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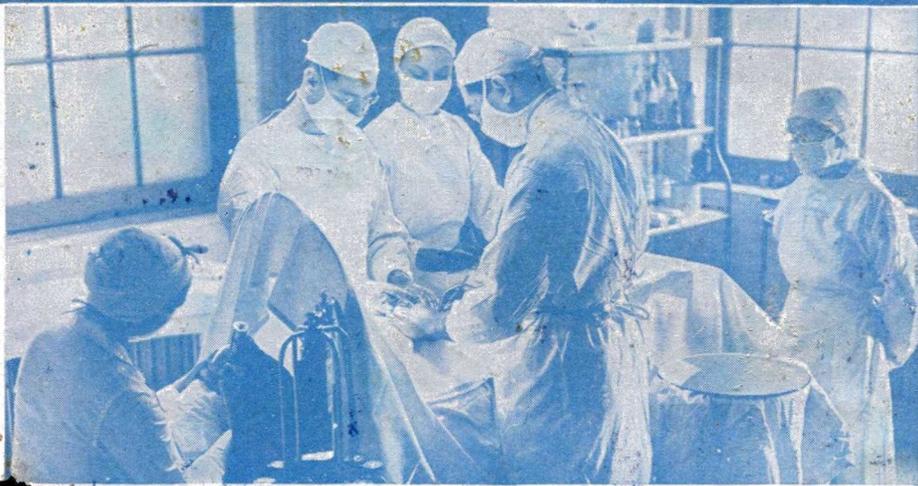
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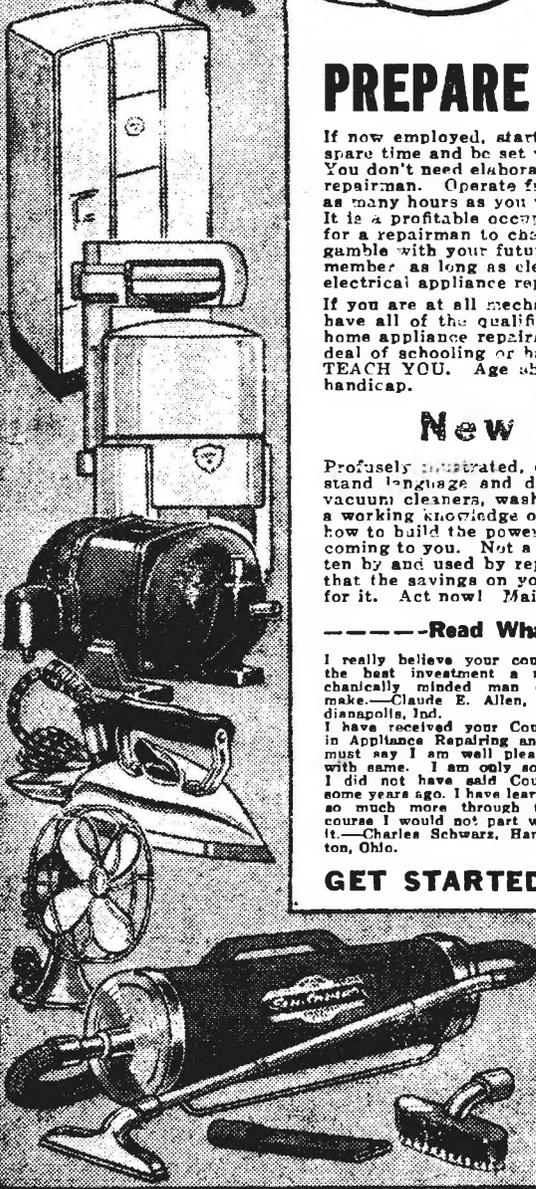
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AUGUST 1946

Contents

All **FEATURES** *Complete*

OFF THE BLOTTER	by The Editor.....	6
LIMEHOUSE LAWS	by Lee Standish.....	48
THE ESSKAYE FRAUD	by June Lurie.....	49
RACKET OF THE SKIRTS	by Lee Kaley.....	54
A WOMAN'S WILES	by Myles Martin.....	55
TRAGEDY OF ERRORS	by Ralph Quint.....	62
THE COBBLER OF COPERNICK	by Sandy Miller.....	63
THE PATRIOTIC SMUGGLER	by H. R. Stanton.....	96
ALIAS THE DUKE	by John Crail.....	130
ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN!	by Gary Lee Horton.....	131
CRIME ODDITIES	by James Slade.....	161
A GHOST ON TRIAL	by R. Clayton.....	176
BACK COVER SOLUTION	by A. R. Steber.....	177

Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn, illustrating a scene from "Tip Your Hat to Death"
Back cover painting by Malcolm Smith, depicting a "Picture Crime"

**MANMOTH
DETECTIVE**

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Volume 8
Number 8

OFF THE BLOTTER

JUST by way of something different, there is no book-length novel in this issue of your favorite magazine. Instead, you'll find three novelettes (most magazines would call them book-lengths), none of them under 20,000 words. In addition, there are five shorter stories to choose from while you're waiting for dinner guests, or bedtime, or whatever you wait for after the sun goes down.

LEADING off this month is a very fine novelette by H. B. Hickey. Mr. Hickey's first story appeared in our sister magazine, *Mammoth Mystery*, only a few months ago, but already he has taken on an enviable stature as a writer. While we were in the midst of making up this issue, he telephoned to say that Liberty had just bought a short story from him. Not that he was excited, you understand; he always stutters that way!

ANYWAY, we can recommend "Tip Your Hat to Death" as one of those unusual stories you see too few of. It is based on psychology, and how proper knowledge of the human mind can solve a murder that defies solution. You'll get a real lift out of the completely unexpected twist at the end.

FOR this month's chuckle we offer David Cantine's "You Saved Me the Trouble." Here is one of those stories you can read through on a short bus ride. In it you'll meet Mr. Kidde, who has nothing to lose, and a couple of characters who took it away from him.



"How's the new mystery story going, dear?"

ONE of a photographer's stocks-in-trade is the "cheesecake" picture; i.e., a shot of the female neither limb tastefully displayed. Leonard Finley Hilts offers "Murder Without Cheesecake" in this issue; and he tells us the title was suggested by his inability to figure out why a photographer would be interested in a photo that had *no* sex appeal! Even with that drawback, however, he manages to give you a story worth reading.

FOR the reader who likes a lot of action and something new in the way of plot (don't we all!), Berkeley Livingston hands out a honey. "Let's Call It Murder," he said, and that's exactly what we've done. There are plenty of bullets in this one to keep you well chilled.

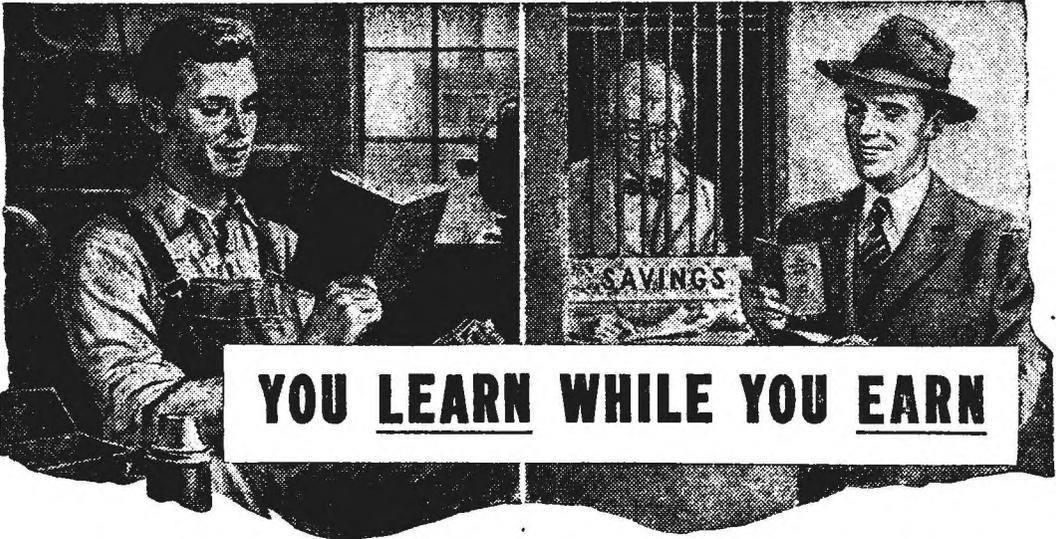
YOU'VE seen Dale Clark's name on a lot of extra-fine yarns in most, if not all, the detective and mystery magazines on the stands. But we're willing to bet you've never read a better one of his than "This Can't Last Forever." There's a private eye present who can take (and does!) more punishment than a Sherman tank. We believe you'll be writing us flattering letters on this.

THOSE of you who have read *Mammoth Mystery* will find a welcome name on our contents page this month. We mean that of Larry Holden, who does the Keogh series—and does it well. As an introduction, he presents "Anybody Lose A Corpse," and in it you'll meet a private detective who has two jobs—solving a murder and keeping his kid brother from landing them both in pokey. This is not a story for the squeamish!

MICHAEL ENGLISH, a new writer to these pages, but an old hand at the game of mystery fiction, hands you "A Gift From the Dead." Here is a story built around a timely device—a racket that feeds on the desire of citizens to own a new car. The only trouble was, a coffin went with each order!

TO CLOSE the book, don't miss "Murder—Country Style." Solving crime in the hinterlands takes the same deductive ability the city police use—but based on circumstances peculiar to the rural backgrounds.

LOOKING ahead: Next month we give you a full-length preview of another novel which will appear later as a book. Its title: "This Deadly Weapon." Watch for it. —E.B.



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Tip Your Hat to Death

By H. B. HICKEY

Inasmuch as the solution to this murder lay in a quirk of the human brain, it seemed proper to start with a headless corpse

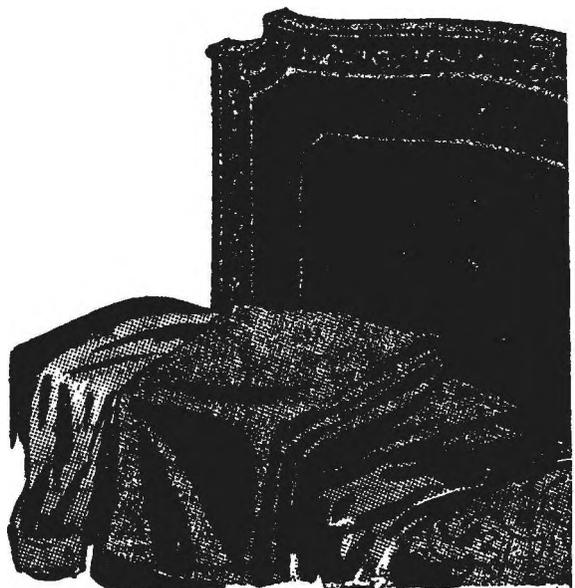
THE two stenographers skirted a small puddle and started up the alley on their shortcut to work. The all-night rain had stopped at eight and the sun was now breaking from the last lingering clouds. Halted by a larger puddle the girls turned left to slide along the back platform of the wholesale butchers' building that was second from the alley's mouth. Perhaps it was the pinkish hue of the water that brought them up short, or the stained cleaver in their path, but a second glance froze them. Mouths agape, they stared at the figure now revealed beneath the platform. It was a man, completely nude! And where the head had been—was a stump!

TOM RITCHIE had sat in the D.A.'s chair for seventeen years—at least until the District Attorney got down to work. Ritchie had originally been loaned to a D.A. by homicide. His ability to get along with a moron, which his first D.A. was,—and thieves, which the next two were, plus his long time knowledge of the city's gang structure had lengthened his tenure as chief investigator.

At the moment Ritchie's feet rested

on the D.A.'s desk, and as, with one hand, he picked his nose reflectively he cogitated on murder in general and the one which the photos in his other hand depicted, in particular. He was a deceptively mild-looking man with rusty hair and twinkling blue eyes.

He stopped picking to look at the clock and then watched the door expectantly. Nine-thirty! The door swung open and Tom Ritchie grinned and got his feet under him as he rose





Pushing the curtain aside, the shadowy figure of a man stepped lightly across the window sill and halted beside the sleeper

to greet his boss.

"Morning, Chief. Going to be a beautiful day!"

It was good to feel *honest* cordiality.

Simeon Field stopped for a second. He was two inches shorter than his gangling assistant, but heavier. Under a broad forehead dark brows met in a straight line to almost hide his piercing black eyes. The straight nose and wide mouth were granite chiselled above a jutting clefted chin. A hard man, an ambitious man, but a brilliant man, his features said. How else lick a machine to become district attorney at thirty-five?

Field was glum. "What's so beautiful about it? I've got a murderous headache."

Ritchie's smile was wry. "Well, here's one guy's been spared your trouble." He showed the picture's to his chief.

"Ugh! What the hell is this?"

"Apparently, boss, you can't see well this fine morn. This is a man who's lost his head."

Field sat down in the chair Ritchie had vacated and hefted an ash tray.

"You'll lose yours if you don't stop fooling around. What's the dope?"

"All right, Chief. Don't shoot. You know that wholesale meat place on Clark, just south of Van Buren?"

At Field's nod he continued. "Well, a couple of girls found him under the back loading platform about an hour ago. He's been dead since about ten-thirty last night."

"How do you know?"

"Because the doc says so and because the ground under him was dry. The rain didn't start till ten forty-five. Before ten-thirty the platform lights were on so the watchman would have seen him. Simple?"

"Yes. Identification?"

"None. Clothes missing along with

his head. Hed been stabbed once through the heart and that would have been enough without the cleaver."

"*What* cleaver?"

"The instrument of decapitation, my dear sir. One of the butchers forgot it out there when they closed yesterday." He anticipated the next question. "No prints. Sorry."

"You look so different when you're sorry."

They both smiled. Field had forgotten his headache.

"Now how about the instrument of death, *my* dear sir?"

"Again no soap. It was probably a long, narrow, double-edged weapon."

"Is that all?"

"That's all!"

FIELD was serious. For several minutes there was silence as he pondered over Ritchie's review of the situation. Finally he looked up.

"How big was the victim, Tom? And how old?"

"About a hundred thirty or so. And about your age, Chief. It's possible for a woman to have done it, if that's what you're thinking."

"So what? Until we find out who the man is we're still no place."

"I was just thinking, Chief, it's queer. On the one hand it's a type of murder which is seldom cold-blooded: a stabbing; and on the other we have a murderer who took the time—and had the nerve—to undress the body and then lop off the head. In other words we find beat and coldness, reason and the supreme irrationality strangely mixed. If and when we crack this case we'll find a very interesting mind behind it."

"'A most ingenious paradox', eh? Well, Tom, I guess we'll just have to wait for a lead."

The phone rang and Field answered

it. It was the mayor. His honor's voice was unctuous.

"Good morning, Field. How's everything? Ah, that's fine! Wonder if you would do something for me? Oh, nothing much, really. I'd like you to drop that bookie case."

The D.A. repeated the mayor's last sentence and saw Ritchie's head bob up and down rapidly. Into the phone he said, "I think we can do that for you, your honor. That's all right, glad to oblige."

He slammed the phone down and turned to his aide. "Why are you so anxious for me to oblige that fat oaf?"

"He may be fat, Chief, but he's no oaf, and he wields power. In politics you've got to take a little, leave a little, if you want to get along."

"I beat them once."

"They underestimated you, but they won't any more. How to be honest, though in politics, *there's* a paradox for you."

Field grinned. "We'll try to do just that, Tom."

"Under my guiding hand you can't miss."

The phone rang again and the D.A. scooped it off the cradle. "Yes . . . you have? Where? Fine!" He was beaming as he picked up a pencil and started writing while he listened. Tom sat on the edge of his desk.

"Okay. Give me the address again. Fine, I've got it. Good work!" The D.A. hung up and swivelled toward Tom.

"There's our lead. Couple of kids just found the head and clothes in some park bushes."

"Swell, Chief, now all we have to do is find out who he was." Ritchie was eager for action, but Simeon Field held up a hand.

"Whoa, Tom. We know who he is—or was. His wallet was in his clothes."

Field paused but his assistant was impatient.

"Come on, give out with the dope. Who was he?"

"His name was—" the D.A. referred to his notes "—Victor Unger, a resident doctor at a sanitarium for the mentally ill. He also had an office at 317 South Clark street."

"Whew! A psychiatrist! Remember what I said about the killer having an interesting mind? Looks like I was right."

"We'd better not jump to conclusions. I think we'll go up and take a look at his office before we do anything else. It's only a few blocks from here."

TEN minutes later Ritchie slid the big Buick to the curb in front of the "Arts and Professions" building. Inside, a steady stream flowed into and out of the battery of elevators. Field shot a quick look at the building directory, then motioned Ritchie into an elevator. He gave the operator the floor number and a moment later the two were disgorged with several others.

For a second they studied the floor plan opposite them. "It's 1806, Tom, so we go left," the D.A. told his assistant.

The office was the second from the corridor's end. There was a single door with frosted glass on which was lettered simply the number and "Victor Unger, M.D." Tom reached into his pocket and brought out a ring of keys. On his second try the door opened and they found themselves in a small anteroom, empty except for two chairs and a little table. The door to the inner office was closed but not locked.

Tom cast a critical eye about him. "Doesn't look like he was doing much business, does it?"

The desk was bare of anything but

the large blotter. A couch stood at the left and a small chair beside it. The walls were devoid of pictures and there was no drapery on the one outside window. The room was uncomfortably warm. It was obviously not the office of a successful practitioner.

There was little enough to see but Ritchie's intense gaze drank it all in. When he was through looking he turned to Tom. "Let's go through the desk."

The top drawer held two pencils, the second was empty and the bottom drawer, double size, was locked. The D.A. looked at Ritchie expectantly and the lanky detective fished out his keys again.

"Don't know why they bother to lock these when it's so easy to open them," he said to Field as he pulled out the drawer.

Open, it revealed an alphabetical file of cards and papers. One card was only half in and they could see the name written on it. Tom's eyes popped.

"'Mrs. Walter B. Amery', it says here!" He looked up at Field. "Maybe he was doing better than I thought. Let's see the others."

The file disclosed only three other patients, but each name brought another whistle from Ritchie's lips. When they were through there was a small pile on the desk before them.

"That's all, Tom. We've got everything we're going to get here." The D.A. looked thoughtful, then: "Maybe we'd better take this stuff to the office where we won't be disturbed while we go over it."

They locked the drawer, then left after relocking the outer door.

PENELOPE REED, Mrs. Walter B. Amery, B. O. Thorne, and James Craig. Why should four big-shots like that go to a small fry like Unger,

Tom?"

Ritchie looked up from the card before him. "You know, I was wondering at that myself. But apparently they came for psychoanalysis, if these cards tell the truth. Could it be, Chief, that four of our leading citizens are crazy?"

Field could not repress a smile. "Not quite, no. But they certainly must have some quirks."

Ritchie lifted a sheet of paper from the pile and started to read aloud. "Sunday, June 13: I found myself in a large room in which there were rows and rows of toilets. I knew I had to clean them all. Something made me hold back, though, so I asked a large shaggy dog to help me. He said he would and. . . !"

"Holy smokes! What the hell is that?" In his bewilderment Ritchie was shouting.

"Pipe down!" Field shushed him. "It's just a dream Penelope Reed had on the date mentioned. Don't you ever dream?"

"Yes, once in a while. Nothing like that, though. My subconscious must be in good shape."

"Lucky fellow. Well, you'd better get out and see if you can pick up any leads. I've got to stay here and get that Muller case ready for trial tomorrow."

Tom hesitated. "Look, Chief. This murder may involve four of the most influential people in the city. If it does—we'll run into trouble."

Field's mouth tightened. "Just remember one thing, Tom. You do whatever you think is right and I'll back you to the limit! I don't care who's involved. I want this murder solved!"

"Swell! Now before I go I'd like to know a few things. Besides his wallet, what else did Dr. Unger have in his coat pockets?"

Field looked puzzled. "Nothing. Should he have had something else?"

"Yes. Keys for his office and desk! They were locked, weren't they?"

The D.A. stared at him. "I never thought of that! What do you think it means?"

Tom shrugged. "Maybe I'll be able to tell you when I get back."

CRAIG kept Ritchie waiting only a few minutes before having him shown in. The bank president looked as though he had been hewn from the same grey stone as the building his institution occupied. Ritchie felt sure that Craig's glance could have frozen anyone but a man with a diamond-studded collateral.

"My secretary tells me you are from the District Attorney's office," Craig said.

"That's right." Tom flashed his badge. "It's in connection with the murder of Dr. Unger." He kept his eyes glued on Craig's face. The face remained immobile but the eyes told of the inner struggle to retain composure. Was there a component of fear in the struggle?

"I . . . I didn't know." For a brief second there was uncertainty in the voice and then mastery came and it was the same solid voice that assured the listener that nothing on earth was wrong enough to shake either Craig or the Second National Bank. "When did it happen?"

"Last night. His body was found this morning."

"That's too bad." Tom could picture the same tone being used to tell a customer that his loan couldn't be renewed.

"When was the last time you saw him, Mr. Craig?"

"Yesterday evening. I came at nine-fifteen and left at ten-fifteen."

"You're sure of the time?"

"Positive. It was soon after that time that he was murdered?"

"About ten-thirty." Ritchie had a hunch that Craig wanted information as badly as he did. What information did he want?

"In his office?" The banker seemed satisfied to do the questioning.

"No. It was a block away. We went to his office as soon as we discovered who he was and found your name on file there. That's how we knew you were his patient."

"I see. Could it have been robbery?"

Tom decided to see if he couldn't get a show of emotion. "No. After he was killed the murderer chopped off his head and carried it away!"

The cold blue eyes didn't blink. "That's strange. Somebody must have hated him intensely to do a thing like that." The heavy voice was almost disinterested. "Does there seem to be any apparent motive at all?"

"Not so far. We're looking for one." Tom waited for the next question.

"I see. You found my name among his patients and are hoping that I might be able to help you?"

"That's all we did find: the names of four patients and some dreams they had." Tom had figured out what Craig wanted to know. Now that he had given him the information he'd see what happened. The banker loosened up. The change was almost imperceptible but it was there all right!

"Well I'm afraid I can't help you much. Dr. Unger was a very kind man, hardly the sort to have many enemies."

"Uh-huh. Would you care to tell me what you did and where you went after leaving his office? After all, you seem to be the last person to have seen him alive."

Craig's answer was unhesitating. "I always sent my car home on the evenings when I had an appointment with the doctor. When I was through I took a cab home."

"And that is what you did last night?"

"That's right." The banker grew a bit more confidential. "You see, it might not be a good thing for the bank if it were found out that its president were seeing a psychiatrist. Unless it is absolutely necessary I'd rather my name did not enter this investigation."

Ritchie assured him it wouldn't. "There is one thing more, Mr. Craig. Do you happen to know the names of Dr. Unger's other patients?"

There was just the hint of hesitation. "No, I do not."

Ritchie's tone was deceptively quiet. "Mind telling me just why you were consulting a psychiatrist, Mr. Craig?"

THE banker allowed himself a mirthless laugh. "Strangely enough, because I had developed migraine headaches! My own physician could discover no reason for them—that is, no physical reasons—and suggested I consult a psychiatrist."

"Had he been able to help you?"

Craig spread his hands. "I had only been seeing him for three months, twice a week. He informed me that it might take a long time before my analysis was completed."

The banker was obviously getting impatient but Ritchie took his time. "And how did it happen that you selected such an obscure man? I should think you would have sought someone better known. His office indicated that he did not have much of a practice."

Craig grunted. "If he charged his other patients as much as he was charging me I can assure you he could have afforded a fine suite. My opinion is

that psychiatrists are as crazy as any of their patients. He insisted that the reason he charged so much was to give me more of an incentive to get well quickly. He seemed to think that money was the least important thing in life. And his ideas! Why, the man talked like a communist!"

It was plainly the worst thing that Craig could think of to say about any man.

Ritchie repressed a grin. "Well, I won't take up any more of your time, Mr. Craig."

"Not at all." The banker was being civic-minded now. "If I can help you in any way be sure to let me know." His handshake was cool and he didn't bother to smile.

Ritchie was thoughtful as he walked from the bank building. There were several things that were troubling him. Craig had been afraid that he knew more than he did. More about what? About his analysis?

Then the banker had lied when Ritchie asked him whether he knew the identity of any of the other patients. Why?

Ritchie pondered those questions while he drove to the exclusive Michigan Boulevard hotel in which Thorne, the lawyer, lived. For the present at least he had to let them go unanswered.

THE lawyer greeted him with a warm handshake. The two had been on opposite sides of the fence in several cases and each had a healthy respect for the other.

The detective had been wondering why he hadn't seen Thorne around for awhile. The grapevine had it that the lawyer had refused several big cases and was thinking of retiring.

"Haven't seen you in a while, Tom," Thorne smiled. He was a short, heavy-set man with warm brown eyes and

thinning brown hair. He wore a brown foulard robe.

"Been trying to dig up some clients for you," Tom grinned. "In fact, that's why I'm here now. This is a professional visit."

"You're lucky to find me here. I'm opening my home on the lake shore up north for the summer. I was going up there today but some business matters will delay me until tomorrow." Thorne became serious. "What's up?"

The detective told him and watched Thorne's mouth open in incredulous shock.

"Why! Why, that's impossible! I can't believe he had an enemy in the world! I can't think of anyone wanting to kill Unger . . ." His voice trailed off.

"Why not?" Ritchie asked.

"Because . . . because he was such a *fine* man. Because he was such a *good* man! There are few people you can say that about but he was one of them. It's impossible to believe that he could harm anyone!"

"Maybe he didn't," Ritchie said.

"But he must have! Otherwise why would the murderer want to mutilate his body? If it were just a murder I could see where in a moment of anger someone might have killed him. But to do such a grisly thing . . ."

"Don't forget that he was psychiatrist. One of his patients might have been a homicidal maniac."

Thorne shook his head. "I don't know, Tom. He never discussed any of his other patients with me. I knew that he had only three others. He saw us each two hours a week. My appointment was always at five-thirty. It lasted an hour. He allowed fifteen minutes between patients."

Ritchie checked it over on his fingers. "That means he saw his second patient at six-forty five, his third at

eight, and his last one at nine-fifteen. Maybe he did that so that you wouldn't run into each other. Most people would rather not have it known that they were seeing a psychiatrist and I can tell you it wouldn't have helped the social standing of Unger's patients."

"It wouldn't have helped my professional standing any, I'm sure. Most people think of psychiatrists as treating people who are out and out lunatics. Not that it would make much difference. I'm giving up my law practice."

"That's what I've heard," Ritchie said. "Does it have anything to do with your visits to Dr. Unger?"

"Yes. I don't mind telling you why I went to him. About six months ago I began to get violently ill every time I entered the court house. It became impossible for me to try a case. Knowing something about psychiatry, I decided to consult the best man I could get. I was sure my trouble was psychological. Dr. Unger was recommended very highly."

"**D**ID you find out what was making you sick?" Ritchie asked.

"Not quite. But a strange thing happened. The doctor told me that for some reason he couldn't get down to the roots of my trouble. He said that I had something covered up so deeply that it was impossible to get at it in an ordinary way. When he saw me the visit before the last he asked if I would mind him hypnotizing me. In that way he felt he might be able to break the wall I'd built up. I consented."

"And he found out?"

Thorne shook his head slightly and bit his lip. "I don't know! And here's the strange thing. When I left his office the other evening I felt easier in my mind than I had in ages. Although

I've never shown it I've always worked under a great tension. That tension was gone!

"The next morning I went down to the court house to see someone and I didn't get sick! Whatever it was he found out, it cured me. I had asked him what it was and he said he would tell me when he thought I was ready to hear it, but not until then. The queerest thing is that now, although the thought of trying a case doesn't bother me, I haven't the slightest desire to practice any more!"

"That is strange. Do you still feel free of tension?"

Thorne looked surprised. For a second he stared at Ritchie without speaking. Then, "Damn it, Tom! You ought to have been a psychiatrist! I can't see how you guessed it, but I must admit I don't! This morning when I got up I found that it had returned as strong as ever. I wonder if it could have been a presentiment."

"Could be," Tom shrugged. "Maybe you ought to find another doctor. Meanwhile, would you mind telling me what you did yesterday evening after you left the doctor's office?"

"I came back to the hotel and had dinner here. I spent the rest of the time reading. About nine-thirty I went to bed and fell asleep at once. I didn't awaken once during the night."

"Well, I guess that takes you off the list of suspects all right." Ritchie turned to go but Thorne stopped him.

"Tom," the lawyer said, "If I can help you in any way I want you to call on me. I thought the world of Dr. Unger and I'd do anything to help get the man who killed him!" He was in dead earnest.

So now there were two of them! Craig wouldn't tell something that might be important and Thorne *couldn't!*

RITCHIE had small hope of getting much out of Penelope Reed. He knew little more than most people did about her. She had come to the city some twenty years before and started buying and selling real estate. In the course of those twenty years she had established herself as another Hettie Green. It was agreed that her fortune was tremendous but she never ventured into society and remained, for all her manifold activities, an almost legendary figure.

There was a high stone wall around the mansion she occupied and Tom found a surly gateman who refused him entrance until he had called the house. The butler who admitted Ritchie had an eye that was colder than Craig's.

He led Tom down a long hall to a room at the rear of the house. Then he held the door open just long enough for the detective to slip through and shut it silently behind him.

The room was as warm as the rest of the house was cold. Wide windows faced a garden that was a riot of color. The chintz drapery was gay and matched the spread that covered the bed in one corner of the huge room.

The woman who sat in the chair behind the desk near the windows was as feminine as the room itself. Her hair was an even grey that softened her features, which might otherwise have seemed a bit harsh. She wore a suit that displayed her womanly figure to advantage. When she saw Ritchie she took off the harlequin glasses she was wearing and dropped them on the abstract she had been reading.

"Oh," Tom said. "I wanted to see Miss Reed." The woman at the desk could not have been much over forty.

Her smile was appealing. "I am Miss Reed. What did you want to see me about?"

Tom found it hard to begin. He had

expected someone a good deal older, certainly someone more formidable looking.

"I'm from the District Attorney's office," he said at last. He identified himself.

"I can't imagine what the District Attorney would want with me," she said.

He explained. "Someone was murdered last night and we think you may be able to give us some help."

Her eyes widened. "Murdered? Someone I know? I can't imagine who that might be."

"Dr. Unger," he told her. The smile wiped off and the sharpness was accentuated.

"Dr. Unger! Who told you I was seeing him? How did you connect me with him? I told him he mustn't tell anyone!"

The ferocity in her voice startled Tom. If she had vanished and been replaced in the chair by a tigress the change could not have been more complete.

"Why . . ." Tom stammered, "he didn't tell anyone! We found your name in his file this morning. That's how we knew you were his patient." His tone became conciliatory. "We don't think you murdered him but we hoped that you might be able to give us some information about him. You saw him yesterday evening?"

She nodded, her eyes remaining fixed on Tom's.

"And you left his office at seven-forty-five?"

"Seven-fifteen."

There was no explanation. She kept her eyes down, apparently studying her glasses. At last she picked them up. "I told that eye doctor these things would make me blind," she said bleakly. "Maybe that's what he wanted to do. . . ." Without a change of

expression she flung them into a corner.

"Why seven-fifteen?" Tom was ignoring the tantrum. "I thought your appointment was over at seven-forty five."

PENELOPE REED was looking at him but not seeing him. Her eyes went through him . . . all the way to Unger's office perhaps. . . .

"Why?" There was a haughty note. "Because I wanted to leave then. Do you think he told me to go?" She called Unger a filthy name. "Imagine the nerve of that— . . . Is that what he told you?"

Ritchie was patient. "I never saw Dr. Unger alive. We found your name in his file this morning." He got off the subject of Unger. "What time did you get home?"

"Eight o'clock," she snapped. "Now get out and don't come sneaking back here again!"

The butler was waiting in the hall. His grey face was a mask, telling nothing. Had he been outside the door, listening?

"What time did Miss Reed get home last night?" Ritchie asked.

"At the time she told you."

"And what time was that?" Tom demanded.

"At the time she told you," the butler repeated. It was like a phonograph record. Ritchie felt certain that if he asked again he would get the same reply in exactly the same tone.

The man at the gate was ready for him. As the guard turned his body toward him Ritchie caught the bulge under his coat. The man's eyes had little scars around them and his nose had been flattened. He was not tall, but very broad and Tom knew he could take care of himself.

The investigator stopped at the gate.

"You on duty last night?" he asked.

The broad man studied him. "Why?" he asked. It was almost as good as a positive answer.

"I'd like to know what time Miss Reed got home," Tom said.

"I wouldn't know," the guard told him.

"You mean you wouldn't *say*," Ritchie said gravely. The wide shoulders lifted and fell in a manner that said it didn't matter which word was used.

A horn honked outside the gate and both men looked toward the sound. The horn was attached to a low slung maroon roadster that had a lot of chromium on it.

The fellow behind the wheel was as flashy as his car. His blond hair was waved so perfectly that it looked like a wig. The moustache was parted under the perfect nose. His lips were full and sensuous and almost as red as a woman's. He wore a deep maroon sport shirt open at the throat and a yellow reefer.

The gateman didn't ask any questions this time. He just opened the gate and let the big red car slide through. The blond man nodded and smiled. He got no answering smiles.

"Friend of yours?" Ritchie asked.

The broad man's mouth turned down in a half snarl, half sneer. He started to swear and changed his mind.

"Ready to go, copper?" he asked instead.

Ritchie got into the Buick and started the motor. He took a long look at the scarred eyes and said, "So that's how it is?"

"Ahh . . . they're all the same," the other muttered. He shut the big iron gate behind Ritchie.

"All the same," he thought as he drove. To an extent they were all motivated by the same desires, the same

passions. Ritchie had been around too long to think that anyone existed who was exempt from the common frailties. But nature had taken care to see that a copper's life was not made too easy. People were all the same but they were all different; each had his own little individual twist that made him a separate problem by himself.

AS a lay student of human psychology Ritchie could pass the exams in the school of experience with flying colors. A knowledge of people was the biggest part of his stock as an investigator. He had also decided long ago that he had not been sent to school to learn to read only the sport pages in the daily paper.

He knew that "Freud" did not rhyme with "food" and that Adler had not been a shortstop for the Cubs. But how much more did he know about psychiatry than that?

"Not enough, he admitted to himself. Certainly not enough to know what the connection was between banking and migraine headaches. Not enough to see the relationship between legal work and nausea.

And not enough by a hell of a long shot, he had to admit, to figure out Penelope Reed. He wondered if Dr. Unger had figured her out!

Ritchie had gone to see an old battle-ax and found a real paradox. A still young and attractive woman who had been smart enough to run a shoe-string into a fortune against the shrewdest realtors in the country, but foolish enough to keep a gigolo—and keep him in a style to which he was probably not accustomed.

She lived in a house that was as cold as a winter on the lake front, but her own room was as warm as May sunshine. And she kept an armed guard at the gate!

Part of the function of intelligence is to find the differences between things that are similar. The other part is to find the similarities between things that are different.

So far there was one thing that Unger's three patients had in common. They generated tension like a dynamo generates electricity. And where there is tension there must be fear!

Were they all afraid of the same thing, or did each have his own private fear? Did they know what they were afraid of at all? If they knew, they might not have needed Dr. Unger.

Ritchie wondered if Mrs. Amery would be afraid too. It was strange how well he knew the names and how little he knew of the people who bore them. Their names were in the papers almost daily.

Yet Tom had been unaware that there was a Mrs. Amery! It was a popular notion that Walter B. Amery had an adding machine for a head and an ice cube for a heart. His factories stretched along the river for blocks, and his interests across the continent.

He loved children, it was said, and was a contributor to several orphanages. Yet he had prosecuted and sent to jail a man who had "borrowed" a hundred dollars from the cash box so his child could have an operation! Tom was looking forward to meeting Mrs. Amery; if she were at all like her husband it was going to be an experience.

He followed the winding road that led through the grounds of the Amery estate. On either side of that road green lawns stretched into the distance until they reached the tree covered hills that formed a natural boundary between them and the next estate.

About a mile in from the public highway there was a grove and on the other side of that grove the outbuildings began. There must have been a

dozen of them, ranging in size from a four-room cottage to the stables, which would have given Hercules his second biggest job.

The house itself was just a house, bigger than any Ritchie had ever seen before, but differing from them only in size. It was older than its present owner could possibly be and its red bricks were covered by ivy.

THERE was a girl on the patio. She had an easel set up and was intent on painting a herd of sheep that was grazing the grounds to the north. She was using water colors and working fast. She didn't hear Ritchie come up behind her. His shadow fell across the paper and startled her so that she dropped her brush and gave a little gasp. She turned and he could see she wasn't as young as he had thought. Her white dress was simply cut and her black hair was caught behind her neck with a clip and left to flow down to her shoulders; it gave her a look of immaturity. She was not over twenty-eight or thirty but her eyes looked a lot older than that. They were dark in her creamy smooth face.

"I'm sorry I frightened you," Tom said.

Her smile was wan. "That's quite all right; I get so engrossed in my painting that it would take an earthquake to disturb me."

Ritchie looked over her shoulder at the easel. The sheep were there, white against the green of the lawns. There was an ethereal quality in the picture, almost a transparency.

"I like that very much," Ritchie said. "You paint well."

"I really don't but it's kind of you to say so," she said.

Tom was astonished when she blushed. He changed the subject. "Are you a member of the family?" he asked.

"I'm looking for Mrs. Amery."

"I'm Mrs. Amery," she said simply.

"Mrs. Walter B. Amery?" He felt a little foolish even as he asked it. Then he felt more than foolish; she'd been asked that before in exactly the same way and he could see that it embarrassed her.

"I'm Tom Ritchie, investigator from the District Attorney's office," he explained. "There has been a murder and we thought you might be able to help us."

Her eyes got very wide. "A murder?" Her mouth stayed open although she had nothing more to say.

"Dr. Unger," Tom told her. "He was found this morning." He spared her the gory details.

Mrs. Amery's reaction was the most unexpected of all. There wasn't any! Her mouth closed and she stood looking at Ritchie as though he hadn't said anything. Her eyes were utterly blank.

"I'd better put my things away," she said. "My husband will be coming home soon and I must dress." She folded the easel with the paper still on it and walked away from Tom.

"Let me carry that for you," he said.

She made no protest and he took the materials from her hand and followed her into the house.

"Put them down anywhere," she said when they were inside. She turned toward him. "What was it you said on the patio?"

Before he could repeat his words she stopped him. "Please ring for someone," she requested.

THEY were in the living room. A grand piano stood in the far corner and beyond it was a bell cord on the wall. Ritchie walked across a couple of huge oriental rugs that looked like throw rugs on the big floor and pulled the cord.

A tall man with very fine white hair appeared so suddenly that Tom was sure he had been waiting just outside the door for the ring. The white-haired man wore the conventional butler's attire. He walked past Tom as though he weren't there. When he got near Mrs. Amery he paused.

"Take those things and burn them," she said. "Immediately."

The butler bowed very slightly and said, "Yes, madam. At once." He picked up the easel and paints and walked out the way he had come.

Ritchie took up where he had left off. He was determined not to let anything surprise him. "I'll try not to take too long, Mrs. Amery. There are just a few questions I'd like to ask you."

She was paying absolutely no attention to him at all. He got red in the face.

Neither of them had heard Amery come into the room. All of a sudden he was there and Tom and Mrs. Amery knew it. Ritchie turned slowly and watched Amery come toward him. He was a big man, well fed but not soft. His hair had been blond and the grey streaks in it didn't look good. He could have been anywhere from forty-five to fifty-five.

"My dear," he nodded to his wife. He disregarded Ritchie. "I see you've been painting again." Amery pointed to a spot on her dress. His tone didn't say whether he liked it or not. Tom had to guess and he guessed that Amery didn't like it. Amery smiled, not unpleasantly.

"Won't you introduce me?" he asked. His wife just looked at him and didn't say anything so Ritchie introduced himself.

"I just want to ask your wife a few questions," he said. "It won't take long."

Amery was in no hurry. "Questions?" he asked quietly. "About what?"

"About a murder. Dr. Victor Unger was murdered last night and we found your wife's name in his file. We thought she might be able to tell us whether he seemed worried about anything or whether he might have mentioned something that would give us a lead. Also, we'd like to know what time she left his office and what she did after leaving it."

Amery thought that over. He was the kind who would give careful thought to anything. "I don't think that is asking too much," he decided.

He looked at his wife expectantly. His decisions were apparently binding for her. She might have been a child asked to recite and she did it like a child, in an entirely unemotional voice.

"I came to the doctor's office at eight o'clock. I always came at eight o'clock. We talked for an hour. At nine o'clock I left. He had suggested that I see the movie that was playing at the theatre across the street from his office. It was 'Now, Voyager', about a girl who was under a psychiatrist's care. I came just as it was beginning and I left before the end. I didn't like it. I went right home."

Ritchie had seen the movie. He recalled that it was about a girl who had been dominated by her mother all her life. He could see why Unger had recommended it.

"You came in soon after nine and left before it was over," he mused. "That means you got out between ten and ten-thirty. Is that right?"

"Ten-twenty. I looked at my watch. I went right home. My husband was angry with me."

Amery was startled. "I would hardly say angry, my dear. It was unusual for you to get home so late. I was

worried."

"It's not unusual for you to get home late, is it?" she asked tonelessly. "I'm not to worry, am I?"

He looked very sad and Tom didn't know for which of the two he felt more sorry.

"Maybe you'd better go up to your room and lie down for a while," Amery suggested. His voice was kind, paternal. But it was still the voice of Walter B. Amery. His wife left the room and Ritchie could see her going up a curved staircase outside the double doors.

AMERY had his lower lip between his teeth and was worrying it. He shook his head. "That's terrible about Dr. Unger. He was doing wonders for my wife. Of course her illness was of a very minor nature but it has caused us some concern and I was pleased with the progress she was making. Too bad he was killed."

He made no attempt to hide the fact that he meant it was too bad for him and his wife, not Dr. Unger. It wouldn't take much practice for Tom to learn to dislike him intensely. Still, the sadness in his face as he looked at his wife had been real.

The curved stairway was high and Mrs. Amery had been walking slowly. Fortunately the stairs were thickly carpeted—fortunately, because she didn't miss one as she rolled down. There wasn't much sound, not even when she landed at the bottom.

The butler was there long before Ritchie and Amery. He seemed to have a post just outside the living room.

Amery took over. "Call a doctor," he commanded. While the butler went off somewhere he bent and lifted his wife and carried her into the living room and put her down on a wide couch. He was more than worried

now; he was frantic but he kept himself under control. Tom thought that the couple looked more like a father and daughter than husband and wife.

There was no color at all in Mrs. Amery's face and when Tom reached past her husband to feel her pulse her hand was cold. The detective was worried as he looked at Emery. The blond man started to blubber.

"She's dead!" he gasped. "My God, she's dead!"

A woman in a maid's uniform came into the room carrying a bottle of smelling salts and Amery tore it out of her hand. Now that he had something to do, he stopped blubbering. He stuck the bottle under his wife's nose and held it there.

After what seemed an age she opened her eyes. Amery still had the bottle under her nose and Ritchie had to take it away from him. He couldn't keep him from talking though.

"Are you all right, darling?" Amery kept saying. His wife didn't close her eyes but she didn't answer his question either.

She had her eyes glued on Ritchie and she wouldn't take them off. He tried staring back for a while but there was something so pitiful, so hopeless there, that he got a sick feeling and turned away.

When he looked back she was crying. There was no sound; her mouth was shut tight as though to hold back any that might have escaped. The tears came slowly, filling each eye until it could hold no more and overflowed onto her cheeks.

The butler was back with another maid. He looked as scared as Amery. "The doctor will be here in ten minutes, sir. Is there anything we can do in the meantime?"

His voice brought a spark of life to Mrs. Amery's waxen features. She

looked at Ritchie again and opened her mouth.

"The doctor is coming," she said faintly. She shook her head so slightly that it barely moved. "No. He won't come. He's dead. I'll never see him again. The little doctor is dead. He won't come; he's dead."

Over and over she said it. Her voice stayed low but the despair in it spread until it hung over the room like a pall. Ritchie turned away again and got out a handkerchief and took something out of his eye. He remembered the time he had to tell a little girl that her mother wouldn't be home any more. The little girl had taken it much the same way.

IT WAS a great relief when the doctor came. He was a bustling man, quick in his movements, and his first act was to send them all out of the room.

It was impossible to tell from his face when he came out ten minutes later just how serious Mrs. Amery's injuries were. He was not bustling now; instead, he wore the meditative air that some physicians effect when they leave the sickroom. The same manner presages the announcement of imminent death or quick recovery.

Amery pounced on him. "Well?" he demanded, "How is she?" Will she be all right?"

The doctor nodded gravely. "I think so. There don't seem to be any broken bones, torn ligaments, or anything like that. She is suffering from shock, however. I gave her something that will put her to sleep for a while. You can put her to bed and see that she stays there. Call me when she wakes up and let me know how she feels."

The doctor's head bobbed up and down and he puckered his lips as though waiting to be kissed. "I'll be out in the morning to make sure she's

all right," he added.

"I want you to get a nurse out here immediately," Amery told him. He was acting like himself again.

"It may be difficult to get one on such short notice," the doctor said.

Amery had been about to re-enter the living room. He stopped and turned around. He looked almost surprised at the doctor's statement. "Get one anyway," he said.

The doctor started to say "yes sir" and stopped himself. But there was no doubt he would get one.

"You'd better wait until I get down," Amery told Ritchie. "I want to have a talk with you."

Ritchie was seated in a comfortable chair, his long legs crossed, when Amery came down ten minutes later. The detective had his notebook on his right knee and was gazing intently at it. His host glanced at the notebook suspiciously.

"Got it all written down?" he asked.

Ritchie turned the notebook around and showed him what he had been looking at. It was a drawing of a key. The investigator smiled up at Amery. "Just doodling," he said.

The blond man studied him for a moment, getting his thoughts in order. At last he spoke.

"Look here," he said, "As you can see, my wife is not well. The news of her doctor's death was a great shock and has apparently aggravated her condition. I don't want her bothered anymore."

Ritchie shrugged. "Unfortunately, I have little to say about that. All I do is follow orders."

Amery nodded. "I suppose so. Well, I'll see to it that your orders are to stay away from her."

of power about Amery. It said that what he wanted done would be done or he'd know the reason why. There were never any reasons that were good enough to balk him.

Except for the few minutes when Amery had feared for his wife's life he was the most dominant person Tom had ever met. If he were a bit less dominant the detective could almost have admired him.

Still, Ritchie hardly blamed him. There was no doubt that he loved his wife deeply and even less doubt that she was in no condition for further questioning.

"Could you tell me exactly what time it was when Mrs. Amery got home last night?" Tom asked.

"It was exactly three minutes past eleven. I was so worried, especially since she was driving alone and the rain was so heavy, that my watch was not out of my hand for more than five minutes at a time. Mrs. Amery usually got home by ten o'clock, you see."

"You saw her downstairs?"

"Just a minute or two after she came in. I had gone upstairs for something but came down at once."

Ritchie pondered that. "Did she use a key or did someone open the door for her?"

"Harris, the butler, let her in."

"If you don't mind," Ritchie said, "I'll talk to Harris alone for a moment."

Amery pulled the bell cord and Harris came in. His employer told him what was wanted of him and left the room.

"You opened the door for Mrs. Amery when she came home last night?" Ritchie asked.

The white head bowed slightly. "I did, sir."

"Was there anything out of the ordinary in her appearance or manner?"

THE detective was not inclined to laugh that off. There was an aura

Harris hesitated and Ritchie prodded him. "Was there?" he demanded.

"Well, sir, she seemed distraught. As though something had upset her."

"I see. Anything strange about her dress?"

"Her clothes were wet and the hem of her coat and stockings were muddy."

Ritchie nodded thoughtfully. "Do you remember how Mrs. Amery was dressed, what clothes she wore?"

"Yes, sir, I do. She was wearing a beige linen suit and a light sport coat. She wore a tan straw hat with a veil that came down over her face."

The detective had given no warning of what was coming next. "Does Mr. Amery often come home late?"

Harris was shocked. "Why, no, sir. On the contrary, Mr. Amery seldom goes out in the evening. He does not like parties and does not care especially for the theatre."

"I see. He seems to be a very devoted husband."

"He is indeed. In many ways he is a very strict and stern man, but to those who obey and are loyal to him he is extremely kind."

"I don't doubt it. Well, that will be all for now, Harris."

THE butler showed him out and closed the heavy oak door behind him. Ritchie stood for several minutes looking back at the great house. The ivy gave an impression of serenity and calm that the detective now knew was false and misleading.

He saw, as though they were before him now, Mrs. Amery's eyes, and wished fervently, for her sake and his own, that it hadn't been she who killed Unger. For her sake because, for whatever reason, she had suffered enough already. For his own, because he knew that Walter Amery loved his wife and would do anything to protect

her.

But Unger's head and clothing had been found in the park bushes and Mrs. Amery's coat and stockings were muddied! It had been raining last night, Ritchie reflected.

He'd have to check her story about going to see that movie. It didn't quite ring true. On the other hand neither did anyone else's story ring true. Craig had certainly lied to him; so had Penelope Reed. Thorne was the only one who was accounted for.

Ritchie drove slowly back to the city. Strangely enough, his thoughts as he drove were not long on Unger's patients. Instead he tried to figure out what the missing keys meant. It was as though he had two paths which might lead to the solution of the crime. One was the slow painful trail he was following, and he had no assurance that it was getting him anywhere; the other path was shut off by a gate. The keys that would open that gate were right before Ritchie but he didn't know how to use them!

He found Field in the office. The D.A. looked up when Ritchie entered and laid the papers he was reading aside.

"Well, Tom, how did it go? Run into any trouble?"

Ritchie gave him a complete account of his activities. Field listened intently, interrupting with a question now and then. When the detective had finished the D.A. nodded.

"So that's how it is? Well, there's only one thing to do. I'll get Craig and Miss Reed down here and we'll find out just what it is that they're holding back. It's time people found out that neither money nor position can protect them."

Ritchie was laughing and Field stared at him in bewilderment. "What's so funny about that?" he demanded.

"Those are very noble sentiments,

Chief, but that's all they are. You get those big shots down here and try to push them a r o u n d and you'll think every lawyer in the country has set up practice in your office. This is one case that will have to be worked up on the quiet. If and when we get something on Craig and Miss Reed there'll be plenty of time to call them in. Neither of them is going to run away."

"Well, then, what would you suggest?" Field asked. He could see the strength of Ritchie's argument.

The lanky investigator leaned forward. "For one thing, I think the tough guy who plays watchdog for Miss Reed has a record. Let's see if we can't get him to talk. Then we might try to get a line on the beautiful boy in the maroon roadster.

"As far as Craig is concerned we'll have to forget about him until we have something on him. My hunch is that the thing he was worried about has nothing to do with the murder but that when he lied about not knowing any of the other patients he was protecting someone. The only angle I can think of in connection with that is that one of them has something to do with the bank. It ought to be easy to find out who it is."

"We don't have to find out," Field told him. "I'm a depositor there and I've seen their statements. Friend Amery is chairman of the board."

"That's what I was a f r a i d o f," Ritchie said. "He knows something about Mrs. Amery and he doesn't want to talk. Amery could break him. The worst of it is that it's probably something important that he knows. Otherwise he wouldn't be worried about it."

"I've still got a good mind to call him in," Field snorted.

RITCHIE shook his head. "We wouldn't get a thing out of him.

He's not a cheap hood that we can slap around. Better lay off until we've got something definite."

"And in the meantime?" Field wanted to know.

"In the meantime we can check up on the elevator operators who were on duty last night in the Arts and Professions Building. We can find out, maybe, if Mrs. Amery really went to that movie. That's routine stuff that you can get men on as soon as I leave."

"All right, Tom. But what I told you before still goes. I'll back you up on anything you do." Field looked up at him. "Have you seen the papers?"

Ritchie shook his head.

"They'd like to go to town on this," Field told him, "but they have nothing to go on. All they know is that we're working on it."

"Good," Ritchie said. "If we can keep them out of our hair for a while this might work out. Of course, if Mrs. Amery's name was mixed up in it they'd soft pedal the case."

"I doubt it," Field grunted.

"Don't be so innocent, Chief," Ritchie grinned. "They won't print anything he doesn't want them to print. That's why I don't want to make a move until I'm sure of myself."

Field got a sour look on his face and Ritchie grinned. "I know I sound cynical but that's the way things are. Don't give up hope though. I'm going out to the sanitarium now and I've got a feeling that when I get back we'll be able to start something."

He nodded to Field. "Better get the men out on the things I suggested as soon as you can."

"All right. By the way, Tom, have you eaten yet?"

Ritchie looked surprised. "Forgot all about it." He glanced at his watch. It was three o'clock. "I'll stop in on the way out there," he told Field.

The investigator found the usual crowd at the City Hall Restaurant. A reporter buttonholed him as soon as he came in.

"How about it, Tom?" he begged. "What's doing on the axe murder?"

Ritchie's eyes sparkled. "We're working on it. That's all I can tell you now."

"Ahh . . ." the reporter snarled. "Don't give me any of that baloney. That's what Field has been telling us."

"That's all there is to tell. When there's more we'll let you know. Have I ever turned you boys down on anything?"

The reporter swore. "I know that, Tom. The trouble is that my boss doesn't. Christ, we don't even know the guy's name!"

"You will," Ritchie assured him, "Just as soon as its possible to tell you."

The reporter said "Ahh . . ." again in the same disgusted tone. He went back to the pinochle game he'd left when Ritchie came in.

THE detective bolted his sandwich and pie and coffee. He hated to eat at the counter because there was no place to put his legs but it took too long to get waited on at a table. He wiped his mouth with a paper napkin and got up and paid his check. The Buick was across the street in front of the city hall and his eyes were thoughtful as he slid behind the wheel. He pushed the seat back to give himself more leg room and got rolling.

Ritchie used the siren and made the sanitarium in twenty minutes. It was just outside the city limits and had once been the estate of a wealthy family. There were no signs, either over the driveway or the door, to indicate that it now served any other purpose.

The door was opened at Ritchie's ring by a white-haired man. "I'd like

to see Dr. Hoelke," Tom said.

The white haired man smiled. "I am Dr. Hoelke."

Ritchie introduced himself and the doctor's face saddened. "Won't you come into my office?" he requested. The investigator followed him into a room that was more like a sitting room than an office.

The doctor pointed toward a radio that stood in a corner. "I've heard about it," he told Ritchie. "I suppose you want me to tell you whatever I can about Victor's family and friends."

The detective nodded and Dr. Hoelke shook his head. "He had neither. He was a refugee. His family was wiped out by the Germans. Most of his training was in the East and he came here only a year ago. Since that time he has lived here with me and assisted me in my work. In fact, it was at my insistence that he consented to accept any patients of his own."

Tom was startled. "You mean that you got him the patients he had? I wondered how he had managed to acquire such a wealthy clientele. I should have thought that they would have found someone better known to consult."

Dr. Hoelke smiled wryly. "There are so few good men in our field. Even in a city this size I could not name more than a handful, and they are so busy that they could not accept any new patients. All of Dr. Unger's patients were referred to me and I turned them over to him."

Ritchie scratched his head. "It certainly was a surprise to me when I found those names in his file. Well, that's neither here nor there. All I got out of that file was the names and a few dreams those patients had. Maybe you can tell me more about them. Did Dr. Unger talk over his cases with you?"

"Not the more intimate details. However, he kept his notes in his room upstairs here. We can go up and get them if you'd like."

Ritchie was eager. "You bet I'd like! If what you say about him having no family or friends is true, that would narrow down the list of suspects to his four patients." The detective paused. "By the way, are you sure that he didn't have more than four patients?"

"Quite sure. If he had acquired another I'm certain he would have told me."

The doctor's room upstairs was as bare as his office had been. Tom went directly to the desk which stood before the window and started pulling out drawers. Again the large bottom drawer was locked and Tom got out his keys again.

There were only about twenty sheets of paper in the locked drawer, but they were solidly covered on both sides by the doctor's neat handwriting. Each patient had about five pages devoted to his case.

Tom grunted. "Wonder why he wrote in German? The cards in his office were made out in English."

"German was his native tongue and I imagine his thoughts flowed more easily when he was writing in that language," Dr. Hoelke said. He looked at Ritchie. "Do you read German?" he asked.

"No. I don't know anyone who does, either. I'm afraid it'll be a job getting those notes deciphered."

"Not at all," Dr. Hoelke told him. "If you want me to, I'll be happy to do it for you. In fact that might be the best way. If there are any technical details of importance I can explain them to you."

"Not a bad idea," Ritchie assented. "But first I'll have to ask you a few

questions. For instance, where were you last night between the hours of nine and eleven?"

Dr. Hoelke smiled. "Right here in this house. I was in my office working on a book. Most of the time I was alone but several times I was interrupted by attendants who came in to ask for instructions regarding some of the patients here."

"I guess that takes you off the list," Ritchie nodded. "Let's go downstairs and go over these papers. There doesn't seem to be anything more here that could help us."

WHEN the two were again seated in Dr. Hoelke's office the doctor checked over the notes. The fine lines about his eyes were more noticeable when he read. He could not have been less than sixty-five years old but his skin was tanned and firm and his eyes were keen and alive.

"Shall I take each case as it comes, or would you prefer that I follow a certain order?" he asked Ritchie.

"As they come," Tom replied.

"All right. I shall read them over to myself and give you a digested version. The first case is that of Miss Penelope Reed."

For almost ten minutes the doctor read silently, nodding here and there as he came to an especially interesting part. At last he laid down the papers and turned his attention to Ritchie again.

The doctor had such a queer expression that Ritchie was startled. "What is it?" he asked.

Dr. Hoelke smiled. "Something very strange indeed." He leaned forward and put his elbows on the desk. "Actually we have formed a very unusual partnership here, you and I. What I shall be doing is simply this: I shall try to tell you, from the picture

I get from these case histories, whether any of these people is a potential murderer; whether any of them have indicated a desire or reason to murder Dr. Under. If I should find that one of them had both the motive and the potential it will be up to you to discover whether that person actually committed the murder."

Tom was getting impatient. "How does that apply to this case?" he wanted to know.

"In this way. It would take a great deal of pressure to get most people to commit a crime yet others require only the vaguest motive. Often that motive is not even real; it is a hallucinatory one.

"See what I mean? To you it may appear that a person has no motive at all. I can show you that he is the type which does not need a motive, at least not one which is visible."

Ritchie's eyes narrowed. "You mean that Penelope Reed is. . . ?"

". . . is precisely that type!" Dr. Hoelke finished for him. "She is a paranoiac! That means that she has delusions of persecution which would lead her to commit murder without the slightest provocation!"

"Holy smokes!" Ritchie breathed. He recalled her remark about the doctor trying to blind her and told Dr. Hoelke about it. Hoelke nodded.

"A perfect example," he agreed. "She is an unusual case because she developed so gradually, without any evident impairment of her intelligence. But she has always been 'queer'.

"As a child she was moody but was exceptionally well behaved. That is always a bad sign in a child. She did well in her studies and got a job in a bank after she graduated from school. She rose to a responsible position.

"Then she stole thirty thousand dollars from the bank! But the young

man to whom she was engaged was the cashier at the bank and he took the blame. He went to jail and died there."

Ritchie was bitter. "And she came here with the money and ran it into a fortune!"

"Yes. But she couldn't run it into happiness! In fact she got worse every year. She did make attempts to break out of it and developed normal relationships but all they led to was a very shabby affair with a man who was ten years younger than she.

"Her condition grew steadily worse. And here is the important thing! Dr. Unger was going to give her up! He wanted her to go to a sanitarium and she was convinced that he was trying to have her 'put away' so he could get her money!"

RITCHIE said, "Oh-oh," in a very quiet voice. He told Dr. Hoelke what Miss Reed had called Dr. Unger. "So she had a strong enough motive and the potential, too."

"Yes. And she should be put away. If she didn't commit this murder she is still likely to commit a different one!"

"We'll have to see about that," Ritchie said. "Now how about the next one?" He waited while Dr. Hoelke read it. It was the case history of Oliver B. Thorne.

"This is a more complicated case," the doctor told Ritchie. "There are many ramifications but only a few facts pertinent to this inquiry.

"The most important fact is this: Oliver Thorne was a somnambulist, or sleepwalker, when he was a child. When he was fourteen years old he stopped. But the last time he walked in his sleep he set fire to the house!

"In this fire his older brother whom he hated unconsciously was burned to death! Oliver's parents never told

him what he had done and he himself was of course unconscious of his crime.

"He never did find out what he had done but the unconscious knowledge and feeling of guilt are probably the factors that led to his choice of a career. You can see that by aiding people who were accused of crime he was in a manner defending himself!"

"But he always seemed so sincere!" Ritchie protested.

"He was sincere. But you may have noticed that he always put the emphasis on the social and environmental factors that led to his client's crime! In other words he did not believe that people were responsible for their crimes. So he was defending himself!"

"But at last the guilt feelings became so strong that he could not continue with his work. The feelings were of course expressed in physical symptoms. That, by the way, is very common. Most people's physical ailments have a psychological basis.

"Because his knowledge of what he had done was completely unconscious Thorne had to be hypnotized so his unconscious mind could be reached. That is how Dr. Unger found out. The proof of what I said about his physical symptoms is that after he told Dr. Unger about setting the house afire he felt much better!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" Ritchie blurted. "That's the most unbelievable thing I ever heard! But why didn't Unger tell Thorne?"

"I don't know. I would have told him if he had been my patient but there may have been other factors involved."

"Well, I hope he doesn't walk in his sleep any more, at least in my neighborhood," Ritchie commented. "Who's next?"

"James Craig. He is another whose mental difficulties took a physical form.

He too had severe guilt feelings and anxiety."

"Whom did he rob or kill?" the detective grinned.

"Nobody. You don't actually have to do anything wrong to feel guilty. He had a deep feeling of inferiority and when, several months ago, he made a very unfortunate loan which cost his bank a great deal of money, he became fearful of his position. He had covered up his error but he was in constant dread that he would be found out.

"Craig had a neurosis which is quite common. It was based on the desire to be loved and the fear that he was unworthy of that love. It led to his attempt to make himself independent of others by always being top dog.

"But here he was in danger of losing his high position! So he attempted to escape from his feeling of inadequacy by having headaches which would furnish an excuse to give up that position he felt unable to fulfill."

RITCHIE was smiling and the doctor smiled back. "Seems hard to believe, doesn't it?" he asked.

The detective grunted. "I guess I'll have to take your word that it's true," he said. "But it sure does sound fantastic!"

"Not so fantastic," Dr. Hoelke assured him. "It works in practice. Lately, in Germany, we have had a variation of Craig's complex. There it took the form of a 'bicycle complex'!"

Ritchie stared at him and the doctor laughed. "That means that each person had to have someone beneath him on whose shoulders he pedalled, or kicked down. He also had to have someone above him who was pedalling on his shoulders."

"How about the person who is really on top?" Ritchie asked. "Who stands

on his shoulders?"

"A very good question. When there is nobody above a certain people they will manufacture a being. Sometimes they call it 'the laws of nature'. That gives them the necessary feeling of security, the feeling that something or someone is guiding them and protecting them even though it sometimes hurts them, too."

"Seems like a pretty complicated affair," Ritchie commented. "On the other hand, I suppose people *are* complicated."

"They are very complicated," Dr. Hoelke told him. "That whole particular problem revolves around what we call the 'sado-masochistic' urges. The urges never work alone. Sadism makes us enjoy hurting others and masochism makes us enjoy being hurt. You can substitute 'bossing' for 'hurt'.

"Did you ever notice how some wealthy people have a group of followers about them all the time? They know that these followers are living off them but they need the followers as much as the followers need them, sometimes more!

"A person of that type will often be mean and hurtful to someone who depends on him. You would think that he is completely independent of that subordinate and the subordinate totally dependent on him. But it is not so! I have seen the threatened loss of such a subordinate cause a complete breakdown in the master! He must have that particular bicycle or he cannot live!"

Dr. Hoelke was all wound up in his subject; his eyes flashed and he waved his forefinger at Ritchie while he talked. Suddenly he stopped short and started to laugh.

"Please excuse me," he said. "I really didn't mean to give you a lecture. Have I bored you?"

The detective shook his head. "Not at all. Solving a crime is something like working a jig-saw puzzle. Sometimes you start with an outside piece and sometimes you start at the center, but the more you know about the relation between the pieces the quicker you solve it. It also helps if you have an idea of what the finished picture will look like.

"While you talked I began to see some sort of a picture and also the relationship between the various pieces. So even a little knowledge helps. But . . ."

"But . . . ?" Dr. Hoelke repeated.

"But I haven't got all the pieces yet," Ritchie smiled. "Better tell me about Mrs. Amery's case. That might supply some of them."

"Let us hope so. Well, Mrs. Amery's case is in many ways the most tragic of them all. Miss Reed is beyond saving; Thorne and Craig have been able to make some sort of adjustment. Mrs. Amery is the most sympathetic figure. She probably has a greater potential for happiness and creativeness than the others but it seems that life has been against her.

TO UNDERSTAND her we'll go back to her childhood. She was the only child of a very fine artist. But he was a bad father. His wife was expected to take care of his home and child, but he himself was inconsiderate of both. He had numerous affairs with women and often stayed away from home for days. His wife dared not reproach him because he had a terrible temper and flew into a rage at any suggestion that he was in the wrong.

"As a girl Mrs. Amery showed real artistic talent but her father discouraged her. He was probably afraid of competition from her. So she never

did anything with her talent.

"She had several suitors but couldn't bring herself to marry until Walter Amery came along. He was in many ways like her father but he was much kinder. He offered security and protection and she needed those, so she married him.

"I don't mean to say she didn't love Amery. We won't talk of love. But he loved her and was willing to do anything for her; anything, that is, except treat her as an equal!

"As their marriage progressed she became more and more submerged. But everyone must have an outlet for his aggressive drives. Some people turn them inward on themselves. Hers took a strange form.

"There are many small animals on the Amery estate. One day the gardener found her with a squirrel she had caught. It was dead. She had killed it with a kitchen knife!

"After the incident was repeated several times her husband became worried. He brought her to me for treatment but I felt that Dr. Unger had more to offer her. He had the artistic temperament himself and I felt that he could do more for her.

"So it turned out. She is an intelligent woman and once he pointed out to her how she had carried over her childhood reactions into married life, Mrs. Amery was quick to understand. Dr. Unger persuaded her to try painting again and to please him she did."

"I saw a picture she was painting," Ritchie interjected. "There was something about it that was different from any picture I've ever seen." He told the doctor what had happened to the painting and the older man shook his head sadly.

"I don't know what is going to happen to her now that Dr. Unger is dead," Dr. Hoelke told Ritchie. "She

had transferred her feeling of dependency to him and he was able to direct her in the right way. Her husband, being what is called a 'practical man', thought painting a childish thing, but his wife continued with it and only a week ago one of the directors of the city art museum saw something she had done and pronounced it excellent.

"Then something not uncommon in psychoanalysis occurred. For some time she had thought that she was falling in love with Dr. Unger! It was apparently on her next to last visit that she got up the nerve to tell him she loved him.

"To an extent that was a good sign. Her ability to paint well had established her in her own mind as an individual who didn't have to depend on reflected glory! Now she was boldly asserting herself in another direction! Ordinarily a patient's love for the analyst is a sign of dependency but in this case Mrs. Amery was exceptionally vehement. Dr. Unger tried to explain the matter to her but when he had to tell her that he did not love her in return she became furious, a woman scorned!"

Dr. Hoelke put down the case history and shook his head sadly. "A pity," he said softly. "A great pity. A little longer and she might have been able to stand on her own feet. Now . . . who knows? I feel very sorry for her."

Ritchie nodded. "So do I. Unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"Unless she killed Dr. Unger! You're so interested in her troubles that you've forgotten I have a murder to solve!"

Hoelke looked incredulous and Ritchie rushed on. "Did you forget about the squirrel she killed with a knife; that Dr. Unger was killed the same way? You yourself said she acted like a woman scorned and I can

tell you from personal experience that the guy who said, 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned' knew what he was talking about!"

THE doctor was about to interrupt him when the phone on the desk rang. Dr. Hoelke picked it up, said, "Speaking", and then listened for a few minutes. At last the doctor said, "I'll see if I have a free hour then," and got out his appointment book. He found the page he was looking for and wrote something down.

Into the phone he said, "All right, I'll see you then," and hung up. He looked back at Ritchie. "So you think you've found the missing piece to your puzzle?"

"All but one," the detective told him. "I still can't figure out why she took his keys!"

Dr. Hoelke sighed. "I wish I could help you, my friend, but I'm afraid that is something you'll have to find out for yourself." He stood up. "Meanwhile I have my own patients to think of." The interview was over.

The doctor closed his appointment book with a snap. The sound was not loud but it brought Ritchie to his feet like a shot!

"My God!" he shouted. "What a dummy I've been! The appointment book! That's what it was! Right under my nose and I couldn't see it!"

Dr. Hoelke stared at him. "What do you mean, the book?" he asked. "What was in his appointment book?"

Ritchie looked like a lazy old bloodhound who has suddenly hit the trail he was seeking. The lanky figure was jumping with excitement. His eyes had lost their pleasant twinkle and were suddenly hard.

"That's just it," Ritchie breathed. "What do you think would be in his appointment book?"

"Why . . . I should think an appointment with one of his patients . . ." the doctor replied weakly. The sudden turn of events and Ritchie's transformation into a shouting madman had left him utterly bewildered.

"Precisely," Ritchie told him, "an appointment with one of his patients." The investigator shook his head sadly. "If I weren't so disgustingly healthy I'd have known that every doctor has an appointment book. The whole point of this is that there wasn't one in Dr. Unger's office!"

Dr. Hoelke looked as though he were going to interrupt and Ritchie waved him down. "Listen to me. I know it sounds crazy but it's the most important piece in the whole puzzle! You see, I couldn't figure out why the killer had taken Dr. Unger's keys. Somehow I had the feeling that it was in some way connected with the reason for cutting off his head and removing his clothes.

"At first I thought that the murderer took the keys in order to get something from Dr. Unger's office. But it's almost impossible to get up to the eighteenth floor of a building like that at night without being seen. After about six o'clock everyone who uses the elevator has to sign in and out.

"But if the murderer went to the office in the morning! By joining the crowd on its way to work he would pass unnoticed! So that would explain the decapitation and the missing clothes.

"After all, Dr. Unger's head and clothes had been hidden where it was certain they would be found soon. That meant that the murderer needed only a limited amount of time. Just time enough to get to the office and remove what must have been the clue to his identity! At least that's what I thought.

"But there was nothing missing! You see, I didn't realize that there should have been an appointment book. So that blew my theory about the keys and the clothes to hell. Now my theory makes sense again!"

Ritchie stared hard at Dr. Hoelke. "What time did Dr. Unger leave here yesterday afternoon?"

"Come to think of it, he left about an hour earlier than usual," the doctor replied. "It seemed strange at the time but I'd forgotten about it until just now when you asked me. Is it important?"

"Very." It was apparent that Ritchie's mind was busy but the doctor had to satisfy his curiosity.

"There is one thing more," Dr. Hoelke said. "The murderer must have known that Dr. Unger had no morning patients and that he had no nurse or secretary. Isn't that significant?"

Ritchie smiled. "You're not a bad sleuth yourself, doctor. It's a most significant clue. It certainly cuts down the number of possible murderers."

Dr. Hoelke's intent features showed that his mind was whirring at top speed and Ritchie grinned at him.

"I think you'll be able to figure it out for yourself," he told the doctor. "After all, you supplied the motive." The investigator turned to go but paused for a moment. "I've got to get back to the office now but I may need your help again."

"Call me at any time," the doctor said. His chin was still cupped thoughtfully in his hand as he watched Ritchie close the door behind himself.

SIMEON FIELD was pacing the floor when Tom came into the office. The D.A.'s face was dark and angry and he did not return Ritchie's greeting. The detective laughed.

"I need only one guess to know what's eating you," he said. "I should say your phone's been ringing."

"I almost told him to go to hell," Field barked. "It's a good thing I remembered your advice or I would have. Imagine the gall!"

"Don't be too harsh on him," Ritchie smiled. "People in this town are not used to having an honest District Attorney. What did he say?"

Field imitated the voice on the phone. "First he said, 'Is this Field?'. His voice was as cool as a cucumber. When I told him it was he said, 'This is Walter B. Amery. One of your men was out here to see my wife. He upset her greatly. I don't want that to happen again. Do you understand?'"

"Do you understand?" Field repeated hotly. "As though I were his office boy! I don't know how I kept my temper in control, but I did. I told him we'd try not to cause her any unnecessary inconvenience and hung up before I lost my grip."

Ritchie nodded understandingly. "I'm glad you didn't blow up, Chief. I want just a couple more hours of quiet before I'll be ready to light the fireworks."

"What fireworks?" The D.A.'s eyes were fixed on Tom. "What happened at the sanitarium?"

Ritchie gave him a complete account of his visit with Dr. Hoelke. He went over each case in great detail. When he finished telling the whole story and his interpretation of it Field's face showed a mixture of emotions.

"I get it now," he told Ritchie. "The most important clue was the appointment book and we didn't even realize that it was missing. We really flopped on that!"

"It doesn't matter now," Ritchie said. "Once we knew about it everything else just slid into place."

Field was glum. "That's what you think!" When the detective looked surprised Field held up his hand. "Oh, you've built up a wonderful case all right. There isn't a hole in it. We know why Unger was murdered and by whom. There's not a chance in the world that you're wrong. Theoretically it's perfect. But I wouldn't dare take it to court!

"You know who did it and I know who did it. But we could never get a jury to convict! We don't have a shred of concrete evidence!

"Can we produce the keys? No! The appointment book? No! The murder weapon? Again no! Why, a smart lawyer would have us laughed out of court! We don't have even a single witness!"

Ritchie's face was hard as granite when the D. A. had finished speaking. His lips were tight and his lean jaw jutted forward. When he did speak his voice was cold.

"You admit we've got the answer, don't you?" he asked.

"Beyond the shadow of a doubt," Field admitted. "I'd be willing to throw the switch on the electric chair myself."

"So we're going to let the killer walk off scot free, is that it?"

Field looked harried. "But damn it, Tom, we *don't* have any witnesses!"

"Then we'll make some!"

Field was aghast. "We couldn't do a thing like that! Why that's . . ."

"That's the difference between law and justice!" Ritchie cut in. "Those case histories are going to come in handy when it comes to putting on the pressure. By the way, what did the other men bring in?"

"Nothing." Field was disgusted. "I was so mad about Amery's call that I forgot to send them out."

"It's just as well. I'd rather handle this myself from here on. It'll be bet-

ter if only the two of us know what's going on."

"I still don't like your idea, Tom. Where is it going to get us? I never thought you were the kind . . ."

"I'm a copper!" Ritchie barked "And I don't like to see anyone get away with murder!"

"Neither do I!" Simeon Field shouted back at him. Although the D. A. was Ritchie's boss he had always treated him as an equal. Even now, in his anger, he did not use his authority.

Ritchie was contrite. "I'm sorry, Chief; I know you feel the same way I do."

"Forget it, Tom. The main reason I'm against your idea is that testimony like that never holds up in court. You know what a lawyer like Thorne could do with those witnesses."

The hardness on Ritchie's face was still there but the glint in his eye was crafty. His tone was conspiratorial and there was the hint of a lift at the corners of his mouth as he spoke.

"But I don't figure it'll get to court, Chief. Don't forget the people we're dealing with are fragile. If we squeeze hard enough something will crack. It happened once, you know. By tomorrow morning I should be ready so you better be set to have Mrs. Amery picked up for murder."

Field's mouth was hanging open as Ritchie finished. There was a look of tremendous admiration, almost awe, on the D. A.'s face as he stared at his chief investigator.

Then Field began to laugh. For a moment Ritchie stared at him in amazement and then he realized what the D. A. was laughing at. The detective permitted himself a broad smile.

"It's all right then, Chief?" he asked.

Field wiped his eyes and got his laughter under control. "Sure it's all right, Tom. Excuse me for being so

thick-skulled that I couldn't follow your subtlety.

"You bet it's all right!" The D. A.'s face got as hard as Ritchie's had been. "I'm still behind you, too. All the way! Now get going!"

Ritchie paused at the door and looked back at Field. "Better wear your asbestos suit tomorrow, Chief," he said. "The heat is going to be terrific."

IT WAS six-thirty when Ritchie got to the Arts and Professions Building. For the most part the building was dark but here and there a window showed light to indicate that someone was working late or that the cleaning women were already on the job.

Most of the occupants of the great building were doctors and few had evening hours. There was no crowd in the lobby now. Only two of the elevators were in operation and fast changing lights on the indicator showed that one of them was on its way up to the top floors.

Before the open door of the other car the operator was talking to the starter. The operator was a good-looking young fellow with red hair who wore his uniform with an air. The starter was a small man and old. His uniform was baggy and crumpled and his white shirt was several sizes too big for his scrawny neck so that the collar came together and covered the knot in his black tie.

He saw Ritchie coming toward him and recognized him as a stranger. "You'll have to sign in, sir," he called. A gnarled hand came out of his sleeve and a finger pointed to a small stand against the wall. On the stand an alarm clock ticked away beside a register.

At the top of the open page was written, Friday, May 26, and beneath it several entries. In the left hand column a few room numbers had already

been filled in. On the same lines with the room numbers were the names of the people who had written them and the time they had signed in. There was a column at the right for signing out. Ritchie turned the page back to Thursday's entries.

The old man saw him and hurried over. "Looking for something?" he asked querulously.

The detective smiled. "That's right, Pop," He showed the old man his badge. "Do you know who Dr. Unger was?" The old man nodded and Ritchie told him, "He's the man who was murdered last night. The one whose head was chopped off."

The starter's jaw dropped. "No! Why me and him was just talkin' about the murder." He pointed back at the redhead. "Why the doc acted like such a nice fellow, too. Talked like a foreigner, you know, but nice."

"That's the one. He was here just two evenings a week?"

"Uh-huh. Monday and Thursday. Always had four patients, little over an hour apart. Always the same ones, too. We used to wonder what kind of a doctor he was."

"Did he always sign in?"

"'Most always. We go on at five. Sometimes he'd get here earlier, like yesterday."

"Do you think you'd recognize his patients?" Ritchie asked.

"Sure." The old man pointed out the names. Thorne's was the only one easily legible. The next patient had scrawled P. Reed. The eight o'clock and nine-fifteen entries were just wavy lines.

"The first one was a short stocky fellow," the starter explained. "He always said hello. The next one was a woman. Sometimes she'd smile and sometimes she'd look so mean we were afraid to say a word to her. She's grey-haired and dresses swell.

"The next one is a woman, too. She always wears a veil so we can't see her face well. But we can see it enough so we know she's a good looker. She never says more'n hello and good-bye but her voice is sweet. Red tried to strike up a conversation a few times but it didn't get him anywhere. She dresses nice, too. Plain but you can see she's rich. Got a lot of class.

"The last guy is the worst. He's a sourpuss all the time. Hasn't said a word to us all the time he's been coming here. Looks like the kind of fellow who wouldn't give you the time of day unless there was a profit in it."

RITCHIE grinned. The description of Craig had been apt. There was no question that the old man could identify all four of Unger's patients.

"Last night was kind of funny," the starter continued. "The grey-haired woman left half an hour early. Then she came back in an hour. Said she forgot her purse so Red rode her up and waited a minute until she got it and came down again. She didn't have to sign that time but it was just about eight-thirty.

"Then the other woman stayed later than usual. She didn't sign out until almost nine-fifteen." He pointed to the entry. "See? Then, just before she signed out you can see that the last one signed in. Red took him up and about two minutes later he had to go back up to get her. She acted mad. Didn't say good-night, just signed out and beat it."

The detective's forehead wrinkled as he widened his eyes. "So, she was mad, huh?"

"Yeah. She had both lips between her teeth and it looked like she was biting down hard. I followed her to the lobby door and watched her go across the street to the movie show.

"The door was open and I leaned against it for a while. You could tell it was gonna rain but it was warm and springlike. Lots of people think that to old geezers like me spring don't mean anything but it does. Maybe not the way it does to young fellows like Red. But last night there wasn't much gas smell from the cars and I could catch that green spring smell and for a minute I saw a green, green island far away." He looked up at Tom. "You know?"

Tom smiled down at him. "My old man used to be like that."

"Yeah. Well, I stuck at the door and who should pull up to the curb in a big black coupe but the first patient! He got out of the car and looked at me and got right back in again and drove away."

"Are you sure it was the short stocky fellow?" Ritchie asked.

"Sure it was him. My eyes ain't bad and I recognized him. In fact I started to say something but he was gone too quick. But that ain't all. About two or three minutes after the last guy left Dr. Unger came down. Red and I watched him go out the door. The girl who went to the show was waiting for him! For a minute they stood and talked and then they walked away together. They went south."

"Well, whaddaya know about that?" Ritchie grunted. "And less than ten minutes later he was dead. It all ties in, though."

Red had just brought someone down in the elevator and was leaning against the wall watching Ritchie and the old man. The detective called him over.

"Tell you what I want," he said. "I want you and Pop to examine this page carefully so you'll remember it. Then you'll sign your names at the bottom and I'll take the book with me." They followed his instructions.

"That's all. I'll take down your addresses too, so I can get hold of you if I need you. Whatever you do, don't leave town or you'll be in a jam. Get me?" They nodded.

OLIVER THORNE still had the overnight bag in his hand when Ritchie came in. Although the desk clerk had announced the detective Thorne had a faint look of surprise on his face.

"Still working?" he asked. "There is apparently no rest for the good either."

Ritchie grinned. "Not if they happens to be coppers." He stared at the bag in Thorne's hand. "Moving?"

"Yes," the lawyer replied, "I feel as though I'm tied up in knots inside. Maybe a vacation will help, or rather a change of scene. I can't really say I've been working hard; I don't even go out much lately."

"Maybe I can save you the expense of a vacation," Tom told him.

Thorne was startled. "How do you mean that?" He tried to catch the tall detective's eye but Ritchie refused to look squarely at him.

Tom persisted in looking over the shorter man's head. His glance flitted about the room, lingering here and there disinterestedly until the silence itself was taut to the snapping point.

"I found out what's been troubling you," he said softly. His voice was careless, nonchalant.

Thorne was caustic. "You want to sell your information? Don't try to put on an act with me, Tom. What have you got up your sleeve?"

"I told you. I found out what it was you told Dr. Unger when he hypnotized you. Aren't you curious?"

Thorne rubbed his hands nervously together. "To tell you the truth, Tom, I don't know whether I want to hear it.

Dr. Unger didn't want to tell me. Maybe it would be better if I got another doctor and you gave the information to him!"

Ritchie was grim. "I'll tell it to you!" He gave Thorne the story in a few sentences, brutally, and watched the lawyer's face go pale.

But years of practice had somehow inured Thorne to shock and surprises and he recovered quickly. His training kept him from speaking until he had regained some measure of control but his voice was still unsteady when at last he spoke.

"I . . . I can't believe it. My brother . . . why, I admired him, loved him . . ."

Ritchie stopped him. "Don't forget your hate was unconscious. He was older than you, maybe stronger, and you were afraid not to admire him. But underneath . . ."

Thorne nodded heavily. "I know; I've read a good deal in psychiatry." He flared up in sudden suspicion. "But what has that to do with Dr. Unger? How does it connect up with that?"

"I didn't say there was any connection. I'm sure you had no reason to kill him. At least no conscious reason . . ." Ritchie let his last words hang in the air, then soak in.

"But Tom, I was asleep at ten-thirty last night! I was right here . . ." His voice trailed off for a moment. "Wasn't I?"

Ritchie countered with a question. "Where do you keep your car?"

"In the hotel garage. Why?"

"You could call them and find out if you took it out last night."

THE lawyer walked slowly to the phone and lifted it. "The garage, he said shortly. When the garage answered Thorne spoke slowly and distinctly. "Do you remember what time

I got my car yesterday evening?"

His eyelids dropped as he got the reply. "And what time was it when I returned? I see. Thank you." He hung up wearily and turned to Ritchie.

"Did I do it, Tom?" he asked.

The detective shrugged. "Maybe. It's plain I've got you pretty well tied up in it, isn't it?"

Thorne was shrewd. "Then why the rigmarole?"

Ritchie leaned forward. "Look. This case could be big. It involves big people. If Field got a conviction on first degree murder it might mean a lot. You could maybe beat the rap but we've got someone who couldn't. All we need is a good witness. Do you follow me?"

Thorne was breathing hard. "Yes, and you stink to high heaven! Do you think I'm a fool? Why should I be afraid? You admit that I could beat it so why should I play your filthy game?"

Ritchie spread his hands. "You *might* beat it. But on what plea?" He let the question sink in.

"On what plea? Why . . ." The lawyer stared at him in horror. "My God! That would be worse! I'd rather hang than—"

Tom eased up. "Listen. We don't figure it'll ever go to court. It's a thousand to one we'll get a confession if we put the screws on."

Thorne's shoulders were bowed and there was an unutterable weariness in his voice. "So, after all these years . . ."

"Why not look at it our way?" Ritchie asked. "We've got the murderer but we have no evidence a jury will accept. You've seen that happen many times. So we've got to get a confession. But we can't do it in an ordinary way because we'd be hamstrung. The only way is to avoid the

legal tangle for a while by getting an indictment immediately."

The lawyer was thoughtful. "I see. Put that way it makes a little sense. Of course I still wouldn't consider it if you didn't have me over a barrel. But before I go further I've got to know more. Who did it?"

"Mrs. Walter B. Amery."

Thorne whistled. "No wonder you're in a hurry. If she's indicted at once the newspapers won't be able to soft-pedal it. If an immediate trial is indicated and the odds seem against her even I would advise her to plead guilty and save her neck.

"That's what Amery's lawyers will do. If they had enough time so the case could cool off his money and power would save her. If she's weak you may get your confession without their help."

"She's weak," Ritchie said.

Thorne grinned wily. "You haven't missed a trick, have you? Well, you'd better coach me on my testimony. I must admit I've coached many a witness but this is the first time I've been one myself."

"Okay. We'll make it short and sweet. The less you say the less they can trip you up."

For almost an hour they talked. At last both men were satisfied that Thorne's testimony would be both conclusive and unshakable. When Ritchie left he was smiling.

CRAIG was waiting for Ritchie in his study when the detective arrived. The banker had been about to leave for the theatre when Ritchie phoned and his expression was dour.

"I thought I made it clear that I know nothing more about Dr. Unger's murder than I told you this afternoon," he said sourly. "You said you wouldn't trouble me further but here you are,

breaking up my evening."

"That is a shame," Ritchie replied cheerfully. The banker glared at him. Ritchie went on.

"The fact is, we've run across something that leads us to believe you *didn't* tell us all you knew. You forgot to mention that you knew Mrs. Amery was a patient of Unger's too. You saw her at his office yesterday evening but that slipped your mind. Yet I'm sure you've met the lady socially and you must have recognized her."

Craig tried to pass it off. "Very well, I did see her. It happens that her husband is a friend of mine and I could see no reason for bringing her name into the investigation."

Ritchie maintained his cheerfulness. "I always say, what good is a friend if he can't do you a favor? Isn't that true?"

Craig nodded but he had the worried look in his eyes again. He did not speak so Tom kept talking.

"Of course Amery is also the real head of the bank, isn't he? He wouldn't like it if you were the one who dragged his wife's name into it. But there's another reason you didn't want to cross him now. You see, we found Dr. Unger's case histories and he'd made note of what you told him about that loan."

Craig changed his tactics. He tried being expansive. "Well, you know how those things are! Everyone makes a mistake now and then. Since it was beyond recall I could see no reason to make it public. That wouldn't do the bank or me any good."

Ritchie grinned. "Especially you!" Craig essayed an answering smile but wiped it off at the sudden change in Ritchie's manner. The lanky detective looked as though he were going to attack the gray haired man.

"You could tell that to Dr. Unger

but you can't tell it to me! You didn't want to lie to the doctor but you couldn't tell him the truth either. It would be impossible to keep a big loan a secret from everyone else at the bank unless the loan was to yourself!"

Craig's ashen features told plainly how true the accusation was. He started to say something but his lips were dry and he had to wet them first. "I . . . I . . . Well, everyone does it," he gulped lamely.

"Do they? That must be why a lot of people keep their money under the mattress. But there must be more to it than that. If you don't talk you'll go to jail. If you do talk you'll still have time to straighten it out with the bank before Amery gets around to tossing you out on your ear. Better play it smart!"

Craig nodded. "All right, there *was* more to it than just seeing Mrs. Amery in the office." He was talking fast now, eager to spill everything. "I came a few minutes early and went right up. It had happened several times before and there had never been anyone there. This time I could hear loud voices in the inner office. One of them was a woman's voice.

"At the time I didn't know who the woman was. I didn't know that Mrs. Amery was a patient of the doctor's. I didn't want to eavesdrop so I started to go into the hall, intending to wait until the patient left.

"But I heard something that stopped me. The woman was screaming with anger. I could hear every word. 'I'll kill you and I'll kill myself,' she screamed. 'I'll take this knife and I'll kill us both!'"

Craig mopped his brow. His recital had brought back some of the emotions he had felt at the time. "Dr. Unger was a small man and I was really afraid he might be injured if the woman

were violent. I started back toward the door of his inner office but before I had taken two steps, it opened and the woman ran past me, looking straight ahead and not even seeing me as I dodged out of her way. Of course I recognized her but did not say anything. Dr. Unger looked worried and I could see that he wasn't paying any attention to me during the hour I was there."

"I figured it must be something like that," Ritchie said. "Are you positive she said '*this knife*'?"

"I couldn't be mistaken. Her words were as clear as though she were in the room with me."

"Well, that's just lovely. Everything is going to be all right. You can expect a call from us tomorrow morning. You remember to tell your story right, the way you told it to me just now, and you won't have to worry about a thing."

Craig nodded. "I don't see how I can do otherwise." He looked like the man who took the frying pan instead of the fire and was waiting for it to start sizzling.

RITCHIE took the street behind Penelope Reed's house and saw that the room he had been in that morning had lights in it. He turned left at the corner, drove to the end of the block and turned left again. The Buick slid to the curb a few feet before the beginning of the tall fence.

He popped a cigarette into his mouth and lit it with the dash-board lighter. Ritchie smoked with short rapid puffs, using the movements to drain off physical energy that conflicted with his thoughts.

There was plenty to think about. Once Craig had a chance to think it over he would realize that he could make a deal with Amery. If he did

there wasn't a thing Ritchie could do about it. Amery could hold up any investigation of the bank's books until they had been straightened out. That wouldn't take long. Maybe Craig would stay worried until morning and maybe he wouldn't.

If he didn't, Ritchie would need Penelope Reed. He hated to take a chance on her. She was likely to blow up at any time and blow up his case right along with her.

It was six of one or a half dozen of the other, Ritchie reflected. He made up his mind while he watched the butt he had thrown from the car window arc its glowing way through the dusk.

He left the car where it was and walked down to the gate. The dark husky man watched him come. Ritchie grinned at him.

"Still playing watch dog, eh? Well, you call your mistress and tell her Lieutenant Ritchie of the D.A.'s office waits without—without patience. I want to see her right away."

"She aint in," the husky man said. He turned his head to loose a stream of tobacco juice at a freshly seeded flower bed.

"She just came down the chimney," Ritchie told him. He had stopped grinning and his voice was brittle. "Tell her I want to see her about that sanitarium deal. Right now."

A minute later the gate swung open. The detective went up the walk feeling the husky man's eyes on his back all the way. Inside the house, the butler led him along the hall to the room in back. Miss Reed stood in front of the desk. She had changed her suit for a black dress with a white print. It was cut low and square across the neckline.

"What is this about a sanitarium deal?" she demanded. Her voice was cool, level. It was a period of nor-

malcy for her.

"The one Dr. Unger mentioned to you," Ritchie said. He watched the tight waist of the dress suck inward.

"I also want to talk about thirty thousand bucks and a guy who died in jail. Of course we could talk about something different if you'd rather."

For a moment she was silent. Then, "I'd rather. What else would you be interested in?" She dropped her eyes and checked the front of the dress. The bodice needed straightening. It was an offer and Ritchie was almost shocked.

"Not that," he told Miss Reed. "Let's try something else; for instance anything you might have heard when you went back to Dr. Unger's office for your purse last night."

She hadn't expected that. There was surprise and more than a little relief in her eyes. "Oh," she said, "was there anything I should have heard?"

"I imagine."

"That's odd. I can't seem to recall anything. Perhaps you could refresh my memory."

GOD, she was smart, Ritchie thought. He suddenly felt a vast respect for the mind behind the lovely hazel eyes. She was sharper by far than Craig or Amery or even Thorne. But sooner or later her emotions would cut that mind off from reality and she would spin beautifully logical arguments that were based on fantastic premises.

How many were there who walked the streets unsuspected, Ritchie wondered, whose thoughts had foundations as unreal? Where was the dividing line between reality and delusion?

He couldn't answer that one; thank Heaven he would never be forced to answer it! For the while it sufficed that Penelope Reed would remember

anything he wanted her to remember.

"It was about eight-thirty when you went back to the office," Ritchie said. She nodded.

"I remember that. I knocked on the door and Dr. Unger opened it. He was expecting me because he had the purse in his hand. I could see past him and there was a woman in the room. What was it they were saying just before I interrupted them?"

Ritchie told her. The words were probably not exact but they would be the words that could have been used, that filled the gap and made sense.

"Oh, yes. I remember she looked excited. She was pretty too. She wore a beige suit and a hat with a veil. Is that all?"

"That's all. Think you'll remember it tomorrow morning?"

"I'm sure I shall."

"I'll be going then. Are you going out tonight?"

She smiled shyly and straightened her bodice again. "Yes, I have a date."

Ritchie felt a sudden wrench at his heart but didn't let it show. Time was running short for her and she must have sensed it.

"Have a good time," he said. "Have lots of fun." He didn't look back as he walked down the hall and out of the door. The short walk to the gate seemed much too long. The gate-man was waiting for him and had the gate open.

"Get what you came for, copper?" he asked. There was a leer in his voice.

Ritchie's bony fist caught him on the side of the neck and smashed him to the ground. He lay retching.

"I can't stand a *wise* guy!" the detective said bitterly. The Buick looked like a hearse as he walked toward it.

MAYOR DALL'S little pig eyes were bitter as he glared at Simeon

Field. If the mayor had a neck it was impossible to see it under the series of chins that hung to his collar. His ordinarily good-humored face was red and creased into folds of reproach.

"Damn it, Field," he groaned, "how could you put me in a spot like this? You might at least have told me what you were up to!"

"I didn't think you'd be interested in a police case," Field told him.

"Hogwash! You even kept your investigation secret from the police! The first they knew about it was when they saw the headlines in this morning's papers. You knew what you were doing all right!"

Field expostulated with him. "What would you have me do, cover up a murder?"

Dall shook with fury. "Don't pull that moralistic malarkey on me! I run this city as clean as any city of its size in the world!" His righteous air was laughable and he knew it. He quieted down.

"It's not only myself I'm thinking of. You're a young man, Field, and you could have a brilliant future!" Dall leaned across the desk and his voice got confidential. "Just this morning I had Washington on the wire. The national chairman told me there's a Federal judgeship open. He's been asked for a recommendation. It could be you!"

Ritchie had been sitting quietly until now. He perked up. "Say, that's a good offer!"

Dall turned on him. "You better keep your trap shut! When this blows over you're going to be walking a beat in the sticks—if I can't have you thrown off the force altogether!"

"I'm in civil service and my pension comes up soon," Ritchie reminded him. "I've got nothing to worry about."

The mayor looked ready to cry.

"Sure, you've got nothing to worry about! Let me do it all! Do you know what Washington told me? They were thinking of pushing through a Federal appropriation for a subway for us! Do you know what that would mean to this city?"

"Yes," Field said drily, "it would mean you'd have your hand in the nation's pocket."

The ringing of Field's phone saved the mayor from a stroke. The D. A. listened intently for several minutes and then said simply, "No, I wouldn't be interested. Thank you." He hung up and looked at the mayor. "You were right about that judgeship. I just turned it down."

"You're a fool!"

"Only if I lose! The grand jury is sitting now and I'll have an indictment by tomorrow. Then we'll see. What if I win?"

"If you win," the mayor said slowly, "I'll be the first to congratulate you. You'll be a hero and we'll all rush to get on the bandwagon. But there'll be a new mayor next election. It's the money that runs politics and don't you forget it. A man who can't deliver won't be elected."

He stared at Field and Ritchie bleakly. "You're ruining me and my machine. For that I hate your guts. But I wish I had them."

He shrugged. "Well, I'd better beat it. I'll just step out this door here. If I go through the outer office I'm sure to run into someone and right now all I want is a little peace and quiet."

DALL almost made it. But as he turned the knob the outer door burst open and Walter Amery stormed in. Behind him was his attorney, a huge man with a flowing mane of dark hair.

"Dall!" Amery barked. The mayor turned around and came back. He had a sheepish air. Amery let him stand and turned a white face toward Field.

"You're going to remember this day for the rest of your life!" he said. "You'll find out that no cheap publicity hound can cross me and get away with it!"

Field kept his temper in check. "I wish you wouldn't take it that way. I am simply doing my duty."

"Is this what you call duty?" To drag a sick woman from her bed and haul her off to jail like a common criminal?" Amery was about to say more but his lawyer stopped him.

"Please, Walter. I understand how you feel but the only way to help your wife is to get the facts." His voice rolled out of his deep chest as from a cavern.

"I am Thomas Eaves," the big man told Field. The D. A. nodded. "I am familiar with your name and that of your firm," he said to Eaves.

"Good. Then let us get down to cases. I understand you have arrested Mrs. Amery on a charge of murder. Mr. Amery's doctor informs me that she is still suffering from shock. You will be held responsible for any aggravation of her condition."

Amery broke out again. "You bet he'll be held responsible. I'll make it my life work to ruin him."

Field was calm. "Your wife is being carefully watched by a competent physician. We want to keep her in good health until the trial I assure you."

"There won't be any trial and you know it!" Amery roared. "You know she didn't kill Dr. Unger! This is just a cheap attempt to get your name in the newspapers and you're low enough to try to frame an innocent woman to do it!"

"On the contrary," Field told him,

"she will be given every chance to prove she is not guilty."

Eaves' voice boomed out again. "If that is so then why are you in such a hurry to get an indictment? After all, the wife of a man of Mr. Amery's position need not be treated so brutally."

"I know exactly what Mr. Amery's position is," Field retorted. "In the few hours I have been offered several genteel bribes and been threatened with every conceivable disaster. Mr. Amery is using every bit of his power to get his wife out of this. He doesn't care if she is guilty or not!"

"That is why we are rushing the indictment. Given enough time he could get rid of me and my assistant and save her. We can prove she is guilty and we shall prove it!"

"There isn't a shred of evidence against her!" Amery snapped.

"More than enough to send her to the electric chair," Field assured him. "We have no intention of holding it secret from you as we might do if we had a weak case. Our witnesses are unimpeachable."

"Then why don't you produce them?"

"All right, I will!" The D. A. looked at Ritchie. "Ask them to come in."

Ritchie went through the door that Dall had been about to use and returned in a few minutes.

CRAIG looked at Amery and turned his eyes quickly away. Amery was staring at him in astonishment. Behind the banker Penelope Reed and Oliver Thorne followed. Ritchie brought up the rear.

Eaves looked worried when he saw Thorne. He had been trying to reach him all morning and now the realization that the famed criminal lawyer might be in the opposition dismayed him. He

nodded curtly to Thorne.

"Do you know these people?" Field asked Amery.

"Just Craig." Amery's eyes were filled with unveiled threat as he glared at the banker. Craig looked miserable.

Field told Amery the names of the other two. "You can understand that when people like Mr. Craig, Mr. Thorne, and Miss Reed offer testimony I cannot regard it lightly. Nor will a court! That is why I am so sure of myself."

"I don't care who your witnesses are, I still maintain my wife's innocence!"

"Very well. Then you shall hear what they have to say. Is that fair enough?" Field looked at Eaves. The lawyer said one word, "Quite."

Penelope Reed told her story first. Her voice was cold and unemotional and rang of truth. "I could not be mistaken," she finished. "Mrs. Amery plainly said, 'If you spurn me I'll do something desperate! I might even kill you!'"

Craig spoke swiftly, keeping his gaze fixed on the floor. It took but a moment for him to say what he had to. When he was through he sat down.

Thorne was completely at ease as he talked. He was used to speaking before an audience and there was no sign of nervousness, as there had been with Craig.

"I was driving along Clark Street, going north toward Van Buren, when I saw Dr. Unger and Mrs. Amery standing at the mouth of the alley where his body was found yesterday morning," Thorne said.

"It was evident that they were engaged in a heated argument. I was driving slowly and got a good look at them. As I drove past them they turned and walked into the alley. I thought that Mrs. Amery's car might be parked there and continued on my way. I never gave it another thought until I heard of

Dr. Unger's death."

Eaves had been watching Thorne closely as he talked. "Just one thing, counselor," he boomed. "It is apparent that Mr. Craig and Miss Reed were patients of Dr. Unger. You must have known him well to have been able to identify him so easily. Were you too a patient of his?"

Thorne nodded. "I was."

Eaves said, "Hmmm."

Thorne laughed. "I would advise you not to try to question my sanity. It would be difficult to convince a jury that men like myself and Mr. Craig are mentally incompetent. After all, he is the president of a bank controlled by Mr. Amery.

"As for my identification of Dr. Unger, it was easy. He was a short man and also slender. He always wore his hair cut very short, crew style. He had little interest in clothes and wore the same suit all the time. It was a light gray with a half belt in back. I would have recognized it at an even greater distance.

"Although I have never met Mrs. Amery I have seen her many times at public functions with her husband. She is not an ordinary woman by any means. If you wish I can describe the clothes she wore that evening."

"That won't be necessary," Eaves told him. "I'm convinced you are an acute observer."

"Then I should like to go," Thorne turned to Field. "I've signed a statement which covers my testimony. I shall be staying at my home up north for the summer and you can reach me there if you want me." He gave the D. A. the address and telephone number.

"You two can go now," Field said to Craig and Miss Reed. "We'll let you know when we want you again." He waited until they were gone and then

gave his attention to Eaves and Walter Amery. Eaves looked far from confident; Amery almost broken.

The D. A. smiled grimly. "Well, I see we have raised doubts in your minds. We have other witnesses whose testimony will reinforce that of the three you have heard.

"Mrs. Amery will be fortunate indeed if she escapes the death penalty. If I were her lawyer I would advise her to plead guilty and take a life sentence. In either case, Mr. Amery, I am afraid you are going to lose your wife."

Amery was silent. The fire was gone from his eyes and he looked old and tame, like a lion whose teeth have been pulled. He turned on his heel and walked out the way he had come, Eaves trotting behind him like a huge shaggy dog.

EARLIER in the night the moon had been full and bright. Now it was completely obscured by heavy clouds which the fresh moist wind had carried in from the lake.

There had been no suggestion of rain and the window of Thorne's bedroom was half open. The fresh white curtains were alternately being blown in and out of the window with a rustling, starched sound.

The sound seemed not to trouble Thorne's sleep nor did the choppy crash of the surf on the beach behind the house. Leaves on the trees that separated the house from the highway and neighboring homes were still too soft to make more than a swishing sound.

If it were dark outside the house, it was Stygian in the bedroom and the figure outside the window waited vainly for a chance to make out objects in the room.

At last a glow from a flashlight showed. It lasted but a second, just long enough to show the bed on the far

side of the room and to disclose that there was nothing near the window which might be knocked over.

Satisfied that all was well the intruder raised a leg and slid it over the low sill. There was a moment of tense hesitation before the other leg followed. The curtains were pushed carefully aside and then a light thud as feet hit the floor beneath the window.

The man in the bed stirred slightly and the intruder froze until the normal breathing was resumed. Then the flashlight showed again, covered by a handkerchief that diffused the light.

The glow moved slowly across the floor, inching toward the sleeping figure. A sudden gust of wind rattled the window and Thorne turned again in his sleep and exposed his shoulders as the thin summer blanket slipped down a little. A faint intake of breath that was almost a sigh came from the man behind the flashlight and his free hand dipped into a pocket and reappeared holding a knife. There was an upward movement of the knife.

A voice shouted, "Drop it!"

The man with the knife whirled and was caught and transfixed by a white beam that blinded him.

Ritchie came slowly from the closet in which he had been waiting. He kept the light in the other's eyes.

"I said drop it!" he commanded again.

Walter Amery closed his eyes to shut out the blinding beam. "Ritchie!" he gasped. His breath was coming in harsh gulps, like sobs. "I was afraid it was a trap but I had to come. I couldn't help myself. I had to come."

As he spoke Amery moved forward toward Ritchie. "One more step and I'll let you have it!" the detective warned.

Amery kept coming. Ritchie lowered his light and tried to duck aside but the

other followed him.

There was nothing else for Ritchie to do. The gun in his right hand roared once and a heavy slug ripped into Amery's thigh. The millionaire dropped screaming to the floor like a wounded animal. In sightless rage he flung the knife at Ritchie. It missed by feet.

THERE were only the four of them left in the D. A.'s office now: Field, Ritchie, Dr. Hoelke and Mrs. Amery. The reporters and photographers had gone, and with them Mayor Dall who had insisted on being photographed congratulating Simeon Field and Ritchie. He had also made statements informing the world at large that in his city no man, however powerful, was immune from punishment for his crimes.

Dr. Hoelke was shaking his head. "I hope you will not think me dull," he said to Ritchie, "but I still cannot guess how you knew that Mr. Amery was the guilty man."

"You told me yourself," Tom grinned.

"I? How? After you left me yesterday I spent hours puzzling the matter over and at the end I was more confused than when I started!"

"That's because you're a psychiatrist. While you were teaching me psychiatric theory I was learning about hidden motives for murder."

The white-haired man looked more baffled than ever so Ritchie went on with his explanation.

"You explained to me the cause of Craig's trouble, didn't you?" Tom asked. The doctor nodded.

"But you were so wound up in your explanation that you didn't see it would be an equally good description of someone else's mind! Amery had all the symptoms Dr. Unger found in Craig and to an even greater degree!"

Dr. Hoelke's face lit up with sudden

understanding. "So that was it! It was a case of my not seeing the forest for a tree!"

"That puts it very neatly," Ritchie smiled. "But the clincher was the appointment book." He paused.

"Go on, please," the doctor urged. "I must confess that I could not for the life of me see the significance of that. Especially since the book was missing! How could you know what was written there?"

"There's only one thing that would be there—appointments! That's why I immediately ruled out his patients as possible suspects."

"This is getting worse!" Dr. Hoelke protested. "I can't see the basis for that last deduction at all."

The D. A. interrupted. "Start at the beginning, Tom. I think Dr. Hoelke is entitled to hear the whole story since he supplied the most vital clues."

"An excellent idea," the doctor assented. "Begin at the beginning with the keys."

"I'll do better than that," Ritchie said, "I'll start with the murder itself. Mutilation of the victim is a gangster trick but it was obviously not a gang murder. They would have brought their own cleaver.

"That meant the killer had been prepared to use his knife for the purpose. In that case he must have been a cold-blooded individual; it was plainly a premeditated murder.

"But why were the clothes missing too? And why run the risk of taking the time to remove them only to leave them where they were sure to be found soon?

"There could be only one purpose: to prevent identification for a short time. The keys told why. The killer had to get to the office ahead of the police and remove something that would point directly to him.

"When I found out that it was the appointment book I knew the killer's name must have been in it. But it could not be one of the regular patients. Why?

"Because there were only four patients and their names were all on file in Dr. Unger's desk! It would have been ridiculous to take only the appointment book and leave the card behind!

"There was only one person who had a motive and who was not a patient—Walter B. Amery. He was losing his wife because of Dr. Unger. As you explained to me, a person like Amery cannot stand losing his dependent.

"He tried ridiculing Mrs. Amery's painting but that did not stop her. Then her work was praised by an authority and it gave her even greater confidence in herself. If she continued her analysis she was certain to become completely independent of Amery. She would refuse to stand for his bullying any longer and since he could not give that up either it would be the end of their marriage.

"So he made an appointment with Dr. Unger, and he tried to get him to give up the analysis. I suppose he tried to buy him off. That's the way his mind worked. He thought he could get anything for money.

"This time he was wrong! He became desperate and decided to kill Unger. He knew what time the doctor would leave his office and he waited for him.

"It must have been a shock when he saw his wife waiting at the door of the building. But she left the doctor at the corner and then Amery followed him to the alley.

"The funny thing is that Amery knew Thorne was lying about having seen Mrs. Amery in front of the alley! But he didn't know that we suspected him.

He thought we were really out to frame Mrs. Amery and it looked like we might make it stick! That put him right where he was before he murdered Dr. Unger: *He was still going to lose his wife!*

"Thorne was the main witness and if Amery killed him it would serve two purposes: it would ruin our case and it would prove Mrs. Amery innocent because she was in custody at the time. So he walked into the trap."

DR. HOELKE smiled. "You make it sound very simple," he said. "Actually you arranged the trap so cleverly that his own drives gave him no alternative but to enter it."

Simeon Field nodded. "Now we've taken care of Amery. But how about the others involved? Thorne and Craig can find other analysts and will eventually get over their troubles. What are Miss Reed and Mrs. Amery going to do?"

"I have spoken to Miss Reed," the doctor told him, "and she has consented to go to a sanitarium run by a friend of mine. She will be well cared for."

Dr. Hoelke paused for a moment and looked at Mrs. Amery. "As for Mrs. Amery, she will stay at my place for a while, at least until things have become more quiet. I feel confident that after a short time, if she resumes her painting, she will be able to face the world as a strong independent woman."

For the first time Mrs. Amery spoke. Her voice was so soft as to be barely audible. "I hope so," she said. "I hope I'll be able to forget I was ever married to . . . him."

She stared at Dr. Hoelke for a while without speaking. At last she murmured, "May we go now?"

Field nodded. "Of course. I'm sorry we were forced to use you for bait."

Her smile was sad. "It turned out for the best. I can't say I'm sorry."

She rose and Dr. Hoelke got up with her. The white-haired man offered her his arm gallantly and the D.A. and Ritchie watched them go out together. For a long time the two men did not speak.

Ritchie heaved a sigh. "I sure hope the trial doesn't drag on too long. The sooner it's over the sooner everyone will forget all about it and the easier it will be for her."

"I'm afraid she won't be allowed to forget it," Field told him. "Amery is going to put up a fight and I don't see how she can escape being pulled into it."

Before Ritchie could say anything in reply the phone rang. Field was disgusted. "Probably the newspapers again," he said. Ritchie picked up the phone. Field had been wrong. It was

the County Jail.

"Who is it?" the voice at the other end asked. Ritchie told him.

"Well, listen," the voice said. "We don't know what to do with this Amery. It looks like he's breaking down completely and we're afraid that he might even commit suicide if we don't put him in solitary and take away his tie and belt. What do you think we ought to do?"

Ritchie did not answer at once. He was staring at the door and still seeing in his mind's eye a white-haired man and a lovely young woman who leaned on his arm. There was hope for the young woman if she were allowed to forget.

Tom spoke slowly. "Don't worry about it," he said. "Leave him where he is and don't take anything away from him."

THE END

LIMEHOUSE LAWS

THE prisoner looked sadly at the foreman of the jury who had just announced his acquittal. His expression did not change when his lawyer clapped him on the back saying, "What's the matter? Don't you understand? You're free to go home." Actually, it was the American lawyer who did not understand. For the prisoner was a Chinese, and he would almost have preferred staying in jail rather than face the ordeal of going home. At home, he would have to face a stiffer justice, the justice of Chinatown.

Statistics show that there are fewer Chinese brought into our American courts than any other people. In fact, crime among the Chinese in this country is so infrequent as to be almost negligible. The story of why the Chinese crime rate is not higher is bound up with the prisoner's reluctance to go home. Upon his return to Chinatown, he would have to report to the headquarters of his Kung Saw. The Kung Saw is the family guild to which every Chinese belongs, and to which he pays dues for its support. In the Chinese community the individual has significance only in his relation to his family. Kung Saw literally translated means, "I am with you, all pulling together."

The Kung Saw Headquarters is the seat of justice for the family. Here, the elders of the clan make all the important decisions for the family, and hold court over disputes. Each family has its Kung Saw in every city where there is a China-

town, so that there is a network of local governing agents, headed by a national clan organization.

When a member of the clan gets in trouble, as the prisoner in this case, all of his clansmen contribute money for his defense. This seeming generosity is actually for purposes of punishment. Each contribution is listed in a little book called "Ne boo." This book is kept at Kung Saw Headquarters so that all might see just what their wicked relative has cost the clan, and when he returns to Chinatown, he not only has to explain to his immediate family, but to the several hundred who have shared the burden of his defense. Then, of course, he must work to pay all the money back.

A trial, Chinese style, before the council of elders of the Kung Saw, is carried on without benefit of lawyers. Both sides state their case before the altar where the family gods smile down, and around which candles are lighted. Each man telling his story, blows out the candles, saying, "If I tell a lie, may my life be snuffed out as easily as this flame." The decision of the elders is accepted as law.

The Chinese code of justice is set forth simply in the Chinese Golden Rule of the wise philosopher Confucius. It reads, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others." Not bad for a man who never heard the Sermon on the Mount.

—Lee Standish

THE ESSKAYE FRAUD

ONE of the most alluring schemes to hit the U. S. mails was the large-scale swindle operated by Edward Young Clarke capitalizing on a faked fraternal order. In 1929 the state of Delaware granted a charter of incorporation to Esskaye, a non-political and non-sectarian order promoted by Clarke. The aim of the organization was high-sounding and all-enveloping; it mentioned the studying and solving of all problems facing humanity in the realm of economics, religion, government, and morals. Its effects were to be far-reaching as the originators of the brotherhood hoped to gain members from all corners of the country, ten million in all. Only the "best" people in each community would be eligible, rated according to how much money they could afford to pay.

After the charter was obtained, the stated motives suddenly changed and the many salesmen who promoted the scheme tried to emphasize its money-making possibilities. A \$500 membership certificate would guarantee the holder a "25 per cent dividend payable semiannually, on every 7th Degree member enrolled during the ensuing ten years." The first 50,000 subscribers for the sum of \$500 were automatically 7th Degree members. And then various lower categories and sums were set with appropriate alluring titles and interest rates to catch the smaller fry. Dividends of \$12,500 on \$500 seemed too good to pass up, too good to be true, and the suckers who were taken in by Clarke did not stop to question how such a scheme could possibly operate successfully.

The sale of memberships was usually arranged by one of Clarke's innocent henchmen who thought he was doing a good thing for mankind, and he received a small commission for his services. The usual procedure was for the salesman to approach a number of influential people and to arrange a meeting which Clarke would then address. In the sales talk Clarke would not fail to state that Esskaye was a new and nation-wide organization which would establish a lodge in every county seat in the country, and from each entry fee there would be set aside a reserve fund with which to pay the holders of charter memberships in the Esskaye Mystic Castle Foundation. Here and there Clarke was able to insert other bargain offers. A \$1,000 life insurance policy for \$20 a year was one of these. Prospects were painted a glowing picture of an enormous printing establishment and emblem shop for this rapidly expanding and prosperous order of "brothers." Building funds were to be set aside for hospitals and recreation centers for Esskaye members.

If prospective members had been cautious they might have tried to investigate the record of Mr.

Clarke, but few of them were suspicious and did not learn until too late that their leader and guide had been the organizing genius of the blood-thirsty Ku-Klux Klan, that he had been ousted from that order because he had been charged with serious crimes in the courts. The Esskaye members did not become suspicious until they heard that the vast membership plan had been laid aside temporarily until certain dubious arrangements could be made through another office in Dallas, Texas. This kind of hedging sounded peculiar to them, and well aware of the fact that if there were to be no new members there was also no possibility of getting the promised "dividends," they brought suit charging diversion of funds and demanded an accounting.

When the truth finally came out into the open with the aid of patient investigation by postal inspectors, it was found that the Clarkes maintained two expensive automobiles, as well as a luxurious suit at a Jacksonville hotel and a spacious home on the St. John's River. The United States government was interested in Esskaye and its money-collecting activities, but Clarke refused to answer questions. Patiently delving through bank records and carefully fitting together the scattered pieces of this jig-saw puzzle, a case was slowly built up against the Mystic Castle promoter. There were no records. Mrs. Clarke, being "national secretary" of the organization, kept the checkbook at her home. Canceled checks were missing, and the post-office inspector had an extremely difficult time gathering his evidence of the fraud that was so apparent on the face of the scheme. Letters written to the victims, an incautious admission here and a small bit of evidence there finally gave the inspector enough evidence to go before a grand jury and ask for an indictment.

At Jacksonville, the inspector ran into an unusual stroke of good luck. The county sheriff had put all of Esskaye's office equipment up for sale under the auctioneer's hammer when the organization folded up. A local junkman had purchased some of the files and records and was going to burn most of the papers when the inspector reached him. Digging through Esskaye's office records, he found the last vital threads he needed to insure conviction of the notorious Edward Young Clarke.

The trial revealed that Clarke had cleaned up a neat \$43,000 from gullible southern citizens on the Esskaye scheme alone. His victims were astonished to learn that he had also made off with a cool million KKK profits. Clarke was found guilty of using the mails to defraud, and both he and his wife received lengthy prison terms.

—June Lurie

READ AMAZING STORIES FOR SCIENCE FICTION



YOU SAVED ME THE TROUBLE

BY
DAVID
CANTINE

*According to Mr. Kidde, they couldn't
have picked a better time to take him
for a ride—even the one-way kind . . .*

THE WEATHER report had been
"fair and colder", but at five
o'clock a thin rain began to fall,

and Mr. Kidde, who was just preparing
to leave the office, sent a boy to the
cloakroom for his spare umbrella. The
girls were grouped in the lobby
complaining about the unan-
nounced downpour, and Mr.
Kidde thought for a long mo-



Mr. Kidde, oblivious to the rain and his evil companions, sat
prim and motionless in the exact center of a polished headstone

ment of offering the umbrella to one of them; but as he hesitated, someone opened the door and they all ran outside together, so he went back to his desk to finish up. It was five-twenty when he walked out on to the gleaming sidewalk and locked the door behind him.

In the parking lot at the rear of the factory a black Buick nosed against the neatly lettered sign, "W. J. KIDDE, PRESIDENT". Mr. Kidde picked his way between the puddles around the car to look at each of the four tires, then retraced his steps to the left front door and shifted the umbrella to his left hand while he found his keys and climbed in behind the wheel. He was shaking the loose drops of water from the umbrella when he became aware of the young man who stood silently in the rain, pointing a small pistol at Mr. Kidde's head.

"Move over. I'll drive."

Mr. Kidde dropped the umbrella on the floor without a word and slid over into the center of the seat. Then, observing that a second young man was waiting outside the other window, he opened the right hand door and made room for him, too.

"You don't mean to tell me," he inquired, "that I'm being taken for a ride?"

"This is a snatch," said the new driver of Mr. Kidde's Buick. "You keep your mouth shut and don't try nothing. My friend's got a rod in your ribs, and if you get funny, he'll take care of you, quick. Be sensible, and you won't get hurt."

"For the last ten years," said Mr. Kidde, conversationally, "I've been expecting that some day I might get kidnapped." The young man on the right shoved a gun muzzle hard into the prisoner's side; Mr. Kidde squirmed but continued. "Ten years—and you kids pick today to do it. My boys, I'm

sorry to disappoint you, but as of today I'm not worth one thin dime, dead or alive, to you or anybody else. How do you like that?"

"Shut up," said the driver, jabbing with his elbow. He had driven on down the alley to Market Street and was now speeding south, toward the edge of town.

"You can believe it or not," said Mr. Kidde, "I'm flat broke."

"You can believe it or not, you're gonna get slugged over the head if you don't shut up. We know what we're doing."

"Do you know I'm bankrupt? Honest, boys, I haven't got a cent. And I can prove it right now." Mr. Kidde's hand started to slide into the inside pocket of his coat, but the second young man instantly seized his wrist and twisted it savagely.

"One more break like that, and you'll finish this ride on the floor, quiet! Now keep your yap shut!"

Mr. Kidde subsided and nursed his wrist, his hands in his lap. "I can prove it," he insisted, in a small, stubborn voice. "You'll see, gentlemen." The young man's gun was in sight now; he held it in front of him and waved it slightly, like a club, and Mr. Kidde said nothing more.

Near the city limits Market Street passes the Evergreen Cemetery. The Buick slowed as it neared the entrance to let another car pass, then turned and rolled in through the gates and on along one of the winding drives under the pine trees. Well back from the street and out of sight of the maintenance buildings it stopped, and Mr. Kidde sat up straight.

"May I talk now? Why did you bring me here? I tell you again—"

"Frisk him, Ed," said the driver. "It can't be a rod he was reaching for, but take a look."

THE man called Ed kept his gun against Mr. Kidde's stomach while he searched. He passed over Mr. Kidde's pen and pencil and cigars, appropriated his wallet and notebook, and from his inside overcoat pocket removed a small, flat leather case.

"It's medicine," he said in surprise, "a hypodermic, and there's a paper with it."

"Deadly poison," said Mr. Kidde softly. "One scratch and you will be dead. Be careful."

ED WAS careful. He replaced the needle with delicate fingers and closed the case, then opened it gingerly to extract the paper.

"That," said Mr. Kidde, "is what I was going to show you. I'm ruined—washed up. Read it and you'll see. What you have there is a note to my widow—my wife, that is. I left a copy on my desk at the office, and I was going to drive out in the country and use the needle on myself."

Ed looked at the driver, who nodded. "I'll keep an eye on him. Read it. Out loud."

Ed laid the leather case on the floor and unfolded the typewritten note, glanced again at his companion, and read slowly:

Dear Martha: When you receive this message, I shall be gone. It's cowardly, I suppose, to take the easy way out, but there's nothing else, absolutely nothing now, that I can do. Within a day or two the auditors will arrive, and it would all come out. I've lost everything, Martha, much more than you know. All I could borrow, too, and there's too much to make up, too many friends I couldn't face, for me to stand it. The company is finished.

"Our house is in your name; you'll have it and the insurance, thank heaven, though that isn't enough. I wish I could have saved more. Try to forgive me, and don't grieve. I shan't suffer—I have a vial of poison, quick-acting and painless, and a few seconds after I push the needle into my arm, it will all be over. Good-bye and God bless you. Your loving husband, Walter Kidde.

"P. S. Please give Blaze to Joe Harvey."

Mr. Kidde's voice was a murmur. "Blaze is my dog."

The driver closed his eyes for a moment as if in thought, and then motioned with his automatic. "Get out of the car. You go sit on that tombstone, Kidde, and don't make any breaks. Come over here, Ed. Better bring that thing with you."

"Why should I make a break?" asked Mr. Kidde. "This foolishness doesn't make the slightest difference to me." He picked up the umbrella as he got out of the car, opened it, and carried it with him toward the gravestone, where he stood shivering slightly. The rain was lessening, but the sky had grown quite dark, and it was colder.

The two young men moved a few yards away and talked to each other in low voices. Mr. Kidde turned his back; he couldn't overhear their conversation, but Ed sounded angry. For a moment his voice was raised, "—but what for? We ain't done nothing to him." There was more muttered argument, then silence, and the sound of quick footsteps. Mr. Kidde looked up over his shoulder just in time to see Ed's eyes staring down at him. There was a sudden sharp prick in his shoulder, then Ed jerked out the needle and threw the hypodermic on the ground.

"Oh!" shouted Mr. Kidde. "You—you've done it!" He straightened and took two halting steps forward, then stumbled and sprawled on the ground.

"I had to mister," said Ed quickly. "It was Rudy's idea. So if you changed your mind. We didn't *want* to hurt you."

Mr. Kidde shuddered; he started to roll over, then sighed deeply and lay very still. Ed leaned down, breathing heavily, replaced the wallet and notebook in his victim's pocket, laid the note on the wet ground under his head, and retreated. With his companion, he turned and fled on foot up the road, their footsteps loud on the driveway.

Mr. Kidde lay limp and still for two

minutes, then rose to his feet, scooped up the note and stuck it in his pocket. The umbrella was broken and muddy where the weight of his body had crushed it against the tombstone. Mr. Kidde frowned.

"Ed and Rudy," he said to himself, "whoever they may be. Well, I suppose the police can locate them—and then what a damned nuisance it'll be! Now I'm late to dinner, Martha will be angry, and my stroke of genius is used up and gone."

He paused to pick up the hypodermic needle and gazed reflectively at the empty glass. "Wonder if that shot could hurt me? Must be years ago I gave up changing the water."

RACKET OF THE SKIRTS

EVERY year, one of New York's largest department stores, chalks up a loss of a million dollars to a brigade of petticoat shoplifters who know no scruples. Though shoplifting is not exclusively a female profession, the bulk of the nation's buyers are women, and this peculiar disease of not being able to withstand the temptation of a cherished article seems to afflict the feminine contingent of the population with greater vengeance. Ninety percent of amateur shoplifters are women; ninety-five percent of all shoplifters are amateurs. This high percentage is not at all startling when we think back honestly on the many times we have looked wistfully at some unobtainable article in a store, and thought how easy it would be to take it without anyone's detecting us.

Motives for these snatches vary from the simple economic necessity of the mother who can't afford gifts for her children at Christmas, or the stenographer who feels that the fabulous diamond bracelet is just the thing to impress her boy friend, to the person who steals just because of a compelling desire to do so. This latter type is known by psychiatrists as the kleptomaniac. These people derive no actual satisfaction of their wants from stealing. Usually, the objects stolen are either of no use to the kleptomaniac, or do not have to be obtained by theft. Yet, the kleptomaniac derives a peculiar psychological satisfaction from his deeds, often because this willful behavior expresses his vengeance upon what seems to him to be an unfriendly world.

Though amateur shoplifters are easy to detect, the corps of professionals have practised the technique to such precision, that only the most alert spotter can apprehend them. The techniques of

the professional shoplifter vary with the sex. The women make much use of a huge pocket inside the front of the skirt, which can hold three or four men's shirts at capacity. At the bottom of the pocket, a string is tied, and if ever the shoplifter fears she is being suspected, she jerks the string and the merchandise falls to the floor, as she nonchalantly walks away.

The male profession has its own techniques. One of these is to wear a cord around the neck, like that used by a saxophone player. With this device, they can pick up a suit—hangar and all—by merely attaching it to the cord. Under a loose-fitting coat, the resulting bulge is hardly noticeable.

Since shoplifting takes such a big chunk out of a store's earnings, the larger ones have begun a vigorous campaign against it. These shops have banded together to form the Store's Mutual Protective Association, which compiles a file of photographs of all the men and women who have at some time been convicted as shoplifters. In this way, the store is able to know whether the thief they have caught is a veteran who ought to be prosecuted, or only a minor offender who should be scolded and sent home in shame.

Not all stores belong to the Store's Mutual Protective Association, but all large stores throughout the country maintain a squad of detectives called spotters. The innocent appearing woman who seems to be absorbed in her own shopping may really be keeping a hawk eye out to spot thefts in her vicinity, and the woman who casually lets her handkerchief drop over some priceless gem on the jewelry counter, is more than likely to get caught with the goods.

A WOMAN'S WILES

BY MYLES MARTIN

ONE August afternoon in 1903, a well-dressed young man purchased a suit of clothes at the Broadway store of Rogers, Peet and Company in New York City. Taking a check for \$280 from his wallet, he told the salesman, that he didn't have any cash on hand that day, but if the store would forward the check to the bank, they would certify it, and then he would send for the suit and the balance of the money on the following day.

When, two days later, a young boy entered the store to collect the clothes, the police pounced on him. The boy protested his innocence, saying that he was only running an errand for a "gent" who was waiting close by. Soon, George Lang, alias James Parker was in the custody of the police. At Headquarters, the prisoner was identified as the gentleman who had been passing bad checks in banks throughout the city in the preceding months.

Detective Sergeant Peabody, who had originally been assigned to handle the case, was a sleuth of the old school, thorough and meticulous. He suspected that this series of thefts could not have been accomplished by one man. Consequently, he ordered a check kept upon the visitors to Parker. When an attractive young girl came to inquire if she could see the prisoner, Peabody ordered the warden to refuse her request, and as she disconsolately left the building, Peabody followed her, never for a minute suspecting that she was a forger, but hoping that she would lead him to the other members of the gang.

The next morning, Peabody put on the most disreputable suit in his wardrobe, and, purposely neglecting to shave, called at the address to which he had trailed the girl.

To his surprise, he discovered that the girl was actually the wife of the prisoner. Careful to preserve his disguise, Peabody introduced himself as a cell-mate of her husband. He won her confidence by agreeing to smuggle in dope to Jim.

Grateful to him, she invited him to breakfast with her at the Broadway Central Hotel. Here, over the coffee cups, Mrs. Parker made the startling confession that she, not her husband, had forged all the checks. She urged Peabody to come in with her and earn enough money to get Jim out of prison as well as a pile for himself.

The detective protested that it was too dangerous. She answered, "It's the easiest thing in the world. All you have to do is to pick the mail out of some box on a corner. I can show you how with a copper wire and a little piece of wax—and you are sure to find among the letters somebody's check in payment of a bill. There at once you have the bank and the signature. Then all you have to do is to write a letter to the bank asking for a new check book, saying yours is used up, and sign the name that appears on the check. It's

too easy. The only thing you have to look out for is not to overdraw the account."

By this time, Peabody was practically bursting with suppressed excitement. But he still had to have more than this verbal evidence. He asked Mabel Parker to show him some samples of her technique. Flushed with pride, she saucily produced a pad and began to reproduce the names of all the recent victims of her forgeries. Her skill was amazing. Her talent eliminated the necessity of tracing. To look at the original signature was enough for her.

THE pad now contained enough evidence to confound any jury. Peabody, pretending to tear the page up lest his "partner" be detected, actually substituted a blank sheet in its place, and smuggled the precious slip of paper into his pocket. The same evening Mrs. Parker, the super-forgery, was taken into custody.

But the case was far from over. Peabody had not reckoned with the appeal of the attractive, naive-appearing young woman upon a sympathetic jury. Probably no more extraordinary court scene was ever beheld than that during Mabel Parker's first trial for forgery.

Dressed appealingly in a sky blue dress and picture hat the defendant sat impudently throughout the proceedings toying with a pen and pad, and, in sight of the jury, copying samples of handwriting for curious members of the press. From time to time, she would even dash off an aphorism on the trial for publication.

The Court was so amused by the witty and arrogant girl that by the time Peabody took the stand his testimony could hardly be heard over the guffaws that filled the courtroom, and he himself was forced to smile. Since the whole case depended upon his word, his amusement at this juncture, only made the case more difficult to prove. Somehow, the jury couldn't believe that a case in which the evidence was so strong and so obvious, since the prisoner was actually handing out samples of her work, could be true.

As a result, the trial ended in confusion, the jury standing eight to four for acquittal of Mabel, placing full blame upon her husband.

The prosecution, furious at the farce which had been made out of the trial, immediately set to work to amass more evidence. Luckily, they were able to contact two former accomplices of the Parkers, and these men gave overwhelming evidence against Mabel. Even then the natural repugnance of the American jury for convicting a woman was shown.

This time, the jury remained out eight hours, and though finding Mrs. Parker guilty, recommended mercy. She was sentenced to the Bedford Reformatory.

Murder Without Cheesecake

By Leonard Finley Hilts

THE blare of martial music had attracted a huge crowd. People standing five deep on Michigan Avenue's curb gazed at the marching men, cheered occasionally when a battalion known for its battle scars swung by, and strained and pushed to see more. It was the typical parade-thrilled crowd.

But Ray Henderson, walking down Michigan Avenue, did not join the gawping group. After four years of helping to prove Hirohito's divinity a myth, he found parades of any nature very unattractive. He had been on the walking end of them too often. Now he walked along between the crowd and the tall buildings, totally unaffected by anything but his own thoughts.

He reset the hands of his watch as he passed a telegraph office, noting that since it was half an hour fast he would now have time for lunch before reporting to work.

He stopped off in a little cafeteria for a sandwich and a cup of coffee. He ate silently, hardly noticing what he put into his mouth. His mind was occupied with thoughts of the future. He felt that he had been lucky to land the job of reporter with the *Chicago Chronicle*, and was planning a bright future.

Another glance at his watch told him he had just time to get over to the

Chronicle's office. He gulped the last of his coffee down and hurried out of the restaurant. Being late on his second day of work would not be the best way of promoting a bright future, Ray decided.

He was still outside of the City News Room when he first heard Blake, the city editor, howling. Blake's irate howl was notorious; but to Ray, it seemed worse than ever today. He wondered what had brought it on as he carefully opened the door. He wanted no part of that temper if he could help it.

He hardly had his head inside of the door when he caught one of Blake's broadsides full amidships.

"Henderson!" Blake screamed, swinging around so that he could bring all guns to bear, "where the hell have you been, you four-bell, rattlebrained nitwit. You're late!"

Ray looked at his watch again and said, "But chief . . ."

"I don't want any damned excuses," Blake yelled. "A murder story broke thirty minutes ago and nobody was here to follow it. You should have been. Every sheet in town will have extras on the streets in another fifteen minutes and we don't even have a man on the case yet!"

"But chief . . ." Ray started again.

"Don't 'but' me, you nimble-brained hack," Blake stormed. "Get the hell

You can't pin murder on a man when he uses a photograph and an electric clock to prove he was somewhere else



The reporter indicated the circled face. "That's the man, all right"

over to the detective bureau and try to get something. It's probably too late, but we've got have something."

Realizing that another 'but' would get him nothing but another tirade, Ray took the better part of valor and evacuated his position. He set his course for detective headquarters in a hurry.

THE first person he met in the big building on South State Street was Tim Muldoon, an old timer in the department, whom he had known for a long time. Muldoon had the sagging jowls and sad eyes of an unhappy Saint Bernard and the disposition of a disgruntled bloodhound.

"What's the dope on this murder, Tim?" Ray asked him after he had jockeyed him into a corner.

"Why don'tcha wait for a few minutes, son," Muldoon answered in character. "You'll be able to read it in all of the papers." He added, "Except the *Chronicle*," with a discouraged wave of his huge hand.

"Aw, lay off, Tim. Blake just gave me *that* sad story. Let's have the facts."

"Okay, okay," Tim said with magnificent resignation. "Charles Sully, the investment broker, got it in the neck with a knife in his office just before noon. In fact, we've fixed the time at fifteen minutes before the hour. His safe was rifled and we figure that about twenty thousand dollars is missing."

Ray took down notes on a pad. Muldoon's sad eyes almost reached the weeping stages when he said, "It's a good story, son. Too bad you had to miss it."

Henderson nodded impatiently. "I know. How about suspects? Have you softshoes got the finger on anyone yet?"

Tim wagged his head slowly and his sorrow seemed almost unbearable.

"That's just it, son. The case is solved. Sully's nephew was in debt and being blackmailed. Only he and the old man knew the combination to the safe. He would know when the old man's secretary would go out to lunch and would know when there would be a lot of cash in the safe."

"What does that prove?" Ray asked. "That doesn't mean that someone else couldn't have done it."

Tim focused his soulful gaze on Ray. "He's the only one with the motive, the opportunity, and the inside knowledge. And we picked him up within fifteen minutes of the murder on Michigan Avenue."

"Is he locked up?"

Tim pushed his head back and forth. "Yeah. He says that he had been watching that parade today all during the time. It's a good twenty minute trip to where he says he was standing and if he can prove he was there at that time, then he's alibied. But he can't."

"How's he trying to do it?"

"Says that a friend of his is a newsreel cameraman and that he swung his camera around as the sound truck passed and got his picture in it. There was a reviewing stand just a few feet down from where he was standing and the cameraman had to shoot that section of the Avenue anyway. The nephew thinks that'll prove it. I don't see how it can. We're waiting for the rushes on the newsreel now, to check."

Ray closed the pad he had been writing on. "Thanks a lot, Tim. I'll go back to the office and turn this into a story. I'll be back to watch for the rushes."

Tim sighed from the bottom of his boots. "All right son. See you then."

RAY poured his journalistic soul into the typewriter at his desk. He made up his mind that a good story

might make up for the lateness, and did a good job. It was almost a feature when he finished it. He turned the yellow pages over to Blake without a word after he typed his thirties across the bottom.

Blake grunted. "Swell. Just in time to make the late editions. Now that everyone knows the story, it should sell like soggy biscuits."

Ray left the office hoping that it would be raining when he got outside. Bad weather would suit his mood. This was a hell of a way to get started on a new job. Nothing like creating a good first impression to start off. It always increased one's chances for a first place in the bread line.

The bar in the lobby of the Chronicle Building winked its neon sign at him. Ray accepted the siren's challenge and pushed through the revolving doors. He needed a beer into which he could cry.

An hour and a half later he pushed the same revolving doors in the opposite direction and found himself back in the lobby of the Chronicle Building. The anesthetic, as prescribed, had worked quite well. The pain he had felt before was now lessened to a considerable degree.

He made a fresh start for the detective bureau.

Tim Muldoon was sitting on a bench on the second floor this time, solemnly contemplating a large brass cuspidor. Ray wondered if he were trying to work up an urge to use it. Tim looked up at his approach.

"Well," he commented unhappily, "if it isn't the Winged Mercury himself, in person."

Ray grinned. "What's the late stuff, Tim?"

The corners of Muldoon's mouth drooped another half inch, so that his expression was like an inverted smile.

"The only thing that's late around here, son, is you. The rushes have been here for an hour and you've been unannouncedly scooped by every ink-spattered wretch in the city."

Fortified as he was, the information didn't bother Ray. He was looking at Muldoon with a kind of awe.

"You know, Tim," he intoned decisively, "if you hadn't been born with such flat feet, I believe you would have been a poet."

"Okay," Tim answered, "so I'm a poet. Better come in and have a look at the stills we got from the newsreel people. And if you want to keep eating, you'd better beat a hot trail back to your writing machine after that. Anyway, I'm ready to go home."

The pictures, large, blown up prints direct from the movie film, showed the crowds on the sidewalk. Diversified expressions were repeated on the faces of the fifty or so people shown. But one face was outlined with black ink. Evidently it was the nephew in question.

"That him?"

"Yeah," Tim answered sadly. "And he's alibied. See that clock in the window in back of him? It says a quarter to twelve and that's when the murder was committed. And that spot is twenty minutes by any means of transportation from old Sully's office. We're stumped. You'd better say, though," he added almost as an afterthought, "that we're working on the case."

Ray jotted down the appropriate notes. "Okay, you mean that the foxes are barking up an empty tree and don't want the poor taxpayers to know about it."

Tim wagged his head. "It's okay for you to say that here, but keep it out of the story. And get going now, or you'll be around to borrow a fin tomorrow to hold you over between jobs."

IT WASN'T until he was on the street that the seriousness of his predicament began to dawn on Ray. Having primed his new job with one failure, he had now very neatly capped the climax with another. The picture of Blake's face that appeared in his mind wasn't pleasant to behold.

He decided to take the cure again. He turned off the sidewalk at the first neon sign he saw.

When he finally arrived in the Chronicle office several hours later, he hoped to find Blake among the missing. Wearing his hat like a sailor, on the back of his head and humming a ditty that he had picked up at a show the week before, he breezed across the office toward his desk.

He barely had time to sit down before Blake was beside him. Ray looked up at him insolently, with one eye cocked.

For a minute Blake said nothing, but stood inhaling the eau de alcohol that surrounded his minion.

"Don't touch that typewriter," he yelled suddenly. "You're drunk, you're late again, you missed the rest of that story, and you're fired!"

"But Chief . . ."

Blake's face was vermillion. "'But,' hell! S c r a m, Henderson; you're through. And you'd better pray that they keep up the unemployment compensation, because you'll starve to death if they don't."

Ray pulled his hat forward on his head and laughed. "Okay, so I'm fired. Good night!"

RAY awoke shortly before dawn on the following day with a kingsize hangover. After his eyes opened he lay still, trying to adjust himself to the three dimensional qualities of his room. No matter how he tried, he persistently lost one of the dimensions, and so, fi-

nally giving it up, he reached for the bottle of vitamin tablets beside his bed.

At the end of a half hour the vitamin B made him feel almost human again. Human enough, at least, to want quantities of very strong coffee. He brewed the pot himself, and made it so black that it could have passed for ink. As he consumed the second cup the radio on the kitchen table gave him a time signal, and as he adjusted the hands, he noted that his watch was half an hour slow.

His mind turned over the employment problem. The condition of his head plus his regrets for having lost his first, and what he considered his best job, caused a heavy black mood to descend on him. He slammed around the kitchen, kicking bitterly at the table legs and cursing himself for being four dozen kinds of a fool.

"What's the use," he growled. "I don't even get started before I'm sacked." He wadded up the dish towel and fired it toward the radiator over which it usually hung. "Damn it!" he muttered.

On the way to the bedroom he decided that something had to be done, but he admitted to himself that he had no very concrete notions.

He was tying his shoes when an idea presented itself and as he finished dressing he toyed with it. By the time he had his hat on, the dull black gloom had lifted completely and a purposeful glint showed in his eyes.

"MR. BLAKE? This is Ray Henderson." After a full morning's work, Ray had sought a telephone to report his progress.

There were noises on the other end of the wire.

"Now, wait a minute, Mr. Blake," Ray put in hastily. "I've got news for you."

Blake's voice over the phone was deafening. "You have?" he asked with a heavy note of sarcasm. "Isn't that nice? I'll bet it's the scoop on that Sully case. After all, it's only two days old now. That seems to be about your speed."

Ray waited until the receiver cooled off and then said, "That's right. How did you guess it?"

Blake slammed down his receiver so hard that Ray had to back away from the phone. He dialed the *Chronicle* number again.

"Look, Mr. Blake, how would you like the solution to the case in an exclusive story, with pictures?"

Blake grunted suspiciously. "Don't tell me you've solved it, my snail-like Hawkshaw."

Ray ignored him. "Furthermore, how would you like the credit for the solution of this, one of the most baffling cases to face the detective force in weeks, to go to one of your own men? Think of the story that would make."

Blake was interested by trying hard not to show it. "How do you propose to bring about this miracle, Henderson, through spiritualism or alcoholism?" He was silent for a moment. "And who on my staff is going to get the credit?"

"Me." Ray answered succinctly.

Blake howled.

"Otherwise you don't get the story, Mr. Blake."

Ray could hear Blake's blood pressure mounting. He seemed to be having an apoplectic fit. But he finally calmed down.

"All right Henderson. You win."

"Okay chief," Ray said pleasantly. "Send a cameraman down to the detective bureau in a hurry. I'll have the story for you in an hour or so. Hold up an edition so that it can hit the streets as soon as I'm ready."

"Listen, wet-ears," Blake snapped back, "you get the story. I'll take care of the editorial end of this paper."

JAMES SULLY, nephew of Charles Sully, walked into the show-up room of the detective bureau with a swagger.

"Aren't you people satisfied with my alibi yet?" he asked calmly.

Tim Muldoon said, "No. In fact, we've decided that it isn't much of an alibi."

Sully arched an eyebrow. "Oh? Wasn't that me in the picture?"

"Sure it was, son. Good picture of you, too, all things considered."

Ray looked up at him for the first time. "That's right, Sully. It was a very good picture. Everything was good about it except the clock."

The color drained completely from the young man's face. "The . . . the clock?" His calm demeanor faded.

Ray nodded. "Yeah, the clock. The one in the telegraph office. Right around noon yesterday I set my watch by it. And later my watch turned out to be half an hour slow. I lost my job because of it."

"In other words," Tim joined in, "you were there to have your picture taken all right. You knew it would be taken, too; the reviewing stand was close by and no cameraman would pass up a shot of all the brass up there. But you weren't there at the time you claimed. In fact, we're convinced that you were in your uncle's office at that time."

Before Sully could say a word, Ray jumped back into the conversation. "I checked with the telegraph people and they discovered that their clock had been tampered with. In fact, the plug had been pulled out of it for a while, they say, and then plugged back in."

Sully pulled his legs up under him and catapulted from the chair in which

he was sitting. But it did no good. Tim Muldoon laid his hammy hand in the middle of his chest and pushed him back down. "Let's not be having any rough stuff now. It doesn't look good." He smiled, for the first time in his life as far as Ray knew. "Want to talk now?"

Sully's head was on his chest. "All right, I . . ."

"Hold it," Tim said. "I want this taken down."

"I'm going to telephone Blake, Tim. Will you let the photographer get some shots while I'm gone?"

Tim looked at him. He was sad again. "Okay. But the photographer won't like it. I've yet to see a newspaper photographer who liked a picture that didn't have cheesecake in it."

TRAGEDY OF ERRORS

By RALPH QUINT

LA TE in life, Jean Bott, a native of Hesse Cassel, Germany, and leader of a small orchestra there, made two critical decisions. First, he decided to seek his fortune in America, and then he decided to invest a sum of money representing practically his lifetime's savings in a famous violin known as "The Duke of Cambridge Stradivarius." Consequently, in 1860 the Bott family, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Bott and the violin, which they cherished as a child, moved to New York.

The genial violin teacher's luck did not prosper in the new world, and the year 1894 found him and his wife with only a half dozen pupils, lodged in two dingy rooms in a tenement neighborhood. As their meager savings dwindled, the couple were forced to consider selling their beloved violin. "The Duke of Cambridge Stradivarius" was offered for sale by Victor S. Fletcher, a friend of Bott's who was a dealer in musical instruments. The prospective buyer presented a forty-five hundred dollar check to Bott, but the old German, who had never seen a certified check and was unaccustomed to such transactions, demanded real money, that he could feel. The prospective purchaser, believing that Bott meant to insult him, withdrew the offer and stormed away in a rage.

On the morning of March 31, 1894, not long after this disappointing incident, Bott set out with his wife for Hoboken to visit a friend. The treasured violin was left in its customary place in the lowest drawer of his bureau at the boarding house. Only four people knew of this secret hiding place. When Bott and his wife returned from their visit, they found that the Stradivarius was gone.

Months, and then years, passed and still no trace of the violin was found. At first, Bott pounded the streets, following every clue, but finally he gave up in despair, and sat silent and morose in his room. Eight years later, he died of a broken heart. Mrs. Bott determined to return to her native land and give up the search. She wrote to Fletcher, the musical instrument dealer, and told him of the death of her husband, and of

her own plans. She also informed Colonel Allen, an assistant of the district attorney who had been working on the case. Several days later, Colonel Allen received word that Fletcher was offering a Stradivarius for sale. Allen, who had been suspicious of Fletcher from the first, was now convinced of Fletcher's guilt. Now that the only person in the world who could authoritatively identify the "Duke of Cambridge" was dead, Fletcher felt safe to offer it for sale, ran Allen's account of the affair. Allen pretended to be interested in buying the Stradivarius, and staged a situation in which Mrs. Bott was able to identify the violin that Fletcher was offering for sale as her long lost treasure.

The trial of Fletcher was the second act in this tragedy of errors. The sympathies of the jury were obviously with Mrs. Bott. However, the defense produced a witness who was himself a maker of violins, and who, moreover, was familiar with the famous "Duke of Cambridge," having seen it three times. He declared that the Fletcher violin was not the stolen Stradivarius. But the technical aspects of the case only confused the jury, and they brought in a verdict of guilty. Fletcher broke down, crying bitterly that he was a victim of a conspiracy.

After three months in the penitentiary, Fletcher secured a certificate of reasonable doubt and was freed pending his appeal. But though free, his reputation was ruined, his family disgraced, and his business lay in ruins. The appeal failed and as time passed people forgot about Fletcher and the stormy case of the missing violin.

On August 17, 1900, the genuine "Duke of Cambridge" was discovered by accident in the home of a middle-class Brooklyn family. The violin had been bought at a pawn shop with no idea of its worth. The court dismissed its case against Fletcher, and ordered the Stradivarius returned to Mrs. Bott. But by the irony of fate, one man had died of a broken heart, and one man had suffered disgrace for eight years, in this amazing tragedy of errors.

THE COBBLER OF COPERNICK

By SANDY MILLER

THE little town of Copernick, Germany, was astonished to learn one fine October morning in 1906 that their Town Hall had been robbed of its treasury, and that its three chief officials had been kidnaped by an unwitting army. This highly unusual crime occurred during the Kaiser's reign, and so embarrassed the military clique that had the nation in tow, that it took years to live the story down. And by some of their own country men it is doubtful if they ever have. The Copernick police and obedient German soldiers had aided a wily crook to make away with the city treasury.

The crime had been carried out in the following manner: The soldiers had finished drilling on the parade ground outside the town and were returning to their quarters when an officer whom they met called them to halt. They did so. He curtly ordered them to follow him, in the name of the Kaiser, and these men who were so used to accepting orders, responded at once. On the way to the Town Hall they met another squad—and these were also commanded to follow. By the time they reached the Town Hall, the heretofore unknown captain of the guards was followed by an impressive group of twenty soldiers.

Six men were posted outside the building to guard the entrance, and the captain issued strict orders that no one was to be admitted. The townspeople, noting all this military activity, became curious and thronged to the square. Fast on their heels came the local police who took the situation nobly in hand. Seeing soldiers they dispersed the crowd and kept the street clear.

Meanwhile, in the office of the chief Secretary of State, Herr Rosenkranz, the little captain was taking over, lock, stock, and barrel. At the point of a bayonet the city official was bamboozled into believing that he had committed some awful crime for which the Kaiser was now having him placed in official custody. Resistance was useless.

Next the captain strode into the office of the Burgermeister (mayor) and demanded the municipal funds. These were promptly handed over in a sealed envelope—about four thousand marks and seventy pfennings in all.

"I am responsible for the money now—the Kaiser's orders." And so saying he wrote out a receipt and signed it with a flourish.

Calling one of his soldiers, he sent for two cabs and ordering the Burgermeister and Secretary to follow, he forced them to enter the vehicles. Soldiers were assigned to ride with them as guards to the Neue Wache, the chief guard rooms. The other men were sent back to the barracks, while the captain walked rapidly towards the railway station, was saluted respectfully by the local police, and was never seen again.

The shrewd little captain made good his escape.

It was not until the soldiers realized that no provisions had been made for the "official prisoners" that they knew they had been victimized. And then the day of reckoning came. The military, vain and conceited as they were, voiced their belief that only a man trained as an officer would have been cunning enough to perpetrate such a daring crime. The German police didn't know what to think, and they followed every lead that turned up.

Before many days had passed, a bundle was found which contained an officer's uniform that had apparently been left in a dark corner on a lonely street. This must have been the uniform the imposter, if he was one, had used. The military could not be convinced. No, it must have been an officer. Suspicion was thrown in the direction of Oberleutenant Karl Von Langebach of the Fourth Hussars, stationed near Karlshorst. He had mysteriously disappeared and was known to be heavily in debt. A search revealed his very dead body swinging crazily from a tree in the forest where he had committed suicide. Doctors called to the scene were certain that he had died several days before the robbery at Copernick had been carried out. Once more the police were stumped, but they carried on their investigation as best they could.

They had only one bit of tangible evidence that could lead them to the criminal . . . the receipt he had signed when he took over the money. The name had been written as just a scrawl, but under it "Hauptmann," the German word for captain had been written and misspelled. The second "n" had been omitted. This important slip of paper was sent to the various prisons in the region in the hope that it might tally with some writing entered in records there. The guess was a wild one, but it proved fruitful for it led the police to an old shoemaker, Friedrich Wilhelm Voigt who had been sentenced to fifteen years hard labor for housebreaking and liberated only six months previously. Hartman, his former cell mate, further incriminated the man by telling how Voigt had tried to interest him in the plot.

In the courtroom, the short, bandy-legged, ugly, shoemaker looked far from the captain he had tried to impersonate. Even the judge found the story hard to believe. With a shave and haircut and the uniform on his back, he presented quite a different appearance, however. A discharged soldier, who had been one of the twenty men taking orders from Voigt that fateful day, stepped forward to identify him, and the verdict was "Guilty!"

Though the judge sentenced him to four years for the crime, public opinion on the little shoemaker's side forced him to cut it down to two years.

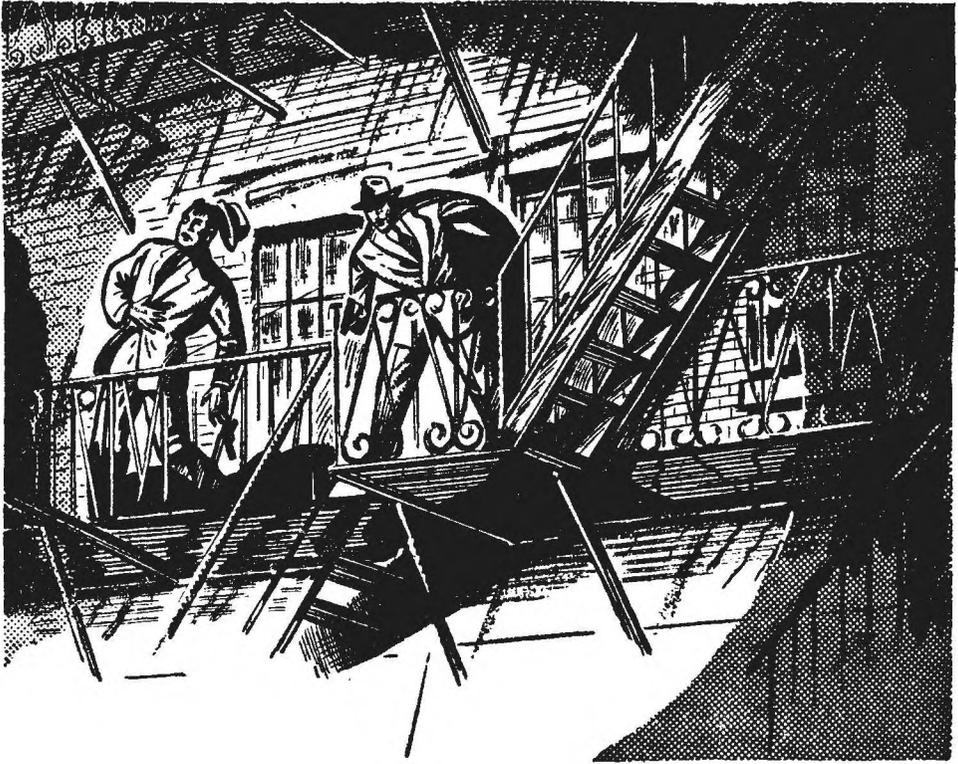
LET'S CALL IT MURDER

By Berkeley Livingston

***It was Joe's testimony that put a
man in the shadow of the electric
chair. Only then did the witness
realize he had made a mistake!***



Under the steady fusillade of shots,
one of the men on the fire escape
clutched at his middle and fell over



THE crossed patch of white tape made startling contrast with the man's red hair. He paused now and then in his descent of the wide stairs, to brush meaninglessly at the patch. There was a dazed, uncompre-

hending look in his eyes.

He stumbled on the last step and, recovering, stood for a moment, a stocky figure in a gray suit, on the sidewalk. He looked right, and left, then making up his mind, turned left and began to walk; his goal, the drug store on the corner.

The long fountain was deserted except for a couple of stenographers, giggling over their cokes. The soda clerk slid a glass of water in front of the red-haired man and said:

"Hiya, Joe. Coffee?"

"Uh, yeah . . . Sure."

He sat and stared at the coffee but made no move to taste it. The soda jerk watched him for a second, opened his mouth, closed it, shrugged his shoulders and moved away. The stubby fingers moved again toward the white patch and brushed gently against it.

Someone sat down beside him and



spread a newspaper wide. The headline read, COP KILLER GETS CHAIR. The red-headed man looked at the headline, his forehead creased in lines of thought. His eyelids narrowed with intense effort, then he shook his head again in bewilderment.

The coffee was still untasted when he threw his nickel on the counter and walked out.

The soda jerk whispered something to the newspaper reader and they watched until he passed from sight. . . .

The numbers on the paint-flaked doors were crooked. The stairs creaked from age and the weight of the stocky gray figure. The door squealed on sullen hinges when he opened it. The heavy figure of a woman appeared in the doorway of a room on the first landing.

"Hello, Mrs. Murray."

"Oh. It's you, Joe. I see—" She stopped as the man continued up the stairs after his greeting. Her lips tightened disapprovingly, but she let him go without further remark.

The man closed the door and looked listlessly about him. There was a warm, slightly sour odor in the room, as if it had not been cleaned in a long time. A narrow bed had been shoved up close to the single window. A chair stood next to the bed. On it was a small radio.

The man stretched out flat on the bed and turned on the radio. Music filled the sour air. He lay on his back, eyes staring in a sort of dumb misery at the ceiling and listened to the music. A voice announced the end of the program and asked the listener to "stay tuned to the news."

The man on the bed stirred, his hand groping for the dial. Abruptly his hand paused, dropped back to the bed. A voice was saying:

"Early this afternoon, after only four hours of deliberation, a jury convicted

Ernest Dawson of the murder of Police Sergeant Thomas Daley. Judge James Miner, who presided at the trial, sentenced Dawson to the electric chair.

"Court officials agree that Dawson was convicted on the testimony of Joe Burke, a driver for the Revere Cartage Company. Burke, the State's principal witness, was an eye-witness to the crime. And his dramatic statement, 'I saw him shoot Daley,' was the highlight of this, the most—"

"Jees!" The red-headed man suddenly sat erect. His eyes no longer were bewildered. Now they were horror-filled.

"Jees!" he whispered again. "That's me, Joe Burke. And I just sent the *wrong guy* to the chair."

THE desk sergeant looked away from the sport sheet. He frowned in annoyance. He looked down at the red-headed man in the gray suit and barked, "Well?" at him. Some jerk, he decided, who had probably forgotten where he parked his car and thought it was stolen.

The red-head just stood there, tense-figured, fists clenched at his side. His face bore a look of misery, yet there was an odd tilt of determination to the square-cut chin.

"Well? What's on your mind, mister?"

"Look," Joe Burke said. "I wanna see the lieutenant. I *gotta* see the lieutenant!"

"So! You *gotta* see the lieutenant? And what, might I ask, do you want to see him about? Y'see, he's a kinda busy man and—"

Anger flamed in Burke's eyes.

"Never mind that stuff!" he snarled.

"Just tell me, is he in or out?"

"Take it easy, lad," the sergeant said.

He saw now that the red-head was all on edge. Suddenly he recognized him. "Say"—his tone was more friendly—"you're Joe Burke, ain't ya? Well, I'm sure—"

"Look, Sarge, will you please tell me if the lieutenant is in? It's *important*."

"Nope, he ain't in. But he should . . . Here he is now." His eyes went over Burke's head to three men coming into the station.

The short, square-bodied man was saying: "—that's why you're in plain clothes. Now keep up the good—" when Burke intruded.

"Which one of you guys is the lieutenant?"

"I am," the short one said. "What's on your mind, Burke?"

"So, you know me?"

"Sure. You got somethin' you wanna say?"

"Jees, yes!"

Lieutenant Parks took the cigar out of his mouth and rolled it between his fingers. Then he jerked his head for Burke to follow. The two plainclothesmen came along.

"Well, Burke, what can I do for you?" Parks said after he had made himself comfortable in his swivel chair. "And don't be afraid to ask. Daley was a friend of mine."

"That's it, Lieutenant!" Burke groaned. "Daley! Daley! I've sent the wrong guy to the chair!"

"What! Say, what're you tryin' to tell me?" Parks was no longer jovial. He leaned forward, pudgy forearms on his desk.

"Sure. I know. It sounds screwy. But it's the truth. Y'see—"

"Okay, okay," Parks said softly. The cigar was back in his mouth. "So who did it, if Dawson didn't?"

"A cop!" Burke expected the reaction that followed his pronouncement.

Stubbornly he went on in the face of their all too apparent disbelief. "I know what you're thinking—I'm nuts! But I'm not! It just came to me—"

"Shut up! Who the hell're you tryin' to kid? First you say Dawson did it. You keep sayin' it while that shy-ster Borkman gave you the stiffest cross-examination I ever heard."

"But I was dopey. Honest to God—"

"Bull! You're nuts. We got the right guy, all right. Dawson's going to fry. Too bad we couldn't nail Nolan. I don't know what you're tryin' to pull, but it stinks."

"To hell with you," Burke blazed in sudden temper. "You're satisfied! A cop was knocked off and somebody had to pay. Well, I know who did it and I'm going to prove it."

"Beat it, punk," Parks said sourly. "You ain't funny. Well," as Burke stood there, his face twitching in anger, "get going."

Joe Burke was in a blind rage, when he left the precinct station.

"Damn dumb flatfoot," he growled to himself. "I'll show 'em."

"Hey, Burke!"

HE TURNED to see who called him. The tall, thin detective—the one to whom the lieutenant had been talking when they came in—was hurrying toward him.

"Waite a second, Burke," the detective said, falling into step with Joe.

Burke kept walking. The other took his arm and pulled him up short.

"Wait a second, stormy," he said. There was a grin on his long face. "Cool off. I wanta talk to you."

"About what?" Burke demanded.

"I don't blame you, Burke. The chief was kinda hot. But me, well, s'pose we sit somewhere. How about a beer?"

"Well—" Burke hesitated. "Okay. But if you got an idea that you're

gonna—”

“Wait’ll we squat,” the other suggested easily. “It’ll keep.”

. . . Joe killed his beer in two swallows. The detective sipped his. Another glass appeared at Joe’s elbow and he drained half of it. For the first time since they sat at the bar Joe faced the other.

“All right, what’s on your mind?” he said.

The other finished his beer before answering. He chose his words with care.

“I suppose you’re wonderin’ why I’m so nosey, eh? Let’s say I’m playin’ a hunch. After all, when the only eye witness to the killing says he made a mistake—well—you can’t blame me for bein’ curious.”

Burke made a wry mouth.

“A lotta good that does,” was his comment. “If the lieutenant doesn’t want to do anything about it, what the hell good’ll *you* do?”

“Just a minute, Burke. Lemme ask you somethin’. You just happened to get mixed up in all this by accident. You didn’t know Daley or Dawson or Nolan. As I remember, you just got through work, was going home, and socko—you’re right in the middle of it. Am I right?”

“Go on.”

“So you see the killing. Nolan beats it out the back, Daley sees him and goes after him—and Dawson shoots Daley in the back. Right?”

“Wrong!”

“But that was your sworn testimony.”

“Look—uh—”

“Mike’s the name.”

“— Mike. You ever dream somethin’ that seemed so real you coulda sworn it *was* real?”

“So?”

“It’s kinda hard to explain. But that trial was like a dream to me. And I

just now woke up. Only it wasn’t a dream. I was awake all the time!” Burke’s voice started to rise.

“Take it easy, Burke,” Mike said soothingly. “You said it was a cop who killed Daley. Did you see him? Would you recognize him?”

“We-ll . . . Yeah. In a way. I didn’t see his face, if that’s what you mean. But I know it was a cop. I saw his uniform! And I saw Dawson fire *after* the cop did. I saw this cop get up outa some bushes at the side of the house. He pulled out his gun and . . .”

“And?”

“Huh?” Burke asked. He didn’t seem to realize he had stopped in the middle of his story. Mike gave him a look of curiosity.

“And what?” Mike prompted him again.

“Nothin’. He just shot Daley.”

MIKE pushed his hat to the back of his head. He rocked gently back and forth on the bar stool. Joe had turned away and was looking morosely at the display behind the bar.

“You know, Burke, it don’t sound so screwy as you think it does. There were a lot of guys, cops included, who hated Daley’s guts. For instance, the lieutenant.”

Joe lost interest in the bottles. Mike continued:

“Daley was somebody’s pet. Somebody who is big. He coulda been a captain. But he liked to show how big he was. Like when Lieutenant Parks paid *him* off. Besides he was a bully. So it coulda been like you say. And that reminds me. Why are you so heated up about this? It ain’t no hair off your head.”

“Don’t say that!” There was an odd note of pleading in Burke’s voice. “God damn it! I’m the guy who’s gonna remember when—when Dawson fries. I

can't let him go without tryin' to do something."

Mike reached over and patted Burke's shoulder.

"All right pal," he said. "I'm with you. But you gotta listen to me. No more going off half-cocked like you did."

"Okay. What do I do now?"

"*You?* I thought it was us?"

"Maybe. But first I'm gonna see what I can do."

"Well—if that's the way you feel about it, okay. But let me give you a tip. Colson, the D. A., is the one to see. He's the only one who can re-open the case. Now I'm not saying he'll do it. Colson wants to be our next governor and that case gave him a lot of publicity. He'll probably refuse. Force his hand. Tell him you'll go to the papers with your story. Get it?"

"Say, I never thought of that. That's an all-right angle. Thanks. Well, guess I'll be blowin'."

"Look, Burke, when'll I see you?"

"How about tonight?"

"Okay. Let's say around nine, huh?"

"Yeah. Where? At the station?"

"Better not. We'll keep this to ourselves. Until we're ready to break it."

"Then meet me at my place."

Mike agreed and Burke gave him the address and left.

LOOKS like you're in now, Governor."

W. Perry Colson smiled at the words. The smile didn't quite reach his eyes.

"*Now?*" He put emphasis on the word. "Why, weren't you sure before, Jameson?"

Jameson, Colson's first assistant, kicked himself mentally. Colson was such a damned peacock.

"Of course, sir. I meant insofar as the opposition is concerned. They'll probably concede now. The Dawson

case was a masterpiece. Exactly what was needed as the clincher in your campaign."

The smile reached Colson's eyes. Jameson was right: It had been a beautiful case. Coming as it did, in the month before election, it had added immeasurably to his prestige. A feeling of warmth spread through him. That case! He didn't want it. But Daley had been Foley's pet. So they put pressure on him. Nothing but circumstantial evidence. It had looked like a frame on Foley's part to get him out of the picture. Then they found that truck driver. What was his name? Burke? Yes, Burke.

"Mr. Colson," a voice intruded into his thoughts.

He looked up and glanced at Elise, his secretary, who was standing in the office doorway.

"A Mr. Burke is here to see you, sir. Says it's a matter of life and death."

That was odd, Colson thought. He had just been thinking of the man. He nodded as a sign to let the visitor in.

"Glad to see you Burke. How do you feel?"

Jameson made a pretense of absorption in the brief on his desk. He wondered what had brought Burke to Colson's office. He noticed the repressed excitement in the man's bearing.

Joe didn't waste any time in amenities. He launched into his story and Colson let him tell it without interruption. Jameson stopped pretending. He almost grinned when he saw the look on Colson's face. He had never seen him look so bewildered. Not that Jameson blamed him.

Colson composed himself with an effort. He took off his glasses and polished the already spotless surfaces. Turning from Joe, he walked to the window and looked down at the street below.

Finally he turned and came back to Joe and looked at him silently for a moment, then spat out:

"It's preposterous! This whole cock-and-bull story of yours! Who sent you here?"

"Wh-what do you mean?" Joe asked. He hadn't expected Colson to believe him. But he had not expected this cold fury and antagonism.

"Don't play games with me, Burke! You didn't think this up. Who sent you here?"

"Nobody, sir. I'm telling you exactly what happened."

COLSON nibbled at his lower lip. He believed Burke. There was no doubting the man's sincerity. But why come to him? There was something fishy about this. Perhaps a few questions might—

"Burke," Colson began softly, "let's see if I have this straight. You say that this uniformed policeman, whose face you didn't see, rose up out of the bushes and shot Daley. Then something struck you and you lost consciousness. You recovered momentarily in the ambulance and heard someone say 'saw Dawson shoot.'"

"That's right."

"And because of your injury, those words, shall we say, *hypnotized* you. So that your testimony was, in fact, false; perjurious."

"Yeah, only I didn't know—"

Colson waved him into silence.

"Perhaps you weren't aware, Burke, that before I saw you at the hospital, I spoke to Dr. Nyland and he told me your wound was superficial. That any testimony you made could be accepted, injury notwithstanding."

"No, I didn't know that, but—"

Again Colson waved him quiet.

"Therefore I accepted, the doctor's statement as true. Just as your testi-

mony was accepted. Now you come and tell me that you were in a daze at the time. That both you and the doctor were wrong. How can I know, even if it were possible for me to reopen the case, that you are in your right mind now? How can I know that any testimony you may offer in the future will have fact as a basis? Sorry, Burke, I think the right man was convicted."

"Like hell he was!" The truculent stubbornness which was part of Burke's nature, came to the fore. "I don't give a damn what *you* say! Maybe I ain't the smartest guy in the world but—"

"Take it easy, fellow," Jameson said. He saw the anger flame in Burke's face and made haste to step between the two.

". . . if I ain't, there's others who are. You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to the papers with this. Then we'll see who's smart!"

The district attorney's face was wreathed in a pitying smile.

"Really, Burke," he said. His manner was that of a man dealing with a child. "Threatening me will get you nowhere. As for going to the papers with this ridiculous story—well, I can't stop you. But remember, if any paper publishes it, I will see to it that you face a grand jury on charges of conspiracy and perjury. And I assure you, you will spend more years in prison than you have lived!"

Colson's words sobered Burke up instantly. One look at Jameson's face told him that Colson's threat was no idle one. He had lost in his second attempt to free Dawson, and had incurred an enemy.

"SO THERE I was, up a creek without a paddle," Joe concluded.

Mike sat in the lone chair the room possessed. His arms were folded across its back. His long chin rested on his

forearms. He had been an interested listener to Joe's recital of the interview with Colson.

"H'm. Never thought of that," he said when Joe finished. "But Colson's right."

"I know that too," Joe rasped irritably. "We gotta figger some new angles. Stuff I can do without askin' anyone's help."

Mike shrugged his shoulders. "Like what, for instance?"

"We-ll. . . Here's an idea. One of those cops shot Daley. I remember reading in some mystery story how they cut the stiff open and got the bullet out . . ."

"A post-mortem."

"Yeah . . . And how it matched up with the bullets in the killer's gun."

"So?"

"Well, I been thinkin'. One of those cops did it. Now if I knew which cops were there when Daley . . ."

"I can find that out."

"Swell! Then I can question each one of those guys, see. You know, on the sly. Maybe even get their guns."

"Hey," Mike cautioned, "take it easy. You'll get yourself in a jam."

"Listen Mike," Joe said quietly. "Get this straight. I don't care about what happens to me. I'd even go to the papers. But that wouldn't do Dawson any good, my going to jail. I'm just a truck cowboy. Nothin' fancy about me. But I'm just this kind of a guy. When I'm in the right, there ain't nobody gonna stop me. Maybe some of the things I'll do will be screwy. But I'll get there."

Mike's pale eyes glinted with amusement.

"Go ahead. It's your neck. Me, I'm gonna work at this in my own way. Maybe between the two of us, we'll crack it."

He reached into his back pocket,

pulled out a notebook, scribbled into it and tore out the page. Joe looked at the paper and read:

Riley 8—4

Seton 8—4

McDonald 8—4

George 8—4

Swanson Dog-watch

"What's this?"

"You wanted the names of the cops. There they are and their watches. Notice they're all from eight to four but Swanson. He's on from midnight to eight."

"Oh."

"Yeah. Now here's the addresses," Mike continued. He read them off from his notebook. Then he stood, yawning and stretching.

"Guess I'll scram now, Joe," he said.

"See you tomorrow. Same time?"

"Yep. That'll be all right."

THE radio in the kitchen was going full blast. Mary Riley liked the daily soap operas. It was her only recreation and she was as devoted to them as were those women who had to have their daily bridge games.

She always had the radio on loud so that she would hear it in whatever room she was in. Now that the two older children were married, there was only Michael, Junior, left. And he was in the parish school most of the day. Riley never came home before five, and if he stopped off for a few beers with Seton, it would more likely be six.

The commercial came on then, reminding her it was four-fifteen: time for the boy to come in and get ready for supper. She went to the living-room windows and peered through the curtains. A man stood on the walk in front of the house. His red hair looked almost pink in the sun. He was studying a piece of paper in one of his hands. Nodding his head, as if satisfied, he

turned and came up the concrete walk. She noticed the white patch of tape over one temple.

She had the door open, even before he reached the porch steps. She smiled as he hesitated on the bottom step.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"Does Michael Riley live here?"

"Yes. I'm his wife. Won't you come in?"

. . . He sat stiff and uncomfortable in a plush chair in the living-room.

"Is there something I can do for you?" she asked pleasantly.

"Well—no. I wanted to see . . ." There was an interruption. The street door banged shut and a tow-headed boy ran into the room.

"Gee, mom," he yelled, running over and embracing her, "we won! And I hit a double and a homer and a—" He became aware of the stranger in the room. Smiling shyly he pecked his mother's cheek and ran from the room.

"My son," Mary explained. He was quick to note the pride in her voice. He was seized by a feeling of revulsion against himself. Why was this necessary? This handsome boy and beautiful woman. They had nothing to do with—murder. His eyes lit on the photographs flanking the mantel clock.

"My daughters," Mary said. She had already seen that this man was troubled by something. His fingers nervously twisted at the tassel of the armchair. His eyes. They seemed so—so full of pain. She wanted to make him feel at ease.

"Is there anything wrong?" she asked. "Perhaps I can help you."

He wanted to scream, "No! Nothing! Except your husband might be a murderer!" But he could only remain silent and wait for Riley to come.

Again the street door closed with a slam. Joe Burke looked with interest at the man who came in. He was a big

man: tall, broad, heavy. A hard man, from the look of his mouth, chin and eyes. Just now, though, his eyes were soft. As though it were a holy rite, he walked over to his wife and kissed her on the mouth. Her arm slid around his waist and pressed tightly against him.

Joe saw the flush of happiness on her face when she said:

"Michael. This man is here to see you."

Riley straightened and said, "Yes?"

JOE was surprised by the softness of Riley's voice. It was unexpected in so big a man. Joe shook his head. He sighed and arose.

"I—I think I made a mistake," Riley, he said. "Guess I'll be going."

"You didn't make a mistake, Burke. You came to see me about the—" Riley's arm went around his wife. He left the rest unsaid.

So another one knew him! He felt that now familiar sense of frustration again. They all seemed to know him. Yet the only one he could recall—and him only dimly—was Colson. Another thing: how did Riley know what he'd come to see him about.

"Yeah. That's why I'm here," he answered. "But how'd you know?"

"You saw Lieutenant Parks," Riley explained. His face was expressionless. Something about their attitudes brought a chill to Mary's heart. Her eyes went from her husband to Burke. Something was wrong! It was in their faces, in their voices, in the way Michael held her. Terror made its way into her eyes.

Damn the man! Why couldn't he have kept quiet? Joe hated Riley for a second.

Joe sat down again. He said:

"That's right. I saw him, all right. And I suppose you know what hap-

pened?"

Riley didn't answer.

"Do I get that treatment here?"

"Michael!" Mary could contain herself no longer. These men were talking yet saying nothing. "Please!" What's wrong?"

He turned to her. Gently he explained:

"This man is Joe Burke, Mary. The truck driver who sent Dawson to the chair. Yesterday he came to see Parks. He told him that he had made a mistake, that it wasn't Dawson who shot Daley, that it was a cop that did the shooting."

"No! No!" The terror had spread to her voice.

"Ssh. Easy, honey! There's nothing to worry about."

"No?" Joe said softly.

"No. Listen to me, Burke. If ever there was a guy who deserved to die, that guy was Daley. Believe me! And whoever killed him did the world a favor."

"I believe you. But what's that got to do with you?"

It was amazing how fast Riley could move. In a flash he had lifted Joe out of his chair and was shaking him. His voice was still soft, but his words were harsh.

"Listen, you nosey punk!" Riley said. "You were told to lay off!"

Joe was startled by Riley's action but not frightened. His fingers broke the policeman's grip and pushed him away. Then Mary was between them. Forgotten was Joe. Terror possessed her completely now.

"Michael"—her voice was high with fear—"you didn't break your promise?"

Riley's face was as gray as her voice.

"No, Mary, I didn't break my promise. But every time I thought of him and of what he was doing to us, the an-

ger in me boiled over. I kept thinking, why shouldn't I kill him? Every time I saw that face and heard that voice. Mary! He was draining us of life.

"That day, when we got the Dawson call, he said he needed two thousand more. Where was I going to get it? He'd taken every cent I had. There was only the boy's policy left. Then I remembered telling him once about it. He knew . . ." Suddenly Riley dropped into the chair Joe had been sitting in. His hands went to his face and he sat silent, bowed in grief.

JOE just stood there, listening. He felt that if he even moved, the spell would be broken. It was the woman who continued the story.

"I'm glad in a way that this happened. It was too much to bear. I'm glad he died! He was like something evil in our lives."

She looked directly at Joe. There was no longer any terror in her eyes. Just a calm acceptance of whatever fate held in store for her.

"Something happened a few years ago," she began, "something that had to do with—one of my daughters. She had gotten into a crowd that was no good for her. There were three of them, Kathie and two boys. The boys held up a filling station. There was a shooting—a man was shot—and they drove away. Kathie didn't know what they had intended to do when she went along. The boys swore they'd never say anything.

"She came home and told us. Perhaps we did wrong—I know now we did—but she was our daughter. We couldn't turn her over . . . Anyhow the boys were caught. They confessed but kept their promise to her. So we thought. They were sent to jail. Then, a month later, Daley came here. He

didn't mince words. He knew Kathie had been with them. Oh, he was clever! He knew how to paint a horrible picture! It was too much for me. I said I'd do anything, pay anything. And so we paid and paid until there was nothing left—not even the desire to live."

"You see, Burke," Riley interrupted, "it was like this. My old man was a cop. A tough, hard cop. So I became one. Eighteen years I've been one. And like my old man I'm tough and hard. You see and hear an awful lot when you've been in that long. And I guess you become pretty calloused. There seems to be more bad than good in this world." He sighed. "It was my fault. Kathie swore she was innocent. I didn't believe her. But I couldn't hurt Mary. So I agreed. And Daley milked me. Then that call came on Nolan. We went out there. Surrounded the house. There was a hell of a lot of shooting. I was at one side, under the hedge. I looked around and saw Daley, safe behind a tree. Then I saw Nolan break and Daley start after him. Don't ask me why I did it—I don't know—maybe it was all those years of hating coming to a head—but I stood up and aimed—"

So immersed in the telling of his story had he become that Riley lived again that moment. His hand moved to his holster and the pistol appeared in his palm.

". . . but I didn't shoot, Dawson beat me to it."

That was all. Joe looked from one to the other. There was nothing he could say.

A SEA of roof-tops met Joe Burke's eyes. In the distance an electric sign blinked intermittently. The room was stifling hot. He walked to the wash basin and rinsed his face. There was

a knock at the door. Somewhere close by a clock chimed the hour. Nine.

Mike walked in. Joe wondered if he ever took his jacket off. Mike removed his hat and wiped the sweat from the leather inner-lining.

"Hot! Too damned hot!"

The matted red hair on Joe Burke's chest gleamed wetly. He skidded the chair over to Mike.

"Yeah," Joe said. "It's hot, all right."

Mike sat down and said:

"Why do you live in a dump like this?"

"Where do you want me to live—at the Drake? I'm only a truck driver."

"Okay. It's too hot to argue. Well—who'd you see?"

"Riley."

"Uh-huh. What'd you find out?"

"Nothin'. Riley's off the list."

Mike's eyebrows went up.

Joe looked at him sullenly. "What's the matter? Don't you like that?"

Mike's pale eyes became cold with anger.

"It's all right with me if it's that way with you. I told you I'm too hot to argue. Or listen to any wise cracks from you. If you feel that way—"

"Sorry, Mike. Guess I'm a little mixed up."

Joe got off the window sill and paced the room. His face was screwed up in lines of misery. Mike watched him with sardonic eyes. He didn't say anything. He knew if Joe had anything to say he'd talk when the time came. He was right. Joe stopped his aimless movements and sat down on the bed.

"Something's bothering me, Mike," Joe said. "Riley knew I'd been asking questions. How'd he know?"

"Don't be a fool," Mike rapped out. "Do you think what you did would be kept quiet? And I'll tell you something else. Colson called the lieutenant-

ant today and told him to keep an eye on you. I know, because I was there when the call came through."

Joe's eyes went wide on hearing that. Mike continued:

"You said you didn't care what happened. Don't be surprised if you'll have to prove that."

"That's all right by me. And I want to ask you something: Why are you so hot about all this? I thought you said Daley was a rat. So a rat got knocked off. That's no hair off your head."

"Wait a minute! I didn't say Daley was a rat. I said people hated his guts. Cops too. But Daley did me a favor once. The kind of a favor a guy never forgets. I'm a little like you, see. Maybe I'm out for the glory. I'd like to be a sergeant. And if *we* break this, I'd be a cinch for it. But mainly I wanta see the guy who bumped him off take the rap for it."

It was the longest speech Joe had ever heard Mike make. It gave him a feeling of warmth to know that he was not alone in his quest.

"Tell me," Mike said, "how is it you've got so much time to spend?"

"My boss gave me a break. Three weeks vacation—with pay."

"Not bad. But to get back to this case. Here's an angle. Seton was Daley's 'boy'. He did the collecting for him."

"Looks like Seton's next on the list," Joe said softly.

THE cop pounded his fist on the bar until the bartender came over.

"Aw, take it easy, 'Bull,'" he said to the cop.

Bull Seton turned to his red-headed companion and said mockingly:

"'Take it easy,' he says. Hell! I been takin' it easy for ten years. Haw! Haw!" He pounded a ham-like fist against his thigh.

Joe Burke couldn't see the joke. Now that he'd found Seton after going to three other taverns before this one, he wondered how he could get him to talk. Seton and he had been drinking steadily for an hour now. And the only effect on the gross-bodied copper was that it made him louder with each drink.

Joe had recognized him from Mike's description. Seton had accepted Joe's offer of a drink with a practiced complacency.

The bartender gave Seton a sour look.

"You're pretty smart, since they knocked off Daley," he said.

Seton's jovial manner disappeared at once.

"Button your lip, jerk," he said tersely. "Or I'll button it for you."

Fury blazed for an instant in the bartender's eyes. Then, thinking better of it, he turned his attention to a customer at the far end of the bar.

"So you were a friend of Daley's," Joe said innocently. It was the opening he had been waiting for.

Seton gave Joe a lopsided grin.

"Who—me?" he asked mockingly. "That's a laugh."

Joe wondered how any man could drink so much and still make sense. He had to fight off the drunken dizziness which came on with every drink he took, while Seton seemed to become more sober as he drank.

"Let's get outa here," Seton suggested, as he heaved his bulk from the stool. He was certainly the fattest cop Joe had ever seen. He walked with a roll, his hams quivering jelly-like with each step.

They didn't go far. Just to another tavern down the street. Joe resumed where he'd left off, after he'd ordered a couple of drinks.

"You know," he began slyly, "there

was somethin' fishy about that case.

Seton's lips parted in surprise. Sweat gleamed oily on his fat face. Then he laughed aloud.

"So you think there was something fishy about the case? Man, oh man! If you only knew that guy like I knew him. Everything he ever did was fishy. It don't surprise me that maybe he died that way."

Joe killed his drink and mulled over Seton's words. This fat cop was beginning to irk him. Talk, talk, and nothing said.

"Burke, you give me a laugh," Seton said, breaking into Joe's thoughts.

"I give *you* a—" Joe stopped. Seton had called him by name. He looked at the cop. There was a smirk on Seton's full lips.

"Sure," the cop said. "Pussyfootin' around. Playing copper. I knew you the minute I saw you. How the hell could I ever forget that dumb puss of yours looking at Dawson and fingering him like you did." He broke into a hoarse, choking laughter at the memory. "And Dawson turning green and saying, 'Well, maybe I did. I know I shot a gun!'"

Joe smiled wryly. Seton had played him for a sucker. Mike *was* right! He had said Joe would only be wasting time.

Joe got off the stool and grinned at Seton.

"At least I was good for a laugh, wasn't I?" he asked.

"Sure." Seton laughed again. "Come around again sometime. I like to laugh. And as Joe started out, "But don't forget, wise guy, I like to drink too."

JOE looked up at the blob of darkness that was the ceiling. Six hours had passed since he'd seen Seton. Six hours given over to thoughts, none of

them pleasant.

He was on a dead-end street. He smiled to himself at the thought. A dead end street. Daley's street. He was a ghost following another ghost. It was strange how Daley seemed to be mixed up in everything. Lieutenant Parks, Colson, the Rileys, Seton, Mike. Joe had no doubt that no matter who he saw, Daley would have been there before him.

He remembered again the affability of Parks and how antagonistic he became later. Why? Colson, the Rileys, even Seton had all shown . . . what? Fear? Hatred?

His head rolled from side to side on the pillow. How was he going to crack this thing? He knew Daley had been murdered by a policeman. Who else knew? The killer, of course. What else did he know?

He wished Mike had shown up. He wanted to talk over his thoughts with him. Perhaps he was out working on one of his own angles.

The room was oppressive with heat. Suddenly he was aware of another feeling. Suspense. Everything was so still. Not even a breath of wind to stir the dirty lace curtains. The silence weighed on him.

He realized suddenly he had been holding his breath. He laughed aloud, a shaky thread of sound.

"Now I'm getting nerves!" He spoke aloud, without realizing it. Getting scared of the dark, like a kid.

Lightning flared purple against a cloud-massed sky. The thunder which followed almost deafened him. A ribald wind tore the curtains apart and sent chill fingers over his sweat-soaked body. But he saw nothing, felt nothing but a petrifying fear.

For the barest instant the room had been illuminated by the lightning glare. And in that instant Joe saw the door

to his room was open. Within its frame stood a man. Something about the man's attitude, the tense, watchful way he stood, sent chills down Joe's spine.

Panic gripped him. Who was this man? What did he want? Why was he so silent?

JOE remembered what Mike had said about getting into a jam. Suddenly he was angry. Reason won over anger and told him that whoever the man was, by his very actions he intended harm.

Gently Joe rolled across the bed toward the window. Thunder boomed again and rain added its voice to the fury of the storm. Daintily, as though the floor were covered with eggs, Joe placed his feet on the floor. Slowly, he started to rise—and the springs squealed in protest.

"Don't move," a voice commanded. Instinct told Joe to obey. He blinked in the sudden glare of light thrown into his face. The stranger had a flashlight. The voice spoke from above the circle of white light:

"Just sit there, Burke, and listen. You've been putting your nose into something that does not concern you. I'm here to warn you. Forget this whole affair. Drop it!"

"And suppose I don't?" Joe asked softly.

There was no answer.

"And suppose I don't?" Joe asked again. He shifted his feet slightly. He was going to see who this intruder was. He had one hand on the brass ball of the old-fashioned bedstead. It was loose. He stood up twisting his body slightly and pulling off the ball at the same time.

Again the command: "Don't move!"

Joe laughed softly. This guy was scared! He could tell it from his voice.

Then Joe moved, deliberately and swiftly. The bed was on rollers. Joe kicked it across the room. At the same instant he heaved the heavy brass ball to the *right* of the flashlight.

The results weren't at all what he expected. First, the bed moved only a foot or so; and then the brass ball struck the wall with a thud. The stranger was holding the flashlight in his *right hand*.

The effect was the same, however, as if the man had been struck. He dropped the light with a startled oath. In the second it took to recover it, Joe reached him.

For the first time Joe was in personal contact with something substantial. Perhaps this was the killer, himself. All fear left him as he grappled with the stranger. Surprise was on Joe's side to give him a momentary advantage. His headlong rush had caught the man in a stooped position. He was just getting erect when Joe's hurtling, almost naked body struck him.

He tumbled backward, Joe grabbing frantically at his clothing. For a few seconds they rolled around the floor. Those few seconds told Joe that his opponent wasn't very big, but that he possessed a wiry strength.

Joe had one purpose: to knock the stranger out. It soon became apparent that the stranger had a different and more deadly purpose—to kill Joe.

The head of the flashlight sliced down across Joe's cheek, ripping it open along its entire length. The pain was agonizing. Joe hammered the other's face with slashing fists. Then the stranger inserted his leg between Joe's and heaved upward. Joe landed heavily against the bed.

He grunted as he surged up to meet the other. Neither had time for words. It was lucky for Joe that a flash of lightning illuminated the room just

then. For he saw the flashlight, lifted high over the man's head, descending in a vicious blow.

JOE threw himself sideways. The flashlight caught him on the shoulder. He swept in low, football fashion, caught the other around the knees and twisted him savagely around. He heard the flashlight strike the floor as the man dropped it to use both hands.

The stranger's hands clawed at Joe's face, tearing at the already lacerated cheek. Joe felt nothing, neither pain nor emotion. His whole being was bound up in the idea of getting the stranger erect so he could use his fists to advantage.

His hands went upward to fasten themselves on the stranger's shirt front. Then he swung him up, as though he were an empty sack. Holding him with his left hand, Joe drew back his right to deliver the knockout punch. But the stranger beat him to it by expediently kicking Joe in the shin.

Pain-ridden, Joe loosened his grip on the other's shirt, and received a terrible blow across the bridge of his nose. He staggered back, bringing both hands to his nose. Blood poured into his palms. He went back another step and his foot landed on the flashlight. It rolled and Joe threw his arms wide, fought to regain his balance. He heard the stranger grunt, "Ah!" Then a weight struck him on the chin and he went backward onto the bed.

"Gotcha!" the stranger wheezed as he put his hands around Joe's throat. And another voice said, "What the hell goes on here?" as the ceiling light went on. It was Mike.

The stranger rolled away from Joe and leaped to one side. He went into a crouch, one hand held low, near the waist.

Joe sat up and shook his head, the

red drops spattering against the wall.

"This guy," he gasped, "sneaked in —tried to kill me!"

THE stranger gave Joe a look of hatred. There was a bump at the side of his cheek near the right eye. His lips were puffed up, the upper one split. The swelling gave the narrow face with its hawk nose a lopsided look.

Mike closed the door behind him. He paid no attention to Joe. He saw only the stranger.

"What're you doing here, McDonald?" he asked.

Joe forgot his bleeding nose and the pain from his torn cheek. McDonald! He had been next on the list.

"Me?" McDonald asked. He regained his composure when he saw the fight was over. "I just came to take a look at this guy." He jerked a thumb in Joe's direction.

"In the dark?"

"Sure. I got cat's eyes!"

"You got a brain to match," Mike said sharply. "Who gave you this address?"

"Oh, a little bird. A little bird on the telephone." McDonald's eyes narrowed in laughter. He grimaced in sudden pain when his lips contracted.

Mike turned to Joe. "Who'd you see today?"

"Seton."

"I figured that! The fat slob tailed you here and hot-footed it over to call McDonald."

"Yeah? Why?"

Mike didn't answer. Instead he motioned McDonald to the bed, saying:

"Sit down Mac. We got things to talk over."

"Uh-uh. Not me! I'm going."

"Siddown!" The menace in Mike's voice was too obvious to be ignored. McDonald shrugged his shoulders and sat.

Mike was disgusted. He showed it in every line of his face and tone of his voice.

"Joe, you're a nice guy," he began, "but when it comes to stuff like this—I told you to leave that to me, damn it! What'd you think it would get you, running around the way you did? D'you think they'd talk?"

It was a subdued Joe who answered, "No. I see that now."

"Hell! I learned more in ten minutes today, than you'd have learned in a year. Yeah. Things about Seton—and our friend here."

The crooked grin disappeared from McDonald's mouth. Mike's words held a hidden meaning he didn't like. He glared at Mike, hate and fear in his expression.

"If you'd read the afternoon papers, you'd have noticed Gibson's joint on Twenty-second Street was knocked off," Mike continued.

Fear won out in McDonald's eyes.

Mike saw it. "'Smatter, Mac, did I say something?" He laughed in his throat. "Yeah. We got together with the D. A.'s men and closed it up. Did Gibson beef—wow! But Colson's after Foley's scalp, so he just laughed at him.

"But to get back to what I found out. Who was left in charge of the office? You guessed it! Me.

"My orders were to get all the records and bring them down to headquarters. So I start dragging out all the stuff that's laying around. And what stuff!" He shook his head in wonder. "Gibson was one smart guy. He figured if ever he got in a jam, he wasn't gonna pay the bill all by himself."

JOE had moved from the bed when McDonald sat down. His nose was still bleeding, as was his cheek. He went over to the washbasin and began rinsing the wounds with cold applica-

tions. After affixing court plaster to his cheek, and holding a cold wash rag to his nose, he took the chair McDonald had first used.

"Most of what I found hasn't anything to do with us," Mike said as Joe sat down, "But there were a couple of things there. For instance, how much he paid Daley—for protection."

"Daley again," Joe mumbled through the rag.

"Yep! And that's funny because Gibson was only the front for Foley!"

Strangely enough, McDonald wasn't at all surprised by Mike's announcement.

"Wait a minute, Mike," Joe broke in. "From what I heard, Foley was the guy who put Daley in. How come Daley was clipping this Gibson joint?"

Mike grinned in reply.

"That Daley was one cute guy!" he answered admiringly. "The only angle I can figure was that he was money hungry. But was Daley getting this dough in person? Not that palooka! Our fat friend Seton was the boy who collected for him."

"Golly," Joe said. "Cross and double cross."

"You ain't heard nothin' yet, Joe. In a special drawer of Gibson's desk I found a small bundle of papers: promissory notes, I.O.U.'s, personal debts—stuff like that. And what d'you think I ran across?"

McDonald had been sitting on the bed, his face devoid of expression during the early part of Mike's recital. But as the story began to take definite shape, it became evident he knew what Mike was driving at. His face became pale. His lips tightened and he kept clinching his fists in convulsive involuntary spasms.

Mike milked every bit of drama he could from the situation. He was thoroughly aware of McDonald's feelings.

He knew McDonald knew what was coming. He told it with a sadistic gloating that was at variance with his usual attitude.

"In that bundle," Mike's voice was cold; emotionless as his eyes, "I found a note—a promise to repay the thousand dollars he had stolen from Gibson—signed by Philip McDonald. The note was marked *paid!*"

McDonald's face was gray. Beads of sweat had formed on his upper lip. He wiped it free with an unconsciously delicate movement of his fingers.

"That was a long time ago, wasn't it, Mac? Twenty years ago! Well, Joe," Mike's lips twisted in distaste, "that note had been made out in duplicate. Or so I thought until I began to think about Daley. McDonald held the original; Gibson the duplicate. What good did that do Daley? Then I remember Davis. He was a bookkeeper for Gibson. He quit a couple of years ago. But I knew of his pals. *So I kept that duplicate when I brought the rest of the stuff down to headquarters.* And I looked up Davis."

Mike's next words fell with the effect of a bombshell.

"*That note was made out in triplicate!* Sure, Davis remembered. It was Daley's idea. Only McDonald didn't know about it. He thought there was only going to be *one* copy. They took his attention for a second; Daley slipped in the extra copy and McDonald was hooked.

"What a devil-mind that Daley had! What good something like that could do him only he could figure out. So he waited for twenty years to use that note, didn't he, Mac?"

ALL this had become meaningless to Joe. Mike was telling them something, but only McDonald understood. Joe could no longer contain himself.

"Say! What the hell's this all about, anyway? What if McDonald stole that grand? He paid it back."

"But you don't understand, Joe," Mike explained patiently. "This isn't signed. Don't you remember? It said Philip McDonald—the one who's running for alderman. This man's brother."

Then it became clear to Joe. Daley had kept that note. Why, only Daley had known. But the day had come when he could use it—as a club. The note had been paid. Now McDonald was running for public office. If it became known that he had confessed to a crime, even though the money was returned, he wouldn't have a ghost's chance of being elected. But why hadn't Daley gone to Philip? Or had he?

McDonald answered the unspoken question in a flat, emotionless voice: "Sure. Daley came to me, all right. He had it all figured out. Phil would have told him to go to hell and made public the truth about that note. Phil is that kind of man. But me,—I'm different." He sighed softly and smiled, a caricature of a smile.

"Twenty years ago, Mike. A long time ago. Remember a few years before that, Mike? You were across; you remember coming back. The crowds, the cheers and tears and the long lines of boys coming out of the ship onto the dock. *They carried me out.*"

He said it so simply, the significance of the statement almost escaped Joe.

"They carried me out and right into a government hospital. Nobody to greet me there!"

He paused again, lost in that memory for a moment.

"I lay in that hospital for two years. Gas in the lungs doesn't make for healthy men. Phil used to come to see me every week. God, what a kid he was. Ambitious, proud, stubborn—he

was going to be somebody some day. Imagine driving a truck all day and working at Gibson's for those few hours and going to law school at night. That was Phil. So he shows up one day and I'm coughing my lungs out in that bed. I didn't know this till later but he'd talked to the doctor and found out just how bad off I was. Only one thing might work—a couple years in some dry place. That's where the grand went. That one and a couple more.

"No, Phil isn't just a kid brother to me. He is something . . . well, I guess something I worship. And then Daley comes along. Oh, there wasn't anything he'd do about it. Oh, no. But wouldn't it be tough if Foley got hold of that note, he says. That licked me. I started paying. And didn't stop till he got knocked off.

"Then this here guy butts in. Asking questions. Noseying around, I had to tell him to lay off. Scare him. So I came here—"

"With the intention of shutting him up," Mike butted in. "Just like you did Daley."

McDonald leaped erect, fright putting a squeal in his voice:

"No! You're nuts! I didn't have anything to do with that. Hell! I got a witness."

Mike's lips curled with derision. "Yeah? Who?"

"Seton!"

"Seton, huh? That's funny. He says he was with you all night. Until you decided to go around to the back of the house. He says you went *alone*."

MCDONALD'S puffy lips opened and closed before words came out. Panicky, frightened words:

"No! He couldn't say that. He was with . . ." He stopped suddenly. His eyes turned thoughtful. "I get it," he said softly. "It's a frame. Well

. . . " He went into action so fast that Mike was caught flat-footed. McDonald's hand whipped down to his hip and came up with his Police Positive.

"Move!" he commanded tersely. "Over to the bed."

Mike moved, but slowly, watchfully. Then McDonald broke for the door and Mike went for his gun. As his hand reached the butt, Joe threw his arms around him. McDonald was gone, racing down the hall steps.

Mike twisted savagely away from Joe, his face blazing with fury.

"What the hell's the matter with you?" he shouted. "You've let him get away. He's the killer!"

"Wait, Mike! Use your head," Joe pleaded. Something about his manner made Mike pause. "Can't you see," Joe continued, "McDonald didn't give himself away. If you'd a shot him, maybe you'd a shot the wrong guy."

"What makes you think he's the wrong guy?"

"I said *maybe*. Here's the thing we gotta do, though, Mike. He's probably gone to get Seton, figuring he tried to frame him. We've got to stop him from doing that!"

Mike pursed his lips and looked away from Joe. It was obvious he wasn't pleased with Joe's remark. Yet he admitted the good sense of it.

"Say, Burke, you're starting to use your head. You know, when I started on this with you, I thought you were a goon. Maybe you're not such a dope after all. But I'm gonna tell you this, though. From here on in, I'm workin' it my way. I think Mac did it and I'm gonna prove it. And I don't think it's gonna be so tough, either.

That was all. He turned and left. Joe watched him, indecision in his eyes. When he did make up his mind, it was too late. He sat on the bed and stared emptily at the room. Then he

noticed his shorts. They were heavily spotted with blood. Muttering a curse, he took them off and stood indecisively for a moment. The sight of his puffed up nose and patched cheek turned his thoughts to something other than McDonald and Mike. A bath—that was what he needed.

"Looks like I been in a brawl, all right," he said to himself, after a careful survey of his face. He put on a clean sport shirt and his new pair of slacks after taking his bath. He felt refreshed and invigorated. He noticed the storm had passed.

"Guess I'll take a walk. Maybe I can manage in some way to figure out what's what."

The streets were deserted. Joe was thankful for that. He wanted to think. People had a habit of intruding. He wasn't the sort of person much given to thought. He had learned the practical ways of life through years of working with people.

There was something that bothered him, the inaccessibility of Daley. Everything led to him. But Daley was a dead end street. Or was he? Maybe there was a way. . . .

"Wait a minute," Joe said aloud. "Why did Daley go through all this? Was he nuts? Did he just like to show he was a big wheel? Or was he doing it all for someone else? Well, maybe he was a little wacky. But that doesn't tie in with some of the other stuff. Could be he liked to show he was Mister Big. Then again—"

Joe was reminded of what McDonald had said: "—if Foley got hold of that note."

"That's it!" he exclaimed in sudden excitement. "Foley! Daley was just a fall-guy. Foley's the man I gotta see. Jeess, why didn't I think of that angle before? It was always stickin' right in my face."

JOE started to cross the street and came to an abrupt halt. A policeman had just come through the imposing gateway to the Foley mansion. There was something familiar about the broad, fleshy back, the rolling, sailor's gait. It was Seton.

Joe watched him turn the corner. There was a thoughtful look in his eyes. What was Seton doing at Foley's? He hadn't expected to see him there, when he decided the night before that Foley was the man who could answer the questions bothering him. Well, that was just another question Foley would have to answer.

Joe looked somewhat apprehensively at the man who had answered the summons of the door knocker. The man was certainly not the movie idea of a butler. Thick-shouldered, beetle-browed, and with a nose that had met up with numbers of padded fists, he looked more ex-pug than houseman. His voice, however, was oddly soft and deferential:

"Yes, sir?" He paused and waited for Joe to give the reason for his call.

"Is Mr. Foley in?"

"Mr. Foley can't be disturbed, sir. If you'll leave a message, I'll give it to him."

It was a polite brush-off. The pug returned Joe's look, stolidly, indifferently. But Joe saw the suspicion in the man's eyes. He could understand that suspicion. He said:

"Don't worry. I'm here to see Foley on business." There was no sign in the other's face to show he had even heard Joe.

There was an edge of temper to Joe's voice: "Well, don't stand there like a dumb ape!"

"Mr. Foley is busy, sir . . ."

"Okay! Ask him if he's too busy to see someone about Sergeant Tom Daley. If he is, tell him I'll go . . ."

Joe stopped in bewilderment. At the mention of Daley, Granite Face had bowed his head and disappeared. In a few seconds he was back.

"This way, sir," he said, opening the door wide.

THE room into which Joe was ushered was high, wide, spacious in design. An entire wall was lined with books. Joe gave the room only a cursory glance. His attention was centered on the man seated in the deep-piled barrel chair by the open French windows.

Silence filled the room. Joe turned and saw that Granite Face had left. The man in the chair gave no sign he was aware of Joe's presence. The thick carpet muffled the sound of Joe's footsteps as he moved around to confront the man who sat, eyes closed, in the chair.

Joe studied Foley for a few seconds before saying anything. He was surprised to learn that Foley was quite elderly. Somehow, he had expected a younger man. But was Foley really old? Perhaps it was the thinning gray hair. Or the way he sagged in the chair. Certainly the face bore lines of strength. Just now they were tired lines.

Joe thought back to the night before. He had passed a restaurant and was reminded that he had not eaten for hours. The counter was filled with night workers: truckers, laborers, street-car men and several waitresses from a nearby tavern. A newspaper, folded at the sport sheet, lay on the counter in front of him. He read the accounts of the day's ball games over the hamburger and coffee he ordered. About to throw it away, he noticed a column heading on an inner page. It told of John Foley's resignation from the traction committee.

He first became aware that someone was sharing the paper when a voice said:

"So John Foley resigned, eh? Well, maybe things will be a little better now."

It was a street-car conductor who had spoken. Another said:

"Yeah? So some other cut-throat'll come in. Hell, they're all alike."

Joe said: "Why, was this guy such a power?"

He learned all about Foley in that next half hour. He was a power, all right! Stronger even than the mayor, he held the strings that controlled the city's political machine. Now, as Joe confronted Foley, he saw that something was wrong. This man wasn't power. He was just a tired old man, sitting in a cold, wide room.

Foley stirred, lifting his chin off his chest. For a second, the eyes that met Joe's were bright and alive. Then they turned listless again. His voice was hoarse and held the slight burr of an Irish accent.

"Yes?"

"My name is Burke, sir," Joe began. "I want you to listen to me. It's about Sergeant Daley."

Foley said a surprising thing:

"Let the dead rest."

THE meaning of that wasn't clear to Joe. It sounded like another brush-off to him, and he didn't feel like taking it.

"Just a minute, sir," he said. "I thought Daley was a friend of yours."

"Daley wasn't a friend. He was my brother."

Joe gasped in surprise. "Jees! Then that's all the more reason you oughta be interested—"

"Wait, Burke," Foley interrupted. "I know all about you and what you're trying to do. Why don't you let mat-

ters rest? Tom's dead! Whatever he may have done is over and gone. 'Twill do no good to stir up that cup of tea."

Things were clearing in Joe's mind. Foley knew of his brother's black-mailing, may have even had a share in some of it. More likely, he had probably instigated some of it. He felt an odd sense of compassion for Foley.

"I know what you mean," he said in soft answer. "But there's one thing I can't forget. A poor dumb jerk is going to fry because I made a mistake. That's the thing I can't make come out even. No matter how much Daley deserved what he got, Dawson didn't do it. No matter how bitter that cup of tea's gonna be, someone'll hafta drink it."

Again, Foley's eyes came alive.

"You're a strange, stubborn man, Burke. A man with guts! I've always admired guts. Yes, you're just what that fat sneak who was here this morning said you'd be."

"Seton?"

"Aye. A buzzard looking for carrion meat. Well, I'm not going to help you. But I will tell you about Tom Daley. I was six when my father died. My mother married again soon afterward. Tom's father was a drunken, brawling, thieving scoundrel. But he had a charm that— Anyway Tom was their son. Mother died soon after his birth. I was only ten at the time but she made me promise to look after him. It was as though she knew what was to be.

"Even as a boy, Tom had a streak of the devil in him. A vicious streak. I thought it was something he'd grow out of. Instead, he hid it as he grew older, and only let it out when he was safe in doing so. It was strange, his wanting to be a cop. He could have asked for anything and I'd have helped him. But all he wanted to be was a cop. Later,

he told me why. He said people are afraid of police. God, he was so twisted up.

"Sure, he could've been a captain. Not Tom, though. He only wanted to be a sergeant—and be able to tell the captain what to do."

Joe realized how right Mike had been. It was just what he had said about Daley.

Foley's head had fallen forward again. His voice, strong at the beginning, was fading into a dull, monotone. Joe had to strain to hear each word.

"It's a funny thing," Foley went on, "but you take a wrong step and somehow, after a while, that step becomes the right one. Only it's still a wrong step. That's the way it was with Tom and me. I knew he was going wrong. I should've put a stop to it at the very beginning. It was too late! He had gone so far all I could do was protect him. So I became as guilty as he. More so. Because I let the monster grow."

Joe was becoming a little impatient with this. He saw that Foley was only talking to ease his own conscience. But he wasn't giving any information.

"Look, Mr. Foley," he said, "I can see why you feel the way you do. But don't you understand? An innocent man is going to the chair. You don't want that on your head, do you?"

Foley didn't answer. Desperately, Joe went on:

"It'd be so easy to prove. They didn't have any post-mortem on Daley. The bullet's still in him. All we've gotta do is get them to cut that slug out. Then Dawson'd go free. That's all I want."

It was as though the man in the chair hadn't heard. He began to talk again, in half-sentences:

"And now that fat slug, Seton . . . Tom's dead but the gravy's still there . . . he wants it now . . . the dead

don't stay that way . . . they reach out with thick, fat fingers . . . I can't, Tom . . . too much . . ." His eyes suddenly became clear and lucid. "Forget all about it," he said. "Forget Dawson and all the rest. What's done is done." Then the film descended over his eyes again. The interview was over.

MR.S. MURPHY, her face set in lines of disapproval, confronted Joe on the hall steps.

There's been a half-dozen calls for you this morning, Joe. Some man named Mike. He wants you to meet him at a tavern on State Street. Says"—she sniffed loudly—"you know where it is."

"Thanks, Mrs. Murphy," Joe mumbled, as he started for the hall door. He was beginning to feel the need for sleep. But something important must have happened, otherwise Mike wouldn't have called.

Joe knew the tavern Mike meant all right. It was the one they had gone to when first they met. Mike was sitting at the bar. A glass of whiskey was at his elbow. His face was tired, sullen, morose. His lips were pulled down at the corners.

"Where've you been? What took you so long?"

Joe plumped himself down on the next stool. He fished a crumpled pack of cigarettes from his pocket and lit one. He waved the bartender away and said:

"Brother! I'm sleepy. 'Where've I been?' To see Foley."

"You . . . saw Foley?"

"Sure. Got to thinking. I figured out what was bothering me. Daley was supposed to have a big shot for a friend. This guy Foley. Well, if he was a friend, then he was the guy to see. I figured he'd help if anyone would."

HE yawned widely. Mike was impatient to hear what had happened. He shook Joe, saying:

"C'mon! You'll sleep later. What happened?"

"Nothin'. That is, Foley won't help. But I did find out his connection with Daley. They were half-brothers."

"H'm. No wonder Daley got away with so much."

"Yeah. Reminded me of McDonald and his brother. Only in reverse. Foley knew his brother was a wrong guy. But did he do anything about it? No. And say, who do you think I saw comin' outa there, just before I got there?"

Mike's eyes were alive with interest. "Who?"

"Seton! From what I could get out of Foley, Seton wants to cash in on what he knows."

There was a grudging respect in Mike's voice. "How come Foley spilled his guts to you?"

Joe shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. Maybe he liked my Irish mug. Personally, I think he's losing his mind. At least he acts that way. But what's the excitement? Anything happen on your end?"

Mike's lips twisted wryly.

"Nothing much, except our case has blown sky-high. McDonald blew out his brains, sometime after he left us last night."

Joe gulped and hastily called for a drink.

"Yeah," Mike went on, "I hot-footed it over to Seton's. He was out and McDonald had already been there. I stuck around for a while wondering what to do. Then I decided maybe Mac got panicky and would try to blow town. So I chased up to his place. I was right. He had his bag packed and was ready to scam. I came to the door; he took one look at me and bingo—he brings out his gun and sticks it to his skull.

"The inquest is on for eleven. I've got to be there as a witness. Damn it!" he exclaimed in sudden anger, "why didn't he hold still for a while? I'd have nailed him sure. And once we'd have gotten him down to headquarters he'd have sung."

Joe swallowed his drink and said:

"Mike, you're wrong. Don't ask me how I know but you are. McDonald didn't kill Daley."

Mike's eyes narrowed speculatively. He said: "Y'know, I'm beginning to think they're right. Maybe you *are* nuts. McDonald practically gave himself away last night. Seton swears he saw Mac pull his gun when Daley started after Nolan. You didn't see the copper's face but you knew it was a cop. Hell! McDonald had the best reason for doing it. And you can't tell me different."

"Listen Mike, I'll admit McDonald had the reason. As for Seton, that fat slob's got something up his sleeve. I'm not so sure he's in the clear. From the way he's acting, I think he wants to take over where Daley left off. That gravy train would be good enough reason for murder."

"Then why did Mac kill himself? Don't you see, Mac had it figured right. He did it and he knew we knew it. So he bumps himself, knowing that would end it. We wouldn't bring up the business of his brother and Daley. That would be dirty."

Joe shook his head. He wasn't satisfied. Mike looked up, saw the clock on the wall and jumped from the stool.

"See you later," he said hastily. "Got to get over to the morgue."

Slowly, Joe clambered from his stool and followed Mike through the door. He saw him already halfway down the block, hurrying to catch a street car. He was thankful Mrs. Murphy wasn't in when he arrived at his rooming house.

He was not in the mood for questions. All he wanted was sleep. Lots of it.

IT WAS dark when he woke up. He'd fallen asleep with his clothes on, having been too tired even to disrobe. He looked dazedly about and finally went to the basin and rinsed his face.

It broke up the cobwebs of sleep. He was almost completely awake and alert when he went out again. The air, turned cool again after several days of heat, completed the work of awakening him.

He knew what he was going to do. Probably the maddest, most insane thing of his life. But he also knew it had to be done. If only Bill Storki was in the garage.

He was in luck. Storki was there, tinkering as usual with the guts of one of the blue-panelled Revere Cartage trucks.

"Hey, Bill," Joe called softly.

A grease-stained face peered from under the running board. Suspicion clouded the somewhat glassy eyes. Then recognition dawned. The face smiled, showing widely separated yellow teeth.

"Well," Bill said, "if it ain't Burke. Whatcha know, kid? Who give you the lumps?"

Joe looked all around the garage before answering. Then he squatted on his heels and whispered:

"Them? Oh, I met up with a swing-in' door. Anybody around, Bill?"

The grease-stained face regarded him with a sober look. Storki decided something was wrong. Joe Burke didn't go around whispering things. Not Joe. He was a sorta loud-mouthed guy usually. Bill rolled out from under the truck and got to his feet.

He was an extremely tall man, skinny; and his clothing was too small for his angular frame.

"C'mon in the office, Joe," he suggested.

Bill perched himself on the desk and waited for Joe, sitting deep in the office chair, to begin.

"Look Bill," he began hesitantly, "I got a favor to ask of you. And—well, it's a hell of a big favor. I ain't gonna feel bad if—"

Bill waved a big-knuckled hand in Joe's direction.

"Shoot!" he commanded. "There ain't no favor *you* could ask that'd be too big. Think I forgot what *you* did for the Storki family? My old lady'd be dead, wasn't for your blood. Well," he prodded Joe, "what's eatin' you?"

"Okay, Bill. I knew I could depend on you. But get this: no questions."

Storki waited patiently for Joe to get to the point.

"Here's what I want you to do. I'm gonna be here tomorrow night—at eleven—and we're gonna borrow one of the panel trucks. Then you and I are gonna drive it to where I tell you and we're gonna pick somethin' up there. Now here's where I need your help. Do you still have the keys to that warehouse down on North Avenue?"

"Yeah."

"Well, we're makin' a delivery down there tomorrow night."

"But, Joe, that joint's used only for cold storage."

"I know," Joe replied. "That's why I picked it."

Bill looked at him wordlessly. Then, shrugging his high, narrow shoulders, he said:

"I told you, it's all right by me. I'll be ready."

THAT night Joe slept deeply and without dreams. It was almost noon before he awakened. Leisurely

he dressed and had his breakfast at the small restaurant on the corner. Then he took a street car downtown, his goal the Public Library.

The half-hour he spent there answered the first part of a question. A telephone call he made answered the second part. He was ready for his rendezvous with Bill.

He started to take in a movie, then remembered that George, the next policeman on the list, patrolled a beat at the lower end of the downtown district.

"Might as well see what he's got to say," Joe thought. "Maybe he can fill in some of this wacky story."

It proved to be a simple matter, meeting George. Joe was standing on a corner, debating with himself which street to take, when a hand descended on his shoulder. He turned to meet a pair of smiling brown eyes.

"Hello, Burke, how're you feeling?" the uniformed officer asked.

"God damn it!" Joe swore. "Why is it everybody seems to know me and I don't know anyone?"

It had occurred to Joe, as he was standing on the corner, that there might be more than one policeman on that beat. And he didn't know George.

George, a handsome, red-cheeked officer, whose neatly pressed uniform was startlingly new, smiled good-naturedly at Joe's outburst.

"Hell, Burke, I oughta know you. Who do you think picked you up off the sidewalk in front of Dawson's and put you in the ambulance?"

A feeling of warmth made its way into Joe's stomach. So this was the cop who had taken him to the hospital. He looked at him with open-faced curiosity.

"So you're the guy," he said. "Well, you're the guy I've been wantin' to meet. Any place around here we can

talk for a few minutes?"

A TAVERN down the block provided a more cooling atmosphere than the street corner. They settled themselves comfortably over a couple of beers.

"Listen, George," Joe started off, "I hope you don't mind if I ask you a couple of questions."

"Go ahead."

"I mean, they might sound like goofy questions?"

"I said go ahead."

"Well—tell me all about that Nolan raid."

George looked his surprise at the question. He started to say something, thought better of it, and answered Joe's request.

"Okay, Burke. We were in the squad room when the call came through. Sergeant Daley, who was my boss, came in on the run and told us Nolan had been tailed to a hideout. We all got in the wagon and shot out there. You remember Dawson's place?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I, being the rookie, had Swanson for a partner, he being the oldest man there. If you remember, there was a ten-foot space between the house and the garage, at the side. Swany took one side and I the other. I was at the back. At the front were Seton and McDonald; poor guy."

Joe understood why George said that. The thought of McDonald sidetracked George for an instant. His face became more serious as he continued.

"Anyhow, Daley and Ritter took the rear. On the way over Swany told me all about this Nolan. But you know about him."

"No, I don't," Joe said. "But I'll tell you about that later."

George had started to drink his beer when Joe made his startling statement.

Carefully he put the glass down.

"Go on," Joe begged. "I'll tell you, when you're through."

"Okay," George said, continuing. "This Nolan was a wrong guy. Mixed up in all kinds of things. What we wanted him for was murder. Somebody put the finger on him. And the stoolies tipped us off he was workin' with this Dawson guy on hot whiskey. So there we were.

"Well, Daley hollered for Nolan to come out. I and Swany had the shotguns because there was lots of cover between the house and garage and in a cross-fire, we'd be sure to get anyone coming that way. The way it turned out, we didn't even use 'em.

"We waited for maybe half a minute. Then Daley hollered again. Only this time he said he was coming in to get Nolan. I guess he must have started, 'cause—wham, wham—Nolan and Dawson let go. Then there was the sound of more firing, this time from the side. Then Swany saw a curtain move up in the second story on our side. But before he could let go, whoever was up there scrambled.

"Next thing I know, Nolan is hot-footing it out the back and Daley's after him. There's a couple of shots. Daley falls and I'm halfway out to where the excitement is. Ritter's climb-in' through the window after Dawson. He'd just plugged him. Seton's bending over Daley, and McDonald is chasing Nolan. Then I see you. You're laying on the sidewalk, about fifty feet to one side of the house. I run over and see that you've been hit. When I lifted your head, you mumbled, 'I saw him shoot that cop.'"

WERE you the one who rode in the ambulance with me?" Joe asked.

"Yep."

"Did you say something to the intern?"

"Yeah. I told him to take care of you. That you saw the shooting."

"So you were the guy who was talking!" Joe half leaped from the booth in his excitement. "I knew it! And I was beginning to think I was nuts. Did you know that because of that crack on the head I was in a daze all through the trial. I don't remember *anything* that happened at the trial."

George looked at him quizzically.

"Well," he said, "there wasn't much for you *to* remember. You were a surprise witness and came on the last day of the trial. Of course, you were on the stand all afternoon. Man! Barkman did his best to shake you loose from your story, but no soap. Then he had the Doc on the stand the next day and you again on cross-examination. But all you'd say was you saw Dawson shoot. That was enough, after Colson made Dawson admit he might have done it. Jeesh! Didn't the jerk know he was cooking his own goose by saying that?"

"But Dawson didn't—" Joe began, then stopped. What was the use of going into that again? The only one who had believed him was Mike, and he was convinced McDonald had done it. He looked up to find George regarding him intently.

"Guess I'll take in a movie," Joe remarked, getting up.

"Yeah, don't blame you. This damned heat! Wish I could go along," George said enviously.

Joe stood outside of the tavern dragging in slow, contemplative puffs at a cigarette. George had gone about his business. Joe leaned against the window and speculated on this latest development. George's disclosure had eliminated two men, Swanson and himself. The cop who shot Daley had

used a pistol. Now Joe realized how hopeless his quest had been from the beginning. Even the one little thing he knew had no meaning.

Then he thought of the work he was to do that night. He sighed explosively. He knew he was asking for trouble. And for what? For all he knew, Mike was right. Certainly he couldn't give a better explanation for McDonald's suicide.

Once again he brought up in his mind's eye the scene of the killing. Unconsciously, he spoke aloud:

"Let's see now. Swanson and George at the side of the house. Seton and McDonald at the front. And Daley and Ritter at the . . . Ritter? Riley, he meant, I guess, at the back. Well, when he got there, Daley was dead. And Riley, Seton and McDonald were all at the back. So I'm right where I was at the beginning. Let's hope I get lucky tonight."

BILL STORKI grinned slyly at Joe, as Joe expertly backed the small truck out of the garage.

"What's the angle, Joe? Where we goin'?"

Joe's lips twisted wryly.

"It ain't funny, where we're goin'! Nope. There's nothin' funny about any of this."

That was all Bill could get out of him. Joe had figured it right. The last driver pulled in about nine. Giving the man an hour to check, he figured eleven would be the earliest he could get there and be certain of not being seen by anyone but Bill. He also knew the truck had to be back in the garage by four in the morning, when the first of the morning shift showed up.

They had been driving for a half hour. Bill had been looking out his window. He looked worried.

"Hey, where we goin'? Joliet? An-

other ten minutes, we hit the city limits."

"That's right, Bill. That's where it is."

"But all's out there is cemeteries."

"Smart boy."

"Huh?"

"Never mind. We'll be there soon."

It was a cemetery where Joe finally stopped the truck. The eight-foot stone wall loomed ghost-like in the half-light of a cloud-obscured moon. Joe shut off the lights and got out.

He looked up and down the dimly lit street, both to get his bearings and to make sure there were no stray passersby to observe his actions.

"Okay, Bill, get the shovels," he commanded, satisfied they were unobserved.

"What do we do now, Joe?" Bill asked after they had clambered over the wall. His voice was hushed and held an accent of strain. It was obvious that courage and superstition were holding a brief but tremulous fight in his breast.

Joe's face, too, was strained as he answered in a tight voice:

"We're gonna dig up a stiff that's here."

"Holy Moses!"

"Never mind that. Let's go."

A slender beam of light came to life and preceded them as they slowly walked past the silent graves. Every now and then Joe paused and stooped to peer at the ground. His flashlight revealed small, circular stone markers, set in the ground. The markers had numbers stamped on their surfaces.

That had been the reason for his visit to the Public Library. He knew that the obituary columns would show the place of interment. Then he had called the cemetery and learned the location of the grave. It had not occurred to him, while reading the papers, to read the account of the trial.

IT DIDN'T take them long to find the grave. A simple headstone marked it. For the first time since entering the cemetery, Joe had an attack of nerves. Misgivings at his proposed deed seized him. Suppose they were caught? There was no legitimate excuse for their being there. He looked fearfully about, an action in which Bill Storki was a whole-hearted supporter. But if there were watchmen on the prowl, they were in another part of the huge, park-like cemetery.

"C'mon, Joe," Bill demanded shakily, "let's get goin'. This business is gettin' my goat."

Joe agreed silently.

For the next ten minutes there was only the plopping sounds of earth falling from their shovels and the "chunk" of the shovels as they bit into the clay-like earth. Then Joe struck the casket and the back-breaking part of their job began. Time after time they had the casket part way out, only to have it fall back into the hole. Each time it fell, there was a thud which could be heard for several yards. The moon had disappeared completely and Joe dare not risk the flashlight.

Finally, by dint of almost super human effort, they brought the casket to the surface. Sweating, they regarded the casket with feelings bordering on awe.

"Jees, Joe," Bill quavered, "we're grave robbers."

"Too late to think about that. It's done! Now, let's get the hell-and-gone out of here."

Joe was thankful Daley's grave wasn't far from that part of the wall over which they'd clambered. The casket seemed to weigh a ton. It took them a good fifteen minutes to travel the hundred yards.

Bill leaned weakly against the wall and gasped:

"Wait! Let's rest. I'm pooped, Joe."

But Joe was not having any. The risks involved were too great. A watchman might appear at any second.

"C'mon Bill," he commanded. "Another ten minutes and it's done. Besides this is the easy part."

It was, too.

Joe had brought not only shovels but a heavy, wide plank and a thick rope. They placed the plank solidly against the earth and set it at an inclined position against the wall. Then they upended the casket onto the plank. While Joe made the rope tight around the hand grips, Bill clambered over the wall and, receiving the loose end of the rope, attached it to the truck gate. Then he drove slowly and carefully, under Joe's direction, until the casket rested on top of the wall.

Joe then heaved the plank over the wall and released the rope, allowing it to play out only a little at a time, until the casket was lowered to the street. Their job was done. It took only a minute more to put it into the truck.

Joe looked at his hands on the steering wheel. They were shaking, as with ague. He felt a muscle jumping in his cheek. And then, from the dark stillness of the cemetery, a voice shouted at them. The truck leaped forward, as from a catapult.

JOE dropped Bill a block from the garage after taking the warehouse keys from him.

"Hell, Joe," Bill said, "I might as well go through with the rest of this."

"No, that's all right. I've got a hand truck in there. It'll be easy getting into the warehouse," Joe said.

The garage wasn't very far from Joe's rooming house and he decided to walk home. He was a little afraid of being seen. His nerves were still jumpy

from what he'd been through and there was little likelihood that he would meet anyone at this hour of the morning.

He started to mount the steps of his home, when a voice called to him from the darkness of the house next to his. He whirled at the unexpected sound, fright heavy in his chest. It was Mike.

The tall figure sauntered casually toward him. "Where ya been, Joe? Kinda late to be moochin' around."

Joe's answer was a poor attempt at being at ease.

"Oh, with some friends, Mike. What's new?"

"Nothin' much. Goin' up?"

Joe wanted to say "no" but realized he was in the middle no matter what answer he gave. His "yes" was brusque, but if Mike noticed it, he gave no indication.

"Mind if I come in?"

"Why so polite?" Joe asked. "Hell! You know you're always welcome."

"Maybe I won't be this time."

Joe sent him a glance of suspicion. But Mike only stood there, waiting for Joe to precede him up the stairs.

JOE'S room seemed insufferably hot, and the sight of the tall, melancholic detective, dressed as always in somber clothing, only made Joe feel warmer.

"Hell's bells!" he exploded. "You *have* to go around dressed like a preacher?"

"Matter, Joe? Too much coffee?"

Joe didn't answer. Instead he removed his T shirt with almost frantic haste, his dirty hands leaving black finger marks on the sweaty, light-colored cloth. Mike's eyes took in the marks in a flickering, appraising glance.

"Been diggin' ditches, Joe?"

Joe twisted about at the question. His eyes glinted angrily.

"Say! What is this—a third de-

gree?"

"No," Mike answered softly. "This isn't. But you might get one."

"What does *that* mean?"

"Just this. And don't say I didn't warn you. You saw George this afternoon. Well, you must have acted a little screwy. Because he was talkin' about it in the squad room. Someone else said you must be nuts—just as Lieutenant Parks walked in. He wanted to know what it was all about. And who do you think put the bee in Parks' ear? Our fat friend—Seton. He said, 'Why don't they pick that guy up? He oughta be put in the nuthouse.' I didn't like the way Parks looked when Seton said that."

Joe's anger boiled over in shouted, storming words.

"So they think I'm nuts, huh? Well, I'll show 'em! When they read tomorrow's papers they'll see who's nuts! I've got an angle nobody can pass by. I told you I'd do it my way! Well, it's done! I was all mixed up before. But now I'm straight. All you guys got the wrong angle. Yeah, you too! You'll see."

Mike's eyes glowed with strange, cold fires.

"What happened?"

"I'm through talkin'! From now on it's action!"

"So? Well, if you don't want to talk—guess there's nothin' I can do."

"Right."

Mike's lean, hungry-looking face held only blankness at Joe's sharp-voiced anger. Yet Joe had the odd feeling that behind that blank look lay—hate! Several minutes passed after Mike's departure before he was able to shake off that feeling. It was only when he caught the reflection of his face in the mirror above the washstand that he understood.

"No wonder Mike looked at me like

that!" he whispered aloud. This face staring back at him couldn't be his! Those eyes, sunk into soot-lined hollows, glittering as with fever, couldn't be *his*. *His* cheeks had never held lines like the gashes of a knife. That pale, moist grayness wasn't *his* skin!

He scrubbed the lather into his face furiously, as though that would eradicate what he saw. Not content with that alone, he subjected his whole body to a punishing scrubbing. But no matter how hard he scrubbed, the glitter remained in his eyes. He had been Death's companion for several hours and the memory of it would not leave him.

He started to dress again and noticed the time. It was exactly two. He looked again to make sure. He found it hard to believe only three hours had gone by since he started out with Bill in the truck. It seemed more like three years. It was too early to go to the newspaper he had in mind.

Wearily, he lay down on the hot bed and almost immediately fell asleep.

SERGEANT CROSS yawned. He wished in a weary sort of way that the long night would come to an end. Three o'clock, and not a damned thing had happened all night. Then the phone rang.

He picked up the receiver, covering another yawn with a broad, fleshy palm. . . .

"What?" he bawled. "No! Well, stay there until I send someone down!"

Grave robbers! Tom Daley's body stolen! With frantic haste he signalled the squad room.

. . . Mike hung up the receiver thoughtfully. So that was where Joe had been. He massaged the stubble on his chin with long strokes of his fingers. There was a look bordering on relief in his eyes.

Lieutenant Parks looked up from the report he was making out.

"Looks like our friend Burke has really blown his top," Mike said.

"What you mean?"

"Report just came over the wire someone stole Daley's body!"

Parks looked dumbfounded. "Someone stole . . . What's this you're giving me?"

"Yeah. Maybe you don't know this but I've sort of been keeping an eye on Burke. And what Seton said yesterday is right. I think Burke is off his nut. He came home at two this morning. He looked, and acted, scared. Like he'd been doing something wrong. Then he started talking crazy: he was going to the papers with something. I noticed his hands were dirty, and so were his pants. Now we get this report. What else can it add up to?"

Parks blew up.

"Damn him!" he yelled. "I'm tired of Burke and his meddling."

"So?"

"What do you mean—'so'? I'm going to have that screwball locked up. That's what. And what a workout I'm going to give that cookie *before* I lock him up."

"Mind if I make a suggestion?"

"Go ahead."

"Burke thinks I'm his friend, see. Let me go up there. If he's really blown his top he might do something desperate and someone'd get hurt. This way I'm sure I can get him to talk. What's more I'll bring him in quiet as a lamb."

"Okay. But don't take any chances. If he makes a move for a gun let him have it."

JOE started to turn over and the knock was repeated.

"Who's there?" he called.

"Mike."

"What the hell do *you* want?"

"Open up, Joe. I gotta talk to you."

Joe scrambled out of bed, opened the door and blearily regarded Mike.

"Well?"

"Look Joe, you can't get away with stuff like you pulled tonight."

"What stuff?"

"Digging up Daley's body and hiding it."

The bleary look left Joe's eyes. How had they found out so fast? Or was Mike just shooting in the dark?

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

Mike was patient. "Let's cut out the con, Joe."

Joe said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Do you know why I came up here instead of the squad Parks wanted to send? Because if they ever got you in that little room they have down there, they'd beat you silly. And don't think you wouldn't talk."

"Okay," Joe said quietly, "So I did take it."

"That's better Joe. What did you do with it?"

"Guess."

"No games, Joe. This is serious. I got orders to bring you in. And I'd rather do it the easy way."

"Won't do you any good, Mike."

But Mike was through listening. "What do you think you're going to gain by this? I can tell you. A beating. And that's all. . . ."

"Hold it, Mike. I know what I did pulling this stunt. And I'm ready to take my medicine. But first . . ."

"Yes?"

". . . I'm going to finish what I started. I'm going to a paper with my story."

"Sorry, Joe," Mike said. His hand went under his jacket and came out with a gun. He held it low, alongside his thigh, the muzzle pointing its dark

menace at Joe's chest. Casually, he flipped it twice around his index finger.

Joe stared in fixed fascination at the gun. He backed slowly away until the back of his legs touched the bed:

"So . . . *you* killed Daley."

MIKE grinned. For the first time Joe noticed that Mike's grin never quite reached his eyes.

"Smart boy," Mike said grimly. "You finally guessed right. Not that it's gonna do you any good. I was gonna bring you in alive but now . . ."

It was funny, Joe thought: being afraid was just like being frozen. His body seemed numb, incapable of movement. Only his brain was alive. It kept repeating over and over: "Mike killed Daley! Mike killed Daley!" Joe's lips twisted against his teeth. "Well," he gritted through his set lips, "why don't you shoot? Or do you want me to turn my back, like Daley?"

"Don't rush me. I got time. Sit down, Joe."

Joe sat. He knew it was just a respite from certain death. But it meant a few moments longer of life; time in which to think, maybe to act. "Tell me, Joe," Mike said, "how'd you guess it was me?"

Joe's shoulders slumped in weariness. All this had been goofy from the beginning. Why hadn't he forgotten about the whole thing? Everybody had told him to lay off. And this was to be the outcome. Death.

Again Mike asked, "How'd you guess it was me?"

Joe's head lifted. There was a spark of something deep in his eyes.

"I didn't guess it. I *knew!*"

"Yeah? How?"

"Remember what you did when you pulled the gun on me?"

"No-o."

"You twirled it around your fingers,

like them cowboys do in the movies. Maybe you got to doing it so much it became a habit. So you don't even remember doing it. But I did. It was the only thing I remember clearly. I'd forgotten it until just a second ago. That cop standing up . . . pointing his gun at Daley's back . . . and then twirling the gun around twice before pulling the trigger."

"So that was it. Who'd think . . . Oh well, it won't make much difference now."

"Mike, would you mind answering a few questions?"

"Go ahead, ask."

"What's your last name?"

"Ritter."

"You know, even after George mentioned your name, I didn't get it. I thought he meant Riley. But Riley was there, too. Where was he?"

"He was the wagon driver."

Joe laughed at that. The sound was so unexpected Mike brought the gun to bear on Joe again. Joe only laughed the louder.

"What's so funny about that?" Mike snarled.

"Me! Thinkin' I'm Dick Tracy. Why, you were right there at the end of my nose all the time, and I couldn't see you. Jeesh, what a dope I was! I shoulda known there was something fishy in the way you hung around all the time."

"**Y**OU weren't so dumb, Joe," Mike said. "I was just lucky. That is for a while. Then luck began to change. No matter how many bum steers I gave you, no matter how I tried to lead you off the track, that Irish stubbornness of yours kept you plugging." Mike sighed in exasperation. "Damn it. I figured the McDonald business would shut you up. I was wrong, as usual. Of course, when you pulled what you did tonight,

there was nothing else for me to do.”

“You’re right,” Joe said thoughtfully. “You *were* lucky. Seems like everybody had a reason for killing Daley; everybody but you. Everyone putting the pressure on me to lay off. Everyone but you. Still . . . Look Mike, it doesn’t make any difference now. *Why* did you do it?”

“Sure, I’ll tell you,” Mike said agreeably. There was an odd look of satisfaction in his eyes. As though he was content with the way things had worked out. “I’ve been a copper for seventeen years. Daley was my boss all those years. Here’s something you didn’t know. No one could get a transfer from his squad. He’d come up to me in that snotty way of his and say, ‘You’ll have to be smarter than you are to get to be a dick, Ritter.’ Hell! I was a smarter cop than him or anyone else. You know what used to burn me up?”

“No, what?”

“I’d go to Parks . . . try to get him to put in a good word. Think he would? Nah. He’d say, ‘You gotta do something smart to be a dick.’ Ha, ha. So I shot Daley. That was smart enough for him.”

Joe was looking at him wide-eyed. “Sure,” he said, “when I first saw you Parks was telling you that’s why he made you a dick. That’s why you were in plain clothes. I remembered that a uniformed cop killed Daley. You were wearing a uniform the night he was killed; by the time the trial was over, you were promoted to plain clothes. And you say I wasn’t dumb. I should of remembered that. But is that the only reason?”

“What’s the matter, isn’t that enough? Seventeen years of being held down . . . of never being given a chance?” Mike’s voice had started to rise.

Quickly, Joe cut in, “Yeah, I get it. But how come no one mentioned your name all this time?”

“I told you I was lucky. The three men who had the best reason for doing it were there. And here you come noseying around, asking questions that were going to cause trouble. People talk about coincidence. There it was. Three men, all of them hating Daley enough to kill him if given the opportunity. And then it was there; but none of them had murder in his heart.”

“What about McDonald?” asked Joe. He stood up and started toward Mike.

“Siddown,” Mike rasped.

Joe sat. But not in the same spot he had occupied before.

Mike smiled. “Again coincidence. That raid we pulled let me get my hands on those papers. And then McDonald shows up here. My luck was still good. Only you didn’t quite go for it.”

THE numb feeling had passed. Now Joe found he was sweating. If only Mike would stand up.

But Mike was still talking; “So I trot down to Mac’s.” He grinned into Joe’s tightly drawn face. “No, I didn’t kill him,” he said. “Mac really committed suicide. Maybe it’d been better if he hadn’t. Then all this wouldn’t have to be.” He stopped talking then and Joe knew it was the payoff. But Mike was still sitting. He *had* to stand.

“Wait, Mike,” he begged. “Daley’s body. I haven’t told you where it is yet. What good—”

“Shut up!” Mike said softly. The spark in his eyes had become a flame, burning bright in madness. “Stand up, Joe,” he commanded in a low voice. At the same time Mike arose.

It was the moment Joe had been waiting for. His body bent forward as he started to arise. And then his hands

were pulling frantically at the carpet runner beside the bed.

Mike's feet slid out from under him. Simultaneously his finger tightened around the trigger. There was a loud booming sound of the gun, the scorching burn of pain across Joe's side and then he was on top of Mike, wrestling for the gun.

"Gotcha!" he gasped, as he staggered to his feet.

Mike rolled over and sat erect. The flame in his eyes had died. They were empty, glassy-looking eyes now.

Joe backed away until there was a healthy space between them. His knuckles were white, so fiercely did he grip the gun. Then there was the sound of voices outside the door and Mrs. Murphy and several of the roomers appeared in the doorway.

"Get the cops," was all that Joe

said. . . .

LIEUTENANT Parks was a very bewildered policeman. Mike, sullen and still, sat on the floor. Joe sat on the bed, a gauze bandage taped to his side. He still held the gun.

"What's this all about?" Parks asked.

Joe told him. It only made Parks more bewildered.

"You got me, Burke," he said when Joe finished. "I don't know whether . . . No, I guess you know what you're saying. But I'll tell you this, Burke, you're just a fool for luck."

"Why?"

"Because Ritter uses steel-jacketed bullets. So all Daley had in him were two bullet holes . . . front and back. There wasn't any bullet *in* him."

THE END

THE PATRIOTIC SMUGGLER

By H. R. STANTON

WHEN smuggling tales are told, the name of Jean LaFitte stands out as champion of them all. Complete books have been written about his escapades. DeMille has immortalized him for the movie-going public. Jean came into the world in 1780 in Bordeaux, France. The Revolution was in full swing as he grew into adolescence, and by the time he was fifteen his appetite for adventure got the best of him. He ran away from home, only to be retrieved by his enraged father.

The second time Jean ran away, he enlisted on the British frigate "Fox" and sailed away from his native shore. Soon tiring of the regimented life on a British ship he deserted and found a place on a ship going to Cartagena. It took him to the Spanish colonies in the Caribbean, where he fell under the spell of this rich western land.

Rebellions and armed conflict between the natives and their Spanish overlords made life more exciting than the young LaFitte had ever seen it. He became active in the thick of it. As a privateer, adventures came at him thick and fast. He was a pirate sailing under a legal cloud of authority, that of the particular nation at war with the ships attacked. Amazing tales are told of his feats, but where the truth ends and fable begins, no one really knows.

The people who first knew Jean LaFitte in New Orleans knew him as a blacksmith. Jean and Pierre, his brother, owned the smithy shop together but were never seen doing the work themselves. At the hammers and forge were negro laborers. Patrons of the shop noticed that none of the workers remained very long; those who drifted away were always quickly replaced. There was talk in the town that wealthy plantation owners were being supplied with slaves smuggled into the country by the LaFitte brothers, and those who thought so were probably right.

The people of New Orleans did not make a habit of asking questions about their friends. The LaFitte brothers enjoyed a great deal of popularity because of Jean's dashing appearance and the lavish entertainments the brothers sponsored. As time wore on, their prosperity increased and a new shop was opened. It housed wonderful silks and china, choice handiwork from all parts of the globe. The shop was located on Royal Street, a fashionable spot between Bienville Street and St. Louis Street, and it became a meeting place for the wealthy belles and matrons of the region.

Where Jean LaFitte gathered his stock of rare items could only be guessed at by his admiring customers. The local authorities were well aware of his shady connections with slave traders, pri-

vateers and smugglers, but they found it hard to prove that he was the agent for all the contraband which drifted into the district.

The principal group of smugglers with whom he dealt had their headquarters on two islands known as Grand Terre and Grande Isle. They were hidden from the inhabitants of New Orleans by a secret trail through vast swamps and a maze of creeks. When trouble broke out between the various bandit factions camped there, Jean LaFitte came in and took over their enterprizes lock, stock, and barrel. He coolly appointed himself as their leader, and before long he had established himself securely in that position.

LaFITTE now operated openly in New Orleans, closing the blacksmith's shop and selling his black loot openly in the streets at regularly advertised auction sales. Governor Claiborne felt that the time had come for the U. S. Government to step in. But, unfortunately, every one of the Governor's valiant efforts met with failure. The people of New Orleans openly flaunted his decrees and filled the smuggler's pockets with gold. A proclamation offering a reward of five hundred dollars for bringing Jean LaFitte to justice, was quickly followed by tragedy and a terse joke. A constable tried to earn the reward, and was shot.

Then two days later, another proclamation was found posted side by side with that of Governor Claiborne's. This was signed by Jean LaFitte and it offered a reward of fifteen hundred dollars to the man who could deliver the Governor himself into the hands of the smugglers at Grand Terre!

Claiborne's attempt to raise an army to attack the smugglers in the hideout met with failure for very obvious reasons. He applied to the state legislature for funds; most of its members had intimate dealings with LaFitte and his men, so it was in their interest to see to it that no funds were allotted for that purpose. At every turn, the Governor's efforts met with only rebukes and ridicule.

The LaFitte brothers made merry at Claiborne's expense, continually flaunting their lawlessness before him. There was but one episode in their entire career which helps to balance the scales somewhat, and prove that these men had at least one honorable streak in them. In 1814 Jean LaFitte offered to work for his country instead of against it.

His offer came at the time when America was in dire need of assistance. She was waging a war against England. The commander of the British forces in Mexico offered Jean LaFitte thirty thousand dollars if he and his men would fight on their side. The smugglers were promised free

pardons for any offenses already committed, together with British protection. The only alternative was death.

LaFitte attempted to play his hand artfully. He politely asked for ten days in which to think the matter over, and the captain granted the request. Immediately, LaFitte contacted the Governor, sent him the captain's letter as proof, and offered the services of he and his men against the British. Claiborne thought that this was part of a hoax, regarding the news as false and the letter a forgery. Instead of accepting the smugglers' aid, he sent part of the American fleet to take over the islands. Very little material damage was done, as only two shots were fired. The smugglers escaped leaving half a dozen ships and a hundred thousand pounds worth of loot behind. When the English ships arrived, the scene had been cleared of Americans and smugglers both.

WHILE the British menace to New Orleans grew at an alarming pace, Jean LaFitte and his band of five hundred bided their time at Last Island, in hiding. Rumors reached Jean's ears that fifteen thousand British soldiers had left Ireland for New Orleans.

General Jackson was well aware of the fact that he was in dire need of reinforcements. At this crucial moment, Jean LaFitte took the initiative. Men were wanted. He had five hundred of them. Ammunition was wanted. He had a cache concealed on his island. He also figured that the 7,500 flints for flint-lock muskets might come in handy. With bold strides he marched into the headquarters of General Jackson, in Royal Street, and made his offer once more.

This time he was accepted. And it was largely through the very brave action of his men in battle that New Orleans was saved. They were granted pardons for their smuggling charges, and an entire nation was grateful.

Shortly afterwards, the LaFitte brothers vanished from public view, and there is little or no record remaining which can clear up the mystery of where they went. In 1826 the name of LaFitte appeared in a Baltimore newspaper alluding to the death of one of the brothers, but failing to state which one. It read:

"LaFitte, the Noted Pirate, Killed. A British sloop of war fell in with and captured a piratical vessel with a crew of sixty men, under the command of the famous LaFitte. He joisted the bloody flag and refused quarter and fought until nearly every man was killed or wounded—LaFitte being among the former."

And that was the last that was ever heard of Jean LaFitte, pirate, smuggler, and patriot.

IN THE AUGUST MAMMOTH MYSTERY
 ★ **THE CUCKOO CLOCK** ★
 By MILTON K. OZAKI
 One of the Best Detective Novels You Ever Read!



It appeared that a lot of people wanted to get rid of Gil. The one drawback to that was his refusal to cooperate



THIS CAN'T LAST FOREVER

By DALE CLARK

"GIL, you're wanted on the phone," Barbara said. She didn't have to open the private office door to tell me.

"It's Pete Storm," she said, looking at me carefully.

She wanted to see how I'd take it. She saw, all right.

She said, "Gil, be nice to him."

"I won't spit in his eyes," I promised.

"Not over the phone."

"Gil!"

"Oh, okay, put him on, Bra-bra."

"When you call me that, leer, darn you," she said, smiling happily. She had that look on her face they get when

they've talked you into something—for your own good. It's woman nature, and Barbara is all woman and a yard around where they measure a perfect 36.

The typewriter in the other office across the hall had stopped beating, and I knew Eddie Nichols was looking at her through his doorway. And not missing much, that guy.

"Just close your door when you go," I said.

She closed it, but I could hear her heels going down the hallway. I didn't hear Nichols going back to writing his reports or his letter to his wife or whatever it was he had to do on the machine.

I picked up the phone and said loudly, "Hello, New York, oh sure, reverse the charges to me," and then there was the click as I was really plugged in by Barbara at the board, and I said: "Baltic speaking."

A man's voice said, "Hold on and I'll connect you with Lieutenant Storm."

Pete Storm's voice was hearty. "Well, well, well, Bally, so you're out of the Army and back among us again."

"That's right."

"I saw in the papers where you got shot up. That's tough, but it's good to have you back. All in one piece, I hope?"

"I've got all my pieces," I said. "One to spare in fact. Well, it was nice of you to give me the buzz. Thank's a lot—"

He interrupted, "We'll have to get together, have lunch."

"We'll do that sometime." I thought it would be a long time.

He said, "No, I mean it. Look, how about today. I want to take you to the Sky Room."

Then I knew he was after something, and he wanted it bad.

WHEN I opened the door, Eddie Nichols lifted his tight little face over his typewriter in his frosted glass walled room. He said, "Oh, Mr. Baltic. About long-distance calls either of us make, I think it'd be best if we deposited the amount of the charges with Miss Drew right away—"

"What gave you the idea I was making a long distance call?"

He blushed and said, "I didn't mean that, I was just speaking generally."

I told him, "About any calls I make, you and I are going to have an arrangement. You keep your big ears out of them."

It was a screwy, silly set-up, anyway. I had an office in the Legal Building before the war, and I had three or four men working out of it, off and on. That was before the war. It was different now. I had to start all over again, and it was Barbara's idea that Eddie Nichols would be glad to have me pay half the rent and half her salary.

Nichols was the guy she'd gone to work for when I closed my office in '41. Nichols called himself a detective: he did collection agency, skip-trace work.

When I got out in front, I told Barbara, "After this, close the door means close his door."

She said, "I hope you've got all that out of your system. I hope you won't go and quarrel with Lieutenant Storm."

I suppose she went and told Nichols they'd have to be patient with me and my war nerves.

PETE STORM is a lad I went to school with—police school. I'll never forget the day, in Judo class, he broke my left arm. He won't forget it, either. That was the day I jumped up from the mat and put the wrinkle across his nose.

He was in plainclothes with the tail of a brown holster showing under his coat. He grabbed my hand and said, "Golly, Bally, the war hasn't changed you a bit."

Life on the home front hadn't changed him a bit, either. Of course, he'd been promoted. His forehead went back maybe a little farther to meet the silky, light-brown, curly hair. But there wasn't any gray in it, nor had he grown a double chin to soften his jaw, and his handshake still felt as if he could tear a telephone book in two.

"How did they happen to let you go?" he asked.

"I slipped the medical officers fifty bucks apiece."

"Ha-ha-ha," he said, looking down to see whether I had a patented leg down there.

"No," I said, "the Krauts sometimes used wooden dum-dums that go to pieces in you. I seem to have something wrong with a kidney."

The Sky Room is on top of the *El Rey* hotel, and he'd reserved a table next to a plate glass picture window with a bird's eye view of Camino City spread under us. I ordered chicken salad and a slice off a turkey's breast, spaghetti, and a bottle of Mexican beer, and waited for Pete to say what he wanted.

He said: "Ammo is tricky and dangerous—all that war stuff. We had a case last week. A fellow named Rex E. Poland was horsing around with a souvenir Jap hand grenade. He killed himself."

"It was in the papers."

Pete Storm studied. "Yeah. By the way, Mrs. Poland keeps coming in to see me. She's coming in again this afternoon. I can't do a damned thing for her. I thought I might send her around to see you, if you're not too busy."

"What's she keep coming after?"

"She's got an idea he was bumped."

So a Lieutenant of Homicide was sending her around to see me—a private dick. It should happen when the M.D.'s start sending their patients around to witch doctors.

I asked: "What would I do in a set-up like that?"

He said: "Charge her a couple of hundred bucks and take a load off her mind. She can afford it, and she'd feel better. She won't take my word for it that her husband's death was accidental. She acts like she thinks I'd fix a murder, ha-ha. She wants to have a private investigation made, and you might as well have her money as the next one, Bally."

I thought about it. "She's not very bright, if she thinks what you say. And if she'd hire an 'independent investigator' you handpicked for her."

He said, laughing, "Oh, she won't know I handpicked you. It'll be fixed—you leave that part to me."

I didn't like the sound of it. This was because I knew there was something behind all this he wasn't telling. He could have dug up other guts who'd have taken her cash and told her Rex E. Poland wasn't murdered.

"Okay?" he asked.

I thought some more, and hard.

"I can't keep the woman from coming in to see me," I said. "It depends on what I think of her story. I might say yes and I might say no. If it's yes, I'll be working for her—and not for you birds in the police department."

NOTHING came of it that day, or the next, but Wednesday after lunch Barbara said:

"Surprise! You've got an appointment with a Mrs. Poland at 11 Hermitage Circle at four-thirty. Gil, you'd better get a haircut and I like

your grey suit better, too."

I went out and got the hair-cut—and I had the barber pour most of a bottle of bayrum over my head. You could smell me a block away and down wind.

It was a pretty good gag, and the look on Barbara's face was worth it. Well, I've seen funnier gags, and she didn't take it too well. But before the war, she wouldn't have told me I needed a haircut.

I told her, "Okay, quit leading me around by the hand. It wasn't diapers I wore over there."

Eddie Nichols came steaming out of his office. He called me a no-good, and said, "Can't you see she's only trying to help you get back on your feet? That's a hell of a way to talk to a girl who's done all for a man she's done for you. I'd be ashamed of myself, ashamed."

Barbara told him, "Oh, shut up, Gil's worth ten of you."

"That's right, honey," I said. "You hold him and I'll hit him."

Then I went to my apartment and stood under a shower and changed clothes. The shower cooled me off. What I didn't like was this business of Barbara telling me to be nice to Pete Storm, and when to get a haircut, and what suit to wear. But I rang up the office and said:

"This is that man in the grey suit."

"Gil," she said, "what's the matter with us? Why do we keep fighting all the time like this?"

"I'll figure it out and tell you at dinner. I ought to be through with this Poland woman by five-thirty. Suppose we meet at six-fifteen at Tarleton's Grill."

FOR my money, there was nothing wrong that one good case couldn't cure—I mean, if she could get to thinking of me as a detective gain, instead

of a war nerves case. But I wasn't willing to bet this was the case—certainly not after I met Harriet Poland.

Mrs. Poland lived up in the foothills, in a place that was cute and Californian and out-size. Eleven was sprinkled in loose, helter-skelter green letters on a stucco patio wall. The patio stank of rank green growth and the fertilizer it grew on. The house was one-story with silvery-stained shingle roof matching the doors and window frames. Poland could have put twenty thousand into building it, but I didn't know that it wasn't just rented.

Anyway, he'd put three or four thousand dollars into furnishing the big central room where his widow sat.

Harriet Poland was a blonde, a big blonde, and a nice-looking blonde. In fact, handsome. There was only one thing wrong with her that I could see—in five minutes.

She was just quietly nuts.

There was a man with her, a big white-faced solemn, silent man. She said his name was Mr. Ethan St. George John, and that he was a business associate of her late husband. She didn't say why he was here today. He was here to size me up, but that was more his idea than it was hers.

She had ideas like this: "Mr. Baltic, there must be somebody in this city I can trust. I hope you're that man; I don't know who else in the world to turn to.

"The police won't do anything. They can't be bothered, or their hands are tied."

"Have you tried the district attorney?" I asked. "District Attorney Burke has a staff of investigators working out of his office."

Harriet Poland said, "Oh, he's in politics, too! He won't do anything, because it was those political gangsters

who killed Rex.”

The political angle was news. Camino City has so-called non-partisan government, so the municipal elections aren't straight Republican or straight Democratic. Or straight anything else. Politics is a dirty business in Camino City, but I'd never heard of it killing a man. And, anyway, who was Rex E. Poland? I'd never heard of him.

I looked at Ethan St. George John to see how he was taking it. He was going along like a frog on a log.

“Mr. Poland was writing a book exposing political corruption in our city,” he explained.

Harriet Poland said, “Good heavens, that grenade didn't blow itself up. How could it, without any powder? It was *empty*.”

I said: “Did your husband take out the detonator, though? Just removing the powder from a grenade won't keep it from blowing up in your face. There's still the fulminate charge in the bou-chon assembly. That's how an ‘empty grenade’ can kill a man.”

I could see she didn't understand that. Any more than if I said the hoopdooer of the katzenjammer with the rootmatootz to the wingdingle could kill a man.

“Well,” I said, “show me where it happened.”

WHAT she showed me was her husband's study, or office. To reach it we went across another patio at the back of the house to a far room on the right wing. It had a door letting into the patio. It had windows—with plywood panes, because the explosion had blown out the glass. It had knocked down some plaster, too.

I figured it could have been an accident. Though if you came right down to it, all this talk about the grenade *was* the hoopdooer of the katzen-

jammer. Anybody who wanted to kill Poland could have walked away with his harmless souvenir, and tossed in a real live one, and run like hell.

St. George John suggested: “Tell him about the man that night, Harriet.”

She said: “Yes. There was a strange man here with Rex that night. Now, why hasn't he come forward and told who he is, what he was doing here. We advertised for him in the papers. Why hasn't he answered?”

Her voice made me want to put my fingers in my ears. She told me her bedroom was on the other side of this rear patio. What she had seen was a light in her husband's study window, and the form of a man seated in a chair.

“Would you know him if you saw him again?”

“No. I paid no attention. I merely glanced out before I closed my Venetian blinds.”

She was getting ready for bed. Later she had opened the blind and the window. There was still a light in the study and the sound of a typewriter. It was about ten minutes later there had been the flash and crash across the patio.

She'd screamed and run out. She was screaming to her husband for help. She threw open the study door and caught a strong smoky smell and she couldn't make the lights work—the explosion had knocked out the bulb filaments. She kept screaming her husband's name, and she was still calling for him to help her. The cook came and pointed a flashlight in, and there was Rex E. Poland with a red wet hole where his face had been.

It's words on a page to you.

It was her voice telling me.

Finally, St. George John on one side and I on the other, we got her back into the living room. He fetched a glass of sherry, and I got a swallow of

that down her throat and the rest over my gray suit.

There was grief in her, yes, and shock, but mostly I figured the woman was insane.

It was her voice.

I told St. George John I was sorry, but I had another appointment, and I had to go change my clothes now.

It was a little after five when I left. I'd come out on the bus, and the buses ran on the quarter hours. It was ten minutes of six when I ran up the two flights of stairs and keyed open my apartment door.

I had reason to remember the time.

What in hell Eddie Nichols had been doing in my apartment I didn't know. He wasn't doing it any more.

He was as dead as a blackjack could make him.

CHAPTER II

I CAME in and closed the door without taking my eyes off Eddie Nichols. I had emotions. Sorrow wasn't one of them. Why would I be sorry? He looked as good to me dead as he'd ever looked alive. He'd have looked better dead up an alley, though.

Eddie was a sawed-off, five-foot-four corpse with dirty fingernails and a shirt he had changed Wednesday. He had a little blood of concussion drying on his lips and in his big ears. He was clinical details.

There wasn't much death could take away from Eddie Nichols. He was a bad debt and deadbeat dick. He was the rounder-upper of all those smart, super-slick swindlers who buy used jaloppies and imitation silverware on the 24% interest plan. He was a Digger Indian in a blue serge suit with a badge that, plus a dime, was good for a streetcar fare. The dime he got back, along with the collections cost, the ja-

loppy, and the fake silverware.

He'd been asking for it, eventually one of those clever crooks who can't read the fine print of the high-pressure sales contracts was bound to get sore and give it to him. Up an alley, Eddie Nichols would have looked logical.

But not on my carpet.

He lay where he would have fallen if he'd opened the door and stepped in and been sapped by somebody waiting behind the door.

Waiting for me?

It could have been me, and maybe it was supposed to be me. That wasn't a nice idea to think about, or an idea that improved if I turned my back on it.

I went on into the next room. I reached up on the closet shelf and found the harness with the King's Formfit Grip making a big handful of gun. The cartridges had been in the gun a long time, so I shucked them out and traded for fresh from a box in the bureau drawer.

I went out without touching Eddie Nichols. I wanted to start work on my alibi, good and early.

TARLETON'S is a brick-walled grotto with an electric waterfall dividing the bar from the dining room. I sat on a bar stool and made a point of asking the bartender the time when I ordered my Martini.

Barbara came in during the second Martini. She had her new-penny-colored hair piled high in an upswept wave that was a new hair-do to me. She had on eye shadow, and silver bangles dripped from her ear lobes. She looked pretty enough. I didn't, and she noticed the stains on me and said: "Oh, Gil! Your suit! What have you been doing?"

"Let's grab a table and I'll tell you."

We sat down and after the waiter lighted the candle and went away, I

said: "Mrs. Poland spit on me."

"Gil!"

"The woman's crazy," I said. "I don't want a crazy woman for a client. She thinks Pete Storm's crooked, and she'd be after my license next. The crazy kind always turn on you."

"I'm sorry, Gil. I hoped this one would be a case."

"Hell with it," I said. "Let's talk about you. How do you make your hair stand up that way?"

She touched her hair with her fingertips. "I went to a beauty parlor, silly."

"You mean Nichols actually let you leave the office early?"

She sighed, "Gil, you've got Eddie wrong. He was really very nice about it."

"He stinks. And his racket stinks." I was thinking hard about Eddie Nichols. "His wife left him, didn't she?"

"Yes, and it broke his heart. Poor guy."

"Where is she now?"

"Oh, somewhere up north. Good heavens, Gil, what do you care about Darlene Nichols?"

"I didn't. Unless she was a reason he was decaying on my carpet."

But I couldn't interest Barbara in it.

She said, "Gil, I think that's very funny about Mrs. Poland. I mean, funny Pete Storm didn't say she was crazy."

"He had his reasons."

She looked at me with candlelight and question marks in her eyes.

"Poland was mixed up in politics," I explained. "She thinks he was murdered on account of it. But even if he wasn't, a cop could buy himself plenty of trouble nosing into it. Storm would probably like to have the political angle aired—at my risk, and Mrs. Poland's expense."

Barbara stared at me with candlelight and exclamation marks in her

eyes. "Gil, then there is a case!"

"Not necessarily a murder case," I said. "A grenade can blow up accidentally in a politician's face, too. It sounded like he probably accidentally knocked this one off his desk and was bending over to pick it up. Politics would have as much to do with that as what he ate for dinner, or how much he loved his wife."

I shook my head.

"Anyway," I said, "taking the lid off the political racket in this town would take weeks, months. For one man, it would be like trying to open a Burma Road with a hand hatchet, and with that crazy woman riding my neck like the Old Man of the Sea."

"Gil, you're not eating."

I said, "I'm thinking. Barbara, I have to see a man tonight. Right away." She leaned back from the candlelight. "I thought you had a date with me. See your man tomorrow."

"I have to see him tonight."

She asked, "Oh, God, why do I bother with you?"

"I said let's not go into it tonight."

The rest of the dinner was like that.

AFTER leaving Barbara at the bus stop, I walked along to Third and the sidestreet. Seven-thirty was too early to fall over the legs of drunks sticking out of the doorways. It was that kind of a side street, with little doorways leading to the stairs leading to the flophouse rooms above the hot dog counters, the shooting galleries, the bars with names like Fall Inn and Here's How.

The El Dorado Theater was playing *Fangs of the Werewolf* and *Meet the Monster*—a chill a minute. I paid 17¢ to a heavily painted girl in the glass booth, and gave the ticket to a prematurely bald youth inside. From a curtained doorway ahead came sound-

track rumblings, a smell of popcorn, and a smell like a dead rat. It was a live rat I wanted. I turned right and climbed dark carpeted steps and opened a door that said *Manager, Private*.

The outer office was a shabby room papered with famous Hollywood faces and bosoms. A man seated behind a desk lifted a hawk's nose and a cigarette out of a screen exhibitors' magazine and said, "Well, bud, what's on your—" and stopped, blinking his eye hoods. "Why, it's Bally. I heard you come back. What can I do for you, Bally?"

"Diegal."

"Sure," he said. "I'll tell him you're here."

"Never mind. I'll tell him."

He kept his pants on his chair. I went past him, into the inner office. This was a smaller, dirtier, darker room, papered with pictures of fighters. Diegal managed fighters, he ran gambling games, and he had a fist in the rackets. Sometimes he combined all three. There had been a fight in which one of his fighters took a dive, back in '41, and then a poker game involving the other fighter's manager. The other fighter was a Hollywood property of a movie big-shot.

What happened back in '41 was that a gunsel knew about the game, and got in there and got out again with sixty-five hundred bucks of the players' money, although Diegal supposedly had a hood on the door, Tommy Jennings. Jennings got a shot at the gunsel, who bled all over the service elevator and out the back way, and died in the alley behind the Commodore House Hotel. But the sixty-five C's weren't on the body.

The Hollywood man, a chap named Trent, thought Jennings was in on the deal, but he didn't want to tell the cops so; he told me. Then afterward

Jennings turned up dead, and the sixty-five hundred wasn't on him, either.

Mr. Diegal thought maybe I shot Jennings, at the time, or knew who did, and knew where the money went.

I thought maybe he was still going to pay me off for that, and had paid off Eddie Nichols by mistake.

He was surprised to see me. "Bally!" he said, staring at me. "I'll be damned if it ain't Bally."

HE LOOKED like a cross between a carp and a toad. He got his eyes from the carp and his mouth from the toad. He had dark brown skin with spots on it, and darker brown hair growing out of his scalp like shoe brush bristles.

I asked him, "What's the matter—you think I was dead?"

"I heard you got wounded," he said, dropping a hand off his desk and out of sight.

"I mean dead tonight. You send one of your boys to see me?"

He went after his gun in his desk drawer as I said it. I went after my own gun in the shoulder rig, and struck backhand, and slashed it across his face. He fell out of his chair. He broke an arm off the chair doing it.

"Get up, and fight like a man," I said.

He went back on his hands and knees until the wall stopped him. The gun had knocked some skin off his cheekbone. He got up saying, "Hey, what you doing?"

I was taking his gun out of the desk drawer—an automatic, as big as they make them. I put that gun in my pocket, and my own in the holster before I stepped over and hit him.

He fell sidewise down the wall.

"Get up and fight." I was going to show him it didn't pay to send his boys to hide behind my door.

"Bally," he panted, "damn you." He came up more carefully, keeping his legs under him in a fighting crouch. A smash in the face made his teeth grind. He took it and hit me in the belly. I cocked my right and teed off and hit him with absolutely all I had. He went down, grabbing my belt as he did. He hung on and caught himself, and tried to give me the knee. That was before I pushed his face down and brought up my own knee.

He let go and flopped and lay flat on the floor. A deep cut showed the bone through one of his eyebrows and a little blood was running out of his mouth.

"Next time I'll come back shooting," I said.

He might have heard me, or he might not.

Hawk-nose had evaporated out of the next room.

So I walked downstairs and left the automatic with the bald youth. "Go up and give this to Joe Diegal. Tell him next time I'm coming back shooting."

It was rough, and it was raw, but you don't get anywhere telling Diegal please be good and obey the law. Better talkers than I am have tried that. Judges have tried it.

I headed for my own apartment, walking. It was a long walk, but I needed a lot of cooling-off before I called the cops about Eddie Nichols.

It was a call I never made. The corpse had company when I walked in. Barbara was there, and Pete Storm was with her.

"Gil, I got off the bus," Barbara said. Tears quivered brightly against the background of eye shadow. Her face was prettier because she was scared. A caveman could knock her over the head and have him a pretty good woman there. "Gill, I had to see

you again."

I was looking at Eddie Nichols. There had been time for Pete Storm to turn out the corpse's pockets. He had turned out a handkerchief, wallet, cardcase, cigarettes, lighter, coins, key-ring, and an envelope addressed to Nichols in a woman's handwriting. The key-ring was loaded with the skeleton keys he used in his business.

Pete Storm's eyes were bright and flat and dangerous. He looked me up and down. "What have you got on you? Blood?"

He meant on the knee I had used in Diegal's face.

"Mrs. Poland passed out on me. I spilled some wine trying to give it to her."

"Bally, you'll have to take off that suit. I'm going to have those stains analyzed."

"Sure," I said.

"I'll go in the other room with you, and you can change clothes right now," he ordered.

CHAPTER III

CAMINO CITY'S police headquarters is a centuries old brick building in a town which was sagebrush flat during the Civil War, and not much more than a realtor's dream when Teddy Roosevelt charged up San Juan Hill. I think they found a bad odor and built around it. Brick and board could hardly sour to that extent in less than a lifetime.

Three of them talked to me, and there was a stenographer to take down the talk.

Pete Storm was one of the three.

Another was Detective-Captain Hugo Watsenberg, who weighed two hundred and thirty pounds, grew hair out of his nostrils, and ears, and was the kind of a cop who took his suspects

into the tank and solved them with a rubber hose. He had been a cop in Boston before they kicked him out, so he moved west.

Assistant District Attorney Walter Phaden was a slim, quiet, dressy man who would be sent out on an errand when the going got rough.

Watsenberg being night chief and a bigger shot than Pete Storm had his say first. He yelled, "A man gets killed in your flat and you don't know nothing about it!"

"That's right."

"You're a liar!" he yelled.

I was lower than a fruit picker in Watsenberg's eyes. I had been a cop and had quit the cops. He opened a desk drawer and lifted out a length of pale gray rubber hose and limbered it in his fists.

Phaden moved his chair closer so as not to see the hose. A law-abiding man, Phaden. He said, "You aren't holding out on us, are you, because Nichols was your partner?"

"We weren't partners. Who gave you that idea?"

"The same office," he said.

"The poorer classes double up like that," I explained.

"Oh, so you admit you have financial difficulties?"

"I didn't get rich in the Army, but I didn't knock off Nichols for the million bucks he carried in his hip pocket, either."

"Bally," Pete Storm said, "let's cut out this wisecracking. We aren't losing our sleep to listen to your jokes. We're here to find out why was Nichols killed at your place."

"I don't know. I wasn't there at the time."

"What time was that?" Phaden asked brightly.

"Any time he was killed, I wasn't there."

Pete Storm lit a cigarette. "How long since you've seen Joe Diegal?"

How much did he know?

I thought and said, "October of '41, wasn't it?"

Captain Watsenberg hit his desk top with the hose. "That's another thing! Why wouldn't you play ball with us that time? Trying to make us look stinking bad, wasn't you?"

"Bally," Pete Storm said, shielding his cigarette inside his palm like Humphrey Bogart. "Diegal was going to ditch you back in '41, wasn't he?"

"Nichols got killed," I said. "Not me."

"I'm working on the theory your apartment is more important than who got killed in it," said Pete Storm. "Some smoked-up torpedo might have made a little mistake of identity, expecting it was you walking in the door there."

"It's your theory if you want to work on it."

"If we bring Diegal in, will you testify he threatened your life on account of that Tommy Jennings case?"

I PRETENDED to give it thought.

The answer was easy. The answer was if I started running to the cops for protection, and had Diegal arrested, the whole town would know it. The answer was if I ever needed protection again, I'd have to get it from the cops. Diegal or nobody else would believe I was man enough and tough enough to fight my own battles. Every cheap mug in Camino City would figure old Bally had come back from the war a washed-up wreck.

"The answer is no," I said.

Assistant District Attorney Phaden asked, "What were your movements between five and six o'clock?"

You get one guess what time the coroner decided Eddie Nichols became meat for the morgue.

"Wait a minute," I said. "A man answering that kind of question is entitled to have his lawyer present."

Captain Watsenberg stood up rubbing his hands. "Let's all have some coffee and clear our heads." He was as genial and good-natured as Herman Goering. "Mr. Phaden, what do you say you run out and get us some coffee?"

"I'll go with him," I said.

"No you won't," Watsenberg said.

"Who's keeping me? Am I under arrest here?"

"It's getting late, and we got a lot of talking to do. We don't want to waste time here," Watsenberg said.

Pete Storm was stoic and silent, a wooden Indian with a broken nose.

I remembered who broke Pete's nose for him, all right.

"I'll hurry back," Phaden said, from the door.

"The tank's downstairs," I said. "In back of the Property Clerk's office."

"So you want to go downstairs," Watsenberg said.

The police stenographer had his arms around me before Watsenberg finished saying it.

"Not that way, damn it," Watsenberg ordered. "We want his hands cuffed in front of him."

I twisted and sunk an elbow in the stenographer's belly. He grunted and hung on.

Watsenberg had my other wrist, trying to clamp steel onto it.

It was Pete Storm who hit me.

I didn't fall down because the stenographer held me up. I didn't feel my wrists being cuffed, though. I shook pink fog out of my eyes and tried to put up my dukes. They came up together, chained that way.

Watsenberg was behind me, a hand on my coat collar and a hand on the seat of my pants.

"Open the door, Pete," he said.

It was nice of them not to push me through the door, closed.

I didn't even have to walk, just kiss the floor with my toes once in a while.

WE WENT down a dirty twisting back stairs. There were scratches left in the plaster by men trying to hang on with their fingernails. Captain Watsenberg couldn't have been helping those men, however.

The stenographer got ahead and opened the tank door. He switched on ceiling lights enclosed on cobweb wire guards. The floor was concrete, slanting to a drain trap so it could be hosed clean of any blood and teeth. The hose hung looped on the wall. In the middle of the room was a large heavy oak table with round legs joined by cross-railings four inches off the floor.

The stenographer grunted and got red-faced lifting just one corner of the table. Its drawers were loaded with sashweights, or something as heavy.

Watsenberg threw me in front of him onto the floor, on my hands and knees. I tried to get up. He grabbed the hose out of his coat pocket and smashed that down across the small of my back.

That's where the army medics took out the dum-dum pieces.

I died on the floor, but not quite completely.

Watsenberg put his foot between my handcuffed wrists and kicked. I followed my wrists along the concrete. The stenographer let the table leg down, and Watsenberg took his foot away. My wrists stayed. The table leg was between them.

I could get out of it by trying to push the table over with my shoulder. That's if I had Mr. Archimedes and his lever on my side. And if Watsen-

berg didn't beat me a little flatter than a carpet while I was trying.

Or I could lay quietly with my face on the floor. I could enjoy the sight of the stenographer's toes bunching pleurably inside his shoes. I could see the solemn, stoical face of my old friend, Pete Storm.

Leather whispered on concrete. It wasn't Pete or the stenographer or Watsenberg.

I screamed. "Stop it! Don't hit me again! I'll talk, I killed him!"

The door jerked open and Phaden came in saying, "I heard that!"

"You see what's going on, too, don't you?" I said.

Phaden stopped short, and his lips worked while he made up his mind.

"Release that man," he said. "Mr. Baltic and I are going to the district attorney's office, where his confession will be taken in a decent and legal manner."

"You can't take him out of my custody like that!" Watsenberg yelled.

"Custody?" Phaden said. "You didn't arrest him. You haven't even booked him."

"Shut up," he said as Watsenberg began yelling again. "I'm taking this man with me. And any cops that tries to stop me is going to wind up on Fifth and Main with a whistle in his mouth."

Phaden had a coupe parked in front of the building. He said as we got in, "That kind of brutality I can't and won't stomach. And you a wounded veteran."

WE WENT to the county courts building, to the maze of offices on the second floor. Phaden left me in the law library while he made a phone call, and then he brought in a bottle and glasses.

District Attorney Loren Burke was a big smooth-shaven politician who had

an excellent average of convictions. Which meant he didn't like to take doubtful cases into court. He disliked the idea of convicting possibly innocent persons, or he disliked spoiling his average.

He carefully shook hands with me. Both these guys were my friends for life. All I had to do was say, yes, I killed Eddie Nichols. My life after that would be too short for too much friendship.

"Just pour me a little one, Walter," Mr. Burke said.

Phaden poured him a little one, and me a good one on top of the other I hadn't finished. "Tell us all about it, Baltic," he said gently.

"There wasn't anything to it," I said. "I don't want to brag. I ran hardly any risk to speak of."

"Why did you do it?" Phaden asked after a pause.

"It seemed the only thing to do. It was what I was being paid for."

"Who paid you?"

"The United States Government, of course."

Mr. Burke was surprised into pouring himself a second shot. "You don't expect us to believe that," he said.

"I don't care whether you believe it. I don't even care to discuss it. I'm trying to forget the whole thing."

"You'd feel better with it off your chest, Baltic," Phaden said patiently. "Just what happened?"

I said, "Well, there was this pillbox off to the left behind the road block. We had to knock out the block, but the krauts in the pill box had it covered. There was this one Heinie—"

Walter Phaden looked like he'd been told the chicken sandwich he'd eaten was really rattlesnake meat. "Cut it out," he said. "This won't get you anything. You told Watsenberg you killed Nichols, you know."

"The kraut," I said. "I didn't mean I killed Nichols."

"Don't give us that. Watsenberg didn't have you handcuffed to a table leg to hear your war experiences."

"What Watsenberg wanted to hear was his business, I was saying I killed the Heinie."

"Excuse me," District Attorney Burke said, standing up.

He was gone long enough to have made a longish phone call. When he came back he said:

"The police aren't going to hold you. They haven't enough evidence—yet. You should have told Watsenberg what Miss Drew told Storm, that you had an alibi. If you can make it stand up, and if they don't find blood on your clothes. You can go now."

Walter Phaden had walked out and stood by a water fountain. He had been washing down an aspirin, perhaps.

"All right, Baltic," he said in a low, trembling voice. "But I can assure you the district attorney's office won't forget this night's work in a long, long time."

I wasn't going to forget it in five minutes, either. My back where the medics had operated and where Watsenberg had laid on the hose was half-killing me.

CHAPTER IV

IT WASN'T just the back in the morning. Next morning was the day after a binge, a big binge including a couple of fist fights and a few passes thrown at the boss' wife.

I started it with black coffee, and then took the newspapers up to the office before Barbara came in.

LINK MURDERS TO VICE RING was in type as big as Tokyo bombed.

There was a picture of Rex E. Poland looking like a human slide-rule

wearing pince-nez eyeglasses, and a picture of Eddie Nichols.

It was District Attorney Burke's show.

The paper said Burke had put his investigators into action with orders to pick up suspected vice barons on sight, acting on information provided when Mr. Ethan St. George John early this morning appeared at the city morgue and identified the body of Eddie Nichols as the mystery caller in the fatal bombing of Rex E. Poland.

The paper continued—as I already knew that Mrs. Poland and St. George John had advertised for the mystery caller to reveal himself.

It further said—and this I hadn't known—that St. George John had got a reply from Eddie Nichols, using the name 'Ed Nixon.'

There had been a meeting at the Columbus Memorial Fountain in Columbus Park, St. George John identifying himself by scattering breakfast flakes to the pigeons.

"Ed Nixon" freely confessed having called on Rex E. Poland on the night of the bombing, for the purpose of selling him certain extremely confidential photographs showing nameless municipal authorities and a nameless vice lord in the middle of a cash financial transaction.

"Ed Nixon" had tried to sell these same photographs sight unseen, to St. George John for ten thousand dollars. St. George John stated to District Attorney Burke that he had decided to have "Nixon" investigated by one Gillian Baltic, private detective.

The newspaper treated it as a practically libelous couple of coincidences that the man Baltic shared a downtown office with was the informer Nixon-Nichols, and also that Nixon-Nichols had been brutally beaten to death in Detective Baltic's apartment last night.

I was reading it twice when I heard the door open, letting in hurrying, heavy footsteps.

They turned suddenly soft and stealthy coming down the hallway.

It was a woman. She didn't see me. She saw Eddie Nichols' name on the opposite door. She turned a beam as broad as a Kaiser carrier and went in there.

I tip-toed too.

She was bending over Eddie Nichols' desk, looking into drawers that the cops had undoubtedly searched last night.

"Whoa!" I said.

THE fat woman, breathing hard, faced me. "Where'd you hide it? It's no use lying, young man. I knowd his face as soon as I seen the paper."

"Which face, ma'm?"

"That Nichols," she said. "He's the one that found Mr. Denzon's body. Discouraged, he was. It came back and he cut his throat. It came back by express, but it wasn't there when I came to look. I was in it, too. Mrs. Sugar, he called me. Mrs. Sweet, that's my real name. But I was in it, all right, to the life."

I said, "Whoa again! Who in hell was Denzon?"

"Don't you swear at the dead," Mrs. Sweet said sternly. "Mr. Denzon, he lived upstairs over my garage."

"Tenant of your?"

"Would have been, only he couldn't pay his rent. Owed for the typewriter, even. I reckon Nichols had a legal right to take that, but the rest was just plain highway stealing. Taking that express package, the dirty stealer."

"What was in it?"

"Mr. Denzon's book," she said. "With me in it, only he changed my name to Mrs. Sugar."

The dawn broke. It was cloudy but it was dawn.

"Oh," I said, "you mean this guy Denzon was an author. He wrote a book, and Nichols swiped it?"

"It wasn't made into a book yet," she said. "They sent it back and Mr. Denzon cut his throat. He was temperamental like.

"It was a manuscript and Eddie Nichols swiped it." I remembered Rex Poland wrote books, too. "Was it a book on politics?"

"No. A love story. I'll take you in my arms."

"You will like—!" A little more dawn broke. "That's the title of it? *I'll Take You in My Arms.*"

She beamed. "I was the girl's mother in it. Mrs. Sugar, he called me—"

"Yes," I said. "Pardon me."

Eddie's phone was ringing—Barbara must have left it plugged in when she left early the day before.

"Hello?" I said.

"Mr. Baltic," the voice said, "this is Steve Kiley."

"You got the wrong number."

"Listen. You remember me. Night clerk at the *Commodore House*—remember?"

I remembered.

He was the night clerk on the desk the night the gungel stuck up the poker game.

"Listen," he was saying. "I've got something for you, but I don't think I better come up to your office. Where can I see you right away?"

"You name it."

"The shoe-shine place next to the Central Parking Lot on Third? In ten minutes?"

I took the fat woman's arm. "Nichols probably threw it away when he found what was in the package, Mrs. Sweet. He wasn't the type to appreciate literature, especially love literature. But the cops were here. You might go down and ask the Property

Clerk if they impounded anything like that."

I got rid of her.

THE shoeshine place is three raised chairs in a shack which must violate all the building ordinances. Steve Kiley leaned against the shack's wall, a lightweight in a flannel suit and twin-tones sport shoes. He had one eye closed, a cigarette smoking itself on his lip.

He was good enough to reach his right hand half-way.

"Why, if it isn't Gil Baltic," he said, and by that time he had a grasp on my fingers.

I don't know where the hawk-nosed one came from. From behind a car in the corner of the parking lot, I guess.

"Get in the back seat here," Hawk-Nose said.

"It's all right, Gil. The boss just wants a talk with you," Kiley said, hanging onto my hand.

I looked around. Hawk-Nose had nothing worse in his hand than a tire-iron. He couldn't do anything more than brain me with it if I tried to stop Steve Kiley from lifting my shoulder-rig gun.

Kiley lifted the gun. I let him. I needed my brains.

"Right here," Hawk-Nose said. "The grey job."

He opened the door for me.

We rolled out of the parking lot through the Jefferson Street exit.

"Who's the boss?" I asked.

"Who do you suppose? Don't you know who runs this town?"

I thought it was Diegal. I said. "Oh, you're working for the mayor."

We rode along. It was a four-story apartment building facing on Columbus Park. Probably Diegal owned it, or it would have been risky to pull this stuff. Risky even though we traveled

up in a rear elevator avoiding the front door and lobby. We went all the way up.

Hawk-Nose stepped out of the elevator first.

I whirled, hit Steve Kiley once, followed him into a corner of the cage.

He was paralyzed from the hairline down. It was his turn to let me take the gun. I took it.

"Now you boys behave," I said. "Or I'll knock your teeth down your throats."

They knew what I meant.

I herded them along the hall.

"Don't knock. Open the door, and you go in first," I told Kiley.

A man makes mistakes like that one. It's the human equation, identical with the one that makes a scared private snap his C.O. a salute on a beachhead. You're trained to salute officers and trained to send other guys through the door first. If I'd stopped and thought, there was nothing a lightweight like Steve Kiley could do behind me.

I should have gone in first, and I could have snapped a shot in time. Or shut the door in time.

Steve didn't try to shut the door. He was right there in front of me, in the way if I wanted to shoot.

The dog came slathering past Steve's leg like two hundred pounds of greased pig.

A dog trained to go for the gun. He was trained to bite your hand off, that dog.

I FELL on the floor and wrestled with the dog and screamed through my clenched teeth, and saw the blood squirt out of my wrist over his muzzle.

I'd dropped the gun. There was the gun somewhere around my knee. I thought, grab the gun and let him bite my other hand off for a change. I was still a civilized man while I thought

about the gun. He chewed the civilization out of me. I quit being much of a man when that tawny, red-eyed half-wolf really went to work with his jaws. I was an arm full of agony, a belly tied in a knot, and a mouth full of salt vomit.

"Steve! Get him off!"

I know I yelled it.

"Diegal, God damn you!"

Maybe I dreamed seeing Diegal's carp eyes looking down on me.

"Eat 'm up, Slug."

I didn't dream I heard that.

I was almost clear-headed again. The arm was turning numb, for one thing. The knot untied in my belly, or it dissolved in a cold ache down there. That was what the medic's call shock, and it was a sign I wouldn't be feeling anything much longer.

The dog kept right on eating my wrist in two.

I got my left hand up to the dog's muzzle. I think Diegal laughed. It was, indeed, laughable that I should entertain the idea of breaking the wolf's grip with my bare hand.

Only that wasn't the idea. I had a better one, an Army Judo one. I got my finger up to the dog's closest red eye, and shoved it in, and kept shoving it through the eye into his brain as far as the finger would go.

Commando stuff.

But Commando guys don't pass out while they're doing it. I passed out. Cold.

THEY carried me inside. I don't remember walking, and inside wasn't where I would have walked without a struggle to remember.

They carried me and laid me down.

I woke up a little bit, and I was still bleeding. In squirts, where that devil had fanged an artery.

I grabbed my wrist to shut off the

bleeding. My fingers slipped around like four drunks on skates. I could have worked up a sweat trying to break a cigarette with those fingers.

The blood kept right on squirting. I had to stop the squirting. It wouldn't wait until tomorrow. I knew that, although I was lit up so you could have hung me on a Christmas tree, only I would have floated off the tree. It wasn't just me, it was the whole room. They had carried me into a fairyland, an Aladdin's cave lighted up with gold and diamonds.

Suddenly I saw Steve Kiley standing there. He was well lighted up, too, with a diamond dangling on the end of his nose.

"Kiley, hey, tie something around it quick," I said.

"The boss didn't tell me to do that," he said.

The boss didn't tell him to do that. What ails this country is guys waiting to be told.

Somehow I fumbled and found a handkerchief in my coat's breast pocket. I got it wrapped around my wrist—somehow.

I even tied a kind of a knot, with one hand and my teeth.

It wasn't tight enough.

I was still bleeding under the bandage. I fainted.

THE next time I woke up the hand kept me awake awhile. It hurt enough. I could see why. It was swollen so the fingernails were little pale islands stuck down in the blue, puffed flesh. The whole hand looked like it had a case of trench foot. The wrist was swollen to fill the bandage now. The arm above the wrist filled my coat sleeve snugly. The skin was chicken gizzard color as far as I could see skin. It burned with old Billy Hell's heat.

The dog would have dropped dead of rabies in another four days, I thought.

I better go see a doctor, then.

I was so full of fever I thought I *could* go see a doctor.

Sure, I knew about Steve and Hawk-Nose and Diegal. I knew if the boss wanted me to have a doctor, he'd have called one.

He wasn't going to stop me. I lay there a while and figured it all out. The trick depended upon the fact there were really two of me. There was the one Gillian Baltic who had been chewed by the dog, and there was the other Gillian Baltic I could send after the doctor.

There was a hitch in the scheme. Gillian Baltic Number Two had to take the dog-chewed hand with him.

I jarred the hand trying to get up. It hurt like ten toothaches. My head swam. I moved the arm gently. It hurt longer that way, not less. What ailed me? It was just a dog-bite. It wasn't an amputation, I'd say only about half an amputation. I had to lay down and rest so I could get up.

The blood running into it, I thought. Okay, I'd hold the hand up. I'd bite into the sleeve, meanwhile sitting up with the help of my other hand.

That's how I did it. Biting that sleeve was a good idea in another way. It gave me something to sink my teeth into.

The next thing was to stand up. Then the thing after that was to take a step. Two steps. I may have taken as many as two dozen steps to reach the door, ten feet from where I started. I had lost so much blood, and I was carrying such a load. It took careful steps, balanced steps, and rest periods between steps. It was ten feet, and it was longer than that first fifteen-mile hike in the Army. But I made it. I

had a little trouble finding the door-knob. I found the knob, and the strength to turn it.

The door was locked.

It might have broken your heart, but it didn't worry me. I had a really bright idea now. I walked, leaning my good shoulder against the wall, until I reached the window. I could go out the window—that was the bright idea,

I THINK for just a moment there I had a vague, unsettling memory of riding up four floors in an elevator. But that was long ago, and it must have happened to some other Gillian Baltic. I could look through this window and see Columbus Park close enough to have reached out and touched it with my hand. It was really no jump at all. It was that close.

I had the idea of smashing the window, and a better idea of not doing it. Broken glass would show them how I got out. The smart thing was to quietly slide the sash up and very silently crawl out over the sill.

The sash wouldn't budge.

Then I noticed it had one of those do-funnies at the side. A kind of metal pin, the old-fashioned kind of fixture. It had to be pulled out before the window could be raised. I sneaked my hand up after it, like a boy after pussy-cat's tail.

The pin came out easy as anything.

And something white fell, landed on the coat sleeve I held in my teeth. A little bit of whitish pill.

There were more of them tucked inside the hollow piece of hardware.

Diegal, the old junker! I never knew he used the stuff, but here it was, stashed right here in the apartment. The real stuff, the medicinal product sold on prescription, and not those decks the way it's peddled to the customers.

I needed it for my hand as badly as a lost prospector in the desert needs a waterhole.

I almost put it in my eye and my ear and over my shoulder, it was like pinning the ears on the Halloween donkey, but I got it between my teeth finally. I made spit and swallowed a bitter mouthful.

It'd take hold pretty quick, I hoped.

Only the infection took hold quicker.

It took me the way Patton would take an objective. I was waiting for the hand to quit aching, and the first thing I knew my head was surrounded and cut off and sort of floating away from the rest of me. So I chased my head. Somewhere along the way I left my sore arm. Somewhere along the way I left the sash pin, too.

"WAKE up."

"Snap out of it."

"On your feet, bo."

There were two of them. The closest was a brown-skinned man with happy shining black eyes and a powerful smell of hair tonic. The other I couldn't see so good with the electric light hurting my eyes.

"He's awake," Hair Tonic said. "Half awake."

"And the other half dead."

"Carry him down is easiest," Hair Tonic said.

I had my arm back again, and I used some names as they lifted me.

"Hang on around my neck, then," Hair Tonic told me.

He helped my left arm around my neck. He helped me walk.

The other went ahead and opened the door. The other had a toy bulldog's face like Tommy Jennings.

I must have let my feet drag.

"Come on," Hair Tonic urged. "You want your hand fixed, don't you?"

Yes, I wanted my hand fixed. I

didn't want Tommy Jennings fixing it, though.

Nuts. Tommy Jennings was dead. This other guy couldn't be Tommy Jennings. I got a good look as we went down in the rear elevator.

The car was parked as close to the rear, service door as a car could park.

"Upsidaisy, fella. In you go. You sit back there with him, Mike."

Mike was the one with the toy bulldog's face.

Hair Tonic slid into the front seat. The motor was already quietly running. He didn't gun the motor getting out of there. He whispered the car into the alley like a young and proud mother giving Junior his first ride in the new perambulator. He was careful not to jolt my arm in the slightest, and I was grateful to him.

I had bled a quart or so, I was swollen up as big as a watermelon with poison, and I had knocked out my brains with morphine. I was willing to go with these two new friends and have a doctor fix me up.

It took a while, and it took a lot of fresh air for me to catch on that this doctor had his office back in the foothills and among the canyons where the coyotes howl and no human foot has ever trod.

I looked out, and there weren't any street lights left, but I hadn't noticed leaving them behind. But I looked through the car window and saw moonlight shinning on some uncivilized California.

It was big bald foothills wrinkled into arroyos, looking like scenery from the moon with sagebrush stuck into it. It was a road winding along the rim of a deep, steep slope sprinkled with boulders as big as General Sherman boulders.

They could drop a body here, and it would be found as soon as the flood

rains washed the bones out of the arroyo. If the bones lasted that long.

THE road went somewhere. You could follow the road far enough to hit the San Fernando Valley, you could go on and hop a plane at Burbank, or jog over the big pass to Hollywood and the Strip. I didn't expect to ride that far on my ticket. They might, and they probably would! they hailed from the L. A. branch, I thought.

Tommy Jennings had a brother Mike in L. A. the last I heard.

It took a while, it took some fresh air, but it came back to me.

"How's he doing?" Hair Tonic said.

"I think the bastard passed out on us," Mike said.

"Find out about him."

"Okay," Mike said.

He pinched my right hand. He wasn't being playful. He put my tongue up to the roof of my mouth. I held it there.

"He's cold as a fish," Mike said.

I was thinking.

If he was Mike Jennings, he might know something about that sixty-five hundred bucks.

He might even know something he wouldn't want told.

He might even have had the sixty-five C's, or a half split with Tommy on the deal.

"Okay," Hair Tonic was saying. "Say when."

"Any time, any place here."

The car swayed a little as the brakes snubbed.

Hair Tonic got out and opened the door and held his arms for me. "Boost him in the fanny, Mike."

It looked like this was the night. This was how I saved money sharing an office with Eddie Nichols, this was the dessert from lunch with Pete Storm. I had come a long ways, crossing an

ocean or two, crossing the rivers with the geography-book names, to find a spot half an hour out of Camino City. What the hell was my hurry? I could have got here without working up half the sweat.

"Listen," I said. "Tommy—" as Mike Jennings pushed me head forward into Hair Tonic's arms.

"What's the matter with him?" Hair Tonic asked.

"Tommy," I said. "Sixty-five hundred bucks. Tell Diegal. Tell him Bally said."

"Sure,"; Hair Tonic said. "We'll tell him. What, pal?"

"Split," I mumbled. "Fifty-fifty. Tell him Bally said it was—"

That's when Mike Jennings socked me from behind. I went limp in Hair Tonic's arms.

"Hey!" Hair Tonic said.

"Let's get rid of the guy," Mike said.

"Sure. But what's the rush? Diegal's gonna want to know what he's saying about that dough," Hair Tonic protested.

I heard the gun go click.

One good jump would do it. One good jump across the road, and it was steep enough I could roll the rest of the way down into the canyon. There wasn't a jump left in my legs. They buckled under me.

I heard the gun go bang.

I fell on my face and my right arm, and I didn't feel being shot at all. The arm was enough. The arm felt like being dipped into a tub of scalding water.

The gun banged again.

I heard scraping sounds. I opened my eyes. I saw Mike Jennings dragging Hair Tonic over to the edge of the road.

I'd talked into something.

I thought of the smell of hair tonic blowing a yard or so down-wind among the boulders and the sagebrush. I won-

dered if there had been time between the two shots for a man to look back and see how he ever came this far. Did he hurry himself getting here?

I hurried myself.

I got up somehow, and fell into the seat, and kicked the car rolling while Mike Jennings was throwing the body into the canyon.

CHAPTER V

I HAD my troubles staying in the road. I drove like I'd never handled a car before. I'd veer a little to the left and make a big swerve the other way and then have to swerve back; then do it all over again.

It wasn't just the dope. Maybe it wasn't even just the dog-bite. I was sick inside, too. Watsenberg hadn't ruined me with one wallop of the hose, had he?

It might be some little thing like a piece of dum-dum the army medics missed. Watsenberg had knocked a sliver of dum-dum loose. Now I could feel it working in me like a swallowed needle.

I pulled over on the road shoulder and stopped. I didn't get out of the car, just opened the door and leaned down, bracing my left elbow on the runningboard.

It came up in teaspoonfuls, and it had tasted better going down.

But I could drive again.

IT was over the foothills and down in the San Fernando Valley and then up a smaller valley on a quiet tree-shaded country road without any of those huts selling for 15c all the orange juice you can drink. The gate stood open, the lane ran back between white-painted corral fences. I remembered he had been going to make a fortune raising polo ponies—in '41.

Polo had been a rage in Hollywood in '41. Fighters had been fashionable, too—and he had owned a middleweight named One-Round Stankey.

His own name was Trent, and he had been the loser in that Commodore House poker game.

The maid said Mr. Trent wasn't at home.

I said I'd wait until he came home.

She said, "Just a moment, please," and went away, and presently a tall, slender, tired-faced pretty woman sun-tanned the color of ryebread advanced down the hall.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but my husband actually can't see you."

"I'll wait. He's got to come out sometime."

"Oh, well. Come in."

She steered me into a den, a Hollywood-style den papered amusingly with blown-up shots of the Perils of Pauline period. There was a fireplace and hanging above it a water color of Mrs. Trent looked ethereal and painted by herself. The desk was a funny old Wells-Fargo desk, and the wastebasket was a genuine old leather fire bucket. Probably the only phony thing about the den was that he never used it.

He came in briskly, closing the ear hooks of a pair of plastic-rimmed glasses in one hand, holding his place in a typewritten script with the other. He said, "Look, Baltic, I won't give you the girl-didn't-place-your-name business. I'm pooped, about the only thing I didn't bring home from the office this week-end was the paperweight."

Trent's brown eyes protruded slightly and shone brightly out of his bland, slightly overfleshed face. He walked with a bouncing step, holding his chest high: he was about as pooped as a mink in spring.

"What's it all about?" he asked.

"Maybe you haven't read the pa-

pers," I said. "We have a situation in Camino City. A reformer named Poland got blown up, accidentally or otherwise. He was writing a book about the vice rackets. A bird named Nichols is supposed to have supplied some of the evidence and was beaten to death with a sap."

His eyes were closed. "What has that to do with me?"

I said: "It's liable to bring up that poker game."

He shook his head. "That wouldn't worry me."

"It worried you plenty at the time."

IT HAD worried him because people might have thought he had deliberately lost his money in the game to pay Diegal for Diegal's fighter taking a dive.

"That's dead and forgotten now," Trent said.

"There's something else. Another angle entirely. Do you remember a writer named Denzon?"

"Writers in Hollywood you have to sweep off the doorstep," Trent said. "He may be one of those three-hundred-and-fifty-dollar-a-week punks, but I've never heard of him."

"He wrote a book," I explained. "An unpublished one, never copyrighted. It was stolen after Denzon's death. The thief may have thrown it away, or he may have tried to peddle it to the studios. He could have changed the title and put his own name on it. *I'll Hold you in My Arms* was the original title."

Trent shook his head. "The studios wouldn't even open a manuscript from an unknown author. They never do."

"But if he found an agent?"

"Agents have twenty times as many published books to peddle as they can place. They'd tell the guy to get it published first."

I said, "Well, I'd like to know if he tried. Even if he couldn't do business."

"It's no use," Trent said. "Your man would have got the brush-off at the main gate. Nobody would remember."

I looked at him awhile.

"Trent," I said, "it wasn't so easy to keep your name out of that Tommy Jennings' inquest. It was a hell of a lot harder than you asking a half dozen questions like this for me."

Into his face came the solemnity and consecrated high purpose of a football coach between halves. "I'll try," he promised, "but don't get your hopes up. It's really impossible for an unknown writer to place an unpublished novel with the studios, but what's his name?"

"Eddie Nichols. He may have used the name of Nixon."

Trent wrote it down. "All right. I'll try. Anything else I can do?"

"Yeah. You can lend me a gun."

He opened the Wells Fargo desk. Maybe he wasn't such a bad guy, even if it was a Wild West relic of a gun he handed over.

I gave him a pep talk.

"You said yourself, unpublished manuscripts are a rarity, therefore it oughtn't be impossible to pick up the trail of one if it has been offered anywhere."

"All right. All right. I said I'd do it for you."

"I don't want you to just say it."

"I'll do it."

I didn't know whether he'd do it or not. It would be so easy for him to say yes, I asked and there's nothing to it. I was just a twenty-five dollar a day dick who got him out of one jam four years ago, and he might figure the Wild West gun was favor enough.

I drove back through the Valley and over the hills and was as far as Twelfth when the squad car sired me to the

curb and two patrolmen came out of it with their guns drawn.

"Throw 'em up! We're taking you in!"

POLICE Headquarters smelled the same as before. Pete Storm wasn't around. It was Captain Watsenberg who sat behind his desk and inspected the borrowed Wild West weapon.

"Where'd you get this, Bally?"

"Friend."

"What friend?"

I wasn't saying what friend.

He picked up the gun, toyed with its cylinder. He looked worried tonight. He snapped open the cylinder, copied the gun's number, put back the cylinder.

"You're not in a spot to play shut-mouth," he warned. "What do you think we found on your grey suit? Soda pop?"

"Wine."

"Wine, hell. It was blood."

I said: "Just a minute. I saw Eddie Nichols. He trickled a little blood from his nose and ears. He didn't squirt it all over the place."

"It wasn't Nichols' blood," Watsenberg said coldly. "Nichols was a type A. This was a type O. We want to know where that type O blood came from."

The gleam in his eyes was nasty.

"There could be different explanations," I said.

"Yeah. Such as?"

I said: "Blood isn't such an extraordinary article in a city the size of this one. You're full of it, I'm full of it, everybody you meet on the streets is carrying around four or five quarts. The human skin isn't indestructably blood tight. Men cut themselves shaving. Kids fall down and scrape their knees on sidewalks. The world is full of nosebleeds and cat scratches and

skinned kuckles. Maybe I rubbed up against something like that on a bus. A mosquito lights on you and you swat it without even thinking, and you've got a fair sized chemical trace of somebody else's blood."

Watsenberg scowled. "Bally, how hard you're going to fall when you do fall—"

He unbent his elbow as the desk phone rang.

"Watsenberg," he said gloomily. "Oh, hullo, Smitty. . . . Where? They are, huh? Yeah. . . . No, you can't do nothing. There isn't nothing to do. Just tell them to wait a minute while I finish with this guy."

He dropped the phone with a bump, and looked at nothing, stolid-faced. His face showed no more expression than a moose's. A moose doesn't turn pale and break out sweating when he's hit by a high-powered rifle. He stands still, maybe tries to brace himself and then lets his head fall.

CAPTAIN Watsenberg braced himself with his hands flat on his desk, and then his big head seemed to sink down into his shoulders.

"Bally," he said thickly.

"Yeah?"

"You was in the war. I guess you went through plenty of hell over there?"

"Some of the guys did."

"But you was the best equipped army the world ever saw. There's that, ain't there? The country took care of you and to spare, didn't they?"

What was he trying to sell me now?

"New York cuts and strawberries every day," I said. "Ha-ha."

He sighed. "Well, I was thinking in other ways. Take medically. You had the best of doctors and everything?"

Was he worried because he'd found out he's slugged me on top of the med-

ical scar?

No, it wasn't that.

"You was there, Bally. You never saw our boys lack for anything in that respect," Watsenberg said. "Of course, there was slip-ups. Things happened. Like for instance, right next door in Los Angeles, there was a hijacking of a truckload of army morphine. But I don't suppose it made any difference. The army knew, hell, a certain percentage was going to be torpedoed and stuff like that. As I understand it, the army protected itself by shipping twice as much as was ever needed. They hit the beachheads with such mountains of supplies, I don't suppose any of our boys ever suffered from any lack of morphine. If they needed it, they would have loaded up an extra plane. The same as they flew whole blood out there."

I sat there staring at his heavy gray face. "What are you trying to square yourself for?"

He shrugged. "It was this, your talking about blood, happened to remind me. Well, getting back to the subject—"

He picked up the gun, closed an eye, squinted with the other into the barrel. "When was the last time you say you cleaned this?"

"No, you don't!" I said, and jumped, but he was too quick for me.

The gun sound hurt my ears. He never heard it. He was looking right down the tube when he pulled the trigger.

His head fell sidewise, and for a moment he hardly bled at all. His face loosened a little and his jaws unclenched and he bled profusely from a corner of his mouth.

His thumb stuck in the trigger guard and slid with the gun over the round of his paunch and came to rest in his lap.

For it might have been ten seconds, I stood stock-still, waiting.

Nobody seemed to have heard the shot.

I turned and went through the door along the hall, and downstairs.

THERE were two guys waiting to see Watsenberg.

One of them politely leaned an elbow on the blotter sergeant's desk. The other might have been memorizing a traffic accident chart thumbtacked onto a bulletin board.

They were a well-scrubbed pair in neatly pressed businessmen's suits, looking rather like highclass life insurance salesmen who would emphasize the investment feature of the policy.

A couple of bureaucrats from the Department of Justice.

"You boys had better go on up," I said. "Watsenberg just looked down the barrel of a gun and saw it was loaded."

Maybe they thought I worked here. They didn't stop me from walking past them toward the front door. Neither did the blotter sergeant. He was the first one to start running up the stairs.

The G-men had moved in.

The F.B.I. was on the town.

That's all I could figure.

I caught a cab out to Columbus Park.

A pair of those high-class insurance salesmen were fixing a flat tire in front of the apartment building. They had the trunk lid up, and one of them was bending over and saying something in a moderately loud tone of voice about a jack handle. He didn't think of looking under a piece of burlap wadded in front of him.

He might have had a jack handle there, or he might have had something that would hose lead at the rate of several hundred slugs a minute.

I got a peek into the lobby as I walked by. There was a mechanic doing something at the switchboard, and staying close to a fat canvas toolbag while he worked.

I walked a block down the street, crossed the street, and walked on the park grass to a bench.

It might have been fifteen minutes later when the shooting started, and then it came from the back of the building.

A single report started it, and a heartbeat later a Thompson sub-machine gun called the roll.

I gave the crowd three minutes to gather.

By that time, a space was being cleared around the bodies. Diegal was the one closest to the car, apparently he had just stepped out of it into the line of fire. The body of the car was stitched with holes as if by a sewing machine. Mike Jennings lay three steps closer to the building. He had died with his gun in his fist. He must have gone for the gun when the boys in back told him to stop. I have felt worse about other things.

CHAPTER VI

BARBARA got to the office first the next morning. She was studying a newspaper whose headline said, F.B.I. SMASHES DOPE THEFT RING. I'd seen the paper, so I looked at her. She was tall and tanned and Californian in a simple, straight-lined, linen-colored dress; she looked as healthy as orange juice.

"Gil!" she said, "What have you been doing?"

"It's all in the paper," I said. "Diegal's mob hijacked a load of Government morphine. Watsenberg covered up for them on the police angle. So the G-men moved in and took our town

apart last night."

She said, "Yes, but what did Eddie Nichols know about all that? How could he?"

"I haven't said he did."

"He knew something. He expected money from somewhere. I looked at that letter of his," she explained, "While Lieutenant Storm had you in the bedroom taking off your gray suit. It was from his wife. Darlene."

"Oh, the letter."

"Yes, the letter. She was coming back to him. It sounded like she expected he'd have quite a bit of money." She shook her head, dissatisfied. "Eddie was hardly making wags."

"It's an angle the police can work on when they find Darlene."

I had an angle of my own.

The first two bookstores had never heard of the guy, but the third turned up a book by Rex E. Poland in the secondhand department.

It cost me the price of a shoe shine.

I walked back to my office, laid the book on my desk because my right hand was as big as a catcher's mitt with bandages, and turned the pages with my left hand.

The copyright was in the name of the Ladder Press, Los Angeles, California. A pen-and-ink drawing showed a zealous reader climbing on a ladder of book rungs. When he climbed three books higher, he would be able to reach a star.

That was as far as I'd read when Barbara plugged in a phone call.

"It's a Hollywood call," she told me.

It was Trent's voice.

"I've seen the papers," he said. "I've got something for you, but I suppose it doesn't mean anything now."

"What have you got?"

"It wasn't either of those names you mentioned. It was a Darlene Nichols. I'll tell you the studio, but you'll have

to keep their name out of it." He named a studio. "The man there to see is Frank Eilerman. He paid fifteen grand for the movie rights of *I'll Hold You in My Arms*, by Darlene Nichols."

I whistled.

"It was one of those inside deals. A girl reader in the studio got the thing from a woman named Dunn. Nobody I ever heard of." He paused. "I could have sold it for twenty grand, maybe thirty," he said modestly.

"Can I use your name to get in there?"

He said, "Yes, if you're good and damned sure you know what you're doing."

I TRIED to think who would lend me a car in a hurry. I didn't think of anyone, so I drove over in a rented car.

It was one of the big studios. A cute girl page led me rather less than half a mile along a cork-floored hallway into the office of Mr. Eilerman's secretary. The secretary led me the rest of the way into Eilerman's office when she saw I wasn't going to tell all to her.

Eilerman was a clean-shaved, brisk, unsmiling chap with the slightly defensive attitude of a man to whom somebody tries to sell something colossal all day long. There were no gold-plated gadgets on his desk. This guy worked for a living.

He said, "Yes?"

I said: "I just wanted to tell you, brother, how you got rimmed out of fifteen thousand bucks on that Darlene Nichols yarn."

"What do you mean?"

"It was stolen."

"From you, no doubt," he said. "Well, the legal department is at the other end of the hall. I advise you to turn left when you reach the front door. Our lawyers are pretty tough."

"This one will break their jaws. The

manuscript was stolen from a suicide named Denzon. A skip-tracer named Nichols walked off with it. He didn't even change the title, just put his wife's name on as author."

"Excuse me," Mr. Eilerman said. "Can you substantiate that?"

"The manuscript was off Denzon's typewriter," I said. "The typewriter and the typing can be traced. Your legal department will tell you you'll have to produce it on court order."

"Manuscript?" he said. "We bought no manuscript. It was an advanced book proof. Would you care to see?"

"I would love to see."

Mr. Eilerman spoke into an inter-office communicator.

He said, leaning back, "We're in the clear. Certainly as far as Miss, or Mrs. Nichols is concerned. I've never even met the woman. But have you any other proof?"

"It was a beautiful love story, the kind a fat landlady would be proud to be in."

"Yes," he said. "There *was* a fat landlady in it, curiously enough."

"Called Mrs. Sugar."

"Yes," he said. He was getting to be a regular yes-man. "Thank you, Mildred," he broke off.

MILDRED was the secretary. She'd brought in the book. I'd never seen one like it before. It was a paper-bound volume of proof pages stitched together, so the back of each page was blank. It was copyrighted by Treasure Editions, Los Angeles.

"You're absolutely positive about the identification?" Mr. Eilerman asked.

"There won't be any trouble about that. In fact, the story was rejected and sent back express by at least one other publisher."

"Yes," he said. It was a safe thing to say.

I said: "Don't you think you ought to get busy getting your dough back from the dame?"

He didn't say yes.

Instead he put his fingertips together in front of him. "That isn't quite the situation. It's not as common as it was formerly, but certain publishers still enter into contractual agreements whereby they reserve a portion or an entirety of the subsidiary dramatic, motion picture, radio, and televisions rights."

I caught on. "Treasure Editions got the fifteen grand?"

"I understood so."

I thought it over.

"I'm just a dumb dick. But isn't it an unusual set-up in which a man gets his hooks into fifteen thousand dollars by investing a few hundred bucks in printing some advance proofs? Who runs this Treasure Editions racket, anyway?"

Mr. Eilerman said: "Suppose I step down the hall to the legal department with you."

We walked down the hall and had a talk with a lawyer named Kissider, and a look at the fifteen grand contract, which was a contract between the studio and Treasure Editions, per W. W. Dunn, Sales Manager.

Treasure editions wasn't in the phone book.

Neither was W. W. Dunn.

But in California, anyone doing business under a fictitious name has to register the fact. The registrations have to be published in a newspaper of general circulation. The usual one is the *Court Recorder*.

I drove down to the Hall of Justice neighborhood, went up to the offices of the *Recorder*, and found that Treasure Editions was a brand new baby, three weeks old, and was the fictitious name of one Ethan St. George John.

I was interested enough to look up the Ladder Press, too. That was going on three years old, and was a partnership between Ethan St. George John and Rex E. Poland.

THE Ladder Press was in the phone book, and was on Olive Street. I went up there and said hello to W. W. Dunn, who was a female aged forty, and was the kind of a sales manager who sits behind a railing and explains that you have to see Mr. St. George John on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and every other Friday.

She asked me which paper I saw the ad in.

"Ad?"

"Our ad for manuscripts," she explained.

I said: "Oh, a friend told me about you."

"Oh," she said, "who?"

"A guy named Nichols. He brought in a manuscript of his wife's, it must have been over a month ago."

"Nichols. It was longer than that ago. Nearer three months," she said.

Then she started telling me how much she had liked Darlene Nichols book, and how she had showed it to a friend who worked in a movie studio, and how the studio had bought it.

I listened and asked, "Wasn't there another man here in the company? Name of Poland?"

"Mr. Poland was a silent partner," she said, "and he passed on recently."

I left there, feeling I had enough to hang a man.

I drove back to the Camino City, feeling surer of it every mile of the way.

I found the office locked.

Barbara had gone, leaving a note. It was one of those phone message forms. Barbara had written with a fountain pen, *Darlene N.*, and *435 Sul-*

tan Hotel. She had been in too much much of a rush to write down the time. But the ink looked fresh. I rubbed it with my forefinger. It smudged a little.

The cabbie had heard of the Sultan Hotel. I took a cab because I thought Barbara might have walked, and I could get there first.

It was one of those off-Third-Avenue hotels. Not a hotel the exalted order of anything would chose for a convention headquarters. It was dirty brick with a brass plate beside the door and a piece of cardboard that said No Vacancies, and meant no vacancies unless you slipped the cleck a buck on the side.

The clerk and a cat were asleep at the desk. The cat opened one eye at me. The clerk opened both eyes, but that was after I was inside the elevator. It was one of those old, open, iron-grill cages. I ran it up to the fourth floor without any help.

DO NOT DISTURB, the sign dangling from 435's doornob said.

QUIETLY, without making any disturbance, I tried the knob. The door had been left conveniently unlocked. The window shades were drawn. There was light enough to see the bed hadn't been slept in.

The bathroom door was closed. It wasn't a clothes closet door because water dripped inside it.

I opened the door.

A woman lay fully clothed in the bathtub. She was sleeping the long sleep of the just—and the unjust, of anybody that's been socked on the skull with a canvas sack full of buckshot.

I didn't know it was a canvas sock full of buckshot until several seconds later. Until I bent to look at the woman in the tub, and the arm reached out of the shower-stall and hit me with

this canvas slung.

Bending over the bathtub was the thing that saved me. The tile floor being slippery helped a little. The combination of bending and slipping made me a little hard to kill. Falling down was too easy. I fell into the tub and the dead woman's lap.

If I had stood up there and taken my punishment like a man, the coroner would have written a report on how it happened.

But falling down kept me alive—slightly. Of course, I had been sapped. My head stayed on my shoulders only because the shoulders and the rest of me went the same direction with my head, and almost as fast.

I didn't even know I'd fallen. My face seemed wrapped up in the kind of inky cloud an octopus squirts. The inky stuff was the woman's skirt. Little flashes if lightning played through the cloud. The lightning was my own private imagination.

I must have hurt the right hand falling, but I didn't feel it. I pawed with the other hand and got the skirt out of my eyes. That turned my left shoulder up. I looked over it and saw him coming out of the shower-stall toward me.

His big, lardy, serious face was as solemn as a deacon's passing the collection plate. He raised his sap to bestow the benediction and dismiss the congregation. He was in no hurry or worry. I had time to see what that sap was.

Convertible coupes used to be made with folding tops that you put down by brute force. The automobile people used to supply little canvas tubes, sacks open at one end, into which you were supposed to insert the swinging top-arms when you wrestled down the top.

One of them filled with buckshot made a dandy blackjack, as long as from your wrist to your elbow. I

imagine he got the buckshot out of shotgun shells, using the shotgun powder to load Rex E. Poland's souvenir Jap hand grenade.

My brain thought of that. One of my feet had the idea to kick him in the belly. It wasn't my idea, and I could have told the foot it wasn't strong enough to stop him.

The foot gave him a gentle push.

HE LOOKED surprised. He jumped back in surprise. Now he knew I was alive. Alive and kicking. Kicking him.

He figured if he circled down to the south end of the tub, I couldn't kick him there. And he could still bat out my brains.

He must have thought my left hand was reaching under me for the bathtub rim to lift myself up. He was used to killing persons like Rex E. Poland and Eddie Nichols and this woman, none of them carrying guns.

He raised his sap and started his swing.

I got my hand there under my lapel. I had the beautiful idea of shooting him right between his solemn blue eyes.

I had a slight lapse of memory there.

I forgot Watsenberg shot himself with the last gun I carried, and I could have got it back after the inquest.

I had no gun.

The sap came swinging down.

I threw up my left hand.

Maybe he tried to change his swing and hit around my hand. Maybe he was just lousy with a sap.

He got me on the left shoulder, not the head.

He was bent over, and for a moment our faces weren't a foot apart.

He didn't mind trying again.

At the same time, I realized the way to get out of this tub was to relax and let my knees down to the floor out-

side it.

Now I was on my knees, and he had to correct his swing.

I stood up.

He reached and grabbed my left arm. I didn't take it away from him. That arm was numb. It had been out of business ever since he sapped my shoulder.

He assumed I couldn't use my right hand at all. I assumed I couldn't use it twice. This had to be good the first time.

As he steadied himself, holding my left arm so I couldn't run away, I put the right hand into his belly as hard as I could drive it.

That didn't hurt me any more than sticking my hand up to the elbow in a fire.

The world turned over a couple of times. Then it slowed to a moderate bobbing in which the bathroom floor behaved like the deck of a ship in a forty-mile gale. We were both down on the floor; I was on top; I had a knee on his chest. I moved the other knee against his jaw and his head knocked against the side of the bathtub. I did that again. I did it several times.

I lost count of doing it. His eyes were closed. I thought maybe he was dead. I kneed him a couple more times in case I was wrong.

Then I started on my knees to the shower-stall.

If I could reach, and turn on, the cold water.

A voice said, "Gil!"

I knew the voice.

"Turn on the cold water here, Barbara," I said.

She stood over me. "Gil, what happened?"

"He sapped me. Cold water."

"You'd get your clothes all wet," she said. "Wait, I'll soak a towel for your head."

"Who is he?" she asked.

"He was St. George John. I don't know the dame."

"She's Darlene Nichols," Barbara said. "What shall I do now, call the police?"

I wasn't that far gone.

"Phooey on the police. Call Walter Phaden at the D.A.'s office. I owe him a good turn."

"All right, Gil. What shall I tell him?"

"Just say I killed St. George John. I'll think up some explanation by the time Phaden gets here."

Barbara said "You didn't kill St. George John. He's alive and breathing."

"Grab the sap and hit him over the head again!" I yelled.

But then I looked. He wasn't breathing that much.

"Okay, swell," I said. "He can think up the explanations."

CHAPTER VII

Crazy Client

ETHAN ST. GEORGE JOHN talked. He was just a businessman. He couldn't keep up with all those district attorneys and detectives and lawyers from the movie studio. He blamed it all on Eddie Nichols, and then he told it again, and blamed it all on Rex E. Poland, and after that he said it was Miss Dunn's fault, but he kept talking. Along about ten o'clock that night, he began blaming himself a little; and by midnight he had talked enough to satisfy me. I went home and had been asleep several hours when Phaden called and said they had a confession.

I thought everybody was satisfied, but when I got down to the office the next morning, Harriet Poland was

there. Sitting in the sunlight and looking like Botticelli had painted her. The most un-carnally beautiful woman I ever saw.

"I've seen the papers," she said, her gloved hands resting on a newspaper. "And I think it's dreadful. It's just like the police. Blaming it all on poor Ethan."

It was her voice that sent the shiver down my spine.

I said, "Mrs. Poland, there've been rackets, and police-protected rackets, in Camino City. That set-up almost killed me, and it's the set-up the F.B.I. raids showed up. But it's got nothing to do with your husband's death."

She said, "Yes, but why haven't the police produced the man who was in Rex's study that night with the blinds drawn? What have they done with the papers Rex typed that night? Why haven't they traced the grenade?"

"If the blinds were drawn," I said, "what you saw was a shadow on the window shade. Not a man at all. Just the shadow of a man."

"Mrs. Poland, you live in a slightly apart world in which time and space hardly count. Sight and sound doesn't count. It all goes on inside your head."

But I tried to tell her.

I took her newspaper and opened it to the personals column and showed her the ad—one of those ads that run on and on, week after month:

Manuscripts wanted. Fiction. Biography. Verse. The Ladder Press, — Olive Street, Los Angeles.

"That's what hooked Eddie Nichols," I explained. "He'd swiped an express package with a manuscript in it. He thought maybe he could turn a dollar peddling it to the Ladder Press."

"That was silly of him," I continued, "because Mr. St. George John wasn't in the business of buying fiction, biography, and verse. He was in the vanity

business of publishing books at the authors' expense. That's how your husband got to know him. Your husband wrote books and lost a couple of thousand dollars having St. George John print them for him.

"Mrs. Poland," I asked, "why didn't you tell me your husband was a silent partner in that racket?"

She said: "Rex didn't care to have it known he published his own work."

"That isn't how St. George John tells it. He says Rex went into the partnership to get his dough back from the other suckers."

HARRIET POLAND scorned: "I can't imagine Ethan saying anything of the kind. It's so utterly unlike him. Mr. Baltic, do you take me for a simpleton?"

I skipped it.

"Usually," I said, "St. George John would have just glanced through the manuscript so he could plausibly praise it to the skies in order to talk Eddie Nichols out of some money. However, in this case a funny thing happened. I mean that Dunn woman picked up the story and started reading. And, by golly, Denzon had really written a book. Miss Dunn couldn't lay it down. She took it home with her. She knew a girl in one of the movie studios, and the girl raved about the story, too.

"And," I said, "the Dunn woman told all this to St. George John. Told him the book was a swell picture bet. So he bet on it. That is, he offered Nichols a contract with fine-print clauses reserving the picture rights. But it wasn't a Ladder Press contract, it was between Nichols and St. George John personally. He paid for the printing out of his own personal pocket, and set up a new Treasure Editions label to hide the copyright behind.

"He did all that to gyp Rex Poland

out of any share in the profits."

The big blonde shook her head.

"Mr. Baltic," she sighed, "if you only knew how unlike Ethan's true character all of this is."

I said: "He's smooth, yes, but he doesn't know the law. The law is that an officer in a company or partnership can't seize a business opportunity offered to him in his official or partnership capacity. He can't say no for the company and yes he'll take it himself. The law is—and the Supreme Court has upheld it—that if he does his company or partner can sue him for the profits.

"Therefore, it didn't do St. George John a damned bit of good to have financed the deal in his own name. Nichols had submitted the manuscript to the Ladder Press, and therefore your husband was entitled to his half. He knew it, and claimed it, and that's why St. George John blew his head off."

She gave me one of her very shiveriest looks.

"Do you really think," she asked, "any of this could have happened without Rex telling me?"

"Yes," I said enthusiastically.

"Well, it's untrue. It's preposterous and it's insane."

Look who's saying it's insane.

BUT I didn't want to make it too tough. So I didn't tell her in so many words it was St. George John's shadow she'd seen on the blind, that he'd tapped Poland with his sap, hung the bomb on his necktie, and walked out laughing. And that if she'd heard typewriting, it was St. George John playing on a portable machine at the other end of the patio.

I skipped that part and went on to the next:

"This came up. Eddie Nichols found out about the movie sale. He came around for his money. St. George

John politely explained the fine-print in the contract covered all that nicely.

"Nichols," I said, "told him the contract covered nothing because the manuscript was stolen. Nichols said, 'You come across or I'll tell the studio the manuscript was stolen.' So that's how it came to pass Eddie became a corpse."

"Mr. Baltic," Harriet Poland protested, "you didn't tell the police Ethan was with me, with you, in my house, when Nichols was killed."

"I needed over half an hour to get downtown on a bus. He drove it in a car in ten minutes."

"He did not. He stayed with me."

I shook my head.

"You can't lie him out of it," I said. "There's too much against him. You see, he could only knock off one guy by the Jap souvenir method. A novelty like that stales fast. He had to think of something else, and he thought of trying to hide it in a political smoke-screen."

"Camino City stinks," I said, "and he thought he could make this so much a part of the stink the cops would walk a mile to miss it. That's why he made up all that about his meeting 'Nixon' at the Columbus Fountain. That's why he dropped the body inside my apartment. He though he could tie Pete Storm and me and everybody else up in knots."

"Well," I told her, "all that's just too fancy. He can tell it that way once. The next time he tells it they ask him if he didn't tell a different lie last time, and he can't remember, and he says yes. They had *him* in knots last night."

She said, "I know. The third degree."

I almost gave up.

"Okay," I said, "Nichols hit himself over the head and ate the sap after he died. St. George John didn't meet Dar-

lene Nichols, take her to that hotel telling her Eddie's contract was there. She brained herself, and ate the sap, too. Is that how you figure?"

A SHINE of serene madness glossed her big blue eyes. "Mr. Baltic, will you answer one question?"

"I'll try."

She bent toward me. "Doesn't that horrible Sweet woman claim Denzon left a will in her favor?"

"The papers say she says so. I haven't seen it."

Harriet Poland smiled a very special smile. "But that's it, that's the answer. The police are allowing her to collect that money, that blood money, that fifteen thousand dollars. Of course, they'll get their share later. You look into *that* and it's *all* perfectly clear why they're framing poor Ethan."

That was one poor Ethan hadn't thought of himself, and he'd thought of plenty.

I said: "Look. St. George John sucked my girl, and me, into that Sultan Hotel death trap. He was there. He slugged me over the head."

"Now," I asked, "if he's innocent, why in the hell did he do that?"

She looked at me steadily, I think with a trace of compassion, perhaps with regret.

"You're lying," she said. "You're in it, too. You're one of them. And I'll send you to the penitentiary before I'm through, too."

She stood. She opened her purse. I thought a gun might come out. I got ready to jump. But a handkerchief came out.

She dabbed at the corners of her eyes and said: "I'll get to the bottom of all this some day. I'll find a man I can trust—an honest man like Captain Watsenberg."

"Watsenberg!"

"He was an honest, decent man," she said sadly. "Don't you think I know that's why you killed him?"

She walked away, all wrapped up in her own little world.

I sat there and thought, maybe she's happier than the rest of us, and was still thinking when Barbara came quietly in.

"Gil," she asked, "who will get that fifteen thousand dollars, really?"

"Nobody," I said. "It was a fraudulent sale. The studio lawyers worked on St. George John last night. They'll

get their dough back."

"But the story—?"

"It was a beautiful love yarn," I said, "but no studio in Hollywood will touch it after the stinking publicity it's had."

The big killing had back-fired, was all.

There wasn't anything left.

I got up.

"Hell," I said, "this civilian life is wearing me thin. It's too tough. I need a furlough, Bra-bra."

So we took a furlough and didn't get back to the office for two days.

ALIAS THE DUKE

ORDINARILY, when the prosecuting attorney of New York City received a note from one of the prisoners in Tombs Prison, he was apt to give it no thought, busy official that he was. But on this morning in the early nineteen hundreds, his attention was caught by the fine style of the note and the signature which followed it: "Charles Francis de Nevers." The prosecuting attorney was intrigued. Departing from the usual rule of his office, he rang for a messenger, asking for full information about the prisoner, and instructing the guard to have de Nevers summoned.

Immersed in the morning routine, the prosecuting attorney had almost forgotten that he was to have a visitor, when the deputy-sheriff entered the office, followed by a tall, fashionably dressed distinguished-looking man, in appearance totally unlike the ordinary occupant of a cell in the City Prison.

The attorney was quite impressed with the prisoner, and offering him a chair and a cigar, invited de Nevers to tell his story. The prisoner began with the startling revelation that he was really the Duke de Nevers, his father the last duke having died in February, 1905. He told of his early life in France, of how he had served as lieutenant in the First Regiment of Engineers at Versailles, of how he was once the Commander of the Legion of Honor, of how he had retired as a Major at the age of thirty-three. His sister, now the Lady Londonderry, had invited de Nevers to come to visit her in London. Here, he had fallen in love with the governess in his sister's household, and had run away with her to America, to escape his family's wrath. For a time, he had lived happily in South Boston, raising three sons. At his wife's death in 1901, he affected a reconciliation with his parents in France. But America lured him back, and he returned to this country as a consulting engineer.

As de Nevers spoke, the prosecuting attorney

became convinced that some ghastly joke had been played upon this distinguished gentleman. The attorney fancied himself somewhat of a judge of human character, and the man before him seemed perfectly sincere. De Nevers showed the attorney some pictures of his family, his sisters and brothers being married to the highest nobility of several European nations. He even had a letter of recommendation from the French Minister of War, replete with an official State seal. Yet, this man was indicted on a charge of perjury.

The prosecuting attorney determined to do some sleuthing on his own. He could not help being fascinated by the romantic quality of the name de Nevers. At the library, he picked the volume labeled "N" of Larousse's "Grand Dictionnaire Universe du XIX Siecle," and soon found the name Nevers. To his amazement, he read that the last Duke de Nevers had died in 1798. Unwilling to believe that he had been duped, the prosecuting attorney traced the lineage of Lady Londonderry, only to find that she was the daughter of Charles Henry Gurney.

Two days later, a young attractive woman confronted the attorney. Her name was Mrs. de Nevers. She told, with some anguish, how the Duke had presented himself to Montreal society, dazzling her with his manner, money, and the thrill of being a Duchess. At the wedding, gifts had been received from the Duke and Duchess de Nevers, from the Marchioness of Londonderry, and from the Countess of Dudley. Everything was wonderful, until one day the money ran out and the Duke was under arrest for not paying their hotel bill in Chicago. Of course, the Chicago police did not retain him for fear of causing an international complication.

A week later, the Duke de Nevers was sentenced to five years at hard labor. This humiliation seemed to have no effect upon the prisoner. He retained his dignity throughout, as befitted the Duke of a noble house.

—John Craig



ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN!



BY
GARY LEE HORTON

MURDER BEATS THE RAP

IS THE United States actually one of the most criminal countries in the world? This is a frequently heard query and a difficult one to answer.

While many countries count the number of their crimes according to records of arrests or convictions, we count all of those "known to the police." Another factor involves the actual definition of a crime. What is considered an illegal act in this country may not be against the law in another, and vice-versa. For instance, gambling is severely punished in Japan; some of our states have legal-

ized it altogether. What are considered crimes of burglary in England are defined quite differently in this country.

Authorities are almost unanimously agreed on one point, however. More criminals go unpunished in the United States than in other countries such as England and France. An example of this is clearly seen in the data of one year in this country's criminal files when 6,000 murders were committed in states where the death penalty was demanded. Yet only 155 persons were executed. One execution to 40 murders!

FRUITS OF POISON

THE invention of a delayed action poison is attributed to a seventeenth century woman who has known few peers at the vicious art of poisoning. The name of this sinister mystery woman of history was Toffana. The centers for her crimes were the Italian towns Palermo and Naples. Apparently without scruples, Toffano extended her professional services to anyone willing to pay the price. It is said that her victims numbered over six hundred, and included two popes.

But the most horrible and incredible of her feats was the invention of a delayed action poison

which she so compounded, that it would operate at any given time up to a year after it was administered. The wave of poisoning that swept like a plague over Europe in the seventeenth century, is attributed in large measure to this work of Toffana.

No one was ever known to have duplicated her delayed action poison. She took its ghastly secret with her to her death, refusing to divulge it even under torture. Her refusal to disclose the fatal formula is probably the only good thing that this woman ever did.

THINK IT OVER!

CVILIZATION had attained the ripe old age of 12,000 years before the idea of imprisonment took root and criminals could look forward to a long life, but a miserable one paying their debt to the society which they had wronged. Until quite late in the Christian era, the only conception of punishment for crime was death or the infliction of bodily pain. Under the Roman Empire, prisons were not places of punishment, but were used only for detaining prisoners until they could be tried or executed. The idea of imprison-

ment for offenders grew out of the Christian conception of solitude as a first condition of penitence. In solitary confinement a wrong-doer had plenty of time for reflection, time to regret what he had done, and having the spirit of life still in him—a chance to mend his ways.

Thus prisons were instituted as the first means of correcting the criminal, and the science of modern penology has gone on from there to turn those prisons into even more useful institutions by rehabilitation programs.

HOT BLOOD

"HAVE you 'good hot blood'?"

For twenty-two years an average of 24,000 bottles of a fraudulent drug sold yearly testified to the fact that a good many people thought their blood needed heating.

The whole idea originated with W. H. Paxton of Birmingham, Alabama, whose entire medical training was acquired while a servant in a certain Dr. Hunt's household. Under such names as "American Cross Chemical Company" and "American Cross Bearers" he sold his miraculous discovery guaranteed to develop "hot blood," an essential to the elimination of poison or almost any

disease of the human body. Some of Paxton's blood-heaters were called Pax 2 New Life Savers, Compound Syrup of Fruit Juices and Pax 3 in 1 Healing Antiseptic and Liniment.

At one time Paxton was investigated by the Department of Agriculture, but it was not until eight years later that his cure-all medicine was declared a fake, and he was denied the use of the mails. At that time Paxton's business was valued at \$75,000, and if it is not at present profitably continuing under other names, that alone is a tidy sum to have "earned" on the basis of "good hot blood."

Anybody Lose a Corpse?

By Larry Holden

MY KID brother's name is really Henry, but nobody ever called him anything but Midge on account of he's so little and scrawny. The rest of the family is big, and even Mom walked herself bowlegged carrying her two hundred and thirty pounds around. I guess you'd call Midge a runt—but not to his face! He's the scrappiest, yappiest little chihuahua in the bone yard, and honest to God, there are times I'd rather have Jack the Ripper working for me.

I'm the Joe Malpas of the Malpas Protection Agency. Midge, he's a Malpas too, of course, but he's just on the payroll. I'm the guy who pays the rent and gets the headaches. Now, there's one thing I want you to get straight right away. Midge isn't pressing his pants on my office chairs just because he's my kid brother. He's got real talent for this snoop and snitch racket. Even as a kid he was a natural tail, and he'd follow us big guys without our knowing he was within a mile of us, then turn up at that well-known psychological moment—me with a beer in my hand.

Then he'd snitch. Just as I said,



I inched slowly up to the half-open door. The doc had a gun pointed at Midge and was bawling hell out of him



You could say this for Joe's brother:

he was in there trying. That was what

made this murder case so hard to solve

he has a talent for it.

But let's get on with it.

This day we got a buzz from a babe named Dodge, who wanted her missing husband traced. She didn't want to come downtown because she had a lot of friends with funny minds, and if one of them happened to see her walking into the office of a professional snoop, he'd say to himself, "Well, what do you know! Penelope's finally getting a divorce. It's about time she's hanging one on that second-hand husband of hers," and off he'd go to spread the good word. And she didn't want a divorce, but if someone gave her the idea, she might be talked into it. All this in one breath. It sounded like a pretty screwy kind of love-life to me.

So off we went, and Midge with me.

He always went with me. He said it was to learn the business, but he wasn't fooling me. He was so nosy that the idea of missing anything drove him nearly nuts.

The Dodge house was out in the suburbs. It had to be. That was the only place there was room for it. It had a huge verandah with six fat pillars running up and down, and a front door wide enough for the subway.

Hung on that was a massive brass knocker you could have used to batter a hole in a brick wall. Inconspicuous, to the left of the door, was a bell-push hiding in a fluted column. I put my finger on it and inside something played *Ave Maria*. I suppose a plain ordinary buzzer would have been blasphemy.

Midge's bright eyes were darting here and there, taking in everything. He poked me in the ribs with his thumb and said, "Some kennel, hey, Joey? What a mansion! Just like *Gone With The Wind*. All we gotta do is find Vivian Leigh inside and . . ." He rolled his eyes and let loose a wolf howl. I said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, Midge.

Shut up. Here comes somebody."

THE door opened about twelve inches and an elderly scarecrow, with a cast-iron permanent, glared out and gave us the steely eye.

"Malpas," I said, handing her a plain card that just said Joseph Malpas. "Mrs. Dodge sent for me."

She snatched the card out of my hand, held it about an inch away from her eyes, grunted and slammed the door.

"Yah!" said Midge, "That's some Vivian Leigh, that is. Queen of the Zombies!"

I said, "Shut up," and the door opened again, this time wide enough for us to go in. The scarecrow tilted her chin toward another door and followed us so closely I felt as if I were under guard.

We were in a living room as big as the American Wing of the Museum of Art, and scattered tastefully here and there was a mess of furniture with a finish so beautiful you could have eaten it with a spoon. It had all been made by hand, I found out later, by a couple guys named Ben Randolph and Duncan Phyfe.

Down by the fireplace was a tall, auburn-haired babe in riding breeches and boots, a green shirt and a leather vest. She was sitting cross-legged on the sofa eating ham and eggs from a coffee table before her, and she looked as if she were enjoying it.

In a rusty, corrugated voice, the scarecrow said, "Here's Mr. Malpas." She gave us another granite glance, to see if we had concealed any knick-knacks in our clothes, then went out, slamming the door as she wanted to pull it through the wall. I don't think she was in favor of men.

The girl waved her fork at us. "Be with you in a minute, Malpas. Park

yourself someplace," she said through a mouthful of egg. "Have a cup of coffee?"

Midge whistled and whispered, "Some mouse, eh, Joey?" He stuck out his skinny chest and strutted down the room after it.

The girl looked at him and exclaimed, "Good Heavens!"

I didn't blame her. He was wearing a very pleated pair of sharkskin slacks, a plaid sport shirt with twelve-inch collar points and a sportcoat that fell in simple lines almost to his knees. I felt suddenly as if I should have been carrying a grind organ and leading him by a chain. I hadn't felt that way before, but I guess I was too used to him.

I saw his back stiffen and he said in a mean voice, "What's the matter with you, sister?"

She grinned. "Now, now," she said. "Did I hurt your feelings? I'm sorry. I just thought you looked a little young for this business."

I could have told her that was the wrong way to talk to Midge. He was as tender as a hangover about anything that had to do with his size—or, in fact, just plain anything.

Before he could snap back at her with something that would have got us tossed out on our cans, I said soothingly, "Shut up, Midge. Sit down and have a cup of coffee."

He whirled on me and spat, "You keep out of this, Joey!"

I took his arm. "Come on, youngster," I said.

He kicked viciously at my shins and flailed at my arm with his bony little fists.

The girl laughed—a rich throaty laugh—and wound up coughing with her napkin over her mouth. "Calm down, Junior," she said. "Here's a picture book you can look at while your father and I talk business."

She tossed him a magazine, but he put his hands behind him and let it hit him on the chest and fall to the floor. He gave both of us a look of blazing hatred and stalked across the room like a wooden-legged rooster. He went into a small room off the living room and closed the door with a crash that would have jarred the Better Housing Administration.

I WAS a little mad too and it must have showed in my voice when I said, "Wasn't that rubbing it in?"

Her brows came down like the visor of a mail helmet, and for a minute or two I thought we were going to go at it, but she turned it into a chuckle and speared a piece of ham with her fork.

"You know, Malpas," she said, "Ted always said, every woman carries a poisoned needle on her tongue. And I have a sense of humor, and sometimes the two go together." She wiped her mouth with her napkin and threw it carelessly on the coffee table. "All of which brings us to Ted, my wayward husband. He's missing." She sprawled out full length on the sofa and rested her head on the arm. She lit a cigarette. "Now don't ask me where I think he might have gone. I don't know, and I don't much care, but somebody's got to pay the bills around here. You're a detective"—she waved her cigarette—"find him."

"I'll have to ask you some questions," I said sourly. "Like, for instance, why he disappeared. Do you have any idea?"

"Hundreds, Malpas, hundreds. He could have taken a fancy to some floozie and run down to Bermuda with her. He could be lying drunk in a River Street dive in Hoboken. Somebody's husband might have come home a day too soon and he's someplace having the buckshot dug out of him. He

might be up to his ears in a ten-day poker game. A great lad, Ted—the answer to a maiden's nightmare. Is that what you want to know?"

I said, "Yeah. But there's one thing you forgot. Maybe he raided the office safe and ran off with the bankroll."

She grinned lazily through the smoke. "You're another great lad, Malpas," she said, "But I suppose the world is full of great lads. It wasn't just *my* bad luck. Yes, I suppose he could have done that, but he wouldn't have run off if he did. He'd coddle old Abel Wilson into thinking it was mice. That's his partner. Old Abel's never been the same since women gave up bustles. That's one thing you *can* do, Malpas. Trot over and have a little chat with Abel. Maybe Ted's been down to the office every day this week. If I'm getting the brush-off, I'd like to know it. Ted'll be as mad as hell when he finds out you're checking up on him, but let him stew. Do him good."

"And where will I find Abel?"

"Acme Garment Company." She gave me the address and I scribbled it on the back of an envelope.

I said, "Now, how long has he been gone?"

"Let's see. I saw him for breakfast Saturday morning, and he was his usual charming self, hangover and all. He looked like a second-hand toupee. Then I went to my sister's place in Scarsdale and I didn't get back until Monday morning. He wasn't here and hasn't been here since. Now I think you've got enough, Malpas. Anyway, it's time for my bath."

She ground her cigarette out in the remnants of egg and stood, stretching sensuously.

I levered myself out of my chair. "What do you want me to do when I find him?" I asked. "Shall I sing, 'Father, dear father, come home to us

now'?"

She gave me a hard, clinical glance. "I meet the damnedest men," she sighed. "Just let me know where he is, and I'll pick it up from there."

I started for the door and she called, "Aren't you forgetting Charlie McCarthy in there?"

I had forgotten Midge. I growled, "Yeah," at her.

MIDGE was sitting behind a broad desk in a little leather-walled room that was probably a den, and before him was piled the contents of every drawer in the desk.

The girl turned to me and said, as nastily as she could make it, "Take that little boy out of here and spank him!"

Midge retreated backward and up-room. "Keep away from me now, I'm telling you!" he screeched. He had a paperweight in his fist. "Keep away from me!" he warned stridently.

He whirled and scurried through another door.

Some of the papers had fallen from the desk to the floor and I bent over to pick them up, but she stopped me.

"I'll clean it up myself," she said. "I think you better go out and see that he doesn't break any windows."

But he wasn't breaking any windows. He was sitting in the front seat of the agency car, and when I climbed in, he said defiantly, "She ast for it, Joey. She ast for it. Didn't she?"

"Maybe she did," I said wearily. "But listen, kid, when I take you out on a job I want you to keep your trap shut. Now understand that, get me? I'm going to fan your backside with a crowbar the next time you pull any stunts like that."

He said, "Yes, Joey." Then craftily, "I found something."

"Yeah? What? Loaded dice?"

"A telegram."

He held it up triumphantly, like a kid showing his first black eye. I spread it on the wheel of the car. It said:

"In trouble. Explain later. Love. Ted."

"Why didn't she say something about that, Joey?" Midge wriggled with excitement. "Why didn't she say something about that? She got it only yesterday. There's f u n n y business going on there, Joey."

I folded it thoughtfully and tucked it down behind the handkerchief in my breast pocket. I started the car.

"Well, don't you think so, Joey?" Midge asked in an aggrieved voice.

"Maybe, kid. We'll hang on to it anyway."

That satisfied him and he settled down contentedly. "Where to now, Joey?"

WE WERE a big surprise to Mr. Abel Wilson of the Acme Garment Company. His fat pink fingers tumbled around in his lap like drunken sausages and he bleated. "Detectives? Detectives? From the police?" He parted his hair in the middle and looked as if he thought all women under sixty immoral.

"Private." I gave him our card.

It said, Malpas Protection Agency. Midge was after me to change it to The Eureka Watch And Ward Corporation, but those were just words he picked up in a book.

Wilson flipped the card around in his hand and finally laid it on the desk, squaring it neatly with the edge of the blotter. He seemed to think he had too many fingers, or maybe that he had lost some, because he kept counting them with his head down.

"What can I do for you gentlemen?" he mumbled.

Midge laughed. "Listen to him, Joey. He wants to do something for us. We're here to do something for you, Buster. We're gonna find your missing partner, ain't we, Joey?"

I said, "Shut up!" Then to Wilson, "We're looking for Mr. Dodge."

He cackled. "Heh, heh, heh, so am I." But he didn't look as if he thought it very funny. He went over his fingers again. "Who-who-who hired you, did you say?"

"I didn't say, but it was his wife."

For some reason, that seemed to bring him relief. "Oh, his wife," he said. "Yes. Unusual girl, isn't she? Did—uh—she seem to have any idea of—uh—why he disappeared?"

"Dozens, but they all add up to a seven letter word meaning illegitimate child. She wasn't much help."

"Dear me, dear me," he said, looking pleased. "This is really very distressing. Yes. I don't know where to turn. Mr. Dodge is an integral part of this business and I—"

"Yeah," I said drily. I didn't like his act. It was corny, and the worst of it was, he thought he was putting it over. "Maybe you can help us, Mr. Wilson. Did Dodge have any business worries?"

"Business worries? Yes." He giggled. "We have twice as many orders as we had last year and we don't know how to fill them. Young man!" he jumped up and waved his arm at Midge, who had opened a door to the left of the office and had his eye glued to the crack. "Close that door instantly! Do you hear me?"

Midge closed the door and looked at me. "What do you think he's got in there, Joey?" he asked in an awed voice. "A dame inna underwear. What kind of joint is this?"

"She's one of our models," said Wilson with asperity. "That's the dress-

ing room.”

Midge leered at him. “Is that why the door’s unlocked, Pop?”

Wilson said, “Oh dear me!” and sank back in his chair and mopped his face with a large white handkerchief.

“Maybe you didn’t know the door was unlocked, eh?” asked Midge innocently.

“Certainly not, young man, certainly not!”

“Maybe the girls unlocked it, Joey.” He winked at me. “But it’s my bet the key to that door is in Dodge’s pocket right this minute. Right, Pop?”

I raised my eyebrows at Wilson. He looked as if he had swallowed his lips.

“I never approved,” he said primly, “I never approved for a minute. But if the girls didn’t mind. . . . Damn it, it’s none of your business. Get out, both of you!” He pointed a quivering finger at the door. “Insulting me in my own office! Get out, I say!”

But behind this facade of anger, his eyes were anxious. A little scared, too.

I took my hat from the desk.

“Okay,” I said. “But you’re sure there’s nothing you want to tell me?”

“Absolutely nothing. Good day, sir!”

I looked around for Midge, but he had gone. I caught up with him in the hall. He was hiding on the stairway, peering around the corner.

“Did he scare you, kid?” I grinned.

He swaggered beside me. “That old goat? Yah! But what was the sense of hanging around? He clammed up on us?”

OUT on the sidewalk I had a hunch and pulled Midge into the doorway of a florist shop beside the office building entrance.

“Now keep still,” I told him. “Open your big mouth and you’ll crab the act.”

God help me if he didn’t choose that minute to turn sensitive again. He

jumped back from me and stood in the middle of the sidewalk.

“Always,” he said fiercely, “it’s my big mouth. What’s the matter with your big mouth for a change. And another thing, Joey, honest to God, the next time you tell me to shut up I’ll kick you black and blue.”

I made a lunge for him and just by luck managed to grab the end of his coat. I dragged him, protesting shrilly, back into the doorway. And with no time to spare.

At that moment Wilson, hatless and coatless, came tearing out of the building and hailed a cab with his furred umbrella. He jumped in and I saw him lean forward and pant urgently at the driver. They dived into traffic like a rabbit going through underbrush.

I sprang for the agency car, but between trying to get the keys out of my pocket and pulling Midge along with the other hand, I dropped the keys in the gutter, and when I came up with them, Wilson’s cab had disappeared.

Midge said helpfully, “I got his number, Joey.”

“Fine,” I growled. “Don’t lose it.”

Wilson, I knew, was going to one of two places, and the only thing left for me to do, was to go to the one I knew about. It was nothing but dumb luck, but I hit it right on the nose. We drove up just in time to see Wilson scurry through that big front door of Mrs. Dodge’s.

Midge gaped at him and said, “Well, whatta you think of that!” He started to climb from the car but I held him by the arm.

“Sit still, kid. Give them time to get acquainted. If we run in now, we might not get canned.”

“You mean, you *want* to get canned?”

I slid down in my seat and put my feet up on the dash. “Why not?” I lit

a cigarette.

Sitting still was hard for Midge. He kept ducking his head to peer at the house through the window on my side, and he finally wound up glowering at me.

"You're nuts," he said. "Here's a case with more stuff than Lana Turner, and you go spitting it up a rope. There's dough in it, Joey. Look at the size of that house. Takes dough to run a house like that."

He was disgusted. At the end of ten minutes he wouldn't even talk to me.

I figured that was enough time and I climbed out of the car. Midge was two yards ahead of me before I was on the sidewalk. The Great Stone Face opened the door again for us and showed us into the living room with her usual loquacity.

Wilson was huddled on the sofa, and standing wide-legged with her back to the fireplace was the Valkyrie, Mrs. Dodge. She was wearing a grim smile, caught up with a dimple at one side of her mouth.

"The Misters Malpas," she said. "Or should I say, the Mr. Malpases. Come in, Malpas. Is that my little playmate hiding behind your skirts?"

Midge's face burned like the end of a cigar, and he told her what he thought in seven guttural letters and turned and walked straight out of the room.

THE girl's laugh rang out. "Frank, isn't he? Well, it's all over, Malpas. We found the strayed black sheep. He's . . . where did you say he was?" she asked Wilson.

He mumbled, "Philadelphia," as if he meant Trenton.

"Philadelphia," she went on. "He's on a buying expedition, so it was business after all. Give Malpas a check for fifty dollars, Abel."

"Fifty dollars is too much, Mrs.

Dodge," I said. "The agency rate is twenty-five dollars a day."

"Forget it, Malpas. The other twenty-five is a bonus. You're a great lad and I like you. I've got a weakness for great lads, haven't I, Abel?"

She was in high spirits and hummed a little tune while he scribbled out the check. She snatched it from under his pen almost before he had drawn the final curlicue. She flapped it at me.

"Now you can go home and count your ill-gotten gains, Malpas. Thanks a lot."

She was in such a hurry to get me out she took my arm and walked with me to the front door. "So long," she said, closing the door. "So long."

I didn't notice until I reached the curb that the agency car was gone, and with it, of course, Midge. I looked up and down the street, swearing, but there wasn't a car in sight except Wilson's cab. I ran to the corner, but the suburb's not the place to find cruising taxis. It was too late to try to make a deal with Wilson's cabbie—even supposing it would work—so I ducked into the shrubbery and watched the Dodge house from there.

In about five minutes Wilson and Mrs. Dodge came out and got in the waiting cab and off they went. And two minutes after that, around the far corner skating on two wheels came the agency heap with Midge peering excitedly over the top of the wheel. I ran out waving my arms to stop him, but he swerved around me and went clattering down the street like a bag of old cutlery, leaving me with an empty feeling and a mouthful of curses.

Don't let anybody tell you I could have hopped on the rear bumper of Wilson's cab and tailed them that way. That's Dick Tracy stuff. You can't throw two hundred pounds on a moving car and tell me nobody'll notice it. Or

even a stationary one. Not unless the car is packed with wax dummies.

I made my way back to the office, bar by bar, but I was so mad it would take more than bourbon to make a dent in me. Behind the desk I had a couple more from the office bottle, but it was just water under the bridgework.

There was nothing I could do but wait. I caught myself playing Wilson's game with my fingers, and that's the state I was in when the phone finally rang. It was Midge.

"Hi, Muscles," he said cockily. "Have I got something or have I got something!"

"Or have you got something," I snarled. "But believe me, runt, it's nothing toward what you're going to have when I catch up with you. They didn't lose you, did they?"

"Lose me?" He boasted for a couple minutes on that theme. Then he said, "And this was the case you were gonna drop!"

"Did they lead you to Dodge?" I demanded. "Where are you now?"

"The Belmar Hotel on Erie Place. He's registered here as Ernest Swenson."

"I'll meet you in the lobby. Bat Johnson's the house dick. If he bothers you, tell him you're working for me. I'm on my way."

HE WAS lurking behind a potted palm when I walked into the lobby of the Belmar. Bat Johnson was at the cigar counter.

He said to me out of the corner of his mouth, "See you later, Joey. There's a comedian over there in the greenery I'm keeping my eye on."

"My kid brother," I grunted.

He stared at me and as I walked across the lobby I heard him go "Haw, haw, haw!" behind me. I took Midge by the arm and dragged him over to a

sofa. He pulled his arm away.

"You better be nice to me, Muscles," he leered, "or I go on from here by myself. Get it?"

"The nicest thing I can think of right now is not slapping your ears down in public. Give, before I change my mind!"

"You don't have to be so tough about it," he whined. "Here I do you a favor. . . ."

"Get on with it!"

"Okay, Joey, okay, okay. It's like this. He killed a guy, Dodge did, and now his wife's got him behind the eight ball. She told him unless he came across with plenty, she was gonna turn him in. I heard it all. I was listening at the keyhole."

So that was it. Believe me, I hate to be suckered—and especially I hate to be suckered by a dame like Mrs. Dodge.

"Who'd he kill?" I asked.

He gave me a blank look and I said, "Oh, hell! The name of the guy must have been mentioned. Didn't you hear it?"

"Don't get mad, Joey. They were all talking at onct and—"

I gritted my teeth. "Why did he kill him?" I asked.

"Jeez, Joey, I couldn't hear everything. I oney had one ear at the keyhole. How many ears you think a guy can have at a keyhole at onct. Jeez, the way you talk. . . ."

I said, "Ah shut up!" and pulled back my hand. He ducked. I had no intention of swinging.

I left him on the sofa and went over to Johnson. "There's a guy named Swenson here," I said. "He used to be a wrong gee. He's on the level now, but I want to ask him a couple things about this and that. Okay with you?"

Without that build-up and the oil, I wouldn't have gotten past the elevator. I knew Johnson. He's a tough onion,

but he can be schmoozed.

"Go ahead," he said. "But no rough stuff." He looked at the register. "Room 307."

Midge rode up the elevator with me, but I didn't have a word to say to him. I rapped on 307 and a voice said too quickly, "Who is it?"

"Lady left a note," I said.

The door opened a crack and he said, "Let me have it." I put my weight against the door and heaved it open.

HE BOUNCED back and stood facing me with clenched fists. He was as tall as I, but slender—and older. He looked as suave as a champagne cocktail—gone flat. He was unshaven, and he wasn't saving those bags under his eyes to carry potatoes.

"Hello, Mr. Dodge," I said. "Let's go inside and have a little talk, you and me."

"And me." Midge slipped in beside me and stuck out his miniature jaw belligerently at Dodge.

I didn't like Midge in a spot that might turn dangerous and I stepped in front of him. But Dodge was far from dangerous.

He wilted against the wall and whispered, "Police?"

"Let's go inside."

Unresisting, he let me lead him into the sitting room of his suite. He collapsed into a chair and covered his face with his hands. His long hair fell over his fingers like a tattered curtain.

"Now what's it all about?" I said, hoping I sounded like a fair imitation of a tough cop.

"He killed a guy," said Midge eagerly. "I told you that, Joey. He killed a guy."

"Let him tell it." I looked at Dodge.

Midge gnashed his teeth. "What's the matter with me?" he screeched, "Can't I talk English? I can talk Eng-

lish just as—"

I said "Shut up!" without looking at him. He pulled his usual stunt and pranced into the bathroom, slamming the door. He wouldn't go any farther than the keyhole.

I said to Dodge, "Is that on the level? Did you kill somebody?"

He took a deep breath and shook his head. "You won't believe me, but I didn't."

"Let's hear it anyway."

"It was like this. My trouble is women. I can't stay away from them. It's a vice. It's worse than taking dope. I can't help it. I'm not responsible. This time it was the wife of one of our resident buyers, a customer of ours. A resident buyer buys dresses on commission for retail houses in the West and Middle West that can't afford buyers of their own. I was out with her Saturday night. She thought her husband was in Chicago, and my wife was in Scarsdale. We got tanked up a little and I suggested going to my house."

"Your idea?" I interrupted.

"My idea? Of course it was my idea. It's always my idea. That's the reason I'm in a jam. So we went to my house. We walked into the hall and I turned on the light and there he was, her husband, lying on the floor with a hole in his forehead and blood down his face and on the floor." He kept twisting his fingers as if he were wringing out a floor mop. "She screamed and ran over to him. First I was going to call the police. I really was, but what would it have looked like?" He looked haggardly at me. "There I was, out with his wife, and there he was, dead in my house. What would it have looked like?"

"Yeah," I said. "It sure would."

"That's what I thought," he said dully. "So I gave her a few drinks and told her we couldn't go to the police. She was scared stiff and she agreed with

me. She wiped up the blood from the floor while I went outside and emptied the trunk of my car. Between us we carried him out and put him in it. Then," his voice turned to ashes; "we threw him in the river."

"You didn't kill him? That's on the level?"

"That's the truth. You can arrest me, but that's the truth."

"I'm not arresting anybody," I growled. "I'm a private detective. Your wife hired me to find you."

He tried to light his cigarette, and after burning out three matches missing the cigarette end, I took pity on him and held my lighter for him.

"My wife," he started bitterly. He stopped and looked up at me. "I'll pay you five thousand dollars to get me out of this jam," he said. "That's more than she'll give you to keep me in it."

THE bathroom door swung open and Midge burst into the room. "Make him put that in writing, Joey!" he cried shrilly. "Make him put that in writing!" He snatched one of his three fountain pens from his pocket. "Never mind. 'I'll do it myself and he can sign it.'" He flipped his pad open on the chest of drawers and scribbled furiously.

"Your partner is a business man," said Dodge with a pallid smile. "You'll take me up on that?"

"Why not? What's this dame's name and address?"

"Miriam Hogan. Her husband's name was Eddie. Her apartment is at 754 Pleasantville Avenue."

"Did you go around with her much?"

"Saturday was only the second time. 'Look,' he said eagerly, 'you don't have to spare any expense. My partner—I've been in touch with him and he's arranging to sell my half of the Acme Garment Company. We own all the

Coquette Dress Shops and that's a million-dollar business."

"You're going to have to take a licking on a quick sale like that, aren't you?"

He tossed his hands hopelessly. "I'll get about half of what it's worth. Wilson wants to buy it himself, if he can raise the money. I'd rather have him get it than some shyster."

Midge turned from the chest of drawers and descended on us with a flourish. He gave the pen and paper to Dodge and said, "Just sign at the bottom, Mac, and we'll have you out of the spot squat in a matter of hours."

Dodge read the paper and darted a sharp glance at Midge. He looked at me. "Do you know what's in this?" he asked.

I shook my head and extended my hand for the paper. It said:

I, Theodore Dodge, do hereby engage the service of the Malpas Protection Agency to discover and prosecute the murderer of Edward Hogan, deceased, and do hereby promise to pay, in addition to the customary agency fee of twenty-five dollars per diem, a bonus of five thousand dollars (\$5,000) to the operative successfully closing the case.

SIGNED.....

It was in Midge's best narrative style.

It was easy to see what he was up to now. Those last seven words were typical Midge strategy. He wanted those five G's for his own sack.

I gave the paper back to Dodge and said, "Cross out that 'and prosecute'. We can't prosecute anybody. That's up to the district attorney. Otherwise it's okay. You can sign it as far as I'm concerned."

"But you're the man I. . . ." He

stopped and shrugged. He signed the paper and held it out to me.

Midge made a snatch at it, but I was there before him this time.

He started to quiver. "Give me that paper, Joey!" he said tightly.

I growled, "Now don't start to cut up, for God sake."

He pointed a shaking finger at me and screamed, "You dirty, double-crossing louse. Give me that paper. It was my idea. I wrote it out. Give it to me or you'll be sorry. I'm telling you!"

He was still telling me out in the hall. He told me all the way down in the elevator, across the lobby and out to the sidewalk. When I still didn't pay any attention, he kicked at my shin and missed, then went and sat in the car and ground his teeth.

SEVEN FIFTY-FOUR Pleasantview Avenue was an apartment house some wit had named The Nell Gwynn. It looked like an old harridan passing her last days in comfortable dirt and ruin.

It was a walk-up and Miriam Hogan's apartment was on the top floor. Our ring was answered by a Van Dyke beard with a man behind it. He looked like one of those imported doctors who sell vitamins in the advertisements. I gave him our card and said we wanted to see Mrs. Hogan.

He looked faintly disappointed. "I was hoping you were members of her family," he said. "Please come in. I'm Doctor Joseph Hoffman. You may see Mrs. Hogan if you wish, but I'm afraid you will not find it very rewarding."

Midge pricked up his ears. "Reward?" he said eagerly, "What's that about a reward?"

His long nose poked forward, like a cat sniffing fish.

I was still off him. I said impatiently, "Shut up, will you now? There's no re-

ward."

He swung and caught me on the shoulder. I think he was trying for my chin, but it was too long a stretch for him. He retreated, holding up his hands. "I warned you!" he shrilled. "I told you the next time you said that I'd let you have it, then you went and done it again. I warned you!"

The doctor observed him mildly over his glasses. "Ah, yes. The little man," he said calmly, "and with the usual aggressive sense of inferiority."

Midge said belligerently, "Come again, Doc?" But his eyes turned uneasy, "Who's inferior?"

"The feeling of inferiority because of lack of physical stature is a common but stupid thing. You have it."

Midge looked awed. "Yah," he said feebly, "Say it in English, Doc. What do you mean, I got something bad?"

"You'd be better off without it, naturally." Dr. Hoffman turned briskly to me and said, "Before you see Mrs. Hogan there are several things I must tell you. I'm not a doctor of medicine. I'm a psychiatrist. I'll try to tell you what is wrong with her without using technical terms, which are, after all"—a white smile gleamed behind the underbrush—"nothing but professional slang."

He sat in the low lounge chair, facing the sofa, and lit a long thin cigar. He took a puff, then looked at the lighted end as if pleasantly surprised at the flavor. I sat on the arm of a sofa, and Midge, watching the doctor uneasily, went around and stood behind me.

HOFFMAN held up one finger. We held our breaths. He affected you like that. "During the past few days," he said seriously, "something has happened to Mrs. Hogan's mind. I do not mean she is actually insane, but she has the illusion she has seen the dead body

of her husband. She may—*may*, mind you—have seen such a thing, or on the other hand it may be, as I have said, an illusion. I communicated with the police, but they have no record of the death of anyone named Edward Hogan. This may mean one of three things. One, that the man is lying dead in the morgue but has not been identified; two, that the body has not yet been discovered; or three, that it is really an illusion and that the man is actually not dead. I mean by that, Edward Hogan may have left his wife as the result of a quarrel, and her mind became deranged because of a sense of guilt, feeling herself at fault in this quarrel. Therefore, the illusion that she has seen the dead body of her husband becomes merely a symbol of her loss. Is that clear?"

I said, "Yeah," but a little groggily.

Midge whispered in my ear, "Yah, that's just the kind of double-talk docs always use when they mean you got a cold in the head. It don't make sense to you, does it?" he finished anxiously.

He didn't want to miss a trick, and it was agony for him to think I was getting something that had flown over his head without his being able to fire a shot.

I said, "Sure it does," and let him simmer.

"Another thing." Dr. Hoffman held up a second finger. "She has been babbling constantly of someone named," he pulled a slip of paper from his pocket and read, "Theodore Dodge. What Theodore Dodge has to do with this, I do not know. He may be a member of her family to whom, subconsciously, she is turning for help. I have tried to call a Theodore Dodge, whom I found in the telephone book, but he is seemingly away from home.

"Here is the crux of it. If I can discover the cause of Mrs. Hogan's aberration, the cure will be comparatively

easy. Also, she must go to a sanatorium. If I had one myself, I would gladly send her to it free of charge, but as I do not, it will be an expensive business, a responsibility I am not prepared to shoulder." He smiled regretfully. "It is essential, however, that she receive immediate treatment. Perhaps if you can help me find Mr. Dodge, he can be of assistance." His sibilants hissed like an over-heated Ford.

"I'll do my best," I said. "But we can see her, can't we?"

"Certainly, certainly." He kept his dignity, even while pushing himself up from that low chair, and that's an achievement. "She's in the bedroom."

He led us to it, and the moment he opened the door I heard that rhythmic hum, as if a thousand bees were making honey on the double.

But it wasn't bees. It was the girl on the bed. From between her barely moving lips came an endless mumble of sounds—not words. Not words you could understand, that is. It rose and fell with a regular beat. And her body was in constant motion. Her fingers wove together in mad patterns on the blanket, her legs twitched, and her head, haloed in a tumble of lustrous chestnut hair spread on the pillow, moved slowly from side to side. Her eyes were closed.

Even without make-up, her face was something I'd frame in gold and stand on my dresser.

"If you'll pardon professional enthusiasm," said Hoffman, "let me point out to you that this is a beautiful example of the ego fighting oblivion. Subconsciously, Mrs. Hogan is trying to erase her experience from her mind, which might mean erasing her conscious mind as well. But the ego resents a void, and as you see her now, she is struggling to keep her sanity. It is so clear and so simple!"

I didn't find it as clear as all that.

Or as simple either.

I tried bending over the bed and saying softly, "Mrs. Hogan, can you understand me? Mrs. Hogan."

THE doctor stood at the foot of the bed and stroked his beard. I guess you have to be in love with a thing like that to wear it all the time. "It's no use, my friend," he said indulgently. "The only voice she can hear is the one inside her."

I took his word and gave it up. Midge seemed glad to escape from that booby hatch too, but there was something else on his mind.

As the doctor closed the door behind us and we were safely in the living room of the apartment, Midge said urgently, "What was that disease you said I had, Doc?"

Dr. Hoffman raised his bushy eyebrows. "Disease? You have no disease, my diminutive friend. You have what used to be called an inferiority complex."

"Yaah, come off it, Doc. If it's got a name, it's a disease. What kind of stuff should I take for it?"

The doctor explained again.

A staff of bewildered lines showed across Midge's forehead. "You mean, Doc, because I'm little I ain't as bright as Joey here?"

"I mean nothing of the kind. Perhaps you are just as intelligent. Your methods of showing it are more spectacular, but I would not say you are more intelligent."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, Doc, but look at it this way. . . ."

And that's the way it went for over an hour. The Doc wouldn't say he was more intelligent and Midge wouldn't let up, and finally I had to drag him away.

He was silent for a long while as we drove, and finally he came up with,

"Yah, I don't think he was much of a doctor anyway. Where were his ear-phones? But say, Joey, while I think of it, let's go back for a couple minutes and beat our gums with that Dodge chick. There are some things I want to ask her."

"That's just where I'm heading."

He looked disconcerted, then said, "The hell you were!"

I grinned and let it go at that. Doc Hoffman had certainly got his goat.

IN THE Dodge hall, Midge went down on his hand and knees and feathering his handkerchief on the end of a matchstick he rubbed it in the cracks between the boards. A brown smear showed on the white fabric.

"Blood," he said, stowing the handkerchief in his pocket.

Mrs. Dodge and Wilson were still together, but this time they were going over the books. Wilson had spread a long ruled form over the coffee table and, pencil in hand, he was peering at it through gold-rimmed glasses. His tie was at half-mast and his rust hair stood out from his head like a broken broom. Mrs. Dodge was standing facing the door with her hands on her hips, and a sullen, muddy look on her face.

I walked down the room. Midge was behind me. "Is this the trial balance?" I said.

Mrs. Dodge said tightly, "Now what, Malpas? I thought I paid you off. What do you want now?"

"Your husband took us on again," I said. "It seems he didn't kill a certain guy everybody seems to want to dump in his lap."

"Nonsense!" she said sharply.

"Why nonsense? Is he the only guy in the world able to pull a trigger? Hell, anybody can pull a trigger. It's easy. Look," I flipped the gun out from under my armpit, "All you have

to do is jiggle your finger."

"Yeah," Midge piped behind me, "what makes you so damn sure he triggered the guy?"

He was leaning against the Winthrop desk near the door, dangling a cigarette from the corner of his mouth. His eyes glittered through the smoke.

"Why don't we cut the comedy?" he said. "For one thing, we all knew Dodge was a chaser. Right Wilson?"

Wilson looked apologetically at Mrs. Dodge. "It was the talk of the industry," he said in a low voice. He was the kind of guy who'd tip his hat before he picked up a hustler.

Mrs. Dodge rolled her shoulders forward until they looked like the hump of muscle on the back of a bull. "And what does this prove?" she said heavily.

"Nothing. We just start from there," jeered Midge.

I let him go. It was the kind of thing I was going to say myself, and letting him say it maybe was good for what Doc Hoffman called his ego. Hell, he was my brother, wasn't he?

MIDGE went on in a voice you could have floated a flag from. "So here's the way it goes. Somebody knew Mrs. Dodge, here, was away Saturday night. The same guy knew old man Dodge had a date with this Hogan fluff, and the chances were he'd drag her here to give his etchings the once over. So this guy tells Hogan what's going on, and the two of them come to the house, here, and the minute they're inside this guy shoots Hogan in the head and scrams, knowing that the minute Dodge calls the cops and tells them he's found the body, the old zing is in. The cops, being no dopes, will put one and one together and get three, and Dodge lands in the sneezer with a murder rap, and maybe the dame in the next cell. The old triangle—hus-

band, wife, and the other guy. The Judd Gray-Ruth Snyder case all over again. Get it? But Dodge crosses this guy by giving the corpse the old heave-ho in the river. So now we got to put it together. Who stands to get something out of Dodge being in a jam? For instance," he sneered, "Dodge tells us, Wilson, that you're trying to grab his half of the business for peanuts. Is that a fact?"

Mrs. Dodge uttered a hoarse cry and stared at Wilson with horror growing dark in her eyes. His mouth had fallen open and he wagged it weakly, trying to fight out the words that had turned to cinders in his throat.

"Tha-tha-that's preposterous!" he choked.

"You are trying to buy the business, aren't you?" I said.

"Yes, but—"

"For about half the real value?"

"Theodore asked me to!" he yelled, losing all restraint. "I had no idea of buying the business until he mentioned it."

Mrs. Dodge said ironically, "Remember your bustle, Mr. Wilson. It's becoming undone."

He yanked at his tie. "You—you . . ." He swallowed heavily. "I regret to say, Mrs. Dodge," he said furiously, "that I think you are not a nice person." He glared at me. "There's no other phrase for it. I apologize," he said stiffly, "but I mean it."

"There he goes," said the girl. "He busted a corset string!" She laughed, but she didn't take her eye off my gun.

"Take it easy," I said to Wilson, "Did you know Dodge had a date with Mrs. Hogan Saturday night?"

"I did not, sir!"

He made an appealing gesture to Mrs. Dodge with his out-flung hand, but her face was as sympathetic as boxcars on a pair of dice.

I said, "You knew Hogan, Wilson?"

"O-o-only in a business way."

"Did he do much business with you?"

"Very little. Practically none, I might say. I don't think he knew very much about it. He brought his wife to select the dresses when he had a customer. I had the impression he was starting his business, and had very few accounts."

"So Dodge must have met Mrs. Hogan right in your office then."

"Theodore handled the Hogan account," he said pompously, "so it stands to reason that is the way it occurred."

The Great Stone Face marched into the room at this point, bearing a tray on which stood a glass of water and three cerise pills. Mrs. Dodge swallowed both with a grimace. She said humorously, "Three votes for the Crisco shortage." She put the empty glass back on the tray and Death's Bright Angel marched out again. I followed her with my eyes, but it wasn't until she was through the doorway that I realized the Winthrop desk had no occupant. Swearing, I ran to the front window. The agency egg-beater was also gone.

I whirled and snapped, "How long ago did he leave?"

Wilson's jaws worked up and down like feeding time in a goldfish bowl, and it was Mrs. Dodge who said briskly, "About five minutes ago, I'd say." Her eyes were shiny and flat, the color of polished silverware.

I stabbed my hand at her. "The keys!" I demanded. "The keys to your car!" Her eyebrows started to climb and I grated, "For Crisake don't let's argue. Somebody's going to get hurt unless I move fast. The keys."

Her eyes met mine for a clashing instant, and she dipped into the small

purse on her lap and handed me a ring of keys, separating one from the others.

"The garage is at the rear of the house," she said. "Let me go with you!" Her eyes glistened.

I said, "Nuts to that," and ran.

IT TOOK me a few minutes to maneuver the long Buick out of that tricky driveway, but once in the clear we went like a bugle call. The agency car was parked, as I had expected, before the apartment house. I was bounding up the stairs, that damn gun in my hand, before the echo of the door slam had died out.

The door was slightly ajar, and I could hear voices coming from inside. I opened the door a little wider and slid into the vestibule. Through the curtains that only partly screened the living room, I saw Midge backed against the wall with his hands held at shoulder height, his face a twitching mask of fright. The doctor had his back to me but I could tell from the way he stood that he was holding a gun. There's something in the set of the shoulders.

As I watched, the bedroom door opened and Mrs. Hogan, bare and beautiful, stood there with a gun in her hand. It was pointed at the doctor and she said in a level voice, "Put it down."

The doctor said gruffly, "This ass thinks I've murdered somebody."

"Put it down," she said tightly, "or I'll swear I'll shoot. This has gone far enough without that."

"Now Miriam," the doctor half turned to her as if to make a plea, but his gun coughed and jumped in his hand.

Her face squeezed together and she took a short step forward, the gun dangling from her hand like a wilted flower. She fell to her knees, then straightened out on her face.

The gun swung around to Midge.

The kid's knees gave out and he started to slide down the wall. He wailed, "Joey! Joey!"

And that was it. I let the doctor have it in the right shoulder, then leaped forward as he spun around from the impact and laid the flat of my gun against the side of his head.

He went down like an empty sack.

Midge was on his hands and knees, goggling at me.

"Meet Eddie Hogan," I said. I stooped and twisted my fingers in Hoffman's beard and yanked. It came off.

Midge bleated, "Eddie Hogan!"

"Yeah," I said, "the alleged corpse of Saturday night."

Midge scrambled to his feet. His cockiness wasn't even a reasonable facsimile of itself. "Well," he mumbled, "I knew he wasn't a real doctor."

THE cops put us through the hoops, but after Dodge and Wilson identified Hoffman as Hogan, the resident buyer, and ballistics proved the bullet that killed Mrs. Hogan, and only Hogan's fingerprints showed on the gun, they let us go. What else could they do?

And me, with Dodge's five G check in my pocket!

Midge didn't have a word to say all the way back to the office. I sat behind the desk and looked at him. He was as bright and shiny as a snuffed candle.

"You tried to cross me, Midge," I said. "You tried to plant me with Mrs. Dodge and Wilson while you went off to cop those five G's."

He said with difficulty, "I know, Joey."

"And you went off half-cocked. Don't you know that's dangerous in this business, you lunkhead?" But even that got no flashing response from him. I went on, "I'll tell you how it went so you can see where you tripped up and

won't make the same mistakes the next time."

He raised his head. "You mean you're not kicking me out, Joey?" He sounded incredulous.

"No, I'm not kicking you out," I growled. "But I'm kicking you, brother, believe me!"

"I deserve it, Joey," he said meekly.

"Shut up, damn it. You talk too much."

"Yes, Joey."

"Okay," I said. "Now here's the way it went. It starts with Dodge's reputation as a wolf. Everybody knew it—including Hogan. So Hogan brings his wife, a comely fluff, and Dodge together and it happens. He makes a date with her and out they go—for the first time. Saturday night was the second time. Dodge said they were tanked up, but it's bucks to beans *he* was tanked up and she was cold sober. So she got him to take her to his house. He still thinks it was his idea, but he's kidding himself. She led him there right by the nose. And when they walk in, there's a corpse! It's the very alive Hogan with some red grease paint on his face and maybe raspberry jam spread on the floor. Dodge was drunk and easy to handle. He believed everything he saw.

"But if you notice, it was she who wiped up the blood from the floor. She wasn't taking any chances on his getting raspberry jam on his hands and tumbling to the whole caper. Then out they go and dump the alleged corpse in the river. Her idea, I'm betting.

"That much done, the stage was set for the little blackmail act. Not just a plain gimme, gimme, gimme. No. Mrs. Hogan needed money for the sanatorium, and Dr. Hoffman said it would be very expensive. You can depend upon it, it would have been. There would have been five thousand for this, five

thousand for that, and maybe another five thousand for a specialist from Vienna. And Dodge would have paid. And paid and paid and paid!

"Only they couldn't find him. So there they were with nobody to put the bee on.

"And that's what sank them, having to hang around like that.

"I didn't tumble right away, but I thought it funny that Mrs. Hogan didn't have a nurse, or someone to take care of her. A real doctor would surely arrange that. And it's a double cinch he wouldn't spend all his time attending someone who wasn't a *very* good friend. And he wasn't posing as a very good friend. Hell, he said he didn't even know the members of her family. So why should he spend hours attending a looney he knew only casually and who had no dough. That smelled!

"Then when he braced me on Dodge's whereabouts, I got a good whiff of it. If he'd been a real doctor and on the level, he would have talked to Mrs. Dodge or, at least, to Wilson.

"And real doctors don't spend an hour with a gooney like you. They either chase them away, or they charge them a fee. That little episode not only smelled, but it stank.

"But the final tip-off you gave me yourself, Kid. When you wiped that blood up from Dodge's hall, it smeared on your handkerchief and it was sticky. Blood wouldn't do that after three days. It would crystalize. You'd get crumbs, but you wouldn't get a smear.

"You were pretty close when you

figured that Mrs. Hogan and Hoffman were in cahoots, but if you'd hung around a few minutes longer you'd have found out it was Eddie Hogan himself who introduced Mrs. Hogan to Dodge. And there it was, plain for all to see. The whole thing laid open.

"You got to watch yourself, kid. You're smart and you're quick, but you spend too much time trying to put something over on somebody."

I missed the crafty glint in his eye when he said, "What about those five G's Dodge gave you, Joey? I know I was kind of a heel, but don't you think you ought to slip me a few bucks?"

"Yeah, sure," I said wearily. I was feeling tired and let-down. "How much do you figure you should have?"

"Half," he said. He ran on shrilly, "I had it all figured out before you did, anyway! I was there first, wasn't I? I had all that stuff about the nurse figured out, and I knew Hoffman was a phony, didn't I? And I was the one who wiped up that phony blood in the hall, wasn't I? Without that, you'd never have found out it wasn't blood. And I led you to old man Dodge, didn't I? Hell." He pushed his hands into his pockets and stuck out his meager chest and spat on the floor. "Without me, Joey, you'd still be sitting here in the office feeling your muscles instead of those five G's. It's *me* that's giving *you* half!"

See what I meant when I said that about rather having Jack the Ripper working for me?

FILTHY LUCRE

FROM time to time a strange band of robbers made assaults on the Treasury vaults of Manila. Their number was overwhelming and their ways so devious as to make them almost inconquerable. Yet they never escaped with their loot.

These robbers were the destructive white ants of the tropics. Having made their way into the

vault through tiny crevices they quickly ate the canvas sacks which contained the silver coins. Finding the money inedible they completely covered the pesos with a thick, gummy deposit.

Experts tried many solvents but no cleanser was found strong enough to scour them. Boys were frequently hired by the Treasury to scrub the silver with brushes in an attempt to clean it.

A GIFT FROM THE DEAD

By Michael English

“LONG distance, Mr. Mulvaney.”

I don't know how long Maria, the big Italian cleaning woman, had been standing beside my chair, but it must have been quite a while, because when I looked up she had a worried expression on her broad face. When I blinked at her she repeated the phrase again.

With a nod I pulled myself from the big chair in front of the fire and walked

to the little desk. The desk clerk, who doubled in the brass as manager and bellhop, indicated the phone with a wave of his hand without stirring himself from his chair. I was the only guest at the hotel, because it was December and this was a summer resort, so I was treated more as one of the staff than anything else. I picked up the phone.

“That you, Tim?” the voice on the

Her twisted, lifeless body lay at the edge of the road where the speeding car had thrown it



Tim Mulvaney had no idea his wife's death was anything other than accidental until he discovered a gift certificate for a product not yet manufactured

other end said. "This is Joe Thomas."

I said, "Hi, Joe," and wondered why a lieutenant of the San Francisco police force should be calling me.

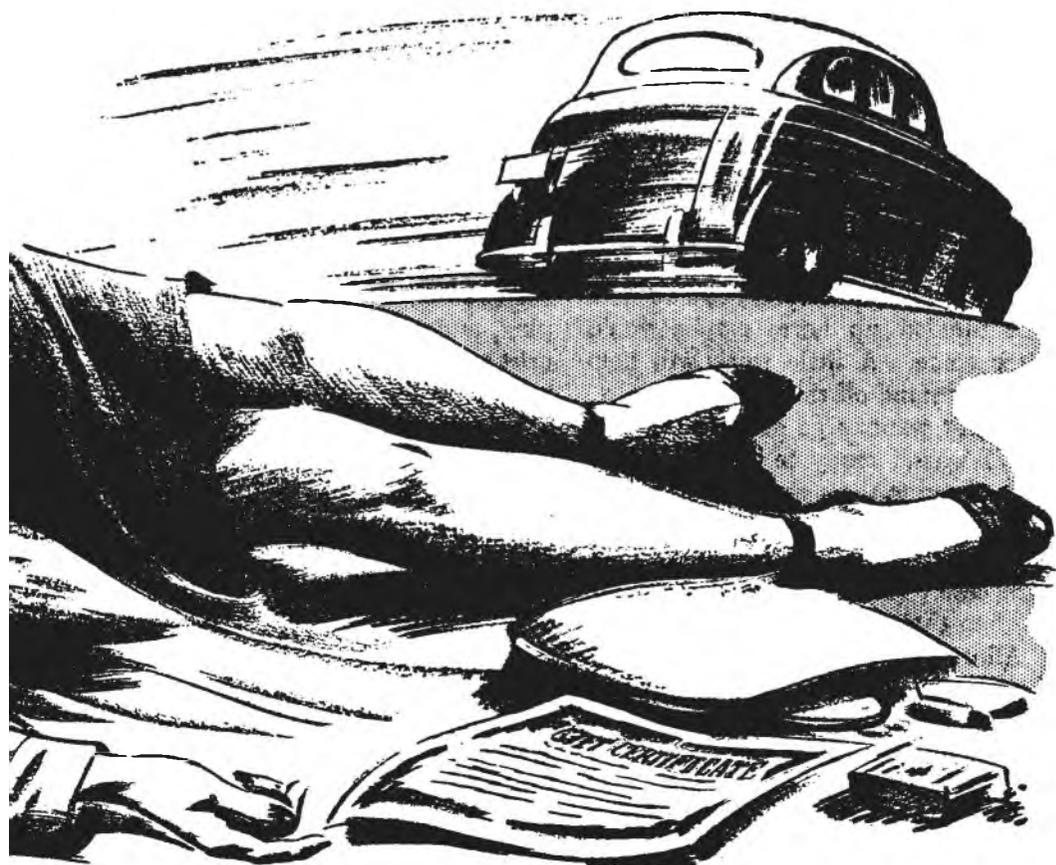
"Tim," Thomas said and his voice sounded urgent, "how long have you been up there at the Russian River?"

"Since the funeral, Joe," I answered quietly. "I didn't even go home after it was over. I didn't think I could stand being in the house alone."

There was a momentary silence from the other end of the phone, and then, when Joe spoke again there was a note of apology in his voice. "I'm sorry I had to call you, Tim. I know how you feel just now. But something's happened here that I thought you ought to know about."

I still couldn't work up any great interest. "Yeah? What is it?"

"Tim, where's your gun?"



That question woke me up a little. "My gun?" I thought a minute. "Hell, Joe, I haven't carried it in a month or so. I usually leave it in my desk at home. I suppose it's there now. Why?"

"We had a murder last night," Joe said with a queer tenseness in his voice, "and your gun, without any fingerprints, was beside the body." He paused for a minute. "The D.A. is interested in the case and asked me to check up on your movements. Any idea how it got there?" His tone was sad but still curious.

So was I. But not enough to let it worry me. "Not unless someone stole it, Joe," I answered. "I can account for my movements, so don't worry. But what's the story? Who was murdered?"

"A garage owner named Paul Norton. He had his place out near your neighborhood. Know him?"

"Paul Norton! Certainly I know him. He's done all the work on my cars for years. But why would anyone want to kill him? He was the quiet conscientious sort. And why with my gun?"

Joe said, "That's what I'm working on Tim. And I'd like you to come back and help me. I know you're pretty broken up, but since you seem to be a little tangled up here, maybe you'd better come. A little work will help take your mind off things."

I didn't want to go back to the city yet. I wasn't ready to talk to people and to listen to them give me sympathy. But I realized that if my gun had been found near the body, I had an interest in the case. Men have been hanged for less than that.

"All right, Joe," I answered. "I'll take the bus tonight or early in the morning and see you when I get to town. And thanks for calling."

WHILE I packed my suitcase I found myself thinking back to

that afternoon a week before when I was sitting in my office at Tracers, Inc. I'm in charge of the Missing Persons Department at Tracers. That was the day that changed my outlook on life.

My phone rang and a strange voice, curiously detached and professional, asked me to come immediately to the emergency ward of a small hospital in the district in which I live. I tried to question him over the phone, but he wouldn't give any information, just insisted that I come right over.

By the time I reached the street to hail a cab I was one bundle of nerves. The thoughts that were racing through my mind were awful. I was sure that something had happened to Helen, my wife, and I mentally cursed myself for having given my car to her. And too, probably been in an accident. And too, if I had the car now, I wouldn't have to chew my fingernails while the driver of my hack took his time getting past every stop light.

I seldom needed a car for my business, and when I did, there was usually a company car loose, so I had given her mine some months before. It was an old model and pretty beaten up, but she liked to drive when she went shopping, and anyway, we live in the suburbs and the stores are pretty well separated.

I don't want to describe the scene at the hospital. It's enough to say that Helen was there and that she was dead. She had been walking from our house to the little store several blocks away when she had been clipped from behind by a hit-and-run driver.

A neighbor of ours, an insurance man named Mullins, had picked her up and brought her to the hospital, hoping that something might be done for her. But she was dead by the time he got there.

Mullins drove me home from the hos-

pital.

"I didn't see it happen," he told me. "But I heard her scream and ran out of the house. I got her to the hospital as fast as I could."

He had kept her purse in the car and he returned it to me. I took it into the house with me and dropped it.

I made the necessary funeral arrangements, took a leave of absence from Tracers, Inc., locked the house and went up to the Russian River, about thirty-five miles north of San Francisco. I knew I would be alone there and that was what I wanted. Helen and I had been very close, closer than most married couples, I think, and the blow of her sudden death made me want to get away from everything human.

That's where I was a week later when Joe Thomas called me.

I WENT straight to his office the next day when I got to town. He was behind his desk when I walked in, a big, hammy-faced man with cold blue eyes and that efficient, conscientious look of a man who has spent his life doing his job well and knows it.

"Glad you were able to make it, Tim," he said to me when I greeted him. "This is a funny case. Seems to be a murder without a motive."

I sat down. I wasn't in the mood for small talk, so I started right in on the case. "How do I stand?" I asked.

Thomas looked down at his stubby fingers on the glass top of his desk. "I explained the situation to the D. A., Tim, and I think he's satisfied. For a while at least. But he's still howling for action."

I nodded, knowing that the D. A. could count his votes in the next election by the number of cases left unsolved. "Anybody tackle the suicide angle?"

Joe nodded and flicked the ashes from his cigarette as he lifted it from a huge bronze ashtray. "We thought about that when we couldn't find a motive. And it seemed to be fixed up to look like suicide. But the doc says that the bullet angle makes suicide impossible."

"Making it look like suicide is a pretty old dodge," I remarked. "What else have you got? Give me the story."

Joe put out the cigarette he was smoking and immediately lit another. "Well, he was shot in his office in the garage. He was down there after working hours, looking over his books. No sign of robbery. Apparently had no enemies. He didn't gamble or drink. In fact, there's just no reason why he should have been shot."

"How about clues around the place?" I couldn't imagine any killer not leaving something behind. Even the smartest of them makes a mistake somewhere.

But Joe just shook his head. "Only one funny thing. Norton had these in his pocket."

He handed four certificates, covered with fancy printing, across his desk to me. I looked at them while he explained. "They seem to be some sort of gift certificate. I never saw anything like them before."

I looked up at him. "All the department stores use them," I told him.

"Yeah, I know, Tim," he said wearily, "but did you ever see one for an automobile?" I admitted that I hadn't. "Well, that's what those are for."

I read the inscription on the certificate. "As soon as delivery is possible, you will be presented with a new 1946 Popla." There was a space for the model and body type, for the dealer's name and one to show who was presenting the gift.

I looked at Joe again. "Hell, that's just some dealer's way of promoting the

sale of new cars before he gets delivery on them. Some new promotion idea, brought out in time for Christmas. I can't see that there's anything so funny about that."

Joe was lighting his third cigarette. He shrugged. "No, I guess not. But I hadn't seen anything like it before, so it looked screwy to me. Why should Norton have them?"

"Probably was doing a little promotin' himself, for a few commissions."

There was nothing else to talk about, so I got up and put my hat on.

"The boys out at the scene?" I asked. Joe nodded. "Well, I'll drop by and look the place over, and then I'll go home. There are a lot of things I should have done, but I didn't have the guts before. If I get any ideas I'll call you."

THERE was absolutely nothing in Paul Norton's office that Joe hadn't told me about. I bummed around, looking the place over for an hour or so, but no matter how I tried to look like Sherlock Holmes, nothing happened. So I walked home. It was a six-block walk and I did it slowly, because I really didn't want to go back.

As I walked, a thought occurred to me. Why the deuce had Helen been walking to the store the afternoon she had been killed? We live in a newly built-up residential section of the city and they haven't put in sidewalks yet. You either walk in the street or in the mud. And I knew that Helen always drove to avoid that.

The thought bothered me. If there was something wrong with the car, Helen hadn't mentioned it to me that morning. And our breakfast talk was full of things like that.

She always said things like, "I'm going Christmas shopping this afternoon," or, "I'm going to run the car

into the garage. It needs a going over."

But now as I recalled the morning of her death, I remembered that she had seemed very happy about something, but that she hadn't said much. She seemed to be keeping a secret. Of course, it was getting close to Christmas and I figured her secret had something to do with my gift, so I didn't ask her about it. I had a little secret of my own, as a matter of fact. It was a bracelet that was still in my desk drawer at the office.

Unlocking the front door was like unlocking a tomb. I shuddered as I did it and took a deep breath when I stepped across the threshold. "Well, here goes," I said to myself.

I decided that her mother and sisters would want some of her personal things, so I went to the bedroom first. After I opened the first drawer of her dresser I couldn't seem to get started. Her things were there, neatly piled, but I couldn't get myself to touch them. I just stood and looked and remembered.

Then I saw her diary. I picked it up and sat on the edge of the bed, thumbing through the pages, reading an occasional entry and recalling with painful vividness the little incidents of which her handwriting spoke. Finally I came to the last entry. It was dated the day before the accident.

"This morning is the last time you'll be driven by me, Fritz. You're going to market so that daddy can have a shiny new job for Christmas."

I stared at the page. Fritz was her pet name for the car. And she was trading it in to give me a new one as a Christmas gift. That was evidently why she had walked to the store. She had paid for my Christmas present with her life.

I went back to the garage and found it empty. Going into the house again I checked through her desk, where I

knew she kept the title of the car, but found it missing. Vaguely I wondered to which dealer she had given the car. I didn't want the new one now, because it would only serve as a constant reminder. I decided to get the money back.

But there was no way of telling who the dealer was. I'd just have to wait until the title cleared through the State office and that would take a month. There was nothing I could do about it until then.

I went past the front closet on the way back to the bedroom. At this time of the year, a few weeks before Christmas, that was Helen's private locker. She put all the presents she bought into it after she wrapped them and it was forbidden territory for me.

She had told me that she had most of her Christmas shopping done, and when I opened the door to the closet I could believe it. There was a huge stack of beautifully wrapped packages. I brought them into the middle of the living room to open them. They wouldn't make such good presents now.

Ties, handkerchiefs, shirts, mufflers, all the usual things came out of those packages. But the largest box of them all began to look like a joke as I opened it. It contained boxes, smaller and smaller, down to the small stationery box at the very inside. I opened it and waded through layers of tissue paper.

It had a gift certificate for a new car in it.

Suddenly, as I looked at the scrap of paper, I realized that it was for a Popla sedan, and was identical to the four blank certificates found in Paul Norton's pocket after he had been murdered. It struck me as a not very amusing coincidence.

The address of the dealer was on the certificate and, since it gave me an ex-

cuse to get out of the house again, I decided to see him immediately and call the whole thing off.

MOTO MOTORS, of Van Ness Avenue, turned out to be a vacant lot!

I was ready to chew a cask of ten-penny nails into dust by the time I got to the drug store on the next corner. I asked the clerk if there ever had been a car lot there.

"I don't think so," he answered. Then he thought for a minute. "No, I'm sure of it. In fact, the only thing that has ever been on that lot was a guy selling Christmas trees. And he ain't there this year."

"I know," I said with heavy sarcasm that made him look at me sharply. "Thanks for the trouble."

I checked the telephone directory at the back of the store, but there was no such company listed. Then I began to get ideas.

Paul Norton had blank certificates of the same type in his pocket when he had been killed. And the certificates belonged to some kind of a pretty sharp racket. Somewhere in the middle of a situation like that there could be a motive for murder. But what really burned me up was the fact that Helen had been taken in by the racket.

That was one racket that I was going after, but good. I started for Joe Thomas' office in a hurry.

In the cab on the way down I remembered the bank. Might be a lead there. I glanced at my watch, saw that the bank was still open and told the driver to take me there.

The teller was very cooperative. "Yes, I remember the day," he told me. "Mrs. Mulvaney cashed a check for a thousand dollars and seemed to be very happy. She made some remark about finishing up her Christmas shopping."

"How did she make out the check?"

I asked, hoping that she might have made it out to the con man operating the racket. If she had, I'd at least have his name.

"To cash. Took most of it in fifties and twenties."

No soap! I thanked him and started away from the window, but he called me back.

"I just remembered that there was a man with her that day. She gave him some of the money from the check. I saw them standing at the desk over there."

I came to point like a hunting dog. "Huh? What did this guy look like?"

The man tried. I'll give him credit for that. But finally he just shook his head. "I'm sorry, but I can't recall anything at all about him. I see a lot of people every day and unless I know them or make a special effort to remember them, it's pretty difficult."

I left the bank feeling like the fox that turned up a blind gully with a pack of hounds howling at his heels.

JOE was just getting ready to call it a day when I arrived at his office. His flat-brimmed, pearl-grey fedora was already on his head.

"Those gumshoe nostrils of yours are quivering," he said when I was inside the office. "You look like you might have run across something. Sit down and let's hear about it." He took his hat off and went back to the swivel chair behind his desk.

"I've uncovered a brand new racket, Joe," I told him. "It's a slick idea and I'm going to bust it wide open if it's the last act of my career."

Disappointment spread across his unhandsome face like a thunder-storm brewing over a mountain. "Racket!" he practically howled. "Whadaya mean, racket? We've got a murder on our hands, with the D. A. griping like mad

and you come in and tell me about a racket." He sighed loudly and swung his chair around so that he could stand up.

"Hold it, Joe," I said quietly. "Suppose this racket has some bearing on the Norton murder? Enough bearing to provide us with a motive? What then?"

He stopped half way out of his chair, held the pose for a second and then relaxed into the rubber cushion. "Why the hell didn't you say so in the first place?" he said, swinging around to face me again. "Spill it."

As quickly as I could I outlined the story of Helen's present to me and what I had discovered when I tried to call off the deal. When I finished the tale I summed up my conclusions.

"It looks to me, Joe," I told him, "as if Norton and some other guy were in on this deal. Norton probably contracted the customers in his garage and the other guy came in to make the sale. He'd take the customer's old car in trade, the balance in cash and present the sucker with a certificate, promising delivery at Christmas. A very neat set-up."

"They probably sold the cars they took as trade-ins," Joe cut in, "and pocketed that cash too."

I nodded. "I imagine that the racket began to get a little hot and Norton wanted to get out. His partner, fearing that Norton would sell him short, met him in the office that night on the pretext of business and disposed of him."

Joe mulled my words over in his mind and then agreed. "Yeah, that sounds plausible. We'll check Norton's bank account in the morning to see if he has made any unusual deposits recently. That should prove it."

"There's one other item," I reminded him.

Joe chewed on his very adequate

lower lip. "I know," he said in a dry voice that was filled with patient exasperation, "your gun. I don't figure that at all." His eyes narrowed shrewdly when he looked at me again. "Are you *sure* you don't know anything about it?"

His attitude got under my skin, but I didn't let it show. I realized that he was under pressure from the front office and that the nagging was beginning to fray his nerves.

"Easy, Joe," I said in an even voice. "You know better than that. Would I leave my own registered gun lying around where it could be found?"

The shrewdness left his face and he collapsed into a moody silence.

"I don't know what happened to it," I continued. "I still think that it must have been stolen."

"How about the house?" he asked glumly and without interest. "See any signs of a burglar?"

I remembered how neat and clean everything had been that afternoon. "Nope. Everything looked normal."

Joe continued to cogitate morosely for a while and then summed up the whole thing. "So we've got two questions to answer before we can get any farther. Who was this guy and how did he happen to have your gun?"

I agreed with him in silence and we left it at that.

"I'll be in to see you early tomorrow," I said as I left. "I'm going to spend the night in a hotel downtown. I couldn't sleep at the house."

HOTEL rooms were as scarce as bathing suits in Greenland, but I finally found one at the Fairmont. I had an Italian dinner at Panelli's and spent an idle hour or so at the bar there before climbing Nob Hill for the night.

I took a shower and settled into a

chair to read the evening paper. The front page was a mess. There was a train wreck, two murders and a kidnaping to occupy all of the big headlines. And the smaller banners carried tales almost as gruesome. I shook my head.

Then, just before I turned to the inside pages of the paper, I spotted a three inch article in the lower left hand corner of the page.

Mrs. Grace Piper, 34, of Oakland was struck down and fatally injured by a hit-and-run-driver early this afternoon at the intersection of Randolph Avenue and MacArthur Blvd. in Oakland. Nearby residents rushed her to a doctor's office, but, according to a coroner's report, the woman was killed instantly.

There was no clue as to the identity of the driver of the fatal car. There were no witnesses to the accident.

Richard Piper, a stock broker, the dead woman's husband, expressed surprise that his wife had been walking, since she owned her own car and usually drove everywhere she went.

Police, checking into the case, discovered that Mrs. Piper's car was missing from the garage in the rear of the Piper residence and all attempts to locate it have failed.

There were some familiar lines in the story. I reread it several times, doing some heavy thinking as I read. Then, suddenly, click—click—click, the pieces of the puzzle dropped into place in my mind and they spelled *a triple murder!*

First Helen, then, Norton and now this Mrs. Piper! The racket began to take on a very sinister aspect.

The guy that was running this racket

had evidently decided to make it a clean profit affair. After selling a certificate and taking the victim's old car on a trade-in, he conveniently arranged a hit-and-run accident, so that there was no chance of discovery. Under those conditions he could keep the racket going for a long time.

A red rage welled up inside of me. A deep hate for this killer, the man who had robbed me of the most precious thing in life filled my mind. He was going to pay and pay dearly to me personally for what he had done to my life. Now, because of the newspaper article, I knew that he was still operating in the San Francisco area and I determined to get him.

I dressed quickly and then called Joe Thomas at his home.

"Have you got a copy of tonight's *Call-Bulletin*?" I asked him. He said that he did and I directed him to read the story that I had just finished.

"Well?" he asked after several minutes of silence.

"Don't you see any connection between this hit-and-run case and the murder of Norton?"

Joe thought a minute. I could tell from the rattle of the paper that he was giving the article another once over. "Damn! You might be right," he answered finally.

"Listen," I told him, "meet me at your office in half an hour. I think we can use this story to help uncover the guy we're looking for."

Joe said, "Right," and hung up.

"FIRST of all, Joe," I said to him in the office, "I want to find out if any gift certificate was found in that Mrs. Fiper's purse, or around the Piper house."

Joe did some quick telephoning and came up with the answer. "Nothing like it, Tim. In fact, her husband

seems to think that her purse had been rifled after the accident. He's blaming the people that picked her up after the accident."

"That checks," I said. "Our killer, after arranging his little murder, went through her purse and took his gift certificate back, thus destroying the evidence against him and covering up his trail. He would have done the same thing with Helen, but her certificate was wrapped up at home."

Joe lit another in his unending chain of cigarettes. "I'll bet he's worried about *that* one. How do you expect to catch up with him?"

"I was thinking of something like this: we'll get that story of today's killing played down in the papers. Then tomorrow I'll run an advertisement with a pretty good spread, offering a reward for information leading to the identification of the man who killed Helen."

Joe got up and walked back and forth in back of his desk.

"It's no good, Tim," he said flatly. "You seldom get anything valuable from a reward notice. Mostly cranks."

"Hold it," I said. "That's not all. I'll offer a gift certificate for a new Popla sedan as the reward."

"So?" he said.

"So," I returned. "our killer will read it and know that one of his certificates is in the hands of someone who might use it against him. It will force him into an attempt to regain the certificate."

Joe wasn't in favor of the idea at all. "Look, Tim," he reasoned. "He's a killer, and he's a pretty shrewd baby. I doubt if he'd make any move that would get him into trouble."

I could feel the muscles along the side of my jaw go rigid. "Joe," I said, and I said it plainly so that he would know how I felt, "that guy killed my

wife." We looked at each other for a minute. Then I added, "Let's give him a chance to make his mistake. And make it where we can do something about it."

Joe still didn't like it, but he saw that I was determined. "It can't hurt too much," he conceded at last. "We'll try it."

THE advertisement was run the next day, in the late morning editions. And the newspaper carried a feature story on it, telling the circumstances behind the accident, without saying anything about the fact that we were after the killer. It got a pretty big play. I figured that if our man read newspapers at all he couldn't miss it.

I decided that it would be at least that night before he took any action, so I made up my mind to go out to the house to make another attempt to straighten out Helen's things. As I went I found myself being very cautious when I crossed streets. I wasn't exactly afraid, but I didn't want to be caught from behind. I knew that there was nothing the killer would like more than a chance at me.

I wandered around the house for half an hour, doing little things and not getting very much accomplished. More than once I caught myself just standing, staring into space and dreaming. Then I ran across Helen's diary again and took it into the living room. Of all her things, it seemed to bring her closer to me.

I had barely started to read the entries when there was a knock on the front door.

It was Mr. Mullins, the insurance man who had taken Helen to the hospital after the accident. "Mr. Mulvaney," he said, "may I come in? I'd like to talk to you."

I said, "Sure," and invited him into

the living room. I sat opposite him and picked up the diary again.

"I tried to get you on the phone last night," he said when he was seated, "but you weren't home. Then I saw you walk up this afternoon."

"I couldn't sleep here," I told him. "Too many memories."

He nodded sympathetically. "I can imagine how you feel," he replied. Then he launched into his subject. "I wanted to call you about that ad in the paper. You see, I'm pretty sure that the gift certificate you're offering as a reward is a phony."

My interest perked up. "Yeah? What makes you think so?"

"Well, my wife was interested in a Popla and got one of those gift certificates from some fellow. But I investigated before I would let her put any money into it. And it was a fake. I thought I'd let you know because I'd hate to have a neighbor swindled."

I showed surprise at the news, but little bright lights were beginning to flash somewhere in my head. "Is that right? Well, I'm certainly glad you warned me in time. I might have made a fool out of myself giving that thing as a reward." I started to get up.

Something in my face must have warned him. By the time I took a swing at him he was out of the chair and his knuckles smashed into my mouth.

It was all I needed to know. I didn't have to scream at him. I didn't have to call him the dirty killer he was. We both knew it, and anyway there wasn't time to talk.

His body crashed into me and I started to go backward over my chair. His face was very close to me now and I could see the fear and hate in his eyes. His fist hit me in the face again and then I couldn't see him at all.

Somehow I got my knee up. I brought

it up hard and felt him stiffen with pain. A groan bubbled in his throat and I twisted quickly and shoved him away from me.

He staggered back, straightened, and then came at me again. There was a look on his face that I had never seen on any face before. But then he wasn't a man any more. He was an animal, and animal noises were hissing from his lips. He was out to kill. But this time I was ready.

He went to the floor when I hit him. I dived on top of him and we rolled around, hitting whenever there was an opportunity. I could feel my senses slipping. I was getting groggy from the sledge-hammer blows he pushed through to my head and face. But I couldn't quit. I owed this guy everything I could give him, because he had killed Helen, taken her away from me in cold blood. I mustered my last strength.

But his size had begun to tell. We rolled one more time and now he came up straddling me, pounding my head and face. I began to lose track of everything but that awful, terribly painful pounding in and around my head. Then, fight against it as I would, the picture faded into nothingness.

WHEN I woke up there on the couch in my living room, the place seemed full of people. My vision was blurry and my head was aching like the world's greatest collection of toothaches. I strained to see and the fog began to lift, until I finally spotted Joe Thomas.

"Hey Joe," I called as loudly as I could. It was little more than a whisper. "It was Mullins. Don't stand

there. Go after him. I can't move. Get going, man!"

Joe came over and sat next to me. "Don't worry, Tim," he said jovially, as if he were attempting to humor me, "we got him. But the next time you want to spring a trap, you'd better figure out something that doesn't get you so battered. You look like hell."

"What happened?" I asked feebly, but with an attempt at dignity. His manner was that of a doctor trying to coax a patient into staying in bed, and it annoyed me. I hoped the dignity would show how I felt.

Joe grinned. "I put a tail on you, figuring that you weren't safe out alone after putting that ad in the paper. When the boys heard the fight in here they came in and got your man. But what happened in here?"

"He made the mistake I was waiting for, Joe," I answered, smiling as broadly as I could. "He came here to fool me by warning me that the certificate was a phony, figuring that I wouldn't suspect him if he did. But he mentioned that he tried to call me last night about the ad and the ad didn't appear until the morning edition of the papers. He knew that I had the certificate all along, but this was the first break he had."

"He'll get his last break when they close the door to the gas chamber," Joe remarked amiably.

I grinned feebly again. "I guess I was just a little untactful in my approach."

Joe patted my shoulder gently as he stood up. "Why don't you try leading with your left the next time," he laughed. "That's more tactful and it always works for me."

THIS DEADLY WEAPON—BY WARD MILLER

**A THRILLING, BOOK-LENGTH DETECTIVE NOVEL
IN THE SEPTEMBER MAMMOTH DETECTIVE—ON SALE JUNE 25**

CRIME

Oddities

NO SECOND OFFENDERS

HORSE thieves may have flourished in other parts of the United States after the year 1799, but not in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, where the citizens organized the "Society for the Recovery of Stolen Horses and Bringing Thieves to Justice."

Among the by-laws of the Society was one which particularly attracted membership. Each rider received six cents a mile for his expenses, a reward of twenty-five dollars if he caught the horse, and sixty dollars if he caught the horse and rider both.

All the members of the Society rode in one body when on the trail of a thief. Once caught, a noose was placed about his neck and he was seated on the stolen horse. The owner of the animal was given the pleasure of starting him off, and the thief was left to dangle and die.

GEOGRAPHY LESSON

*"Two brothers in our town did dwell,
Hiram sought Heaven, but Isaac Sawtell."*

IN THE 1890's that was a popular little jingle.

But it only half described the amusing nature of the murder of Hiram Sawtell by his brother.

The two lived in New Hampshire, a state which then demanded the death penalty for murder; in neighboring Maine the law had been abolished. Consequently, when Isaac decided to kill Hiram, he plotted carefully.

One evening he invited his brother for a ride in the country. It was a dark night, and Isaac drove carefully. When he was certain he'd crossed the state line, he murdered Hiram.

Too late he discovered his error! In his haste he was still within the limits of his own state line, and New Hampshire claimed her rightful criminal.

SWEAT-PRINTS

POROSCOPY, the study of the perspiration pores, is being shown more and more interest by criminologists today. In a sense, it is a branch of *dactylography*, the study of fingerprints, which is still the most important factor in identification work in the United States. No evidence has been shown to be stronger or simpler.

Yet the skillful surgeon or artist, by temporarily obliterating the fingerprints or constructing artificial ones, have been known to baffle the police.

Today poroscopy comes to their aid. For al-

though the print may appear radically different, the perspiration pores that line the original prints can never be changed. Only a few pores of a single papillary ridge or less than 1/5,000th of a complete fingerprint is necessary for identification.

In other words, 1/1,000,000th of the human palm is sufficient for the modern criminologist to present conclusive identification of the criminal.

BRIDGE OF DEATH

GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE has certainly proved the old maxim about misery loving company. It has been popular among death-seekers ever since it was first constructed, but of late has been doing a booming business among those committing suicide.

Since it is the longest and highest single-span suspension bridge in the world a man intent on taking his life can achieve it dramatically in a graceful 250 foot leap into San Francisco Bay.

A record in suicides from the famous bridge was recently made when a woman became the third in twenty hours to leap to her death. Two men had committed suicide there within five minutes of each other. During the same day the middle-aged San Francisco woman contemplated and carried out her death-wish. She phoned a casket company and informed them of her plan. Then she drove to the bridge in a taxi and jumped.

The most recent suicide from Golden Gate Bridge, by a fifty five year old man, was a second attempt. He had survived the first plunge, but on his second try had succeeded in committing suicide.

It has been reported that in the nine years since the completion of the bridge 58 persons have used it to take their lives.

HUMOR IN THE LAWS

LAWS in various cities and states sometimes take a humorous turn. For instance, it is unlawful in Hayden, Arizona, to disturb or annoy a bullfrog or a cottontail rabbit! In California you may play draw poker to your heart's content, but beware of stud. You can be jailed for six months as a penalty!

Houston, Texas, has what they call a "Goo-Goo" law, forbidding "winking, staring at or wiggling the body" at a woman. Recently, a 45-year old man had to answer in court for disobeying the "wiggle" part of the law. He was charged with tickling the ribs of a 24-year old girl.

—Rosetta Livingston

MURDER

—Country Style

By **RICHARD BRISTER**



THE FIRST person Saul Debbens saw, when he stepped off the 6 o'clock onto the Centerville platform, was Sheriff Luke Longacre. Luke hadn't changed a great deal. The same red handlebar mustache drooped along his thin jowls. His jaw punished the inevitable "chaw" with the same old cud-chewing motion that Saul Debbens remembered.

He nodded hesitantly toward the crusty old codger. "Howdy, Luke."

"You're a blasted fool, Debbens." The sheriff stared unblinkingly at him. No, Saul thought grimly, five years hasn't changed him.

He said, "I call that a nice friendly welcome home, Sheriff."

"Do you now?" Luke scowled at him and spat. "Could be, maybe, you ain't welcome in Centerville, Debbens. Ever think of that?"

"Sometimes." Saul frowned, and shrugged his heavy shoulders with an apathy born of long years behind bars. "Welcome or not, I'm back again, Sheriff. I grew up in this town. It's all I know. You can believe this or not, but I'm blasted fond of it. I was born in this town. I mean to die here."

He picked up his battered suitcase and started moving down toward the end of the platform. Luke Longacre matched strides with him. "Die here, hey? And you're like to. Take my word for it. You'll die before your rightful time comes, if you stay here, Debbens."

Having spent all his life among farmers, Sheriff Longacre knew just how to go about solving a country killing



"It ain't goin' to do no good," the sheriff said, "to put up a fuss"

Saul felt a prickle of irritation travelling through his tired muscles. Why couldn't the old fool let him alone? He'd paid the price, hadn't he? He'd served his time. Lord, what did a man have to do, to square himself with the world, commit hara kiri?

Sure, he had knocked the props out from under the bank. His wildness, his instinct for gambling, had broken the financial backs of a number of Centerville folk who had trusted their money to him. But the thing was not new. It was not unique, in a world given over to greed and sharp practice. His greatest sin was that he had failed in his attempt to put over a coup, to pile up a fortune. The only sin in this world was the sin of getting caught at it. And now Sheriff Luke Longacre was warning him to get out of the town he'd been born in, because some people still held hatred in their hearts for him.

He stopped on the corner of Main and Poplar and set down his suitcase, wiping his brow in the heat of the summer evening. He focused his angry gaze on the sheriff.

"I'll tell you your trouble, Luke. You're getting on. You're thinking about your job. You're afraid, that's it. Afraid someone will take a crack at me. Some crackpot who lost money when the bank went under. And you know it's up to you to protect me. Because I've paid society back, for the thing I did. I've been a clean man since I walked out that prison gate, this morning. And if I see fit to live out my days in this town, you can't stop me."

He grabbed up his suitcase, ready to stomp on down the street, when he noticed a small clique of men coming down from under the movie marquee, coming straight toward him.

From the moment he saw them, he ignored Luke completely. His heart

thumped hard against his ribs and he swallowed dryly. Sam Dobbs, Bill Clary, and Harry Wenkel! These were the three who had lost everything they had in the world, when Saul Debbens' bank had folded.

AS THEY approached within speaking distance, he cleared his throat nervously and called out a greeting. "'Lo, boys. It's been a long time."

Wenkel did the talking for them. "You're not wanted here, Debbens. I speak for the town. Get out—quick—if you know what's good for you."

Saul frowned. "Can't you let bygones be bygones? Dang it, man, I've paid —"

"You never paid *me*," Wenkel broke in roughly. "I never got back the twelve thousand you reamed me out of. You get out of town, Debbens. That's final."

"But my sister!" Saul offered weakly. He must not lose his temper, he was thinking. These men hated him in the depths of their souls; there was anger, dangerous, explosive, ready to spark off within them at a moment's notice. "I meant to go out on the farm with Mary. I won't leave the place, Wenkel. I'll stay put there. Listen, you'll never even see me in town, if you'll just—"

"You get out of town," Wenkel repeated. It was all he knew, a rote line that issued again and again through his hard lips, like a phonograph playing a broken record. He wheeled abruptly and walked up the street. Sam Dobbs and Bill Clary glared hard at Saul, as if to reinforce Wenkel's injunction, then turned away with him.

Behind Saul a new voice, with a city inflection, put in ironically, "It would seem the boys don't want you here."

Saul whirled, saw a dapper thin man

(Continued on page 166)



KNOWLEDGE
THAT HAS
ENDURED WITH THE
PYRAMIDS

A SECRET METHOD FOR THE MASTERY OF LIFE

WHENCE came the knowledge that built the Pyramids and the mighty Temples of the Pharaohs? Civilization began in the Nile Valley centuries ago. Where did its first builders acquire their astounding wisdom that started man on his upward climb? Beginning with naught they overcame nature's forces and gave the world its first sciences and arts. Did their knowledge come from a race now submerged beneath the sea, or were they touched with Infinite inspiration? From what concealed source came the wisdom that produced such characters as Amenhotep IV, Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, and a host of others? Today it is known that they discovered and learned to interpret certain *Secret Methods* for the development of their inner power of mind. They learned to command the inner forces within their own beings, and to master life. This secret art of living has been preserved and handed down throughout the ages. Today it is extended to those who dare to use its profound principles to meet and solve the problems of life in these complex times.

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who bore a strange resemblance to Jimmy Walker. "Who's this?" he grunted toward Luke Longacre.

The sheriff spat disgustedly. He did not, apparently, hold a very high opinion of the pale, well-dressed stranger. "City detective. Charley Carson. Got shot up a little, last month, and he's staying out with the Godwins at Maple-leaf Farms, for a kind of a rest cure." He waved from one of the two to the other. "This here's Debbens, Carson. Just told him t' get out of town. Only, he means to be coy about it. Says he wants t' die here. Hah!" His snort gave way to short hard cackles, devoid of humor.

Carson nodded. "The rube's right, Debbens." Saul watched Luke Longacre's face harden, at the word Carson had applied to him. He grinned faintly, and said,

"Think so?"

"I know so." This Charley Carson had a very irritating manner, the kind of brash self-assurance that would win him few friends, and influence less people.

"And if I don't—" Saul suggested.

The city man shrugged. "I'll not be responsible for your safety."

"Say, look here, young fellow," boomed Luke. "Who's sheriff here, me or you? Who's askin' you t' be responsible for him? You're takin' a mite too much on yourself, if you want my opinion."

"I spoke as a man," Carson retorted. "Not officially. Though Lord knows he'll need competent help, if he stays here. Those three weren't fooling. I'm warning you one last time, Debbens. The rube here means well enough, but a man his age can hardly protect you against—"

"Leave my age out of this," stormed the sheriff. There was plainly little affection between him and the city detec-

tive. "I was takin' care of folks in this county when you was suckin' your thumb in the cradle, young fellow."

Saul said wearily, "It's very flattering to have you gentlemen fighting over who's to protect me. I'll be interested to learn how you work things out. Good evening gentlemen."

He turned away from them.

"You—you dang fool!" Luke raged. "You mean—you're stayin'?"

"I'm staying," Saul announced flatly.

He hired a hack to take him out to the farm. His reunion with his sister Mary was one of those tearful, overly demonstrative scenes from which his stern soul always had shrunk with instinctive loathing. He pleaded weariness shortly after dinner and hied himself upstairs to his old room.

Good girl, Mary, he thought, as he went in and saw that the room was just as it had been, five years ago, the last time he'd slept in it. He crawled between clean-smelling, starchy sheets, and luxuriated. He finally dozed off thinking what a fool he'd have been, had he taken the warnings of Sheriff Luke Longacre and of Carson, that brash young fool of a city detective, to heart.

He was home. Where he belonged. And here he would stay, he told himself, until the day he died.

He had been sleeping he did not know for how long when an instinctive awareness of danger brought him bolt upright on the mattress, his eyes staring with fright.

He could see from the growing light outside his window, coming from off to the east, that it was near morning. He blinked, trying to bring himself to complete awareness, trying to adjust his eyes to the pre-dawn darkness, when a stealthy movement, as of someone crossing the carpet behind him, held him transfixed with panic.

“Who—who is it?” he gulped in a half-audible whisper.

Something struck him with bludgeoning force between the shoulder blades. He felt a sharp gouging pain slide right into him, as of some sharp deadly instrument plunged hilt-deep into his flesh. He cried out in hoarse agony, tried to twist around to face his assailant. But again that lethal weapon struck deep, twisting his innards.

His hoarse outcrys faltered. He choked on a mouthful of blood and fell sidewise across the bed, his eyes rolling numbly.

Through a filmy haze, he saw a shadowy figure climb through the window, blocking the light. Then his eyes closed in the long sleep from which there is no returning.

SHERIFF LUKE Longacre hustled down Poplar Street on bandy legs toward the decrepit old sedan which he had left parked at the curb, half a block from his office. As he applied his key to the lock on the sedan's front door, a familiar voice hailed him.

“What’s all the excitement, Sheriff?” It was Carson, that smart-aleck young city shamus. “You look like you were about to have triplets,” the city man added.

Luke scowled at him. “What’re you doin’ in town this time o’ morning, young fellow? Didn’t know you city-bred folks ever got up for breakfast.”

Carson grinned impudently at him. “When in Rome . . .” he shrugged. “Matter of fact, I get up for a constitutional every morning. The sooner I get back my health, and get out of this hick town, the better I’ll like it. I rode into town with the Mapleleaf Farms’ milk truck, if you must know. Now quit sparring, eh, and let a fellow in on what’s up?”

“Plenty. Just had a call from Mary

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Debbens. She's nigh in hysterics. Seems somebody climbed in Saul's window, around six this mornin' and jabbed Saul full of holes with an icepick." His black eyes clouded. "First murder we had in this county for seven years, blast it. I told that dang fool to—"

Carson's face came alive with professional interest. "You driving out there, are you? You rounded up a medico yet for the inquest? I might be able to help you a little."

The sheriff spat with impatience. "Come along if you want to, young fellow. But I don't figure you'll be helpin' me much, not on this killin'. City methods may be all right for city killin's. But this here's a country killin', an' I got my own ideas how to go about nabbin' the guilty party."

Carson was too pleased at the prospect of being in on the party to make any argument. He slid into the seat alongside of the old sheriff, and kept tactfully silent, while the sheriff toiled the creaky sedan out of town to a high-crowned macadam highway.

"Sa-ay!" Carson said suddenly. "This isn't the way to the Debbens' farm, Sheriff."

"Ain't it, now?" The old man glanced sardonically sidewise. "Do tell. Matter of fact, I ain't goin' there. Leastwise, not right off. It's toward Harry Wenkel's place I'm aheadin'."

"But—" Carson sputtered with amazement. "Until you've at least examined the room where the murder was committed—until you've got some idea just when—"

"Know when," the sheriff said shortly. "Six this morning, like I already told you. Mary Debbens was woke up by Saul's screamin', so the time's definite enough. You better take some of the wax out of your ears, young fellow. And—" his hard eyes glittered a little—"get one thing straight. You're along

for the ride. I don't want you messin' in and spoilin' my chances of nabbin' the fella that did old Saul in."

They drove in the Wenkel lane in another five minutes. Wenkel, the sheriff explained patiently, as he punched the doorbell, ran a hardware store on Jones Street and Spruce Lane. He usually left his home to drive in to work about quarter of nine, each morning.

"He's a nervous critter," the sheriff went on idly, and glanced at his watch. "Hmm. 'Taint even eight yet. That means Harry's in bed yet, providin' he wasn't the one that done for Saul."

Carson sneered. "Airtight logic, Sheriff. How did you manage to figure that out?"

"Wenkel's an insomny victim. He don't never sleep worth a dang, till along towards mornin'. Consequence is; he don't get up till the very last minute, just in time to open his store at nine on the button. But if he's pulled off a killin' at six this mornin', he'll be wide awake now, that's for certain. A killer's conscience don't let nobody sleep, I don't reckon, much less an insomny victim."

"Of all the screwball logic," sniffed Carson, "that's really the—"

He cut the speech short as the door opened, revealing a plump, frowsy-haired middle-aged woman.

"Mornin', Mrs. Wenkel," spoke up the sheriff. "Harry up and stirring yet, is he?"

"Why, Luke Longacre. You know very well Harry never gets up till at least eight fifteen. What in the world's—"

"Sleepin' like a babe yet, hey?" the sheriff stepped in. "Mind if I just take a small gander at him?"

Something in his manner, in the tone of his voice, seemed to frighten the woman. "Why—all right—of course," she spluttered.

THE bedroom was on the first floor. The sheriff stood in the doorway, staring intently at the snoring figure beneath the light summer blanket. "Yep," he said. "Dead as a doornail. Harry couldn't begin to fake that kind of wood sawin'. I'm much obliged to you, Mrs. Wenkel."

"What in the name of Heaven is all this about—"

"Saul Debbens' been murdered. Now don't take on, ma'am. I know darn well Harry didn't have nothin' t' do with it. G' mornin'."

He swept through the door, leaving the woman to sputter and stare wide-eyed after his retreating figure. Carson slunk behind him, a bit shame-facedly. In the car, he grunted, "So that clinches it, eh, Sheriff? He's sleeping. He's an insomniac, so he couldn't have done it? You mean to tell me you honestly think that clears him?"

"I think," said the sheriff, "that we'll call at Bill Clary's place next. It's right on the way to Sam Dobbs' house. One of them two must've done it."

"Look," Carson put in, with great patience, "have you ever, in your long and brilliant career, heard of sleeping pills, Sheriff?"

The old man looked at him. "You mean, he might've took one, so's to be asleep when I come to check on him? Knowin' I'd be bound to come, the minute Saul's sister phoned me? Nope. That's no good, young fellow. Ain't a sleepin' pill made that'd put Harry Wenkel t' sleep, if he'd just done a murder. Nope. Got t' be one o' them others."

Carson leaned back hopelessly against the car cushions and swore violently under his breath at the system which permitted such an arrant old fool to remain in office of sheriff.

"I suppose," he said weakly, as the sedan crunched up the gravel drive of



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Bill Clary's country cottage, "you've got some foolproof angle figured out for Clary too. Some way to prove whether or not *he* did it."

"Sure do," assented the tobacco-chewing old timer. "All in knowing a man's personal habits, young fellow. Now you take Bill Clary. There's a fellow who's really nuts about hunting." He looked slyly toward Carson. "By the way, know what date this is?"

"September the first," Carson said, without hesitation.

"Right," boomed the sheriff. "First day of the season. I figure Bill wouldn't miss goin' out for some birds, before he had t' go in to town to his office. So, reckon we'll just look into the matter a little."

By now, it was eight-thirty. Mrs. Clary informed the sheriff that her lawyer husband had left fifteen minutes past; they just barely missed him. The sheriff accepted her friendly offer of coffee and doughnuts, and idly switched the conversation to the fact of the hunting season, and to her husband's skill with a twelve gauge shotgun.

Don't reckon Bill went out this mornin', him bein' so busy and all at the

office. That's a tough case he's on, for the water company."

"Why, lands sake!" laughed Mrs. Clary. "How you talk, Sheriff. Bill'd as soon die as miss the first day of season." With wifely pride, she led him out to the pantry. There, on a bloody, spread-out newspaper, lay the piled carcasses of two pheasants, three rabbits, and four squirrels.

The sheriff grinned. "Trust Bill," he chuckled. "Never fails t' come home with the limit. I reckon we'll be runnin' along, Mrs. Clary. Much obliged for the coffee."

IN THE car again, Carson could contain his disgust only with difficulty. "So," he said scathingly, "a mess of game clears friend Clary beyond a shadow of a doubt in your mind, hey Sheriff?"

"Sure does," the sheriff said easily.

"Did it ever occur to you that he might have got that much game *after* six A.M? After he knocked off Saul Debbens?"

"Nope. If he'd just killed Saul, he'd have passed up the huntin'. Or if he did go out, for appearance sake, he'd've been too wrought up to bag all them birds."

It burned Carson up. "He could have *bought* those birds, Sheriff! For God's sake, use the brains you were—"

"You mind your tongue, Carson. I'm runnin' this. I'm runnin' it my own way, like I told you. Criticizin' comes easy. I don't notice you offerin' no constructive ideas so far this mornin'. If you city shamuses know so much, suppose you get down to work and help me pick a hole in the story Sam Dobbs is sure to have cooked up for me. Because—" his eyes burned with the intensity of his feeling "—you can just mark my words, young fellow, Sam Dobbs done that killing."

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Carson scowled. "You haven't begun to clear the other two in my opinion, Sheriff. Crime never *looks* like crime, till you've smoked it out. That was one of the first things they taught me in the school of crime detection."

"They should've taught you to keep your mouth shut and your ears wide open," opined the sheriff, without rancor. "Never learn nothin' much, while your own tongue's wagging." He waved through the dust-speckled windshield. "There's Sam's place, over yonder. Nice farm, it was, afore Saul got away with so much of Sam's money. Can't rightly blame Sam for nursin' hard feelin's. That's the part a man hates about bein' sheriff. I've knewed Sam Dobbs for years, and now I got to take him in, and the good Lord can say what's to become of his woman."

Carson sat in a brooding silence. "You're that sure, are you, Sheriff? You know he did it?"

"Sure as a man dares t' be, in my line of business. Whup! There's Sam now, cuttin' firewood out back of the house. Don't have the look of blood on him, now does he?"

"Crime never—"

"Looks like crime. You said that, young fellow." The sheriff brought the creaky sedan to a halt and stepped out to greet Sam Dobbs, who was strolling across the lawn to greet him. Dobbs was a bulky man, with a spare tire beginning to show around his midsection. He had close black eyes, and a leathery skin with a color like that of rotting apples.

"What brings you out this way so early, Sheriff?"

"Figure you killed Saul Debbens in his own bed with an icepick, at six this mornin'," the sheriff said bluntly.

He was staring hard at Sam Dobbs' face as he made the unexpected pronouncement. Sam Dobbs didn't flinch



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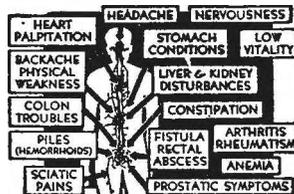
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or move a face muscle, but young Carson gaped, and gasped, and wondered at the swift change in his seemingly benign old companion. Apparently the old duffer could be hard as stone, could really turn the heat on a man, when he figured he had the goods on him.

"Well, now," Dobbs drawled, "that's right interestin', Luke. Right interestin'." He seemed calm, almost too calm, Carson thought watching, as if he were controlling himself only by a supreme effort. "Suppose," Dobbs suggested, "you and your young friend come in the house and tell me how you figure I could've done any such thing, at such an hour."

"Don't mind if I do," drawled the sheriff. It was a sparring match of nervous systems, Carson realized, and was suddenly marvelling at the enormous control the pair were displaying. He was himself of the school that believed in shooting first, and palavering later. The sheriff apparently hoped to take a desperate killer in tow, if in truth, Sam Dobbs had done the killing, by weight of personality alone. If he could do that, Carson decided, then he personally would take off his hat to Sheriff Luke Longacre.

IN THE living room of the house, the sheriff settled comfortably on a low divan, rested his holstered gun along his outflung leg, and faced Sam Dobbs, who stood spreadlegged in the center of the room, his big arms folded. The man's frightened-eyed little drone of a wife stood framed in the doorway that led to the kitchen, dry-wringing her bony small hands.

"Now," said the sheriff conversationally, "suppose you give me a brief idee what you've been up to, Sam, since you got up this mornin'."

"Meanin'—"
 "Meanin'," droned Luke Longacre,

“start talkin’.”

Sam Dobbs scowled, said truculently, huffily, “I got up at five-thirty, like always. My woman here’ll tell you the same thing.”

The woman’s head bobbed in energetic confirmation.

“And—?”

“I done my chores,” growled Dobbs. “What else? I cleaned out the stables under the horses, milked both the cows, fed the chickens, and hayed down the livestock. How in the name of Hades could I have driven all the way over to Saul’s place, like you say, and killed him at six this mornin’. I been busy as a beaver since I pried my eyes open. So if you’re hopin’ t’ pin this thing on me, Luke, you got another think comin’.”

The sheriff sighed and examined his two bony hands. From the barn, came the piercing neigh of a horse, then the full-throated mooing of cattle. Somewhere a cock crowed lustily, completing the roster of sounds most often associated with farm living.

“Noisy place here, ain’t it?” said the sheriff. “Wonder it don’t get on a man’s nerves, in the end. Matter of fact, you seem a might fidgety this mornin’, Sam. Seems like your hands can’t hold still, hey?”

Again the cows mooed, more lustily this time. The sheriff looked up at Sam Dobbs’ wife. “Hearin’ them cows make such an all-fired racket reminds me, ma’am. I’m right thirsty. A glass of milk’d go fine, I reckon, providin’ you had it handy.”

The idle suggestion seemed to electrify the big farmer. He swung angrily toward his frightened wife and commanded, “Don’t move. He’s not here in friendship, and he’ll get nothing from us.” He swung angrily on Luke. “If that’s all, you can leave my place, Sheriff.”

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THE sheriff stood up and walked to-
ward him. He was fishing the cuffs
off his belt as he went across the carpet,
and his face wore an unhappy expres-
sion, as if he was doing something he
hated.

"Put them hands out, Sam. You
ain't fooled me for a minute. You're
comin' in with—"

Sam Dobbs suddenly reached out
with a swift right hand and cuffed Long-
acre with all his might on the side of
the face. The blow stunned the old man,
almost felled him, but there was a lot
more solid foundation in those rickety-
seeming old legs of the sheriff than was
apparent to the eye. He held his foot-
ing somehow, though the blow had
stunned him badly.

Dobbs grabbed the hand the sheriff
sent snaking down toward his holstered
pistol and thrust it backward. With
the other, he grabbed the gun forth and
pointed it threateningly at Carson, who
had come up like a cat from the sofa,
and was closing fast toward him.

"Git back there, young fellow, if you
don't want a hole through you."

"Get back, boy." Luke's voice grated
like iron. He glared at Dobbs. "You're
a fool, Sam. Put that gun down."

"Not that much of a fool," Dobbs
grated, panting. "Get back now, damn
you! I'll drill you, Luke. I ain't—"

Carson stared open-mouthed, while
Luke Longacre advanced steadily
across that big living room toward the
retreating, threatening farmer.

"Put that gun up, Sam." He was
talking to Dobbs, but his eyes seemed
focused upon the frightened face of the
farmer's woman. "It'll go hard for you,
Sam, if you do something foolish. You'll
get a square shake in this town, when
you come to trial. Lot of kindred souls
in this town, who meant the same by
Saul as you did. They'll be on that jury,
some of them. You'll get off with less

than ten years, but another murder is sure to hang you. Now put that gun up and come along peaceful. It's ten years, Sam, against the gallows. There's only one choice to be made, an' you know it."

Dobbs' face was an image of panicky indecision. He went suddenly berserk with the emotional strain of the moment. His finger closed down hard on the trigger. What he did not see was the lightning, frantic approach of his wife. She had taken in every word crafty Luke had had to say. She had known, since he was directing the words squarely toward her, that some sort of action was expected of her. It was her decision, really, as much as Sam's, and the sheriff had forced it upon her by the magic of his drawled logic.

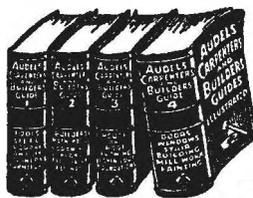
She reached her husband just as the gun went off, and her clutching fingers drove the gun sidewise and downward. The slug thudded harmlessly into the floor. The gun fell with a dull clatter, halfway across the room. The sheriff went over calmly and picked it up, meanwhile drawing on idly, as if nothing important had happened: "You'll be thankin' her, Sam, once you've thought things over. Now, I reckon it's about time we got goin'."

He clipped the cuffs neatly over the wrists of a stunned and submissive Sam Dobbs, and pulled the man gently toward the door.

Carson followed, wagging his head with sudden admiration for the old timer, and feeling a wave of guilt, at the way he had so badly misjudged the sheriff.

Later, in the sheriff's office, he had the old man's explanation. "Sam made one big mistake, son. He either forgot, or he just didn't have time to milk them two cows of his, like he claimed he did, early this mornin'. Now everybody knows how a cow'll put up a ruckus of

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moonin', when her usual milkin' time comes and goes, and nobody milks her." His eyes twinkled. "'Course, she'll moo for her boy friend too, but this ain't the season. Anyhow, the minute I heard both them cows puttin' up such a Godawful squallin', I guessed Sam hadn't milked 'em. And the way he acted when I asked for a drink of milk clinched it. I can tell fresh milk when I taste it, and Sam durn' well knowed it."

"Well I'll be double dog—"

The sheriff grinned at him. "So how about it, young fellow? You still think I should've run out to Saul's place, to look at the corpse and all, first off this mornin'? You was dead set agin the way I went at this thing, remember?"

"I think," said a still-marvelling, muchly-chastened city shamus, "that it takes country methods to solve a country killing!"

THE END

A GHOST ON TRIAL

By R. Clayton

RARELY does the tale of a ghostly apparition figure prominently in the courtroom, but in Marseilles, France, in the year 1726, this very unusual phenomenon did occur much to the consternation of a sober judge. Before him stood the young peasant, Honore Mirabel, and from his lips came an amazing tale.

As the assistant gardener on a country estate he had been wakened from a nap by a ghostly figure which had appeared at the window of a building he knew to be deserted. With the usual mysteriousness of such fantastic beings, the ghost sent a rock hurtling through the air, a rock which fell on a spot to mark a cache of secret treasure. Startled, Mirabel ran from the place. Later in the sober light of the following day he returned to the spot which the ghost had pointed out to him and brought Bernard, another gardener, as witness.

After digging for a short while they unearthed two canvas bags. Mirabel departed with them alone and opened them in secret to find one thousand gold Portuguese coins. At a loss as to how to take care of so great a sum, he put it in the hands of his friend Anquier for safekeeping. And now great trouble had come between them.

Anquier denied having seen the treasure, much

less having it in his possession. Mirabel called upon the court to see justice done.

The judge was certain of only one fact; one of these men was lying. Whether the court chose to believe in the existence of a ghost was not the point upon which Mirabel's case rested—for he produced witnesses. There was Bernard, a Madame Caillot who had known of the proceedings, and two relatives who reported a second appearance of the ghost. The case seemed very strong against the protesting Anquier. His only defense was the fact that ghosts do not exist. In 1726 people were not quite convinced of their non-existence, and it appeared that a confession would be wrung out of him through the use of torture.

The trial dragged on for weeks while Anquier fought to maintain his innocence. Soon the stories of the witnesses began to change. Madame Caillot admitted that her testimony had been memorized at Mirabel's dictation. The second appearance of the ghost was reported to have been staged by Mirabel under a sheet. Seeing his defense crumble before his eyes, Mirabel confessed that the whole story was true only in his imagination, there never had been a ghost or treasure, that he had hoped to gain wealth by forcing Anquier to pay him the fictitious sum. The harassed Anquier was given his freedom while the deceitful Mirabel was sentenced to the galleys for life.

BACK COVER SOLUTION

(See Back Cover)

THE evidence shown, and upon which the detective was able to point out the murderer of Mr. Grahame, consists of the following four clues:

1. It is obvious that Grahame could not have committed suicide, for he was engaged in powdering his face at the time he was slain. This is shown by the powder-puff clutched in his right hand and his face shows powder streaks not yet smoothed off. Since, clearly, he is right-handed, the dagger has pierced his side too far to the left to be self-inflicted.

2. Mrs. Grahame did not kill her husband, since the killer left a single footprint in the powder. This could have been made by one of her flat sandals, but if she were the one who had stepped in the powder that was spilled at the moment of attack, she could not, at the same time, have been holding up her skirts, as they would have dragged in the powder and left marks.

3. The footprint was left in the powder by the killer. This is evident because Grahame's sandals have built-up heels to increase his stature, and the print is perfectly flat. Also, there is no sign of powder on his sandal.

4. Since, by his own statement, no one else entered the corridor, Pownell is the murderer. The final proof to that is the fact that his dagger sheath matches the dagger used in the killing. The dagger he now wears, not only matches Hamlet's belt, but is too long for the sheath at his side.



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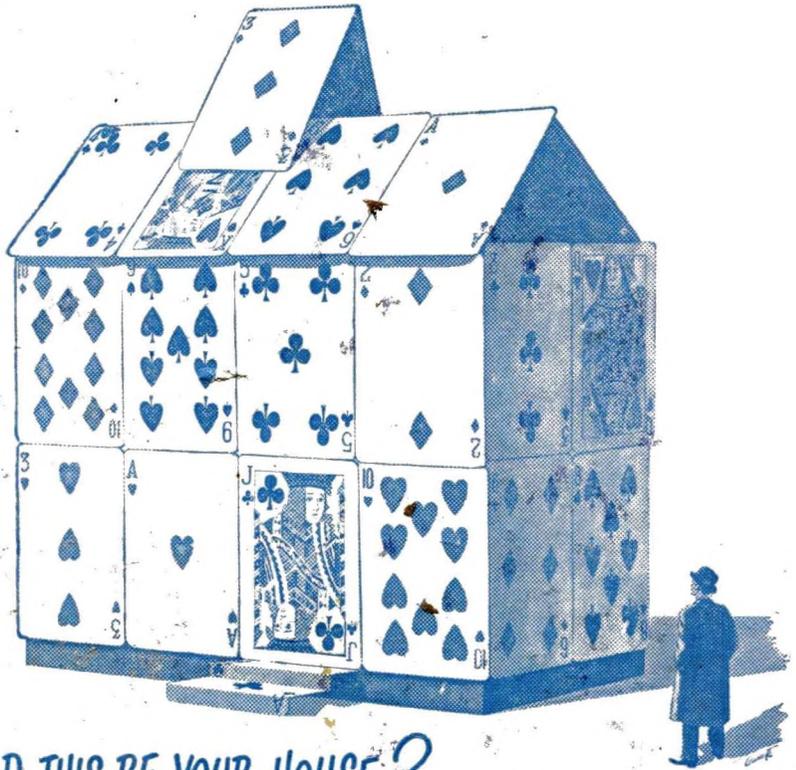


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FOUR CLUES SHOW WHO SLEW HAMILTON CALICO MAN

"It happened just before the last act," Pownell explained in the detective's room. All I know is that we three had some of stage and was questioning over the act