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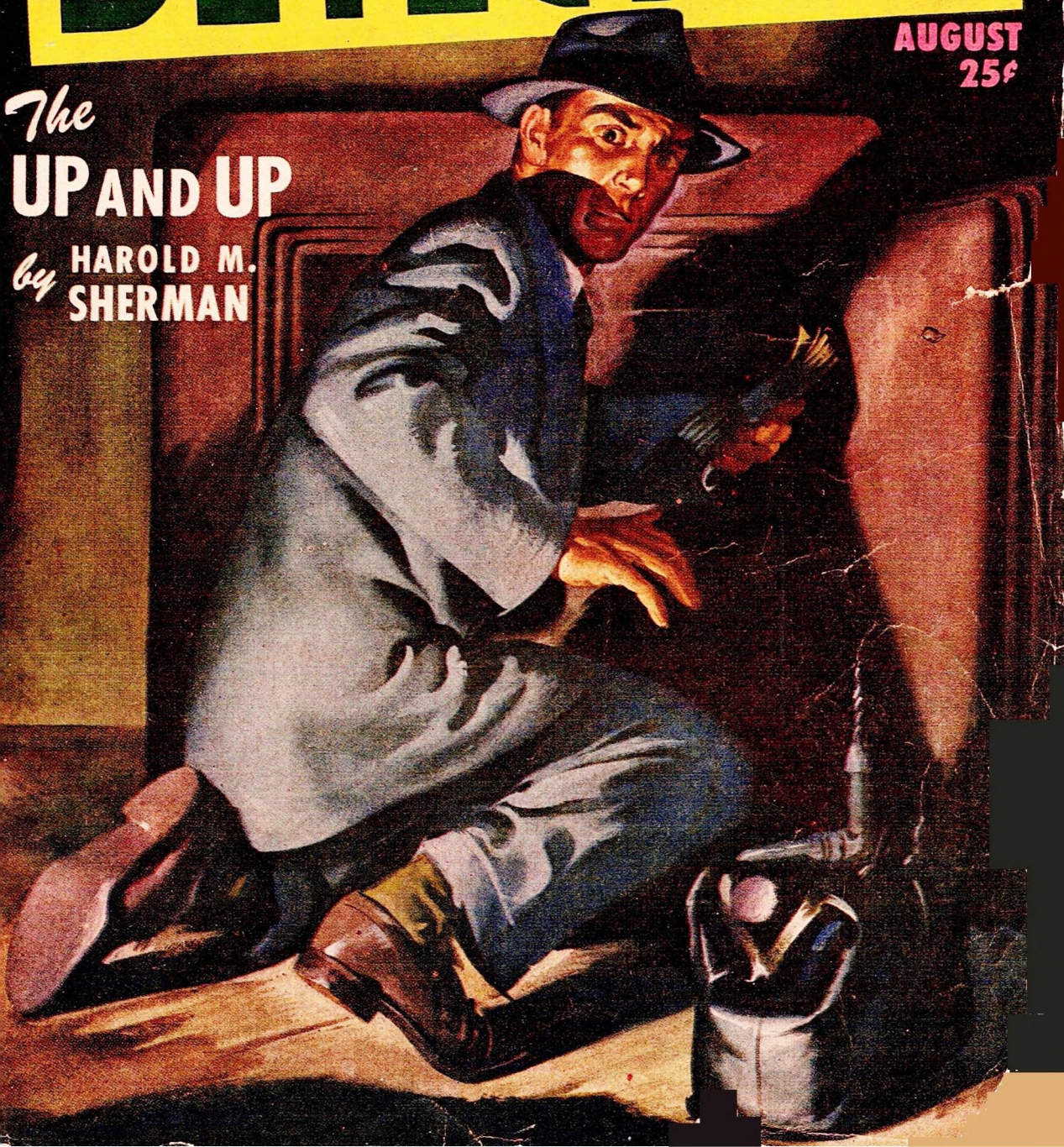
The
UP AND UP
by HAROLD M. SHERMAN



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Mammoth DETECTIVE

All Features Complete

Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn, based on the novel "The Up and Up"

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VOLUME 6 AUGUST 1947 NUMBER 8

All Stories Complete

AFTER an absence caused by a combination of vacation and flu germs, your editor is back at his desk . . . to find this issue of MAMMOTH DETECTIVE all completely edited and ready for the finishing touches. It's always nice to know that your work is being done for you, and we have nothing but gratitude for the staff members who stepped in and did the job.

WELL, almost nothing but gratitude. There's the matter of the "guest" editorial written by Mr. Raymond A. Palmer, head of the Ziff-Davis fiction group, and which appeared in the June issue of this magazine's sister publication, *Mammoth Mystery,* now on the stands. The editorial drew down a flock of letters, some of which agreed with Mr. Palmer, and some which violently disagreed. We're going to answer the boss in the August issue of the same magazine, and give the other side of the story. Watch for it.

WITH the above out of the way, let's turn to what we have to offer you readers this month. Leading off is one of the most unusual "crime" novels we've ever presented. It is called "The Up and Up," was written by Harold M. Sherman, who has written more books than anyone we know, and you've never read anything like it. This one has no bodies dripping with blood, no shrill screams in the night, no homicide dicks saying "Yeah?" through tight lips. This is the story of a crook who tried to go straight; who went into a legitimate business and learned that his competitors were even more ruthless and given to sharp practices than any of the criminal element he was accustomed to outwitting. There isn't a dull sentence or a slow paragraph in the entire 60,000 words!

FOLLOWING the novel is the second of the "Crime Files of Flamond" series. The same author who does the radio show by that name also writes the stories for MAMMOTH DETECTIVE . . . and does one whale of a job on both. If you missed the first of the series, don't let that keep you from this one, since each is complete in itself. This one deals with a lovely society girl who throws a party for a lot of her friends, then calmly announces she is going to kill one of the guests but refuses to say which one. The twist is, the murder happens *ahead* of the announcement.

NEXT in line comes one of Robert Moore Williams' unforgettable shorts. Titled "I Won't Take It!", it tells the story of a man who felt that he had a legitimate gripe and decided to do something about it. But all that glitters isn't valuable —and that wasn't the only lesson he learned. The twist to this one will delight you.

JUST for a change of pace, this issue's fourth yarn is one of the blood-and-action stories that so many of you readers regard with staunch affection. It's called "Passport to Death," and was written by Robert Martin, whose work you've come across in our pages before and a man you've been quick to praise. This one starts with a corpse in the second paragraph, picks up more of them as the story unfolds, adds beautiful girls and pawn tickets and mysterious men and sleek machine guns, and then explodes in a finale of bullets. Yeah, man!

AT THE back of the book (where it has no business being) is probably the best story for the month. It is called "The Body of Madelon Spain," and it was written by the current hot-shot of the detective-writing field. We'd prefer not to tell you anything about the story here because doing so would take away some of its edge. The author is Paul W. Fairman; and while he got his start in the pages of our magazines, you'll find him on the table of contents of the slick-paper publications before many more moons have passed. Sure, we know that every editor who "discovers" a writer has the same thing to say about him; but we've said it before and had it come true, and we'll stake what small reputation we have that it will work out that way this time, too. But make the test yourself: turn to page 154 and start reading. And when you've finished, pull up a typewriter or a pencil or an old hunk of lipstick and write us a letter, confirming or denying our claim. We'll publish them in our reader's page, which returns to the magazine beginning next month.

LOOKING ahead: In the September issue comes another full-length novel by an expert in the field. It is called "The Ram of Aries," is 75,000 words in length, was written by Milton K. Ozaki, and you get it *ahead of book publication.*—*H. B.*

MAN OR MOUSE

FORTUNATELY for those who must read voluminous legal reports and cases to obtain their sheaths to practice law, there is humor as well as horror in the annals of crime. Many such stories pertain to the relation of crime to animals. Criminal history records eccentric but true stories wherein the "culprit" sports wings or a tail.

Before any of these cases are revealed to the reader, it is very important to understand that in ancient times, all animate objects were regarded as possessed of personality. Many learned doctors of centuries gone by saw nothing amazing in their regard of a pig or dog as a wandering, mischievous child of the Devil and, therefore, subject to every sentence of human law.

And so it was that in 1266, a pig was publicly burned according to the sentence handed down by the monks of Sainte-Genevieve, for eating a child. Similarly, a wandering sow bit a child in the face and arm, causing the child to die. The place of this "crime"—Falaise, France (1386)—was ruled by the ecclesiastical authorities who decreed that the sow be caught and imprisoned to await trial. The solemn trial was held shortly afterwards, and the sow-criminal was pronounced guilty of murder. The sentence given to this delectable murderer must have seemed far worse than his fate on Christmas Day, complete with apple in mouth. According to sentence, the sow was maimed in head and leg and finally hanged by a special Parisian executioner. Despite all, the sow could not complain of an undignified death since it was dressed in a man's clothes and led out before its final death in the public square.

Such cases may seem less amazing if it is realized that humans were put to torturous deaths at the stakes in America and Europe for being witches. Constantly fearing superstition, the Devil and other imaginative voodoo, "enlightened Europe" and "young America" carried out their laws with hair-splitting terms and sentences. These animal-criminals who now seem oddities to us were dealt with all the seriousness that the highly-technical and finite medieval law could command.

So it was that the Draconian law—the basis of all such strange yet humorous convictions of animals as criminals—was passed. This law stated that weapons and all other objects which killed a human were to be condemned and "thrown beyond the boundaries." With such legal "logic" in mind, it should not seem so fantastic that a sword, which had been used to murder a priest, was brought to court, judged and finally sentenced to be cast into the sea.

Cats and rats—natural enemies—were the "objects" of a case pleaded by a brilliant lawyer of medieval days, Bartholomew Chassenee. Chassenee appointed himself defense lawyer for the rats of Autun who were accused by the local citizenry of being highly dangerous to health. His main point of defense emphasized the fact that his clients (the rats, to be sure) were entitled to safe conduct to court when their case came up before the tribunal. The judges gave such a request their fullest sympathies and, consequently, ruled that all cats in the parish were to give bonds not to molest the defendants. Indeed, this was a judgment against nature for, as was to be expected, the culprit-cats failed to live up to such a ruling and the case was adjourned until a later date. The resumption of the case found Chassenee, in his most elegant legal language, making a most pathetic plea that many of his clients had already grown sick and old. The ruling judge, just as much a rat-rooter as was Chassenee, granted the accused another extension of time and the case was finally dismissed. Chassenee, unashamedly, won great fame as the animal world's ace attorney and from that time on, this lawyer's name was prominent in most of the animal cases which filled the crime books of medieval Europe.

DESPITE such prize protection from Chassenee and other human sympathizers, the animals got it coming and going. Homicide by a horse in 1369 at Dijon accounted for one of the many writeups of trials in which the hectic horse was condemned to death. Even a bull became more ferocious in the law annals when, in 1499, a horned homicide was committed by a bull which killed a fifteen year old boy. The bull was finally sentenced to the gallows by the judges of the Cistercian Abbey of Beaupré.

Even the birds and bugs found that their minute sizes did not make them immune to such hair-splitting justice. And so it happened on August 17, 1487, that the Cardinal Bishop of Autun actually sent out a warning to slugs, which were devastating the local grapevines, to discontinue their damaging activities immediately or suffer the consequence of excommunication.

Perhaps more humorous than the fates of the birds and bugs was the case against the moles. This crime oddity occured in Western Tyrop (in 1519) when the "murderous moles" were sentenced to external banishment. Some human sympathy was exercised, however, when the sentence also stated that "a free safe conduct of fourteen days be allowed to those which are with young." Even the "civilized" had tender hearts.

It is also noted that the beasts of burden—the mule, in particular—were considered more burdensome than the burdens they bore. In 1565, an executioner cut off the feet of a mule which was formerly condemned to die by burning. The innocent beast had one kick too many as far as the courts were concerned.

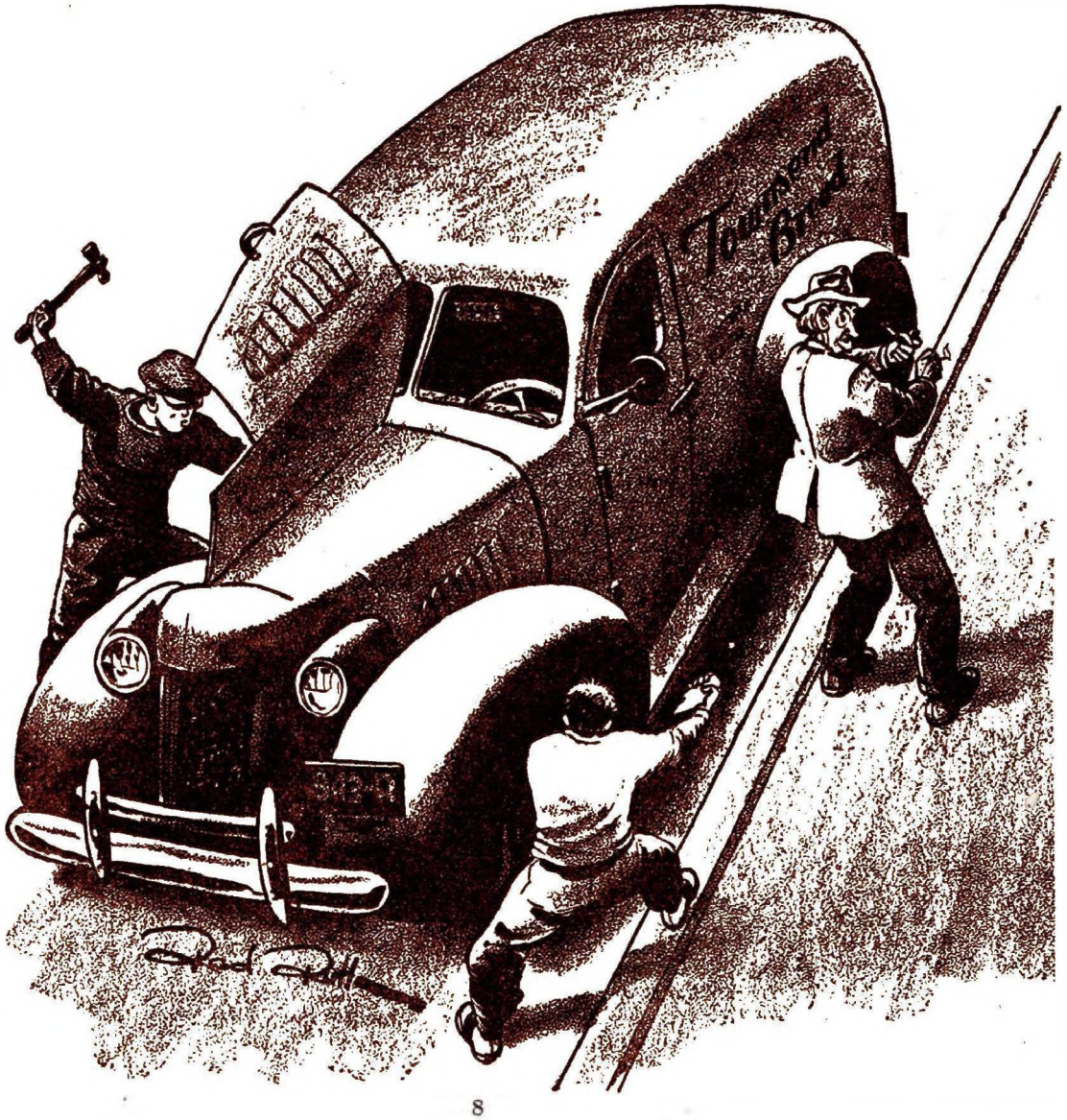
Such was the way of Justice to our ancestors who found that jurisprudence and the very letter of law snared every criminal on earth whether he be man or mouse.

—*A. Morris*

The Up and Up

By Harold M. Sherman

What's a crook going to do when he reforms and finds some of the biggest criminals are well-hidden in the guise of "big business"?



CHAPTER I

THE town of Homewood, California was big enough to amount to something and small enough not to care if it did. It was situated not too far from Hollywood but far enough to escape being overshadowed by what passes for glamour—and to have an identity of its own.

Homewood's Chamber of Commerce boasted that a high percentage of those who came to visit, stayed to live. Homewood had its Main Street, and, as country seat, its public square and Courthouse—a new brick one with shiny, gold dome, if you please! It had replaced the old frame building destroyed by fire—as had the new modern red-brick Homewood Inn, the town's best hostelry, which stood across the square from the Courthouse where city and county offices were located.

As for the people in Homewood, they were the usual human assortment found in any average American community—the rich, the poor and the otherwise; the church-goers and the non-church-goers; the fits and the misfits; the workers and those who didn't have to work; the politicians and their bosses; the retired and the unretired; the smart and the dumb—and those too miscellaneous or ornery to classify.

Into this town of thirty-nine thousand, seven hundred and one souls, as of the last census, came a not undis-

Before the driver could get there, the truck's engine and tires were quickly and skillfully wrecked

tinguished appearing man, arriving by overland Greyhound bus and being deposited in front of the Homewood Inn with his one suitcase and a smile of greeting which he brought along for the occasion.

This smile was bestowed freely and without condenscension upon all strangers who looked his way. It was as warm and inviting as the California sunshine and calculated to win just as many friends. It got him a bell boy on the double-quick who picked him as an important guest, with money.

"Have you a reservation, sir?"

"No, son," said the man. "I was just passing through Homewood on this bus—and the town appealed to me so much I decided to get off and stay here awhile."

The bell boy grinned. "Is that right? Well, I guess I was lucky to be born here!"

"You sure were, son. Is this the best hotel in town?"

"Yes, sir!"

"That's fine. I only like to stay at the best. What's the best bank?"

"The Homewood State. It's just up the street!"

The bell boy pointed.

"Oh, yes. Very convenient. Who's the president?"

"Mr. Percival Harrington."

"Thanks. I want to make a little deposit as soon as I've registered."

The bell boy's eyes widened.

"Yes, sir. I'm sure Mr. Harrington'll be glad to see you, sir. He's the biggest man in town."

"Physically or mentally?"

"Oh, I mean—he's prominent, sir. He's mixed up in lots of civic things. He's president of our Chamber of Commerce . . . and head of the Welfare Society . . . and . . . !"

"Good! That's the kind of a man I like to deal with—only the best. All right, son—I hope this hotel's got a good room for me. Who's your manager here?"

"His name's Mr. Mulloy."

"Lead me to him!"

THE new arrival in Homewood followed the bell boy inside the Inn, with gaping bystanders and hotel loungers looking after. There was an outburst of comment.

"That guy's a big shot from somewhere," observed the doorman. "Imagine him traveling by bus!"

"Maybe he likes to travel that way."

"He's got money. Asked right away for the best bank in town."

"Good looker! Wonder what he's going to do here?"

The crowd of curious Homewoodites ambled into the hotel lobby. They spotted the stranger at the Manager's desk.

"My name's Frank Jordan," he was saying, as he extended his hand. "Been crossing the country by bus. Had to come west for my health."

"That so?" said Homewood's hotel proprietor, getting up to greet his incoming guest. "You look pretty good now!"

"Yes, but I was pretty well shot before leaving. What have you got in the way of a room? Something high up—the best."

Manager Jim Mulloy consulted his room chart.

"Let me see here . . . let me see . . . The best . . . We're full up most of the time, Mr. Jordan . . . it just happens that one of our permanent guests had a death in the family . . . he's checking out of room ten-twenty on the top floor later today. . . ."

"Well, that sounds like a break for me. Sorry someone had to die to give it to me. I'll take the room. What's the exposure?"

"It overlooks the Square . . . and, of course, the mountains beyond."

"Perfect, Mr. Mulloy. Perfect!" The stranger turned to the bell boy. "Son, can you park my suitcase in the check room till the room is cleared. I want to pay a little visit to the bank."

"Yes, sir!" The bell boy had a dollar bill pressed into his hand. "Yes, *sir!*" he added, with emphasis.

"Now, if you'll just come this way and sign the register," invited Manager Mulloy. He motioned toward the main desk across the lobby.

"Certainly!"

Appearing not to notice the wondering lookers-on, the stranger crossed to the desk where he was introduced to Mr. Doyle and Miss Mamie Pringle, the day clerks on duty. Doyle was short, with a waist line and a double-chin. Mamie was blonde, blue-eyed and slenderized.

"How do you do, Mr. Jordan!" they chirped in chorus.

"Mr. Jordon is occupying room ten-twenty as soon as it is vacated," informed Manager Mulloy.

"Very good, sir!" said Doyle, reaching for a pen.

"Sign here," invited Mamie, pushing out the register, and also extending a pen.

The new arrival eyed the two clerks, bowed to Mamie and took the pen she offered.

"Thank you very much!"

He wrote the name "Frank Jordan" with a flourish, and "Chicago, Illinois" as his former place of residence.

"Chicago! I've got a rich relative there," announced Manager Mulloy, brushing back a wild lock of hair which refused to cover his bald spot. "Possibly you know him—he's a meat packer named Stacy."

The stranger shook his head. "Sorry. Meat's not my racket. I mean—I'm not acquainted in South Chicago."

"Well, my relative doesn't speak to me, anyway. He used to, before he got in the money. . . . All right, Mr. Jordan—I hope you feel at home here. How long do you expect to stay?"

Frank Jordan unloosed his ingratiating smile.

"That depends on how well I like Homewood—and how well it likes me."

He could see Doyle and Miss Pringle beam and nod their heads, and felt that he had said the right thing.

Manager Mulloy straightened his tie and fingered the rim of his collar.

"Homewood's a hospitable town," he said. "And so is this hotel. Anything I can do for you, Mr. Jordan—just call on me!"

"That's fine!" accepted the new guest. "Thank you, gentlemen." He turned to include Doyle, behind the desk. "And you, too, Miss!"

The bell boy returned from the check room holding out a metal disk.

"Here's your check, Mr. Jordan. I'll see you when you get back from the bank. Maybe your room will be ready by then."

"Okay, son. Well—I'll be seeing you all later!"

SO SAYING, the important appearing Mr. Jordan turned and made his way through a lobby full of staring lookers-on, reached the sidewalk and strode off in the direction of the Homewood State Bank.

Doyle and Mamie, desk clerks, examined the large handwriting in the name "Frank Jordan."

"I'll bet he's a millionaire," said Mamie. "Most rich men usually make big dots over their 'i's'."

"But Jordan doesn't have any 'i's' in his name!" protested Doyle.

"No—but he does in 'Illinois'," said Mamie.

Doyle returned to his work and Manager Mulloy, with a shrug of the shoulders, went back to his office. Millionaire or not, Frank Jordan had succeeded in making considerable of an impression.

At the Homewood State Bank, Cashier Benjamin J. Norton, looked up from a column of figures to see a strange but pleasant-appearing, dark complexioned man smiling through the window at him.

"How do you do, sir!" he greeted. "What can I do for you?"

"My name's Jordan," said the man. "Frank Jordan from Chicago. I'm thinking of locating in Homewood and I want to talk the matter over with your President, Mr. Harrington."

"I'm sorry, sir, Mr. Harrington's in a board meeting at present. He's apt to be tied up for several hours," said Mr. Norton. "If you could come back this afternoon . . .?"

The gentleman at the cashier's window shook his head. "I'm afraid that will be too late. I want to open an account and make a little deposit. . . ."

"Well, perhaps I can take care of you, sir. How much did you wish to start your account with . . . ?"

"Oh, about fifty or fifty-five . . . ?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Jordan," broke in the cashier, "this bank doesn't take any new accounts—not even a checking account—under two hundred dollars."

The atmosphere exuding from Homewood State Bank's cashier was slightly frigid.

"Then my fifty or fifty-five . . . !" started the stranger.

"It's not enough, sir. Bank regulations."

"Fifty or fifty-five *thousand* is against regulations?" persisted the man at the window, producing a thick stack of bills, carefully sorted and bound with rubber bands.

The blood vessels in Cashier Norton's head looked as though they were considering apoplexy.

"Oh, I—I beg your pardon, Mr. Jordan! I—I'll call Mr. Harrington! Yes, I—I'm sure he'll be glad to recess the board so he can see you . . . just step to the end of the cage here and I'll let you through into his private office. Let me take your hat, sir. Have a chair. Help yourself to one of Mr. Harrington's cigars. I'll send him right in."

The stranger did as directed, biting off the end of a cigar and aiming it at a shiny cuspidor. He seated himself in a red leather-upholstered chair, lighted up and blew a cloud of smoke ceilingward. Cashier Norton disappeared down the waxed hallway to the Board room.

Bank President Percival Harrington was the only man in Homewood with a beard. It made him look slightly like an airedale for it was black and gray and bushy. But it also gave him a distinguished appearance and he enjoyed having his "six-feet-two figure" pointed out by townspeople who usually said: "There goes Banker Harrington!" The citizens whose properties he had foreclosed said, "there goes—*something else!*" but took exceeding care that the head of Homewood's State Bank never heard this. Wouldn't do to have him down on you! As the town's most influential man, Percival Harrington expected everyone to look up to him—and they did!

Frank Jordan instinctively stood up and bowed when Homewood's financial power entered.

"Excellent cigars you smoke, sir!" he said, extending his hand. "Excellent!"

President Harrington surveyed his caller beneath bushy eyebrows and beamed his pleasure.

"The best, sir. Always the best!"

"A man after my own heart!" said the stranger, producing an engraved card which he presented. "That's my motto—it always pays to get the best!"

HOMEWOOD'S leading banker took out nose glasses, attached to a black ribbon and perched them on his nose while he studied the card.

"Frank Jordan—Investments—Chicago," he read. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Jordan. Sit down! Sit down!"

"You have a board meeting, sir . . . I . . . !"

"And damned bored with it, if I may say so!" said Mr. Harrington, proceeding to his cushioned swivel chair. "Always time for a new depositor. The 'Friendly Bank,' that's our slogan. *Do* sit down, Mr. Gordon . . . !"

"The name is *Jordan.*"

"Oh, yes, so it is! . . . Well, Mr. Jordan—our Mr. Norton tells me you have a little deposit you'd like to make with us?"

Frank Jordan emitted a cloud of smoke from one of President Harrington's prize cigars.

"That's correct . . . a little matter of fifty grand . . . I mean — fifty thousand."

"Hmm! I see—savings?"

"No—checking. I may want to pay most of it out. You see, I'd like to find a good investment in this town—and settle down here in some business."

Bank President Harrington's face lighted.

"That's what we need in Homewood, Mr. Jordan—new blood. As President of the Chamber of Commerce, I extend a hearty welcome."

He put out his hand again and the two shook for the second time.

"I like Homewood," said Frank Jordan. "It's the kind of a town I've been looking for—all the way from Chicago. If I could buy into some established industry . . . do you have anything you could suggest?"

"My dear Mr. Horton," said President Harrington.

"Jordan!" corrected the stranger.

"Oh, yes—to be sure. Horton was a former teller who robbed this bank. Excuse me, sir. Jordan—I must remember that. You don't look a bit like Horton. You don't look like Gordon, either."

"Was he another crook?"

"I should say not. He was my father-in-law!"

"You must have a bad time around here—with your cashier's name 'Norton' . . . !"

"Names throw me—they always did. My psychiatrist tells me it's a hearing complex . . . similar sounds confuse me. . . . How did we get off on this subject? You're not interested in my complexes."

"Have you got more of them?"

Bank President Harrington opened his mouth and shut it again He raised and lowered his bushy eyebrows. Then he decided the stranger was joking.

"Yes—yes, I see. You were speaking, I believe, of investments. It so happens there are several industries in town looking for capital. It just depends upon what type of business appeals to you. Do you have anything special in mind?"

Frank Jordan shook his head. "Not in the least—except it's got to be a good money-maker. I want something I can take hold of and go places!"

Bank President Harrington scratched his beard, thoughtfully. "Well, there's the Homewood Ball Bearing Company . . ." He kept his eyes on the prospective investor's face. "No? . . . How about Queen Dry Cleaning Service? . . . No? . . . Maxwell Aircraft? . . . No? . . . I have it—the Town-

send Bread Company!"

"Bread, eh?" considered the stranger. "Well, that's something everybody's got to have. There's money in food. Tell me more!"

"Mrs. Matilda Townsend is a close personal friend of mine," declared Banker Harrington, with real enthusiasm. "Her husband died about a year ago and left her with the best bread business in this part of the state. She's tried to keep on running it herself but she needs a partner badly. Mrs. Townsend is the town's leading society woman and she's quite naturally neglected the business for her social and civic duties. But this can't go on. She's losing out to a new outfit called Tasty Pastries, Incorporated. If this kind of an investment interests you . . . ?"

FRANK JORDAN smiled and rolled what remained of the cigar, in his mouth.

"How . . . er . . . old is this Mrs. Townsend?" he inquired.

Banker Harrington eyes the prospective investor, sharply.

"How old are you?" he demanded.

"I'm not a day over thirty-five," hedged the stranger.

"She looks younger than you—and she's not a day over forty," said Harrington. "One of the most beautiful, charming and capable women in all Homewood! Your name associated with hers would make you in this town over-night!"

Frank Jordan stood up, pressed out his cigar and dropped it in the waste basket.

"How soon can I meet her—and where?" he demanded.

Bank President Harrington pressed a buzzer and spoke into an inter-departmental phone.

"Miss Thacker—I mean Miss Lacker . . . get me Mrs. Townsend's residence." He turned to his caller. "I think she's attending the noon luncheon of the Welfare Society. . . . I'm head of that, too. . . . Good heavens, I've got to be there myself! . . . What time is it? . . . Oh, well—there's an hour yet!" He leaned back in his swivel chair and eyed Jordan. "It may take thirty or forty thousand to swing this. Are you prepared . . . ?"

The stranger took out his stack of bills and dropped them on the desk.

"I brought a little cash along with me. Habit of mine. Very convenient. I'm always investing . . . saves time to hand it right out."

Bank President Harrington nodded. Then, into phone: "Hello, is this you, Matilda! . . . You were? . . . Well, I'm glad I caught you! Listen, dear—there's a gentleman in my office—his name's Mr. Fred . . .!"

"Frank!"

"Frank Wharton!"

"Jordan!"

"Oh, damn it—*Jordan!* No, dear—I wasn't swearing at you. You know my trouble over names. But how could I ever forget yours? . . . Or Townsend Bread, for that matter! . . . Now, listen, darling—this man's here from Chicago . . . and wants to invest in your company. Yes—I think he'll . . . er . . . measure up to your specifications! . . . He's handsome! . . . You do? . . . Right away? . . . What's that? . . . Oh, just a minute!" Bank President Harrington put his hand over the phone mouthpiece and looked up at Jordan. "She wants to know—are you married or single?"

The prospective investor smiled. "Single!" he said.

"He is a bachelor," reported Harrington. "Yes, Matilda—I feel I can recommend this gentleman . . . you know how particular I am . . . My judgment? . . . Thank you, dear! This

may be the answer to your problem . . . Do you think you have time before the luncheon? . . . All right—I'll send him right out!"

Bank President Harrington hung up the receiver.

"There you are, Mr. Jordan! . . . Ah—I got it right that time! Maybe all I need is a memory course. Funny thing— Women's names have always come easier. I shouldn't say that at my age. I'm a widower, myself!"

"Where does Mrs. Townsend live?" asked the would-be investor.

"Seventeen Canyon Drive—but I'll send you out in my car. Now I suppose you'd like to deposit this cash before you . . ."

Harrington pointed to the wad of money.

"Yes—you might set up an account," said Frank Jordan. "One little item—if I buy into this company, I want the controlling interest."

"I think that can be arranged. See Mrs. Townsend first. She's got to pass on you. I told you she's beautiful, charming and capable—but she's also eccentric. If she likes you, she'll probably sell the controlling interest—but she loves the name 'Townsend' and she won't permit that to be changed for any sum of money."

"That suits me," assured the stranger. "Sounds like Mrs. Townsend and I will get along fine. I don't mind admitting I've got a way with women."

The bushy brows of Banker Harrington knotted.

"That's very interesting—and I might say that Mrs. Townsend has a way with men! But you'll find that out soon enough. Every male in Homewood is her willing slave—including me!"

FRANK JORDAN smiled. "You are making this investment sound more and more appealing!" he said.

"But I warn you!" counseled Bank President Harrington. "Keep it on a strictly business basis! I am Mrs. Townsend's guardian, so to speak—the executor of her husband's will . . . her closest and most trusted friend . . . Mrs. Townsend has a great and excessive love of people . . . she overflows with exuberance . . . she needs a hardboiled business man as I feel you to be—to take over her bread company and run it as it should be run!"

"I can run a business!" declared the stranger. "And I know how to get customers. In three months I'll know all there is to know about the bread business. I've been wanting all my life to get in something clean and fine like this . . . so you can count on me. Mr. Harrington . . . your friend, Mrs. Townsend, couldn't be in better hands!"

The head of Homewood's State Bank beamed and pressed a buzzer. His secretary, Miss Lacker, appeared.

"Take Mr. Norton to Mr. Jordan . . . oh, damn—I mean—take Mr. Jordan to Mr. Norton. He wants to make a deposit. Then call my garage and have Joe bring over my car. He's to drive Mr. Jordan out to Mrs. Townsend's home and wait till he's finished seeing her. Where are you stopping, Mr. Jordan?"

"The Homewood Inn."

"Fine. I'll see you after the luncheon if you and Mrs. Townsend come to an understanding and wish to close a deal."

Frank Jordan bowed and backed toward the door.

"Thank you, sir. I expect to be seeing a lot of you."

"Good! I'm going to keep an eye on you, too. As I was saying, Homewood needs new blood. You'll have to join our Chamber of Commerce . . . !"

"Okay with me! If I'm going to be a citizen—I want to be mixed up with everything that's doing."

"You will be—if Mrs. Townsend takes a fancy to you!" promised Bank President Harrington. "Goodbye, now! I've got to get back to that damned board meeting!"

He scurried out of his office and down the hall as Frank Jordan, led by Miss Lacker, approached the cashier's window, money in hand. He turned his smile on the red-head.

"There's only one Percival Harrington, isn't there?" he said.

"You can say that again!" said Miss Lacker.

Tony Canero, alias Frank Jordan, drew a deep breath. Not bad for the first hour in Homewood!

"Boy, do I wish Lola and Sammy could see me now!" he said, under his breath. "I'm even surprising myself!"

CHAPTER II

"DISHONESTY," Tony Canero had said, a week ago in Chicago, as he counted the night's gambling take, "is the best policy!"

"It sure is," agreed Lola, his platinum blonde dice girl. "And to think my poor father had to work for a living!"

Tony made a stack of the fifty and one hundred dollar bills. "Well, he was born too soon. Almost everything's a racket today."

Lola laughed and blinked her artificial eyelashes. "You're telling me! Who's that guy who lit a lantern and went out looking for an honest man?"

"Eleven thousand, two hundred," counted Tony. "I don't know—except, he didn't find one."

They were in the back room on the second floor of Tony's dive on Chicago's Near North Side, just a dice throw from the Gold Coast. It was past four in the morning and the last cash sucker had departed ten minutes before, leaving not only his cash but some I.O.U.'s behind.

Tony pushed two guns aside and reached for a money bag.

"Nice haul tonight," he said, and glanced up to make sure the metal shutters were down. "I wonder where in hell Sammy disappeared to? What's the use in having a body-guard if he's not around when you need him?"

Lola lighted a cigarette and tossed the match at a loaded waste basket. "You said it. I don't feel too safe here myself—the way that Costello gang has been raiding the joints around town. They're getting cockier every day. It's just a matter of time . . . !"

Tony stuffed the money bag and tied it up.

"I know. We're soon going to have to rub them out or get rubbed out ourselves."

Lola blew a jittery smoke ring which broke in two. "I feel a nervous breakdown coming on," she said. "I think I need a few quiet weeks in the country."

Tony eyed her, soberly. "Might not be a bad idea. Things are going to be plenty hot around here and I wouldn't want anything to happen to you."

"Thanks so much," said Lola. "And the same goes double for me. You've made a zillion, Tony—why don't you get out of this business while you've still got your health?"

Tony tossed up the money bag and caught it.

"I guess I'm like the banker or real estate man or a Wall Street broker," he said. "I hate to give up a good thing when I've got it."

Lola slid a soft arm around his neck and pressed red lips against his face. "You don't have to give *me* up," she said.

Tony's mood was not romantic. He patted her shoulder and withdrew her arm. "When did you last see Sammy?" he asked.

"He was around here till after two," recalled Lola. "Don't you remember? He threw that stiff out who lost his wad at roulette and claimed it wasn't being run on the level."

Tony remembered. "Funny how every time a man loses, he figures he's been cheated—and, funnier still—he *has!* . . . I saw Sammy after that but he's always here when I count up. That's why I wonder . . . ?"

Lola's eyes widened. "Yeah," she said, walking away from a direct line with the window. "I get what you mean."

THERE was a sudden sound in the alley and the click of a key in the rear door. Tony dropped the money bag in the waste basket and covered it with some racing forms. He grabbed up a Colt revolver and started toward the back stairs.

"Stay here, Gorgeous. If that's not Sammy . . . !"

Lola took another gun and followed. "If that's not Sammy," she said, "you're going to need help."

The steel door at the foot of the stairs opened slowly. It creaked on a rusty hinge which Tony had said was as good as a burglar alarm. He stood on the stair landing now and leveled his weapon.

"You're covered!" he shouted. "Step in here and I'll blow hell out of you!"

"Tony!" cried a voice. "For God's sake, be careful!"

The door swung open wider and a burly figure appeared, with a large square object in his arms.

"Sammy!" exclaimed Tony, and ran down the stairs. "What are you up to? What'ave you got there?"

"Help me in with this," gasped Tony's body-guard. "It's too damned heavy!"

Tony took hold of one side of the object.

"Okay, I've got it. A steel filing case! What in blazes . . . ?"

"Let's get it upstairs and I'll tell you all about it. Close the door, Lola. I can't let go of this thing."

The two men wrestled up the stairs with the desk cabinet between them, and Lola followed. They put the steel file on the floor and Sammy, perspiring, rubbed his lame arms.

"Man!" he groaned. "That was a job. I carried that thing for three blocks!"

Tony eyed the former prize-fighter and night club bouncer. "Where'd this come from?" he asked.

Sammy grinned with a school boyish look of triumph. "From the Orphans' Home," he said.

"The Orphans' Home! What's the idea?"

"Just a little job, Boss, that I couldn't resist," confessed Sammy. "You know, they've been putting on a charity drive, collectin' donations from people and business firms all over town. . . ."

"Yes, I know that," said Tony.

"Well," said Sammy, expansively. *"We've* got the donations!"

Lola let out a shriek of laughter. "Sammy," she said. "You're a panic. That's stooping pretty low—robbing an Orphans' Home!"

Sammy's broad face wore a hurt expression.

"I don't like that crack. The orphans wouldn't have got the money, anyhow. Old man Comstock starves the kids and salts it away on himself. He's been cryin' poverty for years and gettin' dough from the city and state besides this drive. Only this year the drive's

a bust because I've got the proceeds!"

Tony eyed his man Friday. "Looks to me like all you've got is the personal records of the orphans," he said. "Why did you lug this heavy file all the way over here?"

"I couldn't get the damn thing open," said Sammy, "and the night watchman was due to be comin' through the office any minute—so I picked it up and beat it down the alley."

"But how do you know it's got the dough in it?" asked Lola.

SAMMY grinned. "One of the boys who works at the Home was in here this evenin'. He got tight and took a couple turns at the wheel and he said he guessed he'd better not take any more chances as the money wasn't his. He'd been out making some pick-ups for old man Comstock—said he had about five hundred bucks on him. I asked him what he was goin' to do with that wad over night and the damn fool told me he was goin' to stick it in the file with the rest of the dough. Well, Brother, that was askin' for it. I told him he needed a body-guard back to the place and he was tickled to death to have me go with him.

"I left him at the door and sneaked around where I could look through the office window—and I saw him open the file, put the dough in and lock it. I waited till I was sure he was gone and then I jimmied the window, stepped in and walked off with the works. That's all there was to it."

Sammy looked to Tony for approval but Tony shook his head.

"You are muscle-bound in the wrong place," he said. "This kind of hot money is not for us. About how much do you think you've got in there?"

"The guy said around forty grand," Sammy reported. He looked around the room, saw a heavy crow bar in the corner, sauntered over, picked it up and returned to strike a hammering blow on the file lock. The drawer sprung open. Its front section was filled with index cards but the rear half was lined with bills, coins and checks. "There she is," said Sammy. "That's better than a pay-roll stick-up."

"Not to me, it isn't," said Tony. "You've got a slow brain, Sammy, and you're not using it right. I've never pulled a stick-up in my life. There's enough dough in straight gambling and the bookie racket. What I'm running here is next to a legitimate business. I get protection from the big politicians and all I've got to look out for is competition and shake-downs like I'm getting from that Costello gang. But you have to go out and do something *downright dishonest!*"

"Cut it out, Boss," choked Sammy. "You're gonna have me cryin' in a minute. I just wanted to show you what I could do on my own."

"Yeah, this'll break in the papers and if Comstock's man wasn't too drunk to remember, he'll be leading some flat-foots over here to ask you some embarrassing questions."

"Well, gee, Boss—they won't get nothin' from me. You know I ain't got no memory."

"They'll search the place," said Tony. "If they find this filing cabinet, what are you going to say?"

Sammy scratched a permanent bulge behind his right ear and gave Tony a thick look. "Yeah," he mumbled, lamely. "I guess I should-a left it on the premises but I hated to be that close to dough without gettin' it."

"This dough you're not getting," said Tony. "We're taking it back!"

Sammy stared at his boss, incredulously. "Jeez, Boss—you don't mean it! After I've gone to all this trouble?"

"You're a body-guard—not a petty

sneak thief!"

"I don't get no appreciation around here," complained Sammy. "There ain't no opportunity for a man to develop."

"You'll develop fast when that Costello gang cuts loose on us," said Tony. "I hired you to keep your eyes open and your finger on the trigger. You're about as much protection as a pet canary."

Sammy winced as though he had been slapped in the face. "I'm the best pistol shot in South Chicago," he boasted.

"Yeah," said Tony. "A lot of good that does us on the *North* Side."

"We'll all better go south," advised Lola. "And I don't mean South Chicago. Hide out for awhile in nice, quiet, respectable Miami."

"You're kiddin', ain't you?" said Sammy.

Lola chuckled. "What do *you* think?"

Sammy pulled at a cauliflower ear. "It all depends," he ruminated, "whatcha go to Florida for. If it's horse racin' and gamblin' . . ."

"Perish the thought," said Lola. "We can get plenty of that here. What I want is fresh air and sunshine—and life and liberty . . . !"

Sammy grinned. "You're nuts!" he said. "You got all those things now!"

"Yes," said Lola, "but for how long?"

TONY reached over and took a handful of cards from the filing cabinet. He shuffled them through his fingers, glancing curiously at the different case histories. "Must have been tough to be an orphan," he remarked.

"Or to be an unwanted brat like me," said Lola.

"I was half an orphan," said Sammy. "I had two stepmothers. What's that make me?"

"A *step-laddie*," cracked Lola.

Sammy glared. "That ain't funny," he said.

Tony held up a card. "Listen to this. Here's a guy just my age who was left on the doorstep of the Orphans' Home the day he was born—on Washington's birthday, nineteen hundred and twelve."

Sammy bushed his eyebrows. "Jeez—I thought Washington was born before that!"

"You dope!" said Lola. "He *was!* But there's lots of other people born on February twenty-second, too!"

Sammy nodded. "I get it. You don't have to rub it in."

"The poor kid!" said Tony, still reading the card. "It says here: 'Baby found on doorstep Orphans' Home, February twenty-second, nineteen-twelve, two a.m. Wrapped in faded blue blanket. No identification but footsteps in snow that of a woman. Unsigned note pinned inside. 'Here is my baby. He has no father. Please take care of him.' Mother never found. Child never adopted but was raised by Home. Given name of Frank Jordan after one of Home's donors. Appearance: Blue eyes, black hair, normal. Diseases: Mumps, measles and whooping cough. Vaccinated at seven. Schooling to Eighth Grade. Went to work in shipping department of Everett Brothers Furniture Store at fourteen and worked up to shipping clerk. Enlisted in United States Army at thirty as private soldier and was sent overseas. Killed in Battle of the Bulge'." Tony looked up. "Can you beat that?" he said, "Born on the same day—and both of us fought in the Battle of the Bulge! I got out of it and he didn't. That's life for you!"

"You mean—that's *death!*" cor-

rected Sammy.

Tony looked off into space. "I don't know about that," he said. "I'm getting an idea! . . . It's just possible that Frank Jordan will live again!"

Sammy's mouth dropped open. "How's he gonna do that?"

Tony got up and walked about the room, card in hand. He stopped to re-read the case history.

"Yeah!" he said, excitedly. "Yeah, why not?"

Lola crossed over to him. "What cooks, Tony? What're you dreaming up?"

Tony regarded her, testily. "You really want me to step out of this racket?"

"You *know* I do!" said Lola.

Tony scowled, thoughtfully. "That's not going to be easy. I'm in too solid with some of the big boys. They won't let me pull out if they can help it. I've got too much on 'em!"

"Yes—and for that *very* reason," said Lola, "they'll be knocking you off, sooner or later!"

"Not if I knock *myself* off *first!*" said Tony.

Lola eyed him, shocked.

"How's that? Say that again!"

Tony turned to his man Friday. "Sammy, Lola's been at me to quit the business and I've decided to do it. I've got one last job for you. I want you to help bump me off!"

Sammy backed away. *"Bump you off!"* he said. "Jeez, boss—I couldn't do that!"

"You've *got* to help!" insisted Tony. "I can't do it alone. We'll kill Tony Canero—and I'll resurrect myself some place where nobody knows me—and start life all over again—as *Frank Jordan!*"

"Jeez!" said Sammy. "You had me scared for a minute! . . . You mean, you're gonna *fake* a murder and do a *run-out?*"

"You catch," said Tony. "Lola—how you like?"

She threw her arms about him. "I'm all for it!" she cried. "The sooner—the safer! . . . *Let's kill Tony Canero tonight!*"

CHAPTER III

IT IS easier to kill a man than to pretend to do it. To put Tony Canero away convincingly and permanently took careful planning.

"We've got to kill you so they can't find your body," said Sammy.

"Which means the lake," said Tony. "You'll have to sink me in a block of concrete."

"Don't say that!" protested Lola. "Even in fun! It sounds horrible!"

"This isn't fun," said Tony, "it's serious business . . . and the police have got to believe I've been done away with. What's more—you and Sammy have got to be all broken up about it . . . and it's got to look like the Costello gang has rubbed me out!"

Sammy and Lola eyed each other.

"We've sure got our work cut out for us," said Lola. "Can't we skip town with you?"

Tony shook his head.

"No good! . . . You've got to stick here and face the music. There'll be an investigation. But if I cover my tracks okay, they'll never find me. They'll write me off the blotter as a dead duck. Then, when the excitement dies down and I get set where I am—I'll get in touch with you two—and you can join me."

"Wait a minute!" cut in Lola. "What are you going to do after you get set—start up another place like this?"

Tony gazed at her, reprovingly. "Not me. When I quit, I quit. The minute Tony Canero dies, I go straight. You

don't think I'd give a bad name to *Frank Jordan,* do you?"

Lola studied the man she loved.

"How are you going to earn any money on the level? You haven't had any experience!"

Tony laughed.

"It'll probably be tough for a while. But I'll take a load of dough along and invest in some business. I've been a big shot in the under world—why can't I be a big shot on the up and up?"

Sammy scratched his head.

"It don't sound so hot to me. Are you figurin' on Lola an' me goin' straight, too?"

"Why not? Soon as I'm fixed, I'll make jobs for you. We'll meet the best people!"

Sammy's face registered horror.

"Huh uh, Boss! I've been meetin' 'em in this joint—an' that's enough! I'm a punk an' I know it!"

"But you don't want to be a punk all your life," said Tony, with a wink at Lola. "Wouldn't you like to be a decent, respected citizen for a change?"

"I dunno, Boss. I've put in a lot of years bein' what I am. If I make myself over, it's gotta be a better inducement!"

Tony stepped to the wash room off his office, opened the door and looked into the mirror. He examined his sleek little black moustache.

"I think Frank Jordan ought to be smooth-faced," he announced, and turned to eye Lola. "Any objections, Sweetheart?"

"Go ahead," invited Lola, "but I'm going to miss it."

Tony connected his electric razor.

"Jeez!" said Sammy. "The Boss really means it!"

"He's changing himself from Clark Gable to Tyrone Power," cracked Lola. "And both those guys are my favorites!"

THERE was a whirring sound as the electric razor went to work.

"This hurts me more than it does you," said Tony, watching the moustache disappear. "It took me a long time to train this upper lip confetti. But I guess it's not too much a sacrifice for a man who never wants to see his old self again!"

"Cut it out!" moaned Sammy. "You're talkin' like you've got religion!"

Tony turned about so that his handiwork could be observed.

"There you are! Who am I?"

"Gosh, Boss!" said Sammy. "You look positively *naked!*"

Lola laughed and advanced toward Tony, puckering up her lips.

"Hiya, Stranger—let's have a kiss!"

Tony took her in his arms and obliged as Sammy looked on.

"Well, how does it feel without the fuzz?" he wanted to know.

Lola broke the clinch, gasping for breath.

"Like running for a touchdown without any interference!" she said.

Tony studied his dark features in the mirror.

"No kidding. It changes my appearance a lot. I could meet myself on the street and not recognize me."

"You said it!" Sammy agreed. "That five o'clock shadow under your nose was your trade-mark. When you cut that off, you put yourself out of business. You don't look the part of any big-time gambler no more."

"That—from you—is condemnation enough!" grinned Tony. "What do I look like I could be now?"

Sammy ogled him. "You know them swank Hollywood mortuaries?" he said. "Well, if you just put on a pair of them striped pants and was standin' alongside a coffin—you'd make the damnedest lookin' undertaker I ever

see!"

Lola jabbed Sammy playfully in the ribs.

"You're just jealous," she cracked, "I think, Tony—if you only had a glass of whiskey in your hand, you'd look like one of those 'Distinguished Americans' . . . !"

"That's enough compliments," said Tony. "A couple more like that and I'll go out and get me a new face!"

He crossed over to his desk, pulled open the drawers and commenced removing his personal effects.

"Jeez!" said Sammy. "You're *really* gettin' ready to blow!"

"By tomorrow morning," said the owner and proprietor of Tony's Intimate Night Club. "Tony Canero will be no more!"

"I feel like a killer already," said Sammy. "You're gonna look swell in cement."

There was a sudden sound of a car motor in the alley, beyond the shuttered windows. The car stopped, motor idling. Doors clicked open, feet hit the pavement.

Tony, Lola and Sammy froze where they were; Tony seated at his desk; Lola leaning against a corner of it, and Sammy, standing, facing the window, hands on hips.

"Douse the lights!" ordered Tony, "And DUCK!"

Sammy lunged for the wall switch as Lola and Tony, with one movement, dived to the floor.

As they did so, a rain of bullets tore through the metal shutters, spraying the area above and about the desk. Sammy never reached the switch. He flattened himself between desk and window as plaster from the wall beyond stung his face.

Lying on the floor, out of range, Lola and Tony eyed each other.

"You're not planning to leave any too soon," she said. "It's getting too hot here."

"It's hot down in Florida, too," said Tony.

"But only from the sun, darling—nothing like this!"

TONY reached up and grabbed a gun off the desk, then crawled on his hands and knees to a corner of the window. There was glass all over the floor and pieces of metal shutter and splinters from the window frames.

Outside, car doors slammed and the purr of the motor burst into a roar.

"There they go!"

Tony and Sammy leaped for the window, pushed the blinds aside and blazed away, after the departing attackers. An answering volley chipped fragments of brick off the rear of the building. The car motor died out in the distance.

Lola got up from the floor and brushed herself off.

"Get away from that window, you Screwballs," she said. "They may swing around here again!"

"Could be," said Tony, coming back to his desk and surveying the damage. "You sure called the turn, Gorgeous. You must be psychic!"

"Quit your kidding. You were expecting this yourself. Guess our lucky stars were operating. They figured to liquidate the three of us."

Tony grinned. "They did get ME! This little shooting was made to order! Listen, you two—I'm getting out of here. Sammy—you don't have to help bump me off now. Costello's done that! When the coppers come, tell 'em Costello's gang was here—and *they took me for a ride!*"

Sammy nodded, excitedly. "Jeez, Boss—you've got a brain! That couldn't be better!"

There was the distant chill sound of police car sirens.

"Here they come!" said Lola. "Oh, my gosh, Tony—what are we going to do with Sammy's loot?"

She pointed to the steel file, with its case histories and loose money.

"Stick it in the closet!" directed Tony. Then, as Sammy grabbed the cabinet and started to drag it across the floor, he called out: "Wait a minute! I hate to take money from Orphans but I can't get to the bank now —I'll have to let that dough set . . . and I need more than our takings tonight . . . !"

Sammy's eyes gleamed. "Jeez, Boss —maybe I done you a good turn after all!"

"The kids'll get it back," said Tony. "I'm only borrowing it."

He reached in the waste basket, uncovered his money bag, set it on the desk and opened it up.

"Okay, Sammy, never mind the checks but put the bills in here! Hurry it up. We've got to hide the evidence and I've got to get out of here before the police bust in!"

Sammy commenced filling the money bag.

"You know you're runnin' off with *my* dough, don't ya?"

"All but a couple thousand," admitted Tony. "I'm leaving some cash for you and Lola to go on till I send for you."

Tony rushed to the closet and came back with a suitcase, containing a change of clothes and all traveling essentials. He crammed the money bag in it.

"This should give me a little more than fifty grand." He handed bills to Lola and Sammy. "Take this lettuce and take care of yourselves. You'll be hearing from me!"

"Not so fast!" cried Lola. She grabbed Tony's arm. "You're not running off till we know where you're going!"

SAMMY, having pulled the steel file across the floor, put his foot against it, shoved it into the closet and slammed the door.

"That's right, Lola. He's leavin' us in a hell of a spot. How do we know this ain't a brush-off?"

The police car siren sounded, now less than a block away.

"You two are in on this deal," said Tony. "All you've got to do it squeal on me and I'm a dead pigeon."

"Just the same, I want to know where you're going!" insisted Lola.

"How can I tell that?" protested Tony.

"I'll show you!" cried Lola.

She ran to the desk, grabbed up an old world almanac which Tony had kept for racing records and flung open to a page listed:

AMERICAN CITIES UNDER
FIFTY THOUSAND POPULATION

"Here you are, Tony! . . . Put your finger on this list and shut your eyes. You're going to locate in the town your finger stops on!"

The police car siren sounded in the alley and the whine died out as the car eased to a standstill. In the distance could be heard more sirens.

Tony closed his eyes and jabbed his finger at the list, Lola and Sammy watching.

"What town did he pick?" asked Sammy.

" 'Homewood, California!' " read Lola. " 'Population thirty-nine thousand, seven hundred and one. County seat . . . Manufacturing . . .' "

"That's all I need to know!" said Tony. "Goodbye, Sweet!" He gave Lola a quick squeeze and kiss. "Reach me through General Delivery, Homewood . . . !"

Tony headed for the front of the

nightclub and a secret exit on a side-street through the building next door.

"What's your name again?" asked Lola.

"Frank Jordan!" called Tony.

"You taking your car?"

"No, Sammy—I'm taking a bus . . . Tony Canero can't take his car—remember, he's been bumped off by the Costello mob!"

Sammy put a hand to his head. "That's right!"

"That's our story and we'll stick to it!" promised Lola, blowing him a kiss.

There was a battering on the rear door.

"Hey! Open up! Let us in!"

"Goodbye, Frank!" called Sammy. "We'll be seein' you—*I hope!* . . . But if you double-cross us an' we catch up to you—Jordan will be as dead as Canero!"

CHAPTER IV

MRS. MATILDA TOWNSEND had the finest and most talked about home in Homewood. It was perched on the highest point of Canyon Drive, enabling her to see at a glance what was going on all over the city—outdoors, that is!

The Townsend residence was the House that Bread Built. Her late and much lamented husband had baked his way to fame and fortune and had rescued Matilda from a life in Hollywood by offering her more dough than she had even seen in her life before—literally mounds of it—which he converted into cash, almost before her eyes.

It was common gossip that Charlton L. Townsend had said to Matilda on first meeting: "I'm not a butter and egg man, dearie—but I'm a real bread winner." This had made such a hit with her that when she failed in a screen test she decided to play the role of wife and retired to Homewood where the name of Charlton L. Townsend was a household word. They were married, Hollywood style, in one of the most super-dooper weddings the community ever saw.

Because she had the body beautiful and the magic name of "Townsend," plus a desire to see her name in the "social lights," if not the "bright lights of Hollywood or Broadway," it hadn't been long before the wife of Homewood's Bread King was queen of the town's high society. Once having established herself, she never relinquished her reign, no matter what the cost or the competition.

Even the unfortunate sudden departure of Charlton L. Townsend from earth had failed to dim Matilda's lustre in the social firmament. It had shaken her, it is true—but she had mourned his loss while continuing her social rounds.

"All the world is a stage," she had touchingly declared, at a Red Cross rally, shortly after his demise. "And I must 'carry on'!"

"Matilda, the Magnificent!" some people called her, and nothing, indeed, seemed to feaze her. She was airy, light-hearted, abounding in energy, much a-doing about everything about town. While most folks considered her slightly balmy, wives, knew enough to watch their husbands when she was in their company for Matilda had "taking ways." She was just naturally an adept at wheedling them into public-spirited civic activities—but, putting it more personally—Matilda had the captivating knack of influencing men and winning their attentions. There was little or nothing the other women could do about this, compelled, as they were, to pay her homage. Until they could outshine her socially, they must, in a manner of speaking, follow her!

It was to the home of such a woman that one Frank Jordan, somewhat warned but still quite unsuspecting, was being transported. He was wearing the new suit he had purchased enroute to Homewood—light gray with dark stripe; soft felt hat, same gray shade, pulled down over left eye; bright red tie—and the usual nonchalant attitude he wore with all clothes.

"I've always been able to do business with women," Tony told himself. "This sounds like a real break . . . for *Frank Jordan!*"

BANKER HARRINGTON'S limousine shot up the steep grade to the Townsend residence and swung in on the U curve to the door. Joe, the veteran chauffeur with the one glass eye, opened the door.

"You don't need to wait," said his passenger, getting out. "I'll walk back if I have to. Need the exercise and I want to look over the town, anyway."

Joe examined the Homewood State Bank's new depositor with his good eye.

"Just as you say, Mr. Jordan," he replied. "I guess Mrs. Townsend'll be coming into town pretty soon. You can ride back with her."

Joe got back in the car.

"Thanks just the same!" Tony started up the steps then turned back. "Say, Joe," he called, in a confidential tone. "I'd just like to know—what make of bread do you buy?"

The chauffeur's glass eye almost revolved in its socket as he grinned. "Townsend's, of course!"

"Good bread, eh?" said Tony.

"The best!" said Joe.

"That's all I wanted to know," replied Tony.

"I always go for the best."

Banker Harrington's chauffeur stepped on the gas.

"That guy's nuts!" he said.

An elderly maid opened the massive door in response to Tony's long ring. The house was Colonial style with wide porch and high pillars. It overlooked Canyon Drive and a precipitous cliff with the town of Homewood stretched out far below. Tony had his back to the door, when it opened and was admiring the view.

"Yes, sir?" said the maid. "Who is it, please?"

Tony turned about, putting his hand against a pillar, "Excuse me, Madam —I'm a little bit dizzy. The altitude's got me. Imagine having a sight like this—right in your front yard."

The maid didn't warm up, even when he smiled. Her eyes were as cold as a California night.

"Was Mrs. Townsend expecting you, sir?"

"Oh—oh, yes! My name's . . . er . . . Frank Jordan! Mr. Harrington referred me . . . !"

The maid stepped aside, prim and erect, and gestured.

"Step in, please. I'll tell Mrs. Townsend that you are here."

She ushered the caller into a luxuriously appointed reception room off a main hallway which led to a center stairway, with balconies around the second floor.

"Be seated, please."

As the maid disappeared, Tony watched her out of sight.

"Hm!" he mused. "It's easy to see that Mrs. Townsend doesn't stand for any competition. She'll never win a prize at a beauty show—and there's no chance of that old girl being the life of the party."

He gazed about him. On the wall was the gold-framed life-sized portrait of a somewhat pompous, heavy-set man in his probable fifties. His eyes had a

devilish glint in them when studied closely, as though their possessor had enjoyed life and living. Underneath the portrait was the name: "Charlton L. Townsend—1888-1946."

"So you were the Bread King!" thought Tony.

The musical sound of a woman's voice came floating down from upstairs.

"Yoo hoo! Oh, Mr. Jordan!"

Tony started and stepped out into the hall.

"Yes!" he called.

A vivacious appearing woman, big brown eyes and head a mass of black curls looked down at him from over the stair railing. She was attired in a yellow dressing gown.

"Oh, there you are! I'm dressing for luncheon! Won't you come up and talk to me while I'm getting ready?"

Tony headed for the stairs.

"Why not?" he said.

HE HAD to pass the maid who was coming down as he went up. She had icicles in her eyes and quite obviously did not approve of her mistress's informality.

Matilda Townsend, face smeared with cold cream which she was vigorously massaging into her cheeks, stood in the doorway of her boudoir and motioned to her caller.

"So happy to see you, Mr. Jordan! . . . We can't shake hands just at present. I'm too greasy. Just come in and sit over there—in Daddy's favorite chair. He always liked to watch me make-up. I hope you don't mind."

Tony took in an eyeful of the form and the face. The dressing gown kept him from passing judgment on the legs. About thirty-five, he surmised. Near his own age, at least. Not bad. Not bad at all. He could tell better when her face and hair didn't look quite so wild. What messes women could make of themselves in the process of putting on glamour!

He sank down into the soft boudoir chair, near her dressing table as she seated herself on the bench and surveyed herself in the mirror.

"Seems like there's not enough minutes in the day to do what I want to do," she went on. "Or in the nights, either!" she added, with a quick sidewise glance at her company.

Tony grinned. "Homewood looked to me like a nice, quiet little town," he said. "Where nothing happens to raise your blood pressure. That's one of the reasons I picked it as a place to settle down . . . !"

The wife of Homewood's late lamented Bread King stopped in the midst of her facial operations, fingers pushing into her cheeks, and turned her brown eyes full on him.

"You don't mean a word of it!" she said. "You like excitement, Mr. Jordan. I know men. I know your type. I've got a psychic faculty. I feel things! My husband—dear Daddy—he used to say I was 'uncanny'." She wheeled to point to an identical portrait which hung on the wall behind her. "That's Daddy! The greatest man who ever lived! I can't ever forget him—ever! You remind me of him—your eyes, I mean!"

Tony felt strangely uncomfortable. The eyes in the portrait seemed to be saying: "Look out!"

"Do you have pictures of your Daddy—I mean—your husband, in every room?" he asked.

"No—just one upstairs and one downstairs," said his widow. "It makes him seem closer to me. But Daddy's never really left me. I'm in communication with him all the time!"

MATILDA TOWNSEND rimmed her lips with lipstick and

smoothed it down to a becoming shade. She had made this comment as offhandedly as though it were nothing at all. Tony waited a moment for her to say more, and then asked: "You don't mean that you think your husband's spirit . . . ?"

The Bread King's widow gave him a positive nod.

"But definitely!" she replied. "Whenever I need Daddy, he's with me. I just call him mentally and, no matter what he's doing, he comes running. In no time at all I can feel his presence. I ask his advice on everything."

Tony swallowed hard. "It must be very convenient," he managed.

Mrs. Townsend stood up, facing him.

"I don't know why I'm telling you all this," she said. "But there's something sympathetic and understanding about you. I felt it the instant Mr. Harrington phoned. Sir Percival, I call him. He should be knighted for the wonderful way he's been looking after my affairs."

"He seems like a fine gentleman," hazarded Tony.

"Oh, yes—Percy's a dear!" said Matilda. "He's been so worried about me. Well, now—let's get down to business! Have you seen the Townsend Bread Company's Plant—our baking ovens?"

"No—not yet!" The speed with which she had shifted subjects left Tony dazed.

"They're magnificent! . . . Aren't they, Daddy? . . . He says, 'Perfectly wonderful!' . . . Shall I? . . . All, right, Daddy! . . . He tells me—if I hurry—I can drive you past the plant for a quick look-see on my way to the Welfare Luncheon . . . !"

Tony gulped. "There's not that much hurry . . . I can wait . . . !"

The Bread King's wife stepped behind a screen with her head still visible.

"Oh, no—I can work it in all right. My days are so full I have to do things this way. Besides, Daddy always told me to 'strike while the iron's hot.' Don't you like that expression?"

"Very much," said Tony, hating himself for agreeing with her.

"You'll excuse me just a moment while I slip into this dress?" The widow whose heart still belonged to Daddy lifted the garment up. "We can keep right on talking." She let the dressing gown fall off her, revealing nicely rounded shoulders. "I don't mind confessing—I've been looking for a man to buy into the business ever since Daddy left the earth plane!"

She lassooed her head with a bright blue dress and it slid snugly into place over her sleek body. Tony, observing this, felt impelled to inquire: "Pardon me, Mrs. Townsend—but were you ever an actress?"

Matilda's face beamed. "Why, Mr. Jordan—how did you guess?"

"I've been in lots of dressing rooms in my time," said Tony. "If I may say so—you have all the earmarks of a professional."

"Oh, thank you so much!" glowed Matilda. "I gave up my professional life for Daddy—but I've never regretted it." She blew a kiss toward the portrait. "He heard me say that and it pleases him no end!"

Matilda stepped from behind the screen and now he saw her real form for the first time. What a woman! What a widow! What a set-up! No wonder she had the town at her feet—including Banker Harrington!

"Getting back to business," said Matilda, returning to the dressing table and giving her black tangle of curls a quick run-through with comb and brush, "What's your proposition?"

TONY brought his mind back to investments with a herculean effort.

"Controlling interest!" he said, and as he did so, their eyes met, so that the proposal must have sounded personal. She dropped the brush.

"I—I'll have to ask Daddy about that." She looked toward the portrait and Tony resisted the impulse to tear it off the wall and throw it out the window. But while he was still fuming, she fired point-blank: "Do you know anything about the bread business?"

Tony subsided. "No, I don't," he admitted.

Matilda smiled, reassuringly. "Well, it's not too complicated. All you have to do is maintain the high standard Daddy's set. 'Give the public bigger loaves for less money,' he used to say, 'and you have them eating out of your bread basket.'"

"That sounds reasonable," said Tony.

Matilda dabbed a scent of *Forbidden* on a lacy handkerchief and touched the tip of each ear.

"That's all there is to it," she said. "Plus good business management, of course!"

"And that's where I shine," said Tony.

"And that's what I need!" purred the Bread King's Widow. "I just can't be every place at once, Mr. Jordan. When Daddy was here—in the flesh, I mean—I never gave the Bread Company a thought . . . but now, with all my other activities—it's been quite a strain."

"Yes, I can imagine," said Tony, eyeing her. "Well, if we can come to terms, I'll be glad to relieve you."

Matilda stood up, dark eyes smoldering with appreciation.

"Aren't you kind?" she said. "Well, Mr. Jordan—I guess I'm ready. There's just forty minutes before I'm due at the Luncheon. Shall we visit the plant? You can stay and look around as long as you wish. Or you can go with me as my guest to the Welfare meeting!"

"Whatever you wish," said Tony, recklessly. "I feel sure, Mrs. Townsend, that we're going to be able to get together!"

Matilda smiled, then turned and gazed up, consultingly at the portrait. "Did you hear that, Daddy? . . . What do you think of Mr. Jordan? . . . You do? . . . Is that so? . . . You really do? . . . Well, so do I!" Matilda turned back to Tony, took his arm and piloted him toward the stairway: "Daddy approves! Come on, Mr. Jordan—let's go!"

"Wait a minute!" Tony said to himself. "Is *she* taking *me* in this deal—or am *I* taking *her?*"

CHAPTER V

THE Townsend Bread Company plant was a modern two-story structure with bakery on the lower floor and offices above. It could be seen from the front windows of the Townsend Home on Canyon Drive and the late Bread King had been able to lie in bed, turn out the lights and see the Townsend Bread sign, atop his plant, blinking its red neon message to the world:

When BETTER BREAD is Baked—
TOWNSEND Will Bake It!

The slogan was not particularly original but it had been very effective as an advertisement—at least until the Tasty Pastries, Inc., outfit has trespassed upon Townsend's territory by locating on Hometown.

There were some citizens who opined that this competition had brought about the untimely end of Charlton L. Townsend. He had dropped dead shortly

after reading the electric sign erected by the rival bread concern, which said:

No One Can Bake Better Bread
Because WE Bake the *BEST!*

Matilda drove her own car, a bright red Cadillac coupe, which all Homewood knew and recognized. She now purposely took Frank Jordan past the Tasty Pastries plant, enroute to her own establishment.

"If you go in business with me," she pointed out, "you'll have to fight these people. Their bread isn't so good but their advertising *is!* They rib our bread and our company and *me* every chance they get! Henry Zanger's wife —he's the owner—has been trying to beat me out for top social position! This means a lot in Homewood. Daddy used to say, the higher my social standing, the more Townsend Bread he sold!"

Tony grinned. "Well, I can see right now, we've got to keep you at the top!"

Matilda beamed at him and almost sideswiped a passing car. They pulled up at the curb beside the Townsend Bread Company plant and Tony exclaimed his pleased surprise.

"Very trim looking place!" he remarked.

"Clean, too!" said the widow of the Bread King. "Each employee—even the nightwatchman—has to scrub on coming to work—and the bakers have to wear masks. We wash all the floors and walls once a day. If you go through the bakery you've got to don a white cap and gown."

"Sounds like a hospital!" said Tony. "Some operation!"

He slid out of the car and the wife of Homewood's former Bread King joined him at the main entrance to the plant. As she did so, a noon whistle blew and men and women employees of all ages and sizes, started streaming out. On seeing their "boss," they called cheery greetings: "Hi, Mrs. Townsend! . . . Good morning, Mrs. Townsend! . . . Howdy, Mrs. Townsend!" . . . to which their employer called, "Hello, gang! . . . Hello! . . . Hello!"

"You're a born executive!" said Tony. "You sure know how to handle people!"

"Do I?" said Matilda, her eyes wide with innocence. "Let's go in!" She led the way to a little room where they slipped into gowns and caps and then entered the bakery itself.

AS MATILDA had said, everything glistened—the floors, the long mixing tables and machines, the row on row of fresh baked goods—the ovens, themselves. Tony was duly impressed and so expressed himself to Plant Boss Jerry Baker.

"My name's not a gag," said the heavy-set Mr. Baker. "But it started me thinking along this line as a kid—and I ended up in this business!"

Mrs. Townsend winked broadly at Jerry and nudged him with her elbow.

"I'm trying to sell Mr. Jordan an interest in the plant," she said. "So treat him extra nice!"

"Have one of our doughnuts?" offered Jerry, picking one up, with a dainty paper napkin.

Tony accepted and sampled it. "I'm sold now!" he said.

"Come on upstairs and see the offices," invited Matilda. "My time is running out!"

They divested themselves of the white clothes and hurried up the inside stairway. Tony looked quickly in on book-keeping, advertising, production and other departments—and then let Matilda take him into the front office which still carried Charlton L. Town-

send's name on the door.

"I just couldn't bear to have it taken off," explained the widow of the late Bread King. "But, of course, if *you* take over, I'd expect you to put your name there."

The private office itself was a dream. Thick blue carpeting, blue-leathered furniture, davenport and chairs. Large mahogany desk, a marvelous built-in radio and phonograph set, a mammoth map of Homewood and all neighboring communities serviced by Townsend Bread—and last, but by no means inconspicuous—another framed portrait of Charlton L. Townsend, Founder—which anyone seated at his desk could not escape seeing on the opposite wall!

"Daddy was so artistic!" said Matilda. "He used to play beautiful music when he was thinking. Said it helped him to get ideas on how to sell more Townsend Bread. I hope you love music?"

"Only the best!" said Tony.

This was always a safe answer and, he had noted, never failed to make the right impression. It didn't fail here.

"It's simply amazing how much we have in common!" said Matilda, glowingly. Then, starting toward the door, "Well, I've got to be running to my luncheon—but I'll leave you and Daddy here together—so you can get bettter acquainted!"

Tony felt a peculiar chill chase up and down his spine.

"If you don't mind, Mrs. Townsend, I'd rather attend the luncheon!" he proposed. "I've seen all I need to see here—and I can get acquainted with Daddy—I mean—Mr. Townsend, another time. Next step is for us to sit down with Mr. Harrington and your lawyer—and work out a deal!"

The widow of Homewood's Bread King smiled.

"All right, then—since you feel that way—come along with me! As Daddy used to say, 'There's no time like the present' . . . I'll introduce you to the best people in town!"

MEETING "the best people" outside a gambling or night club joint was a new experience to Tony Canero. Civic luncheons were also out of his line. He had never been interested in the welfare of the community. *His* interest had been centered in his own personal welfare which he purchased in the form of "protection" from a community's politicians and police officers. This had been Tony's exclusive contribution to "society" until he had come under the elevating and reforming influence of one "Frank Jordan."

To now find himself seated at the speaker's table, flanked on one side by bewhiskered Bank President Harrington and on the other by the town's most prominent and vivacious society leader—widowed head of the Townsend Bread Company—was a sensation more frightening than facing the killers of Costello's mob.

"I'm trapped," said Tony to himself, as he dabbed at the usual luncheon plate of veal and peas which had been shoved at him.

There were speeches and reports being made by men and women representatives of Homewood's different charitable and civic organizations, cooperating with the Welfare Society, with Bank President Harrington presiding.

At last, the head of Homewood's State Bank arose and said: "And now, ladies and gentlemen—it gives me great pleasure to present to you the Chairman of our Welfare Society's Milk Fund for Children—our own dear Matilda Townsend!"

There was great applause and Ma-

tilda, getting to her feet, whispered in Tony's ear: "Here's my chance to give you a good boost!"

The blood of Tony Canero took a drop in temperature.

"No, Mrs. Townsend!" he pleaded. "Don't mention me! Please!"

He looked about for some way of escape. The speaker's table was against the wall in the front end of the dining hall, far removed from any exit. He could not get out, without making himself most conspicuous and also offending his hostess. Tony raised a napkin to his face to conceal his embarrassment and concern.

"You asked for this—you wanted to be an on-the-level big shot!" he told himself. "Well, this is part of what it takes, Brother—so you've gotta stick it out!"

Mrs. Townsend was talking—telling of how all the little undernourished children and babies in the county were growing healthier bodies through the Welfare Society's Milk Program. And now she was finishing, thank heavens —without referring to her guest. Tony dropped his napkin, gave a smile of relief, and joined in the applause as Mrs. Townsend bowed.

But the widow of Homewood's Bread King did not seat herself. She remained standing and raised her hand for silence.

"Mr. Harrington," she said, addressing the chair, "if I may, I should like to introduce my guest to my friends in Homewood!"

"Go right ahead!" insisted Banker Harrington, beaming at Tony who recaptured his napkin and looked wildly, right and left.

"My fellow citizens!" said Matilda. "I want you to meet a man who has just arrived in our fair city from that great middlewestern metropolis of Chicago. This gentleman has decided to cast his lot with us and to make his home in Homewood . . . !"

ALL eyes were centered on Tony who sat, head bowed, napkin to his face, as Matilda placed a hand on his shoulder.

"He's extremely modest, as you can see—but I've gotten acquainted with this man this morning—and I'd like to predict that he'll soon be one of our foremost business leaders."

This declaration brought a murmur of excited speculation.

"Cut it out!" moaned Tony, in a low voice, behind the napkin.

But Matilda proceeded, unheeding.

"And so, without further ado, I'd like to present to you the gentleman who is going to be the new joint owner and manager of the Townsend Bread Company—Mr. Frank Jordan!"

There were gasps of surprise and then a great outburst of hand-clapping. It might as well have been machine-gun fire insofar as one Tony Canero was concerned. He had been in hot spots before but never in a spot as hot as this. Nervous perspiration oozed out of every pore. He sat helpless in his chair at the speaker's table, dabbing moisture from his forehead, as Matilda leaned over and murmured in his ear.

"All right, Mr. Jordan—the floor is yours!"

"I don't want the floor!" Tony replied, in a panic. "You keep it!"

Matilda clutched his arm and gave an upward tug to his sleeve.

"Get up and say something!" she insisted, as the applause still rocketed. "They want to hear from you!"

"But I've never made a speech in my life!" Tony protested.

"Oh, ho, ho!" Matilda's shrill laugh rang out in the room. "Mr. Jordan's trying to tell me that he's not a speaker —but I know differently!"

The room had quieted and now three

hundred of Homewood's select men and women were sitting, expectantly—eyes on Mrs. Townsend's guest—the newly announced manager of the Townsend Bread Company.

Tony got to his feet in a daze, one hand still gripping a crumpled napkin. He produced, with a heroic effort, a weak facsimile of the smile he had brought to Homewood for purposes of making friends and influencing people. It almost froze on his face.

"I . . . er . . . what shall I say . . . ?" he heard himself mumbling.

And Matilda, by his side, prodding him, whispered: "Tell 'em about yourself—why you came to Homewood!"

Tony let go the napkin and put both hands in the side pockets of his suit coat. He felt less self-conscious this way. As he did so, his right hand came in contact with a card—the case history from the Orphans' home. Instinctively, with the motion of a drowning man grasping at proverbial straws, Tony pulled out the card and glanced at it. Then he drew a deep breath and looked up into the row on row of faces.

"I . . . er . . . was born an orphan!" he started.

There was a moment's silence and then a roar of laughter.

Tony wet his lips and gazed about. He was in for it now and he'd have to dig himself out.

"I know that sounds hard to believe," he said. There was more laughter. "All right, so maybe my mother and father are still living!" he went on.

The shrieks of laughter went into hysterics.

"All I know is," Tony hastened to add, "I was left on the doorstep of the Orphans' Home."

HIS face was so utterly serious that the merriment increased. Tony lifted the napkin and wiped it across his dripping brow.

"So—being an orphan," he waded on, "I can sympathize with the little undernourished kids—because I . . . er . . .was one myself!"

It was just impossible to restore order now—everything Tony might say was destined to be humorous. But still he persisted.

"I had a tough time of it as a kid."

Banker Harrington lost all dignity at this, doubled up and let out a wild guffaw which touched off another explosion of laughter.

"There wasn't anyone to give me milk in those days," Tony continued.

"Oh, Mr. Jordan!" gasped Matilda. "You're so funny—you're killing us!"

"I suppose," said Tony, trying desperately to find some place to finish, "I suppose that's why—not having milk as a kid—I'm interested in milk today . . . er . . . *Townsend Milk!*"

The rustic rafters of the dining room shook.

"Not milk!" cried Matilda, above the hubbub. *"Bread!"*

"I—I meant—bread!" stammered Tony, so effectively that his audience thought he had made this slip intentionally. "Your Milk Fun—and Townsend Bread! If I'd had a combination like that when I was a kid—I'd have been a better man today!"

Tony sat down, not so much of his own volition but because his legs refused to hold him up any longer. He was greeted by great applause.

"Why didn't you tell us?" Matilda was laughing in his ear, "You weren't born an orphan, Mr. Jordan—you were born a *comedian!*"

Tony's mind was clearing. Was it possible he had come out of this ordeal on top? Had he blundered into some kind of instant community recognition —and popularity?

"You were stupendous, Mr. Jordan!"

congratulated Banker Harrington, clapping him on the back. "Absolutely stupendous! You'll have to make a speech like this at our Banker's Convention! I never laughed so much in my life—never!"

The President of the Welfare Society stood up and gestured to the still mirthful gathering.

"Thank you, Mr. Jordan, for your well chosen remarks!" he said. "We greet you as a new citizen of Homewood—in fact we welcome you with open arms. You need never consider yourself an orphan again—because the whole town of Homewood has adopted you!"

More laughter and more applause! Tony now had recovered sufficiently to unloose his contagious smile.

"I'm sure you'll all want to shake our new resident by the hand," concluded Banker Harrington, "so—meeting's adjourned—and line forms on the right!"

CHAPTER VI

HOMEWOOD had two newspapers—the Chronicle, an afternoon sheet, and the Morning Tribune whose motto was "We Work While Others Sleep!"

Both rags came out with front page stories on the town's acquisition of a new business man in the person of one Frank Jordan, joint owner with Homewood's "attractive society leader, Mrs. Matilda Townsend, of the Townsend Bread Company."

Newspaper photographers had "shot" him following the Welfare Association luncheon and both papers carried two column pictures of Frank Jordan in company with the Bread King's widow. The Chronicle photograph showed shaking hands while the Tribune "take" revealed them looking smilingly into each others eyes. An enterprising captionist had titled this photograph: "Bread Queen Greets New Bread King!"

Tony was still in bed in his room at the Inn, having just read the Trib story and seen the picture, when the phone rang.

"Hello, King!" said a woman's voice.

Tony laughed. "Hiya, Queenie!"

If Matilda Townsend was getting that familiar, he could, too!

A merry laugh crackled over the wire. "Well, Mr. Jordan—what do you think of *our* publicity?"

"Looks wonderful to me!"

"It's worth a million dollars. I'll just bet Henry Zanger and his Tasty Pastries are gnashing their teeth. We've got them on the run now."

"I've got to meet that man!" said Tony.

"You'll meet him soon enough!" predicted Matilda. "He's all over town—sticking his nose into everything he can. Joining all the clubs, hobnobbing with Mayor Goodwillie, pulling strings here and there. His wife's working all the women the same way. I'm warning you again—look out for those two!"

Tony laughed. "I've cut my eye teeth on double-crossing two-timers . . . I mean—I'm used to dealing with slick operators . . ."

"You are! Well, I'm glad of that. I've got great confidence in you, Mr. Jordan. By the way—don't you think, inasmuch as we're going to be seeing so much of each other—since we're partners—we might be less formal . . . that is—well, I'd like you to call me 'Matilda' . . . !"

"All right, Matilda," said Tony. "And, from here on—I'm 'Frank' . . . !"

"That's much better!" trilled the Bread King's widow. "Oh, Frank—I'm so happy this morning. This Henry Zanger really had me worried. But now that you're here—I'm expecting

you to take care of him!"

"Leave that bird—I mean—leave that gentleman to me!" said Tony. "If you take care of his wife—I'll take care of him!"

MATILDA let out a joyous shriek. "It's a *deal!*" Then she continued: "I think we'll make a wonderful team. Daddy does, too. I just consulted with him before I phoned you. He said we must be seen everywhere together . . . !"

"He *did?*" said Tony. Then, to himself. "Maybe she actually believes this stuff!" Into the phone he said: "Your husband must be plenty broad-minded . . . you sure he won't be jealous?"

"Oh, my no!" assured Matilda. "He realizes he's in another plane of consciousness entirely. . . ."

"Well, I'm glad of that," said Tony.

"And, of course Daddy knows that my life has to go on here. Besides, he's got it in for Henry Zanger, too!"

Tony sat up on the edge of the bed. "Is that so? Say maybe he can help us out and do some haunting!"

Matilda laughed. "No, I don't think we can count on that! But Daddy says he's going to hand around till he sees that Tasty Pastries crowd put out of business!"

Tony shoved his feet into bedroom slippers. His telephone ear was getting numb.

"Listen, Matilda—can you keep a secret?"

"Why, Frank—you know I can!"

"I haven't had a shower yet—or any breakfast."

"Oh, you poor boy! I mustn't keep you another second. I just wanted to call to tell you I'd meet you at the plant and get all the employees together—and introduce you to them. What time shall it be?"

Tony groaned. "Well, I . . . if you don't mind . . . I'd like to slip into the office and take over very quietly . . . and kind of get acquainted gradually, while I'm learning something about the business."

"Oh, that's no way to do at all!" protested Matilda. "No new executive does it that way! We should have the newspapers there—and then you make a few funny remarks—that'll warm our bunch up. They'll go for you, Frank—I know it!"

Tony started walking around in a small circle beside the bed, receiver to his ear. He wound the telephone cord around him, then reversed directions. What could he say? How could he get out of this?

"I told you, Matilda, I'm no public speaker. On the level—I'm not kidding!"

"No! How about yesterday?"

"That was just an accident."

"You were terrific!"

"If I tried it again—I'd lay an egg."

"I don't believe it!"

"You're not going to put me in that spot again. If I've made a reputation as a good public speaker I'm going to keep it—by not doing any more speaking!"

There was a disappointed tone in Matilda's voice.

"All right, Frank—but I'll meet you at the plant anyway and introduce you to the department heads . . . say about ten a.m.?"

"Okay!" said Tony.

He jabbed the receiver on the hook and made a bee-line for the bathroom.

"I can see right now," he said to himself under the shower, "this business of going straight is going to be quite a strain!"

HOMEWOOD'S new and well publicized citizen took his time about reporting to his office. He went first

to the Coffee Shop on the ground floor of the Inn, just off the lobby, ate a leisurely breakfast, and kidded the waitress who brought him a morning paper and expressed surprise when she recognized "Frank Jordan" from the front page photograph.

"Gee!" she said. "Have you taken our town by storm! Everybody's talking about you, Mr. Jordan. Honest!"

Tony smiled and tried to act disinterested.

"That so? Why should they make a fuss over me?"

"Oh, I guess it's because folks have wondered what Mrs. Townsend was going to do with her bread company. Everything she does is news, anyway —and you can't tell what she's going to do next." She studied the picture over Tony's shoulder. "Gee—I think you make a swell looking couple."

Tony lifted one eyebrow. "We're not engaged, you know. I'm just her business partner."

The waitress laughed.

"I guess I shouldn't have said that —but you'd better be careful. Mrs. Townsend gets what she wants in this town—and the way she's eyeing you in that picture . . . !"

Tony turned the paper over and picked up the breakfast menu.

"Orange juice, cup of coffee and ham and eggs," he ordered.

"I don't blame her, though," said the waitress, unabashed, as she wrote the items on a check. "Okay, Mr. Jordan —coming right up."

"Everything's nice and fresh here," Tony observed, looking after her as she ambled toward the kitchen. He pushed a plate aside and studied his reflection in the glass surface of the table. "I must be better looking than I thought. Maybe I should be playing this up more!"

He went from Coffee Shop to Barber Shop and told the tonsorial artist in the first chair, "Give me everything you've got—shave, haircut, shampoo and manicure."

This done, looking like a visiting movie star, Tony deliberately strolled through the lobby, stopped by the desk and greeted Doyle and Mamie with a hearty, "Good morning!"

"How are you, Mr. Jordan!" welcomed Mr. Doyle. "We saw your picture in today's paper. Excellent likeness! Glad you're going to stay in Homewood!"

"So am I!" said Tony.

"It will mean a great deal to the town," said Mamie, beaming at him. "At least, that's what people are saying!"

"Thank you!" Tony acknowledged.

He continued on past Manager Mulloy's office and managed to catch the hotel man's eye.

"I like my room very much," he called.

Mulloy looked pleased. "Anything you want, Mr. Jordan—any time!"

Outside Tony had Pete, the doorman, hail a cab.

"Going to the office, Mr. Jordan?"

"Right on the nose!"

"Cabbie! . . . Take Mr. Jordan to the Townsend Bread Company!"

THE taxi driver was alerted. "Right away, Mr. Jordan! Jump in! Glad to ride you, sir!"

On the way to the plant, Tony pursued his plan of making an impression on all whom he met.

"What's your name?"

"Jacobinsky—Jake for short!"

"How long have you been hacking in Homewood?"

"Eight years. Came here from L.A."

"Like it here?"

"Wouldn't go no place else. This town fits its name—it's homey. Lotta

nice people!"

"I suppose you ride most of the town's big shots?"

"I sure do!"

Tony hesitated a moment, then asked, offhandedly: "You know Henry Zanger?"

The driver looked at Tony through his rear view mirror.

"Are you kiddin'? . . . He's your competitor!"

"I know—and I haven't met him yet. I'd like to get a line on him."

The driver sounded his horn as a jay-walking pedestrian caused him to swerve suddenly.

"Damn—I missed him!" he said. "Well, Zanger's a good customer—but, between you an' me, I don't go much for him!"

"What's the trouble?"

"Too damned important and stuck up. He's out to be the town's Number One man . . . and his wife's aimin' to be Number One woman!"

"That so?"

"Yeah—it's a good thing for Mrs. Townsend that you showed up. They're gettin' ready to give her a real run for her dough an' her social position!"

Tony leaned forward, interestedly.

"Yeah—just how do they plan to do that?"

Jake made a sharp right turn which threw Tony over in a corner of the cab.

"I've said too much already," he replied. "After all, a customer's a customer!"

Tony grinned. "Yeah—but I've forgotten what you told me," he said, meaningly. "Tell me more!"

"Nothin' doin'," said Jake. "If Zanger gets to be Number One man in this town, he can make it tough for me. I know which side my bread is buttered on."

He swung the cab up beside the plant and stopped.

"If you do," said Tony, as he paid and left a generous tip, "you'd better make sure it's *Townsend* bread!"

The private office of the late Charlton L. Townsend, now about to have his name removed and that of "Frank Jordan" printed on the door, was filled with boxes of flowers and telegrams of "good wishes."

Tony walked in on Townsend's old secretary, Miss Veronica Vance, known familiarly as "V.V." while she was in the act of trying to arrange the floral offerings.

"Hello!" said Tony. "Who's dead?"

"Oh," said Miss Vance, eyeing him through her shell-rimmed glasses, "Mr. Jordan, I presume!"

"It's not Mr. Livingston," said Tony, considering this an especially apt crack.

"And who is *he?*" asked Miss Vance.

"Skip it," said Tony, and sniffed the air. "Some atmosphere! Enough flower's here for a gangster's funeral."

"They're all for you," announced Miss Vance, "and, if I may say so, that's not being very appreciative."

Tony could see she was exceedingly proper. She and the old maid at Townsend's home could be sisters. The fine Italian hand of Matilda was here in evidence. It was obvious that the only beauty permitted to "surround" Daddy had been his own "beautiful wife."

"I'm not married to her but I'm going to get the same dose," thought Tony.

HE WALKED over to the flowers, arrayed on his desk and commenced reading the cards attached. There was one from the Chamber of Commerce, signed by Percival Harrington, with the scrawled message, in big flourishes: "Welcome to the Business Life of Homewood!" . . . Then there was another card, also signed by Harrington, as President of the Homewood

State Bank: "Greetings to You—Our New Depositer—Your Friendly Bank." And still a third card from the same Harrington, as head of the Welfare Society, carrying the salutation: "We Know You Will Uphold The Public-Spirited Tradition of the Townsend Name."

"This man Harrington gets around, doesn't he?" Tony remarked to Miss Vance who was watching him, critically. "Is there anything in this town that he's not the head of?"

The woman he had inherited as secretary nodded.

"The Salvation Army," she said.

Tony stopped before a beautiful bouquet of long-stemmed American beauty roses. The card was written in an attractive feminine hand. It read:

Success to My New Business Partner

"Matilda"

"Very sweet of her," said Tony, feeling just a bit uncomfortable beneath Miss Vance's gaze.

"She thinks of everything," said the late Mr. Townsend's right hand business woman.

Tony eyed her questioningly. Had he detected a tinge of resentment in her voice?

"She sure does," he agreed, cautiously. "She's a remarkable woman."

Miss Vance had no reply to this. Instead she turned to the biggest floral offering of all, a set piece, and tore the wrappings from it. Revealed to Tony's astonished gaze was a horseshoe of artificial flowers.

"And who might *that* be from?" he asked.

"*This,*" said Miss Vance, with a high degree of venom, pointing to the card, "is from Mr. Henry Zanger!"

Tony's eyebrows assumed a raised position.

"Any message?"

"Yes," nodded Miss Vance, "and I don't think you're going to like it. He's written you a note."

"Read it!" commanded Tony.

Miss Vance adjusted her shell-rimmed glasses and brushed aside a wisp of graying hair.

"It says 'Greetings—You'll probably discover, as I have, that this town's only big enough for one Bread Company. May the best one win!'"

Tony's eyebrows reached toward his forehead.

"Let me see that!" he said, suspiciously. He took the card and read it over.

"He's starting in on you like he did on Mr. Townsend," said Miss Vance. "You never know whether he's joking or serious. Mr. Townsend couldn't figure out how to take him."

Tony laughed. "He'll have to do more than this to get my goat. Get Mr. Zanger on the phone!"

"You're not going to talk to him?"

"Listen in and find out!"

Miss Vance cast a look of growing respect in Tony's direction as she located the Tasty Pastries number on the phone book and dialed it.

"Mr. Zanger, please," she said. "Mr. Frank Jordan of Townsend Bread calling!"

Tony seated himself at Charlton L. Townsend's old desk and looked up into the face in the portrait.

"Don't worry, old boy," he said, under his breath. "I won't let you down!"

"Here you are, Mr. Jordan," said Miss Vance, turning over the phone.

Tony took the receiver from her and said: "Get on the extension!"

MISS VANCE, showing surprising alacrity, hurried from the room to her secretarial alcove and grabbed up the phone.

"Hello," said Tony. "Is this Henry Zanger?"

"It *is!*" said a deep voice.

"I'm calling to thank you for the magnificent horseshoe you sent me—and your good wishes!"

"Think nothing of it, Mr. Jordan. Think nothing of it!"

"But I do think something of it. In fact, I agree with you, Mr. Zanger—this town is not big enough for two bread companies. What will you take to sell out?"

An involuntary gasp could be heard over the wire; then dead silence.

Miss Vance covered her phone mouthpiece with one hand and gave out with a cheer! Tony grinned and waved at her, thinking to himself, "that old girl's got more spirit than I thought!"

"Hello," he said into the phone. "Are we disconnected?"

"We must have been," said the voice, sounding now in a higher register. "What did you say, Mr. Jordan?"

"I said," repeated Tony, " 'what will you take to sell out?' "

"I'm not selling! What will *you* take to sell out to *me?*"

"You're joking, of course, Mr. Zanger. You haven't enough money to buy Townsend Bread—and you never will have!" said Tony, and hung up.

He glanced into the adjoining office and saw that Miss Vance was dancing.

"I'm liking that woman better and better," he reflected, as she came running toward him.

"Oh, Mr. Jordan!" cried Miss Vance. "Pardon me, sir! But, you're wonderful! . . . Mr. Townsend was a nice man but he wasn't a fighter! He folded up when Mr. Zanger and Tasty Pastries came to town. And when he died—well, Mrs. Townsend—she's a power in her way—but . . . !"

Tony nodded, breaking in. "Miss Vance," he said. "I think we understand each other very well. And we also understand Mrs. Townsend. Now here's something I want you to do . . . !"

The phone commenced ringing.

"What if that's Mr. Zanger calling back?" asked Miss Vance.

"It *is* Mr. Zanger," said Tony. "I've got *his* number now. No one's ever hung up on him before—and he's slightly out of his mind. Tell him I'm not in!"

Miss Vance answered the phone.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Zanger . . . no—you were *not* cut off! . . . That's right. Mr. Jordan was through talking. I'm sorry—he's not in. I couldn't say. Yes, I'll tell him you called back . . . Goodbye, Mr. Zanger."

Miss Vance was laughing as she pushed the phone aside.

"I've been waiting a long while for this," she said. "Now what were you going to tell me to do?"

"Oh, yes," recalled Tony. "I want you to wrap up Mr. Zanger's floral piece and send it back to him with a card from me—and I want you to print this message on it . . ."

Miss Vance grabbed for her shorthand notebook.

"Yes?" she asked, eagerly.

" 'Here's your horseshoe back,' " dictated Tony. " 'You're going to need it more than I will!' "

The face of Charlton L. Townsend's former secretary was aglow.

"I'm going to like working for you!" she announced.

"The feeling," said Tony, smiling at her, "is mutual."

AT THAT moment the door to the private office opened and the other partner of the Townsend Bread Company stepped in. She was stunningly attired in a bright red suit with little red hat to match.

"Hello, Frank!" she greeted. "Sorry to be late but I had some social appointments to make. My—the place looks

like a hot-house! Who sent the horse-shoe?"

"Our friendly competitor," said Tony.

"Throw it out!" ordered Matilda. "There's nothing friendly about him. He'd stick a knife in our bread any time he got a chance!"

"I'm returning this to him," Tony informed. "With our compliments." Then, turning to Miss Vance: "Read Mrs. Townsend the inscription."

Miss Vance did as directed and Matilda screamed.

"Oh, that's so clever! How do you think of such things? I'm glad we've got Mr. Jordan with us, aren't you, Veronica?"

"That's what I was just telling him," she confessed.

"Well, Mr. Jordan's given me new life!" said Matilda. "Daddy says he's the 'man of the hour.' And you know, Veronica, when Daddy says something, we can bank on it!"

Miss Vance didn't look too convinced but she nodded her head and glanced warily at Tony, who eyed the portrait.

"But we mustn't waste any more time," went on Matilda. "I've arranged for you to meet some of our people on the first floor. So come on down with me and let me introduce you."

"Okay," said Tony, getting up and going toward the door with her. "But go easy now. Never mind the big build-ups."

"Leave everything to me," the wife of the late Charlton L. Townsend assured.

She led Tony down the stairs and along a hall. As they neared a door he could hear a commotion of voices inside, which caused him to stop and eye her.

"Sounds like quite a gang in there?" he said.

"Oh, just a few!" said Matilda, and flung open the door, pushing him ahead of her.

Tony found himself stepping out onto the platform of a small auditorium which was packed with Townsend employees from all departments, many dressed in white baker's coats and aprons. They burst instantly into applause, and laughed when the new head of Townsend Bread turned in an effort to escape and found the door blocked by a woman in red.

Matilda grabbed his arm and pulled him toward the front of the platform.

"You tricked me!" Tony accused, in her ear. "You're a dangerous dame—I mean . . . !"

Flashlight bulbs popped and Tony blinked at camera shots taken by newspaper camera men.

"Smile!" directed Matilda, gazing up at him. "You look like you were going to take a bite out of me!"

"I feel like it!" said Tony.

Matilda, laughing, held up her hand and the applause died down.

"G o o d morning, everyone!" she greeted. "I knew you were all dying to meet your new boss—the man I've selected to take Mr. Townsend's place. That's why I sent word to have you all assembled here. You've read about Mr. Jordan in our papers and seen his picture—and I wanted you to see that he is even handsomer looking in person!"

THERE was a ripple of laughter as Tony squirmed, uncomfortably, and made a face. More flashlight bulbs exploded and caught his expression. A roar of laughter followed.

"Mr. Jordan just won't take anything seriously!" said Matilda. "Except, of course—Townsend Bread!"

Tony nodded and rolled his eyes. He would have to play up to Matilda somehow. She was bound to make a humor-

ist out of him—but he felt extremely unfunny inside.

"And now," Matilda was saying, "Mr. Jordan, your new leader, has an inspiring message he wants to give you! . . . Mr. Jordan!"

She gave him a shove forward and Tony was now "on his own." What could he say this time? His thoughts revolved like a pin wheel. It seemed like he had been standing for long minutes; the auditorium had suddenly become still. There was an air of great expectancy. Tony's head reeled. Message! He'd have to say something! And then, when it seemed that he must make a break and run off the platform —his mind fixed on Henry Zanger's floral horse-shoe . . . and the message accompanying it. Tony wet his lips.

"I'd just like to say," he started, "this town's only big enough for one bread company!"

He got no further. There were cheers and applause.

"And when there's only one bread company left, I guess you know which one that's going to be!" he added.

This brought greater cheers and applause.

"And so—my message to you is," Tony concluded, *"Sell More Townsend Bread!"*

From the laughter and tumult and spirit aroused, Tony could have believed he was at a football pep meeting.

Matilda had him by the arm and was shouting in his ear: "Oh, Frank, you're terrific! You always know just the right thing to say! You've got our bunch behind you a hundred percent!"

Tony took a deep breath and managed a grin. He lifted an arm and waved at his enthused employees. Now that it was all over, it hadn't been too bad. Maybe he could even get to like this.

A sudden surge of self-confidence came over the man who was known as Frank Jordan. Responding to the feeling of the moment, he surprised himself by booming out:

"Hit 'em hard, hit 'em low—Yea, Townsend—LET'S GO!"

That did it! He had his audience now, right in his vest pocket, and this was the time for his exit.

Tony bowing, backed toward the door, stood aside for Matilda to exit first and then, as she gave him her hand, he raised it to his lips and kissed it.

Townsend employees beat their palms and stamped their feet.

Outside in the hall, Matilda was so excited and pleased that she gave Tony an impulsive hug as she cried: "Congratulations, Mr. Jordan! . . . You were a SMASH HIT!"

CHAPTER VII

LOLA PETERS was jittery and sore. Two weeks and no word from Tony. She had stayed practically glued to her one room and kitchenette, awaiting an expected phone call.

"I ain't heard nothin', either," said Sammy, who had dropped in to pass the time of night. "We can't spend the rest of our lives like this. I'm for jumpin' a bus and goin' out to Homewood and lookin' him up!"

"Have you ever thought that he might not have gone to Homewood at all?" suggested Lola.

Sammy blinked. "But ain't that the town he picked?"

"Yes—but if he wanted to shake us —he could have headed somewhere else."

Sammy considered. "Yeah—but the boss has always been on the level with me. I'd hate to think . . . !"

"So would I!" said Lola. "We played him straight here. He must know we're not sitting any too pretty.

I can't understand why he wouldn't . . . !"

A sudden sharp ring of the phone made both jump. Lola looked at Sammy as she took off the receiver.

"This had better be him!" she said, grimly.

"Long distance—Homewood, California—calling Miss Lola Peters," said the operator.

"That's me!" said Lola, and blew a kiss at Sammy.

"One minute, please!"

Sammy eyed Lola. "Now ain't you sorry you've been runnin' Tony down?"

"You sap! You've been worryin' plenty yourself!"

"Ready now," said the operator. "Here's your party!"

"Hello," said a man's voice.

"Hello, Tony!" said Lola, excitedly.

"This isn't Tony," said the voice. "This is Frank."

"Oh, yes, Frank—for a moment I thought . . . Frank, dear—how are you?" stumbled Lola.

"Couldn't be better. How are you and Sammy making out?"

"Okay, so far. He's here with me right now."

"Good! Took me a few days to get set out here. But I'm in the dough now!"

"Already?"

"Yeah, I'm in the bread business!"

"Bread business! . . . Frank—you're kidding!"

"No I'm not. I'm head of the Townsend Bread Company. It's a good deal. And I've got places for you and Sammy. Grab a plane and get the hell out here!"

"But, Frank—that's not so easy . . . we're being watched . . . everything's a mess—the club's closed, of course . . . and police are dragging the river for your—I mean *Tony's body.*"

"Let 'em drag! You and Sammy give 'em the slip. Buy your tickets to Los Angeles and then take a bus from there. Telephone me on arrival and stay at the bus station till I come and meet you. Have you got that?"

"Yeah, I've got it!" said Lola. "But, listen, Frank—what are you going to do about the money you've got in the bank here?"

"Money? Frank Jordan hasn't any money in a Chicago bank. Skip it."

"I understand it's quite a lot."

"You're talking about some other fellow—and if it's who I think you mean—he can't touch it because he's dead."

"Well, you know best. You want us to leave everything then?"

"Hell, yes! Hurry out here, Gorgeous—I'm crazy to see you!"

Lola's face brightened. "Now you sound like the old . . . !"

"Ah! Ah! Take it easy, Baby! . . . Put Sammy on! Let me talk to him!"

Lola turned the receiver over to Tony's former body-guard.

"Remember—you're speaking to Frank Jordan!" she warned.

SAMMY glared. "Do you think I'm stupid?" Lola opened her mouth. "All right—don't answer!" Sammy turned to the phone. "Hello, Tony!"

Lola groaned. "What did I tell you?"

Frank Jordan was speaking. "Good thing this is a private line. You people had better rehearse. Make one bad break like that in Homewood and you'll get me in plenty of trouble!"

"Jeez, Boss—I mean—boy, is it good to hear your voice!"

"Sammy—did you get that little article out of the club?"

"What article? . . . Oh, yeah!, yeah! Everything's okay. I took it back where it came from?"

"You did *what?*"

"The next night," said Sammy. "I went through the same window—and

put it right on the desk where it was!"

"You crazy goof! And no one saw you?"

"Not even a mouse! I'm proud of myself, Boss! You should-a seen what they said in the papers. Only Houdini's ghost could-a done it!"

"Listen, you dumb cluck! Get out of Chicago while your luck's still with you! Catch the first plane you can and do what Lola tells you!"

"Okay, Boss! Okay! But it's sure good to hear your voice. It sure is!"

"Shut up and get off the phone. Let me talk to Lola again!"

"Sure! But what's this I hear about your bein' in the bread business?"

"Never mind that now!"

"It's important, Boss. Bakin' is right in my line. I used to make pies. My stepmother taught me. Boy, is this a break for you!"

"I'll break your neck if you don't get off this line!"

"Okay! I can take a hint. Here, Lola—the Boss wants to chin with you again."

Sammy reluctantly parted with the receiver.

"Yes, Frank!" said Lola. "I see you've got a baker! What can *I* do in a bread company?"

"You're going to be my receptionist, Gorgeous!" said the voice from Homewood. "They've never seen anyone like you out here. You'll knock 'em dead!"

"Using me for scenery, eh? Well, that's going to cost you. All right, Frank—we're scramming. If you hadn't called tonight I was going to end it all!"

"You're going to love it out here—great town—wonderful people—and do they go for Townsend Bread!"

Lola laughed. "You're sure Sammy and I will fit in?"

"I don't know about Sammy—but you're a cinch. Goodbye now, Gorgeous—this is Frank Jordan—signing off!"

Lola hung up the receiver, wheeled about, threw her arms around Sammy's neck and kissed him smack on the cheek.

"Jeez!" he said, surprised. "What's that for?"

There were tears glistening in Lola's eyes, but she was smiling.

"For nothing, you mug! For *nothing!*"

CHAPTER VIII

IT WAS early morning of the next night, when the telephone in Frank Jordan's room at the Homewood Inn commenced ringing. Tony reached over, half-waking, and knocked the French receiver off the hook. He leaned out of bed and groped for it on the floor. It was just out of reach but he could hear a voice saying: "Hello, Hello!"

"Hello, yourself!" called Tony, practically standing on his head, supporting himself with hands on the floor.

"Is this Mr. Jordan?"

"Yes—who wants him?"

"Frank—this is Lola!"

Tony slid out of bed and retrieved the receiver.

"Lola! Where are you?"

"We're at the bus station!"

"Got here already? Great! Hold everything! I'll be right over!"

He hung up the receiver excitedly and grabbed his clothes, dressing like a volunteer fireman.

The night hotel manager's name was George Bingham. Tony rounded him up in the lobby.

"I've got two guests arriving," he informed. "Friends of mine from Chicago—a man and a woman. I'm moving the man in with me and I want a room for Miss Peters. They've come here to work for the Townsend Bread

Company."

"I see! . . . I see!" said Mr. Bingham. "It so happens we have two vacancies tonight—one on the same floor with you. Ten-twenty-seven, just down the hall."

"Good! Hold it. I'm picking up my friends now!"

"Very well, Mr. Jordan. Delighted to accommodate you!"

Tony hurried out to the street and down the block to the bus station. He spotted Lola and Sammy waiting outside.

As Lola saw him, she started running and would almost have jumped in his arms had he not restrained her.

"Take it easy, Gorgeous!" he warned. "This is a small town and everyone knows me here now—even the porters!"

He had no sooner spoken than a colored red cap, connected with the bus terminal, called out: "Hi, Mr. Jordan —going away?"

"No—grab these bags and give my friends a lift. They're stopping at my hotel!"

The colored man obliged.

"Hello, Boss!" greeted Sam. "I mean —*how do you do,* Mr. Jordan!"

Tony shook hands. "Careful, you lug. I'm a respected citizen in this burg!"

"That I gotta see!" said his bodyguard.

Lola took Tony's arm as the colored red cap led the way down the street.

"How are things going?" she whispered.

"Almost too good!" said Tony. "I've got this town by the ears! All they're talking about here is 'Frank Jordan'."

Lola eyed him. "You still look like Tony to me."

TONY grinned. "I'm a changed man inside," he said. "And getting more changed every day. I don't know why I didn't go straight years ago."

"Meaning you really like it?"

"I love it! I never thought there was so much excitement in legitimate business."

They were turning in at the hotel.

"You're friends of mine from Chicago," wised Tony, in a low voice. "Former business associates I'm bringing out here to work for me."

"What kind of business?" asked Sammy.

"Never mind what kind. Let me do the talking!"

Tony tipped the colored parter who dropped the bags near the desk.

The night manager who had seen them enter, came over to be of assistance.

"These your guests, Mr. Jordan?"

"Yes, I'd like to present Miss Lola Peters, Mr. Bingham . . . and Mr. Sammy Sablow."

Manager Bingham bowed. "Glad to meet you both. Will you sign for them, Mr. Jordan?"

He swung the ledger around and handed Tony a pen.

"The room for Miss Peters is ready. I've had extra towels and wash cloths placed in your room for Mr. Sablow."

"Oh, am I bunking with . . . ?" Sammy started to ask, but Tony stepped on his foot. "I mean," added Sammy, "don't I get any soap?"

"Sorry, Mr. Sablow," apologized Manager Bingham, "not a bar in the house."

"No bar, either?" said Sammy, face falling.

He received a boot in the shins.

"Mr. Sablow's quite a wit," said Tony.

"Yes," said Manager Bingham, smiling a bit uncertainly, "so I see!"

He pressed a desk bell and Tommy, the night bell hop, appeared.

"Take these guests of Mr. Jordan's to their rooms. Now if there's any other service . . . !"

Lola turned her blue-eyed charm on Manager Bingham.

"I'm sure everything's going to be fine," she said. "Thank you, Mr. Bingham—*so much!*"

Manager Bingham was middle-aged, single but susceptible.

"Not at all!" he reassured. "Anything you want, Miss Peters, just call me—any time!"

Lola winked. "I'll remember that!" she said.

Manager Bingham watched her into the elevator, highly pleased with himself.

"A stunner if I ever saw one!" he said. "If she's working for Townsend, I've eaten my last loaf of Tasty Pastry!"

WITHIN half an hour, Lola, Sammy and Tony were holding a reunion in Tony's large room, overlooking the public square, which contained twin beds and enough furniture to provide a sitting room effect. The two new arrivals listened wide-eyed to Tony's account of his experiences in Homewood.

"Thank God you're here," he concluded. "I'm being rushed off my feet by the good people in this town. I admit I went out to make friends with everyone but I guess I went too far. I'm going to need protection."

Sammy swelled his chest. "So I'm getting my same old job, eh?"

"Not that kind of protection, I hope," grinned Tony. "But I could use a special policeman at the plant—and you're it—bright, shiny star and blue uniform—special permit from Chief of Police Avery."

Sammy made a wry face. "Bodyguard, yes—policeman, no. How can a guy like me uphold the law?"

"You'll have to if you're an officer," said Tony. "It's all fixed. You can't get out of it."

Sammy looked glum. "So this is what I've come two thousand miles for?"

"Why not? I can't set you up as a bank robber."

"You don't have to. Just get me a job inside this man Harrington's bank, you've been tellin' us about. I'll do the rest!"

Tony laughed. "You still can't believe this is all on the up and up, can you?"

"If I didn't know different," said Sammy, bluntly, "I'd say you got a bump on the head. And when I think this all started from my robbin' an Orphans' Home! . . . Boy, that ought to be a lesson to me!"

Lola was awaiting her chance to take a poke at Tony.

"Tell me more about this Matilda Townsend woman—your business partner—*period*—I hope!"

The Frank Jordan of Homewood gave her an amused glance.

"You'll see her tomorrow—and then you can judge for yourself. I'm putting you at a desk right outside my private office—as receptionist—so you can waylay anyone whom you don't want to reach me. That, alone, should prove to you that there's nothing but business between me and Matilda!"

Lola smiled. "Oh, yeah? After your telling me she's one of the best looking women in Homewood—and a power in the town? What do you and Matilda do in your spare time?"

"Oh, well," said Tony, "we've got to attend social functions together—for business purposes. You won't believe this, of course—but I've blossomed out into quite a public speaker. I didn't like it at first—but apparently

I've got a knack along that line. Wait'll you hear me!"

Lola stood up, holding her hands at the sides of her head and extending them outward.

"Oh, ho! Mr. Jordan is becoming not only the biggest man in town—but he's getting the biggest head. Sammy, we didn't get here any too soon!"

Tony's former bodyguard walked about in circles. "And I've got to live in the same room with this guy!" he said. "So he's a public speaker now. 'Unaccustomed as I am' . . . Dale Carnegie stuff. What a racket!"

"Cut it out!" snapped Tony. "I can take kidding but too much is too much. You two have had a tough trip. What do you say we all turn in?"

"Good idea," said Lola. "You're getting too well-bred all of a sudden—and I'm not talking about Townsend Bread."

She crossed toward the door.

"Good night," grinned Tony, and made as though to kiss her, but Lola ducked under his arm and slid into the hall. "See you tomorrow at the office," she called, "Remember, I'm just a working girl now, Mr. Jordan!"

Lola shut the door in his face. Tony turned back, eyeing Sammy who had jerked off his tie and was getting ready for bed.

"What in Sam Hill's gotten into her?" he said.

Sammy, one leg in and one out of his trousers, eyed Tony.

"Jeez, Boss—what's gotten into *you?* You gone high-toned on us?"

CHAPTER IX

IF SHE could help it, Lola Peters, former hostess and dice girl at Tony's Intimate Night Club, Chicago—was not going to play second to any woman in Homewood. When she presented herself at the Townsend Bread Company offices the following morning, her appearance caused all who saw her to turn around for another look.

Her platinum blonde hair was arranged in two glistening coils as a crown on her head. Lips and nails a tantalizing red. Figured dress with the emphasis on *figure.* Cocky little black hat with a beckoning feather!

Veronica Vance, veteran secretary, whose forte was efficiency rather than beauty, gave Lola a quick appraisement as she asked to see "Mr. Jordan."

"Oh! I guess you're the Miss Peters, Mr. Jordan was telling me about," she said. "Your desk's been placed right here, Miss Peters. . . . You can put your hat and things in this little closet. . . . I'll show you the routine. We've never had a receptionist before—so this is new to me, too." She eyed Lola again. "But I think you're going to be quite an addition . . . !"

Lola smiled, a bit reserved and on edge.

"You do? . . . I hope so!"

"Have you had experience in meeting the public?" asked Miss Vance.

"Oh, yes," assured Lola. "I've met many big people."

"That seems to be one of the main requirements. Not that so many big people will come here . . . but a girl like you—who has good personality—and can reflect the spirit of our organization . . . !"

"Just what is that?"

"You'll catch it after you've been here awhile, I'm sure. We're one happy family . . . and we're even happier, now that Mr. Jordan's come with us."

Lola studied the older, plain-appearing but efficient woman who faced her.

"How interesting!" she said.

"Mr. Jordan tells me he knew you in Chicago?" remarked Miss Vance, pleasantly.

"Slightly," admitted Lola, cautiously. "He's a fine man!"

"Indeed he is!" said Miss Vance, with genuine enthusiasm. "A real go-getter! . . . I think you'll like it here."

Lola looked around. "Smells very nice," she said. "I always did love the odor of fresh baked bread!"

Miss Vance smiled.

"Come with me, please, and I'll introduce you to the different department heads and secretaries on this floor . . . then you can go in and see Mr. Jordan!"

While Lola was making the rounds, a big physical hulk was being poured into a policeman's uniform at the Homewood Tailor Shop.

"Mr. Jordan left us your order two days ago," said the little squint-eyed man who waited on him. "You're a little heavier than I thought—but we can fix your clothes while you wait. Do you want to wear this uniform right away?"

"Absolutely!" said Sammy. "I came in here a bum—and I want to go out—an officer of the law!"

THE new head of the Townsend Bread Company was in a meditative mood. He was stretched out upon the davenport in his private office, listening to Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. This was luxury, this was life, this was big business!

There was a rap on the door and Miss Vance looked in.

"Sorry to disturb, Mr. Jordan, but Miss Peters is here!" she announced. "She's ready for work now—and she wants to see you!"

"Send her in!" gestured Tony, remaining as he was. "And hold any calls of business, please, until I notify you."

"Yes, sir!" The very efficient Miss Vance stepped aside to permit Lola to enter, then closed the door instantly behind her.

It was Lola's first time inside the private office and its elaborate furnishings and appointments stunned her. But not more so than her appearance did Tony. He sat up, eyes gleaming.

"Gorgeous!" he exclaimed. "That's the word for it! I told you they'd never seen anything like you in Homewood . . . that you'd knock 'em dead . . . and, Baby, you're doing it!"

Lola smiled but kept her distance as she looked about.

"Well, after all—that's what you hired me for, isn't it? Window dressing! . . . You've got quite a dump here, Mr. Jordan. Reclining couches, soft music—and, oh—who is that mug up there?"

She pointed at the portrait.

"Bow very low when you speak of that gentleman," said Tony. "You're in the presence of the founder of this great company—Charlton L. Townsend—and when I say 'presence,' I mean 'presence.' He's not dead, not according to Matilda . . . I mean 'Mrs. Townsend' . . . Oh, no—he's flitting around here in the ether. Of course I don't go for that stuff but she talks to 'Daddy' all the time. He had to approve of me before she'd make a deal."

Lola stared at the man on the wall and then at the man on the davenport.

"Well, it's nice to know we're not alone in here—or is it?"

"Oh, I guess old man Townsend was pretty broad-minded," said Tony. He leaned back on the davenport. "After all, how many business men have offices like this? All the comforts of home. And he's right—a man can think better when he's relaxed . . . listening to beautiful music . . . I'm getting wonderful ideas this very minute."

"Oh, yeah?" said Lola.

Tony crooked a finger, invitingly.

"Come over here, Gorgeous—I want to kiss you!"

LOLA smiled. "Sorry, Mr. Jordan, I'm not in the mood." She crossed to the phonograph and cut the Fifth Symphony. "What are you trying to do—rib me? Is this a pose—or what?"

Tony looked up at her. She was just beyond his reach.

"Take it easy," he said. "Sit down! You've had a chip on your shoulder ever since you arrived. This is what you wanted, isn't it? You had me pick a town. Well, here we are—miles away from Chicago, the old life, and already you don't like it!"

"I didn't say I didn't like it!" denied Lola. "But I don't like the way you're acting. You're a different person!"

"Sure! Didn't you want that, too? I'm making myself over. You're going to be proud of me!"

"Proud of a stuffed shirt?"

Tony laughed.

"I'm going to be an outstanding citizen in this town within a year. Mrs. Townsend's already working on it!"

"Mrs. Townsend! What's she got to do with it?"

"Plenty! The Chamber of Commerce of Homewood once a year picks the town's outstanding citizen—the man who's done more for the community than anyone else. Well, that's the honor I'm shooting at!"

Lola's eyes flashed.

"And where does Mrs. Townsend come in?"

"She's got the influence, Baby. She knows the right people. The Chamber of Commerce appoints a committee, headed by President Percival Harrington, whom Matilda . . . I mean—Mrs. Townsend, can wrap around her little finger."

"I begin to catch," said Lola, bitingly. "Go on!"

"Well, this committee meets to vote on the most likely candidates in July and the elects the winner, judging on what he's done for the town, on December first. I've just arrived in time to get under the wire for this year—and Mrs. Townsend's having Mr. Harrington put my name in the pot."

"You're really commencing to hate yourself, aren't you?" said Lola.

Tony jumped to his feet. "Say, what's eating you? I started out to be the biggest racketeer in Chicago—and you talked me out of it. Then I got the bright idea of killing off Tony Canero and beginning all over, as Frank Jordan. But there's something in me—I've got to be a big shot—whatever I'm doing! So I land here in Homewood—and I play my cards right—get in business with the most powerful woman in town . . . !"

"I understand she's not so bad looking, either," said Lola.

"Skip that!" said Tony.

"I'm not—and, if I know you, you're not, either!"

"Okay, Gorgeous—but I haven't seen a dame yet who could top you!"

Tony suddenly seized her in his arms and kissed her. Lola clung to him, momentarily, then pushed him away. Her eyes were swimming in tear drops.

"You big lug!" she said, as she dabbed with her handkerchief, and reached up and wiped lipstick from his mouth. "I wanted to get you out of the racket—but I don't want to lose the man I loved, doing it!"

TONY tapped a thumb against his chest. "He's still in here—but outside I've got to play a part. I've got to be polished. I'm traveling around in the highest society. It's part of the game. You've got to do it to make money and go places in big business. Don't let Matilda . . . Mrs. Townsend

get you down. She can put me where I want to get! So why shouldn't I be nice to her?"

"So what am I supposed to do?" said Lola.

"Be nice to her, too!" said Tony. "If I can cop that 'outstanding citizen' award—I can have anything in this town!"

"Including Mrs. Townsend?"

"Oh, stop it, will you!" Tony paced across the room and re-started the phonograph. Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony took up where it had left off. "You can help me or you can make it tough for me. I thought you'd get a kick out of joining up and watching me get to the top—on the level! Should I go back and start ducking bullets again?"

Lola shook her head and smiled through new tears. "No, Mr. Jordan—you're right. You should stay here and become the biggest man in Homewood . . . and, of course, I'll help you every way I can . . . but don't expect too much . . . I'm no Mrs. Townsend!"

Tony stared at her. "So that's it!" he said. "You're jealous of a woman you haven't even seen!"

"I'm a woman," said Lola, "and I know women—so let's leave it at that. I naturally wanted to be the *one* woman to help you get where you wanted to go—but, since that's not possible . . . well, I guess I'm just fool enough to try to make the best of it."

"Now, Lola!" Tony protested. "What kind of talk is that?"

Lola put her hand on the door knob. Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony was reaching its climax as were her emotions.

"Double talk!" she said. "Forget it, Mr. Jordan. You hired me as your receptionist and you're going to get service."

Tony grinned, relieved. "That's better," he said. "How about a date tonight, Gorgeous?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Jordan—you can't afford to be seen running around town with one of your girl employees. That's no way to get the outstanding citizen award!"

Lola slipped out of the room and closed the door. The Fifth Symphony came to a crashing finish.

"Hell!" said Tony, "I hadn't thought of that! Lola's right! She hasn't any standing in society. If I was seen out with her, my social position would be ruined!" He kicked the deep carpeting with his foot and scuffed it up, then smoothed it down again. "Oh, well," he told himself. "I'm glad she understands!"

The new special policeman for the Townsend Bread Company was waiting for Lola when she emerged from Frank Jordan's private office. He saluted her as she returned to her desk.

"Sammy!" exclaimed Lola.

Sight of him brought a needed release of tension and a laugh.

"Now I've seen everything!" she said.

Tony's former body-guard twirled a police billy and patted the holster of a forty-five calibre Colt revolver.

"Don't make fun of me, Miss—or I'll knock your brains out with this—and shoot you through the heart with that!" He indicated club and pistol. "I'm a walking arsenal. Just let any so-and-so try to steal a loaf of bread!"

"*Townsend* bread!" corrected Lola.

"That's right—always mention the name," recalled Sammy. "Jeez—I feel like the Lone Ranger or a Mountie without a horse. Is Tony—I mean Mr. Jordan—in his office? I want him to get a load of this!"

Lola took Sammy by the arm and led him into the hall.

"Not now, Sammy. The great man

mustn't be disturbed. He's listening to Tchaikovsky."

"In conference, huh?"

"Yeah, with himself! He's—*thinking*."

"What about?"

"Townsend Bread, of course!"

Sammy blinked. "What's the matter? You and Tony—er . . . Mr. Jordan—have a fallin' out?"

"Beat it, Sammy, and come back later. His secretary's watching."

"Okay. If you want me, I'm stationed just inside the door, at the foot of the stairs."

Sammy retreated, walking with a swagger, swinging the club by its leather strap. Some girl employees, emerging from another office stared and giggled.

"Oh, isn't he cute!" said one.

"What a physique! What muscles!" said another.

"Oh, officer!" called a third. "Protect me, will you?"

Sammy grinned and winked. "Sure, Babe," he said, "on your time off!"

A BRIGHT red Cadillac coupe spun up in front of the main entrance to the Townsend Bread Company and a snappily attired, dark-eyed, dark-haired woman jumped out.

"Hey, Lady!" called a voice of authority. "You can't park there!"

The woman turned to face a towering, broad-shouldered figure in special policeman uniform.

"Oh, yes, I can! I always do!"

"Starting with yesterday, Lady—not today," said the officer, pointing. "See that sign up there. It says, 'No parking—at any time'—and that means 'this time'."

"I've never seen you before," said the woman, slightly irritated. "Are you a city policeman?"

"No, Lady. I'm employed by the Townsend Bread Company," said the officer, expanding several inches.

"Since when?" demanded the feminine motorist.

"Since about twenty minutes ago!"

"Well! Who hired you?"

"The boss himself—Mr. Frank Jordan!"

The woman smiled and patted him on the shoulder.

"I see! In that case, it's all right. I'll speak to Mr. Jordan about you."

She attempted to make a detour around him and to enter the door. The officer stuck out a big arm.

"Just a minute! I'm one of them guys who believes in signs, Lady. You can mention me to Mr. Jordan—but, first, you gotta remove your car!"

"Apparently," said the woman, now slightly more irritated, "you don't know who I am!"

"Lady," said the officer, "I wouldn't even care if you were Mrs. Townsend herself!"

"That's who I *am!*" said the woman.

The officer stared. "No kiddin'?" He extended a massive hand. "Glad to meet you. My name's Sammy!"

The woman gave him her hand and cried out when he squeezed it.

"My—but you're strong! . . . We need a big man like you to watch things around here. Please keep your eyes on my car. I won't be long."

"But, Lady—I mean—Mrs. Townsend—that sign! After all . . . !"

Sammy shrugged his shoulders helplessly. She was gone into the building.

"I oughta let the air out of her tires," he brooded. "Mrs. Townsend, eh? Looks like Tony's got a pretty good thing here!"

Lola looked up from her desk and saw the exquisitely formed figure of a woman approaching—a woman who carried herself with perfect assurance

and authority—yet distinctly feminine withal. She was headed for the private office of Frank Jordan.

Lola's practiced eye surveyed her in a glance—light blue dress; white turbanned hat, set inside a ring of dark curls; shiny black handbag and shoes to match. There could be no mistaking her identity. This was the much advertised Matilda Townsend! And Lola knew in that instant that her worst fears had been realized. Here was a woman to be reckoned with!

"Just a moment, Madam!" Lola called. "Whom did you wish to see?"

The woman stopped, apparently noticing her for the first time. Lola could see that she was startled and took a measure of satisfaction in sensing that Mrs. Townsend had been impressed by her own appearance.

"You're new here, aren't you?" said the woman, crossing to the desk. "I'm Mrs. Townsend. You never have to stop me."

The two women eyed each other.

"New orders," said Lola, evenly. "I stop everyone from now on. Mr. Jordan is in conference at the moment. Wait here, please, and I will let him know that you are here."

THE wife of the late Bread King hesitated. The irritation of the car incident a few minutes before had not yet subsided. Lola chanced to glance in the direction of Miss Vance's office and fancied she saw Mr. Townsend's old secretary waving encouragement.

"Just have a chair, please," she invited, pointing to one against the wall.

"I haven't time to wait," snapped Mrs. Townsend. "Mr. Jordan will see me whether he's in conference or not."

She started toward the private door but Lola leaped to her feet and agilely blocked the way.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Townsend," she said, firmly. "But I've a job to do and I'm going to do it. I'm the receptionist here—and all appointments are made through me. There are no exceptions!"

A cyclonic fury was rising inside Matilda Townsend, with dark clouds first showing in her eyes.

"Announce me at once!" she demanded.

Lola turned to the departmental communications and pressed a button. A man's voice answered, after a pause, during which the two women attempted to out-stare each other.

"Hello, Mr. Jordan," said Lola. "Have you finished your conference with *Victor Herbert?*"

"Victor Herbert!" exclaimed Mrs. Townsend. "What on earth?"

"I see." She hung up the receiver. "He says 'not yet'."

The widow of the late Bread King eyed the new receptionist unbelievingly. "You mean—he's in there by himself—listening to recordings?"

"This is his hour for meditation," said Lola, straight-faced. "Be seated, please. I'll let you know when he's . . . !"

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" blazed Mrs. Townsend. "I don't know who you are—but you're fired!"

The door to Frank Jordan's private office suddenly opened and he stuck an inquisitive head out.

"What's going on here?" On sighting Mrs. Townsend, he exclaimed: "Why, Matilda! Come in! . . . Come in! . . ." Then, reprimandingly. "Miss Peters, why didn't you inform me that Mrs. . . . !"

"I asked if you were still busy," said Lola, "and you said . . . !"

"Never mind what I said," broke in Tony. "I'm never too busy to see Matilda . . . Mrs. Townsend . . . Please understand that, Miss Peters . . . !"

"Yes, sir!" said Lola, icily.

"I want this girl fired," said Mrs. Townsend. "She's too fresh and impertinent. Where did you get her? She's a new face to me!"

Lola was about to explode but a warning gesture from Tony silenced her.

"Step in, Matilda," he invited. "I've been wanting to see you. I've got a great idea . . . !"

"Don't change the subject," cut in Mrs. Townsend, as she entered her late husband's private office which now bore Frank Jordan's name on the door. "I want her fired, do you hear? Fired!"

Veronica Vance came hurrying out of her small secretary's office to console Lola who stood, hands on hips, defiantly facing the closed door.

"Good for you!" she said. "That's about the first time in her life anyone's ever stood up to her. I've never dared do it! But I've wanted to, often enough!"

Lola ran a hand up over her platinum blonde hair. She felt as though it were standing on end.

"So that's how you feel," she said to Miss Vance, and glanced around, guardedly. "Well, then—I guess I can tell you something. I'm crazy about that guy in there—and I'm not going to let her get him—if I can help it!"

Charlton L. Townsend's old secretary nodded, understandingly.

"I'm with you!" she said. "She's had things her own way and run people long enough. But you've got a fight on your hands. I suppose you can see that!"

Lola moistened her lips, resolutely.

"With both eyes shut!" she said.

"I like fighters!" said Miss Vance, admiringly. "If I can help—let me know!"

Lola pressed her hand with a sudden feeling of camaraderie. "You're swell!" she said. "I mean it!"

"You're *beautiful!*" said Miss Vance. "And *I* mean it!"

"Thanks!" said Lola, "for restoring my morale!"

CHAPTER X

INSIDE Frank Jordan's private office, the tempest was blowing itself out.

"I think you might at least have consulted me before you took these two people on," said Matilda. "I've never been so insulted in my life!"

Tony smiled, soothingly. "I know how you feel—but this is their first day and . . . !"

"I don't care—even when they knew it was me, they . . . !"

"It won't happen again," Tony promised. "They've worked for me before. I can vouch for them. They're tops."

Matilda eyed him, sharply.

"You don't need a receptionist. That's something Daddy never had. Miss Vance can take care of any visitors."

Tony shook his head, persuasively.

"Let's face it . . . there's not a woman employee who has any real charm or beauty. You've got beautiful offices here—and they need a beauty or two in 'em. Of course, it's all right when *you're* here . . ."

Matilda's eyes brightened and her face softened.

"Aren't you nice? That's what *Daddy* used to say!"

"But you can't be here enough of the time," argued Tony. "That's why I've . . . er . . . dressed the place up with Miss Peters . . ."

"She should be dressed *down!*" flared Matilda.

"You leave her to me!" urged Tony.

Matilda looked up at the portrait,

questioningly.

"Daddy, what do you think?" Then, to Tony: "He used to be distracted by good-looking women around him—all except me. Some men are like that, you know!" She eyed Tony, testily, and shot a second glance at the life-sized likeness. "How's that, Daddy? . . . Yes, I agree—she's quite an eyeful! . . . You say Mr. Jordan's different? . . . You sure? . . . All right, then, I'll withdraw my objections!" Matilda turned to Tony. "Daddy says I should let her stay—for the present—and see how it works out."

Tony stole a look at the portrait.

"Thank you, Daddy," he said. Then, catching himself. "Now you've got *me* talking to him!"

Matilda laughed. "You can't go wrong consulting Daddy. He's more help to me now than he was in the flesh."

Tony grimaced. "Excuse me," he protested. "While I count my goose pimples. I just can't get used to your talking about your departed husband that way. If you don't mind, I wish you'd keep these remarks to yourself. They're too personal!"

"Now, Frank," chided Matilda, "Don't tell me *you're* getting jealous?"

"I don't know what it is!" said Tony. "All I know is, I'm getting plenty fed up on 'Daddy this and Daddy that' . . . and if he's *really* around, I wish he'd take himself off on a *good long vacation!*"

"Why, Frank!" cried Matilda. "You've hurt Daddy's feelings! . . . He's GONE!"

Tony looked relieved. "You sure?"

"Positive!" said Matilda.

The new head of the Townsend Bread Company got to his feet and came around the desk to face the widow of the former Bread King.

"Then he can't have anything to say about this," he said—and kissed her.

Matilda clung to him, ecstatically.

"Oh, Frank!" she murmured, "I don't think Daddy's *ever* coming back!"

"Good!" said Tony, releasing her, gently. "When you go out—be big-hearted—and tell Miss Peters that you think she's okay . . . she's a nice kid . . . and it'll make her feel better, coming from you . . . !"

"Of course, dear!" purred Matilda. "Anything you say!"

HENRY ZANGER, two-fisted, big-chested head of Tasty Pastries, Incorporated, only rival bread concern in Homewood, was peeved. He was more than peeved, he was furious, as he sat looking at a floral horse-shoe with tag attached, bearing the signature of one "Frank Jordan."

"So he thinks I'll need this more than he does, does he?" Zanger raved. "Well, I'll show him. Old man Townsend couldn't stand the gaff—and he won't be able to, either. He'll wish he'd never come to this town before we get through with him!"

Zanger twisted a cigar to one side of his mouth and reached a pudgy fist for the telephone.

"Get me the City Health Department," he told the operator. Then, after a moment: "Hello, Dr. John Hawley, please!" There was a moment's wait during which he chewed savagely on his cigar. "John—this is Zanger . . . The time has come to turn the heat on Jordan . . . yeah—give him that 'unsanitary business' . . . You can catch him on something—dirty bread pans, employees, unclean handling, trucking . . . No, he won't tumble. What he knows about the bread business would be lost inside an atom . . . Make him sweat! . . .

Thanks, John—I'll see you about this later."

Zanger clapped the receiver down and sat looking off into space, with a satisfied grin.

"And this is only the beginning!" he said, mimicking an old saying, "Only the beginning!"

THINGS commenced happening at the Townsend Bread Company. Trucks mysteriously broke down on their routes, or tires blew out. Delivery service was disrupted, time and again. Grocers, hotel and restaurant owners, dependent on prompt receipt of fresh Townsend products for their trade, began to kick and threatened to change to "Tasty Pastry Baked Goods" unless service could be improved.

In the midst of these troubles, Townsend Bread Company was hit from another quarter. A short, self-important little man appeared and asked to see Mr. Jordan.

"Your name, please," said Lola.

"Roland Campbell from the City Health Department," said the man.

"Oh!" said Lola, and turned on her most winning smile. "Just a moment, Mr. Campbell! Was Mr. Jordan expecting you?"

The little man gave a short laugh. "I doubt it!" he said. "Nobody's ever expecting me."

Lola buzzed Tony and spoke into the inter-communication phone, "Mr. Campbell from the Health Department . . . I don't know, he didn't say. Okay, Mr. Jordan, right away!" She turned to the little man who had now approached uncomfortably close and was eyeing her with frank admiration. "Go on in, Mr. Campbell!"

"Anyone ever tell you, you've got beautiful hair?" he said.

"Occasionally," said Lola, eyeing him.

"Well, it won't hurt you to be told again," said the man. "I'm very observant—that's my business. And you don't seem to be engaged. How's about a date?"

Lola gave him the same winning smile but shook her head with a positive "no."

"They keep me too busy around here," she said.

The little man grinned and shook a finger at her: "All work and no play—what do they say? Makes Jack a dull boy! . . . Jill, too! . . . Better change your mind. You wouldn't know me away from business!"

"That does it!" said Lola, handing it back to him. "I never go out with strangers."

He laughed. "You're all right!" he said. "I'll have to put you down in my book. You'll be seeing more of me!"

He sauntered across the room, turned the knob of the private door marked "Frank Jordan" and went inside.

"How do you do, Mr. Campbell," greeted Tony. "Glad to meet you." He quietly turned a lever in a small machine beneath his desk.

"You may not be when I tell you why I'm here," said the representative from the Health Department. He smacked his lips with apparent relish which belied his tone. "I'm sorry to have to inform you, Mr. Jordan, but we've had a number of anonymous complaints concerning the unsanitary condition of your plant and the handling of your products!"

TONY was genuinely surprised. "I can't understand that," he said. "We've been maintaining the same high standards established by Mr. Townsend. That's one thing we're especially proud of—and always have been—our cleanliness."

The little man rolled his tongue inside his cheeks.

"Well, it's perhaps carelessness. Nothing you can't easily correct. This is just a warning. We don't expect to take any action . . . not unless . . . ?" He eyed Tony questioningly, then added: "I doubt if that will be necessary."

Tony breathed easier, reached for a pack of cigarettes and offered one.

"Thanks," said the little man, "Don't mind if I do. I'm all out!"

He took one, lighted up, then leaned back in his chair, self-assuredly with an air of confidence.

"By the way," he said, in an attempted off-handed air. "You might be interested to know . . . I get around where I hear things . . . It's being talked about town that Townsend Bread is slipping . . . I'd hate to see that, Mr. Jordan, because I always had a warm spot in my heart for Old Man Townsend—his wife, too . . . Now *there's* a woman!" As Tony nodded and smiled, he ventured a quip: "Of course, I prefer blondes myself—like the one in your office!" Tony's face clouded at this and he switched to his original subject. "But, getting back to what I've been hearing . . ." He was obviously feeling his way. "That is—if you'd like me to give you the low-down?"

"Very much, Mr. Campbell," encouraged Tony. "Being a new man in town, it's sometimes difficult for me to . . . !"

"Exactly!" said the little man, exhaling a huge puff of smoke. "But everyone seems to like you . . . yes, Mr. Jordan—I can honestly say that . . . Oh, of course, you have your enemies, as who doesn't? . . . Your competitor, Mr. Zanger—he's naturally against you . . ."

"That's different," said Tony. "One expects rivals in business."

"Right!" agreed the little man. "But, if I may—since I happen to be so situated—could I give you a little tip?"

"Certainly!"

"You don't want the Tasty Pastry outfit to get the jump on you, do you?"

"Not if I can help it," said Tony.

"Then I suppose you know that my Chief, Dr. Hawley, has been prevailed upon—from time to time—because of his position as a Health Authority, to publicly endorse different food products?"

Tony leaned back in his chair. "That so?" he asked casually.

"In fact," said the little man, lowering his voice, "and here's the tip, for what it may be worth—he's just considering an offer that's been made to him by Mr. Zanger to endorse the whole Tastry Pastry line!"

Tony's eyes narrowed. He flicked the ashes from the tip of his cigarette.

"That's very interesting," he said. "What's this tip worth to you?"

The little man was startled by his point-blank query.

"Oh, oh—nothing at all. I just thought . . . well, there still might be time for you to get to the Chief—and get him to . . . well, I've told you—now it's up to you . . . !"

TONY'S reply was deliberate and calculated.

"Do you think—if I topped Mr. Zanger's offer, that Dr. Hawley could be persuaded to grant his exclusive endorsement to the Townsend line?"

The little man stood up.

"I have reason to believe he could," he said. "After all, bread is bread, and quality is quality."

"Would you be in position to sound him out?" Tony proposed.

"Well . . . I don't know . . . possibly . . . this is a rather delicate

matter. I'm not supposed to be meddling in the Chief's business . . . but . . . !"

"See what you can do," pressed Tony, "and let me know."

"Okay," said the agent for the City Health Department, moving toward the door. "Don't worry too much about that sanitation warning—for the time being, anyway."

Tony smiled. "I won't," he said, "Good day, Mr. Campbell. Nice meeting you. Drop in again!"

Returning to his desk, the head of the Townsend Bread Company reached underneath and pushed a lever. A silently functioning device ceased its operation.

Outside, the little man had stopped by the desk of the receptionist.

"Changed your mind about a date?" he asked.

"Not yet," said Lola.

"I'll keep after you," he promised. "I'm not easily discouraged."

Lola smiled. "That's fine—because I'm not easily persuaded."

The little man laughed. "You're all right," he said. "Fast on the comeback. Better be nice to me, Baby—I can do your firm lots of good!"

He sauntered out, twirling his hat on his finger. Lola's buzzer was ringing.

"Yes, Mr. Jordan!" she said.

"Come right in!" said Tony.

Lola waved to Miss Vance to keep an eye on the switchboard which had been placed in her charge, and entered the private office.

"I don't know what you make of that guy," she burst out, "but I think he's a first class . . . !"

Tony interrupted. "Save your breath. Want to hear an interesting playback?"

He turned on the wire recorder. It began to repeat the conversation he had just had with Roland Campbell. As Lola listened, her eyes widened.

"Well, I'm a monkey's sister!" she exclaimed. "Talk about a shake-down! I thought we were above that kind of stuff! Don't tell me it goes on in this business, too?"

Tony smiled. "There's the evidence!"

"What are you going to do about it?"

Tony switched off the machine. "I'm going to get Dr. Hawley to commit himself, either in person or over the phone, if I can . . . and take it down on this recorder."

"But you're not going to pay him for an endorsement?"

Tony shook his head. "Of course not. Do you think Frank Jordan would do anything dishonest?"

Lola eyed Tony, skeptically.

"You don't mean that!"

"You bet I do!" said Tony. "I'm getting a big kick out of going straight. I want to prove to myself that it *can be done!*"

Lola laughed. "Frank Jordan," she said. "I thought I liked Tony Canero best—but I'm not so sure any more. I think I'm beginning to love *you!*"

"That's bad!" said the head of the Townsend Bread Company. "It's a good thing I turned off that recorder. Get out of here!"

"Not so fast!" said Lola, standing up and leaning across the desk toward him. "There's something I've been meaning to ask you. What did you say to Mrs. Townsend to get her to apologize to me?"

TONY looked amused. "It wasn't so much what I said," he confessed. "I have methods of persuasion . . ."

Lola's eyes flashed. "That's what I was afraid of!" she said.

Tony caught her hand and held it.

"Don't get excited, Gorgeous. I

know what I'm doing!"

"*You* do—but *I* don't!" said Lola. "Tony let go—you're hurting me!"

He was pulling her toward him, across the desk.

"Who do you want to kiss?" he said. "Canero or Jordan?"

"Neither one," she resisted. "I think they're both bums!"

She wrenched herself free and ran toward the door.

"You're playing very hard to get since you came to this town!" said Tony. "I'm crazy about you. I hope you know that!"

"Which man is talking?" asked Lola.

Tony hesitated. "I can't tell," he admitted.

"And I can't, either," said Lola. "Things are all mixed up—so I'm just going along for the ride till I know what's going to happen to Frank Jordan. And, incidentally, to Matilda Townsend!"

Tony grinned. "Okay, Gorgeous? . . . I'm beginning to realize how a leopard feels, trying to change his spots. It's not so easy!"

"You're telling me!" said Lola. "Don't they say that, sooner or later, animals always revert to type?"

"Not this animal!" declared Tony.

Lola laughed as she slipped out the door.

"We'll see!" she said. "We'll see!"

CHAPTER XI

EMERSON EVANS was Homewood's leading real estate magnate. He was noted throughout the county as a smart operator. Whenever citizens saw him emerge from a law office or bank, they'd say, "Wonder what property's been bought or sold now?" Hardly a week went by that Homewood papers didn't carry news stories of real estate deals engineered by the far-sighted Evans who had "Homewood's future at heart."

This particular day Evans was calling upon Percival Harrington, president of Homewood's State Bank. He had brought councilmen Roger Stickney and Pat O'Connor with him. The conference was ultra private, no secretaries permitted.

"It's the best location of all for a Municipal Golf Course," Evans was telling the attentive Banker Harrington. "And it can be bought for a song. I've got an option on it . . . and Rog and Pat tell me they can put a bill through the council for its purchase by the city."

"I thought that property on the other side of town was better," hedged Banker Harrington. "Nicer scenery, more rolling hills . . ."

"They want too much for it," reported Evans. "No chance for any real profit."

"I see. Then what do you propose to do?"

"Form a little buying syndicate," said Evans. "Get someone to head it up. Take over the property and hold it till the Council selects this land for the Golf Course. Then sell it to the City!"

Banker Harrington nodded. His long fingers scratched meditatively through his beard.

"The bank can't help you directly in this matter."

"Perhaps not, but I thought you might suggest a man who would join with me in this deal. I'd have to be his silent partner. I was thinking of Frank Jordan? Would he be the type?"

Banker Harrington debated. "Yes, I think he would," he decided.

"Zanger is anxious to get in," said Evans. "But somehow I don't exactly trust him. He talks too much."

"Jordan's better," advised Harring-

ton. "He's close-mouthed. I still don't know too much about his background. He's your man."

"Would it be an inducement for him to know Zanger wants in, if he doesn't invest?" asked Evans.

"That I wouldn't know," said Harrington. "If you like, I'll set up a meeting for you. I suggest you see him in his office."

FRANK JORDAN listened with great interest to the proposition made to him by the impressive appearing, slightly balding real estate magnate of Homewood.

"Let me get this straight, Mr. Evans," he repeated, slowly. "You want me to buy, in my name, with your money and mine—representing investments made by certain other unnamed principals, this property which will soon be condemned by the City Council and a price fixed upon it for purchase and conversion into a Municipal Golf Course?"

"That's it precisely!" said Mr. Evans, eyes gleaming. "A simple little real estate transaction and, within sixty days, we'll turn ourselves a handsome profit of around fifty thousand dollars."

"Of course—certain of the council members will have to be taken care of?"

"Naturally," smiled Evans. "But that's all been figured in."

"A little louder, please," requested Tony. "I didn't quite get that."

He reached under his desk and unobtrusively turned a dial.

"I say—the council members who put this bill through are getting their split. It's all been arranged. But you're not supposed to know about that. You're just interested in the property as an investment and you come to me to buy because you've learned I'm holding an option on it."

Tony nodded. "Sounds like a good deal. But I'll have to take a day to think it over. I'll give you my answer by noon tomorrow."

Evans could not conceal his disappointment.

"I was hoping you could decide at once."

"No, I'm sorry, it's a pretty big buy and I'd have to consult with my banker first."

"Meaning Harrington?" asked Evans.

"Yes, he's handling my affairs here. I don't want to touch certain other capital. I might have to float a sizable loan."

Evans smiled. "Oh, there's nothing to that. Harrington will let you have the money in a minute. He approves of this set-up—off the record, of course. And I don't mind letting you know—sub rosa, that he gets a kick-back, too."

Tony let Evans see his look of admiration.

"You don't leave a stone unturned, do you?" he said.

"You can't in this business," rejoined Evans, frankly. "How about it, Jordan? I have reasons for wanting to close this thing today. Your rival, Mr. Zanger, has been high-pressuring me to get in on it."

"He has?" said Tony, quickly. "How'd he hear about it?"

"One of the councilmen who's working with me is his close friend!"

"If Zanger knows about this and he's not in—aren't you taking a risk?"

EVANS shrugged his shoulders. "Not at all—Zanger's been in deals before, that can't stand the light of day. He'll give us no trouble."

Tony hesitated. "I've still got to think this over," he said. "Call me tomorrow!"

Emerson Evans got up to go.

"I shouldn't say this," he spoke out,

impulsively. "But Zanger's out to ruin you. Don't quote me—but I happen to know he's behind the sabotaging of your trucks. He's doing everything he can to discredit you in this town. It's either his hide—or yours."

Tony eyed Evans quietly. "I am well aware of that," he said. "And I am not accustomed to letting myself be skinned alive." He opened the door for the real estate magnate to exit. "Goodbye, Mr. Evans. I appreciate your confidence. A man doesn't know who to trust these days. It's nice to meet someone, for a change, who's absolutely on the level!"

Emerson Evans gave Frank Jordan a startled glance.

"Thank you, sir! Thank you!" he said, and made a hasty departure.

Tony, laughing, waved to Lola, called her in the office, slipped an arm about her, and walked her to the davenport.

"Relax, Gorgeous!" he invited, "and listen to another interesting recording. I'm getting quite a collection—but this is the hottest to date!"

Lola heard the record through.

"And I was the pure, innocent little big city girl who begged you to get out of the rackets and settle down somewhere and be a decent member of society!" she said.

Tony grinned. "I'm still decent," he said. "I haven't taken any of these propositions yet."

Lola eyed him, shrewdly. "Holding out for a bigger price?" she asked.

"No while Frank Jordan's around," said Tony. "He doesn't go for this stuff!"

"Oh, no!" teased Lola. "Maybe it's not money this time—maybe it's honors! Such as—how about—the outstanding citizen award?"

"Maybe you've got something there," conceded Tony.

"You'd pay a real price to get that?"

Tony hit the desk with his fist. "That's what I'm out after, Gorgeous. You can laugh but that title means more to me than anything I've ever aimed at. I've got to really do something worthwhile for this town of Homewood to get it—and I'm laying my plans."

Lola pointed to the wire recorder. "Getting ready to blackmail the town into giving it to you?" she asked.

Tony shook his head. "Just protecting myself," he said. "I don't ever want to play that thing back and hear Frank Jordan accepting a shady deal."

Lola gave him a quick kiss and jumped to her feet.

"I don't want to hear that, either," she said.

CHAPTER XII

IT WAS loudly whispered in certain Homewood circles "in the know," that School Lunches, as regulated by the Board of Education, provided a fat source of income for politicians in power. Licensed concessionaires made up the lunches each day and sold to the children in Homewood grade and high schools at prices which were designed to return "fair" profits. But it was not the lunches alone upon which politicians depended for revenue, as one Frank Jordan, head of the Townsend Bread Company, was soon to discover.

He was called upon by Political Boss Tim O'Leary, who outlined to him a proposal whereby Townsend Bread could be advertised throughout the entire school system.

"Before there were two bread companies in town, you people had everything exclusive," the fat and somewhat pompous Mr. O'Leary explained to Tony, in the quiet "sanctity" of his office. "But now, since Mr. Zanger is here with Tasty Pastry Bread, things are different."

"Why should they be?" asked Tony. "Doesn't the Board of Education select the food and milk which is adjudged the best for the children, regardless of make or company?"

Tim O'Leary chuckled. His chuckle developed into a full-throated laugh which progressed downward until it shook the jelly-like folds of his waistline.

"Ho, ho! Oh, ho, ho! You're not really that naive, Mr. Jordan! You must have your little joke?"

Tony kept his face straight, as though dealing a poker hand.

"No joke, Mr. O'Leary, I honestly thought the Board passed on all items in school lunches and only placed its endorsement on the milk and food possessing the highest nourishment value."

"In theory, yes!" admitted Mr. O'Leary, still wheezing from his amused explosion. "In practice, no! Of course, whatever the Board votes for is the "best," whether it is or not. The Board's the last word—it's official—who's going to argue against it?"

"Then if my Townsend Bread isn't really as good as Tasty Pastry—and if I have an 'in' with the Board," speculated Tony, "that's all that's necessary?"

The Boss Politician nodded. "That's all! And that's why I dropped around to see you. Mr. Townsend used to make a little political contribution about this time of year—but Mr. Zanger is taking quite an interest in our party. He'd like to get his Tasty Pastry substituted for Townsend. It's not only the regular order for that much bread a year—but it's the publicity. 'Every Child in Homewood Eats Our Bread' . . . that's a commercial plug that's hard to beat."

"It certainly is," admitted Tony. Then, pointedly. "About what sized contribution do you feel would be acceptable?"

Tim O'Leary divested himself of another chuckle which threatened to go the way of the other one.

"Ho, ho! That's the way I like 'em, Mr. Jordan—right out with it—on the line. Well, we'll let you off easy this year. You can sew this School Lunch business up for only ten thousand dollars!"

"Ten thousand!" said Tony. "We'd have to sell a lot of bread for that amount."

"IT'S the advertising!" declared Tim. "And, incidentally, the protection. I see you're having difficulty with your trucks being damaged . . . the police don't seem able to do much about that . . . It's a damned shame, Mr. Jordan . . . But where there's stiff competition, that's apt to happen. It *could* happen to Zanger just as easily, you know."

"Yes, I suppose it could," considered Tony. "Well, Mr. O'Leary, I may be simple-minded and naive, as you suggest, but I've always gone on the basis that if a man made a better mouse-trap than his neighbor, the world would, some day, beat a path to his door. Townsend Bread has been tops for years—and it's a better loaf than Tasty Pastry today. Why should I pay ten thousand dollars of my company's money for you to influence the Board to use Townsend Bread? I'd rather pat that amount in radio—and tell the world it's the 'best' bread myself!"

Tim O'Leary's broad face sobered. He fingered a watch fob which hung from a vest pocket.

"Yeah? Well, that may have been a bit too steep . . . we'll say the figure is seventy-five hundred. It's front page news when the Board of Education selects Townsend Bread over Tasty Pastry. Don't tell me, Mr. Jordan, that's not worth paying for!"

"You're dead right, it's worth paying for!" said Tony, getting to his feet. "But I intend paying for it my way. Mr. Zanger's your man, Mr. O'Leary! I don't talk your language. Good day!"

Political Boss Tim O'Leary got to his feet in open-mouthed astonishment.

"You don't mean it, Mr. Jordan! . . . Without the right support in this town, you can't last!"

"That remains to be seen!" said Tony. "But any deal that's made with Townsend Bread has got to be on the *up and up!*"

This was too much for Homewood's political boss. A great boom of laughter almost shattered him. He went rocking out of the office, beating his sides and howling.

"Oh, ho, ho! Ho, ho, ho! *Up and up!* Ho ho, ho! Wait till the boys hear of this"

Lola, looking after the disappearing hulk, turned to Tony who stood in his private doorway.

"What's so funny?" she inquired.

"*I* am," he said, unsmiling.

Veronica Vance came running over, worried.

"Mr. O'Leary's a power in this town," she said. "Did you arrange for the School Lunch business again next year?"

"Come in, ladies," Tony invited. "I have one more entertainment to present to you in my Fellow Townspeople Series."

He motioned Lola and Veronica to chairs and switched on the wire recording play-back. He sat, studying their faces as they listened.

"I don't know," confessed Miss Vance. "I was disillusioned years ago. You can't beat the system. I'm afraid, Mr. Jordan, you've let yourself in for a lot of trouble."

"Tony smiled. "I'm sure of it, Miss Vance. But, if you must know, this is a game with me! Miss Peters is in on it—and so is Sammy. I'm just trying to see if any business can be run strictly on the level today!"

MR. TOWNSEND'S veteran secretary adjusted her shell-rimmed glasses. Her eyes were glistening as she looked at the man who had succeeded the founder of the company.

"I admire you, Mr. Jordan, very much," she said. "But the way this world is organized, I don't believe that you or anyone else can get very far unles you 'play ball,' as they say."

Tony looked from his secretary to his receptionist.

"How do you feel about this, Miss Peters?"

Lola met his gaze. "I'm inclined to agree with Miss Vance," she said. "But I'm curious to see how long a person can go against the tide."

Tony grinned. "You mean — how long it will take for me to ruin the Townsend Bread Company?"

"Well," said Lola, "if you put it that way!"

The telephone was ringing and Lola answered it.

"Yes, just a moment!" She placed her hand over the mouthpiece. "It's Emerson Evans calling!"

Tony glanced up at the wall clock. "Oh, yes—I promised to give him my answer this noon and it's now four p.m." He reached for the phone. "Hello, Mr. Evans! . . . Fine, thank you! . . . Yes, I've thought it over. That's not for me, Mr. Evans. I understand . . . very confidential . . . yes, you'd better let Mr. Zanger in . . . yes, I know—it's a sure thing . . . Sorry I couldn't reconsider. Good luck, sir!" Tony hung up.

The phone rang again. This time it was Roland Campbell. Tony cut in

the recording device.

"Get on the extensions," he told Miss Vance and Lola.

"Yes, Mr. Campbell?"

"About that little matter we discussed the other day," said Campbell's voice, "I'm in Doctor Hawley's office now and the Doctor says, while he's very particular about what products he gives his endorsement to—he's known, for years, what fine bread Townsend's is . . . and if you'd like him to make a written statement that you can use in your advertising . . . he'd be glad to talk to you."

"That's fine!" said Tony. "Put him on the line!"

"Okay!" said Campbell's voice. Here you are, Doctor—here's Mr. Jordan."

A deeper voice answered in a cautious tone.

"This is Dr. Hawley."

"Hello, Doctor—sorry we haven't met yet, in person—but I've heard a lot about you."

"I hope it's all good?"

"It's *good* all right!" said Tony, with emphasis. "Tell me, Doctor, what would it be worth to you to recommend Townsend products above all others in their field?"

There was a moment's silence. "Well, if I was to let you write your own copy—whatever you'd like me to say," proposed the Doctor's voice, "How would twenty-five hundred be?"

Miss Vance spoke up, guardedly. "His endorsement would mean a lot. Dr. Hawley has a big following in this part of the state. He writes a newspaper column which is widely read . . . and, of course, as head of the Health Department . . . !"

"Just a minute, Doctor, I'm thinking this over," said Tony, into the phone. He covered the mouthpiece. "But it's graft, any way you look at it," he said to the two women. "You heard his proposition—he'll say anything I want him to say—and he'd say the same thing for Tasty Pastry!"

"That's just the point!" said Miss Vance, nervously. "And we can't afford to have him do that!"

TONY returned to the phone. "Hello, Doctor?"

"Yes, Mr. Jordan."

"Mr. Campbell mentioned to me that you had received complaints about unsanitary conditions in our plant. I'm disturbed about that. I wouldn't want to embarrass you, in your position as health officer, in case . . . !"

"I understand, Mr. Jordan. That's very considerate . . . but your company has an excellent past record and I doubt . . . !"

"I'm sorry, Doctor, I guess I'd better think this proposition over a little longer. It's nice to have talked with you," said Tony.

"Just a moment!" said the Doctor's voice. "Mr. Campbell wants to speak to you again!"

"Okay—put him on!"

"That wolf!" said Lola! "Little man, what now?"

Roland Campbell's voice was oily.

"You needn't be concerned about anything, Mr. Jordan. The Doctor's just stepped out of his office so I can talk freely. Mr. Zanger's been on his trail all day—making the same offer—but Dr. Hawley feels—well, after my talking to him—he'd prefer endorsing your products."

"That's nice of him," said Tony. "But I've just made up my mind, Mr. Campbell—I'm not going in for any endorsements at present. We intend to sell Townsend Bread on its merits. If Mr. Zanger feels that he needs endorsements to sell Tasty Pastry products—then he's Dr. Hawley's man. Thank you just the same for your efforts on

my behalf."

There was a pause on the line and muffled sounds of voices. Then Campbell again, somewhat irritated.

"I think you're making a big mistake, Mr. Jordan—but, of course that's your business!"

"It certainly is," replied Tony. "Well, Mr. Campbell, I guess that's all for now. But as I said the other day, it was nice meeting you. When you're in this neighborhood again, drop in and see us!"

"That," said Mr. Campbell, "you can depend on!"

Tony hung up the receiver as Miss Vance and Lola left their extensions.

"I didn't like the tone of his last remark," said Lola.

"I didn't, either," said Miss Vance. "You weren't exactly diplomatic, Mr. Jordan. If you'd been asking my advice, I'd have said—buying that endorsement would have been cheap at the price!"

"No it wouldn't!" said Tony. "As I sit here right now, I owe nothing to any man and nobody's got anything on me—and that, my dear ladies—is a damned good feeling!"

There was a sharp rap on the door. Lola ran to open it and Sammy rushed in. His face was bruised and bloody.

"Say, Tony—I mean—Mr. Jordan!" he cried.

Miss Vance looked queerly from Townsend's top executive to the special policeman.

"What is it, Sammy?"

"I'm just back from Trip Number Three. They jumped the truck when it was parked at the Four Corners Grocery—tried to cripple the engine and slash the tires. I caught 'em both—two kids about sixteen!"

Tony was on his feet and hurrying to Sammy.

"Did you bring 'em here?"

"No, I turned them over to Chief of Police Avery."

"Why didn't you ring me?"

"I did but your line was busy. Operator said there was no one at your switchboard and there was someone talking on your direct wire."

"What did you find out—anything?"

"Yeah—the red head squealed. He said they'd been hired by Zanger."

"Did you tell that to the Chief?"

"I sure did."

"Is he holding them? Did you prefer charges?"

"I didn't do nothin'. I just beat it on out here to see why I couldn't raise you."

"All right—let's go! Look's like the kids gave you quite a tussle!"

Why not? The other one had a hammer. I didn't want to use my gun on kids. But, Brother—are they tough?"

Miss Vance was crying. "Oh, dear—nothing like this ever happened before—in all the years I've been with Townsend!"

Tony turned to her. "Well, Miss Vance, you'd better get used to it. Things always happen around me. If you don't think so, ask Miss Peters! . . ."

He made for the door, Sammy following.

"Mr. Jordan's not kidding," said Lola, as Miss Vance collapsed on the davenport. "You can expect plenty of excitement from now on! This is what happens to a man when he tries to live on the level!"

CHAPTER XIII

HOMEWOOD'S Police Chief Al Avery had been head of the department too long. Mayor Fred Goodwillie had also been in his office too long. But the political machine which had put

them in power had successfully resisted the efforts of complaining but indifferent voters to oust them!

"If you can keep from stepping on too many people's toes at the same time," Mayor Goodwillie had given out as a political formula, "you can stay in office as long as you like!"

He was the living proof it. So was Police Chief Avery. Both men could carry water on both shoulders for miles without spilling a drop.

Right at this moment, the Chief was doing one of his best juggling acts. Henry Zanger was a special friend of his. Wouldn't do for these boys the Townsend special officer had caught to be held for trial. It might lead to an open town scandal.

"You kids get out of here and get quick!" he said, after talking with them. "Keep your mouths shut and keep out of trouble from now on! You're lucky I feel like letting you off easy!"

By the time Sammy and Tony arrived, all was peaceful and serene at the police station.

"Hello, Chief," said Tony. "Where are those kids? I want to talk to them!"

Chief Avery did not bother to move his lanky frame from the swivel chair, nor uncross his legs from the battered desk.

"Too late, Mr. Jordan. I let 'em go!"

"You let 'em go?"

"Sure. There weren't any charges ag'in 'em."

"I told you I was going for Mr. Jordan—and we'd be right back!" said Sammy. "What's the big idea?"

Chief Avery leaned back until the chair creaked alarmingly, and drew a bead on Sammy with his eyes.

"No idea at all. We don't fill up our jail with people just because they've been turned in here by citizens or special police. These kids told me they'd been framed. Said their car had broken down near your truck. One of them got out with a hammer and some other tools to see if he could fix his engine . . . and the second boy was following him, when you jumped them and commenced beating them up."

"Sure!" exploded Sammy, jabbing a thumb at himself. "Only it happens they were working on the engine of our truck—not their car . . . and this second kid has a broken milk bottle and was slashing away at one of our tires. You bet you life I grabbed 'em . . . and they gave me a battle, too . . . till our truck driver got back from his delivery—and pitched in and helped me!"

Chief Avery appeared unimpressed.

"That's your story. I have just as much right to believe the kids!"

"But you're not the judge!" protested Sammy. "Why should I pick on a couple of innocent boys—just to make myself look good?"

"It has been done," said the Chief, without blinking an eye.

"Why, you . . . !" raged Sammy.

TONY caught his arm. "Listen, Chief—I've phoned you, time and again, to report damage to our trucks and ask better police protection. You've done nothing but make a lot of promises. You never sent any officers out to ride our trucks or really investigate this thing. We've had to do the best we could ourselves!"

Chief Avery glowered.

"I've explained to you, Mr. Jordan, that the force is short-handed. There's been so many assaults and street robberies the last few weeks—a regular epidemic—we didn't have any extra coppers to man your bread trucks. But our plainclothes men have been . . . !"

"Sitting on their fannies, doing nothing, too!" scorched Tony.

This brought Chief Avery's feet to the floor with a bang. He shook a long, bony finger in Tony's face.

"You've been riding me pretty hard on this case, Mr. Jordan. Bringing in these kids looks fishy to me . . . like a put up job. You'd like to show up my department. Well, I've been in this town a sight longer'n you have . . . and I can't be pushed around!"

"Nobody's trying to push you around," denied Tony. "How much does Zanger pay you—*not* to give me protection?"

The face of Homewood's police chief turned a fire red. Blood vessels fairly bulged.

"Why, you dirty, lying . . . !"

"Careful, Chief! I won't take that kind of name-calling from anyone!" warned Tony.

"I ought to call you worse than that," stormed Avery. "Accusing me!"

"Why shouldn't I? . . . Sammy said one of the boys confessed to him that Zanger had hired them to disable our trucks!"

"That's a lie, too!" denounced Chief Avery, stamping about behind his chair. "Both boys denied mentioning Zanger. Said they didn't even know him . . . never heard his name till I mentioned it to them."

Sammy could hardly contain himself.

"Hey! Somebody's lying all right—and it's not me! You're covering them up—that's what you're doing! You know damn well they were working for Zanger. That's the reason you let 'em go! What a racket!"

"Get out of here, both of you, before I put you under arrest!" raved Chief Avery.

"I'll get out of here but I'll punch you in the nose first!" threatened Sammy, waving a fist under the Chief's nose.

Tony stepped between the two men and pushed Sammy back.

"Come on," he said. "It's easy to see that a decent citizen can't get protection from his own police department. How much do I have to pay to get it?"

"Get out, I said!" screamed the Chief.

A sergeant and two police officers, hearing the commotion, hurried in.

"We're going," announced Tony, quietly. "But if one more of our trucks is damaged in any way—I'm going to hold you personally responsible—and the whole town's going to know about it! I'll never let up on you till I run you out of town!"

THE head of the Townsend Bread Company and his special police officer walked out, leaving a shaken but raving chief of police behind.

"That was telling him," Sammy complimented, as he slid behind the wheel of a Townsend runabout. "He and Zanger are in cahoots without any doubt. But what in hell are we gonna do about this? Take it lying down?"

"No," said Tony, grimly. "The time has come for me to meet Henry Zanger. Let's see what time it is?" He glanced at his wrist watch. "Just past five. If we hurry we may still catch him at his office!"

Sammy stepped on the starter, put the car in gear and it jumped away from the curb.

"Way I feel now," he said. "I could cheerfully bump the guy off!"

"You're waiting outside," said Tony. "I'm seeing him alone!"

TASTY PASTRY employees were leaving the plant for the day when the two Townsend Bread officials

arrived. One remained in the car while the other went inside, past the outcoming line.

"Where's Mr. Zanger's office?" he asked, of some girls.

"Straight back on the right hand side," said one of them.

"Is he still in?"

"I think so," said another. "I just saw him a few minutes ago."

Tony strode down the corridor to a suite marked: "Henry Zanger, President." The secretary's desk was in the outer office but she was not there. The inner office door was ajar and Tony could hear the voice, apparently of Zanger, talking on the phone. He pushed the door open and stood in the doorway.

Heavy-set, beetle-browed Zanger was seated at his desk but turned away from the door. He had swung in his swivel chair so he could took out the window as he talked. He did not see his uninvited visitor.

"You say one of the kids broke down and mentioned my name? . . . The red head! . . . Yeah, that's bad. What did Jordan say? . . . He was sore, eh?"

Tony, looking about, stepped to the secretary's desk and picked up a phone. He put the receiver to his ear and commenced pushing buttons until he was cut in on Zanger's wire.

"Your damn right I was sore," he said, "And I still am!"

"Who's that?" asked the Chief's voice.

"I don't know," said Zanger. Then, glancing toward his outer office, he started and yelled: "Hey, you! Get off that line!" Jumping up, Zanger shouted excitedly into the phone, "Goodbye, Chief—I'll have to call you back!"

Ablaze with fury, the head of Tasty Pastries, Incorporated, rushed toward his outer office and the brazen intruder.

Tony met him calmly at the door, bringing him to an abrupt stop as he blocked the way.

"Henry Zanger, I believe!" he greeted, icily. "My name's Jordan, in case you haven't guessed!"

"You've got a lot of nerve!" fired Zanger.

"So have you—a hell of a lot!" Tony fired, in return.

The head of Tasty Pastries had been taken so unaware that he was temporarily tongue-tied.

"Aren't you going to invite me in?" asked Tony.

"You *are* in, aren't you?" Zanger managed.

"I thought it was about time we were getting acquainted," advanced Tony. He took out a pack of cigarettes and extended it. "Have one?"

IMPULSIVELY, Zanger reached for one. The two rivals eyed each other at close range as Tony held up his lighter, produced a flame and touched it to the tip of his opponent's cigarette. The light cast a somber reflection on features essentially cruel beneath a mask of studied geniality. Tony knew he was facing a foe who was shrewd to the point of craftiness. He had seen Zanger's type many times in the underworld. He smiled as he lighted his own cigarette.

"Nice offices!" he commented, looking inside.

Zanger relaxed, warily, and motioned to a chair as he backed into the room.

"All right, Jordan. Come in—have a seat. I was just about to leave. What's on your mind?"

Tony sauntered in, taking his time, emitting leisurely puffs of smoke.

"Don't rush me, Zanger. That's not polite. Let's just have a friendly chat

first, before we get down to—shall I say 'business' . . .?"

Tony seated himself and Zanger returned to his swivel chair, looking exceedingly uncomfortable. Both men sought to out-do each other in nonchalance but the effort was unsuccessful. Tension was building up each second and fairly standing in the atmosphere. Finally, Zanger, running a thick finger beneath his collar, said: "I'll have to be leaving in fifteen minutes. I'm meeting my wife at the door. It's Ladies' Night at Kiwanis."

"Fine!" said Tony. "I want to meet Mrs. Zanger, too. She interests me almost as much as you do."

Zanger exploded with exasperation. "Will you stop kidding around and come to the point?"

Tony blew a perfect smoke ring and watched it sail, jauntily, toward the ceiling. He grinned.

"Can you do that?"

Zanger spanked the flat of his hand on his desk top. "Cut it out!"

Tony was unmoved. "You folks don't miss a social event, do you? Giving Homewood's high society a big play. Think that's going to make you top dogs in town!"

Zanger leaped to his feet. "What in hell are you driving at?"

"Sit down—take a load off your brain," said Tony, easily. He glanced at his wrist watch. "I'm keeping track of time, Zanger."

The head of Tasty Pastries sank back in his chair, face wet with perspiration. Tony dropped a hand in the side pocket of his coat and Zanger jumped.

"Nervous tonight, aren't you?" he observed. "No, I haven't got a gun. And I don't have to hire kids to do my dirty work for me!"

Zanger's face put on its mask. "Kids? What kids?"

"The kids you were talking about on the phone," said Tony. "The redhead who mentioned your name. The boys who've been raising hell with our trucks, on orders from you!"

"Me?" Zanger repeated. "I was talking to Chief Avery about that when you came in! Imagine those kids trying to put the blame on me for their devilment? Pretty clever way out for them. We may be competitors but I hope you don't think I'd stoop to such tactics?"

TONY was eyeing him, vastly amused.

"Pretty quick thinking, Zanger, but not quick enough. You've been getting away with murder in this town since Townsend died. You and your wife figured it was just a matter of time before you'd have Mrs. Townsend on the run—and she'd have to sell out. Well, I've just dropped in to let you know that I've taken all I'm going to take from you. Nothing more underhanded goes, see! I'll compete with you on the up-and-up—and if you lick me, okay. But any more double-dealing and I'll hit you with everything in the book. Do we understand each other?"

Zanger, who had been holding his breath, let it out with a laugh.

"You've got a vivid imagination, Mr. Jordan. My wife and I are civic spirited. We're interested in doing all we can for the town. You haven't been here long enough . . . you've naturally misunderstood . . . Mrs. Townsend has probably been talking . . . she may be even jealous . . . but I'm glad know now why you came to see me." He extended his hand. "I'm sorry I didn't come to see *you*—it was really my place. But I sent the flowers as evidence of my good will . . . and I couldn't comprehend why you returned them. I do now." He was still holding out his hand which Tony had not taken. "Can't

we shake hands—and be friends—and co-operate together for the . . . er . . . good of Homewood?"

Zanger had a compelling personality. Tony had to admire the man's smooth ability to talk himself out of a tough situation.

"All right," he said, and gripped Zanger's hand. "But what I said still goes!".

The head of Tasty Pastries was not out of the woods yet.

"My wife may be a few minutes late," he said. "Perhaps you'd rather meet her some other time?"

Tony shook his head. "Oh, no," he said. "I'm in no hurry. I'll be glad to wait."

The tension commenced to build up again.

"I understand," said Tony, in a matter-of-fact tone, "that you have closed an exclusive deal with the Board of Education to supply the bread and pastry for School Lunches?"

Zanger showed an instinctive reaction, but covered quickly.

"Not yet. We've naturally put in a bid for this business—but the Board hasn't met yet."

"Does the Board have to meet?" Tony asked, with deliberate and obvious naivete.

Zanger's face colored.

"You know it does!" he said.

"Strange," said Tony, "I was under the impression that what Tim O'Leary tips off the Board members to do, they do!"

Zanger was about to make reply but checked himself and took a drag on his cigarette instead.

"I also understand," continued Tony, offhandedly, enjoying his competitor's discomfiture, "that Dr. Hawley is endorsing Tasty Pastry products for a nice fee."

"No fee!" denied Zanger. "That's not allowed. No health officer can endorse a product for a cash consideration—only on the basis of merit as determined by food and health standards."

"What do you call his compensation then—a charitable donation?" asked Tony, quietly.

Zanger looked uneasily at his watch.

"My wife should be here now," he said, getting up and grabbing his hat.

AS THEY walked toward the main entrance of the plant, Tony changed to still another subject.

"That's an interesting golf project," he remarked. "I was sorry I couldn't invest. You and Evans and Harrington and the rest should make a good piece of dough."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Zanger.

"Then I'll have to wait and read about it in the paper," said Tony, "after the city council passes the bill to buy the property you gentlemen are now holding."

"It's all news to me," said Zanger. "You shouldn't believe all you hear."

Tony laughed. "Zanger," he said, "you should be in the business I used to be in—you'd be a big shot in no time!"

The head of Tasty Pastries eyed his rival.

"What business is that?"

"Skip it. You're doing all right where you are." Tony pointed. "I believe that's your wife!"

A smartly dressed woman was standing just outside the big front glassed doors. She waved and smiled at Zanger as he swung the door open and stepped out, with Tony just behind him.

"Hello, dear!"

Zanger bent his really imposing figure and kissed her. She was a bright-eyed, auburn-haired woman, a little on

the hard, calculating side, in Tony's observation.

"Darling," said Zanger, trying to communicate as much as he could in a look, "I'd like you to meet our . . . er . . . a . . . new competitor, Frank Jordan!"

Mrs. Zanger's mouth flew open. Her surprise was complete. She gave her husband a quick consulting glance and then tardily held out her hand.

"Well, Mr. Jordan—I'm *so* glad to meet you!"

Tony took her hand and held it while he said: "I've heard so much about you, Mrs. Zanger—I insisted on waiting to meet you."

"Oh, how nice of you!"

"Mr. Jordan dropped in to get acquainted," explained Zanger, a bit lamely. "He's . . . er . . . heard of lot of rumors flying around town—and he thought they ought to be cleared up."

"Oh, yes, I should say!" exclaimed Mrs. Zanger, taking her cue. "There's just no reason why you men shouldn't be the best of friends!"

"None at all," said Tony, "on the basis I've just been outlining to your husband. Well, now that I've broken the ice, I hope you people will come over and see me! I'd be delighted to show you around a *real* bakery!"

The two Zangers laughed, it seeming the appropriate thing to do.

"Of course, our methods may not be quite sanitary enough for you," said Tony. "We were warned just recently by the Health Department—but we'll try to be spic and span at any time you drop in!"

Zanger took his wife by the arm.

"We've really got to be running. Glad to have seen you, Jordan. We'll be in touch!"

HE HELD out his hand and the two rivals shook. Tony doffed his hat and bowed to Mrs. Zanger, paying her marked attention.

"I suppose your husband's told you this many times," he said, "but may I say it again . . . *I think you're very beautiful!*"

The unexpected compliment had the explosive force of an atom bomb. Mrs. Zanger blushed with astonishment, then pleasure.

"Oh! . . . Why, thank you, Mr. Jordan! . . . Thank you!"

Zanger angrily pulled his wife away. "Come on, dear—we're late!"

Tony watched them hurry to their car, talking animatedly to one another, as they drove away. Then, inwardly amused, he returned to the Townsend car—and Sammy.

"Well?" greeted his faithful special policeman. "Where did you leave the body?"

Tony slid in the seat beside Sammy as they got under way.

"I decided to let him live," he said.

"Who was that lady I seen waiting outside?"

Tony smiled. "That was no lady!"

"No?" grinned Sammy. "Then I'll finish the gag—it was his *wife!*"

"Correct!" Tony laughed. "I don't wonder Mrs. Townsend's worried. She's a nice looking Number!"

"Not bad!" admitted Sammy. "And, Brother, you made some hit with her!"

"How's that?"

"They went right by me and never saw me," said Sammy. "And I heard her saying to him, 'Well, I don't care, Henry, I think Mr. Jordan is a nice guy!'"

"Great," said Tony, "that's just what I wanted her to think!"

Sammy eyed the head of the Townsend Bread Company.

"What are you tryin' to do—break up a happy home? You've already got *one* Bread King's wife—if you want

her!"

Tony grinned. "I've *got* what I want—I've got Zanger *guessing!* He can't figure me at all! . . . Sammy—this fighting with *wits* instead of *guns* is great sport! If I'd known how much fun it was, I'd have gone legitimate sooner!"

"Yeah?" said Sammy. "But when comes the pay-off?"

"The pay-off comes," said Tony, "when I lick Zanger—on the square!"

Sammy shook his head. "Frank Jordan'll never do that," he declared. "I'm bettin' you right now—if you ever lick Zanger—it'll take Tony Canero to do it!"

CHAPTER XIV

MATILDA TOWNSEND had not been seeing as much of Frank Jordan as she had wanted. He had acted as her escort at important social functions out of courtesy and the feeling that this would help his standing in business as well as society. But Tony had definitely felt that he could not trust himself too much in her company. She was eccentric but she could also be exciting. And the line of gentlemen interested in her—bachelors, widowers and other women's husbands, still formed on the right at every occasion where attendance could be danced upon her.

Banker Percival Harrington, her most persistent suitor resented her interest in Frank Jordan but did not dare object too strenuously for fear of incurring her displeasure. Secretly he regretted his enthusiasm in recommending Jordan as "the man for whom she was looking" to run her business. Harrington lived in apprehension that she might inveigle the new head of Townsend Bread into running her life.

"Jordan's a very engaging, competent person," Harrington told Matilda. "But I wouldn't become too sentimental over him, my dear. Remember, you've a tendency to become too exuberant over men."

Matilda had reached up and given his beard a little tug, at this point, saying: "Such as my exuberance over you, Percy?" and he had hastily added: "No, no! Of course not! Present company excepted!"

But Matilda would never let Banker Harrington get too serious.

"You'd have to part with your beard, if I ever consented to marry you," she once said to him, "and that would be asking you to make too great a sacrifice!"

"You're joking!" said the President of Homewood's State Bank, but his face had turned pale at the thought.

LOLA PETERS kept a closer watch on the time one Frank Jordan spent with Matilda Townsend than he realized. Residing in the same hotel, Lola usually knew when Tony was out for the evening—and being his receptionist at the office, working in association with Miss Vance, she was informed of his appointments, where and with whom.

Being with Tony in this kind of business hadn't given her the opportunities for working together that she had hoped for. She had felt a real part of his life in the Night Club—remaining with him after hours while he counted up—doing a little romancing, perhaps, talking about the day when he'd have enough to pull out and, while he'd never actually asked her to marry him—she'd just taken for granted that he'd get around to it, at the right time.

Here in Homewood, Lola had found herself up against a different set-up and —another woman. Society was as un-

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CASE OF THE PERILOUS PARTY

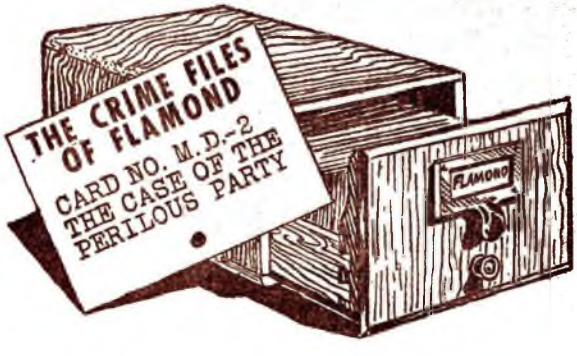
By George B. Anderson

A noisy party seemed an excellent place for murder —but not with Flamond there

A SOUND-DECIBEL machine would have hit the top of the meter at the moment Ginger Carlisle took the drumstick from the pimple-faced boy at the traps. She pounded the cymbal, trying to cut through the shouts of her party guests.

"Quiet, everybody, please. Pull-leeze!"

Guy Carlisle, lounging against the game-room bar, grinned. He was fond of his daughter and he liked this post-war crowd that seemed to think the



The impact took both men off their feet . . . and gravity did the rest

best way to get rid of nerves was to forget about inhibitions.

He was proud of Ginger's pert face and trim figure. He thought, trying to be impartial, that her shiny-black hair and deep blue eyes were as nice as they come. He had no idea concerning her intelligence but thought that anyone with such flip, quick enthusiasm must be at least normally alert.

He was pleased with the quick attention she'd received, the way she'd brought complete quiet out of madhouse bedlam.

"I decided to give you guys and gals a real thrill tonight," she was saying, "something completely out of this world."

She had the crowd's attention, no question of it.

"What's the pitch?" Hartley Graham asked. Hartley was her particular pet, a thin, nervous and terribly intense young man.

Ginger favored him with a smile. "Don't hurry me, Hartley," she said. "I'm doing this my own way. Thinking of how dull things have been lately, I began trying to decide who'd made them dullest for me."

"I hope I'm not on your list," Graham said.

"Why, Hartley, you're my dream on the beam. But, thinking of people who bore me, it was just a step to people I hate."

A girl who'd been told she looked like Myrna Loy and had never gotten over it, spoke softly. "Why, I thought you loved everybody, darling."

"I'll pass that one, kitten," Ginger said, smiling. "You know, Millie, nobody hates very many people—really hates, I mean. Oh, there are plenty of people you'd walk across the street to avoid meeting, but not many you'd risk your life to kill." She paused a few seconds. "I could think of only one person I hated that much."

"Just who is this pet hate of yours, Ginger?" the girl with the synthetic Loy look asked.

"I'm not going to tell you that, Millie. That's part of the game."

"Oh, please, darling," Millie protested. "Not games! Don't you think they're a little on the childish side?"

"There's nothing childish about this game," Ginger assured the girl. "I decided I'd kill that person I hate so much."

Millie was impressed, but tried not to show it. "They tell me the electric chair is awfully uncomfortable, Ginger—and—don't they have to shave a spot on your head?"

Guy Carlisle wondered what kind of a trick his daughter was playing. She seemed absolutely serious.

"I'll take my chances of being caught," Ginger continued. "That's what will make this such a marvelous game. I'm going to kill Mr. X and I'm putting up a prize for anyone who can get me convicted of the murder."

Hartley Graham took a quick puff on his cigaret. "What kind of a prize?" he asked.

Ginger Carlisle was still serious. "Five thousand dollars," she told him. "Maybe even more."

"Is that the reason for the detective being here?" a dark-skinned young man asked. The whole crowd turned to Flamond and Sandra Lake. Flamond seemed uphappy about the attention.

Ginger smiled at Flamond, but received no recognition. She addressed the crowd again. "I know you've heard 'The Crime Files of Flamond' on the radio," she said. "And I thought you'd all like to see him and his perfectly lovely secretary in the flesh."

"And not bad flesh," a male voice on the edge of the crowd put in. Ginger ignored it.

"Flamond," she said, "is supposed to be frightfully clever. A psychologist detective—practically a mind reader. His radio stories have always fascinated me—the way he knows a woman is guilty of murder because she starts wearing a new shade of rouge. And if he's able to convict me of murder, knowing nothing about my friends or my enemies, the prize jumps to ten thousands dollars."

The girl was enjoying the sensation she'd created. "This tops any gag you've ever pulled, Ginger," Hartley Graham said. "It's terrific."

FLAMOND, his left hand on the lovely blonde Sandra Lake's shoulder, was edging through the crowd toward Ginger Carlisle.

"Miss Carlisle, please," he said. "Don't be a complete imbecile."

Ginger favored him with her best smile. "Why, what's the matter, Flamond?" she asked. "You look angry."

"I've never been madder in my life," the detective said. "You've just done one of the stupidest things I ever saw a woman do, and I've seen some mighty moronic females in my time."

Hartley Graham tried to take his arm. "Oh, come on now, fellow," he protested. "Be a sport."

Flamond brushed the boy's hand aside. "I came here with misgivings. In spite of all the mystery surrounding the request for a detective at this party, I didn't believe it could be completely idiotic."

A peroxide blonde showed her appreciation. "Oh, Ginger, this is priceless. He sounds just like on the radio. Is this all part of the game?"

Flamond wasn't through. "Miss Carlisle," he said, "you seem to think it's funny to make a joke of death, of murder. It isn't. You think you're quite a sensation, giving your silly friends a thrill. Well, let me tell you something. You've just given any potential murderer an opportunity to kill somebody and pin it onto you."

Ginger grinned, but the grin faded. "You're being rather nasty, Flamond," she said. "I told you I'd pay you any fee you wanted for coming here this evening."

"I don't want your money," the detective answered. "You think you can get away with anything as long as you pay cash, don't you?"

"I don't know," Ginger said, and now she wasn't smiling. "I wasn't joking. I don't think murder's funny, either. I was deadly serious."

"Then," Flamond said, "you're even sillier than I thought. I've stumbled onto some crude killers, but none stupid enough to announce his plans prior to performance."

Ginger tried to look impudent, and almost got away with it. "Maybe I'm different from the murderers you've known."

"The difference doesn't please me," Flamond replied. "Come on, Sandra. We're going."

Sandra Lake took his arm, and the couple started edging their way back through the now-quiet crowd.

"Just a minute," Ginger called. "Leave now and I won't pay your fee."

Flamond ignored it. "I'll run upstairs and get my wrap, Flamond," Sandra said. "Won't be a minute. And you're right about walking out on her. She needs a good spanking."

Flamond nodded. "I wonder where the devil that butler is. He took my coat and hat."

"He put them in the clothes closet," Sandra said. "I saw him."

Flamond sighed. "I suppose I can find them," he said, opening the closet door. But he didn't paw through the coats to find his. Instead, he looked on

the floor at the grotesquely folded body of the butler, a butler as dead as yesterday's ambitions.

"Well," Sandra said, "I guess I don't need to go upstairs after my wrap just yet. Murdered?"

FLAMOND nodded. "By someone who reads a lot of old-fashioned detective stories," he said. "Imagine—murder with a poison dart. It's been completely out of fashion for years. And the butler, of all people! Here's one we can never use on our radio series."

Sandra smiled. "Anyway," she said, "Ginger Carlisle gets her way. You can't leave the party now."

"From now on," Flamond answered, "it's no party."

Guy Carlisle walked into the hall. "I'm glad you haven't gotten away yet, Flamond," he said. "It was bad taste, and I want to apologize. Ginger doesn't always—" He saw the body. "I suppose I better call the police," he said, crisply.

"Right," Flamond said. "But don't let the guests know what's happened. Is there a private room where I can talk to your daughter?"

"My study," Guy Carlisle offered. "But listen, Flamond, go easy on her. She tried a fool trick but—she didn't do it. I know she didn't."

"Get her," Flamond ordered. "We'll be waiting for her in your study. And don't mention this to the guests."

The girl had changed. She looked completely beaten. "Dad told me," she said. "But—Bradford wasn't the one. I didn't kill him."

"I'm not at all sure that you threw the poison dart," Flamond answered, "but you killed him, whether you did it directly or not. That smart little speech of yours gave a murderer a chance to perform what may turn out to be a perfect crime."

"I had nothing to do with it," Ginger protested. "I wasn't ever out of the game room after the party started. And Bradford never once came in here."

"That's right, Flamond," Sandra agreed. "I noticed it. I thought it was odd that the butler was giving the party so little service."

"With the most perfect alibi in the world, Miss Carlisle," Flamond said, "you'd still be right on the spot. Suppose you tell us who you did intend to murder."

"Nobody," the girl answered.

"You've got to establish your story fast," Flamond went on. "Once the police start working on you, trouble's going to be your middle name."

"The police?" She was contemptuous again. "I'm not worried about them. Dad can stop them in a hurry, if they want to keep their jobs."

"This isn't a parking ticket to be fixed with money," Flamond said. "I don't think your dad's big enough to help you on this."

Ginger lit a cigaret. "You'd really enjoy seeing me convicted of Bradford's murder, wouldn't you?" she asked. "But you'll be disappointed. I couldn't have done it. Any person with an ounce of sense will be able to see that I never had a chance to kill him. I wasn't near him."

"So you get credit for doing something extremely clever," Flamond said. "The murderer didn't have to be too close to the man to kill him. Darts are thrown. You could have been standing near the doorway as he passed—"

"But that's ridiculous. I'm not that good with darts."

"Unfortunately," Flamond explained, "you can't prove to the police how good or bad you are as a dart thrower, because it's to your best in-

terests now to appear bad."

The door opened and Hartley Graham rushed in. "Your dad told me," he said. "And they can't—"

"You'll please go back to the game room," Flamond ordered. "We were talking to Miss Carlisle privately, and we weren't finished."

"You're a tough guy, aren't you?" Graham laughed. "Tough at picking on girls. I wonder how you'd be against a guy who's as tough as you are."

MILLIE, the girl who looked like Myrna Loy, stumbled into the room. And her face was registering fright as perfectly as any actress could portray the emotion.

"I suppose you know all about it, too?" Flamond asked, disgustedly. "He must have told everyone. We'll have to lock the doors and watch to see that nobody leaves."

"You look like a ghost, Millie," Ginger exclaimed.

"Don't say anything about ghosts," Millie protested. "I've just seen something a lot worse than that. I've been looking all over for you. And finally—here."

"What's the matter?" Ginger demanded. "Did you see Bradford?"

"I wasn't looking for him," Millie said. "I went up to your room to powder my nose and, as soon as I walked in, I saw Marge."

"Who's Marge?" Flamond asked.

"Marge Burton," Ginger told him. "A girl who used to go with Hartley before—well, before he and I got together."

"And she was snooping around Ginger's room?" Sandra asked. "Flamond, that might be—"

"Snooping?" Millie was indignant. "She wasn't doing anything. She was dead. I don't think I ever realized how tragic a murdered person would look. She'd been so proud of that evening gown, and it was torn down the front where it had caught on something when she fell. And there was an ugly bloodstain across the bodice." She was sobbing, but Flamond ignored her.

He grabbed Ginger Carlisle by the shoulders. "You're going to get down to business, Miss Carlisle," he commanded. "You're going to tell me who you'd planned on murdering."

"She hadn't planned on murdering anyone," Hartley Graham protested. "That was just a joke. It was an act to—"

"No, Hartley," Ginger cut in. "It wasn't a joke. I really had intended to kill someone. And the plan was perfect. I'd never have been caught. Never in the world."

"Ginger," the boy pleaded, "don't be a fool. You don't know what you're saying."

"Oh, yes, I do," she insisted. "I'd have had such a perfect alibi that nobody in the world would ever have been able to connect me with the crime. And I was going to kill—this person. I wasn't joking. I meant every word I said."

"In that case," Flamond was relentless, "we get back to my question. Who did you intend to kill?"

"That's what makes it so terrible," Ginger answered slowly. "If I tell you, I almost convict myself—and I didn't do it."

"Don't tell him anything," Hartley advised her. "Maybe they won't find out and—"

Ginger shook her head. "They'll find out, all right," she eaid wearily. "I might as well tell, before the police arrive. The man I was going to kill was Bradford, the butler. But somebody beat me to it."

A doorbell rang, far off, and Flamond started to leave the room. He wasn't

going to be able to give the police much information. The whole story was going to sound preposterous. What he resented most was that it was going to make him look stupid.

* * *

Sandra Lake yawned as she finished typing the list of guests at what the newspapers were calling the previous evening's "Murder Party." She glanced at her note pad as Flamond walked into the outer office.

"Ginger Carlisle's father was here, Flamond," she said, "and he's absolutely frantic. The poor man, I felt so sorry for him. He said he'd give you twenty-five thousand dollars to clear her of both murders."

"Oh, he did, did he?" Flamond answered. "Well, he'll pay plenty. You can tell him that if he calls. But I won't take a penny of the money for myself. I'll turn every dime of it over to charities."

"Don't let your personal feelings interfere with the bookkeeping department," Sandra advised. "You're awfully antagonistic toward the Carlisles, aren't you?"

FLAMOND agreed, enthusiastically. "If that brat's father had brought her up with just a faint sign of intelligence, she wouldn't be in the jam she's in now."

"So now you're a child psychologist," Sandra exclaimed. "That's wonderful. When we have a family, I won't have to worry about a thing."

"You better worry about getting married before you start having a family," he pointed out. "Anything else?"

"Hartley Graham was here, too. He said he had to see you right away and he seemed quite nervous about something. You know, Flamond—I wonder if he could have had something to do with those murders?"

"Why?"

"Well," Sandra thought aloud, "he's engaged to Ginger Carlisle, for one thing. And she's admitted she was planning to kill the butler."

Flamond grinned. "Maybe there's a tieup there, but you fail to make it clear. What are you trying to prove?"

"Alone," Sandra went on, "her admitting the butler was her intended victim wouldn't mean anything. But Hartley Graham said Ginger Carlisle didn't have any reason to be mad at the girl who was murdered—Madge Burton. You'll notice he didn't say whether he, himself, had any reason to be mad at her. He'd been practically engaged to the Burton girl before he gave Ginger Carlisle an engagement ring. Now, do I make myself clear?"

Flamond didn't answer. "Did Graham say where I could reach him?"

"He said he'd be at the Carlisle home all afternoon."

"Then we might as well close up the office," Flamond said. "We're not going to have any peace 'til this case is settled."

Hartley Graham met them at the door of the Carlisle home. Sandra tried to stop herself from comparing him with the butler who'd greeted them the previous evening, without success. And the comparison wasn't respectful to the dead. If this boy was a killer, she admitted to herself, he was a nice one. Taut and nervous and too serious, but definitely nice. The kind of boy who'd go as far as murder to oblige a lady.

"We want to see Miss Carlisle right away," Flamond said, not even bothering about greetings.

"She's taking a nap," Graham explained.

"Then have somebody get her up," Flamond ordered.

"The nap," Graham said firmly, "is

by doctor's orders. It seems to me you could have talked the police into delaying that inquisition until today. They kept her up all night."

"That's too bad," Flamond answered, indicating that it wasn't too bad at all as far as he was concerned. "If it wasn't for her father, she'd be in a jail cell right now."

"Which," the boy said, "you'd like."

"Which," Flamond countered, "is exactly what most people would have to endure. But not Miss Carlisle.'

"Look," Graham protested, "is it her fault that her dad's a good salesman? Is it her fault that the police have enough sense to agree when her dad promised to deliver her whenever they wanted her? Could she help it that he put up a bond for her?"

"I suppose it's all wrong for me to resent a brat like that getting special privileges. But I still want to see her," Flamond reminded Graham. "At once. So get her down here."

"Sorry," the boy said. "No can do. And if you want to violate the doctor's orders—hey, come back here!"

FLAMOND had started up the stairway, and Graham rushed him. The boy lunged out in a flying tackle aimed at the detective's ankles. Flamond brought his heel back sharply, twisted and fell on top of Graham. They thumped down the stairs, rolling over the over. Sandra was looking for a practical weapon when Flamond wrenched free and got to his feet.

Graham danced in toward Flamond like a professional boxer, and the detective let him come. He rolled with a short right and Graham followed through—almost. Flamond's right knee came up and landed explosively in Graham's stomach and the boy moaned as he sank reluctantly in slow motion to the floor. He gave indications that he was going to be sick.

Flamond started upstairs again. "They don't teach that knee stuff in the best boxing classes," he called back. "It isn't considered nice. But it's extremely effective."

He walked directly to the door of the room where Marge Burton's body had been found. He knocked, and there was no response. He knocked again and waited. Someone was moving around inside the room, he was sure. The detective hesitated and shoved the door open.

Ginger Carlisle wasn't taking any nap. Dressed in a neat gray suit and blue felt hat, she was snapping the catches on an overnight case. The girl gasped, grabbed the bag and ran toward the window.

"Stop." Flamond shouted. "You fool, you'll hurt yourself."

Ginger turned her head back toward him. "That should make you extremely happy," she said with a note of bitterness. She flung the window up and started to crawl through. Flamond rushed and made a grab at the girl's one leg remaining in the room. She kicked, but he held on. It was a losing battle for Ginger. Slowly but inevitably she moved back into the bedroom.

"I suppose you're proud of yourself," she snapped. "It takes quite a man to maul a girl around, doesn't it?"

Flamond smiled. "It takes quite a girl to risk a jump from the second story of this house," he said. "You must be getting desperate. But you couldn't run away, you know. That's one of the penalties of being a member of a socially prominent family."

Ginger sobbed. "I know you—h-hate me," she said. "And I know it looks like—like the devil for me to be trying to run away. But I'm not a k-killer. You big ape, you should know that much!"

"To be honest, Miss Carlisle," Flamond said. "I didn't think you were a killer. I thought you'd been extremely foolish and it seemed to me that you could be of some value in catching the murderer. But now I don't know what to think. Innocent people seldom try to run away."

"I know," Ginger said, sniffling. "But there's nothing else for me to do. Everybody's against me and—"

She broke down. Her arm crept around Flamond's shoulder as she leaned her head against his chest and let the tears flow.

"My," Sandra remarked from the doorway, "what a touching scene. If you can spare the time, Flamond, our subdued friend downstairs has decided he wants to talk to you. Straight, this time, he says."

Flamond gently removed Ginger Carlisle's arm from his shoulder. "I think," he said, "that you realize how foolish you'd be to try to get away, don't you?"

The girl nodded.

"In that case," the detective said, "go wash your face, powder your nose and come on downstairs. Maybe you'll decide to do some straight talking, too."

HARTLEY GRAHAM was pacing the floor as Flamond and Sandra came into the study. The boy closed the door and ground out a cigaret which had been consumed to a tiny stub that was about to burn his fingers.

He smiled awkwardly. "I was plenty sore at you for that trick with your knee," he said. "At first, I thought it was the dirtiest stunt I'd ever run across. And then—I realized that you can't be fussy about sportsmanship when a murder's involved."

"Is that all you wanted of me?" Flamond asked, disappointed.

"No," Hartley answered. "I wanted a lot more. My thinking's cleared up a lot since you gave me that jolt. And I—wanted to tell you that you're giving Ginger a bum deal. She's really a wonderful person. You've no idea how terrific she is."

Flamond was unimpressed.

"She doesn't deserve all this," Hartley went on. "And—while I was sitting on the floor, trying to get my breath, everything cleared up for me. I made a decision."

"What kind of a decision," Flamond asked.

Hartley looked him straight in the eyes. "I decided to confess."

Sandra gasped. The statement didn't seem to affect Flamon much. "Confess to what?"

"I didn't realize when I decided to kill Bradford that it was going to get Ginger into any jam," the boy said. "I had no way of knowing she was going to make that crazy announcement at the party. Even—after everything that's happened—I thought she might be able to get in the clear. Well, she hasn't, so about all I can do now is give myself up."

Sandra looked stricken and felt the nausea that always hit her when she came face to face with an admitted murderer.

"How did you handle that dart business?" Flamond asked.

"What do you care how I handled it?" Graham brushed the question aside. "Isn't it enough that I'm confessing?"

Flamond went on. "And how did you kill Marge Burton? You didn't have any opportunity to get into Ginger Carlisle's room."

The boy tried to smile mysteriously and achieved a vacuous grin. "You don't know what opportunities I had," he said, "I'm giving it to you straight. But if you're not interested, I'll go to the police."

He waited to see what effect that

would have. Flamond sat down in a big leather chair and crossed his legs. "It's nice of you to volunteer to play the martyr, Graham," he said. "But I don't think the police would be any more interested in your confession than they were in the other one."

Hartley Graham knew he'd heard something important, but he couldn't quite grasp it. "Other confession?" Sandra was incredulous. "Flamond, you didn't tell me anything about any other confession."

"I know," Flamond smiled. "It was routine. Inevitable. The first thing Guy Carlisle did this morning when he arranged his daughter's bond was confess to both murders. And he didn't offer any more plausible explanation than Hartley Graham can."

"We'll see about that," Graham said, determinedly. "I'm going to talk to them."

"You're going to do no such thing," Flamond commanded. "You're going to stay right here. Right now, you're going to sit down."

Graham was belligerent. "You can't order me around," he said defiantly.

FLAMOND didn't argue the point. "If you're honestly sincere about wanting to help Ginger Carlisle," he said, "the worst thing in the world you could do would be to go to the police with your silly confession."

The boy wavered. "How do you figure that," he asked.

"Because they won't believe you," Flamond said. "And they'll think that Miss Carlisle must be rather hopelessly involved when the two people who are most fond of her both come forward with confessions."

Graham decided to sit down, after all. "I—I hadn't thought of that," he admitted. "Maybe you're right."

Flamond was smug. "Of course I'm right," he said.

The study door opened. Millie, the Myrna Loy double, posed in the doorway and the effect was pleasing.

"You wanted something?" Flamond asked.

Millie gave him a high-voltage smile. "Naturally," she said. "Ginger's one of my dearest friends and—I've been dreadfully disturbed by all this. Is there anything new?"

Flamond shook his head. "No," he said, "but if you could give me any idea why Miss Carlisle should want to kill the butler, I'd be eternally grateful. She refused to even talk about motives."

Millie abandoned the pose in the doorway and came on into the room. She leaned against the desk and her attitude became confidential.

"You know," she said, "I think Ginger made that story up. Why anybody would want to kill a butler with the servant problem what it is these days—"

"If that's your idea of a joke, Millie," Graham protested, "it isn't very funny."

"I'm sorry, Hartley," Millie said. "It wasn't cute, was it?"

"My nerves are all shot," the boy said, "and a gag like that doesn't help any. We've got to realize this is serious."

Millie tried to be helpful. "It always struck me that Bradford must be the world's best-paid butler."

She had Flamont's attention. "For what reason," he demanded.

Millie liked the attention. "I don't suppose you've seen his sport roadster," she said. "It's a honey—much nicer than mine, with all kinds of expensive chromium gadgets and extras. And his wardrobe when he was off duty was simply out of this world. You wouldn't have recognized the subdued Bradford when he got out on his own."

"How do you know about his off-duty clothes?" Flamond asked.

Millie considered that. "Why—I—I'd seen him when he wasn't working. Several times."

"Where?" Flamond asked.

"Why—just around. Around here, I guess. Say, what is this, anyway—a third degree?"

"It's a routine attempt on my part to get information," Flamond explained. "And of course I don't see any reason why it should worry you. Unless, of course, you have something to worry about."

Millie forgot the Loy pose. "See here, you've got no right to take that attitude with me," she snapped. "I'm not a suspect in this business."

"Perhaps not," Flamond admitted. "But, technically, everyone who attended the party is a suspect. Did you leave the game room at any time after it was under way?"

"Yes, she d i d!" Hartley Graham blurted. "She went out into the hall. I saw her leave."

MILLIE shot a scornful look at Graham. "I went out of the room because I'd been dancing and my nose was shiny and I was going up to Ginger's room to powder my nose. Bradford wasn't anywhere around."

"So you went up to Ginger's room." Graham was getting excited. "And Marge Burton—what about her?"

"She wasn't there," Millie shouted. "And you can quit looking at me like that. I had no reason to kill either of them. Why should you try to mix me up in this?"

Hartley was pointing his forefinger at her. "You never liked Marge Burton," he said. "You never did! I remember when I was dating her and you told me you didn't see why I wasted my time with her. You hated her! And don't try to deny it."

"Oh, stop it," Millie rasped. "She's dead. I won't talk about her. I didn't see her until—later, when she was dead. I didn't see anybody but—but—" She swallowed. "No, that couldn't be," she said, weakly.

Flamond and Sandra looked on, silent. Hartley Graham was relentless. "You didn't see anybody but whom?" he persisted.

"No," Millie shook her head. "No, I didn't see anybody. Nobody at all."

"You're lying," Hartley accused. "And I'm going to get the truth out of you. Flamond—"

"Oh, leave me alone, can't you?" Millie demanded. "I'll tell who I saw at the proper time if—if it's necessary."

"If you know something that nobody else knows about this," Flamond said, "you're taking an unnecessary risk by not telling us."

"Risk?" She hadn't considered that possibility.

"Yes," Flamond said solemnly. "If the person you saw is the murderer, and you're the only one who knows about it, that person will have to get you out of the way. But if we know who you saw, another murder—your murder—becomes pointless."

"You—you're trying to scare me," Millie said. "I told you I'd tell if it's necessary." She moved away from the desk. "I came here thinking I had to know about Ginger, whether she was still suspected. And you try to involve me. Well, you won't."

Hartley Graham lunged to follow her out of the room, but Flamond took his arm. "We can't make her talk until she's ready, Hartley," the detective said gently. "At least, we can't force her to tell the truth. But I think she's scared. It's my guess that she'll be ready to talk—soon." He closed the door. "And now," he said, "I want

you to do some thinking. I want you to give us every possible motive, no matter how fantastic it seems, for Ginger Carlisle to kill Bradford, the butler. Sandra, you'll take them down, please."

Graham was incredulous. "You mean," he demanded, "that you expect me to try to trap the one person who means more to me than anyone else in the world?"

"Let's not go into that again," Flamond said wearily. "Before we can clear the girl, we have to know what will be used against her. And I don't know. I haven't any idea."

"I—I don't know whether to trust you or not, Flamond," Graham said slowly. "But, even if you're tricking me, I'm going to do as you say. Because if I don't know anything else, I still know that Ginger wouldn't kill anybody."

Millie moved her head away from the keyhole, where she'd been listening. She couldn't believe what she'd heard. Hartley Graham, her best friend's fiancee, testifying against the girl. Giving murder motives to that detective! Something would have to be done! She tiptoed up the stairway and into the long hall. "Ginger," she called softly. "Oh, Ginger—where are you? Ginger—it's Millie! I've got to talk to you."

GINGER opened the door to her room and beckoned Millie in. The door closed. "I've been waiting for you, Millie," she said. "I thought maybe you'd come up to see me before you left."

"You—knew I was here?"

"Yes," Ginger said. "Flamond and Miss Lake told me to stay in my room until I'd cleaned myself up after a crying spell. And then I was supposed to join them in the study. But—I heard you come in. So I tiptoed downstairs and listened to your conversation. It was interesting."

"It was darned annoying," Millie disagreed.

Ginger smiled. "That was nice of you, Millie—not to tell them who you saw upstairs."

"Was it?" Millie asked, expressionlessly.

"It was—wonderful. I appreciate it so much, Millie, that it—it makes what I have to do now awfully difficult." Ginger bit her lip. "I hope you won't think there's anything personal about it."

"About what?" Millie was nervous.

Ginger sighed. "Why," she said, "I'm afraid the same thing's going to happen to you that happened to Marge Burton."

Suddenly, Ginger had a revolver in her hand, a neat, trim little pearl-handled job, highly chromed. Millie thought, it looks like a toy. She couldn't possibly kill anyone with it. Aloud she said, inanely, "You—you're joking."

Ginger shook her head. She moved toward her friend.

It wasn't amusing any more. "Get away from me," Millie said. Then, hopefully, "You wouldn't kill me."

Ginger was sorry. "I don't have any choice, Millie," she said with sincere regret. "You and I both know that sooner or later you'd have to tell what you saw."

Millie was fighting for time. "Then," she said, "it's true. You killed Bradford and Marge."

The revolver slowly moved downward. The drawn lines of Ginger Carlisle's cheeks relaxed. "What?" she said incredulously. "You—you thought you saw *me* up in my room?" She laughed, loudly, shrilly. Her laughter became hysterical. The gun dropped to the floor and she kept on laughing.

Millie was still frightened, but she

sensed that the danger was past. "What are you laughing at?" she finally asked, in a thin, weak voice.

Ginger threw her arms around her friend. "Oh, darling," she said, "you had a close call. So close! You shouldn't have frightened me like that."

Millie was puzzled. "I don't know what you're talking about. You act so—so crazy. One minute you're my best friend again. I can't figure it, Ginger."

"That's lucky for you, honey," Ginger said. "Mighty lucky. And don't try to figure it out, because it might not be healthy."

Slowly, Ginger was reconstructing the scene. "But you were actually going to kill me," she said. "That gun—and now—"

"Forget it," Ginger advised. "Forget all about it. Don't ever mention it, Millie. It's something that never happened." She tried to control a gasp as the door opened.

"Is it all right to come in?" Sandra Lake asked, and then apparently answered herself, "Yes." She called back, "Come on, Flamond."

Flamond and Hartley Graham walked gravely into the room. Ginger looked at their solemn faces. "What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"We were worried when we realized that you hadn't come down to the study," Flamond explained, "and—we've been doing exactly what you were doing a little while ago."

"To wit, listening," Sandra smiled.

"But—I don't get it," Ginger said.

FLAMOND took a step toward Millie. "You performed beautifully, Millie," he said. "I didn't get a chance to congratulate you."

"Performed?" Ginger asked. "What is he talking about, Millie?"

"Why," Flamond explained, "that little scene you eavesdropped on—that one between Millie and me in the study—was all rehearsed. I'd told her what to say before she ever came here."

Millie started to say something and changed her mind. "It was a trick, then?" Ginger asked. "But why? And what were you trying to do? She didn't see anyone?"

Flamond ignored most of the questions. "It was as much of a trick," he said, "as your getting me to attend that party and then making the announcement you did."

Millie still felt hazy. "Then—Ginger did kill Bradford and Marge Burton?" she asked.

Flamond eyed Ginger Carlisle. "How about it, Miss Carlisle?" he asked.

Ginger took a deep breath and threw back her head. "Yes," she said simply. "I killed them."

Flamond silenced Hartley Graham's protest before it could become audible. "That," the detective said, "makes three confessions. Usually, one's impossible to get. But we have three."

Ginger's eyes were blazing. "I said I killed them," she repeated. "That's the way you wanted it, isn't? Aren't you satisfied?"

"Satisfied?" Flamond echoed. "No, I'm not satisfied. There's no such thing as being satisfied with a murder case—not even when the killer's convicted. A conviction doesn't undo any damage."

Ginger sneered. "So I have to listen to a sermon, do I? Isn't it enough that I confessed? What do you want?"

Flamond shook his head. "You might have made a good murderess, Miss Carlisle," he said. "You really might have been good at it. But you make a rotten liar."

Sandra and Millie asked questions with their eyes. "I don't get this at all, Flamond," Sandra complained. "You

have been wanting a confession from her, as far as I could figure it. And now that you have one, you won't take it. What are you trying to do?"

Flamond was patient. "Sandra," he said, "when Miss Carlisle invited us to that party, she did it for a reason, a definite and highly rational reason—but the reason wasn't to commit murder. She hired us in a desperate hope that she could prevent murder."

He looked at Ginger for verification. "I haven't the faintest idea what you mean," the girl said.

Flamond's face hardened. "Oh, yes, you have," he said. "You knew a murder was being planned. And you wanted desperately to stop it. You got an idea, a really brilliant idea."

Millie protested, "But I don't see what was so brilliant about getting involved right up to her neck."

"The plan didn't work," Flamond explained. If her plan had been successful, she wouldn't have been involved in anything because there wouldn't have been any murder."

Ginger opened her mouth to say something and realized the futility of it. Flamond was still talking.

"Miss Carlisle," he went on, "reasoned, and correctly, I think, that if she announced she was going to commit a murder, the person who actually intended to kill Bradford would have to abandon the plan—to save her from being convicted."

Sandra thought that one over. "And that would mean," she thought aloud, "that the murderer would have to be a good friend of Ginger's—a special friend who wouldn't want her to be convicted."

"Right," Flamond nodded.

"BUT it doesn't make sense," Sandra protested. "She made the announcement, and the murder was committed anyway—plus a second one. Which means that the murderer wasn't nearly so good a friend of hers as she thought. The murderer used her plan to throw suspicion on her."

"No," Ginger protested violently, "that's not true." She checked herself, too late.

"You're quite right, Miss Carlisle," Flamond agreed. "It isn't true. Your plan would have worked. The murderer would have been stopped. The only reason you failed is that you were too late."

"Can't you explain any thing any way except in riddles," Millie protested.

"When Ginger Carlisle announced her murder game," Flamond continued, "both murders had already been committed. Nothing could be done to stop them. The murderer never intended to put her on a spot but was powerless to do anything about it. The people were killed."

"You know a great deal, don't you," Ginger sneered. "But you don't know who the murderer was."

Flamond's regret seemed genuine. "You're wrong, Miss Carlisle, he said. "I've known the identity of the murderer for quite some time. It's time to make that name public. Things are getting too dangerous. Even the murderer should be able to see that." The detective turned toward Hartley Graham.

Sandra fought the familiar nausea again. "So it *was* Hartley Graham," she said.

Flamond ignored the remark. "That trick of yours and mine, Millie," he said, "established beyond the slightest doubt that the murderer was—"

Even as Flamond was talking, Sandra saw that Hartley Graham had a revolver in his hand. Two shots blazed in rapid succession. Miraculously,

Flamond was still on his feet. Hartley Graham was running toward the doorway and Flamond wasn't following him.

"The shot that came so—so close," Sandra said, "didn't come from Hartley Graham's gun. Somebody—"

The tears were streaming down Ginger Carlisle's face as Hartley Graham walked back into the room.

"I guess I got him," Graham said to the detective, not looking at anyone else. "I had to shoot the second I saw him, because his gun was aimed, all ready to fire. There was nothing else to do."

"Dead?" Flamond asked.

Graham nodded. "And in more ways than one," the boy said, "I don't think I'm sorry."

"But—who's dead?" Sandra demanded. "Flamond—who was it?"

"Guy Carlisle," Hartley Graham answered.

"He had to kill Bradford," Ginger said. "It was after I tried to fire the man I found out that—I couldn't fire him. A syndicate of racketeers had put him in here to watch Dad. It seems—Dad had borrowed money from them, a great deal of money. They put Bradford in to watch him—and Bradford was making him step farther and farther over the borderline. Dad was getting hopelessly involved. Day before yesterday, he brought home a revolver. I walked in on him while he was loading it. He was frightened, and he made me promise I'd never say anything about it. I knew what he was planning to do."

"The man was desperate," Flamond admitted. "And you thought you had a way to stop him."

"I did have," Ginger insisted. "He wouldn't ever knowingly have gotten me into trouble."

"I'm sure you're right," Flamond said kindly. "And you did everything you could."

Hartley Graham tried to comfort her.

"I never dreamed he'd pick—the party as the place for it," Ginger said. "He never took part in those things. But he was free to roam the house and the party gave him plenty of suspects."

"I can understand about Bradford," Millie said, "but what about Marge Burton? Why should he kill her?"

"THE Burton girl was snooping around," Flamond explained.

"She would have liked to embarrass Ginger in some way and—well, she snooped in the wrong place at the wrong time, so all Mr. Carlisle could do was hold a gun in her back and march her upstairs where the sound of the shot wouldn't be heard. His only reason for killing her was that he had to."

"I hope you won't hate me for killing your dad, Ginger," Hartley Graham said. "Flamond had given me instructions to be ready to pull the trigger. I didn't know who it would be. Please don't hate me."

Ginger dabbed at her eyes with her tiny handkerchief. "No," she said, "I don't hate you, Hartley. You did him a—a favor."

Flamond sighed. "I guess I owe you an apology, too, Miss Carlisle," he said. "I thought you were the lightest-headed brunette I'd even seen."

* * *

The file card had glaring blank spaces in it, but Sandra wasn't typing.

"Trouble?" Flamond asked, amused.

"You and your darned psychology," Sandra exploded. "Well, it didn't work. You were wrong about Ginger and Hartley Graham. They were pretty grand youngsters, if you ask me."

Flamond agreed. "But they had to be treated roughly," he defended himself. "It was the only way to get information."

"You solved that case," Sandra said, "because you guessed that Guy Carlisle was the only person who was roaming around the house unnoticed."

"No," Flamond insisted. "Plenty of people had opportunity in a crowd like that. But I was positive the murderer had to be either Guy Carlisle or Hartley Graham."

"I don't see why."

"I could conceive of a silly girl trying to create a sensation with a dramatic scene like the one at the party," Flamond explained. "But her having us there didn't fit into that kind of a picture at all. We didn't add a thing to the effect of her scene. Her only possible reason for having us around was to scare somebody—scare him out of committing murder."

Sandra thought that one over, "But it was still a guess," she protested. "You couldn't know whether it was Carlisle or Hartley."

"Madge Burton's murder tossed Hartley Graham completely out of the picture," Flamond said. "The boy had dated her, and they'd quarreled. Everybody knew it, and knew that it was Hartley Graham who walked out."

"So," Sandra pointed out, "he wouldn't have hesitated to kill her if he disliked her enough."

Flamond shook his head. "Remember," he said, "that Marge Burton wanted the boy back. She was mad at Ginger Carlisle for taking him away from her. If he'd been the murderer, she'd have used what she saw to force him into coming back. He wouldn't have had to direct suspicion toward himself by killing her—not just then, anyway."

"Even if he didn't want to go back to her?"

"Even so," Flamond insisted, "he'd have dealt. While there wasn't any motive to tie Bradford's murder up with Graham, there was a motive to get the boy into trouble over Marge Burton's death. Given a choice, I'm sure he wouldn't have killed her."

Sandra thought it over and started typing. "You know," she said, "this case was tragic—but Ginger Carlisle tried to be so flip, I think I'll give the file card a flippant title."

Flamond read over her shoulder as she typed—and winced.

At the top of the file card were the words, "The Case of the Pistol-Packin' Papa."

OUT OF THE NIGHT

SCOTLAND YARD is still perplexed over the skillful handiwork of a gang of thieving Englishmen who made off with some of the most treasured relics of the empire. The crime was staged one moonless night at Hever Castle—that famous Kentish stronghold which was once the home of Ann Boleyn.

Only the expensively-oiled purr of a Rolls Royce motor could be heard above the sound of the crickets in the fields as the four thieves pulled up before the castle. They were heavily-masked and wore dark clothes which blended with the shadows in the garden. Silently they made their way through the carefully tended shrubbery. In a few moments that silence was broken by the sound of a stone crashing through a window. The four men waited after hurling the stone.

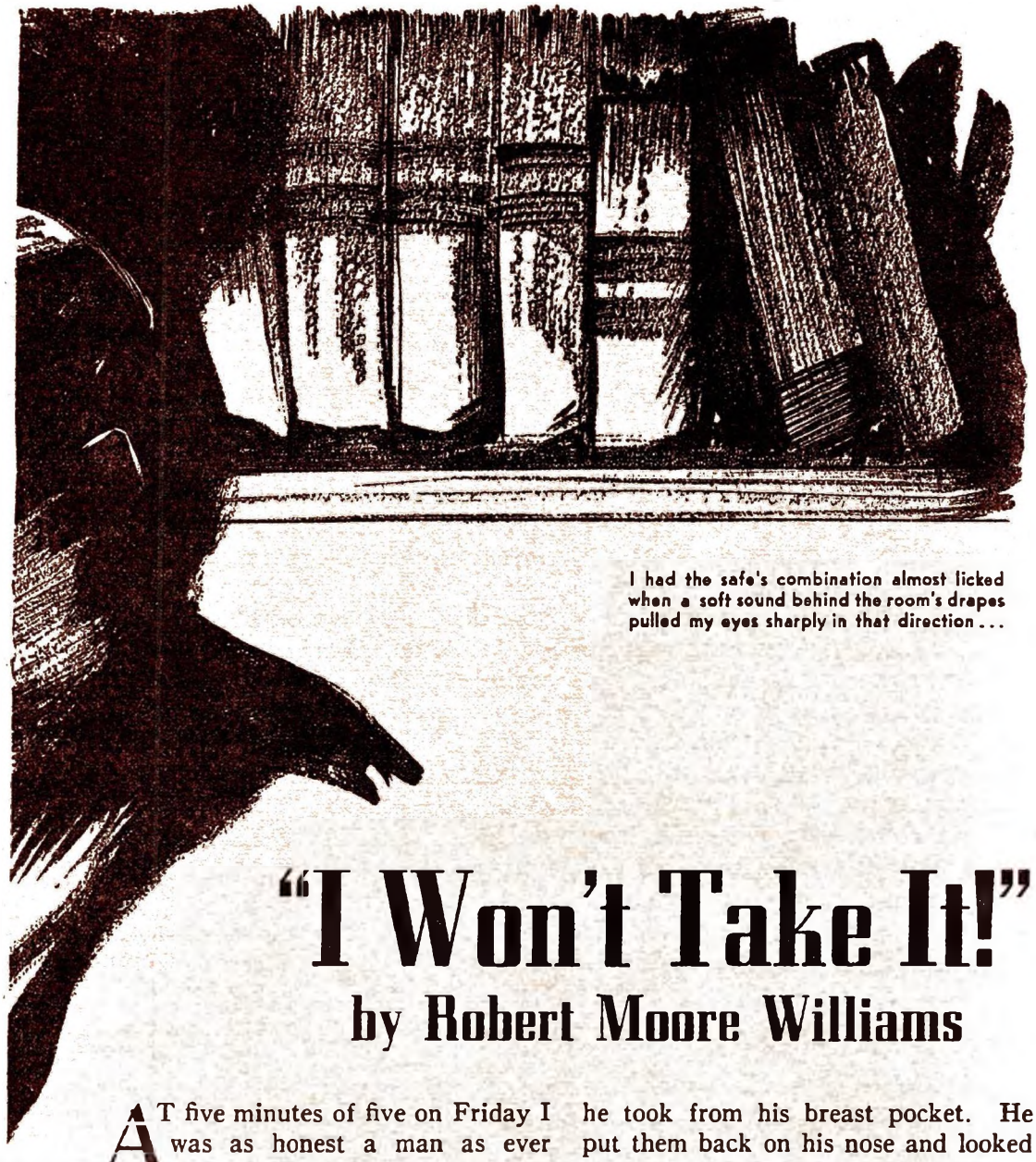
Soon Mr. Scholls, the watchman, came running out of the building looking for the cause of the disturbance. Before he could make an outcry, the four jumped him and bound him hand and foot. Then they set about looting the castle.

Apparently these were not common thieves. At least one of the number was a student of history for most valued among the missing items was a signet ring which Henry VIII had given Ann Boleyn, and the very prayer book which she had carried to the headsman's block when she was executed. Fifteen hundred other jeweled relics were missing also. Every one of them was worth more from the standpoint of historical significance than from the actual material or workmanship that went into them.

The Rolls Royce vanished into the night as mysteriously as it had come. Scholl's was able to free himself and spread the alarm, but to no avail. The unknown car and its unidentified occupants remain nameless to this day.

—Pete Boggs

Was I being fired because business was bad or because the boss's daughter was in love with me?



I had the safe's combination almost licked when a soft sound behind the room's drapes pulled my eyes sharply in that direction . . .

"I Won't Take It!"

by Robert Moore Williams

AT five minutes of five on Friday I was as honest a man as ever watched a clock. I believed in honesty.

Or thought I did.

At four minutes of five old Rufus Jackson came puffing and panting into my office.

"Hi, boss," I said.

"H'lo, Jerry," he said.

He sat down in the chair beside my desk. He took off his nose glasses and polished them with a silk handkerchief he took from his breast pocket. He put them back on his nose and looked out the window. He didn't look at me.

I rolled a pencil between my fingers.

He coughed.

"You got something on your mind, boss?" I asked.

He nodded and swallowed. I could see his Adam's apple bob up and down.

"I'm going to have to let you go," he said.

I dropped my pencil. It made a little clattering sound as it landed on top of

the desk. I took a cigarette out of the package lying beside my hand. My fingers were shaking. I lit it, blew smoke across the room.

"Has my work been unsatisfactory?"

"Lord, no. You're a good man, Jerry. When you came back from the army and I put you in as assistant manager, I had intended to train you to take over my job. Only now—" He spread his hands and looked sad.

"Only now what?" I said.

"Only now it looks like I'm not going to have a job for you to take over."

I let smoke trickle into my lungs.

"You know the plant is down," he said.

"The plant was down when I got my eighty points and came back looking for my old job. It *wasn't* down during the war. Every shaper and planer, every lathe, every drill press, every jig, was going day and night making shell parts. You must have made a mint."

He opened his mouth and started to speak but I went right on. "You were going to reconvert and start making electrical appliances again. You had your plans all made. Since I've been here, we've got part of the re-tooling done. We've got a supply of raw material lined up, we've got sales outlets hollering for our products."

I picked up the pencil, jabbed it at him. "And now you're telling me there's not going to be any job. I'm asking you why?"

"Because I'm broke, Jerry. Or so near broke you can't tell the difference."

His face was gray and pinched with misery.

"I thought possibly I could scrape up enough capital to get rolling again. I started this plant on a shoe-string, thirty years ago, and I thought I could do it again but I guess I'm not as young as I was thirty years ago, because I can't work it out this time."

OPEN-MOUTHED, I stared at him. He must have guessed what I was thinking, for he said, "It's the truth, Jerry."

I laid the pencil down. I laid the cigarette carefully on the ash tray.

"Rufus," I said, "for Sylvia's sake, I'm not going to call you a liar. But I saw the production records on those shell parts. I saw the E you got—"

He waved his hands. "I know."

"And now you're telling you're broke!"

He nodded miserably. "Jerry, I made a lot of shell parts. I made an awful lot of them, I guess. You boys needed them and I couldn't help any other way, so I made them. All I could get out of the machines, as fast as I could get them out, I made. I charged the government one point eight three five for each one I made. $1.835. I had made over two hundred thousand of them before I—"

His Adam's apple bobbed up and down again. "—before I discovered they were costing me $1.89 to make."

I leaned back in my chair. I let him go on.

"Of course it was my fault. I should have checked my production costs more carefully before I set a price. But the army was yelling for those shell parts in a hell of a hurry, and you boys needed them, and I *didn't* check."

He swallowed again.

"Of course, I asked for a price increase. And I got it too, in time. I didn't get it in a week or a month but I got it in six months. All during that six months I continued making parts. You boys needed them—"

"You told me that before."

He sank down farther in his chair. "Well, I got my new price, and I began to make money. But before I got what

I had lost, well—".

"I know. The war was over."

He nodded.

I picked up my cigarette.

"I'm sorry, Jerry," old Rufus said. "I know Sylvia will be sorry too. But I just can't let you stay on here any longer in a business that's going broke, that *is* broke. You're young. You can make a new start."

He rose to his feet, took a check out of his pocket.

"In lieu of notice, I'm giving you two weeks' salary. Here is a check for two hundred dollars."

Laying the check on my desk, he waddled out of the office. At the door, he turned and looked back. "Good luck, Jerry," he said.

The door closed.

That was that.

I PUT the check in my pocket. I opened the desk and took out the extra package of cigarettes. I took out the title for my car and my insurance papers, my discharge certificate, put them in my pocket too. I got my hat, put it on my head. I wondered why he was firing me. Was it because of Sylvia?

Sylvia was his daughter. I had been seeing her one, maybe two nights a week since they gave me that homing pigeon that looks like a ruptured duck. I had taken her to dinner, I had taken her dancing. Maybe we were that way. I don't know. While I was in the army, I had written to her and she had answered. During the three years I had worked for Rufus before I went in the army, I had been seeing her occasionally. She was very nice to see.

Was she the reason he was firing me, the real reason?

She was in the social whirl, she had a good background. Her family was good. Maybe old Rufus wasn't wealthy but he had always made a good thing out of his small manufacturing company. He had always had enough money to live at the right place and know the right people. Naturally, he would want Sylvia to marry the right person.

Socially, that wasn't me. I came from the wrong side of the tracks. I didn't go to college. My old man was a butcher. After I finished high school, I had to do the best I could. I worked in a filling station, I clerked in a pawn shop, I did other things.

I went out the side door and got in my car. I lit a cigarette. It took three matches to get the cigarette buring. I sat in the car and waited for the shakiness to pass away. It didn't.

"Broke!" I said to myself. *"Broke!* That miserable, lying old skunk!"

Old Rufus hadn't told the truth and I knew he hadn't told me the truth. I knew it because of Sylvia, and among other reasons, because of her necklace.

I remembered seeing a feature story in the Sunday supplement about that necklace, shortly after I went to work for Rufus. *"Jewels with Interesting Histories"* or something like that, had been the title of the article. It had told all about the necklace, how Rufus had bought it for Sylvia's mother and how the mother had given it to Sylvia at her coming out party and how a conservative estimate of its worth was $50,000.

Now old Rufus was telling me he was broke when I knew Sylvia had a necklace worth fifty grand. I knew she had it because I had seen her wear it at a fancy party she had taken me to, not over two months previously.

Broke, hell! I wondered how much else he had stacked away somewhere.

NO, HE wasn't broke. He was firing me as the first step in getting

me away from Sylvia and he was getting me away from Sylvia because my family background wasn't good enough for her.

That hurt. It hurt in a way I can't talk about. It hurt deep down inside. It hurt all over. Not good enough.

I was so mad I was shaking.

Hell, this was America, and all that stuff about social position and family background just didn't belong here. I had marched many a weary mile and slept in mud and waded through icy water up to my navel and laid in the snow all night and had seen many a good man with his backside full of lead, all the time figuring my turn was next, just to keep that junk out of America.

And here it was.

I know what hate means. You learn that in places I have been, you learn it maybe when you've seen what's left of your buddy after he's tangled with a booby trap, you learn it when you hear an 88 let go, you learn it in other ways.

I thought I had learned it in all the ways.

This was a new way to me. This was a booby trap you couldn't see, a booby trap that tore hell out of your inside, a Bouncing Betty that got your heart and didn't touch your skin.

I'll take the German boobies. They kill you.

I sat there in the car and spat crumbs of tobacco out of my mouth. I kept thinking about that necklace. And pretty soon I knew what I was going to do. He had hurt me. I would hurt him. It would be even Stephen.

OLD Rufus lived in a private place where the squad cars did not come. The people who lived here provided their own police protection, a private watchman who went around pounding on the curb with his nightstick. Many a night as I told Sylvia goodnight, I had heard the clang of that stick on the curb.

I parked my car in the next street. It was after one o'clock and the night was silent. Changing into a pair of tennis shoes, I pulled on a pair of kid gloves and waited and listened. Over on the private place I heard the watchman pound the curb. When the sound came again, it was farther away. I picked up the tire tool from the seat and slipped it under my coat. I went back to the alley, and went down it. I knew how to stay out of sight, how to take advantage of cover. I stopped behind the garage where Rufus kept his car and stood there and listened. All I could hear was the pound of my heart. It was like night patrol except I couldn't remember ever hearing my heart in Europe.

There was a gate in the back fence, with a bar on the inside. The point of the tire tool lifted the bar. It rattled as it hit the concrete walk inside. I froze, listened, and then opened the gate and went through. Old Rufus had never gone in for modern improvements or even for necessary repairs, and I was betting he hadn't fixed the broken catch on his study window. Raising the window for Sylvia one night, I had noticed the catch was broken. My memory had stored this fact away as if it knew I was going to be a crook some day and was laying up all possible information to help me when the time came.

The broken catch hadn't been fixed. The tire tool lifted the window. I went in.

There was darkness and silence in the house, the kind of silence that goes with old houses, brooding silence, broken occasionally by the creaking of a board. I stood there in the dark study, watching, waiting, listening. There was no sound except the thump of my heart.

My flash showed me the furniture as I remembered it. The door leading from the study was open. For a moment, I considered closing it, then decided not to. If Rufus or Sylvia came downstairs, they would notice the closed door.

I crossed the room to the picture that hid the safe. The picture was hinged. I swung it away from the wall and turned my flash on its back.

The numbers were there all right. Working at home with old Rufus one night, going over reconversion plans, he had wanted some papers from the safe. I had seen him look on the back of the picture before he opened the safe. So I knew the combination was there. I knew the necklace was there too, because I had seen Sylvia take it out.

I ran the combination on the safe, tugged at the handle.

The box didn't open.

A board creaked outside the study.

I turned off my flash and stood there in the dark. Was the safe wired? When I touched it, did a buzzer ring upstairs?

Waiting, I almost wished I was back on patrol, back in the mud and the snow, back with the honest booby traps. I thought about slipping out the window and forgetting about the necklace. But I didn't. I'm one of those unfortunate people who don't turn back.

When the board didn't creak again, I decided it was just the old house popping. Turning on my flash. I checked the combination, saw the mistake I had made.

This time I started from zero. The safe opened.

I CAN'T remember exactly how I felt when the safe opened. It was a combination of feelings, a kind of elation and a kind of sickness. I didn't hesitate in reaching in and pulling out the velvet case. The necklace was there all right. The stones sparkled under the flash.

The necklace went into my pocket, the case went back into the safe. I closed the ancient iron box, swung the picture back, picked up my tire tool, closed the window as I went out.

Old Rufus would probably not look in the safe for weeks. It would be sold long before he even discovered it was gone. I would have myself ten to twenty thousand dollars to use in starting my own business. When I became a successful business man, people wouldn't ask too many questions about my background.

My car was sitting right where I had left it. I got in and took off the gloves and changed shoes. I drove away. Before I got home I ditched the tennis shoes and the gloves in an ash can. The tire tool was legitimate and I kept it.

In the quiet of my own room I examined the necklace. The style was old but the stones were beautiful. It really wasn't a necklace but a diamond pendant with one large stone that was a honey. The feature article hadn't exaggerated its value any.

I hid it under my clean shirts and went to bed.

I didn't sleep well that night.

The next morning, I was shaved, dressed, and gone at my regular time. I ate breakfast where I always ate it, at the corner lunchroom. The coffee tasted awful and the rolls were dry. It seemed to me, as I drove downtown, that there were cops on every corner. I saw dozens of squad sars. Really, I only saw two but the necklace in my pocket was stimulating my imagination.

It was early but Jake Cosmopolis was open for business. I had worked in his pawnshop once and he would

know me. He would give me a square deal for two reasons, one of them because I knew him, and the other because he could make some dough out of me.

His clerk looked up when I walked in and gave me the old, "Good morning. What can I do for you?" routine. I walked on to the back room and Jake was sitting at his desk.

"Ah, Jerry. You have come back to see me, to see old Jake, eh? Good. Sit down."

"Hi, Jake," I answered, sitting down. "How are you?"

"Some days good, some days bad," he said. He was a queer combination of nationalities. His name made him a Greek but he had blue eyes, a thin face, and red hair. And no conscience worth mentioning. We understood each other.

I laid the necklace on the desk in front of him. He looked at it and didn't bat an eye. He just stared at it and moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"That big stone is very nice," I said. "By the time it's cut and reset no man on earth can tell where it came from."

He looked at me out of his blue eyes. "Ah, Jerry," he said. "It is bad to be a thief."

"Skip it, Jake. I came to talk business, not morals. Look it over and tell me how much, in cash."

He was a cool duck. "Why do you bring this thing to me, Jerry? You know I never deal in stolen goods."

"You've told that to the police so often you almost believe it yourself, Jake. However, I'm not the police, and I don't believe it. But if you're not interested—"

REACHING for the necklace, I started to get up. He pushed my hands away, pushed me back into the chair. I didn't let my grin show. He wasn't missing any opportunities like this.

"Do not be in such a hurry, Jerry. We understand each other. I must make my little joke." He paused, drummed with his fingers on the desk top, his eyes on the necklace. I knew what he would do next. He did it.

"Of course, I must examine the stones," he said, picking up the magnifying glass.

"Sure, Jake," I answered. "Sure thing." His next move would be to tell me about the flaws in them. Hell, there weren't any flaws in those stones. Old Rufus would have bought the best, from an expert he could trust. But Jake would try. It was part of him to try to beat down the seller.

I think he had a genuine love for beautiful stones. He had the touch of an artist as he handled that necklace. If circumstances had been different—whatever those circumstances had been—I think Jake would have been an authority on jewels. He loved them. Watching him study the stones, I wondered what booby trap had exploded under him, turning him into a crooked pawnbroker.

He went over the necklace minutely. The seconds ticked off, the minutes passed, and then he looked up.

"For the mounting, Jerry, I might offer you twenty dollars, because you are my friend. But for the stones—nothing. They are paste."

His meaning just didn't get to me, didn't register. I heard the words but they didn't mean anything. When they began to have meaning, I thought he was lying, trying to pull a fast one.

My face told him what I was thinking. He handed me the glass.

"Look for yourself, Jerry. You worked for me long enough to tell the good from the bad."

Jake was right.

Sylvia Jackson, the daughter of Rufus Jackson, wearing cut glass!

Jake, looking at my face, clucked sympathetically.

"Sorry, Jake," I said, wondering if this was my voice I heard speaking. "I wasn't trying to pull a fast one on you. I got fooled myself."

I put the necklace in my pocket and walked out. Jake clucked sympathetically from his desk.

I got my car from the parking lot and started home. I hated Rufus Jackson worse than I had hated him before. Buying paste jewels and palming them off on his wife as real. I wondered if she had been happy thinking that. Sylvia, I knew, had been happy.

I opened the door of my room. A girl was sitting in my big chair.

Sylvia.

She looked like she had been crying.

She stood up when I came in. "Close the door, please, Jerry."

I closed it.

"Now give me the necklace."

I didn't say anything. I didn't know anything to say.

"I heard the bar drop on the back gate last night and got downstairs just as you opened the window."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"And you recognized me?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you call the police?"

I WAS thinking fast. She had recognized me and she hadn't called the cops. There were two reasons why she hadn't called them. Maybe there were more but I could think of two.

She didn't answer. I could see tears hidden deep in her eyes. She opened her purse. It was a little gun, a woman's gun, a .22.

I looked at the pistol. Sure, a little gun can kill you. A .22 bullet in the heart does the job.

I laughed. I didn't care. I didn't know I loved her until I found her here and knew I had lost her. So I didn't care about the .22.

I handed her the necklace.

She tucked it and the gun into her purse. She looked at me.

"Why?" she whispered. "Why did you do it?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes. I want to know."

"All right," I said. "I'll tell you. I was hurt. Rufus fired me. I thought he fired me to get me away from you. I thought he wanted to get me away from you because I came from the wrong side of the tracks. He had hurt me. I wanted to hurt him."

I put it in plain English, the plainest I know.

"That isn't true," she said.

"The part about the wrong side of the tracks isn't true," I said. "My side of the tracks is as good as your side—"

"Of course it is," she whispered.

"—but I didn't know that yesterday," I went on. "I didn't know old Rufus was a crook yesterday."

She was angry. Very, very angry. But puzzled. "I don't know what you mean," she said

"There are different kinds of crooks," I said. "There is the thief in the night. He's one kind. Then there is the kind who palms off a fake necklace on the people who loved him—"

Her eyes grew big and round. Fury burned deep within them.

"So you know it's fake?" I said.

She didn't seem to trust herself to speak. Her nod was almost imperceptible.

I swallowed. This was different. It was very much different. Maybe I had misjudged old Rufus. Maybe he didn't know. But Sylvia. She knew.

"Is that why you didn't call the

police last night? They would catch me all right, and then they would find out the necklace was paste. And Rufus would wonder what had happened to the real necklace that he bought for your mother."

There was a crook somewhere. I wanted to know where.

"I didn't call the police because I didn't want you arrested," she said. "That would hurt you and I didn't —don't—want to do that. Rufus knows the necklace is paste. I know it's paste."

I felt very unsteady. "What?" I said.

"During the war my father needed money very badly," she said. He had an exact duplicate made, then sold the original. At the time, mother was very ill. He didn't want her to worry. That's why he had the duplicate made. She died without ever knowing the truth."

I sat down. I had to. I couldn't stand up any longer. "Then that story Rufus told me yesterday was the truth?" I heard myself say.

"It was the truth," she answered.

I DON'T know how long I sat there in the chair. It was a long time. Then I heard myself saying, "I'm sorry, Sylvia."

And I heard her answer, her voice very soft and close to my ear.

"Anybody can be wrong once, Jerry."

So I knew then how she felt.

I got up. I put on my hat.

"I'm going down to see old Rufus," I said. "Do you want to go along?"

She wanted to go along. Her eyes said she wanted to go along.

Rufus sat at his big desk and listened to the story. He took off his glasses and looked out the window. He harumped a couple of times, then he said:

"I agree with Sylvia. Anybody can be wrong once."

. . . Monday morning I moved back into my office. Pay? Who said anything about pay? I had been paid plenty. I went to work getting a G.I. business loan. It wasn't a very big loan but it was big enough. I took off my coat and went out into the plant. Old Rufus went with me. And Sylvia went with us. Probably we looked funny out there working with our hands, but we got things going. Old Rufus had contacts and know-how. We got a little corner of the plant in operation, one stamper running. And a thin trickle of finished products began to move to market.

Sitting in my office, I can hear that stamper going now, *thump, thump, thump,* like the beat of my heart.

THE END

BLOOD IN THE RED BARN

By LEE KALEY

THE murder of Maria Marten for which William Corder became known as one of the most diabolical criminals in the annals of English justice is, beyond any doubt, as foul and dark a crime as ever stained any criminal history book.

Maria Marten, the murder victim, was born in 1801 and received a superior education; to add to her many virtuous characteristics, Maria was also possessed of a pretty face and fine figure and, consequently, became the object of many suitors at Polstead, in Suffolk, England.

In 1826, William Corder, a farmer's son became acquainted with Maria and finally, a year later to be exact, this suitor approached the girl's father and expressed his desire to wed the much-courted girl. Strangely enough, Corder insisted that the marriage take place quickly and as privately as possible. Corder formulated a strange plan to secure the greatest secrecy and told the girl to dress herself in a suit of his clothes and to accompany him to a part of his property known as the Red Barn, where Maria could exchange them for her own and, from there, both would finally drive to church at Ipswich.

Soon after Corder left his future in-law's house, he was seen by the brother of the girl to walk towards the Red Barn with a pickaxe over his shoulder. Soon afterwards, nothing was heard from Maria, except through some fictitious com-

munications received from Corder. Anxiety mounted when the girl did not return after two days from the time her father last saw her with Corder in his home. Maria's mother began questioning Corder who insisted that she was safe and well and was lodged with some of his friends at some distance from Polstead.

From time to time he put off the increasing questions put to him, and in September he stated that he was ill and would go to the Continent with Maria. After he left Suffolk, the Martens received several letters from Corder in which he stated that he was living at the Isle of Wight with Maria in complete happiness after having been secretly married on the isle. Oddly enough, his letters always were stamped with a London postmark. Because they received no direct word from Maria herself, the Martens began to entertain more suspicions. The circumstances which led to the discovery of this most atrocious crime certainly verified the parents' greatest fears and surmises.

In March, 1828, Mrs. Marten dreamed that on three consecutive nights her daughter had been murdered and was buried in the sinister Red Barn. Terrified at the repitition of such a horrible vision and almost firmly convinced that her daughter had met some foul end, Mrs. Marten persuaded her husband to apply to the local authorities for their permission to examine the Red Barn for some clues to his daughter's sudden disappearance.

Permission granted, the elder Marten began digging at the spot pointed out to his wife in her vivid dream and he finally turned up a piece of the shawl which Maria had worn when she left the Marten home with Corder. Frantically, he dug further and was horror-struck at the discovery he made—Maria's body was already in an advanced state of decomposition but the dress, still perfectly preserved, and certain marks in the teeth, provided enough positive proof that here was all that remained of the beautiful Maria Marten.

THIS gruesome discovery along with the drama of Mrs. Marten's terrifying dreams come true created a sensation throughout England. A surgeon's examination revealed that Maria had definitely met death by violent means; that blood was spattered on the face and clothes of the deceased; and that a handkerchief was tied extremely tight around her throat. More important was the discovery of a wound in the throat which had evidently been inflicted by an extremely sharp instrument. The surgeon's report also disclosed that there was a wound in the orbit of her right eye; and that it seemed as if something had fractured some of her small bones and had penetrated the brain. The body was partly enveloped in a sack when found.

Immediately after all investigations were underway the hunt was on for Corder. Lea, an officer of the London force, was sent in pursuit of the supposed murderer. After discounting innumerable loose clues Lea found Corder living a respectable life as the owner of a school for young ladies near Brentford, England. When confronted, Corder denied even knowing or hearing of a person named Maria Marten. Despite his violent denials, Lea began a thorough search of his house and found a good-sized collection of pistols, bullets and a woman's velvet bag which Mrs. Marten immediately identified as that which her daughter had carried when she made her last and fatal visit to her parents' home with Corder.

A sharp dagger was also discovered; this was soon identified by a cutler who admitted that it was grounded by him for the prisoner several days before the murder was committed. Corder was hurriedly returned to Polstead to stand trial for the atrocious murder of Maria Marten.

The trial caused a sensation and huge assemblages of all classes of people from all parts of the country fought to get into the small courtroom at Bury St. Edmunds. Corder regarded this courtroom furor with concelt, smugness and arrogance. He pleaded not guilty. It was definitely shown that the victim met her infamous end from a pistol-shot or gun-shot wound. Her brother proved, beyond a doubt, that Corder, at the time of his exit from the Marten house on the day of the murder, carried a loaded gun.

Corder's defense provided the dramatic climax to the trial. He declared that when he and Maria reached the Red Barn, they started to argue and words flew at such a furious pace that he flatly refused to go through with the planned marriage. He continued with his defense by stating that he left her at the barn but had just about reached the barn gate when he heard a shot and immediately turned to find Maria on the floor, dead. Horrified that the girl had met her death from one of his pistols, Corder declared that he decided to conceal the body by burying her beneath the barn floor.

After making a complete confession, Corder was delivered into the hangman's noose and Death by Justice.

On the alley stones a man lay dead, and the top-coated figure fleeing from the scene carried a revolver

Passport to Murder

by ROBERT MARTIN

CHAPTER I

I LEFT the barber shop all shaved and clipped and smelling pretty. The cold March air made my freshly scraped face tingle and burn. I started up the street with nothing on my mind but a couple of drinks and a spaghetti dinner at Johnny's on Euclid Avenue. It was ten minutes till six in the afternoon.

A sudden crackle of gunfire sounded above the clatter of late afternoon traffic. It came from an alley ahead of me. I started to run, and as I swung into the alley I saw a hatless, gray-haired man in a camel's hair overcoat dive out of the far end. The coat flew out behind his skinny legs. In the middle of the alley was another man. But he wasn't running. He lay on his back, his knees drawn up, his tan overcoat fanned out beneath him. Already a bright ribbon of blood nosed out from his body and crept across the uneven bricks.

I pounded past the man on the pavement, and I wheeled into the intersecting alley. It was empty. The gray-haired man had disappeared into the endless maze of back doorways and courts which ran clear to the lake front. I turned back.

A blue-overcoated cop was already standing astride the man on the bricks, and people were pouring into both ends of the narrow alley. The cop was blowing his whistle vigorously and waving the crowd back with a gloved hand. Traffic was jammed out in the street, and people on the sidewalks pressed and pushed, goggle-eyed, straining their necks. As usual, a couple of females let out screeches.

I full-backed my way through the

He ran headlong into a shooting scrape; and when all the ends got tied together, they formed a nice tight noose around his throat!

crowd and gained the cop's side. He swung toward me, his jaw muscles tight.

"Hello, Jacoby," I said. "Need some help?"

He recognized me, and for a second his stubborn face relaxed. "Oh, hello, Mr. Bennett—hell, yes. Help me keep these buzzards away from the stiff."

But I had already turned my back on him, and I pushed and strong-armed the curious and morbid pedestrians away from the body at my feet. In a couple of seconds, we had a little circle cleared. The siren of a squad car wailed a block away and died with a sigh as it turned in from the street. The door of the car flew open, and Detective Sergeant Dennis Rockingham jumped out. Using his hands, he cut through the crowd like a swimmer breasting the waves. His crew deployed behind him, a sprinkling of blue in the milling crowd.

Rockingham said: "Nice work, Jacoby," and then he spotted me. "My God," he growled, "can't we have a murder in this town without you sticking your nose into it?"

I jerked a thumb toward the cross-alley. "He went that-a-way, pardner."

Rockingham turned and shouted orders. Two of the cops hot-footed towards the intersection. Two others helped Jacoby keep the crowd back. I helped the cops, while Rockingham leaned in the window of the squad car and gave radio instructions to a cop in the front seat.

I LOOKED down at the body on the pavement. He was a small man with a swarthy face and thin black hair. Three or four slugs had been pumped into his chest at close range, and his vest was soaked with blood. I remembered seeing his hat lying close to his head, but it had disappeared under the feet of the surging mob—maybe picked up by a crack-pot souvenir scavenger. A small blue square of pasteboard lay on the crumpled overcoat. I leaned down and picked it up, thinking that Rockingham would want it. I put it in my overcoat pocket and pushed back a new contingent of sight-seers away from the body.

Rockingham left the squad car and stood beside me, glaring at the crowd and chewing on his red mustache. Presently a meat wagon and another squad car turned into the alley, and the coroner and the photographers went through their act. Then they hauled the body away, and the crowd thinned out. A few stragglers stood and stared intently at the drying blood on the bricks.

The two cops came back from the chase, panting heavily. "He's gone, Sarge. That's a Chinese puzzle back in there."

Rockingham grunted, and said to me: "Did you see it, Jim?"

I shook my head. "No. I was around the corner. Heard the shooting, and I saw him duck out the other end. Tall, skinny guy, gray-haired, tan camel's hair overcoat, brown shoes. I gave it a quick look, but no soap."

"Probably a slot machine operator," he said. "We got that stuff again. It goes in cycles. Last year it was numbers." He turned and headed for the squad car. "Thanks for your help, Jim," he flung over his shoulder. "See you later."

I walked the five blocks down the street to Jimmy's, had two Manhattans, followed by spaghetti and meat balls. When I had finished, I chinned a while with Johnny, and then I stepped out to the street.

It was a clear cold night, and I decided to walk to my apartment twelve blocks away. At the end of the fifth

block, I knew there was a man following me. I stopped and looked in a window filled with baby toys—fuzzy pink and blue rabbits, red elephants, horses, dogs, ducks, rattles. Out of the corner of my eye I saw that the man behind me had stopped three doors down the street and was staring intently at a display of trusses and abdominal supports. He was a big man in a black derby and a black overcoat.

I strolled back and stood by his side. He didn't move.

"I said: "Something you wanted, bud?"

He turned toward me. He had a wide, fat, smooth face, a short thick nose and wide thick lips. He smiled slightly and kept his hands in his overcoat pockets.

"Why, yes," he said, pleasantly. "I'd like that pawn ticket."

I remembered it then, for the first time since I had picked it up. "Sorry," I said. "I don't have any pawn ticket. You've made a mistake."

"I think not," he said, softly, watching me with bright black eyes. "I saw you pick it up."

"You're mistaken," I said again. "Get off my tail." I turned away.

"Wait," he said.

I turned. He had a wallet in his hand and his thick fingers were plucking at green bills. "How much?" he asked.

"Look, bud," I said. "I told you I didn't have any pawn ticket."

He held out a bill to me, and I saw the "100" in the corner.

I sighed. "Why do you want it?"

"I just want it," he said in his soft voice.

"Nuts," I said, and I turned away.

A block down the street I looked back. He was still standing there watching me.

WHEN I reached my apartment building, I kidded Rosie, the girl on the switchboard, for a couple of minutes, and then I hopped into an elevator and went up to my rooms on the sixth floor. I showered, shaved, got into pajamas, made myself a bourbon and soda and spent two hours writing reports in long hand for my secretary, Sandy Hollis, to type in the morning. After that, I made myself another drink and carried it through my small kitchen to the fire escape for a breath of fresh air before I turned in.

The night had turned balmy, and there was a faint smell of spring in the air. Below me, the city was quiet, and I stood and watched the lights of the late evening cars blinking along Euclid Avenue. From out over Lake Erie I heard the faraway hoot of the season's first freighters as they crawled into the harbor. I reminded myself to call Rockingham in the morning and tell him about the pawn ticket.

I went back into my apartment and got the ticket out of the pocket of my overcoat hanging on the inside of a closet door. It was just an ordinary pawn ticket, with a number penciled on it, and the printed words: *Jake Karko —Loans—Merchandise Purchased.* I put it back in my overcoat pocket, turned out the lights and went to bed.

Sometime before morning, I woke up. A metallic sound, like a wire clothes hanger banging against wood, came from across my bedroom. Then silence. I didn't move, but I opened my eyes wide, tried to stare through the darkness. The room was very quiet. And then I made out a dark shape standing against the wall by the closet, and I knew that whoever was standing there was watching me, too.

CHAPTER II

THE reflected light from the sky shone over my bed, and I knew that

I made a perfect target. But to me the person flattened against the wall was only a dark unmoving blotch. My gun was on a table across the room. For maybe half a minute the shadowy visitor and myself stared at each other. And then the shadow against the wall moved slowly toward the door.

I made a dive then, but I fell over a chair in the darkness, and I hit the floor. I heard a pounding of feet, and the sound of the outer door of the adjoining room being jerked open. I scrambled to my feet and stumbled out of the bedroom, and I saw that the light from the outside corridor was shining into my living room through the open door. I ran to the door, and I looked up and down the corridor, but it was empty. Whoever had been sneaking around my room had been plenty fast on their feet.

I figured the elevator was faster than the stairs, but by the time the sleepy night boy answered my signal I knew that it was no use to give further chase. Besides, I suddenly remembered that I was bare-footed and dressed in pajamas.

The elevator door slid open and George, the colored boy, looked at me with popping eyes.

"Go back to sleep," I growled, and I turned and went back into my apartment.

As I closed the door, I heard George say: "Yazzuh, Mistuh Bennett," and the elevator door clicked shut.

I looked at the lock on the apartment door, and I remembered distinctly that I had locked it right after entering that night. The inside catch was unlocked, and either my visitor had released the catch as a retreat precaution before entering my bedroom, or he had done a fast job of unlocking it on his way out. Then I remembered the door opening from my kitchen to the fire escape, but even before I checked I knew that I had forgotten to lock it before going to bed. The door was standing ajar. I slammed it, locked it, went to the telephone and called the switchboard.

"Rosie, did anyone go out the front entrance—in a hurry?"

"Did they! You could have played cards on his coat-tail."

"What did he look like?"

"Big—black overcoat and a derby."

"Thanks," I said. I hung up and went to the closet where my overcoat was hanging. I felt in the left hand pocket. The blue pawn ticket was still there.

I went back to bed. From somewhere out in the city a clock tolled three times. I didn't sleep much the rest of the night, but at eight o'clock in the morning, when it was time to get up, I felt as though I could sleep forever.

I GOT down town around nine-thirty. Before I went up to the office, I stopped at Jake Karko's pawn shop. It was in a dirty building off St. Clair Street, not far from the lake. A bell tinkled as I went in. Greasy curtains parted at the rear of the small room and a short, thick man waddled up to me. He had heavy features, thick black hair, large, liquid brown eyes behind gold-rimmed spectacles. He needed a shave, and his pants were buckled tightly beneath an over-hanging belly. He wore a vest, but no tie, and his unbuttoned shirt revealed a mat of black curly hair. He smelled a little like dead fish.

I backed up slightly. "Jake Karko?" I asked.

He nodded slowly. "Yes. What can I do for you?"

I expected him to start rubbing his hands together, but he didn't. He just hooked his thumbs in the arm-holes of his vest and looked at me inquiringly.

"I'm looking for a man," I said. "I

think he was in here yesterday." I described the man who had been killed in the alley the previous afternoon.

He shook his head slowly. "Sorry. I have not seen such a man."

"I think you have," I said. "Maybe this will help." I held up the pawn ticket.

He looked at the ticket carefully, and pursed his thick lips. Then he said: "I remember him now—a little dark man, wearing a blue suit?"

I nodded. "What did he leave here?"

Jake Karko looked at me, and his heavy lids drooped a little. "A vase," he said.

"May I see it?" I asked.

"Certainly." He stepped behind a counter, stooped down. When he stood up he held a small yellow narrow-necked vase in his hand. The vase was painted with bright colored birds and leafy branches of trees.

The bell tinkled, and the front door opened. A girl walked in. She was young and pretty. Long yellow hair and long straight legs. Blue eyes, red lips, mouth a trifle too large. Gray gabardine topcoat, no hat, brown, high-heeled shoes, a thin gold chain around her slim left ankle.

"Good morning, Jake," she said.

"Good morning, Miss Harrison," he said, smiling. "Just one moment, please."

"Take your time," she said. Her eyes were on the vase in his hand.

Jake Karko looked at me, and one lid dropped over his left eye.

"Pretty," I said. "How much?"

"Two thousand, five hundred dollars," he said.

I laughed. "Not the price of your business," I said. "Just the vase."

He looked at me queerly, and then he smiled. "A bargain, really. This is a Famille Jaune—K'ang Hsi period. Very rare."

"I'll take your word for it," I said. I wasn't getting any place, except that I knew that the vase was not a reason for murder.

I HEARD the click of high heels behind me, and the girl stood close by my side, looking at the vase. And then I felt her hand on my arm, and her fingers dug in. I looked down at her in surprise, but she was looking calmly at the vase.

Jake Karko said: "Is it not pretty, Miss Harrison?"

She nodded, and turned away. "Very nice," she said, carelessly. "I don't see anything this morning, Jake. See you tomorrow." She went out, and the bell tinkled behind her.

Jake Karko sighed. "I'm afraid that Miss Harrison is rather . . . curious. She owns a small antique shop, and she stops in every day looking for things."

"But two and a half grand for a vase is a little steep for her, eh?" I said.

He smiled slowly. "I'm afraid so." He sighed, and put the vase beneath the counter. He walked away from me, toward the front door. "Gradyville," he said, without looking around. "Third dam. Ten tonight."

I thought that over for a couple of seconds. Then I moved past him to the door. "Okay, Jake," I said. "Thanks," and I went out.

A half block away a voice said: "Mister—just a minute."

I turned. The yellow-haired girl was standing in the doorway of a pet shop. Airdale puppies cavorted on sawdust in the window. The girl came up to me.

"You didn't buy it, did you? The vase?"

I shook my head.

She sighed, and then she laughed. She had white, strong-looking teeth. "I'm so glad," she said. "You've got to watch Jake—he's an awful fake.

That vase was a cheap imitation of a Famille Juane. Ten dollars would be a big price for it."

"I wouldn't know," I said, grinning at her.

"Do you like antiques?" she asked.

"Only liquid," I said.

She laughed again, and then she hesitated. "Well—I just thought I'd tell you. I was so afraid you'd buy the vase—and I didn't want to say anything in front of Jake—"

"Nice of you," I said. "Are you going my way?"

"No. I've got to get back to the shop. Goodbye, Mr.——"

"Bennett," I said. "Jim Bennett."

"—Bennett. If you ever want some real antique things, stop in my shop. Jeanette Harrison, over on Carnegie."

"I will," I promised. "Provided you don't spell it *shoppe*."

"Heaven forbid," she laughed, and she turned and walked away. I watched her for a minute, a tall, straight figure with her yellow hair gleaming in the March sunlight. And then I saw something else. A man was standing on the next corner, beyond Jeanette Harrison. He was reading a newspaper. He was wearing a black overcoat and a black derby.

I moved on to the corner, rounded it. Then I stopped and poked my head around the edge of the building and looked back. Black Derby was talking to Jeanette Harrison.

CHAPTER III

IT WAS after ten o'clock when I entered the office. Sandy Hollis was typing busily away, and a man was sitting in a chair along the wall. He was a thin man, very carefully dressed, with a sharp nose, wide flaring nostrils, and straight brown hair parted neatly on the side. He got to his feet as I entered, and Sandy said in her best secretarial manner: "Mr. Bennett, this gentleman—"

She didn't finish. The tall man butted in: "Can I talk to you privately?" he asked me.

"This is private enough for me," I told him. "What's on your mind?"

He moved around so that his back was to Sandy. Then he held out a moist palm in which was wadded a thousand-dollar bill. "I want the pawn ticket," he said, in a low voice. "Here's a grand. Just give me the ticket."

"How do you know I've got a pawn ticket?" I asked him.

He moved his feet impatiently. "Never mind that—I followed you from Jake's."

"You got here fast," I said.

"I didn't want to miss you," he said. "Give me the ticket."

I took the blue square of paste board from my vest pocket. He snatched for it, but I jerked back. His eyes blazed, but he stood still. I took the bill from his hand, and then I handed him the ticket. He grabbed it, and started for the door.

"Wait," I said.

With his hand on the knob, he looked around, and he saw the gun in my hand. "Sit down," I said, and I reached for the telephone on my desk.

He turned slowly, and then his hand jerked toward his overcoat pocket. I lifted a foot and kicked him in the stomach. He grunted and flopped against the wall. I stepped in quickly, jerked a gun from his pocket. It was an old style nickel-plated .32 revolver. I tossed it on the desk, picked up the phone and called Homicide. When I was connected with Detective Sergeant Rockingham, I said: "This is Bennett, Rock. I got a guy over here you might want to talk to. Coming over?"

"About the shooting yesterday?" he

asked.

"Yeah."

"Listen, Jim," he said. "Let us run the Department, will you? The dead guy was a numbers salesman from Detroit. Name of Alonzo Parker. It's no skin off my nose. I've notified the boys in Detroit."

"Okay," I said. "It's no skin off my nose, either. Want me turn this guy loose?"

Rockingham started to curse. Then he said: "Dammit. I'll be over."

I hung up. The tall man was still standing against the wall and gulping for breath. "Take the weight off your feet," I told him. "The police will be here shortly."

He gave me a venomous look and sank into a chair. I laid my .38 on the desk with the muzzle pointing toward him, and I lit a cigarette. Sandy Hollis had stopped typing, and was sitting quietly watching us.

"Get on with your work, Miss Hollis," I said.

"Yessir," she said. "It's just that I forgot to say good morning to you. Good morning, Mr. Bennett."

I nodded solemnly, and took off my hat and laid it on the desk. She returned to her typing, the corners of her pretty mouth twisted upwards.

I said to the man on the chair: "You'll have to talk pretty soon. You may as well start now."

He said two words. The first one was very nasty. I got up and moved around the desk and stood in front of him.

"Why do you want that pawn ticket?" I asked, pleasantly.

He said the same two words again, his eyes on my shoes. Sandy kept on typing, as though she hadn't heard.

I slapped him hard across the face then, and his hat fell to the floor. He sat huddled in his chair, not looking at me. I reached down and took the pawn ticket from his vest pocket. He snatched for it, like a snake striking, and I slapped him again. His head slammed back against the wall, and a thin trickle of blood ran from a corner of his mouth.

I laid the ticket on my desk and sat down again. Sandy's typewriter clicked away, and her reddish hair glinted in the morning sunlight streaming through the windows.

THE door swung open, and Rockingham walked in. There were two plainclothes men standing in the hall behind him. Rockingham looked at the man huddled in the chair, and then at me.

"He tried to buy a pawn ticket I found on the stiff yesterday," I said.

Rockingham's eyes narrowed, and he started to chew on his red mustache. "Holding back evidence again?"

"Nuts," I said. "I forgot. There it is." I nodded at the ticket on the corner of my desk.

Rockingham picked it up, put it in his pocket. He motioned to the two dicks in the hall. They came into the office, and Rockingham jerked his head at the man in the chair. "Take him away. We'll talk to him at the station."

"Let me know what you find out," I said.

Rockingham swung on me. "What else do you know about this shooting—if it isn't too much trouble?"

"Always glad to help the law," I said. "A big guy in a black overcoat and a black derby offered me a hundred bucks for the ticket last night. I turned it down, believe it or not. Later he tried to get it from my bedroom. And he's still tailing me this morning."

"Very interesting," Rockingham said. "And what, pray tell, does this ticket redeem—the Hope diamond?"

"Just a yellow vase," I said. "A small

yellow vase, with pretty birdies painted on it."

"Oh," he said softly. "So you found out?"

"Sure," I said. "Why not?"

He turned his back on me and spoke to the man standing between the two dicks. "Anything you want to say before we place you under arrest?"

The tall man jerked his head at me. "Yes. Tell that dirty crook to give me back my thousand dollars."

Rockingham turned towards me, his lean jaw stubborn.

"Catch," I said, and I flipped the wadded bill at him with my thumb and forefinger.

He caught it, smoothed it out, folded it neatly four times and stuck it in his pants pocket.

"The things I do for law and order," I sighed.

Rockingham grinned wolfishly. "It would have looked a lot better if you had turned it in before he mentioned it."

"Look, G-Man," I said. "I didn't have to call you up here."

"Thanks, pal," he grinned, and the four of them went out the door.

Sandy Hollis said: "You're a dope, Mr. Bennett."

"Maybe," I said. "But after the punk squealed, Rock would have probably had me searched. And beside, you must always remember, Miss Hollis, that honesty is the best policy."

She muttered something unintelligible under her breath and returned to her typing. I looked over the morning mail, read the papers, and pretty soon it was time for lunch. Sandy put on a coat and a perky hat and went out. I had a drink of bourbon from a bottle in my desk, locked the safe, and went down to the street. I walked a few blocks, and turned down towards the lake.

The bell tinkled as I opened the door of Jake Karko's pawn shop, and he came through the dirty curtains. When he saw me he stopped dead in his tracks, and his fat greasy face took on a grayish color, like cooked pork. He just stood and stared at me.

"Relax," I said to him. "Did the cops pick up that vase?"

He didn't say anything, and I moved towards him. He backed up, and ducked behind the curtains. I walked to the archway and poked my head through the curtains.

"Hey . . . " I said.

And then something heavy and blunt slammed me behind my right ear, and I hit the floor.

CHAPTER IV

I DIDN'T blank all the way out, but for a couple of seconds I couldn't move. I just lay on my face, waiting for things to clear a little. Then I got to my knees, and I shook my head, tried to clear my fogged brain.

From somewhere behind me, and to my right, a voice said: "Again."

I heard a quick footstep, and I tried to twist around. Something thudded against my head, and bright purple and green lights flashed before my eyes. My face hit the floor, hard, and I closed my eyes and stretched out my legs. . . .

I don't know how long I was out. When I opened my eyes again it was cold, and I could hear rain beating on a roof. I lay still, trying to remember what had happened. My head pounded wickedly, and when I moved I found that my wrists and ankles were lashed tightly together, with my arms behind me. I was lying on my side on a bare wooden floor. The only sound was the steady drone of rain on the roof above me.

The room I was in was bare and dark, with chipped plaster and rubbish

piled in the corners. One dirty window was boarded up. A door opened into another room, but I couldn't see anything but peeling wall paper and dirty bare floors.

Then I smelled cigarette smoke.

I lay very still and thought a while. And the more I thought, the madder I got. I wanted to get out of there, get a gun in my hand, and hunt up a couple of people. I didn't like being batted around by a greasy junk peddler, and I was sorry I had not taken the thousand bucks from the guy in my office and kept my trap shut. I had played the whole business dumb all the way, and I said to myself: *Bennett, you're a simple so-and-so, with no more brains than a harness bull. Does Rockingham ever give you a break?*

I pulled up my knees and rolled over on my back. Then I let out a healthy groan. I waited a minute. Nothing happened. I groaned again, louder. This time I got results. I heard footsteps, and a man came through the adjoining doorway. I closed my eyes to slits, and began the groaning act again.

The man stopped about six feet away and looked down at me. From under my lowered eyelids I saw that he was a little man, and I was glad of that. He was little and skinny, with a narrow white face and a hat that was too big for him—it bent his ears down a little. He stood looking at me, a cigarette dangling from his pale thin lips.

"Water," I rasped, and I tried to make it sound like a lost prospector in Death Valley.

"There ain't no water, chum," the skinny guy said.

I heaved my chest up and down, and I rolled my head from side to side.

"Water . . . water . . . I croaked.

"Aw, nuts," the skinny guy said. He dropped his cigarette on the floor, ground it with his heel, and turned to go.

I groaned loud enough to stop him. He hesitated, looking at me.

"Tell . . . Jake . . ." I whispered hoarsely.

He leaned forward. "Tell Jake what, chum?" he asked.

I began to mumble. "Tell . . . Jake . . . that . . ."

He moved closer, leaned over me. "All right, all right. Tell him what?"

I FIGURED he was close enough, and I let him have it. I lunged out with my feet and I kicked him violently in the stomach. His slight body flew backwards and struck the wall. He rolled on the floor, gasping and strangling. I rolled over to him, and I banged my trussed-up feet into his face until he stopped wiggling. Then I swung around, writhed like an alligator, turned my back to him, and felt with my bound hands for his gun. I found it in his hip pocket, a big blue Colt .45 automatic, and I rolled with it to the doorway.

I didn't know how long Big Hat would be out, and I had to work fast. Holding the gun behind me, I struggled to my feet and hopped into the adjoining room. The windows here were also boarded up. I backed up to the door, twisted the knob. The door swung open, and I turned clumsily around, looked out. I saw an overgrown and tangled vineyard, a narrow muddy road, and beyond a bare clump of trees Lake Erie rolled oily and sullen in the rain. There was a sagging porch, with jagged yellow sandstone steps leading down to a path. I hobbled out on the porch, sat down, and scooted to the stone steps.

I laid the gun on the edge of the porch, eased myself to the second step, and I began to rub the cord around my wrists against the jagged edge of the

first step. It worked swell. In a couple of minutes I had my hands free. My wrists were numb, and they were bleeding in a couple of places, but I untied my feet before I rubbed my wrists to renew the circulation. The cold rain beat down and plastered my hair to my head.

I picked up the gun and went back into the deserted house. Big Hat was just beginning to wiggle a little. I tapped his head once, lightly, with the butt of the Colt, and went back out to the porch to retrieve the cords which had bound me. I had to tie them together, but there was plenty of length, and I soon had Big Hat trussed up very securely.

I left him like that. I couldn't find my hat, so I turned up my coat collar went out into the rain. I walked a couple of miles through bare wet vineyard before I came to a highway. A farmer came along in a two-ton truck, and hauled me into Rocky River. I got a taxi there, and thirty minutes later I got out in front of my apartment. It was four-thirty in the afternoon.

I took a hot shower, got into clean dry clothes, swallowed a couple of slugs of bourbon, filled my spare .38 with cartridges and called the office.

Sandy's voice said: "Jim! Where have you been? Rockingham wants you to call him, and there was a man here to see you."

"I got tied up," I said, and I intended no pun. "What did Rockingham want?"

"He didn't say—he sounded mad."

"Nuts to him," I said. "What about the caller? What did he look like? Leave any name?"

"He was a big man. He wore a black derby. He wouldn't leave his name. He came right after I got back from lunch, and when I told him that you were out, he left in kind of a hurry."

"All right," I said. "I'm going on a little job down at Gradyville. If I don't show up in the morning, call the cops there and send them out to the third dam. In the meantime, don't tell anyone where I am. Got it?"

"Yes," she said. "But—well—watch yourself, Jim."

"Sure. Keep the home fires burning." I hung up.

I called the garage and told them to send my car around. When I got down to the street, the car was waiting for me. I climbed in, and headed for Carnegie Avenue.

I spotted Jeanette Harrison's antique shop without any trouble. I parked in a lot close by, and walked back. It was a neat little store, its gleaming windows filled with dainty bits of china and glittering metal objects, statuettes, book ends and I don't know what all. I walked in.

JEANNETTE HARRISON stood behind a glass display case with her chin in her hands. She was dressed in a blue smock. When she saw me, she smiled and came around the counter.

"Hello, Mr. Bennett. You wish to buy something—I hope?"

I grinned at her. "No—not today. I'm just looking for someone to have a couple of drinks and a steak with me. What time do you lock up?"

"Six, usually. But today—" she looked at a small gold wrist watch—"today, closing time is five-twenty. We can't keep that steak waiting, can we? I need two minutes to powder my nose."

"I like a gal who knows what she wants," I told her. "I'll give you two minutes."

She laughed gaily, and went through a door at the rear of the shop. It was four minutes before she came back out. She had on the gray gabardine topcoat, and a brown leather purse slung from her shoulders. She turned

off the lights, and we went out. She locked the door, took my arm, and we walked across town, headed for the Erie Inn, a small, quiet restaurant near East Ninth. It had stopped raining, and as we walked through the late afternoon crowd she tossed her yellow hair back from her face and laughed up at me. Her head came just under my chin.

"How's the private detective business these days?" she asked.

"Been checking, huh?" I said.

"Sure. You don't think I'd go out to dinner with a strange man, do you? I looked you up in the directory, and I even called your office. Your secretary, Miss Hollis, has a nice voice."

"She's a nice secretary," I said. "Anything special you called about?" I asked casually.

"No—I just wanted to tell you that the vase has been sold. Jake apparently found a sucker—and I hoped that you hadn't changed your mind about it. I went back to Jake's, just before lunch, on other business, and when I asked to see the vase again, he told me that it had been sold."

"Don't worry," I said. "I didn't buy it."

We went into the Erie Inn then, and we found a small table along the wall. The place was quiet and softly lighted, and a string trio played muted Strauss waltzes.

We had a couple of drinks, and Jeanette Harrison told me a little about herself. Her parents were dead, but she had a brother in Columbus, Ohio. She had worked her way through Western Reserve and had studied music, but after she graduated she got a job as secretary to a dentist. "There weren't any jobs for a girl who played the piano better than an amateur, but not as good as a professional," she laughed.

She saved her money, got the antique bug, and went into business—but I gathered that there wasn't much business.

"I may have to go back to taking appointments for upper plate impressions," she sighed.

We talked some more, and then ordered dinner. She took a comb and lipstick from her purse and excused herself. I stood up and watched her walk across the room. I sat down again.

Her brown leather purse was lying on the table. I slid it over to my lap, unclasped it, and looked inside. The first thing I saw was a blue piece of cardboard. The printing on it was: *Jake Karko — Loans — Merchandise Purchased.*

CHAPTER V

I TOOK the ticket out of the purse and put it in my pocket. Then I replaced the purse in its original position on the table. Jeanette Harrison came back, and I had a couple of bad seconds while she opened the purse and replaced her comb and lipstick. But apparently she did not notice the absence of the ticket, and we finished our drinks and had dinner.

Gradyville is about twenty miles southwest of Cleveland, and I watched the time. After our coffee, we had some brandy, and I found Jeanette Harrison to be a pleasant companion. At eight o'clock I paid the check and we went out to the street. The sky had cleared, and it was a fine, cold March night. As we walked out from under the awning over the sidewalk, I saw a man get into a taxi at the curb. I spotted the black derby.

"Excuse me a second," I said to the girl, and I started for the taxi. But it pulled suddenly away with a grinding of gears and headed west. I walked back to Jeanette Harrison. She looked

at me with a puzzled expression.

"Friend of mine," I said, carelessly. "He didn't see me. Can I drop you some place?"

"Oh—is our evening over?" She looked disappointed.

"Afraid so—for this time," I told her. "I've gotta get back to work."

"What strange hours you keep," she laughed. "But then, I don't suppose private detectives belong to a union. You can leave me right here. It's early, and I think I'll take in a movie before I go home."

"I'm sorry to have to leave," I said, and I really was sorry. "Can I call you again?"

"I wish you would," she said. "Thanks for the dinner."

I left her, and walked away. At the corner I looked back, but she had already disappeared.

I got my car out of the parking lot on Carnegie, and I headed out of town. As I cleared the outskirts and settled down for the drive to Gradyville, I told myself that I was a dope for messing around in this business. There was nothing in it for me so far but an aching head and a date with a pretty blonde. But I was in it, and I was mad, and I was curious—I wanted to see where the trail ended. But I smiled ruefully to myself as I visualized a score board on a football field at the end of the last quarter: *Black Derby, Jake Karko, Jeanette Harrison, et al: 99,000. Bennett: 0.*

I got to Gradyville around nine o'clock. It was a farming town of around 10,000 population, with a river running through it. I stopped in a bar on the main street, had a drink and asked the bar tender where I would hit the third dam. He told me to go to the middle of town, turn right on the river road, and keep going. The third dam was about three miles out of town. He said there was an old abandoned mill there, and an intersecting county road which led up to the Columbus highway four miles north.

"But there ain't no fishing now," he added. "River's too muddy. All you'll catch is carp, and they ain't fit to eat. It's too early for good fishing."

"I want to hit the state road to Columbus," I said. "I was told it was a short cut."

"Straight north from the mill," he said. "You can't miss it."

THE first dam was right at the bridge in the middle of town, and I followed the river road and hit the third dam without any trouble. The bar tender had been right. My headlights picked up an empty hulk of a brick building on the river bank opposite the dam, and a gravel road ran north from the river road. I drove beyond the intersection and parked my coupe in a clump of trees on the river bank. I got out, walked back to the old mill, and sat down in one of the gaping doorways. I watched the road to the north.

The night was very still, and I could hear the river splashing and gurgling over the dam behind the mill. There were no houses nearby, and no cars passed on the gravel road. I moved back into a corner of the mill and struck a match and looked at my wrist watch. Twenty-five minutes to ten. I began to sweat. If I was going to find out anything, it would have to be pretty quick—before the guy who was supposed to be here, whoever he was, showed up.

I heard the faint sound of a motor, and I looked out of the open doorway. I saw headlights coming down the road from the state highway. The lights grew brighter, and they swung across the empty building. I heard a gentle screeching of brakes and the crunch of tires on the gravel. The lights went

off. Then there was silence. I peeked out. A big semi-trailer outfit was parked directly opposite the door in which I stood. In the moonlight I could see the big white letters on its side: *Michigan-Ohio Motor Freight.*

I held my arm clear of the .38 in its clip beneath my left arm, unbuttoned my overcoat, took a deep breath and stepped out of the doorway to the ground. I walked up to the cab of the truck, and suddenly a light flashed in my face.

I held up both palms. "It's okay, boys," I said.

The flashlight was turned off, and I saw that there were two men in the cab. I stepped up on the running board. The nearest man held a sub-machine gun in his lap, its muzzle pointing directly at me. The other man, the driver, sat with his hands on the wheel of the truck. The moonlight was bright enough for me to see them both very plainly.

The guy with the tommy gun had on a heavy leather jacket and a tweed cap. He had a smooth white face, a thin nose, and eyes like marbles. He said: "You on the Cleveland end?"

"Yeah," I said. "I've been waiting an hour. We had a little trouble. You gotta get rolling."

"What kind of trouble?" Tommy Gun snapped at me.

I hesitated for only a fraction of a second. Then I said: "Parker got bumped off—in an alley off Euclid. I don't think he talked first, but you can't tell."

The man behind the wheel began to curse. He was a big man with fat features and a hat which looked too small for him. "That's right," he said. "By God, I never did trust Parky." He reached for the ignition key. "We're gonna roll."

Tommy Gun said: "Relax, Shorty. Where you gonna roll to?" Then to me: "What's your name, friend?"

I was ready for that. "Blake," I said. "Bozo Blake."

"All right, Bozo," he said. "Where do we take this heap?"

I hadn't figured on that, and I thought fast, tried to figure the set-up. I was doing all right so far, and I didn't want to slip up now.

"Columbus," I said. "Broad at the Deshler, ten blocks off High. Nick's Service Center, the alley entrance. They'll be waiting for you."

The big driver nodded his head quickly, and kicked on the starter. The big motor ticked over softly. I started to step down to the road.

Tommy Gun said sharply: "Wait a minute, Bozo. I thought Karko was coming along?"

"He's trying to cover for the Parker kill," I said glibly. "The cops found a ticket on Parker, and they got the vase from Jake—but I don't think they know anything yet."

He lifted the gun and cradled its wicked snout lovingly in the crook of his arm. "How do we know that Karko sent you?" he asked softly.

I COULD feel the sweat running down my ribs under my shirt. I was running out of answers, and the muzzle of the chatter gun was about eighteen inches from my nose. And then I remembered the pawn ticket I had taken from Jeanette Harrison's purse. I pulled it out of my vest pocket and held it up. The big driver flashed his light, and the two of them looked at the square of blue paste board.

The man behind the wheel began to spell out the words slowly. "J-a-k-e K-a-r-k-o, L-o-a-n-s—"

Tommy Gun laughed shortly. "I can read," he said, and he grinned at me. "Okay, Bozo. Tell Jake I said hello."

But I was feeling cocky, and I decided to push my luck. "There's just one thing," I said. "I've got orders to look at the load."

The driver blurted out: "It's all there. We gotta roll—"

Tommy Gun turned toward him, and struck the big man's shoulder with the back of his hand. "Shut up, Shorty," he said. "Bozo, here, has got his orders, just like us. How many times I gotta tell you it's team work that counts? Just like in football, or baseball, or—"

"Snap it up," I said. "I'm due back in Cleveland—and the cops might be here any minute."

Tommy Gun opened the cab door and got down to the road. He still held the gun. "Kee-rect, Bozo," he said. "I'll show you."

I followed him around to the rear of the trailer and watched him unlock the big doors. His back was toward me, and maybe I could have taken him then, and handled the driver, too, but time was too short and I figured I was working on borrowed minutes already. It couldn't be far from ten o'clock, and if they had found that I had escaped from the shack in the vineyard, knowing that Jake Karko had tipped the rendezvous to me. . . .

The truck doors swung open, and Tommy Gun stepped back. There was enough light to see what the truck contained, but I struck a match and leaned in. It was crammed to the roof with women's fur coats—all kinds of fur coats, soft and shining. I reached in and felt the silky hide of a leopard, and I could tell by its very feel that it was the real thing. There was a fortune in furs in the big trailer.

I looked at the label in the back of the leopard coat. It was woven in red silk on a black satin background. In flowing script it said: "Manchester and Browning, Deluxe Furriers, Detroit."

"Okay," I said, carelessly, and I turned away.

Tommy Gun chuckled. "Pretty nice, hey, Bozo?"

"Yeah," I said. "You've done a good job so far, and we don't want any slip-ups. You got the address straight?"

"Sure, sure," he said, as he climbed back into the cab. "See you in church." He grinned at me, and made a circle with his thumb and forefinger.

The truck ground into first gear and began to move. I stepped back and watched it turn into the road leading to the Columbus highway. Its lights blinked on and it moved north, a huge bulk in the night.

I took a deep breath and wiped my face with my coat sleeve. Then I hurried along the road toward my car parked in the trees along the river bank. I was halfway there when I stopped dead in the middle of the road. I listened There was no time now to reach my car and get away.

A car was coming up the river road from Gradyville. It was coming fast.

CHAPTER VI

I RAN across the road and over the soft ground to the door of the abandoned mill. As I jumped into the dark building I knew that the headlights of the approaching car would pick up my coupe parked in the trees along the road. And I didn't have any illusions about what would happen to me if they found me—not with a fortune in furs at stake. I knew there was a door at the rear of the mill opening on to the river, and I wondered if the water was cold, and if it was deep—in case I had to retreat that way. I slipped my .38 from its clip, and I crouched beside the door facing the road.

The oncoming car made a curve, and its brakes wailed. The beam from its

headlights swung over the brick walls of the old mill and I saw it glint on the rear windows of my coupe parked beyond. The car jolted suddenly to a stop, and its lights went off. I watched and waited.

In the moonlight I saw the door of the car open. A man got out and crouched by the front wheels. I saw the glint of the gun in his hand. I waited. No one else appeared. The man was apparently alone. I felt a little better, and I decided there was no use in stalling around. I had to get to a telephone —quick.

In a voice loud enough to carry out to the road, I said: "Stand up, bud, and march over here."

The only answer I got was a blast of gunfire. I expected that, and I was crouched behind the doorway, but I didn't expect to be clipped by a flying splinter of brick. A jagged chunk struck me on the cheek, and for a second I was dizzy, felt blood running down my face. I stood up then, and I fired carefully at the dark form crouching by the car. Two answering slugs smacked the edge of the doorway. I jumped out, and I ran forward, firing as I ran. I heard a hoarse strangled sound, like a man saying "ah, ah, ah," for a doctor, and then I reached the side of the car.

A man was lying on his face by the front wheels. I leaned down, my gun poised, and I got him by the shoulder. I rolled him over in the road. His body was as limp as a bag of apples. I recognized the thin white face and the too-big hat pulled down over his ears. It was Big Hat, the skinny guard at the shack in the vineyard.

I pulled him off the road, and I knelt beside him. He was still breathing. I picked him up and carried him to the mill, laid him on the floor inside. Then I drove his car off the road, left it, got into my coupe, backed out, and headed for Gradyville.

On the way, I dabbed at my cheek with a handkerchief, but the gash kept on bleeding. When I got into town, I parking in front of the main hotel, a rambling, white-painted frame structure called *The Gradyville Tavern*. I went inside, spotted a phone booth, and I put in a call to Rockingham. He wasn't at the station, but I located him at home.

When he answered, I told him as fast as I could what had happened, and that he should get word to the Columbus police and tell them to have a crew at Nick's Service Center to serve as a welcoming committee for the truck load of furs.

Rockingham said: "My God, why Columbus? Why didn't you send them to someplace here in Cleveland? It would have been handy for us."

"And have them get in there before I could tip you off?" I said. "Cleveland's too close. They've had a half hour's start, and I figure they'll hit Columbus around one o'clock—maybe sooner."

"Of course," Rockingham said, "there *is* a Nick's Service Center there?"

"Don't be funny," I said. "Sure there is. Nick's a friend of mine. I stopped there two weeks ago on my way to Cincy. But tell those boys in Columbus to be careful—one of the truckers has got a tommy gun."

"All right," Rockingham said. "I got it. But that truck better show up."

"It'll show," I told him. "Get on that phone."

I HUNG up, and I called the Gradyville police department. "Get out to third dam, below town," I told the cop who answered. "You'll find a car—forty-two Chevvy sedan—and a wounded man in the mill. For details, call

the Cleveland police, Sergeant Rockingham. You better hurry—the guy might be dying."

I hung up fast, and I got the hell out of town. I didn't want to get mixed up with the Gradyville constabulary. It was ten minutes of twelve when I pulled up in front of my apartment house. As I crossed the lobby, the telephone girl called to me.

"Mr. Bennett, someone has been calling for you every half hour since ten o'clock. They wouldn't leave their name The last call came in at eleven-thirty."

"Okay," I said. "Put in a call to the Detroit police for me, will you? Detective Bureau. I'll talk to anyone on duty. I'll take it upstairs."

She nodded, and began to manipulate her plugs and wires. I took the elevator up to my floor, and I had just enough time to pour myself a drink before the phone rang.

A man's voice said: "Captain Holcomb speaking."

"Captain," I said. This is Bennett, American Detective Agency, Cleveland branch. Have you had a fur robbery up there—from the store of Manchester and Browning?"

He thought a minute. "No," he said. "Nothing on it—it hasn't been reported to the department."

"Have you got any information on Manchester and Browning?"

He said he would check, and I waited. My wrist watch said three minutes of twelve. The Captain came back on the wire. "Manchester and Browning appear to be reputable fur dealers. Been in business in Detroit for five months, credit rating good. They have not reported a robbery."

"Is their place open—doing business?" I asked.

"Yes, as far as we know. Do you want me to check it further?"

"You better," I said. "Call the Cleveland police tomorrow. They may check with you in the meantime."

I hung up, but I kept my hand on the telephone. The hands on my watch stood at exactly twelve o'clock, but I waited thirty seconds before the phone rang again. I lifted the receiver to my ear.

Sandy Hollis' voice said: "Jim?"

"Yeah, Sandy," I said. "I just got in, and I'm expecting another call any minute. What's on your mind?"

"Jim . . ." Her voice sounded queer.

"Sandy!" I snapped. "What's the matter? Where are you?"

I heard her voice again, but it was faint. "Jim . . ." She mumbled something I didn't get, and then it sounded like she said, "Aunt . . ." And then I heard what sounded like a fist striking flesh, and a low moan.

I gripped the phone. "Aunt who? Sandy, answer me . . ."

CHAPTER VII

A MAN'S voice said in my ear: "We're awfully glad you got back from Gradyville, Bennett. If you hadn't it would have been rather—ah—messy for your nice little secretary. However, there is still a little time left."

My collar suddenly felt too tight, and my throat was dry. I tried to keep my voice steady. "Let me talk to her again," I said, "and then maybe we can make a deal."

The smooth, pleasant voice said: "Why, I'd love to let you talk to her again, Bennett, but—well, you see, Miss Hollis is—ah—unable to talk at present."

"What have you done to her?" I asked, and it seemed as though my voice belonged to someone else.

"Nothing much—yet. All you've got to do is get busy and call the police

away from that trap you've got set for the truck. Just tell them you made a mistake. That's all, Bennett, except that I want to know where the truck is."

I thought fast, tried to find a loophole. There wasn't any. The truck was due at Nick's in Columbus in less than an hour—maybe it was there now—and by this time the Columbus cops were waiting for it. Maybe I could get Rockingham to call them off, but I doubted it. Rockingham was a cop, and a tough one, with a one-track mind. But even if he did call Columbus, the cops there were bound to check anyway—a long legged girl named Sandy Hollis in Cleveland meant nothing to them. I knew that before I could do anything for Sandy in that way, the deal would be over, or too far gone to stop.

"Don't try to trace this call, Bennett," the voice said in my ear. "You haven't time. You've got—let's see—exactly twenty-four minutes — until twelve-thirty. We'll wait that long, because she seems like a real nice girl. I'll call you then. If you answer and tell me that your little act has been called off, and tell me where the truck is, we'll, ah, delay proceedings with Miss Hollis until we locate the truck. If everything is in order, we will then release her. Is this all clear, Bennett?"

"Yes," I said from between clenched teeth. "I'll be here."

The voice laughed pleasantly, and then there was a soft click and the wire went dead.

There wasn't time to call Rockingham, or to trace the call. There wasn't time to do anything but to get going. There was one flicker of light in the blackness. The phone calls at half hour intervals told me that they had waited two hours to get in touch with me, and they might wait longer. They had nothing to lose, and a fortune in furs to gain. But when I thought of Sandy, I felt suddenly sick, and I knew that no matter what I did it would probably mean the same thing for her—she knew too much already, I was sure of that, and they would never let her go.

I had twenty-three minutes. I called Alec Hammond's private number. I was lucky. He answered immediately.

"Alec," I said, "this is Jim. I haven't much time. Come over to my place—now. I'll leave the door unlocked. At twelve-thirty the phone will ring. Answer it. Tell them it's me—got it?—and say this: 'The deal has been called off. Your truck is at the Maumee Garage on Cherry Street, in Toledo.' Try and stall them. Understand?"

"Yep," Alec said. "I'm on my way."

That was one thing I liked about Alec Hammond. He was a good operator, and whenever I needed him he went right to work, and he didn't ask any questions. The trick probably wouldn't do any good, but it was worth trying, and it might give me a little more time.

I checked the cylinder of my .38, put a handful of extra cartridges in my pocket, and went down to the street. It was ten minues past midnight. I pressed the starter of my coupe, wheeled away from the curb, and I was three blocks away before I slid it into high. The traffic signals were just so many pretty lights to me. At One Hundred and Fifth Street I swung wide for a truck, and my tires screamed. A cop on the corner blew a blast on his whistle. I straightened the coupe out, and swung right toward the lake. I shot a quick glance into my rear-view mirror, and I saw the lights of a car following me. I said to myself: *Come on, coppers. I can use a couple of extra guns.*

I HIT St. Clair, and I began to slow down. Two blocks from Jake Karko's pawn shop I swung into an

alley, killed my motor and jumped out. The car behind me had disappeared, and as I moved up the street in the shadow of the buildings I cursed silently to myself. A couple of cops at my side with their fingers on the triggers of Police Specials would have been very welcome.

Jake Karko's place was dark, except for a dim light burning in the rear. I didn't waste any time pounding on the door. I kicked in the glass and jumped in. Nothing happened, and I ran back through the store to the curtains and pushed them aside, my gun in my hand. The place was silent and dark and smelled of dust. I didn't waste any more time there. I was shooting in the dark, and I had no time to throw away. My wrist watch told me that it was just then exactly twenty-two minutes past twelve.

I ran back through the store, climbed through the shattered window of the front door. The street outside was quiet and deserted. I ran for my car, and I thought bitterly to myself: *any other time, Bennett, if you kicked in a door you'd have six cops on your neck in two seconds.*

I jumped into my coupe and kicked the motor to life. Then I sat with my hands on the wheel, while the minutes ticked away. I prodded my brain: *Where to? Where to? Sandy had said, "Aunt." Aunt who? Aunt what? Aunt Matilda, or Aunt Kate, or Aunt Abigail? How many aunts did Sandy have? Where did they live? How many did I know? Not a one. I didn't know any of her damn aunts. . . .*

And then it struck me like a ton of bricks.

I slammed my coupe into reverse, shot back out of the alley, and I highballed for Carnegie Avenue. Maybe I had time, and maybe I didn't, but I was on my way.

CHAPTER VIII

JEANETTE HARRISON'S shop was dark too, but I saw a dim crack of light beneath the door at the rear of the store. I used the same delicate technique here—I kicked in the glass door, and I went through it, my gun in my hand. I had heard of guys being trigger-happy, but I never thought it would happen to me. I was trigger-happy as hell. Sandy Hollis was a damn nice girl, and she was in this mess because of me, and if they had done anything to her. . . .

I pounded through the store, and I twisted the knob of the door at the rear. It was locked. I stood back and heaved my hundred and ninety pounds against it. It busted right in, and I almost fell on my face.

I stumbled to a stop. Jeanette Harrison let out a scream. Jake Karko stood beside her. His bloated, greasy face was gray. I was in a kind of a storage room, and boxes and empty crates were scattered about. Two jumps took me to Jake Karko, and I wasted no time on preliminary talk. I ripped the muzzle of my gun across his face, and he swung sideways, away from me, his face against the wall, his head down. Jeanette Harrison just stood frozen, her palms against a big packing case behind her.

"Where is she?" I asked Karko as calmly as I could.

He started to say "Who?" and I swung my gun. He covered his face with his hands, and blood ran out from between his fingers. I wanted to hit him again, but I grabbed him by his shirt-front and I poised my gun in my back-flung hand.

"Talk, punk," I choked out.

He gurgled something that didn't make sense, and I slammed the gun against the side of his head. He started to slump against the wall, but I held him

up, brought up my gun again.

Jeanette Harrison said: "In there."

I wheeled on her. Her eyes were wide and staring at a door at the far end of the room. I didn't waste any time on her. I let Jake Karko fall to the floor, and I jumped for the door. But I stopped. The door swung open, and a man stood there. He was a medium-sized man in a striped suit. He wore rimless eye glasses, and he had a wide thin mouth. There was a little blue-steel automatic in his fist.

"Bennett," he said, "you're—ah—a little late. I told you twelve-thirty, and it's, ah—" He raised his wrist to look at a gold watch.

"Late hell," I said, watching him. "Where is she?"

IN THAT instant his little gun spat at me, and I felt a sudden burning pain on the side of my neck. I squeezed my trigger then, and the blast of my .38 rocked the room. It was a lovely, full-throated sound. The man in the doorway sagged against the casing, and I made a dive for him. I hit him in the stomach, and he went all the way down. I jumped clear of him and stumbled into the adjoining room. I whipped up my gun.

I caught a glimpse of a hatless, gray-haired man in a camel's hair overcoat scrambling for a window, and there was another man, one I hadn't seen before. On the floor, in a corner, was the body of Sandy Hollis. She lay on her back, a dirty rag tied over her mouth, her hands and feet trussed up. Her reddish hair fell back from her white forehead, and her eyes were closed. Her long, slender legs were drawn up, and whoever had tied her had not bothered to pull down the skirt of her tweed suit. Her white legs above her stockings gleamed in the dim light, and her jacket and blouse were almost torn from her body.

Through a red mist of rage I took in the room and the people in it. And then I aimed carefully at the gray-haired man climbing through the window. My slug smacked him right between the shoulder blades, and he hung in the window a couple of seconds, his long skinny legs twisting slowly. But even as I fired, I saw the other man move. He was a big, wide man—gray hat, black brows, heavy, wide-joweled face, a dark blue sport shirt buttoned at the collar, no tie, a gray, double-breasted suit.

He scurried sideways, like a crab, away from my line of fire, and as I swung toward him, he opened up with a stubby-barreled revolver. I heard the *splat* of his bullets on the wall behind me, and then a slug struck my gun arm, just below the elbow, and I almost dropped my .38. But he was rattled and firing fast. I grabbed my gun with my left hand, and I pumped two slugs into him. Something smacked me from behind then, and I hit the floor. I thought: *the damn girl—I forgot about her,* and I rolled over, shot a glance at the doorway. Jeanette Harrison was not in sight, but the man in the blue-striped suit was on his hands and knees behind me, and in one hand he held a heavy chunk of lumber. He started to swing it again, and I shot him in the right shoulder. He flopped forward, and rolled the other way.

Big Boy was still on his feet in the corner, swaying like a drunk, and there was a big smear of blood on the lapels of his neat gray suit. Suddenly he lurched toward me, and he began to scream like a Zulu. And then I heard the *click-click-click* of his gun hammer on empty cartridges, and it was a sweet sound to my ears. I grinned savagely to myself, raised myself to one elbow and got the sight of my gun on his ad

vancing gray-covered belly. I pulled the trigger. But I got a *click*, too.

And then I remembered. I had used up all six of the bullets in the cylinder. I flung the empty gun at him. It missed and banged into the wall behind. Big Boy came on in. From somewhere he had produced a wicked-looking, short-bladed knife. He held it in front of him, like a lance, and he came in low, crouching like an ape. I flung up my heels, but he lumbered around me, weaving drunkenly. And then he threw himself on me, and he raised his knife high. I tried to twist out from under him, but he was kneeling on my stomach, and all I could do was thrash my feet and my good arm about. I managed to hook a couple of fingers in his mouth, but he damn near sank his teeth into the bones, and I felt him brace his big body for the knife plunge. I strained and twisted, but his fat knees held me down, and the knife in his fist flashed downward. . . .

There was a single, hammering roar, and I distinctly heard the thick thud of the slug's impact, and I watched the oozing circle of blood spread on the chest of the man kneeling over me. He grunted a couple of times, his eyes already glazed, and then he toppled heavily forward onto the floor beside me, his thick fingers slowly loosening on the knife in his hand.

I rolled over on my stomach, and I looked towards the door. A big man stood there. He was wearing a black overcoat and black derby. There was a big black Colt automatic in his hand, and blue smoke still curled lazily from its muzzle.

CHAPTER IX

BLACK DERBY looked at me, and there was a slight smile on his broad smooth face. "Are there any more around?" he asked. "Kicking ones, I mean?" he added.

"Only the girl in there," I said watching him. "And maybe the fat slob."

"The girl has fainted," he said, looking over his shoulder. "And our pawnbroker friend is still out." He looked down at the man in blue striped suit lying just inside the doorway, the heavy wooden club still in his hand. "He's out, too—for good, looks like. You really cleaned house tonight."

"They almost cleaned me," I said, and I got slowly to my feet. I didn't fall down, so I moved over to Sandy Hollis. I leaned over her, and I saw that her eyes were open. She made a strangled sound, and I ripped the rag from her mouth, tried to help her to a sitting position. Black Derby crossed the room.

"Let me," he said, and he untied Sandy's feet and ankles. She pulled her skirt over her knees, and ran a hand over her face.

"You okay, Sandy?" I asked.

She nodded, and a long red strand of her hair fell over her forehead. She brushed it back and looked at me. "Yes, Jim—I think so—I saw it all. I thought that you. . . ."

"I'm fine," I said. "A few nicks here and there."

"Your arm," she said. "And your neck's bleeding—" She took a handkerchief from the breast pocket of my coat and began to dab at me. I looked up and winked at Black Derby.

"Who the hell are you?" I asked pleasantly.

"My name's Hostetter," he said.

"Well, Mr. Hostetter, you came in at a hell of a nice time— fatso, there, was just about to slid that bayonet into me."

He tilted his derby back on his head. He grinned. "No!" he said.

"Sandy," I said, "how did they get

you?"

"A girl called me—late this afternoon. She said that you had asked her to call and tell me to meet you here. Like a dumb bunny, I went, and—they had me. I tried to yell and get away, and they tied me up. "He—" she nodded at the big man on the floor who had tried to knife me— "slapped me some, and then they got you on the telephone. I tried to tell you where I was, but he hit me—and that's all I remember."

Hostetter said: "Mr. Bennett is a good man to have around. I've been following him since last night, and I know."

I looked a question at him.

"F.B.I.," he said, smiling. "Believe it or not. I won't flash any badges, but take my word for it. We've been on the trail of bankruptcy operators. I've followed them all the way from Seattle. You know how they work—set up shop in a town, pay their bills promptly, establish a good credit rating, and then order a carload of stuff—furs, this time—and light out with it, sell the stuff through a fence, and start in business someplace else. Sometimes they just have a big sale, sell the stuff cheap, and then beat it. The National Bankruptcy Act pulls us into it, and it keeps a lot of us busy."

"Why didn't you say so—when you tried to buy the pawn ticket from me last night?" I asked.

He smiled. "I didn't know you from a pail of paint—then. You might have been in on the deal, for all I knew. I was tailing the man who got shot in the alley. When I arrived on the scene, I saw you pick up the ticket, and I didn't see you give it to the Sergeant."

"I forgot it," I said, "until you asked me for it. That's when I started checking. But the next time you go prowling around a guy's bedroom in the middle of the night, you better introduce yourself first. I might have plugged you."

"I don't think so," he said, grinning at me. "I had you covered. But I didn't know who you were until the next morning. I went to your office—I wanted to hire you, but you weren't in."

"Don't remind me," I groaned. "Was the pawn ticket a kind of a passport—identification for the guys in the deal?"

HE NODDED. "Yes. I found that out in Detroit—that's why I wanted the ticket. I followed this man from Detroit. He had a package. He left the package at Jake Karko's, and he got a ticket in return. I wanted either the ticket or the package, and so I followed him. But before I could do anything about it, he was murdered."

"By the stiff on the floor, there," I said, nodding at the body of the gray-haired man in the camel's hair overcoat. "I saw him duck out of the alley. Why did he bump him—a double-cross?"

Hostetter shrugged his big shoulders. "Yes. The same old story. Manchester and Browning are the current aliases of the bankruptcy operators we're after. I knew this: Manchester went to Cleveland ahead of Browning. Browning was supposed to stay in Detroit and keep the store open for a day or two—to make it look good and to give the boys on the truck a chance to get away and hide the furs. Manchester was supposed to go to Cleveland and get everything lined up. But he decides to slip the double-cross to Browning, and so he buys off the guys on the Cleveland end, and hires one of them to bump off their agent with the identification. Jake Karko was working on a commission basis, and he was supposed to make arrangements to hide the

furs and arrange for their disposal. And he had orders to divulge the truck rendezvous only to the man with the pawn ticket. If Manchester had the ticket, he could meet the truck and take it wherever he wanted to—and Browning would be out in the cold. Do you follow me?"

"Yeah," I said. "Manchester was the guy who came to my office this morning and offered me a grand for the ticket." I sighed. "I turned him over to Rockingham."

"He's still in jail," Hostetter said. He walked over and touched the body of the big man with his foot. "This is Browning. He got into Cleveland this afternoon. He found out that Manchester had been nabbed by the cops, and so he takes over. He goes to Jake Karko, tells him what happened, and then you walk in. Jake knows that you have the ticket, and so they knock you out and put you away long enough to make contact with the truck. Only you get away, and when they find you are gone they send a man to Gradyville to head you off—and to warn the truck drivers that Jake's hand has been tipped. What happened then?"

"You're doing fine," I said. "I got there first, and I sent the truck to Columbus—into a trap. But how did you know all this stuff?"

He grinned. "I told you I've been on your tail since last night. I was even hiding out in the vineyard by the shanty this afternoon. I got wet as well."

"Good," I said. "Why didn't you help me?"

His face grew serious. "I would have, Bennett—if I'd been forced to. But you were getting along all right. And I wanted to stay out of the picture until the deal was sewed up—you see, this bunch got a look at me in Detroit, and I didn't want to tip my hand."

FROM out in the city I heard the wail of police siren. "Sure," I said bitterly. "Here come the cops, like a pack of hounds—after we do all the work."

Hostetter said: "Remember, Bennett—you're working for me. Play it straight."

"All right," I said, "but I want combat pay."

There came a slight sound from the adjoining room. Hostetter turned quickly. Jeanette Harrison stood in the doorway. Her eyes fell on Sandy, and she swayed slightly. "Thank God," she said. "You're all right?" She leaned against the door and looked at the bodies of the two men in the room.

"I'm sorry about your pals," I said.

She straightened up, and her pale face flushed. "I don't understand," she said.

Hostetter said: "I think you've got it wrong, Bennett. Miss Harrison is in the clear on this."

I pulled Jake Karko's pawn ticket from my vest pocket. "Then what was she doing with this?"

Hostetter looked at it. "It's the wrong number," he said. "She probably pawned something at Jake's

Jeanette Harrison laughed a little hysterically. "The ticket—I thought I'd lost it. You took it from my purse tonight, at the restaurant, and you thought—?"

I shrugged. "It got me by in Gradyville."

"They didn't look at the number," Hostetter said. "It's all right, Bennett. I've checked—"

"I may as well tell you," Jeanette Harrison said. "My business is on the rocks. I took some stuff to Jake this noon. He bought it and gave me a ticket—the one you took from my purse. He was going to buy all my stock—he said he would come over to

take an inventory tonight. But when he came, he brought three men with him—and they made me call Miss Hollis—I couldn't help it—"

Sandy Hollis stopped fussing with my arm. "That's right," she said. "They forced her to call me, and when I got here they grabbed me. She didn't want to call me, and they treated her rather badly—I could see that. I heard Karko say, 'They'll never look here—my store is the first place they would go to'."

"Amen," I said. "My apologies, Miss Harrison."

The police siren was loud now, and Hostetter said quickly: "I'm not kidding, Bennett. Remember, you're working for me. You did a lot of work on this case, and I just followed you around. I knew that the police had Manchester, but I didn't have time to see them about it. I was too busy keeping on your tail. Rockingham might be a little touchy about it."

"To hell with Rockingham," I said. "He gouged me for a thousand bucks this morning."

Hostetter grinned at me. "Don't worry about that. It just happens that I've got you down on my expense report for nine hundred and fifty dollars —'James Bennett, private investigator, for services rendered'."

"Will J. Edgar Hoover approve that?" I asked.

"Sure," he said. "It's legitimate—no padding. We got our money's worth out of you."

I sat down on a packing box. From out in front I heard a trampling of feet as the cops trooped into Jeanette Harrison's Antique Shop. I heard Rockingham say: "Reminds me of prohibition—ankle deep in blood."

II

HOSTETTER turned to meet him, and I heard them talking in low tones. And then Rockingham's voice blurted out: "The hell you say!" There was more talk, and Rockingham poked his head around the door. I looked up at him.

"G-Man," he sneered at me. He walked about the room kicking at the bodies of the three men on the floor.

"The guy by the window," I said, "did the shooting in the alley last night. The tub of lard with the toad-stabber is a fake bankrupt named Browning. You've got his double-crossing partner, Manchester, in your clink. You'll have to ask the F.B.I. about the guy in the fancy suit."

Hostetter moved the body of the man nearest the doorway with his foot. "This is John Koontzy. Wanted for blackmail, and other things."

Jeanette Harrison came to the doorway. "Jake's coming around," she said.

I got to my feet, in spite of Sandy's protests, and I walked into the adjoining room. I was a little shaky, but I made it over to Jake Karko.

I leaned my good arm against the wall, and I said: "Jake, that Famille Jaune, K'ang Hsi period stuff about the vase was just a gag, wasn't it?—to keep any curious people like Jeanette Harrison from buying it? You sent the vase to Detroit to the contact man to be used as a counter-sign, a means of identification, since this Detroit tie-up was new to you. You didn't want to take any chances. The man who brought that vase was to receive a numbered pawn ticket from you, and afterwards you would know that whoever presented that ticket to you was in the deal and that he was the person you were to give the truck rendezvous to. You had to play it carefully, because you planned to hide the truck someplace in Cleveland, dispose of the furs later, and take your cut. Isn't that

right?"

Jake Karko, on the floor at my feet, blubbered: "It was Manchester's fault —he wanted it all for himself. He said he would get the ticket from the contact man—and make Browning think that he had nothing to do with it—and he planned—I—I—was only to store the furs, and to arrange for their disposal—I—I—had nothing to do with the murder . . ."

He began to sob, and he buried his bloody face in his hands.

Rockingham said: "Quite a set-up. The boys in Columbus called me. They got the truck. And the Gradyville cops called, too. That guy you plugged down by the old mill stream is still living. He spilled the whole ball of wax, and it checks with what Karko just said."

The police photographer's bulbs started to flash, and Rockingham strode about, shouting orders. Sandy, Jeanette Harrison, Hostetter and myself went outside. Sandy said: "Jim, how did you know where to find me?"

"I didn't—at first. I thought you said *aunt*—and I don't know any of your aunts. But after I found Karko's place empty, it struck me. You had started to say *ant*ique, and they shut you off before you could finish. As soon as I realized that, I went quick, like a bunny, to Jeanette Harrison's Antique Shop—the only antique shop I knew about."

Hostetter said: "And I followed you all the way from your apartment. When I saw you were heading for Jake Karko's, I ducked into a side street and waited. When you came out and headed for Carnegie, I almost lost you."

"G-Man," I said, "a second later, and you would have lost me."

I wasn't funny, but everybody laughed, and we put the two girls in a taxi and sent them home. After that, Hostetter insisted that I see a doctor. After I got patched up a little, we drove to my apartment in Hostetter's car.

We found Alec Hammond sitting in a chair, his feet propped up. He was reading a book of mine called, "Identification of Firearms," and there was a half-filled bottle of my bourbon on the table beside him. His freckled face broke into a grin, and he pushed a lock of bright red hair back from his forehead.

"Come in, come in, gentlemen," he said, waving a hand.

"Thanks," I said. "Did you get a call at twelve-thirty?"

He nodded. "Yep. Right on the nose, like you said."

"What did they say when you answered?" I said.

He poured himself another drink. "I guess I'm not a very good imitator. They said, 'Where's Bennett?' and I said, 'This *is* Bennett,' and they said a nasty word, and then they hung up."

"You were a big help," I said. "Can you spare us a drink?"

"Sure, sure. Help yourself. There's plenty more where that came from. I looked."

We all had a drink.

JACK OF ALL JAILS

By HUGO DRAKE

IN LOOKING through the history of crimes and criminals, one would easily suspect that Jack was an unlucky name; all the most famous criminals were named Jack. The most famous of these, beyond a doubt, was Jack Sheppard, the typical Cockney boy whose criminal exploits in London made him the subject of countless novels, newspaper adventure stories and

legends.

Sheppard, despite his notorious reputation, was a good-natured and likeable son of a fairly-comfortable carpenter in 1702. He was very well educated for the time—he could read and write—and worked happily at his job as an apprentice carpenter until he met Joseph Hind, a shady keeper of the Black Lion Inn in riotous Drury Lane. Hind transformed Sheppard's character in a Jekyll and Hyde manner almost overnight; he taught the innocent apprentice how to drink, hate and steal.

From petty pilfering in shops, Sheppard entered willingly and adeptly on a full-scale career of robbery with another confederate Blueskin, one of the most dreaded thieves of his day. Another notorious creature of the London underworld, Will Field, acted as a fence to dispose of the booty. Two others—Sheppard's brother, Tom, a sailor; and Edgeworth Bess, a deceitful and betraying woman—made up what was now known as the Sheppard Gang whose specialty was robbery, planned, calculated and dreadfully and completely successful.

Most of their robberies were of London shops and the gang's success in eluding capture was terrifying to every successful merchant in London. The gang thoroughly enjoyed their immense booties until the fateful day—which eventually and finally comes to every criminal—when Bess became careless in avoiding the authorities and was captured with a considerable amount of stolen goods upon her. Sheppard, now a brazen and boastful gangleader, visited Bess in jail, overpowerd her guard, and finally freed her. The gang once again resumed their profitable line of robberies. Again the cards were down and Tom Sheppard was captured. With fewer scruples than his brother, Tom turned King's evidence against Jack and Bess.

All London—police and merchants combined—were out to get Sheppard and their efforts proved successful when Jack, stopping in an alehouse, was recognized and captured by a constable. He was imprisoned in the upper story of the Roundhouse, famous London prison, with no tool but a razor with which the prisoner plotted escape.

To insure quiet, Sheppard pulled his mattress into the middle of the room and started to cut away at the roof with the razor. Bits of the roof fell quietly onto the mattress and all seemed to be going well until a loosened bit of tile fell outside and hit a passerby who immediately complained to the prison officials. Jack, realizing that the alarm had been sounded, made a sudden, strong push against the crumbling roof and escaped over the rooftops of the houses nearby.

Sheppard's arrogance and conceit over his escape made him easy prey for recapture and this day was not far off. Strangely enough, Sheppard was recaptured while picking pockets, a petty crime indeed for a member and leader of the Sheppard Gang, and, this time, was sent to a stronger prison—the Newgate Prison—and he was put in the strongest cell.

EDGEWORTH BESS came to visit him and was arrested on suspicion. She was placed in Sheppard's cell. Although he realized that escape was not so easy from Newgate, Sheppard and Bess formulated their plans and the two managed to loosen and finally remove two bars from his cell window. He tied the blankets to make a ladder to climb down the 25 feet into the prison courtyard. The two made their way down their makeshift ladder and, oddly enough, met no opposition in their escape from the prison yards. Newgate, the toughest prison to escape from, was losing its reputation fast after Sheppard's amazing success.

Despite his obvious daring and ingenuity, Sheppard became exceedingly careless of being captured and it wasn't long afterwards that he and Blueskin found themselves before the dock at the Old Bailey Sessions, charged with innumerable robberies. Field, the coward and traitor that most criminals turn out to be when the going becomes tough, turned King's evidence and exposed every job the Sheppard Gang pulled in their long and notorious existence.

The law was savage in its judgment during the eighteenth century and the sentence for robbery was death. Sheppard and Blueskin both received this extreme penalty and they were confined, this time under the strictest guarding, to the Newgate Prison again to await the death warrant. Sheppard was shown no mercy even while awaiting death; he was confined to the infamous condemned hole—a special dark and horrible underground cell for the condemned—until his execution date was set.

Amazing though true, the Sheppard case does not end here for it happened that he had been given a file by a fellow prisoner before the latter went to his death. Sheppard, now an expert at escape, quietly sawed away some of the spikes and made good his escape while relatives of his fellow prisoners were saying tearful goodbyes.

Betrayal again was to spell Sheppard's doom and, since he was a stranger in Newgate, he was easily recognized and finally recaptured.

This time his legs were chained together, he was loaded with heavy irons and stapled down to the floor and was watched day and night. He drank heavily and began to feel too helpless to attempt another escape. He lay still in bed, quaking with terror while awaiting his death warrant which came through soon afterwards.

Just as he was stepping on to the cart to be taken away to his execution, an officer felt his pockets and cut himself on the knife which Sheppard had kept to himself all during his confinement. So they hung Jack Sheppard—frightened yet feared, betrayed yet never yielding—in his twenty-third year.

THE END

THE UP AND UP

By HAROLD M. SHERMAN

(Continued from page 69)

familiar a strata of life for her as it was for Tony, when it came to actually being a part of it. But here was something Lola could not break into, as a secretary. She could only possibly qualify, one day, as Tony's wife.

For Frank Jordan, associated in business as he was with Homewood's society leader, Matilda Townsend, acceptance had been over-night. The ease with which he had landed in the town's top flight social groupings had given him a tremendous kick. What a little money and the right contacts could do! After that it was only necessary for a man to live up to what was expected of him.

Lola and Sammy, after getting the "lay of the land" had been perfectly willing to follow along to help the boss make the biggest killing of his life.

"Maybe I won't get to be the 'outstanding citizen'," Tony had said to Lola one night, at the hotel, "But if I'm up there with the leaders, that'll be a thrill."

"Don't 'kid yourself!" Lola had warned. "You were never satisfied with half the jackpot and you won't be here. I know you—you're going for 'all or nothing'!"

Tony had grinned: "That's the only way to win, isn't it? In love or business or gambling—it's all the same. It's how you play it. Well, I'm giving this thing all I've got—but *strictly on the level!*"

"It can't last," Sammy had predicted. "One of us is gonna crack. It just ain't human to stay honest! There's only two people in history ever done it—Abe Lincoln an' George Washington—an' they're *dead!*"

THE short, self-important little man from the City Health Department, Roland Campbell by name, returned to the Townsend Bread Company plant as promised. He came, this time, with two inspectors and examined the bakery from top to bottom—unearthing "damaging" evidence of existing unsanitary conditions.

"You're just making a pretense of sanitation here," he told Frank Jordan. "Dressing your workers in white clothes doesn't mean they're complying with the health laws. We've got seven different counts against you from unclean baking utensils to dirty handling and we're going to make 'em stick."

"You've framed this evidence and you know it," Tony accused.

The little man smiled. "Better not let Dr. Hawley hear you say that," he warned, "or he may make it tougher for you. As it is, when we turn in this report, he'll issue an order closing the bakery until certain sanitary changes are made."

Tony nodded and eyed the pompous little man who was hugely enjoying his exercise of authority.

"It's perhaps unfortunate," suggested Tony, "that I didn't accept Dr. Hawley's magnanimous offer to endorse Townsend products?"

"It is," agreed Mr. Campbell working his self-satisfied smile.

"I suppose," ventured the head of the Townsend Bread Company, "it's too late now?"

"It is!" said Mr. Campbell, again.

"There's no way we can straighten this difficulty out and save our firm's getting a lot of harmful publicity?"

The little man shook his head. "I could have done something for you before—but I can't now. After all—you can't say you weren't warned!"

"No," said Tony. "I can't say that —but I could say something else . . . !"

"Better not!" cautioned the little man. "You can't win against the City Health Department. Only make things worse—and you can't afford that!"

"How would you like a vacation to New York City, all expenses paid?" proposed Tony.

The little man put on a show of righteous indignation. "Are you trying to bribe me?"

Tony smiled. "No, I'd like a vacation like that myself!"

The little man smacked his lips and rocked back on his heels. "I might be able to get Dr. Hawley to . . . er . . . a . . . go a little easier on you," he said, "but I couldn't go so far as to get these charges cleared."

Tony stood up and shook a fist under a startled Campbell's nose. "You get the hell out of here!" he ordered. "Tell Dr. Hawley to do his damnedest! Nobody in this town shakes me down for one damned cent! You set foot in my office again and I'll break every bone in your head!"

THE little man did a fast retreat to the door but turned around to shout: "Don't you threaten me! I'll have you arrested for that! I'm only doing my duty!"

"Get out!" blasted Tony, and reached for his ink well.

The little man "got"!

Lola, noticing his rapid departure, called after him: "What's your hurry, Mr. Campbell?"

But the agent from the City Health Department did not wait to make passes at the receptionist with the "beautiful hair." He had business elsewhere.

Tony, turning off the recording device beneath his desk, buzzed briskly for Lola.

"The heat is on," he announced. "The Health Department is closing us down—probably tomorrow. You probably heard me telling that—so-and-so off!"

"I did!" said Lola, "and it was magnificent. Sounded like the old . . . I mean—it didn't sound much like Mr. Jordan!"

Tony grinned. "Oh, Jordan has a tough side, too!"

"He'd better have!" Lola replied, with spirit. "Up to now, if you'd ask me, he's been a good imitation of a doormat!"

"But he's still on-the-level," Tony reminded. "And that's what counts!"

Lola didn't look too certain. "There could be such a thing as over-doing it!" she suggested.

Tony laughed. "Gorgeous, you got me into this. It took a little selling, at the start . . . but here we are—living and dealing with decent society . . . and I seem to detect, at times, a sort of hankering, on your part, for the old life?"

"Well, at least," defended Lola, "we knew the people in *that* world were crooks . . . they didn't make any bones about it . . . but here—when they pretend to be something else—and they aren't . . . !"

"Be careful!" warned Tony, "the good citizens of Homewood resent being referred to as crooks. It's all within the law. It's all legitimate. Very interesting technique. I have to admire it. Look what they're getting ready to do to us. It's beautiful!"

"How can you say that? You've deliberately played right into their hands. You're too smart not to know what they'd do to you. You weren't born yesterday!"

"You're right," Tony grinned. "I was born an orphan. That's the best line I ever pulled. The only man living who never had any parents. No

relatives . . . that's a break! And damn few friends—but who does?"

"You're getting to be a cynic," said Lola.

"What's a cynic?" asked Tony.

"Someone who's down on the human race!" said Lola.

Tony laughed. "I'm not down on it," he said. "I'm just *on to* it!"

THE blow fell the following day, on schedule. Chief of Police Avery and officers, armed with an order from the City Health Department, shut up the Townsend Bakery and sealed its doors until the company complied with "certain specified regulations" in protection of the public health.

Frank Jordan accepted the serving of papers with indignant employees crowded in his office and the outer rooms and corridors.

"Who says we're unsanitary?"

"Where's the proof?"

"How about the Tasty Pastries company? Are you investigating it?"

"There's something phony going on here!"

These and other shouts were hurled at the police who were apprehensive that a riot might break out. Sammy was hoping that it would.

"That's tellin' 'em!" he encouraged. "It's a dirty frame-up. Just because your boss, Mr. Jordan, has tried to run things on the up and up. I've known him for a long time—and take it from me, folks, no squarer shooter ever lived!"

Tony, hearing this commendation, called Sammy to him.

"Cut it out!" he ordered. "I'm not a saint—and you know it!"

"You *are*, compared to some of these so-and-so's here!" said Sammy. "Aren't you gonna fight back? Are you gonna let 'em hand you this black eye? This is worse than a gang raid on your place. They can shoot a club up and you can be doin' business as usual the next night . . . but if the public thinks your bread is unsanitary . . .!"

"Keep your shirt on!" said Tony. "And your mouth shut!"

Sammy gave a low moan like a dog being held back that was spoiling for a fight.

"You'd better gag me," he said, "I dunno whether I can hold in or not!"

HOMEWOOD townspeople did not learn the shocking news of the Health Department's drastic action against the Townsend Bread Company until their afternoon paper, the Chronicle, hit the streets. There it was —in great black headlines:

TOWNSEND BREAD
UNSANITARY
Condition In Plant A Menace to
Public Health
Dr. Hawley Closes Bakery

The story, which was avidly devoured by every eater of Townsend Bread, went on to state that Health Officer Hawley had acted in response to a growing number of complaints that conditions in the plant were dangerous to community health. He had thus placed a padlock on the Townsend Bakery and ordered all operations ceased until changes were made as required by law.

"A vehement denial of charges was made by Mr. Frank Jordan, new joint owner and manager of Townsend Bread," the story continued, "but he nevertheless agreed to do whatever was required to assure the public that the high quality of the company's baked goods would be restored and maintained."

Tony read this account, from one of the first papers off the press, brought to

him by Sammy, with Lola and Miss Vance looking over his shoulders, both exceedingly glum.

"You ain't seen nothin' yet," said Sammy. "That's on the *front* page—now turn to the back!"

Tony did so and Lola and Miss Vance shrieked.

"A Tasty Pastry ad!"

"Full page!" said Sammy, "and look what it says!"

"Perfect timing!" remarked Tony, drily. "Remarkable coincidence. Zanger gets a terrific boost as we're getting a terrific knock!"

The ad read:

QUALITY AND PURITY OF
TASTY PASTRY PRODUCTS
PRAISED BY DR. JOHN HAWLEY

HEALTH DEPARTMENT HEAD
MAKES THIS SIGNED STATEMENT:

"While Tasty Pastry Products are comparatively new to Homewood citizens, I am pleased to give them my endorsement as of the highest quality in grade and purity."

SUCH PRAISE IS HIGH PRAISE INDEED!

Dr. Hawley's long and distinguished public career in preserving and protecting the health of Homewood citizens, has signally qualified him to pass judgment upon all foods, grown and manufactured in this area—and Tasty Pastries, Inc., is particularly gratified at receiving this unsolicited endorsement from Homewood's great Health Authority!

SAYS PRESIDENT ZANGER,
TASTY PASTRIES PRESIDENT:

"I pledge for my Company continued vigilance in presenting to our customers the finest baked goods—delivered to you always FRESH and CAREFULLY SANITIZED!"

"That does it!" said Miss Vance, "that drives the nail right in our coffin!"

Sammy and Lola looked at Tony.

"Well, Mr. How-Am-I-Doing-Now?" said Lola, "What have you got to say to this?"

"Nothing at the moment," said Tony. "I think it is about time, though, that I was communicating with my business partner. Please get me Mrs. Townsend on the phone."

Lola and Miss Vance both started to comply but Mr. Townsend's veteran secretary reached the phone quicker.

"Here you are!" she said, after a moment.

TONY took the receiver. "Hello, Matilda!" he greeted. "Have you seen the afternoon paper yet?"

Her high-pitched voice came into the room.

"Not yet. Something interesting in it?"

"Very," said Tony. "Are you dressed?"

"Of course I'm dressed. It's the middle of the afternoon, Silly!"

"Well, slip into that cute red coupe of yours and get down to the office as fast as you can," said Tony.

"But, Frank—I've a cocktail party at five!"

"That's cancelled. You won't want to attend when you hear the news!"

"For heaven's sake—what is it?"

"It'll keep till you get here! Hurry!"

"I'll send out for a paper right away!"

"Don't take time to do that! Get going! You can see it when you get here!"

"Frank Jordan—if this is one of your jokes—you funny man, you!"

"This is no joke, Matilda—unless it's on us!" said Tony.

"Now you've got me really curious!" said Matilda. "I'll be right there!"

The receiver clicked as she hung up. Tony turned about to face a concerned trio.

"What are you going to tell her?" asked Lola. "She's left everything up to you. You sold her such a bill of goods—she's had every confidence . . ."

"She certainly has," supported Miss Vance. "Mrs. Townsend has her faults,

as I've said . . . but when she has faith in somebody . . .!"

"And you think I've let her down?" Tony demanded.

"Yes I do!" said Miss Vance, with fire in her eye. "This could all have been avoided. Mr. Zanger could have been the one to have *his* bakery closed . . . and *you* could have had Dr. Hawley's endorsement. The way you've handled things, it's just turn-about."

"Would it have been any more honest the other way?" asked Tony.

Sammy held his head. "Jeez! If I hear that word 'honest' once more, I'm goin' nuts! Me for the quiet life of a gamblin' joint!"

Tony grinned. "That's no way for a policeman to talk!"

Lola was actually alarmed.

"Tony . . . a . . . Mr. Jordan . . .!"

"What's that?" challenged Miss Vance, "I've heard you call Mr. Jordan 'Tony' before . . .?"

"Oh—he—he's so much like a man I used to know once," explained Lola, "I sometimes make a slip. Pardon me, Mr. Jordan . . .!"

"That's quite all right," said Tony, "But please try not to mix me up any more, Miss Peters . . . it might be embarrassing . . .!"

Sammy groaned and commenced walking about the office, clenching and unclenching his fists.

"Brother, if I could only go into action." He fingered the revolver in its holster. "Nothing to fire this at—except pigeons!" He turned suddenly. "You know something, Tony . . .?" He caught himself quickly and eyed Lola. "Now she's got *me* doin' it!"

"Did you both know this 'Tony'?" asked Miss Vance, with rising suspicion.

"I'll say we did!" replied Sammy. "Remarkable resemblance . . . but not the same guy." He veered off the subject. "I was about to remark, Mr. Jordan, that a private citizen—unless he's got pull and protection—don't stand much chance for justice. Have you ever noticed that?"

"I'm just beginning to," smiled Tony.

"What are laws for?" demanded Sammy.

"To get around," said Tony. "Any lawyer will tell you that—and lots of 'em will show you how, if they can."

"Money doesn't talk," raved Sammy. "It hollers out loud! You could have bought this whole bunch off. Had everybody on your side. Been the big shot you started out to be!"

Tony did not appear too upset.

"Oh, well," he said, "there's more than one way to make a living."

"Yeah!" cracked Sammy. "Rob an Orphans' Home!"

"Stop joking, all of you!" cried Miss Vance. "This is serious. I doubt if Townsend Bread ever recovers. This blacklisting could drive us out of business!"

THERE was a sound in the outer office and Mrs. Townsend rushed in. She was wearing a natty blue outfit but her black hair was wild.

"What's happened?" she gasped. "There's a policeman at the door. He says our plant is closed!"

"It is," confirmed Tony. "Sit down, Matilda—and read this!"

She dropped in a leather-upholstered chair next to him as he handed her the paper.

"Why, the very idea!" she exclaimed. "Our bread unsanitary! Never in the world! Oh, Daddy must be turning over in his grave! This can't be! You know how clean we've kept everything!"

Tony nodded. "I know, Matilda. It's just as clean as it ever was—but the Health Department isn't! Dr.

Hawley's out to get us because I turned down his offer to endorse our products." He took the paper from her and showed her the ad on the back page.

"Zanger! He's behind this! I knew it! I warned you!"

"You sure did, Matilda!"

"And you did nothing to protect us?"

"Nothing," said Tony, "except conduct our business absolutely on the level."

The widow of the late Bread King stared at him. "Will you say that again?" she requested.

"I didn't think you'd approve of buying endorsements from Dr. Hawley," Tony explained. "Or paying for protection you're entitled to from the Police Department, as a taxpayer, or bribing the Board of Education and the town's politicians to get Townsend Bread used exclusively in the School Lunches!"

"Why, that sort of thing's being done all the time!" protested Matilda. "It's considered *legitimate!*"

Tony's jaw sagged. "You mean—you think I've done wrong, *not* to have taken these proposition?"

"Well, that should be perfectly obvious, after what's happened to us!" said Matilda. "This will cost us thousands of dollars."

Miss Vance, who had been nodding in vociferous agreement with the wife of her late boss, now spoke up: "That's what I've been trying to tell him, Mrs. Townsend—but Mr. Jordan, if I may say so, is very set in his ways. And, if I may say so again—quite *puritanical!*"

"Maybe I shouldn't have been born an orphan," said Tony, quizzically.

"Maybe you shouldn't have been born at all," quipped Sammy.

"Maybe I should fire all my employees," said Tony.

HIS tone had stiffened and Sammy and Lola knew enough to know he would stand for no more razzing. This, underneath his exterior, wasn't any laughing matter to Tony. With Matilda Townsend taking issue with him on his business management and threatening to go on the rampage, the applecart had been pushed over far enough.

"I sympathize with Mr. Jordan's sticking to what he thought was fair business practice," said Lola. "It's just unfortunate that it didn't work out."

"It can't ever work out!" declared Matilda. "Not as long as we're human beings! Daddy used to say 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours'. You've got to scratch backs in this world. If you don't—well, you're just left out in the cold, that's all!"

"If you're right," said Tony, "then what's the use of anyone's trying to be honest?"

"I don't know anyone who really is," said Matilda. "They're honest in some things . . . and not honest in others. It depends upon whether it hurts them to be honest, or not—or how much! Daddy used to say, 'It takes a rich man to afford to be honest—and then he doesn't have to be'!"

Tony shook his head. "I never had much real schooling in life—but I'm certainly getting it now!"

"Pretty expensively, too!" said Matilda. "How do you propose to get us out of this?"

Tony stood up, with all eyes on him.

"At this particular moment," he said. "I frankly don't know. But I've got an idea. Miss Peters—will you please turn on some music?"

Lola hesitated. "What for?" she asked.

Tony gazed up at the life-sized portrait of Charlton L. Townsend, founder of the Townsend Bread Company, who was looking soberly down upon the gathering.

"I've been told that Mr. Townsend,

whenever he was faced with a problem, always relaxed in this office and turned on the music. If it worked for him, it may work for me. At least, it's worth trying. Pick out some records . . . some of Mr. Townsend's favorites . . . Matilda . . . you tell her what they are . . ."

"Frank . . . Mr. Jordan—are you really serious?"

Tony looked at her. "Never more serious in my life!"

"He's gone nuts!" said Sammy. "It's been too great a strain—bein' on the level!"

"Music!" ordered Tony. "I'm thinking of something—give me music!"

"All right," decided Matilda, "Play him — 'Finlandia', 'Unfinished Symphony' and 'Music of the Spheres' . . . and, since this is going to be a battle, end up with the 'War of 1812'."

Lola dug for the records and put them on, so that one would automatically follow the other.

"Now, quiet, everyone!" commanded Tony, placing pencil and paper before him, and putting his head in his hands. "Don't anyone speak till I tell you."

The first strains of *Finlandia* began.

MATILDA TOWNSEND looked questioningly from Miss Vance to Lola to Sammy. All three shrugged their shoulders. Then Sammy raised a worried finger, pointed to his head, and commenced revolving it, while he formed soundless words with his lips which said: "He's gone screwy!"

Tony suddenly grabbed for pencil and paper and started scribbling furiously.

"I've got it!" he cried. "Keep still! Don't move! Let me finish!" He glanced up at the portrait as he wrote. "Oh, Daddy—if you gave me this idea —it's a pip!"

"You think Daddy's here?" asked Matilda, unable to keep silent.

"Sure, he's here! Don't you feel him?" said Tony. "He's telling me what to do!"

"No!" denied Matilda. "You're not psychic. He can't talk to you!"

"Yes, he can!" insisted Tony. "He's saying—'To hell with what's happened . . . don't worry about a thing . . . go on the radio . . . go straight to your customers . . . that's the way to lick these b——s!' I had to censor that one word! . . . 'Radio' he keeps repeating, 'Radio'!"

Matilda now became excited.

"Oh, yes—yes—I hear him! . . . Hello, Daddy! . . . Oh, it's so nice of you to come back to help us! . . ."

Tony winked guardedly at Sammy who put a dazed hand to his head.

"You see! You tell 'em, Matilda. What's Daddy saying?"

The widow of the late Bread King looked off into space as Shubert's "Unfinished Symphony" began.

"You're right," she confirmed. "You must have tuned in on his wave-length! . . . Yes—Daddy—the radio . . . the 'Townsend Bread Hour' . . .!"

"Good!" said Tony. "Go on . . .!"

"As Daddy used to say," sang Matilda, in a half musical tone, as she closed her eyes, enraptured. "He's saying it again—'Townsend Bread—first in war, first in peace—and first in the hearts—no, no—in the *stomachs* of our countrymen . . . !'"

"Great!" cried the new head of the Townsend Bread Company, who had been writing it down. "That's the opening of our show! Matilda, you used to be an actress—you're going to star in the program—ask Daddy! . . . You're the Baking Queen!"

"Yes, yes—I've always wanted . . . I gave it up for you, Daddy—remember? . . . but now—if you think . . .

if it will save Townsend Bread . . .!"

"You've got to do it!" said Tony. "This is the answer!"

"Oh, Frank!" cried Matilda, ecstatically, throwing her arms impulsively about his neck. "Forgive me for doubting you one single instant. With Daddy and you and me—working together—how can we fail?"

Sammy sat down hard in a chair, Lola restrained a mad desire to tear her hair, and Miss Vance fled from the room.

CHAPTER XV

BY THE following morning, sales of Townsend Products had fallen off sharply, with the Homewood Tribune also carrying a story of the sanitation edict issued against the company by the City's Health Department. Closing of the plant had naturally cut off production so dealers, hotels, restaurants and all other users of Townsend baked goods could not get supplies—and there was a wholesale shifting of business to Tasty Pastries, Incorporated.

Meanwhile, it was reported that Frank Jordan and other Townsend officials were co-operating with authorities in "correcting the sanitary violations" and hoped to be permitted to re-open the bakery for "business as usual" within a few days.

Matilda Townsend, recovering from her first shock at learning of the attack upon Townsend Bread, could think of nothing else but Frank Jordan's proposed radio program. While he busied himself with preparation of the first script and completing arrangements with the town's one and only radio station, H-O-M-E, Matilda began brushing up on her voice and diction. She phoned Tony every half hour or so with new suggestions.

"Oh, Frank!" she said, on one of her calls late that afternoon. "I haven't been so thrilled since the time Daddy proposed to me. I just know this program's going to go over! You had a real inspiration yesterday. You really did! I didn't think anyone could make contact with Daddy but me! Just to think of your having real psychic powers, too! Isn't it wonderful that we both vibrate on the same plane?"

"It certainly is," Tony agreed, fitting the three words in on an angle.

"And I'm so glad now that you're standing for principle!" declared Matilda. "Don't laugh! I really am! You're a man in a million! Daddy says so! He didn't have the nerve to do what you've done! He just paid—and paid—and paid! But if we can get more business with this radio program, we can say 'Pooh! Pooh!' to everybody, including Mr. Zanger!"

"We certainly can," said Tony, slipping in three words again.

"Don't you worry about a thing, Frank, darling. I'm with you to the finish!" Matilda assured.

Tony hung up and wiped perspiration from his face. "Whew!" he said, and started, to see Lola standing at his elbow.

"That's the fifteenth time she's called today by actual count!" she said. "Now aren't you sorry you dreamed up that bright idea of a radio program?"

"Almost!" admitted Tony. "But it's our one chance to get out from behind the eight ball—and I've got to keep Matilda happy while we're trying it!"

"Happy!" said Lola, "you've got her *delirious* right now!"

Tony eyed her.

"Don't jump me about her again, *please!* . . . I'm in too big a jam to be caught between two women!"

"Okay!" rejoined Lola, feelingly, "but just be sure you're not caught by ONE!"

TOWNSEND BREAD received another jolt from a front page story in the next morning's Homewood Tribune, which told of Tasty Pastries bread being chosen by the Board of Education to be used in the School Lunches. The products of Henry Zanger's bakery were replacing the Townsend line which had serviced the kiddies for years.

The news item intimated that "it is thought the Health Department's action against Townsend Bread was a factor in influencing the Board's decision to give the contract to Tasty Pastries, Inc. This means a great deal in compensation as well as prestige."

Frank Jordan's aggressive rival took full advantage of this latest victory over Townsend with another full page ad which read:

TASTY PASTRIES SCORES AGAIN!
AWARDED SCHOOL LUNCH CONTRACT

Board of Education Selects Tasty Pastry Products As Best and Most Nourishing!

HENRY ZANGER, PRESIDENT
TASTY PASTRIES, INC., SAYS:

"We are proud to serve the children of Homewood. Visit our modern ovens and bakery. See how clean and sanitary our plant is kept for the safety of your youngsters!

And Remember—
No One Can Bake Better Bread
Because WE Bake the *BEST!*

"What do you think?" asked Sammy, as Tony studied the latest blast.

"They've got us punch drunk," said Tony, "but we're still hanging onto the ropes. What do *you* think?"

"I think this is soon gonna be a shooting war!" said Sammy, "And I'm all for it!"

"Wait till we hit back with our first radio program!" advised Tony. "I've booked time for six-thirty Sunday night—just at the Sunday supper hour—starting this coming Sunday. And this is the full page ad we're going to break, Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning."

He reached in his top desk drawer and took out a dummy ad sheet, with the copy pencilled on it.

Sammy squinted at the lay-out.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

TOWNSEND OPENS FOR BUSINESS
MONDAY MORNING

While we have complied with the requirements of the City Health Department, TOWNSEND pleads "NOT GUILTY!" No man, woman or child has ever been made sick or died from eating TOWNSEND PRODUCTS. No suit has ever been filed against TOWNSEND because of unclean or tainted food.

TOWNSEND IS PROUD OF ITS
CLEAN RECORD!

LISTEN! LISTEN! LISTEN!

TOWNSEND TAKES TO THE AIR
SUNDAY NIGHT
6:30
Station H-O-M-E

HEAR MATILDA TOWNSEND TELL
WHAT SHE THINKS OF CONDITIONS
IN HOMEWOOD!

"Do you think that'll get 'em?" asked Tony.

"Get 'em?" grinned Sammy. "Jeez! What a time to rob the town! Every man, woman an' child'll have their ears against the radio!"

SAMMY'S prediction was almost ninety-five percent correct. Making an allowance for those who were hard-of-hearing, at work, or too young to know or care what was going on, a Hooper rating would have shown every set to be tuned in on the premiere of the Townsend Bread Hour.

"What's she going to say?" was the question on everyone's lips before the program went on.

Matilda Townsend was so well known and her bread company had

taken such a beating the past week that public curiosity concerning her reaction was at an all-time peak.

Tony had arranged for the broadcast to take place from the historic office of the late bread king himself with Charlton L. Townsend's framed portrait appropriately draped for the occasion.

"Daddy's here tonight!" Matilda assured him, as they took their seats before desk microphones, ready for the program. "He says for us not to be nervous—that everything's going all right."

"That's nice to know," said Tony, who was having a tussle with mike fright.

He glanced at Lola, Sammy and Miss Vance, who were watching and nodding encouragement.

"Having wonderful time!" he said, in an attempt at nonchalance. "Wish you were here!"

They laughed and Herb Dalton, H-O-M-E's best announcer, raised his arm for silence. Zero hour was approaching.

Throughout the city, dials turned off big national programs and centered on this moment of high local interest.

In the home of the head of Tasty Pastries, Inc. Henry Zanger looked at his wrist watch and called to his wife.

"Time for the Townsend Hour. Better get a load of it. No telling what that scatterbrained woman is apt to spill over the radio. If she mentions my name, I'll sue her!"

"Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen!" greeted Announcer Dalton, in stirring tones. ". . . comes a hush in the day's occupations that is known as the Townsend Hour! . . . Ah, yes—Townsend Bread—first in war, first in peace—and first in the hearts, I should say—*stomachs*—of our countrymen! Here we are—coming to you through the courtesy of our Baking Queen, Mrs. Matilda Townsend whom you'll hear later on this program. Don't miss her gossip-about-town. You may be in it!

"Mrs. Townsend is the exclusive possessor of her late husband's secret formulas for making better bread and more of it . . . You may say to us, "*What* of it?" and we say to you, 'Bread is the staff of life!' You can't do without it and that's where we've got you! . . .

"Ladies — wives — sweethearts — toast your husband with Townsend and he'll never leave home! If you haven't got a husband—toast him, anyway—or somebody else's—and you'll soon have one. Townsend's Bread is the only bread with sex appeal! Get the stream-lined loaf and get that nice vitalized, "I want to do something" feeling! It's irresistible! It's contagious! You can't live without it! . . . But, first, before we tantalize you more —relax and dream of romance as you listen to Victor Herbert's immortal "Kiss Me Again"!

AFTER the musical interlude, Announcer Dalton returned.

"Lovely, lovely, lovely—just like the Loaves of Townsend Bread! . . . And now, a few words from President Frank Jordan!"

Tony leaned toward the microphone and fixed his eyes on his script.

"Good evening! I know you're all waiting to hear from my charming business associate, Mrs. Matilda Townsend, so I won't clutter up the air long. But I just wanted to say to old and new friends of Townsend Products—we'll be on the market tomorrow with our full line by late afternoon, so plan to make your purchases accordingly.

"You are cordially invited to visit our bakery any time we're open and we'll take you through—so you can see for yourself how clean we are. If you

find even one little bit of evidence that we are unsanitary, we urge you to report us to the Health Department . . . that's how confident we are of our cleanliness.

"Why was our bakery and our company thus humiliated and forced to close? We leave that question to be answered by the thinking people of Homewood. By those who have eaten and enjoyed Townsend baked goods for years! They to decide whether we have been treated justly or unjustly.

"Townsend rests its case, as always, on the best bread on the market!"

A musical background had crept in under Tony's comments and now Announcer Dalton cut in with: "Romance again with 'Indian Love Call' from 'Rose-Marie' . . . !"

The program was holding its listeners, with Matilda Townsend, the magnet. She was patting Tony on the shoulder now and congratulating him in dumb show. The program director, lanky Bob Niles, pointed to her and indicated that she was next. Matilda turned away from the microphone, pressed a handkerchief to her lips and cleared her throat.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," introduced Announcer Dalton, "the moment you've been waiting for . . . your host and star of the Townsend Hour — Homewood's own Matilda Townsend—in her spicy gossip-about-town!"

The widow of the late Bread King was on the air!

"Good evening my many, many friends in Homewood!" she said. "I guess you know how much I love all of you—and how much I love this town. There just isn't another place in the world like Homewood.

"Daddy used to say—I'm referring, of course to my husband, the Founder of Townsend Bread . . . he loved all of you and loved this town as much as I do. . . . Daddy said, 'Homewood has all kinds of people in it—and some of them *aren't* so kind!'

"I think this was a wise observation, don't you? We should keep it in mind as we think of the Homewood of the future. Ask ourselves—what kind of people are *we?*

"I ask myself that every morning. And those of you who have important positions in our wonderful town—who have great influence and great responsibilities, should say: 'What kind of a person am I?'

"Citizens like Dr. John Hawley, Health Commissioner; and Tim O'-Leary, our Political Boss, and members of our Board of Education . . . and Emerson Evans, our real estate magnate . . . and yes, even men like Henry Zanger . . . !

"Can men like these look themselves in the face this evening and say: 'My conscience is clear. I am serving my community honestly, unselfishly and whole-heartedly?'

"This is what each and every one of us should be able to say if we are the kind of citizens we should be! If Homewood is to grow and prosper—for the good of all!

"So much for my message—and now for some gossip-about-town . . . !"

MATILDA went on and on with small talk about personalities in Homewood's social and civic news—human interest trivia concerning men and women who were doing things—but the insinuations behind her mentioning of top figures in the town's business life had all listeners buzzing. They were agog with comment as Matilda finished, giving way to another musical rendition.

"That fellow Jordan's put her up to this!" raved Henry Zanger. "He's hit-

ting back at me through her. That's a cowardly trick!"

"Oh, I don't know, Henry," soothed Mrs. Zanger. "Mr. Jordan seemed like too much of a gentleman . . . !"

"Ye gods, woman! Just because a man pays you a compliment about your looks, you think he's a saint!"

"Well, he is—almost!" his wife replied, defiantly.

And now it was time for the closing remarks by the announcer on the Townsend Bread Hour.

"Listen closely, ladies and gentlemen!" Herb Dalton was saying, in tones so dulcet that they fell sweet on ear-drums; "Tomorrow Townsend introduces and presents to you, for the first time, its new Super DeLuxe Special Golden Loaf. To acquaint you with this best bread ever made anywhere—six five dollar gold pieces are being baked into each day's output of Golden Loaves! You may be the lucky one to put the 'five dollar bite' on a loaf of Golden Loaf!

"Start eating Golden Loaf tomorrow and be richer in Vitamins and, who knows, perhaps richer in pocketbook. The biggest, healthiest, purest, richest loaf-of-bread-buy in America. Your golden opportunity to get a Golden Loaf!

"Remember—there's 'gold in them thar loaves'—six five dollar nuggets you may dig out with your teeth. So chew! chew! and strike pay dough!"

Stirring music cut in behind the Announcer's voice.

"And now—our minute for the kiddies with Jolly Jerry Baker!"

"Great idea, using our own real baker for this!" Matilda scribbled on a piece of paper and passed to Tony, as the over-sized Jerry Baker with his genial countenance, stepped before the microphone.

He read from his script. "I wish, my dear eaters everywhere, that I could bring you that lovely aroma, that fragrant, appetizing odor of freshly baked Townsend Bread—good to the last piece of crust! This is Jolly Jerry saying: 'Baker's Man! Baker's Man! . . ."

He went into a recitation.

"I'll bake you a loaf as quick as I can!
It's good for the well; it's good for the sick,
So buy it in loaf or buy it in stick!
Prick it and pat it and mark it with T,
T stands for Townsend with Vitamin Z,
It's back to the bake ovens now for me!"

UP CAME the music and in came Announcer Dalton with: "Ladies and gentlemen—you've just heard the voice of Townsend Bread's Glamour Boy Number One, who personally puts the glamour in every loaf!—Yes—you can actually taste it!

"And now, until next week, at the same time, when our Baking Queen, Matilda Townsend gives you some more gossipy morsels to digest, Townsend Bread says 'Good night, good health and good eating!'"

The instant the program was off the air, Radio Station H-O-M-E was flooded with telephone calls from well wishing radio listeners. The switchboard at the Townsend Bread Company was jammed. Lola and Miss Vance had their hands and ears full, relaying or directing incoming messages to Matilda and Tony.

The surprise call was received by Frank Jordan. A woman's voice insisted that she be put through to him.

"This," she said, when the connection was made, "is Mrs. Henry Zanger!"

Tony, wary of a gag, said: "Oh, yes, Mrs. Zanger—*the* Mrs. Zanger, I presume, of Tasty Pastries, Incorporated?"

"Why, yes, of course!" said the woman.

"You're kidding," said Tony. "How do I know you're who you say you are?"

"I can prove it," came the instant reply. "You told me, when we met, that I was—well 'beautiful' . . . !"

Tony almost dropped the receiver. "I certainly did, Mrs. Zanger—and I meant it! Well, it's nice to hear from you. How's your husband?"

"Oh, he's a little indisposed tonight . . . but I just wanted to call you and congratulate you on your exciting radio program!"

"That's very nice of you, Mrs. Zanger. I appreciate it!"

"I might even try one of your new Golden Loaves myself!"

Tony heard a sudden voice in the background which came booming in over the wire.

"Hang up! You've said enough!"

"Ssssh! . . ."

"I'll send a special messenger to your house with a Golden Loaf tomorrow!" promised Tony. "And, who knows, it might contain one of our five dollar gold pieces!"

There was an argument at the other end of the line.

"You're making a fool of yourself!" said a man's voice. "Get off that phone!"

"Thank you, Mr. Jordan!" called Mrs. Zanger, obviously under pressure. "Goodbye for now!"

The connection was broken.

TONY enjoyed his first real laugh in days.

"We've struck pay dirt!" he said. "And I do mean 'dirt.' I've just talked to Mrs. Zanger!"

"You *have?*" cried Matilda. "Did she like the program?"

"*Loved* it!" said Tony. "And her husband liked it so much he wasn't able to come to the phone! It looks, Matilda, as though the Townsend Hour is a success!"

It was. Townsend's complete supply of Golden Loaves was gobbled up as soon as it could be baked and gotten out to the customers. Each bite carried a special thrill of anticipation. Would it produce the gold that glittered? Happy buyers of the pay-off Golden Loaves phoned Townsend Bread to extend their thanks.

It would take time to completely erase the stigma placed upon Townsend Products by action of the City Health Department—but this radio program was a step in the right direction—business recovery. And Matilda's weekly gossip feature was the talk of the town!

"Satisfied now?" Lola asked an exultant Tony.

"So far, so good!" was his rejoinder. "We've weathered our first real storm, Gorgeous—but you know what I'm aiming at—that 'outstanding citizen' award. If I can land that, then I'll be *sure* I've gotten somewhere!"

"You'll have to do it the hard way," warned Lola. "The town's not going to hand that to you on a platter. Especially since you're not 'one of the boys.'"

"I know," cracked Tony, "but I'm out to prove that 'they can't keep a *good* man down'!"

"He's stayed good now longer than I ever dreamed," said Lola.

Tony grinned. "They've thrown a few things at us, haven't they? But we're still in business—*on the level!*"

Lola's face sobered.

"What do you think they're apt to throw at us next?"

Tony shook his head. "No telling! What could hurt us the worst?"

"One thing!" said Lola. "And it's been keeping me awake nights. They could find out about *'Tony Canero!'*"

The Frank Jordan of Homewood sat speechless for a moment. "Yes," he admitted, seriously. "After what Frank Jordan has accomplished here, on his own, that could *really* do damage!"

CHAPTER XVI

MONTHS have a way of passing and months did pass in Homewood. Business became a routine and Matilda Townsend's interest in Frank Jordan more and more of a problem—to him. He was her escort everywhere and their popularity rating—on the surface, at least—was high.

"Why don't they get married?" was the oft-repeated question. "They make a stunning couple and they're together most of the time, anyway!"

Matilda had even broached the subject but Tony had laughingly answered: "I've got a one-track mind, darling—one thing at a time! You know what I'm after—before anything else!"

"Yes, and I'm doing everything I can to help you get it," declared Matilda. "Keeping you before the public—pushing you into civic activities. Looks like its simmering down now to a last stretch fight between you and that detestable Henry Zanger—and if he wins the year's award for outstanding community service, I'll never forgive you or myself!"

Zanger's ten-strike followed shortly thereafter. Came the big front page story that the City Council had authorized the purchase of property just inside the city limits for a Municipal Golf Course. Emerson Evans, Homewood's most prominent realtor, was mentioned as having negotiated the purchase for the city. Owners of the property were not listed but, in a specially boxed feature story, announcement was made of Henry Zanger's being appointed by the Chamber of Commerce to head a Golfing Committee for the purpose of raising community funds to build a $100,000 clubhouse on the grounds.

"Mr. Zanger, civic leader and one of Homewood's most public-spirited citizens," the news item went on to state, "in taking over chairmanship of this drive, made a personal contribution of five thousand dollars toward the amount needed.

"Mr. Zanger's wife, Emily Zanger, has volunteered to head the women's committee in soliciting funds from all the women's groups in town.

"When interviewed today, both Zangers expressed confidence that the required $100,000 could be raised in thirty days. 'We feel,' said Mr. Zanger, 'that the townspeople will be happy to donate toward the building of this Community Clubhouse which will be a great joy to recreation seekers, not only in the city but to all resorters and other visitors who come to Homewood. We're glad to be giving our time and services for such a worthy project.' "

TONY, upon reading this article, unloosed a few choice bursts of profanity.

"Why, Mr. *Jordan!*" said Lola, within hearing. "How you talk!"

"'Public spirited,' my eye!" raved Tony. "Zanger probably made thirty to fifty thousand on this property deal with Evans and his crowd—so he could well afford to make a donation of five thousand!"

"*You* could have been in his spot!" reminded Lola. "Aren't you sorry now?"

"NO!" exploded Tony.

"Then quit beefing!" said his attractive receptionist.

But Tony could not be reconciled.

"This means that Zanger's practically clinched the 'outstanding citizen' award," he said. "Anything I've done for the town this year will look small compared to this. He'll be getting front page publicity for the next month."

"You really don't want the award this badly, do you?" asked Lola, eyeing him.

Tony crumpled the newspaper and threw it in the waste basket.

"No, I guess not," he fumed. "I guess I was a sucker to ever think I could be a big shot on the up and up. But it was fun while it lasted—gave me something to shoot at. I was willing to work hard and really earn it—I haven't tried to play politics or buy it—you know that!"

"Yes, Frank," said Lola, feelingly, putting a hand on his shoulder, "and I'm proud of you—damned proud!"

Tony put his head in his hands.

"Cut it out!" he said. "I'll get over this . . . I'll get my head out of the clouds—my ambitions down where they belong—where I really live!"

Lola shook her head. "I'm not sure I'd like you any more that way!"

The telephone was ringing.

"Answer that," he said.

Lola did—and stiffened.

"It's Mrs. Townsend!"

"Tell her I can't speak to her."

"She says it's very important."

"Nothing's important any more."

"Here—talk to her!"

Lola placed the receiver in his hand. He muttered to himself as he took it.

"Hello!"

"Frank, darling—have you seen the paper?"

"Yes, what of it?"

"Why, we've got to do something."

"What can we do? He's got everything all sewed up! He'll win in a walk!"

"Who?"

"Zanger, of course! What do you mean 'who!'"

"My dear boy—let Mr. Zanger worry about himself. I'm not interested in him. This is your big chance and I've already lined it up for you!"

Tony straightened up as though coming out of a fog.

"Lined up what? Talk English! Maybe I'm dumb or something."

"Frank—have you got your paper right there? Didn't you read about the New Industry Homewood's trying to land?"

"No!" Tony leaned over and fished in the waste basket, digging out the paper. He spread it in front of him. "Where is it?"

"Second column, lower half of page."

"Oh, yes—here it is!"

"Read it! I'm just dying to tell you what I've done!"

TONY, pointing to the item so that Lola could also see, read:

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ASKED TO BID ON NEW INDUSTRY FOR HOMEWOOD

Word has been received here by Percival Harrington, Chamber of Commerce president, that an industry employing five hundred men and women in San Francisco, is seeking a new town and factory site.

The firm's name is Eagle Aircraft. It manufactures parts for big plane companies.

Cornelius Summers, general manager, states that property now occupied on lease by the company has been sold and the plant must move within the next three months.

Six California cities have been invited to submit offers for the re-location of this industry, Homewood being one of them.

President Harrington has referred the matter to the Chamber's New Industries Committee. Homewood's loss of the Marion Machine Foundry plant by fire, last year, threw hundreds out of work—and a new industry such as Eagle Aircraft represents would be most welcome, could it be secured.

"All right, I've read it!" reported Tony, over the phone. "Where do we go from here?"

"You go to San Francisco to see Mr. Summers!" Matilda answered, with spirit. "And don't you dare come back unless you land that industry for Homewood!"

Tony was suddenly alive with interest.

"Hold on, Matilda—you're too fast

for me! I can't go to San Francisco on my own. I'd have to be sent by the Chamber of Commerce as their representative!"

"You *are* being, Silly!" said Matilda. "I've arranged everything through Percy—got him to appoint you! He's calling a meeting of the New Industries committee for one hour from now in his office—and you're to meet with them and get their instructions!"

Tony had held the receiver loosely so that Lola could hear the conversation.

"That's fine, Matilda—wonderful!" he said.

"You'll just have time to go to your hotel and pack your bag," she continued, "because they want you to jump to San Francisco by plane. This is a big opportunity for the town and, Frank, dear—if you get the factory to locate here—I can almost guarantee you'll get the award!"

"Yeah? How so?"

"Percy has a lot to say about who gets it—and he's practically assured me . . . !"

"Matilda, I love you—love you—love you!" cried Tony. "Goodbye—I'm on my way!" He hung up and turned, excitedly, to Lola. "Well, how do your like *that?*"

"I liked everything but what you said to her last!" said Lola. She threw her arms about him and kissed him. "Goodbye, Mr. *Jordan*—and good luck!"

CORNELIUS SUMMERS, general manager for Eagle Aircraft, was temporarily enjoying top popularity and attention as representatives from six different communities offered their best inducements for him to move his plant to their specific city. He had invited this type of bidding and could now sit back and listen to the propositions, ultimately selecting the one which impressed him most.

This procedure could be followed, on the basis, of course, that Mr. Summers was sincerely interested in deciding which town actually possessed the best facilities for establishment of his kind of business! But, if he *wasn't* sincerely interested in so ascertaining, then other methods of "persuasion," of a personal nature, might help him decide on a town of lesser promise. These were facts which his interviewers had to determine for themselves, on meeting.

Frank Jordan, arriving the following morning, was the last of the six city representatives to confer with Mr. Summers before he was to "make up his mind." This was the spot that Tony would have preferred—after everyone else had "shot their wad."

"You just got in under the wire," Summers greeted. "I'm going to make known my decision tomorrow morning. In fact, one offer, I might frankly tell you, is so attractive that I'm already inclined to accept it."

Tony studied his prospect. Summers looked to be around fifty years of age, a bit stiff and proper in manner, brown hair, blue eyes, a small mole on his chin, medium height, meticulously dressed. There was a silk handkerchief in his suit pocket and a flower in his button-hole — carnation. Tony thought he detected a faint aroma of perfume. The man was fastidious to an unusual degree almost portraying the dandy.

"Don't come to any conclusions until you've finished with me," said Tony, putting out with his most heart-warming smile.

"Fire when ready," said Summers.

Frank Jordan drew city maps and Chamber of Commerce folders, facts and figures, from his brief case, and launched into his sales talk, pointing

out the many advantages Homewood had to offer to new industries. He displayed photographs of possible sites for the new plant—and several pictures of old manufacturing buildings which could be rebuilt to house Eagle Aircraft.

But he had the uncomfortable feeling, as he talked, that his prospect was not interested. He was only listening to be polite. But, worse than this, he was going through a maddening, most disconcerting routine. He had leaned back in his chair and was toying with a pencil, twining and untwining his fingers about it, then balancing it behind one ear, and the other; and, finally attempting to clasp it between nose and upper lip!

Tony continued doggedly to the end of his presentation and then said, abruptly: "Well, Mr. Summers—what do you think?"

THE general manager of Eagle Aircraft had picked up one of the Homewood folders put out by the Chamber of Commerce which had a girl's picture on the cover, dressed in a revealing bathing suit, and saying: "Miss Homewood of 1946 invites you to Homewood!"

"I think," remarked Summers, "that's a damned pretty girl!"

In sheer desperation, Tony followed this slender lead.

"Married?" he asked, pointedly.

Summers looked up and nodded, wonderingly. "Yes."

"Like a good time?"

Summers' eyes gleamed with growing interest.

"Yes!"

"Like to meet a girl even prettier than that?"

"Do you mean it?" Summers' tone was cautious.

Tony smiled, reassuringly. "You bet I mean it. The most gorgeous blonde I ever saw!"

"That's what I go for—blondes," said Summers, pushing aside the maps and folders Tony had laid before him.

"I can have her here tonight," said Tony. "I'll get me another girl, if I can. We'll meet at my hotel for dinner and go to a show . . . make a real night of it!"

"Now you're talking," said Summers. He put his pencil away. Then, as if changing his mind, he shook his head. "No, I guess I'd better not."

"Why not?"

"Because I—I wouldn't want to get under obligation to you—not when our factory's not going to your town."

Tony gathered up his maps, folders and papers and stuffed them back in his brief case. Here was a type who was hard to figure. What was the next move? *Was* there any?

"You'll be missing out on something extra special," he said.

Summers hesitated. "Gorgeous blonde, you say? Yes, I like blondes. But I don't suppose—I've had a right interesting offer from another city—you wouldn't, by any chance, care to match it?"

Tony caught his breath. "What is it? Do they offer a better location—more floor space for your plant—finer buildings, transportation . . . ? We'll match anything within reason!"

Summers took his pencil out and commenced sliding it through and around his fingers again. He did not look Tony in the eye.

"No, it's nothing like that. You see—when the owner of this business died and the property was sold out from under us, his Estate put everything in my hands. What I say goes. Naturally a plant that employs so many people, doing a capacity business, is worth a lot to a town."

"It certainly is!" admitted Tony,

angling for a foothold, "and we want it!"

SUMMERS smiled faintly, then moistened his lips and chewed at the end of his pencil.

"Everybody wants it," he said. "I was never in such a spot and I don't expect to be again."

Tony was commencing to discern what the general manager of Eagle Aircraft was hinting at.

"I see. I presume you've had some offers on the side from other cities to pay you a . . . er . . . bonus if you'd decide in their favor?"

Summers laid his pencil down and looked up, hopefully.

"Exactly!" he said. "They've explained to me that it's a . . . only fair and right . . . and I've always been underpaid here on this job . . ."

"What's your top offer!" demanded Tony, coming directly to the point.

"Well, I . . . it's er . . . ten thousand."

Tony smiled, disarmingly. "Is that all?"

Summers lower jaw dropped. He recovered his pencil and fingered it, agitatedly.

"You mean—you'd be willing to pay more?"

Tony stood up, brief case in hand. "Mr. Summers—don't you give another thought to these other propositions. You and I are going to have a real blow-out tonight, you're going to meet the most luscious blonde in the world . . . and tomorrow morning, we'll talk business!"

"But I've got to know now—will you go over ten thousand?" persisted Summers.

Tony extended his hand. "You'll be entirely satisfied," he promised.

They shook hands. The general manager of Eagle Aircraft dropped his pencil in a drawer.

"What hotel are you stopping at and when shall I be there?" he asked.

"The Golden State," said Tony. "Suite Nine-Eighteen. Seven p.m. Come right up to the room. We'll have dinner served there—much more cozy and private!"

Summers' eyes lighted. "All right, Mr. Jordan—thank you very much! I'll be there!"

CHAPTER XVII

BACK at his hotel, Frank Jordan, New Industries emissary for the Homewood Chamber of Commerce, put in a long distance call for his office, and his blonde receptionist, Miss Lola Peters.

"Yes, Mr. Jordan!" she said over the wire, her voice vibrant with interest. "How you making out?"

"Having tough time," Tony reported. "I need your help. Sammy's, too. Get the first plane up here. Wear your prettiest dress. We're going out tonight with the man who has to be sold. His weakness is blondes!"

"Sounds like old times!" said Lola. "I thought those days were over. Okay, Mr. Jordan. You're my boss . . . I'll be there. But why do you need Sammy? He's got no sex appeal!"

"I've got a special job for him—house detective. Tell him to bring his police badge!"

Lola laughed. "What are you up to?"

"You'll find out when you get here! I'm at the Golden State. Room Nine-Eighteen."

"Goodbye!" said Lola. "We'll be seeing you!"

* * *

"Now here's the set-up," Tony said to Lola and Sammy when they had arrived and were seated, wide-eyed and breathless in his suite, with less than an hour before Cornelius Summers, general

manager of Eagle Aircraft was due to appear. "This guy Summers belongs to the "gimme" school. He says he's been offered ten grand by another city to take the plant there—but he's willing to shift to Homewood if I give him a dollar more."

"A dollar more's not much," said Sammy. "You gonna do it?"

"It's not the dollar that bothers Tony, it's the ten grand," said Lola.

"It might even be the principle," said Tony. "By any other name, this is a shake-down. He's got us over a barrel. If we want his factory for Homewood, we've got to come across. That is, unless my little scheme works tonight."

"I'm all ears," said Lola. "You've observed, I hope, that I look slightly gorgeous, as ordered?"

Tony touched fingers to his lips and blew her a kiss. "I wish I was dating you myself!"

Lola was attired in shimmering green evening dress, with bright green plume in her lustrous platinum blonde hair.

"Now wait a minute, I'm not going to let any middle-aged old stick-in-the-mud romanticize over me to save you from paying him ten thousand dollars!"

"Don't worry, Gorgeous. I wouldn't let any other man get fresh with you. We're just going to have a three-cornered little dinner here in the suite and then we're going to the theatre . . . at least, I've got tickets for a show. But if things go as planned, we may have to attend. My deal should be put through by then—and we shouldn't have to pay a cent to get Eagle Aircraft for Homewood!"

SAMMY was trying to comprehend arrangements. He lifted his suit coat and pointed to the police badge.

"I brought my star. How do I fit in this picture?"

"You're a hotel detective. All you do is sit in the lobby and wait until I come down and get you and send you up to this room to break in and arrest Mr. Summers!"

"What for? What's he done?" asked Sammy.

"Nothing—except you've caught him in this room with a woman, obviously not his wife—with his pants off!"

"Pants off!" repeated Sammy, open-mouthed.

"Hold on!" protested Lola.

"Sure!" grinned Tony, "it's an old trick. An innocent little frame-up. We have an accident, while eating, and poor Mr. Summers gets a bowl full of gravy dumped in his lap."

"Frank Jordan—that's a Tony Canero trick!" accused Lola.

"I don't care what it is!" said Tony, defiantly. "I'm not going back to Homewood empty-handed, if I can help it!"

"All right," said Lola, resignedly. "So Mr. Sucker gets the gravy in his lap, what then?"

"We're both very sorry, naturally . . . and I suggest, if he will retire to the bathroom, that I'll take his pants—excuse me, *trousers,* down to the tailor and get them cleaned and pressed . . ."

"And while you're gone, that's when I bust in!" said Sammy.

"Right! I'll give you about ten minutes to throw a scare into him—then I'll come back and rescue Mr. Summers—for a price!"

"It's a cinch!" said Sammy. "He's a gone duck right now!"

There was a rap on the door.

"That's the waiter with the table and dining service and stuff," said Tony. "Get downstairs, Sammy, and sit tight till I give you the nod."

Sammy hurried out as the waiter came in, wheeling the table.

Tony turned to Lola and saw her regarding him intently.

"What's the matter, Gorgeous?" he

asked, concernedly.

"I was just thinking," said Lola, "this is one thing you couldn't get Matilda Townsend to do for you!"

* * *

CORNELIUS SUMMERS was precisely on time! He was wearing a new blue serge suit with a fresh carnation in the button-hole and he was carrying a little flower box containing a corsage of violets which he presented to Lola Peters the instant he was introduced.

"You're even more beautiful than Mr. Jordan said you were," he complimented.

"Thanks so much!" said Lola, curtsying.

The intended victim looked about.

"But—where is *your* girl friend?" he asked, turning to Tony.

"She couldn't come," Tony replied.

"Oh, that's too bad," said Mr. Summers. "Makes things kind of one-sided."

"That's all right, we'll just have a nice dinner together—and then you two can go to the theatre—and spend the evening . . ."

"Oh, no—you come with us!"

"No, old man—I wouldn't think of it—some other time . . . but, tonight, you and Miss Peters . . ."

"Well, all right," accepted the general manager of Eagle Aircraft. "It's very gracious of you . . . !"

"Dinner's ready," said Lola, smiling. "Shall we . . . ?" She motioned to the table.

Summers beamed and took her arm, then pulled the chair out for her as she was seated.

"This is jolly here, isn't it?" he said. "So nice of Mr. Jordan to share a beautiful creature like you with me!"

"So nice to have the privilege of meeting *you!*" said Lola.

They were eating their shrimp cocktails, with the waiter serving wine. The conversation bounced along on light trifles and Lola and Tony's guest became more and more relaxed and carefree. He was hugely enjoying himself.

The waiter, having served the main course, placed all food on the table and the gravy bowl near Mr. Summers.

"He likes gravy," Tony had instructed, prior to the dinner, "so leave the bowl near him."

As the waiter left the room, Tony caught Lola's eye. The moment for the planned catastrophe was approaching. Her face had a strange, hurt expression.

Tony was seated at one end of a small table and Lola at the other, with Mr. Summers in between them. He purposely leaned forward, gesturing as he talked, and, apparently unnoticing, struck the gravy bowl with the back of his hand, knocking it over and sending its contents flying in Summers' direction.

Tony scored a direct hit. He could not have done better had his act been rehearsed, time and again. The gravy splattered the coat but most of it landed in Summers' lap and ran down his pant legs.

"Oh, what a shame!" cried Lola. "Frank—how could you have been so stupid!"

CORNELIUS SUMMERS was on his feet now, applying a napkin as best he could. Lola handed her napkin over and Tony stood by, berating himself.

"What a clumsy ox! How did that ever happen!" he ranted.

"It's all right," said Mr. Summers. "It could have happened to anybody." He surveyed his bedraggled looking trousers. "I'm afraid they are quite a mess, though," he admitted, ruefully.

"Here, I'll tell you what I'll do. It'll

only take a few minutes," proposed Tony. "You go in the bathroom and take your trousers off and I'll take them downstairs to the tailor and have them fixed up."

"No, that's too much trouble. I . . . !"

"Trouble? After what I've just done? I should say not. Just step in here, Mr. Summers. Excuse us, please, Lola."

"Of course!" she said.

"But I think . . . perhaps I'd better . . . !"

"You can't go to the theatre that way," urged Tony.

Their victim surrendered. He removed his trousers in the bathroom and handed them to Tony who emerged, triumphantly. Lola had gone over to the hotel window and was looking out.

"Sammy will be up in a minute!" said Tony. "He'll raise hell—but give him an argument, till I come back!"

Lola nodded. "He's not a bad guy," she said. "Just starved for a little affection. I'll bet his wife is one of those frigid old naggers!"

"Now don't go feeling sorry for him!" warned Tony, as he slipped out the door, with the trousers. "Think what this means to Homewood!"

The drama was well played. The suspicious "hotel detective" entered the suite and found the man hiding in the bathroom, minus his trousers. He told an entirely unacceptable story about spilling something on them and sending out to be cleaned.

"I've heard that one before," said Sammy. "This is a respectable hotel, Mister, and I'm running you both in."

"You mustn't do that!" pleaded the general manager of the Eagle Aircraft Company. "I'm married . . . my wife . . . my reputation"

"You should have thought of that before you hooked up with this dame," said Sammy. "What's your name?"

"Summers. Cornelius Summers—but can't we hush this up some way?"

"Not with me, Mister. Say—you're not *the* Summers of Eagle Aircraft, are you?"

"Yes, yes, I am! But don't speak of this . . . don't arrest me . . . !"

"Can you imagine a man like you takin' a chance like this?"

"I tell you, officer, there's nothing out of the way here," protested Lola. "Mr. Summers had an unfortunate accident. Mr. Jordan's taken his trousers down to have them . . . !" There was a sound at the door and Tony entered. "Here he is now!"

"Well—what's all this?" said Tony.

"Oh!" said Sammy, "So you're *another* one!" He looked at Lola. You're doin' all right, Baby!"

"I don't get it!" said Tony.

SAMMY pointed at the trouserless Summers.

"Do you get it now?"

"I'll pay anything—do anything!" implored the victim. "Mr. Jordan—if you have any influence?"

"I know the management," said Tony. "I might be able to get you out of this."

"Do whatever is necessary. Explain to this man what happened!"

"I don't want no explanation. I got eyes," snapped Sammy. "Get your pants on and come along with me!"

"Officer, can I speak with you a minute?" broke in Tony.

Sammy eyed him. "Okay, but make it snappy!" He sauntered over to a corner of the room where they discoursed in low tones.

"He's scared green," said Sammy. "Put the heat on."

Tony raised his voice. "Well, that's pretty steep. Wait a minute. I want to talk it over with Mr. Summers."

Tony approached his victim and took

him off to one side.

"The dick says he's gone this far and he's got to make an arrest. I'm a stranger in this town—I'm not married—and I'll take the rap. The tailor's working on your trousers now—but don't wait for those . . . step in the bathroom and I'll let you take mine! Then you beat it out of here."

Cornelius Summers nodded.

"But what about *your* pants?"

"Go down to the valet's room in the basement of this hotel—wait till your trousers are done . . . then send him up with mine."

"But what will happen to you?"

"Don't worry about me. I'm used to getting out of jams. Besides, I got you into this one."

"Well, not exactly. I don't know . . . I'm all confused . . . Is there something I can do to . . . ?"

"Yes, there's one thing. I want your factory to locate in Homewood."

"See me about that in the morning. I . . . !"

"Oh, no, Mr. Summers—if I'm getting you out of this—you can do something for me right now. Just write me a little agreement on this hotel stationery . . . !"

"Hurry it up you two!" ordered Sammy. "Make up your minds or I'll run you both in!"

Cornelius Summers sat down at the writing desk, took the pen and dipped it in the ink. His hand was shaking as he started scribbling. Tony watched over his shoulder and took up the hotel sheet when he had finished.

THE general manager of the Eagle Aircraft Company had written:

Mr. Frank Jordan,
Chamber of Commerce,
Homewood, Cal.
Dear Sir:
I have, this day, accepted the proposition of your Chamber of Commerce, as presented by you, and agree to the Eagle Aircraft plant to your city upon completion of all arrangements between us.

Yours very truly,
Cornelius Summers,
General Manager.

"That seems to be all right," said Tony. "When I get out of this scrape, I'll get in touch with you. I may have to go back to Homewood first."

"Well, how about it?" demanded Sammy, advancing toward them.

"Let him go," said Tony. "I'll stand for this." He opened the bathroom door and pulled his victim inside, slipping off his own trousers and removing their contents. The pants were dark gray in color. "There you are!"

Summers slipped into Tony's trousers. He had put his wallet and other articles in his coat pockets.

"This is humilating for us both," he said. "Not to mention poor Miss Peters!"

"There's nothing we can do about it now," said Tony, "but try to get out of this the best way we can."

They emerged from the bathroom. Tony's trousers were a trifle too long on Mr. Summers. He almost tripped on them.

"Goodbye, Miss Peters," he said. "I hate to be leaving you this way."

The melodrama was close to comedy.

"What goes on here!" blared Sammy, as he saw the switch. "You gents only got one pair of pants between you?"

Lola kept out of the scene as much as she could.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Summers," she called, as he edged toward the door.

"So am I!" he said, and Lola, Sammy and Tony had to gag themselves as he added: "But it was nice meeting you!"

The instant the door closed on the general manager of Eagle Aircraft, Sammy and Tony exploded.

"Awfully corny!" howled Tony, "but it worked."

"Not funny, McGee," said Lola, soberly.

But Tony waved Summers' letter agreement in front of her and grabbed up the phone.

"Give me long distance!" he told the operator. "Homewood, California . . . person to person . . . Mrs. Matilda Townsend . . . !" He danced a jig in his shirt tails and shorts as he waited.

"Hello, Matilda! . . . This is Frank! Just wanted you to know the good news! We've got Eagle Aircraft for Homewood! . . . Yep—signed, sealed and ready to be delivered! . . . Sure—tell it to the papers. Spread the news! . . . I'm coming home by plane first thing in the morning. Okay, Matilda! . . . I think you're swell, too. Wonderful! . . . Good night!"

Tony hung up.

"Well, the evening's still young and dinner isn't even finished yet," he said. "Shall we order more food or go out and have ourselves a celebration?"

"I'm game," said Sammy. "I ain't had so much fun since we came west!"

"Not me," said Lola. "If you don't mind, Tony—I'm going to my room and go to bed. I've got a splitting headache!"

TONY crossed over to her. "Oh, I'm sorry, Georgeous. You were wonderful tonight. I couldn't have put this over without you. Sammy, either! . . . My two musketeers!"

His words somehow sounded hollow—like he was trying to breathe life and spirit into them. He tried to slip his arm around Lola but she drew away.

"Good night, boys! See you in the morning."

The door closed behind her and Sammy and Tony exchanged glances. They sat, saying nothing, for a long moment.

A rap on the door made them both jump. Tony answered it. The valet handed in a pair of trousers.

"Your pants, I believe, sir. The gentleman who had the accident sent them up!" He glanced at Tony queerly.

"Thank you very much," said Tony, tipping him. "Did the gentleman say anything?"

"No, sir. He seemed very nervous and upset—and anxious to be going!"

"I see. Good night, Valet . . . and thanks again!"

"Good night, sir!"

The valet retired, closing the door. Tony stood, looking down at his freshly pressed pants, then wadded them up and threw them across the room.

"Hey!" said Sammy, surprised. "What's the big idea?"

"Did you ever hate yourself?" said Tony.

"Who are you talkin' about?" asked Sammy. "Jordan or Canero?"

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE plane next morning, bound from San Francisco to Homewood, the representative of that city's Chamber of Commerce had something to say to his attractive blonde traveling companion and the big, muscular lug who sat in the seat behind them.

"You may be interested to know that the deal we put over last night is all off," he said.

"What do you mean 'all off?' " asked Sammy.

"I mailed Summers' letter back to him with my apology," said Tony. "Told him it was all a frame-up, if he hadn't guessed it already—and freed him from any promise he made me."

"Jeez!" said Sammy. "I can't follow you any more! You have this thing right in your mitt, after goin' to all this trouble, an' you pass it up. You must

be nuts!"

"He's not nuts," said Lola, putting her head against Tony's shoulder. "He's just finding himself!"

"Which self?" moaned Sammy. "That's what I wanna know! He's got more identities than Jackal and Hide!"

* * *

Waiting to greet the conquering hero at Homewood's airport was a delegation of prominent citizens led by Banker Harrington and Mrs. Townsend and members of the New Industries committee.

This was a big day for the town and the Homewood Tribune had emblazoned the good news of Frank Jordan's achievement in banner headlines.

EAGLE AIRCRAFT LOCATING IN HOMEWOOD!
Means Employment for 500 Local Citizens
FRANK JORDAN WINS OUT OVER OTHER RIVALS

The moment the representative of Homewood's Chamber of Commerce stepped off the plane, he was surrounded by cheering fellow residents. Matilda Townsend fought her way through the crowd, flung her arms about him and kissed him, rapturously. She was surprised to see Lola Peters and Sammy with him.

"Well, did you take them with you?" she asked.

"No, I had them join me," said Tony. "I thought I might need their assistance."

"I see! . . . Well, Frank, we're glad to welcome you home. We're so proud of you!"

"Yes, Mr. Jordan!" called Banker Harrington. "Homewood's forever indebted to you! This is one of the biggest things that's ever happened for the town!"

TONY held up his hands to quiet further demonstrations.

"I appreciate this reception," he said, "but I'm sorry to have to report that my announcement last night was a bit premature. I thought I had landed the Eagle Aircraft plant for Homewood—but I hadn't."

There was a moment of unbelieving silence, then a disturbed clamor of tongues.

"What's that?"

"What did he say?"

"It's not true? We're not getting the plant after all?"

"But how about the big news story? Where'd the paper get its information?"

"Oh, Frank!" cried Matilda Townsend. "NO! It isn't so! . . . You couldn't do a thing like this to me . . . make us the laughing stock of the town!"

"This is nothing to laugh at!" boomed Banker Harrington's voice. "If Mr. Jordan came back without an agreement from Eagle Aircraft to locate here, he is guilty of misrepresentation and fraud."

Henry Zanger appeared from the back of the crowd.

"I'll say he is. Just who is this Frank Jordan, anyway? Does anybody know very much about him? He ought to be investigated!"

"Come on, Lola," said Tony, taking her by the arm. "Let's get out of here and back to the office. Make way for us, Sammy."

The special policeman for the Townsend Bread Company opened up a lane through bitterly disappointed, wrathful townspeople.

"That's his finish in this town!" an unidentified voice cried out.

BY AFTERNOON, with the Homewood Chronicle on the streets containing a refutation of the Tribune's morning story, the entire city was agog with vigorous comment. Many citizens,

overjoyed at news that the new factory would mean jobs, branded Frank Jordan's "over-optimistic" statement as a cruel joke. The Chamber of Commerce came in for heated criticism, as did President Percival Harrington, for selection of Jordan in the role of "new industry procurer."

A special editorial in the Chronicle was headed:

JORDAN'S FAILURE HUMILIATES WHOLE CITY

In his moment of deepest gloom and chagrin, Matilda Townsend walked into the office. She was stopped at the door by Lola.

"You're not going in there if you've come to bawl him out!" she defied.

"I'll say what I please and do what I please!" rejoined the widow of the late Bread King. "Mr. Jordan has all but ruined my reputation in this town."

"He's still, however, major stockholder in this company," reminded Lola.

"Yes—and that's what I've come to see him about!" said Matilda. "I'm going to ask him to sell out—first chance he gets! The people of Homewood will never forgive him for what he's done—never!"

"I heard that," said Tony, stepping out of his office. "I'll be glad to oblige you, Matilda, as soon as a buyer can be found."

"That's fine! The sooner the better. I've never been so hurt and crushed and disappointed in a person in all my life. I can't ever trust a man again. Not as long as I live!"

As she buried her nose in her handkerchief and turned away, a Western Union messenger entered.

"Telegram for Mr. Jordan," he announced.

"Right here, son," said Tony, reaching out his hand.

He slit the yellow envelope open with his finger and glanced at the message, idly.

"Sorry, Matilda, to have let you down," he called. "I did my best!" Then, looking again at the wire, he exclaimed in surprise. "Lola—look! What is this? I can't believe it! It's from Mr. Summers! Read it!"

He held it out before them and they read it together.

MR. FRANK JORDAN,
HOMEWOOD, CAL.
WISH TO ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT YOUR LETTER OF EXPLANATION AND APOLOGY. ALSO RETURN OF MY LETTER AGREEMENT. YOU MAY BE INTERESTED TO KNOW THAT I CAME TO YOUR HOTEL LAST NIGHT WITH DECISION TO LOCATE EAGLE AIRCRAFT YOUR CITY BUT NO OPPORTUNITY TO TELL YOU. PERSONAL OFFERS MADE ME WERE GREAT TEMPTATION BUT I CONCLUDED OTHER THINGS IN LIFE THAN MONEY—YOUR HOSPITALITY, FOR INSTANCE. IF YOU STILL WOULD LIKE EAGLE AIRCRAFT COMPANY TO MOVE TO HOMEWOOD, PLEASE ADVISE ME AT ONCE. TELL YOUR FRIENDS THEY PUT ON A MOST CONVINCING ACT. I HAVEN'T HAD SO MUCH EXCITEMENT IN YEARS. REGARDS.

CORNELIUS SUMMERS
GENERAL MANAGER
EAGLE AIRCRAFT
SAN FRANCISCO.

"I told you he was a nice guy!" cried Lola.

"Give me that telephone!" shouted Tony. "Get me long distance. Put a call through! Where's Matilda? . . . Give her the good news!"

Lola ran out of the office and down the corridor.

"Mrs. Townsend, come back, please! Mr. Jordan wants to see you!"

"I don't want to see him!" was her retort.

"Oh, yes, you do!" insisted Lola. "He's just received word from Eagle Aircraft—they're coming here after all!"

THE face of the Bread King's widow underwent a transition from gloom

to joy. She turned about and ran down the corridor after Lola.

Tony was talking with the general manager of Eagle Aircraft when the two women got back.

"That's fine, Mr. Summers . . . that's fine. Yes—I'll fly back to see you and go over everything . . . and bring the New Industries committee with me . . . Well, I guess that's all—except one thing . . . I'd just like you to know, Mr. Summers, that you've restored my faith in human nature. Yeah, I guess we all get pretty low sometimes. All makes mistakes? . . . And how! . . . Oh, Mr. Summers! . . ." Tony glanced over at Lola and winked. "There's a beautiful blonde here who sends her regards! . . . What's that?" Tony laughed and covered the mouthpiece, as he repeated to Lola: "He says he's off blondes—for life!" Then, into phone: "Goodbye, now—I'll be seeing you!"

As Tony put down the receiver, a repentent Matilda beseeched him: "Oh, Frank, forgive me! I was so upset! You can understand, I'm sure. The whole bottom of my world dropped out—but it's all there again now—and oh, how I'm going to enjoy rubbing it in to those people who said such unkind things! I'm going to demand that the Tribune make a retraction of its editorial attacking you—and the least Percy Harrington can do to make amends is to see now that you positively get the 'outstanding citizen' award!"

Tony looked at Matilda, smiled, and shook his head.

"Funny thing," he said. "It doesn't seem to make so much difference any more!"

CHAPTER XIX

IT WAS the night of the Annual Chamber of Commerce Banquet which was to be the most elaborate affair in the history of Homewood. Everyone of any importance was going and everyone else, who could get in, and who could buy or borrow evening dress for the occasion.

Frank Jordan, who was to receive the "outstanding citizen" award was to be guest of honor. He was attending the dinner, of course, with Matilda Townsend. This couple was now on the topmost crest of the social wave and it was rumored that their engagement might be announced before the evening was over.

The Zangers were runners-up, so to speak, for community honors, and were seated, at the head table, with other distinguished citizens. Henry Zanger's leadership in the campaign to raise $100,000 for building of a Community Clubhouse on the Municipal Golf Course, had resulted in the goal being over-subscribed. His wife, too, had played a substantial part of this civic enterprise. Every golfer in town "loved this couple."

Those "close to the Zangers" whispered that Frank Jordan's rival in the bread business as well as for the coveted "outstanding citizen" award, had taken his civic defeat extremely hard. He had been so "all out" in criticism of his competitor at the time it appeared that Jordan's quest for the new industry had failed that he was having a difficult time "living it down." But "hatchets" had apparently been buried for this occasion of "brotherly love" and expression of community esteem.

At one of the tables on the outer circle of the banquet hall sat a man whose large muscular form bulged beneath a rented dress suit. He was in the company of a "beautiful platinum blonde."

"Jeez, this is some shindig, all right!" he said to his companion, as dinner was being served. "I'll bet Tony—I mean

Mr. Jordan— is gettin' a kick outa this!"

"He'd better!" said the young woman, looking toward the speaker's table. "He worked hard enough for it!"

There were close to a thousand diners in the Homewood Armory for this climactic yearly event, absolute capacity. President of the Chamber of Commerce Percival Harrington was, of course, chairman and toastmaster. The guest of honor, Frank Jordan, sat on his right and next to him, Matilda Townsend; then Mayor Fred Goodwillie and wife, the Tim O'Learys, the Dr. John Hawley's, the Emerson Evans, the Henry Zangers and so on—one well known couple after another.

AN AIR of great expectancy settled over the diners as President Harrington, wiping his prodigious beard with his napkin, rapped his gavel for order and stood up to open the program. A radio engineer shoved a table microphone in front of him as local broadcasting station H-O-M-E prepared to carry every word of the honor presentation to the community-at-large.

"Distinguished citizens of Homewood, friends and neighbors," he said. "This is an occasion of the year when we dispense with the usual oratory and bombast ordinarily associated with back-slapping civic gatherings and, in a simple but sincere manner, pay tribute to that citizen, man or woman as the case may be, who has been selected as 'the outstanding individual, the Number One person in point of public service' for the past twelve months.

"May I say, briefly, in review, that this has been an auspicious year in the glorious history of Homewood. Through united civic effort of all organizations, we have steadily forged ahead . . .!"

"Seems like I've heard his speech before somewhere," whispered Sammy.

"Shut up," said Lola, "they're all the same!"

"We are building a community," the President of the Chamber of Commerce continued, "of which our children and our children's children can be proud."

There was applause.

"They even clap in the same places," said Sammy.

"A little louder," warned Lola, "and they'll throw you out of here! Keep quiet, bum!"

"And, in connection with building," the speaker went on, "I should like to make note of that magnificent achievement accomplished by Henry and Emily Zanger who headed the money-raising committees in the Fund Drive for the Golf Course Clubhouse!"

More applause.

"Stand up, Henry and Emily—and take a bow!"

The Zangers did so.

"Oh, for a rotten tomato!" said Sammy in Lola's ear.

"Love your neighbor!" hissed Lola.

"There was another event in Homewood this past year," said President Harrington, "which meant much to the town. That was the arrival in our fair city of a stranger, who was so impressed with our community that he dropped off a bus and decided to make his home here. This gentleman was brought in to see me and confided that he had money to invest. After some little discussion, on determining him to be a man of unusual character and civic interest, I put him in touch with our beloved Matilda Townsend and, you know the rest. . . . Frank Jordan became her partner in the Townsend Bread Company and filled a void left by our late esteemed Charlton L. Townsend!"

Still more applause. The wife of the departed Bread King bowed and dabbed at her eyes.

"I'm deeply touched!" murmured

Sammy.

"Yes," said Lola, "in the head!"

"Our new citizen," continued Banker Harrington, "endeared himself to us from the moment he spoke so delightfully and extemporaneously at our Welfare Society Luncheon—and we knew then that a new and important civic leader had come among us!"

FRANK JORDAN was sitting, looking up at the man who was paying him tribute, as though fascinated. Matilda Townsend nudged him proudly as each flattering compliment was expressed.

"As time went on," said President Harrington, "and Frank Jordan became better and more favorably known, it was finally decided that he was the one man in Homewood upon whom we could depend to represent us in attempting to secure a new industry for the town! There was an unhappy moment when Mr. Jordan himself thought that he had failed, which saddened everyone in the community—but every cloud, they say, has a 'silver lining' and thus, when the rainbow of success broke across the horizon, all Homewood rejoiced with Mr. Jordan—and his title of 'the year's outstanding citizen' was assured!"

"This is the time for applause," said Sammy, and led it.

"At this point," said President Harrington, "I should like to read a telegram just received from Mr. Cornelius Summers, general manager of the Eagle Aircraft Company who, unfortunately, could not be with us tonight." He held up the wire and read: 'To President Harrington and All Assembled—Deeply regret unable to attend banquet honoring Frank Jordan, owing to pressure of work in preparing to move Eagle Aircraft to your city. But I wish to pay tribute to this splendid public servant, whose brilliant presentation, hospitable manner and persuasive argument caused me to choose your fine city as the new home for my Company!"

This brought cheers and applause.

"'Persuasive argument!'" repeated Lola, "'Hospitable manners'. I'll say!"

"That guy's all right," said Sammy. "Reminds me of my father!"

Lola crushed his foot under the table.

"And now!" Banker Harrington was saying, as he reached for the large silver loving cup. "And now—it gives me exceeding by great pleasure to present to Frank Jordan, on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce and the good people of this wonderful city of Homewood, this token of our appreciation and esteem, emblematic of you, sir—having earned the distinction of being acclaimed, 'the outstanding citizen' of the year, for your services to the city!"

There was a great scraping of chairs as all in the banquet hall stood up, beating their palms and shouting "congratulations."

Frank Jordan had gotten to his feet and taking the loving cup in his hands, examined it with a smile and an appraising gesture.

"Don't hock it!" somebody shouted, and the banqueters roared.

"I won't hock it," he assured. "This means too much to me."

The sounds of the ovation died down as all now gave attention to the "man of the hour."

"When I came to Homewood," he started.

A voice suddenly rang out. "Tell us what you did *before* you came to Homewood!"

FRANK JORDAN turned and looked toward his heckler, Henry Zanger, who was getting to his feet. A shocked gasp and intake of breaths could be heard throughout the banquet

hall. President Harrington pounded with his gavel.

"Order, please!" Then, in reprimanding tones: "Henry, what do you mean by this?"

"Just what I say!" repeated the head of Tasty Pastries, Incorporated. "Let Mr. Jordan tell us all what he did before he came to Homewood!"

Lola hid her face in her hands. "It's happened," she cried. "I've been afraid of it all along!"

"Let her come!" said Sammy, "after what we know about some people in Homewood—we don't rate so bad!"

All eyes were now fixed upon the town's 'outstanding citizen'. If Henry Zanger had expected his rival to be demoralized by his sudden dramatic onslaught, he was destined for a shock. Frank Jordan met the challenge with surprising composure.

"Perhaps, Mr. Zanger," he smiled, "since you appear to have some information concerning my activities before coming to Homewood, you will be so good as to enlighten everyone. I naturally don't like to make complimentary remarks about myself!"

"Complimentary!" blazed Zanger. "Do you citizens of Homewood want to know the *truth!"*

"Yes, Yes!" came shouts from different parts of the hall.

"Then I'll tell you!" Zanger continued. "I've been suspicious of this man ever since he came here. Not because he was my competitor in business —but because of a certain something I couldn't quite put my finger on. I couldn't get away from the feeling that Frank Jordan was actually a *phony!"*

"No, no!" several cried out.

Matilda placed a trembling hand on Frank Jordan's arm.

"What's he going to say?" she whispered?"

"Plenty!" her partner assured.

"Finally, after this near fiasco of Mr. Jordan's getting a factory lined up for Homewood, I decided to have him investigated. I hired one of the finest detective agencies in the country. Do you want me to give you their report?"

The hall became an uproar. President Harrington shouted and rapped furiously for order.

"Quiet, please! Quiet!" Then, greatly upset and embarrassed, he turned to Frank Jordan's accuser. "Mr. Zanger —this is hardly the time and place . . . . !"

"I think it is!" insisted the head of Tasty Pastries, Incorporated. "I think this man, upon whom we've mistakenly conferred these honors, should not be permitted to leave this banquet room until everyone of his trusting fellow citizens know who and what he *is!"*

There were supporting shouts from the hall and President Harrington helplessly subsided.

"Proceed!" he said.

JORDAN remained standing, facing his attacker as Henry Zanger, leveling a condemning finger at him, blasted: "This man was never an orphan! But he's been masquerading under the name of an orphan—Frank Jordan—who gave his life for his country in the last world war."

"No!" cried Matilda. "It's not so!"

"Oh, you were fooled Mrs. Townsend, just like the rest of us!" went on Zanger. "Jordan's real name is Tony Canero—and Tony Canero was, prior to his fleeing for his life from Chicago to escape a gang war—the gambling czar of Chicago's North Side!"

The automatic bomb had been dropped and the banquet hall was rocking beneath its human repercussions.

"What I could do to that guy!" raged Sammy.

Matilda Townsend was on her feet.

"Mr. Jordan!" she cried. "Tell Henry Zanger that what he's just said is an outrageous lie!"

The head of the Townsend Bread Company looked at the woman who had championed him.

"I'm sorry," he said, in a low but clear voice. "Every word Mr. Zanger has spoken is the truth. My real name *is* Tony Canero!"

Mrs. Townsend swayed on her feet. "Then I'll have nothing more to do with you!" she said. "Nothing!" She slumped in her chair and burst into tears.

"And what's more!" took up Zanger. "This underworld character brought two of his accomplices to Homewood and gave them jobs in the Townsend Bread Company." He pointed. "There they are—seated at that table over there . . . Miss Lola Peters and Sammy . . . I believe the last name's 'Sablow' . . . !"

"Correct!" said Sammy, and stood up and took a bow.

"Sit down!" said Lola, and pulled at his coat-tails.

There were boohs and growing dissension and indignation in the hall.

"The party's gonna get rough in a minute," Sammy whispered. "We'd better get Tony outa here—if we can!"

"Not a chance!" said Lola. "Don't start anything. You'll make matters worse!"

Frank Jordan was raising his arms for attention against the hubbub.

"Have you said everything that you want to say?" he asked of Zanger.

"For the time being!" rejoined his rival.

"Then, perhaps, you people who believe in fair play, will let *me* say something!" Tony appealed.

"Yes, yes—let's hear him!" cried a number.

Zanger sat down, glaring. Frank Jordan once more became the center of attention.

"I'd like to ask," he smiled, "if any of you people have ever hung your dirty linen on the line? That's something that we all want to keep hidden, isn't it? We don't go around advertising our bad points—we just publicize the good—like your giving me this award this evening!"

THERE was an uneasy movement on the part of some present but Frank Jordan had his audience now, listening in breathless, almost embarrassed wonderment.

"I came to Homewood a little over a year ago," Tony continued, "and, just for my amusement, I had installed in my office at the Townsend Bread Company a little wire recorder. That's one of the newest inventions, you know, which takes down everything a person says in a room and you can play it back and check up on yourself any time you want to."

Tony paused and let his gaze sweep along the speaker's table as he looked directly at Emerson Evans, Dr. Hawley, Tim O'Leary and others. They squirmed in their chairs.

"You'd be surprised," he went on, "if you'd keep a record of yourself, day by day, the things you'd find that you wouldn't want anyone else to know about."

Diners commenced looking questioningly about at one another. What was Frank Jordan driving at?

"Personally, now that it's happened, I'm glad that you folks know the worst about me. I think it's a good thing, occasionally, to hang our dirty linen on the line . . . and while we're doing it, why not drag it all out?"

The explosive force of this suggestion left many citizens aghast, especially

those at the head table.

"Dr. Hawley," addressed Tony, turning upon him, abruptly. "Don't you think this would be a good idea?"

Homewood's Health Commissioner, in the act of taking a sip of water to moisten a dry throat and tongue, started and spilled liquid over his hand. He se the glass down and stood up.

"I . . . er . . . a . . . get Mr. Jordan's point," he said, feeling for words. "I've been sitting here thinking, as Mr. Jordan has been talking, how quick we are to condemn and how slow to forgive. I can understand Mr. Zanger's good intentions in . . . er . . . making known these facts to us . . . but I . . . er . . . like to judge a man as I find him . . . and I'd like to say that Frank Jordan's dealings with me have always been . . . er . . . strictly honest and above-board!"

This statement occasioned sympathetic applause.

"Even when we had our unhappy little run-in over the matter of sanitation," Dr. Hawley added, "I found Mr. Jordan most co-operative. So I would recommend, if I may, that we accept him for what he has been to us—and, by all means, 'let the dead past bury the dead'!"

Dr. Hawley sat down amid more applause. There was, however, a divided murmur of opinion.

Tony, still standing, eyed the town's political boss.

"Mr. O'Leary," he said. "How do you feel about the 'dead past burying its dead'?"

THE fat and somewhat pompous Tim O'Leary got to his feet, obviously flustered.

"It's a great idea!" he declared. "I've always gone on a 'live and let live' policy. Personally I say—we should all forget the past and think of Homewood's future."

He sat down, afraid to say more, but his words had weight with certain of his followers.

"And you, Mr. Evans?" smiled Tony.

The real estate magnate of Homewood was already rising.

"Mr. Jordan is a hundred per cent right!" he acclaimed. "There's nothing worse in this world than a hypocrite. What this man we have honored tonight has done for our town, we can never repay. Let us then not remind him of his past—which he is trying to forget—and welcome him to this new life he has built for himself among us! Let him who is without fault, cast the first stone. I have no fear that Frank Jordan will be injured!"

As Emerson Evans sat down, the banquet hall resounded with cheers and applause. Henry Zanger's face looked as though it had been boiled in oil. He leaped up and tried to speak but a voice boomed out: "Sit down, you hypocrite!" and he was drowned out with shouts of disapproval.

"Why, Sammy!" exclaimed Lola, "I didn't think you knew what hypocrite meant!"

"I don't!" said Sammy, "but it stopped him!"

Frank Jordan was not quite through. He waited for the tumult to subside and then said, quietly: "This is as good a time as any for me to make an announcement. I've decided to accept the offer of Mr. Evans and his associates and am going to sell my interest in the Townsend Bread Company to them—for the sum of three hundred thousand dollars."

The face of Homewood's real estate magnate was a study in bewilderment.

"Why, I don't recall . . . I mean . . . oh, yes, yes . . . !" he swallowed, after quick consulting glances with Dr. Hawley, Tim O'Leary and Henry Zan-

ger. "Was it three hundred thousand?"

"That's the amount!" said Tony. "And because I'm leaving on a little vacation tomorrow, I'll thank you, Mr. Evans, if you will meet with Mr. Harrington and myself the first thing in the morning at the State Bank and complete all arrangements."

"Yes, Mr. Jordan—I—I'd be delighted!" promised Evans.

"My congratulations to you and your associates," said Tony, "as new owners with this grand woman, Matilda Townsend—of the finest bakery in Homewood!"

He glanced at Zanger as he said this and the audience roared.

Tony then extended his hands, palms upward, in a gesture of resignation, shrugged his shoulders and said, with a smile: "Well, folks, I guess that's all!"

President Harrington, relieved, banged with his gavel.

"Meeting's adjourned!"

BACK in the hotel room, where they could talk, Lola and Sammy "lit in" to Homewood's "outstanding citizen."

"What are you gonna do with that three hundred grand when you get it?" Sammy demanded.

Tony grinned. "First thing, I'm sending a certified check for fifty thousand dollars to the Orphans Home for the loan that gave me my start in life," he said.

"That's ten more than I lifted from there," said Sammy.

"I know," smiled Tony. "That's interest!"

"Jeez, aren't they apt to find out who stole their dough?"

Tony shook his head. "I'm marking the donation 'Anonymous'."

"Well, just so you don't mention my name!"

Lola had been waiting her turn.

"Where do we go from here?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Tony, reaching for the hotel phone. "Hello, operator—have one of the boys buy me an almanac off the newsstand and bring it up."

"Oh, no!" cried Lola, "we don't start this all over again!"

"Why not?" said Tony. "We didn't have such bad luck here—considering!"

"Considering what?"

"Considering that human nature's human nature wherever you find it!"

"You can say that again!" agreed Sammy.

There was a knock on the door and a bellhop appeared with the almanac.

"Whaddaya want to know?" he asked, "maybe I can save you a buck!"

"Scram!" he said. Then he opened the book and ran through its pages. "Here we are. Cities of fifty thousand population!"

"One question!" demanded Lola, "Are you still going straight?"

"Yes," said Tony, "as soon as we pick our next stop, I'm going straight to a minister!"

"That ends it, Brother!"

"No," rejoined Tony, reaching out and pulling Lola to him. "It's just the beginning. This little girl is marrying the 'outstanding citizen of Homewood'!"

"Oh, Tony!" cried Lola, "I mean—Frank—sweetheart!"

They embraced and, as they were kissing, Sammy grabbed the almanac.

"Okay!" he said. "You attend to your personal business—and *I'll* pick the next town!"

He placed his thick forefinger on a column and shut his eyes. Then a sudden thought struck him, causing him to withdraw his hand.

"Nothin' doin'!" he said. "I can't go through with this. My conscience hurts me. It's *gamblin'!*"

THE END

What they did on this rainy night in Chicago was attempt a bit of kidnaping— only to run into a guy who didn't approve

He was going to have to hurry or his rescue act would be a flop

The Body of Madelon Spain

by Paul W. Fairman

HE HAD fallen into the habit of thinking in terms of copy. He was thinking that way now. He thought: What local transit company rates a zero for leaving people stranded on street corners in the rain? Then he said, "Nuts," aloud, and turned to peer up the dark street again. It was black and shiny and empty. No cabs. Nothing but lonely yellow street lights and sheets of water tumbling down out of the night sky.

He hunched lower into the collar of his raincoat and paddled toward the next intersection. The hell with cabs. If this kept up he'd be able to thumb a ride on a passing fish.

A cab on the next street over, maybe. There had to be one somewhere. But it was no good. He got there and found the street as empty as the one a block back. Well, almost as empty. A few yards down, a black sedan was parked at the curb and two men were helping a girl into it. It wasn't a cab though, or he'd have horned in and asked for a ride.

Then he looked again. Maybe he'd horn in anyway.

The men were really putting their

hearts into their work. They were giving it all they had. Their feet were braced against the curb. They could have been shoving a bale of hay through a barn door.

The girl's feet were braced too—against the running board of the sedan. She fought silently, desperately, wasting no breath on useless screams.

Sure—he'd horn in anyway.

He moved through the dull thunder of the rain. The scene grew larger, and he saw a pale spot hanging in space before his eyes. He stepped in close. The spot hadn't moved. It was nestled snugly in a little hollow behind the near man's left ear.

He hit it with a hard fist which traveled about six inches.

Six inches was plenty. The near man stopped pushing the girl and knelt down on the curb as though he'd gotten behind in his prayers and wanted to catch up.

That released pressure on one side, bringing the second man around facing him. The second man had a dim, wet face, and a jutting chin. So long as he was hitting things, why stop now?

He moved his hard fist another six inches. It clicked against the jutting chin. The second man immediately lost interest in the pushing game. He stumbled, sagged against the fender of the car. He hung there, shaking his head.

There was a third man, but he was only a face—a dark handsome face staring lazily out through the rear window of the sedan. A face and two long, negligent fingers, holding a cigarette. The window was partly open and the smoke from the cigarette curled slowly upward and out into the night where it instantly became nothing.

The third man stayed where he was. He remained quiet, detached, unruffled by the sudden business outside. He acted as though he had only come along for the ride and found the whole affair boring.

The man with the fists had run out of things to hit. He paused, uncertainly, but only for the brief instant it took the girl to regain her balance. Then she was pulling savagely at his arm.

"Run, you fool!" She spat the words into his ear. "Run or they'll kill you right here in the street!"

And she showed him how. She was slim and shining in her white raincoat. She wore low-heeled shoes and had a long-legged, supple body. When she ran, she leaned forward and used only the balls of her feet. It was the way you ran when you wanted to get away from a place.

He ran beside her, a steady, pounding trot, two strides to her three, wondering how long she'd be able to keep it up.

THEY turned a corner into a fresh deluge of cold rain, crossed two intersections, and he began to wonder how long *he'd* be in the race. He wasn't exactly out of condition, but he hadn't done any cross-country work since college. He wiped a pail of water from his eyes and yelled, "Let's find a tavern and call a cab!"

"They wouldn't send one," she yelled back, without breaking stride.

A red neon sign flashed into view around the next corner. A Blatz beer sign, glowing luridly in the haze. They came abreast of it and he pulled her to a halt. He opened the door and pushed her inside. He followed her.

It was a typical neighborhood bar, but it was deserted, dank, a trifle depressing. None of the neighbors were out tonight.

The bartender had a stool and an evening paper back by the beer spigot. He sat with his legs propped against the drain board, the paper on his knees.

He wore an amiable expression on his round moon face. He put his feet on the floor and got up and said, "Wet night. Been runnin' in the rain?"

The answer he got had a slight edge on it. "That's right. It's a wet night and we've been running in the rain. What kind of rye do you sell?"

"Mount Vernon."

"Okay. A double. What's yours?"

He called this last to the girl, who had gone directly to the rear and squeezed into a high-backed booth. Her voice came faintly back, "Nothing, thanks."

He shrugged and followed her. He took off his dripping hat and raincoat. hung them on a peg and slipped into the seat opposite her. He said nothing. She tried a quick smile but it got away.

They were both silent, catching up on their breathing, while the barkeep ambled over with a king-sized shot glass and a bottle. He poured the rye and went back and drew some water. He brought that over and picked up the five dollar bill he found lying beside the shot glass. The change took another trip. Then he went back to the bar and stayed there.

The girl tried another smile now. It was more of a success, but it was still a pinched, scared smile. She said:

"It was very nice of you, but I'm afraid you've gotten yourself into a lot of trouble."

She had a face you wouldn't mind getting into a little trouble over. It reminded him of a face he'd seen in a cold cream advertisement. A perfect oval, the features symmetrical to the width of a gnat's wing. Her eyes were jet black. Her hair was forty square miles of starless night, concentrated into one spot.

SHE had beauty—more than enough—but there was something more. She had sex. She was wrapped in an aura of that aloof variety of sexiness that makes men's knees shake. She was the kind of girl a lot of men would be after.

She said, "I'm sorry."

"I like trouble sometimes," he replied. "What did they want?"

"They wanted to kill me, I think."

He raised one eyebrow, carefully.

"The one in the car," she told him, "was—"

"Tony Nunez, a fast boy with the law."

"You—you know him?" Her large eyes became frightened again.

"By sight. Why did he want to kill you?"

"There's quite a little to it. He—"

"Maybe you ought to tell me your name first."

"Oh." Her smooth skin colored slightly. "Madelon Spain. That's my professional name. My real name is Lorraine Higgins."

"Professional?"

"I'm a singer. Not a very good one, I'm afraid. I'm working at the Rio Bamba. It isn't one of the top spots, but it isn't bad."

"I've heard of it. How did you get mixed up with a tough boy like Nunez?"

"I'm—I'm not mixed up with him. I've only seen him once, before tonight. My husband and I—" She stopped. "You haven't told me your name."

"Bob Calloway."

She looked at him closely. She said, "Oh, I've—"

"Sure. You were saying that you and your husband—"

Bob Calloway finally got around to his rye. She watched him toss it off and chase it with water. "My husband has disappeared," she said, "and I'm certain that Nunez killed him. Jim wouldn't just walk out without saying a word to me about it. He wasn't a

coward."

"Why did Nunez want him dead?" Calloway asked, patiently.

"There were—things," she said.

"Why haven't you gone to the police?"

She was seated facing the front, and her eyes had been continuously searching the dark windows. She started to answer, stopped, and the color washed from her cheeks.

She slid out of the booth, snatched her raincoat from the peg, and disappeared through a door marked ladies.

Immediately the barkeep strolled up, as though he'd just happened to be in the neighborhood, and took Calloway's glass. "Another?" he asked.

"Sure. Is there a window in your lady's room?"

"Huh?"

"A window—large enough to crawl through."

"I guess a dame could crawl out there if she wanted to. Never had one try."

"Okay. I was just wondering."

THEY marched in single file; the man with the sore jaw, the one with the lump behind his ear, and the man who had been only a face in the car window.

The Face seemed to be the boss. Once inside, he moved ahead and lead the parade back to the last booth.

He was flawlessly dressed. His dark blue, velvet collared coat had been custom built. His black Homburg would estimate at about twenty-five dollars. A white silk scarf peeped delicately out between the lapels of his coat. He could have owned four railroads, and could have been just back from trying a yacht for size.

He flicked a long finger at the left side of his mustache, looked into the booth, and said,

"You've been a very busy little man tonight."

Calloway replied, "Haven't we all? How are you Nunez?"

Nunez looked thoughtful. He sat down opposite Calloway. His two assistants moved in closer.

They were both solid, heavy-set. They could have been taken from the same mould and been discarded, after inspection, because of obvious flaws. One of them had eyes that looked in two directions at once; eyes you could never be certain about. He could look at you and reach out and slug the guy on the other side. His mate wore a sneer. It was a faithful sneer. It had been well treated. It liked his face and was going to stay there.

Nunez carefully removed his hat and laid it on the seat beside him.

"The advantage is yours," he murmured, politely. "I don't believe I've ever met you."

"You may have read me. Calloway's Comments. A column in the *Blade*. I write it."

Nunez' eyes widened. He made a point of being impressed. "A newspaper man. Hmmm." He raised a languid hand. "This is Steve Belcher —an associate. And Sam Stern."

Stern worked his sneer overtime. "A guy that hits guys when they ain't lookin'," he snarled.

Calloway looked at Steve Belcher's crossed eyes. He got a trifle dizzy, and asked, "How long have you been out of jail?"

Belcher growled deep in his throat. He fingered his jaw and looked venomous. He turned a pleading glance on Nunez. Nunez ignored it completely and said,

"The young lady isn't with you, I see."

"No, she isn't with me," Calloway agreed.

NUNEZ looked at Stern. Then he looked at the door to the lady's washroom and motioned slightly with two fingers. Stern went over and pulled at the door. It held. He set himself, took the knob in both hands, and jerked. It flew open, the lock hanging limply by one screw. He peered in, closed the door, and came back. "She could have gone through the window," he said.

"Did she go through the window, Mr. Calloway?" Nunez asked.

"A squad car came by," Calloway lied. "They took her home."

"But you stayed."

"I stayed. I wanted another drink."

Nunez turned, gravely, and called, "Bartender, bring Mr. Calloway another drink."

The barkeep had been waiting, uneasily, back by the beer tap. He came forward, put the double rye on the table and backed away. Stern leered at him.

Nunez smiled vaguely, and looked at a diamond-studded watch on his wrist. "I imagine she went to the club," he said. He didn't seem to be talking to anyone in particular.

"Why the hell don't you let her alone?" Calloway snapped.

Nunez regarded him clinically. He said, "I should be frightened into answering that, I suppose. The power of the press. But somehow I'm not. All I seem to see is a cocky writer with a misplaced sense of chivalry."

"And all I see," Calloway returned, "is a two bit gangster with a blue coat to cover up a yellow streak and two gutter bums to make him feel important."

Nunez didn't get mad. He looked casually at Calloway and moved the two fingers again.

Stern grinned and leaned forward. His hand came out of his pocket. There was a sap in it. The sap bounced off the side of Calloway's head.

Calloway fell forward. His face hit the table. The building came up off its foundations, did a loop, and settled back with a thud. Bells rang. Calloway groaned and raised his head, only to have it slammed down on the table again.

A voice growled, "Hits guys when they're busy. Tough he is."

There was blood on the table. It came out of Calloway's nose and made a puddle. Calloway's lips were in the puddle. He could taste salt. He licked at his lips.

Then he pushed his toes against the soles of his shoes and came up from the table as though released from a spring. His skull connected with something and there was the click of teeth and a bull roar from Sam Stern.

Stern went over backwards, his arms flailing. A red bruise, where Calloway's head had connected, glowed on his jaw.

Calloway was out of the booth now, crouching, but he was too late, too groggy, and to slow. In a haze he saw Belcher's eyes coming in from all directions. There was an explosion. Calloway was on the floor.

This wasn't a safe to be, however. Somebody kicked him in the stomach. When he brought his knees up, somebody else laid the boots to his back.

From way off on a cloud, he heard Nunez talking softly.

"That ought to fill a column," Nunez said.

The second explosion came then, and Calloway didn't feel the boots anymore.

THE RIO BAMBA was housed in a modernistic, white stucco building on North Clark Street about a hundred yards north of Taber's Funeral Parlors. It was equipped with a large, garish sign, which hung out over the sidewalk. Green neon tubing, bent into

letters, spelled out the name. Smaller letters reminded the public of entertainment inside.

Below the name, a very fat lady, done in red, was kicking at a foaming beer glass in an upper corner. The lady never quite hit the glass, but she kept on trying.

It had stopped raining when Bob Calloway crawled painfully from a cab in front of the place, paid off the driver, and hobbled as far as a large poster standing beside the entrance. The poster gave top billing to a dance team, a snaky Latin and a woman who could have been a window dummy lacquered with clear varnish. In one corner of the poster was a small picture of a dark beauty named Madelon Spain. It didn't do her justice.

Calloway moved on. The doorman had on a Kelly green uniform and wore a nose as bright as the sign. He touched his cap and Calloway went inside.

It was a plush and satin place, built like an amphitheater. The tables were on curved terraces. The terraces diminished down to an oval dance floor. A niche in the back wall accommodated the orchestra. Red velvet ropes bordered the terraces, and soft, indirect lighting toned down the harsh surfaces.

A tall, thin shadow of a man, standing by the dance floor, spotted Calloway immediately and almost knocked over two tables, coming up the terraces. He said, "Nice of you to drop in, Mr. Calloway. Come on down ringside. We've got a dance team you'll like."

Calloway allowed a blonde in a thigh-length skirt to steal his hat and raincoat and followed the shadow down the steps. The man signaled. A waiter appeared and trailed along behind.

The orchestra hammered out a soft, monotonous rhythm, and four couples shuffled around the dance floor with various degrees of skill and enthusiasm. The tall man led Calloway to a small table at the edge of the orchestra niche, motioned toward a chair and took one himself.

"Poor crowd tonight," he apologized. "The rain keeps them away from all the spots. We've been packed, though. Dolores and Dalmar have pushed business up plenty. They're headed places."

Calloway knew the team. They'd grown old playing the second class joints out on the River Road. If they were going to make the top they'd have to hurry or their knees would be too stiff to make bows.

The waiter stepped up. Calloway ordered rye. The tall man went for Rhine wine and seltzer. The waiter left. Calloway asked.

"You ran the Cascade Club for a while, didn't you?"

"Yeah. I bought this place three months ago. Frankly I could use a notice and I think this team rates it."

Calloway remembered him now. His name was Lew Bordon. He probably had some poker tables in the back. Calloway said, "You've got a singer here. Madelon Spain. That's why I dropped in."

Bordon's thin face lighted up. "She's all right. She'll go places. Give her a plug and I'll yank those two lumbering oxes out of the high spot and feature her."

"What do you know about her?"

"Not much. She came in and asked for a job about a month ago. She's got looks and a voice and she can put over a song. Said she'd been singing in some south side places, but I never checked. She's due on in about twenty minutes. Then I'll bring her over."

"Is she married?"

"Yeah. Her husband's name is Jim Higgins. She brought him in one night."

"Know anything about him?"

"Not a thing," Bordon said. "Looks like a nice enough kid."

Calloway watched the waiter set down the drinks and faded back up the stairs. "How long since you saw this Jim Higgins?" he asked.

BORDON thought, staring at his wine and seltzer. "He was only in once, about two weeks ago." Then he leaned forward. "There's an angle you might like to use. See that bushy haired guy alone at the third table on the next terrace up?"

Calloway looked. He saw a well dressed, middle aged man with a mop of blonde hair. The hair was curly. It was the kind he'd have to keep under a coat of oil or look like a Zulu. He sat with his hands clasped around a Manhattan glass and a thin, light brown cigar in his teeth. He stared steadily at the orchestra.

"That," Bordon said, "is Reese Taber. He owns an undertaking parlor up the block and he's carrying the hottest torch in town—for Madelon Spain. He does'nt care who knows it either. He's parked at that table every night, rain or shine. And ten bucks worth of roses every day, delivered to her dressing room."

Bordon sipped at his wine. "Think you could use it?" he asked wistfully.

"Possibly. How does she take it?"

"Laughs it off and dodges him, but he's like a fly in the glue."

"Husband or no husband, huh?"

"I don't think he ever got close enough to find out she's married."

The floor had cleared now. The wax faced band leader waved an affectedly long baton, mouthed a couple of seedy jokes, and opened the show. He announced a comedian named Joey Baylor, direct from Hollywood, and a pint sized youth in comic clothes bounced through a doorway beside the bandstand and went into a ten minute routine which was neither good nor bad. He stretched some polite applause into a couple of curtain calls, and bounced out.

"Clean stuff," Calloway said.

"I don't go in for filth," Bordon answered. "The hell with it."

Another announcement, a fanfare, and the featured dance act glided out into the darkened room under a white spot. They did a rhumba, then went into a specialty that featured the sequinned skirt of Dolores. She twirled in for five minutes, with practiced mediocrity, folded herself into a heap on the floor, and Dalmar stood over her, grimacing up into the terraces with white, false teeth.

The team backed, smiling, through the doorway, but Calloway didn't see them go. Calloway had found something of greater interest. His eyes had drifted to a table on the first terrace. They caught there and held.

The table had been empty until recently. Now it was occupied by three men. He knew the names of the three men. Nunez, Belcher, Stern.

Nunez was conferring with a waiter. He finished and the waiter soft shoed away toward wherever the drinks were made.

Calloway didn't hear the next announcement. His eyes stayed on Nunez' table until the lights went down again. Bordon said, "Here she is," and Madelon Spain's throaty voice demanded attention.

She stood, sheathed in a glistening black dress, in the center of a tube of yellow light. Her song was Stormy Weather, but it could as well have been Father, Dear Father, Come Home With Me Now. Nobody cared. You didn't listen to a girl like Madelon Spain. You looked at her. Men stared through the darkness and thought thoughts.

Possibly a few women bared their teeth if they were that kind of women.

While she sang, Calloway caught the movement of the white-coated waiter who had taken Nunez' order. The waiter floated down with a tray. There was a soft clinking of glasses. The waiter retreated, on tip toe, and Calloway could see what he left behind him. Odd. He left four long-stemmed glasses for three men.

Calloway turned his eyes back to Madelon Spain. She finished Stormy Weather, tried My Man, an old Fanny Brice number, and then sang The Gypsy. She stood straight and still—as unmoving as a frozen black flame.

WHEN the lights bloomed up, Bordon got to his feet. "I'll go get her," he said. "Order another drink." He crossed the dance floor to cut her off at the door.

But Madelon Spain didn't move in that direction. Instead, she walked toward the first terrace—toward Nunez' table. Nunez got up. She sat down in front of the fourth drink. Nunez smiled and sat down too.

Calloway wondered how that had been done. He watched Bordon hesitate at the door, then follow Madelon Spain to Nunez' table. Bordon spoke to her. She glanced over at Calloway. So did Nunez, Belcher and Stern.

Belcher grinned.

Madelon Spain nodded, evidently agreeing with whatever Bordon said. Bordon started back toward Calloway. A waiter cut in, said something. The waiter turned away and started up the terraces. Bordon followed.

Calloway turned his glass slowly in his fingers and waited. He watched Nunez. Nunez seemed to be trying to sell a bill of goods.

Less than five minutes had elapsed before Madelon Spain arose from the table. Calloway watched her as she stood for a moment, staring, white faced up over the terraces. He saw her press white knuckles against her mouth.

Then he watched her turn away and walk blindly toward the curtained doorway through which she had made her entrance. She disappeared. The curtain waved lazily and became still.

Some more time passed. A few more minutes. Then Calloway got up and headed for the dressing rooms. He went straight across the dance floor. As he went through the curtained doorway, he caught a quick glimpse of Bordon hurrying down the terraces.

Beyond the curtain, Calloway found a small anteroom, off which a hallway led toward the rear of the building. There were doors at regular intervals on either side. Calloway moved down the hallway, past the doors, until he came to an old man with thin white hair, seated in a rickety arm chair at the far end. He was guarding the rear entrance to the club. His weapons were a large tin coffee cup and a western story magazine.

"Did you see Madelon Spain out here?" Calloway asked.

The old man regarded him quizzically.

"Didn't see anybody, son. She was out front singin' a while ago."

"She finished."

The old man bristled. "I said I ain't seen her. I'd know if she went out in the alley, wouldn't I?"

"Which is her dressing room?"

"Second on the south side from the front." The old man got suspicious. "Does Mr. Bordon know you're out here, son?" he asked.

Calloway went back and found the second door on the south side. He knocked. There was no answer. He tried the door. It was locked.

He went back to the curtained door-

way. He brushed the red plush drapes aside. He saw Bordon pushing his way through the dancers who had moved out onto the floor. Calloway glanced up the terraces. Nunez and his two towers of strength were gone. Taber, the undertaker, wasn't at his table either.

Bordon was flushed, annoyed. "Didn't she come to your table?" he asked. "Who the hell does she think she is? Lana Turner? Come on."

Bordon led the way to the door Calloway had just tried. He knocked, then tried it himself. He scowled. "I don't go for this temperament stuff."

He went out through the curtained doorway and was back, almost immediately, with a large ring of keys. He fitted one into the lock. He turned it and pushed the door open. Calloway followed him inside.

The lights were on. Even the unshaded, harsh bulbs around the dressing table mirror. A basket of roses, in one corner, filled the air with a sickening sweetness. Madelon Spain's street clothes were thrown over the back of an overstuffed chair. Her white raincoat hung mutely beside the dressing table. Calloway saw his own face, a trifle white, in the mirror.

But Madelon Spain wasn't there. Madelon Spain, it seemed, had a talent for leaving places in a hurry.

IT WAS the first time in years that Bob Calloway had been awake at ten o'clock in the morning. It wasn't that he hadn't tried to sleep. He had. But he'd given it up as a bad job, rolled over and grabbed the telephone.

He dialed a number, waited a while, and then said,

"McElligot. Tell him Calloway's calling."

They evidently didn't tell him that because he came on the phone and said, "Homicide—McElligot."

Calloway said, "How about lunch, gumshoe? You buy."

McElligot said, "Great day in the morning! What got you up? Fired?"

"Insomnia. I'll meet you at Henrici's in an hour. Bring the twenty you owe me."

"Okay," McElligot answered, "but it's blackmail."

Calloway got up, showered and dressed, left his furnished kitchenette and went downstairs and hailed a cab. He got out at Michigan and Randolph and walked over to Henrici's. He waited five minutes before McElligot came in.

McElligot was small, pink faced, and bustling. He looked young for his job —a sergeant attached to Homicide at thirty wasn't bad—and you got the impression that the sordid side of life hadn't put any dents in his personality.

He grinned a hello, and they found a table just behind the cooky counter. McElligot ordered roast beef, an extra side of mashed potatoes, applie pie with ice cream, and coffee. Calloway settled for scrambled eggs.

The waitress went away and McElligot said, "Your nose. What the hell happened to it?"

"It always flattens out that way this time of year. Listen. I want all the dope you've got on a tramp named Nunez."

McElligot laid his hands flat on the table and looked at them.

"A smooth Spik from Taylor and Halsted," he answered. "Got his start in the booze racket back in the twenties. He was tied into a window breaking caper later on; ran a protective patrol gouge we broke up. He skinned out of that one though. In gambling now. The syndicate gave him a chunk of the West Side to have and to hold, I understand. There were rumors that Freddy Dolan tried to take it away from him,

but Dolan died last month from a bucket of slugs in the belly. All in all a stinky character. Why?"

"Did Nunez kill Dolan?"

McElligot shrugged. "Who kills who around this town is a matter for juries to decide. Nunez hasn't faced one yet. But isn't this out of your line? I thought you followed the night clubs."

"I stumbled on this. Nunez and a pair of his stooges tried to kidnap a singer named Madelon Spain last night. I broke it up. Later on in the evening I bumped into Nunez at the Rio Bamba, wehre the girl sings. She had a few words with Nunez and then she took a powder. Didn't even stop for her hat and coat. Being a curious cuss, I just don't like to leave the thing hanging in midair."

The waitress brought an armload of food and began putting it on the table.

"Has Lew Bordon been behaving himself?" Calloway asked.

"So far as I know. He hasn't been caught killing anybody if that's what you mean."

McElligot became interested in his dinner, while Calloway said,

"I might have caught up with her, but she left the place while the damn doorman was out for a beer. He was afraid of losing his job, so he wouldn't admit being away. By the time we broke him down it was too late to chase her."

McELLIGOT filled his mouth with potatoes and asked, "Why chase her. Shes' a free agent, isn't she?"

"You're a hell of a cop," Calloway said.

McElligot chewed roast beef and looked happy.

"She told me her husband had disappeared. She thinks Nunez killed him."

"She hasn't said anything to us about it. We've got to have a complaint or a body before we move in."

"I think you ought to look for him."

"We could look for Charlie Ross too. You get a cock and bull story from some dame and I'm supposed to start pulling people in off the street. What if she wasn't even married. I'd look like a goof."

"You left an opening there," Calloway said, drily, "but we'll skip it. Her husband's name is Higgins—James Higgins. The girl's professional name is Spain."

"Can you prove there *is* such a man as Higgins?"

"I can prove there's a Madelon Spain. I saw her. I toucher her. Now she's disappeared. How about that?"

McElligot's food was disappearing too, as Calloway toyed with scrambled eggs.

"Probably sobering up in some tavern," McElligot said.

"If I ever need a policeman remind me to call Pinkerton," Calloway grunted.

They finished their dinner. Calloway paid the check.

Calloway got to his office at one thirty that afternoon. His office was a small, glassed-in cubby hole on the third floor of the Blade Building, behind the city news room. It contained a chair, a battered desk, an ash tray, and a typewriter. Calloway hammered the typewriter for three hours.

When the Blade hit the street that night, it contained a three line squib. The item, along with other items, appeared in a column headed: Calloway's Comments. It wasn't obtrusive, but it was there just the same. It read:

A certain local underworld character thinks he's getting away with murder. We wonder if he is.

There wouldn't be any lawsuits over that one, Calloway decided. Then it

occurred to him that it might keep quite a few people awake.

AT EXACTLY nine thirty that night, Bob Calloway handed his hat and coat to the pink-legged blonde at the Rio Bamba check room, turned, and saw Bordon hurrying up the terraces. Bordon seemed to spend most of his time doing that. He gave Calloway a thin smile, and said:

"That Spain babe didn't show up tonight. Not yet anyway. Good thing you didn't plug her act."

"Any word since she left?"

Bordon shook his head. "I can't figure it out. She'll show up though. She's got some pay coming."

Calloway stood rocking on his toes, undecided, and Bordon said, "The little comic you saw last night—Joey Baylor—he's got a new routine. Stick around and catch it. It's pretty good."

"No time, but I'll give him a notice anyway."

He moved back toward the checkroom. Bordon followed.

"Thanks a lot," Bordon said.

Calloway tossed the blonde a quarter.

"If Madelon Spain comes in give Casey Smith a ring at the Blade and tell him, will you? I'll call in there."

Bordon said he would, and Calloway went out of the club and walked south, until he came to the morose looking, gray stone front of Taber's Undertaking Parlor. He opened a well-oiled door and went inside. He crossed a small reception room and found himself in the chapel.

Calloway was surprised. It wasn't a dump. The place was meticulously correct in every detail.

Luxury Without Gaudiness could well have been the motto of Taber. The carpeting was thick enough to deaden the footfalls of the Chinese army, and the atmosphere was as soothing and restful as that of an Old World cathedral. The windows were narrow, arched, and of colored glass done into scenes from the days when the Bible was young.

A soft sound, to the left, caught Calloway's attention. He turned and saw Taber closing the door through which he had entered the chapel. Calloway waited where he was.

Taber wore the same, well cut blue suit, and the mop of blonde hair was well under control. He didn't look like an undertaker. He looked like a business man, a successful salesman coming over to sell Calloway a carload of stove bolts. He said "Good evening," in a low, smooth voice.

Calloway said, "You aren't at your usual table tonight."

Taber frowned. When he did that it slanted the lines around his eyes, giving them an odd, oriental look. When you stared straight into them, they had a piercing quality; they became a force. It took conscious effort to keep from backing away from them mentally.

Taber said, "I'm afraid I don't understand you."

CALLOWAY didn't believe in fencing. He believed in being frank. The worst it would get him was another poke in the nose. "I have it that you're interested in a singer down the street at the Rio Bamba. Is it true that you rent a table there by the month?"

Taber's eyes changed. They became swords, daggers, tiger's eyes.

The rest of his face was a mask; a polite, questioning mask. "Who told you that?"

"The same party who told me that Madelon Spain didn't show up tonight. I'm wondering why you're both on the same absentee list. Coincidence?"

"Are you a policeman?" Taber asked. His voice stayed low, even.

"No. Just a newspaperman. That's why I'm here. An instinct for snooping."

"And you think I have something to do with her absence?"

"You tell me."

Taber did some thinking. He did it slowly, as though he had a lot of time. While he thought, he seemed to forget that Calloway was in the room. Then he asked:

"Did you know the three men she drank with last night?"

Calloway shifted his hat from his right hand to his left, and nodded. He felt suddenly uncomfortable. He'd expected, when he came in here, to control the interview. He was used to controlling interviews. But he didn't have a grip on this one. He heard Taber ask:

"Do you think they could be responsible?"

That put Taber two up in the question-answer game. Inwardly, Calloway accused himself of slipping, and asked, "What's your opinion?"

"I inquired about them," Taber said. "The headwaiter told me that the slim, dark man was a well-known underworld character named Nunez."

"The waiter was right," Calloway said. "Nunez tried to force Madelon Spain into his car last night."

Taber leaned forward like a man peering through a heavy fog.

"Are you sure of that?" he whispered.

"I should be. I broke it up and got myself smeared all over a tavern floor."

Taber's mind went traveling again. It stayed far away until Calloway said. "You didn't go to the club tonight. Why?"

Taber's head jerked. He frowned. His expression asked: Who are you? How long have you been here?

He said, "I don't wish to discuss it further. Get out of here."

He walked to the rear of the chapel and went through a narrow, carved door. He closed the door behind him.

Calloway stood flat-footed for sixty long seconds before he left the chapel. He walked up Clark Street, his eyes vacant.

He kept on walking south, woke up, and found himself at the river. He hailed a cab. It took him to Van Buren Street, where he got out and went into the Skyride and listened to Neal Mack play Star Dust.

He called the office at one p. m. He got the city desk and talked to Casey Smith. "A guy called for you," Smith said. Calloway lit a cigarette.

"Yeah, a copper named McElligot. Central Station. He might still be there."

Calloway rang the Central Station on Wabash and asked for McElligot. He was in, and his voice was cheerful and brisk.

"Something you might be interested in," he said. "A man was found sitting against a lamp post over by the Merchandise Mart a couple of hours ago. Deader than a mackerel. Not a mark on him. Looks like he kicked off from heart failure."

"Identified?" Calloway asked.

"Uh huh. His name was Timothy White. He watched the back door for Lew Bordon up at the Rio Bamba."

Calloway became aware of the fact that the fingers of his left hand were aching. He eased their pressure on the telephone receiver.

"The same door," he said, "that Madelon Spain went through and faded into thin air. You *know* that?" He didn't hide the sneer, but McElligot had a thick skin. McElligot said, "Probably a coincidence."

The night was filling up with coincidences.

"My eye!" Calloway snorted. "You'd

better start inquiring around for Madelon Spain and her husband. If this thing breaks open the taxpayers might quit loving you."

McElligot wasn't too greatly worried.

Calloway had a drink, went out and got a cab, and headed for the West Side. He wandered through a few more spots and got back to his apartment around four o'clock.

It was a bright, pleasant little place, but he was hardly glad to be home. The walls pressed in on him. He made coffee. As he drank it, he wondered about a white-haired old man who had apparently roamed ten blocks across town—when he was supposed to be on the job—and had then parked himself in the gutter and died.

He undressed and had another cup of coffee in his pajamas. He carried it to the window and stood watching a city asleep. Somewhere out there a girl named Madelon Smith was following her destiny.

Or was she sleeping too? And was it any of his business? Certainly, he told himself. Anything without answers was his business.

He put his coffee cup on the window sill and went to bed.

HE DREAMED of a man eight feet tall named Nunez. Nunez had a car a block long that went around corners like a snake. It followed Calloway up boulevards and down alleys until he decided newspaper work was bad business. He'd get out of it and raise little night clubs and sell them to people who liked to stay up nights. Then his lungs became bells that rang every time he took a breath. They rang for hours, until they became a bell in a telephone box.

He opened his eyes and he was looking at the clock on the bed table. Eleven-thirty. The sun was streaming in. He picked up the phone. He said hello to whoever it was.

It was McElligot. McElligot said, "We've got one you rate a break on, chum." His voice was more brisk than cheerful. That meant he was excited. "Get into your drawers and hike over to the Harborview Apartments at Sheridan and Belmont. I'll keep off the newshawks 'til you get here if it's not more than fifteen minutes."

Calloway made it with thirty seconds to spare. He found that the building was a large one with several entrances. A uniformed patrolman waited by the door nearest the corner. He came over to the cab as Calloway paid off the driver and asked, "Are you from the *Blade?* The fellow McElligot called?"

Calloway said that he was.

"Second floor. The door's open," the cop said, and went back to his stop on the sidewalk.

Calloway went up to the second floor and into a large, well-furnished living room. He found McElligot sitting on an overstuffed lounge, smoking a cigar. Another plain clothes man held down a chair beside an ornate radio-phonograph combination.

McElligot said, "Close it."

Calloway shut the door behind him.

"I guess we can't call this one a coincidence," McElligot said.

"Dead?" Calloway asked.

"An understatement."

Calloway knew who McElligot referred to. He'd read the name on the mailbox downstairs.

McElligot motioned toward a bedroom door with his thumb. "If you've got a strong stomach you can go in," he said.

Calloway walked toward the bedroom door. He got one step inside and stopped. He put out a hand and leaned against the door jamb. He needed a strong stomach. Tony Nunez hadn't

been merely killed. He'd been literally torn to pieces.

Calloway stared. Nunez' clothing had been ripped from his body in shreds. A handful of hair had been torn from his scalp, leaving an angry, red bald spot. He lay across the bed, his eyes bulging, his tongue protruding and black. One arm was under the body, stretched across at a sickenly unnatural angle. It had been broken at the shoulder socket. His throat was torn, bruised, purple. There was more, but Calloway didn't wait to look at it. He turned away and went over and sat down beside McElligot. He was white and sick.

McElligot grinned. "Did you see the blood on the ceiling?" he asked, heartlessly.

Calloway hadn't and he didn't want to. "My God!" he muttered.

"And he was such a neat character too," McElligot got up and started pacing the floor. "He had a cleaning woman. She found it half an hour ago and called us. We just got here." He turned toward the other detective and said, "Call the station, Joe, and get the coroner out here." He stopped walking and stood in front of Calloway.

"That story of yours means something now, keed. Let's have it again."

Calloway went through it like a school boy reciting a lesson.

McElligot sat down and stared at the rug without seeing it. "We'll put the girl's description on the teletype and try to find out something about the husband of hers."

"There must have been an awful racket in here when he was killed," Calloway said.

McElligot nodded. "Yeah, but the joint's soundproof. You could shoot off a cannon and nobody would hear it."

Callway got up. "I don't like it here," he said, "I'm going home."

McElligot laughed again.

Calloway went downstairs and out of the building and began walking south. He walked eight blocks and began to feel better. Three more blocks and he was thinking again. He found a restaurant and had breakfast.

He took plenty of time over the meal, and then went out and got into a cab and went back to his apartment.

There he took a box from the desk drawer and rummaged in it. He found what he was looking for—a permit from the proper authorities allowing him to carry a gun. He put it in his wallet and went into the bedroom and took a pearl-handled .32 from the dresser. A little gun, sure, but no one would intentionally step in front of it. He dropped the gun into his coat pocket and headed for the Blade Building.

At four thirty he called Central Station and asked for McElligot. There was a wait before McElligot came to the phone.

"Did you pick up Belcher and Stern?" Calloway asked.

"Uh huh, but nothing on the Spain girl. They didn't seem to know a hell of a lot about Nunez' business. They were bodyguards on salary."

"Like hell. How would you like a little outstide help?"

"Tell me more."

"Do me a favor and take Stern up to Nunez' apartment. It want to ask him some questions. You won't even be there. You'll be out for coffee."

"I've been asking him questions for the last two hours."

"I've got some fresh ones. You'll like them."

McElligot thought it over. Then he said, "Okay. An hour."

Calloway hung up and rubbed the knuckles of his right hand. They were still a little sore, but they'd do—anytime or place.

THE cop in front of the Harborview Apartment was industriously holding the building erect with a burly shoulder. He didn't move as Calloway nodded a hello. Calloway went on upstairs. McElligot was waiting. So was Sam Stern. Stern had brought his sneer along. He would have been naked without it.

McElligot didn't say anything. He sat on a window sill and looked out over the harbor. He looked wistfully at a sleek little job with white sails and a black body. Stern looked at Calloway from a comfortable seat on the lounge.

Calloway walked over and stood in front of him.

"Did Nunez kill a man named James Higgins?" Calloway asked.

Stern turned to McElligot as Calloway slowly removed his topcoat.

"Look, copper," Stern said. "Give this guy a transcript of the little talk we had this afternoon. It'll save time."

McElligot said, "It costs dough to own one like that I'll bet."

Calloway looked at Sam Stern and said, "Not long ago I was out of condition, so I went down to Mullen's Gym and told the man to make me some muscles. He did a good job and then he showed me how to use them."

Calloway hit Stern with a hard fist that traveled about six inches.

Stern and the lounge went over backwards. Stern got up, crouching, murder in his tiny eyes. "Nice frame," he snarled. "Hit a guy while a cop holds a gun."

"Don't mind him," Calloway said. "He isn't even here. He's going to buy a boat. He just came up to look them over all at once."

Stern jumped over the lounge. He came fast, twisted his mouth, and threw a ham of a fist into Calloway's stomach. Calloway grunted and went down. Stern's face darkened as he aimed a kick at Calloway's head.

"The man at the gym should have told you how to cover your belly," McElligot observed, as Calloway caught Stern's foot and twisted.

Stern went over backwards.

Calloway got up and moved back two steps and waited. His stomach hurt like hell. "Did Nunez kill James Higgins?" he asked.

Stern was on his feet. "You got a one-track mind," he sneered. "Why don't you give up?"

McElligot looked out the window and said, "That big baby. Can't even get into the harbor. Millionaire stuff."

"Calloway kept his eyes on Stern. "The day I can't beat hell out of a yellow-bellied blackjack artist, I'll do just that. I'll give up."

He moved in.

He took one, then another, as Stern swung twice, backing away. But there were only two. Stern was good with a sap, or when the other party was on the floor. Toe to toe was different.

He backed around the room while Calloway cut his face to a pulp.

Stern hid behind his arms, squinted his eyes and cursed. Gradually the sounds coming from his throat lost meaning. They became moans, slobbers, meaningless gurgles.

Calloway stopped and wiped a hand across his wet forehead.

McElligot turned from the window. "You think they might have a modest little row boat an honest cop could afford?" he asked.

"I'll give you one for Christmas," Callawoy said. He stepped over to where Stern cringed against a chair. "Go ahead, chum, use your feet. Kick me in the belly. I'd love to have you try kicking me in the belly. Now who killed James Higgins?"

Stern didn't say anything. Calloway picked him up by his necktie and

smashed a fist into his pulpy face.

"Nunez done it," Stern sobbed.

CALLOWAY let go of the necktie and went over and sat down on the lounge. He was tired. McElligot came around and sat down beside him. McElligot slanted his innocent blue eyes downward and said, "Maybe I shouldn't have gone out and left you alone with him. But how the hell was I to know you'd get rough?"

Stern dabbed at his face with a handkerchief already sopping with blood.

"You know what we want," Calloway said. "Give it to us from the heart."

"Nunez had to cool off Freddy Dolan," Stern said. He was crying. The words came between sobs. "We gunned him out near the Des Plaines River. But this guy Higgins and his wife were out joy riding and Higgins recognized Nunez. That would have been okay, if he'd kept his mouth shut, but he tried to muscle Nunez for dough. Nunez didn't go for that stuff, so we buried Higgins in a soft place out on the Algonquin Road."

"After that Nunez had to get Madelon Spain? Right?"

"Sure he did."

"What did he do with her?"

"She disappeared," Stern moaned. "We been looking all over hell for her. That watchman—"

Calloway leaned forward. "What about that watchman?"

"We didn't hurt the old screw. We didn't even touch him. We only picked him up and rode him around while we asked him some questions. Nunez figured the dame must have gone out the back door after he inquired at the club a little, and he thought she might have told the guy where she was going."

"So when you couldn't get that out of him you slugged him. Kicked him in the belly maybe."

"That's the crap. He just keeled over on the seat. We propped him up against a post and beat it."

Calloway rubbed a slow hand along the line of his jaw. Nice boys," he muttered. "Just propped him up and left him there. An old man with a bum heart."

Calloway's stomach hurt. He wanted to get away from there. He got up and put on his coat. He said, "I'm tired of doing your work, copper. Take your pal back downtown. Let him sue me for assualt and battery."

"You didn't get anything I couldn't have gotten," McElligot said, virtuously. "Only we aren't allowed to ask questions this way. It says so in the regulations. In fact it probably won't even stick. A good lawyer will yell something about a confession under pressure and blow my badge right out of my hip pocket."

"I don't care whether it sticks or not," Calloway said. "I'm just trying to find things out. And I don't give too much of a damn about your badge."

He left the apartment, went down stairs, hailed a cab, and went south.

TABER'S UNDERTAKING PARLOR was dark. The doors were locked. The windows were barred. Somehow, Calloway had expected that. He walked north to a drug store and a telephone book. He found what he was looking for: Reese Taber, Mortician. An address on Clark Street. Then, residence—.

Calloway hailed another cab and started west.

The cab dropped him in a dark, tree-lined block near Cicero and North Avenues. Large residences brooded haughtily back behind wide lawns. Lighted windows stared at him like dowagers through lorgnettes. He selected one of the houses and moved up

the narrow walk.

This house was dark. Only a dim, yellow gleam behind the front door gave promise of life within. Calloway went up steps and crossed the wide porch. He wondered, vaguely, what he was looking for and, even more vaguely, what he would find. He pushed a neat white button.

A bell chimed mournfully from a great distance, far back in the house. That was all. Calloway pushed the button again. The result was the same. He scowled. He pushed. The bell had a golden throat. If he'd brought his music he could have played the Anvil Chorus. He doubled up a fist and hammered on the door.

That brought light flooding through the glass. The door opened. Reese Taber said, "I'd rather not be disturbed tonight."

"I think we'd better talk," Calloway told him. "Things have been happening. Interesting things."

Taber opened the door wider and Calloway walked inside.

Taber wore a blue silk dressing gown. A blue silk scarf was knotted at his throat. His face was smooth, handsome, but his eyes were haggard. They were inflamed. They held a set, faraway look.

He led Calloway to a small, well-furnished room, off the reception hall, where a bright log fire crackled in a small fireplace. He indicated a chair and stood with his back to the burning logs.

Calloway sat down, tensely, on the edge of the chair, and said:

"When I talked to you the last time, I was looking for a girl named Madelon Spain. I was looking all alone. I've got help now. The Chicago police are hunting too. There are a lot of policemen on the city force."

Taber regarded him thoughtfully.

The eyes stared. Each of them seemed to have a separate mind of its own.

"Why do you keep coming to me?" Taber asked. "What makes you think I would know where she is?"

"Frankly, I don't know," Calloway said. He touched his nose, tenderly. It was still sore. "A hunch. An idea. I know beyond a doubt that you're up to your ears over the girl. I can't quite see you going along about your business without knowing more than you seem to."

Taber turned to face the fire. He held his hands out over it.

"By the way," Calloway asked. "Is it customary to close an undertaking parlor at night? I thought they stayed open twenty-four hours a day."

"I have a night man," Taber replied. "He is ill. My home number is under the night bell."

Calloway said, "Oh. Another thing. Did you know that Tony Nunez was killed in his apartment last night?"

TABER rubbed his hands together over the flame. He turned, facing Calloway. He raised his head slowly until his eyes bored into the ceiling. He said:

"Yes. I killed Nunez. I waited for him in the hall, outside his apartment. I hit him while he was unlocking the door. I dragged him inside and killed him."

Calloway felt a cold tickle along the hair line at the base of his skull, as Taber lowered his head and smiled a flat, terrible smile.

"I killed him," Taber said, "because he dared lay a hand on *her*."

"The police will want to know that," Calloway heard himself whisper. He hung on Taber's eyes like a fly hanging on the ends of two needles, while his mind told him: Crazy. This man could live to be eighty and die a respectable death and get a big funeral. Yet he's as mad as forty-three March thunderstorms.

The silence screamed.

A gun. That was it. Taber was like a loaded .45. Leave it alone and it's harmless. Pick it up and pull the trigger and—wham!

Taber, the gun.

Madelon Spain—the trigger.

Taber said, "I wish there were more people I could kill. People who have harmed her—who have caused her grief." His eyes and his expression grew ecstatic. "She was a flower, a fragile, unworldly thing no man should have touched. Nunez was a fool."

Taber seemed suddenly to come back to earth. He looked at Calloway. He said, "It's all over now, isn't it." A statement. Not a question. "The police will come."

"Yes," Calloway said, "the police will come."

Taber doubled one hand into a fist and squeezed it in the palm of the other. He raised his head and walked from the room, staring straight ahead.

Calloway sat stiff, every muscle in his body aching. He heard the soft brushing of Taber's shoes against the carpeting of the stairway. The sounds moved higher and died.

With an effort, Calloway jerked his mind back under control. He got up and headed for the stairway. He climbed them three at a time.

At the top, a passage veered off to the right. Calloway followed it. There was a door at the end. Taber was standing by the door. One hand was on the knob. The other held a small glass tube.

Calloway took the .32 from his pocket and pointed it at Taber. He said, "Drop it," and felt silly, futile.

Taber smiled. "If you don't mind," he said, "I'd like to die the way she

died. I want to feel the same pain."

HE PUSHED the glass tube into his mouth. He ground it up with his teeth. There was blood on his lips.

"I found her in the alley," he said. "Near my garage next to the club. She was dead when I got her inside. She was dead in her black satin gown and silver slippers."

"Why didn't you call someone?"

Taber's face twisted with a mixture of agony and ecstasy. His voice went shrill. "I couldn't bear to see anyone else touch her, even if she was dead!" He bent double and slipped to the floor. His face became set, like an action picture in a news reel turned suddenly into a still. His lips moved. "She was beautiful," he whispered. That was all.

He died reaching up toward the door.

Calloway stepped over and turned the knob. Then he stopped. The place had turned suddenly chill, as though the fire had gone out, and Calloway realized he was thinking odd, unnatural thoughts in an odd, unnatural atmosphere.

He saw her running through the rain in a white shining coat. He saw her standing perfectly still, singing Stormy Weather, in a tube of white light.

His hand dropped from the knob. He didn't want to see her the way she would be now, beyond that door. He went back down the stairs. Let McElligot open that door. He was paid for opening doors like that one.

He found a telephone in the reception hall. Two minutes later he was talking to Sergeant McElligot.

"You'd better have another talk with Stern," he said. "Nunez poisoned Madelon Spain. Find out what they did with the fourth glass they took with them when they left the Rio Bamba the other night."

"The fourth glass?"

THE BODY OF MADELON SPAIN

(Concluded from page 173)

"If you can find it there should be some traces of poison. And come out here and pick up a couple of bodies."

He gave McElligot the address and hung up and went out and sat down on the top step of the porch to wait.

There were stars out there, and clean, wholesome night.

No madness.

THE END

SLEUTHING INCORPORATED

By JAMES RUEL

IF YOU were to visit the Burns International Detective Agency at any of its 38 branches, you would very likely be surprised to learn that instead of a small, dimly lighted room, such as the movies portray, with mysterious doors, sinister, dusty-looking archives and green-baize desk heaped high with dockets of sensational cases, you'd behold spacious, comfortably furnished offices, no different from any other, and the same bustle and activity that you'd expect to find in the average business house.

Considered the world's largest institution of its kind, the Burns agency has a payroll so large and varying that the company itself can't even make a wild guess as to its size—a payroll that includes almost every kind of professional man and laborer you can name. There are bookkeepers, bank cashiers, doctors, dentists, capable executives, stenographers, plasterers, janitors, mechanics, vagrants, magicians, acrobats—just name your detecting requirement, whether it be plumbing or hemstitching, and Burns will have a man, woman, or child on the scene before you can catch your breath.

Nor would the Burns operator come unprepared or at loss as to what to do. He quietly and methodically sets to work on the case, following the rules laid down during his two years of training as an apprentice detective under the guidance of a seasoned Burns man. No one can become a Burns operator unless he serves this apprenticeship. He must know the tricks of the trade which means he must know everything from first aid to what charges to prefer when making an arrest. He must thoroughly understand such charges as petty larceny, grand larceny, disorderly conduct, and know how to check up on court records and legal documents. One mistake in arresting a culprit and it can cost the Burns agency or its client ten or twenty thousand dollars as a result of a false arrest suit.

Should you ever decide to hire a Burns man it would cost you about $12 a day and expenses. This is a standard rate which is charged by almost all detective agencies throughout the country. However, should you desire the services of one of their more high-powered experts you'd pay in the neighborhood of $50 a day. And those who hired the "Old Master," William J. Burns, paid him as high as $5,000 a day for court testimony and thought they got a bargain.

Furthermore, the Burns agency will not take anything but criminal cases, gathering evidence for civil cases such as divorces they will flatly tell you is out of their line. But this leaves them plenty of leeway. Burns men are employed by the thousands in all kinds of jobs ranging all the way from watching movie stars to selling undies

over the counter of your local department store.

The movie industry, for example, is literally infested with Burns men whose work takes them into every nook and cranny of America's glamor dispensaries. Like a huge nerve system the Burns men cover the entire industry, pulsing every bit of information to the industry's front office. Since the "Fatty" Arbuckle scandal, the movie industry has sought to avoid any further public indignation by being sure of the character of their stars before they're hired. Even before a talent scout has made his decision, the Burns men are at work. They watch the prospective star day and night, at home, at his neighbors', and at his local pub.

AFTER several weeks of close surveillance, they file a report, and upon this report rests the future of the star as far as signing on the dotted line is concerned. But signing the contract very often doesn't end the watching business. He may be watched to see that he lives up to the terms of his contract, that he doesn't break it by giving speeches on the side or lending his name to promotions without the studio's consent. One star was watched to see that she didn't slip up and start taking dope again, another's acute attacks of wanderlust had to be curbed. Like movie stars, both professional football and baseball players are watched by Burns men.

At the exhibition end of the movie industry, Burns men, disguised as ushers or in plain clothes, count ticket purchasers and check up to see that the cashier hasn't a "working agreement" with the ticket taker. Inside, "ushers" are on the lookout for pickpockets and con men. And sprinkled through the audience are a handful of female operators always on the alert for sex morons. In one theater, Burns operators reduced sex outrages from two or three a week to two a year.

The next time you go to a prize fight chances are a Burns man will sell you a ticket, another will take the ticket, and another will show you your seat, and possibly the boisterous gent on your right is not there just to see the fight but also to see that someone in the audience doesn't start taking movies. Movie rights are valuable and fight promoters cannot let anyone but an authorized producer take shots of the fight.

It is also noteworthy that since almost all fight promoters and fighters collect their take from gate receipts, Burns men are on hand to collect and distribute the take to see that one and all get a square deal. Outside of the arena Burns men are also on the alert for scalpers and con men. At the famous Dempsey-Tunney bout, there were over 75 Burns operators on duty. Three of them kept their eyes glued on a movie film which was valued at $1,000,000, a lucrative haul to any thief who could steal it, have copies made, and bootleg them.

As a matter of pastoral protection, farmers can subscribe to the Burns Farm Protective Service for $7.50 a year. Such subscribers proudly display a blue and white sign on their front gate which

warns all would-be thieves that a reward will be paid for their arrest and prosecution. But even small fry crooks know that a Burns man will be on their tail on short order if they start filching from a farmer who uses the Burns service. These crooks know from bitter experience that Burns men have ruthlessly run to earth hundreds of cattle thieves and put them behind bars for keeps. And they also know that the old-time western sheriff would look like a sissy against the modern streamlined methods of a Burns super-sleuth.

The hotel and bank dick are well-known Burns institutions, but it's a less well known fact that a group of Burns operators travel from hotel to hotel throughout the country registering as "guests" in an effort to see if each hotel's service is all that it should be. Not even the hotel owner knows who these men are, and he doesn't know his hotel has been visited until he gets a report.

Furthermore, both hotel and bank owners are warned of the activities of forgers by a monthly bulletin issued by the Burns agency. This bulletin provides complete information about forgers who are active and at large, and wherever possible, prints a photograph of the forger and a sample of some of the checks he has forged. The police will tell you that only an inexperienced forger will cash a phoney where Burns protection is available; the more experienced boys will give the Burns operators a wide berth and cash their fakes with the little merchant who has learned to "judge a man by his face."

ONE of the knottiest problems that most large business houses must contend with is the theft of stamps which, in a large office building, average around $30 a day. Most of the stamps are stolen by petty thieves, usually office boys, who use their loot to purchase merchandise from mail order houses. It's just this that makes their apprehension a cinch. The Burns agency gets a monthly report from each of the leading mail order houses listing the names of all purchasers of goods paid for in stamps. The names on the list are compared with the names of suspects and in most cases the culprit is caught.

Burns men are on duty at political speeches, concerts, expositions, conventions, debutant coming-out parties, weddings (to guard valuable gifts and keep order), and gangster funerals; they ride the trains, steamships, and airlines; and more recently they have been working double-time to protect factories from sabotage. Yet of all the varied and complex duties performed by the Burns organization, none is more important to the American taxpayer than the gathering of evidence against crooked politicians.

Today Burns' executives will say nothing of present activity along these lines, but reliable sources indicate that this work is constantly going on. And you have only to examine the record of sandy-haired William J. Burns, founder of the Burns agency, to realize that much of the past work done by his company was predicated on the

cleaning up of civic cesspools.

In 1906 Burns left his job as head of the G men —yes, he was former head of the Bureau of Investigation, U. S. Department of Justice—to clean up the city of San Francisco after Rudolph Spreckels, the sugar tycoon of his day, and James D. Phalen, and other prominent business men had raised $100,000 to finance an investigation. Although it took him almost three years, he trapped the grafting politicians and cleaned up the city. His outstanding *coup de grâce* was when he discovered that several of his own detectives had been bought off by the opposition. Instead of firing the guilty men he raised their pay and told them they had better play ball with him or else he would prosecute them to the full extent of the law. It was this bit of strategy that later counted heavily in breaking the crooks.

A few years later Burns scored another triumph in cleaning up Atlantic City's graft ring. Disguised as a contractor, a Burns operator engaged the country's ablest and highest-priced engineers to draw up designs for a proposed concrete board walk. He then had the story released in numerous papers throughout the country, giving the affair a very bona fide appearance. As Burns expected, when the contractor sought permission to build the board walk, he had to shell out graft money to get the city fathers to okay his plan. It was through this ruse that the grafters were caught.

No one knows exactly how many cities have come under the purging influence of William J. Burns' cunning graft-catching methods, but there is evidence to show that at least one city is housecleaned each year by Burns men. Civic betterment organizations have been quick to realize that private detective agencies can operate at a marked advantage against political parasites. In the first place, they can bargain with the crooks to get to the men higher up; and, in the second place, they have no political ties to break or jobs to lose.

THESE inherent advantages make the private detective agency valuable to Mr. Average Man. He gets privacy and often demands to meet the Burns agent in secret. Furthermore, he knows that when a Burns man catches a thief, he can bargain with the crook in order to recover lost property; whereas the local police must prosecute as a matter of law.

When it comes to methods, there are also many advantages that come naturally to the private detective agency. For example, Burns was one of the first detectives ever to use precocious children in his work as shadows. "A smart child—a twelve-year-old," said Burns, "can, under certain conditions, do a far better piece of shadow work than a grown-up. The reason is very simple: A child is the last person in the world that a criminal will suspect of following him. The criminal is always on the lookout for a mature detective, and a criminal is just as quick to spot a sleuth as a sleuth is to spot a criminal. But as for

spotting a kid, never."

Newspapers have variously referred to Burns as "Burns, the Great," "Burns, the hater of evil," "Burns the foe of grafters," "Never-failing Burns," and "Burns, the smooth, Burns, the suave," "Burns, the slickest of the slick." Yet in spite of these fancy epithets, Burns was the exact antithesis of what you'd expect to find in a super-sleuth. Instead of wearing a fancy tweed coat, hunting cap pulled over his eyes, and smoking a curved pipe a la Sherlock Holmes, he dressed more in the manner of a statesman, a senator perhaps. Nor were his mannerisms that of an omnipotent detective. He was "one of the clumsiest and silliest looking men you ever saw." Once, masquerading as a waiter to trap a counterfeiter, he was fired because he was so clumsy. Later the trapped counterfeiter said, "I knew he wasn't a waiter, but I thought he was far too dumb ever to be a detective."

But Burns was a master of psychology. He knew the criminal mind, and more than one culprit walked into well-planned mental traps that tortured his mind and set his nerves to squirming until he could only see a complete confession as a means of escape from a cerebral crash. This psychological method, coupled with a reputation of honest dealing, has earned the Burns agency an international reputation. Even the "Old Master" once admitted that "private detectives, as a class, are the greatest lot of crooks that ever went unpunished." With this fact in mind, he worked long and hard to establish an organization that the public could learn to depend upon and it's said that his favorite story was one about a police chief who had said, "A Burns man is so honest and so thorough that he'd arrest himself!"

"I AM INNOCENT!"

By
LEE OWEN

ABOUT thirty years ago, near Minot, North Dakota, the body of a man was discovered swinging from a tree. A horrified group stared at the ghastly spectacle. It wasn't a lynching. It was suicide. The swaying corpse was that of Charles Herzog, a farm hand, and pinned to his coat was a note to his employer. The officials broke the seal of the letter and the contents left them stunned and filled with even greater horror. They pictured a scene that had occured thirty years before. Another dangling body had swung before them, only this time the noose was silencing a gurgling protest, "I'm innocent."

The man was Charles Sterling, hung for murder of Lizzie Grombacker. Now on the desk, before a gathering of shocked police officials, lay Herzog's confession. Herzog directed the authorities to a spot where they would discover the veil worn by the girl on the day she had been killed. The police investigated and found the final proof of Sterling's innocence.

MONEY ISN'T EVERYTHING-

(OR IS IT?)

BY GROUCHO MARX

WHAT do you want to save up a lot of money for? You'll never need the stuff.

Why, just think of all the wonderful, wonderful things you can do *without* money. Things like—well, things like—

On second thought, you'd better keep on saving, chum. Otherwise you're licked.

For instance, how are you ever going to build

that Little Dream House, without a trunk full of moolah? You think the carpenters are going to work free? Or the plumbers? Or the architects? Not those lads. They've been around. They're no dopes.

And how are you going to send that kid of yours to college, without the folding stuff?

Maybe you think he can work his way through by playing the flute.

If so, you're crazy. (Only three students have ever worked their way through college by playing the flute. And they had to stop eating for four years.)

And how are you going to do that world-traveling you've always wanted to do? Maybe you think you can stoke your way across, or scrub decks. Well, that's no good. I've tried it. It interferes with shipboard romances.

So—all seriousness aside—you'd better keep on saving, pal.

Obviously the best way is by continuing to buy U. S. Savings Bonds—through the Payroll Plan.

They're safe and sound. Old Uncle Sam *personally* guarantees your investment. And he never fobbed off a bum I.O.U. on *anybody*.

You get four bucks back for every three you put in. And that ain't hay, alfalfa, or any other field-grown product.

Millions of Americans—smart cookies all—have found the Payroll Plan the easiest and best way to save.

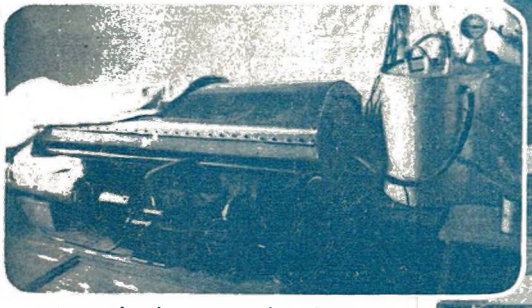
So stick with the Payroll Plan, son—and you can't lose.

SAVE THE EASY WAY... BUY YOUR BONDS THROUGH PAYROLL SAVINGS

Can the dead be brought back to life?

Read this startling TRUE STORY of a successful attempt

You read about it in your newspapers in October of 1940. It was a story that got headlines the world over. But the TRUTH about what really happened has never been told. Did German scientist Karl Tanzler von Cosel, holder of nine degrees, really bring Elena Hoyos Mesa back to life? Here, for the first time, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES brings you von Cosel's OWN story, in his OWN words. Read it now for yourself—and then judge. Here are 50,000 shocking words that will shake you to your soul. *Exclusive* in the September issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.



Actual photograph of Elena in her rejuvenation apparatus.

Von Cosel beside his million-volt generator.

KARL TANZLER VON COSEL'S

"THE SECRET OF ELENA'S TOMB"

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