

CORPSE ON VACATION

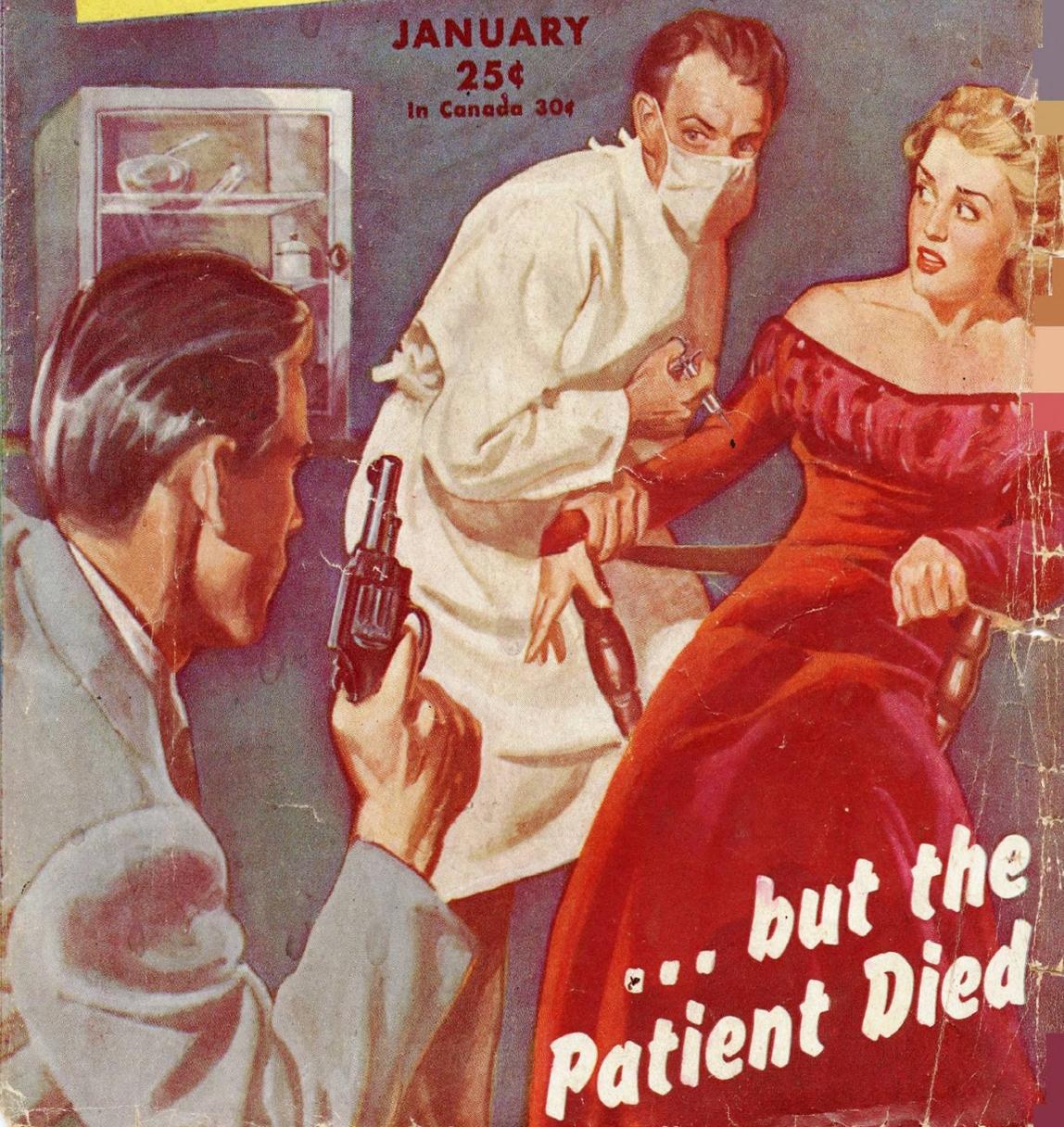
By Chester S. Geier

Mammoth DETECTIVE

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... but the
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Presenting The Author



FRANCES M. DEEGAN

IT HAS occurred to me more than once that I must have got on a merry-go-round when I was very young, and I've never been able to get off. I keep going round and round, and the same things keep happening.

The pertinent facts are simple and few. I was born in Iowa, August 15, 1901. I am 5 feet 2¼ inches tall, have red hair, brown eyes, and weigh 90 pounds. I have never married because nobody ever asked me to—get married, I mean.

I graduated from public school at the age of 16, just in time to be a charter member of the Lost Generation. However, I hadn't heard about that yet, so I got a job with the local office of a large national insurance company.

When I quit my job the boss was shocked. "I must warn you," he warned solemnly, "that it is a strict rule of this company never to rehire a person who is discharged or who quits without notice."

Well, that's a merry-go-round for you. Rules don't apply. As soon as I got to Chicago I wangled a job with the same company just long enough to locate the theatrical agencies. Bookings were plentiful in the booming cafes and night clubs around Chicago. I was pretty terrible, but so was the liquor, and nobody seemed to mind. I got acquainted with all the prominent gangsters, their cohorts and connections—political and otherwise.

After a while I graduated into vaudeville. Whereupon vaudeville gave one last gasp and expired, and I wound up in New York.

The merry-go-round went faster and faster. The Twenties were roaring and flashing past. Speakeasies, floor shows, elaborate musical shows, more gangsters, butter-and-egg men. . . . Somewhere in the melee I bought a typewriter. "I must write some of this down while I think of it," I said. But of course I never did. I also bought a Pekingese and she was the littlest, but the best friend, on or off the merry-go-round. There were enemies too. I've been shot at and missed, had knives thrown at me in a waterfront dive. And once I was taken for a ride by a Brooklyn gangster (humorously known as Mike Shots) and beaten to a bloody pulp with his gun butt. I'm still alive, but he isn't.

When New York began to pall I went to St. Louis with a theatrical organization. Came the depression. I applied for and got the job of press agent with a feminine political organization devoted to repeal of the 18th Amendment. Although I didn't know from nothing, the newspaper men were very kind.

One day I stepped into a building where a man was standing in the middle of an office that had either just been bombed or hadn't been built yet. He was smoking a hot pipe with one hand and tearing his hair with the other. "All right, come in!" he said. "This is it."

I didn't think it was, but I went in anyway. He thought I was a bookkeeper. He had just moved in and nothing was ready, and if somebody didn't bring the books up to date, it never would be. I knew as little about bookkeeping as you know about the love life of a you-know-what, but I felt very sorry for him. So I told him I'd fix his books up for him, and I took the job. I just added things up until they matched and it seemed to work out all right. I know I made out some very satisfactory financial statements that way. Anyway they were good enough to get a loan at the bank. But bookkeeping isn't everything, and I had been reading Ziff-Davis fiction mags. for some time. I suddenly remembered that I had always intended to write, so I went down to see Mr. Palmer. The reception room was elegant, but it was very informal inside. I simply walked in and said, "Do you mind if I write something for you?" And Mr. Palmer said, "No, go right ahead." I went home and wrote a story, and he bought it. I took the check in and showed it to the man I was bookkeeping for, and said, "Look, I have to leave now. I'm going to be a writer for a change."

He smoked his hot pipe with one hand and tore his hair with the other. He said, "I'd like to break that guy's neck, whoever he is, for buying that story! Who the hell does he think he is—making a bum writer out of a perfectly good bookkeeper!"

OFF THE BLOTTER



Chicago: "Publishers of nearly 200 business papers, of scores of general magazines and of hundreds of house organs, catalogs, etc., have been thrown into turmoil here by a strike that has shut down Chicago's printing industry." --- Advertising Age.

This publication is one of those affected. We know it does not meet our usual standards of presentation and appearance, but we believe you would rather have such an issue than none at all. We hope, therefore, that you will bear with us until we can again resume the publication of a normal issue.

The Publisher

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Lots of men hunt chorines. This one hunted them with a gun!
- THREE BUCKS WORTH OF MURDER. . . . by William Rough. . . . 150
Don't pick on the army unless you figure you can lick its best men.
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You couldn't call it a fair choice: a bullet or the electric chair!

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Contents

All **FEATURES** *Complete*

PRESENTING THE AUTHOR By Frances M. Deegan. . . 2

OFF THE BLOTTER By The Editor 3

THEY'RE STILL BEING BORN. By Richard Rawlings . . 41

CRIME AND ANTHROPOLOGY. By Ormond R. Suacy. . . 54

2,000 YEARS AGO By Conrad Priebault . . 54

DEATH BY DIAGNOSIS. By Cecil Carter 55

WHEN CHEATING WAS THE RAGE. By Mann Olieve. 64

GRAFTERS IN TOGAS By Pete Bogg. 65

MISSIONARY VERSUS GANGSTER. By Arnold Young 85

WORKERS OF THE POLICE COURT By Ron Rollings 102

DETECTIVE FACTS By A. Morris. 103

THE JUDGE WOULDN'T TESTIFY. By R. M. Moran. 111

CRIMINALS AREN'T BORN By Crosby Crabb 123

WOMEN POLICE NOT NEW. By Lee Owens. 148

MATAHARI, SPY AND COUNTER SPY By Arnold Young 149

CRIME ODDITIES. By Joseph Joseph. . . . 167

"THIS IS SUICIDE!" -- OR IS IT? By Alexander Blade. . . 177

THE DE AUTREMONT CASE By Alexander Blade. . . 178

FAMOUS AMERICAN MURDERS By Alexander Blade. . . 179

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Volume 5
Number 1

The twisting hose threw Birdie,
but Cissy hung on like grim death



The Mortgage Loan Murders

By **FRANCES M. DEEGAN**

**FOR A COUPLE OF SCARED GIRLS
BIRDIE AND CISSY DID PRETTY
WELL TO FIGHT MURDER AND ARSON**

AT FIVE o'clock Birdie Moriarty staggered up to my desk with the outside metal stamp box and set it down with a crash.

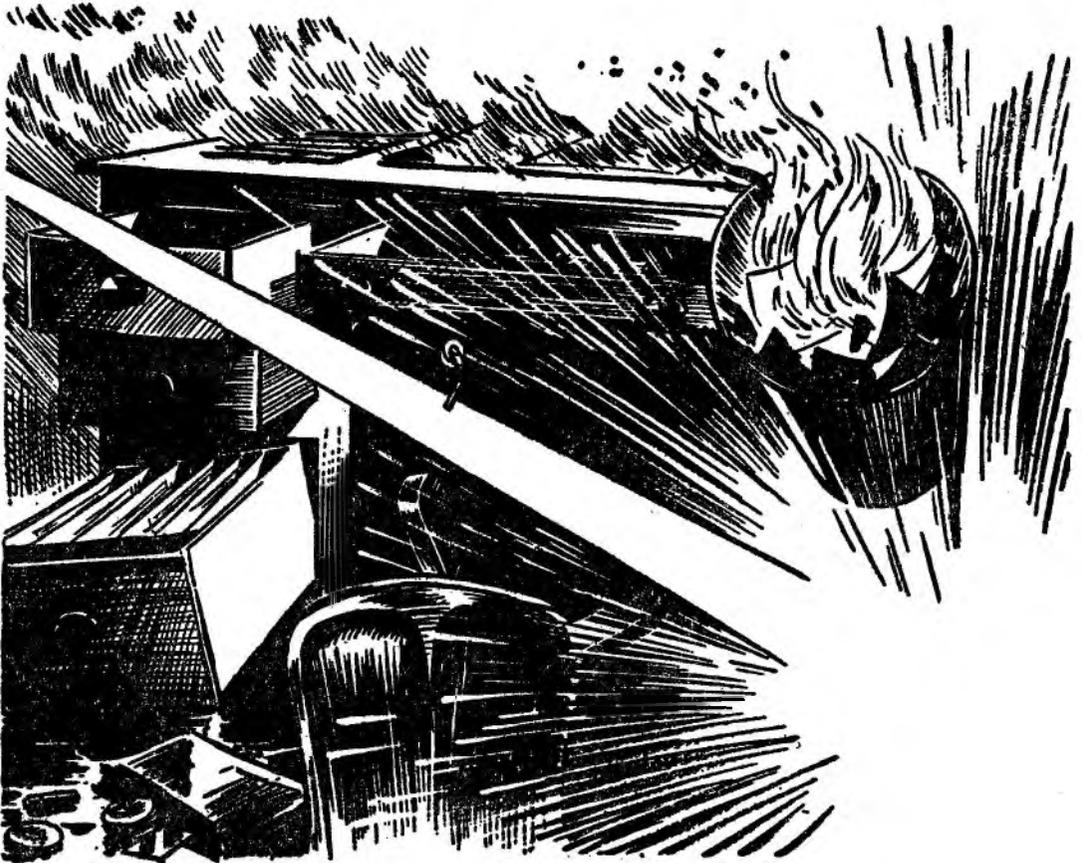
Birdie is a buxom blonde with the face of a jaded cupid. She handles the switchboard and mail at Brakethorn Investment Company.

"If I lug that thing back and forth

much longer," she gasped, "I'll have to get a truss—I mean a truck—Oh, nuts! I'll settle for a drink. How about it Cissy?"

"I can't leave yet," I sighed, visioning the black frown on Jasper Clay's face as he rushed off to his train.

She pursed her lips and bulged her prominent blue eyes at me.



"Do you mean you're gonna work overtime, even when your boss is out of town?" she demanded. "Not even Jasper would expect that kind of devotion."

"He does, though," I murmured. "One copy of the Riverman Building appraisal is missing. He had to leave for St. Louis without it because he wants to close the loan immediately. But that appraisal is terribly confidential. He can't afford to have it lying around the office where anybody might see it. I promised to find it and send it on to him, so—"

"So I still think you're unbalanced," Birdie declared. "What you need is a good stiff equalizer. Come on, we'll dash downstairs and have a cocktail. and then I'll come back and help you find the missing papers."

"Fraid I wouldn't be very good company," I said. "Why don't you ask Marge Miller?"

"I did! The darn fool's got a date with Rocky again."

I said, "Oh?"

"A big black 'O'—like in eight ball." Birdie jerked her head down emphatically. "That gal better watch her step. Mrs. Rocklynn phoned three times today—checking up on her hubby. And she's a holy terror—"

"Jiggers! The Cop," I hissed.

Birdie picked up the stamp box with ease and marched into the vault with it as C. O. Price appeared.

Cop Price was the perennial college boy. Though his sleek hair was gray and his sly blue eyes faded, he still wore pork pie hats and snappy sophomore suits. His initials were apt. He considered it his duty, as Jasper Clay's assistant, to police the office and report all gossip and irregularities. His bland smile hid a multitude of knifings.

"Miss Dane," he smirked. "I presume you intend to find the missing

copy of the Riverman Building appraisal?"

"Certainly!" I snapped. "That's what I'm here for, isn't it?" he had an annoying habit of crossing his arms over his stomach and teetering back and forth as he talked.

"Don't blast at me with that red-headed temper," he chided. "I'd just like to remind you that finished report was so highly confidential, no one in the office was supposed to see it, except you and the chief. It went straight to the Board of Directors for approval and all four copies came back. Mr. Clay told me that much. So the missing copy was lost right here." He poised one finger significantly on my desk.

I was too mad to talk, fortunately.

"I'd advise you to find it," he said softly. Then he tossed me that fake smile, and added, "Good night—and good hunting."

Birdie poked her face out of the vault and mouthed curses at the Cop's back. Then she came and stood in front of my desk, tapping one foot significantly.

"All right," I muttered. "I'll have a cocktail with you. I might even have two . . ."

Her face lifted in an exaggerated grin as she executed a backward glissade and strutted out to the switchboard to indicate pleased anticipation. I had a warning hunch then that Birdie might be something of a lush.

IN THE six months since I had come to Brakethorn as secretary to Jasper Clay, I'd had little opportunity to become well acquainted with anybody. Except, of course, Jasper Clay.

He was the most vital, forceful man I had ever known. That healthy blond type that always looks immaculate. He had a magnetic charm that lifted you way above yourself, and made you feel

that there were unlimited possibilities for such a lovely, important person as yourself. No one else had ever given me that exhilarating lift. I couldn't help being attracted to him. And I couldn't help wanting everything to run smoothly. His vocal praise and his little notes of commendation were something to take home and cherish.

That's why the missing appraisal had taken all the joy out of life. It was the first rift in the lute, and it gave me the first taste of his devastating anger. All the worse because I was sure I hadn't misplaced the appraisal. And I didn't see how any one else could have gotten it either.

Besides Jasper Clay and myself, there were only three other people in the Mortgage Loan Department at Blakethorn. Cop Price, who took care of minor office routine; Rocky Rocklynn, who inspected real estate and drew up detailed reports; and Marge Miller, who acted as secretary to both of them.

Rocky had inspected the Riverman Building in St. Louis and turned his findings over to Jasper Clay. From this Jasper had written his formal appraisal, showing the present worth of the building and land, and its future income potential. The Board of Directors had approved a loan of one million and a half at five per cent. Very good business, indeed. And naturally the details were a closely guarded secret.

It doesn't pay to broadcast the inside information on a deal of that kind. There are brokers along La Salle street who don't mind snatching. If one of them gets all the dope on a profitable loan, they can go in and cut the ground out from under the original investor by refinancing the loan at a half or a quarter per cent reduction in the interest rate, or by making some other conces-

sion which would still leave them a profitable investment. Hence the fact that a copy of the confidential appraisal and recommendation was missing, might prove calamitous.

I closed my desk, and then remembered that I was coming back. But I decided I wouldn't need my typewriter, so I left everything shut up, and went into Jasper's office and closed the windows and pulled the blinds. I stood there for a moment, feeling his presence.

His vital magnetism seemed to impregnate the massive mahogany desk and red leather chairs and divan. I could hear again his deep, mellow voice saying, "Cissy, you're a wonder. I don't know what I'd do without you . . ." And then the whole room blurred with the sharp memory of his angry departure.

I slipped my arms around the tall, red leather desk chair and pressed my face against the spot where his head rested, when he was thinking or dictating. I straightened up slowly, blinking away tears, and there was a lean, dark man standing in the doorway. My immediate impulse was to fire the desk lamp at him.

IN THE first place, he didn't take off his hat. In the second place, he had no business barging into Jasper Clay's private office. He must have gotten through the reception room in the confusion of the thundering herd that stampeded for the doors at one minute past five every night.

I drew myself up as frigidly as I could while I was still blinking. "Are you looking for someone?" I inquired, as if it were unspeakably vulgar.

"Jasper Clay," he snarled. "Where is he?"

"It's customary to make an appointment—"

"I said, where is he?"

I couldn't see much of his eyes, except two gleaming points under his hat brim. But his mouth was hard and contemptuous. And suddenly I was furious. As if the whole wretched day had come to a climax with this thug hurling insults across Jasper's office.

"Hereafter, if you will stop at the reception desk, you will save yourself and everybody else a good deal of trouble," I said hotly. "As it happens, Mr Clay is out of the city—"

"I don't believe it!"

I waved my hand as if I were brushing away an odious trifle. "That will do," I said. "I'm afraid I can do nothing for you. You will have to make your inquiries at the reception desk. If you have any business with Blake-thorn, the receptionist will see that you are handled by the proper parties"

He stood there for a minute looking hard and mean. Then he jerked at his hat, backed out the door, and disappeared. I was trembling from head to foot and had to steady myself on Jasper's desk until the anger subsided. After that I put on a fresh make-up and hurried out to find Birdie.

Her plump, cupid face was no longer pleased. She looked sober and stricken.

"Sam was killed," she said.

"Sam?"

"You know. The night man. He sat at the desk in the lobby and made everybody sign in and out after hours. Kind of a night superintendent—"

"Oh, of course. What a shame! How—"

"One of the freight elevators. He took it up and something went wrong. He fell out. It must have been . . . Gosh! I feel terrible about it. He was such a swell fellow. Many's the time he bought me a drink—with laughs." She flung out her hands helplessly, picked up her purse, and said, "Well, I guess we both need a cocktail now.

Sam would expect that. A cocktail with laughs. The big clown."

CHAPTER II

THE BAR, opening off the lobby of the building, was crowded with La Salle street workers snatching a quick fortifier before braving the daily battle of Chicago's rush hour traffic. Birdie grumbled because we had to take a remote booth.

"We'll have to send up flares to get any service back here," she said. "And even then, it'll probably be too little and too late."

She was right. We ordered Martinis and eventually got scotch highballs, which we accepted—the help situation being what it is.

"After all, we're lucky," Birdie remarked philosophically. "Think of the poor guys who ordered these highballs. They're probably still waiting."

A woman stopped beside the booth and rested a thin, nervous hand on the table. At first I thought she was drunk. Her lumpy, black hat and loose coat had that disgruntled air of things subjected to abuse. And even in the dim light I could see the pupils of her pale eyes expanding and contracting uncontrollably. She stood there like unwelcome doom until Birdie glanced up.

"Why, hello, Mrs. Rocklynn," Birdie said. "How are you, anyway?"

"Where is Mr Rocklynn?" the weird figure demanded harshly.

"I wouldn't know," Birdie answered cautiously. "I think he left early."

"He told me he was working tonight," the taut voice said accusingly. "The doors are locked—"

"Oh, in that case, he probably ran out for a bite to eat," Birdie said convincingly. "Why don't you sit down with us and wait? You can phone from here in a little while to see if he's back

yet."

Mrs. Rocklynn sat down beside Birdie and stared at my hair indignantly. Her own lifeless strands were desperately hennaed.

"I don't think you've met our genuine little redhead," said Birdie, with feminine cruelty. "She's only been with us about six months. Miss Dane, Mrs. Rocklynn."

Before I could acknowledge the introduction, she rasped, "Do you know Marge Miller?"

"Yes, of course," I said, trying desperately to think of another subject.

"What would you like to drink?" Birdie asked loudly, raising an exasperated eyebrow.

"Boiling oil," declared Mrs. Rocklynn, "would be too good for her. However, Miss Miller will not be with you much longer."

"What'll you have," Birdie asked through her teeth, "dear?"

"Snakes," Mrs. Rocklynn said, "are being scotched tonight."

"All right," Birdie told the impatient waitress. "Three scotches. We brought our own snakes." She sighed gustily. "But you can't lock the horse after."

"I have been entirely too passive—" Mrs. Rocklynn turned suddenly to Birdie. "After what?"

"The barn door's been stolen," Birdie supplied glibly.

"Exactly. That is why I must act now," Mrs. Rocklynn said. "Tonight." Her head jerked spasmodically. "Tonight will end it. Mr. Clay is co-operating with me."

It seemed futile to tell her Jasper Clay was half way to St. Louis, with far more important business than her matrimonial tangles to occupy him. Her lies were pathetic, so we let her ramble on.

I DON'T know when I became aware of the man at the nearest table. He

was alone and kept staring at me under his hat brim. Then I recognized him. He was the tough gangster who had come looking for Jasper

There was something brazen about his fixed attention that roused the same furious resentment he had touched off before. That lean, dark face with the hard, watchful eyes was printed like a photograph on my mind. So that even when I tried to ignore him, I was still sharply aware of his scrutiny.

"And I have every right to protect my home," Mrs. Rocklynn was going on, "by whatever means, against the deprivations of . . ." Her head twitched nervously and she got up in the middle of her rambling sentence. "I must telephone my husband."

Birdie signaled the waitress for three more drinks. Then she looked at me grimly. "Our duty," she said, "is plain. This dame is out to do some permanent damage. If she ever catches up with Rocky and Marge tonight—blooey! We've got to fill her up with good cheer and ship her home in a taxi."

"Birdie, it's none of our business," I protested. "Besides, I've got to get back upstairs—"

"Oh, no!" Birdie stated emphatically. "Huh-uh. If she finds out we've got a key to the office, she'll be right on our heels. We'll never get rid of her. Once she gets in, she's liable to wreck the joint. And it would be just like those two dopes to walk in while she's there. It wouldn't be the first time they came back to the office after hours for a little privacy."

"But she'll keep calling the office. If they answer the phone—"

"They won't. The way I've got the board hooked up, incoming calls ring in the cashier's cage. They probably won't even hear it. Be a pal, Cissy. I know Marge is a fool. And poor old Rocky is a broken down has-been. But

I'm sorry as hell for both of them. And if we can prevent a scandal . . ."

I sipped my highball and thought about it. I didn't know just how far this affair between Marge and Rocky had gone. But I knew very well how easily two people on a job could slip into friendship. It had happened to me. And after meeting Mrs. Rocklynn, I could hardly blame Rocky for seeking solace elsewhere. He was still a young man, though his hair was graying and his face wore a harassed expression that aged him—until he looked at Marge Miller. Then the lines smoothed out and his face lighted with a wistful grin that was very appealing.

I had to be honest about it. My sympathies were definitely with Rocky and tall, dark Marge Miller, who wore tailored clothes like a model. Who always looked as trim and clean as if she were cared for by a private maid and hairdresser. And whose black eyes and vivid face were full of lively intelligence.

I looked up and caught the sardonic leer of the watchful gangster. There was a burst of male laughter from the 26 game, and high over the rest was the familiar giggle of Cop Price.

"Oh-oh," said Birdie. "The Cop's here!"

I saw the startled expression on the gangster's face, and the next minute he got up and disappeared in the crowd. He left a Tom Collins glass nearly full on the table.

"Did you notice that man?" I asked Birdie.

"What man?"

"There." I pointed to the empty table. "He insulted me. I was never so mad in my life."

BIRDIE craned her neck out of the booth. Then she looked back at me sharply, and said, "Now don't you

start going neurotic on me. One at a time is enough. I give you my word, there isn't any man there."

"Oh, never mind, if you didn't see him," I said crossly.

"You better switch to something else. Try a gin fizz. That'll freshen you up." She raised her arm and flagg'd down a flitting waitress. "And speaking of neurotics, I wonder what's keeping our girl friend. Be just like her to get lost in a telephone booth."

"No, here she comes," I said. "And nosy Cop Price with her. If he makes any remarks, I'll strangle him!"

Birdie was muttering profane noises under her breath.

"Well, well. Girls will be girls," said Cop Price blithely, handing his charge into the booth beside Birdie. "Looks like I'll have to pop. What are you drinking?" He stood there with his arms crossed on his stomach, waiting for me to slide over in the booth. I didn't budge.

"Nice of you to offer," said Birdie with acid sweetness. "But we're having champagne cocktails, and we couldn't think of letting you pay for a round of those."

Instead of bowing himself off, however, the Cop pulled up a chair and sat down at the outer edge of the table.

"I guess the budget will stand it," he said smugly, helping himself to my cigarettes. "How does it happen Miss Miller isn't with you tonight?" I nearly burned Mrs. Rocklynn's nose as she bent forward for a light.

"She went to Evanston," Birdie whispered confidentially. "To get her second best switch dyed."

"Dyed, huh?" repeated the Cop nastily. "In Evanston. I wonder who'll pay for that?"

"I won't pay for it," declared Mrs. Rocklynn, sitting back. "I've been persecuted. I may be prosecuted. But I'll

never be executed, because I—” She stared blankly at us. “Whatever made you think she died in Evanston?” Nobody could think up an answer and she began fumbling in her sack-like leather bag. “I must telephone my husband.”

“You just spent twenty minutes in a phone booth,” Birdie reminded her. “First thing you know, you’ll get telephonic. And that’s bad.”

“You must be drunk,” Mrs. Rocklynn said pettishly.

“Could be,” Birdie agreed amiably. A crafty, far-away look had come into her eyes. She seemed to be manipulating her hands cautiously under the table.

The waitress set three tall frosty glasses down.

“Now what are you bringing us?” Birdie demanded. “You know we’re drinking champagne cocktails. What’re you trying to do, knock us out?”

“I coulda swore you says gin fizzes,” mumbled the flushed waitress. “Honest, if I take back any more drinks the bartender’s gonna crown me with ’em. We’re that mixed up on the orders.”

“Okay, never mind,” Birdie said magnanimously. “Just leave ’em here and go get us four champagne cocktails.”

“I’m drinking scotch and soda,” Cop Price protested as the girl hurried off.

“You’ll drink what you get, and like it,” Birdie said. “It’s no good confusing her with a mixed order. She has enough trouble when the drinks are all the same. We’re liable to get four bottles of Pluto Water.” She tasted her gin fizz and shuddered. “Which might not be such a bad idea at that.”

The champagne cocktails were mildly pleasant after the sharp gin fizz. I think we had three. Someone—a friend of Cop Price—came and bought a round. Then quite a lot of people seemed to gravitate toward our booth.

We all drank to poor old Sam. Everybody had liked him and regretted his tragic death. There was a rumor that it had not been an accident; but I don’t think anybody really believed it.

THE MAIN crowd thinned out and the service got better. Everything got better. I was even able to understand Mrs. Rocklynn’s disjointed speech. Otherwise the drinks had no noticeable effect on her. But of course, she was weird to begin with, so it was hard to tell.

She leaned across the table and hissed at me, “I must leave you now.”

“Oh, must you go home,” I said tactfully, “so soon?”

She stared at me with those ghostly eyes, and said, “Home?” Her head twitched and she smiled horribly. “Yes, I can go home now. I think my troubles are over, unless— Well, I’ll see . . .”

I walked across the echoing marble lobby with her. Somebody held the street door for us and I looked up and saw the lean, dark gangster again. I pushed through the door hastily. A cruising cab drifted along La Salle street and I helped Mrs. Rocklynn in. She gave an address on North Dearborn and was driven off. The gangster had disappeared too. I was rid of both of them—I hoped.

I went back to the bar feeling desperately sorry for Rocky. Home. What a hectic home he must have . . .

Birdie winked at me raffishly. “Well, we seen our duty, and we done it!” she declared. “I hope you chartered a good sea-going hack—”

“Birdie, I thought the Rocklynn’s lived on the South Side,” I said.

“They do.” Birdie’s eyes focused intently. “Don’t tell me you sent her off in the wrong direction?”

“She gave an address on North Dearborn.”

"Oh-oh. Come on!" Birdie got up abruptly, dislodging three brokers and an insurance agent, who objected strenuously to our departure.

CHAPTER III

BIRDIE dragged me out to the night elevator and held her fist on the noisy bell. The operator was somewhere in the depths of the sub-basement. She kept shushing me every time I opened my mouth to ask a question, though there wasn't a soul in the lobby except us. The electric clock twitched past 8:30 and on to 8:35. The iron gate across the stairs was locked. In front of it stood Sam's battered desk, but his padded armchair was missing.

When the operator finally appeared, he was peevish, and made us go over and sign the night register. There were five or six other names already entered with the time of their arrival, but no departures.

I had my key out when we reached the big double glass entrance doors. But when I fumbled for the light switch inside, Birdie slapped my hand away. She pounced at the switchboard and yanked all the cords out, disconnecting the night phones. Then she plugged in a line, dialled frantically, and asked for Marge Miller.

"You re sure she's not in?" she demanded. "Has she been there this evening? Well, if she comes in, tell her to phone the office immediately, before she goes upstairs. It's terribly urgent."

Birdie pulled the plug and faced me. The lights from the hall gave her face a queer one-sided expression. It looked menacing. Like a snarling cupid.

"What?" I asked fuzzily. "Birdie, what is it?"

She dug into her jacket pocket and laid a flat object down on the switchboard. "This!" she said.

I gasped. It was a small automatic. "She had this in her bag and I snatched it," Birdie said. "But for all I know, she's got a kife in her garter and a bomb in her hat. And the only place she could be going on North Dearborn is Marge Miller's apartment!"

"Oh, Birdie! And I put her in the cab. What can we do?"

Birdie screwed up her mouth thoughtfully. "Marge isn't home, so she and Rocky must have gone out somewhere. In which case they'll probably stay out late. Therefore, Mrs. Rocklynn will get tired of waiting around and come back down here. Just on the off chance that she might catch Rocky working, like he said. So we keep the doors locked and the lights off."

"You think Marge will get your message and call you back . . . in time?"

"Or they may stop in here later. Either way we can warn 'em." Birdie got up and put the gun back in her pocket. "Meanwhile, I'm gonna destroy evidence."

"What evidence?"

"I told you Marge was a fool. She's kept every letter Rocky ever wrote. And he wrote plenty when he was on the road I oughta know. I had to separate 'em from the company mail."

"Maybe Marge won't like that."

"We can't afford to be squeamish at this point. The thing has gone too far for that. And Marge needs help, whether she knows it or not. When a nervous dame starts gunning for you, it's time to duck. Am I right?"

"It certainly seems like it."

"Okay, pal. The night is young and we've got work to do. Saving lives, no less. Wish we had a St. Bernard. Oh, well." She hitched up her skirt and turned back to the switchboard. "I'll connect your phone so we'll be sure to hear it if a call comes in."

I WAITED, and in the silence I heard a door close softly. The vast, dim suite stretched away in both directions from the reception room. The private offices fronted on La Salle street. The inner space was divided into sections for the clerical help. Most of the secretaries had a partially enclosed nook guarding the office of their boss. At regular intervals the length of the office doors opened into the hall.

"Birdie," I whispered. "I heard a door."

"Doing what?"

"Closing."

"Well, that's a perfectly normal thing for a door to do."

"I think somebody's in here."

"Don't be crazy! It was probably a door on the other side of the floor. You can hear everything plainer at night than you can in the daytime. Come on."

The Mortgage Loan Department was at the extreme south end of the suite. First my office, glass enclosed; then Jasper's spacious quarters; and finally the offices of Rocky and Cop Price, with Marge and the department files just outside.

Marge's desk was near one of the frosted glass doors to the hall. There was just enough light to see what we were doing. Birdie began pulling papers out of the back compartment of a lower drawer and stuffing them into a metal waste basket, while I searched foggily through the other drawers. I pulled out everything that looked personal, a small diary calendar, a pocket memo book full of telephone numbers, scraps of paper and knick-knacks. They all went into the waste basket. Good riddance, I thought, and wondered why Marge didn't keep her desk as neat as her person. Everything seemed to be topsy-turvy with pins and clips spilled loosely and papers scattered every which way.

Birdie struck a catch and dropped it into the waste basket.

"People can see that," I said judiciously. "Through the door."

"Huh-uh," Birdie said. "We'll push it back here." She gave it a few unwieldy kicks toward an angle of the steel filing cabinets.

"Now for Rocky," Birdie said. "We might as well clean him out, too, while we're at it."

Rocky's office was small, no more than a cubby hole, but at least we could turn on the desk light after closing the door.

Birdie started on the left and I took the right side. It was one of the company rules that no desks were ever locked. So that in case of sickness or accident, the victim's desk and its contents could be taken over by a substitute without any delay.

We went through the same procedure as before, dropping everything that looked suspicious into the blazing waste basket. I dragged out a bunch of blueprints that had been stuffed carelessly into the bottom drawer and tried to refold them in the original creases. Birdie was plowing through a jumbled pile of rent reports. She pulled out a valentine. A big red heart with a silver arrow through it, and the words "You got me, Babe" printed above. Underneath the arrow was Marge's tall, narrow signature.

"The dopes!" Birdie snorted. Then she squinted with great concentration. "Does it strike you," she said, "that both these desks are slightly mussed up?"

"They're disgraceful!" I said indignantly, and stopped struggling with several acres of blueprint. I kicked the print aside and dropped into the swivel chair. I was promptly dumped on the floor. I have a bad habit of sitting on the edge of chairs because I'm short.

Fortunately the leather cushion went with me when the chair tilted.

BIRDIE regarded me with owlish gravity. "You know what we forgot to do?" she said.

"No, what?"

"We forgot to eat. We're drunker'n seven hundred dollars on an empty stomach."

"I am not!"

"Okay. Make it five hundred dollars," Birdie grunted, nearly pulling my arm out of the socket. "Get up, you lug! We gotta finish our work, and go capture a steak." She picked up the chair cushion and replaced it. Then she said, "Where'd this come from?" And picked up a gray manuscript folder.

"Why that—" I grabbed it and looked inside. "This is the missing appraisal! What was it doing in Rocky's chair?"

Birdie scowled at it. "I'm hungry," she said. "And this whole thing is getting ridiculous. The silliest things can happen when you're drunk. If you'd been sober, you wouldn't have found that in a million years . . . And neither did the other guy."

"I'm not—urp—drunk! What other guy?"

"Whoever it was that went pawing through these desks before we got here." Birdie made an elaborate gesture and leaned on the desk. "It stands to reason they weren't looking for the same thing we were, because they didn't touch the personal letters and valentines."

"But who—" I stopped at a sudden inspiration. "Birdie, where did the cop go?"

"Price?" Birdie looked blank. "How should I know?"

"You remember," I said urgently. "He was at the table when I left to take

Mrs. Rocklynn to a cab. When I came back he was gone. Didn't you see—"

"I think he said he was going to telephone his wife. But by golly. He could have sneaked up here—the rat!"

"He must have known Rocky had the appraisal," I said. "But how in the world could Rocky get it? I locked it in Jasper's brief case with all the other papers as soon as they came back from the Directors' meeting. We didn't discover it was missing until Jasper made a final check, just before he left. And he thought—he blamed me—"

"You sure you put all the copies in the brief case?"

"Positive! There was a letter of transmittal from the Board of Directors with an itemized list of all documents. I checked them off and they were all there. Then I snapped the lock. Jasper has the only keys."

Birdie shoved her hair back of her ears and looked around the small office distractedly. "Keys," she said. "What I need right now is another drink. Two other drinks . . ."

I wasn't paying much attention to her. I was turning the pages of my neatly typed appraisal with a sense of outrage. "Some dirty so-and-so," I muttered, "has scribbled all over my tabulations! This copy is ruined. I can't send it on to Jasper. I'll have to type it all over again. Why would anybody deliberately mark it up like this?"

"I have to go and think." Birdie grimaced like a Pekingese in pain. "It's about the keys. And I wish I was smart—instead of so goddam beautiful."

She opened the door and yelled: "Holy smoke! Fire!"

"That's the waste basket," I said disgustedly.

"Not any more, it isn't—come on, shake your . . ."

CHAPTER IV

IT LOOKED like the whole inner wall was on fire. I hopped around for a minute, waving the appraisal helplessly. Then I slipped it back under the seat cushion and rushed out to the closet where the nearest washbowl was concealed.

All I could find was an ugly green vase that wouldn't fit under the faucet. Birdie was beating at the flames with a desk blotter, and puffing at the fire like she was trying to blow it out. The blotter caught fire, and the green vase slipped and shattered in the washbowl.

Birdie dropped the blotter. "Hell! What's the matter with me? she panted. "My uncle Joseph was a fire captain!"

She plunged into the hall. "When you hear me coming," she shrieked, "open the door!"

I heard her coming, all right. She was galloping down the hall and yelling: "Clang! Clang!" At the top of her voice.

She reached the door at the same time I did and suddenly she was wrestling with a violently bucking fire hose. I backed up just as a vicious spurt of water shot through the door, dancing in a zig-zag pattern all over everything but the fire, which was back against the inner wall, crackling merrily.

I stepped on the door catch and crept out cautiously to help her drag the writhing monster inside. It fought every inch of the way.

"Can't you shut it off?" I gasped.

"What for? We haven't used it yet!"

"That's the way firemen do it! Get the hose in position first—turn it on afterwards!"

"This is better! It's quicker!"

"And wetter!" I sputtered as the water hit the ceiling and sprayed us liberally.

We angled the nozzle slowly down to-

ward the flames and the fire vanished in a brief hiss of steam. The charred heap that scattered under the torrent was barely recognizable as a pile of cardboard transfer files. Then we were battling the gushing boa constrictor back toward the hall.

Several inches of water covered the floor, and the heavy battleship linoleum underneath was slick and treacherous. Of course, we fell down. Twice. Water spouted and poured from everywhere. I kept thinking of that fanciful piece of music in which the magician's apprentice utters the words that put the magic broom to work. And the broom dutifully fetches buckets upon buckets of water, while the terrified apprentice tries to remember the words to break the spell.

ONCE in the marble floored hall, the footing was better. We pushed open the door to the stairs by turning the hose on it, then shoved the hose out on the landing where it sent an artistic waterfall bounding down the steps. Limp as we were, it took both of us to turn the wheel that shut the water off. On our way back to the office, I noticed the hose was still gurgling.

"Takes it a little while to drain off," Birdie explained. "Can't hurt a thing out there. Solid concrete all the way down for fourteen floors."

I hesitated at the edge of the rippling lake that was spreading into the hall and Birdie gave me a shove and splashed in after me.

"You're not going to start getting fussy, now," she said. "There's one thing about water—you can only get so wet, and after that it doesn't matter."

One of us had turned the lights on in the early stages of the holocaust, and now we surveyed the wreckage. It was so complete that we didn't waste any time moaning over it. Even the steel

filing cabinets leaked. The contents were probably pulp.

Birdie said, "They'll have to tear everything out of here and do the whole thing over. So there's no sense in our fooling with it. Let's get dried off." She squeezed out her mop of hair and shook the water off her hand. "Now I know why you wear your hair short," she said. "In case of fire."

We took the whole week's supply of clean towels out of the cabinet and went into Rocky's office. His carpet was soaked anyway, so we couldn't hurt it. After we were stripped to scanties and brassiers, we suddenly realized we had had nothing dry to put on. We also realized that strangers were due any minute to investigate the uproar.

"And Sam had to get killed, tonight of all nights!" mourned Birdie. "He'd understand. I doubt if any one else will. Of course, you know we're both gonna lose our jobs tomorrow?"

"Oh, no!"

"Listen, my fine-figured accomplice! They don't go for firing and flooding the premises at Brakethorn. They're gonna resent it—with words and music. We'll be lucky if we only get canned."

I stood there and tried to absorb the shock. To have to leave Jasper and our work together . . . in disgrace! If I wasn't sober before, I was now.

Birdie slapped my bare back. "Cheer up, for God's sake! It's like the water. We're in up to our necks, it can't get any worse, no matter what we do."

I followed her out to the coat closet where we found several old hats, an umbrella, a pair of high arctics belonging to Cop Price, and a red print smock of Marge's.

The smock was too tight for Birdie. It was too long for me, and the color clashed with my hair, but at least I was covered. The water was cold on our bare feet. Birdie put the arctics on. She

looked more than ever like a huge comic cupid in her skimpy scanties, with her hair straggling every which way. She selected a battered felt hat, stuffed her hair into the crown, and pulled it down over her ears.

"Now if I only had a mackinaw and some breeches," she said, "I could get out of here—disguised as a city sewer inspector."

"Inspecting sewers on the fourteenth floor—Wait a minute! Jasper has an old pair of golf slacks—"

Birdie clumped purposefully toward his office as I stopped to pick up the fateful appraisal.

"Where did you say they were?" Birdie yelled.

"You'll have to take my keys. They're locked in his personal file—"

"My God! You even file his pants?" Birdie pushed the disreputable hat back on her head. "No wonder you have to work overtime. Under 'S' or 'P'—slacks or pants?"

"Just folded up in the bottom drawer." I shoved the appraisal into a large brown envelope with the vague intention of taking it home and retyping it on my portable.

Birdie opened the door and flipped on the lights in Jasper's office. "Well, how do you like this?" she demanded. and let the heavy door close with a hiss.

I pushed it open again just in time to see her bending over the soft, red leather davenport. Marge Miller was lying there, relaxed in sleep. . . . Sleep?

Birdie reached out a hand to shake her and drew in her breath with a startled whoop.

I knew. I knew as well as I ever knew anything, that Marge Miller was dead. But I couldn't stop my feet from moving across the thick taupe carpet.

WE LOOKED down at her for a long time. She'd been hit on the

head and strangled. She was quite cold and stiff. We both touched her with our fingertips. That was enough. The side of her head had bled a little. Not much. The clotted blood was black, and her face was swollen and discolored, her eyes staring. A bright orange ascot tie was still knotted about her neck, but not the way she usually wore it. The edges were cutting into the flesh.

Birdie and I looked at each other, and I don't think either of us was aware of our ludicrous appearance. Birdie swallowed noisily. She lifted her hand and the keys jangled. She stared at them oddly.

"Oh, yes. Keys," she said. "That's what I was worried about." She bit the corner of her lip and backed away slowly. "I needn't have worried. It won't hurt to tell you now. It was Marge who stole the appraisal. Did you know you can get duplicate keys for anybody's brief case or luggage, just by writing to the manufacturer on the company letterhead? That's what she did. She found the invoice in the purchasing department files, and got all the information and wrote to the manufacturer for a duplicate set of keys. She signed her name as secretary to Jasper Clay, and the keys came addressed to her that way.

"She told me Rocky had borrowed Jasper's brief case and lost the keys, and they were trying to replace them before Jasper found out. I didn't really believe that, but I thought whatever she was doing was her own business. When you told me the appraisal was taken out of the locked brief case, I knew how it was done. . . It doesn't hurt to tell you now.

CHAPTER V

WE WERE both moving aimlessly about the room. I passed the file

case several times before I remembered the slacks. I took the keys out of Birdie's hand, unlocked the file and gave her the slacks. She solemnly shook them out and stepped into them. There was a green scarf in the drawer, too. I tied it around my waist and bloused the smock to make it shorter.

"You can put on one of those jackets the boys in the accounting department wear," I said. "We'll have to call the police now."

Birdie paused on her way out and let the door glide shut. She stood there with her legs wide apart and her arms folded.

"Cissy, we can't call the police."

"Can't call—But we have to. This is—"

"I know what it is. It's murder. And we're right in the middle of it. Look how it is. We came up here and did an awful lot of rampaging around. I guess we were pretty tight, because everything we did seemed like a very fine idea at the time. But try and explain it to anybody else—especially the police. They'll say the great fire and flood were strictly for the purpose of wiping out traces of the murder. It all happened around Marge's desk. We even managed to get our clothes soaked, to wash away any bloodstains. I said we were in up to our necks before, and it couldn't get any worse. But I was wrong. We're in over our heads now, chum, and it's sink or swim."

"But I don't see—We can't sneak out of the building, if that's what you mean. There's no way to get down."

"No, there isn't. And anyway, we're signed in downstairs on the register. But here's something else to think about. It's been nearly an hour since we raised all that rumpus over the fire. And where are the crowds of people we thought were going to come storming up here? There hasn't been even one.

We could be hanged, drawn, quartered and murdered six different ways up here, and nobody would pay any attention. So the first thing I'm going to do is get that gun of Mrs. Rocklynn's. And then we're going to lay for that blasted murderer and catch him—or her. That's the only way we can clear ourselves."

We had both avoided looking across the wide room to where Marge was lying so still, but all the time we had been conscious of her. Any grief, or pain, or horror would come afterwards. Now there was only the grim reality of her dead body lying there. We had to accept it, so we did. But beyond that we felt none of the emotion or hysteria people are supposed to experience with the first shock of death. When Birdie said "Catch the murderer," I wanted to do it. For Marge's sake, and for our own.

"You think whoever searched those desks is the murderer, and will come back?" I said.

"I think you did hear a door close when we first came up here," Birdie nodded. "I think we scared somebody away before they found what they were looking for. Maybe it was the missing appraisal. Maybe it was something else. But if they wanted it bad enough to kill Marge—they'll be back. And we'll be waiting for 'em."

"Get the gun," I said, opening the door. "What have we got to lose now?" We went back to Rocky's office.

"Just our lives is all," said Birdie lightly. "By the way, what about the cleaning women? Any idea what time they come around?"

"Very late. Around midnight. Jasper and I were here until eleven one night and they were just coming to work as we left."

"Good. That gives us a couple of hours at least. I wouldn't want to shoot

some old biddy by mistake." Birdie shook her head and readjusted the warped hat. "I certainly wish I knew what this is all about."

"Looks like it's up to us to find out," I said. "Now that we're in it this far. You knew, all those foolish things Mrs. Rocklynn was jabbering about, might not have been so foolish after all. She kept saying tonight would end it, and it did as far as Marge is concerned."

"Damn her! She certainly wished this on Marge. But she couldn't have done it. She said she couldn't get in, and you know the doors are locked promptly at five-fifteen whether everybody's out or not."

BIRDIE was examining the small gun. Our clothes were strewn all around Rocky's office, but they didn't seem to be getting any dryer. My slip was spread over Rocky's golf bag and I picked it up to shake it.

"Oh, darn!" I said. "I've got rust spots on my slip off his golf clubs. I didn't think—Birdie!"

"Quit worrying about a little thing like rust spots."

"It's not rust spots. It's—Look!" I pulled the niblick out of the bag and showed it to her. There was blood and hair on it.

She turned it around slowly, nodding her head. "This is it, all right. The dirty—"

"Oh, gosh!" I said. "Fingerprints!"

"Wipe 'em off. With a damp towel." She shoved the gun into the pocket of the slacks. "I'm going back to the accounting department for a coat. I don't want to meet a murderer with a bare stomach." She took a flashlight out of Rocky's desk and eased herself out the door. We had already turned out the lights everywhere else.

It was terribly still after she left. La Salle street was deserted at this hour.

There was only a faint murmur of traffic from further east in the Loop. The Brakethorn suite and the whole vast building had the deadly silence of a vacuum, in which nothing would ever move again. I twitched my shoulders nervously and sat down in Rocky's chair—carefully this time, and thought again of the defaced appraisal.

There was something malicious about the way my typed data had been crossed out with a slashing pencil and the pages scribbled over. As though someone had hated Jasper Clay, and used this childish means to express it. The Riverman Building loan was quite a feather in his cap, and obviously somebody was bitterly jealous.

Could it be Rocky? Birdie had called him a "has-been" as though he might have started out brilliantly enough, and then slipped. Down the ladder to a routine job with no future.

Where *was* Rocky? He'd had a date with Marge. And Marge was dead—in Jasper's office! More evidence of a vindictive grudge against Jasper. Marge had stolen the appraisal. And there was only one person for whom Marge would do a thing like that. Perhaps Rocky had meant to sell the information to a competitive broker. He'd had to kill Marge—

Birdie slid into the room with a rumpled, gray linen coat buttoned tightly. The sleeves were too short, and the seams appeared to be strained to the point of explosion.

"I tried all the hall doors," she whispered hoarsely. "They're locked, so that's okay, but—" she lifted one foot awkwardly, "I can't do much fitting around in these, and you need shoes, too. Let's look into the other closets. Some of these janes must have some old shoes—"

"Before we do that," I said. "We've got to move Marge."

Birdie drew up one side of her face with distaste. "What for?"

"Because whoever killed her is trying to throw the blame on Jasper. I've been thinking, and I think it was Rocky—"

"You're crazy! Rocky was nuts about her! Anyway I don't think we could manage her. She's—well, she's dead weight."

"Yes, we can," I said. "We can put her on that metal truck in the clerical department. The one they use for card records. If you won't help me, I'll do it myself. I'm not going to leave her in Jasper's office!"

"All right! All right! But for cripes sake, let's hurry. We've still got a murderer to catch."

MARGE was heavy. And stiff. The truck was much too short and her head and feet extended grotesquely at each end. It was very unnatural. Her black patent leather purse had been lying half under her. I slung it over my shoulder by the strap. There were dry, black blood spots on one seat cushion, so I turned it over.

Between Jasper's office and the reception room there were three other private offices. They belonged to the assistant attorney, the chief attorney, and the director of property management, all part of the combined Real Estate and Mortgage Loan Departments.

We pushed the truck into the middle office, belonging to the chief attorney. We couldn't bear to put Marge down on the floor, so we lifted her onto the bare, glass-topped desk. Then I got a dust cloth from the secretary's nook outside and went over the desk, the door knobs, and the truck to wipe off finger prints.

We were getting smarter as we went along. There didn't seem to be any

doubt but that we could surround the murderer when he arrived, nab him, and hand him over to a grateful police department. And incidentally, save our jobs—with honor.

We ran the truck back into the clerical department, which was just outside my office, and Birdie pulled the flashlight out of her pants pocket. She clumped awkwardly toward the closet, lifting each foot high and setting it down carefully, like a bear on hot bricks. She was an ominous looking thing in the moving flashlight.

"Don't tell me they've locked the closet," she growled, tugging at it. "What the hell do they keep in there, anyway?"

We both took hold of the door and yanked. It jerked open suddenly and Birdie stamped on my bare toes. I yipped and hopped around on one foot, but Birdie wasn't paying any attention to me. She had the flashlight turned on the floor of the closet, and Rocky was sitting there, slumped in a heap. I grabbed hold of Birdie and peered under her arm.

It was Rocky's coat that had caught in the door and jammed it. He had been hit on the head and strangled—with his necktie. He looked just like Marge, with puffed and blackened face and wildly bulging eyes. His head had bled more than hers. Or maybe it was because his hair was shorter.

"Let's go!" Birdie was panting. She slapped at my hand. I had grabbed her by the seat of the pants. She stepped on my toes again and we both backed up. And now we had two of them. Two corpses.

"Whatever you do," said Birdie in a dry, cracked voice, "Don't open any more doors!"

SOMEBODY began pounding at the entrance to the reception room. We

looked at each other in grim desperation, then both reached for the closet door and closed it.

"Maybe they'll go away," I whispered. There was a staccato clicking now, as though a key were being rapped on the glass doors. Then the unmistakable sound of a key turning in the lock, and men's voices.

Birdie said, "That can't be the murderer. There's too many of 'em. I guess we'll have to see what they want."

It was the night elevator operator, a building engineer and the lean, dark, hard-eyed thug, or gangster, or whatever he was. It was monotonous the way he persisted in popping up.

They had turned the lights on and stood there in a row glaring at us. As if we were lepers.

Birdie shuffled her feet anxiously, and squeaked, "The office is closed . . ."

"Who in de hell turned dat water on?" roared the husky engineer.

"We—we turned it off," I said.

"I never shoulda let youse up here!" the elevator man shouted. "You was pie-eyed, the both of youse. You got the whole lobby flooded! You got every janitor's closet soaked an' all the supplies rooned all the way down for fourteen floors—"

"We had a fire!" I shouted back at him. "And we did, too, turn it off!"

"You did not!" bellowed the engineer. "De wheel was only turned oncet around—not even half off, you didn't turn it!"

"Let's see the fire," said the gangster. His mouth was a thin, hard line. I glared back at him. After all, he had no business coming into our office at this hour.

"It's up this way," said Birdie wearily. The engineer grabbed the flashlight out of her hand and turned it off. He and the elevator man followed her out of the reception room.

"You needn't come in," I told the gangster coldly.

He gave me a shove and came right along behind me, nearly treading on my bare heels. The engineer was turning on lights as he went.

We passed Marge, behind the closed door of the attorney's office; and nobody looked toward the closet where Rocky sat. I was too furious to be scared or nervous, until we came to my office. The thug turned in abruptly, heading for Jasper's sanctum.

"Here, you stay out of there!" I said indignantly. "That's a private office!"

His hand shot out and he clamped steel fingers around my wrist and dragged me in with him. He found the light switch and looked directly at the red leather davenport. Then his eyes narrowed and he looked all around the office, slowly.

Suddenly I was terrified. He knew! And how could he know unless he was the one . . . Those steel fingers were crushing my wrist. My hand was swelling, getting numb . . .

"Let me go!" I choked. I beat at him with my free hand, trying to twist away as he dragged me closer. I cracked my foot against a carved table and went down on one knee, gasping and sobbing with pain and terror. I tried to scream and couldn't. I couldn't get my breath or stop those tearing sobs. An arm was clamped around me, lifting me up. So he could smash my head and choke the life out . . .

"Shut up!" he said, and slapped me. I gulped and tried to slap him back.

"Behave yourself!" He gave me a shake and let me go. I staggered and sat down.

He looked down at me with a nasty gleam in his eyes. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," he snapped. "You're still drunk. What have you done with your shoes and stockings?"

"You get out of here!" I gasped. "You—you dogface!"

"I haven't got time to scrap with you. Get up!"

"I can't get up—you gangster—you broke my foot! Leave me alone!" I yelled as he reached for me.

He picked me up like a sack of potatoes and walked toward the davenport. "No-o!" I squealed. "Not there!"

He gripped me tighter, his face close to mine, and probed at me with those hard eyes.

CHAPTER VI

I TRIED to look away and couldn't. I shut my eyes. Suddenly I was limp with exhaustion. My head ached and both feet hurt, and I was sick to death of everything.

"Please," I said feebly. "Just go away."

He dumped me into a chair and brought a wet towel from Jasper's lavatory. First he swabbed at the toes Birdie had mangled. Then he picked up my other foot and pinched it and poked at it until I wailed out loud.

"Shut up. It's not broken. Only bruised a little." He wound the towel around it and stood there wiping his hands on a blue bordered handkerchief.

"Now go away," I said. "This is a private mu-matter. It's none of your business."

"I'm afraid I'll have to make it my business." He pulled a leather folder out of his breast pocket and flipped it open. His name was Simon Corse, and he was a city detective, first grade, out of—I forget what station it was.

Now I was really ill! A police detective, and he'd been around since early in the evening. And he knew . . . well, no matter what he knew, it was too much.

"This your purse?" he asked, and

pulled Marge's black patent leather bag off my shoulder.

I nodded dumbly. I'd forgotten all about it.

"Got any aspirin in here?"

"Yes — no! I don't know —" I snatched it out of his hands.. "You go get your own aspirin."

"You're the one that needs it. But suit yourself. If you enjoy a hangover, go to it."

He opened the door and I got up and started to hobble after him.

"Sit down!" he barked. I sat down, because my feet hurt. "And don't you move out of that chair until I come back."

The door followed after him with a hiss, but he was back almost immediately, shoving Birdie before him. She stumbled over the galoshes and looked around at him furtively under the battered hat.

"Dese goddam crazy women!" the engineer ws bawling. "You should put dem in chail for fife years—"

"Ten years!" shouted the elevator man.

"Anyhow twenty years," the engineer raised him. "Chust for de damage alone—" They went away sounding likely a lively auction.

Mr. Corse looked as if he had the electric chair in mind. "Which one of these phones is connected?" He'd even noticed the switchboard with one line up.

Birdie poked a finger toward my desk. "Th-that one." The door closed on Mr. Corse and she looked at it with a sick expression.

"Birdie," I whispered shakily. "He's a policeman."

"Yeah. That's about what I figured."

"He's awfully tough."

"Wouldn't you know?" Birdie slapped at her thighs nervously. Then she leaned toward the door to listen.

"I mean we'll never be able to get around him. I think he's allergic to women. We'll have to do something drastic."

BIRDIE straightened up and yanked at her hat. "It won't do any good to bump him off. He's already phoning the station for reinforcements."

"For Heaven's sake! Be serious. We're in an awful jam!"

"I was never more serious in my life," said Birdie mournfully. "The seriouser I get, the funnier I get. It's a curse. Our whole family was that way."

"Well, try to be sensible, at least," I said crossly. "We've got to make a good impression on the police department."

"Oh, yeah. Sure. That's easy! With bodies hidden all over the place—"

"There's only two."

"How do you know there's only two? That's all we found, but for all we know, the whole office force may be lying around here strangled."

"Think, Birdie! We've got to think. We've got to find the murderer before they find Marge and Rocky. There must be some clue—some—" I looked at the purse in my lap. "The keys! Marge must have those duplicate keys in her purse. That will be something—something to start on . . ."

There were no keys in the purse. None at all. I searched through each neat compartment, and the subtle fragrance of Marge's favorite Chanel clung to my fingers and stole up my nostrils like a vague torment. Her red enamel compact slid out and rolled across the floor, disappearing under the davenport. I went after it and had to lie flat on my stomach to get it.

"Birdie! Her hat—Marge's hat is under here. We've got to get rid of it.

Throw it out the window . . ." I was half under the davenport reaching for it when Birdie started coughing. She made dreadful rending noises that would have terrified the most hardened attendant in a tubercular ward.

"For goodness sake!" I grumbled, sliding out backwards. "Stop that noise. Do you want him to come bouncing in here and catch me—" I turned around on one elbow with the hat in my hand, and Mr. Corse was standing there, looking interested.

CHAPTER VII

"**F**IND something?" he inquired sarcastically.

"Just my—my hat," I said limply, trying to pull the smock over my knees.

He reached down and took the thing and held it up on the tips of his fingers. It was really only half a hat. Bright orange feathers and black yarn, to be worn over one eyebrow, with a few strands of yarn in back to hold it on.

"Nice!" he said, twirling it around. "And whose hat is that green thing on the hatrack beside your desk?"

"Oh, that. It's an old one. I've been intending to throw it out for ages, haven't I, Birdie?"

"Uh-huh," said Birdie without conviction.

He stopped twirling the hat with a snap. "Can you type?" he asked Birdie.

"Why—uh—"

"Yes or no!"

"Y-yes."

"I want you to go outside and start typing so I can hear you."

"Typing what?"

"Anything. I don't care. Just so I can hear the typewriter. I want to talk to this—monkey, but I want to know where you are at the same time. Now get going."

"She's got—her typewriter is a noiseless. You couldn't hear it," said Birdie. "And anyway, I don't know how to run it. I'd have to go over in the stenographic department—"

"Oh, no you don't!" He yanked a pair of handcuffs out of his back pocket.

"No, wait!" Birdie squeaked. "You can hear me from the stenographic department. Honest. Just leave the door open a little ways. Wait, I'll show you—"

In half a second, a loud clatter came from the stenographic department, and I sat up in rapt attention. Only one typewriter in the place made such a racket. The Automatic. When it was turned on, it typed like fury, all by itself. It used perforated rolls, exactly like a player piano, except that it turned out perfect typescript instead of music.

"Can you hear it?" Birdie yelled anxiously.

"Yes, okay. Just keep it up," Mr. Corse called back.

Birdie was up to something, I knew. My part would be to hold this gorilla for as long as it would take her to accomplish it.

"Close your mouth, and get up off the floor," he said. "You look like an idiot."

I started to cry. Softly. "You'd look like an idiot, too," I sniffed, "if you'd been through what I have. I never 've been slapped and kicked around like this before, and had to put out fires and wrestle with a great big fire hose, and ruin all my clothes without any dinner. I ca-can't stand any more. I'm so cold and tired and hungry, I don't know what I'm doing, and you treat me like a tramp or something. You do-don't even take off your hat when you hit me!" I sobbed convulsively.

He shoved his hands under my arms,

lifted me like a wet puppy, and jammed me into a chair.

"Shut up!" he said, and slapped me. I punched him in the stomach.

"You big baboon!" I yelled at him.

"That's what I thought," he said. "You nasty little fraud. Now you listen to me! I haven't even started on you yet. But I will, just as soon as the men get here with the warrant. We'll go through this place like a vacuum cleaner. And you can make it just as tough for yourself as you want to. If you want to start telling the truth now, okay. If not, you can spend the night in a perfumed cell—the perfume is fatal for vermin, but you may get used to it by morning." He walked over to the davenport and started pulling the cushions off.

"It's not my hat!" I said frantically, but he went on dragging off the cushions.

"I'm glad to hear it," he said. "It's got a lot of blood on it." The last cushion had blood on it, too, when he turned it over.

HE LEFT the cushions on the floor and prowled around the office, looking. "Keep talking," he said.

"I—what do you want me to talk about?"

"Not the weather." He kicked at Jasper's tall chair.

"I wish Mr. Clay could walk in here and see the way you're treating his office!"

"So do I. Why can't he?"

"He's in St. Louis."

"What makes you think so?"

"I know so. I made all the reservations."

"Too bad he missed his train, wasn't it?" He looked like an evil Genie, standing over the desk lamp. I could hear the typewriter chattering away. Then somebody started shooting.

I never saw anything move so fast in my life. Except possibly lightning. He went through the door like a bolt, with a gun in his hand—a big one. I hobbled after him.

I thought he'd broken Birdie's neck. Her head was hanging out of one tightly clamped arm, and with the other he was forcing her hand back and up until the flat little automatic came away in his hand. They were standing in the water in front of Cop Price's office.

He pushed Birdie out of the way, opened the door, and said, "All right. Come out of there, you!"

Cope Price crawled out from under his desk.

"Don't shoot—don't shoot!" he stammered. "I was just—just checking up. Your man made a mis-mistake—"

"Checking up what?"

"My things. My stuff. This is my—I live here. I mean I work here. I heard about the fire. I was downstairs having a late dinner—"

"How could you check up with the lights off?"

"They're not off. That is, your man stuck the gun in and shot the lights off—out. I was—" He emerged, mopping his face, and caught sight of Birdie.

"You!" he squawked. "How dare you shoot me! Manslaughter—Assault with a deadly weapon! Get the police! I demand—"

"You oughta be shot!" Birdie yelled. "The way you sneaked in here, I thought you were the mur-mailman!"

I screamed and flung myself at Mr. Corse to cover up Birdie's near slip. "Stop it!" he shouted. "Stop!"

I kept on screaming. The other two were howling and shrieking at each other. We were all yelling. My phone started ringing. We all stopped and stared at it through the glass partition. Mr. Corse tried to move, but I was still

clutching him. He slapped me—not on the face, and I let go. He herded us into my office and grabbed the phone.

"Yes," he said. "Yes. Yes." He was sitting sideways at my desk and I slipped around behind him to peek into the top drawer. I wanted to see if the appraisal was still there. Cop Price came around the other side and started groping underneath, where I hang my clothes brush. Birdie draped herself over the middle of the desk and tried to examine her bruised neck in the glass top.

"Where?" Mr. Corse snapped. "How long ago? . . . Wait a minute!"

HE JABBED me with an elbow, nudged Cop Price with a knee, and stiff-armed Birdie off the top of the desk. "If you'll all sit down and stop bothering me," he said savagely, "I'll let you play house in this desk when I get through."

"Certainly I'm having trouble!" he said into the phone. "I've got three half-wits up here, and they're all trying to sit in my lap . . . Well, get 'em over here. I don't care how important Brakethorn is! It shouldn't take this long to get a warrant, even for the U. S. Treasury. You better have homicide stand by, too. If I don't find a corpse, I'll make one!"

He put the phone down gently but firmly, and looked at Birdie. The typewriter was still clattering. He jerked his head toward the sound. "You can shut it off, now," he murmured coldly. "And no tricks. I can watch you from here."

"Yessir," Birdie said.

When she came back he was clipping questions at Cop Price. The Cop was clawing at his tie and waving it nervously, while he insisted he had been downstairs in the bar and restaurant all evening.

"Why didn't you use your head, and shut the damn thing off?" Birdie mumbled at me.

I shrugged my shoulder apologetically. "What'd you do?"

"Fixed everything. Don't look now but Rocky's blacked out. And Marge's locked in. I snapped the locks on a whole lot of private offices. Just to confuse 'em. Nobody's allowed to lock their doors, so there's no keys for 'em, so—"

"Stop that whispering, and sit down!" said Mr. Corse. "You there—and you there." We sat in opposite corners of my office and folded our hands smugly. "And don't think you're getting away with anything." He slapped the automatic down on my desk. "This is enough to hold you both on a serious charge until I find out what's been going on around here."

"I'll prefer the charges," said Cop Price quickly. "I'll telephone my lawyer right now—"

Mr. Corse moved the phone away. "You don't need a lawyer—yet."

"We can explain about the gun," I said, for Birdie's benefit. I thought it would be smart if we both told the truth about that. It had nothing to do with the murders.

Birdie thought so, too. "Sure," she said. "We took it away from a lady tonight, because she's—nervous."

"What lady?"

"You wouldn't know her," I said evasively. "She lives on the South Side."

"You mean Mrs. Rocklynn?" he snapped back at me. "When did you take the gun?"

"Right after she came back from the telephone, and said she was going to the telephone."

"What time was it?" he shouted. "And where?" He looked at Cop Price. "I don't see how you fellows ever get

any work done up here.”

“You haven’t seen anything yet,” said Cop Price modestly. For once, he was terribly right.

“You lousy Cop!” said Birdie through her teeth.

“Stop that!” barked Mr. Corse. “Calling me names isn’t going to help your situation any.”

“I’m not talking to you! I mean the Cop. Him.”

Mr. Corse gripped the desk with both hands and took a deep breath. “Suppose you let me do the talking for a change,” he said rather tensely. We all sat back and looked interested.

“Mrs. Rocklynn visited an apartment on North Dearborn tonight,” he said, “while the owner was absent. She had a key. She entered and proceeded to ransack the place. She is either unable or unwilling to say exactly what she was searching for. In the course of our questioning, she informed us that the owner of the apartment was dead. That the body was either some place in Evanston, or in a certain private office in this suite.”

“But she couldn’t—” I blurted. “I mean, how could she—”

Birdie rushed to the rescue. “Cissy means that Mrs. Rocklynn got here after the doors were locked at five-fifteen, so she couldn’t get in. We met her downstairs around five-thirty and she was with us until nearly eight-thirty when she left the building.”

“She wasn’t with you when I met her,” said Cop Price maliciously. “She had left your table and was coming from the elevators. I asked her if she had been up to the office and she said she had.”

Birdie and I gaped at each other.

“She claims she saw the dead person,” said Mr. Corse, “lying on the davenport in Jasper Clay’s office. That’s when she took the keys.”

He waited a moment and nobody said anything. “It’s a strange thing,” he went on, “that I keep talking about a corpse, and not one of you has shown the slightest curiosity about the identity of the dead person. Of course, if you know all about a certain fact, you are no longer curious. The body was that of Marge Miller, a fellow employee of yours, according to Mrs. Rocklynn.”

“Why don’t you arrest *her*?” I said angrily. “Instead of—”

“I did.”

“Then what do you want from us?” demanded Cop Price belligerently.

“The corpse,” said Mr. Corse, and went to admit a large and industrious section of the Chicago Metropolitan Police.

CHAPTER VIII

WE WERE shunted out to the reception room with a guard, complete with uniform and gun. In passing, I stole a glance across the darkened clerical department to the closet where Rocky was sitting. Birdie had indeed blacked him out, closet and all.

She had managed to hang a huge linen roll map on the picture hook from which old Cyrus Brakethorn was suspended. Then she simply pulled the map down like a curtain and anchored it with thumb tacks, completely covering both the wardrobe and lavatory doors and part of the adjacent wall of the photostat room.

Which would have been fine, except that the situation had suddenly altered. The murderer was already in the hands of the police, and all Birdie and I had done was involve ourselves thoroughly—and needlessly. A consultation at this point was imperative, and quite impossible.

Mrs. Rocklynn was brought in, and after a brief session in Jasper Clay’s

office, she joined us in the reception room. Cop Price eyed her slyly and Birdie and I tried to ignore her. That was a mistake, because she simply took the conversation into her own hands and started in where she had left off the last time we had seen her.

"I warned you to expect this," she said, and the uniformed policeman pricked up his ears. "I told you I might be prosecuted. I can't understand why you thought it was necessary to move her to Evanston, but since we're all in this together—"

"We're in it," Birdie said firmly. "But not together. So just lay off the conversation. The less we hear from you, the better off we'll all be."

"Well!" said Mrs. Rocklynn. "I don't see what you have to get huffy about. After all, you had more to do with it than I did. I merely walked in because I found the doors unlocked the second time I came up here. I couldn't help seeing—what I saw."

"So you were all in it together," said Cop Price distinctly. "And you tried to kill me because I was a witness to your activities and conversation down in the bar—"

Birdie threw an ash tray at him, and followed it up with the current financial magazines from a nearby table. Cop Price was ducking and squawking for protection, the policeman was bellowing, and Mrs. Rocklynn was shrieking enthusiastically. I sat perfectly still with my feet tucked under me, but when Mr. Corse arrived angrily, he looked straight at me and crooked his finger. "Come in here!" he snapped.

"I didn't do anything!" I said indignantly.

The burly uniform put a paw under my arm and hoisted me off the settee. "Get along," he said patiently.

I was shoved rudely into Cop Price's office, and Mr. Corse closed the door.

He looked like a stern and bitter parent.

"I'm all through fooling with you now," he said harshly. "And I want the truth." He pulled my green envelope purse out of one pocket and my white satin slip out of the other. "You had the Miller girl's purse and hat. Where is she?"

I just stared at him, stonily. Hating him.

"For the last time," he said, "talk to me, or take the consequences. The evidence against you is bad—all of it. But if you can explain it—if you'll cooperate with me—"

"I wouldn't even tell you the right time!" I said furiously. "You'd make something nasty out of it. You've done nothing but insult me and antagonize me from the minute you crashed into Mr. Clay's office this afternoon—"

"Now you're exaggerating. I didn't 'crash' in, and I waited very politely until you had finished embracing the chair—sit down! I don't imagine for a moment that you have a passion for chairs. I don't know just what your relationship is with the owner of that chair; but I do know it's something very personal as far as you're concerned. I think you'd go to extreme lengths to protect him. So the more you try to trick me and evade me, the more you implicate your—precious Mr. Clay."

"He's in St. Louis," I said weakly.

"Do you really believe that?"

"Yes, I do. He has to be there tomorrow morning for an important business transaction. He has to be."

MR. CORSE shoved his coat back and put his hands in his hip pockets. "I wish I knew how you look when you're telling the truth," he said softly. "If you're so sure he's in St. Louis, and nowhere near Chicago, what possible objection can you have to tell-

ing me what happened to Marge Miller?" He spread my slip out on the desk with the rusty blood spots on the bodice. "Unless you're the guilty one yourself."

"I won't—I don't trust you," I said.

"The feeling is mutual," he snapped. "Let's take it from there. Downstairs in the bar, Mrs. Rocklynn said 'Tonight will end it. Mr. Clay is co-operating with me.' How could he co-operate with her if he's in St. Louis?"

"She doesn't know what she's talking about half the time! She—So you *were* spying on me?"

"On you, and anyone else who seemed likely to lead me to Jasper Clay. That's why I followed Mrs. Rocklynn to the Miller girl's apartment. I thought she might be meeting him."

"That's ridiculous! Jasper Clay is far too busy with important matters to take an active interest in her domestic troubles. She probably complained to him, and he promised to speak to Rocky and Marge. I think he did speak to them, just a day or two ago. That's all she could have meant by his co-operation."

"I caught her turning the Miller girl's apartment inside out. She claims she didn't know what she was looking for, but only wanted to remove anything that might incriminate her husband. But she, or somebody else, went through the Miller girl's desk and Rocklynn's office. The fact that you started a fire up here—"

"All right, we did—Birdie and I did go through those desks. But somebody else had been through them before us. They were all messed up."

"What were you burning?"

"Just—evidence."

"Of what?" he said with deceptive softness, then he shouted, "Evidence of what?"

"Don't yell at me," I said coldly.

"Anyway the evidence isn't important any more. It was just personal things. Letters and telephone numbers, and little personal things."

"In other words, anything that might give us a helpful clue," he said bitterly. "So that was the reason you had to get back upstairs to the office. You'd planned to destroy evidence, so you must have known all along—you must have known in advance that the Miller girl was going to be killed—"

"We did not! I planned to come back to the office to find a copy of an appraisal that was missing from the portfolio Mr. Clay took to St. Louis. It had been taken out of his brief case. Marge must have taken it, because after I found it Birdie told me how Marge had got hold of duplicate keys for the brief case. We found the appraisal hidden under Rocky's seat cushion. She was—Marge was fond of Rocky, that's why Mrs. Rocklynn k—I mean, came here tonight. Birdie and I knew she was here to make trouble, so we decided to destroy the evidence of their—their friendship before she got her hands on it. We were only trying to—to help, we didn't know they were both . . ."

I stopped floundering and clenched my hands, waiting for his next blast. It didn't come.

AFTER a while he said quietly, "You're very badly tangled up, aren't you, Cissy? Why don't you begin at the beginning and tell me the straight story all the way through? I'll have to know it sooner or later anyway, but if you tell me about it now, you may save yourself a lot of grief."

"You only want me to talk so you can put me in jail," I said raggedly. "You—you'd hang me on the slightest excuse—"

"No, I won't. They don't hang peo-

ple in the State of Illinois. Anyway I don't think you killed anybody. But I do think you're a stubborn, stupid little fool who's got herself all tied up in a murder rap because of a misplaced affection for a rotten heel—"

"You—you moron!" I choked. "How dare you speak like that about a man like Jasper Clay? You're given a little authority and think you can thumb your nose at your betters! You're nothing but a—a trained ape!"

"Thank you. That's better," he said. "You were looking a little green around the edges. It would be inconvenient if you passed out on me right now." He sat on the edge of the desk. "If I felt about anybody the way you do about this paragon of yours, I'd be so sure the truth couldn't hurt him, that I'd want to shout it out loud. I'd make people listen to it, to justify my own faith—Come in!" he answered the knuckles on the door.

A policeman stood there with a pair of scuffed white pumps in his hand. "Here's all the shoes we could find," he said. "And you'll have to come out and talk to these guys, they're bein'—difficult."

Mr. Corse handed me the pumps. "What guys?"

"Some of the big shots of this outfit. We couldn't keep 'em out, an' they're raisin' hell about us bustin' in here. One of 'em is tryin' to get the Commissioner—"

"That suits me fine!" said Mr. Corse grimly. "Maybe I'll get some authority to back me up." He motioned me through the door.

"Oh, please!" I said. "Let me stay here. I don't want the officers of the company to see me like this. I'd rather die!"

"You got a man watching the hall?" Mr. Corse asked the policeman.

"Oh, sure. Stankowitz is out there."

"All right," Mr. Corse told me. "I think it's a good idea to keep you isolated back here where you can't possibly do any more damage. But don't go wandering into the hall. You're liable to get a bullet in your—hip."

CHAPTER IX

THE white pumps were two sizes too big, but it was just as well, because my feet were swollen and bruised—and very dirty.

I opened my green purse and tried to repair the ravages of a hectic evening, but it was hopeless. All I could see in the tiny mirror was one eye, but that was enough to tell me that I would need far more extensive facilities, if I wanted to do anything about my appearance. I thought longingly of the spacious Rest Rooms on the thirteenth floor, with their well lighted wall mirrors, and soap and towels. It won't hurt to try, I thought . . .

There was nobody outside Cop Price's office. They were evidently all up at the other end of the suite, listening to a lecture by one of the vice presidents of Brakethorn. I opened the hall door cautiously and set the lock so I could slip back in. The policeman in the hall—Stankowitz—was pacing toward the main entrance with his back to me. In a second I was across the hall and through the door to the stairs.

The thirteenth floor was silent and deserted. The only section of the Rest Rooms with windows was the retiring room, where comfortable chaise lounges and pillows and blankets were supplied for weary or ailing female help. This was locked at night when the matron went home, so the inner rooms were as remote and still as a hidden cavern.

My bathing and repairing operations were quick, but thorough. The improvement was gratifying. I took a

last turn before a full length mirror, adjusted the hem of the gaudy red smock, and picked up my purse.

The door to the sick room opened slowly, and Jasper Clay stood there, tall and blond and immaculate. But his face was pale.

"Why, Jasp—Why, Mr. Clay!" I said.

"Thank God, it's you, Cissy!" his voice was low and tense. "You're alone?"

"Y-yes."

"Come in here, and tell me what in hell's name is going on upstairs."

I followed him into the dim room. Outside the windows there was a graveled roof, enclosed on three sides by the upper stories of the building. A lighted office across this inner court gave a faint reflection that outlined the dim shapes of chairs and lounges. We stood close and I felt again the heady thrill of his magnetism, heightened by the strangeness and danger. He spoke quickly and softly.

"Cissy, this is a very bad business, all of it."

"I know it," I gasped excitedly. "You mustn't stay here—the police, they're looking for you. I thought . . . I told them you were in St. Louis. Oh, Jasper! You've got to go there! You shouldn't have come back. It's Marge and Rocky. They—they're dead!"

"I know. I know," he said softly. "I came back to the office for that cursed appraisal. I had an idea where it might have gone. I thought I could take a later train—but instead—" He held my hand tightly. I could see his big jade signet ring glinting in the light. The "J.C." in raised gold letters was square and solid and bright. Like himself.

"I haven't time to tell you much now, Cissy, except that I can't afford to get mixed up in this thing. I think I'm

fairly safe down here. I'm using the office of my friend, Wulf, the attorney. It's right next door. I came in here by the roof, hoping it would be you. I want you to do something for me, if you will."

"Yes, yes!" I breathed. "You know I will."

"It's that damned appraisal. I've got to get it. Some fool turned the fire hose on the stairs and trapped me down here until it was too late to go back and look for it—"

"I found it!" I gasped. "I've got it!"

"You darling!" He kissed me, swift and hard. His arms were tight around me. "You must manage to bring it down to me, if you can. If that's impossible—or dangerous—destroy it. This is terribly important to me, Cissy. You understand that loan isn't closed yet?"

"Yes, of course," I answered happily. "I'll get it. Only, do be careful, Jasper. Please!"

"I will. I am. Now tell me quickly just what happened."

I TOLD him. Everything. As always with him, my brain became quick and electric, stimulated by his powerful personality. He was more astonished at the fact that Mr. Corse had started looking for him at five o'clock than at any other detail, except perhaps that Mrs. Rocklynn had been caught, and admitted she had been in the office.

"What a fool the woman is," he said. "A menace to herself and everybody else!"

I skipped lightly over the fire and flood. I thought I could explain my part in that much more satisfactorily afterwards.

He kissed me again, and there was such tenderness in his lips and hands, that I wanted to bury myself against his shoulder and stay there.

"You poor darling," he murmured. "I'm a beast to ask you to do anything more, but you're the only one I can trust. I'd be lost without you. Be as pleasant as you can to the police, but don't tell them anything. I doubt if they can prove anything, and no matter what that fool Rocklynn woman says, I think it can be established that she is not responsible, so her statements won't amount to a damn. She'll probably get off with a plea of insanity, and that will be the end of the whole wretched business. And you and I—"

His lips brushed my forehead like a promise. "Go now, sweet. And hurry back," he whispered.

I went on winged heels. Up the stairs, and across the hall behind Officer Stankowitz's back. The hall door opened noiselessly and I slid through and met Mr. Corse, looking like a cataclysm going somewhere to happen.

He nearly broke my arm, and yanked so hard my nose bumped his vest. "You little devil! Where've you been?"

"Please don't hurt me any more," I said pathetically. "Can't you see, I've been downstairs to the Ladies' Room to clean up? And I—I came right straight back."

"That's the point that bothers me," he said nastily. "And you look like you did more than clean up. You look like you just had a shot of something. What do you keep down there, emergency supplies?"

"Let's not be unpleasant about this," I said sweetly. "I really feel much better and I've had a chance to think. I think maybe I could help you—"

"God forbid!" he said fervently. "I've had about all the help from you I can stand. Why didn't you tell me you got blood spots on your clothes off that golf club, instead of wiping it off and hiding it behind the radiator?"

"Oh. I suppose Birdie explained

about that. I—hadn't had a chance to tell you about it yet."

"What do you think I've been begging you to talk about—the price of eggs in China? This sudden offer to be helpful is a little overdue. In fact it smells—"

"Don't be Corse, Mr. Cross—I mean cross. Mr. Corse—I really did have a splendid idea. We can sit in my office, and you can take statements from everybody, and I'll type them for you, and I'll be right there where you can watch me, and that way everything will be much more systematic, and—"

"Wait a minute," he said in a brittle voice. "This is much too good to be true. It's positively intelligent. Now I know you had a shot of something." His jaw tightened in an ugly clench. "I'm going to play along with you, baby. I was right the first time. I never should have taken my eye off you."

CHAPTER X

I SAT at my desk and opened drawers carelessly, and got a nasty shock. The appraisal was gone. Mr. Corse was watching me and I tried to wipe the sick desperation off my face, but I didn't succeed too well.

"What's the matter, can't you find what you want?" he snapped.

"Oh, yes. I have plenty of paper," I said inanely. "I was just wondering how many copies you'd need. My best carbon is locked in the vault, and I can't work the combination."

"I can," he said. "That's the first place I looked for the missing Miss Miller. By the way, you haven't decided to tell me which one of those private offices she's resting in, have you? It would save an awful lot of time. Those stuffed shirts you call vice presidents insist that we employ a locksmith

instead of kicking the doors down. At the rate he's going he should have them all open by noon tomorrow."

"Mr. Corse, if there were a body, and I knew where it was," I said. "Wouldn't I be foolish to incriminate myself by leading you to it?"

"In other words, you admit that you know, but you won't talk."

"I admit nothing. And you can't prove anything, either."

"Whoever told you that," he said grimly, "is a liar. I've got plenty of proof, whether I find Miss Miller's body up here or not."

"Proof of what?"

"Willful murder," he said, and motioned Cop Price to a chair as a uniformed policeman brought him in.

"Listen," the policeman said hoarsely. "Them other two dames heard about this one, an' now they're wantin' to go down to the john. What am I supposed to—"

"Take them down, inspect the place to make sure there's no other exit, and look around for a telephone. I think this one talked to somebody while she was down there. Then wait outside the door. If they take too long, go in after them."

"Holy Mother!" the red faced policeman muttered. "After fifteen years, I wind up bein' a matron . . ."

He plodded away unhappily, but he was back again in what seemed like a very short time. Meanwhile Mr. Corse addressed Cop Price with a formal request for a statement and I opened my desk and pulled my typewriter up. There was a note wrapped around the platen. I read it at a glance and slipped it hastily under the felt pad that cushioned the typewriter.

The note said, "Sorry I busted your ribbon. Was in a tearing hurry. J.C. wanted an agreement typed in haste. Marge."

I heard the voices of Mr. Corse and Cop Price raised in argument. Their words didn't mean anything. Jasper had said he didn't have time to tell me much. Actually, he hadn't told me anything, except that he had been in the office after it was closed. So he could have seen Marge while she was still alive. And afterwards, he could have left the office—with the agreement. To get it signed, of course. Or maybe he went down to Attorney Wulf's office to get it notarized. Both our company attorneys would have left. And while he was gone . . .

THE unhappy policeman was back. He wobbled a little and he had Birdie slung over his shoulder wrong side to, and limp as a sack.

"Listen," he said hoarsely. "I never had a chance. I'm lookin' for the telephone an' somebody sapped me from behind. When I come outa the john, this one's layin' in the hall—"

"Wheres' the other one?" barked Mr. Corse.

"Gone. Vamoosed. Whadda ya think?"

"You mean she hit you?"

"She musta. Who else? I told you, I never had a—"

Mr. Corse shouted and got action. Men were dispatched to cover the exits of the building. Somebody phoned the station for reserves to comb the building. And Birdie was laid out on Jasper's red leather davenport. Mr. Corse pulled the battered felt hat off, parted her tangled hair and located a swelling lump at the crown of her head. She was not dead. The hat and the wad of hair had saved her. One of the policemen was giving her expert first aid.

I didn't know I was crying until my nose got out of control. I tried to use the hem of the smock, and somebody pushed a blue bordered handkerchief

at me.

"Maybe this will convince you," Mr. Corse said coldly, "where your loyalty really belongs."

"I do-don't know what you mean," I mumbled.

His eyes drilled at me with a searching glance. Then he jerked his hat down and his mouth settled into the hard, contemptuous lines that had made it so ugly the first time I saw him, standing in the doorway to Jasper's office. "Then I guess you never will," he said, and went back to my office.

I started to follow him. I wanted to ask him what he meant. I wanted something else, too. I didn't know just what it was, except that I was suddenly frightened and confused. And he seemed so sure of everything. Even when he was snapping and snarling.

He was on the phone. "I want a warrant for Cicely Dane," he said harshly. "The secretary, yes. She and the Rocklynn woman were both in it apparently. At least to the extent of covering up for him. Mrs. Rocklynn saw a good deal more than she told us about when she visited this office . . . She hasn't escaped! She can't. She's in the building. We'll find her—"

Ghostly war whoops interrupted him. He slammed down the phone and raced toward the stairs. I ran after him.

A cleaning woman was standing in front of the janitor's closet on the half-way landing, flapping her arms and uttering noises that sounded like foreign swear words.

Stankowitz, the hall guard, got there first. He dived into the closet and didn't come out. Mr. Corse stopped at the door and I peeked around from behind him.

Mrs. Rocklynn was sitting in the janitor's deep sink. Her thin legs dangled over one end and her head lolled at the other. Her lumpy black hat was

perched over one eye. She had been strangled with a cleaning rag. Her eyes bulged and her face was turning black.

Stankowitz turned around and made a flat, final gesture with his hand.

"All right," said Mr. Corse angrily. "Leave her there." He jerked savagely at his coat. I had one corner of it, twisting it around and around like I was wringing out a hard day's washing. He gripped my arm and dragged me back upstairs.

"C-can't you get her out of there?" I panted.

HE PAID no attention to me. Which was just as well. If anybody had told me then they were leaving her there so they could take her picture, I'd have been thoroughly sick.

Mr. Corse was on the phone again, and this time he got homicide, but he didn't seem to very happy about it. His face was grim and tired, and he looked everywhere but at me. And now when I wanted to talk to him, he wouldn't let me.

The door to Jasper's office was open and I could hear Birdie mumbling. "Who pushed me?" she demanded fuzzily.

"Don't you know?" the policeman asked her.

"Huh-uh. Musta been that last drink I had . . . never take 'nother drink if you can't stand up afterwards . . . but how you gonna find out if you don't take 'nother drink . . ."

"Mr. Corse," I said. "Mr. Corse—" He had his elbows on my desk. His hat was pushed back and he was punishing his face with a gouging massage as if he meant to wipe all his features off. I moved closer and put my hand on his arm. "Simon," I said.

He flung me back against the wall with a savage thrust, his eyes burning at me. "Stop that! You vicious little

cat!"

"Why do you blame me for everything!" I gasped. "You know I had nothing to do with—with what happened to that woman!"

"No? Then maybe you can explain this. How does it happen that you can go downstairs alone in perfect safety? Everybody else that went down there was hit on the head. And one of them—an important witness—"

"You—you think I'm helping a murderer?"

"I have thought so from the very beginning. Now I know it! You're lower than the cheapest gun moll that ever got picked up. At least they're honest about it. But you—"

Something tightened inside me and my spine stiffened, and I forgot all my confusion. He was wrong about me. He had been wrong from the very beginning. So he was wrong about all the rest of it, too.

And I could prove it. If I could just get back to Jasper Clay and explain everything to him, and make him see the importance of confronting this perverse individual with the truth. It was the only possible way to clear everything up as far as Jasper and I were concerned, and set the police on the track of the real murderer. It could be anybody. Any of the thousands of people who had access to the building. And Jasper was in danger down there. I had to get to him!

CHAPTER XI

TWO policemen came in to report there was no sign of anybody anywhere on the thirteenth floor. Not even traceable footprints from the still dripping stairs.

"The guy must be invisible," said one.

"Naturally!" Mr. Corse snapped.

"With the night man's keys he has access to every office and cubby hole in the building. Never mind leaving a guard down there. If he wants to move around—let him!"

"Oh, no!" I prayed silently. "Don't let him find Jasper!" But Jasper was smarter than any murderer. Smarter than all these policemen. If I could just get him up here . . .

The homicide squad arrived and went to work in a businesslike fashion. A grizzled man, whom everybody addressed as "Captain," penned the jittery vice presidents and other executives in the Director's room. Cop Price sat like a wan and lonely culprit in the reception room. And I sat on the red leather davenport and held Birdie's hand.

Her policeman nurse pawed through Jasper's cabinet and came out with a box of bicarbonate. "You got a spoon?" he inquired.

"Yes. Yes I have," I said. "In my desk." And I went to get it, wondering if he wanted the bicarbonate for himself or for Birdie.

A gray manuscript folder was lying in the exact center of my desk. It was the twice lost appraisal! I slipped it inside the loosely bloused smock, and made my way unobserved to the hall door opposite the stairs.

There was nobody in the hall. The homicide men had finished their work on the stairs. My luck couldn't have been better if I'd schemed for hours. Except—there was a murderer. Some place. But surely, he wouldn't be prowling around now, with all these policemen in the building.

Still, my legs felt stiff going past the janitor's closet, and I pushed open the door to the Rest Rooms and listened cautiously, holding my breath. Then I scooted across to the closed door of the retiring room and tapped softly. The

stillness was deafening. It seemed to destroy all sense of hearing in exactly the way a stunning sound would do. A horrid chill iced my nerves. What if Jasper had met the murderer, after all!

"Jasper!" I gasped. "Jasper!"

The door opened noiselessly and I was pulled inside. His arms were trembling. "Darling," he muttered. "I thought you were never coming. I've got to get out of here—"

"No! No, you can't," I said. "You've got to come upstairs and face them. Here. Here's the appraisal. You can destroy it, and then you have nothing to worry about. You can go up and tell them—tell them the truth—"

He opened the door of the Matron's office, swept me in, and turned on the light. He swore when he saw the pencil marks on his appraisal. Then he looked at me accusingly. His face was strained and white, with veins standing out on his temples and throbbing unsteadily.

"I don't know who marked it up," I cried. "But it doesn't matter now." I flung myself against him and clung desperately. "You've got to listen to me, Jasper! If you don't go up and face them all now, it may be too late. You've got to go! They think you—"

"Be quiet," he said tensely, and gripped my shoulders with hard hands. "You're upset. I can't go upstairs. But I can get away. Over the roof. I've got a ladder at the back there. It reaches across the alley to the next building—"

"No, no," I moaned. "It isn't safe. It's not only the police. There's a murderer here—in the building. He—he killed Mrs. Rocklynn. Oh, please, Jasper! Please come upstairs. Where it's safe. He's got keys that fit all the doors. He could even get in here. In here . . . But how did you get in . . ."

HIS arms were tight around me, his face pressing mine. "Be quiet," he

murmured against my ear. But there was something wrong. There was no leaping exhilaration. Only a dull, cold dread clamping down on my heart. And the steady purposefulness of his hands, untying his green scarf from around my waist. I wrenched my head back and looked at the cold, murderous blue eyes.

It all flashed through my mind with the speed of a dream just before you wake up. He was the man with the night superintendent's keys. He couldn't possibly have gotten into the Matron's locked office without them. He had murdered poor, trusting old Sam and taken his keys. He had been in the building ever since . . . murdering . . . and Simon Corse was right.

"Simon!" I screamed. "Si—" The green scarf was whipped around my throat. My breath stopped. I struggled. A horrid buzzing was growing in my ears, getting louder and louder. Red and green spots and that fiendish white face danced before my eyes. There was a loud explosion and everything went black. . . .

I was trying to breathe and I kept gagging on a jagged knife somebody had jammed down my throat. It kept sawing away with every breath. But I had to get my breath so I could yell. "Simon!" I croaked.

"Shut up!" he said, and I opened my eyes painfully. He was carrying me up the stairs, and he looked just as mean and hard as ever. But I didn't care. I was getting used to it. I shut my eyes and concentrated on the complicated business of breathing.

I was propped up on the settee in the reception room and a little man in his shirt sleeves oozed through the crowd and pulled at Mr. Corse's coat tails.

"Don't bother me now!" Mr. Corse snapped at him.

The little man peered reproachfully through pink glasses. "I thought you'd want to know," he said mildly. "It's

in there. The body. It's dead." He pointed toward the attorney's office.

"You should wait until now to find it," snarled Mr. Corse. "All right, Stankowitz! Get that homicide crew rounded up. You fellows, grab hold of this couch and move her inside where the other one is. Price! You're wanted in there, too. Get moving!"

It was strictly a police audience. Mr. Corse and his cohorts had plenty of authority now that the bodies had started turning up, and they used it. The vice presidents were kept shut up in the Board of Director's room where they couldn't confuse anything but each other. The grizzled Captain with the mild voice, and Simon Corse, crackling like a machine gun, conducted their inquiry in Jasper Clay's office.

Jasper Clay, himself, was missing. I didn't find out until afterwards that he spent the time on an operating table in County Hospital, having a bullet removed from his—well, it was right below his hip.

THE police doctor gave Birdie and me an evil concoction that was intended to counteract shock and quiet our nerves. I think we could have withstood the shock with far less anguish than the medicine caused. But the blankets he produced were gratefully received. We were both shivering with exhausted reaction, and the astute police department knew it. They were determined to rush their examination before we got our second wind.

Cop Price was a nervous wreck. He kept twitching at his tie and wiping his hand across his mouth. He didn't seem to know the right answer to anything. "This is all a terrible blow," he kept repeating. "I've been close to these people, worked with them day in and day out. I had no idea they were capable of—of slaughtering one another."

Birdie was afflicted with a thick tongue that caused her to mumble her words, and I couldn't speak above a whisper. We didn't seem to be getting anywhere.

"It's hard to believe," said the Captain, "that you young women had no knowledge of what was going on. If your presence here was accidental you should have been terrified. Instead of which, you carried on through one harrowing experience after another. Weren't you scared at all?"

"We thought we were among friends," I said.

"Friends! Are your friends in the habit of strangling people?"

"Well, no. But everything was so familiar, it just seemed like whoever it was had to be somebody we knew. And you're not exactly scared of people you know—even if they do go to extremes."

Mr. Corse turned to the Captain in exasperation. "At their best," he said acidly, "these people are hardly logical. I know that from experience. So it's a waste of time to expect anything coherent out of them now. Suppose I review the whole thing from the beginning and they can verify certain points as we come to them."

"Go ahead," said the Captain placidly. A policeman with a notebook poised his pencil hopefully.

CHAPTER XII

THE night superintendent of this building was killed shortly before five o'clock this evening," Mr. Corse said "His body was found at the bottom of the freight elevator shaft. His keys were missing. Bruises on his head and face might have been disregarded, as having been incurred in his fall, except for one thing. The murderer had inadvertently stamped his initials on the man's jaw. The letters 'J.C.' were per-

fectly clear. In a matter of moments the murderer had been identified as Jasper Clay, who wore a conspicuous jade signet ring with raised gold initials—

I wanted to scream at him, but I could only gasp hoarsely, "Why didn't you tell me! Why didn't you tell me!"

"Because I couldn't trust you," he said coldly. "I had every reason to believe you were prejudiced. And I was right." He flipped open the cover of the gray manuscript folder. "Clay ostensibly left for St. Louis to close an important loan," he went on. "Instead of getting on the train, he checked his bag and brief case at the station where they were later found by one of our men. Meanwhile Clay came back to the building. He wanted to get in without being seen, and he needed pass keys in order to have access to hiding places at any instant. He entered the building from the rear, waylaid the night superintendent, and induced him to take him up in the freight elevator without being observed. The night man was smaller and considerably older than Clay. It was no trouble to stun him and dump him down—"

"Don't!" I choked. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Shut up," said Mr. Corse absently. "The reason—the motive—was this." He tapped the appraisal. "It seems that Jasper Clay was a highly trusted man in this organization. When he turned in a confidential appraisal and recommendation for a real estate mortgage, it was accepted by the Board of Directors without question. But there was one person who did question, and who dared to make an issue of it.

"Marge Miller was evidently under heavy pressure because of her association with a married co-worker. The man's wife threatened to make trouble. I think Miss Miller got an ultimatum from Clay. Give up your job, or give

up Rocklynn. Isn't that right?" Mr. Corse asked me.

But it was Birdie who answered. "That's right," she mumbled. "Mr. Clay threatened to fire 'em both—with no recommendation. Marge tol' me. He couldn't risk any scandal. Him! Hah! I'll scan'lize him." She kicked out both feet. "Ow," she moaned and subsided.

"In trying to protect her job and her—other interests," Mr. Corse continued. "Miss Miller somehow got wise to the fact that Clay had padded and doctored his appraisal of the Riverman Building to give it a value far in excess of its actual worth. She managed to obtain duplicate keys to his brief case, took a copy of his appraisal, and then she—or somebody else—corrected his figures and details, to show the real condition of the building on which Brakethorn had just granted a loan of a million and a half. According to the pencilled figures, the present day worth of the building couldn't exceed eight hundred thousand. Miss Miller had found a very potent weapon to defend herself, provided it didn't backfire. Where did she get her information?"

"From him," said Cop Price weakly.

"Who?"

"Him, of course. That is, Rocklynn. He inspected the building. He inspected all the buildings. But the Chief—Mr. Clay usually destroyed the original inspection report and boosted the appraisal figures to make it look better. It always worked out all right. When the loan was granted, the building was improved, and the rents were increased, and the tenants got better, and so—so everything was all right. But he never jumped it this high before. It must be on account of the building shortage right now. One hundred per cent occupancy at sharply increased rentals would raise the value of the building."

"How much did you have to do with this boosting process?"

"Not—nothing. Nothing. I only found out about it a long while afterwards. After it had worked out all right and he turned the files over to me. I didn't see anything wrong about it. It just looked to me like he was very smart, and always guessed right."

"Where can we find this Rocklynn?"

"Why he's home," said Cop Price. "That is—isn't he?"

I LOOKED at Birdie, but she only gulped and closed her eyes.

"He isn't," said Mr. Corse. "We've had a pickup order out for him all night." He nodded at one of the plain-clothes men. "See if they've got anything on him yet."

"Don't bother," I whispered. "I mean, we forgot to tell you, but he's here."

"Where?"

"Under the Middlewest Territory. I mean, the Chicago office has the whole Middlewest. He's under that."

The Captain was eyeing me with patient speculation. Mr. Corse looked as if he had just chewed up a grasshopper by mistake.

"The map," Birdie mumbled mystically. "Look at the map."

Mr. Corse carefully deposited a handful of papers on the small carved table he was using. Then he stood up. "You see what I mean?" he said to the Captain.

He lifted his hand and I ducked, but he only took my arm and helped me to my feet. "Don't talk," he said grimly. "Just point."

We went outside, and I pointed at the map. In a little while they had uncovered the portrait of old Cyrus Brakethorn, and right after that they found Rocky.

"Hey, Si," one of the homicide men

complained. "If you're gonna give 'em to us wholesale, why not make it all in one delivery? This kind of thing could go on all night! Every time we get packed up, you uncover another one."

"What are you kicking about?" Mr. Corse retorted. "All you've got are nice quiet stiffs. You should have the live ones on your hands for about ten minutes!"

Going back through my office I stopped him and pulled Marge's note out from under my typewriter pad. The one that apologized in her breezy fashion for ripping my ribbon off the spool, and leaving several feet of it in a tangled wad. I explained in whispers that rasped my throat how I had closed my desk at five o'clock and found the note hours later when I pulled the typewriter out to help him take statements.

"That's got it," he said quietly. "That's proof that he met at least one of them here tonight. And also the reason for it. They forced him to sign an agreement, probably to share his earnings from the loan, which he had no intention of keeping. His real intention was murder. They had the appraisal and meant to keep it as a club. It was safer to kill them promptly and try to find the appraisal before any one else saw it, than to let them live with their dangerous knowledge."

"Now can I go home," I said. I was so tired I ached, and none of this made very much difference any more.

His eyes returned to my face and focused there, and that hard look came back and pulled his mouth down. Then he shoved me back into the inquisition chamber.

It seemed to get worse and worse. It all had to come out. All the awful things we'd done. Only now there just didn't seem to be any excuse for any of it. Even the placid Captain was looking stern.

"No question about it," he said gruffly. "Both these young women are liable to prosecution on several points."

"Admitted," said Mr. Corse readily. "However, the police department is not entirely blameless. Aside from the fact that I had inadequate assistance from the beginning, I made several mistakes myself. I assumed that the killer would have left the building immediately, whereas he was here all the time, hoping to find his incriminating appraisal. And thus, eventually killed a fourth person. When he learned that Mrs. Rocklynn had been in the office tonight, he was afraid of what she might have witnessed. That was bad enough, but I made mistakes all along the line, right up to the end when I sent this young woman downstairs in the hope of trapping him."

"Why, you did not!" I gasped. "That was my own idea."

"How do you suppose that appraisal got planted on your desk? And why do you suppose the offices and halls were suddenly so vacant? I thought we could cover you wherever you went, but I didn't count on anything as inaccessible as the spot he chose. Even after I wasted minutes finding my way in through a window, you were no place

in sight. If he had kept that matron's office locked," he finished savagely. "you'd have been number five!"

"I see your point," said the Captain gravely. "Both these young women had the mistaken idea that they were doing their duty. Both were injured while supposedly under the protection of the police. If I thought they had learned a lesson, which they won't forget—Well, how about it? Are you both going to quit meddling in other people's affairs, and call the police at the first sign of a corpse?"

"Yessir!" we said in solemn unison.

In the taxi going home I was quite comfortable, and sleepy. But it seemed as though I ought to say something.

"Mr. Corse," I said.

He was looking the other way, out the window.

"Mr. Corse—"

He kept on glaring at Lincoln Park.

After all, it's a little awkward to have a man holding you in his arms when you're not even on speaking terms. "Simon," I quavered, and his head jerked around. "I just wanted to say I was wrong. And I want to apologize for—for practically everything."

"Shut up!" he said, and kissed me—not on the cheek.

THEY'RE STILL BEING BORN

SUCKERS, the livelihood of many a citizen of these United States, still, it seems abound. Con men recently got a lift in their spirits when it was learned that some of their fellow practitioners had cleaned three noble citizens of Chicago out of \$3,540 plus \$400 worth of rings.

Number one victim was a widow, who on the promise of \$100 interest, plus prompt payment, was induced to part with \$2,400 in order to assure the culmination of a "big business deal." Her acquaintance, needless to say, ended the deal as soon as he received the money. When last seen, he was strolling leisurely down the avenue.

Sucker two was a woman, who, when approached by two strangers with the offer to help them distribute money to charity, thought it a fine idea. Of course, she was not surprised to find that a bond was required to keep the

business on the up and up. The charity plan, however, vanished along with the man, after the innocent one had turned over \$800 and \$400 worth of rings.

The old and by now well publicized penny matching racket still is workable, as was proven by victim number three. He had a nice conversation with two strangers and a nice time,—for a while at least. He discovered his pleasures had cost him \$340.

However, the most heartening fact to the con men was the thought of the many suckers who were caught and, as is likely, did not report the fact to the police.

Barnum was right, apparently, in his famous statement. A bit cautious in his estimate as to the creatures' growth, but nevertheless correct in the fact that "suckers are born every minute." Maybe even faster in these days of streamlining.



Give A Dog The Name

HE STEPPED out from behind a tree. Or Nancy Martin thought he must have been standing behind the elm, for she hadn't noticed him as she approached the red light at the intersection. Suddenly there he was, on the right side of her coupe, his head inclined so that he could peer at her through the window.

"Going to West Amber?" he asked.

Without thinking, she nodded and at once was sorry. Somehow he made her uneasy. Although the weather was mild and it hadn't rained for days, he wore a reversible raincoat, buttoned to his

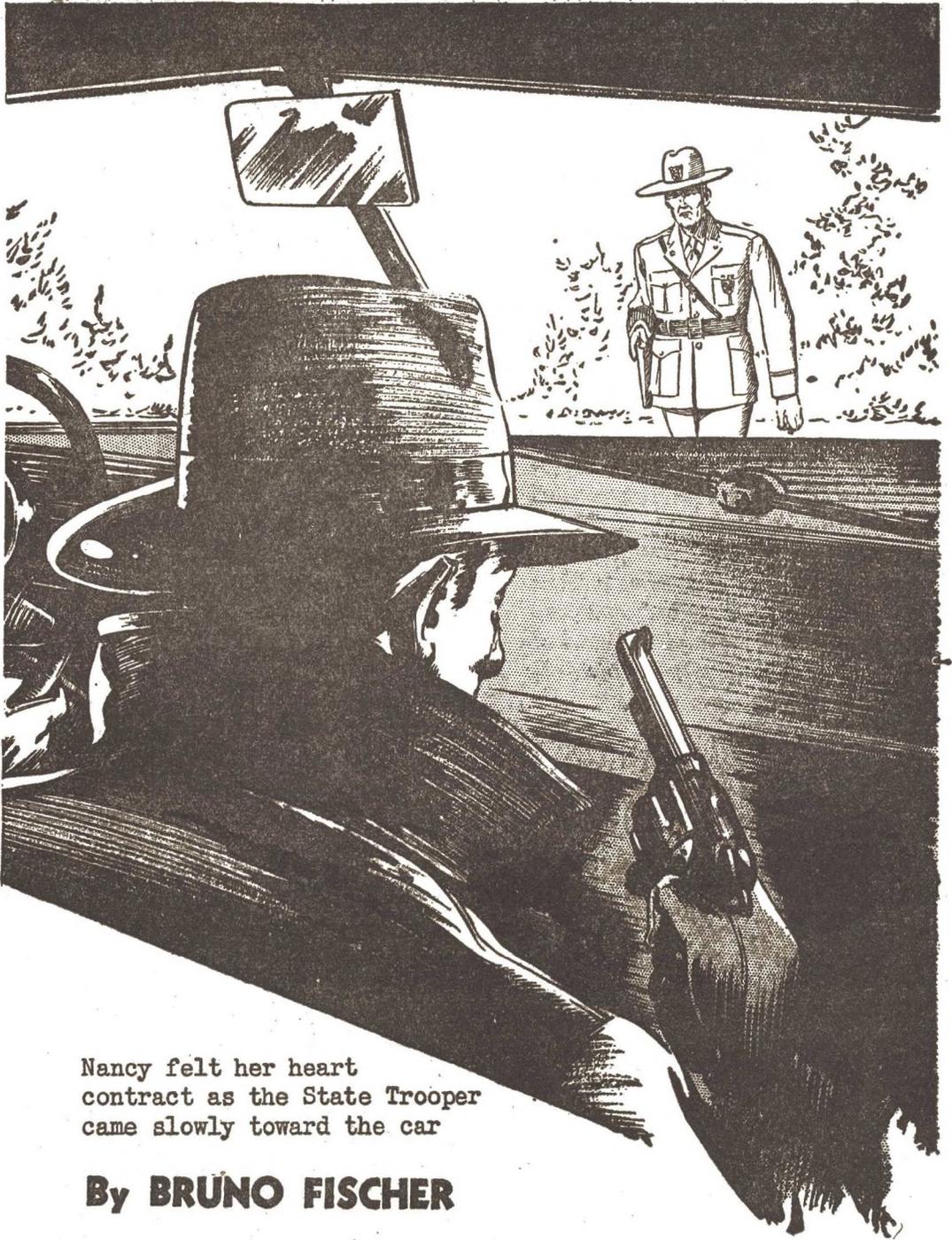
chin. The brim of a battered felt hat was pulled low over his brow, giving an impression of his angular face being in shadow in spite of the brightness of the day. A cigarette bobbed in the corner of his mouth when he spoke. He did not take his hands out of his pockets.

"How about a lift?" he said.

The traffic light changed. A car honked impatiently, then swung out from behind the coupe and shot past.

"A bus passes here to New Hollow," she told him. "From there you can get another bus to West Amber."

The cigarette tilted with the twisting



Nancy felt her heart contract as the State Trooper came slowly toward the car

By BRUNO FISCHER

When you accuse a man of murder he may try to live up to it

of his mouth. "It's daylight and you stay on the highway all the way from here to West Amber. What have you got to be afraid of?"

He was right—she was afraid of him, and without reason. She looked into his eyes and saw nothing but their grayness behind a cloud of smoke. He did not seem to notice how the sun glinted in her yellow hair and that she was pleasant to look at. All he appeared to be interested in was a ride—nothing more.

"All right, get in," she said on impulse.

He opened the door with his left hand, keeping his right hand in his pocket. Settling beside her, he stretched his legs with a small sigh of relaxation. Only an inch of the cigarette in his mouth was left. He hadn't touched it since he had come up to her. Smoke weaved up to the brim of his hat and gathered under it in a lazy cloud. It didn't bother him. He sat as remote and silent as a store dummy.

"Do you live in West Amber?" Nancy asked after they had driven a silent mile.

"No."

"I thought not. I know practically everybody in town. Are you going to visit somebody there?"

"No."

Just that. He didn't want to make conversation with a pretty young girl. He only wanted to ride. She shrugged in annoyance and concentrated on the road.

BOGGS' filling station appeared ahead. As she slowed the coupe, he sat up sharply, flinging the insignificant stub of cigarette through the open window.

"What's up?" he demanded.

"I'm stopping for gas."

He leaned sideways to look at the

gauge. "You've got a quarter of a tank and it's no more than thirty miles to West Amber."

Angrily she swung the coupe between the two yellow pumps. "I don't see where it's your business. If you don't want to stop with me, you can go on any way you please."

Without a word he sank back to his spine.

Mr. Boggs was stripping a tire from its rim. He straightened his dumpy figure, wiped his hands on a greasy rag, came forward with a broad beam.

"Nice afternoon, Miss Martin," he said. "How many?"

"Five."

Mr. Boggs pumped gas into the tank and then returned to Nancy's window for the money. "You coming from Trevan, Miss Martin?"

"I spent the night with my Aunt Margaret. She isn't well."

"How's your father? Wasn't hurt bad, I hear."

She started at him. "Hurt?"

"Didn't you hear? He was taking a prisoner to the county jail in Trevan. A vicious murderer. Killed two people already today. He managed to get the gun away from your father and escape. Didn't you see all the police on the road?"

"Well, I did notice—" Her voice cracked a little. "What did he do to Father?"

"Just socked him in the jaw, they say," Mr. Boggs said. "I'm glad to see you have a man riding with you. This killer is a madman. The whole country's scared."

She glanced at the man at her side. His body was turned somewhat toward her and both hands were deep in the coat pockets. His face was blank behind the curtain of smoke.

"Don't stop for any man," Mr. Boggs was saying. "Especially one about thir-

ty who is wearing a torn shirt. Be seeing you, Miss Martin."

He moved back to the tire he was working on. She wanted to ask him more, but she had delayed too long, and now she wondered if she should call him back.

"How about going on?" the man at her side said. "I'm in a hurry."

His right hand punched the material of the coat pocket, and whatever was in that hand—if anything—was pointed directly toward her.

"I think you'd better get out," she said tightly. "I prefer to go on alone."

"Selfish, eh?" The cigarette bobbed with his speaking. "Got an empty car, but won't give a guy a lift."

"I'll call Mr. Boggs."

He leaned toward her and in the sunlight the cold gray eyes glinted. "Why raise a fuss, sister? Just keep driving the way you were and we'll both be happy."

Was that a threat? She couldn't be sure. If it was, it would mean her life if she asked Mr. Boggs for help to get him out of the car. And probably Mr. Boggs' life too. But if it wasn't a threat, if her imagination was merely working overtime because of what she had heard, then why not take him to West Amber?

In either case, it came to the same thing. She had to drive on.

THE car was back on the highway.

Out of the corner of her eyes she watched the man at her side bring a crumpled pack of cigarettes out of his left pocket. He shook one out on his lap. She waited for him to use both hands to strike a match, but he used a kitchen match. His left thumbnail raked across the head and he had a light.

"What's the matter with your right hand?" Her voice was low, impeded by the tightness of her throat.

"I hurt it, Miss Martin." He was remote again, sheltered behind smoke.

"Why don't you take it out of your pocket?"

"You wouldn't want me to. It doesn't look nice."

"What did you do to it?" she persisted.

"My car broke down in Trevan. I tore my hand while trying to fix it. I left my car at a service station and decided to hitch to West Amber."

"Isn't your hand bandaged?"

"I didn't have time. I'm in a hurry. Just a handkerchief wrapped around it, and the handkerchief is bloody."

Why couldn't that be the truth? A man had asked her for a lift from Trevan to West Amber—that was all it was.

She brought the speed down to twenty so that she could take longer glances at him. Was that the face of a killer? It was incredible that she couldn't see his face only a foot or two away in broad daylight. It wasn't the hat; the brim hid only the brow. And the smoke weaving up from the cigarette he never touched was too nebulous to form any sort of screen. Yet those set, angular immobile features were like looking at a cipher.

"Better keep your eyes on the road, Miss Martin," he drawled. "So your father is Sheriff Martin?"

"Do you know him?" she asked, testing him for an answer.

"Heard of him. He mustn't be so hot if he lets a killer get away from him." He chuckled dryly. "The sheriff's daughter, eh?"

She stopped the car with a jerk which made his head bob. "Get out!" she said. "Why don't you let me alone?"

He laughed softly, and the sound put ice in his veins. "So I made you sore because of what I said about your old man! I'm sorry. Maybe he's the best sheriff in the state."

"Get out!"

He sighed. "Why make a muss, Miss Martin?"

The road was empty. Even if he was just another hitch-hiker whose hand was really hurt, she had no way of making him leave the car. And if he wasn't—

There it was again—no choice. She had to keep driving.

"Smart girl," he grunted and retired to the corner of the seat.

MILES rolled by. And then, through the mirror, she saw the state police motorcycle coming up fast behind her. Would it tear by? How could she signal to the trooper to stop without the man with her noticing?

He heard the oncoming motorcycle. He sat up and looked back through the rear window, then sank lower on the spine.

Sergeant George Atterby was on the motorcycle. He waved when he passed the coupe, shouting, "Hi, Nancy." Suddenly he slowed down, keeping even with her, his eyes stabbing past her to the man beside her. "Pull over," he called. "I want to speak to you."

She kept her car at the same speed. Her mind was a blur. What would the man do if she obeyed?

"Go on, the trooper told you to pull over," she heard him say quietly.

She threw a wild look at him. His right hand was out of his pocket. It wasn't bandaged; it held her father's big Colt revolver. The muzzle was inches from her side.

So there it was beyond doubt. And as she rolled the coupe to a stop at the side of the road, he whispered: "It's up to you, sister. If you don't want a slug in you, get me through."

Her hands clenched the wheel fiercely as she waited for Sergeant Atterby to come up to the car. He moved slow-

ly, with the wide-legged stride of a motorcycle trooper, and his hands hooked in his gun-belt. He gave her a friendly grin.

"You're pretty far from home, Nancy," he said.

"Have you seen my father?"

"I met him on the way back to West Amber about an hour ago. He's got a sore jaw, but that's all." He looked past her. "Do I know you, mister?"

The man at her side was completely relaxed. His left arm was flung indolently over his right hand, hiding the gun. "Maybe you saw me around Trevan," he said evenly.

"Do you live in Trevan?"

The man nudged Nancy. She said dully: "He's Jim Dale. He was waiting for a bus outside of Trevan when I picked him up."

"Jim Dale?" Atterby removed his left thumb from his gun-belt. "You know him?"

"What a question!" she said.

THAT was no answer, but Atterby thought it was. He nodded. "I don't want to bother you, Nancy, but we have to check up on everybody. This Donald Keefe is poison. He killed two people already and he'll keep killing to try to get out of the valley. He's a cornered rat."

Nancy felt her breath bunch in her throat. "What did he do?"

"Do?" Atterby's square jaw ridged. "Do you know that good-looking Alice Strickland?"

"I've met her. She was a chorus girl before Barton Strickland, who's twice her age, married her and brought her up to his house near West Amber."

"That's right," Atterby said. "It seems that a couple of years ago, before she married Strickland, Donald Keefe was sweet on her in New York. He didn't get over her. This

morning he came up here by train and took a cab to the Strickland place. Maybe he wanted to talk her into going away with him or maybe he had made up his mind to kill her. He had a hunting knife ready in his pocket. The maid told him that Mrs. Strickland was taking a swim in the dammed-up creek on their property behind an orchard. Keefe found her alone there and butchered her with the hunting knife.

"Barton Strickland and a friend of the family, a lawyer named Leonard Karlson, were playing chess in an arbor on the other side of the orchard. They heard her dying screams. Karlson ran through the orchard. Keefe met him there and killed him also with the same knife. Strickland acted more sensibly. Maybe not as bravely, but what he did saved him from being the third victim. He made a dash for his car parked nearby and got the gun he kept in the glove compartment. When he reached the orchard, he met Keefe coming for him with that bloody knife in his hand. Strickland kept him covered with the gun and yelled to the maid, who'd been brought out of the house by the screams, to call the police."

"Were there fingerprints on the knife?" Nancy's passenger asked casually.

"A perfect set on the bone handle. We haven't matched them up with Keefe's yet because he got away before we could take his prints to the county jail. But they're sure to be his."

"Did you see Donald Keefe?" Nancy asked tensely.

"No. Your father and his deputy, Charlie Larkin, came for him and took him away in a little while. Keefe kept yelling that he was innocent, like they all do, but they had all they needed, especially after they found those letters. They were in Mrs. Strickland's

room and Keefe admitted having written them. Pretty hot letters, begging her to come back to him. It's plain she turned him down, because if she hadn't he wouldn't have written letter after letter. Probably he came up to kill Strickland too, got Karlson instead."

Nancy's eyes were drawn to the man at her side. His thin nostrils flared and she could hear his breathing, but nothing else changed in the static set of his face. Something dropped into the vastly empty pit of her stomach and jumped sickeningly.

"How did he get away from Father?" Nancy asked.

"The sheriff and Charlie Larkin were taking him to the county jail in Trevan. Larkin was in front driving and Keefe was in back handcuffed to the sheriff. Suddenly Keefe smacked the sheriff on the jaw and reached over and got the gun before the sheriff could recover. By the time Larkin got the car stopped, Keefe had him covered. He made the sheriff unlock his wrists and took Larkin's gun and forced them both out of the car and drove off. Thirty minutes later the car was found in Trevan. Larkin's gun was in it, but not the sheriff's. Keefe still has it."

Nancy knew that. She could feel it against her side.

"If you see a man in his early thirties, watch out," Atterby went on. "About five-ten and a hundred and sixty. Dark hair and long, thin face. Maybe he'll try to steal a car and ask for a lift." Atterby leaned against the car. "He looks something like you, mister. That's why I stopped Nancy. But she says you're okay."

The fool! Nancy thought savagely. Atterby was so close to the truth, yet he couldn't see it in front of his eyes.

DONALD KEEFE leisurely expelled smoke through his nostrils.

"Would a hunted killer show himself in broad daylight on a highway?"

"He might have to. The only way out of the valley is through West Amber, unless he tries to go over the mountains, and we have all the trails blocked. He has no food; he won't have a chance. Getting through somehow by road is his best bet."

"You say he was wearing a torn shirt," Keefe said.

"The last time he was seen. He forgot his jacket in the sheriff's car and the sheriff ripped his shirt when Keefe went for the gun. But it doesn't mean he didn't find or steal a coat or something." Atterby stepped back. "I'm glad you have somebody riding with you, Nancy. I wouldn't want any girl alone with Keefe loose. So long."

Atterby returned to his motorcycle and dashed by and disappeared around a curve. Mechanically she started the car. Donald Keefe was setting fire to a fresh cigarette. His gun was back in the pocket of his raincoat.

When they were driving through the woods before New Hollow, she broke the silence. "Look. There's sure to be a police roadblock ahead. Why don't you get out here and hide in these woods? You'll never get through West Amber."

"The sheriff's daughter will get me through."

Her voice broke in a sob. "I never harmed you. What do you want from me?"

"I'm sorry," he said. "You won't believe me, but I am. I hoped I wouldn't have to show the gun and scare you, but the trooper came along. I'm playing for my life, and you won't get hurt if you obey orders."

His tone was softer, more human, than it had been. She turned her face to him, but all she saw was an angular, immobile mask behind cigarette smoke.

THE only two roads leading southward out of the valley formed a bottleneck two miles before West Amber. It was the inevitable spot for a police roadblock. The sun was dropping from view when Nancy and her passenger reached it.

"Sit tight whatever happens," Donald Keefe said tensely. "Try to get through as quick as you can. If anything goes wrong, let me do the talking and obey orders. If that doesn't get me through, I start shooting—you first."

She rolled her coupe to the end of the line of cars and trucks on the southbound lane. The police were an assortment of state troopers and township policemen and two men with deputy stars on their leather windbreakers.

Nancy said hoarsely: "Some of Father's deputies know you by sight."

"That's what I'm afraid of. But I don't recognize the two I can see from here. It's up to you if you want to live."

One of the deputies was walking slowly down the line, his hand resting on the butt of his gun as he swept with his eyes every car he passed.

Nancy opened the door halfway and stuck her head out. "Ira," she called. "Ira Weems."

The deputy trotted over. "Hello, Miss Martin. We've been looking—"

"Ira, I'm in a hurry," she broke in. "Can you let me get through without any of this red-tape?"

"Sure, Miss Martin, but I guess your father wants to see you first."

"Father!" The word was a cry of horror. He knew Keefe by sight; he couldn't be fooled. "Is he here?"

"He's somewhere at the head of the line. He called up his sister in Trevan and she said you'd started home an hour ago. He's getting nervous, thinking of you driving alone and a crazy

killer loose.'

"Just tell him you saw me," she said. "If Father is nervous, then so is Mother. I must rush home."

"You wait here till I tell him, Miss Martin. He said he wanted to see you when you came by." The deputy trotted off.

Keefe said harshly: "Swing out around this line and go through. If you pass your father, wave to him and keep going."

She nodded. She was as anxious as he was to keep her father from seeing him. She couldn't be saved, but her father might try, and she would die and perhaps he too.

She backed the coupe against the bumper of a light truck behind her and swung to the left lane of the road. A northbound car had crossed the intersection and was coming toward them. With the solid line of cars on the right lane, there wasn't enough room on the left lane for two cars to pass each other. She jammed on the brake.

"Back up before you get blocked off and have all the cops down on us!" Keefe ordered.

GEARS clashed as her trembling hand shoved them into reverse. The space she had left was still empty. She backed into it jerkily and bumped the truck again and stopped with the nose of the coupe overlapping the white center line. But now there was enough room for the northbound car to pass. She shifted into first, about to try it again, when she saw her father.

The tall, slightly stooped sheriff was walking by himself along the center line. His holster slapped his left thigh.

"Father, stay back!" she cried in terror, knowing that nothing she said or did would keep him away.

"Take it easy," Keefe said, "and nobody will get hurt."

She looked at him at the taut set of his angular face and the tightness of the thin mouth. The revolver was again out of his pocket.

Her head swivelled back to the road. Her father had reached the hood of the coupe. He said testily: "What took you so long from Margaret's. I was almost beginning to think—"

He stopped dead, his mouth hanging open, his deep-set eyes sick. Then he started to cross his right hand to the gun on his left thigh.

"Don't make me kill her, Sheriff," Donald Keefe warned.

"Keefe!" the sheriff said in a small, cracked voice. He stuck his head through the window and saw the revolver pressed against Nancy's side. Slowly he pulled his head out. "Good God, Nancy, how did you get into this?"

"I—I gave him a lift." Her eyes misted, blurring her father's face.

"It's up to you, Sheriff," Keefe said. "I haven't touched your daughter so far, and I won't if you let me through."

The sheriff shook himself, as if trying to discard a bad dream. "You haven't a chance."

"Then make it for me. Or maybe you'd like a slug in your daughter?"

"In heaven's name, Keefe!" The sheriff looked around helplessly. There were the cars and the people in them and the policemen standing about, but all they saw was the sheriff speaking to his daughter and to a man who was no doubt a friend of hers.

"I'd like to get going," Keefe urged.

The sheriff turned his stricken eyes back to the car. "I'll make a deal. Let Nancy out here and I'll promise you thirty minutes start."

"Nuts! I make the terms. Nancy goes with me. I'll leave her off when I'm in the clear."

The sheriff nodded abstractedly. "All right, go through."

"Hop on the running-board and clear the way"

Mechanically Nancy's bloodless hands worked the gear shift and the wheel. Her father, crouching on the running-board, signalled the police at the intersection to clear the other lane.

SEVERAL hundred feet beyond the roadblock, Keefe ordered Nancy to stop the car. The sheriff jumped off.

"One more thing," Keefe said. "I don't want to see any car following us or any cop come near us. If you play ball, Nancy will be okay."

"By God, if you hurt her in any way—"

"It's up to you, sheriff," Keefe said. "Get going, sister."

The car moved, gathered speed. Through the mirror she saw her father standing in the middle of the road, his tall body sagging brokenly as he looked at them.

After a mile Keefe turned from the rear window with a satisfied grunt. "We're not being tailed. Not close, anyway. They're even holding the other cars back; probably afraid I'll take a shot at any that come too close. But they've no doubt sent word ahead and we'll be watched every inch of the way."

As he turned to sit straight in the seat, his shoulder touched hers. She shuddered at the contact. When they were out of the valley, what then? All the way south to New York police would be watching for the car. At just what point could he let her go? If he ever did while she lived.

Twilight was deepening when they rolled down the main business street of West Amber. There were no policemen in sight, but she could feel them watching the car. Watching helplessly as long as she was in it.

Where Main Street crossed Division

Avenue the light was red. She brought the coupe to a slow stop.

He laughed mockingly. "By all means observe traffic regulations. We mustn't be caught breaking a law. I'll take the wheel now."

"You mean you're going to let me out here?"

"No. I prefer to do the driving from now on. Slide under me and change places."

He leaned against the dashboard, his torso twisted so that he could watch her as she made the change. The gun was so close to her that the muzzle brushed her chin. He pushed past her and squirmed behind the wheel and placed the gun on his thigh. He turned the car left, down Division Avenue, toward the open roads beyond the valley.

"You must hate me very much," Keefe said gravely.

No answer was necessary. She looked at him surprised, for he sounded as if it mattered that she hated him. And suddenly, for the first time, she really saw his face. Perhaps it was because she was not driving now and had time to study him, or because the dashlight highlighted his features. He did not look at all like a killer. His eyes were strained, but clear, honest. His angular face was lined with tension, but it was an intelligent, sensitive face. The kind of man she ordinarily would like to know. A wave of pity for him swept over her.

That angered her. Suppose he did not look like a killer frantically trying to flee a police trap? Several years ago a homicidal maniac, who looked like a benign Sunday School teacher, had terrorized the valley. His appearance hadn't made him less deadly. Neither did Donald Keefe's appearance.

THE twilight was deepening, but suddenly Keefe switched off the head-

lights. In semi-darkness he sent that light car at terrific speed over the narrow winding road. His face was now only a shadow, more remote and frightening than it had ever been.

"Are you trying to kill us both!" she said.

Abruptly she sprawled against his shoulder. He braced himself against her weight and concentrated on the wheel. She waited for the impact of a crash, but all she felt was a car bounding wildly. When she sat up, she saw that he had not lost control of the car. Without lessening speed, he had turned sharply onto a rutted dirt road.

Had he lost his reason? He had been within half a mile of getting completely out of the valley. Now he was cutting back along the north slope on a seldom used road. He would shake off pursuit, for it would not occur to the police that he would deliberately return deep into the trap. But he'd been in the trap.

Night was descending swiftly, but he left the headlights off. She could scarcely see the road ahead. He lessened the speed somewhat, but it was still too fast. It was suicide.

Then it happened. The coupe left the road. It leaped over the soft shoulder, careened, and she glimpsed the solidity of brush ahead. The car crashed through it and came to a jolting halt which smacked her head against the windshield.

Nancy felt his arm about her shoulder, heard his voice ask anxiously: "Are you all right?"

She sat up and rubbed her forehead and said nothing. He got out of the car and walked around the hood and opened the door on her side. "Come out," he ordered, grabbing her arm.

He had taken the flashlight out of the glove compartment, and now, with a hand closed over her elbow, he led her deeper into the brush and started to

climb the slope.

Here, she thought dully, he would kill her. Probably her car hadn't been seen turning off the highway and certainly nobody had seen it dive into this brush. He had outwitted the police. She had served her purpose. She had led him practically out of the valley, and he had no further use for her. Alive, she was dangerous to him.

He wouldn't use the gun on her because of the noise. A knife probably; he had murdered Alice Strickland and Leonard Karlson like that. Or he'd strangle her with his hands. Then, under cover of night, he would make his escape on foot.

There was a path up the hill, but brambles reached out and ripped her skin and clothes. Her legs were watery. She stumbled. She would have fallen if he had not maintained his tight grip on her arm.

Presently he stopped. "All right, beat it," he said.

Though his face was blotted out by the glare of the flashlight in his hand, she stared at him.

THE light swung away from her and went out. There was starlight and for long seconds she could see his dark shape continue up the path. Then he was out of sight behind a tree, and she was alone and alive.

He had removed the key from her car; she would have to go on foot to the nearest house and call the police. There were not many here, but it would not take her more than fifteen minutes at the most. He wouldn't have enough time for a getaway. Then why hadn't he at least tied her up or knocked her out? Because the two people he had murdered that morning were enough for him? Because he was fed up with killing?

Suddenly she realized where she was

and that gave her part of the answer. Barton Strickland's house was higher up on the slope. This morning Keefe had come here to kill Strickland and his wife. He had failed to get Strickland and now he was going back to finish the job. He had not been trying to escape. In his mad jealousy he hadn't cared what happened to him as long as he could get Strickland.

Nancy turned and ran a dozen feet down the slope. Then she stopped, panting. There wasn't time. That was why Keefe had let her go; he knew she couldn't bring the police in time to save Strickland.

Again she broke into a run, this time uphill.

She reached the apple orchard at the edge of Strickland's sprawling grounds. Beyond the rolling lawn she saw the house, almost every window lighted. And she saw Keefe only a short distance ahead. His flashlight was out, but starlight glinted on the revolver in his hand. He was keeping to the shadow of the trees as he cautiously made his way to the house.

She had brought the killer here. It was up to her to stop him. She snatched up a rock, kicked off her shoes, and ran noiselessly.

Keefe started to turn when she was at his back. Savagely she struck with the rock. It dented his hat. He sank as far as his knees and struggled to twist his torso and gun toward her.

"Don't try it, Keefe!" a new voice snapped,

Barton Strickland's short, pudgy form stepped out of the orchard. He had a flashlight in one hand and a snub-nosed automatic in the other, and both were directed down at Keefe. "Take his gun, Miss Martin," he said.

Keefe crouched lower, staring at Strickland over his shoulder. His revolver waved in small futile gestures,

but with Strickland armed and at his back he did not dare try to use it. Nancy stopped, touched his wrist and moved her hand up to the stock of the gun. His face twisted in a ghastly grin as he surrendered the revolver to her.

"Fine," Strickland said. "When I heard Keefe had escaped, I guessed that he might come back here, so I waited in the arbor. I was right. Let me have that gun, Miss Martin."

Breathing hard, Nancy stepped back from Keefe. "He stole it from my father. I'll keep it."

Strickland shrugged. "Very well. Go to the house and phone the police."

"So you can kill me while she's gone?" Keefe said quietly.

"Not unless you try to escape. I'll save you for the police, the way I did this morning, even after I saw what you had done to my wife and Karlson. . . . Miss Martin, you'll find the phone in the hall."

She stood motionless, feeling the weight of the heavy gun in her hand.

"Strickland will murder me because I *didn't* kill his wife," Keefe told her. "He wants to get rid of you. Why doesn't he go to call the police and leave you to guard me?"

"You'd prefer that," Strickland sneered. "You'd have more chance getting away from a girl. Hurry, Miss Martin."

NANCY went then. The house was beyond the orchard, beyond the rolling lawns. She stepped in among the apple trees and went a little way and then returned soundlessly on her stocking feet.

She heard Keefe's voice. "What are you waiting for? You could have shot me before this."

"Why did you come back here, Keefe?"

Nancy was close enough now to see

them. Strickland stood against a tree and his flashlight picked Keefe out of the night, showed him standing with face tight and bitter.

"So you want to pump me first?" Keefe said. "You want to know how fool-proof your frame-up is, and how I knew you were the murderer. That's simple. It had to be me or you, and I was sure which of us two it wasn't. What was Alice doing—carrying on an affair with Leonard Karlson?"

The flashlight shook in Strickland's hand. "Damn her! She'd been a cheap chorus girl, though very lovely. I married her and gave her respectability and money. And she carried on behind my back with Karlson."

Keefe nodded. "I can understand how you felt about her. I carried a torch for her a couple of months after she went off and married you. That was why I wrote her those crazy, passionate letters asking her to come back to me. But they weren't dated, so when you found them you realized I couldn't prove I hadn't sent them recently. They gave me motive. The murder of Alice and her lover would tag you as the killer right off—unless you had a fall-guy. I was elected. So you typed a letter to me and signed Alice's name. The letter said she was in desperate trouble and begged me to come on the 10:40 train.

"I was annoyed when she wasn't at the station to meet me, but why should I have been suspicious? When I reached the house, the maid told me Mrs. Strickland was swimming in the creek. You knew which train I'd make; you were set when you saw me on the path. You murdered Alice and Karlson and dropped the knife and waited. I found them dead and I heard you come. I thought it was the killer and snatched up the knife for a weapon and put my fingerprints on it. Wasn't that nice co-

operation?"

STRICKLAND said tightly: "I thought of shooting you then, but that would have made the whole thing look too pat. But you've changed that, Keefe. You're an escaped murderer. The police will believe you came back here to kill me. So I shoot you in self-defense, and the case will be closed."

"Will it?" Keefe said.

The automatic jumped beside the flashlight, and Nancy moved closer, afraid that she had delayed too long. But Strickland was not done talking.

"What have you up your sleeve, Keefe?" Strickland demanded shrilly. "You could have escaped, yet you came here. To kill me? I can't believe that just to get back at me you'd throw away your own life."

Keefe laughed harshly. "You've got the gun, yet you're the one who's going to pieces. That's why you've been drawing me out. You're not sure just how tight the frame-up is. You're jittery. I had an idea you wouldn't be able to hold out if I got to you. I was going to wave a gun under your nose and force a confession out of you. It was my one chance and I think it would have worked." His voice turned flat, dull. "But Nancy Martin was too smart for me."

"In short," Strickland said, "I'll have nothing to worry about after I kill you."

"You won't kill me. Nancy was too smart for you too. She didn't go to the house. She heard your confession. She's behind you now with her father's gun in her hand"

Strickland's light whirled, and Keefe left his feet in a tackle. He might have got to Strickland or a bullet might have stopped him. There was never to be an answer because Nancy was set with her gun. Her father had taught her how to shoot. She put a bullet in the dark

shape behind the flashlight.

Strickland screamed and clawed at his shoulder. Keefe leaped up from his dive and hit him in the jaw. A moment later he had possession of the automatic.

"Nancy?" Keefe asked uncertainly.

Then he saw her dim form standing beside him. She slumped into the circle of his arm.

"I'll be damned!" he said. "So you really were there! I had a hope that you hadn't gone or that I could keep him talking till you came back, but it was a vague hope. Did you hear his confession?"

At their feet Strickland was writh-

ing in pain. She turned her eyes from him and shivered.

"I heard it all. And I hit you with a rock. But I couldn't know. All along you acted so much like a killer—until almost the end."

He grinned, and it was an intimate, boyish grin. "Matter of fact, I am an actor. Radio melodramas. Sorry, Nancy, but I had to act so tough in the car to make you afraid of me. Sheer bluff. It was my only hope of getting through to Strickland. I'm a pretty nice guy when you get to know me."

Wearily she closed her eyes and relaxed against Donald Keefe's chest.

CRIME AND ANTHROPOLOGY

CERTAIN theories have been expounded as to relations between the physical characteristics of criminals and the fact that they commit crimes. Many men believe that criminals differ in physical measurements as compared to men who are not criminals. The leader in this field who first worked on the problem is Lombroso. He definitely believed that criminals are inferior in anatomy and have many physical defects. For example, Lombroso made a study of the skulls of criminals and compared his figures obtained on skull defects with those of non-criminals. It was found that criminal skulls were inferior in size or else abnormally large; individual bones were oversized, and wisdom teeth development was not normal. Upon examination of the anatomy it was found that many criminals were smaller in stature and possessed extra long arms. Many were found to have foreheads which protruded abnormally and also exceptionally large jaw bones. These characteristics were not present in the majority of the non-criminals.

Opposed to the theory of Lombroso and his followers we find that many other men believe that these physical abnormalities and defects are characteristic of criminals because of their environment when yet children, that is the lack of proper nutrition lead to improper development. This, of course, would not explain the presence of wealthier men who became criminals.

★ 2,000 YEARS AGO ★

IF YOU think the newspaper item about the crafty insurance racketeers signifies anything modern, you don't know Crassus. Crassus was an old Roman, of great wealth, and little character—a shrewd and miserly racketeer, with the soul of a pawnbroker.

He invented a type of reversed fire-insurance racket which laid the foundation of his immense fortune. After the Gauls had plundered the city, great sections of Rome were rebuilt with tottery wooden houses on narrow crooked streets. There were many fires, and often these tenement-like old houses simply fell down. Crassus, with his usual foresight, saw great possibilities.

First, he assembled about 500 well-trained slave carpenters and masons. These he held in readiness. Then he made it his business to buy houses that were on fire and others that joined upon them. Of course, he got these at a low price, since the owners' fears and distresses hardly made them a match for shrewd Crassus. With his impressive force of builders, he was ready to cash in on the many catastrophes, and, in time, became master of a great part of Rome.

To cash in on these fires, Crassus must have had some sort of private fire-alarm system. More probably he possessed advance knowledge of where fires were going to break out. For, although few people noticed the fact at the time, there were a remarkable number of these conflagrations in a very short time.

ONE WAY TO KEEP OUR VICTORY WON
BUY VICTORY BONDS

DEATH BY DIAGNOSIS

IN THE annals of medical history, many strange cases can be cited which would be enough to make the hair of any ordinary individual stand on end. But most of those cases rely on nature for their horror-producing aspect . . . their deformed bodies, distorted minds, and the crimes these depraved creatures have committed fill page after page of the psychiatrist's library. There is one type of case which we are not apt to discover in the pages of any book, but since all men are human and prone to err—including medical men—we may reasonably suppose that incidents such as this one do happen from time to time perhaps, however, without such disastrous results. This case is so famous that it has become a legend in the telling and re-telling.

For the setting and period we must go back to the 1830's in Manila. In one of those years a young doctor pioneered, in a sense, when he landed there with the sole purpose of gaining some much-needed practical experience. He was in search of a practice; Manila was in need of a good doctor. People at his home tried to discourage him with such tormenting remarks about the new land as "the natives are too poor to be ill and too lazy to die." Nothing could stifle this young hopeful's ambitions, however, and he set out on his long journey around the Cape of Good Hope. When he reached his destination he was almost penniless, but undaunted. He had high hopes for the future. These people needed real help, and he meant to give it to them.

No sooner had he found lodgings than he placed his shingle over the door for all to see. His next thought was to see the town, which he proceeded to do. Sauntering along ahead of him as he walked was a poor but comely native girl who promptly caught his attention. She was obviously a girl of the peasant class. Her light step and easy gait, her calm expression and bright smile were a pleasure to look upon, yet the doctor perceived something to be wrong. This girl who appeared healthy evidently was not. She seemed to be suffering from a hemorrhage, for after every few steps she paused and spat blood.

The doctor followed her expecting at any moment to see her fall over in a dead faint. He felt sorry for her and was sure his professional training could be put to some good use. As they walked, the girl showed no signs of weakening. The young doctor was amazed at Filipino endurance. It was not very long before they entered the poorer section of the city and she entered her home, a very broken-down, ram-shackle sort of building. Without a moment's hesitation, the doctor mounted the steps, knocked on the door, and demanded to be allowed to speak to her parents. All present found they could understand each other if they communicated in Spanish, so the doctor stated the case.

He knew the news would come as a shock, for if they allowed the girl outdoors they surely were

not aware of her serious condition. He tried to be as consoling as possible when he stated that the girl had less than twenty-four hours to live, that she was deathly ill, and that a priest should be called at once. At first her parents refused to believe the earnest young man's statement. The shining eyes and ruddy complexion of their only daughter seemed to be fitting proof that he was wrong, and yet he spoke in such an authoritative tone. He went on to explain that he was only telling them this news because inwardly he wanted to help, do all in his power for the poor girl. He promised faithfully, to use all the professional knowledge he had to try and alleviate her suffering at the last. Then they began to assume his words were truthfully spoken.

When their daughter found out what all the commotion was about she broke down completely. First she cried and then broke out in wild, hysterical screams. This led to a fainting spell and finally unconsciousness. The parents were frantic; they began to wring their hands, pray audibly, and pace the floor. They were at an utter loss as to what to do or how to take this misfortune which had descended upon them. Taking the responsibility into his own hands, the doctor injected drugs and stimulants. A priest performed the last rites while the neighbors flocked in to offer condolences. Her parents could do nothing but groan and pray. By this time the patient really looked ill. She was pale as a ghost and found breathing difficult. Her condition was growing steadily worse. By nightfall she was dead.

The news about the wonderful physician spread over the city. People rushed to him for aid, offering huge sums for a diagnosis. The young man could see that his fortune was made. His reputation was secure. He even looked forward to a retirement after a few busy years in Manila, but his imagination had carried him too far. Only a few days after the death of his first patient, someone asked how he forecast her fate so exactly.

"It was easy enough,—she spat blood."

"Are you sure it was blood?"

"Certainly. It was red."

"Ah, senor, everyone spits red in Manila."

"Bah!"

"Ah, it is true! Everybody chews the buyo leaf, just as everybody smokes in other lands. The juice of the buyo is red."

Slowly the realization came over him. He knew now that his words had killed the girl; he had made her believe she was doomed to die, and her mind had done the rest. He who had been so confident, so willing to help, had killed a poor innocent girl. She who only that morning had so much to live for had fallen prey to his stupid ambition. Accepting her fate, she had given up completely. Without a moment's delay, the aspiring physician packed his bags, pulled down the shingle, and bought passage back to Europe on the same ship.—*Cecil Carter.*



A man was running toward
the door of the little tavern

The Running Man

By WILLIAM BRENGLE



There is one element that makes the perfect crime impossible—sheer chance!

THE moment I saw the man running down the street I felt there was something wrong. You know how it is—you can see nine men running and think nothing about it; you see a tenth one and you *know*. You don't have to reason anything out. It just comes to you. Dogs have that kind of sense.

Of course, it was a miserable night, and the fact that the street was only a few blocks removed from the Brooklyn waterfront may have had something to do with it too. For there was no denying the dreariness of the street, although it seemed perfectly respectable, judging by the modest but well-kept flat-buildings rising on both sides of it.

Even so, it was hardly the kind of address I would have expected. Mack to pick out for himself on his return to the city, even allowing for his eccentric ways.

The old reprobate was the reason for my being there. He had been out of town for a year, painting down in New Orleans somewhere, and on his return a week ago he had dropped in on me at the city-room of the New York paper I worked for. Being an old pal, he had made no bones about the object of his visit, which was for me to look over his year's work and give him some publicity. That being agreeable, we had made a date for tonight (the earliest I could make it) and Mack had scribbled his address on my desk pad. After he had gone, I had penciled in the date of our engagement as a reminder, which was a lucky thing as it turned out—not because I was to forget about it, but because of the opportunity it gave me to read the address, thus enabling me to remember it tonight, when, all ready to start out for Brooklyn, I just couldn't find that slip of paper anywhere. As it was, I could not remember it exactly—only that it was forty-something Cherry Street, which meant it might be any number between forty and forty-nine.

Like most Manhattanites I knew very little about Brooklyn, and nothing at all about that particular section. However, I had no trouble finding the street, which turned out to be a short one and only a few blocks from the subway. As my idea was to go through every building in the 40-block until I found the right one, I looked for Number 40. And when this turned out to be a small saloon on the corner, I almost passed it up until I remembered Mack's famous thirst. If he was known anywhere in the neighborhood, I thought, even only by sight, he'd be known there. So into the Victory Bar

I went.

For the moment the Victory Bar didn't seem to be thriving. The pot-bellied individual in charge was in charge of nobody whatever until I walked in, and neither my appearance nor my modest order seemed to indicate to him that blue skies were just around the corner. He served me my glass of beer and went back to this moping.

I asked him if he happened to know a Mr. McCord, and he said no. I pointed out that he hadn't been living long in the neighborhood, but still he said no. I described him to him, and at last he said yes, explaining that he didn't know his name. I asked if he had been in that night, and he said no, but that he might come in yet. He said he was always popping in. I could have told him that.

I said I would try some of the buildings in the block, and started for the door. And it was then, as I pulled it open, that I saw the man running; and as I said, immediately felt there was something wrong.

IT WASN'T just the strange neighborhood, the miserable night, the silence. It wasn't alone the fact that he was running. It was all those things and more, and in particular it was the look on his face. It was about as fiendish a look as I ever hoped to see on a man, and the moment I saw him running, I thought: What is he running away from?

He had come out of the brownstone building across the street, and he was down the five steps almost before I could take him in.

He stopped and looked quickly to his right and left, and it was then I got a look at his face in the glare of the street light. Only for a moment, and then he was off again, running up

the street as fast as he could go. As he passed out of sight, I glanced up at the few lighted windows in the building across the street. What, I asked myself, did he *leave behind*?

I admit I was startled. I kept seeing the man's face. Something had to be done about it—I made up my mind about that. But first something had to be said.

I turned to the fat man. "There's a man running!"

"Oh?" he said.

"He came out of that brownstone house across the way. He just ran up the street."

Now that was really all, unless you were going to imagine things. You could imagine, over in that silent and darksome building, a blown safe and worse, a body with a dagger in its ribs, almost anything. But not knowing, what could you say?

Still I stared pretty significantly at the pot-bellied owner of the Victory Bar.

"Oh?" he said again. As much as to say, "Well, haven't you ever seen a man running before?"

I saw it was going to be hopeless in the Victory Bar, so I went out, saying I would come back if I didn't have any luck, and if my friend came in in the meantime, to hold him. I walked over to the building across the street, and stood on the sidewalk staring up at the windows. I don't know what I thought I could do, but the place seemed to draw me.

It wasn't long before I was thinking there was something different about the front of that house, and then I got it. When I first looked up, there had been two lighted windows on the second floor. Now there was only one. Of course, it could be that somebody had gone to bed, though it was rather early. It had probably nothing whatever to do with

the running man. Still . . .

I went up the five steps and paused in the narrow entrance to look at the mail boxes. There were six of them—four with names on them, none of which was McCord, and two nameless. The latter, of course, didn't necessarily mean vacancies, so either of them might have been Mack's for all I knew, though I doubted it. I pushed through the inner door and found myself in a dimly-lighted hall where no sound could be heard except, I thought, music, faint, somewhere upstairs. That hall with its narrow stairs leading up to nowhere (for all you could see) rather gave me the creeps.

HOWEVER, there was nothing to be gained by standing there staring. Up the narrow stairs I went, up to the second floor. And the higher I climbed the clearer the music became. It was somebody's radio.

On the way up I saw lights shining through fanlights over doors. Some of them, that is. Others were dark. And among the dark ones was the one of the second-floor apartment from which the radio music was coming.

Now I couldn't be quite sure, but it seemed to me from its position that this was the apartment where the light had gone out. Judging by the length of the hall, running from front to rear with a window at each end, the apartments could not have been very large, probably not more than two rooms each. Except for that coming from the street, there was no light on this floor, and there was something uncanny in the sound of that radio coming from the darkness. I stepped up to the door and tried it gently. It was locked. I moved down the hall to the back window, and opening it, I looked out.

At first all I could see was the fire escape. It ran level with the window,

and of course with the back window of the apartment. This, I noticed, was open an inch or two at the top, which meant it could be raised from the bottom. It would be an easy access to the apartment, I thought, and to whatever the running man had run away from.

That he had run away from something pretty grim, I no longer had any doubts, and suddenly the temptation to find out what it was proved too strong to resist. I started climbing through the window. I had one leg over when suddenly a sound of footsteps coming down from upstairs made me jerk it back again.

I stood rigid, listening, then almost shouted for joy as Mack, of all people, appeared on the landing.

Of course he took it for granted that I was looking for his place. He said he had the studio on the top floor and was just going out to see if I might be looking for him, having just remembered that he had overlooked to put his name on the mail box. I finally had to interrupt him, to impress on him the series of events that had brought me to crawl through a window and along a fire escape to get into a stranger's apartment.

"D'you mean something happened?" he said.

"If you had seen that man's face—" I hazarded.

"That's all very well, old man," said Mack. "But how do you know he came from this apartment?"

"I'm pretty sure," I answered. "Just as I'm sure he left something horrible behind him here."

"Sure?"

"Well, you know what I mean. You didn't see his face, you see. Listen, Mack, we got to call the police."

But Mack wouldn't see it. "That's all right to say. You're just over on a visit, but I live here. If we stir up a

hornet's nest and there's nothing in it—not even a hornet—I'm going to be just about as popular around here as the plague. You can't call the police on a guy and invade his apartment and expect him to love you."

"He's probably past loving anybody," I said.

"Well, let's go over to the saloon and have a short one and decide what to do."

"Not until I know what's inside there," I repeated. "You can tell there's something wrong. The radio playing away and not a light in the place."

"They're probably in bed listening to it. They'll turn it off in a minute."

"Who are they? D'you know?" I asked.

"Have no idea. You don't know anybody in these places."

"Well," I said, "I'll soon settle one point." And I rapped a loud rat-tat-tat on the door of the apartment.

"What if that gets them out of bed?" Mack wanted to know.

"I'm hoping it does," I answered. "I'll just say I'm looking for somebody named Wilberforce."

"And if their name is Wilberforce?" Which I ignored.

WELL, the knocking brought no answer and now Mack was beginning to realize there must be something a little unusual behind that door. I took him to the back window and showed him the lay-out.

"I can be inside in two minutes," I told him. "You wait here. I'll come around and open the door for you."

"I hope it's not gonna raise any hell," said Mack.

"So do I," I said. "But not the way you mean it."

I left him and was soon out on the fire escape and getting busy with the

window. I guess I've found many things in my life harder to do than getting into that apartment.

The room I climbed into was a bedroom. I lit a match, but at a casual glance there didn't seem to be anything wrong. I stepped into the next room, lighting another match, and there, too, after a quick glance around, everything seemed to be in order, if you didn't take into account the radio that was blaring away. I crossed to the light-switch by the door and turned it on, letting Mack in at the same time.

"Well?" he said.

"I don't know yet," I told him. "We'll have to look around."

We stood there looking, and most of the things we took in were tables, chairs, rugs, pictures—all the things you'd expect to find in the places you'd expect to find them. There was just one thing—a plate on the floor, smashed to pieces.

"Knocked down by the man in his desperate hurry to get away," I said.

"From what?" asked Mack.

"We'll see," I said.

And we did in a way, and in another we didn't. We *looked*. We searched every closet and drawer in the place; we looked under the table and under the bed, and even went through the dirty laundry. No burst safes, or any other kind of safes. No bodies, no weapons, no nothing.

"A washout!" Mack exclaimed. "I told you. A fine fool I would have looked if we had called the police."

"It must be some other apartment," I said.

He gave what practically amounted to a snort of contempt.

"What time is it, anyway? That joint'll be closing up before I can give you an official welcome." He looked at the clock on the bureau. "Ten minutes to nine—is *that* all?" He put his

ear to it. "Stopped!" he said. "No wonder."

"I looked at my watch. "Ninety-three exactly," I said.

"Then let's get going. Turn out the light. Leave everything as we found it. And we're going out by the door. You don't catch me crawling on no fire escape."

OUT on the landing, with the door closed behind us, I took his arm. "Of course, I couldn't be sure it *was* that apartment."

"Well, there's five more like it in this building and about fifty more in the block," said Mack. "Go ahead and break into 'em all if you like. I'm gonna have a shot."

And he went. And I went with him. Over to the Victory Bar.

When we were safe behind our glasses Mack burst out laughing.

"Talk about pink elephants!" he said. "Boy! You'd better lay off it, whatever you been drinking."

"Maybe if you had seen that man's face—"

"I can see yours. Well, we pulled a Sherlock Holmes but it didn't get us anywhere."

"Well, we're not sure that's the place. And as for not getting anywhere," I said, "we found four things worth considering."

"What four things?"

"The lights out, the radio going, the broken plate."

"And the fourth?"

"Clock stopped at ten minutes to nine," I said.

"I don't see anything suspicious about that," said Mack.

"I didn't say anything about suspicious. I said it's one of the four things we noticed."

"Oh, well," Mack took a long sip and put his glass down in a way that

meant only one thing—let's talk about something else. He wanted to talk about his paintings—that was what I had come over to see—and he didn't want to be bothered with inconclusive stories of running men who didn't leave anything of interest behind them.

"How many pictures d'you think I knocked off while I was—" he began. Then stopped. We were looking at each other, right into each other's eyes, and the glance told us both in a flash that we had heard it at the same time, although there was so little to hear as not to matter at all.

"Somebody running," said Mack, himself suddenly excited.

We ran to the door and looked out. It was a policeman, and he was running up the street as fast as he could. And coming down the street, two men and a boy, running as fast as *they* could.

"Something going on!" said Mack, stepping out on the sidewalk, with me after him.

The two men had run past and the boy was just passing as we stepped out.

"What's going on?" Mack shouted.

"Dunno, mister," the boy answered. He followed the men around the corner toward the waterfront.

"What d'you say? We're going?" said Mack.

"Going? It's my job to go," I said. And we went.

"Funny," Mack panted as we rounded the corner. "It's usually as quiet as a tomb around here at this time of the night."

We followed the three ahead into streets as they ran out of them. When we got to the scene of the—whatever it was—the three had become a full dozen. And another dozen or so awaited us.

The scene was a large warehouse, facing on the docks. The little crowd

had spread itself across the entrance, through which several patrolmen could be seen hovering just inside. Under the eyes of the nearest patrolman I slipped my press-card inside my hat-band and approached him.

"What's going on, officer?" I asked.

THE patrolman was friendly, though obviously raging inside. I wondered why, then stopped wondering when I learned that one of the victims was a brother patrolman. The other victim was the watchman, and it was the shots that had killed the watchman that had brought the patrolman running, only to be shot at in turn. It seemed he had been shot up pretty badly. The patrolman didn't know whether he was still alive. The ambulance had just got there a few minutes ago, and the doctor was working on him now. They had him over in the office, on account of the better light. The lieutenant was there too, and he could probably tell me more, he said.

"Well, how many were in it—in the holdup?" I asked.

"Just one guy, as far as we know," said the patrolman.

"And did you get him?"

The man shook his head.

"Know who he is?"

"Don't even know what he looks like," said the patrolman.

Evidently a clean getaway. The wounded patrolman, no doubt, would be able to give a description—if he pulled through, that is.

"Well, I sure hope you get him," I said. "And now I think I'll go over and see the lieutenant. D'you mind if my friend goes along?"

The patrolman didn't mind; so with Mack following I made for the office, which was the usual box-like affair built against the wall. We got there just in time to see the wounded policeman be-

ing carried out on a stretcher and put aboard the ambulance which was parked right outside there.

"They're rushing him to the hospital," Mack whispered. And we both stood aside while the ambulance, expertly handled, went screaming out the entrance.

It was several minutes before any of the assembled policeman stirred. They all seemed deeply affected, all except the lieutenant who was in the office phoning. I waited until he hung up, then stepped in and introduced myself.

He had nothing much to add to what I had already learned from the patrolman, except for the names and addresses of the victims, which, like a good reporter, I duly took down. And then, when he made it clear he had nothing else to say, I told him about the running man, hinting that if he cared to search No. 42 Cherry Street he might find another body to add to the night's collection.

"Thanks for the tip," he said briefly, then seemed suddenly busy with something on the desk. And that was all. Whatever he may have thought of my story, it was evident he wasn't going to say, though I rather suspected he didn't mean to do anything at all.

I turned to go, rather disgusted, but he called me back.

"Just a minute," he said. And turning, I saw that he was holding something in his hand. It looked like a piece of cloth.

"This is the only clue we got," he said, holding it up. "It was in the patrolman's hand, so it could only have come off the killer's coat. Right off the elbow part, as you can tell by the shape of it." He slipped the clue in an envelope, put the envelope in his pocket, and added sardonically, "So all we gotta do now is find a guy with his elbow sticking out, eh?"

THERE was activity outside, and outside we all went. Two police cars had pulled up, and from what I caught of their occupants' conversation with the lieutenant I soon gathered that the usual rounding up of suspicious characters was already under way. Every known criminal in town would now be pulled in—all except the murderer, I couldn't help thinking.

"Pretty dull business," Mack commented. "Not at all like you read about it in the papers. This is my second murder, and I'm still not thrilled. Listen, old man, we just got time to pick up a couple of bottles before the bar closes up, and take 'em up to my studio. We can come back here afterward, if you like."

"Okay. And I can phone my story in from the saloon," I said.

A raw wind was blowing from the bay, and there was nothing to hang around for, anyway. Mack was right. Murders, once committed, were pretty dull things at first hand.

We walked back the way we came, and we were actually at the door of the saloon when things suddenly seemed to click into place in my head.

"Mack!" I gasped.

"What's the matter now?"

"You get the beer," I told him. "I won't be a minute. Get the beer, and just wait here for me."

I raced across the street, up the five steps of the brownstone house, into the hall and up the narrow stairs to the second floor. The radio was still playing. The fanlight over the door was dark.

"Fine!" I thought, and hurried back to Mack, standing foolishly outside the saloon with two bottles in his hand.

"Quick, Mack!" I gasped. "Run back to the warehouse and bring a policeman. Bring two."

"Yes, but what—"

"Listen. I was wrong," I gabbled on. "Suppose you had something planned for nine o'clock. Maybe to break into a warehouse. Anyway, nine o'clock is the time, neither before nor after. The time is important—everything depends on it. You're sitting at home, waiting. You look at the clock. Ten to nine. Time to get started. The radio program is over. '*At the sound of the chimes it will be nine o'clock.*' Get it? You jump up, look at the clock. Stopped! So you got to run like hell to make it. You're all excited. You knock a plate off the table. You turn out the light, but leave the radio on. You run—run. Don't you see?"

Mack stared at me.

"I thought he was running *from*," I said, "but he was running *to*. So if I'm right, he must *live* there. Don't you see? *We know where he'll come back to*. So get a policeman—hurry up."

I have to give Mack credit—he came to life all right. He left the bottles with me and produced a couple of policemen in no time at all. What's more, he had explained to them. He hadn't exactly converted them, though.

"But you see, he'll *have* to come home," I explained. "And if you're there waiting for him . . ."

"But what if he ain't the guy we want?" one of the policemen wanted to

know. "What're we gonna say—sittin' there in his apartment—"

"If there's a piece torn out of the elbow of his coat—" I broke in.

"But if there ain't—"

"All right," I said. "From the window of the apartment you can see me standing here in the doorway of this saloon. I'll hang around until he comes. I'll know him all right. If his elbow's all right I'll walk away. You'll have plenty of time to get out of the apartment before he gets up there. You can get right down the fire escape to the back yard and he'll never even see you. If there's a piece torn out of his sleeve I'll light a cigarette. Then it'll be up to you. But if we keep standing around talking he'll be here before we . . ."

Which was the point. And they took Mack with them. The fewer people in the street just then, the better.

The lights went out in the saloon behind me, leaving me in black shadow. Clocks, several (for Brooklyn isn't called the "City of Churches" for nothing), struck a quarter past ten, half-past, and finally eleven.

And down the street came the running man, walking now. He turned in at the brownstone house across the street and went up the five steps without seeing me. I lit a cigarette.

THE END

WHEN CHEATING WAS THE RAGE

IF you think you've been cheated especially harshly by a false-bottom jelly jar, you should have lived in old London.

Grain-dealers put thick, heavy bottoms in their measures. Innkeepers thickened the bottoms of bottles and drinking cups. One ale-house proprietor, a crafty woman, poured about an inch and a half of pitch into the bottom of each quart pot and then covered it with a layer of rosemary.

Officers who inspected these specimens could seldom be deceived, but they could always be bribed. If the sale was not up to "standard," there being no standard except that which the inspector invented, the whole supply could be

seized. The minor officers who were to regulate these and other out-of-the-way businesses, collected regularly on the threat of confiscation, or exposure of adulteration and the use of false measures.

The state of affairs became so ridiculous, in fact, that, at one time in London and for a long period afterward, there was no agreement as how much constituted a hundred-weight. So it was left to the city official, of course. This individual who handled the official scales decided how much was a hundred pounds, and he decided as he was bribed. Many times, it was noticed, he had to be paid to keep his arm off the beam!

GRAFTERS IN TOGAS

LIVING in our tumultuous times one is apt to think that all our troubles are original ones; that dirty politics, for one, is a product of our complex civilization. That is not the case. The so-called perfect democracy of the early Greeks offers an easily recognizable specimen of the Tammany Hall set-up. Contrary to common belief, Athens did not have a pure democracy. Only the free natives whose families had lived in Athens for several generations were allowed to have a voice in the government. Slaves and aliens greatly outnumbered the Athenians. Yet, of the group which was allowed to vote, the aristocratic class was in full power. It was the wealthier men of Athens who belonged to secret political societies.

In Athens, the intellectual center of the thriving Greece of the 4th and 5th centuries before Christ, there were many social-political clubs. These were secret and semi-secret, but it was known throughout the city that they exerted a powerful pull on elections. With the same spirit as the modern Tammany-ites, the ancients would hold initiations full of hocus-pocus, solemn oaths, drinking and general amusement. Behind the scenes, they carefully held in their hands the strings of the political puppets. Every trick known and practiced by the modern political boss and his sly lawyer friends was practiced by these clubs a thousand years before America was even dreamed of. For evidence of all this we turn to the speeches and plays of the great Greek orators and writers.

The Greek political clubs swayed elections in the same way the numerous district leaders of Tammany Hall in New York City are said to be doing it today. The policy in that metropolis is to give enough dances, picnics, excursions, and give the boys jobs or get them out of jail so that they will vote "right" on election day. If one of those considered "faithful" is in trouble, the club doesn't let him down. They hire a clever lawyer, and the members testify as character witnesses. The Greeks stuck together just as tightly. Every member of the Greek Tammany organization was helped when he was in trouble and needed it. In the written speech of Antiphon, a famous orator, we read of the case of a wealthy citizen of Greece. It is a case typical of those found in the columns of the New York papers today, but we find it in the renowned literature of ancient Greece.

A wealthy citizen became involved in the murder of a young boy. He was the financial backer of a play and kept the members of the male chorus at his house during rehearsals. When one of the chorus boys developed a sore throat, the host fixed up a dose of medicine to help his voice. A short time later the boy died.

The death occurred at a strategic moment. This wealthy Athenian citizen had been attacking a few of the notorious officials for graft and theft of public funds. The case involved men as high up

as the Senate of Athens, and the date for the trial had been set.

The enemies of this wealthy man took advantage of this grand opportunity to counter-attack. They enlisted the aid of all their powerful political friends, and a substantial sum of money was raised. With the assistance of the dead boy's relatives who had been financed and stirred to anger, a trial was set accusing the wealthy backer of murder. The day before their own trial for embezzlement the corrupt officials arranged to have charges of homicide brought against the reformer. Too busy defending his own neck, the wealthy citizen found it necessary to drop the case against dishonesty and graft.

This system of counter-charge is an old one, but in the late 1920's Tammany Hall used it time and time again. In addition, the case would be assigned before a specially picked sympathetic judge. The prosecuting attorney was paid, if possible, to bungle the argument, and the whole affair would be hushed up.

There were times in ancient Greece when there, too, it was necessary to be a little rough. If the material witness proved to be stubborn he was taken for a little walk—in place of the modern "ride"—and instead of being dumped out of a speeding vehicle, would be shoved off a cliff.

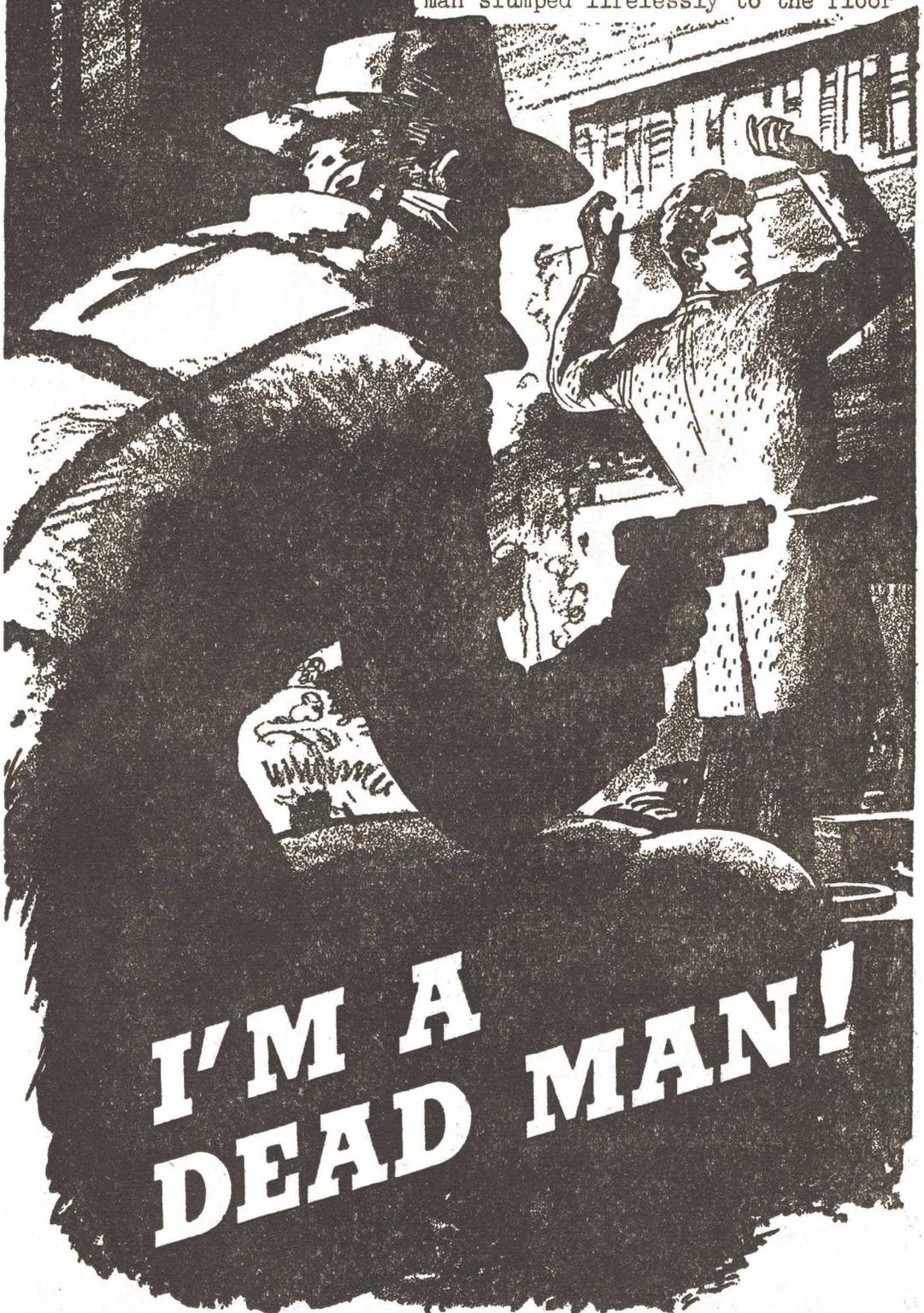
You can pick up any history book and read that in Athens trial by jury was the custom and the law. Much time and energy was spent influencing the jury, and it was not always as simple a task as it is today. The Athenian jury consisted of five hundred, not twelve, men. The famous Aristophanes wrote a satire on the amusing details of the Greek law court in his play "The Wasps."

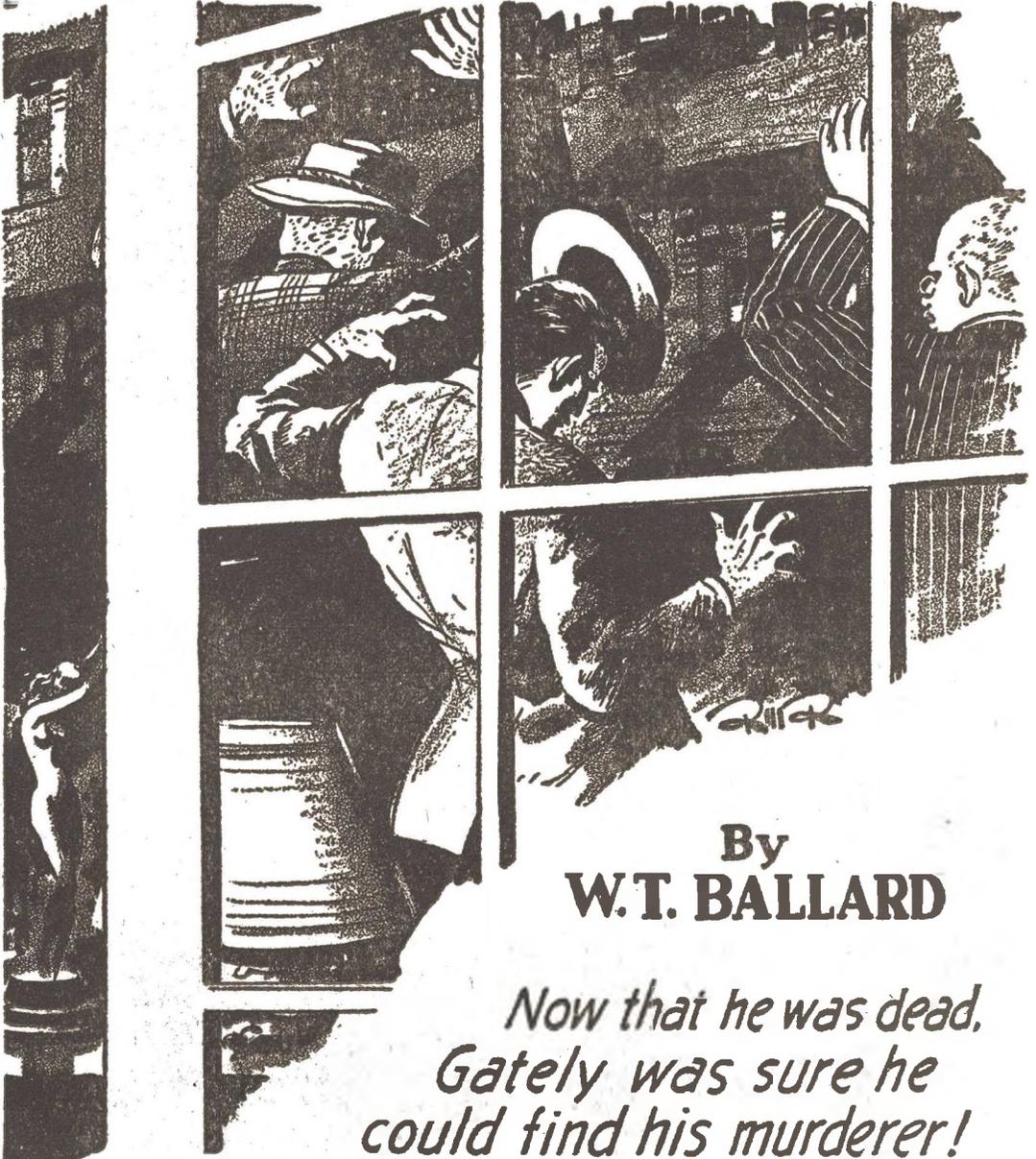
All full citizens in Athens over thirty years of age were eligible for jury duty. Their pay of ten cents per day was considered adequate and politicians used the system of one type of patronage. The ten cents daily pay constituted only one small part of what the jurymen earned. Every trial which involved a wealthy man put great sums of money into circulation through the hands of the jury. The policy during those days was to "soak the rich"—for in the Loeb translation of "The Peace" we read on line 639: "With lawsuits they shook down the fat and rich men . . ."

And elections, too, were run in a similar manner. Money would be distributed to buy votes. The man seeking public office or patronage would beg, cajole, or browbeat his constituents into re-electing him.

The motives, the methods of grafting politicians and their henchmen are the same in the 20th century as they were in the 5th century before Christ. The only distinguishing feature an interested observer might note is the difference in costume. Instead of the familiar bowler hat and cigar, the Greek toga and sandals.—*Pete Bogg.*

The gun spoke once, and the third man slumped lifelessly to the floor





By
W. T. BALLARD

*Now that he was dead,
Gately was sure he
could find his murderer!*

HE'S BEEN murdered," Cordel said, and hung up the phone on the sputtering police operator. He turned around and looked down indifferently at Tom Gately. Gately lay on his back, his knees drawn up as if with pain, his eyes tightly closed, his mouth thin and very still. Toots Apple said from beside the

apartment door, "Maybe he ain't dead, Chief. Maybe you should make certain." Cordel still had his hand on the phone. He was a tall man with long, darkly narrow face. His lips were tight and thin, giving his mouth a slit-like look. "If he isn't dead now, he will be before the cops get here. A man doesn't

live with that much lead in his stomach. Look at the blood."

There was a lot of it, staining the whiteness of Gately's shirt a sharp bright crimson.

The little man beside the hall door stirred unhappily. "I still don't get it. Why should you yell copper? It ain't never smart."

"In this case," Cordel told him, "it was very smart indeed. The cops know that Tom was my bodyguard. Why should I shoot my own bodyguard?"

"Because he was a rat," said the little man. "You had plenty reason to shoot him, Chief. Wasn't he going through your desk when we walked in?"

"Sure," said Cordel. "Sure he was. So I shot him, but then, we've got a body on our hands. It's not smart to move bodies; so, we'll let the cops move it for us. We'll say we came in, and someone took a shot at us. We don't know who, and Tom got it in the stomach. Poor guy. We'll give him a funeral. We'll give him the best, even if flowers are expensive. Now, do you think it was wise to call the cops?"

Toots Apple was not sure. Toots Apple was never certain of anything. He was a worrier and the boys laughed at him for it.

"Come on," said Cordel. "Let's have a drink. We'll come back in a few minutes and make certain that he's dead. We wouldn't want him alive when the cops show, but I don't think he will be, I don't think he is now." He walked across the floor and used a pointed shoe to kick Gately's side, then they went into the big front room, closing the door.

THE man on the floor rolled over and sat up. Pain twisted his mouth, but he did not cry out. He stared down at the blood on his shirt, at the heavy dented belt buckle. He couldn't believe it. The bullet had struck directly

on the buckle and coursed upward, digging a groove across his ribs and going through between his arm and side. It was from this groove that the blood had come and there was plenty to make it look convincing.

The force of the bullet had knocked the wind out of him and doubled him over. Cordel wasn't the only one in the room who had thought that he was dead. Tom Gately had been certain of it.

He'd always heard that a shot in the stomach hurt, bad. He'd writhed on the floor trying to get his wind. He hadn't known exactly when he realized that he wasn't going to die, but the realization had come swiftly, and with it the certain knowledge that if the gambler standing over him guessed that his victim was not seriously hurt, he would send a second bullet.

Gately had lain still. It had taken a lot of will power. But when your very life depends on what you do, you have the will. He'd been surprised to hear Cordel calling for the cops and a ray of hope had come to give him added strength. He breathed in little dribbles, so lightly that the motion of his lungs hardly stirred his chest.

If he could but escape detection until the cops arrived. But Cordel's last words before leaving the room had sealed the doom of that. The gambler would return and make certain that his victim was actually dead. He had to get away from there.

He moved quickly to the connecting door, listening for a moment. The murmur of Cordel's voice came to him indistinctly. There was no chance to go out that way, but there was the fire escape.

He knew the building like a book. Three weeks ago when he had first taken the job of guarding the gambler he had investigated the place thor-

oughly. It was not a new building, and he wondered sometimes why Cordel chose to stay there, but he was not thinking of that now as he crossed the room and opened the window.

The gash in his side was beginning to burn, but he took no heed. His shirt was a mess and he buttoned his coat over it, regretting that he had no overcoat. Then he stepped out onto the fire escape and went downward into the sheltering darkness.

CHAPTER II

HIS name was printed in the morning headlines. Black type said: Police Hunt Vanished Body. Private Detective Murdered.

Tom Gately smiled cautiously. His side was home-taped, since he had not wanted to go near a doctor, and even the strain of letting his lips curve made the tape pull. He drank his coffee in the little restaurant and read on.

Police had been called to the apartment of Oliver Cordel, well-known sportsman, who told them that his bodyguard Gately had been murdered. On arrival Gately's body had vanished but a spot of blood-soaked rug bore out Cordel's story.

The police believed that the killing might be a new move in the gambling war which had broken out spasmodically in the last few months, since Cordel was known to have certain connections with local bookmakers and commission men. . . .

There was a poor picture of Gately, taken a dozen years before, with a caption which stated that his body was missing. One theory advanced was that the murderers had removed it purposely so that if they were caught there would be no *corpus delicti*.

Gately grinned in spite of his smarting side. "So that's what I am," he

said, half aloud.

His waitress turned. "Did you say something?"

He shook his head. "Just repeating my brain exercise. Spell eight words every morning at breakfast, and the first thing you know, you'll be educated."

"The first thing you know I'll think you're crazy," she warned.

He let his grin widen. "I wouldn't be surprised if you're about right." He rose. "Here, buy yourself a pair of nylon hose." He laid a nickel carefully on the table and went out, whistling.

IT WAS after ten, and he wondered what the next thing was that a murdered man should do. He knew that he should have contacted the police, but for certain reasons of his own he had decided to stay dead for a few days.

If Cordel really thought him dead, it might be easier to spy on the man, and that had been why he took the bodyguarding job in the first place. Then too, the continued absence of his corpse would worry the gambler, and that fitted directly into Gately's plans.

There were difficulties of course. He'd spent the night in a cheap hotel, but he had less than a hundred dollars in his pocket, and he did not believe that his bank would honor a dead man's check without asking some leading questions.

He wondered if Cordel was in his apartment. He was still certain that the papers he was looking for were somewhere in that desk. It was corny to think of secret drawers, or compartments, but he knew that Cordel had taken the fat envelope into the room and left without it, and he certainly had seen nothing of it when he searched the desk on the preceding evening.

It was unfortunate that Cordel and his little shadow had chosen to come

home so soon. Had they stayed away another five minutes, he would have finished his search, even if he'd had to pry the desk apart to make certain that it contained no secret compartment.

With this in mind he hailed a cab and told the man to take him to an address a block from Cordel's apartment. After working for the man he knew enough of the gambler's habits to know that Cordel should be leaving the house about this time, headed for his downtown office.

He meant to wait until the coast was clear and then to have another look. As the cab went past the apartment, he watched to see if there was any sign of the police. There didn't seem to be any.

He left the hack at the next corner and started back, keeping on the lookout for Cordel or Toots Apple. Three doors from the gambler's building was a small drug store. He went into this, avoiding the counter for the clerk might recall his face, and moved quickly back to the phone booth.

He dialed Cordel's number and waited while the bell at the other end rang several times. There was no answer and he hung up, satisfied. Apparently the gambler had already gone. He left the store, still avoiding looking directly at the clerk, and moved to the entrance of the alley. He meant to enter the apartment by the back way, through the little hall which led to the incinerator, but he never reached it for as he stepped around the corner, someone called his name from a small car parked at the curb.

He turned, startled, and saw a girl under the wheel of the car. His single glance showed him that he had never seen her before.

CHAPTER III

SHE was a small girl with grey-green eyes. He noted this as he moved

quickly toward the car, but he did not see the gun in her gloved hand until he opened the door.

Four little freckles made a tiny bridge across the short, pert nose. He wasn't looking at her face but at the gun.

"Get in," she said, and he obeyed slowly. Her eyes were bright, her lips soft and looked as if they could laugh. But they weren't laughing now. They were tight-pressed, and the eyes glittered a little. "I said, get in, or I'll start to yell and give the papers a real story."

Gately got in. He took it easy, favoring his side as much as possible. She misunderstood his reason for moving so slowly and snapped:

"Clasp your hands at the back of your neck."

He started to protest, and she jammed the gun against his bad side, making him wince. Then she used her free hand to pat his pockets. "What? No gun?"

"No gun," he said, "and if you don't mind, I'd like to know what this is all about? Who are you?"

"Never mind who I am. You're going to the police," she said. "You're supposed to be murdered. I didn't think I'd find you walking around."

"I didn't say I was dead," he corrected her. "Someone made a mistake, and there's no law that requires me to race downtown and say different."

"There may not be any law about that," she said. "But there should be a law to keep an innocent man from being arrested for a crime that hasn't even been committed."

"Maybe if you talk English, I'd understand what you mean," he told her. "And do you mind if I lower my arms? I've got a sore side. A bullet got too close to it."

Her eyes jumped a little with surprise, then narrowed. "If that's some

more of the act—”

“Look.” His patience was wearing thin. He didn’t like people who pointed guns at him, even when they were pretty and had red hair. “I tell you I don’t know what this is all about.”

Her voice had an icy edge of contempt. “I suppose you don’t know that Boyd Cramer has been arrested for your murder?”

He stared at her. “Boyd Cramer? Are you kidding?”

“I don’t usually need a gun when I am.” Her voice was still icy, but she wasn’t quite as certain as she had been.

He thought this over in silence. “And just how did Cramer manage to get himself arrested? I knew he was dumb, but I thought that even he had sense enough to keep out of a jam of this kind.”

Her eyes got dangerous. “He’s my brother.”

“So he can be your uncle.” Gately was mad and when he got mad enough, he forgot a lot of things, even the gun which she still held within inches of his side. “This is swell. This is all I need to make everything perfect. I’m right in the groove, going to town!”

It was her turn not to understand. “Why . . . what . . .”

“Nothing,” he said, “nothing at all. Forget it. How’d this jerk brother of yours happen to get mixed up in this at all?”

“The police found him hanging around outside Cordel’s apartment last night. He had a gun in his pocket and he’d made threats against Cordel. Maybe you know that.”

“I know it,” said Gately. He was trying to think, trying to decide what to do. He could go to the police, prove that he was alive, but they would ask a lot of questions which he wasn’t ready to answer. “It’s never wise to make threats, even with a gun.”

HER eyes sparkled a little. “And it isn’t wise to have a man arrested for murder when the victim is walking around on two feet. The police are going to ask you a lot of questions, and you and Cordel better have some very good answers ready.”

“Cordel thinks I’m dead.”

Her eyes showed that she didn’t believe him. “A fine story.”

“Listen,” he said. “Take a look at my ribs, you female doubting Thomas. The groove along them wasn’t put there by a nail file.” He lowered his hands without asking permission and pulled open his shirt so that she could see the thick layer of tape.

She eyed it cautiously. “That doesn’t prove anything.”

“What do you want me to do?” He was getting mad again. “Maybe pull off the bandage and bleed all over your car?”

“You mean Cordel shot you?” There was a faint note of doubt in her voice.

“I don’t mean anything else.”

“And why should he shoot you?” She was still far from convinced.

“Because,” he said, using the tone one might apply to a three-year-old child, “he found me going through his desk, and he didn’t like it.”

“But you were his bodyguard; the paper said so.”

“It wouldn’t be the first time the papers were wrong if they had that screwed up; but as it happens, for once they were right.”

She shook her head. “I still don’t get it, but I’m not going to try to straighten it out. I’ll just take you down to the police and . . .” She broke off with a little gasp for his big hand had sneaked out, caught the little gun and twisted it free from her fingers.

“I think not.”

They stared at each other, the girl’s

eyes smoldering. "Give me that."

He shook his head. "Sorry, sister. I don't like women butting into things; they always cause trouble."

"Is that so!" She was really mad now.

He nodded. "That's so. Women try to be so clever. You parked yourself outside Cordel's apartment intending to watch him. He's not there, so you're lucky and see me. That makes you very clever, doesn't it?"

She did not deny the charge. "You're better than Cordel would be," she said. "You're alive; so, my brother couldn't have killed you. Put down that silly gun and we'll go over to the police station."

"And what'll happen then?"

"My brother will be freed."

"And he'll be as bad off as he was before all this started."

She opened her eyes very wide. "What do you know about that?"

HE LOST his temper again. "Look, sister. I know everything about it. Your precious brother works for Professor Donat. They're developing a new plastic and wood combination, supposed to be lighter and tougher than aluminum. Your brother had the whole works in an envelope: formula, notes on the experiments, everything. He was supposed to deliver them to the Cedar Manufacturing Company. The only trouble was that he likes to bet on the races. He stopped in one of Cordel's joints to put a few bucks on a pony's nose. There was a fight; he got his head bumped; and when he woke up, the papers were gone."

Her mouth was open a good half inch. "Who told you?"

He said angrily: "What do you think I was serving as Cordel's bodyguard for? The Cedar people hired me to recover those papers. Never mind how I got the job. It so happens that I

knew a couple of things about Cordel, I also knew that he was having trouble with a rival gambling syndicate, so I sold him a bill of goods that his life was in danger and that he ought to have a second bodyguard besides Toots Apple—someone that these other gamblers wouldn't think was connected with him."

Her mouth closed slowly and her eyes lighted a little. "Oh, I get it: you were a kind of spy."

He grunted. "Okay, I was a kind of spy, or anything else you want to call me. The main idea was to get into Cordel's apartment when he wasn't around and search his desk. It was a good idea, only I got caught."

Her whole attitude had changed. "Who do you think stole that formula—the enemy?"

He shrugged. "Ask the FBI. I'm only a plain private cop. Now, do you see why I can't go down to the police station with you? Besides, jail is a swell place for your jerk brother. He can't get into any more trouble as long as he's locked up."

She flared. "You've no right to talk that way. He isn't a fool. Lots of people bet on the horses."

"And lots of people lose," he told her, not concerned with her brother's gambling. "Look at it this way. The guys that stole this stuff are tough babies and they play for keeps. Apparently your brother had some dizzy notion of getting those papers back alone, or he wouldn't have been hanging around outside Cordel's apartment with a gun. Do you want him killed?"

"Killed?"

His patience was entirely gone. "Certainly—killed. You must believe in Santa Claus if you think he can go wandering about playing cops and robbers with a bird like Cordel. Leave him in jail. The food isn't so hot, but

at least he isn't spending his own ration tickets."

She considered. "For how long?"

Tom Gately shrugged. "How do I know? A day, two days, two weeks. I don't know how long it's going to take to clean this up. Just don't turn me in, let me stay the ghost that wasn't there."

"Well, yes, I'll do it if you'll let me help you."

He groaned at that. "Haven't I got enough trouble without a dumb female hanging around under foot?"

"I'm not dumb!" she flared. "Besides why should I trust you if you don't trust me?"

He thought of something. He didn't have much money with him, and no place to go. She might come in handy at that. "Okay," he said. "If that's the way it works, that's the way it works. Can I stay at your place, I can't very well go to my own."

She hesitated, then nodded and put out one hand. "Partners."

He took her hand, feeling slightly silly. "Partners; but you've got to take orders from me. Understand?"

She nodded and waited expectantly. "You stay here," he said, "and watch. If you see Cordel coming or anyone that looks suspicious, blow the horn." He got out of the car quickly before she had time to object and moved swiftly toward the rear door of the building.

But it did him no good, for, although he got into Cordel's apartment without incident, and searched it thoroughly, he found nothing. If the papers had ever been there they must have been removed after the shooting.

CHAPTER IV

BACK at the car the girl looked at him reproachfully. "I thought you'd sneaked off, you were gone so long."

"You can't search a joint in two

minutes," he told her, getting into the coupe.

"And you forgot to give me back my gun."

He shook his head. "I didn't forget. We're partners, aren't we? Well, I haven't got a gun and I might need one. Besides, I'm more used to handling one than you are."

She didn't like the last, but she kept her mouth shut about it, asking instead, "What do we do next?"

Gately glanced at the clock on the dash, seeing that it was already past noon, so he stalled. "I'm not sure."

"I know what I'm going to do," she decided. "I'm going to Professor Donat. He can at least go to the jail and tell my brother not to worry, that you're really alive."

Gately started to protest, then changed his mind. He'd never seen the chemist and there were a couple of things which had been bothering him.

"Okay," he said. "I'll go for that one. You're doing okay, baby."

She didn't like being called baby and showed it by the look she gave him, but Gately was not worried. He leaned back in the seat, keeping his hat brim well down so that it shadowed his face. There wasn't much chance of anyone recognizing him, but the girl had, even from the bad newspaper picture, and you never could tell.

It took the small car thirty minutes to make the drive across town. The Professor's laboratory was in an old brick building which had once housed a prosperous automobile agency.

The windows of the show room had been painted black, and the whole place had a deserted air. He tried the front door, found it locked and went around to the side through a short paved alley.

The girl's heels clicked across the concrete and she came up to his side

"Do you want to get in?"

He stared at her. "Of course not. I just like to go round, trying locked doors."

"Smarty!" She opened her bag and produced a leather folder.

"What the dickens?"

"My brother's keys," she said, "or did you forget that he worked for the Professor?"

"You're an angel," he said, and stepped aside for her to open the door.

They came into what had once been the service floor. Now it was pretty well covered with wooden cases which the girl told him contained chemicals and material that the Professor was using in his experiments. The windows had all been darkened with paint and the place had a spooky feel which Gately did not like.

They were halfway toward the glass doors which separated the garage part from the old show room, when a sudden sound made him swing around, jerking the girl's gun free.

A little guy had come around a pile of boxes and was watching them through thick-lensed glasses. He had a ring of hair around the sides of his head and none at all on top.

Gately swore softly, but the girl rushed past him with a glad little cry.

"Oh, Professor. We were looking for you. We thought you weren't here so I used my brother's keys."

DONAT blinked at them, his eyes on Gately questioningly, frowning at the gun which the detective still held.

The girl hastened to explain. "He's a detective," she said. "He was hired by Mr. Cidar to get back the formula. He was pretending to be Cordel's bodyguard so that he could search for the formula. They caught and shot him, only the bullet struck his belt buckle."

The Professor blinked more rapidly as if he were having trouble keeping up with the rush of her words. "Yes, yes, of course. Isn't he the one that your brother is supposed to have killed?"

She nodded. "Yes, he's the one. We can't go to the police yet because then Cordel would find out that he was alive."

Gately thought that he'd better take over the conversation. If the girl kept talking she'd have the little scientist so confused that he'd never get straightened out.

"It's really very simple," Gately said easily. "You see, Cidar was quite concerned at the loss of that formula. They'd spent a lot of money, backing you and when you told them that the only copy had been lost and that it might take you weeks, perhaps months, to work it out again from memory, he hired me to try and recover it. It was pretty obvious that Cordel was mixed up in it somewhere. This fight took place in one of his bookmaking establishments, and he isn't the kind of man who allows a fight to take place in one of his joints unless he starts it himself.

"I knew he was in trouble with other gamblers and could use an extra bodyguard, so I chiseled the job, and was searching his desk when he caught me."

"Very, very unfortunate."

Gately grinned sourly. "It would have been more so, if I hadn't worn a heavy belt buckle. I guess I was born to be hung."

"No doubt." The Professor's voice had a dry sound. "But I don't understand why you wanted to see me."

Gately shrugged: "Miss Cramer wanted me to come and prove to you that her brother didn't kill me."

"That's quite obvious," the Professor admitted. "I've heard of spirits walking around, thumping tables and send-

ing messages, but I never heard of one carrying a gun."

Gately grinned and put the gun into his pocket. "Well, that's that. You'll see that the boy gets the information that his victim is walking around on two legs?"

"I can't very well," Donat said. "I don't know where he is."

"But I thought he was in jail?" Gately's face was the picture of bewilderment.

"They let him out around eleven," the Professor said. "Lack of evidence. If you see him," he was speaking to the girl. "Tell him to come right out here. I'll forgive his carelessness if he'll come back. I've got to get to work. I need his help." The man sounded fretful. "I'll have to start all over again from memory. I don't know how this will come out. Discoveries are often the result of accidents, and accidents are hard to repeat."

CHAPTER V

IN THE car Mary Cramer looked at Gately. "Well, I guess there's no need your coming alive, at least from my point of view, since the police have turned Boyd loose."

"You can at least drive me down to the Cidar Company," he said. "You owe me that much for poking that gun into my sore ribs."

Her face got serious. "You ought to go to a doctor and have that side taken care of."

He shrugged, and she started the car. On his orders she pulled it around behind the big plant and waited. Gately showed his pass to the armed guard and the man's eyes opened wide with surprise, "But, you're dead!"

"So I'm dead," Gately told him. "Just forget you ever saw me after you call Cidar's office and tell him I'm coming

up." He passed the startled guard and made his way up a rear stairway toward the office. The switchboard girl gave a little scream when she saw him, her pretty face going dead white.

"Relax," Gately told her sharply. "I'm no ghost. I'll pinch you to prove it."

She almost broke the chair, getting out of his way. "Don't touch me!" She fled toward the private office, Gately following.

Hoffman Cidar was at his desk, big and pink and white, looking well-fed and competent. Albert Sorchon, the company attorney, was standing beside the window, his face thin and dark and sharp-looking. The trembling girl turned as Gately came in and pointed a wavering finger. "He's dead."

"You're crazy." Hoffman Cidar did not raise his voice. "Get back to the switchboard and keep your mouth shut."

She went, banging the door behind her and both men looked at Gately in unconcealed annoyance. "A fine thing," said Cidar. "You're name in all the papers and you aren't even dead."

Gately was not mad. This was the thanks a man got for risking his life, but he managed to control his temper. "Those things happen," he said, almost sullenly. "If they'd stayed away ten more minutes, I'd have had the formula and—"

Cidar's voice was careful and clear cut. "If my foremen fail me, I fire them, just as I'm going to fire you. That formula meant a lot to us, and to the war effort. We've already spent almost thirty thousand dollars backing the old fool and now he can't remember exactly how he put it together. It may take him months, or it may be that he'll never get it again. In the meantime these thieves will find some market and—"

"I'll get it," Gately cut in. "Cordel

thinks I'm dead, and I'll let him think so until—"

Albert Sorchon cut in carefully. "That won't be necessary. I'm going to get the formula myself. I've already made my arrangements. For my part, Gately, I'd turn you over to the police for posing as a detective and getting money under false pretenses, but Mr. Cidar doesn't want the added publicity. My advice is that you get away from here as rapidly as possible and that you don't come back."

Gately looked from him toward Cidar. "I hope you know what you're doing."

"I know," Sorchon assured him. "I've had dealings with people like Cordel before. He won't break his word to me."

CHAPTER VI

OUTSIDE in the car Mary Cramer took one look at Gately's face. "What happened?" You look mad enough to bite nails."

"I'm madder," he said. "I not only get shot at, I get fired. This is a fine case! You've got double crossing gamblers, a wise lawyer; the only thing you haven't got is murder and they certainly tried hard enough on that."

She put the car into gear and pulled ahead. "Well, if you're fired there isn't any reason why you shouldn't come alive."

"Isn't there?" His voice was bitter. "I don't like to be made a fool of, and on my last case, too."

"Last case?"

"Report for the army next week," he said, "but I'm going to clean this thing up before I leave. Sorchon may be willing to let Cordel off and make a deal with him, but I haven't forgotten that that hotshot put a bullet along my ribs, a bullet he meant for my stomach. I'm

going to watch Sorchon tonight. Maybe I can nail him, too. At least I'll try, but what I need is a place to stay undercover until tonight."

"What about my place?"

It was the suggestion that Gately had been angling for. "Let's go," he said. "You're a nice kid, Mary. I'll send you a piece of a Zero when I get to Tokyo."

She glanced at him for a long moment, her mouth soft, her eyes smiling a little, then she gave her full attention to her driving.

Her home was the rear bungalow of a U-shaped court. They left the car in the alley and went in through the rear door. A sharp voice called from the front room to know who it was.

"That's Boyd," the girl said. "Come here, Boyd. I want you to meet your victim."

"My who?" The boy came through the door, stopping suddenly as he saw Gately. "Oh, where . . . I thought you were dead!"

The girl explained. The boy listened, his dark eyes brooding a little. He was tall, thin-faced and restless. "So, they're going to get the formula back themselves." He sounded angry. "We'll see about that."

The girl's voice got worried. "You keep out of it," she warned him. "The Professor wants you to come back to work. He don't blame you for going to that bookmaker."

"Why should he? He knew I was betting on the horses. He even made a bet himself last week."

"Never mind that," the girl spoke sharply. "You go back to work and don't try any detecting of your own. You'll just get into trouble the same way that you did last night."

They stared at each other in angry silence for a few moments, then the boy swung around on his heel and went

into the dining room. A few minutes later they heard the door slam and Mary Cramer sighed heavily. "I guess I didn't do a very good job bringing him up." She turned, looked at Gately. "I've tried my best but he just doesn't listen to me."

Gately shrugged and eased himself into a seat at the kitchen table. She saw the movement. "I'm going to have a look at that side."

He protested, but she led him into the couch and made him remove his shirt, then pulled the tape from his ribs.

The gash left by the bullet was ugly looking, purplish along the edges, and she made little clicking noises with her tongue against her teeth. "I'm going to call my doctor." She turned and was halfway toward the phone before he caught her.

"No, you don't. Any sawbones that you might know would be certain to report a bullet wound to the cops, and I don't want the cops messing in this yet."

She stared at him. "Of all the stubborn men. You've been fired off this case, what do you care what the police do?"

His mouth was very grim. "I care a lot, sister. Cordel shot me, and I owe him something for that. Besides, I don't like being made a sucker of."

"So you'd rather die . . ."

"I'm not going to die. Just patch it up and let me grab a couple of hours sleep. I'll be all right."

She turned back, hesitating. "I've got some of this new sulpha-treated bandage . . ."

"Anything," he said and returned to the couch while she taped his side. Then she brought him a drink that bubbled a little.

He regarded it suspiciously. "What's that?"

"Just a bromide. It will make you

sleep."

"Look," he said. "I can't take that. I've got things to do."

"You wanted some sleep."

"Just for a couple of hours."

"I'll wake you," she told him. "You don't have to worry about that. Here, drink it."

Gately drank, thinking as he did so that he was taking a lot of orders from a woman.

CHAPTER VII

THE lights in the other room were on when he awoke. He lay there, his mind heavy and foggy, hearing slight sounds. Finally his senses straightened out and he was conscious of the darkness outside the window.

He rolled over, getting up; hurt his side and swore softly, but loud enough for the girl to hear and she appeared in the connecting doorway. "Have a good sleep?"

He said angrily: "I thought you were going to wake me up."

"You were sleeping so peacefully and . . ."

He wanted to swear again but didn't. "What time is it?"

"After eight."

"Damn it," he said. "I've got to get over to Albert Sorchon's place."

She didn't understand and he explained. "Sorchon is the attorney for the Cidar Company. He's made a private deal to get that formula back. That means just one thing, that he's contacted Cordel and arranged to buy the formula. I wanted to follow Sorchon and catch them both when the deal was made, but I'm afraid now that it's too late."

"I'll drive you." From her face he saw how sorry she was. I didn't realize and I thought you needed sleep so badly. I'll get the car."

Sorchon lived in one of the big old houses off Third Street. The neighborhood was conservative and well kept, a kind of island of residential property which the city had passed in its push westward toward the sea.

They turned into the street and started along it, then Gately suddenly ordered the girl to stop. His sharp eyes had caught the shadow of two figures hurrying toward the car parked at the curb. Obediently she brought the little coupe to a halt and he swung out.

The street was lighted by standard lamps set every three hundred feet and under ordinary circumstances would have been very bright. But the lamps all wore paint hoods which cut down radiance in accordance with dimout regulations.

Even in the resulting half light, Gately recognized the two men as they gained their car. One was Cordel; the second was the gambler's partner, Toots Apple.

He jerked his gun free and started forward, hardly knowing what he intended to do, but he did nothing because before he could cover the distance, they had gained the car and were speeding away.

He stifled the impulse to send a bullet after their spinning tires, and instead turned up the wide walk which led back to the old-fashioned house.

THE light in the hall was on and he punched the bell viciously. He meant to have a showdown with the lawyer. He meant to catch the man with the formula and force him to go to the police, even if he had to use the gun which he still carried in his hand.

He meant to make Sorchon admit that he had paid Cordel for the formula. He punched the bell again, and as if in answer, the sound of a shot exploded

somewhere within the house.

For an instant he thought that the lawyer might be shooting at him from one of the windows, then he realized that this was not the case and wrenched the front door inward.

Light came out to the hall from an open door at the far end and Tom Gately pelted toward this. He gained the doorway, his eyes sweeping the room beyond, seeing that it was a library. Sorchon was bent forward over the desk, his head forward on his hands as if he were asleep and a shadowy figure was just climbing in at a far window.

The intruder saw Gately at the same instant that Tom saw him and the sound of their shots mingled into a single burst of noise. The bullet from the window clipped past Gately's ear, whistling a little as it came. He ducked instinctively and when he looked again the window across the room was empty.

He knew better than to charge headlong across that room. Instead he reached cautiously around the edge of the jamb, found the switch and cut the lights. Then he stole cautiously forward until he could peer out the window. Nothing but darkness showed in the wide side yard.

He stood there for long minutes, looking out, waiting for movement in the darker shadows that bordered the banks of shrubbery. No movement came and finally satisfied, he pulled down the window and locked it, just in case, then went back and clicked up the switch. Sound in the hall took him around the door, his gun held ready, but it was only the girl, standing in the entrance, staring at him with widely startled eyes.

"Tom! Oh, I thought you'd been shot."

"I'm okay," he told her, "but I'm afraid something's happened to friend

Sorchon." He moved over to the desk and looked at the lawyer without touching him. There was no need to touch the man. Gately was certain that he was dead. A bullet had struck the man's forehead and gone through.

But it was an envelope beneath the man's hand that caught Gately's attention. He managed to slide it out from the grasp of the dead fingers and open it, his heart leaping. Here was the formula.

The girl had come forward into the room. She stood now, just inside the door, staring at the still figure at the desk.

"Who killed him, Tom?"

Gately shrugged. "Lay down with dogs and you get fleas."

She didn't understand and he went on. "Do business with crooks and you're liable to wind up behind the eight ball."

Sorchon was too smart. He couldn't let me handle this, he had to horn in and make his own deal with Cordel. So, he's dead.

"You mean they sneaked back and killed him?"

Gately shrugged. Maybe; maybe not. At least he's dead, and it doesn't matter who did the shooting as far as he's concerned."

"But you've got the formula?" Her eyes were on the papers in his hand.

He nodded. "That's right."

"And the shooting? I heard several shots."

HE TOLD her about the man just crawling in the window. "I didn't get a good look at him," he went on. "It was just a momentary glance. You don't stop to figure out the color of a man's eyes when he's throwing lead at you."

She said nervously. "But what are you going to do now?"

He shrugged. "Turn this over to

Cidar. This formula has certainly caused plenty of trouble. It must be valuable. I told you this afternoon that we'd had everything except murder in connection with this case. Well, we've got that now."

"But mightn't you be blamed?"

He hadn't thought of that and he looked at her keenly. "You're not so dumb, Mary. I just might at that. The bullet that killed this guy went clear through his head. It's probably around somewhere, stuck in one of the walls, but I might have trouble proving that it didn't come from my gun."

"You said it, brother."

They both swung around and saw two uniformed cops standing in the open doorway.

Gately swore under his breath. "How'd you get here so quick?"

One of the uniformed men grinned sourly. "Neighbor heard the shooting and phoned in. We got the call on the prowl car radio. We—" He stopped, staring at Gately. "Say don't I know you. You're—" his face whitened and his rather prominent eyes bulged out a little.

"You're dead." He whispered the last, his tongue running around the circle of his lips. "There's a general alarm out for your body."

His partner said, nervously. "What are you talking about? Are you nuts?"

"It's Gately," said the man.

They both stared as if he were a ghost, and the leader, who had been carrying his service revolver in his hand, let it droop.

"Drop it," said Gately. He had raised the girl's gun.

The popeyed officer let his gun slide. "Then—you aren't dead?"

"Try me," said Gately, "and you'll know whether a ghost's bullet hurts or not."

There was a closet on the far side of

the room. He shepherded them toward it, used their own handcuffs to link them together, and shut the closet door. The girl said in a startled voice. "Why'd you do that?" Now the police will be after you."

He gave her a thin, quick smile. "I need a little time," he said. "I don't care to take the blame for Sorchon's murder."

"But how can you prove that you didn't do it? Even I can't swear that you didn't. I wasn't in the room at the time."

He looked at her consideringly. "I think I've got a fair chance to catch the real killer," he explained. "You see, I've got something that he wants, something that he needs badly."

"The formula?"

He nodded. "You catch on quick."

"But who?"

He turned to glance around the room. "This is no place to stand talking. Other cops are liable to show up here any time. Come on."

CHAPTER VIII

THEY reached the car and she started the motor, pulling away up the dark street before she asked again, "But who?"

Gately shrugged. "Maybe Cordel and his man Apple. We saw them driving away but they could have pulled around on the back street and cut across the rear yard."

"Why?"

He said, "Money. They'd sold the formula to Sorchon. They might want it back to resell to someone else."

She shook her head. "I don't believe it."

He didn't say whether he believed it or not. "There's your brother."

Her shoulders tensed a little. "My brother?"

"Why not? He lost the formula in the first place. Naturally he'd want to get it back."

"He wouldn't kill a man," she said fiercely.

Tom Gately shrugged. "All right. There's Cidar. His company paid the professor plenty for the experimental work. How do we know that he didn't step in and—"

"That's silly," she said. "It would be as silly as for the professor to steal his own formula."

Gately shrugged. "Anyhow, I'm going over and talk to Cordel. I think he and I should have a lot to say to each other."

There was sudden fear in her voice. "But they shot you once."

"And very probably would again if I gave them the chance," he admitted. "But I'll try not to give them the chance. No, maybe I've got a better idea." He was silent for a moment, then he said, "Find a phone. We might as well have some fun out of this."

She shot him a nervous glance. She had not known him long, but even on the short acquaintance it was obvious that Tom Gately was in the habit of doing unexpected things.

He called Cordel's apartment and after a minute Toots Apple answered.

"This is the ghost," Tom Gately said.

"Cut the comedy." Apple was not interested. "If you think this is the time of night for a rib—"

"It's no rib." Gately's tone hardened. "Listen, you little punk. This is a friend of yours. I know how Tom Gately died. I know where his body is. Now, are you interested?"

There was a sputtered gasp at the other end of the wire, then Toots Apple managed to say, breathlessly "Hold it a minute." He was gone for several minutes, then Cordel was at the end of the phone wire swearing softly into

the instrument.

"Who is this?"

Gately was enjoying himself. "Hello, murderer!"

The swearing increased. "Who is this? What do you want?"

"The truth," Gately said in a hollow voice which he hoped sounded as if it came from the grave. "Tom Gately can't rest until the men who murdered him are brought to justice."

CORDEL was an old hand at a gambling table. For years he'd made his living by taking chances, and there was no emotion in the man. He was not one to shy at a ghost, or at talk of a ghost, but he did not like to talk on the phone about a murder that he had committed.

"Who is this?" he demanded. "What is it that you want?"

"The truth." There was a hollow note still lingering in Gately's tone despite an almost over-powering desire to laugh. He would have given a lot to have had a look at the gambler's face at the moment.

"A formula was stolen during a fight at your place. That formula turned up tonight. In reality it's the property of the Cidar Manufacturing company. I want to know how it came into your possession, and—"

"I haven't got it," said Cordel sharply.

"I know that," Gately told him. "You turned it over to a lawyer. He's dead."

Cordel received the news in silence.

"You have one chance," Gately went on. "Come over to Cidar's house now, and maybe we'll forget how Tom Gately died." He rang off and dialed the number of the girl's court. Finally the phone was answered by her brother and Gately lowered his voice confidentially. "Are you alone?"

The boy gasped in surprise, then

said no. "The Professor's here. He just came in."

"Your sister's in trouble," said Gately, "bad trouble. You'd better meet me." He gave the address of Cidar's house and hung up before the boy could protest; then, very pleased with himself, he went out to rejoin the girl in the car.

She looked at his expression and said, sharply. "What are you up to? You look like the canary that swallowed the cat."

"You've got your actors in the wrong spots," he said. "If you really could own a cat-eating canary you'd make a fortune. How about not asking questions and driving me out to Cidars? And make it snappy, sister. I want to get there first."

Cidar was not glad to see him. Few men like being awakened in the middle of the night, and the head of the manufacturing company was not one of them.

He said, peevishly, "I should think you'd be ashamed to show your face around here after the beautiful failure you made of things."

"Who said I'd failed?" Gately pulled the thick envelope from his pocket and waved it under Cidar's nose. "Gately never fails. He does not know the meaning of the word."

Some of the anger went out of Cidar's prominent eyes and they glistened a little as they stared at the envelope. "The formula?"

"Correct," said Gately.

The manufacturer snatched the papers from Gately's fingers and without a word, turned back down the wide hall. Tom Gately followed after glancing back toward the girl who was parked on the far side of the street, half a block away. He'd warned her to wait in the car. Apparently she was obeying orders.

CIDAR moved into a big square library at the end of the hall. He switched on the desk lamp, sat down in a leather chair and spread the papers out on the desk before him, making little grunts of pleasure as he saw the contents.

Finally he looked up. "Where the devil did you get it? Sorchon was going to get it. He'd made a deal—"

Sorchon is dead."

"Dead?" The seated man stiffened as if he'd been touched with a red hot poker.

"He tried to be smart," said Gately, "and he ran into someone smarter than he was. He—" Sound came from the hall and Gately stepped back until his body was partly masked by the curtain at the window.

Cordel tramped into the room, Toots Apple following. The little man paused inside the door looking around, his hands deep in his pockets. Apparently satisfied, he followed his partner toward the desk where Cordel had paused and was glaring down at Cidar.

For his part, the manufacturer was so astonished by their arrival that he failed to find words. "How—who—"

"You called me up." Cordel was whitely furious, but his words were carefully spaced and slow. His eyes had already seen the papers scattered across the desk top and recognized them. "What kind of a double cross is this? I made a deal with your lawyer, sold him those," he indicated the paper with a wave of his hand. "And now—"

"And now," said Gately, stepping from his place of concealment, the girl's gun in his hand. "Don't turn, Apple. Drop that rod."

Toots Apple had stiffened at the sound of his voice. He was motionless now as if arguing with himself whether to take a chance and turn and snap a shot at Gately.

Cordel was motionless also. There was a mirror on the wall behind the desk and he lifted his eyes to look at Gately's reflection. His mouth dropped. It was the only time that Gately had ever seen him surprised.

He tried to speak and couldn't. Toots Apple shot a glance at him as if for instructions, got none and let his gun slide. "A ghost!"

Gately laughed. "A very live one, Toots, my friend. You'll find my bullets hurt like live bullets, too."

Cordel's voice had a dry, harsh grating sound. "So you didn't die after all."

Gately said, "It takes more than a bullet in the stomach to get rid of me, but I've still got enough evidence on my belly to send you up for attempted murder. Try to be funny, and I'll do just that."

Cordel turned slowly. "What is it you want?"

"Information," Gately told him. "There was a fight in your gambling place sometime back. A kid was in there. He got knocked cold in that fight. When he came to, an envelope in his pocket was missing. That fight was no accident. You framed it, you took the envelope and you sold it tonight to Sorchon. Now, I want to know how you heard that the kid was carrying that envelope and who put you up to stealing it?"

"You're crazy," said the gambler.

"No," said Gately. "Someone wanted you to steal that formula. Who?"

"I did." The voice was behind Gately, cold and a little amused. "Very clever, Mr. Gately. Very clever indeed. Let your gun slide to the floor."

GATELY raised his eyes to the same mirror that Cordel had used only a few moments before. He saw a man in a long dark coat, his eyes shadowed

by a pulled down hat and the lower part of his face covered with a handkerchief. He looked like a movie version of a holdup man, but the gun in his gloved hand was real enough.

Gately dropped the girl's revolver. On order he lined up, facing the wall, Toots Apple on one side of him, Cordel on the other. He heard the intruder say, "Just gather up all the papers, Mr. Cidar. Thank you. That's fine; now join your friends."

Cidar obeyed. The masked man's voice got hard. "You double-crossed me, Cordel. You were supposed to deliver this formula to me; you chose to give it to Sorchon. So you die." The sound of his gun was thunderous in the narrow confines of the room. Toots Apple jumped and moaned as if he'd been hit.

Gately dared to steal a glance across his shoulder at the collapsing Cordel.

"Don't turn," the killer's voice was a rasp. "Stay where you are."

There was silence in the room save for Cidar who was swearing under his breath; for Apple who moaned as if in pain.

Gately turned very cautiously. Nothing happened and he swung around. The room was empty. The curtains at the window swayed a little as if it were open, and Cordel was huddled on the rug at his feet, lying half on his face so that the hole between his shoulder blades showed plainly. He was dead.

Cidar had turned also. As soon as he realized that the masked man was gone, he said savagely to Gately, "Everytime you come around, trouble shows up."

"Yes." Gately was staring at the moving curtains, then he stepped forward to scoop up his fallen gun, there was the pound of feet from the porch, excited voices and the girl dashed into the room, her brother at her heels, the little Professor panting along behind.

"What—?" She saw the fallen gambler and turned wide eyes toward Gately. "What's happened? Are you hurt?"

He shook his head. "I'm all right, but Cordel won't be making another bet for awhile."

Toots Apple's face was contorted. "Let me lay my hands on that masked guy. Just let me lay my hands on him."

"Who was he?" Cidar demanded.

The little man turned vacant eyes on the manufacturer. "How should I know?"

"You should," Gately told him. "The man that killed Cordel was the same man who hired him to rob this boy here." He indicated the girl's brother with a jerk of his head.

Toots Apple grunted. "That don't mean a thing. Cordel never told me nothing. He was close-mouthed."

"Maybe it's lucky for you that he was," Gately suggested. "If the murderer had thought that you knew anything, the chances are that you'd have a bullet in your back, too."

APPLE started downward at Cordel and shuddered. Gately turned his attention toward the girl's brother and the Professor. "And where were you two when you heard the shot?"

"I was over at the car with my sister," the boy said defensively, "and the Professor was waiting for me in front of the house."

"Was he?" Gately centered his attention on the man. "So you were waiting outside the house. You didn't by any chance come in, shoot Cordel, duck out the window and be waiting for your young friend by the time he and his sister ran up the block?"

Donat stared at him. "Are you suggesting that I murdered Mr. Cordel?"

"Exactly," Gately told him. "And Mr. Sorchon."

The Professor laughed. "This is high-

ly amusing. And just why do you suggest that? What would I gain by going on this death-dealing rampage?"

"To get the formula." Gately was not disconcerted by the man's easy manner.

"Now you are being absurd. Why should I want to steal the formula from Mr. Cidar? It's his. He paid for the research."

"Exactly." There was satisfaction in Gately's voice. "You had to steal the formula, Professor, because it was no good."

Behind him he heard Cidar draw a quick breath. The girl and her brother were silent, puzzled. Toots Apple was watching the Professor as a cat watches a captured mouse.

Donat managed his laugh again, but this time there was no amusement in it. "That's a startling theory, Gately. I must say that you have a highly developed imagination."

"All of that, Professor." Gately was confident. "But I'm not calling on my imagination at the moment. I'm stating a fact. You got the money for this research from Cidar here, and he got impatient. He was going to shut off your money unless you produced something quickly. But your experiments hadn't worked out. You couldn't show him a workable formula, because you hadn't developed one. So you hit upon an ingenious plan. You wrote out a formula and gave it to the boy here." He indicated the girl's brother. "Then you suggested that he stop at the bookie's where you both had made a few small bets upon occasion. You had arranged to have Cordel stage a fight, knock the boy unconscious and remove the worthless formula from his pocket. Then Cordel was to return it to you.

"Everything went according to schedule. The formula was stolen, but Cordel got the idea that it had more value than

the sum you offered, so he opened negotiations with Sorchon who was attorney for the Cidar Company. I told the boy this afternoon that Sorchon was getting the formula tonight, and he told you." Gately turned to look at Boyd. "Isn't that right?"

THE BOY nodded and Gately turned back to the Professor. "You were outside Sorchon's house when Cordel sold him the formula. After Cordel left, you shot the lawyer through the window and were just going in after the formula when I arrived. You knew you had to stop me, and you figured I'd go back to the girl's place, so you went there and were waiting when I called Boyd and told him to come over here."

"This is absurd. You have no—"

"Proof?" suggested Gately. "Perhaps not, but don't forget I worked for awhile as Cordel's bodyguard. I learned from him that he had stolen the paper for you which is what started me thinking. I—"

He got no farther for Toots Apple had caught up his gun from where he had dropped it on the rug and fired point blank at the Professor. The bullet struck the man in the middle, but evidently his belt buckle was not as heavy as Gately's had been, or Donat lacked the detective's luck for the bullet doubled him over, sending him to the floor. But he had enough strength left to drag his own gun and send a shot into Toots Apple's chest.

LATER, as they left the police station, the girl said, "I still don't understand. If Cordel told you—"

"Cordel told me nothing," he informed her. "At first I thought of two possibilities about the formula. First, it might be foreign agents that Cordel had been working for; second it might be a business rival of Cidar's. But no

foreign agents appeared. I was certain Cordel still had the formula; the Professor admitted knowing the book-maker, and he knew through your brother that Sorchon had a deal on to get it tonight."

"Then you set a trap for him when you called my brother and told him I was in trouble?"

Gately grinned sourly. "I was trying to. I meant to get Cordel and the Professor together and make Cordel talk. But the Professor crossed me up by coming in with that handkerchief on his face, shooting Cordel and re-stealing the formula. Incidentally, the cops found the envelope stuck in the crotch of a tree in the side yard. I suppose he didn't have time to do anything else with it as he slipped out the window and ran around front to meet your brother."

"The police should give you a medal

for figuring this out," she said.

He grunted. "They're sore at me for pretending to be dead, or maybe they're sore because I wasn't murdered when the papers all said that I was. There's no pleasing those guys."

"Well, Cidar ought to like you."

"He's sore, too," Gately grumbled. "In some way he thinks it's partly my fault that the formula won't work. No one likes me."

"I do," she said.

He stopped and grinned at her. "You like me, and so does the army, but you're more important. Shall we do something about it before the army does?"

She looked up at him, started, and then she used Woman's most time-honored phrase. "This is so sudden," she said. "Where can we find a minister?"

THE END

MISSIONARY VERSUS GANGSTER

SOMETIME ago an aged American missionary returned from New Guinea with a native servant and a zeal to fight gangsterism in his home city, Detroit. The servant boy did not think his master any great shakes as a medicine man; the magical feats of his own tribal wizards seemed to him more impressive. He was unable to make head or tail of his master's anti-gangster crusade.

One of the gangsters, known in the underworld as Louey, stole into Howard's grounds and, through an open window, shot and seriously wounded the reformer.

However the servant was up a tree when the shooting occurred. This was nothing unusual—the native was used to climbing trees to look about him. He was unable to stop the assassin, but he did get a good look at his face.

One night soon afterward Louey was posted as a lookout man while his gang undertook to hold up a roadhouse. When they emerged, Louey failed to appear, at which time one of his friends went to look for him.

One of the searchers cried out, "Here's Louey, but he's lost his noodle."

His friends were greatly upset by what seemed to be the most inhuman variation of gang warfare—beheading the servant.

Meanwhile the servant had carried his prize home in a neat basket. Several months later while

his master was still in the hospital the native presented his trophy to Mr. Howard. The native had been unable to preserve the pasty hue of Louey's complexion, in fact, Louey's countenance was nearly as dark as his own. Mr. Howard had no idea who shot him, saw nothing familiar in the dark face, and assumed that the trophy was one the servant brought with him from New Guinea.

When Mr. Howard was well enough to go home, he presented the head to the museum, where it was hung in a place of honor. A few days later, one of Louey's mob ducked into the museum, to avoid being seen by a member of the rival gang. He took one glance at the new exhibit, his eyes opened to astonishing width, and he quickly withdrew.

The curator noticed that during the next week a surprising number of pasty-faced, flashily dressed fellows entered the museum, gazed with horrified expression at the exhibit, and stole away.

One day the leading city gangster asked, "Where'd you guys get that specimen?"

"Why, it was presented to the museum by Mr. James Howard. He lived out in the jungles for a long time, and I guess he brought it from there."

Thereafter Mr. Howard lived at peace, guarded carefully by his New Guinea servant. The word had passed through the underworld that he was an excellent fellow to let alone.—Arnold Young.

"PICKLES" and JAMS"

By **FRANCES M. DEEGAN**

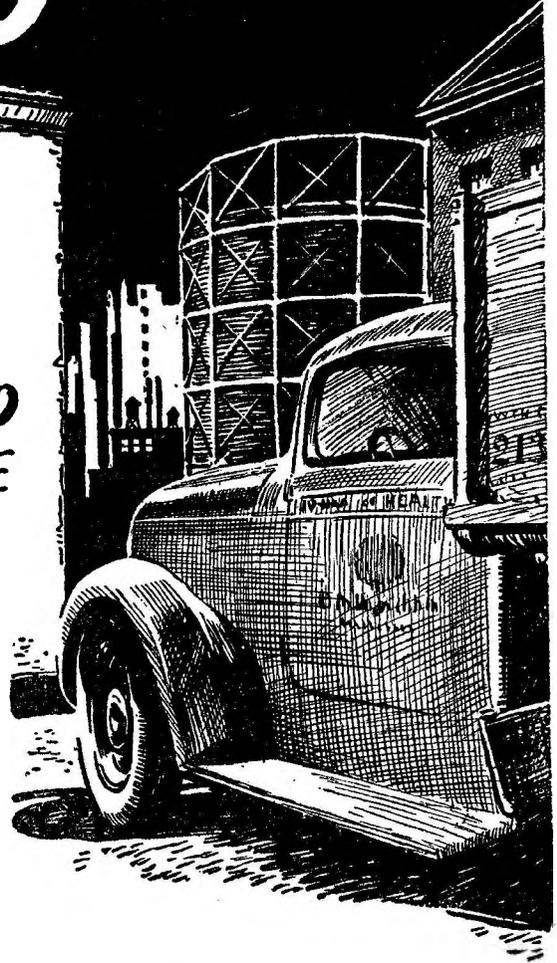
**IT TOOK TWO
STRANGE MEN AND
A LOAD OF GARBAGE
TO KEEP BROOKS
FROM HANGING**

BROOKS Bronson woke slowly and painfully. Then he tried to go back to sleep again, but it was too late. The little devils were already hammering at his brain, reminding him of things, in their usual distorted fashion.

Lenita. Dark eyes no longer remote and inscrutable. Staring at him at the last with a kind of desperation . . . The door closing with a soft snick.

His mouth parched, his feet walking, his head ballooning . . . Ebony fingers on white piano keys, and no sound, only a dull blur . . . People moving, smiling, gesticulating senselessly.

There was pain too, somewhere. And



thundering, jolting movement inside an iron tank. And everywhere the stench of all the putrid rottenness in the world . . . This was madness! This was delirium tremens with a vengeance—

He opened his eyes. On the foot of his bed sat a small gray Humpty Dumpty with an odious expression Brooks closed his eyes and tried to



"Duck down," the little guy said, "we'll cover you up"

count to twenty-five. The devils hammered all out of tempo, confusing the count. He squeezed his eyes tight and let them fly open. Humpty-Dumpty was still there. Worse—he had started to sway back and forth, getting ready to fall.

“God damn you!” said Brooks hoarsely.

“Same to you,” said Humpty-Dumpty in a tired voice and leaned far to the left.

Brooks reached cautiously for the night stand, grasped a crystal ash tray and let it fly crazily. It crashed far beyond the foot of the bed, but it caused Humpty-Dumpty to disappear.

“Is that any way to act,” said the same tired, aggrieved voice, “after all I done for you?”

Brooks pushed himself up on the pillows. As his head cleared the foot of the bed, another head wearing a soiled gray hat emerged from the depths of his armchair. The dark unshaven face was vaguely familiar.

“Oh, yes,” said Brooks thickly. “You’re that chiseler I picked up on Clark Street last night. How come I brought you home with me?”

“You didn’t. I’m the little Boy Scout that lugged you home, after you passed out in the Club Folderol. We put you to bed—me and Hoary.”

“Hoary?”

“Yeah. Horace, the butler. I call him Hoary—”

“He must love that! You mean he willingly let you come in and stay here last night?”

Humpty-Dumpty perched on the foot of the bed again and waggled himself roguishly. Brooks sighed with relief as he recognized the tattered sole of a shoe, so worn that the holes represented a leering face.

“He was not only willing, but anxious,” said Humpty-Dumpty’s owner..

“On account of the cops is looking for you.”

Brooks groaned and massaged his head. His tousled dark hair, bleary gray eyes and blunt features gave him a look of violence that would have done credit to a circus wild man.

“All right. I’ll take care of them,” he muttered. “And I suppose I owe you something, too. For your—er, services. Sorry you had to wait around for your fee. Will you take a check?”

“Look, Brooksy. As the guy says in the song, ‘leave us not pretend.’ Last night me and you was pals. You said it yourself—bosom pals. You leaned on my shoulder and told all. And I mean you spilled. The works. All about your wife leaving you—”

“Sad as my story is,” said Brooks painfully, “I don’t think you’ll find anything in it worthy of blackmail, Mr.—”

“Cabano. John Aloysius Cabano. Johnny to you. And the only reason I don’t get sore and walk out on you is because your story is not only sad, it’s tragical. Things,” declared Johnny Cabano, “have took a turn for the worse. And right now you better have a drink, because I’m gonna have to hand you some very bad news.”

BROOKS stared as the shabby little man lifted himself out of the chair and approached the liquor cabinet with unerring familiarity. He splashed brandy into two goblets and returned to the bed.

“What’s the bad news?” demanded Brooks, taking a goblet in a shaky hand.

“Wrap yourself around that first, and then get hold of your back teeth. It’s gonna knock you.”

Johnny’s sharp face was solemn, his black eyes deep with some dark knowledge that Brooks could sense without being able to recognize. He tasted the

brandy, shuddered, and forced himself to swallow the remainder.

Johnny placed the two empty glasses on the night stand and shoved his hands into his pants pockets. "You want it straight?"

"Let's have it."

"Your wife," said Johnny, "was murdered last night."

There was a blank cold space where Brooks' brain should have been. His whole body was rigid with shock. Johnny snatched up the goblets and returned to the liquor cabinet.

Brooks reached for the goblet and gulped the liquor down. Then he threw back the bedclothes and stood beside the bed, driving his hands up and over his head again and again. He shook himself and stared at Johnny Cabano.

"How do you know?" he asked flatly.

Johnny stepped across the room to the dresser and picked up a Chicago Sun. "All I know," he said, "is what it says in the morning paper. Want I should read it?"

Brooks clenched his teeth, and said, "Go ahead."

"The body of lovely Lenita Lecours Bronson," read Johnny nasally, "was discovered in the living room of her Astor Street apartment last night by her maid, Elsie Brieger. Mrs. Bronson had been strangled with a lamp cord, and the disordered condition of the room was mute evidence of the vain struggle she put up for her life.

"The maid said she left the apartment shortly after dinner to attend a movie with friends, returning at approximately 11:00 o'clock, to find her mistress dead. She ran to the neighboring apartment of Martin Kopen, New York broker, who immediately notified the police and called Mrs. Bronson's physician, Dr. R. O. Strook. Dr. Strook gave it as his opinion that the socially prominent beauty had been

dead less than two hours. This was later confirmed by the Coroner, who gave the time of death as somewhere between 9:00 and 10:00 p.m.

"Miss Brieger declared that when she left the apartment Mrs. Bronson was alone, but that she was expecting a visit from her estranged husband, Brooks Menonville Bronson, wealthy owner of the Bronson Pickle and Jam Company. According to Jeff Hanway, elevator operator at the Astor Street apartment building, Bronson arrived at a few minutes past 8:00 o'clock. The time of his departure has not yet been established, nor had the police been able to contact him up to an early hour this morning. At his home on the Gold Coast, his aunt, Mrs. Minerva Bronson-Johnson, well known socialite, expressed complete ignorance of his whereabouts—"

"OH, LORD!" Brooks groaned.

"Have they been here already?"

Johnny Cabano looked at him with a faintly pitying expression. "Whadda ya think," he grated, "they're gonna wait for you to send out engraved invitations? They not only been here, they still are—since twelve o'clock last night!"

"Twelve o'clock! Then what time did I come in?"

"Around about four a.m. It took a little while to locate Dominick."

"Dominick?"

"My cousin, Dominick. You met him. He drives a scavenging truck—"

"Just a minute," muttered Brooks, sinking limply to the edge of the bed. "I seem to have missed several installments of this story. Lenita—But she can't be dead!" he said harshly. "It's another one of her tricks!"

Johnny tilted his disreputable hat to one side and gazed at Brooks morosely. "I knew it was gonna hit you sooner or

later," he said. "But I didn't think you was gonna go to pieces over it. Accordin' to what you told me last night you and her was all washed up."

"I'm not going to pieces," said Brooks raggedly. "I just don't believe it!"

"Her own doctor identified her," said Johnny sharply. "Better face it, Brooksy. She's dead, and the cops are tryin' to pin it on you. They'd do it too, except for one thing."

Brooks looked up haggardly. "What's that?"

"Except you got an alibi," said Johnny softly. "Me. I know where you was at nine o'clock last night, and I can prove it. Furthermore, you ain't been out of my sight since."

Brooks stared at the cocky little bum with mingled doubt and distaste. He looked like anything but a good Samaritan. He looked much more like one of the murderous thieves who waylaid the lone traveler. But apparently, instead of committing assault and robbery, this creature had brought him home and smuggled him safely into the house under the noses of the police.

"Just where," Brooks asked, "were the police when I—when we came in this morning?"

"One was staked out front," said Johnny. "And the other one was havin' coffee near the phone in the front hall."

"Then we must have tunneled our way in, I take it."

"I ain't surprised you should think that," said Johnny complacently. "It was quite a trick, but me and Hoary and Dominick worked it—with Minnie's help, of course."

"Minnie!"

"The aunt, chum, the aunt. Get the lead out! And quit actin' like you never heard of any of these people before."

"I have certainly never heard any

one refer to my majestic Aunt Minerva as Minnie before!"

"Well, I'll be damned if I'll call her 'The Madam,' the way Hoary does. A nice lady like that!"

"No, no. Horace means it quite respectfully. He means—" Brooks sighed helplessly. "Look, we don't seem to be getting anywhere. How about another drink?"

"Hoary means well," said Johnny judiciously, pouring brandy. "Only he ain't been around. He needs to be wised up. When I get a little more time, I'll go to work on him. I—"

"H'm," said Brooks thoughtfully. "You're planning to be with us for a while, I take it."

"Whadda ya think," said Johnny stiffly, "I can get you out of this jam by four o'clock this afternoon? Besides I'm your valet and bodyguard."

"Since when?"

"Since last night, after we got you inside. We decided."

"We? You and Horace and Dominick and—er, my aunt?"

JUST ME and Minnie. We talked it over. Dominick had to go and take care of his route, and Hoary was busy washing the potato peelings off you."

"Potato p—"

"It was mostly potato peelings, along with some squashed tomatoes, and what not. Look, Brooksy. Don't you remember nothing from last night?"

"No—er, yes!" said Brooks. "Thank you!"

"You're welcome. I was glad to be on hand."

"I mean thank you for delivering me from the D.T.'s. So that was it! Your cousin Dominick is a scavenger, and we came home in his garbage truck. So there really was an iron tank—"

"A big garbage can," corrected

Johnny. "We pulled up to the service entrance and lugged you inside, and Dominick lugged the empty can back. Hoary wasn't even surprised. And the cop out front never noticed that I wasn't on the truck when it pulled out again."

"Brilliant. strategy!" declared Brooks. "But why? Why all the hocus-pocus with the Police Department. They're going to be extremely provoked when they find out I was upstairs sleeping in my own bed until nearly noon, while two of their stalwarts kept the watch below, and the rest of the Department was combining the city. They'll probably be provoked enough to throw us all in the klink. Especially in view of Aunt Minerva's statement that she had no idea where I was."

"That," said Johnny firmly, "was strictly on the up and up. At the time they asked her, she didn't know your whereabouts. And after that they never asked her no more."

"I'll admit," said Brooks wearily, "that I was in no condition to face a police inquiry last night. Nevertheless it will have to be done—and soon. I can't keep on hiding up here indefinitely. The trouble is . . . Everything is so confused—"

There was a light tap on the door. Johnny jerked his hat down, straightened his coat and strode to the door.

He opened it cautiously and murmured, "Howzit, Hoary? Everything quiet?"

"Oh, quite," responded Horace, entering pompously with a large silver tray. He towered over the diminutive Johnny, and there was a massive sleekness about him that made the little man seem yet more nondescript. Horace had a pinkly shining bald head with a gray fringe, pale blue eyes sunk impassively in folds that widened into heavy jowls. His portly frame was faultlessly garbed in a black uniform with low-cut vest,

starched white shirt and black bow tie. His large shoes glistened.

He set the tray down carefully on a low glass coffee table in front of the fireplace, and turned to Brooks. "I thought, sir, you might like a bit of breakfast served up here."

"Don't be so circumspect, Horace," growled Brooks. "You know damned well I don't dare stick my nose out of here after the way you and the rest of my faithful cohorts have conspired to foil the Police Department."

"Yes, sir. It was the best we could do at the moment."

"Never mind. The situation was so bad that nothing could possibly have made it any worse. Thanks anyway for removing the potato peelings. How is my aunt taking it?"

"The Madam is taking it very calm, sir. She'll see you in a little bit. The —er, police officer in the lower hall is handling all telephone calls, thus relieving us of a good deal of disturbance. The telephone has been ringing steady since seven this morning."

"In other words, we're cut off from the world," said Brooks. "What's the fellow outside doing?"

"The other gentleman is sitting on the front steps since it started to rain," declared Horace.

"Can't you ask him in?"

"No, sir. It's his duty to watch the drive and check all vehicles. The traffic has been unusually heavy today. Ever since the cook went out early this morning to do the marketing. The Madam gave her quite a list of establishments to call. There have been two laundry trucks, and The Madam sent all the heavy drapes to the cleaner's. Then there was the plumbing truck, the auto service truck, and the awning man's truck. And after that the new garden furniture was delivered—"

BROOKS stared in bewilderment. "Has my aunt gone mad, do you think?" he demanded.

"Oh, no, sir. All this activity will direct attention away from any one particular delivery." Horace coughed apologetically, and added, "Such as the early morning milk delivery."

"Or the still earlier garbage delivery," said Brooks. "Very appropriate, now that I think of it. My mouth still tastes like—Horace, did you ever see me go under the way I did last night?"

"No, sir," said Horace solemnly. "You've always held your liquor very well. If you don't mind my saying so, it almost seemed as though you'd got hold of knock-out drops in some way."

"Not while he was with me, he didn't!" declared Johnny belligerently. "I can swear to that. I only took him to joints where I got friends. They wouldn't give nobody a mickey unless I give 'em the high sign."

"That," said Brooks, "is not a very strong defense. Since you could very easily have given the high sign in my case."

"And then have all the trouble of luggin' you home?" demanded Johnny, indignantly. "What I was doin', I was tryin' to straighten you out, and keep you from gettin' clipped. As a matter of fact, I did give the high sign, but it wasn't for you. It was for some mug nobody never seen around before. He kept tryin' to edge in on you. After it happened in two different joints, I give the high sign."

"The competition must be fierce," murmured Brooks. "And I suppose I got the mickey by mistake."

"There wasn't no mistake about that one," Johnny asserted. "I seen it work. And I bet that mug is still out in the alley, if he ain't layin' in the can."

"I hope he is," said Horace piously. "In the—er, can, I mean. It's nasty

weather to be out lying in alleys."

"Serves him right for tryin' to muscle in without no references," said Johnny indifferently, pouring himself some coffee. "Anyway he's the least of our worries. Come on, Brooksy, stoke up. We got work to do. I want you to go back over last night and see how much you can remember."

"Why?" asked Brooks flatly.

Johnny pushed his hat back and put down his coffee cup. "So we can figure out the time angle for one thing," he said softly. "If I'm gonna alibi you from nine o'clock on, I oughta know what you was doin' just before that. And it ain't because I'm suspicious. For my money you couldn't have killed your wife. I'm just careful is all. I know cops."

Horace held up a fat finger and leaned toward the door in a listening attitude. There was a faint scratching on the panel.

"That's Aunt Minerva," said Brooks weakly. "Let her in."

MINERVA BRONSON-JOHNSON swept in and surveyed them graciously. "Brooks, dear, why aren't you eating your breakfast?" she demanded throatily, and as Johnny jumped to hold a chair for her, "Good morning, Johnny. Why don't you take off your hat?"

"I don't know, Minnie." Johnny moved his hat around and settled it over one ear. "It's habit, I guess. I'm always afraid I'll leave it somewheres."

"He sleeps in it," declared Brooks morbidly.

"Come sit down, and drink your tomato juice," said Minerva.

She was a tall woman with humorous brown eyes and thick brown hair lightly streaked with gray. There was a reposeful quality about her that lent a quiet, sure strength to everything she

did.

"Horace," she said, "I've invited the State's Attorney to call on me this afternoon. Have something special for tea, will you?"

"Yes, Madam," said Horace correctly. "Will there be anything else?"

"You might just keep an eye on that detective downstairs. Don't let him go wandering around and getting to things."

"I'll see to it, Madam," said Horace firmly, bowing himself out.

"Seems to me," said Brooks, settling himself near the breakfast tray, "you're being pretty high-handed with the Police Department. If they ever catch up with you—"

"That is precisely why I am going over their heads, and calling in the State's Attorney. After all, we're very old friends."

"So I heard," said Brooks. "I didn't think it was purely a social engagement. How are you going to bamboozle him?"

"Brooks, dear, you're not going to be unreasonable about this, are you?"

"Certainly not. I propose to give myself up to the police just as soon as I can pull myself together and get my clothes on. That's a good deal more reasonable than trying to fool the law."

"Whoa! Wait up now, Brooksy," said Johnny, gesturing with flat palms. "You go and give yourself up, all unprepared, and what happens? You're in this jam up to your ears, and we're all in it with you. That leaves nobody to get us out. Not a chance. We first got to prove a case for ourselves. And then let the law try and prove different."

"That's my conclusion exactly," said Minerva.

Brooks stared at her. "You mean you propose to work hand in glove with this—this chiseler? How do you know what he might be up to? It could be anything! Do you know what he is?"

"I think so." Minerva nodded complacently. "Johnny and I had quite a long conversation early this morning. He was quite frank with me. He explained his mode of existence. You said, didn't you, Johnny, that you were out to make an easy buck?"

"Strictly a chiseler," Johnny admitted unabashed. "See, when a guy's got talent without no advantages—it's tough. He likes the easy life as good as you do, only he's gotta scrounge around for it."

"You knew all this," Brooks accused his aunt, "and you shut him up in here with me, and me helpless! Hell! He could have cut my throat and made off with—"

"The answer to that," said Minerva calmly, "is that he didn't. Besides, there were two policemen on the premises."

"And that," said Johnny practically, "brings us back to the main point. I can overlook Brooksy's suspicion on account of I'm used to it. He thinks I want him to try and remember last night so I can find out if he's on to any crooked business I might have pulled. I never pulled none—as far as he's concerned anyway. At first I figured he was a good gee to know. On account of he had dough. And then later, this other thing come up, and I—"

"And you decided to capitalize on it," said Brooks. "How much are you asking for your so-called alibi?"

"**Q**UIT talkin' about how much for how much!" said Johnny angrily. "I'm here, ain't I? Did I ask you for something? If I can make myself useful, I got an in. But if you don't wanta play ball with me, I got no out. I'm stuck. I took one hell of a big gamble on you, chum. When I saw that mornin' paper, I coulda went to the phone and called the cops. And maybe got

my picture in the paper."

"Drink your tomato juice, Brooks," said Minerva, spooning scrambled eggs out of a hot plate. "Have some more coffee, Johnny. I'm having a room prepared for you on the third floor. I'm sure you'll find it comfortable."

"Thanks. Thanks, Minnie." Johnny gulped and his ears turned red. "I guess I was kinda shootin' off my mouth."

"You were," she said kindly. "I expect we're all under a tension. I know I'm not reacting normally at all. I keep trying to be dreadfully sorry about Lenita. But there just isn't any feeling there, any more than there would be for a stranger I'd read about. She was such a strange girl. So elusive. She spent six months in this house and I never even got acquainted with her."

"She was never really happy with me," said Brooks bitterly. "I don't believe I ever got acquainted with her either. God knows, I tried. She was such a lovely thing. But always so remote. And after she left here, the things she did were so incomprehensible."

"Snatching the Bronson jewels out of the vault, for instance," said Minerva. "I can't forgive that."

"Snatching the which?" asked Johnny sharply.

"She took the whole lot," explained Minerva. "The family heirlooms. Like most old families, the Bronsons had accumulated some rather valuable pieces. They are supposed to be handed down from one generation to the next, and always kept in the family. Some time after Lenita left, we discovered that she had taken them all. She had access to the bank vault, naturally, as long as she was Brooks' wife. But she had no right whatever to make off with the whole collection, and then flatly refuse to tell us what she did with it."

"How much," asked Johnny, "how much would you say those family rocks was worth?"

"It's hard to place an exact valuation," said Minerva. "Prices change, as well as the intrinsic value of individual pieces. They were insured for \$250,000."

"*Sancta Maria!*" Johnny clapped a scrawny hand to his forehead. "You let her get away with that?"

"Not exactly," said Brooks stiffly. "We don't know that she was trying to get away with anything. After all, she was my wife. She assured me the collection was still intact, but she refused to tell me where she had put it."

"Sucker!" said Johnny with slow emphasis. "Last night you was tellin' me she quit you cold, and then kept askin' you for dough and more dough. Now you tell me she snatched a quarter million bucks worth of gew-gaws, and still you don't think she was tryin' to get away with anything!"

"What happend when you talked with her last night, Brooks?" asked Minerva.

"I—nothing," said Brooks, eyeing Johnny warily. "Nothing happened. We couldn't come to any decision—as usual."

"All right," said Johnny purposefully. "So you don't wanta talk in front of me. It don't make a whole lotta difference. You told me enough last night so I can kinda piece things together. So I'll show you my good intentions by picking it up from nine o'clock on. I'm sittin' in the grill at the Clark-Ritz Hotel, chinnin' with the counter man, Steve Kurtz. He's workin' a short night and he looks up at the clock and says: 'Seven minutes to go. Boy, are my dogs tired!'"

"It's seven minutes to nine, see? A couple minutes later, Brooksy, you come wanderin' in. You don't feel so

good. You make it over to the counter and sit down, and you ask for black coffee. This grill in the Clark-Ritz has a restaurant on one side and a bar on the other. You remember that?"

"Yes," said Brooks slowly. "I do. I had several cups of black coffee."

"YOU HAD three," said Johnny.

"And I spoke to you. I says: 'Why all the black java, pal? You gotta go home to the little woman?' And you looked at me and kinda sneered, and you says: 'No. I just came from the little woman. And it's the last time, so help me!' You was sore about something, see?"

"I was," said Brooks. "But that coffee—How did I get so tight by nine o'clock that I needed black coffee?"

"That I don't know. But you told me later you'd had some drinks with your wife. Maybe you stopped off on your way down Clark Street and had several more quick ones."

"I don't remember it," said Brooks, looking bewildered. "And why shouldn't I remember? I had only three drinks with Lenita. Not even three. I didn't finish—"

"Brooks, what is it?" asked Minerva, startled at the expression on his face.

"I didn't finish that third drink, because it tasted flat. That I do remember. Definitely and distinctly. Then I was walking—just walking, but my mouth still tasted flat and dry, and my head—"

"So the little babe slipped you a mickey," said Johnny softly. "Why, I wonder? Whatever it was meant for, it didn't work. You didn't swallow all of it. Instead you got out in the air and started walking. And just by instinct you went for black coffee. That delayed the effects of it, whatever it was. But it must have been pretty potent because it caught up with you

—finally."

"But good God!" exclaimed Brooks. "There was no reason for it! Why should she want to knock me out—in her apartment? It's senseless. Like all the other things she was doing!"

"No, it wasn't," declared Johnny, drumming his fingers on the glass table. "There's something pretty damn definite behind all this. Dough for one thing. Why was she needin' all that dough?"

"Blackmail?" suggested Minerva.

"Maybe," said Johnny. "But it coulda been several other things. She was mixed up in some kinda mess. That's for sure. And now I'm beginnin' to wonder if that mug that was tailin' Brooksy last night ain't part of it. I said he was the least of our worries. But now I ain't so sure. Could be he's just the starting point of our worries."

"This is incredible!" said Minerva.

"Isn't it," Brooks agreed. "Three supposedly sane and smart people sitting here talking this rot. And yet, there is Lenita—dead. And all her strange behavior unexplained."

"That, of course, is why she's dead," said Minerva with conviction. "So that none of it could ever be explained. I believe Johnny is right. There is some one else behind all this. Some one who had such a grip on Lenita that she could be induced to dope your drink. A physician could furnish the drug. I wonder what sort of person Dr. Strook is?"

"I've met him," said Brooks. "He's a young man. Dark, good-looking fellow. And ambitious. He's building up quite a profitable practice among the upper class matrons and debutantes. Goes in for the social life. That's how I met him. At a cocktail party. Lenita seemed to think a lot of him. But I can't imagine him resorting to such a—

such a crude murder."

"Any guy," said Johnny, "will resort to anything if he's mad enough. You'd be surprised all the hell people got inside of them. Then you got to remember, if a guy's smart and he has to commit a murder, he's gonna make it look like a murder he couldn't possibly have had anything to do with. So now where are we at? We're back to that mug that was tailin' you. And if he was tailin' you, he musta come from the same place you did."

"You can't be sure of that," Brooks objected. "He was probably just another member of the chiseling fraternity."

"**T**HERE you put your finger on it," answered Johnny. "He wasn't one of us. Nobody never seen him around before. We guys get to be pretty well known when we make the rounds night after night. And a chiseler don't just bust in cold and try to muscle in on somebody else's sucker. He hangs around and gets acquainted. And he lets it be known that he's steerin' bets for some horse parlor, or maybe peddlin' marihuana. So then he's one of us, see? And if he tries to pick up a buck in the evening off some sucker, nobody thinks nothing of it."

"Very educational," said Brooks. "When and where did this mug show up?"

"Right after I met you. In the Clark-Ritz bar. We moved over to the bar after you said you didn't want no more coffee. And the first thing I know, here's this rat at your elbow, tryin' to horn in on the conversation. Then he offers to buy a drink. I make him right off. He's no good time Charley. He's in the know, that baby. And he's gotta be after something when he offers to get in with a drink. So I tell him me and my friend is just

leavin'. And we leave. We go to a hot spot two blocks down the street, where the liquor ain't so hot, but I get a better percentage on the drinks."

"No wonder my head aches!" growled Brooks.

"Mine don't feel so good either," said Johnny. "Anyway I leave you sittin' in a booth while I step over to speak to the manager of the joint. When I came back, here's Mister Mug, sittin' right beside you and tryin' to sell you on the idea of goin' with him to a little private stag party. You don't care for the idea, but I enter right into the spirit of it, and try to help the mug out with his sales talk. Only meanwhile I give the bartender the high sign, and he gets it and delivers the goods, and pretty soon they have to help the mug out the back door. They park him up the alley a ways. And that takes care of him. After that we visit three or four other spots and wind up in the Club Folderol."

"That's where I finally passed out."

"You passed out and I'm sittin' in the booth with you, figurin' you'll maybe sleep it off in a little while, when a newsie comes in with the morning papers. I buy one to read while I'm waitin' and there it is all over the front page, and the cops is lookin' for you. The first thing I think of is to get you to hell out of sight before somebody recognizes you. The bartender brings over wet towels and ice and we try to snap you out of it, but no soap. So the bartender calls the porter, and it takes the three of us to get you outside and in a cab.

"Then I don't know where the hell to go. I see a guy jugglin' garbage cans and I remember Dominick is probably just startin' out with his truck, and that does it. I had to slip Dominick a double sawbuck outa your wallet."

"Make a note of that, Aunt Miner-

va," said Brooks, "and take it out of his pay. The ride I got wasn't worth it."

"Yes it was," said Minerva. "It was worth more than that when Horace told me you were home safe. I've never spent such a frantic, wretched night as I did last night."

"Sorry," said Brooks gently, and covered her hand with his own. "Bronson—Pickles and Jams. That's me. If I'm not in a pickle, I'm sure to be in a jam. Remember when you made that joke? How old was I—ten?"

"You were nine," said Minerva. "And you'd just stolen a horse, because you didn't think the farmer fed him enough. I had to pay fifty dollars for the sorry nag, and he ate his head off for six years."

"There you are," said Johnny soberly. "Everybody's got a past. Who'd ever think a guy like you was once a horse thief? Any more than they'd think that wife of your was ever anything but a nice expensive little doll. What about her past?"

"LENITA?" Minerva frowned.

"There has never been anything—anything questionable. She made her home with her uncle's family. Her father died when she was a child and her mother was an invalid for years before she passed away."

"What about dough? Her folks leave any?"

"There was a trust fund," said Minerva. "With a small income. Then when her uncle died the income was increased. Everybody considered this fortunate at the time because Lenita was suffering a bad nervous breakdown, and it was feared she might become a helpless invalid like her mother. It seemed such a pity because she was only eighteen. They'd had to bring her home from school in the East. And it was shortly after that that her uncle

was killed."

"Killed?" snapped Johnny. "How?"

"In a motor accident. He and another man. They were driving somewhere in—Was it Pennsylvania or New Jersey? Brooks, do you remember?"

"New Jersey, I think," said Brooks restlessly. "But all that has nothing to do with—"

"Whup!" said Johnny, gesturing again. "It all ties in. See, she couldn't lay her hands on a big hunk of dough, except through you. Her mazuma was all tied up in trust funds. So. Soon as she gets, what do you call it—axis?"

"Access," Minerva offered.

"—to your dough," continued Johnny, "the funny business starts. That could mean that this thing goes back a ways, in the past, see?"

"Brooks, did she ever give you a hint of anything like that?" asked Minerva.

"No," mumbled Brooks, resting his head in his hands. "But last night she wanted me to go some place with her. To meet somebody. She was very mysterious about it and it made me sore."

"Why won't you tell us what happened last night?" asked Minerva gently. "There might be something—"

Brooks stood up abruptly, jarring the breakfast tray. "I'll tell you why!" he said harshly. "Because I still don't know—I can't be sure that I didn't—"

"Brooks, no!" cried Minerva. "You wouldn't have harmed her. You couldn't! Not you."

"You heard what Johnny said. A man will do anything if he's mad enough. And I was furious with her."

"Yeah," said Johnny sharply. "You heard what else Johnny said, too. I said you was in the Clark-Ritz grill at five minutes to nine, a good mile away from that Astor Street apartment. And I can prove it by Steve Kurtz, the

counter man. Two doctors claim she died after nine o'clock."

"It could have taken her a little while," Brooks muttered. "After I—"

"Do you remember leaving?" asked Minerva.

"**Y**ES. I remember closing the door.

A big white door with a brass knocker. And I remember thinking it was a funny place for the telephone—just inside the door instead of some place else in the apartment. And it seemed to me she was staring at me—frightened. As if—As if I'd just done something terrible to her." Brooks sank into his chair and buried his head in his hands again.

"That's why," said Johnny softly. "I'd kinda like to get the time schedule worked out. So if worse comes to worst, and Brooksy gets picked up, there'll be a complete story to hand the cops, without no blank spots. I know from Hoary that he got a phone call a few minutes before eight. From his wife. And then he went out. He was walking and the elevator guy says he showed up at the apartment building a little after eight. Say ten, fifteen from the time he got the phone call. That's about the time it would take to walk from here to Astor Street without no stop-offs."

"I didn't stop anywhere," Brooks mumbled through his hands. "I was in a hurry. She said she had to see me right away. That it was important . . ."

As the words came from his lips, Brooks was back at the white door, lifting the knocker. The door opened and Lenita stood there in a rose pink gown, small and dainty as always. Smooth black hair carefully dressed, her complexion immaculate, her dark eyes still aloof. But her hands were restless as she ushered him into the living room. He noticed it because it

was unusual with her. She brought him a highball and sat opposite him in a pale green satin chair.

That was the second thing he noticed. Her long, full sleeves were sheer, and on her upper left arm there was a bruise that showed through. It was pale green, like the chair.

"Brooks," she began in her soft, light voice. "I was a little surprised at your letter."

"Why should you be surprised? You refuse to get a divorce. You refuse to come back to me. You refuse to return the Bronson collection. I can't keep pouring money into your hands for no reason. I'm neither free nor married. The only alternative that I can see is to sue you for a divorce, and ask for an accounting of the money I've turned over to you, and demand the return of the jewels. They belong in the family, you know."

"Yes, I know." Lenita's dark eyes wandered vaguely. She got up to refill his glass.

"Why are you doing this to me, Lenita?" asked Brooks. "If you dislike me so much, why won't you get a divorce?"

She stood before the white mantel and shrugged delicate shoulders. "A divorce is so—I don't want the publicity."

"There'll be plenty of publicity if you don't arrive at a definite decision—and damn soon. I'm fed up!"

"Brooks, if we—If you could be generous and manage a fair settlement, I'd be willing to go away quietly. You'd never hear from me again, and—you'd be divorced."

"Without proof? Oh, no. If I'm divorced I want to know it. And what do you call a fair settlement?"

"You could manage \$500,000, couldn't you?"

"Great God! Half a million? No.

I couldn't manage it, without taking it out of the business. And I won't do that."

"Brooks, there is some one I want you to meet. Perhaps— Perhaps we might find a way out of this if you— Will you go with me?"

"Go with you where? And who is this I'm supposed to meet?"

"We'd have to drive. It's out quite a ways. He's an old friend. He's— He advises me sometimes. Oh, you don't know him, but—"

"The answer is no," said Brooks harshly. "I don't need any outside advisors. I'll simply turn the whole thing over to my attorneys."

"Very well," said Lenita suddenly. "Shall we have a drink on it?"

STILL angry, Brooks took the fresh highball and got to his feet. "You're so damned incomprehensible, Lenita. None of this makes sense. You're forcing me to take very unpleasant measures that mean rotten publicity. And yet you claim that's the very thing you're trying to avoid. Our marriage was a mistake. You detest the sight of me. Why don't you admit it and go to Reno and get it over?"

Lenita came to him and put her small hands up to his shoulders.

"Brooks, darling, I don't detest you," she said softly. "Please sit down and let me—"

Brooks raised an arm and swept her hands away in sudden revulsion. This last wheedling gesture of hers sickened him. Even the highball tasted flat. He set it down and picked up his hat.

"No, don't go, Brooks!" Lenita cried, following after him.

Anger made his head spin. He wanted only to get out of here. He brushed her hand off his arm and opened the door. He had one glimpse of her as he closed the door. She looked stricken,

staring at him with wide dark eyes, frightened . . .

He was too angry to wait for the elevator and took the stairs down four flights. There was a door near the foot of the stairs. It let him out into a cement drive. Then he was walking . . .

Brooks' voice trailed off as he lifted his head and stared at Johnny and his aunt. "Do you believe that?" he asked hoarsely.

"Of course, we believe it," said Minerva firmly.

"It fits," said Johnny slowly. "It fits everything we figured out so far. Half a million smackers! Think of that!"

STATE'S Attorney Pierce Raglan was a tall, genial gentleman with white hair and well-tailored clothes. Distinguished was the word for him.

Minerva greeted him familiarly. "Hello, Rags, it was nice of you to come."

"It was nice to hear from you, Minerva," said Raglan suavely. "Where is Brooks?"

Never one to shilly-shally, Minerva let him have it with both barrels. "He's right here, of course," she said. "That's why I sent for you."

For an instant Raglan looked stunned, then he asked, coldly, "And how long has he been here?"

"Since early this morning. He'd had a bit too much to drink, and for some reason decided to come home on a garbage truck. I thought," said Minerva demurely, "that you'd be pleased if I told you, instead of letting the Police Department handle it."

"I'm glad at least that you told somebody," said Raglan gruffly. "I'll have to put him under arrest, of course."

"Not necessarily," said Minerva. "You see he has an iron-clad alibi for last night. I'd like you to hear his

story, and then you can decide for yourself."

"Very well," said Raglan stiffly. "But I must warn you, Minerva, ~~not~~ to expect any special favors. Where is he?"

"Waiting for us in my sitting room upstairs. Naturally, the police officers here know nothing about it."

"So I surmised. And you can be sure they'll both be disciplined for their gross negligence."

"Dear me, I hope not," murmured Minerva, leading the way upstairs. "They could hardly have expected him to arrive as he did. And, of course, I telephoned you at the first opportunity. No one is to blame, you see?"

"I'll decide that after I know a little more about it."

As they entered the small red and gold sitting room, Raglan nodded at Brooks curtly, glanced at Johnny, then looked again more closely. Johnny had shaved and had been induced to part with his hat, but he still looked like what he was. A small-time chiseler.

"This is Johnny Cabano, sir," said Brooks. "My assistant."

"And bodyguard," Johnny added cockily.

"H'mph!" said Raglan. "Seems to me I've seen you before. In the police line-up." He seated himself and turned to Brooks sternly. "All right, Bronson. Let's have this story of yours."

Brooks was now respectably dressed in a dark blue pin stripe suit, and looked more nearly like his normal self. He seated himself opposite the attorney and told his story. Turning now and then to have Johnny verify some point. Nothing was said about the morning paper Johnny had seen in the Club Folderol. Raglan was left to suppose that two happy-go-lucky drunks had elected to come home on a garbage truck in preference to a more conventional conveyance.

The attorney listened attentively, asked a question here and there, but made no comment until the story was finished.

"I'll have to ask you both to come to my office with me," he said. "Details of your story will have to be checked."

"Yes, sir. That's what we want," said Brooks.

Johnny was escorted to the car by the two chagrined detectives. They sat in the rear seat with Johnny securely guarded between them. Raglan had parked his car in the street, and a few minutes later he and Brooks left the house and started down the winding walk toward the car. Just as they were about to step into the street, a car shot from nowhere and a gun barked repeatedly.

The State's Attorney was hit with the first or second shot and sagged into Brooks' arms. The shots continued, but as the car swept past that in which the detectives were sitting, answering shots spewed after it. A truck driver, confused by the shots, braked his truck at the corner, obstructing the turn, and the escaping car struck it head on. Unhurt, the truck driver helped the detectives drag two men out of the wreckage.

BACK at the house Brooks and Horace carried the State's Attorney into the hall and put him down carefully on a wide divan. He had been struck in the shoulder and was bleeding profusely, but still conscious.

"They were not," he said painfully, "trying to get me. It was you they were after. They kept shooting after I was down . . . Got to get 'em. They're—"

"We got 'em!" said Johnny excitedly. "The cops are bringin' 'em in. And one of 'em is the mug that was tailin' Brooks last night!"

Two battered specimens were hauled

inside and propped against the wall. The detectives stood over them with drawn guns.

A half hour later Captain Blair of the Homicide division stood in the hall and pointed a finger at one of the gunmen. "This man is going by the name of Martin Kopen," said the captain briskly. "He claims to be a New York broker, and he lived across the hall from Mrs. Bronson."

Kopen was bruised and dishevelled and had a long cut on the side of his face, but he had obviously been well groomed and expensively dressed before the accident.

Johnny pressed forward and stared at the man. "That ain't his name," he piped. "I make him now. He's Marty Hagen from New York, and his guys call him 'Copenhagen.' He's a broker, all right. He handles hot stuff that's hoisted out of warehouses."

"You little rat!" snarled Kopen-Hagen. "You were damned anxious to work for me a few years ago!"

Johnny licked his lips and looked at Brooks. "I didn't work for him though," he said. "I never had nothin' to do with his racket. Anyway he kinda give me the bum's rush. But I got acquainted with a couple of his guys, and I heard something. Something that maybe ties this whole shebang up, nice and neat!" Johnny's eyes were glittering now with excitement. "Copenhagen sends three of his guys to lift some records out of a little court house in New Jersey—"

"Damn you! Shut up!" screamed the gunman. A detective slammed him back against the wall.

"The records," continued Johnny, "were about his marriage to some dame and a—a what you call anulment—"

"Anulment," said Brooks tensely.

"Any way the anulment was filed but it never went through, see? So he's still

married to this dame, and the records is still there on account of his guys didn't get 'em. One of the guys got bumped and the other two are in jail."

State's Attorney Raglan pushed at the intern who was working over him. "Get the name of that town!" he ordered. "Get 'em on the phone. I'll soon find out what this is—ouch!"

In spite of his protests, Raglan was put to bed in a guest room of the Bronson house. It was here that Elsie Brierger, the maid, was brought the next morning to tell her story. It was a strange story of the wild attachment of dainty Lenita Lecours Bronson for the brutal man she had eloped with as a schoolgirl, as the court house records proved.

ATTORNEYS for Lenita's uncle in the East came forward with further details. They had copies of an agreement signed by Marty Hagen in which it was stipulated that for the sum of \$50,000 paid in advance, he would agree to an annulment of his marriage to Lenita. The annulment proceedings were cancelled when Lenita's uncle and a man identified as Marty Hagen were killed in a motor accident, obviously faked by Hagen himself.

"Yes," said the State's Attorney. "It was an easy way to earn \$50,000 and he no doubt felt there must be more where that came from. So he decided to stay married to the girl. After she married you—bigamously, he saw his chance and turned up again to threaten her. He held her not only with threats, but with her unreasonable attachment to him."

"He needn't have killed her," Brooks said roughly.

"Well, she failed to trap you," said Raglan. "You got away with the announced intention of divorcing her, and suing for an accounting of the money

and jewels she'd gotten. There'd have been publicity. Instead of staying under cover, Hagen was active again. People knew he was alive. If her former marriage was reported, the whole thing would come out. There'd be an inquiry into her uncle's death. I'm convinced it was his intention to kill you last night. In that event Lenita would have inherited her share of your estate, which would, of course, have gone to him, as everything else did. I'm glad we recovered the Bronson collection of jewels from his apartment. Have they been inventoried?"

"Yes," said Brooks shortly. "Aunt Minerva says there's nothing missing. Too difficult to dispose of so close to home, I suppose."

"Naturally," said Raglan. "And he could afford to wait— Or thought he could. Until Lenita weakened at the last moment. She told you too much, and then let you get away. That was a nervy thing they did, trying to shoot you down in front of two police officers. He still hoped to get away with what loot he had, but he was afraid you

would start figuring things out. That's why that gunman of his was trailing you last night."

"Until Johnny inadvertently disposed of him," said Brooks. "Which reminds me. Johnny has already asked for a night off, and this is also Horace's regular night off. I'm very much afraid—"

Brooks strolled to a front window and looked out at the gray dusk. In a little while two ill-assorted figures marched down the drive. Johnny, with weather-beaten gray hat tilted over one ear, talking earnestly with Latin gestures. And striding in all his dignity beside the shabby little chiseler, was Horace, shining bowler set squarely on his head and smart topcoat carefully buttoned.

"Yes, there they go," murmured Brooks. "And God help me!"

"Why?" asked Raglan sleepily.

"Because Horace's education is about to begin," said Brooks, "in the finer points of chiseling and associated arts. And he has been so reliable and trustworthy for twenty years."

WORKINGS OF THE POLICE COURT

IN case you are ever so unfortunate as to be arrested, justly or otherwise, it might make you feel a trifle better to know just what is going on. Therefore, here are some facts to add to your intelligence on the subject.

When a person is arrested while the police court is in session he is taken at once before the magistrate for a hearing. This is desirable from the viewpoint of expediency. However, some cities provide for such short sessions of police courts that they are forced to detain a considerable number of prisoners awaiting hearings, or in plainer language, they "toss you in the clink."

In some cities the police courts are in session just a few hours each day. The calendars of the courts are prepared at 5 o'clock in the afternoon and contain the cases in which arrests were made during the preceding 24 hours. Thus a person arrested after 5 o'clock Monday does not get a hearing until the following Wednesday.

Obviously, this system is unfavorable to the arrestee and is expensive to the city. You may deem yourself fortunate if you are arrested in a city with an efficient and always-open-for-business police court.

If an arrest is made during hours that the police court is not in session the arrestee is either detained or admitted to bail. The amount of bail is usually double the largest fine to which the prisoner could be convicted. In order to safeguard the rights of persons arrested, the law states that any officer of the police must take bail if any person is arrested for a misdemeanor during the hours when the court is not in normal session.

However, these few facts about the procedure of a police court are valueless unless there is one deciding factor, to wit:

"Get yourself a good lawyer and make like you're honest!"

» » DETECTIVE FACTS « «

By A. MORRIS

MANY a "pistol-packin' mama" couldn't hold a candle to our policemen. To prove their skill in hitting a "bull's eye," more than 100 police marksmen took part in the matches recently held in Chicago by the American Pistol Association. Seven of the matches included the use of .22, .38 and .45 caliber pistols, but the outstanding feature was the match consisting of four-man teams shooting at live chickens, the contestants being allowed to select their own four-somes. The entire event was open to the public and provided a thrill for our more skeptical citizens.

* * *

IN A RECENT burglary in St. Louis, the thief made away with approximately \$5,500.00 worth of rings, watches and other valuables, leaving behind a dazzling array of jewelry valued at \$25,000.00—the kind that women of all ages gaze at appreciatively or wistfully, as the case may be, through the glass of show windows. Not the sort of behavior for a truly conscientious and ambitious thief, but perhaps this one didn't wish to impress people as being too gluttonous!

* * *

THE Netherlands Government has issued a statement announcing its decision to suppress completely opium smoking in the Netherlands East Indies after the liberation of the islands. The text of the statement follows:

"The Royal Netherlands Government, having considered its attitude with regard to the opium smoking habit in certain parts of the N.E.I. after the liberation of these parts from enemy occupation, has decided to take all necessary measures for the discontinuance of that habit and for the complete suppression of the use of opium for smoking in the whole area of the N.E.I. These measures will include the abolition of the opium monopoly.

"The decision is based on the following consideration. In certain parts of the N.E.I. opium smoking is still authorized in conformity with the rules laid down in the agreement signed in Geneva on February 11, 1925, purporting to bring about the gradual, effective suppression of the manufacture of, the internal trade in and the use of prepared opium as provided for in chapter two of the International Opium Convention concluded at The Hague on January 23, 1912. As a state signatory to the protocol annexed to the agreement of February 11, 1925, the Netherlands undertook to strengthen the measures already taken in accordance with Article Six of The Hague Opium Convention of 1912 and to take any further measures which might be necessary in order to reduce the consumption of prepared opium in the territories under their

authority so that such use might be completely suppressed within a period of not more than 15 years from the date on which a commission, to be appointed by the Council of the League of Nations, would decide that the poppy growing countries had insured effective measures to prevent the exportation of raw opium from their territories from constituting a serious obstacle to the reduction of consumption in countries where the use of prepared opium was still temporarily authorized.

"For many years past the Netherlands Indies opium monopoly had endeavored to restrict the use of opium as much as possible in order to pave the way for total prohibition as the ultimate aim of the Netherlands Government's opium policy. Encouraging results had been reached and consumption was steadily decreasing."

* * *

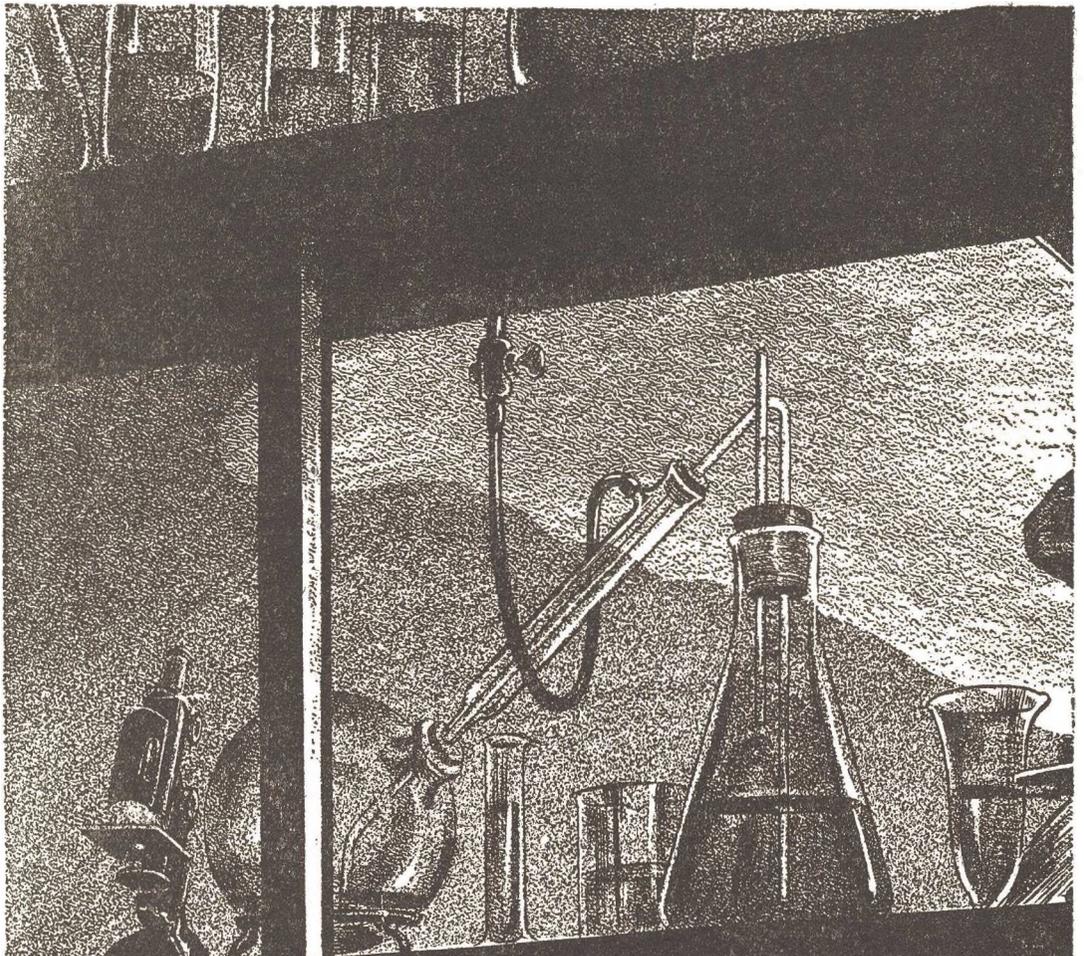
IMAGINE the surprise of the officials of the Crescent City Rifle and Pistol Club, New Orleans, when as a result of announcing a class in the handling of army style rifles for the training of home defense and state guard men and young men under draft age, several women made an appearance, anxious and eager to sign up. In spite of Instructor Thomas L. Hollis' belief that after struggling with the heavy bolt-action weapons, the most persistent amazon would falter, the women did so well that he was pleased to make them a part of the group.

* * *

PITTSBURGH police now find themselves in the unusual role of assistants to the proverbial stork. Since present war conditions have taken their toll on so many cars and hospital ambulances, all police ambulances have received orders to harken to the call of emergency maternity cases for the purpose of conveying expectant mothers to the respective hospitals. For their services, the Pittsburgh police at least deserve to be made godfathers!

* * *

THAT the manpower shortage is acute is evidenced by the fact that our juries are becoming more and more feminine. While up to now juries have been composed of a percentage of women up to a 50-50 limit, the increasing inability of summoned men to appear because of military service, essential occupations, etc., makes it apparent that the impressing row of stern male faces will soon be transformed into an impressing array of feminine hats. Even the jury quarters are undergoing feminization. But woe be to the poor defendant if the women decide to exercise their self-assumed prerogative of changing their minds!



Murder is my hobby

By PHYLLIS DAYTON

*Before you do business with
a man, learn about his hobbies*



"My hands were burned," Bell said, "when some acid spilled on them."

"MURDERERS," said Hansen in his expressionless voice, "do get away with it. More often than we imagine. It's possible to meet a murderer, or at least a potential killer, every day."

"Nonsense," protested John Bell, mixing fresh highballs. "Murder isn't that prevalent. Even if you count accidents, manslaughter, and self-murder."

"I'm talking about deliberate murder," said Hansen. "And a deliberate

murderer. Let me give you an example."

"My dear fellow," Bell laughed patronizingly. "Can't we talk of something a little more cheerful? I understood you came down here from Chicago because you were interested in purchasing some stock in the Worthy-Bell Corporation. I can give you intriguing facts and figures on that topic. Why dwell on anything so unpleasant as murder?"

"Because it interests me," said Hansen tonelessly. His gray eyes and

smooth mask of a face were as expressionless as his voice. "You were interviewed a few weeks ago on the fiftieth anniversary of the Worthy-Bell Corporation. You told the reporter that every man should have a hobby. Murder is mine."

"Rather extreme, don't you think?" Bell smoothed a plump, splotched hand over his thick gray hair. "Why not take up golf, or fishing—or hunting, if you like killing?"

"It's not complicated enough," said Hansen. "Deliberate murder requires devious planning—if the murderer is to be successful in getting away with it. Many of them do."

"I don't agree with you. Nowadays the police are pretty well up on scientific crime detection. A death by violence is thoroughly investigated. But usually even that isn't necessary. In most cases the murderer is pretty obvious."

"In those cases where the murderer is caught, it naturally seems obvious," observed Hansen. "I'm talking about cases when he isn't caught. When the crime is written off as accident, or suicide, or possibly never discovered at all. I'll build such a case for you."

"Abstract theories," said Bell with a wave of dismissal "don't particularly interest me."

"Very well. We'll take an actual case. We'll take the case of your partner, Philip Worthy, who was found with a bullet in his head just about a year ago."

"Oh, look here!" Bell protested. "That's hardly in good taste. After all, the poor fellow is gone because he couldn't face the disgrace of being indicted as an embezzler. But I had to face the shock and the scandal. And the subject is still painful."

"Surely you're not touchy about it after all this time? What's the dif-

ference if we take his case or some other case? I simply want to show you how it could have been murder."

Bell sipped his highball and stirred impatiently. "You're a very odd young man," he said. "Most investors are interested in the financial statement of a company. Not in how or why a former member of the firm died. I assure you that the loss resulting from Worthy's misappropriation of funds was fully covered by insurance, and by his own block of stock which reverted to the company. The fact that he shot himself had no effect on the financial standing of the company. Therefore your interest in his death can only be —" Again Bell waved a pudgy hand as though to dismiss a disagreeable subject.

"Can only be the morbid interest of a man with murder as a hobby," supplied Hansen imperturbably. "Yes. But it was that hobby which caused me to be attracted to the Worthy-Bell Corporation as an investor. So perhaps you will indulge me—" Hasen's straight black brows suddenly arched in inquiry. "You have no objection if I reconstruct Worthy's death as a murder?"

BELL sighed with a trace of exasperation. "No, no. But if you were acquainted with all the facts you would know how ridiculous such an assumption must seem to those of us who had to endure the tragedy."

"Every one was agreed, then, that it was suicide?" asked Hansen. "Even his family?"

"Certainly!" snapped Bell. "His family consisted of a wife and daughter. They were completely broken up, naturally. They could not go on living in a town of this size with such a shadow hanging over them. They sold their home and moved to Chicago."

Bell paused and shot a keen glance at his poker-faced companion. "Let me ask you this," he said. "Do you propose to make this investment for yourself, or are you acting as an agent for other parties?"

"I was planning to invest up to \$100,000 for myself and other members of my family. I'm sure you've already looked me up in Dun and Bradstreet. You know my rating and approximate worth. Otherwise you wouldn't have invited me to your home this evening for a further discussion."

"You're quite right," agreed Bell. "I'm a practical business man, who doesn't mix hobbies with business."

"Neither would I," said Hansen drily, "if I had inherited a business as you did—you and Philip Worthy. All I inherited was an income bearing estate that requires little or no attention from me. Hence my avocational interest in murder."

Bell's full lips twitched in distaste at the repetition of the word murder. He reached for the decanter and mixed himself another highball. Hansen's glass still half full. The younger man's big frame was at ease in the wing chair without slouching, his gaze fixed on the small fire burning in the ornate black marble fireplace. Bell took a long drink from his glass and wiped his lips with a linen handkerchief.

"Very well," he said briskly, humoring the other's obsession. "If you insist upon a murder, you must have a murderer. Whom do you suspect—the watchman who found him?"

"I find it simpler," said Hansen, "to suspect everybody. And then proceed to eliminate them as the reconstruction progresses. We can begin with the watchman's discovery if you wish."

"I have no preference," said Bell ironically. "Nor do I seem to have any choice in the matter. We're going to

have a murder whether I like it or not. And in spite of all the recorded proof to the contrary."

"Evidence—not proof," corrected Hansen. "Things are not always what they seem. So we begin by suspecting everybody and everything."

"That's ridiculous!" snorted Bell angrily. "There are certain established facts. If you're going to ignore them or pervert them to suit your theory, you're defeating your own purpose."

"What are the established facts?"

Bell sat back in his chair and sipped at his highball. "If you don't know," he said, "how can you reconstruct the case?"

"As an advocate of hobbies," declared Hansen drily, "you should know that a real enthusiast rides his hobby for all it's worth." He extracted a long brown envelope from his inside pocket. "I have here a complete file of clippings dealing with the death of Philip Worthy."

BELL pursed his lips as though he were hiding some secret amusement. "Then you know, of course," he said, "that he was found in his private office at eleven o'clock at night by the plant watchman. His own gun, carrying his finger prints was beside him. It was established that he had died some time between nine and ten. The plant was locked promptly at six o'clock. Four people had keys. The night watchman, the superintendent of the plant, Philip Worthy, and myself. No one else could enter or leave without rousing the watchman, because the doors have double locks, both inside and outside. In other words, any one secreted in the building before six o'clock would be unable to get out. Any tampering with doors or windows would set off an electric alarm."

"Then obviously some one used

keys," declared Hansen with conviction.

"Impossible. The keys have certain peculiarities which cannot be duplicated by an ordinary locksmith. In fact they are plainly stamped: *Not to be duplicated*. In order to obtain a duplicate key it is necessary to send an official order to the manufacturer."

"Somebody's keys were used."

"The four sets of keys were in the possession of the proper owners when the body was discovered."

"Ah, yes," said Hansen, riffling through his clippings. "The superintendent couldn't have visited the plant because he spent the evening bowling with a party of four which included, of all things a police sergeant. You, yourself, had been laid up at home for three days with severe acid burns received in a test experiment in your private laboratory. I see you still have scars on your hands."

"My hands got the worst of it. I lost the use of them for three weeks. Very awkward."

"I should imagine so. That leaves us the corpse, whose keys were found intact on his person—and the watchman."

Bell chuckled and tipped the decanter over his glass. "By the process of elimination you now have your murderer. Satisfied?"

"Not by a damn sight," said Hansen coolly. "I've hardly begun. So far we've merely discovered the body. Why did Worthy go to the plant that night—apparently alone?"

Bell sighed and put down his glass. "It seems to me that should be obvious," he said painfully. "The poor fellow was desperate. We had discussed the possibility of liquidating certain securities in order to finance improvements in the plant. The matter was to be brought up at the next meet-

ing of the Board of Directors. The securities, of course, were no longer in the company valut. The discovery that they were missing was only a matter of days or hours. He went to his office in a last hopeless effort to figure some way out of his difficulty. There was only one way out, and he took it."

"Very sad," declared Hansen. "I see nothing in these clippings about a suicide note."

"He left what, in effect, amounted to the same thing. On his desk was a letter, dated two days previously, from a Chicago brokerage firm. It was addressed to him in care of a Chicago post office box number. The letter thanked him for his check in the amount of \$16,500 to cover the purchase of bearer bonds. The bonds were being sent to him under separate cover by registered mail."

"And these bonds were never located?"

"No. It was assumed, of course, that his wife and daughter had them. But Mrs. Worthy assured me that they knew nothing whatever about them. She even offered to turn over to the company the proceeds from his life insurance. But that, of course, wasn't necessary."

"Very fortunate for Mrs. Worthy," said Hansen, glancing at the clippings. "I see it was also assumed that Worthy had picked up the bonds from the post office box. He had made a trip to Chicago the day before he died."

"AS a matter of fact, I was supposed to have made that trip," said Bell musingly. "As you know, Worthy-Bell manufactures industrial equipment for the handling of chemicals. We had a special installation on trial at a large plant in Chicago. It was necessary for me to make frequent trips to inspect and supervise the operation of our

equipment. Because of my accident, Worthy had to make the trip in my place. Ordinarily he handled the executive branch and I took care of production."

"The post office box was empty when examined," Hansen went on reading. "And inquiry at the brokerage office revealed that the check had been drawn on a Chicago bank. At the bank it was learned that the \$16,500 represented all but a balance of a few dollars in a personal account which Worthy had apparently opened a couple of years before. The original deposit was nearly \$200,000. Most of the withdrawals went to various brokerage firms, and the investments were not usually wise or profitable. Quite a gambler, I'd say," Hansen looked up with level brows. "Not a very reliable man to be in charge of the executive end of a corporation like Worthy-Bell."

"Oh, he was careful enough with the business," said Bell grudgingly. "Too careful sometimes. He satisfied his gambling instincts by taking this flier on the side. And," he added carefully rubbing out his cigarette, "he finally crashed. Too bad."

"It was, indeed," Hansen assented. "Or perhaps I should say, it is indeed. I can't help admiring intricate planning, and thus when an elaborate structure crumbles and falls, I always experience a certain regret, even while I am helping to wreck it."

"You needn't apologize," Bell said magnanimously. "You wanted to reconstruct the case, and you did. As I told you in the beginning, they can't all turn out to be murders. Any other questions?"

"Lots of them," said Hansen flatly. "What happened to the nurse?"

Bell's glass twitched away from his lips, splashing liquor on his shirt front. "Nurse! What nurse?" he demanded

in a strangled voice. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"The nurse," said Hansen patiently, "who attended you when you had the acid burns. You were unable to use your hands. You must have had a nurse in attendance. You must have been helpless."

"You — you —" Bell's glass hit the cocktail table with a crash and turned over. His face was livid. "You're an imposter! You're not James Hansen! You were sent here by — by —"

"By my wife, Mrs. James Hansen," replied the other calmly. "Formerly Marion Worthy."

"So." Bell mopped at his face and managed to get control of himself. "In spite of my generosity, they were not satisfied. They still want to make trouble. I can—" he laughed shakily. "I can understand their reluctance to believe all the facts in the case. And I can understand your inclination to—to believe what they tell you. But I assure you that you are making a grave mistake. Professional police handled the investigation of Worthy's death. You, a mere layman, would be an utter fool to think you could make something else out of it after a year's time."

"Most people make fools of themselves over their hobbies," declared Hansen. "It's true that I'm an amateur, but I'm not without experience as criminologist. It actually is my hobby, and I have worked closely with the Chicago Police Department more than once. Marion never was satisfied with the circumstances surrounding her father's death. She heard of me, and came to me with the story. At first I was interested in the girl herself. She's a lovely thing, and her spirit had not been broken, as her mother's had. She was determined to find out the truth, and gradually she managed to infect me with her ardent purpose."

"VERY romantic," sneered Bell, twisting his handkerchief. "I have no doubt she gave you a fine tale which were only to willing to accept—along with her."

"She told me the truth," retorted Hansen coldly, "as I very soon discovered. First of all, there was the fact that all of Philip Worthy's transactions in Chicago were handled by mail, through a post office box number. The man, himself, never appeared, except when he signed for registered mail when he produced satisfactory identification papers—those of Philip Worthy."

"Naturally!" snapped Bell indignantly. "He had to keep all these transactions under cover. He couldn't risk having that mail sent to him here."

"Then there is the queer business of your accident," Hansen continued. "It was so opportune. Three days before Worthy was shot, you were alone in your home, working in your private laboratory. It was Sunday. No one knew anything about the accident until quite late that night, when the nurse called the Worthy home. She said a Chicago specialist had flown down, that she had accompanied him, and had remained to take care of you. The side of your face and both hands were swathed in bandages. You were quite helpless. Therefore it became necessary for Worthy to make the trip to Chicago next day in your place. That gave him an opportunity to pick up the bonds and the letter from the brokerage firm on Tuesday morning, before returning home. The check for \$16,500 and the order for the bonds had been mailed on Saturday. It was customary for the brokerage house to respond to such an order on the day it was received. Thus the bonds were mailed on Monday and were picked up from the post office the next day. All this while of course, you were under the

care of a trained nurse, and because of intense pain had to be kept under opiates for the first few days."

Bell extended his plump hands. They shook only a little. They were covered with white patches and small blue pits where the acid had eaten the flesh. "It was necessary," he said hoarsely, "to have skin grafted on my face afterwards. The accident was thoroughly real. I—"

"It was real enough," said Hansen grimly. "But it was no accident. You plunged your hands into the acid and smeared your face with it the night Worthy was shot. Your little friend, the nurse, put the professional bandages on you Sunday—long before the acid touched you. If you were alone in the house, and in great agony, unable to use your hands, how did you summon the Chicago specialist? And why send for some one three hours away? Any local doctor could have given you relief."

"I don't know how I did it," said Bell. "It was one of those things—one of those times when you call on your physical forces for more than human flesh can stand. God! I never want to experience such a—"

"Don't worry," said Hansen drily, "you won't have to. The micro-film records of cancelled checks from the Chicago bank have been examined by an expert. He asserts that the signatures of Philip Worthy's name are all forgeries. Not too difficult to copy the signature of a well-known partner, and in this case it didn't have to be too perfect. No one who knew it was ever supposed to see it. It would be easy to acquire certain forms of identification belonging to an unsuspecting partner, too. Borrowing a driver's license, or a club membership card, or almost anything else you had access to. It would be easy to borrow his gun, too. Or per-

haps you knew where he kept it, and simply took it. And finally, there are the bearer bonds, the price of which cleaned out the bank account. Bearer bonds. Negotiable paper that can be passed by any one like money. And the all too incriminating letter addressed to Philip Worthy from the brokerage house. It was too good to be true."

Hansen's eyes were half-closed, his hands still as he talked—almost as if to himself. Bell's hand moved restlessly over a small square stand at the right of his chair. Suddenly it dived beneath, ripped open a shallow drawer, and came up with a stubby automatic. His first shot creased the shoulder of Hansen's coat and imbedded itself in the back of the wing chair, but Hansen's hands had already moved, almost negligently. Before Bell could bring the automatic down in more careful aim, the gun in Hansen's fist roared. Bell screamed and screamed again, his shrill voice

trailing off into agonized gurgling.

His shattered wrist was spurting crimson blood and he was sunk in his chair with a look of horror in his bulging eyes.

Hansen stood up and walked around the cocktail table, picking up the linen handkerchief Bell had dropped. With it he fashioned a tourniquet. The gushing red slowly lessened. Then he crossed the richly furnished library to the telephone.

"Long Distance," he said, and his voice was no longer expressionless. "I want to talk to Mrs. Marion Hansen at Chicago. The number is . . . Yes, thank you. And hurry it, if you please."

He disconnected and lifted the receiver to his ear once more. "Give me the Police Department," he said, and for the first time he smiled, a little grimly. "Yes, it is an emergency. Even," he added under his breath, "if it is a year late."

THE JUDGE WOULDN'T TESTIFY

IN THE history of judicial proceedings there are to be found strange and unfamiliar attitudes that shock and surprise us living in the 20th century. When we talk of progress we often fail to remember that the ideas of justice that we have today were completely different but a few hundred years ago. The strange cases recorded are sufficient proof that we have come a long way.

Take the case of Judge Cambo: Judge Cambo, in the year 1720, was the chief judge on the island of Malta. As he dressed one morning, he chose to look out the window. In the street below he observed two men fighting. One of the men drew a stiletto and stabbed the other, and in escaping dropped the sheath. All of this, including the murderer's face, was clearly visible to the judge.

Immediately after the murderer ran away a baker appeared. He picked up the sheath and put it in his pocket but, upon noticing the dead man, became frightened and began to run. The police saw him and after a short chase captured him with the sheath still on his person. Since the fatal stiletto was found to fit the sheath perfectly, he was arrested and put on trial for murder.

As fate would have it, Judge Cambo presided at the trial. Since the evidence offered by the prosecution was insufficient to warrant conviction, the Judge, as was the practice of his times, or-

dered the prisoner to be tortured for a confession. The baker could not endure the pain of the rack and the screw and finally forced to confess to a crime he did not commit. Judge Cambo sentenced him to death.

Some time later the real murderer was caught. He confessed and in the testimony revealed that he had seen Judge Cambo at the window. The Judge explained his action in not revealing what he knew on the grounds that "a judge's duty was to decide a case on the merits of the evidence alone," without regard to anything that he personally knew!

The ideas of court procedure existing at that time, you see, were so rigid and formal that real justice was stifled, and in the eyes of the law even an innocent man could be put to death. Today, of course, the case would be handled easily. Every source of information is used. The judge would present himself as a witness. If he refused to appear he could be subpoenaed. The trial would be decided before a judge who could truly act impartially.

Yes, such things did occur in the past. That we have solved the problem fairly and justly ought to give us faith that, in even more complex questions, we can do as well.—R. M. Moran.



Carefully the concealed figure drew a bead on the victim's back

CORPSE ON VACATION

*Getting yourself accused of murder
is a good way to ruin a vacation*

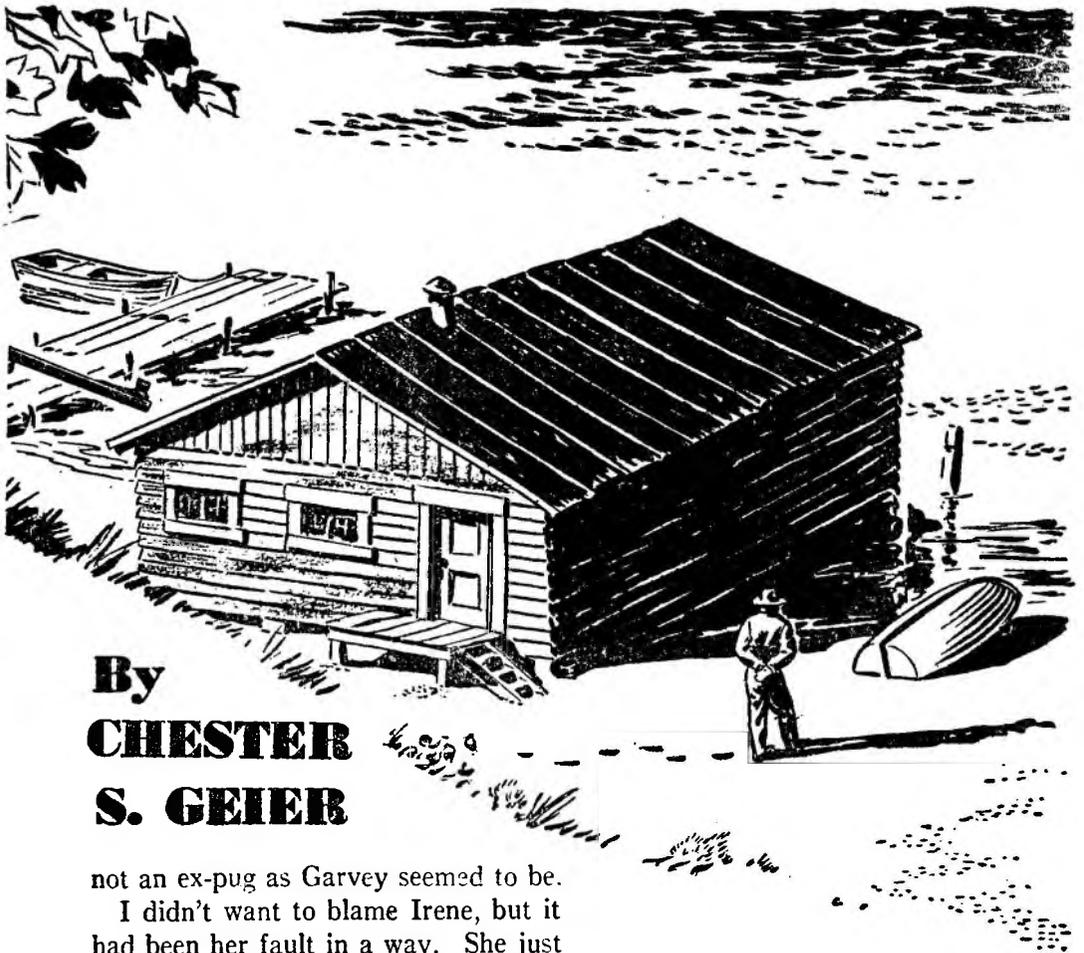
THE sun was sinking toward the far hills in the west when my rowboat grounded on the strip of gravel beach in front of Triangle Lodge. It was a pretty sight, with the clouds tinted rose-gold and lavender, but I didn't pay it much attention. I'd had enough of the sun, sitting out on the lake all afternoon. From the dull smarting sensation in the skin of my face and forearms, I knew I wasn't going to like the sun for quite a while to come.

I climbed stiffly from the boat, and hauled out the oars and my fishing tackle. The fish hadn't been biting, but that had been all right with me. Out

on the lake there had been peace and solitude, neither of which I'd have found by hanging around the Lodge.

Wonderful vacation, I thought bitterly, as I started up the steep path to the oak-shingled building above. For one thing, I'd been so busy selling air-conditioning units that I hadn't been able to get away until almost at the end of the season. For another, there had to be people in the world like Nate Garvey.

I fingered my jaw tenderly as I thought of him. It was still sore from that sock he'd given me. Sure, I'd swung first, but after all I was a salesman and



By
CHESTER
S. GEIER

not an ex-pug as Garvey seemed to be.

I didn't want to blame Irene, but it had been her fault in a way. She just didn't know how to deal with wolves like Garvey. A cold look and a few scathing words would have made Garvey quickly lose interest. But Irene's too sweet to employ such tactics, especially on people she knows are trying in their own particular way to be nice. She tries evasive action, which to guys who are determined and not very bright is mistakenly interpreted as a coy form of come-hither. Garvey wasn't very bright. I'd swung on him when I'd caught him trying to kiss Irene. Any man would do as much for his wife.

I'd taken the count, but all that mattered to Irene was that I'd at least tried. I hadn't helped matters any by storming at her purely out of injured masculine ego. She'd taken to moping in her

room, and between her hurt blue eyes and Garvey's mocking brown ones, I much preferred the lake.

I'd have left in the morning if Lew Reardon hadn't urged me to stay. Reardon owned Triangle Lodge in partnership with Garvey, and was an old friend of mine.

Climbing the broad oak steps which led up to the porch encircling the building, I became suddenly aware of an atmosphere of strangeness. There was no one seated on the porch. I hadn't noticed anyone around. The place was queerly deserted. For no other reason than this, maybe, I had an abrupt premonition of trouble.

I wasn't wrong, I found out, when I

pulled open one of the screened double doors and strode into the lobby. Everyone was there. And as though they had been waiting for me, all eyes turned suddenly in my direction.

Someone had been speaking. The voice stopped abruptly.

THE tableau held like a nightmare frozen in mid-scene. They stared at me, and I stared at them. Seated in the wicker chairs strewn about the lobby, I saw Irene, Reardon, Warren, Hohmeyer and his wife, and—I stopped counting noses when I discovered the two strangers. The first thought that came to me was that the two were new arrivals, but in another moment I discarded the idea. They didn't wear the set expression of shock that seemed prevalent on the faces of the others. They looked grim and purposeful.

As though the impact of my glance had roused him into motion, one of the two men rose and walked toward me. He was tall and raw-boned, with a long gaunt face. He wore a rather wrinkled gray suit, and a wide-brimmed black hat had been pushed to the back of his head, revealing faded red hair. He nodded with a casualness that didn't match the sharp scrutiny of his gray eyes. He asked:

"You Vincent Hewes?"

I nodded because I didn't seem able to speak right away. "I'm Vincent Hewes," I said at last. "What's the matter? What's this all about?"

"Name's Ben Eckard," the tall man said, as though answering a question I'd asked him. "Sheriff Ben Eckard." He pulled back the lapel of his coat to allow me sight of a badge pinned to his shirt.

I looked at that badge and was suddenly afraid. Something had happened. Something bad. And men with badges don't look at you like that unless they

think you've had a hand in it. I tried to think of what might have happened, but I was worrying too much about my hide to be any good at guessing.

A face moved into sight around Eckard's shoulder. It was the round serious face of Lew Reardon. He looked a warning at me.

"There's bad trouble, Vince. Garvey's been murdered."

Eckard whirled. "Who asked for your help?" he snapped. "Go back and sit down, or I'll put you down as an accessory after the fact." Eckard was boiling mad, I could see. He had obviously been preparing a trap, and Reardon's tip-off had spoiled it.

I was dazed. "Garvey . . . dead? Murdered?"

"Big surprise, isn't it?" Eckard growled. "You didn't know anything about it until just now." The sarcasm in his voice might have been laid on with a shovel.

"Of course I didn't," I said. "What makes you think I should know about it?"

"I'll ask the questions, Hewes. To start with, where have you been?"

"Out on the lake. Fishing."

"How long? When did you start?"

"I left around two."

Eckard considered this, rubbing his long nose with a long leathery forefinger. He said, "You were out on the lake all afternoon? You didn't return here at any time?"

I shook my head.

"I can't just take your word for that," Eckard said. He gestured to me and moved toward the group seated about the lobby. I followed, fighting down an attack of stage fright.

I glanced at Irene. She had her lower lip gripped tightly between her teeth, and her small face was pale. She returned my gaze with wide-eyed concern.

ECKARD looked over the assemblage in somewhat the same manner as a lecturer surveys his audience. There weren't many in the gathering, since this was the tag-end of the season. As far as I could see, all at Triangle Lodge were there: Irene, Reardon, Warren, Nesline, Hohmeyer and his wife, and Jan Patek. Patek served as caretaker and man of all work at the Lodge. The others, except for Reardon of course, were more or less temporary guests. The extra man accompanying Eckard was most likely a deputy.

Eckard said, "I want you people to think carefully. Hewes, here, claims to have left the Lodge around two o'clock, and to have been out on the lake all afternoon. Garvey, as near as I can fix it, was killed between four-thirty and five o'clock. Now—did any of you see Hewes anywhere near the Lodge around that time?"

I held my breath. There was a general shaking of heads. I let my breath out.

My morale was bolstered a little. I swung on Eckard.

"Look here, Sheriff, you seem to take it for granted that I had something to do with Garvey's murder. I suppose you have sound reasons. Would you mind telling me just what they are?"

Eckard said slowly, "Between four-thirty and five o'clock, several of the people here heard the sound of a rifle shot. Nobody paid it much attention, even though it sounded pretty near, since there are plenty of poachers hereabouts. A short time later, Jan Patek went down to the boathouse on an errand and found Garvey dead. Shot through the back.

"Reardon put in a call to me, in town. The bullet had gone into Garvey at an angle, showing it had been fired from some spot on the bluff, since the boathouse is on the bottom. Tracing

the line of fire, I found the spot on the bluff overlooking the boathouse where the killer had lain. The ground had been scuffed up, and branches had been broken. But that isn't important. I found this."

Eckard reached into his wrinkled gray coat and produced an envelope. He opened it and carefully shook out an object into his palm. I bent forward to peer at it. The thing was a business card—one of *my* business cards, bearing the name of my firm in the center and my own name as representative in the lower right hand corner.

Maybe it was the angle at which the light shone on the card, but I noticed something odd. Scrutinizing the card more closely, I found that it had been pierced with a tiny hole.

"Why it's got a hole in it!" I said foolishly, engrossed at the discovery.

Eckard stared at me, then at the card. A frown creased the space between his reddish brows. Finally he gave a shrug of impatience. He said:

"The important thing about this card, Hewes, is that it's got your name on it. It shows you could have been up there on the bluff. You had a perfectly good motive for killing Garvey. He'd been bothering your wife. You had a fight with him about it, and he knocked you cold. Obviously, you decided to even up the score and at the same time put him where he'd leave your wife alone. You pretended to go fishing, then sneaked back and went to that spot on the bluff. You waited until Garvey appeared at the boathouse, below, and let him have it. Then you went back out on the lake."

I said innocently, "And what did I use for a gun, Sheriff? All I can remember bringing along is my fishing tackle."

"You must have used the rifle that

Reardon kept under the bar in the taproom," Eckard said. "I've already brought up the question of a weapon. Reardon looked at the place under the bar where he kept the rifle—and it was gone."

I FELT sheepish. How could I have forgotten Reardon's rifle? He'd showed it to a group of us in the taproom only a few days before. He kept the rifle there for robbers, since Triangle Lodge was situated in a lonely stretch of country. I tried to recall the persons present at the time. There had been Nesline, Warren, Irene, and myself. A vague memory of Garvey hovered in the background. Oh, yes. Garvey had glanced in through the door a moment. I'd been sitting nearest the door and had noticed him when his shadow fell across the bar.

I shook my head at Eckard. "I wasn't the only one who knew about the rifle, Sheriff." I told him about Reardon's having shown it to the others. I finished, "And as for the card, I have a habit of passing out my business cards to new acquaintances, as my wife will testify. When you're earning a living as a salesman, you never overlook a possible opportunity for a sale. I remember giving cards to Stuart Nesline, James Warren, and William Hohmeyer."

Eckard rubbed his long nose thoughtfully. His gray eyes had lost their sharpness. I thought he looked a little unhappy. Considering the fact that I'd badly weakened his case against me, that was understandable.

Everyone—or almost everyone—at the Lodge knew about the rifle. Nesline, Warren, and Hohmeyer had possessed my business cards. Any one of them could have misplaced his card so that it could have fallen into the hands of a person who lacked a card—Rear-

don or Patek, for example. If Eckard hadn't been blinded by the bright light of perfect motive, he'd have seen that the mere fact of the card having been left at the killer's hiding place was nothing more or less than a clumsy attempt to frame me for Garvey's murder.

Eckard came out of his brown study. He turned back to the group, his eyes singling out Nesline, Hohmeyer, and Warren.

"Hewes claims he gave each of you one of his cards. Do you still have them?"

Hohmeyer reached mechanically into a rear pocket of his loud green slacks and produced a billfold. From one of the compartments, he pulled a white oblong. Eckard glanced at it, nodded.

"Willie was with me all day," Mrs. Hohmeyer said firmly, as though to remove any last lingering shadow of doubt from her short pudgy husband. "He never left my eyes a minute."

I couldn't help grinning. What she'd said was true enough, as Hohmeyer's perpetual henpecked expression amply evidenced. Hohmeyer, I understood, ran a haberdashery shop in the city.

Nesline finished an unsuccessful search of his pockets. He looked at Eckard and shrugged. "Sorry, Sheriff. I must have left the card somewhere up in my room. But I'm sure my alibi for the time of the murder holds good. Between four-thirty and five o'clock, I was returning in my car from a trip into town. You see, Mr. Warren broke his glasses this morning, and I took the pieces to an optometrist for replacement. Mr. Warren didn't have an extra pair, and as I understand, is practically blind without glasses."

Warren nodded his bushy shock of black hair. "A great favor. Can't say how much I appreciate it." He was slim and managed to look dapper and well-dressed even in sports clothes. I

didn't know his profession. He wasn't given to talking about himself. I had the strong impression of having seen him or someone very much like him before meeting him at the Lodge several days previously, but the precise memory eluded me. Without his glasses, attempts at recollection were even more difficult.

"What about your card, Mr. Warren?" Eckard prompted.

WARREN looked apologetic. "I'm afraid I threw it away. I know it sounds unkind, but throwing away business cards is as much a habit of mine as is Mr. Hewes' of giving them away."

"What were you doing between four-thirty and five o'clock?" Eckard asked.

"I was up in my room," Warren said. "Without my glasses, there wasn't anything else for me to do. Hope you're not considering me as a suspect. The spot from where Garvey was shot is, I understand, some seventy-five feet from the boathouse: At that distance, I couldn't have told Garvey from anyone else here, at the Lodge."

"The optometrist would verify that, I suppose." Eckard moved his gaunt shoulders as if in weary irritation and turned back to Nesline. "What time did you start out for town?"

"Shortly after lunch. About one o'clock, I believe."

"The trip to and from town takes less than an hour, allowing for the visit to the optometrist. What took you so long to get back here?"

"I stopped to take in a movie," Nesline said.

"Or you could have returned here earlier than you claim," Eckard said. "Early enough to wait for Garvey, kill him, and then to pretend to be just returning from town."

"You haven't mentioned a motive,

Sheriff. What reason could I have had to kill Garvey? He wasn't a likeable person, I'll admit, but I got along with Garvey as well as anyone could get along with him. Anybody here will testify that there was no bad feeling between us."

Eckard looked more unhappy, a little more weary. His somber gray gaze turned to Reardon and Patek, and I began thinking the same thoughts which were undoubtedly passing through his mind.

Both Reardon and Patek had hated Garvey. Garvey had been dominating, arrogant, a bully. He hadn't played fair with Reardon in the division of profits from Triangle Lodge. I knew Reardon would have dissolved the partnership long ago if it hadn't been for his attachment to the resort. He might have bought up Garvey's half, but he couldn't have afforded it even if Garvey had been willing to sell.

Reardon had plenty of motive. By killing Garvey, he at once removed a tyrant and gained complete ownership of Triangle Lodge. My fight with Garvey could very well have been the straw that broke the camel's back, as regards any hesitant plans Reardon might have had for murdering Garvey.

As for Patek, Garvey had all too frequently mistreated the stolid simple-minded Slav. Patek just about worshipped Reardon. Even disregarding Garvey's constant bullying, Patek would have had sufficient motive on the basis of his affection for Reardon alone. Patek wasn't too dumb to understand how much Reardon stood to gain by Garvey's death.

And, of course, either Reardon or Patek might have found the card which Warren had thrown away. I couldn't believe that Reardon would have tried to frame me by planting the card at the scene of the murder, but I was sure

Patek had no scruples of that sort where I was concerned.

ECKARD asked Reardon what seemed by now his favorite question. "Reardon, what were you doing between four-thirty and five o'clock?"

"I was in back of the house, working in the garden," Reardon said. "I suppose I had plenty of opportunity." He shrugged his slight shoulders.

"What about you, Patek?"

"I was starting to cook in the kitchen," Patek said. "I had opportunity, yes." Patek shrugged, too.

Eckard rubbed his nose, clearly at the end of his rope. He glanced at Irene, but he didn't try to question her. I could understand that. You have only to look at Irene, and you wouldn't have believed her capable of harming a fly. She's that sweet.

Eckard grasped desperately at a straw. Yours truly, in other words. "I'm not finished with you yet, Hewes. The fact that anyone else should have killed Garvey so soon after your fight with him is too much of a coincidence. You had the motive and opportunity. The business card being left where it was looks like an obvious frame-up, yet you might have been clever enough to leave it there with the idea that the very obviousness of it would divert suspicion away from you." Eckard considered me solemnly a moment. Suddenly he asked:

"You threw the rifle in the lake, didn't you?"

I grinned. "Got you there, Sheriff. I tore it up into little pieces and swallowed them."

This brought a laugh, which didn't help Eckard's tottering equanimity any. He said furiously:

"I'm convinced you're the killer, Hewes. I'd haul you in right now if only there was enough evidence. But

I'll get you yet, don't doubt that!"

Eckard's tone was grimly sincere. Whether he was actually convinced of my guilt or just sore about that crack I'd made, I wasn't sure.

Eckard began preparations for leaving. I learned afterward that the coroner had already been at the Lodge, having left with Garvey's body a half hour before my return from the lake. Eckard's deputy, Jeff Draper, had taken pictures of the body and its position and of the spot up on the bluff where the card had been found.

Eckard finally drove off, leaving Jeff Draper on guard at the Lodge. By a sort of tacit agreement, the rest of us gathered in the taproom where Reardon set up drinks—on the house. And in spite of my being Eckard's prime suspect, I seemed to be pretty popular. I don't know how many drinks we had, but it must have been plenty because after a while we were singing "Auld Lang Syne"—in memory of Garvey.

It was all probably due to aftermath—reaction after shock, the releasing of tense nerves. Or maybe we were just preparing for what was still to come, without consciously daring to admit it. Eckard wasn't through. He had just gotten started. The preliminaries had just been finished. The end itself wouldn't be pleasant.

So we sang "Auld Lang Syne"—and one of us was a murderer. He—whoever he was—would never forget. He would remember Garvey until the electric chair ended all remembering.

What happened after the singing is hazy. I had a foggy recollection of being up in my room with Irene, with no knowledge of how I'd got there. But I do recall one thing.

Irene asked, "You didn't kill him, Vince, did you?"

"Who says I did? Of course, I didn't. I don't kill every guy that socks

me. It isn't sporting."

Naturally, my pronunciation wasn't as clear as that. But Irene understood me, and that was enough.

"I believe you, Vince," she said. "And, Vince, I think it was swell of you to have taken a sock at Garvey. You're so brave. Why, he was six inches taller than you were, and outweighed you by more than thirty pounds!"

The rest is haze again, until I opened my eyes to the blaze of sunshine and found myself with a barrage balloon for a head.

ECKARD returned that afternoon with a group of four experts in homicide investigation for whom he'd probably sent the night before. This was the main event.

A little later there were more arrivals. For the most part, they seemed to be extra deputies. The rest were reporters and curiosity seekers.

Things started humming. Our fingerprints were taken. Our statements were taken. Deputies dragged the lake around the ambuscade on the bluff, while others searched carefully through the shrubbery surrounding the spot, gradually working their way to the Lodge. The experts came in with plaster casts they'd made of footprints in the soil of the part of the bluff overlooking the boathouse. There was a lot of technical talk. I heard some dirty jokes exchanged.

Eckard gave me another going over, this time concentrating on the rifle. He kept asking me what I'd done with it, and I kept telling him I hadn't done anything with it. Finally he got tired of it and told me to get the hell out but to stick around.

The crowd was two-deep at the bar in the taproom. I managed at last to get a beer from a perspiring Patek and

went out on the porch. Seated in one of the wicker chairs I found Warren. He was fiddling with an empty glass and looking disgusted with the world. He was still without glasses and didn't notice my approach until I dropped into a chair beside him. He squinted fiercely, then nodded a greeting.

"Nice place for a vacation," I said.

"Wonderful," Warren said. "I'd have picked out a nice quiet nuthouse if I'd guessed this would happen."

"You and me both. I'm just as bad at guesses as you are."

Warren was silent a moment. "Maybe we need a little practice," he said finally. "Who do you think killed Garvey?"

"My money's on Patek," I said. "But I'm just practicing. We'll know for sure when Eckard's experts get all their data in order and start comparing notes."

"Think there's a chance they'll turn up real evidence?"

"A good chance if all that scientific jargon they spout means anything."

Warren fell silent again. At length he said:

"Wish I had my glasses."

"When are they supposed to be finished?"

"Tomorrow. The optometrists promised Nesline a rush job. Nesline's to pick them up for me." Warren stood up. He squinted toward the lake, then held his right hand up to his eye. I noticed that the forefinger was curled inside the overlap of the thumb, the remaining three fingers held stiffly horizontal. It was the thumb and forefinger part that touched his eye, and he seemed to be looking through this the way one might look through the hole in a doughnut.

"Eye hurt?" I asked.

Warren shook his head absently, intent on what he was doing. "See a little

better," he said. He stood there a moment longer, then turned and went into the taproom.

ALONE—or at least as much alone as the noise from the taproom permitted—I started thinking. I thought of the business card which Eckard had showed me. I remembered the oddness of its being pierced with a hole. What did that mean—if anything? Did the fact of its being pierced with a hole have any special significance? Why just one hole? If someone had been running a pin through it in fond reflection of the person whose name was printed on it, why not many holes?

It was crazy. It just couldn't mean anything. And then, quite suddenly, it did.

I was on fire. Tingles raced up and down my body. I stood up. I had to get my feet down solid, or else I thought I'd float up into the sky.

A hand grabbed my arm.

"Vince! Vince—oh, God!"

It was Irene. She looked as though she'd just seen every fear known to man since the dawn of time. I forgot everything just seeing that look on her face.

"What on earth?" I said.

"The rifle, Vince!" Irene said, in a tense whisper. "The rifle! I found it in our room!"

The porch seemed to be pulled suddenly from under me. Or perhaps that was just my heart hitting the bottom of my stomach.

"I'll meet you in our room," Irene said. "Wait a while after I go. Walk slowly, as though nothing has happened."

I think I nodded. I'm not sure of anything I did at that moment.

Irene left me, and waited a couple of centuries. Then I followed after her. I walked slowly. I don't know how I did it, but I did it.

When I reached our room, Irene hauled me in and bolted the door. She went over to the bed and pulled back the mattress. And there it was. A rifle. I'd have been the last person in the world to bet that this wasn't the rifle that had killed Garvey.

As though pulled to it by some kind of weird fascination, I picked up the rifle. There was a vague thought in my mind about getting rid of it, doing anything with it, but leave it where it was. I looked at Irene.

"Wh-wh-where did y-y-you f-f-find it?" The way I said it was even sillier than it looks.

"In the closet, Vince. It wasn't there this morning, when we dressed for breakfast. Someone put it there while we were gone!"

There was a sudden squealing noise. The window had been half open. The squealing noise was the sound of its being opened wider. Eckard jumped into the room. The roof of the porch ran beneath all the windows on the upper floor of the Lodge. Eckard had simply entered a room down the hall and walked quietly along the roof to our window. And, of course, he had to be so busy getting the window open that he'd failed to hear what Irene had said.

Eckard looked at the rifle. Then he looked at me. His smile was something I still see in dreams when I've eaten too much. He said:

"I thought your wife was up to something, but I never guessed you both were in on it. Shows how much a pretty face can fool you. All right, Hewes," he said in sudden sharpness, "hand over that gun!"

IHANDED it over—barrel first . . . on the side of his head . . . hard. I thought the sound of Eckard hitting the floor must surely have been heard throughout the entire building, it

seemed that loud

Irene sat down on the bed. If the Devil himself and all his imps had walked in the door playing *Glory Hallelujah*, I'm sure she was too far gone to have done so much as even batted an eyelash.

I patted her shoulder and said, "Don't worry, honey, everything's going to be all right." Then I went to the door, unlocked it, and strode into the hall.

I went to a room down the hall. The door was locked, but it wasn't much of a lock, and my shoulder against the panel took out of it what little resistance it had. Nobody was in the room, and that made things a little more simple. I unclenched my fists, closed the door, and got busy.

I hated to go through luggage or drawers looking for things, because I hate to make a mess doing it. But this time I had no such reluctance. I went through two bags and most of the drawers before I found something that seemed to hold what I wanted. It was a brief case, locked. A razor blade from the bathroom took care of that.

Inside the brief case were a picture, a bundle of newspaper clippings, and enough money in currency and negotiable securities to have enabled me to buy out my boss lock, stock, and barrel. It was more than I had expected.

I was glancing through the newspaper clippings when a rustle sounded behind me. I whirled—and found myself gripped by a furiously snarling thing that might have been a cross between Frankenstein and Gargantua.

We staggered across the room, hit the bed, and sprawled across it in a squirming tangle. Nails raked my face from forehead to chin. Fingers closed like the jaws of a trap around my neck, squeezed with insane strength. I didn't try to break the grip. I don't think I could have broken it. With what little

strength I had left, I sank my fist into the stomach of the human hurricane atop me.

The first time brought little apparent result, but the second time did. The vise around my neck came away.

I got up from the bed in time to dodge a foot aimed in the general region of my groin. The other came after me. I ducked a wild swing at my head. Another came right after it, too fast for me to duck again. It caught me on the cheek, made my brain ring. In some strange way, it seemed to clear everything up, give me strength. I took a swing of my own.

My arm went numb up to the shoulder. Then I was sitting on the floor. Then a noise came as though from far away and suddenly was very near and then all the lights went out.

THEY had glued my eyelids down. Or maybe they had weighted them with lead. Or maybe my eyelids wouldn't work anymore. I got so excited I just opened them and found they were all right after all.

I found I was lying on a bed. The room seemed to be the same room where I last remembered being conscious.

There seemed to be a lot of people in the room. I saw them as though through a thinning fog, not making any immediate attempts at identification.

A hand touched my cheek. I saw Irene. She asked anxiously:

"Darling, how do you feel?"

"I don't know yet," I said. "Give me a little time."

"You can have all the time you want," a voice said. I looked around. I found a face on the other side of me, a long gaunt face with a long nose and gray eyes glinting under reddish brows. It was Eckard. He was smiling, which scared me until I compared it to another smile I remembered and found

this smile was really a friendly one.

"You got him?" I asked.

Eckard nodded. "You had him already laid out, and there wasn't much for me to do. Sorry I sapped you. I was down but not out from that trick you pulled with the rifle. The first thing I thought when I came running in here after you was that you'd added another victim to the list."

"Forget it. That makes us square."

"The stuff from the brief case was enough to give him away," Eckard said. "But what really clinches things are the plaster casts the experts took of the footprints he left in the place from where he shot Garvey. Hewes, how did you know it was Warren? Or maybe I should say Bolling. His real name, you know, is Andrew Bolling, not James Warren."

"I know," I said. "I saw that in the newspaper clippings. Bolling was a fool to save them, but ego is a funny thing. It was something to have his picture in the paper even if the story under it wasn't complimentary. I thought I saw Bolling before. It was in the newspapers, of course, but I couldn't remember where. What tipped me off to him as the murderer of Garvey was that business card."

ECKARD'S face became a question mark in skin and bone. "The card?" "But how? What has the card to do with it?"

"The card had a hole in it," I said. "The hole, like the hole in a doughnut, was the important thing. In spite of the fact that he couldn't see well without glasses, Bolling was still able to see to kill Garvey simply by peering through that tiny hole in the business card. The hole served as a makeshift lens, cutting down the amount of light entering the eye and therefore forming an image clearer than otherwise."

"You must have gone to college to know that," Eckard said.

"I've been to college, but I'd forgot about it—if I ever learned it at all. Bolling himself gave me the answer while we were together on the porch near the taproom door shortly before I went up to his room. He looked out at the lake, peering through the tiny opening made by curling his forefinger tightly inside his thumb. When I asked what was wrong, he thoughtlessly told me it helped him to see better. I later recalled the hole in the card—and everything clicked together."

"Bolling left the card to frame you," Eckard said. "He also planted the rifle in your room."

I grinned. "I didn't think I could convince you about that at the time you found me with it, which is why I pulled that trick. Besides, I wanted a look into Bolling's room. I thought if I could find out why he seemed familiar, I'd find a motive for his murder of Garvey. As a guess it came pretty close."

I shifted to a more comfortable position on the bed and continued, "A glance at the newspaper clippings, of course, makes Bolling's motive obvious. He was wanted as an embezzler. He made some sort of slip while hiding here at Triangle Lodge, and Garvey found out. Garvey blackmailed Bolling, demanding money to keep quiet. Bolling apparently didn't like the idea of parting with any of the money, and decided to get Garvey out of the way. My fight with Garvey furnished the ideal opportunity. Bolling broke his glasses to provide himself with an alibi. He didn't think we'd notice that hole in the business card, or that we'd make anything out of it if we did. But that's where he slipped up."

Eckard said, "I could mention a few other things, but we'll let it go at that." He rose from the chair beside the bed

where he had been sitting, and stuck out a big freckled hand. "If you ever need a job, Hewes, come and see me. I could use you as a deputy."

"Thanks," I said. "I'll remember

that." I shook his hand, and then he and the others went out.

I turned to Irene. It wasn't going to be such a bad vacation after all.

THE END

CRIMINALS AREN'T BORN

WHEN the die-hards blow up at the measures of progressive penal experts and cry out long and loud about the foolishness of trying to reform "born criminals" it might be well to point out a few salient facts. It might be well, for example, to answer the accusation about "impossible reforms" by telling the story of the criminal tribes of India.

India is a country about two-thirds as large as the continental United States with a population roughly two and one-half times as great. Despite the strides made in the last three years, it remains today a relatively unindustrialized nation. In the early nineteen hundreds, of course, it could be considered as being in a stage, as far as industry was concerned, roughly like that of England before the Industrial Revolution. With the exception of the great cities like Bombay and Calcutta, the population is scattered in small rough villages. Her agriculture is still of a primitive sort and most of her people live on the delicate margin that separates them from starvation. Bad weather, a drought, and there is famine causing millions to perish.

In these circumstances it is small wonder that whole families and tribes of people have resorted to criminal methods as a means of keeping body and soul together. From time immemorial such groups have marched across India, living as marauders, as thieves, even as murderers. They were the "criminal tribes," and they fought the law simply to exist.

There were thousands of these gangs or tribes scattered across India; their number was estimated at one and a half million souls, and they were a constant menace even to their compatriots. To these people stealing was not a crime but rather the exaction of a form of charity which was given freely in the old days but is withheld in these more degenerate times. They would attack an isolated village by blocking all the exit routes so as to prevent the villagers from getting out. Then they would simply loot and ravage at their leisure. Counterfeiting was a special hobby of the more cunning tribesmen, but the majority of the crimes consisted of petty pilfering, cattle stealing, and small scale swindling at fairs and bazaars. These crimes which they committed amounted to thousands of dollars, besides the violent deaths caused and the personal injuries inflicted. Their criminal customs and practices were passed on from the old to the young; they became traditions which each succeeding generation followed.

It was in the early part of this century that the Indian government decided to do something about these tribes. They passed the Criminal Tribes Settlement Act which provided for registration or settlement of any persons or groups designated by the authorities as criminal tribes. With this law as a backbone they began one of the most important and significant penological experiments of the last century.

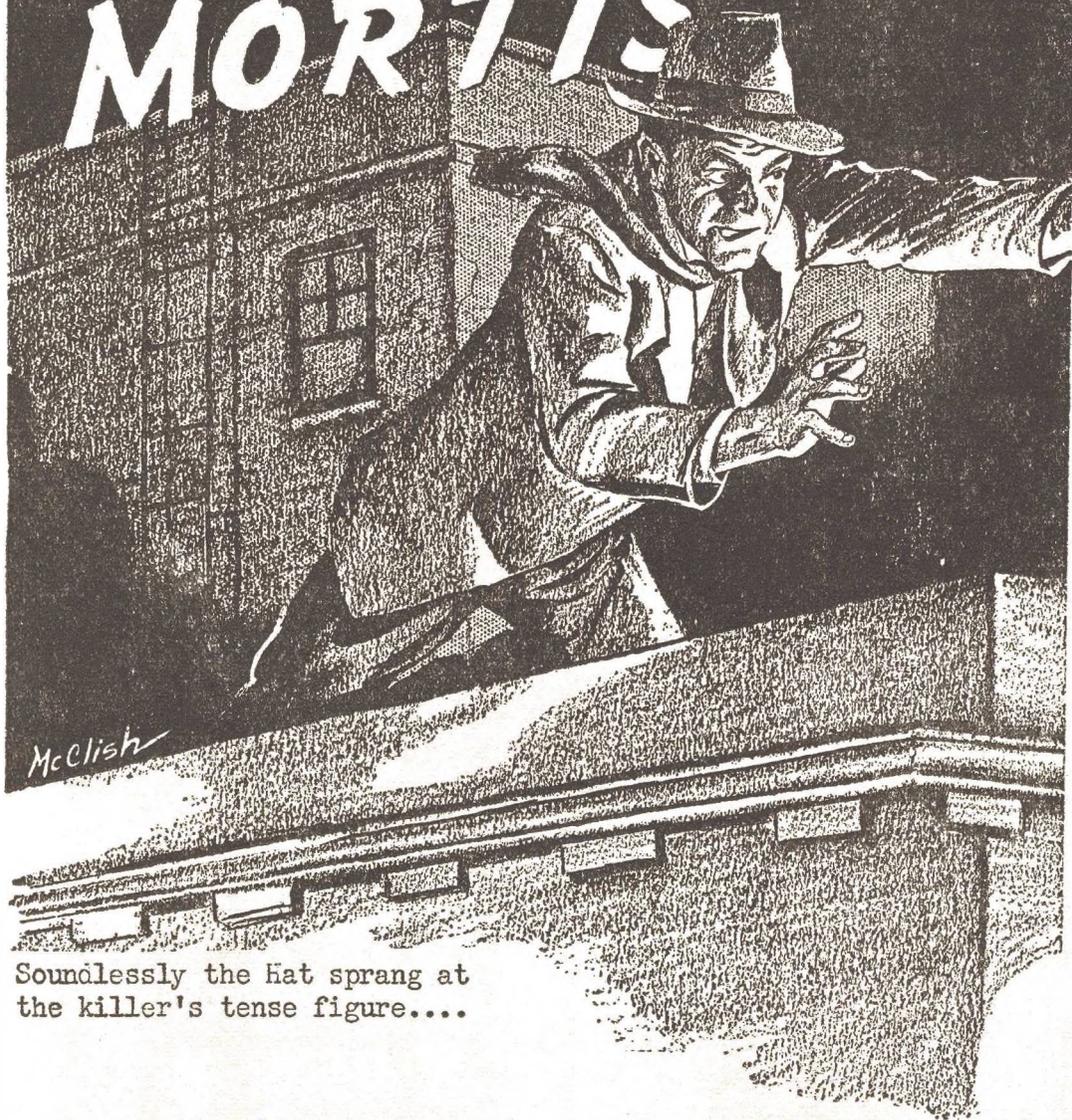
The first move was to effect a registration of these criminal tribesmen. Throughout the length and breadth of India local police authorities began to keep records of the location of the various tribes and to keep them under the authorization of the law. These settlements were of four types. There were industrial settlements located near some large industrial plant such as a cotton mill, railroad shop, or a large tea plantation; agricultural settlements were on lands provided by the government which the settlers were allowed to cultivate at a certain rental; forestry settlements where the settlers worked in the woods getting out timber or reforesting land; reformatory settlements were intended for those who could not be trusted and who had attempted to escape.

The principles applied on these settlements were roughly these. Settlers were allowed to keep their wives and families with them. They were also permitted to receive their entire earnings for the plan definitely includes keeping the economic motive alive. Moreover, there was a system of gradual relaxation of discipline and restrictions, of encouraging settlers to become independent, and of providing speedy means for their complete freedom when they had become self-sufficient.

In the twenty-six settlements that were in operation as early as 1919 the results of the experiment was already showing itself. The practice of supplying lands which the settler and his family would cultivate and build up has produced self-respecting men and women who were once debased and demoralized beggars. The use of educational institutions have changed children from potentially dangerous criminals to normal, healthy, active youngsters who take great pride in their athletic accomplishments. Hardened incorrigibles have learned to direct their energies of leadership toward peaceful and productive accomplishments.

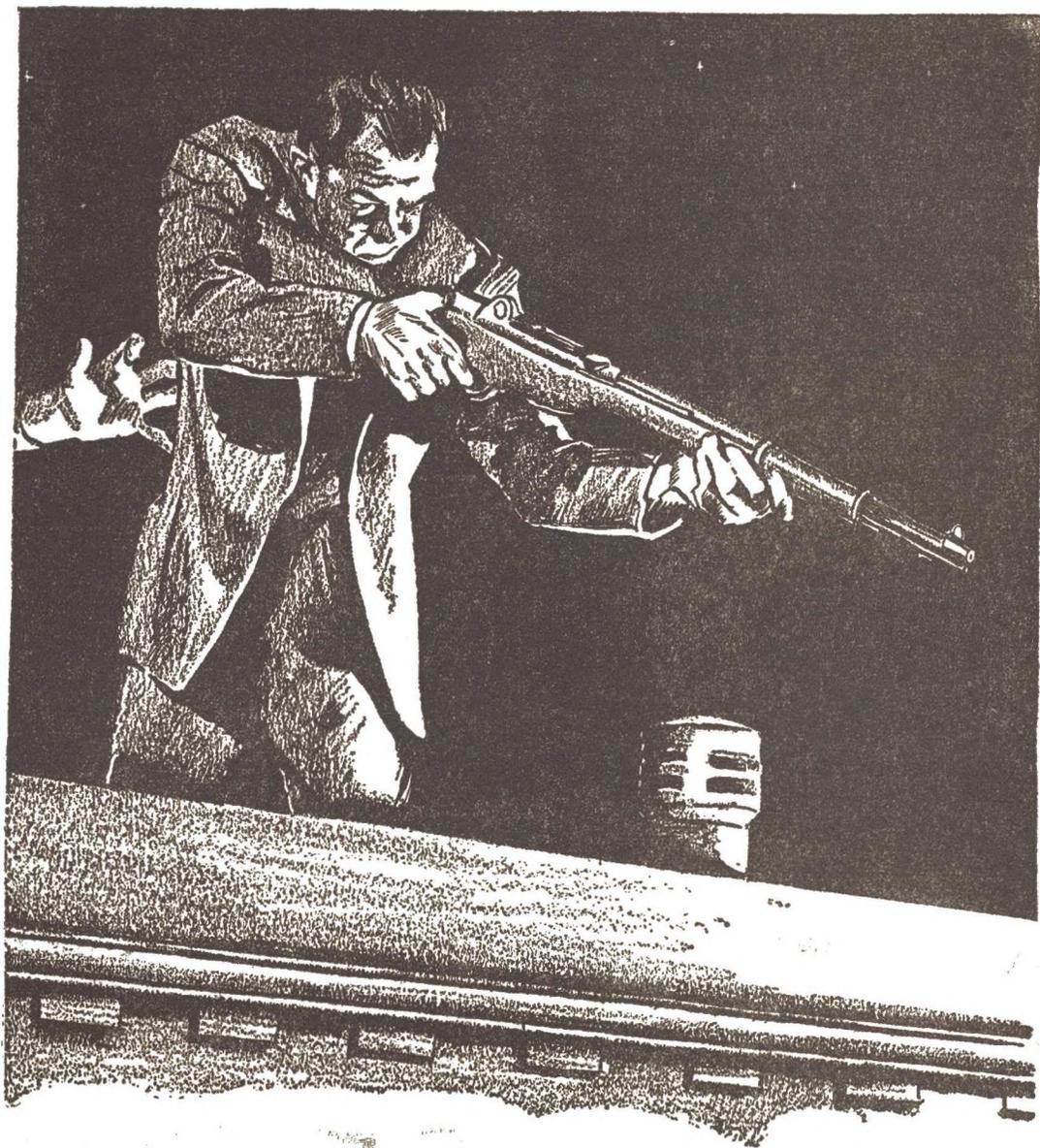
All in all, the experiment has been a success. For India it greatly alleviated and almost eliminated the criminal tribe problem. For the rest of the world, the experiment has given greater strength to the axiom "criminals are not born, but made."

TRIGGER MORTIS



Soundlessly the Hat sprang at
the killer's tense figure....

*It's okay to hunt for chorus
girls.....but why use a gun?*



By ANDREW HOLT

THE crowd by the theatre alley buzzed and hummed, beat itself against the uniformed cops at the entrance, and fell back reluctantly. The Hat slid between a matinee-bound matron and the character in the burgundy shirt into whose reluctant embrace she had been closely pressed, said "*Morning Transfer*" wearily to the nearest cop

and walked up the alley to the brown blanket.

Quite suddenly, his irritation at the dame who had inconsiderately let herself be killed on his day off, left him. He stared down at the thin figure under the coarse wool. Blood had seeped out from beneath the blanket and filled the cracks between the cobblestones like

wet, red paint.

Her shoes projected from the bottom edge, limply, turned a little on their sides. They were pathetic shoes, too high in the heel and too short in the toe. The soles were thin. The leather heel lifts had long since worn away and the wood, itself, was slanted and polished by the pavements.

Too bad she couldn't afford to have them fixed to die in, he thought. Then he remembered that she probably hadn't known she was going to die. He shook himself. It was irritating that after ten years as a police reporter and the sight of hundreds of stiffs he could still feel. He went through the stage door.

Behind the piled flats, the chorus grouped and chattered. They were in rehearsal clothes, looking without lights and makeup the way a burlesque chorus looks without lights and makeup. On stage, under the glare of naked bulbs, there was a dance director with too many pleats in his pants, a worried fat man with a cigar who might be either the producer or a comedian, six reporters, three photographers, a Lieutenant from Homocide whose name the Hat could not recall, four detectives, and a dame sitting on a table. The Hat remembered her name. Mara Marsden, the Queen of them All. He had caught her act once in Pittsburgh. It was good, if you liked strippers, and the Hat did.

Six reporters and three photographers were what Mara dreamed of nights and she had thrown herself to the role of star witness with both legs and every eyelash working. The Hat tapped the Transfer photographer on the shoulder and pulled him out of the circle around the table.

"What've they got, Morris?" he asked, noticing the way Morris' eyes were riveted on Miss Marsden's gams and wondering, as he had always won-

dered how dentists could kiss women, how a guy who took cheesecake pictures every day could retain any unprofessional interest in female underpinnings.

Morris gave him his reluctant attention. "Nothing. The little dame was walking up the alley to see Marsden and somebody put the bee on her. Some guy was on the roof of the Frolics Building across the way with a rifle and a telescopic sight. He got her square in the back of the head like a guy shooting ducks in a gallery and that's all there is. Nobody seen him, and so far as I can tell, nobody's going to."

"Elevator men?" asked the Hat telegraphically.

Morris looked bored. "That's a theatrical building. It's lousy with music companies and agents. Every other guy that comes into the place is wearing a camelhair coat and carrying an instrument and those who aren't have theirs in hock. This guy could have taken the elevator to any floor and walked the rest of the way. The cops have been asking the questions but they ain't getting any answers."

RELASED, Morris returned to his place in the admiring circle. Kramer was the Lieutenant's name, the Hat recalled. He strolled over to him.

"What would you like the Transfer to say?" he asked.

Kramer took a deep breath and opened his mouth oratorically like a man about to make an official and meaningless statement. When the words came out, the Hat listened vaguely, boiled them down to "police doing everything they can which is not much" in his notebook and walked over to the group around Mara.

Questions were coming at her from all sides. Someone had asked one that made her mouth quiver under its

brushed-on shape.

"She was down on her luck for a long time," she said.

"Did you know she was coming to see you?"

"No. She knew we rehearsed mornings. She used to come around to borrow a buck now and then."

"She was a stripper?"

"Uh—huh." Professional pride asserted itself over sentiment. "She wasn't very good. I used to tell her. Jerry, I said, if you'd only learn to. . . ."

The Hat did not hear the rest of it. Out in the alley, he yanked the blanket down. He stared at the familiar face, at the black hair, the pencilled brows, the painted mouth that were so garish against the colorless skin, and the bright green coat that was so unsuitable a costume for death. Then he covered her up again gently.

The street-urchinish quality that made him look like a newsboy grown up, left his face. His blue eyes and the humorous mouth under the tilted nose hardened. He walked up the block to the drugstore and called the desk.

"Listen, Max," he told the assistant city editor after he had thrown the bare bones of the story to a rewrite man, "Jerry Green was a friend of mine. I know her landlady and some of her friends. I think I've got a pretty good chance to get an exclusive lead. Do you want me to try." He listened, said O. K. once, listened again, said, "No, I won't get any drunker than necessary," and hung up.

There was a bar across the street. He had a double bourbon, shook the last lingering hangover ache out of his head and hailed a cab.

On the way uptown, he tried to figure out why he was so mad. It wasn't that Jerry had meant so much to him. She hadn't meant much to anybody, poor kid. Maybe that was it, he thought.

Life had not been kind to her—and, now, neither had death.

He remembered the first time he had seen her—when she was almost beautiful, alive with her desire to see her name in lights. That was about three years ago, before Broadway made it clear to her that she didn't have what it takes. The reporter who introduced her had been giving her the business about publicity for the usual reasons.

"Go back to Hoboken, kid," the Hat told her.

It was a sock between the eyes for her and her face showed it. What made it worse was the improbable fact that she actually did come from Hoboken. He was instantly contrite and his contrition led them to a booth in Tim Costello's and four bourbons for the Hat and one for Jerry.

He remembered, too, the set of professional pictures she showed him, proudly. She had saved up for them by God knows what stratagems. They were the usual imitations of Hurrell, with Jerry lying on a lush satin sofa, her hair blown back as if by a gale, her curves judiciously altered here and there by the retoucher's pencil, and the bit of black lace clutched around her salient points, coyly but not so coyly as to veil them entirely. They made her look good, too good in fact, because she could never hope to live up to them in the flesh.

THE HAT felt sorry for her, saw her often, and did his best for her although he knew it was hopeless. It was not that she wasn't pretty. She just wasn't pretty enough, or talented enough, or tough enough. She went from one dingy, fourth-rate chorus job to another with empty sketches getting longer in between, did her amazingly unsexy strip act once or twice when the ladies for whom she substituted

were unavoidably detained, and stooged for a couple of half-hearted comics. When her failures began to show on her face and she started to make occasional trips back to her native Hoboken to entertain at smokers, the Hat gave it up. It was, as he had always known, hopeless, and it was depressing.

He had had a vague sense of guilt about it. And now she was dead, lying in an alley with a hole in her head. As he paid off his cab, he knew that his conscience was contributing to the rage with which the world, and show business, and guys with rifles were filling him.

THE house was a brownstone, one of a long row of dismal duplicates on the wrong side of a block in the West Seventies. He passed the stone stairway that led to the parlor floor, walked down three steps into an areaway, and pushed the bell under the card on the wrought iron basement door.

The card read "Mrs. Eric Dunmore Bronson" and the Hat hoped it was still too early for the old bag to be stinking. She wasn't. Her hennaed hair was neatly combed and she was at the stage where you could believe that Mr. Eric Dunmore Bronson had once existed.

He gave her his name and professional capacity.

"You must remember me, Mrs. Bronson," he said, "I used to come here to see Jerry Green."

"Of course." She led the way to her sitting room. The Hat followed, avoiding in turn, the scrubbing pail, the case of empty beer bottles, and the coffee grounds and egg shells from the pile of trash that blocked the narrow hallway. "You know Paul?"

"Certainly." Once, on his first visit to the house, the Hat had committed the social error of assuming that Paul was Mrs. Bronson's son. He held out his hand.

Paul touched it limply. He swiveled on his thin haunches, slid his huarache-dad feet down from the arm of the easy chair to the floor and drawled.

"Ghastly, isn't it?" His pants were secured around his slender middle by a pistachio and brown tie, carefully knotted.

"Terrible," said the Hat flatly. "The cops been here?"

"They're here now. Three of them. I'm simply limp from answering questions. After they finally realized we couldn't tell them anything they started on Miss Crane and now they're tearing up poor Jerry's room. I shudder when I think what they'll do to the decor I'd just finished doing it, you know."

The Hat knew. He had a vivid recollection of the black and shocking pink horror in the entrance hall for which Paul was responsible. Jerry had been hurt when he voiced his own preference for occasionally washed floors and honest rooming-house shabbiness over dirty, shame elegance. She thought the shocking pink was smart.

Mrs. Bronson hovered over Paul and touched his hair tenderly. "Never mind, dear boy," she crooned, "it will be fun to do it over again."

The Hat was filled with sudden impatience. It would be going too far to say that there was nothing queer about Paul, but he certainly seemed as usual. Anyway, he wouldn't commit murder unless it could be done by smothering the victim in chintzes.

"Can I see Miss Crane?" he asked.

Paul led the way to the second floor front. They passed Jerry's room. The door was closed and a fat cop's laugh came out of it. Paul knocked at Miss Crane's and swayed back down the stairs.

THE apparition in the doorway took the Hat by surprise. Unconscious-

ly, he had assumed that anybody living in the house would be slightly shabby. But shabby was not the word for Miss Crane. Her clothes had the proper air of cheap smartness and her hair the dull inky blackness that is unmistakably dye, but in spite of these she had an astonishing freshness, a freshness that almost shone against her dull surroundings. The Hat's practiced eye swept down from her face. He permitted himself a low, inward whistle.

"I don't want to talk to reporters," she said crisply and started to close the door.

"Wait." The Hat pulled himself together. "I'm Phillip Sleeper. It's the unpleasant truth that I *am* a reporter but I was also a friend of Jerry's. I'm more interested in catching whoever it was who killed her than getting a story."

Miss Crane inspected him coldly. "She never mentioned you."

He grinned. "She called me the Hat. Everybody does."

"Oh, yes." She took a tentative step back into the room and the Hat followed before she could change her mind.

"I see what she meant." She stared pointedly at the brown snapbrim which remained on the Hat's head.

"Sure," he told her cheerfully. "That's how I got the name. I never take my hat off. It's a gag with the guys on the paper. They introduce me and explain that my relations with women are bound to be on the informal side."

She frowned. He perceived that he had struck the wrong note.

"It's because I'm as bald as an electric bulb and almost as shiny," he continued glibly. This was not a girl who could be browbeaten into answering questions. He would give her a chance to look him over and reach her own

decision. "I lost all my hair at the age of nineteen after reading too much Conrad and shipping on a Danish tramp for Australia. I got tropical fever instead of romance. In fact, I still have it. It comes back every summer and that's why I'm not in the army. Anyway, a kid of nineteen looks pretty silly without hair. I got in the habit of wearing the hat because people asked questions. Nowadays, I wear it because I'm afraid they won't." He pushed it back and displayed a high forehead. "Now that you know all about me, can't I sit down?"

She indicated an armchair, sat down opposite on a bench enameled a garish and amateurish purple, and crossed her impeccable legs.

"What makes you think you can find out who killed Jerry?" she asked.

"You don't think I can?"

She shrugged. "I don't see how anybody can." She blinked and he noticed how red the whites of her eyes were, as if she had been crying. "I mean, usually you'd sort of start from the motive, wouldn't you? And there isn't any. I've been thinking about it ever since the police came and told us. I knew as much about Jerry as anyone. I was with her this morning. In fact, I was supposed to go downtown with her. She hated to borrow money and she wanted moral support. I had *such* a headache, I simply couldn't do it so I lent her my new coat. I thought she'd feel better if she didn't look shabby. Anyway, I'm positive she wasn't afraid of anyone or worrying about an enemy or anything like that. She was just broke and out of work."

HE IDENTIFIED the expression that had been lurking behind her preliminary coldness and which, now that she had relaxed, was very clear in her narrowed blue eyes. She was puz-

zled. He wondered if it was because of Jerry.

"Why do you assume you knew all about her?" he asked.

"Well," she spread her hands to help her explanation. "When I came to live here, I was out of work, too. Since we were both in the same kind of trouble, we sort of consoled each other. She told me everything that happened to her. I can't put it into words without sounding mean, but she was so. . . . I know she wasn't lying or hiding anything. . . . In spite of her experience, she was . . ."

"Let me," said the Hat. "You mean she was naive to a degree you wouldn't expect of a girl who had been in burlesque. It was almost a form of stupidity."

Miss Crane nodded.

"The cops say she was killed by a man. Does that mean anything to you?"

She shook her head. "They asked me that. But I couldn't tell them anything. She didn't have many boy friends and to most of them she wasn't important enough to kill. You know, she was a girl they could call at the last minute if they were going out with a crowd and didn't have a date, or if they were on the town and wanted company. The nice ones were sorry for her and the others seemed to be a little contemptuous. I can't believe anybody ever murders a girl they feel like that about."

"She must have had a family. Do you know anything about them?"

"No. She never mentioned them."

"O. K.," said the Hat. "It's all negative but it clears the ground. Now let's talk about you."

"Me? Why?"

"Partly because I'm idly curious, partly to pass the time, and partly so I can put you down on my list of sus-

pects."

"Oh. Well, there's nothing much to tell. I'm in the chorus at the Four Hundred Club."

"You don't talk like a chorus girl in a second-rate club."

"Is there some special way?"

"Uh-huh. They usually sound better with their mouths shut. You have a nice voice. Where do you come from?"

"The Bronx."

"Oh, come now," said the Hat.

"The Bronx isn't really funny," she told him. "Haven't you any more insolent questions?"

"Sure. I can keep this up indefinitely. What color was your hair before you dyed it?"

"Mousy."

"What's your first name?"

"Dorothy."

"Will you have dinner with me?"

"No."

"O. K.," said the Hat, "I can take a hint."

PAUL was outside in the hall, watching the door of Jerry's room with the exaggerated boredom that comes so easily to his type.

"What on earth do you think they're doing?" he squealed.

"Reading letters, sniffing at perfume, and making cracks about her underwear," the Hat told him. "What do you know about Crane?"

"Nothing," Paul said, "except that she pays her rent, keeps quiet, and her clothes are God-awful. They buy them so tight—" His expression was one of absolute horror. "— and it *classes* them so, I . . ."

"Where does she come from?"

"Good Lord, I don't know. She said she had a job in a club in Hollywood before she came East. But the little-tramps lie so," he broke off. "But

what has this got to do with poor Jerry?"

"Nothing." The Hat started down the stairs. "This is strictly my social life."

In the foyer, he paused for a second, tried hard not to look at the wallpaper, and wondered if there was any point in asking Mrs. Bronson some questions, and what questions to ask her. He heard the swish of a heavy object hurtling down behind him and Paul's shout at the same time. He whirled, realized that he should have ducked, felt the smashing impact against his forehead, and sank onto the black carpet. The blackness rose and covered him.

HE CAME to, wandered for an instant in a nameless void, and shook himself free of Paul's unpleasantly solicitous hands.

"What hit me?" he asked when he could open his mouth.

"The aspidistra."

"The what?" He sat up, wished he hadn't. Through his right eye, he made out, dimly, the broken pieces of flower-pot and the remains of the plant. "What the hell?"

"It was on the newel post," Paul said, "on this." He picked up a little Chinese teakwood stand. "I guess it was a rather stupid place to put a plant."

The Hat wondered. It was possible that Paul had come down quietly behind him. But if so, why? What had he been asking him just before he came downstairs? Oh yes, about Crane. Maybe he was jealous. The thought caused the Hat to grin in spite of the stiffness of his face. Jealousy of a female was the very last thing of which Paul could be suspect. He remembered running down the stairs. The little stand was three-legged. He

might have jarred it off balance.

"We thought you was dead," said the cop on the stairs. "You better see a doctor. I heard of a couple of cases where a guy got hit on the head, felt fine, walked around, and then because of a internal hemorrhage, dropped dead just like that." He seemed very cheerful, as if a dead reporter was a calamity he could easily survive.

"Thanks, I know just what to do." He found the snap-brim, lowered it carefully onto his head as if it weighed as much as a grand piano and walked out the door. Amsterdam Avenue was half a block away. He made it onto the barstool and called for a bourbon. Two doubles made him feel so much better that he had a third. The pain was about the same but light no longer penetrated his eyeballs like the point of an icepick.

He called the desk, stalled around about what he had, learned that Jerry's family in Hoboken consisted of just a father, bedridden with arthritis. He had not approved of her career on the stage and had not seen her for almost a year. The shock had been so great that his emotional reaction could not be classified.

Later, at Homicide, fifteen minutes of cajoling his private source of information, a captain with ideas about keeping in right with reporters, was equally unfruitful. All the cops had was a tenant in an office adjacent to the Frolics Building, who had seen the killer. He described him as a man of average height, probably not over thirty-five, in a light overcoat and a dark hat. And that was that, there wasn't any more.

The Hat analyzed the disturbance in his midriff as frustrated rage and decided to stick with it, even if he didn't as yet know exactly how, and walked to the nearest newsstand for the after-

noon papers. They made him feel sicker still. In the rewriters' glib phrases, Jerry had been transformed. Exotic, beautiful, glamorous, the adjectives dripped from the pages. The old professional pictures simpered from the tabloids and the papers, one and all, agreed in referring to the unknown killer on the rooftop as the "Phantom Sniper." Out of his long experience, the Hat knew that by morning, if there were no new developments, they would begin to hint darkly at a "love killing."

He tore the flimsy newsprint to shreds and stuffed it into the corner trashbasket. On the way home, he bought a small steak, a bottle, and a twenty-five cent mystery. None of them were any fun and after a long time he fell asleep.

IN THE morning, he awoke early and went, as was his custom, for the papers outside his door. Then he sat down and lit a cigarette. The headlines screamed at him, their wording varied but their import unanimous.

"Phantom Rifleman Strikes Again."

The theatre cleaners, entering the alley beside a burlesque house on 14th Street, east, had found the body of Miss Fern Travis. She had the same hole in the back of her head, made in the same way, by the same rifle that had killed Jerry Green. This time no one had seen the murderer and no one had heard the shot.

The police had ascertained that Miss Travis had been the last of the cast to leave the theatre because of a phone call she expected. The old man who was the doorkeeper had not seen the body because he had turned out all the lights except the one over the stage door itself before he left, so that the alley was in almost total darkness. The cleaning women had stumbled over her. Experiment had shown that the afore-

said lights provided the marksman with a clear, silhouetted target. Miss Travis had been in the chorus and she was, of course, beautiful and glamorous. The police were doing everything possible.

The Hat found the bottle he had barely touched the night before on the floor beside his bed and took two long swigs. Then he slid into his clothes. He finished knotting his tie on the way down in the elevator and took a cab to the office.

"Good morning, mastermind," said Max effusively, "are you free for an assignment or do your criminal investigations take up all your time?"

He was a thin little man with thin dark hair and a worried expression which he endeavored to make sardonic. The first Broadway production of the "Front Page" had left him with an impression of the duties of an editor from which he had never recovered.

"Nuts." The Hat was used to the editorial sarcasm which Max assumed as his contribution to convention. "So I made a mistake. How was I supposed to guess we were dealing with a mechanized Jack the Ripper?"

"You agree with the cops that it's some kind of maniac?"

The Hat shrugged. "Is that the line the afternoon papers will take?"

"Yes."

"Well . . . I don't know. Crusaders who go around ridding the world of fallen women, or their own peculiar idea of fallen women, are usually a little more unpleasantly anatomical about it. But what the Hell, there's a new mania every day and no reason at all why this year's model in butchers shouldn't be less bloody and more efficient."

Max's phone rang. He picked up the receiver.

"Stay on it," he told the Hat, "and remember, I want all the human inter-

est stuff on it you can get." He waved dismissal.

The Hat joined a group of reporters, disturbed the bereavement of the parents of Miss Fern Travis in search of Max's human interest, and went on from there to sundry other reportorial tasks.

But the sick feeling did not leave him. It got worse. When his shift was over and he started to try to drown it, the liquor did him as little good as it had the night before. He surrendered to the sickness and let it become articulate.

It was silly, but he couldn't help feeling that after the drabness of her life, Jerry was entitled to at least the dignity of a murderer all her own. This way, she was just one of the victims, dying as she had lived, a member of the chorus instead of a star turn.

HE PLAYED poker that night and lost half a week's pay. When he got home, he put the bottle away in a closet and took two aspirins. In the morning, he knew what the headlines were even before he opened the door for the papers.

This time the girl's name was Bunny O'Hara. She was a redhead and what is known in the profession as an eccentric tap dancer. She had been shot outside the back entrance of a broken-down nightclub in Jamaica. No one had seen the sniper. The police were doing everything possible.

Hysteria took the city in its grasp. Prominent citizens made statements to the press. The Mayor called for police action. The editorial writers called for police action. A great and respected producer of musicals called for police action. All over the city, chorines began to travel in bunches as if the mere presence of their sisters would make them impervious to bullets. They were

photographed arriving at the theatre with policemen, driving right up to the stage door in taxis, staying home because they were scared, and announcing that the show must go on. Publicity men took a new lease on life. Feature writers did research on Jack the Ripper and the Butcher of Nuremburg.

Earnest citizens on Staten Island saw the sniper. Earnest citizens in Bensonhurst saw the sniper. Anonymous phone calls about every man in the city who had ever shot a deer and had a gun to do it with poured into police headquarters. A frightened commuter with a light overcoat, dark hat, and a long bundle of curtain rods was rescued by the police from a lynch mob.

The Hat had a busy day. He interviewed a famous psychiatrist, took a statement from the purity boys on how it was all because the city had not outlawed burlesque long ago, interviewed the fiance of Miss O'Hara, threw biting questions at the Police Commissioner and the District Attorney, and took part in a chase over the rooftops after a young man who insisted he was the sniper but was unfortunately in possession of a Civil-War vintage shotgun which did not fire.

The cops sweated, dodged reporters, issued official statements, guarded everything and everybody they could think of, did everything possible, and achieved nothing.

And under it all, the silliness, the self-importance, and the incompetence, there was the horror. They all felt it—the most pompous of the speech makers, the most cynical of the reporters, and the loudest of the publicity seekers. They all knew that somewhere in the city lurking death waited, anonymous and efficient.

THE HAT had a hangover when he woke the next morning and he was

very tired of the whole thing. He made a pot of coffee and drank two cups and smoked a cigarette before he got the papers. The headlines were what he expected, but the contents of the articles and the features of the dead girl spread over four columns of the first pages, jolted him from his mood. He rummaged in the closet, found enough in the bottom of the bottle to return him to normal humanity. Ten minutes later he was talking earnestly to Max.

"Let me try," he insisted.

Max was thoughtful. "Look," he said, "your friend Jerry was killed in an alley off Broadway and this Crane babe was shot leaving the Four Hundred Club off Fifth. The cops say there's no reason to assume that the murderer knew they lived in the same house."

"Sure," said the Hat, "but this is the first time anything in the whole mess has connected up with anything else. There's no sign he *didn't* know either. You can take your choice, and I think it's worth a little digging."

Max was unconvinced. "What do you expect to find?"

"I don't know. Maybe nothing. Maybe he lives around there in the Seventies and started on Jerry because he could keep track of her, or something like that. Anyway," his voice was almost pleading, "what can you lose? If he keeps on knocking off a dame a night in any part of the city that happens to strike his fancy, you know as well as I do, the police won't catch him until he makes a mistake. They'll just give out with the same explanations and statements every morning and you could send a copy boy to get those."

Max sighed resignedly. "All right," he said and, then as if he regretted his consent, "but remember, genius, no drunks, on three-day disappearances, and no expense accounts in calculus."

The Hat left him briskly before editorial caution could set in. It was not until he was on the street, that he realized he didn't know where to start or how. A subway kiosk beckoned. He went down into it. At Grand Central, he shuttled. Watching the crowds pour from the express and move in a solid mass toward the locals, he was struck suddenly by the immensity of the city and its people.

So many rabbit warrens for him to hide in, he thought, and so many non-descript identities to assume. Unless there *was* a connection somewhere, they would never find him.

On the uptown Broadway express, he passed the time by picking suspects. When he got off at 72nd Street, and walked north, he had seen exactly thirty-three men who could fit the meagre description held by the police.

Paul opened the door. He was draped in a pongee dressing gown with a black dragon embroidered on its back and a satin girdle cinching his waist. The pile of beer bottles in the passage had grown and there was an old spaghetti smell.

"They've all gone." He spoke like a host to a latecomer at a party. "The reporters and the police. It's been a perfect madhouse, like the annual police ball . . ."

"Or a wake," put in the Hat shortly. "Have they been through Dorothy Crane's room?"

Paul nodded. "They wanted to find out where she came from."

"And did they?"

"No."

"Couldn't you tell them?"

Paul spread his hands. "We try to give the place an air, but, after all, it's a rooming house. We can't ask for pedigrees or look the little things up in the social register. Anyway, she's dead now and it doesn't make very much

difference what lies she told or what her miserable secrets were, does it?"

The Hat surveyed him with distaste. Paul flushed.

"Well," he chirped nastily, "the Sniper is certainly cutting a wide swath through your social life, isn't he? First, Jerry and now Dorothy."

He squealed. The Hat's hands relaxed. He let go of the front of the pongee robe and his right fist dropped to his side. Paul wasn't the sort of thing you could hit. He pushed past him and strode to the stairs. The door of Dorothy's room was not locked.

IT LOOKED very much as it had three days ago. Evidently, the police had not expected to find anything very helpful. No thorough search would have left the place so neat.

He opened the door of the wardrobe and looked down at the row of cheap, fancy shoes, then frowned at the incongruous English oxfords. They were not in character, nor was the simple foulard robe cut like a man's. The same thing was true of the underwear neatly piled in the dresser drawers.

Why, the Hat asked the empty room, did the same girl have quiet expensive taste in underclothes, and cheap, fancy and nasty taste in dresses, hats, and all her shoes except one pair?

The striped walls and the purple bench did not answer. He poked idly through the cosmetics on the bathroom shelves, noticed the dye stain on the bristles of her hairbrush. There was nothing in the desk drawers except stationery and a rather hysterical letter from a cleaner who had lost a dress and did not want to pay for it. The trash-basket contained some cream-soiled Kleenex and an empty cigarette package.

As he returned these valuable discoveries to the basket, the Hat's eye

was caught by a gleam of white behind the desk. He reached down and found two sheets of notepaper, balled up. She had tossed them at the basket and missed.

He smoothed them out on the desk top. "Dear March:" read the first one, "I must see you . . ." she had got that far, ruled the words out with a heavy pen stroke and thrown the sheet away. The second said only "Dear March." He put them both in his pocket.

The friendly police captain was in his office and answered the phone. They had unearthed nothing about Crane's background. She could be traced only to the day when she had rented the room in Mrs. Bronson's house. If the kids at the Four Hundred Club knew any more, they were not telling it to the cops. There was nothing new.

The Hat had a ham sandwich, two beers and a pinball game to help his flagging brain. The "March" stood out in the back of his head like neon in a fog. Only he couldn't make it mean anything.

March was a funny name, he told himself for the ninety-ninth time. Maybe it was a girl's name like June or April, or maybe it was a nickname, or maybe. . . . He bounced out of the bar and into a taxi. In the Mirror offices, he went through back issues, reading Winchell.

IT WAS all there, if he was only right. There were many references to Whitney Marchfield in the column. Whitney Marchfield and Bobo Fenton, and Brenda Shayne and Fania Maroff, and the cafe society sensation of the moment and the debutante of the month.

Then there was the Master's scoop on Whitney Marchfield's marriage—that strange, unexpected marriage that had set the town buzzing. After successfully eluding the best laid plans of

half the women in Manhattan and establishing himself firmly as a bachelor, Marchfield had suddenly taken off to his farm in New Hampshire and there married the daughter of the local postmaster. The talk had been tremendous for a while and then it all died down. The bride and bridegroom stayed on their farm and were forgotten. Then the talk flared up again.

The Hat held the paragraph that had caused the second sensation in his hand. It was from a column written, presumably, by Winchell's girl Friday and it said, "Dear Boss: You should know that Whitney Marchfield's bride has left him. Nobody knows where she is."

And, the Hat remembered, nobody had found out. Marchfield had shown the note she left to the police. It had never been published but presumably it was satisfactory and no official action was taken. Mrs. Marchfield eventually disappeared from the pages of the newspapers. From time to time there were the usual rumors but they never came to anything.

The Hat debated with himself for a full minute, then made his way uptown to the apartment house on Park Avenue that was Marchfield's city home and rode the elevator up to the first of the three topmost stories he occupied.

The butler was polite but doubtful of Mr. Marchfield's whereabouts. He showed the Hat to a seat on a long, tapestry-covered bench and disappeared. Five minutes later, he returned with the news that Mr. Marchfield would shortly be visible. He then led the Hat into a room which was presumably called the library because it was lined with books which had not been touched since they left the binders, and stared pointedly at the snapper. The Hat stared him down and was left in solitary grandeur.

He lit a cigarette and tried to ignore his own uneasiness. Ten years as a reporter had not cured him of his discomfort in the houses of the very rich. He had a most childish desire to thumb his nose at the ancestor portraits, make echoes in the silent halls, and slide down the banisters.

He had taken down a book and was riffling through its uncut pages when Marchfield entered. He was one of those Princeton boys who stay that way, well into middle age, complete with tweed jackets and a good figure. Under his perpetual suntan, unhealthy yellow lurked. There were lines in the corners of his eyes and red blood vessels in the whites.

The Hat decided to waste no time. He thrust the two sheets of paper under Marchfield's nose.

"Is this your wife's handwriting?"

Marchfield took them in a trembling hand. From personal experience, the Hat knew the shakes might be hang-over.

"I don't know," he answered at last. "It might be. But it's a rather common handwriting and I'm not certain. Where did you get these?"

"From Dorothy Crane's wastepaper basket."

This time there was no reaction at all.

"Who is Dorothy Crane?"

"Haven't you seen the papers?"

"No. I was dressing when you were announced. I haven't had breakfast."

"Dorothy Crane was shot by the Sniper last night."

Marchfield steadied himself against the refectory table. Then he yanked the bell pull and asked the butler for the morning papers.

WHILE they waited, the Hat said nothing, contented himself by watching Marchfield. Under his silent scrutiny, the latter shrugged impa-

tiently, picked up the notes again and studied them.

"She made her m's that way," he said, "but I can't say definitely . . ."

The butler came back. The Hat took the papers from him and spread the picture out on the table.

"There she is."

Marchfield stared. He brought his hand out of his pocket with a cigarette in it and fumbled lighting it. This time, the Hat did not think it was hang-over.

"Well?" he demanded.

Marchfield set his mouth in a thin line.

"Mrs. Marchfield is a blonde."

"The hair is dyed."

Marchfield said nothing. The Hat simply waited.

"I don't know," Marchfield said at last with the shaking hands folded to steady them. "I don't know. She does resemble Elsa but the—the atmosphere, the manner are different. Elsa never used that much makeup or painted her mouth like that."

The Hat picked up the two notes and put them back in his pocket.

"Have you seen her recently?" he asked.

"No. Not since—since she left."

"Did you hear from her?"

"No. No. I haven't tried to find her because I know she wouldn't want me to. She wouldn't come back to me anyway and I don't care about a divorce."

"And you had no idea where she was?"

"No, none at all."

The Hat felt sorry for him. "Why did she leave you?" He spoke the question softly.

Marchfield froze, then sighed and smiled a little.

"She didn't approve of me," he said simply.

"How long did you live with her?"

"Three months."

"And you aren't sure of her handwriting and you don't know if you recognize her face?"

Again the thin-lipped line. "No. I don't think that's Elsa."

"Look, sonny," said the Hat kindly, "this is no time to start trying to keep the old family name out of the papers. If you're a smart boy, you'll call up the cops, say you notice a resemblance in the published photograph, and you want to see if you can identify the body. That way, you'll be a public-spirited citizen, respected in your grief. If you don't . . ."

He let the sentence die.

"Save it," he began again cheerfully when the other man had opened his mouth indignantly. "I know your family gave up gun-toting when the last Indian was cleared off Boston Common, but the man in the street is kind of sore about these killings. He would not approve of your maintaining a dignified silence while your wife is lying on ice down at the morgue."

He found the door without the butler's assistance and walked down the Avenue briskly. On 57th, in a phone booth, he poured his news into Max's receptive ear.

"He'll probably call up the family lawyer and drag the rest of the kinfolk out of their mausoleums for a huddle before he does anything," he concluded. "If you keep a guy watching for the riot at police headquarters when he calls, and another one at the morgue in case he goes straight there, and have it all set up and ready to roll, you'll scoop the town." He hung up before Max got further than the initial what of his first question.

ON THE street, he looked at his watch. It was too early to find

anybody useful at the Four Hundred Club. The item he had just handed Max would be good enough to pass an extra twenty on his expense account. He walked to Third, found a friendly bar and set to work on it.

Half an hour later, his brain was well oiled and working smoothly but its end products were far from satisfactory. Added up, everything he had done seemed worse than useless. Dorothy Crane was Elsa Marchfield all right, but so what?

He had begun by listing the people who might have known who Crane really was. Marchfield, Mrs. Bronson, Paul. And then the whole thing broke down. If he assumed that she had been killed for some reason connected with her real identity, he could stretch another point and also assume that Jerry had been murdered because she knew something the Sniper couldn't afford to have her know. But why Fern Travis and why Bunny O'Hara? There was no answer, no theory that could include them all and he was back where he started, stuck with a maniac who killed, without rhyme or reason, any female who was a member of the profession of which he disapproved and who happened to make a good target.

He ordered another drink and drained it. He felt lousy. As far as the relations with the desk went, he was O. K. Max would be sufficiently pleased by the Crane-Marchfield angle to forgive his failure on the rest of it. The smart thing would be to go down and listen to his 'I-told-you-sos' right away and then relax with the rest of the boys at Police Headquarters until the cops solved it or stopped trying.

The quarter he flipped to the table top landed heads up. He decided that heads meant he should go to the Four Hundred Club and snoop around before saying uncle.

It was not very good snooping. The man with the vacuum cleaner knew only what he read in the papers. So did the bartender who was busy squeezing lemons. The handsome Greek in the back office confided that he had his belly full of reporters, and that from playing around with chorus kids came nothing but trouble so all he knew about Crane was that she could dance, she looked good on the floor, and she didn't get drunk or start fights. Beyond that he had only an expansive shrug and a grimy list of the kids' names and addresses from which the Hat could help himself.

That was that, and the Hat was back at the street entrance. Just inside the door he paused. Outside, before the glassed-in frame that held pictures of the chorus, a young man lounged.

He seemed very bored. The Hat glanced cautiously up the block. Twenty-five feet away, before the striped awning of the next club, a second man loitered. He was lighting a cigarette. His wide-brimmed hat, broad-shouldered jacket and pointed shoes had a metallic sharpness. So did those of the first young man. They had, apparently, been stamped out by the same die.

SOMEWHERE, beneath layers of consciousness, the Hat's photographic memory preserved a picture of those jackets. He had seen them before, on his walk downtown. They had been following him.

At a brisk pace, he walked out of the entrance toward the Avenue. Halfway up the street, he crossed to the uptown side. When he looked back, they were behind him. He turned onto Fifth and walked north. His shadows stuck close, openly, as if it made no difference if he was aware of them.

He was puzzled and scared and glee-

ful at the same time. The two boys behind him were hoods—ordinary, every-day gunsels. There could be no more doubt about that than that they had not bought those jackets at Tripplers. They were the cash and carry boys, the mercenaries, the guns for hire. And they proved that his instinct had been right. Someone had hired them—who he didn't know but of one thing he was certain. It was no madman, crouched on a rooftop, crooning over a rifle and a lust to kill.

On 53rd, he turned west, crossed again to the uptown side and paused before the Museum of Modern Art. They strolled up and stood near him, inspecting the museum posters with the same blasé disdain with which they had observed the 52nd Street chorus pictures.

"The Hat observed the bulges under the left sides of their coats where the shoulder holsters were, looked up and down the quiet side street and regretted his hastiness in leaving the crowded Avenue. What he needed was company.

The one in the green jacket turned as if to speak. The Hat moved casually through the revolving door, paid his quarter at the desk, and went up the wide stairs to the first floor galleries. Their footsteps rang out behind him on the uncarpeted stairway.

Just beyond the turn by the elevator, a group of students listened to a museum lecturer. He attached himself to the outskirts of the crowd and stared, with every appearance of grave detachment, at a large, pink Renoir nude.

This maneuver left his pursuers with a choice between a blank wall and a bright and forbidding Picasso. As they squirmed under the impact of modern art, the Hat settled down to quiet enjoyment.

In the presence of so many people,

they could do nothing but follow and stop where he stopped. He subjected them to a half-hour inspection of works by Leger, Miro and Mondrian before his experiment with art and the underworld began to pall and the lecturer finished. Then he edged still closer to the student group and followed it through the winding galleries.

Back at the elevator, they waited, the group, the Hat, and his two friends. It seemed very simple. He would stick with the class, leave the building well-chaperoned, and go immediately to the safety of the crowds on the Avenue.

The elevator doors opened. The students poured through them. The Hat stepped forward. The elevator man held up a white-gloved hand and slid the grate past his nose.

"Hey!" yelled the Hat.

"Next car, sir." The doors closed inexorably.

"Gevalt!" said the Hat to himself.

He turned. The young man in the green jacket had his hand inside his coat on his gun and a smile on his face. His companion lounged against the wall, staring back at the Picasso as if it were the only thing in the place that concerned him.

"Down the stairs," said the green-jacketed one, "and out. You go first and no tricks unless you wanta see some innocent art lovers get hurt."

There was no one in the gallery now except a woman down at the far end. She looked as if she might be a school teacher. Anyway, the Hat decided she would be of no use to him. He walked slowly down the stairs.

THE lobby was almost empty. He went past the girls at the desk and the two women on benches against the window. When he reached the revolving door, the man in the green jacket was right behind him. They went out

together, packed tightly into the same pie-shaped section of the door. The other one followed. A cab pulled up from where it had been parked before the neighboring church. The Hat hesitated.

"You're coming, too," said the green-jacketed one. "We wouldn't think of going without you."

The Hat stood still on the pavement. If he refused to enter the cab, if he forced them to slug him or shoot him here, maybe they wouldn't do it. Maybe they would realize how impossible it was to get away with that sort of thing in broad daylight, in New York City, half a block from Fifth Avenue. But on the other hand, maybe they wouldn't think about that until later, until he had a couple of their bullets inside him.

He stepped into the cab. After all if he called their bluff and it worked, he might never find out who they were and who had sent them.

"What do you think, Lou" said the man in the green jacket conversationally, "you think he's a real art lover?"

"Him?" Lou's voice was scornful.

"Yeah. You think he really likes them pitchers?"

"Nah. He's what you call a phony. He thinks it's high class to make like he likes them pitchers. He's a bum. He's a reporter. Reporters are strictly bums. I'm surprised you don't know that, Mario."

Mario was conciliatory. "Well, a' course," he said, "he *looks* like a bum but I thought maybe he really likes them screwy pitchers."

"Nah." Lou settled comfortably with his feet up against the jump seat. "Reporters don't like nothing but liquor and women, and mostly liquor."

"I like women better," the Hat said.

"Shaddup," said Mario.

The cab had gone, without directions, straight across to Ninth, now it

turned south, then west again, and pulled up before a red brick tenement. They got out and walked past the store front labelled "Cider Parlor" into the alley on the side. Halfway up the alley, the Hat heard the cab grind off and stopped.

"Come on, boy-boy," ordered Mario. "You're on our block now. You gotta play it our way." He poked him with the gun.

The alley came out into a court with lines of washing and crowded fire-escapes overhead. Against the rear wall was a low shed with the single word "Club" crudely lettered on its door. Lou shoved it open. Mario prodded the Hat over the sill.

Inside there was nothing but a moth-eaten pool table, an old upright piano with the ivory gone from its keys like teeth missing from a grin, an iron cot with a rusted spring and no mattress, and two chairs with torn cane seats.

Mario's fist sent the Hat sprawling across the pool table. He sprang to his feet. The side of Lou's automatic caught him flat against the cheekbone. He came up again. The gun landed twice in the same place. He smacked a weak right to Mario's jaw and got a solid left over the diaphragm from Lou. The gun landed higher, on his temple. He fell sideways. The iron cot frame bruised his hip. He rose to his knees. Mario kicked him in the belly. His hands slid in his own vomit on the edge of the cot, but he almost made it to his feet.

"Take it easy, baby," Mario told him, not unkindly. "We ain't gonna hurt you for good. You're just gonna need a rest."

Something landed on his head again. He thought, in the second that it took him to fall, that it must be the gun. Then his face hit the floor. When he came to, they were kicking him in the

side, in the soft space between the hip-bone and the rib case. Bitter liquid rose inside him. He choked and blacked out again.

WHEN he woke up it was very dark in the clubroom. The door was unlocked. He could see, from where he lay, a three-inch strip of greyish twilight outside. He crawled over to it, shoved at the door and breathed deeply. It hurt him. There was a sharp, knife-like thrust with each breath. But the air was cool. Somewhere in the next tenement he heard fat sizzle in a frying pan and caught a whiff of garlic. Overhead a radio announcer intoned the news. He decided he had to move. The garlic was making him sick again, he had to get away from it. He crawled across the court, pulled himself upright against the wall of the alley, and made it to the street.

On the corner, miles away, an old-fashioned electric sign read drugstore. He staggered toward it, holding onto railings and resting against the stoops. The street kids yelled after him. They annoyed him. He wanted to turn and inform them with dignity that he was not drunk. But he couldn't spare the strength.

At long last, he was inside the drugstore, leaning against the counter and shuddering away from his own image in the mirror. His fingers found his wallet and dropped ten dollars on the counter.

"Here," he told the druggist, "give me a couple of nickels so I can phone and lay the rest of it out on bandages and arnica so you can fix me up when I'm through."

He dialed the paper, remembered that Max would be gone by now, hung up, and called him at home.

"This is Sleeper," he said.

"Well," Max was ominously polite. "How nice of you to call."

"I'm not drunk," the Hat told him.

"No?"

"No."

"And, of course, this afternoon you were sober, too?"

"I'm not drunk now," the Hat repeated wearily, "and I wasn't drunk this afternoon. I was . . ."

"Then what?" Max's voice rose to a bellow. "What was that pipe dream you phoned in?"

"Pipe dream?" echoed the Hat weakly.

"Yes. If you think I'm inclined to greater sympathy with your vagaries because you've given up the bottle and taken to the needle, you're mistaken. Of all the incompetent, unconscious, imbecilic—"

THE place in the Hat's side where someone had carelessly left a knife was stabbed with pain again. He decided he probably had a broken rib. He felt very tired and Max was a hysterical, nasty little man, all editors were small-time Hitlers, and nobody in their right mind would want to be a reporter anyway.

"Shut up," he said.

Max's last expletive spluttered to death and there was only silence over the instrument.

"And listen," the Hat told him. "I'm not drunk but I wish I was. All afternoon two hoodlums have been jumping up and down on my chest and they've left me with a surprising lack of respect for your position and your talent for invective. What do you mean pipe dream? Didn't Marchfield show?"

"No. Where are . . ."

"Never mind. Don't interrupt or I'll fall on my face. Send someone to Elsa Marchfield's home town to get an identification from the photographs. Is

there anything on the Sniper?"

"I got out a front page," Max informed him coldly, "with the assistance of such members of the staff who still think that sort of thing is what they're paid for, but there wasn't anything in it." His voice softened. "Are you all right?"

"No." The Hat's tone was scientific. "I've been plucked and singed. My chest is full of broken crockery. The Sudanese have moved into my head. Two of them are playing the tom-tom on my brain pan and the women have lit a cooking fire behind my left eye. I'll call you when I've got the Sniper and you can move the cheesecake back to the split page where it belongs."

He hung up. The ten dollar bill was still on the counter and the druggist was eyeing it as if it was a beautiful woman whose kiss was reputed to be fatal.

"I can't do it," he said with every appearance of agony. "You gotta go to a doctor. We ain't allowed to give treatment."

"Look," the Hat told him, "if you sell me a bottle of mercurochrome and I choose to paint myself with it here, you can't stop me, can you? And also if I wrap myself in gauze, you can put your finger on the knot without arousing the wrath of the American Medical Association, can't you? And you can give a friend a drink of your prescription rot-gut, can't you? There's no law against that is there? And what have you got a back room for?"

He put a five down beside the ten and swayed backward as if he was going to fall. The druggist looked around, scooped up the bills, and led the way behind the counter and the shelves.

Ten minutes later, the Hat felt better. His face had calmed down. The whiskey made a warm spot in his middle, and although he was still sick, he

no longer felt hollow. As for the broken rib, he had heard that you could walk around with one for a long time and not even know it and how much worse could it be if you knew it. He picked up the pint, held it to the light, shook his head, and drained the bottom inch. The druggist sucked in his breath in involuntary admiration.

"Take it easy," he warned. "That stuff will hold you up for a little while and then let you down with a bang."

"That," the Hat told him, "will not be a problem."

He walked to the curb, succeeded finally in hailing a cab, gave the driver Marchfield's address and sat bolt upright like a child trying to stay awake past its bed time.

MMARCHFIELD would see him, the butler said. He sat on the tapestry bench again and tried to concentrate. All right, he told himself, hoodlums and professional ones at that, did not fit in with the creeping horror his mind had built around the Sniper. Who do they fit with and why? And what makes you think they go with the plush this joint is lined with?

Marchfield came out of the dining room, glass in hand. His dinner jacket had the right look of easy old age and fit him discreetly. His soft shirt was fresh. He looked as if he had bathed and shaved and spent the day doing pleasant things.

"My God!" he said when he saw the Hat's face. "You'd better have a drink." He led the way to the library and bent over the bar tray. The Hat lowered himself carefully into an easy chair.

"What happened?" Marchfield asked.

The Hat accepted a glass and ignored the question. "When I left here this afternoon, I thought you were going downtown to identify your wife," he

began.

"Did I say so?"

"You had a convinced look in your eye." The Hat took a long swallow. "What changed your mind?"

Marchfield stared down into his glass as if the soda bubbles fascinated him. "It wasn't exactly a case of changing my mind. You rushed me, and I was too upset to think, but after you left I decided you must be mistaken. That girl had nothing in common with Elsa and, besides, if she'd been working at the Four Hundred Club, I'd have heard."

"How?" asked the Hat.

"I don't know what you mean."

"The Four Hundred Club isn't your kind of hang out. You probably don't even know, so I'll tell you — it's the kind of place where you pay high prices for bad liquor and noise. It's strictly for the tourist trade. It would never occur to you to go there. And I don't think your friends go there either. Anyway, it wouldn't matter if they did. They wouldn't recognize your wife because none of them have ever seen her."

He finished his drink and stood up. "When I came up here today, I felt sorry for your. I don't usually feel sorry for people like you, but I'm in a sentimental mood. I get like that when women I know are knocked off for no reason. And I told myself that just because you had too much money and were a well-known lush and a heel about women was no reason not to give you a break when your wife was murdered."

Marchfield lunged to his feet and came at him. The Hat shoved him back into his chair.

"Sit down and keep quiet. Sentiment can take me just so far. I think you're covering up on something. Incidentally, you must hang at some peculiar places for a nice little rich boy or you wouldn't know those two charac-

ters you sent to plaster me around the landscape."

Marchfield reached for the bell pull. The Hat slapped his hand down.

"When I'm better," he said drily, "and my own bones don't reach up and stab me in the back every time I breath, I'm coming up here and push your face in for you. In the meantime, you better set the millions and the old family retainers to work, because I'm going to find out all about it and when I find it, I'm going to smear it in printer's ink and I don't care who gets splashed."

He put down his glass, said "thanks" and walked out without looking back. Downstairs, he got into his waiting cab, circled the block, told the cabbie to park near the corner and settled himself, as comfortably as he could, to wait.

IT DID not take long. Soon Marchfield emerged, with a light topcoat over his dinner clothes, got into the flesh-colored Lincoln convertible at the curb, pushed the button that collapsed its black canvas top, and drove off.

"My gawd," said the cabbie, "tell me, does he have a gadget that makes with a wolf howl instead of a horn?"

"Control your fastidious good taste and stick with him," the Hat ordered. "I don't think he'll stop to pick up any babes tonight."

The big, light car was conspicuous and easy to follow. Heavy traffic slowed it down and the cab was only a block behind when Marchfield stopped at Central Park West and 74th. The cab stopped, too, and the Hat watched Marchfield's long figure disappear into the side street. He gave him a few more minutes and followed.

When he reached the brownstone, there was no sign of Marchfield and no light in the parlor floor windows. The Hat debated with himself. He decided

to take a chance that Marchfield was in the basement with Mrs. Bronson and Paul.

Crouching behind the stone banister, he climbed the high stoop. The glass and mahogany door in the vestibule was locked. The Hat took another chance and pushed a bell at random. Years of New York living told him that it was a good one—no boarding house keeper ever opened a door if there was a roomer alive to do so. There was no answer. He waited ten seconds and rang another. This time the lock ticked. The Hat pushed the door open, ignored the inquiring female voice from the top floor, and dodged around behind the staircase.

His feet were quiet on the basement stairs and the voices below did not stop. Over a shrill and continuous background noise that sounded to the Hat like Mrs. Bronson emoting, Marchfield's rage-filled words rang out.

"You lousy, blackmailing heel!" he shouted. "I was crazy not to realize it couldn't be Elsa. You rotten, little . . ."

Here Paul's voice broke in, softly with a sneer in it. The Hat could not hear what he said.

"I'll see you in hell first," Marchfield shouted. "You don't frighten me at all. You'll never get another cent out of me."

Paul spoke again, still more softly. The Hat crept further down the stairs and strained to hear but without success. After a pause, Marchfield spoke again. The rage had gone out of his voice. There was implacable determination in it now.

"That doesn't work any more," he said. "You can't scare me by talking about publicity. I'm going to tell the whole story myself, right now, to the police."

There was another little silence, and then the room below exploded into

action. There was a crash as a body landed against a chair, another as something, a lamp or a vase, fell and smashed, then the sounds of blows and the heavy grunting breathing of the two men. The Hat stayed where he was. If he interfered, he might never find out what the fighting was about.

There was the single, flat impact of a fist against a jaw and someone fell. Loud footsteps receded down the front hall and the wrought iron door outside clanged. Mrs. Bronson sobbed and fluttered. There was another pause, without content. The Hat grew restless on his step. Then someone walked lightly across the basement room. A drawer was opened and shut.

"No, Paul, no!" screamed Mrs. Bronson.

There was another blow, this time the hard, sharp, slapping of an open hand on flabby flesh. Mrs. Bronson screamed again and then whimpered softly, as a child whimpers.

THE footsteps approached the door to the stairs. The Hat retreated upward and backward. When he reached the hall, he stopped and listened through the door. When he heard the feet on the bottom steps, he darted around to the big front stairway and went silently up the carpeted stairs to the second floor.

The footsteps came on. He heard them scuffle on the carpet, heard them mount the flight he had just come up. His situation was ridiculous. What he should do, obviously, was walk boldly down and out of the house. But he moved silently along the narrow hall to the next flight of stairs. When the faint footfalls sounded near the second floor landing, instinct took him up to the third. The footsteps came on. He was on the fourth floor now and there was no place to go from there. He was

cornered and he would have to face whoever it was who was coming relentlessly up the stairs—Paul he supposed—and look like a damned fool as he tried to explain what he was doing there.

He cursed his instinct-led feet but he moved the length of the hall and mounted the first rung of the iron ladder that led to the roof. It was dark in the little stairwell under the trapdoor that opened onto the roof and he might not be seen. Paul might pass him by and he could sneak sheepishly down the stairs and out of the house.

But Paul would not pass him by. The footsteps were coming straight down the hallway. Without knowing why he was doing it, the Hat climbed the ladder, keeping his feet quiet with infinite care on the slippery iron rungs and pushed at the trapdoor.

It rose quietly. Oiled hinges, the Hat told himself, and then quite suddenly, he wondered why and an answer came to him. He let the trapdoor down without a sound and stepped carefully across the tarred roof. Hidden by a chimney and the shadow it cast, he waited.

The trapdoor rose. Carefully, Paul stepped out onto the roof. Then he moved swiftly and quietly, as if his feet knew the way, across to the tile-topped wall to the next roof, dodging the aerials and coltheslines and chimney pots. When he was over the wall, the Hat followed, inching forward, concealing himself as much as possible in the shadows, crouching through the open spaces. Then he went down on his knees beside the wall, and risked a look over it.

Paul was standing by a low chimney, hauling at a rope. A long dark object rose to view. He untied the rope and lifted the rifle. From somewhere in the opposite apartment house, a lig-

glinted on the barrel. Carefully, he inserted the long, thin shells. He thrust it under his jacket and walked swiftly to the street edge of the roof, looked down the block toward Central Park West, nodded with what seemed to the Hat like satisfaction and went swiftly along the rooftops in the direction of the Park.

The Hat followed as rapidly as he dared. Surely, Marchfield must be in his car and gone by now. But if, winded by the fight, he had walked slowly down the street. . . . With a shiver of apprehension the Hat went over in his mind the little delays, the fumbling for the car keys, the idling of the motor, the heavy traffic speeding past, Marchfield waiting with his hand out to pull away from the curb.

The dark figure ahead, silhouetted by the lights that leaked up from the street, was at the roof edge. The Hat remembered suddenly the open top of Marchfield's car. If he made a U turn and drove past, going downtown. . . .

PAUL adjusted the sight, pumped a shell into the chamber, stepped back to where he could not be seen from the street, and put the butt against his shoulder. The barrel moved sideways, as he peered through the sight.

He set the range and now he's moving with the target, the Hat told himself. A peculiar paralysis had seized him. He was watching murder and, somehow, he was not going to be able to move to stop it.

Paul stiffened, every muscle alive with feral purpose. His hand moved to the trigger. The forces that held the Hat broke and hurled him forward. His shoulder landed against Paul's shoulder, shoved him sideways. The whining bullet sped into the sky, over the treetops of the Park.

Paul whirled. The barrel of the gun

raked across the Hat's throat. He staggered back, blind with pain. In the instant that he recovered, he saw that Paul had stepped backward, away from him and that his hands were busy with the gun.

"He has to pump it," he said almost aloud and rushed in. The gun came down like a club, he stepped out of the swish of its arc and rammed his fist to Paul's face. It was a good punch and it landed just right but it had no effect on Paul at all. He crooned something indistinct and lifted the gun up over his head. The Hat moved quickly but not quickly enough. It crashed onto his left shoulder and the pain ran down from the impact in waves. His rib came back to life and stabbed at him.

He smashed his right at Paul's grin, realized that the grin was not quite sane, and smashed again. His left was useless, but rage kept his tired right moving in, again and again. That's for Jerry, he said inside his head, and that one was for the little O'Hara although I never had the pleasure of meeting her.

And all the time he kept dodging the rifle butt. It sliced against his ear. Sensation returned to his left arm. He put one fist deep into Paul's thin middle, and another to his face. The rifle dropped onto the tar rooftop. Paul came in, still smiling, still speaking softly to himself in a singsong voice, with his hands shaped into claws and his fingernails raking. The scratches stung and burned.

"Damn it," yelled the Hat in spite of himself, "stop grinning."

He hit him again. He was very tired now but something kept his fists moving, one after the other almost automatically. Paul stepped backward, one step at a time, but he did not fall, although he should have fallen many times.

And then, suddenly, the Hat brought

one all the way up and it connected with the side of Paul's face and he gave completely. His scream was thin. It sounded again just before he hit the sidewalk.

The Hat looked over the low parapet at the crumpled heap on the pavement and the crowd. Then he moved away from the edge because he was dizzy and faint. The top of his head was covered with long scratches that bled and he couldn't find his hat.

When they reached him, Marchfield, two cops from a prowler car, and a lady boarder in a housecoat, he was sitting on the tile wall trying to light a cigarette. Marchfield flicked a silver lighter.

"I owe you an apology," he said, "I didn't know what it was all about this afternoon."

The Hat held out his hand. "Forget it," he said, "you've got trouble enough."

AFTERWARD, on the lady boarder's bed, after winning an argument with the doctor over whether he should go to the hospital and losing the one about how he should be strapped, he was propped up against a pillow. They stood around him, Marchfield, the uniformed cops, the detectives, and the Lieutenant from Homicide whose name was Kramer. Downstairs, they could hear the indignation of the reporters who had been locked out.

"Let's have it," Kramer said.

"Well," said the Hat, "to begin with, Dorothy Crane wasn't Dorothy Crane at all. She was Elsa Marchfield. She came here to live when she left her husband." He turned to Marchfield. "I figure she wasn't in on the blackmail, don't you?"

Marchfield nodded slowly. "Yes. I wish I'd realized that before. It makes me sort of responsible for her death."

"Look," said Kramer, with the deference due the scion of the Marchfield's almost crowded out of his voice by impatience. "Remember me? I'm the representative of the municipal police force. It's nice that you two understand each other so well, but it would be even nicer if I knew what the hell goes on, too."

"Uh-huh," said the Hat, "well, Paul was blackmailing Marchfield. Of course, he *said* he represented Elsa." He turned to Marchfield again. "By the way, what was he blackmailing you about?"

"Bigamy. When I was just out of prep school, I got mixed up with a girl. My family didn't approve of her. They bought her off. I didn't dare tell them we were married and she didn't either because I was so young they could have had it annulled and then she wouldn't have been paid. I never knew what happened to her. When I met Elsa, I wanted to marry her very much. I was in love with her." He said it simply as if he were talking about someone else. "I didn't want scandal and the papers and the family messing it up. So I just married her. It was a stupid and arrogant thing to do. I guess I've always had too much money to have much sense."

"Was that why she left you?"

"Yes. My first wife sent her an anonymous letter."

"And then Paul called you and said he represented her and to pay up or else?"

"Yes. I should have known Elsa wasn't the sort to be mixed in anything dirty like that."

"You should," the Hat told him. "I only met her once but I'd have known. Anyhow, a girl has to be an awful dumb bunny to blackmail you when all she has to do is sue for divorce and get a legal settlement." He gave Kramer his

reluctant attention.

"It's a good thing you don't have to take this to trial because from here on in, there's nothing except my imagination and what you can work out of Mrs. Bronson. She knows, though, because she understood right away what he was going to do when he started upstairs. Anyhow, the way I figure it, Elsa found out about the blackmail and she told Paul she'd go to Marchfield unless he returned the money. He stalled her. Because, of course, he intended to kill her rather than lose his racket."

"Wait a minute," put in Kramer, "how did Paul know about the bigamy. Surely Mrs. Marchfield didn't tell him."

"Jerry," said the Hat succinctly. "Elsa told me they confided in each other and Jerry would never have been able to keep a juicy morsel like that to herself. In a way, that's why she died."

"You're crazy," Kramer's voice was flat and positive. "You're forgetting that Jerry was killed first. Are you asking me to believe that a witness was killed first and then the real murder was committed afterward?"

"No. I said 'in a way'. At first I felt badly because poor Jerry was one of a series of victims but at least I thought she was killed on purpose. Actually, she was just a mistake."

KRAMER got up from his chair and prowled around the room as if his temper would not let him sit still. "This had better be good," he growled.

"It is. Elsa Marchfield told me about it herself. You see, Paul thought he was shooting Elsa. Both the girls had expected to go down to the theatre together but at the last minute Elsa changed her mind. And she lent Jerry her coat. They both had dyed black hair and they were the same size, and if you saw the poison green color of that

coat, you know there was no mistaking it. Paul left the house right after Jerry and took a cab to beat her downtown. Only, he didn't know it was Jerry."

Kramer stood stock still and took hold of the footboard with hands on which the knuckles showed white. The sarcasm in his voice was almost a snarl.

"Are you trying to tell me that he made two more mistakes before he got the right one? A little mistake on 14th Street and a small error in Queens?"

"No," said the Hat. "After he came home and found out from the cops that he'd killed the wrong girl and saw how even Elsa didn't suspect him because there was no apparent motive, he had his really big idea. If he killed a couple of other chorus girls first, at random, anyone he happened to come across in a convenient spot, anywhere in the city, by the time he got around to killing Elsa nobody would bother to check on motive and nobody would ever connect him with the killings because they would all be too busy looking for a homicidal maniac."

"And also," added Kramer, the workings of his brain almost visible behind his wrinkled forehead, "if Dorothy Crane died, not Elsa Marchfield, and she was just one of a series of killings,

Marchfield might never know and he could go on collecting and using her name."

"Right," said the Hat.

"How much did you pay him?" Kramer asked Marchfield.

"Not quite a thousand dollars."

It was a plainclothesman who had the final word.

"Jeez," he said, "not even two hundred and fifty bucks a head."

The Hat convinced Kramer that Marchfield would not run away over night. The thank-yous were said, Kramer promised to hold off the other reporters for twenty minutes, and took his retinue downstairs to begin the questioning of Mrs. Bronson.

The Hat flung his legs over the side of the bed and stood up.

"You should stay in bed," Marchfield told him, "but since you won't, I'll buy a drink."

"I'll drink it," answered the Hat. "But first there are a couple of things I have to do."

He called Max and told his story, without trying to keep the jubilation out of his voice. Then he climbed wearily to the roof again, thought for the last time of Jerry lying on the cobblestones, and began to look for his hat.

WOMEN POLICE NOT NEW

ALTHOUGH most of us look upon women police as something that is here only for the duration, women have been active in police work for over forty years. In fact, every modern police force has its division of women police even in peace time whose job consists of apprehending shop lifters, handling women criminals, and acting as counselors for young girls who run afoul of the law—just to name a few of their duties. It is true that in time of war, women police have taken over many of the jobs ordinarily handled by the policemen, but this is true of many other professions and industries.

The first record of official police power given to a woman was the appointment of Mrs. Lola Baldwin in 1905. She had previously been a Traveler's Aid Secretary and was chosen by the police chief

of Portland, Oregon, to watch over the women attending the Lewis-Clark Exposition. She performed her duties so well that when the city later established a Department of Public Safety for the protection of young girls and women, Mrs. Baldwin was put in charge and successfully executed her job for many years.

And, strange as it may seem, there is even a record of a woman chief of police. The distinction of being the first woman chief of police goes to Mrs. Dolly Spencer who attained that position in Milford, Ohio, thirty years ago.

Today women serve as guards in defense plants as well as police women and wherever they serve, they have established an enviable record.

—Lee Owens.

MATAHARI

SPY AND COUNTER SPY

By ARNOLD YOUNG

This famous spy was one of the cleverest military criminals who ever lived; but she failed at last

THE escapades of the famous spies of World War I are in no way spectacular or exciting when compared with that amazing figure shrouded in fiction and fantasy, but substantiated by truth, Matahari. Her real name was Margaret Gertrud Zeller, the name you might expect to find belonging to the daughter of a Dutchman. Yes, Matahari was the daughter of a peace-loving Dutchman, but he must have been a man with an adventurous soul. On his travels he was enraptured by the mysteries and beauties of the East, particularly the worldly beauty of a Javanese woman. He brought her back to Holland together with their little daughter.

Graceful, poised, and full of the spirit of the land from which she came, Matahari became famous for her sensual Oriental dances. This type of dancing was new to Europe in the late eighties and provided a shocking diversion for the upper-class entertainment seekers. Her fame spread far and wide; in Paris she was well known and became one of the highest paid professionals there in pre-war days.

Her activities came to the notice of the English Military Intelligence—Scotland Yard—in July, 1915. In Madrid she was reported to be drinking and dining publicly with known members of the German Secret Service. Scotland Yard came to the conclusion that before very long she would be making her way to Germany via Holland.

They were correct in their prediction. Despite the fact that they had no evidence with which to hold her they made use of their one opportunity to take her into custody. With the contacts Matahari had, a great deal of new information might be acquired. All ships on their way to Scandinavian countries were subjected to search. Early in 1916, Matahari with all her jewels, furs, and silks, was brought ashore and escorted to London.

The British Intelligence was taken off guard by Matahari's conservative appearance. They expected to see a vivacious, excitable Oriental, and instead there walked into the room a tall, slender woman of middle age, severely practical, quiet and courteous. There ensued a battle of wits. Lives of innocent men were at stake. The fate of nations was being deliberated. A war was in the balance. Vital military information was in the possession of every participant in that discussion.

The English wanted to know what she knew; she wanted to know what they knew—and yet

she maintained an outward calm and was able to convey the impression that she was ready to answer any and all questions. She seemed to feel so sure of herself and of her innocence that all that appeared to remain in her was a sincere desire to help.

Matahari quickly misled the British officers who questioned her. They were aware of the fact that she could answer every question quickly and easily, without the slightest deliberation. When they inquired about a dubious character she had been seen with in Madrid, she feigned surprise. She seemed astounded that his patriotism could be doubted.

The results of that first interview were negligible. In fact, with all things considered, Matahari scored a success. The British believed her innocent. She was even able to convince them that she was a spy on their own side—for the French. This was true, but that shrewd woman was clever enough not to add that she was a spy for the Germans as well.

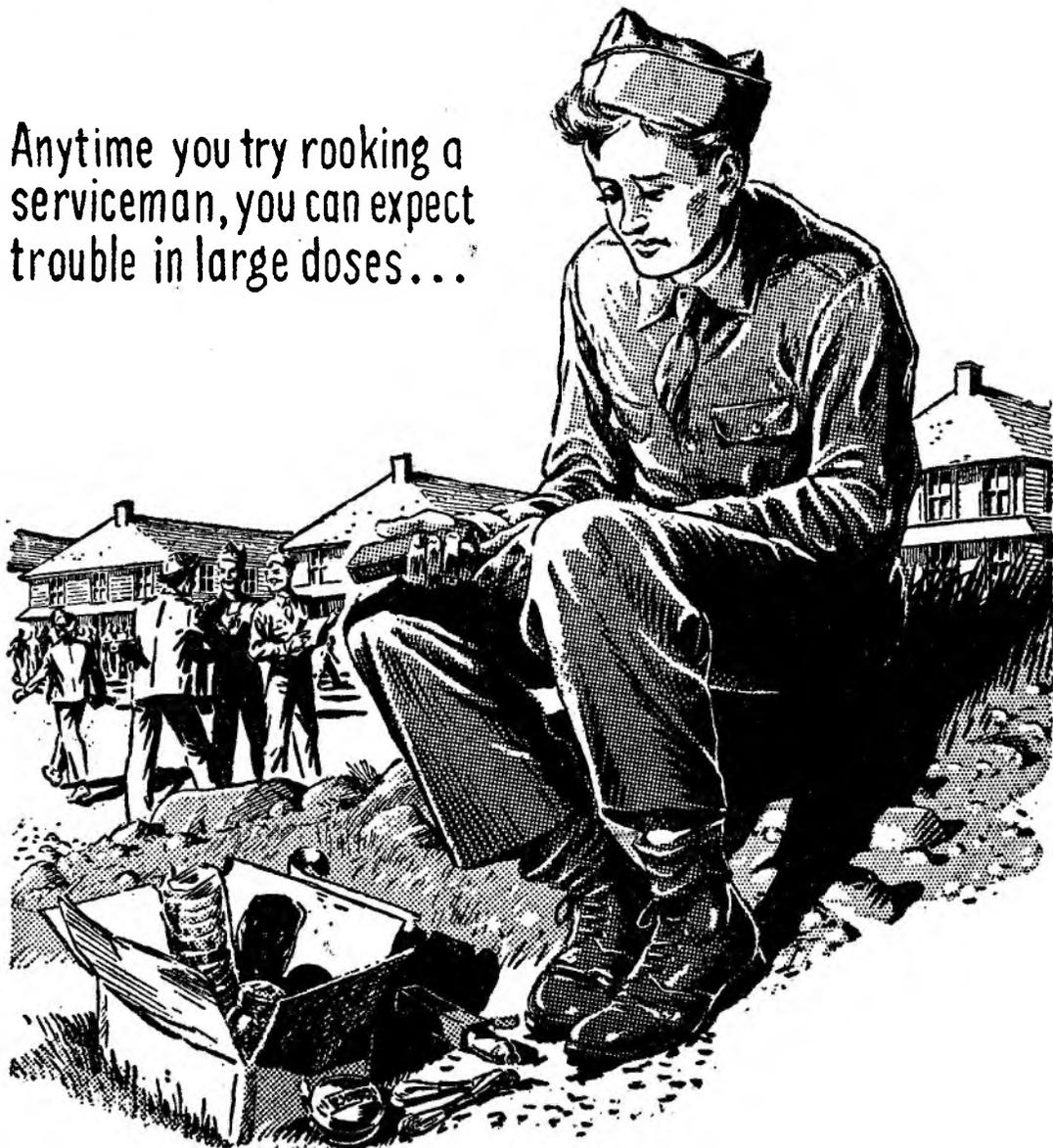
Matahari had, as the saying goes, pulled a "fast one." The French were not so easily fooled. They were lucky when they caught her with questionable documents in her possession. In Paris she was put on trial, judged guilty, and on July 25, 1916, the sentence of death by the firing squad was announced. There was a long delay and it was not until October 15th that she was removed to Vincennes for execution.

A French officer who was present revealed the details of that notorious woman's preparation for her public execution. Awakened at 5 a.m., Matahari dressed carefully just as she would have for any of the important free days of her life. A dark dress trimmed with fur, a large felt hat, and lavender kid gloves comprised her outfit. She seemed undisturbed by the event that was about to take place.

With an escort of two French soldiers, her lawyer and her priest, she was conveyed to the place of execution. Putting aside the ministrations of the priest, she waved salute to the soldiers. She refused to be blindfolded and with a smile faced the firing squad. The men who saw her die, who had compiled the evidence to make her execution justifiable had the satisfaction of knowing they had done their duty. They were sorry, and not ashamed to admit their regret, that a woman with so much live intelligence and beauty had to die such a horrible death.

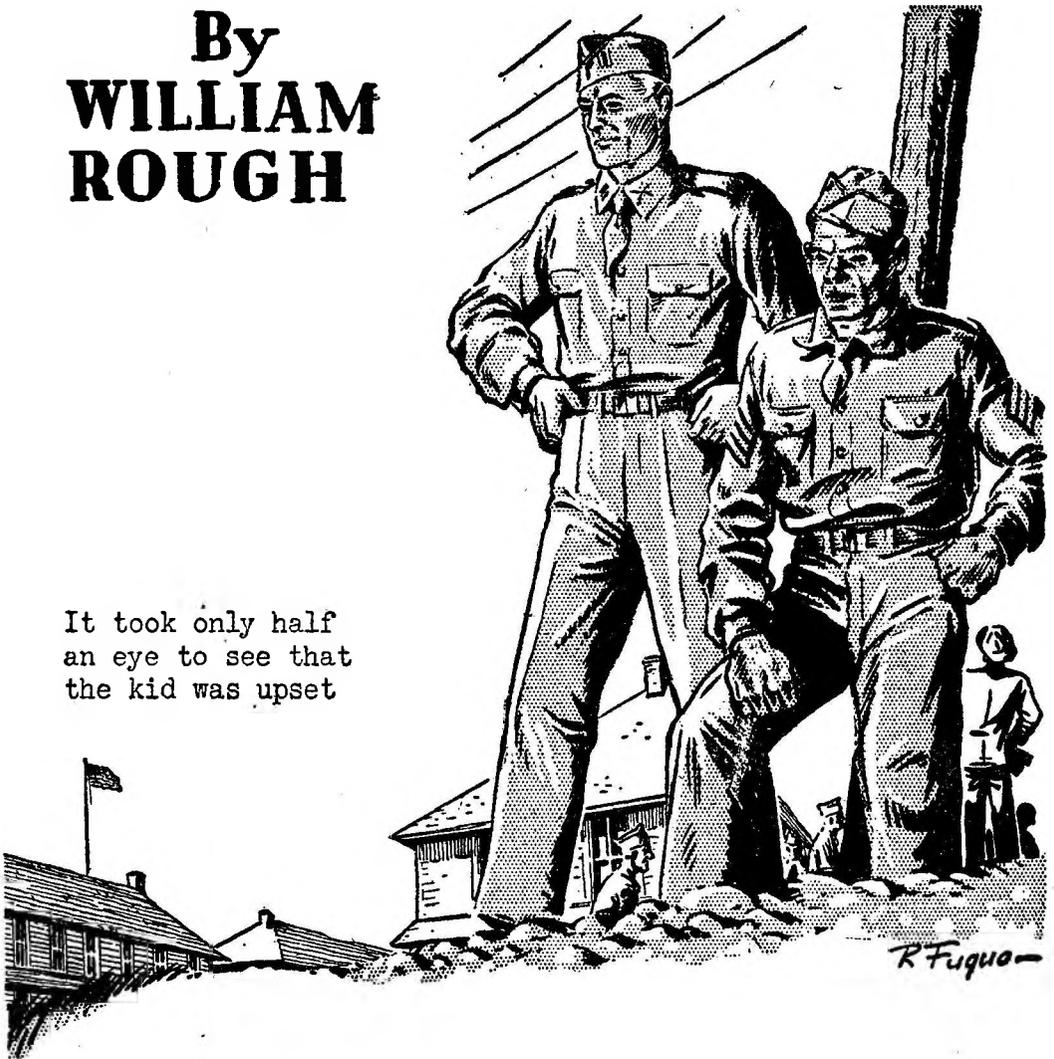
Three Bucks Worth of Murder

Anytime you try rooking a
serviceman, you can expect
trouble in large doses...



By WILLIAM ROUGH

It took only half
an eye to see that
the kid was upset



MAIL call was sounding when I left the old man's office and started for the barracks looking for Tyson. The bugle made me remember the words that went with the notes: "I got a letter, I got a letter, you got a postal card . . ." I'd learned those words with the old Seventy-Fifth last time, when I was a whole seventeen years old and had one stripe on my sleeve. Now I was thirty-five years old officially, forty-two actually and had captain's bars. I would sooner have had the stripe, sometimes. Now, for instance. I got the old feeling when I saw

waves of soldiers ganging around the mail sergeant. Oh, well.

I didn't see Tyson in the crowd, so I waited. When his name was called, he fought his way into the thick of it, an innocent-faced chubby, little guy, built like a top. A year in the service hadn't taken a pound off him, so the boys knew now that what looked like fat wasn't fat at all. It was muscle. A hundred and ninety-five pounds of it, on a frame that was no more than five feet five high.

When he danced back, clutching a half dozen perfumed letters, I growled,

"Tenshun!"

His baby blue eyes flicked at me. "Nuts," he said and waddled over and flopped on a grassy spot alongside the barracks.

"Will you *please* stand up and look half at attention anyway when I talk to you," I groaned. "We're not on Times Square yet."

That did it. He bounced up. "Are we gonna be, Trigger? Did you swing it?"

"I have ten days leave. You have a week's furlough."

Ty aimed an affectionate poke at me, caught himself. "Yes *sir!*" he said. "Meet you at the garage in twenty minutes." His fat face wreathed in smiles as he jammed the letters into his jacket. "I'll get to answer these in person now."

"Salute me, stupid," I hissed.

"Ah-h-h . . . Okay, but shake a leg and—"

Ty broke off, eyes narrowing on a scrawny private who was sitting on the grass. The kid looked as if he was about to bawl. He had a letter and a box. The box was open, and he was looking at the contents unbelievably. Ty got to him. "'S matter, Chum?"

"Oh—sergeant!" The kid started to come to attention. Ty put a hand on the kid's shoulder, so of course the kid couldn't get to his feet then.

"Gimme," Ty said. He took the box from the kid, looked into it. I saw his face get knobby, the well-known signs. I groaned a little inwardly. When Ty gets sore, he does something about it. Fast.

"What—" I started.

But the curses were coming now. A steady stream of them. And Ty hadn't learned them all in the army. I poked my head over his shoulder. The kid came to attention quick when he noticed me.

INSIDE this box were a tube of shaving cream the size of those sample tubes they give away free, a box of shoe polish, a chapstick, shoe laces, razor blades, a measly pack of cookies and two small jars. One of the jars was labeled "candied strawberries," the other, "delicious mints." On the side of the cheaply-made cardboard box was printed: "Deluxe Service Kit."

I didn't swear, but I started nodding emphatically every time Tyson belched a new oath. He growled, "If there's more than a quarter pound of mints here, I'll give fifty bucks to the U.S.O. Look at the strawberries, Trigger—eight of 'em! I'll be a son!" He turned to the kid. "Who sent you this kit, chum?"

"My girl friend, sir." The kid was all mixed up. He was awed at the way Ty was carrying on with me, a captain, on hand; but he was still pretty disappointed in this bunch of trash he'd got from home.

Tyson snapped the box around, let out a roar as he saw a penciled price mark. "Three bucks! Holy Heck!"

I felt myself starting to boil, too. What a louse-awful racket. That kit was worth, at the outside, sixty-five cents. Some cute gal had put out three bucks to give her soldier boy friend a lift. And look at him. Giving him a mess of junk like that was like slamming him in the face. Of course, later, he'd realize it wasn't the gal's fault, that she'd been rooked, too; but the impact of opening a junk-box like that had sent his morale down to the worms.

I was wagging my head at it when Ty bellowed, "Get this address, Trigger!"

That brought me out of it. I said, when he gets sore, he does something about it. Fast. And that's what was happening.

"Now, take it easy," I pleaded. "We have stuff to do in town. We have a

whole week to loaf. I'm not a private dick anymore, and you're not a millionaire playboy. Let the Federal Trade Commission handle this. I'll report it to the old man and—"

"Get that address!"

I straightened to my full six feet five. "Sergeant!" I growled. The kid was staring at us. I *should* have been giving the orders, but, as usual, Ty was.

"Listen, you lug—" Tyson broke off. He, too, had seen the kid goggling. "A-yes sir, Captain," he said. "I'll get the address for you."

I about-faced and marched off. I heard Tyson saying, "Look, chum, I got a week. I'll go in and work over this outfit that sends soldiers junk like this, okay? I'll get back your girl friend's three bucks, too. Yeah. With interest!"

I groaned. Maybe I should ask the old man to postpone our leave and furlough. Knowing how Ty operates, we would be a lot safer in the army. We were practically a cinch to be herded back to the post by M.P.'s, once he started throwing his weight around. I had a notion to beat him to the garage, cop his car—though it was registered in my name—and have my fun alone.

I didn't, though. Habits are hard to break, and Ty was an old, old habit with me. When I had my private detective agency, Ty's old man had hired me to bodyguard the tub. That was seven years ago, and we'd stuck together. And most of the time Ty ended up bodyguarding *me*. I was a meek little rabbit compared to him, even though I didn't earn my nickname serving divorce papers.

IT WAS and office building on Fifty-Sixth Street. "Deluxe Service Kits Co., G. Blake, President."

"Why don't we just call our pal Hannigan on the rackets squad?" I

pleaded.

Ty grabbed the doornob. "Later. I told that kid I'd get back his girl's three bucks personally."

I closed my eyes. "If there's a rumble over this, son, you'll lose those stripes and I'll lose my commission."

"We'll still get to the front, though," Ty murmured. "Don't need stripes to fight."

So what could I do?

There was a guy and a gal in the *first* office. We didn't notice the gal at *first* because the guy took our attention—by starting to run. One look at our uniforms and he was on his way. Could we clean it up quick?

"Grab him, Trigger!" Ty yelled. I cover ground a little faster than him with my legs.

I dived after this huckster, who was long and dark and lean, almost as scrawny as me, but younger and with a trick waxed mustache. He was just enough ahead of me to bang the door in my mush. When I got it open, he was going through another door, banging that, too. Apparently, he'd jumped over the throw rug that was planked in the middle of the office, because he was still on his feet. In fact I *know* he hadn't stepped on that throw rug. If he had, he'd have done the trick I did when *I* stepped on it. I did a loop. That damned rug just skidded to hell and gone under me. I took off and made a three-point landing against the wall. The three points were my head, shoulder and one elbow. I thought I'd broken all three. I was sure of my head, anyway.

A herd of elephants jazzed past me, then, and I got one eye open enough to see that it was Tyson's barrel body. He had momentum up now, and I figured he'd catch our long friend. But when the curses came a second later, I knew he'd missed, too. We'd muffed it, and

now the guy would be on guard.

I groped around like you do when you're groggy, and got a handful of something and pulled myself up. When I was on my feet, I saw that I'd pulled myself up by a doorknob. I looked at the door and winced, then felt my head. I hadn't hit a wall, after all, but that door; and I'd actually splintered the lower panel. I finished the job and got rid of some steam by planting a lusty kick on the panel, knocked it right through.

"There's a freight elevator here! He just beat me!" It was Tyson. He rolled back into the office, glowering. "Bet. it was Blake, too, the president of this joypad."

"Oh no it wasn't!"

SHE was dark and brown-eyed and stream-lined in a white silk blouse and tan gabardine skirt. Her skin was creamy, her lashes silky. Her lips were ripe, *without* lipstick, and her blouse was firm in the right places.

"We-ell!" I decided to forget about my head till later.

"Hi!" Tyson rumbled. "What's a nice girl like you doing in here?"

She rocked us back on our heels. "I," she stated firmly, "am Geraldine Blake, the president of Deluxe Service Kits. If you'll step outside, I'll refund your money."

We stood there, looking. At last I said, "Well, go ahead, push her face in."

Ty's little blue eyes blinked thirty miles an hour. "I don't believe it!" He planted himself in front of Geraldine Blake. "You don't look like a girl who'd give soldiers a raw deal."

That got to her. She tried not to, but she looked ashamed as hell, anyway. "I said I'd refund your money," she evaded

"I guess you'll also refund the

money of the guys overseas who got stuck with these chisel kits?" Tyson snapped. "I guess you'll refund the disappointments they got when they opened 'em, too? No!" He turned his broad back square in her face and snatched a telephone off the desk. "Looks or no looks, sister, you're going to be on the inside looking out. I can't slug you because you wear skirts, but Lieutenant Hammigan can hand you to a policewoman who might have a boy friend in the service."

She went white. She snatched the phone away. "P-please don't! I—honest, it wasn't my idea. And I only found out lately what we were d-doing. I told Hal this is my last week."

Tyson grinned. She'd cracked fairly easily. "Hal, hunh? That string bean we chased."

Brown eyes down, she said, "No, that was George Paxly you chased. He's one of our salesmen. He should be out canvassing, but he was asking me about a book, a little black book he thought I might've seen around the office."

"Who is Hal?" Ty demanded.

"Hal Lawson. He is—was my boy friend."

"But not now, eh?" Ty guessed. "Not since you found out he's using soldiers for suckers. Look, your name is on the door as president, but you're only a figurehead, right?" Ty didn't give her a chance to answer. "This boy friend of yours cooked up the racket and talked you into fronting for him. He probably figured there'd be a beef, sooner or later, and a smooth girl like you could handle hot-headed men without getting your skull fractured. That it?"

SHE didn't use mascara, or it would have been running down her cheeks by this time. "That's the way

it looks," she sniffled. "But we've only been in business two months or so. And it was only last week that the first soldier came in and complained, and I found out how cheesy our product is. I'm ashamed."

Ty rubbed his fat hands. "Then we still get to push somebody's face in and collect three bucks. Where does your Hal Lawson live?"

"Oh, he should be ashamed, too," the girl burst out. "He took an expensive suite in the Carleton House, down the street."

"Must be a good grift." I said.

"We advertise in national magazines. You'd be surprised how many orders we get—Yi-i-i!"

Maybe her scream didn't sound exactly like "Yi-i-i!" but that's as close as I can spell it. It put me into the old crouch, hand snaking for my armpit. Of course I got a handful of uniform instead of clip holster or gun butt, this time. But I didn't need a gun, anyhow. Not *then*. This guy was nobody's trouble any more.

I followed Geraldine Blake's bulging eyes across the office to the door I'd bounced on—and my own eyes did some bulging. A guy's hand was sticking through the hole I'd made when I kicked the door panel in. It clicked over in my mind that the jar of my body against the door had maneuvered this guy's body. When I kicked in the panel, he must've sagged a little, and his arm flopped out.

Tyson beat me to the closet door, but he had to step aside, then. His thick arms were too short to reach in through the broken panel and up to the doorknob on the inside to see if it was a spring lock that could be opened from the inside without a key. My arms were plenty long enough, though, and it was that kind of lock.

The dead man was the usual dead-

looking character. You know, no personality in his present condition. Alive, he'd stand five eight, weigh a hundred and eighty, sport a pot belly and a bald spot and a flabby, massaged pair of chops. Now, he was cold meat. Yeah, cold. I've seen enough of them to know he'd been shot in the breastbone about midnight. It was now around twelve noon, chow time, of our Day Of Departure. Some furlough!

"I don't know his name," Geraldine Blake said when we got around to it. "I saw him talking to Hal once or twice."

Tyson said, "Did he have anything to do with this soldier kits racket? Take it from the start."

HER face was fish-belly white. She stuttered, "Hal worked for a c-company that sells things house to house. You know, shaving cream, furniture polish, s-stuff like that. Then, all of a sudden, two months ago, he said he was going to open a place of his own, be the b-boss for a change. He must have got the money s-somewhere."

"From this dead guy, hunh?"

"Honest, sir, I don't know."

Ty pointed at me. "He's the sir. I'm only a sergeant. Any other guys hang around?"

"Please! Let me s-s-s—"

"Okay, sit." Ty put her in a chair. "Now?"

"K-Kurtz, maybe," she panted. "A wiry, tough-looking little man. He came here the first time last week, and Hal was s-scared. I don't know why"

"Fortunately for you," said the voice from the door.

Ty and I grunted around and saw the same waxed mustache we'd played chase-tag with minutes ago: George Paxly, the stringbean-type salesman. With him was a guy who was definitely not a stringbean. He was

Tyson' type, short, squat, but much uglier. Where Ty's face was smooth and pink, the guy's was leathery and chewed up. These guys could have stood in for Ty and I: a short fat one and a tall thin one.

Paxly held the artillery, a belly gun, snub-nosed. A .38, I figured. He said, "Just a couple soreheads trying to get your pennies back."

"You—"

"Ty, don't!" I yipped. "He's got it in his eyes!"

He had, too. Killer's eyes. Glittering. Little cold eyes with flecks of yellow in them. The fat guy was the bruiser type, and he'd be plenty grief. But Paxly was the one we had to watch.

"We wanted three bucks back, not a kill," I said quietly.

"You lousy finks!" Paxly grated, his waxed mustache twitching in frustrated hatred. We'd got in his way by finding the body. His belly gun hugged his side. He was no amateur. Get set, Hunz," he said. "We're going to show you guys we mean business," he snarled at us. "When you come to, you better grab a big powder. Go for cops and . . . well, if they find Bird's body, it won't make much difference if they find a couple soldiers' bodies, too. Get the rhythm, chums?" Paxly let it sink in, and there wasn't an ounce of bluff in him. "Okay, Hunz," he ordered. Cut 'em up good."

Hunz didn't have just one sap. He had two! He weighed them professionally.

"Just try it," Tyson breathed, chin going down. "Spread out, Trigger."

Paxly's lean face registered surprise. "Well! Hear what he called him, Hunz? Trigger! They must be T. and T., Tyson and Peel. They were a playboy and a private eye. They're lower than cops. Put your heart in it, Hunz!"

Paxly shifted. Hunz shifted. Ty and I shifted. We were two sets of two guys who had worked together before. We knew the ropes, dirty fighting, the works. We were evenly matched, except:

They had the offensive equipment!

Figure it out. Man to man, we might've got them. But with Paxly dancing back, gun cocked, the only thing we could do was try to keep Hunz between us as a shield. And how long could we do that?

One dive I made at Paxly, risking that he wouldn't shoot. Damn him, he did! The slug tunneled out a half-inch-deep gutter in the flesh under my armpit, spoiling hell out of my uniform with blood. Gerry Blake screamed. And then Paxly raked his gun barrel on my head. I practically heard it crunch gristle out of my bald spot. My dive had put me down, head into his feet. I don't remember, then. Thank God. It's bad enough coming out of it *after* they put the kicks to you. It's a son when you're conscious and feel everyone. No, I'm not sorry I passed out. I had a foot and a half area of raw black-and-blue chest and ribs when I came to, but at least I hadn't felt the jolts. I hadn't suffered like Ty. He's got a concrete head. You can't knock him out. The Tony Galento type. He stayed conscious and felt everything they gave him. No wonder he hated them twice as much.

He was puffing and grunting and burping when I started hearing things again. Stuff was being wrecked all around me. I got an eye open and saw that we'd been cached in a little storeroom which contained stacks and stacks of these phony service kits. Ty was systematically demolishing everyone of them.

"Come on, come on, snap out of it," he griped at me. "You got it worse

than this before. I slapped a handkerchief under your arm. You didn't lose much blood. Not too much, anyhow. We gotta get moving again and—" Ty broke off, stopped. "Now what in hell does *this* mean? It's a bug, Trigger."

I heaved up on an elbow and started towards him, collapsed on my puss. The hell I hadn't lost much blood! Brother, what I wouldn't do to that Paxly!

A "bug" is a contact microphone which you suspend between two pins, against a wall. With it, you can hear a conversation going on in the next room. When we broke the storeroom door down and got out, we saw that the next room was Hal Lawson's office. Which meant that somebody had been tapped into it, and had probably heard everything of importance that went on between Lawson and his stooges.

THE storeroom door wasn't much trouble for Ty. Paxly had figured the beating would scare us. He meant for us to escape as soon as we came to. Well, we escaped. But you gotta go through the kicks to know what it does to you. It makes you sick, nauseated, weak. You want to die, but you know you can't let yourself die. The very guys that made you want to die are the guys you *got* to live for. You gotta get them like they got you. You gotta get it out of yourself before you can hold your head up again. That's the way it hit me.

I kept praying we'd get Paxly. There was a chance that he'd get hurt or killed or he'd lam on us. We had to do it on the double. We had to find out where he'd taken the body of the guy he'd called Bird.

Because the body was gone! He and Hunz had taken it out the back, down the freight elevator. They'd taken Gerry Blake, too. Or had she gone willingly? Not that I don't know a

sweat dish when I see one, but so far we had no guarantee of which side she was playing on. After all, Hal Lawson was her boy friend, and he was mixed in it, sure as hell. Wouldn't she cover up for him? Even, wouldn't she get into a fight with this Bird if she'd figured Bird was the guy who had done her boy friend wrong?

I tried to get the velvet out of my mouth. "Hal Lawson, Paxly and this Kurtz guy," I said to Ty. Which is which, and where do we start? Hunz is just a stooge, is my guess. I'm not ruling Gerry Blake out, but we can maybe let her go a while."

"That's just what we can't do," Ty said, little blue eyes sinking deep into fat. "Do you think Paxly would hesitate to give her the same dose he gave us? Why was he hanging around her when we barged in today? He was pumping her, Trigger. "Don't you remember? She *said* he was after a little black book."

"A little black book?" I echoed. "I don't get it. It must be tied in somewhere, but—"

"Of course it's tied in," Ty grunted. "You think a slug like Paxly would be waltzing a dead body around, taking chances with cops and guys like us if there wasn't something he wanted? Well, what he wants is a little black book, and he was figuring maybe Gerry Blake knows where it is. If he thinks that, he'll crucify her like he did us, to make her talk." Ty stopped for breath, then said softly, grimly, "If he does to her what he did to us, Trigger, do you know what *I'll* do?" He held up his stubby, powerful hands. He flexed them spasmodically. "I'll kill him with these," he said. And his voice was flat.

I WAS a hundred percent with him, but I reminded, "Then we'd be mixed up with the law and might be

held for questioning and the outfit would sail without us."

Ty laughed coldly. "As if we won't be mixed up with the law anyhow. Let's go." His barrel body rolled towards the door, gathering momentum.

We had five people and a dead body to catch up with and *one* lead. Hal Lawson. Gerry Blake had mentioned that Lawson had taken a suite in the Carleton House, just up the street. Through him, we had to find her, Paxly, Hunz, somebody named Kurtz, and Bird's body.

"It's only a block. We won't need the car," I said to Ty as he started for the curb where we'd parked it.

"Ha!" he burst.

I followed him, watched him open the dash compartment. "Oh!" I exclaimed. "Excuse it." And got a handful of my .32 on a .45 frame. It makes a nice shooting piece. Of course the smaller calibre calls for more accurate placement, but I've never had any complaints. Ty uses a Luger. Our guns sort of fit our personalities and physical makeup. I hadn't even given them a thought, but I might've known he'd have them handy.

"I'd like to break both his kneecaps with slugs. That's painful as hell," I said, sliding the gun into my pocket.

"Paxly?" Ty nodded. "I'll have to use will power to keep *my* sights off his guts."

WE started running for the Carleton House . . . stopped. There were four reasons for stopping. Good reasons. M.P.'s. They were sauntering down the street, looking bored to tears. The slightest wrong move would get the four of them curious.

Ty and I tried to make off like we were sauntering, too. We didn't do such a good job of it, but I was still wearing captain's bars, and you

couldn't tell the wetness under my arm was blood. We exchanged salutes, then turned into the Carleton House. That is, we started to turn. A doorman stopped us.

He was a big doorman and it was his job to stop people and he was good at it. Except Tyson doesn't stop easy.

"Where yuh goin'," soljer?" he demanded, blocking Ty.

Another second and he would've seen my rank, and it would've been okay. But no. The tub just said, "Inside," and put one chunky hand on the doorman's brass buttons and followed it up with his hundred and ninety-five pounds. He didn't even bother to watch where the doorman landed, just kept going.

The doorman squawked, and out of the corner of my eye I saw the four M.P.'s, down the block, pull up and turn. "Fast!" I hissed, catching up to Ty who, by this time was heading for a desk clerk. The clerk was 4-F and looked it, but he had a sense of humor.

"Long, thin ones and short, fat ones all day today," he grinned.

"So!" Ty yelped. "Where'd they go? Who was with them?"

The clerk was the sociable type. "They went to Lawson's. They had a swell gal in a tan gabardine skirt and a guy crocked to the gills. He couldn't even walk."

"Did they come down again? What's Lawson's number?" Even with out the chevrons, you could have told Ty was a sergeant from his voice.

The clerk got a bang out of it. "They didn't come down yet. Lawson's 1207."

"But fast!" I crackled, giving Ty a push towards the automatic elevators. There was a bank of six of them. This Carleton House was a good thirty stories high, couple thousand rooms, I

suppose. If we hadn't known Lawson's room number, we'd have had a picnic trying to find him.

Ty had a spatulate thumb hard on the "Up" button before I got the doors closed. "Don't stop at the twelfth," I ordered. "You dope, why'd you push that doorman with M.P.'s in sight? They're after us."

Ty started grinning for the first time since we'd left the Service Kits Co.'s office. "They'll be protection," he said.

"Protection?" I snarled. "Who in hell wants protection?"

"Oh, I don't mean us," he came back, surprised. "I mean they'll be protection for Paxly. It'll take more than you to pull me off him."

"Well, I grinned; too."

WE GOT out at the fourteenth floor and ran down to the twelfth. Lawson's door was locked, of course, and nobody answered our pounding promptly. Even if somebody were going to answer he'd have had to do it in less than twenty seconds. Because that's all Ty allowed before he crashed the door.

Gerry Blake and a blonde smoothie shrank back as we flopped into the suite. Gerry's face was white as her cute silk blouse, and the blonde guy's was the same. Gerry had said earlier that Hal Lawson was scared. This guy *was* scared. "Lawson?" Ty gritted and grabbed a handful of the lapels of a perfectly-tailored blue tropical worsted.

"Yes! This is Hal! Oh, I'm glad you came!" Gerry darted close to me as if for protection.

"What do you w-want?" Lawson's lips were twitching. His green eyes skittered around in panic. His head was bobbing this way and that as Ty pumped him by the lapels. All of a

sudden, Ty let go and Lawson careened back. He yelped, "Don't hit me! I'll talk!"

"I didn't hit you," Ty sniffed. "Your chin just bumped my fist. If I hit you, you *couldn't* talk."

"I'd been covering Ty, of course, figuring Paxly and his stooge Hunz would pop out of somewhere. But they didn't show, so obviously they weren't here.

"Where are they, Gerry?" I said.

"I don't know. Somewhere in the building. They took the dead man up to his room.

"Where *is* his room?" Ty growled.

Gerry shook her head. "Ask Hal."

"Careful, you'll bump my fist again," Ty said to Lawson. "Where's Bird's room?"

Lawson was trying to paw his blonde hair smooth, shaking all over from nerves. "I'd tell you! Honest, I'd tell you. But—I don't know!"

"Ho!" Ty said, staring at him.

Lawson got behind a divan. "I *swear* I don't know!" he bleated. "I didn't even know Bird was registered in this hotel till Paxly told me."

Ty kept coming, merely grabbing one arm of the divan and heaving it aside like so much matchwood.

Lawson was panting now. "Listen, it's true," he labored, dancing behind chair after chair, getting ever closer to the corner where Ty would be bound to pounce. "If I had known where Bird was staying, why, I would've told Kurtz right off. It was because I *didn't* know that we had to arrange the trap in my office."

"Let him sing, once," I called to Ty.

"It was all Kurtz' idea," Lawson said quickly. "He wanted to arrest Bird, but didn't know where to find him. But he knew that sooner or later Bird would come to my office. So we arranged it. When Bird came in last

night I called the number Kurtz had given me, and he came over."

"Arrest Bird?" I grunted. "Who is this guy, Kurtz?"

"A Federal Trade Commission man," Lawson blurted. "Look, I want to come clean. If you're investigating for the army, I'm going to turn State's evidence. I told Kurtz I would if he'd let me off."

"From the beginning," I said.

Ty gritted, "But, Trigger, Paxley's somewhere in the building. We gotta get him!"

"Oh, fine," I said. "He's here, sure; but the building has a couple thousand rooms in it. Maybe you think we can walk right into the right one."

"Dammit, Bird must've signed the register," Ty snapped. "All we have to do is call the desk."

WELL, I didn't want to be a know-it-all, so I waved my gun at Lawson, then at the phone. Lawson caught on and called the desk. A second later he hung up and licked his lips. "Nobody named B-Bird is—"

"Thought so," I cut in. "He might register in the same hotel with Lawson, but he wouldn't use his right name. As I understand it, this Bird was keeping himself out of the picture. Right, Lawson?"

Lawson dug a handkerchief into his collar and swabbed. He was still eyeing Tyson warily. I didn't blame him. "I'll tell you everything," he said. "Bird picked me up on the street one day. I was crew manager of a house-to-house canvassing outfit. Bird said he'd set me up in my own business, let me be boss. All he wanted was seventy percent of the profit."

"And it was practically all profit," I said.

"Well, our advertising was pretty big," Lawson said. "And the salesmen

got a dollar on every kit."

Tyson roared, "Salesmen? You mean guys who walked the streets and looked for house windows with service stars in them and then went in and fleeced the soldiers' mothers!"

"Easy, son. We're getting something," I warned Ty. "Go ahead, Lawson. We know about how you got your girl friend, Gerry, to front for you. Who killed Bird? How and why?"

Gerry cried, "Paxly and Hunz are making it look like Kurtz killed Bird. They told Hal they'd take care of everything if Hal would just cooperate and look innocent. I heard them. They made me come here. Then they made a deal with Hal and went out again with Mr. Bird's body. They said they'd take it upstairs and fix things."

Lawson snapped, "Gerry, shut your — Oh, all right, you heard it. It's true. Listen, though." He swabbed more with his handkerchief, passed at his blonde hair. When he started talking again, his green eyes were steadied a little.

"One day last week, Kurtz came to me and said he was an FTC man on the trail of Bird. He told me that Bird has a dozen of these rackets, all over the country, and that if I'd help him locate Bird and testify against him, he'd see that I got off free."

TYSON spat. "You're the type. You're shivering in your boots."

"So would y-you be," Lawson stammered. "This bird always stayed in the background. All I knew about him was that he'd given me the money and the idea for Service Kits Co., and every so often he'd show up "at the office, look at the books, and take his percentage. Even I, his partner, didn't know where he stayed or when he'd be around. No wonder Kurtz didn't

know, either."

"Okay, okay, cut it short," Ty barked. He was pacing up and down, over to the window, back again. I knew it was driving him nuts to realize that though Paxly was in this very building, he might just as well have been in Zamboango as far as our putting the finger on him was concerned.

"Well, of course I told Kurtz I'd cooperate, and the next time Bird came in, last night it was, I called Kurtz and told him to come over. B-but..." Lawson swallowed. "I was so j-jittery that Bird got suspicious. He pulled a g-gun on me, and I—"

"You cracked wide open," Ty shot.

"I— Well, yes. I admitted that a policeman was c-coming after him. He laughed. He was t-tough. He said he'd shoot the first man who stepped into the office."

"But instead, Kurtz shot *him*. I suppose?" I frowned.

"T-that's *just* what happened!" Lawson looked like he was going to thank me for it. "Kurtz came in and dived at Bird. They struggled. The gun went off. Bird was d-dead."

Well, it sounded good. The fact that a "bug" had been planted on Lawson's office argued that the FTC was on the job. Yes, it sounded good up to a point. And this was the point — why didn't Kurtz make the kill official? Would an FTC man kill a crook and then hide the body?

Lawson must've read my thoughts. He said, fast, "After Bird was dead, Kurtz searched him. He said he was hunting for a little black book which contained the evidence to catch the rest of Bird's gang."

"Hol!" Ty bellowed. "The little black book again!"

"But it's true," Lawson insisted. "That's why Kurtz made me hide the body and not report to the police. He

said first he had to find that little black book. He said if the news of Bird's death were made public through the newspapers, why then Bird's partners would grab the little black book."

"This part I like, Trigger," Ty yelled at me. "Is the little black book evidence? It is like hell! Is Kurtz an FTC man? He is like hell! Oh, why don't we know what room Paxly's in?"

TY POUNDED around the room tigerishly, his short thick legs pumping like pistons. He glared out the window, down into the street. "Then M.P.'s are waiting for us on the sidewalk," he said absently. "Guess they don't want to start anything in the building. . . . Trigger, how in hell do you pick the room you want out of as many as are in this hotel? No use describing Bird to that desk clerk, even if we could talk to him for two seconds without those M.P.'s spotting us. The clerk saw Paxly and Hunz bring Bird in just a while ago. If he knew Bird, he'd have recognized him and made a crack to us."

I put my gun in my pocket, held up my hands. "Let's call the homicide squad. We can't get to Paxly unless we bottle the joint."

Ty was mumbling to himself like he had birth pains. It was a bitter pill to swallow: so close and yet so far. We could fix it so Paxly would be caught, sure. But we wanted to catch him ourselves. Like Ty had said, the cops would be protection for Paxly.

"Trigger!" Tyson erupted. He stopped stock still. "We can't get to Paxly, no. But maybe,"—he grinned evilly—"we can get Paxly to *us*. It's worth a roll."

With that, he scuttled over to the window, threw it open, leaned out. Nobody had the faintest notion of what was up. Then Ty started bellowing.

"Yah! You guys! Yah, you dog faces!"

That sergeant's voice of his rolled down to the street, deep and vibrant and sneering.

"G. I. cops!" Tyson roared. He pushed a chubby fist up to his face, spread the fingers wide, thumb to his nose, and wigwagged. "Yah! Come and get me!"

I felt like dragging him away from that window and batting him. But he'd done screwy things before, and no matter what he had in mind, it was worth a try.

"Here they come, Trigger!" Ty came back into the room. His fat face was beaming delightedly.

"Son, you said it, here they come!" I swallowed. "Then what? What'll they do to us when they get here?"

"You'll see," Ty chortled. He waddled over to Lawson. Lawson ducked, but not in time. Ty's fist rocked him. "That's for nothing," Ty said. "Are you gonna swear to every word we say when those M.P.'s get here?"

Lawson blubbered. "I s-said I'd cooperate!"

Ty whirled. "Gerry, get in that chair and cross your legs and do your stuff. Just stop these guys long enough for me to start explaining."

GERRY was in a fog, but she nodded weakly and reached for her compact. "Never mind your face," Ty grinned. "All they'll look at are your legs."

They did too, those M.P.'s. Tyson got Gerry arranged in a chair, then opened wide the door from the corridor. When the elevator stopped and uniforms boiled out, Ty bellowed. "Men! This way!" He waved towards Gerry. "This girl is in trouble."

"Well, it worked. It was just a dodge to slow those guys up while Ty

could shoot in the real explanation, but it worked. They didn't pounce on him, but just blocked the doorway waiting.

Ty gave it to them fast. In about a minute and a half flat, he clipped out the story. You should have seen those M.P.'s faces. Mad? Boy, they started boiling. What soldier wouldn't boil at that scurvy box racket.

Ty was cagy enough not to tell them Lawson was the guy who ran the racket, or they'd have mobilized Lawson right there. Ty just said, "The guy we want is in a room somewhere in this building. We don't know what room, but I got an idea."

He went into a huddle with the M.P.'s. Then they started to deploy.

"You want the power shut off on the elevators, eh?" one guy said. "Gimme five minutes." He darted off.

"How many staircases in this building?" Ty demanded of Lawson. Lawson gulped, "Two," and Ty snapped, "Take one of these guys and stake the back stairs, Trigger. I'll handle the other one." He turned to Gerry Blake. "You're sure Paxly mentioned that he was going to take Bird's body *upstairs*?"

"I t-think so."

Ty glowered. "Well, we gotta risk it. Let's hope Paxly is somewhere *above* us, *not* below. If he's above us, we'll spot him coming down. Get going, Trigger. People will start pouring down these steps in a second. Just let 'em go. Watch for Paxly and Hunz."

I thought I had the idea, now. I took one of the M.P.'s and covered the rear staircase. Yep, in about two minutes the fire alarm bells started clanging. I grinned at the M.P. "Leave it to that Tyson," I said. "He had the power shut off the elevators and then rang the fire bells. Everybody who tries to get out will come tearing down

the front or the back stairs. Yeah, I guess Paxly *will* come to us."

"Cinch," said the M.P.

HE WAS wrong. So was I. Because Paxly *didn't* come to us after all. Hunz did, but not Paxly. Paxly was already out of the building when our caper started. That's the way those things go. Just the same, we found out how to corner him—and we got Hunz. I got him!

I saw his flat, broad, leathery face coming down the back stairs a-helling. "This one," I grunted to the M.P.

"Boy! A bruiser!"

"Watch me take him," I snarled, heat pumping up inside me as I remembered the kicks. I spread my legs wide, poised on the balls of my feet, waiting to swing from the knees when that fat face got within range.

But again the best laid plans went screwy. I must've edged too far forward. Hunz spied me while he was still a dozen steps up. For a man as big as he was, he stopped, whirled and started back up again as neat as you please.

"The son!" I rasped and flung myself up the steps.

"You're groggy!" yelled the M. P. "Let me get him!"

He heaved past me and made knots. I'd forgotten my gun wound completely up until now. But the way I was lagging behind, even with my long legs, told me the M.P. was more than half right when he said I was groggy. I was too weak to catch Hunz. Too weak to catch him, yes. Not too weak to shoot straight!

"Duck!" I shouted at the M.P. as we rounded a corner of the staircase and saw Hunz 'way up ahead of us. The M. P. looked back over his shoulder, yipped, "Gripes, Captain!" and flattened against the wall.

I said softly to myself. "Don't kill

him."

It wasn't too hard a shot, but I was a little weak, and I'd been using an army .45 lately and so was out of practice on my own gun. I shot Hunz in the back of his right knee, all right, but on the left I must've held a little too high. The slug took him in the thigh.

Hunz crumbled on the stairs, clawed at them for support. He finally got himself balanced, and sat there hugging his legs.

"How d'ya like it?" I said. "How does it feel?" I got up to him, slanted my gun barrel down, making off like I was aiming at his foot. "I think I'll slide another one into you."

"Jeez!" grunted the M. P. "You got him sweet, already."

"I haven't got the number of Bird's room, though, or Paxly's! Maybe if I get them, I won't shoot again. What about it, Hunz?"

SWEAT was drooling down Hunz' broad face. "I'm no sucker," he said, licking thick lips. "Bird's in 1610. You won't find Paxly there, though. He just went out for a cop."

"Cop?" I stared. Then I understood. Gerry Blake had mentioned that Paxly was framing the kill to look as if Kurtz had done it. "Is Kurtz up there with the body?" I asked.

Hunz' meaty shoulder shrugged. "I don't know. He's too weak to get far, but I untied him when I heard the fire bell. I wouldn't let the guy burn to death."

"Take over," I ordered the M.P. "If a long thin guy my size comes up these back stairs, let him have it."

I clumped back down to the twelfth floor, went around to the front stairs and told Ty the score. He and I and Lawson and Gerry Blake tramped up to room 1610, yelling, "False alarm!" at the people who got in our way.

Hunz was right about Kurtz being weak. The dried-up little shrimp was staggering down the corridor when we came around the staircase. "That's Kurtz," Lawson said.

Kurtz was slim and small and wiry, with a pinched-up little face that had been chewed to hell. His bleary, close-set eyes started to flame when they saw Lawson, then died out. "Thought you were Paxly," he grunted. "Where's Paxly?"

"Suppose we go into Bird's room, fella?" Ty said. "We want information."

"Where's Paxly?" Kurtz said hollowly. A nerve twitched in his cheek and a crusted scab on his lip broke. Fresh blood trickled from it. "Where's Paxly?" he intoned monotonously. That's all Kurtz was living for, to get Paxly.

Ty put an arm around Kurtz, helped him into room 1610. Bird's body was flopped on the bed. "You kill him?" Ty asked.

"No, they were framing me. Paxly was. Where is he? I'm gonna kill him. Look what he done to me."

Raw flesh showed in splotches on Kurtz' face. He was marked bad. He leaned on the bed for support, then sat down, lifted his feet and stared at them. "He put lighted cigarettes on them," Kurtz said, "Help me get the shoes off, willya, Mac?"

TY PULLED off one of the guy's shoes. Gerry Blake gagged. The flesh of Kurtz' face was raw; the stuff on the soles of his feet was cooked. Paxly had sure given him a going over.

I said, "Paxly was trying to make you tell where Bird's little black book was, huh? What's in that book?"

"It's Bird's account book," Kurtz said, spittle on his chin. "Any guy who gets that book can take over Bird's

rackets."

"Your no FTC man," Ty said. "Were you Bird's partner?"

"Bird didn't have no partners, only stooges," Kurtz said. "That's why it would be easy to take over his rackets if you just knew their names and addresses. Bird just picked guys up here and there and set them up in business. The only time he'd show himself was when he collected his end. He didn't want to be around when the law closed in."

"I get it," Ty said. "You stooged for him somewhere. The law did close in. You took a rap."

"In Chicago," Kurtz admitted. "Bird left me high and dry. I jumped bail and started searching for him. I knew he'd start this soldier kits racket somewhere else, and I watched the advertising."

Hal Lawson was outraged. "Your *not* an FTC man! Why did you tell me you were?"

"Lame brain," I sniffed. "Kurtz had to put the fear into you to make you cooperate. He sized you up and figured your scary spot would be cops. Right, Kurtz?"

Kurtz shook his head groggily, swiped his hand over his lips, smearing blood. "He's the scariest guy I ever came across in a racket," he said, leering at Lawson. "He couldn't co-operate fast enough. He was so scared he owned up to Bird that I was on my way, last night."

"But it was a fight!" Lawson yelled. "It was self-defense, wasn't it, Kurtz? You had to kill him or he would have killed you. Don't worry, you'll get off."

Just then it came. Paxly's voice. I'd have known it anywhere. It came from the corridor. "That's the man, Lieutenant," Paxly said. "His name's Kurtz. There's the body."

We all turned. Paxly, long and lean

and grinning under his waxed mustache, was coming in with a plainclothes cop.

This Kurtz now, he was the surprise. He'd been in the process of passing out ever since we found him staggering in the corridor. By the time Paxly arrived, Kurtz was collapsed on the bed. Who would have figured him for a play?

But as I said before, when a guy puts the kicks to you, you only live for one thing. Paxly had done lots more to Kurtz than just beat him up. He'd practically broken that little guy's will. Practically, but not altogether. Which was Paxly's death warrant.

"You," Kurtz said, and I felt something dig me in the back. "Stand aside, will you?"

I LOOKED back and down over my shoulder. My eyes popped. Kurtz had a gun. My gun. He'd simply reached up and lifted it out of my pocket. I was standing directly in front of him, now. No one but me knew he had it. No one but me could have stopped him. Or could I?

He was weak, sitting down, not paying too much attention to me. Maybe I could have reached out and batted his hand down. Maybe. If I hadn't hated Paxly. If I hadn't felt like doing what Kurtz was planning to do myself. Every instinct in me told me to reach out, take that gun and do my own blasting. But I knew damn well it would get the army bad publicity and might prevent me from sailing with the outfit. I stood aside.

And in so doing, I had just as much to do with Paxly's death as Kurtz. Kurtz just pulled the trigger. When I stood aside, an unrecognizable sound came from Kurtz' throat. And he shot Paxly.

He shot Paxly in one smooth motion that started when he said, "You

stinking son—" And ended when Paxly gagged, wrapped his long arms around his middle, and fell forward, spewing blood.

The police detective was clawing for a gun. "I got him," I said and took the gun off Kurtz.

Kurtz never took his eyes off Paxly. Paxly was in agony, blood pouring out of him. "Sure, you got me," Kurtz said. He started relaxing. He even started feeling good. "You got me, sure. But look what I got. Look. . . . Suffering, ain't he?" Kurtz grinned. "He made me suffer. I hope he goes out slow."

"Jeez!" The police detective looked at Kurtz, then at Paxly writhing on the floor.

Two of the M.P.'s who had come up with us looked at each other. "I'll say he got him," one of them gulped. Gerry Blake fled out the door.

We just waited till Paxly died. . . . "Well, I guess there ain't gonna be no trouble with this," the plainclothes cop said, finally. "We all witnessed it." He looked at Kurtz deferentially. "I guess you won't make no bones about confessing to the other one, will you?" The cop pointed at Bird's body.

Kurtz coughed. "I didn't—"

Ty cut in, "Did you plant a bug on Lawson's office?"

KURTZ shook his head. "Paxly must have done that. A bug, eh? Sure, that explains everything. He was listening last night. He heard me questioning Lawson about the little black book and knew it was important. When I left the office, after the fireworks, Paxly cornered me, said he knew where Bird had been staying. He said he'd followed Bird once before when Bird had been to Lawson's office and found out what hotel Bird favored, and the fact that Bird registered under

the name of Johnson. Paxly said if I'd cut him in on the rackets, he'd take me to Bird's room."

"Why didn't Paxly just come and get the book himself, if he knew where Bird's room was?" I asked.

Kurtz looked at Paxly's body and chuckled. "Paxly figured Bird had a special hiding place for the book and that I knew just where to look. I didn't, though, and after a while Paxly thought I was holding out on him, refusing to find the book till I'd got rid of him. That's why he worked me over."

"Look," Ty said. "Did Bird have a special hiding place for the book?"

"Naw," Kurtz said. "He carried it around with him. I saw him with it lots of times in Chicago. Probably just didn't bring it with him this trip. A fluke."

Ty spun. "In that case, here's my guess," he yelled and piled on Lawson. He didn't reach into Lawson's pocket. He simply got a hold of Lawson's coat tails and ripped them up the middle, pulled off the side with the pocket. A second later he held up a little black book and grinned.

Lawson bleated, "But the murder was still an accident! I want a lawyer! I can prove it! When Bird came to the office last night and saw how nervous I was, he got it out of me that Kurtz was on his way. Just like I told it before. Bird pulled a gun. Well, I thought Kurtz was an FTC man, and I certainly didn't want to have him

killed in my office. I tried to take the gun off Bird. We wrestled, and it went off. When Bird slumped, that book fell out of his pocket."

"It ties up," Tyson nodded. "When Paxly saw that even torture didn't make Kurtz tell where the book was, he started thinking back. He saw the possibility that *you* might have copied the book right after you killed Bird. You were the only one alone with Bird's body immediately after the kill. Paxly grabbed Bird's body after he knocked us out and brought it up here to "use as a threat over you. If you didn't promise to cut him in on the rackets listed in the book, he would have left Bird's body in your suite and put it on you. But if you'd cut him in, he'd put it on Kurtz. Gerry Blake said Paxly made some kind of deal with you before he brought the body up here. That was it, all right."

"I want a lawyer!" Lawson panted. "I have a right to get a lawyer!"

Tyson spat like he had a bad taste in his mouth. "We've been chiseled all around, Trigger, but at least we'll get our three bucks' worth." He ripped Lawson's coat till he came to a wallet. He took out a wad of money, peeled off three one-dollar bills, tossed the rest at Lawson's feet. Lawson stooped.

"*This* I can't resist," Ty grinned. He stepped around behind Lawson, pulled back his foot. "But I beat him to it. I figured I'd get more leverage with my long legs. I did."

BUY WAR BONDS

Don't let the cost of this war pile up a huge mountain of debt that will rob your children of a chance to be happy and to live the life that is rightfully theirs!

PAY YOUR OWN WAY TO VICTORY AND PEACE!

» » CRIME ODDITIES « «

CRIME LABORATORY ON WHEELS

THE Illinois State Police are very proud, indeed, of their huge, sixteen-ton crime bus which is one of the latest devices contrived to combat crime.

The bus was designed by Thomas P. Sullivan, director of Public Safety, and Leonard Keeler, who perfected the lie detector. It is equipped with all the latest devices used in scientific detection work. The bus contains a lie detector, equipment to analyze blood, still and motion picture cameras, a dark room, an emergency hospital complete with X-ray machine, oxygen tanks, anesthesia, and other necessities for performing an operation anywhere. It also carries a collapsible boat, diving equipment, asbestos suits, two-way radio, a short wave radio, and the famous walkie-talkies for communication with members of the crew who have to work outside.

The bus is completely armor-plated and carries sub-machine guns, shot guns, pistols, and rifles. It also has machine guns built into turrets on top of the bus.

A speed of 60 miles an hour can be traveled by the bus and great things are expected of it by both its designers and the Illinois State Police.

* * *

VACATIONISTS SEEK JAIL SPACE

YOU can't use our jail as a hotel!" was the astounding statement recently made by Police Inspector H. S. Redman, Miami Beach, Florida. The whole thing came about due to the fact that with the increasing scarcity of lodgings, desperate visitors presented themselves at the jail, willing to pay as much as \$50.00 for one night's lodging. As attractive as the offer might have been, it was not accepted due to the fact that, as Police Captain V. H. Mathis asserted, the adoption of such a practice would make it necessary to turn out their "legitimate guests." Now residents wait with bated breath for signs of a petty crime wave.

* * *

AMATEUR CRIMESTER

DURING a recent series of petty burglaries a thief left a pair of shoes behind him. Perhaps this particular thief was moving about in his stocking feet so as to prevent a noise and then, being suddenly frightened, forgot all about the shoes and dropped them in a hurried exit. It was not difficult to determine later whether they were his or whether he had left them as a plant on someone else. This is merely an instance of an amateur crimester, but even the smartest sooner or later hungle in some way although they never seem to realize that they eventually will until too late. And to this little crime story the adage of "Haste Makes Waste" can very well be applied.

IDENTIFICATION FOR LIFE

NO doubt all of you have read in the newspapers of criminals who have tried every conceivable method of altering their fingerprints to avoid detection. Some have attempted to burn their fingertips off with boiling oil or by applying red hot metals, but once the wound heals the entire pattern will be there without any changes. Others have resorted to plastic operations hoping to destroy the skin and thus their prints. All of these attempts have been unsuccessful for it is impossible to ever change prints.

The only illness that has ever been known to change prints is the dread leprosy. Even persons suffering with acromegaly, which is a chronic disease in which the patient suffers a gradual and permanent enlargement of the head, hands, and feet, will continue to have the same fingerprint pattern even though the distance between friction ridges may be enlarged.

Doctors have determined that the human foetus develops its fingerprints between the one-hundredth and one-hundredth-twentieth day of the mother's pregnancy. From this point on the patterns may enlarge but there will be no change in the number or pattern of the friction ridges during the person's lifetime or even after death.

It is because of this fact that police have placed such reliance upon the fingerprint as a means of identifying criminals. And it is also a fact that many a criminal has been convicted upon no greater concrete evidence than the discovery of his fingerprint at the scene of the crime.

* * *

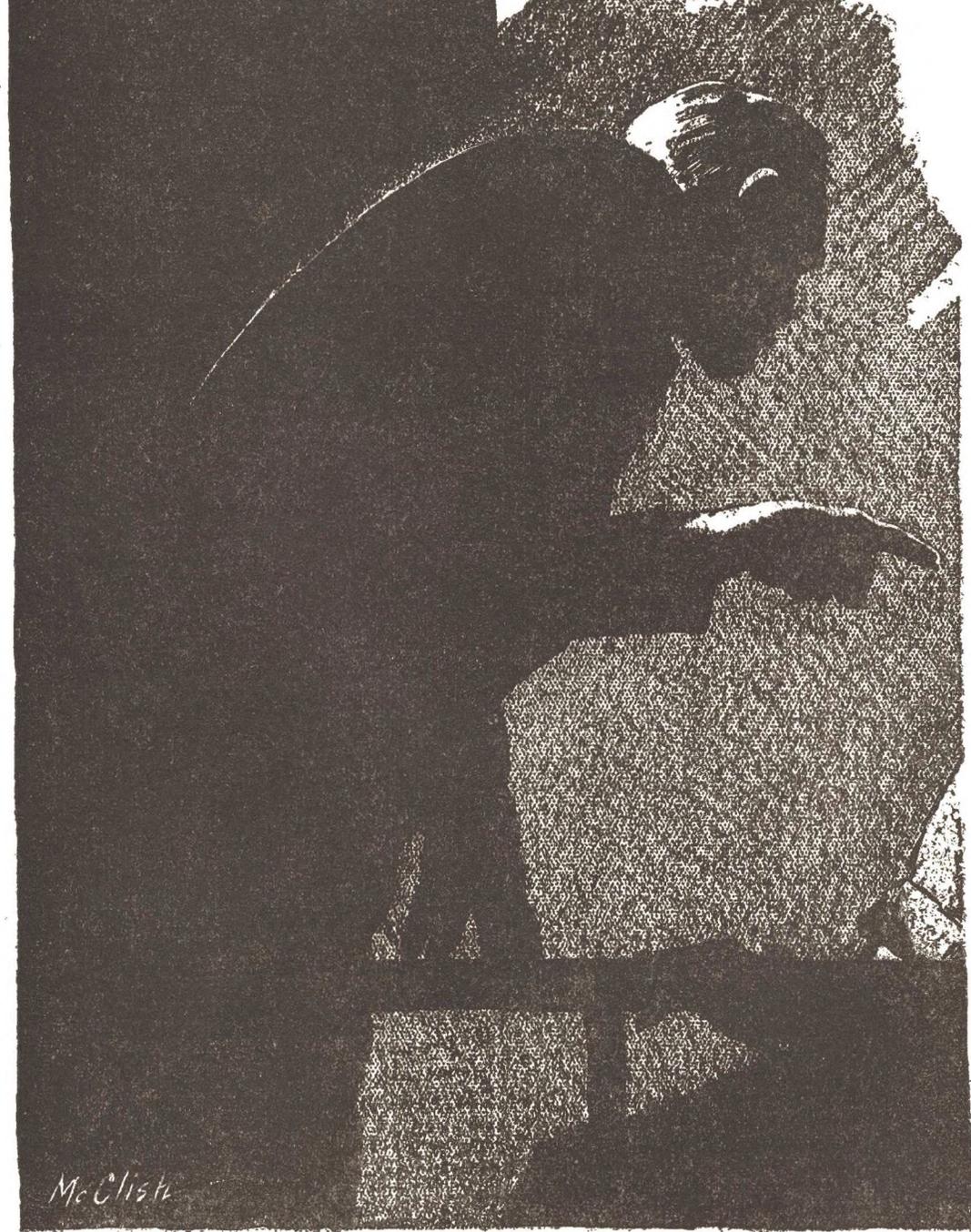
WAR WORRY

AFTER the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor, the west coast was in a constant state of unrest for fear that they too would be bombed. Everything was done as quickly as possible to reduce the dangers in case of an air raid.

Federal prison officials came in for their share of the headaches for the famous Alcatraz prison situated in San Francisco Bay was far from immune in case of attack. The Japs bombed prisons in the Philippines on the theory that prisoners on the loose would resort to looting and cause general disorders.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons doesn't want to spend a lot of money for air raid shelters or to provide the island with fortifications. Moreover it would be very dangerous to have blackouts on the island because some of the most cunning and ruthless criminals in America are kept here and their only thought is of escape. Luckily the danger of a bombing is now very remote for it would have been a very ticklish job, indeed, to move the prisoners if the prison was subjected to a bombing.

... **but the**



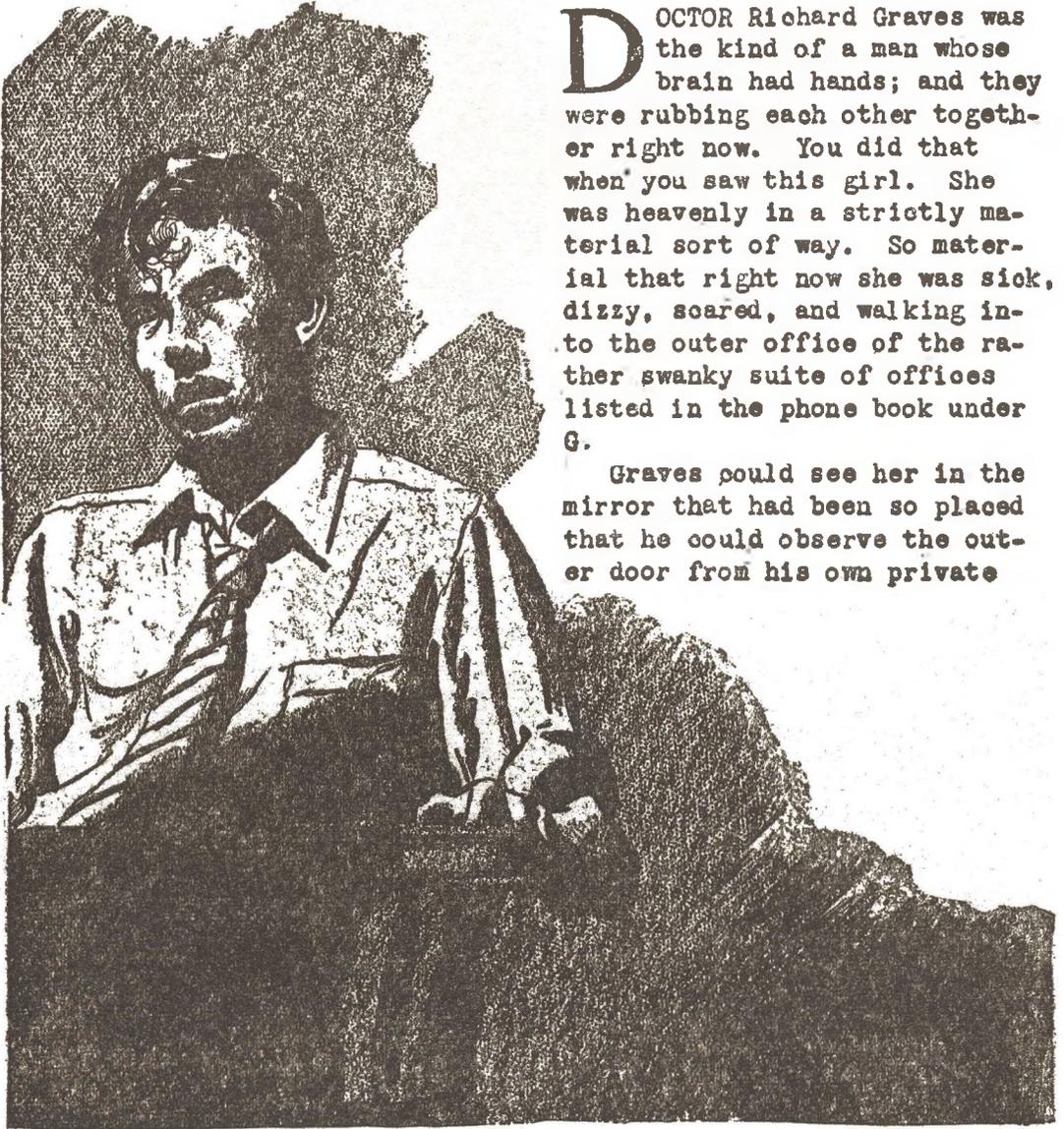
McClish

•You made just one little slip, rat! And now I've got you!•

Patient Died

By WILLIAM LAWRENCE HAMLING

What'll you have, a bullet through the head, or a seat in the electric chair?



DOCTOR Richard Graves was the kind of a man whose brain had hands; and they were rubbing each other together right now. You did that when you saw this girl. She was heavenly in a strictly material sort of way. So material that right now she was sick, dizzy, soared, and walking into the outer office of the rather swanky suite of offices listed in the phone book under G.

Graves could see her in the mirror that had been so placed that he could observe the outer door from his own private

office when his door was open. He almost broke a leg getting it out from under his desk. But he managed to reach the door just as she was putting one forefinger on the call bell.

He couldn't have timed it better, because just as he reached her, she swayed and went down—almost to the floor but not quite, because he had his arms under hers, catching her, and her thick, blonde hair was in his face, smothering him until he shifted his grip, got one arm under her knees, and carried her to the lounge in his office, kicking the door shut behind him.

The perfume of her hair was strong in his nostrils, and it was that delicate aroma that only a few women have; not the kind of perfume that comes in a bottle, but the kind Nature uses on an extra-special female creation. And it was Nature that was rubbing hands in Graves' mind...

She was in a dead faint, and he loosened the neck of her gown—which struck him suddenly as a bit odd, since it was an evening gown, wine-red in color, and made of soft satin. A satin evening gown, in mid-afternoon? And loosing a neckline that low amounted almost to dish-bille! A quick gander at her pulse—not at the wrist—in blind-man fashion convinced him that her heart action was good; so he didn't hurry with the smelling salts. Instead he stood looking down at her calculatingly, thinking of what he'd say...

It would go something like this:

"You must lie still. Just relax completely for a half-hour or so... you're a rather sick young girl. But we'll have you fixed up in no ti—"

He didn't hear the door behind him open til the man's voice said:

"Go for white meat, eh doc?"

The voice was rasping, grating, sarcastic, and somehow stiff with emotion. As though the owner had been running until he was breathless but was trying not to show it.

Graves whirled around.

"Get out of this office," he snapped. "You are intruding on a pa—"

Then he saw the gun in the man's hand and his voice choked off. He was enough of a doctor to recognize emotional unbalance when he saw it. This young man in the gray business suit had the red of murder in his eyes, and he was bursting with it. The whiteness of the knuckles of the finger on the gun trigger was even more pronounced, especially since that gun hand was being thrust right under Graves' nose now.

"She ain't going to be a patient long!" snarled the young man. "Better take a good look at all that white before I smear it up with red."

Graves backed up. His face wasn't quite as red as it had been, but he wasn't exactly a coward, so it didn't didn't get pale. But he swallowed hard as he fought to keep his voice level, unhurried, evidencing no fear.

"You'd better put that gun away before it goes off and hurts somebody," he warned. "And if you want to see me, I'll be glad to look you over if you'll just wait in the outer..."

"You wouldn't get that much thrill out of looking me over!" the man jeered. "Cut it, doc, this isn't the usual run of things. That girl's got to die, and right now. So get outa...uh...say, whyinell should I kill her now? Since she's come to you, why not let's do a professional job of it? Guns are too messy, and too loud!"

Keeping his weapon leveled on Graves' body, the young man walked over

to the drug cabinet, opened it, and examined the contents briefly. Then he selected a bottle, laid it on the cabinet ledge and picked up a hypodermic needle which he handed to Graves.

"Shoot that stuff into her," he commanded. "It'll do a nice, quick job--and almost painless."

Graves stared. "You're crazy!" he blurted.

"Wrong, doc! You're the crazy one--if you don't do as I say! Because if you don't, I'll plug you both. You give her that hypo, and I'll walk out of here. You'll still be alive, instead of a dead man, and you'll have a fifty-fifty chance that the cops will believe your story."

"You don't think I'll do such a thing?" demanded Graves incredulously. "I..."

The gun came up level with Graves' eyes and the finger whitened on the trigger. "Take your choice," said the young man tonelessly. "I will count ten, and if you aren't making any moves by then, I'll finish up this job the messy way, and get out of here. It really makes no great difference to me."

Beneath the toneless accents of the young man's voice, Graves saw the desperation that was inside the man. It was utter desperation, if he had ever seen it. Suicidal desperation. It became suddenly clear to Graves that this young man was not mad, but was faced with utter necessity to kill. Why, he could not guess. But it was certain that the thought of being caught meant nothing. If he got away, well and good. If not, well and good too.

"...four, five, six..."

The voice was continuing, evenly, tonelessly, bleakly. Graves leaped to the cabinet with a gasp, and picked up the hypodermic needle. The counting stopped.

"That's better, doc. You've got sense, at that. Sense enough to see I ain't fooling."

"You certainly aren't!" muttered Graves a bit hoarsely. He was sweating, and the tiny bottle was hard to hold tightly as he filled the hypodermic from it. Behind him there was a stir on the couch, and the girl sat up.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Where am I?"

"Heading for hell," said the young man, "right where you belong!"

She went blank white, and rose falteringly to her feet and walked toward the young man. It was as though she didn't know her body was moving. Utter shock was in her eyes. She didn't speak; her lips hung open, as though paralyzed.

The young man reached out, pushed her roughly back, and she collapsed into a chair.

"Doc's going to give you some medicine," he said. "Sit there and take it, or I'll blow your head off."

She seemed unaware of the import of his words. Just the mere fact of his presence had shocked her into a state that resembled sleep-walking. She sat in the chair, trembling, eyes staring, but saying nothing.

Graves hesitated. "Young man," he began, "don't you think you'd better think this ov..."

"Here we go, up to ten again," the young man said. "One, two, th..."

Graves licked his lips, bent over the girl, his eyes on her pale, lovely face, her golden blonde hair. He took her soft arm in his hand

glanced once at the silent young man

"...four..."

Graves pulled the girl's sleeve down from her shoulder and bared her upper arm. He made one last desperate attempt to swerve the young man's intent.

"This is murder," he said hoarsely. "You'll hang for it..."

"...five six seven eight..." the rapid words spilled out in suddenly terrifyingly, bitter anger.

Graves ducked instinctively, then, muttering a curse that was almost a prayer, he inserted the hypodermic needle under the girl's skin and slowly pushed the plunger home--all the way. The girl merely stiffened uttered a low moan, and slumped down in a second faint.

Graves removed the needle, straightened up.

"You've killed her!" he gasped.

"You've killed her!" the killer laughed. Then, without another word he backed out of the door, closed it behind him. Graves heard his rapid footsteps recede across the outer office, heard the click of the outer door latch, then a second click, and silence.

Then, as though he had been standing on a hot stove, he leaped to the phone, rapidly dialed a number. When a voice answered, he fairly bellowed into it.

"Doctor Martin! Come into my office, quick! It's a matter of life and death!" His voice was almost a sob as he slammed down the receiver. Snatching a scalpel from his tray of instruments, he knelt beside the girl, slashed quickly at the bare shoulder, and red blood spurted. A quantity of watery liquid ran down also. Then, as the door burst open to reveal the portly form of Doctor Martin, he applied a tourniquet and began squeezing the girl's arm around the incision, forcing all the blood from it that would come.

"For Jumping Jupiter's sake," gasped Martin. "What in hell are you doing to that girl?"

"Poison!" choked Graves. "Injected under the skin--managed to get most of it out. But she's near gone. Adrenalin, quick, you ass!"

For all his portliness, Doctor Martin moved with all the quick surety of a man who knew his business in an emergency, and in an instant, he was injecting adrenalin into the girl's left breast, just above the heart.

"How in blazes did you ever make such a fool mistake?" he asked, puffing with his swift motions. "My God, man, if she dies, this is murder!"

"It wasn't a mistake," said Graves, then, realizing what he had said, looked bleakly at Martin for a frozen instant, then returned to his task. Both doctors now bent their full attention to the girl, and after a furious fifteen minutes, Martin straightened up, staring at the girl's face. He rolled one eyelid back experimentatively, lifted a limp arm and felt the pulse.

"Graves. I'm afraid she's going!"

Graves' face went ashen.

"More adrenalin!" Swiftly he gave the girl a second injection, and then stood helplessly, staring down at the girl. For long, tense minutes both doctors watched, Martin clutching her limp, white wrist in his pudgy fingers. Then at last he let it drop, where it swung for a moment.

"Dead," he said with a queer dryness. He faced Graves, who slumped

down now in his desk chair. "Graves, you're in a jam. If what you said before is true, this will be a matter for the police."

Graves nodded. "It's a matter for the police all right. She was murdered, but not by any carelessness of mine. I was forced to inject that poison. I tried to save her life, and mine, by injecting it under the skin only, instead of the veins, but that stuff's too potent, and the killer knew it. All of those acids are, but that one especially..."

He stopped as he saw Martin staring at him queerly.

"What killer?" Martin asked. "What in hell are you babbling, man?"

Graves got to his feet. "A young man, mad as a hatter, with a gun, stood over me and forced me to inject that poison, under pain of death by shooting for both the girl and myself! He followed her here, intending to kill her, and then got the devilish idea of forcing me to kill her with a poisonous hypodermic. I had to do it, Martin! Don't you understand...he was completely insane. Stood by calmly while I did it, then walked out. But the girl's life was at stake, and I had no time to do more than call you for assistance. I tried to fool him but...Martin, you believe me, don't you! You must!"

Martin grunted. He turned to the door. "Come on, before we put in a call to the police, I want to check. If there was such a young man, the elevator man ought to remember him."

Graves nodded eagerly. "That's right!"

They went out into the hall, closing the door behind them. Martin led the way, and rang for the elevator. When it came, he spoke.

"Max, during the past half hour did you bring up or take down a young man who—who might have seemed a little agitated?"

"No, Doctor Martin," Max shook his head vigorously. "Ain't no young men gone up this afternoon at all! You two are the only doctors in the building this afternoon, and ain't none of you got office hours. Only passenger I had was a purty lady in a party dress. She sure seemed flustrated, though. She went to your office, Doctor Graves. Leastwise, I seen her open your door before I went on down. She's still here, ain't she?"

"Yes, she's...still here," said Graves hollowly. "Are you sure about the young man, Max? About five-feet eight, brown business suit, no hat..."

"Nope. If there was one, he used the stairs."

The two doctors went back to Graves' office. Martin indicated the phone. "You want to call the police?" he suggested. "I'd say it was a matter for the police to trace down that young fellow—if there was one."

"You don't believe me?"

"Frankly, no. Graves, your reputation with women is pretty well known, and it looks to me as if you went too far this time. Only thing I can't understand is how you'd try such a stunt, leaving so many holes open. You're explanation is so bad...it's even bad enough to be the truth, but I'm afraid the police won't be so easy to persuade."

Graves looked desperately about, and his gaze lit on the girl's bag, still lying where she had dropped it at the office door. He picked it up, opened it. In it was a prescription blank. He sucked in his breath when he saw it. There was nothing else in the bag but a handkerchief, a lipstick, and powder and rouge. Then he snapped the bag

shut and turned to Martin.

"Martin, I know what the police will say, and I know what'll happen if I give myself up. I'll be a nice handy hanging for the DA's record, which needs one with election time coming up! You can call the police, Martin, but as for me, I'm taking the only chance I can see. I'm going to find that young fellow, because it's a lead pipe cinch the police won't even try!"

He wheeled, grabbed his coat and hat, and ran. Behind him he heard Martin calling, but he ignored his fellow doctor and raced on down the stairs. As he went he could hear the phone key being jiggled up and down frantically. Martin was calling the police.

* * *

For the ninety-third time Richard Graves hung up the receive of the phone in his hotel room. He glanced out of the window in despair. It was already nearly ten-thirty in the evening, and druggists the city over would be closing for the night. There were hundreds more to go. He had gone directly to this hotel, from his office, had registered, and left instructions that he was not to be disturbed. Then he had gotten out the phone book, turned to the classified section, and had begun methodically calling every drugstore in town. In each case his question had been the same. And in each case the answers had been of three different types.

Either there was no such prescription number, or the prescription was not re-fillable, or when it was, the prescription was not the one he wanted.

He looked once more at the blank lying on the telephone stand. It was the standard blank used by all druggists to record a filled prescription, and placed on file. But this one had the prescribing doctor's name carefully torn away, and also the portion which might have held the druggist's name. Only the number given to the prescription by the druggist remained, and the prescription itself. All he had to go on was that number.

Once more he referred to the directory, drew a pencil line through a name, and called another number.

"Prescription department, please," he asked. "Oh, this is Mr. Smith I'm calling in regard to a prescription I'd like to have refilled. The number is seven-oh-oh-two-six-eight."

"One moment, please," said a tired male voice at the other end of the wire. Then he heard the receiver being put down, and silence, except for the background noises of a drugstore. He could hear the whirr of a malted milk shaker, and the high-pitched laughter of several obviously high-school age girls imbibing in their nightly coke. He drummed his fingers restlessly on the phone stand. If only these clerks wouldn't take so long looking the prescription up...

"Mr. Smith?" came the voice in his ear. "Why, yes, we have your prescription here. I can fill it right away, if you want it." The voice sounded guarded, and Graves pricked up his ears.

"How much will it cost--this time?" he asked.

There was a slight pause at the other end of the line. "Five dollars for a dozen papers."

"Five dollars! My God, man, that's..."

"Okay, if you don't want it..." the voice grew cold, harsh. The receiver slammed down, and the line went silent.

There was a grim light in Graves' eyes as he replaced the receiver.

But there was a cold smile on his face. He glanced hastily at the address of the drugstore, looked at his watch, then slammed his hat on his head and almost ran from the hotel room toward the elevator.

* * *

An hour later he tensed in the shadows across the street from the drugstore as the lights blinked out inside. He remained silent as the front door opened, and the figure of a man appeared. The man closed the door tightly, tested it, then turned toward the street. For an instant the street light fell full on his face, and Graves grunted in satisfaction.

"Got you!" he whispered.

As the young man without a hat went swiftly down the darkened street, Graves followed. For several blocks the chase went on, then the dark figure ahead entered a brownstone apartment house. Graves watched from the outside. In a moment a window sprang alight on the third floor. Graves smiled to himself. Then he went into the vestibule of the apartment and examined the listing. The lighted room would be number 301, he decided. It was the only third floor room which was not labeled with "Mr. and Mrs." The name was Robert Chadwick.

Graves climbed the stairs, making no sound on the carpeting, until he reached the third floor, then tiptoed softly to 301. He listened a moment, then knocked. There was a silence for a few seconds, then a voice said: "Who's there?"

"Mr. Smith. Please, Mr. Chadwick, I've got to have those papers. I'll pay anything to get..."

The door opened a crack and the young man's face peered forth. "You fool!" he snarled. "You ought to know enough never to come here! It would serve you right if I didn't give you any..."

The young man stopped speaking with a gasp as Graves shouldered his way into the room, clutched him by the throat, and kicked the door shut behind him.

"One sound and I'll kill you!" Graves said grimly. "This time the shoe's on the other foot!"

The young man's hand snaked for his armpit, but Graves twisted his arm away savagely, then fumbled for and found the automatic holstered there. Once he had it, he shoved the young killer back heavily into a chair.

"Where's your phone?" he asked. Then: "Never mind, I see it."

He held the gun on the young thug and lifted the receiver. "Central, connect me with the police department, please."

While he waited, he spoke to the ashen-faced killer, not so cocky now.

"Didn't have time to take a powder before I barged in, eh, Chadwick? Not quite so brave when you're not hopped up with cocaine? Well, your little racket is finished. You're going to hang for murder."

"How did you find me?" croaked Chadwick. "You must be a devil!"

"Easy, I..." The voice of a man in the receiver checked him.

"Hello, police headquarters? Will you send a man over to 960 Broad Street, apartment 301? I've got a customer for you. The man who murdered a woman in Doctor Graves' office this afternoon...what? Nuts, can't you tell the Captain? Okay, I'll wait..."

While he waited, Graves continued his explanation to Chadwick. "You made one mistake, Chadwick. You forgot the girl's purse. In it was one of your prescriptions, but unfortunately, with the name of the doc-

tor torn off--if there ever was a doctor such as your little prescription slips show! All I had to go on was a number. So it was very simple. I just called drugstores until I got one who agreed to re-fill the prescription and no questions asked. You see, only you would have agreed to that. Ordinary druggists don't re-fill narcotic prescriptions. So when you agreed, I knew I had you. I just came down and waited til you came out and followed you home."

Chadwick's face was a study in chagrin, and Graves went on:

"If there was no such prescription number listed, then I knew one more druggist was eliminated. If the number did exist, but the prescription was refused, another druggist was eliminated. If it was on the files of any druggist, and he agreed to re-fill it, a further question, such as I asked about cost, would tell me if it was another elimination or not. You see?

"Another mistake you made was in showing such ready knowledge of the contents of my cabinet. You knew instantly what acid out of a dozen would act quickest in killing. That gave away your knowledge of chemistry. You were either a doctor yourself, or a chemist, or a druggist.

"You had a perfect drime, Chadwick, and I knew it. If I had waited for the police, they'd have hung me. But I didn't wait, and here I am."

The tiny voice in the receiver came again.

"What was it you wanted?"

Graves frowned at the phone. "It's very simple, Captain," he said. "I've got the man who killed a woman in Doctor Graves' office this afternoon. I'll hold him here till you get here..."

"What is your name?"

A light burst on Graves and he grinned. "My name, Captain, is Doctor Richard Graves...and when you arrive here, you'll find that Doctor Martin was wrong; I did not murder that girl. I have the real killer here, and this time my patient won't die! That is, not until the State hangs him!"

Graves hung up and grinned at Chadwick.

"Have a coke on me," he said. "You'll need it!"

THE END

We thought it was Sinatra...

A tough assignment was given J. Edgar Hoover of the F.B.I. recently, but per his usual efficiency he cracked the case wide open.

It all started when Tom Clark, soon after becoming U.S. attorney general, placed an "employees suggestions box" outside his office door. As he left the office every evening Clark emptied the notes and took them home to read.

One night he found this typewritten and unsigned letter in the box:

"You ought not to wear bow ties. Bow ties do not give you the dignity which is attached to the office of attorney general. And if you are going to wear bow ties, do not wear such loud ones.

"Your wife should also rearrange her hair--do. It makes her look too undignified to be the wife of the attorney general."

Clark had never investigated any of the other suggestions, but he decided to call Hoover in on this one. In a few days the F.B.I. report came in. The author of the anonymous note was Clark's son!

TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCE

THE torture of truth or consequence first appeared in Egypt and Persia about 1200 B.C. and is still a favorite program for most of the radio listening audience of today. In Greece, torture was well established as a part of the judicial system. Toasting inside a brazen bull was the commonest form of torture known to the Greeks of that time. But the Roman Emperor, Caligula, enjoyed the screams of suffering victims. So exquisite was his taste that he delighted to see thorny rose stems inserted into the tenderest parts of the human body, then suddenly jerked out. Nero's pleasure was to have Christians soaked in oil, then lighted to provide illumination for his orgies.

For a thousand years, torture was universal and commonplace in Europe. Youth, weak old age, delicate females—no one was spared. The basic assumption in judicial procedure for so many centuries was: hurt a man enough and he'll tell you the truth.

Today when a criminal is clapped behind the bars, his captors are prevented from the use of torture. The extra legal ordeal known as the "third degree" is employed as a matter of course in most states, and has become a recognized step in the due process of law.

If a prisoner won't give out with a story he is given the "cold turkey" treatment, which consists of submerging him in an icy bathtub till he is nearly drowned. Another withholds drinking water from the victim, while a cold-water tap is kept running in the room. Prisoners are de-

prived of food and bedding and are prevented from sleeping until a declaration of guilt is wrung from their lips.

A number of devices have recently been developed which are practical and humane but as yet not in general use. They are destined to supplant the barbarous torments of the third degree.

The most dramatic and satisfactory of these instruments is the commonly known lie-detector, which infallibly reveals innocence as well as guilt.

A simple effective method of getting a confession with no instrument but a stop-watch is the word association test. This test does not actually reveal a lie; instead it shows a consciousness of guilt.

Using the method of the "mirror confession chamber" which is a psychology of color test, which tends to reflect a ghastly complexion, a hue of guilt upon the victim's face. This chamber has been successful with neurotic and ignorant prisoners.

For certain hard-boiled suspects the truth serum is employed which gets the whole story and gets it straight. This drug is not widely used since it must be administered by a physician skilled in its use, death may easily occur. Since there is a pitiful shortage of first-class medically trained criminologists in the United States the use of this drug is severely handicapped.

Lastly, judges and juries not familiar with the solid bases on which science is founding the new criminology, shake their heads and say that such evidence is taboo.—*Pete Bogg.*

"THIS IS SUICIDE!" -- Or Is It?
(See back cover)

The six clues indicating that the hanging woman was the victim of murder instead of suicide follow:

1. The fibers of that part of the rope crossing the beam are flattened in an upward direction, showing the body was pulled into that position by the murderer.

2. The woman is left-handed, as shown by the fact that her wristwatch is worn on her right arm.

3. Yet the rope knot is under her left ear, instead of the right ear, where it would be had she tied the knot herself.

4. There are traces of mud on her shoes, but the surface of the stool is clean, showing she did not stand on the stool.

5. Obviously the stool itself is not high enough, when set upright, to reach to the woman's feet.

6. The disarrayed condition of the woman's clothing is evidence of struggle with her slayer.

THE DE AUTREMONT CASE

By Alexander Blade

ONE of the greatest manhunts in American history took place after the events of a night in October, 1923. That night a Southern Pacific train came slowly up a grade through the Oregon mountains, when two young men leaped suddenly aboard the engine.

Already aboard were Sid Bates, the engineer; and Marvin Song, the fireman. In the mail car was the clerk, E. E. Dougherty.

When Bates turned, he was staring into two gun barrels. He obeyed an order to stop the train outside a tunnel where a third bandit waited.

Dougherty, aroused by the stop, came to the mail car's open door and a shot ripped by his head. He ducked back, slammed the door and locked it. Prepared for this, the bandits set dynamite under the car and blasted it to wreckage, mangling the clerk beyond recognition.

The bandits decided to uncouple the car and pull it out of the tunnel. The third outlaw squeezed between the cars and uncoupled them and an order was given to start the engine. But the mail car had been derailed and would not move.

The plan had miscarried and part of the loot had to be abandoned. They paused only long enough to kill both engineer and fireman, then disappeared into the forest.

Sheriffs, police officers, postoffice inspectors, the federal government joined in an effort to catch the killers. A search of the forest located their abandoned hideout. They had burned every clue except one—a pair of overalls containing a receipt issued to one Hugh De Autremont who lived nearby. But Hugh and his twin brothers, Ray and Roy, had disappeared.

A world-wide hunt began. In addition to the local and federal men on the case, the railroad hired private detectives. Descriptions and photographs on "Wanted" circulars were circulated over the entire globe, printed in six languages. Fifteen thousand dollars in rewards were offered.

After nearly four years, a U.S. Soldier in the Philippines noticed a similarity between a man on the "Wanted" poster and a soldier known as James C. Price. Price was arrested and questioned. He proved to be Hugh De Autremont, but he would say nothing about his brothers' whereabouts.

Finally, in June, 1927, a woman gave the police of Columbus, Ohio, a vague tale and was referred to a government investigator. She reported a Portsmouth man had seen two men resembling brothers near Portsmouth, Ohio.

The investigator learned the name of the man mentioned and went to Portsmouth to see him.

The man explained that he had read a newspaper article about the Oregon murders and had worked with two men who resembled the De Autremont twins. They were known as Elmer and Clarence Goodwin. One was dark, as the De Autremonts were reputed to be, but the other was blond.

The investigator went to places where the Goodwins had worked in Portsmouth. Records listed the pair as being of different ages and heights, and their birthplace was shown as Mensa, Arkansas. The De Autremont twins were known to have been born in Williamsburg, Iowa.

But unconsciously the De Autremonts had given themselves away, for their older brother, Hugh, had been born in Mensa!

A doctor who had examined the two Goodwins remembered taking their height measurements and had discovered both were the same. Evidently one of them wore lifts in his shoes to appear taller. Also, it was learned the Goodwins had been employed to wreck an old furnace and were familiar with explosives.

In order to dispel the suspicions of "Elmer Goodwin," the agent obtained a job as farm hand nearby where Goodwin was living with his wife and son. The agent had been raised on a farm and knew how to act the part. This gave him the chance to observe the blond Goodwin, and he was soon convinced the man had bleached his hair and eyebrows.

Both Ray and Roy worked at a steel mill in Steuben, Ohio. With the help of local police, the agent arranged to arrest the two men when they reported for work on a certain evening.

But on that particular evening the twins did not report for work together. Roy showed up an hour early and was arrested, but it was imperative that his brother be captured before he sensed trouble.

A ruse was decided upon. Impersonating a street railway claim agent, the investigator went to Ray's home and informed him that Ray had been injured in a streetcar accident. He stressed that Ray should be present at the doctor's office so that there would be no difference of opinion about the injuries in case of a lawsuit. This caught Ray completely off guard and he rushed out of the house on his way to the doctor's office. Instead, he ran squarely into the arms of a swarm of heavily armed detectives.

Upon examination at police headquarters body scars further identified the two men as the long sought criminals, and all three brothers were sentenced to life imprisonment in the Oregon State Penitentiary.

FINGERPRINTS IN THE DUST

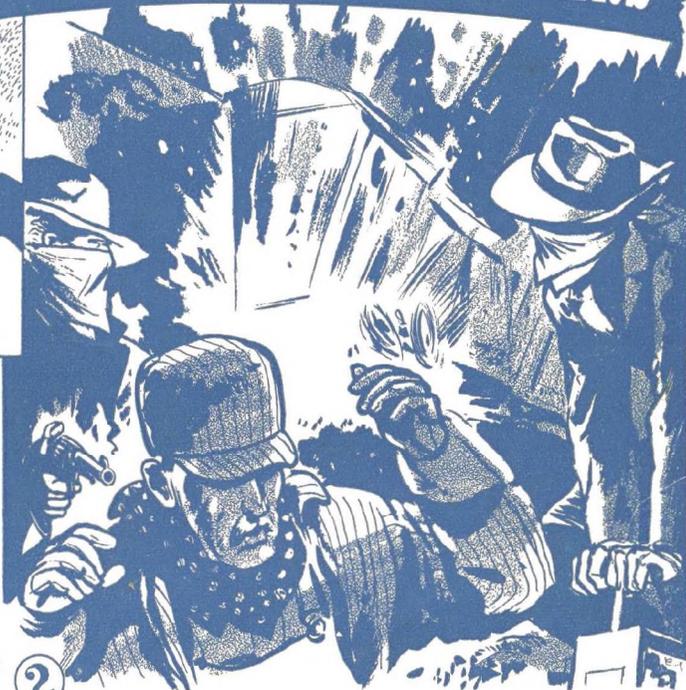
WHAT criminologists consider the most recent development in the realm of identification was recognized by ancient peoples thousands of years ago. They were aware of the fact that no two fingerprints are alike and valued the difference in whorl and ridge patterns. On the face of a cliff in Nova Scotia, for instance, can be found an Indian carving of the outline of a hand, with ridges and patterns crudely but clearly

marked. The Chinese of ancient times also had a custom whereby, on papers of state, there was an impression of the thumb print. As early as 1823, J. E. Purkinje, a professor of anatomy at the University of Breslau, read a Latin thesis, commenting upon the diversity of ridge patterns connected with the organs of touch and even evolving a vague differentiation of these patterns into nine varieties.

FAMOUS AMERICAN MURDERS

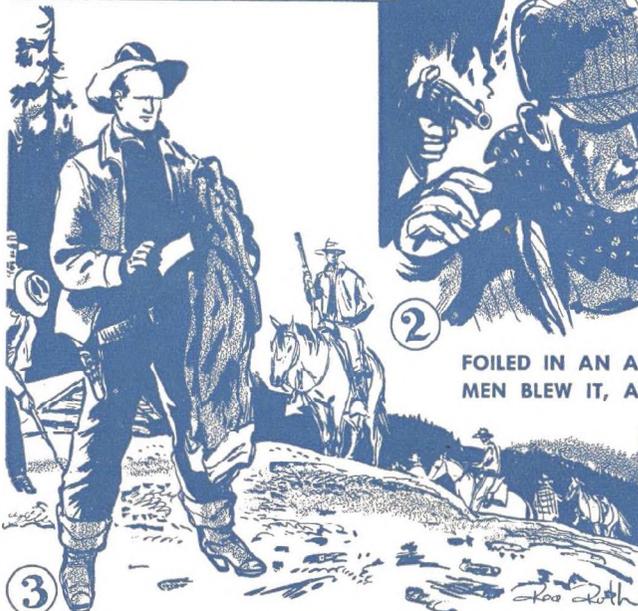
1

ON AN OCTOBER NIGHT IN 1923, THREE MEN HELD UP A SOUTHERN PACIFIC MAIL TRAIN IN OREGON



2

FOILED IN AN ATTEMPT TO ENTER THE MAIL CAR, THE MEN BLEW IT, AND A CLERK, TO BITS WITH DYNAMITE



3

THE FIRST IMPORTANT CLUE TURNED UP WHEN AN AGENT AT THE SCENE FOUND A DISCARDED PAIR OF OVERALLS



4

A SOLDIER AT A U.S. ARMY POST IN THE PHILIPPINES, FOUR YEARS LATER, CAME ACROSS A VITAL CLUE



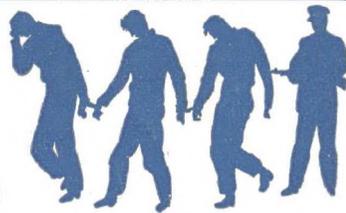
5

ON A TIP, A GOVERNMENT MAN, POSING AS A FARMER, LEARNED THE ROBBERS WERE BROTHERS NAMED DEAUTREMONT



6

FOUND GUILTY OF MURDER, THE THREE BROTHERS RECEIVED LIFE SENTENCES IN THE OREGON STATE PENITENTIARY



THE DEAUTREMONT CASE

**"THIS IS
SUICIDE!"**
- or is it?



When Homicide Lieutenant Slade arrived at the scene he found that Patrolman Moore had managed to "solve" the case.

"It's suicide," Moore said. "At first I thought the beam edge would have cut

the rope. But it's too dull."

"Very good, Sherlock!" Slade said, smiling. "Except that there are six different points to prove it's murder." (For complete details see page 177.)