pale and shaken, his eyes veiled and aloof. He had stubbornly said nothing since dawn. Hasty glanced back at the girl. "It's a way of life," he said.

"You really like it?"

"I quit college to go back to it. Most of these old-timers may be high-line fishermen, but they go by guess and by God. Some of them even tell their position by tasting the sand they get up on the end of a leadline. But not for me. Some day I'll build my own boat, with my own ideas."

"If this mess is ever cleaned up," Judy observed soberly. "Hilding Seastrom was a murderer, and deserved to die. Every time I think of poor Cassie Leigh—" She paused, shivering. "I'm beginning to think it might be better if we never find the killer."

From the pilot house Cap'n Bowhead bellowed angrily:

"Let go on the gallus, Hasty! She's on bottom!"

The huge linen-thread net, with its drag boards opening the sweep and upper cork lines into a voracious funnel, had settled on the ocean bed far behind the *Thetis*'

churning wake. The drag buoy bobbed brightly on the gray seas a hundred fathoms astern, marking the position of the bag. The strain made the tackle shiver and creak. Hasty ran forward while Kirk stood at the quarter bitts, and released the snatch block. Instantly the strain of dragging the net was taken up on the bitts and the *Thetis* steadied, plowing heavily into the wind and tide.

Kirk Adams moved forward to help Doody Walsh and Fialho ice down the first bag of fish. There was nothing more to do for the next hour or more, while they slowly dragged the bottom. His work done for the moment, Hasty watched the girl, aware of her eyes, shining and alert on his every move.

Afterward, he was never sure whether it was accident or a deliberate attack. Kirk had paused amidships by the open fish hold and was staring skyward through the rigging. The overhead boom was swinging in response to a shift in the wind and Bowhead altered the *Thetis*' course. The vessel turned sluggishly, hampered by the weight of her trawl. Hasty studied the drag buoy bobbing in the heavy swells far behind—and then heard a sudden thud, a high shrill scream, like an animal scream of pain and terror.

He whirled, searching the deck.

It was absolutely, incredibly deserted.

He heard Judy gasp and draw a shuddering breath.

"It's Kirk! Kirk fell overboard!"

Cap'n Bowhead was roaring orders from the pilot-house window, and Doody Walsh's head popped up from the fish pen. There was no sign for a moment of Kirk's position in the water. The seas came in high and heavy, topped with a fringe of curling whitecap. Down on the deck something twinkled, where Kirk had last stood. A marlin spike. Somebody had thrown it at Kirk, and the impact had knocked the boy over the side, over the low rail.

Hasty thought of these things in fragments as he searched the gray-green seas. Then something white bobbed up, a hand groping above the surface for air. It was too far for a line to reach. Bowhead was

still roaring orders, spinning the wheel, but the sluggish schooner answered slowly, and every second increased the distance between them and the drowning man. Hasty wasted no more time. He kicked off his heavy rubber boots and left the deck in a long, arching dive toward the forbidding sea.

THE shock of the icy water was paralyzing. He seemed to sink endlessly before his hard strokes checked his plunge and he slid upward. He broke water fifteen fathoms from the schooner, and his first glimpse caught Doody and Bowhead slashing at the drag lines that held the *Thetis* back. Turning, he swam toward the spot where he had last seen Kirk go down.

The boy surfaced again not ten yards away, his face white and strained, his eyes wild. He sank from sight on the lee side of an intervening sea. Hasty dived fast, groping for the boy. He caught one arm, lost it for an instant, then his fingers tangled with Kirk's hair. He kicked hard and came to the surface with lungs almost bursting, seeking the *Thetis*.

He was almost too late. Freed of the drag's weight, the schooner had lunged swiftly around in response, circling to to return to the spot where the two men threshed in the heaving water. The *Thetis* bore down swiftly upon them, looking like an enormous juggernaut, with white foam curling and splitting around the high, plunging bow. Hasty shouted a harsh, horrified warning. His voice was drowned in bubbling spray. The *Thetis* rose on the next sea, like a rearing horse, showing her red copper bottom. Then she started down, plunging almost directly where Hasty struggled with Kirk's limp body.

There was nothing to do but dive.

He could hear the rumbling thud of the screw as the vessel passed over him, and he wriggled desperately aside through the boiling water. Something slammed hard across his back and scraped away his shirt. But he never lost his grip on Kirk. He felt himself picked up and hurled aside by the powerful thrust of

the water, tumbled end over end in a maelstrom of foam—and then he was rising again, breaking through to the air.

A line whipped accurately across his face as he reached the surface. He grabbed for it dazedly. The big hull of the schooner was backing now, her screw threshing madly. The line reached to Doody Walsh's giant figure on the stern rail. The big man was shouting something unintelligible. Judy Randall looked tiny and tense beside him, as if she was straining every muscle to help.

Hasty got a bowline around Kirk and clung to it himself, then felt his body surge through the water as Doody hauled powerfully on the line.

He managed to remain conscious until a second line reached him and he was lifted to the deck of the schooner. He remembered afterward how the terrible, numbing cold of the water didn't touch him until he was exposed to the air. And that was all he remembered, for a long time . . .

CHAPTER VII

Death Trap

JUDY'S face was blurred at first, bending over Hasty. He was in his own bunk. His back felt flayed, raw and burning where the schooner's keel had scraped over him. He was wracked alternately with chills and fever, and there was a strong taste of alcohol on his tongue. He lay very still, filled with wonder at the great tears in Judy Randall's eyes.

"Hello," she said finally. Her smile trembled. "Nice to see you."

"What's bothering you?" he demanded. He tried to sit up and felt his back muscles tighten with bandages. The girl was shaking her head, drying her tears. He said softly: "Were you that worried?"

Her smile was still shaky. "I thought I'd die."

Full memory returned to him. "How is Kirk? Is he safe?"

"He's up forward in his bunk, thawing out. He's better off than you are." She paused, their glances still interlocked.

"You're a very wonderful guy, Mr. Akers."

Hasty kept looking at her for another eternal second.

"It's kind of a surprise," he said. "You grow on a fellow. I—"

He paused as Cap'n Bowhead came down the ladder and entered the cabin. The grizzled old man looked windswept, and Hasty realized the vessel was pounding into a steadily roughening sea. The skipper's huge bulk filled and crowded the little cabin. He looked quizzically at Hasty and the girl.

"That was a fine thing you did, Hasty," he announced. "It's lucky you weren't killed when we ran over you."

Hasty said: "No thanks to the helmsman. Who was at the wheel?"

"I was," Cap'n Bowhead said. His voice was bland, his blue eyes level and unblinking. "It was an accident, son."

Hasty said: "Maybe."

The fat man shrugged. "You want us to put you and Kirk ashore? We got the spare drag out and making a good set. The weather's roughin up, though. It smells bad. We could run for port easy."

Hasty said: "Don't put back unless Kirk needs it."

"Kirk's doing fine."

"How did he happen to go overboard?"

"He slipped, or he fell."

Hasty said: "I thought he was knocked over with a marlin spike."

Cap'n Bowhead said: "Yes?"

"I couldn't see who threw it. I have an idea somebody tried to kill him then, and later tried to kill us both while we were in the water."

Bowhead laughed explosively, his huge belly quivering.

"You're too suspicious, son. I saw nothing like that."

Hasty turned to the girl. "Did you, Judy?"

"I... no, I didn't."

He said bluntly: "I'll go on deck and look for myself."

Aside from the painful lacerations of his back, he felt all right. The wind hit him with surprising force as he came out through the hatch. White water was breaking over the bow, but the vessel was

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comparatively steady, its dragnet acting as a giant sea anchor. He took long strides down the deck to where he had seen Kirk go overboard. Water poured with hissing whiteness through the scuppers. He searched carefully, but there was nothing to be found.

The marlin spike was gone.

He was convinced now that this trip would bring the murderer to light. He, himself, was proving dangerous to the killer. Perhaps the attempt to knock Kirk overboard, in his weakened alcoholic condition, was to make the boy look like a suicide. That would close the case. Certainly the murderer was unnerved by finding the original crew back on the *Thetis*; he would think it a design, a trap for him, and he would be doubly dangerous, like a cornered rat waiting for attack. He would be apt to strike first. Hasty wished more than ever that he had the gun for Judy.

But the afternoon wore on without incident. Kirk appeared on deck after the noon meal looking pale and unshaven, his yellowish eyes flecked with blood. He muttered a brief thanks to Hasty as he took his place in the fish pens, but he added nothing else.

"I don't remember anything," Kirk said. "I don't know if anything hit me in the back or not. I just went overboard, that's all."

At dusk, the engine broke down.

HASTY was at the wheel, with Judy beside him in the pilot house, when the steady trembling of the deck ceased and silence fell over the vessel from below. In the dusk the surrounding seas were dark fields of heaving water streaked with long lines of white-caps racing down from the northeast. The fishing tackle was secured, since the red-fish could never be netted during darkness. The storm trysail kept the *Thetis* jogging to a steady course designed to remain near the ledge until dawn.

The wheel grew slack instantly without the throb of the slowly driving engine. Judy glanced a question at Hasty and he shrugged, waiting and guiding the vessel to the irregular pull of the heavy

sail. It seemed a long time before McWilliams' gray face lifted lugubriously from the engine-room hatch. Simultaneously Cap'n Bowhead materialized from the gloom.

"What in the name of good Hades is wrong now?"

"Got a leak in the fuel line," McWilliams announced glumly. "It's down in the bilges. The place stinks of oil." He became antagonistic. "You want me to run the engine and maybe blow us all to hell?" Bowhead was furious. "Well, fix it, damn it! Fix it!"

"Gotta go down in the bilges for that."

Hasty said suddenly: "I'll go."

Both the old skipper and McWilliams were surprised. Judy said nothing. Hasty added: "I know this vessel pretty well. I can find the leak. It's blowing up harder, and we'll need the engine if we have to make a run for port."

Bowhead snorted. "It's the engineer's job, not yours."

Hasty said: "I prefer to go. It's the only place aboard that hasn't been searched thoroughly. I'd like to see for myself."

The deck suddenly shuddered as an errant sea swept it broadside. The vessel was momentarily smothered in white water. The wind grew to a high keening whistle in the creaky halyards. The fat man eyed Hasty angrily through the tumult. McWilliams licked his lips with a startling pink tongue. His straggly yellow hair looped crazily over his gray face.

"Let 'im go, if he wants to, skipper."

The smell of fuel oil was strong and rancid in the air. Doody and Kirk and Fialho appeared from the forward hatch. Hasty waited no longer, dropping down the ladder to the engine room.

The slap and plunge of the sea was more violent below decks. He braced himself, careful not to come into contact with the hot engine, and lifted the hatch to the shallow bilges below. The smell and the darkness were distinctly unpleasant. He got a flashlight from the engine-room kit and peered below. Seeping through the muck and waste that sloshed around down there was a long, dark rivulet of thickening oil. The leak wherever it was, was

a serious one. Shrugging, he braced the hatch cover and lowered himself through the opening. He wished there was more ventilation, and knew from the odor that he couldn't exist down there long. He had to work fast.

The roll of the ship down here was like being in a coffin at the end of a see-saw. He couldn't stand up in the shallow space, and the heavy black ribs of the schooner made progress difficult. The nearest tank, in the forward part of the ship, looked secured. He felt his pulses pound as he left the ventilation of the open hatch behind him. There was no oil seepage in the fuel lines to main tank, either.

He wondered if he wasn't being foolhardy, searching here for Hilding's cache of stolen money. The bilges looked clear of all impediment in the friendly glow of his flashlight. There was just the usual slosh of water and the creeping fingers of oil. He fought down a growing nausea and turned back to the stern, where an auxiliary tank was located under the counter.

THE bilges were shallower, he had to crawl on hands and knees through the muck and slime. The slap and thump of the sea boomed hollowly through the murky, overburdened air. After an endless crawl he heard the steady bubbling of oil under the counter. The tank was crammed into an extremely narrow area, and his flashlight soon centered on the trouble—the feed line had worked completely loose from a coupling several feet from the outlet. Oil poured from the break in a thick, steady stream, bubbling down through the schooner's ribs. There was a petcock where the line left the tank, and Hasty squeezed hard to give it a sharp turn and shut it off. The oil bubbled forth for another moment, then abruptly ceased.

He was exhausted, sweating from the ordeal, although it was deathly cold in the narrow pocket. Nausea wracked him as he groped awkwardly back to the engineroom hatch. He had progressed only a few feet from the counter tank when he realized something was holding him back, dragging on his left foot with

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palpable weight. He sprayed his flashlight on it.

The object was a tightly wound ball of fish net. The toe of his boot had hooked into the linen threads. It had been jammed between the fuel tank and the overhead, and the vessel's motion had rolled it off the tank.

He laughed, and the sound of his voice echoed crazily above the steady pound of the sea against the schooner's planks. Reaching around, he got the big ball of netting and shoved it before him as he clambered and crawled laboriously back to the hatch. His breath came short and fast now.

He didn't believe it, at first.

Where there should have been light from the engine room—there was nothing.

He crawled a little faster, his heart pounding. The stagnant air couldn't support him much longer. He reached out, spraying light, seeking out the exit. He stared at the overhead for a long moment in stark disbelief.

The hatch was closed.

He put down the torch, very carefully and deliberately, and reached up to the trapdoor and shoved. Somehow he knew what would happen, forwarned by something inside him. The hatch didn't yield.

He shoved again, lifting harder with his shoulders, feeling the blood pound crazily in his head. But the hatch was dogged down fast from above.

"Mac!" he yelled. "Judy!"

His voice echoed crazily, and brought no response. There was no answer from above. He was trapped.

Hasty sat back, fighting against panic. The hatch hadn't closed accidentally. It was fastened down deliberately, to cut him off from escape—and air. In another ten minutes, he knew, the lack of air would make him lose consciousness. He couldn't understand the lack of interference, the others' lack of thought for him. Where were they? Where was Judy?

Then with time precious, he crawled forward, still dragging the ball of fishnet with him. There was another hatch under the crew's quarters. If he could reach it,

he might attract someone's attention. But time was short, his pulses fluttery, and the length of the ship seemed endless.

His lungs were bursting, and his hands and knees were bloody with the struggle, when his flashlight outlined the dim rectangle of the forward hatch. His first shouts were feeble, even to his own ears. He pounded awkwardly from his cramped position, but the crashing sea seemed to drown him out. He looked back futilely to the engine-room hatch, and closed his eyes, gave himself up to an endless, torturing fit of coughing, coughing. . . .

THERE was a gap then, somewhere, in which he dimly remembered hammering like mad on the overhead with his flashlight. The bulb burst, the lens shattered, the metal tube twisted and split in his hand. He was in darkness, but it didn't matter. And then, strangely enough, he could see.

Light was pouring down from above. There was fresh air, too.

A face peered down through the trapdoor, and two arms reached down to grip and lift him upward. It was Kirk Adams. The blond boy's eyes were amazed as Hasty stumbled to the nearest bunk in the forecabin and sat there, sick, gulping long draughts of clean air.

"What happened to you?" the boy asked.

"I got . . . caught down there. Somebody lowered . . . the hatch."

Kirk said wonderingly: "But you didn't go down through this one. I've been here all along."

"It was in the engine room." Hasty stood up, his knees weak and wobbly. He realized he was still clutching the ball of netting, and Kirk was staring at it, puzzled. Hasty said: "Thanks, anyway. You saved my life."

The boy smiled wanly. "That makes us even, Hasty." He hesitated. "I'm sorry I've been such a fool about things."

"It's been a tough time," Hasty admitted. "But it's practically over now. Just a few more minutes."

He left Kirk staring dubiously after him and went up on deck to make his way aft. Hasty moved grimly.

CHAPTER VIII

Savage Is the Sea

THE weather had turned to rain. There was a howling wind and mountainous seas. Hasty slipped and skidded, running down the heaving deck toward Fialho's blurred little figure behind the pilot-house wheel. The little Portugee stared in sudden panic at Hasty's tall, bloody figure.

Hasty bellowed above the thunder of the storm:

"Where is the skipper?"

The Portugee jerked his thumb below, his body straining against the pull of the wheel. Hasty clambered slowly down the pitching ladder, careful not to drop the ball of net.

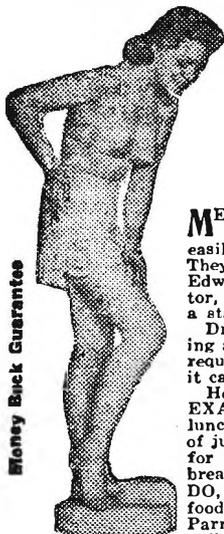
The captain's cabin was crowded by Bowhead's huge and bulky figure. The

bearded old man was enormous in his foul-weather clothing; but the oilskins were dry. The whaler kept his hands deep in his pockets and faced Hasty squarely under the dancing little light. His size almost concealed Judy Randall's slim figure, squeezed into a far corner of the cabin behind him. Her face was white, and her lips moved without making a sound.

For a moment the pitching cabin was silent except for the muted hiss and roar of the raging elements. The lamp swung in its quick, irregular arcs from its length of brass chain. Hasty swayed easily in the doorway, his tall figure stained and streaked with oil and bilge scum. The fingers of his right hand, which had held the shattered flashlight, dripped little drops of blood on the deck. His pale eyes burned queerly.

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He looked at Judy. "Are you all right?"

She nodded mutely. She looked terrified.

Bowhead said deliberately: "It took you a long time, Hasty."

"Yes," Hasty said. "It took me a long time. The leak was in the counter tank, but I shut it off. It's all right to start the engine now. The trouble is, when I tried to get out I couldn't. The engine-room hatch was dogged down. I'm surprised nobody thought to watch the hatch and get me out. I almost suffocated."

Bowhead said evenly: "We had trouble handling the ship while you were down there, Hasty. It must have been an accident."

"Hatches don't fasten themselves down by accident. Somebody tried to kill me down there by cutting off my air. I think it's time I got my gun back, Bowhead."

The old man didn't answer. Tension was like thick smoke in the tiny cabin. Overhead a heavy sea crashed and thundered on deck. The little lamp jumped and jiggled, made shadows of fantastic proportions.

Judy suddenly blurted: "McWilliams is behind you, Hasty. He has a wrench."

Hasty didn't turn. He couldn't see the gray-faced Newfoundlander, but he could smell his oily clothing. He glanced at Judy's white face and smiled, then spoke again to Bowhead, quietly.

"I want my gun," he repeated. "I want it now."

Amazingly, Cap'n Bowhead grunted quiet acquiescence, took his left hand from his pocket, and tossed the little Mannlucher to Hasty. He caught it carelessly, reversing it with a quick flip of his hand, let it dangle from his long fingers. He could see McWilliams now. The engineer had taken a cautious step backward and was out of reach. He held a heavy spanner in his right hand and looked watchful.

Hasty exhibited the ball of netting in his flexed fingers.

"I found something interesting in the bilges," he said. "This ball was jammed above the counter tank, jammed in so tight a man could hardly get it out, even if he knew it was there. But the storm worked it loose."

Judy took a long, sighing breath. Cap'n Bowhead made a little clicking sound, and there was a deep, sudden anger in the fat man's eyes as he stared at the ball of thread. Hasty put his gun down carefully.

"I'll cut it open," he announced.

He didn't bother to unravel the net. With his clasp knife he made four deep slashes in the tight sphere. The ball fell apart in his hands, revealing the tight kernel that collapsed in his fingers.

In the momentary hush the air was filled with the soft rustling of hundreds of currency bills, fluttering down to the cabin floor.

CAP'N BOWHEAD'S voice was queer and flat. "It's Hilding's money."

Hasty said: "Yes, I found it. The murderer did a clever job of hiding it. It was in an apparently inaccessible place. Nobody could have reached in there to cache that money, and if anyone were in the bilges he couldn't have seen it, jammed as it was over the tank. But the storm shook it loose, though. The funny thing is, how did it ever get there in the first place? How could the murderer stow it there?"

Cap'n Bowhead hunched his meaty shoulders forward.

"You know all the answers, Hasty. You tell us."

Hasty said, in reply: "Roll up that little rug under the desk there—way back on the deck."

Cap'n Bowhead's face was dark and clouded. "What for?"

Hasty took a short step forward and yanked the rug—hard. The tiny desk skittered away as the rug flipped aside. The deck was bared at the extreme after-end of the cabin. Outlined in the giddy dancing light was a hatch cover.

Hasty said quietly: "So there is another entrance to the bilges. Nobody knew about it, because the counter tank was built in much later and blocked off this hatch. It couldn't be used. But the murderer knew about it. He dropped the stolen money through this hatch, on top of the fuel tank just below, and thought

it safe and secure until he got around to removing it."

The cabin was very silent now.

Bowhead spoke abruptly: "You know I've been aware of that hatch."

"Yes," Hasty said.

The fat man said: "And you think I killed Hilding Seastrom."

Hasty's face was a brown, oil-stained mask. He nodded slowly.

"Yes, you killed Hilding Seastrom."

Judy took a long shuddering breath, as if an inward tension had at last been released. She was still crowded into her corner of the cabin.

Hasty said: "The temptation of all that money was too much for you, Bowhead. Ever since you gave up whaling and lost your fortune, you've been a bitter, frustrated old man. You hated the world and yourself for your failure. You resented being reduced to groundfishing for Sea Pride. It's true that when you killed Seastrom you rid the world of a murderer; but a price has to be paid. You were willing to let Kirk Adams or myself pay that price. You had no qualms about cutting that winch line and letting the drag knock Hilding overboard. He represented what you hated—Sea Pride and success. But you also killed little Lester Mawhinney. You followed me there, afraid of what I was up to, and you got too rough with Lester when he turned out to be too drunk to answer your questions. Maybe in his drunkenness he accused you of being Hilding's murderer. Or maybe it was an accident." Hasty paused, his eyes on the big man. "I'm sorry, Bowhead, but that's the way it is."

The fat man's stare was level and icy. "I'm still skipper of this vessel, Hasty Akers."

Hasty looked at Judy Randall and asked:

"Why didn't you come down after me when he locked the bilge hatch over me?"

The girl's lips worked a moment before she said: "He locked me in here when I insisted on checking, to see if you were all right down there. But when he heard you coming just now, he told me the cabin door had jammed." She paused, added in

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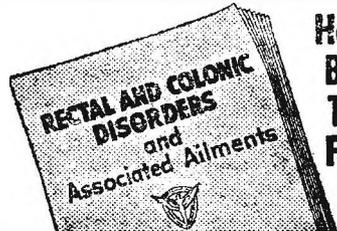
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a small, tight voice: "Be careful, Hasty. He's got his gun in his pocket."

The attack, however, didn't come from Cap'n Bowhead.

HASTY heard the quick, slithering footstep behind him and turned on his heel at that instant. The heavy spanner in McWilliams' hand thudded viciously by Hasty's head, splintering into the venerated bulkhead. Hasty's long arm lashed out, his knuckles cracked precisely on McWilliams' jaw. The gray-faced man stumbled backward, lost his footing, and tottered crazily down the engine-room ladder behind him. Just then Judy Randall screamed. Hasty came completely around, facing Bowhead as the fat captain leveled his huge Colt. He just had time to throw his own gun. He didn't fire it, knowing full well that Bowhead would never have returned it loaded. The Colt bellowed deafeningly in the narrow cabin. The bullet snapped past Hasty's ear as the fat man smothered an oath and dropped his .45, wringing his wrist where Hasty's throw had winged him.

Bowhead's charge was like the rush of a bull—powerful beyond ordinary human strength. The fat man crashed Hasty back against the bulkhead by sheer weight, pinning down his arms. His massive fists pounded into Hasty's middle, doubling him up.

Darkness swam over Hasty's brain. He was aware of Judy, scrambling across the cabin to scoop up the fat man's gun. Bowhead saw her, too. His weight was suddenly gone from Hasty. Bowhead whirled and bolted through the doorway to the deck ladder.

Judy pressed the revolver into Hasty's hand as he staggered free.

"He's gone up above, Hasty."

"There's another gun in the pilot house," Hasty gasped. "A rifle. I've seen it there before, under the chart table."

He went through the doorway, gun in hand, just as Bowhead's feet vanished through the hatchway overhead. There came a muffled thud, the scrape of struggling feet, a loud curse, and a man's

quick gasp of pain. Hasty hit the deck in a hurry.

It was Doody Walsh who had delayed the murderer, slamming him hard with his giant's strength against the pilot house. Bowhead had no chance to reach inside for his rifle. Hasty glimpsed Doody slithering across the deck amid a welter of foam as a sea crashed over the side, throwing him into the scuppers. It was treacherous on the dark deck. The wind was a powerful, living force that pressed a hard weight against him and fought to sweep him from his feet. The white scared face of Fialho peered through the rain-swept pilot-house window. Hasty glimpsed him spinning the wheel, then braced himself to meet Bowhead's on-rushing attack.

THE fat captain never reached Hasty. The vessel came about to the touch of the Portugee's hand on the wheel, catching a mountainous sea broadside. The *Thetis* heeled far over, shuddering and groaning under the impact of tons of green-white, monster seas that raced up with the dark wind. Bowhead, without secure footing or hand grip, was helpless to halt his own charge. He swept by Hasty as the latter clung to the rigging, hip-deep in boiling foam, and Bowhead was swept up by the wall of water, carried high over the schooner's side. He never touched the rail.

There was a high, wild shriek, a cold and final blasphemy from the man who had fought the sea all the years of his life—and then he was gone.

There was no chance to save him.

Slowly, shuddering from stem to stern, the *Thetis* righted herself and shook off her burden of water. Hasty waited until the tug of the sea left his legs before moving away from the rigging. The water was a vast and heaving black wall, all around him. Bowhead was completely swallowed by it, unheard and unseen far beyond the vessel's reach.

He watched Fialho spin the wheel and set her on course again. The Portugee's face was hard and pale. Far off, over the heaving blackness, a red light winked

from an isolated sea buoy. He saw it swinging to their quarter as the Portuguese lined the vessel home to Gloucester.

Then McWilliams appeared in the hatchway.

Hasty had had enough for the present; he could postpone settling for the engineer's treacherous attack on him below.

McWilliams spoke above the tumult of the sea:

"I thought it was you all the time, Hasty. Honest. I thought you was attackin' the skipper."

Maybe he was lying, but Hasty didn't care.

"Get the engine started," he said.

The gray face vanished, replaced in a moment by Judy Randall. She scrambled up on deck and ran to him, clinging to him as if in disbelief at his own, living safety. She was laughing and sobbing, all at once. Hasty tangled his fingers in her red hair and said:

"We're going back now, Judy. We'll be there by morning."

He felt tired, but very good inside, as if there were something singing, deep within him; something free and light and airy. As if he were going home now for the first time. Really going home.



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Hip, Hip, Horror

THE war has made Hollywood horror-happy. Its monsters are making more money than ever before. The paradoxical part of this stands out because just after the war broke out, all the film monsters crawled for cover. They, producers believed, could never compete with the actual horrors unleashed by Hitler and Tojo.



Hollywood was wrong. Mad ghouls, wolf men, and Frankenstein monsters began to get more mail than calendar cuties, or film pin-up pretties. Bewildered producers tottered to the archives, dusted off chiller-diller plots and remade them. When they couldn't keep up with the demand, they threw in the old pictures, too, labeling them truthfully "returned by popular demand."

These shudder shows are rolling along with juggernaut force. Picture makers have been too busy imprisoning these neurotic nightmares on celluloid to account for the phenomenon. It would be a

little like looking a gift horse in the mouth anyway. This is the Charge of the Fright Brigade and no one wants to stop it.

Besides, the private lives of the Beast Brigade hold none of the worries, for producers, as would the off-screen antics of a box-office dazzler, or a Romeo in revolt. You don't have to photograph the horror glamor boys in G-strings, they have no love life to be exploited in the papers or out of them, and nobody gets nosy about whether they eat oatmeal or orphans for breakfast.

AND censorship? The Hays office can often take a vacation when Karloff, Lugosi, or Lorre do their stuff. Being monsters (cinematically speaking), that terrorizing trio can just about write its own ticket. The censor will merely shrug at their peccadillos. Analysts, alienists, psychologists, and assorted pulse feelers have held brow-knitting contests on the subject, but after playing acrostics with themselves, they've come up with nothing. They haven't explained anything, including themselves.

King of the horror roost is Universal Pictures, which annually unleashes a bellowing brood of ogres. This company has been dealing in wolf men, Draculas, phantoms, Frankenstein monsters and invisible agents for years, scaring money out of customers' pockets while other studios tried to coo it out. At Universal, Director George Waggoner turns out the scary masterpieces that do much to promote sleeping tablet sales.

It was Waggoner who first conceived the idea of putting all the monsters into one big jackpot, which came out as "The Devil's Brood", a shudder champion.

Horror, according to Waggoner, is much more than make-up. He claims it is primarily in the mind of the spectator, a mental and emotional interpretation, a probing into his own imagination.

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Hollywood Builds a Flat-Top

ACCUSTOMED to constructing everything from grandfathers' clocks to streamlined railroad trains, the property department of a Hollywood movie studio was undismayed a few months ago when called upon to create a naval aircraft carrier destined never to be launched and not intended to sail the seven seas.

In a sense, the request was not at all unique. The United States itself has already two or more giant carriers in operation which will never sail any of the oceans. These are the converted Great Lakes side-wheel excursion steamers which were taken over by the Navy and rebuilt as training craft for budding pilots of fighter planes and dive bombers. In Hollywood's case, though, no such training ship would do. For cinema purposes the carrier had to look like a genuine war vessel, the kind Uncle Sam is using to blast the Japs from the Pacific.

And the prop experts took the demand in stride—although to be sure, the results they achieved were pretty well scattered geographically. As one Hollywood newspaper writer put it, only an Easterner would see any incongruity in the spectacle of a carrier's broad, smooth flight deck perched on a hill overlooking a Westwood golf course. A Californian, accustomed to the fantastic marvels of motion-picture making, would scarcely raise his head from the more serious business of sinking his putt.

In any event, there was the flight deck erected on dry solid ground, complete down to the smallest detail in its exact reproduction of the genuine article. But where was the rest of the huge ship?

Well, curiously enough, there were no less than thirty-five additional sections of the vessel scattered around the various sound stages and back lots of the studio which was making the picture. These sections included crews' quarters, sick

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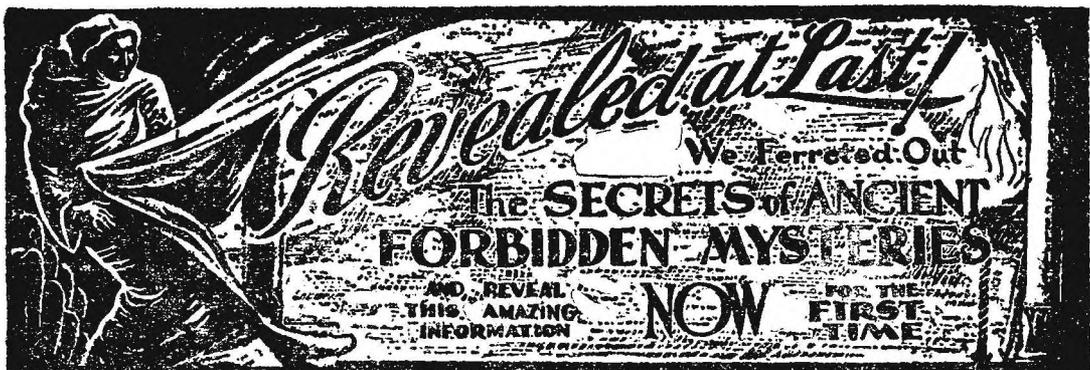
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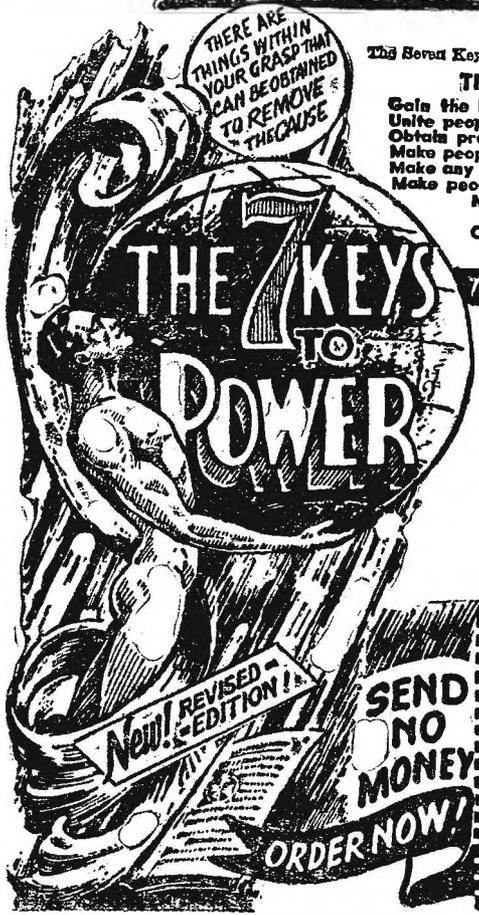
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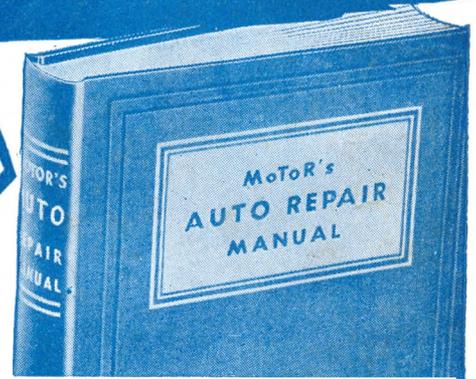
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