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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY

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MIKE SHAYNE'S

Finest Hour

When we first met Mike Shayne we were younger than we are now by quite a few years—we refuse to tell you how many—and we didn't know exactly how far he would go, and whether his clients would keep his Miami office humming with the kind of activity a private-eye thrives on. All writers—or most of them, anyway—feel that way when they meet the big, take-over character in all of their books for the first time and are a little awed when he starts talking. But we went right ahead and placed our bets on Mike and—well, quite frankly, we seem to have picked a winner.

Not only has the redhead's Miami office drawn clients from all walks of life in just the way we'd hoped for . . . his popularity has spread to twenty-five million readers in all book editions. And now, in an hour-long show on NBC Television, starring Richard Denning as the one perfect Mike Shayne, the redhead has soared to a new peak of nation-wide popularity.

We feel both gratified and proud . . . and very humble. For we feel somehow that it is Mike himself who deserves most of the credit and that our role has been more or less that of a Boswell.

In this issue of MSMM, as so often in the past, the redhead keeps us, Boswell-wise, very busy. THE TOASTED CORPSE takes him out of Miami to nearby Nausau, where he tangles, with his usual forthright independence, with the stubborn blind spots of British justice. And there's writing of an unusual calibre in the exceptionally brilliant suspense novelet by Paul Daniels, who gave us the memorable THE IVORY TOWER. It's called THE DARK ROAD HOME, and we've seldom read a more imaginative crime story.

Brett Halliday

MIKE SHAYNE
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY, 1961 Vol. 8, No. 3

COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET

THE TOASTED CORPSE
by BRETT HALLIDAY

Shayne had never been called upon to unravel quite so sensational a murder mystery under Caribbean skies. A Shayne novelet with all of the exciting sweep of a fast-paced novel.

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 8, No. 3. Published monthly by RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC., 501 Fifth Avenue, N. Y. 17. Subscriptions, 12 issues $4.00; 24 issues $7.50; single copies 35¢. Second-class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster—return 3579 to 501 Fifth Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

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A NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET

It wasn't the Redhead's first danger-in-triplicate murder case under Caribbean skies. But Shayne knew if he didn't watch his step . . . it could be his last!

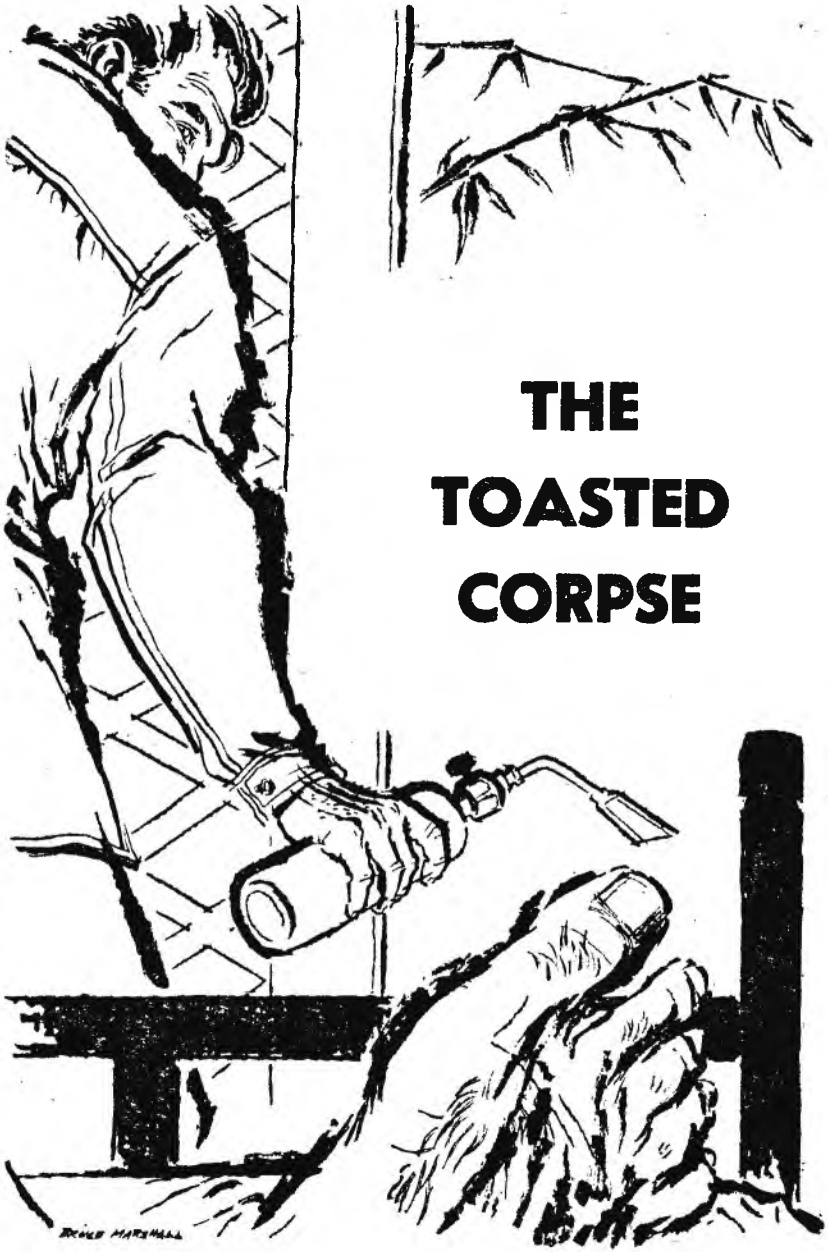
by BRETT HALLIDAY

THE OVERSEAS CALLS from Nassau, British West Indies, came through one, two, three—*bang*—stacked up like pancakes on this suffocating July afternoon.

The first voice was clipped, arrogant, very English public school. "Michael Shayne? You'll only make a fool of yourself and make things harder for Count de Nieully if you come over. If you're smart, you'll drop the Wyndham investigation."

The connection clicked. There was a man who knew what he wanted to say and said it. There was nothing to be gained by trying to trace back that kind of a call.

The next call was a voice speaking with the very precise English of a man not raised with the language. It was a blunt warning to keep away



THE TOASTED CORPSE

from the case if the Miami detective valued his health.

The third call was from a hard breather, talking through a handkerchief, the speech thick and blurred. There was no mention of Wyndham, but the speaker offered the bribe of a preposterous fee if Michael Shayne would leave for Ceylon immediately to track down some mythical commercial data.

Shayne's decorative secretary, Lucy Hamilton, stood belligerently in the doorway after the third call and declared, "See? That's no murder trial over there—it's a lynching bee! Michael, you've got to take this case on."

The redheaded detective lounged back in his spring chair and tugged at the lobe of his left ear. He regarded his pert secretary quizzically. For three weeks, she had been growing more and more incensed at Tim Rourke's reports on the trial as published in the *Miami News* until she had made it her personal *cause celebre*.

"Apparently," Shayne told her, "I'm already in the deal."

It was an hour before the fourth call came. This was from the Countess de Nieully, only child of Sir Herbert Wyndham, the victim, and the wife of the young count on trial for the murder. She made an urgent plea for Mike Shayne's help, using Tim Rourke's recommendation. All she asked was for Shayne to unearth some evidence that would aid the getting of a fair trial.

Shayne accepted the deal on condition that whatever he dug up would be available to the prosecution. The countess agreed reluctantly—the reluctance clearly evident in her voice.

Thus Mike Shayne was at Miami's bustling International Airport just after dawn. Flying eastward into the new day, he chuckled most of the way over Lucy's parting advice—"You just be careful they don't end up making you a party to the murder!"

There was a good deal of shrewdness in her thrust, for the trial was turning out quite as bizarre as the murder itself. As Tim Rourke had written yesterday, "This trial sets a precedent in British jurisprudence. A man is being tried without any incriminating evidence, and is being compelled to prove his innocence in order to disprove a guilt which has not been established."

"And with at least three outsiders wanting the count to hold the bag, it seems!" Shayne added to himself.

The noiseless jet winged over on the tight, downward spiral of island landings. The Bahamas, Jewels of the Atlantic, were strewn on the azure sea beneath. As the neat, sunkissed town of Nassau floated up to meet them, Shayne thought he might altogether enjoy this case.

Forty minutes later, he had radically reversed that cheery hope. He still cooled his heels and warmed his neck at the 'S' sector of Customs while a ferret-nosed inspector dawdled over obvious pretexts for delay. In the very middle of one item, the inspector glanced at the clock, and with no further flicker of interest in Shayne's belongings, replaced them in his suitcase.

"Looks like you're all cleared," he said with a chuckle in his bright blue eyes. "Hope you enjoy your visit, Mr. Shayne."

The detective contained his hot answer and headed for the lobby. Shouldering the door, he glanced back. The inspector had left his station to use a government phone on a post behind him. It was just time, the redhead noted, for the government offices to be opening.

"So," Shayne frowned to himself, "I was not to be passed through until some official brass had his morning tea and toast and could be duly notified!" There could be no doubt at all that he had tangled at the start with a rather startling official attitude.

As he strode through the door, a cool English voice came at him, "Michael Shayne?"

Still bad tempered, the Miami redhead glared into a pair of amazingly blue eyes set in the tanned face of a character right out of Beau Geste. Tall, sinewy, athletic, aristocratic. The man stood a good six feet four and looked like a Scot. He wore tan Bermuda shorts and open shirt, but made his concession to British formality with a white crash linen jacket.

The redhead nodded his identification. The tall man took a briar pipe from his mouth and fell into easy step beside Shayne. "Gave you the official treatment, I see," he commented. "That will give you an idea of what you're up against."

Shayne stopped and put down his suitcase, reached for a cigarette. "You're my caller from yesterday who warned me off the Wyndham case?"

"Advised," the man corrected smoothly. "Name's Anthony Crispin." He looked at Shayne shrewdly. "Apparently, somebody did warn you?"

Shayne cursed his Irish temper for his slip and let the question go unanswered. He frowned and lit a cigarette, tossing the match casually aside. "To what am I indebted for this welcome?" he asked.

Crispin knocked the dottle out of his pipe on the heel of his hand. He blew it and fresh-loaded it from a pouch bearing regimental stripes. "You still have time to take the advice," he said. "Margot was an idiot to call you in. It is going to make things much harder for Raoul."

"How much harder can they be

than a rigged trial?" Shayne grunted.

"The fat's in the fire now," Crispin said. "But the jury can still report a *null prosse* or not guilty."

"You think they're liable to, with the star chamber circus of the prosecution?" Shayne demanded.

"*Ah*—that has to be the unavoidable risk," Crispin murmured. "But if you get to stirring around, you may unearth some very lively skeletons. And every leading family in the islands will be putting on pressure to get Raoul convicted before you have the chance."

"To keep their own skirts clean?"

"Skirts," Crispin smiled with cool, sardonic humor, "is a very apt word! In spite of his age, Sir Herbert was a notably successful old lecher. At best, Island society is pretty much a bucket of eels. Nobody wants the bucket kicked over for public inspection."

"Including you?" Shayne demanded.

"Very much including me," Crispin nodded. "Although there is no slightest chance that I might become a suspect. At the time of the crime, I was in the hospital in traction from an accident water skiing."

"Then why your significant interest?" Shayne inquired.

For the barest instant, danger shot through Crispin's sky blue eyes like tracer bullets. Then he said, fully at ease, "Shayne, under the proper circumstances, there is a little homicide in all of us. I'd not like mine to be tested."

Shayne picked up his bag. He said with droll mockery, "I will be sorry if I have to conjure up the devil in you, Crispin! But if it eases your mind, I'm not interested in any skeletons except Sir Herbert Wyndham's."

He let his hard gaze rest on the tall man for a moment, then moved on toward the telephone booths. He set his bag down to fish for change. He was vaguely conscious of the peculiar sound —a hissing *thwaaaak*—for several seconds before he realized that the sound had come from his bag.

Before he looked, he knew what he sought. And it was there —a small round hole, as black as an ink blot. It had put a period after the 'S' of a Savannah hotel sticker.

'S' also stood for Shayne.

His eyes leaped over the crowd to find something suspicious. Nobody was running, nobody was watching him, in fact, nobody was even *not* watching him particularly.

Crispin had stopped at the end of a waiting bench to fish for a light. He brought a jet lighter from his pocket and applied the flame, tamping the fire down with the butt of the lighter and draw-

ing deeply of the smoke. Not until then did he glance back toward Shayne. His glance might have held a trace of derision.

Shayne watched him head onward for the lobby doors. His jacket pockets were bulky, but Englishmen had a way of stuffing their side pockets. It was impossible to judge whether Crispin carried anything as heavy as a small silenced pistol.

Shayne turned his inspection back to his suitcase, looking for the line of fire that might trace the bedded bullet. The shot had not penetrated the far side of the bag. So, it must have come from a zip-gun or an airgun, and its non-lethal purpose must have been to hit precisely where it had hit. It was impressive warning of somebody's expert marksmanship.

The redhead gave the marksman his rueful respect and stepped on into the phone booth to raise Tim Rourke out of bed. Making arrangements to meet at the Nassau Hotel, he went on to the carports. No airline limousine was ready for town, so he signalled over a private taxi.

In the nearby alighting zone, a handsome, hard-eyed Latin lounged in a blue Ferrari as if waiting for the return of some friend. He was smoking a thick cigarette of dark yellow paper. He met Shayne's glance with unyielding curiosity, expelling a long jet of thick blue smoke.

A mile down the road, Shayne leaned to catch the reflection in the taxi driver's mirror, and saw the blue Ferrari following—without a passenger.

"Good!" he growled. "They're going to bring it to me on a platter!"

Tim Rourke was waiting in the Nassau lobby. Shayne wigwagged, checked in, and told the bellboy to take up cognac and straight rye, and to bring the key to him in the men's bar. Then the two Americans moved into the long dim room for an eyeopener.

Tim tapped a photo envelope he carried and said significantly, "I'll show you these upstairs."

The barkeep nodded to Tim

and said to the detective, "Do I understand yours is always cognac, Mr. Shayne?"

"It used to be—but it's bourbon now." He looked at Tim curiously as the bartender moved off to get their drinks. Tim said, "News that you might enter the case was considered important enough to put on the local radio last night. Likewise, a description of you. With that bricktop of yours, you are not exactly hard to spot!"

"Who supplies the news for these local broadcasts?"

"A little of everybody. But the grapevine was buzzing about you by three o'clock yesterday afternoon."

Shayne frowned. "That's before I even talked with the countess."

Tim lifted his shoulders and let them fall. "The sands have ears when it comes to this case! There isn't anybody in the Bahamas who hasn't a personal angle in it. This bartender, for instance, made some very handsome tips from Sir Herbert Wyndham, keeping him informed of visitors who might be here on various business and political deals. If the information came out, he'd lose his job."

II

THE BELLBOY CAME with Shayne's key, and he and Rourke retired to the privacy of his suite. The rooms were spacious, cooled by old-fashioned ceiling fans and double doors opening on a balcony. It was a pleasant relief from Miami's ultra-modern, sealed-in, sardine cans with their too chill air conditioning.

Shayne unpacked while Rourke mixed drinks. He found the pellet from the shot, a .25 caliber slug sticking to the hard rubber sole of a sport shoe.

He tossed it slowly in his hand as he asked, "Know a hard and handsome Latin who drives a blue Ferrari?"

"Sounds like Luis Valencia. He's a freelance mystery man in Latin politics and arms running. Probably had some deals with Sir Herbert. They were friends."

"Unh. And Anthony Crispin?"

Tim shot him a grin. "Nassau's glamor boy? Third son of a viscount, top athlete, war ace, loaded with medals, and no money. Plays squire to a wealthy young widow, Alma Wollner, who runs with Margot de Nieully—the countess—and who rather adopted Margot's mother for her own. Alma was raised an orphan, so the relationship is quite understandable. Alma is very loyal to the Wyndhams."

Shayne pulled at his ear with one hand and jounced the pellet with the other as he sifted the potentials of these facts. Rourke went on, briefing him in various unpublished aspects of the case.

Shayne turned suddenly toward the door, giving Tim a signal to go on talking. In the same instantaneous movement, he turned the doorknob and threw open the door.

A man stood there, obviously listening. With no slightest embarrassment, he nodded stiffly and moved past Shayne into the room.

He was built square, very fit for his hoary years, with a seamed, dark burned face, iron grey hair and mustaches. He had the same grey in his eyes, and, Shayne suspected, in his veins.

The reporter broke off his talk to exclaim, "Well, Mr. Dennis of the Colony office! Do you know Mike Shayne?"

"I know about him," Dennis said dryly. He looked the redhead over, etching every detail into his memory.

"Shayne," he said without preamble. "I hope that you understand that you are visiting our shores strictly in the capacity of a private United States citizen."

"Which means?" Shayne asked.

"You will be extended no cooperation nor privileges for investigation here. You will not be permitted to trespass nor invade the privacy of any citizen of the Bahamas. Under no circumstance, will you be permitted to carry or use firearms. Any complaint will force us to regard you as an undesirable citizen and to deport you accordingly."

Shayne shaded grey with restrained anger. "What calls for this?"

"We feel our own police and private investigators quite competent," Dennis stated. "And we do not intend to encourage a foreigner's meddling."

His gaze came hard, drill and official. "Have I made myself clear?"

"You have made the case much clearer!" the redhead breathed with anger.

Dennis nodded and turned back to the door. He paused with the door half open to add, "One thing which might save you some embarrassment—the de Nieully property is impounded by the crown until the termination of his trial. The company of the countess would not alter your status should we find you trespassing."

"You ought to be glad for a little help unearthing some real evidence!" Shayne reminded him.

"We have quite enough evidence," Dennis stated. "Nothing that you might turn up would affect the trial, nor the outcome, in the slightest."

Then he was gone.

Shayne stared with disbelief at Rourke. Tim said somberly, "That just about limits you to the clubs and pubs and the Wyndham estate."

"I wonder what they'd say if I came up with the murder weapons?" the redhead rasped.

"Unless they bore the incontestable finger prints of de Nieully, they would probably say they were counterfeit, and charge you with attempting to impede justice," Tim laughed. "My friend, nobody else *can* be guilty as the crown sees it!"

He held out Shayne's drink with a grim smile. "You look like you might need this."

Shayne swept the drink into his hand and downed half of it at one toss. It was simply incredible to him that a case could be handled in this arbitrary manner in any British court. Finally, he forced himself to stretch out on a cool wicker chaiselounge to ask about de Nieully.

"An odd duck," Tim said. "Likeable, but rather colorless. Easygoing, playboy type, but has some business ability. The crown prosecutor branded him a fortune hunter and claimed that he was estranged from his wife. But he's a real count, has sufficient money of his own, and his wife came rushing back from Maine to defend him the minute she heard the tragic news about her father."

"What was the family trouble a few months after their marriage?" Shayne asked.

"She was taken exceeding ill, necessitating a legal abortion. Her father, Sir Herbert, blew his top and blamed the count. Sir Herbert could be pretty crude when he was mad. He came out of the row breathing fire and swearing he'd see that his daughter got a divorce.

"His daughter refused, and Sir Herbert really flipped. Warned the count never to set foot on Wyndham lands again, and instructed armed guards to shoot him like a dog if he did. Changed his will so that the count could never benefit by a cent of his wife's inheritance. Even tried to get the count black-balled out of the yacht club."

"I suppose that could make the count hate him pretty thoroughly," Shayne considered. "But it doesn't paint a very likely background for a quiet bedroom chat at two or three a.m."

"The quietness of the murder has bothered me all through the case," Tim grunted. "The women of the family were vacationing in Maine, as you know. The Wyndham servants do not sleep in the main house. But there was a reliable houseguest that night, sleeping in the room that adjoined Sir Herbert's. No sound was raised loud enough to disturb him, yet both men were quite sober when they retired, anticipating an early rise and breakfast."

"What stands against the count?" Shayne asked.

"Hate. The fact that he knew the habits of the estate, and the layout of the house intimately."

"And what is in his favor?"

"Well, for one thing, Sir Herbert's well-known temper. In

spite of his age, he was still built like a bull, and of a pugnacious disposition. The count is slight of build, and anything but aggressive. It seems a reasonable presumption that the count would hesitate to enter Sir Herbert's room at that time of night without a gun, and that if he'd been armed with a gun, that is the weapon he would have used.

"Even if Sir Herbert was sound asleep, which seems doubtful, killing him with some instrument such as a hammer was damned risky for the assassin. If the first blow had failed, Sir Herbert would have bounced up roaring like a lion."

"I'll buy that," Shayne agreed. "The use of a striking weapon—not even a knife, and with no attendent scuffle—suggests a man with considerable experience in sandbagging. They never identified what the weapon might have been, did they?"

"No. It left half-inch, V-shaped marks. The blows were heavy, but that's all they know. There was absolutely no sign of struggle. Yet Sir Herbert had been burned lightly on his face and lower stomach with a blowtorch both before and after death. Neither the murder weapon nor the blowtorch have been located."

Shayne swirled his remaining cognac. He already knew that the count had been found to have slight burns on his forearm and mustache, such as might have been acquired from a blowtorch. But a houseguest of the count's had testified that the count got the burns while lighting hurricane lamps previous to a dinner party at his home the night of the murder.

"What do the islanders think about that blowtorch angle?" Shayne inquired.

Rourke gave a grunting breath. "What they think and what they're

saying are two different things! Leaving the count out of it for the moment, the use of the blowtorch, as it was used, suggests the brooding vengeance of some husband or lover whose lady fair was stolen for a night or two by Sir Herbert in the past.

"But of course, anybody who says that openly is indirectly aiding the count's defense. And the sad fact is that even friends of the count's who sincerely believe in his innocence would rather see him hold the bag than to see a wide open investigation that might toss up some of their own dirt. So there isn't much talk."

"What do you think about Count Raoul's innocence?" Shayne asked, so quietly and casually that Rourke was half into his answer before it struck him that he was pinpointed.

"I don't know," Tim confessed. "Financially, he lost from Sir Herbert's death. As long as Sir Herbert lived, Margot had a sizeable allowance she could spend as she wished, and a good deal of it was doubtless spent on the de Nieully household. Also, there was always the possibility that she could eventually soften her father toward the count. With Sir Herbert dead, Margot's inheritance is strictly accountable, and the count is firmly excluded.

"Outwardly, Count Raoul is not the killer type. And he has an established alibi for most of his evening. He gave a small dinner party, he was in excellent humor and did not get tipsy. At midnight, he took two young matrons home, returning at twelve thirty for a nightcap with his houseguest and his girl.

"At two o'clock, the houseguest's cat disturbed the count. He brought it to the guest, asking him to lock the damned thing up, or put it out. The guest laughed and decided it was time to take his girl home anyway, and he was back by two-thirty. Count Raoul's car was just where it had been when the guest left, and the lights in his room were out.

"Even the prosecution could not figure any period longer than ten minutes that the count might have had free to get to Wyndham and commit the murder. And it is five miles from his house to Wyndham's.

"But the coroner could not pin Sir Herbert's death any closer than sometime between two and five A.M. Now with luck, the count could have sneaked out of his house and done the job and gotten back in without observation or wakening his houseguest."

"Still, you don't really think he did it," Shayne challenged.

"No, I don't," Tim conceded. "But he could have done it. On the other hand, there are at least twenty people in the Bahamas with even greater motive. Sir Herbert was a pretty ruthless duck—

in business, in romance, or in politics."

"I think that torch angle is the real key," Shayne murmured, pulling his ear harder than usual. "It doesn't fit right. If you bother taking a blowtorch to a man's bedroom at two A.M. presumably you intend to use it on him. And if you do—both before and after death—you don't bother to do it lightly."

"Maybe the killer got squeamish," Tim suggested.

"And so used the torch a second time?" Shayne remarked with a skeptical frown.

Rourke poured them fresh drinks and handed Shayne the photo envelope. The bulk of the pix were police pictures taken at the scene of the murder the next morning. They showed Sir Herbert lying in a relaxed position, half atop his covers, his face turned to the right. His right arm was outstretched with the hand open, palm up, as if he might have just laid his cigar in the ashtray on the night table.

Part of his pajamas were burned. Some of the bedding about him was charred and the rug still smoldered from where ignited bedding had fallen onto it. Otherwise, there was no indication that the gruesome incident had taken place. Even under the burn of the blowtorch, Sir Herbert's face was not contorted.

"The nightlight on his table was still burning in the morning," Tim said. "No other lights were going in the house."

The redhead nodded and looked into a smaller envelope enclosed. It contained two glossy prints of fingerprints, and two negatives.

"The count's?" Shayne questioned.

Tim nodded. "What do you make of them?"

"This takes expert analysis," Shayne said. "But my bet would be that the prints have been superimposed. The fingerprints are too clear for a rough surface. They must have been made on glass. But that's some kind of wood under them in these glossies."

Rourke laughed outright. "I wondered if you'd come up with that! Those prints were delivered to the prosecution for use in the trial next week. Never mind how I got 'em. The photos were made by two experts from the States—two identification experts of your old friend from Miami Beach—Chief Paul Pointer."

Shayne barked a breath and stared hard at Rourke to see if he was joking. The Miami Beach Police chief had once tried to frame Mike Shayne on a murder charge, and except for the help of Chief Will Gentry of Miami proper, Shayne would probably be behind bars right now.

"I don't think the prosecutor is aware they might be phonies,"

Tim went on. "And he'll probably be sure not to become so. But it is a strange coincidence that the Miami Beach boys somehow shanghaied Count Raoul away from his lawyer before they supposedly found those prints and got him to handle a glass pitcher and to pour a glass of water."

"They were supposedly found on the scene of the crime?" the detective queried.

"Right where the local police had looked as if they were looking for a hidden hydrogen bomb and found nothing. Purportedly, they were on a big hand carved wooden screen that Sir Herbert sometimes used to cut the draft onto his bed."

"And of course, the screen could explain the count's unsuspected presence," Shayne growled. "It could be implied he entered the room while Sir Herbert was washing and hid behind the screen."

"Exactly," Tim agreed. "And with feelings the way they are, I rather imagine that evidence will send him to the gallows. That only gives you the weekend to work in, Mike."

Shayne's face set, but breakfast came, and no worry interfered with his hunger. While he ate, he studied one of the death scene pix propped up in front of him. He couldn't get the feeling out of his head that Sir Herbert had been killed during the interim of a conversation—that the killer had sat on the left side of the multimillionaire's bed, and tapped him when Sir Herbert turned to the night table to lay down his cigar.

But that still left the torch part of the affair to be explained.

Shayne finished his breakfast, sealed the second envelope containing the fingerprints, and put in a call to Lucy Hamilton at Miami. She was already at the office and greeted him cheerily, "Haven't they found you guilty yet?"

"Don't think it couldn't happen!" he told her. "With this operation, they'd claim I used a time machine." Then he said, "Lucy, we have a friend in Atlanta, a War Two intelligence, print expert."

"The colonel," she said promptly. "He doesn't like being disturbed after eight P.M. or on weekends."

"That's why you're going to Atlanta with bells on—and the less otherwise, the better! I'm sending over some pix on the next plane. Meet them. You take them up and make that old fussduddy examine them under every light he's got, and come up with an opinion of what they are."

"Suppose he wants to examine me under those black lights?" she asked.

"Not on payroll time," Shayne chuckled.

Still grinning, he hung up.

III

TIM ROURKE DROVE the redhead out to the airport where Shayne found a pilot friend to personally carry the envelope. It was against rules, but it could be done. As they sauntered back through the airport lobby, Shayne saw the familiar Latin.

"Really haunting this airport this morning," he said to Tim. "Is that our Luis Valencia?"

"In the flesh," Tim informed him. "This is earlier than he usually gets up. You must have him worried."

They saw no sign of the Ferrari outside, but midway back to town, Shayne saw the flicker of the blue car in the side mirror. Rourke bypassed the town, cutting across to the shore road. The road was built on a coral shelf that graded down to the shoals and reefs, but directly on its inland side, a ridge lifted and ran parallel to the shore, hiding most of the estates on that side.

Rourke nodded at a pair of gateposts and muttered, "Alma Wollner's. The house is back about a quarter mile. The next big estate on the right is Wyndham's. It sits quite a long way from the highroad, almost atop the water."

It had a tree shaded drive and enormous lawn, the detective noted. The whole second floor was surrounded by a balcony. Rourke

drove on past to show the de Nieully place.

They came to the entrance five miles beyond. A policeman lounging at the gate grinned at Tim Rourke. "Come out to pick some more posies in the garden, I suppose?"

"I always wait for moonlight," Tim told him and tossed him a couple of cigars. "What news out here?"

"Well, we've got a host to greet you proper the next time you come by moonlight," the policeman chuckled. He gave a piercing whistle, and two bristling mastiffs came bounding out of nowhere. "Take a good smell of that Yankee so you won't mistake him and treat him gentle!" the uniformed man told the dogs.

Shayne studied the house in the distance. It was a comfortable looking, old type plantation house with a four car garage, and it looked as if it were muchly lived in, which the Wyndham place did not. An old jallopy stood outside the closed garage doors.

"Is that the count's car?" Shayne asked with surprise.

"Oh, he's got a Caddy and a fast Porsche inside the garage," the guard said. "But he usually drove this one for run around."

"Top speed, fifty miles per hour out on the airstrip," Tim put in. "The prosecution clocked it." He passed some brief banter with the guard and swung around for the five mile ride back to Wyndham.

Rourke drove as near fifty as he could and the ride was bumpy. In the count's antique chariot, it would have unsettled the coolest killer. Shayne timed the drive, and separately, timed their drive from gateposts to the palatial Wyndham house.

The car park was on the inland side of the house, but a butler led them through to a terrace that overlooked the sea. He left them to inform the countess of their arrival.

Rourke nodded at the boathouse and the small man-made yacht. "A small T-class sailer, two speedboats, and that ocean-going cabin boat for travelling to the mainland," he itemized. "Have it real tough, these tax ridden millionaires!"

"Sir Herbert a yachting addict?"

"No, he hates the water. But Lady Wyndham likes the cabin boat. The Countess Margot and her friend Alma Wollner race the speedboats and the sailer."

Shayne gave a low whistle. "Racing boats cost a penny just to keep tuned up! Unless they're female mechanics, too?"

Roarke shook his head. "There's a mechanic at the club takes care of most of the estates along here for a flat fee."

He saw the hopeful glint of Shayne's eyes and shook his head again. "He was here the day of

the crime, he thought Sir Herbert was a diamond in the rough, a misunderstood good guy."

The young countess came onto the terrace, a cool, self-possessed, straightforward looking girl. She was more American in dress and manner than Shayne had expected. And she was gracious. She ordered breakfast for them all.

"Mr. Shayne," she said straightforwardly, "I am sure Raoul had no part in the—the tragedy. I'm so sure of it that I give you *carte blanche* to make the evidence available to the prosecutor, even if it is prejudicial. But what I really hope for is the—"

"Real culprit?" Shayne suggested understandingly.

"No," she surprised him by saying. "I loved my father dearly, but nothing is going to bring him back! I am under no illusions as to his public character. Somebody probably felt they had justified reason to commit this act. All I am after is something to startle the prosecutor out of this star chamber handling of the case."

"That would still be risking the jury," Shayne pointed out.

"This is a peculiar case, as Mr. Rourke has probably told you," Margot said. "My husband was the unfortunate scapegoat. But even with all the pressure and self interest to block any other investigation, I am convinced that the jury will exonerate my husband if the prosecutor can be forced to give an open-minded summary."

"You think evidence pointing definitely toward another suspect would weaken the prosecution?"

"It would tear it to shreds!" she said. "All the world is shocked and angered now at the arbitrary way the case has been handled. If there is the ghost of a chance that after conviction and sentence, a private investigation might turn up the real killer."

Shayne nodded. "The prosecutor and public opinion will both see the wisdom of exonerating your husband."

"Exactly," she agreed. "I know the prosecutor. He is a very severe and honest man, but I believe that he honestly thinks Raoul is guilty. I think he decided that when he thought Raoul and I were separated. Once having brought the charges, he cannot bring himself to even consider any other suspect. But I do not believe he is consciously trying to frame my husband. What I hope you can do is to find evidence that will show the prosecutor that he has been blind and prejudiced."

Shayne admired her. Now, for the first time, he was completely satisfied with his own decision to undertake the case.

"I have a strong stomach and a strong mind, Mr. Shayne," she said. "Ask anything that you find necessary—and count on my cooperation one hundred percent."

"That makes it easier," Shayne admitted. "One thing comes to mind. Your father never kept a gun until recently, it's been said, but on the night in question, he had one in his night table. Do you know why he began arming himself?"

"I can only guess," she said. "He had been very involved in several of these recent Latin revolutions. In one case, he promised to back a certain clique, and then later, withdrew. I suppose he thought that he might be in jeopardy from both sides, and so he began keeping the gun."

She fell thoughtful a moment and then said, "Senor Luis Valencia might know something, but I doubt if he would talk. At times, he had mutual interests with my father, I believe."

"You don't think this could have been an act of jealous vengeance on the part of some husband?" Shayne asked.

The girl reddened but took the question in her stride. "I can think of at least a dozen men who might have thought about it," she told him frankly. "But not one with the guts to tackle father. He was still a miner when he was thirty-five, Mr. Shayne. He never lost the physique—nor the wild temper."

The butler and a maid brought in breakfast, and the two men ate a second time in courtesy. The detective waited until they were on second coffee and the butler had departed before asking, "Countess, can you explain how it happened that several people knew you had it in mind to employ me in this matter?"

She colored guiltily, "I'm afraid I scotched, Mr. Shayne," she admitted. "I had just come from seeing my husband and his counsel about calling you. I was rather upset at the way the trial had gone yesterday morning. I stopped by Alma Wollner's and she was giving a buffet luncheon for about forty guests.

"One of them, a Lady Doane, has an unusually sharp tongue and wayward sense of humor. She made some catty remark about the trial, and I blew my top. I wanted to throw the fear of God into them, and I did—or rather, the fear of Mike Shayne. I told them all that if they thought it was so funny to send a man to the gallows with no evidence whatsoever, I'd produce some Mike Shayne evidence that might give them a real laugh!"

Suddenly, she giggled a little. "I'm ashamed of laughing about it," she apologized. "But you could have heard a pin drop! Two of the Colonel Blimps on hand grabbed for bottles instead of pouring drinks, and I think Lady Doane actually swooned."

"You're very close to Alma Wollner?"

"Like a sister. She worships my mother, and we regard her as part

of our family. We always have."

"Can you think of a reason why Anthony Crispin would not welcome the investigation you've employed me for?"

Shayne could feel that question strike hard within her. It was something she had to think about. She said reluctantly, "Tony is very deeply attached to her, but he does have to live. I think that three or four times she has let him have fairly large sums of money. Of course, if that came out, it would make him look like a common gigolo, and it would look worse for Alma."

For the time at least, Shayne was willing to accept that possible explanation.

"I suppose you'll want to see dad's room?" the Countess offered. For the barest second, her gaze faltered and she bit her lip. Then she rang for the butler.

IV

THE ROOM HAD BEEN put in order, was still much as it had been on the fatal morning. The same rug was still there, with the burned spot where smoldering bedclothes had dropped on it. The same mattress was on the bedstead, still smelling of char. The windows onto the balcony were open, as they had been in the police photos, and the big carved screen still stood obliquely between the end windows and the bed.

Shayne measured off two and a half steps from the screen to the head of the bed and shook his head negatively. It brought him up in an awkward position with his right shoulder jammed against the wall. A downward blow by a standing man was an uncertain one at best, and this position would have been risky in the extreme.

"A man berserk with pent-up jealousy might chance it," he said. "But a man in that mood would have raised a rumpus."

He sat down on the left side of the bed and envisioned the movements of Sir Herbert's powerful body, turning without suspicion toward the night table to lay down his cigar. It would tense the muscles on the left side of his neck and head, and present a clear target for a sitting man to strike him behind the ear. But it was still a damned risky way to attempt murder.

"It's possible," Shayne erupted suddenly, "that the killing was an unintended error. Suppose somebody he trusted, or else held in negligent contempt, came to force some information out of him. They sat over here talking, and took their chance to daze him with a blow. Then they went to work on him with the torch.

"But he was hurt more than they had figured. In fact, he was dying. They realized that when he showed no response to the torch.

That would account for burns both before and after death. When they realized he was dead, they got out fast."

"Sounds plausible," Tim said. "But you can't hide a blowtorch under a tropical suit. How did the killer walk in at two or three A.M. carrying a blowtorch without rousing Sir Herbert's suspicions?"

"Yeah," Shayne agreed. "There is something funny here, almost as if this were two different deals. Maybe they didn't bring the torch. Maybe they went out and got it after they knocked him out. But I don't like that one, either."

The redhead got up and inspected the closets and bathroom thoroughly, and looked at the balcony. The balcony, of course, was a perfect hideout for a killer wanting to observe his victim. But it still didn't click. Shayne felt sure the Sir Herbert had been awake, and conversing, when the death blows were struck.

They returned to the terrace where the young countess looked a little wan and shaky. She pulled herself quickly in hand.

"One thing occurred to me, Mr. Shayne," she said. "A number of women on the island envisioned themselves as Lady Wyndham, but to my father, they were simply a pastime. One of his very few loyalties and softnesses was my mother. That may explain a good deal about our family that is puzzling."

"I thank you," Shayne said. "With your permission, Countess, I may come back later."

"Of course," she agreed. "Higgins, the butler, already has orders that you are to have free run of the place, day or night."

She turned to pick up a list of names from the glass-topped table. "These are the people who were at Alma's when I flipped," she said. "I may have missed five or six, but these are the important ones."

Shayne looked at the list and smiled at her cool thoroughness.

"Hermann Roesch," she added, "had occasional deals with my father. I think he also works with Luis Valencia."

She escorted them to the front door herself, standing there until they turned out through the tree shaded drive.

"Lively little place, Nassau," Shayne murmured and thought of Crispin's description—*A bucket of eels.*

"You get any idea from the talk?" Tim asked.

"Yes. I'm beginning to understand the prosecutor's position. If he'd checked out all the possibles first, he'd have been waiting ten years to pin down a suspect."

"Spot your other two phone-friends from yesterday?"

"Valencia speak good English?"

"The best. Swear he was one of the Brown Boys of Eton."

"My bet is on him for the warn-

ing. And perhaps Hermann Roesch for the bribe."

Rourke had a story to do and loaned Shayne his car. The redhead drove toward the waterfront, to a little old bar that smelled of tar and hemp and sweat, owned by an old friend.

Terry Mathis, the owner, had a new bottle of Shayne's favorite brand already set up on the bar. "Yer late," he said with a soft brogue as greeting for the first time in three years. "Ye got in on the early flight, and don't be telling me different, Mike Shayne!"

Shayne grinned and pumped his hand. "I got tangled with the Orangemen," he whispered. He wrapped his legs around an old fashioned barstool and watched Terry pour them drinks. They toasted—"Up the Rebel!" and laughed, and Terry rested with his cable-like forearms on the bar.

"So yer here to clean up the mess the British be making of the case and to save the poor boy from murther?"

Shayne eyed him. "You feel that strongly against the British, or for the count?"

"Well, he's not what I'd call a cronie of mine," Terry said more seriously, "But Sir Herbert was, and I tell you, the lad did not do the job."

Shayne raised his eyebrows questioningly.

"First, this Raoul is a slight boy, and no damn fool," Terry said. "He'd not be breasting that wild gorilla of a father with nothing but a tack hammer in his hand."

"There was the blowtorch," Shayne pointed out.

"Take it easy—I'm getting there. The blowtorch is part of the reason it wasn't the count. You see, this young count, for all his fancy ways and title, is something of a mechanic, and he knows how to use a torch. But whoever used the one on Sir Herbert didn't know how to manage."

Shayne sharpened. "Don't go wild on me, Terry! Explain that real simple."

Terry Mathis walked to a small storeroom and returned with a torch. "Ye see this rod? This is for pressure, and you always keep the pressure at the full. This valve controls your flow—the size of the flame you might say. And this is your oxygen mix. It controls the combustion, or the heat."

Mathis gave the rod a couple of rams and put a match to the torch. "Just let it warm a bit," he grunted. "Now what I'm going to show you is this. You cannot burn flesh lightly with a proper-set blow torch. Even a flick is going to toast it good, or not at all."

He went off to the cooler to return with a shank of raw lamb. "This is skinned, of course, but you'll see." Mathis drifted the flame across the raw meat in parallel stripes, moving it closer each time.

The first two times left simply smoke marks. The third stripe was like a welt, and the fourth stripe was wide, spattered, and left an acrid stench.

"That," Terry said, "is the way anybody who knew their torch would use it. If they just wanted to singe a man, they would hold the flame sidewise—like this—and just toast him with the heat. But that was not the case with Sir Herbert. The point of the flame had touched him."

Mathis put the torch out, let out most of the pressure, threw the mixing valve a little off, and relighted the torch which now burned with a sputtering sound. "And this is about the way the torch was working." He turned the blaze onto his own arm, singing the hair and turning the flesh red, but not burning himself badly.

Terry turned the torch off again and set it on the back bar with a decisive bang. "Whoever bedevilled Sir Herbert didn't know how to use the tool they had. The pressure was down and they just used it the way they found it. I say that the count would have pumped up his pressure without even thinking before he lit the torch."

"And I say, you may have something, Terry Mathis, and I'll be buying the next drink!" Shayne complimented him. "But who in hell would think of using a torch who didn't understand it?"

"*Ha!* Any of these slick haired hoodlums and smugglers," Terry snorted. "Sure, it was only a week ago that a man whose owned a boat for twenty years brought his torch into me to find out how to use it for some soldering. Y'see, Mike, it is such a simple common tool almost every man thinks he could use one right off, but you come to find out, damned few have ever tried."

"Maybe if you knew Sir Herbert, you've had a hunch of your own?" Shayne suggested.

"No—none that I'd care to mention. Nothing but wild suspicions of one or two people because I don't like them. The truth is, the count himself spoke the truth. It could have been anyone did it, and it is a wonder he wasn't murthered long ago. He was no lily, Mike. But what a man!"

They had their drink. They talked fishing. Then Shayne noted the time and got directions to the Racquets Club.

"Some claim they play tennis up there," Terry chuckled at him. "But all I've ever heard tell is of bar and dance floor!"

V

MICHAEL SHAYNE judged from the parking that the club's bar and cuisine was far more popular than its courts. There couldn't be this many tennis players of a hot mid day!

Tim Rourke was waiting for

him at a small table a little aside from the crowded bar. He was talking with the bar captain, a level-eyed young man who looked at Mike Shayne with a mixture of curiosity and respect.

"One of your fans," Tim said to Shayne. "By virtue of the publicity I gave you."

The captain grinned. "Followed your cases ever since I came here, Mr. Shayne. Some of 'em are better than whodunits."

"This one particularly," Shayne grunted drily. "You knew Sir Herbert of course!"

"Yes sir. But I was not exactly one of his fans," the captain said. He snapped his fingers imperiously at the bar and somehow mysteriously managed to convey the drink order without speaking at all.

"It was not his roughness on the help I minded so much," the captain went on in a carefully lowered voice. "It was that he was always wanting to hurt somebody. It seemed to make him feel good. If he was horsing some friend, there was always a cut in the joke."

He moved away to the bar to bring the drinks himself. Rourke seemed to be his special pet. "Maybe I was raised with too much respect for women," the captain continued. "It jibes me to see a woman hurt, even when she deserves it. And Sir Herbert took a kind of special gloat in that. If he could embarrass a woman, or make her mad, or make her cry, he got his kick."

"Any woman? Or just the—uh—girls?"

"Well, he was mostly concerned with the latter sort, Mr. Shayne. But he could be cruel even to decent women too. There was the night he had the accident—Is that what I should call it?"

"It will do!" Shayne and Rourke both laughed.

"Well, he was having a cocktail in here, waiting for his dinner guests when Mrs. Wollner came in."

"Alma Wollner?"

"Yessir. Now she was like his own flesh and blood, in a manner of speaking. But he had her crying—right here at this table—and you could see that he was enjoying it. Maybe she'd made some mistake in her investments. It was plain that she didn't want to do what he was telling her. But she knew that whatever he was saying was what she'd have to do, and it was making him feel big and powerful just to beat her down."

The captain reddened. "Of course, I was eavesdropping a little."

The other two grinned. Shayne said, "That's our specialty!"

Luis Valencia had strolled through to their end of the bar and disliking the crowded lineup, took the table next to them. While ordering, he glanced at their own half empty glasses and asked

Rourke, "May I offer a round?"

Rourke flicked Shayne a glance and nodded. "Move over here," he suggested. "You two may want to know each other sometime."

"Ah yes, Mr. Shayne," Valencia murmured with well-bred charm. "You're quite the gossip item of Nassau this morning. Tell me, do you have hopes of finding evidence that can clear our good friend, Count Raoul?"

"Evidence," Shayne said, "is one thing. Whether it will do him any good or not is something else. You were a business associate of Sir Herbert's I understand."

"On occasion," Valencia smiled evenly, but the redhead saw his eyes grow cautious, estimating just how much Shayne might know. "We had some political interests in common," Valencia added. "And again, sometimes we were opposed. *C'est la vie,* eh?" He laughed.

Shayne took a blind chance. "Were you opposed a few months ago when he just caught the last plane out of South America by the skin of his teeth?"

Valencia laughed with soft mockery in his eyes. "Mr. Shayne, all the gossip columnists have pointed out that Sir Herbert and I were twin serpents in that little fiasco."

"But you didn't have to catch a plane out," Shayne said.

Valencia gave his white ivory smile. "Fortunately, no. I was able to swing with the tide in time."

The drinks came and Valencia raised his glass in toast. He was a small man, a little chunky of build, very fastidious of dress, very conscious of sitting straight. A fleshy, large man came to the doorway and looked toward him. Making apologies, Valencia finished his drink hurriedly and went to meet him.

"Hermann Roesch?" Shayne asked. Rourke nodded.

The two Americans took their time at their own drinks, quite conscious of the hostility their presence caused, feeling it move against them in growing, silent waves. Shayne shook his head suddenly. "There isn't time," he growled. "They're too many cooks in the broth. Too many people that have nothing to do with what we're looking for. I'm going to have to find a straight path here."

"You won't find anything straight in the West Indies," Tim said.

In due course, they ate a magnificent luncheon. Going out to their car, they noticed Luis Valencia engaged in conversation with four very indignant looking Britishers on the front porch. In spite of the fact that they were beyond earshot, they bristled with hostility at sight of Shayne.

Luis Valencia, however, turned and gave his charming smile and punctilious bow.

"Quite a gentleman," Shayne murmured.

"Quite a snake, also! There is a story that when he was a small timer in alien smuggling, he once heaved an iron cage of twenty refugees into the deep when a Coast Guard cutter put a shot across his bows."

They got into Rourke's car and Shayne sat a moment with head bowed, pulling at his left earlobe. "I would like a talk with the count," he said. "But our friend Dennis sounded as if that privilege had been cut off."

"His counsel checked. There's no way, Mike."

"Well, let's have a talk with his dinner guests on the fatal night." Shayne growled.

The guests verified the facts on the party. It had been a leisurely, informal dinner, attended by the count's houseguest, another count —Francois deLong—that count's current romantic interest, and two young matrons belonging to the island's flying set.

De Nieully had been a perfect host. He was in excellent humor, had not gotten drunk, and had kept them all laughing until midnight, when he took the two matrons home in his dilapidated runabout.

It was this point of the count's defense that the prosecution had made particular effort to weaken, but it was obvious that these young matrons had nothing to gain by falsifying facts to the count's advantage. They had wanted to leave precisely at midnight in order to be home when their airline pilot husbands arrived, which was usually a punctual twelve-thirty.

A couple of minutes before twelve-thirty, Raoul de Nieully had arrived back at his own house. He had mixed himself a last drink to have with his houseguest as the clock struck the half hour. DeLong's testimony withstood shattering crossquestioning. Although he had been a lifelong friend of de Nieully, he had nothing to gain by covering for him, and his testimony was corroborated by his girl.

De Nieully had then retired to his private quarters. At two A.M. —and again, the times had been noted, due, possibly, to the chiming clock—DeLong's pet cat had come into de Nieully's room and awakened him. He had carried the cat to DeLong in something of a sleepy bad humor, asking his houseguest to either put the damned animal outside, or else lock it in his own room.

DeLong had laughed, and then noted that it was time to take his girl home anyway, and he had put the cat outside while he did so. Returning within half an hour himself, he parked beside de Nieully's runabout, the two cars now blocking the garage doors behind which the count kept his faster cars. Both cars were just as he had last seen them in the morning.

DeLong answered all of Shayne's questions with cynical amusement, but what appeared to be honest brevity. He also verified having personally witnessed de Nieully burn himself on the arm and singe his mustache while getting the hurricane lamps lighted before the party. The prosecution had sought to prove the burns might have been made by a blow-torch.

"One thing I am curious about," Shayne remarked, "is why no blow torch was found on the count's place, although he putters around with mechanics a lot."

DeLong made a gesture. "He'd loaned it to Tony Crispin a few days before to refit some bridles over at Alma Wollner's place."

Both Shayne and Tim Rourke showed surprise at that. Tim said, "The prosecution hasn't brought that out!"

DeLong uttered a brief, derisive laugh. "Possibly it suits the prosecutor's purposes with the jury to just leave the dark fact hanging that investigation failed to disclose a torch on Raoul's place."

Nothing further was to be gained from any of these witnesses. It was clear they were all incensed that de Nieully had been charged with the murder, and none of them believed it remotely possible that he was guilty.

Shayne felt a little dispirited when he thought about how blind Nassau justice could be.

VI

THE SUN WAS SLANTING toward Florida when Shayne and Tim Rourke returned to their car and once again headed out toward Wyndham. A few miles from town, Tim said, "Blue car on our tail again, but I can't make out if it's a Porsche or Ferrari."

He purposely drove past the Wyndham place, cutting off behind a bluff at the end of a short straightway. For fifteen minutes they waited, but no blue car came by.

"Must of have been Tony Crispin's Porsche headed for Alma Wollner's," Tim grunted. "But I'd swear he passed her lane."

"Don't get spooky," Shayne cautioned. "We're flubbered up enough as it is."

The countess was out, but Higgins said they were free to go anywhere on the estate, She was certainly a thoroughgoing little girl on the details, Shayne thought. Right now, they'd just take a look at the boathouse by themselves.

They passed through the house, across the terrace, and down over a graded, landscaped lawn. They had reached the end of scattered shrubs when a glint of light flashed high above them, obliquely to their rear.

Shayne's reflexes acted automatically. He rammed Rourke sprawling behind a bush, piling flat alongside at the same instant.

A clod of dirt popped into the air behind them, and then the sharp crack of a flat trajectory rifle came distantly from the place Shayne had seen the glint.

The redhead peered through an opening in the bush at a high hill that reared out of the ridge beyond the highroad. The hill was brushed and day's heat still hazed it slightly, but he thought he saw a spurt of dust.

"That's Wollner property," Tim informed him. "There's a bridle path climbs around that hill to a plateau behind."

"Wait here and don't move!" Shayne rasped curtly. "But keep an eye on that boathouse."

He tore out from behind the bush in a low run, darting from shrub to shrub until the driveway trees hid the hill. He trotted to the car, raced it out of the drive and swung toward Nassau.

Far ahead of him, hopelessly outspeeding him, a car glinted on the highroad. At a point to his right, dust still boiled and sparkled in the oblique rays of evening light, and a gate stood open onto the Wollner bridle path.

Shayne swerved in and braked. He made out the skid marks of a car that had come out of here fast and skid-turned onto the highroad. He followed the tracks in to where a car had parked, and later turned. Climbing to the brow of the hill, he found footscuffs, but nothing useful—except by the inverse of what he did not find. Whatever his rush, the sharpshooter had remained cool enough to pick up his shellcase. Maybe it was a habit, such as picking up the murder tool and torch.

Shayne rejoined Rourke. "We can thank the sun for striking that telescopic sight!" he remarked.

He pulled at his left ear, frowning. "You can see fifteen miles down the island from up there," he murmured. "And the parking space here forms a better target than this lawn. You know, Tim, I've got a hunch we wouldn't have been shot at if we hadn't been headed for the boathouse. Let's take a look in there."

It was a commodious, beautifully kept boathouse. The two speed boats and the sailer floated at their berths. The larger boat was moored in a small artificial basin in front. There was a large playroom upstairs, looking out on the sea, with one small window facing the house. It occurred to Shayne that from this window, an observer could get a pretty fair idea of just what was going on inside the house late at night from the manipulation of the electric lights.

As looking required him to go behind the bar, the redhead took the opportunity to pour them drinks. Happily, the Wyndham's stocked his own brand of bourbon. He drank in silence, however, scratching his red hair.

Suddenly he tossed the drink down neat and came around the bar to run downstairs. Behind the mooring cove there was a large sail room. One corner of this was devoted to a work bench and tools in neat order. There was a gap in a row of cans on a shelf. Although there was very little dust this near the water, there were circular marks showing that something with a round base was usually kept there.

"The torch?" Tim asked.

"It looks it. And missing! The police did comb the grounds here, didn't they?"

"They practically dug up the shrubs and replanted them I heard," Tim nodded. "They were still at it when I got over here."

"So, the killer took it along," Shayne considered. "But he damned well wouldn't keep it long! Let's go talk with the club mechanic."

The mechanic had left the yacht club on a call down the island. From there, he was going directly home. It gave the two men time for a change from their grass-stained clothes, and they still had quite a wait at the man's house before he drove up just after sundown.

His name was Monty Atkins. He answered briefly, directly, definitely, and without offering unasked information. Yes, he did all the mechanical work on the Wyndham boats. Yes, they needed a good deal of looking after, and he came and went at his own discretion, unless called particularly. He had not dropped by since the gruesome tragedy as the Countess Margot had told him they'd not be using the boats for some time.

Oh, yes, he had fixed up the sail and tool room himself. Most of the people he serviced let him do that. That way, he had his special tool shop right on hand for their particular needs. Of course, the Wyndhams had a blowtorch. He'd been using it out there about three days before the murder. In fact, he'd almost burned Senor Luis Valencia's shoe with it when he came down with Sir Herbert as they were taking a constitutional.

"Guess it was my fault," Atkins acknowledged. "Lot of people don't realize how hot the flame is and get right on top of it."

"You keep your torches at full pressure in between jobs?" Shayne asked him curiously.

"My own private ones, yes," Atkins nodded. "But not the ones in my customer's kits. Kids are liable to get hold of them, and we had that kind of accident once. So now I let out the pressure and turn the mixer when I finish."

"You mean it can't be ignited that way?"

"Well, maybe yes, maybe no, but it wouldn't burn hot or throw a long flame, and pretty quick it would fizzle out."

Shayne asked a few casual ques-

tions about the girl's mechanical abilities. Atkins laughed. Miss Alma, now, was always itching to learn, but just didn't have it in her. He'd show her the right tool and how to do something, but next time she'd pick the wrong tool or do it wrong anyway. Once she nearly got drowned in the swells while trying to hook up a loosened sparkplug connection, and he'd just shown her the simple chore a week before.

She was another reason he was damned careful to let the pressure out of the torch over at Wyndham. He'd been going to teach her soldering once, but not after he saw her stick her face right on top of the torch when she went to light it.

"But, you'll find the torch at Wyndham at the right end of the second shelf above the workbench," Atkins said.

Shayne nodded and eased him with some general talk and took his leave.

Outside, Rourke muttered, "Christmas! What are we getting into?"

"Or *who?*" Shayne asked a shade grimly. "I'd better meet this Alma Wollner."

"She'll drift into the casino for the dance tonight," Tim said.

VII

IT HAD BEEN A long, hot day. Shayne and Rourke were glad for a chance to go to their hotels for a bath and change, and then have time for a leisurely drink and supper at the Planter's.

Around eleven they drifted over to the casino. In a few moments, Rourke nodded toward a beautifully gowned, tall brunette, dancing with a Naval captain. Although her body flowed automatically to the music, she kept looking over the captain's shoulder. Shadows lay dark beneath her eyes, and she looked pale. At the end of the dance, she towed the captain immediately toward the bar.

Approaching her unobserved, Shayne realized she was drinking fast. He saw the relief explode within her as Anthony Crispin came toward them, dressed in a white mess jacket and cumerbund that emphasized his wide, athletic shoulders.

Rourke said, "It would be my bet you're going to have to wade through some rough opposition!"

Shayne looked at his fist, decided to take no chances, and shortly made a ten-dollar deal with the waiter to find him a short honing steel out in the kitchen. He wrapped this carefully in a napkin, then drifting toward the bar, broke boldly into Crispin's ranks.

"Just returning this morning's compliment, you know," he said, smiling at the tall aristocrat.

Crispin looked as if he might simply cold shoulder Shayne with English arrogance, or as if he might call for the captain to have this

cheeky Yank taken off. Whatever his inclinations, he was prevented by some caution behind his cool, watchful eyes. Grudgingly, he presented Shayne and Tim Rourke to Alma Wollner and the captain.

At first opportunity, Shayne said to Crispin, "Something came up today I'd like to ask you about."

Crispin evidenced irritation. "Look here, old man, can't you keep these things to business hours?"

"Yes, I could," Shayne nodded. "But seeing as it took place on Wollner property—"

The girl broke in excitedly, "What happened?"

Crispin's mouth clamped. For the first time, Shayne recognized the full danger in this man. Crispin grunted reassuringly, "Just a little men's talk, dear. I'll leave you in the very dangerous hands of the Navy while I do a little deduction with my friend Michael Shayne."

He led the way outside instantly, down off the verandah, and out onto the golf course. "Well, Shayne," he demanded as he turned toward the detective.

Shayne said with a bleak look, "I tried to catch you coming out of that bridle path today, but you burped out of there in one helluva hurry."

Crispin watched him inscrutably. "I usually do," he answered. "There's a sand trap there and you have to keep moving." Then he frowned and added, "But I didn't see you, or any other car there."

"Maybe you didn't think I'd be there," Shayne suggested.

"Why the ruddy should I think you'd be there?" Crispin demanded. Then he said, "Oh, I begin to get it. You think I was trying to cover my visit to Alma by using the bridle path instead of the drive? Well, it was a bit early in the day, and with so much gossip running, there's no reason to advertise the fact that I come and go at some rather unconventional hours."

Shayne studied him briefly. Either he was damned fast at throwing out red herrings, or else it had not been Crispin on the hill at sundown. He was undecided which, and simply stalling for time while his mind worked on it, he said, "Of course, you'll have no objection to my verifying the time with Alma Wollner?"

Crispin stiffened like a rousing Doberman. "You are damned right I'll have objection!" he declared with a growl. "I'll have objection to you questioning her on any fact or subject that might make her feel worse than she does already! In fact, I'm going to make sure you don't question her unless I'm on hand!"

Anger was rising in the Scot like a tide.

Shayne said quickly, nodding beyond the tall man, "Well, here she comes, so we can do it your way."

Crispin's head spun around. With a swiftness that left Crispin unaware of what had happened, Shayne struck the tensed muscles on the side of the Scot's neck with a hard right. It was a harmless, but effective blow. Crispin dropped like a sack in his own boot tracks.

Shayne felt his pulse, decided he was out cold for some time, and went back inside to rejoin Alma Wollner.

"We'll be meeting Tony in a little while at your place," he told her. "But first, I'd like to take you for a little drive."

The fires of suspicion leaped within her eyes. "Where do you want—to—drive, Mr. Shayne?" she breathed.

"We might drive out to Wyndham's," he said.

He saw her nerves tauten.

"Margot's out tonight," she said. "What—what possible purpose can it serve, Mr. Shayne?"

"Well, it is a place where we can talk without being overheard," he said. "And it just happens that they keep my brand of liquor at the boathouse."

The momentary fright washed out of her like a receding wave. "Oh, the boathouse," she repeated. "Well, it probably would be the most private place."

The boathouse didn't bother her. But something in his brief conversation had. He wondered what. This he had to learn.

ANN WOLLNER sank into silence, retaining it even as he led her down across the lawn at Wyndham and into the boathouse and upstairs to the playroom. She neither looked toward the sailroom door, nor showed uneasiness of the place in any way. She snapped on the light switches, quite at home, as they went in, and upstairs, dropped her wrap onto a lounge and asked for a drink—a strong one.

Shayne mixed it and sat on the arm of the opposite lounge with his own drink. He said, as gently as he could, "Mrs. Wollner, I'm going to have to get very personal. Precisely what was Sir Herbert saying to you, earlier the fatal evening, that upset you so at the Racquet Club?"

She stared at him, her eyes dark with sudden fright and panic. "Did Margot tell you to find out?" she breathed hoarsely.

"No," he said. "In fact, I can keep your confidence. But it is necessary for me to know myself in order to see other things more clearly."

She got up and went to the opened mullion windows, looking out upon the phosphorescent sea. Shayne quietly mixed her another drink and left her to her thoughts.

Bringing it to her, he murmured, "Believe me, Mrs. Wollner, I will do everything possible not to disrupt the relationship you have

with the Countess Margot and her mother."

She made a hopelessly weary gesture. "How can you help it, Mike Shayne? But I do believe you'd try. It's in your tone."

She drank deeply from her glass and returned to the lounge and lighted a cigarette. "Believe me," she said, "it's only because of how it would hurt them that I haven't already told this. At first, it seemed easy to keep quiet, because it seemed impossible that that they could seriously accuse Raoul. But all the past week I would have told, except Tony kept telling me how much it would hurt Margot's mother—and nothing could be gained."

Shayne sensed the conversation taking a turn that he hadn't expected. He swirled his drink, looking down into the mellow lights of the cognac, suddenly half wishing that he'd never taken on this case. He had a premonition that a great deal more unhappiness might come of her next words than would come of the trial of de Nieully.

The beautiful girl tossed down the remainder of her drink and pulled a full lungful of smoke and sat very straight as she exhaled it. Then she looked at him, eyes tragic, but brave and level, and said without faltering, "Mike Shayne, I killed Sir Herbert. It was an accident, I was half crazy with shame and anger—but, I killed him."

Shayne had seldom been taken aback, but this caused him to swallow and to renew both drinks. "Let's take that easy," he suggested.

She made a gesture of disgust. "He couldn't keep his hands off any woman he hadn't had," she said. "His ego demanded that he have every woman once. How he got them he didn't care. In my case, he had control of my money"

"That's what he was telling you at the Racquet Club the preceding evening?"

"I told Tony you'd get most of it figured out anyway," she murmured. "Maybe you already know what he was saying. Sir Herbert told me to come out to the house—his house—after midnight, that he'd be waiting in his room. If I didn't come, he said, I might find I had a great deal less fortune than I thought, and I might hear some dirty scandal about some money that I'd loaned Tony. He was quite capable of that kind of vindictiveness."

"You considered that you had no choice?"

"I knew I didn't. I packed Tony off early that night, and finally dressed in riding clothes and went for a ride to calm myself. I carried my crop with a loaded silver handle embossed on the end with the initial 'A'. It was an old crop, pretty well beaten up, and time had forced the silver molding into sharp ridges and raised the sides

of the A higher than the crossbar, which had been dented in.

"Well, finally, perhaps around one o'clock, I faced what had to be faced and rode over here to Wyndham. The only light was in Sir Herbert's room. Frankly, I meant to try and bargain with him, to buy my way out."

She broke off to give Shayne an inscrutable look and to breathe an ironic laugh. "Don't think I'm so prim that a quarter of a million dollars or more couldn't weigh me, Mr. Shayne! But with Sir Herbert —" Her smooth shoulder convulsed. "His wife was like a mother to me. His daughter is my closest friend. How could I?"

She got up this time to mix her own drink. "I knew the house well, of course," she said when she came back. "I went up to his bedroom and closed the door and sat on the left side of his bed to try and talk him out of his crazy idea. I had riding gloves on, so there were no prints.

"He just laughed. I was half crazy with anger more than outrage. Finally I told him to go to hell, and he could ruin my reputation and steal all my money, but he'd never get me into bed. I started to jump up as he turned away to dump his ash, but somehow, he grabbed my left wrist.

"That's when I struck him with the crop. I slashed his face four times on the side of his head. I thought I was using the lash, but it looks as though I was using the crop.

"Only, Mr. Shayne, he was alive when I left! He was rubbing his neck and in a black temper as I ran around the bed and out. I know he was alive because he barked at me, 'Alma, I'll have you yet, and you'll pay for that.' "

She threw down her drink and her shoulders began to shake.

"Steady here!" Shayne told her and pressed her shoulder. "Don't come unstuck! What did you do with your riding crop?"

"I must have dropped it!" she quavered.

Shayne took her hand. "Now Alma, so far, you'd get no blame," he said. "But I have to know the rest. Did you come down here for the blowtorch?"

She blinked at him with bewilderment. She shook her head. "I don't know anything about a torch, Mr. Shayne! All I wanted was to get away. But you won't believe that!"

"Maybe I do," he said soberly and tugged at his left ear. "Now do you know if about an hour before sundown today, Anthony Crispin was near your place?"

"Why yes, he was there with me," she said. "I was too nervous to play tennis or go sailing, and we sat out on the east porch and talked from about four to seven. Then he drove down the driveway to go dress for dinner."

Shayne swung his gaze directly

on her. He would have sworn she was telling the truth. He said, "Alma, I think maybe you've been worrying about something you didn't do. At least for now, this talk ends right here with you and I. And I want your promise!"

She stared at him disbelievingly. Slowly, hope and gratitude surged up in her, and she leaned against his chest and cried. After a time she quieted and decided to spend the night at Wyndham, and he took her and left her on the terrace.

VIII

SHAYNE DROVE SLOWLY back to town thinking of what she'd said. Beyond Wollner's a car shot past him doing an easy hundred. He was just as glad that he was without her in the seat, and that Anthony Crispin didn't recognize Rourke's car in the dark!

In his rearview mirror, he saw the car whip into Wollner's. He put his foot down on the accelerator and sped on to the Nassau.

He was scarcely in his room when the phone rang and Crispin's voice barked at him with cold, murderous fury, "Shayne, what have you done with her?"

"Why, I dropped her at Wyndham's," Shayne told him.

"At where?"

"At Wyndham's. She decided to spend the night with Margot."

"So help me God—!" Crispin grated, then got himself in hand. "Shayne, if you do one damned thing to harm her—" he rasped. Then he said, "Damn you, why didn't you go back home this morning!" and hung up.

Shayne lighted a cigarette, sloshed himself a snifter of cognac and stretched out on his bed to phone the casino for Tim Rourke. He said to the reporter, "I'm bushed and going to hit the sack. But can you be up by daylight?"

"God, I have to commit blackmail, perjury and theft for my art!" the reporter complained. "And now get up at daylight for my friends!"

"I've got your car here. I'll pick you up," Shayne told him.

Rourke was muttering imprecations as Shayne hung up.

The redhead stretched and relaxed, and then he heard the creak upon the balcony. He needed action, he wanted action. His eyes warmed as he sought to place the sound exactly, considering the length he had to leap or charge from his doorway.

Then he considered something else, the stern visage of Mr. Dennis if a complaint were made that he was roughing up local citizens. Tony Crispin might not complain, but others would. And Dennis, he felt sure, would give them the benefit of any doubt. It would be the quick and easy way to rid the island of the Shayne menace.

He got up casually to make a

noisy to-do of pouring a final drink. He drew the curtains across the double doors and turned the water splashing into his tub. In all ways, it looked and sounded as if he were getting ready to hit the sack with quite a few drinks in him. Even the most impatient killer would be a fool not to wait until he was in bed and dozing.

He got the heavy bolster out of the closet, bent it with his knee, and put it under the sheet. The bed was provided with two sets of pillows, two big ones for propping up in bed, two small ones for sleeping. He crushed one of the small ones into a global shape and placed it at the head of the bolster with the sheet partially over it.

He threw his extra pair of shoes down by the bed, and tossed his stained suit from earlier out across a chair. He turned off the bath water, splashed it a bit, let the tub drain with its hollow retching roar, and moved soundlessly to the balcony curtains.

The sound of stealthy movement came through to him, and then a sharp *"Pssst!"* and the sounds of whispers. So there was more than one!

He went back to his bed, switched off the night light, then cussed aloud as if forgetting the curtains, and a moment later, yanked the cord that pulled them back to let in the night breeze. In the dark, he went back to the bed again, made relaxing grunting sounds, and then finding the door, let himself silently out and silently closed it.

It was not the Mike Shayne way, but he was taking no chances of Dennis spoiling his game at this point. He returned downstairs, got his car and drove around to Roarke's hotel where he checked in for the night.

He rooted Tim out at dawn. Before sunup, they had breakfasted and were back at the Nassau. When Shayne threw open the door to his room, he saw about what he expected. A knife stood upright in the bolster. Some heavy object had crushed the pillow that he had improvised for his head, crushing the thick top of the bolster. In hurry and excitement, the crunch would have sounded like a crushing skull, no doubt.

Rourke gestured at the knife. "Finerprints, maybe?"

"There'll be no prints on there," Shayne grunted and removed the knife and tossed the bolster in the closet.

He glanced over the room. Nothing disturbed. They were smart cookies. They'd struck and run, not even attempting to riffle for papers that might indicate their particular interest and eventually lead to them.

They went down and got in the car again and headed out toward Wyndham's. Shayne said, "Even a cool-headed professional gets away from a murder scene as quickly as

possible, and gets rid of any incriminating evidence first chance he gets. Now the police must have searched the Wyndham grounds—and along the road between Wyndham and de Nieully's—pretty thoroughly for the weapon and torch. But I'll bet they never searched the other way!"

Rourke said, "From the inquiry I made, they did not search toward town."

"We're going to," Shayne growled, and drove to the Wyndham driveway and swung around.

At this early hour, they had the highroad to themselves. Shayne let the car crawl along the edge, his eyes a little narrowed as he watched the siding, and his mind cleared of all other thoughts and open to impression. They passed the bridlepath gate and he nearly stopped, but then went on. When he came to a bridge over a creek, he did stop.

He got a wrench out of the repair kit and found himself a twenty-four inch stick with a knobby end. Then he stood in the low car, one foot on the seat, and hurled the objects out into the tall grass along the creek, noting carefully where they landed.

Shayne followed after them, moving so as not to crush the grass and leave a trail. He found the wrench first, then within five feet a small blowtorch. He never spotted his club at all, but he did find the riding crop poking up vertically from the muck.

Weather and salt air had gotten at both objects. It was dubious whether any possible fingerprints would have survived. However, he picked the objects up carefully with handkerchiefs, finding telltale specks of weathered blood on the riding crop. He made a wax impression of the silver head, resmeared it with mud and stuck it back where it had been. The torch he carried back to fit in the empty space of the Wyndham sail room. Its bottom matched the marks there precisely.

Weather had corroded the valve and plunger, but he was able to release the gas to try a light. The pressure was practically gone, and the torch refused to light. But it did flare up the match light for a moment before the match gutted out. Of course, the pressure might have leaked out but he doubted it. This torch had been used out, and probably the pressure had been low to start.

He took the torch back to the creek then. Shaking his head at what might be a foolish move that he'd regret, he sailed it back into the grass.

"Now," he told Rourke, "we're going to go real psychological and give a Christmas play—if those prints of the count's turn out the way I think."

"I like the way the pieces fit so far, Mike," Tim said.

THE TWO WERE BACK at the Nassau having their first eye opener when Lucy Hamilton phoned from Atlanta. "Michael, the colonel says there is no way to prove it, but in his opinion, those photos were tricked from prints on glass to look like prints on wood."

"Atta girl! Will he sign that opinion?"

"I'm sending it over from Miami when I get back," Lucy said efficiently. "But don't you 'Atta girl' me! I look like I'd been through a five dollar sale on real mink coats!"

"We give all for our art," Shayne chuckled. "I was murdered last night in effigy."

"Michael! You're not fooling! Were you hurt?"

"Of course not," he growled. "Not yet, anyway. Hustle back to Miami and get that affadavit on the way. Have him brad the glossies right onto his signed statement, and have him bill the de Nieully counsel."

Shayne put up the phone and lighted a cigarette. "You," he told Rourke "are going to double for me at this Christmas play in a monk's cowl. You're just on the sidelines, so don't get stage fright. All the talking will be in my dramatic voice, on a tape recording."

"This going to be the manger scene?" Rourke grinned.

"It's going to be the murder scene," Shayne growled.

Rourke shook his head with mock criticism. "No fun, no romance in you," he complained. "Always got to be scientific."

They unearthed Terry Mathis at his home, for the pubs would not open today until two o'clock. Terry had a build very similar to Sir Herbert's. All the ham in his Irish nature swelled with importance at the idea of impersonating the dead Sir Herbert at his death scene. Further, he rigged a blowtorch with some other blue flamed combustible that gave off a relatively mild heat. Through a connection at the broadcast studio, Rourke got the loan of a professional machine to make Shayne's tape recording.

Shayne needed two more men, a small man and a large one, and a girl with riding clothes. Then he faced the two delicate points of his plan—the cooperation of the Countess Margot and Alma Wollner.

Margot, he was able to handle on the phone. In spite of their state of mourning, he hoped that she could arrange cocktails at her home for as many as possible of the crowd that had been at Alma's the day the countess had mentioned Mike Shayne's name.

"Don't worry that any will be missing," she told him. "When they hear you've got something to tell, they won't dare not show up!"

Shayne breathed easier at her assurance on the guest score. With Rourke's help, he made his sound track, a very simple one to ac-

company pantomine, mentioning no names, but giving the explanation of the action as a commentator would. He wrapped that up and took it out to Alma Wollner's letting her hear the explanation of the part she had played, but disguised in such a way that it was a seduction scene that might have involved any woman.

At the end of her scene, she was limp, but grateful. "Mike, it could be any one of half a dozen girls in Nassau!" she breathed deeply. "If nothing goes wrong, Margot and her mother need never really know that it was me."

Then she said with sudden worry, "But it's going to be hard to hold Tony in line! He'll think it's a trick! I know he will!"

"Tell him to pack his gun," Shayne grinned. "If it's a trick, he'll have plenty of chance to use it."

There was the final detail now—getting Margot's permission to produce the reconstructed scene in her father's bedroom. She granted the permission, but it took guts on her part. She'd not witness the scene herself at Shayne's suggestion, but this was getting into sensitive territory.

IX

EVERY LAST ONE of the people invited had arrived at Wyndham by sundown. There were also some extras. Presumably, Dennis and other officials were having the affair unofficially covered. Shayne watched for surprise on the part of any of the guests to see him still hale and hearty, but could find none. Or else, it was lost in the engulfing waves of animosity and fear that beat against him from every side.

Shayne explained that this was a two part re-enactment of the murder, which he would explain point by point from his shadowed cowl as commentator. The guests were requested to stand beyond the immediate scene of action.

"Two items in this possible solution of the crime are stage props," he stated. "The murder weapon, and the torch. But we will have a thorough search made tomorrow which should turn them up. We are sure now that we know where to find them."

There was subdued excitement with danger twisting through it like vicious currents in a flooding river. Anthony Crispin watched Shayne with a cold, lethal fire in his blue eyes. Luis Valencia was suave, but watchful. Hermann Roesch breathed heavier than usual and his eyes snapped from one to another group as if all were plotting and intriguing against him personally.

At dusk, Shayne led the group up to the murder chamber. Only the night lamp lighted the scene, and the sides of the room and balcony lay in heavy shadow. By request, the women scattered out

along the room walls. The men stood back upon the balcony beyond the open doors.

Terry Mathis, dressed in pajamas, lay on Sir Herbert's bed smoking one of his cigars. Rourke, wearing the monk's cowl, impersonating Shayne, stood off in the shadow of the carved wood screen. The sound machine was unseen behind the screen, giving Shayne's transcription. The redhead had lost himself without effort at the very back of the crowd of men, whose attention was riveted on the room.

A clock struck one. A girl in a riding habit and carrying a crop came to the door, moving into the room half in fear, and half with angry self assurance. She stood at the foot of the bed a time as 'Sir Herbert' gestured. Her self-assurance sagged. She moved around the bed and sat down beside him, pleading tearfully.

Shayne's voice explained that she was being coerced. All of those people had known Sir Herbert. The women particularly could fill in their own details of the precise words and threats and promises he would be making. The girl began to sob frantically. 'Sir Herbert' scoffed with rough derision.

Suddenly she jumped up in an effort to escape. 'Sir Herbert' reached out and caught her left wrist, jerking her back onto the bed with easy power of brute superiority. He turned away casually to lay down his cigar.

The girl struck him on the head with her riding crop—but with the limber whip. Then she had freed herself and was running out the door. Unsuccessfully trying to intercept her, 'Sir Herbert' thundered, "I'll have you yet!" and grunted an ugly laugh.

As the girl ran out, men's teeth crunched. Along the edge of the room the women's breaths sucked in like a solitary sound.

Then the smaller of the two male actors came through the door. He came sauntering with easy self-assurance, both hands in his jacket pockets. 'Sir Herbert' half rose on one elbow then waved at him carelessly and gestured toward the side of his bed. In the hall outside the larger character stood with the blow torch burning in his hand unseen by 'Sir Herbert.'

The smaller man sat down on the bed and began to converse. Idly, he picked the riding crop off the floor, joking about it, slapping it into his other hand. 'Sir Herbert' turned to reach for his cigar, and suddenly the little man raised the crop and beat the crop down on the side of 'Sir Herbert's' head. On his second stroke, the man outside rushed in, the torch in one hand, a gun in the other.

Shayne held his breath, every nerve and sense in him keyed to the reaction. His soundtrack explained that the torch had been picked up at Wyndham's own boathouse, and that the interlopers

knew he was awake because they had seen his light on from there.

But he could be wrong—dead wrong. It was still quite possible that Alma had pulled the wool over his eyes, and that she and Crispin had executed the job themselves.

Although the night light shed considerable light directly on the bed, the shadows thickened rapidly beyond it. Suddenly, Shayne was conscious that Alma had vanished into the darkness of the hall. Almost at the same moment, Luis Valencia drifted through the open windows into the adjoining bedroom.

There was no way for Shayne to drive through the crowd and pass through Sir Herbert's room unnoticed, and he lost valuable seconds going through the next room, finding the door locked from the outside. Circuiting through a third room, when he reached the downstairs, there was utter quiet. He lost more valuable seconds listening for telltale sounds which did not come. Then he heard the Ferrari start up and sweep out the driveway at highspeed.

Shayne leaped out to Rourke's car, following with lights blacked out. The Ferrari vanished ahead on the highroad toward Nassau. Shayne kept after it, keeping his lights off, and finally saw its tail light, parked, unmoving, close by the creek bridge. Luis Valencia was already out and combing the high grass along the creek with a flashlight.

Shayne drew well to the side of the road, his car hidden by overhanging brush. He leapt out, moving silently along the shoulder, picking up a rock to weight his fist. Valencia had found the blowtorch, and caught the dull shine of the silver handled crop. His flash flickered off, and only the labored sound of his movements back toward the road gave evidence of his presence.

Shayne crouched low, waiting for him to come up the bank. He was unconscious that Anthony Crispin had followed him, also without lights, until the Scot rasped right beside him, "So you didn't buy her story, but you figured to follow and frame her!"

In the swiftness with which full knowledge comes in moments of peril, Shayne realized that Anthony Crispin thought that Luis Valencia was Alma Wollen, and that Shayne had trailed her here to trap her in some way.

He could smell the urge to kill bursting out of the Scot's big body with his sweat. He could feel the man's utterly ruthless and reckless determination to protect his woman at any cost. He heard the click of Crispin's pistol, and at that instant, Luis Valencia threw his flash beam up onto Shayne and snarled a curse. He dropped the objects he held and clawed for his gun.

Valencia's flash had a side beam. In the circle of light, his gun glinted as it whipped on Shayne. The detective saw the wicked epression on Valencia's face as the side beam picked his features out of darkness.

Shayne thrust the rock he held and heard Valencia's contemptuous snarl as he rasped, "So I missed you twice, redhead, but I get you now."

Crispin's gun blazed beside Shayne's head. For a moment, Shayne's brain felt like a bouncing ball with its muzzle roar. Valencia's light tilted sharply up into the air. He shot crazily up into the ridge. Crispin's gun barked a second time, and Valencia dropped, making a soft gurgling sound.

The flash fell in front of his face, showing the vicious snarl on his mouth as he died.

Crispin moved about awkwardly clearing his throat. He growled, "Damn it, I thought that was Alma, trying to find her riding crop, or trying to get away."

"Maybe you'd better marry her while you're still outside bars to do it," Shayne suggested.

He used handkerchiefs to pick up the two valued objects. "At least we've got the right fingerprints back on them," he chuckled.

"But what the devil," Crispin was puzzling. "What did he bother with the torch work for?"

"It's a guess," Shayne said, "but either Sir Herbert had double-crossed Valencia and Roesch, or else they meant to torture some information out of him. He died from the blows while they were at it. I don't think they meant to kill him until later, if at all."

He gripped the tall Scot's steel hard arm in his hand and squeezed him solidly. "I'll be turning this evidence in to the prosecutor. He'll hear the story of tonight of course. But I don't imagine this evidence will ever be offered in court, Crispin. There's no reason for Alma to confess anything to anyone and feel the shame of it. Let sleeping dogs lie."

"I'll see to that!" Crispin vouched.

Shayne took the two items of evidence to the prosecutor's office himself. A third assistant asked loftily, "Is this evidence incriminating to the man on trial?"

"No," Shayne said.

"Then it's immaterial and irrelevant," the assistant said. "Of course, you're free to leave it."

And that was the last heard of it. But the prosecution, which should have reached a thundering denunciation in the summary, was oddly, and suddenly, tepid. The jury brought in the verdict of "not guilty,"

"You're a real doll!" Lucy Hamilton told Shayne when she met him at the Miami airport, and pulling his red head down within reach, kissed him.

A Dramatic, Warmly Human Novelet

THE DARK ROAD HOME

In a child's eyes memory can become a shining light and an adult world of dark crime and violence take on a double pattern.

by Paul Daniels

THE WOMAN WAS in a terrible rage. The little girl, highly sensitive to human reactions—to fear and tension and anger—could feel the vibrations coming through the wall from the room beyond; coming into the place where she sat very still and waited.

The woman kept repeating a single word: "Stupid—stupid—stupid—" and the man who was with her there in the other room growled his defense: "It wasn't my fault. How could I know? I just did like we planned. It wasn't my fault."

The little girl was not frightened in the accepted sense. She had known of too much oppression and injustice to panic even in a situation such as this.

"The important thing now, Helen," the man whined, "is what are we going to do?"

"What can we do? We've got to get rid of her. She's worthless. It's all danger now and no profit. We've got to get rid of her and give ourselves an even break."

"You mean—?"

"What else could I mean?"

The little girl didn't understand one word in ten but the woman's tone, the aura of poised violence, the fear in the man's last question,

gave her the meaning. And she knew the Terror had returned; was here again; had to be reckoned with.

There had been a long, pleasant time beyond reach of the Terror; when they'd told her it would never come again. But she'd known that it would; that it was only waiting out there somewhere to sweep in and take her as it had taken her mother and her father and so many of the people she had known.

And what did you do when the Terror came? You did as you were told. You obeyed orders without question, knowing those who gave the orders loved you and wanted the best for you.

But it was different now. They were all gone. All except Uncle Hugo and maybe he was gone too. So it followed that you did the best you could; gave your own orders to yourself and then followed them.

And the order that came from deep in the little girl's highly sensitized mind was—*leave—get away from this place—make an effort to survive.*

Trust no one in this big black world and never, never, never give up.

This last was the most important lesson she'd learned in the whole eleven years of her life. The will to survive. This was a part of her as she got up from the chair they'd put her in and moved along the wall toward the window. She knew that haste was imperative but also that too much haste could be fatal, so she examined the window very carefully.

It was broken. Three jagged shards angled toward a smashed center and the little girl tested them carefully and found they were loose. Working carefully, she removed them one by one and then lifted herself even more carefully over the sill.

If she had an urge to leap out to freedom—to scream for help—to cry or act in any manner like a child—she stifled the demand because she had learned long ago to do none of these things. Trained for six of her eleven years in the wisdom of alert, deliberate movement, restraint had become a part of her nature even in the face of great peril.

So her seeming casualness, now, was logical as she stood outside in a soft, abandoned flower bed and marshaled all her knowledge of this particular situation.

She'd been brought in through the front door of this secluded house. It was set in a clearing, in a completely deserted section of a forest. There were trees on all sides but the safest direction to move was straight back because then the house itself might keep the man and the woman inside from seeing her.

There were other things she

knew also; that the man had brought her some fifty kilometers north of where she had been; that the automobile in which they'd ridden had been an old one; that they had gone most of the distance on winding country roads with trees close in on both sides.

These things she'd learned even while bound and covered on the floor in the back of the car; learned and remembered.

It was some comfort too, to know that the direction in which she now moved—toward the forest behind the house—was bringing her closer to Uncle Hugo—if Uncle Hugo still lived. Not much closer, but south, in the right direction; only a few feet subtracted from fifty kilometers but even this was comfort for a child who had learned to live—as her parents had lived—from moment to moment. Because only hope supports such living; you learn to rely heavily on hope; so even knowledge of a right direction was a great comfort.

The little girl reached the trees safely; touched a young birch as though it were a loving friend; held its trunk in her arms while she allowed herself the luxury of a quick little-girl sob.

But only one and that but for a short moment because the Terror thrived on those who took time to feel sorry for themselves. It made short work of weak victims. That was why her mother and her father and the people she'd known had lasted so long in the face of the Terror; because they were filled with courage; because they stayed and lived on hope and didn't cry.

And so, after the stolen luxury of one small sob, the little girl circled the birch sapling and moved like a slim blonde shadow into the forest . . .

THE DOBERMAN, a sleek, graceful unit of highly trained ferocity, whined to himself as he paced the eight-foot length of his kennel. He had been a witness and the incident at the child's playhouse in a secluded corner of the estate near his kennel had driven him momentarily mad; a weird silent madness during which he threw himself at the wire walls and the solid roof and had put bruises on his sleek hide.

The action had been over quickly but its image was sharp in the dog's memory; the tall, thin man; the blanket with its musty odor; the battered car the man had driven away.

The action finished, but now another man, a friend, was approaching the kennel and the Doberman paced restlessly, waiting to be let out so he could follow the car and set things right.

The friend was big, grizzled, slow of movement. He wore the clothing of a gardener, a caretaker, and his eyes were kindly. Exactly

the opposite of the Doberman's because the dog had been meticulously trained to kill and death always lurked back behind his eyes; back in his memory.

The dog did not bark at Hugo Kroener because that had been a part of his training also. Never any noise; run silent; run deadly; come out of nowhere to kill.

Kroener said, "Poor, Prince." He smiled and put his hand on the wire as close to the dog's nose as possible. "You'd like to be out running like a dog should, wouldn't you? Out in the forest chasing rabbits."

The dog sat motionless now, waiting to be released. But Hugo Kroener had not seen the action at the playhouse. He took a piece of dog candy from his pocket and tossed it through the wire. The responsive move of the Doberman's head was automatic—the dog appearing to accept the favor as some sort of stupid but necessary preliminary to the important business at hand.

But Hugo Kroener was a great disappointment to the dog. He turned away and started back toward his work at the other side of the estate. After a few steps, he stopped and turned and again smiled. "You miss her, do you not, old fellow? You like to have her in your sight all the time. But that cannot be. She is probably in the great house playing with the other little girl."

The dog knew that the other little girl was afraid of him. He'd learned this while watching the two of them at play; while he'd watched with yearning from his heavy wire kennel. Now he watched Hugo Kroener; motionless; a statue; a rigid machine of man-made death. Tolerated because a little girl loved him.

Kroener moved out of sight and the dog began sniffing the ground along the fence that trapped him . . .

THE LITTLE GIRL had been moving slowly and deliberately through the forest but now she was tired and felt herself entitled to a rest. Not a long one; just a few moments to ease the tension of eternal concentration.

She found a small pocket in the trunk of a big rotted-out tree and vanished from sight so completely that only a highly trained person could have located her.

Momentarily safe, she allowed her mind to slip its grasp on current reality; allowed it to rest and, automatically, memory took over. This was not a good thing, even while resting. In such circumstances as this she knew she should stay passively alert even while regaining her strength. But her longing was great and her thoughts went back . . .

. . . To the awful day when the Terror struck so savagely in Budapest. There had been a very

important meeting that morning in the cellar of the house where the little girl lived with her mother and father. Several men came quietly to talk over some important matters with her father.

Her father was a leader and the little girl had been very proud of him; proud of the respect and deference in the voices of the men who came. She had been proud of her mother also. Her mother never said a great deal but at times her opinion was asked on some matter of importance and she always had something very quiet and sensible to say and the men listened.

The little girl's mother and father talked together also, usually with the little girl in her mother's lap, feeling the gentle touch of her mother's hand and the warmth and comfort of her presence.

But on the awful day of the Terror, the little girl could tell by the tight feeling in the air, by the nervousness of her mother's hands, that things were very wrong.

Then had come the sounds of gunfire in the streets not far away and her father and the other men went there to see if they could help.

After a while the phone rang and the little girl sat very close to her mother while she answered and even though she didn't hear what was said over the phone

there was her mother's choked sob and the little girl knew her father was dead.

But her mother did not cry, so the little girl did not cry. They sat alone in the quiet house for a long time, the mother holding the little girl close in her arms. There alone in the quiet house, waiting, while the Terror lashed back and forth in the streets around them.

Then the telephone rang again, a nerve-ripping jangle in the darkness, breaking in frighteningly upon the stillness.

More news came over the phone and the little girl knew it was bad because her mother's fingers closed over her arm, hurting her, but the little girl made no out-

cry because she knew her mother was not aware of the hurt.

Now her mother began using the telephone, desperately and after a while the little girl knew her mother was talking to Uncle Hugo.

Uncle Hugo tried to get the little girl's mother to run; to try to escape past the Terror through the streets but she refused. She said it was too dangerous—the two of them—out there in the bullet-riddled night. Besides, there was no time.

So she told Uncle Hugo what he was to do and then hung up the telephone and held the little girl tight in her arms for a little while. But even then she was not crying.

When there was no time left even for love, the little girl's mother said, "Now I want you to go to your hiding place under the porch. No matter what happens, you must not make a sound. Do you understand that, my darling? Not one single little sound. You must promise."

"I promise," the little girl said.

After her mother held her for a few scant seconds longer and gave her kisses she would always remember and she went as she had been ordered, to the snug little place under the front porch where —if you stayed quiet as a mouse —no one would ever know.

She'd hardly gotten there when heavy footsteps thumped across the porch over her head; the footsteps of the Terror shaking dust down into her hair.

The men went on into the house, smashing in the door with the butts of their rifles. Then there were deep gutteral sounds. There was the brutal laughter of men who took the Terror with them wherever they went.

They stayed in the house quite a while and the little girl's mother screamed twice before she was finally quiet.

But the little girl obeyed the orders of the one who loved her most and she was as quiet as the stones around her.

She did not cry out even when the men crossed the porch again, on their way out; even when she knew the body they dragged after them was the body of her mother.

Then it was very quiet in the house and on the streets around the house, with the gunfire dying down as though the Terror had spent itself and had to rest and gain new strength.

Still the little girl sat.

Then there was a soft sound close by. The little girl reached out and touched a cold, wet muzzle.

The dog had come . . .

BUT NOW, hiding again in the rotted tree, half a world away from Budapest and that awful night, the little girl felt a touch of alarm at allowing her mind to wander so far from this new time

and this new place. A dangerous thing to do; dangerous because the Terror never rested. It was always alert; always ready to pounce down on the dreamer, the rememberer, the one who allowed mind and its senses to relax.

Besides, Uncle Hugo was fifty kilometers away and the little girl had to get back to him as soon as possible. Uncle Hugo couldn't possibly come for her this time because the little girl's mother hadn't been there to call him on the telephone and tell him where the little girl would be hiding. Therefore she would have to find Uncle Hugo all by herself. There was no one else to help her.

She pushed carefully out of her hiding place, scarcely stirring a leaf or a blade of grass as she tested for danger. There did not appear to be any at the moment so she came into view and continued on toward the south. Moving slowly and carefully through the forest because haste itself could be the greatest danger of all . . .

THE MAN AND the woman in the secluded house argued, berated, and cursed each other for half an hour before it was finally settled; before they agreed upon what needed to be done. Their mistake had to be obliterated; all evidence of it completely destroyed. And even though it would be a grim chore, it would not be difficult. After all—a child of eleven or twelve.

And there were any number of places to hide the body; places in the comparatively wild country where it might never be found; and would certainly remain hidden until time had worked in favor of the man and the woman.

"When?" the man asked sullenly.

"What's wrong with now?"

"I suppose so. How?"

"Do you know how to blow your nose?" Helen Mayhew asked contemptuously.

"Okay, okay."

The man prowled the room. He weighed the lethal comparatives of a milk bottle and a scarred rolling pin and selected the latter. He went to the door leading into the rear room and paused. "Maybe we ought to wait 'til dark."

"And lose the time? Who's around, you lamebrain? Have we got an audience or something?"

"Maybe we ought to take her where we're going to leave her first. Find the place."

"Get it over with, Mack—or haven't you got the guts? Do you want me to do it?"

"Quit riding me!"

Frank Macklin opened the door. He stood for a moment, looking into the back room, then lumbered forward. He found the closet empty, inspected the paneless window, and came back to Helen with a blindfold he'd

just picked up from the floor.

"She's gone," he said.

Helen had been putting on lipstick with the aid of a piece of broken mirror on the table. She straightened with a look of fright. "What do you mean—gone?"

"What I said. She took this off and blew."

Helen's rage flared again. She beat back her fear and made room for rage and if she'd had a weapon at that moment she would have killed Mack'in. She glared at him and went back to the old word: "Stupid—stupid—stupid. I lay things out. I plan—"

Macklin took a menacing step forward. "But you didn't do none of the work. The dangerous stuff—"

"You fool—she saw *me*—not you. When I took the blindfold off and found you'd blundered."

"That's right," Macklin said virtuously. "She saw you—not me. I seized her from behind."

"I made the plans—you made the mistakes. Now you get out and find that kid because I swear if I'm dead you're dead too."

Macklin—for all his stupidity—was still blessed with a certain logic. He nodded stolidly. "Uh-huh. We're both in it. But there's no cause to worry. She couldn't go far in this kind of country."

"Then don't stand there! Move! Do something!"

Helen's rage was melting. The fear was seeping back. The man patted her arm clumsily. "Don't worry. I'll find her. Everything's going to be all right."

And obviously there was some sort of a distorted love between the two of them because Helen's face softened. "Be careful," she said.

Macklin laughed boisterously. "I got danger with a twelve-year-old kid?"

"Move, you fool! Find her."

"Sure, sure."

As he left the house to start searching Helen Mayhew's fear returned. She was crying when he closed the door.

Outside, Macklin went around to the paneless window and found the small shoe prints in the abandoned flowerbed. He scowled. Up to this time he had been very gentle with the little girl—careful, as with a thing of value. But now she was a potential danger and he hated her; hated her as a peril and also for having become valueless.

He followed the tracks over the soft earth to the wall of trees behind the house, muttering as he walked:

"I'll find her and kill her. She won't get us into no trouble. I'll find her. I'll kill her—real good . . ."

IN THE WOODED, hilly country there were many summer homes owned by people who came north for the good months; many who felt a country summer to be in-

complete without a pet to share it with—usually a dog because a dog will romp with its benefactors and show appreciation in many ways.

But later, many of these dogs become problems. What to do with them when summer is over? They would be annoyances in city apartments, needing attention and care. Everyone knows a dog is not happy in close quarters. They belong in the open where they can run and play.

So in many cases the problem is solved by driving away from it; by leaving these summer friends in the country where they gather in packs for mutual protection and are soon no longer pets.

Where they revert to the law of the wild and kill to live. They kill woodchucks and rabbits and pull down deer. Packs with a particularly savage leader will slaughter domestic animals for food. And some of these packs, reverting completely before they are hunted down, have been known to maim children.

Such a dog pack roamed the country through which the little girl moved. The leader, a big German Shepherd gone shaggy and vicious, caught her intriguing scent on the late autumn breeze and sat down on his haunches to consider the matter while his four followers awaited his decision.

The pack as yet had not gone totally vicious what with food still available and the weather still good. But they were farther along than they should have been because they'd been roughly handled. Chased off one farm with clubs, they'd approached the second with far too much trust and had been met by a load of buckshot.

The small Collie swung a loose foreleg as a result and the German Shepherd was in a sullen mood from a wounded jowl that hurt him whenever he opened his mouth to breathe which was most of the time.

The female Beagle, sensing his pain had tried to lick his wound and he'd slashed her shoulder by way of gratitude.

Still, the German Shepherd was not quite ready to take human life—to pass that point of no return in dogdom—but the scent made him quiver deep inside because while human it was not adult and a dog pack is attracted to helplessness.

The German Shepherd came off its haunches and circled restlessly, growled in its throat, and started off through the woods.

Moving with more decision as the scent grew stronger . . .

NEAL GARRETT looked up from the book he'd been reading and saw his caretaker approaching the patio across a hundred yards of lawn. There would have been time to read another page but

Garrett put the book down because he enjoyed watching Kroener. Sight of the big European gave him a sense of satisfaction, Kroener being a reflection of Garrett's own generosity.

And Garrett had a right to this satisfaction. Wasn't he one of the comparative few who'd been thoughtful enough to extend a helping hand to those poor devils? Sharing good fortune with the unfortunate? God, what those damned Russians had put them through over in Hungary! Enough to make a man's blood boil. Of course, Kroener didn't talk much but it had come to Garrett from other sources. Facing death for the little girl. Getting across the border with Red bullets clipping at his heels. Who wouldn't want to help a guy like that?

Besides, there were rewards for Garrett's kind of virtue. Not that they'd been the first consideration of course. But good luck keeps an eye on generous men because Garrett had had to wait only three weeks after he'd first gotten the idea until they told him they had a crackerjack gardener for him.

And this specification hadn't been so unreasonable on his part. After all, didn't a top-notch grass and flower man rate a break as much as some slob who figured America owed the world a living and would just stand around and collect it? Hell yes!

Of course there weren't too many of that kind. European workmen hadn't been ruined by unions and prosperity and most of them appreciated a break. This Kroener for instance. He kept the whole damn ten acres looking like an exhibit and hadn't asked for a lick of help. One man doing the work of two and maybe even three.

Garrett was glad, now, that he'd gambled on the child. He'd almost turned them down on Kroener when they told him the little girl had to come too—figured maybe the guy would have her in tow all the time and let the place go to pot.

But it hadn't worked out that way at all. Just about the opposite in fact. The little girl had even been good for Cindy. Same age, same build. And two little blonde heads around the place were kind of cute.

So it had worked out fine. With both Kroener and the kid knowing their place and Kroener never letting her come into the house unless Grace invited her.

Garrett wondered. Maybe Grave had her up from the cottage a little too much. Not that he was a snob, mind you. Just for the kid's own good. Might be rough on her with so much here she couldn't have. In her condition it might be easy for a kid to turn morbid and get to be a problem.

But that was a minor point.

Garrett forgot about it and wondered if he should ask Kroener to have a drink. Not that he wouldn't have done it automatically, but what the hell—how did they do it in Europe? That was how Americans got a bad name around the world; being too damn generous. Treating people as equals —peasants who weren't used to it and figured you for a peasant yourself just for fraternizing with them. They were queer ducks all right, some of them.

Hugo Kroener had arrived now. He took off his hat and spoke in careful, laborous English. "Mr. Garrett, sir. I have come to inquire of you if my little Tina is here. With your Cindy?"

Garrett got up and went out onto the lawn still carrying his scotch and soda. "Tina? Haven't seen her. I thought she was with Cindy—over in Cindy's playhouse."

"They were there. Now the playhouse is empty. There is no one there."

"Then they may be in the house. Upstairs in Cindy's room, maybe. Wait a minute."

Garrett went back into the screened patio and called, "Grace! Hey, Grace—is Tina in there anywhere?"

His voice was loud enough to reach all of the seventeen rooms and soon a tall, graceful woman appeared. She smiled and said, "Don't stand out there in the sun,

Mr. Kroener. Come in where it's cool."

Hugo Kroener gravely obeyed and Neal Garrett said, "He's come for his little girl. I told you that. You could have brought her down and saved a trip."

Grace Garrett was surprised. "Why, I thought Tina was with you, Mr. Kroener. Cindy came back from the playhouse quite a while ago. She's upstairs in the bathtub."

Hugo Kroener was troubled. "Usually I watch them—to see

that Tina is not left alone too long. But I got busy with the back shrubs."

"It was thoughtless of Cindy. Leaving her that way. I'll speak to her about it."

Garrett said, "She's probably roaming the grounds somewhere. Hope she's careful about not stepping on flowers and things."

"Tina is very careful," Hugo Kroener said.

Grace Garrett frowned slightly as she glanced at her husband. "I'm sure she couldn't have gone far."

Garrett sloshed his ice cubes around and said, "Sure. Let's face it—how far could a blind kid go?"

Grace Garrett was embarrassed—something in her husband's tone and manner. A crudeness. She said, "We'll help you look around, Mr. Kroener."

"Thank you, Mrs. Garrett, but I will find her. As Mr. Garrett said, she could not go very far."

A bell toned melodiously somewhere inside the house. "The front door," Neal Garrett said. "I'll get it, hon. Make yourself a drink and relax a while."

After her husband left, Grace Garrett asked, "Would you care for a drink, Mr. Kroener?"

"No thank you. I must go and look for Tina. I am sorry I have troubled you."

"It was no trouble. And Tina isn't, either. I think it's wonderful, she and Cindy having one another to play with."

"It is very good for Tina," Hugo Kroener said gravely. "She needs friends."

Hugo Kroener returned as he'd come, toward the wooded and shrubbed areas beyond the lawn. Tina had several hiding places around the estate and once in a while, when he was ahead in his work, she would select one and then Kroener would make an elaborate, noisy business out of finding her; calling her name in mock anger; bringing giggles from lips that seldom smiled.

But there was no time for a game now; a quicker way of finding her. The dog. He never made a game of it. He always went straight to where she was and licked her face in glee. The dog and the child loved each other and they belonged together but that was impossible. They could be together only when he was there to watch.

The Garretts were afraid of having the dog loose. And perhaps they were right although Hugo Kroener knew in his heart that Prince would die under torture before he would hurt a child. But there *were* other people around and you could never tell about a dog with his kind of background.

Hugo Kroener stopped and looked toward the kennel. Then he hurried forward. A hole had

been dug underneath the wire.

The Doberman was gone . . .

THE TERROR, Tina had learned, was not a single, clearly defined thing. It was a dark mixture of many evils. Basically, it was the nonlove, the hostility, of persons unknown, and this she had come to take for granted as a part of life, just as her mother had trained her to make the will to survive a part of her life.

You didn't waste mental energy wondering why the unknown persons wanted to destroy you. Instead, you used that energy to always fight back with whatever weapons were available, and Tina's weapons were incredibly keen ears, her every sense honed and sharpened to the uttermost in compensation for her blindness.

So her ability to walk a straight south line through a strange forest was not incredible; no more so than knowledge of the distance she had been driven, or her ability to read black intent from the tone of strange words and feel danger in the subtle vibrations around her.

A mixture of many evils, the Terror, with fatigue, hunger, and cold numbered among them because these weapons of the Terror were calculated to dull your senses, cripple your reactions, make you an easy target for the final attack.

Thus rest was not a luxury; it was a necessity, so in the sharpening chill of late autumn afternoon, Tina began looking for another sanctuary and found a snug hole under a cluster of boulders, probably the deserted nest of a fox or a woodchuck because it was heavy with old animal odors.

There she rested and as her mind again let go, it seemed she was back in the other cave under the porch in Budapest; just as she had been when Prince first came; his cold wet nose; his soft tongue . . .

In a sense, the Doberman too had been a victim of the Terror—trained to become a savage part of it—put to work in places where high walls and barb wire had sometimes failed. He had been skillfully brain-washed and taught to do his work well, his gentler instinct scientifically stifled.

Stifled but not quite destroyed as was proven that terrible night in Budapest when a cog in the machine of the Terror slipped and he was left to himself; no leash; no commands to sit, to stand, to heel —to kill.

A lean black shadow moving through the tense city; trying possibly, to escape the gunfire smells he had always hated; or perhaps keyed to destroy on his own whim if the need came.

He stopped in the vicinity of a darkened house—one that looked empty and deserted—giving it his attention because he knew this was

not the case. Life still existed there and he crossed the street and found it in a small nestlike place under the front porch.

But he did not attack. There was something unusual about this helpless wisp of form and movement; something in the uncertainty of the hand that touched him. A confusing thing but oddly pleasant. He licked the small hand and allowed it to pat his nose.

The Doberman licked the little girl's face and she almost laughed as she heard his tail thump but she caught herself in time and whispered, "Don't be afraid, doggie. I'll take care of you until Uncle Hugo comes."

The dog put his head into her lap and quivered as the little girl stroked him and they waited together.

Perhaps the strangest aspect of the phenomenon was the dog's complete trust in the little girl as was proven when Hugo Kroener crawled under the porch and knelt for a few tight seconds within inches of sudden death. But a whispered word from the little girl told the dog this was a friend and the dog understood.

But Hugo Kroener didn't. He tried to send the Doberman on its way but the dog stood firm, stubbornly demanding acceptance, until Kroener realized that henceforth the little girl's way was the dog's way also, and they moved in stealth through the strife-torn city —the man, the child, and the lean black shadow—avoiding destruction—escaping into Austria . . .

But now the Terror had come again and Tina was alone with only her hope and her instinct for survival. Reaching out from the near-edge of sleep, she whispered, "Prince—Prince—come and find me."

But this, she knew, was wishful thinking. Prince would not come. He was trapped in a kennel with wire over the top. No one would come, so she must rest and banish the weariness and then move on again . . .

HUGO KROENER returned to the big house at dusk. Neal and Grace Garrett were having coffee behind the screens of the patio. Kroener gripped his hat in his huge hands and said, "I have not found her. She is not anywhere on the grounds."

While Neal Garrett frowned out across the lawn, his wife said, "Then we must call the police. She has wandered off and must have gotten confused."

Neal Garrett did not appear to be convinced. "Are you sure you looked every place? This is a pretty good-sized layout. Maybe she got tired and dropped off to sleep under some bush."

"I looked everywhere," Kroener said. "I think the police should be called. It could be very dangerous."

"Dangerous? You've got your locations mixed. This isn't the African jungle. It's urban United States —seventy miles north of New York City."

"But the dog is with her. It might be dangerous for anyone who approached her to ask a question."

"You mean she took that killer—?"

"No. He dug out under the wire of his kennel."

"Then how do you know he's with her? He might have just taken off into the hills."

"Wherever she went," Kroener said, "he is with her."

"Okay—I guess we better call the State Troopers—have them check the neighborhood." There was an odd reluctance in his voice and Grace Garrett looked up quickly, wondering about it, feeling vaguely troubled . . .

They called the closest State Police barracks and were told that all cars in the area would be alerted. A search would be made. The Trooper on the phone said not to worry. They would find the child.

Hugo Kroener went back to his searching. After he left, the Garretts were silent for a time, with Grace Garrett watching her husband as he paced the floor.

Neal Garrett said, "I hope that beast doesn't take an arm off somebody. We'd be liable. I shouldn't have allowed them to bring the monster with them."

"Neal—"

He didn't quite meet her eyes. "Yes—?"

"Has it occurred to you that Tina might have been kidnapped?"

He stared incredulously. "Kidnapped! Are you out of your mind? A nobody's kid. What would be the point?"

"Our Cindy isn't a nobody's child. You happen to be worth a great deal of money."

"Nobody figures me in that class," he snapped.

"Someone might suspect."

"Anyhow, you aren't making sense. We weren't talking about Cindy. She's safe upstairs in bed."

"That's true, but she and Tina look very much alike."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"You're being purposely dense. A mistake could have been made."

"Why hell's bells! They're as different as night and day. The Hungarian kid is blind. Anyone could tell—"

"Of course, but very few people realize it at first glance. She lost her sight from scarlet fever when she was five years old but her eyes weren't damaged. And with the training she got from her mother—to hold her head up so proudly—she appears to be quite normal most of the time."

"You're crazy. Kidnappers are smart. They wouldn't make a mistake like that."

"I don't agree. I think the fact that they're kidnappers makes them stupid. And I think a situa-

tion might arise where a mistake like that could easily occur."

"I say you're off your rocker. Nobody could be sure I'd be able to pay. They wouldn't make the gamble. So that leaves some enemy or other and nobody's out to get even with me for anything. Not people like that, anyhow."

"Of course I'm sure. What are you driving at?"

"Somehow I keep thinking of that Mayhew woman."

"Who's she?"

"The maid who worked for us a month or so last spring. She dropped a trayful of glasses, remember?"

"Oh—that one."

"You lost your temper and cursed her."

"She had it coming."

"Nobody deserves to be cursed for an accident. She cursed you back, you'll recall—said she'd get even with you."

"Hell—she probably forgot all about it the next day."

"Still, you've got to admit she became an enemy."

"You're way out in left field. Kidnappers don't keep you in the dark. They leave a note or send one. They want money."

Grace Garrett studied her husband thoughtfully. "I suppose you're right." There was something distant and uncertain in her voice. She arose from her chair suddenly. "I'm going up to look in on Cindy," she said, and left the room.

Alone, Neal Garrett mixed himself a drink. He gulped it down. At intervals, he swore softly . . .

IT HAD TAKEN the Doberman less than five minutes to tunnel under the wire wall of his kennel—a felony he committed only after discovering that Kroener was not going to release him. He went straight to the spot where the hedge had been broken by the tall man's passage in and out; through which he'd carried the little girl wrapped tight in the blanket.

Just beyond the hedge was a point where a narrow country road wound in close to that corner of the grounds before it snaked off into the northern hills. That was where the car had stood; where the man had bound and blindfolded the little girl before finally covering her with the blanket on the floor in the back seat.

And the Doberman found something else; a heavy blood spoor. This came from the dead body of a robin that had been killed by hitting an overhead telephone wire in flight, the body later flattened by the rear wheel of the fast-traveling car.

So, as the dog loped north in pursuit, the blood spoor remained strong. The road also was a fortunate one for his purpose. In earlier years it had been a main thoroughfare but a six-lane parkway had been built a mile to the east and now the old road was used by the

comparatively few people whose country homes bordered it.

Thus there was no heavy traffic to confuse the Doberman, a breed not noted for superior tracking abilities. In fact, if the kidnap car had turned off into any of the estate entrances, the dog would probably have been thrown into a fruitless circle.

But it stayed on the rutty blacktop mile after mile; until the country became more hilly and deserted and it finally dwindled into a dirt road, rough and tortuous; heavy with dust that held the blood spoor even better than the paved surface.

So the dog found no great problem until he came, after three hours of steady, mile-eating lope, into an area where the dirt road dwindled off and vanished into overgrown trails and footpaths. There, the scent wore out and the dog began circling; flushing out small game and ignoring it as he followed one false lead after another.

But he did not give up. That also was a characteristic of the breed and a marked trait of this particular dog. He would circle and follow, return and go forward, until he dropped in his tracks . . .

THE FRIGHTENED woman, left alone in the isolated house, made dozens of trips into the yard as the afternoon waned into evening. She kept watching the south forest line for a sign of the man's return and now her nerves were about as raw as she could stand. The surrounding woods with its whispering, menacing trees had begun to move in on her; to seem more and more like a big black trap.

She had admitted no guilt in front of the man but alone she conceded that she'd blundered also. That was what came from trying a thing you'd had no experience with. That way, you found out your mistakes after you made them.

First, she should not have moved in anger—she shouldn't have let that slob Garrett bug her so much. Of course, if he hadn't treated her like so much dirt, she wouldn't have gotten the idea in the first place. It had been strictly from revenge in the beginning, with Garrett's contempt and his curses and foul names eating at her until she decided to make him pay.

And it had looked so easy. Helen Mayhew had been sure Garrett would pay; that his wife wouldn't let him go to the cops. And afterwards, how could she and Mack be traced? Who could suspect? Neither of them had a record. When you hunted for a kidnapper, you went through the police files and looked for somebody with a criminal background. You didn't track down ordinary citizens who'd always minded their own business.

And with the kid back, the

whole thing would have died down after a while. She and Mack would just have had to be careful with the money—not flash it around.

But she should have checked one last time. It *had* been several months. She'd taken the chance from fear of being seen in the neighborhood; had gambled that things would be the same. But she'd told Mack that if things didn't look just right to just drive on by and come back.

So it wasn't her fault. She'd told him that and things hadn't been right. But he hadn't driven on by. He'd snatched the wrong kid. How could she have known he'd have a choice? Two kids. Both of them blonde and around eleven years old. Good God!

Thus the failure roiled around in Helen Mayhew's mind; accusation and alibi until the forest shrieked in her ears and she could stand it no longer.

Until she grabbed her purse and started the car and headed out. Out to anywhere. She didn't care. She only knew that she had to get away from this place and keep going. Keep going 'til she hit an ocean somewhere.

And then keep going some more . . .

THE WOUNDED German Shepherd, viciousness flowing into it with its heightening hunger, circled the cluster of boulders under which the little girl waited. The dog could have gone on in and dragged her out but a thin edge of caution held him back; a caution requiring him to snarl and froth in his rising madness a while longer, working himself to a higher pitch of noncaution.

This caution was based on an instinctive fear of traps, the cave under the boulders having that aspect. The wild hunter, the pack leader to which the abused animal had reverted, prefers to work in the open; to circle and bring its quarry down with quick lunges at exposed flanks.

But with the agony of a torn jaw nourishing the dog's madness, the barrier of caution was fast vanishing. Soon he would be ready. He had already pushed to within inches of the crouching child, had ravened in her face and then pulled back at the last moment.

The pack milled restlessly, waiting for the leader to make his move; expecting him to make it, with the leader aware of this demand for leadership. He had to produce food and comfort or he would lose the pack.

The crippled Collie pressed a little too close and the German Shepherd whirled and ripped at the injured paw. The Collie shrieked in pain and limped away. The German Shepherd slavered a warning and moved back to the cave opening.

He was ready now. This time he would finish the chore. But at just

that moment a furious black shadow came out of nowhere to bar the way, smashed against the German Shepherd and knocked him sprawling.

It was a pitifully unequal battle, the German Shepherd supported only by madness and instinct while the Doberman, silent as a well-oiled piston destroyed his enemy with a detached savagry born of cold, scientific training.

There was no time even for the pack to close in on its fallen leader and help with the kill; time only for surprise before the Doberman turned from the death he had dealt out and streaked for the Collie.

And thus the pack was informed of a difference here. This was not a new leader destroying the old one and taking over the pack. Here, the pack itself was in danger of annihilation and the dogs fled in all directions to look back in bewilderment from beyond the perimeter of danger and then go their separate ways.

The Doberman stood watch for a while, grinning at them as they left, and then entered the cave; wriggling along on his belly with strangely immature puppy whines of contentment.

The little girl's hand touched his bloody muzzle and did not draw back. She held the dog close and the dog quivered as from weakness when she whispered, "Prince —Prince. You *did* come and find me." Not in those words; in the soft, gutteral Hungarian the dog understood.

He put his head in her lap and banged his tail against the ground and after a while Tina—her courage and fortitude shredded by weariness—dropped off to sleep.

But the dog did not sleep. He lay unmoving with his head in the little girl's lap, a blood-spattered threat of sudden death to anyone who came too close . . .

THE TALL MAN had hunted through the forest all that day but had not found the little girl. After the tracks vanished into an unbroken carpet of dried leaves, he began moving in aimless circles, feeling that one direction was as good as another.

At one point he came upon the tracks again, or thought he did, but they proved to be a part of many others, converging upon a place where many children had come for a picnic—probably in early summer from the deserted look.

He went on with his wandering, hoping each moment to catch sight of a yellow cotton dress so he could finish the job he'd come to do.

But the little girl seemed to have been swallowed up and the man began cursing his evil luck.

How was it that not a damn thing ever worked out? How come even a sure thing went wrong? Garrett would have paid. And he'd have kept his mouth shut, too.

He was that kind of a guy. Inside the law, but not wanting any cops snooping in his business.

That was how Helen Mayhew had it figured and she'd been around him long enough to know. Helen was smart. She knew what she was doing and just how things should have worked out.

Only one thing—they should have checked first and found out about the second kid. Or would it have made any difference? Maybe not.

His weariness growing, Macklin turned back toward the deserted house. Deep in self-pity, he decided it wouldn't have made any difference. If it hadn't been two kids to trip him up there would have been something else. He'd never been able to ring up a score. Just a hard-luck guy from the beginning and he'd probably end that way.

He broke into the clearing and saw the house; no light; no sign of life. But Helen was probably playing it smart. Some local yokel might spot a light and start nosing around and more trouble would come down on them.

But no car either. What the hell had she done with the car? He called her name. There was no answer. Damn it all, she didn't have to play it that smart.

"Helen! Where the hell are you? It's Mack. You don't have to hide. I'm all alone." No answer. He plodded toward the house.

And even then it took him a good five minutes to realize the truth. She'd run out on him! She'd taken the car and headed out with him pounding the woods like a maniac trying to keep *her* out of trouble.

The lousey, cheap, conniving bitch! She'd taken off and left him to face the rap! He'd kill her by God! He'd find her and ring her goddam no-good neck!

But now he was hungry and he stopped reviling the woman long enough to wolf down some bread and cold meat she'd left in the house. Damned white of her not leaving him to starve to death.

His hunger dulled, fatigue took over, and an earlier resolution to get the hell out of there came up for reappraisal. Sure, he'd have to get away fast but not in a night so goddam black you could crack your skull on it. This was as safe a place to sleep as any. He'd rest up and hit out before dawn—straight south—through the woods; get down into civilization and keep going clear into the South maybe.

He bedded down in a corner of the room they'd first put the kid in and that made him remember her. Damn stupid little brat. Sneaking out and ruining everything. They weren't going to hurt her. But that was how things went for him. He was a hard luck guy . . .

He awoke, refreshed just before dawn as he had intended to, shook off the autumn chill, and ate the

rest of the food. Then, as soon as it was light enough to keep from breaking your leg, he started south through the woods. Morning deepened and he moved faster . . .

Until, around ten o'clock, Macklin got his break. The kid. There she was; walking kind of slow and funny through the woods. Walking like she was afraid of falling over a cliff.

And damn if she didn't have a dog with her. Where had she picked up the mutt? A black Doberman. There'd been a dog like that back at Garrett's place; a dog that couldn't bark. It had gone crazy in its kennel when he took the kid.

This couldn't be the same one, though. Just a coincidence that they looked the same.

Mack picked up a section of fallen branch, a good strong club. Maybe he'd have to kill the dog first. Or maybe the mutt would run. A belt across the chops and it would get the message, anyhow.

The dog had turned and was eyeing Macklin; motionless and silent with no hint of what went on in its mind. The man and the dog stared at each other for long moments. Then the man raised the club and moved forward.

Macklin said, "One side, you black bastard or I'll—"

IT WAS THE evening of the second day and the State Police together with members of volunteer fire companies in the surrounding area were out beating the hills for some sign of the little blind girl. So far they'd seen nothing.

With lack of evidence to the contrary, it had been assumed that she'd wandered away into the hills and was perhaps hiding, weary and frightened, in some rock-pocket or thick undergrowth.

They had rimmed off the widest circle that a blind child could conceivably cross and were covering every inch of it.

But without result. Still, they kept on as others joined them and their wives leagued together and brought food and drink and began collecting flashlights and batteries in preparation for night search.

Hugo Kroener moved steadily, doggedly, silently over his apportioned segment refusing food or rest; like a man hunting for a time bomb with the minutes ticking away. Perhaps not even minutes now . . . Perhaps it was already too late.

Neal and Grace Garrett remained home on advice of the State Police; to be available in case the thing "took a new twist"—words with which the State trooper in charge framed his fear of kidnapping.

He was Sergeant Farrier, a pleasant young man with an air of efficiency about him. He made several visits to the Garrett home during the day and then, around six o'clock, he called from the Patrol

barracks and talked to Grace Garrett.

"The little girl may have been found," he said. "We got word from Centerville, a little place about forty-five miles north of here. Something's been going on up there."

Grace Garrett's nerves were a trifle raw. "Just what do you mean by—*something's been going on?* Either they found her or they didn't. Is Tina—?"

Farrier forestalled the word *dead.* "We don't know yet. As I said, we got the report but in cases like this it's best to go up and find out first-hand. I'm leaving now. I'll be there in less than an hour."

"Shall I tell—?"

"Don't tell anyone. Let the hunt go right on until we find out what this is all about."

"Hurry—please hurry."

"I will." Farrier hesitated, then added. "I can tell you this much. The little girl they found is blind."

"Then it *is*—"..

"It would seem so. But there are other blind children and we want to be sure."

"Thank you. I'll be waiting right here."

Grace Garrett put the phone down and turned to her husband who stood waiting. "They think perhaps they have found Tina."

"Where for God's sake?"

"They aren't sure it's Tina yet. A call came in from a place forty miles north of here."

"That's silly. A blind child wandering that far."

"Sergeant Farrier is driving up to see. Until they know for sure we mustn't say anything about it."

"It—it just doesn't sound reasonable," Neal Garrett said.

"We can hope."

"I'm going to get a cup of coffee."

Grace Garrett followed her husband's exit with troubled eyes. This affair had driven a wedge between them; mostly her fault, no doubt, because she hadn't inquired too deeply into the cause of his obvious upset. Concern was natural, of course, but Neal seemed to have a personal secret eating at him.

Perhaps, Grace Garrett thought, she should have kept probing until she'd brought it out. But she had a feeling that she knew what it was and had been hoping he would tell her of his own accord. Had she been right in thinking—? No. Of course not. How could she have gotten such an idea?

Her head ached dully and she took two aspirin before going upstairs to keep Cindy company. She had kept Cindy inside the whole day and it was difficult for the child . . .

Farrier returned around ten o'clock that night, bringing another Patrolman with him. They were met at the front door by the Garretts and Farrier said, "We had good luck. Things seem to be all

right. The little girl is unharmed."

"Where is she?" Grace Garrett asked.

"There in the back seat. We fed her before we started back. She's sound asleep now."

Grace Garrett took a step forward but the second Trooper raised his hand. "She's perfectly comfortable. It might be better if we let her sleep until her uncle comes. He'll be better able to handle the dog."

"This is Trooper Kane," Farrier said. "He was in charge of things up at Centerville. He rode down with me to kind of wrap it up."

"The dog, you said?" Neal Garrett asked.

"A black Doberman. He's tied up but let me tell you—there's one rough customer."

"Thank God everything's all right," Neal Garrett said fervently. "I'll go out and find Kroener and tell him."

"That won't be necessary. We reported at the local barracks on the way over. The word was sent out to the uncle—and to call off the search. But there are a few things—"

"Come in, please," Grace Garrett said. "We shouldn't have kept you standing here."

"—a few things—" Farrier repeated over a cup of coffee in the study with Grace Garrett sitting on the edge of her chair and Neal Garret with his back to the fireplace, tense and silent.

"Some pretty peculiar points, actually," Trooper Kane said. He was an older man, stocky, with a bronzed, weatherbeaten face. "A man was killed."

Garrett winced. "You mean you killed someone rescuing her?"

"No, it wasn't quite like that." Trooper Kane frowned at the cup in his thick fingers. "Let's see if I can put it in some kind of sequence. First, a farmer outside of Centerville heard what sounded like a dog fight off in the woods late last evening.

"He went out this morning and found a dog dead there—a big German Shepherd. It looked as though it had been killed in the fight. That wouldn't have been too exceptional, though, because we're bothered up in that section by wild dogs. Summer people leave them when they go back to the city."

"You said a man was killed."

"I'm coming to that. A couple of hours later two fellows hunting rabbits came across this man about half a mile south of the dead dog. He was dead too. It was pretty bad. The man had obviously been killed by a savage animal. His throat had been—well anyhow, that was what we had; until we covered the section a little more thoroughly and came on the girl.

"We couldn't get to her, though, because she had a black Doberman with her—the one we've got in the car. He blocked us off from her—wouldn't let us get even

close—so we brought out some nets and trapped him."

The Trooper shrugged and set his cup on the coffee table. "We didn't realize the little girl was blind for a few minutes; you'd certainly think she was all right to look at her. Then we found she couldn't speak much English; kept asking for her *Onkel* Hugo. There couldn't have been two like that roaming the woods so we were pretty sure we'd found your stray."

"But the dead man—" Grace Garrett said.

"We actually can't say the black dog killed him. It could have been the German Shepherd."

"Then there isn't any certain connection between the man and Tina."

"I wouldn't say that exactly. The man had some papers on him—a social security card. His name was Frank Macklin and we're checking him out."

Trooper Kane reached into his pocket and brought out a stamped, addressed envelope. He held it up. "The man was carrying this, too. All stamped and ready to put in a mail box. It's addressed to you, Mr. Garrett."

Trooper Kane took out the single folded sheet of paper the envelope contained and flattened it out on the coffee table. "A ransom demand," he said, forgetting to speak with his usual calmness.

The Garretts moved forward as one and read the scrawled words: *Drive north on Old Mill Road. Throw the satchel with the 25 Gs under the old bridge a mile south of King's Crossing. Then keep right on going. Do like we say and your little girl will be let go. Drop the satchel at 10 o'clock Friday night and keep right on going or it will be too bad.*

"Then Tina *was* kidnapped," Grace Garrett said.

"It looks that way," Sergeant Farrier answered.

"We'll find out exactly what happened—"

Trooper Kane broke off as Hugo Kroener entered from the patio side of the room without ceremony. "I was told that you found Tina."

Kroener was unshaven and haggard. He looked like a specter out of a bad dream. Grace Garrett went to him and laid a hand on his arm and said, "Yes. She is asleep out in the car. We thought it best to wait for you. The dog is with her."

He went past them, through the front door and when they reached the car behind him, he asked, "What dog? What child? Is this a joke?"

The State Troopers peered into the car. "They were there—in the back," Trooper Kane said.

"Then I think I know."

"The dog was tied. The little girl was asleep."

"The little girl was not asleep. And knots can be undone."

He left them and walked off in

the darkness, the others following. He crossed the estate to the Doberman's kennel and went in through the open gate to kneel in front of the dog house.

They were inside, the child and the dog; the dog motionless in the entrance; black head resting on tense paws; eyes as cold as an Artic winter.

Hugo Kroener called, "Tina," and the little girl answered. *"Uncle Hugo—I am so tired!"* she said in her native tongue. He lifted her out carefully. *"It is all right, my little one—it is all right now!"* And to the Doberman: "Come, old fellow. You may lie at the foot of her bed and watch over her . . ."

LATER THAT NIGHT, after the Troopers had left, Grace Garrett faced her husband and put the question that had to be asked: "Why did you do it, Neal?"

He feigned surprise. "Do what for God's sake?"

"Cover it up—keep silent. You knew Tina had been kidnapped."

"I knew *what?"*

"Oh, don't pretend," she said wearily. "It will all come out. They aren't going to drop it here. They'll find the Mayhew woman and—"

"But you said I knew. The kidnap note was in Macklin's pocket—not mine."

She met his gaze unwaveringly. "The second one—yes. The one he didn't mail. But the first one came when you and Hugo Kroener and I were on the patio. You went to the door."

"How did you know it was a kidnap note?"

"I saw the special delivery mailman driving away. And you didn't mention what he had brought. I know you so well, Neal. Your business mail never comes here—and you were careful not to mention it to me."

"All right—quit bugging me. It was a ransom note."

"But why did you conceal it—that's what I must know. Why did you keep saying Tina couldn't have been kidnapped."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars! That's why! I figured it might work out. And that's a lot of money to lay out for someone else's kid."

"I thought that was probably the reason."

"Well, why not? It's your money—and Cindy's—as well as mine."

"Tina took Cindy's place. She could have died for Cindy."

"All right. But would that have been my fault? Is that any reason for not being practical?"

"I suppose not, from your standards Neal, but there's one more question I have to ask."

"Okay—get it over with. I'm tired."

"If there had been no mistake. If it *had* been Cindy. Would you have cringed at the thought of paying out."

"Grace! For God's sake! How can you ask a question like that?

What do you think I am? Inhuman or something?"

"No—no Neal. I'm sorry. I don't think that at all."

"Then let's go to bed. Things worked out all right and that's the main thing."

"Yes, that's the main thing," Grace Garrett said. And it seemed to her that she had grown suddenly older as she got into bed beside her husband.

THE NEXT MORNING Hugo Kroener carefully explained to his niece that what had happened was a very exceptional thing, not an ordinary occurance in America at all; that it could not possibly happen ever again and that it had nothing to do with the Terror.

Tina listened dutifully and nodded and agreed with her uncle because she loved him and knew he really thought he was right. But of course he wasn't. You couldn't hide from the Terror by simply crossing an ocean. It wasn't as easy as that. The Terror was many things and it would come back again. It always had.

The thing to do was to stay alert.

Stay alert and never, never give up.

The Lieutenant had a great respect for logic. But he knew that in almost every crime of brutal violence . . . there are elements of dark compulsion.

SCREAM WOLF

by

FRITZ

LEIBER

ALTHOUGH IT WAS a muggy August night in Chicago, the Lieutenant's smile was as grim and frosty as a December sunrise over the Loop.

"Let me see if I've got it straight so far, Mr. Groener," he said. "This apartment isn't your home. You and your wife were visiting Mrs. Labelle, an old friend. You occupied the front bedroom, just back of this living room. The back bedroom was occupied by another guest of Mrs. Labelle's—a Miss Graves, also an old friend—Mrs. Labelle had the bedroom between."

The big man sitting opposite the Lieutenant nodded dully, his face turned away from the bridge lamp cascading light on his chair.

"You went to bed about midnight," the Lieutenant continued. "Mrs. Groener had been drinking

heavily. At about two you woke and wanted a cup of coffee. You went back to the kitchen, past the other two bedrooms and through the dining room. While you were heating water, you heard Mrs. Groener scream. You found the bedroom empty. There was a cigarette burning out on the end of the sill of the open window beside a glass half full of straight whiskey. Four stories straight below you made out something turquoise-colored glimmering in the back courtyard."

"Mrs. Groener had been wearing a turquoise-colored long-sleeved nightgown. You knocked on Mrs. Labelle's bedroom door and told her to call us. Then you hurried down. You were kneeling beside your wife's dead body when we arrived. Correct?"

The big man slowly turned his head into the light. His face was that of a gaunt old matinee idol under its thatch of silvered dark hair. Then he looked straight at the Lieutenant and held out a steady, spread-fingered left hand.

"Except for one point," Groener said. "When my wife screamed I didn't rush back to the bedroom. I finished making my cup of coffee and I drank it first."

The Lieutenant cocked an eyebrow. The younger blond detective who had been lounging wearily against the wall of the hallway sharply turned his wide face toward the speaker.

"Now and then Mrs. Groener used to scream," the big man explained, "when she'd been drinking heavily and I'd left the bedroom. It may have been a rebuke or summons to me, or a fighting challenge to the whiskey bottle, or simply an expression of her rather dark evaluation of life. But it had never meant anything more real than that—until tonight."

"Mrs. Groener was seeing a psychiatrist?" the Lieutenant asked harshly.

"I never was able to get her to," the big man said. "As I imagine you find in your business, Lieutenant, there's no real middle course between persuading a person to seek therapy voluntarily and having them forcibly committed to an institution. Mrs. Groener always had the energy to be quite sane when necessary."

The Lieutenant grunted noncommittally. "Well, you certainly seem to have been very long-suffering about it," he said and then added sharply, "Cool, at any rate."

Groener smiled bleakly. "I'm an alcoholic myself," he said. "I know how lonely it gets way out there in the dark. I didn't used to scream, but I pounded holes in the walls, and woke up to bloody plaster-powdered knuckles . . . and cigarette burns between my fingers." He gave his head a little shake as if he'd been dreaming. "Thing is, I managed to quit five years ago. My wife didn't."

The long couch creaked as the Lieutenant slightly shifted his position on the edge of the center of it. He nodded curtly.

"So when Mrs. Groener screamed," he said, "you finished making your cup of coffee and you drank it. You thought she had screamed simply because she had become unnerved by heavy drinking. You were not unduly alarmed."

Groener nodded. "I'm glad you didn't say DTs," he said. "Shows you know what it's all about. Mrs. Groener never had DTs. If she had, I'd have been able to do something about her. I took my time drinking the coffee, by the way. I was hoping she'd be passed out again by the time I got to the bedroom."

"This scream she gave—how loud would you say it was?"

"Pretty loud," Groener said thoughtfully, "Almost loud enough, I'd say, to wake the people in the flat across the court—except that people in a big city never seem to bother about a scream next door."

"Some of them don't! Then it would have sounded still louder to Mrs. Labelle, or even Miss Graves, than to you. One of them might have been waked by it, or been awake, and gone to your wife's bedroom."

"No, they wouldn't," the big man disagreed. "They were familiar with Mrs. Groener's emotional tendencies. They're both *old* friends."

"They still might have gone."

Groener shook his head. "I'd have heard them."

The Lieutenant frowned. "Has it occurred to you that one of the women may have gone to your wife *before* she screamed?"

Groener's answering gaze was stony, "I'd have certainly heard them if they had," he said.

The Lieutenant stood up and jerked his head at the blond detective, who came toward him.

"Through with me," Groener asked.

"Yes," the Lieutenant said. "When you get back to the dining room will you ask Cohan—that's the other detective—to send in Miss Graves?"

Groener nodded and started off, his feet dragging. When he came opposite the first bedroom door he paused and his shoulders tightened wincingly. The Lieutenant looked away, but when the footsteps didn't resume, he turned quickly back. The big man had disappeared.

The Lieutenant strode to the bedroom door. Groener was standing inside, just looking. The Lieutenant started to bark a question, but just then the big man's steady left hand moved toward the bed in a slow curving gesture, as if he were caressing something invisible.

It was a bedroom with a lot of little tables and stacked cardboard boxes besides the usual furnish-

ings—evidently used by Mrs. Labelle for storage purposes as well as guests—but a broad clear path led through the orderly clutter from the far side of the double bed to the large black square of the open window.

Standing two yards behind Groener's back, the Lieutenant now became aware of the source of a high tinkling noise that had been fretting the edges of his mind for the past half hour. A small oscillating fan was going on a table beside the bed. Hanging from a yardstick stuck in a top dresser drawer a couple of feet from it was a collection of small oblongs and triangles of thin glass hanging on strings. When the stream of air swept them they jingled together monotonously.

The Lieutenant stepped up beside Groener, touched him on the shoulder, and indicated the arrangement beside the bed. Behind them the blond detective cleared his throat uneasily.

"My wife hated all little noises at night," Groener explained. "Voice and tuned-down TVs and such. She used those Chinese windchimes to blur them out."

"Was she quite a small woman?" the Lieutenant asked softly.

"How did you know that?" Groener asked as he started for the door. The Lieutenant pointed at the dresser mirror. It was turned down so that it cut off both their heads and the big man's shoulders.

The Lieutenant and the blond detective listened to his footsteps clumping noisily down the long uncarpeted hall. They heard the frosted glass door to the dining room open and close.

The blond detective grinned. "I'll bet he learned to walk loud to please his wife," he said rapidly. "My mother-in-law does the same thing when she stays overnight with us. Claims it's so as not to scare Ursie and me—we'll know she's coming. Say, this guy's wife must have been nuttier than a fruit cake."

"There are all kinds of alkies, Zocky," the Lieutenant said heavily, "with different degrees of nuttiness and sanity. You notice anything about this room, Zocky?"

"Sure, it's not messed up much for all the stuff in it," the other answered instantly.

"That mean anything to you?"

Detective Zocky shrugged. "Takes all kinds to make a world," he said. "My mother-in-law's an ashtray-washing fanatic. Never dries 'em either."

They heard the dining room door open again. As they started back for the living room, Zocky whispered unabashed, "Hey, did you notice the near-empty fifth tucked behind the head of the bed?"

"No, I merely deduced the bottle would be there like Nero Wolfe," the Lieutenant told him. "Thanks for the confirmation. In-

cidentally, quite a few people have a morbid fear of dirt, including cigar ashes. It's called mysophobia. And now shut off that fan!"

Miss Graves was as tall for a woman as Groener for a man and even more gaunt, but it was a coldly beautiful gauntness. She dressed it well in a severe black Chinese dress of heavy silk that hugged her knees. Her hair was like a silver fleece.

She seemed determined to be hostile, for as she sat down she glared at the Lieutenant and said to him, "I'm a labor organizer!" as if that made them lifelong enemies.

"You are, huh?" the Lieutenant responded, thumbing a notebook and playing up to her hostility in a way that made Zocky grin behind her back. "Then what do you know about Mrs. Groener? An alcoholic, wasn't she?"

"She was a thoroughly detestable woman!" Miss Graves snapped back sharply. "The only decent thing she ever did was what she did tonight, and she did that much too late! I hated her!"

"Does that mean you were in love with her husband?"

"I—Don't be stupid, officer!"

"Stupid, my eye! There has to be some reason, since you stayed close friends—at least outwardly." He held his aggressive, forward-hunching pose a moment, then leaned back, put away his notebook, smiled like a gentle tomcat, and said culturedly, "Hasn't there now, Miss Graves? Most of these complications have a psychological basis."

She did a double-take, then the tension seemed to go out of her. "You're right, of course," she said. "I knew Mr. Groener in college, before he ever met her, and after that I saw a bit of them both from time to time, through Mrs. Labelle and others."

Her voice deepened. "I watched him misuse his best years on too many high-pressure jobs, trying to be too successful too soon—because of her. I watched him become an alcoholic because of her. Finally I saw him drag himself out of that morass, but remain tied to her more closely than ever. She was his weakness, or rather, she brought out the weakness in him."

Miss Graves shook her head thoughtfully. "Actually I no longer hated her when she killed herself —because during the last years she wasn't at all sane. It wasn't just the liquor, understand. Mrs. Groener scribbled paranoid comments in the few books she read. I found some in one I loaned her. She wrote wild complaining letters to people which sometimes cost Mr. Groener jobs.

"As for her social behavior—well, they were staying here because they'd been put out of their last apartment on account of her screaming and loud abusive talk. And she did all sorts of queer little things. For instance, when I came

in yesterday she was drinking in the sunroom and she had her left wrist tied to the arm of her chair with a scarf. I asked her why, and she giggled something about supposing I thought she was fit to be tied. I imagine you've seen that horrible little wind-and-glass machine she used to blank out the sounds of reality?"

The Lieutenant nodded.

"It wasn't the first time she tried to commit suicide, either," Miss Graves went on thoughtfully.

"No? Mr. Groener didn't tell us anything about that."

"He wouldn't! He was always trying to cover up for her, and he still is! It's a wonder he didn't try to hide from you that she was an alcoholic."

"About this earlier suicide attempt," the Lieutenant prompted.

"I don't know much about it except that it happened and she used sleeping pills."

"I take it you don't live here regularly, Miss Graves."

"Oh no! Mrs. Labelle invited me yesterday with the idea of old friends rallying around the Groeners. It wasn't a good idea. Mrs. Groener was hostile toward me, as always, and he was simply miserable."

"About Mrs. Groener," the Lieutenant said. "Besides her hostility did she seem depressed?"

Miss Graves shook her head. "No—just a little crazier than last time. And thinner than ever, a bunch of matchsticks. Her drinking had got to that stage. We had some drinks after dinner—not Mr. Groener, of course—and she got very drunk and loud. We could hear her ranting at him for a half hour after we all went to bed—about how he shouldn't have let them be put out of their apartment and about how he always had to be surrounded by his old girl friends and—"

"Meaning you and Mrs. Labelle?" the Lieutenant cut in.

Miss Graves made a little grimace as she nodded. "Oh yes. Mrs. Groener firmly believed that any other halfway good-looking woman in the same room with her husband was his mistress or had been at some time in the past. A fixed delusion, though she'd only come out with it at a certain stage of her drinking. I knew that, but it still upset me. I had trouble getting to sleep."

"You stayed awake?"

"No, I dozed. Her scream awakened me. I started to get up, but then I remembered it was just part of the act. I lay there and after a while I heard Mr. Groener coming back from the kitchen."

"Had you heard him go?"

"No, that must have been while I dozed."

"Did you hear the door to the dining room open or close? It's just outside your bedroom."

"I don't believe so. No, I didn't. It must have been standing open."

"Do you sleep with your bedroom door open or closed?"

"Ope—" Miss Graves frowned. "That's strange. I thought I left it open, but it was closed when the scream woke me up."

The Lieutenant looked at her sharply. "Then are you quite sure it was Mr. Groener you heard coming back from the kitchen?"

"Certainly. I couldn't be mistaken. He always made a lot of noise, even in slippers."

The Lieutenant grunted. "And when did you finally get up"

"When Mr. Groener came rushing into the hall and knocked on Mrs. Labelle's door and told her to call the police."

The Lieutenant stood up. "There's one more thing I've got to ask you," he said quietly. "Are you Mr. Groener's mistress—or were you once?"

"No, never," she said. "Oh, Mr. Groener was an attractive man, but she spoiled him for everyone."

"But now that she's no longer here . . ." The Lieutenant left that question hanging in the air and so did Miss Graves, though it seemed to start something working in her that almost had the look of hope. "That's all then," he told her. "Thank you. Ask Cohan to send in Mrs. Labelle."

When they were alone, Detective Zocky said, "Hey, I'll bet you got the same idea as me. There was no trigger for this suicide. But what if Groener had been having his coffee in Miss Grave's bedroom, and his old lady knew it or slipped out and caught them. That'd make a wow of a trigger."

"I take it Miss Graves is a dike no longer," the Lieutenant said. "Ambidextrous at least."

"Hell, that was just descriptive. I'd say Groener and this dame are practically the same type."

"Yes, they're both tall, good-looking people with gray hair," the Lieutenant observed drily. "Bound to start making violent love to each other every chance they get."

"Well, what the hell, it was a perfect set-up for them," Zocky persisted. "The wife passed out and Mrs. Labelle the tolerant type, no doubt. I know this Groener puts on the pious reformed-alky act, but most ex-boozers his age do that. Why, my father-in-law—" He stopped talking as the dining room door opened and high heels clicked in the hall.

Mrs. Labelle was quite as sylph-bodied as Miss Graves but she dressed it in thinner silk—crimson. Under the coiled and gleaming blonde hair her face looked much younger. Its expression was teen-age, in fact, avid and pert. But there were more tiny wrinkles around the corners of her eyes and mouth.

"Do I sit there? she asked, pointing at the brightly lit chair under the bridge lamp before the Lieutenant could. She took it,

tucking her feet under her and carefully drawing down her skirt after giving him a flash of high leg.

"This is quite an event for me," Mrs. Labelle announced. "I've always been fascinated by police work. You must find out so many strange things about how people behave in funny situations."

"Right now I'm just looking for a few everyday facts," the Lieutenant said. "How did the Groeners happen to be staying here?"

"They'd lost their apartment without warning. I always feel very sympathetic toward them, because Mr. Labelle is an alcoholic too. We're getting divorced. He lives at a hotel. Perhaps you can tell me what makes alcoholics tick, officer. They're beyond me. I always told Mrs. Groener that if she'd just control her drinking—not stop altogether and get gloomy like her husband—but just take enough to feel bright and happy and relaxed—"

"Miss Graves now," the Lieutenant interrupted. "How did she happen to be here?"

"I invited her. I thought the Groeners ought to have all their old friends around them."

"And perhaps you were interested in seeing how people behave in funny situations," the Lieutenant said. "For instance, Mrs. Groener thinking her husband's mistress was sleeping in the same apartment."

Mrs. Labelle giggled. "Oh that," she said scornfully. "Mr. Groener chased every pretty woman in a lazy secret sort of way, but if he'd ever caught one he'd have scurried right back to his wife. I think she kept throwing it up to him just to keep him in line. I'm quite a psychologist—"

"Okay," the Lieutenant said. "Now about tonight. Did you hear the Groeners quarreling after you went to bed?"

"I wouldn't call it that. Mrs. Groener just let off steam for a while as any woman will. I listened. It didn't make much sense in her case. But it was interesting."

"And when they quieted down you went to sleep?"

"Oh my no!" Mrs. Labelle gave a little wriggle and flirted her coiled blonde hair. "I had too many exciting things to think about."

"Good! I want you to tell me exactly what you heard in the way of footsteps and other noises. It's important you get them in the right order. Mrs. Groener quieted down. Suppose you start from there."

Mrs. Labelle leaned forward, hugging her elbows, and briefly closed her eyes in happy concentration. "First a long time passed. It must have been an hour or more because I'd almost run out of things to think about and was wondering if I shouldn't take a

sleeping pill. Mrs. Groener's windchimes were beginning to get on my nerves, though I'd hardly heard them at first. Then I heard Mr. Groener go clumping down the hall.

"I called to him, because I had some hints to give him about how to handle Mrs. Groener. But my door was closed and he didn't hear me. Then I heard his footsteps stop for a moment and a door close. A moment later I heard him going on to the kitchen."

"Are you sure about that?" the Lieutenant asked. "Mightn't he have been going into Miss Graves's bedroom? Think hard, please, before you answer."

Mrs. Labelle laughed. "Not chance in the world. He's scared of her. You know why? Because she's actually been in love with him her whole life and too stuck-up to do anything about it. That's why she never married. He wouldn't have gone into her bedroom even if she'd begged him to. Anyhow, I know he must have gone on to the kitchen, because right away I heard him banging around out there making coffee. Men! After a while it got quiet and then Mrs. Groener screamed."

Mrs. Labelle shivered and momentarily closed her eyes. "It was a pretty dreadful scream, even for her, and just a little later there was a thud, as if she'd fallen out of bed. Only it wasn't quite the same. If my window hadn't been closed, I'd have probably heard the difference better and been the one to discover her. Just suppose I'd looked out and seen her perching on the sill ten feet away! That would have been a psychological challenge! As it was, I almost did get up though I knew her tricks. But when I waited, half-expecting to hear something else, there wasn't a sound. Except the windchimes, of course."

"Think carefully, Mrs. Labelle," the Lieutenant said. "Wasn't there some other sound then? Didn't Miss Graves get up? Or didn't Mr. Groener at least start back from the kitchen or make some kind of noise?"

"No, officer, it was all quiet as death—oh, I didn't mean to say that, but it was. Mr. Groener stayed in the kitchen a long time —long enough for two or three cups of coffee, I'd say I thought about a sleeping pill again and finally I took one and about then Mr. Groener came clumping back. I might have called to him, but I'd just taken the pill. Right after that he came charging out of the bedroom and pounded on my door and told me Mrs. Groener had jumped and to call the police. That's all." Mrs. Labelle buried her head in her arms and let out a large sigh.

"Thank you," the Lieutenant said. "Just a couple more questions now. Miss Graves said Mrs. Groener had tried suicide before.

Do you know anything about that?"

Mrs. Labelle laughed. "That was a false alarm. A few months ago he found her almost passed out with an empty bottle of sleeping pills beside her. He started to force warm water down her and he'd just got the waste basket for her to throw up in when he noticed the sleeping pills scattered at the bottom of it. She just wanted to make him think she'd swallowed them. People are funny, aren't they? What's the other question?"

"Miss Graves said that yesterday she saw Mrs. Groener drinking—in your sunroom, she said—with her left wrist tied to the arm of her chair with her scarf. Know anything about that?"

"No, it sounds pointless. The sunroom's that alcove behind you, officer, with the big windows. Wait a minute—I do remember seeing Mrs. Groener do that years ago. It was *Oklahoma*. It was sold out. We were sitting in the second balcony, and she had her scarf wrapped around her wrist and the arm of her seat. I thought she'd done it without thinking."

"Huh!" The Lieutenant stood up and started to pace. He noticed Mrs. Labelle. "That'll be all," he told her. "When you go back to the dining room would you ask Mr. Groener if I could see him again?"

"I certainly will," Mrs. Labelle said, popping up with another flash of leg. She smiled and rippled her eyelids. "You gentlemen have given me some fascinating side-lights on life."

"You're certainly welcome," Zocky assured her, gazing after her appreciatively as she click-clicked down the hall. Then he said to the Lieutenant, "Well, that kills my theory of a suicide trigger. I guess Groener really is the pious type who'd never get out of line."

"Yeah," the Lieutenant agreed abstractedly, still pacing. "Yeah, Zocky, I'm afraid he is, though 'pious' may not be just the right word. Scared of stepping over the line comes closer."

"But this Labelle's a real odd cookie—reminds me of that hold-up girl last month. She thinks everything's 'funny.' "

"You got a point there, Zocky."

"A real bright-eyes too, despite her barbiturates and booze."

"Some it takes that way, Zocky."

"Of course she's real attractive for her age, but that's not here or there."

"Maybe not, Zocky."

"You know what? When you talked to her about Groener's supposed mistress I think she thought you meant her."

"Okay, okay, Zocky!"

When Groener arrived, looking more tired than ever, the Lieutenant stopped pacing and

said, "Tell me, did your wife have many phobias? Especially agoraphobia, claustrophobia, acrophobia? Those are—"

"I know," Groener said, settling himself. "Fear of open spaces, dread of being shut in, fear of heights. She had quite a few irrational fears, but not those particularly. Oh, perhaps a touch of claustrophobia—"

"All right," the Lieutenant said, cutting him short. "Mr. Groener, from what I've heard tonight your wife didn't commit suicide."

Groener nodded. "I'm glad you understand alcoholics aren't responsible for the things they do in black-out."

"She was murdered," the Lieutenant finished.

Groener frowned at him incredulously.

"I'll give you a quick run-down on what really happened tonight, as I see it, and you can tell me what you think," the Lieutenant said.

He started to pace again as if he were too wound-up not to. "You went for your coffee. Mrs. Labelle called to you through her door as you passed. You didn't want any of her child psychology —or anything else from her either. But it told you she was wide awake and listening to everything. Then you came to Miss Graves's bedroom and the door was open and you saw her sleeping quietly, her silver fleece of hair falling across the pillow."

Groener shook his head and moved his spread-fingered left hand sideways. But the Lieutenant continued, "It struck you how you'd wasted decades of your life caring for and being faithful to a woman who was never going to get well or any more attractive. You thought of what a wonderful life you could have had if you'd taken another direction. But that direction was closed to you now —you'd been spoiled for it. You'd built up inhibitions within yourself that wouldn't let you overturn the applecart. If you'd tried to, you'd have suffered agonies of guilt and remorse. It would have killed all enjoyment. So you closed Miss Graves's door, because you couldn't bear to watch her."

"Wait a minute—" Groener protested.

"Shut up," the Lieutenant told him dispassionately. "As you closed the door you felt a terrific spasm of rage at the injustice of it. All of that rage was directed against your wife. You'd had feelings like that before, but never had a situation brought them so tormentingly home to you. For one thing you'd just been treated like a worm by the woman you were tied to in front of the woman you desired with a consuming physical passion. It was tearing you apart. You'd come to the end of your rope of hope. Five years

had fully demonstrated that your wife would never stop drinking or mentally intimidating you.

"You thought of all the opportunities of happiness and pleasure you'd passed up without benefit to her, or yourself—or anybody. You suddenly saw how you could do it now without much risk to yourself, and how afterwards perhaps everything would be different for you. You could still take the other direction. What you had in mind was bad, but your wife had been asking for it. You knew you could no longer ever get free without it. It was a partly irrational but compulsive psychological barrier that nothing but your wife's death could topple. The thought of what you were going to do filled you like black fire, so there was no room in your mind for anything else."

"Really, Lieutenant, this—"

"Shut up. Your plan hung on knowing Mrs. Labelle was awake—that and knowing that she and Miss Graves were both on to your wife's screaming trick, if that should come up. You started making coffee—and even more noise than you usually do—and then you took off your slippers and you walked back to the bedroom without making a sound. Or if you did make a few slight, creaking-floorboard sounds, you figured the wind-chimes would cover them up.

"Yes, Mr. Groener, you're a man who normally makes a lot of noise walking, so your wife wouldn't accuse you of sneaking around. So much noise, in fact, that it's become a joke among your friends. But when you want to, or even just when your mind's on something else, you walk very quietly. You did it earlier this evening right in front of me when you went in the bedroom. You disappeared that time without a sound.

"You found your wife asleep, still passed out from the drinks. You carefully moved back what light furniture and stuff there was between the bed and the wide-open window. You wanted a clear pathway and it didn't occur to you that a drunk going from the bed to the window under her own power would have bumped and probably knocked over a half dozen things."

The Lieutenant's voice hardened. "You grabbed your wife—she got out one scream—and you picked her up—she weighed next to nothing—and you pitched her out the window. Then you stood there listening a minute. This was the hump, you thought. But nobody called or got up or did anything. So for a final artistic touch you put your wife's bedtime drink and one of her burnt-out lipstick-stained cigarettes on the window-sill. You've got to watch out for artistic touches, Groener, because they're generally wrong. Then you

glided back to the kitchen, finished the coffee act, and came back noisy."

The Lieutenant quit pacing and paused, but Groener just stared at him—incredulously, almost stupifiedly, but still steady as a rock. Zocky shot an apprehensive look at his superior.

"The important thing you overlooked," the Lieutenant went on relentlessly, "was that I'd find out your wife was an acrophobe, and that her dread of heights was so great, sober or drunk, that she'd tie her arm to her chair when she was merely sitting near a big window or up on a theater balcony. To suggest that such a person would commit suicide by jumping is utterly implausible. To imply that she'd preface it by sitting or leaning on the window ledge having a last drink and smoke is absolutely unbelievable."

The Lieutenant paused and narrowed his eyes before adding, "Moreover, Mr. Groener, quietly as you walked back to the bedroom, did you really suppose you accomplished that so silently that Mrs. Labelle's sharp ears wouldn't catch the sound of your footsteps?"

Groener roused himself with an obvious effort. "I . . . I . . . This is all quite absurd, Lieutenant. Mrs. Labelle . . ." He made the usual gesture with his left hand. "You can't really believe that."

He looked at his left hand. So did the detectives. It was shaking and as he continued to stare it began to shake more violently. The tendons stood out whitely as he stiffened it, but the shaking didn't stop.

Groener's tight-pressed lips lengthened in a grin but the corners of his mouth wouldn't turn up. "This is embarrassing," he said. "Must be embarrassing to you too. First time I've had the shakes in five years."

Groener shook his head. "All right," he said, closing his eyes, "I did it. Just about as you've described it. I was insane to think I could ever get away with it. I suppose your doctor noticed that her neck had been broken before she fell. He probably deduced it from the tear in her scalp where I'd jerked her head back by the hair."

"No," the Lieutenant said, "but he will now. Zocky, would you get Cohan? Tell the ladies Mr. Groener's coming with us to make a statement at the station. Tell them he doesn't want to speak to either of them now. I imagine that's the way you want it, Groener?" The other nodded.

After Zocky went off, Groener said, "Would you tell me one thing?"

"I'll try to."

"How did you know *her* hair looked like a silver fleece?"

The Lieutenant flushed. "Oh

that—please excuse it. I was just blasting away at you. The words came."

Zocky returned with the third detective. They opened the front door and started down the stairs. The Lieutenant told Cohan to go first with Groener.

Zocky said to the Lieutenant in a gruff whisper, "Hey, I gave you a right steer on that walking loud on purpose business, didn't I?"

"Yes, Zocky, you did."

"I don't like this case, though," the blond detective went on. "This Groener's not a bad guy. Think of listening to those chimes night after night!"

"If they were all bad guys, our job would be easy."

"Yeah. Say, I just realized we don't know any of their first names —not Groener's or either of the dames."

"Cohan will have them," the Lieutenant said. "But that's a very important point about detective work you've just made, Zocky. Never know their first names, if you can make progress otherwise."

Two Hired Killers Pick Their Victim

by JAY RICHARDS

Big Time Operator

THE NIGHT WAS dark but its somber overcast suited Dave Lashek's purpose. He leaned against the wall of the corner building, and watched the mid-town, eight-thirty theater crowds scurrying along the dimly-lit pavements.

Eddie would be showing soon in the hustling throngs of pedestrians, and then all Dave would have to do was point him out. The rest would be taken care of by the dark figures standing in tight-lipped silence on each side of Dave Lashek, the two out-of-town killers Karen had ordered for this job.

After he fingered Eddie for the "hit," he'd fade into the crowds and disappear. The police wouldn't be able to tie Dave to the murder. Not a chance. He wasn't even carrying a gun.

Dave Lashek never operated

without a considerable margin of safety to fall back upon. He believed in playing things sharp and cool. Still, he felt bad about tonight's job, worse than he would have felt about an ordinary kill.

After all, Eddie *was* his cousin.

A dirt-encrusted newsboy came by, struggling under an armload of late editions. Dave took a paper and handed him a bill. The kid gave him change with a pleased grin.

That was a laugh. But it was also good in a way. It proved the newsboy didn't know him and wouldn't be able to identify him later. Only a stranger would give change to Dave Lashek. His fingers opened up, letting the silver drop away as if it was filth. The coins jangled as they hit the sidewalk and the two killers were impressed. Even though they were from out of town, they knew Dave Lashek never carried anything but bills.

B. T. O. That's what people called him and it was true. *Big Time Operator.* The only sound he ever wanted to hear was the silky rustle of bills—large-denomination bills.

The clank of coins was strictly for the peons.

He glanced at his wristwatch under cover of the opened newspaper. Eight thirty-five. Eddie was due any minute now. Too bad. But the kid never should have become interested in Karen. It was only a matter of time before he'd have grown tired of *just* looking. And nobody, not even Eddie, was going to move in on Dave Lashek's woman.

Goodbye cousin, he thought. And he *was* sorry, genuinely so.

The two hoods were becoming uneasy, anxious to do the job they had been paid to do and vanish in the night. The darkness was stirring on either side of him with their restlessness.

But he wasn't disturbed. Eddie would be along any moment now. Dave had told him to be here and he would come. Ed was very dependable. Dave had known that when he'd let the kid into the business over a year ago. It was much too good a business to trust to irresponsible personnel. So Eddie had gotten in on merit, not just because he was Dave Lashek's cousin.

It was an excellent business, Dave thought smugly, running his fingertips lovingly over the thick roll of greenbacks nestling in his pocket. At last he was secure in the Big Time. If anybody in the city wanted slots or girls or the numbers, they had to come to Dave Lashek.

Things would have been fine if only Ed hadn't started looking at Karen *that* way. Not that the kid could be blamed much. It was for precisely the same reason he'd taken Karen for his woman in the first place. So he could walk into any night club with her on his

arm and watch the men at the bar, their stools spinning slowly as they tracked Karen's passage. It gave him pleasure to watch the drooling peasants eat their grubby hearts out.

But it made no difference in the final count, the showdown count, that it wasn't Eddie's fault. Once he'd become interested in Karen, Eddie was through. Because no one took *anything* away from Dave Lashek.

It was eight forty-five now. Dave turned his head slightly, first to the left and then to the right, glancing at the imported talent that Karen had contracted for. The two hoods looked competent enough. Hired killers. But Dave was glad he could afford them for tonight's execution. Sure, he'd done his share of killings but he never cared for that end of the business.

Besides, it was no stranger that was going to be "hit" tonight.

He could have done it, himself, of course. Dave Lashek could do anything he expected of his subordinates. But it was sharper, cooler, to order it performed.

There was a tiny smile tucked away inside his mouth where nobody could see it. Irony was something Dave appreciated. He'd made Karen take care of the arrangements for the out-of-town killers. That was really rich. Here poor Eddie had flipped over Karen, and Dave had forced her to give the order for the execution.

Eddie was coming now.

It was only the work of a moment for Dave to jab elbows into the sides of the close-standing assassins, alerting them to the victim's approach. The young slim face came rapidly nearer, jutting half a head taller than the scurrying crowds. Dave Lashek waited another moment to let the kid get closer still, and then pointed him out.

Dave walked away quickly and before Eddie could see him. All that was necessary had been done. He'd fingered the victim for the two executioners and Ed was as good as dead now. It was just as if Dave Lashek had squeezed the trigger personally.

He regretted the need for Eddie's liquidation. But Dave could harden himself to it because the kill was necessary. They'd all been necessary. *All* the killing that had been performed at his orders over the years. It made him feel kind of tired, inside. But only for a moment. Because then Dave's fingers brushed the huge wad of bills in his pocket and his spirits soared.

He had no regrets. It was worth the occasional twinges of conscience to be Dave Lashek and throw nickels and dimes and quarters away as if they were dirt.

He was listening as he walked. Listening for the sharp crackle of gunfire he'd heard so many times

in the past. The shots would sound any moment now, signaling the end of cousin Eddie's interference. But it was strange. The guns of the hired killers remained silent.

He let another minute go by before he turned. Then he saw the reason for the delay. The two hired killers were about half a block behind Dave. And they were walking after him, purposefully. Eddie was between them, not a captive but a big shot in command, giving the deadly orders.

The realization grated into Dave Lashek's consciousness like a jagged metal spike. His suspicions hadn't extended far enough. He hadn't considered Karen. Eddie's interest in her evidently hadn't been a one-way thing. And Dave had insisted that Karen set up the execution!

She'd set it up, all right. Only *he* was to be the victim.

Instinctively his hand went under his coat for a non-existent rod. Bitterly he cursed his new respectability. In the old days, Dave Lashek wouldn't have been caught out on the streets without a shoulder-holstered pistol. But tonight he was unarmed, leaving flight as his only means of escape.

Dave ran. Through the twisting, darkened streets, down the garbage-strewn alleys, trying to shake his relentless pursuers. The executioners spread out to cover more ground, to corner him between their three-pronged pincers. But he dodged them, using every hard-learned trick of the back streets.

Suddenly he burst out into the open, safe for perhaps thirty seconds from the deadly malice, and saw it.

The haven.

It was only a street-corner telephone booth but nothing had ever looked more welcome. Dave half-ran, half-staggered the last couple of yards, collapsing into the booth. Now he could phone for help. For the first time in his life, he'd be glad to see the police.

His pockets crackled as he went through them frantically. A crisp paper crackling solely—a folding-money crackling. Nothing but bills. Hundreds and twenties and tens and fives. And all Dave wanted was a dime. One lousy little ten-cent piece. Desperately he rummaged amidst the greenbacks. There had to be a dime, a quarter —anything that would fit into the coin telephone slot.

They were coming now. He could see the three assassins converging on the booth. They were walking very slow on the night-black streets, cutting off all retreat for Dave, penned defenseless in the bulb-lit transparency of the phone booth.

He yanked at the telephone cradle, trying to pump it into life, screaming for help into the dead mouthpiece that could have saved him.

Then the guns of the executioners were out with their muzzles gaping darkly at him and immediately thereafter winking redly in the night. The phone booth exploded about him in tinkling glass shards. He stood pinned against the back of the booth—pinned by the angry buzzing of copper-jacketed bees flying over and around and into him. A swarm of bullets.

He watched the useless bills floating down to the floor, stared in dull terror at the bloody red waterfall which was gushing from his sleeves onto the fluttering greenbacks. Red or green, Dave thought as he fell, like a Christmas tree. Just like a goddamned old Christmas tree!

A Chilling Suspense Novelet

Nightmare Edges

The stranger was the soul of good fellowship. How was a dedicated young jazz player to know that he cast a dark and terrible shadow!

by LEE MARTIN

IT WAS A NIGHT for crime. Greenwich Village, like the rest of the great, sprawling city of which it is a part, sweltered in a warm drizzle, compounded with fog and lingering, acrid smoke. It was a night for the store-breaker, the house-breaker, the car-thief, the mugger. It was a night for the rapist, the kidnapper, and the twisted perpetrator of those monstrous violations that drive tabloid newspaper rewrite man to use six-syllable words in an effort to cushion, for public consumption, the ultimate horrors of human depravity.

It was a night for crime. And criminals, seeking to avail themselves of its added obscurity, were everywhere astir, like restless insects emerging from their diurnal nests. Among them, a man, still unknown to the overworked police, whose bloody fulfillments in the past four months had caused daily papers, radio and television news reporters to employ such grisly, well-remembered phrases as Jack-the-Ripper, sex-fiend and Bluebeard. Five times he had struck and vanished.

It was a night for crime.

Inside Pete Bellardi's *Cote d'Azure,* Joe Chance was considering crime in a peculiarly personal application. He had been considering it with increasing urgency and frequency for weeks.

Joe was a clarinet player who wasn't going anywhere, one of those dedicated young jazz men who drift forever into Manhattan, precisely as do equally dedicated young actresses in search of a hearing. He wrapped up the final chorus of *Muskrat Ramble* and began breaking down a clarinet as moist from sweat and atmospheric

condensation as the gaudy sports-shirt that covered his bony, unmuscular torso.

The clock over the bar, just visible from his post by the battered white yacht piano, read nine minutes of eleven. Disappointment lay as heavy beneath his diaphragm as the breaded veal cutlet and french-fries Pete's chef in the kitchen had given him for dinner.

The deadline he had set for himself, the thin line that separated the struggling young citizen-artist from the non-citizen thief, had come. Mary had let him down. She had promised to be in the saloon with one of the jazz greats, a man who could—perhaps—see to it that he got the opportunity that had eluded him for so long.

It was almost eleven—and another disappointment, another rebuff. He closed the clarinet-case with finality, knowing this was it. From now on, he was not a musician. He was a thief.

Al Wilson, the burr-headed pianist, reeled off his concluding chords and Rafe Norton, the pale brown Harlem youth who provided the trio's rhythm, gave his upended suitcase a final lick with the whiskbrooms. There was neither applause nor comment from the sparse audience.

Rafe said, "Hey, Joe, I thought your girl told you tonight was the night Pee Wee was coming in to hear us."

Al Wilson chimed in with, "Yeah, ten o'clock, wasn't it? It's eleven now." He had a habit of blinking his eyes when he spoke.

Joe said, "What the hell, guys. *I* didn't set it up. Maybe Pee Wee got sidetracked."

Wilson said, half-angrily, "I'm beginning to feel like the sparrow that followed the automobile. You can't live forever on promises. Especially when they're nothing but wind."

Joe closed his clarinet case, stuck it under his arm and went out front to the bar. He didn't have the heart to put up an argument. Why blame Al for getting sore? For that matter, why blame Pee Wee Rousell for not showing up to hear them play on such a night?

Pete Bellardi joined Joe Chance at the bar. He noted the packed clarinet and said, "You ain't going home now, Joe? The evening's still a beagle pup. You and the boys sounded cool back there—real mysterious."

Pete was a genial chunk of ex-racketeer who liked to feature jazz in his place, as long as he didn't have to pay union prices for it. He used all the hip phrases lavishly.

Joe sipped a gin buck, his first of the night, and said, "Pete, stop kidding yourself. Nobody's coming to hear us tonight. I'm going home and try to get some sleep."

"You never know," said Pete. "Better stick around awhile."

"Pee Wee was due at ten," Joe reminded him.

"So he's late," said Pete. "So what? As long as he hears you, what difference does the time make?"

"Maybe none," said Joe. "But I'm beat to my shoes."

Pete wandered away and Joe stood alone at the bar, letting the fear and excitement build up inside him. It was deadline time for him. He had promised himself that, if Mary failed this time to get anyone musically important to listen to him, he was going to abandon the shabby, scuffed-around thing his dream had become.

That was what usually happened to dreams. You had one and it was beautiful and you kept it nice and sharp in technicolor, to carry you through all the bad times you had to outlast. But when the bad times kept on and on, something happened to your dream. The bright colors faded and the edges got crumpled and cigarettes burned holes in it and drinks got spilled on it and left white-rimmed stains.

Finally, you had to throw your dream away and put something you could concretely realize in its place.

Joe's dream had been born five years earlier, when he had found he could make a clarinet behave, back in the small town where he was born and raised. He hadn't insisted on becoming a Benny Goodman or an Artie Shaw, for Joe was modest, even in his dream. But he had felt that he could do enough with the horn to make a good life for himself.

It had taken fourteen months of New York to destroy it. Fourteen months of part-time jobs, of a meagre, furnished-room existence, of playing for cakes at Pete's. No one wanted to hear Joe Chance, no one wanted to hire him. He hadn't even been able to get himself a card at Local 802.

It was time to drop the dream and pick up something in its place —even though the substitute had nightmare edges. You couldn't hear the guys talking all the time of making a score here, or getting a rakeoff there, or living it up on minor rackets in the underpoliced city. You couldn't hear these things day after day, night after night, without getting ideas.

Joe finished his drink and fingered the money in his pocket. He didn't have to look at it to know how much was there. One damp, sticky, crumpled dollar bill, a quarter, three dimes and a nickel. Sure, Pete would slip him a five, maybe a ten, if he asked for it. But small change wasn't the answer. Not anymore—not after fourteen months of bitter frustration.

With his clarinet-case still under his arm, Joe walked out into the fog, its gray mugginess no bleaker than his thoughts.

II

THE SOLES OF Joe Chance's loafers went *slap, slap,* on the damp sidewalk as he approached the house he meant to rob. He knew the block like the back of his hand. He ought to—he'd been walking it, casing it, ever since the story in the paper, a week before, about the she-recluse who lived alone in the condemned Kipp Houses.

Her name was Marianne Carlin, and she had been an actress with society connections before the car-accident had messed up her face so badly no plastic surgeon could put it together again. So, ten years ago, she had moved into the house at the end of the row—her grandmother had been a Kipp—and had never come out, according to the paper, sleeping alone on the top floor of a three-story house packed with all the valuable junk a rich family could collect in New York in a hundred years.

The paper had run the story because the Kipp houses were to be torn down. But Marianne Carlin refused to move and, since she had owner's rights, no one had been able to move her. There she sat, fair prey for anyone who wanted to rob her. Joe had been half-hoping someone else would beat him to it. But, so far, no one had.

Even if he made it—and he figured, with the fog, the odds were nine to one his way—Mary would be driven frantic when she found out what he'd done. And she was almost bound to find out in time. But she was too loyal to spill to the cops and, once he was a thief, she'd be better off without him. Her Aunt Alice, with whom she lived in an apartment just north of Washington Square, would say, "See—didn't I tell you Joe was no good all along?"

It wouldn't be the first time Aunt Alice was right.

The Kipp Houses loomed up ahead of him, their daytime raf-

fishness cloaked in glamour and mystery by the smoggy drizzle. They were set back from the sidewalk, an unbroken brick row fronted by a triple tier of wrought-iron balconies. Five sets of steps led down from the long front porch, and five eroded front walks led to five gates in the iron fence out front. What had once been trim flowerbeds between the walks now grew waist-high in a welter of weeds.

Save for Marianne Carlin's house at the far end, they were ghost-town stuff. But in the dim effulgence of the one mid-block lamp across the street, they looked to Joe Chance like a bit of old New Orleans, where Jelly Roll and the King and Louis and Bunk and all the other jazz saints once marched and played. Perhaps, Joe thought, he'd go to New Orleans if he managed to make a decent score.

Stop goofing off! he told himself sternly. He took a deep breath, then marched past the cobbled alley that sloped ramplike to the long areaway behind the houses. He walked along the front of the houses, reached the footway just beyond them, and looked quickly around. He saw the block was empty save for himself.

Sweating a little, Joe tiptoed down a flight of nine steps, turned right and was in the alley behind the houses. Here battered wooden porches sheltered the back doors and a cat darted angrily away from the garbage pail it was pilfering.

From his preliminary surveys, Joe knew the back door was securely locked. But alongside it was a window so rickety that it was an open invitation. He moved around a tattered glider-hammock, opened a pocket-knife and went to work on it.

It proved unexpectedly tough. He could insert the point of his blade all around the edges, but he couldn't get enough purchase to work the catch loose. Perspiration rolled into his eyes, stinging, and trickled down his spine under his already damp shirt. Quivering, he stepped back, wondering shakily if he was going to have to break a pane.

Just then somebody threw a bottle from a window of one of the apartments that backed up on the far side of the alley. The crash of glass on the cobbles paralyzed Joe for an instant. Then he realized it was to his advantage. After such a crash, no one would notice the mere tinkle of a shattered window. He went around the end of the glider to pick up a soggy old cushion. With this, he could push through the glass without risking cutting his hand.

Thus, he was directly in front of the door when it was flung open without warning. Its sweep caught Joe from behind, knocking him down in the narrow space between

the inner end of the glider and the wall, directly under the window he was about to break. Thinking himself assaulted, Joe lay there helpless, waiting for another blow.

But no blow came. Instead, something heavy was slid out onto the porch, holding the door open and cutting off Joe's field of vision, already inhibited by the bottom of the glider. There was another heavy gliding sound and he heard a man grunt with effort as he moved the first object and kicked the door shut. Peering beneath the glider, Joe could see shoes, a pair of trousers, the bottom of a raincoat. The man had stooped to pick up a pair of suitcases that looked uncommonly large in the near-darkness.

There was another grunt of effort, followed by a whispered curse, as the man carried both bags from porch to alley. He set them down on the cobbles and, still invisible from the waist up, walked rapidly away toward the far end of the alley.

Joe thought, *The so-and-so beat me to it!* All at once, his fears and self-doubt were merged in anger. Somebody had got there first and was walking away with the loot. In a flood of frustration, he realized he wasn't even good enough to be a successful thief.

Holding his clarinet-case clamped tightly under an arm, he scrambled to his feet, prepared to get out of there fast. It was an odds-on bet the successful robber was armed.

On his feet, Joe stopped short. The suitcases were standing right in front of him, where the man had put them down.

Convulsively, Joe grabbed their handles and lifted. He felt his clarinet-case slip, put the loot down, pushed the horn back into place. He was only going to be able to get away with one of the bags—and that with an effort. Wondering what it contained to make it weigh so much, he managed to get it safely into the footway and up the steps to the sidewalk, without being observed.

Joe heard the sounds of a car being backed into the far end of the alley as he left it behind him.

"Hey, you! Where do you think you're going!" Joe didn't need the corroboration of a furtive glance over his shoulder to know the voice was that of a cop. The twin rows of buttons on his jacket gleamed like silver beads in the diffused light of the lamp across the street, back by the other end of the Kipp houses.

It was thirty-five or forty feet to the corner, and Joe kept moving, half-expecting a bullet between the shoulder-blades. He knew he hadn't a chance, but he kept on going, panting and terrified.

"Stop, or I'll—"

The cop's warning cry was cut off by the sudden roar of a car, evidently the one Joe had heard

backing around into the alley moments before. Now he heard it come barreling out of the cobbled ramp behind him, heard the cop's shout of alarm as it slammed past him. Then a scream of breaks, a grind of gears, and a quick-growing and diminishing roar as its driver made his turn and high-tailed it toward the Hudson River five blocks away.

By then Joe was around the corner. There was no one on the sopping-wet avenue, and he gasped in relief as he turned the next corner with no sound of renewed pursuit. His breath came in wheezing gasps as he staggered to the front steps of the brownstone, where he had a room in the basement. All he could think of at the moment was that he hadn't been caught after all. He was a thief! He'd gotten away with it.

Then a shadow detached itself from the darkness of the under-the-steps doorway and a familiar voice said, "Joe—thank heavens! I didn't know where to look for you!"

It was Mary Mannis—the girl, *his* girl, the girl who had inexplicably chosen to ally her slender fortune to his even slimmer one. He stepped into the dark shelter of the entryway beside her, put down the suitcase with a sigh of relief.

Mary put her hands on his shoulders and pushed her soft body against his and said, "I'm sorry we were late, but you shouldn't have taken off. There's still

time, darling. Pee Wee said he'd wait for me to bring you back to Pete's. He'll introduce you to some of the right people after he hears you go."

Joe felt as if a pitfall, yawning beneath him, had suddenly sealed itself as he was about to tumble into its depths. So he'd stolen a suitcase. But he hadn't been caught, mercifully, and the other man, the real thief, had drawn police attention elsewhere. And now his dream was back, awaiting him in the person of Pee Wee Roussell at Pete's. He was actually going to be heard by someone who could do him and the dream some good!

He gave Mary a quick kiss, said, "Sorry I ran out, hon, but I didn't think you could swing it. And when you were late . . ."

"I told you my boss is a friend

of Pee Wee's wife," said the girl. "I wish you'd believed in me, Joe. But it's all right now."

"You've been crying!" he said with mock severity. And, when she shook her head violently, "Wait till I stash this bag and we'll take off for Pete's. Thanks, hon—thanks six million."

She noticed the suitcase for the first time as he wrestled it up from the floor. "What is it, Joe?" she asked. "Where'd you get it?"

There was a wide-eyed, shining honesty to Mary, even in the darkness. Joe had never been able to lie to her, was unable to now. He said, weakly, tritely, "That's a good question, honey."

"Joe," she said softly. "Where'd you get it?"

"Aw, it's nothing," he said. "Tell you later—after I play."

"Tell me now, Joe," she said.

Joe blurted it out—the whole story.

When he had finished, Mary clung to him. She said huskily, "Joe, how horrible! Why, Joe—why couldn't you have waited at Pete's just a few minutes longer? I got paid today. I've got the money with me. All you had to do was ask."

He shook his head, feeling miserable. He said, "That's no good now, Mary. I guess everything just piled up on me, and when you and Pee Wee didn't get there . . . Oh, to hell with it! Let me stash this damned bag and let's get going. Pee Wee won't wait forever."

"First you're going to take it back, Joe." Once again her tone was quiet, once again there was no opposing her.

"For God's sake, what if I get caught?" he countered.

"You risked stealing it," she said. "I'll go with you, Joe." She paused, hugged him, then added, "Don't you see you've got to take it back? Otherwise . . ." She left the rest unsaid.

They walked back to the corner beyond which the Kipp Houses stood in their shabby grandeur. Joe said, "Wait here, hon. I don't want you messed up in this. I'll be right back."

Joe turned the corner and found himself on the fringe of a small crowd. The block was no longer deserted. It was full of police and the curious. There were lights on everywhere in the houses across the street. From one window, leaned an enormously fat woman in a loose nightgown, her bright red hair accentuated by the illumination at her back.

From another, Joe saw the naked torso of an old man with a luxurious white beard. Lights from cars, from windows, from doorways, sliced through the drizzle and mist in all directions.

There was no question of Joe's returning the bag, not while the neighborhood swarmed with cops. For a moment, he thought of set-

ting it down and walking away. But a tall, cigar-chewing man at his right elbow was looking at him.

Joe mustered his courage and said, "What gives? Somebody break a tooth or something?"

The man shook his head—slowly. Then, out of the corner of his mouth, "That sex-slayer that's been in the papers has killed another victim. You know, the creep that's been carving up dames like Christmas turkeys. He sliced the hermit lady right in two. The cops found half of her in an old suitcase back of the house."

His glance surveyed Joe, dropped to the heavy bag in his right hand. "Musta looked something like that trunk you're lugging. You ain't got the other half of her, have you, kid?"

Joe gulped and managed to shake his head. "Did they get the killer?" he asked, his voice far from steady.

"Naw!" was the reply. "He nearly peeled off a cop's tail feathers with his car when he made his getaway."

"Thanks," said Joe. "Thanks a lot. See you later."

He got back around the corner to where Mary was waiting. The bag was pinching the skin of his fingers again. He had forgotten how heavy it was while he was talking to the stranger. No wonder it was heavy, he thought, with half a body in it.

Half a body! Joe barely mastered an overwhelming impulse to drop the suitcase right there and run away as fast as his legs would carry him. As if his eyes had developed X-ray qualities, he seemed able to look right into it, to envision the grisly cargo it held. Half a body . . .

What if it were dripping blood? It wasn't—the dim street lights told him that. The killer, whoever he was, must have wrapped it up—like a butcher double-wrapping a cut of beef. Joe's stomach rebelled and, for a moment, he could hardly see.

An arm slipped around him, steadying him, and Mary's voice said anxiously, "Joe, what's wrong? What is it, darling? You're as white as a sheet."

He didn't tell her. He couldn't tell her. For once, in sheer desperation, he managed to lie to her. He said, "I don't know what's in here unless it's a hydrogen bomb. They've got half the cops in New York back there."

"I don't understand it." Mary's usually smooth forehead was wrinkled in perplexity. "Why should they—"

"I don't get it either," said Joe. He hoped his voice wouldn't betray him.

"What shall we do?" the girl asked.

"You go on to Pete's and keep Pee Wee there," said Joe. "I'll get rid of this thing somewhere and join you later."

It was the only way. He was going to have to drop it and disappear. He couldn't ask Mary to get mixed up in a mess as ghastly as this. Nobody had the right to ask that of a nice girl like Mary. A sex-killer—half a body! It was a nightmare predicament.

Mary was stubborn. She said, "Joe, I'm not letting you get into any more trouble. What we need is some place where there are a lot of people with suitcases—like a railroad station or a bus terminal. You can put it down and we'll let someone else find it."

"Unh-unh." He shook his head hopelessly. "I can't lug this damned thing that far. It weighs too much. It's half-killing me now. And we can't risk a cab or a bus or the subway. Have you taken a good look at this thing, hon? It looks like something Phineas Fogg might have had when he went around the world in eighty days. Nobody else has used anything like it in fifty years."

Mary studied the bag in the diffused glow of a street light, and Joe shuddered lest she somehow guess what it held. She said, "It's all bound together with wire, too."

They plodded on silently, aimlessly, and then she said, "Joe, how would this do? There's a bus-stop on Seventh Avenue South, near the Holland Tunnel. It's not a big stop, but there's bound to be people there now—commuters going home to Jersey late. We could walk there and leave it on the platform and take a bus to Jersey City and then come back."

"You go to Pete's," he said. "I'll do it. It's a good idea, hon." She didn't have to know that once he got rid of her, he'd drop it in a doorway and keep right on going.

But Mary refused to be shaken off. "Not a chance," she said firmly. "The only times you get in trouble are when you're out of my sight." She hugged his left arm. "I'm sticking till we're out of it."

"You don't know what could happen to you if we're caught," he said despairingly. That was the worst of it. She didn't know and he couldn't tell her. He just couldn't bring himself to.

When they had gone a half dozen blocks south, she said, "Joe, dear, you're killing yourself. Put it down and take a rest."

"Not a chance, hon." He spoke through gritted teeth. "Let's get it over with before anything else happens."

III

SOMEHOW, THEY MADE the bus-stop, which consisted of a raised concrete platform, shaped like a pear-cut diamond, and a ticket booth. There were perhaps fifteen people of assorted sizes, shapes and sexes there, some of them with luggage. Not many, but enough, he thought, putting the big suitcase

down, far back against the platform wall.

He stood in front of it while Mary bought tickets to Jersey City. Then they stood close together, screening the bag, while they waited for their bus. At any moment, Joe expected the snarl of sirens to announce the police were coming to pick them up. He began to wonder if the bus would ever come.

Miraculously, minutes later, it pulled up, looking like a sanctuary on wheels. They stumbled inside and sank onto a seat and Joe, for the moment, could not quite believe in their good luck. He turned to Mary and managed a smile, drinking in reassurance from the fresh young comeliness of her, the wide-set blue eyes, the tender generous mouth, the smoothly combed brown hair.

He wondered what was the matter with women, and why a girl like Mary should bother with a jerk like Joe Chance. He wasn't even aware they were in the tunnel until the bus stopped on the Jersey side and Mary tugged at his sleeve, saying, "Joe, dear, we get off here."

Involuntarily, he looked for the suitcase, the Phineas Fogg bag with its wrap-around wire and built in half-body. It didn't seem possible that he was rid of the horror. The dampness of the night air restored him a little, and he gripped his clarinet-case tightly and made a silent vow that never, never

again, would he steal as much as a penful of ink from a post-office desk.

Mary looked up at him and said, "Joe, dear, you look half-dead. How about a cup of coffee? We've got twenty minutes before the bus comes back."

"Okay," he said. Then, "I'm sorry as hell I fouled up your deal with Pee Wee. Trust me to make a hash of things!"

She hugged his arm again and said, "This is a lot more important Joe, believe me. You'll never do it again, will you?"

"I won't even tilt a pinball machine, so help me!"

The bar-grill was hot and stuffy and reeked with a blend of old

onions, older beer and raw whiskey. In back, a jukebox was blasting an idiotic rattle-and-roll number. But Joe wasn't bothered by any of it till he caught a glimpse of himself in the back-bar mirror. He was white as the proverbial sheet. He looked sick.

All at once, now that he thought of it, he felt sick. The heat, the noise, the smells—they all closed in on him. He gulped and said, "Sorry, hon, I need air." Feeling unsteady on his feet and all torn up inside, he slid off his stool and moved toward the door, with its promise of fresh air and relative quiet outside.

When Joe stepped onto the sidewalk, he stopped short. He felt his mouth open and a scream rise in his throat, only to have his larynx too constricted with sudden terror to permit any sound at all. He lurched back against the wall of the building, closed his eyes, forced himself to take a deep breath. Not until he heard Mary's gasp did he know he had not suffered a hallucination.

There, in a rectangle of light cast through the glass upper portion of the bar-grill door onto the sidewalk, was the bag—oversized, of worn saddle leather, with straps, elaborate handle, bound with wire —just as it had looked when they left it in the bus-stop on the other side of the Hudson. It couldn't happen, but it had. The suitcase had followed them, like some legless bloodhound, under the river.

He heard Mary say softly, "Oh my God!"

He wondered what she'd have said had she known what the battered old bag contained. And then, overwhelmingly, he realized that the suitcase could not have traveled by itself. Someone must have brought it through the tunnel. But who—and where?

As if in answer to Joe's unuttered question, a man moved out of the night shadows into the rectangle of light. For a moment, either through a trick of position or through Joe's own horrified suggestibility, he looked like Mephistopheles, with acquiline nose, bottomless pools for eyes, tufted brows, a cruelly curving mouth.

Then, as suddenly, he was merely a man in a seersucker suit, a stranger wearing an expression of amused concern, saying in medium-deep, well-bred accents, "I saw you youngsters forget this at the bus-stop in Manhattan." A nod toward the bag. "I chased you all the way over here in my car, to return it to you. You wouldn't have wanted to lose it, would you?"

Somehow, from the depths of the sickness that held him in its grip, Joe managed to mutter, "We're very grateful to you. We must have forgotten all about it. Thanks a lot."

He stood in front of them, across the suitcase, smiling, studying them. He was not much taller than

Joe, but his shoulders were heavier. He said, just before the tension became unbearable, "You two youngsters must be very much in love. Right?"

Only it wasn't a question. This man, this stranger, this busybody, was telling them, not asking them. Joe saw Mary nod, nodded himself. He couldn't just stand there, like an idiot.

"Of course you are." The stranger looked vaguely pleased. "Persons like me—who spend much of their lives alone in crowds—become sensitive to emotion in others. You two are bathed in love, you radiate it, you warm my heart with it." Another pause, then, "Come on inside. You won't mind my buying you a drink."

He carried the suitcase into the bar-grill ahead of them. Helplessly, Joe and Mary followed. His sickness increased as he became aware of the extent of their disaster. This man, this stranger, this busybody—could not only identify them. He could chain them to the bag and the horror it held.

Mary murmured something about their bus being due and Joe could have wrung her neck. They'd look great to this unwanted helper, he thought, taking a bus back to New York now.

"Forget your bus," said the stranger. "I've got my car outside. I'll be glad to drive you wherever you wish. After all, I've come this far on your behalf." There was a brief interruption, while they ordered drinks. Then he said, "I hope I'm not intruding. I merely want to help if I can. My name is Hornung—Arthur Hornung. My friends call me Art."

There was something odd about him, some quality Joe couldn't reach out and touch, something that made him feel like a bug pinned to a card. He tried to tell himself that, under the circumstances, he would be suspicious of John the Baptist. But when he downed his drink, quick and neat, he shuddered. And it was not alcohol alone that sent a chill racing up his spine.

He tried to catch Mary's eye, to read in it what she was feeling, what she was thinking. But she was talking to the stranger, saying, "I'm Mary Mannis and this is Joe Chance."

Added panic went pounding through Joe's nerve-channels at the girl's admission. But then he thought, *So What? We're dead ducks anyway. All we can do is play out the string. Poor Mary!*

Hornung nodded and said, "Hello Mary—Joe. Let's see if I'm reading you right. You are running away together, aren't you?" Again, it was statement, not question.

"You could call it that," said Joe cautiously.

"Since you're not married, you must be running away from something." He paused, then added,

"Something like parents, an uncle —perhaps an aunt."

It was Mary's turn. "Something like that," she said.

The smile again—Hornung could turn it on and off like a neon sign. "And you haven't much money, or Joe wouldn't be taking his clarinet along."

Joe could sense that he and Mary were being pushed and chivvied, under the guise of friendship, as this stranger wished. Yet they could do nothing about it—nothing at all. Not while the suitcase was still in close proximity to them.

Hornung paid for the drinks from a well-filled wallet. He said, "Joe, unless I'm wrong as can be, what you and Mary need is a place to be together, to get yourselves organized. You're nice kids and I like you, so I'm going to offer you a haven. As it happens, I'm having my house rebuilt into rentable apartments. It's not yet finished, but there's plenty of room for all of us in my apartment. Don't worry, I'm not doing this merely because I love humanity. Actually, I don't. But I like both of you, and I'd enjoy having you as my first tenants."

He paused, smiled again, and added, "Who knows? Since you're in love, having you as my first tenants might bring luck to the entire house."

Mary said faintly, "You're very kind, but I don't think—I mean, after all, we're not married."

"Oh, come, child!" There was gentle mockery in his tone, reproof in the look he gave her. "After all, this is the twentieth century, is it not? And after all, couldn't I be your chaperon?"

Joe could sense the laughter beneath Hornung's question. He caught Mary's pleading look and hesitated. The man was taking them for some sort of a ride. But he couldn't do them any harm—not as long as he didn't open the suitcase.

Hornung chose that moment to pick the suitcase up. He said, almost petulantly, in the voice of a man accustomed to being obeyed since childhood, "Come along, children. We're a long way from home."

Mary gripped Joe's arm tightly, "Darling," she whispered, "tell him we can't go. There's something about him . . ."

"I know," said Joe. "He's a take-charge character." He saw Hornung, still holding the suitcase, pause in the doorway and look back.

Mary said, "It's not just that—there's something else about him, something queer. He seems to be inwardly laughing at us."

Joe nodded toward the suitcase. "We don't seem to have much choice, hon," he said. He picked up his clarinet-case from the bar.

As they got into the front seat of Hornung's hard-top, the older man said, "By the way, Joe, what

sort of music do you play?"

Joe shrugged. "I'm just a jazz guy," he said. "Dixieland."

"How interesting!" Hornung got the motor started. "I've got quite a record collection at my house—including some of the rarer oldies you don't hear often."

"Swell," said Joe with what enthusiasm he could muster under the circumstances.

"By the way, Mr. Hornung," Mary asked, "where is your house?"

"Please—not Mr. Hornung. Art," said the older man with infinite pain in his voice. "My house? Oh, it's in Greenwich Village, a few blocks south of the Square."

Joe felt as if a fighter had punched him in the stomach. Greenwich Village. They were going right back where they'd come from. And with the suitcase and its ghastly load.

IV

SOMETHING WAS WRONG with the amplification system of Hornung's costly high-fidelity sound equipment. When the volume was on full, there was a death rattle in its throat. Hornung had merely spread his long-fingered hands, smiled ruefully and said, "You see? Something like this always happens when I try to show off."

Joe could not decide whether the older man was mocking them or himself. His whole manner seemed tinged with mockery, blanketing whatever might lie beneath. Since Joe had taken a brief course in television and electronic repair late the previous year, he had volunteered to take a look at the set and see if he could find the trouble and repair it.

Hornung's apartment occupied the entire second floor of what had, long ago, been a Manhattan red-brick mansion. The rest of the house was a welter of paint pots, lumber, floorboards, stepladders, and other tools of reconstruction, through which they had picked their way upon their arrival a half hour earlier.

The living room took up the front half of the floor. It was a large, unexpectedly luxurious room with low, modern furniture, gleaming parquet floor, grotesque African lamps and a baby grand piano. Two thirds of the way back, it was almost partitioned by a well-stocked bookcase that rose almost to the ceiling. The rear of the bookcase, which was really a double one, held the hi-fi equipment and a vast stock of records, in albums or loose, that seemed to span all music, from early Montiverdi to late Duke Ellington.

At Joe's back was a comfortable kitchen, with a door to the hall that ran the length of the floor on the north side. Behind it, he guessed, were the bath and bedrooms. These he had not yet seen. He had had little trouble in locat-

ing the loose connection that was causing the unwanted noise. But was finding it a slow business to rehook the wiring without proper tools.

In front, on the other side of the bookcase-partition, Hornung was reading aloud to Mary from a morning paper he had picked up on their drive back from Jersey City. His deep, rather mannered voice had droned on, and Joe was no longer listening.

Suddenly, however, as he finished the repair job, he came to full attention. Hornung was reading about the murder—*the* murder—in the Kipp Houses that evening. It might have been self-suggestion, but to Joe it seemed the older man's voice took on richer, more significant tones.

"What a horror!" he exclaimed. "Listen, Mary, this must have happened a mere matter of hours ago. The sex murderer struck again, and not far from here. You may know the place—those picturesque old wrecks called the Kipp Houses. Think of it! The sixth time in less than four months. He seems to strike every three weeks."

"You say the Kipp Houses?" asked Mary. "Why, that's—"

"Just a few blocks from here, my dear," said Hornung. "Hmm—something seems to have gone wrong. They found half a woman's body in an old-fashioned suitcase behind the murder house. You read about that pathetic actress lady who lived there alone. She must have been mad to let the newspapers write her up."

"Half a body in a suitcase?" Mary sounded ill.

"Yes, my dear," Hornung went on. "It seems the police almost caught him. Some patrolman blundered onto him, right after the murder. But they couldn't stop him from making a getaway."

"What sort of a suitcase?" Mary asked, her face very pale.

"My dear," said Hornung, "the description sounds a little like that bag I rescued for you and Joe. If the two of you weren't together, I might be suspicious." He chuckled, and Joe, paralyzed, could picture his eyes fixing themselves on the stolen bag, which was currently resting on the parquet floor of the living room, just inside the hall door.

Hornung went on. "There isn't much information in the paper. I suppose it's too early yet. But I can just visualize the excitement in the block after they found the body. All those horrible little people feeling important merely because one of their neighbors was murdered. Imagine it. I can see them leaning out their windows in the fog, watching and listening and chattering amongst themselves. Fat, red-headed women in nightgowns, white-bearded old men, all the morbid and gruesome jetsam of the city. Can't you see them, too?"

This was getting too close for

comfort. Joe forced himself out of the stasis that held him in its grip. "Art!" he called. "Come here a moment, will you? I think I've got it fixed."

Hornung appeared, checked what Joe had done, looked pleased. "Anything special you'd like to hear?" he asked. "I've got them all—Bigard, Benny, Artie Shaw, Jimmy Noone, Pee Wee Roussell, Johnny Dodds."

"They're all great," said Joe.

"Good!" Hornung didn't actually rub his hands but he looked as if he were doing so. "I'll set up a concert with all of them—a real *Clarinet Marmalade.*"

"Great!" said Joe. He walked around the bookcase and almost let out a yell.

Mary, apparently spurred by Hornung's reading from the paper, had crossed the living room and was squatted in front of the suitcase, her fingers busy undoing the heavy wire that was wound around it.

He wanted to call to her, tell her to get away from the horror, to let it alone. But he couldn't call without giving the whole game away to Hornung. He took a quick step toward the girl, then another. If she did open it and the horror inside was revealed—

Without warning, the room was flooded with a blast of sound as the opening chorus of Duke Ellington's ancient *Tiger Rag* came pounding on full volume. Through the blare of brasses and the drive of the rhythm section, which sounded as if they were right in the room, Joe saw, rather than heard, Mary give a quick little scream of fright and turn until her eyes met his.

They looked at him unblinkingly, almost without recognition. Then, slowly, she rose and walked across the room to the curved, sectional sofa. Her gaze never left his own. It was deep with accusation and—yes—fear.

At that moment, Hornung reduced the volume of sound and emerged around the bookcase, saying, "Nice job, Joe—she's as good as new." He looked from him to Mary and said, "Do you think Mary will be safe if I leave you while I get us some drinks?"

Hornung didn't wait for an answer.

Joe and Mary were alone—for the first time since Hornung had picked them up in Jersey City. Joe stood over Mary, who was sitting on the sofa, looking up at him as if he were something strange and horrible. She said, her voice very low, "Joe, you knew what was in the suitcase. You knew all the time."

"Not all the time," he said, with a desperate, pleading urgency in his voice. "I didn't find out till I went back there to return the bag. Somebody told me."

"Why didn't you tell me then?" she asked. "Why, Joe?"

"Why didn't I . . .? Because I couldn't," he replied desperately. "I was too sick myself. I didn't want you to know. I didn't want you mixed up in it. I tried to make you go away, but you wouldn't." And, when she still said nothing, "Honest, hon, it wasn't me. You don't think I go round sawing women in half for kicks!"

"I don't know," she said and her little hands became clenched fists as they rested on her thighs. "I don't know anything, I guess."

He couldn't bare the unhappiness in her face, the fear—the fear of *him*. He said, "Hon, it wasn't me. I never even got into the house, I swear it. I didn't have time. You can check easily enough."

"Who was it then?"

Joe ran a hand through his hair. He longed to pick her up, draw her to him, kiss away the terror and suspicion in her eyes. But he couldn't—not while she looked up at him like that, like some trusting animal betrayed by its master.

"It was the guy with the car," he said. "The guy that nearly ran down the cop. I swear it!"

Some of the suspicion, some of the hopelessness, left her face—not all of it but a little. She said, "The man with the car. I'd forgotten. But Joe dear, you should have told me anyway."

"I couldn't," he said. "I was too sick, too shocked. I—well, I couldn't, that's all."

"Joe!" she said, and she wasn't back with him yet. "Joe, what are we going to do?"

"I don't know," he told her honestly, hopelessly. "What can we do?"

V

THEY WERE STILL staring at one another when Hornung came back with a drink-laden tray. With his return, Joe became aware that there was still music around them, one of Jimmy Noone's old clarinet records. Briefly, he had forgotten everything but Mary and the suitcase.

Hornung put the tray on the low, round table in front of the curved sofa. "Help yourselves, kids," he said. "This is liberty hall."

Mary sipped at her drink, then set it down. She smiled at Hornung brightly—too brightly, Joe thought. She said, "Art, I don't want to spoil the party, but I've had a long night. If I could lie down for a little while . . ."

Hornung was all solicitation, hovering over her like a Disney vulture in dove's clothing. He said, "Of course, my dear, of course. You'll find the bedroom in back, beyond the bathroom. Make yourself comfortable. But don't sleep too long. We'll miss you, won't we, Joe?"

"Sure, hon," said Joe. "But take it easy." He knew what Mary wanted. She wanted to be alone, to think, to try and figure things out.

He wished, longed to go with her. But that was impossible. Somebody had to stay with Hornung.

A half hour later, he and Joe were still sitting there alone, across the round table, listening to records again. There was something funny about the way Hornung listened to jazz, Joe thought, just as there was something funny about everything he did or said. Once again, Joe had the feeling that something obvious was eluding him, something he should have sensed much earlier.

Hornung didn't clap his hands or weave his body or even tap his feet—for all of which Joe was grateful. The older man was much too mature for any such juvenile behavior. Yet he reminded Joe of a teen-ager by his very immobility, by the almost feverish raptness with which he listened, his head cocked a trifle toward the machine.

A man his age had no business taking it that seriously. It looked like an act. Yet somehow Joe knew it wasn't an act, and that made it all the more wrong.

There was a moment of silence, while the changer operated, and Hornung took advantage of it to say, "They come and they go. Thirty years ago, your top clarinet men were Jimmy Lytell, Jimmy Dorsey, Pee Wee Roussell—with maybe a few of the negro players like Bigard, Noone and Buster Bailey."

"You sure know your jazz," said Joe, wondering how long this concert in hell was to go on.

Hornung stopped listening, a moment, said, "What was that?"

Joe lifted his range of hearing above the music. Mary was calling him. He glanced at Hornung, who nodded, and Joe went to the hall door, wondering how this man had established such control over him that he had to ask permission before doing anything. It wasn't just the suitcase, he thought. There was something else—an odd, elusive sort of power that chilled him.

Mary called, "Joe, will you bring me my bag? I left it on the table. I want to freshen up."

"Coming, hon," said Joe. He went back and got the bag, a neat, inexpensive white plastic affair with gilt trimmings.

Hornung smiled and nodded and said, "Take your time, Joe. It's all right with me."

So what, Joe thought. *So what if it wasn't all right with him?* But he knew he was whistling in the dark.

Mary was waiting for him, just inside the bedroom door. It was a big room, almost as big as the living room, with big furniture—a huge bureau, an immense wardrobe, a vast Hollywood bed. The prints on the walls were not actually pornographic, but they suggested odd, unpleasantly distorted eroticism—Watteau with a Kafka twist.

Mary's blue eyes were alight with

excitement as she pulled Joe inside and shut the door quickly, quietly, behind him. "Look!" she said. "Look at these, Joe."

She was holding a mess of women's garments, which she turned and dropped on the big bed—dresses, nightgowns, underthings.

Joe looked at them, poked at them, frowned, said, "So Hornung has girl friends. So what? He's not a bad looking character, and with a setup like this—" He looked at the room around them.

"Joe!" Mary was actually shaking him. "Look at them. Here's a bra that must be a forty-eight—and here's a size twelve skirt. And this nightgown—those look like bloodstains to me!"

"Good God!" said Joe. His liver turned over again and he had to sit down on the bed as the meaning of Mary's discovery got through to him.

"They belong to five different women," Mary told him, frowning with desperate earnestness. "According to that story he read me, this sex-killer is supposed to have murdered five other women besides the one in the . . ." Her voice trailed off.

"Where'd you find them?" said Joe, shaken.

She nodded toward a large cedar chest on the far side of the bed. He got up, told her, "Better put them back for now. After all, they don't prove anything. I'm afraid the whole thing's impossible."

"What do you mean—impossible?" she demanded, dropping the lid of the chest on the suspicious garments.

"Just that," he told her. "It's a nice theory but it just won't wash. Suppose he is the sex-killer. How in hell did he manage to trace the suitcase to where we left it. How did he manage to trace us? It just can't be, hon."

Mary scowled out a rear window at a backyard vista already touched with the grey of early summer dawn. She said, "But it could have happened if he followed us. He has a car. He could have done just as he said."

"But where could he pick us up?" Joe asked helplessly.

"I heard him take off from the murder scene in his car."

"Suppose he circled, parked the car and went back to make sure he was safe," said Mary. "He might have seen you when you tried to return the bag. Surely, if he was there, he'd have spotted it like a shot."

"Wait a minute, hon." Joe sank on the bed, pressed the heels of his hands against his eyelids. Then, looking up at her, he said, "You remember when he was describing the scene on the block to you just before I interrupted him?"

"Yes." Now Mary was dubious. "But he was just making that up."

"But he wasn't!" Joe was on his feet, holding her arms tightly. "That's just it—he wasn't. I saw

the red-headed fat woman in the nightgown leaning out her window, and the man with the white beard. He couldn't have made them up. He must have been there."

"Joe!" Mary's voice was a whisper. "But if he is—if he did—why has he brought us here? What's he planning to do with us?" Her face crumpled with fright.

"I don't know, hon," he said. "I don't know. All we can do is play it cosy until he tips his hand."

"Why don't we just get out of here?" Mary asked. "We can't stay here and let him—let him do whatever he's planning."

"We can't leave now," Joe told her fiercely. "He's got us in a cleft stick. Remember, the cop saw me. If Hornung goes to the police and tells them about the suitcase, and about us, we're dead. At least I am, and you're in a mess that will ruin your life. He's got us just where he wants us."

Mary shuddered and Joe held her close a moment. "Aunt Alice will go to the police," she said. "She always worries when I'm late getting home. Especially since yesterday was payday. But she won't know where to tell them to look."

"She'll have the police on my tail," he said grimly. "You can lay odds on that." He released her, scowled, ran a hand through his short hair. "What have they got to go on? Just the suitcase? Remember, they've got its mate. And it's individual enough. It's the only thing they can be looking for. And it's the only thing we can use to bring them here. With those things you found in the chest, we might be able to pin it on him."

Mary grabbed him fiercely. "Joe!" she said. "Joe, don't do anything foolish. If he finds out we're onto him, we're as good as dead."

He managed a smile. "I'll be careful," he said. "You root around some more and see if you can turn up anything else. If we do get out of this, we'll need everything we can get. Remember, he can make out quite a case against me—and you'll be caught in it with me, no matter how it comes out."

"Don't worry, darling—we're going to be all right!" she said and kissed him.

VI

JOE CHANCE sat in the living room with Hornung, wondering what he could do, wondering what Mary was doing, watching his host and trying not to show it, knowing that Hornung was watching him. Fingers of daylight poked their way through the slats of the venetian blinds, but the terror of night lingered in the dimly lit room. It was a sealed crate, an artificial satellite shut off from the world.

And the suitcase still stood against the wall beside the hall door. Sooner or later, Joe thought, it would begin to smell in this heat.

Sooner or later, Hornung would drop the masquerade of geniality. Meanwhile, the music kept on, relentlessly pounding its beat through Joe's skull until he was ready to cry out in agony.

Jack Teagarden's big horn, Krupa's driving drums, Bubber Miley's growling trumpet, Coleman Hawkins' thick-toned tenor sax, Harry James, George Wettling, Benny Goodman—each of them distinct in Joe's mind and memory and inner ear, as different from one another as Scotch and rum, became blurred and fused like a kaleidoscope twirled too rapidly to be followed by the eye.

Terror stalked the room when Hornung spoke, when he moved, when he stayed still. Yet, if Joe hadn't known he was sitting with a madman who pulled women apart as readily as a schoolboy tears the wings from a fly, he might have sensed nothing wrong.

True, there was a trace of strangeness in his talk—in the way he touched on love, on hate, on death, on the futility of all things, that might have sounded mad. But, as Joe well knew, Greenwich Village is full of mad talkers and beatniks, who would shudder at the thought of drowning a kitten.

". . . love is more than a biological trap, set by nature to put man to genetic use," Hornung said while the music was briefly soft. "It destroys man's very soul." He smiled oddly, distantly, then put down his glass and rose, adding, "Speaking of nature . . . You'll excuse me, I hope?"

Joe nodded. What a ridiculous mockery of the conventions! He watched Hornung leave the room and his eyes fell to the suitcase. He studied it, half-consciously, while his brain raced through a rat maze of dead-end passages. What to do? How could he put it to use? He could feel the sweat on his forehead, mopped it off with a crumpled handkerchief.

And then he heard the answer, as if sent by some capricious Providence that had, till now, delighted in twisting him ever deeper in the toils of terror that had closed around him since he left the safety of the *Cote d'Azure*. It came from somewhere down the street, somewhere in the middle distance, the clatter of metal canisters, the sounds of men's voices, the growl of a heavy, slow-moving vehicle.

The city garbage disposal truck was making its rounds!

Quickly, silently, Joe moved to the window, pulled up the blinds, looked out onto the slum street, deserted in the dawn, its broken sidewalks lined with cans and cartons, drawn up like opposing armies that would never meet in battle. Three blocks away to the southward, he could see the monstrous bulk of the great silvery truck. Through the open window, the crash and clatter of cans sounded louder, sharper, than it had in-

side. The truck was moving his way!

Joe darted to the suitcase, picked it up, grunted anew at its heaviness. And he recalled unhappily the comparative ease with which Hornung had carried it in from the car. Two of them had been too much for him, back at the Kipp Houses. But he was strong enough to handle a single heavy bag a lot more easily than Joe ever could.

Joe hoisted the bag onto the window sill with a tremendous effort. He tilted it there briefly, slid it slowly out, watched it fall end over end, almost in slow motion, till it struck the sidewalk with a thud and rolled over. For one terrified instant, Joe thought it was going to burst open and spatter its ghastly contents all over the street. But the locks held firm.

He was still looking out, blocking the window, when a hand fell on his shoulder, making him gasp and start with fright. Hornung's voice said, "I wouldn't put too much weight on that coping, Joe. The wood's very old and it might give way and throw you out. It's a nasty drop—enough to kill a man."

Joe moved back quickly, dropped the blind. Had Hornung seen him push the bag out, had he seen it lying there on the sidewalk?

Hornung said, "It's better to keep the blinds down, Joe. That way, the heat stays outside. And if we keep the lights on in here, we can pretend it's night and not realize how tired we are."

He went back behind the bookcase, said, "How about some of the old Trumbauer and Bix things, Joe? We haven't played any yet, and I've got some of the rare ones —Three Blind Mice, Krazy Kat, *Apple Blossoms*. Tram plays a bassoon in *Apple Blossoms*, believe it or not."

"Sounds great," said Joe. "Put them on, Art."

The garbage truck was only a block away now. Soon they would be directly beneath, and it would hardly do for Hornung to hear any remarks the men might make about the bag. The music would keep his interest diverted.

Joe sat there, trying to look interested in the music, while his hopes, his soul, his entire attention was focused on the unseen sidewalk beneath. Salvation—or catastrophe—might lie within the next few minutes. He looked at his watch, saw it was after eight o'clock.

Frankie Trumbauer's slick, sweet, C-melody sax tones came on in *Three Blind Mice*, and Hornung murmured, "He had something, that fellow—something rich and real. A pity he became a pilot instead."

But Joe barely heard him. The disposal truck was directly under the front windows. He heard a crash as an empty can was dropped

to the sidewalk. Then a voice, a hoarse male voice, saying, "No, Tony, not that old bag! You wanna rip the teeth right out of the unit?"

"Okay, but it's just junk." This from a higher-pitched voice.

"So let somebody else take care of it," said the first voice. "You don't want to damage the unit. Leave it lay."

The truck moved slowly on, and Joe felt palsied with reaction, with fear, with a sense of utter and total helplessness. He looked at Hornung and wondered if he and Mary, out of their own desperation, had not created a fantasy about their host. Sitting there, absorbed in the music, a half-empty glass in his hand, he did not look the part of a sex fiend. But then, Joe wondered, how exactly did one look?

He thought of something then. The man he had seen emerge from the murder house with the two suitcases had worn a raincoat. When Hornung picked them up, he had been wearing none. Then he discarded this idea—the weather was hot and, in the shelter of his car, the older man might have dropped the garment in the back of the car somewhere.

As for the clothing Mary had found in the bedroom chest, they might merely have been relics of romantic evenings in this apartment. The brown stains might not have been blood at all—or, if they were blood, their source might not have been criminal.

Even the fact Hornung must have been on the scene of the crime shortly afterward was not necessarily damning. His purpose in following them, in returning the suitcase, in bringing them here, might not have been sinister. Often lonely men seem sinister to those more gregarious than themselves.

VII

MARY WANDERED IN from the bedroom, looking fresh and lovely with her hair combed, her makeup renewed.

Hornung sighed, shook his head and said to Joe, "You know, you're a lucky guy."

"Think so?" said Joe. He got up, put his arm around the girl, gave her a quick hug, whispered, "Find anything else?"

She shook her head faintly. "I'm starved. Is there anything here for breakfast?"

"Just about everything," said Hornung rising and leading the way to the kitchen. He opened the refrigerator, said, "Eggs, bacon, sausages, butter, milk, frozen fruit." Then flinging open a high cupboard, "Canned hash, beans, chili, Vienna sausage, kippers. You name it, we've got it."

"I'm dying for some coffee," said Mary. She tested the faucets, said, "Oh-oh, no hot water."

"That damned heater!" said

Hornung. "I'll go downstairs and get it going. It won't take long. This weather, and with the house in a mess, it's hard to remember everything."

"I could heat some water on the stove," said Mary, but he was already gone.

"Joe!" she said tensely. "Joe, what happened to the suitcase? When I looked just now, it was gone."

He told her what he had done, what had happened, what he was beginning to feel about Hornung. She said, "I hope you're right—oh, how I hope you're right! If you are, then we can simply walk out of here. Oh no"—dismay spread over her face—"the suitcase. Even if he isn't—even if he isn't what we thought, he knows we had it."

"Maybe I shouldn't have flung it out the window," said Joe.

"If anything does happen," said Mary, "and Mr. Hornung is all right, the only thing we can do is level with him. Maybe that's what he's waiting for."

"He's going to have to wait a while longer then," Joe said grimly, his castle of hope toppled by Mary's logic. "I must have been crazy to kick that suitcase out. But I couldn't keep it here."

"I'm going to look," said Mary, darting from the kitchen toward the front of the house. Following her more slowly, Joe watched her pull the blind, saw her peer out the window, draw back, drop the blind, turn to face him.

"Joe!" she half-whispered. "Joe, it's gone!"

"Let me see." He took a quick look himself. Save for the empty ashcans the truck had left behind, the sidewalk below the house was quite empty. He pulled back inside hurriedly.

"Quick, Joe!" Mary said. "He's coming back."

They darted back to the kitchen. They heard Hornung's footsteps on the stairs, heard him enter the apartment, move past the kitchen down the hall. "Just checking thermostat in the back closet," he explained. "Why in hell they had to put it there I'll never know."

Then he was with them in the kitchen. He said, stiffling a yawn, "It will take about half an hour. I'd better put some more records on. You kids need anything, just holler."

Joe stared after him. At the moment, he didn't know whether he wanted Hornung to be the fiend or just an interfering bystander. Either way, he and Mary were in grave danger. He wished he'd forced Mary to leave him alone with the suitcase right after he'd learned what was in it. He wished that he had—

But it was a little late for wishing.

While he was daydreaming, Mary had darted into the hall. A moment later, she reappeared, her

face drained of color, her legs unsteady.

"Joe!" she said. "Joe, the hall closet. It was locked before." Her voice was more a croak than a whisper. But it was urgent, terrified.

Joe slipped past her into the hall. The closet door was ajar. His eyes noted the thermostat gauge on the wall just inside the door. Then he looked down.

There it was, as if he had never left it at the bus stop, as if he had never pushed it out the window and watched it land on the sidewalk beneath. There it was, the bag, the suitcase, the carryall for half a dismembered corpse, the cause of all his trouble!

From somewhere in the distance, somewhere ridiculously far away, he half-heard the driving introduction to *That's A Plenty,* the big Eddie Condon record with Bill Davison's hard, brilliant trumpet. And with the sound, with sight of the suitcase, the baseless, optimistic theory he had built about Arthur Hornung's innocence shattered to fragments.

No wonder the suitcase was gone from the sidewalk. Hornung had seen it there, over Joe's shoulder. He had waited until the garbagemen were gone, biding his time, playing with them like a very unhungry cat, toying with a pair of mice for which it had no immediate appetite.

No wonder Hornung was in no hurry, Joe thought. After all, he had made his last kill only a few hours earlier. And according to the schedule of his past murders, he needed a body only once every three weeks.

But Hornung wouldn't wait three weeks this time. He couldn't. His retrieving the suitcase meant just one thing—he knew the two of them were aware of his real nature, his real identity. He would have to put them out of the way quickly, before they could get to the police.

But they couldn't go to the police without risking Hornung's framing them for the crimes he himself had committed. They couldn't go to the police—because Hornung couldn't afford to let them. He could not even frame them safely until they were dead.

Mary was in the kitchen, with nothing to protect her from a man who had already slaughtered six women to satisfy his mad impulse to kill. Even at this moment . . .

Joe Chance raced back to the kitchen. Mary was there, alone, unharmed, waiting for him. The music buried their voices.

"You saw it—the suitcase?" she asked.

He nodded. "Honey," he said, "he'll be coming in here any minute." He looked around for a weapon, anything, that would serve as a weapon.

Mary handed him an old-fashioned rolling pin. "I found it back

of the breadbox," she whispered.

"Got breakfast started?" Hornung's voice sounded just as it had sounded all night. Although Joe could not hear his footsteps above the jazz, he knew Hornung was coming. He gripped the rolling pin, gave Mary a push toward the hall door.

"Run!" he said. "I'll stop him, slow him down with this." He looked at the improvised weapon in his hand. "You saw the back door—open it, get out, run for help. It's our only chance."

"Oh, Joe!" she said.

But Mary went, darting around the corner out of sight just as Hornung appeared in the other door. He said, "You're awfully quiet out here. I was wondering if you—"

Joe hit him with the rolling pin, just as hard as he could, right on the top of his head. Hornung made a funny noise and half-turned toward Joe, lifting his arms to ward off another blow. But he was too slow. Joe hit him again and then ran, leaving him sprawled on the kitchen linoleum.

Mary was still at the back door, sobbing a little as she wrestled with the lock. "I can't get it open!" she gasped.

"Here!" Joe pushed her aside, found the spring catch under the old-fashioned lock, turned the bolt, swung the door open. "Qut you go!" he cried, giving her a shove.

She moved only a few inches. The doorway had been boarded up from the outside! And the music went driving on, louder and louder, building toward its climax.

Joe grabbed Mary, turned her around. If he had hit Hornung hard enough, they'd have time to make a break for it through the front door. Surely they could get the police back before Hornung could destroy the evidence of the stained woman's clothing, the suitcase, what was in it.

"Come on!" he urged, half-dragging her along with him. "Come on, hon!"

But Joe had not hit hard enough —or perhaps he had not placed his blows to do the most damage. Hornung stepped out of the kitchen in front of them, blocking their passage.

The mask of amiability had fallen, to be replaced by a cold, implacable fury from which the madman's eyes blazed like the eyes of an angry great cat. He said something softly, inaudible above the hot, climactic chorus from the living room, but there was no mistaking the intent with which he lifted the heavy cleaver in his right hand.

At that moment, the music stopped—and Mary screamed. The sound gathered echoes of terror as it reverberated through the apartment.

As if in answer to her cry, there came a thunderous rap on the

door. A gruff voice shouted. *"Open up in there—police!"*

Hornung took a step toward them, his blazing attention focussed on Joe. Then Mary screamed again. She broke and ran for the bedroom, sobbing. There was a shot from beyond the door, a second shot and the crackle of stout wood splintering under the impact of a bullet.

The door slammed open and Hornung leapt, with a welling redness on his chest, to face this new assault, his cleaver still uplifted to strike. The third shot crashed through the hallway and into him before his feet touched the floor.

During a long, slow, endless moment, Hornung stood there, a statue. Then, gently, he lowered the cleaver and seemed to squat as he laid it neatly on the hall carpet beside him. He said, "It's still raining," in a matter-of-fact voice. Then he collapsed and lay motionless, dead as mutton.

From the living room came the opening blasts of Muggsie Spanier playing *Royal Garden Blues.* Somebody shouted, "Turn that damned thing off!"—and the hall was full of uniforms and then, again, there was silence, except for heavy police footfalls and conversation.

A plainclothesman buttonholed Joe against the wall and said, "Do you happen to be Joe Chance?" And, when Joe nodded dumbly, "Where's the girl? Is she okay?"

Joe pointed toward the bedroom. Then he asked, "How'd you know about us?"

"The girl's aunt has been raising hell at the Charles Street Station all morning," was the reply. Then, "Were you the one who tossed the suitcase out of the window? If you were, you done a good thing, boy."

"Yeah, I did it," said Joe, his eyes bewildered. Then, with mounting bewilderment, "But how could you have found it? He"—with a nod toward Arthur Hornung's crumpled body—"brought it back. It's in the closet there."

"The garbage-men remembered it—they couldn't get it in their disposal truck—and told us about it. Said they believed it looked exactly like the suitcase that had been found near the scene of the crime—with the hermit lady's half a body in it." The detective was all business. He moved quickly to the closet, brought out the suitcase, said to no one in particular, "I had a feeling the other bag would turn up—if we kept at it."

He opened it, gingerly. The lid fell back and the interior was revealed. For a long moment the detective stared at the horror in the suitcase. Then a convulsive shudder seized him and he closed the lid hastily.

He looked at Joe and said, "You better go back there and see if you can quiet the girl. We'll be wanting to ask you both some questions."

"Sure," said Joe. Now that the

detective had mentioned the fact, he could hear Mary having hysterics. His mind was very busy with the story he would tell the cops.

He was quite sure that if he kept it simple he'd be off the hook. He and Mary had encountered the murderer accidentally, without suspecting any part of the truth at first, and the rest had followed as night follows day. There was nothing to tie him to the nightmare, now that Arthur Hornung was dead—and he had every right to keep what he knew about the affair all to himself.

A guy could be a good actor when he was putting on a performance for the only girl in the world—to keep her safe and secure and protected until they were both too old to dream.

He headed for the living room.

"It's the other way," said the detective.

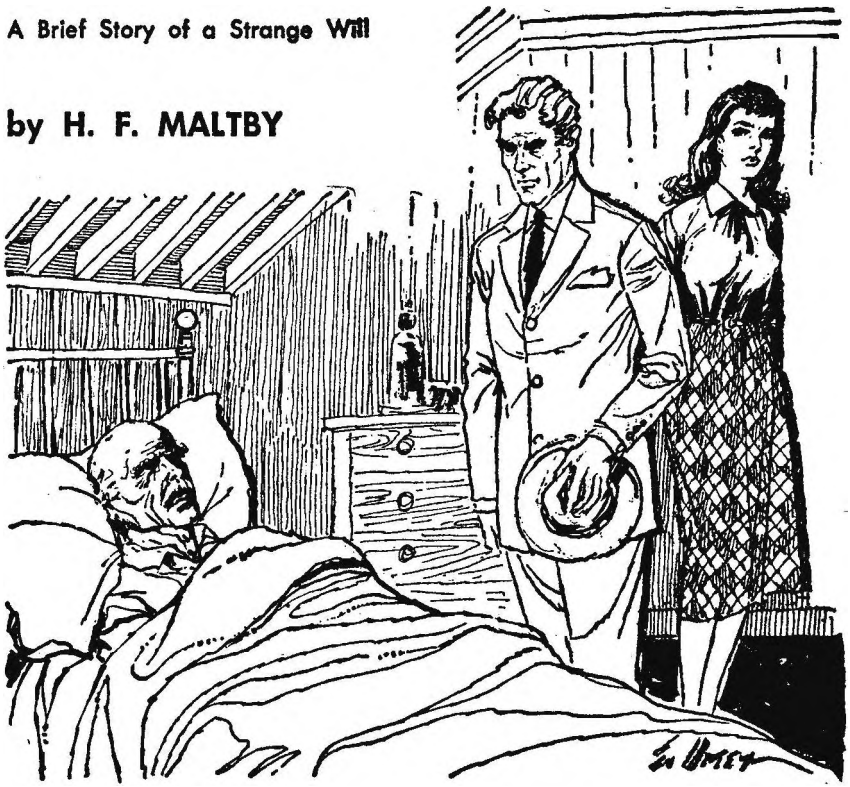
"I know," said Joe. "I just want to get my clarinet first."

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, JULY 2, 1946 AND JUNE 11, 1960 (74 STAT. 208) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine, published monthly at New York, N. Y. for October 1, 1960.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publisher,* Leo Margulies, 1172 Park Avenue, N. Y. 28, N. Y.; *Editor,* Cylvia Kleinman, 501 Fifth Avenue, N. Y. 17, N. Y.; *Managing Editor,* Mrs. Cylvia K. Margulies, 1172 Park Avenue, N. Y. 28, N. Y.; *Business Manager,* (None). 2. The owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member, must be given.) Leo Margulies, 1172 Park Avenue, N. Y. 28, N. Y.; Mrs. Cylvia K. Margulies, 1172 Park Avenue, N. Y. 28, N. Y. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. 5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required by the act of June 11, 1960 to be included in all statements regardless of frequency of issue.) 51,038. (Signed) Mrs. Cylvia K. Margulies, *Managing Editor.* Sworn to and subscribed before me this 14th day of October, 1960. [Seal] Maragaret M. White, No. 41-4248150. (My commission expires March 30, 1961).

A Brief Story of a Strange Will

by H. F. MALTBY



MY REMARKABLE CLIENT

I WAS THOROUGHLY enjoying my first night of freedom—my wife had left the day before on a ten day holiday with her folks in Philadelphia. Suddenly, the front door bell rang twice. I glanced at my wristwatch. It was just nine-thirty. I rose from my chair, and went out into the hall with every intention of making the caller unwelcome.

Standing on the step was a

small, bedraggled girl. She did not look more than fifteen and her face was very pale. "Does Mr. Perry live here?" she asked.

I nodded. "I'm Mr. Perry. What do you want?"

"Are you Mr. Perry the lawyer?"

"That's right," I said.

She pointed her hand vaguely into the darkness. "You're to come at once?" she said.

I stared at her. "That sounds a little vague. You'd better give me a few details."

"He said I was to bring you with me," she replied.

"Now look," I said, becoming a little impatient. "Is this someone's idea of a joke?" It was bitterly cold and I didn't relish standing in the doorway.

"It ain't no joke," she said in a scared voice. "He's dying."

"Who's dying?"

"The old man who boards with us."

"What's his name?" I asked, my impatience rising. "Do I know him?"

"I don't know his name. He's only been with us three days. He's just an old man."

"But I don't understand," I said. "If he's dying why does he want me? He needs a doctor!"

"No," she insisted. "He's had a doctor. He says he can't last out the night. He wants a lawyer to make his last will."

"But what made you come to me?" I asked. "This isn't my office. There are a half-dozen lawyers with offices in the neighborhood. Why don't you go to one of them?"

"He said you were the nearest," she said. "He found your address in the phone book. You're to come at once. He says he can't die happy unless he makes his last will and testimonial. He says that if he don't he won't rest peacefully in his grave."

I was becoming annoyed. I felt that he, whoever he was, ought to know better than to die at that time of night. Why couldn't he do it during business hours and give the job of his last will and testament to someone else. I certainly didn't want it.

I closed the door, pulled on my overcoat and muffler and going to my study, picked up a few sheets of legal paper. The girl had come in a taxi. When I opened the front door again, I found her still standing on the doorstep and the cab waiting outside.

"Fourteen Hawthorne Street," she told the driver, and we started off.

I was vaguely familiar with Hawthorne Street. It was in a semi-slum neighborhood near the Norwalk railroad station. Here I was, the senior partner of one of the oldest firms of lawyers in Manhattan, sitting in a taxi with a little tenement district child, on my way to make a will for some

impoverished old man—with perhaps less than two hundred dollars to his name.

The taxi finally drew in to the curb. "Here we are," said the girl, who had not spoken a word during the trip.

I opened the door and got out, putting my hand in my pocket to pay the fare. But the girl was before me.

"He said I was to pay," she explained. "He gave me the money."

At any rate, my new client possessed some sense of decency.

"This way," said the girl when she had settled with the driver.

"One minute," I interrupted, addressing myself to the taxi-driver. "You'd better wait. Never mind what the meter shows." He nodded. It had occurred to me it would be difficult getting another taxi at that time of night and I would feel safer knowing he was outside.

She led the way across a muddy patch and through the open door of an ancient frame house. The passage and stairs were lit by a single dim light bulb. It was easy to see that this was just a very shabby boarding house.

We mounted the creaking stairs and, turning left at the landing, mounted again. Reaching the second floor we climbed another flight and eventually found ourselves in the top hallway, in almost complete darkness.

"There's four more steps," the girl said. "Will you take my hand?"

She clasped my hand tightly and together we ascended what felt like a rickety step-ladder.

"Here we are!" she said, as she knocked at the door.

From within a weak voice replied, "Come in."

A door opened and I found myself in an attic bedroom. The room, which was lit by another solitary small bulb, seemed to be all ceiling. The room was practically bare of furniture—the most conspicuous item being the bed.

Upon an old-fashioned iron bed lay a frail old man with a wrinkled face, white mustache and bald head. He smiled feebly as I entered.

"It's good of you to come," he said in a singularly refined voice. "I must apologize for being a nuisance. If I had known my attacks were going to recur this evening I would have attented to this business earlier in the day and not have troubled you."

"But are you sure—" I began.

"That I cannot last out the night?" he asked with a smile. "For years I have suffered from a painful malady. I understand its symptoms better than the doctors. Tonight I have received my final warning. It is only a question of hours."

I was silent. His quiet resignation impressed me.

"Nellie," he said. "A chair for

Mr. Perry." He watched the girl bring over a rickety wooden chair, a grim smile upon his face.

"Our one and only chair," he said. "And now, Nellie, you can run away while Mr. Perry and I discuss our business."

He paused and lay back, smiling faintly.

"You wish me to draw up your will," I asked, as soon as we were alone.

He nodded. "It may seem curious to you that a man in surroundings like these should bother with a will. It was indeed good of you to come."

I waved his thanks aside, remembering with what impatience and bad grace I had answered his call.

"But I do not expect you to do it for nothing," he said. "I have written out a check for your fee. It is made payable to Bearer."

He drew from beneath his pillow a check which he handed to me. It was for one hundred dollars.

"You have your pen and paper?" he asked, before I could point out that the amount was excessive.

I assured him that I had.

"You will require my full names," he said. "They are Henry —Wilton—Callwood. A family name," he explained.

"Address?" I asked.

"I have none. As I have resided here for three days and will shortly be dying here, I think we may use it as an accommodation address."

He watched me closely while I wrote the usual opening clause.

"I appoint as my sole executors the Queens National Bank," he dictated, adding, "I have made all required arrangements with that institution for the carrying out of these bequeaths."

I wrote, wondering what was coming next.

"I declare that I am of sound mind," he went on, "and that this, my last will, is made for the sole purpose of making certain that none of my nephews, nieces, or relatives, who have so long and so impatiently awaited my demise, shall benefit in any way by my death."

"So that's the secret," I thought. "*Revenge.* He could not die in peace if he thought any of his relatives would gain a cent."

When I had finished with the opening clauses, I waited for hm to continue.

"I leave and bequeath to *Our Dumb Friends League, The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* and to *The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children* the sum of five thousand dollars each."

I was startled. We were dealing in big figures, it seemed. But the bequest that followed surprised me more. Unless he was quite mad, this little wreck of a man

must be worth over fifty thousand dollars, and every penny of it was to go to charity.

"The residue of my estate," he dictated, "I leave and bequeath to the *Parks Commission of the City of New York* as a small return for the many concerts of splendid music I have enjoyed across the years."

It was the most remarkable will I have ever drawn up, and the circumstances were equally remarkable.

In the presence of the small girl who had brought me to the boarding house I witnessed it. Then, bidding him goodbye, I returned to the waiting taxi.

I remained so preoccupied with what I had seen that it wasn't until the driver drew in to the curb and opened the door for me that I realized we'd arrived at my home. I settled with him, discovering to my surprise that I had spent over an hour with my extraordinary client.

On entering the house, I realized at once that something out of the ordinary had taken place during my absence. My clothes were strewn about everywhere. I rushed to my study—it was in the wildest imaginable disorder.

The contents of all of my drawers lay scattered on the floor. My safe had been forced and everything of value had vanished. I strode wildly from room to room; it was the same everywhere. The place had been ransacked. I seized the telephone, but the wire had been cut. I tore out of the house to my nearest neighbor and called the police.

In a few minutes two policemen arrived in a radio patrol car. Together we proceeded to fourteen Hawthorne Street. The little frightened girl met us at the door. She was with another woman I took to be her mother and it was evident they were both in a state of great agitation.

"Oh," the girl gasped on seeing me. "He's gone!"

"Dead?" I asked.

"Dead, my foot!" said the elderly woman. "The moment you had gone a big car drove up and he was up and into it and away before no one could stop him. He ain't paid his rent. He ain't ever paid for the things I got for him."

"Has he left nothing behind?" I asked.

"Only this," said the girl. She held up the will in my handwriting, and across it, in blue pencil, was scribbled, *Nuts to you, my credulous friend.*"

The PRICE of SILENCE

by HERBERT HARRIS

THE BOOKSELLER WAS squat and flabby, and when he smiled his ugly smile, the eyelids were little rolls of white fat and the lips like thick wet rubber.

"My name is Audenhaupt." He

gave the clergyman a small deferential bow, removing the crumpled gray snapbrim from a head almost hairless.

The Reverend Saul Wayland frowned at him for a moment. Then he said inhospitably, "Come in."

Audenhaupt, holding his hat against his chest with short fat fingers, followed his host into the latter's study, and watched with furtive eyes as the Reverend Wayland sat at his desk.

"Sit down, Mr. Audenhaupt," the clergyman said in a quiet voice. Then he locked his hands as if in prayer and gazed levelly at the bookseller. "Well?"

"You got my letter?" Audenhaupt drew back his lips to display yellow teeth. "About your father?"

"Yes, I received it."

"I said, as you may remember, that I'd call in person on the tenth if I didn't hear from you. So you were expecting me, I take it?"

"Yes," the clergyman said. "And I'm glad you came. I was very curious to see what sort of person would want to tarnish the reputation of a dead man."

Audenhaupt spread his pudgy hands. "Business is business, Reverend. Your father left quite a lot of money, I understand, and the money has now become yours. Not that I begrudge you a cent of it. I really don't at all."

"Thank you."

"I'm quite sure, however, you wouldn't want any of your father's debts to be left unpaid. The amount—twenty-five dollars, wasn't it? I keep a careful record, of course. The titles of the books he had . . ." Audenhaupt laid his large bald head on one side, spreading his loose lips in an unctuous smile, as if in apology for approaching so delicate a matter in half-completed sentences.

The Reverend Wayland didn't return his visitor's smile. "I gathered from your letter, Mr. Audenhaupt, that you were coming to claim not the small cost of some books but the price of your silence."

The bookseller pursed his lips. "Let me put it this way, Reverend. The gentlemen who come to my bookshop—along Fourth Avenue in Manhattan—can buy a Bible or a collection of Shakespeare, if that's what they want. But a lot of them like something else. A little reading matter to—how shall I put it—relieve their inhibitions?

"Your father, Heaven rest his soul, was only human, like you and me. If he got a little happiness from the sort of books which I keep in a small back room . . . graphically written, but earthy, you know—" Audenhaupt broke off, and waited.

The clergyman, calm and dispassionate, said: "The only books which my father ever bought from your shop were books for his boys' clubs."

"Oh, there were some of those —quite a good many, Reverend. But he didn't mention the other sort? No, of course, he wouldn't. Probably he got rid of them after he'd read them.

"I mean, it wouldn't do, would it? A very respected man, a pillar of the Church, a philanthropist, founder of boys' clubs. Almost a legend in his time, I believe."

The Reverend Wayland gripped his interlocked fingers so tightly that the knuckles showed white, but there was no emotion showing in his face.

"He made quite a national reputation, you might say, Reverend! Television and all that. And that big house and farm of his where he held his youth rallies. Quite an interesting man. But a lot of people would think differently if they knew he liked to read what I call my 'special books,' wouldn't they? Your own bishop, for example! He'd be really shocked, I expect, if he found the name of John Wayland in my sales ledger—the one with the special book listings. Not that I like to betray confidences, of course."

"When you're paid not to betray them—no."

Audenhaupt moistioned his lips, and regarded the clergyman steadily, his eyes like black slits. "There's not such a lot of money in books," he said. "Even if you sell them at a special price in a small back room. So you have to look around for what little extra you can pick up. Me, I'm very reluctant to spread filth about a grand old man who's left a good name."

Audenhaupt leaned forward, his head tilted slightly. "What can

smother the harmful whispers?"

The Reverend Wayland studied his blotter for a moment, then looked up. "How much are you asking?"

"Well, I did say in my letter, I think that your father owed me twenty-five dollars. Audenhaupt gazed reflectively at his shapeless hat. "I mean I may have been mistaken as to the exact sum. It could have amounted to as much as a couple of hundred dollars?"

Pursing his lips, the clergyman said softly, "Two or three hundred dollars would be quite a lot of money, Mr. Audenhaupt—even for the kind of filth you claim to have sold to my father. But I'm very grateful we've had this chat."

"I thought you'd be reasonable, Reverend."

"I'm very grateful because my good friend Inspector Gleason has been able to make a note of it, I'm quite sure." The Reverend Wayland looked across his visitor's shoulders towards the drapes in front of the french windows.

The bookseller, his fat face creased and noticeably paler, sat very still for a moment. Then he turned the large bald head slowly.

Detective Inspector Gleason had moved as soundlessly as a cat, and stood only a few feet behind Audenhaupt. His eyes clashing with those of the man in the chair, were hard and unyielding.

"I've been looking forward to this," Gleason said. "One of your biggest crimes is that you are such a fool."

Curiosity mingled with the fear in Audenhaupt's face. He sat silent, his cheek muscles twitching nervously.

"Your victim is dead, so he can't defend himself," Inspector Gleason said. "But you made one small mistake, Audenhaupt. You didn't know enough about Mr. John Wayland. You see, Mr. Wayland began his industrious life by working on a farm at the age of eleven—almost seventy years ago.

"Because of the noble work he did, people forgave him when he boasted that he had never learned to read."

—Continued From Back Cover

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